

Seaton Chamber CIC

June 2026 Public Meeting

Monday 22nd June at The Old Picture House

1. Welcome

The Chair opened the meeting and thanked attendees for coming out despite the warm weather. A strong turnout was noted and appreciated.

2. Guest Speaker – Maria McCarthy

Maria McCarthy delivered a 30-minute session on PR and media engagement.

Key Points:

- Background in journalism; currently freelancing for the Midweek Herald.
- Passionate about positive community stories.
- Works with businesses on gaining press coverage; shared examples including Otterton Mill.
- Encouraged businesses to think beyond traditional marketing (leaflets, posters) and consider creative approaches.
- Press releases allow businesses to shape their message and present themselves authentically.
- Influencers can be useful but results vary.
- Online presence matters — press coverage helps people find you even if they're not on social media.
- PR requires time, knowledge, and persistence; journalists rarely come to you.
- Local journalism is fast-paced and mostly online, with high staff turnover.
- Press releases now require strong content, quotes, and good landscape photos.
- Start small and aim for easy wins.
- Press releases can cover anniversaries, new staff, milestones, or helpful expert commentary.
- Be contactable and responsive.
- Avoid taking sides on controversial issues; stick to neutral, informative commentary.
- PR increases chances of being included in “round-up” features (e.g., best places to eat).
- In interviews, it is acceptable to steer the conversation to key messages.
- Act quickly for local news; magazines have longer lead times.
- For broadcast interviews, research the programme style and ask who else will be on.
- Build relationships with journalists; follow up persistently.
- Services offered include:
 - Level 1 Power Hour – discussion about your business
 - 3-hour session – develop first press release together

- Full service – Maria writes content for approval
- Caution: do not photograph magazine pages for social media due to copyright; instead link to the article.
- Event press releases should be sent around one month in advance.

Contact: maria@mariamccarthy.co.uk or www.mariamccarthy.co.uk

3. Chamber Project Updates

a. Pirate Festival

- The May Pirate Festival was a clear success, with excellent feedback, strong community participation, and a great atmosphere throughout the town.
- Attendees enjoyed the family-friendly focus, creative costumes, and the way local shops embraced the theme.
- The 2027 festival will take place on Saturday 22nd May.
- The Chamber intends to keep the event in its current format, growing gradually each year.
- A call was made for more volunteers, as the event is entirely run by a small team of volunteers.
- It was emphasised that the festival is community-driven and not a commercial venture.

b. Seaton Summer Local

- Ongoing initiative encouraging residents and visitors to shop locally throughout the summer. Please see attached documents for more information.

c. Poppy Display

- The Remembrance poppy display will return this year.
- The Chamber is now collecting handmade poppies — knitted, crocheted, crafted — and encourages the community to get involved.
- Poppies can be dropped off at Little Gems or Paperchain.
- A locality budget application has been submitted to expand the display into Jubilee Gardens.
- Funds raised will support the Royal British Legion.
- Volunteers will be needed later in the year to help attach poppies to the netting.

d. Christmas Events

- Planning for Christmas has begun.
- Chamber members with a tree holder above their shop will receive a Christmas tree free of charge; non-members can purchase one at cost.

- Stand-alone trees will be expanded into more areas of the town to increase festive atmosphere.
- Fundraising will include raffles and tombola's at our monthly markets.
- The Christmas Window Competition will return, along with the Local Legend Award and Glowing Angel Award.

g. Seaton Market

- The monthly community market continues to grow, with a core group of regular stallholders.
- The Chamber is seeking more stallholders to keep the market fresh and varied.
- Market stalls cost £25 per year.
- Volunteers are urgently needed to support market operations.
- The market takes place one Saturday each month, and volunteers can give as much or as little time as they are able.

h. Town Promotional Video

- The Chamber is exploring commissioning a promotional video showcasing Seaton's natural environment, community spirit, and independent businesses.
- Initial enquiries have been made; ideas and suggestions are welcomed.

i. Family Funday – 30th August

- Joint event with Seaton Town Football Club from 2pm–8pm.
- Will include market stalls, food, music, and family activities.
- Chamber members will receive a 20% discount on pitch fees.
- Intended as a Bank Holiday celebration to mark the end of summer.

j. Art Project

- The Chamber recognises the strong public interest in art and visual displays.
- Flags are now up around the town, with bunting to follow.
- A large tree stump has been rescued and is now with a carver — future location and final design to be confirmed.
- Longer-term ambitions include murals on distinctive buildings.
- These projects will take time and community collaboration.

k. Call for Volunteers & Addressing Rumours

- A strong appeal was made for more volunteers and new Chamber members.
- Raised the rumours circulating that individuals are being paid or personally benefiting from Chamber activities which seem to be being led by one individual.
- The Chamber firmly stated this is untrue — all work is voluntary and undertaken for the benefit of the community.

4. AOB

Street Cleanliness

- Concerns raised about the town looking untidy with insufficient street cleaning.
- There is too much red tape and licenses required for the chamber to arrange another clean up event this year but we encourage shop owners and the public to take pride in their town and do their bit outside their shops and houses.
- We have met with Street Scene and written to EDDC regarding weeds and general maintenance.
- The local Street Scene manager has recently left, leaving no clear point of contact.
- EDDC responsiveness remains limited due to local government reorganisation.

Seafront Parking Charges

- Members expressed frustration that parking charges continue to reduce footfall and negatively impact local businesses.
- No significant change is expected until local government reorganisation.
- Seaton is perceived to be low priority within EDDC.
- Potential future asset transfers to STC were discussed, though STC is also volunteer-run.

Signage Update

- A wetlands funding bid by EDDC includes a proposal for improved town-wide signage.
- The Chamber has mapped the town and submitted recommendations.
- Awaiting outcome.