

## **Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan**

### **Response to Initial Comments of the Independent Examiner by Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group on behalf of Saxmundham Town Council - November 2022**

Please note the references below to paragraph numbers use the same numbering as the Examiner's Initial Comments.

#### **Regulation 16 Comments:**

##### ***Paragraph 4:***

Please See **Appendix 1** for response to East Suffolk Regulation 16 comments

Please see **Appendix 2** for response to all other Regulation 16 comments.

#### **The issues arising from the Garden Neighbourhood being split between two parishes:**

##### ***Paragraph 8:***

Please see **Appendix 3** for chronology of the evolution of the Neighbourhood Plan area and the relationship with the Garden Neighbourhood

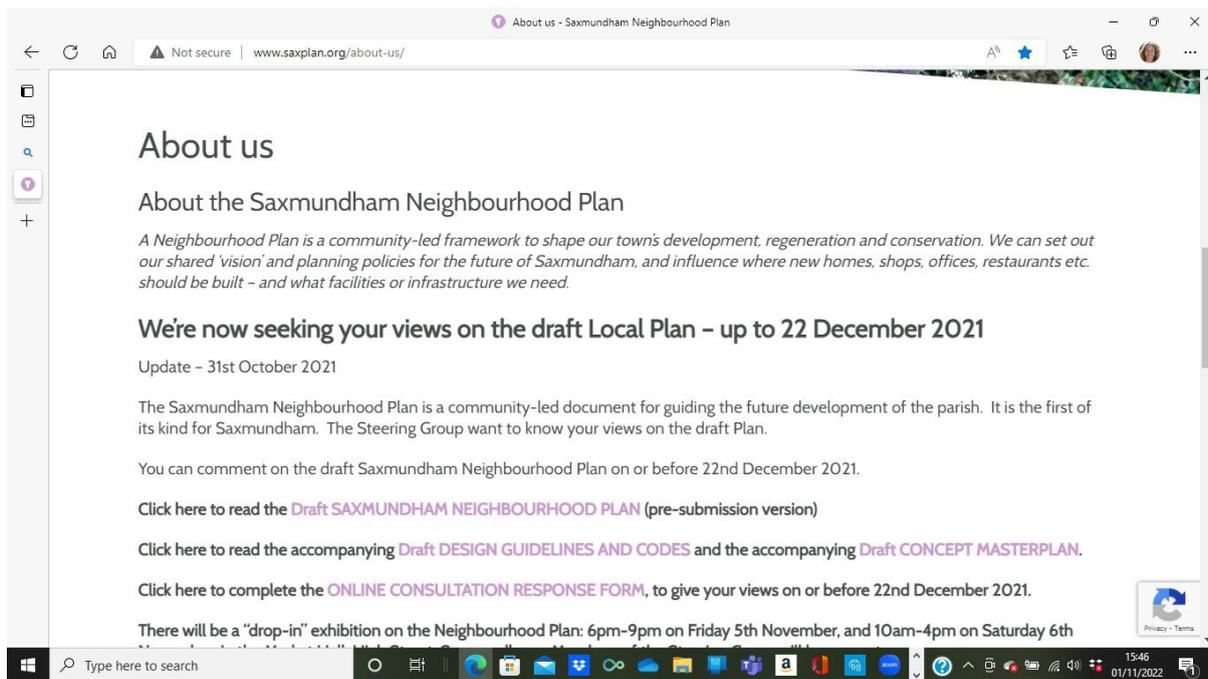
##### ***Paragraphs 9 and 10:***

The Town Council's preference for overcoming the consequences of the split between two parishes, would be Option 2 as outlined in paragraph 10. This would allow the Neighbourhood Plan to remain intact, to continue its process and to provide a policy framework for the determination of applications within the Neighbourhood area which importantly also includes those parts of Saxmundham parish that lie outside of the Garden Neighbourhood. It would also retain some local influence over the development of the Garden Neighbourhood.

In terms of the practicalities of realising both options, this would be dependent upon Officers at East Suffolk Council being agreeable to the content of the Masterplan document. If changes to that document were required then the Town Council would be agreeable to contacting AECOM to facilitate this.

The Town Council can confirm that both the AECOM Design Guidelines and Codes and the AECOM Masterplan documents were subject to Regulation 14 consultation alongside the Pre-Submission draft of the Plan. Both documents were available on the Neighbourhood Plan website together with the Pre-Submission Version of the Neighbourhood Plan. The links are still available. See below, together with a screenshot of the web page.

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Printed (hard) copies of both documents were also available at the Drop-in Exhibitions held on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> November 2021.

Comments were received on both documents as a consequence of the consultation. *See Pages 236-256 of the Consultation Statement that accompanies the Neighbourhood Plan.*

## **Opportunity Zones**

### **Paragraph 12:**

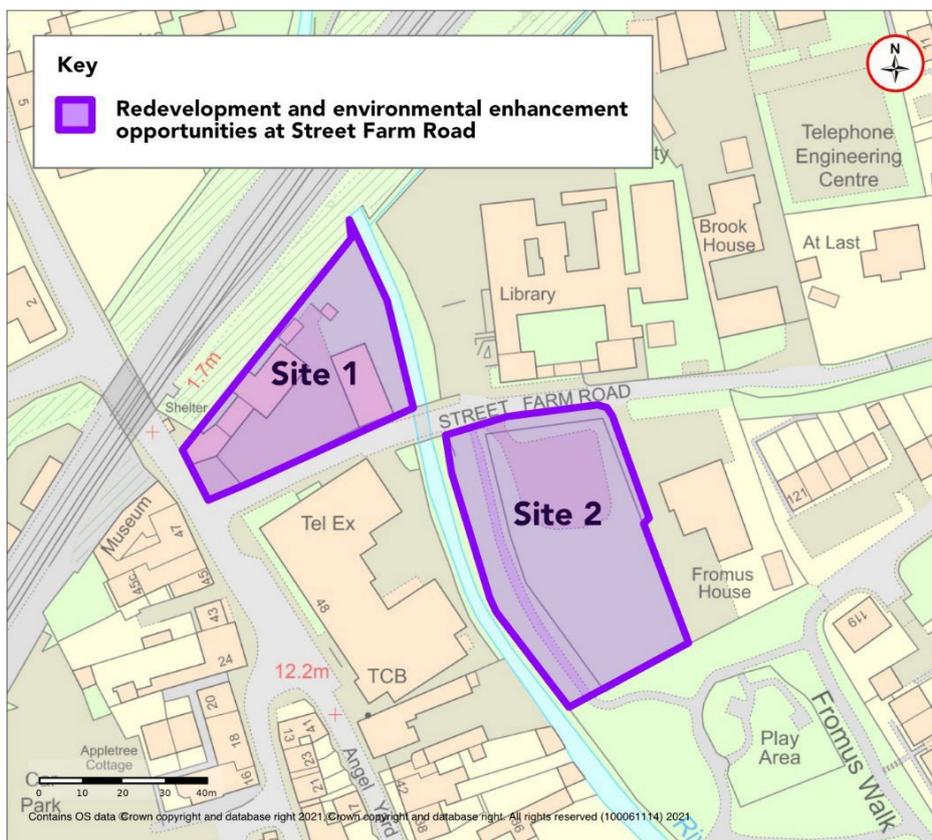
The Opportunity Zones are not intended to be formal site-specific allocations. The Opportunity Zones highlighted in the Neighbourhood Plan are all underused brownfield sites in key locations within the town that would benefit from regeneration/redevelopment. The Zones were highlighted as areas that would benefit from economic, environmental or visual enhancement either through community consultation with local residents, by Steering Group members through local knowledge, or through the AECOM work. By identifying these areas as Opportunity Zones where support in principle is given to their future development, it was hoped they would act as a mechanism to highlight interest in an area that may benefit from further investigation into development potential. The Opportunity Zones policies do not include detailed policy information or requirements on the development of the sites that would be expected to be found in an allocation policy – for example, they refer to a broad range of uses that may be appropriate but do not include:

