



***AN OPEN LETTER TO CLLR GARY HOPKINS –
the locally elected Bristol City Councillor for
Knowle,***

***Our response to your more recent public
statements about Knowle Neighbourhood
Planning Group (KNPG) - and our work
responding to plans out for consultation to
redevelop Broadwalk Shopping Centre.
Dec 2022***

December 21st 2022

Dear Cllr Hopkins,

Like much of the Knowle community, we cannot help but notice the increasing public hostility that you hold for us a resident planning forum - and as our locally elected councillors.

Your recent KCP newsletter (November, 2022) and letter to the South Bristol Voice (Cllr Hopkins, Dec 2022) now leaves us with no choice but to respond to the following plainly asserted statements about Knowle Neighbourhood Planning Group (KNPG).

**1. KNPG is anti-development of the Broadwalk Shopping Centre site.
THIS IS NOT TRUE.**

In fact, KNPG welcomes and supports the redevelopment of Broadwalk Shopping Centre – and the provision of additional housing on the site (particularly affordable housing for local people). We welcome the investment and regeneration of Broadwalk and are committed to its future redevelopment.

KNPG would like the developers to bring forward better plans - building fewer or no high-rise blocks and reducing density with a smaller number of flats. We want to see more retail space as well as more resident and visitor parking spaces, amongst other things. We are one of many stakeholders saying this.

KNPG know that developers review plans and resubmit them when needed. Repeatedly stating that Broadwalk will become “derelict” because KNPG is advocating for something better for Knowle is incorrect and misleading. It also scares local people.

In fact, KNPG have met the developers 5 times in 2022. We believe we have had frank and open conversations with the developers, challenging them in some areas whilst being listened to in others. We have also seen some changes made to the plans now in front of the public and our local community that reflect our feedback.

2. KNPG threatened to walk out of a meeting with developers if you, Cllr Hopkins, were present. THIS IS NOT TRUE.

You may remember that you turned up uninvited to a private meeting that KNPG had organised with the developers in Feb 2022. When challenging your unexpected attendance, KNPG proposed that we establish a date to meet with you separately in order to ensure the planned meeting went ahead. However, our attempts to do so after that meeting were rejected or ignored.

KNPG would have done exactly the same thing if any politician, Council Officer or Stakeholder had turned up, without invitation to that or any other private meeting held with the developers

KNPG is an independent and non-political community group. We value that principle as it means we are more able to advocate clearly for Knowle.

In recent months, KNPG have met with Green, Labour, Conservative and Lib Dems councillors who represent areas neighbouring Knowle whose residents use Broadwalk Shopping Centre. None have asked or presumed to attend our meetings with the developers. All have been generous with their time, offered us advice, listened to our and resident concerns and shared their concerns about the widely perceived over development of the Broadwalk site – and for some, their opposition to this particular set of planning proposals.

KNPG continues to be more than willing to sit down and meet with both you and Cllr Davies as our Knowle elected councillors in order to discuss the common ground between us and share feedback with you from local people.

3. KNPG is made up of “Labour Party Leaders” operating with “political reasons”. THIS IS NOT TRUE.

In fact, almost all of the 12 local Knowle residents in our core group are NOT members of any political party (and yes, we have asked them as a result of your statement).

Party political membership does not - and has never - played a part in KNPG internal or external discussions, public positions or views. Being independent and apolitical is a clear statement in our terms of reference – and in our public descriptions of our role. We repeatedly state that. We are not apologetic about any of KNPG’s volunteers being members of political parties – it is their right.

KNPG deplore being used by you as a political football to score goals against political rivals of the Knowle Community Party.

It is upsetting for many to see Knowles elected councilors deflecting attention from the real issues that local people are raising about the Broadwalk Shopping Centre redevelopment.

Only 1 KNPG core group member is a member of a political party when all were asked in Nov 2022 – and that person is not in any formal leadership position in their political party.

Due to personal commitments people come and go from KNPGs core group. We now know in a 3-month period earlier in 2022, 5 people (out of 14 then) were members of two political parties. Membership was split fairly equally between those two political parties at that time.

It is also the case that no one in KNPG is a member of your new political party Knowle Community Party (KCP). It seems to have formed in the months after you were elected as Liberal Democrats in Knowle in May 2021 and that you left shortly after your election.

**4. KNPG is “spreading scare stories” and have “misled residents”.
THIS IS NOT TRUE.**

KNPG is very fortunate to have the support of local residents who are themselves architects, surveyors, planners, builders etc. and who are all experts in their field. They have assisted us to understand the detail provided by the developers - and more importantly critically assess the planning proposals now out for consultation. Consequently, the formal positions that KNPG hold are evidence based.

Many more residents have shared with KNPG what they think and why – and where there is an evidence base to support those concerns we reflect that as part of our stated role as a Neighbourhood Planning Forum.

The advice we give to residents on how to explain their views to the City Council is based on an informed understanding of how the planning process works.

KNPG does not knowingly mislead residents or anyone else, refutes that allegation clearly and will continue to do so.

KNPG is assessing information everyday about what the Broadwalk planning proposals mean for all of us in Knowle. We welcome other views (expert or otherwise) and information that constructively challenges or adds to our ability to accurately share information locally or respond to the planning proposals now out for consultation.

**5. KNPG is a community group that as Knowle’s elected councillor you are now publicly advising residents you will not work with.
THIS POSITION IS NOT SUPPORTED BY THE CODE OF CONDUCT YOU
HAVE SIGNED AS AN ELECTED COUNCILLOR**

In fact, in opposition to this statement as our local councillor you invited KNPG to speak at your public meeting in June 2022. We accepted your invitation and

participated in good faith, but challenged your view that KNPG is “anti-development”.

KNPG was therefore particularly surprised and sad to read in November and December 2022 that you will not work with KNPG, despite the commitments that you made when signing the Code of Conduct of a Bristol City ‘Councillor. In signing it, you commit to

The Public Life Principle of Objectively in your role as an elected Councillor to *“act impartially and fairly, taking decisions on merit...without discrimination or bias”*.

KNPG struggle to believe you are both being impartial or objective where our role, views and activities are concerned?

Respecting Others including *“Always treating people with respect, including the organisations and public you engage with”*.

KNPG do not believe we are being treated with respect.

Being Open *“listening to the interests of all parties”* and *“taking all relevant information into consideration, remaining objective and making decision on merit”*.

KNPG do not believe we are being listened to as an interested party, or the many views of local residents we reflect and advocate for. In fact, you are stating you are not open and formally closed to this set of interests – and also consistently misrepresent KNPG’s position too.

Offering leadership to Knowle with a duty *“to enable and improve community cohesion”*

KNPG believe it is divisive and confrontational to publicly and consistently single us out the way that you have done. We do not understand how any of your positions on the issues identified in this letter contribute to you enabling community cohesion in Knowle as our elected councilors?

In addition, City Council guidance encourages developers to work with KNPG on planning applications affecting Knowle. We are one of 45 planning forums across Bristol that do this through the NPN (Neighbourhood Planning Network).

KNPG do not think it is unreasonable to expect our own Bristol City local councillor in Knowle to do the same – and is the case in other local Neighbourhood Planning Forums across Bristol

We respectfully state again that we at KNPG are more than willing to sit down with you and Cllr Davies from KCP to share views and hopefully reach a better relationship that truly benefits the Knowle community. We hope you agree that is what Knowle deserves. We may have different views in some areas but we also have common ground on others with regard to Broadwalk’s redevelopment.

From your concerned members of KNPG.