

Report from Breckland District Councillor Timothy Birt for the Ovington Annual Parish Meeting 19 April, 2021:

It's been a very different year ... or more. We learned to use Zoom, to sharing screens and that term "next slide please". That learning extends to the officers at Breckland Council, many of whom have made exceptional effort over the last year.

The pandemic has exposed some of the shortcomings in the partnership we had with South Holland in Lincolnshire. That partnership has now amicably ended.

Throughout the year, the bins have been emptied (and remember that at the beginning nobody knew what risk those operators were putting themselves in), fly-tipping has been robustly addressed, new animal welfare officers appointed and £525k devoted to environmental action. Breckland Council have set their zero-carbon date as 2035. We have got a very long way to go with the climate emergency, but at least it is now 'on the agenda'.

That's what has worked, however some things have not been so good: transparency and scrutiny have failed significantly and this comes from the very top of the organisation. There are huge levels of secrecy and restriction of information. For example discussion about major Breckland assets such as Barnham Broom Golf Club and The Green Britain Centre being completely closed down. It should be possible to discuss the performance of these assets, but I am not permitted. I continue to challenge this secrecy.

Even more seriously, I believe the Council is operating unlawfully by not disclosing requested information in timely fashion – often not at all! – this is not an isolated incident, it has happened multiple times.

I have challenged the legal officers at Breckland over this with direct links to legislation and been promised a reply. However, after many months of reminders and repeated request for clarity I have had no answer. I think the only logical conclusion is that they don't have an answer and that Breckland Council is indeed operating unlawfully.