

REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT 2004

GREEN BELT

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Green Belt monitoring has been undertaken within the Region since the late 1980s, initially for the West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt. Since Regional Planning Guidance was first published in 1995, monitoring has included the North Staffordshire Green Belt. The change to Green Belt boundaries was an indicator in the RPG Monitoring Report 2000, and as a Strategic Objective, Green Belt was included in the RPG Baseline Monitoring Report 2002. However, information on Green Belt monitoring was not included in the subsequent Annual Monitoring Reports. This report addresses this deficiency.
- 1.2 PPG2 recognises that Green Belts can assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land. The Regional Spatial Strategy envisages a fundamental change of direction to reverse the decentralisation of population and investment from the Major Urban Areas. Retention of the Green Belt in the Region is one of the objectives of the Regional Spatial Strategy, although the objective allows for the adjustment of boundaries where necessary to support urban regeneration. Policy PA1 sets out the criteria for economic development on the edge of the Major Urban Areas, whilst Policy CF3 makes clear that housing development that extends the boundaries of the major Urban Areas is contrary to the Regional Spatial Strategy.
- 1.3 PPG2 sets out the types of development that are appropriate in the Green Belt and advises that development that is inappropriate to a rural area should not be permitted, unless there are very special circumstances. Very special circumstances may include the wider environmental benefits associated with a development, such as increased production of energy from renewable sources (see PPS22), or sustainable waste management (see draft PPS10).
- 1.4 Green Belt monitoring is undertaken by the Joint Data team of Mott Macdonald, on behalf of the West Midlands Regional Assembly, the regional planning body.
- 1.5 For further information on Green Belt monitoring, contact:

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2. Spatial Strategy Objective (para. 3.14(d) of RSS)

To retain the Green Belt, but to allow an adjustment of boundaries where this is necessary to support urban regeneration.

3. Relevant Indicators

Net changes in the area of designated Green Belt.

Planning applications for significant development in the Green Belt, by proposed use and decision.

4. Key Data

Table 1: Change in the Area of Designated Green Belt (sq.km.)

	2001 Area	2004 Area	Change
West Midlands Region	2,678	2,679	+1
North Staffordshire	378	378	0
West Midlands Metropolitan	2,300	2,301	+1
Local Authority:			
Birmingham	40.93	41.89	+0.96
Walsall	38.06	38.07	+0.01
Redditch	18.38	18.31	-0.07
Dudley	18.03	17.98	-0.05

N.B. All other authorities – no change in area.

Table 2: Planning applications for Significant Developments* in the Green Belt

Proposed Use	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004
Housing	54	58	64
Business/Office	7	13	14
Manufacturing/Warehousing	21	15	24
Retail	4	2	6
Leisure	35	29	23
Hotel/Guest House	2	0	5
Other/Mixed	23	24	38
Total	146	141	174

* New development or changes of use for 5 or more dwellings or 500 square metres or more floorspace for non-residential uses.

Table 3: Decisions for Planning Applications in the Green Belt

Decision	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Refused	30	20	30
Granted (Full)	73	66	86
Granted (Outline)	3	9	13
Withdrawn	6	12	8
Not Determined (excl. Appeals)	26	24	30
Appeal Dismissed	6	6	1
Appeal Allowed	0	0	1
Appeal Withdrawn	1	0	0
Appeal Not Determined	1	4	5
Total	146	141	174

Table 4: Reason for Grant of Planning Permission

Reason	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04
Emerging Plan	3	0	3
Conversion/Redevelopment	45	39	53
Extension to Existing	6	6	15
Other	20	29	27
Not Known	2	1	1
Total	76	75	99

Diagram 1: Location of Planning Applications 2003-04

Diagram 2: Location of Planning Permissions 2003-04

Source: All data is from the Regional Green Belt Survey 2001-04.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

Change in Area

- 5.1 The net change in the area of designated Green Belt between April 2001 and 2004 shown in Table 1 is insignificant, increasing marginally from 2,678 to 2,679 square kilometres. In most local authorities, there has been no change in area, and only those authorities where a change has been recorded are included. The changes relate to the West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt and may result from minor redrafting or inaccuracies in the 2001 figures. These findings accord with the Spatial Strategy Objective to retain the Green Belt.
- 5.2 However, monitoring needs to take place over a five year rolling average period in order to even out annual fluctuations. The findings from monitoring over the next two years will offer a more complete reflection of the change in Green Belt since 2001.

