

## NATIONAL BROWNFIELD STRATEGY



# Time to unlock the potential: Green light for England's National Brownfield Strategy

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At the National Brownfield Conference held in London on 4 March 2008, the Government delivered its formal response to the National Brownfield Strategy recommendations, submitted by English Partnerships in May last year. In the Foreword to the response document the Housing Minister, Caroline Flint MP, stated: "The re-use of Brownfield land lies at the heart of a wide range of Government policies and English Partnerships' work in developing a National Brownfield Strategy is an important step towards achieving our ambitious targets for housing growth.....and for achieving more sustainable patterns of development."

The National Brownfield Strategy is based on a set of 'over-arching principles', which should be taken into account whenever the redevelopment or reuse of brownfield land is being considered. It provides the mechanisms through which Government, its agencies, local authorities and a range of stakeholders will:

- tackle existing problems of dereliction, particularly in our towns and cities;
- help ensure a continuing supply of land, returning previously developed to beneficial use; and
- encourage and promote best practice in the reuse of previously developed land, which recognises the biodiversity value, or nature conservation importance, of some brownfield sites and is consistent with the principles of sustainable development.

The recommendations submitted to Government contained nine policy recommendations, in four 'Strands':

All of the recommendations were accepted in the Government's response, and approval of several was confirmed in the Housing Green Paper *Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*, published by the Department for Communities and Local Government in July 2007. The Green Paper emphasised that local authorities need to continue to prioritise sustainable brownfield land in their plans and take stronger action to bring more brownfield land back into use. English Partnerships is supporting this process, assisting government at all levels to understand and overcome problems that are preventing some private and public brownfield sites from being brought back into use.

Government's response to the recommendations in the four Strategy 'Strands' included:

### STRAND ONE – IDENTIFYING, ASSESSING AND PREPARING BROWNFIELD LAND FOR REUSE TO ENSURE AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF LAND WHEN IT IS NEEDED

"Compile Local Brownfield strategies in areas of greatest need, providing an input to Local Development Documents using NLUD-PDL 2006 and the policy baseline."

*Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 3 – Housing* requires local planning authorities to plan for the long term by identifying developable sites. It maintains a focus on recycling land, reaffirming the national target for at least 60 per cent of new homes to be built on Brownfield land. Government recognises that English

Partnerships has a key enabling role in helping local authorities with this work.

English Partnerships is focussing on those authorities with the greatest concentrations of brownfield sites relative to deprivation – more than 20 per cent of recorded brownfield sites are in the 10 per cent most deprived Super Output Areas (SOAs) in England.

English Partnerships is working with the London Development Agency and ARUP, carrying out a review of brownfield land for all London authorities, through which comprehensive London-specific guidance and a brownfield action plan will be produced.

"Assess the physical, regulatory and market problems needing to be resolved in order to return Brownfield land to reuse."

The work being undertaken by English Partnerships and local authorities will identify brownfield land that can be developed and delivered to meet the country's future land-use needs. Land identified in this way will need to be assessed to determine the barriers that may hinder its reuse.

Government has asked English Partnerships to extend its support to all local authorities for site assessments, through the provision of specialist technical advice to assist with the preparation of tender documents, desk studies and intrusive site investigations.

"Taking steps to prepare the most seriously damaged Brownfield sites and make them ready for the most appropriate forms of reuse." **cont..**

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Local Brownfield Strategies will identify the extent of the problems which need to be addressed to remediate the most seriously contaminated sites. Government recognises the importance of sustainable methods of preparing land for reuse, including remediation technology.

CL:AIRE (Contaminated Land Applications in Real Environments) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation, established to raise awareness of, and confidence in, practical sustainable remediation technologies. It fulfills the need for objective, scientifically robust, appraisals of remediation technologies and methods for monitoring and investigating sites and Government will continue to work closely with CL:AIRE .

The Local Brownfield Strategies will give a much clearer view of the range of issues preventing brownfield sites being brought back into use. Some sites may have problems that could only be tackled by an approach similar to that taken through the National Coalfields Programme. Where these sites have a strategic importance it may be appropriate for Government to take direct action through its delivery partners to ensure that the sites are brought back into use. English Partnerships will report back to Government on the extent of strategic sites of this nature.

### STRAND 2 – SAFEGUARDING THE ENVIRONMENT TO ENSURE APPROPRIATE LEVELS OF REGULATORY CONTROL AND THE EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE REUSE OF LAND.

“Ensure that the environment is adequately safeguarded when land is being reused whilst simplifying and streamlining where possible the regulatory procedures that have to be observed.”

Government recognises that the interface between planning and pollution-control regimes is complex and developers can be subject to overlapping requirements. CLG and Defra have undertaken a joint review to identify options for making this interface work better during both brownfield development and the delivery of new waste infrastructure.

The review recommends that a change in the regulatory culture rather than the regulatory framework is needed, and that this should be based on a more integrated approach reflecting the fact that both planners and the pollution-control authority are making decisions as part of one process and on the same development proposal.

