



Independent Commission
on the
Future of Brandon

Independent commission on the future of Brandon

West Suffolk Council is establishing an independent commission of expert advisers and stakeholders to oversee the exploration of viable options for the authority and other local stakeholders to consider in respect of the future delivery of growth in Brandon, while conserving and enhancing biodiversity. Engagement with residents, local and national stakeholders will be at the heart of this process to shape the options for Brandon.

Terms of reference

1. Purpose of commission

To provide West Suffolk Council with independent, evidence-based and locally grounded advice on the future development of Brandon in order to:

- a. best grow the prosperity, enhance the wellbeing and secure the cohesion of its current and future communities, while
- b. recognising and protecting the sensitive ecological and environmental characteristics of the town and wider area in which it is located.

2. Background

Brandon (population 9,224 (2021)), in Suffolk, is a historic market town with strong community groups and facilities on its doorstep such as a country park, unique countryside and picturesque river, transport links to the A11 and rail network as well as shopping, health and leisure facilities that give it all the building blocks of a thriving town. It has been unable to grow in the way a town of this size would usually be expected to grow due to various constraints. Growth in housing, employment, infrastructure and services would potentially help to address some of the needs among Brandon's communities around health, skills and deprivation.

Brandon's proximity to a Special Protection Area, designated because of the landscape and habitat features that are preferred by stone curlews and other priority species, is a barrier to its physical development. This restricts the nature and scale of new development. At present, only very small residential developments can be brought forward within the settlement boundary. West Suffolk Council has a statutory duty to preserve and enhance biodiversity.

3. Commission membership

The commission will comprise the following categories (an individual or organisation may fall into one or more of them):

- a. Up to six **commissioners**, who will be responsible for the delivery of the commission's final report.
- b. Four **stakeholder consultative groups**: residents; businesses; ecological and environmental; and public sector and statutory authorities. Members of the groups will be invited to give evidence to the commission and attend, observe and, at the discretion of the chair, contribute to full meetings.
- c. **Commissioned experts and consultants**, who conduct research, provide evidence and use professional judgement to address questions and issues specifically identified by the commission.
- d. **Evidence providers**, who may submit written or oral evidence to the commission and, at the discretion of the chair, attend, observe and contribute to one or more full meetings.
- e. **Observers**, who, at the discretion of the chair, may attend, observe and contribute to one or more full meetings.
- f. **Secretariat**, who will support the business of the commission under the direction of the chair.

The commissioners will comprise:

- a. An independent **chair**, appointed by the Leader of West Suffolk Council following the recommendation of an appointment panel.
- b. Up to two further independent '**non-local commissioners**' with experience and expertise relevant to the commission, but not living or working in or near Brandon, appointed by the chair.
- c. Up to three '**local commissioners**', who live or work in or near Brandon, and between them can credibly engage with (although will not be fully representative of) local residents, businesses and ecological/environmental groups and interests. They are appointed by the chair taking into account, insofar as is practical, views expressed by the relevant stakeholder consultative groups.

In accepting their appointment, all commissioners commit to act with independence and in good faith in the furtherance of the commission's purpose alone. Commissioners should not be elected members or officers of West Suffolk Council, Brandon Town Council, Suffolk County Council or any other neighbouring authority. Although it is important that the commission engages fully with relevant national government departments and agencies, and it is hoped that they will both observe and contribute to the commission's meetings and activities, their representatives may not serve as commissioners. The Leader of West Suffolk Council may nominate a lead portfolio holder to attend full meetings as an observer.

4. Values and approach

The commission will be entirely focussed on delivering actionable advice to West Suffolk Council and other relevant local authorities for the benefit of Brandon's communities and natural environment.

The use of 'commission' as a descriptor reflects the importance of the issues being considered and the seriousness with which West Suffolk Council is seeking to address them; it is not an indication of unnecessary bureaucracy or formality. The commission will operate as a working group – with a collaborative, consensual and output-focused ethos, which can be summarised with the three Rs:

- **Reasoned** – the commission's recommendations will be based on a considered, logical and thorough weighing of evidence.
- **Reasonable** – the commission will conduct itself with courtesy, empathy and respect, and will expect the same of those who engage with it. It will operate on the basis of reasonableness and apply such as test to the evidence it receives.
- **Realistic** – although commissioners will start with a blank sheet of paper and be willing to think the unthinkable, their recommendations must be practical, actionable and pragmatic.

