

Objection to 24/03218/F (Change of Use of The Bell Inn Public House).
Comments from Keep Hanwell Village Rural Action Group.

Dear CDC,

Please don't accept the applicant's lazy assertion that The Bell Inn is not a cherished asset of the local community, and biased assessment that it cannot be viable with its current land use. Living in a neighbouring north Oxfordshire village we are very keen to see our pubs retained as pubs. You don't have to accept the assertion that it's inevitable that The Bell Inn will need to have an alternative use. There are examples that have bucked the trend of a reducing numbers of village pubs, and there is an appetite amongst the local community to retain The Bell Inn as part of the fabric of our community. We should be given the opportunity.

We have seen other nearby villages lose their pubs. Last year the Planning Committee approved conversion of The North Arms in Wroxton to residential use, in part due to the worsening condition of the property at the hands of the developer. The Bell Inn building is currently in good repair and there is no imperative for approving change of use at this time in order to prevent it falling into disrepair. Each case must be taken on its merits and in this case there is not an objective assessment that proves The Bell Inn to be no longer financially viable in the long term.

In support of refusal of this change of use application, there are numerous planning policies and guidance, both national and local, that are material considerations relevant to this application.

NPPF Section 6 paragraph 88 states "Planning policies and decisions should enable: d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship."

Section 8. paragraph 97 states "To provide the social, recreational and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should: a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments."

The Cherwell Local Plan retained policy S29 maintains that PROPOSALS THAT WILL INVOLVE THE LOSS OF EXISTING VILLAGE SERVICES WHICH SERVE THE BASIC NEEDS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY WILL NOT NORMALLY BE PERMITTED. The planning framework confirms that "The District Council recognises the importance of village services, particularly the local shop and pub, to the local community and will seek to resist the loss of such facilities whenever possible. However, it is also recognised that it will be difficult to resist the loss of such facilities when they are proven to be no longer financially viable in the long term."

The developers financial viability report overly talks down the prospects of The Bell Inn being run as a going concern. It does not include any survey of local residents as potential patrons of the pub, as has been done by the Save The Bell Inn Group. We do not feel it has been proven beyond doubt that The Bell Inn cannot be financially viable.

It should also be noted that CDC have promoted the development of public houses, consistent with national and local policies, through approval of new housing estates. This is seen with the Hanwell Arms (located in the estate known as Hanwell Fields, built over fields previously farmed from Hanwell). It would be very churlish and counter-intuitive for CDC to now acquiesce to the reduction of public houses that provide a service to existing communities. Indeed, the role of the planning

authority is to stand up to laissez faire market forces, and help retain our assets of community value. You must balance the needs and vitality of local communities in villages as well as towns against profit-orientated developers. This proposal is one of many that is increasing the threat to traditional village pubs, alongside the threat of sprawling housing that also threatens the rural identity of north Oxfordshire villages.

We urge you to refuse this change of use application and show your support for communities of North Oxfordshire.

Yours sincerely,
Keep Hanwell Village Rural Action Group