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Where should we build new homes?

RTPI Policy Statement on identifying new housing development opportunities

Royal Town Planning Institute, November 2016

A top priority for the UK Government must be to address the severe difficulties that many people in England (for which it is responsible) have in accessing decent and affordable housing. We therefore welcome the expressed intention of the government to produce a Housing White Paper for England in autumn 2016.

Identifying new development opportunities for where new housing should be located, is a key to this review of housing policy. A fresh approach to the policy on the location of housing is therefore one of the RTPI's 16 Ways to Solve the Housing Crisis. The Royal Town Planning Institute has also canvassed its members across the country on their experience in trying to meet the shortfall in housing supply, which has formed the basis of the following statement.

Make brownfield land achieve its full potential

Previously-developed brownfield land in built-up areas must continue to play a vital role for a range of purposes including housing. But a "brownfield first" policy will fail to deliver its full potential if there is insufficient available funding for the treatment and assembly of land. New proactive remedial programmes are needed to remove constraints on development and to make places where people want to live which are accessible by sustainable modes of transport.

Involve communities in regeneration

The increase in density of existing housing areas in towns and cities may also have a key role in providing new housing. It is however essential that increasing density is of high quality and is supported by infrastructure and facilities including sufficient open space. This requires real community consultation to take account their needs and minimise the displacement of existing residents.

Land within existing built up areas will not meet all our needs

Even with an enhanced urban renewal and regeneration programmes of action and funding, land within existing built up areas will not meet all our housing needs in full. Some of the future housing needs will have to be met

**RTPI 16 Ways to
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on greenfield land around our towns and cities. The experience of our members clearly indicates that this can be done without undermining the priority to be given to brownfield sites through a planned, managed and phased approach to development

Make green belts work for everybody

A managed approach to urban expansion, whilst avoiding urban sprawl around our major cities, has been successfully achieved through planning policies such as green belts. The planning profession has championed this policy for over 60 years. But it is important to revisit the purposes that green belts need to fulfil over the coming generation. The value of green belts is not simply about what is ugly and what is attractive, as some argue. We need to talk about who green belts are for, and about their social impact, along with their continued role in shaping and managing urban growth.

Green belt boundaries may well need to change, but only through careful reviews over wider areas than single local authorities, and where safeguards are put in place to ensure that development is sustainable, affordable and delivered in a timely manner, and without prejudice to the renewal of brownfield land.

Better planning, not less planning

If government is to help ensure timely action to deliver new housing opportunities, (whether from brownfield, using existing urban areas more intensely, or on greenfield sites) it is important that the planning system is allowed to work. In particular, local plans that properly plan for the homes their communities need and which have been scrutinised and found sound by the independent Planning Inspectorate, should not face the risk of an eleventh-hour call-in and delay. Rather, support be given to local authorities who have worked in partnership to deliver those homes. Effective strategic planning is needed to address the housing crisis. Planners have the skills to do the job, working in partnership with politicians and communities.

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