

## District Councillor Report – January 2024

Dear Councillors,

December seemed to arrive early and disappeared in a flash..! There has, of course, been a lull in BDC activity over the seasonal period, I've also been a little unwell with a significant dose of something akin to Covid/Flu etc which laid me low over the lead up to and Christmas. I suspect I'm one of many in that category. It did lead me to try and understand the level of Covid infection over the UK which was 1 in 24 per head of population in England which surprised me based upon what I surmised might be our current vaccination rate in the Autumn. Maybe we aren't as eager to be vaccinated as we were?

### Activity

- Planning Support – This remains one of my principle 'inbox items' - Requests for additional consideration of balancing planning policy weighting from residents & architects. Inevitably, some are 'un-winnable', but many just need a fresh look with a different set of eyes and a reflection upon perspective, particularly the resident/householder applications.
- Brockley Wood Mineral Extraction Site Application to SCC – As the applicant requested to defer consideration of this Planning Application (SCC/0105/22B) from the meeting schedule for the SCC Development and Regulation Committee, I didn't attend this meeting. My understanding is that the amendment will include the removal of the proposed concrete batch plant.
- BDC Timperleys Residents – Following concern from residents over the pace of repairs and other medium to longer term housing issues, I agreed to meet with the community on the 4<sup>th</sup> January to understand the issues and potentially agree solutions with officers.
- In Capel, I'm still talking with Persimmon Homes on the footpath (Butchers Lane). The solution to this is being considered by SCC ROW along the lines of a sustainable/durable surface dressing. I'm also, with the help of Persimmon, helping residents find their definitive (LR) boundaries where the development meets Boundary Oaks. Finally, on Persimmon, we are asking to be fully informed on the 'legacy' green space areas and the plans for the future with the management company they intend to instruct. Its important we have a sustainable plan in place.
- This point forms part of the Persimmon note above for Capel – I've now met with several residents on this issue in establishing land ownership.
- Helping/support of a funding application for Capel School Association.
- Ongoing meetings with, several residents, across a range of social housing and environmental issues.

### Babergh Notes

I mentioned in my December meeting notes the BDC financial forecast for Q1 23/24 and the potential deficit of £921k. The outlook hasn't changed since the time of writing my notes, having said that we haven't yet heard the outcome of the authorities funding outturn from government. It's unlikely to have escaped your notice that BDC are looking at all an 'all options on the table' to plug the gap with any or all means at our disposal. You will know from the press and media that we are looking to review/restructure our 'free' car parking facilities across the district along with further consideration of 'empty and second homes' council tax rates and, least palatable, cuts to services. Just to add a quick bit of perspective, over the last couple of years inflation and general council costs have increased by over 10%. These, as you would imagine, include significant increases in energy costs. This isn't restricted to Babergh, but includes our colleagues at Suffolk County Council along with our Police & Crime Commissioner – Tim Passmore – all finding themselves in challenging financial situations. On the incendiary subject of car parking, firstly let me say, I'm not 'anti-car' and completely understand the current need for 'independent' transportation. I also prefer to park my car without incurring a charge as, I suspect, we all do. We do, however, need to be realistic when considering an 'asset' owned by the community and what value we place upon it. The reality of the matter is we don't all use 'free parking' and some residents (and business's) use it much more than others. We need to find a fair solution that works for the vast majority of our residents and businesses, but that does mean the status quo has to change at some point. I know comments like this are potentially unpopular, but we can't turn our backs upon making tough decisions for the sake of short-term political favour. There are so many important things that need to be done, in the

community, but aren't possible because our access to good basic funding resources are slipping away for a plethora of reasons.

On Babergh planning committee, we met on the 29<sup>th</sup> November. Two applications were heard by the committee. The main application was for a 38 'Holiday Homes' development on the outskirts of Raydon (Brett Valley Golf Club). John Ward (Brett Vale Ward Councillor) put forward the case to support the officer's recommendation for refusal. The application was heard utilising JLP part 1 policies, as points of consideration, and planning policy weight along with the strong local objections from all neighbouring parish councils. The application, recommended for refusal by officers, was ratified by committee members.

The second application related to The Red Lion at East Bergholt. This included the development of 4 homes (2 Bedroom units) in the grounds/garden, construction of a new store to replace a temporary unit, construction of 2 '2B&B' units and reconfiguration of the car park. This application followed a previously unsuccessful application (now at appeal) for a larger number of new homes. Cllr Sallie Davies (East Bergholt Ward Councillor & Cabinet Member for Planning) put forward a compelling case based upon the East Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan to overturn the officer's recommendation to grant permission. Again, we considered the application based upon JLP considerations and, of course, the East Bergholt Neighbourhood Plan. It wasn't an easy consideration as the EBNP was made in 2016 and elements of their housing demand considerations weren't entirely current. The recommendation for approval was validated by committee on a fairly closely split vote.

The BDC Overview and Scrutiny committee hasn't met during December, but is due to meet on the 22<sup>nd</sup> January. The forward programme will be to consider a 'Review of Savings & Pressures, and the Updated Position – General Fund & HRA Accounts'. I remain open to any members who would like to be briefed on specific anonymised examples of the council's work, in this area, please let me know. Equally, and its worth remembering, these meetings are open to councillors and members of the public wishing to attend.

Full Council meets on the 9<sup>th</sup> January to consider much of the financial points set out above. Again, its open to councillors wishing to attend or members of the public.

### **District Councillor Resident Surgeries**

My regular meeting opportunity for residents in Capel library. The next meet up will be Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> January, 10.00am to 12.00am and Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February. No appointment is necessary, but if residents need more of a confidential chat, please let them know beforehand so I can arrange some privacy. I'm also available 'on demand' at the PC office in conjunction with Julie/Chris and or Capel parish councillors.

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