

## **Extraordinary Meeting 29<sup>th</sup> June 2020**

### **Item 16 – Consideration of report from Visitor Services Manager regarding proposals for summer 2020**

#### **1. Boat Park**

The Boat Park opened to the public on Saturday 13<sup>th</sup> June with many customers using this facility. We are now operating a full standard service from this location in terms of staffing and service provision.

#### **2. Beach**

Authority was provided to employ up to four Seafront Advisors to patrol the beach and staff the boat park. Due to recruitment issues this has taken some time and as of 24 June we have two employees. While the beach has not been particularly busy for much of the last few weeks, these staff have been extremely useful to release pressure on the Operations Team by undertaking beach cleaning tasks and some beach maintenance work.

The RNLI Lifeguards returned to the beach on 20<sup>th</sup> June, although this is not being promoted currently.

The designated swimming area was installed on 20<sup>th</sup> May to protect swimmers.

With the arrival of the Seafront Advisors and Lifeguards we are now able to raise the ‘Blue Flag’, which demonstrates that the beach is safe and meets the Blue Flag requirements.

#### **Decision Required:**

The Council are asked if they would approve the raising of the Blue Flag from 4<sup>th</sup> July.

#### **3. Beach Huts**

Beach Huts will open from 4<sup>th</sup> July for pre-booked huts and from 11<sup>th</sup> July for new bookings. A document has been produced detailing how social distancing will be managed (see appendix 1). Essentially this will require the closing of every other hut in most cases and the installation of a one-way route along the upper level.

Each beach hut will be disinfected before any new booking. This will be undertaken by the Seafront Advisors and the cleaning contractor. Keys will be disinfected on return and before being given out.

Currently bookings are only being taken until 4<sup>th</sup> September and this will be reviewed in late July/ early August.

We are expecting to refund £25,000 and transfer into next year £25,000 (ex. VAT). A further £10,000 is expected to be ‘lost’ due to restricted huts available due to social distancing. To date we have issued around 200 refunds and transfers.

The Shore Road beach hut doors are currently being replaced and will be completed before 4<sup>th</sup> July.

#### **4. Concessions**

The deckchair and water sports concession are now fully operational. Work is ongoing with the Punch and Judy concession with the view that they will use the Hardstanding below Santa Fe for this year so as to avoid conflict over space on the beach and to ensure social distancing.

The three ice cream kiosks are now open.

#### **5. Events**

All events using land operated by Swanage Town Council have been cancelled or postponed up to mid-September.

We are now starting to get requests for small scale events or performances, either using the Bandstand or the Hardstanding and in one case PAG. The Council are asked to consider what their view might be regarding the provision of authority regarding events that may not attract many people (i.e. busking type performances) or a number that is allowable under government guidance (currently 6 people but this will change). The recommendation from the Visitor Services Manager is to not permit any events until further review at a future Council meeting.

#### **Decision Required:**

Should small scale events be permitted as long as they are within government guidance?

#### **6. Beach Gardens**

The Tennis Courts have been open to Tennis Club members since late May and from last week we have permitted members of public if playing alongside Tennis Club Members. We are expecting to offer tennis to paying customers from 11<sup>th</sup> July when the kiosk opens. The Basketball Court opened last week.

This kiosk facility is currently due to open on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> July. No hot food will be offered, and a counter service will be provided from the door, so customers will not need to enter the building. Other social distancing actions will be implemented to ensure safety for customers.

Usually we would recruit 3 seasonal staff to cover this on a 'zero' hours contract. This year we would like to recruit just two staff as we expect to open for fewer hours.

An early assessment suggests that the net cost of opening Beach Gardens to the public this year would be £2,500, however it would be difficult to support public tennis.

#### **Decision Required:**

Should we recruit two staff members for Beach Gardens and open Beach Gardens on 11<sup>th</sup> July?

#### **7. Swanage Information Centre**

Swanage Information Centre is currently planning to open on 4<sup>th</sup> July. The intention is to offer, as far as possible, an outside service using a gazebo to protect staff from sun and ensure social distancing can always be maintained. Customers will still be permitted to enter the Information Centre, but these will be limited to small numbers and a Perspex screen has been

constructed along the desk. Additionally, a rear entry point has been created to allow staff working upstairs to avoid moving along the stairs and through the customer area.

As Councillors will be aware, Swanage Information Centre is different to many other Tourist Information Centres in that we also offer a beach management office and support to beach huts as well as the other sites such as the boat park and Beach Gardens.

Currently we have 3 staff plus the Visitor Services Manager. While the Visitor Services Manager can and will help the staff undertake customer service duties it should be noted that two key additional roles have been taken on by the manager in the last few months. These involve supporting the Market and leading on the Town Recovery planning. It is also expected to be a very challenging year in many areas so it is recommended that any assumptions with regard staffing the Information Centre do not include the manager as a front line officer in order to ensure capacity is available to deal with issues as they arise and to support the wider Council.

With the three current staff we are only able to provide a basic 5-day information service which will also require lunchtime closures. Within the original budget we were provided with 3 seasonal staff to allow 7-day opening. This basic service would see us potentially closing on days when we have staff sickness and/or holidays. Additionally, the manager has been very clear to staff that if they become overwhelmed or experience too many issues the Information Centre will be closed to the public, either for an hour, day or a longer period if necessary.

We would ask that we are provided with two seasonal staff to allow us to operate a slightly limited 7-day service, as we feel this is difficult but manageable this year. This would cost approximately £7,000. While any further capacity would be useful it would more likely be used by the Seafront Advisors as they could be brought in to support the Information Centre in a customer role if required.

We would like to recruit both members of staff on flexible hours so that if we do not require them, we can ensure that savings are made. Additionally, we would look to recruit one for 4<sup>th</sup> July and only open from 10.00am to 3.00pm for 7 days.

From the middle of July, or as required if necessary, we would look to open from 10.00am to 4.30pm. The second staff member would be recruited from mid to late July.

### **Decisions Required:**

What kind of service should we provide from 4<sup>th</sup> July and should we recruit two additional staff on flexible hours at approx. £7,000?

### **8. Promotion**

We are currently not undertaking promotional activities although the message from Dorset Council is moving from 'Think Twice' to 'Respect, Protect, Enjoy'. We will continue to follow Dorset Council's line on promotion which is likely to see a slow increase in these activities over the next few months.

## 9. Financial position across Visitor Services functions

The figures below are very early indicative figures for the income and expenditure for Boat Park, TIC, Beach Gardens, Beach and Beach Huts and Market. It is very difficult to forecast what might happen this year although the figures below assume a reasonably slow return of visitors. We are hopeful that income levels will increase, and further expenditure items can be avoided. In many budget lines we have assumed full expenditure as we are unclear how this year will turn out.

These figures include the proposals within this report and are exclusive of VAT.

	<b>Original Budget</b>	<b>Forecast Out- turn</b>	<b>Diff</b>	
<b>Income</b>	-£298,280	-£154,505	£143,775	-48%
<b>Expenditure</b>	£456,195	£365,203	-£90,992	-20%
<b>Net Budget</b>	<b>£157,915</b>	<b>£210,698</b>	<b>£52,783</b>	25%

## 10. Summary - Decisions required

1. The Council are asked if they would approve the raising of the Blue Flag from 4<sup>th</sup> July.
2. Should small scale events be permitted as long as they are within government guidance?
3. Should we recruit two staff members for Beach Gardens and open Beach Gardens on 11<sup>th</sup> July?
4. What kind of service should we provide from 4<sup>th</sup> July and should we recruit two additional staff on flexible hours at approx. £7,000?

Culvin Milmer  
Visitor Services Manager

June 2020

## **Appendix 1            Swanage Beach Huts Plan: July 2020**

4 <sup>th</sup> July	Beach Huts open to pre-booked huts  (if few huts are booked out we may wish to allow some to be booked on a limited basis)
11 <sup>th</sup> July	Beach Huts booked as per normal up to 4 <sup>th</sup> September (no bookings after that period)
End July	Review beach hut operations and booking procedures
Early Aug	Depending on review, likely to allow bookings up to end March 2021
Mid Sept	Review if Spa and Spa Retreats can be made available for 2021
October	Bookings open for 2021-22

### **Social distancing approach**

#### Shore Road

Every other hut will be utilised, and each hut will have 4 chairs and a table. Stools and balcony tables will be removed from all upper level huts. An ‘advisory’ one-way traffic flow will be installed on the upper level to avoid people passing on the stairs.

No markings will be indicated on the floor for the Lower Level huts apart from around the stairs where yellow hatching or similar will be created to allow sufficient space between huts and stairs. This may not be required at all locations once we have established which huts will be used.

Beach Hut 60 will be closed due to the movements around the stairs and kiosk.

For the upper level huts a line will be installed by the railings to create a ‘safe’ passageway.

#### Spa – wooden huts

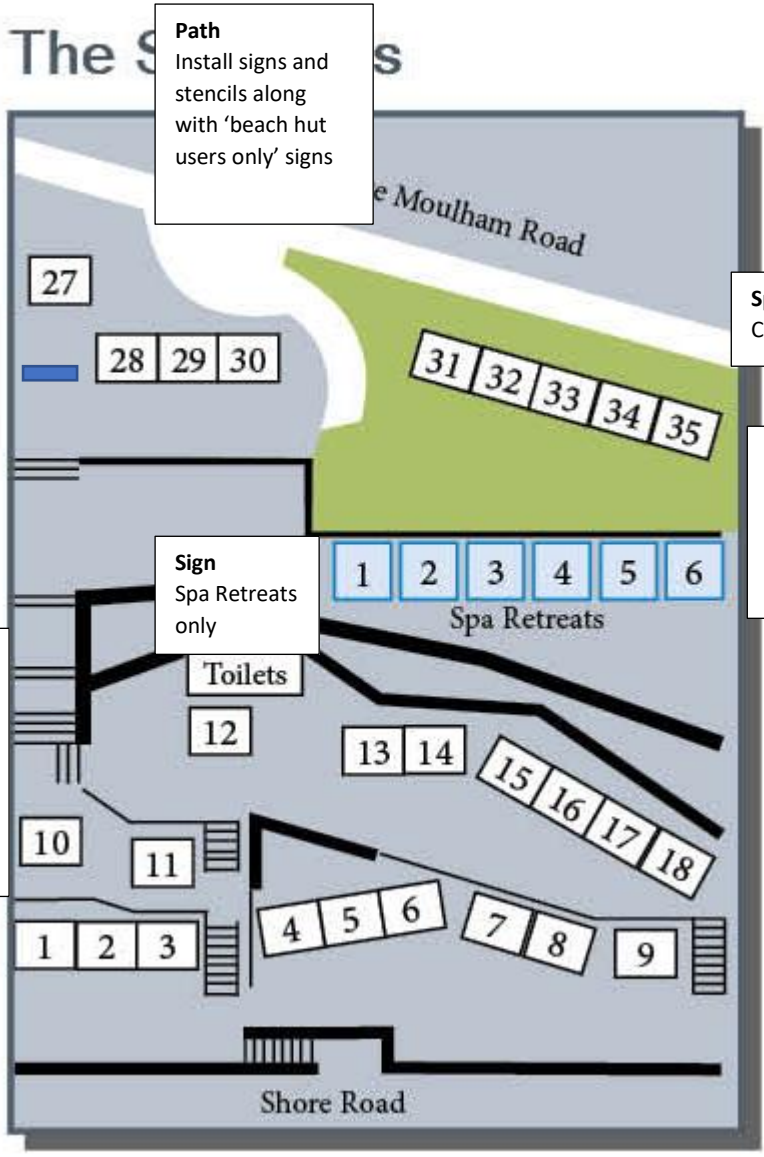
These huts have sufficient space to allow movement and will all be open. No one way traffic will be installed other than signs to remind people to keep their distance. Toilets will not be provided for 2020 due to the inability to provide warm water for hand washing and the potential risk of Covid-19 infection. The nearest water point is at Sandpit Field and Shore Road beach huts.

#### Spa Retreats

Only huts 1, 4 and 6 to be opened. Access for 4 and 6 from slope up from Shore Road and no. 1 from steps through Spa field.

### **Booking approach**

We will start by allocating huts to those booking the longest periods and work through the diary in a fair and equitable way. We hope that we can retain everyone in a beach hut for this summer, although many will need to change to alternative huts. If a customer is unhappy with what is offered, they may request a full refund or transfer to next year as per the current terms and conditions.



**Path**  
Install signs and stencils along with 'beach hut users only' signs

**Rear area**  
Install basic barrier

**Spa Retreats**  
Close 2, 3 and 5

**Entrance**  
Sign saying entry for Spa Retreats 6 and 4 only.

**Sign**  
Spa Retreats only

**Path**  
Install signs and stencils along with 'beach hut users only' signs

