

PAUL CLOVER/MARGARET MAYBURY DISTRICT COUNCILLOR'S REPORT FOR LAVENHAM PARISH MEETING 1ST FEBRUARY 2024.

Babergh Cabinet proposal to introduce car park charges in the town centres of Lavenham, Sudbury and Hadleigh update

The petition against introducing new parking charges now stands at around 5,500 with many more hard copy petition forms to be collected at the end of the month. This is way past the 1,000 signatories required to take this proposal to full council debate on 20th February. On appeal at last cabinet meeting the senior leadership team have agreed to extend consultation to the parishes who use the car parks.

It is important to note that the Cabinet are split on this proposal as are full council members. Cabinet members who oppose the parking charges have been informed they cannot vote against the proposal. This is not the case, the petition mechanism means they can vote as they choose following debate. The fact remains that the implementation of car park charges was agreed by a previous administration and the Cabinet were looking to introduce these charges without debate by the full council or consultation with all of the parishes affected. We believe this to be undemocratic.

The published subsidy figure to run the car parks has been given as £427k. Inside this is £300k of business rates, a substantial proportion of which goes back to Babergh DC. Some of the other figures are round figure guesstimates, therefore it is difficult to have informed debate. In 20/21 the subsidy figure was £185k. We have asked the reason for such a substantial increase and not received an answer. We are seeking clarification on what the nett figures are.

In the wider context, staff costs at BDC have increased by £3.4m in the last 3 years. £8.23m in 20/21 to £11.613m in 23/24.

Further to the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny committee, no real clarity has been given as to the strategic vision behind the implementation of car park charges. The senior leadership team have refused several calls for an impact assessment such charges would have upon local economies. Comments range from 'there will be no impact' to 'you can increase footfall by taking traffic out of town centres so people spend more money'. Research papers from amongst others such as Deloitte, on traffic management in town centres show this not to be the case and that the car community can be reduced by up to 30%.

Claims have been made about the need to ease congestion and improve air quality but these are demonstrably not real issues in these town centres.

The constitution states that monies derived from the provision of parking services can only be used towards the delivery of those services. However, the Council leader and Chief Executive are stating that this will not necessarily be the case and that derived income could be used elsewhere. In which case, the implementation of car park charges simply becomes another tax for our residents to bear.

To sign the petition against car parking charges either go to the Babergh DC website, type 'petitions' in the search bar, click on the first result, then scroll down to 'view current petitions or contact me, Paul Clover, for a hard copy document. We are grateful for all support in this matter.

Meadows Close Play Area

The new slide unit is now in production and we are awaiting a date for installation.

Wayleave Agreement on Babergh land at Meadow Close

Despite continuous chasing we still await confirmation from Babergh re the granting of permission for German Fisher to install an underground cable.

Corks Lane, Hadleigh development

At Council on Tuesday 23rd February we asked questions on items within the agenda, particularly the Treasury Return which does not hold details on the Babergh Growth account which is dealing with the redevelopment of Corks Lane (the previous BDC headquarters).

Review of Governance system

Lastly, in 2022 it was brought to council that a governance review of the Cabinet versus Committee system would be held. This has not happened and it is being pursued.

Joint Local Plan

All planning applications and appeals are now subject to the new conditions as laid down by the Joint Local Plan part 1.

Call for Sites

Babergh's call for sites will be a basis for future development which may include developments outside parish/town settlement areas.