

HOLTON ST MARY ANNUAL PARISH MEETING
WEDNESDAY 8th April 2026 8pm
HOLTON ST MARY VILLAGE HALL

Draft Minutes

Present: Oliver Greene (Chair), Faye Hall (Clerk), Claire Rowan (Cllr), Mark Anderson (Cllr), Georgia Hall (County Cllr), John Ward (District Cllr), John Whyman (District Cllr for Chapel St Mary), Zunaid Saiyed (running for CC) and 12 Parishioners.

1. **Chairman's Welcome:** The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.
2. **Apologies for Absence:** Cllr Mike Hay, Cllr Mark Rogers and Cllr David Johnson.
3. **Minutes of 2025 Annual Parish Meeting: To agree as a true and accurate record of the meeting held on 9th April 2025:** The minutes were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.
4. **Parish Council: Chairman's Report and Financial Report:** The report was presented by the Chairman and copies of the financial report were circulated at the meeting, both are attached in Appendix A.
5. **County Councillor's Report:** County Councillor Georgia Hall presented her report. A copy of the report is attached in Appendix A. Georgia Hall is standing down as a County Councillor.
6. **District Councillor's Report:** District Councillor John Ward presented his report. A copy of the report is attached in Appendix A.
7. **Highways report Report:** The report was presented by Mark Anderson – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
8. **Parish Church Report:** The report was presented by Paul Torrington – a copy can be found in Appendix A
9. **Social Club Report:** The report was presented by Steven Sleight – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
10. **Village Hall Management Committee Report:** The report was presented by Peter Longmate – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
11. **Millennium Green Trust Report:** The report was presented by Bill Priestley – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
12. **United Charities Trust Report:** In the absence of Sally Thurlow the Chairman read out the report – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
13. **Constable Country Medical Practice Patient Participation Group Report:** The report was presented by Jan Cheng – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
14. **FFOTMLC (First Friday of the month Lunch Club) Report:** In the absence of Sally Thurlow the Chairman read out the report – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
15. **Slow Stitch Group Report:** In the absence of Jeanette Appleton the Chairman read out the report

- a copy can be found in Appendix A.
16. **Green Gym Group Report:** In the absence of Richard Appleton the Chairman read out the report – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
 17. **Litter Picking Team Report:** In the absence of Richard Appleton the Chairman read out the report – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
 18. **The Well Piece Garden:** The report was presented by Anne Priestly – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
 19. **HSM Woman's Book Club Report:** In the absence of Liz Norton the Chairman read out the report – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
 20. **Facebook Report:** In the absence of Sally Thurlow the Chairman read out the report – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
 21. **Local History Recorder Update:** In the absence of Sally Thurlow the Chairman read out the report – a copy can be found in Appendix A.
 22. **Public Forum:** Zunaid Saiyed and John Whyman introduced themselves – they are both running for County Councillor in the May Suffolk County Council elections. On the Holton St Mary Facebook page there is a pylons page within this Facebook group. Parishioners at the meeting expressed interest for a Neighbourhood plan in view of the Babergh call for sites where land for a possible 109 homes has been submitted for HSM but wanted more information as to what exactly it is and what is involved with developing one. District Cllr John Ward advised that he could give the PC more information to circulate and can arrange for Paul Bryant from Babergh to come to a meeting to discuss Neighbourhood plans. The Chairman will talk to Raydon and SSM PCs who have shown an interest in developing a joint Neighbourhood plan with HSM PC and will discuss arranging a joint meeting. Cllr Claire Rowan proposed creating a working group and volunteers from the village would be needed. John Whyman advised that there is a strategic planning group which is a forum between the parishes of Sproughton, Belstead, Wherstead, Capel St Mary and East Bergholt and suggested that HSM should look at becoming part of.

Meeting closed at 2148hrs

Appendix One – Reports

- 1. Parish Council: Chairman’s Report and Financial Report**
- 2. County Councillor’s Report**
- 3. District Councillors Report**
- 4. Highways Report**
- 5. Parish Church Report**
- 6. Social Club Report**
- 7. Village Hall Management Committee Report**
- 8. Millennium Green Trust Report**
- 9. United Charities Trust Report**
- 10. Constable Country Medical Practice Patient Participation Group Report**
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- 15. The Well Piece Report**
- 16. HSM Woman’s Book Club Report**
- 17. Facebook Report**
- 18. The Local History Recorder Report**

Holton St Mary Parish Council
Annual Parish Meeting
Report
April 8th 2026

Parish Councillors
Mark Anderson
Oliver Greene (Chair)
Mike Hay
David Johnson
Mark Rogers
Claire Rowan (Vice Chair)

First, we would like to welcome new members of the parish who joined us during the year. We hope that they will participate in our meetings when they are able so they can provide their input into the issues relevant to them. We recognise that the timing of these meetings is difficult for those who work long hours.

Second, as you will have heard, County Council elections will now take place in May and, in due course, both Suffolk Council and Babergh District Council will be disbanded and replaced by three Unitary Councils. In whatever way it all may evolve, I would like to express our parish appreciation for the diligent and helpful representation and interest in our village provided by Georgia Hall, County Councillor who is stepping down and John Ward District Councillor. I believe the three Unitary Council model is more likely to be able to represent village interests notwithstanding the inclusion of Ipswich in our area.

Meetings: The Council met six times during the year and commented on 5 planning applications. All the other topics covered at these meetings are contained in the minutes that have been published. What is not shown is the substantial work done by councillors outside these formal meetings. Some of this is presented below.

Finance: The financial situation is stable and sound though we do not have a lot of room for new initiatives. The CIL monies amount to £2471.59. We have again needed to increase the precept owing to an increase in all our out of pocket costs and to make provision for future needs such as repairs to the telephone booth. The full financial report is available on the HSM web page and copies are being made available at this meeting.

Amongst the most important topics discussed and, where possible, actioned were:

1. Planning:

- (i) The application for the Care Home on farm land to the West of the village was eventually approved by Babergh Council. Your council took legal advice on whether there were grounds to challenge this decision. That advice was to appoint a KC to assess how strong that case would be in the courts before proceeding further. At a well-attended open meeting of the village it was

agreed that the Council would crowd fund its legal expenses. Unfortunately, the amount raised was insufficient to cover expenses already incurred or pursue further action; so, the challenge was abandoned.

(ii) National Grid Pylons project. This has been a very time-consuming project ensuring that the Council, on behalf of the village could input the process of Inspection and Examination on the effects on our parish. Various short deadlines were imposed on respondents. We made representations in November and in February and a further representation will be made by next week. It should be noted that national grid has not made any attempt to formally consult with the council. The issues that are the most worrisome are: a) While welcomed as an alternative to using the B1070 through the village as the access road, the location of the proposed temporary haul road behind the north side of the village should be moved further north along with the cable sealing compound near Raydon; b) the effect of undergrounding on Bacons Green and the six listed buildings close by; c) ecological damage to the West of Sandpits Lane. The Council's full February submission has been posted on its Facebook page. Because this work is so time consuming the Council delegated responsibility for continuing to make representations to a sub-committee consisting of the Vice Chair, Claire Rowan, and the Chair. Moreover, we would like to express our thanks to Erik Ellis for his insightful contributions.

(iii) Neighbourhood Planning. Following the Government increasing Councils' housing allocations, almost doubling the quota for Babergh, Babergh published the results of its call for sites to be incorporated in their new Local Plan. While these will need to be analysed and are not set in stone, if implemented in their entirety, there would be an increase of 109 homes in Holton both inside and outside the village boundary. Without an approved Neighbourhood Plan Holton has no statutory say in where and how many of these houses should be situated. The Council has been in discussions with Raydon and Stratford St Mary on a joint plan. Volunteers are needed to help develop one and we need a lead person for Holton.

2. **Speeding:** This perennial problem has been brought to the attention of Suffolk Highways continuously during the year. A new initiative sponsored by Kingsleigh Estate Agents has been the installation of "Slow Down" banners at various spots in the village. Suffolk Highways declined to agree the addition of a Stop sign at Four Sisters. There are still too many accidents and near-misses. Suffolk Highways have also been asked by the Council to consider a 40-mph limit along the Four Sisters stretch of the B1070 between Holton St Mary and East Bergholt but it stated that there is insufficient evidence for such a need. *It is important to report accidents to the police or Parish Clerk as if the police do not attend these accidents they are not recorded.* Thanks to Councillor Mark Anderson who continues to press Suffolk Highways. With the new Unitary council setup for Suffolk it is hoped that there will be more opportunities for making changes in local speed management.

3. **Church Square.** The unsightly border between the square and the church has been removed and new railings installed- the cost being shared by the Council and the PCC. The decision to install railings has been widely welcomed and the view of the church is greatly improved. Thanks to Richard Appleton who again has organised and planted up the flower pots in the square.
4. **Footpaths.** The programme of replacing stiles with gates has been completed rendering the footpaths more suitable for those with impaired mobility. Thanks to Councillor Mike Hay for driving this effort.
5. **Green Gym.** This wonderful group of volunteers have continued to keep our village looking well and raise issues where they see them. In particular in the absence of any action by Suffolk Highways they should be thanked for their work restoring the verge to the west of the village that was mangled by a sugar beet lorry and for clearing the bus shelter on the A12 slip road, among other work to keep the village tidy. I believe they could do with a few more helpers. Richard Appleton is the person to contact.
6. **The Well Piece.** The Well Piece formally opened last summer; I think all will agree it is a magnificent place to meet and socialise; Anne and Bill Priestly and their volunteers should be congratulated on a fantastic addition to the village facilities for all to enjoy. In recognition of this Anne and Bill received a special Community Recognition Certificate awarded to those who go "above and beyond for their community" in South Suffolk from our MP, James Cartlidge.
7. **Events.** There have been so many events that bring the village together from the Christmas Sale, the first Friday of the Month Lunches, Mulled Wine at the Well Piece Progressive Dinner etc; so, a special mention to the Village Hall Committee, the Well Piece, Millenium Green Committee and others for organising so many of these and all the volunteers involved.

In these difficult times when energy and food prices are soaring and we know not for how long this will last, we hope that there may be some people who can organise travel plans to include neighbours' needs where appropriate as for shopping etc. Although it is good news that the Hopper Bus is likely to be introduced this year-the proposed schedule that includes Holton is currently restricted to commuting hours. So, in the interim if anyone can think of a way of helping out ideas would be welcome.

Finally, and most important, all the Council members express their appreciation of the wonderful support they have received from Faye Hall, our Parish Clerk, in ensuring that the Council works effectively and in line with the myriad of regulations that govern its operation.

Oliver R. Greene
Chairman

FINANCE REPORT FOR ANNUAL PARISH MEETING: 8th April 2026

Income from the last financial year 2025-2026 has been generated by a Precept of £7,398. Other sources of income have been a VAT refund of £448.79, income from a GoFundMe page set up to assist with legal costs for planning applications of £1,186.97 and interest earned amounted to £105.96. The Parish Council also received a donation of £357.50 from the PCC towards the installation of railings. Total Income received was £9,497.22.

Expenditure for 2025-2026	
Payroll	£4,209.30
Admin	£1,056.64
Hall Hire	£138.00
Grounds Maintenance	£504.94
Defibrillator	£0.00
Dog bin emptying	£99.60
Training	£0.00
Insurance	£424.11
Internal audit charge	£276.00
Subscriptions	£159.50
Website	£234.00
Infrastructure	£2,094.00
Wreath	£39.44
ICO Fee	£47.00
Flowers	£70.00
S137 Donations	£350.00
Total Expenditure	£9,702.53

On Expenditure the Parish Council used £1,745 net of CIL money to clear the border in Church Square and install railings. £810 was spent on legal fees to challenge the planning application for the Care and rehabilitation centre at Holton Hall Farm.

