



Report of the Suffolk Design Management Process Workshop 4

Workshop 4: Applicants and the process

27th November 2019

The Report of the Suffolk Design Management Process Workshop 4

Date	27th November 2019
Meeting location	Thomas Crisp Room, Riverside, Lowestoft
Attendees:	<p>Roz Claxton, IBC Mike Taylor, IBC Richard Collins, IBC Elizabeth Flood, BMS Rachel Almond, WSC Marie Smith, WSC Penny Mills, WSC Eloise Limmer, ESC Ben Woolnough, ESC Luke Barber, SCC James Cutting, SCC Steve Merry, SCC Natalie Beale, BA Paul Pictcher, Wellington Homes Mike Carpenter, CODE Development Planners Glen Bickers, Concertus Chris Game & Nick Loomes, Plaice Architects Ross Kozyrko, Badger Building David Collinson, WSC Colin Dunigan, WSC Karen Chapman, SGPB Kay Bonning-Schmitt, SGPB</p>
DSE Team:	<p>Chris Lamb, Design South East Kieran Toms, Design South East Garry Hall, Design South East</p>
Outline of the day:	<p>This was the fourth of 4 workshops to develop the Suffolk Design Management Process (SDMP).</p> <p>The process that had been developed over the previous three workshops was presented as a timeline with actions organised into specific phases. Using this SDMP timeline as a foundation for the session, participants built upon the outputs developed in previous workshops.</p> <p>This included the insight into current issues and potential solutions developed in workshop 1, the structuring of the SDMP in workshop 2, and the finessing of specific details and discussion of organisational change in workshop 3.</p>

The aim of this workshop was to look at how the SDMP will work ‘in practice,’ and how specifically it will work with applicants. The aim was that, by the end of the workshop, to have refined the SDMP timeline and agreed the core actions within each phase.

This then provides a final draft version of the SDMP, ready for ‘soft launch’ at two roundtables, one with senior management teams and one with housebuilders and agents.

Purpose:

The specific purposes of the day overall were:

- Reflection on outputs from workshops to date
- To understand how the SDMP would work ‘in practice,’ and how specifically it would work with applicants.
- Resolution of key details in the SDMP
- To enable development of a final draft version of the SDMP which encapsulates the Suffolk Design approach and that is ready for ‘soft launch’ at roundtables along with the Suffolk Design Charter.

Introduction:

To begin with we undertook an overview and recap of the work undertaken to date and gave those present a reminder of what Suffolk Design is, why it exists, and what the programme of work (including the concurrent development of the interlinked Design Charter) is trying to achieve. This recap was particularly beneficial to the applicants in the room, who had not been involved in the first three workshops.

Session 1: Barriers for applicants

For the first session, the participants were split into groups. One group consisted of solely the applicants. The other groups were groups of officers, with each group consisting of officers from a range of different Authorities.

Each group had to answer the question: “What are the key barriers facing developers in the planning process?” The idea was to compare how applicants see the process, and how officers think that applicants they see the process. Groups fed back to the room and discussed their answers to this question, to allow for this comparison to be made and to get to an agreed and shared understanding of these barriers from the applicants’ perspective.

It was found that there was a broad crossover between what applicants saw as the barriers/issues and what the officers had expected them to say, with some different perspectives on some of the details. The key issues identified were:

1. **Uncertainty / Inconsistency in the process:** A lack of clarity at outset, and an inconsistency in decision making during the process, not only between different local authorities, but also within individual councils, with the outcomes being depending on the specific officers, leading to inconsistency on the advice and input from different officers within the same council – as well as a difference between what applicants have been told by officers and what the Planning committee decide.
2. **Time:** a lack of resources impacting on the time spent on the application and communicating with the applicant, leading to a lack of service or quality of service for applicants, despite them spending money on PPA and Pre-App, which in turn compromises timescales. Whilst some authorities do work well, the content of PPAs needs to be carefully considered to ensure they are worthwhile.
3. **Community Engagement:** A lack of proactive engagement with communities and the political process, leading to difficulties later in the process when these considerations do start to feed into the process. Generally there was feeling that although it is good to have certainty, sometimes the wrong decisions were made too early, without the proper input from the right. By the time these are addressed or discussed, too many constraints have been set to allow for genuine input. This in turn causes tension and undermines confidence in the planning system as a whole and in its ability to achieve positive outcomes.
4. **Infrastructure:** A lack of input around key decisions related to infrastructure requirements for new development.

