

GORDON BAMBRIDGE

Annual Breckland District Councillor report April 2025 - March 2026

PERSONAL

This year has been one of the busiest in terms of council work that I have experienced in 23 years as a councillor, first in Eynsford ward and for last ten+ years in Upper Wensum Ward. The increase in workload comes from three main areas,

First, many more asks from residents across the area with problems relating to planning or benefits plus the multitude of single issue questions that arise in life - these have always been there, but this year just more of them plus so many road issues have been raised with me, although these are really a county council matter I could not ignore potholes, road surface failings or closures relating to the A47 improvements which most have welcomed despite the problems.

Second, Local Government Reform with re-alignment of elections and mayoral proposals etc. Both I and your County Councillor Bill Borrett have updated the parish councils over the year and before, but any who may have missed out, please get in touch. The plain fact is that this single group of issues added considerably to the almost 150 formal meetings over the year. These include the 25 council meetings I sit on plus the 14 council meetings I attended, but not on the committee, but attend to represent the ward or individuals in some way. I normally attend all full council meetings plus am an allocated member of Planning Committee and usually attend Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee as an observer.

Third, the additional work most councillors commit to. This is mainly made up of organisations outside of Breckland, I have sat on Norfolk Rivers IDB or its predecessor for over 23 years which also means attending other flood related meetings such as Norfolk Strategic Flood Alliance, This also involves keeping up with such as Association of Drainage Authorities, and Water Level Management Alliance. plus a few odds and ends.

(The full list of some 40 such formal organisations and who sits on them representing all of Breckland on the whole councils behalf can be found on the Outside Bodies page of the councils website)

On all of these issues I have reported to your parish council in various ways, but I am happy to discuss with residents of the ward if required.

Essentially the added number of meetings has meant it is increasingly difficult to attend all parish meetings. Now with 14 villages 11 of which hold regular meetings and 3 occasional parish meetings, some of which clash. There is an increase in evening meetings by Breckland or others, and many meetings are out of the area and many last all day.

I am not normally available to attend meetings on second Tuesdays.

BRECKLAND

TAX

Breckland, as a council is destined to disappear in a couple of years time, but we are still a fully functioning district council and one of very few able to produce a balanced budget and of course still producing investment funds which support non statutory services in the district and we are still open to bids for support funding of various projects. A previous council at Breckland sold the council housing stock, but unlike others it invested this in other property

creating revenue funding for use on an annual basis, this portfolio has grown and currently produces more income than our domestic council tax enabling that to still be the lowest district council tax in England.

For example

BAND D £123.48 per year for all Breckland services, you also pay for County £1843.38 pa, Police £344.79pa, parish in our ward between zero and £124.15pa and in some cases other such as street lighting. Our villages all set their own tax according to local needs. Your parish council can precept to cover many essential expenses, and can spread such over a number of years for community good.

Bear in mind the majority of Breckland homes are band A to C and pay less and bands E to H pay more. We do not penalise second homes at this time and they pay a single banding in Breckland. People on lower incomes can still claim a reduction according to need. Full details of all council taxes and spending can be found on the minutes of the February 26 Council meeting

BINS

We are still operating a bi-weekly waste with a matching recycling collection, but very soon we will be forced to create a food waste collection also. I examined this a few years ago when I had that portfolio and we concluded that for a rural area where domestic waste is dealt with somewhat differently to urban areas we could not justify it in terms of cost or need. Whilst many of us councillors and far more residents are of the same view it must proceed so that will be on the way soon. We also operate a business waste collection service, a garden waste service.

PLANNING

This service guides the building of almost every property in Breckland, a few such as some farm or industrial units, some ancient monuments and some very large developments which pass to County or National governments, but even there we have say as consultees. The local plan will have consultations now and will be examined for approval about the end of this year.

Planning applications always seem to attract supporters and opposers, but I am happy always to give advice individually and will present the opinion of the parish or community either on the planning committee or to officers considering it.

Many will be aware that the recent proposals to site the Norwich Livestock market within the ward has now been withdrawn.

We have had a recent call for sites within the district to try and accommodate the governments target for housing and individual villagers can look up their area on the Breckland Website. Planning includes building control department. We are still open for neighbourhood planning proposals

HOUSING

Breckland have agreed that building sites of above 10 should include 25% affordable houses. These provide accommodation for local lower income families and those starting out, either to rent or buy.

We also are open to so called exception sites for rent or part ownership housing for local peoples this is a consideration for communities wishing to grow in a controlled manner working with Breckland.

The new local plan will detail the level of development Breckland feel is appropriate to your community. You can comment on this. Basically Breckland has to produce just over 900 new homes each year to 2040.

BENEFITS

Breckland controls certain benefits and this is normally between the recipients and the council, or specifically Anglia Revenues Partnership who you will all know as it sends out our council tax account. This is one of the most successful ventures by your council in the past 20 or so years.

LEISURE

Breckland have contracted out our two main leisure centres in the district at Dereham and Thetford, but also support those in other towns and consider grants for villages seeking their own facilities.

CAR PARKS

Source of much mis-information online, but Breckland are in the process of passing car parks to the towns, this is part of our policy of ensuring that assets remain within the communities.

PROPERTY

Our commercial property portfolio is currently about 98% let and in 25/6 earned the district £3,185,326.

Some small properties or land areas are being offered to communities who are free to take up or refuse, most villages have done this. Private buyers are welcome to ask about ownership.

LICENSING

Certain activities need licenses to trade. Breckland will hold regular meetings to consider applications for sale of alcohol or tobacco etc, we also will license commercial tips, keeping of wild animals and many more activities.

Add to the above - **public health inspections, cleaning streets, removing graffiti, electoral registration and running elections, supporting various community projects etc,**

As I prepare this to send we are informed:-

The LGR have decided on a three way Unitary Council for Norfolk. We will be Western area.

County Council elections will be held on May 7th

We expect these Unitary elections to be Early May 2027 (no information on District situation).

We expect parish councils to be elected May 2027

We expect Unitary Councils to 'go live' in April 2028

We expect Mayoral elections in May 2028

Gordon Bambridge, Member Breckland District Council, Upper Wensum Ward