

Row over golf plan contract

Objectors try new tactics in park golf course battle

11-8-81

THE plan to make a golf course at Cobtree Manor Park is to be investigated by the Charity Commissioners.

They are to consider whether Maidstone Council is acting strictly under the terms of the will in which Sir Gerrard Tyrewhitt Drake left the land for the benefit of Maidstone people.

Objectors to the proposed £500,000 18-hole course and clubhouse have already reported the council to the local Government Ombudsman.

They are threatening to sabotage the work on the pay-and-play course by sitting down in front of the bulldozers.

Acted

Roy Brightman, chairman of the Cobtree joint association of committees, said: "The council has acted completely out of hand all the way down the line on this project.

"The land was left for the benefit of the people, not the select few who will benefit from this golf course."

A spokesman for the Charity Commissioners said: "We have been asked our opinion on whether the council is acting strictly under the terms of the will and are investigating accordingly."

Liberal Councillor Chris Brown has asked the Environment Secretary, Michael Heseltine, to investigate the council's involvement at Cobtree.

Jeremy Hindle, chairman of Maidstone Council arts and recreation committee, has said: "The council has spent the last seven years researching this project and getting it right. The will has been gone into thoroughly, with counsel's advice.

"Then at the 59th minute of the 11th hour up popped self-appointed busy-bodies with objections which do not hold water.

"The golf course will not be an exclusive set-up. It will benefit anyone who wants to use it."

Objectors have calculated that the golf course and clubhouse will lose £100,000 a year. They say it will take 22 years to recoup the money spent by Maidstone Council.

11-8-81

OBJECTORS to a planned golf course say they will sit in front of earth removers and diggers to stop the project starting.

The warning comes from Lance Rogers, who launched Cobtree Manor Park action group which is fighting the council's plan to develop part of the 277-acre site near Maidstone.

The land was bequeathed to the people of Maidstone.

He said: "We will have men, women and children ready to sit down in front of these heavy machines to stop them digging up part of the beautiful woodland to

make way for a golf course."

Objectors are angry that equipment has been moved into the park.

They say the appropriate contract has not been signed with the council.

Harry Chorlton, principal arts and recreation officer, said the council never promised the action group they could stop the contractors moving in.

Yesterday Ian Lambert the council's assistant technical officer, said: "We are not sure when the contract formalities will be completed. But authority was given last week for equipment to be moved on to the site on anticipation of the formalities be-

ing this week."

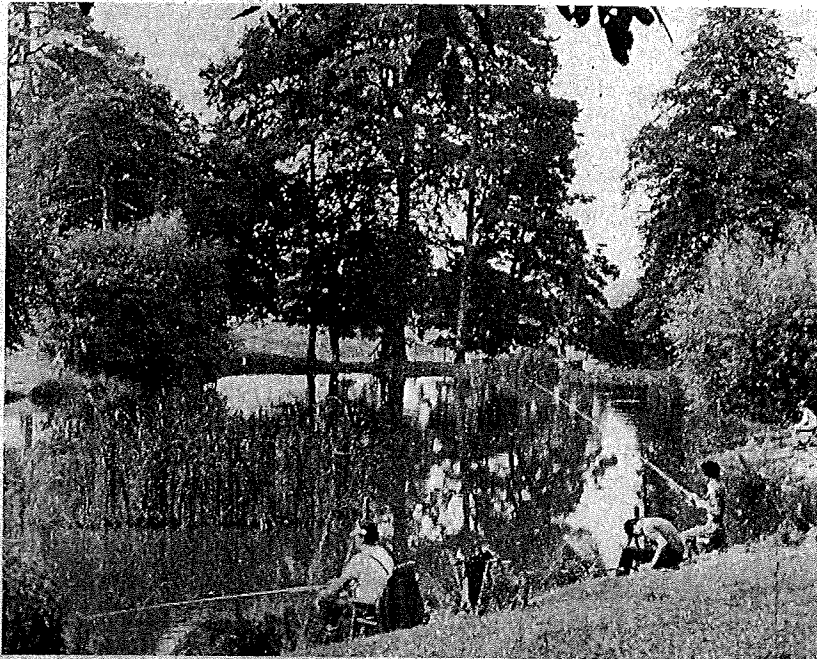
The protesters say the land was left to the people of Maidstone by former town mayor and landowner Sir Gerrard Tyrewhitt Drake and that the local authority is abusing the terms of his legacy.

They have reported the council to Baroness Serota, the local government Ombudsman. Liberal councillor Chris Brown has told Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine of his objections to the plans.

But Cllr Jeremy Hindle, chairman of Maidstone arts and recreation committee, attacked the objectors. He said: "It infuriates me that whenever the council does anything in Maidstone a gang of self-appointed watchdogs starts carping.

"The council has taken counsel's advice on several occasions to check out the terms of the will."

The golf course and club house plan which will cost more than £500,000, is expected to be completed by April 1984.



Ombudsman to be called in over golf course plan

7-8-81

MAIDSTONE Council is being reported to the local government ombudsman for its handling of the Cobtree Manor Park project.

Objectors, who say the scheme is a giant white elephant, fear a planned 18-hole pay-and-play golf course and clubhouse will waste more than £500,000 of public money.

They claim the facilities will be so costly it would become an exclusive membership-only club.

