



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

Local Authority Green Belt: England 2019-20



Planning Statistical Release

10 September 2020

- The extent of land designated as Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2020 was estimated at 1,615,800 hectares, around 12.4% of the land area of England.
- Overall there was a decrease of 3,520 hectares (0.2%) in the area of land designated as Green Belt between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2020.
- In 2019-20, fifteen local authorities adopted new plans, with the result being a net decrease of 3,170 hectares in the overall area of land designated as Green Belt compared to 31 March 2019.
- In addition, updates to the Local Authority District (Mean High Water mark) boundaries resulted in a net decrease of 350 hectares in the area of land designated as Green Belt, notably in coastal areas.

Introduction	2
Context	2
Extent of the Green Belt as at 31 March 2020	3
Net changes	5
Revisions to 2018-19 estimates	7
Longer term changes	7
Accompanying tables and geographic boundary files	8
Uses of the data	9
Annex A – explanations of changes in 2019-20	9
Technical notes	11
Enquiries	20

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Introduction

This Statistical Release presents National Statistics on estimates of the area of land designated as Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2020.

Context

England has a land area of just under 13,046,320 hectares¹ of which only about 8 per cent is of developed use.² When including land designated as Green Belt, just over 37 per cent of the area of England (4.9 million hectares) is protected against development by one or more environmentally-protected designations. Environmentally-protected designations include National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs).³

The National Planning Policy Framework states the Government attaches great importance 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:

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

Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, 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.

Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period. Where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been established through strategic policies, detailed

¹ As measured at the mean high water mark <http://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/standard-area-measurements-2019-for-administrative-areas-in-the-united-kingdom>

² Derived from [Land Use in England 2018](#), published by MHCLG

³ The proportions of land in each local authority area that are constrained by Green Belt, National Parks, AONBs or SSSIs were calculated using boundary data published by Natural England, available from <https://data.gov.uk/> Area figures were also published in September 2017 in conjunction with a Housing Need consultation. They are available in the 'Publication Data' sheet within the 'Housing need consultation data table' available from <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/planning-for-the-right-homes-in-the-right-places-consultation-proposals#history>

amendments to those boundaries may be made through non-strategic policies, including neighbourhood plans.

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 resulting from the proposal, is clearly outweighed by other considerations.

Related publications

It is useful to consider this statistical release alongside other statistical releases published by the department. [The Land Use](#) statistical release provides a breakdown of land uses within the Green Belt at Local Authority level. [The Land Use Change](#) statistical release provides information on the proportion of new residential addresses created within the Green Belt and the previous use of the land on which the new residential addresses were created, also at local authority level.

