

Oxfordshire Plan 2050 - Green Belt

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.

The broad extent of the Green Belt in Oxfordshire was established in 1975. Green Belt boundaries were then formally defined in 1979 by the Oxfordshire Structure Plan.

A full assessment of the Green Belt was commissioned by the Oxfordshire Growth Board and completed in 2015 and this helped inform decisions on how to meet Oxford City's unmet housing need. District authorities have also undertaken focused Green Belt work to support to the production of Local Plans.

The production of the Oxfordshire Plan offers an opportunity to carry out an assessment of the Oxford Green Belt in a holistic manner alongside the development of a strategic framework for growth up to 2050. Therefore, it is intended to commission a new assessment of the Oxford Green Belt to inform and support the production of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050. This will provide up-to-date evidence to inform decision making and outline a Green Belt appropriate for the mid-21st Century.

In a practical sense, a Green Belt Assessment assesses the relative performance of the Green Belt, and a Green Belt Review looks at the potential for areas to be removed from or added to the Green Belt. A Green Belt Review requires judgements to be made about the amount and location of land that should be added to or removed from the Green Belt, and is informed by a Green Belt Assessment as well as other planning issues. The first stage therefore is to carry out a Green Belt Assessment.

The Green Belt Assessment undertaken to inform the Oxfordshire Plan will consider how the land within the Oxford Green Belt performs against the five purposes of Green Belts as set out in paragraph 134 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

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

Green Belt boundaries can only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, and only through the preparation or updating of plans. The Oxfordshire Plan should therefore consider whether this is appropriate and necessary and it may be that a Green Belt Review forms a second phase of work following the Green Belt Assessment. Any review would consider whether 'exceptional circumstances' exist to make any recommendations relating to the alteration or review of Green Belt boundaries and consider opportunities for including additional areas of land within the Green Belt.

Growth Board Scrutiny Committee may like to consider the following aspects of the Green Belt:

- What should be the long-term vision for the Oxford Green Belt?

- Given the need for permanence, what might the Oxford Green Belt look and function like in the mid-21st century?
- What local considerations should be included in the Green Belt Assessment?

The Oxford Green Belt

