



## Council 29 June 2010

### CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

#### *Written report by Cllr Lynsey Alexander, Culture & Sport Portfolio*

**Portfolio includes:**

- Sport;
- Public Halls;
- Arts Development;
- Festivals and Events;
- Heritage;
- Parks and green spaces; and
- Cemeteries.

**1. Parks and Cemeteries**

- 1.1 The parks services have moved into their busiest period of the year with a multitude of diverse events having taken place in the Borough's Parks so far, ranging from an Ascension Day parade, the Royal Anglian's home coming parade, through to fun fairs and an emergency services day event held in Abbey Gardens on the 6 June 2010. At the same time the rangers are continuing to host the popular volunteer sessions that allows the community to help with the conservation and biodiversity in East Town Park and Nowton Park.
- 1.2 On the 26 May 2010 the Green Flag judges visited Abbey Gardens to conduct their audit of the facilities and to evaluate the Abbey Gardens Management Plan and its delivery on the ground. The Borough Council will be informed in July 2010 of the verdict for Abbey Gardens, East Town Park and Nowton Park.
- 1.3 In May 2010 the Dedham Vale and Stour Valley Project, well supported by the Borough Council, received confirmation that its Heritage Lottery Fund Landscape Partnership Scheme grant application has been successful and has been awarded just under a million pounds. This is the first such award in the East of England, and will be of enormous benefit to the area. The grant will enable the partnership to progress a number of improvement schemes including archaeology, biodiversity, and conservation of historic features, which will involve volunteers, visitors and community organisations. The Stour Valley has long inspired artists and writers and part of the funding will focus on improving access and interpretation of a number heritage hotspots. This award is good news for our area and falls in the 40<sup>th</sup> year of the designation of the Dedham Vale as an area of outstanding natural beauty.

- 1.4 Work with the Borough's In Bloom groups is continuing ahead of the Anglia in Bloom and Britain in Bloom judge's visit scheduled for the summer, with the Parks Service completing a number of projects, including working with the Haverhill in Bloom group on improvements to St Mary's Church Yard and the 30,000 bulbs planted around Haverhill last October, which has made a big difference to the look of the town.
- 1.5 The Cemeteries Service is awaiting the delivery of a memorial to commemorate the interment of the many hundreds of babies and still born children who have been interred in unmarked graves in the Bury St Edmunds Cemetery. Up until recent times, and probably prompted by families financial constraints, it was common practise for young children and still born babies to be buried in un-purchased graves or at the foot of an adult graves. Due to changes in the law and the attitude of grieving parents the cemeteries services are now able to provide a memorial to commemorate the loss of a child and siblings buried in such graves. The cost of the memorial will be covered by the purchase of memorial plaques which will be placed around its base. The Cemeteries Registrar will be circulating details of the memorials unveiling which will take place in the autumn of this year.

## 2. **Sport**

- 2.1 On 4 June 2010 the Haverhill Community Football Project was handed over to Haverhill Community Sports Association, a new body with a board consisting of representatives from the local business community and Haverhill Rovers, which is advised by officers from Suffolk Football Association and the Borough Council. Fundraising has already begun to enhance and sustain this exciting new community facility which has already been awarded a grant of £5,000 from the Havebury Housing Partnership. A high profile official opening event is currently being planned and I look forward to advising Members in due course.
- 2.2 The Borough Council has been working in partnership with Bury St Edmunds Rugby Club in respect of providing the freehold for their ground at the Haberden. The Club is a key community facility used by hundreds of players of all ages and is recognised as such by the Rugby Football Union.
- 2.3 On 17 September 2010 the Tour of Britain cycle race is coming to Suffolk and St Edmundsbury is hosting the 7<sup>th</sup> stage of the event, with the start taking place on Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds then routing through Haverhill and Clare, into Babergh and culminating in Colchester. This is the biggest professional bicycle race and the largest free to attend event in the UK and a centrepiece of the British sporting calendar attracting over a million spectators to the roadside, and hundreds of thousands more on television and via the internet. It is also an excellent opportunity to get the community involved in being healthy and active and therefore the Borough will be organising a number of events on Angel Hill and in the Abbey Gardens the afternoon before the race which will involve many schools and groups.
- 2.4 The latest Active Peoples Survey results have been released by Sport England which shows another increase in participation in sporting activities within the Borough. Indeed, we have the largest improvement in participation figures in the East of England and are one of only five districts who have significantly and consistently improved participation since the figures were first collected in 2005. This is testament to the excellent partnership working between Abbeycroft Leisure and our leisure services and further evidence of what investing in our infrastructure can deliver.