- Details relating to access arrangements
- Details of the scale, layout and form of development proposed including landscaping or boundary treatments, pedestrian and cycle connections etc
- Details of other elements that may need to be provided as a consequence of development e.g. open space

- Details of assessments or other information that would be needed to support development e.g. surface or foul water drainage plans, landscaping management plans etc

**Paragraph 13:**

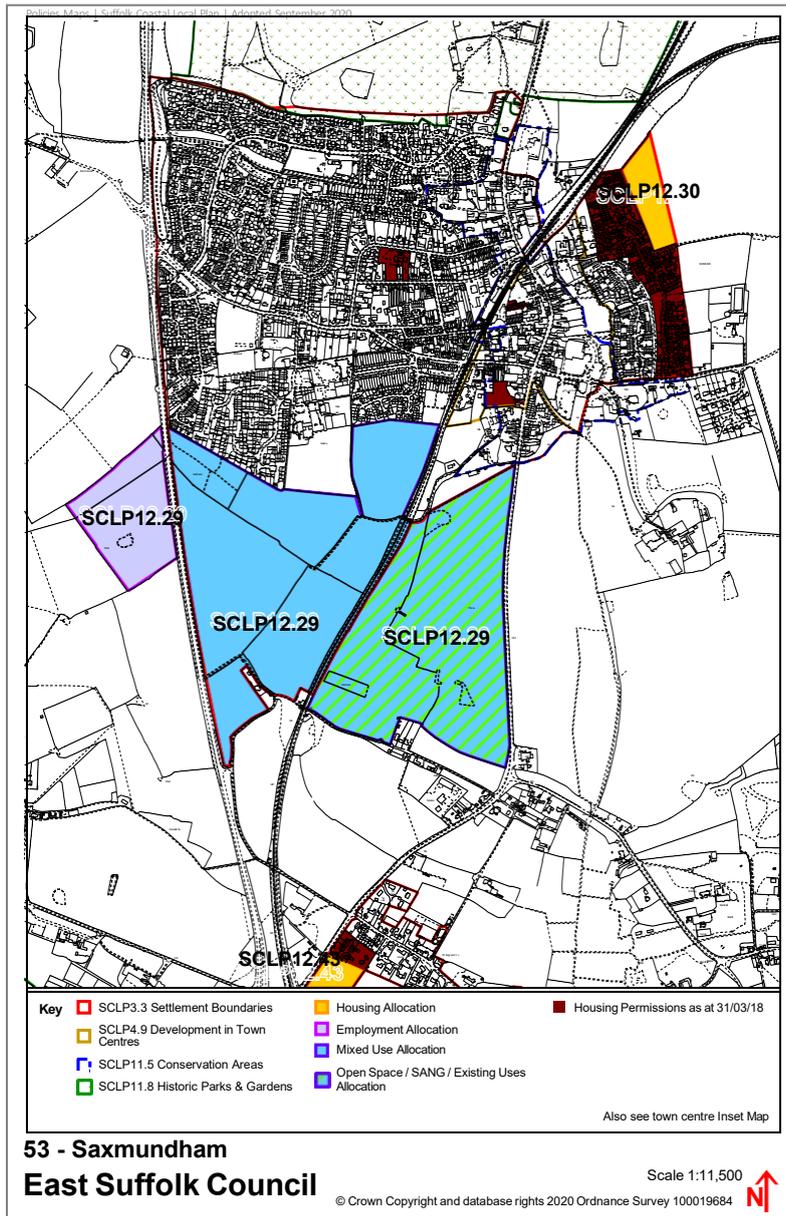
The boundaries of the Zones had clearly defined boundaries in the Regulation 14 version of the Neighbourhood Plan, but this was changed in response to comments made by East Suffolk at Regulation 14 Stage. It would be easy to reinstate more clearly defined boundaries as per the Regulation 14 version of the Plan. An example of the Street Farm Road Opportunity Zone from the Regulation 14 Version of the Neighbourhood Plan is shown below. Such maps can be easily amended to show a red line boundary instead of the shading and other colours.



**Mapping**

**Paragraph 14:**

It appears some unexplained corruption of the PDF file has taken place which has removed part of the Map from Figure 4. It is unclear what has happened and for this we apologise. This map also featured in the Regulation 14 version of the Plan without error. The map will be reviewed for any future version to make sure it is properly replicated as shown below.



**Policy SAX4**

**Paragraph 15:**

Upon review and consideration of this question, the Town Council is not able to identify any specific local circumstances that would justify a more restrictive approach in this policy to that in the relevant Local Plan policies.

**Policy SAX 8**

**Paragraph 16:**

Sources: [RAC Foundation: Standing Still](#) and [Choosing The Right Size Garage For Your Car | Lidget Compton](#)

The average size of cars in the UK has increased over time in both in width and in length. In 1965 the top five models sold in the UK had an average width of 1.5m and average length of 3.9m, compared to an average width of 1.8m and length of 4.3m for the top five sellers of 2020. Despite this, the typical garage door width for a domestic property is around 2.1m, leaving just 0.15m on either side of the average car in 2020. Therefore garage size poses a

problem for anyone wanting to use their garage to park their car. This view is borne out by an RAC study from 2014 which revealed that 62 per cent of households use their garage for purposes other than parking a car. Of the 38 per cent choosing to use their garage for its intended purpose, one in five had difficulty getting their car in, owing to limited dimensions. Industry standard recommendations are a minimum of 2.9m (w) and 4.95m (l) which allow for driver door clearance, passenger door clearance and also accommodate wing mirrors.

