

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

15 August 2022 – Councillor Report

Babergh District Council Meeting 19 July 2022 cancelled. Agenda deferred to the September Meeting.

Other Business

Energy Rebate Scheme to be extended

Babergh Residents who have been unable to access financial support through the Council Tax Energy Rebate Scheme may now be able to do so through a discretionary fund.

The one-off rebate worth £150 aimed to help households in Bands A-D with the rising cost of energy was launched in February. There may be people in need of support but who were not eligible then but can now access the £150 rebate due to some extra funding from the Government

The discretionary fund is for people who live in a house where the council tax is paid by the property owner or for those in a house of multiple occupation and in any Council Tax band that was not eligible for the Council Tax Rebate. Applicants must provide evidence that they are responsible for the energy bills and are in receipt of Universal Credit or Housing Benefit.

In addition, residents in households band E-H who on the 1 April 2022 were in receipt of Council Tax Reduction, a Council Tax discount or certain exemptions.

The scheme is also open to Households in bands F-H who are in receipt of Disabled Band Reduction.

£200,000 more funding for community causes now available in Babergh

Community groups can improve their neighbourhoods thanks to two new Community Development Grants.

Projects including play areas and equipment, protecting or enhancing our natural environment, provision of cultural experiences, improving digital access, reducing social isolation, supporting renewable and net zero energy projects are all eligible to be supported by new funds

Each application is eligible for an award up to £20,000. Only one application is permitted but applicants can still apply to other community grant schemes for the same project.

This is in addition to the **Suffolk Climate Action Community Match Fund** which allows groups to work towards Babergh being carbon neutral by 2030.

Can I encourage Parish Councils to consider applying for these funds and communicating this information to your local clubs and societies to encourage interest, as many funds are often underspent.

Projects must demonstrate they are supporting the Council's strategies of supporting communities, wellbeing and leisure or leisure, sport or physical activity. Visit the **Councils Community**

Development Page. Bids close on Friday 16 September 2022 I would like to see my Parishes benefitting from these funds.

Empty Homes can be restored and provide more available housing for residents.

There are currently over 1000 empty properties across both districts. A new Empty Homes Policy has been introduced to reduce that number. This will help property owners turn empty homes into safe and secure places to live as well as a viable source of income. Supporting the new policy is the Empty Homes Renovation Loan - an interest free loan of up to £20k. The loan has been created to help owners to renovate properties that have been empty for more than six months. However, the Council will actively identify properties that are having an adverse impact on the community or the sustainability of the neighbourhood (attracting damage and deterioration). They want to regularly monitor empty properties. Parish Councils are often in a position to know where there are empty properties and the council will welcome any notification about them. Contact BDC Housing on both counts.



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Wildflowers across Babergh

Trials are in place to allow wildflower verges to grow across our district as part of efforts to tackle biodiversity and climate change.

Last week saw BEES NEEDS WEEK and grass cutting of verges will be reduced in specific areas to give existing wildflowers, a chance to thrive. The flowers provide food for bees and other wildlife while longer grass provides shelter and helps keep the ground cooler.

Where the land is not council owned working with Parish Councils is essential and includes the tree, hedgerows and wildflower scheme which is currently open to Parish councils until 31 August 2022.

Last year's scheme saw over 5,000 trees and hedgerows planted.

Summer Holiday Activities to support families over the summer break

One of the highlights of being a portfolio holder for Communities allows me the privilege to visit, participate and enjoy those activities that encourage our young people to join in sports and leisure activity. However the efforts made by Babergh District Council, Abbeycroft Leisure and Active Suffolk to offer many fun activities, whilst encouraging everyone to keep fit and healthy and to ensure no child is left hungry or lonely over the holidays is no mean feat. I visited Suffolk Games in Bury St Edmunds where young people of different abilities and disabilities were able to compete at a local sports venue and have their achievements recognised with medals and much cheering from their supporters. Forest Park Cooking is an event where families can learn to cook together with lots of healthy ingredients and Mums and Dads as well as the young people can try out a recipe and enjoy their efforts and at the end of the day take away a large box of fresh food that can be made up into the six colourful recipe cards provided and can cook a meal for six people for six days. I was very impressed with that event. I am joining a group of young people next week who will be doing a theatre day in Sudbury. There is a wide range of activities across Babergh throughout August. For families who have children who receive Free School Meals the events are free but for others a small fee will be required. At every event there will be food provided to ensure that no young person is going hungry.

Places get booked up early but it is worth finding out what is also on offer at Sudbury (Kingfisher) and Hadleigh Leisure Centres.

Access Holiday Activities Fund Programme on the Babergh Council Website.

Implementing the sustainable travel vision

Babergh with Mid Suffolk are among the first district councils in Suffolk to take the next step towards a sustainable travel solution, aiming to increase active travel and help tackle climate change.

Babergh Cabinet have approved the initial plan. Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) It will come to Council in September. There are a possible 200 potential, sustainable travel infrastructure schemes across both districts which will have to be prioritised when looking for local, regional and national funding. Shotley is considered a large scheme so this will have to be broken down into several elements and various funding options considered. By having such a plan ensure that rural and urban areas can support residents to lead more active, healthy and environmentally friendly lives.

Applications for my Locality Grant are welcomed.

Mary McLaren

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1 August 2022



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