

SHOW-PIECE COST IS PROBED

Stony-lane works inquiry opened

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THE reasons why Christchurch's show-piece sewage works proved to be too small only months after it opened were probed at a Ministry of Housing and Local Government inquiry.

The Stony-lane works is costing about £360,000, but already extensions are being proposed which will cost another £296,000.

Christchurch Ratepayers Association brought the matter to the notice of the Ministry because it was "alarmed at the ever-increasing cost" of the works, committee member Mr. James Campbell told the Ministry inspector, Mr. W. F. George.

But apart from three CRA representatives, only three members of the public were present, one of whom was a councillor.

Mr. Campbell said his committee appreciated that specialised knowledge was required which very few rate-payers possessed, and the appeal was made to get an unbiased assessment by an expert officer of the Ministry.

In 1951 the works was estimated to cost £160,000. Three years later the estimate was £270,500. The reasons given for the increased costs were: population increases, rises in the costs of labour and materials, addition of pumping stations and a staff house, and an outfall to the River Avon to meet the water company's objections.

Mr. Campbell said the CRA were not aware of any abnormal growth of population between 1951 and 1954: the population had only increased by 5,890 between 1952 and 1963.

Should not the rises in costs have been foreseen and adequate provision made in the estimates, asked Mr. Campbell.

REVISED AGAIN

In 1957 the estimates were again revised to show a cost of £315,000 approximately 200 per cent greater than the original estimate. The final cost had not yet been ascertained but it was likely to be about £360,000, including £20,000 for extra sludge beds.

Mr. Campbell said they were aware the extensions planned might cost more if carried out in stages instead of under a single contract, but the method should be considered, as the full capacity of the works for a population of 48,000 might never be required.

Mr. Campbell pointed out that the ratepayers, many of them elderly people living on fixed incomes, were already hard-pressed to meet the ever-increasing rate burden.

The proposed extensions would also provide for a population of about 11,000 living in the Ringwood and Fordingbridge Rural District, and the CRA wanted to know how far the extensions were necessitated on that account.

ASSURANCE SOUGHT

"We consider that the ratepayers of Christchurch should not be called upon to finance any portion of the works for adjoining authorities, and we ask that an assurance shall be given that this will not be the case," said Mr. Campbell.

Had the borough council been aware that the original estimate of £160,000 would in the course of a few years be increased to a sum which might reach threequarters-of-a-million they might have considered reaching a far more economical agreement with Bournemouth. Under this Christchurch sewage would be dealt with at the new Holdenhurst sewage works established by

Bournemouth.

Mr. John Midgley Haseldine, a partner in John Taylor and Sons, the consultant engineers concerned in the erection of the sewage works, said that at the time the design was commenced in 1952, the dry weather flow through the works was estimated at 1,015,000 gallons per day in 1961.

The estimate was based on a resident population of 28,500, plus allowances for trade waste and summer visitors.

The present dry weather flow was now "very substantially" in excess of the designed capacity amounting to about 1,800,000 gallons per day.

MANY REASONS

There were many reasons for the discrepancy, said Mr. Haseldine. Water consumption in the borough had increased more rapidly than was at first thought likely.

Since the original design sewage had been accepted from Burton and Winkton. Although the flow from this area was at present quite low, it was expected that ultimately a population of 3,000 would be contributing.

Insufficient allowance was made for trade flows and for infiltration water.

The works were laid out in such a way that they could be duplicated to bring the total flow up to 2,030,000 gallons per day. Negotiations had taken place to accept sewage from Bransgore which would have a final population of about 8,000. The sewage from the population would give a total flow of at least two million gallons,

"It is thus evident that a simple duplication of the works will do little else than correct the existing overloading and give no margin for future expansion of the borough, said Mr. Haseldine.

"I am therefore recommending to the Corporation that the works be extended to give an ultimate capacity of three million gallons, and this can be done by substantially adhering to the layout of the works that was envisaged, but making the new tanks and channels larger than was proposed."

After discussions with the West Hampshire Water Company, Mr. Haseldine assumed a future domestic flow of 40 gallons per head per day, plus 10 gallons for industrial users and 25 gallons for summer visitors.

When the extensions scheme was proposed in October 1963 the cost was estimated at £296,000.

During the last 18 months "considerable difficulty" had arisen with smell from the sludge drying beds due to incomplete digestion of the sludge,

Mr. Haseldine said he had recommended the construction of four secondary sludge digestion tanks. The lowest tender amounted to £36,427 16s. 2d., and the Minister's acceptance was sought as quickly as possible.

CONTRIBUTION

Borough treasurer Mr. Harry Preece said the RDC's annual contribution towards the operating costs was estimated at £950 for 1964-65, and the RDC also contributed towards the capital costs. Hampshire County Council paid one-half of the total loan charges over a rate of 3d. in the £.

The Inspector said he had received a letter from the RDC saying they had concluded it would be wrong to use good agricultural land to build a sewage works for Bransgore and Thorneyhill with the Corporation's works so near.

Negotiations had been entered into with Christchurch, and the terms were in course of settlement. It was a great disappointment to the RDC that the extensions were not likely to be completed before 1967, and that the Bransgore and Thorneyhill sewerage scheme had to be put back.

The RDC were most anxious for approval to be given to the proposed extensions.

BOARD'S CONSENT

Mr. A. Brayshaw, Avon and Dorset River Board fisheries officer, said the dry weather flow had been substantially increased without the Board's consent, and presumably Christchurch council had committed an offence under the Rivers Pollution Act of 1951.

The Board must accept that this was inevitable. The council could not have done anything else, but obviously the matter should be regularised, and Mr. Brayshaw felt the Board would give consent subject to certain conditions.

Questioned by the town clerk, Mr. John Macfadyen, Mr. Campbell agreed that a fair financial arrangement had been reached with the RDC.

Mr. Haseldine told Mr. Albert Toombs, chairman of the CRA, that for Bournemouth to take Christchurch sewage the Holdenhurst works would have to be extended, and therefore there would be no saving. All the pumping stations would have to be changed to deliver the sewage to Bournemouth.

Coun. Miss Carol Sharp, speaking from the public seats, could not see how anyone could have foreseen the increase in the public consumption of water.

Mr. Macfadyen said the council were advised that it would not be economical for the extensions to be built in stages.