



PL/2022/02413/PPFL Erection of 20 dwellings with vehicular access off Langfield Road including associated public open space and works

Comments of the Knowle Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH) Neighbourhood Forum (NF)

Introductory remarks

This is a major application accompanied by 59 documents. The Forum team has reviewed many of the documents and, in view of the extent of documentation, a meeting was held with the applicants, Hayfield Homes, on 14th December 2022. The meeting was helpful and constructive; consequently, the applicants are aware of the issues raised in this response and we understand that further consideration is being given to various matters as set out below.

The Forum is aware that the applicants have undertaken consultation with local residents and various interested bodies, including the Knowle Society, and that this has already led to a number of minor changes being made to the scheme.

Neighbourhood Plan context

This application is the largest housing proposal in the KDBH area since adoption of the Neighbourhood Plan (NP). It is important, therefore, that the proposal is properly assessed against relevant NP policies. The NP is the most up to date part of the adopted Development Plan for the area and takes precedence over the Solihull Local Plan if there are any differences in policy.

The applicant's Planning Statement lists the following NP policies of relevance:

VC5- Green Character

NE1 -Protection of mature or important trees and hedgerows

H1 -matters to be addressed on housing sites of 20 or more houses

H2- 25% of affordable to be offered to households with a local connection

D1- Design

T2, T3, T4- contributions to traffic infrastructure, needs of pedestrians and cyclists and secure storage facilities for bikes

ECF 4- need to enhance local community facilities

E4- support for home working.

There is no mention of Policy H3, Housing Mix which the applicants acknowledge is an oversight.

The Forum's main issue with this application is that whilst most of the relevant policies are identified, there is no assessment of the extent to which the proposals comply with these policies. This is a fundamental omission which needs to be rectified. Failure to do so effectively ignores the NP and undermines its credibility. This cannot be allowed to happen when the area is subject to major housing development proposals in the near future.

The Forum understands that this was not intentional and that further assessment and consideration by the applicants may be forthcoming. We would ask the Council to ensure that the policies of the NP are fully taken into account in the determination of this application.

The Forum provides its own assessment of the proposals' compliance with NP policies below.

NP Policy considerations

Policy VC5 Green Streets

This policy requires new development to respect, maintain and, so far as reasonably practical, enhance the green character of residential roads. Where loss of frontage planting is unavoidable, applicants must provide details of replacement planting.

In this case, similar issues arise in relation to compliance with Policy NE1 and are addressed together below.

Policy NE1: Trees, Hedgerows and Woodland

This policy seeks the protection of mature and important trees, groups of trees or woodland within any development scheme. The supporting text states that the protection of trees is a priority for local residents.

The application site is covered by a Tree Preservation Order. It is regrettable that this is not mentioned in the applicant's Planning Statement. We are concerned therefore that local residents have not been made sufficiently aware of the impact on trees. The TPO is mentioned briefly in the Arboriculture Assessment Study. That shows that almost all trees on the western side of the site will be removed to allow the access road to be built. In total we understand that 8 'B' trees (which are of moderate value and have at least a 20 year life) plus two 'B' groups of about 10 trees will be lost together with 9 'C' trees and groups of scrub. It is noted that many of the trees along the brook will also be reduced in size to allow the houses to be built.

The Forum does not have expertise in assessing the quality of trees to be lost and relies upon the Council's tree expert to advise on the degree of impact on trees and the extent of compliance of the application with Policy NE1.

The Forum notes that an extensive planting and landscaping scheme has been submitted by the applicant. This proposes planting 72 new trees, many along the western edge alongside the new access road, together with new native shrub and hedge planting. The applicants have confirmed that 40 of the new trees will be heavy standard trees of 3.5-4m high alongside the access road. **In the event that the Council is satisfied that the loss of TPO trees is acceptable and is minded to approve this application, the Forum requests that these detailed landscaping proposals are approved as part of the scheme and that landscaping is not deferred for later consideration through a planning condition.**

The supporting text to Policy NE1 refers to the importance to local residents of promoting the preservation and restoration of key local habitats and biodiversity.

