

**The Urban Regeneration Agency**  
**(Edge Lane West, Liverpool) Compulsory Purchase Order**  
**2005**

**Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act**  
**1993, Part III**

**Acquisition of Land Act 1981**

**Compulsory Purchase of Land (Prescribed Forms) (Ministers)**  
**Regulations 2004**

**Written Representation of John H Earnshaw**

**1. Introduction, Qualifications and Experience**

1.1 My name is John Earnshaw. I am a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Housing and hold the Diploma in Housing Management.

1.2 I am employed as the Low Demand Project Manager with The Empty Homes Agency – see [www.emptyhomes](http://www.emptyhomes) for more details on the project and myself. I am also a member of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Advisory Network for the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder programme.

1.3 Details of my career background and history:

***John Earnshaw, FCIH** - started his career as a trainee Housing Manager with Mexborough UDC (South Yorkshire) way back in 1964 and has been a housing professional for over 40 years now! John was Area Housing Manager with Barnsley MBC for 20 years and has held a variety of similar management posts with other local authorities and housing associations in the Yorkshire region, before moving to Kirklees MDC in 1997.*

*Career highlights include winning the Empty Homes Agency's National Award in 2001 for the **'Best Strategy for Tackling Low Demand'** whilst Voids Project Manager at Kirklees MDC and a BBC2 documentary - 'First Sight' and 'Look North' was made on his innovative marketing strategy. This was based on the successful pioneering Kirklees/Camden housing partnership and was the start of moving people out of London (now LAWN) to Kirklees (Huddersfield, West Yorkshire - 'Last of the Summer Wine Country'), in the North of England. He also made a significant contribution to the **ODPM's 'Empty Property - Unlocking the potential'** implementation handbook, which was published in 2003. He has had several articles published in *The Guardian*, *Housing Today*, *Independent on Sunday*, *Inside Housing*, *London Housing News*, *Property People* and latterly in the ODPM's 'Signpost' magazine – June 2004.*

*John has done housing consultancy work and run several courses, seminars and workshops for BURA, CAPITA, CIH, Housemark, The Housing Training Company, Marlow Associates, TPAS, Urban Forum, the Welsh Assembly Government and the Welsh Federation of Housing Associations on **Marketing Empty Properties, Low Demand and Social Housing** and currently is a consultant for Void Doctor, see - [www.void-doctor.org](http://www.void-doctor.org)*

*He has spoken at several national and regional conferences, including the CIH Annual Conference and Exhibition at Harrogate (Lovell Policy Platform) in June 2004. He ran his workshop – ‘**Making Unattractive Houses into Homes**’ at the CIH National Homeless & Lettings Conference (and ran a charity disco for Centrepont, the CIH President’s charity) at Harrogate in November 2003. John was invited to submit a paper on Low Demand to the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, Social Housing Conference in Vienna on 28<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2004.*

*Whilst working for the Empty Homes Agency, as Low Demand Project Manager (see - [www.emptyhomes.com/ld/lowdhome.htm](http://www.emptyhomes.com/ld/lowdhome.htm) for full details on the project), John has done several in-house low demand assignments and presentations including, Accent NW, Bradford Community Housing Trust, Canopy Housing Project, Giroscope, Leeds South Homes (ALMO), Leeds South West Homes (ALMO), Sheffield City Council, Walsall Housing Group and Yorkshire Metropolitan Housing. John is a member of the ODPM’s Advisory Network Group on the Evaluation of the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder programme.*

## **1.4 The Empty Homes Agency**

The Empty Homes Agency was set up as a housing association with charitable status, however we neither own nor manage any empty property. The Empty Homes Agency is an **independent campaigning charity**, which exists to highlight the waste of empty property in England and works with others to devise and promote solutions to bring empty property back into use.

The Agency was set up in 1992 in response to the high number of empty properties and the crisis with homelessness - something had to be done! In the early days the Agency worked on bringing individual empty properties back into use and encouraged local authorities to implement empty property strategies.

Historically the work of the Empty Homes Agency has been focussed on the issue of empty properties in areas of high demand. This position was fundamentally challenged by it’s Community Fund project, which ended in

2002. ***This project, working closely with communities in areas of low demand, demonstrated to the Agency the importance of expanding our work to include solutions to empty homes in low demand areas***, where high demand solutions clearly will not be effective.

***Since 2002 the Agency has worked hard to include solutions to empty homes in low demand areas as a key part of it's national remit.***

1.41 As a result of this strategic change in direction, the Agency welcomed both the scope and the scale of initiatives proposed and underway in the Government's Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder areas. ***The Agency is fully in support of the broad philosophy of the pathfinders working across local authority boundaries and developing very long-term time-lines.***

***As will become clear below, the Agency has a few reservations about the direction of this work***, but is totally in support of the broad thrust of this exciting programme to tackle the issue of low demand.

In 2003, the Agency also secured a new Community Fund grant over three years specifically ***to support communities in areas of low demand***. It now has a Northern office, based in Barnsley and has two full-time staff working on this new project.

