

## Monthly Report Jan'25 - Sproughton & Pinewood Ward

### GENERAL UPDATES

The district wide monthly update can be found here - [Download Babergh's town and parish briefing notes](#)

**Devolution:** Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner announced that Norfolk and Suffolk are among the areas to be included on the Government's Devolution Priority Programme (DPP) - a fast-track process with additional support, which will see a regional Mayor for Suffolk and Norfolk elected in May 2026 and new unitary councils elected in either May 2026 or 2027. As part of this, the Government has decided to cancel the County Council elections in May this year for Suffolk & Norfolk. The Government will begin the DPP by launching a public consultation in our area shortly. This will be led by MHCLG and we will be getting further details of this very soon.

I know that there are a lot of concerns about what is going to happen and district councillors particularly share those as we have real doubts about the claimed cost savings, the financial security of unitary councils and the reduction of local accountability: quite simply, the plan removes the 'local' from local government. However, we can't stop this and so we do encourage everyone to respond positively to the consultation. It would be particularly good to hear views on the number of unitaries that would be appropriate for Suffolk and suggestions for approximate boundaries and sizes of wards.

Just so you all know, the county council leader and cabinet want just one - essentially for the county council to absorb the districts - but there are real worries about this, given the county's poor record of delivering services and managing its budget. The district councils favour either two or three unitaries, set up with a clean sheet and not inheriting any administrative problems from the county council. More than one will also go some of the way to alleviate concerns about local representation.

One further point to clarify: the mayoral strategic authority will be responsible for powers and funding devolved from central government: the new councils will still operate independently, delivering the services councils are currently responsible for.

It is a fast-moving situation with a very ambitious timescale as we have to submit an interim plan on or before 21st March 2025. The government expects all the councils in Suffolk to submit a jointly agreed plan, which might be challenging given the county's position. I hope that they will take a collaborative approach, particularly if local opinion differs from what they want. I will keep you all updated as we hear more from the government.

**Planning:** The project manager to run the JLP programme has now arrived at Babergh DC. I am looking forward to starting work on the new JLP. At least this gives us the chance to incorporate all the new regulations but also to fix the issues with Part 1 that has necessitated the creation of a number of supplementary planning documents that expand on the JLP Part1. In parallel with this Babergh have recommended that parishes without a neighbourhood plan think about doing one and those that have a plan think about reviewing it to give a parish as much protect as possible from development in the wrong place. Given Babergh's housing numbers have gone up by 87% it is worthwhile thinking about where development could go!

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The Planning Committee has met to consider the solar farm application in Bentley. This was recommended for refusal and the committee agreed unanimously to refuse. It was on high grade agricultural land, close to heritage assets but without a timely connection to the national grid. I expect the developer will appeal. They usually do. It is notable that the Badley solar farm application was refused but granted at appeal.

**Local Nature Reserve Strategy:** Suffolk CC & Norfolk CC have been appointed by the government as responsible authorities for preparing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy for their counties. This is being done in conjunction with district councils and other stakeholders and includes several rounds of public consultation. This initiative is a requirement of the Environment Act 2021 the aim of which (part of anyhow) is to improve biodiversity & restore natural habitats. The aim is to work together to help improve wildlife habitats and reverse the decline of biodiversity across the region and the go-live date is Jul25. The (extremely cool) mapping tool defines areas and species to be protected and clearly shows where additional work could take place to join up these areas. The LNRS will help farmers & land managers ensure and shape nature recovery in their area and encourage collaboration with neighbouring farms, identifying areas for improvement. Developers will be able to use this to fine tune their BNG requirements and others such as parishes or community groups will be able to use this to target what will enable them to deliver the 'biggest bang for the buck' when considering biodiversity projects. Now we are revisiting the JLP we will be able to incorporate these requirements giving more weight to improving biodiversity & nature recovery in the district. I briefed the cabinet on this in January, did an All Member Briefing and it is going before Feb cabinet meeting for approval.

## **PORTFOLIO**

**Climate Change Briefing:** Babergh & Mid-Suffolk are looking to setup a Stowmarket Climate Hub which will provide advice on all aspects of reducing energy consumption, implementing things like heat pumps and solar panels trying to explain, educate and provide advice. There is a workshop on 25Feb regarding this project.

The date for the 2025 Schools Green Skills Summit is going to be November. There are several schools interested in hosting and several sponsors have already confirmed! The climate change team are busy going into the schools that attended last year to followup on what changes the school and students are making to be & live more sustainably.

I gave an update to the full council on the progress that the Sustainable Travel Group has made - I was grilled for an hour with questions although for some reason parking charges kept being dragged into this.

**Visit from Tokyo:** A delegation of three officers from the Tokyo Metropolitan Government met with myself, my Mid-Suffolk counterpart and the biodiversity team on 27Jan. It follows the councils' UK Council of the Year award win in spring last year at the prestigious local government iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards. A win which caught the eye of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's statistics division. The award recognised several UK firsts, including becoming the first rural UK councils to commission a pioneering full tree canopy data survey. The survey, carried out by Treeconomics, established the districts' detailed

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baseline tree coverage data. Essentially the visitors were interested in how we had collated the data and turned it into something usable. We demo'd a neat tool that shows tree coverage in Babergh so we can see where best to do additional planting. [Tokyo Metropolitan Government visits Babergh and Mid Suffolk councils - Babergh District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk](#)

### **THE WARD ITSELF**

**Parking at Suffolk One:** First Buses, Suffolk One & myself have met to discuss an initial plan to roll out the new bus scheme - tentative start date is July in order to trial before the end of the summer term. We hope to have a meeting with local residents in April to discuss the parking issues and what solutions residents suggest.

**Traffic A14 Diversion via Sproughton:** Suffolk Highways are looking to trial a possible diversion route for the next road closure. It is likely to be in one direction only but this is a start!!

**Traffic Solutions 4 Sproughton:** The results of the traffic exhibition in the Tithe Barn have now been collated. We are looking to publish the results shortly, agree on a solution then put in a bid for CiL funding - a challenge but worth a go.

**Taylor Wimpey Phase 2 Design Codes:** The design codes document has now been reviewed by Sproughton PC and comments will be going in shortly. Sproughton PC (+myself) are monitoring this carefully. We are expecting the first application in Q2'25 and will let people know when it has arrived. The Design Codes document was a very long document so we needed to ask for an extension in order to have enough time to do the review justice.

**CiL Funding:** The round of CiL applications are due in, in May. If you have a project for which you are looking for funding please see ? to fill in an enquiry form to see if your project is eligible. Please please please get your applications in before others as it is we cease to exist as a district council as we have no idea what will happen after a unitary is formed.

If you ever have an issue to raise with me please use the contact details below. I look forward to hearing from you.

*Helen Davies*

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