

**Suffolk Design**  
**Project management update for SCOLT & Suffolk Design Project Team**

**21<sup>st</sup> July 2020**

**Introduction:** this note provides an update to SCOLT and the Suffolk Design project team on the status of work to date and sets out proposals for going forward. This note follows discussion between the Suffolk Growth Partnership Manager with both SCOLT and the Suffolk Heads of Planning (the client team) and will be shared with The Broads Authority, as a key partner in the Suffolk Design work. The note will also be uploaded on to the Suffolk Design website to inform our wider partners (e.g. Environment Agency, housebuilders, RIBA).

**Background:** initiated in July 2018, Suffolk Design is a local authority wide project to embed high quality functional design into developments in Suffolk. The work has been funded by a grant from MHCLG and is aligned to the design led approach Government has been promoting. The Suffolk work is focused on improving our engagement with all involved in the development process; from landowners to housebuilders; from town and parish councils to future residents; and relies on an integrated approach across local authorities including: planning, housing, communities, transport, floods, environment.

A full summary of all work to date and a list of decisions needed was prepared by Suffolk Growth circulated to Heads of Planning & SCOLT at the end of 2019. This summary is attached in the appendix for reference.

Since the end of 2019 Suffolk Growth has provided further updates on Suffolk Design to the Climate Change Directors Group (Feb 2019) and SCOLT (full meeting March 2019 / discussion with SCOLT Chair July 2019). Additionally, Suffolk Growth Portfolio Holders were given an overview of the Suffolk Design work at their July 2019 meeting.

**Suffolk Design products:** we currently have a number of “products” for Suffolk Design, including:

- *Design Charter:* High level document setting out design considerations that should be reflected in future developments.
- *Design Management Process:* officer & industry designed 11 step process setting out how / when different stages of development relate and the actions that need to be considered within each if we are to improve the quality of design. The process is designed to improve engagement in the development process (local authorities – developers – communities) and deliver improved outcomes. There is a key piece of work, Statement of Intent, that needs a commitment from Heads of Planning to progress and enable officers to work with developers / communities to trial the approach. This work was discussed on 20th July with all Suffolk Heads of Planning.
- *Community engagement protocol:* BMS led work with SALC, with the potential to roll out across Suffolk to set a “standard” for town & parish engagement.
- *Suffolk Design for Streets:* detailed design guidance and specifications for new roads / streets across Suffolk. (Member workshop: 21st July). This work will be going out for public consultation later in 2020.

**Going forward:** the work of Suffolk Design is currently at cross-roads and as a result the decision has been taken to “pause” the work of the Suffolk Design team for the next 4 months. The reasons for this decision are summarised in the following bullets:

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- i. To achieve the results that we are looking for there is more work needed to *socialise* the aims of Suffolk Design within each local authority, particularly with senior managers via Corporate Management Teams (CMTs) and local members. This will ensure the work reflects corporate priorities and is not viewed solely as a planning project. The Heads of Planning need to lead on this work, and integrate it with the discussions set out in point (iv) below.
- ii. Impact of COVID 19 on planning & development teams and their capacity to dedicate the required staff time to taking forward work on Suffolk Design, at the present time. Heads of Planning have confirmed that until there is some capacity within planning teams, work on the *Management Process* and specifically the *Statement of Intent* cannot proceed.
- iii. Government is reviewing national approaches to planning and development and it is likely that changes to the current system will be put forward in the forthcoming White Paper (expected Summer 2020). Whilst the work undertaken will remain useful, any changes are likely to impact on all elements of Suffolk Design work and Heads of Planning, along with other professional leads, need time to reflect and respond to national changes before making any further decisions on Suffolk Design work.
- iv. Much of the Design Charter is focused on improving connectivity with new developments (through improved transport links, with a focus on active travel) and improved approaches to mitigating climate change (through improved water use on sites and retention of existing environmental features). Both elements of work (active travel & climate change) are going to be significant features in Suffolk's recovery from COVID 19 and an integrated approach to these work strands is needed.

#### **What will this 'pause' mean for you?**

It must be stressed that Suffolk Design is being "paused", not stopped. The learning that has been gained over the past two years and the joint working that has developed between officers on the Suffolk Design project team has been significant and Suffolk Growth are keen that this is not lost.

- All scheduled Suffolk Design training events (focused on the Management Process) will be postponed until further notice. The input of Penny Mills, Luke Barber and Rachel Almond in developing and delivering these sessions has been significant and the positive feedback received from the officers that have attended demonstrates the need to continue with these sessions to embed behavioural / cultural changes across planning & development teams.
- All Suffolk Design project team meetings will be postponed until further notice.
- The Suffolk Design website ([www.suffolkdesign.uk](http://www.suffolkdesign.uk)) will be kept up to date and provides a useful resources for officers and our partners.
- The Suffolk Growth team will continue to liaise with the Climate Change Directors Group and SCOLT (Strategic Recovery Cell) as Suffolk's recovery plan is developed. The work that has been undertaken by Suffolk Design in considering both climate change mitigation measures and transport improvements is easily transferable and should be reflected in wider recovery thinking going forward.

- Work on Suffolk Design for Streets will continue and is likely to go out to further rounds of engagement and consultation in Autumn 2020. Again, much of the operational learning that has started through the wider Suffolk Design work is being enhanced by and is interchangeable with the streets work, and indeed, given the impact of COVID 19 and focus on active travel, the streets guidance will be providing a clearer pathway of how active travel can be supported through design.
- Heads of Planning will consider Suffolk Design work at their scheduled meeting in October 2020 and a further note will follow this meeting.

