

Reasoned Justification

Evesham Leisure Centre



24.1 This policy looks at indoor community facilities (for outdoor sports and recreation uses, see policies SWDP 44 and 45). Community facilities include specific buildings (and associated land) for a range of uses, e.g. health facilities, emergency services such as ambulance, police, fire, educational establishments such as schools and colleges, community centres, village halls, leisure and cultural facilities, public houses, places of worship, libraries, and indoor sports facilities, including swimming pools.

24.2 The aims of the policy are to protect existing facilities and enhance provision for the future by:

- Encouraging retention, enhancement and provision of a range of community facilities across South Worcestershire which are appropriately located, easily accessible and reduce the need to travel;
- Providing a framework within which community facilities are able to expand, change or relocate.

24.3 The policy takes account of existing policies on the protection and enhancement of existing community facilities, whilst at the same time allowing for changes likely to take place under the Decentralisation and Localism Bill which will permit the listing of community assets, the community right to challenge (in delivering public services) and the encouragement of communities to run their own facilities.

24.4 Some of the existing Local Plan policies are specific to certain uses, such as educational uses, pubs and community halls. However, it is recognised that a more general spatial policy that covers a wider range of indoor uses will be useful in allowing alternative community uses to be considered.

24.5 We have addressed the need for new large scale proposals such as indoor sports arenas and swimming pools in that these should be in sustainable locations. Therefore, there should be a sequential approach to their location, in that initially they should be considered in city and town locations.

24.1 SWDP 42: Indoor Leisure and Community Facilities

24.6 The three South Worcestershire authorities wish to protect valuable community facilities and services that play an important role in the social infrastructure of South Worcestershire and that help support sustainable communities. In communities where access to alternatives may be very limited, the presence of these facilities may be very important in maintaining a high quality of life.

Malvern Theatres



24.7 In terms of indoor sports facilities the South Worcestershire authorities have published a Sports Facilities Framework that has assessed the need for built sports facilities for the plan period. The report provides evidence of need for a range of facilities including sports halls, swimming pools, indoor tennis and indoor bowls. Developer contributions to these facilities will be required. Further details are set out in the Implementation Plan.

24.8 The release of any community facilities to other uses must be fully justified in terms of their contribution and viability. The Local Authorities will require any application involving the loss of a facility to be supported by written evidence that the facility is no longer needed and/ or no longer viable. The level of evidence required

to be submitted will vary according to the level of access to alternative facilities in the area and the extent to which the facility contributes towards sustainable communities, but would be expected to include such evidence as:

- The current and projected patterns of community use;
- the nature and condition of the building and the cost of repairs, renovations or improvements needed to allow the facility to continue in operation;
- the extent of the local catchment including the location of the premises in relation to the local settlement pattern and accessibility;
- the nature and location of comparable facilities;
- the potential to relocate the use into other premises in the community;
- in respect of public houses the approaches and attempts to transfer from a chain of tied pubs to a free house;
- evidence of the marketing of a site should include sales literature, details of approaches and details of offers and show that it has been offered as a whole and that parts have not been identified for separate sale;
- and evidence that the local community has been notified of the intention to close the facility and has not, within a period of one year come forward with a realistic proposal to assume operation of the facility, including proposals to finance and operate the facility.

24.9 The importance of particular facilities will vary between communities, and it is essential that the community is involved in considering the merits of any facility and the suitability of any proposals for alternative forms of community use, should their continued viability of operation be in doubt. Applicants proposing to redevelop or convert facilities valued by the community will be expected to consult local communities about the relative importance of the facilities which could be lost. Not all facilities satisfactorily meet the needs of local communities, and it may be that combining or rationalising facilities might be more appropriate.

24.10 Support will be given to the provision of new facilities where these will enhance the sustainability of community life and will meet the needs of an existing or growing and changing population. Standards for the amount and quality of community provision will vary according to the type of community use. Different providers will have different standards, for example, when there is a need for new school premises, police buildings or doctor's surgeries. Other standards, such as the need for new indoor sports facilities are covered in the South Worcestershire Sports Facilities Framework (2010), and Worcester City Council's PPG17 audit, that covers the requirements for community centres. Such standards or relevant service providers will be referred to in assessing the need for new community facilities.

SWDP 42: Indoor Leisure and Community Facilities

The provision of new community facilities and the retention and enhancement of existing community facilities will be supported, where these positively contribute to the quality of local community life and the maintenance of sustainable communities.

The involvement of the local community will be sought in assessing the importance of existing or proposed local facilities. Any proposal that would result in the loss of a site or building currently or last used for the provision of facilities, services, leisure or cultural activities for the community, or is identified for future provision of such uses on the proposals map, will only be supported if the local planning authority is satisfied that:

Change of use/loss of community facilities:

- An alternative community facility to meet local needs is, or will be provided in an equally or more accessible location within walking distance of the site (800m); or
- It has been proven that it would not be economically viable to retain the site/buildings for a community use; and
- The community facility could not be provided or operated by either the current occupier or by an alternative occupier (for example by the local community/ public-private partnership), and it has been marketed to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority for a minimum period of 12 months in order to confirm that there is no interest and the site or buildings is genuinely redundant; in the case of a business, evidence that it has been offered on the open market as a whole and at a realistic market value. This should be for a period of not less than twelve months by a competent agent; and
- A satisfactory assessment has taken place that proves that there is an excess of such provision and the site or building is not needed for any other community facility or use.

Provision of new community facilities:

- The use is compatible with adjacent land uses and would not be detrimental to residential amenity or highway safety
- The use meets design criteria outlined in policy SWDP 26
- The proposal(s) are of a scale to meet the needs of the local community, and in keeping with the character of the area.

- Within the towns proposed facilities would normally be expected to be located within the development boundary. Within the rural areas, proposals located within or adjoining the settlement they are intended to serve will be permitted.
- If the proposal is for large scale facilities it should meet the requirements of policy SWDP28 as regards the sequential approach to the location of land uses that attract large numbers of people looking first at city and town centre locations.

Links to the Objectives

24.11 The Preferred Options policy for Indoor Leisure and Community Facilities supports the following objectives:

- Economic success that is shared by all objectives 3 and 4;
- Stronger communities objective 4;
- A better environment for today and tomorrow objective 2;
- Improving health and well-being objectives 1, 2 and 3;
- Communities that are safe and that feel safe objectives 1 and 2.

Alternative Options Considered

24.12 Concentrate all Facilities in the main urban areas: Although this approach brings facilities closest to the majority of the population it does nothing to enhance the importance of the many local village communities which have a distinctive character. They are dependent on local pubs and village halls to survive. This approach is considered to be unsustainable in putting extra traffic on inappropriate roads.

24.13 Allow market forces to dictate provision: This approach would not allow the local community to be involved in identifying the needs of their communities. Many community facilities do not make profit, but the sites they are on can be very valuable. This approach would not protect facilities for the benefit of the community.