

Key takeaways from our...

BROWNFIELD INTELLIGENCE NETWORK

Environment Analyst's Brownfield Intelligence Network, an exclusive corporate members and special guests only debate and networking afternoon, was held on 8 October 2019 at the Millennium Gloucester Hotel in London.

The event provided a platform for senior-level executives within the brownfield sector to discuss key issues affecting their businesses including: the future of the brownfield development market; the skills shortage and impact of technology on staffing; international opportunities and the role of the UK market; and biodiversity net gain and delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan.



For further information on our Brownfield Intelligence Network and future meetings, please contact:

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Exploring the Future Shape, Structure & Policies Affecting the Brownfield Development Market

- Bigger companies taking the bigger sites - smaller developers and companies get what is left
- Brownfield has become mainstream and there is scope for smaller companies and specialists. Trend to middle market disappearance
- Land Remediation Relief – lack of use – too public? And doubts about research and development relief – mixed views
- Brownfield and contaminated land clean-up grants are difficult to find. Some companies don't want to get involved in public-sector market
- Innovative model - Meridian Waters; Enfield using Gross Development Value – could be copied by other local authorities
- Discussion on HMRC tightening of tax on contaminated soils - amendment to landfill tax regulations – stick and no carrot
- Companies involved want certainty and risk reduction – questions over whether the Definition of Waste Code of Practice is fulfilling or can fulfil this? Increased amount of material going to landfill partly due to this
 - Landfill industry has an effective lobbying machine which helps holes to get filled
 - Under the voluntary code of practice – is what is a waste defined enough? Specialists in the same company can't agree. Topsoil and made ground are particular issues
 - Another issue - soil transfer and inability to use it on site of origin
 - Environment Agency is used to dealing with industrial process waste. Tendency to treat contaminated land 'waste' as hazard-based process waste. There are different attitudes in different regions. Example given of Vertase at Sandford Farm needing to get a bespoke permit
 - Suggestions that qualified persons deal with risk assessing waste from brownfield sites – following Quality Mark scheme. Some expressed doubts whether consultants would want to put themselves in the firing line
- National Quality Mark Scheme – off to a bad start – CLOs felt under attack and side-lined. Some evidence of increased take-up among local authorities following mention in the revised NPPF but still a way to go
- Could there be a risk-based approach to waste from brownfield sites post Brexit and Waste Framework Directive?
- Clearer definitions of competence needed. Lack of definition of competence in NPPF
- Incidents such as Whaley Bridge and Grenfell highlight the need for maintaining and increasing standards. Example given of meeting regulations by fitting a gas membrane as an afterthought – but not enough attention to fitting it properly – causing potential problems in future
- In relation to Part 2a – could there be a blight test?
- Should there be a new term in the lexicon – Brownfield Preferred?

Skills & Recruitment: Tackling the Skills Shortage & Managing the Impact of Technology on Staffing

- Group agreed the biggest challenge was finding staff with 4-10 years' experience
- The "void" between graduate training and chartership
- Some of the larger firms are now recruiting more graduates, and looking to train them
- Partnerships with universities help.
- Some consultants focus on retaining a small core team of technical leaders while building a team around them of "churners" on lower salaries
- In the remediation contracting field, there is a need to find staff with HND or similar qualifications (rather than degrees) but it is really difficult to attract people. Trying apprenticeships
- Recruitment consultancies don't tend to draw quality applicants
- Difficult to find people who are happy to work outdoors
- Mega projects have reduced scope for broad skills development. (e.g. London Olympics a few years back; major infrastructure projects today). They lead staff to become too specialized, rather narrow. When they come back into the office, they can find it hard to adapt to new jobs, can need retraining
- Skills focus linked to chartership has helped the industry to focus on standards at a time when there has been a reduction of regulatory oversight
- Group agreed that it would be a good idea to promote staff exchanges between companies, e.g. between consultants and contractors
- Digital solutions are currently a threat to SMEs in the areas of Building Information Modelling, Computer Aided Design and Geographic Information Systems because larger firms can develop the solutions. But this could change as technology becomes more readily available
- Practical experience of remediation is declining because there is less remediation taking place.

International Opportunities & the Role of the UK Brownfield Development Market

- Companies are pursuing opportunities mainly where there are existing corporate clients are seeking help in their international projects and there is an existing trusted relationship with that client
- Opportunities for large strategic projects, western facing areas like Singapore and Hong Kong
- Multi-national opportunities for pan-world consultancy/ contractors including asset management
- Limited success in bidding for opportunities in the open market
- UK well established and well developed along with countries such as Australia and South Africa, but some countries have a lack of brownfield/ contaminated land policy
- Liability issues
- Who is the regulator?
- In some Middle Eastern countries, the equivalent of EA can be difficult. Examples of royalty over-ruling environmental rules
- Different cultural interpretations of standards. Some expect conditions in the contract to be met without any inspection or verification
- Regulatory attitudes differ in Europe too. Different funding, housing and population drivers
- Decline in value of the pound - an opportunity?
- Opportunity for contaminated land consultancy on the back of multi-disciplinary work – renewables, energy efficiency and climate change solutions.

Biodiversity Net Gain and Delivering the 25 Year Environment Plan in Brownfield Planning & Development

- Lessons learned from contaminated land regime of last 10-20 years. How apply to BNG? What lessons can be learned?
- Need to think out strategies for example, skills
- Re the 25 Year plan – little action or talk from government on BNG
- Emphasis that Biodiversity Net Gain will be Mandatory and managed for 30 years
- Viability issues being discussed
- Dangers of managing ‘the problem away’; creating less units; creating less biodiverse habitats to begin with – weed-killer etc
- Lead being taken by NGO interest groups
- Questions arise over appropriate persons; is a Quality Mark Scheme needed?
- Opportunity to embrace BNG and re-imagine brownfield sites; placemaking
- Need to know who is doing what; where input can be most effective, for example technical standards
- How will agreements diverge from Section 106 agreements?
- Will BNG limit the amount of remediation? Will it lead to more creative schemes? Does it justify some greenfield development?
- Land Trust as a model?
- Paying for maintenance – how will it work?



Facilitators

- Ian Grant, *Editorial Director*, Environment Analyst
- Hugh Mallett, *Technical Director*, BuroHappold
- Richard Clayton, *Director & Head of Ground Risk and Remediation*, WSP Group
- Alison Carruthers, *Associate Hydrogeologist Contaminated Land*, Mott MacDonald
- Paul Sheehan, *Technical Director*, Langan International

Companies who attended include:

- Hydrock
- CGL
- Delta-Simons Environmental Consultants
- Soilfix
- Westenviro
- RSK
- VolkerStevin
- RSK
- GeoStream
- BuroHappold
- WSP Group
- Mott MacDonald
- Langan International

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