



Green Belt land, 2022/2023

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1 Summary

According to [Green Belt statistics](#) published by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities the Lancashire 12-authority area contained around 69,670 hectares (ha) or 696.7 km² designated as 'Green Belt' in 2022/23, or approximately 24% of the land area. A substantial proportion of the Green Belt land in the Lancashire-12 area is designated in West Lancashire (44.5%), where it covers 90% of the district, owing to the large amount of top grade farmland.

At a national level, there have been changes in ten authorities in England as a result of adoption of, or changes to, development, allocation or local plans or core strategies. The net result is an increase of 860 hectares in the total Green Belt land figure for England compared to 2021/22; in 2022/23, the Green Belt covered 1,638,420 hectares (16,384 km²) or 12.6% of England's total land area. This was the second successive annual increase. Two of the authorities increased their extent of green belt, in North Hertfordshire the increase was 3,350 hectares and elsewhere the total reduction was -2,490 hectares. The national increase was offset by revisions totalling -590 hectares, mostly due to changes in methodology.

The only authority in Lancashire to have changed its Green Belt land area was Blackpool, where just 10.3 hectares was removed from the local plan. This was one of a handful of very small changes nationally. There was an increase of 10 hectares in Ribble Valley, but no explanation was given for this. The effect of this was to reverse the reduction of -10 hectares the previous year, which was due to a digital boundary update. Most of the Lancashire authorities had minor revisions for technical reasons, resulting in a fall of -50 hectares compared to the published 2021/22 total for the Lancashire-12 area.

2 Introduction

Green belts have been an enduring element of national planning policy and enjoy a high level of public understanding and support, although the dangers of overly-tight containment policies on housing and economic development are well recognized. Green belts are characterized by their degree of openness and permanence: once designated, they are intended to be maintained and sustainable as far as can be planned ahead and only be altered in exceptional circumstances.

The first official proposal to provide a reserve supply of public open spaces and of recreational areas and to establish a green belt or girdle of open space was made by the Greater London Regional Planning Committee in 1935. New provisions in the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act allowed local authorities to incorporate green belt proposals into their first development plans. The codification of green belt policy and its extension to areas other than London came in 1955 with a circular inviting local planning authorities to consider the establishment of green belts.

Section nine of the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) mentions the current policy on protecting the green belt land. It states that green belt serves five purposes:

- 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;

- to assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

3 The extent of Green Belts 2022/23

The figures for the regional distribution of Green Belts are shown in Table 1.

Table 1, Area of designated Green Belt land by region, 2022/23

Region	Area (ha)	Region	Area (ha)	Region	Area (ha)
North East	98,550	E Midlands	77,410	London	34,770
North West	254,350	W Midlands	264,510	South West	107,970
Yorkshire & the Humber	261,600	East of England	233,990	England total	1,638,420

Source: [Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics: England, 2022/23.](#)

At a national level the designated green belt land in England was estimated at 1,638,420 hectares (16,384 km²) as at 31st March 2023, about 12.6% of the land area of England. This represents a rise of 860 hectares (8.6 km²) on the 2021/22 figure estimated at 1,637,560. The 2021/22 total had been revised down by 590 hectares due to methodology changes. Ten local authorities were affected, of which one, Blackpool, is in the Lancashire sub-region. The main cause for the increase was the addition of 3,350 ha to the extent of green belt land in North Hertfordshire which previously stood at 14,240, a percentage increase of 24%. Seeing an authority increase its green belt coverage should not be interpreted so much as a reduction in the availability of land for development as a rationalisation of its planning policy. Details can be found in North Hertfordshire's [Local Plan Policy : Policy SP5: Countryside and Green Belt](#). In this case although about 1,000 hectares of land were removed from the allocation for development and other reasons another 4,350 hectares were added in order to fill the gap between Luton and the A1 (M) corridor. Of the other nine local authorities affected only Cheshire East with an increase of 10 ha saw a rise. Elsewhere some local authorities had large reductions in the extent of green belt land: St. Helens (-900 ha), Epping Forest (-840 ha), Calderdale (-480 ha) and Wyre Forest (-230 ha). Watford had a reduction of -30 hectares and in both Blackpool and Bath and North East Somerset the reduction was around -10 hectares. The remaining affected authority, Waverley in Surrey, had no overall change from 2021/22 but there was a certain amount of tidying-up of the boundaries, perhaps with minor changes that balanced out the gains and losses, and were too small to be realistically quantified.

The general extent of green belt across Lancashire was defined in the late 1970s/early 1980s and the reasons for the definition still by and large endure. Within the Lancashire sub-region, 75,000 hectares are designated Green Belt, covering around a quarter of the total land area and representing 4.6% of the England total. Some parts of every single Lancashire authority, including highly urbanised Blackpool, have been designated as Green Belt but coverage is particularly large in Chorley, South Ribble and especially West Lancashire (Table 2). The only area of the Lancashire sub-region affected by the latest change is in the Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone. See figure 2. More details are given in Blackpool Borough Council's [Local Plan](#). There was an increase of 10 hectares in Ribble

Valley, but no explanation was given for this. The effect of this was to reverse the reduction of -10 hectares the previous year, which was due to a digital boundary update. Most of the Lancashire authorities had minor revisions for technical reasons, resulting in a fall of -70 hectares compared to the published 2021/22 total for the Lancashire-14 area.

The [DLUHC report](#) explains the changes for all affected local authorities.

