



Notes from NFGN Stakeholder Forum
Tuesday 30 July 2024, 18.00 | Felixstowe Town Hall

1 Welcome & Introductions

Attendees:

Mike Deacon – Chair

Seamus Bennett – Vice Chair

Darren Aitchison – TC and Felixstowe Society

Nev Farthing – Felixstowe Allotment Association

Claire Mackinder – Felixstowe Allotment Association

Nigel Palmer – Fair Play 4 Felixstowe

Ian Buxton – Fair Play 4 Felixstowe

Barry Topple - Fair Play 4 Felixstowe

Michael Sharman – Felixstowe Sports Council

Bob Whitehouse – Country Park Group

Peter Constable – Felixstowe Society

ESC: Paul Wood, James Goldberg, Sheline Gledhill

2 North Felixstowe Petition

JG: We have received a petition with more than 5,000 signatures, which has been debated at full council. From a project point of view, we are seeking views, taking stock and using this as an opportunity to get more input to the masterplan.

MD: At council we were told, no decision had been made about future of Eastward Ho. I have also asked for a pause in the process but was told it could not be paused.

SB: The full council meeting was a constructive debate and representatives from all three political groups spoke and there was some consensus. It was constructive.

PW: The footage is available on You Tube near the beginning of the meeting.

3 Housing

How the master planning process will address the mix of housing Felixstowe needs as identified in the Local Plan.

JG presented a number of slides to illustrate the proposed siting and density of housing for the project, which is designed to meet the housing need and the percentage of new housing allocated to Felixstowe in the Local Plan.

NP: (FP4F) We believe the number of houses necessary has been overestimated to reach Government targets. We believe we could meet the targets with 1,000 less houses. Issue comes around density. On the map shown to the group, the density is the same as Laureate Fields.

Is there a case to look back at windfall rates over last few years and see where we are now, and do we need quite so many houses?

BT: Asked about the work undertaken by Avison Young.

JG: We commissioned the project for the wider Felixstowe regeneration, and that work is not finished yet. What we are responding to here is Local Plan requirement. Research is ongoing so not released.

NP: In the first iteration of the LP, Felixstowe was allocated 18% of the 10,000 homes needed for Suffolk coastal. We've ended up with 40% of allocation. Hard to understand the shift. It feels like they have come up with conclusion of what they wanted at the end and worked backwards. Is there a case for revisiting?

Windfall rates and could we reduce the density? As you get further in, the protest will become worse.

JG: We are ESC but we are not the planning authority, and can't speak on matters of detail. The Local Plan is reviewed every 5 years, and it is not normal to scrutinise in the meantime, but please send detailed questions to the planning authority.

PW: We could try and get an answer from planning.

JG: Wanted to clarify the definition of Eastward Ho, as not everyone has the same idea what EH is. The ESC definition of EH is playing fields and paddocks.

EH needs an access road, and we need some development to fund that infrastructure. The Paddocks are technically agricultural land, not open space. We try to look at what's appropriate and where things should go.

The masterplan offers a significant increase in open space with the northern buffer zones and meadows, there will be an additional 28 hectares of open space. By comparison, the new Lowestoft country park is 20 hectares.

Green buffers at the edge help the site to bed into the landscape. Natural and semi natural areas are important for visual impact of the project and the development will be layered with tree planting and open spaces.

The west of the site is better for higher density housing and the Leisure Centre.

Drainage strategy, rainwater needs to be managed and not put into the sewers to prevent storm surges and then release, so we create wetland habitats, making a wetland asset.

IB (FP4F). They have these at Trelawny Place, deep water, and doesn't improve the site. If you go along Gulpher Rd and look back it looks severe. Big houses overlooking green fields and looks terrible.

SB: That is part of the argument for this master planning. Without it this area will look like that.

IB: I am great supporter of a Master Plan.

JG: There are other ways of doing it.

We also need to meet SANG requirements (Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space). We want to protect the spaces we already have and use these new 28 hectares of green spaces. This is a fantastic opportunity, and we have to work through details with the landowners to make sure we get the best from this space.

The 28 hectares doesn't include the Grove or Abbey Grove, they shouldn't be double counted. There will be improvements to footpaths on the Grove and Public Rights of Way from CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) money to connect Trelawney to the Grove. It will be less muddy in winter and the N-S and E-W routes will be improved.

SB: This will bring more people in. How robust will the nature be?

JG: Stewardship is something we are waiting to explore. Could be innovative – a trust perhaps. Feasibility work starts in September. At the moment it is maintained by East Suffolk Services who have 2 rangers for whole district. Walking and cycling routes will create strategic greenways and make it easier for people to hop on their bikes.

NP: Won't Gulpher Road become rat run?

JG: We will put forward some options on Aug 13 to get feedback. No one wants to use Gulpher as school drop off site. It is on our minds.

IB: Is the Conway Close site included?

JG: The site is not part of NFGN but it is in LP to provide access to the site.

SB: Has that been put back?

PW: Yes. It will come back to the Planning Committee in September.

JG: The pitches will be relayed with proper drainage, changing rooms along with smaller sites at the Leisure Centre, new allotments and formal parks.