Extent of the Green Belt as at 31 March 2020

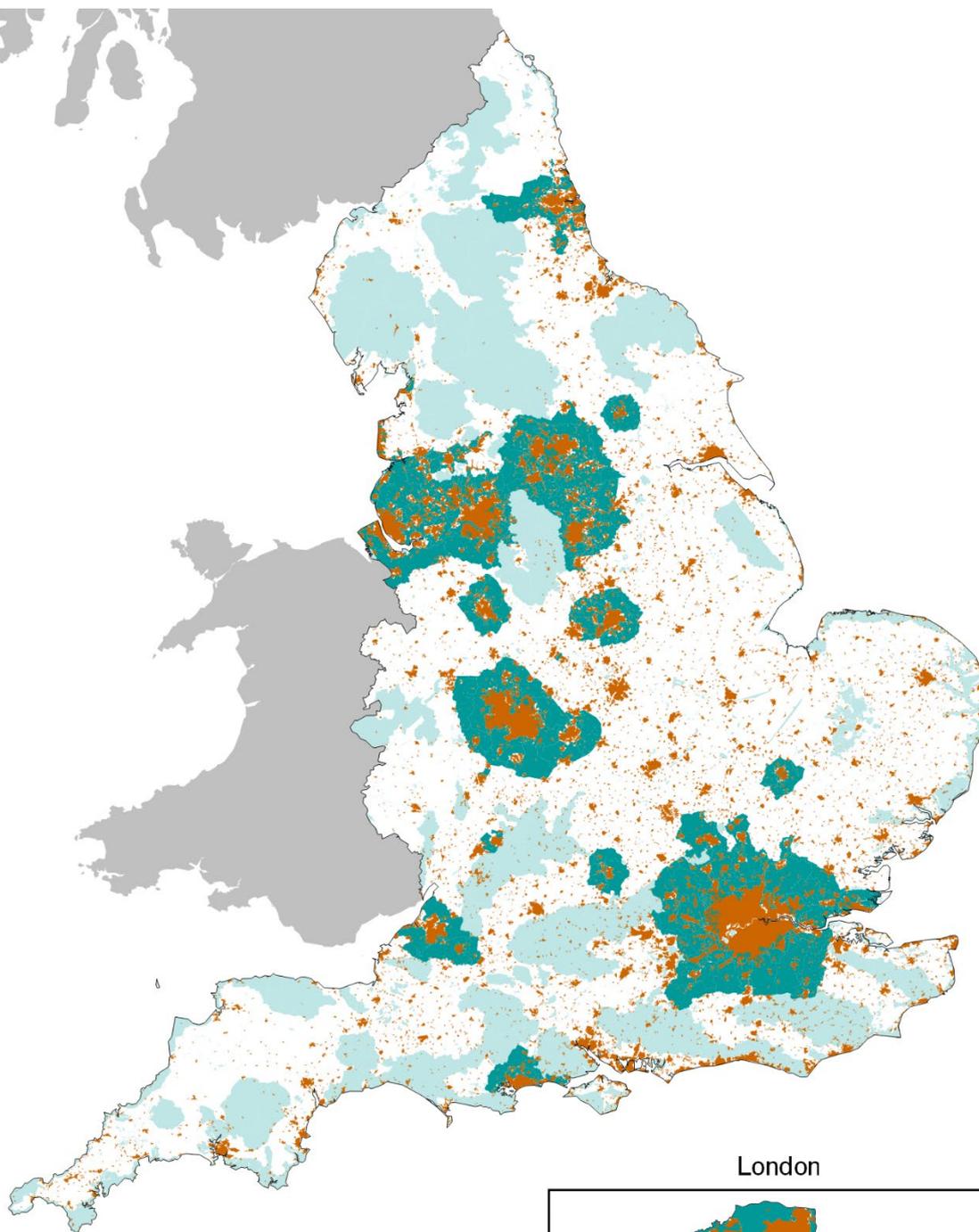
The extent of land designated as Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2020 is shown in *Map 1*, below. It was estimated at 1,616,150 hectares, around 12.4% of the land area of England.

A regional breakdown of the number of hectares designated as Green Belt and the proportion of the total regional land area designated as Green Belt is shown below in *Table 1*. The table shows the South East has the largest area of land designated as Green Belt with 306,340 hectares, followed by the West Midlands with 265,010 and Yorkshire and the Humber with 262,270 hectares. Out of the nine regions, London has the smallest area of land designated as Green Belt with 34,790 hectares but has the highest proportion of its total land area designated as Green Belt with 22.1%. The region with the smallest percentage of its land designated as Green Belt is the South West with 107,610 hectares, accounting for only 4.5% of its total land area.

Region	Green Belt area (hectares)	Percentage of total land area
East Midlands	77,490	5.0%
East of England	233,950	12.2%
London	34,790	22.1%
North East	71,960	8.4%
North West	256,100	18.1%
South East	306,340	16.0%
South West	107,610	4.5%
West Midlands	265,010	20.4%
Yorkshire and the Humber	262,570	17.0%
Total	1,615,800	12.4%

Note: hectareage figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

Map 1: Extent of Green Belt as at 31 March 2020

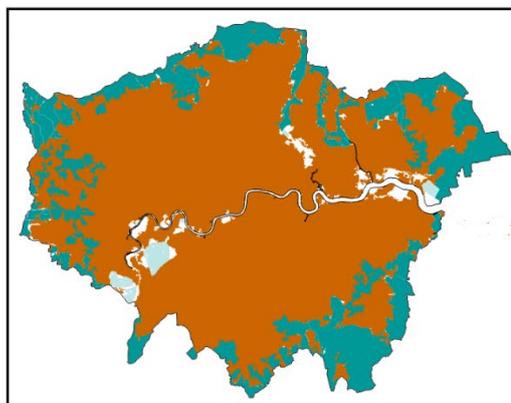


- ONS Mean High Water Mark boundary (2019)
- England Green Belt as at 31 March 2020
- Built-up areas (December 2011)
- Other designated protected areas

0 50 100 150 km



London



Produced by the Housing and Planning
Analysis Divison (HPAD), MHCLG

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Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database 2020

Urban core areas

Land designated as Green Belt is distributed around sixteen urban cores. These are mapped using the teal areas in *Map 1* and listed in *Table 4*, which also gives the area of land associated with each urban core. The Metropolitan Green Belt (London) is the largest area of land designated as Green Belt surrounding an urban core equating to just under 32% of the England total. Merseyside and Greater Manchester is the second largest with 15% along with South and West Yorkshire also with 15% (after rounding).

