Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government

Local Planning Authority Green Belt: England 2018/19

- The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2019 was estimated at 1,621,150 hectares, around 12.4% of the land area of England.
- Overall there was a decrease of 3,290 hectares (0.2%) in the area of Green Belt between 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2019.
- In 2018/19, thirteen local planning authorities adopted new plans, with the result being a net decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 31 March 2018.

Planning

Statistical Release

18 October 2019

Introduction	2
Context	2
Extent of the Green Belt as at 31 March 2019	3
Net changes	5
Revisions to 2017/18 estimates	6
Longer term changes	6
Accompanying tables	8
Uses of the data	8
Annex A – explanations of changes in 2018/19	9
Technical notes	12
Enquiries	19

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Introduction

This Statistical Release presents National Statistics on estimates of the area of designated Green Belt land in England and by local authority, as at 31 March 2019.

Context

England has a land area of just over 13,046,130 hectares (according to the Office for National Statistics mean high-water mark[1]). Of this area only about 8 per cent is of developed use[2]. Allowing for overlaps, just over 40 per cent of the area of England (5.6 million hectares) is protected against development by one or more environmentally-protected designations. As well as designated Green Belt land, this estimate covers National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)[3].

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

Green Belt serves five purposes:

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

As stated in the National Planning Policy Framework[5],

> *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*

[1] https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/datasets/standard-area-measurements-2018-for-administrative-areas-in-the-united-kingdom

[2] Derived from Land Use in England 2017experimental statistics, published by MHCLG

[3] The proportions of land in each local authority area that were constrained by being Green Belt, National Park, an AONB or an SSSI were published in September 2017 in conjunction with a Housing Need consultation. They are available in the 'Publication Data' sheet at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/644783/Housing_Need_Consultation_Data_Table.xlsx

[4] National Planning Policy Framework Chapter 13, MHCLG 2018

[5] Paragraphs 143 and 144

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.

Local authorities are encouraged to regularly review whether their designated Green Belt continues to meet the five purposes of the Green Belt outlined above. Should the area no longer serve the stated purposes, an authority may consider whether other designations are appropriate, for example, Local Green Space[6]. As such, a decrease in the land designated as Green Belt does not necessarily result in a decrease in the amount of land protected from development.

It is useful to consider this statistical release alongside the annual Land Use Change statistical release published by the department, which focuses on land changing to a developed use, in particular to residential development; and also to the experimental statistical release: Land use in England 2017. Key information from these releases is available in the section titled 'Uses of the Data'.

Urban core areas

Green Belt land is distributed around fifteen urban cores. These are mapped in *Map 1* and listed in *Table 3*, which also gives the area of land associated with each urban core. The largest two areas account for 62 per cent of the total area of Green Belt land between them: the Metropolitan Green Belt (London area) and Liverpool, Manchester and West Yorkshire, at 32 per cent and 31 per cent respectively (proportions rounded to the nearest percentage).

