



# The Brownfield Guide

A practitioner's guide  
to land reuse in England

English Partnerships is the national regeneration agency helping the Government to support high quality sustainable growth in England.

We have five core business areas and deliver our objectives through:

- Developing our own portfolio of strategic projects.
- Acting as the Government's specialist advisor on brownfield land.
- Ensuring that surplus public sector land is used to support wider Government objectives, especially the implementation of the *Sustainable Communities Plan*.
- Helping to create communities where people can afford to live and want to live.
- Supporting the Urban Renaissance by improving the quality of our towns and cities.

English Partnerships wishes to thank all of the individuals and partner organisations that have contributed to the production of this Brownfield Guide. Their contributions and support have been invaluable.

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# Foreword

English Partnerships is the Government's specialist advisor on brownfield land and, with a clear focus on sustainability, we are committed to securing the positive reuse of these important assets. Although much remains to be done, it is encouraging that so many new jobs, new homes and other amenities for local communities are now being created on previously developed land. In 2005 some 74 per cent of all new housing was built on brownfield sites and the figure continues to rise.

Across England, local authorities, regional development agencies, private developers and housing associations are working in partnership with local communities and English Partnerships to unlock the full potential of such sites. Many brownfield sites are in areas which have suffered from industrial restructuring and housing market failure. Today with a focus on comprehensive and sustainable regeneration, new opportunities are emerging. In Beswick in East Manchester, former industrial land has been remediated and prepared for reuse with investment by English Partnerships. It is now being redeveloped as a vibrant, mixed tenure community with high quality housing, public realm, a brilliant new school and a green boulevard providing a safe pedestrian route through the neighbourhood.

Sustainable communities are also being created on brownfield land in the former coalfield areas of the North and Midlands, and in old rundown dockyard areas as far apart as Plymouth, Gloucester and Liverpool. In Northampton, the Brownfield Initiative will transform three former landfill sites, providing new housing, a district centre and new employment facilities. Detailed design work is now underway to reclaim Avenue Coking Works in Chesterfield, one of the most contaminated sites in Europe, which will pioneer the use of new technologies. This and many of the other projects with which we are involved will create new and improved habitats for diverse forms of wildlife, including endangered species.

Unlocking brownfield land successfully is about vision, leadership, professional skills and using the latest technologies. Creating sustainable environments should be at the forefront in brownfield projects, with land being reused to provide housing, employment and recreation facilities as well as, where appropriate, being assisted in returning to a natural state. Land reuse though is not an end in itself; it is also about local people being engaged in the development process and helping to shape the future use of the areas in which they live, work and spend their leisure time.

In recognition of the important role of everybody involved in this process, English Partnerships is delighted to be launching this new Brownfield Guide. Its aim is simple: **to provide straightforward practical advice on how to effectively and sensitively reuse brownfield land.** The reused land and buildings will be a significant asset for the country's future economic and social well-being.

I hope you will find the guide valuable in helping you to achieve your goals in the creation of sustainable development.



**The Baroness Ford of Cuninghame**

Chairman, English Partnerships  
October 2006

“A successful invention or discovery is usually a slow growth, to which new elements are added, and from which old elements are removed, first in the thought of the inventor, and subsequently in an outward form, until at last precisely the right elements and no others are brought together. Indeed, it may be truly said that if you find a series of experiments continued through many years by various workers, there will eventually be produced the result for which so many have been industriously searching.”

Ebenezer Howard (1898)  
*Tomorrow: a peaceful path to real reform*, p95.

# Preface

Although Howard wrote these words more than 100 years ago, in the context of Garden Cities, the general principles hold good today in relation to the reuse of land. Reusing land in England is not a new phenomenon; we have practised it for centuries, with considerable success. What is relatively new, having come to the fore over the last three decades, is the fact that when land reuse is planned it is necessary to have regard for environmental conditions and the previous uses that existed on the land. Even more recent is the change in attitude towards the generation and disposal of wastes, including recognition that sites suitable for the disposal of contaminated soils are few in number and only have limited capacity remaining. This is leading to the development of new techniques in preparing sites for redevelopment.

Preparation of this guide to brownfield land reuse has built upon the different elements affecting land use change. Literally hundreds of individuals and organisations have given their views as to the issues that surround land reuse. Their suggestions have helped to identify the topics that need to be covered in the guide. The work has also been shaped through the analysis of case study developments, best practice notes and pilot projects.

Over the past 12 to 15 years the term 'brownfield' has come into common usage in many industrialised and post-industrial nations around the world. In some countries, for example in the United States, brownfield is defined by the presence of contamination. Elsewhere, including the United Kingdom, brownfield tends to be regarded as land that has been previously subject to physical development (other than agriculture) and where its reuse may be complicated by one or more factors, which may include contamination.

These definitional variations can lead to different policy responses. If 'brownfield' is linked to contamination, then the response will probably be from an environmental perspective. If the wider physical development definition is used, the emphasis on environmental issues may be less apparent. This may manifest itself in recourse to regulatory enforcement only occurring in situations where actual environmental harm is taking place, or where such harm is threatened. This approach is the one adopted in the United Kingdom.

The guide considers the issues affecting the reuse of land and examines the existing policies and other mechanisms available to assist in the process of unlocking sites. Recognising the contentious nature of some of the issues, problem areas have been identified and used as pointers to the tools and mechanisms that might be employed to effect change. Case studies from the extensive brownfield project experience of English Partnerships and the agency's best practice notes are used to help inform the process of reusing land.

The process of establishing Local Brownfield Partnerships is described, together with work undertaken on pilot Brownfield Land Action Plans. The aim of both of these initiatives is to bring together stakeholders in brownfield land, including public sector agencies, community representatives and the development industry, in order to produce practical solutions for reusing land.

The guide has been produced by a small team, drawn from staff in English Partnerships, supported by the National Brownfield Forum comprising representatives from the agency, the Department for Communities and Local Government, local authorities and the environmental charity Contaminated Land: Applications in Real Environments (CL:AIRE). The work could not have been undertaken without the input provided by the different consultants that have carried out research work for the project, the local authorities that painstakingly compiled their NLUD returns and the many brownfield specialists, in both public and private sectors, who gave freely of their time to attend workshops and other meetings. The contributions made by everyone concerned are gratefully acknowledged.



**Professor Paul Syme**  
National Brownfield Adviser, English Partnerships  
October 2006

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