

LOCAL AGENDA 21 CHARTER

SUFFOLK COASTAL DISTRICT COUNCIL'S APPROACH TO GREEN ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

This document, Suffolk Coastal District Council's Local Agenda 21 Charter, expresses the Council's commitment to the Local Agenda 21 process and sustainable development.

So what is sustainable development? A widely used international definition is:

"Development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". (From Our Common Future (the Bruntland Report), report of the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development. Oxford University Press 1987).

Although the idea may appear simple, internationally the task is substantial. It means meeting four objectives at the same time, in the UK and worldwide.

- ◆ Social progress which recognises the needs of everyone;
- ◆ Effective protection of the environment;
- ◆ Prudent use of natural resources;
- ◆ Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment.

LOCAL AGENDA 21

In 1992, nearly 180 countries met at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro to discuss how to achieve sustainable development. The countries agreed a plan of action, Agenda 21, and recommended that all countries should produce national sustainable development strategies. The United Kingdom was one of the first to do so, in early 1994.

In 1997 at the UN General Assembly in New York, the Prime Minister, Mr Blair requested all local authorities to produce a Local Agenda 21 strategy by the end of the year 2000.

This Council recognises the need to deliver sustainable policies at the local level, in relation to a number of topics, in order to improve quality of life whilst protecting our environment.

Within the Council's Vision Statement is a clear commitment to achieving a district where people want to live and to invest and people care for others and the environment.

To achieve this the Council will focus on:

• **Developing a safe and healthy community with access to leisure opportunities**

We will protect and promote the well-being of the community in terms of its health, safety, leisure and cultural opportunities by:

- increasing the opportunities for everyone to gain access to leisure and cultural activities
- reducing crime and the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour
- continuing to provide a healthy and safe environment for the community

• **Protecting and enhancing the environment**

We will protect, improve and make sustainable use of our environment for the people who live and work in, and visit the area, leaving a rich and diverse legacy for future generations by:

- protecting and enhancing both the natural and built environment of the district
- ensuring the principles of sustainability are promoted widely and guide Suffolk Coastal in its decision making

- **Strengthening our economy**

We will stimulate a prosperous and sustainable economy in order to improve the quality of life for the community by:

- seeking to improve prosperity for the district
- promoting the importance of our market towns
- increasing the value of tourism

- **Meeting housing needs**

We will encourage the improved provision of, and access to, appropriate housing to meet existing and future needs by:

- achieving a balanced supply of appropriate housing throughout the district to meet the varied needs
- reducing the number of homeless people in the district
- ensuring that benefit entitlement is paid accurately and on time

The Charter describes how these objectives will be met and details the Council's commitment to sustainability in each area and what this means for the Council and the community in terms of real action. The following areas are considered:

- ◆ Pollution
- ◆ Air quality
- ◆ Water resource
- ◆ Waste
- ◆ Health
- ◆ Housing
- ◆ Energy
- ◆ Transport
- ◆ Land use, Landscape quality and Biodiversity
- ◆ Economy and Employment
- ◆ Social investment
- ◆ Purchasing

To assist with this aim, all the Council's major policies have been checked to see what effect they will have on the environment. This is in line with one of the Council's strategic priorities which is to:

- **Ensure the principles of sustainability are promoted widely and guide Suffolk Coastal in its decision making**

The topic areas will now be visited in turn, and the Council's commitment for each area is stated.

POLLUTION

All types of pollution, whether it be to air, land or water, can potentially damage natural ecosystems, human health, the natural and built environment and, ultimately, the quality of life.

Sustainability will only be promoted if we strive to reduce pollution to air, water, land, and the number of polluting incidents and accidents.

The Council's strategic priority is to:

- **Protect and enhance both the natural and built environment of the district**

In addition, this Council will, through its services:

- ◆ ***ensure that pollution potential is minimised and, where it does occur, to reduce the threat to health or to the environment;***
- ◆ ***make use of environmental and planning powers to ensure conformity with legislation and prescribed standards.***
- ◆ ***adopt and implement a Contaminated Land Strategy to ensure the appropriate treatment of brown field sites prior to redevelopment.***

AIR QUALITY

The Government's Air Quality Strategy aims to ensure that polluting emissions do not cause harm to human health or to the environment. Any harm caused as a result of poor air quality brings environmental, social, and economic costs.