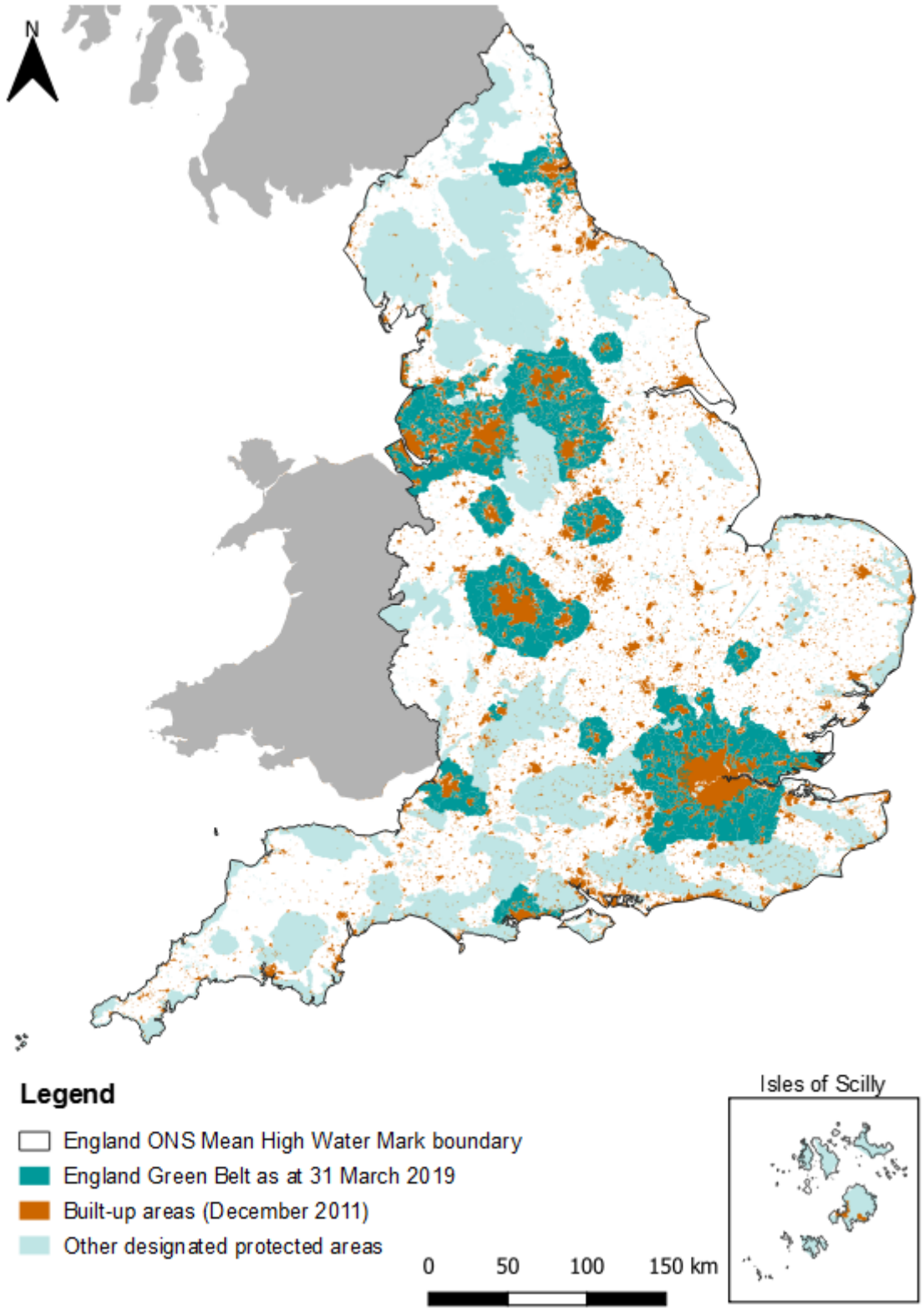
Extent of the Green Belt as at 31 March 2019

The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31 March 2019 is shown in *Map 1,* below. It was estimated at 1,621,150 hectares, around 12.4% of the land area of England.

The 'Area by LA' table in the Accompanying tables 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 2019. The *'Change in area by LA'* table in the Accompanying tables compares estimates as at 31 March 2019 with the revised estimates as at 31 March 2018 by local authority. The distribution of Green Belt land in England, surrounding fifteen urban cores is shown by the turquoise areas in *Map 1*. More details are given in *Table 3*.

[6] National Planning Policy Framework paragraphs 99 - 101, MHCLG 2018. Local Green Space receives protection equivalent to Green Belt designation. Local Green Space was introduced as part of NPPF 2012

Map 1: Extent of Green Belt as at 31 March 2019



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

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Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database 2019

Net changes

Overall, there was a decrease of 3,290 hectares (0.2 per cent) in the area of Green Belt in England between 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2019.

