

Summary of North Felixstowe Citizens Panel – Workshop 5

Held on:
17th June 2024

Present

Name	Inits.	Company	Inits.
Jeni Watts	JW	East Suffolk Council	ESC
Seb Burchell	SB	LDA Design	LDA
Tom Shopland	TS	LDA Design	LDA
James Goldberg	JG	East Suffolk Council Citizens Panel	ESC CP

Activity

On Monday the 17th June, LDA Design and East Suffolk Council hosted the fifth and final workshop of the North Felixstowe Citizens Panel. The focus of the first part of the session was to explore the topic of Meanwhile Uses. In the second part of the session, the Panel were asked to revisit the process and to identify things they would like to have spoken about more throughout the process. LDA Design and East Suffolk Council used the final part of the session to discuss the impact that the Panel had made during the process and how they could continue to do this in the future.

The session began with the lead facilitator introducing the agenda for the session before handing over to Seb, an Urban Designer and Citizens Panel facilitator, from LDA Design. After running through the presentation and the conversation guidelines (a list of rules to ensure the Panel and speakers could engage in meaningful, courteous and constructive debate) Seb explained what a Meanwhile Use was (the temporary utilisation of under-utilised or disused land or space), their importance and their constraints. He then showcased several different and contrasting Meanwhile Uses to demonstrate their flexibility. He also stressed the importance of Meanwhile Uses and their surrounding context when exploring examples. Examples included community gardens situated within disused car parks, container shopping centres, and repurposed vacant shops. – *these examples cannot be shared with the public due to photo copyright.*

At the end of Seb's presentation, he asked the Panel to breakout into groups and to undertake a visioning activity to come up with some Meanwhile Use ideas for the neighbourhood. Seb gave the groups 3 different locations on the site to suggest Meanwhile Uses for. Each location was situated in a different context, with specific strengths and weaknesses. It was suggested that the Meanwhile Uses should consider these strengths and weaknesses. The following ideas were generated by each group and presented to the rest of the Panel at the end of the activity.