**Paragraph 17:**

[How to charge your e-bike | Halfords UK](#)

Charging an electric bike indoors will provide the best results, however it is acknowledged that this may not always be possible due to the size, format or location of the user's dwelling and therefore public provision is also desirable. Electric bikes and electric vehicles do not use the same charging points.

**Policy SAX9**

**Paragraph 18:**

It is the intention that proposals would meet all criteria within the policy

**Paragraph 19:**

It is acknowledged that there is repetition and/or conflict between criterion a and criterion c. The Town Council's preference would be for criterion a to remain and criterion c to be deleted if this was required to clarify the policy.

**Paragraph 20:**

It is acknowledged that this policy does not add any significant local dimension to the existing Local Plan policy.

**Policy SAX10**

**Paragraph 21:**

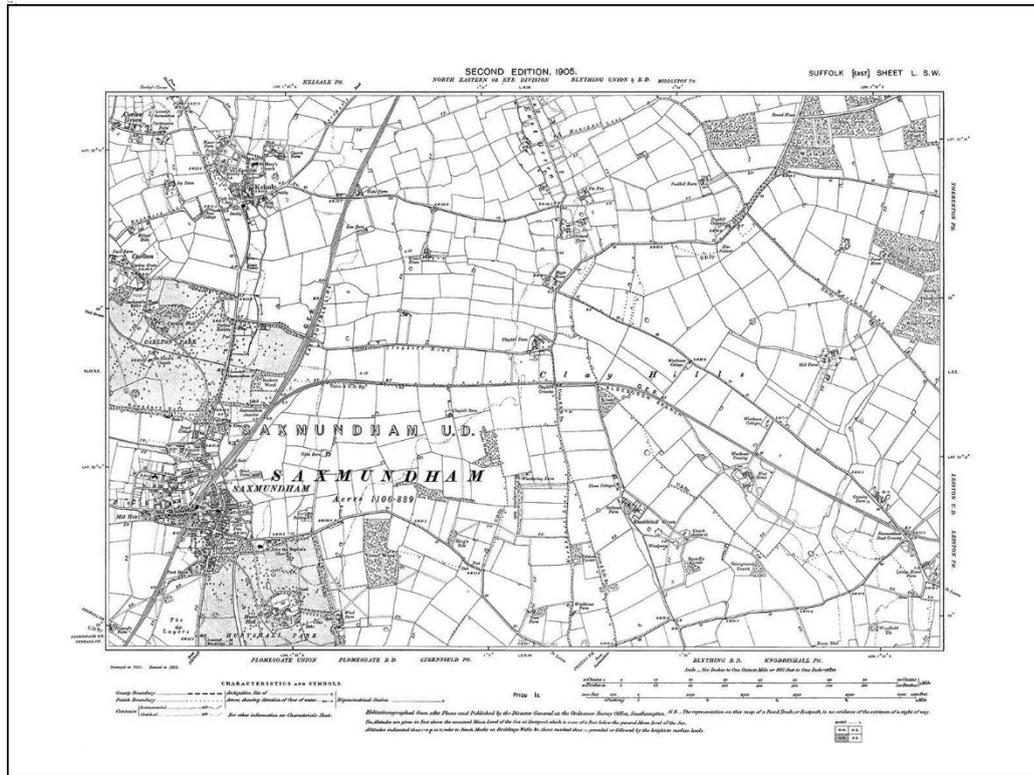
The Local Plan policy, including the Garden Neighbourhood, is based on a housing needs assessment by the LPA but covering a far larger catchment area. The NP policy is based on community preferences based on the results of public consultation, in particular the responses to the 2019 household survey . It is acknowledged that there is no specific Housing Needs Assessment currently in place for Saxmundham. Information on housing need on a broader basis would be available from the District Council or potentially in the future as part of the information submitted to accompany a planning application to support a proposed dwelling mix.

**Policy SAX12**

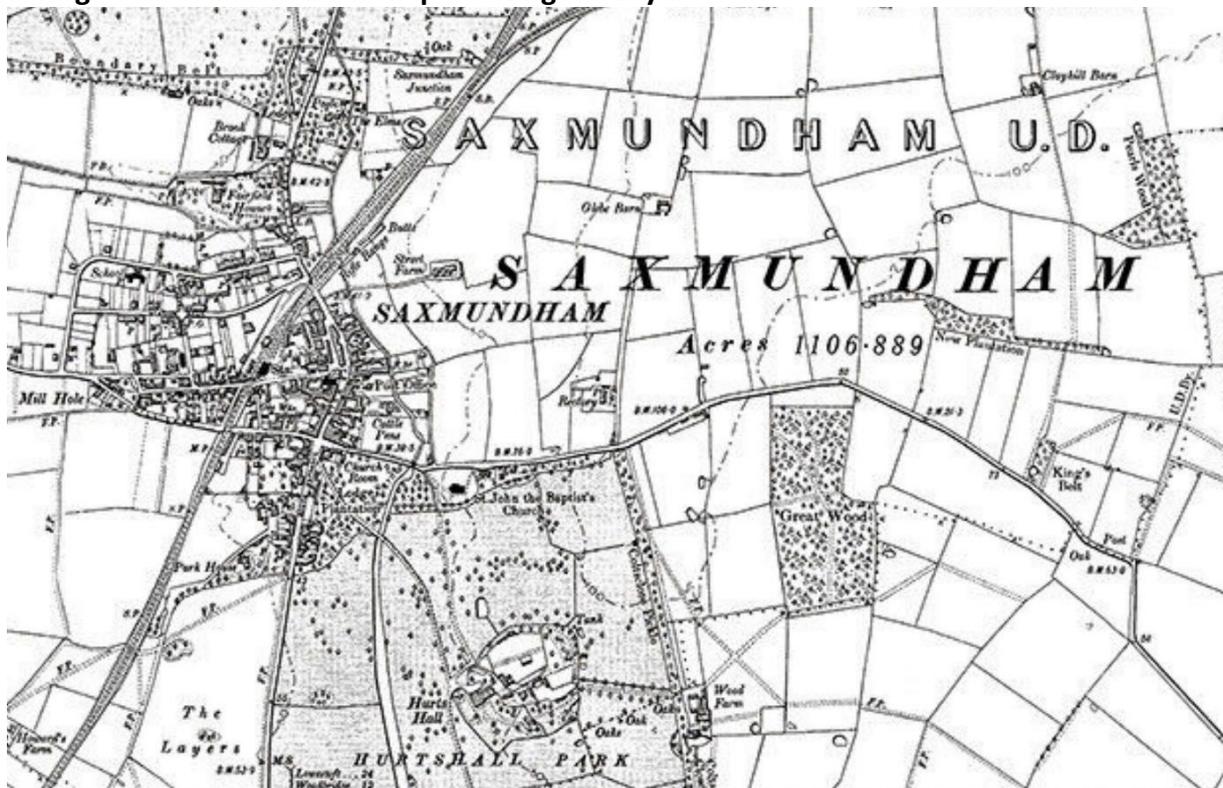
**Paragraph 22:**

The Town Council can confirm that the area of The Layers that has the strongest ongoing historical interest is that bounded by the footpaths 16 21, 20 and 19. The exact extent of The Layers as a whole is generally taken to be the larger area shown on Figure 21 of the NP. The 1905 OS map below shows it in the area identified above by reference in effect to those footpaths. The "Old Ordnance Survey Map" for Saxmundham dated 1925 (in reproduction "The Godfrey Edition") however refers to The Layers on the southern edge of the map, indicating the more extensive area to the south towards Kiln Lane.

