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Ham & High

Tolmers eviction battle

SQUATTERS WIN A REPRIEVE

SQUATTERS occupying 26 houses in the Tolmers Square area called on Camden Council to mount another "Stop Levy" campaign after possession orders were issued for the houses.

Speedy intervention by Councillor Frank Dobson, leader of the council, won a five-week reprieve from eviction for the 81 occupants of the houses, but Camden is powerless to guarantee the tenure of the squatters much beyond that.

Glennifer Finance Corporation reopened controversy on Tolmers Square by issuing the possession orders.

The squatters, some of whom have lived in the area two years, protested to Mr

Dobson, who asked the town clerk to intervene. The council won Glennifer's agreement to delay hearing of the orders from last Friday until April 25.

"We demand that Camden Council, the Labour movement and the Government take whatever steps may be necessary to prevent these stupid and unnecessary evictions," the Tolmers Village Squatters Action Group said in a Press statement. About 40 squatters carrying posters lobbied council members outside Camden town hall before the Housing Development Sub-Committee meeting.

Mr Dobson told the Ham and High that, although he saw the evictions as unnecessary, the council could do little to stop them. "We have no status in the matter other than using our good offices with the owners to make representations on

behalf of the squatters, which we have done," he said.

"We are not prepared to jeopardise our long-term plans for the area for the sake of some of the temporary occupants."

Camden's development strategy for the area changed last year after a joint development for the area with Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust was halted by political pressure. The council now plans to take over all properties in the area and concentrate on rehabilitating them.

But Mr Dobson said the two compulsory purchase order applications were being held up by Camden until the Lands Nationalisation Bill is on the way to enactment, and until negotiations and plans for several small infill sites were completed.

"Once a CPO application is made it freezes all planning for an area until the Minister makes his decision, so we are

getting all our detailed work done now," said Mr Dobson. "But it in no way freezes security of tenure for the occupants, so there is little we can do about the squatters until we own the properties."

But Councillor Alan Greengross, leader of the opposition, said the situation confirmed his worst fears about delays in taking over development of the area. "If we had gone ahead in 1971, new homes would be built in the area by now," he said.

● Holborn and St Pancras South Labour Party's general management committee has condemned the eviction threat, saying there was "no justifiable reason" for the company to seek vacant possession, because Camden intended to buy the houses. Leaving the houses empty would cause them to decay, adding to the council's rehabilitation costs, it said.

The committee called on Camden to use its influence to persuade Glennifer to drop the action and, failing that, to help the squatters oppose the possession orders in court.