

# Cabinet and Corporate Management Team

## Portfolio Holder Briefing Report

June 2013



# Cabinet Members

	<b>Councillor Alan Melton</b>
<b>Leader of the Council</b>	

	<b>Councillor Christopher Seaton</b>
<b>Deputy Leader of the Council</b>	

	<b>Councillor John Clark</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	

	<b>Councillor Ralph Butcher</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	


	<b>Councillor Steve Garratt</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	

	<b>Councillor Pop Jolley</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	

	<b>Councillor Simon King</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	

	<b>Councillor Peter Murphy</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	

	<b>Councillor David Oliver</b>
<b>Cabinet Member</b>	

	<b>Councillor Mac Cotterell MBE</b>
<b>Cabinet Advisor</b>	

# Neighbourhood Planning

## NP1 Growth and future shape of Fenland

### Core Strategy

The Core Strategy was discussed by Cabinet and full Council on the 30 May 2013 when it was agreed to remove the North East March (Estover Road) strategic allocation for housing growth from the Plan. This followed a re-consideration of its inclusion within the Plan which Cabinet had agreed at its meeting on 21 March 2013.

Due to the significant nature of the change, a further six week public consultation will now take place on an Addendum to the document. The Addendum removes the North East March allocation of 450 dwellings, and redistributes 200 extra dwellings to the South West March broad location and 250 dwellings to be found on additional "windfall" sites within the town. The overall target of 11,000 dwellings for Fenland during the 20 year plan period is retained, as well as the proposed total housing numbers for each of the market towns.

The consultation will commence on 27 June and run to 7 August. All responses received during both this forthcoming consultation, and the one which took place from February to April earlier this year, will be collated and forwarded to the Secretary of State in September. At this stage it is anticipated that an Examination (comprising a series of public hearings) will take place sometime in December or in the early part of 2014. Should the plan be supported by the Inspector, an adoption date sometime in the mid-part of 2014 is likely.

### Statement of Community Involvement (SCI)

The Fenland SCI was approved by June Cabinet. This document sets out the Council's approach to public consultation on the various planning functions of the Council, along with the neighbourhood planning option contained within the Localism Act 2011.

### Working with Neighbouring Authorities

Cabinet (June) endorsed two separate memorandum of understanding related to joint working between local authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. These focussed on future housing needs, along with growth levels, and demonstrate our commitment under the 'duty to cooperate' to work with neighbouring local authorities.

## **NP2 The built environment**

### **Wisbech Dilapidated Buildings**

The profile of the Dilapidated Buildings in Wisbech is high on the agenda of our Members and that of the local community. Recently, Steve Barclay MP became involved, keen to tackle the problems of derelict buildings in Wisbech.

Officers prepared an update report that was considered by Cabinet at its 20 June meeting. The report summarises the actions taken to date and includes confirmation of works already undertaken by FDC, the enforcement actions which have been taken and explains how FDC have, and continue to, work closely with the property owners (where present) to encourage and promote the refurbishment & redevelopment of these properties.

Steve Barclay MP has been asked to support FDC's ongoing ambitions to help enable the refurbishment and re-use of these derelict properties using all of its appropriate powers to do so.

A further confidential report is being proposed for consideration by July Cabinet, containing the legal position and suggested ways forward for consideration.

### **New Affordable Housing**

Doddington Court is now open and able to provide new affordable homes for frail older residents. In helping to enable this important local amenity, the Council has assisted with the following outcomes:

- 30 of the 50 flats are already let and further viewings are due to take place.
- Most tenants were initially referred by Doddington Practice GPs.
- A third of new residents are selling or letting their homes in order to self fund their care package.
- All residents have a local connection to either March, Wimblington, Doddington, or Wisbech.
- Doddington Court is accommodating higher care needs than were originally anticipated.
- There is close partnership working with mental health teams, GP practices, local hospitals and the intermediate & planned care team.
- Staff at the scheme are being trained in dementia care and are also developing dementia champions.
- Staff at the scheme are being trained in reablement skills, which will help to provide support for people with poor physical or mental health or a disability. This then helps residents to live as independently as possible by learning or relearning the skills necessary for daily living.

- The scheme is planning to open a day centre in collaboration with other accommodation providers in the area.
- The Intermediate care flats are opening in stages.
- The restaurant is a great success with residents, hospital staff and visitors.

## **Localism**

### **L1 Supporting vulnerable members of our community**

#### **Homeless applications and Advice**

During 2012-13, the Council dealt with 129 homeless applications, which is slightly higher than during 2011-12 (a total of 122). Out of the 129 application taken in 2012-13, the Council accepted a duty to house 76 families. In 2011-12 the Council accepted a duty to house 73 families.

The Council advised 1243 families on housing matters in 2012-13, compared to 1364 in 2011-12, which was a slight decrease in numbers.