This Council will, through its services:

- ◆ ***exercise its duty to assess air quality in the District and, where the relevant air quality objectives are unlikely to be achieved with current measures, will designate air quality management areas and produce appropriate action plans;***
- ◆ ***continue to control air pollution by making use of environment and planning powers, in order to improve the quality of life whilst protecting public health and the environment;***
- ◆ ***continue to monitor, where appropriate, the ambient air quality throughout the District in order to continually assess air quality;***
- ◆ ***provide readily accessible air quality information to the public.***

WATER RESOURCES

Water is a precious natural resource and its sustainable management is essential to protect the water environment and to meet current and future demand. The growth in population and housing, household size and affluence all affect how much water we use. Other factors such as climate change are also likely to put supplies under greater pressure in the future, making it important that we become more efficient in the way we use water.

Access to clean, fresh drinking water is essential for health and using this finite resource efficiently makes good financial and environmental sense. In addition to the direct costs of collecting, cleaning and distributing water there are also environmental costs from its use of energy that contributes to the production of harmful greenhouse gases.

There are several objectives in relation to water resources that need to be considered in order to promote sustainability. These include:

- Safeguarding fresh water resources;
- Ensuring that public water supplies are clean;
- Protecting natural watercourses from pollution.

This Council's strategic priority is to:

Protect, improve and make sustainable use of our environment for the people who live, work and visit the area, leaving a rich and diverse legacy for future generations.

In addition, this Council will, through its services:

- ◆ ***review its own water consumption and identify ways in which demand can be reduced and water conserved;***
- ◆ ***consider the use of water efficient fixtures, fittings and appliances as part of any new build or refurbishment plans;***
- ◆ ***consider options for grey water and rainwater harvesting schemes to reduce the Council's demand on public drinking water supplies;***
- ◆ ***raise awareness amongst Council staff of the importance of water efficiency and what steps can be taken to conserve it;***
- ◆ ***encourage, and where possible require, the use of water saving technologies, including grey water schemes, by developers in all new build within the district;***
- ◆ ***maintain its commitment to protecting public health by ensuring that drinking water supplies conform to legal standards;***
- ◆ ***liaise with other agencies such as Defra, the Environment Agency and water companies to limit pollution and encourage water conservation to prevent the depletion of water sources;***
- ◆ ***continue to examine its policies in relation to recreation, conservation, flood and coastal defence, water quality, fisheries and landscape and the subsequent effects that these policies have upon overall water quality and quantity.***

WASTE

The types of waste we produce, the way in which we manage it and the way in which we transport it impact on our environment and sustainability. Waste can also impact on health when it is not collected from households and businesses through its attraction to vermin and other disease carriers. Without proper regulation and control, some waste management processes can be harmful to health. The Council recognises the need for an integrated approach to waste management which considers impacts upon health and the environment, the use of natural resources and the way this shapes attitudes towards waste.

This Council's strategic priority is to:

- **develop its current recycling and waste minimisation initiatives to improve recycling and composting rates within the district and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill.**

In addition, this Council will, through its services:

- ◆ ***develop waste minimisation and recycling initiatives in partnership with other Suffolk authorities and local communities, and make those initiatives work through active community involvement;***

- ◆ *achieve a reduction in the number of heavily littered or detritused streets and sites by targeting resources to litter 'hot spots'*
- ◆ *work with other Suffolk authorities to promote waste minimisation and seek to influence recycling behaviour.*
- ◆ *encourage businesses within the district to reduce their waste production and increase recycling through initiatives such as the materials exchange scheme.*
- ◆ *Review and improve its own waste and recycling performance.*

HEALTH

Improving health means tackling the causes of poor health. We know that the causes of ill health are many; a complex interaction between personal, social, economic and environmental factors. The Council recognises that it has a responsibility for delivering local services and local programmes that support people to achieve better health.

