

London-wide Green Belt Assessment FAQs

Document name (month year)

London-wide Green Belt Assessment (May 2026).

What is the purpose of this document?

The purpose of this document is to understand the strategic role and function of the Green Belt within Greater London. The Green Belt assessment systematically considers parcels of land in an objective and consistent manner against the 5 Green Belt purposes defined in National Policy. The 5 purposes of the Green Belt are:

- a) to check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
- b) to prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another.
- c) to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment.
- d) to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- e) to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

This assessment helps understand variations in the contribution of Green Belt land to these five purposes and, in doing so, identifies areas which have potential to meet the government's definition of grey belt.

In addition to the main strategic Green Belt assessment, a number of supplementary assessments were also produced as part of this body of evidence and are published alongside. These studies were focused on specific associated Green Belt policy matters and built upon the findings of the main Green Belt assessment. These additional reports comprise:

- Green Belt enhancement opportunities report
- Green Belt to MOL opportunities report; and
- Green Belt Fundamental Impacts assessment.

These assessments were used to inform the development of the London Plan. Further information on the findings from all these assessments and their role in the development of the draft London Plan is to be found within the supporting Green Belt Strategic Approach Paper, [available online](#).

Why is this needed?

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) requires all strategic and local planning authorities to undertake an assessment of Green Belt land within their areas to understand variations in performance, identify the presence of grey belt land and where appropriate, to help inform decisions about boundary revisions.

The Dec 2024 NPPF, (current at the time of publication) included several policy changes in relation to Green Belt, representing a significant shift from previous iterations. The scope and implications of these changes are discussed further within the Green Belt assessment itself as well as the Green Belt Strategic Approach paper. In summary these changes mean that, for the first time, there is an explicit expectation in national policy that Green Belt release should be considered by the next London Plan where development needs cannot be met in full using brownfield land alone, and that strategic plans are informed by up-to-date strategic Green Belt assessments.

Within Greater London, a total of 18 Boroughs contain Green Belt land and, in the past, each has undertaken separate assessments of the land within their areas. As a consequence, the age as well as the methodology used varies across London. In the context created by the current NPPF, a far better and consistent understanding of the performance and nature of London's Green Belt land was required to inform the development of the new London Plan. This is important as it supports a 'borough boundary-blind' approach to planning to meet London's needs in the way which best meets London-wide objectives.

What has the assessment involved?

The strategic assessment therefore involved and includes:

- Preparation of a comprehensive methods statement for the project, developed with input from the project steering group (membership of which is provided in Appendix A).
- Up-to-date mapping for the whole of London's Green Belt, sub-divided into strategic scale parcels (minimum of 5 hectares) based on a uniform, consistent methodology.
- Preparation of a consolidated, uniform list of 'footnote 7' designations as applicable within the London context and the identification of the presence of such features within the Green Belt.
- Analysis of all the strategic parcels to provide ratings against Green Belt purposes in line with national guidance in a uniform, consistent manner. This process involved detailed discussions with commissioning boroughs and refinements to ratings attributed to land.
- Identification at the strategic scale of areas of Green Belt which contain the strongest performance against national Green Belt criteria.
- Identification at the strategic scale of areas of GB with the potential to meet national grey belt criteria.

The outputs from this study represent the first time that the entirety of Greater London's Green Belt land has been audited in a consistent and strategic manner.

How was it produced?

In January 2025, grant funding was made available by government to all planning authorities in England to complete Green Belt assessments. The GLA received its share of national funding to undertake this work on behalf of the 12 'commissioning boroughs'. Some boroughs chose to apply for their own funding to complete separate studies but also wished to remain involved in the GLA's study, these were 'participating boroughs'. The full list of stakeholders is provided in appendix 1.

Specialist consultants, Land Use Consultants (LUC), were jointly appointed by the GLA and the commissioning boroughs to undertake the study and began work in February 2025. Whilst the work was primarily desk-based, site visits were carried out in all 18 boroughs. These were to visit parcels where further investigation was required to conclude on rating assessments or following discussions with the borough.