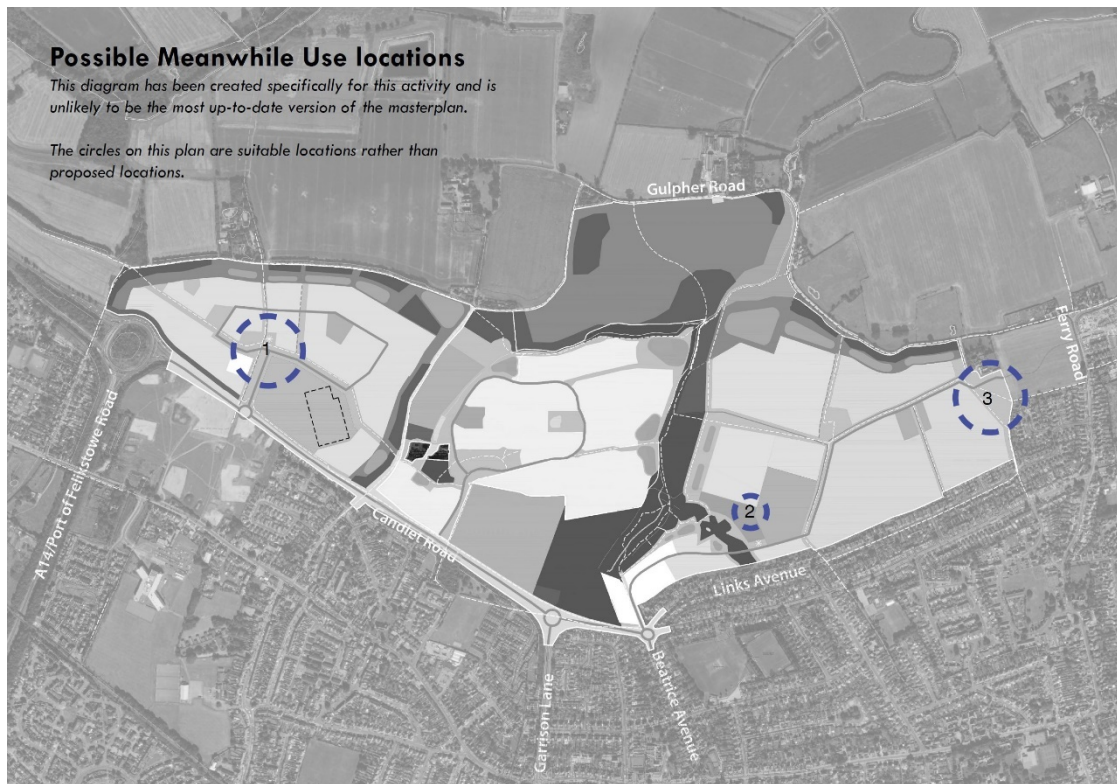


Image 1 illustrates the plausible locations for a Meanwhile Use on the site. These locations are not fixed and were chosen for solely for this activity.

Group 1:

Location 1:

- This group identified that Location 1 would be the most suitable for a Meanwhile Use.
- They suggested that a community use would be the most appropriate.
- They noted that there could be problems with the mixed-use nature of the road, e.g navigating between building traffic and visitors.

Location 2:

- The group suggested this area is prone to waterlogging and is limited to the number of uses possible. This area is also naturally used so therefore would not need revitalising.
- Respective of these suggestions, a forest school was suggested as a suitable use.
- Equally a use with minimal intrusion would be suitable for the area.

Location 3:

- It was suggested the dirt or groundworks that would be excavated during the construction in this part of the site, should be reused for bicycle dirt tracks.
- The group recommended that other uses should be avoided due to access and land quality.

Group 2:

- Their spokesperson firstly stated that none of the land would be disused and therefore the idea of a Meanwhile Use would be challenging to comprehend.
 - *Whilst this group made a good point, Meanwhile Uses can also be situated on under-utilised pieces of land or areas.*

Location 1:

- The group suggested that a children's playground, indoor soft play or a picnic area could be appropriate.
- They thought a container park similar to Beach Street could be suitable. This could attract retail, convenience and small business locations.
- Kiosks and cafes were suggested considering the location and surrounding uses.
- The group also suggested that a conference space, adult learning centre and outlet shopping would all be suitable in this area. These were things that were all identified as assets that were currently missing in Felixstowe.

Location 2:

- A community farm was considered as a good Meanwhile Use for this location. However, it was suggested that this would be better at Goslings Farm or Gulpher Farm towards the north of the site.
- There was a suggestion to leave the area as a park, but to modernise it.
- Equally an outdoor theatre or a woodland school was regarded as suitable. Both things should be designed in accordance with the Woodland Trust.

Location 3:

- It was suggested that this area would be the least suitable for a Meanwhile Use.
- Again, a children's playground was suggested. This could contain or be accompanied by natural wooden structures or a forest school, big country park, or an adventure playground.
- Cafe and kiosks were also recommended for this location.
- Bike tracks were identified as a good Meanwhile Use considering the landscape-led context surrounding this area.

Group 3:

Location 1:

- This group recommended that a community hub could be created that could include larger retail brands such as Marks & Spencers.
- Other suggestions within the community hub included start-up style business workspaces, furniture makers, t-shirt printers, part exchange/recycle tabletop space, conference centre space, light business or makers' space.
- The community hub could also feature apprenticeship, training, upskilling, adult learning (including support those with disabilities).
- This group enquired whether the Freeport or tax-free shopping designation could be explored.

Location 2:

- A community farm was suggested for this location.
- The group recommended that an amphitheatre or an outdoor theatre could be suitable that would feature local theatre companies such as the Red Rose chain production or local story telling.
- A woodland education use was identified as a suitable use. Habitat training and woodland management could form part of the woodland education.
- The group said any Meanwhile Use near the woodland should consider engagement with companies like Groundworks and/or the Woodland Trust. These uses could also provide an opportunity for additional planting (with the support of local volunteers from local organisations).