This Council's strategic priority is to:

- **protect and promote the well-being of the community in terms of its health, safety, leisure and cultural opportunities.**

In addition, this council will, through its services:

- ◆ *work with the Primary Care Trust and the voluntary sector to identify and address health inequalities within the district*
- ◆ *work with the Local Strategic Partnership to deliver health improvement targets set out in the Community Strategy;*
- ◆ *promote the contribution the Council's services can make to a healthier district including services that target workplace health and safety, food safety standards, housing, crime reduction, leisure and public health;*
- ◆ *ensure that appropriate leisure opportunities exist which are accessible to the community, in order to enhance the health and well-being of residents and visitors to the District.*

HOUSING

The availability of good quality, affordable and safe housing is a keystone to health and well being. People's housing has a significant impact on their physical and mental health. At the same time, the impact of new housing development in an area where pressures on land use are already considerable can produce a number of potential conflicts with sustainable development.

The Council's strategic priority is to:

- ◆ **Encourage the improved provision of, and access to, appropriate housing to meet existing and future needs**

It will do this by

Achieving a balanced supply of appropriate housing throughout the district to meet the varied needs,

Achieving a continued reduction in the number of homelessness cases occurring
Ensuring that housing and council tax benefit entitlement is paid accurately and on time

In addition, this Council will, through its services:

- ◆ ***continue to work in partnership with registered social landlords, Parish and Town Councils, Suffolk County Council Adult Care Services, Suffolk Primary Care Trust, carers organisations, individuals and private developers, users and the voluntary sector to develop social housing schemes in the District to meet identified need;***
- ◆ **direct Home Improvement Grant aid to those in greatest need in the District: the disabled, the elderly and those suffering financial hardship**
- ◆ **help older people to stay in their own homes through the use of its Helping Hand Agency Service, which will organise essential repairs and maintenance to those homes on their behalf.**

ENERGY

Energy use and production is considered to be one of the most important issues affecting sustainability. The burning of non-renewable fuels affects air quality, which in turn impinges on health, and in addition, increases the levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere which contribute to global warming. As climate change is now widely recognised as being the greatest environmental challenge facing the world, action is required at all levels of government and within the community to reduce carbon emissions. Rising global temperatures will bring changes in weather patterns, rising sea levels and increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events. These effects will be felt most severely in low-lying coastal areas such as Suffolk Coastal district where communities are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change such as coastal erosion.

The extraction of fossil fuels also has an impact on landscapes and the natural environment. Nuclear fuels, whilst having less effect on greenhouse gases, present their own issues, including the long-term considerations relating to waste storage, disposal and recycling.

Reducing energy usage, promoting the use of renewable energy sources and having regard to the environmental effects of the production of energy is imperative in any sustainability assessment.

The Kyoto Protocol commits the UK to achieving a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 12.5% of 1990 levels by 2010. The need for a more significant reduction in carbon dioxide emissions is recognised in the Energy White Paper that sets a target for reducing emissions by 60% by 2050.

As a direct consequence of the Rio Summit, the Government has given local authorities the responsibility within the Home Energy Conservation Act (HECA) to encourage all domestic energy users to reduce their carbon dioxide emissions.

Through its services the Council will play its part in contributing to these national carbon reduction targets by:

- ◆ ***signing the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change and implementing an Action Plan to reduce carbon emissions from our own activities and encouraging action to reduce emissions from our local communities;***

- ◆ *working with the Suffolk CRed Partnership to produce a Climate Change Strategy for the County and deliver a programme of work to mitigate and adapt to the effects of global warming;*
- ◆ *reducing energy use in our own buildings, facilities and services;*
- ◆ *buying energy from renewable sources where any additional cost can be offset by energy savings and proactively encouraging renewable energy sourcing and production in the Suffolk Coastal area;*
- ◆ *using planning and building control measures to encourage developments that adopt best practice in energy efficiency and use of renewable energy supplies;*
- ◆ *reviewing our own vehicles and business mileage and producing a Green Travel Plan;*
- ◆ *directing our housing grant policy to the carrying out of cost-effective measures to reduce energy consumption in the home;*
- ◆ *supporting the SEAL solar water heating and home insulation initiatives that enable Suffolk residents to purchase at discounted prices;*
- ◆ *working with energy suppliers on the Warm Front grant scheme and Energy Efficiency Commitment which help to provide financial support for energy efficiency and home insulation measures;*
- ◆ *continuing to work with the energy suppliers, the Energy Saving Trust and others to promote initiatives in reducing energy consumption;*
- ◆ *providing advice and information to assist householders and businesses with reducing their energy consumption and increasing their use of renewables.*

