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# Battle lines drawn in Camden planning fight

By a Staff Reporter

The battle for the London development prize of Tolmer's Square, new Euston station, is taking on unexpected proportions. A campaign announced yesterday against the proposed deal involving Mr Joe Levy, the property developer, is backed by Mr Reginald Freeson, MP, shadow spokesman on housing and construction, and Mr Iltyd Harrington, deputy leader of the Labour-controlled Greater London Council.

The battle-lines are curiously drawn up. On the left stand Mr Freeson and Mr Harrington: the former calling for an area "land commission" assembling land on behalf of the GLC to push out private developers, and the latter declaring optimistically that "the day of the jackal is over".

They both support a non-profitmaking plan for houses and a large office block on the 10½-acre site. Launched three months ago by two journalists, Mr Bennie Gray and Mr Christopher Booker, it is designed to provide housing to ease Camden council's desperate shortage and up to £5 million development profit as a community windfall.

It has the support of tenants' associations in Camden, two constituency Labour parties, some MPs, and union leaders, including Mr Clive Jenkins of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs, and Mr Ray Buckton and Sir Sidney Greene of the rail unions.

Then there is Camden Council, which earlier this month turned down the journalists' scheme in favour of its long-standing deal

with Mr Levy, who controls Stock Conversion and Investment Trust Ltd.

Mr Frank Dobson, the council's Labour leader, called a press conference yesterday to repeat his scepticism about the Booker-Gray scheme. The council, which fought bitterly against the Conservative Housing Finance Act, is not used to campaigns against it from this quarter; it sees itself trapped uneasily in the middle, forced into partnership with Mr Levy because he will provide relatively cheap housing land in return for planning permission for his own office block.

Virtually off-stage stands Mr Levy himself, who owns quite a lot of the area already and would have to be bought out by compulsory purchase if he were to be deprived of what the deal's opponents claim would be £20m of almost effortless profits.

"I shall carry on as I have done over the years", Mr Levy, who retires from the company this week and who developed the nearby Euston Centre, said yesterday. "I shall carry on in the honourable and straightforward manner I am accustomed to".

The final decision may rest with Mr Rippon, Secretary of State for the Environment, and if his department gives any indication that it would not veto the Booker-Gray scheme or one like it, Camden council may well reject the Levy deal. Silence implies refusal, its members feel, and there is no precedent for approving such anti-private developer arrangements.