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Rt Hon Gavin Barwell MP
House of Commons,
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Dear Minister,

Community-led housing in London

I am writing to follow up our discussion during the London Assembly plenary meeting at City Hall on 7 December 2016.

I was very encouraged to hear your enthusiasm for community-led housing and that this could form a part of the Government's plans for public land on sites such as Holloway Prison. Could you tell me more about how you are working with the various Government departments who hold land, to help and encourage them to bring community housing models in to their plans?

In particular, I would be interested to hear about how the wider economic benefits of keeping land in public control were being evaluated. I mentioned the New Economics Foundation study on the savings to the public purse – primarily housing benefit savings – of building affordable homes on surplus public land, and have provided a reference to this and its summary in Appendix A.

You said that you are in talks with the Mayor about working together to use the London Land Commission to achieve a greater mix of tenures and to support community-led housing. When can we expect to hear an announcement with more about this work?

I welcome the Government's announcement on 23 December 2016 that it will allocate some of the £60 million for community-led housing that was proposed in last year's Budget to London boroughs.¹ The Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development, James Murray, has also spoken highly of community-led housing and his desire to support this at City Hall (see appendix B) so I will discuss with him how the GLA might work with the boroughs to make the most of this funding.

Thank you for your time at City Hall and I hope you are able to consider and take forward these ideas. I look forward to receiving your response.

Sian Berry
Green Party Member of the London Assembly

Appendix A

Summary of New Economics Foundation research, November 2016

<http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/land-fire-sale-methodology-note.pdf>

In a snapshot survey of sites being offered for sale to private investors, the New Economics Foundation identified ten publicly-owned land sites which communities could instead develop as genuinely affordable homes.

Their analysis shows land across just 10 sites would provide 4,631 good quality, low cost homes needed to tackle the housing crisis.

At many of the sites identified, local people are already demanding that the land is used to tackle their chronic need for decent, low cost homes.

The use of this land for affordable community-led housing would guarantee a better deal for taxpayers, because any short term profit generated from private land sales would be quickly subsumed by rising housing benefit payments..

In contrast, building affordable, community-led housing on these ten sites alone would reduce the housing benefit bill by as much as £231m in the next three decades.

The first ten sites identified by the Foundation include:

- Brixton Prison
- St Ann's NHS Trust site, Haringey
- Maiden Law Hospital, County Durham
- Officers Mess within Connaught barracks site, Dover
- Alt Bridge Park, Liverpool

Each of the ten sites has been earmarked for sale to private investors by Whitehall departments.

Appendix B

Deputy Mayor for Housing and Residential Development, James Murray

Speaking during the 7 December Plenary meeting – transcript page 23

<https://www.london.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/b14965/Minutes%20-%20Appendix%20%20-%20Draft%20Transcript%20of%20Item%205%20Wednesday%2007-Dec-2016%2010.00%20London%20Assembly%20Plenary.pdf?T=9>

“The greater diversity that we can possibly get in terms of how to deliver new homes the better. To quote the Minister earlier, there is not a single solution to this. This is everything. All the different models we can use to deliver homes and co-ops or community-led housing are really vital. That is mentioned in our funding programme as well: the support that we want to give for community-led housing, particularly in terms of developing the capacity for community-led housing projects to develop. There are a lot of good examples of community-led housing occurring across London, but sometimes that learning is not shared with other people so there is no way of particular people who have started a co-op or a Community Land Trust (CLT) or whatever sharing all of their learnings for people who want to do it again. If we can provide some way through City Hall of sharing that learning, increasing capacity and helping to support these different innovations, it would be a good thing.”

ⁱ Budget 2016 section 1.127

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508193/HMT_Budget_2016_Web_Accessible.pdf