



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# Local Planning Authority Green Belt: England 2016/17

- The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2017 was estimated at 1,634,700 hectares, around 13% of the land area of England.
- Overall there was a decrease of 790 hectares (less than 0.05%) in the area of Green Belt between 31 March 2016 and 31 March 2017. In 2016/17, eight local planning authorities adopted new plans which resulted in a decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 31 March 2016.



## Planning *Statistical Release*

7 September 2017

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# Introduction

This Statistical Release presents National Statistics on estimates of the area of designated Green Belt land in England and by local authority, as at 31 March 2017.

## Context

England has a land area of just under 13,046,200 hectares (according to the Office for National Statistics mean high-water mark<sup>1</sup>). Of this land, around 11 per cent<sup>2</sup> is developed, while more than a third<sup>3</sup> is protected from development through being part of an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, a National Park or part of the Green Belt.

The Government attaches great importance<sup>4</sup> to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their openness and their permanence.

Green Belt serves five purposes:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

As stated in the National Planning Policy Framework<sup>5</sup>,

*Inappropriate development is, by definition, harmful to the Green Belt and should not be approved except in very special circumstances. When considering any planning application, local planning authorities should ensure that substantial weight is given to any harm to the Green Belt. 'Very special circumstances' will not exist unless the potential harm to the Green Belt by reason of inappropriateness, and any other harm, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.*

Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ons.maps.arcgis.com/home/item.html?id=a79de233ad254a6d9f76298e666abb2b>

<sup>2</sup> Derived from Office for National Statistics [Built up Areas 2011](#)

<sup>3</sup> Derived from data published by the department and Natural England

<sup>4</sup> [National Planning Policy Framework](#), DCLG, 2012

<sup>5</sup> Paragraphs 87 and 88

### Urban core areas

Green Belt land is distributed around fifteen urban cores. These are mapped in Map 1 and listed in Table 3, which also gives the area of land associated with each urban core. The largest two areas account for 61 per cent of the total area of Green Belt land between them: the Metropolitan Green Belt (London area) and Liverpool, Manchester and West Yorkshire, both at 31 per cent.

## Extent of the Green Belt as at 31 March 2017

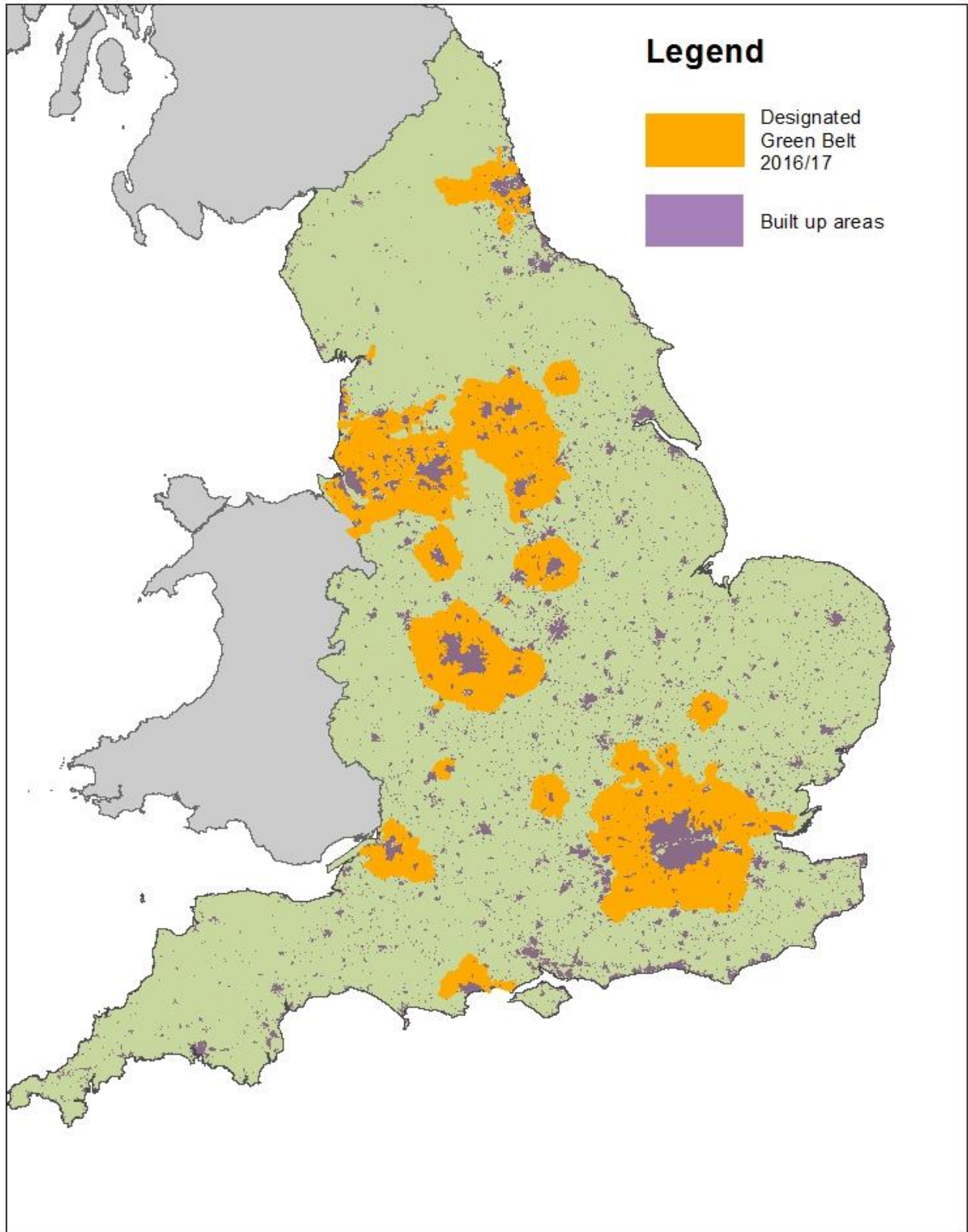
The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2017 is shown in *Map 1* overleaf. It was estimated at 1,634,700 hectares, around 13 per cent of the land area of England.

*Annex Table 1* shows estimates of the area of Green Belt land in each of the 186 local authorities with some Green Belt land in their area as at 31 March 2017. *Annex Table 2* compares estimates as at 31 March 2017 with the revised estimates as at 31 March 2016 by local authority. The orange areas in Map 1 show the distribution of Green Belt land in England, surrounding fifteen urban cores. More details are given in *Table 3*.

**Map 1:**

  
Department for  
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# Extent of Green Belt as at 31st March 2017



Produced by the Housing and Planning Analysis Division, HPAD

Data Sources

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OS Boundary-Line, DCLG AGB1 Return

# Net changes

Overall, there was a decrease of 790 hectares (less than 0.05 per cent) in the area of Green Belt in England between 31 March 2016 and 31 March 2017.

In 2016/17, eight local authorities adopted new plans that involved a change in area of the authority's Green Belt, resulting in a decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 31 March 2016. The changes are set out in *Table 1*. There may be discrepancies between individual figures due to rounding, given that all figures have been rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

**Table 1: Authorities which adopted new boundaries for the designated Green Belt 2016/17**

Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 31 March 2016 (hectares)	Area of designated Green Belt land 31 March 2017 (hectares)	Change from 31 March 2016 (hectares)
Birmingham	4,150	3,730	- 420 (-10%)
Bromsgrove	19,480	19,300	-180 (-1%)
Hertsmere	8,040	7,990	- 60 (-1%)
High Peak <sup>1</sup>	3,980	3,980	- (-0%)
Redditch	1,830	1,800	- 30 (-2%)
South Derbyshire <sup>2</sup>	2,390	2,390	- (0%)
Stratford-on-Avon	22,370	22,360	- 20 (-0%)
Vale of White Horse	8,310	8,230	-90 (-1%)

Note: figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

<sup>1</sup> Area decreased by less than five hectares.

