



STRATFORD ST MARY PARISH COUNCIL

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ANNUAL PARISH MEETING

**MONDAY 27th of April 2026 1930hrs, Village Institute, Higham Road,
Stratford St Mary**

DRAFT MINUTES

PRESENT:

Cllr R Barrell - Chairman, Cllr D Robinson, Cllr W Davies, Cllr Townsend, Cllr G Robinson, Cllr N Wright, Cllr R Carvalho, County Cllr Georgia Hall, District Cllr J Ward and Faye Hall - Clerk.

Members of the Public -12

1. Apologies for Absence. Apologies accepted from Cllr L Shead and Cllr N Woodard.

2. Approval of Minutes from the Annual Parish Meeting held on Monday 28th April 2025. The minutes of the APM held on 28th April 2025 were approved as a true record and were signed by the Chairman, proposed by Cllr Wright, seconded by Cllr D Robinson, all in favour.

3. Reports:

Chairman Roger Barrell – Chair Report Stratford St Mary Parish Council. The report is attached in appendix A.

County Councillor Georgia Hall – Suffolk County Council. Latest report is attached in appendix A. CC Hall advised that she will not be standing again for CC.

District Councillor John Ward – Babergh District Council. The report is attached in appendix A. Cllr Davies asked if the bottle banks in the village will be removed once glass is allowed to be placed in recycling bins from June, John Ward advised that it is highly likely that bottle banks will disappear. Cllr G Robinson asked how the need for new houses works with the new council structure – John Ward advised that they are waiting on advice from the government with regards to this. The target for social/affordable housing is 30% for developments.

4. Reports from various village organisations

PC Finance report – presented by the Clerk, report is attached in appendix A. A resident asked why there was no expenditure on the playground 25/26 – the Chairman advised that the responsibility for the playground has transferred to the VI Committee but the PC have allocated funds in their budget which allows the VI Committee to ask for financial help if needed.

Stratford St Mary Primary School – report received and read out by the Chairman. Full report attached in appendix A.

Stratford St Mary Community First Responders – report received from Peter Dawson and read out by Cllr G Robinson. Full report attached in appendix A.

Neighbourhood Watch – Cllr Davies is the Coordinator for Neighbourhood Watch and advised that there is a low crime rate in SSM. Not many residents are involved in the scheme and it needs to be regenerated, it would be good to have more people onboard. Cllr Davies will put an entry in the Quartet and a resident will put a message on a local what's app group.

Stratford St Mary Ramblers – report received from David Umfreville and read out by the Chairman. Full report attached in appendix A.

Stratford St Mary Community Trust – report from Roger Barrell, full report attached in appendix A.

Bowls Club – no report received.

Stratford St Mary Chapel – report received from Philip Wyncoll and read out by the Chairman. Full report attached in appendix A.

Parochial Church Council – report received from Sandy Ranson and read out by Cllr Townsend. Full report attached in appendix A.

Village Institute Committee – report from Emily Barrell, full report attached in appendix A.

Community Speed Watch – report from Cllr Davies. SSM Speed Watch has been going since 2013 so 13 years and they have 8 volunteers and are looking for more. Some statistics given:

2022	85 sessions done	18,703 vehicles went through	843 were speeding	4.5%
2023	77 sessions done	17,035 vehicles went through	524 were speeding	3.08%
2024	85 sessions done	17,687 vehicles went through	443 were speeding	2.56%
2025	85 sessions done	18,500 vehicles went through	467 were speeding	2.52%

The ratio of vehicles caught speeding has decreased so this justifies what Speed Watch are doing. Details of any vehicles caught speeding are given to the police and letters are issued. If there are repeat offenders then the police may set up a speed trap.

A resident asked if the 30mph speed sign coming into the village from Dedham can be renewed – agreed to agenda this for the next PC meeting.

Village Life – no report received. This group is still running and are there not to make money but to arrange community events like quiz nights, Spanish night etc and have a meeting on the 28th of April.

Orchard Barns – Olivia from Orchard Barns emailed to advise that some of the things they are developing include their Forest Garden, with their new Forest School lead Janet. They are also hosting an open day for prospective families, on Friday 19th of May 9-11am.

5. Open forum – residents (any other matters)

A resident asked if the PC have any information about possible alteration to the flooding risk for the village consequent on the new underground power cable installation and during the construction period – the Chairman advised that this has been highlighted in the report submitted from the PC to the planning inspectorate but no comment back has been received.

ABC pre-school – residents have raised again that the new report submitted to Babergh planning from Highways is vague. When assessing traffic in SSM, Highway's assessment was undertaken at 0800hrs in the morning which would give them the wrong figures. The PC have responded to planning on the Highways report and there are residents putting together a petition against the preschool and additional traffic/parking issues that it will cause.

A resident thanked the PC for everything that they do for the village.

Meeting closed at 2101hrs

Appendix A – Reports

- Chairman report – Stratford St Mary Parish Council
- County Councillor Georgia Hall report
- District Councillor John Ward report
- Parish Council Finance report
- Stratford St Mary Primary School
- Stratford St Mary Community First Responders
- Stratford St Mary Ramblers
- Stratford St Mary Community Trust
- Stratford St Mary Chapel
- Parochial Church Council
- Village Institute Committee

Annual Report for Stratford St Mary Parish Council 2026

This is a report on the activities of the Parish Council in the last 12 months.

The Parish Council has the full compliment of councillors following the coopting of Russell Townsend and continues to meet monthly.

The accounts were audited in the last period and were signed off.

The precept was considered in January and due to rising costs and for services and commitments it was agreed it should be raised by £2,000.00. The new amount is therefore £18,100.00 per annum

The Parish Council continues to monitor the National Grid Pylon proposals having sent a revised report at the time of the formal submission.

We are advised by Suffolk Highways that the flooding issues down Dedham Road have now been resolved. Only heavy rain will prove this. It has taken two years of continual pressure to get this resolved.

