

Breckland Council Year in Review 2020/21

As you'll be aware, 2020/21 was a year which was dominated by the international pandemic. It had an impact on people's lives around the world, including in Breckland.

Throughout the pandemic, ***Breckland Council's top priorities have been to protect the lives and livelihoods of its residents.***

Business support

We've distributed more than £42m in local and national grant funding to local businesses to help them weather the storm of coronavirus and have been on hand throughout to help them make changes to comply with national legislation, trade safely, and protect jobs.

Most recently, we've set aside £2m to help businesses recover from the impact of the coronavirus pandemic and go on to thrive. The support includes:

- A Shop Front Improvement Scheme which will help pay for a lick of paint through to a completely replaced shopfront to make local shops more attractive
- Grants worth up to £5k to help businesses invest in equipment which enables them to trade safely, from extra protective equipment and screens to a marquee or outdoor seating to support social distancing
- Money and training to help business trade digitally, including new payment systems, websites and online advertising

We've committed to support any business that needs it, so urge your local businesses that need help to get in touch: www.breckland.gov.uk/businesssupport

There for our communities

You'll also be aware that Breckland Council has coordinated a massive relief effort to help individuals who have been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic.

From sending food parcels, making welfare calls and delivering medication, as well as releasing grants to those in most financial-need, we have been there when people needed us.

Our new team of **Covid Support Officers** have been working across the district to provide a reassuring presence, give advice, guidance, and investigate reports of any instances of breaches.

Most recently, we launched a **Covid Safe Scheme**, which recognises businesses in the district which have put in place measures and working practices to help protect their staff and customers from coronavirus.

We've been supporting and inspecting Breckland businesses to assess their anti-covid measures, including the provision of protective equipment such as screens and masks, hand sanitiser for staff and customers, and opportunities to maintain social distancing.

Businesses which have been assessed and given accreditation are listed on our website and given a sticker, for prominent display in their window, so residents know that you can shop there safely and with confidence.

Outside of the pandemic

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While the year was dominated by the pandemic response, the council continued to operate its core functions whilst also made progress in a number of other important areas / projects.

This is despite the challenges of the Chief Executive retiring from her post, a strategic review undertaken to bring the strategic partnership between South Holland District Council and us to a close, and in turn a whole restructure of the senior management team.

This includes adopting our inaugural **Sustainability Strategy**, which pledges for the council to be carbon neutral by 2035.

We've ring-fenced an additional £0.5m, on top of the £2m we already spend annually, to deliver a range of 'green' schemes. This includes £100k for a community grants scheme to support grassroots environmental projects, £100k for tree planting and similar schemes, and £200k to make our buildings more efficient. We've also switched to a green energy tariff for our buildings.

We began work on converting the former day unit on Elm Road in Thetford into a **new temporary accommodation centre** for people who are homeless, or emergency accommodation. Work is due to be complete around the end of the year. The project will cost £1.8m altogether, including the cost of Breckland Council buying the building from Norfolk County Council, which took place in 2019. When opened, the centre will provide expert support and high quality accommodation for people in need of good-quality, safe, emergency housing. The new facility has been designed to house single adults, couples, and families from Thetford and the wider Breckland district. In addition to supporting them with their temporary housing needs, Breckland Council will be working with other public sector partners to provide support to people using the site on a wide range of social, employment and personal matters and help them back into permanent accommodation.

We've continued our support for our market towns through our **Market Towns Initiative**, which ringfences £150k per town over three years to support projects which address their specific needs and challenges.

We're also working hard to ensure Breckland has a bright future. We've commissioned urban regeneration experts **Hemingway Design** to support our vision work for the future of Thetford, including engagement with local people to help them shape the development of the town.

And, more recently, launched our **Town Delivery Plans** project – named Future Breckland, which will see strategic plans drawn up for each of our towns to help make the case for national funding and align various organisations under one identified vision. This work will shortly get underway focused on Dereham, before engagement opportunities are held in our other towns over the course of the coming year. This isn't about redesigning town centres. This is about transport, skills, health and so much more. Everyone within the District is being encouraged to engage in this exciting process.