Lance Rogers, who formed Cobtree Manor Park Action Group, said: "The 277-acre estate was left to the people of Maidstone by its former owner, Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt Drake, for recreational and leisure purposes.

"A golf club which benefits the minority, and means part of the woodland will have to be chopped down to make way for some of the greens, hardly benefits everyone."

The golfing facilities will be completed by April 1984 at a cost of £577,000.

Mounting opposition has come from residents' associations and others, including anglers upset because one of their favourite haunts will disappear.

A lake known as Dingley Dell - believed to have been the location used by Dickens in Pickwick Papers - will be included in the golf course, and fishing banned.

Chatham angler Bob Ashbey has launched a protest petition and complained: "It's the only place round here where you can fish without a permit."

Meeting

The action group calculates it will take 22 years for the cash spent by Maidstone Council to be recouped.

Mr Rogers added: "The state of the park is absolutely disgusting and we have asked the local government ombudsman, Baroness Serota, to step in."

Meanwhile Liberal councillor Chris Brown has written complaining to Environment Secretary Michael Heseltine.

He says the council is planning to spend the money on a new golf course in an area already served by 14 courses.

He said: "This facility is expected to make a loss of £100,000 a year. To accomplish this feat they have not only had to restrict expenditure on such essentials as housing and road maintenance, but they have also had to disregard the wishes of the person who left them the land."

Roy Brightman, chairman of the Cobtree joint committee of associations, said a recent meeting with council officers had been frank and open and a further meeting would be held in coming weeks.

Harry Chorlton, the council's principal arts and recreation officer, said: "The full financial implications of the construction of the course and clubhouse and its running and maintenance costs have been investigated.

"There will be a deficit but the income will gradually increase as the course gets more use and will eventually make a profit."

He added: "Demand for golf is very great in this area and as more people have more leisure time, I am certain it will



Lance Rogers (left) with residents' secretary Joan Wickham and Cllr Chris Brown

Council golf plan on the right course

by PETER BARNETT

THE Charity Commissioners have dismissed a complaint that Maidstone council has been acting illegally in its golf course project at Cobtree Manor Park.

Objectors to the £500,000 scheme at the 277-acre park claimed the council was breaking terms laid down in the will of the former landowner, Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake.

28-8-81

PROTEST OVER WILL FAILS

The protesters said the land for the 18-hole pay-and-play course and clubhouse would only benefit a small minority, not most people in the borough.

A spokesman for the Commissioners said: "We have investigated this project and are satisfied that Maidstone council is acting within the terms of the will."

Cllr Jeremy Hindle chairman of the council's arts and recreation committee, said: "I am pleased with the reply from the Commissioners, which again confirms we are on the right course with this venture."

"Here we have a golf-for-all scheme which will benefit the people of Maidstone. All the protesters are trying to do is throw a spanner in the works."

The Cobtree Joint Association of Committees has reported the council to the local government ombudsman and Environment Secretary, Michael Heseltine.

Anti-golf course leader collapses

28-8-81

ONE of the top campaigners fighting a golf course plan in Maidstone has collapsed from a heart attack.

Lance Rogers, who is operations organiser with the Cobtree joint association of committees, collapsed after hearing that diggers and bulldozers had begun clearance work at the site.

His wife, Maureen, 45, said yesterday from the Rogers' home

at Chatham Road, Maidstone: "Lance was absolutely devastated when the news that work had started at Cobtree reached him."

"He has been working day and night for the last two months to stop the golf course plan going ahead. It simply got too much for him."

"He has dedicated so much time and effort to keep this land free for leisure use for the people of Maidstone. But the strain has taken its toll and he just collapsed."

Lance, 41, who retired from the British Transport Police earlier this year, has been recovering from his heart attack, which happened last Friday, in Preston Hall Hospital, Aylesford.

Mrs Rogers added: "From now on he has been told by doctors to take it easy and as far as I am concerned that means no more Cobtree work."

The campaigners say Maidstone council is going directly against the will of former Cobtree estate owner Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt-Drake with their £577,000 golf course and clubhouse project.

urged over Rethink plan

PROTESTORS are urging the Charity Commissioners to think again over the planned golf course at Cobtree Manor Park.

The Commissioners gave Maidstone Council the all clear with the project and officially said the council was acting within the guidelines laid down in the will of former Cobtree owner Sir Garrard Tyrwhitt Drake.

Diggers moved on to the site two weeks ago and the ground is being cleared and woodland levelled off by contract workers Golf Landscape Limited.

Mrs J Wickham, from The Cobtree Joint Association of Committees said: "We think this decision reflects the superficial enquiry and will certainly urge the Commissioners to investigate the matter in greater detail."

Support is growing for the protest campaign over the £577,000 golf course and club house scheme at the 277-acre park.

At the weekend the objectors were in Maidstone town centre distributing leaflets calling for opposition to the venture, which they say, goes directly against the wishes of Sir Garrard.

Mrs Wickham said: "We were overwhelmed with the public response to our cause and collected more than 350 signatures against the project in less than two hours."

"This magnificent response confirms that the people of Maidstone are concerned over the loss of public space."

● Mr Lance Rogers, 45, operations organiser with the Cobtree Joint Association of Committees, is recovering at his Chatham Road, Maidstone, home after a heart attack. He collapsed after hearing the diggers and bulldozers had begun clearance work at the site.