

# The East Suffolk Planning Alliance (ESPA) Newsletter



**October 2024**

*Distribution to ESPA Affiliates across East Suffolk 😊*

## **ESPA Steering Committee meets East Suffolk Council Chief Executive and Planners in the first *Community Engagement Group***

Dear ESPA Affiliates,

We are delighted to announce that the Community Engagement Group (CEG) met at East Suffolk House, Melton on 3rd October 2024. The CEG will be triennial and the next meeting will be in January 2025. The CEG was well attended, including the ESPA steering committee members, East Suffolk Council Chief Executive, ESC Strategic Director, ESC Head of Planning and Coastal Management, two District Councillors, Hedgeley and Langdon-Morris (with ESPA).

We want to send our thanks to our ESPA affiliates for submitting questions for this first CEG meeting, and we look forward to your future review, response, comment and input. The main takeaway from this initial CEG meeting is:

- The CEG Terms of Reference have been mutually agreed; ESPA is arranging for an official signing with the Chief Executive (complemented by a press release).
- We agreed that guest speakers can attend future CEG meetings, e.g. Suffolk County Council Highways, The Environment Agency, Community Planning Alliance, *et al.* We welcome this broadening out of our ongoing NPPF/planning discussions that will affect our district in the future.
- The CEG draft minutes have been completed and await final approval, they will be sent to all affiliates as soon as possible. We look forward to your review & comment.

We were recently asked by East Suffolk Council Planning to share a list of our ESPA affiliates. As you know we contacted you about this and 22 affiliates agreed that would be acceptable. However, as we do not have a majority response on this issue, we have decided that it would be preferable if you could contact East Suffolk Planning by email: [planning@eastsoffolk.gov.uk](mailto:planning@eastsoffolk.gov.uk) if you so wish to indicate your ESPA affiliation.

See a list of documents below to keep you updated on where we are as an advocacy group!

Regards, ESPA Steering Committee

## ESPA. Questions for the Community Engagement Group meeting (3-10-24)

Preamble to our questions.

The majority of planning applications are approved with minimal fuss - however, there are some more controversial applications that attract significant well founded objections that have not seemingly been addressed by ESCP. This is the essence of why ESPA is in existence.

1. ESPA has links with many resident's groups across East Suffolk and also nationally (some established many years ago, e.g. Kirton and Trimley Community Action Group; Save Our Country Spaces and Community Planning Alliance). Do the East Suffolk council planning officers have any thoughts, observations about why these voluntary advocacy groups have formed and remain active?
2. Where does ESPA fit as an advocacy group driving the agenda for the CEG under the agreed terms of reference within the East Suffolk Council governance and constitution and other forums?
3. What do East Suffolk Council planning officers feel is ESPA's 'value addition/unique selling point' in the planning process across our district, e.g. assisting in the review of the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan in January 2025?
4. Can East Suffolk Council planning officers provide an update on the revised National Planning Policy Framework (not forgetting LURA)? This framework forms the foundation for development across our region and this may change planning processes in the district. This is where past and present concerns are raised by our affiliates.
5. Given that we face further ongoing climate / environmental challenges, ESPA would like to understand how other important state and private institutions will be more closely incorporated in future planning process, e.g. Suffolk County Council Highways ( infrastructure), Environment Agency (flooding), Essex and Suffolk Water (water supply), Anglian Water (effluent offtake). ESPA is also concerned about community (Town and Parish Councils) led neighbourhood plans, their implementation, meaningful feedback from ESCP, and face to face engagement.
6. There is a perception that once a developer has received outline planning permission they can often proceed with impunity, e.g. removing ancient hedgerows; changing the number of promised affordable homes in the scheme and ignoring designated routes onto the construction site. Will ESC Planning enforcement be strengthened to better oversee and ensure best practice and adherence to agreed planning conditions with developers?

# Terms of Reference: East Suffolk Council & East Suffolk Planning Alliance for Community Engagement Group (CEG)

**1.0** This document refers to the relationship between East Suffolk Council (ESC) and the East Suffolk Planning Alliance (ESPA) participating in a Community Engagement Group (CEG).

**MISSION:** To build transparent bridges of communication between East Suffolk Council and district residents, especially as it relates to National Planning legislation and frameworks and its implementation within East Suffolk.

This relates particularly to the relationship between East Suffolk Council Planning (ESCP), Planning and Building Control, statutory partners and ESPA and affiliates. To be more aware of, and understand planning policies, decisions taken and implementation actions.

## 1.1 In the CEG ESPA will:

- through its steering committee members, represent its Affiliates in the CEG forum
- collect and collate ESPA Affiliates questions, and also wider community planning questions, for submission, discussion, escalation, resolution within the CEG forum
- aim to represent the full geography of the East Suffolk District as much as possible
- provide a forum for our Affiliates to both question and express their views on ESC planning processes, interpretation and implementation of strategic planning policy
- support the five-year review of the Suffolk Coastal and Waveney Local Plans for an East Suffolk Local Plan which is scheduled to begin in January 2025 (subject to plan making reforms)

## 1.2 In the CEG ESCP will:

- update ESPA / CEG forum attendees on latest planning policy, it's interpretation and ongoing implementation
- present the ongoing review of the Local Plans for discussion within the forum
- provide feedback against the pre-submitted questions raised by ESPA and its Affiliates

## 1.3 The CEG will:

- initially meet tri-annually and be hosted at ESC offices
- have a pre-agreed meeting agenda
- have minutes taken and a draft agreed with ESC / ESPA, before sign-off and wider distribution
- from time-to-time host guest speakers to the CEG, including Technical Experts and other relevant Agencies
- agree future CEG meeting dates beforehand, as documented in the ongoing minutes
- be chaired by an ESC councillor
- not replace or be used in place of other forms of established and necessary engagement, such as Town and Parish Forums and statutory consultations
- consider this Terms of Reference as work in progress and updated as necessary by mutual agreement. **Agreed**

**for East Suffolk Council**

**Agreed for East Suffolk Planning Alliance**

..... **Date:**

..... **Date:**

## Supporting Notes to the CEG Terms of Reference

### 2.1 What is a CEG?

A Community Engagement Group is a forum where our local governance and resident organisations can meet, identify, share and discuss important planning issues. It is convened to foster better mutual understanding of local government strategic planning and decision making, planning procedures by the communities that are affected, and how they can be fully engaged during discussions and conclusions to implement these decisions.