We've also set a **balanced budget for 2021/22**, which will not only protect frontline services but see further investment made in several key areas. This includes investing in projects which help our towns and surrounding villages to thrive, ring-fencing money to help vulnerable residents, supporting our businesses to spring back from coronavirus, and expanding council teams focused on tackling flytipping, climate change, and animal welfare.

- We're expanding teams focused on tackling fly tipping, business support, Covid-19 advice, and animal welfare issues. Our new animal welfare officer started in post within the last couple of weeks and as part of their role will be inspecting animal breeding businesses to ensure animal welfare standards are being maintained

- We have invested £1m+ in our Inspiring Communities programme, supporting residents susceptible to loneliness in later life, drug gangs, domestic abuse, or poor mental health
- £150k for each of the district's five market towns, over three years, to fund projects which help them and their surrounding villages to thrive
- £500k to deliver actions which tackle climate change
- £17m national and regional funding secured to improve local electricity supplies, which will enable housing and business growth
- £1.8m to create a brand-new temporary accommodation site for people who are homeless
- Saving £3 million over 4 years through back-office efficiency, digitalisation and generating new income.

Breckland Council in the news in 2020/21

April 2020

- Following the start of the pandemic, Breckland Council had already distributed just over £16m in grant funding to local businesses. The money, which was provided by central government, helped support local businesses which may be particularly affected by the current lack of trade. Breckland wrote to more than 3,000 local businesses eligible for grants worth between £10k and £25k.
- Planning permission for up to 4,000 new homes on the edge of Attleborough was formally issued by Breckland Council after a £34m community investment agreement was reached with the developer. The money will fund the construction of new primary schools and invest in the existing Attleborough Academy. A new linear park, allotments, and open green spaces will be created, a community centre constructed, and contributions made to support indoor sport, libraries, and public transport provision in the town.

May 2020

- Breckland Council created an online roll of honour to thank local businesses, community groups and volunteers for the support they've shown in helping care for members of the district's communities.
- We announced a new grant award of £5000 for Norfolk Accident Rescue Service (NARS), which will help continue their vital work in supporting the emergency services and saving lives in the community.
- Norwich City and its football foundation boosted the local food supplies effort by donating 120 parcels to the council, containing essential non-perishable food items such as tinned goods and dried foods. The boxes also included hand sanitiser, toilet roll, sweet treats, a NCFE gift and a note from celebrity chef and Canaries shareholder Delia Smith.

June 2020

- The first 'virtual' committee meeting was held on Monday, June 1. The committee meeting was held via video-conference and streamed live to the council's YouTube page. The video

feed enabled people to observe the meeting's debates and the decisions being made.

- In response to a rise in litter and fly tipping in the district, a number of case studies were shared via social media and local press. These included the “world’s most expensive coffee break”, where 3 staff littered coffee cups in the countryside resulting in a £240 fine. A fly tipping incident solved in just 3 hours resulted in a £300 fine, and £600 fine was issued to a Thetford resident who dismantled a car in local woodland.
- As shops started to reopen after an initial lockdown period, Breckland launched the "Shop with Confidence" initiative, part of a much wider "Do Business with Confidence" campaign to support every business and every job possible during the Covid recovery phase.
- Breckland Council passed a significant milestone this month when it despatched its latest food parcels, which contained its 10,000th meal for vulnerable residents in the district.
- Two charities which offer support to people who have experienced domestic abuse in Breckland and Norfolk benefitted from a shared donation of over £3000. The Daisy Programme and Leeway Domestic Abuse Support Service received the funding after Breckland Council's Chairman selected them as her charity beneficiaries for 2019/20.
- Great news for birds and bees - In July we started to provide developers with planning advice and guidance which will help them create sustainable habitats for wildlife as part of its emerging approach to climate change and the environment. The advice will include the incorporation of bird boxes and bee or swift bricks into housing plans.
- Armed Forces Day - The council raised the flag at its offices to mark the occasion and called on residents in Breckland to take a selfie of them saluting and share it on social media using the hashtag #ArmedForcesDay2020 and #OurBreckland

