

## **2026 Report for Annual Parish Meetings – Shipdham with Scarning, incl Cranworth from District Councillors, Lynda Turner and Paul Hewett**

**This report is a snapshot of the past year, a much fuller report can be found on parish websites.**

This may be the penultimate report given to the Parish Council by the two of us – see later on.

During the past year, Breckland Council has continued to deliver all statutory services, together with many non-statutory ones, which included £1M for Inspiring Communities and the dog warden service which won several awards. The Link in Dereham went live, with a range of information, help and support for residents all under one roof, with face to face assistance. The purchase of a number of properties has helped reduce the number of homeless residents, and has brought down the cost of emergency accommodation.

Digital upgrades and innovations, now enable residents to use our website and associated links more efficiently and effectively, though there is still human contact when and if needed: our call centre last week took 1,200 calls in a day (up from 250) mainly relating to new government-imposed business rates. Members continue to receive regular training both in house and externally, including safety in lone working, IT skills, community relations, and communication skills.

Domestic Food Waste collections will start this year, again a service made mandatory by the current government, at a cost of £3M to Breckland (this includes purchase of adapted vehicles, caddys and bins etc.): There has been a delay in rolling this out as every council in the country has ordered the specialised vehicles at the same time (even though we put our orders in over 18 months ago). Funding for all of this is not met by Central Government, and will need to be met by taxpayers moving forward.

There are four key topics that continue to overshadow us all.

**The Local Plan** The review of the Local Plan enabled parish councils and all residents to participate in consultations with their vision for the future, whether it be for housing, businesses, infrastructure, leisure or open space. We worked hard for our three Parishes when the government announced its increase in new housing targets, and were able to evidence that Shipdham in particular needed no increase beyond its original projected numbers. Other villages are not so lucky, and the timeline for the Local Plan is unfeasibly tight – it needs to be in place before the autumn. That means decisions being made during the summer in order to ensure further Central-Government imposed housing targets will not apply: neither the timeline, the targets, and the underlying process are things we can control, but we will do our hardest to meet it.

**Devolution** – The transfer of power from central government to a Norfolk and Suffolk Mayor – public elections for a Mayor take place in 2028. Police and Crime Commissions will be absorbed into the new Mayoral control. There is no new funding for this, and the delay in the Mayoral elections for a further year means there will be gaps as well as budget cuts made to the current Police Service.

**Local Government Reorganisation** – All county, district and borough councils to be abolished, and the Secretary of State has “minded” to approve the power of 3 unitary councils for Norfolk which is the least worst outcome for us. The next outcome would have been leaving everything “as is”, but that was not an option. So Breckland, Kings Lynn and West Norfolk, plus some parishes from South Norfolk will become West Norfolk Unitary Authority, subject to a legal challenges, judicial reviews, and policy changes, on 1 April 2028. The irony of this date is not lost. Parish Councils are not affected at the time of writing. County Council elections take place this May, elections for councillors for new authorities take place in May 2027, 2027-28 will be a transition (shadow) period, and Breckland will cease at 11.59pm on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2028, with the new “West Norfolk”, “Greater Norwich”, and “East Norfolk” new unitary councils will be effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2028. Currently there is insufficient funding to make this happen (Gov’t announced £900k - elsewhere the actual costs have proved 10 times more than expected), and the process of breaking up county-wide road networks, health provision, educational services and adult social care is absolutely enormous (Govt is clear – nothing “transferred over”, everything is wholly new). Case in point – Norwich has lots of Children’s Homes and the West has very few; the West has lots of open spaces and Norwich very little: these cannot “move” to where the need is. But the clock is ticking, and deals need to be made. And today we heard from MHCLG that “the structural change order is not yet written in stone”...!

Closer to home we have worked with members of the parish council in regard to pieces of land currently owned by Breckland Council which, if meeting the criteria, could be transferred to the relevant parishes. We attended workshops with parish councillors to discuss the viability of these.

**Solar Farms** – the debate carries on with a Norfolk steering group leading the way, which includes 3 MPs. Final decisions will be made by the Secretary of State, with the exception of the Shipdham project which will be decided by the local authority planning committee. Locally and nationally, some applications are being overturned and rejected, but the current War in the middle East is only proving that global energy security cannot be reliant on the whim of powerful individuals and states alone

**What do these topics mean for you?** To be honest, a lot of disruption, uncertainty, and a lot of costs: not only will about £300m of Norfolk’s debt will now be assumed by the West which need to be financed now only by the West, but also Council taxes will increase as a result of “equalisation” to the higher districts surrounding us (anyone who has parked in North Norfolk of Kinga Lynn will know what that feels like). Breckland only counts for 5p in every £ of your Council tax Bill currently: the new “West” and “Devolved Mayoral Authority” will be covering everything, and many non-

statutory services in the future may be lost in the melee. And whatever the faults of Breckland – and there are many – direct access to representatives will be also reduced because wards in the West will be bigger than we are used to, and Ward Member responsibilities greatly increased. Despite no new powers or funding planned for Parish Councils, it is clear that a greater responsibility of local issues will be picked up by Parishes and Towns moving forward – we need to plan for that now.

For now, though, as long as we are able to, we will continue to work with local groups and individuals on a number of issues, many of which are highly confidential, but can range from housing to welfare support, and planning applications to licensing matters. We will also continue to make groups and individuals aware of grants and support systems, as they arise – e.g. help with heating oil which NCC are managing. Although Breckland will stop, our communities will not and we need to ensure everyone is prepared for what is to come.