### 2.2 Key principles that will underpin the CEG.

**Mutual Respect:** the CEG is a place to question, listen, understand and we should do this respectfully. We will not agree on everything, but the forum is based on open sharing and [grounded in the Nolan principles](#) and cannot be undermined by allegation or abuse.

There may be material shared for the benefit of the CEG in meetings which might not yet be at a stage of publication and therefore any request for material to not be shared outside of the meeting will be respected (with the understanding that it is because of timing, not long-term privacy).

**Listen, Learn and question:** The CEG is an opportunity to debate different perspectives on land use in our District. The CEG will provide a forum to discuss and broaden public awareness and understanding of the purpose of planning process and functions. In addition, to explore methods of improved information sharing, and approaches to disseminating this across the community.

**Engagement:** At its heart a CEG must foster a shared sense of wanting the best development for the people and communities of East Suffolk, including the right homes in the right places. This is an opportunity to widely engage across the community on the planning factors feeding into this.

**Understanding:** There is an opportunity for all participants to learn and understand more about the motivations, feelings, constraints and context of other participants and organisations.

**System wide:** The CEG needs to work at a generic, systems level. In some cases, it may need to refer to specific examples to learn from and inform future system design.

**Sovereignty:** The CEG will be a non-political forum for discussion, where opinions and interpretation may differ between the representative institutions and resident advocacy groups

**Accountability:** Council Planning Policy function must achieve objectives within a parliamentary mandated legislative framework. In addition, organisations such as the Planning Inspectorate consider 'compliance' within this framework. There must be clear and transparent communication and accountability.

**Limitations:** Land use planning is a heavily regulated function, seeking to give all participants in the system the right opportunity to influence. Current planning legislation and NPPF present the frameworks within which planning must operate. This is a reason why ESPA exists as a broad-based planning advocacy group to avoid communities feeling or being marginalised and excluded from opportunities to influence planning decisions.

**Collaboration:** The CEG could provide a constructive meeting space for ESPA and others to collaborate with East Suffolk officers, councillors, statutory consultees such as, other local government institutions, housing developers, relevant national organisations, e.g. the Community Planning Alliance.

**Diversity:** CEG members will work proactively to increase the diversity of participation in the discussion and wider planning process.

### 2.3 Why a CEG?

The formation of ESPA in February 2024 as a community-based advocacy group was due in large part to the

many 'why' questions grounded in and around district and national planning.

ESPA Affiliates consider what we need are the right homes in the right places, that may not always mean the construction of new builds. With a new government, ESPA hopes that their policy pledges do not embrace the building of ever-increasing numbers of unsuitable, unaffordable homes in the wrong locations.

ESPA considers that a functioning and transparent CEG forum will help to facilitate communication, increased transparency in decision making and dialogue between our institutions, decision makers and communities. There are local examples, which include Ipswich Borough Council, fostering a forum with communities and also the Joint Parishes Transport Initiative (JPTI) hosted by East Suffolk Council.

East Suffolk Council is the Local Planning Authority and must work in compliance with the National Planning Policy Framework and national legislation and statutory guidance. It must produce a compliant Local Plan and manage the delivery of that Local Plan balancing a wide number of views and demands from local communities and residents alongside those delivering and enabling homes and business, local partners and statutory consultees.

East Suffolk Council considers that a functioning and transparent CEG forum will help to deepen understanding of the planning system, provide a positive forum for discussion and strengthen relationships between the Council, communities and residents. It will complement the work the Council does with Town and Parish Councils, including the twice-yearly Town and Parish Forums; the Planning and Coastal Management Newsletter and site-specific activity such as Brightwell Lakes Community Forum.

#### **2.4 Where** will the CEG meet - logistics

The CEG will meet at East Suffolk House (Melton) or Riverside Council office (Lowestoft) tri-annually This will be facilitated by ESC who would also arrange for minutes to be taken (either manually or electronically) and distributed to CEG members within 30 days.

#### **2.5 Who** will attend the CEG meetings?

The CEG chairperson will be an elected politician. In addition to ESPA steering committee representatives, East Suffolk Council will nominate senior executives to represent the Council and its planning community, associate agency and third parties as appropriate.

#### **2.6 How** will ESC & ESPA Affiliates be engaged?

**ESPA will represent affiliates who may be invited to the CEG to address a specific topic. ESC may invite specialist agencies and associates to address specific topics of interest on an ad-hoc basis.**

**Questions:** ESPA will invite its affiliates to submit questions which will be reviewed and collated by the steering committee. These questions will be shared with ESC at least three weeks in advance of a CEG. This will allow ESC officers to review the submitted questions and either approve or suggest alternatives that will need to be mutually agreed. Questions covered in the meetings will be responded to through the minutes rather than full written responses, unless mutually agreed to do so in the meeting.

#### **2.7 END of supporting notes**