#### **Community House partner impact – Youth Service Providers and Children's Centre**

There are several partners currently using the Community House in Wisbech on a regular basis. These include Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB), Norfolk & Waveney Enterprise Service (NWES), Youth Service Providers and the Children's Centre.

Recently, Youth Service Providers have been supporting a group of Lithuanian young people who meet fortnightly at the Community House to set up a Free Running Club. The club have been utilising the Wifi connection to carry out research into equipment and make contact with other groups across the country for shared learning.

As a result of this action, the Youth Service Providers have agreed to run regular general sessions at Community House during the summer holiday.

The Children's Centre have been utilising the Community Garden for stay and play sessions with families, which has resulted in more 'new' people attending the Community House and finding out about the services on offer. Additionally, as the Wifi connection reaches the garden the Children's Centre, staff have been able to use iPads to access translation software to enable families to fully take part in the activity, even when English is their second language.

#### **Unauthorised encampments**

During May 2013, the Council became aware of 4 unauthorised Gypsy Traveller encampments in the Wisbech area.

After conducting the statutory health and welfare enquires required, the Council was able to move on those encamped via negotiation. This eliminated the need for the Council to take legal action or clear up costs often incurred with encampments elsewhere in the country.

## **Benefits**

We have implemented a new electronic declaration to our on-line benefits claim form, meaning that customers do not have to print off a declaration, then sign it. This will improve convenience for our customers. We have also started to automate some updates that we get from the DWP each day. These tell us about changes to customers' state benefits (i.e. Tax Credits, Income Support etc.) that may affect entitlement to benefits we administer. Both of these changes will help us further improve benefits performance this year. New claims processing time was at 27.7 days at the end of May (it was at 36 days at this point in 2012) and changes of circumstances processing time was at 11 days (14 at this point in 2012).

The number of claims has also increased from this time last year; 825 new applications were received from 1 April to mid June in 2013, compared with 782 applications for the same time last year.

## **L2 Promoting Cohesion throughout Fenland**

### **Service Level Agreements for the Community grants- The Rural Cambridgeshire Citizen's Advice Bureau (CAB)**

A total of 10% of all households used CAB services during 2012-2013 compared to 14% in 2011-2012. This in actual figures equates to 5709 in 2011-2012 and 3982 in 2012-2013. Although there is a reduction, this still equates to a high total number of households in Fenland receiving support.

During 2012-2013, 12 new volunteers were recruited to the CAB. Each volunteer attended the CAB interview and training process. The total number of volunteer hours for CAB volunteers working in Fenland has been financially valued and equates to £150,000. This method of calculation has been developed by Volunteer England and takes the equivalent hourly rate per staff in the paid sector for the skills required in the volunteer role. This amount is in addition to the Court desk service which is separately recorded by FDC as part of the Council's Homelessness Strategy.

During 2012/13, CAB support was given in relation to 6697 debt issues (an increase of 13% from 5907 last year) and the total number of debt re-negotiated on behalf of clients is £5.1 million (no baseline figure from last year to compare).

The value of benefits applied for through CAB in Fenland was just over £822,129 for 2012-2013. This is an 11% reduction from the amount applied for last year (which was £921,083).

There was a 99% satisfaction rate for clients using the CAB services.

### L3 Supporting our ageing population

#### Golden Age Fair

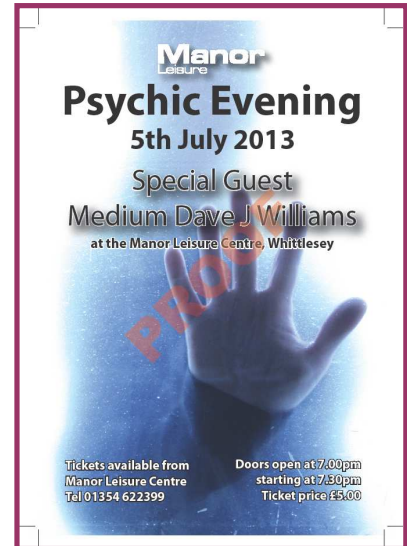
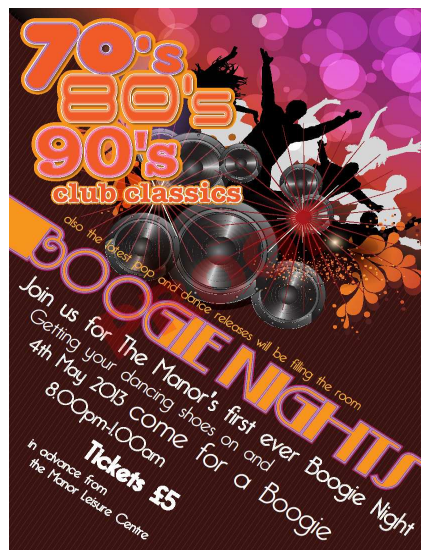
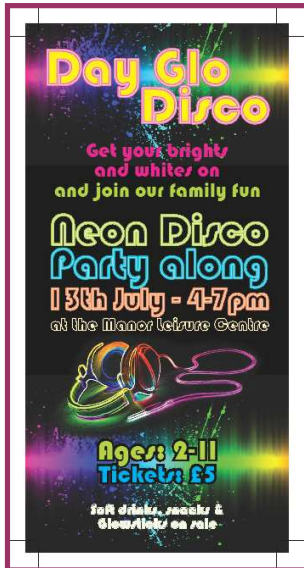
Golden Age events are delivered by the Council and its partners. They help to bring a range of services out into the community and improve services and information for the over 60's. The most recent Golden Age drop-in session was held in Chatteris and was attended by 18 people. A total of 8 of these visitors received blood pressure tests and one visitor was alerted to the fact that they may be eligible to claim additional benefits.

