



Department for  
Communities and  
Local Government

# Local Planning Authority Green Belt: England 2013/14

- The extent of the designated Green Belt in England in 2013/14 was estimated at 1,638,610 hectares, around 13% of the land area of England.
- Overall there has been a decrease of 540 hectares (around 0.03%) in area of Green Belt between 2012/13 and 2013/14. In 2013/14 three authorities adopted new plans which resulted in the decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 2012/13. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 hectares.
- The revised 2012/13 Green Belt in England is estimated at 1,639,160 hectares. This is a slight increase of 70 hectares on the estimated 2012/13 Green Belt area of 1,639,090 hectares published in March 2014. 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 re-designation 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 2014.

## Context

England has a land area of just over 13,040,000 hectares (according to the Ordnance Survey high-water mark). Of this land, 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)

# Extent of the 2013/14 Green Belt

The extent of the designated Green Belt in England in 2012/13 was estimated at 1,638,610 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 2013/14. *Table 2 (Annex 1)* compares the 2013/14 estimates with the revised 2012/13 estimates by local authority.

## Net change

Overall there has been a slight decrease of 540 hectares (around 0.03%) in the area of Green Belt in England between 2012/13 and 2013/14. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 hectares.

In 2013/14 three authorities adopted new plans which resulted in the decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 2012/13. 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 2013/14**

Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 2013/14 (hectares)	Change from 2012/13
Rochford	12,570	-190 (-2%)
South Gloucestershire	23,030	-210 (-1%)
West Lancashire	34,470	-150 (0%)

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

### Rochford

“The Council adopted its Core Strategy on 13 December 2011, which established that a small amount of Green Belt land would need to be reallocated to meet the housing and employment land requirements for the District. Following this, the Council progressed its pre-submission Allocations Plan to identify sites in the Green Belt to meet the identified housing and employment land needs. The Council adopted its Allocations Plan on 25 February 2014.”

### South Gloucestershire

“This figure accounts for the planned release of Green Belt at land east of Harry Stoke (EoHS), and at land west of the A4018 as part of the Council's commitment to supporting sustainable development over the next 15 years. In total these areas represent a net loss of 205.47 ha and is

split between 144.35ha at EoHS and 61.12ha west of the A4018.”

## **West Lancashire**

“Once the Council had established its objectively assessed housing needs during the preparation of the new Local Plan and identified all available land within the existing settlements, it was apparent that due to the amount of Green Belt land within the Borough, there would be a requirement to amend the Green Belt boundaries and release some of this land.

The Green Belt was released in the following locations:

Yew Tree Farm, Burscough (Key Service Centre) – Mixed use strategic site to deliver 500 homes and 10ha of employment with land safeguarded for further development beyond the plan period. See Policy SP3 for further details.

Grove Farm, Ormskirk (Key Service Centre) – Housing development for 300 dwellings. See Policy RS1 for further details.

Fine Janes Farm, Halsall (Rural Sustainable Village) – Housing development for 60 dwellings. See Policy RS1 for further details.

Land at New Cut Lane, Halsall (Rural Sustainable Village) – Housing development for 150 dwellings. See Policy RS1 for further details.

Edge Hill University, Ormskirk – 10ha for new university buildings, car parking and new access road. See Policy EC4 for further details.

In addition, Green Belt land was released and safeguarded as “Plan B” for further housing development at the below locations in the event there is a need for additional housing land supply and subject to policy triggers. See Policies RS6 and GN2 for further details

Land at Parrs Lane, Aughton – 400 dwellings

Land at Ruff Lane, Ormskirk – 10 dwellings

Land at Red Cat Lane, Burscough – 60 dwellings

Land at Mill Lane, Up Holland – 120 dwellings”

## **Longer term changes**

Statistics on the area of Green Belt are available back to 1997 (Annex 2). These show an overall increase in the area of Green Belt between 1997 and 2013/14, 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 2012/13 estimates**

The revised 2012/13 Green Belt in England is estimated at 1,639,160 hectares. This is a slight increase of 70 hectares on the estimated 2012/13 Green Belt area of 1,639,090 hectares published in March 2014.

The change to the estimate of the area of Green Belt land in 2012/13 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 below *Table 2 Annex 1*.

## 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 2013/14.

Annex 1 (Table 2): Area of designated Green Belt land by local planning authority: 2012/13, 2013/14

Annex 2: 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 2012/13 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2013/14. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if the 2012/13 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.

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 (97% in 2013/14) 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 2011/12 area was revised from 1,639,410 hectares to 1,639,480 hectares, while the 2012/13 area was revised from 1,639,090 hectares to 1,639,160 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.

## **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](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/about/statistics)



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