SOMERLEYTON, ASHBY & HERRINGFLEET PARISH COUNCIL

BRIEFING PAPER FOR PARISH COUNCIL MEETING — 2 JULY 2026

Subject: Second Homes and Short-Term Holiday Lets — A Proactive Response
Prepared by: Cllr Claire Diggins and Cllr Julia Griffith
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1. Purpose of this Paper

This paper has been prepared to inform discussion at the Parish Council meeting on 2 July 2026. It sets out the case for the Council to take a proactive position on the growth of second homes and short-term holiday lets in Somerleyton, and recommends a course of action that makes full use of the planning and policy tools currently available or shortly to become available.

2. Why Act Now?

Somerleyton is a small, cohesive estate village of approximately 162 properties. Its character — a conservation village on the Suffolk Broads, with a Stately Home, attractive countryside, and good rail connections to Lowestoft, Norwich and London — gives it considerable appeal as a holiday destination. A number of properties are expected to come to market in the near future.

The experience of nearby communities — most notably Southwold, where roughly 60% of properties are now second homes or holiday lets — demonstrates clearly what can happen when communities fail to act before the market tips. Once a village reaches a critical threshold of non-permanent residents, the consequences are difficult to reverse: loss of community cohesion, reduced support for local services, pressure on housing affordability, and the gradual hollowing out of village life.

The Parish Council has an opportunity to get ahead of this issue. The national regulatory environment is changing in ways that will give communities new tools — but only if local authorities and parish councils are ready to use them.

3. The Current Position in Somerleyton

At present, the total housing stock in Somerleyton stands at approximately 162 properties. A cap of 5% of total housing stock — the level proposed for consideration at this meeting — would represent a limit of approximately eight properties used as second homes or short-term holiday lets. It is not yet known how many properties currently fall into this category, and establishing that baseline figure should be an early priority.

4. Tools Available to the Parish Council and East Suffolk Council

It is important to understand clearly what a Parish Council can and cannot do directly. The Parish Council does not have planning authority — that rests with East Suffolk Council (ESC). However, the Parish Council can formally resolve to request action from ESC, can update its existing Neighbourhood Plan, and can make representations to any planning applications. The following tools are relevant.

4.1 The Mandatory National Register of Short-Term Lets (from April 2026)

The Government has introduced a mandatory national registration scheme for all short-term lets in England, which came into force from April 2026. All short-term holiday let properties must now be registered on a government-run database. This is significant for Somerleyton because it will, for the first time, give local authorities reliable data on how many short-term lets exist in any given area. This baseline data is the foundation on which all other regulatory tools depend.

4.2 The New C5 Planning Use Class (forthcoming)

At present, outside London, a homeowner can generally convert a residential property to a short-term holiday let without needing planning permission — the change is not automatically treated as a material change of use requiring formal consent. This is about to change.

The Government — under both the previous Conservative administration and now confirmed by Labour — is introducing a new planning category called Use Class C5, specifically for short-term lets that are not someone's sole or main home. Once C5 is enacted:

- All dedicated short-term lets will be formally recognised as a distinct planning category, separate from ordinary residential homes (Use Class C3).
- Existing short-term lets will be automatically reclassified as C5 — they will not need to apply for permission retrospectively.
- New conversions from residential to short-term let use will, in principle, be permitted under national Permitted Development Rights — meaning they would not automatically require a planning application.

However — and this is the crucial point — the C5 use class comes with a powerful tool that local authorities can use to override the national permitted development right.

4.3 Article 4 Directions — The Key Mechanism

An Article 4 Direction is a legal instrument used by a local planning authority to remove Permitted Development Rights in a specific area. In plain terms: it means that something which would normally be allowed without a planning application instead requires full planning permission.

Once the C5 use class is enacted, East Suffolk Council could make an Article 4 Direction covering Somerleyton. The effect would be:

- Any owner wishing to convert a residential property (C3) to a short-term holiday let (C5) would need to apply for full planning permission from East Suffolk Council.
- East Suffolk Council could then assess that application — considering the impact on the local community, housing availability, and character of the village.
- The Parish Council would be a statutory consultee on any such planning application, giving it the formal opportunity to object if the 5% cap had already been reached.

