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28 September 1984

PRIME MINISTER

② This refers to the papers circulated to be discussed but not discussed. Your views are well known. Agree no need to write?
AT 28/9

E(DL): UNUTILISED LAND AND HOUSES

Shall discuss in letter.
Mered - in no

Patrick Jenkin's ideas of:

- (a) publicity and better access for the Land Registers;
- (b) more pressure on local authorities to release surplus land;
- (c) targetting a priority list of bad authorities with a lot of land;

are all to be welcomed.

We should be wary of thinking of the current Land Register of 110,000 acres as definitive. This is only the land identified as surplus. Much more land is available which may be surplus to requirements, or which could be sold for better uses. It is interesting, for example to note that the Coal Board is credited with 2,297 acres of surplus land, and yet its accounts state that it has more than 30,000 acres of non-operational land. A lot of this may not be development land, but it still could be sold.

Same goes for MOD

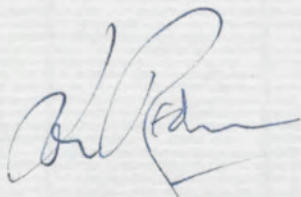
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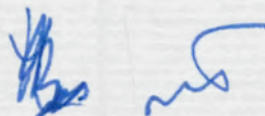
The paper is more tentative on the subject of empty houses. Ministers should be prepared to use the Land Register powers to compel local authorities to put long-term empty dwellings onto the market. Yes, there may well be a political row, but it is one where the overwhelming public sympathy would lie with the Government in trying to use houses that will otherwise fall into complete dereliction.

The DoE housing department itself should be encouraging individual bad-performing local authorities to learn from better management practice elsewhere, and from good ideas on refurbishing big blocks of flats. But there is no substitute for the DoE Ministers using the powers they already have to get some action to move on some of the identified empty houses, and to identify more.

You could write supporting Patrick's initiative and looking forward to some good results.



JOHN REDWOOD



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