

Greater Nottingham  
Planning Partnership



# Preferred Approach: Green Belt Background Paper

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# 1 Introduction

1.1 Broxtowe, Gedling, Nottingham City and Rushcliffe Councils are working jointly to prepare evidence to support the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan. As part of this work, the Councils have undertaken a strategic Green Belt Review.

1.2 This background paper will:

- Summarise current Green Belt policy to consider whether the Planning Policy context has changed since the last Green Belt Review;
- Outline the approach taken to the previous Green Belt Reviews to consider whether a consistent approach has been taken to Green Belt review across the authorities; and
- Explain why the current Green Belt Review has been undertaken and explain how Green Belt issues will be addressed as part of the preparation of the Strategic Plan.

1.3 A separate Methodology document has been produced to outline the methodology used for undertaking the current Green Belt Review.

## 2 Background

- 2.1 It is the role of an emerging Local Plan to formally review Green Belt boundaries and to allocate land for development, having taken into account all relevant planning considerations. This includes whether there are, in the first instance, exceptional circumstances for altering existing boundaries. It is not the role of any Green Belt review to establish whether or not such exceptional circumstances exist, but if there is a need to alter Green Belt boundaries, the review is intended to inform how this might best be done. A review is therefore a technical document forming part of the evidence base which informs the preparation of the Local Plan that is used to aid decisions on where the Green Belt may be amended to accommodate future development requirements.
- 2.2 A strategic assessment of the Nottingham-Derby Green Belt was undertaken by Broxtowe Borough Council, Gedling Borough Council and Nottingham City Council as part of the production of the Aligned Core Strategies and this process is described in the [Green Belt Background Paper June 2013](#). Assessments of broad areas and more specific assessments, informed by the [Greater Nottingham and Ashfield Green Belt Assessment Framework](#) (February 2015), were subsequently undertaken by Broxtowe, Gedling and Nottingham City Councils.
- 2.3 Rushcliffe Borough Council undertook its own Green Belt review. The first stage of its [Green Belt Review](#), focussing on a strategic review and a detailed review adjoining the Principal Urban Area, was published in November 2013 in order to support its Core Strategy. The Principal Urban Area is defined in the Rushcliffe Core Strategy as the main built up area of Nottingham including West Bridgford, Clifton, Beeston, Stapleford, Long Eaton, Bulwell, Arnold and Carlton. A more detailed [Part 2 \(b\) Green Belt Review](#), focusing on rural towns and villages, was then undertaken to support the Part 2 Local Plan.

### 3 Changes to Planning Policy Context

3.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out the Government's Green Belt policy and how it should be applied. It provides a framework within which locally-prepared plans can be produced. This section compares the [National Planning Policy Framework \(2012\)](#), which was in place at the time of the Green Belt review which informed the preparation of the Aligned Core Strategies, with the [National Planning Policy Framework \(2021\)](#). This is in order to consider whether any there have been any significant changes such that the previous review would no longer comply with national policy.

3.2 Paragraph 137 of the NPPF states that '*the Government attaches great importance to Green Belts*' and stresses that 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*'. This paragraph (previously paragraph 79) remains unchanged.

3.3 The five purposes of including land in Green Belts, as set out in paragraph 138 of the NPPF, are:

- *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.*

This paragraph (previously paragraph 80) remains unchanged.

3.4 Paragraph 140 of the NPPF identifies that, '*once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified, through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period. Where a need for changes to Green Belt boundaries has been established through strategic policies, detailed amendments to those boundaries may be made through non-strategic policies, including neighbourhood plans*'. This paragraph (previously paragraph 83) has been amended to include reference to detailed amendments to boundaries. However, the principle of only altering in exceptional circumstances remains unchanged.

3.5 Paragraph 141 states that '*before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies, which will take into account the preceding paragraph, and whether the strategy:*

- a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;*
- b) optimises the density of development in line with the policies in chapter 11 of this Framework, including whether policies promote a significant*

*uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and*

- c) *has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground*'.

3.6 This is a new paragraph and whilst it is of significance for preparing the Strategic Plan, it is not the role of this Green Belt Review to establish whether or not such exceptional circumstances exist. However, if there is a need to alter Green Belt boundaries, the Green Belt Review is intended to inform how this might best be done.

3.7 Paragraph 142 of the NPPF states that *'when drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries, the need to promote sustainable patterns of development should be taken into account. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary. Where it has been concluded that it is necessary to release Green Belt land for development, plans should give first consideration to land which has been previously-developed and/or is well-served by public transport. They should also set out ways in which the impact of removing land from the Green Belt can be offset through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land*'.

