

**Come and find out more about the Draft Neighbourhood Plan
Monday 22nd October - 6.00-9.00pm
Millennium Hall, Mights Road, Southwold**

DRAFT SOUTHWOLD NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN SUMMARY

What is a Neighbourhood Plan?

It is a guide to development in the town and will be required be used by anyone considering, or making, a planning application.

What does it do?

The Plan sets out policies that will have legal force when a planning application is submitted. Some of the Policies apply to the whole of Southwold and some apply to specific parts of the town. The Neighbourhood Plan should be read in conjunction with the Waveney Local Plan.

How long will it last?

Once approved, the Plan will apply for 20 years. This is why it is important that we set the right Policies, as they will affect development in the town until 2038. The Plan can be reviewed before then, if necessary.

What are the Policies?

The Policies have to be written in legalistic language and these can be found in full in the Plan itself. We also have to provide all the evidence that supports these policies, so the full Plan and its appendices runs to 300 pages. This summary explains why each Policy has been included and what it aims to do.

Why are you being asked for comments on the Plan?

The Policies have been drawn up using the responses to the questionnaire that was distributed in 2016, and to which 39% of residents responded, and consultation with local people and businesses. We now want your thoughts on the Plan so that these can be taken into account before the final version of the Plan is voted on in a local referendum next year.

How can I get a copy of the full Plan?

If you would like to read the full Plan it is available on the Town Council website www.southwoldtown.com and printed copies are available to read at the Town Hall and Southwold Library.



What are the challenges for Southwold over the next 20 years?

- Making sure all development is of a high quality design, and at an appropriate density.
- Providing sufficient residential properties that are affordable to local residents and those who work in Southwold and the local area.
- Reducing over-reliance on tourism, whose seasonal nature has adverse consequences for High Street traders, especially the independent shops.
- Redressing the demographic imbalance created by Southwold's declining and increasingly elderly population.
- Providing suitable and affordable accommodation for younger people and families, enabling a wider range of people of all ages to live in the town.
- Addressing the limited availability of on-street car parking during periods of high tourism.
- Addressing the lack of employment opportunities and premises for businesses not involved in retail or hospitality.
- Protecting existing community services and providing for their changing needs, as well as providing for new community services.
- Maximising the potential reuse of existing built assets for the benefit of the wider community.
- Protecting the natural environment for the benefit of residents and visitors.

Housing

The questionnaire results showed over 80% of respondents wanted the Plan to try to encourage full time occupancy of newly built properties. The Plan therefore has a policy that includes what is called a Principal Residency Requirement.

This policy will, except in exceptional circumstances, require all newly built properties to be occupied as the main residence and residents will be required to provide proof of their residence in the property. An example of an exceptional circumstance is where a small number of non-principal residence properties would make building affordable housing financially viable.



Design

The questionnaire results showed over 87% of respondents saying that it was important to discourage the infilling of gardens and courtyards through extensions or new buildings. Protecting historic building styles and materials and protecting and enhancing open spaces were also seen as priorities by many respondents.

The Plan has a design policy that is intended to reduce over-development and that requires planning applications to contribute positively to the character of the local area through the design and type of building materials used.

A heritage consultant conducted a Character Assessment of the town, that we had previously broken up into seven character areas, and the consultant identified in detail the special qualities of each area. These character assessments should be used in the future by developers to ensure that all new design is sympathetic to Southwold.



Parking

Anyone who lives in, or visits, Southwold will be aware that for much of the year there are parking problems. These problems are made worse when properties are built or extended, without additional off-road parking being provided, or where garages are taken out of use through being made into living accommodation.

The Plan has a policy that states all developments that increase the size of properties must provide an additional number of parking spaces required for each bedroom in the property, in line with the Suffolk County Council guidelines. These spaces are allowed to be on-street only if the street is in a part of town where there is sufficient spare on-street parking to accommodate the additional demand. Additional parking spaces in front gardens are only allowed if these are not out of character with the local area.

The policy also requires that if a development removes an off-road parking space, a replacement space must be provided in the same part of the town.

Economy

The economy of Southwold is largely dependent on leisure and tourism. 70% of respondents to the Southwold Town Plan Questionnaire thought the character of Southwold High Street 'very important' and this was confirmed by the Neighbourhood Plan focus groups. In recent years, Southwold has seen a decline in the number of independent businesses and an increase in national chains, that tend to want larger store sizes. The Plan has a policy that makes it harder to increase the floor area of a unit above 150 square metres, seeking to tilt the balance back from national chains towards independent retailers.



In the Neighbourhood Plan survey, support for 'non-tourism-based businesses' was the first or second priority for nearly 60% of respondents. In addition, 84% of respondents thought it important or very important for 'small, flexible-use premises for small and start-up businesses' to be provided. The Plan has a policy to encourage start-up businesses, either through conversion of existing buildings or provision of new buildings.

Natural Environment

Southwold is located in an exceptional natural landscape of common, marshes, beaches and dunes. It includes and is surrounded by areas designated to be of high wildlife value. The Plan has a policy that encourages provision for wildlife in developments.

In Southwold, gardens (including courtyards) provide amenity for residents (including a sense of surrounding space); make an important contribution to the visual experience of residents and visitors; and help to shape the character of different parts of the town. The Plan has a policy that discourages the loss of private garden space in developments.

Green spaces that are common land, grazing marshes, play and recreation areas or allotments are considered to already have sufficient protection from development and most are owned by Southwold Town Council or the Common Trust. However the plan has a specific policy to protect the town's famous greens from development.

There are areas of the town that are vulnerable to flooding or experience problems at times of intense rainfall. Southwold is served by an antiquated wastewater and sewage system, so new developments need to minimise the load placed on the system. The Plan has a policy to try to minimise new developments contributing to the likelihood of flooding.

Community Services and Facilities

Community services and facilities are the life-blood of Southwold, not only for its residents and visitors but also for the surrounding parishes. The Plan has a policy to try to prevent the loss of community facilities through development.

Development Sites

Southwold's situation as an island surrounded by water and marshes and within a sensitive natural environment in the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) restricts development sites to brownfield land within the town boundary. There are few development sites that are available and expected to come forward during the Plan period. The plan has a policy that supports these development sites to be used either for residential units that address local housing needs, for small-scale start-up or growing businesses or retail space, or for community space.



Comment on the Draft Neighbourhood Plan and make your views known

We encourage you to go to the Town Hall or Southwold Library to look at the Draft Plan, or download it from the Council's website www.southwoldtown.com. You are very welcome to send written comments to the Town Hall, Market Place, Southwold IP18 6EF, or email to admin@southwoldtowncouncil.com, by 5th November 2018.

Note: Your comments will be placed in the public domain.

There will be a drop-in on the Neighbourhood Plan on Monday 22nd October, 6.00-9.00pm, at the Millennium Hall. You will be able to browse copies of the full plan plus appendices and talk to members of the Neighbourhood Plan Working Group.

