



Christchurch Chamber Chat

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Town bids to join the culture club



Christchurch, along with neighbours Bournemouth and Poole, have submitted a bid to become the first **UK Town of Culture 2028**.

The brand new title has been launched by the government following the successful of the "City of Culture" initiative, which has seen the spotlight fall on Liverpool, Glasgow and Hull amongst others.

If the bid is successful, grant funding of **over £3m** will be made available.

Expressions of interest must be submitted by the end of March, with the winning town or towns chosen by early 2027.

The bid aims to highlight the creativity, community connection and local pride in each town.

Part of showcasing creativity across the BCP region includes the **Arts by the Sea Festival**, which will be held again this year after being awarded funding.

Last year, the event in Bournemouth saw more than 150 performers including live music, a circus, aerial art and large-scale installations.

The festival currently forms part of BCP's Town of Culture bid, along with the Boscombe Emerging Arts Fringe and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

Speaking exclusively to Chamber Chat, BCP's Portfolio Holder for Culture and Communications, Cllr Andy Martin said:

"Town of Culture 2028 is a wonderful opportunity to showcase our amazingly diverse arts, culture and heritage and to show just what a huge impact it has in our communities across the three towns. From a cultural point of view, Christchurch, Poole and Bournemouth are much stronger working together."

He added: "This is a chance to bring our cultural organisations and communities together, show the power of arts and culture, and to create both a cultural identity for our area and a lasting legacy."

"I believe arts and culture is not simply a nice to have, but essential for its own sake and equally for health and wellbeing, joy and happiness, education, connected communities, economic growth, destination, public health and much more."

"I hope everyone across Christchurch, which I am proud to represent, will be able to get behind our application for Town of Culture 2028."



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Christchurch entrepreneur named one of 2026's leading UK female founders

Claire Richards, founder of **Dorset Coast Wills** has been recognised as one of the UK's 100 most inspiring female entrepreneurs. Claire, who founded her business in 2019, will be featured alongside leading founders from across the country as part of **Small Business Britain's f:Entrepreneur #IAso100** campaign, which celebrates women running businesses in the UK.

The campaign celebrates 100 exceptional women across the UK who are driving innovation, growth, and **positive impact** in their communities, while running successful businesses.

Claire Richards is profiled for her dedication to providing five-star will writing and lasting power of attorney services delivered with empathy, complete risk and cost transparency, and clarity, her commitment to mentoring new Will Writers, her support for **Macmillan Caring Locally Hospice**, for which she provides monthly free Wills for staff and clients including critical end-of-life Wills, and her commitment to sustainability.

Claire runs another business alongside Dorset Coast Wills, called **allthingsraffia**. A personal passion since the 1990s, Claire is the only person in the UK and Europe offering workshops, digital courses, and patterns for raffia craft. Raffia is a sustainably farmed material, carefully managed by Madagascan farmers, that is both flexible and durable. Claire's workshops, which have been described as "**culturally and ecologically perfect!!**", enable participants to produce eco-friendly fashion items whilst making time for self-care, tapping into the benefits of craft for mental health.

Claire said: "I am incredibly proud to be listed in the #iAlso 100 this year. I know some of the previous winners and the exceptional calibre of the entrepreneurs involved. I am thrilled to be listed amongst them and be recognised for my contribution. I'm passionate about the role of older female entrepreneurs and keen to champion this. **£250 billion could be added to the UK economy** if women started and scaled new businesses at the same rate as men."

Cheque presentation for Christchurch Community Partnership

Mudford care home **Avon Reach** recently hosted a special cheque presentation in support of its chosen charity for 2025, Christchurch Community Partnership (CCP).

Residents, staff, and guests came together to mark a year of fundraising and community spirit, celebrating the charity's vital work in the Christchurch area.

CCP provides practical and emotional support to local people, working to reduce isolation and strengthen connections across the community.

The presentation highlighted the commitment of Avon Reach's residents and staff to making a meaningful contribution to the lives of those they support.