Location 3:

- The group suggested that in this area, once again, there could be mountain biking trails or BMX tracks similar to the example at Kentford near Newmarket.
- Equally a skate park could be suitable considering the surrounding context.

Group 4:

Location 1:

- This group caveated their suggestions with the presumption that a building will be built.
- They suggested that the main constraint with the location was the transport and access.
- This ground also suggested that a community use or something that leaned towards intergenerationality would be suitable in this location.
- A skate park and cycle track (BMX style) was deemed as suitable for this location. An undefined set of youth facilities were also mentioned.
- Something like a shared resource library or a cafe was deemed as a sensible use.
- The Men's Shed concept was deemed appropriate considering the context of the location.
- A community allotment was identified as a plausible Meanwhile Use for this location.

Location 2:

- The group suggested that the main constraint with the location was the staffing for the educational offer.
- All age education was deemed as appropriate for this area - specifically things like rural skills.
- The group suggested there should be a range of activities to prevent loneliness and isolation. These could be sports or gardening based.
- Intergenerational activities could also be present in this location.

Location 3:

- The legal liabilities of this landscape-led location were deemed as the main constraint.
- Group 4 suggested activities such as football or boule rinks for this area.
- They also thought a play space, or a sustainable pond could be appropriate.
- Finally, they suggested a range of intergenerational activities.

- Break -

After some lunch, the second half of the session began with the lead facilitator from LDA Design, giving a presentation recapping the entire Citizens Panel process. Firstly, he revisited how the Citizens Panel were recruited and the structure of the process, for example identifying the topics covered within each of the workshops. He then spoke through the format and outcomes of each session, providing an overview of the recommendations process.

The recommendation process - Where the facilitators had asked the Panel for recommendations relating to the topic they had been speaking about in that session. The facilitators would then pass these recommendations to the design team, and they would either accept, remain undecided, or reject the recommendations, with an accompanying explanation as to why they had either been accepted or rejected. These recommendations would be relayed back to the Citizens Panel (by email or in-person). In situations where many recommendations had been generated by the Panel, they were sometimes asked to vote on their highest priority recommendations.

The facilitator then spoke about the thematic analysis that the facilitators and design team had been undertaking between each session. This process consisted of thematically coding each Citizens Panel recommendation. The lead facilitators summarised the structure of each session and the key themes that had emerged from each session. They were as follows:

- Session 1:
 - A common starting point
 - This session consisted of a Q&A and a visioning activity. Speakers included Paul Wood, Head of Economic Development and Regeneration, and David Bell, Associate Town Planner at LDA Design.
 - Paul Wood spoke about ESC policy context within the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan and the intention of submitting an outline planning application at the end of 2024.
 - David Bell mentioned that a design code would be submitted as part of the application, and this would be the place where their recommendations could be featured.
 - Topics discussed within the Q&A included calculating the demand on existing services (NHS and Education), what the term the Leisure-Led meant, how the development would be phased and how infrastructure would be developed alongside that.
 - Other questions included how the Citizens Panel could impact the process, how the site was allocated in the Local Plan, and how the town calculated existed housing need.

- Session 2:
 - Green and Blue infrastructure – how green and blue spaces look and feel.
 - Speakers included Judith Sykes, Sustainability Consultant at Expedition UK, and Jane Healy of Transition Woodbridge.
 - Tom Evans, Urban Designer at LDA Design also provided insight into the design decisions made around green and blue spaces in the masterplan.