5. **Dialogue:** A lack of dialogue and a lack of proper discussion and engagement during the process between stakeholders of all kinds, from the council side, the applicant side and statutory consultees.

It was also pointed out that not all of these are barriers at all times. Applicants pointed out that there were many good processes, good officers, good councillors who made the process a positive one. The goal of Suffolk Design and of the SDMP therefore should be to ensure that this level of quality is in place at all times and is what is expected and delivered every time.

Session 2: How does the SDMP help these issues?

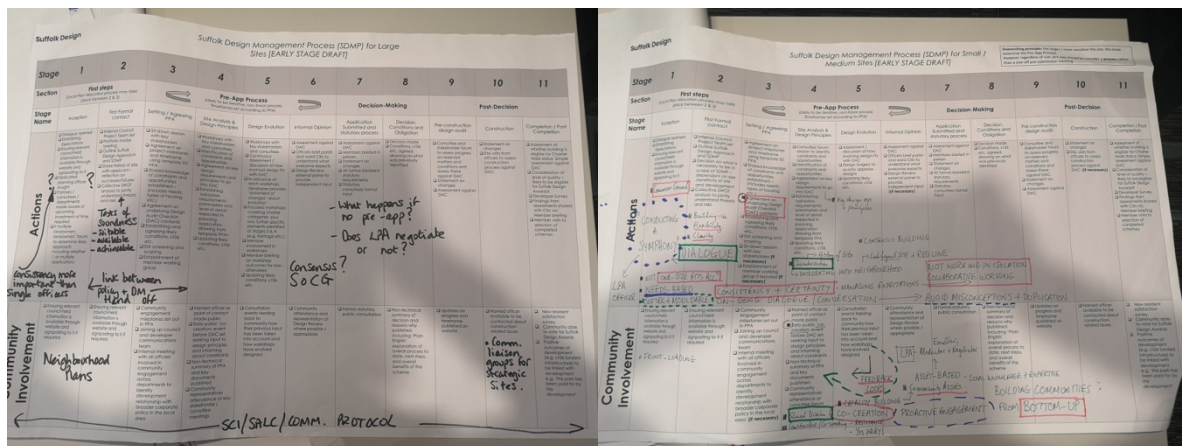
For the next session the applicants left their applicant-only group and joined one of the other groups, so that there was a spread of applicants across each other group.

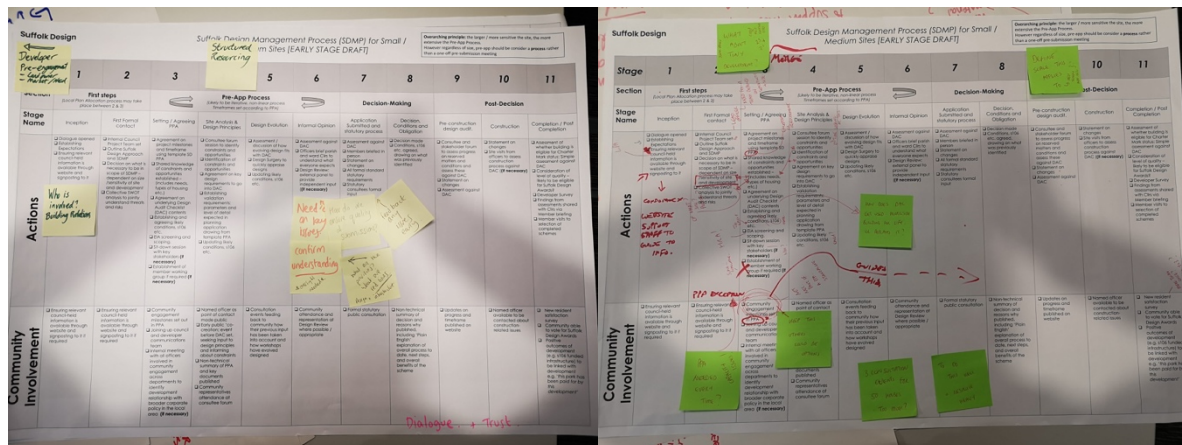
The challenge for each group in this session was to discuss whether they think the draft SDMP was addressing the key issues outlined in the first session.

