

Supplementary Planning Guidance on

Doctors' Surgeries, Health Centres and other Primary Health Care Facilities



Wandsworth Unitary Development Plan
non-statutory supplementary planning guidance

December 2003



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status of supplementary planning guidance

The guidance supplements the application of relevant policies in the adopted Wandsworth Unitary Development Plan and is a material consideration in deciding planning applications in line with Government Guidance in PPG12 (Development Plans - December 1999) paragraphs 3.15-3.17. This supplementary planning guidance was approved by the Council on 25 July 1996 following public consultation. Appendix 2 describes the result of consultation and the Council's response.

introduction

- 1 Wandsworth Council supports the provision of local facilities for primary and community health care. The Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) provides the land use planning policy framework against which planning applications for health care facilities are considered. The purpose of these guidelines is to explain the Council's planning policies and advise on steps you should take when seeking to provide new or expanded health care facilities, including temporary accommodation.
- 2 The Council acknowledges the changes taking place in local health care provision and the requirement for expansion and improvement of facilities, which must be accessible to local people and be within the doctor's existing catchment area. There has been an increasing number of planning applications for new and expanded surgeries. A major factor in this has been Government funding made available to implement the Tomlinson Report's findings, particularly the need to raise standards in Inner London GP premises. This has financed improvements to the standard and range of local health care facilities and includes a trend towards associated professionals providing Primary Health Care within surgeries or health centres. The increasing number of development companies specialising in leasing purpose-built surgery premises to GPs is also likely to result in an increase in planning applications. Problems can arise when proposals are submitted for premises which may have been in use for some time, but which are not suitable for a wider and more intensive role. This usually involves a broader range of services, with greater numbers of staff, visitors and patients and longer opening hours. Scope for expansion may be limited by the nature of the existing or potential accommodation - many surgeries are in relatively small terraced houses - and also by its location, frequently within a residential area.

advice and information

- 3 If you are looking for new premises, it is worth contacting the Planning Service to find out whether we are aware of any potentially suitable premises in your area of search. Planning officers will also be happy to discuss your proposals prior to the submission of a planning application. Various sources of information and help are listed in the Contacts section at the end of the guidelines.

the council's planning policies

4 As the local planning authority, the Council needs to take into consideration the suitability of the premises and their location, and the potential impact on neighbours, traffic conditions and the environment generally. The UDP indicates the circumstances where the provision of health care facilities would be acceptable. Advice is set out below on the following options:

- residential property
- shops
- other commercial premises
- new development and extensions
- temporary accommodation

use of residential property:

5 The use of residential accommodation for medical/health care facilities will normally be acceptable if there are no suitable alternative premises available, the proposal would not have a significant detrimental effect on neighbouring properties by way of noise and disturbance, or unacceptable effects on car parking, congestion and traffic generation; the proposal would not result in an over concentration of similar facilities in any residential area; and the nature, scale and design of the proposal is compatible with the area in which it is situated.

the council's planning policies

points to consider:

- Problems often arise in the case of small or mid-sized properties that are just not large enough to cope with new and increased demands which require use of the upper floors and/or extensions. If that is the case, then it may be a better solution to find larger premises nearby which may not require extending or where an extension would be easier to accommodate.
- Detached or end-of-terrace houses often lend themselves more readily to meeting existing needs and adaptation in the future; large extensions may be out of character with properties in the street or area; they may cause problems by taking an unacceptable amount of light from adjoining properties or adversely affecting outlook. The impact on neighbours' gardens may also be a consideration.
- Using the whole building, together with extensions, can give the property a more "institutional" feel which may be out of character with its surroundings - in these circumstances it is particularly important that the appearance of front gardens and any parking areas is not neglected.
- The comings and goings associated with a medical practice, especially with extended opening hours, may cause some disturbance in larger detached (or possibly end-of-terrace) properties, although this may be less of a problem than in smaller, mid-terrace properties.
- If an extension is unavoidable, it should impinge as little as possible on adjoining properties. It is important to pay careful attention to its design, to make sure that it is in scale with the rest of the building, that the materials used and the window and door openings are in character and appropriate to the existing building and to the character of the area. This is particularly important in conservation areas, although where a uniform design does not prevail, high quality contemporary designs may be acceptable.
- Though medical practices serve local catchment areas, they still attract a significant number of car visits, and car parking is often required for staff. Most of the Borough has very high level of on-street parking but some areas are worse than others. Ideally, some off-street parking should be provided but where the front garden of the property is small, this may not be possible without harming the character of the street. The effect on traffic congestion may also be an important factor particularly where there is a concentration of similar facilities or other traffic generating activities. Concentration of facilities can also lead to intensification of activity, noise and disturbance, adversely affecting the amenity and environment of residential areas. This will depend on the size and nature of the properties and the number of non-residential activities already present in a street.

the council's planning policies

use of shops

- 6 Shop premises may provide good opportunities for new or expanded transport, provide large and readily adaptable accommodation, and may not lead to many of the amenity problems associated with the use of residential accommodation

points to note:

- the use of shop premises is generally acceptable except for certain protected ground floor shopping frontages in Town and Local Centres. You can contact a planning officer to check which properties are involved.
- a shopfront should be retained or provided, with an entrance of sufficient width (ideally 900mm) to allow access by wheelchair or pushchair.

Further information on shop premises on the market can be obtained from local estate agents.

use of commercial premises:

- 7 The use of other commercial premises (such as buildings last used for business, industry or warehousing) may be acceptable, depending on the circumstances. Again, quite often such buildings provide flexibility of floorspace to meet needs, together with the availability of car parking, and do not raise the same level of amenity concerns as the use of residential property. Further information on available commercial property can be obtained from the South London Business property database at www.properties.southlondonbusiness.co.uk or by telephoning Becky Price on 020 8666 0288.

use of other non-residential premises

- 8 The use of buildings formerly used for health or medical purposes and buildings such as former day nurseries and schools, day centres, halls or places of worship may also be appropriate. Their use for health or medical purposes may not require planning permission as they are in the same "Use Class" (D1). However, external alterations are likely to require planning permission. It is important to check this and whether there might be any planning restrictions on the use, for example limiting occupancy to a specific organisation.

opportunities for new development

- 9 There may be occasions when a vacant site is suitable for the development of a new health care facility, or such a facility may be appropriate as part of a mixed development. For example a residential scheme, completed in Falcon Road, SW11 included a new medical centre and pharmacy on the ground floor.

the council's planning policies

- 10** The Council prepares development briefs for important sites or buildings that become available for development, redevelopment or re-use. These indicate the type of uses considered appropriate within any future development. MSW Health are consulted on these development briefs, and where appropriate, medical/health care facilities can be identified as part of the range of suitable uses for the site or building.

temporary buildings

- 11** The Council recognises that temporary accommodation may be needed while permanent buildings or extensions are being constructed, or other alterations are being carried out. Given their appearance and means of construction, temporary buildings should be retained for as short a period as practicable. A more flexible approach to considering applications may be appropriate, depending on the circumstances, such as scale, sensitivity of the proposed location and timescale of the proposal, as the impact on the surrounding area will be short-term. Relocating temporarily in nearby vacant premises may be more appropriate in some instances.

provision for disabled people

- 12** The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)1995 introduces requirements to make provision for disabled people. Further details can be obtained from the website www.disability.gov.uk
- 13** The UDP requires new medical/health care developments to be accessible for people with disabilities, including toilets and reserved parking spaces. Provision for disabled people is particularly important in the case of health facilities and should be aimed for wherever possible in the conversion of existing buildings too. Many people experience some form of disability during the course of their lives and in some cases this may be the reason for visiting the health care facility. Improvements which meet the needs of disabled people would also often benefit other users of the facility such as the elderly and parents with babies or small children. Many proposals include health care facilities on upper levels, reached only by stairs. This arrangement presents difficulties of access to the elderly and parents with children as well as disabled people. The majority of clinical accommodation such as consulting rooms ought to be provided downstairs, but where this is not possible, the situation may be helped by internal re-arrangements that practice nurse offices or record rooms etc are kept upstairs, leaving the ground floor free for reception and consulting rooms. These issues can often be overcome if they are tackled at the outset.

points to consider:

- Is level access being provided?
- Are the front door and internal circulation space wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair or double buggy?
- Are the reception counter and seating arrangements suitable to meet everyone's needs?
- Are the colour contrast, lighting and signage helpful for people with impaired vision? (The Tooting Walk-In Centre, at St George's Hospital, and the improvements to the reception area of the Brocklebank Health Centre received Mayor's Access Awards in 2001 for their high standard in this respect and are good examples to draw upon.)
- Are there patient facilities on upper floors? Do they really need to be there or are there other options that can be achieved through internal rearrangement?
- Is a toilet suitable for use by someone in a wheelchair being provided?

provision for disabled people

- Is the toilet suitable for use by parents with small children, for example are baby changing facilities included?
- Are the sanitary fittings usable by those with limited hand strength or dexterity? Are they of materials and colours readily discernible by people with impaired vision?
- Are the needs of those hard of hearing catered for - is an induction loop provided?
- Is there parking space of appropriate dimensions for people with disabilities?

