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Camden New JOURNAL

No. 33 Thursday, November 4, 1982

Free to 52,000 homes
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New Journal brings joy . . .

Andy gets his action chair



● Andy, at his King's Cross home.

CASH and cheques have come pouring in for the New Journal's wheelchair appeal on behalf of disabled Andrew D'Costa. Journal readers were clearly moved by our front page story of Andrew's plight.

Now a specially built wheelchair to play his favourite game of basketball is no longer a dream.

Within hours of the New Journal appearing, the £300 or so to buy the wheelchair was raised. Donations ranged from £2 to £150. And with them came

letters of kind wishes. "Thank you for printing an article such as this and wish Andrew well from me," said one Somers Town gent. A caller from Primrose Hill promised to make up the balance on whatever was raised. And a pensioner sent £5 cash.

Generous

The Mayor of Camden, Councillor Tom Devine, who has enthusiastically launched his own charity appeal fund on behalf of the disabled, certainly

put his money where his mouth is. As soon as he saw our front page, he made a generous offer.

Camden Sports Council held an emergency meeting after reading the story and offered to buy the wheelchair for Andy outright. But by that time the amount needed had already been subscribed.

Andrew told the New Journal from his home in Frederick Street King's Cross: "I cannot believe the generosity of so many people. My thanks go to all of them."

● In your 20-page special —

Snapped by our photographer: Stuart Lipton, director of a developing company, Gerald Levin, architect and Nick Wates, a former squatters' leader. What do they see through the lens?

Feature
P9-14.



● 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 to 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, it 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.

Newsdesk Tel. 485 8207
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4,000 homes go begging

Hope for the homeless

NEARLY 4,000 homes in Camden are empty — and almost a quarter of them are owned by the council, according to the latest published figures.

Last April, 3,900 homes in the borough were empty, the official Greater London House Condition Survey revealed. This is more than twice the number of properties that were classified as empty by the Camden Single People Housing Campaign which did a borough-wide house-to-

house survey earlier in the year.

Just over 1,000 of the empty homes listed in the official survey were owned by Camden Council, compared with 2,500 in private ownership and 250 owned by housing associations.

A report to a council sub-committee on Thursday claimed that Camden were taking steps to reduce

the number of vacant properties in their hands by letting them on a short-life basis. And they are now considering ways to reduce the number of homes left empty by private owners and put homeless families in them.

Two schemes adopted by other London councils under which the local authority take over homes

left empty by private landlords were considered in the report.

Brent Council have successfully put homeless families in vacant properties — and saved themselves substantial sums — by negotiating a lease with landlords on a fixed-term contract.

The owner received a
Continued on P4

Vice-girls pay the price

OVER THE past year more than 1,200 prostitutes have been arrested in the King's Cross area.

But pimps, who many believe are part of the organised crime network behind prostitution, have an easier time of it. Only six have been arrested in the same period.

Obtaining evidence to successfully prosecute a pimp involves many hours of police observation and plenty of proof, Camden's police chief Frank Chambers told a meeting of the King's Cross Working Party.

The brothel keepers of Argyle Square are under even less pressure. Only four have been arrested this year — six less than last year. And even when caught they can expect to get away with a £100 fine or, at worst, three months imprisonment.

Commander Chambers disagreed with the popular notion that big-time gangsters operate in King's Cross, encouraging a rise in street violence and robberies.

Although there has been a rise in tension since May, he said, there was no evidence of organised groups moving in. Only 17 cases of violence had been recorded for that area.

Commander Chambers, criticised by many speakers about the type of policing in King's Cross, estimated that there were about 400 prostitutes operating in the red light district. Yet there were only 800 police in the whole of Camden, he pointed out.

He said that police were obliged to apply the law. If local people were dissatisfied with the results, they should try to change it.

Camden Council police committee, which was presented with a report of the King's Cross Working Party yesterday (Wednesday) are to investigate possible legal means of preventing kerb crawling in the area.

Lady in luck

A SURPRISE £5 is on the way to Mrs. L. Kerr, of Lady Somerset Road, Kentish Town — this week's Lucky Strike winner.

Mrs. Kerr spotted the words New Journal in the Shopping Centre advertisement page 2/

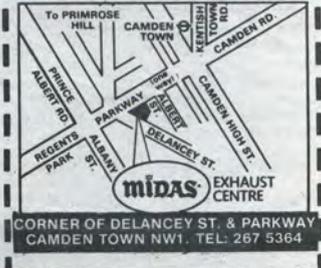
If you want to try your luck again this week, search for the words New Journal hidden in one of the advertisements. Cut out the advert, fill in the coupon on page 7 (FULL name and address please) and send both to: LUCKY STRIKE, Camden New Journal, 40 Camden Road, NW1, to reach us no later than first post Tuesday morning. The first all-correct entry out of the editor's "hat" will be the winner.

