

Breckland District Councillor report for Annual Parish Meetings of Shipdham with Scarning, inc. Cranworth – 2023

Paul and Lynda are proud to have served their ward for the past 20 years between them, and hope to continue post local elections.

As your District Councillors, our ward covers a vast geographical area stretching across from Cranworth and its hamlets through Shipdham to the parish of Scarning – a total of over 2500 households, including two large nursing homes, two schools and local businesses including Shipdham Airfield Industrial estate

During the past year one or both of us have attended every parish Council meeting in Shipdham, Scarning and Cranworth as well as hosting village forums, and initiating the inter village transport strategy: the road network between our villages is inadequate and much of our time is spent with traffic complaints liaising with the police, Norfolk Highways and other users (such as Serco) to minimise local disruption and frustration during the working day.

We have attended site visits, meetings with planners, environmental health and community officers, meeting businesses and business owners, as well as speaking on your behalf at a number of meetings at Breckland. Paul is a Cabinet member at Breckland, and Lynda chairs the General Purposes Cttee, and we both attend Cabinet and full Council, and spend much time working with officers on your behalf. Usually this proactive approach with officers mean we can achieve what we, our residents and our businesses are seeking. But even when we don't get what we want, we remain at the table too ensure any decision minimises the impact on local people and residents.

We have a good relationship with our Parish Councils and have worked with all of them on areas such as management of land, management of traffic, and management of development inside, and outside of village boundaries.

Following the pandemic, we have continued to ensure that individuals and organisations in Shipdham receive as much financial support as is possible, either through local or national grants – including money for the Queens's Platinum Jubilee, the forthcoming Coronation, the environment, and £2000 to enable the warm space project in All Saints Church. We were also instrumental in getting the Mobile Food Bus to call at Shipdham once a week.

Looking outside of Shipdham, Cranworth and Scarning, here are just a few key Breckland Council achievements from 2022-2023 based on the 4 strands of the Corporate Plan.as they affect this ward and the wider community of Breckland

Supporting our local environment

Actions have included investment in LED replacement street lights to bring the District and the County up to speed with what we have been delivering in Shipdham for our streetlight network over the last few years. This has helped reduce CO2 emissions in the District by 437 tonnes in the year. At the same time, we are being more energy efficient at our leisure centres and commenced trade waste collection for businesses, and installation of EV points in Swaffham and Watton in addition to those in Dereham and other locations in the district.

We have employed a Forestry Officer, planted over 700 trees in our towns and villages, and taken enforcement action against 100 waste offenders. More recently we have teamed with the National Trust to plant 3000 trees at Oxborough Hall to support their wildlife project, supporting biodiversity and sustainability.

Our bin collections now include the ability to collect batteries and small electrical items. And we have given a further £100K for local “green” schemes, working with schools re recycling and sustainability. For a small district council we are punching above our weight in terms of the local environment.

Thriving Places

We have invested £750K into Market Town Initiatives for our market towns, making them better and more vibrant places to visit.

We have helped businesses bounce back from the pandemic with £4.2M of funding. Last month the refurbishment of the Queen Mother’s garden in Dereham was formally opened, supplementing our investment in the Eleanor Fenn garden opened last year. Any visitor to Dereham should see what has been achieved at both of those locations, turning dead spaces into vibrant community gardens and hubs.

Less popular initially, but just as effective, is our work in car parking: visitors from our villages to Attleborough now have a better chance to park there now that restrictive parking has been introduced to our car parks meaning that commuters to Norwich or further afield don’t simply abuse the parking that we offer to shoppers to visit and see the vibrancy that Attleborough town can provide.

We have supported nearly 50 new enterprises, and created more than 65 jobs in the Start-Up programme as well as securing £1.6M to fund the boosting of skills and training: investment that supports both our businesses and our most vulnerable residents. When we say we want our business and our residents to thrive, we mean it.

Inspiring Communities

We have invested £4.6M for emergency housing: we are fortunate in our patch that there are few identified rough sleepers but when we do identify them we reach out. Our frustration often is that we cannot do more: we remain clear there is a housing shortage and we are seeking to do more to address this.

For the identified vulnerable in our community we have contributed £100,000 to support survivors of domestic abuse via the Daisy programme; we have introduced the Mobile Food bus that serves rural areas (Lynda and I are members if you can, please also become a member which helps fund the cost of this even if you do not

plan to use the service), and static discount food stores in Watton and Thetford: both services offer advice, counselling and help as well as food.

Our Mental health training continues to roll out across district enabling Mindful Towns and villages: 200 residents are now mental health champions, and hopefully initiatives in Shipdham can increase that number more.

Working with partners we have introduced of social prescribers, easing pressure on NHS, and seeking to head off challenges before they deteriorate into problems.

We have improved investment into leisure centres in Dereham and Thetford, and more recently announced plans to build new centres in Attleborough and Swaffham.

Our new handyman service means that residents who need small adaptations or building works in their homes can get this done quicker, and cheaper, than waiting for national funding to deliver.

We have given £120,000 to community projects – including those in our patch, and furthered this with additional financial support to range of celebrations across the District for both the Platinum Jubilee and the forthcoming coronation.

And we have welcomed 100 Ukranian refugees to our district with appropriate support to ensure their trauma can be lessened.

For a district with domestic challenges of our own, it is inspirational that we still look out for those less fortunate than ourselves.

Working Smarter

Whilst perhaps not the most important concern for some, how we work with residents over the next few years will be as important as what we do: we were using the term “agile working” before lockdown, and we will continue to work smarter with our residents in the future.

We are now in the top 10 of councils for our website accessibility: we still have call centres but the majority of our residents get from us what they need through the web, and the majority of them comes through Bobbie – the chatbot

16 staff have now completed Apprenticeship courses – the council continues to be a place where people want to work, and still last year we made £334,000 savings in efficiencies for the Council with more to come.

We exceeded our rental income target last year which helps keep council taxes low: our rental portfolio generates some £3.4m council tax payers across the district: the equivalent of around £75 for every Band D property allowing us to deliver what we deliver for our environment, places, and communities.

We make, and continue to make, the best use of social media and info sources to keep residents updated of what is happening in the district – from bins to the weather.

A recent survey of residents showed that 79% were satisfied/ happy/very happy with the services provided by Breckland Council: that is significantly above the national average or for the average in Norfolk.

During the year the Council was subject to a Peer review which concluded “The Council can be rightly proud of where it has been, where it has got to and its direction of travel”. Working smarter doesn’t always make good headlines, but it does make good sense: it allows our businesses and our residents to thrive.

This has been a long but important report for you all – and we are happy to take any questions.

As ever, we have been proud to serve you over the past year and would love to continue – but that's dependent on who you choose for the next four years. Thank you.

District Councillors for Shipdham with Scarning, inc. Cranworth

Lynda Turner	lynda.turner@breckland.gov.uk
Paul Hewett	paul.hewett@breckland.gov.uk