

Derek Davis Babergh District Council

Ganges ward annual report 2021

It has been an extraordinary year for all of us and as we have seen there have been many people stepping up to help their family, friends, neighbours and the community in general. Ordinary people quite often doing extraordinary things, not just every now and then but in some cases day after day, week after week and month after month as this wicked pandemic continues.

Thankfully, with vaccines and everything else we have learned and put in place, things are getting better.

Babergh has worked closely with partners within the Suffolk Resilience Forum to serve and support our communities and individual or isolated residents.

It has been humbling, and something of an honour, to be the cabinet member for communities with a team of outstanding officers dealing with a wide range of issues, quite often in addition to their other duties as we, along with all other departments look to keep all our services running as near normal as possible.

My team has helped oversee the distribution of more than £600,000 in seen the highest ever amount of Community Grants/Section 106 money. This is in addition to government Covid grants.

We have also been involved in many community initiatives, including the cookery lessons, which are being piloted in Hadleigh, working in partnership with the Fork deli, and its award-winning chef, and food banks, teaching those with how to cook basic, nutritious meals. Wile on a tight budget

We have overseen significant improvements to our two leisure centres and I'm delighted to report since the Hadleigh Pool and gym reopened we have had 100% take up on swim sessions.

Our team has worked with local town councils in updating and upgrading CCTV and in Hadleigh we are in the process of building new skate park

Latest from Babergh

We had our annual council meeting on Tuesday, as Wherstead Park as dictated by the government who will not allow us to meet virtually any more, although Parliament allows a hybrid system for its MPs. That one meeting cost us as taxpayers more than £3,000. Anyhow, the meeting was mainly to vote in new chairs and deputies for various committees and I'm delighted to report the

Shotley peninsula now has three ward councillors in key roles. Meet McLaren of Stour ward is now chair of O&S, while Brantham ward councillor has joined me on the cabinet to replace Lee Parker who has joined Babergh growth, ironically as his own business has grown and demands more of his time. As I have indicated I am still on the Cabinet, going in to my fourth year in fact and the rare distinction of serving two administrations over that time.

Despite my role on the Cabinet, my first duty remains to you, the people of Shotley & Erwardon in Ganges ward, and that includes dealing with a wide range of issues for individuals and the wider community.

That has meant being able to fund projects close to home with the Locality Awards I introduced and was able to implement within Babergh for the first time in its 48 year history. My grants went to help fund the Shotley Open Spaces mobile defib on the wall of the Bristol Arms. Other projects have been focused on young people with Shotley Point Yacht Club offering sailing lessons, and supporting Shotley Peninsula Cricket Club with their range of activities to help youngsters stay active.

Some of you will have seen the wonderful progress being made with the eight, two bed social houses in Queensland. Despite the understandable setbacks, I'm delighted to report that the sign off for those homes is due on September 21, with the homes going on Gateway in August. It was fortunate that I was able to secure at least three of those for people within our village, with the other five cascading outwards, depending on banding.

I know they will be over-subscribed, which is why it is important we secure more housing that suits our needs in Shotley and surrounding villages to ensure those that want to downsize can, and those youngsters that want to stay in Shotley can also do that without being priced out.

As always, I'm always available, so please don't hesitate to contact me on derek.davis@babergh.gov.uk 07 and I put regular updates on social media, Nub News and In Touch.

As a council Babergh has also accomplished much, such as:

Planning:

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan was approved at council meetings in November and, following the final consultation, we submitted it for examination on 31st March.

Both Councils also recently published their Five-Year Housing Land Supply position statement, evidencing that Government housing requirements can be met by the districts until 2025 and beyond.

We provided responses to the Planning white paper and also to the consultation document on changes to the current planning system.

It has been suggested that the white paper removes local control and favours large developers, although there are explicit statements to the contrary in the white paper. As is often the case, people read into these things what they want to see. The current planning system is too complex and inefficient, but some of the criticism from government aimed at local authorities is ill-informed. It remains to be seen what legislation is proposed but, through the District Councils' Network and the Local Government Association, we will seek to influence and monitor whatever is laid before parliament.

Local Economy

Our businesses have had a tough time, but many have been able to keep going and others have had much-needed support. 28 businesses from across Babergh and Mid Suffolk were shortlisted in our first ever business Innovation Awards in November. These were held virtually and were a great success. Of the 11 winners, two were from Hadleigh: Challs International won the Most Innovative SME category and Ferguson's Deli won the High Street Innovation award.

Another success has been the Sudbury Virtual High Street that allows shoppers to enjoy the very best of Sudbury from the comfort of their front room. More than 100 businesses have now signed up to this and we will now be rolling it out to the other towns in the districts.

We are excited by the success of the Freeport East bid, which will encompass Felixstowe and Harwich ports and the new Gateway14 business park outside Stowmarket. We expect a boost with businesses wanting to locate in Babergh as well as neighbouring districts.

A new £300,000 funding programme for small businesses across Babergh and Mid Suffolk has been agreed - with funds to be allocated over the next three years. This will provide a much needed boost to businesses after the coronavirus crisis to help sustain and create jobs, provide opportunities to grow and innovate as well as react to the changing business landscape.

We have agreed to an £180,000 upgrade in CCTV provision for Hadleigh and Sudbury.

Economy and Budget

At the February council meeting, Babergh's budget for 2021/22 was approved and included an increase in council tax of £5 (2.96%) a year for a Band D property. The annual council tax for a Band D property will now be £173.86. There will also be a small increase of 1.5% in council house rents.

Our investments continue to be an increasing and necessary part of our income to replace lost government support and are forecast to provide 14% of our income this year. We have a balanced budget this year, with some spare funds to top up our reserves, but the medium term outlook still presents a challenge and we await a long-term funding settlement from the government.

We have, of course, suffered significant increased costs and income reduction due to Covid, but the government has provided extensive support, which covers much, but not all, of these losses.

Parking:

We reviewed our parking provision across the district and whilst we recognised the need and desire to retain an element of subsidised parking, we have made changes to ensure the Council's finances are secure and also to encourage more sustainable transport options for the future.

We have also introduced the MiPermit app in our car parks so that users do not need to get a paper ticket.

Environmental measures:

Cabinets at Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have approved a raft of environmental measures to help the councils achieve their ambition of becoming carbon neutral by 2030. We have:

- Created action plans for Sustainable Travel and Biodiversity.
- Approved running our vehicle fleet on HVO – Hydro-treated Vegetable Oil – to cut their carbon emissions by up to 90%.
- Approved the installation of micro-generation and electricity storage solar carports in Sudbury and Stowmarket.

We have also been able to keep up our regular waste collections, despite periods of reduced staffing levels due to crew illness and isolation. We did, however, have to suspend the garden waste collection over winter, but this has now resumed.