### L4 Promote healthy lifestyles

#### Manor Leisure Centre Functions Venue

Since its launch last year, the Manor Functions Venue has successfully hosted 36 events, created £33,000 of income and generated £17,000 of surplus to support the Leisure income target.

Looking forward, a series of events for this year is in progress with 22 events already booked, ranging from clairvoyance evenings and disco nights to outside music festivals. Our target is to host 48 events throughout the year.



#### Supporting local Sports Clubs

March Town Football Club has recently been successful in achieving planning permission to build a new multi purpose clubhouse. The Council's Sports Development team were involved in the early stages of this development and were able to offer the club advice on various topics such as funding streams.



The Sports Development team are also in the process of aiding Wisbech Acorns FC in their transition to a new venue, which is hoped will be completed by April 2014.

Wisbech Tennis Club, Wisbech H&CC, Whittlesey Warriors Netball Club and Whittlesey Blue star FC are all currently receiving help from FDC in terms of funding applications and advice or facility/ ground maintenance.

The Sports Development team also recently attended the official opening of the new Gorefield pavilion which the team aided in the early stages of development with advice and information.

### **Attendance at Leisure Centres 2012/13**

In line with the strategic approach of Leisure Services, customer numbers and income increased during the last financial year. Paying customers made 621,000 visits to the Council's four leisure centres over the past year. This is a 9% increase on the target for the year.

During this time, the gyms and swimming were the most popular activities (113,000 and 326,000 visits respectively) along with soft play attracting 16,000 visits and fitness classes more than 63,000 visits. This highlights how the capital investment plan over recent years is contributing to the performance of the business.

### **Fenland Exercise Referral Launch**

After undergoing a period of development, the new look Exercise Referral Scheme for Fenland was launched on 22 May 2013, with Councillors and Health professionals coming together to learn about the new format of the scheme.

The revised scheme consists of a 12 week fitness and activity programme. To qualify for the reduced price 3 month programme individuals must be referred by a health professional such as a doctor, nurse or physiotherapist.

The referred customers get use of the centres facilities outside of peak hours. They are also able to participate in various fitness classes and special weekly group gym sessions, enabling them to train with a qualified member of staff in a friendly and supportive environment.

It is hoped the changes to the scheme will encourage a change of lifestyle for those referred, embed an exercise habit and that they will continue as active members of the leisure centres.



**Councillors and Health Professionals at the Launch**

### **Healthy Employer initiative**

A Healthy Employer event was recently delivered at G's Fresh Produce, in March. Staff at G's could access information on health, receive blood pressure checks, take a carbon monoxide test to encourage smoking cessation and also experience a taster session using exercise cycles and rowing machines, to promote physical activity. Being physically active is a key part of this and the events enable access to leisure facilities to be highlighted. Signposting on benefit issues was also included at the suggestion of G's.

The role of local businesses can be influential in supporting action to address health inequalities in Fenland. The Healthy Employer initiative was developed to provide a setting for people at work to be provided with health information and advice and it has been well received by businesses taking part.

The initiative was delivered by Environmental Health and Leisure Services, in conjunction with Camquit, the local smoking cessation service and G's human resources team.

Further events are planned in the district.



## **L5 Engaging young people**

### **Youth District Council**

The Youth District Council (YDC) held their Annual General Meeting on 15 May 2013 which was attended by students representing Neale Wade Academy, Cromwell Community College, Sir Harry Smith Community College and Wisbech Grammar School.

The outgoing Chair of the YDC delivered the end of year report which highlighted the achievements of the YDC in 2012/13. These included successful delivery of democracy day, an employability skills day and full distribution of the £10,000 grant funding provided by FDC .

The YDC discussed priorities for the forthcoming year which includes increasing the profile of Youth District Councillors within the schools by working closer with School Councils/Parliaments. The YDC also elected their new Chair, Vice-Chair and Finance Officer; all students from Neale Wade Academy

The meeting was once again well supported by CMT, Councillors and for the first time, headteachers and parents.

