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Article

2026: From rust to riches – the year the brownfield opportunity is unlocked

Jenny Han • December 11, 2025

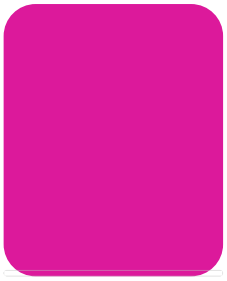
Once overlooked and forgotten, brownfield sites are fast becoming prime real estate for the next wave of infrastructure. From data centres and wind farms to battery storage facilities, these locations offer an answer to the challenge of sustainable development, and they are critical to the energy transition. As demand for renewable energy and electrification accelerates, brownfields provide the space to build the backbone of a low-carbon economy.

The benefits are clear. Regenerating blighted land, often already located close to existing transport and energy networks, reduces pressure on greenfield sites and revitalises communities. And while society demands greener energy and better infrastructure, few want these projects in their own backyard. Brownfields offer a compromise, repurposing land with a history of industry, rather than consuming untouched countryside.

But environmental liabilities loom large. Former industrial use often leaves behind legacy contamination, chemicals that degrade over time, creating unpredictable conditions. Even with thorough due diligence, site investigations are indicative, not exhaustive. Developers may uncover unexpected pollutants during excavation, facing operational exposures like dust, vapour, or chemical runoff. Extreme weather events, such as flooding, can carry contaminants, impacting nearby sites.

Insurance as an Enabler of Responsible Development

But through insurance, developers can have confidence to invest and realise the opportunities of brownfields, enabling sustainable regeneration and supporting the next energy transition whilst protecting people, communities and ecosystems.



Jenny Han

Focus Group Leader - Environmental

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