<sup>2</sup> South Derbyshire has also revised the Green Belt area for 2015/16, resulting in a net increase in area of one hectare; see explanation in Annex A for details.

The reported decrease of 790 hectares of Green Belt during 2016/17 is smaller than the 1,020 hectares decrease reported in 2015/16. In the four years prior to 2014/15, not more than four local authorities made amendments in any one year: see *Table 2*.

**Table 2: Number of authorities making changes to Green belt boundaries**

Year	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
Number of authorities changing their Green Belt boundary	3	3	4	3	11	8	8
Net change in size of the Green Belt boundary (hectares)	0	-50	-320	-530	-2,130	-1,020	-790

Note: the area figures reflect any revisions made; they are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

Local authorities making changes to their Green Belt boundaries were contacted to obtain explanations for the changes, which are detailed in *Annex A*.

## Longer term changes

Statistics on the area of Green Belt are available back to 1997 (*Annex Table 3*). Figures are, however, available on a consistent basis only from 2006, following the designation of 47,300 hectares of Green Belt land as part of the New Forest National Park in 2005. Those from 31 March 2014 are set out in *Table 3*.

**Table 3: Trend in the area of Green Belt land as at 31 March since 2014, England**

	2014	2015 <sup>R</sup>	2016 <sup>R</sup>	2017	% change 2014-17
<b>England</b>	1,638,630	1,636,500	1,635,490	1,634,700	0
<b>Urban core</b>					
Birmingham	231,350	231,250	231,230	230,580	0
Blackpool	2,600	2,600	2,600	2,600	0
Bournemouth	36,380	36,000	36,000	36,000	-1
Bristol and Bath	71,730	71,630	71,630	71,630	0
Burton upon Trent	730	730	720	720	-1
Cambridge	25,100	25,100	25,180	25,180	0
Derby and Nottingham	61,400	60,700	60,700	60,700	-1
Gloucester	7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500	0
Liverpool, Manchester and West Yorks.	504,570	504,400	503,410	503,410	0
London area	514,200	514,080	514,080	514,030	0
Morecombe	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740	0
North East	73,060	72,490	72,430	72,430	-1
Oxford	34,990	34,990	34,990	34,910	0
Stoke	44,440	44,440	44,440	44,440	0
York	27,940	27,940	27,940	27,940	0

<sup>R</sup> Revised since the original estimate was published.

The total of urban core Green Belt areas will not therefore match the England total. The area figures reflect any revisions made; they are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

Local authorities may be mapped within the Green Belt of more than one urban core.

## Accompanying annex tables

Three additional annex tables are available to download alongside this release:

- Table 1 Area of designated Green Belt land by local planning authority as at 31 March 2017
- Table 2 Difference in Green Belt area between 31 March 2016 and 31 March 2017
- Table 3 Historical trend in the area of Green Belt land since 1997

They are available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/green-belt-statistics>.

In addition, a geographic boundary (shape) file setting out Green Belt area boundaries as at 31 March 2017 is available at <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/english-local-authority-green-belt-dataset1>.

## Uses of the data

The local authority Green Belt boundaries are used in DCLG's Land Use Change Statistics, to assess the level of development within the Green Belt, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/land-use-change-statistics>

The summary statistics of land use changes within designated Green Belt land are:

- In 2015/16, two per cent of new residential addresses created were within the Green Belt. This is a decrease from the three per cent recorded in 2014/15.
- In 2015/16, 57 per cent of new residential addresses created within the Green Belt were built on previously-developed land. This is an increase on the 56 per cent recorded in 2014/15.
- Of the area of all land changing to residential use in 2015/16, eight per cent was within designated Green Belt, an increase from the seven per cent recorded in 2014/15.

