

"BUY SITES NOW" FOR POST WAR HOUSING SCHEMES

The Minister of Health (Mr. Ernest Brown) speaking in London today (Friday) at a special meeting of local authorities arranged by the National Housing and Town Planning Council, said:-

"After the war we may have to aim at a target figure of between three and four million new houses. It took 20 years to build 4,000,000 houses after the last war. This time we must build at twice the rate.

"In the first year after the Armistice only 715 houses were built in England and Wales, and less than 30,000 in the second year. We must learn from that bitter experience, and do during this war the preliminary work which last time was left until the peace came.

"In order to get the wheel turning immediately the war ends - or sooner if conditions permit - there is much thinking and planning to be done. My Ministry and Central Housing Advisory Committee are hard at work on questions of design, standards of construction, equipment, and rural housing.

"But planning and thinking is not enough. There must be action. I have been considering what more can be done in the meantime; and I am going to inform local authorities of my view that they need not await either the result of the Ministry's full investigations or a pronouncement by the Government on the many important principles raised by the Barlow, Scott and Uthwatt Reports. I am suggesting to the local authorities that there are almost certain to be in each area sites which, whatever the future national or local plan, are bound to be suitable housing sites. I am asking the authorities to decide on sufficient of such sites for a one-year housing programme. These sites will be selected in consultation with the Regional Officers of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning.

LOANS IF NECESSARY

"I am glad to announce, with the concurrence of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, that if the local authorities do not possess the sites, and cannot purchase them out of funds available to them, I shall be prepared to sanction the raising of the necessary loans.

"While I hope that authorities will be able to buy the land by agreement with the owner at a price below the 1939 value, I am prepared, where necessary, to entertain compulsory purchase orders.

"This is a valuable step forward. When local authorities have bought the sites, I hope they will be able to go ahead right away with the preliminary work of surveying and preparing the general lay-out. It is vital that local authorities should begin at once to place themselves in the position that the moment conditions permit, they can go to tender and get into their swing without any delay".

Other points from Mr. Ernest Brown's speech are:

SLUM CLEARANCE

"Because of the stoppage of building owing to the shortage of labour and materials about 300,000 families are living in houses which have already been, or but for the war would have been, condemned as slums. Many others are living in overcrowded conditions.

WAR-TIME BUILDING

"The scheme for 3,000 houses for agricultural workers is in the nature of a 'Commando raid, from which we shall gain experience in framing our plans for the main battles which have yet to be fought on the Housing Front. I can hold out no hope of other new house building for the time being. We must all recognise that the claims of the armed forces and of the strategic building programme must come first if we are to survive".

BADLY DAMAGED HOUSES

"A scheme is being launched in conjunction with the local authorities and the Ministry of Works, to repair 40,000 houses which were seriously damaged and are at present unoccupiable. The aim is to complete this work by the end of November. It will be a substantial contribution to the relief of the housing shortage.

ESSENTIAL REPAIRS

"Owing to lack of ordinary repairs and maintenance, large numbers of undamaged houses are deteriorating rapidly. The Ministry of Works are arranging for a minimum labour force which should ensure that owners can get essential repairs carried out".

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