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**Response to First Draft Local Plan of Suffolk Coastal District Council**

September 2018

**Summary of conclusions and recommendations**

* Saxmundham Town Council considers that the town is well located to be a thriving retail, employment and service centre, for which it has strong locational advantages
* We support further growth of the town, which will benefit its residents and businesses, and provide services for neighbouring areas
* We consider however that the scale of growth proposed in the draft Plan for Saxmundham is excessive and not justified; it would involve the town growing by at least 50% in population over the next decade, and by around 60% from 2011.
* Moreover, we consider that for one small town to be required to take over 20% of the total new homes for the whole Suffolk Coastal District is itself disproportionate and will have a negative impact on the overall character and environment of the town
* We consider that the current proposals for a South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood are ill-conceived and excessive. 800 homes in this area may be excellent for landowners and developers, but is not shown to be in the interests of the town, for reasons set out below. While treating the whole area as a single entity, the draft Plan fails to provide any serious or guaranteed means of linking the two sides of the railway into a coherent and integrated development, which is the very essence of master planning.
* Just as significantly, the draft Plan is based on apparent mistakes of fact as to land availability for development elsewhere, i.e. the larger site 435 to the east off Church Hill. This has been justified in two different ways – (a) that the land is not available for development in the lifespan of the Plan, which we understand is not correct; (b) that the land is less suitable on planning grounds than the south Saxmundham sites
* Despite requests, we have not been informed of any planning assessments that give rise to the conclusion that the Church Hill site(s) would be less suitable than the south Saxmundham sites. We believe that there needs to be clear evidence based on proper assessment before a rational conclusion can be reached on respective suitability.
* Moreover, we believe that there is or may be a strong case for a split development, with part taking place on the less environmentally sensitive area to the south which is west of the railway, i.e. close to the Free School area, and part on the land to the east off Church Hill. This would prevent the worst urban coalescence, enable the current Layers site to be preserved, and keep important ecological and other advantages.
* We propose that the new housing requirement for Saxmundham for the next Plan period should be in the region of 400 to 600, which could be (we believe) accommodated in principle, and subject to detailed analysis of planning suitability, on the two sites (south/west of rail; east/Church Hill), to also include primary school and employment land.
* We support the overall strategy for Saxmundham in the draft Plan, save as set out here in relation to the proposed South Saxmundham Garden Neighbourhood.