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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 Arden Multi – Academy Trust, Station Road, Knowle**

14<sup>th</sup> March 2019

## 1. Introduction and Overview

- 1.1. The members and Trustees of Arden Multi-Academy Academy Trust wish to make the following representations in respect of Supplementary Consultation on the Draft Local Plan Review. This document outlines our support for the proposed allocation of Site 9 (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 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 (Option 2) is supported but the proposed extent of development required to ensure viability is not.
  - The overall capacity achievable within Option 2 is greater than the estimated 600 put forward in the Supplementary Consultation document.
- 1.3. We via our consultants have engaged in all previous stages of consultation on the draft Local Plan Review in order to promote our strategic vision for Site 9 and, in particular, the community benefits that could be achieved through the development of a new Arden Centre for Community Learning (ACCL) and the release of the existing school site and surrounding land for much needed housing development. Separately, we have also liaised with SMBC officers and Ward members, with parents and local residents, representative local organisations including the Knowle Society and the Knowle, Dorridge, and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum (KDBH) 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

welcome the prospect of forthcoming engagement with SMBC's Consultants who have been appointed to fulfil this role.

## 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. We strongly believe that Site 9 (Arden Triangle) should be included as an allocated site and that a new Arden Centre for Community Learning (ACCL) should form an integral part of the masterplan for this area. It would provide a unique opportunity to create medium and long term educational, social, environmental and economic benefits for the local and wider community. A new school is a key part of wider proposals for Site 9 – The Arden Triangle, as shown on the Concept Masterplan (Option 2).

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 through the proposed release of land from the green belt that would make a significant contribution towards meeting the housing land target for the plan period, whilst enabling major community benefits to be provided.

### ***The Case for a New Arden Centre for Community Learning***

2.4 The aspirations of Arden Multi – Academy Trust Academy members and trustees, staff, parents and students to create a new ACCL on a relocation site formed the initial catalyst underlying the 'Arden Triangle' initiative. The relocation of the school to an alternative site provides a unique opportunity to create a contemporary 21st century teaching environment that also provides a major resource for community activity and interaction. The existing site is tightly constrained and offers minimal scope for further expansion and growth of pupil numbers or community use.

2.5 There is a compelling case for the development of a new fit –for- purpose school in this part of the Borough. The remodelling of the existing school has been carefully considered but is not a realistic solution because:

- The bulk of the premises are no longer fit for purpose and hinder the incredible potential for student attainment and wider community use; the school site infrastructure was designed for 500 students – there are now over 1700 students and 200 staff attending every day;
- Additions and extensions over the years have led to a patchwork of development without a clear definition of spaces;



- Further rejuvenation and renovation is no longer possible or cost efficient;
- Much of the site is over 50 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.
- 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 which would actually hinder student learning and attainment.
- The energy efficiency of the building is poor and costs over £100,000 more per annum than a modern school.
- Major safety concerns 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;
- Annual maintenance alone in the existing school costs £150,000 p.a.
- No gym, floodlit sporting facilities or swimming pool at the school with nearest facilities some miles away.
- Significant traffic congestion outside school and no formal drop off points.

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

- School rooms have 96% usage rate
- School hall cannot accommodate full assemblies
- Hall - 1700 on site but hall can only accommodate 120 seated
- Exams in hall - noisy (next to kitchens)
- Space for PE and Sports is used for teaching and examinations;
- Acoustics poor for concerts
- Location and conditions of toilets poor
- No covered external facility outside
- Not a pleasant eating environment
- No dry social space
- Food queuing outside
- Changing facilities and space is poor
- Public footpath across the site creating significant safeguarding issues and vandalism
- Not enough science labs



- No room for lockers
- 75% of school is not accessible to disabled people - ramps but no lifts
- No hearing loops due to unsuitable infrastructure
- Pupils get wet when walking between classes.

### **Creation of Better Community Facilities**

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

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

2.9 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.
- Better Community Safety when travelling to and from school with a significant reduction in traffic and parking on journey to school routes.
- A Youth Zone. A safe place 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**

2.10 Funding a major new school with significant community facilities from the private purse is not an option. It is therefore proposed that the development value\* of the existing school site is used to help secure the capital investment needed for a new school with additional community



facilities. 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.

- 2.11 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 to the ACCL a significant area of land for school fields and the main vehicular access to the new ACCL and playing fields will be secured through the release of this land.
- 2.12 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 via our consultants are willing to work with the Council and other landowners to explore the scope for securing a commercially viable masterplan that is acceptable to all parties as well as to SMBC as Local Planning Authority.

**Comments on Draft Concept Masterplans**

- 2.13 In view of our aspiration to secure the new ACCL it follows that we cannot support Option 1. This Option assumes that the Academy is retained on its existing site. This means that the current difficulties presented by an ageing campus can only deteriorate further 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.
- 2.14 Option 2 meanwhile shows a new school and associated infrastructure as a key part of wider proposals for Site 9. Whilst clearly supporting this proposal in principle, we consider that Site 9 presents the scope to realise a greater overall housing capacity than the estimated total of 600 dwellings assumed by both Options. Indeed, we believe that this will be essential in order to make Option 2 commercially viable.
- 2.15 An increased overall capacity is achievable both in terms of density assumptions and recognition that Site 9 comprises other available land parcels with development potential that neither option currently acknowledges.

**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 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 for more affordable homes to help in meeting the major shortfall of affordable housing for young families and single people in the locality. In doing so, this increases the ability to provide a more diverse housing offer overall.
- 2.19 We also consider that there is additional capacity available that should be utilised to ensure overall site viability.
- 2.20 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. This would help to conserve the bio- diversity of the site and provide an attractive visual amenity for local residents.

## Conclusion

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.

By contrast, Option 2 (incorporating our suggested revisions) illustrates major Place Shaping opportunities with wider community benefits that are not realisable under Option 1. We would urge the Council to support this course of action.

We welcome and look forward to the opportunity to engage in on-going 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 for delivery.

**Dr Celia O’Donovan**

Chair of Arden Multi – Academy Trust

## Members and Trustees

Geoff Harley-Mason; Dr Andrew Devitt; Tony Stonehewer; Andrew Cole; Graeme Chaplin;

Wendy Jarema; Val Thomas; Malcolm Allsop; Alan Volkaerts; Damian Burgess; Martin Murphy