14 The Council has produced Access Guidelines based on the Building Regulations. These provide detailed design advice covering most circumstances. Copies can be obtained from the Borough Planner's Service. Specific provision for parking vehicles driven by, or used by, disabled people on the public highway is made by bays regulated by Traffic Management Orders under the Road Traffic Act 1984. These are denoted by white markings on the carriageway as well as signs. An advisory alternative, which cannot be enforced, is denoted by white markings but no sign. On-street disabled persons' parking spaces can be provided in appropriate situations. For further information contact the Borough Engineer's Service. The Wandsworth Access Association, a voluntary group concerned about furthering and providing improvements for disabled people in the Borough, can give practical advice and assistance through the perspective of different disabilities (see contacts below).

do I need planning permission?

- 15** The erection of buildings for use as doctors' surgeries, health centres, etc. (including temporary accommodation and extensions) requires planning permission. Alterations to the structure or appearance of a building may also need planning permission. Change of use of existing buildings almost always requires planning permission, but there may be instances where it does not. Use of a building for the provision of medical or health services, except where attached to the residence of the practitioner, falls within Class D1 of the Town and Country Planning Use Classes Order 1987. This means that a change of use from any other use falling within the same Use Class (for example another health facility or a nursery school, school, day centre, public hall or church) does not normally need planning permission. Alterations to the building may, however, require planning permission, and there may also be restrictions limiting use to a particular activity or person.
- 16** **It is important to check first with a planning officer whether planning permission is required and whether what is being proposed is likely to get planning permission.** Even if you do not require planning permission, you may well need Building Regulation approval (for example covering structural work or means of escape). The Council carries out public consultation on all planning applications. It may therefore be helpful if you inform immediate neighbours of your proposal before submitting the planning application, especially in cases where extensions are proposed which might affect neighbours' daylight or outlook.

signs

- 17** Some advertisements or notices can be displayed without the need for consent. For example, these include one name-plate outside a surgery, or a notice or a sign relating to any medical premises provided that it does not exceed 1.2 sqm in area and that it is no higher than 4.6m above the ground. The advertisement may be illuminated provided that the illumination is intended to indicate that medical or similar facilities or supplies are available at the premises, but no letters, figures or symbols etc. can exceed 0.75 in height. The regulations applying to advertisements can be complex to interpret and are subject to change. It is best to see advice from the Borough Planner's Service as to whether consent is required and, if so, whether it is likely to be granted.

who to contact

Planning Advice and Information

If you wish to discuss your proposals before submitting a planning application, or for advice on whether planning permission is required and whether your proposals are in line with the UDP policies, contact:

Putney area – 020 8871 6632 or 8411

Battersea area – 020 8871 6639 or 8412

Balham & Tooting area – 020 8871 8413 or 8416

Information on current planning applications and on the planning history of premises is available on the planning pages of the Council's website –

www.wandsworth.gov.uk

Copies of planning application forms can be downloaded, and the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) which contains the relevant policies, can also be viewed and downloaded.

Planning application forms can also be obtained from the Planning Service Reception on the 5th Floor of the Town Hall - opening hours are between 9.00 and 17.00 Mondays to Fridays, and between 9.30 and 12.30 on Saturdays - or by ringing 020 8871 8600/6637.

For a copy of the Council's Access Guidelines or Guidelines for Advertisement Control, contact the Borough Planner's Service at the Town Hall or ring 020 8871 6650.

Building Regulations

For advice and information on building regulation matters, contact Building Control on 020 8871 7620.

Commercial Premises

For information on shops and other commercial premises on the market, contact the Wandsworth Business Advice Service on 020 8871 5247-9

Highways

For information on traffic and highways issues, telephone Engineering Services (Development team) on 020 8871 6611

who to contact

Parking for Disabled People

For information about existing on-street disabled parking spaces, phone 020 8871 8051.
To apply for a doctor's bay, phone 020 8871 8420.

Wandsworth Access Association

The Wandsworth Access Association can be contacted through
Betty Lewis, 4 Lavenham Road SW18 5HA, phone 020 8870 0723.

If you have any queries or require further assistance about the Council's planning policies,
phone 020 8871 6649 or write to:

Borough Planner's Service

Technical Services Department

Town Hall

Wandsworth High Street

London SW18 2PU.

e-mail: boroughplanner@wandsworth.gov.uk

appendix 1: relevant UDP policies

Depending on the circumstances of the planning application, different policies of the UDP will apply. The following is a list of the main policies likely to be applicable.

