**DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORT  -  MARCH 2025**

**GORDON BAMBRIDGE - UPPER WENSUM WARD**

**Council Tax**

20th Feb saw Breckland fix its district council tax for the year with a band D for 2025/26 set at £118.53 per annum and increase of £4.95 on last year. This is still the lowest district council tax but will allow Breckland to provide services required by law plus carry on the additional services we have traditionally provided to the area and maintain a balanced budget for the year. Full details of the budget can be found within the council minutes on the Breckland website and you can follow the meeting on Breckland YouTube. I am always happy to answer questions from residents in the ward an these ands other matters. The parish councils precept is also contained in these minutes alongside the amount this adds to individuals householders total bills, of course most houses are below band D and will pay a lesser amount.

**Planning Matters**

I should have an update briefing very. soon, if you have questions please ask. sorry about all the delays.

**Devolution and Local Government Reform**

Key areas for parishes to consider over the next few months and years.

Most of you will be aware that Norfolk CC applied and were successful in getting into the first tranche of two tier council areas to enter this process, from this your county elections for May 2025 have been cancelled and as yet we are not certain when the replacement bodies will be in place. We are told that there will be an election for a Mayor for Norfolk and Suffolk combined in May 2026, it is likely that District elections will be cancelled in 2027 and we could be in place until 2028 when a shadow authority may be elected but it all seems very fluid.

We are advised that parish councils will remain, possibly as community councils, not sure what that means yet.

One absolute certainty will be that it will cost us all on several levels:-

1/ Breckland are currently the lowest council tax in Norfolk (probably England) and whatever replaces Districts will certainly have council tax harmonisation, which for us will mean upwards (with Kings Lynn/West Norfolk +30% with North Norfolk +48% with all of Norfolk + 53% on current figures)

2/ Central Government will **not** absorb councils debt, and Breckland is one of few with not real debt. Several hundreds of millions across the county which will be rationalised.

3/ harmonisation of assets, Breckland has a considerable portfolio of property acquired mostly over the last 30 years or so by prudent management and providing an income for the district greater than our council tax.

4/ the only certainty given regarding community councils is that there will be no funding for them.

5/ at the moment we all have district councillors each representing just under 3000 constituents as an average, with county councillors on an average of less than 12,000 - after the proposed changes we estimate you will have one councillor/representative for between 7 and 11000 constituents dealing with all questions giving a severe democratic deficit for local government.

6/ Norfolk could be presented as one, two or three separate unitary council areas, no decision has been made but each would have its own advantages/disadvantages. But with a single mayor for two counties.

7/ Breckland currently has 49 district councillors (with a proposal to increase to 51 pending) County has 84 members across Norfolk. The Boundary commission sets a limit of 120 councillors in a single body.

**Boundary Review**

This may well be another exercise in futility, but you can also follow from the council minutes. I would commend you do follow as **IF**devolution falls (and it has before) then this may apply. Both the Boundary commission plan and the Breckland Council plan are shown. I am aware that whatever, there will have to be changes in this corner of Breckland if we remain a district council.

Everything in this report has been driven by central government - the council tax increase is dictated by them, the reorganisation of devolution and local government reform (not the same thing as you know) are driven by them and the final say on boundaries is controlled by the Local Government Boundary Commissioners, who last time ignored everything we said and insisted on different (at that time I was part of the Breckland team)

I do remain your elected member and will happily support your parish council in every way I can as long as I have this position. Pressure of increasing meetings does mean I am not always available on your PC evenings, but will always attend if I can, and if I am unable to attend on the day I will be willing to meet clerks, parish councillors or members of the public outside of those times - just ask.

Gordon Bambridge

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