

HOBURNE APPEAL

99 acres for medium and low cost homes?

New Milton Advertiser July 27, 1974

HOBURNE DEVELOPMENT COMPANY had the present capacity to build about 120 dwellings each year, but it was likely to reduce its programme drastically unless their appeal over their wish to develop 99.5 acres of land at Highcliffe was allowed. "Such action seems to be both illogical and immoral, at a time of great demand for housing at a reasonable cost", said Mr. Robert Burry, a director of the company, at a public inquiry on Wednesday.

The company were appealing against the failure of the old Christchurch Borough Council, acting on behalf of Hampshire County Council, to give within the prescribed period, notice of their decision on an application for residential development of the land, which is bounded by the A35 and A337 roads and Hoburne Lane, and against the refusal of Dorset County Council (in whose area the land now lies) to permit the development.

The company's development plans include the construction of 150—200 medium price units of accommodation, and about 600 low price units which can be extended as families grow. On a costing made in May of this year, these would sell at £6,950 freehold, which figure includes the purchaser's costs. In a brochure produced by the company, it is stated that the low cost houses would be offered to selected applicants, and sales would be subject to a "buy-back" clause in the event of resales within five years, at cost plus 5% per annum. The Borough Council would be invited to participate in the selection process.

Mr. Burry told the Inspector hearing the appeal, Major-Gen. A. H. G. Dobson, C.B., O.B.E., M.C., that the cost of the houses could be kept down so much as the greater part of the land had been in the family since 1912. In their case against the development, the County Council had stated that it would be impracticable to attempt to control the cost of private development under planning legislation, but Mr. Burry answered that they would be prepared to enter into an agreement, binding upon them and their successors in title, to carry out the development in the form proposed.

Called by Mr. Peter Harvey, Deputy County Solicitor for Dorset C.C., Mr. John Scutt, Eastern Divisional Planning Officer, referred to the reasons for refusal of permission which had originally been stated by Hampshire County Council and said that when the Dorset Planning Sub-Committee received the company's second application, they had decided there were no changes in the circumstances since Hampshire's refusal which would invalidate that decision. (Though Christchurch Council's Development Control Committee had recommended that the development of the area be agreed in principle.)

The Dorset sub-committee's refusal had been on the grounds that the site was outside the areas allocated for residential use on the approved Christchurch Town Map on which the site was within an area where it was intended that only development appropriate to a green belt would be permitted, and in the main existing uses would continue undisturbed. The land was of good agricultural value and the Ministry of Agriculture objected to its loss.

The site was within the area covered by the Land Use and Transportation Study for S.E. Dorset and S.W. Hampshire, the recommendations of which had been adopted in principle by the local planning authority. The development would result in the population capacity envisaged for Christchurch being exceeded.

Any review of the provisions of the Town Map and the Purewell Plan would take place in the light of the Structure Plan for East Dorset which was to be based on a Growth

Policy for the sub-region to be determined by the local planning authority on public consideration of a report on alternative policies. The allocation of any additional land for future use that might be justified within the terms of the Structure Plan would have regard to necessary improvements to the transportation network and the provision of public services and community facilities related to the population increase and its location. An area of six acres on the eastern part of the site was required by the Local Education Authority to provide adequate playing fields for the Highcliffe Secondary School.

Mr. Scutt said that it was intended to publish the draft of the Structure Plan in 1976, for public comment and submission to the Secretary of State in 1977. The Growth Study was programmed for completion this autumn. The Dorset County Surveyor had commented to the Planning Sub-Committee that the scale of development proposed was undesirable prior to the programmed construction of a primary road which would provide a necessary improvement to the existing network of roads through Christchurch.

Mr. Scutt referred to the Sub-Committee's view that it would be impracticable to attempt to control the cost of private development under planning legislation, and went on "If it were possible and desirable to do so, then there might be a case for imposing such control on allocated sites for residential development where it would be appropriate for lower-cost housing to be provided as part of the planned and committed development of Christchurch, with necessary ancillary facilities."

Within the area of the Christchurch Town Map there were about 194 acres for housing development able to accommodate some 2,210 dwellings, which could provide houses for 6,630 people. The land was widely distributed throughout the borough and included areas at Burton, Purewell, Mudeford and Highcliffe. The land available for housing development would last more than six years.

Combined with the open nature of a large part of the grounds of S.R.D.E. to the south and the touring caravan camping ground recently granted permission over the whole of the area south-east of Hoburne Lane between Highcliffe Road and Hoburne Farm buildings, the land in question helped substantially to provide a desirable break between large residential areas at Highcliffe to the East and Mudeford/Somerford to the west, said Mr. Scutt. The development of the appeal site would further accentuate this tendency by virtually joining two settlements together and creating a continuous urban area lacking any form of settlement pattern on which community facilities and social amenities could be based.

Mr. Roy Hughes, for the Ministry of Agriculture, said they strongly objected to the proposed development on agricultural grounds, the objection being that the area was good agricultural land. There was approximately 10 acres of Grade 1 land, 25 to 30 acres of Grade 3, while the remaining 71 acres were predominantly Grade 2, being generally good quality land suitable for a wide range of agriculture and horticultural cropping.