Avon Reach would like to thank everyone who contributed to fundraising efforts throughout 2025 and looks forward to continuing its partnership with CCP into 2026.



Tell us your news

Chamber Chat is all about Christchurch businesses small and large. If you are a Member of the Chamber and have news you are happy to share, please do tell us. If you have a contribution you would like to make to the next edition, email richard@pp-printing.co.uk

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Welcome to another bumper edition of Chamber Chat, and my sincere thanks to **Agilico** for their generous sponsorship. Support like this allows us to reach a wider audience, strengthen our voice, and continue sharing stories and insights from across our vibrant business community.

It has been a particularly busy and productive period for the Chamber. One development I am especially pleased to share is our involvement in a quarterly resilience group alongside BCP Council, the Town Council and the BID. This forum enables open discussion about what is happening across Christchurch - from strategic planning to the practical realities of roadworks - giving us the opportunity to anticipate issues, communicate clearly, and work together for the benefit of local businesses.

That spirit of collaboration is already proving its value. I'm delighted that Amy Welbourn, Stakeholder Engagement Lead at Aureos, brought together all stakeholders involved in the forthcoming Sopers Lane roadworks for a dedicated meeting at the Captain's Club. With works scheduled for March and April, this **proactive approach to communication** will help minimise disruption and ensure everyone is informed and aligned.

It is also a pleasure to celebrate success within our own Chamber membership. I would like to wish committee member **Jason Giddings** every success with the opening of **Eighteen Bar and Restaurant** at the King's Arms, alongside his business partner Dave Burns. Already well-known and highly respected within Christchurch's hospitality scene through The Thomas Tripp, Bodega and The Smugglers, Jason and Dave are bringing something new to the town. Eighteen promises a distinctive bar and restaurant experience, complemented by live jazz at weekends, a fantastic addition to our local offer.

Looking ahead, I am delighted to announce that our next business breakfast at the Cliffhanger restaurant in Highcliffe will feature **Simon Boyd OBE** as our guest speaker. Simon was recognised in the New Year Honours List for his contribution to the steel industry and is Managing Director of **ReidSteel** here in Christchurch, a business that works worldwide. He will be sharing insight into the company's ambitious expansion plans, as well as offering a timely perspective on how government policy is shaping the future of British steel. Please save the date: 26 March, 8.00am I very much look forward to welcoming you there. As always, thank you for your continued support of the Chamber. It is through strong relationships, open communication and shared ambition that we continue to **champion our local business community**.



President's Update

By Tim Lloyd

MD Captain's Club Hotel and
President Chamber of Trade

Free parking initiative drives footfall into town



Few of us wish to be reminded of the three week bypass closure in Autumn last year. The ensuing gridlock was **catastrophic** for town centre businesses.

Chamber **President Tim Lloyd** was acutely conscious that the period after the bypass re-opened was crucial for many in the retail and hospitality sector. Tim negotiated with BCP to offer a free parking facility in 5 BCP town centre car parks over two full Saturdays in December. The idea was to help entice shoppers into town during the Christmas shopping season.

It is worth pointing out that although the Chamber was at the forefront of the project, as with all such projects it has been a **great team effort**. Tim was hugely grateful to our friends at the BID and Town Council, who were directly involved from the very start of discussions. Chamber members **Kimmeridge** and **Mathews Shoes** were also hugely helpful with the practicalities on the parking days themselves.

We were also fortunate to have the help of two commercial sponsors. Amy Welbourn, Stakeholder Engagement Lead of **Aureos**, commented "At Aureos we truly believe in getting behind the communities we are working in and creating positive lasting relationships. Given that the initiative aligns exceedingly well with our values, we were only too happy to be able to support such an important campaign in the area."

The initiative went down well with the businesses it aimed to support as well - "A **brilliant initiative**, must have made a massive difference to the Carols in the Square event!" was a typical comment when we sought feedback afterwards.

