

District Councillors Report

July 2023

Local Plan:

When the current Local Plan was adopted in November 2019 it contained a policy, INF 03, inserted by the Inspector at the examination in public. This required Breckland Council to submit updated policies on housing, economic development, gypsy and traveller accommodation and internal space standards. The new policies were submitted for examination in public late in 2022. The Inspector in charge of the examination has submitted an interim report which, in a very pragmatic way, has cleared all the policy updates required by INF 03 to be included in the Local Plan full update which is being carried out currently. The Inspectors interim report has been published on the planning policy section of Breckland's website.

A reminder that none of the sites submitted by landowners, developers and agents have been assessed for their suitability for development and subsequent inclusion in the new Local Plan. The results of the recent Issues and Options consultation and the fully appraised sites will be issued for a further consultation later this year. The timelines for the completion of the Local Plan are contained in the Local Development Scheme (LDS) document which is available to view on the Councils website. The LDS is "living" document so if the timelines change, they will be reflected there.

It is intended that the draft Local Plan is submitted for examination in December 2024, and if found "sound" at that time, adopted by December 2026.

All the documents relating to the Local Plan full update can be found at <https://brecklandlocalplan.commonplace.is/>

Nutrient Neutrality:

Mitigation schemes to offset the harm nitrates and phosphates are causing to certain rivers and their catchments are currently being worked up by the Environment Agency and government departments. Schemes will include the creation of new wetlands which will be designed to "soak up" the pollutants. The first scheme, costing c£30m, started in March in the Tees area. Developers will be able to buy credits to offset the pollution from their development, it is estimated (in some quarters) that neutrality mitigation will add around £10k to the cost of a rural dwelling. Other areas will be rolled out in the future.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

Another reminder that from November this year most developments (small sites from April 2024) will have to prove, through on-site measures or purchased credits, that the biodiversity of the site is measurably better than before the development took place. This will require developers to carry out a baseline biodiversity assessment of their site plus a post development assessment to prove the biodiversity uplift. The government are asking for a 10% uplift in biodiversity on all

development with few exceptions. BNG is in addition to, and does not replace existing protection for protected sites, habitats or species. Habitat enhanced or created for BNG purposes must be managed and maintained for 30 years. The Natural England website contains a quick guide to BNG.

Housing the Homeless:

Addressing the housing crisis and homelessness is one of the key challenges facing Breckland, as well as the rest of the country. Nationally there has been a 50% rise in no fault evictions over the past year. In Breckland we have seen the numbers in temporary accommodation double over the last 3 years.

Breckland has already taken bold steps towards tackling these challenges. In 2021-22 the Council invested £1.8m into the Elm House site in Thetford, creating new temporary accommodation for up to 35 people. In 2022 the Council started a programme of targeted acquisitions to use as temporary accommodation. In February 2023 it was agreed at full Council that external funding should be used to continue to expand this programme. Capital funding has seen the Council obtain ownership and refurbish around 26 properties some of which provide sustainable homes for those welcomed to the area under the Afghan and Ukrainian resettlement schemes.

As part of the programme the Council agreed to review the best solutions for holding and managing housing assets. A strong legal and regulatory steer has indicated that the Council should become a Registered Provider (RP) with the Regulator of Social Housing. Access to more external funding to purchase properties and relief from stamp duty on the purchase price are just some of the benefits which RPs enjoy.

The Cabinet will discuss becoming a RP at its meeting on 3rd July.

Business Waste Collection Service:

Breckland Council have commenced a business waste collection service. This will provide an affordable and flexible waste collection service with reliable collections as often as is needed, including one off and seasonal events. For details visit www.waste.breckland.gov.uk .

Contacting Breckland:

Applying for housing and council tax, building control inspections, garden waste collections, voter registration and more: - www.breckland.gov.uk/applyforit

If an issues affects you, your property or your community: - www.brecklad.gov.uk/reportit

You can be kept up to date with all things to do with Breckland Council by subscribing to receive information that interests you at www.breckland.gov.uk/email-updates

Mark Kiddle-Morris
Member for Launditch Ward.

1st July, 2023.