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Council plans massive office block

By Judy Hillman, Planning Correspondent

The London Borough of Camden has applied to itself for planning permission to build a massive office block at Tolmers Square, just north of Euston Road. At 300,000 square feet, or two-and-a-half times the size of Centre Point (the empty tower at St Giles's Circus) the block is 50,000 square feet larger than proposed by Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust in the early 1970s.

The size of the office content and the prospect of so much profit led the Labour-controlled council in October 1973 to reject a deal already approved by its planning and resources committee. This deal would have allowed the property company to build and give Camden a small share in the profits, plus eight acres of land for housing at a very heavily subsidised price. The firm was also planning to construct about 100,000 square feet for mixed commercial use.

By the summer of 1975, Camden had made arrangements to buy the land for £4,000,000, only £1,000,000 of which had loan sanction from the Department of the Environment. This covered the housing content proposed for part of the land. At that time, the council intended to build homes for 1,700 people and provide about 85,000 square feet of offices — although officials warned this figure would have to be increased to obtain the necessary development finance.

The rest of the deal was somewhat complex, with Camden passing the deeds to the merchant bank, Morgan Grenfell, on the understanding that it returned them after five years.

The new scheme for Tolmers Square will provide homes for about 1,300 people, shopping and workshop space, as well as the 300,000 square feet of offices, for which Camden has the necessary office development permit. In other words, the area could have more offices and fewer homes at a much later date than would have been the case if the Stock Conversion deal had gone ahead.

Giant office block planned at Euston

CAMDEN COUNCIL are hoping to build a huge office block in partnership with a property developer on part of the controversial Tolmers Square site near Euston Road, writes Robert Langton.

They are about to grant themselves planning permission for a block which would have 225,000 square feet of space to let, and yield a rent of more than £2,000,000 a year.

In the early seventies, the council were involved in a bitter argument with conservationists and Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion company over what should be built.

Mr Levy had spent years buying up properties around the square with the idea of building a huge amount of offices.

In return, he was prepared to set land aside on which Camden was to have houses.

But in the end, the deal fell through and Stock Conversion sold the land it had assembled like a jig-saw to the council.

"We want to build a block on a part of the site which is considered unsuitable for housing because it is noisy and

on a very busy corner," said a spokesman.

Not only will the £16 million scheme provide work for 2,500 people, but when finished it will pay for the cost of buying the land in the first place from Stock Conversion.

Over 400 homes for 1,325 people are being planned by the council for their tenants and half will be completed, if all goes to plan, by 1980.

Skills

"We shall carry out the scheme with a suitable developer who has the necessary expert skills and project management, and it will mean that the council can share in the equity or profits," added the spokesman.

There will be workshops, shopping facilities and a cafe as part of the scheme if it goes ahead.

It appears that Tolmers Square will now have more offices and fewer homes than Stock Conversion had proposed in its earlier plan.

Mr Joe Levy told me recently: "Camden Council could have had all the homes they had wanted if they had accepted my plan — and the homes would have been built and occupied by now."

'Stop cities exodus'

ACTION is needed now to stop the flight of people from Britain's cities.

That is the warning from Mr Jack Smart, chairman of the Association of Metropolitan Authorities.

Mr Smart, a Wakefield Metropolitan District councillor, says that Government figures spell out a frightening future.

The Office of Population and Surveys has forecast that between now and

1991, almost 98,000 people will leave London every year.

The corresponding annual figure for Liverpool will be almost 11,000 people leaving; and for Manchester 8,000.

"Depopulation is a very real factor in economic decline," Mr Smart said.

Experience showed that while a city's population might fall the proportion of poor people rose. More people needed local authority help and there were fewer people to pay for it.

"Did the Labour Party really sincerely have any idea of what they were trying to achieve when they called the scheme off?" the Conservative opposition leader, Mr Alan Green-gross, asked last night. "The second important thing is what it has cost people in terms of delay, and of compromising on basic principles, and the financial burden this has imposed on the very people that the Labour Party claims to be helping. It is the ratepayers who are going to pay in the end."

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