

SOU WILLESBOROUGH and NEWTOWN **COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

SWAN COMMUNITY PLAN OCTOBER 2021- MARCH 2023 PUBLIC CONSULTATION

Foreword by Councillor Sue Mullan

September 2021

Dear residents, businesses and social groups

Since our formation in May 2019, South Willesborough and Newtown Community Council has been seeking views not only on how we can best preserve, support and enhance our community but also how we empower SWAN citizens in relation to our service delivery.

Residents' feedback, along with an assessment of other data, has helped to inform our longer term vision for the SWAN area, define our objectives and priorities and our future funding needs.

We are now in a position to consult with residents on the key activities we propose to include in the Community Plan to the end of the next financial year- March 2023 and receive your feedback

This consultation document also reflects that we don't exist in a SWAN "bubble". Whilst our prime focus will always be the SWAN area, we also consider ourselves a partner in "Team Ashford" and are generally supportive of the efforts of the principal councils (Ashford Borough Council and Kent County Council) and Kent Police to improve the Borough's social wellbeing, safety, environmental sustainability, leisure offering and economic growth.

Consequently, we have aligned our service delivery plans, where possible, with Ashford Borough Council's objectives as defined in its draft strategy to 2024

Sue Mullan

Chair - SWAN Community Council

Background - Where SWAN Council sits in the UK system of Local Government

- SWAN Community Council is classed as a Local Council. It has the same status as a parish or town council.
- We serve the SWAN electorate, our Councillors are independently elected and we raise our own precept (a charge we levy on Ashford Borough Council)
- Local councils work towards improving community well-being and providing better services.
- SWAN Council's activities fall into three main categories: representing the local community; delivering services to meet local needs; striving to improve quality of life and community well-being.
- Local Government law empowers us to provide and maintain a variety of local services. However, the
 only duty local Councils have in law is to manage allotments in areas where both a Parish Council and
 Borough Council exist. Hence the reason we assumed responsibility for the Gas House Fields allotments
 in October 2020
- Borough Councils are responsible for services such as Housing, Planning and Refuse Collection. The County Council is responsible chiefly for Education, Social Services and Highways. We liaise with these bodies on a regular basis.
- The services we provide are determined by three things a) what the law permits us to do b) resident's affirmation of support for our plans and c) the size of the budget we have to work with

In 2020, we surveyed the community to find out what it liked and disliked about SWAN and the improvements it would like to see. That feedback, along with an examination of other data, has helped SWAN Councillors to understand the issues that really matter and to group resident's feedback within 7 distinct themes

1) A SAFER PLACE 2) A WELL

3) A BETTER FEEL TO THE PLACE 4) AN ECO-FRIENDLY PLACE 5) AN EQUAL AND DIVERSE PLACE

6) AN EFFECTIVE COUNCIL

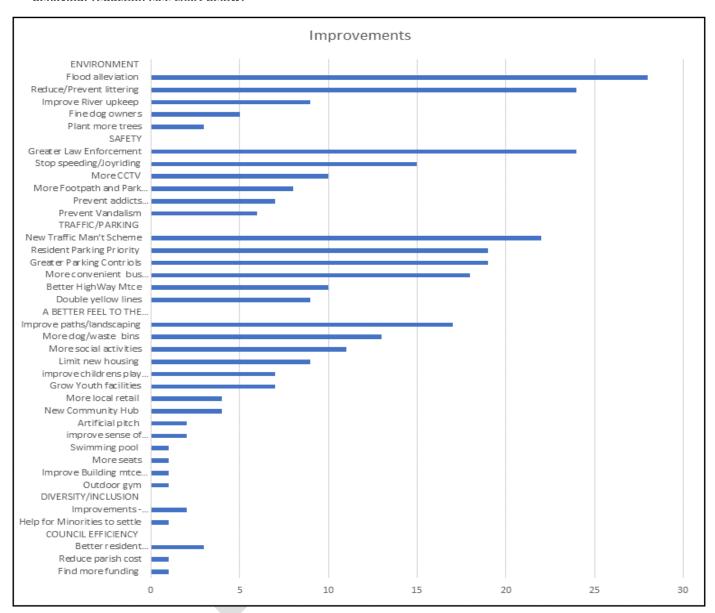
7) A PLACE TO DO BUSINESS

WHAT RESIDENTS TOLD US ABOUT SWAN

Key Likes were- Green Space, Community spirit and Convenient Location

Key Dislikes were - Parking and transport problems including speeding, Littering and Flooding

Key improvements identified were - Flood alleviation, Litter/cleanliness, Parking/traffic solutions and Crime/Anti-social behaviour reduction (see chart below)





Flooding - a perennial problem



Example of criminal damage



Daily Parking/traffic problems

Residents put safety as their 6th highest reason for living in SWAN, but put heightened law enforcement, including attention to speeding and greater CCTV cover as the 2nd most needed improvement.

