

District Council Report

March 26

Call for Sites Map

The map of the sites offered up for planning has been published on the district council website. The map shows numerous sites around the village. With fields off of Ipswich Road, Nedging Road and Whatfield Road. The potential allocations are hashed in Orange or Purple, with the orange sites submitted in 2024 and the purple submitted this year.

At the moment these are only potential sites, and it is highly unlikely they will all be accepted. The council will now assess each site to determine if they are viable before the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) is published in the spring. There will then be a public consultation when the council publishes its draft local plan. Once the sites are finalised, they will still need a developer to choose to build on them, and any proposals will have to go through planning.

Neighbourhood Plan

Money is being made available to help parishes to create a neighbourhood plan. The money will be a limited amount and will be on a first come first served basis. Once it is gone its gone. Only villages who are prepared to offer allocations will be considered, but there may be options to work with neighbouring parishes.

General Fund Budget

At Full Council, last week we debated the budget position. Following the release of the Local Governments Financial Policy Statement, Babergh's General Fund was left with a surplus of £334k in the revenue budget compared to a deficit of £633k in 2025/26. While the 2026/27 budget is balanced and delivers a modest surplus, achieved through significant savings and one-off government adjustments, **the medium-term outlook is challenging**. A **£9.656m gap** is still emerging due to the business rates reset, reduced government support beyond 2026/27, and rising service demands.

Without further structural savings or income generation, the Council's reserves would be depleted before the end of the Medium-Term Financial Position (MTFP) period.

As such the finance team has recommended

- An increase to Council Tax of £5.79 per annum (11p per week) for a Band D property, which is equivalent to 2.99%, increasing from £193.73 to £199.52 per annum.

The Government's assumptions on council tax yield are higher than Babergh can actually raise (producing a **£119k shortfall** in 2026/27 alone).

Housing Revenue Account

The Housing Revenue Account also came before full council last week.

The HRA is forecasting an **£8.855m revenue deficit**, funded directly from HRA reserves. Income for 2026/27 is budgeted at **£23.882m**, an increase of **£1.275m**, driven by rent increases while expenditure totals **£18.834m**, a decrease of **£1.014m**, attributable to the pension contribution rate reduction, staff restructures, and repairs/maintenance management.

Despite this the finance team are recommending rents rise by **CPI + 1% = 4.8%** in 2026/27. Average social rent increases by **£5.50/week** and average affordable rent increases by **£7.90/week**.

Housing

It was recently reported in the press that Babergh still has 12.77% of its housing stock that is failing to meet the decent homes standard. This was discussed at Overview & Scrutiny meeting this month. This figure is still too high, even though it is improving each quarter, due to the fact that we have now completed a full stock check on the state of our homes. This was something that the Green Councillors on cabinet pushed for from day one. The state of our homes had always been assumed, and we insisted that a quality check would be needed urgently to understand what needs to be done.

The work to rectify the problems were delayed until we employed a new contractor. These homes will now be prioritised for improvement works as our insulation contractors are mobilised.

Roundabout Support

I am pleased to report that Green Party Councillor for North-West Cosford, Deborah Saw, and I were able to provide the Roundabout magazine with £1000 (£500 each) from our locality budget. This money will help support the magazine.

With Council assistance the magazine was able to set up a bank account of their own, that will be hugely beneficial for them.

Council Complaints

The report on complaints to the council was also reviewed this month. The report, which was for 2024/25 identified an increase in complaints, which is counter intuitively a good thing. Following the installation of a new reporting system it shows that residents are finding it easier to report issues. Early data from 2025/26 is showing that complaints are now reducing.