

Annual Report

Ian Monson Norfolk County Councillor.

By all accounts the year 2015/16 has been a difficult year for the County Council. On a number of fronts it has been under attack and has had to adapt to many quite large changes in the way it operates. Staff and inevitably services have had to be streamlined and with ever decreasing revenue coming in from government this has not been easy.

Following a poor Ofsted report two years ago Children's Services have seen improvement. In schools, exam results are up and there are less schools in special measures, but there is more to do to bring Norfolk's schools up to excellent levels of achievement we expect to see. Just recently many of the poorer performing schools have become academies in the belief that this will help stimulate improvement. It remains to be seen if this will be the case.

Our care services for the elderly have been doing a wonderful job in spite of staff shortages and lack of funding. We are encouraging closer working with the NHS to find a safe place to stay for those leaving hospital in order to relieve pressure on beds in hospital.

In preparation for the Budget in February the Council held a County Wide consultation at the end of last year on where savings could be made. Many proposals came forward including reducing the Fire Service, cutting down opening times of Recycling Centres, Libraries and Museums and reducing road maintenance. All very unpopular measures, but at the end of the day when we came to deciding the budget for this coming year many of these measures had a reprieve and savings were found from behind the scenes.

In spite of this Achievements have been made during the year. Work was started on the Norwich Northern Distributor Road, which when completed will be of enormous benefit to all those living in the NE of the County and who use the Airport or visit the Broads. The Council

has successfully promoted business opportunities in the County notably at the research Park at Colney, the Hethel Engineering Centre, the offshore renewable energy business in Great Yarmouth and many other smaller sites around the County through the creation of enterprise zones with the government.

The future continues to bring change and uncertainty with government proposals for devolution and the creation of a new tier of government with an elected mayor. This is not something it seems many people in Norfolk are enthusiastic about. The County Council will be deciding whether or not it supports these proposals at a special meeting of Full Council at the end of June.

I look forward to representing you all over this coming year leading up to the County Council elections in May 2017.

Ian Monson

Norfolk County Councillor
The Brecks Division.

ANNUAL REPORT FROM CLLR SAM CHAPMAN-ALLEN

BRECKLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL 2016

Like many councils, we have been affected by public sector funding reductions, all time low returns on cash deposits and changes to the way councils are funded. But despite these challenges the council's prudent financial management and innovative approach to income generation means that we have a balanced budget for 2016/17 and are able to protect frontline services. Breckland has continued to deliver fantastic value for money and still boasts being the lowest council tax in the country.

A small snap shot of some of our success stories are;

Recycling revolution: launched Norfolk wide. In Breckland we have worked to promote the benefits of recycling to communities, eg cost reduction to council, black bins not overflowing. This has led to a reduction of contamination from 17 to 12 percent. We are targeting problem areas rather than a blanket approach. Parishes have been really helpful in promoting of recycling, please continue.

Green waste: Breckland has launched its "on line book and pay" via the website...to make it easier for residents to buy or renew a green waste bin. Take up has been really good, 200 transaction in first 10 days. Benefits include cost reduction again to the council, we get recycling credits on compostable materials and it reduces the need to travel to household centers, whose operational hours and locations are being reduced by NCC.

Community Grants: Breckland provides match funding and smaller grants schemes across the district and these continue to be popular with the community. Grants for 2015/2016 totaled £133,000 paid in match funding. The council has provided match funded to a range of projects from play areas to dementia cafes.

Early help hubs: Collection of public agencies including councils, children services, police, fire service, housing associations...working together aimed at all residents to support and provide expert advice in times of need. The benefit is to help prevent minor issues escalating to major intervention by public services. This provides better outcomes for families and better outcomes for public services with costs reduced. The first one will be in Thetford which is currently in progress with a second in Dereham autumn 2016.

Our approach to supporting Dementia within the Community: Breckland is a dementia friendly council as accredited by Norfolk Age UK, which means that our staff, councilors and contractors are trained to identify the signs of dementia and support residents accordingly in accessing our services. Our

facilities eg leisure centres and council offices have made physical improvements to help those with dementia. We also deliver “our day out” programme, for those with dementia and their carers, and have held events in supporting dementia awareness in Attleborough, Dereham and Watton

Leisure Centres: Participation in our leisure centres has reached an all time high, over 1000 members at Thetford and Dereham, and on average 30,000 visits per month to our centres. This provides access for the community to enable them to take part in activities which benefit their health and wellbeing. We also provide discounts for carers and the cared for at our leisure centres. Carers are some of the most important volunteers in the community and the council acknowledges that the valuable work they do can mean that looking after themselves is sometimes difficult. We are the only council to have done so far.

