



Council 25 February 2014

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 and Growth

1.1 Six Point Plan for jobs and growth

1.1.2 The Economic Development and Growth (ED&G) team's action plan, 'West Suffolk six point plan for jobs and growth', was approved by Cabinet on 11 February 2014.

1.1.3 This plan sets out, in six points, what the West Suffolk councils will do to meet our priority of economic growth. The points are:

- (a) meeting and understanding West Suffolk businesses;
- (b) promoting the West Suffolk economic region;
- (c) supporting our market towns;
- (d) ensuring the right conditions for growth;
- (e) developing skills and increasing employment opportunities for all; and
- (f) capitalising upon our key sectors.

1.1.4 The plan is closely aligned to, and derived from, the strategic growth plans of our principal partners, including Suffolk County Council's (SCC) 'Suffolk Growth Strategy' and the growth plans produced by the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

1.1.5 In addition to the full action plan, a flyer version has been produced to hand out to businesses and investors.

1.2 West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group

1.2.1 The first meeting of the West Suffolk Joint Growth Steering Group took place on 20 January 2014. This group was formed to advise Cabinet on issues relating to delivering growth across West Suffolk. I was elected as Chairman for 2013/14 and Forest Heath Councillor David Bowman was elected as Vice-Chairman for 2013/2014. The group's terms of reference were discussed and presentations were received from members of the ED&G team and the Planning team. These meetings are likely to take place on a quarterly basis, with extra meetings as appropriate.

1.3 Housing and Economic Growth Summit

1.3.1 I attended the Housing and Economic Growth Summit organised by the National Housing Federation on Friday 31 January 2014. I was really pleased to see the mixture of speakers that included representatives from both our Local Enterprise Partnerships; Chamber of Commerce representatives and a range of other experts from organisations such as the HCA and various Housing providers. This is the first time to my knowledge that the important role housing plays in driving growth in the local economy has been acknowledged at such an event. Like with many such events most people took good advantage of the opportunity to network with people they either knew or had just met.

1.4 SCC Overview and Scrutiny

1.4.1 On 12 February I attended Suffolk County Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on behalf of Councillor Griffiths. Both of our Councils had been invited to take part in this committee that was set up to examine how SCC is working with the LEPs to secure economic growth. The meeting sought to understand the existing relationships with both of our LEPs and then how these may be improved.

1.5 Business Engagement

1.5.1 Activity around business engagement over the last couple of months has largely focussed around implementing a programme of leafleting individual businesses around West Suffolk with information on the availability of certain grant funds and other business support initiatives. All of the main industrial estates in West Suffolk have been covered and this has also been used as an opportunity to introduce members of the ED&G staff team to the business community. This is an activity that will be repeated at various times throughout the coming year as suitable opportunities arise as a way of maintaining a level of contact with a large number of local businesses on relevant issues.

1.5.2 In addition we have also held the first meeting of the West Suffolk Business Forum. We hope that this will evolve into an established group, meeting on a regular basis with the main Business Representative Groups in West Suffolk, such as the Chambers of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, Our Bury St Edmunds (previously Bid4Bury), the Newmarket Retailers Association. The initial response of these organisations is positive and we look forward to taking this initiative forward in the future, giving us the opportunity for regular consultation with the West Suffolk business community on specific issues/"opportunities". For example, the skills agenda, access to finance and the role of the LEPs.

- 1.5.3 Key business opportunities/requests for support requiring more urgent attention continue to be dealt with on a 1-2-1 basis, primarily by the Principal Growth Officers, as and when they arise. In the short term this will continue to be a significant aspect of our engagement with local businesses.

1.6 Strategic Tourism

- 1.6.1 The new Visit Suffolk website (www.visitsuffolk.com) went live in January 2014. The innovative site, which has intuitive search functionality, aims to inspire and inform new and repeat visitors about all there is to do and see in our wonderful county. The site is being promoted via a 52 week content strategy, through a variety of weekly themes of sharing blog posts, monthly e-newsletters and social media. The overarching aim is to raise Suffolk's profile further and deliver on the stay longer, spend more objective.
- 1.6.2 Visit Suffolk also launched their 'Take me to Suffolk' campaign and accompanying website (www.takemetosuffolk.com) in January 2014. This campaign will run for 16 weeks to promote Suffolk's shoulder seasons.
- 1.6.3 There has already been fantastic coverage of both the new website and campaign in both local and national press.

1.7 Market Development

- 1.7.1 The new Markets Development Officer is continuing to familiarise herself with existing groups and established bodies. The focus of activity relates to the promotion and improvement of the different markets in West Suffolk as well as how to attract new traders to the market with a particular emphasise on young entrepreneurs.
- 1.7.2 An events plan for Haverhill, Bury St Edmunds and Newmarket markets is beginning to take shape. Activities planned include Easter events, summer events and three separate events during 'Love Your Local Market' week in May.
- 1.7.3 Planning continues with regard to Christmas Fayre 2014 as well as the analysis of facts and figures captures from the last event. It was agreed at the last Christmas Fayre meeting that the event will start on the Thursday afternoon again (27 November) and will be designed for locals. This will include a parade, entertainment and special offers. The Christmas Fayre will be 27-30 November 2014.

2. Transport and Infrastructure

- 2.1 I regularly attend a meeting with the SCC Cabinet Member for Roads and Transport and SCC officers to discuss possible improvements to road and rail infrastructure and bus information in the west of Suffolk. The fruits of this engagement are beginning to be seen with the inclusion of our major infrastructure projects in the New Anglia LEP's Strategic Economic Plan; the Suffolk element of which was written by the SCC transport officers.

3. Parking Services

- 3.1 The parking services team were kept very busy over the Christmas and New Year period and we saw high demand sustained throughout December and into the early weeks of the new year.

- 3.2 This year, our customers were kept up to date about available spaces and live reporting about traffic conditions through Twitter, a service which we have received some great feedback about. This medium will be developed further this year to incorporate general parking information for our customers, as well as traffic management updates at our peak periods.
- 3.3 I am pleased to report that all of our car parks again received the prestigious ParkMark award which is a joint award between the police and the British Parking Association. This year the assessor commented 'The standards of your car parking facilities are exemplary....it is apparent that the necessary management procedures that you have in place are working to create a safe and non-threatening environment for your clients'.
- 3.4 Parking Services have taken advantage of some reasonably dry weather to renew white line markings in Town Hall and the Leisure Centre car parks in Haverhill and at Parkway surface and Cattle market/arc car parks in Bury St Edmunds and over twenty faded and ageing signs have been replaced in Haverhill car parks and new blue badge bays created in the Town Hall site.

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