

Tuesday 25th September 2018

Time: 09:00 - 11:00

Christchurch Mansion, Soane St, Ipswich IP4 2BE

This first roundtable was focused on defining *what is good growth in Suffolk*. Unless we know ‘what’ good growth is; we cannot plan for it. But in the context of Suffolk, a county of real diversity; what is good growth? Can we agree one definition, or do we need to evolve a number of definitions to reflect the differences in context across the county?

The roundtable was chaired by Design South East Director Chris Lamb, with Bob Allies, Partner, Allies & Morrison as our guest speaker.

Welcome from Chris Lamb - Explaining structure of events and public campaign running by Wayne Hemmingway.

Attendees:

Rachel Almond, West Suffolk Councils

Marie Smith, West Suffolk Councils

David Collinson, West Suffolk Councils

Keith Moore, Envoronment Agency East Anglia

Cllr Carole Jones, Ipswich Borough Council

John Clough, Planning and design support in active environments/Director, Suffolk Sport

Bob Allies, Allies & Morrison (Speaker)

Anthony Hudson, Hudson Architects

Garry Hall, Design South East

Darren Cogman, Bidwells

Cllr Geoff Holdcroft, Suffolk Coastal & Waveney District Councils

Karen Chapman, Suffolk Growth Programme Board

Bryan Wybrow, KLH Architects

Tom Barker, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils

Fiona Cairns, Suffolk Preservation Society

Tony Swannell, Tony Swannell Architects

Chris Lamb, Design South East (Chair)

After introductions from Chris Lamb, Chief Executive of DSE and long-time advocate of design quality in the built environment, we began with a thought provoking introduction from Bob Allies, looking at how does *‘design’* support good growth?

**Bob Allies introductory summary**

* ‘Growth is always good’ it benefits communities
* Two types of growth on the inside and outside of settlements – internal and external
* Both types have to engage with their contexts and shape a new urban fabric
* On rural development quoted – Hawkes – A Land – “**rural urbanity”** – **consistency and completeness, continuous and coherent, not** fragmented, insular and confusing.
* The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.
* The challenges include storage - Waste, cars, cycles and sustainability – alternatives to the car
* Supportive of higher densities - less consumption of land, better infrastructure

**THEMES COVERED BY ROUNDTABLE**

**Land is finite, the climate is changing, and health is becoming a major issue. We want to see an end to new development that leads to fragmented and fractured settlements, and see a commitment to the design of new developments that helps to make more complete and consistent settlements; that means thinking about the principles we use to allocate sites for development and how we proactively plan developments so that public and privates sectors are aligned and communities are able to see what is proposed early in the process. The clear message is that Suffolk wants to help to build communities; not simply deliver homes.**

But a key question is are we building homes in the right places, places that will result in settlements with the consistency and completeness we seek? That will deliver good growth? The allocations process is strategic design tool, so we need to think how the new design guidance can help to determine the right locations for housing allocations.

**COMMENTARY**

**Obstacles to good growth & cultural shifts required:**

Most house builders don’t continue to make ‘urban fabric’ - the way we procure and build these days is not quality – it’s not sensible in terms of sustainability – We shouldn’t be building detached houses these days as they are insufficient in terms of energy. It shouldn’t happen and yet it does. How do we get there?

It needs everyone to make responses. One wants to applaud projects where people achieve these policies but there are many obstacles in the way like planning process, approval process, highways - still too many obstacles to achieve these qualities.

Really interesting what you said about House builders are not extending the urban fabric – the scale at which we develop – not developing at a scale like Cambridgeshire/Oxfordshire arc because, A there’s not the demand, B not the infrastructure – we are starting to see 80-100 unit developments – we want to take this forward in a different way – during the 19thC we extended our villages in a more coherent and comprehensive way – now we build housing estates (everywhere not just in Suffolk) – changing that to ‘extending the urban fabric’ and ‘rural urbanity’ is a cultural shift – where extending your village and the urban fabric around it is a subtle change in the narrative but one we must explore.

an interesting notion that density is part of this fantasy to own land and garden. How do we ask people to rethink their logic. Developers can’t go on with what they’re doing but unfortunately the market wants them to create ‘fantasy housing’.

