

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-022-2013/14

Date of meeting: 9 September 2013



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure and Wellbeing

Subject: Limes Farm Centre

Responsible Officer: Derek Macnab (01992 564051)

Democratic Services: Gary Woodhall (01992 564473)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

(1) That the Cabinet formally note the outturn figure for the redevelopment of the Limes Farm Centre of £1,101,000 against the Capital Provision of £1,102,000 (£842,000 from Epping Forest District Council and £260,000 capital grant from Essex County Council Extended Schools Funding)

Executive Summary:

On 31 March 2009, Epping Forest District Council resumed the management responsibility for the Limes Farm Hall, Chigwell. A multi-agency group was formed to identify how the potential of the facility could be maximised for the benefit of local residents. As a result the hall has been refurbished and extended and now offers a wide range of community activities and advisory services. This report provides details about the redevelopment process and advises Members of the Final Account.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

It is a Policy requirement of the Council that with respect to major Capital Projects, the final account is formally reported to Members.

Other Options for Action:

In accordance with the above policy, there are no alternative options.

Report:

1. The original Limes Farm Hall was a community facility located in the centre of Limes Farm Estate, Chigwell. The facility has historically catered 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. As per a number of community facilities transferred to local councils at the time of "parishing", the facility was managed and maintained by Chigwell Parish Council, under a management agreement. However, in April 2008, Chigwell Parish Council notified the Council of its intention to cease management of Limes Farm Hall as from June 2008. This was understood to arise from difficulties experienced in making the facility cost effective and general management problems encountered. The date for the transfer was, however, extended by negotiation to 31 March 2009.

3. At its meeting in November 2008, the Cabinet agreed to meet the costs of management and essential repairs to Limes Farm Hall over the period 1 April 2009 to 31

March 2010, via DDF provision totalling £47,520.00. Cabinet agreed this sum, to ensure that community use of the Hall was retained whilst its longer-term future was determined.

4. To meet with the wishes of Cabinet, a multi-agency stakeholder group was formed in January 2009, with representatives from Essex County Council; West Essex PCT, Limes Farm Community Association, Essex Police, Chigwell Parish Council, Limes Farm Junior and Infant Schools, East Potential, London & Quadrant Housing and the Council's Housing, Community Development and Safer Communities Services. The purpose of this group was to assess the potential long-term future of the hall or alternative facility, in providing a range of improved local services. The general consensus from the group was that people living on Limes Farm would benefit significantly from provision of a multi-agency purpose built facility, enabling the improvement in service delivery from a range of statutory and non statutory partners.

5. Stakeholders were asked to seek external funding towards an improved multi-use facility. An opportunity was identified through Essex County Council's Extended Schools programme for capital development. A submission was made on behalf of the Council and the wider stakeholder partnership. The full amount of £270,000 (£260,000 capital and £10,000 revenue) was successfully secured towards the project in March 2009.

6. Following an interim report to Cabinet on 29 June 2009, on the success of the external funding bid, Members requested the commissioning of an Options Appraisal and Feasibility Study for potential development of Limes Farm Hall, to include an investigation of both capital and revenue costs.

The Feasibility Study

7. In accordance with the Cabinet's wishes, the Essex Procurement Hub was utilised to identify suitably qualified consultants to undertake the options appraisal and feasibility study.

8. In the event, Norfolk Property Services were engaged. The company not only undertook site and building condition surveys, but consulted with a wide range of local stakeholders, who had an interest in any new provision.

9. Norfolk Property Services 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 reprovion of new build to accommodate a youth space on the same footprint; and
- (iv) demolition of existing facility and reprovion of a larger new build to accommodate a multi-agency community facility.

10. On the 16 November 2009, the results of the Feasibility Study were formally reported to the Cabinet, who considered that the Option of a whole scale refurbishment and extension of the existing facility achieved the best balance between enhanced provision and affordability. At a capital cost of £842,125 (in addition to the £260,000 capital provided by Essex County Council) not only could a significant new facility be provided for young people, replacing the aging porta-cabin, but with the co-location of the Health Clinic, Housing Office and Children's Centre, the community could benefit from more immediate access to a range of services provided by the Council and Partner Agencies. This was to include drop-in sessions by the Police and the Council's Benefits Service.

