

Report from Lynda Turner and Paul Hewett – elected District Councillors for Shipdham with Scarning (including Cranworth): April/May 2021

During the past year Breckland Council has continued to support all communities and local businesses during the pandemic, with all front line services delivered (if occasionally late!)

Working for our communities

All communities have been impacted with major COVID outbreaks in some locations, but we have risen above the disruption and refocused our resources to support each and every community. Officers have worked from home, many were (and still are) redeployed to ensure the right support where needed.

Vulnerability was high on the agenda, and food parcels, welfare calls and prescriptions were all delivered by the thousand. Community hubs were set up in each market town, and will continue to operate. The Silver Social went online and provided a lifeline for those older people isolated or lonely. We strengthened partnerships with many agencies to deliver a seamless service at pace. The first social supermarket opened in Thetford, and specific targeted training was delivered to members and staff alike. My Future social was launched for young people, in particular young carers, and £1.8m was spent on a new temporary housing unit. During lockdowns all rough sleepers and homeless were offered accommodation. This is not the “traditional” service provision for a District Council for its residents, but if it helps our communities to thrive it should be. And besides, these are “not traditional” times.

Working for a Stronger Breckland

The economy was key - £42M given out in grant funding, with visible support and engagement with our businesses. Council tax relief and rates holidays, hardship payments and many other financial assistances were given. The Council has a balanced budget going forward, but efficiencies will still need to be made.

The market town initiative was launched with Hemingway assisting major programme in Thetford. Tourism has risen up the agenda, to try and help build a better, stronger community across Breckland Spring back programme. And the new Waste Contact has started, Breckland has a joint contract with two other authorities to deliver a better service at a lower cost. All this to help maintain our position as the lowest District Council Tax in the UK.

Working for a brighter future

The Council declared a Climate Emergency, and are working with other agencies. For sustainability, we have adopted a 2035 carbon neutral goal, delivery of a green agenda, green grants scheme, and new smart waste vehicles. Our Worksmart programme will enable continued agile working, including overnight hours in some areas, enabling the Council to get closer to residents.

At the same time the Breckland Conference centre has been redesigned to be multi purpose, fit for the future, although we will continue with “virtual democracy” using Zoom and Teams where appropriate.

The Council voted to review its management partnership with South Holland, as we move into a different future. The 10 year partnership worked extremely well, but with the impact of the pandemic etc it is time for change. Breckland will continue to work with and share appropriate services with local agencies – but with a single status. There will be a new Senior Management Team, staff and member support, a brand new corporate plan, offices and resources fit for the future – all to Build Back Stronger towards a brighter future for the Council and our residents.

Working for you

The key message is Breckland Cares – about our community, and about the future. At times of increasing uncertainty, it is a privilege to represent you in a Council focussed on delivering best value to the people it represents. For every £1 of your district council tax element, the council spends over £7 per head, all under a single ambition – “to enable our businesses and residents to thrive.”

In addition to their ward duties, both Lynda and Paul have extra responsibilities Lynda has continued as Council Chairman and Older Peoples Champion and Paul has continued as Executive Member for Contracts and Assets.

Happy to answer any questions via phone or email

Lynda and Paul