



KDBH Neighbourhood Forum

PLANNING APPLICATION FOR A MOTORWAY SERVICE STATION at J4 of M42

RESPONSE OF KDBH NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM TO CONSULTATION

Process

The KDBH Neighbourhood Forum held an open Forum meeting on Wed 16th November. Mr Des Stafford, Head of Developments of Applegreen was invited and presented details of the proposals by Applegreen to build a Motorway Service Area (MSA) on the NE corner of Junction 4 of the M42.

Members of the Forum have previously been directed to the details of the proposals located on the SMBC website.

The presentation was followed by a question and answer session. In addition, attendees were invited to provide written feedback as were those members who were unable to attend on that date.

This feedback and the meeting minutes have been collated and the notes below represent the considered view of the Neighbourhood Forum members.

The Need for an MSA

Members do not believe that the need for an MSA along this stretch of the M42 has been established or validated.

There are 3 other motorway service areas within close proximity – Tamworth and Hopwood (8.5 miles away) on the M42 and Warwick (23.5 miles away) on the M40

The argument for development is often cited as safety; the issue of fatigue. Road travel has changed much in just a few years and if a driver feels fatigued or short of fuel along this stretch of the motorway, their Satnav will readily direct them to fuel facilities. In fact fuel facilities are available within three minutes in either direction of junction 4. Rest areas are also to hand at Tesco and Notcutts just seconds from J4 and the Tesco site is even open 24/7, akin to an MSA. These could be signposted from the motorway.

The recommended maximum distance between stops may be applicable to rural motorways but this stretch is well supported by existing amenities close to every junction from 7 to 3a.

Given that the above arguments may be dismissed, the impact needs to be considered.

Urbanisation

An earlier application for an MSA at this site was regarded as an inappropriate development in the green belt and there is no new very special circumstance that could justify a different assessment.

An MSA development at Junction 4 would have an impact on the narrow and vulnerable green belt gap that exists between Solihull and Knowle / Dorridge.

There is a fear that such encroachment would not end with the MSA but would be seen as the thin end of the wedge and further applications for development would follow creating a creeping urbanisation and industrialisation of the area.

The M42 is seen as a natural boundary and if an MSA is to be developed at J4 it would be more appropriate for it to be on the other side where there is already development.

The development might be smaller than that proposed for Catherine de Barnes but the effect would be no less.



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Environmental impact

Whilst accepting that the environmental impact is mitigated by the innovative design including greening and screening, it is clear that large tracts will be covered in tarmac for car parks for over 700 cars plus coaches and considerable numbers of HGVs.

This is an 'off-line' development and is not entirely Motorway related. The proposed exit via Gate lane has a further urbanisation effect.

In addition, light pollution is light pollution whether you install smart dimming technologies or not. The visual impact is lessened at the margins only.

Finally, the impact of pushing development into the green-belt has not been assessed in terms of the environmental impact on adjoining woodland and agricultural land, the new green-belt frontline.

Traffic and congestion

Residents expressed many concerns about the impact of increased traffic volumes at J4 and the impact on local traffic. The planning assessment seems only to have considered motorway users.

It was noted that J4 is already very busy at peak hours and this was accepted by the Applegreen representative since they have access to the statistics that support that assertion.

J4 will become a very complicated configuration and Gate lane is extremely compromised with an arrangement that seems to circulate around the existing property on the site with a roundabout and / or traffic lights.

The exit onto Gate Lane does not seem viable. The plan estimates approximately 300 vehicle exits per hour in peak time. It is inevitable that such volumes will simply back up to the service station. In fact this is anticipated hence the long roads within the site. Thus local traffic on Gate Lane will be heavily disadvantaged when competing with such numbers. Any 'smart' traffic signals will have to be very smart.

The increased volumes will make the entire junction more susceptible to complete grid lock in the event of the smallest incident, that now, the junction might be able to absorb.

There is also concern that drivers who regularly use the junction will find alternative routes. This will increase traffic volumes through the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath area as drivers look for local shortcuts.

The A34 is solid already at peak times so any more traffic attempting to use the junction will cause issues on that side of the junction.

There are further plans for development at Blythe Valley and whatever form they take it is inevitable that they will result in increased traffic volume at the junction and A3400.

So we have a junction that is already busy and where local developments are likely to increase the traffic volumes.

It does not seem sensible to compound these issues with an MSA which can only exacerbate the congestion levels and create a much bigger problem for future generations.



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Community benefits

The benefits in terms of new jobs are not disputed. However, the 300 roles are, by the Developers' own admission, predominantly entry level jobs, across a 24/7 operation.

In an environment where there is lower than average unemployment in the area the benefits to Solihull and Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath would be marginal.

Local sourcing seems a bit unlikely and most local residents would have little need to use these facilities given the ready access to services across the borough.

Alternatives

Although this response to the consultation primarily addresses the plans for J4, it cannot be compiled without reference to the other MSA application at Catherine De Barnes.

Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath residents are no more in favour of the Catherine De Barnes proposal than they are in favour of the J4 proposal. The fact that the Catherine De Barnes proposal takes up even more Green Belt means that the arguments above regarding green-belt equally apply.

A contra argument that was voiced is that since the Catherine De Barnes option has its own dedicated motorway exits the congestion issues would not materialise and thus if the Secretary of State demands that an MSA is built, an on-line proposal would seem to be the 'proper' way to proceed and would appear to be more future proof.

Conclusions

There is little or no benefit to the residents of the area.

The Neighbourhood Forum does not accept there is a need for an MSA in this vicinity. There is an unacceptable and needless loss of Green belt.

The impact on traffic congestion at Junction 4 and Gate lane will be substantial and eventually will be unsustainable without serious investment such as new or widened bridges.

There will be increased traffic volumes within Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath from drivers deliberately avoiding the junction at peak times.

In terms of impacts, there is really no change in circumstances that warrants this application being passed now and it should be rejected just like its forebear some years ago.