

Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Briefing for Breckland Council elected members (14 July 2021)

Purpose of the note: To ensure members are aware of the plans that are being put in place to ensure that Breckland is prepared, as far as possible, to respond to the impact of coronavirus.

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1. Recent Government advice/action

New: Prime Minister confirms move to Step 4

Prime Minister Boris Johnson has confirmed England will move into [Step 4 of the roadmap](#) from Monday, 19 July, but is urging people to proceed with caution and take personal responsibility.

New: COVID-19 vaccines highly effective for most people in clinical risk groups

Data shows that vaccines used in the UK are as effective at [preventing symptomatic disease](#) in the majority of people with underlying health conditions as they are with the rest of the population.

New: Amazon, Sky and Molson Coors back vaccine rollout campaign

A number of [additional businesses](#) have joined a growing list of leading employers encouraging their staff to get vaccinated.

New: More than 80 million vaccines administered across the UK

Over half of young people aged 18 to 24 in England have [received a first dose](#) following rapid uptake.

New: Confirmed cases of COVID-19 variants identified in UK

Latest information has been released about the [Covid-19 variants](#) detected in UK.

New: DHSC recognises the importance of transparent face masks to make communication easier

Since September 2020, Department of Health and Social Care has been working on a coordinated range of initiatives to enable the creation and availability of safe and effective [transparent face masks](#) to health and social care professionals.

New: International travel from amber list countries and territories

The guidance on travel to and from [amber list countries](#) to England will change from 19 July 2021. Fully vaccinated passengers returning from amber list countries will be able to travel quarantine-free.

New: Weekly national flu and COVID-19 surveillance reports published

The latest national [influenza and COVID-19 report](#) has been released, monitoring coronavirus (COVID-19) activity, seasonal flu and other seasonal respiratory illnesses.

New: COVID-19 vaccine surveillance report published

The new national coronavirus (COVID-19) [vaccine surveillance report](#) has been produced, including estimated number of hospitalisations and deaths prevented.

New: Supporting Argentina's response to the Covid-19 pandemic

Through a special fund, the UK is helping to finance projects related to [Argentina's response](#) to the pandemic.

New: New recovery fund to tackle harms facing vulnerable children

A £24 million [regional fund](#) for children's social care, including funding to support unaccompanied minors, has been set up to tackle harms.

New: Latest REACT-1 study findings show COVID-19 infection rates 3 times lower for double vaccinated people

Interim findings from one of the country's largest studies into COVID-19 infections in England have been published, showing the impact that having [two-doses of vaccine](#) have on infection rates.

New: Asymptomatic testing backed by new research studies

Published research demonstrates how effective [widespread testing](#) has been against emerging variants of concern.

2. Supporting businesses and employees

Reminder: Support remains available

Please ask them to engage via <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/businesssupport> or regeneration@breckland.gov.uk

We have now issued almost £50m in financial support since the start of the pandemic, and whilst many Covid-related grant schemes are coming to a close, we still want to find support for any Breckland business in need. So please do flag any known issues to us.

Restart Grants: We have been able to pay businesses who meet the national eligibility for "Restart" Grants and have issued over £6.5m of grant monies, and believe all eligible businesses have now relieved support. The application closing date for the Restart Grant was 30th June 2021.

Businesses who have not previously received support will also be able to engage via our single web form, and we will match against eligibility via: <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/article/16267/Covid-19-Business-Grant>

Additional Restrictions Grants: Breckland's discretionary policy

We have now completed our allocation, ahead of the Government's deadline for spend. Awards from Breckland total almost £4m, supporting almost 1,000 businesses.

We are anticipating a further allocation of discretionary monies in July, which will initially be used to continue our Spring Back programme (below) and are reviewing what additional support which might be delivered to support the wider recovery.

Updated: Spring Back Business Support Programme

Our “Spring Back” Programme is fully operational to support Breckland businesses who may now access a further £2m of support, our grants schemes are proving popular:

Shop Front Improvement Scheme – investing in the biggest ever “Spring Clean” across the district. Any businesses based in Breckland’s primary shopping areas, or any customer facing business, will be able to get financial support for improvements and enhancements to their shop frontage – from a lick of paint through to a replacement frontage.

To date grants have been approved to 25 businesses totalling £51,000 with further applications progressing forward.

Covid Safe and Adaptions Grants – helping businesses shoulder the burden of trading in a Covid-safe way and meet the challenges of serving under restrictions. Grants of up to £5k will be available to invest in safety; or change business practices. From extra PPE and screens, through to a new marquee or outdoor seating.

To date grants have been paid to 35 businesses totalling just over £106,000 with further applications progressing forward.

Digital Breckland – building on the highly successful scheme – Breckland Digital High Streets enabling any Breckland-based business to get support for their digital offer, with grants towards making key digital changes from a new payment system, through to search engine optimisation.

To date grants have been paid to 99 businesses totalling just over £239,000 with further applications progressing forward.

