

## **District Councillor Report (March 2024)**

Dear Councillors,

Sadly, my hope and expectation of slightly drier conditions evaporated pretty soon into February...! My garden, at present, is looking a bit like 'Water World'..!! The good news is, I've tackled my elderly apple tree, giving it a 'two-year' haircut! On a more serious note, it's a real concern that our road drainage infrastructure has been found so wanting and in a poor state of maintenance. The moral in this story is 'a stitch in time saves nine'..! Roadside ditches, under-road culverts and our streams and river tributaries, must be kept clear debris. We must get better at anticipating issues wherever we can and not allowing 'quick fix' jobs to stand in the way of good quality, long term, solutions. I've been involved with several interventions, on this subject, over the last few months, many of which would have been avoidable by an programmed set of maintenance measures. Moreover, had we tasked our agile and thoughtful parish councils to consider and take responsibility, through managed devolution, the works would have been completed – a thought for the future perhaps?

### **Babergh Notes**

Finances and budget setting along with the consultation on car parking, within the district, remains a significant topic of discussion. The budget was agreed at the full meeting of Council on the 20<sup>th</sup> February. Quite a 'marathon' meeting that lasted nearly 4 hours. We had no alternative to make good the deficit other than to 'budget' some £1.4m of our reserves to fill the potential revenue gap. Having said that, there are other mitigation measures being considered including reconfiguring the senior leadership team, cutting some less essential discretionary spending and, of course, considering the district council 'free' parking facilities and tariffs. There aren't any easy decisions. The chronic underfunding of local government across the UK, particularly in rural authorities, like our own, are now becoming clear and present threats to maintaining anything other than our non-discretionary services. We will still face significant financial challenges moving into the next 24/36 months unless there is some robust re-thinking of financial support to local government and moving away from the 12-month settlement process. It simply doesn't give authorities sufficient surety to plan their activity and manage expenditure. On a slightly more positive note, BDC Housing Revenue account remains in a relatively strong position which will enable us to continue with our capital programme of improvements and quality maintenance to the districts housing portfolio.

The car parking consultation period has almost closed. All town and parish councils, along with interested local groups and organisations have been contacted for their feedback on the key issues. The report, compiled by officers, will be presented at the next meeting of BDC Overview & Scrutiny meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> March. O&S will consider the results and recommendations of the report, ensure the exercise was completed with adequate and appropriate evidence to support its recommendations. The next stage of this process will be for O&S to note the report and/or add further recommendations to BDC Cabinet. Ultimately, the decision lies with BDC Cabinet as to whether the recommendations are accepted or rejected. Any decisions to increase any costs to residents are difficult at the best of times, but in the current financial climate even more challenging. We need to act with some degree of financial responsibility, and we also need to make well informed decisions for all our residents across the entire district from Shotley to Sudbury and Burstall to Brantham. This makes many of us appreciate the real value of our parish/community parking and the hard work parish and community leaders have put in to make these investments happen.

Babergh planning committee hasn't met this month yet, but I have a several site meetings next week in Leavenheath (2 visits) and Bildeston.

The BDC Overview and Scrutiny committee hasn't met in February, but are preparing and considering material for our meeting on the 18<sup>th</sup> March when the car parking consultation comes forward along with

our joint BMSDC meeting on the 14<sup>th</sup> March when we are considering the Culture, Heritage & Visitor Strategy and Customer Services Performance. As ever, I remain open to any residents 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 parish councillors and members of the public wishing to attend either in person or online.

Full Council meets on 19<sup>th</sup> March. Again, it's open to councillors and members of the public wishing to attend.

### **District Councillor Resident Surgeries**

My regular meeting opportunity for all residents Capel St Mary library. The next meet up will be Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> March 10-12 and again on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> April 10-12. No appointment is necessary, but if residents need more of a confidential chat, please let them know beforehand so I can arrange some privacy.

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