Issues with visitors and parking along the Dedham Road at Dedham Boat house came to a head last year with the intervention of Suffolk Police over public safety. Suffolk Police are insisting on continuous yellow lines, and these are due to be installed shortly.

The pedestrianisation of the B1029 to Dedham has not been taken further while the yellow lines are resolved.

The old ABC playschool building has been taken over by Constable Childcare, who want to enlarge the building for potentially 42 children. A planning application for this has been submitted and has been heard through the planning committee. The Council has serious concerns over parking for staff and parents, which has still not been addressed.

Babergh have published their initial proposed development sites. This includes two new sites within Stratford. One is proposing 72 new homes in the field on the west side of the A12 between the church under pass and the A12 layby. The other is a commercial site beside the Woodhall barn Site. The council have written back to Babergh suggesting that these are not practical due to traffic noise, pollution and lack of utilities.

The Parking issues at the Swan continue to be a concern with pavements blocked and issues with the blind bend. After consultation with Suffolk Highways the council has agreed to part finance yellow lines to prevent further issues. These have been approved but will not be installed until August at the earliest.

The speed sign installed at the Black Horse has had its solar panel stolen. This is being replaced by the insurance. It seems to be very effective and the Council are budgeting for another sign on Dedham Road.

We continue to try to get interest in a joint Parish neighbourhood Plan. Currently we have been invited to join a Three Valleys group which could be another alternate scheme.

Work has started on the Black Horse converting this into a café and shop. This has stopped due to a lack of listed building approval and at this stage the time scale for completion is unknown.

Georgia Hall is retiring from Suffolk Council. We would like to thank her for her support over the time she represented our area. The elections are taking place on the 7th May 2026.

Samford Report for April & May 2026

As I deliver what will be my final report as your County Councillor, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to have served alongside such dedicated colleagues and community members. Over the past five years, your unwavering support, collaboration, and commitment to progress have been truly remarkable, and I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you for your partnership throughout my term.

ROAD SAFETY AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

School Crossing Patrol Safety

A new county-wide campaign, "Lollipops Aren't Just For Children", reminds drivers that stopping for school crossing patrol officers is a legal requirement. Abuse and dangerous behaviour towards patrol staff has resulted in body-worn cameras being rolled out across Suffolk. Failure to stop can result in fines of up to £1,000, penalty points, and driving bans. Patrols have legal authority to stop traffic for any pedestrian, not only schoolchildren.

Walking and Cycling Improvements

Work begins shortly on major safety improvements along the route between Ipswich Hospital and the Waterfront, including new crossings, junction changes, traffic calming and 20mph limits. Two new crossings have also been approved for Haverhill's Railway Walk to support safer access for pupils and families. A new Ipswich Waterfront Walk has opened as part of the King Charles III England Coast Path, improving access to green spaces and the town centre.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Secondary School Admissions

For September 2026, 97.8% of Suffolk pupils have been offered a place at one of their preferred secondary schools, with 92.9% receiving their first preference. Waiting lists and appeal routes are in place where preferences could not be met. Families eligible for school transport will receive further information shortly.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Vaccinations

Parents are being urged to ensure children are fully vaccinated following a national increase in measles cases. A new MMRV vaccine now protects against measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox. Vaccinations remain free on the NHS and are vital to protecting vulnerable residents.

No Smoking Day

A joint campaign highlights both the health risks of smoking and the increased risk of accidental house fires. Free stop-smoking support is available across Suffolk, including nicotine replacement and personalised advice.

ENVIRONMENT, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

New Ipswich Recycling Centre

A new, purpose-built recycling centre is being constructed off Hadleigh Road to replace the Portman's Walk site. The facility will be three times larger, safer, easier to use and able to handle increased recycling demand.

Public Rights of Way Investment

Cabinet will consider a £3.9 million investment to repair and replace bridges and structures across Suffolk's public rights of way network. This aims to prevent closures, improve access and support health, tourism and the local economy.

TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS

HGV Restrictions

A new 7.5-tonne HGV restriction is planned for residential areas north of the A1214 in Ipswich to prevent lorries using local roads as shortcuts, while maintaining access on appropriate main routes.

Strategic Road Investment

Several Suffolk road schemes have been included in the Government's five-year investment programme, including A12 improvements at Woodbridge and junction works at Earl Stonham. Further development continues on Copdock Interchange and the A11 Fiveways junction.

ECONOMY, SKILLS AND ENERGY

Economic Growth and Skills

The Suffolk Business Board's first annual review shows strong economic growth, increased skills training and improved employment outcomes. Investment in engineering and construction training at East Coast College and Suffolk New College, supported by Sizewell C funding, will help local residents access long-term skilled jobs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Government has confirmed that Suffolk will move to three new unitary councils in 2028. Parish and town councils will continue as the most local tier of government.

Brett Vale Annual Parish Meetings 2026 Babergh District Councillor's Report

There is a common theme to my annual report this year and that is 'change'. Sometimes we go for a long while without change and then suddenly lots of things change at once. This applies to local government as much as anything else and we're definitely in a period of significant change now. When it happens it can be unnerving, particularly if it isn't explained well.

The three big changes we are undergoing now can be summarised as:

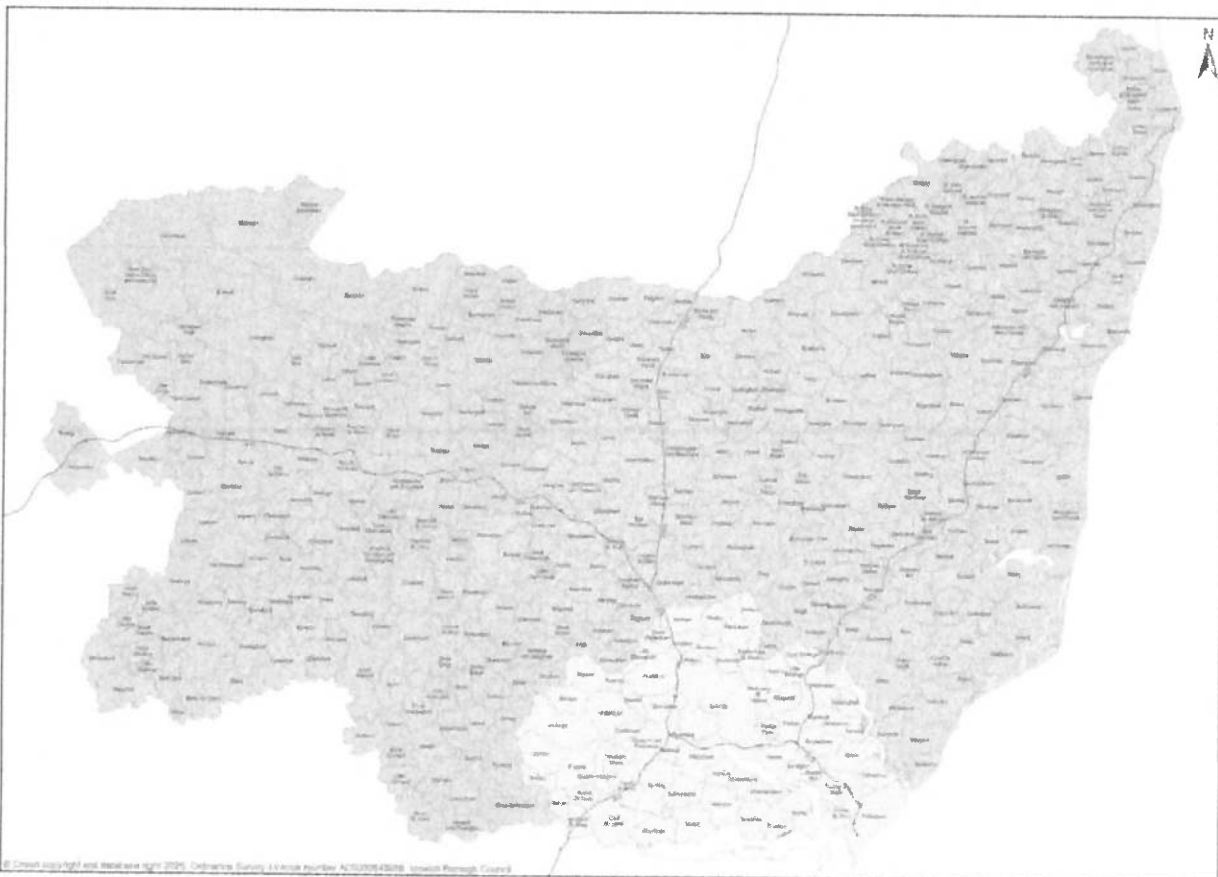
- New councils
- New waste collection rules
- New housing

New Councils

The government is committed to the latest round of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to replace the remaining county and district councils with unitary councils. This affects all remaining 21 counties which still have both county and district councils.

As you now know, we will be getting three new councils in Suffolk to replace Suffolk County Council and all the districts, including Babergh.

For us, Polstead will be in the Western Suffolk Council and Higham, Holton St. Mary, Layham, Raydon, Shelley and Stratford St. Mary will be in the Ipswich and Southern Suffolk Council.



The leaders of the districts and Ipswich borough are delighted that our proposal was selected and we firmly believe that the government has made the right choice for Suffolk.

Both the Three Councils and SCC's One Suffolk proposals met the government's six criteria but the minister thought that overall ours met the criteria better. The minister was also persuaded that the three councils will be aligned to the regional, cultural, social, and economic patterns across Suffolk and will reflect and respect the county's different local identities and communities. This was the powerful argument we made and the minister agreed. We will ensure that this is not mere words but will be the core ethos of the new councils.

The minister also took account of all consultation responses and noted the strong, consistent local support for three councils – not just from the public, but also from the named consultees and other organisations. Consultations do matter and do influence decisions.

There is a huge amount of work to be done before the new councils take over, but this is underway. Elections to the new councils will take place in May next year. They will operate as shadow councils until formally assuming responsibility and replacing the existing councils in April 2028. During the intervening 11 months they will be carrying out a number of statutory requirements to get themselves up and running, such as agreeing a constitution and approving their first budgets.

There are, of course, pros and cons to reorganisation, but I think most people realise that the present local government system that came into existence in 1974 has run its course. Size and the potential for remoteness are concerns about unitary councils, but I am really excited about the future and will be working hard with my colleagues to ensure that the new councils have the best possible start.

The Suffolk County Council election is now going ahead, having been postponed from last year – in my view, unnecessarily. It will mean a short two-year term, but a further postponement – in effect a cancellation – this year would have been problematic as it would have meant existing councillors serving seven years – almost two full terms – which would not have been democratic.

The whole episode of the off-on election has not looked good. The correspondence between the government and Suffolk County Council was a masterclass in sophistry and buck-passing, with neither wanting to be seen to take the blame for cancellation. Suffolk's letter was enough for the government to infer that they wanted cancellation without saying so explicitly, and the government was happy to oblige saying they were just acceding to what the council wanted. We have finally got the right decision, but it could all have been avoided.

Babergh isn't due to have elections this year.

New Waste Collection Rules

We are starting to prepare for the changes to waste collection and bins mandated by the Environment Act 2021. The aim is to increase significantly the amount of material that is recycled.

Leaflets explaining the changes and new bins are being delivered. It is a huge change, affecting how recyclable material will be collected and the collection frequency for each type of bin. The new collections are:

- A separate food waste collection. An indoor 5 litre caddy and 23 litre external bin are being provided.
- The inclusion of glass bottles and jars, cartons, including Tetra Paks, and thin plastic, including plastic bags and film, along with cans and plastic bottles and containers, in the blue bin.
- A new green-lidded bin for paper and card is being provided.

Other glass – such as pyrex – must still go in the black bin as it can't be recycled at present.

Food waste will be collected weekly and the black, blue and green-lidded bins will be collected on a three-weekly rotating cycle. There will be no change in the garden waste collection for those who subscribe to this service.