## Streets Ahead

### SA1 Maintain current levels of waste, recycling & cleansing

#### Environmental Services Performance 2012/13

The Council's Streets Ahead corporate priority continues to deliver high performing services which meet with customer satisfaction.

#### Refuse and Recycling

- Our customers collected 200 extra tonnes of blue bin recycling during the year.
- Plastic tubs, pots and trays were introduced in to the blue bin service.
- 94% of our customers were satisfied with the service (170 from 181 returns)
- An average of 300 missed collections each month from the 280,000 collections possible
- 100% of the 549 Bulky Waste Collections requested were performed on the correct day.
- The local recycling bring bank sites were well used by customers and collected 625 tonnes of textiles, paper, glass, books and media materials.
- Overall, recycling remained at 50%.

#### Street Cleansing and Rapid Response

- The Rapid Response teams dealt with 99% (977) of the 987 requests for service by the end of the next working day.
- The team responded to 18 requests to remove graffiti.
- The newly formed Village Response Team dealt with 99% (150) of the 151 village requests for service on the same or next working day.
- Of the 758 street cleanliness inspections performed, 98% (743) have been found to be of a suitable standard.
- Our community cleansing satisfaction survey across the year found that 87% (162) of the 186 respondents were satisfied with the cleansing service in their area.
- Additionally, the 526 inspections performed since September 2012 demonstrate that the public toilets are working, clean and suitable for use 94% of the time (494 inspections).
- Since April, 11 compliments have been received about staff within the team.
- All of the 7 cleansing complaints that did require investigation were responded to and resolved within 10 days.

## **Street Scene**

- 2,723 issues raised by the public were investigated and resolved.
- 81 abandoned vehicles were investigated resulting in 3 being removed.
- 35 fixed penalty notices were issued for parking infringements on March Market Place.
- 15 fixed penalty notices were issued for littering offences.
- Dog Control Orders and signage were put in place across Fenland's Open Space.
- Joint patrols with Police Community Support Officers commenced in support of the Wisbech 2020 Vision.

## **RECAP Advance Waste Partnership Work**

The RECAP, Cambridge and Peterborough waste partnership is working to identify how future waste services across the area can be provided in the most efficient and cost effective way.

Current projects include examining possible future waste collection options and ensuring best value for the recycling materials we collect.

The RECAP partnership is overseen by a member board and will continue to update partner authorities as these projects progress.

## **SA2 Delivering community projects that improve the environment and our streetscene**

### **Maintaining High Vehicle Maintenance Standards in 2012/13**

The Council's workshop team has demonstrated that it continues to maintain high standards in vehicle maintenance. The Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) have classified their work as amongst the best in the country.

The results from VOSA for the year 2012/13 incorporated all of the 20 heavy goods fleet vehicles, such as refuse vehicles and road sweepers, owned and operated by the Council. The vehicles recorded a pass rate of 90% for the initial test and 100% upon retest. This is a very good result and way above the national average.

VOSA also rate the Council through an overall roadworthiness score system which is based on the risk considered by VOSA for the particular fleet. It takes into account test pass rate, failure items, vehicle roadside encounters etc. and through their scoring VOSA has confirmed that they consider Fenland a low risk, competent commercial vehicle operator.

## Street Pride Continued Success

During 2012/13, the time given by residents (with support from the Council) to improve their local environment was an incredible 4194 hours. Throughout the year, 265 events were held by the various groups across the district to help make Fenland a great place to live and visit.

There are now 11 Street Pride groups, with 2 new groups (Benwick and Newton) being set up within the last year.

Friends of Rings End Nature Reserve are the latest addition to join the ranks of 'friends groups'. The group have made much progress in promoting the nature reserve, which is just outside March. The work of the group has been impressive including repairing the steps, raking wildflower areas, repairing the boundary rabbit netting, filling-in of pot holes in car park, installing new dog mess bins near to the entrance and a Facebook page to promote the group, events and wildlife spotted on the reserve.



This has been made possible by working in partnership with the reserve owners, the County Council and the National Probation Service to better manage green space by engaging with residents.



The official launch of the reserve this month was a great success with community activities going on throughout the day.

Wisbech Street Pride, Wisbech in Bloom and Delamores are also branching out by taking ownership of neglected spaces. They have created a community herb garden on an unused section of land near to the Boathouse. Apprentices from Delamores designed the appearance of

the garden and the Fenland company provided the plants. The garden will enhance the street scene and provide an excellent communal asset, which will strengthen cohesion amongst residents.



### **Love Your Local Fenland Market**

'Love Your Local Fenland Market' is Fenland's part of a nationwide promotion to re-focus attention on the value of markets within town centres. Markets are seen as the heart of retail trading and a valuable attraction that add vitality and benefit within communities.

The launch of the Fenland activity on March Market Place was well received by market traders and customers.

More activities are planned across the district to build on this first event with a programme of attractions and activities throughout the year.

The markets program is designed to improve market footfall and encourage more market trades to visit our Fenland markets.



