

# HOTV communications policy

May 2021

## About this document

*In response to a number of comments about how communication between HOTV management and members and the wider community could be improved, a provisional communications policy was written and issued at the end of March 2021. The present document is an adaptation of that in the light of feedback received from a number of people listed below.*

*One person objected that the original document was strictly speaking both more and less than a communications policy: it did not go far enough in terms of proactively generating engagement but it covered topics such as public relations and decision-making that would not normally be thought of as pertinent. In that respect this document has not changed: it attempts to cover all aspects of how the Management Committee and other officers communicate with the members (and vice versa), with the overall aim of improving the flow of information, enabling everyone to feel that their views are heard, improving our collective decision-making and spreading the word more widely, to encourage feedback and attract volunteers and customers.*

*This policy is and will remain a work in progress. We are currently hampered by Covid restrictions and HOTV is also still in an active developmental phase. As circumstances change so will the nature of our communications.*

## Overview

Heart of the Village is a Community Benefit Society. HOTV policy is determined by its Members via a Management Committee, but the aims of the Society are to serve the whole community of Stoke St Gregory and neighbouring parishes. The MC needs to have clear channels both to distribute information to all Members and other customers, and to receive feedback from them. All stakeholders should be clear that they are listened to and that their views will be responded to and, where practicable, acted on. The particular aim of this policy is to clarify how such information should be directed and received.

*"Members" (capital M) refers specifically to Members (i.e. shareholders) of HOTV.*

There are various strands of information to consider:

- 1) Keeping Members (and others) regularly *informed* of progress and intentions.
- 2) *Consultation* on major or minor refurbishment and policy decisions
- 3) Spreading the word to as to encourage more *custom* in shop, pub and café
- 4) Putting out messages to encourage more *volunteers* to come forward
- 5) Informing the wider *press* so as to raise the profile of HOTV and the village
- 6) Equally important is encouraging and maintaining the flow of comment, suggestion (and complaint) from the membership and the wider community *back* to the committee and the managers.

There are a variety of channels available to us: public meetings, website, email, social media (Facebook, Nextdoor, Twitter, Instagram, TripAdvisor), Stoke News, leaflet drops, posters and press releases. We should not forget that word of mouth is another ever-active channel over which we have little control but cannot afford to ignore.

## 1) Information

The most important element is maintaining a regular flow of information. It does not require Members to do anything, but it keeps them engaged and is appreciated. Good information is also a prerequisite for consultation and encouragement to customers and volunteers.

**Email:** The Chairperson sends regular updates—at least monthly during this phase—with occasional intermediate emails when particular questions arise. These cover all major developments and are also a means of asking for comment and conducting the occasional ballot. We would be reluctant to increase the frequency of these for fear of irritating those on the email list and potentially diluting the essential messages.

**Public meetings:** We hold monthly public meetings (currently on Zoom) where we can give a more detailed briefing and Members can ask questions. These are likely to continue for the time being, and they will become physical meetings (probably in the Royal Oak) as soon as Covid restrictions allow. Public meetings will become the default means of debating and deciding policy once they can be held in person.

The frequency of meetings (and email updates) is likely to decrease once the main thrust of the refurbishment is complete and the pub is open on a regular basis. They must at the very least be held annually. Under certain circumstances Members may ask the Secretary to convene a Special Members' Meeting to discuss a particular issue.

It should be noted that we do not exclude non-Members from any of our public meetings, and we are always happy to hear their views, though only Members are entitled to vote.

**Website:** The HOTV pages of the website provide the main channel for providing static information and news about HOTV. We are aware that we need to up our game in keeping this up to date and putting out more news items. We will also respond to comments that the information on the site could be made easier to find.

**Social media:** Facebook and Nextdoor are currently our preferred means of notifying those who subscribe to these services. Although it only reaches a fraction of the membership it has the advantage of actively alerting people rather than requiring them to visit our website. At present information is posted on an ad hoc basis by various people. We have been aware for some time that we need someone to take on responsibility for actively publicising HOTV news and events on social media, including responding to comments. The shop managers do this successfully on behalf of the shop, we expect that the bar manager will take this on for the pub. Our social media presence should probably expand to include Twitter, Instagram and especially Tripadvisor. We are actively looking for someone to oversee this on behalf of HOTV as a whole.

