

District Councillors' report for All Saints and Wayland Ward, May 2019

In writing this report, I am conscious that owing to a long standing commitment I, Phil Cowen, may not be able to attend all the Annual Parish Meetings in the ward for which my apologies. Sarah Suggitt and I will aim to attend as many Parish Council meetings as practical in the coming months and years and we shall work as a team to represent the interests of all residents and businesses in this part of Breckland that we call home.

Looking back over the year 2018-2019 it is appropriate to reflect on some achievements that your council, officers and members alike, have delivered in our key objective of serving the various communities throughout the District

1. We have established a Community Reserve of £1.4 million that is committed to help support our residents, via:

- The development of Breckland Innovation Den to support entrepreneurs
- The preparation of leisure feasibility studies for Swaffham and Attleborough
- The development of support services for young people struggling in employment and housing
- Supporting a start-up scheme for businesses and entrepreneurs on the high street businesses

This will enable councillors to invest £1.4m in 2019/20 into projects which directly support communities across the district and follows on from the £1.7m fund in 2018/19 for similar initiatives.

2. MARKET TOWN INITIATIVE

The market towns initiative makes funding available for projects that focus on: "Supporting market towns in the district to be attractive to new businesses and visitors to the area whilst meeting the needs of rural communities and businesses". Therefore we have set aside £250,000 in 2018/19 to support this initiative that will allow us to lever in additional funding from other sources including the Local Enterprise Partnership.

Whilst aimed at the five market towns in Breckland this will benefit our rural communities as villages use towns as hubs. Thus, strong, vibrant towns mean more employment and leisure opportunities locally.

Funded projects include:

- Improvements to Swaffham Buttercross, Batten Island and murals in Thetford
- Purchase of the Glutton to improve street cleanliness
- 'On the Green' activities at Thetford Riverside
- New Market stalls in Watton and Swaffham
- Helped establish a new ParkRun in Watton and Swaffham
- ShopAppy and 12 Elves of Christmas Campaign – promoting local traders and enabling people to choose to shop local / see what's available on our high streets
- We have developed the BreckWorld App – driving visits to our attractions and towns via films and an interactive treasure hunt in an app

3. INNOVATION DEN

After receiving applications earlier this year, the Breckland Innovation Den invited 10 potentially promising businesses and new start-ups to pitch for a share of £100,000 business development funding.

The applicants had to demonstrate how the funding would help them to deliver products or services within the district, drive employment, and explain how the grant would help them make their business sustainable for future growth.

4. BRECKLAND LOTTERY

Breckland Lottery continues to grow and provide a way for communities to support important local good causes. We now have over 60 good causes signed up, selling over 1,200 tickets per week and are projected to raise £40,000 for good causes in the first year.

5. BRECKLAND LANDLORD FORUM LAUNCHED

We are committed to engaging with local landlords to support them and encourage improvement in local housing options

6. CO-LOCATION OF DEPARTMENT OF WORK AND PENSIONS

Following the successful co-location of the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) into our offices at Elizabeth House in Dereham we have moved DWP into our Breckland House office in Thetford. This has created greater efficiency for our residents who use both services.

NATIONAL AWARDS SHORTLIST

- **Best Local Authority Arts Initiative in the 'Heart For The Arts 2019 awards'** – Silver Social project. An arts programme to engage rural, socially isolated people to engage in the arts and make new friends
- **Innovation Award at the Local Government Chronicle Award 2019** – finalist for commercialisation of Breckland Training Services and unique service offer across the country

Even though we are setting aside funds to help to drive the economy of the District in an upwards direction I am delighted to report that the Council is in a sound financial position going forward. Our prudent management of our budgeting process, innovative ways of providing our core services and our continued investment in our commercial property portfolio all help to generate the finance necessary to carry out these initiatives

Phil Cowen & Sarah Suggitt

All Saints and Wayland Ward, May 2019