

## **District Councillor Report (January 2025)**

Dear Councillors,

Happy New Year - I wish everyone a healthy and peaceful 2025...!

Shortly before Christmas BDC leader, Deborah Saw and Chief Executive, Arthur Charvonia, issued a joint e mail to town and Parish Councils providing an update on the governments, recently published, Devolution White Paper, the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and our own budget setting process. Its worth a read if you have the time and inclination.

Firstly, on the Devolution White Paper, you may remember, in my December report, I alluded to the potential changes in local government structure and the UK Gov. desire for Unitary authorities and regional Mayor's. I'm generally positive towards structural change providing we create real efficiencies within the system, but not at the price of distancing ourselves from communities along with the loss of genuine 'local democracy' – this is, and remains, a very important 'right' for community residents. Take Capel St Mary as an example. We have one district councillor (me...!) I will stand or fall on the level of my performance as the communities elected 'local government' representative. I'm sure everyone will have a view but that remains, very much, a community driven choice. My concern, which is echoed by many, is that in our desire to create efficacy of elected members and reduce costs, we will lose our ability to make good and well-informed electoral choices. This was brought home to me, before Christmas, when listening to a briefing on the potential structures and being advised there will be no further district council elections. So, whatever the outcome of the debate, I will be the last district councillor Capel St Mary ever elects! Quite an impactful thought...! On the matter of the County Council elections due to be held in May this year. There is a 50% + expectation Suffolk County Council will defer/cancel them. I suspect we will know within the next 4/6 weeks. BDC will be proposing a date for a town & parish liaison meeting shortly to discuss 'devo' along with the changes to the NPPF with members to inform and obtain your views.

BDC budgeting for 25/26. Finance officers and our cabinet member for Finance & Assets, John Ward, have been working very hard since the release of the governments 'Local Government Funding Settlement'. We have reduced our budgetary gap to around £375,000 from £1.2m by a combination of savings on job roles by combining and deferring recruitments along with the reductions in discounts on discretionary activities.

Some good news – Our building control team had been shortlisted for the national Local Authority Building Control Team of the Year award by the LABC Building Excellence Council for the second year running. We also hosted two events keeping local building industry business's up to date with the latest regulations and celebrating best building practice across the district.

Brockley Woods – We need to remain mindful that this application remains in the background, but must not be forgotten by us. I suspect the application will now be heard in February at the next meeting of SCC Development Committee. We must continue to push back hard against this potential imposition upon the local communities and our already overloaded road infrastructure. I continue to urge members to scrutinise the terms of the application and respond to the consultation if you can.

### **Babergh Notes**

Babergh planning committee met on 11<sup>th</sup> December to consider an application for approval of Reserved Matters for phase 3 of the Chilton Woods development relating to the construction of 149 homes. The application sought to set out the appearance, scale and layout of the homes. The application was recommended for approval which was validated by committee members.

The BDC Overview and Scrutiny committee met on the 16<sup>th</sup> December where we scrutinised the councils 2025/26 Draft General Fund Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) along with the Review of the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) 2025/26 Draft Budget and 30 Year Business Plan. The paper was presented by Cllr John Ward the Cabinet Member for Finance, Assets and Investments. The Council faces a challenging financial environment, but as I said earlier in my report much work has been done to reduce the budget gap on the general fund to create a balanced budget with minimal input from reserves. BDC revenue budget continues to benefit from significant positive investment yield input from our wholly owned property business, CIFCO Holdings Ltd.

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 14<sup>th</sup> January 9.30 – 11.00am. The forward date for next month will be Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 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.

John (Whyman) Cllr - Babergh Council Member – Capel St. Mary

[John.Whyman@babergh.gov.uk](mailto:John.Whyman@babergh.gov.uk)

**Mobile: 07928 512597**