

SWDP 37: Built Community Facilities



- A. The provision of new community facilities⁽⁸²⁾ or the enhancement of existing facilities will be permitted, particularly where the proposals have resulted from neighbourhood planning, subject to satisfying the sequential test in the Framework where applicable. Applicants will be required to consider whether the combining or rationalisation of existing facilities would be more appropriate than the provision of a new facility.**
- B. Any proposal that would result in the loss of a site or building currently or last used as a community facility will only be permitted if the following criteria are met:**

82 Community facilities comprise specific buildings (and associated land) for a range of uses, including: -

- Health facilities.
- Emergency services i.e. ambulance, police, fire.
- Educational establishments such as schools and colleges.
- Community centres, village halls.
- Leisure and cultural facilities.
- Public houses.
- Places of worship.
- Libraries.
- Built sports facilities
- Cinemas / theatres.
- Formal sports pitches / courts.

- i. An alternative community facility which meets local needs to at least the same extent is, or will be, provided in an equally or more accessible location; or**
- ii. It has been demonstrated that there is an excess of similar provision in the appropriate catchment area for that particular facility and the site or building is not needed for any other community facility; or**
- iii. In the case of commercial community facilities, it has been demonstrated that it would not be economically or operationally viable to retain the facility for community use; or**
- iv. In the case of non-commercial community facilities, the use is no longer operationally viable; or**
- v. The community facility could not be provided or operated by either the current occupier or by an alternative occupier (e.g. by a local community body, public-private partnership, etc.) and it has been marketed in accordance with Annex F (Marketing Requirements).**
- vi. Applicants are required to scope existing facilities in the area and consider whether it would be more appropriate to combine or rationalise existing facilities in the first instance.**
- vii. Applicants proposing to re-develop or convert a community facility should consult the appropriate community prior to the submission of a planning application.**

Reasoned Justification

1. This policy is consistent with the Framework (paragraph 28) and provides more detail. Alongside national planning policies, the South Worcestershire Sports Facilities Framework (2010) and the emerging Community Buildings Strategy clearly set out the need for new community facilities to service the anticipated level of housing growth.
2. The policy allows for changes under the Localism Act 2011. This permits the listing of Community Assets, the Community Right to Challenge (in delivering public services) and the encouragement of communities to run their own facilities, or plan for its local area through neighbourhood planning. This allows for the consideration of a wider range of community services when appropriate, acknowledging that the importance of particular facilities will vary between communities. It is essential that the community is involved in considering the merits of any new facility and the suitability of proposals for alternative forms of use.
3. The SWC wish to protect valuable community facilities and services that play an important role in the social infrastructure of south Worcestershire and help to secure sustainable communities. These mainly local facilities are particularly important in helping to maintain a high quality of life for local residents, some of whom have limited access to alternative

facilities further afield. Under certain circumstances it may be more appropriate to look to combining or rationalising facilities in a locality rather than replicate through a new proposal. In situations where a facility may be redundant a robust assessment should have taken place, as appropriate.

4. In the case of any proposals that would result in the loss of a community facility, a satisfactory assessment should be undertaken (using recognised national methodology, e.g. Sport England), that proves there is an excess of similar provision in the appropriate catchment area for that particular facility and the site or building is not needed for any other community service / use.
5. When applying these tests to specific proposals, the Local Planning Authority will have full regard to the particular characteristics, needs, service priorities and objectives of the service or organisation concerned. The implications of maintaining and running new facilities will also be an important consideration.
6. For urban areas, proposed facilities should ideally be located within development boundaries. Within rural areas, proposals should be located within, or adjoining the settlement. If the proposal is for large scale community facilities, it must meet the requirements of SWDP9 in reflecting the sequential approach to the location of land uses that attract large numbers of people; such sites should, in the first instance, be sought within the development boundary of the urban areas.