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THE CAMDEN and ST. PANCRAS CH

# Council Leader on 'Camden & Squatters'

IN a statement this week, the leader of Camden Council (Cllr Frank Dobson) said that Camden Council is still fully committed to obtaining the ownership of the land and property in the Tolmers Square area so that by rehabilitation and redevelopment it can provide decent housing in the area for about 1700 people, with an old people's home or sheltered housing for 40. The council's plans were announced in September last year. They have been displayed in the area and were discussed at a public meeting organised by the Tolmers Village Association.

To obtain possession of the land and buildings, the council has decided to make two compulsory purchase orders, one covering the area east of North Gower-street, the other covering the area to the west. Submission of these CPOs to the Department of the Environment has been postponed until the terms of the government's proposed Community Land Bill are known. This is to make sure that the council does not do anything in advance of the new law which could ruin the chances of local people benefiting from it.

### NO ACTION

Once the CPOs are submitted no action in the area requiring planning permission would be possible until the Environment Secretary had come to a decision. So the council is pushing through plans for infill housing on sites it owns or where there is a good chance of getting the agreement of the present owners, so that the design work and even the building work can get under way while the CPOs are being considered. These will provide homes for 161 people in total.

In the meantime the council is keen to buy any land in the area from any of the owners who wish to sell. Also, as soon as the homes in Robert Street are ready for them, the council's pledge to re-house the worst-housed, longest-stay residents will be fulfilled. It could not be done sooner than the new places were ready to be occu-

As far as its own property concerned, Camden takes the view that short-life houses are better in use than left empty. Therefore it is willing to license the use of its short-life property to squatters, and it takes no action against squatters in such property, providing they are not a nuisance to their neighbours and are not keeping the council housing people off the waiting list or special cases.

The council will not accept squatting in the normal part of the council's stock of homes, and it takes immediate legal action to get rid of squatters in anything but its short-life properties. The council will also take legal action against anyone destroying or damaging reasonable council housing from which they are evicted.

If the council applies the same

principles to squatting in privately owned property, the Council has few, if any powers to assist or prevent squatting in such housing.

### PROCEEDINGS

"Therefore, when I was informed that the private owners of squatted property in Tolmers Square had commenced legal proceedings to get the squatters out, I asked the Town Clerk to make immediate representations to the owners to stop their action. This was done the same day, and the owners sought the council's permission to adjourn the action for 28 days.

### PERMISSION

"This permission has now been given, partly because Camden sent the attached letter to the owners, which was presented in evidence to the judge. Camden will continue to seek to prevent unnecessary action of this nature against squatters, but in the end the outcome will depend on the owners and the courts.

"I think I should make it clear that when Camden does take over the ownership of the Tolmers Square area, it will continue its policy of leaving alone any squatters who are not a nuisance. However, it will not allow squatting to hold up its plans to provide decent homes for about 1700 people."