

Final Report of Cllr. Karen Lawrence, Buxton Ward, Broadland District Council

I have really enjoyed my time as your councillor and thought I would share with you some of the key highlights, although the longer version of this will be in the round. My most challenging but most rewarding times have been engaging with and supporting local community groups in the three villages in the ward.

During Covid I helped support the community group that sprung up, making sure the vulnerable members of our community could remain feeling safe and reduce the need to be exposed to getting Covid. It was also during this time that the home office dropped asylum seekers into our village up at Badersfield. I made weekly visits to drop off fruit and cosmetics for the pregnant women that were there and just get a sense of how things were going. I also supported making connections with a local charity ensuring they could provide wellbeing assistance to the 90 people living there, and I monitored hate crime from social media outlets, whilst engaging with Police to ensure they had the support they needed. Given the 12 different languages being spoken and the slow nature of the processing I contacted the home office on several occasions. There were a few cases arose where I supported local community groups that were providing support and liaising with support networks in the UK. It was during this time that I also worked with the County Councillor Dan Roper. COVID was a challenging time for us all and in Buxton I helped set up the helpline and provided the funds for a dedicated phone line. I managed to get a number of community groups a £300 pound keep it going grant, which was additional to the £500 pound Ward fund.

The aftermath of COVID presented its own difficulties as the sudden increase in traffic impacted many people, so several meetings were held with social distancing to enable people to voice their concerns. In response I created a budget to fund village speed signs – 20 is plenty and distributed them to several villagers in Lammas, Buxton and Badersfield. In the later part of my term signs were also bought to try to reduce conflict at Oxnead and ensure wedding traffic did not drive into the livery stables and farm, and finally Lt Hautbois was put on the map and has its own village sign.

As District Councillors we only get £2000 over the two years to award to community groups. I wanted to make sure that all three villages in the ward received some funding. Groups have increasingly come forward and I was able to match the Ward funds to make them stretch further. So that during the four years the total from the Ward funds alone was £3,590.69 the difference made up from match funds.

During 2022 with strong floods eroding footings of 2 footpaths in Buxton faster than expected funds were found for Footbridge Project Support worth about £11,000 – I coordinated the response from various organisations so that local landowners would not have to pay for the works as I felt this was not fair. It also meant I had to coordinate with the county councillor Steve Riley and he provided funds from his highways award budget to pay for one of the bridges.

In summary the community groups and actions that have been supported during my term by £16,290.69 and include the following:

- 19-20 Ward fund supported projects
 - Brampton – Defibrillator project £550 (£50 matched)

- 20-21 Ward fund supported projects
 - Buxton Football club £300 (£100 matched)
 - Buxton pre-school £300.
- 21-22 Ward fund supported projects
 - Frettenham funsters £200
 - Frettenham cricket club £500 (£200 matched)
 - Buxton Scarecrow £540.69 (£540.69) matched)
- 22 - 23 Ward fund supported projects
 - Buxton and Lamas 1st Sea Scout Group- St Georges Day Parade £400 (£200 matched)
 - Frettenham and Hainford Preschool £500 (£200 matched)
 - Buxton Preschool £300 (£300 matched)

COVID £300 Keep it going grants totalling £1500, were given to:

- Frettenham and Hainford Rainbows
- Buxton Bowls Club
- Buxton Football club
- Badersfield Community Church – Eyes in the Sky project
- Buxton and Lamas 1st Sea Scout group

Special Funds (approx. £11,000)

- ✓ Bridge over camping beck £5500 – Broadland District Council
- ✓ Southern Footbridge £5500 – cllr. Steve Riley's County Council highways fund

Please see my financial report at the end of this report.

I have tried to listen to various perspectives and opinions and support people in their concerns, I haven't always been as successful as I would like to be, but always tried to listen and learn. One of the greatest challenges was with dealing with the BVR's vegetation management and the BDC's lack of transparency in terms of stating who was responsible for vegetation management along the path and land drainage clearance. I received many complaints from residents about the use of herbicide, vegetation clearance and intimidating behaviour of their staff. There had been extensive tree clearance that has deeply concerned residents, and although I tried to dialogue with them, I was hit by a complaint into my conduct. I presented sufficient evidence that overturned nearly all of the points of the accusation, leaving me to apologise to having a 90 minute conversation with their staff during work hours. The Bure Valley path continued to be contentious with NCC cutting large parts of the bank for Ash die back without conducting impact assessments and bringing contractors that trashed the water meadows. The long awaited works on the new fencing have created other issues for residents where it was initially put right by their windows denying them access to their house maintenance. This has been addressed and glad to say that the fence was eventually moved with permission from BVR. I have also supported the BVR in their requests with BDC in getting bridges mended at Lt Hautbois that were very dangerous, several cars went over at that corner and the large lorries have hit the bridge too many times to mention. This has been addressed and although NCC has upgraded the path, many of the steps and railing need to be repaired and there still is not acknowledgement of the biodiversity value of the path vegetation nor a management plan.

As a district councillor I get sent all the planning applications for the three villages, and by going to the parish councils it has helped me to understand whether I needed to call in the application for review by the planning committee. Most of the time I have not needed to call in applications, but there have been a few and one even went to appeal, which I went and represented the views I had heard at the parish council. There have been several planning enforcement issues along the way, with Lammas watermeadows, and Bure valley business centre being the most contentious. However I have also had to apply for a licence review for a wedding venue in one of the villages in the ward after residents contacted me desperate for help. I have helped them gather and analyse the data over the year to enable them to have a strong case to ask for restrictions on the venue to enable neighbours and their children to sleep. This is still not resolved and so my involvement will continue.

In the council itself I have submitted a couple of policy motions (Climate Emergency and Water Sewage discharge accountability) and several questions, but also as a member of the appeals panel I have helped protect over 50 trees through approving their TPOs. I was also on the awards panel for selecting the most sustainable building design and enhanced design in Broadland District during 2022. I have sat on the environmental excellence panel and hope that the environmental strategy was made better by the questions I asked and the comments made during those meetings. It's been an amazing learning experience and one where I have met incredibly talented and dedicated colleagues in Parish Councils and fellow councillors. I could not have made it thus far if it had not been for the support of my Step-father who sadly died this January.

So it was with great sadness that I stood down as your district councillor, but family and work circumstances have meant that I could no longer continue. I am very pleased though to find that Mark Goodman won by a large margin, and gained 457 votes. He grew up in Buxton and talking with him it's great that he knows the area so well. He is also interested in beyond our village through his work with the local brewery and in the local agri-food industry. With children of his own as well there is not much that he won't get in Buxton ward. The elections have brought a new opportunity for more debate and democracy in the council chambers which will hopefully see one of my biggest frustrations being addressed. It never mattered how good our suggestions for policies or amendments were as the opposition, they would always be voted down, due to the councillor numbers held.

Now it is time to pass the baton. Thank you

Karen Lawrence

Financials

Councillor Allowance

£19,823

Total Expenses= £4,464

Expenses claimed = £ 0.00

Travels (attend meetings in 3 parishes and at BDC)

£973

Signs for Traffic management

£491

Phone for COVID helpline

£129

Match Funds for Community Projects

£1591

Food for Asylum Seekers

£ 1,280