Detailed statistics on changes within the Green Belt can also be found in the Land Use Change Live Tables, numbers P310, P311 and P380 to P383, accessible from the above link.

## Revisions to 2015/16 estimates

The revised Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2016 is estimated at 1,635,490 hectares. This is an increase of 10 hectares on the previous estimate of 1,635,480 hectares published in September 2016.

The change to the estimate of the area of Green Belt land as at 31 March 2016 was due to minor corrections of the area of five local authorities' Green Belts. The reasons given for the updated figures provided for 2015/16 are given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Reasons for amending the Green Belt area as at 31 March 2016**

<b>Reason for updated Green Belt area</b>	<b>Number of local planning authorities</b>	<b>Size of change hectares</b>
Positional accuracy improvements	1	-10
Other improved measuring technique	2	-50
Change in boundary	1	-10
No change but incorrect figure	1	80

# Annex A – explanation of changes in 2016/17

## **Birmingham**

“We have revised the greenbelt area following the adoption of our Birmingham Development plan in January 2017, which has policy to build on the greenbelt.”

## **Bromsgrove**

“The Green Belt in Bromsgrove was changed following adoption of the Bromsgrove District Plan 2011-2030 in January 2017. The Plan allocates two sites in Bromsgrove on the boundary with Redditch Borough Council for the housing needs of Redditch up to 2030.”

## **Hertsmere**

“A limited number of amendments were made to the Green Belt boundary in Hertsmere through the adoption of the council’s Site Allocations and Development Management (SADM) Policies Plan in November 2016 and publication of a new policies map. These documents form part of the Hertsmere local Plan 2012-2027 along with the Core Strategy 2013 and Elstree Way Corridor Area Action Plan 2015.

The main change was to remove a 63ha former hospital site from the Green Belt which was developed in the 1990s for housing. This change was in accordance with a commitment made in the Core Strategy 2013 because the nature of the site had changed from an open, semi-rural site to a largely suburban housing estate.

14.6ha of land on the edge of Borehamwood has also been designated as safeguarded land for employment development beyond 2027 and was taken out of the Green Belt through the SADM Policies Plan, in line with the Core Strategy.

A few minor adjustments have been made to define a more logical and defensible boundary around existing development. The largest of these is the removal of a 1.7ha private hospital site from the Green Belt in order to draw a continuous defensible boundary along the opposite side of a road. A further 0.3ha has been allocated for housing and removed from the Green Belt.

Approximately 4ha of land safeguarded for housing in the 2003 Local Plan has been returned to the Green Belt through the SADM Plan 2016 following its designation as a Village Green in the intervening period.”

## **High Peak**

“The Green Belt Boundary in Furness Vale was changed following the adoption of the High Peak Local Plan (LP) in April 2016. Studies concluded that this site did not meet Green Belt purposes. It is allocated for residential development with a capacity of around 39 dwellings. The following is quoted from the Inspector’s report:

The LP proposes a single change, at Furness Vale where land on the edge of the village adjacent to the A6 would be removed from the Green Belt and allocated for 39 dwellings. The site is enclosed by a road, canal and existing built development. The Council’s Landscape Impact Assess-



ment (January 2014 with updates in July and August 2014) (LIA) undertaken by Wardell Armstrong has demonstrated to my satisfaction that it does not contribute to the purposes of including land within the Green Belt. Furness Vale is identified as a larger village in the LP settlement hierarchy where a moderate scale of development is acceptable. Taking these factors together the exceptional circumstances test has been met and the exclusion of the land from the Green Belt has been justified. (Report into the Examination into High Peak Local Plan March 2016)”

### **Redditch**

“The Green Belt boundary in Redditch has changed following adoption of Borough of Redditch Local Plan No.4 in January 2017 (2011-2013). Approximately 35 hectares of land has been removed from the Green Belt for residential development at the edge of Redditch.”

