



Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH) Neighbourhood Forum

Response to Planning Application PL/2020/00411/PPFL

25 Station Road Knowle Solihull B93 0HL

Demolition of the existing car sales showroom and associated buildings and the erection of nine terraced residential dwellings with associated parking and landscaping.

The KDBH Neighbourhood Forum (NF) wishes to make the following additional comments in respect of the above application. These are made further to the submission of a viability report and the Planning Policy Officer's statement that a residential use is not a matter of principle in this case. We understand that today, 28th May, is the deadline for comments.

The viability report does not test a commercial option, but indicates that the site lends itself to a commercial use. The NF accepts that commercial life may be changing post coronavirus. However, once the current employment use is lost, it is gone for good. This highlights the importance of fully testing and understanding what the state of the local commercial market is before reaching a decision.

Our response is set in the context that:

- I. this is undoubtedly one of the largest employment sites to become available in the village centre;
- II. the outcome of the Residents' and Business Survey showed support for retaining employment opportunities and mixed commercial uses, now duly reflected in Neighbourhood Plan (NP) policy; and
- III. this is an important early test of the NP regarding employment and frontage policy.

As such, it is particularly important that the Council, and the Neighbourhood Forum, is seen to uphold the principles of Policy E1. While we recognise that this has been done in part with the request for a viability assessment, we request that in this case the Policy, and its supporting text, be fully applied and tested. This would necessitate marketing evidence also being provided. As the lease has not yet expired, there is time for this to be done without having a vacant site left in the village.

We have previously acknowledged that the residential scheme is in itself well designed. However, we cannot agree with the Council's view that residential use in this location is, in principle, acceptable at ground floor level without having first fully tested the loss of commercial use against the relevant NP 'E' policies.

If no commercial interest in this site, and no alternative viable option, can be clearly demonstrated and evidenced, then the NF would accept that residential use of the whole site is appropriate, ie. the terms of Policy E1 and its supporting text would have been fully addressed.



Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH) Neighbourhood Forum

We would be grateful if you would take these comments into account in determining this application.

Yours sincerely

Jane Aykroyd
Chair
Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum