


Our ref:
Your ref:




Property Management and Disposals
Team Leader
Ash House
Falcon Road
Sowton Industrial Estate
Exeter
EX2 7LB

Direct Line: 
22 July 2011

Dear 

YOUR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST DATED 24 JUNE 2011

Thank you for your email of 24 June requesting information about empty properties owned by the Highways Agency. The Agency acquires properties in advance of road schemes and, wherever possible, lets them at market rents until they are required for the road scheme, or become surplus and can be sold.

Because the number of empty properties in our ownership varies by the day, all the information we have provided is correct as at 5 July 2011.

1. Of the 419 residential properties in our ownership, 88 are currently empty. Of these, 61 have been empty for more than 12 months.

The 88 properties are empty for a variety of reasons; 36 are being sold, 21 are temporarily empty as we are between tenants, 26 are being refurbished this financial year and will be let as soon as they are available. 5 are empty because they are derelict and, taking into account the future of the property - primarily in relation to the road scheme, it is not cost effective to repair them.

2. The Old Farmhouse, Ashflats Lane, Stafford, ST18 9BP has been empty for the longest period, since 17 November 1994. The property was purchased for the widening of the M6 motorway. The plans for the M6 have changed over this period impacting on the future of the property, and thus influencing consideration given to investing the money needed to bring the property into a lettable condition or selling it. Since 2008, we have regularly reviewed the status of our properties against the latest information on the road schemes and wherever it is cost effective to do so, we refurbish property and let it. We have brought 66 empty properties back into use since 2008. As part of our regular review of empty properties, we are looking again at whether The Old Farmhouse is still required for a road scheme. If it is not, we will look to sell the property as soon as possible.



3. The Highways Agency spent £953,333 on security for empty dwellings in the financial year 2010/2011, to protect against the depreciation of these assets. Four of the properties which were secured for some or all of last year have a combined value of approximately £6 million. We secure our properties when we are selling them, in between tenancies, during longer-term void periods and whilst the properties are inaccessible during road works.

From the beginning of this financial year, we have data available about our properties categorised by occupation. In the first quarter of this financial year, we spent £59,740 on the maintenance of vacant properties. Properties will move in and out of this status during the year

We were not able to capture this information for last year and as requested, we are providing a figure for the maintenance of the 88 currently vacant properties described in 1 above, but for financial year 2010/11. This figure is £40,446. This figure is less than that for quarter 1 of 2011/12 because some of the 88 properties were not empty last year and some were not in our ownership last year. Many of the properties that were empty in 2010/11 have now been sold or refurbished and let. These properties have not been included in the figure provided.

- 4a. The Highways Agency contracts its property management work to Smiths Gore. When properties are vacant, Smiths Gore considers an appropriate method of security to protect the property asset. Sometimes monitored alarm systems are used and for other particularly vulnerable properties, resident guards are employed to ensure the property remains secure.
- 4b. During the financial year 2010/2011, the Highways Agency spent £953,333 securing empty properties and this is included in the figure provided in item 3.
5. None of our empty dwellings has been transferred to another organisation within our control within the last 2 years.

In keeping with the spirit and effect of the legislation, all information is assumed to be releasable to the public unless exempt. We will, therefore, be releasing to the public the information you requested, together with any related information that will provide a key to its wider context via our website: <http://www.highways.gov.uk/>

If you are unhappy with the way we have handled your request you may ask for an internal review. Our internal review process is available at <http://www.highways.gov.uk/foiresponses/FOLresponses/8024.aspx>.

If you require a print copy, please phone the Highways Agency Information Line on 0300 123 5000; or e-mail ha_info@highways.gsi.gov.uk. You should contact me if you wish to complain.

If you are not content with the outcome of the internal review, you have the right to apply directly to the Information Commissioner for a decision. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

If you have any queries about this letter, please contact our National Press Officer Alex Barnett on 0207 1534847.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]

Property Management and Disposals
Email: [REDACTED]@highways.gsi.gov.uk

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