

**News and information from Jane Gould, Babergh District Councillor.
To the Parish Councils and residents in Orwell Ward
November 2020**

Cross-party task force puts biodiversity at the heart of Babergh

Councillors are set to consider a raft of environmental measures developed by a cross-party task force tackling climate change and furthering the councils' ambition to become carbon neutral by 2030.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils' cabinets are due to meet this month (9 November) to consider the proposals. They have been developed following the extensive work of a Biodiversity Task Force, made up of councillors from all political parties; a subgroup of the councils' Climate Change Task Force, with advice from experts. If agreed, the proposals will form the councils' first Biodiversity Action Plan, setting out how they aim to protect and strengthen biodiversity in the districts. The action plan will link with the councils' Carbon Reduction Management Plan, and will play a crucial role in fulfilling their ambitions of becoming carbon neutral by 2030.

Headline proposals, which follow the climate emergency motions passed by both councils in 2019, include:

- Developing a wildlife network map. This would be to identify and create wildlife corridors, as well as tree and hedge planting areas to enhance connectivity, and improve management of local wildlife sites in the districts
- Working with town and parish councils and local communities to identify areas where trees and hedges can be planted
- Increasing hedge planting through the DEFRA hedge planting grant scheme, and helping to fund planting which isn't eligible where possible
- Planting wildflower meadows to replace strict grass cutting regimes where suitable, to encourage bees and insects

- Developing a supplementary planning document linked to the Joint Local Plan, to strengthen protections for biodiversity, and set out the districts' expectations in terms of design, landscaping and open space for new developments
- Exploring the possibility of a green burial site

Residents are also being encouraged to take action, however small, to increase biodiversity in their communities. This includes things such as installing bird and bat boxes, planting flowers to attract bees, creating hedgehog corridors, and being biodiversity-conscious when gardening. The councils' Tree for Life scheme also continues to offer local parents a tree to celebrate the arrival of a child, or remember babies sadly lost. The scheme will play an important role in the wider-districts' biodiversity, using native, locally grown and sourced trees.

Suffolk hedge species village survey

This was done in 1998 to 2012 by two thirds of the villages in Babergh and many more across Suffolk. All the records are still on paper and have yet to be digitalised. But many parishes may still have the records for their own village, and these are worth digging up in order to provide informed responses to planning applications which may threaten certain hedges or in helping to draw up a Neighbourhood Plan. A summary of the survey is available to download in pdf form here <https://www.eastsuffolk.gov.uk/environment/east-suffolk-greenprint-forum/suffolk-hedgerow-survey/>

Public Realm

Will Burchnall has now joined Babergh DC as the Public Realm Corporate Manager. Will joins us from The National Trust, and before that the Broads Authority.

Quiet Lanes

The cabinet has given Highways £235,000 from last year's budget surplus to promote Quiet Lanes where parish councils request them. I understand that

these are generally for roads where the national speed limit applies but there is low traffic and demand for use by pedestrians, cyclists, horse riders. The aim is not to calm traffic but to make drivers more aware and encourage more foot and cycle traffic.

Babergh to say no to proposed new housing quota formula

Government have proposed changes to the quota of new houses that councils have to build, the suggestion is to tweak the formula to bolster the number of houses. In Babergh the number would rise from the current requirement of 300 to 789. The response, which was a unanimous “no”, has been approved by full council.

Babergh’s latest 5 year housing land supply healthy

A report into the current 5-year Housing Land supply in Babergh has demonstrated that the council currently has enough approved developments for 6.75 years. The council is required to have 2184 properties, but actually has 2943 – 35% more. This means that more weight can be attached to the council’s existing local plan when considering applications.

Joint Local Plan

The revised Joint Local Plan is due to come back before Council next month before it goes out for Technical Consultation. The objective is to have the technical consultation completed by the start of the New Year so that the Plan can be submitted to the inspector for examination before March. Work will also begin on Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) to complement and strengthen the policies within the JLP. These will include Environment and Biodiversity SPDs.

White paper on “Planning for the Future”

This proposal is separate from the white paper on a new planning system that has received more publicity. The Government is proposing effectively to

introduce zoning with planning consent assumed in at least one of the three zones. There was a wide range of views in councillor session held for Babergh and Mid Suffolk members with many of our responses along the lines of “Yes, so long as....” The whole paper appears to lack detail and to be encouraging too much centralisation.

Planning

Cllr Jamieson, who is one of my Green Party colleagues on the council and the Green Party member who is on the planning committee, has put together some notes on planning which I thought some of you might find helpful. There is sometimes a mistaken notion that individual councillors can “stop” planning applications and I hope that councillor Jamieson’s notes explain why this is not possible.

Types of Planning

Outline planning

This is an application for planning permission which does not include full details of the proposal, usually only sufficient detail to identify the principles of the proposal; details not submitted at this stage are called ‘reserved matters’. Details of the Reserved Matters are then submitted to the local planning authority at a later stage.

