



## **POLICY STATEMENT**

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

#### 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.

PPG 2 Green Belts (amended March 2001) sets out national policy for Green Belts. It says (para 1.4) that '*the fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the most important attribute of Green Belts is their openness*'.

Five purposes are defined for including land in Green Belts (PPG2, para 1.5), 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.

Landscape quality is not a criterion for Green Belt designation. However, once Green Belts have been defined, PPG 2 says (para 1.6) that the use of land in them has a positive role to play in fulfilling the following objectives:

- to provide opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- to retain attractive landscapes, and enhance landscapes, near to where people live;
- to improve damaged and derelict land around towns;
- to secure nature conservation interest; and
- to retain land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

Para 2.1 of PPG 2 states that '*the essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence*' and that '*their protection must be maintained as far as can be seen ahead*'. Para 2.6 goes on to clarify that '*once the general extent of a Green Belt has been approved it should only be altered in exceptional circumstances*' and '*if such an*

*alteration is proposed the Secretary of State will wish to be satisfied that the authority has considered opportunities for development within the urban area contained by and beyond the Green Belt’.*

## 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.

Accordingly, we consider that the general extent of the current Green Belt should be broadly retained, but consideration should also 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 urban extensions or other development would need to be justified by *exceptional circumstances*, in accordance with policy in PPG2. Removing land from the Green Belt for development should only be contemplated where 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 leading to less sustainable patterns of development.

Separate detailed statements should be produced to set out the *exceptional circumstances* for *each* of any proposed modifications of the Green Belt boundary (ie for any proposed urban extensions into the Green Belt). Such statements should set out 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. Accordingly, we have pressed for the inclusion of the following Strategic Objective in the Joint Gloucester, Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Core Strategy:

- *To promote the positive management of the Green Belt to enhance its contribution to the landscape, biodiversity and access.*

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, wildlife rich habitats, to places for recreation and for growing local food.

We would 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.

Green infrastructure can also make a major contribution to achieving the recommendations in the Lawton Report, *Making Space for Nature*, which have been endorsed in the Natural Environment White Paper, 2011, *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*.

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