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Guidance

Green Belt

Advice on the role of the Green Belt in the planning system.

From: **Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-local-government)**, **Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (2018 to 2021) (/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government-2018-2021)** and **Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (/government/organisations/department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities)**

Published 22 July 2019

Last updated 27 February 2025 —

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Scope of guidance

This guidance sets out:

- the considerations involved in assessing the contribution Green Belt land makes to Green Belt purposes, where relevant to identifying grey belt land
- the considerations involved in determining whether release or development of Green Belt land would fundamentally undermine the remaining Green Belt in the plan area;
- guidance for considering proposals on potential grey belt land
- guidance on identifying sustainable locations when considering the release or development of Green Belt land
- updated guidance on how major housing development on land which is released from the Green Belt through plan making, or on sites in the Green Belt, should contribute to accessible green space
- updated guidance on how to consider the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt

Assessing Green Belt to identify grey belt land

This guidance is relevant to those authorities performing a review of Green Belt boundaries to meet housing or other development needs (either prior to or as part of the plan making process), those authorities otherwise required to determine whether land constitutes grey belt in decision making, and others seeking to identify grey belt land.

Where grey belt is identified, it does not automatically follow that it should be allocated for development, released from the Green Belt or for development proposals to be approved in all circumstances. The contribution Green Belt land makes to Green Belt purposes is one consideration in making decisions about Green Belt land. Such decisions should also be informed by an overall application of the relevant policies in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).

Why should authorities assess their Green Belt to identify grey belt land?

As set out in national policy, the review and alteration of Green Belt boundaries should take place, where necessary, as part of the plan making process. In doing so, we expect authorities to identify grey belt land to inform this review and the prioritisation detailed in paragraphs 147 and 148 of the NPPF (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/13-protecting-green-belt-land).

National policy also requires authorities to identify, where necessary, whether land is grey belt for the purpose of considering applications on Green Belt land. Where land is identified as grey belt land, any proposed

development of that land should be considered against paragraph 155 of the NPPF (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/13-protecting-green-belt-land), which sets out the conditions in which development would not be inappropriate on grey belt land.

Paragraph: 001 Reference ID: 64-001-20250225

How should authorities assess their Green Belt to identify grey belt land?

In order to identify grey belt land, authorities should produce a Green Belt assessment, either as part of the review of Green Belt boundaries during the preparation or updating of a local plan, or at another relevant point. This assessment should be informed by the guidance below.

We expect most Green Belt assessments to be undertaken by local authorities or appropriate groups of local authorities. Green Belt assessments should also inform the preparation of Spatial Development Strategies where these will be setting the strategic context for land release.

When updating or preparing plans, authorities will need to consider whether any existing Green Belt assessment remains up to date.

Paragraph: 002 Reference ID: 64-002-20250225

What are the key steps in a Green Belt assessment?

In order to assess the Green Belt in the relevant local or strategic development area effectively, authorities will need to:

- identify the location and appropriate scale of area/s to be assessed
- evaluate the contribution each assessment area makes to Green Belt purposes (a), (b), and (d), using the criteria identified below
- consider whether applying the policies relating to the areas or assets of particular importance in footnote 7 to the NPPF (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/2-achieving-sustainable-development#footnote7) (other than Green Belt) would potentially provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development of the assessment area
- identify grey belt land
- identify if the release or development of the assessment area/s would fundamentally undermine the five Green Belt purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt when considered across the area of the plan

Paragraph: 003 Reference ID: 64-003-20250225

How should authorities define the land to be assessed?

