**KN2: South of Knowle: comments regarding test of soundness**

Positively Prepared and Justified

The local plan as it applies to the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath area (B93) has been entirely based on the proposals put forward by Arden Academy and Knowle Football Club. Each has its own agenda for improvement of its resources. As a consequence, the opportunity to objectively assess the needs of the area has tended to be retrospective rather than from first principles. Further, the nature of the proposals for South Knowle has escalated from a few hundred houses in keeping with the area to the current proposal. There are consequences to the proposed plan that cast doubt on the assessment of need and appropriateness of strategy.

* The total number of houses in the B93 area is entirely located in Knowle. It is totally out of proportion with the current size of Knowle and shows no attempt to distribute the impact of development. This will overstretch the limited retail provision and parking at the village centre, this being in the context of a recently built Sainsbury’s with car parking located at Dorridge. Medical provision is already (pre Covid) overstretched and there are no plans for this vitally needed expansion. It will add to congestion at key times, particularly in the High Street, Station Road and Lodge Road.
* There is a need for additional facilities in sport and fitness. With appropriate management to guarantee public access, the Hampton Road site addresses this. Such additional facilities at the new school would duplicate this and, at best, be out-of-school hours. Developer funding could have covered more areas of need.
* The site is some distance from Dorridge Station that provides good links to Birmingham and London. The distance is such that residents from the new site will either use their car to get to the station, exacerbating parking issues and pollution, or will use their car instead of the train.
* The newly proposed location for the school does not reduce length of journey for students and residents living in Dorridge and Hockley Heath. An opportunity to put the school geographically near the centre of the B93 community has been lost. This will increase car pollution and road congestion through students in Dorridge and Hockley Heath being driven to the new school, seeking education elsewhere and increasing numbers of students attending from outside the B93 area.
* The entire site is the ‘wrong’ side of Knowle. Access to the M42 and to Birmingham can only be through the village centre, adding to pollution and congestion. The Knowle relief road would have helped but this has been abandoned.
* All of the necessary affordable, presumably dense, housing has been focused together on this site. This is likely to work against a policy of social inclusion and gives licence to developers to deliver a huge area of uninspired, unattractive and unsuitable housing as demonstrated by recent development.

Effective

* The financial implications of this development are profound with many unknowns: the cost of acquiring land; provision of open spaces; quality of housing; the quality and nature of school buildings; the excavation of sloping land; the inherent cost of demolishing existing school buildings coupled with consideration of retaining and adaptation of existing relatively sound buildings. This may lead to reduced specifications on the site.

Consistent with national policy

* The South of Knowle site, and the Hampton Road site, are entirely on green belt. This is contrary to the stated national priority to build on greenfield sites where possible.
* The large proportion of rented accommodation contradicts a national agenda to encourage home ownership.

Suggestions

* Substantially reduce the number of houses on the site by identifying brownfield sites or locations with good transport links.
* Distribute affordable housing into smaller huddles over several sites.
* Reinstate the Knowle relief road.
* Site school near Downing Close as previously planned.
* Use investment to expand primary medical care facilities.
* Consider new uses for some existing school buildings.
* Investigate and ‘firm up’ financial implications of site.
* Clarify management issues to ensure public access to sport and fitness facilities.