



Saxmundham Town Council

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11th September 2018

PRESS RELEASE

Saxmundham Town Council rejects District Council plans for new ‘Garden Neighbourhood’ 800 home development as excessive, unjustified

Saxmundham Town Councillors have given a unanimous thumbs-down to Suffolk Coastal’s first draft Local Plan proposal for a new 800-dwelling development in a so-called ‘Garden Neighbourhood’ at the south end of the town.

Under the District Council’s proposals, the historic market town (pop. 4,500) would grow by 50% in population by 2030 (an increase of some 2,200), being required to provide for more than 20% of all new homes in the whole District for the next 18 years.

The Town Council, meeting on Monday, in its 18 page Response called the plans “excessive” and “ill-conceived.” It considers that the District Council has not properly and fairly evaluated alternative sites, has put forward contradictory site plans, and has failed to show how it would meet genuine ‘Garden City’ principles (which it claims to support), including the need for genuinely affordable housing.

The fact that the proposed site is split in two by the railway line means that in reality it is two separate sites, not a single ‘Neighbourhood’, the town council also argue, absent an expensive new road bridge.

Town Council Chairman Phillip Dunnett said:

“Our Town Council wants our town to continue growing in size and to become an even more attractive and lively place for local people. But our councillors are unanimous in our message that the scale of the new development plan is excessive and would seriously damage the

character, heritage and environment of our town. The 'Garden Neighbourhood' plans are, we believe, poorly argued and fail to look at other options.

The District Council needs to fundamentally rethink its plans for Saxmundham. There are many good points in the draft Local Plan, but they have not got it right here. We are happy to work with them on proposals for good quality, reasonable development that benefits local people, as well as fairly helping meet the District's broader goals."

The Council argues that, rather than build all in a massive single development that would in-fill the area from Saxmundham to neighbouring Benhall, on both sides of the railway track and across to the A12 bypass, there is a site to the east off Church Hill that has been wrongly ignored or rejected by the District and which could take part of future development. This would enable the historic Layers site, to the south of the town and east of the railway, to be preserved.

The Town Council favours future development of 400-600 new homes over the Plan period, rather than the 1,000 (including current pipeline planning consents) proposed by Suffolk Coastal.

The Town Council also fears that the scale of current District proposals, allied to future Sizewell C plans, could cause severe problems for Saxmundham, including traffic. The town council is also concerned at the impact on water, sewage, drainage etc. as well as local transport network.

The full Saxmundham Town Council Response is attached (in pdf format)

ENDS

For more information, please contact

Maddie Gallop, town clerk, on 01728 604595 or

Cllr Jeremy Smith (chair of Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group) on 07951 032283

ANNEX

Summary of Conclusions and Recommendations from the Saxmundham Town Council response:

- Saxmundham Town Council considers that the town is well located to be a thriving retail, employment and service centre, for which it has strong locational advantages
- We support further growth of the town, which will benefit its residents and businesses, and provide services for neighbouring areas
- We consider however that the scale of growth proposed in the draft Plan for Saxmundham is excessive and not justified; it would involve the town growing by at least 50% in population over the next decade, and by around 60% from 2011.
- Moreover, we consider that for one small town to be required to take more than 20% of the total new homes for the whole Suffolk Coastal District is itself disproportionate and will have a negative impact on the overall character and environment of the town. And when combined with the potential development of Sizewell C and the impact that could have on local infrastructure, transport and demand for services, the proposed development presents a very real risk that existing services would be overwhelmed and unable to cope.

- We consider that the current proposals for a South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood are ill-conceived and excessive. 800 homes in this area may be excellent for landowners and developers, but is not shown to be in the interests of the town, for reasons set out above. While treating the whole area as a single entity, the draft Plan fails to provide any serious or guaranteed means of linking the two sides of the railway into a coherent and integrated development, which is the very essence of master planning.
- Just as significantly, the draft Plan appears to be based on apparent mistakes of fact as to land availability for development elsewhere, i.e. the larger site 435 to the east off Church Hill. This has been justified in two different ways – (a) that the land is not available for development in the lifespan of the Plan, which we understand is not correct; (b) that the land is less suitable on planning grounds than the south Saxmundham sites
- Despite requests, we have not been informed of any planning assessments that give rise to the conclusion that the Church Hill site(s) would be less suitable than the south Saxmundham sites. We believe that there needs to be clear evidence based on proper assessment before a rational conclusion can be reached on respective suitability.
- Moreover, we believe that there is or may be a strong case for a split development, with part taking place on the less environmentally sensitive area to the south which is west of the railway, i.e. close to the Free School area, and part on the land to the east off Church Hill. This would prevent the worst urban coalescence, enable the current Layers site to be preserved, and keep important ecological and other advantages.
- We do not consider that the present Garden Neighbourhood (GN) proposals in the draft Plan reflect the Garden City principles in a satisfactory way, and this adds to our non-acceptance of the GN based on other grounds. We are also extremely concerned at the apparent coalescence with Benhall, and on material variances in different versions of the GN site plans.
- We propose that the new housing requirement for Saxmundham for the next Plan period should be in the region of 400 to 600, which could be (we believe) accommodated in principle, and subject to detailed analysis of planning suitability, on the two sites (south/west of rail; east/Church Hill), to also include primary school and employment land.
- We believe the first focus must be on providing affordable homes for local people, including for younger people. This requires different sizes and tenures to meet the needs of different types of household. Since we have a significant population of older residents, housing needs also to reflect their needs.
- Housing also needs essential related infrastructure for - in particular – drainage, waste water, sewage and other utilities. We consider that specialist surveys are required before reaching firm final proposals.
- We support the overall strategy for Saxmundham in the draft Plan, save as set out here in relation to the proposed South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood.