

## **SOUTHWOLD AND REYDON SOCIETY MAGAZINE ARTICLE FOR DECEMBER 2016**

### **New Threat to Southwold High Street**

The current five-yearly review of Business Rates will have a severe effect on the shops in Southwold High Street. The review is based on the rateable value of each business which is, in turn, based on the rental value. As rents have risen very sharply as a result of the purchase and conversion of shop premises in order to attract national chains, the rateable values are now assessed as much higher. If this rise also lifts the business out of bands which are given reductions, the effect can be as high as a 245% increase in annual rates payable (£10,000 per year increase in that particular case). Several other independent shops face increases around 180% and the average increase is around 140% to be phased in over the next five years. By contrast, average rises in Aldeburgh are around 80%, in Halesworth around 20% and some rates in Woodbridge will actually fall.

The Society is concerned that this increase will threaten the viability of retail businesses in our High Street, leading both to the loss of more independent shops and, in future, empty shops or more charity shops. If this happens, we will lose more of the quality which makes Southwold attractive and maintains its economic health. The rates increase is simply another step in the process we predicted would follow when we lost the battle to keep Costa out of Southwold – a process which seems likely to continue to drive out the independent shops from the High Street.

Business Rates are set by a national formula. Nonetheless, we have written to Waveney District Council, which is responsible for the collection of Business Rates, to urge them to use any flexibility open to them to limit the size of increases in rates for Southwold shops. We have also asked Southwold Town Council to take what action it can to help.

### **Minor Injury Provision**

As we have previously reported, the 7-day walk in Minor Injuries Unit at Beccles is due to close if current proposals are agreed by Health East, the local commissioning group. This is partly due to the fact that the current provision does not fully meet new national guidelines. Locally, the Sole Bay Health Centre is funded to provide minor injury treatment during the day on weekdays, provided staff are available which is not always the case at lunchtimes. We have urged Health East to find a better solution as the alternative at weekends and out of hours in the week is for all minor injury cases to go to Accident and Emergency at James Paget. This will be bad for patients and costly for the Health Service.

### **Councils to Merge?**

Currently, Waveney and Suffolk Coastal District Councils are consulting residents on a proposal to merge to create a new East Suffolk District Council. This "super" council will be the largest in England and the merger will extend the current process of developing shared services. We think the plan makes sense and could lead to savings which may prevent further loss of services. However, it is also a major step which takes decision-making further from local communities without any further delegation of powers to parish or town councils. We hope readers will respond to the consultation via the Waveney District Council website. To do so, follow this link: <http://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/features/views-on-merger-proposal/>

Philip O'Hear, Secretary