

MINISTRY'S "NO" TO 160 HOUSES

C.T. May 18, 1946

THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH HAVE TURNED DOWN PROPOSALS SUBMITTED BY CHRISTCHURCH TOWN COUNCIL FOR THE BUILDING OF 160 PERMANENT PREFABRICATED BUNGALOWS SIMILAR TO THE ONE BUILT BY COUNCILLOR KERMODE IN ENDFIELD ROAD. **This decision was reported to the Council at their meeting on Thursday by Councillor E. J. Slinn, chairman of the Housing Committee, who made a lengthy statement on the outcome of the interview which the Council's representatives had on the subject with the Ministry a few days ago.**

There was a lively debate when Councillor Slinn had finished his statement, and the failure of the deputation to secure satisfaction was attributed by one Councillor to the fact that the Ministry officials "would not carry the can."

Councillor Slinn, in his statement, recalled that the Council had agreed to purchase 20 acres of land off Somerford Road as a site for the 160 houses and said:—

"With a view to making an early commencement on this scheme the committee authorised some of their members to seek an interview with the Principal Housing Officer of the Ministry of Health for this area. As the type of building was not considered to be of the normal traditional type we were informed that it would be necessary for it to be submitted to a higher official for approval.

"The Town Clerk has since received a telephone message from Mr. Greaves, the Ministry's architect, indicating that the Ministry are not favourably disposed to this type of construction for Council houses. This means, of course, that we cannot proceed with this scheme.

"My committee recommended this type because in their opinion it could be erected in much less time—and time is such a vital factor in the present housing situation—and also would require less of the kind of labour (such as bricklayers) and material (such as bricks) for both of which, at present, the demand greatly exceeds the supply."

A full report of the debate will be published next week.

COUNCILLOR SAYS MINISTRY OFFICIAL WOULD NOT "CARRY THE CAN"

C.T. May 25, 1946

AN allegation that a Ministry of Health official was not prepared not prepared to "carry the can," and that that was the reason why a proposal to build 160 permanent prefabricated bungalows was turned down ,was made at last week s meeting of Christchurch Town Council.

As reported in our last issue, the chairman of the Housing Committee, Councillor E. J. Slinn, told the Council that a telephone message had been received from the Ministry saying that they were "not favourably disposed to the type of construction." The bungalows were to be of the type built by Councillor Kermode in Endfield Road.

In the debate which followed Councillor Slinn's announcement, Councillor McArdle asked whether there was any particular objection to the permanent prefabs.

"The objections were mainly on the character of their structure," replied Councillor Slinn.

Councillor Kermode reminded the Council that the Ministry of Health had approved the type of construction. "I blame the man we saw at Reading because he had been given executive powers and he would not---to put it bluntly — carry the can for this new method of construction," said Councillor Kermode. "He tried to place the responsibility on the Regional Architect.

"He said there were many things in favour of it, but in typical civil service style he was not prepared to carry the can if there was nothing in black and white in Ministry circulars about this type of construction. He would not approve it unless his chief in London approved, and the chief in London would not approve unless he got higher authority either.

NOT TO WORRY ABOUT MATERIALS

" We were told that as a housing authority it was our duty to plan houses of a traditional type and that it was not our job to worry about shortage of materials. We were told that we were to proceed on the assumption that the materials were there, although we knew that the Ministry of Works would say that the bricks were not there. That is the type of thing this Council is up against. How can we produce houses when we are up against Ministry departments like that.

"The Minister of Works has been quite frank. He did say he wondered how many Members of Parliament realised all the implications behind the orders to build houses. My answer is that the builders throughout the country realised this; that is why they have spent their lives in becoming acquainted with these problems."

Councillor Bingham, who said he did not want to be misrepresented by inferring that this was a political question, declared that the Council had not been told the whole facts. He contended that Mr. Williams, the Ministry's representative at Reading, did the correct thing by stating that the Ministry wanted permanent dwellings. Mr. Bevan had said that he was sick and tired of prefabrication.

It would obviously have been to the advantage of Mr. Williams to approve the scheme for 160 houses whatever they were like, and it would have rebounded satisfactorily for a time in his favour, but only for a time. But Mr. Williams said quite specifically that they wanted permanent dwellings and he (Councillor Bingham) believed that that was what the people did want.

BRICKS AND TIMBER WOULD COME.

When Mr. Williams said that they must assume the bricks and timber would come, he was right. It would take about three months to prepare the site and by the end of that time there would be the bricks. In the last eight weeks brick production had increased more than 50 per cent.

Councillor Bingham contended that Mr. Bevan and Mr. Williams were on the right track. "I would not be honest to myself if I said that prefabrication is the solution to the question.

"I honestly and sincerely believe that sound planning is what we need. A month ago I suggested that we should mobilise the builders of this district and I am of the opinion that if we do this we shall achieve success. There is one essential factor and that is good will. It is no use us bringing in any personal issues," he declared.

Councillor Barnes, who was one of the deputation that met the Ministry officials, said that he supported the proposal to build the permanent pre-fabs, because he thought that with that type of construction they would be able to make the best use of the summer months.

GONE BACK ON HIS WORD.

The view that the Minister, in disapproving the pre-fabs., had gone back on his word, was expressed by Councillor McArdle, who recalled that at a meeting at Southampton a short time ago the Minister said: "You must welcome anything that will house the men and women coming home from the Forces."

Councillor McArdle concluded by saying that they should ask their M.P. and also the M.P. for Bournemouth to raise a question in the House on this matter. "Let us have a clear understanding why the prefabricated building was turned down," he said.