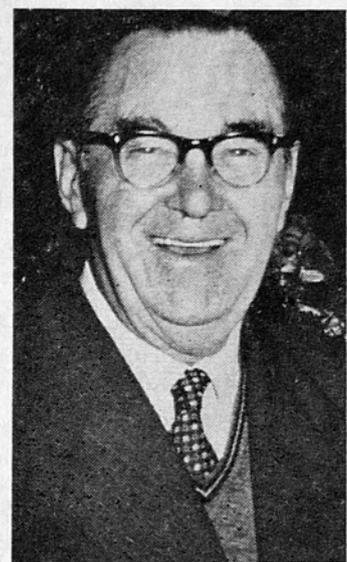


# EIGHT-STOREY FLATS -'A WELL GUARDED SECRET'

## JRA ASKING FOR PUBLIC INQUIRY

C.T. June 9, 1967



Coun. Walter Tucker

**A BIG ROW has blown up in the Jumpers ward of Christchurch over planning permission for an eight-storey-high block of 32 flats on the triangular piece of land embraced by Barrack Road, The Grove, Stourvale Avenue and Oak Avenue.**

Jumpers Residents' Association, who allege that the application "slipped through" Christchurch Planning Committee and that the "true position was a well-guarded secret" have written to the Minister of Housing and Local Government asking him to force a public inquiry into the decision.

The application was in the February schedule of the planning committee and was for: "Erection of 32 flats and garages, Barrack Road, Christchurch".

It was approved subject to the condition that the materials to be used shall be submitted to and approved by the local planning authority before development commences.

The full force of the row was brought to light at a meeting of Jumpers Residents' Association in St. George's Hall on Tuesday evening.

Coun. Walter Tucker, chairman of Christchurch Planning Committee and one of the Jumpers Ward representatives on the council, was present at the meeting and when asked if he were aware that it was an eight-storey block he

replied:

"I'll be quite candid. If every member of this association put a lovely £5 note on the table and offered them to me I couldn't tell you whether it is a four, five or six-storey block because we get a matter of up to 130 items on our agenda every month. It would be impossible for anyone to carry in their minds any definite application".

He said he wanted to make it perfectly clear that it was not a case of a level vote on the committee with himself having to give a casting vote. The question of the flats went back a long time, to the time in fact before the planning committee had delegated powers. It came forward on behalf of the executors of the late Mrs. Richards.

He remembered the application coming forward when the late Ald. Tom Lander was in the chair and Mr. Freeth, the planning officer. There was quite a lengthy debate over the matter and it was passed by a small majority nine or ten years ago. The area planning committee also approved outline permission.

Coun. Tucker said it did come before the present planning committee some little time ago as no development had taken place on the site. It came before the committee again and there was nothing the committee could do but renew their approval of an outline plan.

### APPROVED

He believed it had been approved twice in outline and then the detailed plans had been approved. "The planning officer saw it, a panel of architects have seen it and the recommendation from the planning officer to the committee was that approval be granted and that approval has been granted", went on Coun. Tucker.

"The point is this. Had the planning committee refused it, the applicant would have still been in a position to have made an appeal to the Minister. I think possibly that would have been the better thing to have been done".

He said that once planning permission had been given and the minutes signed it became absolutely legal and the development could proceed.

There was one thing that might be done and that would be to persuade the local council to withdraw the permission. In doing so, the applicant would then be in a position to issue a purchase notice against the local authority and they would have no option but to buy the site which could be anything in the region of £50,000 which would fall solely on the ratepayers of Christchurch.

Coun. Tucker was asked by Mr. J. W. Ellis, minute secretary of the association, if he were in favour of an eight-storey block and if he agreed that the ratepayers had been misled due to the fact that the minutes had not clearly stated that the flats would be eight-storey.

Replied Coun. Tucker: "I am standing here as chairman of the planning committee and I am unbiased here as I am in committee".

The association's letter which has gone to the Minister states that the immediate area "is seething with anger at the proposal" and goes on to state that Mrs. Moira Druitt, whose bungalow would be one of those dwarfed by the suggested "monstrosity" has collected 55 signatures of residents who would also be actually affected.

This petition was sent with the letter which goes on: "These people make an urgent request that a public inquiry be set on foot by your Ministry so infuriated are they by the guile of the borough council's planning committee who kept the true position as a well-guarded secret".

### 'INFLUENCE'

It states that the association has a membership of some 1,400 and "is not without influence in the town" and continues: "Up till now and in the interests of good planning, the authorities have insisted that no building in this district should exceed two-storeys, but with the flats to be erected it would mean that at least 50 existing properties would have to be devalued".

The letter goes on to claim: "We now understand that the developer has stated that the county council planners had put pressure on him to create this huge block of flats by the side of the A35.

"The architects have refused to make the plans public and two of our councillors who are on the planning committee have made no effort to discover the feeling of the electorate on the matter".

Mr. W. Scott Atkinson, chairman, said it all started with a rumour that the block of flats was going to be eight storeys high. The association set up a special sub-committee to investigate and the developer assured them that it was to be an eight-storey block.

### PETITION

He said there would no doubt be a large number of people ready to sign a petition because an eight-storey block of flats in Christchurch was quite unheard of and would quite obviously be out of keeping with the ancient Priory town.

People in the immediate area were aware that flats were going up and had no objection to a normal block but they felt they had been misled. They understood that the block would be two storeys high and not eight. It was felt that the fact that it was eight storeys high had been concealed, although possibly quite unwittingly.

Mrs. Druitt said that she and other people in the area were "very worried" about it. They were under the impression that it was only two storeys high. A local councillor had told them that it was only two storeys and a foreman on the site had told them the same.

### 'MONSTROUS'

Mr. Scott Atkinson read a letter from Coun. Miss Carol Sharp, one of the Jumpers ward representatives which stated: "If your committee deems it the right thing to put this matter before the appropriate minister with the object of forcing a public inquiry I would be very willing to speak at the inquiry because I think the whole thing is quite monstrous".

Mr. Scott Atkinson said there were other alternatives to the ratepayers having to foot a £50,000 bill for the site. He hoped the Minister would consider these.

He added that a letter had been received from the Minister thanking them for bringing the matter to his attention but they had not heard anything further yet.