

Report from the Othona Trustees March 2012.

This report was emailed to members and will also appear in the Spring 2012 Full Circle.

Over the last weekend in January 22 Othona members (all nine Trustees, six representatives from each Centre, plus the Community Secretary) met, on behalf of the whole of Othona, to bring to an end the two year discernment process called *Othona 2010 and beyond: taking stock and moving forward*.

In November 2011 we, as Trustees, had affirmed that we would stay together as one Community living out the Othona vision through the life of the two centres and in the lives of the members.

At the January 2012 weekend we made a long list of the signs and symbols of our unity and worked on a revision of the 2007 Mission Statement. At their meeting on 1 March the Trustees approved the following - for use on our web-sites and our programmes to give enquirers a sense of what we are.

Othona is an open and inclusive Community rooted in the Christian tradition and drawing on a wealth of other inspirations. We welcome people of all ages, abilities, backgrounds and beliefs to our two centres on the quiet coasts of Essex and Dorset. Through sharing in a daily rhythm of work, learning, worship and play, we seek personal renewal and glimpses of the sacred. In community we explore the relationship between faith and life and encourage one another in caring for the world and its people.

Moving forward – here are the agreed steps – but they will all take time.

1. While the Othona Trustees retain the ultimate responsibility for the well-being – financial, spiritual and organisational – of the Community **more authority will be devolved to new Centre Committees**. This will be done by appointing up to 4 Trustees from the main body to serve as Centre-based Trustees on each Centre Committee. The present Bradwell and West Dorset committees will disband and new Centre Committees be formed under the chairmanship of one of the Centre-based Trustees.
2. **New Trustees will be recruited by canvassing the whole membership** for proposals and then using a small group of Trustees or former Trustees to nominate the right number of people with the appropriate skills and gifts to the full Trustee Meeting.
3. A similar recruitment method will also be used by the Centres for recruiting the other members of the Centre Committees. Elections, as a method for tapping into the many gifts and skills of the membership, had not been serving us well – Bradwell had not had a full complement of elected members for some years and both committees had been using co-option of those already known to committee members as the way of finding the right people. We looked at Quaker practice for this model of finding people for service. .
4. **The Centres will be given more financial responsibility and independence** – on condition each Centre Committee has one member (not necessarily a Trustee) who is financially literate, able to have a good grasp of the Centre's finances and report on them to each Centre Committee meeting. Each Centre will keep any annual profit and be responsible for any loss. Loans can be obtained from central community funds but must be repaid.

£30,000 from reserves will be transferred on 1 April 2012 to each Centre to form a basis for that Centre's financial independence.

5. **We will work towards one single Community database which can be inputted from both Centres.** Thus recruitment of new members – and of 'friends' – will take place where people are met face to face. 'Friends' of the Othona Community will pay no money but will be on the database to receive, via the internet only, as much or as little information as is wanted. This is part of stepping up our marketing strategy.
6. **Members are those who support the Othona Community and its mission and purpose.** They are the heart and soul of the Community and we want to encourage both membership numbers and members' participation in the life of the two centres. Members will pay a minimum subscription (probably £12) towards central costs and any contribution beyond the minimum will go to the Centre of choice, or be divided between the two. Through the database members will be able to offer their skills and experience and receive the information they want or need. Members will be able to raise issues and questions at the AGM and vote on them if that is appropriate.
7. Although the communication route for the future is clearly going to be largely via the internet we will continue to send *Full Circle* and the Centre Programmes by post to those who request that.

Most of these steps will not be taken quickly and will involve a considerable amount of work. Some will require changes to the Trust Deed and we are taking professional advice from a charity lawyer on that. Ali Tebbs is the lead Trustee investigating the database way forward and she is consulting widely. Rupert Bragg will visit each Centre in turn to explain the new financial arrangements. You will already have received your invitation to propose names for Trusteeship, and for members of the new Centre Committees.

No more 'taking stock' – now is the time for 'moving forward'.

Sheila Maxey

21 February.