UDP Chapter		Policies
Community Services	Health Care Facilities. Use of Residential Accommodation for Medical/ Health Care Facilities	CS7
Housing	Alterations and Extensions to Residential Property	Para 153 H4
Townscape and the Built Environment	Design and External Appearance Conservation Areas Advertisements – see also Guidelines for Advertisement Control	TBE5 TBE10-11 TBE9
Business and Industry	Appropriate Uses on Land Buildings Currently/Last Used for Business or Industrial Uses	BIN2, BIN5
Town Centres and Shopping	Uses Allowed in Different Shopping Frontages Design of Shopfronts and Signs List of Addresses and locations of Town Centres, Local Centres and Important Local Parades	TCS4-6 and Table 1, TCS8 TCS10 Proposals 71-132 UDP Proposals Map
The River Thames and the Riverside	Appropriate Uses in the Wandsworth Thames Policy Area	R1
Regeneration and Development Principles	Creating Accessible Environments	RDP6

appendix 2: Planning Committee, 25 July 1996

Report of the Borough Planner on Guidelines for Doctors' Surgeries, Health Centres and other Primary Care Facilities.

summary

This report describes the results of consultation on the draft guidelines and recommends their approval as supplementary planning guidance, along with some minor amendments.

- 1 **Introduction.** On 22nd April this year, the Committee approved guidelines for the location and expansion of doctor's surgeries, health centres and other primary care facilities, subject to consultations (Paper No. 96/308).
- 2 **Consultations.** Copies of the proposed guidelines and Committee report were sent to Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth Health Authority (MSW Health); Richmond, Twickenham and Roehampton NHS Trust; twenty-one local GPs and dentists, and six architects/planning consultants who had recently submitted a planning application. In addition, the Balham, Putney and Wandsworth Societies and the Wandsworth Access Association for People with Disabilities were all consulted. A total of fourteen replies were received (42% of those architects/consultants, and from the Balham and Wandsworth Societies and the Wandsworth Access Association. The guidelines were reported to the Health Sub-Committee in June where they were welcomed and commended, and to the Health JCC for Wandsworth in July 1996.
- 3 **Response to consultations.** All responses complimented the contents and the purpose of the guidelines.
- 4 **MSW Health:** Broadly support the approach in the document and welcome the helpful liaison which has been set up with the Council on planning/premises issues. The guidelines will complement MSW Health's broader guidance for GPs. Welcome the opportunity to comment on planning briefs and hope that this will result in firm proposals on a number of key sites; traffic implications should not be overstated – a recent survey undertaken by a GP indicated only a very small minority of patients coming by car; introduction of appointment systems allows a more even spread of comings and goings base on experience most surgeries avoid an "institutional" appearance externally; welcome recognition of the occasional need for temporary premises while alterations to permanent premises are being carried out; the section on the needs of disabled people is welcomed.

appendix 2

- 5** **Doctors/Practitioners:** Various favourable supporting comments were received from doctors and from one dentist who generally considered the guidelines helpful and encouraging. Specific comments include: it is difficult to find suitable space to relocate – practical help would be welcomed. Parking needs to be considered flexibly as it is impossible to provide adequate parking in established residential areas. Concern over possible over-restrictive approach to temporary accommodation. Concern was also expressed about the impact of health centres on individual practices and pharmacies. Liaison with the Health Authority is to be welcomed.
- 6** **Architects/Planning Consultants:** Attention was drawn to two additional factors giving rise to an increasing number of planning applications: the funding made available by the Government to implement the Tomlinson Report's proposals, and the growth of other associated professionals delivering Primary Care. A rise in applications for medium to large size practices is also forecast. These would be funded by the Private Finance Initiative which allow and encourages private developers to be involved in premises development in partnership with GPs.
- 7** Advice on parking should be more specific, with indicative standard included, for example spaces for 50% of staff, some for disabled patients. Guidance is also needed on external signs. The section on access issues needs to be expanded to include mothers and babies who are an important group of users and who would also require level access, along with baby changing facilities and buggy storage. The wording should be strengthened so that all clinical accommodation should be on the ground floor unless there are special circumstances. This should be brought forward in the other section of the guidelines. The guidelines should also indicate whether planners are prepared to discuss proposals prior to the submission of a planning application.
- 8** Location of surgeries in commercial premises would be a better solution rather than in houses, and the perception of doctors in this respect needs to be changed.
- 9** Most house-based surgeries are no longer suitable to provide the facilities required by the changes in the delivery of primary care. Doctors should be encouraged to relocate to more appropriate premises. Health authorities should take a more active role to this end, as the extent to which planning can be used as a tool is questionable. The guidelines are however a step forward.
- 10** **Balham Society:** Welcomes the guidelines but is concerned about the concentration of institutional uses in residential areas, especially within conservation areas.

