



## Council 28 February 2012

### 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. Shared Services**

- 1.1 We are entering the next chapter in our relationship with Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) following the appointment of our new Joint Chief Executive, Ian Gallin, who will be joining us in April. Ian brings a wealth of experience, business skills and enthusiasm to help us develop our shared services work and take us forward in the challenging and interesting times ahead for both Councils. In this regard, I would like to express our thanks and appreciation to our current Chief Executive, Geoff Rivers, who has done so much for St Edmundsbury during his time with us.
- 1.2 Meanwhile, our shared services partnership with FHDC is progressing well. Work on business cases to transform and integrate services across both Councils is continuing, including options for an integrated customer access model. This work is supported by customer feedback and surveys so that we can ensure that our proposals take account of the needs of our customers. We now have a shared ICT and Learning and Development service in place and will be moving to implement a shared communications team as soon as possible. Consultation is now handled jointly with the two Unison branches which are being supported in creating a Joint West Suffolk Branch from 1 April 2012.

#### **2. Vision 2031**

- 2.1 The three Vision 2031 documents on Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and the rural area have been approved by the Area Working Parties and Cabinet for further consultation. The consultation period lasts two months, until the end of April 2012, and will be launched at three events: at the arc in Bury St Edmunds on 29 February, at Horringer Community

Centre on 1 March and at Haverhill Arts Centre on 2 March. The launches will be followed by a series of drop-ins in the towns and larger villages and by focus group meetings. There will also be consultation sessions at working parties, committees and meetings of outside organisations. Emails are being sent to all individuals and organisations that have expressed an interest and anyone who wants to express a view can do so via the website: [www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/vision2031](http://www.stedmundsbury.gov.uk/vision2031).

### **3. Communications**

#### **3.1 Current Communications Activities**

Recent priorities for the communications team include:-

- (a) developing closer working relationships with the communications team at FHDC during the run-up to a merger of the two teams. The Borough Council's Corporate Communications Manager is spending two days a week in Mildenhall, and team members are learning about each other's roles and exploring ways of carrying out more joint work;
- (b) supporting the Planning Policy team with the design and print process for the Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and Rural Vision 2031 documents and public consultation materials;
- (c) producing the annual Council Tax leaflet and planning the next edition of Community Spirit (distributed in May); and
- (d) setting up, running and monitoring social media sites, including Facebook ([www.facebook.com/stedmundsburynews](http://www.facebook.com/stedmundsburynews)) and Twitter (Twitter.com/stedsbc). The team is also helping services and Councillors to build their own social media profiles to complement traditional communications and community engagement routes.

### **4. Economic Development**

#### **4.1 2012 Business Festival**

The first Business Festival in 2011 was a great success, and another Festival is planned for this year. It will be held from 11 to 21 September 2012, and will open with the Menta Trade Fair. West Suffolk College will again be running training events, and there will also be workshops on International Trade with China and Intellectual Property Rights. It will conclude with the first Bury Free Press business awards ceremony.

#### **4.2 Business Ratepayers' Event**

I had the pleasure of chairing the annual Bury St Edmunds business ratepayers' event on 19 January 2012 at West Suffolk House. It was called '*Is your business young enough?*', and it focussed on the benefits of having an apprentice and on social media. The speakers were Nick Claxton-Webb, Head Chef at Ickworth House Hotel, Angela Gant and Lisa Bebbington of West Suffolk College, Sean Proctor of Phoenix Internet Consultancy, on behalf of Menta, and our own Geoff Rivers. It was well-attended and as a result of a suggestion at the meeting, a new group has been set up to look at and lobby about business rates.

### **4.3 Inward Investment**

Inward Investment describes any activity that results in the injection of money into an area from an external source. Nationally, UK Trade and Investment (UKTI) works with UK-based businesses to ensure their success in international markets, and encourage overseas companies to invest in the UK. UKTI has recently changed the way it deals with inward investment enquiries and makes more use of the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) in matching companies with suitable land and premises. St Edmundsbury deals with inward investment enquiries at a local level and is working with Suffolk County Council (SCC) to establish a new inward investment service, working at the county level in partnership with district councils and other partners. The work of the new service will be directed by a small Inward Investment Task Group, chaired by SCC's Economic Development Portfolio Holder, and including district council and LEP representatives.

## **5. External Relations, including Local Enterprise Partnerships**

### **5.1 Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs)**

The New Anglia LEP, which covers Norfolk and Suffolk, is forging ahead with a wide range of innovative projects. It has been granted 'Green Pathfinder' status by the Government for a project which aims to strengthen and promote our area's expertise in the green economy and an event on 1 March 2012 will promote the project. Last year, the LEP's bid to create an enterprise zone for Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft was successful, and the enterprise zone is scheduled to open on 1 April 2012. The Government has also awarded the LEP £12 million to create a loan fund to invest in infrastructure projects to help create new jobs and kickstart stalled development sites. The LEP has also been working with the Government to look at ways of stimulating growth and creating jobs in rural areas, and is bidding to be one of six pilot rural growth networks, which would see about 12 locations in Norfolk and Suffolk designated as network hubs. It is also creating a Business Information Portal to help people wanting to start a business or expand an existing business navigate the labyrinth of business support, and it is campaigning to improve the rail network.

