

COUNCIL REJECT £40,000 OFFER FOR SITE OF WICK LANE COTTAGES

December 24, 1971

THE prospect of land-hungry developers trying to get their hands on a slice of valuable land the borough council wants for old people's homes was one viewed with disdain by most councillors on Tuesday.

The council had been offered £40,000 for half an acre of land on which stand the Wick Lane cottages, facing across Quomps to the River Stour. The housing committee recommended the council not to consider the offer, as it had already been decided to replace the cottages by old people's homes.

Housing committee chairman, Ald. Miss Carol Sharp, reminded members there had been a resounding majority in September in favour of building the homes for old people.

Developers with an eye on the main chance would be coming along with offers for the site, as many had concluded in September, but she wanted the council to stick to its decision.

Ald. Maurice Lynk remained implacably opposed to this view. He had been a "lone voice" in favour of selling the site at the last meeting. He hoped for more support on Tuesday.

However, he got very little.

One by one, members of the council stood to defend the needs of the old people and urge that the developers didn't get their hands on one of the best views in Christchurch.

"This land is so valuable," said Ald. Lynk, "that if it were put on the open market it would produce enough money to buy other land elsewhere of sufficient area to build homes for three or even four times as many old people.

"I question the right of the council to deny these old people homes in which to spend their closing years. Nobody more than I would like to see a home assured for every old person in the borough."

The land was worth about £60,000, he said — the £40,000 was a "good opening offer". The inhabitants of the borough should have their chance to share in this value.

Ald. Lynk put an amendment "temporarily suspending" the plans for old people's homes while enquiries were made as to what development might reasonably be expected to receive planning permission and as to the value set on the site by the district valuer.

Ald. Lynk said that the value of the site at the time of building, plus the cost of building the old people's homes, would produce a figure of £12 a week for the rent.

'EXPENSIVE'

"It's all very well saying 'Let's build a memorial on this site'—but can we afford such an expensive memorial?"

Borough surveyor, Mr. F. R. C. Hart said that plans being prepared were for 12 or 14 old people's homes.

Ald. Hubert Bourke, supporting Ald. Lynk, thought the council had gone into its decision to build old people's homes "with its eyes shut". The council should provide four times as many houses on a suitable site.

"The housing committee seemed to think 'What we have, we hold', irrespective of what it might do with the money," he said.

The greatest needs of the old people were comfort and warmth— not necessarily a good view.

Ald. Eric Spreadbury thought the old people of the borough had a right to the site, and the commercial value of it didn't matter.

Where was the borough going to buy land at a third or a quarter of the price offered for that in Wick Lane? Near the sewage works or away from the shops?

Coun. John Holroyd-Doveton said he would consider the amendment if there were other suitable sites in the central area. But none had been suggested, just sites on the periphery of Christchurch.



Coun. Mrs. Irene Stevenson complained: "What a dreadful thing it is to grow old in this borough. It seems that if you grow old the house you live in is no longer suitable for you, so they push you away somewhere else.



COUN. MRS. NEWBURY
'... don't rat on old people'

"These people have lived at Wick Lane for many years. I think it is a most suitable place for old people. They like to live where they can see what's going on.

"Young people can live on the periphery of the borough — they have got two good legs to get about on."

Coun. A. R. Payne agreed: "Old people don't want to be pushed away to some outlandish spot to live out their lives in loneliness. They want to be at the centre of things, near the shops and buses."

Coun. Mrs. Barbara Newbury: "Are we here to promote the common good or the well-being of the property developers? This land was bought for the specific reason of buying homes for old people, and we mustn't rat on them."

Coun. Tom Staniforth added: "Don't let us say that the ones with the biggest chequebooks should be the ones to enjoy this site."

Ald. Miss Sharp agreed that old people wanted to be in the centre of things; they wanted to be able to see something happening from their windows. The council had made a "grave error" at Rutland Road by putting the old people's homes at the back — it should learn the lesson of that mistake.

The recommendation was carried by a large majority.