

Report to the Cabinet

Report reference: C-013-2013/14
Date of meeting: 9 September 2013



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure and Wellbeing
Asset Management & Economic Development

Subject: Epping Hall – Sports and Leisure Feasibility Study

Responsible Officer: Derek Macnab (01992 564051).

Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470).

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) That the Cabinet formally note the Epping Hall Sports and Leisure Feasibility Study;**
- (2) That whilst a preferred option has been identified within the Study, none of the options be excluded at this stage, by virtue of the fact that no other proposals have yet to been considered as a result of the Expressions of Interest exercise;**
- (3) That the Study form part of the evidence base in the preparation of a new Leisure Strategy for the District and the procurement strategy for the Council's next Leisure Management Contract; and**
- (4) That the formal views of Epping Town Council be sought on the feasibility study to include their level of commitment to the re-provision of a new Sports Centre on land within their ownership.**

Executive Summary:

This report outlines the outcome of a Sports and Leisure Feasibility Study undertaken in association with the Design and Development Brief, agreed for the St John's Road site in Epping. It sets out a series of options, an evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each option, along with indicative costings. It also identifies a preferred option for consideration.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To report on the results of Epping Hall Sports and Leisure Feasibility Study.

Other Options for Action:

To consider the findings of the Feasibility Study and to reject/agree any of the specific options.

Report:

Design and Development Brief for the St John's Road Area

1. On 10 March 2008, the Cabinet approved the preparation of a design and development brief to guide the future redevelopment and re-use of sites and buildings in the St John's Road area, Epping, which are predominantly in public ownership. Essex County Council owns two thirds of the land, with the District Council and Epping Town Council owning approximately a sixth each. (Detailed on Page 4 of Feasibility Study, Appendix 1).
2. The intention of the brief was to:
 - (a) ensure an integrated planned approach;
 - (b) clarify the land use and planning policy requirements affecting the area as a whole and its context in the wider area;
 - (c) clarify the development constraints to inform investment decisions about development sites, land disposals, acquisitions and lease arrangements;
 - (d) stimulate interest amongst land owners, developers and prospective occupiers so as to bring sites forward for development whilst at the same time explaining development constraints and expectations, they will have to resolve; and
 - (e) provide guidance to Council Officers and Members to assist in the determination of planning applications.

Developing the Brief

3. The District Council together with the County Council engaged specialist urban design consultants Allies and Morrison Urban Practitioners to produce the brief. From the outset there were stakeholder meetings which contributed to the various options that formed part of the consultation process. The consultation period was extended and intensive, using various media, exhibitions and manned sessions.
4. The completed Development and Design Brief was subsequently endorsed by Cabinet on 12 September and formally agreed by Council on the 27 September 2012.
5. As part of the public consultation, very strong local support was expressed for the idea that sport and leisure facilities might be provided within the St John's Road site as a possible replacement for Epping Sports Centre, which is currently located in Hemnall Street. The current Centre is an ageing facility, with poor access for people with disabilities and limited parking.
6. In addition to the public response, Epping Town Council indicated a wish to explore the possibility of provision of a leisure facility incorporating the Epping Hall. The Leader of the District Council agreed to this request and Urban Practitioners were commissioned to undertake a Feasibility Study.

The Sports and Leisure Feasibility Study

7. In line with the public consultation, the Design and Development Brief, includes the potential for sports and leisure development. This allows for the Council to evaluate options which could include a sports facility, but also allow the market to respond with other proposals. It is worth reiterating that the Design and Development Brief does not tie the

Council into delivering a sports and leisure facility on the St John's Road site. A copy of the full Feasibility Study document is at Appendix 1.

8. The purpose of the Epping Hall Feasibility Study, was to answer the following questions:

- What extent of land would be required for a replacement sports facility on a near like for like basis, with the Hemnall Street facility?
- What scale of sports facility could be accommodated if the site were to be limited to the land in Epping Town Council ownership?
- Are there options which allow some or all of the existing Epping Hall building to be remodelled and incorporated, into the new facility in either of these options?
- What are the build costs of the options?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the options?

9. The work that was undertaken to answer these questions, suggests that it would be possible to provide a Sports and Leisure facility on a like for like basis, within the land currently owned by Epping Town Council (on which the Epping Hall stands), either making use of the existing building, or starting with a completely fresh structure. Options have also been explored which retain the existing forecourt and green space, at the front of the current building.

10. The specific Options that have been identified and evaluated are:

- **Option 1**
Replacement facilities on a like for like basis with a new building extending back from the existing Epping Hall building line to retain the green space and accessible parking.
- **Option 2**
Replacement facilities on a like for like basis, retaining and re-using the existing Epping Hall building.
- **Option 3**
Replacement facilities on a like for like basis, within the curtilage of the Epping Town Council ownership.
- **Option 4**
Replacement facilities on a like for like basis within the curtilage of the Epping Town Council ownership and retaining the existing building.

