

**Mr Chairman, Parish Councillors, Jo, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The civic year for District Councils began at the Annual Council Meeting on 14 May 2025. At the meeting the Chair and the Vice Chair of the Council are elected, and the Chairs and Vice Chairs of all Council Committees are also elected.

I gave up my Chairmanship of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which I had undertaken for nearly six years and was elected as Chair of the Licensing Committee (covering the regulation of Taxis and Private Hire and under the Licensing Act - the sale of alcohol-retail -club premises – regulated entertainment and the provision of late- night refreshment)

I also serve on the SCC Health Scrutiny Committee, The Joint Standards Committee (Scrutiny being one of my skills in a previous life) and act as an observer on the Board of Ipswich Citizens Advice and the Future Systems Board at West Suffolk Hospital as it prepares to build its new Hospital.

Over the past year I have accompanied the Council Chairman – Cllr Liz Malvisi to various civic events across Suffolk including civic gatherings at Bury St Edmunds Cathedral. As a matter of interest Mark Pendleton (Businessman and one time Governor of RHS ) will become Suffolk’s new Lord Lieutenant and Oliver Paul (Suffolk Food Halls and local Landowner) will become Suffolk’s new High Sherrif when the present incumbents of these distinguished and important roles step down in April.

Babergh District Council restated its commitment to the Armed forces Covenant - an important pledge to thousands of families across the district. As an ex-navy wife, I fully support this commitment. The covenant sets out the action the Council will take to support those who served or have served in the Armed Forces as well as their families.

In July a new system to improve the repairs process for our tenants was implemented. The system was designed to deliver a better experience for tenants whilst making life easier for our teams when dealing with repair reporting and appointments. In addition, a Tenants Scrutiny Board was set up where a committee of tenants (Chaired by a Stutton tenant) scrutinise complaints that have come to the Housing Department or to the Scrutiny Board and investigate the concerns on behalf of all the tenants involved. This has been very successful as twice a year they present their reports to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In December overall tenant satisfaction with repairs had risen to 90% from 75% since June 2024.

In September Babergh and Mid Suffolk hosted the second stage of the Men’s Lloyds Tour of Britain. Starting and finishing in Stowmarket, visiting Debenham, Thurston and Eye in Mid Suffolk and through Lavenham, Hadleigh and Sudbury in Babergh. These events bring with them needed income for our villages and towns which is so important for our communities. Braving the elements was a major problem and the 100 mile plus route was undertaken safely. Millions watched on television and both stages were won by Olav Kooji. I was pleased the Bike Active ( A cycling charity based at Alton Water for disabled people) were invited to Stowmarket to enjoy the race first hand.

Car Parking Charges in Babergh Car parks and a very contentious issue in Hadleigh, Lavenham and Sudbury were reviewed in September and the report found that foot fall in all three places had surprisingly increased but the pattern of parking stays had changed especially in location

In October 84 students from 11 schools from both council areas attended an event at RHS in Holbrook and were given the opportunity to discuss climate issues at a COP style event. The event was facilitated by the Interclimate Network, and some students were able to represent 16 nations at COP30 in Brazil which was an amazing experience for all of them. It also opened opportunities for other career options.

My locality grants this year were allocated mainly to activities involving young people -Stour Wanderers Girls Football Club, Holbrook Bowls for young people, Holbrook Village Hall and a small contribution to a Bench highlighting Suicide Prevention to be sited in Shotley.

Of course, Waste Collection services are due to change in June, and residents should have all received their letters from the council. I have had lots of discussions with residents on an informal basis and have met with groups e.g Suffolk Sight (visually impaired residents who attend a monthly meeting in Stutton Village Hall) Deliveries of Green Lidded Bins and Food Waste Caddy and Bins will be from April onwards.

The main changes around devolution and Local Government RE-organisation have now been agreed by the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Suffolk will be divided into 3 unitary authorities and Shotley Peninsula will become part of Ipswich and Southern Suffolk. I have had discussions with many residents about the changes and am very happy to continue with informal meetings.

Planned programme

### **May 2026 County Council Elections**

**May 2027 Elections of Councillors for the new Unitary Authority – existing councillors like me will stay on an extra year to enable new councillors to familiarise themselves to the new order.**

### **May 2028 – The Unitary Authority becomes Live**

### **2028 – Mayoral Elections**

I wish to thank the Chairman, the Parish Council and Residents for all their support to me this year. It has been a privilege to serve you and your community, and I look forward to another year of joint working and joint achievements.

**Mary McLaren**

[Mary.McLaren@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:Mary.McLaren@babergh.gov.uk)

