

## Public Consultation and Partnerships

### PUBLIC CONSULTATION

The Council has a strong belief in the importance of consultation and the involvement of the local community. The views of the public have been obtained through a variety of surveys in recent years, including MORI's "Suffolk Speaks" and the "State of the District" consultation in last year's "Babergh Matters". This year members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have expanded that consultation into the early stages of the service and financial planning process with "Meet the Public" days and discussions with Parish/Town Councils and the voluntary sector.

So what has that consultation told us about what the public and others consider to be important and what Babergh should be doing?

#### *Priorities for Improving Quality of Life*

There have been three "Suffolk Speaks" surveys since 1999. On each occasion the public were presented with a different list and asked which issues they thought were most important to improve the quality of life. The top 6 items from each survey are shown below:

Important Issue	Priority Order		
	1999	2001	2002
• Protecting shops and village facilities	1		
• Facilities and opportunities for young	2		6
• Developing public transport	3	4 jt	
• Making the area a safer place to live	4	1	1
• Increasing employment opportunities	5		
• Protecting and improving local environment	6 jt		4
• Providing affordable housing	6 jt		5
• Helping older people living independently		2	
• Improving health/health services		3	2
• Increasing recycling		4 jt	3
• Brownfield development		6	

Since then, when Overview and Scrutiny Members asked 78 members of the public in Hadleigh, Holbrook, Lavenham and Sudbury in July 2003, whether the Council should be spending more, the same or less on some of the quality of life issues, they received the following response:

Service Area	No of People who said spend		
	More	Same	Less
Affordable housing	56	12	4
Facilities & opportunities for young people	44	25	5
Leisure facilities	32	37	4
Facilities & opportunities for older people	30	39	3
Employment opportunities	26	38	4
Community safety	23	45	2
Village facilities, including shops	22	46	6
Local environment & conservation	17	50	5
Refuse collection & recycling	14	53	5
Town centres	14	44	9

It must be recognised that this was a relatively small number of Babergh residents and that their replies cannot be interpreted as being representative of all 83,000 residents in Babergh. However, they do bear a number of similarities with the well-structured consultation of “Suffolk Speaks”, particularly with the emphasis on the need for the Council to do more on affordable housing and facilities and opportunities for young people.

### ***District’s Attributes (now and in 10 years)***

The “Suffolk Speaks” survey in 2002 also asked about the district’s attributes and what the public thought the position would be like in 10 years’ time. The table below shows that residents expect the district to be far less safe and clean in 10 years’ time, but there is optimism that facilities for young people will improve.

District’s Attributes	Now %	10 Years %	Change %
• Economically successful	39	46	+7
• Clean	67	50	-17
• Safe	67	35	-32
• Affordable housing	29	20	-9
• Strong communities	50	44	-6
• Good facilities for young	17	30	+13
• Good facilities for elderly	41	39	-2
• Good health and social care for elderly	39	35	-4
• Good leisure facilities	44	45	+1
• Cultural and arts facilities	40	36	-4

### ***How Well is Babergh Doing?***

The “State of the District” consultation in November 2002 indicated how well the public thought the Council was doing in the following areas:

Question	Very/fairly well %	Not very well or at all %
<b>Babergh's Purpose</b>		
To what extent is Babergh contributing to "making the area a better place to live and work for everyone"?	81	14
<b>Babergh's Aims</b>		
How well do you think that Babergh is achieving their five aims of:-		
• Establishing a safe, secure and healthy community	72	22
• Providing a thriving, caring and inclusive community	66	24
• Protecting and improving the environment	75	21
• Providing all services efficiently and effectively	74	21
• Listening to and involving local people	66	25
<b>Improving the Quality of Life</b>		
How well do you think Babergh is tackling these issues:-		
• Protecting shops and village facilities	52	35
• Providing facilities and opportunities for young people	39	38
• Developing local public transport	52	37
• Making the area a safer place to live	55	36
• Helping older people live independently	55	19
• Increasing recycling	88	10

The overall satisfaction rate with the way in which the Council runs its services was 71%, with 11% being either fairly or very dissatisfied.

### ***Charging and Council Tax***

In November 2002 the public were also asked their views on charging for Council services and on the potential levels of Council Tax increases for the coming year. Fifty four percent considered that Babergh's services should be funded generally from Council Tax, rather than from charges on the actual users of a service, and 30% disagreed. As regards the balance between service provision and the potential level of Council Tax increases in 2003/04 for Babergh's services, the public's level of support for each of the options was:

Level of Support	Service	Resulting Council Tax Increase
21%	Maintain services, meet commitments and improve some services	At least 14%
55%	Maintain services and meet commitments	At least 10%
24%	Reduce services	At most 10%

However, it has to be recognised that the public's views on Council Tax increases have probably hardened in the light of the overall increase of 18.4% in the actual bill for 2003/04.

When the 78 residents were asked in July about service levels and Council Tax, and were

told that “bearing in mind that just to maintain services at their current level could result in Babergh’s Council Tax increase being more than the rate of inflation”, the response from 76 of the 78 residents was that:-

<b>Level of Support</b>	<b>Service</b>
14	Reduce services to keep the increase to the rate of inflation
49	Maintain services at their current level
13	Make some improvements to services

It will be recognised that, when put in the context of a Council Tax increase, this answer on service standards differs from their views on whether more, the same or less should be spent on particular service areas. However, the earlier table does indicate what those residents considered to be most important.

More consultation took place with the public through “Babergh Matters” at the end of 2003. Details of the responses are contained in the budget report.