In assessing their Green Belt, it will in most cases be necessary for authorities to divide their Green Belt into separate assessment areas for the purpose of identifying grey belt. The number and size of assessment areas can be defined at a local level and respond to local circumstances. However, the following principles will need to be considered:

- when identifying assessment areas, authorities should consider all Green Belt within their Plan areas in the first instance
- to ensure any assessment of how land performs against the Green Belt purposes is robust, assessment areas should be sufficiently granular to enable the assessment of their variable contribution to Green Belt purposes
- a small number of large assessment areas will not be appropriate in most circumstances – authorities should consider whether there are opportunities to better identify areas of grey belt by subdividing areas into smaller assessment areas where this is necessary
- authorities should consider where it may be appropriate to vary the size of assessment areas based on local circumstances. For example, the assessment of smaller areas may be appropriate in certain places, such as around existing settlements or public transport hubs or corridors

Paragraph: 004 Reference ID: 64-004-20250225

How should the contribution land makes to the relevant Green Belt purposes be assessed?

When making judgements as to whether land is grey belt, authorities should consider the contribution that assessment areas make to Green Belt purposes a, b, and d. Considerations for informing these judgements are set out below:

Purpose A – to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas

This purpose relates to the sprawl of large built up areas. Villages should not be considered large built up areas.

Contribution	Illustrative features
Strong	Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development, and lack physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development. They are also likely to include all of the following features:

Contribution	Illustrative features
	- be adjacent or near to a large built up area - if developed, result in an incongruous pattern of development (such as an extended “finger” of development into the Green Belt)
Moderate	Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to be adjacent or near to a large built up area, but include one or more features that weaken the land’s contribution to this purpose a, such as (but not limited to): - having physical feature(s) in reasonable proximity that could restrict and contain development - be partially enclosed by existing development, such that new development would not result in an incongruous pattern of development - contain existing development - being subject to other urbanising influences
Weak or None	Assessment areas that make only a weak or no contribution are likely to include those that: - are not adjacent to or near to a large built up area - are adjacent to or near to a large built up area, but containing or being largely enclosed by significant existing development

Purpose B – to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

This purpose relates to the merging of towns, not villages.

Contribution	Illustrative Features
Strong	Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely to be free of existing development and include all of the following features: - forming a substantial part of a gap between towns - the development of which would be likely to result in the loss of visual separation of towns
Moderate	Assessment areas that contribute moderately are likely to be located in a gap between towns, but include one or more features that weaken their contribution to this purpose, such as (but not limited to): - forming a small part of the gap between towns - being able to be developed without the loss of visual separation between towns. This could be (but is not limited to) due to the presence or the close proximity of structures,

Contribution	Illustrative Features
	natural landscape elements or topography that preserve visual separation
Weak or None	Assessment areas that contribute weakly are likely to include those that: - do not form part of a gap between towns, or - form part of a gap between towns, but only a very small part of this gap, without making a contribution to visual separation

Purpose D – to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

This purpose relates to historic towns, not villages. Where there are no historic towns in the plan area, it may not be necessary to provide detailed assessments against this purpose.

Contribution	Illustrative Features
Strong	Assessment areas that contribute strongly are likely be free of existing development and to include all of the following features: - form part of the setting of the historic town - make a considerable contribution to the special character of a historic town. This could be (but is not limited to) as a result of being within, adjacent to, or of significant visual importance to the historic aspects of the town
Moderate	Assessment areas that perform moderately are likely to form part of the setting and/or contribute to the special character of a historic town but include one or more features that weaken their contribution to this purpose, such as (but not limited to): - being separated to some extent from historic aspects of the town by existing development or topography - containing existing development - not having an important visual, physical, or experiential relationship to historic aspects of the town
Weak or None	Assessment areas that make no or only a weak contribution are likely to include those that: - do not form part of the setting of a historic town - have no visual, physical, or experiential connection to the historic aspects of the town

Paragraph: 005 Reference ID: 64-005-20250225

How should the application of footnote 7 be considered when identifying land as grey belt?

As defined in the NPPF, grey belt excludes land where the application of policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 to the NPPF (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development. In reaching this judgement, authorities should consider where areas of grey belt would be covered by or affect other designations in footnote 7. Where this is the case, it may only be possible to provisionally identify such land as grey belt in advance of more detailed specific proposals.

