



Government on track to provide land for 100,000 new homes

Housing Minister Grant Shapps today hailed the rapid progress of Government plans to release formerly-used public land with enough capacity to build up to 100,000 new homes by 2015.

In a major boost for housebuilding and Government transparency, departments with significant landholdings have published, for the first time, strategies that set out how their formerly-used land and property has the capacity to deliver more than 50,000 desperately-needed new homes.

Over the summer these departments have moved swiftly to identify land and property that could be released for new development. This builds on the 11,000 housing starts that will be achieved through the release of land owned by the Homes and Communities Agency. The amount of previously-developed land owned by the public sector is more than twice the size of Leicester, and its development could support as many as 200,000 construction and related jobs.

At the same time the Minister announced fresh steps to help communities across the country reclaim and develop hundreds of acres of unused public sector land and buildings, which could be used to deliver the schemes communities want to see in their areas.

Members of the public will now be able to request a sale of public land and buildings by filling in a simple and user friendly form. It will replace a system that is so obscure and restrictive that it has hardly ever been used, with only one successful application in the past 13 years.

The improved process for requesting the sale of public land and property will be one way of applying for land to be released by Government departments, and will also apply to land owned by councils and other public bodies.

Alongside a website that maps and provides details about public sector assets owned by councils and other public bodies, the new process to request the sale of disused land and buildings will form the bedrock of the Community Right to Reclaim Land.

Housing Minister Grant Shapps said:

"The Government is one of the country's biggest landlords, so at a time when we desperately need more homes, we have a critical role in making new sites available for developers and communities.

"So I'm delighted that Government departments have quickly taken up the ambitious challenge to release land with capacity for over 50,000 new homes, and that property specialists will continue to work with these departments to make sure that no stone is left unturned. I will look to ensure that as much of this public land as possible is available under our innovative Build Now, Pay Later model - helping get developers on site and laying the foundations for these homes as quickly as possible.

"I'm also pleased to announce that from today communities will have a new option to improve their local area by developing disused public land and buildings, instead of being forced to battle through a quagmire of bureaucratic obstruction and indifference.

"Under our new Community Right to Reclaim Land, local people will now be able to see at the click of a button if disused land and property in their area is owned by a public body. And from today, ordinary people will have a simple system for making a case to use that land and improve their local area, with a promise they will now be listened to."

The Minister will also look to extend the innovative Build Now, Pay Later model to as much formerly-used public land as possible - so developers and communities can get on the site and start building, paying for the land only after homes are built.

Property specialists will continue to work with each department and challenge them to release as much land as they can for new homes, and a Cabinet Committee will carefully analyse each department's plans to ensure every possible site is made available for housebuilding.

Earlier in the summer Mr Shapps outlined his own department's contribution, as the Homes and Communities Agency published its plans to release more land for redevelopment. This included a commitment to dispose of land using the Build Now, Pay Later model where appropriate, with housebuilders getting going without bearing the upfront cost of land - providing a lifeline to those struggling with cash flow problems, and enabling them to start building straight away.

The new Community Right to Reclaim Land will help communities to improve their local area by getting disused publicly owned land released for new development, and will revolutionise the way local people, working alone or with their communities, will be able to come together to build the homes, shops and businesses the area needs.

Under the improved system for requesting the sale of land, called the Public Request to Order Disposal, anyone can send a request to the Secretary of State setting out why they think:

land or property covered by the Request process is under-used or vacant

there are no suitable plans for the land, which have been consulted upon and publicly tested, in place or likely to be put in place in an acceptable period of time; and

why the land should be disposed of in order to enable it to be brought back into use.

Work is continuing to increase the number of organisations that are covered by the process for requesting sales of public land.