

planning permission, require an approval in principle from the London Borough of Richmond's Highway Structures Engineer. This is to protect the structural integrity of the highway.

24 Securing new social and community infrastructure to support a growing population



Policy 49

Social and Community Infrastructure (Strategic Policy)

- A. The Council will work with service providers and developers to ensure the adequate provision of community services and facilities, especially in areas where there is an identified need or shortage.

New social and community infrastructure

- B. Proposals for new or extensions to existing social and community infrastructure will be supported where:
1. it provides for an identified need;
 2. is of a high quality and inclusive design providing access for all; and
 3. where practicable is provided in multi-use, flexible and adaptable buildings or co-located with other social infrastructure uses which increases public access; and
 4. is in accordance with Policy 1 'Living Locally and the 20-minute neighbourhood (Strategic Policy)'.

Loss of social or community infrastructure

- C. Loss of social or community infrastructure will be resisted. Proposals involving the loss of such infrastructure will need to demonstrate clearly:
1. that there is no longer an identified community need for the facilities or they no longer meet the needs of users and cannot be adapted; or
 2. that the existing facilities are being adequately re-provided in a different way or elsewhere in a convenient alternative location accessible to the current community it supports, or that there are sufficient suitable alternative facilities in the locality; and
 3. the potential of re-using or redeveloping the existing site for the same or an alternative social infrastructure use for which there is a local need has been fully assessed. This should include evidence of completion of a full and proper marketing exercise of the site for a period of at least 18 months in line with the requirements set out in Appendix 2.

- D. Where the Council is satisfied that the above evidence has been provided and the change of use away from social and community infrastructure use has been justified, redevelopment for other employment generating uses should be considered.
- E. Where a scheme proposes 100% genuinely affordable housing and meets the requirements of Policy 11 'Affordable Housing (Strategic Policy)' in terms of mix, tenure and affordability, the proposal will not be required to satisfy parts C.3 and D of this policy as above.

Impacts on existing infrastructure

- F. Development proposals for 10 or more residential units should assess the potential impacts on existing social and community infrastructure in order to demonstrate to the Council that there is sufficient capacity within the existing infrastructure to accommodate the needs arising from the new development. Development proposals need to fulfil the requirements of Policy 51 'Health and Wellbeing (Strategic Policy)' Section B (1) in relation to the provision of Health Impact Assessments.

24.1 Social and community infrastructure facilities provide for the health, welfare, social, education, spiritual, recreational, leisure and cultural needs of the community. The provision of adequate community and social infrastructure is essential to support the projected population growth within the borough. Such facilities are often at the heart of local communities; they are important for the quality of life of residents, in the creation of more inclusive and sustainable communities and in helping to promote social interaction and encouraging people to lead more healthy and active lives. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted just how important social and community infrastructure is to the local community. It is important that these facilities and services continue to meet people's needs at all stages of their lives and are accessible to all.

24.2 This policy covers any type of social and community infrastructure floorspace that is important to the local community. It encompasses a wide range of services, some of which are statutory services such as health and education and the Council will work with partners to ensure that local communities continue to have access to such services. Others are non-statutory community services such as cultural, play, recreation, sports and faith facilities including those for voluntary or charitable purposes. The Council considers it important to protect such uses and facilities as they play a key role in maintaining and fostering community and social cohesion. This approach also reflects London Plan

Policy S1. Some examples of social and community infrastructure include public services, GP surgeries, nurseries, community centres, public halls, arts and cultural facilities, policing, fire and ambulance services, youth centres, social clubs, indoor sport and recreation facilities, libraries, laundrettes, places of worship, and public houses. This is not an exhaustive list and the Council will determine whether any facility or service is considered to be a social infrastructure or community use. The pre-application process is encouraged and on specific schemes may clarify which policies and requirements apply. Schools and other education facilities, health and social care facilities as well as leisure and recreation facilities are dealt with in more detail in separate policies within this Plan.

