

District Councillor Dave Busby 2023-24 Annual Report

The last 12 months have been challenging in more ways than one. After the district election, Babergh had 14 new councillors, 3 leaders and an administration made up of the 10 Greens; 9 Independents; and 5 LibDems. I was to take the first year as leader but with the onset of my health issues in September I had to hand over to John Ward.

This 4-year term is going to be beset by financial concerns caused by a 30% reduction in core grants from the Government since 2010; inflation at over 10%; interest rates above 5% and limited ability to increase council tax. As a result, we have had to re-evaluate what services we can subsidise and this has led to a battle on car parking fees. The towns want to retain the 3-hour free period but we can no longer afford to use £0.5m of our funds to do this.

Locally we have been having 'Groundhog Day' planning battles over solar farms. Unfortunately, the Government favour cheaper electricity over food and this makes it very difficult for us to refuse solar farm applications – and we have seen a number. We continue to fight to protect our natural environment especially from the level of industrialisation that would be caused by a mineral extraction site combined with a waste processing and concrete crushing plant or from the jungle of pylons.

For those of you that have recently visited Hadleigh you may have noticed the changes to the old HQ site. We are converting the old buildings into 44 residential units but the project has not been without its setbacks, especially as much of the site is listed. Units should be available for purchase in the late summer.

We finally published the first part of our 'new' Local Plan which, in my opinion, fails to protect that which is dear to us but over protects against other housing applications. We recognise the need for many more houses (of the right type) but then seem to do our best to discourage them from being built. The second stage of the Local Plan – the land allocation – is being worked on now but will probably not be published until the end of 2025.

CoVid caused a build-up of outstanding maintenance work in our council house portfolio. Despite bringing the work back in-house we have not yet eliminated the backlogs. This will be a major target for the remainder of the year.

We won Council of the Year (along with Mid Suffolk) for our willingness to seek out new ways of doing things and the successful delivery of many ad hoc tasks.

I would like to thank everyone for their good wishes and understanding. I will be back soon – I hope! Also, a big thank you to John Whyman and Helen Davies who have given my parishes valuable support.

Best wishes

Dave