

# COUNCIL MERGER – ITS A CON



The proposed (and hence certain to go through) merger between Waveney District Council (WDC) and Suffolk Coastal has been coming for a long time. Never admitted of course, never tested at elections but all the signs were there. Tory run Waveney combined with even Toryer Suffolk Coastal will, they hope, entrench them for ever in what is left of local government.

The abandonment of Lowestoft Town Hall, now empty and shuttered, and its replacement with a dull office block (and car park) a mile south of town on the road to Woodbridge defied logic and planning rules. Suffolk Coastal's new offices, yes, a mile or so north of Woodbridge on the road to Lowestoft created facts on the ground. A merger and probably the closure of one of those offices is a likely next step.

Meanwhile in continuing attempts to balance the books WDC has hived off, leased out, contracted out, sold off or privatised most of the services that it was responsible for.

WDC now has planning, coastal management, council housing and not much else. District councils will lose all their central government funding (which still accounts for about a third of Waveney's income) within a few years. The New Homes Bonus Scheme, which doubles council tax income through government subsidy, is also ending. WDC will raise charges where it can and sell off more assets (the demolition of Battery

Green car park and the sale of the site is an obvious example). One would predict that WDC's Marina Customer Service Centre will be closed and sold. The Councils will try, and probably fail, to raise business rates. As WDC itself admits, there is little scope to raise revenue. More cuts are to be expected.

The merging of departments that has already taken place has failed Lowestoft. Philip Ridley, at present employed by Suffolk Coastal, is Head of Planning and Coastal Management for both Councils. He was responsible for pushing through the evacuation of the now abandoned Town Hall. He backed Tesco's failed takeover of the Tramway Hotel. He was involved in the murky and now collapsed agreement for WDC to buy the Sanyo site for housing. He argued vigorously for the granting of planning permission for mass house building and the demolition of existing waterside businesses on the Brooke Peninsula/Jeld Wen site. The company he backed, Cardy Construction, with an awful known record of failure in Ramsgate has since gone into administration.

Dressing up cuts as improvements doesn't wash. The merger is cuts-led and less funding in the future means more cuts and less democracy. We oppose it.

## WHAT YOU CAN DO...

- Support LCAC by joining our leafleting every Saturday, 11-1pm, in the town centre precinct, outside the Britten Centre.
- Join our email list - keep up to date with activity in your area.
- Forward this leaflet and pass it onto friends and workmates.
- Want to know more? We can supply a speaker for your group or trade union branch.

Contact us

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# COUNCIL SILENT ON EVICTION OF MARKET TRADERS

Many have expressed dismay at the abrupt eviction of the market traders from their traditional site in the Britten Centre. That it took place over Christmas with no reasons given and with only a month's notice has made things near impossible for the ousted traders.

The "suggestions" for alternative sites, for example the Triangle market area (little footfall) and the railway station (development plans some way in the future) were not credible. The shops in the Britten Centre come with rents running into the tens of thousands of pounds, way out of reach of market traders.

Given the number of bodies that are now apparently responsible for the well-being of the town, not only Waveney District Council (WDC), but Lowestoft Vision (a Chamber of Commerce body) and the recent arrival Lowestoft Rising (nobody knows where they came from) it is shameful that no-one intervened. The traders at least should have had adequate notice and consultation about alternatives. One, or all, of these bodies should have stepped in and demanded fair treatment. Instead we have the loss of another amenity and the

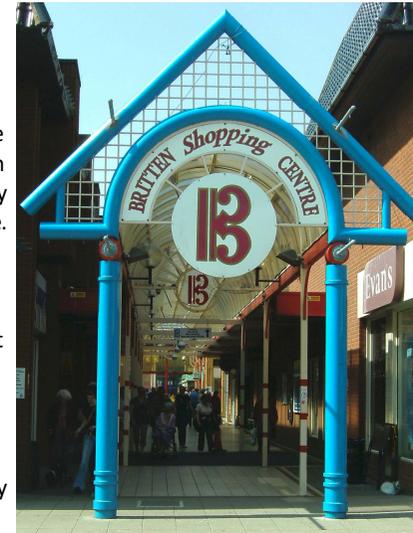
loss of livelihoods.

Perhaps it isn't surprising that WDC remained silent. It appears that they had a significant role in making the eviction possible. WDC used to hold the leasehold on the area where the stall holders traded. After a company called Wayshop 2 (Lowestoft) Limited (registered in Jersey) bought the Britten Centre (ie the arcade and shops) WDC surrendered their lease to the new owners, presumably for cash. According to the stall-holders, WDC had already changed their leases to remove previous safeguards. In fact their current, worthless, lease was not due to run out until March. The way was open for the eviction to take place.

There is another twist to the story. The market was created and paid for under the Waveney Sunrise Scheme

which ran from 2003 to 2008. Stallholders understand that conditions were attached. They believe that dismantling the market has breached those conditions.

The Tory administration of Waveney District Council has questions to answer. Lowestoft Coalition Against the Cuts will be asking those questions.



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