

MINISTER'S FOREWORD



by **Jonathan Shaw MP,**

Minister for Marine, Landscape & Rural Affairs and
Minister for the South East

I am delighted to have been asked to write the foreword for this year's *Land Remediation Yearbook* and to bring you up to date with Government thinking in this vital area.

The land-remediation sector has been growing strongly over the last few years. One recent estimate found that the industry may be worth £1bn per annum, and that it is expected to grow by perhaps four per cent per year for the next few years.

A major driver now and in the future is the Government's plans to build three million new homes. The re-use of brownfield land lies at the heart of this policy, and the Government recently endorsed English Partnerships' recommendations on the National Brownfield Strategy.

Better use of brownfield land underpins our ambitions to revitalise major towns and cities, and bring about more sustainable patterns of development. It will help preserve the countryside by reducing urban sprawl, and help ensure that neglected land is brought back into productive use, supporting new homes and jobs. As the work by English Partnerships has shown, it is also possible to develop brownfield land in ways which work with the grain of urban nature – preserving the often rare and valuable biodiversity to be found on brownfield sites, and avoiding redevelopment of areas of high flood risk.

This is a long-term initiative. Over the last decade we have made significant progress in making better use of brownfield land, which helps limit the need to develop greenfield land. It is encouraging that currently around three quarters of new development takes place on brownfield land, compared with less than 60 per cent ten years ago.

An example of our policy in action is the National Coalfield Programme, run by English Partnerships. This will bring more than 4,000ha of currently derelict colliery land – often located in disadvantaged communities – back into use. In doing so, it will help

create around 42,000 jobs and 8,000 homes, attracting a billion pounds of private-sector investment to reinvigorate those communities.

The recent Housing and Regeneration Bill will reinforce the Government's view that brownfield land should be developed before greenfield. The Bill will establish the new Homes and Communities Agency, which will take forward English Partnerships' work on the National Brownfield Strategy. The Agency will put brownfield land at the heart of its work. It will aim to ensure that derelict and contaminated land continue to make a major contribution to the creation of new jobs, homes and recreational space.

The Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), Defra and English Partnerships will also establish the new National Brownfield Forum. This will bring together the leading partners and agencies working on brownfield and contaminated-land issues. It will help us deliver the strategy in a streamlined way, improving co-ordination across all those working on this important issue.

Across Government, we will continue to reduce unnecessary regulatory barriers to development. We are discussing a new protocol to set out expectations on collaborative working across the planning and pollution interface with the aim of delivering streamlined and efficient decision making. Later this year, we hope to publish joint CLG and Defra guidance which will support the protocol and will be developed in close consultation with stakeholders.

On contaminated land, we have been working extensively with stakeholders on the technically complex guidance for regulating risk to human health which forms a central component of identifying and managing contaminated land. We hope to announce significant improvements to this in spring 2008.

The last year has also seen difficult negotiations in Brussels on the proposed EU Soil Framework

Directive. The proposals sought to address various issues affecting soil functions, including erosion, compaction, organic matter decline, salinisation, landslides, contamination and soil sealing. In principle, we support action on all these issues. However, having conducted our own Impact Analysis and in the light of stakeholder consultation, we felt the proposed Directive would place disproportionate burdens on industry and the taxpayer. At last December's Environment Council, we joined a number of other Member States in saying we were unable to agree. It remains to be seen when or on what basis discussions might resume. We will in any event not be able to support an outcome which does not respect the principles of better regulation and subsidiarity.

In the meantime, we will be going ahead with our domestic policy to protect our soils resources. In April 2008, I plan to launch a public consultation on Defra's proposed Soil Strategy, which will build on the success of the Soil Action Plan 2002-06. The strategy will put in place a framework for action by government and its partners to ensure that current generations and future generations continue to receive the benefits we obtain from soils.

Finally, Defra's Land Use Project is looking at how we can optimise our use of land – both urban and rural – to deliver environmental, economic and social benefits over the next 50 years and more. It recognises that land is a finite resource which is under growing pressure from many challenges, including population growth and climate change. A major piece of work feeding into the project is a study by Foresight on the long-term future of land use in England. This will combine the most up-to-date evidence with well-informed futures work to probe what we might want land for in the future and how we might value it. The study is being jointly sponsored by CLG and Defra, and we expect that it will be launched shortly.