Please see [www.emptyhomes.com](http://www.emptyhomes.com) for more information.

1.4.2 The Agency has had contact with a number of the pathfinders over the past couple of years, and it's response is based on this experience together with it's work in non-pathfinder areas. But what, however, has made a major impact on the Agency, is the interest in it's project from low demand areas outside of the pathfinder areas.

1.4.3 ***A major reservation with the pathfinder programme is the perception that demolition is their starting point and default position.*** Whilst we accept that there are many properties for which demolition is the only answer, ***we are concerned at any position that regards demolition as the obvious solution.***

We at the Empty Homes Agency, have seen great examples of micro schemes bringing properties back into use, when all hope had been abandoned. The work of the Canopy project in Beeston, Leeds is a great example of a community solution to long-term council and private empty homes. We also think that there is more mileage in exploring the potential of regional mobility schemes, such as LAWN and MoveUK, especially if there is a clear link between empty property and employment opportunities.

1.4.4 ***We also believe that with the Pathfinders adopting a sequential approach and tackling their worst areas first, that they will need to work hard to hold areas that are low demand but not yet their priority for attention. In the highest priority areas, demolition may be the only viable***

***solution AFTER a full 'option' appraisal, but in lower priority areas more imaginative thinking may be required by the Pathfinders. It is here that some micro schemes used in combination might prove invaluable showing confidence in an area before the pathfinder can devote all its attention to it. We believe that there is a need for more fresh thinking in this regard of the options prior to demolition especially around innovative design.***

## **2. Overview of Low Demand taken from the ODPM website –**

**[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_communities/documents/page/odpm\\_comm\\_023263.hcsp](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_communities/documents/page/odpm_comm_023263.hcsp)**

### **2.1 Revitalising neighbourhoods**

Low housing demand and abandonment, spread across over 120 local authorities in the North and Midlands affects around one million homes.

Low demand areas are characterised by limited market choice, the departure of economically active households, poor condition of unpopular housing, poor facilities and inadequate local services. Both social and private sector housing is affected.

Each pathfinder has been challenged by the government to develop strategic approaches to dealing with the problems that exist within their areas. There is no blueprint, as the problems in each pathfinder differ and so will the solutions. ***The pathfinders will need to work with their many 'partners' to bring about change to their areas.*** The funding provided by Government supports the change, and will help turn around these areas to make them better for everyone.

***The programme is not just about the clearance of existing properties.*** It is true that the Market Renewal Pathfinders will be demolishing some properties in their areas, ***but it is important to recognise that this is only a small part of the approach to tackling low demand. Any demolition will take place alongside other activities such as refurbishing existing homes and will include the communities in the decision making process.***

Where demolition does take place, residents will be offered a range of re-housing options, which include ways to maintain home -ownership.

### **2.2 Scheme updates**

Market renewal pathfinders have made significant progress since the programme was established in 2002. Most pathfinders have developed an initial market renewal scheme, successfully delivered early action

programmes, and are now reaching the end of the first year of main programme implementation.

Over the last couple of years, we have witnessed substantial changes in the housing market and at the same time, our collective understanding of low demand has dramatically improved. ***The time is thus right for Pathfinders to review their strategies and programmes - in the light of the changes in their housing markets***, and with the benefit of increased knowledge of how to successfully tackle low demand.

Pathfinders have therefore been invited to submit scheme updates during 2005. ***This is an important opportunity for pathfinders to demonstrate continuing commitment to the market renewal challenge***, focusing now on the long-term transformation of their areas into places of distinction we all want to see.

### 2.3 See also –

[http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm\\_communities/documents/downloadable/odpm\\_comm\\_035675.pdf](http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_communities/documents/downloadable/odpm_comm_035675.pdf)

2.4 It is also recommended that the Audit Commission's report (link below) be read in detail, as it contains many of examples of good practice and guidance for the Pathfinders to follow –

[www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=ENGLISH^1628^SUBJECT^1200^REPORTS-AND-DATA^AC-REPORTS&ProdID=184E49B1-6B96-4efc-9D85-A004C6E9E9B0](http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/reports/NATIONAL-REPORT.asp?CategoryID=ENGLISH^1628^SUBJECT^1200^REPORTS-AND-DATA^AC-REPORTS&ProdID=184E49B1-6B96-4efc-9D85-A004C6E9E9B0)

## 3. Market Renewal Programme: Learning Lessons – Manchester/Salford 2003

3.1 The Manchester/Salford pathfinder was the first to be allocated funding under the housing market renewal programme - £125 million over 10 years was announced at the conference. How did they get to this point? ***And what lessons can others learn from their experience?*** Manchester city council's deputy chief executive Eamonn Boylan and Salford city council's Director of Strategy and Regeneration Charles Green gave their personal views...



