Opening Statement for the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan
Examination Hearings

August 2019

1. Thank you for the opportunity to say a few words at the start of these hearings into the new Suffolk Coastal Local Plan.

2. My name is David Ritchie and I am the Cabinet Member for Planning and Coastal Management for East Suffolk Council. As many of you will be aware, the former Suffolk Coastal and Waveney District Councils had been working in partnership since 2008. This naturally led to combining the two Councils into one and on the 1 April this year one new super District called East Suffolk was created. But for now, our focus and the focus of these hearings is on the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan which covers the geographic area of the former Suffolk Coastal District.

3. The Suffolk Coastal Local Plan plans for the period 2018 to 2036 and is the culmination of 3 years hard and diligent work from a considerable number of people. Some of these officers will be representing the Council at these hearings.

4. The Council is proud of its submitted Local Plan and considers it lays out a robust, resilient and sound spatial development strategy for the former Suffolk Coastal part of the District.

The Plan

5. The Council consider that the Plan meets all its statutory obligations, not least the statutory Duty to Cooperate. It has been prepared in accordance with the Local Development Scheme and meets the requirements of the Statement of Community Involvement.

6. With respect to the Duty to Cooperate, the plan area has strong functional economic and housing market relationships with neighbouring Ipswich Borough, Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. To this end, there has been considerable and on-going collaboration between the four local authorities and Suffolk County Council to address common cross boundary issues, particularly in relation to housing, employment, infrastructure and protection of the natural environment.
7. The Plan has been through public and stakeholder consultation and contributions have been made from a wide range of individuals and organisations at the various stages of preparation. I would like to express my thanks to them all for taking the time to participate in the process of plan-making. The contributions have been invaluable in shaping the Final Draft version of the plan.

8. The plan sets down a vision, strategic priorities, a strategy and policies and proposals for enabling sustainable development to be achieved across what is a diverse plan area with a mix of urban, rural and coastal communities, many of which are set within or adjacent to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and in close proximity to estuaries and sites of European and international nature conservation value.

9. An important thread running throughout the plan and its policies is to improve the health and well-being of the existing and future population and ensure a high quality of life.

10. More specifically, with respect to the local economy, the plan contains a mix of new employment opportunities to support a range of businesses from the food and farming sector to the Port of Felixstowe. Policies continue to support an already successful tourism sector, whilst protecting the sensitive natural and historic environment.

11. The plan provides an ambitious approach for the delivery of new housing, including affordable housing to meet the needs of the plan area. A mix of housing is proposed, to address the wide diversity of needs and in particular those of our aging population.

12. The Plan seeks to create new special places to live that existing and future residents will be proud to call home. These take the form of new garden neighbourhoods to the north of Felixstowe and South of Saxmundham that seek to raise the quality of design, are inclusive and provide the necessary infrastructure alongside the development.

13. The provision of new infrastructure to support the delivery of growth is an essential part of the Plan’s approach to achieving sustainable development and responds to strong local opinion on this matter.
14. This plan focuses more growth in the rural areas than in the past, in recognition of the importance of sustaining rural communities and taking advantage of advances in digital technology.

15. Maintaining and enhancing the vitality and viability of the District’s town centres, namely Felixstowe, Woodbridge, Leiston, Framlingham, Saxmundham and Aldeburgh is a key objective of the Plan. Central to the aim of supporting the vitality and viability of town centres is the protection and promotion of the considerable heritage present in these towns.

16. The plan seeks to safeguard the high quality natural, built and historic environment of the plan area in urban, rural and coastal areas. High quality design, landscape and townscape character are all important elements of the plan, as are the protection and enhancement of biodiversity, together with mitigating the impacts of and adapting to Climate Change.

17. Crucially the delivery achievements of the Plan will need to be monitored in order to gauge the success of the Plan and to inform its further review. To this end a clear approach to the delivery and monitoring of the Plan is set down.

18. In terms of what this Local Plan does not include; many of you will be aware that Suffolk County Council has recently published a consultation on alternative route options for an Ipswich Northern Route. This is an early stage consultation and is due to close on 13 September. I would like to clarify that consideration of the route options and any potential future associated housing growth, do not form part of this Suffolk Coastal Local Plan currently being examined. Should the Ipswich Northern Route project continue to be progressed, any route options and associated housing growth will need to be considered through a future Local Plan review. The Council have provided a note for the Inspector in this respect and this can be found on the Examination pages of the Council’s website.

19. Likewise, Sizewell C proposals are not included in this Local Plan. EDF energy has recently published a stage 4 consultation that closes on 27 September but the timing of the project is not yet confirmed. As a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project decisions in respect of this new power station will be made at a national level, with the Council being a Statutory Consultee. To this end, this Plan is cognisant of this project and also other potential major energy infrastructure projects and so includes a Major Energy Infrastructure
policy that seeks to influence decisions and ensure the most successful outcomes are achieved.

19. That just leaves me to say that the Council welcomes the independent Examination of the Local Plan and looks forward to actively engaging in positive discussion with the Inspector and participants throughout the hearing sessions.