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MEDIA RELEASE
6th August 2003

"OPEN MORE HOURS!"
BABERGH EXTENDS OPENING TIMES FOR RESIDENTS

Babergh District Council will become the first council in Suffolk to operate extended 'phone opening hours for its Benefits, Rents and Taxation services when it trials a new scheme from 1st September this year.

Prompted by responses to a customer survey in 2002 which suggested that many residents would take advantage of later opening hours, Babergh will be offering the 'Open More Hours' telephone enquiry service from 8am to 7pm, instead of the current 8.30am to 5pm hours of operation.

The extended opening hours will provide a better service for residents who have queries or who wish to make transactions in the areas of Housing and Council Tax Benefit, Council Tax, council house rents and business rates.

"Babergh listens very carefully to the wishes of local people and tries to deliver what they want. In response to a possible public demand, especially from those working during the day Babergh will use the trial to evaluate its long-term viability during the forthcoming winter months" explained Bob Southgate, Babergh's Head of Revenues. "The only way to accurately assess demand is to simply do it."

Mr Southgate continued "it matters to our staff that they deliver a good service. Everybody involved in the trial is a volunteer, so there is no additional cost to our Council Taxpayers. We are just trying to see if we can work more flexibly to meet the changing needs of our residents, if that is what they want."

"Babergh has invested in additional staff training and we are aiming to deal with as many enquiries as we can there and then. This should cut down on the frustrations to a caller of being passed from one person to another" concluded Mr Southgate.

The "Open More Hours!" 'phone lines are (01473) 825798 or 825898. ENDS

For further information: Paul Simon, Communications & PR Officer (01473) 826634