

Council 30 June 2014

LEADER'S REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

Report by Cllr John Griffiths Leader of the Council

Portfolio includes:

- Leadership of Council
- Communications
- Strategic Economic Development (LEPs)
- Corporate Planning

I must begin by apologising for my report being late, and lengthy.

May I however also take the opportunity – on behalf of all of us at St Edmundsbury – formally to record our respects and give thanks for the lives of our former colleague (and past Mayor) Mike Ames, and one of our Honorary Freemen Sir Eldon Griffiths. Both sadly passed away since we last met and helped achieve, during their happily long and active lives, many good things for our residents, towns and villages. I know their respective families very much appreciate the many kind messages from so many at the Borough Council and further afield.

I am also pretty sure, and assuming they are both now in the same place again, that everyone there will be hearing a great deal more about world affairs, West Suffolk, and Bury St Edmunds than they did before.

Both were rather extraordinary men in their own ways and have our thanks, but I also believe they would encourage us to move on and forward in the interests of the people of West Suffolk whom we serve.

1. Leadership of Council

- 1.1 We continue to work increasingly closely with Forest Heath and others for the benefit of both Councils, and West Suffolk, and I have attended numerous meetings to hopefully raise the area's profile, not least because wider recognition should help support our bids for regional and national funds. Here are just some examples.

I was pleased to have the opportunity, along with Cllr Waters, to update Local Government Minister Brandon Lewis on our 'West Suffolk' journey. The

transport and infrastructure challenges facing us are examples of where we are stronger together and our discussions included wider Government support for the Bury St Edmunds Eastern Relief Road. This has the potential to deliver up to 15,000 new jobs (and many other education, transport, environmental and sporting benefits) by opening up the Suffolk Business Park; in this respect I have also been able to join various meetings with landowners and key people aiming to resolve many of the issues involved.

When hosting the latest meeting of the New Anglia LEP board (of which I am a member, representing all Suffolk districts and boroughs) in Bury St Edmunds we also took the opportunity to talk to them about the Eastern Relief Road and I'm delighted to report that it is their current number one infrastructure project.

- 1.2 We were also able to discuss the Council Tax Support Grant and, as a result of this and other work, have already announced our intention to review the amount of grant we pass to our towns and parishes for the financial year 2016/2017. The Leader of Forest Heath has also committed to the same review.
- 1.3 The Chief Executive and I had a very interesting meeting with Roger Quince, Chairman of West Suffolk Hospital. There are lots of areas where we do, and should, work together (on car parking for example) as well as in communities. It is of course very important to understand the challenges of our colleagues in health, but not least because in July 2014 we welcome the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group to West Suffolk House.
- 1.4 The same goes for policing and another productive meeting was with Police and Crime Commissioner, Tim Passmore. We have several opportunities to share services and assets (particularly, perhaps, property) with the Police and fire services. While it is still 'early days' it is important we keep talking and develop proposals.
- 1.5 There are also other huge opportunities for savings, and service improvements, through bringing public sector bodies closer together and sharing facilities in West Suffolk. We started this process some years ago through building, with our partners Suffolk County Council, West Suffolk House – Phase I of the Public Service Village (PSV) in Western Way, Bury St Edmunds. We already host a number of organisations here and are looking at opportunities to bring more on site through the development of PSV Phase II. This will involve relocating our depot to a new location and we are looking to achieve this in partnership with Suffolk County Council through sharing our new depot site with their waste transfer station. This potentially very exciting project has many long term public benefits. Not only would it locate the County Council's proposed waste transfer site from an unpopular (with local residents and our own Development Control Committee members) location for this, but it would also enable us to modernise our depot (and in the process create opportunities for more commercial working), while also help achieve our ambition for a Public Service Village providing space for a whole range of partners on one site.
- 1.6 While much time is (perhaps sadly!) spent in meetings, the important thing is to achieve outcomes as a result, including securing necessary external funding support. An example of this is the Local Enterprise Partnership funding we recently helped secure for the Five Ways / Barton Mills junction on the rapidly improving A11, and I was pleased to attend the ground breaking event on site. Our influence with the LEPs is enhanced by our track record in getting projects delivered, and in this regard it is excellent news that the innovation centre on

the LEP-funded Haverhill Research Park has now gained planning consent, bringing another 2,000 new jobs for the town closer.

