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## Perceptions

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"First comes the shape of the development"



"Second comes the choice of materials and details...."

## What Others have Said

2.0.1 In February 1990 a Royal Institute of British Architects/House Builders Federation seminar took place in London. The following are extracts from the subsequent Discussion Paper entitled 'Good Design in Housing'.

'There is a hierarchy of design importance, three key factors which, when combined, create good design:

### a) Shape of Development

First, comes the shape of the development and the spaces within it, the scheme as it is seen in the landscape. This shape is created by solids and voids, buildings and planting, hard and soft surfaces. The layout should come from the nature of the site, its natural features and context. The detailed form is determined by the height and massing of the buildings, by roof pitches, storey heights and the profiles of the housing elements. This is where we can demonstrate our response to the setting for the new development.

### b) Materials & Details

Second, comes the choice of materials and details that shape our response to the character and quality of the local built environment. There is opportunity for well considered contrast and variety but larger developments should normally work within an overall theme which harmonises with the landscape or townscape context. Generally, dominant colours and textures that complement traditional development and local materials will be acceptable to most people.





"Not so much the house itself..."



... but it's setting

### c) The Individual Dwelling:-

The last factor is the house itself. Planners, architects and developers spend too much time and thought on this, at the expense of the first two priorities. There is no point in having a beautifully designed house which uses the wrong materials and is laid out in an inappropriate form'.

'We need to reproduce the charm of existing settlements in a new way. We must create a variety of spaces and not allow the car and road to dominate'.

'We want new designs with vigour, clarity and authenticity, twentieth century designs which also respect local building tradition, materials and details.'



"Unique character of Suffolk ..."



"... totally nondescript..."

## Suffolk Vernacular

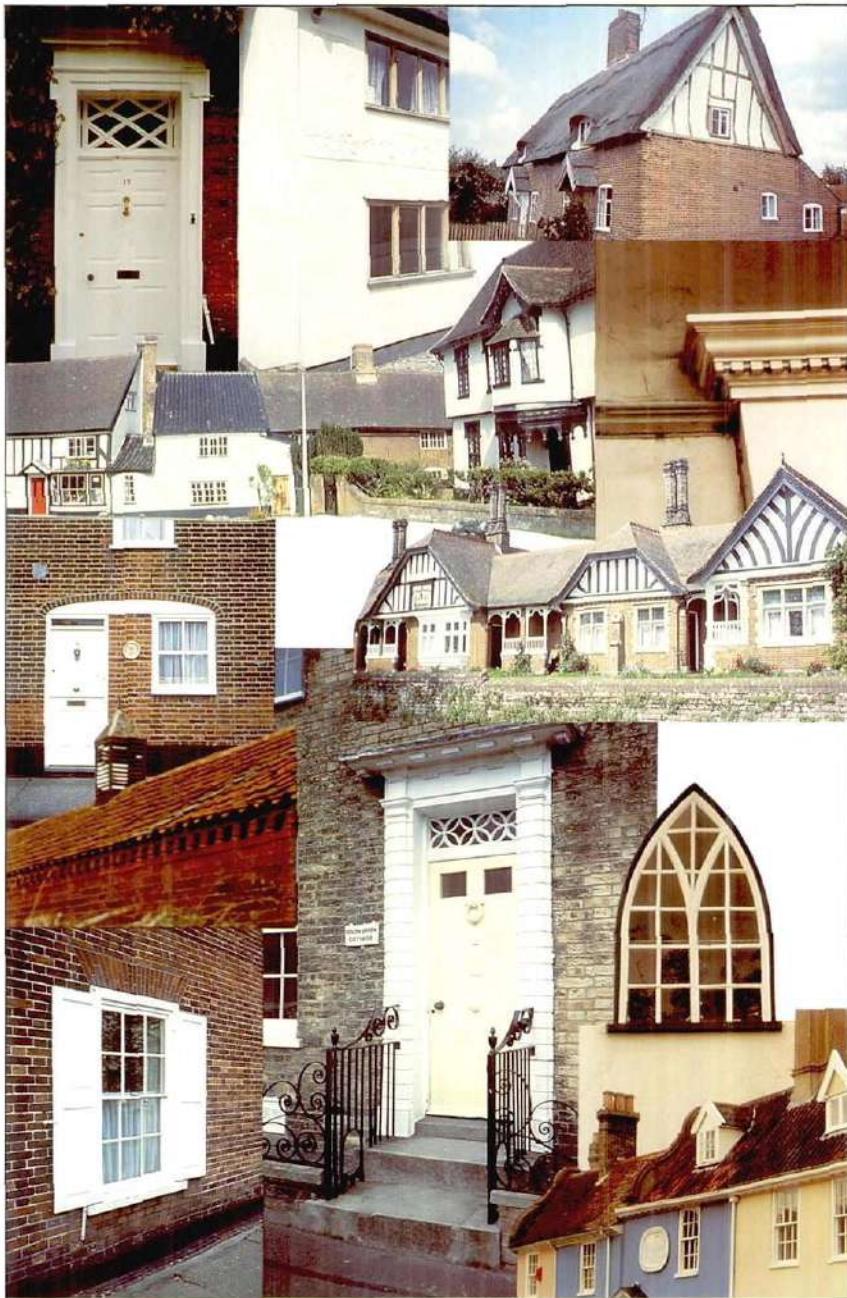
2.1.1 Vernacular means 'The language of a particular people or place'. When applied to buildings, the term 'vernacular architecture' refers to the type of buildings which are unique to a particular area - those buildings which so clearly help to distinguish one county from another.

