

“PIT” DEVELOPMENT

PUBLIC HEARING OF OBJECTIONS TO COUNCIL’S SCHEME

Fine Improvement Outlined

C.T. August 12, 1939

THE Christchurch Conservative Club, Messrs. A. S. Hayball, Mr. W. G. Alford, Mr. Allen, landlord of the Duke of Wellington Inn, all lodged objections against the closure of the right-of-way through or over "Pit," as proposed by the Christchurch Town Council.

Mr. P. F. Allfree, of Messrs. Druitt and Allfree, appeared for the above-named petitioners, and Mr. J. B. Fogaty appeared for Messrs. Miller Bros., builders, and the Parkstone and Bournemouth Co-Operative Society, was represented by Mr. Harker Curtis, valuer and estate agent.

The Christchurch Chamber of Trade put forward an objection, but were not represented. Mr. Herbert Druitt was backed by 278 signatures to a petition.

The hearing was conducted before Mr. J. A. Illingworth, A.R.I.B.A.

Mr. W. D. Platt stated the case for the Town Council. He explained the necessity for the demolition of "Pit," and subsequent purchase by the Council, detailing an agreement with the County Council for the acquirement of a strip of the land of about 26ft. in width, abutting on to Barrack Road for the purpose of road widening. The whole of the frontage of Barrack Road was on offer to the Office of Works for the purpose of building a local General Post Office. The Council had plans for the erection of a Fire Station and Civil Defence Offices and store rooms. It was, therefore, a matter of necessity that the existing right-of-way over the site should be closed.

The existence of these roads, the Town Clerk stated, is contrary to the Minister of Transport's recommendation (Memo. 483, roads) respecting intersection roads, which should be 440 yards apart. A test had been made and it was found that walking from the end of Pit round the Fountain Corner to the other end took only 1½ minutes longer than walking through Pit. Two objections, he thought, were justified, those of the Conservative Club and Messrs. Miller. The Council was prepared for the Order to be modified to enable part of the top end of Pit to remain. Messrs. Miller's objection would be met as part of the site adjoining their premises would not be closed, as it came under the road widening scheme.

MAYOR’S EVIDENCE

The Mayor (Councillor H.E.W. Lapthorne), in reply to the Town Clerk, and in course of cross-examination, gave it as his opinion that the scheme of the Corporation was a very desirable one. With the clearance of the ground and the erection thereon of the Post Office building plan by the Office of Works, and the building of the new Fire Brigade headquarters and Civil Defence Offices, it would be found to be really first-class development and would certainly tend to raise the value of the adjoining properties.

Mr. Allfree: Will it not be actually to the detriment of the traders of Bargates?

The Mayor: On the contrary, it will be very much to their advantage. If this development does not take place, it may result in the erection of a very large number of shops and a great deal of competition. The development as outlined by the Corporation is all to the good of the existing traders.

Mr. Allfree: Have you any guarantee as to a definite class of development?

The Mayor: I have never met any department of His Majesty's Government who were not always anxious to meet the local authorities in order that they should abide by their own suggestions.

Speaking from his own knowledge of the place—a matter of 20 years—Pit had been a "slum" property, and as such was avoided by pedestrians.

Mr. Allfree asked if the Mayor did not consider it a hardship for the traders of Bargates to have the "through" cut denied to their customers?

The Mayor replied that in his opinion such a question did not arise, for when the planned County Council road widening undertaking was effected and the old Antelope Hotel and adjoining premises site were taken into the road widening, together with a strip of land, the local authority were contributing to the improvement scheme, a pedestrian walking from the Conservative Club right round the site to a point corresponding on the Barrack Road, would take hardly longer than it now took to traverse the open space. There was also the new through way of Twynham Avenue. He mentioned that the demolition of the Antelope would in all probability be used for the purpose of making a traffic "round-about."

Further, in his (Councillor Laphorne's) opinion, the traders of Bargates had already received Two-and-sixpence for a penny," and they should be well content to allow the planned development to proceed. What had already happened was that a slum had been cleared from about their businesses and the whole immediate district improved.

He reminded them that the Office of Works was not prepared to consider any development in regard to the placing of the new Post Office unless they could obtain the precise area situated as shown in the plan. This indeed was an Office of Works minimum requirement.

£5,000 TO CLEAR PIT.

Continuing, the Mayor said it had cost the local authority already £5,000 to clear the site of Pit, of which sum £3,335 was outstanding and meant a charge equivalent of a one farthing rate for the period of 80 years. The sum which would be received from the Office of Works for the acquisition of the site of the proposed new Post Office would reduce this burden to one-fifteenth of a penny over a similar term.

In answer to Mr. Fogaty, for Messrs. Miller Bros., he said the Council were willing to accede to a modification to enable Mr. Miller to have goods delivered at the side of his premises.

CO-OP. PLAN MILK DISTRIBUTION CENTRE.

