

Babergh District Council - Annual Report 2024/25

My annual report is a refresher on what happened month-by-month in Babergh and the Sproughton & Pinewood Ward. A lot has happened and the pace shows no sign of letting up with portfolio and devolution work ongoing.

May 2024

- General Election – Babergh dealing with and providing support during the General Election and ‘returning’ services.
- Norwich – Tilbury Grid Extension – BDC engaging with National Grid, along with other bodies, in pushing for alternatives to over-ground pylons.
- Brockley Wood Mineral Extraction Site – BDC, Ward Councillors and parish councils supporting the prospect of ‘Judicial Review’ of the legality of the site application.
- Babergh Cabinet – Discuss and agree process for the implementation of ‘simpler recycling’ following legislation to bring this into force by April 2026.
- £1.2m in CiL funding handed out across BMSDC
- Carparking charges approved for Hadleigh, Sudbury & Lavenham – decision called in for review by Overview & Scrutiny
- Attended Norwich 2 Tilbury Pylons meeting hosted by James Cartlidge
- Received ‘Emergency Planning Training’

June 2024

- BDC Holiday activities and food programme returns for support to communities.
- Community Grants window ‘open’ for applications up to £10,000
- ‘Call for Sites’ process commenced to support Joint Local Planning (Part 1)
- 3 ‘Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD’s) out for consultation (Biodiversity & Trees, Housing & Intensive Livestock & Poultry)
- Confirmed Locality Budget spending for previous financial year - dog-bins, recycling bins & bench for Sproughton and new bench for Pinewood
- BMSDC received a grant of £300,000 to install EV chargers in council carparks
- SCC completed works to (hopefully) fix the flooding on Hadleigh Road nr Church Lane)
- Met with leadership team at Suffolk One College to discuss issues with student car parking outside the college
- Was given the Climate Change, Nature Recovery & Biodiversity Portfolio

July 2024

- Deborah Saw (Green Party) Elected as Council leader for next 12 months. Cabinet reviews its strategy with some changes to portfolio holders. Our very own, Dave Busby, remains on cabinet.
- ‘Fun Days’ for the schools’ summer break announced for July & August.
- Spent the night at Endeavour House on election night watching the counting. James Cartlidge re-elected with 50% fewer votes than last time.
- ‘First Time Fix’ Project announced – designed to improve how repairs, maintenance & servicing are handled. Repair numbers gradually increasing

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- Additional funding for vulnerable residents approved to allow people to stay in their own homes for longer
- Further updates on new recycling rules. In 2026 it will be possible to include glass bottles & tetrapaks in the recycling bins and from 2027 plastic film & bags. A new food waste bin (collected weekly) will be supplied.
- Suffolk residents able to access electric vehicles on a short-term basis from Summer 2026
- Looking to obtain additional bus funding for students to improve take up of the 100 carparking spaces reserved for them at Tesco Park n Ride

August 2024

- Household Support Fund announced to help tenants with cost-of-living support. £100,000 made available to council tenants, a reduction in council tax for low-income households and £150,000 to households struggling with rent.
- Tom Barker, current Director of Planning becomes new BMSDC Chief Operating Officer.
- Rural Prosperity Funding Grant announced to support rural business.
- New Local Listed Building Consent Order, allowing Grade II listed property owners to upgrade or replace windows without having to make individual applications, subject to conditions agreed. Also a Local Development Order, allowing solar PV and other renewable technologies to be installed on unlisted buildings within the curtilage of a Grade II listed property.
- Labour government increases its housing targets – BMS set to discuss how these can be achieved.
- Overview & Scrutiny Committee completed their review of carparking charges – now revised slightly.

