

1 September 2017

Ms Therese Coffey MP
House of Commons
London
SW1 0AA

Dear Ms Coffey

Suffolk Preservation Society – A ten point plan to re-focus our broken planning system for the benefit of Suffolk Coastal

The Suffolk Preservation Society is the county's leading heritage champion working to protect and promote the special landscape and heritage qualities of Suffolk. The Society was established in 1929 and is an independent, apolitical and self-funding charity which works through the planning system to protect and enhance the quality of the countryside, towns and villages of Suffolk. We employ qualified town planning and heritage planning officers and supplement our professional capacity with qualified urban design, landscape architecture, policy and archaeology expertise.

The SPS believes that one of the Government's priorities should be to re-focus the planning system. In recent years we have witnessed a building programme that too often blighted communities and created environmental and heritage damage, but with ever increasing housing unaffordability – the worst of all worlds. A good planning system is key to delivering well-planned housing and satisfied communities. **In Suffolk Coastal we are experiencing a policy failure which is leading to unsustainable housing development pressure across the district. There are also development threats to the fragile landscape of the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty including Sizewell C. We are also concerned about the emerging trend of “enabling development” schemes such as St Felix School Reydon, Woodbridge School and across the Alde and Ore Estuary area. Clearly, it is time to urgently address the shortcomings of our planning system if we are to safeguard our natural and historic built environment while meeting the demonstrable need for development.**

Below are 10 key points which The Society believes that Government must support to deliver improvements in this vitally important area:

1. **Reinvest in our planning departments** - while local authorities have been shrinking in size, planning capacity and expertise has drained away. Too many of our Suffolk councils have out of date local plans and the resources to facilitate this vital work must be made available by speeding up the delivery of uplifted planning fees and ring-fenced spending on planning. This additional resourcing must be targeted to provide fully resourced conservation, landscape and urban design teams.
2. **Urgent revision of the National Planning Policy Framework** is required to moderate the harmful impacts of the presumption in favour of sustainable development for those councils

who do not have an up to date local plan. We are losing too much of our countryside to unplanned, commercially driven planning consents.

3. **Launch a renewed focus on regenerating our towns** by building on available brownfield, derelict or underused land. This policy relieves pressure on previously undeveloped land leaving it for countryside, agriculture, nature and well-being. The separation of town and country is a long-respected and sustainable planning principle.
4. **Encourage co-operation between local authorities** to ensure that essential infrastructure can be delivered strategically to support large scale housing development.
5. **Promote truly affordable housing** linked to infrastructure needs for those communities accommodating growth.
6. **Plan for “beauty” through high quality design** - the overwhelming response to the *#SuffolkBeauty* photographic competition, run by SPS last year, shows the widespread support for attractiveness and distinctiveness to be part of our built environment. Places that are well-planned are pleasing to the eye and uplifting to the spirit and promote satisfaction and well-being.
7. **Ensure that Neighbourhood Plans are given full statutory weight** in the decision making process so that local people have confidence in the validity of the process. There is growing concern in communities that their plans are given scant regard by local authorities when determining planning applications.
8. **Support local authorities to use their statutory powers** to take appropriate action against owners of neglected listed buildings and so conserve our built heritage. The better use of Compulsory Purchase Orders would facilitate the release of land banked and stalled sites, thereby relieving pressure on our countryside.
9. **Deliver positive fiscal change for heritage assets** through a more simple tax regime for repair, maintenance and conservation. Presently, work on historic buildings including repair is subject to 20 per cent VAT – no VAT is charged on new build. Perversely, this creates an incentive to demolish old character buildings rather than maintain them and is resulting in avoidable environmental damage.
10. **Promote Heritage Lottery Funding for our churches** - the Government should commit to the future of the *Listed Places of Worship* grant scheme so that VAT can continue to be recovered for those important buildings, and look to extend this scheme to other historic assets.

The Society is committed to campaigning for high quality development which provides the places in which people want to live and work. We listen to the increasing concerns of our members and we call upon you, as our local MP to work with us in fighting for effective, fair and high quality development. Please do get in touch if you would like more information or to discuss any part of this letter. I thank you for taking the time from your busy schedule to read this.

Yours sincerely

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cc Secretary of State Rt Hon Sajid Javid