Paragraph: 006 Reference ID: 64-006-20250225

Making an assessment of whether land is grey belt

After consideration of the above criteria, any assessment area that is not judged to strongly contribute to any one of purposes a, b, or d can be identified as grey belt land, subject to the exclusion of land where the application of the policies relating to the areas or assets in footnote 7 to the NPPF (other than Green Belt) would provide a strong reason for refusing or restricting development.

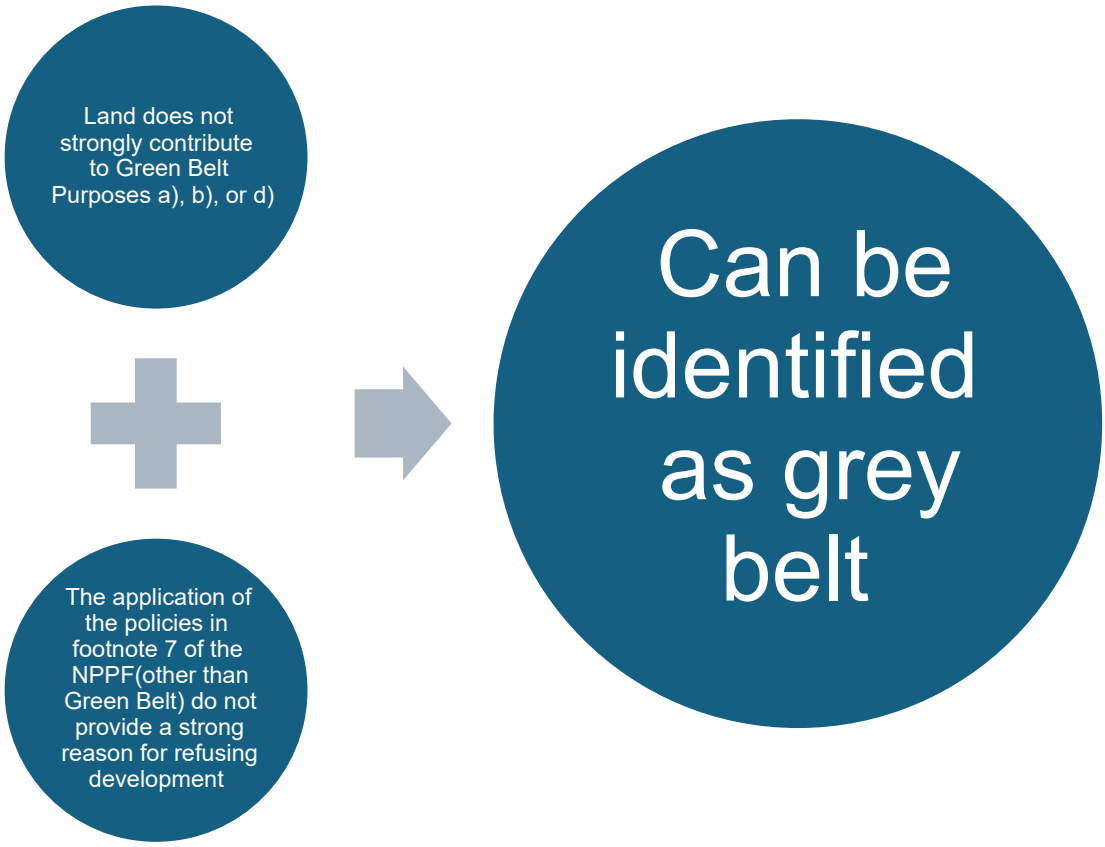

Figure 1. When can land be identified as grey belt

Paragraph: 007 Reference ID: 64-007-20250225

Considering the impact on the remaining Green Belt in the plan area

How can the impact of releasing or development on the remaining Green Belt in the plan area be assessed?

A Green Belt assessment should also consider the extent to which release or development of Green Belt land (including but not limited to grey belt land) would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area as whole.