## Refurbishment of Walsoken Cemetery Gates



As part of the Council's Capital Programme to support and maintain Fenland's Open Spaces, the refurbishment of the entrance to Walsoken Cemetery has significantly improved the appearance and standard of this active Fenland cemetery.

The refurbishment of pillars and gates, and the installation of new fencing

have been completed at Walsoken Cemetery.

The original gates were refurbished and the pillars rebuilt to ensure the gates to the new section now close correctly.

This has resulted in a more formal and appealing entrances to this important local cemetery and continues the investment programme across Fenland's cemeteries.



## Crescent Gardens – Working with Community Payback

Community Payback (part of the National Probation Service), have teamed up with the Council to help refurbish the railings at The Crescent Gardens in Wisbech.



The Crescent Gardens are one of several high profile gardens within the historic Wisbech town centre and were part of the formal entrance to Wisbech Castle, prior to the main garden entrance being closed and bricked up and a side entrance opened. A new War memorial was also sited outside the gardens on the

original entrance to Wisbech Castle.

During this time, the gardens were taken over by the Town Council and then by the District Council and have been maintained as high amenity gardens ever since. Community Payback have cleaned off all rust and loose debris and painted the railings black, with the top finials painted a gold colour.





## Warming up in the Coldest of Springs

This spring was the second coldest for a hundred years, which made the Council's work to help keep vulnerable people warm and well even more important. For the second year running, the Council became a partner in the Warmer Homes scheme, securing £34,600 from the department of health for



local people, £10,000 more than last year. Between January and March, we helped 87 households who were in need, an increase of 37 from 2012. The support offered included; emergency heating repair and replacement boilers, extension of heating to living areas and materials for young and old to help make getting through the winter easier.

The project has been made possible by working in partnership with NHS Cambridgeshire, Age UK, Care Network, The British Red Cross, Ormiston, Care and Repair and Cambridge Community Foundation and many more.

The scheme has been so successful all of the local authorities in Cambridgeshire are working towards a Green Deal scheme that will reach even more people and offer help towards heating and insulation all year round.

## SA3 Promote a Safer Fenland

### Acquisitive crime update - Shoplifting

Fenland crime trends are reducing with one exception - shoplifting. In response, the Fenland Community Safety Partnership is focussing on the top 20 individuals who are having the largest impact. This is predominantly in Wisbech town centre and the larger super market chains. The Partnership has therefore been working with UK Border Agency, the Police and the business community to improve identification and awareness to shop staff to stop the cohort entering the premise.

Education and awareness sessions continue to be delivered in partnership to improve security, communication and prevention techniques, including the roll out of SIRCS (Secure Incident Reporting and Community Engagement System). The partnership will closely be monitoring the impact for the first quarter of 2013/14 at its July meeting.

**Council CCTV achieves record positive outcomes**

During May 2013, the Council raised 347 CCTV incidents (compared to 435 incidents, May 2012) which is a further example that crime and disorder levels continue to drop within the Fenland District.

Through effective partnership working with our external law enforcement partners and through cross team working, the Council was able to achieve 86 positive outcomes from these CCTV recorded incidents, which is a record figure (previous record, was 82 incidents receiving a positive outcome in February 2013). These included arrests, fines, drug warnings and formal notices.

## **Open for Business**

### **OB1 Develop business and employment in Fenland**

#### **Economic Estate**

Overall occupancy of the entire Business Premises Estate is 75.9% against a target of 78%. We are encouraged that there continue to be a steady flow of enquiries for new lettings and it is anticipated that further lettings will be reported next month.

In addition, in order to address a previous fall in Boathouse lettings, a local specialist marketing company has been engaged to promote the centre.

May has seen the positive start to the financial year continuing with very healthy conference income at both South Fens and The Boathouse, in fact this is the highest combined income for May since both Centres opened.

#### **Cromwell Park, Wisbech**

It is pleasing to advise members that site preparation works have commenced on the Cromwell Park development. Tesco, who control the site, anticipate the cinema and new store to be completed during spring 2014 bringing new investment and jobs to the area.

#### **Supporting Business Growth**

Over the past year, the Council have been working proactively with NWES to support business growth and start-ups. A programme of 20 workshops and seminars has seen the creation of over 25 new Fenland businesses. The aim now is to nurture these businesses through their first year with support from the Fenland for Business partnership. The Fenland for Business Partnership includes partners from the high street banks, accountants, College of West Anglia, Jobcentre Plus, Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Business, Princes Trust and business support organisations.

The benefit of bringing this type of partnership together is the critical mass of organisations that can support not just early stages venture, but growing and mature businesses as well. Business growth seminars have also included presentations from Bank of England, UKT&I, HMRC, LEP and going forward NIAB.

#### **Moy Park Employee Support Programme**

The Council have been working with Moy Park since becoming aware of proposals to close and relocate part of the Wisbech business to Grantham.