The 'Area by LA' table in the Accompanying tables shows estimates of the area of Green Belt land in each of the 183 out of the 317 local authorities that had some land designated as Green Belt as at 31 March 2020. The 'Change in area by LA' table in the Accompanying tables compares estimates as at 31 March 2020 with the revised estimates as at 31 March 2019 by Local Authority.

Changes in methodology

A methodological change has been introduced as part of this year's statistical release providing general improvements to mapping accuracy, boundary definitions and area calculations. The area of land designated as Green Belt for each Local Authority was previously calculated by local authorities but is now calculated by MHCLG using the digital Green Belt boundary files provided by the local authorities. The Local Authority Green Belt boundaries are mapped against ONS Local Authority District (Mean High Water mark) boundaries⁴ for the corresponding period. This results in greater accuracy in the delimiting of land designated as Green Belt where it meets coastal or estuarine areas and ensures a consistent national approach.

MHCLG have applied the changes in methodology to the Green Belt data for previous years to ensure a consistent time series. Revisions have been made to the hectare figures from 2013-14 onwards allowing users to better track the changes to the Green Belt over time.

The 'Net Changes' section has been amended to record the year on year net change made to the area of land designated as Green Belt resulting from Local Authority designation policies and net changes resulting from updates made to the Local Authority District (Mean High Water mark) boundaries for the corresponding period.

Net changes

Overall, there was a decrease of 3,520 hectares (0.2 per cent) in the area of land designated as Green Belt in England between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2020.

In 2019-20, fifteen local authorities adopted new plans that involved a change in area of the authority's land designated as Green Belt, resulting in a decrease of 3,170 hectares in the overall area of land designated as Green Belt compared to 31 March 2019. The changes are set out in *Table 2*. There may be discrepancies between individual figures due to rounding, with all figures rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

⁴ Local Authority Districts in the United Kingdom, as at 31 December 2019: (BFC) Full resolution - clipped to the coastline (Mean High Water mark). Available from <https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/>

Table 2: Local authorities which adopted new boundaries for designated land as Green Belt 2019/20

Local Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 31 March 2019 (hectares)	Area of designated Green Belt land 31 March 2020 (hectares)	Change from 31 March 2019 (hectares)
Bolsover	1,100	1,080	-20 (-2%)
Broxtowe	5,130	4,910	-220 (-4%)
Guildford ^R	24,110	22,640	-1,470 (-6%)
Hillingdon	4,970	4,870	-100 (-2%)
Lichfield	15,190	15,180	-20 (-0%)
Nottingham	750	740	-10 (-1%)
Nuneaton and Bedworth	3,600	3,250	-350 (-10%)
Oxford	1,290	1,270	-20 (-1%)
Reigate and Banstead ^R	8,880	8,770	-110 (-1%)
Rugby ^R	20,610	20,590	-20 (-0%)
Rushcliffe ^R	16,580	16,250	-330 (-2%)
Stevenage	260	180	-80 (-31%)
Sunderland ^R	3,350	3,180	-160 (-5%)
Vale of White Horse	8,230	8,090	-140 (-2%)
Wycombe ^R	15,750	15,630	-120 (-1%)

Note: hectareage figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

^R Local Authority estimate for 2018-19 also revised.

Of the fifteen local authorities reporting changes to their land designated as Green Belt, Guildford contributed 46% of this change alone, with a reduction in its Green Belt of six per cent.

The reported decrease of 3,170 hectares of land designated as Green Belt during 2019-20 is the third largest decrease reported in recent years, following the changes recorded in the previous two years. The number of local authorities making changes to land designated as Green Belt has also increased in recent years, particularly from 2014-15 onwards: see *Table 3*. Local authorities making changes to their Green Belt boundaries provided explanations for the changes on their AGB return. They are detailed in *Annex A*.

Updates made to the Local Authority District (Mean High Water mark) boundaries resulted in a net decrease of 350 hectares in the area of land designated as Green Belt, notably in coastal areas where the Mean High Water mark (average high-tide line) can shift year on year. The largest fluctuation was observed in Rochford with a net decrease of 220 hectares of land designated as Green Belt, notably in wetland areas. A breakdown of these net changes is provided at Local Authority level within the '*Change in area*' accompanying table.

