

Report and Assessment on Chigwell Community Hub



Prepared by:

Sue Sheppard

RCCE Village Halls & Community Buildings Adviser

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Executive Summary

Chigwell Parish Council has developed the Chigwell Neighbourhood Plan 2015-2030 which includes a proposal for an enabling development at Rolls Park, Chigwell. The enabling development will fund the cost of an offsite Community Hub on Hainault Road, the site of the current community facilities.

CPC has undertaken robust community consultation for the NP which includes outline proposals of the Community Hub and other onsite community facilities.

The proposals for a Community Hub will bring together the existing organisations which currently occupy separate buildings, into one community space. There will also be space for large community events, sports, arts, café and new parish council offices.

RCCE has been commissioned to assess the information available in various documents and has cross referenced this to the NP. Recommendations for further action have been included in the relevant sections.

CPC has developed the enabling project and had plans drawn for the Community Hub and are fully engaged with the project. The recommendations included in this report encourage CPC to engage more fully with the public specifically on this major project and to undertake further investigations and develop a detailed business plan to enable this project to progress in separation to the planned Rolls Park development.

1. Background

RCCE Village Halls & Community Buildings Adviser was asked by Chigwell Parish Council to review the plans for a new Chigwell Community Hub and to provide an assessment of the community need for the project.

During a meeting with Cllr Richard Alvin, the following documents were provided to assist in the assessment of this project:

- Chigwell Neighbourhood Plan 2015 – 2030
- Chigwell Parish Council NP Consultation report
- Epping Forest District Council Neighbourhood Planning Briefing Note
- Chigwell Parish Council Outline Planning Application Design and Access Statement
- EFDC Annex – Assessment of draft CNP policies
- Site Assessment Report, Rolls Park, Chigwell
- Chigwell Parish Council Community Hub Business Case

The proposed site on Hainault Road already provides a community hall (Victory Hall), Chigwell Members' Club and Essex County Council Library service to a population of approximately 11,000 residents in the parish of Chigwell. Residents are familiar with the site and recognise it as the focus of community facilities.

However, these buildings were constructed between the 1950s and 1980's using construction methods of the time and with the improvement of materials and construction methods, these buildings are coming to the end of their natural lifespan. Generally, buildings of this age with felt roof coverings and single skin walls will be energy inefficient and have ageing and poor heating; nearly all buildings of this age will be non-compliant with current access provisions and facilities, insulation, electrical installations etc unless substantial work has been carried out to improve and refurbish.

The current buildings are separated and not inter-connected and are run by different entities and organisations. The proposed Community Hub will bring these organisations together under one roof where common facilities such as toilets, heating, kitchen, access etc can all be shared. One single entity – Chigwell Parish Council – will then manage and control the building and use, although some long-standing organisations will be offered 'peppercorn' rents. This is supported by CNP Policy CHG2 Enabling Development at Rolls Park, Chigwell.

Chigwell lacks a General Practice surgery and it is the intention to make provision for a satellite surgery in the existing Parish Council offices once these are vacated and the Parish Council has moved to the new Community Hub. This is supported by CNP Policy CHG6 Supporting Community Assets.

2. Limitations

Whilst the plans for this project are supported by Chigwell Neighbourhood Plan (CNP), this report does not comment on:

- The suitability of the Neighbourhood Plan or the policies contained therein;
- The appropriateness of the housing development at Rolls Park to fund this project through s106 monies or,
- Whether this development and the proposal for a Community Hub provides the 'very special circumstances' required by national planning policy.

Condition, structural and asbestos surveys of the current facilities at Hainault Road have not been undertaken and therefore beyond visual inspection of the external appearance of the buildings, this report cannot comment on the existing structures and their demolition or suitability for refurbishment.

Recommendation:

- In order to fully satisfy the justification for a new Community Hub and to validate the demolition of the existing buildings a full structural and condition survey should be undertaken.

3. Proposals for a Community Hub:

Within CNP, there is a specific development proposed at Rolls Park contained within Policy CHG2, which will, in turn, fund the development of the offsite Community Hub in Hainault Road through s106 monies.

Also included in the proposals on this site and within the same Community Hub are:

- New Parish Council offices
- A public library
- A village café
- Multi-use Hall
- Chigwell Members Club
- A large, free to use car park

In addition to the Community Hub, the s106 monies arising from the Rolls Park development will also fund an onsite Scout Hall, new infrastructure and access, public park, affordable housing and a community transport scheme.

Similar schemes have been built across the country and in Essex, Community Hubs have brought together vital services and community facilities into one building in:

- Manuden Village Community Centre: <http://www.manudencommunitycentre.co.uk/>
- Springfield Parish Centre: <https://www.essexinfo.net/springfield-parish-council/parish-centre-matters/>
- Langham Community Centre: <http://www.langhamcommunitycentre.org.uk/>
- Leighs Village Hall: <http://www.leighsvillagehall.co.uk/>
- Loughton Murray Hall: <http://www.loughton-tc.gov.uk/Hall Hire and Weddings 2592.aspx>
- High Town Community Centre for Arts and Sports, Luton: <http://www.activeluton.co.uk/hightown-community-sports-and-arts-centre>

The benefits of bringing these services and facilities together under one roof have been well documented in other projects across the country. A new facility will provide:

- A single space for existing organisations to thrive and develop and remain sustainable;
- Space for new organisations to establish and provide services and facilities to residents not previously available at the existing buildings or within the village;
- A recognised 'one-stop' and focus of community facilities for residents;
- A sense of 'community' and an opportunity for communal activities and events on one site;
- Use of 'fit for purpose' buildings and facilities with modern standards of construction, insulation, heating, toilets, access etc
- An opportunity to provide health and well-being services and facilities to residents;
- An opportunity to develop arts and cultural facilities;
- A central, focal community hub will reduce the need to travel outside of the parish to access services and facilities;
- An opportunity to identify and provide youth services
- Provide facilities and services to elderly people in the parish to overcome isolation and promote social interaction and shared experiences
- The provision of a regular local bus service which stops at the Community Hub will ensure residents can easily access community facilities at low cost
- Bringing the management and control of the building under one organisation will ensure consistency of charging, effective control of health and safety measures, reliable and consistent fire risk and risk assessment.