The Employee Support Programme has been developed by the Council and our partners for 'at risk' employees of Moy Park in Wisbech. The 4 stages of the Employee Support Programme are as follows:

- Stage 1: initial presentations from providers to encourage 'thought provoking' on options available if they choose redundancy.
- Stage 2: information disseminated around the notice boards of the company.
- Stage 3: 1-2-1 on-site meetings with providers for employees to ask more probing questions on self employment, housing and council tax benefits, JobCentre Plus related benefits, and a months on site training from The Consultancy Home Counties (TCHC) organisation delivering CV writing, covering letters, interview techniques and job seeking skills training. TCHC will also identify and fund training that is required to help secure future employment.
- Stage 4: bringing in businesses that are looking to recruit to guarantee interviews to employees facing redundancy. Fenmarc and QV Foods have already posted adverts and a further 2 business in Wisbech and one in Chatteris are looking to invite applications at the end of the month. The factory is looking to consolidate by the end of August.

By undertaking this programme, the Council and partners are aiming to minimise job losses for Fenland residents and workers.

## **OB2 Promote the economic profile of Fenland**

### **Supporting Local Retailers**

The Council has been working with Wisbech Town Council and the Horsefair Shopping Centre to develop 'My Loyalty Card', a pilot shoppers voucher scheme to help support local retailers in Wisbech with a view to then roll out across the district. The scheme will provide shoppers with weekly discounts in store to help promote and encourage footfall within Wisbech. The card, free to both customers and retailers will offer discounts at the point of purchase rather than through a loyalty point collection scheme. The scheme will go live in early September 2013.

### **Encouraging Inward Investment and International Trade**

FDC now sits on two Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) project streams; Inward Investment and International Trade. These look to implement the most effective mechanism to attract Inward Investment and International Trade across the Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough area. Objectives for both project streams are:

- Develop the best web presence to ensure that the LEP area is successfully positioned for Inward Investment.
- Ensure that robust handling systems are in place across the LEP area to ensure timely and effective responses to business enquiries.
- Develop effective systems and relationships with UK Trade & Investment (UKTI) to further position Greater Cambridge Greater Peterborough LEP as a first choice for investment and conversion of enquiries.

FDC's involvement in this work is aimed at increasing the amount of business investment in the district, and maximising opportunities for international trade.

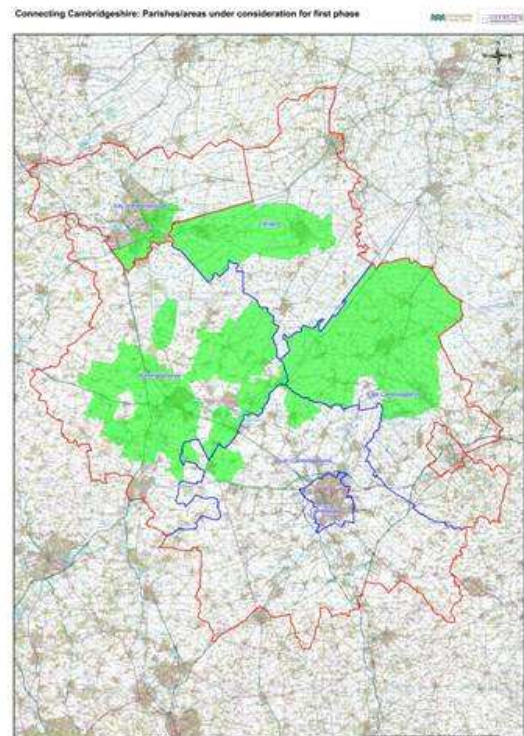
### **Business Information Sheets**

Business information sheets have been designed to help potential inward investors understand who of their like-minded peers also operate in Fenland, and encourage them into the district. The fact sheet acts as a mini directory of businesses and the services and products they deliver. Current factsheets cover Manufacturing and Engineering, Port and Marina, Food and Drink, Business Support and Business Premises.

### **Connecting Cambridgeshire with Superfast Broadband**

The Connecting Cambridgeshire team is working closely with BT through its Openreach division and carefully planning the roll-out of superfast broadband to make the best use of public money. This will help to ensure that it reaches as many businesses and communities as possible by the end of 2015.

Over the coming months Openreach (and their contractors') engineers and surveyors will be seen out and about around the district carrying out detailed planning and surveys to re-design the network. The process also involves working with both the highways and planning authorities to ensure that the process is as swift and efficient as possible. If surveys reveal unexpected issues it may affect when an area is connected.



The Connecting Cambridgeshire programme is on track to achieve our ambitious targets to make superfast speeds of 24 Mbps

upwards available to more than 90% of homes and businesses across the county with better broadband of at least 2 Mbps for very nearly 100% of premises by the end of 2015.

Alongside the commercial roll-out, by the time the contract is completed, around 98% of the county's homes and businesses can expect to get fibre-based broadband, while alternative technologies like satellite and wireless can be used for harder to reach areas.

