

Southwold Town Council

Feed-back on drop-in on the Station Yard plans held Aug 19th, 2018

About 100 people attended the Southwold Town Council/Ingleton Wood drop-in on the proposed Station Yard development over the course of the six hours. Representatives from both the Town Council and the architects Ingleton Wood were present throughout the day.

Background

The Town Council had become aware that the garage roof and structure was in a poor state of repair and the paint shop had not been used for several years and is likely to have some contamination. Rather than continue with regular expensive maintenance council considered that there was an opportunity to redevelop the site to improve the facilities available. As the site is owned by the Town Council, it already controls the rents that are paid, and in moving forward it will be able to ensure that both the residential and business properties become available to local tenants while keeping the rents affordable and fair.

Diversifying the local economy is key to sustaining Southwold as a vibrant town and was therefore a high priority goal set by the 2013 Southwold Town Plan and is a key part of the Council's 2016 Strategy Document, having been highlighted as an important issue from the Neighbourhood Plan feedback. The goals of this development are strongly supported by the Waveney Economic Team and the Coastal Community Team. In STC's 2016-17 Annual Report, delivered to every household in the town last summer, we announced that we had commissioned architects to take a design forward to a planning application.

The design

We wanted the design (a) to be consistent with the 'Design Framework' for the entrance to the town which the Town Council set out in November 2015 and which all new developments in this area are required to conform to, (b) to be flexible, both in size and potential usage, so that units can be retail or business on the ground floor and business or affordable residential flats on the upper floors. The design is built round a pedestrian-only courtyard and has to respect the existing buildings around the site and try to reflect the original style of the site.

We recognize that at the drop-in several attendees (not all) disliked the design, in particular the view of the corner of Station Road/ Blyth Road as one drives into town. We have asked the architects to consider whether any amendments can be made to this aspect of the design.

Existing tenants

Contrary to some rumours, the shops and residential flats on Hurren Terrace are not affected by the development. At the drop in there was concern expressed about the future of the existing tenants whose premises are affected by the redevelopment. Prior to the public engagement in 2015, the existing tenants were informed by the Town Council for plans for the site and ongoing private discussions have continued over the past 3 years. In view of the terms of the existing tenancies – each historically different to each other – the Town Council has been discussing with them the options and opportunities that may exist to accommodate their individual circumstances. At present no options have been finalised, but the Council would hope to achieve individual solutions and interim arrangements whilst construction is under way. Although the garage will not be rehoused on site, the Town Council has been working with the existing tenant with regards to possible alternative sites nearby.

Parking

Queries have been raised in relation to parking.

The Council is conscious of the difficulties residents in certain parts of the town have with parking, especially in the summer. To address the situation, the Town Council is actively developing a comprehensive parking plan, which acts on the concerns of residents and other stakeholders within the town. A consultation on this will be arranged as soon as it is completed. With regards to parking for this development – given the nature of the site, permitting cars to enter the courtyard area would not provide a safe pedestrian courtyard. However, the Millennium Foundation have plans for a permanent car park of over 100 spaces and spaces have been specifically allocated for this site.

Funding and timescales.

The strategy for Station Yard was included within the Coastal Community Team Economic Strategy for Southwold which itself brings funding opportunities – indeed an application to Stage 1 of the funding bid has been submitted for approx. £1m. Other funding monies are available to support business growth and job creation. The Town Council has a large property portfolio, with some of the properties now needing extensive repair works. The council has the option of diversifying its portfolio to assist the sustainability of the town, considering the future needs of residents, businesses and their employees. Specific cost of development will depend on many factors including the overall design of the scheme and the materials used – so a realistic timescale for works to start would be 2019/2020.

Consultation

Some attendees (and objectors on the Waveney Planning website) complained about a lack of consultation. We are surprised at this complaint. The initial public consultation/ drop-in on these plans was held in 2015 and the Town Council highlighted their proposals for Station Yard in the 2016 Southwold Town Council Strategy, and the 2016-17 Annual Report. The redevelopment for Station Yard was also included within the Coastal Community Team Economic Strategy for Southwold.

Agendas and minutes of Council meetings are posted on the Council's website, and these meetings are all open to the public to attend and comment if they wish. The Town Councillors are a group of volunteers working hard to maintain the town and secure its long-term future, and we are committed to transparency. To improve communication, I am planning to resurrect the Town Council monthly newsletter which will be published on our website (<https://southwoldtown.com>) and circulated to the local press. Future updates will also be provided within these publications and online.

Cllr Michael Rowan-Robinson, Town Mayor