

Southwold and Reydon Society
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How refreshing...at last we have a subject on which all seem to be agreed – that the empty site on the approach to Southwold is an eyesore and that “something needs to be done.” There is, sadly, no sustainable financial case for a swimming-pool or skate-park (land costs money) so the solution, almost inevitably, points towards a commercial housing development.

The site has “history”. A previous owner obtained permission for flats (which is still extant); the site passed to a bank and has since been the subject of debates and plans for some years. But in 2015 Equity Estates acquired the blue-fenced former petrol station sites and has, for some months, been submitting and amending plans for a housing scheme, fronting Might’s Road and both sides of the junction with North Road. The project has been through detailed discussions and consultations with Southwold Town Council (which has recommended rejection of the latest revision) Waveney District Council (WDC), the Suffolk Design Review Panel and other groups – including the Society (SRS).

At SRS we had already formed a working group as we recognised the importance of the site as part of what we termed “The Southwold Gateway”. We commissioned Brian Haward’s broad vision for the Gateway which is published on our website, www.southwoldandreydonsociety.org.uk . We also met the developer as part of the pre-application process.

STC’s consultation event “Entrance to the Town” in November set out their views for the future development of the area including the old fire-station, the Police Station, the Telephone Exchange and properties/workshops in Station Road on the corner of Blyth Road.

There remain a number of reservations about the present scheme – some on matters of principle and some on matters of design. SRS had a further meeting with the developer which we felt was very constructive. However, whilst welcoming his intention to build high quality housing, we were unable to agree that the scheme now submitted for planning permission was a good enough design for this key site. We have therefore responded to WDC requesting that further discussions are held to consider these design issues and failing that then this scheme should be rejected.

We also had a useful meeting with STC and established much common ground in our overall approach to the Gateway as well as exchanging views on the current application. SRS and STC share a fundamental belief that the designated areas are key to first impressions of the town. They should be treated as a whole and the quality of any development of part of the area will set a precedent for the rest. This brings the obligation to encourage the highest standards of sustainable design and the development of an area where people will want to live and work.

Whilst the present scheme appears to be the only show in town, nobody (including the developer) wants a flop. We very much hope, therefore, that further discussions can lead to revised proposals for development of the first of the “Gateway” sites that everyone can welcome.