- Some of the most discussed ‘recommendation themes’ from this session were:
 - **Landscape** - Specifically the need for early planting of trees and landscape in green spaces rather than seeing construction vehicles. The importance of the landscape extended to the retention of hedgerows along Gulpher Road, the potential creation of a community orchard and planning that encourages play.
 - **Facilities** – Picnic sites and natural seating were identified as important aspects of the landscape, as well as a community hub for green projects. The inclusion of a community farm, forest school and activities for all ages (such as a skate park or pump track) were also recommended by the Panel.
 - **Destinations** – The Panel suggested there should be elevated viewpoints to maximise views over the Deben Estuary. A boardwalk over the proposed wetland area was also deemed appropriate. A natural amphitheatre and performance space was also recommended, in addition to a bird hide.
 - **Connectivity** – The Panel recommended creating a well-connected walking and cycling network that was effectively signposted to all parks, allotments and amenity spaces. Wellbeing/running routes from The Grove around the Northern Open Space were identified as a priority, as was the need to keep Gulpher Road as a quiet lane was also deemed important.
 - **Accessibility** – Eco-friendly, graded all weather paths in The Grove were earmarked as priorities for some of the Panel. Wheelchair friendly paths that didn’t damage the woodland were also suggested by the Panel. Finally, securing the allotments from vandalism with fences and hedgerows was also deemed to be important.

- Session 3:
 - Active Travel and Connectivity
 - Jon Tricker, Placemaking Director at PJA Transport Consultants, provided an overview of the transport objectives for the projects. These objectives included the site’s approach to sustainable transport and managing car use. PJA also discussed the options with dealing with Candlet Road.
 - Local speakers included Andrew Casey of Quiet Lanes Suffolk and Richard Holland at Felixstowe Travelwatch.
 - Some of the themes that emerged from this session included:
 - **Active Travel** – The Panel recommended ensuring the new neighbourhood should be connected across Candlet Road, by a foot/cycle bridge or by a ground-level pedestrian crossing. It was further recommended that the development should have improved cycle facilities and routes, including bike hire, and secure parking. The group suggested that walking and cycling routes should be safe, attractive and segregated from the road. Some members of group also suggested that a green barrier should be provided either side of Candlet Road.
 - **Traffic Control** – The Panel asked the design team to acknowledge that Candlet Road is the gateway to Felixstowe

within their design. They also recommended that there shouldn't be any additional traffic lights in Candlet Road. Better signage to key destinations was identified as a way manage to traffic on Candlet Road by some members of the Panel. The group agreed that the key routes to focus on within and on the edge of the development would be Candlet Road, Beatrice Avenue and Garrison Lane.

- **Public Transport** – The group recommended that the development should include things such as car sharing schemes and improved bus frequency to important parts of the town and beyond.

- Session 4:
 - Housing and Land Uses
 - Avison Young, presented their research about the socio-economics of Felixstowe and the current demand for housing and non-residential uses.
 - Sue Downs from Community Action Suffolk spoke about Community-Led Housing.
 - Peter Corrie, Director of Urban Design and LDA, ran through updates on the emerging masterplan, including information about land uses, density and character areas.
 - Some of the most discussed themes that emerged from that session included:
 - **Community-Led Housing** – There was an appetite for community-led housing amongst the group. They suggested that this model would be appropriate for young people and downsizers. They stressed the need for the Council to undertake a housing needs survey, with the subsequent results publicised for the public to be made aware of. It was also suggested that the Council should appoint a project officer to pursue this approach to housing.
 - **Housing Design** – High quality homes with low maintenance was a high priority for the group. They recommended that homes should have an individualistic style, such as Almhouses instead of the toy-town standard house types. More communal gardens were recommended by some members of the group. The group agreed developers should be accountable for sustainability standards, whilst they suggested that the masterplan should be subject to external quality assessments by Suffolk Design Review Panel.
 - **House types** – Some members of the group suggested they had a preference to 1/2/3 bed homes over 4/5 beds.

All of the recommendations and responses (from the LDA design team, subconsultants and East Suffolk Council) from each session, can be found here in the session summaries section on the [website](#).