3.8 This matter was previously covered by paragraph 84 which read as follows:-

*"When drawing up or reviewing Green Belt boundaries local planning authorities should take account of the need to promote sustainable patterns of development. They should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary."*

3.9 The NPPF in paragraph 143 sets out guidance for defining Green Belt boundaries and includes a number of changes to the previous paragraph 85, as shown in strikethrough below. These changes are considered to be minor in nature and do not impact on the methodology for undertaking Green Belt review.

Local planning authorities should:

- *'ensure consistency with the development plan's ~~Local Plan~~ strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;*
- *not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;*
- *where necessary, identify ~~in their plans~~ areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;*
- *make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan a ~~local plan review~~ which proposes the development;*

- *be able to demonstrate ~~satisfy themselves~~ that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the ~~development~~ plan period; and*
- *define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent’.*

3.10 Paragraph 145 contains new guidance stating that, ‘*once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land*’. Again, it is considered that this new requirement does not impact on the methodology for undertaking a Green Belt review.

3.11 It is concluded that, for the purposes of undertaking a Green Belt review, national policy remains broadly the same. The updated guidance clarifies the hierarchy by which land should be removed from the Green Belt and introduces the requirement for compensatory improvements to offset the impact of removing land from the Green Belt. Further details regarding compensatory improvements is provided in Section 7.

3.12 Due regard should also be given to relevant case law. [Calverton Parish Council v Nottingham City Council, Broxtowe Borough Council and Gedling Borough Council \[2015\] EWHC 1078 \(Admin\)](#) and [Compton Parish Council v Guildford Borough Council \[2019\] EWHC 3242 \(Admin\)](#) both considered how the test of whether exceptional circumstances should be applied and how it is a matter for the Council to reach a sound planning judgment on whether exceptionality exists in the circumstances. There is a recognised two-stage approach which can be followed to provide the necessary evidence and justification to identify that exceptional circumstances exist to alter the Green Belt. Further detail is provided within Section 7 of this Background Paper.

3.13 In conclusion, it is considered that national policy in relation to Green Belt review remains substantively unchanged since the previous Green Belt reviews which informed the preparation of the Aligned Core Strategies were undertaken. To summarise:-

- The purposes of including land in the Green Belt remain unchanged.
- Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified following the two stage approach outlined above.
- It is the role of a Local Plan to formally revise Green Belt boundaries and to allocate land for development, having taken into account all relevant planning considerations.
- This includes whether there are, in the first instance, exceptional circumstances for altering existing boundaries.
- It is not the role of any Green Belt review to establish whether or not such exceptional circumstances exist, but if there is a need to alter Green Belt boundaries, the review is intended to inform how this might best be done.
- The methodology for undertaking a Green Belt review remains unchanged.



## 4 Approach to Previous Green Belt Reviews

- 4.1 This section summarises the approach taken to the earlier Green Belt reviews and considers whether this approach can be rolled forward. In particular, consideration is given to the approaches taken by Broxtowe Borough Council, Gedling Borough Council and Nottingham City Council compared to Rushcliffe Borough Council to determine whether there were any inconsistencies in approach.
- 4.2 Undertaking a review of the Green Belt involves two stages. These are a strategic assessment (Stage 1) followed by a more detailed site-by-site process to define precise Green Belt boundaries (Stage 2). Due to the current Local Plan being prepared in two parts and the strategic nature of the Aligned Core Strategies it was not possible to carry out these two stages in their entirety as one. However, both stages were fully undertaken through the previous Local Plan process.
- 4.3 A strategic assessment of the Nottingham-Derby Green Belt was previously undertaken as part of the production of the Broxtowe Borough Council, Gedling Borough Council and Nottingham City Council Aligned Core Strategies. This process was described in section 6.0 of the [Aligned Core Strategy Green Belt Review Background Paper June 2013](#) and informed the subsequent Green Belt review for Broxtowe, Gedling and Nottingham City. The process taken by Rushcliffe was described in [Rushcliffe's Green Belt Review paper dated November 2013](#).
- 4.4 For the Aligned Core Strategies and the Rushcliffe Core Strategy, Stage 1 involved a strategic assessment of Green Belt land around Greater Nottingham and also an assessment of the most sustainable locations for large scale strategic development taking account of a range of criteria. This work helped inform the overarching spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy adopted in Policy 2 of the Aligned Core Strategies and Policy 3 of the Rushcliffe Core Strategy. Stage 1 also established the principle of undertaking more detailed Stage 2 assessments.
- 4.5 Part of the Stage 2 assessments were also undertaken for the Aligned Core Strategies and the Rushcliffe Core Strategy and involved a more detailed look at the individual sites and settlements where growth was proposed. Stage 2(a) was focused on the large scale strategic sites which are allocated in the Aligned Core Strategies. The Aligned Core Strategies needed to show how the Proposals Map had been changed as a result of the policies within it. Therefore, any site allocated by the Aligned Core Strategies needed to identify specific Green Belt boundaries. In addition, Rushcliffe's Green Belt Review was used to draw up inset boundaries for those settlements listed within Policy 4 of its Core Strategy and a review of existing inset boundaries was undertaken in order to check that they still followed features on the ground.
- 4.6 Where decisions about sites were not being made in the Core Strategies, the Policies Maps were not updated at that stage. This included where the principle of Green Belt review had been established but work was not yet advanced enough to establish exact boundaries (such as the Broad Locations for Growth,

