

no long term interest in its success. Camden Council have made it clear that they will not fund the new Community Centre and would only use their planning powers (by way of a legal covenant attached to the planning permission for the conversion of the Town Hall to offices - called a Section 106 agreement) to ensure the community facilities were realised. The developers of the Town Hall, Bee Bee, have no long-term interest in Dragon Hall, wishing only to get it finished and handed over to Camden as quickly as possible, so that they can let the new speculative offices in the old Holborn Town Hall, allegedly to Estee Lauder. Throughout the process the only concern of Bee Bee and their builders, Sindalls (who signed a design & build contract with Bee Bee, which implies that for a certain sum they will provide the Community Hall), has been to build the new facility as cheaply as possible within Camden's criteria.

Whilst the building work took place there was paltry supervision, and only as a result of considerable badgering by the Trust and the CGCA did Camden appoint their own surveyors to undertake periodic visits to ensure the works were proceeding correctly. By December 2001 Sindalls had "finished" their work and left site, and Dragon Hall has been locked up ever since. Camden's surveyors have endeavoured to get Bee Bee to rectify the defective work (a schedule of over four pages of outstanding and/or defective work is still outstanding). Bee Bee have apparently tried to get Sindalls to return to rectify the defects and complete the work to no avail. Meanwhile Bee Bee have let parts of the Town Hall in contravention of the planning conditions. Concurrently Camden Leisure Services have not unreasonably refused to take possession of Dragon Hall until the works are completed satisfactorily and have endeavoured to get their colleagues in the

planning department to enforce the planning conditions. Stalemate - Dragon Hall meanwhile remains locked up.

The Trust have written and cajoled Camden continuously to take action. Future users (the local primary schools and the City Lit) have also tried to bring pressure to bear but so far to little avail. Bee Bee do not wish to spend any money on rectifying the defects whilst Sindalls refuse to do so saying that what they built fits the brief given to them by Bee Bee. Camden's Leisure & Community Services Department, correctly, refuses to take possession, as the premises are not complete. Sue Wilby, Camden's L&CS Assistant Director, has been a constant supporter and enabler. Her frustration with the whole process is almost as pronounced as our own and her contribution over the past year is gratefully acknowledged. Camden's Planning Department continues to operate in their own time zone (in case you had not realised, a different time zone operates in Camden Council - one year real time equates to 10 years Camden time). However, the councillors who are ostensibly responsible for the actions of the relevant departments have failed to respond to correspondence on the matter from the Trust until the recent local elections, when things started to move.

In Camden's defence, the satisfactory procurement of complicated facilities like a new community centre by way of planning conditions is fraught with difficulties, especially when the whole building process has so many middle men and different players all with totally different objectives. Add to this hopeless recipe the inherent inefficiencies of local government and it is no surprise that Dragon Hall is still not open.

While the building process grinds on the Dragon Hall Trust edges closer to agreeing the legal documentation with Camden. However there are still some important sticking points, not least the current refusal of Camden to grant a lease within the Landlord and Tenant Act. The Trust argue that, as Camden refuses to provide any long term funding for the community facilities, it is vital that the lease allows the Trust to raise loans and attract charitable grants. The terms that Camden are currently offering will, in our view, make this impossibly difficult.

In summary we have in our local back yard a classic example of why our railways, underground, hospitals, schools, public housing, health service, parks, swimming pools, indeed the whole public domain will not improve while the mantra dictates that such work must be undertaken by public/private initiatives, as no one actually is responsible and if failure does occur then it is the public who have to shoulder the consequences. However, we can rest assured lawyers will get extremely rich as a consequence of all the litigation.

If, from this tale, you consider Camden has been inept, just pause to consider what other councils in similar situations are like, so remember Camden is the recipient of the "Council of the Year" award.

But, however depressing this may read, rest assured we will struggle on, and next year I can assure you that come hell or high water, the CGCA's AGM will be held in Dragon Hall, or I will eat my bat! (see the Salmagundi Gardeners report on page ***)

Jim Monahan, Trustee