

## The benefits of London's Green Belt

The main benefit of London's Green Belt is to do with the reason it was put in place – to stop London sprawling into the surrounding countryside.

As the poet Andrew Motion said: “Since about 1940, the population of Los Angeles has grown at about the same rate as the population of London. Los Angeles is now so enormous that if you somehow managed to pick it up and plonk it down on England, it would extend from Brighton on the south coast to Cambridge in the north-east. That's what happens if you don't have a green belt.”

**Why is urban sprawl bad?** Urban sprawl has multiple economic costs, including increased travel costs; decreased economic vitality of urban centres; increased tax burdens due to more expensive road and utility construction and maintenance; increased car use leading to higher air pollution and increased health care costs for diseases like asthma, and loss of productive farmland and natural lands that support tourism.

**Two thirds of Green Belt land is in agricultural use** – not surprising given its proximity to potential markets in the city. This is a vital economic resource for food security and soil protection.

**Recreation, sport, health** Green Belt protection has ensured Londoners enjoy open land and countryside in and near the city. Many areas of Green Belt are country parks or playing fields, they support sport and recreation, tourism and health – including reducing stress by providing peaceful, breathing spaces and 9,899km of public rights of way

**Eco-system benefits** Different types of open land provide multiple eco-system benefits which include urban cooling, improved air quality, flood protection and carbon absorption (especially the woodland areas), as well as local food production.

**Future proofing** As London grows into a higher density city, so more people come to rely on protected green spaces for the many benefits they provide. Government recognises that Green Belt land may be, and in fact stipulates that they should be, enhanced to provide more benefits in future.

**It is at times when cities grow that land protection policies are most critical. At these times land protections should be strengthened rather than weakened or abandoned.**

### The stated purposes of green belts are:

- To prevent unrestricted urban sprawl
- To prevent neighbouring towns 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 urban land



The London Green Belt Council is an independent, voluntary organisation. Its membership is made up of local and national organisations with an interest in protecting and preserving London's Green Belt. Formed in 1955, it is funded by member subscriptions.

The Council exists to protect London's Green Belt, which it does by providing information and advice about current green belt issues and offering comment to politicians, the media and others.



### **London's Green Belt is now under threat like never before**

There is huge pressure to build houses in London and the South East of England and the open countryside of London's Green Belt attracts developers who would rather build on green field sites than re-use derelict urban land. Powerful pressure groups lobby Parliament to have parts of the Green Belt 'freed up' for development.

### **We need your help to save London's Green Belt**

The London Green Belt Council's strength is in its numbers. If you are part of a local community, resident or environmental group with concerns about London's Green Belt, please do ask the group to consider becoming a member. The current subscription is just £10 a year. We also ask for a voluntary donation of an additional £15 if groups are in a position to contribute a bit more.

### **Contact, donations and membership enquiries**

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Chair of the London Green Belt Council,  
Richard Knox-Johnston

### **What is a green belt?**

A green belt is a ring of open land around a city or town which is protected from development: it can only be built on in exceptional circumstances. It effectively defines the limits of a town or city.

### **London's Green Belt**

London's green belt is 486,000 hectares. It starts in the outer London boroughs, well inside the M25, and includes large areas of Hertfordshire, Essex, Kent, Surrey, Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire.