

19th June 2012

All NHS Chief Executives

Dear Colleague

ACCELERATING THE RELEASE OF SURPLUS PUBLIC SECTOR LAND

I wrote to you on 12 January 2012 with regard to the Government's initiative to deliver up to 100,000 new homes on surplus public sector land (Gateway Ref:17074).

Since my letter, the annual data collection of surplus or potentially surplus NHS land has been undertaken which showed an increase in such land since the last return in Summer 2011. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all NHS trusts who contributed to what was a 100 per cent return rate. The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) has since estimated that the land identified has the capacity to provide around 12,000 new homes which is a considerable increase from the previous return. The Government though wishes all Departments and public bodies, including the NHS, to continue to identify more land for disposal and to seek to accelerate the sale of those sites that have already been identified.

Whilst recognising the independence of the NHS and that the Department cannot be held accountable for the delivery of any specific number of homes by the NHS on its surplus land, the Department wishes to do what it can to help the NHS in achieving timely sales and to assist the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in monitoring progress.

In the Department's 'Disposal Strategy – Land for Housing' published on 5 October 2011, we stated that if the HCA required more frequent updates than the annual data collection, we would work with them to see how this might be achieved but would expect this to be only required for the top 10-20 sites. We have now been asked to provide such updates. I am therefore writing to confirm that, during the year, we will be making contact with the relevant NHS trusts (including NHS foundation trusts). I hope that those trusts approached will provide assistance; it will also be an opportunity for them to raise any issues that may be a barrier to early sales of the sites.

In my earlier letter, I outlined some assistance that is available to the NHS in delivering sites and I outline below an update on these:

- Build Now, Pay Later – DCLG has issued an outline of the scheme which can be found at <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/buildnowpaylater>. In addition the HCA has published some more detailed technical guidance on comparing bids and this can be found at <http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/ourwork/build-now-pay-later-guidance>
- ATLAS (Advisory Team for Large Applications) – This is a free service that can help to unlock planning problems that may exist on large sites. A number of NHS trusts have used the service. Further details can be found at <http://www.atlasplanning.com/page/index.cfm>
- Assistance from the HCA – We are aware that a number of NHS trusts have been in contact with the HCA to see what help they may be able to offer in bringing sites forward. The initial contact at the HCA is Tina Hothersall (tina.hothersall@hca.gsx.gov.uk, telephone 01925 644651)

By a Direction dated 23 July 2007 (Gateway Ref:8544), NHS trusts and PCTs were required to place surplus property on the Register of Surplus Public Sector Land. On 3 November 2008, Monitor wrote to NHS foundation trusts confirming the requirement also applied to them as it was referred to in a Dear Accounting Officer letter issued by HM Treasury on 8 October 2008. NHS trusts have been placing property on the Register (there are currently over 400 entries) but some are not. I would ask that NHS trusts do place property on the Register which is now part of the Government's e-PIMS property data base. NHS trusts can register for access to e-

PIMs and thus have the ability to upload surplus properties by e-mailing epimsservicedelivery@cabinet-office.gsi.gov.uk or the proforma attached to this letter can also be used.

In the Department's Disposal Strategy referred to earlier, we said that we would consider NHS trusts publishing data on their estate locally as an incentive to provide the opportunity for the public to consider whether the estate was being best used. This is also consistent with the Government's transparency agenda and the aims of the Localism Act. Whilst addresses of NHS property can be found on the Public Sector Assets database managed by the DCLG, only limited information is available. The Department therefore encourages NHS trusts to publish on their websites details of the land and buildings which they own, and identify those that are surplus..

I hope that you will find the above of assistance and will continue to support the initiative. I would be grateful if you would discuss this with your staff who have day-to-day responsibility for your estate.

If you have any queries, please either contact Mike Bellas (mike.bellas@dh.gsi.gov.uk, 0113 254 5757) or David Gubb (david.gubb@dh.gsi.gov.uk, 0207 972 5604).

David Flory
Deputy NHS Chief Executive

CC: Directors & Managers of Estates & Facilities