I know that there are concerns about storage of additional bins but we do have alternatives for residents who don't have enough space. If you haven't already been contacted by us, please let me know.

All this will start at the beginning of June and further information can be found on the Babergh website.

New Housing

Because the government has given us much higher new housing targets, increasing the number from 416 to 779 a year, and will soon be publishing a new National Planning Policy Framework, Babergh is having to work on a new Local Plan to manage development for the next 15-20 years. A part of this process is to ask landowners and others if they have any sites that they would like us to consider for residential, recreational or commercial use. This is an essential early evidence-gathering stage for the new plan. We have now published the map of all the sites we have received, but they haven't been through assessment or public consultation yet. It's important to stress that the map merely shows the sites that have been submitted and the use which the site promoter is seeking. They have no planning status and many will not get selected. The map can be found here:

<https://www.babergh.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/call-for-sites>.

The Day Job...

Of course, Babergh has also been doing the day-to-day business of managing our council houses, emptying the bins, determining planning applications and supporting our communities. Here are some of the highlights of the past year.

Neighbourhood Plans

Until last year, groups developing a plan could access financial and technical support from the government through an organisation called Locality, with basic grant payments of £10,000. The government, however, withdrew this in June 2025.

Now Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have agreed alternative funding of up to £20,000 to support groups prepare Neighbourhood Plans which help to meet housing need in the area. There isn't a lot available so it will be first come, first served. To qualify, plans must allocate sites that will make an agreed contribution to meeting the district-wide housing number.

LLBCO

Our district has one of the highest numbers of listed properties in the country, but these historic properties often suffer from poor energy performance due to their original features, poorly fitting windows and single glazing. It leads to higher bills for owners and is costly for the environment.

In the past, owners had to apply for Listed Building Consent to make upgrades, but working closely with Historic England, we have developed a Local Listed Building Consent Order for double and secondary glazing, making it

easier and quicker to complete sensitive improvements. We are the first rural councils in the country to successfully achieve this

CIL

Significant amounts of CIL continue to be collected from developers, with much going back to communities to fund community projects including play areas, cycle paths and village hall improvements, in addition to funding major infrastructure such as school extensions.

LNRS

Cabinet has approved Suffolk's new Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The strategy has been designed to identify the areas across Suffolk where restoring or improving habitats will deliver the greatest benefits for nature and people. It maps existing habitats, highlights priority areas for improvement and outlines opportunities for targeted action.

It's all part of a nationwide initiative which was set out in the Environment Act 2021. Suffolk County Council led the project, with input from all the district and borough councils, conservation bodies, land managers and the wider public.

Repairs and energy efficiency improvements in council houses

We are carrying out a major programme of repairs and installing energy efficiency measures in our council houses. The repairs programme has suffered recently for a number of reasons, but we have committed extra funding and have carried out a major overhaul of the repairs service.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk received £1.6m of government funding last month to add to £2.25m already committed by the councils to install energy saving measures.

We rolled out of a new job management system for our council houses. It has improved day-to-day reporting and management of repairs, maintenance and compliance (damp and mould) jobs across our housing stock and increased first time fix rates. It has helped our teams and also delivered a better experience for tenants with much improved communications.

Community Support

We continue with our varied and important programme of grants and support activities for our communities and residents. This work is often under the radar as it is not a statutory service, but it is valued greatly and makes a huge difference to many. We have:

- Provided support for residents struggling with the cost of living crisis.
- Provided activities to help tackle loneliness for older residents.
- Continued with our scheme to improve the wellbeing of young people in schools and connect them with their communities.
- Continued with the Sustainable Communities Food Fund – small scale initiatives such as community pantries.
- Continued with the Living Well in Winter grants – to help tackle increased social isolation in winter.
- Provided Community Development Fund grants:

Some 46 organisations across Babergh and Mid Suffolk have received community development grant awards in the past year. In total, £813,752.88 has been awarded, with £206,694 shared between 14 organisations in Babergh and £607,058.88 between 32 organisations in Mid Suffolk.

- Locality Awards. In the past year I have funded projects in:
 - Gates for Layham community orchard
 - Defibrillator at Bower House Tye, Polstead
 - Raydon BBQ
 - SSM Institute car park repairs

Community Fun Days July 2025

In partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure, we continued with our Community Fun Days in Hadleigh and Sudbury in July, providing families with a series of free days out packed full of activities.

Children that receive means tested free school meals are able to pre-book some activities and order a free lunch.

EV Hire

Working in partnership with others, we are now hosting EV rental services – cars in Hadleigh and Sudbury and e-bikes in Lavenham and Sudbury.

City of Culture

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are backing Ipswich's bid to become City of Culture 2029 – saying it deserves Suffolk-wide support. I was very pleased to propose a motion at January's council meeting that was supported unanimously and then taken up by Mid Suffolk at their meeting. We now know that Ipswich is in the last nine and a full bid is being prepared. A successful bid will not only be great for Ipswich, it will also have huge benefits for other parts of the county, particularly Babergh with our artistic heritage.

Men's Tour

On a very wet day in September Babergh and Mid Suffolk hosted stage two of the Lloyds Men's Tour of Britain – the UK's biggest professional cycle race and largest free-to-spectate live sporting event. We were lucky that the tour passed through our villages here – Higham, Holton, Raydon and Layham.

Organisers of the tour thanked communities for braving the elements and turning out in force to support the race through town and villages across our districts. The start in Stowmarket was dry, but the weather deteriorated as the race progressed. Thankfully, there were only two minor spills.

Budget

Babergh's share of council tax bills will increase by 2.99%. It means a Band D household will pay £199.52 per year, a total annual increase of £5.79 – or 11p a week. About 9p in every £1 of council tax goes to Babergh.

We have been able to reduce the net cost of providing Babergh's services by £1.3m to £13.7m by identifying where savings can be made and additional income generated.

We are getting the first three-year financial settlement in many years, which is good, as is the move to simplifying the government funding streams. However, the intention to allocate funding based on a revised and extended needs-based allocation has penalised rural areas.

