

# Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics: England 2008/09



- Designated Green Belt land in England as at 31 March 2009 was estimated at 1,638,840 hectares, about 13 per cent of the land area of England.
- There has been a net increase of 3,170 hectares when compared with the 2007 estimates. Of this net increase 3,330 hectares was as a result of improved measuring techniques and the impact of Ordnance Survey's positional accuracy improvement exercise on some local authorities' data rather than a real net increase. The remaining net increase of 10 hectares was due to reasons unknown.
- The largest net increase as a result of improved measurement was in the North West (2,430 hectares) whilst the largest net decrease was in East Midlands (380 hectares).
- Between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2009, three authorities adopted new plans which resulted in a real net decrease of 170 hectares.

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## Introduction

This Statistical Release presents National Statistics on the estimates of the area of designated Green Belt land in England by region and by local authority, as at 31 March 2009. The estimates are based on an improving methodology whereby an increasing number of local authority estimates are provided from digital mapping. This means that the 2008/09 estimates are regarded as more reliable than those previously published.

At 31 March 2009, designated Green Belt land was estimated at 1,638,840 hectares, about 13 per cent of the land area of England. A map of the Green Belts in England at 31 March 2009 is provided in Annex 3. Local authority Green Belt estimates, as at 31 March 2009, are shown below by region.

### Area of designated Green Belt land: 2008/09<sup>1</sup>

	Hectares
	Area
<b>England</b>	<b>1,638,840</b>
North East	72,990
North West	262,730
Yorkshire and the Humber	264,580
East Midlands	78,620
West Midlands	269,380
East Anglia <sup>2</sup>	26,100
London/wider South East <sup>3</sup>	554,310
South West	110,130

<sup>1</sup> Green Belt estimates as at 31 March 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Government Office for East of England region, excluding Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire.

<sup>3</sup> Government Offices for London and the South East of England regions, including Bedfordshire, Essex and Hertfordshire.

Information is not presented by the standard Government Office Regions. This is because for example, the Green Belt for London straddles the London, East of England and South East regional boundaries.

*Table 1 (Annex 1)* shows estimates of the area of green belt land in each local authority. *Table 2 (Annex 1)* compares, by region and by local authority, the 2008/09 estimates with the previous 2007 estimates.

## Changes to the area of Green Belt between 2007 and 2008/09

In 2007 the area of green belt land in England was estimated at 1,635,670 hectares. The 2008/09 estimate of 1,638,840 hectares indicates that there has been a net increase of 3,170 hectares compared with the 2007 estimate. It should be noted that although the 2008/09 estimate shows a net increase in the area of green belt land, most of this change is due to improved measuring techniques and the impact of Ordnance Survey's positional accuracy improvement exercise on some local authorities' data rather than real changes.

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## Changes due to new adopted plans (real changes)

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 Planning Policy Guidance Note 2.

Between 1 January 2008 and 31 March 2009 three authorities adopted new plans which resulted in a net decrease of 170 hectares:

### Real increase

Wycombe (10 hectares).

### Real decreases

South Cambridgeshire (170 hectares) and Havering (10 hectares).

## Changes due to measurement

Other changes in the estimates of the area of green belt land at local authority level between 2007 and 2008/09 were due to improved measuring techniques from digitised data (using geographic information systems as opposed to measurements from paper maps) and the impact of Ordnance Survey's positional accuracy improvement exercise on some local authorities' data (*Table 2 of Annex 1*).

The largest net increase due to improved measuring techniques was in the North West (2,430) mainly arising from West Lancashire (2,540 hectares) correcting errors found when checking the accuracy of the inner and outer boundaries of their digital Green Belt map. The apparent increase of Green Belt in West Lancashire resulted from this improved measurement.

The largest net decrease due to improved measuring techniques was in East Midlands (380 hectares) arising from North East Derbyshire (260 hectares) and Rushcliffe (60 hectares).

## Department Strategic Objective

The Comprehensive Spending Review 2007 (CSR07) settlement set out strategic objectives which the Department is committed to deliver. Indicator 7 of the Department's Strategic Objective on Planning (DSO5) relates to the Net change in the area of Green Belt land. The measure of success of this indicator is to sustain the level of Green Belt nationally, measured by region, over the CSR period. The 31 December 2007 baseline estimate for the total area of Green Belt was 1,635,670 hectares; as at 31 March 2009 this amounted to 1,638,840. Most of this change is due to improved accuracy in measuring the area of Green Belt.

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## Data collection

Estimates of Green Belt land in individual local authorities in England are collected annually on AGB1 (Annual Green Belt) return via *Interform*, the Department's housing and planning electronic data collection system.

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 other publication on green belt estimates. 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.

## 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 are 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.

The Department's preferred method of calculating estimates of the area of Green Belt land for each local authority is using the Cartesian method. However, of the 197 local authorities with Green Belt land in their area only 119 were able to provide estimates using this method. As more authorities convert to the Cartesian method, revisions to previous estimates will occur where there are no actual changes to the area of green belt land in such authorities. Published areas will eventually be based solely on measurements using the Cartesian method.

In 2008 local authorities were invited to review their published green belt estimates for 2007 and provide estimates of Green Belt land as at 31 March 2009.

Where there was an increase (or decrease) of more than 10 hectares between the 2007 published estimates and those as at 31 March 2009, authorities have been approached to obtain an explanation for this. A list of reasons for changes to the green belt estimate, where provided by local authorities, can be found in *Annex 2*.

From April 2007 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.

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## 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 as at 31 March 2009.
- Annex 1 (Table 2): Area of designated Green Belt land by region and by local planning authority.
- Annex 2: Reasons for changes in Green Belt Estimates between 2007 and 2008/09.
- Annex 3: Designated Green Belt land in England as at 31 March 2009.
- Annex 4: Regional trend in the area of Green Belt land since 1997.

## Background notes

### **Green Belt policy**

1. There are five purposes of including land in Green Belts:

- to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- to prevent neighbouring towns from 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.

2. Once Green Belts have been identified, the use of land in them has a positive role to play in fulfilling the following objectives:

- to provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- to retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- to improve damaged and derelict land around towns;
- to secure nature conservation interest; and
- to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

3. This Release is a web-only publication.

4. Details of officials who receive pre-release access to this statistical release 24 hours before publication can be found at

[www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/nationalstatistics/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/nationalstatistics/)

5. National Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice. They undergo regular quality assurance reviews to ensure they meet customer needs.

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## Further information

### **Date of next publication**

Local Planning Authority Green Belt estimates as at 31 March 2010 will be published in April 2010.

### **Enquiries**

1. This Statistical Release, as well as previous Releases, can be accessed from the Communities and Local Government website at:

[www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningbuilding/planningstatistics/localplanningauthority/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningbuilding/planningstatistics/localplanningauthority/)

2. Information on Green Belt statistics can be obtained from: Deborah Aniyeloye, Development Control and Green Belt Statistics Branch, Housing Markets and Analysis Division, Communities and Local Government, 2/A5, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London SW1E 5DU.

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Information on Official Statistics is available via the UK Statistics Authority website:

[www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk)

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