

Provision and Retention of Local Community Services and Facilities

5.203 The availability of local services and facilities is an important factor in ensuring the sustainability and vitality of communities. The loss of such facilities can have severe consequences, particularly when there is no alternative provision nearby. This issue is particularly pertinent in rural areas where presence of services may be sparse.

5.204 The Local Plan seeks to ensure that facilities and services that provide for the health and wellbeing, social, educational, spiritual, recreational, leisure and cultural needs of the community are retained and improved where possible. Such facilities may include community/village halls, village shops, post offices, schools, nurseries, places of worship, health services, care homes, convenience stores, libraries, public houses, museums and performing arts venues. Proposals for a change of use that would lead to the loss of a community facility should be justified by evidence that the current use is no longer viable and that the service cannot be retained in another form elsewhere. Consideration will also be given to the availability of comparable facilities that are accessible to the community in question.

Policy CF 5

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The Council will seek to maintain and improve the provision of local community services and facilities. This will be achieved by:

- Supporting proposals which protect, retain or enhance existing community facilities (including multi use and shared schemes) or provide new facilities. New facilities should preferably be located within defined built up areas where they are most accessible. In exceptional cases facilities may be located adjacent to these areas where it can be demonstrated that this is the only practical option and where a site is well related and connected to the existing settlement.
- Safeguarding land required for the provision of facilities to meet existing and future community needs, as identified by service providers.
- Resisting proposals involving the loss of community assets and facilities (including land in community use, community/village halls, village shops and post offices, schools, nurseries, places of worship, health services, care homes, convenience stores, libraries, public houses, museums, performing arts venues and other community facilities) unless it can be demonstrated that the existing use is no longer financially or commercially viable and there are no other means of maintaining the facility, or an alternative facility of the same type is available or can be provided in an accessible location. If permission is granted for a change of use or redevelopment, preference will be given to premises remaining in some form of community or employment use so long as this does not result in traffic, amenity, environmental or conservation problems.