A 69-year-old West Hampstead woman, Miss Irene Drury, was found dead in her Loveridge Road flat on Wednesday last week by police who had been called by anxious neighbours.

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STANDING CHARGE					9.00	0.00	0.00	9.00

Gas meter charge explosive

PAYMENT IS NOW DUE

Charged to	(Tax Point)	for Enquiries	No.	Total Amount Due
15 10 82	20 10 82	315 1 612	00 1	9.95
				0.00
				£ 9.95

ST PANCRAS North MP Jock Stallard is fighting a fierce campaign to make sure that elderly people no longer receive gas bills like this (above) sent to a Kentish Town pensioners two weeks ago.

The £9.95 bill may appear modest — but nearly the whole sum is made up of a "standing charge" which all consumers have to pay regardless of how much gas they actually use.

The pensioner who received the bill used just 95p-worth of gas last quarter in her ground-floor flat in Falkland Road. The standing charge increased her bill nearly tenfold.

Bills

And last week in Parliament, Energy Secretary Nigel Lawson revealed that about 500,000 other pensioners also receive gas bills in which the

By NEW JOURNAL reporter

standing charge comprises more than half of each quarterly bill. But this was just about all Mr. Lawson gave away in reply to a series of Parliamentary questions put to him by Mr. Stallard, who has been campaigning for two years to get standing charges on pensioners' fuel bills scrapped altogether, or at least limited

to less than 50 per cent of the total sum demanded. Pressure last year by Mr. Stallard and other Labour MPs forced the Government to review the standing charges and an inquiry has been under way since last January. But Mr. Lawson has so far refused to publish its findings. Work on the review — being done together with the DHSS

— "is proceeding", he said in reply to a plea from Stallard that the results should be made public. "I do not propose to publish further results at this stage."

Limiting

The British Gas Corporation and the Electricity Council are looking at the possibility of limiting the standing charges but have made no decision about the idea, he added.

MP Jock steps up the pressure . . .

MP Jock Stallard brought up the question of standing charges at the annual meeting of Camden pensioners on Saturday.

As a result of well-organised campaigning by pensioners the Government was now under a tremendous amount of pressure to do something about it, he said.

Mr. Stallard, a staunch defender of

pensioners' rights, spoke of the plight of old people under the Thatcher Government.

He told his audience: "This Government has been consistent in one way only — consistently bad."

Cut

He explained how they now wished to cut back on pensions on the grounds that they had been overpaying.

"I can't believe that any government in its right mind — and in election year — could claim two per cent back from pensions," he said.

And the problem of hypothermia he accused the Government of regarding as just one of the day-to-day hardships to be endured. He said: "Soon there will be a new corner's verdict known as 'bad luck'."



● Jock Stallard, MP.

About one million gas users and 750,000 electricity consumers pay more on the compulsory standing charge than on the fuel they use. According to Mr. Lawson, about half of these bills are received by pensioners.

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CAMDEN

Camden Council Housing Redevelopment of Tolmers Square

The successful outcome of the joint co-operation of local people, Camden Council, Greycoat London Estates Ltd., the developers.

A unique venture which has gradually brought back life into a neglected area by providing decent homes and community facilities for 71 families — as well as financial gain to Camden.

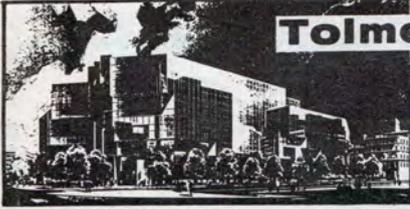
The council would like to take this opportunity to thank the many local people and organisations who have contributed towards its success in a number of different ways.

It would also like to thank consultant architects Renton, Howard, Wood, Levin Partnership, for their imaginative scheme which reflects so well the former character of the area and Sir Robert McAlpine & Sons for implementing it.

The council now looks forward to the completion of the final scheme, being undertaken by its own building department which will provide a further 66 homes in the area during Spring 1983.