Health: Delivering the Breckland Fit Families project in Primary schools to encourage activity and healthy eating for children and parents - Norfolk Health and Wellbeing Board has funded a Breckland Council project targeting ‘healthy behaviour change’ in families from 5 Breckland Areas highlighted by the National Child Measurement Program as having a high prevalence of Reception age children at risk of development ‘Weight Related Illness’ in later life. A total of 400 families have taken part in one of five 8 week programmes that were carried out in the following primary schools: Westfield Infants (Watton), Carbrooke Primary, Watton Sure Start, Swaffham Infants, Raleigh Infants (Thetford).

CCTV: system continues to work in all our market towns, operated by a partnership with Kings Lynn. This delivers helps in prosecutions and it’s deemed as an effective deterrent.

Operational partnership: Working with the Police and our anti-social behaviour team we have seen a reduction of ASB across the district of 10.1% reduction compared to same period last year. This partnership support victims of crime and ASB as well as practice prevention through street briefings at hotspot areas engaging with communities and trouble shooting.

Customer Portal for Choice based lettings and housing options:

Working with Home Connections we have to deliver an operational website, providing residents with information on housing options as well as an online service to register for services, process changes and a list of available properties. The portal enables residents to access this critical council service at any time, making it more convenient for those who cannot contact the authority during office hours

Building stronger relationships with the Department of Work and Pensions by having members of the team co-located in Elizabeth House

– The preparations for shared office space have been completed and the DWP centre is now operational. Working relationships between DWP and Breckland staff are developing and options for working across related services (such as housing/homelessness or revenues and benefits) are being explored. Ultimately, information and process sharing will result in a more seamless and simplified experience for residents.

Breckland Bridge: is a joint venture with an expert developer LandGroup, set up to deliver projects that make best use of the Council's existing assets to drive growth and regeneration for everyone's benefits within the district, keeping council tax requirements low through the income it generates. Breckland Bridge is currently working on Thetford Riverside, an £8m regeneration scheme, that include 3 screen cinema, 62 bed hotel restaurants and food outlets, all on programme to deliver by end of 2016.

Anglia Revenues Partnership: a group of 7 local councils, formed in 2003 provides significant improvements in services and financial savings, with a focus on the billing and collection of council tax and non domestic rates, the assessment and award of housing benefits, delivery of local council tax reduction schemes and fraud investigations. The speed of services such as process of housing benefit and council tax benefit and changes to circumstance is excellent and amongst the best in the country, this performance supports residents to get back on their feet and into work more quickly. The partnership has adopted high ethical standards in regard to enforcement and investigations; we recognize the difference between those who can't pay and those who won't pay. Financially the partnership enables Breckland to provide high quality services that is value for money.

Local Plan consultation: The Council is in the process of producing a new Local Plan, which will replace the Core Strategy. The Local Plan sets the strategic direction and context for development in the district, governing the decisions made on planning applications and what types of development are suitable for each areas. It's a key document that guides development over the next 20 years. There has been a good start to the consultation responses, a significant response rate to the consultation, and much interest in the sites and ideas. Local roadshows have been well attended and well received, with 9 consultation events across the district and further drop in briefings for parish councils. Further consultation will happen later on Sites Allocation(June July) and again pre submission (Oct/Nov) with parishes.

Neighbourhood Planning : Council has put in resources to fund an additional officer, dedicated to working with parishes to support their development of their Neighbourhood plans. There are currently 10 Neighbourhood Plan areas formally confirmed and have plans in preparation. We are likely to see our first referendum on a Plan end of 2016.

Growth of the District

Two major growth allocations are progressing well. Both have local partnership arrangements aimed at delivery co-ordinated and integrated delivery of housing and associated infrastructure. Greater Thetford Development Partnership is working through the delivery of the sustainable urban extension which will see 5000 additional homes for the Greater Thetford areas. The opportunities of this growth need to be harnessed for all the communities both new and existing. Outline planning permission has been granted for 5000. The Attleborough Development partnership is likely to have an application by end of calendar for 4000 homes.

