

**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London  
City Hall  
The Queens Walk  
London  
SE1 2AA

9 March 2020

Dear Sadiq,

## **Regeneration Committee investigation – Public Land Disposal**

In October 2019, the London Assembly Regeneration Committee examined the processes for the disposal of surplus public land, with a focus on three of London's public landowners: the Metropolitan Police, the London Fire Brigade and the NHS. We spoke to senior estate management representatives from these three bodies and a major housing association, alongside representatives from Mayor's Office for Police and Crime, Transport for London (TfL), and the GLA Housing and Land team.

Guests provided insight into the processes for identifying surplus public land and bringing this to market for development, the challenges they face in doing this and their experience of support provided by the GLA and other bodies. In this letter we set out some of our findings from the investigation, together with recommendations as to how public land disposal in London could be better supported.

### **Maximising the potential of the brownfield land register**

The London Land Commission produces a register of publicly owned land and property<sup>1</sup>, which was conceived as a platform for identifying public land available for development. The site itself states that your team is "working to improve the content of the register, including investigating the potential to identify surplus brownfield land which could come forward for redevelopment." Despite assurances given in responses to MQTs<sup>2</sup>, dating back to 2017, it appears that the improvements to the database to facilitate development have not materialised and the map remains essentially a static resource that is updated on an annual basis. The Committee calls on you to prioritise making the land register map of greater use to developers, planners and other interested parties, by converting it into a live resource of available public land in London.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://maps.london.gov.uk/LLC/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/questions/2018/5492>

**Recommendation 1**

*That you prioritise making the brownfield land register map a live resource of available public land to encourage development.*

**Reviewing the London Development Panel**

The Committee acknowledges that the reconstituted London Development Panel 2, a framework for use by UK public sector bodies, free of charge, to deliver schemes in Greater London only, has only been in place since 2018 and that it built upon the learning gathered from the first iteration of the Panel. We are still concerned, however, that it is not meeting the needs of London's public landowners. Guests' experiences of using the Panel were mixed. One of the bodies represented said that they had tried to make use of it but abandoned their attempts due to lack of interest from potential developers, which was further compounded by the statutory best value rules by which public landowners are bound. They therefore took their usual open market route for disposing of the surplus land. Given this, the Committee urges you to work more closely with the public landowners in London to develop the panel into a platform that meets their specific needs to facilitate bringing surplus land to market.

**Recommendation 2**

*That you engage with London's public landowners to gather their views on how the London Development Panel can be improved to meet their land disposal needs.*

**Sharing good practice in public land disposal**

The session demonstrated that London's public landowners were facing similar challenges to disposing of surplus land. However, they were taking separate approaches to managing these issues. Whilst there were no problems identified with individual bodies taking their own approach, the Committee believes that there is more that the GLA could do to gather and disseminate best practice in relation to public estate management in London. Thanks to the reforms put in place to TfL estate management in response to the Housing Committee's Homes Down the Track<sup>3</sup> report in 2017, TfL introduced a number of strategic and operational improvements to the way surplus land is identified for development and planning aligned with boroughs and other partners. This learning would be invaluable for other bodies in similar circumstances. However, it was not clear whether any of this had been shared outside the confines of the TfL.

The Committee calls on you establish a mechanism to encourage the sharing of good practice in public land disposal amongst London's public landowners. This would need to draw on TfL's experience, which has seen a transformation in its approach to surplus land management in recent years and could be in the form of, for example, a learning forum.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/housing\\_committee\\_-\\_homes\\_down\\_the\\_track\\_report.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/housing_committee_-_homes_down_the_track_report.pdf)

**Recommendation 3**

*That you establish a learning forum to encourage the sharing of good practice in public land management, drawing on TfL's experience.*

**Strengthening the co-ordination and transparency of London's NHS estates**

The Committee recognises the complexity of NHS estate management in London given the diversity of landowners and the interdependency between different services. We acknowledge the role taken by London Estates Board and the London Estates Delivery Unit, to provide greater clarity and co-ordination on major decisions around NHS estates. Whilst there has been progress, the Committee believes that more needs to be done, especially as the Board transitions into a new decision-making role on capital investments and key business cases in London.

The Committee was disappointed that the NHS representatives were unable to share any information on surplus NHS land in London and gave "commercial sensitivity" as the reason for this. The other public landowners were happy to share their information to quite a level of detail and did not feel bound by commercial confidentiality, despite the obvious operational sensitivities about these services in London. The Committee supports the principles of openness and transparency in the public interest and as the London Estates Board evolves into its decision-making role, it needs to ensure that it also applies these principles to its processes and to the information it holds on surplus land. Greater transparency would benefit the development of NHS estate in London, by ensuring that the relevant stakeholders are better informed and engaged in the process.

**Recommendation 4**

*As Chair of London Health Board, that you encourage the London Estates Board to prioritise greater transparency of decision making and information on available NHS land, as it moves into its new phase of making decisions on capital investment in London.*

The Committee believes that the work of the London Estates Board and its Delivery Unit was still very much focused on the large hospital and mental health trusts in London and overlooked the vast primary care estate in the capital. There are thousands of relatively small primary care facilities across the capital, from local GP surgeries to larger walk-in centres. However, there does not appear to be a strategic approach to how this estate is being managed and rationalised. There is a role here for the London Estates Board, which should develop a work programme aimed specifically at the primary care estate and build the necessary relationships to identify, pool together and publicise available primary care land in London. Sir Robert Naylor, in his 2017 independent review of NHS property and estates<sup>4</sup>, made the case for this type of locally driven delivery and was praised for his work.

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<sup>4</sup> Naylor, Sir R, NHS Property and Estates: why the estate matters to patients, Department of Health 2017  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/607725/Naylor\\_review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/607725/Naylor_review.pdf)

**Recommendation 5**

*As Chair of London Health Board, that you encourage the London Estates Board to develop a primary care estate work programme that will build relationships with the relevant stakeholders to identify, pool and publicise available primary care land in London.*

**Expanding the Small Sites Programme**

The Small Sites programme<sup>5</sup> aims to provide a streamlined service to encourage public sector landowners to bring small sites forward for housing-led development and facilitate interaction with smaller, local developers. The programme initially focused on TfL small sites and in its second phase expanded to include local authorities. The Committee urges substantial further expansion to small sites owned by the London Fire Brigade, the Metropolitan Police, the NHS and the G15 group of housing associations. This programme would be of particular use to primary care landowners, whose sites are numerous and predominantly smaller in size, and would align with the creation of a primary care specific work programme outlined above.

**Recommendation 6**

*That you expand the Small Sites programme to incorporate all public landowners in London, such as the London Fire Brigade, the Metropolitan Police and the NHS, to include primary care sites in due course.*

I would be grateful to receive a response to our findings and recommendations within three months from the date of this letter. Please could you send your response to Sheenagh Simpson, Senior Policy Adviser for the Regeneration Committee, ([sheenagh.simpson@london.gov.uk](mailto:sheenagh.simpson@london.gov.uk)).

Yours sincerely,



**Tony Devenish AM**

Chair of the Regeneration Committee

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/housing-and-land/land-and-development/small-sites/making-small-sites-available-small-builders>