

Fell "Completely In Love" With Convent Walk Site

C.T. September 28, 1962

MR. A. MILLER, a Ministry of Housing and Local Government inspector, conducted a public inquiry at Christchurch on Friday into an appeal against the refusal of the local planning authority to permit the erection of a cottage dwelling with a boathouse, servants' quarters, a garage, and construction of an access on land adjoining Convent Walk, Christchurch.

The appeal was made by Mr. Cecil Silver, 56, Stafford Court, Kensington, London, who had purchased the land in November, 1961. Mr. Nigel Bridge, counsel, appeared for Mr. Silver at the inquiry, which lasted for more than five hours.

Grounds for refusal were that the proposed development would not accord with the provision in the Christchurch Town Map that existing use should, for the most part, remain undisturbed; that access was considered unsatisfactory by reason of its excessive length and inadequate width; and that the proposal would be detrimental to the visual amenities of Convent Walk, the grounds of the Priory Church and the Avon.

Mr. J. Macfadyen, Town Clerk, appeared for the planning authority. Mr. P. G. Geare, represented the Priory Church Council and the trustees of Church Hatch and Priory House. Mrs. A. S. Savage, 23, Bridge Street, was an objector. Mr. T. J. Williams appeared for eight objectors: Mr. and Mrs. C. F. Styles, Mrs. J. C. Church, and Mr. and Mrs. W. M. T. Parsons, all of Willow Place, Miss E. M. Lobb, East Quartleys, Willow Place, and Dr. and Mrs. T. A. Dodd, Tyneham House, Bridge Street. Mr. L. J. J. Morgan represented Mrs. M. I. Gardner, 11, Bridge Street, Mrs. E. Cazalet, Bridge Place, Bridge Street, and Mr. H. S. A. Bemister, Bridge Walk.

The appeal site, explained Mr. Bridge, lay at the apex of a triangular island which lay between the Avon, Mill Stream and the junction of the Stour. To the south-west of the island, which was substantially waste-land, lay the important boat building yards and the premises of Christchurch Sailing Club. A pleasant public footpath known as Convent Walk was separated from the appeal site and most of the island by a substantial hedge.

"SUBSTANTIAL SUM"

When Mr. Silver bought the appeal site in November, 1961, for a "substantial sum", there was a building on the site, clearly a dwelling house, which was used in connection with a boat-hiring business, said Mr. Bridge.

Mr. Silver had "fallen completely in love" with the site, which to him was one of "unique attraction". He was a keen fisherman and yachtsman, had acquired fishing rights on a stretch of the Avon and would have a mooring for his boat.

But when he purchased the site, he had never contemplated living in the existing dwelling house on the site and had also never contemplated that there could have been any planning obstacle to its replacement by a structure more worthy of the site. However, an informal approach to the planning authorities in December, 1961, had produced a prompt negative response.

The present application was then submitted, and Mr. Bridge described the grounds for refusal as "unintelligible".

"The replacement of one residential building by another, is in my submission, by no reasonable application of the English language to be described as 'a disturbance of the existing use'.

"AN IMPROVEMENT"

"Whatever shortcomings there are in the access, they can be made good. No building erected on this site in replacement of the existing building could possibly be less attractive to look at than the existing building itself, and any new structure must of necessity be an improvement to the visual amenities".

The present occupant of the site, besides living in the dwelling house, plied boats for hire on the river, said Mr. Bridge. The local authority, he said, were of the opinion that when the life of the sub-standard building ceased the land should revert to meadow land, but the residential use of the site put considerable value on it, and no one was going to let the building fall down, so that it reverted to meadow land. The site had no other value than as a residential site, he said.

In one way or another, said Mr. Bridge, the appellant intended to use the property as his residence, unless it was acquired from him by the exercise of compulsory powers. If the appeal succeeded he would occupy it in a new building and if it failed he would occupy it in the original building.

HIGHEST STANDARDS

If the appeal succeeded, a building "of the highest standards" would be erected, "something to the order of £12,000" would be spent on it and the laying out and landscaping of the site, he added.

A London consultant, Mr. E. J. Davis, said that the envisaged bungalow would be specifically designed for the site. The boat-house and the servants' quarters were not an intrinsic part of Mr. Silver's proposals and he was quite prepared to limit redevelopment to a bungalow for himself and his family. He thought the site was particularly suited to the development.

Mr. J. Macfadyen said Convent Walk was very popular with holidaymakers and obviously the amenity of the walk would be affected by what went on the appeal site. The building on the site at present could only be described as a very small cottage-type of a building which was re-developed as a dwelling house out of a tea house in 1926.

However unprepossessing it maybe at the present time, by virtue of that drabness and its small size, it was very inconspicuous as a part of the view where the public resorted.

A PRECEDENT

Mr. Macfadyen said the inspector might think it regrettable than a residential use had been established there at all. That had to be accepted, but he said that the proposal was an attempt to take advantage of that fact, and it might establish a precedent for other development.

Mr. K. C. Jeremiah, Area Planning Officer, said the present building was built in 1926 and had first been used as living accommodation in the late 1930's. It could only be regarded as a temporary structure and perpetuations of bad planning by introducing permanent buildings to replace those at the end of their life should not be allowed.

Mr. T. J. Williams contended that one of the most charming areas in the borough was Convent Walk and its surroundings, and his clients were interested in preserving what was left of the charms of Christchurch.

RIVERSIDE WALK

The present structure could only be seen from the easterly end of Town Bridge, and there was no doubt that when the building wore out it would vanish. His clients hoped that in time there would be a walk along the river there and until the present proposal came into being there seemed every hope that this would be possible. But until the present structure was removed, nothing could be done.

Mr. Morgan said that at the moment the present building did not take the eye as a dwelling at all.

Mrs. Savage said that when the present building was erected 35 years ago, everyone was very upset about it. They were told nothing else would ever be built there again and that the Council would do their utmost to buy the land and have it as an open space. She thought the Council had tried to buy it twice but there had been no satisfaction, and she supposed that a post-war Council nothing knew nothing about it. Mrs. Savage thought "this beautiful place" should be left for everybody.

The Minister's decision will be made known later.