### **South Derbyshire**

“In 2012 a technical assessment of the South East Derbyshire Green Belt was undertaken by South Derbyshire District Council, Amber Valley Borough Council, Derby City Council, Derbyshire County Council and Erewash Borough Council. It concluded that the A50 and A6 spur, completed since the Green Belt was first designated, formed a physical feature in the landscape. Consequently an area bounded by London Road and the A6, measuring 11.5ha, no longer contributed to the openness of the Green Belt and an area of land south west of Thulston, measuring 12.5ha, now appeared to perform a Green Belt role<sup>6</sup>. The Green Belt boundary has therefore been amended by deleting the area bounded by London Road and the A6 and adding the land to the south west of Thulston, resulting in a net increase in the Green Belt area. The change to the boundary has been made through the adoption of the South Derbyshire Local Plan Part 1, Policy S8.”

### **Stratford-on-Avon**

“The area of Green Belt in Stratford-on-Avon District has changed to accommodate two sites for Employment uses. Approximately 20 hectares of land have been removed from the Green Belt. One site on the edge of the District has been allocated through co-operation with Redditch and Bromsgrove Councils to help meet the employment land needs of Redditch. The change to the designation has been made after the Core Strategy Examination Inspector found the Plan’s approach to the Green Belt to be consistent with national policy and through the adoption of Stratford-on-Avon District Core Strategy by the Council on 11 July 2016.”

### **Vale of White Horse**

“Vale of White Horse District Council proposed a change to the Oxford Green Belt through their local plan process (set out in Local Plan 2031: Part 1), which was subject to scrutiny by independent Planning Inspector through an Examination in Public. The Inspector concluded that ‘exceptional circumstances’ had been demonstrated and that the plan proposals were soundly based and in accordance with national policy, guidance and legislation. The plan was adopted on 14th December 2016.”

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<sup>6</sup> Previous shapefiles and figures held by DCLG had the 12.5 ha west of Thulston mapped within the Green Belt though South Derbyshire have advised us this change only occurred in 2016/17. A revision to the 2015/16 estimate was therefore made to exclude the 12.5 ha west of Thulston from the 2015/16 estimate. The removal of 11.5 ha and addition of 12.5 ha in 2016/17, has therefore resulted in a marginal increase of Green Belt area by less than 1 ha.

# Technical notes

## Data collection and methods

Estimates of Green Belt land in individual local authorities in England are collected annually on the 'Annual Green Belt' (AGB1) return via Interform, the department's housing and planning electronic data collection system. Authorities were asked to confirm their published Green Belt estimates as at 31 March 2016 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2016/17. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if the estimated area as at 31 March 2016 had been revised, authorities were contacted to obtain an explanation and to provide a revised geographic boundary file (shape file).

Robust estimates of the area of Green Belt land in England by local planning authority were first published in 1997. Between 1998 and 2002 there was no further publication on the area of Green Belt, but from 2003, Green Belt estimates were collated on an annual basis to monitor the department's target on the area of Green Belt land in England. However, figures were not published for 2005 due to the extensive quality assurance required in that year.

The analysis carried out by the department verifies the area of the shape files supplied by local authorities, and aggregates them (together with previously provided boundaries for authorities who have not amended the Green Belt boundaries) to provide a national estimate of the area of Green Belt in England at a particular point in time. Any discrepancies are followed up with the authority and a corrected shape file obtained.

If there has been an actual change in Green Belt, rather than an improved measurement of its extent, this is followed up with the authority to determine the reason for the change. The statistics produced allow a comparison of Green Belt area between authorities and between different years.

The data collected have been chosen to provide useful and relevant information on the level and trends in the extent of the Green Belt to users while ensuring that the burden placed on local authorities of completing the return is not excessive. Only authorities who have changed the boundaries of their Green Belt, or who have corrected the boundaries, are asked to supply shape files.

