

Buxton Crescent Heritage Trust

Communications voice guidelines

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Do you need to print **all** of this document?
Perhaps just print the pages relevant to you.

Introduction

This document outlines the thinking behind the written copy that Buxton Crescent Heritage Trust (BCHT) will use as part of its external communications work.

Informing the communications voice

The BCHT communications voice is informed, in part, by audience-facing communications that have been issued by the Trust so far and also by the experience of creating visitor-facing interpretive copy for Buxton Crescent Visitor Experience. It's also informed by the wider branding exercise that is taking currently place for the town of Buxton in general. Brands in and around Buxton will be taking note of that as it develops and considering where their own brand fits in with it.

Communications voice and brand

This document does not represent, and is not informed by, a full brand articulation for BCHT, which may need to be completed as part of a general communications review. And it is not a design document that talks about imagery or brand articulation in visual sense.

Instead, it sums up the results of a collaborative workshop that took place recently and harnesses the collective thoughts about how the Trust will write and talk to audiences.

Voice vs messaging

This document established guidelines for *how* BCHT seeks to write and talk to audiences. It does not, however, specify *what* you are going to say. This is another piece of work you will need to do, to ensure that you are 'on message' when speaking with potential audiences.

This report is intended to help you articulate those messages.

Where we use this voice

The communications voice is used alongside another voice (the interpretive voice). Although the two voices are connected, and share some common values, it is important that writers across the organisation understand where each voice is used.

We have agreed that the voices are used in the following places ...

Interpretation voice	Communications voice	Informed by the communications voice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Front of house • The exhibition graphics, panels • Directional signage within the experience • Printed leaflet/guide in the experience • Large print guide • Digital interpretation including films and interactive elements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverts, editorials and print • Public relations communications • Website • Social media • Hashtags • E-shots and news letters • Ticketing and follow-up visitor communications • Evaluation and feedback • Verbal presentations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising and development • Stakeholder communications • External emails • Formal learning sessions • Learning materials E.g. teacher resources • How we speak with visitors • Talks and guided tours

A reminder of some context for the communications voice

WHY are we interpreting Buxton Crescent?

BCHT seeks to ...

- Create a financially sustainable visitor attraction.
- Be welcoming and inclusive to all visitors.
- Create a compelling, wow factor experience.
- Meet the needs of a wide audience, including existing and new visitors to Buxton and the Peak District.
- Establish the context for the Crescent, including the appeal of Buxton and the Peak District, and the health issues and medical options people faced in the past.
- Tell the story of Buxton's water cure from its origins to the present day.
- Tell the story of the Crescent from its origins to the present day.
- Tell the story of the Devonshire family and make links to Chatsworth House and the wider Peak District.
- Integrate with any future education and activity programme.
- Integrate with and support the visitor welcome role of front of house staff and volunteers.
- Link with and signpost to other venues and heritage sites in Buxton.
- Support the wider Buxton Water brand and its values.

WHO is our audience?

The following groups will make up the majority of the audience:

- Existing tourists and visitors to Buxton and the Peak District National Park – Peak District visitors including 'active explorers', 'affluent achievers' and 'comfortable commuters' (the core audience)
- Mature explorers aged 45+, often in couples or small groups
- Local residents curious to see how the refurbishment has gone, often with a strong sense of local pride and who can become ambassadors for the scheme with their VFR audiences
- People with a particular interest in heritage and architecture – potentially specialists or those drawn to the Crescent because of its significance
- Hotel and spa day visitors, often from a more affluent demographic
- Coach parties and organised groups, many of whom will be in Buxton for a limited period of perhaps 2 hours
- Families with children aged up to 15
- People who have visited or are planning to visit Chatsworth
- School groups, University of Derby students and their families
- International tourists e.g. Chinese

WHAT do outcomes do we want to see in visitors to the BCVE?

