

## THE MYSTERIOUS WAYS OF WHITEHALL

**W**HAT constitutes good planning and what is injurious to the amenities of the countryside is often a matter of opinion, so that it is not surprising that decisions on planning matters are far from consistent.

Occasionally, however, a decision is made which seems so devoid of common sense that it is difficult to understand how it could have been arrived at by anyone in full possession of the facts.

Such a decision was that given recently by the Minister of Housing and Local Government, refusing permission for the construction of a golf course for Keswick on land at Shoulthwaite, St John's-in-the-Vale.

The decision followed a public inquiry into an appeal by Keswick Golf Club Ltd. against the refusal of the Lake District Planning Board to allow the construction of the course.

Many of the facts of the matter are not in dispute. Keswick, one of the main holiday resorts in the Lake District, should be able to offer golf as an attraction to visitors. The site selected for the course is on rough ground of little agricultural value and the developers are anxious and able to meet all conditions for siting and screening of buildings and car parks.

The original decision of the Planning Board was incomprehensible but the Minister's final "no" was unbelievable, for it reversed the recommendation of the inspector holding the inquiry that the golf course should be permitted.

The inspector heard comprehensive evidence from both sides and inspected the proposed site. He considered that the making of greens and fairways would be minor transformations of insignificant scale in relation to the surroundings. Except the numbers would be greater, he could see no difference between golfers carrying their bags and walkers carrying their rucksacks. He expressed the opinion that a car park alongside a main traffic route would not look out of place and that the golf house, by using suitable materials and screening, could be made to blend with the surrounding countryside.

The inspectors who conduct these inquiries are not infallible and it is not suggested that their opinions should always be adopted by the Minister, but they are highly skilled, professional men who have had the advantage of hearing both sides and of seeing the sites concerned.

In this case, however, the Minister, in his Whitehall office, presumably not having made a trip to Keswick to see the site, decided that he knew best and turned down a project which could have a considerable effect on the prosperity of Keswick as a holiday town.

His reasons for so doing are that the greens and fairways of a course would be a different texture from the surrounding moorland and that there is a risk that man-made changes would harm the magnificent natural beauty and character of the area. No word of objection to the buildings or the car park.

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Those who know this bald, moorland area will be at a loss to understand what the Minister is talking about. As the inspector reported, the greens and fairways would hardly be noticeable against the scale of the landscape and, if anything, would look much more pleasant than the existing fellside. As to making changes, any farmer in the area could make much more drastic alterations to the appearance of the moor if he decided to drain a few acres and improve the pasture—and he would be given aid by the Ministry of Agriculture to carry out the change!

The Minister says that he accepts that there is a need for a golf course at Keswick but if he will not allow construction on this least attractive part of

the area, where can the promoters hope to find an acceptable site?

This newspaper has always been in the van of the fight to prevent development in the Lake District which would be out of place and destroy the natural beauty which so many people come to admire, but this is a case where the building of a golf course would improve the appearance of the area concerned, would help the prosperity of Keswick and would provide enjoyment for thousands of people. One is left to wonder if the Minister, or those who advise him on these matters, fully understood the facts of this appeal or appreciated the nature of the countryside concerned.

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