The improved coverage will be achieved through existing commercial network plans combined with the Connecting Cambridgeshire programme's intervention areas. Without this intervention, around a third of premises across the county would not be able to receive superfast broadband by 2015.

### **OB3 Raising aspirations and improving learning opportunities**

#### **Fenland Enterprise in Education (FEE)/Youth District Council (YDC) Employability skills day**

An Employability Skills Day was held on 9 May 2013 with 50 year 10 students. The day covered interview techniques, CV compiling and interview roleplaying with presentations from local businesses on what they expect from CV's.

Feedback on the day's event included:

- 100% of students said they thought the day was useful
- 96% of students said they thought it would help them get a job.
- Feedback from employers was positive - they all said they enjoyed the day and would be happy to support future events.

#### **Work Experience Placement Scheme**

FDC is working with JobCentre Plus on pilot work experience placement scheme, which are now available to young people (16-24 year olds) who are out of work and claiming Jobseekers Allowance (JSA). The placements last between 2 and 8 weeks and should be for up to 30 hours per week. Benefits of work experience include the continuation to receive full JSA payments during their placement and so not financially disadvantaged while gaining valuable skills and experience. Currently, we are interviewing for two work experience posts, one to be placed in the Economic Development Team to support the Fenland Enterprise in Education project and the other placed with the HR team supporting the Learning and Development administration.

## **OB4 Promote Fenland as a tourism and visitor destination**

### **Fenland Tourism Board**

The Fenland Tourism Board has supported local business Fields End Water Caravan Park in opening three new luxury log cabins as part of an ongoing effort to attract more visitors to Fenland. The three new luxury log cabins are the first phase of a bigger development planned at Fields end Water in Doddington. Working with Fens Adventurers, the Council helped secure funding of over £6000 to develop this first phase. By offering alternative high quality accommodation for Fenland and the rest of Cambridgeshire, the Log Cabins will help to meet Fenlands objective in attracting more visitors into Fenland helping to boost the local economy.

## **Quality Organisation**

### **Q1 Providing good quality customer services that are accessible to the community**

#### **Customer Access**

The first 6 months of the year is traditionally a busy time for calls and, compared to this time last year, the percentage of calls answered within 20 seconds is slightly lower (68% of calls answered in 20 seconds in May 2012 compared to 63% of calls answered in May 2013). However, our call abandon rate is slightly better than last year (8.7% abandon rate for May 2013 compared to 9.3% abandon rate in May 2012).

The main reason for the lower answer levels is the large volume of calls being made with regard to Council Tax Support and the in-depth advice being given by the team. We have been able to utilise the new Customer Services (Contact) team, comprising of Revenues staff and Customer Access staff to help during peak times in taking calls on reminders and summons and this has lessened the impact of a 1% increase in calls since April.

Customer Services shop staff are also able to take calls when they do not have customers with them, but they have also seen a 12% increase in the number of customers coming in to either make a payment or see an Advisor face to face.

#### **Council Tax & National Non Domestic Rates (NNDR)**

Collection rates for Council tax and Business Rates are higher (1.80% and 1.09% higher respectively) than that of this time last year and which is a positive start to the financial year. A total of 2309 Council Tax reminders were sent out in May, along with 1726 summons (944 more than this time last year).

The newly created Customer Contact team will be able to utilise their combined capacity and use resource to contact Business Rate and Council Tax customers to chase payments and offer advice on ways to pay.

#### **Emergency Planning**

Following on from the flooding in the Whittlesey Washes area during 2012, a group of Whittlesey residents have volunteered to become trained Flood Wardens for their area. This has now been progressed with joint meetings between FDC and the Environment Agency to set the group up formally. Their key roll during flooding is to assist vulnerable persons, act as a conduit between the FDC and the Environment Agency. This will become the first Flood Warden group to be set up within Fenland.



## **County Council Election**

On 2 May 2013, Fenland District Council delivered the Cambridgeshire County Council elections across the District.

The team were responsible for the election in relation to the 11 County Council divisions in the Fenland area, all of which were contested. Fenland had an eligible electorate of 74,345

Electors across the District were able to cast their vote in person within the 53 Polling Stations located across Fenland. In addition the team also issued 10,372 postal votes. The overall turnout in our area was 28.86%

The District Council's performance in relation to the management of elections is rigorously monitored by the Electoral Commission. The standards set assess all aspects of electoral management including Planning and Organisation, Administering the Poll, Absent Voting and Verifying and counting the votes. The commission have assessed us as meeting all the required standards which is a significant achievement.

## **Housing & Community Support**

By meeting the Council's Equality Act duty, FDC have been highlighted as exhibiting good practice by the Equal Opportunities Review Magazine.

While a recent Government Equality Office survey suggests that more than 90% of employers support equality in the workplace, the same research found that two-thirds of organisations were unaware of the implications of the Equality Act.

