

Report from Cllr Bill Borrett and Cllr Gordon Bambridge Breckland Council highlights 2021/22



Introduction

Welcome to our report on Breckland's year which has been a very busy one. Breckland's Corporate Plan brings together its strategic priorities for the coming years and outlines what we'll do to make a difference in Breckland to ensure it is a place where people and businesses can thrive. This report outlines some of the projects Breckland has delivered in 2021-22 against our overarching commitments and priorities as Members.

These priorities are grouped across four key themes:

- **Inspiring Communities**

We want Breckland to build on the many strengths of its local communities so that people can lead happy, healthy, fulfilling lives here. Working collaboratively with our partners, as part of a community-led approach, we want to work to address vulnerability in Breckland. Covid-19 has left a lasting effect on our communities, and we are committed to supporting our residents and businesses to recover from the pandemic and support them in adjusting to life with covid in the longer term.

- **Thriving Places**

Each of the five town centres are different. Breckland will enable strategic and focused action within each of them and their hinterlands (which includes the Upper Wensum Ward) working with key stakeholders and partners to drive investment and change that will help the towns thrive now and in the future.

- **Breckland 2035**

We want Breckland to lead by example as an organisation taking action to reduce its own impact and achieving net zero emissions by 2035. We recognise that it cannot achieve this alone. Therefore, we want to use its resources and regulatory powers to create an environment in which our residents and other key stakeholders are enabled to act for themselves in contributing to this agenda.

- **Working Smarter**

As a performance-led organisation, we want it to evolve its approach to delivering services to become a modern organisation which is set up to best meet the changing needs of its residents. Adopting an agile working approach will enable it to break down the barriers of site-specific working and empower officers to work with members to work at the location and time that meets business demand and best supports the delivery of high-quality services.

Finally, we are excited to share the **Breckland Cares** programme for the first time, which is made up of seven campaigns delivered over a rolling 12-month programme. The campaign will shine a light on several passions of ours, including mental health, diversity and inclusion, and climate change.

Please see below a more detailed description of the four areas together with a set of graphics that summarise them at the very end.

Best wishes

Bill and Gordon

Inspiring Communities

Breckland Council will help our residents to live safe and healthy lives by playing an active part in local communities. We will do this by providing and enabling excellent services that understand and support the needs of our residents and local areas, enhancing the quality of life for all.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

- Invested £1.8m in the creation of a brand-new **temporary accommodation facility in Thetford** (Elm House) to help people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. And have now begun work in partnership with Broadland Housing to provide five new units of 'move-on' accommodation, with intensive support, for people who have been sleeping rough.
- Commissioned by Mid-Norfolk Primary Care Network to deliver **social prescribing services**, helping over 300 residents through holistic support to improve their health and wellbeing.
- 30 community groups are now able to offer enhanced services to their communities through the **Inspiring Communities match funding scheme**, leveraging in over £250,000 to the district.
- Introduced **Breckland Mobile Food Store**, launching in April 2022, providing subsidised food to those most in need, with additional support mechanisms in place to address wider wellbeing issues such as social isolation and loneliness
- Created the **Early Intervention Fund** to provide financial support to individuals in extreme financial hardship to prevent them reaching crisis point.
- Boosted our **mental health** offer by **training 100 mental health champions** as part of our Mental Health Community Partnership scheme and continue to arrange and deliver mental health training across the district with partners including MIND, YANA and NSFT.
- Worked with partners such as the **Daisy** project to support survivors of **domestic abuse** and sexual violence and to help raise awareness.
- Developed a new and exciting partnership with Creative Arts East to transform the delivery of our popular **Silver Social programme**, extending the offer in local communities
- Established a Grants and Adaptations Team to work with residents who require **adaptations** to enable them to stay in their own homes. So far, they have delivered 24 projects with a further 246 ongoing.
- Continued to offer residents a high level of service from the **Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG)** team who received praise for their work with one resident who suffers from Motor Neurone Disease. This resulted in the team's work being praised on BBC breakfast.
- Supported **Breckland Youth Advisory Board (YAB)**, to deliver **mental health support** to Breckland families with young people aged 11 to 18 who are awaiting treatment or at risk or not attending school due to their mental health through the Cup-O-T Service.
- Played a key role in **responding to the pandemic**, including recruiting a team of Covid Support Officers to engage with businesses and members of the public to ensure compliance with national guidance and offer advice. Also engaging with partners to set up and operate district **asymptomatic testing** (walk in lateral flow tests), supported vaccination centres, promoted

