

TITLE OF REPORT: DEVELOPMENT OF A RURAL RESOURCE CENTRE AT GREAT ASHBY

REPORT OF THE HEAD OF LEISURE AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
PORTFOLIO HOLDERS: COUNCILLOR L. NEEDHAM & COUNCILLOR I. KNIGHTON

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide Cabinet and Southern Rural with an update with regards the work undertaken to progress a feasibility study to establish the potential of developing a Rural Resource Centre on the edge of the District Park at Great Ashby.
- 1.2 To provide an update regarding the future direction of this project.

2 FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan April 2008.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Great Ashby is an area of new housing development on the outskirts of North East Stevenage. It is a large and growing housing development, consisting of approximately 2,000 dwellings plus a range of community amenities. The largest of which is the District Park which provides open space for the area and is under the management of North Herts District Council (NHDC).
- 3.2 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) in conjunction with NHDC have agreed to carry out a feasibility study investigating the possibility of building a 'rural resource centre' or 'environmental centre' within or adjacent to the District Park. The centre will be funded primarily using £275,000 of Section 106 funding secured by NHDC and will be used as match funding in the procurement of grant aid.
- 3.3 The authorisation for the undertaking and financing of this work was identified and reported to cabinet dated 26th June 07

4. WORK UNDERTAKEN TO DATE

- 4.1 Initial works have investigated the feasibility of designing a building based on the following specifications and principals.
 - Provide a new headquarters for HCC's North East Area Countryside Management Service (CMS) plus 'touchdown' facilities for NHDC and potentially other partners.
 - Showcase the principles of sustainable building construction and using the most appropriate solutions to maximise the natural resources of the location in order to produce a 'carbon neutral' building design.

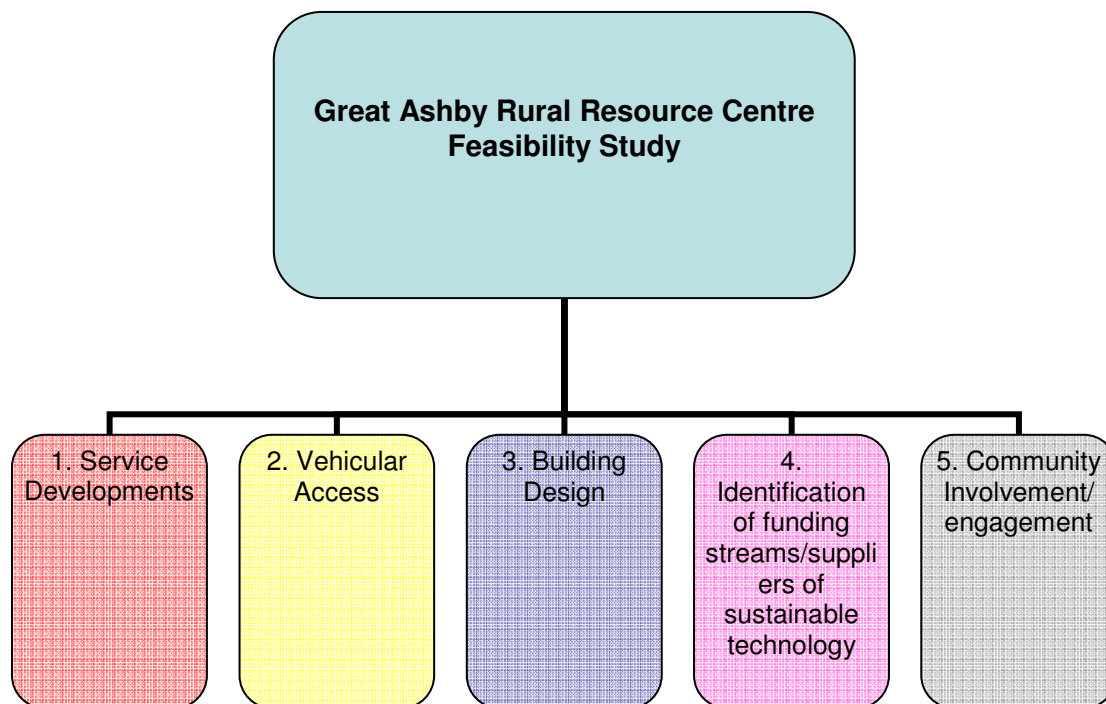
- To provide an example of HCC's and NHDC's commitment to sustainable development and to the climate change agenda.
- To encourage involvement of the Great Ashby community in the management of their green spaces.
- To use the premises to develop CMS by training and developing volunteer groups and to assist in the development of a Great Ashby Friends Group.