non-strategic sites around the urban area and the Key Settlements for Growth) and whether smaller settlements would be inset or washed over by the Green Belt. While the Aligned Core Strategies includes indicative areas at the Broad Locations and the Key Settlements, the need for further work and public consultation meant that Stage 2(b) was fully addressed through the Part 2 Local Plans prepared individually by the local authorities involved.

4.7 At both stages 2(a) and 2(b) the need to designate safeguarded land was considered. Consideration was given to the designation of safeguarded land where:

- The land is suitable for development; and
- One of the following applies:
  - The need to develop the site within the plan period is not foreseen as more sustainable sites are available; or
  - It is not necessary to keep the land permanently open; or
  - It is not appropriate for land to remain in the Green Belt due to the need to define defensible Green Belt boundaries.

### Approach to Previous Reviews

Stage of Review	Aligned Core Strategies	Rushcliffe Core Strategy	Commentary
Stage 1	<p>Strategic assessment of Green Belt land around Greater Nottingham and an assessment of the most sustainable locations for large scale strategic development taking account of a range of criteria.</p> <p>This work informed the overarching spatial strategy and settlement hierarchy adopted in Policy 2 of the Aligned Core Strategies.</p>	<p>Part 1(a): Strategic review of the Green Belt around the Nottingham Principal Urban Area within Rushcliffe using existing evidence and work as a starting point.</p> <p>Part 1(b): Strategic review for the rest of the Green Belt within Rushcliffe focussed on rural settlements and areas proposed for regeneration.</p> <p>A review of existing settlements “washed over” by the Green Belt and identification of whether or not they should be “inset” from the Green Belt.</p>	<p>Both used the following documents as starting points to undertake a strategic review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nottingham - Derby Green Belt Review (2006)</li> <li>• Appraisal of Sustainable Urban Extensions (2008)</li> <li>• Sustainable Locations for Growth Report (2010)</li> </ul> <p>Both approaches involved a strategic assessment of Green Belt land around Greater Nottingham and also an assessment of the most sustainable locations for large</p>

Stage of Review	Aligned Core Strategies	Rushcliffe Core Strategy	Commentary
			scale strategic development.
Stage 2(a)	Detailed review was limited to focussing on the large scale strategic sites which were allocated in the Aligned Core Strategies. It considered the specific Green Belt boundaries for these locations. This was limited to two sites in Broxtowe.	Detailed review of inner Green Belt boundaries around the Principal Urban Area and for proposed strategic regeneration sites across rural Rushcliffe that were within the Green Belt.	For the Aligned Core Strategies, the detailed review was restricted to the allocated strategic sites. All other assessments were undertaken as part of Part 2 Local Plans.  In Rushcliffe, due to the need to accommodate strategic growth around the Principal Urban Area of Nottingham (within the Borough), a more detailed review was undertaken at Core Strategy stage.
Stage 2(b)	Stage 2(b) assessments were undertaken as part of the preparation of Part 2 Local Plans.	Stage 2(b) assessments were undertaken as part of the preparation of Part 2 Local Plan.	Policy 3 of the Aligned Core Strategies and Policy 4 of the Rushcliffe Core Strategy included the same criteria for reviewing Green Belt policies.  All assessments undertaken by the authorities as part of Part 2 Local Plans focused on a more detailed site-by-site assessment to define precise Green Belt boundaries

4.8 Whilst Rushcliffe undertook additional work at the Core Strategy stage, it is considered that there is significant alignment in respect of the approaches undertaken.