Table 2: Area of designated Green Belt land, 2022/23 and annual change 21/22–22/23

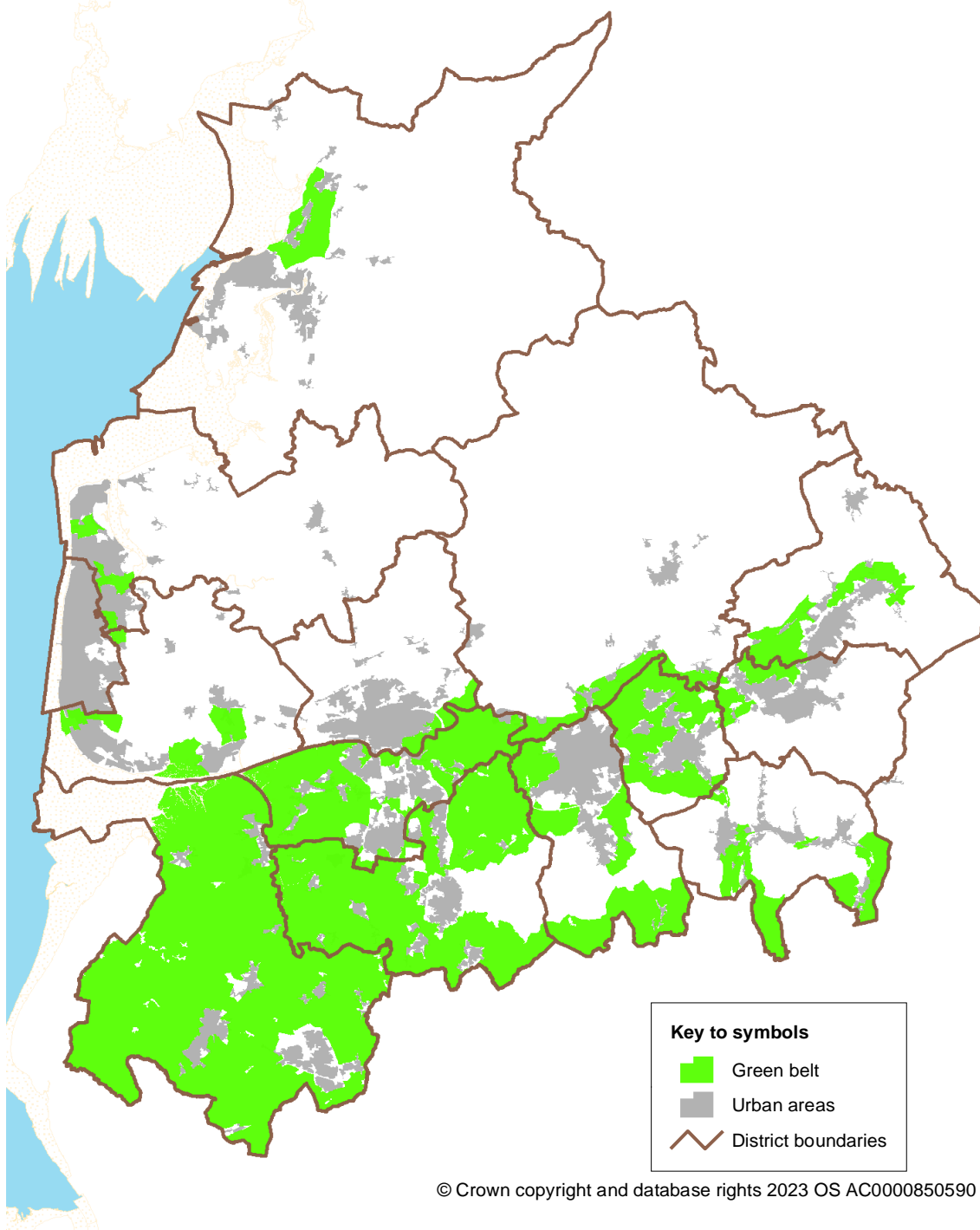
Local authority	Area (hectares)	Change from 2021/22 (hectares)
Burnley	1,050	
Chorley	14,550	
Fylde	1,750	
Hyndburn	3,990	
Lancaster	1,540	
Pendle	2,040	
Preston	660	
Ribble Valley	1,730	10
Rossendale	3,060	
South Ribble	7,610	
West Lancashire	31,010	
Wyre	680	
Lancashire-12	69,670	10
Blackburn with Darwen	5,270	
Blackpool	60	-10
Lancashire-14	75,000	0
England	1,638,420	860

Source: Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities – Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics: England, 2022/23

4 Previous changes to Green Belt land extent in Lancashire

This year's very minor change of -10 hectares in Blackpool follows on from a small reduction of -50 hectares in Rossendale in 2022 and a more major change of -200 hectares in Lancaster in 2021. Prior to that the only statistics in quite some time when there were any significant changes in any of the Lancashire-14 authorities, were during 2015/16 and only then affecting three authorities: Blackburn with Darwen (-290 hectares), South Ribble (-40 ha) and Pendle (-40 ha). The areas of Green Belt prior to this in these authority areas were 5,550 ha in Blackburn with Darwen, 7,810 ha in South Ribble and 2,070 ha in Pendle.

Figure 1: Designated areas of Green Belt in the Lancashire-14 area, 2023



5 Change to methodology

A methodological change was introduced for the 2019/20 release providing general improvements to mapping accuracy, boundary definitions and area calculations. The area of land designated as Green Belt for each Local Authority was previously calculated by local authorities but is now calculated by MHCLG (DLUHC) using the digital Green Belt boundary files provided by the local authorities. The Local Authority Green Belt boundaries

are mapped against ONS Local Authority District (Mean High Water mark) boundaries for the corresponding period. This results in greater accuracy in the delimiting of land designated as Green Belt where it meets coastal or estuarine areas and ensures a consistent national approach.

Figure 2: Change in areas of Green Belt at Blackpool Airport

