

CG 110



FROM: FINANCIAL SECRETARY  
DATE: 27 JULY 1984

Prime Minister ②

To note and await further report from Neil MacFarlane.  
(I would never have expected DHSS to be the largest Government landowner of surplus land).

PRIME MINISTER

PUBLIC LAND REGISTERS

You asked for a report on which Government Departments hold surplus land and on what is being done to accelerate its sale.

I had a helpful meeting with Neil MacFarlane today at which we discussed the general problem of disposing of surplus land owned by Crown and public bodies and by local authorities. He made it clear that he shares your concern at the need to speed up sales of surplus land, and that the initiatives which the Department has been taking are aimed at that objective. He will be reporting to you on the questions which you have asked about local authorities; and will also be letting you know as soon as possible what is being done to accelerate the sale of surplus land held by Government Departments.

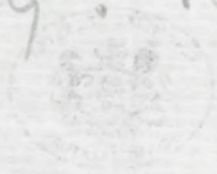
At 1 January 1984 the following Government Departments were registered as having surplus land holdings:

	<u>No of Sites</u>	<u>Acres</u>
Department of the Environment	37	366
DHSS (including Regional Health Authorities)	292	4,279
Department of Energy	48	311
Department of Transport	6	78
Ministry of Defence	89	2,572
Departments of Trade and Industry	1	12
Other Crown bodies	11	23

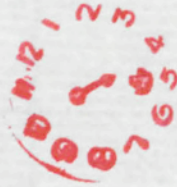
I am copying this to Neil MacFarlane.

JOHN MOORE

Housing: Policy: P12



50 JUL 1984



COMMUNICATIONS

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

1 August, 1984.

Public Land Registers

11/55-  
The Prime Minister has seen the Financial Secretary's minute of 27 July setting out the holdings of surplus land by Government Departments. She was surprised to discover that the DHSS, including Regional Health Authorities, was the largest holder of such land. She looks forward to receiving Mr. MacFarlane's report on ways in which sales of surplus land held by Government Departments and local authorities can be accelerated.

I am sending a copy of this letter to Sue Faulkner (Mr. MacFarlane's Office, Department of the Environment).

Andrew Turnbull

A.P. Hudson, Esq.,  
Financial Secretary's Office,  
HM Treasury.

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10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

9 July 1984

PUBLIC LAND REGISTERS

BT/

The Prime Minister has seen the Financial Secretary's letter to Mr Macfarlane of 5 July and welcomes the efforts being made to speed up the sale of all land held by the public sector and not just that held by local authorities. The Prime Minister noted in particular that Government Departments hold something like 500 unused sites. Following the Financial Secretary's meeting with Mr Macfarlane, she would welcome a report on which Departments hold this land and what is being done to accelerate its sale.

I am copying this letter to David Peretz (Chancellor's Office), Andrew Hudson (Financial Secretary's Office) and Sue Faulkner (Neil Macfarlane's Office).

Andrew Turnbull

John Ballard, Esq.,  
Department of the Environment

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*File with X*

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*Prime Minister* (2)

*CC/100*

*AT 10/17*



*Treasury also taking up  
budgets on unused land*

*AT  
6/7*

Treasury Chambers, Parliament Street, SW1P 3AG

Neil MacFarlane Esq MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State  
Department of the Environment  
2 Marsham Street  
LONDON  
SW1P 3EB

*MS*

5 July 1984

*Dear Neil,*

PUBLIC LAND REGISTERS

*X/*

The Prime Minister's Private Secretary *attached* has written to Patrick Jenkin's recording the Prime Minister's concern to speed up sales of derelict and surplus land and unoccupied housing held by local authorities, and asking for comments on suggestions for taking this forward.

As it happens, I was about to write to you on the wider subject of the public land registers. Having looked recently at the figures relating to the disposal, or bringing into use, of registered public land holdings, I am disappointed that faster progress has not been made. This is, of course, a difficult area, and I would welcome the opportunity to discuss with you the problems involved and the ways in which they might be overcome. The comments which you will be providing for the Prime Minister on what can be done about surplus land held by local authorities will be helpful, but the nationalised industries and statutory undertakings are also registered holders of a significant amount of unused or under-used land, and have made the least satisfactory progress. Government Departments have something like 500 unused sites.

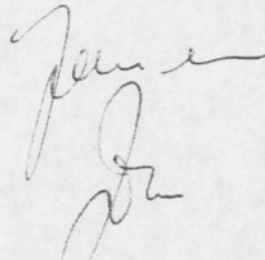
*Archives -  
please follow up*

I am not at all clear whether the main problem is a reluctance on the part of the owners to dispose of holdings or a lack of interest by developers, or a combination of both. The approach which your department made some months ago to the owners of sites with development potential may have helped to identify the problems, and I should be interested to know what came of that. The general question of 'direction' under the Local Government Planning and Land Act is an aspect which we could usefully discuss.

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If you are content to have a meeting, perhaps our offices could arrange a suitable date.

I am copying this to the Prime Minister.



JOHN MOORE

- 6 JUL 1984



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file



ase  
6e: Mr. Redwood

10 DOWNING STREET

*From the Private Secretary*

3 July 1984

DERELICT LAND AND URBAN HOUSING

The Prime Minister is concerned to speed up sales of derelict and surplus land and unoccupied housing held by local authorities. She would be grateful for comments on the suggestions set out in the attached note.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to John Gieve (Chief Secretary's Office, HM Treasury).

Andrew Turnbull

John Ballard, Esq.,  
Department of the Environment.

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3 July 1984

DERELICT LAND AND URBAN HOUSING

1. Could housebuilders and developers be given an encouragement to hunt through the registers and identify that land which their members want to build on, but which is not being made available? The Secretary of State could then use his powers to encourage more enforced disposal.
  
2. Could the DoE arrange a timetable of auctions for land on the registers, if local authorities fail to sell within a reasonable time period? The auctions would have to be so arranged that a local land market is not swamped by making an unduly large amount available. We should not worry if some of the land is auctioned off at a very low price, as long as it is going to be used.
  
3. Would it help if the DoE set out in a clear simple circular to the local authorities guidance on how to encourage land sales?
  
4. Would it help if more publicity were given both to the successes of renovation of tower blocks and other run-down inner city housing, and to the obstruction

of some local authorities who stand in the way of dealing with the problem? For example, the Barratts redevelopment of Minster Court in Liverpool, and the Cantril Farm estate in Knowsley, are successes which could be better advertised; while the refusal of Glasgow to allow Barratts to take on three large tower blocks which are standing empty could be made more of.

5. Would it help if the DoE set up an action line to a senior official, so that any commercial developer who felt that public bodies had rejected an offer for property without good reason, could get a fair hearing and have his complaint pursued vigorously? This would also help the DoE obtain information on the nature of the wasteland problem, and on when and where to use their powers.

These principles could also be extended to the auction of empty houses. A large number of inner city councils hold a large number of empty houses, allegedly for redevelopment. In practice the houses stay tinned-up for years, whilst many people in the locality are without access to the kind of housing they want and can afford. Could the DoE draw more attention to the scandal of unused houses? And could it consider taking powers to back up its exhortation to enforce sale of empty house property? Where the property is in a very bad state of repair and unlikely to be used by the

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public sector, it would be desirable to sell it in auction to a private sector developer, or at a low price to somebody in need of a house who is prepared to do it up.

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