

SOLIHULL DRAFT LOCAL PLAN 2020 (DLP)

POLICY KN2: South of Knowle (Arden triangle)

- 1. The Site is allocated for 600 dwellings together with the redevelopment of Arden Academy secondary school and new primary school to provide an ‘all through’ school.**

Comment: the allocation of the Site is fully justified by the requirement for 600 new dwellings, and will provide, for the first time, a firm and defensible Green Belt boundary (in accordance with NPPF) for this part of Knowle, using Warwick and Grove Roads. Earlier iterations of the Concept Masterplan have demonstrated that these dwellings and a new primary school can be accommodated without the need to encroach on the existing Arden Academy campus or playing fields. (See Consultation January 2019 Site 9 Option 1)

The need for a new Primary School, partly arising from the 780 new dwellings on allocated sites and local windfalls is acknowledged, and its proposed location within KN2 is accepted, and also can be accommodated.

SMBC has not adduced any evidence of need for the re-location of Arden Academy within KN2, although some updating of the existing school may be required in order to realise its full existing capacity. Thus the extension of this Policy to include the construction of an entirely new secondary school can only be regarded as an ‘optional extra’, but which makes no difference to the area of land to be removed from the Green Belt. The present Concept Masterplan is merely a re-arrangement of parcels within the necessary Site boundaries.

It is important to note that the 600 dwellings and new primary school can be provided without the loss of any existing playing fields. However the SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL DRAFT MITIGATION STRATEGY – OCTOBER 2020 shows (Page 8 ref: Site 9) that the development of Site KN2 WITH the re-location of Arden Academy will result in a net loss of playing fields. Any loss of playing fields therefore arises solely through the re-location of the Academy and not through the housing development per se. It is also stated (Page 29 Summary) in that document that “Arguing that the re-build of Arden Academy Trust meets a policy exception is not advisable at present as the need for the improvements proposed is questionable.” It is of course perfectly possible for part of the existing playing fields to be retained in order to eliminate any possible loss, and they should be.

3 i Financial contribution to the provision of an ‘all through’ school to provide a facility for both primary and secondary education on site.

Comment : Developer contributions to education are set out in the document SOLIHULL SCHOOL ORGANISATION PLAN 2020/21 (SSOP). Page 6 para 3.4 states: “Where the Council assess that a proposed development will create a full or partial shortfall of places in primary or secondary schools, a contribution will be sought from the developer, assessed in accordance with the Council’s Section 106 methodology statement attached at Appendix A.”

It can be seen from that Appendix A that the result of the calculations is a per-pupil fixed contribution which is not linked to any specified method of provision. It is for SMBC to decide how to spend the money, and **3 i** is the expression of that choice, rather than any specific obligation on developers to provide an ‘all through’ school or a new secondary or primary school in any particular location. That said it is accepted that a new primary school is to be built within KN2, albeit only partly funded by the 600 dwellings.

SSOP Page 2 1.2 third para states “Any school reorganisation proposals need to demonstrate how standards will be improved and will seek to make the best possible use of existing assets, meet the needs of parents, and optimise expenditure to help maximise performance of schools in the future.” (my emphasis)

At pp 33-34 it states: “**Secondary**–Arden School serves this area and has already expanded by 2 FE (300 places). Its year 7 intake of 300 per year is sufficient to meet the existing demand, rising year on year until it peaks in 2025, and then to accommodate the growth coming forward from the additional 780 dwellings. Therefore no additional secondary places are required in this area. Whilst the provision of secondary school places is theoretically sufficient, the current infrastructure constraints of Arden Academy affect how efficiently it can be used in the future. It is recognised that the academy has some up-to-date and modern teaching space; however, its supporting infrastructure including kitchens/dining space and other supporting facilities does not match this and the secondary school places that may be available cannot be accessed without these supporting facilities. It is therefore proposed that a new purpose built and modern facility must be provided for the academy within the allocation site.”

In the face of no demonstrable need, it is difficult to understand how the proposed demolition of Arden Academy’s perfectly useable buildings, albeit partly in some need of modernisation, and construction of a completely new school is consistent with 1.2 above. It is something of a leap to suggest that it ‘**must**’ be provided.