After the facilitators presentation recapping the Citizens Panel process, the Panel were then asked to split off into groups to identify whether they felt that any topics had been missed throughout the process, why these things were important, and what this would include. The groups identified the following:

Group 1:

- *Topic identified:* When/where was the decision made to say that Eastward Ho was a development area (some of the panel members believe that this is against the local plan), where it was a designated a community area and could not be built on. A school is not a community asset.
- *Why is this important?* Eastward Ho (is) important to the community, keeping (it) as open natural use. Alternative plots within Felix(stowe) maybe better served for second primary site.
- *What would this include?* Overwhelmingly against building on site, take this on board.

- *Topic identified:* What about Community Centre like at Kesgrave, which is badly needed by Felixstowe. Kesgrave Community Centre was built because of the development at Grange Farm.
- *Why is this important?* Because residents need places to meet and a larger community multi-use space.
- *What would this include?* (include) future Citizens Panels further on in the planning process and development of site. This would also include looking at Kesgrave and other working successful space.

- *Topic identified:* Community infrastructure like police, health, fire (public services), libraries, doctors, etc MIU – increase.
- *Why is this important?* Because services are strained already and reduced. We need these services sorted and working efficiently before such a large increase in housing.
- *What would this include?* Making working fire/police services (small site currently). Accessible MIU services again. Increase dental and other health services.

- *Topic identified:* What is the Council's agenda to push this development forward. Money? Land value increase? What is the Urgency?
- *Why is this important?* Because since (the Local) plan (was) adopted Eastward Ho (is) now being developed, where is the proof that consistent reviews as other developments and government guidelines have been changed. Lack of review.
- *What would this include?* Review of future population numbers and demographics. Transparency provided publicly about decision making process and publicised. We want to understand the process with (the) changes that have happened – e.g Brexit and the Pandemic.

Group 2:

- *Topic identified:* Provide the additional capacity for infrastructure before any housing development begins. This includes healthcare, roads, education, public transport, leisure centre and community centre, police and fire service.
- *Why is this important?* Felixstowe is already at capacity for all of the above. These things are not priorities for developers. These must be mandated. Developers profits are not a priority. If sites are not sustainable, they shouldn't continue or be started.
- *What would this include?* New secondary school, new primary school, public transport routes, plan for Candlet Road, new GP surgery, plan for Felixstowe general hospital (potential urgent care centre).

- *Topic identified:* Full review of a Local Plan which is potentially out of date. The last local plan was written pre-pandemic, the local plan review should use updated, housing demand and employment (data).
- *Why is this important?* Massive changes since the plan was conceptualised (Covid-19, Brexit, 2x General Elections). Recent developments were not part of (the Local) plan (Deben/North Walton). The last review of (the Local) plan occurred the during the pandemic (September 2020) – there was no capacity for review. Use updated data.
- *What would this include?* Housing demand review, employment opportunities, wider Suffolk context, and use updated data.

- *Topic identified:* Eastward Ho! Must not be developed for anything other than leisure purposes.
- *Why is this important?* Important site for the town. In keeping with the leisure-led ethos of the development. Promised to whole town to remain undeveloped. It's within the local plan, to protect. Demonstrated as important to whole town population from recent engagement. Development kept away from Grove. Opposition of all development.
- *What would this include?* See above.

Group 3:

- *Topic identified:* There should be a review for the Local Plan.
- *Why is this important?* A document that needs to reflect what has happened since the Local Plan was written/adopted.
- *What would this include?* To protect and enhance Felixstowe and where development is situated. It should also reflect and enhance Felixstowe as a place.

- *Topic identified:* How can we continue this a group and as a group what do we do next.
- *Why is this important?* To continue to push the priorities of the group.

- *What would this include?* Produce initiatives, workbooks, spreadsheets. Formalise the Citizens Panel. There needs to be ongoing communication between the Panel and relevant bodies.
- *Topic identified:* Continue to lobby and message Councillors about key issues.
- *Why is this important?* To ensure the communities priorities are being raised to the Council using their formal process.
- *What would this include?* Writing emails, letters and starting community action groups.

