

East Suffolk Council – consultation on three planning related documents

Note by PAG

1. Statement of Community Involvement

A Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) is a statutory requirement for the local authority to prepare. It explains how the local authority will deal with the many processes that it operates in regard to statutory items such as: local plans; planning applications and; neighbourhood plans. It should set out how the public and other interested parties can be involved in these items. East Suffolk has had such a document, but as legislation has changed, they feel a need to update the previous version. They are inviting comment on the new document.

On the face of it this is a reasonable thing to do, but local authorities are often severely constrained by the legislative procedures, and the room for manoeuvre is very limited. The SCI often appears as a summary of what is possible. It will rarely offer more opportunity than the legislation stipulates. However, it can be viewed as a document which brings together the opportunities to participate in planning related items, into a single helpful source. It would be highly unusual if a suggestion were made which sought e.g. longer timescales to be responding to planning applications, to be accepted as the statutory requirements are so tight already, so as to leave the local authority with few if any options to change.

Conclusion – The suggestion is that the PC note the revision to the SCI and make no particular comment.

For information the contents cover:

- Approach to Engagement
- The Planning Service
- The Role of the Council
- Getting Involved in the Preparation of Planning Policy Documents
- How will the Council involve you in the preparation of the Local Plan?
- How will the Council involve you in the preparation of Supplementary Planning Documents?
- How will the Council involve you in the preparation of the Community Infrastructure Levy Charging Schedule?
- Housing Land Supply
- How will the Council involve you in Neighbourhood Planning?
- Getting Involved in the Planning Application Process
- Community Engagement and Masterplans
- Planning Support for Communities
- Appendix 1 – Consultation Bodies
- Appendix 2 – Material and Non-Material Considerations

The aims for the document are given as:

- Ensure each process is clearly outlined and easily understood
- Communicate clearly the purpose of all consultations

- Use appropriate and cost-effective methods, including utilising the Council's website
- Share information to ensure consultations are accessible to as many people as possible
- Be clear about the results of all consultations and planning applications to show that all views have been considered

2. East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy

This document is not actually saying anything other than at this stage asking for ideas from consultees. When produced as a strategy it will contain various corridors and suggested infrastructure for walking and cycling. At present it is an information gathering exercise.

The East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy will (*when actually formulated with ESC proposals*):

- Identify the key corridors within East Suffolk where there may be significant benefits from improving cycling and walking connections between settlements;
- Produce cycling and walking suitability maps for the 'major centres', 'market towns' and some of the more sustainable 'large villages' in East Suffolk (as identified in the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan and Waveney Local Plan);
- Identify cycling and walking infrastructure improvement opportunities throughout East Suffolk and propose potential solutions to achieve these improvements (for example, from marking up new cycle lanes, to new cycling and walking routes segregated from vehicle traffic); and
- Produce an implementation map to monitor the delivery of cycling and walking opportunities identified in the Strategy, which will be regularly updated when identified cycling and walking solutions are implemented.
- Support the new [East Suffolk Council](#) environmental, health and well-being objectives.
- Work closely with Suffolk County Council throughout the project. Find out more on [Suffolk County Council cycling projects](#).

ESC currently envision that the Cycling and Walking Strategy will be adopted in 2021.

The consultation asks people to

- highlight cycling and walking matters in East Suffolk which you think should be addressed.
- You can provide solutions which you think could encourage more people to cycle and walk.

You can also view an online map showing opportunities and potential solutions raised by others. *There are none in / around Walberswick at this time.*

Conclusion - Unless the PC has very specific ideas and suggestions it wishes to put forward (which I am sure will be welcomed by East Suffolk) there is little opportunity to engage meaningfully.

3. Suffolk Coast Recreation Disturbance Avoidance and Mitigation Strategy (RAMS) - Supplementary Planning Document

This is perhaps the most significant of the three documents offered for consultation. Its aim is to:

- reduce the impact of increased levels of recreational use on Habitat Sites (also often called European Sites), due to new residential development in the Suffolk Coast area,
- and to provide a simple, coordinated way for developers to deliver mitigation for their developments.

Without overcomplicating the matter there is a legislative requirement for local authorities to ensure there is no likely significant impact of these European designated sites. A number of which are located in and around Walberswick. (It should be noted that the simple proximity of new development to a site is not the key point, it is also the cumulative effect of recreational pressures from all the new residents arising from potential developments in the Plan area(s).

East Suffolk and the other authorities are planning to charge a levy on new development, and spend that jointly on measures to reduce impacts overall. Zones are given and the charge varies according to which zone the development is located. This mechanism is in use in other areas of East Anglia and across the country. It is a practical way to address potential harm in a co-ordinated and effective way.

It does not suggest any additional housing (it is based on the current Local Plans – Walberswick has a very small figure in that regard) it merely deals with the impacts of what is proposed.

It is possible that the European sites in our area may have money spent on them to ameliorate visitor pressures or divert visitors from the most sensitive areas: but it is not about encouraging more visitors.

The 'Tariff' zones of influence are used to determine the contribution that needs to be made for each new residential dwelling built.

Zone Tariff

Zone A £121.89 per dwelling

Zone B £321.22 per dwelling including Walberswick

It should be noted that some residential schemes, particularly those located close to a European Site boundary or large scale developments, are likely to need to provide additional mitigation measures (in addition to the tariff) such as Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS) or green infrastructure measures such as enhanced walking routes and connections to the Public Right of Way network. This would need to be assessed through a specific project level Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) The Local Planning Authority, in consultation with Natural England, will advise on these cases through the pre-application process.

How will the tariff be spent? A list of strategic projects is listed in the Strategy document – however this was not immediately apparent.

Conclusion - The PC should welcome the new process / tariff and seek assurances that it will be implemented to avoid harm from increasing visitors associated with new housing across East Suffolk in Walberswick and other designated areas.

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