

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-105-2009/10

Date of meeting: 19 April 2010



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure and Wellbeing

Subject: Limes Farm Hall Development

Responsible Officer: Julie Chandler (01992 564214).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That Cabinet notes the Council's success in securing £270,000 external funding towards the proposed Limes Farm Hall development; and**
- (2) That on the basis of the reduced level of Capital required, confirms the provision of £802,000 towards the development of the preferred Option 2b, by means of a reallocation from the Customer Transformation Programme.**

Executive Summary:

At its' meeting in November 2009 Cabinet agreed to meet the capital costs of re-development of Limes Farm Hall, subject to officers seeking to secure further external funding towards the project. All potential sources of funding have subsequently been investigated in full, but due to limited availability of funding opportunities officers have been unable to secure any additional funding above the £250,000 from Essex County Council Extended Schools.

This report therefore seeks Cabinet approval to meet the capital shortfall of £802,000 for the project to enable the preferred development Option 2b, to take place. This amount will be match funded by £260,000 (£270,000 less £10,000 cost of Options Study) from Essex County Extended Schools Funding which has already been secured and must be spent by end of the financial year 2010/11.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

Cabinet has agreed that it is desirable to continue to provide a community facility on Limes Farm due to issues of deprivation and disadvantage. The current community hall does not meet local need and requires significant investment to remain operational.

Following undertaking of an independent Feasibility Study in 2009, Cabinet identified Option 2b as the preferred development for Limes Farm, which would include refurbishment and re-design of the current hall facilities; an extension for a Housing and Benefits office and a further extension for a dedicated youth centre.

Other Options for Action:

Cabinet undertakes a further review the Options presented in the Limes Farm Facility Feasibility Study and agrees to fund:

Option 1 - Refurbishment of the existing hall at a cost of £484,000, less £260,000 ECC Funding = £234,000 Council contribution. It must however be noted, that this option may not meet the facility development criteria of Essex County Council and therefore the total amount of £270,000 could be withdrawn.

Option 2a – Refurbishment of the hall and small extension to the front of premises for a Housing & Benefits Office or a youth centre, at a cost of £678,000, less £260,000 ECC Funding = £428,000.

A decision is taken by Cabinet not to support the proposed development and the current relatively poor quality provision is maintained at an annual subsidy and will require an immediate investment of £60,000 for structural repairs.

Option 3 - The Council withdraw financial support to the hall and agree a phased closure.

In the event of Option 3 (above) the Council seeks to dispose of the hall for alternative use or redevelopment.

Report:

Background

1. Limes Farm Hall is a 1970's community building that is located in the centre of Limes Farm Estate, Chigwell. The building is functional, but requires significant investment for internal and external modernisation/improvement and complete roof replacement. It is currently used for a range of local groups and organisations and local residents in general. The District Council owns the building and land that it is situated on.

2. Responsibility for the Hall was returned to the Council by Chigwell Parish Council on 31 March 2009 and the Council has managed the building since 1 April 2009, under DDF budget provision for administration of bookings; caretaking; general operating costs and essential maintenance works.

Local Need

3. Consultation with local residents and stakeholders indicates that the hall is inadequate for the current and future needs of the local community, and that a better community facility is an essential requirement for Limes Farm.

4. A range of partners provide services from buildings elsewhere on the estate and are keen to work closer with the Council and each other, to improve service delivery for local residents. This includes: NHS West Essex transferring their clinic services to a central location and providing additional outreach work for families and young people in conjunction with partners; Essex Police operating their community policing in conjunction with Safer Communities; Essex County Council extending their existing Children's Centre activity; London and Quadrant Housing providing front of house services alongside the Council's Housing

Service and the introduction of a new Housing Benefits Service.

The Feasibility Study

5. In accordance with Cabinet's wishes, independent consultants were appointed to undertake an options appraisal and feasibility study for the potential development of the Limes Farm Hall in Autumn 2009.

6. Norfolk Property Services were appointed to undertake the work and were tasked with looking at four broad options, namely

- (i) Refurbishment of the existing facility;
- (ii) Refurbishment and extension of the existing facility;
- (iii) Demolition of the existing building and re-provision of new build to accommodate a youth space on the same footprint; or
- (iv) Demolition of the existing facility and re-provision of a larger new build to accommodate a multi-agency community facility.

7. In total some five options were identified, as Option 2 - Refurbishment and Extension of the existing facility has two sub options (a) and (b), offering different scales of new provision. Indicative floor plans were developed for each of the options demonstrating the type of accommodation that could be provided and the range of activities/services that could be accommodated.

