



Council 5 April 2011

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

***Written report by the Leader of the Council,
Cllr John Griffiths***

1. **West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP)**

- 1.1 The WSLSP Board has met and focussed on the distribution of £209,000 of capital funding which we are wishing to use to fund one or more projects that will provide a sustainable legacy to the the WSLSP area as a whole. An assessment panel had advised the Board that 9 of the 14 applications were of too local a nature to provide a genuine legacy for the whole of the WSLSP area and the Board agreed. The remaining five projects are now being invited to provide more detailed information to allow all the bids to be assessed against the criteria of deliverability, sustainability, risk and value for money. The five projects still in the running reflect a range of WSLSP priority outcomes. They are:-
- (a) the creation of a Low Carbon Centre at West Suffolk College involving teaching of low carbon construction techniques and a demonstrator area where the public and businesses can see the technology in use;
 - (b) the Renewable Energy Action Loan (REAL) programme which would offer interest free/low interest loans to communities to fund the installation of renewable energy. The fund would be replenished as repayments are made, plus there is the opportunity to attract other funding to the scheme;
 - (c) the Citizens Advice Bureaux are making a case for investment in IT across all the West Suffolk Bureaux with common telephony and IT allowing the roll-out of national software on debt advice and catering for voice and video links to allow clients to access specialist advisors across the bureaux without the need to travel;
 - (d) West Suffolk Voluntary and Community Sector hub. The sector is planning to purchase a building which will provide cost efficient office space for a range of voluntary groups and serviced low cost meeting and conferencing rooms for hire; and
 - (e) a Suffolk Acre led project to develop superfast broadband off the back of the Suffolk County Council investment in the schools broadband network.

1.2 The Board also received a presentation from our local Census Manager who reinforced the need for all bodies involved in spending public funds to try and encourage a good response in order to provide accurate data on which to plan future services, and to ensure West Suffolk attracted suitable levels of funding in future. I hope that by the time we meet at Council we have all made our returns and encouraged others to do so as the reference date, 27 March 2011, will have passed by then. Anyone wanting help in completing their form can contact the national helpline on 0300 0201 101.

2. Rural Issues

2.1 The Rural Area Working Party met on 10 March 2011, and Members received a petition led by a resident from Stansfield, asking for the reinstatement of some form of regular public transport through the villages of Stansfield and Poslingford. The Working Party also discussed the final Rural Action Plan document, and were given updates from officers regarding progress with Rural Vision 2031 and the Waste and Street Scene Services cleansing review.

2.2 The new Rural Action Plan document, which will cover the period from April 2011 to March 2014, was approved by Cabinet on March 2011, following the recommendation from the Rural Area Working Party. The new plan includes 37 projects that aim to empower our rural communities, improve our environment, increase prosperity and develop well-being. The Plan will be monitored throughout the year by officers, and reviewed on an annual basis by the Area Working Party.

2.3 As previously advised, the Parish Conference is taking place on Thursday 12 May 2011 from 6pm, at Stanton Village Hall. All Parish Councils, rural Village Hall Committees, and other rural community groups are most welcome to attend, though booking is essential, so please help officers 'to spread the word'. The new Rural Action Plan will be launched, and there will be updates on Rural Vision 2031 and the Localism Bill. Following a refreshment break, where delegates can look at useful information stands, there will be workshops on allotments and shared land use; emergency planning for parishes; and social housing reforms.

2.4 Since the last report, Honington and Sapiston Parish Council has been awarded £2,300 to add to the provision of play equipment at their play area; Stradishall Parish Council has been awarded £1,000 towards new safety surfacing at their play area; and Rougham Sports Hall Management Committee has been awarded £1,171.80 towards the purchase of sports safety netting around the play area at the Sports Field.

2.5 The Suffolk Village of the Year Awards for 2011 were launched in early March 2011. This year's competition is open to villages with up to 500 local government electors, so in St Edmundsbury 57 villages are eligible. Judges will be looking at community spirit, the general appearance of the village; the parish council; and any special activities. Judges will also be looking closely at plans for the future of the village, as well as its recent achievements. They want to see that all residents are listened to and catered for, from the youngest to the oldest. Splendid new halls and transport initiatives will be applauded but so will simple low cost ideas, such as a rota for collecting prescriptions, or the care of those who are housebound or people with cars offering rides to town for those with no transport. A variety of clubs for all ages and a high proportion of residents joining in is just as impressive. Officers have sent application packs to all the Parish Councils for the eligible villages. We hope to receive a good number of applications before the deadline of 27 May 2011, so again, please 'spread the word' if you have an eligible village in your ward.