

District Council Report

Hedges – Nedging Road

I reported the issue of the missing hedges to planning enforcement. They looked at the case and confirmed that the landscaping scheme condition had to be completed within the first seeding season (October to March) following the commencement of the development. They contacted the landowner who provided picture evidence on the 13th of December 2024 that the hedges are planted.

While enforcement are now happy and have closed their case I will monitor progress of the hedges.

Jubilee Gardens

I have reported the situation with the open space area in Jubilee Gardens to planning enforcement who have opened a case, although no update has been received yet.

Devolution plan

The planned creation of a combined strategic authority and subsequent unitary councils will mean the end of the district council, which has always ensured that local government has remained genuinely local. If the combined authority and Mayor bring with it the finances and power to deliver real change for our residents, then it could be a positive step. However, we need to ensure that delivery of services are completed by those who are close to their communities, who understand their specific needs and can respond quickly to address inequalities – particularly for those most in need.

Bigger is not always better – and a ‘one size fits all’ approach is unlikely to meet the diverse, and often complex, needs of our rural communities and market towns.

In seeking to cancel May’s county elections, the county is removing the democratic right of Suffolk residents. The County is currently failing in so many areas and this will prevent residents from expressing their dissatisfaction with the current incumbents. District councils in Suffolk are writing to the Secretary of State to re-iterate this.

Joint Local Plan review

As part of their drive to build 1.5 million homes nationally the Government has increased the annual housing requirement from 416 to 775 homes in Babergh (up 86%).

Each year, planning authorities must demonstrate they have a five-year land supply for the required number of homes, something that we have done in recent years. However, the higher figures, set in December’s National Planning Policy Framework review, mean this may become more challenging in future years.

If this happens, there is a risk that national planning policies would start to take priority over the Joint Local Plan - and the council may find itself in a position where they have to approve planning applications on sites contrary to the development plan.

We feel that it is wrong to blame the council for failures in houses being built. Repeatedly developers fail to build out approved applications.

Because of the Governments unrealistic ask, although the plan was only approved in 2023 the council has no option but to review it.

Budget warning

Babergh are looking to increase their element of the Council Tax by the maximum amount allowed, 2.99%, as well as increasing all fees and charges to help the councils difficult financial situation.

The draft budget report shows savings and additional income totalling £2.559m have been identified. Savings include £403,000 where vacancies were not filled, and other staff savings amounting to £313,000. While cost efficiencies including reductions in bank charges and reduced mileage costs amount to around £277,000.

But there is still a predicted deficit of £361,000 which must be met from reserves if no further savings are identified, and a forecast cumulative budget gap of £10.86m over the next five years – with the council due to run out of uncommitted reserves at its current rate by 2028/29.

The budget will be finalised over the next couple of months.

Kingfisher leisure centre ongoing delays

In my last report I mentioned that the leisure centre in Sudbury would be re-opening on the 11 December. Unfortunately, surveys completed on the pool in November identified further structural issues. The work required to resolve these will delay reopening of the pool until mid-February. Other parts of the leisure centre are still open as normal.

Community projects cash boost

Once again, the council have been able to assist community projects across the district with funding from the community infrastructure levy (CIL). Projects in East Bergholt and Glemsford received c£61k and £28k respectively from the October submission window.

Babergh endorses the Suffolk Economy Strategy

The Suffolk Public Sector Leaders Group (SPSL), which includes Babergh Council, has endorsed the Suffolk Economy Strategy.

A comprehensive plan will propel Suffolk's economic growth and position the county at the forefront of the UK's green evolution, by playing on Suffolk's strengths in clean energy, agri-food, and logistics, and integrating these core sectors with emerging opportunities in technology and innovation.