



**Alistair Burt**

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August 28<sup>th</sup> 2009

Mr Peter Bull  
Senior Planner  
Bedford Borough Council  
Town Hall  
Bedford  
MK41 1SJ

Dear Mr Bull

**Planning Application 09/01516: Five Bells, Riseley**

Following representations and after attending a meeting in the village, I would like to add my support to those opposing a change of use for the Five Bells, in order for it to retain its character as a public house.

The council will be aware, and I believe is sympathetic, to the issues facing rural villages within the area and the continuing loss of facilities. In all too many cases once an amenity is gone, it remains lost, and the character of the village is adversely affected.

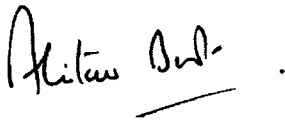
This is a case in point. Whilst acknowledging that Bedfordshire is far from being alone in facing pub closures, I am aware that an offer was made to Greene King by a local prospective purchaser with a track record of pub management which indicates that this is still a viable commercial opportunity. If this is the case then there should not be a change of use prematurely, and a further chance should be offered to keep the pub.

There are other factors I would ask the Committee to consider. The way in which a pub is run has much impact on its success. Local opinion appears almost unanimous that previous recent tenants did not act in a way likely to maximise use or income, nor was there sufficient investment put into the premises. Again, a chance should be given to see what can be done with a different approach.

There are no equivalent premises in the village. The Fox and Hounds is a first rate restaurant with its speciality steaks, and has been well built up by its owner to be a real feature of north Bedfordshire, and rightly attracts custom from far and wide. But it cannot provide all the services a 'local' would do. I am particularly concerned at the threat to local sports teams, who cannot now access what the Five Bells used to provide, as happens in so many places all over the country, namely the facilities and refreshments that go with a fixture. Loss of such teams, often with lengthy histories and much to contribute to village life, would make a huge difference to Riseley, and a change of use would make this more likely.

Accordingly can I ask the Committee to support its own commitment to sustainable communities as set out in the Council's planning guidance, and the needs of the Parish Council, by rejecting the application and making very clear that a viable pub in the village, with a character suitable for predominantly local use and catering for local village needs, will remain part of Riseley's life for the foreseeable future.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alistair Burt', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Alistair Burt MP