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Tolmers Square deal looks off

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By DAVID WILCOX

CAMDEN Labour councillors are expected tonight to call a last-minute halt to a deal with Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion property company to develop Tolmers Square, Euston.

The council was due to approve the deal on Wednesday, under which Stock Conversion would get permission for profitable office blocks in exchange for providing cheap land for council housing, within the 11-acre site.

However, critics, led by journalists Bennie Gray and Christopher Booker, have claimed that Stock Conversion would make £20 million profit, and

argued that the council should investigate alternatives.

Tonight the Labour group meeting is expected to defer any final decision on the deal—even though it has been approved in principle once by the council and in detail by policy committee.

I understand that although the deal with Mr Levy will not go through, it is unlikely that the councillors will wish to take up the non-profit option provided by Mr Gray and Mr Booker through their Claudius Properties.

Law changes

One possibility would be for the council to go for compulsory purchase of the Tolmers Square site, even though Stock Conversion own nearly half.

If this were approved by En-



Evening Standard: Annela Drake-Drummond
THE CRITICS—Bennie Gray (left) and Christopher Booker.

vironment Minister Mr Geoffrey Rippon, the council could seek to carry out redevelopment on its own terms.

If, on the other hand, Mr Rip-

pon refused to confirm the order, Camden could point out that it was the Government which forced them into the arms of the developers.

Throughout London, Labour councils are anxious to work out ways in which development can be carried out on expensive sites with benefit to the community rather than profit to the developer.

Under changes in compensation law made in the 1960s, councils are forced to pay market price for land. In Central London these prices are inflated by speculative buying — with developers gambling that councils or the Minister will give them planning permission.

Legal poser

The result is that councils can usually get housing, parks and other amenities only by deals which give the developers permission for offices.

Since developers are unlikely to open their books to officials, it is difficult for councils to know when they are striking a tough enough bargain. Furthermore, there is some doubt about the legal status in planning law of what amounts to selling of planning permission.