Group 4:

- *Topic identified:* The Citizens Panel should continue to be involved at each critical stage of the process.
- *Why is this important?* Continuity of thought and oversight.
- *What would this include?* Regular meetings with stakeholders at each stage of development.

- *Topic identified:* Sustainability measures should be built into the building of the houses.
- *Why is this important?* Preparation for the future – making Net Zero.
- *What would this include?* Solar Panels on each roof, ground source heat pumps for each home. Other up to date (at the time of building), sustainability measures.

- *Topic identified:* We'd like some idea of how the community infrastructure levy is going to be spent. What Section 106 money is available and what will it be earmarked for?
- *Why is this important?* Because these monies sometimes get spent on things the community don't want or need. The communities Panel could be consulted on this.
- *What would this include?* Could be used for a community hub.

- *Topic identified:* That Eastward Ho and the land at the rear of Links Avenue is not developed and should be retained as a green space/recreational area, not reduced in size in any way.
- *Why is this important?* It's important to retain this recreational green space for use by the local population.
- *What would this include?* It could include a new pavilion for the football pitches.
- Group 4 also added: We also have concerns that the area around the new leisure centre will also have shops etc – which will pull footfall away from the main shopping area in Felixstowe (High Street and Hamilton Road).

One member of the Citizens Panel gave both the Council and the facilitators a letter objecting to any development being placed on Eastward Ho and the land to rear of Links Avenue. The letter reads:

'TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

FORMAL OBJECTION TO ANY DEVELOPMENT ON EASTWARD HO AND THE LAND BEHIND LINKS AVENUE.

As a member of the Citizens' Panel on the North Felixstowe Plan, I would like my objection to any development of Eastward Ho and the land to the rear of Links Avenue formally noted.

This land, owned by East Suffolk Council, should be retained as recreational/green space and not sold to a developer or developed by East Suffolk Council as proposed on the draft plans seen by the Panel. Nor should Eastward Ho be reduced in size in any way.

The only exception to any development would be for the provision of improved pavilion facilities for the sport activities on Eastward Ho.'

The Council took the physical letter containing the objection, but it was recommended that if the individual wanted to formally object to the planning application, they should wait until a planning application for the site has been submitted. It is important to remember that ESC are acting as land owners - not as planning authority - in the masterplanning process. Although we are one council the masterplanning team do not have any more access the local planning authority than any other developer.

The final part of the session began with an update on how the Citizens Panel have impacted the process, including the current situation with the Eastward Ho playing pitches. The facilitators from LDA Design explained that the Citizens Panel have shaped the Design Code, a planning document that will shape certain parts of the masterplan – this document will be written in the Autumn/Winter. They also said their recommendations will have influenced other planning documents such as the transport and environmental statement that will also be written in the Autumn and Winter. LDA also suggested that this process had identified the priorities of the Citizens Panel and that the Citizens Panel are beginning to establish a platform from which these can be shared with the wider community. The facilitators also highlighted that this process had brought community groups such as Community Action Suffolk and Deben Community Farm into contact with the Council.

The Council then outlined the current situation at Eastward Ho, explaining that the recent petition following the previous session, had led the design team to revisit the design of the masterplan. The Council stated that nothing in the masterplan had changed yet, but **alternatives were being explored**. Several members of the Panel asked why the Eastward Ho area was deemed as a suitable location for a school and residential development. Both LDA and the Council responded suggesting the area was a good location due its connectivity with the town and that it was of an effective size for the required school's building footprint. The Council stated that there are a lot of considerations that need to be thought through in this situation. There will be implications on public open space requirements, drainage, biodiversity targets and increased density of homes elsewhere in that part of the site. Further there are two other landowners involved in the masterplan and land uses need to be balanced between them. The Council re-iterated that none of the plans presented had been set in stone. The Council further suggested that the way our planning system works is through interpretation of the Local Plan and the policies contained within it. For example; in how one would define the Eastward Ho playing fields; or how one defines the term protection. Most planning permissions have to balance and mitigate some loss of assets in some areas with gains in others and it is a process that we are working through with the Local Planning Authority, the other landowners while also engaging with the public. Some of the members of the Citizens Panel expressed their unhappiness with the answers they had received. The Panel also asked whether the local plan could or couldn't be changed.

