



The redevelopment of Tolmers Square in Central London by Camden Council and Greycroats Estates combines mirror-glazed offices and brick-faced housing. The plan (above left) shows the new landscaped square enclosed by crescents of offices and housing.

HAPPY ENDING FOR TOLMERS SQUARE

Tolmers Square, scene of London's most inflamed showdown over property speculation, has completed its transformation into a brand new development of offices on Euston Road with council housing behind.

The controversy began 23 years ago when the property developer, Joe Levy, applied to redevelop as offices the elegant Victorian square of porticoed houses. Planning permission was refused, and Levy proceeded to accumulate properties, which he subjected to classic planning blight so as to leave no alternative but redevelopment.

What Levy did not reckon with was that as soon as his houses were vacated, they were squatted, predominantly by articulate students from University College on the other side of Euston Road. The squatters welded existing residents and themselves into an active community and orchestrated an impressive publicity campaign demanding that Tolmers Square should be

retained as housing.

The squatters' pressure on the local authority, reinforced by the collapse of the property boom in 1974, culminated in Camden Council buying out Levy for £4 million. But by then blight had taken its toll of the Victorian houses, and the council's loans from City financing houses left it with little option than to develop the very offices they had stepped in to avert. Camden then invited bids from a new set of property developers on a partnership basis in which 50 per cent of net profits on the offices would accrue to the council. The bid was won by Greycroats Estates, which had the bright idea of using the same architects, Renton Howard Wood Levin Partnership, as had been commissioned by the council for its overall design.

The redevelopment as built takes the form of two crescents of offices fronting Euston Road. Facing the inside crescent of offices is a crescent of new four-storey council housing, with a large new landscaped Tolmers Square between. A barrier block of housing above shops has been

built on Hampstead Road, which rises into an eight-storey tower of old-persons flats, and other existing houses and shops have been refurbished on the two minor street frontages of the block. As well as 21 000 m² offices and 81 new and rehabilitated dwellings, other facilities include a cafe, squash courts, gymnasium and new pub, while the former corner pub has been converted into a community centre. Offices and new housing have in common the crescent-shaped building form, but their respective cladding materials are in sharp contrast. The offices fronting Euston Road are sheathed in mirror-glass striving for the appearance of a cut-glass sculpture, while the housing behind is faced in orthodox, pseudo-traditional brickwork, with fanlights above front doors half-heartedly echoing the former terraces.

The entire development was built by McAlpine, a shareholder of Greycroats Estates. Quantity surveyors were Gardiner & Theobald for the £14 million offices and Gleeds for the £3½ million housing.

GLC REJECTS BRIXTON REDEVELOPMENT

Lambeth Borough Council's latest plan to revive Brixton town centre in South London (*Building* 1 October) has been condemned by the GLC.

The Planning Committee at County Hall decided this week that the proposals are over-ambitious and the borough is over-optimistic about Brixton's capacity to attract private investment. According to the GLC, there is too much new shopping and office floorspace in the plan and the multi-level, multi-use form of development proposed will lead to operational and environmental problems. The GLC will be formally objecting to the draft plan at a public inquiry.

The GLC stance has infuriated Lambeth Council, which has spent more than two years on what it claims is the first realistic plan for Brixton since the initial grandiose designs of the 1960s.

Because of the loss of housing involved in the new shopping and road proposals, Lambeth's plans have already attracted considerable local opposition. With the GLC now hostile, the prospect is for a bitterly fought public inquiry which could fatally damage any effort to boost confidence in Brixton following last year's riots and lose the borough the 3800 jobs it is planning.

The Brixton situation is obviously influenced by the GLC's political hostility to the borough council since the ousting in May of Ted Knight's Labour administration, but throughout suburban London the GLC appears to be taking an increasingly hard line against borough plans for large-scale town centre expansion. This is particularly so where there is already local opposition.

This week it put Bromley on notice that it was unhappy about the office proposals in its own town centre plan. Another row is brewing in Wimbledon, where Merton Council is planning even more grandiose redevelopment against the growing opposition of local residents.

● A £14 million facelift for Coatbridge, near Glasgow has been approved by the Scottish Development Agency – a project that should give some boost to the construction industry. The SDA is prepared to fund the project to the tune of £10.7 million and is looking to Strathclyde Regional Council to come up with a further £2.9 million. Monklands District Council is also being asked to back the project with £0.6m.