The Parish Council were pleased to donate £350 to the Pylons East Anglia group to help with legal fees to fight the Norwich to Tilbury Pylon project.

The accounts for 2025-2026 will shortly be audited via an internal auditor and relevant documentation will be issued once complete. All documents once issued, will be available to view on the Holton St Mary Parish Council website and available from the Clerk upon request.

This year we have not been in receipt of any new funds via the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), but the amount of CIL that will be carried over to 2026-2027 and available is £2,471.59.

In January's meeting this year, the Parish Council agreed to increase the precept for the next financial year (2026/27) to £8,091.

As of the 31.03.26 the Parish Council accounts are:

Current account £721.21

Reserve account £10,396.73 (£2,471.59 of this is CIL and £1,785.70 is earmarked reserves)

Total left after CIL and earmarked reserves are deducted is £6,860.65

Faye Hall
Parish Clerk
Holton St Mary Parish Council

Samford Report for April & May 2026

As I deliver what will be my final report as your County Councillor, I am filled with gratitude for the opportunity to have served alongside such dedicated colleagues and community members. Over the past five years, your unwavering support, collaboration, and commitment to progress have been truly remarkable, and I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to each of you for your partnership throughout my term.

ROAD SAFETY AND ACTIVE TRAVEL

School Crossing Patrol Safety

A new county-wide campaign, "Lollipops Aren't Just For Children", reminds drivers that stopping for school crossing patrol officers is a legal requirement. Abuse and dangerous behaviour towards patrol staff has resulted in body-worn cameras being rolled out across Suffolk. Failure to stop can result in fines of up to £1,000, penalty points, and driving bans. Patrols have legal authority to stop traffic for any pedestrian, not only schoolchildren.

Walking and Cycling Improvements

Work begins shortly on major safety improvements along the route between Ipswich Hospital and the Waterfront, including new crossings, junction changes, traffic calming and 20mph limits. Two new crossings have also been approved for Haverhill's Railway Walk to support safer access for pupils and families. A new Ipswich Waterfront Walk has opened as part of the King Charles III England Coast Path, improving access to green spaces and the town centre.

EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Secondary School Admissions

For September 2026, 97.8% of Suffolk pupils have been offered a place at one of their preferred secondary schools, with 92.9% receiving their first preference. Waiting lists and appeal routes are in place where preferences could not be met. Families eligible for school transport will receive further information shortly.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Vaccinations

Parents are being urged to ensure children are fully vaccinated following a national increase in measles cases. A new MMRV vaccine now protects against measles, mumps, rubella and chickenpox. Vaccinations remain free on the NHS and are vital to protecting vulnerable residents.

No Smoking Day

A joint campaign highlights both the health risks of smoking and the increased risk of accidental house fires. Free stop-smoking support is available across Suffolk, including nicotine replacement and personalised advice.

ENVIRONMENT, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

New Ipswich Recycling Centre

A new, purpose-built recycling centre is being constructed off Hadleigh Road to replace the Portman's Walk site. The facility will be three times larger, safer, easier to use and able to handle increased recycling demand.

Public Rights of Way Investment

Cabinet will consider a £3.9 million investment to repair and replace bridges and structures across Suffolk's public rights of way network. This aims to prevent closures, improve access and support health, tourism and the local economy.

TRANSPORT AND HIGHWAYS

HGV Restrictions

A new 7.5-tonne HGV restriction is planned for residential areas north of the A1214 in Ipswich to prevent lorries using local roads as shortcuts, while maintaining access on appropriate main routes.

Strategic Road Investment

Several Suffolk road schemes have been included in the Government's five-year investment programme, including A12 improvements at Woodbridge and junction works at Earl Stonham. Further development continues on Copdock Interchange and the A11 Fiveways junction.

ECONOMY, SKILLS AND ENERGY

Economic Growth and Skills

The Suffolk Business Board's first annual review shows strong economic growth, increased skills training and improved employment outcomes. Investment in engineering and construction training at East Coast College and Suffolk New College, supported by Sizewell C funding, will help local residents access long-term skilled jobs.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Government has confirmed that Suffolk will move to three new unitary councils in 2028. Parish and town councils will continue as the most local tier of government.

Brett Vale Annual Parish Meetings 2026 Babergh District Councillor's Report

There is a common theme to my annual report this year and that is 'change'. Sometimes we go for a long while without change and then suddenly lots of things change at once. This applies to local government as much as anything else and we're definitely in a period of significant change now. When it happens it can be unnerving, particularly if it isn't explained well.

The three big changes we are undergoing now can be summarised as:

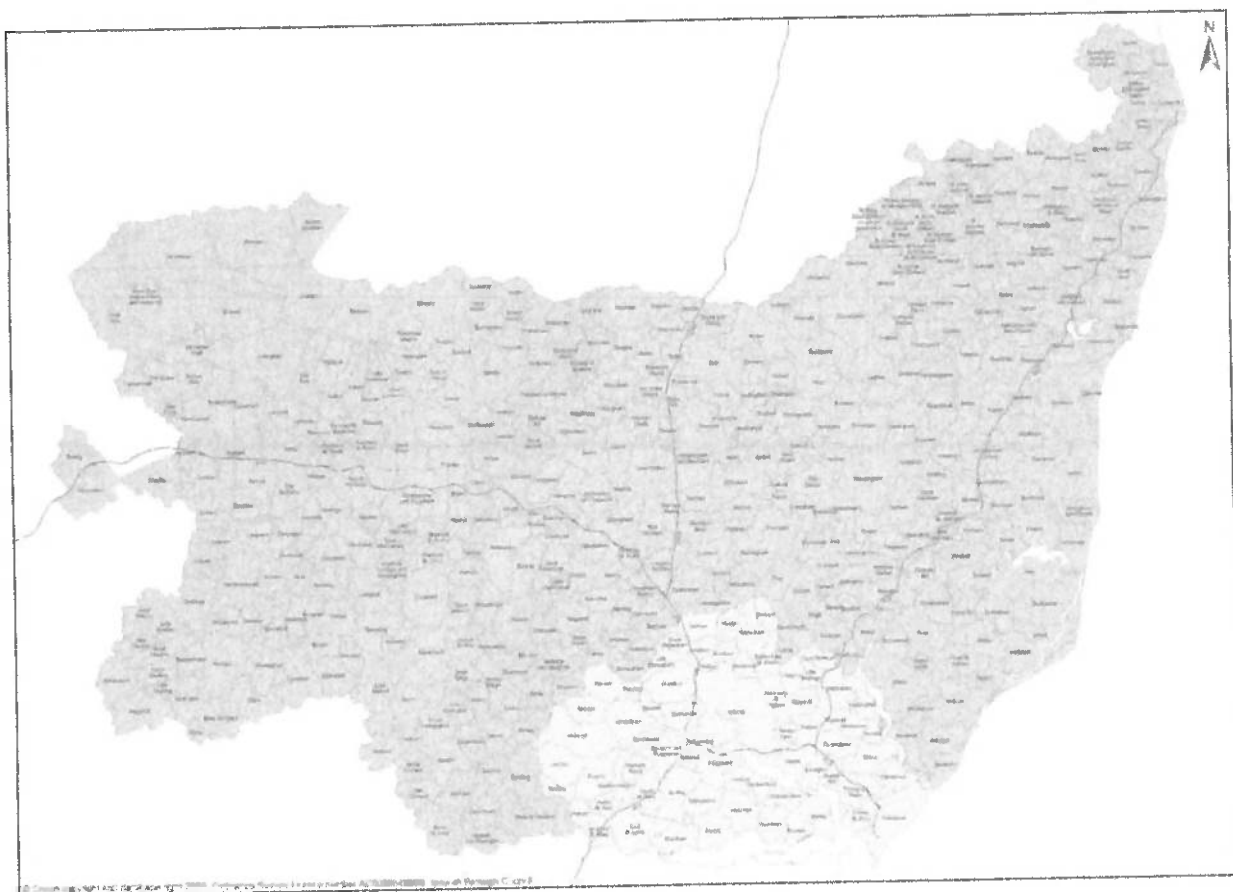
- New councils
- New waste collection rules
- New housing

New Councils

The government is committed to the latest round of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) to replace the remaining county and district councils with unitary councils. This affects all remaining 21 counties which still have both county and district councils.

As you now know, we will be getting three new councils in Suffolk to replace Suffolk County Council and all the districts, including Babergh.

For us, Polstead will be in the Western Suffolk Council and Higham, Holton St. Mary, Layham, Raydon, Shelley and Stratford St. Mary will be in the Ipswich and Southern Suffolk Council.



The leaders of the districts and Ipswich borough are delighted that our proposal was selected and we firmly believe that the government has made the right choice for Suffolk.

Both the Three Councils and SCC's One Suffolk proposals met the government's six criteria but the minister thought that overall ours met the criteria better. The minister was also persuaded that the three councils will be aligned to the regional, cultural, social, and economic patterns across Suffolk and will reflect and respect the county's different local identities and communities. This was the powerful argument we made and the minister agreed. We will ensure that this is not mere words but will be the core ethos of the new councils.

The minister also took account of all consultation responses and noted the strong, consistent local support for three councils – not just from the public, but also from the named consultees and other organisations. Consultations do matter and do influence decisions.

There is a huge amount of work to be done before the new councils take over, but this is underway. Elections to the new councils will take place in May next year. They will operate as shadow councils until formally assuming responsibility and replacing the existing councils in April 2028. During the intervening 11 months they will be carrying out a number of statutory requirements to get themselves up and running, such as agreeing a constitution and approving their first budgets.

There are, of course, pros and cons to reorganisation, but I think most people realise that the present local government system that came into existence in 1974 has run its course. Size and the potential for remoteness are concerns about unitary councils, but I am really excited about the future and will be working hard with my colleagues to ensure that the new councils have the best possible start.

The Suffolk County Council election is now going ahead, having been postponed from last year – in my view, unnecessarily. It will mean a short two-year term, but a further postponement – in effect a cancellation – this year would have been problematic as it would have meant existing councillors serving seven years – almost two full terms – which would not have been democratic.

The whole episode of the off-on election has not looked good. The correspondence between the government and Suffolk County Council was a masterclass in sophistry and buck-passing, with neither wanting to be seen to take the blame for cancellation. Suffolk's letter was enough for the government to infer that they wanted cancellation without saying so explicitly, and the government was happy to oblige saying they were just acceding to what the council wanted. We have finally got the right decision, but it could all have been avoided.

Babergh isn't due to have elections this year.

New Waste Collection Rules

We are starting to prepare for the changes to waste collection and bins mandated by the Environment Act 2021. The aim is to increase significantly the amount of material that is recycled.

Leaflets explaining the changes and new bins are being delivered. It is a huge change, affecting how recyclable material will be collected and the collection frequency for each type of bin. The new collections are:

- A separate food waste collection. An indoor 5 litre caddy and 23 litre external bin are being provided.
- The inclusion of glass bottles and jars, cartons, including Tetra Paks, and thin plastic, including plastic bags, film and crisp packets, along with cans and plastic bottles and containers, in the blue bin.
- A new green-lidded bin for paper and card is being provided.

Other glass – such as pyrex – must still go in the black bin as it can't be recycled at present.

Food waste will be collected weekly and the black, blue and green-lidded bins will be collected on a three-weekly rotating cycle. There will be no change in the garden waste collection for those who subscribe to this service.

I know that there are concerns about storage of additional bins but we do have alternatives for residents who don't have enough space. If you haven't already been contacted by us, please let me know.

All this will start at the beginning of June and further information can be found on the Babergh website.

New Housing

Because the government has given us much higher new housing targets, increasing the number from 416 to 780 a year, and will soon be publishing a new National Planning Policy Framework, we are having to work on a new Local Plan to manage development for the next 15-20 years. A part of this process is to ask landowners and others if they have any sites that they would like us to consider for residential or commercial development. This is an essential early evidence-gathering stage for the new plan. We have now published the map of all the sites we have received, but they haven't been through assessment or public consultation yet. It's important to stress that the map merely shows the sites that have been submitted and the use which the site promoter is seeking. I do want to stress that they have no planning status and many will not get selected. Everyone will be able to respond to the sites when we go out to consultation but we are happy to receive comments at any time. The map can be found here: <https://www.babergh.gov.uk/web/babergh/w/call-for-sites>.

The Day Job...

Of course, Babergh has also been doing the day-to-day business of managing our council houses, emptying the bins, determining planning applications and supporting our communities. Here are some of the highlights of the past year.

Neighbourhood Plans

Until last year, groups developing a plan could access financial and technical support from the government through an organisation called Locality, with basic grant payments of £10,000. The government, however, withdrew this in June 2025.

Now Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have agreed alternative funding of up to £20,000 to support groups prepare Neighbourhood Plans which help to meet housing need in the area. There isn't a lot available so it will be first come, first served. To qualify, plans must allocate sites that will make an agreed contribution to meeting the district-wide housing number.

LLBCO

Our district has one of the highest numbers of listed properties in the country, but these historic properties often suffer from poor energy performance due to their original features, poorly fitting windows and single glazing. It leads to higher bills for owners and is costly for the environment.

In the past, owners had to apply for Listed Building Consent to make upgrades, but working closely with Historic England, we have developed a Local Listed Building Consent Order for double and secondary glazing, making it

easier and quicker to complete sensitive improvements. We are the first rural councils in the country to successfully achieve this

Community Infrastructure Levy

Significant amounts of CIL continue to be collected from developers, with much going back to communities to fund community projects including play areas, cycle paths and village hall improvements, in addition to funding major infrastructure such as school extensions.

LNRS

Cabinet has approved Suffolk's new Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

The strategy has been designed to identify the areas across Suffolk where restoring or improving habitats will deliver the greatest benefits for nature and people. It maps existing habitats, highlights priority areas for improvement and outlines opportunities for targeted action.

It's all part of a nationwide initiative which was set out in the Environment Act 2021. Suffolk County Council led the project, with input from all the district and borough councils, conservation bodies, land managers and the wider public.

Repairs and energy efficiency improvements in council houses

We are carrying out a major programme of repairs and installing energy efficiency measures in our council houses. The repairs programme has suffered recently for a number of reasons, but we have committed extra funding and have carried out a major overhaul of the repairs service.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk received £1.6m of government funding last month to add to £2.25m already committed by the councils to install energy saving measures.

We rolled out of a new job management system for our council houses. It has improved day-to-day reporting and management of repairs, maintenance and compliance (damp and mould) jobs across our housing stock and increased first time fix rates. It has helped our teams and also delivered a better experience for tenants with much improved communications.

Community Support

We continue with our varied and important programme of grants and support activities for our communities and residents. This work is often under the radar as it is not a statutory service, but it is valued greatly and makes a huge difference to many. We have:

- Provided support for residents struggling with the cost of living crisis.
- Provided activities to help tackle loneliness for older residents.
- Continued with our scheme to improve the wellbeing of young people in schools and connect them with their communities.
- Continued with the Sustainable Communities Food Fund – small scale initiatives such as community pantries.
- Continued with the Living Well in Winter grants – to help tackle increased social isolation in winter.
- Provided Community Development Fund grants:

Some 46 organisations across Babergh and Mid Suffolk have received community development grant awards in the past year. In total, £813,752.88 has been awarded, with £206,694 shared between 14 organisations in Babergh and £607,058.88 between 32 organisations in Mid Suffolk.

- In the past year I have funded these projects with the Locality Award money available to me:
 - Gates for Layham community orchard
 - Defibrillator at Bower House Tye, Polstead
 - Raydon BBQ
 - SSM Institute car park repairs

Community Fun Days July 2025

In partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure, we continued with our Community Fun Days in Hadleigh and Sudbury in July, providing families with a series of free days out packed full of activities.

Children that receive means tested free school meals are able to pre-book some activities and order a free lunch.

EV Hire

Working in partnership with others, we are now hosting EV rental services – cars in Hadleigh and Sudbury and e-bikes in Lavenham and Sudbury.

City of Culture

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are backing Ipswich's bid to become City of Culture 2029 – saying it deserves Suffolk-wide support. I was very pleased to propose a motion at January's council meeting that was supported unanimously and then taken up by Mid Suffolk at their meeting. We now know that Ipswich is in the last nine and a full bid is being prepared. A successful bid will not only be great for Ipswich, it will also have huge benefits for other parts of the county, particularly Babergh with our artistic heritage.

Men's Tour

On a very wet day in September Babergh and Mid Suffolk hosted stage two of the Lloyds Men's Tour of Britain – the UK's biggest professional cycle race and largest free-to-spectate live sporting event. We were lucky that the tour passed through our villages here – Higham, Holton, Raydon and Layham.

Organisers of the tour thanked communities for braving the elements and turning out in force to support the race through town and villages across our districts. The start in Stowmarket was dry, but the weather deteriorated as the race progressed. Thankfully, there were only two minor spills.

Budget

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.

We have also had to increase our council house rents to pay for the continuing repairs and energy efficiency improvements programme.

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

NG Pylons

Finally, and update on where things are with the two National Grid projects affecting us – N2T & B2T Reinforcement.

The Bramford to Twinstead Reinforcement project has started construction after receiving its Development Consent Order in September 2024.

In February 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 hearings allowed initial statements from interested parties, and I was delighted to be able to give a verbal submission on behalf of Babergh.

I 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, but unfortunately we have an energy secretary who is not curious about NG's proposals or interested in alternatives.

John Ward

Babergh District Councillor

Brett Vale

john.ward@babergh.gov.uk

Highways

Speeding traffic remains an issue for road safety in the village, including Bacons Green. Because of this, we get regular safety camera visits from Suffolk Police as the village regularly meets the criteria and thresholds for speeding traffic.

We get the speeding camera system (ANPR cameras) and in rotation with other villages in Suffolk.

We still have the ongoing support from Suffolk County Council with the placement of the temporary speed warning sign.

A new initiative has been introduced by the Parish Council recently and with the installation of the Slow Down signs, kindly donated by Kingsleigh Estate Agents and designed by the children of SSM Primary School, the signs have been strategically placed in the village and there is hope that these will have some effect in making drivers think about slowing down.

The Parish Council have previously looked into the idea of getting a gated village sign installed at the entrance to the village, Hadleigh bound and on the left-hand side but the costs came in quite high so we decided against it.

The Parish Council have also previously looked into the idea of getting a Solar Powered Speed Recognition Sign/Device but again, costs came in high for such a project and with the limited funds that we have, we decided against it.

Another ongoing road safety concern is regarding the T Junction that joins the B1070 from the Four Sisters A12 junction and the increasing number of accidents that have happened, SCC Highways are aware of the matter and we suggested additional signage to be considered and to help ensure drivers stop at the junction but after review, SCC Highways said that no new changes would meet their criteria.

Nothing to report still on the 20s plenty scheme that aims to reduce the speed limit to 20mph in certain places, the Parish Council have expressed an initial interest in the scheme.

Any road issues identified can be reported at any time by a resident using the online tool : <https://highwaysreporting.suffolk.gov.uk/>

Cllr Mark Anderson

REPORT ON HOLTON ST MARY PARISH CHURCH FOR THE PARISH COUNCIL : 2025/26

During 2025, our services followed the regular pattern of one communion service a month in Holton St Mary, usually on the third Sunday of the month, with services held in the other three churches, Stratford St Mary, Higham and Raydon on the other Sundays. We also held the occasional Evensong in Holton, usually on the first Sunday of the month.

There was no weddings, funerals or baptisms held in the church in 2025. Average church attendance on "normal" Sunday mornings was 23 people, down on last year. Highlights for the year were Plough Sunday where part of the service took place outside around a tractor, choral evensong sung by Jubilate and the Christmas Day service.

Rev'd Manette Crossman advised us in January of her intention to retire and her last service was held on Easter Day 2026. So we are now in a state of vacancy – the process to find a replacement starts on 7th May with a meeting with the Archdeacon. However, if previous vacancies are anything to go by, it may take at least a year or more to find a replacement.

The fabric of the church is generally sound. May I take this opportunity of thanking the Parish Council for the support it has continued to show us in 2024 and in particular for keeping the churchyard tidy with regular mowing. A new fence has been installed between the churchyard and Church Square which is a big improvement on what was there before.

The new compostable toilet was duly installed in June on the Wellpiece land, with huge thanks to those individuals and village organisations who contributed to the cost and helped with the installation. The total cost, including the installation of a new path was just over £9,000, of which about half was funded by contributions and the balance paid for by the PCC. We should of course also thank Anne Priestley for maintaining the loo!

Despite this significant one-off cost, the church finances are still in good order with total funds of £25,278 at year end, down from £33,000 in 2024. Despite not having a rector for much of 2026, we will still have to pay our portion of the annual Parish Share, nearly £9,000 for Holton's PCC. I would like to thank those donors who generously give on a regular basis, whose support we could not possibly do without. I would also like to thank those who have helped organise fund-raising events which also provide vital income for the church.

Finally, as always, may I take this opportunity to thank those in the village who assist with the upkeep and administration of the church in any way, whether that be serving on the PCC, helping with fundraising, attending fundraising events, participating in services, assisting with churchyard clean-up days, cleaning the church, decorating the church with beautiful floral displays, polishing the brass, cleaning and starching the linen, reviewing the church accounts, locking and unlocking the church, and anything else which serves to keep the church a living and vibrant part of our community.

PAUL TORRINGTON, Churchwarden

Evening everyone — great to see you all.

It's been another busy year for the Social Club.

We managed seven committee meetings — which definitely felt like more — and thanks to our brilliant bar volunteers we stayed open every single week. That alone deserves a medal. As you may notice, we now have a sign outside the village hall to remind all in the village that the bar is open from 5.30pm every Friday

We've had a real mix of events during the last year: our January Get-Together with a free drink to ease us back into normal life, two quiz nights, live music from Lee Rose, and themed Fridays including St Patrick's Day. We even braved a freezing VE Day event on the Millennium Green, saved only by the firepit from the Well Piece Garden,

We've started working more closely with the Well Piece Garden too, running our first pop-up bar in the summer and a Christmas one with mulled wine and mince pies.

We also bought a new Bluetooth amp, which has already been put to good use — especially at Chinese New Year, so we can have music wherever we go as they say...

Brekkie on the Green continues to be a favourite. Huge thanks to James and Jackie for keeping it going — and extra credit to James for carrying on after a run-in with a hedge trimmer,I did check my buttie for extra "Sausages"

Bonfire Night was, as always, our biggest event, I seem to remember about 300 people attended, massive thanks to Lee, Kevin and everyone who builds, cooks, pours, lights, and clears up. It's a huge job and they do it brilliantly.

We've also started raising money for the Village Hall refurbishment — a big project, but an important one. We've raised over £1,200 from events, plus more than £1,000 from Chinese New Year. A great start.

On the admin side, we sorted out our membership records and now have a shiny digital sign-up form. We've got 118 members as of January, which is fantastic for a village our size, and now its organised, we can update all members with the emailed newsletter. And we've introduced safeguarding basics, so all volunteers know what's what. A very big thankyou to Sally for all of the background work that goes into the admin side, a lot of which is unseen, but very important.

A big thank you to the whole committee for their hard work. Special thanks to Lee Barton, who stepped down as Bar Manager, and to James Lancaster, who is moving away — we'll miss you both.

And finally, thank you to all our members. You turn up, you join in, and you make everything we do worthwhile.

We're already planning for our 50th anniversary of The Social Club next year, and we've got plenty more to look forward to this year too.

Cheers everyone — here's to another good one.

Village Hall Management Committee – Report to the Annual Parish Meeting

Chair’s Report for the Year [2025–26]

I am pleased to present this report on behalf of the Village Hall Management Committee, summarising our activities, progress, and priorities over the past year.

Bookings

The hall has played host to the usual range of activities including:

- Regular exercise and hobby groups: - Yoga/Slow Stitch/Self Defense/Table Tennis/Bowls/Lunch Club
- Parish and community meetings: -Parish Council/Pylons
- Social Club Events: -Quiz Nights/Chinese New Year

Bookings have remained steady throughout the year. However, as many will appreciate, the costs involved in maintaining and running the Village Hall have risen significantly. Despite careful budgeting, our outgoings now exceed our income. For example, those costs for 2025 include Electricity has gone up 8%, Water 34%, cleaning costs are up by 14%. So overall costs have increased by 11.6% which condones our 12% rent increase. However, on the plus side, insurance went down by 4%.

Management Committee

The Management Committee meets twice a year to oversee the running of the Village Hall and ensure that key decisions are made collectively and transparently. In addition to these scheduled meetings, the Refurbishment Group has been meeting more frequently to progress the ongoing project and manage the detailed work involved. For your information the Village Hall is a registered charity.

As many parishioners will know, the Management Committee has embarked on a significant Refurbishment Project to ensure the Village Hall remains a safe, welcoming, and sustainable asset for the community. This work represents an important investment in the hall’s future, and we are grateful for the support and patience shown by users and residents as the project progresses.

The current status of the project is summarised in the report below prepared by Sally & Jan

Village Hall Refurbishment Sub Committee

We met with the Grants Officer from Babergh Council to learn more about how to apply for a Local Authority grant, namely The Community Infrastructure Grant, (CIL). The grant is for a maximum of £100k. The Village Hall charity will need to contribute 25% of the costs. Grants from other organisations may be possible. Grant application involves a lot of work and community involvement. Our original estimated cost was over £300k for the full works. The Committee will review the wisdom of the previous decision to undertake the work in phases as we have learned that we can only have a CIL grant once, and cannot apply for a grant for a subsequent phase.

The local Government re-organisation in two years time may affect the potential for a CIL grant as it is a scheme not adopted by all the current Councils that will make up the new Unitary Authority

Our new Treasurer, Jacqui Lester, has completed a workshop about grant application.

Most grants require considerable evidence of community involvement and fundraising. Our first effort was the very successful Chinese New Year event raised £1250 for the fund. The Village Hall Committee arranged this in partnership with the Social Club and we look forward to more events in the future. We are grateful to the Social Club for their 'matched funding' contribution to the fund.

Message from the Chairman

After serving as Chair, I have taken the decision to stand down at the end of this term. It has been a privilege to support the Village Hall and work alongside our current team of volunteers. With this change, the Management Committee is now looking ahead and warmly invites new volunteers to join us. Fresh perspectives and additional hands will help ensure the hall continues to be an important part of our community

I would like to record my thanks to all the committee members I have worked with for their time, energy, and goodwill.

Thank You

Peter Longmate

Chair

MILLENNIUM GREEN TRUST REPORT 2025

MEMBERS

The Green continues to be overseen by the committee of trustees. Special thanks are due to Pam Quare who has now stepped down from the position of Chair after four years.

ACTIVITIES

The Green continues to be an open resource for the village and this year it has hosted the 2nd Capel St Mary Brownies group (twice), a private party in June, the 80th Anniversary of VE Day, and a bacon roll Sunday breakfast in August. The annual fireworks and bonfire were also held.

A crab apple tree was planted to mark the coronation of King Charles 111.

We have tried to accommodate activities for children with the willow tunnel, stepping logs, book library and den building whilst preserving the natural appearance of the site.

The committee welcome ideas for the use of the Green and we respectfully ask to be consulted on proposals that could have an impact on others.

FINANCES

The Trust is funded via a lottery which has prize draws every quarter. We hold reserves in order to be able to replace essential maintenance equipment such as the mower if needed.

MAINTENANCE

The upkeep of the Green is done by committee members, and thanks are also due to members of the Green Gym and other volunteers who have pitched in to keep trees and hedges in good condition as well as regular mowing of the grass.

We aim to resolve the issue of the beacon, the lighting of which has increasingly created some health and safety issues. A consultation with the village via various means is currently underway.

United Charities Trust

This is our village charity, set up as four small local charities and amalgamated in the last century. The capital held is the residue of the assets held by these and the sale of the Field that is the Millennium Green. The small piece of land we hold is the Well Piece Community Garden, leased to the organisers at a peppercorn rent. Disbursement of modest grants from interest and the rent are made in response to applications from residents and groups in need have focused on helping a community group and young people in recent years, for such things as contributions towards insurance, costs of courses or educational events. The original purpose was to support the poor and the community, with some infrastructure (water pump) but times change and things move on and there are fewer poor in the village than in the 18th century. Applications should be made to the Administrator; Sally Thurlow (salthurlow@gmail.com).