24.3 Infrastructure provision and needs have been identified with the relevant partner organisations and are set out in the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan 2023. There is a need for nursery, education and health provision across the borough. More specific requirements for community facilities may be identified by local communities, such as a Neighbourhood Plan. The London Plan also seeks to conserve cultural infrastructure, as set out in London Plan Policy E10, and the GLA have developed a snapshot mapping the existing cultural infrastructure. The Council will work with partners including public and private infrastructure providers and the community and voluntary sector in ensuring the provision of services.

24.4 It is recognised that in some instances there may need to be some additional development to support the cost of retaining or reproviding existing social infrastructure uses. Such development may be acceptable provided that the proposal will result in an overall improvement to the existing social and community facilities and services.

24.5 The COVID-19 pandemic has had a widespread impact on how services and support are delivered to local people, and over time the infrastructure needed to deliver them may change. However in many areas, it has brought a focus on having local, community hubs, as part of “Living Locally” and adaptable spaces bringing opportunities for interaction. In addition, the Government’s changes to the Use Classes affect social infrastructure and community infrastructure. Class F1 includes learning and non-residential institutions and Class F2 local community uses including halls and community spaces, indoor swimming pools and areas for outdoor sport or recreation. Class E is a wide range of commercial, business and services including gyms, indoor sport, creches, medical and health services. While this Plan supports provision of social and community infrastructure for meeting local needs, the flexibility introduced by Government through Use Class E (commercial, business and service uses) does in principle allow for changes of use both to and from other Class E uses for some types of social and community infrastructure, provided there are no restrictive conditions on a specific property. The policy approach to retaining existing social and community infrastructure and assessing new or improved social and community infrastructure set out above will apply where planning permission is required for a change of use, or to extensions and new development. Where necessary and justified, the Council will use conditions and/or planning obligations to limit uses consented within Classes E and F in order to achieve the objectives of this policy and in line with the NPPF and accompanying PPG to ensure provision of social, recreational and cultural facilities and services to meet community

needs and to mitigate the impacts of development given the range of uses that need to be fully assessed.

New social and community infrastructure

24.6 Provision of good quality social and community infrastructure is critical for social cohesion and contributes to the creation of lifetime neighbourhoods, i.e. places where people are able to live and work in safe, healthy, supportive and inclusive environments with which they are proud to identify. The Council will support the provision of new or extensions to existing social infrastructure where it provides for an identified need.

24.7 Need is identified on an evidential basis from the Council and its partners strategies and plans, including:

1. The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan
2. The Council's Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)
3. The Council's School Place Planning Strategy and Childcare Sufficiency Assessment
4. The Council's Cultural Partnership Strategy and Culture Richmond 2021-2031
5. Estates Strategies produced by health bodies, such as the NHS England and South West London Integrated Care System
6. Government departments' Estates Strategies
7. The Metropolitan Police Authority's Estates Strategy
8. Other local evidence such as community needs identified as part of Neighbourhood Plans.

24.8 Access for all is important including for the young, old and disabled. The appropriate level of accessibility to the public will depend on the nature of the scheme and its catchment. The types of larger facilities in multi-use buildings that will be visited regularly and by a greater number of people should be located in the borough's centres or areas of good public transport accessibility. Smaller facilities serving a more local

catchment should be accessible by walking or cycling. The Council will encourage high quality and sustainable design of social infrastructure including measures to improve its actual, and perception of, accessibility. There may be relevant standards for new social and community infrastructure covering regulatory aspects for the specific type of provision, for example for health and care facilities the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC)'s Health Building Notes provide guidance on the design and planning of new healthcare buildings and their immediate environment.

