

Merger

You will have recently received a notification from Babergh giving you the opportunity to cast your vote by post, telephone or electronically on the proposal to create a new Council incorporating Babergh and Mid Suffolk which could become the largest District Council in England.

A lot of time has been spent on this proposed merger with Mid Suffolk District Council.

Three proposals were put forward for discussion.

1 Stay as we are

2 Joint Management team

3 Full merger

It was finally decided go ahead immediately with a joint management team and seek the view of the inhabitants of the two councils on whether to fully merge.

The Councils have recently appointed a new joint Chief Executive who will commence her duties in next week. I am pleased to report that Babergh Councillors voted to decrease the Salary level of the new appointment to less than that of the existing officers. This will result in savings once redundancy and pension payments are made. When the new Chief Exec is in place appointments will be made for heads of services for both councils. This operation will go ahead irrespective of a full merger.

I had given my support to the proposals until the Council Meeting held in March. At this meeting we were informed for the first time that Mid Suffolk District Council were carrying Debt levels of £29.9m £12.1m on the General Fund and £17.8m on the Housing Revenue Account. This caused me a great deal of concern and this view was spread across the council as the proposal to accept the Business Case for Integration was only passed by 19 votes to 15 with one abstention.

The officers have tried to re assure members that the debt levels should not cause concern I do have my doubts.

I have other concerns –

Council Tax Equalisation Mid Suffolk have higher rate than Babergh.

Babergh residents paying an increase of £6.09 over a four year period while mid Suffolk remain constant

Figures have been based on a reduction in Govt grants over a four year period although only the next two years have been confirmed. No announcements have been made covering years 3 and 4. I think it is unlikely that the Government will continue to cut with elections looming.

Recently Babergh residents were asked to give their views on how the Council is run. i.e. Leader and Cabinet or Committee arrangements. The reply was to continue with committee arrangements. No decisions have been made on how the new Council would be run.

Locality arrangements - A new Council would be made up of 50 – 60 Councillors as compared with 83 at present. How this reduction would be made is undecided.

I believe there are too many things still to be decided to make a decision – everything is being rushed through too quickly

More joint working. Already in place – Revenues and Benefits, refuse collection.

If the decision is to proceed proposals go the Boundary Commission who would look at the overall boundary for the new council area, the warding arrangements within that area and the number of councillors.

It is possible that the Boundary Commission may consider that some of the current Babergh and Mid Suffolk wards should be transferred to Ipswich such as Pinewood.

I believe that Babergh could exist as a single entity. Additional income could come from car parking as an example. Free parking for 3 hours is out of context with all other adjoining councils. A charge is made of £1.50 for over 3 hours. Sudbury station car park 1.50 compared to £6.20 at Manningtree.

Please go the Babergh Website to see the full details before you make up your mind. Please do vote, it is important to the future of your area.

Do you want to be part of the biggest District Council in England. A massive area spreading from Shotley to Glemsford and Higham to Eye

Over the past year I have once again served on the Development Committee and Human Resources Committee. As Members Champion for Health and Safety I have also been a member of the Health and Safety Group and The Suffolk Coast & Heath Joint Advisory and Partnership Committees.

During the year the Pin Mill Task Group of which I was a member was disbanded due to completion of its role. Following work at Pin Mill to replace the old scrubbing posts and work to re-instate the hard, the area is now managed by Pin Mill Bay Management Company made up of Parish Council member, local companies, yacht club etc who will be responsible to collect rents for the use of the scrubbing posts and moorings. These improvements were made possible by obtaining grants from various organisations. *and platform for boats*
mainly Haven Gateway.

