ANNUAL REPORT OF GORDON BAMBRIDGE - BRECKLAND COUNCILLOR UPPER WENSUM WARD.

Year 2023/24

Report for villages of

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This year has been for me personally a year of change and for Breckland Council a year when many achievements have been made and new goals set. To Breckland first.

The council has made real progress on over 50 areas where promises were made and kept from our manifesto at the last election. I have attached as a separate document the list for you to consider, but they fall into the four main areas where we promised to work for the whole community. Some of these may apply to all of you, and some to only some of you but I am proud that during my time in Breckland we have always achieved movement for the community as a whole

**The four areas are**

**Breckland 2035**

Which is the overarching name for getting a carbon neutral council by 2035, and by and large not by buying credits. So from community and individual composting, to planting thousands of trees, to car charging points, to supporting businesses, to litter pick and enforcement to keep our community clean - we have made a start on achieving this goal

**Thriving Places**

Is our target for ensuring established and new businesses can thrive and that our communities can grow in all ways and be more pleasant places for us all to live in. In doing this we have managed to lever in much additional funding across the district despite this being ‘hard times’ all around, Some of these you may have seen announced in the media, some still to be announced. Breckland has always been a council that is not too proud to seek outside funding and partnerships to ensure we provide the best for our communities, whilst at the same time keeping the district council tax the lowest.

**Inspiring Communities**

From individual grants to families in hard times, to housing advice and supporting abused people. To promoting mental wellbeing with over 300 mental health champions trained in the district. The Food Bus, and the community supermarket, to helping 3000 residents with housing advice. Working with young people and the police, with dog wardens and local charities Breckland are fulfilling their commitments

**Working Smarter**

We have performance indicators and are continually holding ourselves to these, debated in most council meetings - which you can watch, all key meetings are online live or recordings. We seek to work transparently, and if you have a case going with the council you will be increasingly able to follow progress online. Already we are offering advice on many matters online with AI and by telephone 24/7 using electronic systems whilst maintaining the office hours human contacts. Gaining many national awards for the council over the last year building on the time we spent during the pandemic modernising the building and workplace Breckland is now number one on preferred places to work.

**The complete list is attached as a pdf file**

**To me as a councillor.**

I have represented around half of the ward now for 21 years, and the other half for around 13 years since the last reorganisation of council ward boundaries, and as I have shared with some of you that is all happening again this year for the next election in 2027.

**Since May 2023** I am no longer a cabinet member at Breckland but as your representative I do still attend most council meetings and actively represent every resident of Upper Wensum within the district council system. I am also in regular contact with our MP George Freeman, where necessary also contacting government departments directly, and with the County Council supporting Bill Borrett who doubles as a district and county councillor. However on matters concerning the ward I also lobby directly as is deemed necessary.

**Many councillors** also represent the district in other areas (it’s called an outside body) For my part I represent Breckland on the Norfolk Rivers Internal Drainage Board. This obviously impacts on our ward, but also many other wards across Northern Breckland so it involves working with them also to a certain extent. Because I have held this position for over 20 years I have progressed up and sit on other organisations and attend meetings on drainage management in Westminster and across the region dealing with both government and shadow ministers and with such as the EA from time to time. These additional positions for the council are entirely unpaid, and do of course take up time, but I find that apart from expanding my horizons it does enhance my ability to better represent you to Breckland and beyond. This could be seen for example when Storm Babet caused flooding in Breckland last October, I was able to extend the reach of our influence supporting both individuals and communities.

**In a normal time Planning** matters take up much of a councillors time, Breckland is the panning authority for the area, but lately Nutrient Neutrality has slowed down all housing related applications, this has tended to make more work for me rather than less. Whatever your view on this may be, the fact of an organisation like Natural England bringing in regulations like this without attention to mitigation I find appalling. We do now seem to be edging towards some sort of solution. On planning matters I generally take my lead from the parish but always also have to hear all sides of every situation so will speak to applicants and developers alike

**On a similar subject,** most councils, indeed whole communities are against unchecked development. However the district has targets for housing to meet. On this matter I tend to stand with the individual parish council, which leaves me sometimes a bit schizophrenic, some want a little growth, others a bit more, others perhaps substantially more growth. And all of this is predicated on the size of the community and the facilities within. I believe within this ward we do have some very mature and tolerant opinions on the matters of growth.

My stance on the matter is that I will always support the view of the parish, but that most communities (not all) do need a little growth, to support their shop/pub/bus/school etc.

I do believe that most larger villages should consider a neighbourhood plan.

I do believe that most communities would support an exception site which is where a small development of truly affordable dwellings are built with local support for local people in perpetuity. And I am happy to talk through these issues.

**On wider matters:-**

**I have opposed**the proposed New Town on land encompassed Billingford/Bintree/Elmham mainly in two wide ranging areas encompassed by infrastructure and environment, I noted that some 45 communities opposed this many in Breckland but also from North Norfolk and Broadland areas, and I am happy to discuss this (it was the most raised matter during the recent election)

**I have supported** the dualling of the A47 on the basis that it improves access will enhance all of our communities. (It does affect me personally)

**I support the proposed Western Link Road**on the basis that every one of the fifteen villages in the ward are adversely affected by its lack to a greater or lesser extent. The A1067 and every Southward road off it to Guist and beyond have become rat runs because it is not there. All of Northern Norfolk suffers because the Norwich Northern Bypass was not made a complete circular road around the city.

Again I am happy to discuss these matters

**I am acutely aware that with fifteen villages** I do miss a lot of parish meetings, I am sorry for that. In addition to your parish councils and other necessary meetings I do also need to keep up with the few Breckland meetings held in the evenings and others such as the police SNAP. Also sometimes there are two, three or even four parish meetings on the same night.

**What I will say is** that I am always available to meet with parish clerks, chairmen or councillors outside of the usual parish meeting. Day or evening. I will also make time to meet parishioners singly or preferably in groups. This can be in your parish or at Breckland office, or on site if appropriate.

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