

Annual parish Meeting Report

What a year we have all had. Communities and individuals across Breckland came together in force to negotiate their way through a very difficult time, financially and emotionally. It is not over yet and we need to continue to be alert and follow guidelines.

At Breckland Council as departments were given the order to work from home we had to move quickly to get things in place, fortunately we were in a good position to do this as Worksmart 2020 and agile working had begun to be rolled out. The staff adapted quickly and all frontline services were maintained.

Grants for Businesses-40,000 grants had to be processed, I know this was not Breckland Council money and came from Central government but even so it was a huge task to be undertaken getting this money to all the qualifying businesses. I have spoken to businesses that were astonished at how quickly the money landed in their accounts at what was a very disrupting and unsettling time. We have continued with discretionary grants for those businesses that fell through the gap of the grant application process.

Breckland Council donated £10,000 to the 2 food banks in Dereham and Thetford and then further money has been made available for Dereham to hire new premises and at Thetford 12.5k donated for their food-bank to purchase its own premises.

As voluntary groups stood up to protect their communities Breckland Council was dedicated in its support. Officers and staff moved quickly to make sure that the vulnerable residents in our towns and villages had the support that they needed. There were many residents who offered their help in forming small action groups to ensure prescriptions were collected and that people had food on their tables. 10,000 meals were delivered and we continue to support where it is needed. Welfare calls were made to isolated and vulnerable residents. It is safe to say that this was a collective effort from the Council, Parish councils and residents. None of this could have been done in isolation so we give our thanks to everyone who helped in whatever way under extraordinary circumstances.

Vulnerability –Our vulnerability programme is a huge programme to help groups and individuals, whether that is through our support of the Daisy programme, ongoing Council tax relief, silver social and the new My Social for young carers. £60,000 was granted to Norfolk Police for the installment of NPR cameras to protect our district from the influx of County lines drug dealers.

None of the above could be done if we didn't have a good fiscal approach to maintaining a property portfolio. Many Councils across the country do not have the resources that Breckland has and we are fortunate to have a forward thinking business mindset. This brings me on to Council tax where again we have the lowest district Council tax in Norfolk.

MTI-The Market Town initiative is now underway. All five of our Market Towns will have an equal share of money. We will work in collaboration with Town Councils and the District Councillors to make our towns places where residents and visitors would like to visit and shop.

Climate Change/sustainability programme. We will reduce our own impact as an organisation. We will use regulatory powers to influence behavioural change in planning, waste & recycling and environmental protection, putting climate change at the centre of decision making. The Council has set a net zero target rate for 2035. £525,000 has been allocated to fund projects.

Impact is already being made by the following-Change of electricity supplier to a green tariff at Elizabeth House.

- £825,000 to replace all the streetlights we own with LED alternatives which is already reducing energy consumption.

- £90,000 to fund a new 2-year fixed term Environment and Climate Change Officer.
- £10,000 to carry out an initial carbon audit to understand its emissions more fully.
- £10,000 for Elected Member ICT kit to enable paperless meetings.

Grants will be made available for 'green' initiatives within our communities.

Waste-Our new waste contract is with SERCO and working in collaboration with Kings Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council and North Norfolk District Council has seen the purchase of a new fleet of refuse collection lorries. The technology isn't there yet for electric vehicles for rural districts such as ours but the lifter and compactor are electric instead of diesel, reducing noise as well as being more environmentally friendly. Serco service vans are electric.

Dog warden- We have been able to maintain the services of a dog warden. The Council has for the 5th year in a row received the RSPCA gold award for its work with animal welfare. We have recruited an animal welfare officer who will carry out inspections and visit licensed premises.

Housing-During the pandemic all rough sleepers were given accommodation. We continue to work with single people and families to gain a permanent home of their own. The Elm Road project is underway with an investment of 1.7 million £. This will see Breckland have its own temporary accommodation unit to house both families and individuals in the interim period of finding them a new home and employment if needed. This will be a place where people can re-set themselves and with help from this Council gain the confidence to move forward with their lives.

Grant funding-£100,000 is available for match funding grants for projects within our towns and villages of up to £5,000. With support from your District councillor groups and Parish Councils can apply and bid into this. Our grants are overseen and delivered by Norfolk community foundation.

I have very much enjoyed working with all the Parish councils and residents in my ward villages this past year, even though it has been difficult to do as much as I would have liked. I will continue to attend Parish Council meetings and make myself available to community groups and residents when needed. I look forward to face to face meetings this year and being out and about in the 5 villages I represent at District level.

Cllr.Helen Crane (Saham Toney Ward)