



GROWING CAUTIOUS

There was an unusually cautious appraisal of the year ahead by Woolwich Building Society chairman Sir Oliver Chesterton at last week's annual press luncheon. No return to the overheated conditions of a few years ago, said Sir Oliver, but "I well foresee prices moving ahead in 1983, at least in line with the forecast inflation rate of between 5 and 6 per cent."

After this unambitious forecast, Sir Oliver ducked out of a question on why current house prices aren't moving by murmuring that it was very difficult and giving it to Woolwich general manager and BSA chairman Alan Cumming to answer.

This is not the Sir Oliver of old who has always gone in for extravagant though often wayward predictions. Last year, for instance, he anticipated a fall in price of up to 10 per cent in the middle-range housing market. In fact there was a 7½ per cent rise.

I shall be sorry if Sir Oliver draws in his horns because of one unfortunate miscalculation.

PULLING LUNCHES

You can tell the political inclinations of a direct works manager by the people he's planning to take out to Christmas dinner, if the debate at the IME's seminar on dlos is anything to go by.

David Green from Plymouth City Council delivered an impressive talk, the nub of which was that dlos should adopt

ruthlessly the methods of the private sector contractor if they were not to disappear without trace.

This worried a hirsute Mr Stoddart from Sunderland. Did this mean, he asked, that Mr Green condoned the use of "gratuities" to smooth the dlo's path? He was having enough difficulty persuading the treasurer to allow him to take his 25 shop stewards and their wives out for Christmas dinner, in the old Labour tradition of keeping the workforce happy.

He should not have worried. Green assured him that he was not giving his tacit approval to backhanders, but, he pointed out as a true disciple of the private enterprise ethic, he wouldn't be taking his shop stewards out, he'd be taking his client out.

At that point it looked as if delegates would be split clean down the middle between those who intended to celebrate with their workforce and those who felt it would be more worthwhile to drink their clients under the table.

But then a compromise solution was suggested by Bromley's aptly named Mr Makepeace. Working on the principle that co-operation between departments within the local authority was the most important consideration, he told the delegates that he would be entertaining the director of housing this year.

GIVE THEM A WARM HAND

With the opening of the Low Energy Office at Garston, and the prospect of a low-energy hospital being built on the Isle of Wight we could all find ourselves in one of these air-tight buildings sooner than we think. But a word of warning—in cold weather make sure you take a hot water bottle with you.

These buildings are kept at a standard 18°C by ultra-modern, high technology devices that ensure you don't have anything really hot, like a radiator, on the premises on which to warm low technology objects like hands and feet.

Should one come to the office with cold hands, they'll have to stay like that until they reach the same temperature as the rest of the 180°C, high-technology room, a few hours later.

TOLMERS SQUARE TRUCE

Camden Council's redevelopment of Tolmers Square with the very offices that the council stepped in to avert must appear like the ultimate sell-out to the residents and squatters who, some years ago, fought the property speculations of Joe Levy so vociferously. But the new development does provide some compensations to the former residents as well as a total of 81 new and rehabilitated dwellings.

The day before the scheme was officially opened, former activist Nick Wates could be seen clinching a deal with the scheme's new, plate-glass newsagent to flog his paperback history of the 23-year controversy, *The battle for Tolmers Square*.

BEHIND THE TIMES

The administration of GLC leader Ken Livingstone prides itself on its democratic and enlightened attitude to the "ordinary Londoner". Regrettably in one important respect GLC members remain a privileged minority.

I refer to the question of the quality of lavatory paper available in County Hall. While the 5000 staff are compelled to use a somewhat coarse and hard variety, each piece stamped with that familiar public service message "now wash your hands", the members' floor is equipped with the softest of tissues and, of course, no message is considered necessary.

The staff have been agitating for years to end this cruel form of municipal apartheid and when Livingstone and his friends were elected last year they had great hopes that at last soft paper would be available for all.

Alas, in the post-Denning era, every council spending decision has "to be seen to be reasonable" in the interests of the London ratepayers. As a consequence the council's director of supplies has had to point out that he has in stock several years supply of the hard paper, and members have now decided that the long suffering staff should bow to the inevitable. Nudge, nudge.

TIME FOR REFLECTION

Stamp dealer and farmer Michael Friedrich may be setting up a record as the UK's slowest house-builder. Plans were passed for the detached property by Oldham council in 1968 and work started soon afterwards. Fourteen years later the house, roofless, windowless and the subject of complaints by irate neighbours, is still only half finished.

Time seems to be up for the patient Friedrich. Two years ago Oldham council gave him 18 months to finish the job. Planning officials now say that as planning permission has lapsed and the house is in a green belt area, it must come down.

Friedrich, however, refuses to admit defeat. "I'm thinking of asking for permission to convert it into a barn," he says. But ominously he needs more time to think about it.

