



Council 1 March 2011

CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

Written report by Cllr Sara Mildmay-White, Economy & Asset Management Portfolio

Portfolio includes:

- West Suffolk House;
- Economic Development;
- Tourism and Tourist Information Centres;
- Town Centre Management (Bury St Edmunds);
- Rural Economy;
- Markets;
- Property Services;
- Facilities Management (including printing);
- Estate Management;
- Asset Management; and
- Economic Partnerships.

Highlights

- ◆ Bid4Bury has a new Chief Executive, Mark Cordell.
- ◆ A proposal to create a 'mini' Public Service Village at Haverhill Council Offices is being drawn up.
- ◆ A 'New Anglian' Local Enterprise Partnership covering Norfolk and Suffolk has been approved by the Government.

1. Economic Development

1.1 *'Bury St Edmunds.....Bucking the Trend'*

'Bury St Edmunds...Bucking the Trend' was the title of the Bury St Edmunds business ratepayers' consultation meeting, held on Monday 17 January 2011 at West Suffolk House. The speakers were Steve Cuthbert, Factory Manager at British Sugar on *'British Sugar and Bury St Edmunds'*; David Wilson, Area Director, Norfolk and Suffolk, East of England Development Association (EEDA), on *'Future Economic Challenges – Business Opportunities in an Age of Austerity'*; Martin Garratt, Director of the Greater Cambridge Partnership, on *'Bury St Edmunds and Cambridge – the Economic Relationship'*; and our own Chief Executive, Geoff Rivers, on *'Bury St Edmunds...Bucking the Trend'*. Between them, the four speakers covered an enormous range of very diverse topics, but they all agreed on the fact that Bury St Edmunds has great potential and is indeed bucking the trend. I chaired the meeting and was delighted by the large number of local businesses which attended and the lively discussion which followed.

1.2 Broadband

BT's Fibre to the Cabinet (FTTC) upgrade in Bury St Edmunds is almost complete with the new service expected to offer Superfast Broadband, and download speeds of up to 40Mb per second, to around 16,000 homes and businesses in the town. The technology is expected to offer businesses major advantages, including new services and more sophisticated communications, such as high-quality video conferencing. Bury St Edmunds is the first town in Suffolk to be upgraded by BT in this way.

1.3 Job Centre Plus Bus

The Job Centre Plus Bus has now been hosted on the Bury St Edmunds Wednesday market on six occasions. The bus is staffed by representatives from Business Link, Menta and Job Centre Plus. The purpose of the bus is to provide free advice and support to people considering starting a new business or growing an existing business, including recruitment and advertising jobs. To date four major employers in Bury St Edmunds have benefitted from the bus being located on the market, these include Asda, Wilkinsons, Curve Motion and Allied Healthcare.

1.4 Business Park Signs

A replacement business park sign has been installed on Bunting Road (Moreton Hall). This is the latest in a programme of replacing the business park signs. Signs already replaced in Bury St Edmunds include: Lamdin Road; Eastern Way; two signs at Moreton Hall; and Northern Way. A new sign will soon be placed on Kempson Way, identifying the businesses on Suffolk Business Park. These signs will benefit from an annual update to ensure they keep up to date.

2. Tourism and Tourist Information Centre (TIC)

2.1 Bury St Edmunds Christmas Fayre

The 2010 Christmas Fayre went very well, with over 300 stalls in six different sites: Angel Hill, Athenaeum, The Apex, Charter Square, Moyses's Hall and the Cathedral. Now we have to start thinking about the 2011 Christmas Fayre, which will be on 25 to 27 November, so please put these dates in your diary.

We have now had chance to analyse the visitor surveys from the Christmas Fayre, which will help us to plan this year's event. We estimate that over 80,000 people attended the 2010 Fayre over its three days and, based on the survey returns, are likely to have spent in the region of £4m; over 60% of which will have been in the town's existing shops and restaurants. The Fayre is also important for promoting the town as a tourist and shopping destination: 72% of respondents travelled over 10 miles to get to the Fayre, and 51% over 25 miles.

2.2 Summer Tourism Events

The TIC is involved in organised two events for the summer: Nowton Park Country Fair on 19 June 2011 and Armed Forces Day on 25 June 2011. Please put these dates in your diary too!

2.3 Publicity

The West Suffolk Visitor Guide for 2011 is now available. It has been produced in partnership with Forest Heath District Council. 30,000 copies have been printed and will be distributed to TICs throughout the country. The guide has been financed from advertising revenue so it is both self-financing and free to users. TIC staff attended the group travel show 'Excursions' at Alexandra Palace in January 2011 and have produced a group organisers' leaflet aiming to encourage groups and coach operators to visit the town. The TIC has had a new till system fitted which will enable better reports and statistics about sales at the TIC to be produced.

