



# CHRISTCHURCH CHAMBER CHAT

Issue 1 - September 2020

## Welcome to our new newsletter

from our new President Andy Barfield

My thoughts and best wishes go out to all Chamber members and the broader business community as we all struggle to find the 'new normal'.

As the President, I want to thank you all for your support. We are all doing the best we can for our members and fellow business owners locally, as well as for the wider community around us. Although we have had to halt physical meetings

and events, we have moved to a secure online platform for our meetings and to provide updates of important information to members.

We are aware that many of our members have suffered significantly and we are mindful that it will be a long road to recovery. The Executive Committee is conscious as to how the rules and guidance are changing almost daily and how important it is to provide up to date information to support members throughout this ordeal. This is assisted by the support we know members are giving to other members. That sense of belonging and the knowledge that we are speaking to like-minded business owners with the same problems and issues makes the Chamber what it is - a strong sharing and caring business forum.

We are now some way through a staggered transition back to our workplaces after experiencing working from home. The Chamber has been extremely busy throughout this period, helping members navigate through the stimulus packages and other initiatives released by Central Government and the local BCP Council. We attend regular online meetings with the BCP Council and councillors so we can share the voice and concerns of our members. Only yesterday I was at a meeting with a BCP Director and the Deputy Leader, with others, regarding the planning of the Christmas offering for the area and the meeting proved very positive.

We are working closely with the Christchurch Business Improvement District as this rolls out next year, and also with the Christchurch Town and Highcliffe Parish Councils.

Transitioning back to normal is going to be difficult and the market place will have changed. However, this provides us with the opportunity to create a new and improved normal as our working practices change to match the demands of the altered market we will work in. The Chamber will play a vital role in this transition and our input will become crucial in assisting businesses to rebound from the impact we have all felt. Getting back to normal will be slow and tentative, and liable to bumps in the road. The Chamber is here to help and I am looking forward to seeing you all again as soon as we can recommence social events.

**Andy Barfield**

President.



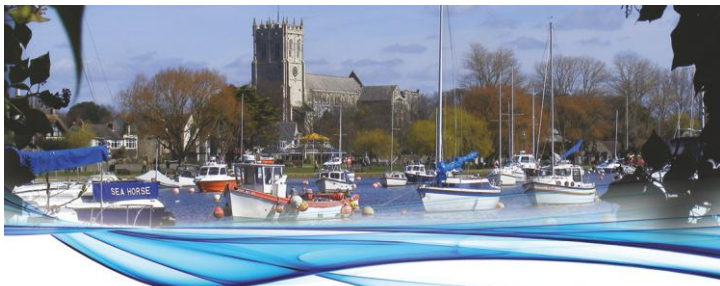
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## Join the Chamber - today!

Whatever your business, be it big or small, be it retail, service provision or manufacturing or anything else in between, we are here to help you—help you to talk to others, keep in touch with what is going on, find suppliers and promote your own business.

We are a subscription based association of local businesses that support one another and represent our combined interests. We are a non-political body, so we can support or oppose any proposals that affect our business community.

We have friendly, informal networking events (re-starting as soon as conditions permit) and they are a great way to meet other people in Christchurch as well as an opportunity to showcase your business by sponsorship.

The Chamber is the key player in the Business Improvement District (BID) which is looking to raise funding to make the town centre more attractive, and we are always keen to listen to what our members want for the Christchurch area to help their businesses.

With reorganisation, the Chamber is working closely with BCP Council and are well represented on Economic Development, Tourism, Planning Strategy and other organisations important to Christchurch's future.

To join us go to our website [www.christchurchchamber.co.uk](http://www.christchurchchamber.co.uk) and follow the link to join. It is, after all only £35 per annum!

Sue Harmon-Smith  
Secretary, Christchurch Chamber of Trade & Commerce



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# BCP Council Covid 19 update

As part of their extensive programme of Covid-19 business outreach and assistance work, BCP Council have been providing information to businesses on the national and local grant schemes available. Information on business support available is on the business pages at [bcpcouncil.gov.uk](http://bcpcouncil.gov.uk). Business can also sign up to the business newsletter at [bcpcouncil.gov.uk/newssignup](http://bcpcouncil.gov.uk/newssignup) to be kept up to date with latest government guidance.

Information Officers have been conducting visits to businesses across all of our high streets to support their safe and successful reopening and offer further support and guidance if required. Guidance for social distancing measures and making your business COVID-19 Secure is available online at [bcpcouncil.gov.uk/COVID19Businessinfo](http://bcpcouncil.gov.uk/COVID19Businessinfo) and signage templates for business to download, print and display are also available at [bcpcouncil.gov.uk/COVID19signage](http://bcpcouncil.gov.uk/COVID19signage).

A new grant support programme for SME's is to be launched in September. The grant funding will be used to help SME's access new technology and other equipment as well as professional, legal and financial advice. To find out more visit [www.dorsetgrowthhub.co.uk/recovery-grant](http://www.dorsetgrowthhub.co.uk/recovery-grant)

Paula Sales

Economics Development Officer - BCP Council



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# How are you coping?

By Tim Lloyd, MD of the Captains Club Hotel & Spa

To say it has been a rollercoaster is an understatement.

As a hotel (along with thousands of other businesses) we were forced to close our doors here at Captain's Club hotel and Spa on March 23rd due to the coronavirus outbreak. Close everything down in an instant, put the crew on furlough, drain the beer kegs, clean the beer lines, shut down the kitchen, dispose of fresh food, close down the systems, close down the bedrooms, empty the pool, switch off the power to the majority of the hotel and put in place security in the form of a live-in member of the crew to ensure continuation of insurance cover.

Then the sun began to shine, it was great news for those on furlough, time to relax in the sun but not good for those running businesses. We could see what revenue was slipping through our fingers, the sun-blessed terrace was empty. It was, indeed, an empty silence.

Next on the agenda came the dealings with the bank to ensure we could get a grant to help us through this devastation. The banks were being pessimistic, they had to be. The bank believed we would not be able to open until September. It was a period of number crunching, forecasts and working on what we would need to get us through the winter months.

It was weeks to get into place but the bank manager was supportive and eventually the deal was done, the fat lady sang and the loan money was in place. We could slowly begin to pay our loyal suppliers who had found themselves in a similar position.

The agreement with the bank meant us buying into the cash flow and forecast that had been set out. They asked us to look at business levels based on 25% of last year for September and October and then a small increase as we moved towards Christmas. They were confident that our income would be very low until the middle of 2021. With this came the realisation that, despite the job retention scheme support, we wouldn't be able to retain all of the team. In fact at that time we were looking at a reduction from 95 to 25 to give us the budgeted wages.

What would we do now? The answer was, begin a collective redundancy consultative committee – a member of staff elected by their teams from each department – to meet at regular intervals over a month to work out the best way forward. This involved looking at forced as well as voluntary redundancies. The team came up with the idea of reduced hour contracts so that we could save as many as 50 people. The reduced hours contracts would be introduced in September and staff were set to lose between 25% and 40% of their hours. This was sad but inevitable, we were forced into being realistic.

Next were the plans for re-opening, indeed if we could re-open? Could we operate with social distancing in place and make it viable? What would we need to do in terms of new

cleaning policies, sanitisation, PPE, signage, one way systems and keeping our guests and staff safe? Lots of furniture moving, re-setting the terrace and moving our lounge area into the function room.

The announcement came from Downing Street, we could re-open the doors from July 4th 2020 as long as we had put in place all the necessary procedures including track and trace. The staff were brought in for induction, shown the way of "Sani 6" and issued with their personalised visors. We were set to go (apart from the function room and spa which would remain closed).

Then it happened, the consumer confidence seemed to grow in an instant, the telephones were ringing off the hook and room bookings were coming in by the minute, day in day out.

It has been truly remarkable. The sun has helped but we have been busy for lunch and dinner every day. We are running at more than 65% room occupancy (it was standing at 20% before we re-opened) and this is increasing by the day. Christchurch is the most fabulous location for a staycation and the tourism team at BCP have been very supportive and helped to get the message out there that we, Christchurch, was open for business and ready to welcome visitors.

It has taken its toll. It has been really exhausting for the dedicated team we retained. They have worked tirelessly and fortunately it has meant that reduced hours have been put firmly on hold. We are, in fact, looking to recruit for a couple of key positions for crew members that have not been able to re-adjust after living in the furlough bubble. This is a very hard industry and after three months of not working evenings and weekends, enjoying time with family their mind set has changed and hospitality is no longer for them. Who can blame them!

As I write this article we have enjoyed strong business in July, an even stronger August (With the spa re-opening gradually from 1st August) and hopefully this will continue into September. Then what? Will the bubble burst? Will consumer confidence remain high? Will the second wave will be upon us? Will we face a local lockdown? Can we retain all of those lovely crew members who have supported us through the manic summer? Are we being asked to sacrifice hospitality in favour of schools? Can we survive the winter?

## How are we coping you asked?

I don't know the answer.....but you did ask!



# Tell us your news

This is the very first edition of Chamber Chat.

It is about Christchurch businesses both small and large. We intend to publish every other month.

If you are a Member of the Christchurch Chamber of Trade and Commerce and have business news you are happy to share, please do tell us.

If you are a new member and want to tell the rest of us about your business, then we look forward to hearing from you.

If you, like Tim Lloyd in this edition, are prepared to share how you have been coping with the all the pandemic has thrown at you then let us know.

And if you are not a member, why not? – look at the article on page 2 and join us!

Remember, Christchurch Chamber covers the whole of the old Borough and we welcome members from Hurn to Highcliffe and all places in between.

This Chamber Chat is being delivered free to businesses across Christchurch, Highcliffe, Somerford, Mundeford, Burton, Barrack Road, Fairmile and elsewhere. It's printing is being paid for by it's adverts—with any surplus funds that might arise helping to fund the Chambers future activities

If you would like to advertise in future editions then contact Sue Harmon-Smith on [sueharmonsmith@gmail.com](mailto:sueharmonsmith@gmail.com)

Not only will you be supporting the Chamber but your advert will reach a targeted local business audience.

If you have a contribution you would like to make to the next edition, then contact me on [pwatson-lee@outlook.com](mailto:pwatson-lee@outlook.com). The next edition is due 1st November 2020, but the sooner you contact me with your idea or proposed contribution, the better.

**Peter Watson-Lee**

Editor

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Published by Christchurch Chamber of Trade & Commerce,  
10 Bridge Street, BH23 1EF  
Printed by PP Printing, 31A Bargates, Christchurch, Dorset BH23 1QD

# It's all about balance

and more than ever in times of pandemic

- by Chamber Member Paul O'Connell,  
Physiotherapist and owner of Bridge Health & Wellbeing, Christchurch

The term 'work/life balance' can be overused at times but when we are navigating a global pandemic, it couldn't be more relevant.

With reports of more than 50% of the national workforce working from home and a significant number of people also on furlough, the next few weeks and months are going to be a real challenge for businesses, employers and employees.

For people that have, in effect, been forced to work from home, there are a few things that employers should aim to do to help their personnel maintain a satisfactory setting in which to work:

1. Home office/workstation set up – workstations should be set up correctly with a decent chair and screen. The office itself should be well lit, quiet and, of course, be a suitable space to promote productive work.

2. Switching off – employers should make sure that their workers are taking their usual breaks and 'clocking off' at a decent time. In addition, workers should be encouraged to be active during the working day, taking every opportunity to go for a walk or taking an exercise class at lunchtime for example.

3. Team spirit – people will inevitably feel isolated when not going to work in the office so it's important that they still feel part of the team. Regular check-ins and up-dates are vital and can be enhanced by more informal contact, perhaps a team challenge or a team quiz on Zoom, which are great options for keeping the team in touch with one another.

4. Leading by example – if owners, team leaders and managers are positive and embrace these challenging times and circumstances, an optimistic outlook will filter down through the company and optimize the future health and wellbeing of both the employees and the business.

Looking to people who reach the end of their furlough, there may well be nervousness when returning to the office environment and potentially some motivational issues as they have been off for so long.

These employees should be kept up to date with the changes made to keep workers safe from Covid-19, describing the policies and procedures introduced to maintain social distancing and satisfactory hygiene levels. Regular contact will reassure them and enable you to address any concerns they may have, ensuring a smooth transition back to the workplace.

It's clear to see that we are not anywhere near "business as usual" yet but accepting the "new normal" is the only way that work and life can move forwards.

## Christchurch underpass progress

For a very many years, the Chamber has been pressing for improvements to the dismal underpass that divides Christchurch Town centre. For very many years we have been thwarted – but no more. Under the new BCP Economic Development Officer things are going to be happening very soon – see our next Edition for the full story.....