

NEWSLETTER

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Planning and Politics



'Brownfield passport': could this be the answer to 'get Britain building'?

A look at the recently published policy paper from the government regarding the 'brownfield passport'



This week, the government published a policy paper on the option for 'brownfield passports', which would be more specific about the development that should be regarded as acceptable on brownfield land in urban areas.

An introduction to the concept:

- The government has continually reinforced its goals to get Britain building and has already consulted on a range of proposed changes to national planning policy.
- The government has also recently established the New Towns Taskforce, charged with identifying the next generation of new towns.
- While these will be important in securing more new homes, the government has been clear in its approach to brownfield land.
- The government aims to go make the most of previously developed land and taking forward sites that which have been overlooked for too long.

The government wants to consider whether there are opportunities to go further in terms of providing faster and more certain routes to permission for urban brownfield land, and whether the introduction of a 'brownfield passport' could ensure that default answer to brownfield development is "yes".

The objectives to making the most out of brownfield land:

- Bringing vacant and under-used brownfield sites into more productive use
- Identifying where existing developed land would benefit from redevelopment, intensification or a change of use, including where appropriate and sustainable in suburban areas
- Having clear policies in place to communicate these opportunities, with plans and development proposals informed by the views of local communities
- Ensuring such development contributes to making great places supporting healthy, resilient communities – using design guidance and codes as well as masterplanning to be clear about the quality expected locally, supported by the right infrastructure



"...we have started the hard yards of planning reform. Because we are facing up to decisions ignored for years. Because we are introducing new planning passports that will turbo-charge housebuilding in our inner cities..."

Kier Starmer, speaking at his first Labour party conference



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Below we highlight the changes the government wishes to make at a national and local level, covering principle, scale, and form of development in different types of location:

1. Principle of Development

- The National Planning Policy Framework is already clear that substantial weight should be given to the value of using suitable previously developed land within settlements.
- To provide more clarity, the government is interested in whether national policy could take the 'in principle' further.
- This would mean being explicit that development on brownfield land within urban settlements is acceptable unless specified exclusions apply. This for example could be that there is no adverse impact in relation to flood risk and access cannot be mitigated.

2. Scale of Development

- Many of the country's urban areas have been developed at relatively low density, especially when compares to cities and towns in parts of continental Europe.
- There could however, be scope for increases in some areas. One approach could be to use national policy to set minimum expectations for certain types of location where a particular scale of development may be appropriate.
- The policy parameters, such as height would need to be carefully set and policy could be amended to encourage such parameters set through local plans.

3. Form of Development

- The government is interested in understanding more about using design guides and codes that draw on the existing character of places, to identify these opportunities and clarify the types of development regarded as acceptable in particular locations.
- Several London Boroughs have already taken this approach, utilizing supplementary planning guidance to set out opportunities and make it easier for the redevelopment of existing plots to be brought forward.
- This approach could be deployed from the national to the local scale and be underpinned through supportive national policy.

4. Area-wide Permissions

- An additional approach would be to combine the options for the scale and form of development with Local Development Orders (LDOs), to provide upfront consent to developments that meet the criteria.
- Combining them with the criteria above would allow a LPA to establish one or more zones in which particular types of development had planning permission without the need for individual applications.
- The government believes it would be important that the use of an LDO would remain a matter for local decision, and that any LDOs were prepared with the benefit of effective community engagement.

Concluding thoughts:

The government's 'Brownfield Passport' initiative represents a promising and unique solution to brownfield development in the UK. It has the potential to become a successful tool in the government's aims to 'get Britain building' and achieving economic success which has continued to be at the forefront of its campaign. The government is seeking views on this proposed policy, and more specifically a set of 10 questions, all of which can be viewed [here](#).

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