This site has long been an undeveloped green corridor which has grown in value as a wildlife corridor in view of the length of time it has been left vacant. It links the LWS in Jobs Close

Park to the LWS at the rear of houses in Wychwood Avenue. It is noted from the applicant's Planning Statement that updated survey work needs to be undertaken prior to any works which might impact on relevant species. It is also noted that the Council's LWS Panel concluded there was insufficient information to determine whether the site is of LWS status and have requested further surveys be undertaken in May/June 2023. **We consider that it is premature to determine this application until its' ecological value as a potential LWS has been determined.**

Housing policies

Policy H1-- this policy sets out detailed design matters that need to be addressed in a development of 20 or more houses. It overlaps with the matters referred to in **Policy D1** and therefore both are considered here.

As with other policies, the applicants have not specifically mentioned this policy although their Design and Access Statement and plans indicate that most matters have been considered. Detailed points that still need to be addressed are:

1. The garden areas of some plots, especially plot 14, have rear gardens that are overshadowed by tree canopies. This affects their use as amenity space and can lead to pressure from occupiers to remove trees. This would not be desirable alongside the brook which should take priority here. **The Forum is pleased that the applicants are willing to reconsider the house type on this plot.**
2. Refuse storage arrangements should be clarified to prevent unsightly bin storage on frontage areas.
3. The proximity of the rear of the houses to the brook, and the sensitive nature of the relationship, raises the question of whether permitted development rights should be removed to ensure extensions do not affect the brook. **The Forum requests that permitted development rights are removed if this development is approved.**

Policy H2- this policy states that 25% of all new affordable housing should be occupied by households with a strong local connection. The applicants have not indicated how they intend to comply with this policy. **We understand that they are willing to include this within either a S106 Agreement or other suitable development mechanism.**

H3 Housing Mix- this policy is intended to apply to all developments of 20 houses or more and is more up to date than the relevant Solihull Local Plan policy. The applicants have not applied the market housing mix in Policy H3. They have proposed 10 bungalows and two 5 bedroom houses. The bungalows are proposed mainly for visual reasons but also to provide homes suitable for the elderly and those downsizing.

Whilst this mix of house types does not accord with the specified mix in Policy H3, the policy does allow for a different mix where justified. In this case, the Forum is well aware of local concern at the loss of many bungalows to redevelopment in recent years. The introduction of 10 bungalows is therefore welcomed -as long as these are genuinely intended to be predominantly single storey dwellings. In this respect it is noted that several of the bungalow designs have generous roof space coupled with rooms above garages which could potentially become 3, 4 or even 5 bedroom properties.



Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH) Neighbourhood Forum CIO

The Forum is pleased that the applicants have confirmed that the intention is that these remain single storey bungalows. **They have indicated a willingness to reconsider the roof design of some of the bungalows and also to consider a suitable legal mechanism (removal of PD rights or other means) to deliver what is intended.** The Forum looks forward to hearing what is proposed in this regard.

The Forum has queried whether 2 substantial 5 bedroom houses at the end of the development is appropriate. It has suggested that smaller 3 or 4 bedroom houses would offer a better overall mix to complement the 1 and 2 bedroom house mix.

Highways and parking (Policies T2, T3 and T4)

The development is forecast to generate 9-10 additional 2 way trips in the peak hours. The applicants state this will not have an adverse effect on the local road network. The Forum asks the Council's Highways Officers at what point do the incremental additions to traffic arising from new developments such as this and the Knowle Precinct scheme, which individually are assessed as not being significant, become significant? A more holistic assessment of development impacts on the KDBH area is needed.

The proposal to provide secure bike storage for the affordable housing is welcomed. The proposal to build garages for the houses is also welcomed.

Clarification of what contributions to local transport infrastructure are to be made is awaited.

Policy ECF 4- no mention is made in the main body of the Planning Statement to whether any enhancements to local community facilities will be offered in the context of Policy ECF4. However, Section 8 of the Statement provides Draft Heads of Terms for a draft Planning Obligation includes contributions to education and health provision, if required. **We await clarification of what is proposed to meet this policy requirement.**

Policy E4- the double garages contain a room above which is identified as an office. Room for an office or study is also shown in some of the house types. The designation of office/study sits well with Policy E4 which supports working from home.

Conclusions

Following our discussion with the applicants, we are pleased that they acknowledge that more should be done to demonstrate compliance with the NP. There are aspects of this application that the Forum would support provided that the impacts on the TPO and on biodiversity can be satisfactorily addressed. There are other matters that require further work or clarification to ensure that the NP is upheld. We look forward to engaging further with the applicants and the Council's planning officers on these.

Roger Cook
Chair,
Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum