



Spatial Economics Research Centre

Wednesday, 9 June 2010

Well, that's one (brownfield) target met

In 1998, approximately 50% of development occurred on brownfield land (a figure that had been remarkably stable for long periods of time). The Labour government committed itself to a target of 60% of new development on brownfield land by 2008. The target had been met by the early 2000s. In 2005, [73% of new development](#) was on brownfield land.

Brownfield land is expensive to build on. It is often re-developed at high density to meet national targets. Lots of it is in ex-industrial cities where demand for housing is low. Large pieces of land that become available (ex MOD or NHS sites) are some way from existing settlements (working against stated objectives on densification). Worse, as [highlighted by the coalition government today](#), a large proportion of building on "brownfield" land has been building on private residential gardens.

In short, top down targets for brownfield land haven't delivered the kind of housing people want in the places where they want to live. They have also been terribly unpopular with local residents. If top down planning doesn't appear to be making anyone happy*, then you have to welcome today's announcement to localise decision around building on private gardens.

But, all of this comes with a very big caveat: It is still unclear how the coalition government is going to ensure local residents in popular places are offered sufficient incentives to say "yes" to new housing. Partly the existing brownfield target was met because not many houses were being built (and not just the recession). Prevent building on gardens and supply falls further. Lower supply means higher prices and greater price volatility. We are promised reform of the planning system, if we are not to make the same mistakes as the last government, it has to tackle the incentive problem head on.

*[I guess it makes planners happy - by some figures the sixth fastest growing occupation in the England in the past decade]

Posted by [Prof Henry G. Overman](#) on [Wednesday, June 09, 2010](#)

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2 comments:

TomA said...

I agree, but there remains massive support for brownfield-first. People seem to see it as a free lunch, which it isn't.

Zac Goldsmith was on Today on Wednesday and gave 3 ways to increase housing supply: empty homes, "prioritising" brownfield development and high speed rail.

Btw, the planners stat comes from the UKCES Skills Audit

[10 June 2010 at 14:51](#)



Tim said...

Zac G also said that the end of garden grabbing would mean that Richmond would go from being top of developers target list to bottom. He is probably right. But house prices do suggest expansion in and around Richmond would be a good thing.

[28 June 2010 at 23:54](#)

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