Reserved Matters

If an outline application receives planning permission, it may specifically reserve for later consideration some matters not relating to the principles of the proposed development. Matters reserved at outline stage can include access, appearance, layout, scale, and landscaping. While it is possible to reject a reserved matters application the rejection can only relate to the matters reserved and it will not affect the planning permission previously agreed in outline. More often than not if there is an issue with a reserved matters

application it will be deferred so the applicant can resolve the issues before coming back at a later date.

Full planning application

A full application will include all matters and will generally come with detailed drawings.

Five Year Housing Land supply.

If the council do not have a five year housing land supply then The 'tilted balance' principle comes into effect which states that a presumption in favour of planning permission being granted should be the case, unless there are “adverse impacts which would significantly and demonstrably outweigh its benefits.” When we do have a five-year housing land supply, as is the case now, then the tilted balance does not come into effect and we do not have to have a presumption in favour. Rejecting an application becomes easier. This became evident when we achieved the five-year supply last year. We went from approving almost every application to rejecting the majority.

Committee

Generally applications will only come before committee if they are for 15 dwellings or more, or if they have been called in.

Decisions

There are normally four scenarios that happen at committee

1) *Planning officer recommends acceptance – Committee agree and vote for approval*

No further action required – Application approved.

2) *Planning officer recommends refusal – Committee agree and vote to refuse.*

No further action – Application refused

3) *Planning officer recommends refusal – Committee disagree and vote to accept.*

Proposer will need to stipulate on what grounds they think application should be approved e.g. benefit to the community outweighs the grounds for refusal in officer's recommendation. The reasons will need to stand up to a potential legal challenge.

4) *Planning officer recommends acceptance – Committee disagree and vote to refuse.*

The member who proposed refusal will again need to provide justifiable and legal reasons for refusal. These will need to be in line with policies taken from the Core Strategy, saved policies from the Babergh Local Plan and policies from any adopted Neighbourhood plans.

The more of these policies that can be incorporated to back up the decision the better as the developer is likely to appeal to the inspectorate.

Grounds for decisions

All applications have to be assessed on planning grounds only and committee members should not take any personal reasons, or predetermined decisions, into the meeting. If we are seen to, it could be grounds for appeal.

Each application is then decided against the policies set out in our existing local plan (The Core Strategy), saved policies from the Babergh local plan, any approved neighbourhood plan policies and the stipulations set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) . Each policy will carry varying levels of weight depending on the circumstances of the application.

The submissions from the statutory consultees are also important in the decision. For example if Highways say that they have no objections to an application then it becomes very difficult to reject it on grounds of traffic. If we do it would very likely be overturned on appeal.

This can make it very frustrating in terms of environment sustainability. If the applicant has met the requirements set out in the building regs and has satisfied the planning officer that they are doing what's required of the NPPF then it becomes difficult to refuse on environmental grounds, even if the developer is

clearly not doing enough in real terms. Again a refusal would lead to a strong appeal. Similarly, if the application shows a net gain, then they would be deemed to have met the requirements of the NPPF. This is not difficult if they are building in a farmer's field.

If the officer recommends refusal, they will set out the grounds for refusal and will detail which policies are not being met. However, as stated above, if the committee go against the officer and decide to refuse then they have to state why. This generally falls to the proposer and the members who voted in favour of refusal with the help of legal and the chief planning officer. The decision must be based on legally defensible grounds based on policy.

Politics

The current committee is made up of 5 Tories, 3 independents, 1 Labour, 1 Lib Dem and 1 Green.

2020 Innovation Awards

28 businesses from across Babergh and Mid Suffolk have been shortlisted in the first ever business Innovation Awards. The awards recognise and celebrate organisations who are thinking outside the box and finding new ways to either reach new customers, become more sustainable or grow their business.

Parking

Motorists parking in Babergh and Mid Suffolk can now scrap their paper ticket and go digital to help protect their health and the environment; this is thanks to the introduction of MiPermit. With around a million visits made to the council-owned car parks each year, opting for MiPermit could save millions of pieces of paper going in the bin annually. The cash option will remain but MiPermit offers a digital and paperless alternative. Virtual tickets are available online, via the MiPermit app, by phone, and by text both in advance and on the day – allowing visitors to choose an option to suit them. Further electric vehicle charging points across the districts, and upgrading car park machines to include a card payment option, continue to be explored.

Self-isolation support payments for low income earners in Babergh

Residents on low incomes and unable to work because they have been asked to self-isolate by NHS Test and Trace can now claim a £500 payment from the Local Authority to compensate for loss of earnings.

Good News

A recent survey has ranked Babergh as having the greatest life satisfaction in the county; this reflects the district's residents, businesses, heritage and natural beauty. The survey, carried out by the Office for National Statistics, rates life satisfaction with a score of 0 showing participants are "not at all satisfied" and 10 being "completely satisfied"; Babergh residents gave an average score of 8.24, well above the national average of 7.66 and placing Babergh in first place.

Please contact me if you have any issues that you think I can help with and all the very best to you all.

Jane Gould

Babergh District Councillor, Orwell ward

Jane.gould@babergh.gov.uk

07548 153777

01473 780777