RUBBLE TO ROSES?

Press Release: TOLMERS VILLAGE RESIDENTS TAKE OVER EMPTY SITE FOR A GARDEN AND PLAYSPACE

The people of Tolmers Village are occupying a vacant site on the corner of Drummond Street and Coburg Street.

In our area there is nowhere for kids to play. There is nowhere for old people to sit. There are no trees, no gardens and nowhere to hold community events.

The site has been vacant since the war apart from a few years when it was used for temporary huts for contractors.

We intend to make this site into a community garden and playspace for children. We would also like to build a community hall.

Last November we asked the owners - Connolly's (Blakley) Ltd - if we could use the site for a community bonfire. The Council supported this request and the Town Clerk wrote to Connolly's on our behalf, but they refused to let us use it despite the fact that we had insurance cover against any damage caused. On March 11 this year we wrote again finally to ask if we might be allowed to use the site as a temporary garden and children's play space until it is required for anything. Again we offered to cover any loss or damage.

We have not yet had a reply. We have heard, however, that they intend to put up another fence around it to prevent it being used for anything.

We are fed up with a system which allows absent landlords and owners of property to do what they like with their property regardless of the local community. The Tolmers Square area has suffered for too long. Many houses were bombed during the war; others have been demolished since. Over 70 houses have been lost and still nothing is built to take their place. The area continues to decline. Absentee landlords (Stock Conversion in particular) prefer to leave houses empty rather than allowing people to live in them. The residential population has dropped to less than half of what it was in 1965.

We demand that the Council takes steps as fast as possible to bring the land under public control, so that it can be developed in the public interest.

Nick Wates, 102 Drummond St
CORNER SHOPS UNITE!

Profiteering by property developers has created a storm of public protest. But we accept as a matter of course the changes in our streets - the dwindling numbers of small shops selling groceries and everyday goods, replaced by a pattern of supermarkets and boutiques. It is true that the small shopkeeper's prices are undercut by supermarket chains. But the convenience of the shop around the corner, with someone on hand to serve and chat to, means that the shopkeeper can still make a living and provide a much needed service. Often the pressures which are likely to force him out of business come from elsewhere - redevelopment and rising prices.

Even a socialist council like Camden seems unable to replace or even attempt to replace the variety of established businesses it demolishes. Whole areas of Camden, like Gospel Oak, are becoming wastelands of repetitive housing with no scope for the future growth of shops, workshops and small businesses that our area now sustains. It would be ironic if we one day realised how much had been destroyed and that it could never be replaced. Our area is still threatened by redevelopment and must not become another Regent's Park Estate.

The other factor forcing small shops out of business is ever-rising rents. Residents in Hampstead have been forced to watch local shops changing hands, where grocers and even supermarkets are replaced by boutiques and banks, as medium-priced shops disappear. Hampstead Village is dominated by luxury shops just as Tottenham Court Road is now only good for expensive furniture and hi-fi shops. Our area is likely to face the same problems unless positive action is taken to break the cycle.

Barry Shaw

LOCAL BUSINESSES GET TOGETHER

Following the last meeting of business interests held in the Exmouth Arms, the TVA has been carrying out a survey of all the businesses in the area. There are 74 businesses which are likely to be affected by any development. So far, 24 have completed the survey.

Although too early to draw any conclusions, it would appear that many of the businesses are likely to be pushed out by rising rents as happened in so many other places. It is therefore all the more important that we form some collective opposition to any move which allows this to happen. At the meeting of business interests the idea of a community development company was discussed. Unfortunately, it seems that this is unrealistic in practice and that it would be better to wait until a council C.P.O. and then object to it unless conditions are written in that allow small businesses to remain. The Council Community Planning and Resources Committee discussed the Tolmers Square issue at their meeting on Monday and it is likely that some action will be forthcoming soon.

NO WAITING

Installation of meters is almost complete. Residents parking areas are being provided, but you have a permit. To save you walking to the Town Hall, application forms are available at the TVA.

AT LAST A LAUNDRETTE

Mr. Ahmed is planning to open a launderette in the basement of his shop in Drummond Street. We are badly in need of a launderette. The nearest, at present, are at the Post Office Tower in Cleveland Street, and at Robert Street. All these are ten minutes walk away, and involve crossing main roads - a struggle for many people, and many have asked for a local launderette. Mr. Ahmed hopes to get planning permission soon, and to be ready for first customers in a couple of months time.
I HEARD IT THROUGH THE GRAPEVINE

The Vines' Groceries and Provisions shop on Drummond St. has been an integral part of the Tolmers Village scene for 39 years. Mr. and Mrs. Vine moved from Kentish Town to the present premises in 1935 and are now the only survivors of Drummond St. pre-war enterprise. The area then provided homes for many families who were the main clientele for the Vines fare of sweets and groceries. Mr. Vine can remember legendary prices like the 4d loaf and 20 Players for 11½d.

