



Council 27 September 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 report from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will no doubt cover the annual update on the work of the WSLSP which was received by the Committee on 7 September 2011. I won't steal his thunder but I would commend the Committee report to any Members wanting to familiarise themselves with the work of the partnership over the last year.
 - 1.2 Earlier that same day the WSLSP Board met. We received our first update on 10 projects being delivered in 2011/2012, the final projects which the WSLSP can directly finance as the Performance Reward Grant funding has now ceased. Projects range from provision of apprenticeships, to support for the Rural Coffee Caravan, projects to address fuel poverty, provision of community transport and the Citizens' Advice Bureau rolling out an online programme to help people manage their debt and budget more effectively, to name just five of the projects to give you a flavour of the way they give very real and direct benefit to people living West Suffolk. The WSLSP has committed just over £403,000 to these community based/self-help partnership projects.
 - 1.3 The final allocation the WSLSP has made is a contribution of just over £157,000 to the creation of a Low Carbon Centre at West Suffolk College. This project, which the Borough Council supported and which will complement work done by our environmental management staff, secured funding that the WSLSP made available for a legacy project. This project will provide lasting benefit for the area covered by the WSLSP as it will see the creation of a Centre which allows students to be trained in modern construction techniques and the installation of environmental improvements to older buildings. As well as construction professionals, the Centre will be promoted to community groups and the public as it will also provide access to displays which demonstrate environmental impact and show the cost savings individuals and groups can make. The facility will be housed in the newly opened Milburn Centre in Anglian Lane, Bury St Edmunds and the College is actively seeking additional funding so it can expand on the initial provision financed by the WSLSP.

- 1.4 Other than performance reports, the main focus of the Board meeting was discussion on the future of the partnership. A number of options were identified and the Board asked officers to further develop a new model for a re-named West Suffolk Strategic Partnership based around a Board of key individuals from the area with a shared strategic interest in how the west of the county develops and ensuring it has a voice at local and regional level. The partnership will identify those areas where our interests overlap and we can add value by having a combined voice or working on joint projects. The Board will continue to be supported by an officer group and the membership of both will need to be re-evaluated to ensure they reflect the priorities identified, although it is still envisaged that it will be a mix of public sector agencies, voluntary and community groups and business representatives. There will also be a network to allow the work of the partnership to be informed by the experiences of the grass-roots organisations working out in the communities.

2. Rural Issues

- 2.1 The Rural Area Working Party met on 12 September 2011. Members received a presentation from the Managing Director of Suffolk Circle, a membership organisation for people over 50. Consideration was also given to reports on community safety in the Borough's villages and the development brief for land east of The Granary, Clare.
- 2.2 Plans have been finalised for the next Parish Conference, which is due to take place on Thursday 20 October 2011 at 6.00 pm, at Great Whelnetham Community Centre. There will be presentations on the various transport schemes available in Suffolk and what the Public Works Loan Board can offer Parish Councils. This will be followed by an open forum question and answer session, with a subsequent refreshment break providing the opportunity for networking and enabling attendees to look at information stands from partners. Lastly, there will be workshops on how to deliver the benefits from allotments and other forms of local shared land use for local food (linked to one of our Rural Action Plan projects); neighbourhood plans and the Local Development Framework; and community Land Trusts and what they can mean for communities.
- 2.3 After winning the district round of the Suffolk Village of the Year 2011 awards, Great Livermere was viewed highly at the County round and successfully went through to the final round. The judging for the final took place on 3 September 2011, and the results were announced on BBC Radio Suffolk on Saturday 17 September. Sadly Great Livermere did not win the overall title but the judges were extremely impressed nonetheless, awarding Great Livermere a very respectable third place. We congratulate those involved for all their hard work throughout the judging process.
- 2.4 The Wickhambrook Memorial Social Centre was awarded £3,000 from the Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme towards works in their hall, including double glazed windows, a draught-proof door, a fast-response electric heating system and the installation of an induction loop. Brockley Village Hall Management Committee has been awarded, in principle, a grant of £6,500 towards refurbishment works in their village hall. This is a very ambitious project for the size of the village, and as such full approval of the grant will be offered once the Management Committee has finalised all their match-funding.
- 2.5 Funding advice sessions as part of the Rural Action Plan are currently being organised. One-to-one advice sessions will be available over a couple of days, giving rural community and voluntary organisations the chance to discuss their project plans with experienced officers who will advise on project planning and funding opportunities. Details will be announced in due course.
- 2.6 Stanton Community Village Hall has had Wi-Fi installed and received their free laptop and grant as part of the 'Connected Villages' project.

2.7 The Woolpack pub in Fornham St Martin has received a grant of £5,000 as part of Pub is the Hub's 'Suffolk Community Champions Scheme'; the first successful applicant in Suffolk. This grant will be used towards the creation of a grocery shop as part of the pub. This will be a great asset to the pub, which is already very keen to support local people and groups, for example by providing a meeting base for young farmers, model-railway enthusiasts, a squash club and a local drama group.

3. **New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Mid Anglian Enterprise Agency (MENTA) Trade Fair**

3.1 On Thursday 15 September 2011, it was pleasing to see The Apex full of business representatives from across Norfolk and Suffolk for the first of the LEPs promotional programme of events to be held in and around the LEP area. I am also pleased to be able to report that the New Anglia will be the lead LEP on a national basis for green energy, renewable, re-generation and micro-regeneration. This area has several schemes working in these fields.

3.2 There were excellent contributions from the Chairman of the LEP, Birketts Solicitors, PWC and Go-Ape amongst others. I left convinced that this was a terrific boost for the LEP and I will continue to put my weight behind it as one of its Directors.

3.3 'Visit East Anglia' was also "re-launched" at this event.

3.4 While on the theme of economic development/regeneration it was very pleasing to open the MENTA Trade Fair two days earlier at Ickworth House. Again this was very well attended and got our Bury St Edmunds Business Festival fortnight off to an excellent start.

4. **Shared Services**

4.1 A Summit was held on Friday 16 September 2011 involving myself, Councillors Stevens and Everitt with colleagues from Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and senior staff from both Councils. The issues raised from the FHDC review of Shared Services were discussed and explored in detail. There was recognition that there are some differences in pay between staff at the two Councils (although less than first thought) where a direct comparison can be made. This 'gap' was modelled and both Councils felt it could be bridged. It was agreed that further work is undertaken on establishing a payline that would be appropriate to both Councils.