

# SOHAM EASTERN GATEWAY

## May 2018 | Public Consultation Report 2 Open & Green Spaces Workshop findings version 2 - revised summary\*

### Date and Time

21 April 2018  
Session 1: 11am – 12:30pm  
Session 2: 1pm – 2:30pm

### Project team in attendance

Tom Sims, This Land  
Mike Carr, Pegasus Group  
Teresa Hazelwood, Pegasus Group  
Steve McAdam, Soundings  
Leonora Grcheva, Soundings  
Timothy Chan, Soundings  
Janet Hall, Soundings  
Fatima Khuzema, Soundings

### Location

The Pavilion, Fountain Lane, Soham CB7 5PL

### Attendance

First session: 58 residents  
Second session: 23 residents

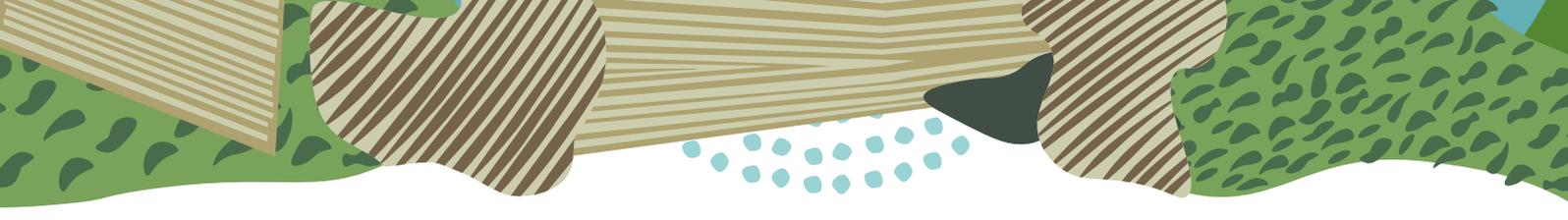
### Information on the consultation is available at:

[www.sohameasterngateway.com](http://www.sohameasterngateway.com)  
[info@sohameasterngateway.com](mailto:info@sohameasterngateway.com)  
<https://www.facebook.com/sohameasterngateway>  
020 7729 1705

\*The summary was revised to include comments received from a resident attending the workshop, and to include comments on the report findings received online from residents that did not attend the workshop.

If any residents attending the workshop have any additional comments on issues discussed that have not been sufficiently covered in this report, please let us know and we will review your comments and revise the report accordingly.





# SOHAM EASTERN GATEWAY

## Open & Green Spaces Workshop Summary Public Consultation | May 2018

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Community engagement consultants Soundings were appointed by the developer This Land Ltd, to conduct the public engagement and consultation for the evolving masterplan for Soham Eastern Gateway. As part of the ongoing consultation programme, an Open & Green Spaces Workshop was held to identify resident's priorities and aspirations for new open spaces within the development.

This summary is compiled from the comments made during the workshop. Two identical sessions of the workshop were held on 21 April 2018 in The Pavilion, Fountain Lane.

During previous consultation events, many residents had reiterated the importance of maintaining and enhancing the open and green spaces of Soham. This led to the workshop dedicated to this issue.

The workshop aimed to understand existing provision of open and green spaces in Soham and to identify priorities that should be given when designing such spaces within the Soham Eastern Gateway development.

The event was advertised on social media, through posters put up in several locations of Soham, emails to residents who have signed up to the mailing list and leaflets distributed to 3200 addresses in Soham\*. The workshop was attended by 58 residents in the morning session and 25 in the afternoon.

Each session of the workshop began with an introduction to This Land and a summary of all consultation events to date, including some of the findings of the previous survey and Walk & Talks. It was followed by the presentation by the architects Pegasus outlining some initial thoughts for the green and open spaces and their previous experience in other similar developments.

Attendees were then divided into smaller groups, each accompanied by representatives from the project team. Each group discussion began with an evaluation of existing open spaces, before discussing different options and possibilities of the designs within the development. These designs options were grouped into three topics – Respecting Nature, Parks and Neighbourhood Square, and Connections.

