

Update from Visitor Services Manager

Overview of season

- Relatively poor weather in April and May generally kept people away, but things started to pick up from June
- Very large numbers of people throughout summer. Many days felt like ‘Carnival’ days
- Longer than usual season, being busy up to, and including, October
- High income levels for all activities, including Beach Huts, Boat Park, Beach Gardens and TIC retail
- Staff have performed fantastically despite high workloads and often in very difficult circumstances

Swanage Information Centre

- Gazebo used again to encourage people to stay outside where possible – this is something we plan to retain in future years as it provides a pleasant welcome to customers
- Beach hut bookings took up a large part of the year for staff – see below
- Large numbers of visitors. We have come to the conclusion that the front desk area in the TIC is too small and cluttered and we are looking at ways to optimise this space

Events

- While not a large number of events held during the year, those that managed to occur were successful, including the May Market, Rowing Regatta, Folk Festival and a number of others
- Significant work undertaken by Council officers to ensure events were safe and Covid secure
- A number of new events this year, some of a commercial nature, which took up a great deal of officer time

Beach Huts

- Demand has been unprecedented this year
- At end October 2021, £127,000 income was generated from beach huts, against a budget of £58,000. It is anticipated that the forecast for the year will be £129,000
- Due to several reasons, over the summer the cleaning of beach huts was undertaken by the Seafront Advisors with support from the TIC staff
- For 2021-22, three separate booking releases were undertaken (October 2020, April and July 2021), due to the Covid restrictions. This was a challenge for all staff and led to less ‘longer lets’ in the summer and more weekly bookings. The result of this is more beach hut cleans and more administration, but more income
- 50 beach hut refunds / booking changes received this year (compared to 220 last year)
- Main issue for beach hut customers is the inability to obtain a hut, which is due to excessive demand

- In the April 2021 booking release, we received over 5,000 missed calls in the first 90 minutes
- In the July booking release, in a single day we took 86 bookings, of which 67 were online (78%). In the first 10 minutes the figures were 40 bookings, of which 38 were online (95%), one was through the TIC and one on the phone.
- Very few difficulties were experienced with beach hut locks this year

Seafront Advisors

- Dorset Council provided £15,000 for additional Seafront Advisors this year
- Total of 5 Seafront Advisors at any one time, 3 of which were working full time
- One individual was recruited for the 12-month period, others for the summer. Due to DC funding one of these were extended to end October
- Their role changed this year and included ‘basic maintenance’ within their job description. This has led them to undertaking the following tasks for the first time:
 - Cleaning all signage and street furniture along the seafront including removing stickers and flyers
 - Cleaning litter bins on the outside (generally a weekly task)
 - Painting flower pots, signs and various other items
 - Beach hut cleaning
 - Repairing items around the seafront and many other miscellaneous tasks
- A key new task was supporting the waste team from Dorset Council. This is a task which at times was challenging for the staff involved, yet they continued and did an amazing job. To support them we obtained permission from DC to use the ‘Welcome Back’ grant to employ an additional Seafront Advisor in the afternoons over 6 days to primarily focus on waste. This proved extremely valuable and the individual helped the entire team across a wide range of duties for the peak of the summer.
- As we enter a quieter period, the Seafront Advisors is turning his attention to the town by undertaking litter picks, meeting and greeting visitors and liaising with businesses

Waste Management

- Beach cleaners undertook daily cleans each morning across the seafront
- The new litter bins arrived in June and it became clear that capacity was not sufficient and collection frequencies were not as expected, at least during the lunchtime and early afternoon period
- Additional bins arrived in late June and then we received additional green barrel bins. It is clear this additional capacity helped yet the amount of clearance undertaken by the Seafront Advisors on most days was significant and on some days the system was overwhelmed. However, the Seafront Advisors retained a very good working relationship with the waste operatives and worked very much as a team.
- In August two solar powered self-compacting belly bins arrived as a trial
- The Council received a large number of compliments during the year regarding the cleanliness of the town generally as well as its toilets and other facilities

Dogs on the Beach

- A relatively large number of complaints were received around dogs on the beach. This has been put down to the following:
 - There seems to be far more dogs around than ever before
 - When the beach is busy, it is quite hard to see dogs, unless advised by a customer
- This was despite improved and additional signage being placed out last winter. This will be reviewed again this winter

Beach

- Generally we experienced very few issues on the beach throughout the summer and on the whole beach users were happy and content and quite laid back. In fact we have received a relatively large number of compliments this year about the cleanliness of the beach and seafront generally. Other than around dogs, the Council did not receive any formal complaints regarding the beach during 2021
- On three occasions over the summer, water quality advisory signage was displayed on the beach, as requested by the Environment Agency
- Received positive feedback regarding seaweed removal and beach raking

Lifeguards

- RNLI lifeguards were in place from May through to early September and provided an important facility
- RNLI lockers will be installed on the Banjo Pier for next summer

Boat Park

- Very busy, despite relatively poor boating weather this year – 20% increase on income compared to 2019
- Lots of new boats and new boat owners
- We closed boat park to new seasonal customers in July, although remained available for daily launches
- Quite a large waiting list now exists
- Relatively large numbers of issues raised by customers around the following:
 - Lack of parking within boat park (and when busy lack of parking anywhere nearby)
 - Confusion regarding parking within bays and trailer parking within the trailer row
 - State of the slipway (seaweed, holes and boulders)
 - Use of jetty by the public conflicting with boat users
- A review of the boat park will be undertaken during the winter

Personal Watercraft Partnership

- A water safety advisory boat was situated in Swanage during the summer and undertook a large number of interventions with powered watercraft

- New signage was installed around the bay and leaflets produced
- A reduction was seen with jet ski incidents in comparison to 2020
- An example of a complaint from a local resident can be found at Appendix 1

Beach Gardens

- Very busy throughout the year
- Turnover of £35,500 on main sports activities and refreshments, which is an 18% increase on 2019 (if bowls are excluded)
- Our seasonal staff at this site have been with us now for a good number of years and continue to offer a fantastic service
- No major problems have arisen
- We are considering plans to turn this facility into more of a kiosk and increase the seating outside

Culvin Milmer
Visitor Services and Business Development Manager
November 2021