

# Liberal Democrats in Kenilworth

## Response to consultation on the Land East of Kenilworth Development Brief

### INTRODUCTION

The ways in which the development of the land east of Kenilworth proceeds over the coming years will be of huge significance to the town, and will affect all current residents as well as the new ones.

If done well, it could contribute to a major transformation of some of the current inadequacies of Kenilworth's local infrastructure and facilities.

If done badly, it risks the creation of a largely separate new population living close to the existing town but not forming an integral part of it.

The most important statement in Chapter 6: Vision and Objectives is: **“The new community will be fully integrated into the existing town...”** The rest of the paragraph then concentrates on highways infrastructure, sustainable travel and public transport, and while these are all hugely important subjects the same vision must be applied to all other aspects of the Development Brief – for example in the provision of community facilities. **The question should not be “*what does the new community need*”, but “*what does the whole town need*” to ensure that the ambitious vision is achieved.**

### KEY CONCERNS

#### Walking and cycling

In terms of linking the site with the rest of the town, heavy reliance is placed in the document on linking with the WCC “Kenilworth Cycle Network” shown in Figure 24 (page 67). However, much of this “network” only exists on paper and is purely aspirational at this stage, with little to no public funds currently dedicated to its delivery. Reference is made to seeking S106 contribution from developers to assist, but we believe that the cycle network for the whole town should be one of the top priorities for CIL and public infrastructure funding as well.

There are significant barriers to safe cycling in Kenilworth at the moment, in particular the shortage of safe routes across the railway line splitting the town, and the dangerous St John's Gyrotory road system. The National Cycle Network route 52 through the town has a gap in the middle, with the ongoing failure to resolve the question of a cycle route through Abbey Fields. The Greenway cycle route to the University of Warwick lacks sufficient connectivity with key areas of the town. The K2L route to Leamington remains unfunded despite many years of lobbying and campaigning.

The Land East of Kenilworth development, and the scale of developer and public infrastructure invest funds it can unlock, represent a unique opportunity to transform Kenilworth into a safe town for walking and cycling for all ages and abilities.

#### Public transport

It is vital that residents of the new development are as closely linked with the existing town as possible, and bus services have a vital role to play in this. What is proposed at the moment is completely inadequate.

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Diverting the Stagecoach X18 service through the site will link new residents with Coventry and Leamington for employment or shopping/leisure purposes, but do nothing to help them get in and out of Kenilworth.

The only town bus link proposed appears to be to extend the route and frequency of the current hourly station link service, which is poorly used and dependent on time-limited public subsidy.

We recommend that urgent consideration is given to diverting the strategic Stagecoach X17 service, by turning off the Leamington Road, going along the southern section of the new slip road as far as Glasshouse Lane, then turning left down Birches Lane and re-joining the existing X17 route at the St. John's Gyratory. This would be a relatively minor diversion, which would link the majority of new residents directly with the town centre via a frequent service, as well as further afield to Coventry and Leamington – therefore making the proposed X18 route diversion probably unnecessary.

#### **Access at southern end of development**

We question the rationale for separating access for the employment area and for the spine road at the southern end of the development, either both off the Leamington Road, or one off the Leamington Road and one directly on to the Thickthorn roundabout. A single entrance to the development, ideally coming directly off the Thickthorn roundabout, would be safer and would help maintain traffic flow on one of the main entrances into the town.

#### **DETAILED COMMENTS**

##### **1. Housing mix (pp 60-63)**

The shortage of affordable housing within the existing housing stock in Kenilworth is one of the major current problems facing the town. Children of current residents find it difficult to stay locally when they want to get on to the housing ladder, while many people employed within the town, especially in the retail and hospitality sectors, cannot afford to live here. It is unclear how the housing mix percentages set out in Table 1 (page 61) meet WDC's overall 40% affordable requirement, which must be the minimum objective for this development.

We agree with the comments about older people's housing and student accommodation, but note that both will require good public transport links, a subject we have highlighted earlier as a key concern.

##### **2. Employment land and employment opportunities (pp 63 – 65)**

We welcome the inclusion of employment land within the development.

However, we disagree with the deliberate separation of the employment land from the residential areas, with no through route for vehicles. While it is right to encourage sustainable travel (walking and cycling) to and from work for new residents living within the development, residents from the existing eastern side of the town can be

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expected to take up these new employment opportunities as well, and may well be travelling by car given the longer distances. Their logical route to/from work may well be using the new spine road through the residential areas, which will keep them away from the congested town centre. With what is proposed, however, they would have to join the Leamington Road for a short distance before leaving it again to access the employment area, adding extra congestion to this already busy road.

The comment about avoiding rat running is not understood. If the concern is about rat running through the whole development, the new spine road will provide this opportunity anyway, however it joins the Leamington Road. This needs to be addressed in the design of the spine road itself, not by creating an artificial barrier between the employment and residential areas.

