



Respecting the past, shaping the future

Press release

Date: 17/06/08

New Chairman will work to keep Suffolk special

A retired planner who spent the last 15 years of her professional life at Suffolk County Council has become the new Chairman of Suffolk Preservation Society (SPS).

Alfreda Thistlethwaite, who has been a member of SPS for 20 years, has succeeded Mike Coleman and will be in office for three years.

“One of my ambitions as Chairman is to work hard to help Suffolk retain its distinctive character,” she said.

“The Suffolk environment is special, shaped by man over the centuries yet virtually untouched by the Industrial Revolution. Suffolk is characterised by a multitude of listed buildings, beautiful villages and market towns set amongst well-tended fields, hedgerows and woodland – a living testament to the care and empathy that the people of Suffolk have for their county.

“I know from when I worked and lived elsewhere in the country what a negative impact development can have on the environment, such as the proliferation of superstores around towns and cities.

“However, I don’t want Suffolk Preservation Society to simply be known for seemingly always resisting change. I would like us to become more involved in projects like the housing scheme in Elmswell in which the Society has been a key partner.”

Before becoming Chairman at the annual general meeting, Mrs Thistlethwaite was a vice-chairman and trustee of SPS. Her husband Andrew is a member.

Born and educated on Tyneside, Mrs Thistlethwaite, 65, moved to Suffolk from Leicestershire in 1988 to become Assistant Director for the Environment at Suffolk County Council and remained with the authority until she retired in 2003. She joined SPS soon after moving to East Anglia.

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Previously, she had been a regular visitor to Southwold and Walberswick for holidays, but joked that she never ventured further south than Woodbridge or further north than Lowestoft.

In Suffolk, she lived at Wetheringsett, near Eye, until two years ago when she moved over the Suffolk/Norfolk border to Diss. During her 18 years in the village, she witnessed the closure of its post office and pub – and even its paper round! So, like many couples of their age, the Thistlethwaites made the difficult decision to move to a community with more facilities so that in later years they could maintain their independence.

Mrs Thistlethwaite has had a life-long interest in the relationship between man and the environment and studied town and country planning at university in Newcastle before working for local authorities in Tyneside and Leicestershire.

Richard Ward, Director of SPS, said: “There can be no doubt that Mike Coleman’s greatest legacy will be the Elmswell affordable and environmentally friendly homes project. He was instrumental in driving that development forward and we will always be thankful for that.

“Now we are looking forward to working with Alfreda and building on the successes of previous years and taking the Society and Suffolk forward together.”

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Caption: Alfreda Thistlethwaite

Notes to editors:

1. SPS, founded in 1929, originally worked to protect the county’s buildings and landscape. Today, the society has broadened its focus to help shape Suffolk’s future, largely campaigning for sensitive and appropriate development, more and better quality affordable homes and to ensure sustainable infrastructures are in place to support the county’s communities.

2. The 26-unit award-winning development in Elmswell, called the Three Gardens, is the result of a multi-agency scheme involving SPS, the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the Orwell Housing Association, Mid Suffolk District Council and Elmswell Parish Council. It has been built using energy saving natural resources, such as lime and hemp, making the scheme the first in the country to leave a near-zero impact in terms of its carbon footprint.

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