



Council 1 March 2011

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

- ◆ Consultation for the new Vision 2031 has been launched.
- ◆ The Lighting for the Queen Street gates has been unveiled.
- ◆ A new plaza has been created at the leisure quarter.
- ◆ A new photograph resource contains images of recent developments in Haverhill.

1. *Commitment for Haverhill*

1.1 Meeting with Matthew Hancock MP

I attended a meeting entitled '*Next Steps for Haverhill*' called by Matthew Hancock MP at the New Croft on 4 February 2011. Geoff Rivers gave the opening presentation, showing recent developments in the town and what is planned for the near future. He warned that the Council is entering a 'post capital era' and said that we need to protect our investments and make sure that Haverhill continues to grow in a way that meets the town's needs and enhances the reputation it is gaining. Richard Herbert, Chairman of Haverhill Enterprise, outlined what the business community thinks are the top priorities for the future of Haverhill: fast completion of the North-West relief road, enhancing the existing retail offer, creating a new research park at Hanchett End, improving the A1307 and improving broadband in the town. Matthew Hancock neatly summed these up as Highways, Hi-tech and High Street. He said he felt the town should aim for the A1307 to be a dual carriageway which bypassed Linton. Several people referred to Haverhill having reached a 'tipping point'. The meeting was lively and constructive and it finished with Matthew Hancock and members of the audience agreeing that Haverhill was a very positive place, with an excellent sense of community.

1.2 Haverhill Vision 2031

The consultation for the Haverhill Vision 2031 was launched on 1 February 2011 at Haverhill Arts Centre by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive. Vision 2031 is a new strategic long-term vision covering every aspect of life in the town including housing, shops, business, open spaces, schools, transport, health, social services, leisure, and planning for new neighbourhoods such as the one at North-East Haverhill. About 60 people attended the event and were asked to identify key issues and to put forward their vision for the town in 2031. One of the most striking visions was put forward by a pupil at Castle Manor Upper School, who said she wanted Haverhill to be a town 'which people want to come back to'. There will be further consultation events on Monday 7 March 2011 from 4 pm to 7 pm at the Leisure Centre and Thursday 10 March 2011 at the same time at the New Croft. Members are welcome to drop in to either of these or to contact LDF@stedsbc.gov.uk or telephone (01284) 757352 or 757368 for more details. Reply paid cards are also available at the Council's Offices, the library, the Leisure Centre and the Arts Centre. On 12 February 2011 at Learning Education Access Point (LEAP), officers engaged with residents and visitors on Vision 2031 using the cards and questionnaires and Councillors joined Matthew Hancock MP giving out the cards and speaking to residents on the Saturday market.

1.3 Queen Street Gates

The Queen Street gates were launched on 16 July 2010 by Matthew Hancock MP and local schools, but they were not quite complete as they still needed to be illuminated. So on 17 December 2010, the lights were switched on at a small but loud ceremony, which started with students from Samuel Ward Academy and Westfield Primary School polishing the gates to music provided by local Elvis impersonator, Darren Aldous, who very kindly gave his services free of charge. Councillor Karen Richardson welcomed everyone and hosted the event. Will Howe, a student at Samuel Ward Academy, talked about what the gates mean to Haverhill's young people. We couldn't launch the lighted gates without a visit from Santa Claus who gave out presents to Neil Williams, Head of Art at Samuel Ward Academy, and to Councillor Mrs Richardson to thank them for their efforts in designing and delivering the gates.

1.4 New Plaza

The new plaza outside the Leisure Centre has been transformed into an open space that can be used for entertainments and events. The Town Centre Manager, in partnership with Abbeycroft Leisure, the businesses which border the plaza and local community groups, is planning a programme of events and activities: the aim is to encourage the local businesses and community groups to organise a series of activities that will be attractive for people of all ages.

1.5 Town Centre Management (TCM)

The Haverhill Shopper Survey prize winners were Peter Harvey from Feltwell Close and Mrs Jones from Haverhill North. The 1,093 responses are being analysed and conclusions and recommendations, with a programme of action, will be produced in March 2011.

1.6 New Haverhill Photograph Resource

Local company, The Design Office, based in Steeple Bumpstead, has produced a new collection of images of events and recent developments in the town. The images are designed to promote all aspects of life in Haverhill and to illustrate all the new developments that have taken place in recent years. 1,000 glossy postcards will be available in March 2011 using those images which particularly impressed Members of the

Haverhill Area Working Party. These cards will be distributed in and around Haverhill to promote the town. The images will be available on-line for partners to use to promote Haverhill and can be accessed via the Borough Council's website.

