

Houghton Village News

Annual Report Houghton Annual Parish Assembly 2022

Recent History of 'Houghton News'

Houghton News (as the magazine was formerly called) was an institution in Houghton & Bossington for many years and a key part of how we communicate news, stories, and events to parishioners.

Sponsored by All Saints' Church, the magazine was subscription based, enjoyed by around a half of the dwellings in the parish. Subscription fees and advertising revenue funded the printing and other costs. Houghton News was published 10 months each year, the exceptions being in January (when advertisers need to be re-signed and new advertisers sought) and August (which is the prime holiday month). The magazine was full colour, printed to A4 size, with any residual proceeds going to All Saints' Church, with the finances managed by the treasurer of the Parochial Church Council.

In the summer of 2020, the editors Kate and Simon Selwood, announced their intention to stand down at the end of 2020 and new editors were sought. When this role could not be filled, the magazine became redundant with the last copy hitting doormats in late November 2020.

Houghton Support Group

The above group was formed by Dennis Stephens to support the village through Covid-19 lockdowns, and the organisers met virtually to speak about ways we could help us all through this unprecedented period in our history. During the meetings in 2021, Michael Woodhall lamented the passing of Houghton News and wondered if there was a role for the group to take it on and resurrect it. In the summer of 2021, Michael and I met, and I suggested that, rather than a 'committee' take editorial ownership, it was best to do so by an individual or individuals (as previously) and I volunteered to take the project on, but with certain conditions which are outlined in the strategy below.

Houghton Village News; New Name - New Strategy

1. Subscription Free Model

I wanted to have independent editorial control to shape Houghton Village News as a wide-ranging resource for everyone in the parish, not just those who chose to, wanted to, or could afford to subscribe. Therefore, I set an ambitious target to make the new magazine 'subscription free' so that every house in the parish received a copy each month, yet at the same time, not to increase the number of adverts.

2. Content

I wanted to upweight the content and make it broader to engage the community with a range of (hopefully) interesting subjects. The downside was that this would mean a magazine with more pages than previously, which would increase the print costs each month and further increase the financial burden! Having seen Kate and Simon sometimes struggle for content when sending out pleas via the village email, I decided on a different approach and contacted a handful of villagers that I knew could potentially write a monthly column for the magazine, either on their profession or a hobby that others might find of interest. These would run alongside the regular updates from All Saints' Church, Houghton Neighbourhood Watch, Houghton Parish Council, Houghton Village Hall, and Houghton WI. Happily, all accepted the challenge, and we now enjoy reading about Bees, Cookery, Fitness, Gardening, Local Theatre & Events, Nature, and the River Test. These, together with one off articles, means that to date, there has not been a shortage of content for each edition!

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Also, I was keen to avoid publishing any content that could be determined as being campaign or rant based; I don't feel that Houghton News is the place for content of this nature; there is enough of this posted on Social Media these days!

3. Funding

I needed to find a way to offset the loss of subscription revenue which at the time, ran at around £1,200 per annum whilst not increasing advertising revenues, plus the inevitable increase in print costs. In a meeting with Michael, he suggested an approach be made to the Houghton Community Benefit Fund and Houghton Parish Council for grants to offset these and after a rapid process, both agreed to lend their financial support, which gave the project the green light.

4. Printing

I wanted to reduce the size of the magazine down from A4 to A5 for a couple of reasons. We needed to deliver twice the number of the new magazines to reach all houses in the parish and I felt that A5 would both reduce the weight of the material and ease the posting through letterboxes. I also wanted to keep to a full colour magazine; whilst more costly than black and white, any photographic content would look far better in full colour.

I briefed the concept to three printers; the incumbent, a local printer who helps with printing for The Houghton Trail Event and a friend of mine who owns a print business. By far the best cost and quality and (as I later discovered) delivery was the incumbent based in Devon and specialising in printing parish magazines.

5. Distribution

I called upon Sandra Harper for help; Sandra had previously managed the distribution team for Houghton News and she was keen to continue to help and we set about carving the parish up into 10 delivery rounds. With twice the number of magazines to be delivered, we needed a bigger team. The call went out on the village email, and we now have a team of 15 volunteers who undertake the deliveries in all weathers!

Continuous Improvement

We have acted on feedback from our readers and tried to accommodate all suggestions for improvement. One of the problems when formatting content on a computer is that it is difficult to know how it will look in print and one key issue was the size of the font. This has increased from font size 12 to font size 15 emboldened and seems to have done the trick for most of our readers.

There have been a couple of calls for a return to A4, which I have so far resisted to help the delivery team's task as described above.

We tried a 'Recommended Traders' column, a kind of Houghton Check-a-Trade but felt that this conflicted with some advertisers and so was dropped.

Latterly, I have introduced a feature called 'Houghton News' to report on the activities and events that take place in the village. There is much to be enjoyed in Houghton and Bossington!

Current Status

At around the time of the Annual Parish Assembly, we will be delivering the 8th edition of Houghton Village News. We lost a couple of advertisers in January but were approached by other organisations who saw the new publication and wanted to advertise, so we have a couple more adverts that at the time of relaunch, but the advertising; content ratio remains (in my opinion) healthy.

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I thought that content would be a real issue, but happily, to date and thanks to our contributors, this has not been the case. I hope this continues as it makes the task easier!

The Future

The magazine is financially viable, content is flowing, and my enthusiasm has not waned, so 2022 looks good for Houghton Village News.

I have entered the magazine into the Parish Magazine Awards 2022, the winners of which will be announced in November. There are 5 categories:

- *Best Design* – Focuses on any artwork within the magazine, page layout and use of graphics.
- *Best Content* – The variety of articles, use of photos and general information included.
- *Best Editor* – Order of content, variety, accuracy, and interest value.
- *Best Print* – Quality of printing and finishing of the magazine.
- *Best Overall Magazine* – A general overview of all the above categories.

Fingers crossed for success and an article in the December 2022 issue!

Acknowledgements, Without Who...

- Funding - The Houghton Community Benefit Fund and Houghton Parish Council
- Our columnists and contributors
- Our Advertisers
- Our Distribution Team of Lisa Aitken, Alistair Dougall, Linda Harrison, Di Haslam, Sandra Harper, Tina Heffernan, Sue Marshall, Lindsay Parker, Pip Redding, Kate & Simon Selwood, Sarah Shorthouse, Dennis Stephens, Sue Welch, and Gill Young
- Editing/Proof Reading Support - Alistair Dougall
- The residents of Houghton & Bossington

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