24.9 Where practicable, social infrastructure and community facilities should be provided in multi-use, flexible and adaptable buildings or co-located with other social infrastructure uses which can increase public access and help to minimise capital or revenue costs to community groups. Multi-use means, for example, that a school uses the school and playing fields during the school day, during term time and the facilities are available for use by the community outside school hours i.e. evenings, weekends and during school holidays. Community use could be individuals, sports and arts clubs, voluntary sector groups or private groups, and can range from informal/occasional bookings through to planned, professional activity. Multi-use already exists in many forms within the borough. The Council will encourage and promote the multi-use of premises, including in independent and free schools and other private or commercial facilities for sports and community purposes, subject to appropriate management arrangements and secured through community use agreements as part of a legal agreement. The combined impact of multi-use facilities needs to be taken into account, including shared parking, hours of use, and the impact these may have on the character and amenity of the area, the living conditions of local residents, as well as consideration as to how flexible spaces will be used e.g. sufficient storage for different users and security considerations.

24.10 The Council's Indoor Sports Facility Needs Assessment highlights the need for new facilities within the borough and will be updated in 2023³⁵. Where possible and

feasible, such provision should be provided on-site in line with the Council's Indoor Sports Facility Needs Assessment. The supporting text to Policy 37 deals with the use of Community Use Agreements and artificial pitches, which may also be relevant to indoor facilities.

Loss of social or community infrastructure

24.11 Development pressures and high land values in the borough mean there is pressure to redevelop sites and it can be difficult to find new sites for community use, especially for use by voluntary groups. The Council will resist the loss or change of use of existing social or community infrastructure. Consequently, the potential of re-using, refurbishing or redeveloping existing sites for continued social or community infrastructure use must be assessed in order to preserve a sufficient range and amount of such infrastructure across the borough. As outlined above, the flexibility for change of use within Class E means that a wide range of social and community infrastructure uses can occur without the need for a planning application and should improve the prospects of finding an alternative social and community infrastructure use.

24.12 To assess the loss of social infrastructure, the Council will require evidence to justify the loss and demonstrate that it is no longer an essential local facility. The applicant must demonstrate that either-

1. there is no longer a community need for the facilities or they no longer meet the needs of users and cannot be adapted in any way. This should be based on evidential need and related to the Council's and its partners strategies and plans and may include evidence of a public disposal process. Where the application relates to the loss of a health facility, the requirements of Policy 51 Health and Wellbeing will also need to be addressed and written agreement from the Southwest London Integrated Care System, NHS England, or other relevant health body must be provided; or
2. the existing facilities are being adequately re-provided in a different way

or elsewhere in a convenient alternative location that is accessible to the current community it supports, or that there are sufficient suitable alternative facilities in the locality. Any redevelopment proposal must not lead to or increase any shortfall in provision. Consideration will be given to whether alternative facilities are accessible to all, well located and sustainable.

3. Alongside either 1 or 2 as set out above, it is essential that the potential of re-using or redeveloping the existing site for the same or an alternative social infrastructure use for which there is a local need is assessed. This should include a full and proper marketing exercise ongoing for a period of at least 18 months. As part of the marketing process space should be offered at a reasonable charge for community groups / voluntary sector organisations reflecting its existing use value and condition. More detailed information on marketing requirements is provided in Appendix 2. Where the site is an existing health facility, consideration should first be given to re-using the site for other health facilities and applicants should contact NHS Property Services to discuss their needs for health floorspace in the area.

24.13 Proposals that could result in the loss of an existing indoor sport facility will also be assessed against the Council's Indoor Sports Facility Needs Assessment and the criteria as set out in the NPPF. Early engagement with Sport England is encouraged where a proposal affects an existing indoor sport facility.

24.14 In some cases, change might be inevitable, for example to meet the changing needs of users or through multi-use to make continued provision more economically viable. Any strategies produced by third parties demonstrating local need should have been subject to consultation with appropriate bodies to demonstrate the robustness of the evidence to the Council. If a public disposal process has taken place as part of an agreed programme of social infrastructure re-provision which confirms that the disposal of assets is

necessary to ensure continued delivery of social infrastructure and related services, for example, NHS service transformation and estate strategies, this will be taken into account by the Council when assessing proposals against the criteria set out in this policy.

