

4 Dec 1975  
Guardian

## Camden denies housing charges

By JUDY HILLMAN, Planning Correspondent

The London borough of Camden yesterday held a press conference, to refute charges made against its housing policies in the Observer last weekend, by Christopher Booker and Bonnie Gray.

The Labour leader, his deputy, the housing chairman, and a second housing spokesman, and a small covey of officials were present for the council, facing a selection of journalists—from two national papers, including the Guardian, one London evening and the locals — but not Messrs Booker and Gray.

Had they been asked? The Observer had, was the reply. And the Observer would receive a letter and article to put right what Camden councillors feel are many injustices and inaccuracies.

In particular, the councillors were irked by the suggestion that Camden might be involved in losses running into millions of pounds, having bought property in Tolmers Square last summer for £4 millions. After all, they said, it was those same two journalists who, under the guise of Claudius Properties, had put forward a scheme for buying land in the same area for much higher prices in the days of the boom.

Then, as part of a joint development company, they too were prepared to pay up to £880,000 an acre residential and up to £4 millions commercial, whereas Camden had paid about £250,000 and £1 million respectively.

If Camden, the councillors

said, had gone ahead with that scheme it would have been a disaster, with a merchant bank having paid out £10 millions, plus rolled up interest charges and the site worth no more now than £4 millions. They were soon hoping to build housing but there could be considerable difficulties with the commercial section now that rents no longer necessarily pay off building and other costs, let alone provide a profit.

There was also a series of other detailed defences. The deficit on the housing revenue account would be bad, but not that bad. Management was expensive at £174 per dwelling but did include gross central heating charges, housing aid centres, and the administration of rent rebates. Other London boroughs, it was said, were nearly in the same league of expenditure.

Subsidies to each Camden tenant were high at £639 annually but not as high as the £950 quoted in the Observer, and anyway Kensington and Chelsea were up at £579 and Islington at £524, as compared with the national average of £237.

As for rehabilitation costs, they were higher than the Department of the Environment would like and higher than south of the Thames but the properties were more difficult, partly because of the extra storeys and because they missed out on the discovery of damp courses 100 years ago so that properties suffered extensive damp and dry rot.