

# ANNUAL REPORT SOUTHWOLD TOWN COUNCIL 2015/16



**This report will give you a flavour of the activities in the first year of this new Council.**

The work of the Town Council is carried out in our committees and working groups, so it seems appropriate to give a precis of their activities in the report.

**The Leisure and Environment Committee** has been engaged in many projects which have lifted the spirits of our community. With the help of local volunteers, they organised the sewing of wild flower seeds on the beds above Ladies' Walk, the first of which had to be abandoned due to high south easterly winds. On a more explosive note four of the six cannons have been refurbished, together with the flagpoles on Gun Hill, and St James's Green. The town sign on Electricity Green was repaired and repainted by an offender in Hollesley Bay prison as part of the community service scheme, and I am sure that you will agree that he has done an excellent job.

One of the things that we do really well in Southwold is our public events and much of the work of the committee is taken up with providing events that enhance our quality of life and sense of belonging. These have included Civic events, provision of more outside gym equipment, a blue plaque scheme for notable people associated with Southwold, improved management of the marshes and Ferry Road garden, and plans for the Queen's birthday celebrations in 2016.

**The Highways and Footpaths Working Group** has also been busy doing their best for the town in very challenging circumstances. You are all aware of the review of policing which has resulted in resources being reallocated across the county and no police presence in Southwold police station in future. This includes the restructuring of Police and Community Support Officers (PCSO's) who provide a police presence in the town and enforce parking regulations. As the highest profile tourist town in Waveney we must have a local PCSO presence. I am pleased to say that after lobbying the Police and Crime Commissioner he has agreed to fund half the costs of the PCSO for the next 12 months if Southwold Town Council pay £16,000 for the other half. This has been agreed and we now have clearer objectives and reporting procedures in place too. We do listen to the people of the town, and after feedback from the town plan survey we have commissioned a review of parking. The next step is to define an action plan and put in place stage 1. We have also been working with the police to try and upgrade the existing CCTV system to ensure this works effectively, especially with a reduced police presence.

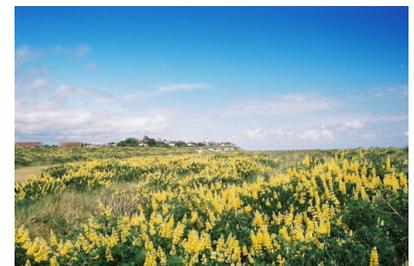


Photo credits: Steve Wolfenden, Richard Wells & James Bass

**The Planning and Development Committee** dealt with 113 planning applications during 2015, a 33% increase in the past two years. Members of the Committee have attended various planning workshops that have increased the technical knowledge of individuals, while continuing to develop an increasingly beneficial liaison with Waveney District Council planning officers. One highlight has been a successful outcome to discussions with the developer, WDC and the Suffolk Design Panel, in respect of the former service station site on Rights Road.

**The Finance and Accounts and Best Value Working Groups have been busy** modernising computer accounting systems, and moving away from cheque payments to a BACS system. The team monitor Council budgets and respective spend and consider all donation requests from local organisations. Underpinning all of this they ensure we have up to date policies and governance structures in place, and that we work effectively as a corporate body.

Things are also changing regarding the management of town properties, which have lacked a rolling maintenance programme. The **Landlords Working Group** now have one in place which the Council plans to implement in the next three years. Much work has also been done on the subject of rent reviews in a move towards market rents, and regular consideration is given to ensure we have a property portfolio that supports our strategic objectives. Finally, we are conscious that the entrance to the town can be much improved, and to that end we commissioned a firm of architects to create a design framework for the entrance to the town to indicate our aspirations to developers and the District Council.

**The Neighbourhood Plan Team** has reached a critical milestone, whereby policies have been identified, and strengthened by supporting evidence from the community, with a questionnaire going to press for distribution later in the year. It is now a matter of testing the ideas that have been suggested, against what is possible, by seeking scrutiny by local experts, prior to the final consultation beginning.

## **Town Council**

We have done a lot of work with partners, locally and at District and County Council level, to try and achieve the best outcomes for the town. Some of these are still in process.

With WDC we have been looking at the basis on which dogs access the beach, divestment of assets to a local level and protecting assets as much as we can - for example the recent consultation on public conveniences. We continue to work with them on the Joint Harbour Committee regarding transfer of the harbour to local control.

With County we have been liaising on the prospects for the Police and Fire station site and the needs of the library in the short to medium term.

Work has been done with groups to consider the potential for community assets like the Kings Head and Hospital site.

We are represented on the local parishes liaison group re Sizewell C implications.

We have communicated with the Minister regarding to Ship to Ship transfers.

We have also tried to improve our communication with the townspeople. We are committed to being open and transparent and to reach out to our community. To this end we have continued to develop the new Town Council website and produce the regular newsletter. At Christmas we engaged in an initiative to encourage the community to come together in St Edmunds church to give an outward and visible sign of the strength of our community. It was very pleasing to see the strength of response, when about five hundred members of our community filled the church to capacity at the candle lit service.

## **Precept**

This has been a momentous year. For the first time Southwold Town Council has voted to levy a Precept to cover the operations of the Town Council, and enable us to be prepared for a divestment agenda by the District Council and service providers such as the police, fire and health services. The depth,

complexity and demands of these agendas are unravelling, week by week, but the implications for the Town Council are becoming hugely significant. It is essential for us to have the financial wherewithal to manage these cuts as they impact upon our community, and to be able to implement our aspirational agenda for the town which we have set out in our strategy for the future.

