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PROPERTY

Fewer offices in scheme for Tolmers Sq.

By BRUCE KINLOCH

STOCK CONVERSION and Investment Trust is drawing up new plans for the redevelopment of its controversial Tolmers Square site close to London's Euston station. The new scheme, which should be unveiled before the end of the year, will contain provisions for some 100,000 sq ft of offices compared with the 250,000 sq ft included in the original proposals.

Disclosure of the new plans was made at yesterday's annual meeting of the company. Replying to a list of questions put by a member of Tolmers Village Association, the chairman, Mr Robert Clark, said: "We have been thwarted in all our negotiations with the London borough of Camden. Three times the council has reneged on its agreements and we have now instructed our architects to prepare fresh plans for the whole site."

Stock Conversion's negotiations with Camden for the joint development of land owned by the Council and the property group began in earnest in 1970 and by April 1971 agreement in terms was reached with the then Camden Council. In May 1971 an election changed the political complexion of the council.

The council did not adopt its predecessor's agreement but opened up fresh negotiations which resulted in an agreement which the council approved on June 10, 1973. Before that agreement was signed the council broke off to talk to Claudius Properties, a company headed by freelance journalist Benny Gray.

These negotiations broke down and then on Sept. 15, 1973, the Town Clerk of Camden wrote to Stock Conversion stating that he was now authorised to complete the necessary formal agreement. But this agreement was never signed. In his annual statement to shareholders, Mr Clark said: "It appears that for political reasons the council has refused to implement its freely negotiated agreement."

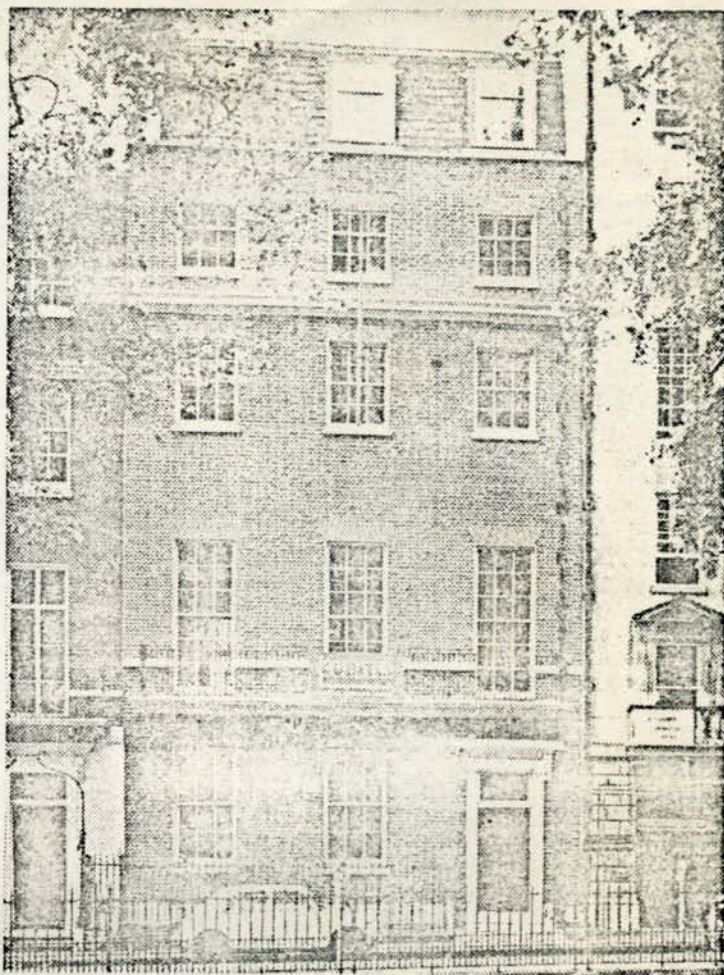
Mr Clark went on to tell shareholders that as a consequence of its actions, the council has delayed, "if not lost, the opportunity of building some badly needed low-rent dwellings." The council is now contemplating serving compulsory purchase orders on the whole or part of Stock Conversion's site. The directors are confident that such orders can be successfully resisted.

The new plans being prepared for Tolmers Square will provide for the refurbishment of the existing early 19th century houses in the square and the provision of open space in the centre of the square.

The office content of the scheme will be confined to the front of the site, which is currently zoned for mixed commercial use. After the meeting, Mr Clark said the amount of offices in the development would depend on building costs. On current figures the minimum requirement was 100,000 sq. ft.

But there is a snag. Before applying for planning approval for the new scheme, Stock Conversion will have to obtain an Office Development Permit for the whole office space planned. As the present Government is resisting further issue of ODPs, it is difficult to see how the group can make any move until there is a change of policy.

Clearly, Stock Conversion's experiences over Tolmers Square will cause the company to have second thoughts regarding its plans for the redevelopment of properties it owns around York Way, King's Cross.



THE Bowater Corporation has sub-let the whole 14,600 sq ft of its leasehold property at 49, Berkeley Square, W.1 (above) to an unnamed banking group. The rent has not been disclosed but earlier this year a figure of around £230,000 was being asked. Refurbished by Compass Securities some 18 months ago, the property has been redecorated in the style of the 18th century. Weatherall Green and Smith acted for the banking group and Bowater were represented by Anthony Lipton and Company.

A shares cue for Kuwait

THERE ARE any number of property companies available at prices not dissimilar to that being offered by the Kuwait Government for St Martins Property Corporation, so why did the Arabs decide to enter the fray?

Activities of the Kuwait Investment Office, unnoticed in Britain for two decades, have been kept very much under wraps. Suddenly they are making a spectacular cash offer against an existing bid from one of our own insurance companies.

Such an action will create the widest publicity in Britain, in Kuwait and throughout the world, and Kuwait, presumably, does not intend to suffer defeat either at the hands of Commercial Union or the British Government.

So the market was yesterday assuming that Kuwait would win, possibly encouraging other Arab states to make takeover bids (they have the money here already) and certainly making CU look elsewhere for its expansion.

Thus the property share market looks just about the most

exciting over the next few months, whatever happens in the Election. But all this activity does little to help property companies suffering crippling liquidity problems, and the next quarter day is now only three weeks away.

Co-op centre for Leicester

A £20 MILLION development plan for High Street Leicester, one of the most over-officed cities in the country, has been submitted to the planners by the Leicestershire Co-operative Society.

The Co-op, which is acting jointly with Fielding and Johnson (part of the Lister Group), is proposing a mixed development including a major new store, leisure centre, cinemas, a restaurant, offices, housing and a multi-storey car park.

The Co-op said yesterday that it believed that the full potential of the High Street shopping area has not been realised. The

scheme is clearly designed to woo shoppers back to the area from the competing Haymarket development.

Plans were worked out for the Leicester Co-op by the Manchester-based Co-operative Wholesale Society, which has its own property development service available to member societies.

Meanwhile, there is still no news of the plans for the big development planned by the CWS on its own doorstep in central Manchester. The scheme was to have been undertaken in partnership with British Land.

The Leicester project embraces a scheme envisaged by Lister many years ago, under which the textile group was planning to build an office tower block.

Because of an enormous volume of development both completed and under way in the city, there have been serious doubts that the timing was right for the building of even more offices there.

The CWS plan includes a new 150,000 sq ft Co-op, plus two other large stores, a supermarket and individual shops