The development of a new protocol, to be badged by CLG, Defra, the Environment Agency and the Local Government Association has been announced and this will set out expectations for regulators to work collaboratively and to deliver decisions on projects in the most streamlined and effective way. Joint CLG/Defra guidance will complement the protocol and provide more detailed advice on its implementation.

“Recognise that not all brownfield land is suitable for development purposes, but can nevertheless make a contribution through encouraging biodiversity and the alleviation of flood risks.”

It is recognised that planning, development, and regeneration should have minimal impacts on biodiversity and enhance it wherever possible. *Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9)* sets out the Government's objectives and planning policies on the protection of biodiversity.

Developers need to do more to assess the environmental implications of their proposals for brownfield sites at an early stage, in consultation with appropriate agencies. They should take account of the environmental and resource impacts of development on such sites, and mitigate where appropriate.

*Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 25, Development and flood risk (published in December 2006)* promotes strategic consideration of flood risk, to locate development away from flood risk whenever possible. Regeneration of brownfield land, whether as part of a development or where the site is not suited to development, offers opportunities to improve the management of flood water and reduce risk to communities.

### STRAND 3 – ENHANCING COMMUNITIES THROUGH THE REMOVAL OF BLIGHT AND BY ENSURING THE LONG-TERM MAINTENANCE OF RESTORED LAND CONTRIBUTING TO SUSTAINABILITY

“Improve local communities by tackling the visual and economic blight associated with small brownfield sites that may not be economic to reuse their own.”

English Partnerships and CL:AIRE have been developing a pioneering new approach to remediating contaminated land. Entitled ‘CLUSTER’ this initiative has been launched as a pilot with the potential to significantly speed up the restoration of groups of contaminated sites. It is an innovative approach with the potential to deliver substantial cost savings and environmental benefits.

This is an exciting start and one which we hope will encourage the identification of sites in other areas where this approach can be replicated.

“Secure the treatment and long-term maintenance of amenity land and other sites that are lacking development potential.”

The Land Restoration Trust was established as a pilot in 2004 by English Partnerships, the Forestry Commission, the Environment Agency and Groundwork, recognising the need to ensure that land, once restored as newly created open space, was maintained and managed. An evaluation of the Trust's work has reinforced Communities and Local Government's view of the need for the long-term sustainable restoration and management of derelict land with no development potential.

The Government published ‘*A Strategy for England's Trees, Woods and Forests*’ – its revised policy for woodlands and forestry in England – in June 2007. The Forestry Commission, in co-operation with Natural England, are leading the preparation of a

Delivery Plan for England's Trees, Woods and Forests. Consultation with key stakeholders on a draft Delivery Plan will take place in the spring, with publication of the final Plan expected in the autumn.

Consideration of proposals for the integration of trees, woodland and associated green infrastructure within regeneration and brownfield restoration will be guided by the principles of the National Brownfield Strategy.

### STRAND 4 – ACCREDITATION AND SKILLS MEETING THE NEED FOR APPROPRIATELY QUALIFIED AND EXPERIENCED BROWNFIELD PRACTITIONERS WITH THE PUBLIC, PRIVATE AND VOLUNTARY SECTORS WORKING TOGETHER TO DISSEMINATE BEST PRACTICE.

“Strengthen and improve the process of preparing land for reuse through the accreditation of suitably qualified and experienced practitioners ensuring that new practitioners are provided with the necessary skills and training.”

A wide range of skills will be required to bring forward brownfield sites. Government welcomes the work carried out by the Academy for Sustainable Communities and English Partnerships in assessing the skills gaps in the brownfield sector, and in publishing a draft Brownfield Skills Strategy.

Government recognises the importance of the SiLC (Specialist in Land Condition) accreditation scheme, which was established in response to the recommendations of the Urban Task Force to enable individuals achieve professional accreditation of their skills and competencies. The SiLC PTP (Professional and Technical Panel) is developing proposals to increase the number of accredited SiLCs, and different levels of accreditation, to meet the future demands of the industry.

Government will work with the SiLC PTP to embed the scheme into the developing brownfield skills strategy. It is important to retain SiLC's independence, but it is acknowledged that some additional help may be required initially to allow the further development of the scheme and to align it more closely to the brownfield skills strategy.

“Ensure a more joined up approach to brownfield land reuse on the part of Government and other stakeholders.”

Development of the National Brownfield Strategy and the successes that have already flowed from it have demonstrated the importance of making the right linkages between Government, the regulators and the practitioners. In order to secure better co-ordination at the national level, Government will establish a new National Brownfield Forum, jointly sponsored by CLG and Defra. The Forum will bring together Whitehall Departments, the Environment Agency, the Health Protection Agency and industry stakeholders with the aim of promoting a more cohesive and inclusive approach to policy development and to encourage the exchange of best practice and knowledge.