



JOHN HODDER

Children make an adventure playground of the vandalised flats at Brunton Wharf.

Developer wants doomed council flats

A PRIVATE developer has appealed to the district auditor to intervene in a dispute over a doomed block of 86 council flats, writes Nick Wates.

If the auditor takes action it may prove to be a test case on whether councils can be prevented from randomly demolishing buildings which the private sector is prepared to buy.

The London borough of

Tower Hamlets has refused the developer's offer to buy the U-shaped block of flats known as Brunton Wharf at a price based on the land value determined by the borough valuer. Instead, the council is to spend more than £200,000 demolishing it.

The developer claims that the council is wasting at least £250,000 and destroying a valuable housing asset in an area of desperate housing need. The council has a

waiting list of more than 8,000, but has no plans for the site. It is to be zoned for industrial use even though there is 'idle industrial land in the vicinity.

The case is not unique. Last month the London borough of Newham decided to demolish two 1960s tower blocks at a cost of more than £1 million in spite of an offer by a private consortium to take them over at no financial risk to the council.

With only a handful of tenants left, Brunton Wharf is neglected and vandalised. The developer believes it can be modernised to provide flats for young people.

At £11,000 each, they would be some of the cheapest flats for sale in London. Local people would be given first option to buy.

The block, built between the wars, has fine steelwork balconies and well-built bay windows. One wing has views over the Grand Union Canal, and all ground floor flats have private gardens opening onto a communal courtyard and play area. Structurally the block is relatively sound.

Council officers have consistently tried to persuade the council to use Brunton

Wharf. In 1979, Tower Hamlets' Director of Development submitted a report recommending a full 30-year refurbishment, but the development committee turned it down and opted for demolition.

Council officers are also supporting the current developer's offer. The Director of Finance pointed out that the council would receive a capital payment, and would not have to spend funds maintaining and developing the site. He advised: 'The disposal of the estate would be totally in line with the policy of recycling assets

A special meeting of the Tower Hamlets Development Committee on 3 August decided unanimously to reject the developer's offer and proceed with demolition. Vice-chairman Dennis Twomey said it was felt that, whatever was done to the flats, they would still be slums.

'We wouldn't want to push people into a position where they were forced to buy flats which we thought were unacceptable to live in,' he said. He also admitted that the committee had not seen the developer's proposals for the block.