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'Stop Levy' battle grows

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Ham & High

A HIGH-POWERED campaign to stop Camden signing the "Levy deal" to redevelop Tolmers Square swung into action this week.

It is backed by a galaxy of prominent people, ranging from Labour MPs and trade union officials to tenants' leaders and architects.

When Camden Council members assemble for their crucial meeting on October 10, they will face the prospect of a bitter fight against GLC leaders and many traditional supporters of the Labour majority group, if they decide to join Stock Conversion and Investment Trust in the Euston development.

Battle lines for the campaign were sharply drawn at two Press conferences held within two hours on Wednesday, one at Tolmers Square, the second at Camden town hall.

At the first, some of the prominent supporters of the "Stop the Levy Deal Campaign" outlined their case.

Mr Nicholas Tomalin opened the meeting by explaining why he had withdrawn the writ he served on Camden two weeks ago.

He had sought a High Court declaration that Camden's decision to sign a contract with Stock Conversion was unlawful and against the interests of ratepayers as a means of allowing "the people of Camden to discuss the issues involved."

But some people had complained that the

legal action was inhibiting debate and, after gaining an assurance from Councillor Frank Dobson, leader of the council, that no contract would be signed before October 10, he had withdrawn the writ — but had another ready to serve.

Major Sam Waldman, chairman of the Buckingham - Avenue - Marlborough Tenants' Association, said he had joined the campaign because he considered the Stock Conversion deal a bad one. Mr Levy's company stood to gain £20 million from the office development, while Camden received a "paltry" £3,500,000 to subsidise the housing element.

Mr Reg Freeson, MP, Labour's Shadow Housing spokesman, said the alternative to this deal, put forward by Claudius Properties, had benefits for the council and the community.

"If Camden does decide to proceed with the present scheme and applies for compulsory purchase orders, it would be the duty of any Secretary of State to refuse the application and advise Camden to adopt the alternative approach," he said.

Mr Iltyd Harrington, deputy leader of the GLC, said a decision against Mr Levy at Tolmers Square could serve notice on developers at Covent Garden and Dockland that they were being driven out of London.

Councillor Paddy O'Connor, who is also a GLC alderman, warned that he and other Labour members of Camden would resign in disgust if the council signed the Levy deal.

But shortly after, at a hastily called town hall Press conference, Mr Dobson re-stated his conviction that Camden had to go with Stock Conversion.

He had no doubt that Claudius could provide a handsome subsidy to Camden by its non-profit scheme, but he did not believe Camden could meet its side of the deal by getting the Environment Secretary's permission to purchase compulsorily nearly half the Tolmers Square land, owned by Stock Conversion, for Claudius to develop.

Labour's Camden Local Government Committee, representing party branches in the borough, added a further view at a meeting on Wednesday night.

Holborn representatives, alarmed that Tolmers Square might be used to give the illusion of a "Labour split," were instrumental in having a motion calling on Camden to reject the Stock Conversion deal defeated 11-4, with five abstentions.

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