



St Edmundsbury  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

# F124

## Council 23 September 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

#### **1. Leadership of Council**

- 1.1 Today, with your support, we may well reach the end of a long, and extremely interesting, journey and I very much hope that my councillor colleagues will formally approve our Vision 2031 documents. These will help guide us in managing change throughout Bury St Edmunds, Haverhill and our rural areas in the coming years. Very many people – including the Planning Inspector – have joined us on this journey, attending roadshows and other events, taking part in consultations, passionately debating the merits of their points of view and telling us what they think we are doing wrong (and right). Our three Vision 2031 Local Plans, if approved, will provide us with a framework for the growth and change which we know is inevitable in St Edmundsbury, putting us, and those we represent locally, firmly in the driving seat (and less vulnerable to speculative planning applications from others).
- 1.2 Vision 2031 is far more than simply a Local Plan. It is as it says – a vision put forward by the council responsible for sustainable development and growth for our future. It is not something we have done alone and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all those who have played their part in developing this vision. The process started in 2011 and the thousands of comments we have received, even if we could not, of course, please everyone, has shaped Vision 2031.
- 1.3 This is not the end; it is actually really where it starts. Now it is all about delivery and using our powers as the local planning authority to turn this vision into reality. We are encouraging our villages to produce neighbourhood plans which will complement Vision 2031, while as just two further examples, in Haverhill there's the town centre masterplan to progress and in Bury St Edmunds there are major developments, linked to the Eastern Relief Road, to manage.

- 1.4 While on the subject of growth, I would like to congratulate Cllr James Waters, Leader of Forest Heath District Council, on his election to the board of the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough Local Enterprise Partnership (GCGP LEP) to represent district councils in that area. With me, for some time now, having a similar role on the New Anglia LEP (NALEP) we are now in an even stronger position to put forward the case for sustainable growth in, and further raise awareness about the strengths of, and opportunities in, West Suffolk. The partnership of our two councils, and track record of successful delivery, is a real advantage when it comes to bidding for national and LEP funding. By way of just one example, this reputation undoubtedly helped us recently to secure an additional £6 million of Government funding through the NALEP to support delivery of the Eastern Relief Road.
- 1.5 Another example of successful bids for external resources is the funding we have received from the Government's One Public Estate initiative, which will help us to build the business case for further co-location and integration of public sector services both here in St Edmundsbury and Forest Heath. Service integration is not just about bringing together our own services. Across West Suffolk and further afield the whole public sector has to modernise the way we do business. We all have fewer staff, so less capacity, which means we have to work differently in order that key decisions – in our case decisions taken by councillors – are delivered efficiently and at a cost the taxpayer can afford. Modernisation, partnership working, cutting demand and more commercial ways of thinking are not options to consider, they are our daily reality. St Edmundsbury, and indeed West Suffolk, is a geographic area, but as an entity we can only deliver the services if we work innovatively with others who operate alongside us. This is something that is recognised, and regularly discussed, at Public Sector Leaders' meetings (the political leaders of the district, borough and county councils across Suffolk, and the Police and Crime Commissioner) because we all face similar resource issues.
- 1.6 West Suffolk House is really helping us to make the most of such opportunities. If you haven't toured the building recently, ask a member of staff to take you round because there have been major changes to who is working here, and where, since we, and the county council, moved in five years ago. The third floor, for example, is integration in action, with the West Suffolk Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) sitting alongside our housing team and the county council's adult team, whose customers can often have health needs. A quick conversation across a desk and problems or blockages often can be more swiftly sorted out than before. We also now have even more county council services based here so again it's much simpler to find solutions before issues become problems. With Haverhill House also demonstrating the advantages of bringing a range of organisations together, and the plans coming forward for the Mildenhall Hub (with education, leisure and police as well as council partners) being another example, we continue to show we are ahead of the game, keen to work differently in West Suffolk, and understand that this is the future of local government, and indeed the whole public sector.
- 1.7 Bringing organisations together is a keystone of the hugely successful Bury St Edmunds and West Suffolk Business Festival. With 25 partners and 24 events, we are providing another opportunity for businesses to network, gain new skills, get advice, learn what's on the horizon and, through the business awards, celebrate success. It runs from 1 to 10 October and I would urge you drop in at some point. The Fresh Festival, for example, which brings together enthusiastic, optimistic and skilled young entrepreneurs, is a real breath of fresh air and they

would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about their hopes for the future. You can find out more about events on the website: [www.businessfestival.org](http://www.businessfestival.org)

- 1.8 In the Portfolio Holder's report on resources you will find more information about financial matters but I would in passing like to take this opportunity to thank all those who took part in the recent budget consultation. We had an excellent response; the statistical validity of this result gives us confidence that the views are generally representative of our borough. Alongside other research, evidence and information, such as future levels of Government funding, the impact of growth and changing demand for services, these consultation responses will help inform and guide us as we take the decisions necessary to set the budget for 2015/16.
- 1.9 Finally, I would like to acknowledge an initiative from the Secretary of State which makes it the law that anyone can film, photograph or record any public council meeting and use social media to broadcast what is happening. St Edmundsbury has always valued transparency and welcomed such activities even before it became law. It was interesting to see that two recent meetings have been filmed, with the debate being posted online, and I hope this interest continues.

## **2. *Strategic Economic Development (LEPs)***

- 2.1 It is with great pleasure that I can confirm the allocation from the government via the New Anglia Local Enterprise Partnership of a total of £10m for the delivery of the Eastern Relief Road in Bury St Edmunds. There is still a long way to go but the road should link the Rookery Crossroads (Junction 45 of the A14) with Moreton Hall and open up significant opportunities for growth including an estimated 14,000 new job opportunities over a twenty year period.
- 2.2 The funding should also help trigger the delivery of the 68 hectare expansion of the Suffolk Business Park – land that could for example be used to attract the head offices of big national companies, enable the building of 500 new homes, a secondary school, and even a community football project. In total it is anticipated that the project could bring an estimated £275m of investment into the area.

## **3. *Communications***

- 3.1 St Edmundsbury is increasing its use of social media to complement other forms of communication, such as the print and broadcast news media, with residents and businesses. Press releases are now publicised wherever appropriate through the use of Twitter and sent to a number of Facebook and other community social media groups. The council's Facebook page is also regularly updated and monitored so we can respond to queries. It allows us to share information and engage more closely with local business and community groups, including those who produce their own newsletters.
- 3.2 Using these routes allows us to reach increasing numbers of people directly. Our use of social media supported media and website publicity for the recent budget consultation, for example, which had a high rate of responses.
- 3.3 You can follow us on Twitter through @stedsbc and look at our Facebook page by typing in St Edmundsbury Borough Council. Suggestions for groups or individuals who may wish to receive St Edmundsbury's news regularly are welcomed – please contact [communications@westsuffolk.gov.uk](mailto:communications@westsuffolk.gov.uk)

- 3.4 There has been, and continues to be, a huge amount of work to develop the new West Suffolk website, a joint project with our partners Forest Heath District Council. This will be completely different to our current website – much more focused on service delivery, helping people to carry out the transactions they want to do and find answers to their queries quickly.
- 3.5 A test version of the website is now set up and once the testing to check it works properly is finished the team involved will start to load content on to it. Every page is being rewritten to bring a consistent look and increase simplicity of use. The end result should also be easy to view on mobile devices, which is the method people are increasingly using to access information. There's still a lot of testing to be done (and there are almost certainly bound to be glitches!), but it will be sent to all councillors, as well as some members of the public, for comment before it goes live later this year.

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