Each session was concluded with an open discussion in which each group shared the summary with the other groups, and any issues or disagreements were discussed.

This main focus of this report are the findings from the open and green spaces workshop only - aiming to inform the architects and landscape architects. The report does not summarise the entire consultation programme (additional reports can be seen on our website) - it therefore does not reflect all views of Soham residents across a range of other issues related to the proposed development, however issues that were raised at the workshop are included at the end under 'General comments'.

\*We would like to officially apologise to residents in 16 households on Qua Fen Common, who did not receive leaflets due to distribution error, and we are content that residents from Qua Fen Common made it to the consultation informed by their neighbours. We have made sure that this error does not happen again, particularly considering that these residents will be directly impacted by the development.

# SOHAM EASTERN GATEWAY

## Part 1: Existing Open and Green Spaces in Soham

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The aim of the first part of the group discussion was to help the architects get a full picture of what types of open and green spaces are currently being used by the community in Soham.

Residents were given a map of Soham. They were asked to point out existing green and open spaces in Soham, and to discuss if there are any merits or rooms for improvement.

On the next page, you can see a map of the open spaces in Soham mentioned and discussed during the workshop.





6

6

10

11

8

10

7

1

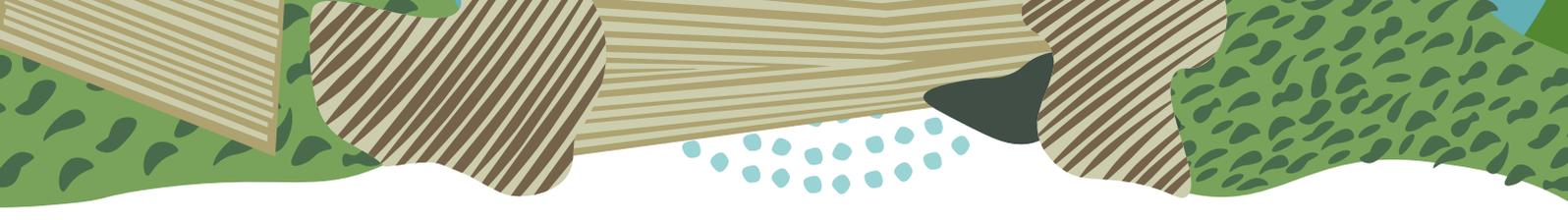
5

2

3

4

9



# Part 1: Existing Open and Green Spaces in Soham

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- 1 **Soham Recreation Ground**
  - suitable for children up to 13
  - a new play area is currently being constructed
  - not dog-friendly
  - closed after 6pm
- 2 **Mill Corner development**
  - some provision of play area
- 3 **Open space near College Road**
  - suitable for dog-walking
  - insufficient signage, it can be easy to get lost
- 4 **Mill Drove**
  - walking route to Wicken
- 5 **Wheat fields along Soham Lode**
- 6 **Football pitches**
  - insufficient provision for growing population
  - often waterlogged and vulnerable to flooding
- 7 **Soham Eastern Gateway site access**
  - fences have made it difficult to access from East Fen Common
- 8 **Soham Eastern Gateway**
  - land for grazing
  - footpaths are often muddy and waterlogged
- 9 **Cherry Tree development**
  - broken sewage
- 10 **The Commons**
  - they should be protected
  - used for walking and dog walking

## Some general comments:

- There is a need for sporting facilities
- There is no provision of swimming facilities
- New developments in recent years have threatened the open spaces in Soham
- The background (Google) aerial map is not up-to-date, ongoing and approved developments should be added to it to fully understand the wider town context

- 11 **Bishop Laney Meadow**

# SOHAM EASTERN GATEWAY

## Part 2: Open and Green Spaces in Soham Eastern Gateway

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In the second part of the group discussion, the focus was on the types of open and green spaces, places and routes residents would like to see in the Soham Eastern Gateway development; what would complement what is already there in the town and what would benefit the existing local community most.

The discussion was divided into three topics, representing three categories of open and green spaces that would be part of the Soham Eastern Gateway. In each topic, a set of precedent images was presented to the residents and discussed with the project team. These precedent examples were

chosen on the basis of the appropriateness of the Eastern Gateway development, considering the scale and constraints. Attendees could 'rate' the images with a red sticker for dislike and a green sticker for like.

For each topic, a discussion was held and residents could write down comments on things they would like to see, things they are concerned about, things they think would not work in Soham, what would be a viable option for the development and what would benefit the broader community of Soham, etc.



## Topic 1

# Connections: Footpaths, recreational routes, streets and site boundaries

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There are a number of footpaths leading to and across Soham Eastern Gateway. Preserving and improving these footpaths are important to Soham.



# Topic 1

## Connections: Footpaths, recreational routes, streets and site boundaries

### ROUTES AND CONNECTIONS



Mown footpaths...?

Like: 3 Dislike: 1



Cycling routes...?

Like: 10 Dislike: 1



Jogging routes...?

Like: 3 Dislike: 1



Bridleway...?

Like: 8 Dislike: 1



Tarmac paths...?

Like: 6 Dislike: 1



Gravel paths...?

Like: 2 Dislike: 7

### STREETS AND SITE BOUNDARIES



Trees in planting...?

Like: 8 Dislike: 0



Trees in verge...?

Like: 6 Dislike: 0



Parkland railing and beech hedge...?

Like: 4 Dislike: 2



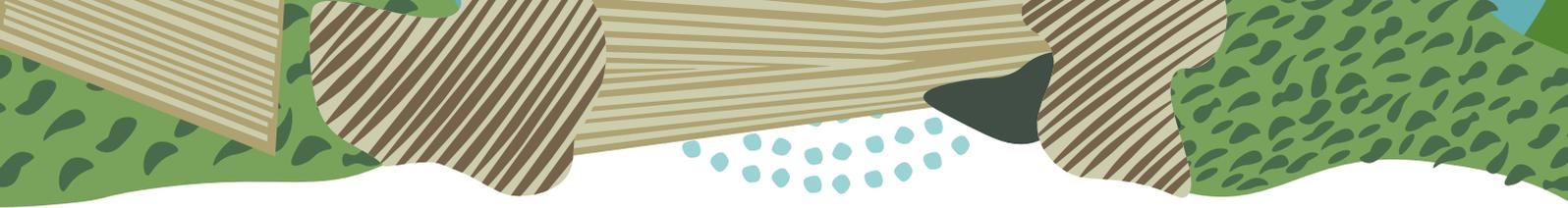
Timber knee rails...?

Like: 1 Dislike: 5



Tree and shrub buffer planting...?

Like: 14 Dislike: 0



## Topic 1

# Connections: Footpaths, recreational routes, streets and site boundaries

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### Questions asked during the discussion included:

- *Would you like to see new connections to the town and natural area, beside the existing footpaths?*
- *What type of paths would you like to see - mown paths, wild paths, tarmac paths?*
- *Should there be special provision for the elderly, children or wheelchair users?*
- *How would you like the new streets to look like?*

The comments written and discussed by residents are summarised divided into subtopics.

### Footpaths

- There was a preference for landscaped footpaths with plants such as willow.
- Footpaths should be accessible throughout the development. Some residents mentioned that it is important for them to be able to walk to the A142 from the town centre.
- There should be regular rest areas along footpaths and they should be accessible to the elderly and people with different physical disabilities.
- Footpaths to parks should be wide enough to for emergency service access.
- There should be improvements to existing footpaths leading to the development, for example, Kents Lane to ensure that the site is well connected with the town. Kents Lane could be improved with lighting. Kents Lane should be pedestrian and mobility scooter accessible only.
- Lighting on footpaths is generally important, for safety and accessibility.
- There was a preference for more naturalistic style towards less populated parts of the development.

### Footpath materials

- There were suggestions that gravel would be good for drainage.
- However, gravel footpaths may not be suitable for pushchair, mobility scooter and wheelchair users or residents carrying shopping trolleys. Many people expressed concern about gravel footpaths.
- Tarmac footpaths will support different uses such as jogging and cycling and were preferred by most.

