



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Rachel Maclean MP

Minister of State for Housing and Planning
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Our reference: 22427288

Sian Berry AM
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28 February 2023

Dear Sian,

Thank you for your letter of 15 November to the Secretary of State about the recommendations from your report, London's Dead Spaces. I am replying as this matter falls within my ministerial responsibilities, and I apologise for the delay in doing so.

I am grateful to you for getting in touch regarding the recommendations in your report. The Government shares your desire to see under-used land and buildings brought back into use.

Local authorities have various compulsory purchase powers available to them to acquire empty and derelict properties, including where owners are unknown or unresponsive. It is for them to decide when and how they use those powers, and there must always be a compelling case in the public interest to justify interfering with a person's private property rights.

The Government is bringing forward a package of measures in the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill to improve these compulsory purchase process, which will give local authorities greater confidence to use them. We are also introducing changes to the compulsory purchase compensation regime to ensure it doesn't deliver elevated levels of compensation for prospective planning permissions which would result in more than a fair value being paid. This will remove costly burdens for local authorities and help empower local communities to lead transformative regeneration projects to tackle empty buildings in their towns and cities.

The Government's Assets of Community Value scheme is designed to assist local community groups to preserve buildings or land which are of importance to their community's social well-being. With over 4,000 assets of community value successfully listed in England, we believe the scheme is delivering this objective.

In July 2022, the Government launched a four-year, UK-wide Community Ownership Fund worth £150 million to support community groups who are seeking to bring local assets under local control through community ownership. The fund encourages applications from groups seeking to acquire assets of community value, and we currently finalising details for the next bidding round.

To support local areas, the Government reformed the Use Classes Order from 1 September 2020 to create a new Commercial, Business and Service use class (Class E). This includes a diverse range of uses, such as offices, shops, banks, cafes, and gyms. Movement within the class does not require planning permission. While we have no plans to make further changes to the Use Classes Order in this regard, I am grateful to you for bringing your proposals to my attention.

Thank you again for writing on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Maclean', with a small dot at the end.

RACHEL MACLEAN MP
Minister of State for Housing and Planning