Meetings will be chaired as lightly as possible as roundtables. Evidence will be received, and views heard, with respect and empathy, polite and constructive challenge encouraged, and consensus and practical ways forward sought.

Where decisions are required and anonymity is not possible, decisions shall be made by simple majority of the commissioners, with the chair having the deciding vote should it otherwise be drawn equal.

Commissioners and all other members of the commission will conduct themselves in accordance with the expectations of their employing organisations and the [GOV.UK - The Seven Principles of Public Life](#). In the event of disagreements or disputes between members of the commission that cannot be resolved by the chair, independent mediation will be procured on a mutually agreed basis.

5. Evidence collection

The commissioners will take evidence from and hear the views of the stakeholder consultative groups (residents; businesses; ecological and environmental; and public sector and statutory authorities), commissioned experts and consultants, and other evidence providers.

The commission will identify and seek evidence from relevant local and national stakeholders, and it will receive evidence from other interested parties who wish to contribute. The commission cannot compel stakeholders, so it will operate in a manner that makes it as easy as possible for them to contribute.

Evidence shall be received in writing and/or orally at full meetings of the commission and be freely publishable by the commission thereafter in full or part. In addition, the chair, alongside as many other commissioners as may be practical and appropriate, may receive evidence orally outside full meetings. The chair may also use discretion to determine ways on a case-by-case basis to receive evidence from stakeholders who are only willing to submit evidence confidentially or anonymously.

To the extent it is practicable, all full meetings of the commission will be hybrid: held in person at a suitable venue in Brandon with the option for contributors to attend virtually using a video conference platform, such as Microsoft Teams. At the discretion of the chair, other meetings may be hybrid or virtual, with attendance by invitation only. Any organisation or individual that wishes to attend should contact the chair in advance, who may extend an invitation at his discretion and subject to space.

In addition, the commission will seek to address any gaps in the extant evidence through procuring the services of relevant experts and consultants, as well as its own research and engagement. Within budget limits agreed with West Suffolk Council, the commissioners will determine the scope and specification for any procured services, select contractors (subject to a veto by West Suffolk Council), and be responsible for the management of the technical aspects of the contractors' delivery. West Suffolk Council will manage the procurement process, contract with the selected contractor and manage the legal and financial relationship.

6. Report and recommendations

In light of the evidence received, the commissioners will produce a report for the Leader of West Suffolk Council setting out their findings and recommendations.

The commissioners will seek consensus with the ambition that decisions are made unanimously. Given the diversity of disciplines and perspectives among commissioners, it may be that there is not unanimous agreement to the totality of the report. In these cases, the report will describe the different views held by commissioners.

Although they may seek the comments of stakeholders on drafts, the final report and recommendations will be the responsibility of the commissioners alone.

The report to the Leader of West Suffolk Council may include material that is confidential or restricted. In such cases, the commission will produce an alternative edited report that may have a public circulation.

It will remain the decision and responsibility of West Suffolk Council as to whether, how and when to publish the commission's report.

The conclusions of the commission are advisory and non-binding on West Suffolk Council. There is no statutory basis for the commission. It does not replace any of the functions or responsibilities of West Suffolk Council or any other authority.

7. Access to information

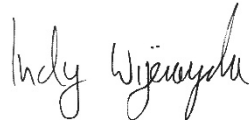
As an independent and non-decision-making body, West Suffolk Council's 'access to information rules' do not apply to the commission.

Commission members may want to have a free and frank debate, in which they may test concepts and ideas and to share such information when it is in a formative state. These ideas may be subsequently discounted in entirety. Releasing information into the public domain could undermine the subsequent proposals and decisions of the commission and have the potential to damage the commission and West Suffolk Council's reputation.

Unless the information is already in the public domain, all papers (including meeting minutes, documents and presentations from consultants, and drafts of reports) must be treated as confidential unless otherwise agreed by the chair. Confidential information should not be shared with other parties.



Mark Pragnell
Brandon Commission Chair



Cllr Indy Wijenayaka
Cabinet Member for Growth

March 2025