Thriving Places

Breckland Council will play an active role in creating the right conditions for new and existing local businesses to thrive. We will continue to support growth in the local economy, bringing forward and shaping large-scale projects and activities, which will unlock significant employment and housing opportunities.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

- Began construction work of a new **£3.5m electricity substation in Snetterton**, which will enable businesses to grow at Snetterton Heath, protecting and creating jobs in the district
- Supported Homes England to hold public engagement events on the **Attleborough SUE**, with a design code, structure plan, and strategies now being developed to deliver quality housing
- Transformed old waste ground in Dereham into a beautiful new community space called **Ellenor Fenn Garden**.
- Improved the local area by overseeing the purchase and removal of an unsightly **boat from Thetford river**, a move supported by local businesses and communities.
- Determined 89% of minor or major **planning applications** within our specified timescales.
- Increased the housing stock for local residents with **two new housing developments** in Attleborough and Mileham.
- Engaged with over 20,000 residents as part of the **Future Breckland** project, to identify significant projects that can be delivered for our five market towns to help them bounce back from the challenges of covid-19 and build a strong and sustainable economy for the future.
- Supported over 300 local businesses to achieve **covid Safe Scheme accreditation**. The scheme recognises businesses in the district which have put measures in place to help protect their staff and customers from coronavirus and provide reassurance to local residents and visitors that they can shop safely.
- Supported 45 enterprises through the **Breckland Business Start-up Scheme**, helping them with funding and support to set up and begin a business because of covid.
- Created an innovative **Spring Back Programme** which has supported over 1360 businesses and provided over £4.5m of investment into the most vulnerable and in need areas of the economy.
- Applied for round one of the **Levelling up Fund** - a highly commended bid was made for £17m of investment in Phase 1. No issues were identified by Civil Servants in their analysis, and its strong logic and excellent value for money (Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR) were commended.
- Worked with the council's leisure provider to help **leisure centres recover** post-covid lockdowns and enable ongoing services for the wellbeing of local residents.
- Better equipped businesses to reach customers that are declining in numbers on the high streets and across the district by improving their digital platforms through the **Digital Breckland Fund**.

vaccination availability, engaged with major employers to manage **infection control** risks and **investigated Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)** to ensure that there was no threat to public safety.

- Continued our **crackdown on littering, fly tipping, and abandoned cars**, raising awareness of our no-tolerance approach and resulting in a significant number of fixed penalty notices being issued to deter others from offending in the future

Breckland 2035

Breckland Council has recognised that there is a climate emergency that needs our urgent attention. As a result we have created our 'Breckland 2035' Sustainability Strategy, which sets out the direction of how we play an active role in mitigating its impact.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

