



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Local Planning Authority Green Belt: England 2015/16

- The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2016 was estimated at 1,635,480 hectares, around 13% of the land area of England.
- Overall there was a decrease of 1,020 hectares (less than 0.1%) in the area of Green Belt between 31 March 2015 and 31 March 2016. In 2015/16, eight local planning authorities adopted new plans which resulted in a decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 31 March 2015.
- The revised area of the Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2015 is estimated at 1,636,500 hectares. This is a slight decrease of 120 hectares on the original estimate of 1,636,620 hectares published in October 2015. This change is due to minor corrections in the areas of three local authorities' Green Belt boundaries.



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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 2016.

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 11 per cent¹ is developed, while more than a third² 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 importance³ 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 Framework⁴,

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.

¹ Derived from Office for National Statistics [Built up Areas 2011](#)

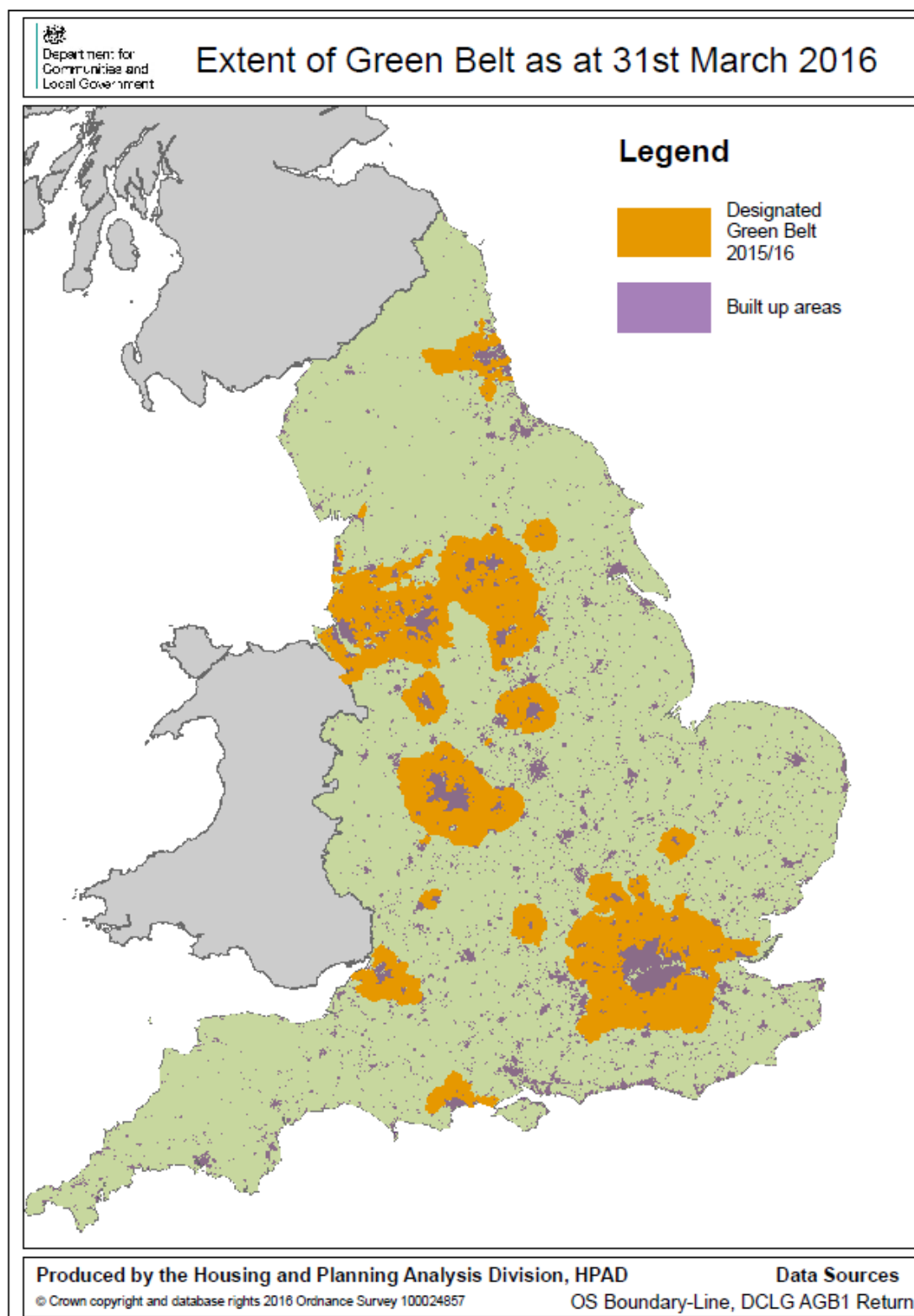
² Derived from data published by the department and Natural England

