

District Council Report

The Council's biggest challenge over the next two months will be delivering a balanced budget for 24/25 and beyond. Finances are tough, the council have been hit by inflation, pay rises and lack of major development across the district. Some difficult decisions will therefore have to be made to ensure that we can continue to provide services.

Building in Babergh

The council has, finally, become the only rural district in the country to partner with the Considerate Constructors Scheme (CCS). This is something I proposed a couple of years ago. However, despite being approved by full council, nothing happened. Thanks to our increased presence in the administration things have now moved on. The scheme sets out how construction teams should respect neighbours, minimise impact on the environment, and have an inclusive and healthy workplace.

Developers will be encouraged to sign up to the scheme when they are granted planning permission, but it will be mandatory in communities where construction could have a severe disruptive impact. The council is also looking at how this approach could be further strengthened in the future.

Second Home/ Empty Property Tax

Babergh Councillors are also considering higher tax premiums for owners of second homes and long-term empty properties, following the introduction of new government rules. There are almost 600 empty properties in Babergh, and many residents are frustrated at the building of new properties while so many lay empty. Bringing these homes back into use will help meet growing housing need.

Proposals being considered by cabinet members would see the owners of properties left empty for a year or more paying double, with a premium of up to 100% from April 2024; properties empty for five years or more seeing their council tax bills treble with a premium of up to 200%; and owners of properties left empty for 10 years facing quadrupled bills, with a premium of up to 300%.

Also under the proposals, the owners of 576 second homes in Babergh would see their council tax bill double from April 2025.

Housing Repairs

Babergh's new Green Councillors have discovered that there are significant issues with the state of Council housing stock across the district. The group have made this matter a priority and will be pushing the council to improve on the situation as soon as is possible. To help with this the council have released £943,000 from reserves to help clear the repair backlog. The money would also support wider improvements to the council housing service in the district.

Joint Local Plan

Part one of the joint local plan has now been fully approved by the Council. At Full Council in November Babergh voted unanimously in favour of both part 1 of the JLP and the local development plan. The decision, which has been long in coming will provide the council with up-to-date policies to direct planning decisions. Part 2 will be developed over the next two years.

Call For Sites

Following on from above, the Council is already progressing with the production of part 2. At this initial point of the plan-making process the Council is inviting site submissions to be put forward for residential land use for consideration for future development.

This is known as the 'Call for Sites' process.

Homeless & Rough Sleeping Strategy

Babergh have developed a new strategy to help tackle homelessness and rough sleeping. This strategy has been developed by the new team and is focussed on.

- Early prevention & intervention.
- Make rough sleeping rare, brief, and non-recurring.
- Ensuring the health and wellbeing needs of households are met whilst in temporary accommodation.
- To expand and future-proof the role and remit of Central Suffolk Lettings - improving access to the private rented sector.
- To mitigate against the impacts of the cost of living.

There is currently a public consultation open for your input until the 14th of January.

Car Parking Charges

Implementation of car parking charges in Hadleigh, Lavenham and Sudbury is being looked at again, as a way of closing the budget gap. A paper was due to go before cabinet this month recommending a targeted consultation with affected towns and parishes to develop options for changes to parking tariffs later this year.