

UK HOUSING

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- The Government has introduced a National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which all local authorities must follow. This makes sure they use land effectively and ensures they use Brownfield sites where possible, the 'Brownfield First' policy.
- The framework aims to safeguard the environment and protect Green Belt land, maintain existing habitats and create new habitats where possible.
- The protected Green Belts around towns and cities conserve green space, prevent urban sprawl and the merging of towns, and safeguards the countryside.
- 'Exceptional Circumstances' are needed if a local authority wishes to change Green Belts and allow development.
- Local Authorities must develop a Brownfield Register of available sites within the urban area. This will also allow the remediation of despoiled, degraded, derelict and contaminated land.
- A recent speech by Michael Gove the minister for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities outlined the new policies of the NPPF and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023. He stressed the need to streamline planning and urban regeneration in towns and cities and this may speed up the planning and implementation of the development of Brownfield sites.
- The Government is under some pressure at the moment to relax planning regulations in Green Belts particularly to allow the building of starter homes. A future Labour government policy suggests relaxation of those regulations to help kickstart home building to help reduce the housing shortage.
- Local government officers and officials must be aware, however, that political expediency at the national level to keep MP's on board in the run up to a general election may outweigh more important economic, environmental and social issues.
- The UK has a housing shortage. The Affordable Homes Programme of 2021 suggested that 180,000 new homes per year were needed outside London over the next 4-5 years.
- A House of Commons paper in 2023 gave the Government an ambitious target of 300,000 homes per year by the mid 2020's. Some research suggests nearer 340,000 new homes per year are needed.
- In the year 2021-22 only 233,000 new homes were built, supply is not meeting demand.

GREEN AGENDA

- The development and regeneration of Brownfield sites within towns and cities can go some way to addressing the Green Agenda as proposed by bodies such as the UN, the EU and the UK Government. It will also reduce the need to use Greenfield sites on the edge of towns and cities
- These sites will also help to address the UN Sustainability Goals, especially goal 11, promoting the growth of sustainable cities and goal 17, concerning sustainable development.
- The latest NPPF is clear about the need for sustainable development, saying that plans and provision should apply a presumption in favour of sustainable development. The Framework states that 'all plans should promote a sustainable pattern of development that seeks to: meet the development needs of their area; align growth and infrastructure; improve the environment; mitigate climate change (including by making effective use of land in urban areas) and adapt to its effects.'
- The NPPF outlines 3 main areas that should be addressed in all planning decisions; an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, and importantly an environmental objective - to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- The addition of green spaces and nature will improve infiltration of rainwater, reduce runoff and aid in flood prevention. This may involve the re-wilding of rivers to increase biodiversity and re-introduce natural features.
- Buildings, both residential and business, within developments should be sustainably built with sustainably resourced materials. They should be energy efficient, use heat pumps and integrate micro-generation of electricity by photo-voltaic cells and/or wind turbines. The addition of green roofing systems will also reduce water runoff and improve biodiversity.
- Mixed usage will integrate residential dwellings with business, retail, entertainment and leisure facilities. In some places this may include educational facilities to help further reduce the need for long commuter journeys and break the dependence on cars. The addition of walkways and cycleways within developments can also help cut journey times, the need for cars and carbon emissions.