

Babergh District Councillor's Report

March 2026

Joint Local Plan Call for Sites

We published the latest JLP potential sites map on Friday 27th February, which shows the locations of the sites submitted to us through both the 2024 and 2025/26 Call for Sites exercises to support the new Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan. We did publish a map in 2024 with the sites that were submitted to us then and this map updates that one. It simply shows the sites that have been submitted and the use for which the site promoter is seeking.

The 2024 Call for Sites was for residential sites only, while the latest one is for residential and employment sites. It is an essential early evidence-gathering stage for the new JLP, which is proceeding in response to significant changes in national planning policy and updated Government housing requirements.

The following messages should be noted:

- No planning status is granted by submission. Sites do not benefit from any presumption of development and it is not a list of preferred locations.
- Submissions will now be assessed against planning policy, constraints, evidence and deliverability criteria.
- Residential sites previously submitted in 2024 are still included in the assessment process.
- Assessment outputs will be published through the Strategic Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) in Spring 2026.
- Assessment does not determine allocations — that occurs at the draft plan stage, which will be subject to full public consultation.
- We are publishing to promote transparency and ensure communities have early visibility of what has been suggested. This is part of a long-term evidence-gathering process.

The map can be found here: <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/call-for-sites>

Update on local elections

As you will be aware, following legal advice the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government withdrew his decision to cancel the elections of 30 local councils due to take place in May this year.

This means that both Suffolk County Council and Ipswich Borough Council elections will go ahead as scheduled.

Thankfully, the elections teams in all Suffolk's districts (who are responsible for conducting all elections) had taken the precaution of continuing to make preparations, so we remain ready and able to deliver the Suffolk County Council election as planned.

Local Government Reorganisation

You can ignore what I wrote about this last month as it was my opinion on the cancelled elections, which are now back on – the latest government u-turn.

The big question now is: will there be a change to the Local Government Reorganisation timetable? I don't expect there will be as the government seems to be clear that things are on track. and, indeed, if there isn't, it will blow a big hole in the argument used for cancelling the elections – that the current timetable relied on capacity freed up by not having elections. But councils' confidence in the government maintaining consistency from now on has been dented. The promise of an additional £63m capacity funding for the 21 areas undergoing LGR on top of the £7.6m provided last year is most welcome has clearly not washed with Norfolk County Council: as you might have seen, the leader has withdrawn from both LGR and devolution with a very public polemic and fruity language attacking SoS Steve Reed. Suffolk CC has said that a council vote to approve the devolution statutory instrument must wait for the new administration.

So, what is the impact for Suffolk?

Suffolk's LGR should go ahead as it won't be impacted by Norfolk's decision – actually Norfolk's probably will too as it is a matter for the government now, not the council, but how will the government's choice between one or three councils in each county be affected? Devolution is a matter for both counties, but it is on hold anyway due to the postponement of the mayoral election until 2028. A new Norfolk administration will make its own decision. Can Norfolk County Council withdraw or will the government impose change on it? Will Norfolk and Suffolk County Councils really want to be the only area without a Combined Authority? If so, what would be the impact on future investment and regional credibility? What would be the impact on the proposed transfer of PCC powers to the mayor if we don't have one? Questions without, as yet, any answers.

We await the next instalment of the government's soap opera.

Pylons project would 'devastate' special Suffolk landscapes, councils warn

Last month there were public open hearings into National Grid's Norwich to Tilbury project. This is the first stage of the Planning Inspectorate's examination of the project.

The hearing allowed initial statements from interested parties, and I was delighted to be able to give a verbal submission on behalf of Babergh on the 11th February.

We remain seriously concerned about the project's impact on the environment, our communities and businesses. The landscape of the district is highly valued, with National Landscape designation, many cultural and historic associations, and sensitive views that contribute to the unique character of Babergh and the wider region. Views that have been immortalised by Constable and Gainsborough.

I made it clear that we believe these plans should be halted so alternative options, particularly an underground HVDC solution over the entire length of the project, can be properly considered and costed. There is still time for this to happen.

Of course, grid reinforcement is necessary and all options have impacts – residents do understand that.

But we have never had a proper national debate about the trade-offs between costs and impacts of all the new energy projects. This is what is needed.

Council agrees ‘financially responsible’ budget to protect services and promises to communities

Babergh District Council has agreed a budget which protects vital services and unlocks funding to deliver promised community projects.

Babergh’s share of council tax bills will increase by 2.99%. It means a Band D household will pay £199.52 per year, a total annual increase of £5.79 – or 11p a week. About 9p in every £1 of council tax goes to Babergh.

We have been able to reduce the net cost of providing Babergh’s services by £1.3m to £13.7m by identifying where savings can be made and additional income generated.

We are getting the first three-year financial settlement in many years, which is good, as is the move to simplifying the government funding streams. However, the intention to allocate funding based on a revised and extended needs-based allocation has penalised rural areas.

The built-in assumption in the settlement that councils will raise their council tax rates by the full referendum limit has renewed calls for the whole system to be reformed, but that won’t happen for many years – it is a hot enough topic for a confident government, which the present one is not now.

It is extremely frustrating that, in spite of all the good work we do to make efficiency improvements and change the way we deliver services, successive governments have constantly put financial obstacles in our way.

If LGR goes according to plan, I will only have one more Babergh budget to deliver.

Hundreds of trees gifted to new families

Several of our staff members headed to Needham Lake last week to gift hundreds of new families in the districts their Trees for Life.

Almost 400 families applied in 2025 and were able to choose from a variety of fruit trees to plant at home - from plums, to pears, apples, cherries and more.

Applications for 2026 will reopen in the spring.

Council renews pledge to boost biodiversity

Babergh District Council has renewed its commitment to protect, restore, and enhance the district’s biodiversity after approving a new action plan.

Tech donation gives new life to old devices and gets rural communities online

A new initiative distributing refurbished laptops will help tackle digital exclusion and isolation in Suffolk.

Wildlife Wise encouraging grant applications to protect wildlife on Suffolk coast

Organisations looking to deliver projects that help to protect vulnerable wildlife and their habitats on the Suffolk coast are being reminded of the grant funding that's available from Wildlife Wise.

Growing digital confidence

The [Suffolk Digital Help Finder](#) has launched, helping people grow their digital confidence, stay connected and gain new skills for everyday life and work.

The tool helps residents find free local support and makes it easier for staff and volunteers to match people with trusted support, learning opportunities and practical resources.

Please encourage local organisations in your ward to register their services and encourage your residents to give it a try.

[Find further information on our websites](#)

Business rates valuation

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) regularly updates the rateable values of all business and other non-domestic properties in England and Wales.

Businesses that think their current rateable value is wrong, have until 31st March 2026 to request a change from the VOA.

The new rateable value will come into effect from 1st April 2026.

[Visit the Government website to find more information](#)

Flooding advice

In the wake of recent poor weather, the Healthy Suffolk website has been updated to help residents learn more about the risks of flooding, how to respond in an emergency, what they can do to protect themselves, and what support is available in the event of a flood.

To stay up to date with the latest guidance, please [visit the Healthy Suffolk website](#)

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](#).

John Ward
Babergh District Councillor

Brett Vale

john.ward@babbergh.gov.uk