

Second Edition

Welcome to the second edition of the Talk of the Town Hall newsletter, brought to you by Swanage Town Council.

What's Inside This Edition

- An overview about the role of a Town Councillor, with profiles of Cllr Mike Bonfield, Cllr Chris Moreton and Cllr Megan Coward
- Updates on Swanage Market and festive highlights from the Christmas Lights Switch-On
- Public consultations explained - why they matter and how you can get involved
- Progress on the Green Seafront Scheme
- The Neighbourhood Plan - what it means for Swanage's future
- Formulating the new Corporate Plan for 2026–2030 and how you can help shape priorities

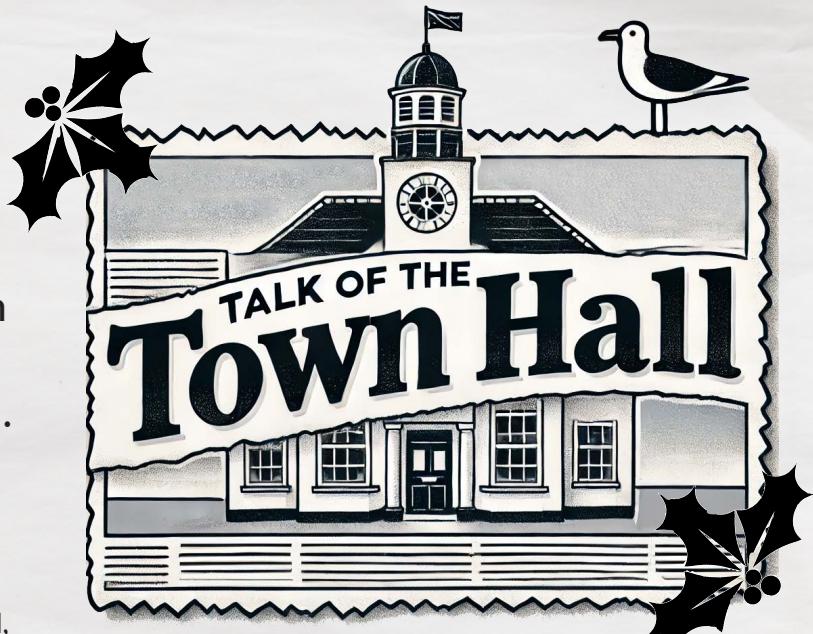
Unfortunately, it has not been possible to publish the June and September issues due to the constraints of by-elections. A by-election is a difficult time for all involved, especially after the very sad loss of Councillor Bill Trite. We now have a new representative on Dorset Council in Chris Tomes, and three new Town Councillors with Phil Burridge elected for the South Ward, and Gary Suttle and John Bishop returned for the North Ward. We all look forward to a busy and productive Town Council year.

Your Town Councillors are committed to working together with our dedicated staff and the wider community - to improve Swanage and enhance the quality of life for all.

We're committed to keeping you informed about the Council's work, and just as importantly, hearing your views. You can now reach us through our new dedicated email address: comms@swanage.gov.uk, where you can also share your feedback or to sign up for future editions of our newsletter.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS SWITCH ON

The start of the festive season in Swanage was marked by a magical Christmas lights switch-on in the town centre. Crowds gathered outside The Mowlem to enjoy live music, carols, and a special performance from the Swanage Musical Theatre Company cast of its forthcoming Beauty and the Beast show. Father Christmas arrived on his sleigh to join the celebrations, and two lucky children helped the Mayor press the big button at 4:30 pm, lighting up the High Street, Station Road, Institute Road and a sparkling Christmas tree by the station. Thank you to everyone who came along and made this a truly joyful community event.



Merry Christmas
and Happy New Year



WHAT IS THE ROLE OF A TOWN COUNCILLOR?

The principal role of parish councillors (in Swanage's case, styled as town councillors) is to take collective decisions on behalf of all residents within the parish. Councillors must take great care to avoid taking decisions which reflect their own opinion only. They have a responsibility to be well-informed, and to listen to and understand the needs of different groups within the community... see more about this on the back page.

The role is without a salary, but councillors are not volunteers in a legal sense, as they are elected representatives and holders of a public office with statutory duties. Councillors in Swanage currently serve a 5-year term, reducing to 4-years from 2029 and any individuals elected at a by-election or co-opted serve until the next election. All councillors must apply the law and comply with the Member Code of Conduct. Under local government law, councillors may only vote if they are physically present at the meeting.

Councillors contribute to the work of the Council by suggesting ideas, influencing policy, engaging in constructive debate and by responding to the needs and views of the community. They comment on proposals and vote to enable the Council to make decisions.

