

District Councillor Report (November 2024)

Dear Councillors,

Our new government are continuing to make their presence felt within the local government environment. Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have written to the Deputy Prime minister and Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Angela Rayner, urging the Government to act now on England's "broken council housing finances" ahead of this week's Autumn Budget. As I also mentioned in my October report, it is extremely difficult to plan ahead when the 'value of resources' available is only made known to you 3 months or so before you make your budgetary decisions. We face an extremely challenging financial environment causing the authority to have to make very difficult choices across discretionary expenditure areas of our budget, from the costs of running our leisure centres to the expense of supporting the emptying dog bins.

Some members may have noticed Babergh have just started to market the first phase of homes being converted from our old offices in Corks Lane, Hadleigh. We have made a significant investment in Hadleigh's future through the development of this project. The quality of the developed properties is outstanding and, I'm sure, will create a good level of interest and demand. The project was first considered following the councils move from Corks Lane in 2016. It's great that we are now seeing the product of our endeavours and a real boost for high quality homes in Hadleigh.

Just to prove its not all bad news, towards the end of this month town and parish councils throughout Babergh and Mid Suffolk are set to receive more than £979,000 in developer contributions to help community infrastructure keep pace with housing growth through district CIL.

Many members will be aware of the Brockley Woods planning application via Suffolk County Council development control committee (Aggregate Extraction site, so dealt with by SCC) only a few miles from Capel St Mary, on the eastern side of the A12. The first application heard in May and approved by SCC 'development' committee was, following objections from Copdock & Washbrook and Bentley Parish Councils along with several individuals, was overturned after a judicial review in the High Court. Suffolk County Council are bringing forward a second application, likely to be heard towards the end of this year, on the same site for the same processes. Should this application be granted, there is every likelihood that it will generate approximately 200 HGV movements a day to and from the site and could have significant implications for traffic movement in and around our community. I would urge members to scrutinise the terms of the application and respond to the consultation. Babergh will be objecting to the application across a range of grounds and on the basis there isn't a strong case for additional mineral extraction sites in this part of the county.

On other matters a few notes below on general community action themes as follows:

Activity

- Brockley Woods – I've been working closely with BDC Cabinet members, Cllr's Busby & Davies to scrutinise the second iteration of planning issues for this site. We remain extremely concerned at the impact it will create and, of course, the significant harm that will be generated by the exploitation of aggregate extraction at a location so rich in biodiversity and an integral part of our joint landscape area we share with Bentley, Copdock & Washbrook and the surrounding communities.
- Clearstone Energy (Bullen Lane, Bramford – Battery Site Application) – I joined colleagues from Mid-Suffolk District Council to undertake a site, information gathering, meeting on 30th October. Although this planning application is not within the Babergh district, I'm mindful of the community impact for Burstall residents and the cumulative impact of the range of energy generation and storage applications around the community. My understanding is an application will be made to Mid-Suffolk district council before the end of 2024. I have a range of documents I'd be happy to share with members should they so wish.
- Bramford Sub-Station Landscape Mitigation Plan – I've been working with colleagues from both Babergh & Mid-Suffolk to discuss & consider an overall landscape mitigation plan. The process now involves Babergh & Mid-Suffolk cabinet members along with a positive enabling role from BMSDC Public Realm team. Until recently, as Burstall members will know, this matter has rested with Principal Planning Officer, Bron Curtis. I'm hopeful these changes will generate a considered plan moving onto releasing S106 funding to landowners for development of the mitigation measures.

Babergh Notes

I attended the BDC Council meeting on 29th October where Council considered, in confidential session, the progress at Corks Lane in Hadleigh. We also considered a motion put forward by Councillor Holt to reconsider the, previously used, 'Committee' model as opposed to the current 'Cabinet' model of council business management. It was agreed by Council to do so, subject to deferring the consultation into the next Council budgetary period.

Babergh planning committee hasn't met in October again, mainly due to applications being delayed for various reasons (outside the influence of council). We are, however, looking at and reviewing the joint councils 'Planning Charter' which sets out our strategy over dealing with and managing our planning business processes. We also meet, via the online platform, Teams, to look at various issues – this month it was the impact of flooding/water supply issues, engaging with AW, EA & Suffolk & Essex Water.

The joint BMSDC Overview and Scrutiny committee met on the 14th October where we reviewed and scrutinised the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy. Part of his process has been the setting up of our new 'tenants boards' that represent the interests of our social housing tenants (Approx 3700 across both districts).

As ever, I remain open to any members who would like to be briefed on specific anonymised examples of the council's work, in this area, please let me know. These meetings are also open to both parish councillors and members of the public wishing to attend either in person or online.

District Councillor Resident Surgeries

My regular meeting opportunity for residents in the library will be Tuesday 12th November 9.30 – 11.00am. The forward date for next month will be Tuesday 10th December 9.30 – 11.00am. No appointment is necessary, but if residents need more of a confidential chat, please let them know beforehand so I can arrange some privacy. I'm also available 'on demand' at the PC office in conjunction with Julie Lawes (Clerk & RFO) Capel St Mary.

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