***Charles Green: 'Perhaps the biggest fear is clearance. Offer residents a guarantee that they can stay in the area'***

### 3.2 on the image of the area...

'It is essential to change the image of the area. This transformation should make the area a place where new residents would choose to live **as well as improving the area for existing residents. The whole environment should be addressed, not just the housing. The housing market depends on other factors as well as housing alone – 'Community Anchors' - such as more shops, sports facilities, parks and open spaces and health facilities, not just decent homes. Deal with the things that prevent people from deciding to exercise their choice to buy a home or invest in the area'**

### 3.3 on big bang design ideas...

'It will not be enough to create good quality ordinary homes. People will just go somewhere else for those. We need to attract people and **retain them with innovative design that helps to rebrand the whole sense of place. Urban Splash has agreed to develop glass-backed terraced homes in Salford. Sometimes you have to be bold. It may not be possible to prove demand for something radical until it is done.** But Urban Splash's involvement has already led to higher house prices in the area before they have even started'

### 3.4 on links to employment centres...

'We can't just improve the housing. **Stable housing markets require employment to sustain them.** If enough isn't available on the doorstep, you need to create bridges to areas of employment. For us that means connecting Manchester city centre with the parts of Salford and Manchester that need market renewal'

### 3.5 on the worst moments...

'One, reading the final draft of our bid and realising that we didn't have enough evidence. Two, sending the wrong draft to ODPM! Three, awaiting the Audit Commission's comments'

### 3.7 on reassuring residents...

'**Perhaps the biggest fear of all is clearance.** That again can be tackled by stressing that our programme is about deliverable change. For example we will be offering home swaps and equity stakes. The bottom line should be some kind of basic *guarantee* that an affordable new home will be available to existing residents'

### 3.8 on community ideas...

'**So many of the best ideas come from the community.** Even home swaps were a local idea. A vicar in Seedley and Langworthy came up with the bones of the system at a consultation meeting. Now, with home swaps, we stress that this is not about moving people out of the area but helping them to stay. The problem is how long it takes to see the process through'

**3.9 See also the Government's Response and the relevant sections which relate to consultation and refurbishment - July 2005**

## **4. My own experiences with community groups to date**

4.1 As Low Demand Project Manager, I have been involved with and visited many communities in areas of low demand in the UK, who have contacted the Empty Homes Agency for help and support.

4.2 The main problem facing members of the communities I have visited, is the terrible uncertainty that a Compulsory Purchase Order brings to them. Most of them do not understand the complexity, nor the vast powers of such orders. After all, it is their home that is literally under the hammer. This in turn frightens them and quite a number of them go for the 'easy' option, which is to run away and find a house elsewhere where there is no hassle. This course of action then makes the housing situation in that area, even worse, as only a few people are left to object to the order. The low demand situation then 'spreads' to nearby streets and if it remains unchecked, escalates at a rapid pace. The whole process of Compulsory Purchase is outdated in 2005 and needs re-thinking.

## **5. The Current Housing Shortage in the UK**

### **5.1 The Government**

Announcing new proposals to tackle the housing shortage and related longer term economic problems, the Deputy Prime Minister said **'local planning authorities will need to work together to be more flexible and responsive to the local housing market.'**

The Deputy Prime Minister also said:

**"For decades, this country has built too few homes, with the result that too many people on moderate incomes can't afford a home.**

### **5.2 Halifax**

#### **Empty homes could ease housing shortage**

**There are over half a million empty houses in England, which could help ease the housing shortage if brought back into use.**

Only last week, the government warned that the number of thirty-something couples able to afford to buy a property would continue to fall unless more houses were built.

And currently there are over 100,000 households in England living in temporary accommodation.

But research by Halifax, using figures from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, shows that there are 689,675 empty homes.

Many empty homes – branded ‘red field’ sites by the Empty Homes Agency (– see - [www.emptyhomes.com/resources/goodpractice/publications/manifesto%20bkl%20fin\\_Layou%201.pdf](http://www.emptyhomes.com/resources/goodpractice/publications/manifesto%20bkl%20fin_Layou%201.pdf)

are in the north-west. Burnley has the highest proportion of empty homes in the country at 8.3 per cent of its housing stock, followed by Liverpool, where 7.6 per cent are empty.

### **5.3 Summary of the ‘Housing Shortage’ in the United Kingdom**

In 5.1 and 5.2 above it is clear that there is currently a housing shortage in the United Kingdom and if we continue to demolish our current housing stock (Victorian Terraces) at the current rate, then the housing shortage will become much worse.

5.4 In Edge Lane, Liverpool there may be a clear case for ‘some’ demolitions, but not as is proposed, large scale demolitions. I feel that there is room for a compromise in this situation and that the way ahead is for a ‘partnering’ arrangement, comprising all parties and including the residents, to come together and jointly resolve this major housing issue. After all, it is the residents who know their area well and better than most and in my opinion, it is they who should be the ‘Masterplanners for their own area.

5.5 If the above suggestion is adopted then, there can only be one outcome for all concerned and that is Win – Win!

5.7 Then we (the Government, Local Authorities and Pathfinders) need to sit back, take a deep breath, halt the demolitions across the UK and listen to what the people, whose areas are affected, want and then take it into account. After all it is their community, their houses, so why not let them decide what’s best!