

Breckland Lives On!

Statement from Paul Hewett and Lynda Turner

It is rare that the term “shambolic” is an understatement, but the Government’s decision on Monday 7th September to abandon plans for Local Government Reorganisation in Norfolk can only be described in those terms. LGR was a ridiculous idea in the first place – Norfolk did not want or need it, and certainly could not afford it in either money or time: LGR was an ideological idea at best, never fully thought through, based on out of date information, and wholly unsuitable for a rural area such as ours. The proposals were rushed through, unfunded, and oblivious to the carnage they would cause to local people and local councils.

This was pointed out when announced two years ago, and reminded of, through the District Council Network in countless meetings. It was fully opposed by Breckland, as residents would lose access to local democracy and accountability. It was opposed by every other District Council in Norfolk. It was even opposed (and challenged) by Norfolk County Council a year ago (before Reform took over). It led to the postponement of County elections, and uncertainty over District ones. It created uncertainty for residents, Council Officers and Councils themselves, which were told, time and time again, they would need to wind down and cease in April 2018. Council was pitted against Council, as to what the final version of LGR would look like, 3, 2 or 1 Unitary Authorities for Norfolk. The public were consulted, and reconsulted. Millions of pounds, and thousands of Officer hours, were spent preparing for the change and an uncertain future. Indeed the only certainty in this whole process was council tax bills would increase as a result of LGR.

Then in the week before 7th September, someone in central government finally realised that the whole process was flawed and probably not legal. And ultimately pointless. So at the whim of the government, everything stops. We are told we won’t get our money back as something may start again. Or it may not. We are told that District Council elections will run next year on “existing boundaries”, but no one in central government knows where Breckland’s boundaries actually are, as they were changed during the initial stages of LGR (also at the same time an utterly pointless process). And we are also told that the Mayoral elections (already postponed from last year) will still take place for combined Norfolk and Suffolk, maybe in 2028 but the Mayoral authority still has no funding associated with it, and will cost another fortune. That is before anyone in central government realises that Norfolk and Suffolk are not the same. Maybe that will also be stopped at the last minute.

So where does that leave you, our residents? Right now Lynda and I simply do not have a clue. But services will continue, bins will be emptied (even the unfunded costly food waste ones), and we will continue to do our best to represent you and your interests. So sorry this doesn’t sound more positive than it is. We will keep you updated at Parish Council meetings as and when we can!

Cllr Paul Hewett and Cllr Lynda Turner – Shipdham with Scarning Ward