



Information for prospective Watchkeepers

Sheringham Coastwatch is one of a growing number of Coastal Surveillance Stations set up to keep a watch around the coast of Great Britain. It is affiliated to the Sea Safety Group UK (SSG), which is an association to promote safety at sea.

Sheringham Coastwatch is registered as a charity with the Charity Commissioners and also with HMRC for tax purposes.

What we do

Our over-riding aim is to help ensure the safety of those on the sea and people who use the beaches and cliff walks in the Sheringham area.

We are the eyes and ears of HM Coastguard for the stretch of sea, the cliff tops and the beaches visible from the station. We maintain a visual and radio watch. We also use radar and Automatic Identification System (AIS) receivers. Although much of the time the work is routine, watchkeepers receive training as to what to do in cases of emergency.

We operate to nationally agreed standards contained in a Memorandum of Understanding between HM Coastguard and the SSG, a copy of which is held in the station.

In brief our role is to:

- Keep a visual watch on the coastal area visible from the station
- Keep a radar and AIS watch (most commercial vessels are required to have AIS equipment which transmits information about the ship, its position, speed and course and destination).
- Monitor the international distress channels including VHF chs., 16 and 70.
- Log all passing vessels.
- Report any incidents or emergencies to HM Coastguard and/or Police or Ambulance Service, as appropriate.
- Co-operate with HM Coastguard and other Search and Rescue organisations when requested.
- Watch over and assist divers in the vicinity.
- Monitor local weather conditions and when requested give local weather reports (not forecasts).
- Assist the general public and relevant authorities where possible.

Why we were set up

In the 1960s HM Coastguard became a "999" service, enabling the public to raise the alarm as with the other emergency services: the last station where a visual watch was kept closed in 1994.

In 1994 two fishermen lost their lives directly below a recently closed Coastguard lookout. Local volunteers decided to re-open the lookout and to keep a visual watch. And so the Coastwatch movement was born. Since then the number of Coastwatch stations has grown and there are now over 50 around the coast.

Sheringham Coastwatch was formed in 1997 and with the closure of HMCG Gt Yarmouth in May 2013 our role has become even more important.

Where we are

We operate from the Old Coastguard Lookout (the Watch tower) on Skelding Hill, the highest point of Sheringham golf course. The Lookout was built in 1932 and was used by the Coastguard until 1993.

Opening times

We are open 365 days a year from 09:00 to 16:00hrs in winter and 09:00 to 18:00hrs during British Summer Time.



How long and how often do Watchkeepers work?

Watches are usually 3 hours long. Most Watchkeepers stand one regular watch per week. Sometimes a newly trained watchkeeper may have to wait a few weeks before a vacancy for a regular watch occurs, but in the meantime, they can volunteer to cover watches for the regular Watchkeepers.

Our Watchkeepers

Most of our Watchkeepers have no previous maritime experience and all receive full “on the job” training under the guidance of an experienced Watchkeeper. Once it is thought that you have attained an acceptable standard you will undertake a test. After passing the test you will be supplied with your ID card, (if not already issued), and epaulettes and you can stand watches alone. (The epaulettes remain the property of Sheringham Coastwatch).

Uniforms

It is compulsory for Watchkeepers other than trainees to wear an approved uniform when on watch, when fund-raising and when otherwise representing Sheringham Coastwatch. Trainee Watchkeepers are encouraged to wear the approved uniform when training but it is understood that they may wish to wait until their training has been completed before acquiring the uniform.

Wearing the approved uniform projects a professional image to the public. It is a visible indication that the wearer is someone in whom their confidence can be placed and to whom incidents can be reported and upon whom they can rely for information. Also, the uniform enables ready and swift identification of members of Sheringham Coastwatch which can be important, particularly in emergencies.

The approved uniform

- White shirt with epaulettes, black trousers/skirt and black shoes. A black tie is optional. A navy-blue pullover with epaulettes may be worn over the white shirt. Members may wear smart black shorts with appropriate socks instead of black trousers/skirt.

OR

- A Sheringham Coastwatch polo shirt with black trousers/skirt and black shoes. A Sheringham Coastwatch sweatshirt and/or Sheringham Coastwatch fleece may be worn over the polo shirt. Members may wear smart black shorts with appropriate socks instead of black trousers/skirt.

Sheringham Coastwatch ID cards

All Sheringham Coastwatch members other than trainees must wear their Sheringham Coastwatch ID card when on watch so that it is clearly visible; also when fund-raising and otherwise representing Sheringham Coastwatch.



How we are run

Our station is totally self-financing and Watchkeepers are expected to take part in occasional fund-raising activities.

As a charity the Trustees are responsible for ensuring that the organisation is run effectively and efficiently. The Trustees also formally approve membership applications.

The station is managed daily by the Station Manager.

The current Trustees:

- Station Manager & Chairman Graham Williams
- Treasurer Deb Struthers
- Secretary Mike Bersin

All were elected at an AGHM and serve for a three-year period

As well as an AGM, there are four General meetings a year at which members may raise and discuss any issue that relates to Sheringham Coastwatch. In addition there are four meetings of Trustees a year.

We hold a number of social events each year which include a formal dinner in January, informal gatherings at a local public house and fish and chip quiz nights. These events provide an excellent way for members and their partners to meet colleagues in an "off-duty" setting.

So, would you like to join us?

What we are looking for is an enthusiasm to play a part in keeping our coast, beaches and cliff-top paths safe. You must be fit and able to get to the station at the top of Skelding Hill. You must be at least 18 years of age.

If you would like to become a Watchkeeper please complete and return the Application Form. We will then meet up with you at the station to talk over your application and to answer any questions you may have. Before your application can be formally approved it has to be considered by the Trustees. You will be required to do three familiarisation sessions with a senior Watchkeeper to determine your suitability for the role and then will be fully trained before undertaking a watch.

If you have any questions, please contact sheringham-sec@outlook.com