### ***Parish/Town Council Views***

The Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees held two meetings with representatives of the Parish/Town Councils to obtain their views on service provision. The main issues raised were:

- Twin Bin scheme – Concern about fortnightly residual waste collection.
- Street cleaning in Sudbury.
- Litter – Enforcement by fines and possibility of delegation to Parish/Town Councils.
- Hadleigh Swimming Pool, but not at High School.
- Shotley Gate development – Effect and opportunity for “planning gain”.
- Young People – Need for facilities in their own locality.
- CCTV in Hadleigh – Effectiveness questioned.
- Car parking charges – Hadleigh and Sudbury opposed and concerned about effect on businesses and vibrancy of town centres.
- Tourism – No Tourist Office in Hadleigh.
- Affordable housing – Parishes to have involvement in identifying sites and type of housing.

## **PARTNERSHIPS AND COMMUNITY STRATEGIES**

The Council has recognised the importance of partnership, particularly with other public sector bodies, if the services wanted by the public are to be provided in the most efficient and co-ordinated way. As a result, the Council is participating in the following strategic partnerships in Suffolk, which have all produced Community Strategies that have been endorsed by the Council:

- Suffolk Strategic Partnership (SSP)
- Babergh East Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)
- Western Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (LSP)

Those Community Strategies, together with the Council’s contribution to the Suffolk Public

Service Agreement with the Government, set out the priorities which the Council has said it will support. They reflect the Council's current Vision, Purpose and Aims, and **it will be important in relation to the Council's vision and strategic direction for the future to decide how these partnership priorities will be reflected and what emphasis will be put on them.**

There is a great deal of common ground, as well as some differences, in these partnerships. An analysis of their priorities and how they and the Council's current aims compare is set out below. The most common priorities are highlighted in bold type.

<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Strategic Partnerships</b>			<b>Public Service Agreement</b>	<b>Council's Current Aims</b>
	<b>Western Suffolk</b>	<b>Babergh East</b>	<b>Suffolk</b>		
Make Life Safer					
• <b>Reduce crime</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓
• <b>Make people feel safer</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• <b>Reduce re-offending</b>	✓		✓	✓	
• Prevent and reduce anti-social behaviour		✓			✓
Make Life Healthier					
• <b>Reduce smoking</b>	✓	✓	✓		✓
• <b>Reduce drug/alcohol abuse</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Improve air quality	✓		✓		
• Improve housing	✓				✓
• <b>Reduce teenage pregnancy</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	
• Encourage healthy eating		✓			✓
• Encourage active lifestyles		✓			✓
• Improve access to health services		✓			
• Improve health services			✓		
• <b>Reduce accidents</b>		✓	✓	✓	
Make a Clean and Green Environment					
• Promote prudent use of resources	✓				
• Reduce contributions to climate change	✓				
• Improve air, land and water quality	✓		✓		✓
• Protect and enhance landscapes and biodiversity	✓		✓		
• Maintain and improve built environment	✓				
• <b>Have effective waste management</b>	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
• Reduce litter and fly tipping		✓			✓

<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Strategic Partnerships</b>			<b>Public Service Agreement</b>	<b>Council's Current Aims</b>
	<b>Western Suffolk</b>	<b>Babergh East</b>	<b>Suffolk</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove abandoned vehicles quickly</li> </ul>		✓			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support Brownfield Development</li> </ul>			✓		✓
<b>Make a Prosperous Community</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Facilitate business investment</b></li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓		✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Support appropriate development, i.e. tourism</b></li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓		✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support skill attainment</li> </ul>	✓				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote Broadband</li> </ul>		✓			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arrest decline in rural services</li> </ul>			✓		✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support sustainability of local communities</li> </ul>					✓
<b>Make a Learning Community</b>	✓		✓	✓	
<b>Make Life Active and Creative</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Promote cultural opportunity for all</li> </ul>	✓		✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Preserve cultural heritage</li> </ul>	✓				✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make towns/villages welcoming</li> </ul>	✓				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Improve facilities for young people</b></li> </ul>	✓	✓	✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Help older people stay active/ independent</b></li> </ul>	✓		✓	✓	✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Co-ordinate cultural, leisure and sports services</li> </ul>	✓				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide new Hadleigh Swimming Pool</li> </ul>		✓			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improve access to leisure facilities</li> </ul>		✓			
<b>Make an Inclusive Community</b>					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure good quality affordable housing</li> </ul>	✓	✓			✓
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tackle discrimination</li> </ul>	✓	✓			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meet equality standards</li> </ul>			✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support community and voluntary organisations</li> </ul>	✓		✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase volunteering and community belonging</li> </ul>	✓		✓		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Develop appropriate transport solutions</b></li> </ul>		✓	✓	✓	✓

<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Strategic Partnerships</b>			<b>Public Service Agreement</b>	<b>Council's Current Aims</b>
	<b>Western Suffolk</b>	<b>Babergh East</b>	<b>Suffolk</b>		
• Improve access through E-services and new technologies		✓			✓
• Ensure benefits and other support are received					✓
• Improve availability and access to services for all					✓
• Provide leadership and encouragement for a caring and inclusive community					✓
Develop Community Engagement					
• Listen to local views	✓				✓
• Have fully inclusive consultation	✓				✓
• Listen to "hard to reach" groups	✓				✓
• Make information accessible	✓				✓

In addition to the above local dimension, there is a partnership and national statement of shared priorities between central and local government. The key national priorities, most of which are relevant for this Council's role, and which complement the above local priorities, are:

- Raise standards in schools.
- Improve the quality of life for:
  - Children, young people and families at risk.
  - Older people.
- Promote healthier communities and narrow health inequalities.
- Create safer and stronger communities.
- Transform the local environment.
- Meet local transport needs more effectively.
- Promote the economic vitality of the area.

The Council has now fully reviewed its Vision, Values and Priorities for the future and will be reflecting these in a Corporate Plan to be published later this year. This will set out aims and targets for the immediate future and the longer-term.