

ST. CATHERINE'S HILL ESTATE: — "A FAIT ACCOMPLI," BUT
DEVELOPERS WANT HELP IN PLANNING

C.T. November 25, 1955

CRITICS of the proposed St. Catherine's Hill estate were this week given the opportunity to help plan the development.

"Give us your views and advice. Help us do what we are trying to do — develop this estate in the very best possible way," Mr. Hugh Insley Fox, of Messrs. Fox & Sons, urged a public meeting at the Town Hall.

At the same meeting a member of the Council for the Preservation of Rural England congratulated all concerned with the arrangements.

"I have examined the site from all possible angles," said Major T. V. Booth Jones, J.P., vice-chairman of the Avon Valley Committee of the C.P.R.E., "I hope the arrangements will go through."

After a two hours' discussion on the proposals for the 70 acre estate, however, a motion, proposed by Mr. W. Gordon Palmer, supporting the scheme, was not seconded.

Agreed was a suggestion by Mr. C. Hall that the Christchurch Citizens Association should ask the Malmesbury Estates for the production of the deeds relating to the land.

Approval also greeted a remark by Coun. P. G. King, that he felt the meeting "was not in sympathy" with the development.

Coun. King added: "It has been stated that this estate is a fait accompli. If public opinion is strong enough in this town to say 'we do not want this development,' the Minister can revoke his decision."

In reply, Mr. Fox pointed out that if the Minister agreed to such action heavy compensation would have to be paid.

"SECRECY."

Opening the meeting, which was organised by the Christchurch Citizens Association, Mr. W. E. Tucker, chairman of the Christchurch Debating Society, referred to the impression that the development had been carried out "under a cloak of secrecy."

"This is incorrect," he added. "Publicity was given to this development when the planning authority first published a plan in 1952, giving the whole of the area as an open space. The plan, I understand, was open for inspection at the Town Hall."

Mr. Tucker then submitted a multi-point questionnaire for reply by Mr. Fox on behalf of the developers.

He asked:—

(1) Was it the production of the 1952 plan that gave the Malmesbury Estate the idea of developing this land as an estate?

(2) Proposed are some 260 houses which will bring in about £190,000. How does the ratepayer figure in this transaction? The Estate is not only selling land but the amenities going with it. How much has it cost to develop the 70 acres for building purposes up to the present time?

(3) When did the Estate first consider the development of the land for building?

(4) Is it in the minds of the Estate to develop all, or part, of the land from the present marked boundary to the old W.A.A.F. site?

DRAINAGE

(5) If this land is to be developed will the estate have its own disposal station, or will it be connected to the existing main?

(6) What is the position of existing house owners on the opposite side of Hurn Road? Already these houses are subject to a certain amount of flooding. With the making up of roads will this not mean that instead of water soaking into the ground it will flood over Hurn Road and into these properties?

(7) In order to clear the air. Leading up to the suggestion of the offer of the Estate of the deeds of Town Common, and the offer to sell at a reasonable figure land adjoining Town Common, would it not be in the interests of the ratepayers to know if the Estate approached the Council first or was the position reversed?

(8) This is, I understand, common land. What difference therefore does it make who holds the deeds so long as the rights of the individual are protected"

<9> I understand the reason for this generous gesture on behalf of the Estate was that no opposition should be given to the proposed development, and it was pointed out that should permission be refused the Estate could apply for a compulsory purchase order and the Council would then be faced with raising some £20,000. It would be interesting to know if the matter had gone that far whether the Minister would have granted the order?

(10) If repairs are necessary to the track to the gravel pit will the ratepayers have to foot the bill?

GOODWILL GESTURE

Finally Mr. Tucker suggested that as a "gesture of goodwill and appreciation of the amenities provided through ratepayers' contributions," the Estate should make a free gift of the land they proposed to sell to the Council as an open space.

"At the same time, as they will not be called upon to pay income tax on the profits of the development of the building site, or as the Estate, through being, I believe, a Limited Company, will not face further death duties, they should ask the ratepayers of Christchurch to accept a gift of 20 per cent. of the net capital gain.

In reply, Mr Fox—who was accompanied by Mr. Wallace, Lord Malmesbury's agent—stressed he wanted to stop any misunderstanding such as had occurred with the estate development near Hengistbury Head.

Some of the questions asked were "nonsense", he added. The position simply did not arise. With regard to the question it has quite "th regard to the development the position was a fait accompli. Planning permission had been granted. "I believe that this will be a very proper development for Christchurch, and one which the citizens should approve and encourage," he said.

FIRST IDEA

Turning to the questions, Mr. Fox said that it was in 1937 that the idea of developing the estate was first conceived. Apart from rates and taxes the development had cost nothing up to the present time, but to carry through the scheme it was going to cost "a great amount of money".

There was no intention, he continued, to develop to the old W.A.A.F. site. The Forestry Commission were going to develop it purely for forestry purposes.

With regard to the drainage there seemed to be a lot of misunderstanding. "We have agreed on behalf of the Estate, to bear a very large sum of the cost. As for the suggestion that

people on the other side of the road will be swamped, that is sheer nonsense. Those people will, in fact, be better off. As far as I know the Council will not be called upon to provide additional drainage."

Mr. Fox said he understood the Estate had first approached the Council with regard to taking over Town Common as far back as 1927 or earlier. He considered too, that the number of actual commoners was extremely small.

If permission had been refused for building development the Minister would have had no option but to approve compulsory purchase. With regard to the gravel track repairs the Estate would be responsible for the cost. Furthermore, he had no knowledge of his Lordship being a limited company, and he understood he had to pay very heavy death duties.

OPEN SPACES

Mr. Fox added that several large areas on the estate were being reserved for amenity open spaces. Lord Malmesbury was insisting on purchasers preserving trees, and it was intended to allow only a "very nice type" of bungalow development. Nothing was to be built higher than the 100ft. contour, so there could be no question of the vista on to the hill being spoiled. All the roads were to be avenues, with verges, and in addition to the open spaces reserved there were other large areas planned for shops or community purposes, and for a church.

"The development of this estate will, I submit, be of tremendous benefit to the borough by way of obtaining a large increase in the rateable value and of rates coming into the borough."

In reply to one question from the audience Mr. Fox said the Council had no jurisdiction over Town Common; the freehold had always belonged to the Malmesbury family.

"If these negotiations proceed as we hope, you will then have for all-time 415 acres of open space." he added.

Coun. King was asked by Mr. Brian Molony if the Council were to take over Town Common would they prevent it being used as a "Tom Tiddler ground" Motor cycle scrambles had turned paths into quagmires, said Mr. Molony. Also was Coun. King aware of the extent to which gravel was being worked on the hill.

NOT ALLOWED

Coun. King replied that his own view was that the motorcycle scrambles should not be allowed on the land. With regard to gravel workings the County Planning Committee was the authority. The regulations laid down the pits should be filled as they became disused. If that was done the amenities did not suffer very much.

Coun. J.W. Richardson pointed out that in the past he had been an opponent of the scheme. Now it had been approved the Borough must concern itself with the future.

He suggested the Association should call a public meeting to consider the provision of a school for the Jumpers ward, as have been urged by Mr. Stanley Kermode. A more adequate bus service was also wanted for the area.

Chairman at the meeting was Mr. F. Donovan Lane.