

15 April 1976.
Ham & High

A FREESON SPANNER IN THE TOLMERS WORKS

ANOTHER argument over housing density is looming, between Camden Council and Housing Minister Reg Freeson, this time over the council's "profits for the people" scheme in the Tolmers Square area of Euston.

Mr Freeson has told Camden he favours a housing density of 70-100 people to the acre—and preferably at the lower end of that range—while Camden's scheme has an average density of 160 people per acre.

As the scheme is at an early stage, the council has high hopes of reaching a compromise over density at Tolmers Square, but Mr Freeson's views could play havoc with other council developments in central London.

First warning of the Government's new thinking came last October, when the Environment Secretary said of the Greater London Development Plan: "The Government believes that significantly lower densities for housing for families with children are necessary for the future."

"Higher densities (than the 70-100 per acre yardstick) will only be acceptable either where the number of family dwellings in any given scheme is small and can be provided in low rise building, or where dwelling houses, as distinct from flats and maisonettes, are provided."

While north of Euston Road council developments should not fall foul of the Government's measure (although the scheme for Haverstock Hill, Hampstead, sets a density of about 120 people per acre) the story is very different in central London.

Housing developments planned for areas such as Tottenham Court Road, Covent Garden and Grays Inn Road envisage densities nearer 200 people to the acre.

While Camden argues that people wanting to live in central London welcome high density developments if they are well designed, Mr Freeson argues that all council tenants in London deserve low densities, gardens and the other trappings traditionally associated with suburban council estates.

But the council fears that the Government view could paralyse any new central London schemes, because only high densities can justify the high cost of the land.

Councillor John Mills, Camden's deputy

leader and Community Planning and Resources Committee chairman, told the committee there would have to be more negotiations with the Department of the Environment over density. "The subsidy to build homes in Central London would just increase if densities are lowered," he said.

But the committee was told that even without the Government's intervention, the number of people to be given homes in the controversial Tolmers Square scheme would have to decrease.

By Camden's housing standards only about 1,400 people would be housed, rather than the 1,700 originally envisaged.

But the committee agreed to press on with the scheme, which results from the purchase of six acres of land from Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust, for £4 million, last year. Rehabilitation of houses has begun and erection of houses on the northern part of the site should start next year.

But the council is staying its hand on the other aspect of the scheme, the 300,000 or more square feet of offices it will build to finance the housing.

The committee agreed that the office development could wait a few years, and higher office rents expected next decade would compensate for the additional interest on loans the council is now paying.