

MINISTRY FIGHT PLAN FOR CARAVANS

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A plan to use land at Quex Park, Birchington, as a caravan and camp site met with strong disapproval from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food at a public inquiry in Margate on Tuesday. Mr. I. B. Prowse, assistant Land Commissioner with the Ministry, said the land was classified as top grade agricultural land, of which, he said, there was a small proportion in England and Wales.

“We must oppose in order to preserve for future use the best agricultural land in this country,” he commented, and added: “It is well above the national average in its potential for productivity.”

The enquiry followed an appeal by Keat Farm (Caravans) Ltd against a decision by Margate Corporation to refuse the use of 13.6 acres of land at Quex Park for touring caravans and tents, and as a static caravan site.

Permission had previously been granted to use six acres of the appeal site for touring caravans and tents at a time when Margate Corporation hoped to develop this site. This scheme was later dropped by the Council and an option taken on the site by Keat Farm (Caravans) Ltd.

TOURING TRADE

For the appellants, Mr. Bernard Marder recalled that as far back as 1963 the need for a site for touring caravans and tents was recognized. In 1968 Margate Corporation applied to the county council for permission to use six acres of wooded land for a site for the touring holiday trade and this was granted. He submitted that alone this was not a viable proposition, but in order to satisfy the recognized need his clients wished also to provide a site for static holiday caravans.

Their plan was to provide facilities for 80 touring caravans and 20 tents – in accordance with the original permission – alongside 100 static caravans. He pointed out that the actual loss of agricultural land was 7.6 acres. The six acres, the subject of the original approval, was largely wooded and part had not been farmed for many years, having formed part of a radar station.

“In terms of agricultural resources in Thanet, the loss is entirely minimal,” he commented, and added: “It has to be weighed against this obvious need for caravan accommodation. “You can’t provide a touring site unless it is subsidized by a static caravan site.”

Mr. Christopher Powell-Cotton, Chairman and managing director of Quex Park, described the site as the less valuable land of the estate. He said four acres was “reasonable agricultural land” and this would be the extent of the loss to agriculture.

Chartered surveyor, Mr. I. R. Toms said the original 5 acre site restricted to touring caravans and tents would not be a viable proposition. Another 7.5 acres was needed to provide for 100 static caravans, along with the ancillary facilities of a shop, club and store.

“There is a dire shortage for touring sites for the home market and visitors from abroad,” he stated. Had Margate proceeded with its original plan to provide for this touring trade it would have had to be subsidized by the rates.

Mr. Graham Lord, Margate Council senior planning assistant, outlining the council’s opposition to the proposal, said the development would result in the loss to agricultural production of about eight acres of high quality land.

The increase in area of the site to 14 acres would lead to intensification of vehicular and pedestrian traffic to the detriment of road safety on a narrow road close to a major road junction. The proposal was in conflict with the Kent Development Plan, on which the site was shown as land which should remain undisturbed.