

Proposal for Glastonbury Business Research and Support Centre

This is a proposal to establish a business research and support centre in Glastonbury that would potentially make an important contribution to the economic and cultural life of the town. On one side, it would help to generate knowledge and information about the town and its unusual economy, and provide a resource for academics wishing to undertake research in the area. On the other side, it would provide support to individuals – and groups – seeking to establish and develop local businesses and organisations. While of value for anyone setting up a business in the town, the main target audience would be those seeking to establish an organisation or business with a charitable, spiritual or environmental focus.

Background

The idea of having a research centre in the Town has been around for a number of years. In 2006, Barry Taylor wrote in the Oracle:

‘A number of university based academics are discussing the possibility of establishing a centre for the study of the various manifestations of contemporary spirituality, with a focus on Glastonbury. The prime initial purpose of the centre will be to foster academic research, but it is hoped that it will also develop creative relationships between practitioners and the academy; encourage dialogue and engagement between faith and other communities, and assist individuals wishing to pursue projects in higher education.’

The idea received a further boost in 2011, when a number of academics and practitioners attended the 2011 Glastonbury Academic Symposium¹ hosted by the Glastonbury Pilgrim Centre. Amongst the ideas generated by this symposium were:

- **Glastonbury as a research centre.** Many of those present saw Glastonbury as a unique facility where the way in which contemporary spirituality manifests in the practical world can be observed. It also could be thought of as an ideal laboratory for practical research. There was a feeling that if we could put something coherent together here there would be interesting work and revenue not only for people in Glastonbury but also for our friends in the universities.
- **Glastonbury as a broker for cross-disciplinary research.** The community and its various activities and beliefs are of potential interest to a wide range of academic disciplines – theological, sociological, anthropological, political, economic and others.
- **Glastonbury as a centre for consensus and the concomitant study of consensus.** We would suggest that consensus is an emergent property of community, and that this property has partly been exemplified by the Symposium itself, featuring a wide range of personal spiritualities and disciplines. Glastonbury could well have a role as a place of studying the way in which consensus emerges in a community with many different philosophies and beliefs.
- **Explaining Glastonbury.** Representatives of the Library of Avalon, the Isle of Avalon Foundation, the Abbey and the PRC who were present all mentioned that they have the repetitive task of explaining to each new bunch of researchers and students the basic outline of Glastonbury. Some agreed format or paper which all could use would be a help.
- **Assistance for placement programmes.** It would be useful to have some sort of an agreed programme to ensure that placed students gain the most from their placement.

¹ <https://www.glastoncentre.org/glastonbury-academic-research-symposium.html>

- **Glastonbury as a Whole.** Glastonbury was seen as a place with an ancient and special landscape that has sparked off a number of quite separate individualistic activities. These activities were not seen as being particularly related. It does seem that work is still needed on promoting the idea of Glastonbury as a whole as a spiritual centre. Glastonbury is in fact, other than in name, **a University of the human spirit**, with a wide range of faculties within the University. These are provided by individual courses, workshops and researchers.
- **The establishment of a Glastonbury museum.** A considerable amount of interest was shown in the possibility of establishing a museum to support the work of the research centre. Such a museum could focus upon the history of spirituality within a Glastonbury focus featuring, for instance, material such as the Maltwood archives.
- **Academic research.** There was a broad consensus from the visiting academics that now is a time of uncertainty in all universities. No one quite knows what funding is going to be available for what - certainly funding is being severely cut in areas such as the arts and comparative religion. On the other hand there are still funds available for some types of research. There was a general feeling that it might be possible to create something really worthwhile in the way of research in Glastonbury.

More recently, there has been interest in exploring the contribution that spiritual and alternative organisations make to the economy of Glastonbury, and how best to support those seeking to develop new businesses in the town. This was the subject of a research project undertaken by Dr Dione Hills (from the Tavistock Institute, in London) who in association with the Glaston Centre, interviewed nine people involved in enterprises that have made a significant contribution to the town's cultural and economic life. The report of this research (see annex B for conclusions) gives an account of some of the challenges they experienced in setting up and running an organisation or business in the town, and resources that helped them address these challenges. This small study has generated a number of ideas for further research that might be of benefit, both to the town itself, and to others interested in the study of organisations of this kind (see below).

The proposal

The current proposal is to establish a centre in the town which would serve two functions – a location and centre of a network for academics and practitioners (including consultants, business coaches and evaluators) interested in the town and its organisations, and a resource centre for local businesses and organisations.