Knowledge and understanding

As a result of visiting, the majority of visitors will be able to:

- Express a general understanding of the water cure in Buxton
- Express a general understanding of the restoration and original uses of the building
- Articulate the link between the water under their feet and the water they might drink from a Buxton Water bottle
- Express a deeper understanding of the stories that are most interesting and meaningful to them
- Know or understand something new or intriguing – “I didn’t know that”
- Talk about one or two of the interpretive characters they encounter
- In addition, visitors will learn the detail of one or more of the primary and secondary themes, depending on their particular interests

Values, attitudes and feelings

As a result of visiting, the majority of visitors will feel:

- Welcome and confident about finding their way around
- A part of the experience of being in original heritage spaces
- Stimulated and interested in the stories of Buxton Crescent, health and the water cure in Buxton – and pleased that they have learned something new
- Connected to the history and significance of Buxton Crescent, its architecture and national significance as a building
- That there is something of value to explore and preserve here
- A stronger feeling for the importance of water in people’s lives
- A greater sense of place and local pride (local residents)
- That they have enjoyed their heritage learning experience

Activity, behaviour and progression

As a result of visiting, the majority of visitors will:

- Find their way easily around the rooms and displays
- Return to the Pump Room at the end of their visit
- Be more likely to visit other related heritage sites or walking routes in Buxton
- Fill a water container at the well or fountain
- Want to visit the spa, if they can afford it
- Share their enthusiasm for Buxton Crescent’s history and heritage with friends, family and on-line communities – telling them their “I didn’t know that ...” fact
- Understand where Buxton Water comes from and remember their visit here today in relation to Buxton Water products and brand

Written tone of voice: how we write communications copy

We spent time exploring the tone of voice that our communications seek to emulate – who we sound like, (who we don't sound like) and how we seek to communicate with our visitors.

A writing tool

This document is designed for the writers of communications copy to use as a writing tool. It can also be a reference tool for anyone editing or reviewing outward facing copy to ensure that it is reflective of this voice. The drivers provide the bulk of the practical tips and suggestions that will help you create great communications copy.

The intention is not that these guidelines are simply reproduced verbatim in communications copy. Visitors will never see the voice articulated in this way. These pages are tools for BCHT to use when writing communications copy.

Guidelines, not rules

The content listed here does not need to be followed slavishly. Writing that conforms to lots of rules tends to sound rather too corporate and guarded for our liking. That said, wandering too far from the drivers will result in a mixture of voices that are at odds with one another.

Adaptable toolkit

Within the individual driver descriptions there are some tips for how to 'dial up' each driver. These are provided as initial suggestions that can be used as a starting point, but if you wanted to personalise these to your own tastes and styles then please do so. Write and scrawl on them and make them work for you. Feel free to add annotations, images or other ideas to your own copy of the toolkit.

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So what does this voice sound like?

The BCHE communications voice is on one hand somewhat like a traditional heritage communications voice. It is:

- warm – at all times and to all people
- welcoming – it invites people to come to our town and our Crescent
- trustworthy – a safe pair of hands that can speak with the clarity, honesty and authority about the Crescent

But beyond that, it also needs to set the expectation for potential visitors of a 'wow' factor inside BCVE. So it is also:

- involving – it encourages you the reader to see yourself in Buxton Crescent
- upbeat – positive and, at times, entertaining
- refreshing – offering unexpected or incongruous ideas to our potential audience
- playful – slightly quirky, with a twinkle in the eye

The BCHT communications voice does not:

- sound like loads of other boring, bland, repetitive or overly formal heritage communication voices
- indulge itself in superlatives – we don't seek to be the biggest, grandest, 'most unique' etc.
- overuse the dreaded 'visitor verbs' as part of the sell – though it may on occasion use them when inviting potential visitors to see themselves in the Crescent
- pretend to be overly worthy
- preach to its audience
- describe or define what Buxton Crescent, BCHT or BCVE is without making a meaningful statement about it – we do not simply list facts about architecture or heritage, like everyone else does

In order to create this, the voice is written:

- with an upbeat and warm positivity
- with a refreshing playfulness that sets itself apart from other heritage voices
- in active support of the Trust and the Crescent, telling people not only what it is, but why they should care or see themselves there. It is involving.
- with honesty – let's not oversell or overpromise
- with a hook or a snare to start much of its copy, rather than starting with the abstract – this enables us to capture potential audiences' attention
- in harmony with any imagery that may be accompanying the copy – we see this copy working well with a strong and potentially creative/provocative visual identity such as collage

Sound like anyone familiar?

