Dear xxxxxxxxxxxxx

Request for Information: Sale of land, buildings and other assets

Thank you for your enquiry dated 9 July 2007 addressed to the Secretary of State for Defence. This was passed to Defence Estates (DE), the Ministry of Defence (MOD) organisation responsible for the defence estate and has been dealt with as a request for information under the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act 2000.

You asked six questions which I will deal with in turn.

1. The MOD is empowered to sell surplus land, buildings and other assets, on behalf of the Secretary of State, in accordance with the Government Accounting (GA) 2000 manual, Chapter 24. In particular, the MOD is under a duty to keep all holdings under constant review and, once surplus assets have been identified, they should be disposed of as quickly as possible subject to value for money considerations. You may wish to visit [http://www.government-accounting.gov.uk/current/frames.htm](http://www.government-accounting.gov.uk/current/frames.htm) for more detail on the GA manual.

2. DE does not hold any central records of sites debated in Parliament and to compile such a list would incur disproportionate costs. However, a list of surplus sites is maintained in the House of Commons Library and MPs can, of course, raise questions relating to these sites if they wish.

3. Assuming it is not required by another Government Department or subject to ‘Former Owner’ considerations, it is usual MOD policy to sell surplus property through DE on the open market, either with the benefit of planning permission or clawback, in order to achieve the best price reasonably obtainable (i.e. market value). Exceptionally, where an asset is to be sold at less than market value, MOD will follow the reporting procedures for gifts in accordance with GA Chapter 25.

4. DE does not hold central records of individual purchasers. It is likely that the vast majority of the disposals involved different buyers but a number of our sites are sold for housing development and therefore, over the years, will have been purchased by some of the major house-builders and development companies.
5. Disposal receipts are an important part of the overall Departmental budget. All disposal targets are agreed with HM Treasury as part of the periodic Spending Reviews and Departmental budgets are adjusted to reflect the receipts that will accrue to the department. Where disposal targets are exceeded during the year, the department may retain the benefit of the additional income providing that it is reflected in Supplementary Estimates (Winter and Spring). Opportunities for additional estate investment as a result of additional disposal receipts will be considered by the Defence Management Board at the same time as other defence priorities.

6. The MOD is still one of the largest landowners in the UK with a diverse estate of some 240,000 hectares in the UK. The estate is held ‘in trust and on trust’ to support the delivery of defence capabilities. It is kept under constant review and should be no larger than necessary to meet the operational needs. A list of current disposal opportunities is maintained on our website http://www.defence-estates.mod.uk/index.php under the link ‘Property for Sale’.

I hope that you have found this information helpful but if you are unhappy with this response or you wish to complain about any aspect of the handling of your request, then you should contact me in the first instance. If informal resolution is not possible and you are still dissatisfied then you may apply for an independent internal review by contacting the Director of Information Exploitation, 6th Floor, MOD Main Building, Whitehall, SW1A 2HB (e-mail info-XD@mod.uk). Please note that any request for an internal review must be made within 40 working days of the date on which the attempt to reach informal resolution has come to an end.

If you remain unhappy following an internal review, you may take the complaint to the Information Commissioner under the provisions of Section 50 of the Freedom of Information Act. Please note that the Information Commissioner will not normally investigate the case until the internal review process has been completed. Further details of the role and the powers of the Information Commissioner can be found on the Commissioners website http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,