

REPORT OF DISTRICT COUNCILLOR PENNY CLARKE  
MAY 2007

The elections are over – thank goodness and we can all return to normal. Tony Roberts and I would like to thank residents for their courteous reception of our representations and to assure you all that we will do our best to do a good job.

The final makeup of your new Babergh District Council is:

Conservatives 19

Liberal Democrats 16

Independents 7

No party 1

Once again, no party in political control. Labour was wiped out, – and there are only 6 lady councillors.... At the first full Council meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> May, we reappointed Councillor Rex Thake as Chairman and sorted out the committees, panels, and 'outside bodies' representations. We have 14 new councillors and they have been kept busy attending a range of induction seminars.

Tony and I will endeavour to keep you informed of any major changes of direction undertaken by the new Council.

1. So what has your Council been up to? Council tax first. Over the last four years, Babergh has kept to its intention of keeping Council tax increases below the rate of inflation; this year, it's beneath inflation at 2.9%. We need to remember that Babergh's part of the tax bill is only about 10%. The rest comes from the County, - the Police - and your parish council.

2. Sports promotion has been very successful, particularly the Babergh

Be Active scheme which has attracted 327 new participants including 217 at risk of offending and 110 disabled – yes, mostly in the west of Babergh. Our people have however been involved in the Suffolk Youth Games. Most welcome has been the range of activities held at or via the splendid new Holbrook High School sports centre. In response to my enquiries, Babergh staff tell me they have worked with the students on the school council and put on a number of taster sessions based on the questionnaire results. Included were Kickboxing circuits (don't ask me.....) boxing, Hip Hop street dance (54 attended) roller skating at the Gainsborough Centre (45) and fencing. They've managed to set up a regular hi hop class and a fencing club on Saturday mornings. Community Sports coach Glen Parker has also been active and has set up a Friday night Samba soccer club at the Sports Centre.

Our problem here is of course transport to such events and I know the school is very well aware of that. I know too – And greatly sympathise – with Shotley's need for a professional youth worker. You may like to know that Chelmondiston is equally preoccupied with young people's needs and Dave and I have begun to wonder whether there may be a way forward through joint County Council/ parish council funding.....

3. Over the last four years, Babergh's managed to get built 220 new affordable homes in the District via Registered Social landlords, on target to achieve 700 by the end of this Council. The recently adopted Local Plan requires that up to 35% of new developments should be affordable (that is for rent or shared ownership) Our dedicated housing officer is also available to help and advise parishes wanting to get involved with a local affordable housing scheme. Queensland has had quite a boost with the

new bungalows there and further improvements may be possible. Babergh's also on target to meet the government's Decent Homes standards for all our council housing by 2009/10.

Benefit claims are now being processed in 20 days instead of 56 due to new technologies and better working systems

4. Waste collection – thanks to all of you, Babergh's percentage of recycled waste in the third quarter of the year was up to 35% - hopefully still rising. That's your achievement. And everything we manage to recycle reduces the amount that has to go to landfill, saving the council money. Fortnightly collections have received a hammering from the Daily Mail during the elections; nevertheless, there hasn't been a great deal of reaction on the doorstep – we had about six complainants and others hardly any apparently. In Suffolk, it has been those councils which are using that same system which have delivered the highest recycling rates. But to reassure you, if there proves to be a need to revisit the current arrangements, that will be considered by the new Council, along with the specific concerns about kitchen waste - and the costs involved.
5. We older residents have had a field day with our all Suffolk concessionary bus passes. On the bus, I have met pensioners who've batted all over Suffolk for free and had great days out. Some 200 disabled residents have also had voucher help with their travel costs.
6. Buzabout goes from strength to strength. The service has received County Council support (Dave has been a help over that) and has been enhanced with the help of all our Parish Councils. Particular thanks go to Freston Parish Council for taking on the onerous task of keeping the financial records required for funding purposes. The original Buzabout has recently been replaced by a new cranberry coloured vehicle and the old one is being kept as reserve back up in case of breakdowns. Suffolk Acre are currently advertising for more drivers so if you know anyone likely to be interested, encourage them to contact Suffolk Acre.
8. Going back to Holbrook High School and its new amazing sports centre - the school is also working closely with the Haven Gateway partnership and the Babergh East Local Strategic Partnership on learning provision in the Peninsula. The Headteacher is here tonight and will tell you about the open event being planned, probably for September.

Litter clearance has been high profile this last year. When I was whizzing around getting my nomination form completed, there were parish councillors galore in bright yellow jackets, dedicated souls picking up other people's mess. Fantastic achievement. People should be congratulated on trying to get the message across – don't mess our patch. Or any patch for that matter.

10. The Code of Conduct has undergone some welcome revision by the Standards Board of England. And under new arrangements most complaints are likely to be referred to the local Standards Committee ie Babergh's. Next year, complaints will go direct to the local committee instead of to the Standards Board for England. Naturally, no cash to meet the additional legal costs we'll incur is being passed down to us from Whitehall so it is in all our interests to avoid breaching the Code....

11. There are many other facts and figures about Babergh's services which are probably on the website but I haven't listed them here. Here, it's Ganges of course which remains top of our list of priorities. So where are we now. The answer is not much further. So far no new submission from Haylink has been received by Babergh. Haylink continue to have three options – a general residential development, retirement homes, or a mixed development proposal (part housing/ part employment/ community facilities etc) along the lines of the Secretary of State's decision. Many residents we spoke to as we went around were concerned about traffic but not against some housing. Just not too much.
- There is however a current application for a Certificate of lawful Development, harking back to 1989, for the site to continue to be used for C2 purposes – in this case, use of land and buildings as a residential training centre. This is a legal matter where the applicant has to provide evidence of such use having been more or less continuous for a period of 10 years or more. **It is not a planning permission application.** It may be intended to legalise the current police use of the site perhaps. I don't know. Shotley has sent in a very well informed response, aimed at preventing any future sidetracking of the system on the basis of C2 approval. You may like to know that CLDs have also been used in our area to help legalise and strengthen the position of some of the houseboats in Pin Mill. I'll continue, like you, to keep an eye on all these developments. That's all folks.

Penny Clarke May 22nd 2007