



The
countryside
charity

Worcestershire

From Dr Stuart Cumella

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Martley

Worcester

Response to planning application M/ 23/01711

CPRE Worcestershire strongly opposes this application for the following reasons:

1. Excessive increase in the size of a small country village.

This is the third speculative planning application in Martley within a year. One (for 83 dwellings) was approved and is under construction, while a second (for 52 dwellings) has received outline approval. The 2021 Census showed that Martley Parish had a population of 1386 living in 586 households. About half live in the village itself. This application, together with those already approved, would therefore expand the village by about two-thirds. This would place a major strain on local traffic, on schools, and on other community facilities. This problem would be made worse by the inappropriate location for the proposed development.

2. Inappropriate location

The proposed estate would be in open countryside, well away from the development boundary, as defined in the Martley, Knightwick and Doddenham Neighbourhood Plan. Like the two approved developments, it would be convenient for access to the playing field and burial ground, but beyond ordinary walking distance (800 metres) from the schools, and sports centre. There are no cycleways in the village and public transport is not available near the site of the proposed development. There is limited employment in Martley and only a vestigial bus service that is inconvenient for travel to work. Indeed, the 2021 Census found no-one in the parish used public transport to travel to work. The nearest railway station is eight miles away in Worcester, and Martley is 13 miles from the nearest motorway junction. Five roads leave the village, all B-roads and all narrow lanes. The application, if approved, would therefore promote greater motor vehicle use for destinations within the village, to places of employment and for journeys to supermarkets. The proposed housing would therefore be a carpark-to-carpark development, increasing traffic through unsuitable roads. The Traffic Survey commissioned by the developer estimates 97 vehicle journeys/hour at morning peak periods from the three developments in addition to existing traffic. The consequent total vehicle usage is not estimated, but would probably amount to an unbroken stream of traffic, normal for an urban area but not for a country village. The consequence can be seen in the photograph below, which shows the main road to Worcester and the schools

at peak times. Traffic from the proposed estate (as well as the two which have already been approved) would go down this road to the schools and to Worcester.



3. Loss of valued local views

The response by the Urban Design Team notes the significant loss of landscape to the community should this application be approved. It would have the effect of making the village feel more enclosed and diminish valued views of the Iron Age fort at Berrow Hill. It should be noted that the site of the proposed development falls within the proposed extension to the Malvern Hills National Landscape agreed by the Partnership Board and currently being reviewed by Natural England. Needless to say, it is also a loss of yet more of our best and most-valued agricultural land. Research by CPRE in 2022 found that 14,500 hectares of the country's best agricultural land, which could grow at least 250,000 tonnes of vegetables a year, has been permanently lost to development in just 12 years. This was all the result of incremental planning decisions.

4. Impact on local drainage

This planning application, like many others, assumes that surface water can be managed by installing an attenuation pond at a low point in the proposed development, but does not take account of where the water drains thereafter. Martley is built on Triassic sandstone, identified by the British Geological Survey as a principal location for aquifers in Worcestershire. Flooding has become increasingly common in Martley in recent years and is probably a consequence of surface water drainage from local housebuilding. The

five lanes that leave the village all go uphill, and the only drainage is a small brook. Heavy rainfall raises the level of subsurface water to flood Hastings Close, Hollins Lane, and the gardens of houses in parts of St Peters Drive. The cellar of the Crown public house and even the maintenance pit in the garage are flooded at such times. It is therefore recommended that no further development be approved in Martley until there has been a wider investigation of water levels and drainage across the entire village.

5. Other problems with the application

Confidence in the application is much reduced by its belief that Martley:

“...is situated approximately 3km north-west of the town of Pershore and less than 10km south-east of the city centre of Worcester. Bus stops are located on Main Road, in close proximity to the site, with services to between Pershore, Evesham and Wick. Additionally, the site is less than 3km from Pershore Station which is served by Great Western Trains. There are frequent trains through Pershore providing further connections to London Paddington, Worcester Shrub Hill, Great Malvern, Hereford, and beyond.” (paragraph 6.11).

The planning statement (paragraph 3.7) states that “It is clear that there has been a significant under-delivery of housing across the South Worcestershire area.” This is untrue. The latest Housing Delivery Test shows that between 2019 and 2022, South Worcestershire completed 145% of the target set by the standard method (4789 homes delivered compared to 3294 required). An updated calculation of the five-year land-supply was completed by the South Worcestershire councils in December 2023, based on data up to March 2023. This found a five-year land-supply for Malvern Hills of 3.31 (excluding dwellings in the Wider Worcester Area). This is indeed below the target of four years required by the NPPF for planning authorities which have submitted a local plan for examination, but there have several major planning applications approved in the last 11 months including those in Leigh Sinton, Arley and Martley itself.

Footnote 27 of the NPPF proposes that:

“... Strategic policies should promote an effective use of land and optimise site densities in accordance with chapter 11. This is to ensure that homes are built in the right places, to prioritise brownfield and other under-utilised urban sites, to utilise existing infrastructure, and to allow people to live near the services they rely on, making travel patterns more sustainable.”

This represents a significant change in policy towards the densification in urban areas rather than the construction of suburban-style housing estates dispersed throughout the countryside. It is hoped that this policy will prevent further unsuitable planning developments of the kind proposed in this planning application.

Stuart Cumella

29th February 2024