Wartime bombing began the evacuation of many of Vines' customers with the demolition of the houses at the end of Drummond St., and the lure of new flats moved many other families away in the 1960's. Adapting to new circumstances the Vine empire has turned to satiating the lunchtime palates of local office workers. Many of their older customers, who now live on the Regents Park estate still return to the shop for groceries and a chat.

The future of the small family run shop looks grim as rents and supermarkets take their tolls, but their social role remains as essential. Unfortunately profitability can take no account of it. The Vines recognize that any move would spell the end of their business. Hopefully the Council's turn about in planning the redevelopment of the Tolmers area will allow them to continue to serve the residents with groceries and the office workers with sausage rolls for many more years.

Patrick Allen

LEGAL ADVICE

Solicitors are on hand every Wednesday evening from 6.30 to 10pm at the TVA to give free legal advice. Housing repairs? Rents? Business problems? They may be able to sort it out.

Police Seminar on Squatters.
The Police want to 'understand' squatters better. For the next four weeks they are holding seminars for their officers and they would like two or three squatters to go along to each one to explain what kind of people squat and why. Anyone who would like to go, come and see Nick - There might be lunch included.

Did you know that a planning application has been made to make 52 Hampstead Road, which a few years ago was a butchers, but is now empty, into a wine bar, complete with tinted glass and flower boxes outside.

Pam Daly of 61 Coburg St.
has a little kitten who
can be taken away from its
mother in a week. Does
anyone want it?

MR. HARIA AND BHAVNEETA NOVELTIES

Mr. Haria of Bhavneeta Novelities, Hampstead Rd. has already suffered from the actions of planners and councils. In 1958 he started a grocers shop at 32 Hampstead Rd. which flourished to such an extent that queues sometimes extended as far as the Cyprus Travel Agency. It did not last long. In 1962 the Council decided that it had to be knocked down to allow road widening in Euston Rd. Funnily enough, the site has still not been used and there was no real need to pull it down at all. Mr. Haria thinks that racial prejudice may have had something to do with it, although Council incompetence is just as likely.

But what happened to Mr. Haria? First he went to Uganda, but was pulled out by the government. He then took a shop in Drummond St., Whitfield St., and Grafton Way, but could not regain his custom. "We went down and down". His factory in Kentish Town also had to close down, as there was no retail outlet.

The ultimate result is that years have passed before he can work up his business again. He now owns Bhavneeta Novelities - the Indian silk shop in Hampstead Rd. - which he has finally built up into a going concern, and which has a regular clientele.

"What happens if this shop is demolished?"
"We are finished!"
Hampstead Road is very ancient being part of the main road from Westminster to Hampstead village which has existed from the eleventh century.

To the east of Hampstead Road between what is now Warren St and Highgate lay the Manor of Tottenhall the manor house being just south of the Euston road which itself was not built until 1746.

Edward IV visited Tottenhall manor in the middle ages and since that visit the manor was known as Tottenhall court which eventually was corrupted to Tottenham court and the lower half of the hamstead road became known as Tottenham Court Road.

To the north of the manor house was a pond used for water supplies where Tolmer Square is now. By the pool was a house known as King John's Palace, which is shown on Rocques' map of 1746 but it is doubtful whether there is any connection with the English king of that name. It is interesting though that a part of the road then called the new road, now Euston road, between Hampstead Road and Gower St was known as Palace Row.

In 1847 the first St Pancras public baths and washhouse were built by the pond in the manor and the entrance to these facilities became the entrance to Tolmer Sq from North Gower St.

The pond was filled in and Tolmer's Square built in 1863 and the Chapel in the centre of that square was opened in 1873. The church institute still standing in Drummond St was built on the site of the bath and wash houses in 1879. The Church was closed for worship at the beginning of this century and was converted to a cinema in the 1920's and as we all know the cinema was demolished last year.

Further parts of this article will deal with the origins of land ownership in the area from the time of the original Tottenham Court Manor which laid by the Dukes of Grafton (the Lords Fitzroy) at the time of Charles II.

John Stansfield, Hampstead Road.