July 2020

- Breckland Council and Solo Housing joined forces to deliver a joint new project to help rough sleepers across the district. The £40.5k 'Off the Street' project was funded by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government as part of the national Rough Sleeping Initiative. The project enabled Breckland Council and Solo Housing to provide temporary accommodation to people who were homeless or sleeping rough in Breckland, helping them into more settled accommodation.
- Environmental news - It was announced that the council will move away from its existing energy tariff and switch to a renewable energy tariff as part of its commitment to sustainability / tackling climate change.
- Also as part of our sustainability work, new steps were unveiled to create more bee-friendly habitats across the district. The council announced it would be leaving some verges and land to grow wild, or operate a 'cut less, cut later' approach, to help bees and other pollinators to thrive.
- Breckland Council's Silver Social Project announced a new series of arts events online, while physical venues were closed and social distancing guidance is in place. The new programme

included acclaimed singing comedy sensations, the Opera Dudes, and creative writing and poetry sessions from Dan Simpson.

August 2020

- Breckland Council announced it would be providing new funding to enable the Daisy Programme to establish a community support team for residents vulnerable to domestic abuse. Consisting of an Early Help Community Lead and six or more volunteer Daisy Ambassadors, Breckland Domestic Abuse Community Support Team will help people affected by domestic abuse feel less vulnerable and help them rebuild their lives.
- A covid outbreak at Banham Poultry made local and national news. Breckland Council worked with Norfolk County Council and other partners to tackle the specific outbreak in the Breckland-based factory.
- A new housing policy enabled vulnerable and disabled people to access new funding and support to meet their bespoke housing needs. The revised Housing Assistance Policy saw funding ring-fenced to help disabled residents to live more independently in their own homes and improve housing conditions for vulnerable residents. The previous policy already offered grants of up to £30,000 per household to help pay for adaptations, but the newly revised policy will now include the option for owner-occupiers to take a loan of £10,000 if disabled adaptations cost more than the initial £30,000 grant.
- A new business grant in Breckland was launched to help businesses to continue safely trading despite Covid-19. The fund was available to local businesses in the tourism and hospitality sectors and could see them receive up to £5,000 to help put in place safety measures and invest in ways to keep trading successfully over the winter months.

September 2020

- Swaffham received 700k towards the protection and enhancement of its historic high street and surrounding areas, with £380,000 of this total from Historic England funding. We're working with partners to highlight and protect this historic high street.
- We worked with Dereham Town FC and the Daisy Programme to raise awareness of local support services and start conversations about domestic abuse. This forms part of the Inspiring Communities programme which focuses on the prevention of domestic abuse. The football club adopted the Daisy Programme as its shirt sponsor to help highlight this service.

October 2020

- Breckland Council picked up an RSPCA award for the fifth year in a row, this time scooping the Gold Award status in the Stray Dog category. This is part of the ongoing commitment to protecting animal welfare. We've since invested in a new animal welfare officer to carry out inspections and ensure local businesses meet animal welfare standards.

- Breckland Council's Our Breckland Lottery hit a major milestone this month, with £100,000 for local good causes through online lottery ticket sales.

November 2020

- The Council rolled out the Local Restrictions Support Grant scheme and started to distribute further grants to Breckland businesses to help them through the pandemic.
- A new community shop, The Burrell Shop, launched in Thetford to ensure good quality, affordable food is available to people living close by. It was supported by Breckland Council and one of the ways we are helping our residents who are most in-need of support.

December 2020

- In the run up to Christmas – normally peak shopping time – we urged shoppers to spend money with local traders as part of our new 'Enjoy. Discover. Explore' campaign. This is one way we have protected livelihoods during the pandemic. We've since launched our Spring Back campaign to help businesses thrive following a difficult period during the height of the pandemic.

