

Green Belt Assessment

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) places 'great importance' to the Green Belt, which is designated around major urban areas to prevent urban sprawl and keep land permanently open. Strategic planning must therefore be informed by an up to date and robust assessment of the performance of Green Belt land against the purposes set out in national planning policy.

Stage 1 Green Belt Study (WoE)

We, working with the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), Bath and Northeast Somerset Council and Bristol City Council, commissioned LUC to undertake a Stage 1 Strategic Development Strategy – Strategic Green Belt Assessment. This was intended to form part of the evidence informing the emerging [West of England Spatial Development Strategy \(SDS\)](#).

The purpose of this document is to understand the strategic role and function of the Bristol and Bath Green Belt within the WECA area, which includes Bath and North East Somerset, Bristol, and South Gloucestershire authorities. The strategic Green Belt assessment systematically considers parcels of land in an objective and consistent manner against the 5 Green Belt purposes defined in national policy. These are to:

- check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another
- assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment
- preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
- assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land

Despite WECA halting work on the Spatial Development Strategy in May 2022, the constituent WECA authorities have confirmed that the Stage 1 Strategic Green Belt Assessment remains proportionate and effective, and therefore it is considered to form a component part of a suite of technical evidence that will be used to inform the preparation of the South Gloucestershire Local Plan.

Importantly, the Stage 1 Strategic Green Belt Assessment is not a decision-making document, nor does it propose where any release of Green Belt land will take place. It is a 'stand-alone' document that does not include impact assessment of the release of specific sites or locations for development in the Green Belt. Also, it makes no recommendations for any areas of land for potential release.

However, the assessment does point to considerations of potential harm that the release of land from the Green Belt would have on the integrity of remaining Green Belt land, which as technical evidence will inform the preparation of our new Local Plan.

Stage 2 Green Belt Review

We are currently undertaking a Stage 2 Green Belt Review. This will help us to provide evidence on how call for sites submitted and assessed through the HELAA perform against the Green Belt purposes, with the objective to inform plan-level considerations regarding sustainable patterns of development.

The Stage 2 Green Belt Review will take the same basic assessment criteria from the Stage 1 Strategic Green Belt Assessment and will further refine these based on the need to achieve consistency for a finer grain site-specific analysis. This Stage 2 Green Belt Review will not function as a policy or decision-making document to determine whether areas of the Green Belt should be released for growth.

Instead, it will be used alongside other technical evidence to inform the consideration of the Local Plan's spatial strategy. This study is expected to be published in early 2024 to inform the Submission (Regulation 19) version of the Local Plan.