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Financial Information

- Agreed that there will be no increase to the Council Tax charge for 2011/12
- Over the last eight years Babergh has kept Council Tax at or below the rate of inflation.
- Babergh has maintained its position of having the second lowest Council Tax of any District Council in Suffolk (£139.01 for a Band D property) and remains in the lowest 20% nationally for Borough/District Councils.
- It is projected that Babergh will have collected nearly 99% of Council Tax, non domestic rates and housing rent by 31 March 2011.
- Babergh has achieved around £1.6 million in savings, efficiencies and additional income during 2010/11 and identified a further £1.7m for the 2011/12 Budget.
- Work on establishing a Shared Revenues Partnership with Ipswich and Mid Suffolk Councils to start in April 2011. This will generate savings of £4m over the next 10 years for the 3 councils.

Quality Homes Local People Can afford


- **New Homes** – It is estimated that 220 new homes will have been built in Babergh by March 2011.
- **Developing the Affordable Housing Programme** – The Council's Affordable Housing and Planning teams work together to increase the provision of affordable housing across the district. Babergh's target is to complete 100 new affordable homes during 2010/11 and by mid February 72

had been built. This is good progress given the continuing problems with the housing market, the reducing funding available and the prolonged spell of bad weather in December. It is estimated that a further 20 could be finished by the end of March if there are no delays on site. A further 16 are progressing well and may be finished before April.

- **Council Homes** - The Council actively manages 3,493 council homes across the district.
- **Decent Homes Standard** – Although the Decent Homes Standard has been achieved for the council's housing stock there is still a need to renew kitchens and bathrooms that become life expired. So far this year 69 bathrooms and 189 kitchens have been renewed in Babergh council houses.
- **Energy Efficiency** – By December 2010 improvements had been made to the insulation of 472 council houses and a further 22 homes had been fitted with air source heat pumps.
- **Planning Applications** – A total of 940 planning applications were processed by the Planning Team between April 1 and December 31 2010. This is 19% more than in the equivalent period last year.

A Greener and Cleaner Babergh

- **Street Cleanliness** – In a recent survey 89% of residents said they were satisfied with the level of street cleanliness in their local area. This is an improvement on last year's figure, which was 75%.
- **Domestic Waste** – 42.3% of domestic waste is now being recycled. There has also been a concentrated effort to tackle blue bin contamination. As a result of this work, 97% of the material placed in recycling bins is now suitable for recycling. Household waste is collected from over 38,500 homes across Babergh.
- **Garden Waste Scheme** – The number of subscribers to the scheme has increased since last year. 22.4% of all Babergh households are currently participating in the scheme.
- **Environmental Enforcement** – The Council prosecuted two people and issued Simple Cautions to 7 others for offences related to fly-tipping or the unlawful transfer of waste.
- **Building Regulations** – By mid February the Building Control Team had dealt with a total of 5,838 building control applications - 820 of these generated fee income for the Council. Building Control also carried out 6,500 inspections across the district in the same period
- **Food Safety** – 92% of local businesses have been assessed as being broadly compliant with food hygiene law by the Food Safety Team.
- **Suffolk Food Hall** – The Planning Team worked closely with the Suffolk Food Hall Company to ensure that a planning application to convert and change the use of a redundant farm building was approved by the end of December. As a



result of meeting this deadline the project was able to benefit from European Funding that had been secured via the East of England Development Agency. The application was supported by letters from local companies explaining how the local food hall is an important outlet for their business. On completion the new business incubator units will create 40 new jobs at the Suffolk Food Hall site.

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Parish Report - AGM

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David Wood

The past year at the Council has been extremely tough. The required reduction in public spending has forced local councils across the country to make difficult decisions in order to balance the budget. The approach to this in Suffolk is to 'divest' or close many of the services we know and cherish. The New Strategic Direction has caused a lot of controversy, but as we see the next financial year come, I hope that vital services in the community are not lost.

New Strategic Direction

The County Council back in September 2009, agreed to implement the New Strategic Direction, which was then deemed as a new way to run the Council in order to save the sums of money that the County predicted would be cut from the Government Grant.

At the end of 2010 more detail came to light about the method the Council wished to take to overcome this hurdle. The main idea running through the report brought to Full Council was to look at ways in which the community and other organisations could run Council services. The term 'divestment' was used to illustrate placing Council run services such as Libraries, Youth Clubs, and anything else that could legally be provided elsewhere in the community, or into the hands of businesses willing to provide and fund the service.

This New Direction would, according to the administration, provide the means to cut the costs to the County Council but still provide the services that individuals relied on.

There have now been a number of consultations, or 'conversations' around the Libraries, the Country Parks, Care Homes, and Youth Clubs, to assess whether businesses are willing to take on the provision of services in place of the County Council.

The Lib Dems oppose the New Strategic Direction, as we have not been provided enough information about how the Council plans to implement these changes. It is still unclear as to whether some services that have been cut, can be divested to the community legally, or the level of funding that they may receive.

The New Strategic Direction will continue through the year, and I will keep you up to date with the latest developments.

The Budget

Towards the end of February every year, the County Council sets its budget. This year was one of the hardest budgets we have seen from the Council. Many services that provide for the community have been cut or lined up ready for divestment.

Over the next four years it is predicted that the County Council will have to save £125m, this year the budgeted saving is required to be a total of £42.5m.

I will go into more detail for the larger aspects of the budget which are being removed later, but below please find a brief summary of the cuts at the Council.

- Community Meal Cost increase from £3.55 to £5
- Divestment/Closure of Youth Clubs
- Ending Healthy Schools Programme

- Reducing opening hours at Household Waste Recycling Centres and closing seven sites.
- Withdrawal of Bury Road Park and Ride
- Cease funding School Crossing Patrol Service
- Divesting the running and operation of Countryside Parks and other Countryside sites.
- Cease checking lorries if they are overloaded
- Divest Fire Control Service to another authority

At the meeting the Liberal Democrat group put forward an amendment to the budget which would have saved many frontline services. We believed it would be possible to provide funding for all these services if we looked at savings from the centre of the organisation and used a small proportion of the £108m which the council holds in reserves.

The Liberal Democrats amendment would have saved these services;

- Libraries
- Youth Clubs and Youth provision
- Subsidies to public transport services for Sundays, evenings and Bank Holidays
- Park and Ride Service from the Bury Road, Ipswich site
- Funding for the eXplore student card, which gives half price travel on buses up to age 19
- School Crossing Patrol Service
- Keep open all Household Waste Recycling Centres, instead of reducing them from 18 to 11
- Continue checking Lorries to see if they are overloaded.
- Stop the divestment of the Fire Control Function to Huntingdon
- Keep Felixstowe as a Day Crewed fire station, instead of reducing it to retained
- Retain full time crewing of the Ipswich Aerial Appliance

By using these funds:

- Re-open Bury Road Park and Ride by reviewing revenue streams for Park and Ride to increase income, including from concessionary fares, creating a cost neutral service
- Reduction in Road Maintenance Revenue Budget – not affecting emergency repairs
- Business Mileage reduction of 10% - saving nearly £1m a year
- Reduction of hours, to enable the continuation of all Household Waste sites
- Reduction of one Director and 2 Assistant Director posts
- Reduction of 2 Cabinet posts
- Reduce back office staff in Fire Service & review the number of appliances attending incidents (at present, for example, they send 5 appliances to a cat up a tree)
- Reduce External Room Hire by 30%
- Felixstowe Fire Station to 5 day weekday manning
- Use of Service reserves
- Reduce Corporate Contingency reserve
- Reduce Management of Change reserve

These savings would be heavily focused on the use of the management of change budget, which was set up for business transformation during the year at the council, and the corporate contingency fund, which is there to help manage risk throughout the year and has been increased to deal with the higher risk levels associated with this budget. We believe with the current financial situation this is the best time to use the reserves to ensure communities will continue to receive essential services.

The amendment was defeated on the day, and all of the cuts we passed.

Libraries

In line with the County Council's New Strategic Direction, the decision has been made to divest the majority of Libraries in Suffolk.