# 1905 Map of Saxmundham



## Enlarged extract from 1905 Map showing the Layers



1925 map extract:



The Layers was originally identified as a potential Local Green Space in the Regulation 14 Pre-Submission Version of the Neighbourhood Plan. However it was discounted from the list as a result of the consultation, due to objections received from the landowner in respect of whether the area sufficiently met the NPPF criteria. The Steering Group agreed that the area was potentially an extensive tract of land (approximately 17ha) and that there was doubt as to whether the LGS designation was compatible with the current agricultural use. (See Consultation Statement Pages 170- 174).

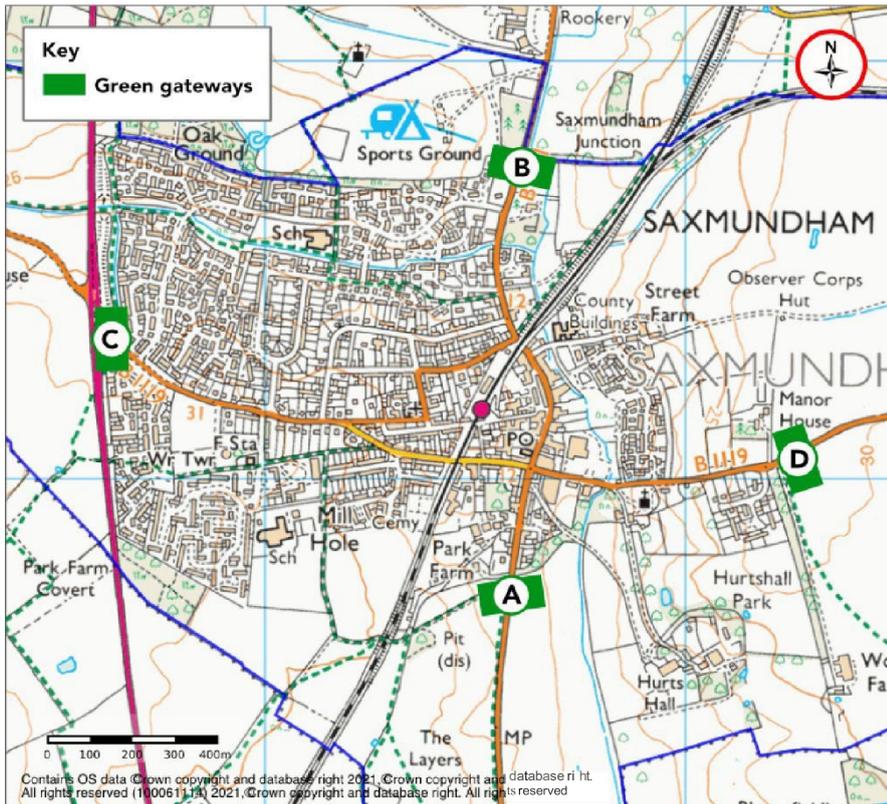
### Policy SAX13

#### Paragraph 23:

It is accepted that Viewpoint 6 is from outside of the Neighbourhood Area.

#### Paragraph 24:

This is a similar issue to that referred to in paragraph 14 above, in that the PDF has been corrupted and removed Green Gateway B. Figure 23 can therefore be easily included in any future versions of the Neighbourhood Plan.



**Policy SAX15**

**Paragraph 25:**

Upon review, the Town Council agrees that there is duplication in these protections.

**Paragraph 26:**

There is no legal definition covering the distinction. Allotments are generally understood to be individual plots cultivated for private use, grouped together on a larger parcel of land. The site is usually owned by the local authority (town or parish council), managed by an allotment association and the individual plots are cultivated by one person or family. The fruit and vegetables they grow are for their own consumption and not for sale. The plots are usually of a standard size and having a yearly charge for rent and services such as water provision.

A Community Garden is generally a parcel of land which is cultivated by a group together. Community Gardens are usually started by local people who would like to grow food for their own use but also to benefit the wider community. Frequently, growing on community gardens is done collaboratively by the volunteers. The idea is to share the work and reward. Most community gardens are open to everyone to join and do not have waiting lists.

A useful indicative definition is found here:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-05/allotments-and-community-led-gardening-guidance.pdf>

**Policy SAX16**

**Paragraph 27:**

The landowner of The Layers is William Notcutt. His agents, Armstrong Rigg, responded to the Regulation 14 consultation and indicated support for the identification of The Layers as SANG. *See pages 195-196, 170 and 174 of the consultation statement.*

The key points are reproduced below:

*“Our client is supportive in principle of providing SANG on their land, subject to the Neighbourhood Plan producing an HRA Appropriate Assessment as discussed under SAX14. Further, given the likely requirement for c.15ha of SANG across the Garden Neighbourhood, we consider that the majority of our client’s land at ‘The Layers’ will be needed as SANG.*

*As set out above, our client objects to the inclusion of their land as a Non-Designated Heritage Asset and as Local Green Space as it does not meet the relevant criteria for these designations and the aims of these designations are mutually exclusive to the delivery of SANG. Our client supports the SANG designation and considers that the Neighbourhood Plan has an important role to play in delivering SANG on ‘The Layers’, but this will only be achievable if the site is not protected for heritage or Local Green Space”.*

It is not expected that all agricultural activity will cease. The Local Plan indicates that on land to the east of the railway there is scope for some agricultural uses to remain.

**Policy SAXGN1**

**Paragraph 28:**

The Town Council does not have a strong preference and would not object if the issue was covered in the initial part of the policy rather than at the end.

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## **Appendix 1: Response to Regulation 16 Comments from East Suffolk Council**

In the following sections, we have sought to respond to ESC's points where necessary or appropriate. We have not sought to duplicate here points made in answer to the questions in the Initial Comments of the Examiner. Page number references are to the document "Responses to Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan".

ESC requests some mapping amendments – these changes can easily be accommodated – specifically Figures 15, 20, 21 and 23.

### **East Suffolk Council**

#### **Page 3:**

#### **The Neighbourhood Plan area and South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood (SSGN)**

The ESC response argues that "the consequence of this [the SSGN does not fall entirely within the NP area] is that the NP cannot contain policies that address elements of the SSGN outside the NP area".