Mr. Marker Curtis, for the Parkstone and Bournemouth Co-Operative Society, said that the society had recently purchased No. 17, Bargates for a milk and dairy distributing depot. It was their intention to pull down the premises and build larger premises with a shop. If these proposals to close the area were carried through it was very doubtful if the society would re-build.

Mr. Allfree, on behalf of a number of objectors, said as far as his clients were concerned they only objected to the closing of the straight road through Pit. This, he submitted, was a short cut from Bargates to the Recreation Ground and was used by residents and by school children.

GENERAL OBJECTORS.

Mr. A. N. Wooff, secretary of the Christchurch Conservative Club, said the club proposed to enlarge and improve their premises. The premises were freehold and they had a membership of 260. Their plan included a main entrance at the side, in Pit, and, of course, they objected to the road being closed. They considered they had a valuable corner site which would be depreciated.

Mr. Tom McArdle, general secretary, Christchurch National Spiritualist Church, stated that they were lessees of the Assembly Rooms, over the Conservative Club, and that many of their members used Pit on their way to and from meetings. There was an outside fire escape, and he thought this would not be very effective if people were trapped in a cul de sac.

Mr. W. G. Alford, coal merchant, who had a coal yard in Pit, feared that a cul de sac would cause him loss of time with his vehicles.

Seven different tradesmen carrying on business in and around Bargates feared that the closure of Pit would cause serious loss of trade.

Mr. A. S. Hayball, baker of Bargates; Mr. W. G. Boggust, grocer, of Barrack Road; Mr. George Allen, landlord of the Duke of Wellington; Mr. J. E. Tuck, jeweller, Bargates; Mr. F. Pollard, spirit merchant, Bargates; and Mr. F. Pollard and Mr. F. Thompson, both butchers of Bargates, all pointed out that their customers coming from Bargates or Barrack Road, if unable to come through Pit would have to enter High Street, where other shopping facilities would be closer than those they patronised at present.

Mr. A. V. Wright, of 2, Bargates, feared that his children would be endangered crossing Barrack Road at Fountain Corner when on their way to school. He personally thought that it was safer to cross the road at Pit.

MR. DRUITT CONCERNED FOR NEXT GENERATION.

The chief objector and the most closely cross-examined by the Town Clerk was Mr Herbert Druitt, of "Woodside," Barrack Road, local antiquarian. He declared he was most concerned about the coming generation —he did not want them "all run over" in Barrack Road.

In evidence, he pointed out that Pit was an ancient thoroughfare, which had been used by the people of Christchurch for centuries.

The present derelict condition of Pit site was due solely to the policy of the Council, to which he was strongly opposed.

Continuing with the history of Pit, he said that Spicer Street was erected in 1825, after a great fire, and had been named after the Mayor of that year. Pit was admittedly of very ancient origin, but he indignantly denied that it had ever been a "slum."

In reply to Mr. Platt, he indignantly denied that he had been responsible for raising a petition against the closure of Pit. He had helped, he said, because as a member of the Council for ten years, it was considered that he knew the ropes well enough to be of assistance in such a matter.

THE WORM TURNS.

The Town Clerk: "Do you not usually criticise and oppose everything the Council brings forward?"

Mr. Druitt: "I certainly oppose some, but not everything."

The Town Clerk enumerated a list of Mr. Druitt's previous objections, and witness replied that he did not consider this recital at all relevant.

The Inspector commented: "If you are in the habit of opposing everything, it will have some bearing on the evidence.

Town Clerk: "He does oppose every change." Then speaking to Mr. Druitt: "Do you know of any scheme you have supported?"

Mr. Druitt: "Again and again things are being thrust down the ratepayers' throats, and this is an instance where the worm has turned."

POST OFFICE AS LONG AS THE PRIORY

Mr. Druitt continued that he could see no reason for closing the road, and taking the Borough Surveyor's own measurements, 225 feet was quite sufficient for a Post Office and a road as well.

"Do you know how long the Priory Church is?" he asked. "No?, Well it is a little more than 300 feet. Do you mean to tell us that you are going to have a Post Office as long as the church? In that case you will shut the fire engine and everything else out from Barrack Road.

Town Clerk: "Is it not reasonable for the Council to develop this site and reduce the loan charges at small inconvenience to the public?"

Mr. Druitt: "But it is not a 'small' inconvenience. The public have not been considered at all. I am sure that the Post Office would be agreeable if properly approached."

In his submission to the Inspector, Mr. Platt said: "The Council have fully considered this scheme and the evidence brought forward to-day will not affect the decision. The greatest inconvenience which could be caused to any pedestrian is a matter of only about a minute.

"The Council feel that they are meeting the most serious objection by allowing this Pit road to remain open as far as the coal yard. This proposal in the estimation of the Council will be a great improvement to the locality. As to the divergence of traffic, it is better to divert via Stour Road than across Pit."

This closed the evidence, and the Inspector said that he would view the site on Friday morning.