We feel the voice of Lucy Worsley is close to how we want to communicate with our potential visitors. Lucy has an upbeat energy and enjoys her work and there is much of this spirit that we would like to emulate. She's smart, well-presented and confident.

She is an intimate storyteller, beckoning us into the tale she is telling – she almost whispers in our ear sometimes, letting us in on a secret. But it's not just her secret. Instead, she takes delight in the viewer/reader/listener/visitor taking ownership of the story. She unlocks the door and invites us in. She's not afraid of dressing up. She says to us 'come with me...' 'let me show you' 'you're going to like this'



Yet Lucy Worsley also has authority. She works for a respected organisation (Historic Royal Palaces) and her BBC pedigree reminds us that we trust what she says is honest and truthful. She cares for her subject, she cares about heritage and history, and we get the sense that she cares about us.



Lucy also has an infectious enthusiasm for her subject. We get the impression she's so passionate about communicating with the public, she'd probably do it for free.

A word of caution

While Lucy Worsley's charisma is an attractive quality for many, for some she is simply too much. We should be mindful not to emulate her tone too closely, lest we alienate part of our potential audience. Be inspired by how she writes and speaks, but not slavish to her tone.

The four drivers

In order to articulate what the communications voice sounds like, we have created a suite of four **drivers** which describe how we write.



What are drivers?

The drivers are the foundation of how we look, feel and speak when we write. These drivers should always be present to a degree in our tone of voice – not literally using these words, but certainly keeping their meaning and their sentiment at the front of the writer’s mind.

They are, as might be suspected, what is supposed to *drive* us as writers.

The information BCHT uses to inform the messaging for your communications is not necessarily directly related to the drivers (although there may be some tonal overlap between the messages and the tones of voice in which they are written).

As stated above, drivers are not tools for helping you decide *what* to write – that comes from your communications plan. Instead, drivers help you understand *how* you write. They describe the words and the tone you use in your written text.

The four drivers are explored further on the following pages.

Welcoming host

This driver says
to the visitor ...

"We're unlocking
the doors, for you,
not for us."

Driver strapline ... a warm welcome into the Crescent

Sounds like ... a generous dinner party host

Wants the visitor ... to feel positive and delighted
about the prospect of visiting

The WELCOMING HOST driver is the part of the voice that encourages potential visitors to come to us, especially those who may have reservations.

It is a benevolent and kind voice, inclusive and welcoming. Think of a friendly butler or the best kind of tour guide – someone who knows the venue already, but who also wants to show it to you.

This is an active and upbeat host, filled with energy, rather than a passive host that simply waits for their visitors to arrive. Imagine the host eagerly awaiting guests, excited about ushering them in with an active welcome.

The welcome we offer isn't grand, showy or over-the-top though. Instead it's warm, friendly, comfortable and kind. Though we have no need to be too humble. We know that what we are offering to visitors is bloody brilliant. The key to the WELCOMING HOST driver is that rather than being passionate about showing off our brilliant Crescent, we are instead passionate about enabling access to the Crescent. To your crescent. We're throwing the doors open and putting down the carpet – not for us, but for you.

