

Suffolk Design

Briefing Note

Updated National SuDS Standards – What Local Authority Teams Need to Know

Issued: July 2025

[View the national standards here](#)

Overview

On 19 June 2025, the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) published an **updated set of National Standards for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS)**. These replace the original 2015 standards and provide refreshed expectations for how surface water should be managed in new development and regeneration projects.

While the updated standards remain **non-statutory**, they are strongly endorsed by government and statutory consultees, and are likely to carry significant weight in planning, infrastructure design, and environmental assessment. Local authorities across Suffolk, including district/borough planning authorities and Suffolk County Council as the Lead Local Flood Authority (LLFA), have an important role in embedding these standards through local policy, design advice, and development management.

What's New

The new standards promote a more integrated, multifunctional approach to drainage design, placing SuDS at the centre of climate resilience, place quality, and environmental value. Key themes include:

- Mimicking natural drainage patterns in surface water management
- Enhancing biodiversity and creating ecological value
- Integrating SuDS into landscape, open space, and streetscapes
- Addressing water quality and pollution at source

- Planning for long-term functionality, stewardship, and community benefit
- Multiple attenuation features rather than one large feature
- Mandatory assessment of rainwater harvesting features

These expectations align with the **National Design Guide, Biodiversity Net Gain** requirements, and frameworks such as **Building with Nature**.

Key Considerations for Suffolk

Site Design Expectations

- SuDS should be considered early in the design process and integrated into the overall site layout—not treated as a technical afterthought.
- Proposals should demonstrate multifunctional outcomes that deliver value for placemaking, amenity, ecology, and climate adaptation.
- Minimise ‘pipe to pond’ design approaches with multiple attenuation features

Local Plan and SPD Alignment

Local plans and supplementary guidance across Suffolk support the delivery of SuDS through policies related to flood risk, water management, biodiversity, and high-quality design.

Authorities are encouraged to:

- Review how the updated national standards align with their existing policies and guidance
- Consider updating validation checklists, SPD content, or design expectations to reflect the revised approach
- Promote early discussion of drainage principles at pre-application stage

Suffolk County Council LLFA Guidance

Suffolk County Council, as LLFA, continues to play a central role in reviewing drainage proposals and shaping early design conversations. Its local guidance is closely aligned with national best practice.

- The [Suffolk SuDS Guidance – Appendix A2 \(2023\)](#) sets out requirements for:
 - Following the SuDS hierarchy
 - Calculating greenfield run-off rates
 - Securing biodiversity and amenity benefits
 - Registering SuDS features as assets
 - Long-term maintenance and management planning

- A clear preference for open SuDS systems (e.g. swales, basins, ponds)

The LLFA does not adopt SuDS infrastructure. Therefore, robust stewardship models—typically through private management companies—must be secured through conditions or legal agreements.

The LLFA are in the process of updating Appendix A, with a view to publish in early 2026, incorporating the new standards amongst other improvements.

Retrofitting and Regeneration

While the standards are primarily aimed at new development, they also encourage inclusion of SuDS in regeneration and intensification projects. This includes town centres, estate renewal schemes, and brownfield redevelopment sites where opportunities exist to integrate surface water features into the public realm.

Clarifying Legal Status and Maintenance

- The standards are **non-statutory** but are highly material in the planning process. Local policies, design codes, and decision-making frameworks can support their application.
 - **SuDS adoption by LLFAs is not currently mandated**, meaning long-term maintenance responsibilities rest with landowners, developers, or third-party management companies.
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Next Steps for Officers and Teams

Local authorities across Suffolk are encouraged to:

- Circulate and review the **updated national SuDS standards** across relevant teams including planning, drainage, policy, design, highways, and ecology
- Embed SuDS expectations in early engagement with applicants and across the pre-application and validation process
- Work collaboratively with Suffolk County Council as LLFA to shape high-quality, integrated drainage solutions
- Reflect the updated approach in SPD reviews, validation requirements, or officer training sessions