

Breckland District Councillor Annual Report

Bradenham 14th May 2018

DC Theresa Hewett -

It has been a privilege to represent Bradenham over the last year at Breckland District Council. My report begins with an overview of my role as your District Councillor.

Once elected, despite any party affiliation, councillors will and do represent every member of their wards, on a range of matters large and small. Where a number of opposing opinions and views are held around an issue I seek to listen to all residents who wish to express their view, and work towards resolutions where I can. Sometimes I find myself between a rock and a hard place, and at these times inevitably it is difficult to please everyone. These are the times when I use my best judgement, this could mean expressing the majority view or making my own call on a decision.

The District Council's responsibilities are:



Official duties I undertake regularly include attending a variety of District Council meetings, assisting residents with questions and concerns, and advising Parish Councils in relation to District matters. Meetings include Full Council, where decisions are made which affect the whole District and minutes ratified from the various committees. I sit on the Member Development Panel and the Governance Review Committee and attend other meetings as appropriate such as the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Drainage Board and Planning Committee. Occasionally we are asked to work as part of a Task and Finish sub-group looking at a specific issue, and to attend update and training meetings to help us to fulfil our roles effectively. I am the Breckland District Council representative to the Wayland Partnership.

The Ward of Saham Toney covers five diverse areas: Saham Toney, Carbrooke, Bradenham, Ovington and Scoulton. Although each village is unique, the residents share many similar priorities, concerns and issues. My key role is to represent and assist my residents. I visit the villages regularly and seek to attend as many of the five parish council meetings as possible, despite occasional clashes. I also attend other meetings that I may be invited to, such as consultation on Neighbourhood Plans, planning, village hall committees, village development and flooding/drainage to offer advice or to take questions back to officers of the Council and coffee mornings when work allows.

Topics I have been involved in over the past year include: planning applications, breaches and appeals, dog fouling, vulnerable residents, housing, homelessness, grants, traffic, health and wellbeing, flooding and drainage, highways issues, and crisis management.

A list of Breckland Key Achievements for 2017/18 is attached, based on the four priorities in the Corporate Plan. We have a balanced budget for 2018/19, including the removal of reliance on government grants. The Council's portfolio of investments realises over £2M income a year, which helps keep Council Tax low (across the UK, Breckland Council still has the lowest District Council Tax element of your total bill whilst maintaining front line services). The Council is able to reserve £1M for homelessness, £1.7M for sustainable community projects, and £950,000 for provision of broadband, as well as supporting other projects such as the Market Town Initiative and services for older people.

Other initiatives this year include joining the ShopAppy group, creating the *Our Breckland Lottery*, allocating over £250,000 of grants to projects in the District, the installation of Community Fridges, the Silver Social project and helping to restore unsightly sites across the District, maintaining holiday activities for children and increasing recycling rates to over 40%.

I have attached the details of the Rates Relief Scheme for Retail Businesses which aims to support businesses to move back into empty units on our High Streets.

Please do not hesitate to call or email should you have any comments or concerns you would like me to pass on. My phone number is 01362 820354 and my email is theresa.hewett@breckland.gov.uk

Many thanks.

Theresa Hewett

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Although the majority of residents who have contacted me have planning queries, anti-social behaviour concerns or questions about grant funding, the Council also continues with its daily work. The report below contains headlines about the key areas of work for the Council in terms of our priorities this year:

Breckland Council key achievements (2017/18)

Breckland Council's vision is to make Breckland 'a place where people and business can thrive'. This is underpinned by four priorities, outlined in the Corporate Plan:

- Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive
- Providing the right services at the right time and in the right way
- Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth
- Enabling stronger, more independent communities

Examples of how projects have contributed to the priorities/vision are given below:

Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive

Set a **balanced budget** for the coming year (2018/19), including the removal of our reliance on Government Rate Support Grant (RSG).

Allocated £1.7m to support sustainable community projects over the coming financial year.

Developed our draft **Local Plan**, which has been through its final round of consultation and is now awaiting inspector feedback. The Local Plan Examination Hearing sessions are to be held in public between April and June. We have worked with communities to develop a number of Neighbourhood Plans.