8. Cabinet considered the options for development at its meeting in November and agreed that Option 2b at a capital cost of £802,000 would provide the best balance of service provision for the community. This would be through provision of a one-stop shop enabling access to a range of advice and services, and demonstrating that the District Council and other agencies are serious about meeting the needs of residents. This would include a new joint Housing and Benefits Advice Office, dedicated youth facility and Primary Care facilities on the same site. In addition, this option would also make the building more sustainable and reduce ongoing maintenance costs and would see an opportunity to share revenue costs with partner agencies.

9. At this meeting, Cabinet requested that officers seek further external funding to support Limes Farm Hall development building costs and as such, the following partners were approached via written correspondence:

- NHS West Essex - Apology letter received February 2010;
- Essex County Council - Apology letter received February 2010; and
- Chigwell Parish Council – No response following several reminders.

10. In addition, officers supported Limes Farm Community Association (LFCA) in requests for funding towards the development, as follows:

- Grange Farm Trust – Apology letter received by LFCA March 2010.

11. In support of the need for this proposed development, a recent Inspection of the

Council's Benefits Service highlighted a need for the Council to improve access to benefits advice for its residents. As Limes Farm Estate is located in the far south of the district and accommodates many families in need of benefit support, the introduction of a new Benefits Advice Service would assist the Council in addressing recommendations of the Inspection Report.

12. Furthermore, the work undertaken by the Customer Transformation Task and Finish Panel recognised the importance of retaining access to services in satellite locations across the district and currently contained within the Capital Programme is an allocation of some £2.1m for the Customer Transformation Programme. There is, therefore, an option for Members to potentially re-allocate some of these capital resources to the Limes Farm Hall Project, as it would achieve the same objectives of improving access to and customer satisfaction with the Council's Services.

Resource Implications:

A sum of £270,000 has already been secured from Essex County Council Extended Schools Funding, with £260,000 being allocated towards the building costs of new or improved community facilities and £10,000 revenue towards design and options study.

A contribution from the Council Capital Programme of £802,000 if Option 2(b) is pursued. This figure takes account of the £270,000 secured from Essex County Council i.e. cost of £1,060,000 minus £260,000 (remainder following feasibility study)

Partners involved in the proposed development have committed to contributing the revenue costs of their premises within a new building and this would be via facility rental agreements.

Officers have been invited to submit a second stage bid to Big Lottery Reaching Communities Fund, which if successful, will provide £50k Capital towards the youth 'space' as part of any new development and revenue funding of £100k for a) costs of providing mentoring and support for young people to encourage them to undertake training and skills b) provision of one-off grants to enable these young people to access professional training courses and c) 3 year facility management costs of operating the youth space to enable it to be accessible on 7 days per week. A development plan for this proposal is currently being developed in conjunction with Essex County Council Youth Service and Tottenham Hotspur Foundation.

The exact revenue implications of the new build are dependant on final agreement with partners in respect of office rental costs, but are expected to be less than the current net cost to the Council which is approximately £22,000 per annum.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council currently employs a caretaker who would be able to service the new provision but however, would be subject to redeployment/redundancy in the event that the hall was to close.

The options for management of the new facility on Limes Farm are as included within the Options Appraisal report.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

It is anticipated that quality of life and community respect would be improved for all residents on Limes Farm if a new community facility was provided and that this would have an impact on anti social behaviour on the estate. In addition, the new facilities would enable much improved access to service provision on behalf of the Council and partners including on site benefits advice; primary health care; purpose built youth facility and learning and skills for people of all ages, therefore increasing opportunities to change lives significantly and particularly for young people currently not in Employment, Education and Training.

Consultation Undertaken:

An extensive range of consultation has been undertaken with local residents and stakeholders, including specific face- to- face consultation with young people, families, the elderly and the range of stakeholders and partners involved.

Background Papers:

Limes Farm Cabinet Report November 2009.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The Risk Management paperwork associated with a Council decision not to support this recommendation is included within the DCE Business Plan (Asst. Director CS & CR) 2010/11. However, this confirms that there is a significant risk that if a decision is taken to close Limes Farm Hall and not re-provide a community facility, incidences of anti – social behaviour may increase and community response will be negative. In addition, the decision to withdraw this community facility would adversely affect the Council's reputation as a key service provider and particularly in respect of the Council's recent Benefits Inspection where it was identified that the Council needs to provide greater access to Benefits advice and services.

Members should also note reference to the Corporate Risk Register item No. 17 'provision of Capital Resource to a non-revenue generating asset'.

Equality and Diversity:

This recommendation has a positive Equality Impact, in that the provision of a new community facility on Limes Farm would enable the Council to widen access to its core services and therefore improve equality of service provision for the elderly and many socio - economically disadvantaged residents. In addition, young people at risk of social exclusion would specifically be supported in terms of their integration within the community and wider society and people with disabilities would have much improved access to the building through design adjustments to meet with DDA.

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? N/A

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
N/A.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
N/A.