September 2024

- Annual Canvass of Residents to record and support our data on the ‘State of the District’ made.
- ‘Pension Credit Action Week’ supported by the council raising awareness of qualifying conditions for claims.
- ‘Call 4 Land’ summit held with the objective of helping local landowners or those with large gardens to consider how they can improve the biodiversity of their land by working with the Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Woodland Trust or Forestry Commission to plant trees, hedges, orchards etc.
- Drain under Belmont Road finally jetted – hopefully flooding will now cease
- A14 Traffic diversion starts through Sproughton to allow overnight resurfacing works to take place. Much effort expended by our Traffic Chair to get 4-way traffic lights in the village.
- Traffic Exhibition held in Tithe Barn – design your own solution to Sproughton’s traffic problems!
- Solar Together launched in Suffolk - offering residents affordable renewable energy sources Suffolk residents will boost local renewable energy generation, cut carbon emissions, and save on energy bills with a community-led solar panel initiative

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- Social Housing: Both Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils called for urgent government action to address the financial crisis in council housing. Both councils have written to Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner and local MPs, highlighting the need for changes to the current financial model governing council housing in England.
- Devolution: Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils have added their voices to a joint statement following the news that a proposed Suffolk devolution deal has been scrapped by the Government
- Sustainable Travel Group set-up with myself as Chair

October 2024

- ‘Simpler Recycling’ – Council responds to UK Gov legislation on the implementation of a simpler recycling scheme expectations for April 2026. The Council initiates consideration of what a Suffolk wide scheme might look like, planning and implementation.
- Storm Babet. Suffolk resilience forum reviews, one year on, the impact and ‘lessons learnt’ from the storm on residents and infrastructure by flooding in the district.
- The Living Well in Winter grant aimed at tackling social isolation in winter has returned for a second year, thanks to funding from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils. Aims to support things like ‘Meet-Up Mondays’
- Babergh cabinet met last week to discuss proposals for the increase of next year’s fees and charges. Babergh has a predicted £1 million deficit for Feb’25, added to an already identified £6.7 million gap. The aim is to recover the true cost of the services provided. Currently these are not fully recovered as Babergh has been subsidising them for several years at least.
- Consultation started on Copdock2Capel cycle path
- Sustainable Travel Group now identifying sites for the installation of Eezybike electric bike hire pods
- Results are in from the ‘Call 4 Land’ summit – over 20% of attendees contacted the grant providers to see what projects can be funded.
- LCWIP – part of the path between Bramford & Claydon is being upgraded – have requested we look to improving the path between Sproughton & Ipswich
- ‘Bus Service Improvement Plan ‘ bid has gone in to support Suffolk One efforts to reduce student parking on local streets.
- Church Lane flooding – work continued on trying to resolve this by working with landowners and SCC
- Sproughton PC & I met with Taylor Wimpey to discuss their new Design Codes document that is supposed to comply with the Sproughton Neighbourhood Plan Design Codes – Taylor Wimpey includes 3 storey buildings in direct conflict with the Neighbourhood Plan

November 2024

- Annual Governance Statement – Published by Council. All local authorities, by law, need be accountable to their residents for the provision of value for money.

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- There was a call for land to support nature, to increase tree coverage and to improve biodiversity.
- Rural Housing Event – Held in Lavenham looking at the issues of affordable homes, health and wellbeing.
- Brockley Wood: Bentley PC have had an application for a quarry and crushing plant approved by SCC, rejected at Judicial Review now coming back to SCC in the New Year. Bentley are continuing to fight this one.
- Work on the budget continues – detailed analysis of what can/can't be cut, job vacancies frozen
- Greenhouse Gas Report for Babergh prepared ready for cabinet in December (our emissions are decreasing)
- Sudbury Town Council agreed to the installation of an Ezybike pod at Kingfisher Leisure Centre
- A14 Traffic Diversion thru Sproughton continues. Unfortunately, a lorry clipped a house on the High Street. No one in the village was surprised!!
- Flooding in Church Lane, Sproughton: Flooding source, landowner agreed to meet with residents

