

Development plan for wharf site rejected

C.T. December 24, 1971

A "JUNKYARD, a great ghastly mountainous collection of broken down sheds ... or a boatyard in its appropriate setting by the river."

These were the opposing descriptions from different sides of the argument at Christchurch Council's meeting on Tuesday.

The argument was about whether Avon Wharf, by Waterloo Bridge, Christchurch, should be kept as a boatyard, or whether its owners should be able to replace it with nine houses, five flats and garages.

The planning committee was by majority preservationist; it recommended that the application should be refused.

Some found the whole thing rather confusing. For example, Ald. Eric Spreadbury seconded refusal of the change to housing. He hoped the council would "seize the opportunity to put some character back into Christchurch". Some residential development was needed.

He shuddered to imagine the traffic congestion that would result from further industrial development.

WITHDREW

At this point he withdrew his seconding; he was obviously speaking against the recommendation. Coun. W. F. S. Freestone stepped in to second instead. But after listening to Coun. John Morgan's condemnation of the planners recommendation, he changed his mind.

Coun. Morgan began by asking a few questions. They elicited the information that "mixed development" was allowed at Avon Wharf in the Purewell Plan; and that the architects' panel had thought the proposed houses were "really good."

In the planning committee, said Coun. Morgan, there have been a majority of one to refuse the application.

The reasons for refusal were that the density proposed would have an adverse effect on the character of the area and be detrimental to adjoining buildings; that the design of the buildings was unsuitable; and that the creation of a new estate road to serve this amount of development on this part of Bridge Street, adjoining the bridge to the east where visibility is severely restricted would cause danger to and interference with the free flow of traffic on this heavily trafficked road.

NOT HIGH

Nine houses and five flats on one and a half acres was not a high density, he said. New homes would not be out of character with existing houses there. To suggest that the cars going to and from these houses would cause worse congestion than commercial vehicles, lorries and trailers, going to a boatyard was nonsense

The view on the approach from Purewell was of decrepit buildings, then ghastly gasholders, then Avon Wharf—a charming cottage and the building next to the bridge, both of which would be retained in the new proposed development. But at the back of these were corrugated iron sheds, some green, some unpainted, looking rather like a junkyard.

“If this refusal were to go to appeal the council would be a laughing stock.” He put an amendment that planning permission be granted, subject to conditions.

Coun. Leonard Pearson thought the plan for houses and flats an excellent one. A great amount of redevelopment was needed in Christchurch in the not-too-distant future. The council's problem would be to decide at what point the property had reached the end of its useful life and should be demolished.

PRESERVED

Coun. A. R. Payne didn't want houses on the site. "The character of Christchurch must as far as possible be preserved. We have a duty to ensure this, and not let the character of this town be eroded away.

Past mistakes had allowed the irresponsible destruction of the environment and were a constant source of embarrassment, he said.

What was inappropriate about a boatyard on the banks of the river? In spite of the efforts of the planners for conservation, there were some who would sweep the riverbank clear to see a block of flats there. The plan was overdevelopment and the town couldn't afford to be overdeveloped any more.

IMPOSSIBLE

If this application were approved, the council would find it impossible to refuse further residential development along the riverbank.

Coun. Tom Staniforth was against residential development. The site was next to a humpbacked bridge — it was a miracle the buses missed the building as they passed.

As for the description of the present buildings as "a junkyard", he said the planning committee had powers to ensure that a site didn't become an offence to the environment.

Coun. Morgan commented: "If the character of Christchurch is some clapped out corrugated iron contrivances, then it's not for me."

The council defeated his amendment by 11 votes to 10, and approved the recommendation refusing planning permission by the same majority.