

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

TO: Council	REPORT NUMBER: BC/23/32
FROM: Acting Leader Cllr John Ward	DATE OF MEETING: 23 January 2024
OFFICER: Arthur Charvonia, Chief Executive	KEY DECISION REF NO. N/A

OUR PLAN FOR BABERGH

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Set out in this report are the refreshed priorities for Babergh, that we have collectively identified in communication with our communities, businesses and partners. In October we set out our draft priorities to Cabinet and intent to engage with different people, groups and sectors.
- 1.2 Our Plan for Babergh sets out the approach we intend to take to help create a resilient, more sustainable future, with and for, all residents and communities of Babergh. We are ambitious for our communities, but also we recognise we need to be financially sound in challenging financial circumstances for local authorities.
- 1.3 This report sets out how we went about that engagement, the feedback we received and how we have taken onboard that feedback. This has enabled us to develop our final refreshed priorities for the next eight years, which are set out in Appendix A. This gives us our vision, direction and accountability for what we will deliver for our communities in the next four years, and into the longer term.
- 1.4 These priorities were agreed by Cabinet earlier in January, and now they are presented to Full Council to agree adoption of Our Plan for Babergh.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Options considered include:
 - 2.1.1 No plan: This was not pursued as there are new challenges for our districts that the Council needs to respond to within its refreshed plan.
 - 2.1.2 Plan adopted with no amendments from draft version: This option was not chosen as valuable feedback and insight was provided by stakeholders during the engagement that we wish to reflect in the final plan.
 - 2.1.3 Joint plan with Mid Suffolk: It is important for our communities to see how we are reacting to the challenges facing our district. Whilst there are commonalities with Mid Suffolk and their published priorities, we first want to ensure we have a representation of the challenge and opportunities facing Babergh.
 - 2.1.4 Respond to feedback from the engagement and amend plan to reflect, to ensure the priorities identified consider the valuable insight shared during this engagement.

3.	RECOMMENDATION
3.1	To accept the recommendation from Cabinet to adopt Our Plan for Babergh, setting out the vision, approach and strategic priorities for Babergh District Council for 2023-2031 (Appendix A).
	REASON FOR DECISION
	To set a clear direction of travel for the Council to 2031.

4. KEY INFORMATION

4.1 The refreshed plan sets out the new vision and strategic priorities of the Council. At Cabinet in October we identified and agreed the priorities that were most important to us with a view to seek the views of our communities, businesses, stakeholders and partners on these.

4.2 Informing these draft priorities was insight we had received from our communities and partners in the months and years running up to our successful election in May. Our annual State of the District Report for Babergh, considered at Full Council in September, also sets out the issues facing our district using data and insight. Following on from these, we have sought feedback from our communities, businesses, partners and our own staff on these priorities to find out their views and opinions, alongside the completion of our annual Resident’s Survey.

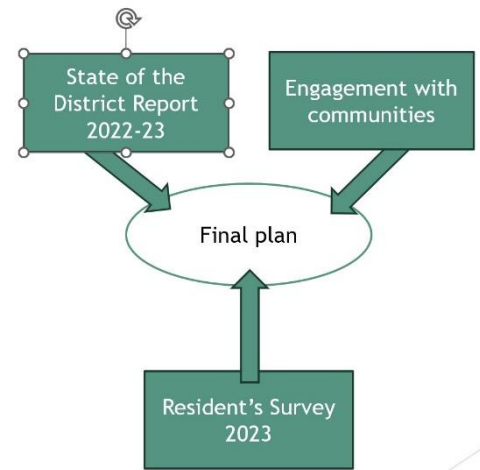


Figure 1: Contributors to the plan

4.3 Engagement happened between 4th October to 15th November, during which time an online survey was live and promoted with our public sector partners in Suffolk, Town and Parish Councils, on our social media channels, to our businesses, Voluntary, Community, Social and Faith (VCSF) sector organisations and own members of staff. Events, meetings and community conversations were held with a number of the above as well, including conversations with organisations or individuals who represented our seldom heard voices to ensure we achieved the most representative view we could of our communities.

4.4 Across our social media campaign, 22,600 people viewed our ‘Have you say’ posts. 1014 responses were received to the engagement in total, which included 540 responses on Babergh priorities. This response rate benchmarked well compared to similar engagement other councils have recently undertaken. The response rate for the whole population may be low, but the rate is in line with what would usually be expected for engagement on this more strategic discussion. There were also some low response rates from some areas, including businesses and the VCSF sector, but an ongoing commitment is in place to continue the conversation with these groups moving forward. The number of responses was large enough for us to be assured that we have received the full breadth of views across the district.

4.5 The outcome of this engagement and data is shown in summary in Figure 2 below. Whilst feedback broadly supported the priorities, the approach to achieving these priorities could benefit from clarity.

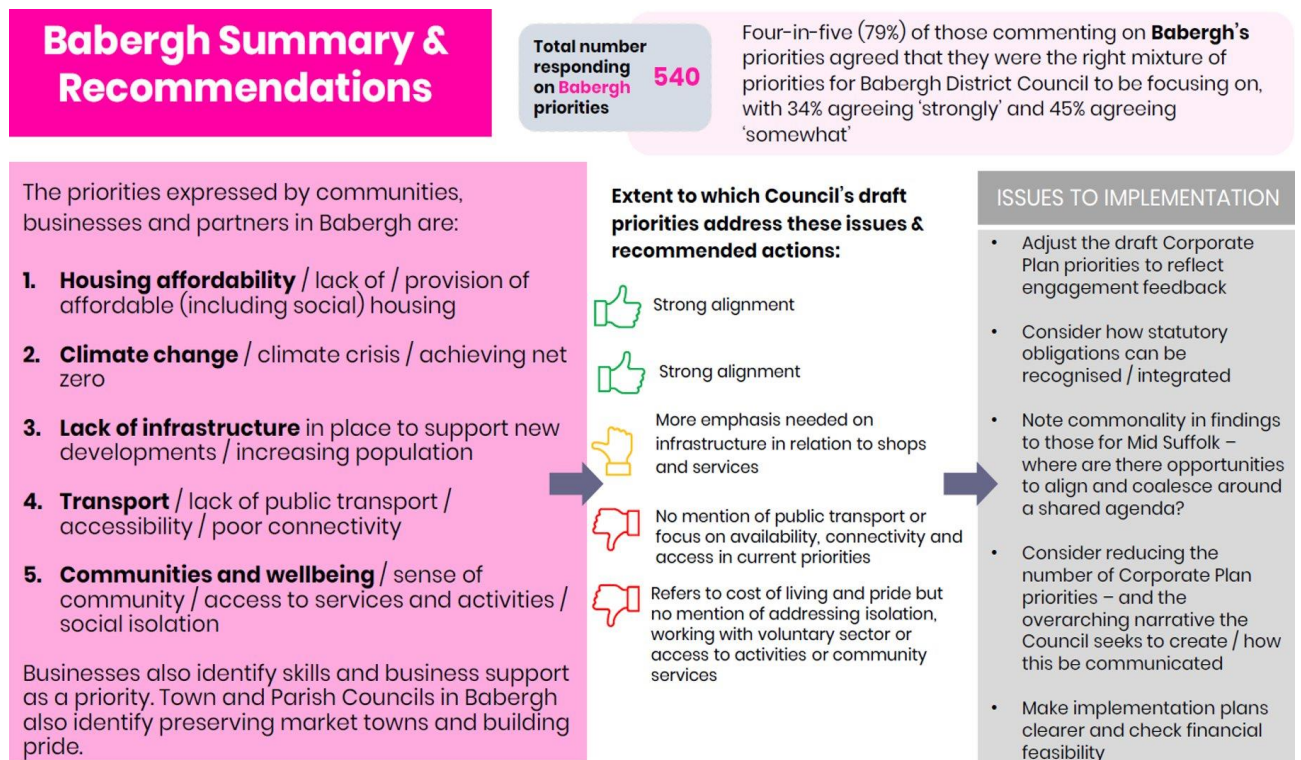


Figure 2: Overview of engagement feedback and recommendations

4.6 Following this engagement feedback, it was clear that how we approach these priorities was vital. To address this feedback amendments have been made as follows;

4.6.1 *Ensuring we provide core service delivery, in a financially responsible way;*

4.6.2 *Respond to challenges (such as extreme weather events, a pandemic, international events that impact on our communities and economy) and build in the ability to reflect on such challenges through our Annual Delivery Plan;*

4.6.3 *Ensuring we are clear that we can directly deliver some priorities, but others we can only work in partnership to influence others to deliver.*

4.7 We also have the commitment to ensure we are delivering through the development of appropriate performance targets for these priorities. These will be developed and reported through the Annual Delivery Plan.

4.8 A key focus of the plan is sustainability. From sustaining core services to ensuring our actions create the most sustainable future for our residents and communities. Sustainability has a different meaning in different contexts. It can mean ensuring something is maintained to the same level (e.g. service provision) to having the most minimal impact to avoid depletion of a resource (e.g. biodiversity). As the priorities develop through the Annual Delivery Plan, the concept of sustainability will be explored further to articulate this into real outcomes for our district.

4.9 The final plan (Appendix A) reflects the feedback we received through our engagement, forming an excellent foundation to move forward from, provide direction, clarity to our communities and our staff, and accountability to deliver on these strategic priorities for the next eight years.

4.10 These priorities were agreed by Cabinet earlier in January, and are now presented to Full Council with the recommendation to agree adoption of Our Plan for Babergh.

5. LINKS TO CORPORATE PLAN

5.1 This is the refresh of the previous corporate plan, providing new strategic priorities for the Council moving forward over the next eight years.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The plan identifies priorities to be delivered over the next four to eight years. There will be financial implications from the delivery of these priorities, but the priorities will need to be developed further into specific outcomes to be able to determine the budget associated with these. And indeed, as identified in the foreword to the plan, the council is facing a challenging financial situation and will need to respond accordingly. The plan identifies in the next steps that we will develop an annual delivery plan to target activity in relation to each of the three areas of focus. Budgetary information will be considered at this stage and as decisions are made by Cabinet and Council on delivering these outcomes.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 There are no legal implications from this report. Core services will continue to be delivered, with a focus for new strategic priorities provided.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 Key risks are set out below:

Key Risk Description	Likelihood 1-4	Impact 1-4	Key Mitigation Measures	Risk Register and Reference*
The Councils may not have the capacity to respond to member demands in 2023/24	3	2	Agree refreshed corporate plan, including priorities and outcomes for both councils	SRR011
The joint arrangement between the two Councils could cease	2	4	Joint Member briefings	SRR012
Babergh Council may be unable to react in a timely and effective way	3	3	Monitoring and reporting of financial forecast Capital reserves	SRR004BDC

to financial demands			SLT position review workshops Cabinet briefings to review position and budget options Budget approval Internal and external audits	
The Councils may suffer a perception of untrustworthiness and poor reputation.	3	2	Annual Resident survey Engagement with residents for corporate plan refresh	SRR005
Failure to deliver a revised corporate strategy	3	4	Ongoing discussion with Cabinets to ensure development of Corporate Plans reflects needs of organisation to ensure ambitions are aligned to strategy in Corporate Plans.	Strategic Policy ORR009

**Name of risk register where risk is currently documented and being actively managed and it's reference number*

9. CONSULTATIONS

9.1 Consultation has taken place within our own Council staff, externally with our communities, businesses, partners and stakeholders as set out above in the report.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

10.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) initial screening has been completed. This determined that a full EIA was not required. Our Plan for Babergh will guide the council's actions and activities over the next eight years, but how the council goes about those activities will provide the detail that can be subject to scrutiny for impact on those with protected characteristics. None of the strategic priorities directly or indirectly disadvantage any protected group. But ensuring later strategies, projects and programmes are appropriately assessed will ensure no adverse impact on any groups with protected characteristics.

10.2 In addition, in development of the final plan, engagement has been undertaken with our communities including groups representing seldom heard voices (people who we may not usually reach and effectively engage with). Groups approached and engaged with represented groups with protected characteristics.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Our Plan for Babergh provides a framework to promote environmental responsibility. The plan therefore will positively impact the environment through delivery of the strategic priorities identified.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Appendix A – Our Plan for Babergh	Attached

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

13.1 State of the District Report 2023

14. REPORT AUTHOR

Jo Hobbs – Corporate Manager – Strategic Policy