



Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH) Neighbourhood Forum

Planning Application: Ref. No: PL/2021/01477/PPFL

Widney Evangelical Free Church, Widney Road, Bentley Heath, Solihull

Demolition of vacant church hall and development of 4 town houses.

FAO: Benn Watkinson, Case Officer

The Forums Position

- The Forum initially raised a letter of no objection to the proposal, although we also stated our support was:
 - ◆ *'subject to the Council being satisfied that the layout and design meets the Council's criteria set out in its Residential Backland Development Supplementary Planning document (RBDSPD) particularly in respect of backland development being subservient to frontage development and achieving satisfactory access arrangements'*.
- The above section was not included in the Planning Committee Reporting Pack and therefore misrepresents the Forum's position.
- Following discussions with local residents and retailers and further consideration, including on site visits, the Forums position was subsequently updated to an objection on the basis that the development does not comply with RBDSPD guidelines or achieve satisfactory access arrangements.
- As a result of reviewing the Planning Committee Report and documentation further matters of concern have come to light which are detailed below.

Key issues

Residential Backland Development SPD

- Subservience to the frontage development - 0.40m is not considered subservient. If approved it will set an unwelcome precedent that height, just a few centimetres below the frontage development is the sole determinant of subservience and fails to take account of design and scale.
- The 3 storey development is out of character and its scale and massing would 'read' as more dominant than the 2 storey front parade.
- Over-development - the proposed site is over-developed given the tightness of the space available. The rear gardens are mostly under the canopies of existing trees causing overshadowing and inadequate amenity to an unacceptable extent.
- The car parking provision is lacking and with only one space allocated per dwelling will result in additional resident and visitors vehicles using the service yard for parking causing congestion and unacceptable noise, disturbance and exhaust fumes throughout the day and night. This will be in addition to existing shop staff and customers using the car park.
- No mention or consideration has been made of the 3 bed flat/maisonette (106a) above the Dark Horse cafe which will be overlooked by the proposed development.
- The proposed development of the former Widney Evangelical Free Church site is residential and permanent rather than non-residential and transient in its former existence.
- This is an early and important test of the RBDSPD for the Council and we disagree with the officers conclusion.



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KDBH Neighbourhood Plan (KDBHNP) - Policy D1

- Does not comply with the Neighbourhood Plan, particularly Policy D1. It is not a particularly innovative design and is in a location where design should be sympathetic to the surroundings, traditional in style and materials and preserves or enhances the appearance of the area. The proposed development does not deliver on the criteria used to assess the acceptability of the design of the development.
- Substantial weight should not be attributed with regards to the comments of the Planning Officer in respect of the KDBH Neighbourhood Plan. The Neighbourhood Plan is supposed to give more power to local people to shape local development and should not be used to justify planning applications that are not in the local interest.

Access to and from the proposed development

- The entrance to the access road leading to the proposed development is only 2.85m wide. Co-op delivery vehicles (typically 2.60m wide excluding side mirrors) have considerable difficulty in reversing into the access way and service yard.
- The Highways Officer report states that at a point along the access road the width at 4.8m is sufficient to accommodate a car to pass by a delivery vehicle if it were parked directly alongside the close-board fencing adjacent to 106 Widney Road. Delivery vehicles are normally 2.60m wide (exc. side mirrors) and cars typically 1.85m (again exc. side mirrors) - leaving a maximum gap of 0.35m if no allowance is made for side mirrors. This assumes that the delivery vehicle can actually park very close to the fence and that only cars and not other types of vehicles (e.g. Amazon delivery vehicles) are not attempting to get into or out of the service yard. For all practical purposes it is not possible for the delivery vehicles and cars to pass one another safely along the access road. Also, from site observations delivery drivers normally park in the middle of the access way.
- In the Planning Committee Reports Pack it is stated that delivery vehicles are parked for between 30 and 60 minutes and that between 6 and 8 deliveries take place per day. This will cause considerable inconvenience to all users of the access way over an extended period every day.
- There are 3 emergency/fire exits from the Dark Horse and Co-op directly onto the access road and car-park/service yard. The fire exit from the kitchen of the Dark Horse leads to a gate in the close-board fencing (directly where the Highways Officer indicates delivery vehicles should park). This gate also serves as the only entrance and exit point to the flat/maisonette at 106a Widney Road referred to above. In an emergency the exit could be blocked. There is no Fire Officer report provided in the Planning Committee Reports Pack and it is strongly recommended that a report is provided given the delivery vehicle parking proposal by the Highways Officer.
- Given the very narrow access road width there is either no or no adequate explanation stated how emergency services and refuse vehicles will access the proposed town houses

Conclusion

The Forum requests that the planning application is refused or the determination of the planning application is deferred to enable a site visit by the Planning Committee to be conducted and all outstanding concerns raised properly considered and resolved prior to any decision being made.

Roger Cook
Chair
Knowle Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum



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Photographs - Widney Evangelical Free Church, Widney Road, Bentley Heath

