

### 1.0 Document Purpose

This document sets out the responsibilities and expectations of all those involved in carrying out work on behalf of the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH) Neighbourhood Forum (NF).

### 2.0 Who We Are

The NF is registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) operating as the 'Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum CIO' (the CIO). The CIO holds all of the Forum's assets. Decisions affecting the CIO and use of its assets are made by the Trustees. The CIO objectives are underpinned by the KDBH Neighbourhood Plan 2018-2033 (the Plan), which was created by the NF and formally adopted in 2019. The vision set out in the Plan, and its policies, are central to the CIO objectives in helping to achieve sustainable development in the KDBH Neighbourhood Area.

### 3.0 The Forum Team

For the purposes of this document, those involved in running the activities of the organisation are called the 'Forum Team'. The Forum Team comprises the Trustees and supporting Steering Committee members. This Code of Practice provides Forum Team members with an understanding of what is required of their role; and a framework for working that promotes transparency, openness and accountability in what they do and good practice in how they do it. In summary, it sets out each person's individual commitment to work at all times in the best interests of the NF and, as a team, to work together in ways that enable efficient and effective operation both internally and externally, as set out below.

Each member of the Forum Team is expected to sign up to this Code of Practice, honouring both its content and spirit.

### 4.0 Our Motivation

Each member of the Forum Team believes in, and is committed to, ensuring the continuity of an effective KDBH NF and its central role in influencing new development to protect and enhance the character of our villages for the benefit of the whole community.

### 5.0 Our Ethos

We are a team of volunteers with a shared commitment to act on the basis of:

- a. transparency and openness
- b. professionalism and discipline
- c. consistency and fairness
- d. an outward focus, through active communications and encouraging community engagement and participation in various forms
- e. being independent and evidence driven, a trusted intermediary between different stakeholder groups (eg. residents, Solihull Council, developers)

- f. seeking out and representing (all sides of) community views
- g. putting any new or revised Neighbourhood Plan (NP) policy decisions before the wider Forum membership (as happened for NP development)
- h. building relationships for effective cross community networking and partnership
- i. being flexible in responding to the needs of our community.

### **6.0 What We Do: Overview of Main Activities**

The KDBH NF was originally established in October 2015 to develop a Neighbourhood Plan (NP). This was successfully achieved when the KDBH NP was formally 'made' by Solihull Council in April 2019.

In August 2019, the Forum Team undertook a review of the NF's post-adoption role given its reduced available resources. This resulted in agreement on an on-going need to undertake both NP and community-related activities that broadly fall into four main categories, summarised below, all of which are pursuant to the objectives of the CIO. (The NF Standing Orders provide more details).

- **Neighbourhood Plan (NP) Monitoring and Review**

This is a statutory requirement and a responsibility the NF shares with Solihull Council. The primary purposes in monitoring are set out in Section 1.5 of the NP.

- **Respond to Planning Applications**

NF responses to new planning applications will be objectively based on the content of the adopted KDBH NP, approved at Referendum by 96% of KDBH community voters, and associated planning legislation.

- **Engage in Solihull Council's Local Plan Review (LPR)**

The Forum Team's role is to inform, seek feedback from, and fairly represent the views of the KDBH community. Our goal is to help reduce any potential adverse impacts from the scale of development proposed, while also promoting delivery of community benefit from potential opportunities that development may bring.

- **NCIL, Community Actions and Wider Community involvement**

As part of its role in helping to realise a shared vision for future development in KDBH, the Forum Team is keen to lend support to wider (ie. not just NP related) community matters affecting the KDBH Neighbourhood Area. Our CIO objectives include promotion of the protection, preservation, improvement and revitalisation of our natural and built environment, and the sustainable development of the Area. To achieve this, we will continue to build links across the KDBH community that enable us to disseminate information, seek views and feedback, and gain early insight into emerging local issues.

An important focus of activity relates to the Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL). Solihull Council applies this levy to some new developments. In the KDBH Area, 25% of the funds raised are made available for community projects. The NF will actively promote and encourage community wide awareness and engagement in NCIL relating to these funds, and support those wishing to put forward a suitable project. Projects could include some of those listed as Community Actions in Appendix 4 of the KDBH Neighbourhood Plan.

### **7.0 How We Go About Doing Things: Our Code of Practice**

#### **Integrity**

- 7.1** Forum Team members will act at all times in the best interests of the NF and its beneficiaries and avoid bringing the NF into disrepute. Any public comments made by a Forum Team member about the NF or its members will be duly considered and in line with organisational policy.
- 7.2** No Forum Team member will put themselves in a position where their personal interest conflicts with their duty to act in the interests of the NF. Where a Team member does have a conflict of interest, they will proactively and openly declare and register the conflict, and absent themselves from any involvement in related matters. Failure to declare a conflict of interest may be considered a breach of this Code.
- 7.3** A member of the Forum Team must not place themselves under any financial or other obligation to individuals or organisations that might influence them in the performance of their official duties. No Forum Team member will gain materially or financially from involvement in the Forum unless specifically authorised to do so.
- 7.4** The Forum Team respects organisational, Team and individual confidentiality. It is not, however, acceptable to use confidentiality as a reason for failing to disclose matters that should be transparent and open. Confidential information or material provided to, or discussed at, a meeting must remain confidential, within the confines of the meeting and be managed according to relevant legislation.

