

APPENDIX 4

Social and Community Facilities Policy

Social and Community Facilities

An important element of sustainable development and the creation of sustainable communities is the provision and protection of social and community facilities. The NPPF notes that achieving sustainable development includes a social objective and to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities and to achieve this there is a need to consider accessible services and open spaces to reflect current and future needs and support for communities' health, social and cultural well-being.

Social and community facilities and important local services may include (but are not limited to) local shops, post offices, health services such as doctors or dental surgeries, schools and nurseries, libraries, places of worship, community centres or village halls, meeting places, sports venues, open space, play space, cultural buildings, facilities for arts, theatres, and public houses. Outside of urban areas, facilities such as public houses, post offices and petrol stations in particular can perform a vital function in terms of the economic and social welfare of such areas and to help ensure the continued vitality of village and rural communities.

The retention and enhancement of this social and community infrastructure which makes a crucial contribution to the mental and physical wellbeing, learning and education and sense of place and community will be strongly supported. In addition, there is a need for a range of facilities to meet community needs and new social and community facilities should be provided as part of significant new development proposals.

Policy: Social and Community Facilities

Protection of Existing Facilities

(1) Proposals for the redevelopment or change of use of any premises resulting in the loss of social or community facilities, or services that support the local community, will not be permitted unless:

- a) A replacement facility is provided on-site, offering a level of accessibility and standard of provision at least equal to that of the existing facility which would continue to meet the need of the local population; or
- b) The facility or service concerned will be adequately supplied or met by an easily accessible existing or new facility in an appropriate alternative location, served by sustainable modes of transport; or
- c) It can be demonstrated that there is no current or forecast future demand for the use or an alternative social or community use through provision of marketing information and an impact assessment to show why the site cannot support the social or community use and impacts on users;

And

- d) The premises or site cannot readily be used for, or converted to, any other community facility.

(2) Where a use is no longer economically viable, the Council will require supporting information setting out reasons as to why the use is no longer viable and cannot be made viable in the foreseeable future. This may include details of previous use, accounts and marketing information demonstrating that the premises has been

marketed for use as a community facility for a reasonable length of time and that no suitable user has been/or is likely to be found.

New Provision and Enhancement

- (3) The council will support proposals to provide new and/or extended or enhanced social and community infrastructure facilities and their co-location with other social and community uses, subject to an assessment against all relevant Local Plan policies.
- (4) Social and community infrastructure will be funded through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and/or section 106 planning obligations (as appropriate). In addition, new and/or extended on-site provision of social and community infrastructure may be required as part of the supporting infrastructure for significant new housing and mixed-use development proposals where necessary to mitigate the impacts of the development on local services and meet the needs of occupiers.
- (5) Development resulting in the provision of new social and community facilities which are not generally accessible or available to the public, such as school sports facilities, will be required to enter into Community Use Agreements to allow and promote access by local communities to the facility.
- (6) Proposals for new or improved social or community facilities, including extensions to existing facilities will be supported where they are in accordance with relevant objectives and other policies of the Local Plan and:
 - a) Are located in areas convenient for the community they would serve and be accessible by a range of sustainable modes of transport including walking, cycling and public transport;
 - b) Provide spaces and buildings which are inclusive, accessible, flexible and sustainable and which meet the needs of intended users; and
 - c) Are designed and sited to maximise shared use of the facility.

Reasoned Justification

Paragraph 92 of the NPPF confirms that to provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services that the community needs, policies should plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities, and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments. Policies should also take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community; guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs; and ensure an integrated approach to consider the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

Social and community facilities, whether publicly or privately owned, can be subject to development pressures from alternative uses. It is therefore important that where appropriate such facilities are retained within the local community.

In addition, ensuring that new development is supported by a suitable level of social and community infrastructure is important not only for the quality of life of residents in new

developments, but also for the existing population who should not see a reduction in the quality of their services, their health and wellbeing or their experience of living in Three Rivers.

The Council will also continue to work with partners to secure improvements to community facilities and services in the District. It will liaise with partners across a broad spectrum of social infrastructure including education, public health, general health care, police and other service providers to improve access to and facilitate the modernisation of services and facilities and to promote a reduction in social and health inequalities. Section 11 of the Local Plan and the Infrastructure Delivery Plan provides an indicative list of projects to facilitate the growth outlined in the Local Plan.

Protection of Existing Facilities

It is vital that all residents have good access to community, leisure and cultural facilities and it is recognised that the loss of these facilities can have a detrimental impact upon an individual's quality of life.

The Council will therefore seek to protect, retain and enhance existing facilities and where their loss is proposed, the Council will endeavour to ensure that satisfactory provision is available within an accessible location to ensure that residents do not become disadvantaged.

Proposals resulting in the loss of social and community infrastructure supporting the community will therefore be resisted and all reasonable efforts should be made to preserve existing facilities in community use and/or re-provide facilities on-site, including active marketing for a range of other suitable social infrastructure uses.

Where it is intended to rely on replacement or alternative provision to meet needs, an application must demonstrate that this provision offers an equivalent or enhanced standard of provision, and is in an accessible location which is suitable to meet the needs of the local population.

There may be some instances where proposals involve loss/reduction/relocation of social and community infrastructure in response to changing community needs or services. However any proposals involving loss of social and community infrastructure should demonstrate that the facility in its current form is no longer needed or able to meet community needs, both now and in the future through evidence including marketing information and an impact assessment to show why the site cannot support the social or community use and impacts on users.

An impact assessment may include details to evidence understanding of the needs of service users and expected users; an explanation of changes in the service or in the needs of service users over time and details of why the service or facility is not required to meet current or future needs, including on the basis of the results of consultation with service users.

New Provision and Enhancement

In addition to ensuring that existing services and facilities are retained, it is also recognised that new developments can generate a demand for additional services and at times the Council may be required to work alongside other infrastructure providers to ensure that there are the necessary services to meet the needs of existing and new communities.

New development will be required to support social and community infrastructure provision to provide for the social, mental and physical wellbeing of the existing and new community, either through necessary enhancements to existing facilities or new provision.

Meeting needs may involve financial contributions secured through CIL or s106 legal agreements, or on-site provision at larger developments secured through planning obligations.

Proposals for new or extended or enhanced social and community infrastructure facilities will generally be supported subject to assessment against all relevant Local Plan policies and co-location of services or facilities is also strongly encouraged subject to compliance with all other relevant requirements. However it is particularly important that such proposals ensure that facilities provided are accessible to and meet the needs of the communities that they are intended to serve and reduce the need to travel further afield.

To make efficient use of land and facilities provided, allowing and promoting access by local communities to new facilities which may not otherwise be available to all users (for example within schools) is also strongly supported, and Community Use Agreements may be required to facilitate access to new facilities.