



Draft Discussion Paper to the Brownfield Forum presented by the Land Trust.

UNDERSTANDING THE TRUE COST OF BROWNFIELD LAND

Purpose

- Brownfields are a major cost to Society. They cause blight; they encourage anti-social behaviour; they contribute to mental and physical ill health; they damage the economic vitality of areas; they damage community cohesion. Current focus of Government is on those sites which can be redeveloped and the potential economic “gain” that may be achieved through such development. Where no development potential exists reclamation is generally seen as an unjustifiable cost. We need however in light of the substantial evidence available to re-position brownfields recognising the true societal costs of leaving these derelict, and the positive economic, social and environmental benefits that can be brought by restoration.

Background

- The return of the Brownfield Forum provides an excellent opportunity to revisit the Strands of the National Brownfield Strategy within the context of our rapidly evolving understanding of “sustainability” and current Government policies for Localism and The Big Society. These set out clear requirements to ensure that the needs and expectations of local people are fully integrated within delivery objectives.
- We have traditionally tended to approach the restoration of brownfield land from the point of view of the balance between the physical costs of remediation and the direct economic returns that restoration will bring. Whilst an awareness of the wider social and environmental benefits may have helped the decision process it has tended not to be the primary motivator.
- In the context of trying to achieve greater levels of sustainability from the restoration process this paper argues for a shift in thinking, which will place social impacts and the true costs of leaving derelict land un-restored at the heart of funding and remediation decisions.

Key issues

- Brownfield restoration is as much a social paradigm as it is a technical one. There is a need to develop a clearer understanding of what impacts dereliction and blight bring to local people and communities. This in turn will allow us to gain a much better appreciation of what the real costs to society are of leaving land un-restored when it cannot be developed.
- There is already a strong body of evidence to show how derelict and disturbed land can create a whole range of “social ills” in terms of mental and physical health, and reduced opportunity and well being. However the actual costs of these impacts to society tend not to be fully understood (or at least addressed) nor are the potential savings to be made by tackling them through delivering the appropriate remediation solution. Instead focus is instead on the cost of remediating.
- Gaining this understanding would enable a critical shift in thinking whereby we can move from a position where funding is brought forward not on the basis of the need to address remediation for its own sake, but on the basis of its ability to realise a whole range of social, economic and environmental gains brought about through the remediation process.

Opportunities

Such an approach creates a range of potential advantages:

- It enables greater clarity in developing realistically costed proposals commensurate with the full range of objectives and benefits to be gained through delivery.
- It enables a greater dialogue with those people with most directly affected by the land and how it may ultimately be used.
- Successful community engagement can better inform the development and design process enabling solutions more able to meet and fit with local needs. It creates opportunities to deliver a whole range of goods and services to local communities related to health, recreation, education and skills. There is a need consider how local community engagement can be best utilised to meet shared objectives.
- A strong social dimension can be critical in helping to secure long-term sustainable solutions for restored land. Evidence supports the notion that a “community” that feels good about their environment very often feels better about themselves thus helping create a greater sense of well-being in which a more positive approach to wider social and economic activities can take

place. In practical terms the opportunity to engage with local people on how their local land might be maintained, used and managed can make a significant contribution to creating a sense of worth in the area thereby contributing to its better care and reducing maintenance costs in the long-term and importantly helping avoid future dereliction. There is a need to develop robust methods of capturing the values successful community engagement can bring to the land management process.

Recommendations

Consider the case for moving towards a more socially led means to brownfield regeneration based on a greater understanding of:

- The full costs to society of leaving land un-restored
- The development of restoration solutions most able to deliver a range of locally derived social goods and services

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