- Mown footpath would be suitable for the wildlife corridor connecting the commons.
- There were a few concerns about maintenance and potholes.

### Cycling paths

- Almost all residents were in favour of cycle path provision. However, many stated that cycle paths should not be planned in isolation from the wider area. Therefore, the developer should actively coordinate with the local planning authority to ensure new cycle paths are well connected with the town.
- There was a preference for separate cycle paths from footpaths for safety reasons. There were comments that there should not be a hard division between pedestrian and cycle routes, but enough space, colour or material to differentiate etc.

### Roads

- Roads leading to the development need to be wide enough to avoid disruption to residents.
- There should be parking restrictions on main accesses and nearby roads so that additional cars will not cause disruption to existing residents.
- There should be sufficient parking provision on the development to prevent the new roads from becoming cluttered with parked vehicles that would also endanger the pedestrian paths.
- Some residents emphasised that there should be a thorough transport survey prior to planning. This needs to be comprehensive and consider different times of the day when there is heavy traffic such as school drop-offs.

### Jogging routes

- Some residents maintained that if footpaths are well designed and constructed, there is no need to create dedicated jogging routes.
- Some residents cited the Soham Millennium Walks as an example of poor maintenance where plants have overgrown.

### Bridleway

- There were aspirations among residents to see horseriding take place in Soham again, especially for the younger generation. Some had concerns that horses may not be appropriate for the development.
- Safe bridleway would encourage horseriding in the area.
- There were a number of stables in and around Soham, therefore there will likely be demands for bridleway.
- Bridleway should be carefully planned not to pose any disruption to the wildlife.

### Site boundary

- Many residents suggested that there should be hedges and trees to protect the privacy of existing and new residents.
- There were suggestions for willow hedging.
- Along the A142, there should be sufficient planting to create a buffer from the motorway.
- A number of residents expressed dislike of timber knee rails along the site boundary.

### Connections

- There was a strong aspiration for development to be fully integrated with the rest of the town in terms of road connections and community interaction. Residents do not want to see the Eastern Gateway to form an isolated part of Soham. Permeability was crucial for this, many paths and encouraging connections between the development, and the town, as well as between the A142 and the town, across the development.
- Some residents would like to see a safer connection between the Gateway and the open space on the other side of the A142. The connection is currently unsafe for pedestrians. There were suggestions of a pedestrian bridge.
- Residents enquired as to whether the allotments have to be delivered as a single piece of land, and whether the allotments could be reconfigured to create a north south connection between the commons.

## Topic 2

# Respecting Nature: biodiversity, water, the Commons, wildlife corridor between the Commons

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The commons and natural habitats are important assets of Soham and the local community. Protect the existing wildlife and natural environment and enhancing the biodiversity will be a priority for the development.

Drainage engineers will be consulted on the plans to introduce water features to the site. How these features will work with existing natural habitats will be carefully considered. Eastern Gateway will aim to provide spaces where Soham residents can continue to enjoy the nature and the wildlife.



## Topic 2

### Respecting Nature: biodiversity, water, the Commons, wildlife corridor between the Commons



Formal pond...?

Like: 2 Dislike: 3



Wetland...?

Like: 15 Dislike: 0



Wet swale...?

Like: 8 Dislike: 0



Woodland...?

Like: 11 Dislike: 10



Wildflower meadow...?

Like: 14 Dislike: 0



Nature trail...?

Like: 10 Dislike: 0



Naturalistic pond...?

Like: 8 Dislike: 4



Insect hotels...?

Like: 5 Dislike: 0



Bird and bat boxes...?

Like: 4 Dislike: 1



Feeding ducks...?