In reaching this judgement, authorities should consider whether, or the extent to which, the release or development of Green Belt Land would affect the ability of all the remaining Green Belt across the area of the plan from serving all five of the Green Belt purposes in a meaningful way.

Paragraph: 008 Reference ID: 64-008-20250225

Proposals on grey belt land

How can Green Belt assessments be used in the development management process?

An assessment of Green Belt will (alongside other considerations) inform the determination of applications which involve reaching a judgement as to whether proposals utilise grey belt land and whether development of the site would fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area.

Where grey belt sites are not identified in existing plans or Green Belt assessments, it is expected that authorities should consider evidence, in light of this guidance, on:

- whether the site strongly contributes to the Green Belt purposes a, b or d; and
- whether the application of policies to areas and assets of particular importance identified in footnote 7 to the NPPF (other than Green Belt) provide a strong reason to restrict development; and
- whether development of the site would fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area, as set out in national policy and this guidance.

Paragraph: 009 Reference ID: 64-009-20250225

In what circumstances should proposals on grey belt land be approved?

Where a site is judged to be grey belt, and to not fundamentally undermine the purposes of the remaining Green Belt across the plan area if released or developed, wider considerations will still be relevant to the consideration of development proposals on the site. These would include determining whether the development would not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt, as set out in paragraph 155 of the NPPF (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/13-protecting-green-belt-land). That question would include consideration of whether a development is sustainably located, whether it would meet the 'Golden Rules' contributions (where applicable), and whether there is a demonstrable unmet need for the type of development proposed.

Where a development is not inappropriate in the Green Belt, this does not itself remove the land from the Green Belt nor require development proposals to be approved. In accordance with section 38(6) of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 (https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/5/section/38), wider policies and considerations apply, including those in the area's adopted Plan, and in the NPPF read as a whole.

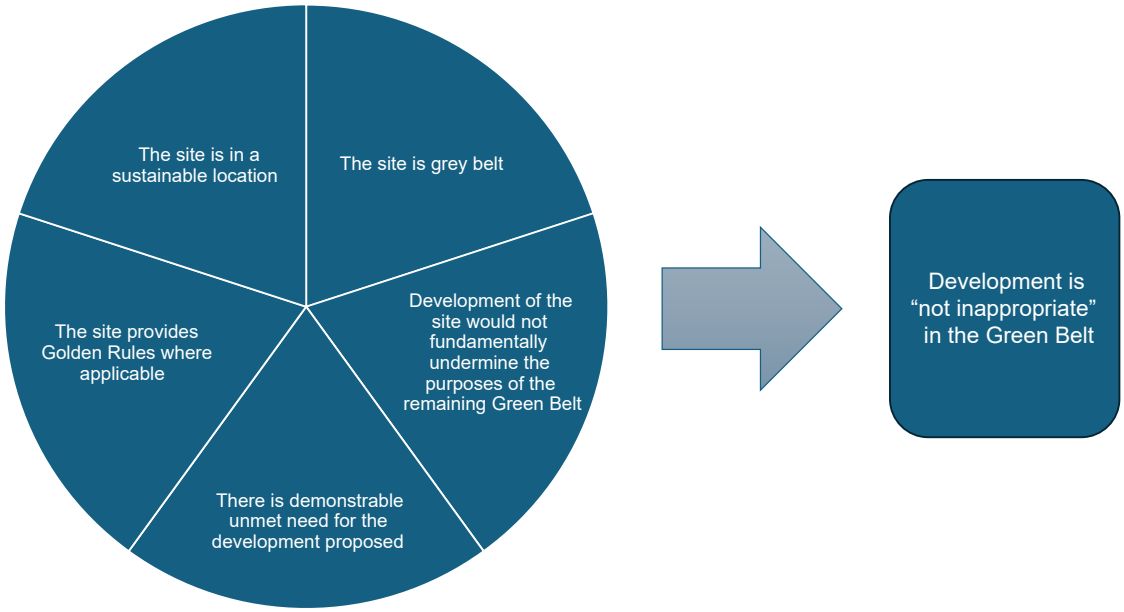

Figure 2. When is development in the Green Belt not inappropriate under paragraph 155 of the NPPF?