## 2) Consultation

This is the most controversial area and in the nature of things we are unlikely to satisfy everyone. A few argue that every question needs to be democratically decided whereas the majority appear to feel that they elect a management committee to manage. We clearly do need to consult on some of the more significant questions. The best way of handling this is to identify three levels of decision:

- a) Highly significant issues that should be agreed by all members
- b) Issues on which we inform in advance and only consult if asked to do so
- c) Minor issues that are handled without consultation

The potential rejigging of the pub, moving skittles upstairs etc would be a good example of a), and of course the election of MC members is another. Normally these things would be decided at actual public meetings. We can (and have) arrived at decisions in Zoom meetings and we have also conducted successful email ballots. We need to adapt to circumstances but we do not feel that radical changes are necessary either in how we handle consultation over the big questions or how minor day-to-day operational decisions are made.

The middle ground (b) is trickier, and in particular demarcating the boundaries between (b) and (c). It has been suggested that we could *define* medium level decisions, but it seems unlikely that we could arrive at a prescription that would satisfy all cases: there would be sure to be issues that slipped below the wire but someone felt passionately about, and many others that met the definition and therefore triggered a cumbersome decision-making process without exciting much interest at all. The conclusion is that the degree of interest, not some abstract definition, should be the trigger.

The mechanism we still propose therefore is that we *inform* Members of our intentions, *wait* at least three days for comments or objections and then either proceed or widen the consultation according to the feedback we receive. We cannot guarantee to notify all Members via any one channel, and we would be reluctant to send mass emails several times a month, but almost everyone has access to the website at any time, so this has to be the official noticeboard for proposed actions and developments. We would however notify more actively or initiate a consultation on any matter which was thought to be of serious interest.

Announcements will be made either via meeting minutes or HOTV News items, though we may also set up a page for bare bones progress reports and proposals for upcoming work. Members could choose to receive notifications when this page changed. Any comments in response to information on the website (or elsewhere) should be sent to [contact@hotvssg.org](mailto:contact@hotvssg.org).

### **3) Advertising**

Attracting sufficient custom has long been understood to be an essential element in the success of HOTV. Jo and Carolyn are doing a very good job of handling shop publicity on Nextdoor and Facebook, and with leaflets. The intention would be for the pub manager to do the same. The pub will stand or fall long-term according to how well-known and well-regarded it is in the wider community.

We need to sharpen our social media presence in any case, and maintain an active presence on Tripadvisor. As the business progresses we may want to consider paid advertising in the local press or elsewhere.

### **4) Volunteers**

We need to keep attracting fresh volunteers and we need to keep existing volunteers informed of matters that concern them. Member emails, leaflet drops, articles in Stoke

News and posts on Nextdoor have been reasonably successful in attracting volunteers, though we can hardly have too many so there is a constant need to invite more.

The 3Rings website is used as a means to co-ordinate shifts, and direct emails have been used as the main means of contact within the volunteer pool. All of this seems to work reasonably well.

#### **5) Press**

Tim has done a great job of putting out press releases and there is no obvious reason to change what he is doing. Those of us involved in operational matters should be liaising with Tim in order to alert him to upcoming newsworthy moments.

#### **6) Feedback**

The default channel for Members and others to contact the MC is the email address [contact@hotvssg.org](mailto:contact@hotvssg.org). Please direct any comments, suggestions, questions or complaints to this address. Anyone who sends an email should expect a reply within 48 hours; please write again if this does not happen. Further contact details are in the Contact section on the HOTV landing page at [www.hotvssg.org](http://www.hotvssg.org).

We intend also to set up suggestions books both in the shop and in the pub. As long as Covid restrictions apply you will need to submit your suggestions verbally. We are happy to receive any form of feedback in these including what you'd like to see stocked in pub and shop.

*We thank the following HOTV members whose feedback was taken into account when refining this document: Roger Brown, Susan Crabbe, Paul Fielding, Fiona McQueen and Ian Upshall. If any of these would like the full text of their comments made available, please let the author know and they can be linked.*

NRS 13-5-21