

Director's Report for the AGM year 2019-20

The SPS celebrated its 90th anniversary in 2019 and the Society has had a very active year in celebrating this achievement as well as reaffirming its commitment to its charitable objects and investing in a new website to appeal to a new and wider audience. In part, this has been facilitated by a substantial legacy which enabled a 25% increase the professional capacity of the Society. In turn, this has allowed for an increased level of activity across the board.

In 2019, SPS planners responded to 74 major/sensitive cases, a 14% increase from the previous year. Well over 80 per cent related to residential schemes, many of them large scale housing developments of between 10 and 500 dwellings. Once again, a significant proportion of these applications have been in Babergh and Mid Suffolk, both of which have struggled to demonstrate the requisite housing land supply. I am pleased to report that, to date, the number of applications that we have positively influenced stands at over 68%, up from 58% the previous year, with losses at around 14% compared to 18% the previous year. At the time of writing 13% of cases have yet to be determined. This improvement in outcomes is encouraging and may be a reflection on emerging Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans which arguably have given greater certainty to the outcomes of the planning process.

SPS planners have also responded to a wide range of emerging policy documents which will affect the changing face of our County over the next 20 years including - the Suffolk Coastal Draft Local Plan, Babergh Mid Suffolk Local Plan (Reg 18) consultation and the East Suffolk Historic Environment Supplementary Planning Document. We have reviewed 10 Neighbourhood Plans, up from 8 in 2018, as they emerge through the planning process and made representations on the heritage, landscape and design policies in all cases. It is encouraging to note that quality of policy writing and supporting information including; landscape characterisation, non-designated heritage asset identification and design checklists have all improved as best practice is becoming more established and resources for professional support have been made available by the government. This is an important undertaking to ensure that the new generation of local policy is robust and effective in protecting our most valued qualities. SPS also responded to the Ipswich Northern relief road consultation calling for a more appropriate response through reducing car dependency and investment in the existing highway network.

In addition to local development and emerging policy frameworks we continue to respond to National Significant Infrastructure Projects, including stages 3 and 4 of the Sizewell C public consultation exercise for a Nuclear Power Plant, and stage 4 of the offshore windfarms, East Anglia 1 North and East Anglia 2. The SPS Director, supported by Bethany Philbidge and volunteer, Philip Butler have attended a number of meetings with the developers, county and district councils, Natural England, Historic England and the AONB Partnership. SPS involvement with another major energy proposal for a large solar farm in the west of the county has been ongoing with community groups. We have also been in dialogue with CPRE Central Office to secure support at a national level to help Suffolk lobby for a more strategic and coherent energy policy to ameliorate the most damaging effects

on our rural landscape. These efforts are beginning to show some signs of success and CPRE has now committed to taking this issue forward as a national campaign.

SPS planners have continued to engage with stakeholders across national and local government, media and the local community to raise awareness of the threats and challenges to our County. As part of our 90th anniversary celebrations we produced our Manifesto which set out how the Society will work to meet its charitable objects to protect and promote the special qualities of Suffolk. This has been distributed to all members and is a key document for engaging with new audiences. We have also invested in a new website which has a fresh new look that is compatible with all digital formats, while allowing people to easily donate, join and book for events online. It also allows people to sign up to receive our campaign bulletin which is produced and distributed monthly. We continue to contribute monthly articles to the EADT and regularly provide interviews to local journalists on planning matters. We strive to influence opinion shapers through our active engagement with all media channels. We continue to produce our bi-annual Suffolk View magazine and have also developed our social media reach through regular contributions to Facebook and Twitter and have also expanded our reach to new audiences via Instagram.

The SPS has continued to engage with the Suffolk MPs calling for changes to the planning system, better resourcing of planning departments, greater weight to neighbourhood plans to allow the community to have more control over their neighbourhood, and a greater push for better quality design of housing development in the face of a substantial increase in the demand for homes across all parts of Suffolk. It has engaged with senior political leaders and officers across the County calling for better engagement with SPS and reminding them of our shared objectives in delivering high quality development in the right places. SPS staff have participated in the new Suffolk Design initiative led by Suffolk County Council Growth Team, attending a series of formative workshops and discussion groups to facilitate the work of the Team to deliver improved design of new development. It continues to work with many local groups including parishes and amenity societies, neighbourhood groups and single-issue campaign groups across Suffolk including: Substation Action Save East Suffolk (SASES), Theberton and Eastbridge Action Group (rebranded StopSizewellC), the Suffolk Design Review Panel, the Suffolk Conservation Officer's Forum and The AONB Partnership.

In 2019 SPS continued to develop its outreach role by providing training to parish councils and other stakeholders to support them in their statutory role of responding to planning applications. It held three training seminars on 'heritage planning', 'media training' and 'landscaping in new housing developments'. These sessions, run by professionals in the field, have been well received and are developing an increasing following. SPS is grateful to those who sponsor these events, including Mr Robert Williams of Haughley Park Barn, speakers who have either gifted their time or offered a much-reduced rate, and all those who have provided a venue and refreshments for our training events.

SPS has also delivered a series of high-quality social events for its Members including a day school at Orford with Dr Richard Hoggett on the archaeology of Suffolk's landscape; Mr Geoffrey Probert, our President generously hosted the Society's birthday party in June at Great Bevills. This special occasion also gave the opportunity to say farewell to Linda Cockburn, our office manager of over 10 years and welcome her replacement aboard, Julie Howe. We thank Linda for all her hard work and wish Julie every success in her new appointment. The close of this important anniversary year was marked by a commemorative tree planting event at Haughley Park to recognise the long-standing support given to the Society by the Roberts family. The event included a lecture by Professor Tom Williamson on the importance of trees in the Suffolk landscape. We are indebted to all those who support our work.

This has been an extremely busy for the small but dedicated team. We have expanded our planning casework, devoted greater energy to campaigning and raising awareness, while delivering a broad range of high-quality events to our members. We have achieved much this year and can demonstrate positive outcomes in over 68 per cent of its planning cases, we have reaffirmed our commitment to deliver our charitable objects with the production of the Manifesto, and invested in our digital communications to appeal to new audiences. I would like to thank the staff for all their hard work and the ongoing support from our trustees, members and volunteers.

Fiona Cairns
06 April 2020