



Council 14 December 2010

CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

Written report by Cllr Anne Gower, Haverhill and Housing Portfolio

Portfolio includes:

- Commitment for Haverhill including:-
 - Haverhill Masterplan;
 - Town Centre Management;
 - Youth Action Plan; and
 - Community Development.
- Strategic Housing;
- Homelessness.

Highlights

- ◆ A new photograph library of Haverhill contains images of recent developments.
- ◆ The new Queen Street gates are being lit.
- ◆ The new piazza is being created at the leisure quarter.
- ◆ A new '*Chill Out Youth Zone*' was launched at the beginning of November 2010.
- ◆ 70 new affordable homes were opened at Moreton Hall on 16 November 2010.
- ◆ Oxlip House at Moreton Hall was launched on 17 November 2010.

1. *Commitment for Haverhill*

1.1 Town Centre Management (TCM)

The Haverhill Shopper Survey closed on 30 November 2010 and attracted 1093 responses. These are now being analysed and the results are expected in the New Year. The winner of the £100 in shopping vouchers actually received vouchers worth far more, £180, thanks to the three months free membership at the Leisure Centre donated by Abbeycroft Leisure. Other vouchers were provided by Sonia's, C&B Beautiful, Clarks and Tony Strowger Jewellers, and M.J.Pipe donated a heater.

1.2 **New Haverhill Photograph Library**

Local company, The Design Office, based in Steeple Bumpstead, has been busy taking photographs and has produced a new library of images of events and recent developments in the town. These images will be available on-line for partners and agencies to use to promote Haverhill. The project was designed to show Haverhill as *'a fine place to live, work, learn, shop, visit, enjoy leisure time/play, in which to invest and with a rich history and heritage'* and also to demonstrate all the new investments and developments that have taken place in recent years. The image library can be accessed via the Borough Council's website and a report to the next meeting of the Haverhill Area Working Party (HAWP) will discuss how it can be publicised.

1.3 **Shops and Lettings**

New venture @itude, selling designer clothes for males from 14 to 74, opened at 48 High Street in October 2010. Haverhill continues to enjoy a low shop vacancy rate, currently under 6%. As Members are aware, Havebury Housing Partnership has bought the former Bowes & Bowes site on the High Street. This project is still in the early stages but it is hoped that work will start in the spring of 2011, subject to funding availability. Once this redevelopment is complete, it will bring life to a long disused and prominent space on the High Street.

1.4 **Queen Street Gates**

The Queen Street gates were launched on 16 July 2010 and now the large set of gates are being lit, which was part of the original scheme. It is planned to switch on the new lighting at 3.30pm on Friday 17 December. We anticipate that these lights will add to the festive feeling in the town, but the lighting on the gates will be a permanent part of the installation. The students who helped design the gates will be playing a leading role in the switch-on and the date has been chosen because it is the last day of term. Councillor Karen Richardson will be co-ordinating proceedings. All Councillors are warmly invited to attend.

1.5 **New Piazza**

As agreed at HAWP, work has started on the new piazza outside the Leisure Centre to transform it into an open space that can be used for entertainments and events. The work is costing about £20,000 and the piazza will be completed before Christmas, depending upon the weather.

2. **Community and Youth Development in Haverhill**

2.1 **Haverhill Youth Partnership and the Chill Out Youth Zone**

The Haverhill Youth Partnership is a recently established group to support and improve youth provision in Haverhill and its members consist of Abbeycroft Leisure, Haverhill Town Council, Police, the Borough Council and Haverhill Volunteer Centre. The group has organised the new *'Chill Out Youth Zone'* which was launched at the beginning of November 2010. This new project for young people takes place one night a week using Haverhill Leisure Centre's Coffee Shop.

2.2 'On the Spot' Project

The 'On the Spot' project is continuing to work very well. There are three evening sessions a week, engaging up to 60 young people at each session. The resource is now also being used one afternoon a week at the Cangle Housing Foyer providing careers advice to young people. Planning for the spring and summer programme is underway and this will include visits to the upper schools.

2.3 Clements Primary School site

On 30 October 2010, a drop-in session, which I attended, was held at Clements Primary School to consult the local community on the future use of the site. This land will come into the ownership of the Borough Council when the new school at Puddlebrook is occupied, which is anticipated to be in September 2011. Between 35 and 40 people attended, most of whom were close neighbours of the site. Officers conducted another consultation session at the school Christmas Fair on Friday 26 November 2010, where 62 local people had an opportunity to express their views as well. Generally, the feedback has shown a preference for play space, allotments and community gardens and officers are now investigating which combination will make the best use of the site given the funding available.