Where they judged that the SDMP did not yet satisfactorily address these issues, the groups had to come up with suggestions for improvements.

The outcomes of this session was a broad series of suggestions.

- More clarity on some of the aims and outcomes of the document.
- Some specific sections/topics needed to be clearer or expanded





Session 3: Focusing on specific topics

The purpose of this session was for each group to focus in on one of the topics that came out as an issue in the discussion during the second session, and to focus on these sections/topics. The four topics were:

1. The 'Charter Mark': What could this be?
2. Outcomes: What should they be for each sections / stage?
3. Applicant 'Behaviours': what would they be, ideally?
4. 'Statement of common purpose': What would be in this? How would it be structured?

- Being Suffolk-wide there would be a large target audience, and this would help the awards have a high profile and level of prestige.

There could be a range of types of awards. Proposals for awards included:

- Awards for different types of built development. For example they could be grouped by size (e.g. smaller, medium larger) but also by use, e.g. residential, commercial, retail etc.
- Quality of submission
- People's Choice award
- Best officer
- Community engagement
- Partnership award

Although there was a suggestion that those who did not get involved in the Suffolk Design process should not be eligible, it was also agreed that the point of the Suffolk Design is to raise standards. So a scheme that came forward with high standards already wouldn't need to go through as many iterations of the SDMP, as it would already be of a high standard. Indeed, this is the point of SD: to raise expectations of the standard of design quality in Suffolk.

Outcomes: For each stage

Suffolk Design Management Process (SDMP) for Large Sites (EARLY STAGE DRAFT)											
Stage	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
	OUTCOMES - WORDS										
	FEELING WELL-INFORMED CLARITY OF WHAT NEEDS TO BE ACHIEVED - OUTCOME OF DEVELOPMENT - KEY (CONSTRAINTS) - (NEGOS) DIRECTION OF TRAVEL	DESIGN + AUDIT CHECKLIST • Statement of COMMON GROUND on key issues "PRO-ACTIVE" • TRUSTED PROCESS OF ENGAGEMENT (Dev, Comm, CPA) VFM ITERATIVE ACCESSIBLE LEADING TO A SUCCESSFUL APPLIC.					ACCURACY + EFFICIENCY • TRANSPARENT ASSESSMENT • UNDERSTANDING - Rationale • Balancing CONTROL + FLEXIBILITY • Solving key DEPENDENCIES	• ACCURACY + EFFICIENCY ↳ "Statement of Change" • Evaluation of ACCEPTANCE • Validation + PERMISSION	• Multiple Difference - LEARNING + REFLECTION • EVALUATION + IMPACT • RECOGNITION - CPA, Community, Developer • QUALITY + PRIDE "LEGACY"		
							TRANSPARENCY UNDERSTANDING CONTROL + FLEXIBILITY KEY DEPENDENCIES ACCURACY + EFFICIENCY ACCEPTANCE VALIDATION + PERMISSION		EVALUATION IMPACT RECOGNITION CELEBRATION LEARNING + REFLECTION "LEGACY"		

This group focused on being very specific about the desired outcomes for each part of the SDMP. They chose to split the outcomes into the four main sections of the SDMP. This was the opportunity to re-appraise the SDMP in light of the further discussion which had taken place since the outcomes were initially set. Re-appraising the outcomes and making them very specific will allow the actions to very clearly follow on and link in with the outcomes.

