

To: The Rt Hon Greg Clark MP, Secretary of State, BEIS  
Cc: Margot James MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary, BEIS

7th November 2016

Dear Secretary of State,

## **Opening up the Land Registry**

We are a broad coalition of organisations, spanning housing, environment and development charities, conservation groups, open data specialists, unions, and digital economy experts.

We welcome the Government's announcement that the forthcoming Planning Bill will not include provisions to privatise the Land Registry.<sup>1</sup> 300,000 petition signatories, numerous experts and MPs of all parties opposed its privatisation. We hope that this marks an end to all plans to privatise what is a strategic public asset that already pays its way.

We are not, however, simply defenders of the status quo. We believe that the Land Registry needs to open up and complete its register, to deliver a much better, 21<sup>st</sup>-century service for the public.

The Land Registry contains vital information on who owns the vast majority of England and Wales. Great strides have been made by Government since 2010 to open up data – increasing transparency and accountability and boosting the economy and public participation. We are especially impressed by the Open Defra project, which has seen the release of 12,000 public datasets and created a new culture of collaboration between Defra's many arms-length bodies. Meanwhile, Companies House, a BEIS non-departmental public body, has reinvented itself as an open data organisation, swapping prohibitive licensing fees for making all registered company information free at point of use.

The Land Registry, however, still charges the public £3 for each and every land title and plan. Yet far from being an important source of revenue, these charges in fact account for a very small proportion of the Land Registry's annual income, with the vast bulk of income coming from conveyancing services.

**We ask that you open up the Land Registry.** Privatisation would only result in higher fees and barriers to information; yet retaining the Registry's current fees structure makes no sense either – holding back information for little monetary benefit.

The wider economic, social and environmental benefits of making land ownership data open, conversely, could be vast. We envisage it being used for all sorts of purposes: enabling councils and neighbourhood planning fora to identify spare land for house-building; assisting SMEs with finding business premises; helping communities locate derelict land for food-growing or recreation; allowing conservation charities to link up landowners to create wildlife corridors; aiding flood prevention by encouraging whole catchment management between the owners of land along rivers. The opportunities are manifold and exciting.

Having the ability to establish who owns the land and property around them is a vital tool for communities keen to take back control of their own destinies.

We would be delighted to meet with you and relevant officials to discuss these proposals and explore the potential for opening up the Land Registry.

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<sup>1</sup> Financial Times, 'UK shelves privatisation of Land Registry', 7<sup>th</sup> September 2016.  
<https://www.ft.com/content/e2ec0140-74dd-11e6-bf48-b372cdb1043a>

Yours sincerely,

**Craig Bennett, CEO, Friends of the Earth**

**Mark Walton, Founder & Director, Shared Assets**

**Campbell Robb, Chief Executive, Shelter**

**Trudi Elliott, CEO, RTPi (Royal Town Planning Institute)**

**Tim Hughes, Coordinator, UK Open Government Network**

**Hugh Ellis, Interim Chief Executive & Head of Policy, TCPA (Town & Country Planning Association)**

**Angus Hanton, Co-Founder, The Intergenerational Foundation**

**Marc Stears, Executive Director, New Economics Foundation**

**Maurice Frankel, Director, Campaign for Freedom of Information**

**Chris Baugh, Assistant General Secretary, PCS (Public & Commercial Services union)**

**Cat Hobbs, Director, We Own It**

*Leo*



*Mark*



*Campbell Rob*



**UK OPEN  
GOVERNMENT  
CIVIL SOCIETY NETWORK**

**Shelter**

*Chris Grist*

*Adrian*



**RTPI**

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**tcpa**

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*Angus Hanton*

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**intergenerational  
foundation**

Fairness for Future Generations