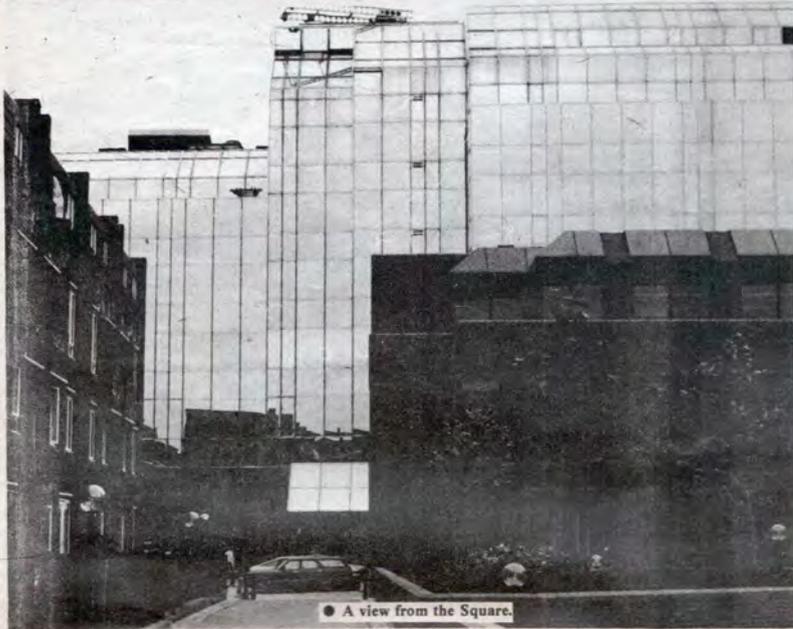
London Borough of Camden
Camden Town Hall
Euston Road, NW1

Tolmers Square special



Profits-for-people plan now all square

By NEW JOURNAL reporter



● A view from the Square.

IT STANDS like a giant orb capturing in mirrored walls the mad scurry of traffic skimming along Euston Road.

Ghostly lifts slide noiselessly up and down see-through lift shafts standing guard at the entrance.

Inside, the offices possess the last word in electronic wizardry, a strange contrast to the ground floor where a natural brick-walled arcade is fringed with plants and palm trees imported from Spain.

It is a tribute, in its own way, to what architects can do when commercial urges are subordinated to aesthetic needs.

Behind the glass-like complex, scaled down in size, is a homely estate cushioned from the sound of traffic in Euston Road.

In the centre is a grassy recreation area with slides and climbing frames, all sculpted out of the site where once stood the old Tolmers Cinema.

This, the new Tolmers Square, is undoubtedly a unique phenomenon, a combined office and housing development pioneered by Camden Council.

During the quiet civic jollities of the opening ceremony on Saturday it was easy to forget that Tolmers Square was once a cause celebre of post-war urban redevelopment.

For about twenty years up to the mid-seventies private developers had

tried to claim Tolmers Square for offices in bitter battles against residents who wanted the land for housing.

But all that seemed to belong to yesterday at the ceremony when the makers of the new Tolmers Square were clearly reflecting in the glory of their creation.

The politicians puffed with civic pride.

Gerald Levin, a partner in the firm of architects, Renton Howard Wood Levin Partnership, with colleague John Tebbutt, couldn't restrain smiles of satisfaction.

Foes rally against Camden deal over Tolmers decision

Stuart Lipton, director of the property developers, Greycoat London Estates Ltd., who partnered Camden in the scheme, did not seem unhappy either.

A youngish man who is said to have made a pound or two he seemed extraordinarily overawed, as if he were seeing the new Square for the first time. In fact, during the two years of construction, he visited the site hundreds of times, watching it grow.

He said he felt satisfied because the project proved that sound commercial practice and good architecture can go together.

Buildings that last and are admired and wanted will go on making money for those who own them — as he sees it.

In such down-to-earth terms the council can't be too worried either. It is understood that as freeholders the council stand to draw about £400,000 a year from the office part of the development.

Little seemed to be able to spoil the serenity of the opening ceremony. A protest banner, held by a group of men and women who once squatted in the crumbling Georgian houses of this historic square, finally gave and sank to the ground. No one seemed to mind. The group lay back on the grass and watched the children skim down the slide.

Even Nick Wates, the former squatters' leader of those battles ten years ago, grudgingly admitted that it was not such a bad development after all.

He thought it was a pity that none of the families who had lived in the old slums had gone back to claim a stake in the re-born Square. He blamed the council, who had promised that anyone displaced by the development could return, for not encouraging them to go back.

However, a few of the old stagers who had campaigned during the 'fifties and 'sixties against the slum landlords and later the speculator, Joe Levy, did return for the ceremony — old soldiers visiting a battleground.

