

Purpose of the Study

To give the Black Country Authorities a detailed picture of individual areas of Green Belt as part of the evidence needed for the Black Country Plan.

What is the Green Belt and what does it consist of?

The Black Country Green Belt forms part of the West Midlands Green Belt. The West Midlands Green Belt is a large, mostly continuous, belt of land around the urban area which was originally designated in 1975 to prevent the expansion of the West Midlands Conurbation (built up area) into the surrounding countryside and to stop it merging with neighbouring towns.

Green Belt is a national planning designation and relevant national policy strictly controls which types of development can take place within it.

In line with national policy, 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.

What does the Green Belt consist of?

The 'Green Belt' consists of a wide variety of land:

- some of it is already developed – or has been developed in the past;
- some of it is open land of good quality and is used for recreation;
- some of it is agricultural use and is intensively farmed;

Green belt land can therefore cover a range of different uses and not all Green Belt Land is green!

Around one quarter of the Black Country Green Belt is occupied by existing development, such as schools and small housing estates.

Some of the Black Country Green Belt also takes the form of green wedges - these run through the urban area instead of around it.

It is important to remember that Green Belt Land and Greenfield Land sound similar but are completely different - Greenfield Land is land which is not developed on and includes all Public Open Space and residential gardens within the urban area.

Scope of the Study

National Policy requires Green Belt boundaries to remain unchanged, unless a Local Plan review takes place that demonstrates that "exceptional circumstances" exist to change the boundary and release land for development. An overall review of the Black Country Green Belt has not taken place since it was established because it has previously been possible to accommodate all of the housing and employment development needed within the urban area.

However, the evidence produced to support the current Black Country Plan has demonstrated that exceptional circumstances now exist to justify a review of the Green Belt. This is because the Black Country Plan covers the period up to 2038, and the amount of development land needed by this date is so large that it is unlikely that all of it can be provided within the urban area of the Black Country and other areas alone.

Therefore, a Green Belt Assessment has now been produced to give the Black Country Authorities a detailed picture of individual areas of Green Belt as part of the evidence needed for the Black Country Plan. The assessment will help the Black Country Authorities to understand if there is any suitable land within the Green Belt, which, after further detailed assessment and consultation, of other relevant evidence, could be put forward as an option for removal from the Green Belt for development.

The Black Country Authorities and South Staffordshire jointly commissioned LUC consultants to produce a Green Belt Assessment in September 2018. Separate reports were produced for the Black Country and South Staffordshire. The final report for the Black Country was completed in September 2019 and can be viewed on the [Black Country Plan website](#).

What the Study does

Rates areas within the Green Belt as to how they CONTRIBUTE to the 5, nationally defined, purposes of Green Belt

Excludes areas of Green Belt which have significant planning CONSTRAINTS on them from further assessment - e.g. Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation or land at a high risk of flooding

Rates the remaining areas of Green Belt against the HARM which would be caused by their removal from the Green Belt to the integrity of the remaining Green Belt.

Finally, assesses how far the LANDSCAPE CHARACTER of each of those Green Belt areas (e.g. their landform, historic value and use for recreation) would be sensitive to development.

What the Study does not do

Recommends which areas of land should be REMOVED from the Green Belt

Amends the Green Belt BOUNDARY

States which parts of the Green Belt should be DEVELOPED – e.g. for new housing

ALLOCATES LAND for new development

Implications for the Black Country Plan

Without a Green Belt Assessment, when the Black Country Plan is examined, a Planning Inspector may reject the whole plan, because alternative strategies for making land available for new housing and jobs in the region had not been considered.

It is important to understand that:

- if an area of Green Belt is rated low within this assessment and/or contains a Call for Sites submission, it does not automatically mean that it will be built on
- if an area of Green Belt is rated high and/or does not contain a Call for Sites submission, it does not automatically mean that it will not be built on



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