A timeline showing the breakdown of net change reported in each year (from 2013-14 onwards), reflecting subsequent revisions made to the accuracy of the estimates of Green Belt in each year can be seen in *Table 3*.

Table 3: National summary of net changes to land designated as Green Belt

Year	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Number of local authorities changing their Green Belt boundary	3	11	8	8	10	13	15
Net change from Local Authority designation policies (hectares)	-530	-1,890	-1,070	-1,190	-6,090	-3,860	-3,170
Net change from Local Authority digital boundary updates (hectares)	-5,240	0	40	10	-20	0	-350
Total net change (hectares)	-5,770	-1,890	-1,030	-1,180	-6,110	-3,860	-3,520

Note: hectareage figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

Revisions to 2018-19 estimates

Revisions are made each year to the published estimates for the previous year in order to accurately calculate the net change in Green Belt area. The revised Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2019 is estimated at 1,619,320 hectares. This is a decrease of 1,830 hectares on the previous estimate of 1,621,150 hectares published in October 2019.

Eighty-six revisions have been reported with the majority due to the methodology changes introduced as part of this year's release. A summary of the scale of revisions over the preceding statistical releases, is available under the 'Scale of revisions' heading in the Technical Notes Section.

Longer term changes

Statistics on the area of Green Belt are available back to 1997, in the 'Area since 1997 – England' table of the Accompanying tables. 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 4, broken down by urban core*.

Table 4: Trend in the area of Green Belt land as at 31 March since 2013-14, hectares

	2013-14 ^R	2014-15 ^R	2015-16 ^R	2016-17 ^R	2017-18 ^R	2018-19 ^R	2019-20
England	1,633,390	1,631,500	1,630,470	1,629,290	1,623,180	1,619,320	1,615,800
Urban Core							
Bath and Bristol	71,820	71,710	71,710	71,710	71,710	71,700	71,710
Birmingham	231,480	231,400	231,320	230,670	227,640	227,440	227,050
Blackpool	2,580	2,580	2,580	2,590	2,590	2,520	2,510
Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	35,250	34,850	34,850	34,840	34,840	34,780	34,810
Burton-upon-Trent and Swadlincote	730	730	730	730	730	730	730
Cambridge	26,160	26,160	26,160	26,160	26,150	26,100	26,100
Carnforth, Lancaster and Morecambe	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740
Cheltenham and Gloucester	7,490	7,490	7,490	7,490	6,230	6,190	6,190
Derby and Nottingham	61,420	60,720	60,720	60,710	60,710	60,510	59,950
London	513,170	513,260	513,270	513,220	513,050	511,310	509,110
Merseyside and Greater Manchester	251,730	251,620	250,840	250,840	249,370	249,360	249,300
Oxford	35,000	35,000	35,000	34,910	34,910	34,910	34,760
South and West Yorkshire	249,600	249,610	249,430	249,040	249,000	247,500	247,480
Stoke-on-Trent	44,470	44,470	44,470	44,470	44,440	44,450	44,450
Tyne and Wear	72,860	72,300	72,300	72,300	72,190	72,120	71,960
York	27,900	27,870	27,870	27,870	27,870	27,970	27,970

Note: Figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

^R Revised (in this publication) since the original estimate was published

Accompanying tables and geographic boundary files

Additional tables, on total area and changes to land designated as Green Belt (annual), are available to download alongside this release. The tables are as follows:

'Area by LA'	Designated Green Belt land - area by local authority as at 31 March 2020 and comparison with total land area
'Change in area by LA'	Change in Green Belt area between 31 March 2019 and 31 March 2020
'Area since 1997 – England'	Area of Green Belt land since 1997, England
'Area by LA 2013-14 to 2019-20' .csv	Designated Green Belt land – area by local authority (annually) from 31 March 2014 to 31 March 2020.

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

In addition, geographic boundary (shape) files setting out Green Belt area boundaries are available at <https://data.gov.uk/>.

Uses of the data

The local authority Green Belt boundaries are used in MHCLG's Land Use Change Statistics and the statistical release: Land Use in England 2018, to assess the level of development within the Green Belt.

