

King's Cross Think Again campaign: Press release of 26 April 2007

King's Cross development: campaign wins listed building reprieve till judicial review hearing

King's Cross campaigners celebrated a victory on 24th April when developers, Argent, withdrew their appeal against an injunction preventing demolition of listed and conservation area buildings.

Just hours before Mr Justice Sullivan was due to hear the appeal in the High Court, Leigh Day and Co, solicitors for the King's Cross Railway Lands Group, agreed a deal with the developers, Argent. In return for withdrawing their appeal against the injunction, Argent will be able to carry out minor internal demolition to Stanley Buildings North, beside St Pancras station. In addition, they have signed an undertaking to reinstate any damage to the building if the campaigners' judicial review of Camden's planning consent for the £2bn development succeeds.

Michael Edwards, co-chair of the King's Cross Railway Lands Group, which leads the King's Cross Think Again campaign, said:

'We are delighted that Argent has agreed not to demolish any buildings until after the judicial review is heard next month. We agreed with them doing some work inside Stanley Buildings North, like removing any asbestos, but were worried in case other salvage work caused irreparable damage. So we are even happier now they have given an undertaking to restore all the salvaged material if our court case succeeds and they don't get a new consent to demolish within 18 months. This agreement makes sense: if we lose the judicial review, Argent won't have lost any time. But if we won the judicial review having lost this injunction, there could have been needless destruction of the historic buildings which are such an asset to the area.'

Stanley Buildings consists of two Grade II listed tenement blocks built in the 1860s. Argent plans to 'embed' Stanley Buildings South in an office development, and demolish Stanley Buildings North to realign Pancras Road.

Camden council's sale of Stanley Buildings to Argent is also causing controversy. In March Camden's Executive agreed to sell the buildings, consisting of 20 three-bed flats, for an undisclosed sum rumoured to be little more than £3m. Both campaigners and property experts dispute whether Camden is getting best value for the blocks, since the valuation is based on the buildings' last use as affordable housing rather than on its potential development value. Nor has it been offered to any developer except Argent, so the price has not been tested on the open market.

On 24th April Camden's Scrutiny Committee agreed to recommend that the Council should get a second independent valuation to ensure the council was getting the best deal possible. But the following night, Camden's Executive rejected the Committee's recommendation and decided to press ahead with the sale. The Department for Communities and Local Government has already made clear it will not give consent to the sale till after the judicial review.

'We are very surprised the council seems to care so little for getting best value for its property,' said Michael Edwards. 'The estimated development gain on this part of Argent's current scheme would be 95,000 square feet. If this prime site in central London between two railway stations were on the open market that should make its price more than twice what we've heard it is. Camden seem to have offered Argent a knock-down bargain—buy one, get one free.'

The campaign's case for judicial review will be heard in the High Court by Mr Justice Sullivan on 24th and 25th May; he is expected to give a judgement either at the hearing or soon afterwards.