First Friday of the month club

The First Friday of the Month Lunch Club is going into its 11th year of continuously running every month except August. It is a community lunch that runs monthly (first Friday except if it clashes, such as April, with Easter, when it is a week later), and is all about getting together, having a chat with others in our community, over a light lunch cooked by our wonderful team of volunteer cooks and supporters, and is held in the village hall, 12.30-14.00(ish). So that we don't over, or under cater, we do ask that people confirm if they are coming, where possible ahead of the day, and if you do have to drop out, a meal can often be delivered as a takeaway. Prices remain at £5 (with no shrinkflation here!).

Contacts are Sally Thurlow and Frances Torrington and our details are in the Parish Magazine; Quartet.

Slow Stitch Report

The Slow Stich group continue to meet each month on the third Thursdays a drop-in group from 2 – 4pm. In the summer months we meet in the Well Piece Cabin moving to the warmer venue of the Village Hall from October to March.

We continue to support various community projects as well as making our own items. Beginners are always welcome. The kettle goes on at 3pm if anyone just wants to come along for a chat and a cup of tea.

Jeanette Appleton

Green Gym Group

In the past year (now our seventh), work has continued as usual; weeding, clearing, pruning, tidying and planting (another couple of hundred spring bulbs) throughout the village courtesy of a very generous donor; plus ça change... We lovingly re-instated the damaged verge by the black barn and have also tried to ensure that the footway through the village is now wide enough to safely accommodate two people side-by-side or dog-walkers or a parent with a child (including in a buggy). This has not been possible in the section which has a brick wall adjacent to the footway and there is another very short section by the Village Hall that awaits approval for widening. Members of the group also cleaned and refurbished the bus-stop signs on the B1070 underpass and at the two slip-roads as well as the extremely overgrown zig-zag paths that allow access to the slip-road bus-stops. We remain a core of nine and are keen, nay, desperate, to welcome new members with stronger and less stiff and aching muscles.

Richard Appleton

Litter-Picking Team

The team of ten has continued with its generally thankless task of clearing rubbish through, and around the village. People of little brain and no conscience continue to keep us gainfully 'employed'; plus ça change... Worryingly, glass bottles are being increasingly discarded. Year-on-year, the Ipswich-bound slip-road continues to record the densest discharge of detritus in the shortest distance. The most revolting item in 2025/6 was a 'Bag-for-life' full of soiled nappies and wet-wipes... Others are very welcome to join the team but with no guarantee of finding such a disgusting deposit. On a 'positive' note (yes, really...), there has been less fly-tipping, particularly down Sandpits Lane, but perhaps we have spoken too soon...

Richard Appleton

THE WELLPIECE ANNUAL REPORT

The Wellpiece is now into its third year of running as a Community garden. Our aims remain the same:

- To involve local people to promote social resilience, to provide
- To provide a safe environment for active leisure
- To grow flowers and vegetables organically
- To respect the environment and promote diversity within it

MEMBERS

There is no strict membership scheme, we have a core volunteer group which meets every Tuesday morning, and interest is also maintained with a "Wellpiece Friends" WhatsApp group.

By necessity we have a committee comprising Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.

ACTIVITIES

A number of social activities are planned for the year. We liaise with the Social Club for some of these whilst maintaining an ability to have impromptu events such as pop-up barbeques.

Planned events are advertised via the village media

FINANCE

The committee has secured grants to help set up the project and build the infrastructure. We may have exhausted the scope of such funding now so in the longer term we are keeping options open to sustain the project. We are grateful to those who have provided donations locally.

Holton Women's Book Club report 2026

Holton Women's Book club is now in its 6th year and meets on the first Thursday of every month.

Each month members take turns to select a book which is then discussed over drinks and nibbles. Our group is relaxed and friendly and we engage in many lively discussions, sharing our varying views knowing that each member will be heard and respected.

We aim to read a range of styles and genres, sharing our favourite novels as well as stepping out of our comfort zones to challenge ourselves and try something different.

The group has a penchant for stories with a strong female protagonist as well as themes that illustrate key roles played by females, whether in contemporary fiction or historical novels. We also regularly select novels that have a link to Suffolk.

Holton Women's Book club members have strong connections with other village activities and broader community fundraising. At the Christmas Fair a second hand book stall was set up and sales made, along with additional donations resulted in £127.00 being sent to the Book Trust. The focus of the Book Trust is to support children who do not have access to books, especially those from low income or vulnerable families, so that they can gain a love of reading and all the lifelong benefits it can bring.

Recent book shared at Holton Women's Book Club have included :

Guilty by Definition by Susie Dent - A mystery with the main character being the editor and lexicographer of the Clarendon English Dictionary.

Mr Mac and Me by Esther Freud- Set on the Suffolk coastline in 1914, the story tells of the friendship between a 12 year old boy and the Glaswegian artist Charles Rennie Mackintosh

A List of Suspicious Things by Jennie Godfrey- A coming of age story set in Yorkshire 1979, as two young girls navigate their way through their teenage years, alongside the trail of murders carried out by the Yorkshire Ripper, Peter Sutcliffe

A Morbid Taste for Bones by Ellis Peters- A medieval mystery featuring a Welsh Benedictine monk in 1137. It is the first novel in The Cadfael Chronicles adapted for television in 1996.

For further information on Holton Women's Book Club please contact Liz Norton - 07745607713

Facebook report

The village has a Facebook Group that is called "Holton St Mary Group". The focus is on things happening in and around us, village events and alerts, with very little advertising - we do allow people to recommend businesses and people but don't accept people who just use it to advertise their business - in fact we remove and block those who do so. It is a closed group so while you can find it by searching, you have to be a member to see the content. This also means there is no point in tagging people who are not members. To join, you need to be associated with the village in some way, residents (near residents), former residents, family or things like a councillor.

Sally Thurlow

Village Local History Recorder

Sally Thurlow is the Village Local History Recorder and maintains a record of interesting events and changes in the village.