

For interviews and more info contact the BPF on 020 7802 0113. Please include the link to the petition in your coverage: petitions.number10.gov.uk/emptythreat/

EMBARGOED UNTIL 0.01h MONDAY 10 NOVEMBER

- Petition 'EMPTYTHREAT' launched today on No 10 website
- Bond movie makers stung by bombsite Britain tax

Petition launched as bombsite Britain tax hits Bond

The film studio behind James Bond is embroiled in a row over a £130,000 bill for empty property rates, the controversial 'bombsite Britain' tax making businesses pay full rates on empty space.

Columbia Pictures Corporation, the studio behind Quantum of Solace, has taken the Valuation Office Agency, which collects the tax, to a Lands Tribunal. It is appealing against a £130,000 rates bill on its headquarters west London, which it had to pay while it was being refurbished at a cost of £2.8m.

The revelation comes on the day that a petition calling for the scrapping of the tax is launched by Kent Conservative candidate Laura Sandys at <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/emptythreat/>

Over 130 MPs have signed Commons motions calling for the controversial tax to be axed and now politicians and businesses want the public to show its support.

It follows an open letter to Gordon Brown backed by Tesco, BA, Nokia, Legal and General and hundreds of other UK firms as the campaign against the tax on empty shops, offices and warehouses has grown into a full-scale political row. Before April, firms received business rate relief at 50% for empty offices and shops and 100% for warehouses and factories.

Columbia's building could not be used while rewiring, the installation of new ceilings, floors and soundproofed recording studios was completed. However, David Fearnley, the district valuation officer, said the works were 'alterations with some repairs', and did not make the building 'materially different'.

The British Property Federation, which has led the national campaign against empty rates, has criticised the way in which the tax penalises those who upgrade buildings to reduce their environmental impact.

Laura Sandys, the Conservative parliamentary candidate for South Thanet who has launched the petition, said:

"I have seen the devastating effects of empty rates first hand in Thanet, where local businesses are being penalised for being loyal, local citizens and staying true to their roots. They have continued to keep their businesses in Kent, pouring their money and efforts into keeping the area vibrant, and are now being stung for a tax on properties they simply cannot use just as recession begins to bite. It's vital that people all over the country sign this petition."

BPF chief executive Liz Peace said: "Empty rates are a terrible example of how disjointed the government is. Taxing empty buildings is totally at odds with government policy over helping business, promoting flexible leasing and sustainability. The long term costs of raising £1bn in empty rates will be immeasurable. Firms will be forced into bankruptcy through paying tax on properties

earning then nothing, while the forced demolition of perfectly usable buildings will mean less affordable space for new businesses when we come out of recession.”

Steve Thomas, head of rating, Montagu Evans, Columbia’s surveyors, said: ‘Since the abolition of empty rates relief in April of this year, the VOA appears to be reticent to delete assessments of buildings undergoing genuine works which would have been deleted without question only a couple of years ago.’

From April this year businesses have had to pay full business rates on empty buildings, even if they have no tenants or have only recently been completed. Shops and offices now get just three months’ relief while industrial properties get six months. Before April, shops and offices paid 50% rates while industrial properties paid nothing.

Halifax MP Linda Riordan, who placed an early day motion in the summer, said: “Locally, we have been hit very hard by empty rates. It is vital for the people and businesses of Halifax that full rate relief for empty property is applied immediately.”

MPs, councils and businesses the length and breadth of the country have backed the British Property Federation’s campaign.

Please include the link <http://petitions.number10.gov.uk/emptythreat/>

Anyone affected is being advised to write to their local MP and email info@emptyrates.com with information about their plight.

FOR ANY REQUESTS, CASE STUDIES, GUESTS, SUPPORTING QUOTES OR STORIES, CONTACT:

Andrew Teacher, head of media, British Property Federation, 07968 12 45 45

Selection of media coverage

Television

[BBC 6 o’clock News – 26 August 2008](#)

[BBC News 24 – 1 April 2008](#)

[Bloomberg Money and Politics – 5 August](#)

National press

[Daily Mail – 31 October 2008](#)

[Guardian – 26 August 2008](#)

[Daily Mail – 27 October 2008](#)

[The Times – 27 October 2008](#)

[BBC News Online – 27 October 2008](#)

[Times – 13 August 2008](#)

[Telegraph – 11 July 2008](#)

[Independent – 13 August 2008](#)

[Times – 1 April 2008](#)

[Telegraph – 3 July 2008](#)

Regional press

[The Huddersfield Daily Examiner – 3 November 2008](#)

[Birmingham Post – 31 October 2008](#)

[Bradford Telegraph Argus – 3 November 2008](#)

[Liverpool Daily Post – 29 October 2008](#)

[Birmingham Mail – 28 October 2008](#)

[Peterborough Today – 7 November 2008](#)

[Portsmouth News – 28 October 2008](#)

[Western Daily Press – 19 August 2008](#)

Radio

[BBC Radio 4 Today Programme – 24 October 6.20](#)

[Today Programme](#) (2)

[Today Programme](#) (1)