At the beginning of February a consultation was held to ask the people of Suffolk their views on the Library service, and whether any community or business would be willing to take on the running of Libraries. At that stage Libraries were split into two different categories, the first being a community Library, and the second being a County Library. Community Libraries are those which tend to be smaller and attract users from the

immediate area. They also tend to open fewer hours than other libraries. There are 29 libraries in Suffolk in this category, including three in Ipswich and Capel St Mary.

Within the consultation the County Council stated that if they do not receive adequate proposals or response from those people who use these Libraries, funding will be stopped from 2012.

The second form of Library is the County Library, these tend to be much bigger and serve a larger portion of the community. There are 15 of these Libraries, and the plan is to assess whether these can also be divested, apart from a collection of three individual libraries.

There is also the risk as part of this review of Library services that the mobile library could also be removed.

This consultation, which is still ongoing, is collecting views on all aspects of the Library service, including the mobile Libraries. We will find out after the 30th of April, what decisions or bids have been made.

Buses

In addition to the budget cuts as specified above, the County Council has made significant reductions in the levels of subsidy provided to passenger transport, a total of £2.2m, which enable commercial services to operate in non-peak time slots. This means that some services will cease completely, whereas others will stop operating in the evenings, and on weekends.

This has affected many services across the County and in our area. We have also now heard that the Buzabout service is likely to be reduced in hours, removing the late night provision, and the Sunday service.

In addition to the cuts to the bus services, the popular eXplore card, which provided reduced bus rates for those 16-19 year olds in the county, has also been stopped saving the council around £1.7m.

The County Council at the end of February released information of all those buses that will now cease. You can find all the relevant information here –

http://www.suffolkonboard.com/news/changes_to_public_transport_services_april_2011

Online Petitioning & consultations

At the beginning of the year, the County Council launched e-petitioning, where members of the public can create, and sign petitions in order to bring an issue to the Council's attention.

The system works on a basis that once a petition achieves 3,675 signatures the issue will have to be brought to Full Council and debated. This had already happened with the petition to save school crossing patrols and is likely to occur even more throughout the year.

Scrutiny

As a result of constitutional changes, the beginning of 2011 heralded a new era in scrutiny for the Council. Instead of the previous arrangement where scrutiny was based around a theme, the County decided that having only one scrutiny committee would be more effective.

Previously the Council had a total of eight different scrutiny committees, covering a range of subjects.

- Adult and Community Services Scrutiny Committee
- Children and Young People's Services Scrutiny Committee
- Customer Services Scrutiny Committee
- Environment, Waste and Economic Development Scrutiny Committee
- Health Scrutiny Committee
- Public Protection Scrutiny Committee
- Resources, Finance and Performance Scrutiny Committee
- Roads and Transport Scrutiny Committee

These themed scrutiny committees have now been amalgamated to form one scrutiny committee that covers all items. The committee meets every month for an entire day to discuss the latest items requiring scrutiny, making recommendations, and questioning decisions by the administration. So far the committee has

discussed items such as Country Parks, Stroke Care and the upcoming implications of incorporating some of the PCT functions into the Council. The Scrutiny committee discusses business in public, and therefore anyone is able to attend.

Incinerator given the go-ahead

Over the past year the County Council finally agreed to sign the contracts for the incinerator at Great Blakenham.

The Incinerator, which will be built by Sita UK, will burn over 250,000 tonnes of waste per annum. The process of burning the waste will lead to electricity production to feed back into the grid, and the possibility of providing heat to local houses/business.

The Lib Dems opposed the Incinerator at all stages of its development, even calling the decision in to Full Council back in September. Unfortunately, the administration has proceeded with this polluting and wasteful technology.

We feel that there are other technologies available that would help us reduce our reliance on landfill sites, but also reuse more valuable resources, and be significantly less polluting.

The next stage of the process is the planning application, which will be heard at the Development Control Committee on the 21st of July.

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