The NP is entitled (we would argue 'required') to contain policies that 'address' – meaning 'take into account' - elements beyond the NP area, because so many elements of the SSGN fall (in whole or in part) within the NP area and are by logic inter-connected with the wider area that falls without doubt within the NP. A Neighbourhood Plan cannot contradict the Local Plan policy, but is fully entitled – and duty bound – to consider proposals that supplement the LP where necessary for the proper sustainable development of our town and parish. The NP therefore seeks to set out policies that are for implementation in, and in relation to, the NP area, consistent with good planning of/for the whole SSGN area as per the Local Plan. To our knowledge, nothing in the draft NP is inconsistent with any of the policies, or their criteria, set out in the Local Plan for the GN.

The issue could have been mitigated or substantially resolved had the would-be developers actually engaged with us (and others in the local community) as laid down in the Local Plan in relation to their concept of a masterplan for the GN site in line with the SCLP policy, but this is not the case. Despite the explicit wording of SCLP 12.28, the only form of (very limited) 'engagement' we have had from the developer (Pigeon) took place around 2 years ago, very shortly after the Local Plan was formally approved.

However, that 'consultation' by Pigeon (in December 2020/January 2021) related to a substantially different site from that approved less than 3 months before in the Local Plan, in that it

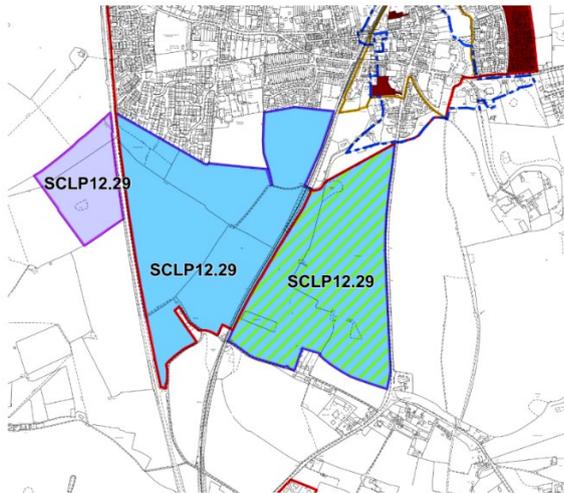
- excluded most land to the east of the railway (designated - as per the Inspector's report - to SANG, open space and some existing use),
- included a large additional commercial site development – rejected by ESC in the Local Plan process - to the west of the A12, adjoining the Plan-designated employment site, and
- included land to the south (between railway and A12) not included in the Local Plan site.

We received no feedback or answer from Pigeon to our response, in which we argued inter alia that the Local Plan site and policy should apply; the website used for the consultation was dismantled soon after, without trace, and as far as we are aware, the overall results have not been made public.

Our response to the consultation can be found here: <http://www.saxplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/STC-response-to-Pigeons-final-19-Jan.pdf> - it includes the map of Pigeon's then proposed site, which can be compared to the approved Local Plan site:



(2) Pigeon's proposed Garden Neighbourhood site for consultation, December 2020



(3) The allocated Garden Neighbourhood site, as approved by the Local Planning Authority, September 2020

(We are aware that ESC have held ongoing discussions with the developer concerning proposals for the site over the last 2 years, but we have not been kept in the loop and do not know what is currently proposed or under discussion, nor to which actual site the discussions relate).

We believe that the SSGN is (save for one point, see below p.16 Policy SAX16) "accurately referenced throughout the NP", including in the NP proposed policies.

**Page 4:**

**Status of the ‘Saxmundham Design Guidelines and Codes for the Garden Neighbourhood site and Neighbourhood Plan Area’ and ‘Saxmundham Concept Masterplan for the High Street and Garden Neighbourhood’**

The representations from ESC in this section closely reflect comments from ESC (and Pigeon) in the Reg 14 (pre-submission draft NP) consultation process. The text of the NP was amended by us in significant ways to respond to the points made. But ESC’s Reg. 16 response does not appear to properly take into account the changes made in response to their comments at the earlier stage. *(See pages 76-77 of the Consultation Statement on this point .*

ESC criticize these documents, produced by AECOM as consultants for the Town Council to help us in preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan:

“It is ESC’s view that wording within the NP should clearly explain this status of the proposed master plan and design code with regard to the SSGN, given that the site falls outside the NP area and the deficiencies related to stakeholder engagement.”

We do not accept this. The status of the two documents is clearly set out at paragraph 1.15 of the NP:

“In addition, the following two supporting documents, which have provided technical input in developing some of the Neighbourhood Plan’s policies, are submitted to be drawn upon as appropriate in the future master-planning of the South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood and High Street/Town Centre, and in design of future development, both within the Garden Neighbourhood and in the town and Neighbourhood Plan area as a whole.”

Moreover, the argument here from ESC that “the site falls outside the NP area” demonstrates the incorrect basis of argument on the LPA’s part – a very substantial proportion of the site lies wholly within the existing parish of Saxmundham and NP area. The clearly implied position of ESC is that the NP area excludes that part of the parish which lies within the SSGN area – which is not the case. Thus, ESC’s argument here is based on a false premise.

Moreover, when we look at the actual policies in our Neighbourhood Plan, there is nowhere that the AECOM masterplan or design guidelines are imposed upon the GN development, as against providing highly experienced professional input that we have taken into account and make available.

In the text leading to Policy SAX1 on General Design Principles, we again set out explicitly the role of the Design Guidelines, which themselves reflect discussions of AECOM with, and input from, the NP Steering Group/Town Council, and also the results of the Steering Group’s large-scale community engagement:

“6.10 The Town Council commissioned consultants AECOM to produce Design Guidelines and Codes not only for the Garden Neighbourhood but also for the rest of the parish. This work was completed in July 2021 and is a supporting document to inform the Neighbourhood Plan (see paragraph 1.15 above). The Design Code reflected a detailed analysis of the local character of the parish, developed some strategic design guidelines and identified a palette of materials which should influence the design of future development. The Code’s principles have informed and are reflected in Policy

SAX1, and its more detailed guidance should be drawn upon as appropriate in the design of future development, both within the Garden Neighbourhood and in the Neighbourhood Plan area as a whole. In addition, the report provided specific guidance to be used by the Town Council when assessing and responding to consultation in future planning applications for new development.”

(See also paragraph 6.14, which also refers to the Guidelines).

Policy SAX 1 (on design) makes no specific reference to AECOM’s Guidelines, which are in no way ‘imposed’ on the SSGN.

We would draw attention to the much more positive comments on the Design Guidelines and SAX1 Policy from ESC’s Design and Conservation Team (page 13).

