

Babergh District Councillor's Report

January 2024

Parking back on the agenda for Babergh as it seeks to balance books

A significant budget gap for 2024/25 has forced parking back on the agenda for Babergh District Council. Options for the implementation of new parking tariffs are to be discussed with affected town and parish councils, pending cabinet agreement at a meeting on January 9th.

Parking Charges and the Budget

I will be providing a detailed update on the budget proposals next month, but, since we have announced our intention to revise the tariffs and extend short-stay charges to the car parks in Hadleigh, Sudbury and Lavenham, this has become, as expected, a major talking point. Therefore, I want to set the context for this now.

There has, inevitably, been a lot of disinformation and focus on the wrong things by those strongly opposed to the proposal in order to force a rethink, but we do need to be clear that this is both necessary and fair.

The primary driver for this is the need to balance our budget. This year the challenges being faced by councils across the country are severe – much worse than the normally difficult budget-setting process. We have been faced by high inflation, high interest rates and a greater than expected national pay award. These factors, coupled with continuing squeezes of government funding, mean that our budget pressures are of a different scale from those we faced in previous years.

We will be looking at full cost recovery for all our discretionary services, which will mean significant increases for some of them. Parking has remained an anomaly, where are element of this (short-term) has remained free in most of our car parks. Our car parks cost a lot to run: this is no longer sustainable and we need to include modest short-term charges where they haven't previously existed and increase them where they do already exist. These are not the only measures we will be undertaking to balance the budget: we have identified further savings we can make in how we do things, we will not fill staff vacancies unless the post is essential and we will postpone some capital projects, but we do want to try to maintain the services that many people want and value. I don't want these services to be reduced or removed just to maintain 'free parking' for some.

Most councils are struggling: some have issued bankruptcy notices and other may well follow in the coming months. All, irrespective of political control, are critical of the current local government financing regime, which is no longer fit for purpose. A long-term settlement has been promised and postponed for many years. We have already seen the latest announcement from Suffolk CC about their cuts.

I do understand that this proposal is not liked by many of those who use the car parks, but we also have to consider the many who don't and who might have to lose something. We will only be introducing small charges – £1 for three hours is likely in Hadleigh – but this will help a lot and should be a sensible balance between the needs and desires of all our residents, while reassuring those who fear that there could be an impact on high street businesses.

New Year in new homes – council housing boost

Tenants have picked up the keys to more than 120 new affordable, high-quality council homes across Babergh and Mid Suffolk over the last 12 months.

Councils award funding to provide warm spaces this winter

31 community projects have received a share of more than £36,000 to help their communities this winter.

Councillors to consider tax premiums for second homes and empty properties

Councillors at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are considering higher tax premiums for owners of second homes and long-term empty properties, following the introduction of new government rules.

Last chance for parents to claim free tree before January

Applications for a popular free tree scheme for new parents who welcomed arrivals in 2023, will close on January 10th.

£2 million pledged to accelerate climate emergency action in Suffolk

A further £2million has been pledged by Suffolk Public Sector Leaders to tackle the climate emergency.

Homelessness and rough sleeping strategy open for consultation

The councils are asking residents and organisations for their view on tackling homelessness and rough sleeping to help shape their future strategy. The consultation runs until January 14.

'Building in Babergh? Be a good neighbour'

Babergh District Council expects developers and commercial builders to follow the 'gold standard' of working practices to protect nearby residents from construction site disruption.

Emergency planning advice and information

The severe flooding caused by Storm Babet and heavy rainfall over recent weeks is a reminder of the benefits of communities having their own emergency plans.

If your town or parish doesn't already have a plan, or is looking to update its procedures, there is lots of useful information and advice on the

Suffolk Resilience Forum webpage

Community emergency planning is about people understanding local risks and knowing what resources they have available to help minimise the impact of an emergency. Emergencies can take many forms, from house fires through to flooding or widespread power outages.

If you have any further questions, contact District Emergency Planning Officer [Ben Wilding](#), or Emergency Planning Officer [Freddie Gulliver](#).

XL Bully dog ban - the impact for our council tenants

Our teams have been busy advising tenants on the implications of the XL Bully ban, with restrictions for the breed now being phased in.

Following the recent addition of the XL Bully to the Dangerous Dogs Act, the breed is now no longer allowed in public places unless muzzled and on a lead - and, from February 1st, it will be a criminal offence to own the breed without an exemption certificate.

This means no **new** XL Bully dogs will be allowed in our properties from February 1st. However, we are reassuring any existing council tenants that currently own this breed that they may continue to keep their pet, **provided they comply with the law and have the necessary exemption certificate**. We are also asking them to inform us that they have an XL Bully so we can ensure the necessary measures are in place for the safety of our residents and for staff and contractors.

[Read our pet policy](#), plus see further information on [how to prepare for the ban](#) and [how to apply for an XL Bully exemption certificate](#) on the gov.uk website.

Meetings

Cabinet, Council and Planning Committee meetings can be watched, either live or catch-up, on our [YouTube Channel](#).

For agendas and minutes, please visit the [Democratic Services homepage](#).

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