

TOLMERS VILLAGE

PUBLIC HOUSING - PRIVATE PROFITS!

TOLMERS VILLAGE, the area that lies between Euston Station, Euston Road and Hampstead Road, has been a centre of controversy between property speculators, the local council and the local population for 18 years.

In the early 1960s Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust Ltd. started buying up the area, and running it down, in the hope of gaining permission to undertake an office and commercial development on the site.

By the early 1970s over 50 houses and some commercial buildings had been demolished, whilst many of those remaining were partially or wholly empty and in varying stages of dereliction.

11% of the land was vacant, numerous business had closed down and the residential population had declined by one half since 1960.

Levy deal

In 1973 Camden Council approved a scheme negotiated with Stock Conversion, subsequently known as the Levy Deal, whereby the Council would buy land for housing in Tolmers Village for £200,000 per acre in exchange for Council support for an Office Development Permit for 250,000 sq. ft. Levy stood to make £20m out of the deal.

However, strong opposition and pressure on the Council caused them ultimately to reject the deal.

Instead the Council came up with its own scheme which was to include housing for 1700 people, 85,000 sq. ft. of office space, commercial and industrial space, public buildings and community facilities.

In June 1975 Levy finally gave up and sold out his interests of 6.07 acres in Tolmers Village for the sum of £4m. The battle against Levy was won.

The Council now pays Grenfell in order to retain its option to buy the land at the same price paid for it.

Thirdly, the Council say that office development is the only way to offset the high cost of housing land.

Fourthly, the office content was increased to 300,000 sq. ft. to make it an attractive proposition for private developers.

How much will Camden profit from this?

Since the Council is dependent on a private developer, the developer will extract the most favourable terms possible from the Council and is likely to take the lion's share of the profits.

Moreover the Council intends to use the Community Land Act to buy the proposed commercial part of the site from Grenfell.

Under the CLA, although leasing to a private developer will relieve the Council from interest repayments on this land, they can only keep 30% of any profits.

The other 70% goes straight back into government coffers.

So despite the Community Land Act, the arbitrary system of land values still remains, and it is still the same people who make the profits: the property speculator, Levy; the financiers; the merchant bank, Morgan Grenfell; and the property developer.

And it is the people of Camden who are paying: financially out of the General Rate Fund, and in terms of a plan which is not based on social need but on the demands made by financial institutions and property developers.

Tolmers Village is a resource which belongs to the people of Camden. The plan for the area should be determined by the needs of the people that live and work in it, and not by the interests of merchant banks, property developers and financiers.

It has constantly been recognised that Inner London communities are being destroyed, jobs and houses are disappearing, and that people are being pushed out in the name of progress and multi-million pound profits.

We refuse to allow Tolmers Village to be yet another example of this destruction.

It is in the interests of the people who live and work in Camden to see Tolmers Village remain and be rehabilitated.

We demand that the Council carry out its obligation to buy up the property in Tolmers Village and immediately start implementing a plan for the area dictated by social need.

The potential of the area in terms of its size and location in Central London should be used to provide housing, light industrial and community and recreation facilities.

Housing With thousands homeless, massive waiting lists, and many living in cramped and inadequate conditions, it is imperative that the Council embarks on a major housing development in the area.

Employment The unemployment rate in the borough of both craftsmen and manual workers is continually rising. The Tolmers development could provide light industrial workshops for local people.

Community and leisure facilities There is a desperate lack of such facilities in this part of the borough. There is enough space in Tolmers to provide a multi-purpose community and recreational centre which would fulfil the social needs of the area.

6) That there should be a multi-purpose leisure centre of flexible design equipped to accommodate comprehensive community facilities including a cinema/theatre, youth club/dancehall, nursery/creche, bar/light refreshments, sports facilities (eg table tennis, darts, pool, a playground), meeting rooms and facilities for a tenants association and neighbourhood centre, a launderette, on the southern part of the Hampstead Road/Euston Road site.

7) That Council architects be provided to cooperate with the residents of Tolmers Village and representatives of other residents organisations in the borough, the Trades Council and the Direct Labour Force in drawing up a plan for Tolmers Village based on social need.

8) That the Council carry out its obligation to acquire the rest of the Tolmers Village site.

Inner city areas

As Camden Council and the government are committed to revitalising the inner city areas, creating employment and increasing the housing stock, we feel that there are grounds for requesting the government to make available special funds to enable this project to be carried out.

Some of this could be done within the existing structures such as the Job Creation Scheme, Urban Aid programme, employment subsidies and through the £80m grant which the government has allocated to help attract industry back to inner city areas.

