

Babergh District Council

Annual Report to the Parishes

Isabelle Reece – District Councillor for Bures St Mary & Nayland Ward

- First, it is an honour to have been elected last May to represent the three parishes of Bures St Mary & Nayland Ward for this four-year term.
- In the Babergh District elections no party achieved an overall majority. A coalition was formed from the 10 Green Party, 9 Independent & 5 Liberal Democrat councillors. My Group of 7 Conservative councillors, together with the 1 Labour councillor, form the Opposition.
- Since there are so few of us in the Group, we have had to take on a heavier Committee workload than is usual for a new councillor. I was appointed to the Joint Audit & Standards Committee and to the Dedham Vale Joint Advisory Committee and Partnership; and sometimes must substitute for a colleague on the Planning Committee.
- This first year has been a whirlwind: wave upon wave of new information & procedures, briefings and training sessions; and of course, the inevitable mindboggling number of emails.
- The Administration stated its priorities as Climate, Housing, and Communities and in the January Full Council Meeting passed its *Plan for Babergh*: less a plan *per se*, more an ambitious list of aspirations for the District. It contains little if any idea of how and exactly what will be achieved or any time frame for delivery.
- The Council has been providing considerable support to people on low incomes, including delivery of £100,000 to tenants through the Housing Support Fund; a reduction in Council Tax for low-income households and the awarding of £150,000 in rent relief through the Discretionary Housing Payment scheme. It also joined the Safe Suffolk Renters project; allocated £1.6million towards maintenance and improvement of its housing stock, and introduced a new Homelessness Strategy
- Residents & businesses affected by storm-related flooding received support and assistance and Babergh helped distribute monies from the Property Flood Resilience Repair Grant Scheme
- At its February Meeting, the Council voted to increase Council Tax on empty properties and on second homes and it increased its overall portion of Council Tax by 2.9%
- In June of last year the Council made clear its objections to the infamous Norwich to Tilbury Pylon Route, with subsequent reiterations. As we know, the Statutory Consultation is now under way – and seems to promise to be as skewed as the non-statutory so-called ‘consultation’ we have already had.
- In November, following amendments stipulated by the Inspectors, Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils finally had Part 1 of the Joint Local Plan approved. Work on Part 2 continues: since Part 2 includes housing allocations for the District, there could be some conflict or complications with existing Neighbourhood Development Plans
- As a result of a short Public Consultation before Christmas, the Council is to introduce new Local Listed Building Consent Orders (LLBCOs). These will enable owners of Listed Buildings to make certain energy efficiency savings: the first of these, which is scheduled for June of this year, will be for windows; two further ones will be for insulation and for solar panels.

- As is the case for all local authorities, Babergh is facing certain financial challenges, including regarding allocations from Central Government. Questions have been asked, however, about some of Babergh's projects, whether already under way or planned. The Corks Lane development in Hadleigh is forecast to result in a £2million loss for Babergh, and changes to borrowing rules will add to the budgeting pressures. A new waste depot is planned: to be located outside of the District. This will almost certainly mean the closure of the Sudbury Depot.
- Recently, dismissing the petition of over 8,500 signatures led by my colleague Paul Clover, Cabinet decided to increase Parking Tariffs in Council owned car parks, causing anger amongst many residents and businesses, particularly in Sudbury, Hadleigh and Lavenham; as well as the District's villages. Following a Call-in Notice, this Monday (22nd April) the Overview & Scrutiny Committee voted unanimously to return the matter to Cabinet for reconsideration, including specific reference to impacts on the local economy, as well as on rural poverty and on vulnerable groups across the district
- In the next two years we will be seeing major changes in the way our household waste is collected, involving perhaps up to 5 different bins. This includes what I consider a negative, namely the collection of 'food waste', something that should be an oxymoron.
- The Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty have been rebranded as National Landscapes, though as legal entities they remain AONBs. One of the most exciting developments is an extension of DeFRA funding within the FiPL (Farming in Protected Landscapes) scheme, to help restore old buildings, which are now rightfully considered a part of a landscape's cultural heritage. One of the first to benefit is Thorington Street Mill – a two-minute walk from where I live.
- My £2,000 Locality Budget for 2023-24 went to Bures Baptist Church for a new Notice Board; a small contribution towards their major renovations which, when completed, will provide valuable facilities for the Community of Bures St Mary and indeed for residents of its 'sister' parish, Bures Hamlet the other side of the River. I have already received interest for the 2024-25 Budget from three groups across the Ward.
- Since May I have dealt with many cases and enquiries, from individual parishioners and from the Parish Councils. Most are related to Planning or Public Realm – refuse collecting and grass cutting – but some have also been assisting people with complex needs to access appropriate help. Unfortunately, not all cases are easily resolved: some remain frustratingly difficult to get dealt with.
- In the first few months following my election, I attended one community coffee morning per month in each of the three parishes, as well as a few other events. Unfortunately, I had to take a break from this owing to health issues – and having another new job – but hope to start attending these and other community events again on a regular basis.

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