

Making **best use** of surplus public sector assets



Case study

Working together for results

In spring 2002 English Partnerships and the South West Regional Development Agency concluded a joint deal to buy RAF Locking, a former training school in Weston super Mare. The plan is to create a mixed-use development that will be part of a broader vision for Weston being spearheaded by North Somerset Council.

This public sector partnership has brought together two sets of skills to deliver a common agenda. The RDA is charged with improving the economic and social well-being of the town while English Partnerships is committed to bringing about regeneration through physical development. By joining with English Partnerships, the RDA is able to call on a wide range of skills and expertise in planning, development and sales that will be vital in delivering this key component in the wider regeneration strategy for the area.

A top priority is to make the town much more cohesive, by attracting new business, creating new local jobs and making the older part of

the town more appealing to residents and visitors. As well as Locking, two other major brownfield sites – one of which is in private ownership – will contribute to the overall plan. Working together to deliver a single vision for Weston is going to provide the sort of well-planned comprehensive development that piecemeal working could never achieve.

“By working in partnership we are creating a far superior product,” says John Lewis, Projects Director for English Partnerships. *“It is gratifying – and important – that in the case of RAF Locking the private sector is keen to work with us and recognises that we can help add value to its plans. Weston is an excellent blueprint for partnership working. It shows that where public sector bodies take a joined-up approach and use their combined strengths we can bring forward development that will generate good financial returns and regeneration benefits.”*



RAF Locking,
Weston super Mare



“By working in partnership we are creating a far superior product”

Unlocking the potential of public sector property

The latest Review by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has provided English Partnerships with a fresh mandate and a clear strategy to support sustainable development and growth in England. We will focus on:

- Sustainable urban regeneration in areas of need
- Relieving housing market pressure, increasing affordability and tackling abandonment
- Promoting best practice in regeneration, development and good urban design
- Strategic brownfield redevelopment of both public and private sector land

Brownfield redevelopment

Making best use of the nation's scarce supply of land is one of our main areas of work. English Partnerships will produce and maintain a national brownfield strategy to ensure that as much new development as possible is accommodated on previously-developed land.

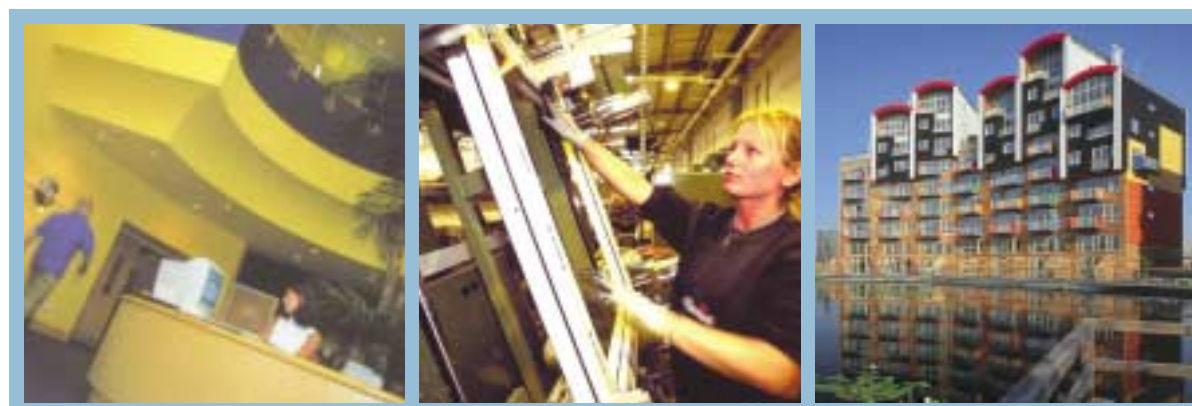
A major part of this strategy will be to ensure that the government makes the best use of its own surplus land and buildings. In this way we will reduce the amount of our countryside lost to development, while also strengthening the economies of established urban areas.

English Partnerships is therefore committed to working closely with other public sector bodies to maximise the potential of previously-developed land and property. One route is through our **Strategic Joint Ventures** initiative which aims to bring together the skills and expertise of English Partnerships with those of other public sector bodies, including local



authorities and Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) who are key to local delivery.

Photo by Nick Huffon



Making surplus assets work for you

Latest statistics reveal that England has around 67,000 ha of brownfield land, with a high proportion owned by public sector bodies. Traditionally, these landowners have been charged with disposing of their surplus assets by selling to the highest bidder.

The problem with this approach is that private sector investors are naturally only willing to invest in land or property that offers minimum risk and maximum profit. Poorly-located or contaminated tracts of land are often left unsold or abandoned. Development that does occur can end up being piecemeal or inappropriate to the local community.

With rapidly-expanding household growth in England, the pressure is on to provide more new homes and government now sees building on brownfield land as a priority. The spotlight is therefore firmly focused on finding better ways to use previously-developed land to help solve the country's housing problem.

Creating mechanisms that deliver results for the private and public sectors – while generating the types of development that serve the needs of our communities – is essential.

By partnering public sector landowners we can help to reduce risk and create a product that:

- Delivers strategic, long-term sustainable development
- Provides higher returns to the public sector
- Is in line with government policy to create sustainable communities
- Is more attractive to private sector investors

English Partnerships can add value by:

- Providing funding to decontaminate or clean up sites
- Investing in modern and essential infrastructure
- Securing planning consents
- Providing strategic planning expertise
- Undertaking site assembly that enhances site attraction and value





We take a flexible approach when it comes to partnership arrangements. Our expertise in planning, development, engineering, site assembly and funding initiatives makes us an adaptable partner who can call upon a range of skills.

Track record and **flexible approach**

A particular advantage of working with English Partnerships is that we are driven by our remit to deliver sustainable regeneration programmes and not solely by the level of financial returns. This means that in any partnership arrangement the land or property owner can reap the financial benefits associated with creating added-value sites.

The register of **surplus public sector assets**

- Work has begun on a register detailing surplus public sector assets in England. The register – referred to in the government's Sustainable Communities plan – will be created and maintained by English Partnerships.
- Surplus public sector assets are being defined as '*vacant land or buildings or property that is no longer required for the purposes of the public body*'. In addition, land that is to become surplus by a specified date can also be included.
- The register will focus on the land-holdings of the country's 200-plus public sector organisations. At this stage it is anticipated that a core of around 20 organisations will provide the bulk of the surplus assets. Local authority land holdings will not be included in the first phase of the register.
- Long-term, the database will be a comprehensive, interactive register, providing information such as digitised plans, site details and ownership data. The objective is to create a system that can be of benefit to all of the contributing organisations as well as allowing government to undertake its own assessments to ensure that surplus assets are being used in the most appropriate way.
- The first tranche of information is expected to be collated by summer 2003.



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