appendix 2

- 11 Wandsworth Society:** Clear and helpful means of setting out the Council's policies; applicants should be referred to the relevant sections of the UDP; advice on the design of extensions to buildings only refers to matching existing features – contemporary design should be promoted as well; advice on making provision for disabled people could be considered unnecessary as the guidelines are intended for doctors and architects and these matters are covered in detail by the Building Regulations.
- 12 Wandsworth Access Association:** Agree with and support the guidelines.
- 13 Comment:** The positive response to the guidelines is welcomed. The liaison which has been built up with MSW Health is clearly regarded as important, particularly in identifying suitable premises. Consultation on development briefs is one effective way of assisting this process.
- 14** A number of UDP policies are likely to be relevant depending on the circumstances of a particular planning application. The guidelines refer to the UDP and already cover the policy for the change of use of residential property in detail. Numerous references to other specific policies would make the guidelines over-complicated and would not necessarily cover every relevant consideration. However, an appendix can be added listing the principal relevant UDP policies.
- 15** Car parking and traffic generation issues often arise in planning applications for new or expanded facilities especially in residential areas. However, the impact of this can be affected by a variety of factors, such as the nature of the location, size of catchment area, extent of parking congestion, controlled parking, car ownership levels, frailty etc of patients and, as referred to in the consultation response, the patient appointment system. As there are so many varied situations, limited benefit would be achieved by having specific standards which in their own right might rule out otherwise acceptable proposals, and for this reason the UDP does not include car parking standards for such uses.
- 16** It is reasonable that a less stringent approach should be taken towards temporary accommodation than for permanent development. However, this needs to take into account the length of period involved and the sensitivity of the circumstances. The guidelines can be amended to reflect this.
- 17** The possible impact of large health centres on nearby individual practices, in terms of service provision rather than effects on the physical environment, is not a matter that can be addressed through the land use planning system.

appendix 2

- 18** Greater prominence can be given in the guidelines to encouraging clinical accommodation to be located on the ground floor. This can only be promoted as good practice rather than imposed as a requirement. The access needs of others in addition to those of disabled people can also be highlighted.
- 19** The guidelines can also make clear that proposals can be considered prior to the submission of planning applications and that pre-application discussions with officers are encouraged.
- 20** The background/introduction to the guidelines indicating changes and reasons for expansion in primary health care is not intended to be exhaustive. However, the points made about the inclusion of other associated medical disciplines and a brief reference to the funding background would be appropriate.
- 21** Reference to signs and advertising regulations is a gap in the guidelines. An outline of the current regulations can be added, explaining the types of notices/advertisements which can be displayed without requiring consent.
- 22** Experience of applications and the majority of responses indicate that detailed advice on provision for disabled people is supported and necessary.
- 23** The guidelines recognise the importance of locating doctors' surgeries in or close to residential areas. The need to avoid an institutional feel to the exterior of residential properties is well founded in experience, and supported by the public consultation response.
- 24** The UDP states that in conservation areas where a uniform design does not prevail, contemporary designs of a high quality may be acceptable and the guidelines can be amended to reflect this point.
- 25** **Recommendation.** The Committee are recommended to approve the guidelines for publication subject to the alterations indicated in paragraphs 14, 16, 18-21 & 24.

English

If you have problems understanding this in English please contact

Wandsworth Interpreting Service
Bedford House
215 Balham High street
SW17 7BQ
Tel: (020) 8672 1043/3649

Bengali

এই লিফলেটটি বুঝতে অসুবিধা হলে দয়া করে যোগাযোগ করুন:

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Hindi

यदि आपको इसे अंग्रेज़ी में समझने में कठिनाई होती है, तो कृपया सम्पर्क करें:

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Punjabi

ਜੇਕਰ ਇਸ ਨੂੰ ਅੰਗਰੇਜ਼ੀ ਵਿਚ ਸਮਝਣਾ ਤੁਹਾਡੇ ਲਈ ਮੁਸ਼ਕਿਲ ਹੈ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ:

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Gujarati

જો આને અંગ્રેજીમાં સમજવી તમારા માટે મુશ્કેલ છે, તો મહેરબાની કરી સંપર્ક સાધો:

વોન્ડઝવર્થ ઇન્ટરપ્રિટિંગ સર્વિસ
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ટેલિફોન: (020) 8672 1043/3649

Urdu

اگر اسے انگریزی میں سمجھنے میں آپ کو کوئی مشکلات ہیں تو برائے مہربانی رابطہ قائم کریں:

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Technical Services Department**