Like: 4 Dislike: 10



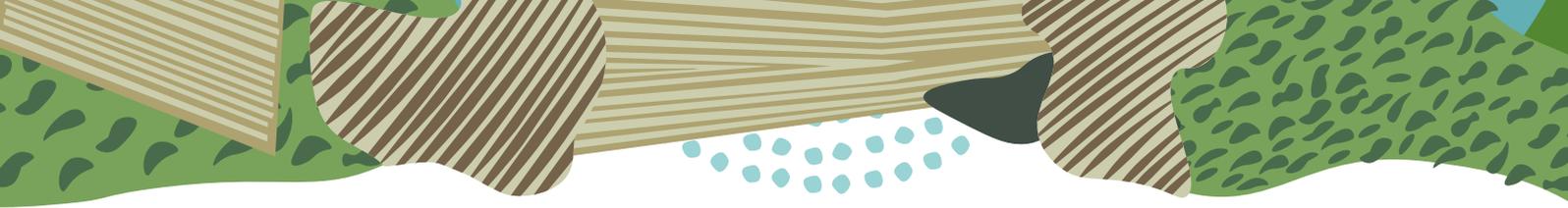
Feeding ducks...?

Like: 2 Dislike: 1



Fishing pond...?

Like: 4 Dislike: 3



## Topic 2

# Respecting Nature: biodiversity, water, the Commons, wildlife corridor between the Commons

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### Questions asked during the discussion included:

- *What types of plants will be suitable for the development?*
- *How should the corridor connecting the two Commons look like?*
- *What types of habitat would be suitable for the development?*
- *What type of water spaces would you like to see?*

The comments written and discussed by residents are summarised divided into subtopics.

### Woodland

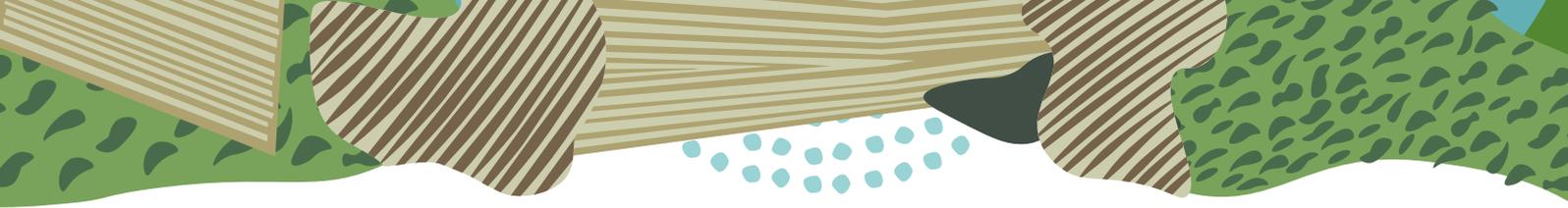
- Many residents expressed that although woodland maybe attractive habitat, it does not reflect the character of Soham, in particular, the character of the fenland where the Eastern Gateway development lies. Some, however, noted that it would be nice to have as many trees as possible.
- New habitat should support and enhance existing natural features.

### Wet swale

- Some residents commented that wet swales will provide a sustainable drainage system and would be advantageous to existing flooding problem.
- It is noted that wet swales may be a hazard for children and the elderly.
- Some raised concerned that the swales will be filled with rubbish, and there will be blockage as a consequence.
- The new development on Kingfisher Drive was cited as an example of poor management of wet swale.

### Water features

- Although existing natural water features on site have not been well maintained, many residents would like to see such unique character preserved. Any loss of water features should be compensated with well-designed and maintained ones.
- There was some debate on the issue of a pond in Eastern Gateway. While it was welcomed by most as a place for residents to walk nearby and relax, some residents, however, expressed



concerns that a pond would be difficult to maintain and pose a hazard.

- While it is essential for wildlife to access to water feature without artificial obstacles, there were concerns about safety, for example, children falling in the pond. Some residents suggested that being near water is better for children – it is safer than high protection walls and fences, and enables access to water that is rarer these days.

### Biodiversity and corridor between the Commons

- Nearly all residents maintained that it is pivotal to include a wildlife corridor between the two Commons in the development as mitigation measures to the disruption to the natural habitat.
- A considerable number of residents remained sceptical whether such measures are sufficient to neutralise the adverse impact to the environment.
- It was reinforced that there needs to be a throughout ecological survey prior to the development.
- Native species should be planted instead of introducing new species.
- There were some suggestions for planting orchards.
- Some residents mentioned that apple trees and plum trees used to be widely planted in Soham and it would be nice to see them again.
- There were a few suggestions for a community garden and they were widely welcomed. Some residents would like to see engagement process and initiatives for such garden.
- New habitats should carefully designed in order to support and enhance local wildlife.
- Some residents stated that the population of sparrow has declined because there are fewer hedges in the area, so planting hedges should be part of the development.
- Any design should be sympathetic to existing wildlife. Species mentioned in the workshop included snipes, lapwings, badgers, hedgehogs,

deer, frogs, newts and snakes.

