

JUNE 1988.



THORNCOMBE.

THE MAKING OF THE THORNCOMBE LANDSCAPE.

Mr Tony Smith, Head of Geography at Holyrood School, Chard gave the talk which followed the AGM of the Trust on Wednesday 11 May 1988. Claiming that, geologically speaking, West Dorset is one of the most interesting focal points in Europe, Mr Smith explained that the rocks in the area originated perhaps 200 million years ago in the West Indies. He described how the greensand, gault, clay and chalk had been formed and instanced the Marshwood Vale within its ring of hills such as Lewesdon, Pilsdon and Lamberts Castle. Weaknesses in the rock structure led to the forming of the rivers Blackwater, Synderford and Axe.

The geology of the area had precluded the creation of major industries; on the other hand it had provided a ready supply of good building materials such as Portland and Hamstone, clay (for cob and bricks) and flint. A carefully chosen selection of slides of rock features and landscapes in the South West illustrated the impact of geology on our surroundings. This fascinating talk was followed by the customary bring and buy and raffle.

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HIGHER FARM INQUIRY, 26/27 APRIL 1988.

A Public Inquiry into the proposed development at Higher Farm, Thorncombe was held in the Village Hall on the 26 & 27 April 1988. The Inquiry was conducted by an Inspector from the Department of the Environment, Mr J.R.Coward. The Appellant, Mr Michael Fearn, was represented by Miss Jennie Atyeo (Solicitor) whose witnesses included Messers Vernon (Town Planning Consultant), Cumming (Klargester Developments) and N.R.Atyeo (Farmer). The West Dorset District Council was represented by Mr A.McClure (Solicitor) whose witnesses were Messers E.Fry (C.G.Fry & Sons Ltd.), Williams (South West Water) and Boyt (Forward Planning Officer WDDC.). Other submissions were made by Mr J.A.Terrett (District Councillor), Miss A.Greenlees, Mr David Barrow (Parish Council), Mr F.Quick (Farmer) and Mr P.Moreland (Thorncombe Village Trust).

The Appellant began by withdrawing the craft workshops proposal from their scheme. They claimed that the existing farm buildings and house were no longer suited to the running of the farm and that the bulk of them could be converted into holiday units without spoiling their character. Their farm role would be assumed by a new house and purpose built outbuildings at the South West corner of the development site. The residential part of the development of mixed housing would conform with many of the requirements of the Structure Plan which designates Thorncombe as a Priority Village. The estate could

logically be included in a re-designed village envelope and its visual impact would be considerably less than the suggested plans for Chard Street. From the traffic viewpoint, no objections had been raised by the County Surveyor who had agreed that traffic generated by 50 - 60 new houses would be acceptable. It was suggested that pedestrians could use a new path through the estate and existing farm yard to gain access to the village centre. The Appellant proposed that the sewage problem could readily be met by the installation of a privately maintained plant whose design and performance would need to meet the Water Authority's requirements.

The District Council opposed the development on many Structure Plan grounds and cited the need to control with great care any new building in Area's of Outstanding Natural Beauty and of Great Landscape Value as they came second only to National Parks. Accepting the need to meet the minimum Structure Plan target of 50 new houses by 1996, they had revised the Village Envelope to facilitate such building in Chard Street area where new building of an estate-type would be much more in accord with existing buildings there and in Gribb View. The flat nature of the site would lessen the visual impact and the possible developer had declared his willingness to share the cost of a new sewage works designed to meet the needs of the whole village. The road and pedestrian access in Chard Street were felt to be markedly better than in High Street.

Among the other submissions, Miss Greenlees made a strong personal appeal for the gradual enlargement of the village community in a way that would preserve its character and environment. Mr Quick supported the Appellant's case as he felt that one or two smallish developments were preferable to the large estate suggested for Chard Street. The Trust supported the District Council's case excepting the extent of the building in Chard Street; the Trust believes that Thorncombe was categorised "Priority Village" in error and should have been listed in the Structure Plan for limited residential development. Members of the Trust Committee attended the whole Inquiry and also accompanied the Inspector on the Site inspection which followed. In addition to that the Inspector had clearly made a very thorough study of the area on foot in order to assess the impact of the various plans from many view points.

One of the professional witnesses remarked after the proceedings on the lack of acrimony and very pleasant atmosphere which had prevailed and this will doubtless assist the Inspector in reaching a fair decision.

From experience elsewhere, that decision will undoubtedly pay due regard to the strength of local feeling and, for that reason alone, the Trust feels that it is of great importance that local residents should show their concern in all planning matters by submitting their views both in writing when appropriate and by attendance at public meetings and inquiries. In view of the misleading nature of the Notice prior to this Inquiry, it was praiseworthy that so many residents found time to attend.

P. Moreland (Vice-Chairman)

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DONATION.

Mr & Mrs Battle have kindly offered to donate a Copper Beech tree complete with stake to be planted on a site chosen by the Trust. Unfortunately this will have to be held over until the Autumn when ground conditions are more suitable

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MEMBERSHIP.

Membership is open to all who are interested in furthering the objectives of the Trust. Those wishing to join contact John Whitbread - Winsham 525.