



The Knowle Society

Established to maintain the character of the Village

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21 December 2009

G. Palmer, Dip.TP, MRTPI
Head of Design and Development
PO Box 11652
Council Offices
Solihull
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Dear Mr Palmer,

SAINSBURY PLANNING APPLICATION, DORRIDGE (2009/1746)

The Society recognises the need to redevelop Forest Court in Dorridge, in the process improving facilities for shopping in that village. While we see the potential benefits to Dorridge of a modest food store we have great concerns over the size of the proposed development and especially over its impact on Knowle and the amenity of its inhabitants. Accordingly we formally object to this planning application. The specific grounds on which we make this objection are detailed below.

The size of the proposed supermarket

The total store floorspace (Planning & Retail statement s3.4, table 3.1) is given as 4,660 sq m. The sales area is given as 2,462 sq m. Thus it is at the very top of the definition for a 'Supermarket' and could well be considered as a 'Superstore' (PPS6 – Planning for town centres, Annex A, Table 3). It should be compared to the two 'large format' stores on the Stratford Road (Tesco and Sainsbury) at 5,240 sq m net and 5,410 sq m net and to two 'medium size format' stores in Solihull (Morrisons and Sainsbury) at 2,180 sq m net and 1,990 sq m net respectively. This store must therefore be considered of a very significant size, comparable to all these other stores, which are located out of residential areas, whereas this one is in the centre of a residential area, albeit its immediate environs are at least partly commercial. Dorridge is not and cannot be considered as anything more than a 'local centre' according to the definitions in Annex A, Table 1 of PPS6 and is therefore not suitable for such a large-scale development. The applicant's 'Planning and Retail Statement' s4.63 recognises that Knowle is a 'local centre'. Dorridge is clearly even less of a centre than this.

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The 'Planning and Retail Statement' s6.93 states that this proposal meets the sequential approach of PPS6 in that a 'town centre' site is the first choice for such a development. However the definition of a town centre in PPS6 ("the principal centre or centres in a local authorities area.") can in no way be held to describe Dorridge.

PPS6 s2.41 states: - 'Uses which attract a large number of people should therefore be located within centres that reflect the scale and catchment of the development proposed. The scale of development should relate to the role and catchment of the centre within the wider hierarchy and the catchment served. The aim should be to locate the appropriate type and scale of development in the right type of centre, to ensure that it fits into that centre and that it complements its role and function.' This proposal for Dorridge cannot be held to meet these requirements.

The proposed development would actually reduce the shopping opportunities in Dorridge (and in fact has already done so to some extent). The plan includes four small retail units to replace the 20 existing ones (of which admittedly only 14 were occupied at the start of the process) and one of these four is being promoted as a cafe. This will adversely affect the nature of the centre of Dorridge, converting it into a place where one retailer will monopolise, while the variety and local nature of the existing offerings will be lost, to the detriment of local shoppers. In contrast the 'Planning and Retail Statement' s6.122 suggests, incorrectly, that "Existing retailers will be retained ..." How this will happen when only 3 or 4 units will be available in place of 14 beggars belief!

The impact on traffic flows and the environment

One of the main justifications for a store of the proposed size is 'leakage' of retail expenditure from the Hockley Heath, Dorridge and Knowle areas and the assertion that the planned store would very largely eliminate this. No measure has been given of the retail expenditure that is expected from shoppers living outside these areas and coming to Dorridge in place of shopping at other sites. Shoppers do have personal preferences for the stores they use, supported by the stores' 'loyalty schemes'. Sainsbury shoppers from outside the area would therefore travel to Dorridge to use the new store. This would be particularly so for those who currently use the Poplar Way store in Solihull. The proposed store in Dorridge would be much more convenient for shoppers, with its dedicated parking away from the congested Solihull Town centre, providing that in the process they do not clog up Knowle & Dorridge.

Traffic flows of shoppers leaving the study area to shop at the existing supermarkets are diffuse, leaving from a multitude of locations and taking a variety of routes to a number of different locations. In contrast, the traffic flows of shoppers going to the proposed store from within and without the immediate area will be focussed onto a very small number of roads, all concentrated on the proposed site. In particular, Station Road will take the major increase in traffic flows. This will have a significant effect on the Station Road/Grove Road/Widney Road junction, with most traffic from Bentley Heath and Knowle passing around the roundabout which is forecast to be operating at close to capacity.

The proposed realignment of Station Road in Dorridge at the junction with Poplar Road would mean that traffic exiting Poplar Road intending to turn right would have even greater difficulty than at present, leading at least some to divert via the Station Road/Grove Road/Widney Road junction, thus further increasing the load here.