The story of Highcliffe Beach parkrun

by Jan Whittaker

Four years ago, we moved from Poole to Christchurch. In Poole, life revolved around Poole Park, just a ten-minute walk from our front door and home to Poole parkrun. I'd been a regular there since 2013. parkrun wasn't just something I did on a Saturday morning — it was part of my routine, my community, my wellbeing.

Arriving in Christchurch was a shock. The nearest parkruns were Bournemouth, Moors Valley, Lymington or Brockenhurst. No longer a short stroll away, but a ten-fifteen minute drive — and something important suddenly felt out of reach.

Rather than accept that, I set myself a mission: Christchurch needed its own parkrun.

I began close to home, exploring possible routes at Stanpit Recreation Ground and the SANG. Both were rejected by the council. Undeterred, I moved further east towards Highcliffe Castle — again, rejected. Still not ready to give up, I pushed on further and discovered the Highcliffe beachfront around three years ago.

The original beach route showed promise but was ultimately dismissed due to concerns about wear and tear on the cliff paths. Another setback — but not the end.

Fast-forward to the beginning of 2025.

Alongside two parkrun Ambassadors, myself and another prospective Event Director for Southbourne were fortunate to secure a face-to-face meeting with BCP Council. Some attendees joined online, and during the meeting a voice came through from a laptop suggesting we revisit my original Highcliffe route.

That moment changed everything.

What followed were months of testing, measuring, refining and reassessing the route, with invaluable support from Christchurch Running Club. Together, we proved the route worked. The proposal was submitted once more — to BPC councils — and then to parkrun HQ for final approval.

Highcliffe parkrun officially launched on 13 December 2025, supported by an additional Event Director (Corinne Ellison) and a strong and committed Core Team. From the very first event, it was clear that the appetite for a local parkrun had been there all along. Week by week, the event has continued to grow, with increasing participation and an incredible team of volunteers helping to make each Saturday morning welcoming, safe and enjoyable for all.

Throughout it all, parkrun Ambassador Mike Cure was an absolute rock. His belief, guidance and unwavering support carried this project through its most challenging moments.

And that is how Highcliffe parkrun came to be — not overnight, not easily, but through persistence, community support and a shared belief that everyone deserves a parkrun close to home.

From a ten-minute walk lost... to a parkrun gained for an entire community.

We look forward to welcoming you at Highcliffe Beach parkrun soon.





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Hello from Christchurch BID!

We have certainly landed into 2026 with a bang! It has not been a wet start for Christchurch BID Operations Managers Louise & Ellie who are currently preparing and planning for a multitude of projects and events in Christchurch starting with summer planting, reinstatement of the lamppost banners in Bargates and the bunting on the High Street.

The BID will once again promote all large Christchurch events through a **Summer What's On** print and digital campaign, and the free SEEDL online training will be extended for all Christchurch BID ratepayers for another year, with lots of online courses, from Food Hygiene to First Aid at Work, HR and a **new AI course**.

Roadworks: A brand new resilience working group with several BCP departments, Christchurch BID and Christchurch Chamber has been implemented and commenced their first meeting in December 2025 to tackle potential issues surrounding roadworks before they arise, ensuring Christchurch business voices are represented and heard! Christchurch BID will send out a fortnightly roadworks email, to give you time to plan staffing, communications to customers business should you need to do this, if any potential impact is unavoidable.

NEW! Christchurch BID have sponsored the **Distinguished Gentleman's Ride** on Sunday 17th May 2026. Bringing thousands of motorcyclists riding dapper to support men's health to Christchurch High Street and raising funds for Movember, who focus on prostate cancer and mental health initiatives. Don your most dapper outfits and create window displays to welcome the riders! If you can also spare a couple of hours, we are asking for volunteer stewards to support the event and marshal the bikes! Please get in touch with us using the contact details below.

Food Fest Local 2026 We are thrilled to announce that Food Fest is back with a bang on May 23rd and 24th! Prepare for a weekend filled with delicious food and vibrant activities. Fill your window displays, and prepare to promote your business to the passing trade.

The **first term** of Christchurch BID ends on 31 October 2026 and in July 2026 Christchurch BID will require a new term ballot in order to continue to provide its services, projects and events. We have invested a significant amount of **time, expertise and investment** to establish the BID over the past five years, and learnt how to create a meaningful impact in the town. Much of our first term has been about building capability, forming partnerships and understanding what works for Christchurch, and that work is now paying off. More information will be distributed to all ratepayers this spring.

For any questions or queries, please contact Louise or Ellie on hello@christchurchbid.co.uk



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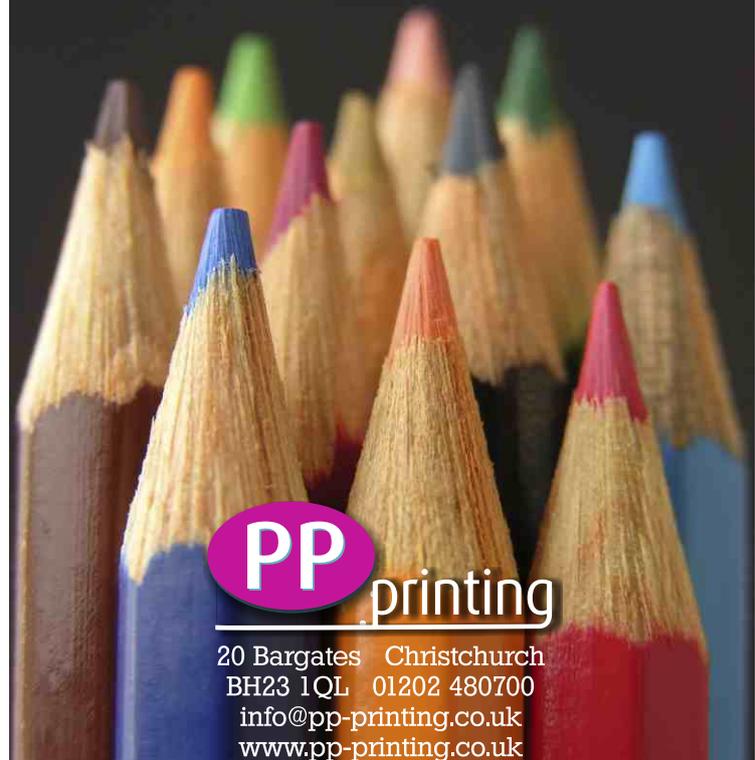
Is your workplace technology helping you move forward, or holding you back?

We would welcome the opportunity to continue the conversation with fellow Christchurch Chamber members and explore how we can support your organisation.

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The Cliffhanger Restaurant begins a new chapter after 20 years

Perched on the cliffs of Highcliffe overlooking the sea. The Cliffhanger restaurant has been a landmark for locals and visitors alike. After two decades of welcoming guests, the restaurant has now completed its first phase of an exciting refurbishment- marking the beginning of a fresh new era.

The initial phase has focused on refreshing the interior spaces.

The aim has been to let the sea views remain the star of the show, whilst making the space more inviting for everyone.

The Cliffhanger restaurant remains proudly rooted in Highcliffe- the same iconic location, now with a new renewed look and feel.



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Home-Start Wessex's family charity shop now open

Families charity **Home-Start Wessex** is delighted to announce the opening of its first-ever family charity shop and family support hub in Christchurch.

Work began last year to transform empty retail units in Saxon Square, redesigning and refitting the space to create a retail shop and a reading corner for families. Shelves and racks are now full of clothing, toys, and equipment for children and their parents.

Shop staff will host regular activities, such as storytime sessions, to bring local families together. There is also an online shop to help extend the charity's retail reach.

