



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# Local Planning Authority Green Belt: England 2012/13

- The extent of the designated Green Belt in England in 2012/13 was estimated at 1,639,090 hectares, around 13% of the land area of England.
- Overall there has been a slight decrease of 390 hectares (around 0.02%) in area of Green Belt between 2011/12 and 2012/13. In 2012/13 four authorities adopted new plans which resulted in the decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 2011/12. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 hectares.
- The revised 2011/12 Green Belt in England is estimated at 1,639,480 hectares. This is a slight increase of 70 hectares on the estimated 2011/12 Green Belt area of 1,639,410 hectares published in November 2012. This change is due to a correction of the area of one local authority's Green Belt boundary.
- Since these statistics were first compiled for 1997, there has been an increase in the area of Green Belt after taking account of the redesignation of some Green Belt as part of the New Forest National Park in 2005.



## Planning *Statistical Release*

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# Introduction

This Statistical Release presents National Statistics on the estimates of the area of designated Green Belt land in England and by local authority, as at 31 March 2013.

## Context

England has a land area of just over 13,040,000 hectares (according to the Ordnance Survey high-water mark). Of this land, only around 9%<sup>1</sup> is developed, while more than a third 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>2</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.

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> Countryside Survey: Final Report (Centre for Ecology & Hydrology 2011)

<sup>2</sup> National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG)

2 Local Planning Authority Green Belt: England 2012/13 Statistical Release

# Extent of the 2012/13 Green Belt

The extent of the designated Green Belt in England in 2012/13 was estimated at 1,639,090 hectares, around 13% of the land area of England. *Table 1 (Annex 1)* shows estimates of the area of Green Belt land in each local authority for 2012/13. *Table 2 (Annex 1)* compares the 2012/13 estimates with the revised 2011/12 estimates by local authority.

## Net change

Overall there has been a slight decrease of 390 hectares (around 0.02%) in the area of Green Belt in England between 2011/12 and 2012/13. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 hectares.

In 2012/13 four authorities adopted new plans which resulted in the decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 2011/12. Note that there may be discrepancies between individual figures and totals due to rounding.

Real changes are rare and are the results of new local plans being adopted, which must satisfy the strong tests for protecting Green Belt land set out in the National Planning Policy Framework.

**Table 1: Authorities which adopted new boundaries for the designated Green Belt 2012/13**

Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 2012/13 (hectares)	Change from 2011/12
Ealing	310	-20 (-6%)
Manchester	1,280	-430 (-25%)
Purbeck	8,200	460 (6%)
Wakefield	23,500	-400 (-2%)

These local authorities have been contacted to obtain explanations for the changes in their Green Belt boundaries, which are detailed below.

### Manchester

“The growth of Manchester Airport to 2030 will be supported, and it is designated as a Strategic Site. This will involve the expansion of the developed Airport area ... The Green Belt boundary in this area has been amended so that areas needed for airport development have been excluded from the Green Belt.”

[http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/4964/core\\_strategy\\_development\\_plan](http://www.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/4964/core_strategy_development_plan)

## Wakefield

The Green Belt boundary has changed in various locations throughout the Wakefield district, due to the adoption of the Council's Site Specific Policies Local Plan on 12 September 2012. A Green Belt boundary review was undertaken as part of the process in preparing the Local Plan. Land released is to be used for housing (including land included in a Special Policy Area east of the city of Wakefield) or employment purposes (including land at the Ferrybridge power station).

## Ealing

The change relates to the change of one section of the Green Belt network (GSK Sports Ground/London Marathon Playing Fields/Greenford Lagoons and Birchwood) to Metropolitan Open Land (MOL), resulting in a loss of around 20 ha to the Green Belt in Ealing. This change was made because the area was considered to more appropriately reflect the characteristics of Metropolitan Open Land rather than Green Belt. This position was upheld by the Inspector examining the local plan. Given the presumption against built development which applies in the case of Green Belt applies equally to MOL, the protection afforded to this site remains unchanged.

## Purbeck

"The extent of the South East Dorset Green Belt in Purbeck will be maintained subject to the following alterations:

- Redefining the southern and western boundaries of the Green Belt to provide a more robust and justifiable boundary;
- Accommodation of the settlement extension at Worgret Road, Wareham;
- Addition of Green Belt at Sandford and Holton Heath where the previous plan's housing proposals were abandoned;
- Minor boundary re-alignment to coincide with OS Base map."

<https://www.dorsetforyou.com/local-plan/part-1/purbeck>

## Longer term changes

Statistics on the area of Green Belt are available back to 1997 (Annex 3). These show an overall increase in the area of Green Belt between 1997 and 2012/13, after taking account of the re-designation of some Green Belt as part of the New Forest National Park in 2005. Some of this increase is, however, due to improved measurement rather than actual changes.

## Revisions to 2011/12 estimates

The revised 2011/12 Green Belt in England is estimated at 1,639,480 hectares. This is a slight increase of 70 hectares on the estimated 2011/12 Green Belt area of 1,639,410 hectares published in November 2012.

The change to the estimate of the area of Green Belt land in 2011/12 was due to a correction of the area of one local authority's Green Belt boundary (*Table 2 of Annex 1*). A list of reasons for changes to the Green Belt estimate, where provided by local authorities, can be found in *Annex 2*.

## Accompanying annexes

Accompanying Annexes are available to download alongside this release. These are:

### Annexes:

Annex 1 (Table 1): Area of designated Green Belt land by local planning authority in 2012/13.

Annex 1 (Table 2): Area of designated Green Belt land by local planning authority: 2011/12, 2012/13

Annex 2: Reasons for changes in Green Belt Estimates in 2011/12.

Annex 3: Historical trend in the area of Green Belt land since 1997.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/green-belt-statistics>

## 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 for 2011/12 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2012/13. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if the 2011/12 estimated area had been revised, and these differed by more than 10 hectares from the area previously published, authorities were contacted to obtain an explanation and to provide a revised geographic boundary file (shapefile).

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.

In 2011-12 178 out of 186 authorities (96%) who have designated Green Belt land within their boundaries responded. Where authorities did not respond, we have used the previous boundary and area.

The analysis carried out by DCLG verifies the area of the shapefiles 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 shapefile obtained.

If there has been an actual change in Green Belt rather than an improved measurement of the 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 has 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 shapefiles.

## 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 10 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 but due to the high response rate achieved (96% in 2012-13) these errors are minimised.

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 revisions 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 10 hectares, they are asked to submit a revised shapefile to the Department.

### Scale of Revisions

The last two scheduled revisions have resulted in minor changes to the overall area of the Green Belt in England - the 2010/11 area was revised from 1,639,540 hectares to 1,639,530 hectares, while the 2011/12 area was revised from 1,639,410 hectares to 1,639,480 hectares. However, individual local authority revisions can be more volatile.

## Uses of the data

As well as its use in monitoring its overall area 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. In 2011, the latest information available, it is estimated that 2% of all dwellings were built within the Green Belt, while 71% of these dwellings were built on previously-developed land. Also, around 7% of land changing to a developed use was within the Green Belt.

## 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:  
[www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/browse-by-theme/index.html](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/browse-by-theme/index.html)



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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