Paragraph: 010 Reference ID: 64-010-20250225

Identifying sustainable locations

How should authorities establish whether Green Belt land is in sustainable locations?

The Framework is clear that, when reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should determine whether a site's location would be appropriate for the kind of development proposed. Similarly, when making decisions regarding planning applications on grey belt land, authorities should ensure that the development would be in a sustainable location. For the purpose of these decisions, where grey belt land is not in a location that is or can be made sustainable, development on this land is inappropriate.

Whether locations are sustainable should be determined in light of local context and site or development-specific considerations. However, in reaching these judgements, national policy is clear that authorities should consider opportunities to maximise sustainable transport solutions, as set out in paragraphs 110 and 115 of the NPPF (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/9-promoting-sustainable-transport).

Paragraph: 011 Reference ID: 64-011-20250225

Golden Rules

Further guidance on Golden Rules for Green Belt development is set out in the Viability guidance (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/viability#golden-rules-for-green-belt-development).

How can major housing development on land which is released from the Green Belt through plan making, or on sites in the Green Belt, contribute to accessible green space?

The following contributions to accessible green space should be considered:

- New residents and the wider public should be able to access good quality green spaces which are safe; visually stimulating and attractive; well-designed; sustainably managed and maintained; and seek to meet the needs of the communities which they serve.
- Accessible green spaces are areas of vegetation set within a landscape or townscape, often including blue space, which are available for public use free of charge and with limited time restrictions.

- Where possible access to green spaces should include safe active travel routes and should be served by public transport, which also means providing the necessary infrastructure (such as footpaths and bridleways).
- Proposals should consider how the creation or enhancement of existing green spaces can contribute to the priorities for nature recovery set out within the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategies, providing greater benefit to nature and contributing to the delivery of wider environmental outcomes.
- Where appropriate, authorities should consider the use of conditions or planning obligations. The Community Infrastructure Levy can also be used to fund improvements to existing greenspaces or the provision of new ones. Local authorities should consider arrangements for the long-term maintenance of green spaces.

Paragraph: 012 Reference ID: 64-012-20250225

Considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt

What factors can be taken into account when considering the potential impact of development on the openness of the Green Belt?

Assessing the impact of a proposal on the openness of the Green Belt, where it is relevant to do so, requires a judgement based on the circumstances of the case. By way of example, the courts have identified a number of matters which may need to be taken into account in making this assessment. These include, but are not limited to:

- openness is capable of having both spatial and visual aspects – in other words, the visual impact of the proposal may be relevant, as could its volume
- the duration of the development, and its remediability – taking into account any provisions to return land to its original state or to an equivalent (or improved) state of openness
- the degree of activity likely to be generated, such as traffic generation

Paragraph: 013 Reference ID: 64-013-20250225

How should harm to the Green Belt including harm to its openness be considered if a development is not inappropriate development?

Footnote 55 to the NPPF (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-planning-policy-framework/13-protecting-green-belt-land#footnote55) sets out that if development

is considered to be not inappropriate development on previously developed land or grey belt, then this is excluded from the policy requirement to give substantial weight to any harm to the Green Belt, including to its openness.

This is consistent with rulings from the courts on these matters that, where development (of any kind, now including development on grey belt or previously developed land) is not considered to be inappropriate in the Green Belt, it follows that the test of impacts to openness or to Green Belt purposes are addressed and that therefore a proposal does not have to be justified by “very special circumstances”.

Paragraph: 014 Reference ID: 64-014-20250225

Published 22 July 2019
Last updated 27 February 2025 + show all updates

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