When dialling up the WELCOMING HOST driver:

- We can, of course, just say the word 'welcome' to potential visitors, but every heritage organisation does that. Instead, think of ways of making your language actively welcoming. With your words open the door for the reader, look them directly in the eye, beckon them in, put them at their ease, make them a cuppa and fluff up a cushion to show that it's okay for them to join us.
- We care. We offer a warm welcome. An active welcome. We're throwing the doors open and encouraging you in like a friendly insider who is excited to bring people in.
- What words have people said to you when they've really wanted you to go to their venue, especially if they've shown you around a special place? How can the words we use make that invitation personal?
- Build anticipation for potential visitors. *You're going to love this. We're expecting you. Excited to welcome you in.*
- Remember that we are, in part, talking to people who are perhaps already interested in visiting us. So we don't need to go on a hard sell. Indeed, we can offer a soft and warm sell that beckons people towards us.
- We use positive welcome words like *enter, include, everyone, openness, public, unlocked, unwrapped*
- Write your text with a beaming smile. Write it as if it could have an exclamation mark after it – and then please delete every exclamation mark, unless it's grammatically necessary. (We don't like write Adrian Mole.)
- Be caring towards our potential visitors. Show them that they matter to us. We're not aggressive or brash in our sell. We are gentle, open and honest. Let warmth run through your words.
- Use words that remind the visitor they are the ones who are welcomed in. *You* and *we* work well.
- We don't lay any claim to the building. Words like *our* and *ours* would reinforce that.

This driver takes some inspiration from the interpretation voice drivers of SENSORY and INTIMATE.

Quiet confidence

This driver says
to the visitor ...

"We are polished
and elegant, yet
also accessible"

Driver strapline ... knowingly modest

Sounds like ... a refined Dowager Duchess

Wants the visitor ... to be drawn towards our beauty
but not be overwhelmed by it

This driver reminds us that we are not in the slightest bit brash. But neither are we a wallflower. Safe in the knowledge that our Crescent is a beautiful example of Georgian architecture, faithfully restored to its former glory, we embody a QUIET CONFIDENCE when talking about it. There is no need to be showy, noisy or vulgar in the way we hold ourselves. Sometimes, we just let the facts do the talking.

Think of the dignified posture of an elegant swan or ballet dancer – male or female. Like the Crescent, we are beautifully dressed and filled with grace, but also understated at the same time. Cultured, experienced, sophisticated, yes, but not showy about it.

We are clear, we are calm and we are confident. We know our station, but we certainly don't flaunt it. There is a humility and reservation to how we write and speak. We know when to keep our mouth shut. There's nothing wrong with leaving some things unsaid.

We have poise, dignity and grace. The QUIET CONFIDENCE driver radiates a gentle sense of late 18th-century sophistication. It also satisfies some of the expectations people may have when visiting a fine example of a Georgian Crescent.

When dialling up the QUIET CONFIDENCE driver:

- Embody the dignity and elegant sophistication that the voice deserves. Sit up straight in your chair, fix your hair nice and write calmly and neatly in your best handwriting. Don't stick nose in the air (you're not that grand), but certainly hold your shoulders back and sit up straight when writing. A quite smile to oneself is perfectly fine, just don't let the public see too much of it.
- Bring a subtlety and gentility to language. It should float on the page and in the reading. Sing your message to the reader, or set it to a sonnet or a gentle folk tune before committing the words to paper.
- Don't be tempted to use words that are unnecessarily fancy or beyond the reach of our potential visitors. This is still an accessible visitor experience for all, not a private party for the gentry.
- When in doubt, let the facts do the talking. On their own, they're already impressive. Stating them plainly, and not over-manipulating them, will underline the sense of quiet confidence.
- What visual cue reminds you of quiet confidence? A neatly pressed napkin. An empty art gallery. A Gainsborough portrait.
- Be real and authentic to the reader – there is no need to over-promise or to over-polish the product. We are confident that the product can sell itself.
- Resist the temptation to use big, brash, loud or showy words. We don't use superlatives. And we don't use exclamation marks. Nothing too noisy or ugly and certainly no swears.
- Words with long vowels and that are spoken with the mouth open, create a sense of calm and openness, rather clipped and closed words.
- There's a hidden strength to Buxton Crescent. Let's keep some of that hidden.
- There's no need to flex our muscles. Our well-cut shirt will do that for us.

This driver takes some inspiration from the interpretation voice drivers of AUTHENTIC and DIGNIFIED.

