

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

Holbrook Parish Council Report – 19 February 2024

Babergh District Council faces reality

Babergh District Council Leaders are calling for the Government to address a local authority funding crisis as it faces a £1.8 million budget gap.

A report to Babergh's Overview and Scrutiny Committee showed the cost of providing its services and communities to residents is expected to rise by £2.5 million to £15.12m next year – a 21 %increase. This is mainly due to inflationary pressures, particularly interest rates and salary costs, while there has also been a reduction in planning fees as potential development continues to stall due to the economic downturn.

While costs have risen 21% in the last year, Government funding has only increased by 3.4%. Babergh is a well-run authority. It is making savings, driving efficiencies, and reviewing our fees and charges -but this year it will have to spend some reserves to balance the budget, but it can only spend reserves once.

The Council is increasing fees and charges to reflect the cost of licences and services. It also continues to engage with local communities over the introduction of new parking tariffs in Sudbury, Hadleigh and Lavenham.

When the Government announced its annual grants for local authorities in December it based its forecasts on the assumption all councils would raise their council tax to the maximum allowed.

This would mean a 2.99% increase to Babergh's element of the bill – the equivalent of £5.46 a year or 10p per week for a Band D Home.

The district's share is less than 10% of the total bill with the remainder going to Suffolk County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and town or parish councils.

Under draft proposals Council Tenants would see a 7.7% increase in rents to try and keep pace with increased costs to ensure the necessary investment in repairs and maintenance across the Council's social housing stock.

This would mean the average weekly social rent increasing by £7.92 from £102.88 to £110.81. For affordable housing weekly rents would increase by £11.13 from £144.51 to £155.63.

Babergh District Council provides advice and support to those struggling to pay their bills with a council tax reduction of up to 100% for residents with the lowest incomes.

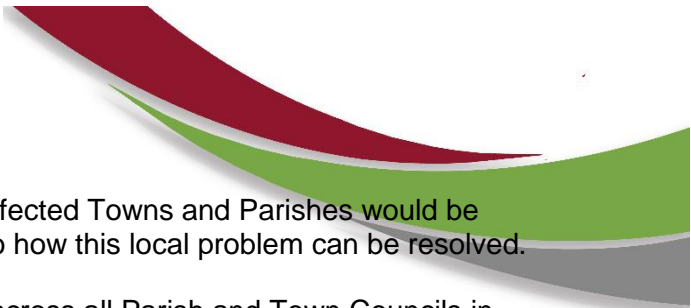
Further engagement over parking charges in bid to balance finances.

Babergh District Council has a history of dissent and division amongst its councillors so the car parking charges debate should not surprise anyone who has followed Babergh's often heated discussions over the past few years. For the three main communities involved in the debate, Sudbury, Lavenham and Hadleigh there is a clear-cut outcome to be supported and delivered for them - no change please. However, we should look at the facts.

- 1) These three communities have never had free parking – They have always had 3 hours subsidised parking. Subsidised by other council taxpayers across the Babergh District Council Area. £425k pa
- 2) The Council Run Pin Mill Car Park on the Peninsula does have parking charges.
- 3) All council car parks in Mid-Suffolk Council towns and villages require a fee to park. As do adjacent towns in Suffolk.
- 4) So given the financial difficulty facing the council and the large shortfall in our budget what other services should we consider for reduction? Funding our Leisure Centres or the support we give to our frail elderly in rural isolation or suffering from dementia.



Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils
Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX
Telephone: (0300) 1234 000
www.babergh.gov.uk www.midsuffolk.gov.uk



It was agreed that further in-depth discussions with the affected Towns and Parishes would be undertaken whilst looking for suggestions from them as to how this local problem can be resolved.

It was agreed that further engagement and consultation across all Parish and Town Councils in Babergh would be undertaken by Mark Emms and his Team from the Public Realm Directorate again to seek solutions and ideas. Parish Councils will have already been contacted by the team for comments.

The proposed tariffs will also be reviewed by the Babergh Overview & Scrutiny Committee in March before going back to Cabinet in April.

Petitions by campaigners protesting against the introduction of parking charges will also be heard at February's full Council Meeting but with the cost of subsidising car parking expected to be more than £400k next year councillors warn that avoiding a modest parking tariff would mean cuts elsewhere whether people use car parks or not or even drive.

Funding available for community action on climate change

Applications are being invited for "The Suffolk Climate Action Match Funder". Available to charities, community interest companies, parish councils, voluntary groups and other not for profit organisations whose projects contribute to Suffolk's Climate Emergency Plan.

The fund is provided by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group which includes Babergh District Council. The fund offers match funding of up to 50% or a maximum of ~£10,000 towards the cost of the project. Projects could include:-

- Improving the energy efficiency of buildings (solar panels, insulation, glazing)
- Promoting walking and cycling (organised walks/rides and community bike schemes)
- The use of sustainable/recycled materials (building refurbishment or play areas)
- Raising awareness of climate change through events (community events to promote low carbon.

Visit the Green Suffolk Website

Have you got friends and relatives living abroad?

British citizens living abroad are now eligible to register to vote in UK General Elections regardless of how long they have been living outside the UK. The Electoral Commission are campaigning to spread the word to friends and family in the far-flung corners of the globe (and we are helping them) who can register to vote, now the previous 15-year limit has been abolished. Those who have previously lived in or been registered to vote in the UK now have the right to vote in UK Parliament Elections. Anyone on a UK Electoral Register is also considered a permissible donor. They can register online to vote:- www.gov.uk/register tovot e and will need to confirm their personal information every 3 years. The British Government estimates that the abolishment of the 15-year rule could mean 3 million more British citizens being eligible to vote.

Mary McLaren

Mary.McLaren@babergh.gov.uk

5 February 2024



Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils
Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX
Telephone: (0300) 1234 000
www.babergh.gov.uk www.midsuffolk.gov.uk



Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils
Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX
Telephone: (0300) 1234 000
www.babergh.gov.uk www.midsuffolk.gov.uk