The Community Hub will provide 2509m² of floor space over two floors on a site adjacent to the existing buildings currently farmed by a local farmer but owned by CPC. The overall site is approximately 6647Ha. The new Community Hub will be built on the 'green' site allowing the existing buildings to be used. Once built, the existing buildings will be demolished and the site used as a free car park for users of the hall and as a general car park for station and village use.

Refurbishment of the existing buildings is not an option due to the construction methods and materials used in these buildings approaching the end of their natural lifespan and will not bring the benefits described above. The cost of refurbishment would outweigh the benefits and more buildings would need to be built to provide similar benefits a Community Hub would bring. This wouldn't provide the focal point required by CPC and the buildings would always appear irregular and disjointed.

It's not clear if other schemes and plans for a Community Hub were considered, for example, the site is large and could easily accommodate a building on one level. This would remove the need for a lift in the building and construction would be quicker, easier and cheaper on one level.

Recommendation:

1. CPC should develop a detailed business plan specifically for this project;
2. As part of a detailed business plan for this project, other local halls within and around Chigwell should be assessed to determine suitability, distance from Chigwell village centre, availability and cost to hire;
3. If not already undertaken, Parish Councillors should arrange to visit two or three halls in Essex to view facilities and gain an appreciation of scale, facilities, costs, capacity, value for money, and the issues that commonly arise from running a Community Hub;
4. If other plans were considered by CPC, these should be made available to residents for them to determine the most appropriate plan and cost.

4. Community Consultation:

During the development of the Neighbourhood Plan a number of public consultations were undertaken through:

- Public meetings
- Letters and pamphlets published with all residents receiving a copy
- Two long weekend Open days held
- CPC website
- Availability of documents at CPC offices

Data from local residents' responses to the CNP showed an approximate 9% response to the Pre-Submission Plan. The CNP has been revised to include comments and feedback.

CNP highlights a contradiction for residents and EFDC in that clause 2.2 identifies '*a strong desire to maintain the Green Belt land as far as possible, as Chigwell's fields are seen to be the very reason the Green Belt Policy to protect them was introduced*'. The CNP then goes

on in Policy CHG2 Enabling Development at Rolls Park to propose approximately 45 homes on land that is *'expected to remain in the Green Belt'*.

There has been no specific community consultation on the proposed Community Hub and the benefits this will bring to residents and this is an area of work which will require some additional work by CPC and will strengthen the argument for the Rolls Park enabling scheme.

Recommendation:

1. In preparing a case for 'very special circumstances' with EFDC, CPC may wish to undertake specific consultation in the form of a questionnaire or open events showing architects drawings of the new facility to fully engage with residents on this project and to gauge support for the scheme.
2. Further public consultation will also identify the benefits and advantages of this particular scheme over any other option.

5. Funding

Funding of £6.5million has been earmarked for the construction of the Community Hub via a proposed enabling agreement with the developer of the Rolls Park development. The Rolls Park development consists of 45 homes with 40% of these designated as 'affordable' with the rent set by the developer for 20 years. The enabling agreement will also fund the cost of the other onsite community works described in the earlier section.

On current building costs (provided by Architects Stanhope Wilkinson) the approximate cost for new construction of this size would be in the range of £2000 per m². The area of the proposed hall is 2509m² giving a cost of approximately £5,018,000. With demolition, site clearance and landscaping, this cost could easily reach the proposed £6.5million.

In order to achieve more accurate costs, a Chartered Quantity Surveyor should review the drawings and plans and provide a Cost Plan for the works.

A scheme on one level could be significantly cheaper.

CPC intend to charge a peppercorn rate to Essex Library Service and Chigwell Members Club to lease a large proportion of the overall building. CPC also intend to make the car park free of charge; this could see large numbers of station users parking at the Community Hub to the detriment of hall users. Whilst these policies are a very worthy approach, experience and long term financial planning for the sustained viability of the Community Hub will

depend on the generation of large surpluses to continue the effective maintenance, management and standards expected of a community facility.

Recommendation:

1. Engage a QS to independently verify the building costs for the Community Hub
2. Review the policy to offer peppercorn rents
3. Review the policy to offer free car parking to non users of the Community Hub

6. Conclusions

CPC has demonstrated significant community awareness of the need for the proposed Community Hub, and in principle and as demonstrated in the CNP, the public supports CPC in taking this approach to develop and fund the community facilities.

However, CPC has stated in the section 4.16 of the CNP that without the benefit derived from the Rolls Park development *'the Parish Council would not have made this proposal'*. To ensure the long term sustainability of the project, plans for a Community Hub on this site should be developed and considered in separation to the planned development as this is a critical community facility which the community needs and which will bring significant benefits – CPC recognise this but it needs to be described and explained in more detail to residents. Whilst this enabling development would make this project happen more quickly, CPC should ensure that plans for a Community Hub continue to be developed whatever the outcome of the development.