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Camden's Plan For Tolmer Square

AS was reported in this Journal last week Camden Council is to pay £4 million to buy up Stock Conversion and Investment Trust's six-acre holding in the area around Tolmers Square, N.W.1. The Council's Community Planning and Resources Committee agreed last week to recommend the purchase for approval by the Council.

Outline proposals for the whole of the Tolmers Square area were approved in principle by the council in October 1974 following extensive publicity.

These included: 1. Housing for 1700 people, one third in rehabilitated houses and two thirds in new housing;

2. An elderly persons' home for 40, a community centre and indoor recreation facilities;

3. Offices, public buildings, showrooms, shops, restaurants and a small cinema mainly on the Euston Road frontage;

4. Retention and extension of most of the present pattern of small streets, courts and mews;

TRAFFIC NOISE

5. Location of new developments on the boundaries of the area to act as barriers to traffic noise; and

6. Traffic management proposals linked with townscape and environmental improvements, a street market and improved local shopping facilities.

Before these plans could be realised, the council had to obtain ownership of the area and so two compulsory purchase orders were made: one covering the area to the east of North Gower Street and one the area to the west.

The council immediately set about trying to purchase properties by agreement, because this is much quicker than proceeding by compulsory purchase.

AGREEMENT

Towards the end of 1974 Stock Conversion made informal approaches to Camden and lengthy negotiations have led to the present agreement. The price agreed is the same as would have applied when the government's community land proposals come into operation some time in 1976. The agreement will therefore give Camden the opportunity to get on more quickly with its proposals for redevelopment, and rehabilitation.

The bulk of Stock Conversion's

holdings are in the area to the west of North Gower Street where it is intended to locate most of the non-residential facilities together with a hostel and about 275 homes, most newly built. The council is entering into discussions with pension funds and merchant banks about the development of the non-residential element.

FEASIBILITY STUDIES

While these feasibility studies are progressing, the limited amount of Stock Conversion land east of North Gower Street will be included by the council in its proposals for speedy rehabilitation and infill redevelopment of that part. This includes the site for the elderly persons' home which may be provided in the form of clustered "sheltered housing".

The Council may still have to resort to compulsory purchase to obtain freeholds and leaseholds not owned by Stock Conversion. In the meantime progress will be made on more detailed feasibility and design studies and building work on the infill sites.

THE SQUATTERS

A considerable number of the properties in the area are squatted in. The council will consider its existing policy — that it is willing to licence the use of its short-life property and not to take action against squatters in such property providing they are not nuisances to their neighbours and are not holding up the council's plans for the area.

Commenting on the situation, the council's leader, Frank Dobson, said: "This agreement is a big step in the right direction. It should help the council get on with its plans for the area and in particular bring about a massive improvement of an interminable struggle over compulsory purchase which could have delayed action until the 1980s. It has taken more than a decade of effort and frustration to reach this stage."

HAM & HIGH

Plea for Tolmers delay rejected

CAMDEN is ready to sign a contract with Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust to buy six acres of land at Tolmers Square in Euston for £4 million.

The deal was approved by the council on Wednesday, despite pleas from opposition members to delay the deal while officers considered the financial viability of the commercial development which Labour members hope will subsidise the cost of housing in the area.

Officers could do all the work necessary to take over housing in the area while reconsidering the financial aspects of the scheme, which involves Camden in borrowing £3 million from a merchant bank to buy most of the land at £400,000 a year interest, said Councillor Alan Green-gross, leader of the opposition.

But the only Labour member not to sound totally enthusiastic about the deal was Councillor Ivor Walker, who warned that Camden would be tempted to increase the office content on the site from 80,000 square feet to possibly as much as 250,000 square feet, in order to maximise profits.