Expanded enterprise and start-up scheme – having already created 14 new businesses since Christmas, we are looking to grow the pipeline of new innovative businesses further. With finance and advice for new entrepreneurs looking to start-up locally.

To date grants have been paid to 21 businesses totalling just over £109,000 with a further £113,000 allocated to applications progressing forward. In addition, this week 3 new business consultations have taken place. Also, we have assisted with 7 business support queries regarding premises required, funding availability, or assistance with identifying local trader which can do work required for a new business unit or grounds works.

The Spring back grant program is currently unable to release awards while we await further government funding. These schemes remain open to new applications, and we continue to process them in anticipation of further funding becoming available from government.

Growth Programme:

Town Delivery Plans – the ‘Future Breckland’ Project: This year-long-project is designed to be a significant undertaking, helping Breckland bounce back from the challenges of Covid-19 and build a strong and sustainable economy for the future.

To shape these plans, the team will be holding engagement sessions with key stakeholders across the district, public online workshops, and activities in each town to invite residents to highlight the best of their town and areas of focus.

The team will be focusing on developing a plan for Dereham over the next few months, with work to follow for the remaining four market towns. Each engagement period for each town will last for around 6 weeks. The Dereham intervention workshop has been held and was attended by over 40 people on the 17th of June.

- After a programme of engagement, detailed in this report, the first draft of the Dereham Town Delivery Plan is due to be submitted and published for public feedback at the end of July.
- The next phases of the project have now been decided and will be as follows:
 - Phase 2 (July – Nov): Watton and Swaffham
 - Phase 3 (Nov – March): Thetford and Attleborough

Online surveys for Watton and Swaffham are now live on dedicated web pages for each town at <https://www.breckland.gov.uk/Future-Breckland>

Further details on the project are available on the [website](#).

Any questions can be addressed to the Project Team on tdps@breckland.gov.uk

Snetterton Growth

We are working with UKPN on their recent quotation to reach an agreed construction cost and programme. In conjunction with Greater Southeast Energy Hub (Govt. funded advisors) we are exploring the possibilities of existing businesses installing solar panels on their roofs to supplement the existing power network.

Housing Development

- **Thetford HIF** - We have received Balfour Beatty's commercial offer for the new primary substation and are undertaking a detailed review which will take several weeks to conclude.
- **Rural Exception sites** - Currently enabling 6 rural exception sites and work started on focussed project on targeting parishes for a scheme.
- **Extra Care** - Working with Norfolk County Council to enable the delivery of extra care scheme in Thetford and Dereham (affordable rent and shared ownership).
- **Retrofitting** - Working with Registered Providers we have requested £520k from Energy Hub to retrofit homes for Flagship, Broadland, Orbit and Clarion. Allocated pot of £447k.
- **Community led housing** – holding initial talks with community groups interested in developing own and local housing solutions.

New: Government Updates Detail on extended eviction protection for businesses most in need can be viewed [here](#).

Providing apprenticeships during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic can be viewed [here](#).

The Self-Employment Income Support Scheme fifth grant will be available from late July 2021. Updated details can be viewed [here](#).

3. Community Support

Breckland Mental Health Community Partnership (BMHCP)

Mental Health training is being scheduled from early Autumn through the Breckland Mental Health Community Partnership. The partnership aims to provide Community-based Mental Health Awareness training to community organisations, grass roots groups and small businesses so that they are more confident and skilled in having meaningful conversations with people needing support to improve their Mental Health.

Partners

- **Breckland Council** will coordinate and promote the BMHCP network.
- **Norfolk and Waveney MIND** will be commissioned to lead on education, training, and retention on champions from the Small Business community.
- **NSFT Wellbeing Service** will lead on education, training, and retention of champions from community organisations.
- **YANA** will lead on the education, training, and retention of champions from Rural Industry.

Training sessions start from September 2021 and comprise Mental Health First Aid training, Mental Health Champion Training and Suicide Awareness. Members are welcome to book themselves on to any of these sessions once dates are released. To be notified of upcoming course dates, please email community@breckland.gov.uk FAO Stefan Clifford.

New: Council launches Breckland Cares programme

As a council, Breckland is adapting to its changing role, responsibilities and priorities in the wake of Covid. The Breckland Cares campaign is a new initiative designed to bring together a range of ways in which we demonstrate our support for our people, communities and environment.

We are encouraging a **hybrid-working model** within the organisation, as making sure our people feel supported has never been more important:

- Members and officers need to feel they are returning to a supportive and caring environment, with new policies and ways of working established (for example, sometimes working in the office, in community venues/'in the field', and at home)
- As part of this, we want to foster an inclusive working environment that harnesses the strength and value of a diverse workforce.

Our responsibility to **'care and support' extends to our community**, too. As a potential employer, we want to attract and encourage candidates from as wide a pool of experience/backgrounds as possible – including apprentices and graduates. We need to make sure we are supporting our most vulnerable residents – especially those who have been most adversely affected by Covid.

As a place-shaper, we want to use our influence to help **protect our environment** – for us and for future generations.