A research centre

The research centre would pick up many of the ideas put forward at the end of the symposium in 2011. Since that time there has been a considerable growth in interest in the study of new spiritual movements and their organisations which are regularly discussed in networks such as the Religious Research Association², the British Association for the Study of Spirituality³, the Scientific and Medical network⁴, the Management, Spirituality and Religion branch of the Academy of Management⁵ and in its journal 'The Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion'⁶

² <http://www.rraweb.org/>

³ <http://www.basspirituality.org.uk/>

⁴ <https://explore.scimednet.org/>

⁵ <https://msr.aom.org/home>

⁶ <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rmsr20/current>

Potentially, the research centre would connect academics and practitioners (including business consultants and coaches) with local individuals with similar interests to create opportunities for new research, as well as building connections with existing networks such as the ones listed above. The research centre would not itself fund research but would provide a base for Higher education students undertaking relevant theses, or academics wishing to undertake research funded from other sources.

There were a number of possible areas that would benefit from further research, emerging from the short study undertaken this year (see annex B). These include:

- A thorough economic assessment of the contribution that spiritual and organisations make to the economy of the town including an assessment of the current size of the sector both in financial terms and as a percentage of the overall economy of the town. Assessment of the potential for further growth and what would be required to support this growth. (potentially useful to encouraging further investment in the town).
- Exploration of the challenges of operating within a 'multi faith' environment, particularly in promoting inter- organisational and inter-faith cooperation, particularly when mediating competing demands from different groups using the same premises or physical resources (of interest to sites like Stonehenge and Avebury, as well as churches who make their premises available to community and other faith groups)
- How best to recognise and support people going through a spiritual or life crisis particularly when these are part (staff, volunteers or participants in activities) organisational activities. (of potential interest to others working in the field of mental health).
- What would be most helpful (consultancy, coaching, training, support) in helping to develop the capacities of those with little prior entrepreneurial or business experience seeking to establish new businesses in the town (while there are mainstream resources available in this area, these are not always accessible to those due to their location or language to those seeking to establish a strongly value – or spiritually – based organisation.) This would make an excellent topic of a piece of action research combining provision of support with an assessment of its impact).
- How to help alternative and spiritual organisations combine their spiritual inspiration or guidance with best practice in terms of leadership, people management, employment and equal opportunities responsibilities (this is a challenge in mainstream religious organisations as well as more alternative ones).

A resource centre

In building connections with academics and practitioners working in the field of spiritual and faith organisations, the centre would also provide a valuable resource for local people seeking to develop organisations and businesses in the town. This could be via local workshops and training activities, run either by local people or external experts, or via a library of resources and relevant research studies, supporting the town as a growing centre of excellence in this field. It is relevant to note that there are already two individuals in the town who have developed spiritual business or leadership courses that would fit well within the profile of the centre, and another who is the author of a book on this subject. On line courses and support (e.g. of the kind provided by the US organisation 'Heart of Business') could also be obtained for use by local people.

Workshops, symposia or a permanent research and resource centre could provide an opportunity for some of those with experience locally (like some of those interviewed) to share their experience with others, as well as attracting people from outside Glastonbury, with similar interests. An example of similar activities are the annual events and workshops run by the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland, on topics such as leadership, sustainability and supporting individuals, teams and organisation. These attract quite a large audience from both mainstream and alternative organisations and professions. For many, Glastonbury would also be a particularly attractive location for events of this kind.

Services and activities

The proposed centre would provide a range of resources and services to help local people to navigate these challenges when setting up, running, or even working within local organisations.

These would include:

- A library of books on setting up an alternative or spiritual business, leadership, management and group dynamics, conflict management and other topics suggested by participants in other activities listed below (possibly housed at the Avalon library)
- A place to lodge 'grey literature' – research undertaken in Glastonbury (or on related topics) which have not been published in books or journals
- Provision of services: individual mentoring, workshops and training: on topics such as applying for grants, research and evaluation skills (specifically related to undertaking research in these areas or applying for grant funding), interfaith dialogue, leadership, accounting, business skills and marketing, establishing legal and charitable status, consultancy and mentoring: for those undertaking research, or involved in the establishment or management of spiritual projects or organisations.
These could be virtual or in person, with recordings being made of the main part of the content and made available on the Glaston centre website.
- Membership and access to related business and management networks and their journals
- A list of online resources (similar to the one currently on the Glaston Website, but to be expanded and regularly updated)
- Local 'surgeries' at which local people can bring organisational dilemmas for discussion with an experienced facilitator and other participants. These could have a different theme for each event.
- An annual event with visiting speakers, including academics with an interest in the town and its activities, and others with specific experience of relevance to local organisations
- Support for students wishing to undertake research in the town (as is currently the case at the Avalon library)

