



Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics: England 2011/12

- The extent of the designated Green Belt land in England in 2011/12 was estimated at 1,639,410 hectares, about 13 per cent of the land area of England.
- Overall there has been a decrease of 130 hectares from the revised 2010-11 Green Belt. This is due to three authorities who have adopted new plans in which they have changed the boundaries of the Green Belt. This represents a decrease of less than 0.01% per cent in the total Green Belt area.
- Since these statistics were first compiled for 1997, there has been an increase in the area of Green Belt after taking account of the redesignation of some Green Belt as part of the New Forest National Park in 2005.



Headlines	1
Introduction	2
Context	2
Extent of the 2011/12 Green Belt	2
Net change	3
Longer term changes	3
Revisions to 2010/11 estimates	3
Other uses of the Green Belt data	3
Data collection	4
Data quality	4
Revisions	4
Accompanying annexes	5
Notes	6
Further information	7
Enquiries	7

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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 2012.

Context

England has a land area of just over 13,040,000 hectares (according to the Ordnance Survey high-water mark). Of this land, only around 9%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.

Extent of the 2011/12 Green Belt

The extent of the designated Green Belt in England in 2011/12 was estimated at 1,639,410 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 2011/12. *Table 2 (Annex 1)* compares the 2011/12 estimates with the revised 2010/11 estimates by local authority.

¹ Urban Settlement 2001: England and Wales (DCLG)

² National Planning Policy Framework (DCLG)

Net change

Overall there has been a slight decrease of 130 hectares (less than 0.01%) in area of Green Belt between 2010/11 and 2011/12. All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10 hectares.

In 2011/12 three authorities adopted new plans which resulted in the decrease in the overall area of Green Belt compared to 2010/11. The main reason given by these authorities for the loss of Green Belt was the release of employment land (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.

Authorities which adopted new boundaries for the designated Green Belt 2011/12

Authority	Area of designated Green Belt land 2011/12	Change from 2010/11
Chelmsford	12,852.80	-35.08
Hyndburn	3,985.73	-41.20
Thurrock	11,920.57	-51.18

Longer term changes

Statistics on the area of Green Belt are available back to 1997 (Annex 3). These show an overall increase in the area of Green Belt between 1997 and 2011/12, 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 2010/11 estimates

The revised 2010/11 Green Belt in England is estimated at 1,639,530 hectares. This is a slight decrease of 10 hectares on the estimated 2010/11 Green Belt area of 1,639,540 hectares published in April 2011.

The change to the estimate of the area of Green Belt land in 2010/11 was due to corrections and improved measuring techniques from digitised data (such as using geographic information systems as opposed to measurements from paper maps) and the impact of positional accuracy improvement on some local authorities' data (*Table 2 of Annex 1*). A list of reasons for changes to the Green Belt estimate, where provided by local authorities, can be found in *Annex 2*.

Other uses of the Green Belt data

As well as its use in monitoring its overall area the local authority Green Belt boundaries are used in DCLG's Land Use Change Statistics, to assess the level of development within the Green Belt. In 2010, the latest information available, it is estimated that 2% of all dwellings were built within the Green Belt, while 69% of these dwellings were built on previously-developed land. Also, in 2009,

around 10% of land changing to a developed use was within the Green Belt.

Data collection

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 2010/11 and indicate whether they had changed the Green Belt boundary in 2011/12. If the Green Belt boundary had changed, or if the revised 2010/11 estimate differed by more than 10 hectares from that 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 Green Belt estimates, but from 2003, Green Belt estimates were collated on an annual basis to monitor the department's target on the area of Green Belt land in England. However, figures were not published for 2005 due to the extensive quality assurance required in that year.

In 2011-12 180 out of 186 authorities (97%) who have designated Green Belt land within their boundaries responded. Where authorities did not respond, we have used the previous boundary and area.

Data quality

The Department originally captured its own Green Belt data from local authority paper records. This activity was then outsourced to a private sector supplier. Considerable effort was required from Departmental staff to quality assure the data provided by the supplier. Given resource constraints and technological advancements by local authorities, many of which were now able to produce digital map data of Green Belt, in 2007 it was concluded that a more cost effective approach would be for the Department to build and maintain a new Green Belt dataset from the increasingly available local authority digital data, thus also improving quality assurance.

From April 2007 an indication on the level of quality assurance undertaken by the local authority was recorded as part of the final sign-off for this return. All shapefiles are checked to ensure that they match the area of the Green Belt as recorded by the local authority on the Interform return.

Revisions

The revisions 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 or dissemination process, the statistical release and other accompanying documents 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 2009/10 area was revised from 1,639,560 hectares to 1,639,530 hectares, while the 2010/11 area was revised from 1,639,540 hectares to 1,639,530 hectares. However, individual local authority revisions can be more volatile.

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 at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engagement-strategy-to-meet-the-needs-of-statistics-users>

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 2011/12.

Annex 1 (Table 2): Area of designated Green Belt land by local planning authority: 2010/11, 2011/12

Annex 2: Reasons for changes in Green Belt Estimates in 2010/11.

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

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.

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>

Further information

Date of next publication

The next publication of this Statistical Release is due to be published in November 2013. This will present information on the extent of the Green Belt as at 31st March 2013.

Enquiries

1. This Statistical Release, as well as previous Releases, can be accessed at:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government/series/green-belt-statistics>
2. Information on Green Belt statistics can be obtained from
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Information on Official Statistics is available via the UK Statistics Authority website:
www.statistics.gov.uk

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-communities-and-local-government>

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