The built-in assumption in the settlement that councils will raise their council tax rates by the full referendum limit has renewed calls for the whole system to be reformed, but that won't happen for many years – it is a hot enough topic for a confident government, which the present one is not now.

It is extremely frustrating that, in spite of all the good work we do to make efficiency improvements and change the way we deliver services, successive governments have constantly put financial obstacles in our way.

We have also had to increase our council house rents to ensure that we can afford repairs and energy efficiency improvements.

If LGR goes according to plan, I will only have one more Babergh budget to deliver.

NG Pylons

Finally, an update on where things are with the two National Grid projects affecting us – N2T & B2T Reinforcement.

The Bramford to Twinstead Reinforcement project has started construction after receiving its Development Consent Order in September 2024.

In February there were public open hearings into National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project. This is the first stage of the Planning Inspectorate's examination of the project.

The hearings allowed initial statements from interested parties, and I was delighted to be able to give a verbal submission on behalf of Babergh.

We remain seriously concerned about the project's impact on the environment, our communities and businesses. The landscape of the district is highly valued, with National Landscape designation, many cultural and historic associations, and sensitive views that contribute to the unique character of Babergh and the wider region. Views that have been immortalised by Constable and Gainsborough.

I made it clear that we believe these plans should be halted so alternative options, particularly an underground HVDC solution over the entire length of the project, can be properly considered and costed. There is still time for this to happen.

Of course, grid reinforcement is necessary and all options have impacts – residents do understand that.

But we have never had a proper national debate about the trade-offs between costs and impacts of all the new energy projects. This is what is needed, but unfortunately we have an energy secretary who is not curious about NG's proposals or interested in alternatives.

John Ward

Babergh District Councillor

Brett Vale

john.ward@babergh.gov.uk

FINANCE REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING: 27th April 2026

Income from the last financial year 2025-2026 has been generated by a Precept of £18,100. Other sources of income have been a VAT refund of £1,531.19 and interest earned amounted to £143.26. The Parish Council also received a cleansing grant from BDC relating to litter picking of £1,587.30 and £100 compensation from Barclays Bank. Total Income received was £21,461.75

Expenditure 2025-2026

General Admin	£9,524.06
S137 Donations	£1,905.00
Playground / VI maintenance	£0.00
Village Maintenance	£5,217.25
Subscriptions/Training/Publications/Website	£636.03
Institute/Parish Room Hire	£217.00
Village Lighting / maintenance contract	£695.38
Insurance	£654.91
Misc	£2,236.61
Dog/litter bins emptying	£1,463.40
Wreath	£20.00
Speed gun expenses	
Speed signage	£480.87
Noticeboard and cycle rack rent	£25.00
Parish Election Costs	£0.00
Total	£23,075.51

On Expenditure the Parish Council used £822 for tree pruning on Millennium Ave, grass cutting was £1,090.60 for the Village Institute and £662.75 for Millennium Ave, Millenium Garden and the River Garden, £2,088 for the refurbishment of the Village sign which the PC also received a £425 locality grant for in the 24/25 financial year. £2,038.64 was spent on the TRO for Dedham Road to alter and increase the double yellow lines.

The Parish Council made its annual donations to the Parochial Church Council, Suffolk Accident Rescue Service, Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project and Suffolk Preservation Society. Donations were also made to the Village Institute Committee, Pylon campaign group and the Parish Room. Total donations were £1,905.

The accounts for 2025-2026 will shortly be audited via an internal audit and relevant documentation will be issued once complete. All documents once issued, will be available to view on the Stratford St Mary Parish Council website and available from the Clerk upon request.

This year we have not been in receipt of any new funds via the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), but there is remaining CIL of £348.05 that will be carried forward to 26-27.

In January's meeting this year, the Parish Council agreed to set the precept for the next financial year (2026/27) at £20,100 and will use money in the Parish Council's reserves to cover the rest of the budget which has been set at £24,217.

Faye Hall
Parish Clerk
Stratford St Mary Parish Council

Report to the Parish Council April 2026

- The school currently has 89 children on roll and these come from the village, our catchment area and further afield.
- We have 4 classes, with 3 full time teachers and 2 part time teachers. We are fortunate to have an active parent / teacher association who raise funds for the school - these are put back into the school for various projects.
- The children continue to enjoy learning inside the classrooms and on the school grounds - this includes the Forest School area. One of our teachers has recently started her Forest School training and this will continue throughout the year. We have some volunteers who currently come into school each week. This provides additional support for school staff when the children are partaking in their Forest School sessions and we are very grateful for their continued help.
- Learning also continues outside the classroom and the children have enjoyed various trips and visits including to the recent 'Schools Farm & Country Show' at Trinity Park and a trip to Mount Fitchet Castle. We are also in the process of planning a return visit to North Wales for our Year 6 residential trip.
- Miss Jones and the Junior Road Safety Officers have continued to work on Road Safety projects. They continue to send regular newsletters to our parents reminding them of parking considerately and respectfully and we are regularly on 'gate' duty. We have been asked why we no longer advertise events on the school website, however, due to matters, which we cannot discuss further, we are unable to advertise these school events on that platform at the present time.
- We continue to use the local area, with its wealth of history including Stratford St Mary church which was also used for our nativity and carol services and Hall Farm. Thank you to all concerned for facilitating this for us.
- Unfortunately, we do not have any information on the vacant 'preschool' building which shares our school site. The land is owned by Suffolk County Council, but runs as a completely separate 'venture'. We do not receive or get any information about this / potential opening etc other than what is available in the public domain.
- The school website www.stratfordstmaryprimary.co.uk has a wealth of information and in particular the News page details more of the learning and events which have taken place. Please feel free to visit these pages.

Co-ordinators report for the Stratford st Mary Community First Responders.

The group has continued to provide cover on the Essex and Suffolk border throughout the year. In 2018 the cover was an average of 36 hours a month, 2019 48 hours, 2020 80 hours, 2021 128 hours, 2022 the average was 106 hours, 2023 it was 126, In 2024 we saw a decrease in hours, it went down to 90 a month and finally in 2025 it was 58 hrs. This was split between the two bags, one doing 13.29 and the other 45.58 monthly averages.

The hours are down again as we still only have two active responders, one in Langham and one in Higham, a third responder moved out of the area but is hoping to move back.

We did have 2 people interested in becoming responders last year unfortunately one moved out of the area and the other dropped out as she only had a mobile phone for communications, which makes it very difficult to carry out the initial training. We recently agreed that I buy a group laptop for both me to use for training or a person with no computer to borrow so they can complete training.

We recently posted a recruitment notice on various sites and have had 2 people express an interest, one from SSM and one from Langham. These will be followed up.

The finances remain in a healthy state so presently we have enough funds, so if both our defibrillators failed at the same time we can get new ones at once. Due to the amount of funds we presently have, we do not see the need for major fund raising this year.

Fund raising from our existing charity boxes has been wonderful, these are presently at The Dedham Vale Garage, Langham Community Shop and the Swan in Stratford St Mary. We are hoping to add a few more to these 3 shortly.

The group continues to train monthly in Stratford st Mary. This training is important and it keeps the responders updated on techniques, re-enforces skills and gives us new skills. The 2 responders have recently passed the annual assessments. The trainer we had did stand down and it was agreed I could take over as the groups trainer. The group bought a projector, screen and sound bar for the training.

We still have the Goodsam system for responders, which will alert them of a cardiac arrest even if they are not on duty as a CFR but the VETS system was cancelled as it was not really being used efficiently.

With the defibrillators I look after, if somebody has called 999 and the ambulance service gives them the access code to one of "my" defibrillators, I get an email at the same time, so if I am about but not on call, I normally head to the defibrillator in question, to see what is going on and if I can assist. The group maintains four defibrillators in Stratford st Mary, Langham, Great Horkesley and Dedham, these are all checked on a monthly basis.

We are a small group and we try to give as much support as we can our area. We cannot go to every emergency, for which I apologise but hopefully the calls we do attend, we make a difference.

Peter Dawson.
Group Coordinator.

Ramble Club Report for 2025/6.

We undertook thirty local walks in and around Stratford with the furthest being at Woodbridge. Our year as usual started at 11 o'clock with a short walk on New Years Day to Langham Church and back. A recent outstanding ramble started and ended at Copford Church where we spent some time viewing the wonderful medieval wall paintings. On the downside unfortunately we had to cancel a couple of rambles at the last minute due to severe weather conditions. Most rambles start from the Parish Room at 09.45 and for those who wish, end with a pub lunch. The walks are usually between three and four miles long, and of course we are always pleased to welcome new members, further details can be obtained by phoning me on 01206 322656.

David Umfreville.

Stratford St Mary Community Trust
Annual Report for the Stratford St Mary Annual Parish Meeting
on Monday 27th April 2026

The Stratford St Mary Community Trust is a village charity supporting village residents in need of financial assistance, provide financial help with finding new employment or for further education.

The Trust raises funds through the ownership and rent of property and land within the village.

This year the Trust has provided one off funding for computers for university students and funding for individual students for school trips.

There are 6 trustees who manage the Trust and its property in accordance with the Charity Commission regulations. These trustees live or work within the village, they are: -

Shaun Baker (Chair)

David Isaacs

Gill Robinson

Rachelle Jones

Norman Woodard

Roger Barrell (Secretary and treasurer)

Any of these trustees can be approached for help or for information on those that may need help and the whole process is handled with complete confidentiality.

E mail contact details; - rhbarrell@gmail.com

STRATFORD ST. MARY CHAPEL
REPORT TO PARISH COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING

In addition to the Church services we conduct every Sunday morning , we provide the following activities for the local community:

Coffee Mornings:

These take place in the Chapel Lounge every Tuesday morning from 10 am – 11.30 am. Attendance varies but there are usually there are between 10 – 15 participants.

Little Sparks:

This is a Mums and Tots group which runs during school term times on a Thursday morning between 9am and 11 am.

Sparks:

This is a Children's Club which runs during term time on Friday evenings from 5 am – 6.30pm. Between 20 and 30 children attend most of whom are living in the village.

Ignition:

This is a Youth Club which we run during school term time on Friday evenings from 7.30pm – 9.30pm. Around 30 young people attend between the ages of 11 – 16. This is the only Youth Club in the area and those attending come largely from the village, but also from East Bergholt and Capel St. Mary .

Mission:

We also finance and run two sister Churches in Southern Moldova

Funding:

We are totally funded by our membership and are not dependent, or receive or accept any funding or grants from any other bodies.

Philip Wyncoll (Trustee)

Stratford St Mary Parish Church

Report for the Annual Parish Council Meeting - Monday 27th of April 2026

Thank you for this opportunity to provide an update on the activities of St Mary's Parish Church over the past year.

Our parish church continues to be part of a 4 parish Benefice, along with Higham, Holton St Mary and Raydon. Over the past 5 years, our Benefice has shared one part-time priest. However, Rev'd Manette Crossman retired on 15th April and we are now entering a vacancy period, whilst we advertise for a new minister. Over the coming weeks and months, services will be covered by other clergy from within the diocese and Hadleigh Deanery or by local retired ministers and/ or the churchwardens.

In Stratford St Mary, our church services are generally on the first Sunday of the month, in the church and the third Sunday, when we hold our Café Church in the Parish Room. This is proving very popular and starts with a delicious breakfast from 9.30 and continues with an informal service lasting about 30 mins. Everyone is welcome.

Our churchwarden Sandy Ranson and assistant warden, Christine Cousins are both happy to receive enquiries about Weddings, baptisms confirmations and funerals. Information about our services and forthcoming events and activities can be found on our '4 Mary's' website and on our Facebook page.

