



**GAIA HOUSE**  
INSIGHT MEDITATION IN THE BUDDHIST TRADITION

## **Background Information for Deputy Director Position**

March 2018

*The following information outlines the structure and strategic aims of Gaia House Trust, and provides an overview of the culture and history of Gaia House.*

### **Mission Statement**

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Gaia House Trust's primary purpose is to enhance and develop mental, emotional and spiritual well-being by providing opportunities for people to learn and practise meditation. We aim to achieve this by offering a programme of teaching that enables people to develop their practice and understanding of Insight Meditation in the context of Buddhist thought.

Gaia House is open to those of any faith tradition or none. We do not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality, disability, age, sexual identity, gender, gender identity, class, religion or political beliefs.

The environment provided at Gaia House is one of silence, rural tranquillity, simplicity of lifestyle, sensitivity to the needs of others, and a commitment to ethical behaviour rooted in non-harming, compassion, kindness and generosity.

In order to fulfil its mission, Gaia House aims to:

- Offer a year-round programme of retreats directed by teachers who are committed to realising its purpose and respecting its silent practice environment.
- Make provision for solitary meditators, work retreatants and volunteers.
- Support the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being of all who reside and work in the house.
- Encourage and support the development of meditation and study groups locally and nationally.
- Establish and maintain harmonious relations with like-minded communities and organisations worldwide.
- Enable a wider audience to have access to the practice and understanding of meditation.
- Maintain and sustain the building and grounds in a way that is commensurate with the ethos of non-harming.
- Encourage the development of a Buddha Dharma that is relevant and consistent with modern thought and ideas, and develop relationships with other relevant disciplines/organisations, for example, the Mindfulness Initiative.

## **Strategic Aims**

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The following aims were agreed by the Trust in February 2013:

- To develop a layered programme, with different access points
- To reach a wider audience by developing outreach activities
- To take account of different learning styles and have clearly articulated learning objectives
- To contribute to the development of the understanding of Buddha Dharma and its relationship with other related disciplines
- To maximise the availability of single rooms and improve accessibility to the building
- To maximise the use of renewable energy
- To improve staff and teaching accommodation
- To explore the potential of creating non-silent meeting space (study retreats etc.)
- To invest in staff to enable them to reach their potential
- To promote good communication and team working
- To seek to embody the 6 Principles of Good Governance
- To explore options for defining membership and encouraging member participation

## **Structure of Gaia House Trust**

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Our Trustees have ultimate responsibility for the running of Gaia House, in accordance with our “Articles of Association”, and are accountable to the Charities Commission. Our “Articles of Association” currently state that we can have up to 18 trustees, with a quorum of four people required to make decisions. Only Trustees of Gaia House have a formal right to vote on any matter, though in practice, matters are usually settled by consensus and a vote is rarely taken. The Trust prefers to make decisions based on consensus, allowing individual views and concerns on particular issues to be addressed as thoroughly as possible.

The Trust currently consists of 7 trustees, who meet quarterly to develop the strategic direction and policies for the charity. The two directors also attend trust meetings, along with other staff as appropriate.

During 2015 a change to the sub-committee structure was implemented whereby the previous Trust Executive Committee and Finance & HR Committee were merged to form a Finance & General Purposes Committee. This group has a quorum of three trustees, is also attended by the director, and meets quarterly to make operational and strategic recommendations to the Trust.

## **Organisational Structure**

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A Teacher Council, consisting of nine senior teachers who regularly teach at Gaia House and have a particular commitment to the charity's objectives, also provide valuable advice on policy, strategy and operational issues. These teachers receive Dana payments from people who attend Gaia House retreats. In order to consider their advice to the Trust and director without compromising the principle of conflict of interest, the Trust has set up a number of Advisory Groups. The role of these groups is advice-giving only; they do not have any decision-making powers. Membership of these groups comprises at least one trustee, one

teacher, one director and other management staff as appropriate. Specific areas covered by the Advisory Groups are: programme, outreach, financial assistance/bursaries, teacher support, retreat environment, green issues, communications and strategic development.

Day-to-day responsibility for operations is delegated to the director, supported by a deputy director and a team of five department managers (Finance, HR & Admin, Retreat Management, Maintenance and Communications/IT) who in turn line-manage six staff, and the team of eight resident volunteer coordinators. The director also has line-management responsibility for the Resident Teacher who supports individual retreatants and staff.

### **Role of the Director**

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The director is employed by the Trust and is accountable to the Trustees who set the vision and policy, and are ultimately responsible for the operation of Gaia House. Quarterly Trust meetings are the forum where matters of strategic planning are decided by the trustees, which the director can then implement. The director works with a substantial amount of autonomy but will liaise closely with the deputy director and trustees who have particular areas of expertise and responsibility as appropriate.

The director is tasked to take responsibility for the following areas of the operation of Gaia House:

- To help the Trust to develop its vision and strategy to ensure the long-term future of the organisation.
- To deliver an effective retreat programme in consultation with representatives of the Teacher Council.
- To develop a strategy for the long-term sustainability of the building, minimising its carbon footprint as much as is practicable.
- To ensure that staff and volunteers achieve their full potential by means of mentoring, support and relevant training.
- To support effective fundraising and marketing strategies.
- To oversee financial & resource planning and to ensure compliance with relevant legislation and regulation.

### **History of Gaia House**

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The original Gaia House in Denbury was bought by a group of friends in 1983. The aim was to create a place where people could come to learn about and to practise meditation. The name Gaia was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, Gaia is the Greek earth goddess, now a symbol for the growing understanding of the interrelationship and interdependence of all things sharing this planet. Secondly, the Buddha became enlightened near the city of Gaya in northern India. Gaia House Trust received charitable status in 1990.

The present Gaia House was purchased in April 1996, and the original Gaia House was sold to a private individual in the August of that same year. The new property was purchased to answer the increasing demand for retreat spaces and more single rooms, and to provide improved facilities for retreatants.

For the 40 years prior to the purchase the house was used as a convent. As part of the purchase, the sisters took a 99 year lease on the graveyard adjoining the meditation hall and have a right of pedestrian access to the graveyard.

## **Gaia House Today**

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Gaia House is the only non-affiliated retreat centre in Britain which offers guidance in different meditative disciplines from the Buddhist traditions. Our retreats are designed for both experienced meditators and beginners, of any faith or none, who seek to cultivate a path of wisdom and compassion. All retreats are held in silence and explore the essential themes of calm attentiveness, equanimity, insight, joy and freedom. It is an independent registered charity and not affiliated to any other organisation.

Gaia House operates a year-round rolling programme of group retreats including meditation days, meditation courses, and longer retreats. These are led by Gaia House Teacher Council members and invited visiting teachers from around the world. A full group retreat can hold approximately 54 people with potential to increase to 60 on an 'exceptional retreat'.

We also operate a separate wing of the house that accommodates personal retreatants who are sitting solitary retreats. This wing houses up to 18 people. Personal retreatants are offered guidance and interviews by local teachers throughout their stay.

## **Current Strategic Development**

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Gaia House currently has a major development project underway. We have been actively fundraising to enable us to develop our centre with the addition of a new wing where we currently have workshops and garages. Planning permission has been obtained and funds required for some of this development have been secured. We are now in the process of identifying companies to approach for contract tendering. This work is intended to begin in the summer of 2019 and be completed by 2020.

March 2018