

DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT FOR NEDGING & NAUGHTON PARISH COUNCIL

13th MARCH 2018

Introduction

Mainly updates on current issues. Under Cllr John Ward's leadership Babergh DC approved the 2018/19 budget at the full council meeting on 20th Feb 18. Council tax will increase next year (FY 18/19) by an average of 3.25% (equivalent to £5 for a band D house). We are under no illusion about the financial challenges that we face and unless services are cut, council tax will continue to rise (your bill comprises 3 parts namely Suffolk CC with care provision + Police & Crime Commissioner + Babergh). In the case of Babergh DC, this has been required primarily to fill the gap left by the cuts in direct revenue support grants from Central Govt plus the fact that we still need to deliver more houses in the District.

Public Access

There are some moves to have an additional location provided in Hadleigh to meet with Council Officers and this was discussed at the Council meeting. A motion was moved by a Labour Member at that Council Meeting demanding this additional facility. I supported the motion. It's early days and it would be wrong to offer any assurances that this will happen, but I am still keen (and optimistic) to see some form of public access support provided in Hadleigh even if it's not 5 days a week.

Leisure

Some good news! I am pleased to report that the Council Meeting on 20th February approved in principle the expenditure of £3.8 millions to replace the Hadleigh Leisure Centre Pool **and** to redevelop the Kingfisher Leisure Centre in Sudbury. Tenders will be sent out shortly with target completion dates of Sept 19 for the Sudbury facility and Jan 20 for the Hadleigh Pool.

Boundary Commission

The Boundary Commission for restructuring the current Babergh Ward pattern was due to produce its final recommendations on 6th February 18. However, this was delayed to 20th February 18. As expected, the Boundary Commission has now produced another set of recommendations for further consultation that will end 30th April 18. Their final recommendations are now expected on 7th August 18 for presentation to the Sec of State for implementation at the next local elections in May 2019 – getting time critical. The Boundary Commission website explains how to make comment on the proposals should you wish to do so.

I still expect the number of District Councillors to come down from 43 to 32. PS If the initially proposed Ward structure goes ahead, I expect the new Ward to be renamed South East Cosford and will comprise the parishes of – Elmsett, Aldham, Whatfield, Nedging & Naughton, Kersey, Semer, Chelsworth and Monks Eleigh.

Public Sector Housing - Correction

Further to the information that I provided previously, it has now become clear that the number of Council owned affordable flats that will be provided in Hadleigh following the refurbishment of Angel Court will be closer to 20 rather than the 34, a number that was previously suggested by the new Leader of Babergh DC. Frustratingly, I am currently not able to provide any further detail but it is evident that work on this project will not start in the timeframe that was originally anticipated, and it could be 2021 before we see a result – from my perspective this is a highly undesirable delay and the residents of Hadleigh deserve a clear explanation why the project has been subject to such delay. Finally, Babergh also continues to buy suitable properties on the open market to increase the supply of Council owned houses.

Private Sector Housing

The Sec of State (Javid) has issued new guidance to help facilitate the building of more private sector houses. The challenge for Babergh DC has been seriously complicated by the absence of a 5-year land supply and I suspect that the introduction of new regulations will only slow/complicate the process. Theresa May appears to believe that we're at fault for not approving applications and has threatened to send in government agents if we don't meet our targets. What we actually need is to ensure that the approvals are turned into completions and suitable infrastructure funds are provided to support developments – that's where the Government could drive meaningful change. Worryingly, we were informed in a Members briefing on 9th Feb 18, that Babergh's target for completions (currently 355 per annum) is likely increase to about 440 per annum under new government planning criteria. **Personally, I would far rather the government legislated to make developers start building (eg graduated Council Tax implementation) rather than allow them to sit on approved developments for commercial benefits that are driven by the market. NB** I have heard recently that the PM has set up a cross party committee to address this question. It's already a major issue for Babergh & other Councils – my expectation is that it will get worse before it gets better.

Brett Works – McCarthy Stone

The McCarthy Stone development for over 55s, located behind the High Street in Hadleigh, is well underway. The cottages will now be built first and sold off plan in August 18 for occupation on Nov 18. Local people will be invited to a presentation by the developer in April 18. Details tbc. Phase 2 will now be for the flats in the replica "Maltings" development.

Merger of Babergh & MSDCs

The telephone poll on the merger option was completed on 5th February 18. No announcements have been made re the outcome, but a Members briefing will now take place on 20th March 18 – slipped due to recent weather. As I have reported previously, my concern centred around the questions that were asked of voters, which from my perspective, failed to provide an objective and balanced picture and led people towards approval of a merger without a full understanding of the issues. The absence of a full business case to support the merger is a prime example of this. The Chief Executive and his staff are now working on the business case that will be shared with the Babergh electorate before the merger referendum takes place. This is now expected to be in the summer of 2018, possibly in June. If the vote is in favour of merger, the decision must then be supported by a majority of Babergh Councillors

and Mid Suffolk before it can be submitted to the Secretary of State as a **recommendation**. Only he can take the final decision and I would not now expect this to happen before 2020/21.

Disposal of Corks Lane Buildings

Members were briefed on the disposal **recommendation** for the Corks Lane facility on Friday 12th January 18. In a nutshell there is no appetite/interest for an office or hotel commercial solution for the Corks Lane site. This leaves the single option of a housing development. Assuming that it happens, the listed buildings will be retained, and some of the 1980s extension (including the Council Chamber) will probably be recommended for demolition. If the current outline plan is approved (lot of water to go under the bridge before that happens) we are likely to have 50+ flats/houses built there. As part of that process, the Council will have to decide if it is prepared to take the risk and develop the site itself with the expectation of profit, or whether it should just be sold off. The key is to ensure that whatever solution is finally approved, it is viable in terms of a suitable return for Babergh DC. That is our responsibility to Babergh residents.

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