

## **Breckland District Councillor for Launditch**

### **Annual Report 2020/21**

As you will be aware, 2020/21 was a year which was dominated by the international pandemic. It had an impact on people's lives around the world, including in Breckland.

Throughout the pandemic, ***Breckland Council's top priorities have been to protect the lives and livelihoods of its residents.***

I thought it might be useful to give you a rundown of the events of the past year month by month to highlight the hard work and the achievements whilst working under the restrictions imposed by the pandemic.

#### **April 2020**

- Following the start of the pandemic, Breckland Council had already distributed just over £16m in grant funding to local businesses. The money, which was provided by central government, helped support local businesses which may be particularly affected by the current lack of trade. Breckland wrote to more than 3,000 local businesses eligible for grants worth between £10k and £25k.
- Planning permission for up to 4,000 new homes on the edge of Attleborough was formally issued by Breckland Council after a £34m community investment agreement was reached with the developer. The money will fund the construction of new primary schools and invest in the existing Attleborough Academy. A new linear park, allotments, and open green spaces will be created, a community centre constructed, and contributions made to support indoor sport, libraries, and public transport provision in the town.

#### **May 2020**

- Breckland Council created an online roll of honour to thank local businesses, community groups and volunteers for the support they've shown in helping care for members of the district's communities.
- We announced a new grant award of £5000 for Norfolk Accident Rescue Service (NARS), which will help continue their vital work in supporting the emergency services and saving lives in the community.
- Norwich City and its football foundation boosted the local food supplies effort by donating 120 parcels to the council, containing essential non-perishable food items such as tinned goods and dried foods. The boxes also included hand sanitiser, toilet roll, sweet treats, a NCFC gift and a note from celebrity chef and Canaries shareholder Delia Smith.

#### **June 2020**

- The first 'virtual' committee meeting was held on Monday, June 1. The committee meeting was held via video-conference and streamed live to the council's YouTube page. The video

feed enabled people to observe the meeting's debates and the decisions being made.

- In response to a rise in litter and fly tipping in the district, a number of case studies were shared via social media and local press. These included the "world's most expensive coffee break", where 3 staff littered coffee cups in the countryside resulting in a £240 fine. A fly tipping incident solved in just 3 hours resulted in a £300 fine, and £600 fine was issued to a Thetford resident who dismantled a car in local woodland.
- As shops started to reopen after an initial lockdown period, Breckland launched the "Shop with Confidence" initiative, part of a much wider "Do Business with Confidence" campaign to support every business and every job possible during the Covid recovery phase.
- Breckland Council passed a significant milestone this month when it despatched its latest food parcels, which contained its 10,000th meal for vulnerable residents in the district.
- Two charities which offer support to people who have experienced domestic abuse in Breckland and Norfolk benefitted from a shared donation of over £3000. The Daisy Programme and Leeway Domestic Abuse Support Service received the funding after Breckland Council's Chairman selected them as her charity beneficiaries for 2019/20.
- Great news for birds and bees - In July we started to provide developers with planning advice and guidance which will help them create sustainable habitats for wildlife as part of its emerging approach to climate change and the environment. The advice will include the incorporation of bird boxes and bee or swift bricks into housing plans.
- Armed Forces Day - The council raised the flag at its offices to mark the occasion and called on residents in Breckland to take a selfie of them saluting and share it on social media using the hashtag #ArmedForcesDay2020 and #OurBreckland

## July 2020

- Breckland Council and Solo Housing joined forces to deliver a joint new project to help rough sleepers across the district. The £40.5k 'Off the Street' project was funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government as part of the national Rough Sleeping Initiative. The project enabled Breckland Council and Solo Housing to provide temporary accommodation to people who were homeless or sleeping rough in Breckland, helping them into more settled accommodation.
- Environmental news - It was announced that the council will move away from its existing energy tariff and switch to a renewable energy tariff as part of its commitment to sustainability / tackling climate change.
- Also as part of our sustainability work, new steps were unveiled to create more bee-friendly habitats across the district. The council announced it would be leaving some verges and land to grow wild, or operate a 'cut less, cut later' approach, to help bees and other pollinators to thrive.
- Breckland Council's Silver Social Project announced a new series of arts events online, while physical venues were closed and social distancing guidance is in place. The new programme

included acclaimed singing comedy sensations, the Opera Dudes, and creative writing and poetry sessions from Dan Simpson.