Issues when there is lack of 5 year land supply with developers taking advantage of this.

Evidence base is there but deliverability in the end wins which is not necessarily good growth.. but how do we push forward most sustainable sites rather just the deliverable ones?

government programs often work against good planning and take precedence.

**Good growth is getting the community of board at the right time:**

We need to rethink how to engage communities. Too often it is late and based on tick boxes. It needs to be open and early.

there is always big resistance from residents and instantly you can create conflict – need to set this up and tackle it head on. We need to explain scope of growth at the very outset then incrementally. We have to set-up the next 50-100 years. It’s not just about now. Design response now is it can’t connect. We’re interlopers living on the edge of villages – not neighbors and no community.

I thought the challenge was how to get developers to build the right things? How do we deliver communities that people want to live in is nearer to where we want to get to rather than a nicely designed building – **but now the challenge is to engage with communities and what they need in design first and foremost** – country continually grows and will continue to grow – understanding growth needs to happen – as professionals we need to connect to communities to give them faith in the system. It’s not about ticking boxes. It’s about how to engage people for ‘future proofing’.

. We consulted and collaborated like crazy with steering panels, members of community, public meetings and it made no difference. The people who came forward were all older with perfectly nice houses and the opposed. They have the completely wrong attitude. We need to think about who we are targeting. People who are thinking about future and might want to live in these houses.

There is a concern of developers taking advantage when parcels of land come forward. Residents feel plans are being imposed upon them without being properly planned and housing is just being bolted on instead of organic growth

Community becomes a franchise at that point doesn’t it. Its unplanned growth, it’s being done to them and the other negative problem is they cannot influence the quality. People would be happier if developments would add to quality of their life.

It is known that some large house builders don’t even go on to site and this is rather telling. We must demand that developers work a little harder and engage within communities rather than providing just a product. It’s no surprise local residents don’t accept one design fits all!

**Good growth is planned growth:**

My experience from local authority is that there are two types: speculative development or planned growth. Both can be difficult journeys. What has worked well in West Suffolk is extra layer of masterplan, development plan, additional consultation, brings relationships together from the outset. This should be mandatory as that’s what is starting to build those concepts and discussions.

How do we extend the urban fabric?” **–** what do we need to do? This applies to all scales of settlements. Developments are speculative development or planned growth. Planned growth leads to less community opposition; speculative growth is often in the face of community opposition. Our design guidance needs to help the public and private sector extend the urban fabric so that new and existing result in consistency and completeness. But how. Proactive planning is critical; local authorities can facilitate this through masterplanning and development briefs, for major sites.This is the foundation; but housebuilders must be prepared to collaborate and deliver quality. There are many issues with unplanned growth, not least that communities cannot influence the quality and therefore oppose

My experience of where the masterplanned process has worked well we rarely get objections from local community by the time it gets to planning application. The local community has been significantly engaged at masterplan stage. The Key is engagement within the community. This is done mainly through the developer, drop in sessions, exhibitions – Before the developer reaches application stage they have the masterplan adopted. Masterplan – adoption – outline application and then the phase comes forward.

**The challenges of future proofing growth**

raises concerns in terms of housing for the aging population. Suffolk has big challenges and we need to use design and planning systems in a proactive way. The over 65 population will increase from a quarter to a third by 2037. Future proofing challenges – health infrastructure – physical inactivity. We must have a plan for the next 50 years.

We agreed the home is changing, rapidly. We need to plan for different demographics and an ageing population. Above all we need to shift the discussion to be about homes rather than houses; the delivery of detached houses is an inefficient use of land.

about the momentum of developments. Part of the issue is the speed life moves. By the time a development is finished the funding of public services/the way it operates is fundamentally different to when you started. There are also future challenges – electric vehicles – very different transport to what is current

A question to builders/architects in the room: Is there any evidence to suggest cultural shift in houses for sale to houses for rent? Does who you’re building for as an end user make a difference in design? Lifestyle is now expanding with older ages. They don’t want to be cemented into a mortgage. Do these factors affect community?