Engaging with partners to enhance the digital broadband speeds and connectivity through our financial contribution to influence Better Broadband for Norfolk

BDC has coordinated responses from the district's businesses and worked with NCC to inform their roll-out. Breckland Council has provided £950,000 in contribution towards the cost of the infrastructure but is not a directing partner in the project, its role in coordinating the responses has been more advisory.

Encouraging local suppliers to provide goods and services to the council including holding a 'Meet the Buyer' event – first Meet the Buyer

event held September 2015, further events under discussion. The event introduced local businesses to the council's procurement process and encouraged more to consider applying to provide services to the authority. These events are designed to make the procurement process more transparent and to increase competitiveness – helping the authority make savings and promote local business.

Creating a discretionary business rate relief scheme aimed at reducing the number of empty shops and encouraging a wider variety of retail offering (to be piloted in Dereham from April 2016) – The planned scheme

allows new independent small businesses to apply for up to 80% business rate relief in the centre of Dereham with the aim of filling vacant shops with a mix of enterprising businesses. The council believes that making improvements in the retail options in the market towns is key to strengthening the local economy. A budget of £10,000 has been allocated to the Dereham trial scheme and if successful Breckland will look to introduce it to the other market towns across the district.

And finally, we have a new Leader and Deputy Leader of Breckland District Council. Following the previous Leader Michael Wassell stepping down last month, William Nunn was elected as the new Leader of Breckland District Council and myself as the new Deputy Leader.

CROXTON PARISH COUNCIL CHAIRMANS ANNUAL REPORT 2015 - 2016

Once again it has been a busy and challenging year for the Parish Council and if possible placed an even greater demand on the time of Councillors and Officers.

As Chairman I can report that once again your council has met the many challenges and demands and in my view have worked as always for the best interests of the Croxton residents, with considerable success.

The main items of interest or information this year have been as follows:

- Moving Thetford Forward / Greater Thetford Development Partnership.
The MTF Board has in effect completed its initial remit and been replaced by the GTDP. The formation of this new vehicle, which is effectively an attempt to form a group which working together to take forward the development of some 5000 houses within the parishes of Croxton, Brettenham & Kilverstone to the north of Thetford, in conjunction with ensuring benefit to that wider community, has been frustratingly slow.
However it has now reached the stage of being close to appointing an independent chairperson, and has formed up the three Sub Groups agreed in the initial concept document, which hopefully should produce some useful results in the coming months.
- The SUE Development South of the A11 Thetford Bypass.
Little progress has been made since Outline Planning permission was given in April 2015, apart from 'Brand naming' the site Kingsfleet. The latest estimate of site work commencing is '...sometime in 2017'.
We will continue to try to influence any developments or changes for the benefit of Croxton Parish and community wherever possible and keep residents informed as and when we have relevant information on this.
The Joint Neighbourhood Plan which I comment on next is being developed with this in mind.
- Joint Neighbourhood Plan
A Joint Questionnaire for all residents of Croxton, Brettenham & Kilverstone was prepared and distributed in April 2015. The consultation period for the questionnaire closed on May 17th. The results have been analysed and results of both Questionnaire and Analyses Results posted on the individual Parish websites.
The Councils have issued a draft "Summary and Structure" to Breckland District Council to ascertain whether a Strategic Environmental Assessment and/or a Sustainability Appraisal are required. We have since been advised that an SEA will not be required which is good news and we await advisement on other possible requirements from the other regulatory bodies.
We aim to complete this work by summer to allow the first draft to be developed.
To this end we have professional guidance and assistance from Andrea Long, Director of Planning Resources, Broads Authority.
- The Wider Economy
We are all keenly aware of, and affected by Government cut backs in the National Economy. In the last year this has again filtered down into cuts in County and District Council budgets and available funding. Fortunately at Parish level so far we have managed to remain reasonably unaffected and continue to maintain the Parish Precept requirement unchanged again for the coming year.
We continue to encourage the use of our Recycling Bank at the village hall which continues to provide a worthwhile annual income.
The recent BC initiative encouraging residents to recycle glass into their black bin at home rebounded somewhat as the price of recycled glass fell during the past year.