## 5 Changes to Context

- 5.1 Following the review of the planning policy context set by the NPPF and a comparison of the approaches taken by the participating Councils, consideration needs to be given as to whether there have been any significant changes on the ground which may alter the conclusions of the previous Green Belt review. The adoption of Part 1 and Part 2 Local Plans by the participating Councils have removed strategic and non-strategic areas of land from the Green Belt and this may alter the assessments undertaken previously, resulting in the need for an up to date review targeted on these areas of change.
- 5.2 The changes that may result in the need for a review are as follows: -
- a. Strategic allocations identified in the Core Strategies;
  - b. Non-strategic allocations identified in Part 2 Local Plans; and
  - c. Other significant planning permissions granted in Green Belt locations.
- 5.3 It should be noted that the above changes (a) and (b) may result in the need for review irrespective of whether development has commenced, given that the Green Belt boundary is amended on adoption of the Local Plan. In relation to (c), planning permissions should be considered on a case by case basis to review whether the permission is likely to be implemented and thereby impact on the Green Belt.

## 6 Is a further Green Belt review necessary?

- 6.1 As the planning policy context expressed through the NPPF remains broadly similar, the requirement for and broad methodology for undertaking a review is unchanged. Based on this, it is not considered that a wider review, focusing on the strategic function of the Green Belt, is required. The work which informed the Core Strategies, as set out in the relevant Green Belt background papers referred to above, are therefore still relevant.
- 6.2 However, circumstances on the ground have altered as a result of the removal of land from the Green Belt through the adoption of the Core Strategies and Part 2 Local Plans and, for some Councils, the granting of planning permission in the Green Belt.
- 6.3 In light of the considerations above, it is concluded that there is a need for further Green Belt review which focuses on updating the 'Broad Area' assessments, the outcome of which will inform the preparation of the Strategic Plan.
- 6.4 It is considered that the review should focus primarily on broad areas where strategic development can be accommodated on the edge of the main built-up urban area and key settlements, as previously defined within the Core Strategies, together with some freestanding areas that could accommodate strategic levels of growth and are available for development. Further assessments will be undertaken as part of the Part 2 Local Plan preparation.
- 6.5 For Broxtowe, Gedling and Nottingham City, the assessments relating to these Broad Areas were updated as part of the Part 2 Local Plans, following the approach established as part of the Core Strategies and using a joint assessment framework and criteria. However, for Rushcliffe, the work undertaken in preparation of the Core Strategy remains the most relevant. The following assessments have therefore been updated as part of the review:
- [Broxtowe Borough Council Green Belt Review \(2015\)](#)
  - [Gedling Borough Council Green Belt Review \(2015\)](#)
  - [Nottingham City Council Green Belt Background Paper \(2016\)](#)
  - [Rushcliffe Borough Council Green Belt Review \(2013\)](#)
- 6.6 The boundaries of these Broad Areas were chosen using mapping, aerial photographs and professional judgment and are based on similar characteristics in terms of size, structure and form. The above assessments for Broxtowe, Gedling and Nottingham City used a two-step approach. The first step focused on Broad Areas which have been revisited as part of this Green Belt Review. The second step focussed on smaller sites which have not been reviewed as part of this Review but will be considered as part of the preparation of the Part 2 Local Plans.
- 6.7 The Green Belt covers approximately 40% of Rushcliffe. The outer boundary was adopted as part of the Nottinghamshire Green Belt Local Plan in 1989. To date, no review of the outer boundary has been undertaken as there have not been any exceptional circumstances to do so. As stated before, it is a matter for

the Strategic Plan to establish whether there are exceptional circumstances for a review of the Green Belt. It is not proposed to undertake a review of the outer Green Belt boundary at this stage. However, additional 'freestanding' Green Belt assessments have been undertaken to cover areas of Green Belt which fall outside of the existing Broad Area assessments, where strategic sites are being promoted for development and are being considered as a 'reasonable alternative' for the purposes of the Sustainability Appraisal and site selection process.

- 6.8 Within Gedling, additional Green Belt assessments have been undertaken to cover areas of strategic Safeguarded Land. Further details are provided in Section 8 of this Green Belt Background Paper.