MS: Why aren't we putting in larger NEAPS (Neighbourhood Equipped Area for Play)? Might be missing an opportunity here.

NP: Going back to the petition. A lot of people think EH is protected in LP. Most people think it's the whole thing.

MD: That is a big problem.

JG: Things have landed where they have for good reason, everything is possible but there will be implications around density if we start moving things away from EH.

MS: Two new primary schools are planned - why can't we get anyone down to talk about all through schools? Significant request to have an additional secondary school and Darren said at last meeting Felixstowe School is at capacity. We need to consider an all through school or share the sixth form between the two. We don't seem to be getting anywhere with that concept.

SB: Regarding the schools. Would like to get SCC education down. Kelly was at launch, they set out strategy. It's about timings and site size. Trelawney not large enough for four form entry.

MD: We need to hear from them soon.

SB: Huge impact of that second school on EH, taking up big swathe of green space and just a few metres from Colneis School.

JG: Housing mix will include self-build, affordable, there will be housing mix which is tenure blind. In terms of density, it will be higher in the south

NP: Reflecting on the planning system. You have the opportunity to plan this but look at Laureate Fields - you get outline PP and the rest is left to reserved matters and if we don't persist, we will get the same result.

Builders come in with their designs and this is not the way planning should be done. All that should be reserved matters is materials. Is there any change? Conway Close for eg. Access road and the rest is reserved matters. I believe in this Masterplan, but we have to have the process to see it through.

The comparison of what went through outline planning and what we got at L Fields – it changed significantly. That’s what upsets people and they think what’s the point?

Comes back to how the district runs its planning.

JG: We want landowners to come along with us and buy into this. We are doing a lot of work to set a high quality of public realm – roads, open spaces etc – which can go some way to setting out what type of homes will come forward by the nature of the size of plot left. We will be doing our best to lock in as much quality as possible and try and make sure the other owners work with us on that. Unfortunately, our planning system is the way it is, and it’s unlikely the LPA will deviate from policy as it would leave them open to legal challenge.

MD: Laureate Fields was not what we thought it was going to be and its within feet of AONB

SB: Are the densities you are showing us – have they been tweaked?

JG: We are working on an Illustrative Master plan for next public meeting, the north becomes more “picturesque” with semi-detached and detached homes and to the south is predominantly terraces – we are working through it.

MS: Pleased to see new allotments. Still surprised to see school on EH. When I said about LC there, I was told it wasn’t possible because of the water table. (back in 80s) Will there be a shopping centre? Lots of dissatisfaction with superstore in the town – a large new one would be welcome.

Also, in line with the development of Felixstowe as a tourist attraction, any chance of a hotel and conference centre?

NP: Britain isn’t over built, it’s under demolished. Let’s look at the old school and do something better.

Let’s start again when things have reached their sell by date (ie school).

SB: Agreed, Colneis school, not brilliant.

BW: Asked about gas mains for the site.

JG: There will be no gas. All electric to help the decarbonise the project. Details of sustainability of the project still coming through, ambition is to be as green as possible.

4 Next steps

The second public event will take place on **Tuesday, August 13 at Brackenbury Sports centre from 3pm to 8pm**. It will be a drop-in session where members of the public can meet officers, consultants and councillors and see the latest information on the progress of the master plan.

A further public event will take place in September.

The masterplan will then be discussed by the Cabinet.

PW: The second event will be a 'Question time' style event at Felixstowe School, which has a capacity of 300 and it will be ticketed and also live streamed. Details to come shortly.

The August 13 event is an opportunity to come and look at plans and talk to people and then the second will be a Q&A led by councillors and an expert panel.

JG: There will be lots of information to consider, but we still have 6-9 months to go. So, the plans are evolving and are not finalised.

After the events, we will be taking stock and then there will be a period of landowner engagement to get heads of terms formalised. A paper will then go to Cabinet in February for decision on whether they support the Master Plan and then we will apply for outline Planning Permission.

5 AOB

MD: Please address the title of the project. (Referring to the proposed change from NFGN to Grove Garden Neighbourhood which has caused concern)

JB: We have worked on new branding and a new name because there are three landowners involved and it is not just ESC. We are working with agency to develop the idea. North Felixstowe is a planning term, and we looked at finding a name that locates it to the area we are protecting and enhancing. It seemed appropriate but appreciate this has caused some concern.

SB: Common disillusionment with places called, for example, Daisy Meadow Close when it used to be a daisy meadow. It has caused suspicion from the community. Good thing to eat a bit of humble pie and ditch the new name.

DA: Landowners – How are the negotiations going with the other landowners?

PW: We are making progress with one; the other is involved in a planning decision being made September and after that is sorted, we will get full engagement.

NP: With reference to school provision; if you challenge their guidance the first answer is 'no'. If you show there is a reason for them to reconsider, you can get things through. It should be pushed. Guidance is guidance and not definitive.

IB: There are two Garden Neighbourhoods in the Local Plan, one Felixstowe and one in Saxmundham. Is that progressing?

PW: Yes it is moving forward, I can take that away. We are not the landowner there.

4 Date of next meeting: Wednesday, October 3.