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

- In 2017-18, two per cent of new residential addresses created were within the Green Belt. This is a decrease one per cent from the three per cent recorded in 2016-17.
- In 2017-18, 53 per cent of new residential addresses created within the Green Belt were built on previously developed land. This is an increase on the 51 per cent recorded in 2016-17.
- In 2018, 7 per cent of land designated as Green Belt in England is of developed use with 93 per cent of land of non-developed use.
- Of the Green Belt land area, 0.3 per cent is of a residential use with residential gardens accounting for a further 2.9 per cent.

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 below link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/land-use-change-statistics>

Detailed statistics on land uses within the Green Belt can also be found in the Land Use in England 2018 Live Tables P401a and P401b, accessible from the below link:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-land-use>

Annex A – explanation of changes in 2019-20

Bolsover District Council

The boundary of the North East Derbyshire Green Belt was reviewed during the preparation of the Local Plan for Bolsover District. This local Green Belt review led to the removal of 21.2 ha of land from the Green Belt upon the adoption of the Local Plan on 4th March 2020 and this change accounts for the majority of the reduced figure. The figure has also been slightly affected by a recent technical adjustment to the District boundary on the shape boundary file, which increased the measured area by 0.5 ha. These changes have meant an overall reduction of Green Belt land of 20.7 ha

<https://www.bolsover.gov.uk/index.php/local-plan-documents>

Broxtowe Borough Council

Our Part 2 Local Plan was adopted on 16th October 2019; this involved some Green Belt boundary changes.

<https://www.broxtowe.gov.uk/for-you/planning/planning-policy/local-plan/part-2-local-plan/adoption/>

Guildford Borough Council

Adopted new Local Plan on 25/04/2019, which removed areas of land from the Green Belt.

<https://www.guildford.gov.uk/localplan/2015-2034>

Hillingdon London Borough

The London Borough of Hillingdon Local Plan: Part 2 was adopted on 16th January 2020. This document included alterations to the existing Green Belt, including both de-designations and extensions. The major change was the de-designation of Green Belt land which used to contain the Perry Oaks Sludge Works, but now contains the completed Heathrow Terminal 5. There were also changes between Metropolitan Open Land and Green Belt. These alterations were described as follows in the Inspector's Report on the Public Examination: ' a number of minor changes to the Green Belt boundary that have been proposed to take account of mapping errors, planning permissions (including Terminal 5 at Heathrow), and changes in physical features. These are detailed in the Green Belt Assessment Update document (2013) and shown on the Policies Map and would ensure the boundary is logical and robust. Consequently, exceptional circumstances exist to justify these boundary changes.' The Local Plan: Part 2 did not include changes to the Green Belt boundaries in order to facilitate an identified unmet need for development.

<https://archive.hillingdon.gov.uk/lpp2>

Lichfield District Council

Lichfield District Council adopted its 'Local Plan Allocations' document on 16th July 2019 (link to document: <https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/local-plan/local-plan-allocations/1>). Policy B1 within the document makes a change to the Green Belt boundary within the District. This changes are reflected in the figures provided.

<https://www.lichfielddc.gov.uk/local-plan/local-plan-strategy/1>

Nottingham City Council

Adoption of our new Part 2 Local Plan that replaced the policies map. A substantial Green Belt review was undertaken as part of this process which included some minor amendments to the Green Belt to make it more accurate and comply with national policy on defining Green Belt boundaries. A more substantial amendment was made to allow the allocation of housing development using exceptional circumstances.

<https://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/information-for-business/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/the-local-plan-and-planning-policy/the-adopted-local-plan/>

Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council

The plan-making process demonstrated exceptional circumstances to alter the Green Belt at various locations. Following examination of the Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Plan, by an independent inspector, the Plan was adopted in June 2019. The Green Belt was de-designated at various locations and the land allocated for either housing or employment land.

https://www.nuneatonandbedworth.gov.uk/info/21014/planning_policy/146/borough_plan_information

Oxford City Council

Planning department advised some sites have now been removed from Green Belt.

https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20067/planning_policy/1311/oxford_local_plan_2016-2036

Reigate and Banstead Borough Council

The borough's Green Belt boundaries have been amended following the Council's new Development Management Plan adopted in September 2019.

https://www.reigate-banstead.gov.uk/news/article/223/reigate_and_banstead_s_local_plan_adopted

Rugby Borough Council

The Rugby Borough Local Plan was adopted 4th June 2019. The plan contained several housing allocations on the edge of rural settlements located in the Green Belt. The Planning Inspector considered the plan was sound and the allocated areas were therefore released upon adoption.

