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England: Planning Policy Briefing

Green Belt briefing

What are Green Belts?

Green Belts are areas around certain towns, cities and large built-up areas, where the aim is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping the land permanently undeveloped.

There are over a dozen green belts in England and their combined area is 1,638,610 hectares (6326.7 square miles) or 13% of the land area of England in 2013/14, according to [DCLG figures](#).

Green Belt boundaries often cross local authority boundaries and this has consequences for planning development and growth and the retention of rural land and countryside.

Land is not included in green belts due to its landscape or ecological value. Green Belts should not be confused with “greenfield” land, which is any land not already built on, nor with countryside or rural land, which is covered by different policies.

Where do Green Belts come from?

The Greater London Regional Planning Committee proposed a green belt around London in the 1930s. However the concept did not obtain statutory force until the first county development plans in the 1950s. The Conservative Government urged county councils to establish green belts in a Circular in 1955.

Green Belts were greatly extended in the County Structure Plans of the 1970s, and confirmed in the Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) of the 2000s. Following the abolition of both structure plans and RSS, green belts are currently found in individual local plans for local authority districts, boroughs or cities.

What is the purpose of Green Belts?

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) says the purposes of green belts are to:

- Check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas
- Prevent neighbouring towns from merging
- Safeguard the countryside from encroachment
- Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- Assist urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

What can happen in Green Belts?

The NPPF says that the following activities are “appropriate”:

- Provision for outdoor sport, recreation and cemeteries provided the development maintains the openness of the green belt
- Modest extensions to existing buildings
- Replacement of existing buildings
- Limited infilling in villages and limited affordable housing to meet local community needs
- Redevelopment of previously developed land provided it would not have a greater impact than the existing development

Any other development is deemed to be not “appropriate”.

Can Green Belts be changed?

The designation or de-designation of green belts should only be made in exceptional circumstances through local plan reviews. This policy position allows local planning authorities to retain the same coverage of green belt but change the boundary by de-designating existing areas and designating other areas they deem more appropriate.

The Conservative Government elected in 2015 remains committed to protecting the green belts.

Can neighbourhood plans alter the Green Belt boundary?

Green Belt boundaries can only be altered through a review of the local plan. This means that neighbourhood plans cannot seek to extend green belt boundaries or allocate areas of land for development within existing green belts. This position was reaffirmed in the [response to recommendation 7](#) of the CLG Select Committee Inquiry into the Operation of the National Planning Policy Framework.

Can I see a map of the Green Belts?

The Daily Telegraph has produced an interactive zoomable map of England's green belts. You can view it here:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/greenpolitics/planning/9708387/Interactive-map-Englands-green-belt.html>

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