

# Monthly Report - Feb'24 - Sproughton & Pinewood Ward

## Babergh Budget 2024-25

So, the budget has finally been agreed. This was a long council meeting which discussed both budget and car-parking. It lasted from 5:30pm until 9:30pm and as you would expect there were some forthright discussions. The upshot is that the budget was agreed with the shortfall being covered from reserves. Covering shortfalls from reserves isn't a long-term solution. There are about £2.4m left of usable reserves (reserves equate to yours & my savings account). We have to save around £6.7m over the next 4 years in order to keep the books balanced - this is a legal requirement. It's estimated that 1 in 5 councils are about to go broke which doesn't say much for the level of government funding (I'm assuming here that councils manage their money prudently, although some probably don't). The council has increased fees and charges to reflect the actual cost of providing licences and services, and a savings programme is expected to achieve savings of £540k. Assuming there is a different government in place after the next election it will be interesting to see what happens on funding next year (Note to self - do not hold breath)

## Car-Parking - Sudbury, Hadleigh & Lavenham

The debate continues...I know this probably doesn't affect many people in the ward but the residents of these towns are firmly against the introduction of charges. The charges would also only apply to council-run car parks, with existing on-street parking remaining unchanged and blue badge holders still able to park in the council's car parks for free. Business owners are (understandably) worried about a reduction in footfall - nearly 10,000 people signed the petition against the introduction of charges. It would have been useful if the petition had covered alternate solutions and got people's thoughts on where acceptable cuts could be made as that would have presented a more rounded picture. The Lib Dems have suggested that the car-parks be transferred to the ownership of the towns to manage. Apparently if the car-parks are held in a Community Interest Company business rates do not apply - business rates form the majority of the cost of £425k standing at ~£330k. This would seem a win-win to me. Discussion due on this in cabinet w/b 11Mar. Another lively discussion. I'm sure!

## Planning

We have held a review meeting on this and most of my changes got through - still going to work on getting the remainder in though, then comes presenting it at a council meeting for approval.

## Suffolk's Local Transport Plan consultation

Suffolk County Council's transport strategy team are consulting on the latest update of the Local Transport Plan. It will help to shape the future of transport in Suffolk and to identify future transport schemes, developments and priority areas. The consultation survey launched earlier this month and will be active for eight weeks - so

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please encourage people to fill it in [Find out more on the Suffolk County Council website](#)  
Given the number of comments I hear on the lack of public transport in rural areas it would be good to feed in our views.

### **Tax premiums to increase on empty homes**

Higher tax premiums for owners of second homes and empty properties have been agreed in a bid to bring more housing back into use. The new policy is set to come into effect from April and will see owners of properties that have been left empty for more than a year paying double on their council tax. For properties empty for five years, tax will triple and, if left vacant for 10 years, the owners will pay quadruple. There are currently almost 600 empty properties in Babergh, which the Housing Team says it wants to see in use, to help meet growing housing need. In addition, starting in April 2025, council tax will double for the owners of 576 second homes across the district. These properties are defined as having nobody in residence, but which are "substantially furnished" -with exceptions for homes being actively marketed for sale or rent. It is hoped that the second homes premium will generate an additional £1.1 million for Babergh, while the empty homes premium could bring in an extra £300,000.

### **Orchard project blooms as 1,000 new trees set to be planted**

New trees have been planted in Stowmarket and Hadleigh as part of a Suffolk initiative to re-establish orchards across the county. Volunteers from Hadleigh Environment Action Team helped plant a community orchard beside Pykenham Way footpath, while Friends of Pikes Meadow helped plant at Pikes Meadow, Elizabeth Way, and Gainsborough Road in Stowmarket. Funding of £201,213 was received from the government's Local Authority Treescapes Fund which will be used to plant 1,877 new trees. The funding will also cover three years of maintenance of the orchards.

Anyone want to do anything similar in Pinewood or Sproughton?? Orchards can be mini - 3 or 4 trees or much bigger, any size really. Let me know.

### **A bit of good news**

Initial planting completed on Sproughton's new green space (the Oak Pit) between Church Lane & Ladderfield recently. Everyone is looking forward to the new hedge & trees starting to grow as we enter Spring. Next step is to look at clearing the stream so that the culvert under the road stays clear - something probably close to the hearts of some of the residents on Church Lane & Gipping Way!

Also, I have a Locality Budget & get £2,000pa to spend within the ward. I split it equally between Pinewood & Sproughton. The grant applications have just gone in for a new bench for Pinewood (entrance to Belstead Meadows) and for Sproughton, a new dog waste bin (Playing Fields), recycling bins (Tithe Barn) and a small bench (new green space).

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### Casework

Work continues on casework. 59% relates to Suffolk County Council - our SCC councillor is probably bored from me contacting him too much although we are about to start asking questions in the SCC chamber so that we can get a timely answer to things. My first question to the chamber will be on flooding (what a surprise!) The rest of the casework relates to Babergh which is easier to influence.

|            | Category             | #         | %           |
|------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------|
| <b>BDC</b> | CiL                  | 1         | 6%          |
|            | Environmental Health | 1         | 6%          |
|            | Grants               | 3         | 18%         |
|            | Planning             | 1         | 6%          |
|            | Policy               | 1         | 6%          |
| <b>SCC</b> | Flooding             | 3         | 18%         |
|            | Lighting             | 1         | 6%          |
|            | Traffic              | 6         | 35%         |
|            | <b>Grand Total</b>   | <b>17</b> | <b>100%</b> |

*Helen Davies*

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**Councillor Helen Davies: District Councillor for Sproughton & Pinewood**

**Posts:** Babergh Cabinet - Member without Portfolio,  
Vice Chair - Babergh Planning Committee,  
Member - Joint Local Plan Working Group,  
External Appointment - Greenways

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