Regulation 10A of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 introduced in 2017, states that local planning authorities must review their plans within five years from the date of adoption.

After the session, the facilitators asked East Suffolk Council's planning team to answer two questions about the Local Plan reviewing and writing process.

1. How is the Local Plan reviewed every 5 years?

Answer - Local Planning Authorities are required to review the policies in a Local Plan every year five years to assess whether they need updating. East Suffolk has two Local Plans, the Waveney Local Plan and the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan. The Waveney Local Plan was adopted in March 2019, and the review assessment of that Plan was therefore undertaken earlier this year. The National Planning Practice Guidance on Plan-making sets out a list of factors that can be considered during the review, for example appeal performance of policies. The focus of an assessment is on the effectiveness of the policies, not solely on whether anything has changed. The Council published a new Local Development Scheme in March 2024, and paragraph 2.6 explains that under the current planning system, the Council would need to review the Suffolk Coastal Local Plan to determine whether it needs to be updated before 23rd September 2025.

2. How does the Local Plan respond to potential economic/political/societal changes

The Local Plan is informed by robust evidence including forecasting. The plan includes a level of flexibility (for example buffers to the housing requirements) to reflect uncertainties that might arise during the plan period. Having an up-to-date Local Plan in place provides a level of certainty, and a plan-led approach, to the growth that will come forward. The requirement outlined above to review a Plan to determine whether it needs to be updated every five years, provides a mechanism for considering whether policies remain effective. It should also be noted that reviewing Local Plans is a lengthy process which takes a number of years. The Council monitors the delivery of the Local Plans and reports on this each year through the publication of the Authority Monitoring Report.

The session closed with a discussion of 'what's next' for the Citizens Panel. The Citizens Panel asked if there would be any further meetings amongst the group. The Council said that there might be an opportunity for this later in the process when the policy requires for it. They continued to say that there would be two more public engagements (one in-person and one online), and updates on the website. The Council concluded their point by encouraging them to speak with their Councillors. The Citizens Panel suggested that the group should continue to meet, and this was agreed with the Panel. The Panel exchanged email addresses.

The Panel then asked other questions enquiring about the next stage in the planning process. The Council responded by saying that they plan to submit an outline planning application at the end of 2024, or by Spring 2025. The Council suggested that if the public wanted to formally submit their feedback, this would be the appropriate time. The Panel asked if they could be notified when the planning application would be submitted. The Council agreed to notify them when the application had been submitted. The Council and LDA also recommended that the Panel should follow the "East Suffolk Planning Alliance" - community action group.

Next, the Panel asked the Council and LDA to change the terminology of the "minutes", on the website as they are not minutes. LDA suggested that these should be changed to a "summary", and the Panel appeared to agree that this would be acceptable.

The final question was from one member of the Panel who asked the facilitators whether there was anything that the facilitators and the Council were surprised to learn during the process. LDA initially responded by saying they were surprised that a lot of the issues related to the wider planning system and called for planning reform. The Council responded by saying they had been encouraged by a lot of the discussions, particularly around ensuring the quality and long-term sustainability of the development. This can be used as evidence to push our landowner partners and the local planning authority to be more ambitious.

The session with the panel thanking the project lead and LDA and ESC staff present, for their time and for their involvement in the process. ESC mentioned that there will be a survey that they had asked for them all to complete and that they will arrange the 'thankyou' vouchers soon. They added that they will notify the panel members when they are ready for collection from the Town Hall.

The facilitators and the Council also discussed when the next public consultation event would take place, either in August – both in-person and online.

