

# District Council Report

## District Council Priorities

The new administration at Babergh finally agreed a number of priorities that will be the basis of all plans for the next 4 years. Increased climate change action, close collaboration with communities, and a focus on good housing will be priorities for the new Council.

Collaboration and partnership with communities, the voluntary sector, business, and neighbouring councils are at the heart of the coalition vision. The administration will take the lead in responding to climate change, while protecting and enhancing the district's natural and historic environments. This will include encouraging the building of energy efficient homes and commercial buildings with high insulation standards and low carbon heating systems – while ensuring council housing reaches these standards too. It will also look at ways it can support community energy projects.

Supporting market towns and villages to flourish will also be an area of focus, alongside business support, promoting inward investment, and ensuring people can learn new skills and secure good jobs.

The administration is now looking at some short-term ambitions including ways of improving the energy efficiency of listed buildings; relaunch of neighbourhood plans; identifying more land for community housing and improving planning enforcement using the considerate constructor's scheme.

## Temporary Leadership Change

Unfortunately, Council Leader Dave Busby has had to step back temporarily from his leadership duties due to illness. Following a cancer diagnosis councillor John Ward will take over as acting leader while councillor Busby has treatment. There will also be some changes in portfolio ownership in the short term.

## New Funding

As well as the capital funding that I've mentioned the council is also set to benefit from a new round of funding thanks to the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). Small businesses and community organisations across the districts will have access to three grants under the fund: the Rural Business Growth Fund, the Rural Culture & Creativity Fund, and the Rural Communities Fund with grants available between £5,000 - £10,000 per application and will fund a maximum of 50% of total project costs.

Eligible projects include net-zero developments, agriculture and farm diversification, visitor economy business expansion as well as SME investment and diversification or investment in community facilities in our rural areas.

## Other news

- CIFCO, the council's commercial property arm, is still generating decent income for the council and is currently generating 11% of Babergh's income. However, I, and other Green councillors, are concerned at the value of the properties which have lost £10m since last year and are worth c£1.5m less than when they were purchased. The current business plan is being reviewed by the council.
- The councils Cost of Living strategy is currently being reviewed by the council. The report highlights the work completed so far and details the next phase of work that is due to be completed.
- More than £705,000 collected from developers in Babergh and Mid Suffolk is set to be injected back into communities through the Community Infrastructure Levy – funding projects including play areas, cycle paths and village hall improvements.
- The giving of live animals as prizes will be banned on land owned by Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. The move, which was initiated by Green Party cabinet member Jessie Carter in support of an RSPCA campaign, has been agreed by both councils' cabinets at meetings this week. The animal charity says it regularly receives calls nationwide about the issue, in particular cases of goldfish held in plastic bags for long durations before being given away at fairs.