Natural charm

This driver says
to the visitor ...

"I'm sure you'll
agree this place is
completely
delightful."

Driver strapline ... a fine pedigree

Sounds like ... a handsome hotel with a super view

Wants the visitor ... to be impressed by our charm, but
not put off by it

This is perhaps the grandest of the drivers, but it is certainly not flash or showy. When we are NATURALLY CHARMING, we write with an elegance and a politeness that verges on romance.

We can be both classic and contemporary at the same time, like a vase of lilies or a handsome table, laid out for the finest afternoon tea. Feel the crispness of the linen and see the sparkle on the crockery.

We want potential visitors to feel like that they're not going to get lectured at, but that they're part of a conversation with us. Indeed, our charm needs to draw people towards us, not put people off. If potential visitors think we are a load of stuck-up poshos, then we've got the job wrong. But they should certainly anticipate something rather delightful.

We draw people into our history and architecture by talking to them directly. But instead of teaching them something in a didactic sense, we are beckoning them close with a charming welcome. The charm we offer isn't exclusive – by visiting, people will be able to step into some of this charm, just for a moment.

The NATURAL CHARM driver may make reference to the nature that surrounds the Crescent – the water below the ground, the green areas of the townscape, clean air and the Peak District.

When dialling up the NATURAL CHARM driver:

- Think grand – not necessarily huge, but certainly significant.
- Think about what potential visitors see as charming – most likely Downton Abbey and National Trust afternoon tea. How do these places describe themselves to audiences.
- We're not exclusive so invite potential visitors to be a part of the charm. Invite them in to share in our charming environs. Use warm words that show the visitors you care about them and their access to this charming place. What words would a wealthy friend or contact, who's just invited you to tea at Claridge's, use to make you feel at ease?
- Don't labour the charm. Be effortlessly charming. People who are charming don't say that they're charming.
- How does Eliza Doolittle make the transition to being naturally charming? It's not just what she says, but how she says it. Think *I could have danced all night*.
- Take inspiration from the QUIET CONFIDENCE driver, but then go the extra step beyond that. Being NATURALLY CHARMING doesn't mean being posh, rich, royal or overly grand. We're not covered in gold leaf and we would never show off. Charm can be modest and understated, at times.
- Write strong, confident language that is robust and rooted. Sentences may start and end with bold words, anchoring and fixing them to paragraphs. There are no vanishing or subtle turns of phrase here.
- Consider using gentle verbs and suggestive language, rather than verbs that are too prescriptive or directional.
- Steer away from anything that could be brash, bold, brassy or bossy as tempting as it may be. Don't let anyone think you're a know-it-all.
- Charming people listen. Give the visitor space to respond to us and to have their own opinion, whether that's in person or in print. Afford them the grace and courtesy with which we regard ourselves.

This driver takes some inspiration from the interpretation voice drivers of AUTHENTIC, DIGNIFIED and GRANDEUR.

A bit of a smile

This driver says
to the visitor ...

"It's not all that
serious."

Driver strapline ... Go on, take a peek. I won't tell.

Sounds like ... a clever joke that we're all part of

Wants the visitor ... to appreciate there's more to
Buxton Crescent than meets the eye

Not all of our drivers are serious or straight-laced. The A BIT OF A - SMILE driver allows writers to let their hair down a little and to soften some the voice. Plus it allows visitors to see that, despite the Crescent's obvious classic grandeur, the Trust is not stuffy or pompous.

This driver draws inspiration from some of the spicier elements of the visitor experience.

A BIT OF A SMILE introduces some wit, some quirkiness, some idiosyncrasy and even some incongruity. It allows writers to show some flair and to enjoy more freedom with their use of creative language.

We are a little a bit naughty, a little bit spicy and a little bit surprising. But don't let that fool you into thinking we're like Blackpool sea front. We're more like a clever cartoon strip.