1.7 Shops and Lettings

Two of the shops that were awarded grants under the Queen Street Shop Fronts Grants Scheme, Haverhill Tandoori and USA Chicken, have started work on their new shop fronts. As part of the fitting out of 16A High Street, previously 'Your Move', Ladbrokes has agreed to restore much of the façade of this building and expects to open by 10 March 2011, in time for the Cheltenham Gold Cup. The work will lift the area by restoring this listed building which has been empty for some time. There are currently 12 vacancies out of about 187 units in the Town Centre, a vacancy rate of 6.4%, well within the range considered healthy by the Association of Town Centre Management (ATCM).

1.8 ONE Haverhill

Members of the Haverhill Executive and Partnership Forums have agreed recently that these groups should be merged into a new entity called the One Haverhill Board. Currently Terms of Reference are being drafted, which will detail both the composition of the Board and the way it will work. It is proposed that there will be equal voting members across all three tiers of local authorities as well as voting members from the Voluntary Sector, business community, Police, education etc. All meetings will be open to the public and it has been suggested that six-monthly public forums be held to receive ideas which will be delegated to task and finish groups drawn from the wider communities. The transition Board will work towards delivering these Terms of Reference over the coming months.

2. Community and Youth Development in Haverhill

2.1 Chalkstone Area

(a) Community Centre

Financial information has been provided to the Residents' Association (CATRA), together with a list of regular hirers, to allow the group to consider the option of running the Community Centre.

(b) Community Picnic

Planning is currently underway for a community picnic to be held on the estate during the half-term week which starts on 30 May 2011. Officers are working with the Residents' Association, Children's Centre and schools to provide a free, local event aimed at encouraging parents to spend some fun time outdoors with their children. The aim would be for the Residents' Association to take the lead if this proves successful and they want to hold future events.

(c) Aeroplane Park

Following a consultation on the future of the Aeroplane Park, officers have been working with local residents and have formed a 'Friends' group. This group is keen to keep the area for local children and has applied for £50,000 from Community Spaces, an organisation providing grant funding to groups which want to improve green spaces and enhance the quality of life for local people. If the application is successful, this money will help improve the area and help to deter anti-social behaviour.

2.2 Clements Area

(a) Leiston Community Association

Officers are supporting the Community Association which manages the Community Centre on the estate and have helped them with a payroll service so that they can employ a caretaker.

(b) Clements Primary School Site

Officers have been working with local residents to discuss options for the use of the site which will come into the ownership of the Borough Council once the new school is occupied. The old school buildings will be demolished as the site comes with the condition that it remains predominantly an open space, to compensate for the open space given up at Puddlebrook. Initial consultation has established that there is local interest in allotments, a community garden and playspace on the site. Everyone who expressed interest during consultation has been invited to a meeting on 3 March 2011 to look at how the different uses identified could be combined, whilst taking account of the concerns of near neighbours of the site about security. £130,000 has been secured to redevelop what will be an important green space in the heart of this largely built-up area.

(c) Clements Skills for Life Project

Officers are working to provide basic skills courses for people who are long-term unemployed or have low levels of literacy and numeracy. The courses will be delivered by 'Workwise' and partners include West Suffolk College and Havebury Housing Partnership.

2.3 Youth work

The *'On the Spot'* project is going very well and each session is attracting 30 to 40 young people. The van goes out three nights each week and travels around Haverhill to areas where groups of young people are known to congregate. A full report on the project will be available at the end of the financial year.

3. Strategic Housing

3.1 Social Enterprise Award for Private Sector Leasing Scheme

Housing Action has been awarded the *'Social Enterprise Mark'*, an award recognising organisations that trade for social and environmental purposes. I am honoured to have been asked to present them with the award. Housing Action joins other ethical businesses such as Age UK, the Eden Project and Suffolk Acre. Housing Action is the Borough's new partner in delivering the Private Sector Leasing Scheme, working with landlords to provide a realistic return on their property and helping the Borough find housing solutions to those in need. The Borough has invested £75,000 in Housing Action to access over 75 private sector properties on leases of up to ten years.

3.2 Update on Social Housing Reforms

Members will be aware of the wide-ranging social housing reforms currently under discussion. On 19 January 2011, I presented a report to Cabinet outlining one of the major reforms: 'affordable rents' which will enable registered providers to offer tenancies on fixed terms of at least two years, and also charge a rent that is up to 80% of the local market rent. Cabinet agreed in principle to accept the new 'affordable rent' on new social housing schemes, including schemes currently in development where appropriate, and to set targets for both social and affordable rent tenancies. Officers and a small group of Members will now be working with partners to develop these targets and the New Tenancy Strategy. There is much work to be done on finalising the reforms and Members will be

invited to take part in workshops and discussions and comment on the proposals as the work progresses.

3.3 Homelessness

There are currently 1,935 applicants on the Housing Register as opposed to 1,951 in December 2010. The applicants broken down by banding are as follows:-

Band A – 63; Band B – 171; Band C – 957; Band D – 744.

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