

Govt. land claim is 'a nonsense'

A ROW over the supply of land has broken out between house-builders and the British Government.

The argument centres over the publicly-owned vacant land that has been placed on registers.

● **The government** claims that 96,000 acres of land are now available – and that the sale of over 2,400 acres is a good track record.

● **The builders** claim that only 11 per cent of that land is available and suitable for housing development.

House-Builders Federation President Mr. Richard Dibben declared after revealing the results of their investigation:

"It is important to introduce a measure of realism into the claims being made about land registers.

LAND PRICES

Builders save the pennies to spend £s

THE PRICE of land is going to make 1983 a "fascinating" year for British builders, according to property journalist Jeremy Gates. He reported in the *Daily Express* (31.12.82):

"Prices for decent land where people really want to live are soaring. Seven acres of filled-in gravel pit at Cheshunt, Herts., fetched £1.2m; Letchworth, Herts., land is topping £150,000 an acre.

"In Bedford, Abbey Homesteads have paid £113,000 an acre, envisaging homes averaging £48,000 each and managing director Ray Davies admits: 'Land prices have now surged to about 25 per cent of eventual selling price'.

"Consequently builders are watching every penny. Many are cutting back land banks to three years' supply, where they once held might have taken five to ten years to build out."

By IAN BARRON

"Those who have suggested that 96,000 acres of vacant land is awaiting development have quite clearly been misled."

The builders have challenged the government's claim that there is an adequate supply of land available for them. This claim, they say, is "nonsense."

The Federation examined 63 registers, and concluded that some local authorities were manipulating the rules to avoid releasing many of the best sites.

As a result, publicly-owned vacant land represented less than one year's supply of dwellings.

THE ROW has spilt over into the House of Commons. Labour MPs do not share the general Tory enthusiasm for the disposal of public land. One of them, Mr. Frank Dobson, accused builders of being "parasites and vultures who hover over the registers of public land."

And Mr. Douglas Jay, a former President of the Board of Trade, pointed out that a major vacant site in his constituency had been held idle for 15 years by a private property company.



● Richard Dibben

But Mr. Giles Shaw, the Under-Secretary of State for the Environment, claimed that the problem was over the demand for land, rather than its supply.

He declared: "The real need is to ensure that there is a demand for sites actually on the land register.

"The economic climate has scarcely been helpful to the rapid disposal of land from the register. Nevertheless, more than 2,500 acres within a few months is not a bad achievement."

NEWS in BRIEF

'High time' for the landowners

THE IMPACT of the recession in the U.S. has varied widely.

People in the densely-populated north-eastern states are migrating to the Sun Belts, only to find that work is not available. Many are now living in shacks reminiscent of urban centres in the Third World.

But for landowners north of San Francisco, the recession has paid handsome dividends. Because many people have turned to growing marijuana as their alternative cash crop.

John Barnes reported in *The Sunday Times* on Nov. 7: "In Garberville, it's easy to tell when it's harvest time: the \$100 bills are being flashed around. Mercedes and new four-wheel-drive pick-up trucks vie for space along main street.

"Land prices have more than doubled in the past couple of years..."

Heartless!

FIRST-generation Asian immigrants thought they were investing in prime building land close to town centres when they decided to buy land – and a new life – in Canada.

In reality, a London court was told, they were paying residential land prices for cheap agricultural land with no prospect of permission to build and no related opportunities to live in Canada.

About 500 Asians and West Indians were due to pay £2½m when the racket was exposed. Three men were gaoled for what was described as a "heartless" fraud.

Deserted!

LAND speculators are disappointed at President Reagan's decision not to base the MX missile system in the Great Basin Desert straddling Utah and Nevada.

For two years, the speculators have been buying up large chunks of the desert – expecting to find themselves right in the path of what was expected to be the largest public works project in history.

But the president's decision not to site the system in the area has left speculators holding a lot of sand. One of them Margaret Sansone, a Las Vegas broker, admitted: "I expected to make a minimum of 200 per cent profit. I'll be lucky now to make 20, 30 or 40 per cent."

Said Jack Matthews, president of the Nevada Association of Realtors: "The small businessman is in shock."