When dialling up the A BIT OF A SMILE driver:

- Remember this is a smile, not a full-blown grin or grimace. A nod, a wink or a cheeky peek is perhaps more appropriate.
- We don't want to give all the game away. Some of the spicier elements of the visitor experience ought to be a surprise once they get inside.
- Use more flamboyant language that suggests a lighter tone. Words with poppy letters (ing, j, ck, p, q, z) and hard double letters to provide some edge to the text
- Be a little theatrical. Go on, put on a great outfit to write in this driver.
- Use colloquialisms and characterful language that encourages a sense of informality.
- Make incongruous associations or reveal facts that potential visitors might find interesting or surprising.
- Moderate use of cheeky or shocking language or facts. It's not silly, sexy, slapstick or daft. And it's not self-deprecating. And don't go for the cheap laughs. Remember, this driver sits alongside other drivers filled with charm and grace.
- Have fun when writing using this driver, but also remember to get the message across clearly, rather than simple being entertaining for the sake of it.
- Work hard at the comedic elements like writer of Radio 4 comedy, Private Eye or Peanuts.

This driver takes some inspiration from the interpretation voice drivers of INTIMATE, SPICY and SENSORY drivers.

Modulating drivers into Buxton Crescent communication voice

It wouldn't make sense for all four drivers to be used at the same time. Writing a piece of copy using them all would be a real challenge and text that was welcoming, quietly confident, naturally charming and smiling slightly would also end up being rather a mess. Indeed, it may put potential visitors off.

Instead, communications text will use a combination of these drivers – most often drawing on one or two drivers at once. The chart on the next page explores how these might be articulated for different communications outputs. The exact modulation of these drivers for the different outputs will perhaps involve a little experimentation – have a go at writing for the various voices and see what comes out. Feel free to adapt this chart to suit your own needs.

The modulation does not need to be adhered to strictly in all cases, but there may be times when certain drives are dialled up more than others. For example, front-of-house staff would do well to dwell on the WELCOMING HOST driver more than others, dialling up any one of the other three drivers in addition, where necessary for the individual visitors who are in front of them.

Remember, these represent the *ways in which the text is written*, not the stories themselves.

BCHT communications voice matrix

	Welcoming host	Quiet confidence	Natural charm	A bit of a smile
Print adverts			X	X
Editorials		X		x
Public relations (aimed at media)		X	X	
BCHT website	x	x	X	
Social media	X			X
E-newsletters	x		X	x
Ticketing and follow-up communications	X	x		
Evaluation and feedback		X		
Verbal presentations	X		x	x

Before you start writing

Setting pen to paper (or finger to keyboard) can sometimes be daunting. If you'd like a checklist of things you may like to go through before you start writing, then try these. If all of this is in place, you're all set to write some great interpretation copy.

- Keep our audiences in mind when you're getting ready to write. Re-read any audience research or feedback from visitors.
- Figure out what it is you're going to say. A content plan of which message needs to be communicated will help to focus the mind, rather than starting with a blank page. What do you want the reader to know or do as a result of reading this?
- Have the house style document to hand – the guidelines about grammar, punctuation and consistency that sits separately to this document. (The interpretive elements of the project will use the British Museum house style guide, unless otherwise advised.)
- Have a good idea in mind of how the text you're about to create will appear when the reader sees it. They won't see it in black on white on your computer screen. They'll often see it set by a designer and hopefully with a powerful image.
- Print out the four image driver sheets for the relevant drivers and have them to hand when you're writing. Perhaps stick them above your desk. Or if you're writing as part of a team, add them to the office noticeboard so everyone can see.
- Feel free to amend the driver descriptions to suit your own needs. Use the wordlists as the starting point for your own personalised thesaurus for each driver. As you experiment with the drivers and find what works for you annotate your own personal copy, ensuring it remains a practical working tool. If you're a visual thinker, and if you have the time and inclination, fill in the grey boxes with images that summon up this driver for you.
- Remember, the drivers are not about *what* we choose to say, but *how* we articulate what we mean in written text.
- Stop using this list as a tool for procrastination. Get on with it.

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