

NEWS

Taubman could be having his shares valued for two reasons

A FINANCIAL expert has told the *Gazette* that Alfred Taubman's hiring of an investment bank to value his stockholding in Sotheby's does not necessarily mean that the former chairman is looking to sell up.

Papers filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission in Washington have revealed that Mr Taubman, whose alleged role

in illegal price fixing with Christie's is being investigated by the US Justice department, has hired Credit Suisse First Boston to evaluate his block of 13.2 million shares in Sotheby's, although for what purpose is still unclear.

The move comes after months of speculation that he might sell his controlling stake in the company.

The shopping mall mag-

nate's personal spokesman in Detroit, Christopher Tennyson, said that Mr Taubman felt it was time to evaluate his shares "because of all the many things that had transpired at Sotheby's over the past year". However, he added that Mr Taubman was undecided about the future: "He will be deciding whether to increase his holdings in the company, or sell a proportion, or all of his stake. The process is just at the beginning and we do not have the names of any potential buyers."

Both Ron Baron, the biggest non-executive shareholder in Sotheby's, who has been seeking greater influence over the board of the company, and the owner of Phillips, Bernard Arnault, whose LVMH group made an offer for Sotheby's in 1999, could not be reached for comment.

David Kusin, a financial analyst specialising in the art market, said that Mr Taubman, aged 75, could simply be doing a routine evaluation to prepare for retirement.

"Businessmen at his time of life often like to do a spot of estate planning", he said, "but it would also be a prudent way of privately marketing a block of shares too large to be absorbed at a stable price on the open market," he added.

It has been reported that Mr Taubman may be valuing his holdings for use as collateral against loans needed to pay his \$186m portion of the settlement of the civil action lawsuits against Sotheby's last year.