4.2 Initial work has been undertaken by Herts County Council, Countryside Management Services and North Herts District Council to identify the key elements of the project which has included the following items.

Completed Task	By Whom
Identify any alignment of the project with corporate, environmental and service based targets	HCC & NHDC
Identify links to other strategic areas such as the development of Friends of Groups and green infrastructures management	HCC
Identify potential traffic flows for the access	HCC
Scope the requirements of the access road with Transport Planning	HCC
Investigate previous projects proposed for the site	HCC & NHDC
Develop an estimated cost for designing the access road	HCC
Identify the requirements of potential users of the building	HCC & NHDC
Scope the initial principals of a sustainable construction and identify examples of good practice	HCC
Draft a brief for the employment of a consultant to progress the project from a concept to final design	HCC & NHDC
Consider the local community and methods of consultation	HCC & NHDC
Identify sources of grant funding	HCC

5. WORK COMPLETED TO DATE

- 5.1 The key conclusion from the initial work completed to date is that it would be appropriate to proceed with a comprehensive feasibility study. At this stage there has been no single issue identified that cannot be overcome within the scope of this project.
- 5.2 The proposed project organisation is summarised below and has been broken-up into key areas of focus that will need to be addressed within the feasibility study.



6. IN DEPTH FEASIBILITY STUDY

- 6.1 The identified outputs of the proposed feasibility study will be to produce progress reports, provide design plans for the building and roads, reports and conclusions from specialists summarising the conclusions and to provide final reports to the appropriate committees identifying the most appropriate and achievable option in this instance.
- 6.2 Officers identify suitably experienced consultants to undertake the feasibility study and seek quotations so as to progress the project to a final design stage.
- 6.3 Upon completion of the feasibility study that a further report is provided for members to advise of the preferred option so as to seek authority to proceed with the intended development upon securing the required grant funding.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 None at this stage. However the feasibility study will also need to identify the various implications associated with a building that is jointly owned and managed by two separate authorities that could also be occupied in the future by other third party organisations.

8. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 A budget of £25,000 has been made available for the feasibility study relating to the building. Herts County Council have agreed to cover the £10,000 - £15,000 costs associated with the separate study associated with the highway and access roads. Following completion of the studies any scheme proposals will be incorporated into the business planning process for inclusion in the Council's capital programme.
- 8.2 Any financial and risk implications associated with the development of the Rural Resource Centre will be identified as part of the feasibility study.

8.3 The main risk is if the feasibility study concludes that the project is unaffordable or that the technologies available at present to meet the carbon neutral criteria are also uneconomic to either install or maintain in the future. However this will not be known until the proposed feasibility study is complete.

9. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None in terms of the feasibility study

10. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

10.1 To date input has been from Herts County Council, Countryside Management Services and North Herts District Council. As part of the proposed feasibility study consultation will be undertaken with local residents and any organisation that has expressed an interest in the District Park from its conception.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 That Officers are authorised to proceed with the detailed feasibility study so as to identify the viability of the proposed Rural Resource Centre.

12. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

12.1 To provide sustainable working practices to best meet customer expectations for the maintenance of the environment in both urban and rural contexts.

12.2 To provide a show case example of sustainable development within a community development role so as to best meet its customers needs and provide value for money.

13. APPENDICES

13.1 None

14. CONTRIBUTING OFFICERS

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