### **August 2020**

- Breckland Council announced it would be providing new funding to enable the Daisy Programme to establish a community support team for residents vulnerable to domestic abuse. Consisting of an Early Help Community Lead and six or more volunteer Daisy Ambassadors, Breckland Domestic Abuse Community Support Team will help people affected by domestic abuse feel less vulnerable and help them rebuild their lives.
- A covid outbreak at Banham Poultry made local and national news. Breckland Council worked with Norfolk County Council and other partners to tackle the specific outbreak in the Breckland-based factory.
- A new housing policy enabled vulnerable and disabled people to access new funding and support to meet their bespoke housing needs. The revised Housing Assistance Policy saw funding ring-fenced to help disabled residents to live more independently in their own homes and improve housing conditions for vulnerable residents. The previous policy already offered grants of up to £30,000 per household to help pay for adaptations, but the newly revised policy will now include the option for owner-occupiers to take a loan of £10,000 if disabled adaptions cost more than the initial £30,000 grant.
- A new business grant in Breckland was launched to help businesses to continue safely trading despite Covid-19. The fund was available to local businesses in the tourism and hospitality sectors and could see them receive up to £5,000 to help put in place safety measures and invest in ways to keep trading successfully over the winter months.

### **September 2020**

- Swaffham received 700k towards the protection and enhancement of it's historic high street and surrounding areas, with £380,000 of this total from Historic England funding. We're working with partners to highlight and protect this historic high street.
- We worked with Dereham Town FC and the Daisy Programme to raise awareness of local support services and start conversations about domestic abuse. This forms part of the Inspiring Communities programme which focuses on the prevention of domestic abuse. The football club adopted the Daisy Programme as its shirt sponsor to help highlight this service.

### **October 2020**

- Breckland Council picked up an RSPCA award for the fifth year in a row, this time scooping the Gold Award status in the Stray Dog category. This is part of the ongoing commitment to protecting animal welfare. We've since invested in a new animal welfare officer to carry out inspections and ensure local businesses meet animal welfare standards.
- Breckland Council's Our Breckland Lottery hit a major milestone this month, with £100,000 for local good causes through online lottery ticket sales.

## **November 2020**

- The Council rolled out the Local Restrictions Support Grant scheme and started to distribute further grants to Breckland businesses to help them through the pandemic.
- A new community shop, The Burrell Shop, launched in Thetford to ensure good quality, affordable food is available to people living close by. It was supported by Breckland Council and one of the ways we are helping our residents who are most in-need of support.

## **December 2020**

- In the run up to Christmas – normally peak shopping time – we urged shoppers to spend money with local traders as part of our new ‘Enjoy. Discover. Explore’ campaign. This is one way we have protected livelihoods during the pandemic. We’ve since launched our Spring Back campaign to help businesses thrive following a difficult period during the height of the pandemic.

## **January 2021**

- Urban regeneration expert, Hemingway Design, was appointed to help shape Thetford’s future. Public consultation followed which saw strong engagement with local people helping to shape the future of the town.
- Breckland Council agreed to sell the Green Britain Centre in Swaffham to an expanding international business. This will bring a new business and more jobs to the town. More information about this is expected to be released publicly soon.
- We helped Dereham’s Mid Norfolk Foodbank secure a new storage unit after releasing funding worth £2,500.
- The Digital Breckland programme launched to help businesses get set up online. The initiative provided training and advice to help businesses receive online orders, take digital payment, and get future-ready for an evolving high street.

