

SITES FOR HOUSES — PRICES AND RATEABLE VALUES

A NUMBER of questions have been asked in the House of Commons about the negotiations of local authorities to acquire land for their housing schemes or for other municipal purposes. Noteworthy are the admissions of Ministers that the land which is wanted has no rateable value no matter how high the price may be. It is this fact, this contrast, this exemption of valuable land from rating and taxation, which is in the main responsible for dear land and consequent high rents; and to make matters worse, the houses are taxed when they are built and occupied. The twin effort of our present rating and taxation system is to hold up and penalise building construction and, in forcing up rents, to hold wages down and aggravate unemployment. The house famine is simply part of the greater land question, the solution of which is to treat the value of land as public property (as it is), so that public revenue will be derived therefrom instead of rating and taxing houses and other buildings and improvement. Houses should be de-rated—not the land.

Eastbourne. On January 25 Mr. F. C. DOUGLAS asked if the Council has been negotiating with the Chatsworth Estates Company for the purchase, for housing purposes, of land at the junction of Churchdale Road and Northbourne Road; if the district valuer was unable to agree a purchase price with the Chatsworth Estates and the company were unwilling to consent for the case to be submitted voluntarily to an official arbitrator; if for three acres a price of £2,500 was asked; whether the purchase had been sanctioned and at what price; and what was the rateable value of the land in question? The Minister of Health, Mr. WILLINK, replied that the Council had made a Compulsory Purchase Order in respect of this site, which he confirmed on December 29; negotiations had been proceeding between the Estate and the Council in the matter of the compensation, which had not yet been fixed; the land was de-rated.

Arnold, Notts. On January 25 Mr. DOUGLAS asked if the Urban District Council had considered the purchase of land in Breck Hill Road for a branch library, the District Valuer being prepared to recommend the purchase at the price agreed upon by the committee; what was the area of this land, its rateable value, and the price it was proposed to pay; and what the result of the negotiation had been? Mr. WILLINK said he was making enquiries and later wrote that the Council had agreed to purchase the site referred to, subject to his consent to its acquisition in advance of requirements and to a loan for the purchase price and costs; subject also to the approval of the Minister of Town and Country Planning.

The land had an area of 5,050 sq. yds.; it had been vacant for some years and was therefore not rated. (As for the purchase price, the District Valuer's report had not yet been obtained.)

Worthing. On January 25 Mr. DOUGLAS asked if sanction had been given for the acquisition by the Worthing Town Council of land adjoining Barrington Road area for building houses; what was the area of the land involved and the rateable value at which it had heretofore been assessed; and what price was being paid? Mr. WILLINK replied he had agreed to the acquisition by the Worthing Town Council of 5 acres of land, in addition to 6½ acres they already owned in Barrington Road, and the Council were in negotiation with the owner; the land was de-rated.

Worthing. On February 8 Mr. DOUGLAS asked the reason why the Rural District Council had referred back a recommendation of the public health committee to acquire, for housing purposes, three and one-third acres of land at Sompting at a cost of £2,750; whether renewed steps had been taken to acquire this land; what price had been agreed and what was the rateable value of the land? Mr. WILLINK said the matter had not been submitted to him, but he was informed that the Rural District Council were re-considering the question of purchase. The land was de-rated.

Walton and Weybridge, Surrey. On February 1 Mr. CLUSE asked what difficulties or delays the Council had met with in the acquisition of housing sites on Longmore Farm, Hersham, and on the fields in Esher Road, Hersham; whether compulsory purchase orders had been sought or obtained and with what result; and what was the area and present rateable value of the sites in question? Mr. WILLINK replied that the Council had provisionally agreed with the owner to purchase 4½ acres of land at Hersham, the price being £1,100. The Council failed to purchase an adjoining 3¾ acres by agreement, and had made a Compulsory Purchase Order, which he was about to confirm. All the land was de-rated.

Strood, Kent. On February 1 Mr. CLUSE asked regarding the efforts of the Rural District Council to acquire housing sites at Allhallows for 12 houses and the construction of a new road in Cliffe for about two acres for 12 houses, in Grain for 18 houses and in Hallin approximately eight acres; if any of these sites had been acquired, what was the purchase price and previous rateable value thereof? Mr. WILLINK replied he had agreed to the acquisition by the Strood Rural District Council of 1½ acres of land at Allhallows, and the Council were in negotiation with the owner; the

land was de-rated. No definite proposals for Cliffe and Grain had yet been received; the Council were considering the purchase of land there for housing purposes, including the construction of an access road. The Council had acquired by agreement a site of approximately 9 acres in Halling, at a cost of £950 plus legal charges; the land was de-rated.

Peterborough. On February 1 Mr. CLUSE asked concerning the delays the Council had experienced in the acquisition and development of their proposed new housing estate at Dogsthorpe and Garton End; what was the area and rateable value of the land in question; whether the Council had been offered 10,832 square yards of land at Garton End for allotments at a price of £365 per acre, subject to conditions as to fencing, but had decided against purchase; and what was the present rateable value of that land? Mr. WILLINK said that last July the Council were informed that consent could be given to the purchase of a part only of the estate at Dogsthorpe and Garton End, which comprised 326 acres and had a rateable value of £24. They were now in negotiation for the purchase of 119 acres of the estate. He was aware of the decision of the Council as regards land for allotments at Garton End; the rateable value of that land was £16.

Pontypool, Monmouth. On February 7 the Minister of Supply, answering Mr. DOUGLAS, said that the arbitrator's award in the case of the compulsory purchase of land from the trustees of the Pontypool Park Estate was £1,441. The area of the site was approximately 28 acres and the land "being agricultural" had no rateable value.

Runcorn, Cheshire. On February 8, Mr. GLENVIL HALL asked what price the Rural District Council had paid or proposes to pay for 9.764 acres as a housing site in the parish of Appleton; and what had hitherto been the rateable value of that land? Mr. WILLINK replied that the Council had made a Compulsory Purchase Order in respect of this land, which he had decided to confirm. The price had not yet been fixed. The land had not been rated since 1929; before that date the rateable value was approximately £17.

Chingford, Essex. On March 6th Mr. GLENVIL HALL asked whether the Council had been in negotiation with Ropers, Limited, for the purchase of 12 acres of their sports ground for housing purposes; what price had been agreed upon; and what was the present rateable value of the land? Mr. WILLINK said the Council were negotiating for the land but the price had not been agreed; the rateable value of the land and pavilion was £90.