

Analysis ↘

BROWNFIELD REMEDIATION

Brownfield focus fails to tick boxes

By Laura Edgar

Although planning's place in the election campaign was most evident in the woolly and oft-repeated phrase 'planning reform', the BBC debate on April 16 did at least connect to something tangible – brownfield remediation grants.

A proposal in UKIP's manifesto was mentioned, one that put a figure for grants of 'up to' £10,000 per unit for developers undertaking 'essential' remediation work.

But is providing remediation grants a viable incentive to encourage development on brownfield land?

Speaking to *The Planner*, Amanda Beresford, partner and head of planning at Schulmans, said that it was difficult to say whether the proposal was viable.

"It depends on how much remediation is involved, how heavy it is, how attractive and suitable the site. Does it have any existing infrastructure, for example. "Undoubtedly, for some sites, up to £10,000 per dwelling will be the difference between site development being viable or not. For some, even the maximum won't be enough to cover the remediation costs."

Michael Wood, senior planner at Indigo Planning, said that because the biggest constraint for developers is remediation, incentives to developers will be key – and that while promotion of brownfield development is vital, "we must be realistic about what can be achieved on these sites".

The Liberal Democrats and Conservatives also proposed to prioritise brownfield land development – but to what extent will prioritising brownfield land satisfy housing demand? Recent reports, including *The Green Noose: An Analysis Of Green Belts And Proposals For Reform* by the Adam Smith Institute, suggest the need for housing is too great to be sated by available brownfield land.

Speaking to *The Planner*, a spokesperson for the Centre for Cities think tank explained that parties are assuming that housing supply can primarily be met through brownfield development, which analysis suggests is "highly unlikely".

Nexus Plannings managing director Roger Tustain said his understanding was that "seven out of every 10 new homes built are already on brownfield land", and it is estimated that there is only enough brownfield remaining to deliver 200,000 new homes

Record number of finalists for RTPI Awards



A record number of entries have been shortlisted as finalists for the RTPI's Awards for Planning Excellence.

The awards are contested between consultancies and local authority teams across 14 categories. Projects, people and plans from Belfast to Bridlington, Loch Leven to Lincolnshire and Craig y Deryn to Cambridge have all been shortlisted, with entries up 50% up on last year. Judges also claim to have had a 'more difficult job than ever' in selecting finalists.

RTPI president Janet Askew said: "It will be a tremendous challenge picking individual category winners from such a high quality field."

Winners will be announced in London on the evening of 6 July, at the Pullman London St Pancras hotel.

by 2020*". Caution, he added, would be required to sustain such a 'brownfield first' policy.

And 'brownfield first' also concerned Mark Sitch, senior partner at Barton Willmore.

"It would end up reducing the delivery of new homes overall," he told *The Planner*, "with the less pro-growth local planning authorities seeing this as a means to delay or prevent necessary greenfield development."

Reaction to the various manifesto commitments has consistently pointed out that while brownfield development was high on the agenda, no mention was made of the green belt.

"It is disappointing – although predictable – that all parties have shied away from committing to a debate about the purpose and function of the green belt around our key cities, said Tustain.

Beresford agreed that a green belt review will probably have to be considered, pointing out that while both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats commit to new settlements, "what they don't say is that the only logical conclusion is they would have to be on greenfield or green belt land".

John Acres, a consultant to Turley, told *The Planner* that although the parties haven't mentioned it now, "when they get into power they will need to look critically at the green belt to see how and where some development could be accommodated somehow. If you apply green belt too rigidly it would effectively prevent towns and cities from organically growing".

Steve Turner of the Home Builders Federation agreed. "A range of options will be needed if we are to build the number of homes required... with both brown and green field land."

* DCLG national statistics on land use change in England for 2011 (most recently published (December 2013)

* DCLG Building more homes on brownfield land – consultation proposals document (January 2015).

Comment: Joe Kilroy, policy officer, RTPI

"We have been examining all the parties' policies on planning. In our housing paper, *Delivering Large Scale Housing*, we recommend that surplus public sector land holdings are disposed of to take account of the wider community value, for example for affordable housing, and not to maximise capital receipts. We would also like to see local authorities take a larger role in land assembly on brownfield sites."