

FROM CLLR GORDON BAMBRIDGE

Councillors report 2020 - 2021 (Upper Wensum Ward)

PREAMBLE

Who would have thought when I last made an annual report that the then 'lockdown' would be refreshed and repeated and that one year later we would still be in this position.

Annual reports by their nature tend to look backwards, but I also like to look forwards, and as I re-read last years missive I can see some predictions I could not achieve, and some where Breckland have been very successful as a unit of government locally.

So where did I fail, well mainly it was in my prediction I would be back attending meetings in the parishes, I was not able to do that, in fact in 2020/21 I only attended 5 formal parish council meetings, compared with an average of 54 in the ward up to that point. This of course alongside all the other events where I represent the ward.

On being taken ill I had spoken to my doctors and they agreed that if I felt capable I could continue working (I was doing around 35/40 hours council work pw) but that I should not be working in the evenings. Wise words as two hours evening meeting, even online, meant virtually nothing next day.

I do give a great tribute to the NHS at the two hospitals who continued to fit me in right through the overload the pandemic had placed upon them, with treatments and clinics right throughout the time, and still continuing.

LOOKING BACK

So how did the predictions all pan out for the year?

Because of the pandemic most meetings for councillors became 'on-line' using ZOOM or TEAMS or similar, this was pretty good for me, also whilst remaining on the cabinet, the reshuffle had moved me from Planning to Environmental and Public Protection portfolio which meant that more work was done on-line anyway. (As reported last year)

At Breckland. In addition to representing you I am a Cabinet member with responsibility for Environmental protection and Public Protection.

My attendance record, as published by Breckland shows I attended 100% of all required meetings, plus 100% of (optional to me) Scrutiny meetings, plus a few others.

Of course that is the tip of a very large iceberg. We started the year with three informal cabinet briefings each week, These are reduced to about one per week now, and at least one with senior officers, plus the several portfolio briefings and decisions to be made on various matters.

These extra meetings by Breckland councillors enabled the efficient rollout of the extra measures demanded by the pandemic and responsibilities passed down to us from central government to be taken without any holdups, by enabling strategic, political and operational decisions to be made.

In the parishes. My attendance has been very low. Only 5 formal parish council meetings 2 virtual and three held outside during daytime. I have however been available to parish council members and to parishioners throughout, with virtual or properly socially distanced daytime meetings and of course telephone and internet media, even a few actual letters. I have visited each parish several times during the year. Some parishes have had more problems than others, but it has been a lively year despite the lockdown.

On other duties. My responsibilities at Breckland are mainly as one of the councillors representing the 15 parishes in Upper Wensum Ward, followed by the appointed cabinet role. This also includes representing the council on a number of other organisations related to my cabinet role. Most of you will also be aware of my interest in water level management and the drainage board covering this area.

All of this requires some attention on a regular basis, and reporting back to the council. And for all of which I am open for questions from you as well as Breckland.

Throughout this year Breckland Leader ,Sam Chapman-Allen has sent all parishes a weekly information letter updating on the pandemic and how this council was dealing with a fast moving situation, It has proved that District councils, with their closer contact to the people do an incredibly efficient job when the chips are down. In Breckland the council has been in contact with as many businesses as we can find from our and others data base records, we have handed out over £40m of central government money, and a number of cash grants and loans from our own funds to help those individuals, families or businesses in distress. We currently have a team of "Covid Wardens" operating in the district helping and advising both the public and traders who interact directly with the public. Mostly of course in the towns, but also coming into our rural communities where the truly local village shops, pubs etc have been a real life saving link for many of us locked down folks over most of the last year.

I do especially thank all of those individuals and organisations within our area whose volunteering was so valuable, and those 'going the extra mile' in the 15 communities of this ward which has meant so much to all of us, and not least to the most vulnerable within our villages.

LOOKING FORWARD

My biggest job outside of the ward has been the NEW WASTE CONTRACT. Several years in the negotiation and the biggest single contract awarded recently, locally, where three councils join to provide a better service and a more cost effective deal for all. This commenced for Breckland on 29th March. I have put this in looking forward as it is the future for how councils work, whatever central government decides on how local government is formulated, and matters are due for a change. This will form a huge part of my work for the wider council going forward.

You will all be aware of the decade long association Breckland has had with South Holland in Lincolnshire, and I believe the only one in the UK with a non-contiguous border. Whilst this ceased on 30th April it does remain one of the longest lasting and most successful amalgamations of councils in the country. In the future, if councils are to be really successful in serving the communities they represent, then similar joint ventures will have to take place, like our Waste Contract. The lessons we learnt with Sth Holland will stand us in good stead going forwards

Attention to littering and fly tipping, again I have laid the groundwork and Breckland is running ahead of the pack in our policy clearing promptly and prosecuting offenders. It will remain a No 1 priority.

The best way for you to contact the council with concerns in the future will be via the website, with common needs, and increasingly this is being set up to report matters with a few clicks, you can also leave photographs as appropriate and it gets complaints to the right people faster.

Some departments, like Planning, Licensing and other legal services of the council now have a 'generic' email, and whilst many of you, like me, hate this sort of approach, it really is the fastest way to get matters dealt with, **BUT** - of course parish councillors, and individual constituents, can always contact me direct on any matter, and it can be useful to copy me with your concerns made directly to the council.

I am now half way through my fifth term or representing half the ward on Breckland, and third term for the other half. It is my intention to represent the needs of the ward to the best of my ability going forwards. Part of that will be by attending parish council meetings as often as possible, but I am also willing to be involved in other meetings and events across the 15 villages of Upper Wensum Ward.

Most of you will know that I can be reached on either

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