2.5 On 17 June 2010 the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, on behalf of the five funding Departments, announced that the resource funding for the Government's Free Swimming Programme would cease on 31 July 2010. We will be working with Abbeycroft Leisure over the coming weeks on what options are available and to find a way forward, although it is unlikely that it will continue in its current format if at all.

### **3. Heritage**

3.1 On 26 April 2010 the new Heritage Ticket was introduced to allow repeat visits to Moyse's Hall and West Stow for up to a year. The ticket has been well received by visitors and figures up to the end of the first week in June have shown an 8% increase in visits at West Stow when compared to the same period last year, which equates to an extra 200 admissions. There have already been a number of repeat visits in that short period, with one visitor already filling up his first ticket. The new ticket also enables a better understanding of our heritage sites by providing important data on visiting patterns and allows contact with ticket holders to pass on additional Heritage News.

3.2 In July 2010 the new exhibition, called '*Keeping Time*', will open in Moyse's Hall Museum, Bury St Edmunds. The Exhibition that has been worked on with the British Sundial Association and the Antiquarian Horology Society will showcase a large number of our clocks, watches and sundials and demonstrate the role of Frederic Gershom-Parkington in providing important elements of our collections.

3.3 As part of the services continuing effort to gather performance management data, staff have been obtaining customer satisfaction information from visitors to Moyse's Hall and West Stow. Visitors have been asked one simple question 'whether they would recommend the site to others', at present there has been a 100% positive response; however, staff are now looking to elaborate on the information and will be keen to ask visitors how the sites can improve their offering.

### **4. Arts and Events**

4.1 I am pleased to report that this years Bury Festival was the most successful in its 25 year history. It surpassed all income targets with in excess of 26,000 people enjoying events as part of the Festival.

4.2 The artistic programme was extremely well-received and well-balanced, appealing to a wide cross section of the community. The £5 ticket price offered to full time students and people aged under 17 helped to encourage new audiences to a number of festival events.

4.3 High quality and well known performers visited the Festival and there were also a number of opportunities that allowed over 400 local people to perform and take part.

4.4 The ongoing sponsorship partnership with Greene King has continued to flourish and reached new heights this year with enhanced financial input and which saw them hosting a very successful Real Food and Beer Festival, something we hope will become an important and regular feature of Bury Festival in the future. The successful Charity Ball also helped to raise over £11,000 for 2 local charities.

### **5. Public Halls**

5.1 Building work is moving on at a great pace at The Apex and it is looking absolutely fantastic. We are planning a community opening in the autumn, with a full programme of bookings in the New Year.

- 5.2 Recruitment is underway for the key posts of Marketing Manager, Operations Manager and Box Office Manager. All support staff will be recruited to coincide with the opening. To ensure that we are providing the most up to date technical support this will be contracted in the most appropriate way to serve each event. Under the guidance of the Venues Director a team of professional motivated and committed staff will be in place to take the centre forward.
- 5.3 Preparations are well advanced for setting up a box office that will provide a superb front of house service combined with detailed information on users that will enable targeted promotions to take place.
- 5.4 I will keep Members fully updated through the Members' Bulletin and at an appropriate time look forward to giving Members a tour of The Apex.

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