

Report from Breckland district Councillor Phil Cowen for May – July meeting

As we approach the end of the Council year I thought it would be helpful to review the year's achievements and reference them to the Corporate Plan which is refreshed on an annual basis.

Our vision is to make Breckland 'a place where people and business can thrive' and this is underpinned by four priorities, outlined in the Corporate Plan:

- Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive
- Providing the right services at the right time and in the right way
- Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth
- Enabling stronger, more independent communities

In setting out to achieve this vision, Breckland Council's officers undertake their 'day jobs' whilst putting in place the mechanisms to address the four priorities in order to deliver services that are affordable and relevant to our residents. Some examples are

"Supporting Breckland to develop and thrive"

We have developed our draft Local Plan, which has been through its final round of consultation and is now awaiting inspector feedback. The examination in public will take place between April and June and we anticipate that by the end of the calendar year we will be preparing to take the new plan forward to Council for adoption.

We are preparing evidence for the expansion of the Cambridge-Norwich Tech Corridor to support the delivery of business growth in the district including sites in Snetterton and Thetford and we continue to work with partners on scoping a business case for enhancements to the A47, including backing calls for central government investment.

We have developed a strategic health and wellbeing action plan and, in partnership with Public Health, identified Thetford as a priority area for investigation on health and wellbeing issues.

Declared an air quality management area to address levels of traffic-related nitrogen dioxide in an area of Swaffham. Organised a public consultation on potential measures to improve air quality in the town centre. Working with stakeholders to improve air quality in this area.

Through our development company, Breckland Bridge we have been delivering much needed housing both full market and affordable in the district.

"Enabling stronger, more independent communities"

We have launched our Market Town Initiative, which includes a range of collaborative projects that will ensure each market town is economically vibrant, achieves long-term sustainability, has a clear identity, is a popular destination, has an enhanced environment, and secures third-party investment and implemented new partnership with ShopAppy, which will give local independent businesses a central web presence and enable shoppers to make purchases online 24/7.

We have implemented various initiatives for our communities including:

- The Breckland Lottery, which will enable residents to support local community groups through ticket sales.
- In partnership with Norfolk Community Foundation, allocated £250,000+ of grants to projects in the district, including children's play area and outdoor sport provisions.
- Commenced delivery of the 'Silver Social' project which is delivering workshops across the district to those who are at risk of being socially isolated.
- Launched community fridges in the district's market towns, including the first in Norfolk.

"Developing the local economy to be vibrant with continued growth"

We have secured grants and funding to help to unlock key investment sites that have been blocked through lack of infrastructure funding in the district:

- £10m Housing Investment Fund (HIF) central government funding to support infrastructure projects and delivery of new homes on the outskirts of Thetford.
- £2.65m from New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to upgrade Snetterton Heath's existing electricity supply and support substantial business growth.
- £300,000 from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government's Land Release Fund, which will support an infrastructure project to provide access onto Council-owned land in Shipdham and enable the development of housing in the future.

In addition, we have completed a pilot business rates reduction scheme in Dereham and announced roll-out of district-wide scheme from April 2018 and developed our 'Open for Business' approach, ensuring support and advice is available for businesses of all sizes. Made regular visits to key businesses in the district to provide advice and assistance on the range of support services available from the council and partners.

We have made referrals for business to the New Anglia LEP to facilitate and support grants for business growth in the district.

At the request of town councils, agreed to implement pilot enforcement periods at some Swaffham and Attleborough car parks.

"Providing the right services, at the right time and in the right way"

We have reduced waiting list for housing and increased speed of housing adaptations delivery and agreed an investment strategy which will see around £1m used to provide new temporary accommodation to help meet the needs of those who experience homelessness in the district and keep families together.

We have changed the way in which some services are accessed and provided including:

- New digital services including a 'connect and serve' log-in for ARP customers to improve the customer experience and ability to access their benefit information
- Created a co-located area at Breckland House in Thetford which is utilised by: Children's Services; Social Workers; Health Visitors; Flagship Homes; Norfolk Constabulary. Fortnightly 'referral' meetings have been established as well as monthly strategic boards. Discussions have been taking place with GPs to determine how they can link into the Help Hub.
- We will see shortly, Department for Work and Pensions collocate in Breckland House in Thetford, creating a services hub similar to established office in Dereham
- An updated council website's design and functions, promoted new digital options for our services (including via Transforming Breckland residents' magazine), such as application forms and e-payments, which have made services more accessible while saving time and money.
- Increased recycling rates - from 39.9% in 15/16 to 40.3% in 16/17.
- Wider use of social media to include regular information about day-to-day service delivery (#ourbreckland) as well as short films discussing recent decisions made by the council.

Phil Cowen, All Saints and Wayland Ward

Breckland Council