It was concluded that we won’t get a situation like Europe because to be a renter in this country is an incredibly insecure place to be. But people are prepared to build housing more quickly because they are not worrying about rate of sale if it’s for rent. We know ownership is becoming increasingly difficult and ownership has gone down. This should begin to change with renting becoming popular but we must encourage this.

**What is scope of good design?**

We must begin to steer away from what buildings look like we need to reimagine how they are placed together and design connections.

We talk about design; but we need to be clear about how – as a county we are defining it. We are not talking about the appearance or layout ofhouses; for us design is how those houses, or rather homes, fit together. For us, is about the settlement or neighborhood, it is the key to building new communities. Heathy communities, connected communities.

There was a lot of discussion about housebuilders and standard house types. We agreed that we need to engage housebuilders in a dialogue about quality, but more specifically to say that building in Suffolk means building communities, not just building houses. And that means designing layouts that are a framework for healthy, connected communities.

But a key question is are we building homes in the right places, places that will result in settlements with the consistency and completeness we seek? That will deliver good growth? The allocations process is strategic design tool, so we need to think how the new design guidance can help to determine the right locations for housing allocations.

**Are we getting good growth at the moment in Suffolk?**

Anthony Hudson and Chris Lamb examine the notion “zooming out” with the concept of definition of design. How far do you zoom out? Do you zoom out to Suffolk as a whole? Question to the council do you think your local plans have got it right? Is where you’re placing growth in the right place? what determines a sensible place? What makes the things to make good growth – connectivity ‘between’ cities and villages – schools, shops etc. – these are the things that are vital to make local communities – is that embedded in local plans?

The Local plan is the right tool – we do have growth in the right places – concept plans from the outset – problem is historically taken so long to get there – forget planned approach – our starting point is design. Interesting if you think this isn’t already in our plans. We do look at how it connects in the infrastructure and character areas. It’s more about deliverability. Weight the perfect site but is it deliverable?

All authorities need a housing study that indicates to us who wants a home, who needs homes and then how do we provide them. we behave appropriately as it’s a legal obligation. It’s down to funding local government that shapes our future. It’s not about building houses it’s about building communities – top priority – about people not buildings.

**Some specific items to be considered in developing a design Guide.**

Variety of sites allocated encourages diversity of approach, agents and housebuilders resulting in diverse outcomes.

Don’t overlook importance of landscaping – trees, hedgerows, green spaces. Planting of trees – I want a list of approved species - Can the importance of planting be part of the guide?

When should people be involved in Planning process on land allocation?

Communicating with landowners

Should take a wider pan Suffolk view regional strategy .. look at infrastructure and resources water, energy, fabric performance.

Avoid sprawl and intensify town/ village centres. An email from a resident of Saxmundham:

A vast sway of surrounding fields will provide a massive sprawl of around 800 houses. Within the town there are a number of brown sites that could provide sustainable town center homes that would transform this failing market town into a vibrant community. Part of the failure is the blind spots councilors have for the need to construct traditional houses. Well structured town center apartments will provide friendship, community and facilities that are suited for the long term.

**Some post-roundtable thoughts:**

Given that the definition of good growth is likely to be similar to the definition of sustainable development (i.e. you do not allow meeting current needs to compromise the future) it is then a question of looking at what that means in terms of design at different scales:

* Relationship to existing settlements – where development happens, how it is connected – does it reinforce the success of the town/village centre?

* Relationship to the landscape – does it improve biodiversity, water/flood management, clean air?

* Disposition of uses – where do we want residential, commercial; where should we insist on mixing uses?

* What urban network are we creating?  Are we encouraging active travel/healthy lifestyles?

* What built form are we creating?  Is it using land efficiently?

* How are we responding to local character (or in some places, lack of character)?