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Minister for Local Government

Department of the Environment
2 Marsham Street London SW1P 3EB
Telephone 01-212 3434

21 August 1985

Dear Secretary of State,

Prime Minister.
Contact with the arrangements
for the disposal of County Hall?
MEFA 25/8

Yes no

GLC COUNTY HALL

Now that the London Residuary Body (LRB) has been established we need to return to the question of the future of County Hall. I am writing in Patrick Jenkin's absence.

The position reached in our earlier exchanges was, I think, that disposal to the private sector, at least of the River Block, should be our aim, but that no final decision could be reached until the LRB had had an opportunity to assess the position. We agreed, also, that this need not imply any immediate disturbance of ILEA staff on abolition day, and that it would be reasonable to assume that the LRB would make some compensation payment to ILEA, which would offset, to some extent at least, their relocation costs.

If they are to make a proper assessment of the prospects, the LRB need to know that we shall not put obstacles in their way, and, if disposal is to be achieved, it must be pursued vigorously and quickly. Sir Godfrey Taylor, the Chairman of the LRB, has therefore decided that he should set a target date of 31 March 1987 for clearing the River Block. This may not be easy to achieve; but setting tight deadlines for vacating the building must be the right approach. We understand that certain private sector interests will not be willing to enter into negotiations until any danger of political disputes is out of the way.

The primary responsibility for the future of County Hall must rest with the LRB as prospective owners of the building. Sir Godfrey will, therefore, be pursuing his own discussions on this. These discussions will include a meeting with Mrs Morrell, which is to take place early in September. Sir Godfrey intends then to outline his approach to the future of County Hall, including the target date for clearing the River Block.

I am anxious not to do anything to cramp Sir Godfrey's enthusiasm for early disposal. I have, however, told him that I must put you in the picture before he speaks to Mrs Morrell - hence this letter. My own view - with which I hope you will agree - is that Sir Godfrey's approach will be useful in concentrating minds in ILEA, and should help us in bringing out into the open an issue that must be resolved - and better sooner than later.

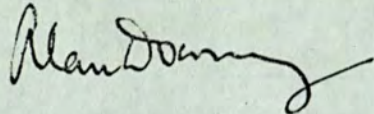
Sir Godfrey is also anxious to establish that plans for disposal will not be upset by emergence of a demand for some continued public sector use. I certainly would not favour that - even if funds were available to acquire the building from the LRB - and I have told Sir Godfrey that there is no intention of trying to acquire it for Government

offices. Sir Godfrey has specifically asked for confirmation that there is no plan to acquire County Hall to provide extra accommodation for MPs - as has been suggested in some Press comment. I am copying this letter to John Biffen, and shall be grateful for any comments that he may wish to offer.

Unless I hear to the contrary by Friday 30 August, I intend to tell Sir Godfrey that we are keen that he should pursue his disposal plans, and that we have no objection to his floating with Mrs Morrell the question of early action to clear the River Block.

In view of her involvement in the earlier exchanges I am copying this letter to the Prime Minister.

Yours sincerely,



KENNETH BAKER
[Agreed by the Minister and signed
in his absence by the Private Secretary]