<https://www.rugby.gov.uk/lpconsultation>

Rushcliffe Borough Council

With the adoption of the Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 2 in October 2019 a number of sites were removed from the Green Belt and allocated for housing and/or employment use.

<https://www.rushcliffe.gov.uk/planningpolicy/localplan/localplanpart2landandplanningpolicies/>

Stevenage Borough Council

The Stevenage Borough Local Plan was adopted on 22nd May 2019. The Plan met the exceptional circumstances for the release of land from the Green Belt in order to meet the identified housing needs within the Borough Boundary.

<http://www.stevenage.gov.uk/149690/planning-policy/90175/>

Sunderland City Council

The reduction in the size of Sunderland City Council's Green Belt between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020 is because of the Council's Core Strategy and Development Plan was formally adopted which took space out of the Green Belt.

<https://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/15978/Core-Strategy-and-Development-Plan->

Vale of White Horse District Council

The Vale of White Horse District's Local Plan is divided into two parts: Local Plan 2031 Part 1 was adopted at Full Council in December 2016; and Local Plan 2031 Part 2 was adopted by Full Council on Wednesday 9 October 2019.

<http://www.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/services-and-advice/planning-and-building/planning-policy/local-plan-2031>

Wycombe District Council

Green Belt land was released in the Wycombe Local Plan (adopted 19 August 2019) in order to meet the need for housing and employment land.

<https://www.wycombe.gov.uk/pages/Planning-and-building-control/Planning-policy/Wycombe-Development-Plan.aspx>

Technical notes

Scale of revisions

The last six scheduled revisions have resulted in 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 1,633,390 hectares,
- the area at 31 March 2015 was revised from 1,636,620 hectares to 1,631,500 hectares,
- the area at 31 March 2016 was revised from 1,635,480 hectares to 1,630,470 hectares,
- the area at 31 March 2017 was revised from 1,634,700 hectares to 1,629,290 hectares.
- the area at 31 March 2018 was revised from 1,629,510 hectares to 1,623,180 hectares.

- the area at 31 March 2019 was revised from 1,621,150 hectares to 1,619,320 hectares.

Individual local authority revisions can however be more volatile.

Data collection and methods

Estimates of Green Belt land in individual local authorities in England are collected annually (as at 31 March) on the 'Annual Green Belt' (AGB) return via DELTA,⁵ the department's electronic data collection system. Authorities were asked to confirm whether they agree with the Green Belt area estimate as calculated by MHCLG as at 31 March 2019 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2019-20. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if they disagree with the estimated area as at 31 March 2019, 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 calculates 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

Data quality summary

Trends in the area of Green Belt can be reliably and easily assessed both nationally and at a local authority level. The high response rate (consistently over 90%; 94% in 2019-20) and quality assurance procedures followed result in accurate estimates of the Green Belt which should be suitable for many different uses. The flow diagram (*Figure 1*, below) sets out the key steps in

⁵ The Annual Green Belt return was collected on DELTA for the first time in 2017-18; previously the data were collected on Interform. The type of data collected did not change, only the method by which the data are submitted.

producing and quality assuring the Green Belt statistical release.

The minimum expected response rate for the Green Belt return is 90%. The response rate has been consistently above this, as shown in *Table 5*. In 2019-20, the response rate was 93%, with 13 out of 183 (7 per cent) of authorities not completing the return. They are:

- Basildon
- Dorset
- Enfield
- Havering
- Liverpool
- Newham
- Rotherham
- Runnymede
- Southend-on-Sea
- St Albans
- Thurrock
- Uttlesford
- Wokingham

Table 5: Response rates for Annual Green Belt return

Financial Year	Response rates
2013-14	97%
2014-15	99%
2015-16	97%
2016-17	98%
2017-18	94%
2018-19	98%
2019-20	93%

Assessment of data quality

In 2015 the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA) published a [regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data](#). To assess the quality of the data provided for this release the department has followed that standard.

The standard is supported with an [Administrative Data Quality Assurance Toolkit](#) which provides useful guidance on the practices that can be adopted to assure the quality of the data they utilise.