### 3. Transport (pp 65 – 97)

We strongly support the statement on page 65 that: ***"It is vital that good connectivity is provided from the site to key destinations ..... to ensure that the development provides residents with a choice of sustainable travel options"***.

Turning this into reality in a town like Kenilworth, where the existing road and footpath network places severe constraints on sustainable travel options, will be a major challenge, and will require action and substantial investment not only within the boundaries of the new development but also elsewhere in the town.

#### Walking and cycling

We agree with the "Manual for Streets" providing the design basis for encouraging and prioritising walking and cycling within the site.

In terms of linking the site with the rest of the town, it must be recognised that the majority of the WCC "Kenilworth Cycle Network" shown in Figure 24 (page 67) is purely aspirational at this stage, with little to no public funds currently dedicated to its delivery. Reference is made to seeking S106 contribution from developers to assist, but we believe that the cycle network for the whole town should be one of the top priorities for CIL funding as well.

The cycling provision for the spine road is possibly over-specified. While it is highly desirable to have a cycle track on both sides of the carriageway, each could be a 3 metre shared use track (i.e. walking and cycling) rather than a 4 metre track with separation of use. What is more important is the design of safe crossings (of side roads on to the spine road) with priority for both cyclists and pedestrians.

Shared paths through green areas should not be reduced below 3 metres minimum width. While reference is made to secondary networks being for pedestrian use, policing their non-use by cyclists is generally impracticable.

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#### On and Off Site Highway Infrastructure

We strongly support the general principle of 20 mph speed limits throughout the site. However, the comments about the spine road are a concern, with a mixture of 20 mph and 30 mph sections planned for both the spine road and Glasshouse Lane. We would prefer a single 20 mph speed limit for the whole development, with appropriate traffic calming measures where required.

We prefer the option of access to/from the employment area directly on to the Thickthorn roundabout, to minimise the impact on the existing Leamington Road gateway into Kenilworth. This should also provide easy and safe access for cyclists on to the K2L cycle route between Kenilworth and Leamington, which is a major CIL priority investment.

As stated earlier, we question the need for separate access for the spine road and the employment land. This is especially important if the option of access direct on to the Thickthorn roundabout turns out not to be feasible. To have two access points off the Leamington Road within a short distance of each other would be highly undesirable.

Figure 28 (page 76), the plan for the Crewe Lane/Glasshouse Lane/ Hidcote Road junction, is not understood. It appears to show no entry from Hidcote Road into the junction, but there is no reference to this in the text. Hidcote Road is an important link from eastern Kenilworth out towards Coventry and the A46, and is on the strategic X17 bus route.

We support the idea of a section of Glasshouse Lane becoming the central section of the spine road, but every effort must be made to mitigate the impact of this on existing residents. Our comments about not over-specifying the spine road are particularly relevant here.

The signalisation of the St John's Gyrotory is long overdue, and is a major priority for the town. However, the design in Figure 36 (page 86) appears to have omitted any reference to improvements for cyclists, or integration with the K2L cycle route or the Kenilworth Cycle Network. This is currently a very dangerous junction for cyclists, and in fact a major barrier to many residents cycling into the town centre at all.

The proposals on public transport (pp 89 – 92) have already been commented on.

#### **4. Social and Community Infrastructure (pp 97-101)**

##### Local Centre and Community Facilities

We support the development of these facilities, to support the needs not only of the new site but also of existing residents in the adjacent areas of Kenilworth. We strongly support investment in such decentralised facilities, rather than concentrating further investment in the town centre, for example by building a new civic centre at Smalley Place.

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While mention is made of possible restaurants/cafes within the Local Centre, no comment is made about the possibility of a pub. Eastern Kenilworth is currently poorly served by pubs compared with the rest of the town.

The outline specification for the community centre appears to be based on that for the (currently unbuilt) Whitnash Centre, which may not be appropriate for the Land East of Kenilworth. Any new facility must be planned taking full account of what is planned at the new Secondary School site, and what other community facilities already exist in the town. The earliest possible consultation with and involvement of existing community centre organisations is recommended to ensure a holistic approach is taken to meeting the needs of the whole town, and complementing rather than competing with what we already have. Financial sustainability of the community centre will be crucial in the longer term, even with developer funding to start with, and all opportunities to gain synergies with existing community centre organisations should be explored.

#### **5. Environmental Quality (pp 103 – 116)**

##### Open space provision

We support the general approach set out under Development Principle 5A: Delivery of green infrastructure, play and recreation provision on pp 109-110. In particular, we support the concept of concentrating open space provision as much as possible into a large central park (min 8 ha) within the development, with a range of facilities to attract residents of all ages.

##### Noise and air quality

Given the proximity of the new development to the A46 trunk road, these aspects of the design brief require careful attention if a good quality of life is to be provided to all of our new residents. It is already the case that noise pollution from the Kenilworth By-pass can blight homes and gardens across eastern Kenilworth, particularly when the wind direction is from the south.