

**Cotswold  
Knowle Drive  
SIDMOUTH  
Devon  
EX10 8HW**

**Mr E Freeman  
East Devon District Council  
Knowle  
SIDMOUTH  
Devon  
EX10 8HL**

**18<sup>th</sup> September 2012**

Dear Sir,

**Application 12/1847/MOUT by East Devon District Council**

As Chair of the Knowle Residents' Association I am writing on behalf of the Association to object in the strongest possible terms to the above planning application by your Council.

The Knowle Residents' Association was formed earlier this year in order to share information and to protect and enhance our neighbourhood. We have an adopted Constitution, a Steering Group and some 65 Members from Knowle Drive, Knowle Gardens, and nearby properties in Station Road and Broadway. Many of our Members are elderly. All of them are appalled and feel badly let-down by your Council's proposals.

Knowle Residents have enjoyed living with the Council as our neighbours and in the security of knowing that we have a beautiful area of public open space on our doorsteps which the Local Plan designates as Recreation land. All this is now set to change forever if the planning application is approved and the development goes ahead. Instead of peace and quiet we will have noise and intrusion, instead of beautiful trees and gardens and wildlife we will have houses and traffic and visual intrusion. All our properties will be affected to a greater or lesser extent. This is not what the Knowle Residents voted for at the last election.

If this all sounds very “nimby” then I would assure you that we are equally concerned about the damage which the development would cause to the beautiful town of Sidmouth. Members of the Association have spoken to many, many visitors during the past few weeks. They come to Sidmouth over and over again because of the peace and quiet. They are outraged, as are the local residents (as your own Community Engagement exercise has shown) at the loss of the gardens, the loss of visitor car-parking and the travesty of building anything on the scenic approach to the Town.

Residents of other towns in East Devon feel that this would be a precedent, the thin edge of the wedge and that their parks and gardens will be next. A lot of distrust will be created if this proposal is allowed.

As you can see, the Residents feel very emotional about this proposal. Whilst Members of the Planning Committee may empathise with our point of view I feel that we need to explain the reasons for our objection in greater detail.

**Development Plan.** The application is contrary to the existing Development Plan ie the East Devon Local Plan 2006. Part of the site is shown as Recreation land. Policy RE1 (Retention of Land for Sport and Recreation) provides that proposals that would result in the loss of open space currently or previously used for recreation and/or sports uses, play areas or playing fields will not be permitted unless certain criteria are met which do not apply in this instance.

Paragraph 13.121 states that Sidmouth has an overall under-supply of formal recreation land.

Paragraph 13.123 recognises that there is a shortfall of car parking provision in Sidmouth given the scale of use of the town centre particularly during the holiday season. The Local Plan also notes the “park and walk” scheme to encourage visitors to the town centre at weekends to leave their cars at the Knowle car park.

**National Planning Policy Framework.** The proposed development is contrary to both the spirit and the letter of the National Planning Policy Framework. In particular: it is not a sustainable development; it fails to contribute to protecting and enhancing the natural, built and historic environment; it does not help to improve biodiversity; it fails to use natural resources prudently.

It contravenes the spirit of resisting the development of residential gardens where this would cause harm to the local area. It directly contravenes paragraph 74 of the NPPF which provides that existing open space should not be built on (other than in circumstances which do not apply in this instance). It fails to protect and enhance the natural and local environment.

**Wildlife.** The proposed development would have an adverse effect on wildlife in the Park including bats, badgers, buzzards, rabbits and foxes.

**Trees.** The proposed development would involve the loss, and have an adverse impact on the setting of a further number of fine specimen trees which are included within the recently launched Sidmouth Arboretum and located in an area which is subject to a Tree Preservation Order.

**Road Safety and Traffic.** The junction between the southern end of Knowle Drive and Station Road is substandard. This section of Knowle Drive is narrow, single-tracked, winding and without footways. Access between the (listed) stone pillars is so tight that accidents (not necessarily reported) have occurred. The proposed development would be detrimental to highway safety.

I am pleased to say that the Council drivers currently using the gardeners' yard are courteous and professional drivers and are used to meeting elderly pedestrians and other vehicles on Knowle Drive. The same could not be guaranteed in the future from the drivers of miscellaneous traffic associated with new housing development.

**Footpaths.** An application has been submitted to register a number of footpaths across the site as public footpaths. These would need either to be legally closed or diverted to potentially less commodious and less attractive routes. A footpath through the middle of a housing estate is not a particularly attractive alternative.

**Buildings.** The proposed development would require the demolition of the existing offices and fine former hotel building. No serious attempt has been made to find alternative uses for these buildings. There would also be a detrimental impact on the setting of the Folly which is a listed building.

**Amenities.** The proposed development would have a severe adverse effect on the amenities of homes and the character of the area.

**Parking.** The proposed development involves the loss of weekend park and walk car parking which is a valuable asset in desperately short supply in Sidmouth, particularly for visitors on whom the Town relies.

**Public Open Space.** The proposed development would remove a large percentage (at least a quarter) of the public open space at Knowle including at least half of the southern gardens. These areas have been enjoyed over many years by very many local residents and visitors of all ages and involving a wide variety of interests and activities.

**Jobs** The proposed development would entail a net loss of 350 jobs from Sidmouth. This would be a tragedy at the time when a government priority is job creation and retention and the Town relies on the economic spin-off.

**Precedent** If the application were approved it would provide a precedent for the development of other public open space land in East Devon.

**Tourism** The loss of the carparking and parkland would have a negative impact on tourism in Sidmouth.

**Economy** The loss of the Council's headquarters would have a negative impact on the economic welfare of Sidmouth.

On 14<sup>th</sup> July a survey was carried out of people who had also visited your Council's display in the Market Place, Sidmouth. A total of 160 responses were received from residents of Sidmouth, residents of other areas in East Devon and visitors. Of the people surveyed, 95% either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the Council's proposals. The same percentage, 95%, agreed that the loss of a significant area of public gardens will be bad for residents and visitors to Sidmouth. 91.2% agreed or strongly agreed that the loss of a significant area of weekend car parking will be a problem for Sidmouth. 95.6% agreed or strongly agreed that unrestricted access should continue over all the park and gardens. Whilst these statistics may not constitute a material planning consideration they clearly demonstrate the deep public unhappiness with the Council's proposals.

In conclusion I hope that the application will be considered on its merits and not, as many fear, out of a desire to liquidate an irreplaceable asset which properly belongs to the Community.

Yours faithfully,

(Diana Hurn, Chair of the Knowle Residents' Association)