On investigation we found a mixed picture – A lower level of recorded crime than other areas of Ashford in Violence against the person, theft from vehicles and theft offences, but a higher level in burglary, criminal damage, car and cycle theft and vehicle interference. (Source Multiple Deprivation Index)

Based on residents' responses we examined and costed several options

- 1. To support/promote existing proactive crime prevention schemes staffing and small project costs only
- 2. To install more CCTV cameras £10200 per camera plus £1200 pa monitoring cost
- 3. To appoint a dedicated SWAN PCSO £3000 training plus £30000 pa employee costs
- 4. To appoint accredited security marshals- up to £48000 pa per person inc VAT plus uniform and training costs
 - 5. To install a speed indicator device (subject to KCC approval) £7000 (KCC specification)
 - 6. To install solar powered lighting on unlit footpaths £4500 per unit plus connection costs

The Council feels that a sustained increase in crime and anti-social behaviour, if left unchecked, could lead to the physical deterioration of visible, community facilities such as play areas, subways, waste bins, street signs and noticeboards.

When compounded by environmental crimes such as fly tipping and littering, people's perceptions of crime in an area are heightened

SWAN Council's conclusions are

- Until more detailed crime data is available, it would not be appropriate or good value for SWAN residents to pay substantial additional local taxes to support a dedicated PCSO, contracted street marshals or additional CCTV
- That its current policy of supporting crime prevention partnerships such as Neighbourhood Watch and Speedwatch with time and project funding represents better value for money for SWAN taxpayers
- That the Council can help to create a community of interest by encouraging residents to report all crimes and anti-social behaviour that affects them
- Given resident's ongoing concerns about speeding, a speed indicator device on at least one key thoroughfare could be introduced
- 5) There is substantial added value in supporting the appointment of a Handyperson to improve the quality of our public areas and reduce the perception of crime in the SWAN area (see Theme 3 A Better Feel to the Place)

These conclusions are reflected in the activities proposed for inclusion in the Community Plan 2021-23 in the coloured panel (above right)

For an assessment of the impact of these activities on the average SWAN local tax payer in 2022-2023, go to Page?

Residents put safety as their 6th highest reason for living in SWAN, but put heightened law enforcement, including attention to speeding and greater CCTV cover as the 2nd most needed improvement.

FOR INCLUSION IN THE COMMUNITY PLAN

Ongoing actions:

To develop the partnership with Neighbourhood Watch and Kent Police with the aim of preventing crime

Invite Kent Police to all our Council meetings

Communicate the Neighbourhood Watch scheme benefits to all SWAN residents

Encourage all residents to record and report crime and anti-social behaviour

Continue to lobby Ashford Borough Council for Newtown's inclusion in the Town Centre Public Spaces Protection Order

Promote the activities of the Speedwatch scheme

Additionally, by March 2022 we will

Print and distribute crime reduction themed, wheelie bin stickers for all SWAN residents - £800

Install a speed indicator device (subject to KCC approval and siting)

Install a publicly accessible defibrillator at The Alfred Arms and organise training

And by March 2023 we will

Develop links with the Ashford Partnership Against Crime and promote its benefits to SWAN businesses

Linked to Theme 3, contract a part time Handyperson to improve the quality of our open spaces/reduce perceptions and fear of crime

Re-examine the crime statistics and, if required review current policies in consultation with SWAN residents

These activities support the following Council Objectives

- 5) Work with Kent Police and other agencies to provide a safe and secure environment for our residents and businesses
- 4) Work with the Borough Council to provide safe, healthy and timely opportunities for recreation, leisure and education and to provide, improve and maintain play equipment and public spaces

Link to Ashford Borough Council Objectives

CA1 – Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages and incomes to live sustainably and safely