The Green Belt Statistical release is produced by MHCLG based on data provided via its DELTA data collection system by 183 local authorities. An assessment of the level of risk based on the Quality Assurance Toolkit is as follows:

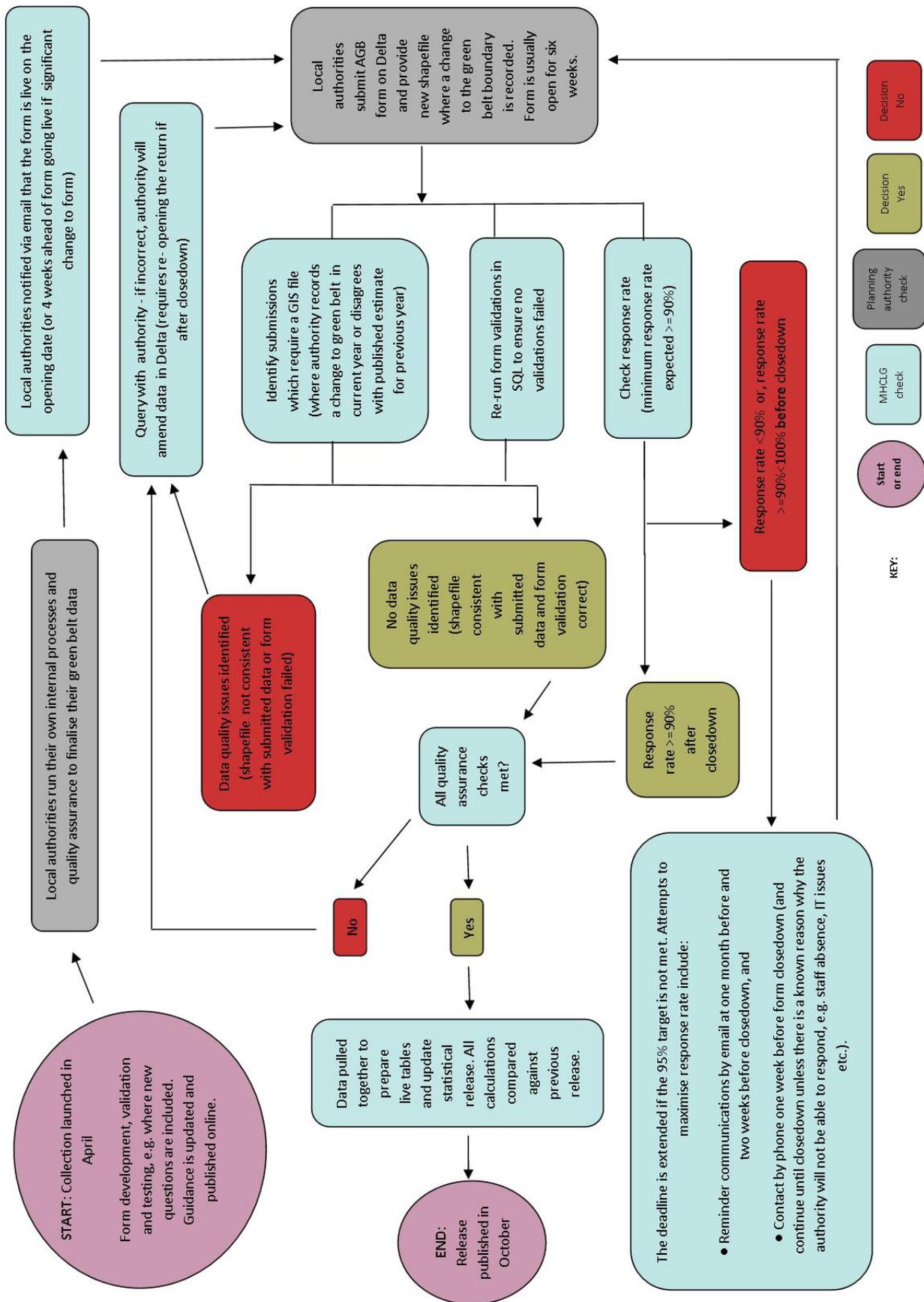
Risk/Profile Matrix Statistical Series	Administrative Source	Data Quality Concern	Public Interest	Matrix Classification
Green Belt Statistics	Local authorities' individual planning systems	Low	Medium	Low Risk [A1]

The publication of Green Belt statistics can be considered as medium profile, as there is mainstream media interest, with moderate economic and/or political sensitivity.

The data quality concern is considered a low concern given that the data is collected from each local authority, via the data collection system DELTA which includes built in quality assurance checks. The data are then further quality assured by the responsible statisticians, who perform further detailed validation and checks, spotting and correcting any errors.

