

## Neighbourhood Plan - which future for Saxmundham?

We imagine 3 possible futures for our town, based on different levels of future growth and development – which do you favour?

How do you see Saxmundham’s future – or how do you see Saxmundham in the future?

We look at some possible pros, cons and risks of each – do these seem right to you? Are there other good and bad points?

Each future is looked at from the perspective of the Year 2036 – chosen because it marks the end of the District Council’s next Local Plan period.



**Future 1** we call “Greater Saxmundham”, which would have the highest level of new housing and population growth (1,200 new homes, a population increase of nearly 3,000)

**Future 2** is “Growing Saxmundham” with around 800 new homes over the period, a population increase of 1,800 to 2,000.

**Future 3** is “Steady State Saxmundham” which grows by the lowest amount, with around 300 new homes over the period, a population increase of around 750.

## **Future 1 – “Greater Saxmundham”**

Saxmundham made the choice to grow substantially, to become a key service centre, with excellent rail links, for the whole of east Suffolk. It provided a service hub, using its strategic positioning half-way between Ipswich and Lowestoft, and with tourist access to the Suffolk Heritage Coast.

By 2036, the population of Saxmundham and nearby villages has grown by around 3,000, representing some 1250 new dwellings. As a result of this high level of increase, the town has a new primary school and a local primary health centre. Plans have been agreed for a new by-pass road for traffic from the A12 heading to Leiston.

This degree of growth means that housing development has taken place on the south side of town, joining up to Benhall, and filling much of the land between the railway and the A12 bypass.

More houses have also been built up Church Hill to the brow. Over one quarter of the new housing is confirmed as affordable, and this includes new social housing provision, especially for local families, and some designed specifically for people with special needs.

While many residents commute to work in other places, a growing share of the population works locally, taking advantage of faster networked connectivity. This includes the extended industrial estate in Kelsale, a new employment complex on the west side of the A12, and new and converted start-up and shared offices in and around the town centre. In addition to, the jobs linked to the ‘east Suffolk service centre’ function, the town has a growing reputation for its cultural life covering both popular culture (notably through its respected Music Festival) and for its arts programme, using its proximity to Snape Maltings to offer an ‘off Festival’ programme.

The town centre, reflecting a greater footfall and spending power than 15 years earlier, has a set of popular and not-so-dear restaurants and refreshment outlets, as well as local services and a number of premises occupied by artists and small offices focusing on the cultural industries. The Market Hall offers a welcoming High Street meeting place and venue after its refurbishment, and the Street Farm community hub provides a valued set of community services including a much used community centre, library, town council administration and information point.

The towns’ long standing traffic and parking issues have seen improvement, but problems remain, which the new Leiston -link bypass road should improve. The High Street now has wider pavements and short term parking bays. New cycle paths to Benhall and Kelsale have been created, and improved pedestrian and cycle access to the town.

**PROS:** (1) A growing population should mean new public facilities being provided – we here assume a new primary school will be provided, as well as a health centre, and that a new bypass road towards Leiston would over time be planned for and funded to overcome some of the growing traffic problems.

(2) If Saxmundham can play the new mid-way service centre role, it should lead to more spending power in the centre, reflected in more service jobs there. We also assume that Saxmundham can develop a reputation as a good place for artists and culture generally with employment spin offs. (3) More Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) that comes from a greater level of development to be used for the benefit of the town.

**CONS:** (1) This option involves large scale housing and related development on the south of the town, which will have material impacts on landscape and local environment. Currently the area has well-used public footpaths of a rural character which offer good walks (including for dogs).

(2) Additional development on the hill to the east will increase congestion at the cross roads, and because of its prominent position have an impact on the wider landscape.

(3) Much of the new housing would be difficult to link organically to the town centre, so the ‘new’ population may not add to the sense of community.

(4) New employment land off the A12 would similarly be difficult to link organically to the town and would have implications for the A12.

(5) A new Leiston link bypass will have environmental consequences and depending on the route chosen could have an adverse effect on the wider countryside or on the setting of Hurts Hall and the church, or both.

**RISKS:** (1) There is no certainty that even with this large-scale growth, new public infrastructure will in fact be implemented, though it is certainly more likely at this higher level.

(2) The growth in population may not lead to much more spending in the local economy, in which case the town will lose some attractive habitat and landscape and gain little in return, i.e. becomes more of a dormitory town lacking in a deep sense of community.

## **Future 2 – “Growing Saxmundham”**

Saxmundham has said yes to our town growing – but not to the point where that meant that there was no longer a time-honoured, landscape separation from Benhall and Kelsale. By 2036, around 800 more homes had been built with a population around 1,800 higher than in 2018. Many of the new homes were located by developing further up Church Hill to the brow of the hill, [while others were built on part of the Layers, close in to the town] and around the back of the Free School; the latter had vehicular access directly to the A12, which tended to reduce their sense of ‘belonging’ to the town.

Over one quarter of the new housing is confirmed as affordable, and this includes new social housing provision, especially for local families, and some designed specifically for people with special needs.

Saxmundham has grown its function as a service town for a wide surrounding area, with an expanded medical practice on the traditional Lamsale Meadow site. After much debate over capacity in local primary schools, by 2030 it was agreed that a new one was needed and has just opened.

