

The Proposed Plan For Mundeford

Area Planning Officer's Report 1960

CHHRISTCHURCH Development Sub-Committee's recommendation concerning flat development at Mundeford was made public at Wednesday's meeting of the South West Area Planning Committee at Lyndhurst.

A report of Wednesday's discussion appears on page 1. Below, we print a full preamble explained by Mr. F. F. Freeth, area planning officer and the recommendation in full.

Mr. Freeth's report stated:

The committee will be aware of the fact that various proposals have been put forward for high density flat development in Mundeford.

A preliminary survey has been made of the area between Argyle Road and the sea front at "Gundimore". This is an area which contains quite a large number of old houses which, during the next 25 years or so, will have outlived their usefulness and have become uneconomical to maintain. Proposals have already been put forward for flat development just east of Argyle Road, at "Inveravon", at "The Lawn" and at "Sandhills". Consent has been given for a two storey block of flats at "Green Loaning".

The fact that redevelopment will take place along the harbour frontage in this part of Mundeford is, in my opinion, inevitable. If this redevelopment were to take the form of speculative building such as bungalows and houses on the normal small plot after the manner of the neighbouring estates, it will result in the destruction of the tree screen and the entire spoliation of this attractive landscape.

It is suggested that consideration should be given to an overall scheme for the redevelopment of the land between Mundeford Road and the Harbour and that the first action to be adopted here would be to ask the County Planning Committee at the first review of the Development Plan to amend the Christchurch Town Map to include for a higher density within the area. It will, of course, be appreciated that this area includes a portion of "Sandhills" which is at present shown in the Town Map as "public open space" and has been included with the Green Belt proposals. It is, however, understood that the economic background has been considered by the Borough Council and the suggestion put forward that favourable consideration should be given to some form of flat development at least on part of this property. I would, however, stress the importance of preserving the maximum of open space both in the interest of amenity and providing for the ever-increasing number of visitors to this attractive place.

If the committee were agreeable to the suggestion of a considerable increase in density to allow for flat development, it is suggested that a joint report on the effect of such a proposal should be prepared by both the Borough Engineer and the County Planning Officer, as quite obviously dense development would have a considerable effect upon public services such as water, gas, electric light and sewerage. The County Planning Officer has been instructed by the County Planning Committee to prepare a report on the effect of high density development. Consideration would also have to be given to the effect it would have upon road traffic, obviously, provision would have to be made for improved access toward the town centre in the form of road improvements affecting Mudford Road and Stanpit.

Redevelopment of the area suggested would of course, necessitate very careful consideration being given to the provision of adequate means of access from the main road. Some form of development roads would have to be introduced. Furthermore, great care would have to be taken to maintain the amenities of the area as a whole. The trees within this area are not, as individual trees, of great value but their massing particularly from the Harbour, is of major importance. Any final scheme prepared should make provision for the preservation of as many trees as possible and provide for future planting to ensure a continuity of amenity.

COULD ENHANCE THE PICTURE

The question of heights of buildings has been given some consideration. It will, of course, be appreciated that without a detailed survey the actual siting of new buildings cannot, at this stage, be determined but the general principle of flat development has been looked at from the amenity aspect and it is suggested that at on at least part of the area tall blocks of buildings properly designed, would not be out of keeping with the landscape—in fact, they could enhance the picture. In this connection I would point out that already quite considerable-sized houses are existing in this area. Many of these are visible—particularly from the Harbour, in fact they form part of the picture on this northern shore.

Consideration has been given to the possible future area for redevelopment including Argyle Road westward as far as the open space. It is suggested that at this stage any scheme for redevelopment would be premature but that in this area, provision could be made for a service area to serve the high density development to the east.

It was recommended (1) that the County Planning Committee be requested to give consideration to providing for increased density by flat development and open space with public access to the water front; (2) that the area of "Sandhills" and its surroundings be re-zoned to include for flat development in part, and open space with public access to the sea front; (3) that in general, any proposals for individual plot development in the form of

bungalows or small houses within the area be not entertained; (4) that a joint report on the effect upon public services of flat development of increased density in the area be prepared by the Borough Engineer and the County Planning Officer.

July 22, 1960

The penalties of secrecy in the preliminary stages of development planning are plentiful. The worst of them become evident when, as in the case of the development of Mundeford, there is a leakage of information.

For months past some people have known what was in the wind and when a few scraps of information become known, and are expanded by conjecture, a stage is reached when an attempt is made to organise a public revolt against a scheme only partially understood. Another source of grave unrest arises when people hear talk of properties changing hands at tremendous prices (figures of £36,000 and £29,000 are mentioned) when, not so very long ago, they were virtually unsaleable at £4,000 or £5,000. Clearly there is need for information and thought on the subject for, lo, some of the country's 'Golden Acres' which have been debated in Parliament this week exist here in Mundeford!

Interest begins to stir when it becomes known that the planning authorities are not averse to considering high density development. The mechanics of the process are thuswise: take a big old house standing in an acre of ground—and almost nobody wants to buy. Let it become known, however, that the planning authority might approve of the land being used for eight bungalows and it becomes saleable (if it is in a good position) at, say, £6400. Let it be rumoured, however, that planning approval might be given for a scheme coagulating those eight units and building layer upon layer on top (each one of eight units) and the picture becomes fantastically different. Each unit gives the land a value of, roughly, £1,000. The value of the acre on which eight-storey flats can be built with eight units on each storey could thus become £64,000—ten times its value as an acre for bungalow development

There is a very great deal to be said for new legislation to divert some of such vast capital appreciation back to the community either by means of a development charge or a capital gains tax—and that is not talking Socialism. Many conservatives think the time has come to stop being unrealistic on the subject of big unearned increments. Who, for example, be he Conservative, Liberal or Labour, thinks it right that the owner of useless land across which a road is driven at public expense should personally pocket the £6,000 an acre the road creates.

Of course, the community does already stand to gain to some extent from high density development. Take the hypothetical one-acre-and-a-house again. In its present state it may pay rates on a valuation of £80. If eight bungalows were

built on the land, the total valuation might be £240. If eight storeys of eight flats each were built on it, the Council might draw rates on £1,920! That is why the Council is interested in flats! But, meanwhile, the fortunate owner who first sensed the potential of flat development has got his £64,000.

We now come to the question which is seriously disturbing the little community of Mudeford: the rights of the residents to a say in what is going to become of their village. Their immediate reaction has been to say they don't want anything to alter the character of the place; but we think one can take a better line than this. Let it be realised that the character of Mudeford has already been altered by the building which has been done there in the past five years. Likewise the character of one of the entries to the New Forest has been conspicuously altered by the petrol station at Hinton; St. Catherine's Hill has been altered; Pokesdown Hill has been altered since the days, within living memory, it was a muddy cart track across open fields. One cannot avoid altering the character of a community: every change of resident, every fresh association, every new flower bed, every new building (whether it be a bungalow or a block of flats) does that. What one must do is to avoid spoiling a community.

Along those precautionary lines the vigilance of Mudeford residents is to be praised. They have perhaps, been frightened by the sight of two storey blocks of flats which are little more than awkward, oversized houses. But that should not lead them to argue that up to the present moment in time Mudeford has been developed to a peak of perfection which nothing can ever possibly improve. After October 1 the borough will have greater delegated control over planning matters. Then, as now, the sturdy interest of residents in their own community can be a rewarding occupation which, as at Mudeford, can merit the gratitude of many future generations. Those are the lines along which to view proposals for high density developments and not to condemn them out of hand.