Delivery vehicles

The impact of delivery/service vehicles on the road network and traffic flows is notably completely absent from the Transport Assessment. The only document that mentions them is the Service Yard Management Plan. This is a major omission as the impact of heavy goods vehicles, especially full size articulated vehicles, is much greater than that of light vehicles.

We are particularly concerned that the plan is for all delivery/service vehicles to leave the M42 at Junction 5, travelling down the A4141 through the village of Knowle and turning right at the Warwick Road/Station Road junction, neither of which have been considered in the traffic survey. They will then travel along Station Road to Dorridge, passing through the very tight roundabout at the Station Road/Grove Road/Widney Road junction, which will be under great pressure already. Observation of the very few large HGVs that currently use this roundabout will readily identify the problems they have negotiating it.

As is well known, most students at Arden School walk to and from school. The great majority of them walk along Station Road which is not the widest main road in the area and has narrow pavements, especially on its southern side, resulting in a great risk of students spilling out onto the roadway. This significant increase in heavy vehicles traversing the narrow Station Road at the time it is in use by students is a clear hazard which must be avoided or, at the very least, greatly mitigated.

Impact on the Knowle Conservation Area

The impact of the increased shopper and, particularly, the delivery/service vehicles on the High Street in Knowle must also be considered, especially in light of its status as a Conservation Area. Note must also be taken of its narrowness and of the awkward bend just north of its junction with Kenilworth Road, where large vehicles frequently have problems. The expectation of the developers is for 12 deliveries per day (including Saturday and Sunday) from Sainsbury's depots plus an unknown number of ad-hoc deliveries. Each of these will involve a return journey through Knowle, resulting in some 24+ trips through the village. The impact of these on the Conservation Area and on the amenity of Knowle residents in general will be significant. Previous concerns over the damage to buildings and the roads in the village caused by heavy goods vehicles will be bound to increase.

PPG 15 (Planning and the Historic Environment) s5.3 states that "In developing policies and projects it is essential, therefore, that local highway and planning authorities take full account of the wider costs, including impact on the historic environment." PPG 15 s5.11 states that "Local highway authorities should take measures to protect the historic environment from the worst effects of traffic."

The Knowle Conservation Area Appraisal, published in September 2007, included several comments regarding the adverse impact that traffic was already having on the Conservation Area. S3.1 mentions "... the effect of constant traffic on the A4141" [the High Street]. The 'Key negative characteristics' in s7.2 includes "Weight of traffic at times along the High Street and Warwick Road". The 'Recommendations' to the Appraisal include in s8.4 "Consideration should be given to further work in the High Street area to provide an integrated package of traffic calming, pedestrian priority and environmental enhancement". All of these points would be directly impacted by this proposal.

Impact on listed buildings

It is accepted that the disturbance and damage caused by traffic to older buildings is exacerbated when heavier vehicles pass close by. There are a number of nationally listed buildings on the proposed route for the delivery vehicles, some very close to the road edge. These include the Grade I listed parish church and the Grade II* Chester House and the similar Guild House. Chester House in particular is very close to the roadway. In addition there are many Grade II listed buildings, as well as many that are locally listed, on the High Street and Warwick Road, all of which could be adversely affected,

All these factors point to a real need to eliminate or at least drastically reduce the impact on Knowle of the additional traffic caused by any major development, such as that proposed, even if that means a radical reduction in the size of the development.

The best option for mitigation of these problems is for all delivery vehicles to travel from Junction 4 of the M42, down the Stratford Road and into Dorridge from Hockley Heath. The Stratford Road is suitable for such vehicles and they would have minimal impact on Hockey Heath and Dorridge. We understand the reason given for not favouring this option is the height of the railway bridge at Dorridge. However this has a 4 metre height limit which would be sufficient for vehicles which meet the European standard for HGVs and which could be used for all deliveries. While this might cause some inconvenience for Sainsbury, we do not see why all the inconvenience (and danger) should be imposed on Knowle. If the problems for Sainsbury of this option are said to be too great, then the clearance under the railway bridge should be increased at their cost.

We reiterate that we see the need to improve Forest Court and a modest supermarket there might well be an acceptable option. However the total impact of the current proposal on Knowle and its surroundings would be such that it cannot possibly be allowed to go ahead as currently planned.

Yours sincerely,

Leighton Jones
On behalf of The Knowle Society
Cc Ward Councillors, DDRA, The Knowle Society Trustee Directors.