

Council Want Time To Study Development Plan **Future Of The Airfield Still A Cause Of Considerable Anxiety**

C.T. March 28, 1952

MEMBERS of Christchurch Town Council were not prepared on Tuesday to accept without question the final draft of the Borough's 20 year development plan which the Hampshire County Council propose to submit to the Minister of Housing and Local Government.

The main cause for concern were the indications that in due course the Christchurch Airfield would be used for housing development, and it was agreed that members should be provided with copies of the plan so as to be able to study it in detail. It will then be discussed at a special meeting of the Council on April 8th, and any observations will be forwarded to the County Council.

After the Town Clerk (Mr. W. D. Platt) had read a letter from the County Planning Officer referring to the development plan, Coun. K. L. Smith wanted to know what the position was with regard to the Christchurch airfield. It was essential he said, that the airfield should be retained, and the Christchurch Chamber of Trade had made their attitude quite clear in this respect. Had they had proper notice of the recent inquiry they would have most certainly stated their case before the Inspector.

The future of the airfield has always been brought before this Council declared Coun. S. Kermode. So far as complaints were concerned, if members were not aware of what had been proposed, it was because they had not read the minutes of the Development Sub-Committee, of which they had all had copies. Coun. J Vaughan emphasised that the Chamber of Trade would have been represented at the inquiry had they known about it in time. The trouble was that these county matters went through in spite of what was said by the local people. There was the question of the by-pass---they didn't take much notice of those traders at one end of the town who might be put out of business. Coun. Kermode interrupted to say that if those members of the Council who were members of the Chamber of Trade had read the minutes of the Development Sub-committee they would have known that the inquiry was to take place.

THE PLAN.

In order to give some idea of what the development plan envisages for Christchurch during the next 20 years, its main points are set out below.

Existing Land Use.

The main shopping centre is in the High Street and provision should be made for an extension northwards along the east side of Bargates. Such an extension would involve filling in between existing premises.

The Barrack Road shopping area considered to be a problem in that the shops lie on either side of the main road A.35 which has a very heavy volume of traffic (approximately 14,000 vehicles per day at the last census in 1938). In view of this and the fact that the shopping centre serves a residential area lying largely to the north, it is thought that in future, shops should be encouraged on the north side of the road only.

There are existing subsidiary shopping centres at Highcliffe, Fairmile Road and Burton, and these should be maintained in their present positions. New subsidiaries will be necessary at Walkford, near Hinton Admiral Station, Mudford, and Somerford,

Age And Conditions Of Buildings.

After mentioning that Christchurch was almost entirely confined to the area immediately adjoining the Castle and Priory prior to 1875, the survey points out that as a result of the comparatively late growth of most of Christchurch, areas of old and obsolete development are few. Residential areas which may need redevelopment are to the east of the High Street and Bargates, to the north of Purewell and north of Barrack Road and Jumpers Common. The shopping area at Highcliffe is of a makeshift character, and could be considerably improved.

Land Unsuitable For Building Purposes.

The main problem, of the future development of Christchurch falls under this heading, in that it is concerned with the way in which any future expansion should, or could, take place.

The town of Christchurch has spread to cover practically all the available land between the two rivers. Further expansion northwards is blocked by St. Catherine's Hill, and the value of the hill as an open space feature make it desirable that this expansion should cease at its present line. Land for further urban development has to be sought to the east of the Avon, and it is of necessity cut off from the western part of Christchurch by the flood plain of that river, which can be developed only along the Purewell causeway. The land to the north of the railway and east of Burton is of considerable agriculture importance, and should be retained in its present condition. The future development of Christchurch is, therefore, virtually limited to the area south of the railway between Purewell and Highcliffe.

Within the area liable to flood in the Avon Valley at Dudmoor Farm and Coward's Marsh, some undesirable development has taken place which the Borough Council intends to remove as soon as possible.

Under the heading of ancient monuments and buildings of architectural or historic interest, the schedule lists Christchurch Bridge, Christchurch Castle, Christchurch Castle Hall (known as Norman House), Staple Cross, oval earthworks on St. Catherine's Hill, Camp and round barrows on St. Catherine's Hill. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government has not yet prepared a list of buildings of architectural or historical interest of the area, but when the list is prepared it is expected that many buildings in the High Street area will be included.

Population.

A table is given summarising the history of the population of Christchurch since 1921, indicating the large number of people coming to live on the south coast on retirement and reflects that the high percentage of people of retired age makes up the present population.