³ [National Planning Policy Framework](#), DCLG, 2012

⁴ Paragraphs 87 and 88

Extent of the Green Belt as at 31 March 2016

The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2016 is shown in the map below. It was estimated at 1,635,480 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 2016. *Annex Table 2* compares estimates as at 31 March 2016 with the revised estimates as at 31 March 2015 by local authority.



Net changes

Overall, there was a decrease of 1,020 hectares (less than 0.1 per cent) in the area of Green Belt in England between 31 March 2015 and 31 March 2016.

In 2015/16, eight authorities adopted new plans which resulted in a decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 31 March 2015. 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 2015/16

Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 31 March 2016 (hectares)	Change from 31 March 2015 (hectares)
Blackburn with Darwen	5,260	-290 (5.6%)
Knowsley	4,210	-430 (10.2%)
Oxford ¹	1,290	- (0.2%)
Pendle	2,040	-40 (1.1%)
Rotherham	20,450	-210 (1.0%)
South Ribble	7,770	-40 (0.5%)
Tamworth	210	10 (5.2%)
Wychavon	8,830	-30 (0.3%)

Note: figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares

1. Area decreased by less than five hectares.

The reported decrease of 1,020 hectares of Green Belt during 2015/16 is smaller than the 2,000 hectares decrease reported in 2014/15. The larger decrease in 2014/15 was due to a higher number of 11 local authorities making changes to their boundary in 2014/15. 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
Number of authorities changing their Green Belt boundary	3	3	4	3	11	8
Net change in size of the Green Belt boundary (hectares)	0	-50	-320	-530	-2,130	-1,020

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

The local authorities making changes to their Green Belt boundaries were contacted to obtain explanations for the changes, which are detailed below.

Blackburn with Darwen

“The Council completed a review of its Green Belt boundary in September 2013 as part of the technical work carried out to inform the preparation of a new Local Plan; *Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies*. The purpose of the review was to explore the scope for releasing land from the Green Belt and to make recommendations for potential boundary changes.

This was the first review of Green Belt in Blackburn with Darwen (BwD) following the adoption of the Lancashire Green Belt in 1982. The 2013 review was not a strategic review of Green Belt boundaries within the borough; it covered the inner Green Belt boundary around the towns of Blackburn and Darwen.

The Council’s growth strategy as set out in the Core Strategy acknowledges that over the local plan period, 2011-2026, there may be a need, triggered by a shortfall in suitable and available land for development within the existing urban area, for a limited number of small scale urban extensions into the adjoining Green Belt. The Core Strategy noted this would be determined during the preparation and examination of the Local Plan Part 2.

Housing market conditions within the borough and across the wider East Lancashire area are particularly challenging. This has created a situation where many of the available sites within the BwD urban area, principally brownfield sites, are not viable and are not deliverable in the short to medium term. Additionally many of the available sites within the urban area are not suitable for delivering the type of housing required by the Core Strategy to diversify the housing market and achieve economic growth. Altogether this was considered to present exceptional circumstances sufficient to justify a review of the Green Belt in order to ensure an adequate, appropriate and deliverable housing land supply to meet needs up to 2026.

The review concluded that a number of land parcels in the Green Belt could be released without affecting the integrity of the Green Belt. Some of these land parcels have been allocated for housing development within the Local Plan alongside sites within the established urban area and other non-Green Belt land on the edge of existing built up areas. Land released from the Green Belt and not needed for development in the period up to 2026 has been designated as safeguarded land to meet development needs beyond 2026.”

Knowsley

“The Green Belt boundary in Knowsley was changed following adoption of the *Knowsley Local Plan Core Strategy* in January 2016. The Plan allocated 374 hectares of Green Belt land as “Sustainable Urban Extensions” for residential and employment development. A further 58 hectares of Green Belt land is allocated as “Safeguarded Land” to meet development after 2028.”

Oxford

“A small parcel of land was removed from the Green Belt as part of the *Northern Gateway Area Action Plan (AAP)*. The Northern Gateway site was allocated as a strategic site in the Oxford Core Strategy 2026. The AAP provides the additional detailed policies needed to deliver and shape this development. The Core Strategy made provision for a highly focused Green Belt boundary review as part of the AAP. This review was carried out as part of the AAP process; it concluded that there were exceptional circumstances to justify the release, and therefore a small

parcel was taken out of the Green Belt and allocated for development as part of the wider site. The AAP Inspector considered that the policy approach was justified, consistent with the requirements of the NPPF, and would assist in bringing forward the development of the wider site.”

Pendle

“The Green Belt boundary in Pendle has been changed to facilitate the allocation of a Strategic Employment site in the borough. Approximately 30⁵ hectares of land has been removed from the Green Belt. The site was selected following a robust assessment process which justified the exceptional circumstances required by the National Planning Policy Framework for the alteration of Green Belt boundaries. The change to the boundary has been made through the adoption of the *Pendle Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy* after it was found sound at the Examination in Public.”

Rotherham

“Following an independent examination into Rotherham’s Local Plan, the Core Strategy was officially adopted by the Council on 10 September 2014. The Core Strategy includes a strategic allocation for growth (known as Bassingthorpe Farm) which is an area of Green Belt land of approximately 205 hectares which the planning inspector agreed could be removed from the Green Belt, prior to any other areas which may be allocated as part of the subsequent Local Plan Sites and Policies document.”

South Ribble

“The Chancellor announced in 2011 that a bid for the designation of an Enterprise Zone at Samlesbury Aerodrome had been approved. A large part of the Aerodrome area was, in the Local Plan (adopted 2000), designated as Greenbelt. Through the production of the new Local Plan, it was proposed to alter the Greenbelt boundary at Samlesbury Aerodrome to facilitate the delivery of the Enterprise Zone. The new Local Plan was formally adopted in July 2015.”

Tamworth

“The increased size of the Green Belt area results from a number of small changes to the boundary in order to make it more logical and to ensure the performance of the Green Belt in the future. The changes take account of existing development within the area as well as physical changes on the ground over time which had resulted in the route of the boundary being difficult to trace on the ground in places. The previous boundary did not take account of some physical features, for example by passing through the middle of two ponds left as a result of quarrying activity, and has instead been redrawn to follow features that are likely to be permanent in order to create a more suitable boundary that is more clearly defined going forward.”

Wychavon

“The land has been removed from the Green Belt for three reasons. First there was a clear error in its inclusion in the previous Local Plan. Second, the land does not perform any of the necessary Green Belt functions. Third, the land forms part of a larger site, with the remainder lying within Wyre Forest District and is also not in the West Midlands Green Belt.” (South Worcestershire Development Plan Examination Inspector’s Report, February 2016).

⁵ Table 1 on page 4 shows the size of the change for Pendle as derived from unrounded data held by the Department. The reference to ‘approximately 30 hectares’ in the explanation provided by Pendle has been reproduced verbatim.

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.

Revisions to 2014/15 estimates

The revised Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2015 is estimated at 1,636,500 hectares. This is a decrease of 120 hectares on the previous estimate of 1,636,620 hectares published in October 2015.

The change to the estimate of the area of Green Belt land as at 31 March 2015 was due to a series of minor corrections of the area of three local authorities' Green Belts. The reasons given for the updated figures provided for 2014/15 are given in Table 3.

Table 3: Reasons for amending the Green Belt area as at 31 March 2015

Reason for updated Green Belt area	Number of local planning authorities	Size of change hectares
Positional accuracy improvements	1	-70
No change but incorrect figure	1	+10
Change in boundary	1	-60

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 2016
- Table 2 Difference in Green Belt area between 31 March 2015 and 31 March 2016
- 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 2016 is available at <https://data.gov.uk/dataset/english-local-authority-green-belt-dataset1>

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 2015 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2015/16. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if the estimated area as at 31 March 2015 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 but due to the high response rate achieved (97 per cent in 2015/16) these errors are minimised. In 2015/16, six 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:

- East Hertfordshire
- North Hertfordshire
- Rochford
- Solihull
- Thurrock
- York

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 two 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, while the area at 31 March 2015 was revised from 1,636,620 hectares to 1,636,500 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:

<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

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