

Mr A Wells
Chairman of Cherington and Stourton
Village Hall Committee
Church Cottage
Cherington
Shipston on Stour
Warwickshire
CV36 5HS

5 May 2011

Dear Mr Wells

Proposed Village Hall, Cherington and Stourton

On receipt of instructions concerning the proposed village hall at Cherington I am writing to you in your capacity as Chairman of the Cherington and Stourton Village Hall Committee. If I may introduce myself: I am a member of the Royal Town Planning Institute with 27 years' experience as a planning officer working for Stratford on Avon District Council. Since leaving the council in 2007 I have worked as a self-employed planning consultant dealing with all aspects of planning. I regularly submit planning applications to Stratford on Avon District Council and many other local planning authorities.

I understand the intention is to seek permission for a small amount of enabling residential development on the site of the existing village hall to fund the cost of developing the new hall. There are local concerns that developing a new village hall with a limited amount of residential enabling development will increase the likelihood of other development being permitted on neighbouring sites. These concerns have been expressed by at least one local resident on the Cherington and Stourton website. I have read the comments of concern on the website.

I have been asked me to provide an independent opinion on the likelihood that planning permission would be granted for development of neighbouring land if the village hall proposals, including any small scale enabling development, were to be successful.

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It is very clear from an analysis of current local and national planning policy that the village hall proposals will not increase the likelihood of planning permission being granted for development of neighbouring land. There are a number of reasons for this which I set out below.

Current local planning policy is set out in the Stratford on Avon District Local Plan which permits development in accordance with a hierarchy of settlements within the District.

New residential developments are directed to the larger settlements such as Stratford upon Avon, Wellesbourne and Shipston on Stour. In smaller settlements such as Cherington and Stourton developments are restricted to affordable housing that meet identified local needs. There is a strong policy presumption against new open market housing development in Cherington and Stourton. This policy presumption against development applies with equal force regardless of whether the new village hall proposals and enabling development are accepted.

There may be local concerns that allowing a small amount of enabling residential development would set a precedent for permitting further development on neighbouring land. This would not be the case. The special circumstances that would apply to the development of the hall and associated enabling development would not apply to development proposals on neighbouring sites, therefore the hall and enabling development would not set a precedent for further development in the area.

I note from the village website a suggestion of potential for housing development as a form of infilling on land alongside the new hall and alongside the existing hall site. I do not consider either of these two suggested developments constitute infilling, which most planning authorities define as development of a gap in a built up frontage. Local planning policy does not, in any case, identify infill development as an accepted reason for allowing housing development in the smaller rural settlements such as Cherington.

The current local plan is soon to be replaced by new planning policy known as the Local Development Framework (LDF). A key part of this new policy framework will be the Core Strategy document that will establish the amount and location of new development that will be encouraged throughout the District until 2026. In 2010 Stratford on Avon District Council published a draft Core Strategy. This document is currently in the process of review, mainly because of the change in Government in 2010 and the abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy. The draft document has given a clear indication of the thinking of the planning authority and that future planning policy is unlikely to identify smaller settlements such as Cherington or Stourton as being suitable for open market speculative housing development. This is to be expected because the planning authority does not consider smaller settlements to be sustainable locations for new development. It is very likely therefore that the current policy that prevents open market housing in Cherington and Stourton will continue as policy in the new LDF.

There may be concerns that the Localism Bill currently passing through parliament will introduce changes to the planning system that will make it easier to obtain planning permission for development alongside the new village hall. The intention of the Localism Bill is to give local communities greater control over planning and

housing decisions. The Bill was published in December 2010 and will only be put into practice when parliament agrees to the proposed changes. The Bill will be discussed at length by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. I expect there will be many changes to the Bill before it becomes law. There are many new ideas in the Localism Bill. A key change proposed for planning is the introduction of a concept called neighbourhood planning where local communities will be able to draw up a “neighbourhood development plan”. It is this type of document that is most likely to affect planning decision at a local level. In Cherington and Stourton I anticipate any such document will reinforce existing planning policies that greatly restrict new housing development. The Bill also introduces the concept of a “community right to build”. This will allow local community groups to bring forward small developments of homes, businesses and shops. Whilst this new approach appears to indicate a loosening of planning control in rural areas, the underlying principle is that local developments will need to be supported by local communities. For this reason therefore, whatever the final form of the Localism Bill, it is very unlikely to result in locally unpopular speculative housing development in Cherington and Stourton, whether associated with the new village hall or otherwise.

Local planning policies support the provision of a new village hall. It may be possible to submit a case for a small amount of enabling development as the only means by which the hall can be provided. There is no policy basis whatsoever for the planning authority to allow further housing development either alongside the new village hall or on land on the opposite side of the road. In relation to the village hall proposals in Cherington and Stourton, the concepts of infilling and precedent would not be sufficient reason to permit further development as a consequence of the hall and enabling development.

I hope that this assessment clarifies the likely planning consequences of constructing a new village hall with a limited amount of enabling development.

Please give me a call if you would like clarification of any of the issues covered in this letter.

Yours sincerely

Steve

Steve Bromley MRTPI, DipTP