January 2021

- Urban regeneration expert, Hemingway Design, was appointed to help shape Thetford's future. Public consultation followed which saw strong engagement with local people helping to shape the future of the town.
- Breckland Council agreed to sell the Green Britain Centre in Swaffham to an expanding international business. This will bring a new business and more jobs to the town. More information about this is expected to be released publicly soon.
- We helped Dereham's Mid Norfolk Foodbank secure a new storage unit after releasing funding worth £2,500.
- The Digital Breckland programme launched to help businesses get set up online. The initiative provided training and advice to help businesses receive online orders, take digital payment, and get future-ready for an evolving high street.

February 2021

- Breckland Council launched 'MyFuture: Social' programme of events for young carers. Virtual events were organised to support carers in our area, offer them skills advice and employment opportunities, as well as a chance to socialise with peers and develop a support network.

- Breckland Council members voted to adopt a balanced budget for 21/22, which protects frontline services and invests in key areas – such as climate change, flytipping, and animal welfare.
- Breckland Bridge – the partnership between Breckland Council and developer The Land Group – completed a set of new homes Chantry Court in Attleborough. The scheme is helping to meet the rising demand for housing in the district.

March 2021

- Building work starts at Elm Road, in Thetford, to create a new unit for people in need of temporary accommodation. Work is expected to be completed on the scheme around the end of this year.
- Members voted to bring South Holland and Breckland’s partnership to end after more than a decade sharing a management team. The partnership was a big success, but a changing landscape, including local government reorganisation proposals, meant both councils opted to bring the partnership to a close and consider more local (within the same county) new partnerships.
- To help break the chains of transmission, an asymptomatic testing programme was rolled out in Breckland. This meant anybody without covid symptoms could access a free test to make sure they didn’t have coronavirus without knowing it and spreading it.
- A brand-new waste contract launched in Breckland, after the joined commissioning work in partnership with councils in west and north Norfolk. The move saved taxpayers money by cutting procurement costs while securing ‘best value’ service. Working together also brings benefits to service delivery, as cross-boundary working means vehicles, staff and other assets can be shared so the teams can work more effectively across multiple areas. During the first year of the contract, investment will also be made into shared IT systems, so real-time service information is available to residents and it is made easier for people to book additional services online, such as garden waste collections. The contract has also seen a brand-new fleet of bin collection trucks and other vehicles rolled out, which will operate across all three council areas. These include reduced emissions and hybrid vehicles. We can also now offer a commercial waste service for the first time and this has got off to a great start. We’ve already issued around 200 quotes to prospective clients and have over 40 customers signed up to receive commercial bin collections from the council.
- ‘Spring Back’ grants and support to help Breckland businesses reopen their doors. The new scheme includes:
 - A Shop Front Improvement Scheme, which makes funding available to businesses wanting to make improvements and enhancements to their shop frontage - from a lick of paint through to a completely replaced front.
 - Covid Safe and Adaptions Grants worth up to £5k to help businesses invest in equipment which enables them to trade safely, from extra protective equipment and screens, to a marquee or outdoor seating to support social distancing.

- Any Breckland-based business will be able to have an assessment of their digital offer, with money available to help them trade digitally. The Digital Breckland project will support new payment systems through to online advertising.
 - A streamlined pavement licence application process to help support businesses create outdoor seating areas, where appropriate, and encourage social distancing and covid-safe practices. This is in addition to online training and support being available from the council's Licensing and Public Protection teams.
 - For prospective businesses, Breckland Council is offering an Expanded enterprise and start-up scheme, providing funding and advice for people looking to launch their new business in the district. An earlier iteration of the scheme has already helped 10 innovative businesses get off the ground in the first few months of 2021 and the council hopes to help dozens more over the coming months.
- People living in Breckland can now contact the district council via video call, as the council expands its customer services offering. We launched the video call appointments system to make it as easy as possible for people to get in touch with the council, building on existing methods of contact including phone calls, email, web chat and online forms. It comes off the back of a rise in popularity in video calls during the pandemic and means residents will be able to speak virtually face to face with one of the council's Customer Services officers. Appointments will take place from the comfort of a resident's home via the video conferencing service, Microsoft Teams. Calls require access to a smartphone, laptop or a tablet and a stable internet connection.