As regards the AECOM Concept Masterplan document, its role is referred to in the explanatory text of the NP at paragraph 12.2:

“12.2 ...The following policies seek to guide development of the Garden Neighbourhood within the parish of Saxmundham and their content has been informed in part by the AECOM Master Plan and the Design Guidelines and Codes for the Garden Neighbourhood (see also relevant area wide policies). As stated earlier, the AECOM Masterplan is a notional masterplan used as the basis for evaluating the impact the development may have on the town and the policies needed to mitigate the problems raised and to strengthen the advantages.”

We said “informed in part” because there are many other influences on our approach, in particular the local expertise and knowledge of the Steering Group and town Councillors, but also by the very large number of responses to our own community consultation exercises – including the household questionnaire of 2019 which generated nearly 1,000 responses. We are therefore surprised at the ESC response that “The Masterplan covering the SSGN produced for the NP cannot afford formal masterplan weight in the delivery of the site when considered against Local Plan policy SCLP12.29”. We have, on the contrary, not stated that it affords formal masterplan weight in the delivery of the site, as the draft NP makes clear.

The two AECOM documents formed part of the earlier (Reg. 14) public consultation and were available physically and digitally. (See response to Examiner’s Initial Comments paragraph 10). The public (as against ESC and site landowners/developers) have not expressed objections to their contents.

Our counter-critique to ESC’s point here is that, while the AECOM work is criticized inter alia for “deficiencies related to stakeholder engagement”, the developer who is charged under SCLP 12.29 with carrying out community engagement on masterplanning for the Local Plan site has failed to do so at all, leaving a huge void in policy implementation which ESC has not addressed.

In conclusion on these points, we wish to underline that we have sought faithfully to follow and add necessary ‘flesh’ to the strategic policy for the SSGN and defined site as laid down in the Local Plan, with the intent to make it work properly and successfully for and with the town to which it is to be attached and with which it is to be integrated, as we all hope. ESC ask how

a Masterplan “can interact with a developer led masterplan”? But that is a misunderstanding of their own plan – the Local Plan does not refer to “a developer led masterplan” but to “a masterplan approach brought forward through landowner collaboration and community engagement.”

#### **Page 5:**

##### **Paragraph 2.1**

We agree that the word ‘district’ could be deleted, since Ipswich is not in the formal District of East Suffolk.

##### **Paragraph 6.13 (Suffolk Design Streets Guide)**

The 2022 edition is now on the SCC website at [https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/Roads-and-transport/maintaining-roads-pavements-and-verges/5647\\_21%20-%20Suffolk%20Design%20Street%20Guide%20v26.pdf](https://www.suffolk.gov.uk/assets/Roads-and-transport/maintaining-roads-pavements-and-verges/5647_21%20-%20Suffolk%20Design%20Street%20Guide%20v26.pdf) so if the Examiner agrees, we would suggest to delete ‘draft’ and add ‘(2022 version)’ at the end of the first bullet point.

#### **Page 6**

##### **Policy SAX1: General Design Principles**

We have no objection to the points made here. If deemed appropriate by the Examiner, the penultimate paragraph could (deleting reference to ‘guidance’) state: “Consideration should be given to the relevant policies for the Opportunity Zones”

##### **7. Parish wide: Local economy**

We consider that it is important for a Neighbourhood Plan for a town with a not over-strong local economy to include relevant policies for the local economy, as part of our remit to promote sustainable development.

##### *Policy SAX2: Expansion of Existing Businesses*

Re criterion (c), the concept of sustainable jobs or sustainable employment is a recognized one in policy terms, see e.g. House of Commons Public Accounts committee report “Sustainable employment: supporting people to stay in work and advance”

(<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmpublicacc/131/131.pdf> )

Employment that provides sustainable jobs clearly means a non-temporary employment-provider, taking into account the nature of the business, e.g. not a purely seasonal business, or temporary retail etc. As regards young people, we have recorded in the section on demography that young people in Saxmundham have lower qualifications (in terms of GCSEs etc.) than the Suffolk or national average, so the policy here support sustainable employment that will help in skills development for young people.

##### **8. Parish wide: Community Infrastructure**

This first point, re Policy SAX4 is covered in our response to the Independent Examiner’s Initial Comments.

On the second point, ESC here argue at some length that “much more attention” needs to be given to “the infrastructure Priorities of the town, including the infrastructure needs acknowledged in the Local Plan in the Infrastructure Delivery Framework and ..Infrastructure

Funding Statement; other infrastructure of local importance “should be listed and categorised as essential or desirable, therefore interacting with the expectations of the CIL Spending Strategy”. However, this set of ESC comments does not point out any specific passage in the draft NP and its policies that is argued to be wrong or needing of improvement, so we have no comments on changes to drafting to offer for the Examiner’s consideration.

Moreover, this response repeats at length, virtually word for word, the response on this issue to the earlier Reg 14 draft NP, see pages 111-113 of the Consultation Statement. We responded to the earlier criticism (as stated in the Consultation Statement) by agreeing to make some significant changes to the NP which do not seem to have been noted or taken into account in this more recent set of representations. (We said in the Statement: “Policy SAX5 has been amended to identify the essential and desirable priorities for the town and an additional section on CIL has been added at 8.9 onwards.”)

We consider that, given the changes made, this repeated comment is misplaced and unjustified as criticism of the submission draft Neighbourhood Plan.

We are fully aware of the Local Plan references to Saxmundham projects, most of which relate to the SSGN or other statutory authority projects (e.g. primary school, early years, library improvements).

Town and parish councils are not required to follow the views or “expectations” of District Councils – this is not a top-down process. We have however set out our priorities for “essential” and “desirable” community infrastructure, in general accordance with ESC’s framework. There is no “critical” infrastructure that we are privy to that is needed to ‘unlock’ development sites in the parish.

In other sections of the Neighbourhood Plan, we explicitly note and support Local Plan-mentioned infrastructure priorities, many of them attached to the SSGN, such as footpaths, cycle ways, sustainable transport etc.

The need to expand health facilities in the town is one of our “essential” priorities (not least as the present GP premises has flooded), as is an indoor sports hall and/or gym, which the town sorely lacks. These “essential” priorities arise from our public consultation. We have defined other local priorities which the Town Council has set for the (very limited) parish council share of CIL, and these are set out in the Plan at 8.10. .

## **Page 8**

### **9. Transport and movement**

We would be willing to refer to the recently approved East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy, if deemed appropriate by the Examiner. We note here that it reinforces policy proposals in the Neighbourhood Plan, see for example p.162 of the new Strategy which sets out Leisure Route LR8 Benhall–Saxmundham–Kelsale:

“4.49 The route seeks to provide a traffic free (as far as possible) cycling and walking route between Benhall, Saxmundham, and Kelsale. The community of Benhall, Saxmundham and Kelsale has planned such a route (The 3 Communities Link) and this is broadly followed in the following recommendations. In taking forward the

recommendations consideration of and consistency with the emerging Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan will need to be demonstrated...”