Improving planning and building control functions – we have continued to work closely with Capita to deliver planning and building control functions undertaking a full review of performance. We are currently working with our partner to further improve the service for the Council and our customers.

Procured consultancy to provide evidence for the expansion of the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor to support the delivery of **business growth** in the district, including at sites in Snetterton and Thetford and continued to work with partners on scoping a business case for enhancements to the A47, including backing calls for central government investment.

Developed a **strategic health and wellbeing action plan** and, in partnership with Public Health, identified Thetford as a priority area for investigation on health and wellbeing issues.

As part of **Breckland Bridge** property and development partnership, built and sold homes in Mileham - including some affordable housing. Expanded housing development in Mileham to include an extra three homes as part of a second phase of construction. Secured planning permission for new homes in Attleborough, as part of the Breckland Bridge partnership.

Declared an air quality management area to address levels of traffic-related nitrogen dioxide in an area of Swaffham. Organised a public consultation on potential measures to improve air quality in the town centre. Working with stakeholders to improve air quality in this area.

Enabling stronger, more independent communities

Launched our **Market Town Initiative**, which includes a range of collaborative projects that will ensure each market town is economically vibrant, achieves long-term sustainability, has a clear identity, is a popular destination, has an enhanced environment, and secures third-party investment. The Initiative will have benefits for villages and residents surrounding the market towns.

Implemented new partnership with **ShopAppy**, which will give local independent businesses a central web presence and enable shoppers to make purchases online 24/7.

Implemented the new **Our Breckland Lottery**, which will enable players to directly support local community groups through ticket sales. First draw was at the end of March.

In partnership with Norfolk Community Foundation, **allocated £250,000+ of grants to projects in the district**, including children's play area and outdoor sport provisions.

Commenced delivery of the **'Silver Social' project** which is delivering workshops across the district to those who are at risk of being socially isolated.

Launched **community fridges** in the district's market towns, including the first in Norfolk.

Committed funding as part of budget setting to **replace and/or repair footway lights** in the district.

Committed to tackling **'unsightly sites'** across the District.

Introduced **Public Space Protection Orders** within our towns, to help tackle anti-social behaviour.

Overseen the **extension of the gym facilities** at the leisure centre in Thetford, providing a new free weights area in the gym, which was provided at no cost to the council and with positive feedback from users.

Commenced promotion of a **'Smokefree Sidelines'** project to help de-normalise smoking. Received support from a number of local youth football clubs.

Continued to meet as part of the **antisocial behaviour advisory group** which brings together multiple agencies to share and support on cases, giving a co-ordinated approach to support and action against ASB.

RESPECT Zones continue in car parks across the district, helping to reduce levels of anti-social behaviour.

Organised an Easter and a summer **holiday activity programme** for children.

Investigated infectious disease and food poisoning outbreaks to ensure prevention and control.

Sampled food and water supplies/bathing water to prevent ill health and early intervention.

Continued to both proactively and reactively deal with dog fouling to ensure public spaces are cleaner for residents' use.

Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth

Won the highly prestigious Municipal Journal (MJ) award for Commercialism in the Property estate.

Secured £10m Housing Investment Fund (HIF) central government funding to support infrastructure projects and delivery of new homes on the outskirts of Thetford.

Secured £2.65m from New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to upgrade Snetterton Heath's existing electricity supply and support substantial business growth.

Secured £300,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's Land Release Fund, which will support an infrastructure project to provide access onto Council-owned land in Shipdham and enable the development of housing in the future.

Completed a **pilot business rates reduction** scheme in Dereham, and announced roll-out of district-wide scheme from April 2018. (Details below.)

Developed our **'Open for Business'** approach, ensuring support and advice is available for businesses of all sizes. Made regular visits to key businesses in the district to provide advice and assistance on the range of support services available from the council and partners.

Made referrals for business to the New Anglia LEP to facilitate and support grants for business growth in the district.

Supported the growth of Thetford and Attleborough by working with developers and providing planning advice.

