

20<sup>th</sup> January 2017

**Dartington**

Dear Abundant Life Supporter

### **Update on Abundant Life**

Following the Trust's decision to withdraw from the Abundant Life partnership with Sanctuary and our last communication with you in February-March 2016, I am conscious that very little information has since been shared with you as a supporter of the Abundant Life project.

I'm very sorry for the delay in writing to you and want to assure you that, over the Summer and Autumn of last year, a great deal of work took place internally to review the vision and brief for the Abundant Life project. This took place within the context and timetable of our emerging Estate Framework. As you'll be aware, when the Abundant Life project was originally conceived and during its subsequent development, the Trust had no coherent spatial framework for the whole estate within which to assess whether Foxhole was the best/only site on which to realise its commitment to a progressive, many-sided living project for older people. The absence of such a framework has now been addressed.

As part of our recent review, we also sought external advice nationally from leading specialists in the housing for older people sector, including innovators, researchers, designers, developers and operators. This included us holding a two-day creative workshop at Dartington Hall last Summer, involving relevant trustees and staff, to seek external advice on our future approach to Abundant Life. We were highly conscious that it was over six years since the Abundant Life project had been conceived and that we would benefit from a clear understanding of what contemporary innovation looked like within the housing for older people sector in 2016.

There was a clear and strong consensus from the workshop group that the Abundant Life project at Foxhole was too large. We learned that leading innovators and progressive developers within the sector are now moving away from large-scale, single-site housing schemes entirely for older people towards a series of significantly smaller schemes/clusters that are more closely linked with a mixed community of various ages. The advice from recent research and experience was that individual clusters of c. 20-30 units were regarded as more socially and communally successful than large specialist settlements of 100+ units all on one site. Apparently, at a smaller scale, relationships improve between residents and there is better integration with the wider community.

The workshop also consolidated our understanding of why we had struggled to achieve the quality and ambition of our vision for Abundant Life within our partnership with Sanctuary. The professional advice we had received during our external review of the Abundant Life project at the end of 2015 was fully upheld by the workshop group who similarly advised that a scheme of 180+ units like the former Abundant Life project represented a significant financial challenge and development risk for any developer (particularly in a relatively untested market in this part of South Devon and not least in a complicated listed building such as Foxhole), resulting in a more cautious and conservative approach to innovation and design quality.

Another benefit of delivering smaller clusters of specialist housing units for older people is that each scheme represents far less development risk and opens the door to a range of smaller and more innovative and creative developers. In turn, this approach can also result in greater diversity of housing product and choice for prospective residents.

The workshop review concluded that the original vision, purpose and aspirations of the Abundant Life Project were extremely good, and that the level of community interest and input at Dartington had been highly impressive and indicative of an active and progressive local community of older people. However, it was felt that the Trust's vision would have been very difficult to realise within the former development model of one single developer delivering 180+ apartments all within Foxhole (this was not a criticism of Sanctuary). The group fully upheld the Trust's decision to withdraw from its former partnership with Sanctuary and recommended that we now focus on working with a range of smaller, innovative developers to build clusters of specialist housing across the estate which particularly appeal to/cater for the needs of older people. It was suggested that roughly a third of the proposed total of 300 new homes to be delivered across a range of sites under the Estate Framework ie up to 100 specialist units, be designed specifically for older people.

We were also advised that the innovative support/care services formerly planned for Abundant Life at Foxhole, which required a certain critical mass in order to be viable, could still be developed incrementally in line with the proposed way forward, although this would require active curation by the Trust.

On a more general level, it was felt that the principle and concept of '*Abundant Living*' originally articulated by the Elmhursts, should be expanded to *all* Dartington Hall Estate residents irrespective of age, not least the occupants of the c.300 new homes the Trust intends to build.

As a result of the workshop review, the concept of Abundant Living has been fully embedded within the Estate Framework as an overarching driver of imaginative housing, place-making and community development for people of all ages. The Trust will now seek to ensure that all new housing settlements on the estate are:

- Connected to the external world both physically and virtually;
- Inter-generational and inclusive;
- Proactive in fostering and creating beautiful gardens, landscapes, places and buildings;
- Encouraging of life-long enterprise through learning, making, creating and trading;
- Encouraging of volunteering;
- Experimental and curious about the unpredictable;
- Based on a contract between the Trust and the individual, enshrining the principle of mutual commitment through engagement and participation.

Further best practice and market research, concept and design development and financial appraisal will now be required to produce more detailed proposals. This will be integrated into the forthcoming development delivery strategy which will immediately follow the completion of the Estate Framework document at the end of this month.

All of the recommendations outlined above were formally presented to Trustees last Autumn who fully endorsed the proposed approach. Trustees were particularly keen that I should write to you to update you on progress and on our agreed way forward. They were keen that we should seek your continued creative involvement in the development and provision of specialist housing for older people across the Dartington Hall estate, as well as in developing meaningful future opportunities for occupation, volunteering and cultural and community activity here.

You may be wondering what the Trust's future plans are for the Foxhole site. In the short-term, a mixed use is planned for the site, including office space for small businesses, studio space for arts and crafts and budget-style hostel accommodation. Some work will need to be undertaken to make the spaces fit for purpose and we are currently working up a project plan to make this happen.

We are extremely grateful to you for your contribution to the former Abundant Life project. We hope that, despite the understandable disruption and disappointment caused by our withdrawal from the former project at Foxhole (and our partnership with Sanctuary) early last year, you may still be interested or hopefully even excited about our planned way forward. If so, we hope you will stay actively involved and participate in future consultation meetings. We shall notify you of all future opportunities to get involved. If you have no further interest, perhaps you could let us know by return at [AbundantLife@dartington.org](mailto:AbundantLife@dartington.org) or by post to Abundant Life, Communications Team, The Granary, The Dartington Hall Trust, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6EE and we will remove you from our database. Otherwise, we hope to maintain your interest and involvement.

I apologise for sending you such a long letter, but was keen for you to receive as full a briefing as possible after such a long silence.

With warm wishes

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rhodri Samuel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Rhodri Samuel  
Chief Executive