



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

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Thank you for your letter of 12 November to the Rt Hon Eric Pickles MP, on behalf of the Mayor of Stockton Borough Council, Councillor Kathryn Nelson, about the National Planning Policy Framework and the Government's policies on the development of brownfield sites. I have been asked to reply, as the matters you raise fall within my Ministerial responsibilities.

This Government is working hard to get every inch of brownfield land back into use, where this is possible and practicable. The Framework promotes the re-use of brownfield land, provided it is not of high environmental value, and enables local councils to set locally appropriate targets for re-using this land.

Of course, brownfield land can make an important contribution to our housing needs and we are taking a range of measures to facilitate the re-use of existing redundant or underused land and buildings. This includes the provision of £235 million in grant and £130 million to local authorities in New Homes Bonus for homes to be brought back into use. We are also selling off surplus public sector brownfield land, and we have implemented the office to residential permitted development rights which help to maximise the use of existing stock, thereby reducing pressure on greenfield development.

Where brownfield land is vacant, however, not all of it can be expected to come into use in the immediate future, and it is not always economically viable to develop it. In other cases, brownfield sites may be in areas where development is unsuitable, such as an isolated location without appropriate infrastructure, and some brownfield land may have become valuable for the local community. That is why we rejected the previous Government's absolute prioritisation of brownfield use, which was in place until 2010, as that policy helped drive up land prices, and led to unpopular, high density development. Our policies in the Framework allow councils to make decisions on the location of development that are right for their area.

Our reforms to the planning system through the Localism Act and the Framework place local communities at the heart of planning and we have no intention of changing that. The Framework is also quite clear that it promotes sustainable development, not development at any cost. So, where decisions have to be made on the basis of the Framework, because a council has not yet put in place a proper plan, or cannot demonstrate a five year supply of housing sites, these decisions will need to be made in the light of all the policies contained in the Framework, including those that provide strong environmental protection. But getting an up-to-date plan in place will stand local councils in good stead in deciding applications, and dealing with appeals from, developers.

I certainly don't want to see any more open land used for development than is absolutely necessary. But there is not enough brownfield land to build all the homes that this country needs, so we should accept that we will have to use some previously undeveloped land. We should also keep the amount of development needed in perspective: 8.9% of England is built up, compared to 40% being covered by protective designations.

We keep the policies in the Framework under review, but we do not have any plans to revise them at the moment.

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NICK BOLES MP