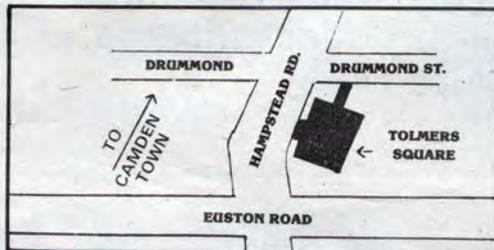
No doubt they remembered the rickety houses, the buildings that actually gave up and collapsed through decay and neglect,

Continued on P.12

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● The men who helped to make the project possible — Stuart Lipton, director of the developing company, Eric Farmery, council official responsible for the scheme, architects John Tebbutt and Gerald Levin, and Stuart MacKrell from the builders, Sir Robert MacAlpine.

Greycoat London Estates Ltd. and Legal & General (Pension Fund) are pleased to have been in partnership with the London Borough of Camden during the development of Tolmers Square project and wish it every success



Tolmers Square special



Reflections— by John Mills

THE OPENING of the new office block at Tolmers Square marks the end of a long and tortuous road from the run down and decaying old buildings and traditional community of ten years ago to the reflective glass building on Euston Road and brand new housing just behind it.

This site had been an infamous ground between those who supported and those who opposed re-development, especially during the property boom of the early 1970's. Ranged on one side were the developers, with huge profits being made by city centre office building. On the other side was the local community, bitterly opposed to the disruption and housing loss which re-development would bring in train.

In between were many different groups with axes to grind — banks and financiers, planners and architects, community activists and squatters who had moved into many of the empty properties in the area, journalists — remember Booker and Gray? — and right in the middle, Camden Council, whose job it was to try to resolve so many different and conflicting interests.

What in the end was decided was probably the only practical way out of the dilemma, though this did not produce a scheme which satisfied everyone. Camden bought the site from the developers who owned it and instigated a classic city mixed development. A well known property development company built the offices, but out of the profits made on doing that came much of the money to pay for Local Authority housing which could otherwise never have been built there plus a further sum which will help to keep down Camden's rates.

Of course the purists are right. It was a compromise. The local residents were disrupted. Some people did make a lot of money. The old Tolmers Square has gone. But re-development of city centre areas is never a painless operation, and there are substantial gains to set against the losses.

Was the re-development of Tolmers Square worthwhile? I think so, unless you believe that a modern city can survive without change.

● Councillor John Mills, former housing committee chairman, one of the main protagonists of the joint office-housing scheme.



● Reflections in a mirror

Continued from P.10

the evictions, the protest marches . . .

At that time, Joe Levy, who had slowly swallowed Euston Road and made millions out of its re-development, had his eyes on Tolmers Square. But a new Labour government in the mid-seventies had made it possible for Camden council to buy out Levy's company, Stock Conversion, at a time when the property market was collapsing. Then came the deal with Greycourt.

It saved not only another slice of Euston from further

speculation but also allowed the council to breathe life back into the adjoining Drummond Street area, a little village of restaurants, wine bars, shops and flats, a community that would have died if skyscraper office blocks had been allowed to cast their shadow over the area . . .

When the Camden-Greycourt deal was concocted in the late 'seventies, it was dubbed a "profits for the people" plan. Many in the majority Labour group on the council were sceptical. Some still are. But, on the whole, it seems to have worked, judging from the smiles on the faces of children playing in the square.



● Tolmers Square of yesterday — and the site of the Tolmers Cinema, the cheapest flea-pit in London with seats costing one shilling (5p)!

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Davy McKee (London), Great Britain's leading multi-contractor organisation, wishes the London Borough of Camden every success in the Tolmers Square project.





Tolmers Square special

"A place for a decent life" — MP

THE new Tolmers Square estate is an outstanding example of what happens when private profiteering is replaced by public service.

This was the theme of the speech of local MP Frank Dobson when he performed the opening ceremony of Tolmers Square on Saturday at the estate's new community centre, The Lord Palmerston.

"It took public ownership, public funds and public commitment to transform this area from a decaying slum into a place where local people can live a decent life," he said.

Dobson, who was Camden council's Labour leader when bitter battles were fought in the early 1970s over the future of the Square, recalled the old times.

Referring to the Tolmers Cinema — an old flea-bit of a cinema which once stood in the heart of the area — he said it was to the Empire Leicester Square what a doss house in to the Ritz Hotel.

