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SOLIHULL LOCAL PLAN REVIEW

DRAFT LOCAL PLAN – SUPPLEMENTARY CONSULTATION

The Arden Triangle

LPR Reference: Site 9, Land south of Knowle

**Response on behalf of the Local Governing Board of Arden Academy, Station Road,
Knowle**

14th March 2019

1. Introduction and Overview

1.1. The governors of Arden Academy wish to make the following representations in respect of the Supplementary Consultation on the Draft Local Plan Review. This document outlines our support for the proposed allocation of Site 9 Option 2 (Arden Triangle), Land south of Knowle, for housing and associated infrastructure, to include The New Arden Centre – A Centre for Community Learning (ACCL).

1.2. Site 9 is referenced on page 45 of the Supplementary Consultation Document and in the accompanying Draft Concept Masterplans Document (pages 68-73) which sets out two Illustrative Emerging Concept Masterplans (Options 1 and 2). Option 1 retains Arden Academy in its current position, with residential development on neighbouring land within Site 9, whilst Option 2 shows the relocation of the Academy to an alternative site within Site 9, with residential development on the existing Academy site and along Station Road. The accompanying text shows an estimated capacity of 600 houses for both Options. Section 2 below outlines our view that:

- Option 1 is not supported;
- The relocation of Arden Academy and redevelopment of the existing school site as illustrated in Option 2 is supported.
- The overall capacity achievable within Option 2 has the potential to make a larger contribution to the approximately 1,000 homes earmarked for Knowle than the approximately 600 identified in the Supplementary Consultation document and may indeed be necessary in order to make Option 2 viable.

1.3. We, via our consultants, have engaged in all previous stages of consultation on the draft Local Plan Review in order to derive maximum community benefit from any new housing development. The result is a strategic vision for Site 9 that includes a new Arden Centre for Community Learning (ACCL) on a neighbouring plot, releasing the existing school site (and surrounding land) for housing development. Separately, we have also liaised with SMBC officers and Ward members, parents and residents, representative local organisations including the Knowle Society and the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum (KDBHNF) and other third parties, to highlight the benefits of the proposals and seek support for them.

1.4. Discussions have been held with neighbouring private landowners with a view to achieving the assembly of an accessible site of sufficient size to accommodate the new ACCL, including supporting infrastructure, and ensuring the overall financial viability of the proposals as part of a broader land deal on which delivery ultimately relies. SMBC officers were in attendance at the last meeting in February 2018 when the scope for an equalisation agreement was first mooted.

1.5. We understand that SMBC, as freeholder of the land currently occupied by the school (and the proposed site on which the new school buildings are proposed under Option 2), is putting in place arrangements to work closely with the school and other landowners to progress the master-planning work for both options and undertake more detailed financial viability appraisals. We look forward to engaging with SMBC and its Consultants in order to progress this exciting community opportunity.

2. Question 24 of the Supplementary Consultation Document

Question 24 of the Supplementary Consultation Document asks:

‘Do you believe that Site 9 land south of Knowle should be included as an allocated site, if not why not? Do you have any comments on the draft concept masterplan for the site?’

2.1. Given that studies by both SMBC and KDBHNF identify the need for new housing in our community, we firmly believe that Site 9 (Arden Triangle) should be included as an allocated site for such housing, and that a new Arden Centre for Community Learning (ACCL) should form an integral part of the masterplan for this area in order to secure medium and long term educational, social, environmental and economic benefits for the local and wider community.

2.2. The following sections of this representation provide an overview of salient factors that demonstrate the need for a new ACCL and how this aspiration can be realised.

The Case for a New Arden Centre for Community Learning

2.3 The aspirations of Arden Academy students, parents, staff and Governors to create a new ACCL on a relocation site within the ‘Arden Triangle’ provides a unique opportunity to create a contemporary 21st century learning environment. It would also provide a major resource for community activity and interaction.

