

Use of Swanage Beach for commercial water sports

During the summer of 2021, the Visitor Services Manager was approached by three local companies each asking if they could use Swanage beach to launch kayaks on a commercial basis. Previously the Council has expressed some concerns with allowing water sport and outdoor adventure companies use of the beach. It is known that a number of local companies use Ocean Bay and North Beach, as well as Studland. The email below was received by the Council during the summer and is indicative of the requests we have received.

I run a water sports centre based on the Jurassic Coast and currently work with multiple schools, group and the National Trust. We are looking to expand our services for the 2022 season (March- Oct) and are currently looking for access to the water around Swanage for kayaking and paddleboarding to be able to offer trips out to the sea cliffs and around the bay. We are looking ideally for a small section of beach that we can turn up launch and paddle off from and return from. I appreciate that Swanage beach gets busy in the summer but I feel with the offer of kayaking and paddleboarding down there with qualified staff would be a real plus for the area. We do currently have a deal with the National Trust to have access to their land at Dancing Ledge where we run climbing and coasteering and pay them a fee per person we take so would be more than happy to explore a similar thing with yourselves if you feel this is something that could work.

Proposal

It is clear that Swanage Beach is relatively small and certainly in the last two years has been extremely busy with beach users. The access points can also be difficult, with some being rather small and with difficult parking arrangements.

However, this industry plays an important role in the town's economy and the Council are encouraged to consider ways that may enable use of the beach to support this industry. One way may be to offer out of season use (i.e. excluding July and August) with perhaps early starts to avoid potentially crowded beaches. Consideration should be given for the Mowlem slipway to be used as this area of beach is often a little quieter than that towards Ocean Bay and is easier to oversee with Council staff. Any agreement will be subject to a licence which will include, as a minimum, a risk assessment and public liability insurance.

It should be noted that the Council currently provides a licence for a small company to operate out of the boat park and they offer kayak experiences and tuition for small groups. This has not caused any issues to date. In 2021, we also started to store kayaks at the boat park and now have 8 in storage and a further 14 on a waiting list.

Recommendations

That engagement is undertaken with the three companies who have expressed an interest in operating from a beach with a view to take a proposal to the Tourism Committee for approval.

Culvin Milmer
Visitor Services and Business Development Manager
October 2021

Accessible beach

During the summer of 2021, there was a great deal of discussion on various Swanage social media sites regarding the possible adoption of a beach access mat and a beach wheelchair.

These were originally discussed by the Town Council back in 2018 and at the time a decision was made not to procure these items. The key concern around a beach mat was the varying levels of Swanage beach and how this might make a mat difficult to maintain for the Council and also because the sea itself is usually not far from the ramped access points. With regards the beach wheelchair, it was difficult to identify a space where the wheelchair could be stored overnight as space is extremely limited on the seafront.

Swanage has aspirations to be more accessible and the committee are asked for their views on what might be possible, particularly as the Council will shortly begin developing the Spa site which may provide opportunities to increase accessibility to the beach (storage facilities for example).

Further ideas that have been provided to us by customers are as follows:

- Remove a section from each groin to allow people to walk along the beach
- Increase the number of benches and seats, particularly along the section after the Clocktower
- Install a hand rail along a groin or the Banjo Pier to allow easy access to the sea

It is noted that each of the above ideas pose some technical challenges, particularly due to the marine environment and the varying levels of the beach.

It is further noted that the Council is about to develop a 'Seafront Strategy', and it is suggested that accessibility is a key consideration within this proposed strategy.

