

Deputy's Words prove haunting

Camden
Pancreas
14.10.77



● Deputy leader John Mills.

THE CONTROVERSIAL words of the town hall's deputy leader John Mills on the "appalling and disastrous" saga of Tomers Square, came back to haunt his Labour colleagues in the shape of a Tory motion, on Wednesday night.

The Tory motion quoted precisely Mills' words from a newspaper article, in which he described the "whole saga of Tomers Square" as an "appalling and disastrous example of non-planning over a number of years."

For the Tories it was a vindication of their opposition to Labour's handling of the Tolmers Square site dating back to the days when property developer Joe Levy owned it.

Labour Councillors were reminded by Councillor Julian Tobin of how he and his fellow Tories had opposed the council's eventual decision to block the "Levy plan" for developing the Square on more or less the grounds that Mills had quoted.

The handling had resulted in the site being wasted over a long period of time to the benefit of none.

Labour councillors, however, opposed the motion making it clear that

the Labour council could not be blamed for the actions of other parties and the lack of Government support including Tory Government support which allowed Levy's plans to develop unchecked until a late stage.

Councillor Mills himself was in no mood for eating his own words. "I stand by what I said," he told councillors, but went on to say that numerous factors had contributed to the damaging delays on the site's being developed.

When it came to the vote, the Labour Group overwhelming outvoted the small Tory group, who had clearly half-hoped that Mills would join them on this one. But Mills abstained.

Ham & High 14.10.77

Tories bait the Tolmers hook

ONE issue which clearly divides the Labour group from top to bottom is the council's go-it-alone development of the Tolmers Square area.

The Tories had neatly baited a hook by proposing a motion: "That this council notes with regret that the whole saga of Tolmers Square is an appalling and disastrous example of non-planning over a number of years"—the exact condemnation which Councillor John Mills, the council's deputy leader, made in a statement to the Ham and High.

While Councillor Roy Shaw, the council leader, evaded the bait with a more optimistic view of the area's future, Mr Mills firmly bit the hook.

Councillor Julian Tobin, deputy leader of the opposition, said the council's current scheme provided less

housing and more offices than that which had been jointly formulated with Mr Joe Levy's Stock Conversion and Investment Trust. The council was proposing to build 300,000 square feet of offices at a time when 500,000 square feet was already advertised as to let in Euston Road.

Councillor Martin Morton said that if the council had gone ahead with the joint development it would be "well under way with a considerable housing gain", instead of which its latest plans for the area had been abruptly withdrawn at the Development Control Committee meeting on the previous night, with no explanation.

While "prolonging the agony of Tolmers Square" the council was also paying £500,000 a year in interest charges for the land it had bought.

Mr Shaw said that had

the motion quoted Mr Mills in the past tense—it would have been accurate, but as it stood it was a misquotation. The blame for the disaster lay with successive Secretaries of State who had over 15 years prevented St Pancras and Camden Councils from developing the area.

The familiar unacceptable face of capitalism and the collapse of the property boom were also to blame. "Chaos only began to give way to reason a couple of years ago when we decided to buy the site," he added.

Now Camden had 25 homes under construction, 18 of them being rehabilitated, and contracts had been signed which would soon produce housing for another 320 people.

The Levy scheme would have produced 490,000 square feet of commercial buildings, compared with Camden's planning application for 330,000 and the

council's scheme meant more rehabilitation and more listed buildings saved.

The planning application had been made only to prevent the council's Development Permit lapsing at the end of August, but now the council would get down to serious planning of the whole area.

There was some drop in housing, but that was because the Government had radically reduced inner city housing densities. "The appalling and disastrous chaos is a thing well of the past," he concluded.

But Mr Mills said his statement was "a very accurate description of what's been going on".

He agreed that Government inaction and the Office Development Permit system bore some blame, but so did the successive local authorities and the GLC, which had insisted in getting involved in allocation of office space.

"In the private sector

there were some greedy and unscrupulous people involved, who are not interested in the area but only interested in making money," he said.

"I don't believe we are out of the woods. I believe this miserable saga is going to go on for a few years yet and the only hope is to emerge with a social and housing compromise that is acceptable to the area.

"If we don't, I expect I'll be making the same statement in a year's time."

Mr Mills abstained in the vote on the motion, and about half a dozen Labour colleagues joined him in this expression of frustration.

● A Conservative motion calling on the council not to make the same "mistake" in restoring The Granary, in St Pancras, to industrial use as it had with allocation of the Kingsgate Road factory, West Hampstead, to a crafts group was also defeated.

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