Each outcome is a product of what comes before:

Section 1: First Steps

- Clarity around ultimate desired outcome
- Understanding of key constraints and needs
- Everyone feels well-informed
- Common ground established

Section 2: Pre-App Process

- Trusted process of engagement between public, LPA and applicant
- Iterative process outlined by PPA
- Confidence in successful outcome for the scheme evidenced by DAC and SoCG
- Certainty in process and ultimate outcome

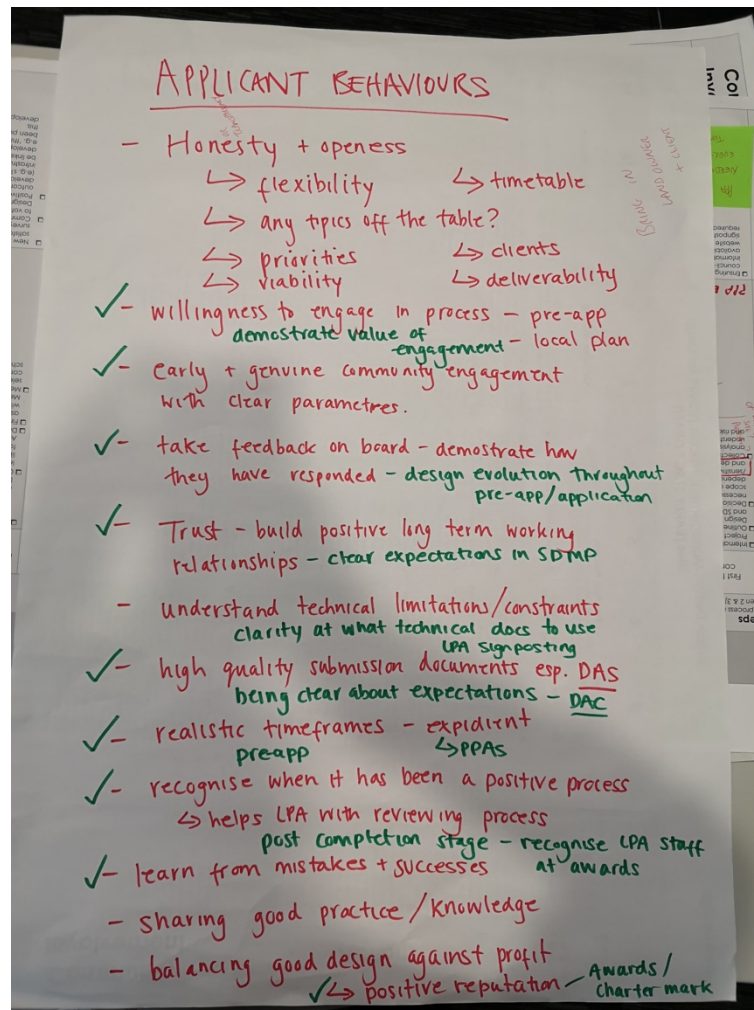
Stage 3: Decision Making

- Transparency
- Recognition of acceptability of development
- Formal acceptance
- Understanding rationale for decision
- Reflection of previous stages

Stage 4: Post-Decision

- Learning and reflection
- Evaluation of input
- Recognition and celebration
- Learning and reflection

Applicant 'Behaviours': what would they be, ideally?



This group identified the ideal applicant behaviours. As the point of SDMP and of Suffolk Design more generally is to change behaviour and encourage everyone, including applicants, to work in a way which was conducive to quality, this was seen as a good way to 'test' the work done so far to see if it was leading to these behaviours.

The group identified the desired behaviours then identified where the SDMP or other tools would be able to encourage this kind of behaviour.

The key principles underpinning all the behaviours were identified as:

- Honesty and openness
 - o Flexibility
 - o Any topics off the table
 - o Being clear on priorities
 - o Viability
 - o Timetable
 - o Clients
 - o Deliverability

These manifested themselves in the below behaviours:

Applicant Behaviour	Covered in the SDMP / elsewhere in Suffolk Design?
Willingness to engage in the process – pre-app and local plan	Yes: The SDMP demonstrates the value of engagement
Early and genuine community engagement with clear parameters	Yes: community engagement is set out in the SDMP
Take feedback on board – demonstrate how they have responded	The SDMP demonstrates the design evolution throughout the pre-app and application process
Trust – build positive long-term working relations	There are clear expectations set out in the SDMP – adhering to these will help create relationships
Understand technical limitations / constraints	The SDMP gives clarity about what technical documents to use and allows for LPA signposting
High quality submission documents, especially the DAS	The SDMP is clear about the information that is expected to be submitted – this will be outlined by the DAC
Realistic timeframes – expedient	Pre-app and PPAs will set these out at an early stage in the process
Recognise when it has been a positive process – this helps LPA with reviewing process	Post-completion recognition through awards will help to recognise LPA staff / processes
Learn from mistakes and successes	Reflection at the later stages of SDMP will encourage learning from process
Sharing good practice / knowledge	The joined-up nature of the SDMP and the Suffolk Design process more generally will share good practice – awards and recognition will help disseminate and publicise it

