

**SOUTH EAST ENGLAND
REGIONAL HOUSING BOARD**

Date: 28 June 2006

Subject: **Brownfield Land Portfolio**

Report of: Regional Director for Southern Region, English Partnerships

Recommendation: That the Board note the contents of this report.

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 This report is to update the Regional Housing Board on the progress of work undertaken by the Brownfield Land Sub-Group to develop the proposal for a portfolio of brownfield land to support the delivery of affordable housing in the South East.
- 1.2 The Board is asked to note progress to date on identifying suitable sites on the Register of Surplus Public Sector Land and to consider the proposal to encourage local authorities in the South East to identify sites for the initiative.

2. Background

- 2.1 At the meeting of the Regional Housing Board (RHB) on 13 December 2005, the Board endorsed the Terms of Reference of the Brownfield Land Sub-Group.
- 2.2 The Sub-Group is working to produce a proposal for a possible brownfield portfolio in support of the South East region's affordable housing priorities as identified in the Regional Housing Strategy.
- 2.3 It was agreed that the Brownfield Land Assembly Trust (BLAT) model was a suitable vehicle to purchase and assemble sites and that the Register of Surplus Public Sector Land had a key role in identifying surplus sites in public ownership. English Partnerships (EP) was commissioned to begin work on analysing sites on the Register in the South East to identify possible purchases.

3. Progress to date

- 3.1 English Partnerships has now prepared an analysis of sites in the South East over 0.4 hectares in size which are currently held on the Register. There are to date 50 sites in the South East which have been identified as surplus by public agencies such as Defence Estates, the Highways Agency and the British Railways Board.
- 3.2 Sites on the Register have been matched against affordable housing and other priority areas in the South East. This is based on the classification in the Regional Housing Strategy of the region into High Priority Investment Areas (HPIA), Priority Investment Areas (PIA) and Growth Areas (GA).
- 3.3 Sites have also been analysed against affordability data published in 2005 by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The data identifies house price to income ratios by local authority area. This affordability data was a key tool in developing English Partnerships' First Time Buyer Initiative which divided local authorities in the South East into quartiles. Sites in the fourth quartile have been identified as the least affordable areas in the South East.
- 3.4 There are 68 additional sites on the Register which are less than 0.4 hectares in size which have a similar level of analysis available.

4. Next Steps

- 4.1 Work undertaken to date gives a good overview of sites that are potentially available to purchase for the brownfield land portfolio. However, the Register is currently only used by central government departments, their sponsored bodies and associated public-sector agencies such as NHS Trusts.
- 4.2 Local Authorities are not required to place surplus sites in their ownership on the Register. This means that the analysis undertaken to date is based on only a sample of surplus public sector land available in the region. EP is currently running a pilot to test the appetite for local authorities to place sites on the Register but as yet no local authorities in the South East has signed up to the initiative.
- 4.3 It is clear that there is likely to be a significant amount of land in local authority ownership that may be suitable to bring forward for a brownfield portfolio. If the Board is in agreement that local authorities should be encouraged to identify suitable sites for the initiative, it is proposed that the Regional Assembly write to each local authority in the region, on behalf of the RHB, asking them to identify surplus sites which could be brought forward for inclusion in the portfolio.
- 4.4 The advantage of this approach would be that while each local authority would need to identify sites in their area, they would not need to put them on a database ie the Register at this moment in time. In addition, the

inclusion of local authority land would make the exercise more coherent as the sites currently identified are limited to those agencies signed up to the Register.

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23 June 2006