

TOLMERS SQUARE: CAMDEN

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COUNCIL'S DECISION

CAMDEN Council have agreed to go ahead with their scheme for the joint development of Tolmers Square with Stock Conversion. This scheme will give the Council more than eight acres of housing land at less than market price and will permit Stock Conversion to build an office development overlooking Euston-road, N.W.1.

The arrangement was originally approved by the council in May but its completion was held over when Claudius Properties Ltd. offered a site which would have given the council the housing land virtually for nothing and would have passed on the profits on the office development to the council.

The council took the Claudius proposal very seriously and investigated the financial viability of the scheme and its chances of success. The council were satisfied that the scheme was a starter in financial terms although there were reservations about the amount of profit which the council might receive.

INVOLVEMENT

The Claudius proposals would have involved the Compulsory Purchase of Stock Conversion's extensive land holdings in the area which include practically all the land on which the offices would be built and a substantial part of the housing site.

The Department of the Environment were consulted but refused to give any indication of the likely outcome of such an Order.

The council's lawyers advised there were doubts about the Secretary of State's powers to confirm a compulsory purchase order in such circumstances; that even if the powers existed it was unlikely that the Secretary of State would use them and that even if he did confirm the CPO Stock Conversion would be likely to use every means at their disposal to get the decision set aside in the courts and that this would lead to long delays even if Stock Conversion were not to succeed.

Counsel's Opinion was sought and this confirmed the views of the council's own legal staff.

REPORTS

At their meeting last week, the Council's Community Planning and Resources Committee considered extensive reports on all aspects of the two alternatives and decided to continue with Stock Conversion. The main reason was the council's desperate need for housing which counter-balanced the possible financial advantages of the Claudius proposals.

It was felt to be unlikely that the Secretary of State would confirm the CPO on the Stock Conversion property, in which case the Claudius proposal would fall through leaving the council with no housing land and in no position to bargain again with Stock Conversion.

"LIKELY"

The Stock Conversion deal, on the other hand, seemed likely (but

not certain) to secure the approval of the Secretary of State. With 11,000 people on the council's housing waiting list, with homelessness increasing and with a desperate shortage of housing land, it was decided to go for the alternative which seemed most likely to provide homes for about 1,500 people.

A feasibility study of the housing site was approved for public consultation. This includes proposals for the retention of a considerable number of the existing buildings and in particular the retention of existing terraces of housing in North Gower-street and Drummond-street.

A model of the proposal will be put on display and an extensive programme of public consultation will commence shortly. At the end of this the council hopes to proceed to submit the necessary CPO to the Secretary of State for his confirmation, together with the planning proposals based on the feasibility study.

DETAILS

Details of the scheme can be seen at the Town Hall, Euston-road, N.W.1.

The council also propose to enter into detailed talks with Claudius Properties Ltd. to investigate the possibility of applying their scheme to other sites where the chances of success are greater.