

Annual Babergh District Council Report 23rd May 2024, for Boxford APM.
Presented by Cllr Bryn Hurren.

This has been a pivotal year for all local authorities, whether they be District, County or Unitary. Lack of funding from national government, combined with a huge increase in prices of all commodities, including the rate of borrowing, has hit councils and constituents very hard. As a small District Council, we alike others have been hit with increased costs along with increased demands for our services due to the cost-of-living crisis, big rises in mortgage rates and almost double the rate of tenants and homeowners declaring themselves homeless.

Through and despite of all this, we have set a balanced budget for year 24/25 but to achieve this, we have had to make some cuts to services, leave vacancies open, edge charges up a little, look at making BaberghmidSuffolk one sovereign council, instead of two councils working together, and look seriously at making very modest charges for parking cars in our towns. While we run all our 20 odd car parks for the benefit off all and to support our high streets at the modest sum of £140,000, the horrendous £300,000 in business rates levied upon them and us by the national government is the straw that has broken the camels back and is a disgrace. We have always regarded our car parks as a initiative to support and enhance our High Streets and it is regrettable that the national government use them as a tool to impose upon us more stealth taxes.

Feel free to lobby your local MP or government minister if you feel as strongly about this as I do.

Although BDC collect all of the council tax as a statutory duty, we only keep just under 9% to run the District Council, with PCC now coming in at around 12%, County at approx. 77% and towns, villages and boroughs at around 2%.

Babergh's share equates to £188.00 per year on a Band D property, £3.50 a week and excellent value for all we achieve for all our residents.

As a well-run Local Council BDC has always entered the National Council awards scheme in various categories including the biggest one, which is National Council of the year award.

We are past winners of a digital tree mapping scheme along with top awards for our CIL management and various housing awards and we have had several commended gongs for the way we perform and run BDC.

This year we were awarded the honour for being simply the best council across the whole of the UK outright. A fabulous achievement and a tribute to the coalition of political groups who work together to run the council and to all of our officers and staff who despite the pressure of the lockdown years and even worse now, continue to give sterling service to our residents.

The remarks given by the judging panel included praise for the way our 2 councils are run together by one team of staff, the solar panel scheme, fitted to our council house roofs that provides cheaper power for our residents as well as £350.00 in feed in tariffs per year, as a financial benefit, our initiative in changing our fleet of vehicles to HVO, fitting air source heat pumps to our leisure centres and our recycling initiatives. To name but a few.

We are now being asked by national government, to instigate kerbside collections of food waste and glass collections, throughout the district by 2026.

While this is promised to come with sufficient funds to carry out this service, initial investigations reveal that this money is around £500,000 short of what it would take to run the service well. Seven lorries, staff and facilities to deal with collections, will not come cheap. With us already having had to take on policing of parking and licensing duties, this will stretch our already diminished budget to beyond breaking point.

The launch of our compost initiative has been a great success with take up being beyond expectations, watch this space.

The CIL levy continues to fund many community projects across our area and now it has been widely accepted by most developers, works well and delivers much needed infrastructure projects across our District, we currently have just in excess of £16 m in a ring fenced budget to award to our villages and communities across the joint Districts.

Our newly adopted part one Joint local plan continues to bed in well and is being accepted by developers and inspectors alike, we are now trying to get part two up to speed and have already put in a call for sites appeal, to get acceptable land into our landbank for future needed development.

It should be noted at this point that the 64 house proposed development at Sandhill was eventually turned down recently at appeal by the appointed Government inspector. Apart from horrendous traffic concerns and the impossibility of providing a safe pedestrian access down into the village centre. The fact that this application was contrary to the District JLP and the Village Neighbourhood plan was also noted.



Matters local to Boxford.

I have been thrilled to be part of the CIL applications at the Boxford Pavilion and Playingfields which is a shared facility with neighbouring villages as well. So important that we provide such facilities for this and the next generation as well. Huge thanks to Hugh and his team for this.

Also that I have been able to give a large proportion of my locality budget towards securing and enhancing the Croft path, which is so important for the connectivity and safe passage of so many of the local and neighbouring village residents.

Also pleased that this fund has been retained for at least one more year, as it is such an important way to get funds into community schemes and village projects.

Currently working with public realm team to see how the current service can be improved as the current mowing arrangements are obviously inadequate, maybe villages need consulting throughout the district to see if more monies can be contributed to enhance the service.

My Thanks to Chair Clerk and Councillors of Boxford PC and I look forward to working with you
and all the residents of Boxford for another Year.

I am happy to answer any questions from Councillors or members of the public.

All Very Best Wishes. Bryn.