

Masterclass:

## **Context-sensitive design**

### **Workshop questions**

1. What is the approach to context on this project?
2. How can the design improve by being more contextual?
3. Does this have any relevance to supporting better design in Suffolk?

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### Group 1 West Suffolk

#### Feedback

Approach was constraint-led. Transition edge to town centre. Better approach to town centre needed. Better understanding of the 'use' of the site needed; who will use it and how does that impact on the design? Case can be made that this should be more than an 'ordinary' piece of the town. Too ordinary at the moment. Arrangement of spaces on site needs to be better resolved. This site can influence the character of the road in the wider sense; could be part of the vision?

Bury context distinct from the wider Suffolk context; specific places need a different approach. To make scheme work, you have to work through the 'layers', both in terms of functionality and detailed design. Tension: regional vs. local characteristics.

### Group 2 Ipswich

#### Feedback

Original scheme used local contextual cues without understanding them. Location and layout was constraints-led. Addressing the corner of the plot, providing a frontage to the main street, being part of the street scene and not hidden from

it, all needed for improvement. Needed to integrate and have a visual presence on the street. Trees very important, but not adequately integrated with the layout.

Contextual approach needs to be holistic, not just superficial. Whilst a small scheme, just as important as larger schemes as quality can be eroded piecemeal. Pre-application advice would have been beneficial in the details of this scheme. Design that is sympathetic to context is needed, regardless of where that is in Suffolk. Heritage comments drove design which did not provide a balanced set of advice.

### Group 3 Babergh and Mid-Suffolk

#### Feedback

Number of site assets and constraints. NHS want to use the site too.

A stronger concept and masterplan needed for the design to be more contextual. Good ideas, but there were eroded as the scheme progressed. Good features lost over time. If something on site is being retained, then it has to be integrated. Often a gap between early vision (design briefs etc) and what a developer actually delivers. Issue with the weight of these early vision documents. Developers like to know as much as they can upfront. Helps them cost things. Prescription in terms of expectation can be useful, even on low-value sites. Helps reduce risk. Role for Suffolk Design in supporting briefs etc, but Local Plans must take the policy weight. Collaborative approach is likely to work best, rather than people working in silos. See Haverhill historic mill scheme. Top tip: get a good design team in the first place! Solves lots of issues!