2.4 Voluntary Sector at the Lower Downs Slade Offices

Officers have been talking to the four voluntary sector bodies based at the offices about the future plans for the building. The Borough Council is keen to retain the presence of the voluntary organisations, rather than just considering its own needs. Although there will be slightly less space available to the voluntary organisations they will all have the benefit of being based on the ground floor which will make access easier. Officers are working with the voluntary sector on how the space can best be used.

3. Strategic Housing

3.1 Affordable Housing

- (i) I was really pleased to attend the official opening of 70 new homes at the Kingsbury Grange and St Edmundsgate development at Moreton Hall, Bury St Edmunds on 16 November 2010. The two projects were developed through Granta Housing Association and comprise 49 rented and 21 shared ownership homes. All the properties are occupied. The Borough Council supported the bids to the Homes and Community Agency (HCA) both of which were successful, attracting £3,474,588 of funding.
- (ii) Oxlip House sheltered scheme also at Moreton Hall was officially opened on 17 November 2010. Oxlip House provides 52 one and two bedroom flats for people over 55 who live independently in their flats but require care and support. It was developed by Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association and is managed by the Order of St John Care Trust. The scheme is unusual in that 39 of the flats are for shared ownership and 13 rented. The Borough Council supported the bid to the HCA which was successful and attracted £3,315,000 of funding. It was opened by Terry Fuller, the Director of the HCA who said 'it was the best he'd seen'. I had the pleasure of paying a visit to Oxlip House on 26 November and saw for myself the excellent facilities that are available not only to the residents but also to the wider community.

- (iii) On 23 November 2010, Orbit Homebuy Agents ran a 'drop in' event for anyone wishing to find out how they can take their first steps onto the property ladder by talking to the Orbit Homebuy Agent and a financial advisor about shared ownership. The event was very successful with 91 attendees, the highest number of attendees so far. The feedback from this event will be made available to Members through the Members' Bulletin and it also helps us to gauge the need for shared ownership over the Cambridge sub-region, which is covered by our Choice Based Lettings scheme.
- (iv) A planning application has been received for the extension to the Gypsy and Traveller site at Kelly's Meadows, Wickhambrook. Details of the application can be viewed on the Borough Council's planning website.

3.2 **Local Investment Plan**

I am extremely pleased to report that the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has awarded grant totalling £676,000 for affordable housing schemes in the Borough. This will contribute to the funding of eight homes in Cavendish and Bardwell, and both of these rural exception schemes will be on site before the end of this financial year. The funding also included £120,000 towards the supported housing scheme at Lethrede in Risby. The Local Investment Plan (LIP) was instrumental in the success of these bids to the HCA and I am very pleased to report that all the schemes identified as priorities in the LIP to start on site in 2010/2011 now have funding. The LIP is being monitored on a quarterly basis and all priorities are on schedule.

4. **Homelessness and Housing Options**

4.1 **Severe Weather Provision**

As Members will be aware from previous years, we have a duty to provide shelter during the severe weather for anyone sleeping rough. I am pleased to advise Members that we are continuing to work with Havebury Housing Partnership on this, and Tayfen House will again provide the severe weather shelter on a night by night basis. The provision is based on a definition of severe weather as being '*a weather forecast predicting three consecutive nights, or more, of a minimum temperature of zero degrees celsius or lower*'. This provision has been available from 1 November 2010 and will continue until 31 March 2011. Tayfen House can accommodate up to four people and the rough sleepers will be referred to Tayfen House through the Housing Options team. If a referral needs to be made out of hours then the duty housing options advisor can be contacted through the out of hours emergency service. Four people have made use of the provision since 1 November 2010, and two of those have subsequently been given placements in Tayfen House.

4.2 **Housing Register**

There are currently 1951 applicants registered on the housing register as follows: Band A – 62; Band B – 167; Band C – 939; and Band D – 783.

4.3 **Proposals to change the social housing system**

The Government is currently consulting on its proposed wide-ranging reforms of the social housing system. Consultation closes on 17 January 2010 and the Borough Council's response will be prepared by the officers for the relevant Portfolio Holders to agree. I am happy to share a draft of that with all Members early in the New Year. Once it is clear exactly what the changes are likely to be, Members' awareness training will be provided, as these are potentially radical reforms to social housing that could have considerable impact on our residents.