2025 was a very busy year in the life of our church particularly in trying to progress restoration and repair projects to the building. The project to repair and restore a south facing window in the Lady Chapel and deal with internal plasterwork was completed and the restoration to the tower pinnacles also went ahead. Funding these repairs for a grade 1 listed medieval building, remains an ongoing challenge and we very grateful to local and community benefactors and to local village organisations who have provided funding to help us maintain our beautiful heritage building for future generations. More recently we have needed to repair the boundary wall along the roadside following damage from a large service vehicle. Cones are in place along a section of Church Road, where the original verge existed and hopefully this will provide a small measure of protection for pedestrians and to the building itself, until a suitable resolution for the road is achieved.

We continue to make as much use as we can of the church building as a venue for musical concerts and events - the acoustics are excellent and the sound system has been upgraded this last year. The church is regularly included in cultural tours of the area. Last year we held very successful events featuring a summer concert by the Suffolk Phoenix Brass Band and a Christmas event with a retelling of Charles Dickens' 'A Christmas Carol'. We are grateful to have continued support from the village community in supporting our fund-raising events. Thank you!

Looking ahead, there are projects in train to create a new memorial garden area within the churchyard, for the laying of ashes as the existing plot has very little space remaining. There is also further work to be done to conserve the stonework, particularly to the South of the church.

Our church remains open every day for parishioners and visitors alike. We extend a warm welcome to all visitors to our church, whether joining us for a service of just popping in to have a look around. If we can help in any way, do get in touch.

STRATFORD ST MARY VILLAGE INSTITUTE

Registered Charity 304824 · Stratford St Mary, Suffolk

Annual Report 2025 – 2026

1. About the Charity

The Stratford St Mary Village Institute (SSMVI) is a registered charity that has served the village of Stratford St Mary, Suffolk, for nearly 100 years. The Institute Hall is a community hub providing facilities for a wide range of social, cultural, educational and recreational activities for the village and surrounding area.

The charity is governed by a board of volunteer Trustees their time to manage and develop the hall for the long-term benefit of the community.

The charity pursued the following core objectives:

- Maintaining and improving the hall as a safe, welcoming and well-equipped community facility for Stratford St Mary and surrounding villages.
- Growing and diversifying the programme of regular hirers and community activities for their benefit.
- Running fundraising and community events that bring residents together and raises funds for improvements and refurbishment.
- Developing new initiatives to broaden the hall's appeal and financial sustainability.

2. Trustees & Governance

During 2025–2026 the following individuals served as Trustees:

- Emily Barrell – Chair
- Derek Robinson – Treasurer & Minutes Secretary
- Gill Robinson – Trustee (co-opted during the year)
- Jessica Baldry – Trustee (co-opted during the year)
- Keith Street – Trustee (resigned during the year; but continues financial oversight for us)

Resigned:

- Ineke Cook – Trustee (resigned during the year; continued to support on a voluntary basis)
- Norman Woodard – Trustee (resigned mid-year)
- Bill Davies – Trustee (resigned mid-year, but continues to do the bins and support practically)
- Karen Bowe, - Volunteer who has continued to support the committee when she can.

The Trustees would like to place on record their sincere gratitude to those who stepped down during the year. Bill Davies served as Chairman until 2025 and then as Trustee and has been a staunch supporter of the hall for many years. Norman Woodard, who resigned mid-year, provided invaluable practical support throughout his time on the committee. Ineke Cook's outstanding contribution as Booking Secretary, and the community relationships she built, has been of immeasurable value to the Institute. Keith Street contributed practical skills and sound

judgment, including support for our financial monitoring. Karen Bowe supported the committee with minute taking which was extremely helpful. The committee is grateful to all of them.

We are actively looking for new Trustees who can bring a local voice to the charity's governance, represent the interests of our regular users, and contribute expertise in premises management and administrative support. If you are interested, we would be very pleased to hear from you.

Governance Developments

This year saw meaningful progress in the charity's governance framework. Our fire safety monitoring, risk assessment and hall management procedures were reviewed and updated. Role-based email addresses and a shared document repository were introduced to improve communication and continuity. Bookings and correspondence are now managed through improved digital systems, and we have reviewed and consolidated our logo as part of developing a more consistent identity for the Institute. Our social media presence continues to grow, and we now regularly organise the What's On entries in the Quartet for the Institute and Parish Rooms. We have also instigated the 'super-committee' of village charities and organisers with the hope of creating a coordinated support network for events in the future; this is still establishing.

3. Hall Operations & Bookings

Regular Hirers

The hall continued to host a strong programme of regular bookings throughout the year. Hirers reported high satisfaction with the space and amenities, and new groups joined during the year, including the Silver Swans. While some fees were adjusted to bring them more in line with comparable venues, the committee resisted significant price increases, and the hall remains excellent value, though as always, we keep hire fees under review and market price compare regularly.

Booking Systems

Digital booking forms were introduced for hirers, centralising records and improving how we manage and communicate with the groups and individuals who use the hall. Initial feedback from occasional hirers has been positive and the system continues to be refined. Regular hirers benefit from a simplified renewal process after their first detailed booking, and this is still being established.

Staffing & Caretaking

A new cleaner was appointed during the year, and the role was expanded to include a broader caretaking function. Additional hours were agreed to cover tasks such as key code management, maintaining supply stocks and site oversight. A structured key code rotation schedule was introduced, with codes changed regularly to improve security. This has improved the hall cleaning and management of the hall floor condition. There are of course, occasional hiccups still as we move into new ways of working.

4. Events & Fundraising

The Institute ran a varied programme of events during the year. Community events including the VE Day celebration, and breadmaking workshops were well attended and well received, demonstrating real appetite for social and creative activities in the village.

The Institute sponsors the Sewcial Sewing Group since the Autumn, which has become a welcome regular social group in the community. Along with the VE Day event, it directly reflects our charitable aim of encouraging community engagement rather events purely for fundraising.

The VE Day event was particularly successful in bringing together a wide range of residents and is planned to repeat next Monday 4th May 2026.