### Duck feeding

- In general, residents are not in favour of duck feeding as a suggested activity, although a few were in favour.
- Some mentioned that there are too many ducks in the local area.
- Duck feeding may pose a safety concern to children and, therefore, should not be encouraged.

## Topic 3

### Parks and neighbourhood square

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Throughout the development, there will be a generous provision of smaller parks for different recreational activities. These parks will be designed according to the needs of the community, they can be formal or informal, with play areas and spaces for other desired activities. There will also be a new neighbourhood square. The neighbourhood square will provide an open space that is both attractive and beneficial for Soham residents.



# Topic 3

## Parks and neighbourhood square



Informal kickabout...?

Like: 6 Dislike: 1



Bandstand for community events...?

Like: 3 Dislike: 4



Seating...?

Like: 10 Dislike: 0



Natural play space...play equipment?

Like: 4 Dislike: 2



Timber equipment...?

Like: 3 Dislike: 0



Ornamental planting and seating...?

Like: 3 Dislike: 3



Space for community events...?

Like: 2 Dislike: 4



Outdoor gym...?

Like: 1 Dislike: 6



Off-lead area...?

Like: 6 Dislike: 3



Nature activities...?

Like: 10 Dislike: 0



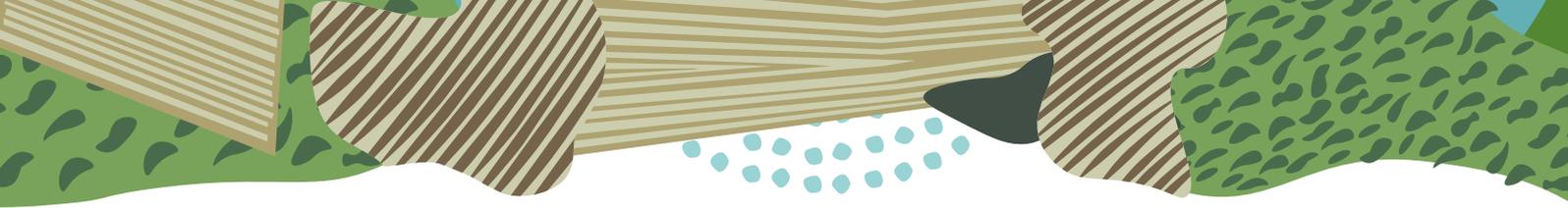
Ecological play areas...?

Like: 5 Dislike: 1



On-lead area...?

Like: 8 Dislike: 0



## Topic 3

### Parks and neighbourhood square

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#### Questions asked during the discussion included:

- *Would you prefer several smaller pocket parks or one bigger park?*
- *What types of activities would take place?*
- *Who would be using the parks?*
- *How do you see yourself using the parks?*
- *Do you think there needs to be a dedicated dog park? Or on-lead and off-lead areas?*
- *What kinds of play areas would be appropriate for the development?*

The comments written and discussed by residents are summarised divided into subtopics.

#### Seating

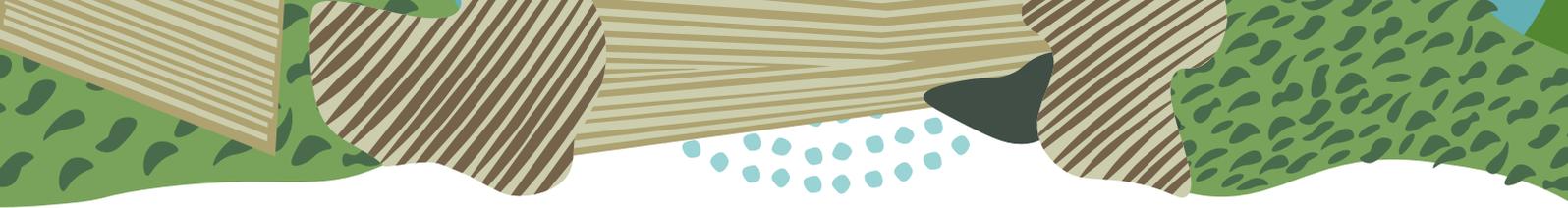
- Many residents have stated that outdoor seating is especially important to the elderly.
- Sufficient seating should be provided throughout parks and footpaths for people who cannot walk for long distances to rest.

#### Bandstand

- Although some residents believed that the town could be benefited from a bandstand, they have stated that it may not be suitable for the development given the location.
- Bandstand should be placed in the town centre where it should be the main meeting place.
- Some has cited the bandstand in the development on Cherry Tree Lane has not been regularly used because of the location.

#### Parks

- The majority of residents reinforced that the development needs to recognise gaps and demands of the existing community when planning for parks.
- All age groups should be considered equally.
- Residents do not want to see the development becoming a secondary hub of Soham as this will hinder integration with the town and draw people out of existing parks. There should therefore be a provision of places that complements what is already there in Soham.
- There were suggestions that the design of the parks should be appropriate to the unique character of the site, therefore the connections with fenland and nature.
- Most residents pointed out that formal style may not be suitable for the rural character



of Soham and preferred more informal, naturalistic settings.

- There should be a variety of open space, bigger park as a focal point for gathering and smaller pocket parks for nearby residents.
- Parks should be family-oriented and cater for all age groups, for example, the elderly who would want to relax with their grandchildren.

### Play areas

- Play areas are essential to the families in Soham.
- The example of creative play space was most favourably received.
- There were comments that informal creative play spaces are more interesting and non-prescriptive for children. They should be filled with installations that do not dictate but inspire play.
- There should be play areas complementing what is already there, therefore more informal play areas compared to the existing the formal playgrounds in Soham.
- This could help bring residents from Soham to the new development for a certain type of play space and vice versa. In turn, it will help promote to the process of integration between the existing and new residents, encouraging crossover of people, helping build an integrated community, and avoiding creating a bubble out of the development.
- Safety and antisocial behaviour need to be considered during the design process. Lighting and spaces being overlooked should be considered.

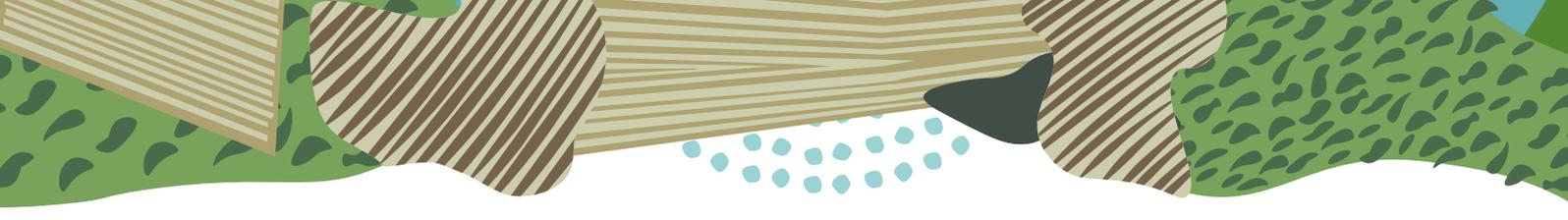
### Open spaces for young people

- Free and accessible open spaces should be provided for teenagers (not children).
- These kinds of spaces are not readily available in Soham.
- The project team should work with young people in Soham to identify what type of

places they would like to see. Skate parks were mentioned as a suggestion.

### Open spaces for young people

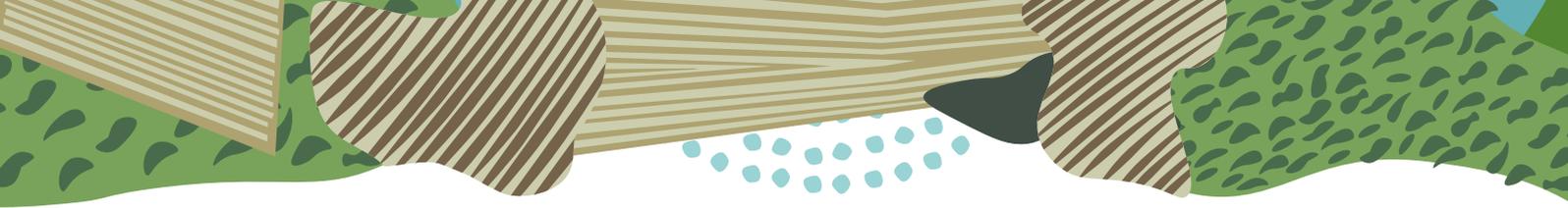
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## General comments raised during the workshops

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- Residents stated that they feel that with all the recent developments, Soham has already contributed its part in providing new homes and they do not see a justification for another big development being built in Soham
- Many stated that the examples shown in the precedents images would be a favourable addition to Soham. However, it is also noted that, without being informed by the broader context, therefore a site plan of where these features will locate, many residents find it difficult to give more in-depth comments. For instance, when choosing between mown and tarmac footpaths, residents explained that the former would be suitable for the wildlife corridor while the latter would be suitable for general pedestrian use.
- Management and maintenance remained a key concern throughout the discussion. In general, residents welcomed the new provision of open spaces, however, many of them cast doubt on the feasibility of proper management and the cost it will incur. There should be more clarity on who and how these new spaces will be managed. For instance, will they be maintained by the local authority? If not, will the cost be shared by new residents of the development only?
- Most residents are familiar with the site of the development and understand that part of the site lies within a flood zone. Throughout all consultation events, there has been consistent concern over the new development worsening the existing vulnerability to flooding and heavy rainfall. Numerous residents have reiterated that there needs to be a thorough survey prior to any planning and reassurance that site neighbours will not be affected as a result of poor planning and management.
- Residents commented that they would like to see the development contextualised with all the other building work that has happened in recent years, and the other planned developments
- The majority of residents had expressed the frustration that Soham has been inundated with almost indistinguishable new developments in recent years. They would like the Eastern Gateway development to adopt a more thoughtful approach and offer Soham new open spaces that will reflect the needs and aspirations of the community.
- These new developments have limited provision of facilities to Soham and fail to align with the interest of the community. This led to many residents highlighting the importance of 'added value',



therefore, how the development will benefit Soham.

- This means, firstly, the development should provide sufficient open spaces for the demands of existing and future residents. Secondly, and more importantly, new provision needs to complement what Soham already has, but not to compete with existing ones. This should be informed by a throughout understanding of the current demand for different types of open space.
- Some residents in the workshop had felt that they are not in a position to speak on behalf of the younger residents. They urged for further conversation and collaboration with youth organisations and schools to identify priorities of young people, who are more likely to take full advantage of certain open spaces.
- During the summary discussion, a number of residents mentioned the Kennett Garden Village development. Many commended the development for its provision of community facilities and the quality of green spaces. The sustainability, low density and the preservation of the indigenous rural character were regarded favourably and can be seen as an exemplar for the Eastern Gateway development given the number of similarities.
- The relocation of the allotments does not form part of the discussion, as there has been no decision made. However, in the event of the allotments being relocated, some residents suggested new allotments should be placed on the periphery of the site along Qua Fen Common to act as a buffer between existing and new houses.
- Many residents wanted to discuss other issues related to the development, such as the roads and traffic, and the potential relocation of the allotments. It was discussed and agreed that these topics will be sufficiently covered in the next stages of the consultation, once more information is available.

## Conclusion

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The objective of the workshop was to inform design related decision making. During the workshop, architects were in attendance and participated in the discussions with residents. The feedback and comments have provided insight on priorities. These are now being taken into careful consideration by the architects who are working on developing the proposals.

In the next stages of consultation, there will be further explanation of how the feedback and findings have informed the design of the masterplan.

