



Council 13 December 2011

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

Report by the Leader of the Council and Corporate and Rural Affairs Portfolio Cllr John Griffiths

Portfolio includes:

- Communications;
- Economic Development;
- External Relations, including Local Enterprise Partnerships;
- Property, Asset, Facility and Estates Management (including West Suffolk House);
- Rural Affairs;
- Shared Services; and
- Vision 2031

1. Communications

1.1 Current Communications Activities

Among the usual activities, the communications team is working on:-

- (a) ensuring staff and councillors at both Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council, plus residents, businesses, local organisations and other stakeholders, are aware of progress with shared services, including the appointment of a shared Chief Executive, through media briefings and internal communications;
- (b) improvements to the website;
- (c) publicising budget consultations and decisions;
- (d) promotion of Borough Council winter events and activities;
- (e) helping the media to explain issues and decisions to their readers, such as transferring the Victory Sports Ground to community ownership; and
- (f) promoting Haverhill activities, such as the shoppers' survey, High Street enhancements and Lower Downs Slade office refurbishment.

2. Economic Development

2.1 Growing for the Future event

On 21 October 2011, I chaired the 'Growing for the Future' business ratepayers' event at Genzyme in Haverhill. Once again, the partnership between the Borough Council and Haverhill Chamber of Commerce made the event a great success. We were fortunate to have several excellent speakers, including Mathew Hancock MP; Neville Reyner, Chairman of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership; Alex Till, Chief Executive of Menta; Sarah Howard, Chairman of Haverhill Chamber of Commerce; and Chris Homan, Senior Quality Director from Genzyme. Our own Chief Executive, Geoff Rivers, provided a review of the past year and a look forward to the future for Haverhill. Genzyme demonstrated once again its commitment to the town by providing their facilities and support without charge. The Bury St Edmunds ratepayers' event is due to take place on Thursday 19 January 2012 in West Suffolk House: please put the date in your diaries.

2.2 Destination Haverhill

The 'Destination Haverhill' project started on 24 November 2011 with the launch of the Haverhill Shopper Questionnaire. The project aims to attract more visitors, shoppers and businesses into Haverhill and has three main phases. The first phase is gathering information with surveys, retail audits, and quantitative measurement such as footfall counts and car parking statistics. The second phase includes a range of training initiatives and small projects designed to address the findings from phase one. The final phase starts a year after the first and will gather more information to assess how effective the interventions have been. The Association of Town Centre Management is very interested in the project because it is the first project of its type that uses the information gathered to generate practical initiatives and monitors their impact. It is being run in partnership with the University of Kent Business School led by Professor Andrew Fearne, known for his work with Tesco on its loyalty scheme.

2.3 Haverhill Business Development

There has been some very good news about Haverhill business recently. Planning applications for Haverhill Research Park were approved at a special meeting of the Development Control Committee on 24 November 2011. The research park is on thirty acres of land and includes a 60 bed hotel and 150 new houses, 10% of which will be affordable. It could create up to 1,000 new jobs. It will form a new entrance to the town on the road from Cambridge and help form stronger commercial links between Haverhill and Cambridge. In the same week, International Flavours & Fragrances announced that it is making a major capital investment at its Haverhill site, where 260 people are employed. The investment is in the CAPLOCK™ encapsulation system which provides flavours which do not deteriorate for a wide range of products, especially those needing a long shelf-life. The company has sales, manufacturing and creative facilities in 33 countries so it is encouraging that it is making such a large commitment to its Haverhill works.

3. External Relations, including Local Enterprise Partnerships

3.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships

- (a) Because of its location, St Edmundsbury is covered by two Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs). Links between the two LEPs are being strengthened and St Edmundsbury is ideally placed to play a strong role in both. I am on the board of one, the New Anglia LEP covering Norfolk and Suffolk. The other, covering Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough (GCGP LEP), is proposing to set up a local authority reference group which

would ensure that local authorities like St Edmundsbury which are not directly represented on the GCGP LEP board have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from the LEP.

- (b) The LEPS have been successful in attracting funding and Government support into the region. The GCGP LEP secured an enterprise zone covering part of Alconbury Airfield and the New Anglia LEP secured another covering six sites in Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft and designed to capitalise on the area's leading position in the energy sector. We supported both bids. Andy Wood, Chairman of the New Anglia LEP board, announced at the LEP's Open For Business conference, held at The Apex on 15 September 2011 as part of the Business Festival, that the New Anglia LEP has been chosen by the Government as the country's '*Green Pathfinder LEP*' to play the lead role within the national network of LEPS in developing the low carbon sector.

3.2 West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP)

The next, and quite possibly the last, meeting of the current WSLSP Board is on 21 December 2011. It will receive a paper advocating that the current partnership is dissolved and a new West Suffolk Strategic Partnership set up as its successor to build on the many good links made through the current WSLSP. At a time of so much change for both the voluntary sector and public bodies I think it is valuable for strategic leaders to meet, identify common priorities and lobby on behalf of the west of the county to ensure we get a fair deal at county, regional and level. The new partnership also offers a ready-made grouping to take advantage of any funding which may become available at short notice.