#### **Decision Making**

- 7.5** We will be as open as possible about the decisions we take, giving reasons where appropriate and restricting information only when wider interests require it.
- 7.6** Members of the Forum Team respect each other's views. By preference, we will seek to work on a consensual basis, accepting that at times we may not all agree on everything. If necessary, we will make decisions by majority vote so as to avoid undue delay in progressing or resolving matters. Once a decision is made by the Forum Team, we will all abide by it and only seek to re-open the matter if something material changes that may affect the decision.
- 7.7** Leaders of nominated sub-committees must take all reasonable steps to ensure that other Forum Team members are kept fully up-to-date with information upon which decisions may be taken. Wherever possible and appropriate, Forum Team members should have an opportunity to input their views in advance of key events or stakeholder meetings.

- 7.8** Forum Team members take collective responsibility for decisions made. In all interactions with members of the public, their statements will reflect the Forum Team position. This does not preclude Forum Team members from responding on their own behalf to on-line or written consultations undertaken by a public body (ie. where individual responses are not made public), on the proviso that, should there be any conflict with the NF position, they must make clear in their response that this is their own personal view and does not in any way reflect the views of the NF.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

- 7.9** Each Trustee, or workstream lead, will have a clearly defined area of leadership responsibility. No-one will work alone on an activity; there must always be at least one other team member in support who is able to pick up an activity should the need arise. We will create and maintain a chart showing roles and responsibilities.
- 7.10** We will trust those with delegated responsibility to get on with the job, providing support and encouragement as and when necessary. Workstream leads will ensure that the Forum Team is kept informed of progress, and in particular of any issues arising, in a timely way.
- 7.11** If a member of the Forum Team wishes to step down at any time, they will inform the Chair in advance in writing, stating their reasons for leaving.

### **Communications**

- 7.12** We will be robust in managing, recording and keeping Forum Team members apprised of communications with all key stakeholders, notably Solihull Council, developers and community organisations. At least two Forum Team members will attend key stakeholder meetings. Any material written communication to a key stakeholder(s), must be signed out by the Chair, or her/his nominee (usually the Deputy Chair).
- 7.13** A Trustee will be nominated as the lead contact point for all meetings and communications with Solihull Council, supported by a planning advisor. Forum Team members will keep this person apprised of all written or verbal communications they may have with the Council so as to enable her/him to make links between related activities/people/issues.
- 7.14** Any NF communication to the public, and especially Forum meetings, must have been reviewed by an appropriate Forum Team member prior to use. This applies to electronic, paper-based or other forms of communication, including presentations. A copy of all NF public communications will be included in the NF's archives and made available on the NF website.
- 7.15** The Forum Team's preferred way of operating is to develop trusted relationships and mutual understanding through a network of personal contacts across the KDBH community (ie. rather than by formal processes and procedures). This does not, however, exclude formal processes where appropriate and necessary.

- 7.16** To help speed and clarity of electronic communications, we will aim to minimise the number of emails and avoid using 'reply to all' unless really necessary. To help recipients quickly distinguish the level of priority / urgency, we will include a tag in the email subject line, eg: FOR INFO, ACTION; URGENT. Where appropriate, we will by preference use phone or face to face contact.

### **Process and Procedures**

- 7.17** Operationally, we will keep things as simple as possible. We will avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, using existing or good practice processes wherever possible. We will review this code of practice at least annually to ensure that it remains 'fit for purpose'.
- 7.18** Key outcomes and actions from all Forum, Forum Team and key stakeholder meetings will be documented through minutes or meeting notes. These will be circulated to all Forum Team members, with a copy included in the NF archives.
- 7.19** To expedite Forum Team meetings and free up time for community matters, where possible we will progress internal operational matters separately through individual or small group meetings. In the spirit of openness, however, Forum Team members must be aware of such discussions, with any material outcomes brought back to the Forum Team for review and/or decisions.
- 7.20** We will be disciplined in our meeting etiquette. If we are unable to attend, we will send apologies and try to find another Forum Team member to fulfil any meeting responsibilities or to act as proxy for input to discussions or voting. To respect Forum Team members' time, meeting papers will be issued to attendees at least 48 hours in advance so as to facilitate effective meeting time management and decision making.
- 7.21** Forum Team members must attend meetings regularly. If attendance is proving problematic, a team member can request a leave of absence or sabbatical.

### **Breach of Code**

- 7.22** Material breach of any part of this Code may result in procedures being put in motion that could lead to a Team member who is in breach being asked to resign. Before this happens, any issue(s) will be explicitly highlighted and discussed openly and fairly with the Team member with a view to understanding the cause and to agreeing an appropriate resolution. A decision to ask a Team member to resign requires a majority of the Forum Team, with the Chair having the casting vote, where required. The Team member must accept the decision of the Forum Team and, where required, resign at the earliest opportunity.
- 7.23** In any event, a Team Member will be required to stand down where their involvement brings the NF into disrepute or where they persistently fail to rectify issues of compliance with this Code of Practice.