

EXPERIES

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Even in miniature, Tolmers starts a row

AN ACCUSATION from members of the Stop the Levy Deal Campaign that Camden Town Hall's model of the Tolmers Square development was "grossly misleading" was quickly rebutted by the council this week.

Campaign members called for withdrawal of the model from public display, claiming that the model office block was equivalent to 150,000 square feet, while 370,000 square feet of office space—"almost twice the bulk of Centre Point"—was actually proposed for the development.

But Councillor Frank Dobson, leader

of the council, said the model had been checked by Renton, Howard, Woods, architects for the scheme brief, and by members of Camden's Planning Department, and found to be accurate.

"There is no reason to assume that a tower block, as the protesters envisaged, is required," he said. The plot ratio of Centre Point was about 10:1, while that projected for Tolmers Square offices was 3.5:1.

He suggested that the protesters might have overlooked one part of the office development while measuring the model.

Mr Christopher Booker and Mr Bennie Gray, of Claudius Properties, which has submitted a controversial alternative scheme for Tolmers Square, hurriedly met with the

architects and Camden officers yesterday for another look at the model.

After the consultation, Mr Gray said: "We have looked at the model from a different point of view and the discrepancy is not as great as the campaign has earlier alleged."

A spokesman for the campaign said yesterday that "several thousand" people had signed a petition calling on the council next week to withdraw from the deal with Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust for redevelopment of the area. Members would be taking petition forms round Camden shopping centres this week-end. They also hoped to take a deputation

to the council meeting next Wednesday. Members of the Tolmers Village Association, which claims to represent some 1,400 people living and working in the area, explained this week why they supported the campaign.

"In order to make a marginal gain in housing numbers, some members of the council are prepared to upset an old-established community of residents, small businesses and low rental shops," said Mrs Jane French, association secretary.

She pointed out that the Claudius non-profit redevelopment scheme for the area was not the only alternative to the Stock Conversion deal, and all alternatives should be explored.

Two vital decisions

POLITICS, it has been said, is the art of the possible. You can have all the pious hopes in the world—and we usually get them at this time of the year when the major parties hold their conferences—but words are no match for action, as Mr Heath in particular now knows to his cost.

Which brings us to two considerable dilemmas that will face Camden Council at its meeting next week. Vital decisions will have to be taken on Witanhurst and on Tolmers Square. Which way will the council jump?

Let us take Witanhurst first. Here the council faces the crunch, after years of controversy, on whether to grant permission to Pamlion Properties to build 60 luxury homes on the Highgate slope overlooking the Heath.

Camden, surprisingly, has never debated the issue. But when it does so it will be in the light of two reports that show that there are ways of defeating the compensation bugbear that has haunted the council for so long.

Reports from the Witanhurst working party and from St Michaels Medical Services declare that if Camden refuses planning consent and revokes the existing permission for 121 flats on the site, then the compensation payable might even be nil and, at most, £675,000, which is far below earlier estimates of sums up to £2 million.

There is no doubt that here is a case to be answered. The council will be hard to convince. Indeed, it may well mean that the final decision on Witanhurst will have to be delayed yet again while Camden seeks expert advice.

If that is the case, then so be it. For while there is the possibility of saving the Witanhurst site from development, the council must fully investigate the situation before taking an irrevocable decision.

Now to Tolmers Square, where there is a definite chance that the Labour group will change its mind, rejecting the deal with Mr Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust and opting for the Claudius scheme put up by Mr Christopher Booker and Mr Bennie Gray.

This would be an undoubted victory for the vociferous Stop the Levy Deal Campaign. But should this happen it is more than likely to be a hollow one, all the more so since the campaign has ambiguous aims.

We have no regard for Mr Levy. We don't like the idea of him making a penny—whether his plan goes ahead or is turned down. Indeed, we are 100 per cent behind the profits for the people ideas submitted by Claudius.

But can Claudius work? Not one of its backers has yet advanced any proof that the Government would approve a CPO for the land Mr Levy owns. Of course a stop must be put to a few making millions out of the many, but we have no confidence whatsoever that this Government would act in such a way.

This may well be the time to fight, but Tolmers Square is not the place. The possibility of providing council homes has to take precedence over nailing bloody colours to the mast.

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Ham & High