

COUNCIL WANT TO BUILD 160 PERMANENT PREFABS

C.T. April 20, 1946

CHRISTCHURCH Town Council's unanimous decision at its meeting last week to apply to the Minister of Health for permission to build 160 permanent prefabricated bungalows similar to the one erected by Councillor Kermode in Endfield Road, provoked one of the liveliest discussions heard in the Council Chamber for some time.

The Government's policy of restricting the issue of licences to private enterprise builders so that a four to one building ratio can be established in favour of local authorities was strongly defended by Councillor Bingham, who described recent statements in the Press about the desire to kill private enterprise as "absolute poppycock."

To strengthen their case for the erection of the 160 bungalows, the Council is to ask the Ministry to receive a deputation.

In submitting the resolution, Councillor Slinn, chairman of the Housing Committee, said he wanted to make it quite clear that Councillor Kermode had no proprietary rights in regard to it and gained no financial advantage from it. "As you know," he continued, "the Ministry have decided that the erection of houses by local authorities shall be in the proportion of four to one against those erected by private builders. At the moment the position is the other way round, except that in Christchurch the Council's number is none at all, and we have issued licences to private builders for considerably more houses than the Council is likely to erect for some considerable time."

The Council, he continued, were anxious to implement the demands of the Ministry. At their last meeting they issued licences for 40 private dwellings, but it was obvious that while the Ministry's ruling remained in force the licences would not be approved by the Minister. This attempt by the Council to provide 160 dwellings, if approved, would enable the 40 licences issued to private builders to be implemented, as it would give the Council the necessary four to one ratio. "In order that the case may be made out as well as possible we are proposing to ask the Ministry to receive a deputation," added Councillor Slinn.

HOUSES FOR LETTING.

Seconding the resolution, Councillor Bingham said he intended to deal with the position from the point of view of the Council "and not as a leader of the local Labour Party." He contended that he had never been against private enterprise building, but he found that out of all the bungalows and houses built by private enterprise it was fair to say that eight out of ten were not built for letting.

"There has been plenty of dirt thrown up since this Government came into power," declared Councillor Bingham. "It was stated in the Press that Mr. Bevan intended to kill private enterprise. That's a falsehood. We have learned during this present week the reason why Mr. Bevan stopped local authorities from going ahead in the guise of private enterprise. It was because he found that out of 1,500 local authorities 100 were on his black list as they were building for sale only."

AGAINST "PRIVATE PIRACY."

After referring to the fact that in Christchurch there were between 600 and 700 applicants for houses, Councillor Bingham said he would like to ask private enterprise what it had done to reduce that figure. "Private enterprise can be beneficial and I don't object to it, but what I do object to is private piracy," said Councillor Bingham.

Reverting once again to the "statements in the Press that the Government is out to kill private enterprise," Councillor Bingham described them as "absolute poppycock" and added, "I object to statements which are mischievous." He claimed that the pre-fab. houses which were so much criticised, was a legacy from the Minister of Health in the Coalition Government.

After asserting that he had always tried to play the game with anybody politically opposed to himself, Councillor Bingham declared: " If we have failed as a local authority to house the people, the whole Council is to blame, because what we should have done was to have prepared our schemes years ago and not wait for the end of the war.

ROTTEN CONDITIONS.

" The present Government is always being attacked because it is not playing up to private enterprise, but I am going to say that private enterprise in the building industry cannot get its workers back because of the rotten conditions in the industry before the war. We have got the Spring here now and the nice weather, and if private enterprise is to help us house the people we have got to get all builders in Christchurch on the job instead of letting one or two monopolise the contracts." Councillor Vaughan expressed his dislike of the political tone of Coun. Bingham's remarks, and asked why the Government did not compel private enterprise builders to build houses for letting.

Councillor Barnes said that he had gone into the details of the Kermode house pretty fully and he thought it was the type which would meet their need for producing houses quickly. As regards the suggestion by Coun. Bingham that they should endeavour to get the help of all builders in Christchurch, he thought they would be only too pleased to help in any workable scheme.

A PROVISIO.

Councillor McArdle suggested that private enterprise might put up a few houses with the proviso that they be let for, say, five years.

Councillor Mrs. Wright wanted to know what the Borough Surveyor's opinion was of the Kermode bungalow, and in reply the Borough Surveyor said that it complied with the building bye-laws and the requirements of the Ministry of Health. He would like to see a better type of wall board used both inside and out, and he understood that it was intended to use a better type as soon as it was available.

In winding up the debate, Councillor Slinn remarked that he was not concerned with politics; all he was concerned about was getting houses.

After the resolution had been carried, Councillor Kermode said that if the Ministry approved the scheme he wanted to see every builder in the town tender for the building of them. "If the Ministry decides that this house can be built only by direct labour I shall be pleased to offer my services in an advisory capacity, and to take my coat off if necessary to help provide homes for the people," he said.

He went on to say that private enterprise could not compete with subsidised local authorities, but he would be pleased to build to let if he could get the same subsidy as the local authority.

THE HOUSING SITE.

An explanation of the plan of the proposed site for the 160 permanent prefabricated bungalows was given by the Borough Engineer. The land, for the purchase of which negotiations are going on with Sir George Meyrick, extends to approximately 20 acres off Somerford Road near Purewell Hill.

The Borough Engineer stated there was room for 600 housing sites and provision was made for eight acres of open space. Certain parts had been reserved for churches and schools and spaces would be left for communal buildings. There was also a site for an hotel.

In reply to Councillor McArdle, the Borough Engineer said that the land also adjoined Burton Road and that the frontage to Somerford Road was to be used for shop sites.