- EPR Thetford Power Station

The major noise issue experienced in August 2014 has largely been resolved and noise complaints have basically ceased. At the recent Liaison Meeting of 26 April, the Station was reported as now operating at 92.9% efficiency and the annual maintenance shutdown is scheduled for 8 August for 14 days.

Other Areas/Items and Issues

- Skate Park

This was completed during the year with alterations to plans which were not discussed with CPC. There have been a number of complaints/suggestions from users which echo some of the points raised by this Council, but ignored. However hopefully these will not grow into major issues.

- High Tree Close - Bennett Homes

The resident at High Meadows, Harefield Road has a drainage problem possibly caused by surface drainage from High Tree close. This has been referred to NCC Environment for investigation which been actioned. We are awaiting the outcome.

This potential problem has been repeatedly raised in planning applications for this site but ignored by BC Planning. BC were requested to raise the current problem for investigation but failed to do so, and hence CPC raised it directly to NCC who have provided a positive response.

The long term concern we have for this site is the obvious provision made by Bennett Homes for possible future access to The Vicarage plot.

- Mobile Phone Coverage - Vodafone

During last year the Council pursued the possibility of having an upgrade system, funded by Vodafone for users based in Croxton. This was approved by Vodafone who installed 2 masts. This however left a gap in signal strength in the centre of Croxton and a third mast is required. CPC (Doug Stephen) is pursuing this with Vodafone.

- Specific Issues Raised by residents

- 1 **The Street – Surface Drainage**

Passed to NCC Highways – date for review/discussion to be agreed with GG.

- 2 **Speeding through Village**

A Speedwatch group was set up by residents and Police Speedwatch Team, and is In operation.

- 3 **Traffic Survey (Highways)**

NCC Highways agreed to carry out a survey in The Street as CPC believe the village is being used as a 'rat-run'. The survey is presently under way.

- 4 **Defibrillator / First Aid Training**

A resident raised the possibility of having a Defibrillator provided for the village. This in turn raised the possible value of having First Aid training courses for residents. A public meeting was held on 10 April which 13 residents plus 4 councillors attended and discussed/clarified requirements and views.

The Council is currently investigating the matter.

- 5 **BT Telephone Kiosk – The Street**

In parallel with the Defibrillator request the subject of adopting the BT kiosk in the village was raised by Mrs M Raker. Mrs Raker had previously raised the subject of adoption some time ago and has kindly offered to take responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the kiosk.

CPC has subsequently signed a Kiosk Adoption Contract with BT.

Planning Applications

Applications submitted since my last report:

40 The Street IP24 1LN	31-01-16	Householder	Permission
Hill Farm The Street IP24 1LL	18-01-16	Full	Permission
Hill Farm The Street IP24 1LL	18-01-16	Listed Build Consent	Permission
Chimneys The Street Croxton	24-08-15	Tree Work App CA	No Objection
Croxton Park Croxton Road	24-06-15	Full	Permission
Off Croxton Road IP24 Skate	15-06-15	Full	Permission
Croxton Park Croxton Road	10-06-15	Full	Permission
Church Cottage The Street	04-05-15	Listed Build Consent	Permission
Church Cottage The Street	04-05-15	Full	Permission

Financial Notes

The Responsible Financial Officer / Auditor will summarise the financial report after this Report. However I would like to highlight the following:

- We have decided to retain the Parish Precept at the same figure as last year, so any increase in Council Tax will not be due to any change in Precept. Council Tax increase will be due to BDC increasing tax by around 4% and Norfolk Constabulary increasing their requirement by 2%
- The finances show a reasonable recovery in overall profit for the year compared to the last financial year, this being mainly from increased recycling income claimed, and recovery of shared JNP costs from Brettenham & Kilverstone PC.
- We have obtained JNP funding from My Community (Locality) toward anticipated costs during the next 6 monthly period, with the option of applying for BD match funding also in due course.

As always I must thank all the councillors, volunteers, and helpers, for their contribution to the Council during another very busy year. As always the Chairman can only be as effective as the councillors and officers who support him.

Thanks also must go to Tony Yates who regularly gives of his time to audit the accounts and ensure that these are always in order.

Lastly I sincerely hope you feel the Parish Council is representing you the community and your interests, in a satisfactory manner and if you have any issues or comments please feel free to raise these with any of the councillors.

Signed. 

Date.12 May 2016.....