- Launched our **Sustainability Strategy** setting out how we will work with residents, businesses and partners to effect positive behavioural change that will lead to Breckland becoming a sustainable rural district in the country.
- Grown our **garden waste service**, which now covers nearly 25,000 residents.
- To keep our streets safe and save energy costs, we have supported the replacement of 133 streetlights within the district with more energy efficient **LED bulbs**.
- Released around £100k through our **Community Green Grants** scheme. The fund was set up to support communities in Breckland to take action for themselves and promote environmental sustainability, create behavioural change in response to climate change, and encourage communities to take positive action. Some of the projects funded include:
 - Croxton Parish Council to install EV charging points at their site
 - Purchase of battery storage for solar power at a village hall
 - Charles Burrell Centre replace lights with LED to reduce impact and cost
 - A water management scheme in Blo Norton, including a pond and reed bed filtration system
 - Several schools to create wildlife gardens and/or allotments
 - A variety of organisations including parish councils, community groups to install bat and bird boxes.
 - The community trust at Elm House (our new temporary accommodation facility) enabled to **create vegetable gardens** to help residents at sites to grow their own food
 - Harris Hardware in Dereham to carry out a **re-use and repair scheme** for residents
 - Kickstart Norfolk to buy **five electric mopeds** to provide young people with transport
- Worked with the leisure centre provider to **install environmentally-friendly measures**, such as LED lighting and pool covers to retain heat. These are due to installation imminently.
- Developed plans to **plant hundreds of trees** in the district as part of our commitment to protect and enhance the Breckland environment, as well as support the national green canopy initiative for the Queen's Platinum Jubilee.

- Launched a new **Commercial Waste Service** and have already launched over 200 bins, providing a flexible, cost-effective service whilst also generating an income.
- Invested in our resources for animal licensing, with Breckland taking a lead role on investigating welfare standards, tackling 'puppy farms' etc.
- Supported our commercial tenants through difficult times during covid with **rent deferrals and lease variations**

Working Smarter

We put our residents and businesses at the heart of everything we do. Prior to the pandemic, Breckland Council committed to a significant transformation programme to change the way its members and officers undertake their respective roles. The outcome will allow us to continually improve the delivery of services, make better use of space and resources, and future-proof the organisation - enabling us to operate as a modern council. Ultimately, this will make the organisation more efficient and effective while continuing to operate within our established budget.

What we've delivered in 2021/22:

- Worked in partnership with councils in north and west Norfolk to deliver a **new waste and recycling collection service**, along with street cleansing and grounds maintenance.
- Launched an **online chatbot** to allow residents a fully automated and 24- hour way of interacting with the Council and its services. The impact of this is already being seen with 80% of our live chat interactions now being automated allowing us to focus on calls.
- Successfully delivered and implemented the **Agile Working Policy** - fundamentally changing the council's approach to how and where we work.
- Continued to increase **mental health awareness** and support within the organisation through awareness sessions for managers and increasing the number of mental health first aiders within the organisation.
- Made our **website more accessible** than ever and are now ranked 14th out of 406 local authorities and public bodies in terms of accessibility. We are ensuring there are no barriers that prevent interaction with us due to a disability, bandwidth or speed.
- Added more **digital forms** to our website to make it easier and more efficient to contact us. We've received around 35,000 completed forms in the past 12 months.
- **Reviewed our Customer, Housing, Communities, Finance, Human Resources and Environmental Health teams** to ensure that they can offer the best possible service to residents within the district.
- Re-written our **Recruitment Policy** to include the Armed Forces Covenant and to make us a better disability employer. This is so we continue to be a diverse hiring organisation and that can attract all candidates.
- Re-established governance procedures to operate as a single council after **ending our partnership with South Holland District Council**, including establishing practices needed to ensure that the council could continue to operate democratically as a single organisation.
- Expanded our **Contracts and Procurement Team** and now offer expert procurement and contract support to a total of five Councils within Norfolk and Lincolnshire.
- Successfully held the district's **first major election** since the start of the pandemic, which saw the adoption of new health and safety measures whilst also continuing to deliver a fair and transparent election for residents across the district.

TO SUPPORT OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES WE HAVE...

Inspiring communities

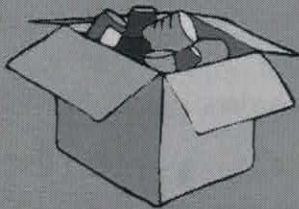
Trained 100 mental health champions as part of our mental health community partnership scheme



Worked with Daisy project to support survivors of domestic abuse and sexual violence



Developed Breckland Mobile Food Store to address food poverty in rural areas



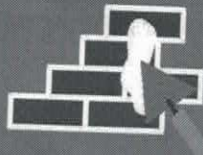
Delivered a new £1.8 million accommodation facility in Thetford for those at risk of homelessness



Over 250 residents have benefited from our multi-agency approach to early intervention



Delivered 24 grants and adaptation projects to allow residents to stay in their homes, with 250 more projects ongoing



Secured funding and started delivery of 5 new "move on" accommodation units



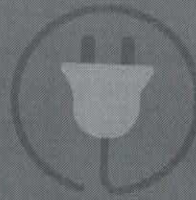
Successfully ran the first social supermarket in the East of England



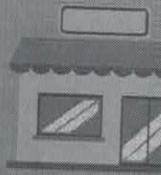
TO HELP OUR DISTRICT THRIVE WE HAVE...

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Begun construction on a £3.5 million electricity substation to enable growth at Snetterton



Supported over 100 local businesses through our COVID Safe Scheme and our Breckland School



Supported 1,360 businesses with £4.5 million investment through our Spring Back programme



Continued to invest in our district with £150,000 annual investment to increase vibrancy in our town

Engaged with over 20,000 individuals as part of Future Breckland to help shape our District



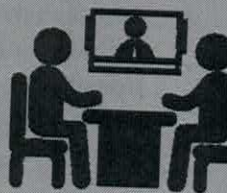
Launched our new commercial waste service and have installed over 200 bins across the district



Acquired an asset in a strategic location to allow for potential regeneration on Thetfords riverside



Supported 45 start-up enterprises through our Breckland Business start-up programme



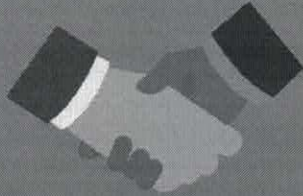
TO SUPPORT OUR LOCAL ENVIRONMENT WE HAVE...

Breckland
2035

TO WORK SMARTER WE HAVE...

Working
Smarter

Launched our Sustainability Strategy to protect the future of our District



Expanded our garden waste service to over 24,000 households



Created a Contracts & Procurement Team to support five Councils in Norfolk and Lincolnshire and deliver value for money



Launched our online chatbot for customers to interact with 24/7

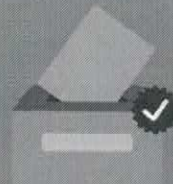


Delivered £100k funding through community green grants



We have continued our £800k street light upgrade and have replaced a further 133 further with more efficient bulbs

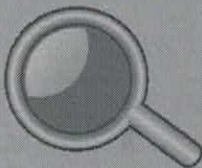
Held the first major elections since the start of the pandemic, in a COVID safe and transparent way.



Rewritten our recruitment policy to reaffirm our commitment to the forces and people with disabilities as an inclusive employer



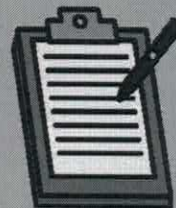
Led the county in enforcement action to tackle fly tipping and environmental crime



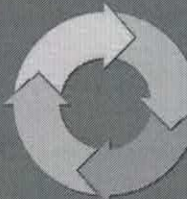
Worked with our providers to install environmentally friendly resources at our leisure centre sites



Successfully launched our new Corporate Plan setting out our priorities for the next 4 years



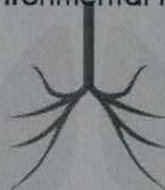
Fully embraced working in a post-pandemic environment and world state of the art



Transformed old waste ground into a new community space at Ellenor Fenn Garden



Flagship heritage action zone project in Swaffham to deal with historic environmental issues



Went live with a tri-district waste & recycling collection service



Ensured a balanced budget and supported frontline services by keeping Council Tax