2.4 There is a compelling case for the development of a new fit –for- purpose school in this part of the Borough. Much of the site is over 60 years old. For example, the school hall, main teaching blocks, library and dining area are largely the same as when built in the late 1950's. Furthermore, the original school site and infrastructure was designed for 500 students; there are currently over 1700 students and 200 staff on site. Retaining and remodelling the existing school has been considered but is not a viable solution because:

- The existing site is tightly constrained and the bulk of the premises are no longer fit for purpose, which risks hindering student attainment and restricts wider community use;
- Additions and extensions over the years have led to a patchwork of development without a clear definition of spaces and poor interconnectivity.
- The investment required to update the present site is around £18m. These sums of money from the public purse are no longer available. Even if they were, Arden would be a building site for over 10 years, hindering a whole generation of students’ learning and attainment.
- The energy efficiency of the building is poor, costing over £100,000 more per year than a modern school. In addition, annual maintenance costs £150,000 p.a. These will increase year-on-year.
- The current site presents significant safety issues on Station Road for pedestrians/children at the main entrance at the start and end of the school day. There is no parking for parents at parents evenings, school events or open evenings which causes significant traffic congestion and parking problems for local residents;
- The school has no gym, floodlit sporting facilities or swimming pool and examination areas are sub-optimal.

2.5 The issues posed by the physical condition of the building fabric and lack of space create major challenges for the teaching and learning environment:

- Classroom usage of 96% provides no flexibility for teaching, preparation and maintenance.
- The site has insufficient science labs
- The school hall cannot accommodate full assemblies and acoustics are poor for concerts and ceremonies.
- Exams must be held in the school hall, which is noisy due to closeness to kitchens and main school thoroughfare, and in PE and Sports spaces, impacting teaching.
- The location and conditions of toilets are inadequate and inappropriate
- No covered areas outside for pupils in hot and wet weather and dispersed school buildings means pupils get wet when walking between classes.
- Changing facilities and spaces are poor; there is no room for lockers.
- 75% of the school is not accessible to disabled people.
- Site has no hearing loops due to unsuitable infrastructure.
- Public footpath across the site creates significant safeguarding issues and leads to vandalism.

Creation of Better Community Facilities

2.6 It is proposed to build a new 3 storey, 10 form entry (as now) ACCL that will be able to accommodate all children in the current Arden catchment area.

2.7 The development of the new ACCL provides a one-off opportunity to incorporate a series of improved community facilities to engage both young and old alike during and outside school hours. The requirement for such facilities has been identified by residents via public consultation exercises, including the KDBHNF Neighbourhood Plan Residents Survey undertaken during Summer 2016.

2.8 The Facilities proposed to be incorporated into the new ACCL include:

- A Sports Centre with a possible swimming pool.
- A Gymnastics/Fitness Centre
- A 600 seat Performing Arts Theatre.
- Outdoor recreational open space and playing fields
- Conference /meeting facilities.
- A 50 place Day Nursery(privately managed by the school)
- Multi Games all weather 4G floodlit pitches.
- Drama/ dance/music practice/recording rooms.
- Improved community safety when travelling to and from school with a significant reduction in traffic and parking on school routes.
- A youth zone, a safe space for young people to meet, be active, happy and learn.

- Potential to co-locate a new Primary School.

How the new ACCL will be funded

- 2.9 Funding a new school from the private purse is not an option. It is therefore proposed that the development value of the existing school site¹ is used to help secure the capital investment needed for a new school with additional community facilities.
- 2.10 In terms of land assembly, the proposed new ACCL site is dependent upon additional land being made available for playing fields and other external space requirements. Mr Ved Goswami, the neighbouring owner of land immediately to the east of the existing school site, has very kindly agreed to gift a significant area of land for school fields and to provide the main vehicle access to the new ACCL.
- 2.11 However, the delivery of a new ACCL also depends upon sufficient housing development taking place within the 'Arden Triangle' to help finance the project, including the additional infrastructure that the release of Site 9 would require. We are keen to work with the Council and other landowners to explore the scope for securing a commercially viable masterplan that is acceptable to all relevant stakeholders.

Comments on Draft Concept Masterplans

- 2.12 Based on our aspiration to secure the new ACCL it follows that we cannot support Option 1 since it assumes that the Academy is retained on its existing site. This will mean that the current difficulties presented by the ageing campus will worsen and the opportunities to create medium and long term educational, social, environmental and economic benefits for both the school and the wider community will be lost. However, the community would still absorb the same scale of housing development.
- 2.13 We do the proposal for Site 9, Option 2 since this shows a new school and associated infrastructure. We believe, however, that the overall capacity achievable within Option 2 has the potential to make a larger contribution to the approximately 1,000 homes earmarked for Knowle than the approximately 600 identified in the Supplementary Consultation document. Indeed, we believe that this may be necessary in order to make Option 2 commercially viable. This is achievable via modifying the density assumptions and incorporating other available land parcels into the development area.

Density Assumptions

- 2.16 Under Option 2, the redevelopment of the existing school site presents the scope to build at a higher density than elsewhere across Site 9, taking advantage of the existing scale and height of buildings, the fact that the site is already an integral part of the built up area very close to the local centre of Knowle and that public transport is readily accessible.
- 2.17 Assuming a density of between 60-80 dph on the two proposed development parcels closest to

¹ The realisable land value of the school site would not represent a gift from the Council to the Academy. This is because the existing school land value is not actually realisable by the Council as the school has a 125 year lease on the land.

Station Road and approximately 40dph across the remainder of the school site, the overall capacity of Site 9 could increase by approximately 100 under Option 2, even taking into account that other medium density development parcels shown under Option 1 form a part of the school site in Option 2.

- 2.18 Option 2 also presents the scope to provide more affordable homes to help in meeting the major shortfall of affordable housing for young families and single people in the locality and diversifying the overall housing offer.
- 2.19 We would therefore urge SMBC to assign a more appropriate capacity to Site 9 which recognises the development potential of the site to provide medium density housing whilst retaining, as far as possible, important landscape characteristics including the existing lake and its immediate surroundings, helping conserve the bio- diversity of the site and provide an attractive visual amenity for local residents.

Proposed Revisions to Option 2

- 2.20 Please see attached our proposed Revisions to Concept Masterplan Option 2 (based upon our observations above) and a proposed phasing plan which suggests the following order of development:
- Phase1 – Development of land parcels owned by Mr Goswami;
 - Phase2 – Development of the new ACCL;
 - Phase 3 - Development of the vacated Arden school site

Conclusion

- 3.1 Whilst Option 1 would contribute to meeting the Council's housing land requirements, the retention of Arden Academy on its existing site would represent a lost opportunity to create medium and long term educational, social, environmental and economic benefits for the local and wider community. This opportunity is unlikely to arise again. We therefore do not support Option 1.
- 3.2 By contrast, Option 2 (incorporating our suggested revisions) provides major Place Shaping opportunities with wider community benefits that are not realisable under Option 1. Currently this is the only viable mechanism by which Arden Academy can be transformed into the 21st Century centre of learning that current and future students deserve. We would therefore strongly urge the Council to support this option.
- 3.3 We welcome and look forward to the opportunity to engage in further discussions with the Council and their consultants and with other landowners to secure agreement on a commercially viable Concept Masterplan for a revised Option 2, including density and number of dwellings, and the mechanism to deliver 21st century educational and community facilities.
- 3.4 We have also attached the results of our survey (which asked for a response to the same questions posed by SMBC) which people completed on – line, following our meetings with the local community during this consultation period. We also met almost 200 members of our local community who attended the seven information events.

Yours sincerely

Martin Carter

Chair of Arden Governing Body

Governors

Nici Cutler; Jennifer Whitehill; Kate Brennan; Sharon Butcher-Johns; Dave Warwood; Sarah Bloomer; Petro Nicolaidis; Anthony Stonehewer; Geoff Harley-Mason; Dr Celia O'Donovan; Bill Bohanna