



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Local Planning Authority Green Belt: England 2014/15

- The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31st March 2015 was estimated at 1,636,620 hectares, around 13% of the land area of England.
- Overall there has been a decrease of 2,000 hectares (around 0.1%) in area of Green Belt between 2013/14 and 2014/15. In 2014/15 eleven authorities adopted new plans which resulted in the decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 2013/14. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 hectares.
- The revised 2013/14 Green Belt in England is estimated at 1,638,630 hectares. This is a slight increase of 20 hectares on the 2013/14 Green Belt area estimate of 1,638,610 hectares published in October 2014. This change is due to minor corrections in the areas of 16 local authorities Green Belt boundaries.
- Since these statistics were first compiled for 1997, there has been an increase of 32,000 hectares 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*

1 October 2015

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Date of next publication:

September/October 2016

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 2015.

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%¹ 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 importance² 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.

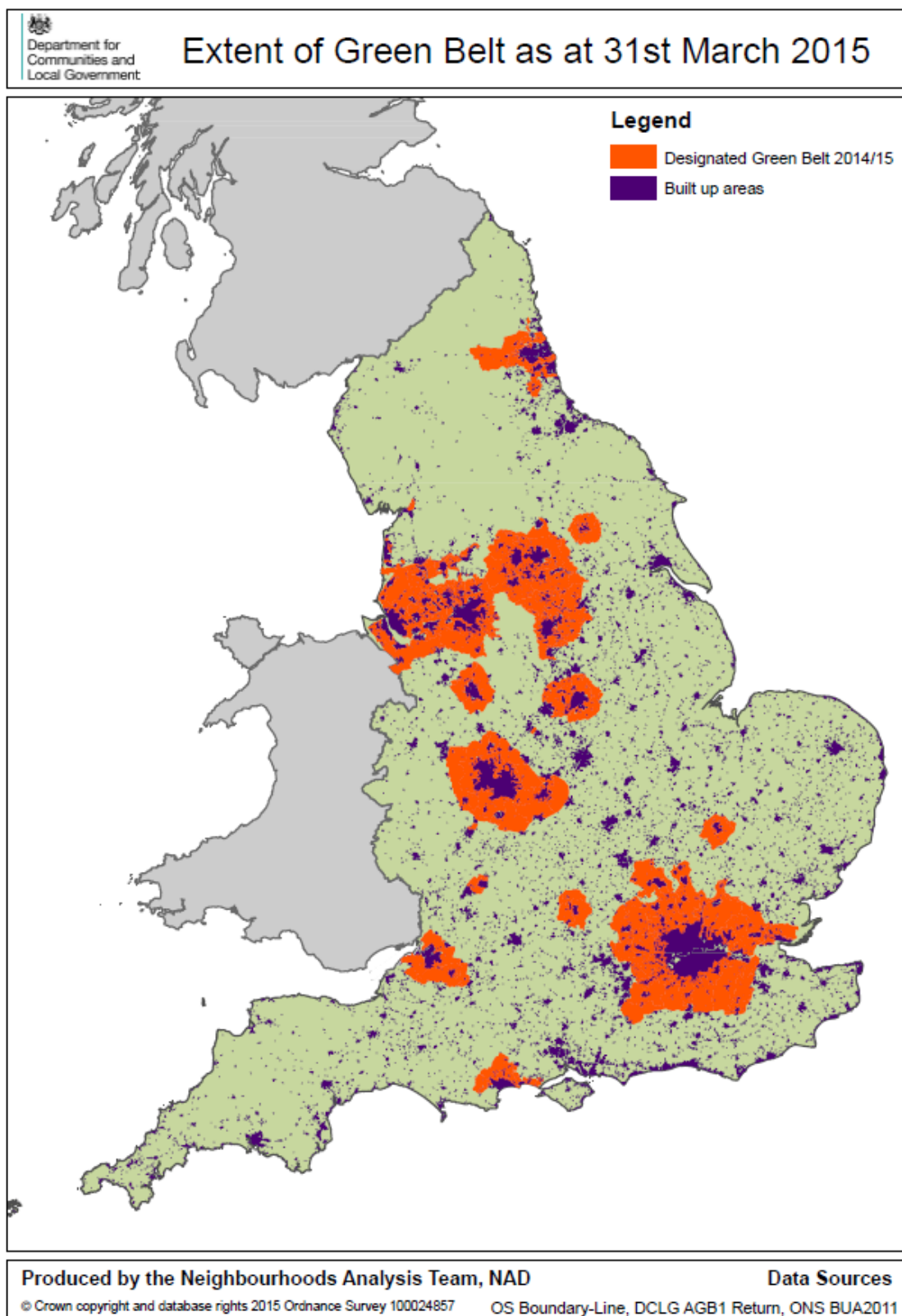
Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance the beneficial use of the Green Belt, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

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

² [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (DCLG)

Extent of the 2014/15 Green Belt

The extent of the designated Green Belt in England as at 31st March 2015 was estimated at 1,636,620 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 2014/15. *Table 2 (Annex 1)* compares the 2014/15 estimates with the revised 2013/14 estimates by local authority.



Net changes

Overall there has been a decrease of 2,000 hectares (around 0.1%) in the area of Green Belt in England between 2013/14 and 2014/15. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 hectares.