Overall, the Green Belt statistics have been assessed as A1: Low Risk. A full outline of the statistical production process and quality assurance carried out is provided in the flow chart in *Figure 1*. Further details are also provided against each of the four areas outlined in the Quality Assurance Toolkit.

Figure 1: Quality assurance flow diagram



Operational context and admin data collection

From 2007 to 2017, the department built and maintained its Green Belt dataset from local authority digital data supplied via the Interform return for local authorities, with a migration of this data collection to DELTA taking place for 2018 onwards. Authorities have also been required to provide the boundary of the Green Belt in their area on a suitable digital map to enable the publication of a shapefile for public use.

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. All calculations are carried out using exact measurements, but published information is rounded to the nearest ten hectares. No imputation is carried out as authorities who fail to respond are assumed to have had no change in Green Belt, although statisticians check whether there is evidence online of the non-responding authorities updating their Local Plan during the year, given that Green Belt boundaries can be changed only through the Local Plan process. 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.

Communication with data supply partners

Authorities are supplied with comprehensive guidance to ensure that there is a common understanding of what information is to be supplied. Feedback on the return/statistical release is regularly sought from data providers and users, most recently regarding the move to DELTA data collection system, through a number of formats (Single Data List, the Central Local Information Partnership (CLIP) Planning Statistics Sub-group, and the data collection mailing list).

The form is usually 'live' for six weeks. Should the minimum response rate of 90% not be met by the deadline, an extension is agreed and the Data Collection team will continue attempts to maximise the response rate until the new deadline. However, regular contact with local authorities as well as reminder emails throughout the time the form is 'live', result in relatively high response rates, as outlined in the section on response rates⁶. Whilst errors are minimised by the high response rate on the return, nonetheless they may also occur due to authorities not submitting information in time; authorities who do respond are assumed, perhaps incorrectly, to have had no change in Green Belt.

QA principles, standards and checks by data suppliers

Local authorities may measure their Green Belt using different software to that used by the department (e.g. ArcGIS as used by the department or other popular software such as QGIS or MapInfo). Depending on the mapping software used, a combination of methods may be implemented, which could result in different outcomes. Differences between the data provided could result from, for instance, different types of coordinate systems (geographic, i.e. a global or spherical coordinate system, or projected, i.e. on a Cartesian coordinate plane), or different scales of capture (e.g. OS Mastermap or OS landline).

⁶ Should any significant changes to the form be carried out since the previous year, local authorities will be reminded that the form is due to go live four weeks in advance of the 'go live' date.

As there are 183 different organisations supplying data to the department, it is not possible to fully understand and monitor each individual provider's practical processes. To mitigate this lack of direct oversight, the department ensures additional effort is put into the QA checks carried out when the data is received. The department also reviews and updates guidance put out to local authorities each year, maintaining regular communication with providers throughout. All boundaries are checked to ensure that they match the area of the Green Belt as recorded by the local authority on the Interform/Delta return.

Producers' QA investigations and documentation

Whilst local authorities are expected to carry out their own checks on the data submitted and are expected to specify the level of checks carried out in the form itself, discrepancies may arise due to use of different geographical software, or other different procedures used. 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. 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.

National Statistics status



National Statistics status means that our statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value as set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). It is the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's statisticians' responsibility to maintain compliance with these standards.

The continued designation of these statistics as National Statistics was confirmed in June 2012 following an assessment by the UK Statistics Authority.

The statistics last underwent a full assessment

(<https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/statistics-on-green-belt-land-and-planning-applications/>) against the Code of Practice for Statistics in 2012.

Since the latest review by the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA), we have continued to comply with the Code of Practice for Statistics, and have made the following improvements:

- Introduced a table showing trends in the area of Green Belt land in each of the fifteen urban core areas in England;
- Including further details of the ways in which data quality is assessed, in line with the UK Statistics Authority's regulatory standard for the quality assurance of administrative data, including a quality assurance flow diagram; and
- Improved the accuracy of the geographic boundary (shape) files publishing alongside the release, including by 'clipping them' to the ONS High Water Mark boundary where relevant.

Revisions policy

This policy has been developed in accordance with the UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Statistics and the Ministry of Housing 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.

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>

Enquiries

Media enquiries:

office hours: 0303 444 1209

out of hours: 0303 444 1201

Email: newsdesk@communities.gov.uk

Public enquiries and Responsible Statistician:

Alex Reynolds

Email: planning.statistics@communities.gov.uk

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

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

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

www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/statistics

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