## Data quality

Since 2007, the department has built and maintained its Green Belt dataset from local authority digital data supplied via the Interform return for local authorities. This requires authorities to mark the boundary of the Green Belt in their area on a suitable digital map. Authorities are asked to record which mapping product was used to create the Green Belt boundary. An indication on the level of quality assurance undertaken by the local authority is also recorded as part of the final sign-off for this return. All boundaries are checked to ensure that they match the area of the Green Belt as recorded by the local authority on the Interform return.

An England level dataset is created from the individual local authority boundaries, making sure that there is no overlap or duplication between different authorities. Trends in the area of Green Belt can be reliably and easily assessed both nationally and at a local authority level. No imputation is carried out as authorities who fail to respond are assumed to have had no change in Green Belt. Authorities are given the chance to correct previously published estimates, whether due to actual changes that were not submitted in time, or because of more accurate Green Belt boundary information. All calculations are carried out using exact measurements, but published information is rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

Authorities are supplied with comprehensive guidance to ensure that there is a common understanding of what information is to be supplied. The main possible source of error in the production of the statistics is a mismatch between the area estimate and the actual boundary supplied by the authority. This can occur because of the different geographical software used to define the boundaries. Any such discrepancies are rare and are investigated with the local authority concerned to ensure that the calculated area of the Green Belt matches the boundary file supplied.

There are also possible errors due to authorities not submitting information in time. These errors are minimised by a high response rate (98 per cent in 2016/17). In 2016/17, two authorities did not complete the return in time. It is assumed for these authorities that there has been no change in the boundary area. They are:

- Hounslow
- Rochford

The use of digital boundary files is much more cost effective and more accurate than the previous method of digitising paper maps. Given the increasing sophistication and accuracy of the software used to define and measure the Green Belt, estimates of its area should be very accurate and suitable for many different uses.

## Revisions policy

This policy has been developed in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official statistics and the Department for Communities and Local Government Revisions Policy (found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statistical-notice-dclg-revisions-policy>).

There are two types of revision that the policy covers:

### **Non-Scheduled Revisions**

Where a substantial error has occurred as a result of the compilation, imputation or dissemination process, the statistical release, live tables and other accompanying releases will be updated with a correction notice as soon as is practical.

## Scheduled Revisions

Local authorities are asked to confirm the previously published area of their Green Belt when completing returns for each annual statistical release. If they do not agree with this figure, or they have changed the digital boundaries to more accurately represent the actual Green Belt boundaries, and the difference between the revised and previously published areas is more than ten hectares, they are asked to submit a revised shape file to the Department.

## Scale of Revisions

The last three scheduled revisions have resulted in minor changes to the overall area of the Green Belt in England - the area at 31 March 2014 was revised from 1,638,610 hectares to 1,638,630 hectares, the area at 31 March 2015 was revised from 1,636,620 hectares to 1,636,500 hectares, and the area at 31 March 2016 was revised from 1,635,480 hectares to 1,635,490 hectares. However, individual local authority revisions can be more volatile.

## User engagement

Users are encouraged to provide feedback on how these statistics are used and how well they meet user needs. Comments on any issues relating to this statistical release are welcomed and encouraged. Responses should be addressed to the "Public enquiries" contact given in the "Enquiries" section below.

The department's engagement strategy to meet the needs of statistics users is published here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engagement-strategy-to-meet-the-needs-of-statistics-users>

## Notes

1. This Release is a web-only publication.
2. Details of officials who receive pre-release access to this statistical release 24 hours before publication can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/statistics>
3. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.

## Devolved administration statistics

Information and statistics on planning for the devolved administrations can be accessed at the following links:

Scotland: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Planning>

Wales: <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/planningstats/?lang=en>

Northern Ireland: <http://www.planningni.gov.uk/index/tools/about-statistics.htm>

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Information on Official Statistics is available via the UK Statistics Authority website:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/>

Information about statistics at DCLG is available via the department's website:

[www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/statistics](http://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/statistics)

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