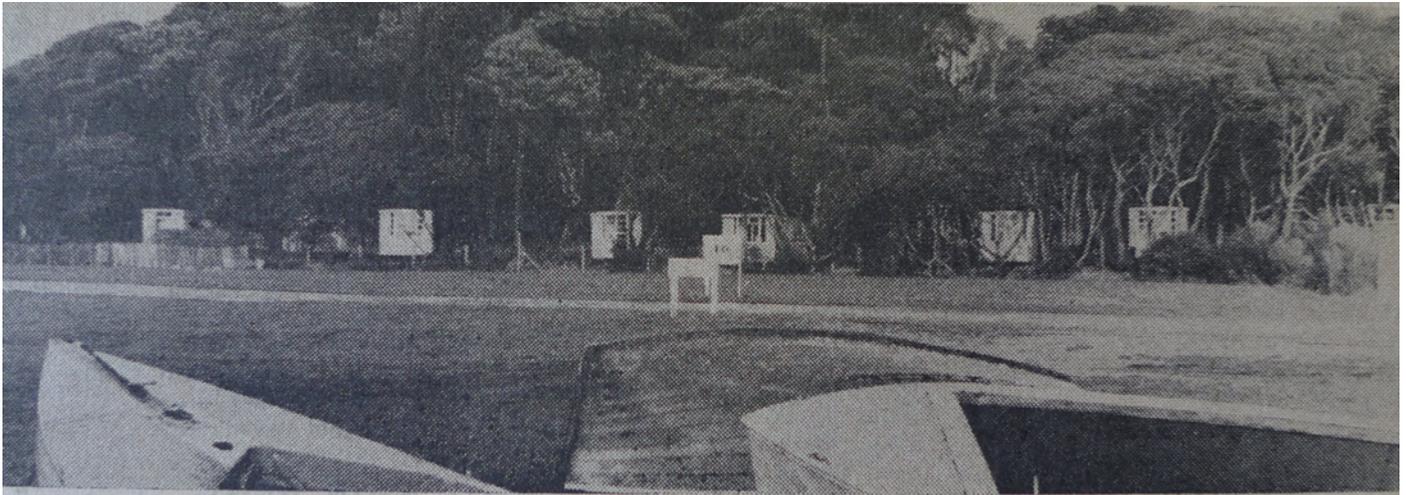


“AMUSEMENT FACTORY” OUT OF PROPORTION AT SANDHILLS INQUIRY TOLD

C.T. December 22, 1967



The Sandhills caravan site seen from Haven Quay.

RESIDENTS around Sandhills feared the proposed "amusement factory" there would be "out of proportion to what we have been used to," last Thursday's local inquiry into a plan to establish a holiday caravan park on the site was told.

Greatways Holidays Ltd. planned to put 243 caravans and chalets on the nine and a half acre site. Three residents' associations, local inhabitants and Hampshire County Council objected.

"We fear that, by the injection of another 800 or so people during the summer, the roads will be cluttered with cars. I'm afraid they just won't take it," said Mr. Leslie Deeley, of Bure Lane.

He said residents were "shocked" to learn of a proposal to introduce "a factory—albeit an amusement factory, a holiday factory, with all its noise and traffic."

REDUCE

The appeal was against planning refusal for 206 chalets and 54 caravans, but Mr. Gordon McMurtrie, for the appellants, said they now proposed to reduce this to a total of 159 units.

Sites manager for Greatways Holidays Ltd., Mr. Charles Still, said there were 80 caravans on the site at present. A site licence was granted for this in December, 1961. Two of the caravans were residential.

He believed that "having regard to Mr. Knott's (the owner) desire to retain the existing character of the grounds," the maximum number of units which could be sited there was 159. Cross-examined by Mr. Barrington Myers for Mudeford and Stanpit and Friars Cliff Residents' Associations. Mr. Still explained that 84 of the units were double ones. Total number of caravans and chalets was, in fact, 243.

CAR PARKING

There was "considerable space" which could be used for car parking behind the house and along the drive. Part of the house was "derelict, beyond repair." One wing will have to be demolished, and could make way for car parking.

Asked about trees, Mr. Still said 47 had been condemned by the local authority as diseased or because they interfered with the growth of a more important tree. No further trees would need to be felled to make way for caravans or chalets.

THE PERIMETER

A number of people who had lived in caravans on the site since before 1947 gave evidence. Mr. Douglas Witcher, of Slinn Road, Somerford, said that when he left the site in 1951 there were 20-25 caravans on the site. The 'vans were all round the perimeter. Mrs. Pamela Copage, of Cricket Close, Mudeford, gave similar evidence, as did Mrs. Josephine Seccombe, of Bracken Way, Walkford.

Mrs. Copage added: "They keep pulling down the old houses, ruining Mudeford. It would be so much nicer as a caravan site, kept at a low level, out of the way of Mudeford. I would rather see chalets and caravans there than blocks of flats and these terraced houses, which are horrid."