- 1.7 The 1,000 home North East Haverhill outline planning application has also received approval. This has the potential to deliver the long-awaited relief road that so many in and around the town have been waiting for, as well as many other facilities.
- 1.8 There are of course a lot of other good things happening in Haverhill and, while following progress on the town centre master plan (which is being led by ONE Haverhill and enabled by St Edmundsbury) I visited Gurteens and I Care Health.
- 1.9 I believe that, for Councillors and officers alike, serving and representing an area well requires listening to others, as well as thinking both laterally and long term – and thereafter being resilient in defending our plans. I am delighted with the Planning Inspector's various comments and broad support for our Vision 2031, including his appeal decision on the land east of Cambridge Road Retail Park in Haverhill, which should secure the amenity value of this site for future generations. The decision is another endorsement of existing and emerging planning policies and supports the opinion put forward by St Edmundsbury.
- 1.10 There are many exciting things going on outside St Edmundsbury in West Suffolk, including the £15 million national heritage Home of Horseracing project which is expected to bring 100,000 people a year to Newmarket; and Newmarket Vision, an innovative community initiative enabling people to identify and deliver things for many local residents and businesses in Newmarket and beyond.
- 1.11 Finally, it was a great pleasure to attend the Magna Carta celebrations, which St Edmundsbury supported and which were very ably organised by members of a special committee set up by the Bury Society. These activities again brought to life Bury St Edmunds' history and importance to the region.

2. Strategic Economic Development (LEPs)

- 2.1 Both Local Enterprise Partnerships (New Anglia LEP and Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP) are eagerly awaiting feedback from the Government on their Strategic Economic Plans early in July 2014. As mentioned above, I was pleased that the most recent New Anglia board meeting was held in Bury St Edmunds. We used the occasion to make a presentation on a whole range of growth opportunities in West Suffolk (as well as the Eastern Relief Road) plus an excellent – and productive for all concerned – visit to, and with, West Suffolk College.
- 2.2 Briefly, New Anglia is asking for approximately £500 million over six years. This includes more than £200 million for transport improvements to help develop economic growth, and over £100 million to invest in the expansion and development of colleges. The Plan sets a target of delivering 95,000 more jobs, the establishment of 10,000 new businesses, and the building of 117,000 new homes by 2026.
- 2.3 In total the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP has bid for £119 million of funding for 2015/2016, with an overall funding bid of £500 million over the next six years. As a result of this investment, the Plan would support

the delivery of 70,000 new jobs and 50,000 new homes, leading to a £2.8 billion uplift in GVA across the LEP area.

2.4 Mark Pendlington was appointed the new Chairman of New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership in April 2014. Mark is also the Group Director at Anglia Water and knows West Suffolk very well; he succeeds Dr Andy Wood who was instrumental in the successful formation and establishment of New Anglia and stepped down as Chair after serving his maximum three-year term (though he remains on the Board).

2.5 **InDigital Connect Conference**

It was a pleasure to open the first 'InDigital Connect Conference' on 1 May 2014 at The Apex. The conference was the start of what we hope will become a very important support network for digital talent throughout the region, and I was delighted that the organisers chose Bury St Edmunds to host their inaugural event.

The West Suffolk Six Point Plan for Jobs and Growth has recognised the importance of the Digital and Cultural Creative industries as a vital sector to the West Suffolk economy. This sector will undoubtedly play a massively important role in the future of the UK's economy with digital expected to be the major growth area. With this in mind I wanted to assure the digital professionals (digital regional specialists and developers), local businesses and agencies, as well as students from West Suffolk College who attended, that West Suffolk councils will do all that we can to support that growth.

There are definite signs that the local economy is beginning to take advantage of the perceived national economic upturn. Thanks not least to our working with others (for example Our Bury St Edmunds), things in our towns and villages are broadly improving. In Bury St Edmunds, for example, shop vacancies are plummeting, the market is enjoying a continuing revival and the numbers of visitors using our car parks keeps going up.

3. Communications

3.1 There has been a change in staff within the communications team which brings new skills and enables a greater emphasis on social media as well as the more traditional print and broadcast media.

3.2 A major focus for the team over the past couple of months has been, and is, the development of a new West Suffolk website. This is being designed as one website, with the flexibility to reflect the differences between the two councils as well as the similarities. As part of this work we have:

- given responsibility to 15 people (the Web Content Team) working in services across both councils for ownership of their webpages, reviewing and updating them as necessary;
- provided support and training as required, with regular meetings to support their development as a team;
- had a major involvement in creating the new single transactional website;
- worked with Leisure Services to transfer information from Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury's websites on to the more commercial West Suffolk Diary (which takes paid advertising from non-council sources).

3.3 Other work for the team includes:

- developing a communications business plan which reflects the activities and services St Edmundsbury will be delivering over the next year;
- increasing range of social media, including research into local community sites and activity;
- building marketing expertise among services, such as identification and targeting of relevant audiences and more cost effective communications methods.

4. Corporate Planning

4.1 The 2013/2014 Annual Report discussed at our recent Joint Cabinet meeting with Forest Heath will be the first such shared document to have come through joint committees, and our shared West Suffolk Strategic Plan and Mid Term Financial Strategy will soon be complemented by the West Suffolk Housing Strategy.

4.2 We have received the final report from the Local Government Association's Corporate Peer Challenge Team, which provides us with some really positive constructive feedback. We have shared this with Members during well-attended member development sessions. I commend these sessions to you.

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