

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C/116/2005-06.
Date of meeting: 6 February 2006.



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Finance and Performance Management

Subject: A Parish Centre for Nazeing – An opportunity to make provision for Integrated Community Facilities.

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Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 – 56 4470).

Recommendations:

- (1) That the efforts of the Nazeing Parish Council to provide a Parish Centre be supported by the District Council by:**
 - (a) Acquiring the site of the former Total Garage at an estimated cost of £480,000; and**
 - (b) Making a grant towards the employment of consultants to work with the Parish Council in order to work up the project and make funding bids to develop the project in the sum of £20,000; and**
- (2) That a supplementary estimate in the sum of £500,000 for 2005/06 be recommended to the Council for approval.**

Report:

1. Nazeing Parish has arguably the worst community infrastructure in the Epping Forest District. Its present leisure Centre and Village Hall are situated several miles from the village centre and are past the end of their useful life. They are situated in the area of Bumbles Green, which to all intents and purposes is a village on its own divorced from what is now the centre of population.
2. The former Total Garage in the centre of the village and opposite the main shopping parade has shut down and is to be offered for sale in the early part of 2006. It immediately adjoins the site of St Giles Church Hall which itself is some 40 years old and not able to meet the needs of the community. Nazeing Parish Council has seen this as an opportunity to provide a new Parish Centre in a central location which can both provide a venue for essential services and improve the village scene. To that end they have made approaches to the County Council, the District Council, the Church, the Primary Care Trust, the local Member of Parliament and others in an effort to take this initiative forward.
3. An initial meeting was called for on 13 January 2006 and chaired by Bill Rammell MP. Both Mr Rammell and the Leader of Essex County Council have made approaches to Total to see if they are prepared to offer the site to the Council at below market rate or at least to offer it prior to auction to the Council at its valuation price. The District Valuer and Valuation Officer has been asked to provide an estimate of the likely value which is understood to be in the order of £480,000.

4. The Church has agreed that they are prepared to enter into a Partnership with the Council. This is understood to mean that they will enter into an agreement whereby the site of the St Giles Church Hall is added to the Total site and redeveloped to provide a two storey building in place of the existing which will meet the needs of both the Church and the local community.
5. The Parish Council had hoped to persuade the Primary Care Trust to abandon its plans to provide a new Healthcare facility on the site of the former Police houses in North Street and to re-provide the facility as part of the new Parish Centre. This would have enabled the funding that goes with the provision to help meet the costs of the new Parish Centre. However, it became clear at the meeting that with the imminent demise of the Epping Forest Primary Care Trust the risks involved with a change of direction at this late state were too great and it was agreed the PCT should proceed with the agreed contract for the new facilities at North Street. Nevertheless, the PCT expressed a wish to be involved in the new Parish Centre and offered its support for the concept.
6. This was a disappointment for the Parish Council who had built the PCT's participation and funding into the business case for the new Centre. The Leader of the District Council proposed that the District Council would fill that gap and suggested that in order to support the project the District Council should:
 - Seek to purchase the site of the Total Garage; and
 - Make a financial contribution under its youth budget provision to enable the employment of consultants who could work up the feasibility plans for the project and help the Parish Council with funding bids to build the new Parish Centre.
7. It was generally agreed that a real need for such a facility exists in the Nazeing area and that it would:
 - Provide an important focus for community engagement and participation in the democratic affairs of the area e.g. Parish Council and Police etc;
 - Enable the existing pre-school provision to expand and improve upon their current limited facilities;
 - Provide a venue to develop activities to meet the needs of youth in the area which currently do not exist;
 - Meet the needs for function rooms which clearly exist but are not met at present; and
 - Encourage the development of Clubs and Societies to meet the needs of Nazeing residents who currently have to travel to surrounding areas.
8. The combined site of the former Total Garage and St Giles Church Hall provides a unique opportunity to meet the needs of this village community. It is right in the centre of the village, with good facilities for access both in terms of public transport and car parking. It is near to the local shops, primary school and sheltered housing unit but sufficiently divorced from nearby residential units to minimise noise nuisance and inconvenience.

9. The design of the building will require careful consideration in order to obtain planning permission. This is because of the difference in levels between the sites of the former Total Garage and St Giles Church Hall, the Nazeing Brook runs through the middle of the site and its location on the edge of the Lea Valley Regional Park and in relation to the flood plains. The Environment Agency have concerns in this regard but accept that as buildings already exist on both sites this may provide some mitigation.
10. Should the Council agree to this proposal in order to help Nazeing Parish Council provide a Parish Centre it will be a departure from the previous policy and practice of the District Council. For many years the Council Policy in relation to village halls was tied to the County Council in as much as the Council's policy was to support works to village halls at the rate of 50% of any grant made by the County Council up to a maximum of £12,500. (The County maximum was £25,000). However in 2003/04 this was changed to enable applications to be considered on their merits at the direction of the Portfolio Holder for Community Wellbeing. However, that Portfolio Holder has had no involvement in this particular issue.

Statement in support of recommended action:

11. Nazeing Parish has arguably the worst community infrastructure in the Epping Forest District. Its present leisure Centre and Village Hall are situated several miles from the village centre and are past the end of their useful life.

Other options for action:

12. To not support the endeavours of Nazeing Parish Council.

Consultation undertaken:

13. All undertaken by Nazeing Parish Council but involve the Member of Parliament, the County Council, the District Council, the Primary Care Trust, the Church of England and the Environment Agency.

Resource implications:

Budget provision: No budget provision exists – supplementary estimate necessary.

Personnel: Nil.

Land: Possible acquisition of land.

Community Plan/BVPP reference: N/A.

Relevant statutory powers: Local Government Act 2000 – Community Wellbeing Powers.

Background papers: Proposal for provision of integrated community facilities prepared by Nazeing Parish Council. Letter from the leader of Essex County Council.

Environmental/Human Rights Act/Crime and Disorder Act Implications: None.

Key Decision reference (if required): N/A.