For 30 years, Home-Start Wessex has supported families in crisis, facing mental health struggles, financial hardship, isolation, bereavement, domestic abuse, multiple births, parenting challenges, and life in homeless shelters, providing vital help when it is needed most.

Over the last year, the charity has transformed 1,716 lives, helping a record 526 families. Their reach covers the Purbecks, Swanage, Weymouth, Dorchester, Bridport, the whole of the BCP Council area, including Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch, across the borders of Hampshire and Wiltshire, going as far north as Cranborne and Fordingbridge and as far east as New Milton - a huge area with a population of over 650,000, including many pockets of high-level deprivation.

Kathy Fryatt-Banks, CEO of Home-Start Wessex, said, "Opening our first-ever charity shop is an exciting milestone in our charity's development. Over the past few years, we have experienced significant growth, doubling our geographic reach across West Dorset, doubling the number of families we support, and more than tripling the number of support groups we run.

The shop in Saxon Square is now open to the public and will be open six days a week, run by a team of staff and volunteers.

The charity is actively recruiting kind and compassionate volunteers to assist in the shop, as well as volunteers to provide emotional and practical support to parents with young children across Dorset. If you could spare a few hours a week to help local families through challenging times and make a difference in your community, please contact office@homestartwessex.org.uk. No experience is needed – just a big heart and a listening ear, as full training and ongoing support are provided.

The charity is also accepting donations of good-quality clothing, toys, and equipment for the shop. Items can be dropped off at the shop during opening hours.



A new chapter for dining in Christchurch

Eighteen Restaurant & Bar, located inside The Kings Arms Hotel, offers modern British cuisine using locally sourced ingredients from nearby farmers, fishmongers and artisan producers.

Head chef Quentin Royles said: "We're passionate about telling the story of Dorset through our food."

"Every dish celebrates the incredible farmers, fishmongers, and artisan producers on our doorstep."

Co-owner Jason Giddings said: "Eighteen represents a new chapter for dining in Christchurch."

"We've created a space that's refined without being pretentious – somewhere you can enjoy exceptional food and wine whether you're celebrating a special occasion or simply enjoying a Tuesday lunch."

After a "soft" launch there was a grand opening evening held on 5 February.



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Get social with the Chamber and enjoy fascinating guest speakers

Chamber Business Breakfast at The Cliffhanger, Highcliffe on Thursday 26th March

The Chamber is delighted to have another Business Breakfast event planned at 8.00am on Thursday 26th March at the Cliffhanger Restaurant in Waterford Road, Highcliffe, Christchurch BH23 5JA, which has fantastic sea views and delicious food! The morning will kick off with everyone having the opportunity to mix and mingle with lots of other local businesses, providing a great chance to network.

A full English or Vegetarian Breakfast is then served with tea, coffee and all the trimmings for just £16 per person. Once breakfast is finished, we are delighted that our special guest speaker is **Simon Boyd**, Managing Director of ReidSteel, who has recently been awarded an OBE in the King's New Year's Honours List. Simon is well known for his leadership skills and is an influential champion of UK businesses, regarding job creation as essential for prosperity.



Chamber Business Networking SmartBase, Aviation Park West, Parley on Thursday 4th June

On Thursday 4th June, the Chamber is delighted to be exploring a new venue in the heart of the Airport Industrial Estate where so many Christchurch businesses are based. SmartBase is a modern, fully equipped shared working environment for small businesses to locate and take advantage of great shared facilities.

One of these is a large meeting space, which the Chamber will be enjoying on Thursday 4th June from 5.30pm giving our members and prospective members a chance to meet and discuss how they can work together. In addition, we will be welcoming Mike Phipp, the Airport's Historian (*pictured below*), who will give a presentation on the long and amazing history of the Airport.

There will be a complimentary buffet and drinks and the event is **free of charge** to attend.



