

East Suffolk Council 'Draft Housing in Clusters and Small Scale Residential Development in the Countryside Supplementary Planning Document (SPD)' - Note for Walberswick Parish Council from PAG

July 2022

Background

National and local planning policy is often concerned to maximise the amount of housing that can be built in an area. Whilst policies do try to constrain the bulk of new development to towns and villages there are often policies that will allow *some limited* development beyond the boundaries of such settlements. East Suffolk Council has policies that do this, but it is a subjective matter as to how these policies might play out in practice, especially in terms of the character of an area, so they have proposed additional clarification via an SPD. This is a consultation and views are requested as to how it might work across the District. This note is intended to advise the WPC on the content and potential implications for the village.

Content

Purpose of the 'Clusters' SPD

ESC explains that the purpose of this Supplementary Planning Document is to provide guidance on the application of policies (as discussed below) and includes further guidance on how the individual criteria of each policy will be applied and how each of the relevant criteria are to be met for development to be considered acceptable. Guidance is also provided on how policies relate to other policies in the Local Plans.

SCLP5.4 - Housing in Clusters in the Countryside

The strategy of the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan seeks to focus housing growth towards the Major Centres, Towns, Large Villages and Small Villages. (Walberswick is defined as a 'Small Village'). This includes applying Settlement Boundaries to those defined settlements and allocating sites for development in a number of locations. New development *within* Settlement Boundaries will be acceptable in principle.

Policy SCLP5.3 Housing in the Countryside sets out the limited circumstances where housing would be acceptable *outside* of Settlement Boundaries and allocated sites, including housing development in 'clusters' in the Countryside. The geography of the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan area is such that there are many small, dispersed communities and clusters of housing outside of the defined settlements. Such communities do not have the level of services and facilities to support larger scale new housing development (and hence do not have Settlement Boundaries) but a small amount of development may help to meet local housing needs, enable people to stay within rural communities and help to sustain these rural communities and any services and facilities that exist within them. Policy SCLP5.4 therefore provides for a limited amount of housing development to come forward in these locations - referred to as 'clusters'.

A 'Cluster' can only exist outside of a Small Village, Large Village, Town or Major Centre as categorised in the Local Plan and defined by Settlement Boundaries, i.e. in the Countryside. The overarching purpose of Policy SCLP5.4 is to support a limited amount of development in those locations, recognising that they do not have the range or number of facilities to be classed as a Small Village, Large Village, Town or Major Centre in the Local Plan but that a limited amount of development may support the social sustainability of the rural areas.

A great deal of effort appears to have gone into describing in writing and through illustrations where potential development is considered acceptable or *not* acceptable. Whilst useful it is impossible to describe every situation that could arise. Only when a proposed development proposal is worked up in a particular location can acceptability be fully assessed.

An interesting aspect of the Local Plan policy is that in order to be successful any proposal must show a high level of 'meaningful and effective' public consultation. Parish Councils are seen as key in this situation. For East Suffolk there seems to be an unwritten expectation that at the end of such a process there is some form of support for any proposal to be successful. Mention is also made of the need for proposals to meet some form of local housing need, gauged through local survey.

Implications for Walberswick

Walberswick is a 'Small Village' and has a defined 'Settlement Boundary', so the SPD could be relevant. However even on a cursory examination of the areas around the village it will be seen that there are likely to be very limited geographical locations where suitable sites might exist. In addition the policy requirements are detailed and stringent, we have a multitude of natural and built environment designations, and any applicant needs to carry out (positive) significant public consultation to proceed.

The SPD represents a very reasonable attempt to give transparency to a difficult subject, but the reaction to any specific application can properly only be judged when a specific proposal is brought forward as a planning application (or pre-application public consultation).

Recommendation

In the circumstances the Parish Council is recommended to NOTE the content of the SPD and consultation, and make no specific representations to East Suffolk.