3. Bury St Edmunds Town Centre Management (TCM)

3.1 Business Improvement District (BID)

Bid4Bury now has a new Chief Executive, Mark Cordell, who started work on 7 February 2011. Many people in Bury St Edmunds will know Mark as he was previously a Chief Superintendent with Suffolk Police, and served as Sector Commander for Bury St Edmunds and as Area Commander for West Suffolk. Mark says he is keen to build on what exists here already and to consult widely with both businesses and the public.

3.2 New Shops in the Town Centre

Two new shops have opened since Christmas: Vintage Romantics at 79 St Andrews Street North (previously M&R Newsagents) and Anglia Wine Merchants at 46 Abbeygate Street. Several shops are fitting out, including Mistral (ladies fashions) at 2 Buttermarket opening in March 2011 (previously Jefford carpets), Moza Indian takeaway in a shop on St Andrew's Street South and Wilkinsons in the unit that was formerly occupied by Roy's on Risbygate Street. The last two are especially good news as they have been vacant for some time. Thing-Me-Bobs on Abbeygate Street is hoping to move to one of the units in Cornhill Walk.

4. Markets

4.1 Bury St Edmunds

Special Christmas Sunday markets were held throughout December 2010 with high demand from traders but the unusually severe weather conditions in the run up to Christmas adversely affected trading. The recycling initiative continues with savings derived from the reduction in landfill charges earmarked to finance new market initiatives identified by the Markets Forum. Good communication between traders and operatives is helping to ensure this is successful.

4.2 Haverhill

Haverhill traders also reported that the severe weather made trading difficult before Christmas, but there was a very well attended Christmas Eve market where traders from both Friday and Saturday markets combined in the High Street under a special traffic order. Income has been boosted by strong demand from casual traders.

4.3 Markets

The Markets Forum, that I chair, met in December 2010 and February 2011. Both meetings were well attended and had full agendas. Initiatives included a marketing workshop activity, market recommendations priority setting, the waste recycling initiative, staffing updates, customer charters and examining 'bag for life' products, with a view to introducing branded bags for market customers.

A recruitment drive following the retirement of the Markets Superintendent in January 2011 saw the appointment of two new Market Officers covering Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill. I am pleased to report that the temporary Market Officer has been appointed to the new Team Leader role.

5. Property Services

5.1 Bury St Edmunds Leisure Centre

Repairs to the defective cladding in the pool hall at the Leisure Centre are well underway and are due to be completed in early March 2011.

5.2 2 Hollands Road, Haverhill

Estates Management have recently agreed terms for a new letting of 20,000 sq ft of factory space at No 2 Hollands Road, formerly occupied by Miller Graphics, to an existing Haverhill manufacturing company. The office element of the site was opened last year as the new Menta Business and Training Centre whilst the adjacent factory has been empty since September 2009.

6. Asset Management

6.1 Council Offices, Haverhill

On 16 February 2011 the Cabinet considered an exciting proposal to use the Council Offices in Haverhill more effectively by retaining them as the customer hub for public services at Haverhill, providing a single point of contact for both the public sector and a range of complementary voluntary services. A joint business plan has been prepared with Suffolk County Council for shared ownership, using the 'West Suffolk House model'. Ownership of the offices will be shared between the Borough and County Councils, and revenue and capital costs of refurbishing, running and repairing the building split 50:50, building on the successful partnership approach of the two councils at West Suffolk House. For the Borough Council, savings will be achieved through maximising the use of its property asset and halving the cost of future maintenance liabilities, whilst maintaining a 50% share of the freehold ownership. The outcome will be an improved 'fit for purpose' asset which will be achieved through shared ownership and investment.

7. Economic Partnerships

7.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEP)

In my last report, I said that we were members of the newly-created Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough LEP. Now I can report that another LEP covering this area has been created, the New Anglian LEP which covers the whole of Norfolk and Suffolk. The two LEPs have overlapping boundaries, and three district councils are in both LEPs: King's Lynn and West Norfolk, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury. LEPs are supposed to cover functional economic areas and we believe that our position in both LEPs makes sense because St Edmundsbury's economy is both part of Suffolk and within the Greater Cambridge sphere of influence. So we intend to play a full role in both LEPs and gain the maximum advantage from our dual membership: for example, both LEPs have already supported the Council's bid for funding for the access road at Suffolk Business Park.