

SOUTHWOLD AND REYDON SOCIETY NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2017

After protracted delays, during which St Felix School and their advisers persuaded Sport England to drop its objection, the Waveney Planning Committee decided on 11th July to approve a major application from the school to develop 69 houses on one of its playing fields. Waveney officers recommended approval despite many local and national planning policies to protect the countryside. Officers accepted the school's case that this is an enabling application and therefore a permitted exception to the rules.

We disagreed strongly and wrote to the Planning Committee with our detailed reasons, chiefly that the test of public benefit was not met. The proposals aim to fund routine maintenance not long term investment and will not make the school more viable as a business. The replacement sports facilities are wholly inadequate and the provisions for public access are derisory. We are dismayed our elected councillors failed to protect our environment and uphold their own policies.

Not only is this decision wrong, but it sets a precedent for future development in the Suffolk Coasts & Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and erodes the legal protection given to the AONB. We will actively consider whether there is any possibility of overturning the decision.

Apart from issues of principle, the application raised significant concerns about traffic access onto Halesworth Road and further pressures on the struggling local sewage system. The Planning Committee decided the application must return for a final vote when the detailed conditions for permission have been negotiated. If the decision itself cannot be challenged, we hope conditions will address these issues and ensure that the affordable housing element is long term with priority for local people. Then the Secretary of State will have to make a final determination due to the loss of a playing field. We will engage at these further stages to try to minimise the damage done by this decision.

We also continue to monitor threats to Southwold High Street. The rates increase issue is far from solved; it remains likely to threaten independent shops as increases of up 180% bite in 3-5 years. And we now have another incident of redevelopment of a shop to attract a national chain. 84 High Street, formerly Daddy Long Legs, is a listed building in the Conservation Area. A modest redevelopment was agreed which met the standards required. However, with work well under way, two further applications have been submitted for removal of walls to increase the retail space and which may compromise the structure and certainly will change its character.

The works on the roof appear already to have exceeded what was allowed and we have asked Planning Officers to inspect these urgently. It seems that the developers and their architect are willing to bend rules and exploit loopholes in the pursuit of the higher rents that national chains can pay. The losers are our local traders and, ultimately, the uniqueness of the High Street which is what attracts shoppers in the first place.

Philip O'Hear, Secretary