



A to let sign in Southwold. Right, Southwold Pier

Pictures: SARAH LUCY BROWN

# Can Southwold's housing crisis continue?



With a lack of affordable homes available in Southwold, **Danielle Lett** asks what does this mean for the town's future?

Southwold has long been a popular seaside resort, attracting visitors from not just East Anglia, but places further afield such as London and the Midlands.

With a population of around 1,000, nearly 60% of the town's 1,400 residential units are occupied as second homes or used as holiday lets. But with a shortage of available housing, combined with some of the highest house prices in the country, where does this leave the town's longstanding residents?

Southwold town and district councillor David Beavan fears that the rising number of second homes, coupled with already expensive house prices, will result in the town becoming a seasonal holiday resort, rather than somewhere people can live long-term.

He said: "Our community is dying because of the number of houses here that are used as holiday homes or second homes. It's at 60% now, which is the highest in the country."

"We've lost our police and fire stations, pubs are closing, and without a community here, why would people want to come here? If it's just a holiday park, it loses its attraction. I want the community to thrive as a

community."

But why has a town like Southwold got such a small permanent population, and a high percentage of second homeowners?

Cllr Beavan said: "A lot of the second homes are there because so many people have sold up. An elderly resident passes away, their family inherits a place in Southwold, they see they can get £500,000 for it, they put it up on the market and sell it as a second home because no local person can afford to buy it."

A report by housing specialist Compare My Move recently revealed the average house price in Southwold is £487,996 – more than double the UK average which is around £235,000. This makes the town the fifth most expensive coastal resort to buy in.

A quick search on Rightmove will back this up, and show just how expensive it can be to get your foot on the town's property ladder. At the time of writing, a one bedroom flat in Southwold costs anywhere between £399,000 and £495,000.

Cllr Beavan added: "You just can't get a mortgage - someone from here would have to be earning five times the average wage to be able to afford a house here."

As a town that relies so heavily on tourism, and with an average salary of just under £25,000 according to Adzuna, Cllr Beavan believes the ongoing housing crisis is indicative of a larger overall problem that unfortunately seems to have been magnified in Southwold especially.

He said: "We are looking to get more high value jobs in the town, but the industry here is tourism and that just doesn't create high value jobs."

"The second home problem is just one symptom of what's going on right now, and I think there's something very wrong with a society that pays a banker so much money they can afford two or three homes, but it doesn't pay a nurse enough to afford one home. It really sticks in the craw for local, hardworking people who can't even afford to rent here."

With such a high-demand for housing, it's meant competition for homes is now at an all-time high, with Cllr Beavan citing a recent example that saw nearly 50 residents compete for one property.

He said: "Last week, a council house became available, which very rarely happens because

there's so few left. There were 44 applicants for it, all local, as we have a local letting policy. Five of those were Band A, and about 10 were Band B applicants. Obviously only one got it, and I'm very pleased for them, but what about the rest? Local people just can't afford to live here anymore."

Mayor of Southwold Ian Bradbury has been living in the town since the 1970s, and believes the ongoing housing issue isn't just down to second homeowners, but more specifically the holiday lets that dominate the town.

He said: "Our major aim is to repopulate the town with permanent, or more permanent, residents. We don't want to stop tourism, but we've got a finite space and limited building and housing stock."

"I certainly don't want to condemn second homeowners to a major degree, as many of them support the town by coming here regularly and spending money. A lot of them visit five to six times a year, some every weekend. It's the holidays lets that worry me. Buying a house and then letting it out is the sort of moral dilemma people face."

A quick search on any of the local holiday letting websites

show that a short-term holiday let in Southwold can cost anywhere between £400 and £600 for a weekly stay - with some costing £1,000 for the week.

Mr Bradbury said: "We mustn't knock second homeowners, as they're not all the same - I just don't want many more of them in the town as it can't survive on the basis of second homes. Let's try and get affordable homes that are really affordable, and increase our stock that way. Our neighbourhood plan, when it's ratified, will aim to do exactly that."

The consultation, which begins today, will run for six weeks and outline five new policies for its emerging Neighbourhood Plan which will support building affordable homes for local people, while increasing the town's full-time population.

Some of its policies include preventing affordable housing being built and sold as market housing by the occupant – something that happened in Southwold's Tibby Triangle in 2011, as 90% of those properties are now second homes or holiday lets.

"Another policy would aim for any new housing built in the town



Councillor David Bevan - he believes the Southwold is oversaturated with the number of second homes within the town

Picture: SARAH LUCY BROWN

to be lived in by full-time residents only.

But while a lack of housing can cause issues with residents, some businesses welcome the second homeowners and holiday home renters, as they bring in a much-needed boost to the town's economy. "That's what the businesses want - they want the footfall and for people to spend the money," added Mr Bradbury. "A view often expressed to me is they'd sooner have one person who spends £200 come in, as opposed to 30 people who spend a fiver, or nothing at all."

David Ball, who owns Southwold Boating Lake and Tearoom, has been in the area for a number of years - and has seen the housing issue start to make its way over to neighbouring Reydon.

He said: "While the house prices might be high, there's not a lot of industry here apart from tourism, therefore there's not enough high paid jobs to support local families buying extremely expensive houses. Because there's a scarcity of affordable housing now, it's begun to resonate out of the town and into Reydon. We live in Reydon, about a mile away from our tearoom, and the bridge between the two towns was once

the dividing line - but now the high house prices in Reydon are just as high as Southwold's."

Mr Ball also believes that what is happening to local residents in regards to house prices could eventually trickle down and affect businesses in a similar way.

He said: "It's the same for all coastal towns. We enjoy going down to Cornwall, but when you look at the high streets there, they all have the same range of shops because it's only the big chains that can afford the rents, such as Joules and Fat Face. All we can do as a small business is try and offer something that's quirky and different, to help keep that seaside charm."

While keeping that seaside charm is imperative to Southwold, it seems the best course of action would be to find a happy balance between permanent residents and second homeowners, with a priority to ensure homes are both affordable and available for locals.

Cllr Bevan said: "We don't want to ban holiday makers, that's not what we're saying, they contribute to our town, but enough is enough. 60% of second homes is enough. We need to get it down below 50% - anybody with any sense would agree with that."



Southwold has around 1,400 residential units - and 60% of those are owned by second homeowners

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