Key outputs

- We will increase the number of streets/SWAN residents protected by, and participating in, the Neighbourhood Watch scheme each year
- We will make all SWAN residents aware of how to report crimes by October 2021
- We will install a speed indicator device and an additional defibrillator in the SWAN area by March 2022 and provide training for users
- We will undertake a qualitative assessment of the impact of Handyperson (see Theme 3) by March 2023

Although some residents were unhappy with some bus services, the majority put the physical connection to local facilities as one of their top three "likes" about living in SWAN

Some expressed the view that increasing traffic and parking problems were starting to have a negative effect on the ability of people to move around freely. This supported the findings of an earlier survey (2019) which focused on parking, traffic and pollution problems

For the purpose of this theme the Council considers that 2 other aspects of connectivity should be included.

1) Digital (broadband and phone) connectivity
2) The Council's connection with the SWAN community

SWAN Council's conclusions are

- That in order to address the perceived traffic and parking problems, its priority is to lobby residents to support a new, parish-wide traffic management system and parking regime
- That it will start that process by undertaking street by street surveys and communicating the findings to résidents
- 3) A new traffic scheme that includes increased use of value both to Theme 3 – A Better Feel to the Place and to Theme 4 – An Eco Friendly Place such that it becomes a key longer term priority.
- Digital technology is as important to residents of all ages as physical connectivity and we should ensure that SWAN benefits from it
- That the Council takes its connections with the SWAN public seriously and will invest time and money in developing its communications media.

For an assessment of the impact of these activities on the average SWAN local tax payer in 2022-2023, go to Page?

LINKED TOPIC -A FUTURE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN?

Many residents expressed concerns about the possible over-development of SWAN's green spaces in the future and its impact on the semi-rural sense of place and increased levels of congestion from traffic and parking

The Council considers that one way to protect the parish is through the development of a **Neighbourhood Plan**

Neighbourhood planning is a way for communities to have a say in the future of the places where they live and work. It gives them the power to produce a plan with real legal weight that directs development in the local area. It helps communities choose where they want new homes, shops and offices to be built - or not as the case may be.

However, although grants are available, it's not uncommon for a Neighbourhood Plan to cost over £30000 to produce such that the Council needs to be assured that the benefits will outweigh the increase in local taxation before it engages in meaningful discussion with residents

Link to Council Objectives

- 1. To understand and communicate the views, needs and aspirations of residents and businesses to statutory and non-governmental bodies as required
- 2. Increase public involvement in the community through ensuring the parish council and its activities are open, transparent and accountable to residents.
- 3. Support local business and economic activity in the area **Link to Ashford Borough Council Objectives**

GP1: Reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets

TG2 – Enable the improvement of digital infrastructure to support the growing needs of business, voluntary sector and residents

TG4 – Support growth in the visitor economy

Key outputs

- We will distribute SWAN News to 2100 households quarterly and encourage wider access to our social media and website
- We will distribute a guide to community transport providers to SWAN residents by end March 2022
- Longer term we will provide evidence for a campaign to improve the traffic management in the parish
- We will explore the cost and benefits of a SWAN Neighbourhood Plan and engage with residents on the findings by March 2023

Residents told us that their greatest "likes" about SWAN was its friendly and semi-rural feel. The Council was left in no doubt that they would like to see that spirit preserved and enhanced.

The Council was also left in no doubt that the disruption to their lives caused by regular flooding in the area was one of their greatest dislikes.

In addition, residents also thought

a) the place would feel better if it was tidier and attention paid as quickly as possible to littering unkempt pathways and verges, damage to public assets and items thrown in to the river

b) that the spirit could be enhanced if there were more facilities available for public

meetings and social events c) that events were important to the area

The Council has concluded that

It agrees generally with the resident's view
Its grant and donations policy can play a key role in
helping social groups and other organisations to
improve the area, the health of residents and
facilitate social interaction

c) As it owns no premises at the moment, and is aware of the high demand for the Swan Centre, the Council will need to work with other groups and landlords to ascertain the demand for meeting space d) That a longer term aspiration would be for the Council to own or loans its own community space.