Budget

The costs of the centre would depend to some extent on the kind of activities will emerge in response to demand. Some basic annual costs can be calculated on the basis of similar activities elsewhere. While having a physical location for the centre would be useful in terms of generating a presence in the town, in the initial stages (while it establishes itself and tests demand) premises (meeting rooms) could be rented on an ad hoc basis for events, while other activities (hosting students, admin) could potentially take place from existing premises such as the Avalon Library or the Glaston Centre Office (or from the home of an administrator).

Item	Costs
Office space (optional)	???
Books (for library)	£500
For online resources: annual subscriptions (see annex A) and purchase of online materials and courses	£1000
Courses and workshops: room rental, organisation, visiting speaker costs	£5,000
Local surgeries: room rental and visiting speaker costs	£1,000
Development and management of web content	£2,000
Annual event: organisation, room rental, visiting speakers and video recording	£5,000
Admin to support networking and organisation of events	£4,000
Total	£18,500

Income

An initial grant will be required in order to establish the centre and promote information about its activities to those who might be interested in accessing and using its services. Ideally this would be for one or two years work, during which a more detailed plan would be developed (based on the level of interest experienced) for sustaining the centre in the longer term, from income generated by its activities. Income could come from a number of sources – a subscription service, income from services, workshops or training activities, or from accessing recordings of workshops and training activities online.

Once established, it would also be possible to apply for grants to support specific activities, such as networking activities or individual research projects, from research funding bodies (e.g. UKRI: UK Research and Innovation), or foundations and charities with an interest in this field of work. Some of the networks listed in annex A provide small grants (usually for individual students and researchers, or for networking activities).

Annex A.

Examples of networks/organisations and their membership subscriptions

Organisation	Annual Membership
Religious Research Association (inclusive of quarterly journal, networking and some funding opportunities)	£35
The British Association for the Study of Spirituality (inclusive of 2 journals a year)	£65
The Scientific and Medical network (includes 3 issues of Paradigm Explorer journal a year, a monthly online newsletter and weekly networking opportunities)	£60
Management, spirituality and religion branch of the Academy of Management (opportunities for networking and access to events)	£140
Journals	Annual Subscription
The Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion (quarterly peer reviewed journal with some articles available open access)	£86

Appendix: excerpts from research study: Spiritual, alternative and faith organisations in Glastonbury: their challenges and resources. Dione Hills (Tavistock Institute) 2020

Section 6: Conclusions and further steps

During 2019 and 2020, a small piece of research was undertaken, sponsored by the Tavistock Institute (London) and the Glaston Centre (Glastonbury). The aim of the research was to explore some of the typical (and no so typical) challenges that people faced when setting up and running an alternative or spiritual organisation in Glastonbury, and what resources help people to deal with these challenges. This felt to be an important question at a time when this kind of organisation is making a growing contribution to the town's cultural and economic life.

The nine people interviewed all had some involvement in organisations that are already making a significant contribution to the economy and culture of the town. As the interviewees indicated, there are spiritual and alternative organisations in the town that not only provide a source of employment, but also contribute to attracting of the thousands of people to the town each year, many of whom support other local businesses, including B and B's, cafes and food shops. Several of the organisations represented also provide opportunities for volunteering or run training opportunities that enable local people to develop new skills and take up new professional and entrepreneurial roles.

The present research project was small – only 9 people interviewed, representing only a small proportion of the overall alternative and spiritual organisations in the town. However, it does indicate that, as well as providing significant opportunities to those wishing to set up an organisation, this is not without its risks, both to those developing and working in the organisations, but also those using their services. Groups, organisations, and businesses can 'come and go' with interest in a new activity or idea arising and disappearing quite quickly. The alternative 'market' in the town, whether in terms of shops, healers or workshops and events, has become quite saturated, which makes finding – and keeping involved - customers, participants in activities, and volunteers difficult. It can take considerable ingenuity and entrepreneurial skills to find a particular 'niche', as well as the usual skills required to establish and build up a business.