24.15 Where the Council is satisfied that the above evidence has been provided and redevelopment away from a social or community infrastructure use or an educational use may be appropriate, redevelopment or change of use for employment generating uses should be considered.

24.16 In a Borough which has such high land values and an acute need for affordable housing, the Council will consider an exception to parts C.3 and D of this policy, where a scheme proposes the redevelopment or change of use of the site to 100% genuinely affordable housing, and where such is in accordance with Policy 11 Affordable Housing in terms of mix, tenure and affordability. Part C.1 or C.2 would still need to be addressed first. This is to assist in meeting local priority needs, in recognition of the wider community benefits of delivering affordable housing. If an economic viability case is put forward, at the point of consideration of a planning application or through any subsequent variation, to justify less than 100% affordable housing or a different tenure mix that is not policy compliant, then this exception to parts C.3 and D would not apply.

Impacts on existing social infrastructure

24.17 Development proposals for major developments are likely to put an additional burden on existing facilities, particularly on education and health infrastructure. Therefore, the potential impact of development proposals on existing social and community infrastructure must be assessed by the applicant as part of the planning application process, supported by evidence, to ensure that there is capacity within the existing infrastructure. For applications for 10 or more residential units, this should be addressed in a Supporting Planning Statement and a Health Impact Assessment, as required (in accordance with the Local

Validation Checklist and Policy 51 and/or through an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for projects above the threshold. Where necessary, measures will need to be put in place to mitigate the impacts of development on existing services. This could include financial contributions and / or Planning Obligations (in line with the Council's Planning Obligations SPD), and / or where appropriate, on-site provision of community facilities.

Assets of Community Value

24.18 Community groups have a right to nominate buildings or other land as Assets of Community Value where they believe they are of importance to their community's social well-being. The Council manages and

displays this list on the Council's website. If the asset comes up for sale, then the community will be given six months to make a bid to buy it on the open market. The Assets of Community Value process is helpful in testing the viability of community uses as the bidding process will demonstrate whether there are workable proposals to sustain or reuse the premises.

24.19 Loss of Assets of Community Value will be strongly resisted in line with the requirements and criteria set out in this policy. Where premises have been registered with the Council as an Asset of Community Value under the Localism Act 2011, this is likely to be a material consideration in the determination of applications for the site for change of use to non-community related use.

Policy 50

Education and Training (Strategic Policy)

- A. The Council will work with partners to encourage the provision of facilities and services for education and training of all age groups to help reduce inequalities and support the local economy, by the following means:
 1. supporting the provision of facilities to meet the needs for primary and secondary school places as well as pre-school, childcare and other education and training facilities;
 2. safeguarding land and buildings in educational use;
 3. identifying new sites for educational uses as part of this Plan; the Council will work with landowners and developers to secure sites for pre-schools, primary and secondary schools as well as sixth forms to ensure sufficient spaces can be provided for children aged 2-18;
 4. encouraging the potential to maximise existing educational sites through extensions, redevelopment or refurbishment to meet identified educational needs;
 5. encouraging flexible and adaptable buildings, multi-use and co-location with other social infrastructure.
- B. Early engagement is required with the Council (Achieving for Children) where there is a loss or proposed gain in pre-school, primary and secondary places; evidence of discussions between the Council (Achieving for Children) and providers will be required to demonstrate how needs will be met, and should be submitted with an application.
- C. Proposals for education and childcare facilities will be considered against the criteria set out in London Plan Policy S3 Education and childcare facilities parts B and C.
- D. The Council will promote local employment opportunities and training programmes in accordance with London Plan Policy E11 Skills and opportunities for all, and seek opportunities to support local procurement of goods and services. Where the employment opportunities generated by construction as well as the end use of the development create more than 20 (Full Time Equivalent) jobs, a Local Employment Agreement, secured through a Section 106 agreement, will be required. This will secure