### **Policy SAX11: Historic town centre and Conservation Area**

No objection to use of ‘preserved’ instead of ‘protected’ in line 2.

### **Figure 20**

NDHA: We propose to include the Chapel site with grounds which include the small cemetery at the rear, and will amend map.

### **Page 10**

### **Policy SAX16: Green spaces**

#### *Green Spaces*

The designation in SAX16 is indeed intended to preclude development save in exceptional circumstances as per the NPPF. If this needs to be explicit in the policy, we would offer the following for consideration, drawn from NPPF para.149:

“New development will not be permitted in designated green spaces other than where the development involves:

- (a) the provision of appropriate facilities for outdoor sport or outdoor recreation, community gardens and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the designated green spaces and do not conflict with the purposes of that space;
- (c) the extension or alteration of an existing building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;
- (d) the replacement of a building, provided the new building is in the same use and not materially larger than the one it replaces;”

#### *SANG*

We agree with the point made, that the reference to SANG here needs to be brought in line with the Local Plan policy for The Layers and other SSGN land east of the railway.

Our proposal for the Examiner’s consideration would be: *replace existing text (“Land east of the Railway line... landscape, nature conservation and heritage”) with:*

“Land east of the Railway line and to the south of Saxmundham, including land known as The Layers, is identified as an area of SANG and open space, in connection with the South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood, together with existing uses where this complements the delivery of SANG and open space. This area of SANG and open space will serve to meet the informal day to day recreational needs of both the new Garden Neighbourhood and the existing community. The location, design and access of the proposed SANG should take into account the purpose of the SANG, the need for easy and safe access to it together with potential impacts on landscape, nature conservation and heritage.”

[For ease of reference: the relevant extract from Local Plan SSGN policy:

“the provision of open space and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), to be masterplanned and delivered as part of the garden neighbourhood. The retention of existing uses on land to the east of the railway would be supported where this complements the delivery of open space and SANG.”

### **Policy SAXGN1: Connecting the Garden Neighbourhood**

We appreciate the welcome given to our detailed consideration of connectivity between the SSGN and the town.

On ‘connections and movement within the Garden Neighbourhood’, of the sub-paragraphs referred to, viii and ix are wholly within Saxmundham parish, and accord with the Cycling and Walking Strategy (LR8). These provide for

- improving walking and cycle links from Benhall to Saxmundham, using existing rights of way,
- upgrading the footpath alongside the B1121 to make it a cycle path

As to vi and vii, these offer support to (but not requirement for) the proposals referred to and can be implemented (though not in totality) within Saxmundham parish. Of the (‘encouraged’) circular green route, we estimate that some 70% of the route would fall within the existing Saxmundham parish.

As earlier indicated, we would be very willing to include references to the new East Suffolk Cycling and Walking Strategy, if the Examiner so agrees. As it relates to Saxmundham, the new Strategy is wholly in line with the policies supported in consultation and now in the Plan, including SAXGN1.

### **Page 11**

#### **Policy SAXGN2: Green Infrastructure links**

Policy criterion iii) – dealing with the land east of the railway - is included because it is an essential, integral element of the totality of green links for the Garden Neighbourhood, within the Plan area (which the land referred to here is). The proposed policy serves to reinforce and support the Local Plan policy for this large area of the SSGN site as identified in the Local Plan.

#### **Policy SAXGN3: Community Facilities**

We do not agree with this ESC point. Save for the indoor sports provision (which is encouraged), the other facilities are required for the Garden Neighbourhood. These facilities may or may not all be built in the Saxmundham Plan area (parish) but they are essential to the SSGN and Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan, and for the success of the Garden Neighbourhood development insofar as it relates to Saxmundham. Nothing in the policy here contradicts the Local Plan policy.

## Appendix 2: Response to other Regulation 16 Consultation Responses

Serial	Respondent	Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group comment
1	East Suffolk Council	See separate response at Appendix 1

2	Environment Agency	<p>The EA did not submit any comments on the Neighbourhood Plan at Regulation 14 stage.</p> <p>The SCLP contains Policy SCLP9.5 which deals with the issue of floodrisk and adequately sets out when the sequential and exception tests apply. It was considered that the Neighbourhood Plan did not need to repeat this specific guidance and there was therefore no need for a generic floodrisk policy in the Neighbourhood Plan. Policy SCLP9.5 also provides guidance for Neighbourhood Plans in respect of making specific allocations. The Local Plan policy also sets out when flood risk assessments should accompany proposals.</p> <p>The EA supports the uses identified within Street Farm Road Zone 2 which are water compatible uses consistent with NPPF Annex 3 Flood vulnerability classification. There would be no objection if the policy and/or supporting text were amended to usefully refer to the fact that the Zone falls within Flood Zone 3b and that any development must fall within the water-compatible or essential infrastructure classifications and follow the principles set-out in paragraph 067 of the Planning Practice Guidance: Flood Risk and Coastal Change.</p> <p>The EA has expressed concern relating to Street Farm Road Zone 1 which is identified as being within Flood Zone 3a. The site is currently used as a hand car wash and was formerly a Bus Garage. Zone 1 occupies a prominent position at the junction of the High Street. The policy identifies it as an area that would benefit from environmental and visual enhancements and that uses such as car parking commercial and employment uses might be appropriate. The policy is not intended to be a formal allocation but a mechanism to highlight an area that may benefit from further investigation into development potential. The uses identified in SAXSFR1 are classified as ‘less vulnerable uses’ under the NPPF Annex 3 Floodrisk vulnerability classification meaning that development within zone 3a would not require the exception test. There has not been a formal sequential test undertaken prior to identifying the opportunity zone, however the Opportunity zones are all underused brownfield sites in key locations within the town and represent opportunities for regeneration, which cannot be replicated on other sites in less</p>
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		strategic locations within the NP area. The identification of the SAXSFR Opportunity Zone has been led by the fact it is currently underused and rather run-down in appearance, occupies a prominent position and that it would lend itself to a much needed car parking use close to the town centre. The Policy or supporting text could usefully refer to the Flood Zone classification of 3a and identify that any future proposals on the site would need to comply with SCLP9.5 and NPPF and EA floodrisk guidance.
3	Historic England	Noted
4	National Highways	Noted
5	Natural England	Noted
6	Suffolk and North Essex Integrated Care Board	Supportive comments noted. No objection to the inclusion of suggested reference to the Town Council supporting the ICB to ensure sustainable provision of healthcare services for residents
7	Suffolk County Council	<p>Education – The siting of the primary school, in Policy SAXGN3.</p> <p>The SCC statement that “The purpose of the new primary school is to serve the needs of the additional children arising from the new Garden Neighbourhood” is in contradiction to the Local Plan, which at 12.298 states:</p> <p>“Consultation responses and engagement with Suffolk County Council have highlighted the need for increased primary school provision in the Saxmundham area. Limited capacity in existing schools is increasingly acting as a barrier to the future development of Saxmundham and the surrounding communities. The provision of a primary school with early years provision would support future development in this part of the plan area. The exact location of a new primary school with early years provision will need to be considered early in the masterplanning stages to ensure it is an integral and accessible part of the design and layout of the new development, and opportunities to benefit from shared facilities with Saxmundham Free School will be supported”.</p> <p>The need for a new primary school has from the outset been put by ESC on a broader basis, to serve a wider community and area than just the Garden Neighbourhood. ESC’s justification for the Garden Neighbourhood in Saxmundham was precisely around this point that there was a wider need, hence it was described as an ‘education-led development”.</p> <p>The location of the school should not be determined by reference to the GN population alone, but by reference to its best location for the town (including GN) and wider area also. The access route</p>