Not all events reached the sign-up levels needed to be viable. The Voyage Through the Vale walking event and the Work & Connect working hub, whilst innovative ideas, did not attract sufficient bookings to proceed. These experiences have been valuable in shaping our thinking about how we plan and promote events going forward and focussing on aligning with other community groups to get the best level of engagement.

The Trustees recognise that the best events grow from ideas that already have community support behind them. We are actively seeking to expand our committee and volunteer base to bring in fresh perspectives and help shape a programme that truly reflects what residents want. If you would like to get involved, we would love to hear from you.

Looking ahead, a Gardeners' Question Time is booked for late May 2026, and are considering a wine tasting event. We are keen to hear ideas for further workshops and activities. Such events support two of our charitable aims: raising funds to maintain the hall and encouraging community engagement.

5. Maintenance & Capital Works

Maintaining and improving the hall remains a priority, and this year saw good progress across several areas.

The car park was repaired, funded through a combination of Institute reserves, a successful application to our local Councillor's locality budgets, and the annual lease of 4 spaces for staff from Orchard Barnes Nursery. We ensure that money is retained for our ongoing car park improvement fund.

Eighty new chairs and two trolleys were purchased, transforming the comfort and appearance of the hall for hirers and event guests alike. The quality of the new chairs has already drawn positive comment and represents a significant upgrade to the experience of using the hall. Twenty hard chairs have been retained for outside use. We were able to dispose of the grey chairs, the pallets and have three old tables to dispose of which would be suitable for hobby or gardening staging.

The hall floor required more attention than anticipated, needing a full re-sand. As the floor has a finite number of re-sands remaining, we have put in place guidance for all hall users over the initial 6 weeks and hope that we have now established good practices with all our regular users and most of our occasional users.

Other works completed during the year included installation of new exterior lighting, an isolation switch for the electricity meter, and PAT testing of equipment. A plumbing issue was resolved but we note the need for future work in the toilet block. Security cameras were installed and a formal key code rotation schedule introduced. Work also progressed on new signage for the car park, and an ad hoc handyman was engaged for some ongoing grounds and outdoor maintenance.

This year is the first year we have been fully responsible for the playground and have organised inspections and have paid for repairs from our budget, as well as the costs of playground bark. We are grateful the Parish Council still pays for the grass cutting through their budget as the playgrounds and grass areas do not raise funds for themselves and we have a finite budget.

6. Communications & Website

The year saw substantial progress on the Institute's communications and digital presence. A branding workshop in April 2025 identified the core qualities of the village and the Institute, and work on developing a coherent brand identity and logo continued throughout the year. A new

website was developed and soft-launched in January 2026, with work on search engine optimisation, images and final aesthetics ongoing.

Alongside this a live calendar for the hall was made available facilitating both hirers and local attendees to know what is happening at the Institute throughout the year. Digital booking forms were introduced for hirers, centralising records and improving how we manage and communicate with the groups and individuals who use the hall.

Behind the scenes, role-based email addresses were set up for all Trustee functions, a shared document repository established, and a private committee area created for internal documents and forms which is still being formalised. Social media and event promotion were given clearer structure, with ongoing work on templates being developed for event notices and controls put in place over our Eventbrite and Facebook accounts, improving our digital safety.

7. Financial Summary

The charity recorded a strong financial result for the year ended 31 December 2025, with a surplus of £7,288 compared to a deficit of £30,461 in 2024 (which reflected the major refurbishment programme). General reserves more than doubled from £7,621 to £14,909, with cash at bank increasing from £8,229 to £15,544.

Hall hire income grew significantly to £10,876 (2024: £6,294), reflecting both a full year of post-refurbishment bookings and the minor fee increase for occasional users agreed in April 2025. Promotions and events generated a net income of £3,089 in the year. Grants of £1,500 were received, compared to £10,464 in 2024 which had supported the refurbishment.

Total expenditure of £9,954 was substantially lower than 2024's £51,297, which had included £41,341 of refurbishment costs for the internal reskinning of the main hall to improve insulation. Running costs were well managed, with the main items being repairs and maintenance (£5,821 in total), utilities (£2,619), and insurance (£1,079).

The 100 Club, which contributed £291 in 2025 (2024: £500), was closed by the committee in April 2025 having become operationally unsustainable due to falling rolls and increased regulatory requirements making it less viable. Members were offered reimbursement. Only two required returns of balance.

The accounts for 24/25 have been independently reviewed. The full Income & Expenditure Account, Balance Sheet and Notes to the Accounts are available on request.

8. Volunteers & Community Support

The Institute depends entirely on the goodwill and effort of its Trustees and volunteers. During the year we lost several valued Trustees through retirement and people moving out of the area, and we are now a small committee. This is beginning to limit what we can commit to, both in the events and activities we can offer, such as the Bank Holiday community events, and in our capacity to maintain and improve the hall.

During the year we benefited from the support of several volunteers who gave their time generously, including help with outdoor maintenance, grant research, health and safety assessment, and practical improvements to the hall. We are grateful to all of them.

We actively seek new volunteers and committee members and advertise opportunities via Facebook and the Quartet. Roles we are particularly looking to fill include a Minute Secretary, a Communications Co-ordinator to help manage the website and promotions, and a bookings secretary. Support for grant research and applications, and practical help with infrastructure monitoring and maintenance.

The Institute is nearly 100 years old. It belongs to this village and has served it across generations, and we want to continue to take it forward as a hub for village life.

9. Looking Ahead

As the charity moves into 2026–2027, the Trustees have identified the following priorities:

- Recruit additional Trustees and volunteers, particularly for communications, minute-taking and caretaking support.
- Complete the launch and embedding of the new website and online booking system.
- Continue the programme of hall maintenance, progressing with door replacement; consider the redecoration of the toilet block.
- Continue to explore grant funding opportunities for capital improvements on these capital improvement projects.
- Develop a structured annual events calendar with longer lead-in times for promotion
- Contribute to the collaborative programme with other village organisations including Village Life, the Parish Council and the PCC to coordinate activities and share resources.
- Begin initial planning for the Institute's 100th anniversary in 2028.