In his evidence, Mr. Burry, of 273a, Lymington Road, Highcliffe, whose company was represented by Mr. David Adamson, said that 55 acres of the land formed the original area of Hoburne Farm. This had been let on a tenancy from 1932 until the tenant left in 1967 because he found the farm was no longer economically viable. Since then it had been used for grazing for ponies and donkeys.

The loss of 16 acres of the land which was required by the Education Authority (six for playing fields and ten for a first school and middle school) following the loss of the **Mr. Burry said that the cost of the housing would go up by at least 55% if they had to wait for the Structure Plan.**

farmhouse and all of the land to the south of Hoburne Lane meant that the farm was even less viable than it was in 1967. The remaining area of the original farm would only be 39.7 acres, without house or buildings. Only some form of intensive farming would be possible

economically and this would involve the construction of large factory-type buildings which might not be desirable or acceptable in this location. At a planning inquiry held in 1973 concerning the extension of Hoburne Caravan Park, on the south side of Hoburne Lane, no agricultural objection was raised and the appeal was allowed. The quality of this land appeared to him to be very similar to the site of the present appeals.

After declaring that the company would have to drastically reduce their building programme if the appeal was not allowed, and that this seemed both illogical and immoral at a time of great demand for reasonable cost housing, Mr. Burry went on that he understood Christchurch Council had over 500 applications on its housing waiting list and the average waiting time was about four years. The wait was much longer for young married couples without children and for other low priority applicants. The purchase by the Council of private sector houses for letting at rents subsidised by the ratepayers did not seem to be a satisfactory answer to this housing problem.

The two main elements in the cost of housing were land and building. "In this instance the land cost is low," said Mr. Burry "and I know of no other suitable land which can be made available on such favourable terms. In this connection I have inspected all of the sites with a suggested capacity of 20 dwellings or more which are shown on the schedule attached to the County Council's statement. None of these appears to be available for immediate development on such terms, for much of it has been sold in recent years at high prices."

The schedule showed that the total acreage claimed to be available for housing had a capacity for 2,210 dwellings. This acreage, however, included land which was within the proposed Green Belt; was zoned as public open space and subject to covenant's against building. Of the 2,210 suggested dwellings, only 641 had planning permission, according to the County Council's statement. In other words there was less than a two year supply of land with planning permission. This did not accord with a Department of the Environment

TAX KILLS PROFIT MOTIVE

After he had outlined the details of the low cost houses, and explained that it was intended to select applicants in consultation with the Borough Council, Mr. Burry was asked by the Inspector: "You are telling us your company are not in this for the profit motive but for philanthropic motives?" Mr. Burry replied: "This land has been in the family for a long time, and it doesn't make a great deal of difference in the ultimate to the shareholders with taxation as it is today, whether the land is sold for full market prices or a price which would show a more modest profit. To that extent the answer is yes."

Circular which urged that at least a five years supply of land should be available.

The appeal site land was in an area which had a predominantly retired population. As housing costs had risen, the younger element had been forced to seek housing elsewhere and the balance of the age groups of the permanent residents was being upset. This must have a serious long term effect upon local industry and finance. The appeal site was close to the main local industrial area and would make a real contribution to its housing needs.

The proposal was in broad outline only and included provision for residential development, communal open space, a possible youth club and site for a community centre and could also accommodate the additional educational requirement. These communal facilities would provide the social centre of activities which were at present lacking in the Highcliffe to Mundeford area. Reference to the Town Map would show that these two settlement were already joined but were surrounded by the open countryside in the vicinity of the railway line, the Stanpit marshes and the coastal open space area. Part of the appeal site

would remain as open land in the form of communal space and school playing fields and the loss of the remainder would not be intolerable.

In his summing up for the planning authority, Mr. Harvey said a great deal of emphasis had been put on the very low price housing, but this was not part of the application which was in outline only. If the appeal was allowed, then it would be open to the appellants to sell the site with the benefit of the permission and the future purchaser would not in any way be bound by what had been said at the inquiry.

It had been suggested that this could be overcome by a Section 52 agreement, but said Mr. Harvey, he had doubts as to whether it would go very far to ensure the low price housing. He thought it was too much to expect an agreement of this sort to say that none of the houses within a certain area should cost more than £8,000, and that they should be made available to persons on the housing list in cooperation with the local housing authority.

Speaking on behalf of the 3,500 member Highcliffe Citizens' Association, vice-chairman, Mr. J. Brooks, said they were divided. "Probably slightly less are dead against it because of the effect on Highcliffe and slightly more accept reluctantly what councillors have told us, namely that sooner or later there will be building on that site. I think we would be putting our heads in the sand if we said we wanted no building at all although there is a very large body that take that view."

But those that did accept that there would be development there, did not think it should take place until the land study had reached a later stage, until the growth policy had been decided and the structure plan completed to show how much development could be supported. They were not satisfied that the existing sewerage system could cope, and they were not satisfied they had the necessary health services, waste disposal, roads system, etc. "It is on these grounds that we ask that planning permission be refused," said Mr. Brooks. He added that speaking personally, he was also concerned about the possibility of people buying the lower cost homes, and then selling them as holiday homes as soon as the five years was up.

The inquiry was closed after an all-day hearing, and the Secretary of State's decision will be made known at a later date.