



## Council 5 April 2011

### 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 March 2011 was a busy period for parks with much activity around the Borough especially from those willing to volunteer their time, as was evident when a keen and enthusiastic group happy to get their hands dirty helped weed the old shrub rose bed adjacent to the cloisters in the Abbey Gardens, Bury St Edmunds. Moreover, on 29 March 2011 the inaugural meeting of the Abbey Gardens Friends Group will take place with one of their main objectives to encourage community involvement in the future management of the Gardens. Also in the Abbey Gardens, the Appleby Rose Garden has had all the rose dedication plaques restored and there are a few rose beds still available for dedication under a new 10 year scheme.
- 1.2 Work on extending a cycle and pedestrian access path through Castle Playing Fields in Haverhill commenced in March and will shortly be completed. The new path will provide a vital link across the park to the neighbouring three schools and will encourage more parents from the surrounding area to walk their children to school and ease road congestion.
- 1.3 The Parks Service has been successful in securing a grant of just under £5,000 from the West Suffolk Community Safety Partnership. The grant, which was supported by the local Police, is for the installation of motorcycle deterrents around the boundary of Puddlebrook Playing Fields in Haverhill. The riding of motorcycles on the site at Puddlebrook has been a longstanding problem and the work being carried out will look to resolve the issue once and for all.
- 1.4 Work on the Abbey Gardens new play area has started with the contractors now on site. This excellent project will soon provide some great facilities for children including a tree house. The work is looking to be completed in May 2011.

- 1.5 As part of the Parks Service drive to generate additional income a wedding reception booking has been accepted as a trial in Nowton Park in July 2011. This trial will take place without any impact on other users of the Park and, if successful, could be a valuable source of revenue and a great new way for people to use this community resource. All parks are looking at their income and there have been some particularly popular events in East Town Park, in Haverhill; additional dates for willow workshops had to be arranged to cater for the extra demand.
- 1.6 The Parks Service have been advised that Green Flag Judges recently carried out 'mystery shopper' visits to both East Town Park and Nowton Park. Both sites passed the various tests and their Green Flag status for 2011/2012 has been confirmed.

## **Sport**

- 2.1 I am pleased to announce that a Rwandan Convention will be coming to Bury St Edmunds on 22 to 24 July 2011. It is the first of its kind in the UK and is likely to attract up to 700 delegates for the event in The Apex, with spin-off benefits for the local economy. The Convention will also link with the '*Lap of Honour*' launch event which will mean Rwandan delegates will be able to meet past Olympic athletes from Suffolk.
- 2.2 In June 2010 the Borough Council approved the sale of the freehold interest of the Haberden Sports Ground to Bury St Edmunds Rugby Club. The sale was completed under the provisions of community management and ownership of assets and was subject to a covenant which restricts the uses of the grounds to community and recreational use only. Sport England is now using this transfer as an example of good practice nationally in Leisure Asset management. We are also carrying out a review of all of our leisure assets and how they can be sustained in the future and this will be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in the autumn.
- 2.3 On 2 March 2011 I was pleased to present a review of the Cultural Strategy to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The review was accompanied by a report of accomplishments within Leisure Services since the inception of the Strategy in 2009 and was well received by the group who were rightly proud of all that had been achieved.

## **Heritage**

- 3.1 The latest Ring Quest event, based on Tolkien's Lord of the Rings, was run at West Stow and once again proved very popular. The event, which encourages all the family to work together to solve clues and hunt for rings, was attended by 1364 visitors, 275 more than last year. Many visitors came from Cambridgeshire, Essex and Norfolk in search of an unusual day out and to witness the costumed characters from the Tolkien fantasy world such as an Orc, an Elf and Rangers. This year also had an educational element as pupils from Horringer Court Middle School worked on their media skills with '*Born of Hope*' film director Kate Madison on their last day of term.
- 3.2 Ian Coote, from the British Horological Institute gave a lecture to a full house at Moyse's Hall, entitled '*The Clock Workshop*' in conjunction with the current exhibition '*Keeping Time*'. It included a detailed insight into the secrets of the tools of the trade required for keeping timepieces in good working order. Reference was made to several clocks in the current exhibition and his lecture included images and stories of the search for ever more accurate time keeping.

- 3.3 In March 2011, Moyse's Hall had a striking display of items from the Unitarian Meeting House to mark the 300 year anniversary of that building. There were 8 items of silver plate, a Rose Mead painting of the building and two original documents dating back to 1711, one signed by King Charles and the other by the Feoffees.
- 3.4 A home has at last been found for the very large life sized portrait of Archdeacon Hodges, then vicar of St James Church, by local artist Rose Mead that used to hang in the Council Chamber at the former Borough Offices on Angel Hill, Bury St Edmunds. As vicar of St James the Archdeacon lived in what is now the Deanery in the Great Churchyard, so it is entirely appropriate, as well as being one of the few places where it will fit, that this painting should now have returned to its original home in the Deanery, on loan from the Borough Council. It will be accessible to the public on open days.
- 3.5 Heritage Services recently ran an after school art club in Cornhill Walk, Bury St Edmunds in conjunction with Smiths Row and with funding from schools extended services. The club was so popular that further funding is being sought to have an art club for three years that runs after school at Moyse's Hall and also a new one that operates from West Stow on a Saturday morning. The sessions will be run by an art educator and the participants will be looking at the collections as inspiration for the artworks made using a variety of media.

#### **4. Arts and Festival**

- 4.1 The acoustics at The Apex continue to receive plaudits, with more and more musicians hearing about the venue and being keen to come and play. March 2011 has seen the rock band Funeral for a Friend come and perform to a packed house as well as some great jazz, folk and classical concerts including a number of local amateur groups. The Apex continues to consolidate its position as a significant new addition to the UK concert hall circuit and the growing reputation means that we are sharing the billing on artists' literature with the Sage in Newcastle, the Bridgewater Hall in Manchester, and the Barbican in London amongst others.
- 4.2 Work is progressing to enable the venue to turn its attention to marketing the commercial opportunities that the conference facility will provide and work is underway to complete way-finding signage, external furnishings and greenery, a lighting schematic and artwork for the foyer area to put a finishing touch to the building works.
- 4.3 The first art is appearing in the café bar area through an exhibition called *'Behind Closed Doors'* which is a collaboration between photographic students from West Suffolk College and the National Trust and gives a glimpse of work currently taking place to renovate the historic Rotunda at Ickworth House. There is also an exhibition from JumpstART, which provides courses for adults with learning difficulties and is run by Suffolk Artlink. Their exhibition of paintings and drawings is entitled *'People and Places'* and can be seen on the north side of the café. We hope art will form a key part of the attraction of The Apex, with ongoing collaborations with our partners, including Smiths Row Art Gallery. On that theme, Members will be interested to learn that Smiths Row Art Gallery has a new patron, the Right Honourable Chris Smith. Lord Smith of Finsbury stated it was *'an honour and a delight to become a patron of this wonderful contemporary gallery as it is a terrific asset not only for Bury St Edmunds, but for the whole region.'*
- 4.4 Following the launch of the Bury St Edmunds Festival at The Apex, ticket sales are going well and the shows in the Abbey Gardens have enjoyed their fastest ticket sales in 5 years; one of them is already well on its way to selling out. The Apex has enabled a number of musicians and bands to come to the festival that we would not have been able to attract in the past.