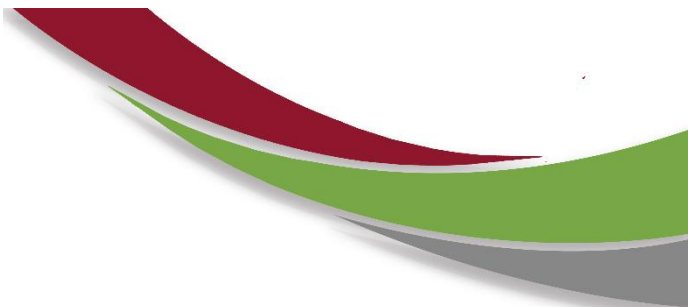


To Chairman and Councillors
Holbrook Parish Council Meeting
20 January 2025
From Mary McLaren
Babergh District Councillor - Stour Ward



First of all A Very Happy New Year to all and may 2025 bring some positive action among the plethora of changes that are being proposed at National and Local Levels.

Devolution and Local Government Re-organisation - Babergh District Council Cabinet

The Devolution White paper was published the week before Christmas. In our initial response we stressed that our councils are united in our position that local democracy and accountability are vital in any future successful devolution and structuring arrangements.

We are going through the White Paper in detail and are proposing to arrange town and parish liaison meetings early in the new year so we can discuss this. We must remain mindful that there are two separate, but linked, proposals here: Devolution to Mayoral Strategic Authorities and Local Government Reorganisation to create unitary authorities. The case for and roadmap to the former seem to be clear but the precise shape for the latter for Suffolk and the dependencies between the two are less so.

Suffolk County Council has arranged an extraordinary meeting on 9th January to discuss this. [The agenda is now on-line.](#)

The leader of the County Council is eager to push things through with haste and achieve his preferred aim of being a single unitary for the county, essentially the county absorbing the districts, but there is little appetite for this outside his cabinet. This has been complicated by the offer from the government that any area wishing to go on the Devolution Priority Programme can ask for the county elections to be delayed by a year or possibly longer. This has been grasped by a county administration that is worried about losing. It is profoundly undemocratic.

National Planning Policy Framework

BDC are working through the detail of the Government's announcement which raised Babergh's housing requirement from 416 to 734 homes per year.

We have reinforced our message urging all towns and parish councils to develop an up-to-date Neighbourhood Development Plan to give their communities a statutory influence to shape how their local area develops with help available on our website.

Budgets

Babergh District Council Budgets were discussed by the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2024.


Babergh District Councils Cabinet considered a 2.99% increase to the district's share of council tax bills as councillors were warned of a £10.9 million budget gap over the next five years due to a broken funding system

The proposed increase would see Babergh's element of council tax bills for a Band D home rise from £188.10 a year to £193.73 for 2025/26 – an extra 11p per week.

This would mean that Band D Households will be paying £3.72 per week for all district services including waste collection, planning, public realm and supporting the local economy, culture and communities.



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Babergh keeps less than 10% of the total council tax bill with the rest going to Suffolk County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner and Town and Parish Councils.

Figures show that the net cost after income and the use of earmarked reserves are taken into account, providing district council services to residents and communities will rise by 7% to just over £15 million next year with rising demand and costs due to inflationary pressure impacting local authorities nationwide.

Babergh's cabinet member for finance, assets and investments - Cllr John Ward said:

“Babergh continues to deliver excellent value for money providing vital services that people rely on. However, like many councils, the severity of our financial position cannot be underestimated. We are a well-run organisation and have already made savings and efficiencies and have identified even more in this budget.

But even with our proportionate balanced approach to protect our services, incredibly difficult decisions will have to be made unless the Government fixes the funding system for local authorities.”

The draft budget report shows savings and additional income totalling £2.559m have been identified. Savings include £403,000 where vacancies have not been filled and other staff savings amounting to £313,000 while cost efficiencies including reduction in bank charges and reduced mileage costs amount to around £277,000.

But there is still a predicted deficit of £361,000 which must be met from reserves if no further savings are identified and a forecast of a cumulative budget gap of £10.86m over the next five years - with the council due to run out of uncommitted reserves at its current rate by 2028/2029.

The proposed budget comes back to the cabinet in February for agreement before the full council on February 26 2025.

Suffolk Public Leaders Group endorse the Suffolk Economy Strategy

The Suffolk Public Leaders Group, which includes Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils has endorsed the Suffolk Economic Strategy. This is a comprehensive plan to propel Suffolks economic growth and position as a county to the forefront of the UK's green revolution.

The Strategy was developed by the Suffolk Business Board through extensive collaboration and consultation with key stake holders.

It is designed to leverage Suffolks strengths in clean energy, agri-food and logistics, integrating these core centres, with emerging opportunities in technology and innovation.

The hope is to establish Suffolk as an epicentre of clean technology convergence, supporting robust economic growth while ensuring every resident can benefit.

The collective effort aims to secure Suffolk's position as a leader in clean growth, innovation and community prosperity.



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Supporting and celebrating our local building industry

Our building control colleagues were busy hosting two events in late 2024 keeping the local building industry up to date with the latest regulations and celebrating best building practice across Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

It provided an opportunity for a range of building professionals to better understand regulation changes, ask questions and share best practice.

A condensed webinar version of the session with accompanying Power Point presentation. Anyone wishing to access this event - Please contact the Building Control Team at Endeavour House.

Parking charges

After extensive debate last year new short-term parking charges will be introduced in Sudbury, Hadleigh and Lavenham from Monday 13 January 2025. New signs will be in place to ensure drivers are aware of the changes which include a reduction in the current cost of all day parking in Sudbury and Hadleigh.

Pension Credit Letters

In December letters were sent out to all households in receipt of the Council Tax Reduction that they would also be eligible for Pension Credit and urging them to check for their entitlement.

However, if you know of any residents who are over pension age and might be eligible for Pension Credit tell them to check using the Governments Pension Credit Calculator.

The money could help with their energy, heating, housing and NHS Costs

More information about Pension Credit is available on the Babergh website.

Well People Healthy Places Fund

Applications for the Well People Healthy Places Fund opened on the 6 January.

The fund provides financial support for projects which promote healthier lifestyles and seek to improve wellbeing.

It is suitable for charities to apply as well as organisations such as village halls, voluntary and community groups, parish councils and sports clubs.

Up to £5000 is available to apply for in Parishes that have either a Neighbourhood Plan, People and Place Plan, Parish Infrastructure Plan or similar.

Find out more information about the Fund from the Babergh District Council Website

Mary McLaren

4 January 2025

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