## **February 2021**

- Breckland Council launched ‘MyFuture: Social’ programme of events for young carers. Virtual events were organised to support carers in our area, offer them skills advice and employment opportunities, as well as a chance to socialise with peers and develop a support network.
- Breckland Council members voted to adopt a balanced budget for 21/22, which protects frontline services and invests in key areas – such as climate change, flytipping, and animal welfare.
- Breckland Bridge – the partnership between Breckland Council and developer The Land Group – completed a set of new homes Chantry Court in Attleborough. The scheme is helping to meet the rising demand for housing in the district.

## **March 2021**

- Building work starts at Elm Road, in Thetford, to create a new unit for people in need of temporary accommodation. Work is expected to be completed on the scheme around the end of this year.
- Members voted to bring South Holland and Breckland's partnership to end after more than a decade sharing a management team. The partnership was a big success, but a changing landscape, including local government reorganisation proposals, meant both councils opted to bring the partnership to a close and consider more local (within the same county) new partnerships.
- To help break the chains of transmission, an asymptomatic testing programme was rolled out in Breckland. This meant anybody without covid symptoms could access a free test to make sure they didn't have coronavirus without knowing it and spreading it.
- A brand-new waste contract launched in Breckland, after the joined commissioning work in partnership with councils in west and north Norfolk. The move saved taxpayers money by cutting procurement costs while securing 'best value' service. Working together also brings benefits to service delivery, as cross-boundary working means vehicles, staff and other assets can be shared so the teams can work more effectively across multiple areas. During the first year of the contract, investment will also be made into shared IT systems, so real-time service information is available to residents and it is made easier for people to book additional services online, such as garden waste collections. The contract has also seen a brand-new fleet of bin collection trucks and other vehicles rolled out, which will operate across all three council areas. These include reduced emissions and hybrid vehicles. We can also now offer a commercial waste service for the first time and this has got off to a great start. We've already issued around 200 quotes to prospective clients and have over 40 customers signed up to receive commercial bin collections from the council.
- 'Spring Back' grants and support to help Breckland businesses reopen their doors. The new scheme includes:
  - A Shop Front Improvement Scheme, which makes funding available to businesses wanting to make improvements and enhancements to their shop frontage - from a lick of paint through to a completely replaced front.
  - Covid Safe and Adoptions Grants worth up to £5k to help businesses invest in equipment which enables them to trade safely, from extra protective equipment and screens, to a marquee or outdoor seating to support social distancing.
  - Any Breckland-based business will be able to have an assessment of their digital offer, with money available to help them trade digitally. The Digital Breckland project will support new payment systems through to online advertising.
  - A streamlined pavement licence application process to help support businesses create outdoor seating areas, where appropriate, and encourage social distancing and covid-safe practices. This is in addition to online training and support being available from the council's Licensing and Public Protection teams.
  - For prospective businesses, Breckland Council is offering an Expanded enterprise and start-up scheme, providing funding and advice for people looking to launch their new business in the district. An earlier iteration of the scheme has already helped 10

innovative businesses get off the ground in the first few months of 2021 and the council hopes to help dozens more over the coming months.

- People living in Breckland can now contact the district council via video call, as the council expands its customer services offering. We launched the video call appointments system to make it as easy as possible for people to get in touch with the council, building on existing methods of contact including phone calls, email, web chat and online forms. It comes off the back of a rise in popularity in video calls during the pandemic and means residents will be able to speak virtually face to face with one of the council's Customer Services officers. Appointments will take place from the comfort of a resident's home via the video conferencing service, Microsoft Teams. Calls require access to a smartphone, laptop or a tablet and a stable internet connection.

I hope the above is of some interest, it does highlight the diverse nature of the work carried out by Breckland Council, and all for the lowest district council tax in England. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact me.

Mark Kiddle-Morris,

Member for Launditch Ward. (Beeston with Bittering, Fransham, Great Dunham, Kempstone, Lexham, Litcham, Newton by Castle Acre, Rougham)