

Station Yard, Southwold – Update 12.3.2020 Media Release

At a public meeting held at the Methodist Hall on 10 March 2020, Southwold Town Council agreed to revise its plans for an Enterprise Hub with a convenience store at Station Yard. The new plan will include some workshop space. This decision was reached after long, detailed and careful consideration of an alternative redevelopment proposal based on seeking to retain a garage.

The alternative proposal grew out of a petition filed with the Town Council in November 2019 that asked for a pause in redevelopment so that other options could be considered. The Town Council agreed to set up a task force composed of two Town Councillors and three residents of Southwold and Reydon to devise an alternative proposal. It provided a budget of £1k to help with business planning.

The work of the Task and Finish Group was considered at several public meetings held in January, February and March. An important consideration throughout was the impact of any alternative scheme on the Town's ability to retain a £1m grant from the Coastal Communities Fund. Awarded in September 2019, the grant allocates £800k towards the cost of building the Enterprise Hub, which is expected to generate around 70 jobs. The remainder is to employ a three person economic development team to help all of the Town's independent businesses, which are under pressure from high rents and rates.

On Tuesday night, the Town Council considered three options for retaining a garage on the Station Yard site. This meeting was focused on financial viability. After analysing data supplied by the Task and Finish Group, its business planning consultant advised that all three garage options would generate a negative Net Present Value (NPV) of up to £1m. Members of the public were given an opportunity to ask questions before and after Councillors discussed the issues.

“Regrettably, the numbers just did not stack up,” Town Mayor Ian Bradbury explained. “The majority of Councillors could not support putting the Town's finances at risk. They were looking at a situation where the Council might end up having to raise the precept. The Council worked hard to accommodate the views of the Task and Finish Group, which put in a lot of time and effort. Our obligation is to do what is best for the whole of the Town. Moreover, we were advised that if we went ahead with any of the alternative options, we could lose the Coastal Communities Grant.”

The semi-derelict Station Yard site is now occupied by two separate garage businesses working out of industrial sheds that are in poor condition; some date back to the 1920's when the Town Council rented the land to the Eastern Omnibus Company to use as a depot and workshops. Since 2004, the Town Council has had plans to redevelop this land. In 2014, the Council employed architects to draw up a design framework for the entrance to the Town. The opportunity for the Council to begin work on the land that it owns came in 2019 when the Town was awarded the Coastal Communities Fund grant.