11. For each of the Options an assessment of each proposal's Strengths and Weaknesses was undertaken. This evaluation leads to the conclusion that all the options are technically feasible, but with strengths and weaknesses which would need to be balanced, in any final decision to proceed with re-provision, on the site (Pages 13 and 15 of the Feasibility Study).

12. However, having reached this general conclusion, the consultants on the basis of the options explored, have proposed a preferred option. This works within the curtilage of the Epping Hall site, but removes the existing building. This provides the opportunity for a new facility which can be constructed whilst minimising the likely need for significant excavation.

In view of the current patterns of use at the existing sports centre, the profile of proposed uses for the preferred option new centre have also been slightly revised, with the key variations being a reduction from four to two squash courts whose popularity has decreased and an equivalent increase in fitness gym space, for which there is significant demand.

13. Other factors such as environmental impact, traffic management and the effect on car-parking in the town centre, will also need to be taken on board.

14. Initial indicative costings are provided for all four options and the preferred option which range between £3.48M to £3.76M, but exclude the cost of the land/building, although this could be offset by any capital receipt, generated by the sale of the Hemnall Street Sports Centre site.

Proposed Way Forward

15. The Council's four Leisure Centres are currently managed under an agreement with SLM Sports and Leisure Management Ltd. The contract is due to be re-tendered, with the new contract due to commence in January 2016. As part of this procurement process, a new Leisure and Culture Strategy is being prepared which will review the Council's existing provision and address the issue of future need, on a District-wide basis, to ensure that any new facilities are provided in the correct location to maximise participation, promote access and deliver value for money.

16. This strategic work will be overseen by a Portfolio Holder Advisory Committee, which is due to be established and led by the Leisure and Wellbeing Portfolio Holder. The St John's Hall Feasibility Study will provide an important part of the evidence base for the Leisure and Culture Strategy and assist in Option appraisal for the Leisure Management Contract. It is therefore recommended that the Council formally note its content. However, it should not be forgotten that the Council is not the land-owner of the Epping Hall site and is only a minority land-owner in the totality of the site.

17. Currently an exercise is underway to establish expressions of interest for taking forward the Design and Development brief. Again, the results of this will influence future leisure provision options. On this basis, whilst a preferred option has been identified, it would be sensible to not exclude any option at this stage to retain flexibility.

18. Finally, as highlighted to the Council in September 2012, when the Design and Development Brief was agreed, the Local Plan will take precedence over the Design and Development Brief, as well as influencing any future Leisure Strategy.

Resource Implications:

The feasibility study gave an indicative construction cost for each of the Options provided by Quantity Surveyors experienced in the Leisure Construction field:

- Option One – Set back from the road, all new build, no major new excavation, additional land take required £3,670,000
- Option Two – Set back from the road, re-use the existing hall, no major new excavation, additional land take required £3,483,000
- Option Three – Set forward in the site and close to the road, all new build, significant new excavation required, no extra land take required £3,745,000

- Option Four – Set forward in the site and close to the road, re-use existing hall, significant new excavation likely, no additional land take £3,568,000
- Preferred Option – New building, no significant new excavations likely, no additional land take £3,760,000

On Page 19 of the Feasibility Study, the consultants explain the reasons behind while it may have been expected that by adopting Options 2 and 4, which entail the retention of the existing building, the build cost will be significantly less, in practice, there is little material difference.

The figures exclude any land acquisition costs. The land acquisition costs for Options One and Two are likely to be higher due to the larger land take.

At this stage, no revenue cost projections have been developed for the running of any new facility, although it is likely that these would be lower than the existing building, which has a number of longstanding maintenance issues. It is however, still likely that a subsidy in the form of a management fee, would be required.

Legal and Governance Implications:

The Council has the power under the Community Wellbeing Act 2000 and the Local Government Act 1974 to provide Sports and Leisure facilities for the Community.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Any new building would be considerably more efficient in terms of energy use and cost, with a lower carbon footprint than the existing Hemnall Street Centre.

Consultation Undertaken:

Public Consultation as part of the development of the Design and Development Brief and with Epping Town Council (formal response to be requested, see Recommendation 4).

Background Papers:

Design and Development Brief.
St John's Road Epping Hall Sports and Leisure Feasibility Study (attached).
Report to Cabinet 12 September 2012.
Report to Council 27 September 2012.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

In terms of risk, the conversion/refurbishment of existing buildings does involve a higher risk than a new build approach. The re-provision can only proceed with the consent of the other land owners, which may be withheld.

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? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
The current facilities at Epping Sports Centre are poorly accessible for people with disabilities and movement difficulties, being spread over several levels. The existing Epping Hall has a lift which would also be provided in any new facility.

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?
Will be accommodated within any design brief for any new facility.