Council to own or lease its own community space which could be used for social events and public meetings – but that is unlikely to be achievable in

the course of this plan
The key challenges in this theme cross over with actions already identified in other themes eg. The aspiration to preserve the semi-rural spirit can be aspiration to preserve the semi-rural spirit can be helped by producing a Neighbourhood Plan (see Theme 2) in the longer term and by employing a Handyperson from April 2022 to keep the place clean and tidy whilst concurrently diminishing the perception of crime (See Theme 1) Given comments on the provision and maintenance of SWAN's play areas that it should examine the case for transferring these public assets from Ashford Borough Council to SWAN Community Council and keep residents informed of any progress

Council and keep residents informed of any progress and financial implications.

g) Its relatively small projects budget could be used to

enhance key features/memorials in the area. That it should facilitate more public events but work with public and private sector partners to achieve that.

It also concludes that

The flooding is a multi-agency problem with at least 5 other organisations involved – Ashford Borough Council, Kent County Council, Environment Agency, The Internal Drainage Board and Network Rail.

Realistically SWAN Council cannot possibly solve this problem itself – we simply don't have the skills or finances of the other organisations.

But, the Council is the voice of the community and will use the loud message the community has sent to lobby hard for

a solution.

A I but a solution is unlikely to be found during the course of this plan ie by March 2023.

> For an assessment of the impact of these activities on the average SWAN local tax payer in 2022-2023, go to Page?

Ongoing activities

Provide grants and donations to local groups and charities

Maintain a projects budget for improvements to the SWAN

Organise the annual Christmas Carol concert at the SWAN Centre

Promote the work of SWAN's volunteer litter pickers Continue to lobby for flood alleviation interventions

Continue to look for suitable building for use as an office, community meeting space and small business incubator space (See Theme 7)

Additionally, by March 2022, we will

Examine the business case for transferring children's play areas from Ashford Borough Council to SWAN **Community Council**

Assess the demand for and capacity to deliver a more varied range of social activities

Organise and manage a post Covid community event focusing on local arts, crafts and businesses

Co-fund the repainting and repairs to the railway memorial on Newtown Green

Take direct action to tidy unkempt and littered public footpaths and verges

And by March 2023 we will **Contract a part time Handyperson (see Theme 1)**

Organise a larger scale themed family event (subject to permissions)

Link to Council Objectives

Support local business and economic activity in the area Work with the Borough Council to provide safe, healthy and timely opportunities for recreation, leisure and education and to provide, improve and maintain play equipment and public spaces To support the work of voluntary organizations through grants and practical support

Promote, within our community, activities which support the principles of inclusion, environmental sustainability and an ethical society

Link to Ashford Borough Council Objectives

CA1 – Homes and neighbourhoods in the borough meet the needs of local people of all ages and incomes to live sustainably and safely

CA2 - Local people have access to life-long learning to ensure they have knowledge and skills to take up local employment

CA3 – Reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local people CA4 – Communities celebrate their heritage and the diversity of their population to build a more connected community and strengthen social

responsibility

Key Outputs

Increase number of grants awarded to local groups Organise 2 events each year Employ a Handyperson from April 2022 Railway memorial Newtown Green enhanced by March 2022 Increase capacity in volunteer litter pickers Develop business case for transfer of playgrounds to SWAN CC by March 2022

THEME 5- AN EQUAL AND DIVERSE PLACE

Residents told us that one their greatest "likes" about SWAN was its green spaces but commented on the impact of traffic on the environment, the need for more trees to help carbon neutrality targets and the difficulties experienced by wheelchair users on our paths and other highways

The Council concluded that not only could it influence other organisations to make changes but also that it could give a lead on both environmental and equality/diversity issues.

Subject to external funding*, for example, we have agreed to install 2 "Happy to Chat" benches to help reduce social isolation post Covid and to improve connection and community (* grant awards)

In that respect many of the actions in these themes are internal to the Council – eg the minimization of paper use in the office such that there will be no additional cost to residents

It could also use its only premises at the moment – The Gas House Fields Allotments as a model for encouraging the use of greener methods of horticulture and assisting people with physical or mental health issues.

