

Arguing the case

Some possible cases that would make Green Belt necessary, which could support your efforts in step 3 of our guide:

- There are no existing planning policies, beyond those in national policy, to constrain development effectively, with the result that 'development control' has not prevented urban sprawl, which seems set to continue
- 'Strategic gap' policies are present to keep the land between settlements rural, but these local policies are hard to defend at appeal so development nevertheless chips away at the gap
- Other open land around the town has been designated locally for protection from development, but pressures for development have been stronger and land within the designated area has been built on
- Countryside protection policies exist but are undermined. For example, the quality of land is deliberately allowed to run down, and development then allowed (with no need to prove that 'very special circumstances' exist) on the basis that it will improve the environment
- Urban capacity studies show that the necessary development can largely be supplied on previously developed urban sites, but greenfield land is still allocated for development on the urban edge
- Even though land has been allocated in suitable locations for necessary development, other development is nevertheless permitted on other greenfield sites which were not allocated.

stepbystep

Guide to good campaigning

How to create new Green Belt

England has 14 Green Belts, covering 13% of the land. For 50 years, Green Belts have done a great job of containing urban sprawl. If you think your town or city could benefit from a Green Belt, there are a few steps you should follow to get land designated.

1 Conduct a background check

It's worth first finding out why there isn't a Green Belt in your area already, whether an inspector has previously ruled on this issue in a local plan inquiry report, and whether other local groups have been pushing for Green Belt. Your area may have some local policies which try to achieve something similar, but they will never have the same weight as a national Green Belt policy: national policy has the crucial 'general presumption against inappropriate development' ... except in 'very special circumstances', which local designations are not allowed to invoke.

2 Develop a sound technical case

Government policy on Green Belts says authorities can propose land for designation as Green Belt if they wish to:

- Limit the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
- Prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another
- Safeguard the countryside from encroachment
- Preserve the setting and special character of historic towns

- Help urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of land within the urban area.

Work out carefully which of these purposes apply in the location where you are considering proposing a Green Belt. The more demonstrably applicable the purposes, the stronger the case for a new designation. Bear in mind that different reasons may apply in different parts of the area you wish to see covered.

Try to anticipate the arguments of those who might resist a new Green Belt (such as the need not to hinder development, or the need for new roads) and examine those points equally carefully.

3 Press hard for what is reasonable

The case for designating a new Green Belt depends on making your argument effectively to your local authority, because it must demonstrate why normal planning and development control policies aren't adequate and Green Belt is necessary.

Therefore, examine where existing policies have been tried but found to be less than effective (some examples are in the side panel).

4 Accommodate necessary development

The strength of Green Belt policy in restricting all but the most limited kinds of new development means that new Green Belt will only be accepted if it is clear where necessary development will be located

instead. Green Belt should not be considered in isolation but should be proposed with a clear understanding of how it will contribute to the strategic planning of the area.

Inner Green Belt boundaries should be sufficiently tightly drawn around urban areas to achieve their principal objective of constraining inappropriate, sprawling development. Only then can they contribute to objectives such as preventing the coalescence of settlements and encouraging urban regeneration (by removing the opportunity for edge development).

At the same time, boundaries must be drawn with a view to allowing development in suitable locations, for example to redirect development to sites which would otherwise not be priorities for developers, and encourage the regeneration of declining settlements. The permanence of Green Belts means boundaries should be durable and set to last for the long term.

Green Belt designation can be tied to the reappraisal of existing strategic policy. It may help implement existing policy, particularly for urban renewal and countryside protection, more effectively. It may also prompt a change of approach. For example, instead of an 'anything goes' approach to encouraging development in economically weaker areas, a new Green Belt could instead be part of a new strategy to make an area physically more attractive as a basis for enticing inward investment.



MPs Dr John Pugh, Mark Prisk and Colin Challen accept a mailbag of postcards sent in by the public to show their support for Green Belts. Mark Prisk MP has tabled a Private Member's Bill to protect Green Belts, supported by John Pugh MP and Colin Challen MP

5 Get support for the principle

The broad extent of a new Green Belt will be established in the development of regional planning policy, and individual local authorities' plans will set detailed boundaries. Make sure the case presented is appropriate to the geographical scale of each policy process. New Green Belts must be established as desirable in regional spatial strategies. This is sensible because most new Green Belts will cover land in more than one local authority area, and there does need to be coordination between participating authorities.

New Green Belts are therefore one of the policies campaigners will wish to promote through the community involvement in the review of regional spatial strategies. A significant campaigning effort will be required across a wide area both to make the technical case for a new Green Belt and to gather support for that case.

Regional spatial strategies are drawn up by regional assemblies, which employ their own staff but still rely heavily

on the professional assistance and political support of the local authorities within their regions. The greater the level of support for a new Green Belt which can be generated among both the professional officers and the elected councillors in the affected area, the more likely it is that the campaign will be successful. Influential planning officers in both local and regional authorities who can act as champions are likely to be particularly valuable.

6 Establish detailed boundaries

Aim to ensure that land close to urban areas is included in the new Green Belt unless there are very sound reasons for its omission. Detailed Green Belt boundaries are established at district level, on an Ordnance Survey base, through the preparation of local development frameworks. These boundaries are expected to be virtually permanent (they can be varied only 'exceptionally'), so careful attention should be given to choosing them. Small areas of land may be proposed for

omission, to allow for specific developments such as transport interchanges, which may be locally controversial.

Efforts to create new Green Belt are likely to generate both supporters and opponents in each local authority within the area proposed for designation. A coordinated campaign to persuade each authority, through its officers and members, will be necessary. This should be timed to be effective at the next appropriate stage in the review of the regional spatial strategy. A sound technical case will need to be combined with an effective demonstration of support. On the latter, aim to win over the public, regeneration agencies, environmental organisations and heritage bodies. Encourage debate by circulating information, holding meetings, attending the meetings of local organisations and using the media. Where there is a sound case for new Green Belt, the merits should become self-evident to people unfamiliar with them, so that they in turn can become advocates.

Case study: Durham

A Green Belt around the city of Durham, mooted since the 1960s, finally became a reality in 1999, when the Durham County Structure Plan was approved which contained a tongue of new Green Belt extending southwards to the city.

The campaign for a Green Belt, led by CPRE, the Ramblers' Association and Save Our City, was well organised and used arguments significant in the context of the county.

In 1993, regional planning guidance included a policy for a significant Green Belt extension into County Durham as well as an expansion within Tyne and Wear. The Durham County Structure Plan was a focus for discussion of how to apply this regional policy. Different arguments were appropriate for having Green Belt in different parts of the county: preventing unrestricted sprawl of Newcastle/Gateshead into Chester-Le-Street and Derwentside, and of Sunderland towards Seaham; stopping coalescence between Chester-Le-Street and Durham; protecting the setting of the World Heritage Site of Durham City; and using the Green Belt to encourage the regeneration and revival of urban areas, including the depressed old mining towns in the north of the county.

Support was essentially led by council officers, especially those in Durham County Council and Durham City Council, and this was particularly critical in securing the new Green Belt.

Local councils have been preparing their own plans to implement the strategic policy. For example, the Durham City Local Plan was adopted in May 2004, in line with the structure plan.