

TOWN MAP: A DIFFICULT JOB FOR THE COUNTY PLANNERS

C.T. February 26, 1971

PLANNING to bring an 18th century town up to 20th century standards proved an "extraordinarily difficult" job for the county planning department, said deputy county planning officer, Mr. Roger Brown, this week.

It took the department close on ten years to get the plan settled; years of bargaining with councillors, compromising with objectors and redrafting their proposals.

The final plan was published this week, and represents little change from its immediate predecessor. It is intended to cover about a ten-year period. There are high capacity traffic lights at Pit Site, comprehensive redevelopment on the town hall car park site, car parks north and south of the Druitt Gardens, and traffic management to reduce the amount of traffic using the Priory Conservation Area.

The planners' work over the last ten years has produced three plans: the first was in 1966, and brought howls of protest, chiefly for its proposals for an enormous roundabout at Pit Site, a car park on the whole of Millhams, and for carving the Druitt Gardens up for car parks and rear service roads.

The county planning department withdrew the plan eventually, and produced the first draft of the present plan just over a year ago.

Mr. Brown complained that physically, Christchurch was a difficult place to plan. The town centre was bounded by the water meadows, the attractive area around the Priory Church, the Druitt Gardens and the A35.

Despite these restrictions, and those imposed by the problem of summer visitors who wanted to be able the walk safely to and around the Priory area and Quomps, the planners had tried in a modest way to bring an 18th century town up to the 20th century.

They had tried to make room in the town centre for modern shopping development and for the car parks modern shoppers wanted.

The county planners had been through a fairly full process of trying to find out what the public wanted, and the borough council had been "pushing hard for progress".

CO-ORDINATED PLAN

The county planners still felt the development on the town hall car park should be to a co-ordinated plan, but on a less ambitious scale than they suggested in 1966. They had come to the conclusion that it would be necessary to extend car parking into Millhams, but on to a smaller area of land. The objection to the use of Millhams was the only objection on which the county planners had not given way, he said.

The planners had written into the map the idea that in the longer term it might be necessary to extend the town hall shopping area across the by-pass to the south-east corner of Bargates. The by-pass footbridge, which he expected to be built at the same time as the traffic lights were installed at Pit Site in any case, would be a prerequisite of this extended shopping development.

The county has given way to an extent on the restrictions on Bargates development. In the first draft of the present plan they put a depth limit of 50 feet on the southern section of Bargates and 30 feet on the north-eastern section. These have been extended to 70 feet and 50 feet respectively, a compromise between the planners' original proposal and the view of the borough council that there should be no restriction at all.

Mr. Brown said the purpose of the depth restriction was to keep out supermarkets — 70 feet would be enough for normal shops.

'SERIOUS OBJECTIONS'

The Creedy Road in the Druitt Gardens originally proposed had been eliminated because of the "serious objections", so at least part of High Street had to be used for traffic access to shops and car parks. As for rear service roads, all new development in the High Street would have to provide them or space for them, he said.

The proposals for traffic included the high-capacity traffic lights at Pit Site to replace the roundabout, which was too small by modern standards. Mr. Brown anticipated that the traffic lights would have five-lane entries from High Street, Bargates, the by-pass and Barrack Road. The Sopers Lane junction would be restricted to left turns only.

Access to the Quomps area would be along St. Margaret's Avenue from Sopers Lane and Willow Way from Tuckton. A new road through the Corporation's pumping station would connect St. Margaret's Avenue with Christchurch Quay.

The aim was to discourage traffic from using Church Street and the Wick Lane and Castle Street area close to Priory Corner, he said.

PARKING SPACES

The planners estimate that by 1981 the town centre will require some 2,600 car parking spaces — at present there are 1,165. New car parks are planned at Millhams (this could be replaced by a multi-storey car park in the redevelopment site), off Sopers Lane adjacent to the Druitt Gardens, off Wick Lane south of the Druitt Gardens, and in Bargates within the extension of the town hall redevelopment area.

The town hall/Millhams car park is planned to increase from 250 to 500 spaces; the extension into Bargates must provide for another 300 to 400; at ground level the one north of the Druitt Gardens would cater initially for 250 and could be made multi-storey to take 750; the one south of the gardens will be 150 at surface level and could expand to 600 multi-storey.