2.1.2 The traditional buildings of any region spring from the available local building materials, from the terrain, the climate, and the social and industrial structure. The inaccessibility of Suffolk meant that it was less affected than most by the upheaval of the Industrial Revolution of the 18th Century, although development was more rapid in the larger towns in the 19th Century. Many of Suffolk's towns and villages have a uniqueness stemming from this slow rate of change and clearly illustrate a gradual evolution of styles building upon the skills of previous generations and adopting the ideas of immigrants.

2.1.3 To some, Suffolk will evoke a mental image of picturesque churches and thatched cottages nestling into a rural landscape. To others it may be an image of the rich variety and bustle of a mediaeval market town, or indeed the remote and exposed beaches of the Suffolk coast. Few, if any, would instinctively conjure up an image of a modern housing estate as being characteristic of the County. Far too much modern housing estate development is totally nondescript and some developers seem only too willing to build exactly the same style of house on sites from Lands End to John O'Groats. Unless we are prepared to see the character of Suffolk continue to be eroded, new development must compliment traditional Suffolk building styles.







"...Buildings of Suffolk display a wealth of detail and a love of quality."

2.1.4 This guide does not advocate the re-creation of settlements from the past, indeed 'pastiche', if badly done, devalues the original. The buildings of Suffolk are of many styles but they display a wealth of detail and a love of quality. Frequently the better quality materials and more ornate detailing are confined to the 'public' side of the building, and, as a general 'rule of thumb', the larger, grander buildings would have been the more ornate whilst the artisan's cottages would have had a simpler, uncluttered elevational treatment.

2.1.5 Traditionally they would have been arranged in one of two ways - the low density rural approach where the buildings were secondary to the landscape, or the higher density urban approach where the building frontages gave shape to the streets, squares, alleyways and courtyards. Too much modern development fails to differentiate between these basic principles and the result is mediocrity. What is required now is twentieth century development which builds upon the lessons of the past; development of quality which respects its surroundings and which is as characteristic of the County as that which has evolved over many generations.

## Suffolk Present

2.2.1 Modern materials and techniques have been embraced by every generation through the ages, and it would be foolhardy to try to turn back the clock. Twentieth Century man has access to a range of building materials and techniques undreamed of by our forebears, but the unthinking application of modern mass produced materials, used on stereo-typed house designs and unimaginative layouts has done much to detract from the character of Suffolk's towns and villages. Mass production, standardisation, Planning and Building Regulation controls all impose their own constraints. Economic reality is as relevant now as it has ever been, and, in addition to these, the motor vehicle is an ever-present fact of life.





Shape...



Materials...



The Individual dwelling...

## The Way Forward

2.3.1 Many of the people who live and work in Suffolk value it for the sense of being unspoilt and retaining a character which by contrast has been made less recognisable elsewhere by ubiquitous developments. Lifestyle plays an important part in attracting economic development to the area but the changes this brings must not be allowed to destroy Suffolk's pleasant character which is the very key to its success. It is therefore ultimately in the interests of landowners and developers to retain an environment which is valued by people who live in it.

2.3.2 Outline planning permission for a particular site cannot carry a presumption in favour of just any form of development. The presumption must be that when part of a Suffolk landscape is to be laid under bricks and concrete, the transformations will positively contribute to its present surroundings. Housing should look good in the landscape with a design philosophy directed to enhancement and not just concealment.

2.3.3 The key to achieving this is to foster the right design approach which must start with an overall perspective of what needs to be achieved. The question should not be, 'What can the site do for the development?' but, 'What can the development do for the settlement?' Raising the quality of the built environment has to be a team effort, including - architect, builder, highway engineer, landscape architect, and local planning authority.

2.3.4 The eventual 'bricks and mortar' must spring from a logical, step-by-step appraisal of many factors, which may be grouped under three main headings:

- a) SHAPE OF DEVELOPMENT
- b) MATERIALS
- c) THE INDIVIDUAL DWELLING