

## HOTV report for APM 2021

It has been an extraordinary year for the Heart of the Village, or bearing in mind that last year's APM was cancelled, I should say that it has been an even more extraordinary *two* years.

At the time of the last Annual Parish Meeting in April 2019 we had recently held a public meeting in the village hall to gauge interest in the project and invite feedback, but we had only just embarked on our Business Plan. This and the Share Prospectus were released in August that year to coincide with the opening of the share offer.

Towards the end of 2019, following a lot of research, principally by Mike Blair, we had located a container adapted to serve as a shop which was about to become available, and this was delivered to the Village hall car park in time for Ian to transfer the Village Stores into it at the beginning of 2020. Thank you to the PC for helping to fund this.

From January to April 2020, Ian and Karen did sterling work training volunteers to take over the operation of the shop for when it would transfer to HOTV ownership, but then Covid struck in earnest and the March 2020 lockdown defeated our plans and obliged us to hand over the the running of the shop from April to Jo and Carolyn our two managers. They have however done such a brilliant job in building the business that this could be regarded as a blessing in heavy disguise.

The share offer closed in March 2020, having raised £205,650, at which point we started putting together the finance to purchase the Royal Oak and refurbish it.

Our first Annual Members' Meeting took place (via Zoom) in June, which also marks the date from which we had an elected committee. We had a few slightly rocky meetings at which some Members had cold feet as to whether we should proceed in the face of a pandemic, but warmer feet prevailed and we finally clinched the deal on the Oak at the end of August 2020.

Since then there has been a maelstrom of activity on all fronts, and we could never have got as far as we have without the help of an astonishing number of people. The first target was to prepare the building to install the shop. Dave Dyer did his magic on the structure, and an amazing team of volunteers led by Tom Stobie and Trevor Daniels came in day after day and worked like Trojans to transform the LH bar. The shop opened at 7:30 on 30 November 2020. (I am proud to record that I had the honour of being the first customer!)

You are all aware of how the shop has gone from strength to strength since then, thanks both to the flair, commitment and hard work of Jo and Carolyn, and to the many volunteers, especially Marilyn Clarke, who have assisted them, largely unseen, from day one.

Meanwhile there was much more work to do to prepare for pub re-opening. To some extent it was an advantage that the enforced closure of pubs took the pressure off, though pressure has mounted as we approached opening day on 16th April.

Anyone who enjoyed a drink in the garden then or since will have appreciated how far we have come. Our volunteers have done us proud outside as well as in, and Helen Gittins and Kathryn Astin in particular have done wonders to the garden, along with

their team of garden volunteers. We also owe a massive debt to Carolyn's husband Simon for transforming the cellar, preparing the bar and handling the whole drinks side of things.

We hope to be able to open the inside bar in May. We welcome our new bar manager Phil Evans who is set to become a familiar face in the village. We look forward to being able to offer cooked food in both the café and the pub once the kitchen has been refurbished and re-equipped. We further look forward to getting the skittle alleys back in action and solving the puzzle of access to the function room to open up more dining space.

To touch briefly on the finances: HOTV turnover for the first year's trading was about £270K, which is ahead of what we had projected despite not being able to receive any appreciable revenue from the pub or café. When taking overheads, depreciation and finance costs into account we will just about break even, though of course we still have loans to pay off and more capital spend to come. The overall message is that despite the pandemic, we remain on course.

The Royal Oak, and HOTV in general will always remain works in progress. Once we have weathered the pandemic, paid off our debts and put everything on a firm commercial footing it was always the intention to plough most of the profits back into the community in whatever way seems most appropriate. It sometimes feels as though we have a mountain still to climb, but looking back to where we came from should give us confidence: it has been a long and rocky climb but we have come a hell of a long way in a relatively short time.

Finally more thank yous: there are far too many people to mention by name, and I'd be sure to forget someone vital, but I have to say that this simply would not have happened without the slog and dedication of Graham and John. My fellow committee-members Mike Blair and Chris Reah have also done a lot of essential work, and we could not have done without the skills of our demon Treasurer David Crabbe, the book-keeping talents of Sally Taylor or the accounting advice of Sophie Harris.

The volunteers are all heroes, whether they paint walls, clean floors or serve drinks: thanks to all of you for helping us to create a true community enterprise. As well as those I have already mentioned I'd like to put in a special mention for Sue and Robert Smyth who cheerfully tied themselves in knots doing one of the least glamorous jobs imaginable: repairing and repainting the loos! We love you!

We also appreciate hugely the 250+ Members who bought HOTV shares, thus demonstrating their faith and commitment. In many case Members and volunteers are the same people, but we make no distinction in terms of value: you are all essential and very much appreciated.

Last but by no means least I'd like to thank all the many customers without whom we'd be completely stuffed. Your contribution literally keeps us in business.

There have been a few hiccups and disagreements along the way, but after more than three years of hard work, HOTV has blossomed into exactly the sort of thriving social focus that we had dreamed of, and without which the village would be a much diminished place.