
PARISH COUNCIL ENGAGEMENT EVENT – 15 OCTOBER 2019

WORKSHOP SUMMARY REPORT

Overview

Following an initial Suffolk Design Parish workshop held in February 2019 and in advance of SALC's AGM/Annual Conference, Suffolk Growth Programme Board (SGPB) has been working all Suffolk Local Authorities planning teams and the Suffolk Association of Local Councils (SALC) to develop and agree an engagement protocol.

The aim of the event was to explore the issues and options in developing an engagement protocol to provide clarity and set out expectations on when and how communication takes place between developers, parish councils / local communities and local authorities. The workshop also considered examples of good practice engagement.

The next step is to present a draft engagement protocol at the SALC AGM / Annual Conference (18th Nov. 2019) for consideration.

Further information on the parish workshop held in February 2019 can be found by visiting: [Suffolk Design events](#).

Attendance

31 parish council members attended from across Suffolk. The parishes represented at the event were:

- Tuddenham St Martin; Trimley St Martin; Badwell; Laxfield; Martlesham; Kenton; Elmswell; Bures St Andrew; Exning; Charsfield; Worlingham & Ashfield-cum-Thorpe; Mendlesham; Nedging & Noughton; Chilton; Woodbridge Town Council; Onehouse; Barnby; Nacton; Southwold; Melton; Great & Little Whelnetham; Walberswick; North Cove; Great Bealings; Creeting St Mary; Yoxford; Great Ashfield; Shimping; Great Glemham; and Palgrave.

Presentations

Three guest speakers presented at the event, as follows:

- James Bailey, Boyer Planning: the development industry view on what good engagement looks like and how it can be improved on both sides
- Bryan Panton, Lavenham Parish Council: a parish example of delivering development locally, through a community land trust and working with the existing community, district and county councils
- Philip Isbell, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils: the local authority view of the planning application process and how community engagement can work well (and not so well)

The full presentations are available as a PDF and are appended to this note.

An additional 8 members of staff from across Suffolk district councils and SGPB attended to help facilitate and support the discussion towards developing an agreed Suffolk wide approach.

Feedback

Following the presentations two questions were put to the workshop. Participants discussed the questions and feedback in a plenary session.

Question 1: what are the key steps that need to be taken to make engagement work for you?

Please note the following feedback has been colour coded according to the level of commonality across all attendees – with green being agreed by all, amber by some and red by only a few.

| Feedback | Suggested action | Commonality across group |
|---|--|--------------------------|
| Understanding the value of engagement. | Developers and parishes learning the economic benefits of early engagement. | Green |
| Parishes being able to inform the way that developers engage with them. | Parishes providing feedback to developers on how they have engaged with them, being constructive. | Green |
| Being able to engage with 'hard to reach groups'. Including young people, families etc. | Gaining a better understanding of how to use other methods of communications effectively, such as social media. | Amber |
| Local Authorities to encourage engagement between developers and parishes. | Local Authorities to promote that all developers should engage at pre-application stage. | Green |
| Transparency of pre-application advice. | Local Authorities to work towards using language that the community and parishes can understand clearly. | Amber |
| Greater resource within the planning system – would like a named individual for the whole process. | Local Authorities to consider how this can be done, e.g. through increased planning fees to pay for resources, planning apprentices etc. | Amber |
| Ensuring there is a consistent relationship between LA's, developers and Parishes. | For example, using Parish Councils for local knowledge – to support quality validation. | Green |
| Information on what is confidential and what can be shared with Parishes, when certain parts happen during the process and who does what. | Work towards a guide to planning for parishes or a standard training that could be delivered across Suffolk. | Green |
| For all those involved to have a pro-active approach. | Including parish design statements. | Amber |

Question two: what does successful community engagement look like to you?

| Feedback | Suggested action | Commonality across group |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| Early engagement as early as possible and during the pre-application and application process. | Encouragement from Local Authorities to achieve this by supporting the facilitation of discussions. | |
| Having a one-size-fits-all approach. | Work towards a mutual understanding of what works where and learning from one another. | |
| Parish councils are respected within the system. | Consulting and using Parishes to understand the context of the parish. | |
| Understanding the language used during the process. | Ensuring meanings are provided for acronyms and planning related language. | |
| Importance of recognising the interdependence of all those involved. | Having key links that are clear and consistent between SCC, Local Authority and the Parish Council. | |
| Having confidence that you will be listened to. | Having a mutual respect for one another with the system. | |

Going forward

The Suffolk Design initiative is focused on a cultural / behavioural change to promote and consistently deliver high quality design within all Suffolk developments. As part of the Suffolk Design work we want to improve the quality of engagement with parishes / local communities as well as working closely with developers, through developer roundtables and continuous engagement with both SME builders and national firms.

The outputs from this workshop will be fed into a draft engagement protocol that will be brought to SALC's AGM / Annual Conference 2019 for consideration.

By the end of 2019 we anticipate the Suffolk Design initiative delivering:

- A Suffolk Design Charter – an endorsed set of Suffolk-specific design principles that illustrate ‘what good looks like’ in Suffolk.
- Suffolk design management process - developed with and for officers that describes ‘how we get there’.
- Both of the above documents launched online, improving access and enabling immediate updates to be made to reflect Government guidance / wider changes in the planning system.

Please visit the following websites for further information on both Suffolk Design and the work of Suffolk Growth Programme Board:

www.suffolkdesign.uk

www.suffolkgrowth.co.uk

Thank you for attending, please refer any queries to: SGPB@east Suffolk.gov.uk