### **5.2 West Suffolk Local Strategic Partnership (WSLSP)**

West Babergh has now officially left the WSLSP and the last meeting of the Board will be held on 22 February 2012, when the WSLSP will be dissolved and the new West Suffolk Partnership (WSP) will hold its first meeting. Reflecting the changing public sector landscape, Job Centre Plus, a Public Health representative from the County Council and, in due course, representatives of the West Suffolk GP Commissioning Consortium will be joining the new partnership alongside the existing public, faith and voluntary sector partners. In the short-term, the Police Authority will continue to be present but from next November 2012 that seat will be taken by a representative of the Police and Crime Commissioner. In line with localism and the move to commission and devolve services, the partnership is not seeking to employ a co-ordinator, but is instead inviting expressions of interest from organisations in West Suffolk to provide that service. The co-ordinator will support both the West Suffolk Strategic Group, the equivalent to the current Board, and the Network, which will be the forum for representatives of communities and organisations across West Suffolk to communicate with the strategic group. There will also be an operational group, made up of officers from the partner organisations, which will help conduct WSP business. As well as providing a strong voice for West Suffolk, another benefit of the new WSP is its ability to bid for funding. An expression of interest has already been submitted by the West Suffolk Consortium for Voluntary Organisations on behalf of, and with input from, the WSP to the national Sustainable Communities Fund.

## **6. Property, Asset, Facility and Estates Management**

### **6.1 Asset Management**

The asset sales of major sites reported at December Council are still proceeding and I hope soon to report their completion:-

#### **(a) Hamlet Croft**

Bloor Homes is agreeing detailed designs for a scheme to provide 91 new houses, of which 27 (30%) would be affordable. Two ecological surveys will be undertaken in March 2012 to ensure that all wildlife requirements are met. A planning decision should be forthcoming when these surveys have been assessed. Subject to this, it is anticipated that building works will start later this year.

#### **(b) Site E2, Suffolk Park**

Contracts for the sale of 6.5 acres of business park land are almost agreed and completion of the sale is expected by March 2012. I am pleased to say that the sale will help a very successful local firm to continue to expand its business. Development will be phased over the next few years and the company will employ more local people.

#### **(c) Vinefields Farm, Bury St Edmunds**

Final arrangements are being made for the transfer of a strip of land at East Close, which will give access to the Vinefields Farm housing site. Hopkins Homes is completing the purchase of both the main site and the Council's access land. This will enable 73 houses to be built, again including 30% affordable units.

#### **(d) Millfields Way, Haverhill affordable housing development**

Contracts have been exchanged for the sale of a small parcel of land north of Millfields Way. Orbit Homes will build 11 units, all for affordable housing, including two special needs bungalows. The whole development will be to Level 4 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, and it will be an exemplar project to illustrate how higher levels of sustainability can be achieved. The project has been subsidised using national growth area funds.

### **6.2 Haverhill Council Offices**

I am pleased to report that the first phase of the refurbishment and renewal work has been completed, and Borough Council and Anglia Revenues Partnership staff are now in their new accommodation. Work on the remaining ground floor offices is underway and the voluntary agencies will move into their improved accommodation in the Spring, relocating from the first floor. They will then manage their own reception area. If this phase goes to plan, staff from Suffolk County Council will move from their Camps Road building into refurbished, more open plan offices in May 2012. Both Borough and County staff will be able to use the building in a more flexible way, like West Suffolk House. Occupiers and visitors are being kept informed about progress.

## **7. Rural Affairs**

### **7.1 Rural Area Working Party (RAWP)**

At the RAWP meeting on 23 January 2012, Members were briefed on plans for the Parish Conference and given a chance to suggest additional presentation and workshop items. Members also discussed the draft Rural Vision 2031 document before it goes out to public consultation.

## **7.2 Parish Conference**

The next Parish Conference is at 6pm on Monday 23 April at Great Barton Village Hall. Parish Councils, Village Hall representatives and other rural community groups have been invited. There will be presentations on the future of Suffolk libraries; the Suffolk Local Broadband Plan; and Rural Vision 2031; and workshops on '*A parish that means business*' with a case study from one of our villages, and the Localism Act, a quick overview of the non-planning elements of some of the new rights and freedoms.

## **7.3 Rural Grants**

In December 2011, grants from the Rural Initiatives Grant Scheme were approved for Suffolk Wildlife Trust (£7,500 towards the purchase of Knettishall Heath); Wickhambrook Parish Council (£10,000 towards the refurbishment of their play area); and Honington and Sapiston Village Hall Committee (£2,592 towards new seating for the village hall).

## **7.4 Suffolk Village of the Year**

The Suffolk Village of the Year awards for 2012 were launched on 14 February 2012. The sponsors this year are UK Power Networks and East Anglian Daily Times, with support also from BBC Radio Suffolk and Adnams. This year's competition is for villages with 501 to 1,250 residents. All the Parish Councils of the eligible villages have been informed about the opportunity to apply, and officers welcome support from Ward Members to encourage a high level of interest.

## **7.5 Golden Age Fair**

The '*Golden Age Fair*' will be held on Friday 11 May 2012 in Stanton Community Village Hall, and will provide help and advice from many different organisations, aimed at enabling people over 60 to stay fit, healthy and independent. It is being organised by the Rural Coffee Caravan Information Project in conjunction with officers.

## **7.6 Rural Business Advice**

The Rural Action Plan project aimed at bringing enterprise to villages is now underway. Officers have commissioned Menta, the Suffolk Enterprise Agency, to attend events at Barrow, Great Barton, Hundon, Stanton and Wickhambrook, where they will promote the project initially. Menta will then take bookings for free one-to-one start-up business advice sessions that will also take place in the same villages during March 2012. Different villages will be chosen for the following two years of the Rural Action Plan.