

Dartington

A letter to parishioners
from The Dartington Hall Trust

15 November 2019

Dear Dartington parishioner,

We feel that it is important to write to you now as the Trust works on new plans to support our mission to become a 'testbed and model for a just and sustainable society', a mission to which we remain fully committed, and to share with you some of the things that we are starting to discuss with staff and with Dartington Trust members.

Having spent the last few months re-assessing our financial future, understanding the hard lessons from an unsuccessful bond issue and with a new leadership structure in place, we are plotting a new course to address the Trust's long-standing financial challenges.

Building on existing strengths, our new strategy is to focus on delivering a world-class learning programme and attracting audiences to year-round top quality arts and cultural events. We will also continue to actively encourage visitors and the local community to enjoy the rich heritage of the estate – including its historic buildings, Grade 2* listed gardens, deer park, woodlands and more. Alongside this we are committed to achieving a more sustainable future by fully understanding our current environmental impact; developing plans to reduce our carbon footprint and embedding those plans in the way we operate across the whole estate.

We want to be open and honest about our financial position, which is starkly illustrated by a current annual deficit of £3 million, equating to a loss of around £8,000 a day. The reasons why we are in this situation are long-standing – simply put they are the result of our combined activities over the years not covering costs. Over the coming months, we will tackle our financial situation in 4 key ways: by growing income; reducing spend; selling land and buildings as well as building homes and delivering new projects.

We are planning to grow income in a number of ways, for example, by developing new learning opportunities and courses and expanding our events programme in order to reach more audiences. We want to attract more visitors to the estate – visitors who, though spared of entry fees often charged at similar venues, provide the Trust with needed income through use of our cultural and hospitality facilities. At the same time we will continue to work closely with our generous supporters and foster new philanthropic investment.

Across the organisation we are looking hard at ways to reduce day-to-day costs and to make sure that money is being spent on the right things. This includes a restructure of the people and resources needed to run the Trust and we are working closely with staff to shape these plans.

Earlier in the year, a handful of commercial properties - Webbers Yard, Lescaze Offices, Lower Tweed Mill – which are no longer central to our core mission, were put up for sale. Having previously sold two off-estate residential properties, Trustees took the decision in September to explore with existing on-estate tenants the sale of some residential properties in Warren Lane and Park Road. In choosing to sell on-estate residential properties, our aim is to sell vacant properties and to sell to current tenants who have expressed an interest in buying their homes. Existing tenants who do not wish to purchase will continue to be tenants of the Trust. The sales contracts will include a clause that requires the Trust to be given first-refusal should the owners of residential properties on the estate decide, in the future, to sell. We have also made the decision to sell the land in the parish that has been allocated for housing in the Joint Local Plan. Specifically, Broom Park Field and the field called Sawmills West (adjacent to the A385 on the edge of the village) will now be sold for development. Any future development on these sites will be subject to full public consultation through usual planning processes.

Reflecting a history of experimental house-building started by the Elmhursts that shaped much of Dartington Trust over the years, it remains the Trust's intention to work with others to build homes that are inspiring, sustainable and socially inclusive and that demonstrate a new model for rural living. The Estate Framework, the subject of a new Joint Local Plan policy, on which we are working with South Hams District Council and Historic England, will guide our management of the core estate, balancing environmental and heritage sensitivities with new development. When published, the estate framework will also enable us to build around 120 homes on the core estate (subject to planning consent). A draft estate framework will be available for consultation in coming months. We are keen to discuss this and associated transport plans with everyone who has an interest in the future of the estate.

Over the last couple of years, many people have shared with us the complicated journey towards building homes at the Plantation and Paddock (Lane End). Ideas for this site have been plentiful, however the reality of developing viable proposals has been very challenging. We are revisiting proposals and exploring innovative and exciting ideas for this site, which we would hope to take forward as a joint venture.

We continue to actively pursue grants and other external assistance in support of a number of projects including the Elmhurst Centre, for which we hope to secure funds from the National Lottery Heritage Fund building on our success of the Deer Park wall project.

In summary, our future plans are clear: to get ourselves on a much stronger financial footing, to successfully implement our learning, arts and social justice strategy and, at the same time, to become carbon neutral by 2025.

To help do that, we are changing the way that we engage people in our work. Building on the series of small group sessions held with Dartington Trust members over recent weeks, we will continue to keep the conversation about the estate open through regular small group meetings

that will more directly inform and assist future decision-making. This will give members and our community more opportunity for discussion with us than was the case in our previous large events. If you aren't already a Dartington Trust member, we encourage you to consider joining. Our hope is that anyone with an interest in the future of the estate will consider becoming a DHT member.

We appreciate that there is quite a lot to absorb in this letter but feel it is important that we communicate with you in as much detail as possible. We will continue to stay in touch and, of course, if you want to find out more about activities and events on the estate, or if you wish to become a member, please visit our website (www.dartington.org).

Yours Sincerely



Greg Parston

Chair of Trustees



Alan Boldon

Managing Director (interim)

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application of new ideas

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