In 2014/15 eleven authorities adopted new plans which resulted in the decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 2013/14. Note that there may be discrepancies between individual figures and totals due to rounding. Changes are set out in Table 1

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 2014/15

Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 2014/15 (hectares)	Change from 2013/14
Bath and North East Somerset	24,690	-100 (0%)
Bolton	7,230	-50 (-1%)
Broxtowe	5,130	-20 (0%)
Cheshire West and Chester	39,170	-60 (0%)
Christchurch	3,270	-200 (-6%)
East Dorset	16,720	-160 (-1%)
Gateshead	8,530	-150 (-2%)
Newcastle upon Tyne	3,980	-410 (-9%)
Rushcliffe	16,570	-670 (-4%)
Solihull	11,870	-40 (0%)
Three Rivers	6,720	-110 (-2%)

This is the largest annual change in the area of Green Belt reported in the last five years. This is driven by a higher than previous number of local authorities making changes to the boundary in 2014/15. In the previous 4 years not more than 4 local authorities made amendments in any one year.

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

Bath and North East Somerset

“Revisions follow changes to the Development Plan that came into force in July 2014.”

Bolton

“The reason for the boundary change is due to the adoption of Bolton’s Allocations Plan in December 2014. The Plan allocated the Cutacre site, now known as Logistics North, as a strategic employment site with a net developable area of 80 hectares to meet Bolton’s employment land requirements to 2026. Much of the site had been subject to open casting for coal and contained the sizeable Cutacre tip. While there has been a net loss of Green Belt some land was also added back into the Green Belt. Following restoration and clearance of the tip development of significant distribution and manufacturing facilities surrounded by a managed country park is now underway.”

Broxtowe

“The reason for the boundary change is that the Core Strategy for Broxtowe was adopted in September 2014. This involved the removal of a particular site (Field Farm at Ilkeston Road, Stapleford) from the Green Belt.”

Cheshire West and Chester

“The revised boundary was adopted on 29 January 2015 as part of the Local Plan (Part One) Strategic Policies.”

Christchurch & East Dorset (Joint authority plan)

“The boundary changes are related to the adoption of the [Christchurch and East Dorset Local Plan Part 1](#). The Green Belt boundaries have primarily changed to allow for new residential and employment development, and the operational part of the airport has also been removed from the Green Belt. In addition to these, smaller areas have been removed to allow for improved education facilities, or placed in to the Green Belt in response to sites previously safeguarded for development in earlier local plans no longer being suitable.”

Gateshead & Newcastle (Joint authority plan)

“The amended boundary was approved as part of the adoption of the 'Core Strategy and Urban Core Plan for Gateshead and Newcastle' adopted on 26 March 2015.”

Rushcliffe

“The change in Green Belt occurred as a result of the new Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy being adopted. Detailed revisions to the Green Belt have been made through the Local Plan Part 1 (Core Strategy) to: accommodate the strategic allocations around the main Nottingham area

(Within Rushcliffe) at land off Melton Road (Edwalton), Land south of Clifton and land East of Gamston/north of Tollerton; remove Edwalton Golf Course from the Green Belt and identify it as safeguarded land and inset from the Green Belt the regeneration sites at the Former Cotgrave Colliery and RAF Newton. For full details please see [Rushcliffe Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy](#) and [Policies Map](#)”

Solihull

“This follows on from the Green Belt changes that occurred as a result of:

- 1) Solihull Local Plan Adoption December 2013
- 2) Solihull Gypsy and Travellers Site Allocations Plan December 2014
- 3) Removal of new Green Belt sites in Solihull Local Plan following successful legal challenge and Court of Appeal decision, December 2014”

Three Rivers

“Minor revisions of the Green Belt boundary were made through the plan making process so as to exclude sites allocated for development (where it was necessary to do so to avoid conflict with Green Belt policy) in the Site Allocations Local Development Document.”

Longer term changes

Statistics on the area of Green Belt are available back to 1997 (Annex 1 table 3). These show an overall increase in the area of Green Belt between 1997 and 2014/15, 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 2013/14 estimates

The revised 2013/14 Green Belt in England is estimated at 1,638,630 hectares. This is a slight increase of 20 hectares on the estimated 2013/14 Green Belt area of 1,638,610 hectares published in October 2014.

The change to the estimate of the area of Green Belt land in 2013/14 was due to a series of minor corrections of the area of sixteen local authorities' Green Belts. The reasons given for the updated figures provided for 2013/14 are given in table 2.

Table 2: Reasons for amending the Green Belt area for 2013/14

Reason for updated Green Belt area	Number of Local Planning Authorities
No Change but Incorrect Figure	8
Positional Accuracy Improvements	2
Other Improved Measuring Technique	1
Change in Boundary	1
Other	4
Total	16

Accompanying annexe

Three additional annex tables are available to download alongside this release:

Table 1	Area of designated Green Belt land by local planning authority in 2014/15
Table 2	Difference in Green Belt area between 2013/14 and 2014/15
Table 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 2013/14 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2014/15. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if the 2013/14 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 (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 DCLG 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 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 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 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 (99% in 2014/15) 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 2012/13 area was revised from 1,639,090 hectares to 1,639,160 hectares, while the 2013/14 area was revised from 1,638,610 hectares to 1,638,630 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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October 2015

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ISBN: 978-1-4098-4693-2