

DISTRICT COUNCIL REPORT FOR MAY 2023 - BRINTON WITH SHARRINGTON PC

Dear All

LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS

I am extremely pleased that I have been voted in for a second term and I would like to thank both of my opponents for the encouragement they gave me to focus on my campaign to achieve a majority of 206 votes.

After the election the Lib Dems continue to control the Council with 25 seats out of the 40 (up 1) Conservatives 12 seats (up 2) at the expense of Independents (down 3). A total of 42.8% voted in Stody Ward and the vote share was Lib Dem 491, Local Conservatives 285 and Labour 61. Across the District 42,117 people (39%) voted with the Lib Dems supported by 48% of voters and the Local Conservatives (otherwise known as Conservative and Unionists) recording 37%.

VOTER PHOTO IDENTITY RULES

The Council were requested by the Electoral Commission to keep records on the effect of the new rules at every polling station when electors either had no photo identity or if they had proof but had forgotten to take it with them to the polling station. What we will never be able to quantify is how many felt disenfranchised through realising too late that they could have registered for a postal vote instead of attending and did not vote because they objected to the new rules on principle.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DEVOLUTION

The Bennett Institute and Institute for Government have released a detailed review of local government structures. It identifies three areas holding back devolution to improve accountability in local councils: -

1. administration is over-centralised via the civil service in London, top-down control over public spending and a real lack of autonomy for local councils like ours.
2. political boundaries are not aligned with geographical spending areas set by central governance.
3. major problems with how democratic accountability works in England.

Basically our system of local government looks upwards to government ministers and not downwards towards local communities which leads to national interference in really local issues. Consequently voters are less likely to turn out in local elections than in other comparable countries, weakening local accountability.

For recommendations for how to address this very important issue for our local democracies visit www.bennettinstitute.cam.ac.uk and instituteforgovernment.org.uk.

AFFORDABLE HOMES RESCUE

A recent planning committee decision has saved 23 from 52 dwellings being built on Hempstead Road in Holt. Hopkins Homes applied to remove a requirement to build these properties because of unforeseen expense in decontaminating on-site ground pollution. The Council worked with the developer to provide funding to save the day and provide more affordable units desperately needed in our area.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

The Government has announced an action plan to tackle antisocial behaviour including higher fines for fly-tipping, littering and graffiti. However, if the new proposed 'hotspot police' and enforcement patrols or the new 'instant justice' measures are to work then the concern is they need to be properly resourced. Under the scheme, offenders will be made to repair the damage they cause to communities with work starting within 48 hours of an offence being committed.

COUNCIL AGENDA FOR 2023-27

The new administration will be working on the new Corporate Plan to set out the Council's priorities for the next 4 years. We will be setting out the plans for managing development in areas of need, reforming engagement with our planning system, continuing maintenance of our tourist facilities and on delivering food-waste recycling as well as many other reforms to be announced when the Council resumes business.

VOTING REFORM MOTION

An opposition motion was put before the Council last month requesting the Chief Executive of the Council to write to the Government urging an urgent reform of the voting system to replace the outdated first past the post system. The present system consistently elects Government with well under 50% of total votes cast which means the majority feel unrepresented by any elected Government by definition. The motion was passed with a healthy majority.

SECOND HOME PLANNING CONSULTATION

The Council are responding to a consultation in April to look at new rules to give communities greater control over short term holiday lets in the tourism sector. Planning consent to turn an existing home into a short term let in so called honeypot destination preventing people from finding affordable homes will be of particular interest. Thanks to a lack of Government support for a local registration system for second homes or holiday lets it causes real difficulty for the Council to record the impact on our beleaguered communities especially on the coast.

Finally, I would like to thank everyone regardless of whether you voted for me and I will continue to serve this District to the best of my ability.

Thank you for taking time to read this report.

Sincerest regards,

Andrew