Across the year, the programme will focus on a number of key areas, with each area led by a member of the Cabinet and an officer from the Corporate Management Team. Breckland Cares will focus on:

- Armed Forces (caring for everyone) – Cllr Paul Claussen/Andrew Holdsworth
- Mental Health (Caring for everyone/ourselves) – Cllr Alison Webb/Steve James
- Personal safety inc. Domestic violence (Caring for everyone/ourselves) – Cllr Gordon

Bambridge/Sarah Shipley

- Climate Change (Caring for our environment) – Cllr Ian Sherwood/Greg Pearson
- Diversity & Inclusion – Cllr Sarah Suggitt/Riana Rudland
- Chairperson's charities – Cllr Roy Brame/Alison Chubbock
- Pride – Cllr Paul Hewett/Ralph Burton

New: Green Community Grants

A new Green Community Grants fund has been set up to support communities in Breckland deliver initiatives which promote environmental sustainability and positive behavioural change in response to climate change. The fund can also support school projects which encourage pupils to take action for the environment.

How much is available?

The fund will award:

- Approximately 80 small grants of £500
- Approximately 6-12 large grants of between £5,000-£10,000

Timeframes

We are now accepting applications to this fund. The closing date for applications is Sunday, 12 September. All applications will then be considered, and awards will be made by 4 October.

Who can apply?

We will consider applications from:

- Breckland Community Groups
- Breckland Schools
- Businesses in Breckland
- Town and Parish Councils
- Local Breckland Charities

Requirements

The project being put forward for a grant must demonstrate that it will lead a positive behavioural change towards climate change reduction or environmental sustainability. It must benefit a community in Breckland.

We do not want to inhibit creativity so we will consider all applications, however below are some examples of potential projects we would consider funding:

- Projects that enable residents to find solutions to environmental problems.
- Projects that aim to reduce litter and waste.
- Projects that target the reduction of energy or water use.
- Projects that support more environmental ways of travelling to and from work or school.
- Projects that look to improve the energy efficiency of a community building/asset, for example by improving insulation or installing a green energy source.
- Community and School composting schemes.
- Projects that promote the increase of biodiversity or protect natural habitats.
- Events that promote better education of the community on sustainability
- Carbon literacy training for the community
- Projects that enable the community to take action for themselves to protect and improve their local environment.
- Projects that promote growing your own food
- Projects that promote a more circular economy by prevent waste and promoting reuse.

The Fund is unable to support:

- Projects that do not demonstrate improvements to the environment.
- Outdoor play/sports facilities.
- Animal rescue charities e.g. seal rescue charities
- Village/town beautification initiatives such as 'In Bloom' competitions.
- School education trips and cultural visits.

How to apply

If organisations think they have a scheme that meets the criteria then they just need to complete our expression of interest form which can be [found on our website](#).

4. Breckland service updates

Reoccupation of Elizabeth House

Breckland's Elizabeth House office in Dereham is set to be re-occupied with more staff from next week. The reoccupation will take place gradually, over the summer period, to be a full capacity by the start of September.

This re-occupation follows the Prime Minister's recent announcements on COVID-19 and the removal of restrictions regarding social distancing, etc. It is also reflecting the phased approach we are taking to desk booking, meetings, IT, etc. as part of the final stages of the WORKSMART project. Social distancing, where practical to do so, will be supported but not mandated for staff, members, and visitors to the building, along with the use of the hand sanitizer that is provided and the wearing of a face covering if staff, members, or visitors wish to do so.

Asymptomatic testing remains one of the government key pillars to manage Covid. Members and staff are being encouraged to test regularly when visiting Elizabeth House either through the on-site testing facility which remains at Elizabeth House or there are other testing options – i.e. ordering online, from specific locations or at public test centre or collections a libraries.

All users of Elizabeth House will be encouraged to use the NHS Track and Trace system by checking in with the QR code on the entrance doors to the building.

As for the Conference Centre, face-to-face committee meetings will take place on-site in line with national guidance and legislation and therefore without most of the earlier restrictions. We would encourage attendees at the Conference Centre to take reasonable and practical steps to keep themselves safe and to protect other users where possible, but limits on meeting size, desk spacing, etc. are being lifted.

Environmental Health and Licensing, including Covid Support

- Over 180 businesses have now received Breckland Council Covid Safe Scheme accreditation, recognising businesses which have gone above and beyond to keep customers and staff safe
- All Teams in the Environmental Health and Licensing services are seeing a high level of service requests, particularly Covid related, event notifications, noise and odour complaints
- The team engaged with several licensed premises about the Euros. This included sending out guidance and making visits
- The team carried out some night time patrols, with specific focus on takeaway premises across the district and all market towns. There were some lapses in social distancing, face mask wearing and covid safe measures. Some businesses received written warnings
- The Covid Support Team have been supporting the Vaccination Bus and we have had a good take up.
- As Covid Cases continue to rise nationally and locally, this has led to an increase in contact tracing and enhance contact tracing and welfare support visits.

Breckland Council
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