It is expected that this immigration will continue, and that in spite of a forecast of the natural decrease of the existing population of 19,040 in 1949 to 18,250 by 1971, the eventual population in the borough will have reached 25,000 by that date. The eventual total for the borough of 25,980 is due to there being at present an estimated 980 people living in temporary accommodation provided by the Borough Council outside the borough boundaries, who will eventually be housed within the borough.

Industry And Employment.

Tables are given covering the Christchurch Employment Exchange area which includes besides the borough of Christchurch most of the parishes of Christchurch East, Sopley and Hurn in Ringwood and Fordingbridge Rural District, with a total population of 23,400 in 1948.

Before the last war the building of houses was by far the most important single industry, and even in 1948 the building and servicing industries claimed 69 per cent, of the total number employed. Since the war there has been an expansion of the aircraft industry which is now the largest single industry and employs about 1,150 people. The Ministry of Supply Signal Research Station and Experimental Engineering Depot have also become important sources of work, and the Ministry employs a large number of people at its Christchurch depots. The area is somewhat better balanced industrially than in inter-war years, but there is perhaps too much reliance on aircraft production and signals research. The provision of a small area of land to accommodate extensions to existing industries seems desirable.

Communications.

After describing the 1938 traffic census figures near Holmsley, along Barrack Road, near Highcliffe and between Christchurch and Ringwood, the survey mentions the immediate problem of congestion in Purewell and High Street which, it is thought, can best be solved by the construction of the new road from Somerford to Pound Lane.

The present car park at the junction of Barrack Road and Bargates should be incorporated in a detailed scheme for the erection of local government buildings in this area.

The survey states that Christchurch railway station handles an average of 50 trains and 370 passengers per day.

Airport And Airfields.

It is thought that the use of Christchurch Airfield should be discontinued within the period of the present development plan for two main reasons.

In view of the fact that the Airfield is closely ringed on all sides, except the east, by residential areas, it is thought that its retention constitutes a definite danger to life and property. Any further extension of Christchurch which may take place, will, of necessity, be forced to take place in the area to the east of the Airfield. Such development would add still further to the urban ring and increase the danger.

Secondly, there is likely to be a shortage of suitable land to accommodate the expected further development of Christchurch, and it is considered unlikely that this demand can be satisfied without the use of the land at present within the airfield, unless a satisfactory standard of amenities were to be sacrificed.

Not only does the existence of the airfield prevent residential development on the ground which it occupies, but the height restrictions necessary to safeguard its approaches, are a considerable, curb on the development of adjoining areas.

Government Departments.

The Ministry of Supply is the Government Department which has holdings most seriously affecting the future planning of Christchurch. Not only does it hold the airfield but also several adjoining properties which form the Signals Research Establishment. To the south of Barrack Road a large area is also held for an Experimental Engineering Depot. Apart from the case of the airfield, it is thought that these holdings can be satisfactorily incorporated in the plan.

Social Services.

Within the Borough of Christchurch there are at present seven Primary schools and one Secondary school, and it will be necessary to provide five new primary schools and two new Secondary schools.

Educational facilities are inadequate for the existing population, and the most urgent necessity is the provision of a Secondary school at Somerford. The Highcliffe Primary school is too small and incapable of extension, and it will also be necessary to find sites for a Primary school at Mudeford and ultimately towards the end of the planning period, a new Secondary school in the Highcliffe area. At Burton the existing Primary school is inadequate and will need to be replaced on a new site.

Provision should be made for a comprehensive Health Centre to the west of the High Street, and as the Public Offices and Town Hall are inadequate for present purposes, and are likely to prove even more inadequate if the expected development materialises, the survey draws attention to the fact that the Borough Council has already purchased and cleared a large site at the junction of Barrack Road and Bargates for the erection of a new Civic Centre.

There is some lack of community facilities in the outlying areas, and, in particular, a site for a public hall should be found near the Grove on the western side of the Borough.

The riverside by the Stour is described as an important open space feature, and it is thought that eventually the belt of land running along its entire course from the Stanpit Marshes to St. Catherine s Hill should be available to the public.

Caravan Sites.

Dealing with caravan sites, the survey states that the great intermediate problem is probably existing and proposed camping and caravan sites. There are a number of these and the present provision would be quite adequate were it not for the fact that the sites are overwhelmingly used by permanent caravan owners and sub-standard dwellings, which leave little room for the holiday makers. It is hoped that by the end of the plan period these sites will cater more adequately for the genuine holiday maker, and when this happens it is

thought that no further provision of large scale camping sites will be necessary. It may be necessary to re-locate some existing camping points, and if so, a new site should be found in the Wolhayes area.