In 2018/19, thirteen local authorities adopted new plans that involved a change in area of the authority's Green Belt, resulting in a decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 31 March 2018. 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 2018/19

Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 31 March 2018 (hectares)	Area of designated Green Belt land 31 March 2019 (hectares)	Change from 31 March 2018 (hectares)
Barnsley	23,050	22,400	-650 (-3%)
Bromley	7,730	7,660	-70 (-1%)
Burnley	1,060	1,050	-10 (-1%)
Cambridge[1]	980	970	-10 (-1%)
East Hertfordshire	17,530	16,440	-1,090 (-6%)
Fylde	1,770	1,780	10 (1%)
Gedling[1]	9,010	8,800	-210 (-2%)
Kirklees	25,490	24,990	-500 (-2%)
Poole[1]	1,810	1,750	-60 (-3%)
Rotherham[1]	20,450	20,060	-390 (-2%)
South Cambridgeshire	23,280	23,230	-50 (0%)
South Staffordshire[1]	32,330	32,130	-200 (-1%)
Wyre[1]	750	680	-70 (-9%)

Note: figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.

[1] Local authority also revised its accuracy of the estimate for 2017/18. Individual authorities may have provided more detail in Annex A.

Of the thirteen local authorities reporting changes to their designated Green Belt areas, two (Barnsley and East Hertfordshire) contributed over 50% of this change between them, with a reduction in Green Belt of three percent and six per cent respectively.

The reported decrease of 3,290 hectares of Green Belt during 2018/19 is the second largest decrease reported in recent years, following the change recorded last year. The number of LAs making changes to the land that is designated as Green Belt has also increased in recent years, particularly from 2014/15 onwards: see *Table 2*. Local authorities making changes to their Green Belt boundaries were contacted to obtain explanations for the changes, which are detailed in *Annex A*.

Table 2: Number of authorities making changes to Green Belt boundaries

Year	2010/ 2011	2011/ 2012	2012/ 2013	2013/ 2014	2014/ 2015	2015/ 2016	2016/ 2017	2017/ 2018	2018/ 2019
Number of authorities changing their Green Belt boundary	3	3	4	3	11	8	8	10	13
Net change in size of the Green Belt boundary (hectares)	0	-50	-320	-530	-2,130	-1,020	-790	-5,070	-3,290

Note: the area figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares.
Table 2 shows the net change reported in each year and does not reflect subsequent revisions made to the accuracy of the estimates of Green Belt in each year.

Revisions to 2017/18 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 2018 is estimated at 1,624,440 hectares. This is a decrease of 5,070 hectares on the previous estimate of 1,629,510 hectares published in October 2018.

As part of an ongoing scheme of general improvements to mapping accuracy and boundary definitions, local authorities have been asked to map their Green Belt areas against the ONS Mean High Water Mark boundary. This results in greater accuracy in the delimiting of designated Green Belt land where it meets coastal or estuarine areas and is to ensure a consistent national approach in boundary definitions.

Thirty-five local authorities reported revisions with the majority due to ongoing mapping improvements. Sixty-seven per cent of the overall revision in Green Belt area for 2017/18 is attributed to West Lancashire, which was reduced by eleven per cent following the exclusion of land below the high tide mark. Further information on revisions made to last year's Green Belt estimates, as well as a summary of the scale of revisions over the preceding statistical releases, is available under the 'Scope and 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 3*.

Table 3: Trend in the area of Green Belt land as at 31 March since 2013/14, England, hectares

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18[R]	2018/19	% change 2013/14-2018/19
England	**1,638,630**	**1,636,500**	**1,635,490**	**1,634,580**	**1,624,440**	**1,621,150**	**-1.1**
Urban core							
Birmingham	231,350	231,250	231,230	230,560	227,450	227,510	-1.7
Blackpool	2,600	2,600	2,600	2,600	2,590	2,520	-3.1
Bournemouth	36,380	36,000	36,000	36,000	35,820	35,320	-2.9
Bristol and Bath	71,730	71,630	71,630	71,630	71,710	71,740	0.0
Burton upon Trent	730	730	720	720	730	730	0.0
Cambridge	25,100	25,100	25,180	25,100	26,170	26,100	4.0
Derby and Nottingham	61,400	60,700	60,700	61,380	60,700	60,530	-1.4
Gloucester	7,500	7,500	7,500	7,500	6,190	6,190	-17.5
Liverpool, Manchester & West Yorkshire	504,570	504,400	503,410	503,390	498,620	497,310	-1.4
Metropolitan (London area)	514,200	514,080	514,080	514,020	513,430	512,400	-0.3
Morecombe	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740	1,740	0.0
North East	73,060	72,490	72,430	72,440	72,180	72,230	-1.1
Oxford	34,990	34,990	34,990	34,910	34,910	34,930	-0.2
Stoke	44,440	44,440	44,440	44,440	44,420	44,450	0.0
York	27,940	27,940	27,940	27,940	27,960	27,990	0.2

[R] Revised (in this publication) since the original estimate was published.

For 2018/19, area figures were calculated from the attribute table of the shapefile of Green Belt.

The area figures reflect any revisions made since the figures were originally published.

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten hectares. Some local authorities are included within the Green Belt of more than one urban core. The total of urban core Green Belt areas will not therefore match the England total.

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 three tables are as follows:

'Area by LA'	Designated Green Belt land - area by local planning authority as at 31 March 2019 and comparison with total land area
'Change in area by LA'	Change in Green Belt area between 31 March 2018 and 31 March 2019
'Area since 1997 – England'	Area of Green Belt land since 1997, England

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/dataset/d0337f1b-4ed9-4711-bb2f-7e4ddf569b0e/english-local-authority-green-belt-dataset.

Uses of the data

The local authority Green Belt boundaries are used in MHCLG's Land Use Change Statistics and the experimental statistical release: Land Use in England 2017, 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 from the four 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.
- Of the area of all land changing to residential use in 2017/18, eight per cent was within designated Green Belt, a decrease from the ten per cent recorded in 2016/17.
- 7 per cent of the land designated as Green Belt in England is developed with 93 per cent of land of a 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 3.2 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 2017 Experimental statistics Interactive report and Live Table P401, accessible from the below link:
https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/green-belt-statistics

Annex A – explanation of changes in 2018/19

Barnsley

Barnsley Local Plan was adopted in January 2019. The Plan released significant areas of Green Belt land for housing and employment development, greenspace and safeguarded land that could not be accommodated outside the Green Belt and made further minor changes to the Green Belt boundary to address issues such as mapping anomalies, accuracy issues, changes in physical features and to provide more defensible boundaries.

Bromley

All the changes resulted during the preparation of the Local Plan:

- 12.5ha re-designated as Urban Open Space and education purposes to ensure adequate land school expansion and new provision
- GB designation dropped to provide for Gypsies and Travellers 12.9ha to comply with government guidance on such provision
- 2.6ha re-designated as Urban Open Space sites no longer contiguous with GB
- Other land removed - 44.2ha. mainly less than 0.5ha where half garden was in GB but the main curtilage in built up area. 28.78ha built development at Biggin Hill Airport. 1.7ha re-designated as 'Locally Significant Industrial Sites', currently in use as such. 12.67ha - large site developed residentially following appeal decision and a former hospital abutting the built-up area, designated as an 'MDS' [Major development site] in the GB in the Unitary Development Plan, now redeveloped for housing.
- 4.5ha added to GB – Small sites, mostly under 0.5ha, minor corrections of past cartograpcal errors.

Burnley

Burnley's Local Plan was adopted on 31st July 2018. To inform the Local Plan, a Green Belt Review was undertaken. This review recommended a number of Green Belt parcels which could be removed as they no longer fulfilled Green Belt purposes. The Council agreed with one of these recommendations due to the fact that the site had outline planning permission for redevelopment on the footprint of a former school and its particular circumstances in relation to other developments in the locality over time had significantly altered its role in Green belt terms. The Council proposed a change to the Green Belt boundary in the Proposed Submission Local Plan. The Inspector's Report considered this proposed change and stated that there were exceptional circumstances to alter the boundary of the Green Belt to remove the parcel of land in question.

Cambridge

Cambridge City Council has removed land from the Green Belt as a result of the adoption of the Cambridge Local Plan in October 2018: www.cambridge.gov.uk/local-plan-2018.

The Local Plan removes land from the Green Belt for housing or employment uses at:

- Land north of Worts' Causeway (Policy 27 and Site GB1) – allocated for housing
- Land south of Worts' Causeway (Policy 27 and Site GB2) – allocated for housing
- Fulbourn Road West 1 & 2 (Policy 27 and Sites GB3 & GB4) – allocated for employment uses

East Hertfordshire

Adoption of Local Plan (East Herts District Plan)
https://www.eastherts.gov.uk/planning-building/east-herts-district-plan/east-herts-district-plan-2018

Fylde

Adoption of the Local Plan enabled a minor alteration to one of the areas of Green Belt. The original Green belt boundary wasn't a defendable boundary & has been redrafted around the edge of previously developed land (holiday camp) currently being developed for housing

Gedling

Adoption of the Local Plan.
https://www.gedling.gov.uk/resident/planningandbuildingcontrol/planningpolicy/adoptedlocalplanandpolicydocuments/

Kirklees

Adoption of the Kirklees Local Plan on 27th February 2019.
https://www.kirklees.gov.uk/beta/planning-policy/local-plan.aspx

Poole

Following a comprehensive Green Belt Review, the South-East Dorset Green Belt boundary within Poole was amended to release land for strategic urban extensions and educational use. Previously non-Green Belt land was incorporated in the new boundary where it sufficiently met the purposes of Green Belt.

Rotherham

The Local Plan Sites and Policies document was adopted by the Council on the 27th June 2018 following a public inquiry and the Green Belt boundary in the borough was amended to allow sufficient land to be allocated to meet identified future requirements. This resulted in a net loss of approximately 390 hectares.

South Cambridgeshire

South Cambridgeshire District Council has removed land from the Green Belt as a result of the adoption of the South Cambridgeshire Local Plan in September 2018: www.scambs.gov.uk/localplan2018.
The Local Plan removes land from the Green Belt, for either housing or employment uses, at:

- Land between Huntingdon Road and Histon Road (Policy SS/2) – allocated for housing, most of the site was removed from the Green Belt through adoption of the Site Specific Policies DPD in 2010 however, the northern boundary of the site was extended to provide a small additional area of residential development outside of the Air Quality Management Area.
- Land north of Babraham Road, Sawston (Policy H/1b) – allocated for housing
- Land south of Babraham Road, Sawston (Policy H/1c) – allocated for housing
- Land north of Impington Lane, Histon & Impington (Policy H/1d) – allocated for housing
- Land at Bennell Farm, Comberton (Policy H/1h) – allocated for housing
- Cambridge Biomedical Campus Extension (Policy E/2) – allocated for biomedical and biotechnology R&D uses & related higher education & sui generis research institutes
- Fulbourn Road East (Policy E/3) – allocated for employment uses The Local Plan also

makes minor amendments to the Green Belt boundary at:

- Comberton Village College – to better reflect the extent of built development on the school site.
- Comberton – to exclude a small parcel of land between the new housing allocation at Bennell Farm (Policy H/1h) and the existing village framework boundary.
- White Field Way, Sawston – to follow the field boundary rather than cutting through the middle of a garden.

South Staffordshire

South Staffordshire Council adopted its Site Allocations document (SAD) on 11 September 2018. The SAD released land from the Green Belt for housing and employment allocations, safeguarded land for future housing and the amendment of Green Belt boundaries to recognise 2 area of existing major housing development.

Wyre

The Wyre Green Belt study (published May 2016) made recommendations that three parcels of land listed below were considered for removal from the Green Belt as part of the Local Plan process:

1 – Cardinal Allen School Grounds, Fleetwood.

2 – Land South of Blackpool Road, Poulton-le-Fylde.

3 – Land north east of Poulton Road, Poulton.