Most of the more recent residents are either retired, or commute to work in other places. There has been a modest increase in those who work locally, taking advantage of improved network connectivity and more service job opportunities. This includes the extended industrial estate in Kelsale, and some new and converted start-up and shared offices in and around the town centre.

The town has been working hard to reinvent itself as a modern entertainment and cultural centre, with some real but limited success, covering both popular entertainment (working with its respected Music Festival) and a growing art and culture programme, using its proximity to Snape Maltings to develop an ‘off-Festival’ programme.

The town centre, although still ‘on the edge’, has some increased footfall and spending power compared to 15 years earlier, with some popular and not-so-dear restaurants and refreshment outlets, as well as local services and a number of premises occupied by artists/artisans. But the old retail outlets have mainly disappeared. The Market Hall offers a welcoming High Street meeting place and venue after its refurbishment, and the Street Farm Road community hub provides a valued set of community services including a much used community centre, library, town council administration and information point.

The town’s long-standing traffic and parking issues have slightly improved but are still an issue. The High Street has wider pavements now and short term parking bays. Improved pedestrian and cycle access to the town centre has been developed and moving around town on foot, by bike or by mobility scooter has become a more pleasant option.

**PROS:** (1) A growing population should mean new public facilities being provided – we here assume a new primary school will at last be provided, and that the current medical centre will expand but at its current premises.

(2) With a significant population increase, though less than in Option 1, there should be some increased local employment, and also some more spending power in the town centre, reflected in more service jobs there. We also assume that Saxmundham can begin to develop a reputation as a good place for local entertainment and culture generally, drawing more people into the centre with a degree of employment spin off.

(3) A Community Infrastructure Levy commensurate with the level of development has been obtained, but less than with Option 1.

**CONS:** (1) This option involves further significant housing and related development, both up Church Hill and close to the A12 to the south west of the town, which will have impacts on landscape and the local environment.

(2) Much of the new housing would be difficult to link organically to the town centre, so the new population would not add to the sense of community.

(3) Compared to Option 1, this option may make it harder to win new service infrastructure such as a new primary school or medical facilities.

**RISKS:** (1) There is no certainty that with this level of growth new public infrastructure (schools, medical roads) will in fact be implemented.

(2) The growth in population may not lead to much more spending in the local economy, in which case the town loses some attractive habitat and landscape, and gains little in return, probably becoming more of a dormitory town lacking in a deep sense of community.

### **Future 3 – “Steady-State Saxmundham”**

While recognising that it must continue to grow and help to meet people’s housing needs, Saxmundham has made the strategic choice to remain a smaller service town, with development largely within or close to the 2018 development limits and preserving and nurturing its historic market town character. Between 2018 and 2036, a further 300 dwellings have been built, with the population increasing by about 750 over the period.

While this level of increase had some effect on local services such as schools and health service, it has not proved to be large enough to generate significant new investment in its social infrastructure, with only small extensions to the local school and medical centres within existing sites.

Apart from small infill and windfall sites, most of the housing is situated up Church Hill, with some at the rear of the Free School. While some 20-25% of the housing is deemed affordable, it has proved hard to meet all the housing needs of local families.

Local employment has increased somewhat, including the extended industrial estate in Kelsale, and some new start-up office premises in the town. The town centre itself has struggled to maintain an adequate level of economic activity, so alongside some successful local services and refreshment providers, some of what were once retail establishments have reluctantly been allowed to change to residential use to prevent longer-term decay.

Despite the town centre’s economic fragility, Saxmundham’s centre provide a focus for a reasonably strong social life, both in the community hub in Street Farm Road and in the improved Market Hall, with a growing range of local entertainment and cultural activities centred on these venues.

The town’s long-standing traffic and parking issues have seen only modest attention, with no major infrastructure improvement. The High Street now has somewhat wider pavements and a few short term/disabled parking bays. Some improved pedestrian and cycle access to the town centre has been built.

**PROS:** (1) The town retains its traditional character and maintains its historic attractive rural setting, and its separation from surrounding villages.

(2) The increased population, although not huge, brings some additional spending power to the centre, a modest increase in local employment opportunities and increased participation in local community activities.

(3) At this level of development, the Community Infrastructure Levy is welcome but is much less than Options 1 and 2.

**CONS:** (1) This level of development is probably not large enough to attract, or require, major new investments in physical and social infrastructure (roads, school, health services), but the population still grows and puts more pressure on existing services.

(2) The lower level of housing development may adversely affect the chances of local families, notably the less well off, from being able to find affordable housing in the town.

(3) The town is unlikely to see major increases in local employment opportunities or investment, and the town centre economy remains fragile.

**RISKS:** (1) The proposed level of new housing may be seen as inadequate by the local district council in setting its local plan housing requirements, which overall need to plan for quite high levels of additional housing.

(2) Moreover, housing developers may seek to develop on sites not provided in the Neighbourhood Plan, arguing that there are no good planning reasons against such development.

(3) The town centre may decline even more and more rapidly than envisaged, if the town is seen as a backwater.

(4) The position of the town as a service centre may decline, if other nearby towns are able to provide more community, leisure and cultural opportunities.