Our track record on the allotments since we took them over from Ashford Borough Council in October 2020 is

- The Council has established an Allotments Committee supported by co-opted expertise
- Agreed to prioritise SWAN residents on the waiting list
- Agreed to fast track an applicant with GP or recognized Charity Mental Health Referrals
- Reduced the waiting list from 14 local residents to 3
- Divided several larger plots to encourage novice allotmenteers and more elderly tenants or those with mobility problems to downsize
- Spent £1200 on removing untidy waste
- Carried out monthly inspections and taken action against tenants who are not adhering to their tenancy commitments
- Sought funding to create a community plot to assist residents with physical and mental health impairments and to provide life-long learning opportunities
- Created a £3000 reserve to cover emergency

Links to Council objectives

Promote, within our community, activities which support the principles of inclusion, environmental sustainability and an ethical society

Work with Kent Police and other agencies to provide a safe and secure environment for our residents and businesses

Link to Ashford Borough Council objectives

GP1 Reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets

GP2: Increase biodiversity and encourage sustainable lifestyles

GP3: Reduce the amount of waste produced from homes and business

CA2 – Local people have access to life-long learning to ensure they have knowledge and skills to take up local employment

CA3 - Reduce health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local people

THEME 4 - An Eco-Friendly Place

Ongoing activities

Use digital technology to minimise the use of paper

Use distribution services to circumvent the need for non bio-degradable packaging

Promote eco-friendly gardening and horticulture at the Gas House Fields allotments (see panel opposite)

Minimise trips by car for Council business

Organise the annual Spring Clean

By March 2022 we will

Sign up to the Ashford Plastic Free Pledge and use our media to encourage residents and businesses to limit their use of single-use plastic items

By March 2023 we will

Present a report to Kent County Council and Ashford Borough Council on reducing the impact on wheelchair users and young families of cars on our streets (linked to Theme 2)

THEME 5- An Equal and Diverse Place

Ongoing activities

Ensure that equality and diversity is reflected in everything we do – from employment, policy and decision making, service delivery, choosing meeting venues and working with partners.

Use our communications media to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act and those who don't

Encourage those with protected characteristics to become local representatives

Additionally, by March 2022 we will Agree and publish the Council's Equality and Diversity policy

Agree and publish the Council's policy on mental health

Examine the difficulties reported by disabled residents and young families on our streets

Seek funding for and install 2 "Happy to Chat" henches

Seek funding to support the creation of a community plot and mental health fitness project at the Gas House Fields allotments

By March 2023 we will
Agree a youth strategy for SWAN in liaison with Kent
Police and youth service providers in the area

Key Outputs

Install 2 Happy to Chat benches by March 2022 National Spring Clean organised (Covid permitting) each year Increase number of accessible allotment plots

The creation of a Community Plot at the Gas House Fields allotments

THEME 7 – A PLACE TO DO BUSINESS

The Council's existence, performance and financial prudence appears not to be a major concern for the majority of residents.

Despite that, the members Council share a collective responsibility and need to be assured that the Council is acting within its permitted limits and is using the public money invested in it wisely.

Although still an "infant" Council, Council members been keen to demonstrate to residents and social groups that it operates with high standards and is both efficient and effective

The Council is pleased that independent audits over the last 2 years have confirmed that it is not only doing things right - but well and within budget

Through this process of consultation, we will also ensure it is doing the right things for the Community whilst, at the same time, contributing to Ashford Borough Council's proposed economic and social outcomes

All the activities in this theme are, therefore, ongoing activities aimed at ensuring community engagement, openness, transparency and financial probity.

The Council has concluded that there is little more it can do to protect its own reputation, the public money that supports it or encourage residents to make a meaningful contribution in Council and Committee meetings

Theme 7 – A Place to Do Business is a new area for SWAN Council but important given the number and variety of businesses located in the parish.

The Council does not have the skills and finances found in organisations such as the Invicta Chamber of Commerce and therefore cannot and would not wish to, offer business support or training services for example.

It can, however, signpost people to such services and help to create links and loyalty between businesses, local residents and social groups in the SWAN area

The Council already runs a "Think Local- Buy Local" campaign in its quarterly newsletter, for example

As neither of these Themes involve growth projects or schemes of any kind, the only cost associated with them is training and staff time. It must be stated though that the Council staff enjoy great support from the unpaid, volunteer councillors who give their time freely to the SWAN area

Link to Council Objectives

To understand and communicate the views, needs and aspirations of residents and businesses to statutory and non-governmental bodies as required

Increase public involvement in the community through ensuring the parish council and its activities are open, transparent and accountable to residents.

