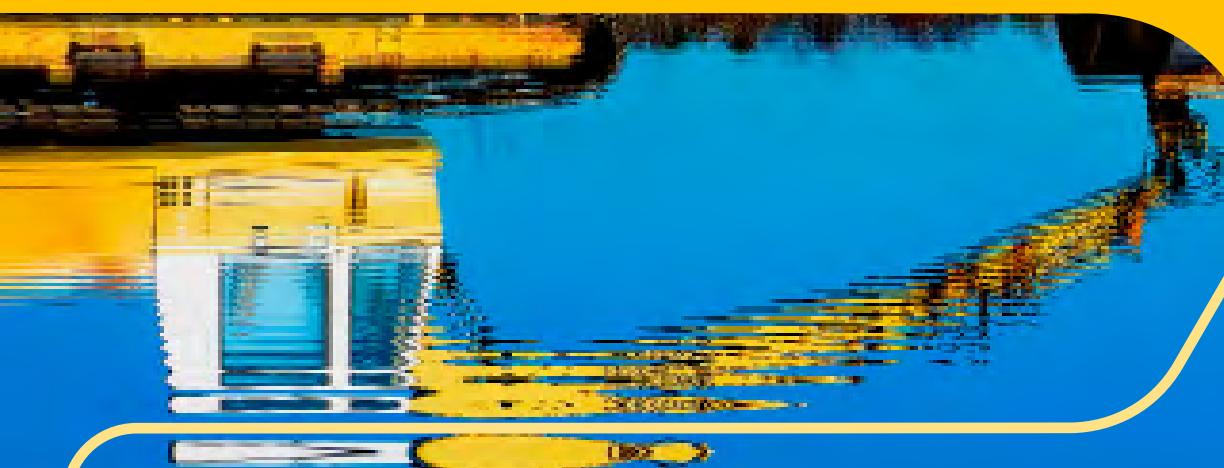




Chapter three: Land use and re-use for sustainable development



Priority actions for the UK

Government: Land use and re-use



1 A holistic approach...

Take a holistic approach to the use of land across the UK to secure multiple benefits for communities and our natural world.



2 promoting healthy soils...

Promote a sustainable, healthy, and resilient approach to soils across Government policy by coordinating governance, monitoring, and practice.



3 starting with brownfield...

Realise the safe use, re-use, and redevelopment of brownfield land in line with sustainable development.



4 ...delivered together.

Work with the environment sector and local government to deliver competency and best practice in the transition towards a more holistic approach to land.

“We need to address land condition directly to deliver a better future.”

Land condition is critically important as we transform society towards sustainability. The land we live on interacts directly with our homes, our food, our energy security, and the protection of the natural world that people love.

The health of our land can be compromised by how it was used in the past and how it is used now. We need to address land condition directly to deliver a better future for our communities and the natural world.

Despite the overwhelming consensus of the environment sector to take a holistic approach to land, delivering healthy soils, and realising the safe use and redevelopment of brownfield land, regulation often works against a ‘common sense’ approach.

Current regulations and consenting processes for developing land and disposing of waste are often disconnected or adversarial by nature, preventing solutions which would be better for everyone.

Economic development and environmental outcomes need not be adversaries: sustainable development can deliver mutual benefits for people, the economy, and the environment.

Likewise, sustainable development can simultaneously tackle some of the biggest social crises, such as housing, and the

biggest environmental crises, such as climate change.

Working with environmental scientists, landowners and local communities, the Government can transform the way we treat and use our land, unlocking economic growth and maintaining a landscape that is healthy for people and ecosystems.

Box 2. About the Land Condition Community

The **Land Condition Community** is a member-led special interest group of land condition professionals spanning sectors and job types, dedicated to promoting best practice in the specialism.

The Community steers the IES’s activities related to land condition and supports the development of tailored membership services, exploring synergistic collaborations with key stakeholders in the sector where relevant.

1. Take a holistic approach to the use of land across the UK to secure multiple benefits for communities and our natural world.

- i. Reach a cross-governmental consensus on the use of land, supported by a **Land Use Framework** that coordinates social, economic, and environmental objectives, and manages their trade-offs, including the **Environmental Improvement Plan** (and equivalent policies in the devolved administrations), food security, public health, and addressing the linked crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and environmental pollution.

This aligns with the Government's **manifesto commitment** to “**introduce a land-use framework and make environment land management schemes work for farmers and nature.**”

- ii. Prioritise brownfield land for new developments whenever suitable for use, taking a ‘common sense’ approach to building homes, developing infrastructure and protecting our green spaces.

This reflects the Government's **manifesto commitment** to “**take a brownfield first approach, prioritising the development of previously used land wherever possible.**”

2. Promote a sustainable, healthy, and resilient approach to soils across Government policy by coordinating governance, monitoring, and practice.

- i. Place soil health on the same legislative framework as other key environmental outcomes, introducing a statutory target for soil health and improving soil monitoring data.
- ii. Improve waste rules for soils by introducing a regulatory framework for the re-use, recovery, and recycling of soil. Include soil in the **Circular Economy Regulations** as a resource where safe re-use is encouraged. Expedite the development and rollout of the Soil Re-Use and Storage Depot scheme.

This will be an essential element of the Government's **manifesto ambition** to “**champion British farming whilst protecting the environment.**”

3. Realise the safe use, re-use, and redevelopment of brownfield land in line with sustainable development.

- i. Consolidate consenting processes to minimise duplication, delivering NPPF guidance that planning issues should not be unnecessarily revisited through permitting regimes. Avoid double regulation with formal agreements between departments and regulators, clarifying which process will encompass which actions and activities.
- ii. Use regulatory incentives to actively encourage brownfield development. Explore higher scrutiny processes for greenfield development which should be 'by exception only'. Showcase the positives of brownfield development and the multiple benefits which can be achieved for communities and developers.
- iii. Align **governance** and consenting processes across local and national policy, through frameworks such as the **NPPF** and **NPF4**. National environmental objectives and outcomes should be linked to local delivery as explicit considerations in Local Plans.
- iv. Improve designations for land to better reflect its complexity. Recognise that brownfield land can have more ecological diversity than some greenfield land. Ensure definitions do not lead to absurdities such as the intentional degradation of land to facilitate technical **compliance with BNG**.

This is the most sustainable way to deliver the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"Get Britain building again ... with 1.5 million new homes over the next parliament."**

This aligns with the Government's **manifesto commitment** to **"take a more strategic approach to greenbelt land designation"** and to **"introduce 'golden rules' to ensure development benefits communities and nature."**

4. Work with the environment sector and local government to deliver competency and best practice in the transition towards a more holistic approach to land.

- i. Support industry, professional bodies, and communities of practice to promote key competency standards (such as **NQMS**, **SiLC**, and **CEnv**). Hold regular reviews to ensure standards are fit for purpose, working with local government on a needs-based approach to competency, and delivering training on new technologies, data, and digital development.
- ii. Facilitate universal best practice through guidance for local authorities and delivery organisations, supported by sufficient resources and by evaluating the success of the **Planning Skills Delivery Fund**.
- iii. Deliver on the recommendations of the NAO's **Implementing Statutory BNG Report**, including monitoring local authority enforcement of BNG and overall impact to ensure environmental gain in practice.

This will be vital to delivering the Government's **manifesto ambition** to **"make the changes we need to forge ahead with new roads, railways, reservoirs, and other nationally significant infrastructure."** Planning reforms will only succeed if the right people have the skills they need to deliver in practice.

This will support the previous **Environment Secretary's core priority** of **"Ensuring nature's recovery"**.