

10 December 2024

Our Ref: FOI & EIR 593

Request

We received your request on 14 November 2024 for the following information:

Please disclose a list of the land and property you own which is unused, vacant or derelict. For each please include:

- a brief description of the land or property, including if available its area size (i.e. acreage, square footage or whatever units of measurement you have).*
- its address.*
- in each year from 2022 to present, the maintenance costs to secure and/or maintain the land or property.*

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) & Environmental Information Regulations 2004 (EIR).

Our response

Land

The Housing Executive currently maintains approximately 1,670 hectares of land across its 3 Regions, Belfast, South and North. Some 1,550 hectares of this land is amenity open space lands within Housing Executive estates, forming an integral part of the structure of the estate for recreation purposes. Therefore, it is not unused and falls outside the scope of your request.

115 hectares of Housing Executive land is managed within the Housing Executive's Undeveloped Land Schedule (ULS), as these sites have been assessed as having development potential. The attached spreadsheet provides a list of all sites on the Housing Executive's ULS, including size and site name/address (as undeveloped land, not all sites have a specific street address).

These lands are classified on the ULS as, Transfers to Housing Association; Retained for Future Use or Surplus for Disposal. Definitions of each classification are provided below:

Programmed for Transfer to Housing Association - These are sites which are included in the Social Housing Development Programme for development by a Housing Association to meet social housing need.

Retain for Future Use – These are sites which are retained pending further investigation into their development potential for social housing or suitability for any other function carried out by the Housing Executive or pending completion of an Economic Appraisal.

Surplus for Disposal - These are sites which have been subject to Economic Appraisals and declared surplus to requirements as they are no longer required for the purpose for which they were acquired or for any other function carried out by the Housing Executive.

ULS sites are not individually insured nor are they covered by individual security arrangements; therefore, it is not possible to apply these costs to individual sites

Property

As of the 18th of November 2024, the Housing Executive had 464 actionable and 1293 non-actionable void properties.

Actionable voids are properties which are vacant while in the process of being allocated/awaiting change of tenancy repairs. These may also include properties deemed to be difficult to let. Non-actionable voids are properties that are not immediately available for allocation and are held vacant for operational reasons i.e. decanting purposes (where they are being used to house a tenant on a temporary basis pending works to their home), planned maintenance schemes, and properties which have been identified for sale/transfer or have approval for demolition.

The table below shows the breakdown of current void properties by bedroom and property type.

Property type	Bedroom count						
	not held*	1	2	3	4	5	8
Bedsit		34					
Bungalow	1	72	102	25	2		
Cottage			13	13	1		
Flat	4	233	712	46			
House	17	1	125	230	33	6	1
Maisonette			47	37	2		
Total	22	340	999	351	38	6	1

*Please note there are a small number of properties for which bedroom data is not held on our system.

The Housing Executive is not able to provide the addresses of vacant properties, as disclosure would be likely to prejudice the prevention or detection of crime. The relevant exemption is section 31(1)(a) of the FOI Act (Prevention or detection of crime). We have considered the Public Interest as outlined below.

Factors in favour of disclosure

- Transparency and accountability.
- Promoting public understanding.
- Understanding decision-making.
- Public interest in bringing empty properties back into use.

Factors in favour of maintaining the exemption

- Making public the addresses of void properties would likely lead to squatting and other criminal activity in and/or around these properties.
- Need to protect vacant properties from crime and avoid the considerable public expense that would be incurred dealing with crimes in relation to empty or vacant properties.
- Preventing the distress that is caused to victims of crimes of this nature.
- Residents who live in close proximity to such addresses would also be affected by crime committed within the vicinity and this would be detrimental to their reasonable expectation of feeling secure in their homes.

Outcome of public interest test

- Although there is a public interest in information about bringing properties back into use, the immediate concern is the protection of property and the well-being of residents.

We have reached the view that, on balance the public interest is better served by withholding the information relating to addresses of vacant properties under Section 31(1) (a) of the Act at this time.

The maintenance costs to secure and/or maintain the land or property are as follows

			Overall Total
1/4/22 - 31/3/23 CT019 Contract	Planned Total	£ 117,129.60	£ 147,413.20
	Response Total	£ 30,283.60	
1/4/23 - 30/04/24 CT019 Contract	Planned Total	£ 142,694.27	£ 178,715.97
	Response Total	£ 36,021.70	
1/5/24 - Present CT085 Contract	Planned Total	£ 95,812.60	£ 97,418.40
	Response Total	£ 1,605.80	
			£ 423,547.57

This concludes our response.