

MD'S COLUMN MERCURY – AUGUST 2009

An overheard remark that local authorities only make a difference on their own patch has set me thinking.

In fact we do make an impact further afield, and it is probably to our detriment that we don't make more of it - because things learned and trialled in Great Yarmouth have helped and are helping other people.

So I would like to share with you just a few of the ways Great Yarmouth Borough Council, and its partners, have aided organisations both regionally and nationally, in areas as diverse as community projects, conservation, health and employment.

My first example begins with a question. How many of you know that the Council has been recognised by the Government's Department for Communities and Local Government as one of 18 national empowerment champions?

Because of the excellent work carried out by our community housing team, and the engagement and empowerment achieved by ComeUnity we are seen as a pioneer in community involvement.

This means we share good practice with other local authorities keen to learn from our success. A ministerial visit to ComeUnity by Vernon Croaker MP, Minister of State for Policing, Security and Crime focused on Great Yarmouth's achievements. Not least of which was the work put in by youngsters in south Yarmouth to fund and design the recently opened Revolution Skatepark.

In a totally different vein, our legal department has led the way in the successful use of compulsory purchases to bring redundant buildings back into use.

Working as the Compulsory Purchase Consultancy Service, it offers advice and carries out work on behalf of other local authorities. These include Windsor and Maidenhead, Islington, Stroud and Stowmarket who have all benefitted from the service to obtain land and buildings for more constructive use.

It is always heartening when a respected organisation uses Great Yarmouth as an example of what can be achieved. No less a body than English Heritage has sung our praises in several magazine articles.

The work carried out by the conservation team has often been featured highlighting how buildings, such as the Time and Tide Museum, have been rescued and turned into amenities to the benefit of residents and visitors.

The derelict Boultons and Bretts buildings have recently taken on their new roles as housing for young people and for families, not bad for two structures

which many would have handed over to the bulldozers rather than the conservationists.

I am looking forward over the next few months to spreading the word even more of our own successes and those achieved with our partners.

In September I will be addressing a conference looking at health inequalities in coastal towns, and the measures we take to combat these problems.

There are a host of things to choose from, including St James and Cobholm health centres, health trainers, and community nutrition. To learn more about the last two services visit www.community.connections.org.uk or www.qywpct.nhs.uk.

In December the topic at a London conference organised by the Municipal Journal, will be tackling unemployment.

Our partnership with Voluntary Norfolk has seen 50 people supported back into work in just one year. The Target Opportunities Project is set to be rolled out from south and central Great Yarmouth, where it was piloted, to other parts of the borough.

It would be a shame if these kinds of excellent results stayed just here in the borough, but through publicity and networking we do share our good practices to the benefit of many more people.