Former works director for Bluebird Caravans, Parkstone. Mr. Ronald Smith, of Okeford Fitzpaine, Dorset, said there were 50 caravans on the site in 1964.

INCREASING

Mrs. Doreen Wicks thought there were well over 50 caravans on the site in 1948. She described the site as "full" when she left the site in 1954. Later she visited friends on the site, and saw that the number of caravan there went on increasing.

Mr. Kenneth Thomas, of Mudeford Lane, an aircraft fitter, who lived at Sandhills Lodge for some time, said the local council requisitioned Sandhills in 1946. They held it for 10 years.

After 1948 caravans appeared on the site "thick and fast," he said. The reason for this, he thought, was that the borough council had built toilets there.

After 1956 the permanent residents were largely replaced by holidaymakers.

'SHIFTED GROUND'

Mr. A. C. Johnson, assistant county clerk, said the planning authority had to assume an inquiry into an appeal of "an application which has somewhat shifted its ground during the course of this inquiry."

The appeal was based, he said, on refusal in December, 1965, of outline application for development of a holiday park at Sandhills.

"It became clear from this application that the planning authority were faced with a proposal for a total of some 260 units on this site which had hitherto carried not more than 80 units."

MATERIAL CHANGE

Mr. Johnson maintained this increase was a "material change of use."

The appellants had asked the Minister to determine whether permission was required. Mr. Mc-Murtrie claimed that there was no change of use; the site had existing use rights for caravans from before the 1947 Town and County Planning Act.

HAD APPLIED

Mr. Johnson pointed out that the appellants had applied for planning permission; they would not have done so if their argument that existing use rights made this unnecessary were correct.

The jump from 80 to 260 units would mean little regard could be given for the natural features of the site, he said.

Area planning officer, Mr. E. S. Johnson, said the appeal site had been taken out of the proposed green belt by the Minister at the review of the Town Map in 1961.

FOR WALK

Then the local planning authority asked the Minister to approve the removal of most of the site from public open space. They only wanted enough for a walk from Avon Beach to Haven Quay—a strip 100 to 150 feet wide.

However, the Minister refused, and insisted that the whole site, except for the kitchen garden, should remain public open space. Said the Ministry: "We consider that this is likely to be a controversial proposal and a

sufficient case has not been made for making any change in the original proposals for the Mudeford area at this stage."

The policy map for Mudeford, produced by the county planning department after the Town Map review, stated there was a case for amending the Town Map to make only part of the Sandhills site open space, permitting "limited development" elsewhere on the site.

NO AGREEMENT

Preliminary discussions had taken place with the owners of the site, but no agreement reached. Thus the planning authority didn't feel they could ask the Minister to modify the public open space provision. The Ministry of Housing in a publication about caravan parks, said: 'The nature and shape of the site will often govern the density standard to be adopted. On some sites, a relatively low density may be desirable if the most is to be made of existing trees and bushes and other natural features. Larger caravans, too, demand a lower density if other standards are to be met. Holidaymakers would be forced to look outside the site to the holiday attractions of this area, in particular to Mudeford Quay and Avon Beach, said Mr. Johnson,

Said Mr. Johnson: "The local planning authority contend that the complete exploitation of the site in the manner indicated in the application would be contrary to the local authority's policies for the area and would be objectionable."

Mr. Johnson said the local authority didn't admit that the proposal was to extend a use which had existed since 1942. Representing Highcliffe Citizens' Association, Lt.-Col. A. C. Tarnow, said the association contended that to put caravans and chalets adjacent to "highly expensive" properties inevitably was to the detriment of the latter.

Sandhills was one of the loveliest spots on the south coast, and as large a part of it as possible should be retained as open space.

Sea defences at Highcliffe meant that more people using beaches west to Avon Beach and Haven Quay.

Mr. Leslie Deeley, of Bure Lane, told the inspector: "The appeal site has always disturbed us. We came to live here fairly quietly. Some years ago Mudeford was called a fishing village—the name couldn't be applied today with any truth.

"We are shocked to learn we are going to have introduced to us a factory—albeit an amusement factory, a holiday factory, with all its noise and traffic. It seems out of proportion with what we have been used to.

"We fear that, by the injection of another 800 or so people during the summer, the roads will be cluttered with additional cars. I am afraid they just won't take it."

Mr. Myers recalled the Minister's refusal of permission to develop the site for caravans in 1956, when 180 caravans were proposed.

SIMILAR

The situation today was similar, he said, except that the number had been increased, and the caravans had a greater capacity. There was also an approved licensed club on the site.

At present there were 80 caravans. If another 160 caravans and 800 people were added and this were thought not to be a "material change of use" then "indeed we are living in an Alice in Wonderland state." The county council's coastal survey wanted no further development in the holiday use at Avon Beach and Mudeford:

further development should be towards the east, pointed out Mr. Myers. After the inquiry, the inspector, Mr. A.G. Harcourt, visited the site. The Minister's decision will be made later.