

To Chairman & Parish Councillors Holbrook Parish Council
From Councillor Mary McLaren

21 March 2022

News from Babergh District Council

On 21 February the Council met for the second time in a month. It agreed its budget for 2022/23 ensuring continued investment in our resident's quality of life.

It was agreed to increase Babergh's element of the council tax by 2%. This means a total of an extra £3.45 per annum or 29p per month for an average Band D household.

Covid-19 has presented challenges for the Council, but BDC are in a strong financial position with reserves and funding received from the Government to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic. Although BDC collects council tax from its residents, it gets to keep less than 10% of each household's payment with the remainder going to Suffolk County Council, the Police and Crime Commission and Town and Parish Councils.

Councillors also agreed to freeze sheltered housing charges and garage rents at 21/22 levels, but BDC Tenants will see an increase of 4.1% to their rents to cover inflation and all our investment to improve the quality of Council Homes.

Storm Eunice in Suffolk

Babergh and Mid Suffolk joined a multi-agency response for the major incident as Storm Eunice hit Suffolk. This incident demonstrated the partnership of local councils (District and County) health bodies, utility companies and the emergency services.

New County Deal

There is good news that Suffolk is one of nine counties invited to negotiate a ground-breaking devolution deal. In real terms that means bringing in more control over areas such as transport, infrastructure and skills to the region to address regional inequalities.

New Digital Skills Programme for Businesses

Business owners in Babergh who want to learn and improve their digital skills can access free courses as part of the new business support programme. This has developed as a result of the successful Virtual High Street project. The workshops which are held virtually are free for some subjects and cover topics such as on-line security, digital and social media marketing, e-commerce and information management. Other subjects are offered at a fee. This is part of the Councils post covid recovery strategy and is being run by MENTA. Access our website & menta.org.uk

Empty Houses Week (25 February to 4 March)

The week of course will have passed when you read this report. However, it is to remind owners about the Empty Homes Renovation Loan designed to help improve vacant properties across the district which have been empty for over six months and in need of significant repairs.

Empty Homes Renovation Loans of up to £20,000 interest free can be used to restore empty homes into safe livable properties, relieving the financial pressure of returning empty homes back into use. The loan can help to carry out a range of major repairs including installing a central heating system, electrical re-wire or fixing a leaking roof.

The Council would also like to encourage residents to report any long-term empty houses they have noticed across the district.

Access the website - Empty Homes Renovation or contact Private Sector Housing on 0300 1234000 (option 3)



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New Government Rebate

On 3rd February, the Government announced measures to help protect millions of households from rising energy costs including a £150 council tax energy rebate. This applies to residents whose primary residence is valued as CT bands A-D and for some residents who are in the higher bands but are on low incomes.

We understand that those who pay their Council Tax by Direct Debit are likely to receive the rebate first. Worth a review on how you pay your Council Tax. Government Fact sheets on energy bills and the cost of living can be found on the GOV.UK website.

VAWG Violence Against Women and Girls

This week was the anniversary of the terrible death of Sarah Everard in London.

BDC has signed up to a new county wide strategy outlining how Suffolk will address violence against women and girls. The SAFER, STRONGER Communities Board (SSCB) – a multi-agency group covering Suffolk has a shared ambition to tackle this important issue. However, violence against women and girls is not limited to domestic abuse, sexual violence, stalking, coercive and controlling behaviour and revenge porn. Recent figures show an increase in sexual offences and domestic violence and the Board recognises the need to drive positive change through effective partnership working.

View the strategy online via the Suffolk County Council's website.

From my work load - "Call In"

As Chair of Babergh Overview & Scrutiny Committee I received a Call In from 6 BDC Councillors regarding a decision made by the BDC Cabinet with which they disagreed. Any decision made by the Cabinet (Public decision) can be called in for review by the Committee by any District Councillor, who has to find 5 other signatories to support their call in. Due process requires a time limit on the Call In and the Scrutiny process itself. The Committee met in public on the 21 February 2022 and listened to evidence made by the Lead Signatory and a presentation by a Cabinet Member. There were Officers of the Council to provide factual evidence. The Cabinet decision was upheld by the Committee. This meeting was a Live Streamed public meeting and can be viewed on the BDC website.

Cabinet or Committee Model - Council Governance.

A paper by the Babergh Constitution Group regarding the future Governance Model the Council may wish to adopt, will be presented at the Babergh District Council Meeting on Tuesday 22 March 2022. Members will have to decide based on the options presented, how they wish to vote.

Mary McLaren

3 March 2022

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