



Briefing Note – Watton Town Council Discussion Points

To	Watton Town Council
Date	28 th September, 2021
Purpose	To provide Watton Town Council with an overview of key activity and policy in relation to questions recently raised to the Leader of Breckland Council

In support of your discussion on 28th September, we have prepared a short briefing document to cover the key questions arising.

- **Regarding the history / approach to local leisure facilities**

Prior to 2005 Breckland District Council was in discussions with the Watton Sports Association about its inclusion in the Districts Leisure PFI. At that time the Sports Association declined the opportunity and so Breckland continued with its two Strategic sites in Thetford and Dereham.

The existing sites at Attleborough and Swaffham are both owned by NCC and leased to the two respective Academies, Breckland is responsible for operating these sites during community hours, the remainder of the time they are utilised by the two high schools for their educational purposes.

Breckland has invested in Watton Sports Association in the past, investing a large amount of money in the astro-turf pitch as well as loaning the Association funds for a shortfall in their funding.

Since that time Breckland has made significant attempts to support the Sports Association. Numerous officers and Elected members have met with a variety of members from the sports association (committee and staff) over the years. Breckland officers have assisted with grant funding information and applications, advice and guidance on building condition surveys, support to develop a vision and a business case for future investment, ongoing dialogue with Sport England and introductions to Active Norfolk. Breckland has also brought in specialist leisure operators to give expertise and advice on improvements that could be made to generate income as well as improve the operation and marketing of the site.

Breckland is not the landowner of this site, nor does it have any control over its governance.

- **Regarding the roll out of electric vehicle charging points in Watton and across Breckland**

Breckland Council wants to increase the number of electric vehicles charging points across the district as it sees this a good incentive to encourage more people to consider purchasing an electric car. Over the summer the council has commissioned a study that looks at the key locations where it should be facilitating installations which would encourage greater take up of electric vehicles. This study is due by the end of September and will then enable the council to develop a strategy for delivering new charging units as previously stated once this work is completed, we will look to enable the delivery of a least one charging point in Watton. We are aiming to have identified the site in Watton by the end of this calendar year, with delivery in the first six months of 2022 subject to changes to parking orders, securing match funding from the Office for Low Emissions Vehicles and commissioning installers.

- **Regarding future investment plans, and schemes anticipated in the future**

The joint “Future Breckland” project is intended to help shape, define, and identify those key activities and interventions which will make the most difference to Watton and its communities. The work in form the Delivery Plan for Watton is currently underway, with teams from ‘Hatch’ and ‘We Made That’ leading sessions and engagement across Watton over the next period. The publication of this plan should provide a clear roadmap and blueprint for those investments all parties would like to see brought forward in Watton.

- **Regarding 106 agreements, and the role of Town and Parish Councils.**

Parish and Town Councils are able to be signatories to S106 Agreements. It is considered on a case-by-case basis.

- **Regarding business rates, empty properties and landlords.**

Non-Domestic Rates (Business Rates) is a statutory tax which emanates from the 1988 Local Government Finance Act. Each relief (reduction) is determined by Government legislation. A key part of the legislation is the determination between occupied and unoccupied properties.

Unoccupied properties attract Business Rates charges – Billing authorities such as Breckland Council have no discretion in this matter. However some empty properties can receive an exemption from Business Rates if they meet certain criteria, e.g. – listed building, have RV below 2900, etc. Please see the following link. [Empty Properties \(angliarevenues.gov.uk\)](https://www.angliarevenues.gov.uk/empty-properties)

Occupied properties are also subject to payment of Business Rates unless they themselves receive relief. The most common relief is Small Business Rate Relief however a key criteria is that the premises is occupied. This is national legislation and local authorities such as Breckland Council have no discretion in this matter. Please see this link [Relief and Exemptions \(angliarevenues.gov.uk\)](https://www.angliarevenues.gov.uk/relief-and-exemptions)

Further reliefs up to July 2021 have more recently been created by central Government for occupied properties in response to Covid, however no such relief has been granted for unoccupied properties.

Local Authorities do have powers to create their own reliefs for any circumstance following the Localism Act 2011 which is designed for attracting growth and investment to the area. Furthermore, Hardship Relief from Business Rates can be granted, providing the applicant can demonstrate genuine hardship and that it is in the best interests of the local council tax payer to award. The cost of both of these reliefs is met by the Local Authority.

- **Regarding shop frontages and empty units on the High Street**

If you are concerned about specific properties we would recommend that a complaint is made via the Planning Enforcement page on the Council website. The Council has several powers that it can consider in order to improve the appearance of individual properties.

More broadly, the Council is currently offering a “shop front improvement scheme” grant to help business owners meet the costs involved in improving the exterior facades to their premises. We are also bringing forward work to help promote and encourage more visitors to high streets, to help traders access the most customers possible. We are also able to offer support to new entrants to the high street, to help fill empty units.

- **Regarding waste collections and litter on the High Street**

Breckland's street cleansing contractor SERCO are responsible for ensuring the high street and land in Breckland's control and ownership are free from litter. they use mechanical sweepers and a "glutton" machine to ensure the high street remains free from litter and empty the litter bins regularly.

It is the responsibility of other landowners to ensure that land in their control remains free of litter. If there are areas of concern, or 'hot spots' then these can be reported to Breckland Council using our report it button on our website and we can investigate and if necessary, contact the landowner to make them aware of their responsibilities and request the litter is removed.

Where our team can trace litter (and / or fly tipping) to its source we are able to take enforcement action which is often in the form of a fixed penalty notice.

- Ends -