## 7 How will Green Belt issues be considered as part of preparing the Strategic Plan?

- 7.1 Green Belt is not considered as part of the **Sustainability Appraisal** process. The Green Belt is a policy tool and not an environmental protection designation. As such it will not be included as part of the Sustainability Appraisal Framework to be used to test the sustainability of the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan.
- 7.2 The **site selection process** includes the consideration of a wide range of factors that are taken into account in considering whether a site is allocated in the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan. The conclusions of the Green Belt Review will be one of the factors considered. The site selection process will confirm where the impact of removing land from the Green Belt will require offsetting through compensatory improvements to the environmental quality and accessibility of remaining Green Belt land. This will include consideration of the Blue and Green Infrastructure Study and Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping.
- 7.3 Green Belt is considered through the **Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment** (SHLAA) process and will impact on whether a site is considered suitable for development. The approach is set out in the common [SHLAA methodology document](#) with Green Belt being a key factor when considering whether a site is 'suitable', 'could be suitable' or 'not suitable' for development. The SHLAA is the starting point for identifying potential strategic sites for further assessment through the site selection process. Sites submitted through 'Call for Sites' are also considered through this process.
- 7.4 **Policies** in the Greater Nottingham Strategic Plan will address strategic Green Belt matters, including the principle of the Green Belt and any strategic alterations to the Green Belt boundary, should these be required. Policies will also set out the approach for reviewing Green Belt Boundaries as part of Part 2 Local Plans and will consider how the Local Plan will enhance the beneficial use of Green Belts in accordance with paragraph 145 of the NPPF. Non-strategic matters, such as the approach to infill development and extensions, would be considered through the preparation of the Part 2 Local Plan.
- 7.5 Due regard has also been given to relevant **case law**. [Calverton Parish Council v Nottingham City Council, Broxtowe Borough Council and Gedling Borough Council \[2015\] EWHC 1078 \(Admin\)](#) and [Compton Parish Council v Guildford Borough Council \[2019\] EWHC 3242 \(Admin\)](#) both considered how the test of whether exceptional circumstances should be applied and how it is a matter for the Council to reach a sound planning judgment on whether exceptionality exists in the circumstances. There is a recognised two-stage approach which can be followed to provide the necessary evidence and justification to identify that exceptional circumstances exist to alter the Green Belt. Stage 1 requires the Council to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development and this should also include taking a sequential approach to how a development need might otherwise be met without amending Green Belt boundaries as set out in paragraph 141 of the NPPF. Stage 1 also considers whether there is any non-Green Belt rural land which could meet any of the unmet need. Stage 2 involves considering which site, or

sites, would best meet the identified need having regard to Green Belt harm and other relevant considerations including whether they are suitably located and developable.

- 7.6 Where there is a need for Green Belt release, the exceptional circumstances for altering Green Belt boundaries will be fully evidenced and justified, following the approach outlined above.
- 7.7 It should be noted that the Strategic Plan identifies two new **strategic allocations**, one within Gedling Borough and one within Nottingham City. The extension of the existing strategic allocation at Top Wighay Farm comprises existing safeguarded land and, as such, does not involve the alteration of the Green Belt boundary. A new site at Broad Marsh is based around the former shopping centre within Nottingham City.



## 8 What is the approach to Safeguarded Land?

8.1 Paragraph 140 of the NPPF identifies that, '*once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of the Local Plan. At that time, authorities should consider the Green Belt boundaries having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so that they should be capable of enduring beyond the plan period*'. As such, each authority will consider the need to identify Safeguarded Land to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period.

8.2 Gedling and Rushcliffe Borough Councils currently identify safeguarded land. Safeguarded land was designated where:

- The land is suitable for development; and
- One of the following applies:
  - The need to develop the site within the plan period is not foreseen as more sustainable sites are available; or
  - It is not necessary to keep the land permanently open; or
  - It is not appropriate for land to remain in the Green Belt due to the need to define defensible Green Belt boundaries.

8.3 In Gedling, the Aligned Core Strategies identified areas of land excluded from the Green Belt (as safeguarded land) to allow for long term (i.e. beyond the plan period) development needs. Whilst these areas are not currently designated as Green Belt, it is considered helpful to have an understanding of their value in Green Belt terms to inform future decision making, especially where they are being promoted for development. Strategic safeguarded land has therefore been subject to an assessment, following a consistent approach with the wider Green Belt Review. Only the following strategic safeguarded land has been assessed:

- Top Wighay Farm, Hucknall (46.8ha);
- Oxton Road/Flatts Lane, Calverton (30.7ha);
- Mapperley Golf Course (46.8ha);