

Babergh District Councillor's Report

August 2025

Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation – update

Councillors at a meeting of Babergh District Council last month gave the green light to progress plans for three new unitary councils as part of the biggest shake-up of local government in 50 years:

[Babergh agrees to progress plans for three new unitary councils.](#)

You will know that late last year the government decided that all remaining two-tier local authority counties – those with both county and district councils – must reorganise into unitary authorities, combining the roles of both. This will complete a process that has been going on gradually since the 1990s. The timetable is challenging and in fits and starts the government has provided outline expectations and guidance of what it expects us to consider and the criteria upon which proposals will be judged.

From the outset it became obvious that there was a divergence of opinion between the county council and the districts and Ipswich borough. SCC decided immediately that they would propose a single unitary model – effectively the county taking over the district functions. This is more or less business as usual and offers nothing in terms of innovation in service delivery, which is sorely needed for some of the county's own services. Their argument is that the only thing that matters is that one council provides the maximum savings possible, quoting a national report from PwC that the County Councils' Network commissioned which claimed that multi-unitary solutions would cost more and not provide savings compared with the current system. This report did state that local financial analyses must still be carried out to confirm the costs and benefits in each area.

In contrast, the districts and borough were of the opinion that Suffolk is too large geographically – the 8th largest county in England – and that a single council would not be responsive to the needs of our diverse communities. In March we therefore submitted an interim proposal that we would be pursuing a multi-unitary approach. At that stage we didn't know if either or both of two or three unitaries would be viable.

We then chose to conduct an open-ended survey of residents across the county and also engage with our Parishes and Towns about their priorities in local government. There was an extremely strong response to keep a local approach, recognising the variety of communities we serve. We have had more or less unanimous feedback that one council was not popular and this has also been backed up by social media comments.

Work since March has shown that both two and three unitaries would provide substantial savings and so last month all the districts and Ipswich borough voted to proceed with a three unitary proposal as this would be more able to provide the local connections that residents clearly want.

We are continuing to work together and on 7th August, once we were confident in our initial financial analysis and had draft borders that could stand up to scrutiny, we were finally able to launch our proposal.

We have and will focus on the merits of our proposal. SCC is conducting an increasingly shrill campaign of denigration of our proposal, rather than trying to persuade people to support theirs.

This has been reinforced by a rather bizarre Alice in Wonderland-themed leaflet sent at great expense to all residents.

It is evidence, a case and a proposal on practical lines that the Government is asking us for, not a political slanging match.

The government would prefer just one proposal from each county but does recognise that this won't always be possible. It will therefore have to assess and decide upon the two it will receive from Suffolk. Norfolk will also submit two proposals, with the same county/district split. Some other counties will be submitting two proposals, but our two county councils are the only ones that will be proposing single county unitaries.

There will be a public meeting on Tuesday 2nd September at 7pm, to be held in Raydon Pavilion. I will give you an update on the three unitary proposal and I'll be able to answer your questions. In the meantime, our website is now live and will be updated continually as more detail becomes available: <https://threecouncilsforsuffolk.org>.

Also during July, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government confirmed that Suffolk and Norfolk was amongst the [six locations to become priority areas for English devolution](#). This means we are now set to get our own mayor with powers over housing, transport and other vital areas, having met key legal tests to proceed.

Subject to SCC's consent, legislation will be brought before Parliament in order to establish the Mayoral Strategic Authority early in 2026, so that the election can be held in May. The election will be by first past the post and not by Supplementary Vote due to the legislative timetable for the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

There was no further detail about funding in the letter, so we still have to wait for that.

You may also be interested in this [summary of the measures in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill](#), also published by the MHCLG during July.

Tributes paid to Babergh District Council deputy leader

Tributes have been paid to Babergh District Council's deputy leader Cllr David Busby, who died on Sunday 27th July after a long illness.

Dave was a councillor for many years, mostly as a backbencher. However, I was pleased to be able to bring him into coalition cabinet in 2019. His contributions to council meetings were usually insightful, sometimes witty, occasionally acerbic, but always useful and welcome by all.

Suffolk's Big Weekend announced, with attractions encouraged to sign up

Tourism, leisure and hospitality businesses across Suffolk are being invited to showcase what they offer by taking part in the newly expanded Suffolk Big Weekend.

£415k pot for improving rural businesses

From cowshed conversions to solar power transformations, rural businesses are receiving a helping hand to grow and diversify, thanks to a new grant from Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk to host second stage of the Lloyds Men's Tour of Britain

Britain's biggest professional cycle race and the UK's largest free-to-spectate live sporting event will return to Suffolk this September, as the opening stages of the race take place in the region on Tuesday 2nd and Wednesday 3rd September. We are absolutely thrilled that Babergh, along with our neighbours in Mid Suffolk, will host stage two.

This is the first time that two stages of the event will be held in Suffolk – with stage one of the race in East Suffolk.

The second stage will pass through four of our villages: Higham, Holton, Raydon and Layham. After reaching Stoke-by-Nayland at 2.21pm, it will proceed to Higham, then along Sandpits Lane to Bacon's Green, the B1070 through Raydon and Layham, and reaching Hadleigh at 2.41pm. The race itself will be preceded by the police motorbike controlling the rolling roadblock and the support vehicles for the teams.

Pioneering partnership helps Suffolk residents 'Feel Good Vibes' this summer

Feel Good Suffolk is launching a new campaign to promote the free support available to help the county's residents enjoy a healthier summer.

Simpler Recycling survey

With [improved recycling and weekly food waste collections due in 2026](#), the Suffolk Waste Partnership is asking residents how they would like to be contacted about the upcoming changes. To do so, a short survey has been prepared, which must be completed before 31 August. I would like to encourage everyone to [complete the survey](#). This is an important change, resulting from government legislation (The Environment Act 2021), that will affect all of us.

Don't bin your batteries campaign

The Suffolk Waste Partnership, of which our councils form part of, is currently running a campaign to discourage people from putting batteries in their rubbish bin. Batteries that end up in general rubbish, or left in electrical and electronic devices that are recycled, often catch fire and cause a lot of damage to waste processing centres. Please dispose of them separately.

Our residents' survey

Just under 14,000 letters have been sent recently to households across the districts, inviting them to take part in this year's Babergh and Mid Suffolk Resident Survey.

The survey is being conducted on our behalf by Opinion Research Services (ORS) - an independent social research agency.

Since 2022, this survey has provided an opportunity for residents to tell us how they feel about their local area and how well we are performing.

These results will help us to inform our policies and services, making life better for people in our districts.

The survey doesn't go to everyone, but is sent to a representative cross-section of residents. We really want as many responses as possible so that we get a good view of what residents think.

More information about the survey can be [found on our websites](#).

SALC

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Suffolk Association of Local Councils, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary. Our parish councils are very fortunate in having such an effective organisation providing them with support and representation.

Meetings

Cabinet, Council and Planning Committee meetings can be watched, either live or catch-up, on our [YouTube Channel](#).

For agendas and minutes, please visit the [Democratic Services homepage](#).

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