

District Councillor Report: Andy Mellen – Bacton ward

(Bacton, Cotton, Finningham, Westhorpe and Wyverstone)

January 2025

Council meetings	There was no scheduled full council meeting in December. The next council meeting will be held on 23rd January 2025, and a cabinet meeting on 10 th January.
Budget updates	Proposals for the General Fund budget were approved at December's second cabinet meeting, and were also examined at the Overview & Scrutiny committee on the 19th December. This shows the council's budget to have an expected surplus in the upcoming financial year, unusual for District councils, in part due to expanded housing developments and income generated from Gateway 14. Key figures include an increase of £1.689m in net revenue service expenditure, a £2.660m increase in gross expenditure, and a capital budget of £29.986m in 2025/26. The proposal is for no rise in council tax for the upcoming municipal year. The budget will come to February's council meeting.
CIL Expenditure updates	New updates regarding the Community Infrastructure Levy programme were discussed in the first cabinet meeting of December. This includes approval of half a million pounds of investment into the Stowmarket Health Education and Leisure Facilities (SHELF), and £188k of funding for Thurston Community College.
Devolution White Paper	The government's White Paper on devolution was published just before Christmas (it can be accessed here: English Devolution White Paper). This sets out the government's plans for a massive shake-up in local government, including the formation of mayoral authorities across the whole country, and also a change to the two-tier local government structure, replacing this with unitary councils. This is a very big change but the government is ambitious and wants to work at pace. Suffolk and Norfolk could potentially go into a 'priority programme' as one of the early areas to seek change, though there are differing views between the various councils involved. Both Suffolk and Norfolk County Councils are holding extraordinary council meetings on the 9th January so that they can make decisions ahead of the government's deadline of Friday 10th. This is a fast-moving situation and I can provide verbal updates when I attend parish council meetings. Whilst I am open to discussion about change, and welcome devolution of powers from central government, I am very concerned that these changes could potentially reduce democratic accountability and local decision making.
National Planning Policy Framework	Changes have been made to the National Planning Policy Framework to assist with the government's housebuilding plans. This includes mandatory housebuilding targets for councils, with a priority on brownfield sites. The new plans have sparked both praise and backlash, with concerns over the role of individual councils. Mid Suffolk's portfolio holder for Heritage, Planning and Infrastructure Cllr Andrew Stringer has commented on the new proposals. Statement in response to Government's National Planning Policy Framework announcement - Mid Suffolk District Council - babergh.gov.uk / midsuffolk.gov.uk