4. Property, Asset, Facility and Estates Management

4.1 Asset sales

Several asset sales of major sites are currently under way, which in many ways bucks the national trend of a depressed property market:-

- (a) **Hamlet Croft**

Preliminary ecological surveys have been undertaken to establish the wildlife potential of the site. Bloor Homes, the developers, carried out a public consultation in Haverhill a few weeks ago and is amending some design elements as a result. It is still anticipated that a detailed planning application for 91 new houses, including 30% affordable, will be submitted in December 2011.

- (b) **Site E2, Suffolk Business Park**

After the national marketing of the Council's 6.5 acre site on Suffolk Business Park, bids have been analysed and terms have been agreed for the sale of the whole site. Contracts are currently being prepared and completion of the sale is expected early in the new year. I am pleased to say that the sale will help a very successful local firm to continue to expand its business and take on more local people.

- (c) **Housing site**

The Council will be selling a strip of land at East Close, Bury St Edmunds which will give access to the Vinefields Farm housing site. Planning permission has recently been issued for 73 houses, again including 30% affordable units.

4.2 Haverhill Council Offices

The refurbishment and renewal of Haverhill Council Offices is progressing well. Seaman's will soon complete Phase 1 of a 3 phase project, comprising the ground floor area where

Borough Council services will be based. Phase 2 is improving the accommodation of the voluntary agencies, and it is anticipated that this will start early in the new year. It will be followed by the final phase, which is the whole of the top floor and includes accommodation for Suffolk County Council and a committee room. The refurbishment will result in a fit-for-purpose, flexible office environment with an extended life of 30 years.

4.3 Estates Management

Office Team, a national firm, has taken out a new 5 year lease of Unit 7 Bunting Road, Bury St Edmunds and moved their stationery distribution operation there from Eastern Way.

5. Rural Affairs

5.1 Rural Area Working Party (RAWP)

RAWP met on 9 November 2011 and heard Tim Freathy, Community Development Officer specialising in Local Food at Suffolk ACRE, promoting the recently launched Suffolk Local Food project, which supports residents to set up local lunch clubs, community allotments, etc. Tim would particularly like projects to be started in West Suffolk and would be grateful if Members would promote the opportunity. Details can be found on Suffolk ACRE's website. Members also discussed the success of the October Parish Conference and plans for the next one; the Suffolk School Organisation Review in the Thurston area; the rural youth work programme; and the leaflet being produced to let rural voluntary and community groups know about the support the Borough Council can offer them.

5.2 Parish Conference

The October Parish Conference went well and all the feedback forms stated that the event had been 'very useful'. Through rural ward members, officers are consulting with those Parish Councils that did not attend the conference in the hope of encouraging more to attend in the future. Preparations have begun for the next Parish Conference, due to be held on Monday 23 April 2012 from 6pm at Great Barton Village Hall. If Members have any suggestions for presentation and workshop topics, please let the officers know.

5.3 Grants

The Bradfield St Clare Village Hall Management Committee was awarded £2,130 from the Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme in October 2011 to help improve the hall's drainage and add new soffit boards and windows. The one-to-one funding sessions commissioned as part of the Rural Action Plan went well, with 12 community groups benefitting from advice at the surgeries and the aftercare that followed. Kedington is the latest village to benefit from free Wi-Fi installation in its community centre as part of the '*Connected Villages*' grant package. The grant towards a projector and screen for village hall use is proving popular, with six villages applying so far. The Rural Coffee Caravan Information Project works in partnership with over 25 organisations to deliver a '*Golden Age Fair*' that offers help and advice to enable people over 60 to stay fit, healthy and independent, and officers are discussing with the organisers the idea of hosting the fair in St Edmundsbury.

6. Shared Services

6.1 Recent Progress

- (a) The Borough Council and Forest Heath District Council have formally agreed to appoint a single Chief Executive and unify the staff structure, including Management Team. There

are more details about this recruitment process elsewhere in these council papers. We will be keeping staff and Councillors at both councils fully informed of progress through regular newsletters and briefings during the coming months as well as making sure that our residents, businesses and other stakeholders understand what is happening.

- (b) I joined the Leader of Forest Heath District Council at a press briefing recently to explain what we are doing and why, and we issued this joint statement: *'Council Tax payers and businesses throughout West Suffolk are facing tough financial times and we need to do all we can to make sure we tightly control council costs. Cutting those costs by sharing a Chief Executive and senior managers is a logical next step. Having a single structure, with skilled and experienced staff seamlessly providing high quality services wherever people need them makes a much better use of our limited resources. Coming together in this way also puts us in a stronger position to develop other partnerships where we could make further savings or generate income to help minimise the financial burden for people living and working in West Suffolk. We believe that this is the best possible result for people in West Suffolk and for both councils, enabling us to support our communities by continuing to provide good quality, real value for money services.'*

7. Vision 2031

7.1 Recent Progress

Members have attended consultation events led by the Prince's Foundation to help draw out and refine what we want this area to look like in 2031. The ideas and information gathered have been used to compile not only the Vision 2031 documents but also the Council's Corporate Plan. Drafts will be considered by the three area working parties in January 2012 and Cabinet on 1 February 2012. If they are approved, there will then be a two month consultation period in March and April 2012. We intend to go far beyond the statutory consultation required and to build up an engagement programme to try to ensure that this is not just a planning exercise and that as many local residents as possible know about the Vision 2031 documents and can comment on them. Work is also being undertaken to ensure that the Council's Corporate Plan has a strong relationship with Vision 2031.