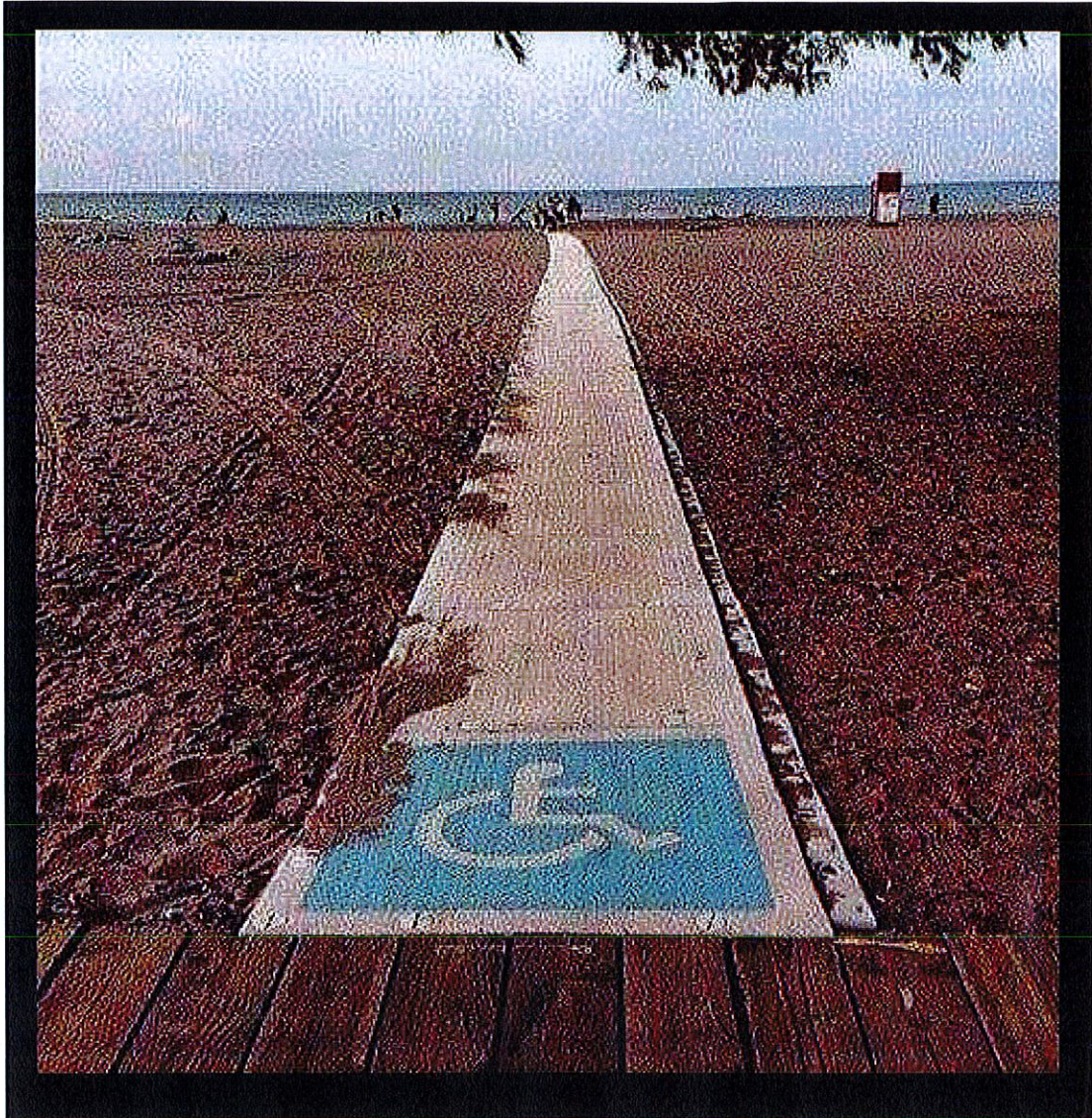
Current information regarding beach accessibility

Currently the Council provides an online 'Accessibility Guide for Swanage Beach'. The link is provided on the beach safety boards sited at key parts of the beach and can also be found here: <https://www.accessibilityguides.org/content/swanage-central-beach>

Recommendations

1. That accessibility improvements are considered for Swanage Beach and brought to the General Operations Committee for approval.
2. That accessibility is incorporated as a key element in the proposed Swanage 'Seafront Strategy'

Culvin Milmer
Visitor Services and Business Development Manager
October 2021



Update from Wessex Water

Dear Emma

Hope you are well. As previously discussed, regarding the following query:

Members would be interested in the incidents of water quality in the bay over the summer and any plans for 2022.

If you are unavailable would you be able to provide something to report?

Our Water Recycling Centre at Swanage receives sewage from the Swanage area, primarily using our membrane treatment plant to provide secondary biological treatment and disinfect the final effluent. As a part of our continuous improvement measures, we are continuing our enhanced major maintenance regime this winter, with planned replacement of membranes in two of the six membrane tanks located on site. We undertake these works outside of the bathing season, and the aim is to complete the first tank by November 2021 and the second tank by March 2022, although this is weather dependent. We are also looking at improvements to the screening handlings plant this financial year, and we are installing more accurate depth monitoring in our in-sewer storage by March 2022.

