



The countryside charity  
Gloucestershire

## **Change is inevitable: it should be for the better**

### **POLICY STATEMENT**

#### **GLOUCESTER AND CHELTENHAM GREEN BELT**

##### Summary of policy position

*We endorse the five purposes for Green Belts set out in national planning policy.*

*The general extent of the current Gloucester and Cheltenham Green Belt should be broadly retained. There is also a case for extension of the Green Belt to the north of Bishop's Cleeve to provide further containment to the Cheltenham urban area, and to the south of Gloucester to safeguard the important strategic gap between Gloucester and Stonehouse.*

*Any proposal to modify the general extent of Green Belt land to accommodate urban extensions or other development would need to be fully justified by exceptional circumstances and only be considered where this would provide the most sustainable solution.*

*The Green Belt should be a focus for investment in Green Infrastructure, as an integral part of new development and largely funded by developer contributions. Investment should fund: improved networks of open space; better access into the countryside; enhancement of the landscape and wildlife habitats, and more opportunities for recreation and exercise contributing to improving health.*

##### Background

The Gloucester and Cheltenham Green Belt was designated in 1958. It is the second smallest Green Belt in England, being confined to land separating Gloucester and Cheltenham, and Cheltenham and Bishop's Cleeve.

Section 13 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out national policy for Green Belts. It says (paragraph 133) that *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.*

Five purposes are defined for including land in Green Belts (paragraph 134), namely:

- 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.

Green Belts are a spatial planning tool to contain urban sprawl and landscape quality is not a criterion for designation. However, once Green Belts have been defined it is important that the land within them is managed and where possible enhanced for public benefit. Paragraph 141 says that *local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, 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.*

Paragraph 136 says that *once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any change to Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they can endure beyond the plan period.*

Paragraph 137 says *Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies.....and whether the strategy:*

- a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;*

*b) optimises the density of development.....including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and*

*c) has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground.*

Paragraph 138 says *When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic planning authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary; towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously developed and/or is well served by public transport.*

#### Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy (the JCS)

The JCS was adopted by the three local authorities in December 2017 to guide development in the area to 2031. Separate local plans for Gloucester City, Cheltenham Borough and Tewkesbury Borough, currently in preparation, will provide more detailed policy; and a partial review of the JCS is to take place to address a shortfall in housing land in Gloucester City and Tewkesbury Borough when assessed against the Objectively Assessed Housing Needs for the area.

In preparing the JCS, assessed housing needs and assessed availability of land within existing built up areas led the three local authorities to propose urban extensions to both Gloucester and Cheltenham to meet housing targets in the most sustainable way. These required Green Belt boundaries to be amended. Although this has resulted in the area of the Green Belt being reduced by some 15%, the main purpose of maintaining the separation of Gloucester and Cheltenham has been protected.

## CPRE Policy

### a. Extent of Green Belt

In CPRE's view, the Gloucester and Cheltenham Green Belt has served its primary purposes well, namely to prevent a risk of Gloucester and Cheltenham, and Cheltenham and Bishop's Cleeve from merging and to define a limit to urban sprawl. This has not been materially affected by the loss of some Green Belt land as a result of the JCS.

Accordingly, we consider that the general extent of the current Green Belt should be broadly retained, but consideration should also be given to extension to the north of Bishop's Cleeve to provide further containment to the Cheltenham urban area, and to the south of Gloucester to safeguard the important strategic gap between Gloucester and Stonehouse (in Stroud District).

Any proposal to modify the general extent of Green Belt land to accommodate further urban extensions or other development would need to be fully justified by *exceptional circumstances*, in accordance with policy in the revised NPPF. Removing land from the Green Belt for development should only be contemplated where all other development options have been tested and it is clear that this would provide the most sustainable solution for accommodating future development requirements, for example by avoiding development leaping to settlements beyond the Green Belt.

Separate detailed statements should be produced to set out the *exceptional circumstances* for *each* of any proposed modifications of the Green Belt. Such statements should explain clearly the *relative advantages and disadvantages* of the proposal (including the material disadvantage of loss of the Green Belt land itself) and the assessment that concludes that this would be the most sustainable approach in that area. Any losses to the Green Belt should be kept to the absolute minimum and only land of low environmental quality considered for release.

### b. Management of the Green Belt

Opportunities clearly exist to enhance public benefits within the Gloucester and Cheltenham Green Belt.

Better and more co-ordinated land management would help the Green Belt to deliver vital environmental and other services - from attractive landscapes with new woodland and wildlife rich habitats, to places for recreation and for growing local food.

We wish to see the Green Belt as a focus for investment in Green Infrastructure, as an integral part of new development and largely funded by developer contributions through the Community Infrastructure Levy. Investment should fund: improved networks of open space; better access into the countryside on foot and by cycle; provision and enhancement of landscape features including new areas of woodland; enhanced wildlife habitats and ecological networks helping to tackle the challenges of a changing climate; opportunities for Community Supported Agriculture; and more opportunities for recreation and exercise contributing to improving health.

An early priority for action should be enhancing the landscape along the M5 corridor through the Green Belt.

### Implementing the Policy

CPRE input to the JCS process in relation to the Green Belt followed the policy set out above. We pressed for Green Belt releases to be kept to a minimum and only taken forward when other development opportunities had been exhausted, and argued that the assessed housing need was “too high” as it was based on unrealistic assumptions about economic growth. We did accept, however, that the proposed urban extensions provided the most sustainable pattern of new development and, in the main, would not compromise the essential purpose of the Green Belt in preventing the coalescence of Gloucester and Cheltenham. We also welcomed the Council’s policies for Green Infrastructure. We were disappointed, however, that our proposals for Green Belt extensions were not accepted at this time.

The policy, set out above, will continue to inform our continued input to planning within the JCS area.

**Updated September 2018**

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**CPRE Gloucestershire Policy Statements are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary. They should be read as a set**