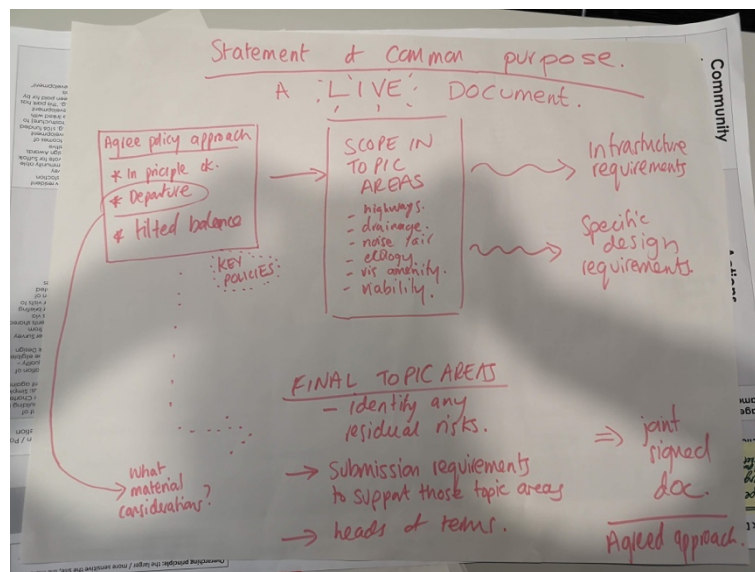
Balancing good design against profit can help give a positive reputation

The awards and charter mark will help recognise this

The other key points made were

- Flexibility (or not) can come from whether or not housebuilder has their own existing house types that they will be using. Knowing this at early stage will inform what happens.
- The landowner can make a difference through having further motivations such as legacy which may inform how positive or collaborative they are
- There can be a lack of trust between agents and clients. Having public-private secondments could work to address this both ways – even just a week of being in the same office and working together would help to build trust and understanding. There often currently exists a culture of mistrust, perhaps because private sector people tend to stay in private sector and public in public

‘Statement of common purpose’: What would be in this? How would it be structured?



The statement of common purpose was a document whose need emerged from the workshops to date. It was seen as an important document as there was a need to establish and record areas of clarity and agreement. This would allow for consistency and open-ness and ensure that points of shared understanding would persist even if personnel change. It would also record areas of change – for example if something that had previously been agreed on had changed, then this change being recorded in the statement of common purpose would make the precise nature of the change clear.

- The SoCG would be a live document that is updated as a scheme moves through development.
- The SoCG would be a template document that could easily be updated by officers and applicants.
- It would keep a record of the evolution of the proposal and of what was said and decided at each stage.
- It would set out clearly the residual risks and would outline the submission requirements.
- It would be flexible enough to be adaptable for different size and scales of development, but there would be a consistency in layout of information.
- It would set out elements such as (but not limited to):
 - o Points of consensus
 - o Redlines
 - o Priorities
 - o Points of flexibility
- It would be agreed upon by all parties: and signed

Next Steps:

Roundtables

The next step is a roundtable with housebuilders. The purpose of this is to consider some of the key questions from the housebuilders perspective, such as the strengths and weaknesses of this approach; what would encourage housebuilders to engage, and what wouldn't, and the scale(s) of development that attendees expect the SDMP to be (most) successful on.

Purpose of the round tables:

- To discuss the Suffolk Design Management Programme and our long-term approach to embedding high quality design into future developments.
- The session will be conducted under Chatham House rules, meaning the outcomes of the discussion can be reported but will not be attributed to any one individual in attendance.



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