

## Scoulton Parish Council – 11 January 2023

Report from Timothy Birt:

Happy New Year!

1. Breckland's draft budget has been released, see cabinet papers for details.

<https://democracy.breckland.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

(click on Cabinet and select 9 Jan meeting)

The Breckland District component will likely rise by £4.95 (typical band-D); there are the usual "efficiency savings" (called the Evolve project) but funding isn't as tight as it could have been with a further extension of the New Homes Bonus for one more year. Next year is likely to be more difficult with a number of changes to central funding having significant budget effects. As usual the political spin about lowest district council tax is being quoted while forgetting to include parish precept in the comparison with boroughs like Great Yarmouth, which has the actual lowest overall council tax in Norfolk.

Since there is a little more money than expected, opposition members are considering suggesting some amendments to the budget to increase support for our most in need residents, such as those struggling to pay council tax and energy bills

There doesn't appear to be any funding to implement Breckland's 2035 climate emergency pledge. Insulating existing homes and building better insulated homes seems obvious, but we are struggling to even achieve this with our "Breckland Bridge" partner, a joint enterprise between Breckland Council and a private developer. I have a meeting on Friday to discuss further.

2. The Cabinet papers also include the Local Plan full update and options.
3. I am still pursuing information disclosure and after 18 months of trying we now have a useful part of the Serco contract (schedule 2, the "service specification"), so at least we now know what should be done!  
A general point worth making is that if you request information using the "freedom of information act", also ask for the request to be considered under "environmental information regulations" which are more powerful, albeit with a narrower scope.
4. You may have seen in the press that Barnham Broom is to be sold (again) following an "unsolicited offer". The decision to sell was taken at Cabinet in late November and a special mechanism was applied to stop it being called into the *Overview and Scrutiny Commission*. I was so concerned about process that I engaged a barrister to advise me and I presented that advice to Cabinet, who dismissed it and voted the sale through unanimously.
5. As always, I am happy to try to answer any queries, put questions to cabinet or committees and I welcome comments.

Email: [Timothy.Birt@BrecklandGreens.org.uk](mailto:Timothy.Birt@BrecklandGreens.org.uk)

Tel: 01953 889208