TRANSPORT

The principle of reducing the environmental impact of transport through reducing the need to travel and maximising the accessibility of development is now widely recognised as forming a significant element in the overall objective of environmental sustainability.

This District Council does not have the statutory responsibilities of a Highway Authority. However, through its functions as a Local Planning Authority, its responsibility for policy and provision of off-street parking, and as a provider of leisure and sports facilities the Council can act effectively in improving both facilities and opportunities for cycling and walking.

This Council's strategic priority is to:

- **contribute to meeting the transport needs of the District by concentrating on local planning and off-street car parking policies and services, and encouraging the appropriate authorities to address local transport issues affecting the District.**

In addition, this Council will, through its services:

- ◆ ***support the preparation, implementation and review of the Local Transport Plan, Rights of Way Improvement Plan and other opportunities, and encourage other appropriate authorities to address local transport issues affecting the District; and***

- ◆ ***improve and update the network of Public Rights of Way available in the District, under the Highways Act 1980.***

LAND USE, LANDSCAPE QUALITY AND BIODIVERSITY

The way in which land is used can have a profound impact on the environment, particularly where a use impacts on 'traditional' natural or semi-natural features, as is often the case with 'built' development which can result in irreversible changes.

Much of the "traditional" landscape in Suffolk Coastal is man-made, and has evolved gradually over hundreds of years. Changes in agricultural practices in the decades following the end of the 2nd World War however resulted in significant changes to the farmed landscape in many areas. The management of this countryside has largely been influenced by agricultural and more recently environmental subsidies that are outside the control of this District Council.

The landscape of Suffolk Coastal is renowned for its beauty and diversity. Its intrinsic value is important for the economy of the District, for example, by contributing significantly to tourism, whilst offering a vast array of habitats important for biodiversity and positively contributing to the quality of life of the District's residents.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (Biodiversity) also owes its origins to the Earth Summit in 1992. The UK was one of 150 countries to sign the convention reflecting the growing concern that human activities are changing and destroying habitats and natural ecosystems on an increasing scale.

In signing up to the Biodiversity Convention, the UK agreed to develop national strategies, plans and programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity. In 1994, 'Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan' was published confirming the Government's commitment to the principles and requirements of the Convention. The UK Biodiversity Steering Group, the body that prepared the Action Plan, also recognised that a national plan can only be implemented successfully if it is translated into action at the local level.

The Council supports the Suffolk Biodiversity Initiative.

The Council's strategic priorities are to:

- **provide a framework which will maintain and enhance the quality of the built and natural environment whilst securing the long-term prosperity of those living and working within the rural area, including the AONB;**
- **endeavour to raise the level of knowledge of Town and Parish councils about town and country planning matters;**
- **amend the nature and standard of maintenance of outdoor amenity areas to reflect their contribution to the wider community and tourism;**
- **develop a programme of management plans, in partnership with local community groups, for selected public open spaces used for informal recreation and/or amenity areas;**
- **continue with a rolling programme of environmental enhancement based on Local Development Framework priorities, and opportunities for partnerships (including local community initiatives);**
- **work with other coastal local authorities through the Local Government Association Coastal Issues Special Interest Group to encourage the Government to ensure that coast protection is adequately resourced;**

- maintain its current level of countryside management work in partnership with others and fulfil its obligations in respect of the Suffolk Coast & Heaths Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) management;
- examine the scope for the refurbishment of the principal gardens, with the aim of reducing cyclical and responsive maintenance.

