

## **District Councillors Report (March)**

### **Babergh District Council has agreed a budget which protects vital services and unlocks funding to deliver promised community projects.**

On Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February, councillors agreed a 2.99% increase to its share of council tax bills. It means a Band D household will pay Babergh £199.52 per year, a total annual increase of £5.79 - or 11p a week. This is the equivalent of £3.84 a week for all district council services - including rubbish and recycling collections, the upkeep of parks and green spaces, leisure facilities, planning services, regeneration projects and help for those at risk of homelessness.

Babergh leader, Cllr John Ward, said: "This year is probably the most difficult budget setting we have faced. For years, the funding we receive from the government has failed to keep up with demand for our services and the increased costs we face."

The net cost of providing Babergh's services in 2026/27 will be £13.7m, down £1.3m from £15m in the current financial year. Cllr Ward said "difficult decisions" had been made to identify savings and additional income. But he added: "This budget will still enable us to deliver on commitments we have made – particularly to Sudbury where we have included additional capital provision to enable the Belle Vue Park café to finally be built and also to carry out work to Kingfisher Leisure Centre."

During the meeting, Cllr Ward said Babergh faced additional challenges because, just days before budget setting, the government changed the council's provisional finance settlement.

The total impact of this was a net funding cut of £717k for Babergh over the next three years.

"I know we didn't expect a pleasant surprise, but neither could we have expected this. It is awful," he said.

Cllr Ward said it was important not to push budget challenges "down the road", particularly with Local Government Reorganisation on the horizon and the need to not pass on financial weakness to any successor councils. He added: "This budget is a sensible balance of the use of some reserves, some reduction in services and some increases in fees and charges.

"But it is important that we still provide the services – many discretionary – that our residents, particularly the most vulnerable value and rely on, and which makes real differences for them. Local government is about more than just doing the statutory stuff – emptying the bins, planning, licensing." Babergh keeps only 9% of the total council tax bill, with the rest going to Suffolk County Council, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and town and parish councils.

### **Pylons project would 'devastate' special Suffolk landscapes.**

National Grid's plan for more pylons in the Suffolk countryside should be halted, leading councillors from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have told a public hearing today.

National Grid proposes 159km of new overhead lines between Norwich to Tilbury, with the route cutting through the Suffolk countryside. It includes 21km of underground cabling, including

some through the Dedham Vale national landscape, and up to seven new compounds to connect underground sections to overhead lines.

Public hearings of initial statements from interested parties are being heard this week.

At a hearing today in Ipswich, both councils called for a delay to the project so other options can be considered and costed – such as an undersea route or undergrounding of the entire length of the project.

They cite serious concerns about the impact on the environment, communities and businesses.

Babergh District Council leader, Cllr John Ward, told the hearing: “The landscape of the district is highly valued, with the National Landscape designation, many cultural and historic associations, and sensitive views that contribute to the unique character of Babergh district and the wider region. These are views that have been immortalised by Constable and Gainsborough.

“The applicant states the project will have significant adverse landscape and visual impacts which are not considered to be adequately mitigated or compensated.”

He said the impact on the Dedham Vale National Landscape will be particularly devastating with a wide swathe cut through one of the most beautiful and historic parts of the region.

Cllr Ward said: “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.”

Cllr Andrew Stringer, Mid Suffolk’s cabinet member for heritage, planning and infrastructure, told the hearing that the transmission network is likely to be sufficient until 2035 – so there was time to explore other options.

He said: “This project, in its current form, will threaten food production, devastate biodiversity, and will decimate local tourism and impoverish our unique heritage.”

There are particular concerns regarding the cumulative effects of energy infrastructure development around the Bramford substation, he added.

Cllr Stringer said: “Mid Suffolk has a unique character, and already has a north to south national grid pylon route, that was more than doubled in capacity in recent years.

“In the transition to cleaner energy Mid Suffolk will more than play its part, but as with all transitions if the changes are not seen to be just, this essential transition could be delayed, or even fail.”

## **Better Recycling for Suffolk**

As once in a generation recycling changes in Suffolk edge closer, Deliveries of new bins and caddies in Mid Suffolk are expected to begin **next week** taking place over several weeks. Deliveries for Babergh are due to start a little later in April. Should you have any questions, you can find FAQs on our websites, as well as on the Suffolk Recycling website.

## **New Initiative disrefurbished laptops will help tackle digital exclusion and isolation in Suffolk.**

FCC Environment (FCC) has donated 10 refurbished laptops to the Rural Coffee Caravan, a local charity dedicated to tackling isolation and supporting residents across rural communities.

FCC, which runs the 11 recycling centres in Suffolk on behalf of Suffolk County Council, has worked in partnership with Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils - which play an active role in bringing together local organisations to improve digital access. Together they identified opportunities to ensure the donated devices benefit residents in most need and improve access for those in rural areas.

The donated laptops will be distributed to residents who are not able to afford a device, helping to bridge the digital divide and improve access to vital online resources. Volunteers at the Rural Coffee Caravan will also support recipients to feel more confident using devices and getting online safely, as part of their wider programme of digital support.

Gemma Green, FCC reuse development manager, said:

“At FCC we are passionate about giving items a second life, and this donation is a perfect example of how reuse can deliver both environmental and social benefits.

“By repurposing laptops that might otherwise have gone to waste, we’re reducing carbon emissions while helping the Rural Coffee Caravan support residents who need digital access most. “It’s fantastic to see these devices making a real difference in Suffolk communities.”

Ann Osborn, CEO of the Rural Coffee Caravan, said:

“Helping people in rural communities build digital confidence and get online is central to our work in tackling isolation and fostering connection.

“This donation from FCC Environment will enhance the support we offer, ensuring those most in need have the opportunity to stay connected and aren’t left behind.”

As well as supporting local communities, the initiative contributes to environmental sustainability. By repurposing laptops rather than sending them to waste, FCC and its partners are helping reduce carbon emissions.

According to the Reuse Network, each reused device saves significant carbon and represents a charitable donation valued at £100 per laptop.

Cllr Andy Mellen, leader and cabinet member for performance and resilience at Mid Suffolk District Council, said:

“Being online helps residents stay connected and reduces isolation, which is vital for mental wellbeing. This is particularly important in rural areas like Mid Suffolk.

“That’s why we’re committed to tackling digital exclusion and supporting initiatives such as refurbished device schemes like this, that give people the access and confidence to use technology.”

Cllr Alastair McCraw, cabinet member for performance and resilience at Babergh District Council, said:

“Access to the internet opens up opportunities for learning and employment, helping rural

communities thrive. It also helps residents manage bills, book health appointments, and access vital services quickly and easily.

“We’re proud to support projects like these vital device refurbishments, that help make technology accessible to everyone.”

The donation highlights FCC’s ongoing commitment to supporting local communities through reuse and recycling initiatives, ensuring that valuable resources are given a second life while delivering tangible social impact.