KC  
21/7/2020

## Appendix A: 2019 Recap

### *Suffolk Design* 2019 Recap & Next Steps

#### Purpose

Long term approach to embedding high quality design into developments in Suffolk. Design that is functional, not simply aesthetic, and delivers improved outcomes for both new and existing communities.

#### Approach

Develop a *Suffolk Design Charter* to secure a corporate commitment to the approach.

On-going development of “tools” to embed high quality design into each stage of the development cycle, clearly setting out the roles / responsibilities of those involved (e.g. LA officers, communities, housebuilders). Over the long term use these tools to deliver a consistent and efficient approach to place making, resulting in better outcomes for all.

Development of a Suffolk wide online facility, initially the *Suffolk Design* website, but longer-term consideration to be given to development of a SD portal.

#### Work in 2019

Key elements of work are summarised below. While listed as a series of activities it must be recognised that the impact of *Suffolk Design* will only be achieved if the approach is embedded throughout the wider place-making agenda across Suffolk – we are looking to change the way we grow our communities.

- Hemingway led consultancy commission concluded in April 2019. Key outputs from this work were:
  - o Launch event / study tours (3) / officer & member training (5) / masterclasses (4) / roundtables (4) / 4x research papers / other events & engagements
  - o Lessons learned: mixed views on the balance of vision vs. process that was expected from the work / critical to establish a core team of officers to take forward the work – Heads of Planning to lead on who attends sessions and contributes to the development of the approach.
- Establishment & management of Suffolk Design website ([www.suffolkdesign.uk](http://www.suffolkdesign.uk)) by SGPB.
- Re-focused consultancy commission with Design South East (Sept – Dec). Key outputs from this work have been:
  - o Establishment of an officer *cohort* to lead on the development of the “tools” for *Suffolk Design*. Inclusion of SCC Highways & Floods from outset. Significant buy-in to the process has been achieved by this group and the team ethos to develop consistent tools / shared approaches has been a major “win” for the project.
  - o 4x officer / applicant workshops to develop *Suffolk Design Management Process (SDMP)*. This is an 11-step process setting out where / when / how in the development cycle design should be considered and the improved outcomes that will be delivered.
  - o Draft *Suffolk Design Charter* – setting out the long-term approach to the work and a series of design characteristics that define “what good looks like in Suffolk”.

- 2x Roundtables: one with housebuilders & MHCLG to outline SDMP / one with CMT leads to outline *Suffolk Design Charter*.
- Suffolk officer led engagement with Parishes via SALC (workshops in Feb / Oct & major conference in Nov) – development of a DRAFT *Good Practice Guide to Engagement*.
- Government published National Design Guide (Oct 2019) and announced further work on a National Design Code to follow in early 2020.
- Suffolk officer led engagement with housebuilders / developers / architects / stakeholders via SGPB / wider growth work – e.g. July Housing Conference, RIBA presentations, East Suffolk Quality of Place Awards.
- Heads of Planning have met monthly in 2019 with *Suffolk Design* as a standing item on the agenda. Additionally, updates have been given to SGPB in May, June and November on the work programme and outcomes that *Suffolk Design* is looking to deliver. Individual Heads have also held internal discussions with teams / colleagues / management / members within their own organisations. Suffolk Health & Well-being Board were given a presentation on *Suffolk Design* in June with health organisations keen to engage further.
- Development of a brief for Highways Design Guidance, this work has been led by SCC, SGPB and D/B representatives. The guidance will “sit” under the SDMP and should be in draft form by late Spring 2020.

## **2020 Work programme & decisions needed**

A draft work programme for 2020 has been prepared and circulated to all Heads of Planning for comment. This work programme seeks the commitment of Heads to *Suffolk Design* and the staff resource needed to take forward the work on the SDMP – e.g. trialling it with housebuilders / further development of “tools” to be used by planning officers / growth colleagues. Additionally staff and member training sessions (8 in total) have been provisionally scheduled to embed the approach across all teams and Cabinets.

Key decisions that need to be taken in 2020 are:

- Are Suffolk LAs committed to a *Suffolk Design Charter*?
  - A draft *Charter* has been discussed with Heads / CMT leads. The consultants are currently re-drafting reflecting on comments received and this revised document will be discussed with Heads in mid-January 2020.
  - Once finalised will the *Charter* be agreed at a corporate level? Can it add value to the wider growth narrative giving Members, communities, developers, officers and stakeholders a consistent message on what they can expect in term of future place-making in Suffolk?
- Should the *Suffolk Design Management Process* be adopted as SPG?
  - At this stage it is not proposed to adopt the *SDMP* as Supplementary Planning Guidance. This is largely as a result of the current progress of Local Plans. Heads have discussed the potential for the *SDMP* to be adopted over the longer term, but no consensus has yet been reached. If there is agreement to adopt then can a timeline and work plan for this work be established?
- Can we “test” the SDMP in advance?

- A number of housebuilders / developers have indicated their commitment to “trial” the *SDMP* in 2020. This would take the form of working through the *SDMP* from their current position (i.e. we use a mix of sites, some nearing completion / some very early stage) to test how the steps work and whether each of the stakeholders in the wider development process realises the anticipated benefits.
- How can we broaden engagement with *Suffolk Design*?
  - SALC have been increasingly engaged in the work but we are still only engaging with a small number of parishes. There are parishes that are not members of SALC and areas of Suffolk that do not have parishes (notably Ipswich). How can we broaden community engagement? What about wider public sector engagement – both within authorities and partners (e.g. health, school builds)?