Where the District Council is able to control development (including the use of land) it will, through its services:

- ◆ *through the Town and Country Planning Act, exercise control over development by the adoption of sustainable Planning Policies (The Local Development Framework) and the determination of planning applications against those policies (Development Control). It will seek, in undertaking those functions, and in consultation with the public, to ensure that development is sustainable and only takes place in suitable locations and on a scale and in a form suited to that location and to ensure that appropriate mitigation measures are undertaken;*
- ◆ *seek to protect mineral reserves by ensuring that development proposals do not put at risk sites identified in The Suffolk County Minerals Plan;*
- ◆ *on its own land, and in partnership with others, seek to ensure that land which is of landscape or nature conservation interest, is managed in a manner so far as is practicable which safeguards those interests;*
- ◆ *support and act as partners with other agencies and organisations in the preparation and implementation of Countryside Management Plans (e.g. Suffolk Coast and Heaths Management Plan and Greenways Countryside Strategy);*
- ◆ *continue to closely liaise with, and support, other organisations in the positive management of the landscape of the District and furthering the understanding of landscape quality;*
- ◆ *support community-based initiatives that maintain and enhance local distinctiveness;*
- ◆ *maintain its commitment towards the Suffolk Biodiversity Initiative by supporting the activities of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group and Suffolk Biological Records Centre;*
- ◆ *support the monitoring and review of the Suffolk Biodiversity Action Plan;*
- ◆ *implement planning policies in a manner which recognises the needs of Biodiversity Action Plan species and habitats;*
- ◆ *support community-based initiatives which maintain or enhance biodiversity at the local level.*

ECONOMY AND EMPLOYMENT

Part of the attraction of the District and indeed a substantial part of its economy, depends on visitors to its largely unspoiled natural environment – the nationally recognised landscape, the internationally recognised habitats and the built heritage of many towns and villages. The promotion of employment opportunities, as with any form of development, must therefore be in the context of the Council's statutory obligations to safeguard that environment.

It is inevitable in a predominately rural district, where the level of employment provided by agriculture and associated industries has progressively declined over the recent decades, that large-scale employment opportunities tend to be concentrated in the main urban areas. Farm diversification however provides important opportunities stimulating employment opportunities in the rural areas.

Sustainable businesses particularly in the rural areas, will be those which often entail high level of home working and have developed in the fields of information technology, the creative and cultural industries and tourism. These businesses can have a wide geographical spread in their customer and user base, so they are doing more than just meeting a local demand. The business services sector is another large (and growing) area across the district, including the rural market towns in the North of the district.

The Council's strategic objectives are:

- ◆ **to promote inward investment in the District and stimulate the creation of new jobs from within the existing business community.**
- ◆ **to foster, with partner organisations, a comprehensive business support and advice service for all businesses, including start-ups.**
- ◆ **to stimulate the development of suitable sites for employment growth within the district.**
- ◆ **to optimise the benefit accruing to the District via the external designations of parts of the District as areas of disadvantage.**
- ◆ **to support the development of the infrastructure needed for the sustainable development of the district.**
- ◆ **to work with others a) in understanding the economic performance and needs of the District, and b) in promoting the economic interests of the District.**

In addition, this Council will, through its services:

- ***encourage, support and promote a diverse and sustainable economic base throughout the District;***
- ***seek to promote and support local producers' markets in the district.***
- ***encourage small businesses to undertake green audits to improve their cost effectiveness and environmental performance.***

SOCIAL INVESTMENT

For some members of the community, their individual circumstances often means that they are excluded from access to services, such as housing, education or health. This can be as a result of factors such as, for example, insufficient income, illness or disability. The consequence of this, for many individuals, has been multiple and overlapping deprivation, with potentially long-term consequences. This "social exclusion" is a complex problem which requires cross-boundary working both at national and local government level.

There is a history of some success in cross-boundary working to address issues of social exclusion at a local level. Area-based regeneration initiatives, the promotion of effective partnerships between local public service agencies and the private and voluntary sectors has become an important feature of many Council policies over the last few years.