Support local business and economic activity in the area Respond to planning applications and other statutory consultations on time, ensuring that recommendations made to the Borough Council adhere to any statutory regulations and are in the interests of the community

Ensure that Councillors and staff have access to high quality training and development opportunities and that they meet all required standards, for example working towards achieving "General Power of Competence" status

Link to Ashford Borough Council's Objectives

TG3 – Strengthen local supply chains and increase the resilience of the local economy

TG5 – Stimulate vibrant, accessible and sustainable Town Centres for residents visitors and business

CA4 – Communities celebrate their heritage and the diversity of their population to build a more connected community and strengthen social responsibility

Theme 6 – An Effective Council All activities in this Theme are ongoing

Ensure risks to the Council and the public money invested in it are mitigated

Mitigate risks via robust, transparent financial control

Test the adequacy of our controls via an independent audit of our accounting and governance procedures

Publicise and invite the public to our programme of public meetings and an annual "Parish" meeting

Post minutes or draft minutes on the Council's website as soon as possible after the meeting

Offer the public the chance to comment on the Council's performance at Council meetings

Ensure all legal requirements for the notices and conduct of meetings are met

Make bids for grants and other income to support the Council's projects and work

Use Cloud technology and enhanced security to protect our data and finances from cyber crime

Ensure Councillors have appropriate training and development

Comment on every planning application we receive,

THEME 7- A Place to Do Business

We will continue the following ongoing activities Promote and enhance local businesses through our regular "Think Local- Buy Local" campaign in our quarterly newsletter

Objections to planning applications for business premises are tied to new planning regulations and local plan policies

By March 2023 we will Create an up to date and comprehensive on-line SWAN business directory

Explore, with Ashford Borough Council, the possibility of using the town centre as a feature space for SWAN businesses e.g. town centre car show

To explore new premises for SWANCC with the resource to provide co-working space for fledgling businesses

Key Outputs

Number of open Council/Committee meetings organised Qualitative – internal and external audit reports Zero breaches of Data security Increased income from external sources 8 local businesses promoted pa (newsletter) SWAN business directory created by March 2022 Percentage- planning applications commented on by

deadline

SWAN Council's current year budget is £61,013. This runs April 2021 to March 2022.

- The average cost per household per week of SWAN Council's activities in 2021-22 (based on a Band D property) is 70p
- All the projects identified in the plan for Year 2021- 22 can be found from the current year budget

Going forward to the year April 2022 to March 2023.

- We estimate the base budget for 2022-2023 would need to rise by 5% to account for inflation.
- Additionally, the two projects/schemes identified in the plan will require additional budget in the financial Year April 2022- March 23
- Project Additional Costs for Theme 3 –
 A Better Feel to the Place
- a) The Appointment of Handyperson- £20,000 inc equipment.
- b) Community Post Covid Event £5,000 (net cost)
 - We estimate that the identified two projects that require additional funding will increase the average weekly charge for a Band D property by between 22p and 42p from April 2022. Residents living in Band A-C properties would pay less than that in line with their Council Tax banding.
 - This is influenced by how Ashford Borough Council re-calculates the local tax base. SWAN Community Council has no control on this.



In Conclusion SWAN Community Council feels

- It has responded to resident's concerns and comments seriously.
- It has not been frivolous and only endorsed 2 key projects which offer high value for money for SWAN residents.
- Both projects reflect the resident's wishes to see improvements in both the fabric and the spirit of the SWAN area which came out so strongly in the survey responses
- The vast majority of activities identified in the plan under the 7 themes only involve staff time and as such, will have no impact the amount of local tax residents pay now.
- The use of the Budget will give excellent value for Tax Payers money and a solid representation of residents wishes.
- SWANCC commends this plan to you.

WHAT NOW?

SWAN Community Council believes this plan represents excellent value for SWAN residents and would now invite your comments and feedback.

Consultation with residents provides the backbone of all the decisions and plans the Council are proposing.

To give your opinion you can
Come to the Annual Meeting of Electors at Stockpot
Café 2nd October at 10am

View the exhibition in the entrance to Hobbs Parker Market and leave your feedback

By visiting our website and using the online form , by calling 01233 528933 or by e-mail to clerk@swancc.org.uk

This can also be done in writing to SWAN CC, Invicta Business Centre, Orbital Park TN24 0BH, by calling 01233 528933

We look forward to hearing from you.