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Social Infrastructure

Delivering Social Infrastructure M51.
Would Policy S1 provide an effective and justified approach to the development of London's social infrastructure? In particular would it be effective in meeting the objectives of policies GG1 and GG3 in creating a healthy city and building strong and inclusive communities?

This policy S1 could be taken to apply to, or mainly to, areas subject to development plans. As I presented the case in relation to GG1 in building strong and inclusive communities, the policies should start from the understanding that communities and neighbourhoods are part of the human living system. The policies should always therefore *start* from what exists and that it is indivisible by imposed boundaries for borough administration and land site development.

In particular:
a) Would Policy S1, in requiring a needs assessment of social infrastructure and encouraging cross borough collaboration provide an effective and justified strategic framework for the preparation of local plans and neighbourhood plans in relation to the development of social infrastructure?

The requirement for a needs assessment is very welcome. However this overlooks and undervalues key elements of social infrastructure:
- Existing uses of land and buildings which constitute important sometimes integral parts of social infrastructure.
- These are community assets already meeting significant needs, as well as being part of a social system wider than the boundaries imposed by development plans.
- Social infrastructure is part of a dynamic system which extends beyond particular sites and buildings. Effective assessment cannot be confined to those in areas designated for redevelopment.

The policy should be *a requirement for an audit and assessment of the borough's existing social infrastructure which are its assets, and after that a needs assessment*.

The exhortation in para 5.1.2 to work collaboratively with all stakeholders including the local community is welcome. It is also essential if there is to be an effective and realistic assessment of what exists and what the additional needs are. To be effective the policy should include a *requirement* that the assessment of the existing social infrastructure as well as the needs assessment should be carried out collaboratively with the stakeholders, across the borough especially including the community sector, and that this exercise should produce an agreed report. This report would form a required part of the Social Impact Assessment which should be a policy requirement alongside the other required Impact assessments in the Integrated Impact Assessment.

The encouragement of cross borough collaboration is also welcomed. Social infrastructure does not in reality stop at border boundaries. Communities and neighbourhoods are split by borough boundaries and it is especially important for social infrastructure that there is very close cooperation between boroughs across their boundaries. This should include support for and facilitation of collaboration between community groups and networks across the borough boundaries.

b) Would it provide a justified definition of social infrastructure?
If the definition is in para 5.1.1 then it is on the right lines but incomplete. Social infrastructure is more than services and facilities, and land and buildings. It includes also the social processes and structures in the community which are a key part of what gives life to the visible and physical parts of the 'social infrastructure'. This might be met by adding to the end of the second sentence in 5.1.1 *', and the community social processes and structures'.*

c) Would it provide an effective development management framework for boroughs, particularly with regard to Policy S1D, F and G?

Policies S1D, F and G are attempting to accommodate the loss of social infrastructure. Experience and observation shows that these kinds of provisions can encourage the loss of existing viable and effective uses by assuming that reproviding physical accommodation space somewhere else is a viable and effective solution. Any use, activity or facility that serves a community of people is embedded in a complex social system of relationships between people and places. These are often not capable of being transferred or replaced as they can die in the transfer. In this case they are similar to SSSIs, which are a formal part of the protection from development in planning as Sites of Special Scientific Interest. So these S1 social infrastructure policies will not be effective without something built in to them requiring an understanding of this characteristic of the nature of social infrastructure as living and not as a mechanical 'service delivery'