

The Local Plan's approach to allocating primary and secondary school sites

The emerging Local Plan for Tower Hamlets allocates nine sites for primary schools and five sites for secondary schools. The plan allocates more school sites than required to meet the projected need for the following reasons:

- a) School sites are generally located on land in private ownership, and are part of a larger scheme which also includes housing, commercial and open space. The delivery and timing of the school is linked to the delivery and timing of the overall scheme, and therefore not within the control of the Local Authority (LA).
- b) New primary school sites are intended to deliver a 2 form of entry (FE) school and new secondary school sites are intended to deliver a 6FE school. However, site constraints may mean that only a smaller school can be delivered. While smaller schools may not financially be the best model to operate, these may be considered if additional school places are required. There would also be an option to deliver expanded school provision where a site is adjacent or in close proximity to an existing school.
- c) There may not be sufficient demand in the area to support the development of a new school when a site comes forward. For example, if there was a need for one additional school in an area and two sites came forward at the same time, the LA may only take forward one of these sites.
- d) Other issues, particularly air quality, may make an allocated site unsuitable for a school when it comes forward for delivery. There are several site allocations with known air quality issues, however it is possible that these can be addressed through design and the school's location within the site allocation.
- e) Pupil projections are a useful tool in planning for future needs, but they can be volatile, particularly in the medium to long term (e.g. after 5 years). Projections rely heavily on information about historical trends (e.g. births, migration), which makes them less reliable in times of significant demographic change. Brexit will undoubtedly impact the economy and migration patterns, making this a particularly uncertain time for population projections in Tower Hamlets, and indeed the rest of London and the UK.
- f) Tower Hamlets is relatively small in terms of land area. The borough will continue to experience fast paced changes in terms of its built development, with the highest housing target in the adopted London Plan and the second highest in the emerging London Plan. At the same time, the borough has a number of areas with limited development potential due to design and heritage factors. It is unlikely that sites large enough to accommodate schools, particularly secondary schools, can be identified in future Local Plans.

This approach ensures that the LA is able to effectively plan for school places and meet its statutory duty. The alternative approach would be to allocate the exact number of sites to meet the projected need at that point in time, but this would put the LA at serious risk of not meeting its legal duty to provide sufficient schools if, for example, sites were not delivered or the projected need increased during the plan period.