	<p>from the A12 needs to link across to the Employment Site, as defined in the Local Plan, which leads to it being towards the northern end. The Pigeon proposal in late 2020 was for the access route to be in the centre of the site, but link to their proposed vehicle service area/lorry park, not to the Employment Site Concept Masterplans and Design Code.</p> <p>The draft NP was amended in significant ways to take into account the points made including those of SCC at Regulation 14 stage.</p> <p>Area of LGS 1 Memorial Field is 1.7ha. No objection to this being added to the Appendix. See response to Examiner's Questions and the ESC comments re the SCLP map and the Suffolk Design Streets Guide.</p> <p>The Design Code and Master Plan are supporting documents that have been produced to inform the evolution of the Neighbourhood Plan. Their status is made clear in the Neighbourhood Plan. If required, the Town Council can approach AECOM through Locality to have the suggested changes to the documents made.</p>
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## Appendix 3: Chronology of the Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan Area

### The area for the Saxmundham Neighbourhood Plan

*In summary, at the outset in 2017, there was no proposal for a Garden Neighbourhood straddling two parishes. This was first mooted, but in a lesser way than in the final Local Plan, in July 2018. Saxmundham Town Council and NP Steering Group strongly argued against the location and scale of the Garden Neighbourhood, which in its first iteration would have seen most built development within Saxmundham parish. The ESC proposal for most built development to be on the west of the railway (thus more in Benhall) came in 2019, but the scale and location were contested by us through to the Public Examination in August-September 2019, and the decision was a year later (September 2020).*

### Chronology

**May 2017:** Saxmundham Town Council (STC) applied for the Plan area to be designated to cover the whole of the parish. This followed contact with the neighbouring parishes of Kelsale-cum-Carlton and Benhall, who however expressed no interest in a joint plan.

**June 2017:** Hopkins Homes delivered proposals for circa 250 homes plus primary school to be built on The Layers (all land within Saxmundham parish), sought decision from ESC that no Environmental Assessment was needed

**August 2017:** Saxmundham NP area designated by ESC, as per the application – for the whole Saxmundham parish

**August 2017:** ESC publishes ‘Issues & Options’ paper, which set out broad options for future growth in housing in particular in the district. Saxmundham featured in all 3 options as potential growth area, but scale differed widely

**September 2017:** STC written response to Issues & Options paper.

**June 2018:** Steering group members met with senior ESC planners, and were informed orally of proposal for Garden Neighbourhood to the south, but in very general terms and emphasizing no coalescence with Benhall

**July 2018:** ESC published 1<sup>st</sup> draft of Suffolk Coastal Local Plan (SCLP) – for first time, South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood formally proposed by ESC, straddling Saxmundham/Benhall parish boundary. However, the area was smaller (44 h) than later proposed, with far less in Benhall, and the indicative outline masterplan showed much development on The Layers, i.e. most within Saxmundham parish.

**September 2018:** STC response to 1<sup>st</sup> draft SCLP, contesting huge scale of development as disproportionate, also location (we proposed site up Church Hill and/or split site, for e.g. 500 homes), including strong opposition to development on The Layers

**January 2019:** final draft SCLP published: larger site going further south into Benhall with more development west of railway, and employment site moved across the A12. Though indicative masterplan showed no development on The Layers, the policy text was ambiguous.

**February 2019:** STC response to final draft SCLP, continuing to contest GN scale and location, and raising many other related issues on which we were not satisfied, as well as points of agreement. Argued for clearer policy for no built development on The Layers

<http://www.saxplan.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Response-for-STC-to-Local-Plan-19-Feb.pdf>

**May-June 2019:** Preparing & distributing questionnaires to 2200 households

**June – August 2019:** responding to Examiner’s written questions

**August - September 2019:** active participation in public examination of SCLP

**March 2020:** first Covid lockdown

**8<sup>th</sup> September 2020:** Inspector's conclusions with main modifications published; clarified (para 150-152) policy should make clear no built development on The Layers (open space / SANG only)

**23<sup>rd</sup> September 2020:** ESC formally approves SCLP, including provisions for GN that take on board the Inspector's modifications for it

**December 2020 – January 2021:** Pigeon (potential developer) holds online consultation on outline masterplan ideas. However, the consultation related to a substantially different area from that recently approved by ESC in the SCLP, excluding most land east of the railway but including a new large additional area on the west of the A12 for the (non SCLP) purpose of A12 service area/lorry park (proposals put forward by Pigeon and rejected by ESC in the SCLP process). There has therefore to date been a total absence of consultation on the Garden Neighbourhood masterplanning in relation to the SCLP site and policy. STC responded in detail to Pigeon, but received no feedback; the website for the consultation was taken down shortly after and there has been no further communication.

**From March 2022:** With agreement of Benhall Parish Council, STC asks ESC to change the boundary in their Community Governance Review, to include the whole of the GN site plus the additional site area across the A12 within Saxmundham parish, so that the whole development, if approved, falls within a single local administrative area. This has now been agreed by ESC.

#### **Contacts with Benhall Parish Council**

At the outset, Benhall and Kelsale had been asked if they wished to join in a common NP with Saxmundham but indicated that they did not wish to do so.

**November 2017:** the Chair of the Saxmundham NP Steering Group wrote to Chair of Benhall Parish Council suggesting (following Issues & Options paper) "a more structured relationship for the future." Benhall Councillors took part in our large public meeting on the NP that month, but did not follow up further. Benhall PC was offered a standing invitation to attend the NP Steering Group as observer but did not take this up.

**Late 2020:** A closer (informal) liaison has occurred after the Local Plan was approved and Pigeon's initial plans were unveiled in late 2020.

**May 2021:** Benhall Parish Council chair invited to be a regular attendee at the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group meetings but declined by email on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2021

**November 2021:** Benhall consulted on draft Regulation 14 Neighbourhood Plan and submitted comments. *(See Consultation Statement)*