

HOTV Management Committee meeting minutes

The Royal Oak, 7 June 2021, 7:00pm

Present: Graham Gleed (Chair), Mike Blair (Vice-Chair), David Crabbe (Treasurer), Nick Sloan (Secretary), Chris Reah, Jo Bown, Carolyn Dauncey, Simon Dauncey, (later) Phil Evans and about 12 others. Apologies from John Davison.

Minutes of the last meeting

- 1.1 The minutes of the last meeting were agreed to be accurate.

Members feedback

- 2.1 Susan Crabbe asks for news on the road signs to the Royal Oak. NS has made some designs. The signs should be sited at all relevant road junctions. Ian Upshall suggests that the signs also say "shop". **NS to reconsider designs and circulate.**
- 2.1 Ann Woods [?] suggests that we find out how to have the café listed on the website cafenetwork.info, since this could bring in more custom from cyclists. GG adds that there are also a number of cycling apps that list cafés. We are also looking to provide facilities for bicycle servicing. **GG to research website and app listing.**
- 2.2 Paul Fielding says that there is another Royal Oak closing near Street, and wonders whether there may be anything available that we could make use of. **SD to find out.**
- 2.3 GG relays a suggestion that a mirror be placed on the wall opposite the car park entrance. To be noted and considered.
- 2.4 GG relays a question about why the frame of the pub sign has no bottom. NS says it was always like that. GG further asks whether the sign could say "and café". NS to consider. [*There has been an alternative suggestion to have a separate café sign; the external signage needs to be generally rethought—NS.*]
- 2.5 Paul Fielding has asked if we should maintain and publish the Community Benefit Plan that originally formed part of our Business Plan. Ian Upshall says that it is an important document that should be maintained, but is unlikely to change very much. GG says that most of the items on the CBP have been realised, with the notable exception of a facility for young people. One item not in the plan is the possibility of providing meals to the school. Ian suggests that the CBP be published as a series of dated independent documents to form a historical record. **GG to update and NS to post on the website.**
- 2.6 Susan Crabbe asks who would be cooking school meals. GG replies that this is part of a wider question about use of the kitchen. The provision of school meals is still at an exploratory stage, and discussions are ongoing.

Shop operations

- 3.1 CD reports continuing good trading in both shop and café. CD thanks the volunteer cake-bakers, but asks if others could contribute to help spread the load. The noticeboard has arrived, and the intention is to attach it to the railings so that notices can be read when the shop is closed. Could we consider a shed to house fruit and vegetables overnight if the previously proposed awning is not happening [yet]? The shop has two new suppliers: the Mump market garden at Burrowbridge who are a new business providing local produce and a supplier of handmade scotch eggs from

Taunton. Some new volunteers have signed up, but there is still a reluctance for people to commit to shifts, particularly towards the end of the week. More shifts will need to be added when the kitchen is operational and the café is serving food. More volunteers are becoming proficient on the till, and coffee training should be available soon. Carolyn and Jo are very committed to building a strong team of volunteers.

Financial headlines

- 4.1 GG reports that the shop had its best trading week this week, and DC confirms that net sales were just below £7.5K. The café component is £250 to £300 per week, though this does not include cake. Initial trading in the pub has also been very good, totalling just over £1K last week. April was expensive in terms of stock as we had to set up the pub. Our gross margin is about £7.5K a month for shop and café and about £2K for the pub. Running costs (salaries, services and bank loans) are approximately £9K per month, so we are at least breaking even.
- 4.2 We have used about £80 in capital expenditure, with more to come on refurbishing the flats. We have received about £3.5K in new investments and selling the shop-in-a-box. In general the books are looking healthy and heading in the right direction. GG adds that we are operating well within our forecasts. Our Plunkett Foundation adviser was very complimentary on a recent visit.
- 4.3 Marilyn Clarke points out that Jo and Carolyn work all hours, and no provision has been made for them to have holidays. GG acknowledges that the MC is very conscious of this and taking steps to address it. DC points out that volunteer training should be part of the solution.

Kitchen

- 5.1 MB: repair of the floor has been delayed, but should be completed on Tuesday 8 June, after which we can start bringing equipment into the kitchen. Two small chillers are replacing the milk fridge in the shop, which is then being moved to the kitchen. The pizza oven still needs to be repaired once parts have been procured from Germany. PE has offered use of a garden pizza oven. NS reports that Dave Dyer believes that he has a solution to the leak in the kitchen, and will do the necessary work as soon as he can.

Other works

- 6.1 NS: discussions are in hand about the building and plumbing work necessary in the flats. This is to be completed before the end of July.
- 6.2 GG asks what is happening about the pavement around the gate. NS replies that cleaning up this area has been on the list for a while but has been overlooked. This is partly because of uncertainty about whether or not we should maintain the railing in its present position or set up separate entrances for shop and pub. GG says that Trevor Hooper has volunteered to do any necessary work here. **NS to expedite plans.**
- 6.3 Marilyn asks about the café garden door. GG and NS reply that this is to be replaced as a priority with double french doors without a sill and with an external ramp in place of a step. **NS to finalise plans and order.**
- 6.4 It is asked if there are plans to put heating in the café. GG says yes, but it is now June, so we have a while to consider.

Recruiting a cook/chef

- 7.1 GG: finding the right person to work in the kitchen is going to be crucial and we are on the lookout. There is supposedly a national shortage of chefs, so although we could (and may) advertise, we are focussing our efforts on networking at present. GG and JB to contact a potential local candidate. Everyone is invited to ask around and make suggestions. JB, CD and PE will be involved in the selection process. Paul asks if the chef would be cooking for the pub alone or pub and café; Susan asks if they would be part- or full-time. GG replies that all this is up for discussion, and that eventually there is likely to be more than one person working in the kitchen.

Amazon drop-off

- 8.1 PayPoint have been pushing the shop to become an Amazon parcel drop-off point. DC says that the financial incentive is minimal, the main consideration is whether we have the capacity to store parcels safely in the shop. GG points out that the delivery of parcels is far less problematical now that customers are no longer required to sign for them. Susan suggests asking Plunkett about the experience in other shops. **GG to follow up this suggestion.**

Newsletter

- 9.1 Fi McQueen, with help from DC, has produce a draft newsletter. The first edition should be available online and in the shop before the next meeting. This will be issued at intervals. The provision of content and the form of the collaboration in producing it is still to be worked out. Graham's monthly email update will continue independently.

Pub operation

- 10.1 PE reports positive feedback from pub customers despite the necessity to enforce table service only. Last week showed the best trade so far. Evening shifts have been split in order to make them less onerous for volunteers, but Thursday and Saturday night shifts have proved difficult to fill.
- 10.2 GG says there have been comments about the harsh acoustic of the bar and the need for soft furnishings to improve this. PE asks if the MC could agree a budget of up to £1K to pay for sofas and other sound-dampening items. One idea would be to put the sofas and a low coffee table near the wood-burner, which would also open up the stove to the rest of the room. Curtains could be helpful too. GG agrees to add these items to our to-do list.
- 10.3 PE suggests an open discussion about what sort of special nights (e.g. quiz night, pizza night) would be welcomed by the community. Music nights are another suggestion. It is very much the intention to make one skittle alley useable in the next couple of months, and skittlers are known to be keen to return.
- 10.4 In response to a question about extending opening times, PE explains that this is problematical for as long as we are restricted to table service and require multiple volunteers, but he would hope to open for longer when it is easier to do so. We will need to discuss ways of working when shop and pub are open at the same time, and customers may want to order from both. PE suggests that we canvass the community on the opening times they'd like to see, possibly via the new newsletter. GG thanks PE for his work.

Other items

- 11.1 GG says that HOTV has almost achieved its primary objectives and we need to agree a plan for how we progress. By the time of the Annual Members' Meeting in September we should have some options on the table, but in the meantime GG invites anyone with an interest to make their views known to any member of the MC [or via contact@hotvssg.org].
- 11.2 GG: there will be an election at the AMM for at least two places on the MC. If you would like to make a contribution by joining us, please consider it now. MB suggests that we need a more diverse group of committee members. GG encourages those present to spread the word.
- 11.3 It is generally agreed that face to face meetings at the Oak are preferable to Zoom meetings, and should continue.

Meeting closes 8:15 pm (1h 15m)

The next scheduled meeting is the public HOTV meeting on Monday 5 July, at 7:00 pm in the Royal Oak.