In DLP para 724 of Justification for Policy KN2 the final sentence states “Funding for the school will be expected via Section 106 agreements associated with the development of the allocated sites.” This of course is not untrue, as stated in **3 i** above, but could be read as suggesting that the entire funding for the school will come via S106, and may be misleading. SMBC has however provided, outside of the DLP, an estimate (Sept. 2020) of projected costs and revenues for the scheme which gives a total cost for demolition and construction of £49.4m against S106 revenues from KN1 & 2 totalling £6m. S106 therefore provides only c12.1% of the funding.

CIL funding is not mentioned in Policy KN2, but could provide an additional contribution towards the provision of the new primary school, which is covered by the three CIL tests:

- Necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- Directly related to the development; and
- Fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

The ‘optional extra’ re-location of Arden Academy would not qualify for CIL money, and it is clear that the burden of providing the balance of full funding for this project, including re-provision of any lost playing fields, falls squarely on SMBC, and it should be clearly stated within the DLP that this will be forthcoming, by way of SMBC underwriting the scheme, otherwise the soundness of Policy KN2 is in doubt.

4 Green belt enhancements should include:

Comment: item 4 iii refers to on-site infrastructure, which clearly will not be in the Green Belt. This calls into question exactly which of the numbered subsections refer to on-site works and which refer to Green Belt works.

SUMMARY of ‘Soundness’ modifications sought to Policy KN2 and its Justification:

- 1 Clarification that the “redevelopment of the Arden Academy secondary school...to provide an ‘all through’ school” is not a requirement of the housing development on KN1 & 2, but is a voluntary scheme by SMBC.
- 2 Removal of ambiguity and clarification that Financial Contributions direct from developers of KN1 & 2 are limited to S106 payments in accordance with the SSOP 2020/21, providing approximately 12% of total cost, and that the full balance of cost will be met and underwritten by SMBC, including any re-provision of playing fields lost within KN2.
- 3 Clarification of which are Green Belt enhancements, and which are on-site.
- 4 Deletion of p85 of the Concept Masterplans, showing out of date and irrelevant Developer Proposals and Engagement.
- 5 Added emphasis in KN2 5 that concept masterplans are illustrative and not binding in detail.

POLICY P17: Countryside and Green Belt

2 Land designated as Green Belt in the Borough on the Policies Map and will be kept permanently open, in accordance with national Green Belt Policy.

Comment: NPPF para 130 - “When defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should:”

And, at 130 b) “not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;”

It is clearly National Policy that areas of existing concentrated built development that are both not open now and therefore not necessary, or even possible, to keep permanently open, should not be included in the Green Belt. (Also see NPPF 140)

It is necessary now to refer to the SOLIHULL DRAFT LOCAL PLAN SUPPLEMENTARY CONSULTATION of January 2019, paragraphs 375 – 379 ‘WASHED OVER GREEN BELT.’

This section (q.v.) identifies five areas of concentrated development, namely Cheswick Green, Tidbury Green, Millison’s Wood, Whitlock’s End, and Widney Manor Road, which do not perform any Green Belt function. I identified an additional similar area of 200 dwellings which I put forward at the time, and described as the Oldway Drive Area. (see Appendix A).

The DLP is in breach of National Policy by not excluding those six areas from the Green Belt, and is therefore unsound. **P17 3 i** does not make it sound.

MODIFICATIONS SOUGHT:

- 1 Deletion of **P17 3 i**
- 2 Revision of para 423 to read: ‘ Limited infilling identified as appropriate development in the Green Belt in the NPPF, will be permitted in Chadwick End. In the other Green Belt villages and hamlets in the Borough, new building, other than that required for agriculture and forestry, outdoor sport, outdoor recreation and cemeteries, or for extensions and alterations will be considered to be inappropriate development, in order to protect the Green Belt and the character and quality of the settlements.’
- 3 Revision of para 420 to read: ‘A small number of changes will be made to address anomalies in Green Belt boundaries across the Borough, including the removal of settlements and areas of existing development which no longer perform any Green Belt function, taking into account an assessment of submissions made during the preparation of this Plan.’
- 4 Alteration to the Policies Map to exclude Cheswick Green, Tidbury Green, Millison’s Wood, Whitlock’s End, Widney Manor Road, and the Oldway Drive area (as defined in my Appendix A) from the Green Belt.