To book to attend either event or ask any questions please email the Chamber Secretary, Sue Harmon-Smith at sueharmonsmith@gmail.com

Chamber stalwart retires after 40 years service

Bob Atkins is to **step down from the Chamber's Executive Committee** after more than 40 years sterling service. Bob, now in his 80's, started out in Christchurch in engineering including working at Stour Precision in Wick Lane, now Bodega, before opening his own business in Fairmile specialising in special purpose machinery.

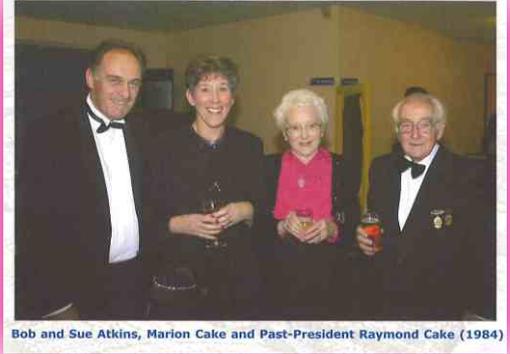
His wife Sue, with whom he celebrates a Diamond Anniversary next year, was working at Escor Toys for **Peter Thorne**, another long-standing Committee member. Peter was President in 1986 and as a manufacturing business felt that with mostly retailers on the Executive, it would even things up a bit and so invited Bob as a fellow manufacturer to join the Committee.

Bob's role was to help Ray Cake of Pimpernel Printed Products to look at all the Traffic Orders and Planning Applications for the Chamber to decide whether to support or object. Bob has stayed in that role right up until his retirement, although he says the technology has changed considerably over the years. The planning lists were posted to him originally and then in the 90's they were emailed, which continued recent changes meant Bob had to access the lists on the BCP website.

Bob has great memories of Chamber events including the **Snow Queen Procession**. Local girls would enter a competition at the Regent Centre organised by a well-known local hotelier – Lillian Jefferis – and the winner would be Snow Queen and runners up would be her attendants. The Snow Queen would then head the procession organised by the Chamber which incorporated the turning on of the Christmas Lights.

Bob also has very fond memories of the Chamber's extremely popular **Annual Dinner Dance** held in the Ballroom of the Kings Arms Hotel – the ballroom was pulled down some years ago and the houses built at the back of the hotel bordering the Mill Stream. The Dinner Dance had about 120 attending and was a highlight of the social year in Christchurch!

The Chamber Executive Committee will be wishing Bob a **very fond farewell** soon but still welcome him and Sue to social events which they have loved to attend over the years. Bob & Sue will enjoy spending more time with their two daughters, Sara and Rachel, and their families including three grandchildren.



Bob and Sue Atkins, Marion Cake and Past-President Raymond Cake (1984)



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REID Steel MD “humbled” by honour



REIDsteel is proud to announce that its managing director Simon Boyd has been made an Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in the King’s New Year Honours List.

Simon received the prestigious award in recognition of his many decades of service to British steel manufacturing and Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs).

He said: *“For decades I have been doing my best to try and protect our industry and to the bring to the surface the real issues facing UK businesses.*

“I am delighted to be awarded this honour in recognition of this work and at the same time I feel quite humbled by the experience.

“I would not be able to do the work I do without the help and support of my colleagues and the guidance of wise friends. It hasn’t quite sunk in yet!

“A big thank you to those who proposed and supported that I be recognised for my work through such a prestigious honour.”

Simon has become renowned for his business leadership and as a vocal and influential champion of UK based businesses, the steel industry, manufacturing and particularly SMEs.

He promotes the importance of job creation and the important role businesses play in prosperity for all; he is a passionate believer in social mobility.

Simon recently campaigned to save British Steel’s sole surviving blast furnaces in Scunthorpe and for the company to be brought under public ownership. He continues to fight for British Steel.

Under Simon’s leadership, REIDsteel was the first steelwork contractor to sign the **UK Steel Charter** in support of the UK steel making industry.

We are delighted to confirm that Simon will be a guest speaker at a Chamber breakfast event on March 26 - see page 10 for details.



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