We note the bathing water sample results appear to be of a consistent high quality for another year ([Bathing water profile \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk/dataset/bathing-water-profile)). We have a small number of storm overflows that are permitted by the Environment Agency to discharge to the bay during storm conditions (detailed in the text of [Bathing water profile \(data.gov.uk\)](https://data.gov.uk/dataset/bathing-water-profile)). Although we are currently collating the performance data, ahead of our routine bathing water season data submission to the Environment Agency by the end of this month, early indications are the performance of these assets during the bathing season is similar to the past couple of years.

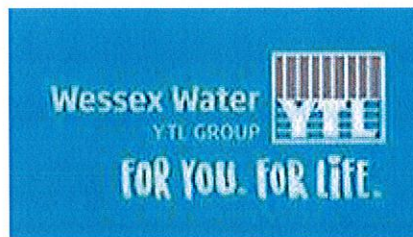
We did not have any events notifiable to the Environment Agency in the Swanage area during the 2021 bathing water season.

If any members please require any other information, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Many thanks

Ed

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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 23 September 2021, £123,000 income was generated from beach huts, against a budget of £58,000. It is anticipated that the forecast for the year will be £127,000
- 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 has 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 this has been 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 two remaining Seafront Advisors are turning their 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

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
- 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

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 £34,000, which is a 10%+ increase on 2019, although we now utilise less staff hours so the surplus has increased
- 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
October 2021

Appendix 1

This is an example of an email we have received this year:

Good afternoon

I've noticed an increase in jet ski noise recently. Can I ask – is there a limit to how many can launch off of North beach?

To be honest – that beach has also become a mess with the sand being piled up to make room for MORE jet skis!

Whilst I realise it's a private beach and business – and no-one wants to put people out of business- I've looked up these machines in terms of the environment and the data I've seen is noted below. I'm not saying completely ban these polluting machines – but at least have a ceiling on how many can arrive in Swanage to crash around the bay making that awful racket.

I look forward to your thoughts on this esp as the Swanage Council are signed up to and support environmental issues.

*In September 2019 Swanage Town Council voted unanimously in favour of declaring a Climate and Ecological Crisis. The Council resolved to establish a working party to use its best endeavours to make Swanage Town Council **carbon neutral by 2030**.*

- **Pollution:** Widespread PWC use has a significant impact on the **environment** due to the two stroke engines which leak millions of gallons of unburned fuel into the waters each year (Pearce, 1998). ... **Biological Impact:** The pollution emitted from PWCs have a considerable impact on wildlife. 24 Nov 2020
- **Jet ski** motors can emit up to 25% of its fuel right back into the water.
- Simply put, the main problem with **2-stroke engines** is that they don't burn the gas/oil mixture perfectly, causing part of the fuel to get into the exhaust system and finally into the water. According to tests, a **2-stroke jet ski** is so polluting that it can emit **two** gallons of gas into the environment every hour!

Access to the town for boat users

The following email was received in August 2021 and is indicative of a number of emails received this year regarding small boat access to the town.

I would like to raise a 'tourism' suggestion. I recently visited Swanage Bay arriving on our boat and anchoring up planning on staying overnight. Later in the afternoon, a very nice person driving the harbour taxi came by and offered us a floating mooring for the night which we were very grateful off. It was at this point we booked an evening meal for 5 persons at one of your local restaurants and planned on spending the afternoon having a walk and drink in one of your public houses. Having now sorted ourselves out, we now learnt the harbour taxi finished at 5pm so we decided to use our own tender. We took our tender over to the shore and then spent over half an hour looking for somewhere to moor up temporarily. Every place we went to, we were told its private or we could not tie up here. We asked where the public mooring was and was told that you just go up to the stone wall where the ferry would come in and out (the Stone Quay). We then proceeded to do this and then we were told, this was private and for the ferry use only. Having visited many bays around the south coast and found the majority of towns encourage large boats to visit and moor, can I ask why Swanage does not have the facilities of a small floating pontoon for small visiting tenders. I note that the water ski company and boat hire company both had ideal floating moorings but when we asked to use the facility they claimed that's it's a council matter and not their problem.

With Swanage Bay being a wonderful sheltered bay and great facilities for dining and shopping, provision of small boat mooring would I'm sure be beneficial to your town council.

Culvin Milmer
Visitor Services and Business Development Manager
October 2021