The Precept will be levied on households in 2 stages—the first in April 2017 and the second in October 2017.

### **Financial Report 2015.16**

#### **Income**

The Council's income from its property rents means that to date no precept has been levied. However, the property portfolio is ageing and is increasingly expensive to repair. The Council tries to maintain its properties to a good standard and allocates to spend £50,000—£60,000 per year on its properties. Recently the Council has commissioned a full repairing schedule for each of its properties, and this shows that over the next 10 years the Council will need to spend £1million to keep the properties in good order.

Total income for the Town Council in 2015.16 was £298,997 (£295,924 in 2014.15). This includes £13,031 from the market stalls, which, has become a vibrant asset for the town, being full on most Mondays and Thursdays and £1000 reimbursement from Waveney District Council for the recycling banks being retained on Town Council land. It also includes such items as the income from Kilcock Toilets, hire of the Council rooms, rent from Charter Fair and rent from the gallopers on the Klondyke during the summer.

#### **Expenditure**

Against this, expenditure in 2015.16 was in line with budget, with total expenditure of £299,260 (£204,746 in 2014.15). Included in this figure is expenditure on the many projects mentioned in this report, together with expenditure on repairs, maintenance and improvements to Council assets such as Kilcock toilets (£21,261), open spaces

(£3,816) and the Klondyke play area (£1972). Of specific note is the expenditure on the match funded PCSO (£9,834) which ensures that a police presence is retained in town. There were government and local authority elections in 2014.15 and the Town Council paid £1318 in election fees for these to be held.

#### **Reserves**

In addition to the expenditure throughout the year, other monies are set aside at the end of each financial year for projects not yet completed. These include a sum of £140,000 to upgrade and repair our assets £5,000 has been allocated towards the provision of the shuttle bus service. The Council has to retain sufficient funds for at least one election each year and £3,000 has been annotated for this purpose, whilst a sum of £10,000 has been set aside for the works needed short term to implement priorities highlighted by the parking review. Other reserves; £51,582 general reserves, £30,000 admin costs, £30,000 for contracts, £21,396 works to Station Road garage, £2,000 for traffic issues, £25,000 for repairs to Town Hall and £6,200 to ensuring the website is capable of providing all the information that residents and visitors may need.

#### **Future**

As the report mentions, Council is aware of the need to ensure that an appropriate financial budget is prepared to enable it to carry out the many strands of work and projects required. Council will continue to update residents on matters through the regular Council newsletters and the website. See website; [www.southwoldtown.com](http://www.southwoldtown.com)

#### **Volunteers**

The Town Council would like to thank everyone who helps out with any of the projects that the Town Council undertakes including the organising of events. All such help is very gratefully received, as without it these things would not be possible. The Town Councillors devote significant time to the town and community of Southwold, as well as undertaking 'normal' Town Council business, and all of this is carried out on a voluntary basis with no remuneration. I should like to take this opportunity to thank my fellow Councillors for their talents and hard work throughout the year.

**But what of the next twelve months 2016—17?**

Probably the most important thing that we have done this year, and another first, is to prepare the Town Council strategy for the future of the town. The implementation of the strategy will be our focus in the next twelve months.

As elected Councillors our purpose is to provide leadership and direction for the people of Southwold. We do this with honesty and integrity, without fear or favour to one group or another, whilst recognizing our social responsibilities to all in our community. Over the past 12 months the Council has moved towards a culture of creating tomorrow rather than defending yesterday. The whole Town Council has put in about 200 hours of time on this overarching plan for the future, which has clear objectives, reporting procedures and budgets to enable us to deliver our plans. The purpose of the Committees, Groups and Neighbourhood Plan Team is to implement the actions required to deliver our strategy. We are now ready to communicate this to individuals and organisations inside and outside the town.

**Vision**

Our vision for the future of Southwold is to be the successful, vibrant, attractive town on the East Anglian Coast where people want to live, work and visit. We will focus on projects that are important for the town and we will not settle for anything less than excellence as a Town Council. However we have the humility to admit when we are wrong and the courage to change.

To implement our vision we have identified a number of strategies that will direct our activities to secure a strong future for the town. Tourism is important for Southwold but we feel that we need to diversify the economy by encouraging more knowledge based businesses. This creates an opportunity to establish a dynamic business hub on our Station Road site. Linked to this is our strategy to try and halt the decline in number of the local population and make the town more attractive for families to work and live. It is important to us to retain and maintain our natural environment, the quality of the built environment and our community assets. To this end we are working on a Neighbourhood Plan to enhance the built environment and our architectural heritage, and we are working with other organisations to enhance the denes, the Common and the greens of Southwold. Our plans also include trying to maintain the independent character of the High Street. We all know that this is difficult because this is something over which we have no control, but we do aim to keep a vibrant and dynamic High Street that serves the needs of the community. We are also working on the difficult issues of optimizing accessibility to the town and tackling the parking problems. We won't solve this all at once, but we have made a start and we are determined to make progress.

Overall, I would say that we are at a really important stage of moving the town to a point where we can be *the* successful, vibrant, attractive town on the East Anglian coast, where people want to live, work and visit – and while our traditions are important, we are definitely moving away from a culture of defending yesterday and towards creating a dynamic town for tomorrow.

**Melanie Tucker**  
**Town Mayor**  
**2015 –2016 and 2016—2017**