Planning Applications

- 5.3 The data on planning applications provides some evidence of the pressures for development in the Green Belt, and of the effectiveness of the policy presumption against development inappropriate to a rural area.
- 5.4 The total number of *applications* for significant development (new development or changes of use for 5 or more dwellings, or 500 square metres or more floor space for non-residential uses) in the Green Belt increased in 2003-04 compared with recent years (see Table 2). However, the current rate of 174 applications remains well below the levels experienced during the 1990s.
- 5.5 There has been a slight rise in the number of housing and business proposals, and a fall in the number of leisure proposals. The main increase is in planning applications for mixed-use and 'other' development, including six applications for mixed business and storage use. The remaining applications are proposals falling into the 'other' category, consisting of:
- agriculture related - 6
 - minerals and waste - 6
 - education - 6
 - other institutional development - 4
 - retail or storage not including buildings - 5
 - a fire station, a museum and a cemetery - 1 each.
- 5.6 It is possible that some of these proposals, such as the business, retail and storage applications would be more appropriately included in the business, warehousing or retail uses. Some of the uses, such as agriculture, cemeteries and minerals and waste may not be inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

- 5.7 There has been a significant increase in the number of *planning permissions* granted in the Green Belt in 2003-04, when compared with the previous two years (see Table 3), although the overall level remains within the range for the last 10 years. Table 4 provides information on the reasons why planning permission was granted for development in the Green Belt. More than 50% of the approvals were for conversion or redevelopment schemes, i.e. on previously developed land rather than green field sites. Conversion of existing buildings is not inappropriate development in the Green Belt. About 15% of the approvals involved extensions to existing development, although it is not possible to tell if all of these were on previously developed sites. The bulk of the remaining permissions are in the 'other' category, which includes development appropriate in a Green Belt.
- 5.8 Diagram 1 shows that the *planning applications* are spread widely over the two Green Belt areas, although there is a concentration close to the inner edge of the North Staffordshire Green Belt, and to the south and south-east of Birmingham in the West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt. The *permissions* are spread across the region's two Green Belts (see Diagram 2), with a higher proportion in the North Staffordshire Green Belt than in the previous two years. However, those in the West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt are concentrated to the south and east of the Birmingham conurbation, a more marked trend than in recent years.
- 5.9 The increase in the number of *planning permissions* may be a concern, as development in the Green Belt would be contrary to the Regional Spatial Strategy, which seeks to concentrate new development in urban areas. As the Regional Spatial Strategy takes effect, it would be reasonable to expect to see a reduction in the number of permissions in the Green Belt. However, it may be too early for the Regional Spatial Strategy to have had a real impact. Some caution is needed in interpreting these findings, as many of the permissions will be for development that is not inappropriate in the Green Belt, and which the Regional Spatial Strategy is not seeking to prevent. Some significant developments, such as transport infrastructure, are not the subject of planning applications and are not included in this monitoring report.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 The main indicator for the Green Belt, identifying the change in the area of designated Green Belt, is included in the regional core output indicators proposed by ODPM. This indicator shows no significant change between 2001 and 2004. However, monitoring needs to take place over a five year rolling average period in order to even out annual fluctuations, so future monitoring will offer a more complete reflection of the change in Green Belt in the West Midlands region.
- 6.2 Data is also collected on significant planning applications and permissions in the Green Belt. This indicator shows an increase in the number of *planning applications* compared with recent years, resulting from a rise in housing and especially business proposals. It also shows an increase in the *planning permissions* granted, with the majority being conversions or redevelopment, or extensions to existing development. There was a higher proportion of permissions in the North Staffordshire Green Belt, perhaps reflecting the policy presumption in favour of the use of previously developed land. In the West Midlands Metropolitan Green Belt permissions were concentrated in the south and east, the area under greatest pressure for development.
- 6.3 It is likely that many of the *permissions* granted are for development that is not inappropriate in the Green Belt. Nevertheless, the rise in the number of permissions appears to be in conflict with the Regional Spatial Strategy, which makes clear that housing locations that extend the boundaries of the Major Urban Areas will not be acceptable, and sets strict criteria for economic development in such locations. Concern about the number of permissions in the Green Belt should be tempered, however, as it is likely to be too early for the change of direction envisaged by the Regional Spatial Strategy to be demonstrated in the monitoring of planning permissions. The impact of the Regional Spatial Strategy, and any policy tensions such as the need to encourage the exploitation of renewable energy and provide for waste management, should become clearer in future Annual Monitoring Reports for the Green Belt.

APPENDIX

GREEN BELT 2001 – HECTARES BY LOCAL AUTHORITY DISTRICT

District	Hectares of Green Belt
North Shropshire	0
Bridgnorth	24,271
Oswestry	0
South Shropshire	0
Shrewsbury & Atcham	0
Staffordshire Moorlands	17,380
South Staffordshire	32,170
Lichfield	15,180
Newcastle-under-Lyme	9,479
Stafford	11,104
East Staffordshire	0
Cannock Chase	4,814
Tamworth	206
North Warwickshire	17,212
Rugby	20,270
Warwick	19,849
Stratford on Avon	22,175
Nuneaton & Bedworth	3,641
Malvern Hills	0
Wyre Forest	11,196
Wychavon	8,873
Bromsgrove	19,760
Worcester	205
Redditch	1,838
Birmingham	4,093
Wolverhampton	810
Coventry	3,127
Dudley	1,803
Sandwell	813
Solihull	11,943
Walsall	3,806
Stoke-on-Trent	1,747
Herefordshire	0
Telford & Wrekin	2