The Redevelopment

11. Having secured the capital provision, Norfolk Property Services undertook a

competitive procurement exercise which resulted in Beardwells Ltd, being appointed as the main contractor. Work started in April 2011 and was anticipated to be completed by 30 October 2011. Unfortunately, delays were experienced in having to remove additional asbestos, not evident in initial building condition surveys and also to re-design some of the steel work fabrication in the roof. With the refurbishment and extension of older buildings, there is a risk that these types of eventualities may occur once the original fabric is exposed. Notwithstanding the delay, the newly rebranded "Limes Centre" was opened in January 2012. The opening ceremony was attended by some 400 residents, and since this initial event the Centre has proven to be extremely popular.

12. A wide range of new activities are now provided from the Limes Centre for local people of all ages and abilities. These include the daily provision of a Children's Centre for families with children under 5 years old, where parents are offered a range of parenting skills training and support with budgeting and healthy eating and single parents have the opportunity to access peer support. This service has been further enhanced by the introduction of a Health and Baby Clinic which also operates on a daily basis and provides families with support in regard to breastfeeding and baby & child care. The centre also offers a regular programme of classes and activities which includes British Associated Judo clubs for juniors and seniors, drama club for children, support group for migrant families, youth and older people's activities, karate clubs for juniors and adults, women's health and fitness sessions and a new community café is due to be launched in September, which it is hoped will become a Social Enterprise initiative. The facilities are additionally utilised for children's and family parties regularly at weekends and the main hall receives bookings for weddings during the summer months.

13. In addition to the ongoing programme of community activities offered, residents have also been making good use of the Housing Management and other advisory services on offer. The Children's Centre is well utilised, with the Council recently reallocating some of the office accommodation to provide a better and more efficient working environment for their staff. In order to support the work of the Children's Centre, a rationalisation of storage is planned which will involve the knock through of an internal wall, the estimated cost of which has been allowed for within the outturn figure.

14. One disappointing aspect of the project has been the time taken to achieve the relocation of the Health Centre into the new building. This has been delayed primarily because of the changes within health service management generally, with the demise of the Primary Care Trust and the establishment of the new provider South Essex Partnership Trust (SEPT). However, the lease and outstanding maintenance responsibility issues have now been finalised and at the time of drafting this report, the Health Centre, was due to relocate to the Limes Centre on the 29 August 2013.

15. Whilst the general quality of the new build has been to the specified standards, there have been a number of design issues and outstanding snagging items that have taken a protracted period of negotiation to resolve. However, the Architect and Builder have accepted responsibility for their respective issues and work is being finalised currently. An update on this will be given at Cabinet. Whilst it has been frustrating seeking resolution of all outstanding matters, this has not adversely affected the use and enjoyment of the Centre by the residents. However, one issue that has become apparent is that the acoustics, particularly in the main hall are poor, with a lot of reflected noise, particularly when use for children's parties and functions. A specialist acoustic survey has been commissioned and it may be that additional resource will be required, depending on the solutions proposed. This will be subject to a future separate report.

16. Overall, the Limes Centre has come in on budget, despite the delayed construction period and is proving to be a well valued community resource for the residents of Limes Farm and surrounding area.

Resource Implications:

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

A contribution from the Council's Capital Programme of £842,000 has been made.

Partners involved in the development have committed to contributing the revenue costs of their premises within the new building. The Council's revenue costs are being met within existing budget provision.

The Caretaker TUPE transferred from Chigwell Parish Council.

Legal and Governance

The Council has power under the Community Wellbeing Act 2000 to provide these types of community facilities.

All necessary Planning Approvals were achieved and the environment around the Centre has been improved.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

The quality of life and community cohesion have been improved for residents on Limes Farm. The new facility is anticipated to have an impact on anti-social behaviour on the estate by the provision of a range of diversionary activities. In addition, the new facilities 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:

Future of Limes Farm Hall Cabinet Report November 2008.
Limes Farm Cabinet Report November 2009.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

The Risk Assessment undertaken in 2009 confirmed that there was a significant risk that if a decision was 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 last Benefits Inspection where it was identified that the Council needs to provide greater access to benefits advice and services.

Equality and Diversity

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? Yes

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?

The redevelopment has had a positive Equality Impact, in that the provision of a new community facility on Limes Farm enables 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 have much improved access to the building through design adjustments to meet with DDA.