

13-19 June



**Planner's playground:** Joe Levy's Stock Conversions empire is giving up its attempts to destroy the Tolmers Square area of Camden. Last week the developers agreed to sell their property in and around the Square to Camden Council for £4m.

Levy spent much of the '60s buying up sections of the area with the intention of building 250,000 sq ft of offices on the site. Unfortunately for him local resistance, organised by squatting students from the Architectural Association and property journalists Christopher Booker and Benny Gray, delayed his schemes for so long that he was caught in the collapse of the property market 1½ years ago, and his plans ceased to be viable. Even so, the present

value of £670,000 per acre is over 13 times the 1962 figure.

Towards the end of 1974 Stock Conversion started secret discussions with Camden Council, and lengthy negotiations led to last week's announcement. In the interim the company successfully took some of the area's squatters to court to obtain possession orders on a handful of the properties.

Camden Council's progressive image has had a large number of holes shot through it because of its handling of the Tolmers Square affair, so its own plans are, not unexpectedly, relatively radical and 'community-oriented'. They include housing for 1700 people, one third in rehabilitated houses and two thirds in new housing; an elderly people's home, a community centre and indoor recreation facilities; offices, public buildings, showrooms, shops, restaurants and a small cinema; retention and expansion of most of the present pattern of small streets, courts and mews; location of new developments on the boundaries of the area to act as barriers to traffic noise; and traffic management proposals linked with townscape and environmental improvements, a street market and improved local shopping facilities.

The plans were hatched in October,

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by Roger Perry

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**Tolmers Square hits back.**

1974, however, and cutbacks in local authority spending will doubtless require the axing of some of the less 'essential' features.

The future of the Tolmers Square scheme is also particularly important because it represents a 'dry-run' for the Government's Community Land proposals, not due to become law until next year. The Government's planning researchers will be watching the area closely to see if any lessons learnt can be incorporated into the Bill before it is passed.

So, after ten years of being experimented on by planners, the remnants of the original community round the Square still have some time to serve before they can start leading their own lives. The large number of squatters in the area, who have been largely influential in stopping its destruction, will be tolerated until their properties are needed. And Stock Conversion will receive £4m for six acres of near-Jereliet buildings.