The Act aims to provide protection against discrimination based upon the following characteristics: age; disability; gender reassignment; marriage and civil partnership; pregnancy and maternity; race; religion or belief; sex; sexual orientation.

It is over two years since the Act came in to force, and a steering group has been appointed to carrying out the Government's review of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

Michael Rubenstein Publishing produces a regular Equal Opportunities' Review magazine and has undertaken a survey of all statutory bodies e.g. Councils, Fire Service & Police. Their report has highlighted FDC's approach to delivering and embedding the PSED as a good practice model.

## **Q2 Continue to use our resources effectively**

### **Member Services Hotline Summary**

The Member Services hotline has now been in place for four and a half years. It was introduced at the request of members to ensure that there was a dedicated telephone line to aid councillors to manage their work, including dealing with enquiries, researching information and providing access to other Council officers.

Since its launch, we have received:

- A total of 5,121 calls
- 42 different councillors have used the Members' Hotline (this figure includes former councillors and those that have replaced them)

The feedback that has been received shows how successful the Hotline has been.

A question included within the recent Members' Survey for 2013 on the Members' Hotline, the question asked:

"Do you use the Members' Hotline? If yes – how do you rate the service you have received?"

- 72% of respondents stated that they used the Members' Hotline; 100% of these users rated the service they have received as Excellent

Comments made by those that use the service included:

- Rarely let me down
- Often used the number as you know that regardless of who picks up the call the service is always excellent
- Excellent service, quick service.
- Use the helpline frequently as always answered promptly

### **Provisional Outturn 2012/13**

The provisional financial outturn for the Council for 2012/13 was presented to Cabinet on 20 June 2013. It has been another challenging year and the Council has successfully delivered over £1m of savings with minimal effect on front line services. In addition to these savings, it is pleasing to report that a small underspend of £25k has been achieved. Given the scale of the challenges, this is a considerable achievement and is due to the hard work of officers across the Council in achieving savings and controlling costs with Member's direction. This continues the strong financial management shown in the last three years during extremely challenging circumstances.

Although the final position for 2012/13 is good news for the Council, Members will be aware of the considerable challenges that remain for 2013/14 and over the medium term, particularly with the recent Comprehensive Spending Review announcement for 2015/16 which was made on 26 June 2013.

### **Q3 Deliver regulatory services in a customer focused way**

#### **The Relevant Authority Officer (RAO) Group**

RAO is a multi agency group which meets monthly to agree coordinated action for hot spot Licensed premises based on evidence of incidents linked to premises. The evidence is placed onto a shared web based system called ECINS and awards a traffic light score for each premise. Each incident carries a value of points added against the premises which dictates a status of amber or red and a list of hot spot premises.

A recent development is that the RAO group has encouraged premises owners/managers to report incidents using the Secure Incident Reporting Community System (SIRCS) and came up with an incentive by stating that all licensed premises would be scored a minus 1 point in relation to any premise acting responsibly by adding a report/profile onto the SIRCS database. This has encouraged more licensed premises to use the system and check reports regularly.

#### **Cumulative Impact Zone (CIZ)**

The Council received a request from Cambridgeshire Constabulary for a CIZ for Wisbech Town Centre. This would create a presumption that in Wisbech Town Centre applications for new premises licences, club premises certificates or variations to those authorisations would normally be refused, following relevant representations, unless the applicant can demonstrate that there will be no negative cumulative impact on one or more of the licensing objectives.

Licensing Committee met on 14 May 2013 to consider responses to the public consultation held between the 19 December 2012 and 8 March 2013. A total of 27 responses were received during the consultation period. All bar 1 were in favour of the CIZ implementation. After reading the responses, the Licensing Committee decided to progress a CIZ for the Wisbech Town Centre. It is now being referred to Cabinet and full Council prior to implementation.

#### **Environmental Health courses**

Local businesses continue to invest in food safety and health and safety training to help achieve and maintain good standards. Our courses are delivered by environmental health staff and are externally evaluated by the accrediting body which also marks the exam papers. Having external accreditation, which

is recognized nationally, enhances the course status and is a frequent reason for the course being chosen.

Typically 95 – 100% pass rates are achieved and the course evaluations normally rate the courses highly. A recent food safety training course was evaluated as Excellent by 92% of attendees and Good by 8%; customer comments were as follows:

- No comments to improve tutor and the course was excellent.
- Easy to follow and understand.
- Very good course tutor, explained course to an excellent level.
- Worthwhile and informative

Delivering training courses is an important part of the Councils approach to encourage good standards, as it demonstrates the business support approach of the Council and helps build good relationships with the business community.

In addition, income from training courses was maintained at £10,300 during 2012/13 despite the tough economic climate and the pressures that businesses are under. The good standards achieved also reduce the inspection frequency which means that the regulatory burden on businesses is reduced and this can also lead to further savings.