This Council recognises that socially excluded people are, by definition, relatively powerless and their voices are not always heard in policy-making circles. Often, other interests are much better represented.

Perhaps, most importantly, the Council recognises that it is democratically accountable to its community. The Council has powers to plan, invest, regulate, manage and enforce, and it is through these powers that the Council comes into close contact with members of the community who are directly or indirectly affected by its actions. It therefore follows that the Council is a crucial point for ensuring appropriate social investment, where the community's views, values and aspirations can be translated into Council policies, plans and programmes.

In line with this, the Council's strategic priorities are to:

- **Tackle anti-social behaviour to ensure that people feel safe and are safe from crime by;**
 - Raising awareness of S17 throughout the Authority;
 - Obtaining information relating to Anti-Social Behaviour leading to the identification of hot spots, local needs, gaps in service provision and priorities for action
 - Contributing to the formation of the plan for Stronger Safer Communities fund.
- **Work to Increase the opportunity for everyone to gain access to leisure and cultural activities by;**

Working directly and in partnership with others to facilitate access to opportunities for participation in a programme of activities;

Establishing a Community Sports Network through the district

- Maintain and develop relationships with and through partnership working to contribute to a reduction in Anti-Social behaviour through increased participation in activities

In addition, this Council will:

- ***Deliver well performing, efficient and accessible services to all;***
- ♦ ***offer support and empowerment, together with good working relationships and productive partnerships with our:***
 - ***town and Parish Councils***
 - ***business community***
 - ***voluntary organisations***
 - ***other local authorities and public bodies***
 - ***community groups***
- in pursuit of common goals;***
- ♦ ***be a good employer by:***
 - ***valuing and supporting our staff***
 - ***promoting good employee relations***
 - ***providing fair employment policies and practices***

- ◆ ***be open, accessible and fair in the development and implementation of its policies;***

PURCHASING

It is the policy of this Council to promote the conservation and sustainable use of resources. The Council wants to minimise environmental pollution in all its purchasing activities.

This Council's strategic priority is to:

- **respond to our customer and community needs with integrity and openness, using resources wisely and encouraging public participation wherever possible**

This will be achieved through the adoption of a Procurement Strategy that balances the need to achieve value for money, support for the local economy and, as far as practicable, the objectives within the Council's environmental purchasing policy.

The Council's environmental purchasing policy is to:

- ◆ ***minimise the purchase of new items and re-use items such as office furniture, paper and stationary items;***
- ◆ ***when purchases are necessary we will specify products which are:***
 - i) ***made from recycled materials***
 - ii) ***can be recycled or reused***
 - iii) ***can be operated in an energy efficient manner and***
 - iv) ***cause minimal damage to the environment in their production, distribution, use and disposal;***
- ◆ ***cease the use of specified environmentally damaging products; these products are: ozone depleting chemicals, tropical hardwood which is not independently certified from managed forest, and pesticides on the UK red list, and the EC Black List;***
- ◆ ***include environmental considerations in our assessment of suppliers and their products and, where possible, use suppliers who have statements of environmental good practice and policy;***
- ◆ ***incorporate sustainable development considerations into all new build and major refurbishment construction projects;***
- ◆ ***consider whole-life costs from procurement and use through to disposal when making purchasing decisions;***
- ◆ ***review our purchases with the intention of reducing the environmental impact of our direct and indirect purchases;***
- ◆ ***reduce the purchasing of new products by cutting down on waste and repairing or reducing the use of existing products;***
- ◆ ***include environmental specifications in new contracts for the purchase of products and services where the contract is let under standing order 40;***
- ◆ ***where possible, obtain supplies within Suffolk, in order to minimise delivery distances and boost the local economy;***

- ◆ *place orders to minimise the number of deliveries to Council premises;*
- ◆ *where possible, purchase comparable products, which use the minimum of packaging, or packaging that can be returned, reused, or recycled.*
- ◆ *Consider, where possible, the use of biodiesel for fleet and business use.*
- ◆ *raise staff awareness of the environmental issues affecting purchasing, through provision of appropriate information and training.*