Full Council meetings are held most months, and all councillors are expected to attend, as well as meetings of the committees on which they sit. There are six committees: Community Services, Environment and Greenspaces, Personnel, Planning and Consultation, Tourism and Local Economy and Finance and Governance. Councillors are also expected to sit on one or more of the two advisory committees, three sub-committees, as well as any of the Council's working parties and task and finish groups which are established to deal with specific matter in detail.

Full details of these committees can be found on the Council website, along with the councillor attendance records here at www.swanage.gov.uk/Councillor-Information.

A THANK YOU FROM THE COUNCILLORS...

We are grateful to all the residents of our beautiful town who engage with the Town Council in all our consultations and surveys. We rely on your feedback to help shape our decisions looking to the future. You can contact us via email to comms@swanage.gov.uk.

We also want to send a huge thank you to all the staff and officers who work so hard to keep our town looking good. This summer has been exceptionally busy and challenging, so we are grateful to all the volunteers who keep the beach clean alongside our hardworking and cheerful employees in the operations department and the Swanage Information Centre.

Editorial Team: Councillors Tina Foster (Editor), Sarah Vile (Sub-editor), Cliff Sutton (Sub-editor) and Megan Coward (Picture Editor). With the support of the team at the Town Hall.



A QUICK INTRODUCTION TO...

Councillor Mike Bonfield

Why did you want to be a Councillor?

Having been born and raised in Swanage, it has given me a deep connection to the town, though in my younger years I didn't always notice the finer details that make it so special. After retiring in the mid-2000s, I developed an interest in local affairs and became interested in the work of the town council after seeing how it was making a real positive impact in our town. Seeing the commitment of those serving inspired me to step forward myself, and in 2011 I stood for election, motivated by a desire to contribute to the well-being and future of the community I call home.



What key issue are you most passionate about?

Preserving the heritage of Swanage is highly important. Our town's history and charm are what make it so special, and we must safeguard this for generations to come. At the same time, I believe that thoughtful progress can ensure Swanage remains vibrant and attractive without change for change's sake. Residents and visitors alike value the town as it is, but we must continue to review our needs and modernise where appropriate, always with care and respect for what makes Swanage unique.

What do you love most about Swanage?

The rhythm of Swanage through the seasons is something I treasure. Spring brings anticipation and energy as the town prepares for summer. Autumn offers a quieter, reflective atmosphere, while winter allows us to enjoy Swanage's beauty without the bustle of visitors. Above all, it is the community spirit that shines through with people supporting one another, volunteering and working together to keep our town thriving. That sense of belonging and shared purpose is what makes Swanage truly special.

Councillor Chris Moreton

Why did you want to be a Councillor?

Having led council prayers over several years in my capacity as the local Methodist Minister, I usually stayed for the whole meeting and witnessed the numerous issues that were discussed and the tensions and expectations as well as respect (in most cases) of the public towards the elected members. As I got to know the councillors one thing impressed me, and that was that each had 'a heart' for Swanage, its people's well-being and the development of the town. So, being a 'people's person', it seemed a natural step to offer myself as a councillor for a town and its people who I have grown to love and call home.



What key issues are you most passionate about?

Affordable housing for families and singles must be a priority for the people of Swanage. I am also mindful however of the need to support and appreciate the emergency services of our town, the majority being volunteers. RNLI, Coastguards, Coastwatch, ambulance and police services and our local hospital. All do sterling work, as a community we say thank you!

What do you love most about Swanage?

A community spirit that is second to none. Just read the local community newsletter featuring over thirty community groups, just an example of the numerous clubs, and vibrant organisations that pumps the heart of this vibrant, welcoming Town.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

Councillor Megan Coward

Why did you want to be a Councillor?

Having grown up in Swanage, I've always had a strong interest in what happens in our town and how decisions are made. I wanted to become a councillor to be a voice for young people – making sure they're not only heard but actively involved in shaping Swanage's future. Too often, younger voices are overlooked in local decision-making, yet they are the ones who will inherit the outcomes.



What key issues are you most passionate about?

My passion lies in helping secure a better future for Swanage, especially when it comes to addressing the lack of affordable housing. Too many young families are finding it difficult to stay in the area, and I believe we must do more to make Swanage a place where future generations can live, work and thrive.

What do you love most about Swanage?

What I love most about Swanage is the community spirit. It's a truly special place, where people look out for one another and pull together in times of need. There's always something happening, and I feel proud to be part of a town that's so welcoming and active. It's a privilege to serve such a connected and caring community.

MAKE IT TO THE MARKET

Have you visited Swanage Market recently? Held every Friday in the Main Beach car park from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM, it's a vibrant and welcoming space packed with local produce, unique goods and friendly faces.

The Town Council stepped in to run the market in 2019 when it was at risk of closure, and thanks to the hard work of councillors, officers, and staff, it has grown into a thriving weekly event.

