



Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath (KDBH)

Neighbourhood Forum

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING ACT 1990

APPEAL UNDER SECTION 78

Appeal Reference APP/Q4625/W/21/3285876

Site: Wyndley Garden Centre, Warwick Road, Knowle, Solihull, B93 0DX

Proposal: Demolition of the existing garden centre and associated buildings, and the erection of an extra care facility (Use Class C2) comprising: a village care centre; 39 No. one and two-bedroom care suites; 46 No. one and two-bedroom care apartments; and associated works, including car parking, access, landscaping and associated engineering works Application No: PL/2020/01993/PPFL Appellant's Name: Knowle Care Limited

Further comments by the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum (‘the Forum’)

The Forum does not wish to become a Rule 6 party to this appeal. It maintains its objection and is largely content to rely upon its previous response, dated 21 October 2020. We do, however, wish to make a few additional comments in response to the Appellant's Statement of Case and to recent events.

Firstly, point 2 'Detailed Observations and Objections' of our October response sets out the extent of local support for the garden centre, as being the last such asset serving the area. This is further evidenced by the local petition to retain the garden centre that we are aware has been separately created and has, we understand, attracted over 600 signatures.

Secondly, regarding the Appellant's Statement of Case, our comments are:

In Introduction, para 1.4: the Appellant helpfully summarises the Case Officer's assessment of the proposals, indicating the weight attached to each element.

The Forum does not agree with the Council's assessment of the: weight attributed to the closure of the garden centre (limited weight); adverse effect on the rural character and appearance of the area (limited weight).

Closure of the garden centre should be considered an issue of at least moderate weight, given that:

- a) the loss of the facility would be unsustainable, given there would be far more car journeys generated to centres further afield; and
- b) this popular commercial facility has not been demonstrated to be unviable, contrary to Policy ECF3 of the KDBH Neighbourhood Plan.

The adverse impact on the rural character and appearance of the area is, at the very least, 'significant'; it can be demonstrated as 'substantial', having regard to the extent of adverse impacts set out in the Forum's October 2020 objection, and our comments below.

In all other respects, the Forum wholeheartedly supports the Council's reasons for refusal.



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Merits of the Appeal

1. Is There a Care Need?

The Forum's October 2020 letter of objection refers to the number of recent care home developments serving the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Area. Also at that time, the Knowle Society submissions indicated the level of vacancies in care home provision in Knowle, suggesting here is no overriding urgent need for additional provision. It should be noted that, since then, a new Care Village at Eastcote, Barston has recently opened.

The Submission version of the Solihull Local Plan allocates two large sites in Knowle for the development of 780 dwellings. As yet there has been no decision on these proposals; however, the Forum has sought assurances from the Council that any large-scale Green Belt allocations would make provision for the elderly, should this type of accommodation be required. This is to ensure that, if a substantial loss of Green Belt is confirmed in the Local Plan, then there will be no need to lose yet more Green Belt for elderly accommodation (or any other residential development). We understand that this assurance has been provided - for example, as referenced in relation to the proposed Hampton Road allocation. In the event that additional elderly accommodation is evidenced as necessary on the Arden Triangle site, then the Forum would expect this to be built as part of the site development plan (albeit not in the location promoted by one of the landowners which the Council's Masterplan shows as the location for a new 'through school').

In summary, this demonstrates no overriding urgent care need, given the: extent of existing provision in, and close to, the Knowle, Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Area; current availability of accommodation; and prospect of provision through the Plan led system.

2. Reasons for Refusal

The Forum profoundly disagrees with the Appellant's case that the proposed development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt by virtue of it being on previously developed land and causes no greater harm to the openness of the Green Belt. Their contention that the proposal has only a modest increase in footprint and volume with a broadly neutral effect on visual openness, is simply not tenable when assessing the proposed height, scale, layout and design of the scheme in the site's setting.

The Forum is confident that a site inspection will demonstrate the gulf between the site's current minimal impact on the Green Belt v. the scale of impact and harm that the proposed development causes to the character and appearance of the Green Belt in this area.

Finally, turning to the Appellant's list of very special circumstances (vsc). The Forum has made the case that the level of present need is not so urgent as to constitute vsc. Most of the other vsc's listed (eg traffic levels, downsizing, the threat of a derelict site, economic benefits, support to village centre, well-being, environmental and climate change benefits etc) are what would be expected of any such proposed developments. They do not, either individually or collectively, meet the test of being 'very special'; nor do they decisively outweigh extensive harm to the Green Belt arising from the proposed development.

The Forum requests that these additional comments be read in conjunction with its October 2020 letter of objection; that this appeal is rejected; and that planning permission is not granted.

Roger Cook

Knowle Dorridge and Bentley Heath Neighbourhood Forum CIO