

## Paper from SAFE for the Annual Parish Meeting

Supporters Against Fressingfield Expansion (SAFE) is an informal group which does not use this meeting to attract new members. The purpose of this report for the Annual Parish Meeting is to inform residents of what is happening in respect of housing development as this could have major effects on the village in years to come. We maintain and frequently update our website:-

[www.fressingfieldhousing.org](http://www.fressingfieldhousing.org)

This covers a spectrum of information on national, district and village development activity. Our focus is to get the right houses in the right places in appropriate numbers.

We were formed in 2017 when major housing developments totalling over 200 houses were proposed and, in cooperation with the village, these were not built. We are again faced with increased development at national and local level.

At national level the Government intends to build 1.5 million homes by the end of this Parliament. This is approximately 300,000 per year. The concept is that more housing will improve the economy and result in a decrease in house prices. However, recent tax changes will add to labour costs and there is also a shortage of skilled workers. Additionally, the price of materials has increased by 30% over the last two years. These factors will make the target difficult to achieve. Added to this, other factors will increase costs. These include:

- Biodiversity Net Gain which is an obligation on the developer to make sure that habitats for wildlife are left measurably better than before development.
- Community Infrastructure contributions which is a sum of money payable by the developer on each new house to fund infrastructure projects at local authority and parish level.
- The cladding tax (to fund the replacement on existing buildings, to be applied to all new builds next year).

Whilst the principles of these measures are to be commended, they will have financial implications.

At a local level the Mid Suffolk housing target will increase from 535 to 734 per annum (37%) and in Babergh the increase is from 416 to 775 ( 86%). Local district experts feel these targets are both extremely challenging and unrealistic.

The provisional figures for Fressingfield are 160 new houses over 20 years, which reduces to 122 when allowance is made for houses under construction or with planning approval. These are provisional figures but could be influenced by a range of factors including the review the local Neighbourhood Development Plan. (NDP)

Mid Suffolk District Council is re-examining the 'Settlement Hierarchy.' This is a method of ranking villages by the population and range of services. In the original assessment Fressingfield was ranked as an 'Hinterland Village' capable of supporting only small-scale limited development. We believe this situation is unchanged. SAFE believes that the infrastructure deficit is so great that the number of houses recommended for development

must be built in a more sustainable location. The provisional figures given are based on algorithms and take no account of infrastructure.

A review of the Fressingfield NDP is currently being undertaken. SAFE is critical of the review process and the Chair of the Review Steering Group has recently resigned. Poor governance and lack of transparency within the group are cited as the main reasons for this resignation. The whole process is very secretive and villagers have not been consulted or properly informed. Even the MSDC Monitoring Officer feels that there is no reason for this degree of secrecy. Some villagers with experience in planning applied for membership of the review team but their applications were somehow 'lost.' Experts were enlisted to help formulate the housing questionnaire, but did not see the final version.

Infrastructure has not been properly considered in the NDP review. Any increase in housing needs to be related to the infrastructure deficit (SAFE Article 31.1 24) The current, previously adopted NDP states "new development would only be permitted if it can be demonstrated that sufficient supporting infrastructure is available to meet the needs of the development." The development of any more houses now has the potential to worsen the infrastructure including sewage egress which the former CEO of Anglian Water stated is a capacity issue.

During the year several articles relevant to planning in the village have been placed on the SAFE web site. We have NO public transport. Developments in adjacent parishes which share facilities in Fressingfield also need to be factored in. The development of the former Weybread chicken factory may be relevant in this respect.

During the last year two of our founder members have passed away:- Michael Miles was a long-term resident of the village and an active member until shortly before his death. Betty Priestman was involved with the group until her health deteriorated and she was in care. It was a pleasure to work with them both.

SAFE will continue to examine new planning applications and new planning policies to ensure that they are appropriate for the village of Fressingfield and that we have the right homes of the right quality in the right places.

John Castro – Chair, on behalf of SAFE Members

9<sup>th</sup> April 2025