Seen the opening of Grand Central, the first restaurant in the Thetford Riverside leisure complex. The council is in ongoing discussions with tenants who are potentially interested in opening at the leisure complex in the future.

At the request of town councils, agreed to implement pilot enforcement periods at some Swaffham and Attleborough car parks.

Influenced enhancements to digital broadband speeds with around 90% of the district now able to receive high speed broadband.

Worked with partners, including Department for Work and Pensions, to review and encourage work-placed training, as well as **holding job fairs** and engaging with schools in conjunction with job centre plus.

Provided Licensing pre-application advice to support and grow businesses.

Continued to work closely with colleagues in Food Standards Agency, Health and Safety Executive, Police, and Trading Standards, in order to prevent food fraud/crime and restrict the supply of illegal tobacco products in licensed premises.

Providing the right services, at the right time and in the right way

Reviewed our services and how we operate commercially through the **Moving Forward** transformation programme.

Reduced waiting list for housing and increased speed of housing adaptations delivery.

Agreed investment strategy which will see around **£1m** used to provide new temporary accommodation **to help meet the needs of those who experience homelessness** in the district and keep families together.

Extended Human Resources services to receive additional income around £18,000 including payroll and learning and development courses.

Established a commercial trading arm of the Public Protection team, known as Environmental Health Training and Consultancy (EHT&C). Offering a wide range of advice and training to businesses, including expanding the current range of courses on offer to include online courses, bespoke and on-site training and consultancy.

Developed new digital services including a 'connect and serve' log-in for ARP customers to improve the customer experience and ability to access their benefit information

Created a co-located area at Breckland House in Thetford which is utilised by: Children's Services; Social Workers; Health Visitors; Flagship Homes; Norfolk Constabulary. Fortnightly 'referral' meetings have been established as well as monthly strategic boards. Discussions have been taking place with GPs to determine how they can link into the Help Hub. Also delivering project which will see Department for Work and Pensions co-locate in Breckland House in Thetford, creating a services hub similar to established office in Dereham.

Updated council website's design and functions, promoted new digital options for our services (including via Transforming Breckland residents' magazine), such as application forms and e-payments, which have **made services more accessible** while saving time and money.

Increased recycling rates - from 39.9% in 15/16 to 40.3% in 16/17.

Modernised the committee processes through greater utilisation of Mod.gov.

Re-awarded **Silver Armed Forces Covenant Status** for work supporting servicing Armed Forces Personnel and Veterans.

Worked with businesses around National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme, making sure businesses are at least 'broadly compliant'. The number of 3, 4 and 5 rated premises in the district are at record levels.

Recruited a **new legal team** which will support services and ensure the council is legally compliant, assisting with legal matters throughout the council.

Expanded use of **social media** to include regular information about day-to-day service delivery (**#ourbreckland**) as well as short films discussing recent decisions made by the council. Increased social media followers to record levels.

Details of the Rates Relief Scheme for Retail Businesses:

Following on from the Dereham pilot last year, and as part of our wider work to support market towns, we are now rolling out the scheme to Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton. The initiative aims to reduce the number of empty units in town centres, support new retail businesses and assist existing town centre businesses by increasing footfall.

Under the scheme, eligible new business moving into retail premises could be eligible for up to 80% business rates relief.

Which businesses can apply?

Under the scheme retail businesses – including shops, restaurants and others - who are considering moving into town centre premises in Attleborough, Dereham, Swaffham, Thetford and Watton can apply for a business rates reduction on those premises.

Some empty retail premises outside town centres may also be eligible – applications regarding these can apply through the scheme and will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

Potential applicants can find out more about the initiative and eligibility criteria, and see map showing the scheme boundaries at www.breckland.gov.uk/businessrates

When can businesses apply and when will the reduction come into force?

Businesses can apply to the scheme at any time between now and 31 March 2019, with any business rates reductions coming into force from 1 April 2018 or, going forward, 12 months from the approval date. **The reduction will apply for the first year of trading.**

We are launching the scheme today, and a press release will be issued shortly. Letters to commercial property agents, explaining the scheme, are currently being sent out and the initiative will also be supported through social media.