

**2021 Annual Report by Breckland Council's Mattishall Ward Councillors:
– Paul Claussen & Ian Martin**

This past year for Breckland as for everyone has been very different. Thank you from both of us to everyone in the parishes and villages of Mattishall Ward for all you have done and are doing.

Covid-19

This has dominated the whole year – and we have all probably exhausted what there is to say, but just as a reminder in Breckland:

- Grant funding, Breckland has enabled government grant funding to be speedily and comprehensively distributed to businesses and community organisations. In Mattishall Ward Village Halls, Scout Huts, Church Rooms and a Cricket Pavilion have all benefited. In total around £300,000 has gone to these facilities in this ward.
- Support for volunteer groups, formal and informal, that sprang up in response to Covid-19 was put in place around “hubs” in the market towns – huge thanks to all the volunteers, and now some have become permanent support groups under the “Good Neighbour Scheme” banner.
- For high street businesses it has now launched its “Business Spring Back” support to help local businesses to be in the best and safest condition to welcome back residents and visitors into our businesses in market towns and villages.

Breckland Council Key points:

- Virtual committee meetings have been taking place for most of the period up to 6th May 2021.
- Most staff have been working from home & we have all had to learn different ways of doing things.
- Many staff have been redeployed to provide support where it has been needed in the Council.
- A new video-call facility has now been introduced to help residents to access Council services, and in addition a dedicated evening telephone appointments system is being trialled to support residents who need help in completing online applications and forms outside of normal office hours.
- The waste collection service has maintained a very high standard, and apart from a short period of poor weather in January combined with the second wave – and this has now returned to normal. A new waste contract was launched in April 2021 – covering the 3 districts of North Norfolk, West Norfolk and Breckland. Serco continues as the contractor and the Councils have bought the equipment. It is to run for 9 years and is projected to show significant savings – for the same service.
- Fly-tipping has led to many prosecutions and fines as Breckland has targeted this issue
- Breckland's budget has been balance for 2021/22 and Breckland's Council Tax has only gone up £4.95 for a band D property, and is still the lowest in the country at under £100 pa.
- In 2019 Breckland Council declared a “Climate Emergency”. Breckland's first ever Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy has been agreed and an Environment & Climate Change Officer appointed, and the Council has switched to green electricity amongst other initiatives.

Breckland's Future

- Work has started to develop a shared vision for the long-term success of Breckland district.
- Breckland and South Holland agree to end their 11 year partnership as Norfolk and Lincolnshire are travelling in different directions in the future. Breckland will seek a similar partner council within Norfolk, and in the meantime from 1st May 2021 has its own stand-alone management structure.
- The Committee Suite has been significantly upgraded during the pandemic to enable the latest technology to be use so meetings can be physical, virtual or a hybrid and all council committee meetings will be live-streamed over YouTube and other social media.

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Grant Funding & Support (Non-Covid)

Inspiring Communities programme of grant-match-funding with community groups was a great success in 2020/21, so much so Breckland has launched a new 2021 funding scheme of up to £5,000 per community project. For more information on how your group could apply for an award of up to £5000 please see <https://www.norfolkfoundation.com/funding-support/grants/groups/breckland-council-inspiring-communities/>

£1m for vulnerable support programme to help bring support for our most vulnerable residents and included for instance: funding from the Daisy Programme and in helping to tackle domestic abuse; support for Foodbanks in the district through grants and securing equipment and storage; 24/04/21; Trip Start secure £66,000 in funding from Breckland Council; Trips start has secured funding for its continuing work to help long-term unemployed back to work.

Working with Others

We have worked throughout with other members and officers of Breckland, with elected colleagues such as our County Cllrs – Bill Borett for Mattishall, and Ed Connolly for the other five parishes in the ward – particularly on Highways and flooding, our thanks to both. We have called-on George Freeman MP and he has been very supportive on many issues, such as planning and flooding. We have also worked with Anglian Water, Flagship Homes, the Local Lead Flood Authority and Environment Agency mostly (but not exclusively) on flooding and sewage issues.

Planning

No Breckland report would be complete without mentioning planning. We have worked with parish councils, neighbourhood plan groups and residents to the best of our ability to assist with planning applications or to oppose those that really do not fit comfortably in our villages. These applications take a lot of time and work for all involved – and to be honest we have had mixed results in this past year, with failing to stop major applications in Mattishall and Yaxham. We have had greater success in at least moderating some of the smaller scale applications – and opposing them where there are good planning reasons – which we continue to do. We have also worked with individuals who have a perfectly reasonable application for a new dwelling, but have run into planning policy issues – and been successful in a number of these in helping to get permission. A large application just outside the ward for 255 homes at Toftwood has been defeated at appeal – so that was quite a success.

Breckland adopted its new Local Plan in November 2019, and with it was able to demonstrate that Breckland has a 6-7 year supply of permissions to meet the Plan requirements. This was reconfirmed in November and we hope that the new statement due to 31st March 2021 will do the same. With this the Local Plan and Neighbourhood Plans have full weight in planning matters. Nothing stands still in planning. The Local Plan needs reviewing in key housing policies by end 2022 and the whole plan by end 2024. However, last year the Government published planning consultations and a White Paper that brought into question the whole planning framework for the future, so these reviews are on hold – as are the Neighbourhood Plan reviews, until the planning future is made clearer by the Government. We did all band together and defeated the “mutant” algorithm that would have forced Breckland to increase its planning targets by 75%.

So, it has been a busy year on all fronts, and Breckland and the parishes have risen to the challenge. Let us hope and pray that we are through the worst and return to making the most of our beautiful part of the world – thanks again for all your help and support in a challenging year.

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