

CARAVANS: A SERIOUS PROBLEM AT DUDMOOR

C.T. February 9, 1968



Miss Auton's caravan (right) at the end of Marsh Lane

MISS JOAN AUTON lives alone in a 20ft. caravan at the bottom of St. Catherine's Hill. She has no running water, no main drainage, and the dustmen will collect if she carries her refuse half a mile down the road. For this she pays £10 a year rates.

She has lived on her small site at the end of Marsh Lane for 20 years; the remains of her two former caravan homes still stand derelict on the site. There is no gate—a visitor has to climb over a barbed wire fence and a piece of corrugated iron.

Miss Auton, a former dressmaker, now makes hand-knitted clothes—some of her work is exported to the

United States.

Her home is just one of well over a dozen caravans off Marsh Lane on the large area of land southeast of St. Catherine's Hill known as the Dudmoor Farm estate.

The caravans, most of them sporting planning existing use rights are on small plots of land in different ownerships. Some of the sites are in similar condition.

Empty sites along the road are strewn with rubbish—this area seems to be a popular dump for refuse from miles around.

The planners, objecting to development on the adjacent Dudmoor Farm three years ago, described the district as having rural amenities. The village development, they said, would be out of character and harmful.

The area was one for which the county development plan provided that the existing use should remain undisturbed.

A town hall spokesman agreed that the Dudmoor area presented a "serious problem."

A PROBLEM

He said: "It's a problem we would like to solve. A fair measure of the development looks pretty horrible, but as they have existing use rights, we can't touch them."

The local authority had powers to clean up sites and charge the owners. However, the difficulty was finding the owners to charge, and anyway, the area would soon be back to its original condition. "Eventually, it just becomes a burden on the rates to clear the place up," he said.

A survey carried out by the council a year ago produced the identity of only 50 per cent of the owners. The council were trying to persuade them to clear up the sites—with little success.

Another problem was that the rubbish was tipped there by outsiders. "It's not just the people who live there. Just about everybody in Christchurch with rubbish to dump takes it to Dudmoor."

The problem began in the early 1950s, when the caravans began to move to the area. Little action was taken by the local authority to clear the area, so the caravans acquired existing use rights.

He agreed that one final solution to the problem was to allow development there.

Area planning officer, Mr. E. S. Johnson, said the county council had asked the Minister of Housing to approve an order making all minor alterations to properties there subject to planning control. So far the Minister had not decided.

Effect of such an order would be to give the planners more control over the area. If used effectively, it would ensure further development would not "go by default" and gain existing use rights under planning law after four years. It would "maintain the status quo."

'A PITY'

Said Mr. Johnson: "It would be a great pity if it continued to deteriorate as it has over the years." The land, he thought, was not likely to be allocated for housing in the future. He hoped that eventually money would be found to make discontinuance orders and pay compensation. Money could be found now. Says a Ministry of Housing circular on spending cuts issued this week: "The Government do not contemplate a reduction in expenditure on derelict land, which is a minor element in expenditure, but is of special importance in some areas."

VILLAGE SCHEME

If the Dudmoor village scheme had gone ahead the caravan sites would probably have been eventually developed also, another planning officer told the CT. There had been a number of applications for permission to build on small sites there, he added.

Even if development were allowed on this land, which is proposed green belt, the fact that it is divided into small plots would present difficulties—not all would necessarily be built on.

Mr. Maxwell Goode, who proposed the village scheme for his 132-acre Dudmoor Farm, commented: "You can't have it both ways. Either it's a beauty spot, and it should look like one, or housing is allowed there. At the moment it certainly isn't a beauty spot. If you went into the scrap business you could make a fortune from the rubbish there."

Dudmoor Copse, which the planners hoped to preserve when they refused to allow the village, has now been partly felled to make way for pylons and cables of the new Christchurch — Mannington power line.

Said Mr. Goode: "It makes nonsense of the planning inquiry. We spend a lot of time and money, the Minister comes to a decision. Then they come along with the pylons and destroy the copse anyway."