

Planning Advisory Group: Report to Walberswick Parish Council
Local Plan Review: SCDC Briefing

03.10.2017

Councillor Josie Bassinette and I attended a Local Plan Review briefing meeting with Suffolk Coastal District Council officers on 30.09.2017. The purpose of the meeting was to enable SCDC to explain the review process and to identify issues and policy options relating to Walberswick which the Plan should address.

1 Programme

Suffolk Coastal District Council and Ipswich Borough Council are preparing new Local Plans for their areas for the period to 2036. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are also working together to produce a new joint Local Plan. One of the aims is to improve collaboration and coordination between the authorities, particularly in relation to housing provision and employment.

In order to identify future policy requirements, SCDC has published the 'Issues and Options' consultative document which is the subject of this report. Part 1 of the document concentrates on strategic, cross boundary issues for Ipswich Borough Council and SCDC. Part 2 deals with matters of more relevance to SCDC and ourselves.

Having considered the responses, SCDC will publish the first draft of the revised Plan in April/May 2018. After a further round of consultation, the Final Plan will be published in the Autumn of 2018, before the inauguration of the combined authority East Suffolk District Council in 2019.

2 The Consultative Document

The document asks many questions about the choices facing the District and their policy implications. Those which are relevant to Walberswick are noted below.

2.1 Housing Supply

A major element of the plan relates to housing provision. Using the criteria for so called 'Objectively Assessed Housing Need' there is an estimated requirement within the district for an additional 460 units per annum over a 15 year period, possibly increasing by 35 units pa under a revised Government method of calculation.

The plan proposes alternative ways of accommodating the additional provision (A14 corridor, A12 corridor, expansion of larger settlements etc) none of which will impinge on Walberswick. The plan also includes a schedule of potential land within each parish available for housing development of more than five units or for other uses. No such land has been identified in Walberswick.

Nevertheless, the village does have housing needs, as noted in the Parish Plan published in 2012. The provision of affordable housing, particularly for young people, remains a priority (Q40 of the consultative Document) as does the provision of accessible smaller dwellings for elderly residents who wish to downsize but continue to live in the village (Q47-48). It is essential that applications for development should include accommodation to meet these needs, as far as possible ring fenced in perpetuity for the purpose.

No change is proposed to the physical limits boundary of the village

2.2 Climate Change and Sea and River defences.

The Blyth Estuary Strategy envisages the abandonment of all river defences within the next 15 years following the withdrawal of the Environment Agency. The collapse of the southern river bank from a major surge will be the almost certain result of this decision, with disastrous consequences for amenity, tourism, the local economy, the protection of low lying dwellings and the long term future of the harbour.

These matters are central to the concerns of the Local Plan. The Blyth Estuary Group established in 2006 continues to look for ways of remedying the situation but more assistance is required from the local authorities.

2.3 Design and Development Control

The provisions of Development Management Policies DM21-24 and the policies surrounding Conservation Areas provide a good basis for exercising development control, if properly enforced. However, we believe their effectiveness would be enhanced by the introduction of Article 4 Directives removing permitted development rights within the Conservation Area (Q120).

At present, the two constituent members of East Suffolk District Council have opposing policies: SCDC does not use Article 4 directives whereas WDC applies directives in all Conservation Areas.

There is a need to harmonise policy across the new district authority. We believe in the efficacy of Article 4 directives and would wish to see their application to the Walberswick Conservation Area. This would remove the anomaly at Ferry Road where, for historic reasons, some of the car park and other development lies within the Southwold Harbour and Walberswick Quay Conservation Area and is therefore subject to an Article 4 directive but the remainder lies within the Walberswick Conservation Area and is not.

A further anomaly in the policies of the two authorities relates to the protection of non listed buildings considered worthy of preservation. SCDC identifies these so called 'non designated heritage assets' on a case by case basis in response to specific planning applications, whereas Waveney District Council maintains a local list of these buildings. We believe this approach gives greater certainty to owners, applicants and amenity groups and should be applied across the new authority.

2.4 Conservation Area and non-listed buildings

There is a need to augment the protection of the Conservation Area not only in respect of unlisted buildings which contribute to the character of an area but also to the large gardens and surrounding landscapes which are an essential feature of their setting (Q127, Q131).

A specific case is the land bounded by Leveretts Lane. Laid out with a series of villas by the Arts and Crafts architect, Frank Jennings, the houses are arranged around the perimeter of the site so that their large gardens combine together to form a significant green 'lung' in the centre of the village and a valuable heritage asset.

However, in spite of representations from the Parish Council and the recommendations of the Conservation Area Appraisal which identifies these elements, recent and on-going alterations to one of the Jennings' houses have undermined the quality of the house, its garden and the simple, rather secret character of the adjoining lane.

Other large gardens in this area may be subject to similar development pressures in the future and will need more protection if this unique feature of the village is not to be lost. A further, detailed appraisal of the Conservation Area is required to ensure its preservation.