"In the last few years before it closed it seemed to be showing 'Gunfight at the OK Corral' every other week," he said. "I must have seen it six or seven times myself. Looking back I think it was an omen."

He said that years later the battles to get decent housing for local people in the Square became bitter and protracted.

At the height of the property boom the council nearly made a deal with the property developers, Stock Conversion, but "Thank God, we drew back at the last minute."

Without spelling it out he praised the "amateur" protest group who had helped to persuade the council to back off from the deal.

Tenants fight council's £20m deal with site developer
Camden Council
lowers Levy d

Finally, the council bought the land for £4 million. And he disclosed how.

He said that Robert Clarke of Stock Conversion rang the town hall to say he had been so moved by a television talk on housing by Lord Goodman that they thought they should sell the land to Camden.

"I nearly laughed my head off," he said. "What he really meant was that there was a Labour government and the bottom had



● The new Tolmers Square

dropped out of the property market."

Owning the land meant that the council had finally wrested it from private ownership and were now able to put it to good public use.

He recalled how people living in "appalling" conditions in the Square had fought so hard to make this happen.

He remembered one of them in particular — an old Labour party activist, Rose Gavin.

When he was a student he attended a Labour party meeting at her home. She had fought ceaselessly to improve the lot of her neighbours. It was such a great tragedy that later on she was so senselessly murdered.

He made the point, too, that the "stinking" housing conditions in Tolmers Square used to breed prostitution just as they would do in King's Cross today. And, as with Tolmers Square, he said that

prostitution would only end in King's Cross when social conditions improved there.

As for the new Tolmers Square there were now high-quality homes for people — and everyone involved, the developers, builders and architects, had done an excellent job in providing them.

"For the first time ever the land round here is owned by the people and is being used to benefit the people," he said.

"For the first time ever nearly everyone round here will live in good conditions.

That's no coincidence. Under private landlords the land and buildings round here were devoted to private profits. I remember the raddled ruins into which the houses were allowed to decay by the private owners."

He did not believe in God but he was sure that Rose Gavin, and all the others who had fought for the people of the Square, would be glad to know that their dream had come true.

● Bill Birtles, chairman of the council's housing development committee, described the project as "superb", and promised that it was the first of several big developments now in the pipeline.

He praised everyone involved with the project, referring particularly to the council officers and the private firm of architects — Renton Howard Wood Levin Partnership — who had designed it.

It was fashionable nowadays to "knock" council officers but he had nothing but praise for the dedication

and hard work of those employed by Camden. Many of them were now working as many as eighty-nine hours a week.

He said Camden now had the money to spend on housing. Unfortunately, he had met government officials on Friday who had pressed for cutbacks on standards. They had objected to the installation of such essentials as central heating and lifts.

"But this council is not prepared to lower its standards," he said "in order to meet the political wishes of this government.

"We will continue to build to the high standards of which Tolmers Square is such an excellent example."

● Praise for the project came too from Julian Fulbrook, chairman of the housing management committee who described it as "magnificent". He was sure that the 15,000 people on the waiting list, the 100-odd families living in bed and breakfast accommodation, as well as the 8,000 council tenants seeking a transfer, would appreciate the importance of such developments as the new Tolmers Square.

He said the council wanted to tackle the housing crisis in the borough — and they hoped the government would listen to their pleas for help.

Square facts

○ The development scheme covers the grounds of an old manor, Tottenham, that went back to the age of the Domesday Book.

○ During excavations on the site, remains were discovered that dated back several centuries.

○ The new office complex — in three linked blocks stepping from eight down to four storeys — is a new joint partnership development by Camden council and Greycot London Estates Ltd.

○ Funded by Legal and General Assurance (Pensions Management) Ltd, it comprises 206,000 sq. ft. of office space with 18,500 sq. ft. of leisure facilities. Three blocks are clad with a smooth articulated skin of mirrored curtain walling and faceted steel mullions.

○ It is let as the headquarters of a large engineering firm, involved with oil rig construction, Davy McKee (Oils and Chemicals) Ltd.

○ Half the net rent of the 1.8 office site goes to Camden. This development has enabled Camden to get 34 underground car park spaces for the residents and to rebuild the square.

○ Altogether the Tolmers Square Project cost is around £18m.

○ The project is part of a council improvement scheme for the whole area which will be completed early next year.

○ With work already having been completed on other sites in Drummond Street, North Gower Street and adjoining roads, a total of 247 homes, housing 828 people, will have been provided since work began in 1976.



● The arcade.

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