December 2024

- Councils Celebrate 130 Years of Women District Councillors – Women now make up over one third of all elected ward councillors.
- BMSDC New Grants Process Launched – Meetings to help communities gain access to grant funding. This was done in conjunction with the launch of a new webpage – ‘Click’ Access to Community Funding.
- BMSDC ‘Reset’ on Building Services – Councils bringing back support for our housing and property assets ‘in house’ for the vast majority of building and repair works required.
- Babergh cabinet approved the 2025-26 budget and the Greenhouse gas report.
- The ‘Green Skills 4 Schools’ summit held at Ipswich High School for Girls was so successful we have already agreed to hold another one in 2026. Funding already agreed.
- Became a member of the Suffolk Environment Portfolio Holders Group which is run by SCC
- The Bus Service Improvement Plan funding bid was approved.
- Devolution: The Labour government issued the English Devolution White Paper. SCC began to think about cancelling the county elections in May’25 due to the amount of work devolution is likely to entail.

January 2025

- Budget Fixing for Councils – No change in last 12 months from UK Gov on funding along with withdrawal of Rural Funding Support Grant (worth £365,000 to BDC)
- Devolution Becomes the ‘Big Topic’ along with Local Government Reform and the move away from two tier authorities to single tier Unitary Council model. It was confirmed Norfolk & Suffolk would be on the fast track for devolution towards a combined mayoral authority.

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- UK Gov Announces changes to NPPF and requirement for BDC to ramp up house building from 416 to 775 homes.
- Parking Charges Introduced – Parking charges come into effect from January in Sudbury, Lavenham & Hadleigh.
- The new project manager for the Joint Local Plan project has now arrived at Babergh
- Norfolk/Suffolk Local Nature Reserve Strategy was presented at a cabinet briefing prior to approval at Feb's cabinet meeting.
- Initial discussion on a rollout plan for the extended Park 'n' Ride to Suffolk One bus service. Meeting with local residents to be arranged

February 2025

- A balanced budget was delivered albeit by use of £765,00 of reserves.
- Devolution & Local Government Reform – Workshops delivered by BDC to inform District, Town and Parish Councillors of timelines, potential formulation and structural responsibilities. Leaders now spending a lot of time on this.
- BMSDC Building Control Team – Victorious at LABC Awards held at Grosvenor House Hotel ceremony. BMSDC picked up 'Best Team' of year award.
- Burnett Close Play Area has been surveyed with a view to upgrading this area.
- Sproughton Nature Reserve presented at a cabinet briefing.
- Traffic Solutions 4 Sproughton – results paper being collated

March 2025

- 'Planning for the Future' – BMSDC launch a briefing pack to Town & Parish Councils setting out what the governments significant changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) mean to the joint district councils and the potential impacts this will have upon Neighbourhood Development Plans.
- BDC Brief Town & Parish Councils on the 'Interim Housing Requirement Advice' document which gave initial advice on the housing requirement numbers across our communities for parishes to factor into their Neighbourhood Plans if possible.
- The Brockley Wood quarry application was heard however deferred due to late submission of a material document
- The new Bramford battery storage application has been approved despite a number of concerns around safety.
- The new Norfolk & Suffolk Nature Reserve Strategy went before the February Cabinet Meeting and was unanimously approved. It will be going out for public consultation shortly
- Sproughton Nature Reserve application approved at cabinet

April 2025

- Devolution: Babergh council approved the response to the Combined Norfolk & Suffolk Mayoral Authority consultation which has now been submitted. We are

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waiting on a response from the government on our interim plan which was submitted in March.

- The Brockley Wood quarry application was supposed to be heard (again) having been deferred previously due to insufficient time to review a significant document that had landed 24hrs before. However, the meeting has been deferred by SCC for a second time as the new Bentley Conservation Area was approved the day before the meeting.
- Another Nature Reserve??: Capel St Mary are now looking at designating an area as a nature reserve – the legal agreement is being worked on.
- Planning: We have had two planning committee meetings this month – numbers of applications are picking up in comparison to last year. One for Assington Autos, predictably enough in Assington, wanting to extend the time for complying with previous planning conditions and the other for 300-ish homes on the HMS Ganges site in Shotley. This was an old Navy training establishment but has been abandoned for decades – the kind of site that the government wants us to develop. The developer is providing affordable homes,