Considering the difficulties encountered in getting private industry to create and maintain employment, surely the answer is for local councils to tackle the problem directly.

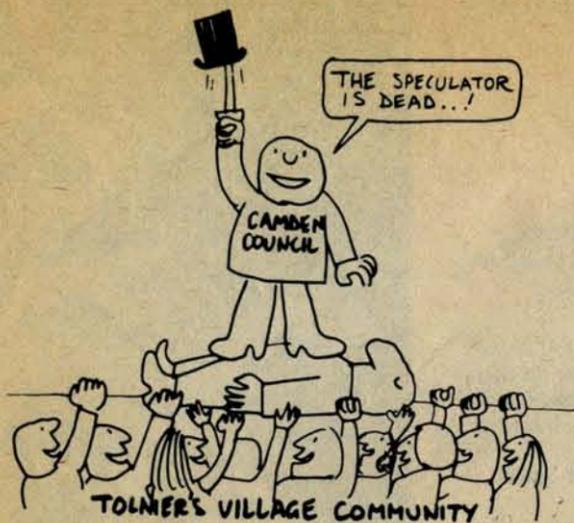
There are already many ways in which local councils act as employers, eg London Transport, Direct Works Departments, council-owned and run laundrettes/wash houses, supermarkets, schools, playgrounds, parks, job creation schemes etc.

The Council could make a positive contribution to solving the unemployment problem in the borough by building a light industrial development on the Euston Road site and taking managerial responsibility.

This would ensure that the Tolmers development would be a mixed development and should be well-received by the trade union movement and the unemployed in the borough.

This would be a far more positive contribution than building yet another office development and could be a pilot scheme which could give a lead to the future.

Louis Hellman, May 1976.



New scheme

However one year later in April 1975 the Council announced a new scheme for Tolmers Village.

This will mean 300,000 sq. ft. of office space and the destruction of Tolmers Square to make room for it, housing for 350 less people than previously proposed, and the loss of some shops, restaurants and light industry.

The provisions for public buildings, some community facilities and extra light industrial space have been omitted.

Why did the Council change the plan?

Firstly, the high cost of the land - £4m, an average of £660,000 per acre. Secondly, Council obligations to financial institutions incurred through the transaction with Levy. These amounted to £512,000 per annum in 1975/7 in interest and option charges, payable out of the General Rate Fund.

This £512,000 consists of:

a) £112,000 interest to the financiers who lent the Council £1m towards the purchase price.

b) £400,000, 3% above the Inter Bank Rate, to Morgan Grenfell, a merchant bank. The bank bought the rest of the land from Levy for £3m under the terms of an agreement with the Council

The Council has not yet found a developer to invest, but meanwhile Tolmers Village still suffers from planning blight and decay.

Though the Council has started work on four small infill sites and some rehabilitation, the majority of the original Levy property remains untouched.

Some residents and businesses have moved out but because of the cuts in public expenditure, work will not start for at least another year.

Many of those remaining within the area face an uncertain future.

We believe that the Council must immediately start implementing a plan for Tolmers Village dictated by social need.

The needs of the area and alternative proposals

At a local public meeting organised by Tolmers Village Action Group on 17th of February, objections were raised to present Council plans, the needs of the area were discussed and alternative proposals were suggested.

This discussion formed the basis of what is set below.

Proposals

For these reasons we put forward the following objections and proposals:

1) We oppose the office development because it does not satisfy any of the needs of the people of Camden. It stops the land from being used for more essential facilities and would be an environmental nuisance. It is counter to Camden Council, GLC and central government policy on office development.

We propose:

2) That Tolmers Square be rehabilitated in order to keep the character of the area and the existing housing stock.

3) That extra housing be provided at the southern end of North Gower Street.

4) That existing light industrial and craft workshops be retained and additional workshops be built on the southern part of the Euston Road/Hampstead Road site.

5) That all shops, restaurants, small businesses and residents should have the right to be relocated and remain in the area if they so wish.

Gas bill scandal P2

Weekend TV P7

Jobs P15/16



The age of diesel - Motors P18

Walkabout Monday?

CAMDEN could be without buses and with only a few tubes on Monday. Transport unions are preparing take strike action in support of the health unions.

Round-the-clock pickets at Chalk Farm garage will ensure a complete shutdown of bus routes 46, 24, 31 and 68. Meanwhile, tube services will be seriously reduced, is expected.

The transport strike is in solidarity with the health workers national day of action in support of a twelve per cent wage claim.