



Respecting the past, shaping the future

Press release from
Suffolk Preservation Society
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So “grossly wrong” that something must be done

Campaigners have called upon the Secretary of State to use special public interest powers to prevent the construction of a “substandard” affordable housing scheme which will blight a Suffolk town’s streetscape forever.

Suffolk Preservation Society (SPS) has personally called upon Hazel Blears MP to use default public interest powers to prevent 30 new homes from being built on a small parcel of land in Out Westgate, Bury St Edmunds.

The society says the design and layout of the development is so poor that it will do everything possible to force a rethink before construction work begins. If the Government fails to intervene, says the society, its own credibility as a self-proclaimed champion of good design will be brought into serious doubt.

“We are so disgusted with the substandard design of this appalling scheme that we have asked the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Hazel Blears MP, to intervene,” said Richard Ward, society director.

“Her office has written to tell us that she has default powers if a development is judged to be so grossly wrong that it would do serious damage to the wider public interest.

“We, among others, believe this to be a perfect example of where those powers should be used. I can think of no better public interest than providing well designed homes – both for the benefit of the residents living in them and for the wider community.

“Failure to do step in will prove that, despite its grand promises, the Government simply does not care about protecting the special nature of our rural towns and villages and securing good design which will stand the test of time.”

Mr Ward said there was a variety of reasons why the Out Westgate proposal raises wider public interest issues. These include:

- A strong vocal commitment made by Ruth Kelly, the Secretary of State’s predecessor, to use her powers to improve design during a 2006 speech at the Housing Design awards.

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- Safeguarding public money. The scheme would be delivered by a local housing association using public money. The society therefore feels it represents a potentially serious waste of public finances.
- Maintaining confidence in the planning system. The society says the scheme has already brought the credibility of the planning system into question after several members of St Edmundsbury Borough Council’s development control committee described it as “lacklustre and disappointing” and “a blot on the landscape” before granting it permission. Confidence could be restored, they say, by a Government intervention to block construction work from beginning.

“Everyone who has seen this scheme has echoed the society’s views and feel its delivery would represent a huge waste of public funds and should be stopped before it begins,” added Mr Ward.

“Schemes delivered elsewhere have shown that good quality design can be easily achieved. Why should we put up with second best?”

“We are exploring every possible avenue to prevent it from proceeding. Unless it is stopped, we will be left with an extreme example of very poor design for which the Government will be ultimately responsible.”

The fight against the scheme has seen SPS join forces with the Bury St Edmunds Society and David Ruffley MP, has been asked to question the Government on the proposals on SPS’s behalf in the House of Commons.

Ends

Note to editors:

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.

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