Those interviewed were all involved in organisations which were relatively soundly established and successful, and in several cases this success came from attracting participants from outside of Glastonbury, drawing on the unique character or resources in the town to do so. This had usually taken some years to achieve, and most of those interviewed reported on having been able to draw on their spiritual practices, or past experience, to see them through more challenging and sometimes painful moments along the way.

One theme that came across through many of the interviews was the fact that Glastonbury can attract some quite vulnerable people, whether as tourists, participants in activities, or as permanent settlers in the town. One view was that the very decision to move to the town or choose to work or volunteer for a spiritual organisation, can often be an indication that someone has recently gone through, or was currently in the midst of a spiritual or emotional crisis. Others thought that the energy of the town created a situation in which some kind of spiritual or emotional crisis became more likely.

Support for people in this position is available in various ways – whether through the volunteers at the Pilgrim Reception Centre, the regular health services, the many healers working in the town, or

through the kindness and informal support provided by friends and colleagues. Nevertheless, it was unclear how far there was a general discussion, or availability of knowledge, of how best to support someone going through a crisis. For example, it is unclear how many people would recognise when someone is at risk of serious breakdown and should take a step back from their spiritual practices or take better care of themselves. Similarly, it is unclear how many businesses would, as another indicated, allow their staff to take a day off when they felt they were becoming overwhelmed? This would be a potential useful topic for further research, both to explore the extent that this is a problem and go into the strategies found most helpful in dealing with this issue in more depth.

Having a vulnerable clientele, staff and volunteers, makes it particularly important to ensure that there are good organisational practices in place: including employment practices around hiring and firing staff, supporting staff and volunteer wellbeing, or processes through which people can make a complaint if they feel that the service they have received is inadequate or their employment rights have been violated. The research suggests that many of those running some local organisations could sometimes be unfamiliar with their legal responsibilities, or of the factors that contribute to structural inequalities and lead to the risk of racial, religious, sexual and gender abuse. Again, finding out how far this is the actual case would be another useful topic for further research.

There was some interest in finding new sources of support for some of the more challenging aspects of living and working in Glastonbury. Advice in how to manage or facilitate groups, particularly with such as diverse local population, was mentioned, as well the possibility of having support – or even a local mediation service – to help when inter or intra group conflicts arose. There was some interest in having more information and support in dealing with the unconscious processes that can derail a spiritual organisation if not effectively addressed. More and better help for those starting up in business was mentioned, as well as help in finding an appropriate organisational structure (and leadership style) that was less hierarchical than the perceived norm in mainstream organisations.

How far such sources of support would actually be used was not entirely clear. Only three of those interviewed mentioned having turned to external support when dealing with a particular challenge, as most reported relying primarily on others in their organisation, friends and a few trusted advisors and mentors in the town. One person suggested that this might be due to people's lack of knowledge of the kind of support that might be available elsewhere or having an unrealistic view of this. Cost could also be a factor, hiring a business or emotional support consultant could be expensive. However, there are also many resources available, including books and online courses resources that are either free or at relatively low cost. Not many people appeared to know about or have access to resources of this kind.

It might require some kind of external intervention to encourage people to look for support of this kind. This could include a collation of resources in an accessible place. There is a now growing list of resources, for example, on the Glaston Centre website, and it could be possible, given additional resources, to have a section of the Avalon library dedicated to books on subjects such as building a spiritual business, leadership skills, or group facilitation.

Another possible idea is to begin to create and provide resources – such as a support network set of workshops, to see whether this attracts attendance. One of the interviewees had tried this for a while; something that had begun successfully but dwindled over time. Inviting in external speakers on subjects chosen by participants could be one way of keeping this fresh, but external funding might be required to cover the cost of these, rather than expecting it to be covered by local contributions.

The Findhorn Foundation created a new market for its activities when it developed a series of events and conferences that brought together people from both mainstream and alternative organisations and professions, on topics such as leadership, sustainability and supporting individuals, teams and organisation. For many, Glastonbury would also be an attractive location for events of this kind. One such event, the Glastonbury Academic Research Symposium, held in 2011, was very successful in attracting a number of academics and participants, with plans developed for a more permanent research centre, something which has yet to be developed⁷. Further workshops, symposia or a permanent research and resource centre could provide an opportunity for some of those with experience locally (like some of those interviewed) to share their experience with others, as well as attracting people from outside Glastonbury, with similar interests, to bring their expertise to those living and working in the town.

⁷ <https://www.glastoncentre.org/glastonbury-academic-research-symposium.html>