The draft Wyre Local Plan (2011-2031) proposed that these three sites be released from the Green Belt which was considered by the Local Plan Inspector.

In addition, the inspector considered the potential release of a small parcel of previous developed land at Norcross which is part of an outline planning permission for a mixed-use development, including housing. The proposed Main Modifications to the draft Local Plan proposed to release this site from the Green Belt.

The Local Plan Inspector accepted the proposed alterations to the Green Belt in finding the Local Plan sound. The Local Plan was adopted by the Council on the 28 February 2019.

The Local Plan Inspector's Report and the Wyre Green Belt Study can be accessed on the Council's Website at:

http://www.wyre.gov.uk/downloads/file/5574/final_report_on_the_examination_of_the_wyre_local_plan

http://www.wyre.gov.uk/downloads/file/3428/wyre_green_belt_study

Technical notes

Scope and scale of revisions

The change to the estimate of the area of Green Belt land as at 31 March 2018 was due to minor corrections of the area of thirty-five local authorities' Green Belts. The reasons given for the updated figures provided for 2017/18 are given in Table 4.

Table 4: Reasons for amending the Green Belt area as at 31 March 2018

Reason for updated Green Belt area	Number of local planning authorities	Size of change hectares [7]
Change in boundary	4	-230
No change but incorrect figure	10	-290
Positional accuracy improvements	2	10
Other improved measuring technique	17	-600
Previously submitted dataset incorrectly digitised	2	-4,010

The last five 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 1,638,630 hectares,
- the area at 31 March 2015 was revised from 1,636,620 hectares to 1,636,500 hectares,
- the area at 31 March 2016 was revised from 1,635,480 hectares to 1,635,490 hectares,
- the area at 31 March 2017 was revised from 1,634,700 hectares to 1,634,580 hectares.
- the area at 31 March 2018 was revised from 1,629,510 hectares to 1,624,440 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' (AGB1) return via DELTA[8], the department's electronic data collection system. Authorities were asked to confirm their published Green Belt estimates as at 31 March 2018 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2018/19. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if the estimated area as at 31 March 2018 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

[7] Total size of change in hectares may not reconcile to the total England revision difference for 2017/18 due to rounding.

[8] 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.

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

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%; 98% in 2018/19) 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 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 2018/19, the response rate was 98%, with three out of 186 (two per cent) of authorities not completing the return. They are:

- Hounslow
- Uttlesford
- Wokingham

It was confirmed that none of the above local authorities have adopted a new Local Plan between 1st April 2018 and 31st March 2019 and as such no changes to their Green Belt designation are expected.

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%

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 186 local authorities. An assessment of the level of risk based on the Quality Assurance Toolkit is as follows:

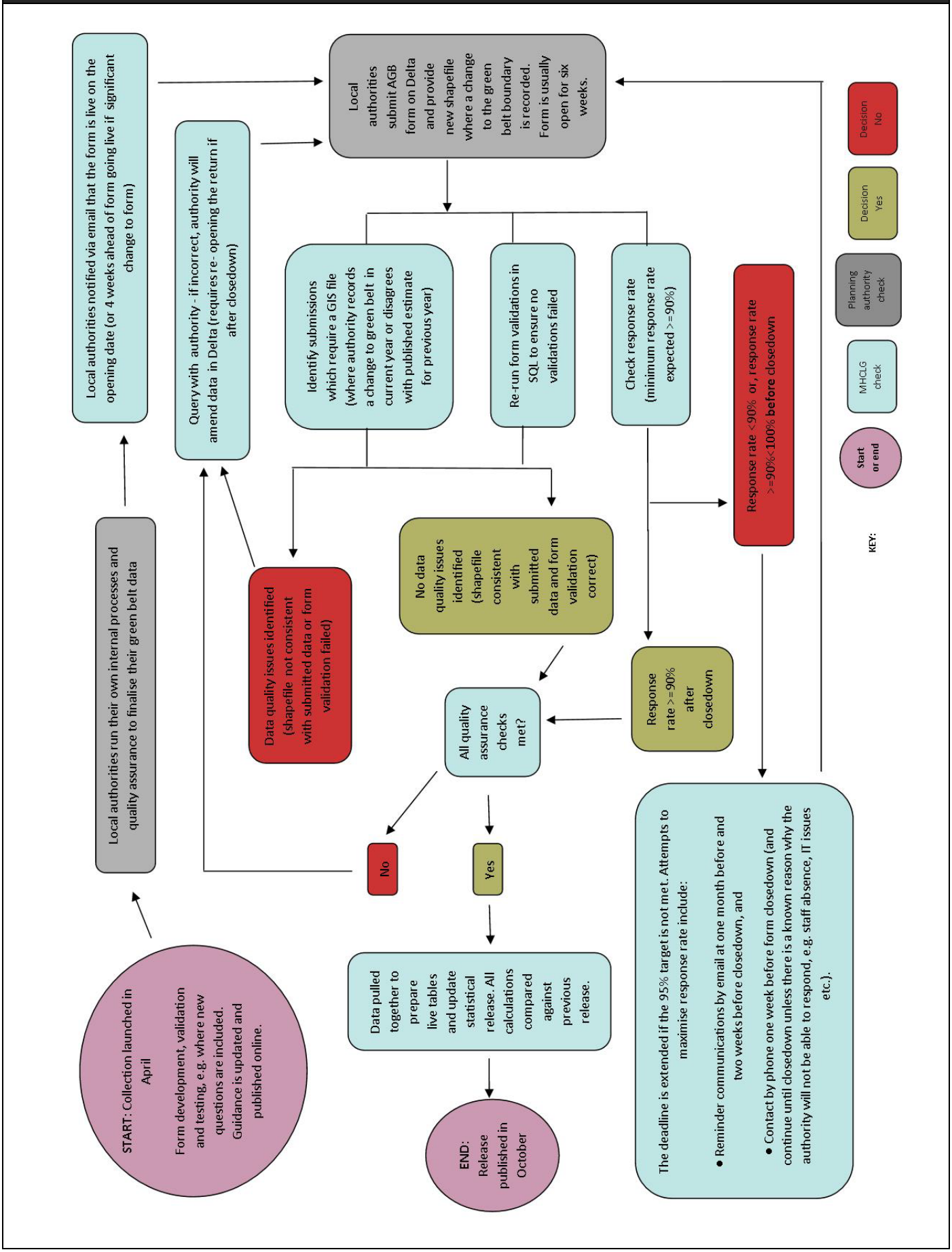
Risk/Profile Matrix **Statistical Series**	**Administrative Source**	**Data Quality Concern**	**Public Interest**	**Matrix Classification**
Green Belt Statistics	Local authorities 'individual planning systems	Low	Medium	Low Risk [A1]

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. 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 rates[9]. 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).

[9] 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 186 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. Authorities are asked to record which mapping product was used to create the Green Belt boundary, to assist with reconciling any observed differences, and an indication on the level of quality assurance undertaken by the local authority is 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/Delta return.

Table 6 gives information on the methods used by the thirteen local planning authorities reporting a change in the area of Green Belt land during 2018/19, as reported on the AGB1 return.

Table 6: Method of estimating the change of Green Belt area in 2018/19

Method	Number
Figure taken from GIS data file using Cartesian method (usually using ArcGIS or Mapinfo)	8
Figure taken from GIS data file using Spherical method (usually using Mapinfo)	3
Measured manually	0
Other	2
Total	**13**

Source: AGB 1 returns, question B5

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.

Local authorities may also incorrectly allocate a change to the wrong explanation, for example they might allocate a revision to last year's figure as a 'real' change in the Green Belt or a 'real' change as a revision. These errors are identified either through the explanation for the revision supplied in the form, or through the explanation asked for (by email) to provide context for the real-world change.

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:
0303 444 1209
Email: newsdesk@communities.gov.uk

Public enquiries and Responsible Statistician:
Sophie Ferguson
Email: planning.statistics@communities.gov.uk

Information on Official 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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