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HOME NEWS

Camden issues new purchase order for Tolmers Square and pins hope on Labour victory

By John Young
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Camden Council, London, yesterday put a cat among the political pigeons by publishing its plans for the redevelopment of Tolmers Square. Much of the site, which has been the subject of a long, embittered controversy, is owned by Stock Conversion, the property development company.

Mr Frank Dobson, the council's leader, said yesterday that the scheme had been drawn up "to show what we would do if we had the power".

A compulsory purchase order was made on Monday, but it has to be confirmed by Mr Crosland, Secretary of State for the Environment. Confirmation is unlikely to be given before the election. A previous council purchase order on part of the property was rejected in 1970 by the Conservative government.

The council clearly has in mind the prospect of being able to buy the land at existing use value rather than market value, as foreshadowed in a White Paper published earlier this month.

With remarkable honesty Mr Dobson said yesterday that the chances of going through with the scheme would be poor un-

less the present Government was returned at the general election, so that its proposals on development land could become law as soon as possible.

"This would give us additional powers and dramatically reduce the price to be paid for the land," he said. "It is about time too. The existing law has forced local authorities to pay through the nose to achieve gains for local communities. We shall be happy to put forward Tolmers Square as the very first scheme to go through when the law is changed."

Mr Robert Clark, chairman of Stock Conversion, said he was unable to comment on the council's plans because he had not received a copy.

Tolmers Square became a subject of controversy last year when the council was forced on the defensive over its proposed deal with Stock Conversion, under which it would receive part of the site for housing at a low price in return for allowing the company to build a large office block.

Stock Conversion, which is largely owned by Mr Joseph Levy, was responsible for the huge Euston Centre near by. At its recent annual meeting, Mr

Clark rejected accusations that the company had persecuted tenants and had deliberately damaged houses in Tolmers Square or allowed them to fall into decay.

The council's latest proposal would provide accommodation for 1,707 people, compared with about 600 at present.

Development along the Euston Road frontage of the site, which covers about eight and a half acres, would include offices and public buildings, showrooms, shops, restaurants and a cinema.

Albert Bridge: An inspector's recommendation that the Albert Bridge should not remain permanently closed to traffic will be considered by the Greater London Council on Tuesday. It follows a public inquiry last July, the first to be instigated by the council under regulations introduced in 1972. Since the inspector reported to the council rather than to the Department of the Environment, the council, which supported closure of the bridge, is not necessarily bound by the recommendation.

The inspector said he foresaw no environmental advantage in closure, but rather widespread traffic disadvantages.