



## Council 30 September 2013

### CABINET MEMBER REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

#### ***Report by Cllr Alaric Pugh Economic Growth Portfolio***

**Portfolio includes:**

- Economic Development and related Planning matters
- Town Centre Management (Strategy)
- Markets (Strategy)
- Tourism (Strategy)
- Car Parking (Strategy)
- Transport (Strategy)

#### **1. Economic Development**

- 1.1 The establishment of the new Economic Development and Growth service for West Suffolk has now been completed with the addition of two new Growth Officers to the team. The additional capacity available signifies the Council's commitment to appropriate growth for West Suffolk and provides new opportunities for investment in the local economy.
- 1.2 Much of the recent activity in the team has related to the Strategic Economic Plans that both Local Enterprise Partnerships have to prepare for submission to central government. In addition, the team plays a key role in the Suffolk Growth Group which in turn has been working on the delivery plan for the Suffolk Growth Strategy. Whilst these documents are important as they set the framework for growth in the wider area, there is more work to be done to set out the priorities and key actions for the local economy of West Suffolk and this is the next key step for the strategy work. In the meantime renewed priority has been given to senior managers and Councillors in both boroughs, meeting senior business leaders on a regular basis ensuring a greater understanding of how best to support existing and incoming businesses.
- 1.3 In support of the Suffolk Growth Plan and its specific objectives for Skills development across the county, two Working Groups have now been established to support implementation and delivery. These Working Groups are focussed on Careers Education Information Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) and Apprenticeships. Initial meetings have taken place and these groups will now be looking to develop action plans and projects across the whole county going forward. West Suffolk officers from the Economic Development and Growth team are participating in these groups to ensure the needs of West Suffolk are catered

for in any action plans. Both West Suffolk Portfolio Holders have participated in a Suffolk-wide workshop.

- 1.4 The Norfolk and Suffolk Local Transport Body (LTB) is one of many local transport bodies that have been set up across the country to manage major transport scheme money. Whereas previously this money was managed centrally, government has now devolved the funding to local areas. Created to cover the geographical area of the two counties and New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), the Norfolk and Suffolk LTB is likely to receive around £39m of funding for major transport schemes over the 2015/2019 spending period.
- 1.5 The Norfolk and Suffolk LTB published a 'long-list' of possible schemes across the two counties and invited comments and additional schemes. A response was sent which listed a number of additional West Suffolk priority projects that could be eligible for this funding; or indeed other funding in the future. The LTB will be making a decision later in the year.
- 1.6 A new post is being created to oversee the strategic development of the provisions markets in West Suffolk. The aim of this post is to ensure that the markets are exciting attractions in their own right that contribute to the overall offer of each of our towns.
- 1.7 The annual Business Festival organised by officers was judged to be another resounding success by many participants and it was larger and more influential than ever. It is becoming firmly fixed in the regional business calendar and still has a great deal of potential to be realised. The Portfolio Holder believes officers are to be congratulated for the scale of commitment involved in delivering this two week long event.
- 1.8 Much work has been done to increase and improve communications with Suffolk County Council (SCC) and others and the new SCC Portfolio Holders for Economic Development and for Transport have both visited St Edmundsbury Borough Council (SEBC). Joint briefings are also being used effectively and the Portfolio Holders in Mid-Suffolk and Babergh District Councils have prioritised a meeting with us to learn from our approach to Economic Growth developed over recent years.

## **2. *Parking Services***

- 2.1 After a very successful 18 month trial of pay by phone cashless parking, SEBC has optioned an on-going three year contract with suppliers RingGo. Since the trial began, over 40,000 transactions have been paid through this platform and its popularity is increasing each month with over 2,500 regular customers and an average of 50 new customers each week. The service is being promoted with banners in the Cattle Market/arc car park to raise awareness.
- 2.2 Parking Services continue to develop an ambassadorial, customer-focused approach – recently discussed and reviewed by the Portfolio Holder. All the front line team have received specific customer service training and are actively engaged in traffic management and meet-and-greet duties. This strategy has resulted in a dramatic reduction in fines issued. Fines are issued as a last resort, in most cases where it is apparent that no payment for the service has been made or attempted. Fines issued this financial year saw a decline of 20% against the previous year and 37% against 2010. Currently, the number of fines issued equates to 0.2% of our transactions – in other words, 99.8% of customers who visit the town understand and comply with the parking charges and so do not

risk being fined. This is considered to be a positive contribution to economic success in Bury St Edmunds in particular.

- 2.3 The new weekly ticket offer introduced in May 2013 allows customers to buy a discounted weekly ticket using a credit or debit card at key pay machines. Feedback from customers suggested that the outlay required to buy a longer term season ticket was too great a disincentive and the weekly ticket can be bought from as little as £7.50 in a long stay car park. We are now selling an average of 165 tickets a week and this is increasing each month.
- 2.4 The introduction of the 'Free from 3' offer in short stay car parks on Tuesdays in Bury St Edmunds has been mainly monitored through the electronic loops which provide data for the Variable Messaging Signage (VMS) system. Where loops are not fitted we have estimated on average use data. The offer was introduced on 2 April 2013 and use has steadily increased over the four month period from around 1,400 in the first week to 2,000 more recently.
- 2.5 In Haverhill, the 'Free from 3' offer on Fridays cannot be directly monitored as the car parks are not fitted with loops but it is estimated that around 300 customers per week use the free period. But discussions are ongoing about the most effective use of this initiative.

### **3. Transport**

- 3.1 A Haverhill town centre transport event took place at the Haverhill Arts Centre on 11 September 2013. This session, organised by SCC and facilitated by a consultant, involved a wide range of stakeholders from the town including children from local schools. Looking at planning the future of the town centre, the purpose of the workshop was to provide an update on the current situation, discuss issues and concerns, explore and develop ideas and aspirations, investigate the relationship between retail and transport in the area and examine areas of contention. The Portfolio Holder and officers along with the Portfolio Holder for Housing, participated in this very positive full day event. Further consultation took place on the market on 14 September 2013 and a full report will be issued in due course.
- 3.2 Several recent workshops, including ones on use of European Funds, have continued to identify Rural Transport issues as barriers to growth and this has been recognised as an important focus of on-going attention wherever and whenever progress is possible.