

## **C9 Existing community facilities**

Development that would result in the loss of, or have an unacceptable adverse affect on, an existing community facility, will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that:

- a) the current use is no longer needed or a suitably located replacement facility of at least equivalent standard has been secured; and,
- b) the land or building could not fulfil, or is not needed for, an alternative community use.

Applications must be supported by appropriate and proportionate independent evidence, including appropriate financial, business planning, options appraisals, marketing and community engagement evidence.

### **Aim**

4.62 To protect vital community facilities.

### **Justification**

4.63 A range of facilities are vital in maintaining the fabric of remote rural communities. They include core facilities aimed at providing for educational, healthcare and recreational needs such as schools, childcare, libraries, nurseries, doctors surgeries, dentists, village halls, reading rooms, community offices, sports pitches, churches, chapels, play and recreational areas, public gardens and greens, sports pavilions, gymnasiums and changing facilities. They also include other important amenities like community car parking, allotments, communications and utilities infrastructure. In addition, there are the more commercially-orientated facilities, including pubs, village shops and post offices.

4.64 All these facilities aid social cohesion, reinforce local identity and enable essential services to be provided as locally as possible. The presumption is that they should be retained or replaced with something of equivalent standard. Where development would lead to the loss of a facility or reduce its viability, applicants will need to provide very strong justification based, first and foremost, on there no longer being a need for it. This will require community engagement to assess current and historical use, and to identify barriers to, and opportunities, for continued community use.

4.65 The policy particularly seeks to guard against short-termism. The case for losing a facility must not revolve around the needs of the current owner/tenant, their chosen business model, or narrow consideration of operational models. Applicants will need to look at a full range of potential uses or ways of operating a business or facility, in order to demonstrate that it is not workable in the long term. The Authority will expect applicants to commission independent assessments of the facility in both its current and alternative roles, to assess the potential for continued or alternative uses. Short term marketing assessments will not be sufficient in their own right. By the same token, testing of such proposals will need to be done in a proportionate way where, for example, a premises is clearly only suited to a very narrow range of community uses. Policy BE7 provides guidance on the Authority's marketing requirements for testing demand.

4.66 The Authority would encourage communities to register important facilities as 'Assets of Community Value' under the 2011 Localism Act. This will ensure an added layer of statutory protection against harmful losses, and would offer communities the opportunity to formulate their own proposals to safeguard their future. Where a public house is registered as an asset of community value, ordinarily permitted changes of use now require full planning permission. Where the exercise of a permitted development right for a change of use of a community facility would threaten a valued local facility, the Authority will consider whether an immediate Article 4 Direction should be made to protect the interests of the local community.

4.67 Where it would assist in retaining viable community facilities, changes of use that result in joint or mixed uses of premises will be encouraged.

