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The Dartington
Hall Trust
The Elmhirst Centre
Dartington Hall
Totnes
Devon TQ9 6EL

Tel: 01803 847000
Fax: 01803 847007
www.dartington.org

Dartington

Interested in the future of Dartington? Then come to an Open Space event, to join me in beginning to answer the question “What Can Dartington Be?”

An invitation from Rhodri Samuel

Hello,

It's been eight weeks now since I took up my new role as Chief Executive at the Dartington Hall Trust. I have spent much of that time meeting and listening to members of staff across the organisation, to some of the many entrepreneurs who run the 130 or so diverse and remarkable small enterprises based on the estate, to musicians and lovers of music from far and wide who attend the International Summer School and Festival of music each year, and to a wide range of individuals who have a strong or longstanding connection to the Trust and estate. I have heard what people like and don't like about Dartington, where they think things might have gone wrong in the past and their hopes and fears for its future.

Some of what I've heard isn't new to me. Before taking on this job, I spent almost eight months working as a part-time adviser to the Trust. This enabled me to get to know a large number of thoughtful and passionate people who play an influential role in the life of Dartington village and parish, Totnes and further afield who didn't hold back in telling me what they thought about Dartington.

I have heard how passionately people love this place and feel that it has a beauty, magic or spiritual quality all of its own. I have heard how much the progressive vision of wholeness, creative experimentation, 'learning through doing', rural enterprise and community pioneered and supported by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst for much of the 20th century still deeply inspires people today. And I have heard how many of the Trust's current charitable activities in the arts, social justice and learning - initiatives like Schumacher College, LandWorks, Research In Practice, the International Summer School and the Barn Cinema - continue to be respected, valued and supported by many.

I have also heard the concerns and frustrations of people who feel the Trust isn't fulfilling its potential, who are still wounded or angry about past decisions such as the closure of Dartington College of Arts or the sale of important artworks, who feel aggrieved about the Trust's more recent approach to development in and around the village, or who believe that the Trust isn't open enough as an organisation and isn't living its values. I have also heard from many loyal and dedicated members of staff who feel demoralised by local negativity towards the organisation they work for.

It is also clear that whatever people feel about how or why the Trust has ended up where it is, there are serious financial challenges ahead – challenges that won't be solved by a few cut backs here and there.

So why did I take on this role? I can hardly plead ignorance.

My first proper experience of Dartington was in September 2013 when I attended an international design summer school here and fell in love with the place. Since that time, my passion for this place and its future potential has grown. As has my belief that something is currently blocked and needs to be

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released in order for Dartington to rekindle its former creative, experimental and entrepreneurial spirit.

Part of my new role is to try and make that happen. It won't be easy. But I'm hopeful. Everywhere I look – among the staff and Trustees, the enterprises and residents on the estate, the local community, inspiring individuals and organisations based in the area, and our wider community of national and international supporters – I see so much potential. So many people care deeply about Dartington and its future and it is to all of you that I write this invitation.

At the end of January 2016 I will present a way forward to the Board of Trustees for their approval. But I don't want it to just be my way forward. Everyone I meet with has something to say about Dartington. So if that's you, if you're someone who's interested in the future of this place, and who would like to get involved in answering the question "What can Dartington Be?" then please come along to one of our Open Space events.

People tell me within and beyond the Trust that much of our communication has been overly prescriptive in the past. I'd like to change that and believe that using the Open Space format run by experienced independent facilitators would be a helpful start. If you are unfamiliar with Open Space it is an interactive and inclusive way of structuring a meeting that allows you, the participant, to set the agenda. It is a very dynamic way of talking about complicated and difficult things. You will not be talked at or asked to talk about things you don't want to. Everything that is discussed will be recorded and you will get a copy of that document.

In order to include as many people as we can we are holding 4 full day Open Space events, each will be from 9am until 6pm and held in Space on the Dartington Hall Estate. The dates are:

Friday 20th November 2015
Thursday 26th November 2015
Saturday 5th December 2015
Thursday 14th January 2016

Feedback gathered from the first three Open Space events together with my report capturing the output and influence of these events will be available online at www.dartington.org and in printed form which can be read in the Visitor Centre at Dartington Hall. These documents will form the invitation for the final Open Space event on the 14th January 2016. This event will be a chance to discuss what I have learned from the earlier events and how this has influenced the purpose and direction I will be presenting to Trustees.

We know the events are long days but Open Space works best when there's enough time for everyone to talk about everything they want to, and there's a lot of work for us to do. It will be better to come for the whole day, but if you need to leave early that's ok. We have chosen to start at 9am so there's time for local school drop off and we will be sensitive to this for the first sessions.

Each event has a capacity of 200 people. Booking for all events will open on Friday 30th October and tickets will be issued on a first come first served basis. To book, please call the Dartington Box Office on 01803 847070 or book online at www.dartington.org/whats-on. Tickets are to be collected from Reception in Space on the day. Whilst the events are free, tickets are priced at £5.00 towards a healthy and delicious lunch, which we'll provide, and we'll make sure you're well looked after during the day.

A strength of Open Space is its ability to unite groups of enormous diversity, so whoever you are, you will be very welcome. What can Dartington Be? I hope to see you there.



To find out more about Open Space Technology please click on the following link
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Open_Space_Technology