



Chairman's Annual Report 2014-15

It's been a pleasure to act as Chairman of the Southwold and Reydon Society for the past three years. It's been a dynamic time for the Society and we have fought some important campaigns on your behalf. This month sees our 50th anniversary and to celebrate this Barry Tolfree and I, with input from several committee members and others, have prepared a brief History of the Society. This will be distributed free at the AGM.

This year the Society has supported the Reydon Village Plan, with several members being active on the Steering Group, and members from both Southwold and Reydon helping with delivery of questionnaires. The Plan is being vigorously pursued by the Reydon Parish Council, which has set up several subcommittees to follow up the main recommendations. Southwold Town Councillor Will Windell, Chairman of STC's Planning Committee came to our Executive Committee to seek support for their proposal for a relatively small-scale Neighbourhood Plan, covering Southwold-specific issues like infilling, parking and the preponderance of second homes and holiday lets. We agreed to provide what help we could while reserving the right to continue to campaign on issues not covered by STC's Plan. We have provided detailed input to STC's consultation on the Neighbourhood Plan.

Southwold High Street remains a major battleground and it has been a frustrating year with landlords increasing the rents to levels that only national chains can afford. Several excellent independent shops have been lost this year and several new national chains have come in. Waterstones had the grace to present their new bookshop as the semi-independent 'Southwold Books', with no visible reference to the parent company. It appears that Gentian have managed to find tenants for 8 East Street and 72 the High St, formerly the Blue Lighthouse and the Launderette. The loss of the Eco electrical store was especially poignant. We have had a working group trying to come up with ways to defend the High Street. One promising idea is to try to persuade Waveney District Council to refuse proposals to expand the footprint of shops, in the hopes that this will favour independents over national chains.

Major planning applications which the Society opposed included one by the Global office furniture company to expand their operations outside the Reydon Business Park into the adjacent Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and a second for an 'iceberg' development under a listed cottage on East Street.

On the environmental front we have been trying to follow up issues from the Southwold Town Plan with the relevant agencies. One small success has been new notices at the entry points to the sea front reminding dog-owners of the regulations in place during the summer months. We continue to run our very successful doggie bag scheme.

The Society provided input on the NHS consultation on mental health provision. While there were some good ideas behind the proposed reforms, particularly the idea of expanded provision of care in the community, our concern was that the main goal seemed to be to make savings and reduce the number of mental health beds available in the area.

The Society is monitoring developments at the Southwold Caravan Park. This is in urgent need of refurbishment, but any redevelopment should not be at the expense of existing tenants, and obviously should not be out of keeping with Southwold and Walberswick. The Society hopes to work with Southwold Town Council to put forward a vision for the 'Southwold Gateway', as the former service station, fire station and police station sites are redeveloped.

We are also taking an active part in the campaign to preserve the First World War pillbox at Might's Bridge, one of only a few such objects surviving in Suffolk

Our subscription remains at the very low level of £2 per annum, which covers our running costs, but many of our members generously make an additional donation. As a result we are able to make donations to other community organisations and activities, including donations to Southwold Christmas Lights, Reydon Christmas Lights, the Southwold Library, the Voluntary Help Centre, the Hopper Bus and the anti-burglary CCTV camera on Might's Bridge. Our membership continues to stand at around the 400 mark.

The Society's Excellence Awards were a popular feature of last year's AGM and I'm sure they will be again this year. Thanks to Tony Evans and his committee for the work they do on these awards.

Our Committee this year has been John Stewart (President), Tony Evans (Vice-Chair), John Perkins (Secretary), Jon Hadgraft (Membership Secretary), Brian Harrild (Treasurer), Dexter Kirk, Ridley Burnett, Sue Doy, Peter Fells, Philip O'Hear, Stephanie Holt and Pam O'Hara, with Mischa Lester and Pam Cyprien as co-opted members. Many thanks to all of them.

Michael Rowan-Robinson (Chair)

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