In other words, the Article 4 Direction is the mechanism that would make a 5% cap on second homes and short-term lets practically enforceable. Without it, conversions can proceed without any planning process at all. An Article 4 Direction can take up to 12 months to put in place once initiated, which further underlines the importance of acting now.

It is worth noting that Southwold has already pursued residency clauses for new build properties, and Cllr David Beavan — ESC Councillor for Southwold, who has been contacted ahead of this meeting — has direct experience of using these mechanisms. His input would be of great value to this discussion.

4.4 East Suffolk Council Tax Premium on Second Homes

East Suffolk Council already charges a 100% council tax premium on second homes — meaning owners pay 200% of the standard rate. This was enacted under the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. While this is a financial disincentive rather than a planning control, it does reduce the financial attractiveness of holding a property as a second home and has already generated significant revenue which is directed towards affordable housing and homelessness initiatives across the district.

4.5 Neighbourhood Plan — Principal Residence Test (Update Required)

The parish already has a Neighbourhood Plan in place, which is a significant advantage. Rather than starting from scratch — a process that requires extensive community engagement and can take several years — the existing plan can be updated to include a Principal Residence Test for new-build properties. This is a legal restriction, included as a planning condition, which means that any new homes built in the parish can only be sold to and occupied by people using the property as their main permanent residence. They cannot be sold as second homes or holiday lets. This approach has already been used in Southwold and other Suffolk coastal communities. Updating an existing Neighbourhood Plan is a considerably faster and more straightforward process than developing one, and should be treated as a priority.

5. What We Propose the Parish Council Resolves

We ask the Parish Council to consider the following resolutions:

- **Establish a baseline:** Request that East Suffolk Council confirm, using the new national register, the current number of short-term lets and second homes in Somerleyton, so that the Council can assess the position relative to a 5% cap.
- **Formally adopt a 5% cap as Council policy:** Resolve that the Parish Council considers 5% of total housing stock (currently approximately 8 properties) to be the appropriate upper limit for second homes and short-term holiday lets in the parish, and that this position be communicated to East Suffolk Council.
- **Request an Article 4 Direction from East Suffolk Council:** Formally write to East Suffolk Council requesting that, once the C5 use class is enacted, an Article 4 Direction be made for Somerleyton, requiring full planning permission for any conversion of a residential property to short-term let use. This should be progressed as a priority, given the 12-month lead time.
- **Update the existing Neighbourhood Plan:** Agree to update the parish's existing Neighbourhood Plan to include a Principal Residence Test for any new-build properties in the parish, restricting their sale and occupation to permanent residents.
- **Engage Cllr Paul Ashdown:** Request that Cllr Ashdown, in his capacity as a member of the ESC Planning Committee, support and champion the request for an Article 4 Direction and the other measures set out above.

6. Wider Context

Parish Councils across England in similar situations — attractive rural and coastal villages with strong tourist appeal — are increasingly taking this kind of proactive stance. The national regulatory direction of travel is firmly towards giving communities greater control. The Parish Council's role is to ensure that Somerleyton is positioned to use those controls as soon as they are available, rather than discovering the need for them when it is too late.

I am grateful to Cllr Julia Griffith for her research into the legislative and policy framework, and to Cllr Paul Ashdown for his knowledge of the ESC planning process. I have also written to Cllr David Beavan, ESC Councillor for Southwold, whose extensive experience of tackling this issue in one of England's most severely affected communities may provide valuable guidance.

7. Summary

The Parish Council cannot impose a cap on second homes directly, but it has real and important levers it can pull — and the regulatory environment is moving in its favour. The critical steps are:

- Establish the current baseline of second homes and short-term lets in the village.
- Formally adopt a 5% cap as Council policy and communicate it to ESC.
- Request an Article 4 Direction from ESC to require planning permission for future C3 to C5 conversions — the key enforcement mechanism once the C5 use class is enacted.
- Update the existing Neighbourhood Plan to include a Principal Residence Test for new builds.

Acting now, before the market moves, is the most effective thing the Parish Council can do to protect the character, community and long-term wellbeing of Somerleyton.

This paper is circulated for discussion purposes. Any resolutions arising will be formally minuted at the Parish Council meeting on 2 July 2026.