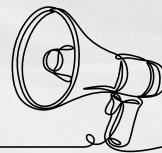
If you haven't been down on a Friday morning, you're missing out on a fantastic selection of fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, bread, and other essentials. You'll also find tempting treats from around the world, handmade meals, and a variety of non-food stalls offering clothing, household items, books, crafts, baskets, fishing tackle, jewellery and more. In summer, the number and variety of stalls increase even further, making it the perfect place to shop and catch up with friends and neighbours.

The market is full of colour and character, with flowers, plants, and even live music raising money for local causes adding to the lively atmosphere. It's a great way to support local traders and discover something new each week. Please note: The last market before Christmas will be on Tuesday 23 December. The market will not be open on 26 December or 2 January 2026.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year

LET'S TALK PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS



Over recent months, countless hours have gone into discussions, public engagement events, and council meetings focused on consultations about future planning – both from Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council. You might be thinking, “Not another one!” but consultations and surveys are essential. They give residents a real voice in shaping the best way forward for our community.

What is a Public Consultation?

A public consultation is any activity that allows local people to influence important decisions. It means listening and learning from residents before priorities are set or decisions are made. This can range from surveys to more formal processes aimed at gathering views on significant proposals that affect the community.

In some cases, councils are legally required to consult, especially on issues like planning – for example, a statutory consultation will be held next year for the Neighbourhood Plan. These statutory consultations follow strict rules under legislation, meaning the consultation process must meet certain standards of fairness, transparency and proper consideration of residents' views. But beyond legal obligations, consultation is simply the right thing to do. Engagement is at the heart of democracy after all.

Consultations from Dorset Council this year include:

- The Dorset Council Local Plan Options
- Local Transport Plan 2026-2041
- The Dorset Design Code
- Low Carbon Dorset Community Impact Survey
- Age-Friendly Dorset
- Dorset Council Budget Simulator
- Shore Road (in partnership with the Town Council)

Consultations from Swanage Town Council this year include:

- Green Seafront Scheme (currently under analysis)
- Neighbourhood Plan
- Corporate Plan 2026-2030 (coming soon...)

As councillors, it's our responsibility to consult with residents before making the big decisions that shape our town and community. Public consultations can be challenging, time-consuming, and costly, but they are essential for Swanage's future. Please engage with us at the Town Hall and contribute positively to the conversation. We invite you to share your views and work with us to ensure our town remains safe, prosperous, and vibrant!



WHAT IS A NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN?

A Neighbourhood Plan is a statutory planning document prepared by the local community, which sets out policies and priorities for land use and development within a defined area. Once adopted, it becomes part of the Development Plan for the Dorset Council area and must be considered in planning decisions.

The Swanage Neighbourhood Plan will: reflect the community's vision for the town, support sustainable growth, protect valued green spaces and heritage assets, encourage well-designed development, help deliver new community facilities and promote climate change mitigation.

Why now and what's next?

The existing Swanage Local Plan, adopted in 2017, only covers the period to 2027. With Dorset Council preparing a new Dorset Local Plan, it is timely to develop a Neighbourhood Plan that ensures Swanage's specific needs and aspirations are represented in future planning decisions.

Feedback from this autumn's informal engagement will inform the next stage of formal consultation, during which the Draft Plan will be shared with the community and statutory consultees early in the New Year. Following this, the Plan will be revised, submitted for independent examination, and ultimately subject to a local referendum. For more details, please visit www.dorsetcoasthavetoursay.co.uk/swanage-neighbourhood-plan.

GREEN SEAFRONT SCHEME UPDATE



A huge thank you to the 1,400 people who completed our recent survey on the Green Seafront Scheme. We received a wealth of valuable qualitative feedback that will help us make the proposed options more accessible, welcoming, and reflective of community needs. Most responses came from residents, and we're delighted that our engagement events were so well attended.

The Engagement Report is now available on our website, along with the outline programme timeline, technical reports and other supporting documents. Visit our dedicated webpage to explore these resources and stay informed as the project moves forward.

A NEW CORPORATE PLAN FOR 2026-2030

We have commenced work on a new Corporate Plan that will set out the Town Council's priorities for the next four years. This plan will guide how we deliver essential services, invest in community projects, and protect our town's unique environment and heritage. It's a roadmap for the future and we want you to help shape it.

Your feedback is vital. Engagement events and an online survey will be launched soon and continue into the early part of the new year. This is your chance to influence decisions on issues that matter most to you, from improving local facilities and supporting sustainable growth to tackling climate change and enhancing quality of life for residents.

By taking part, you'll help us create a plan that reflects Swanage's aspirations and ensures resources are focused where they make the biggest difference. Together, we can build a safe, vibrant, and resilient town for the years ahead.