What engagement and consultation has been undertaken as part of the assessment?

There was no public engagement undertaken as part of the work. The assessment was a consultancy led, technical exercise involving objective mapping, data analysis and modelling. However, to support the implementation of the project a steering group was establishing containing representatives from both commissioning and participating boroughs, as well as various key statutory stakeholders (see list in appendix 1). This group's feedback was critical in the establishment of a consistent assessment methodology. Feedback from the group also helped refine detailed findings throughout the assessment, though to ensure a fully consistent approach, adjustment to assessment findings were generally only accepted where this remained in accordance with the consistent methodology and approach.

Engagement with members of this group varied depending on their role (e.g. commissioning or participating) and was undertaken in rounds associated with key project milestones:

- Steering group session #1 – all members (March 2025).
- Draft methodology consultation – all steering group members plus follow up sessions for certain stakeholders where needed. Legal consultation on updated draft methodology (April 2025)
- Pilot borough assessment consultation – all steering group members (May 2025)
- Draft borough assessment consultations – 5x meetings held with batches of borough including all commissioning boroughs as draft assessment findings were completed in sequence (June – Oct 2025)
- Steering group session #2 – all members (Jan 2026)
- Draft London-wide assessment consultation – all steering group members (Feb 2026)

In addition to the main engagement events set out above, email project updates were also provided at regular intervals to the whole steering group. Email updates were also issued at regular intervals to all lower and higher tier authorities which adjoin Greater London as well as the two non-participating Green Belt boroughs (LB Croydon and LB Hillingdon).

What are the key findings?

The assessment provides a comprehensive and consistent strategic audit of London's Green Belt for the first time. Over 1,000 parcels were defined based on land attributes and Green Belt characteristics, and each was assessed against the five national Green Belt purposes. Borough-wide maps show performance for each purpose (from Weak to Strong), as well as areas performing strongly across multiple purposes. Using this analysis, potential grey belt land—parcels not performing strongly against purposes A, B, and D—was also identified.

Overall, it estimates that around 20% of London's Green Belt (c.6,900 ha) could meet grey belt criteria. However, this varies significantly by borough. Higher proportions tend to occur where

land is fragmented or isolated within the urban area rather than connected to the wider countryside. Overall, the mapping shows a highly uneven and fragmented spatial distribution across London's Green Belt area.

It is important to note that where land does meet grey belt criteria, this does not mean that it is therefore suitable for development. This will depend on a range of other factors. The national criteria are narrow and focused only on performance against certain Green Belt purposes, taking limited account of other planning considerations or land designations. For example, areas such as public parks could meet grey belt criteria, but this does not mean they represent suitable or sustainable locations for growth or that other material planning considerations should be overridden.

What are its limitations?

TO NOTE: This assessment was designed to provide strategic-scale evidence to inform the development of the London Plan and therefore has some limitations in terms of its application. As stressed within the report, the assessment does not:

- Include proposals or recommendations for land that might be suitable for development / release.
- Make any proposals for adjustments to Green Belt boundaries.
- Include any assessment of specific development or release proposals.
- Make final conclusions in terms of whether land will constitute grey belt land.

In addition, while steering group members have provided feedback and advice at various stages of the project, they were not requested to – and do not necessarily – formally endorse its findings.

These limitations reflect the study's strategic scope. For example, using a minimum parcel size of 5 hectares restricts the level of detail possible at a London-wide scale. As a result, more detailed local assessments will still be needed in some areas as part of future plan-making – these should build on this strategic work.

How has the assessment been used?

The London-wide Green Belt Assessment is part of a suite of technical evidence used to inform the development of the next London Plan.

The London Plan must assess options for meeting plan objectives and development needs in line with legal and national policy requirements, including in doing so, the role of its Green Belt land. This process includes consideration of the function and performance of Green Belt land, and this technical assessment has supported that analysis.

The Green Belt Assessment is not a decision-making document and does not identify or propose areas for release, nor does it assess the impacts of releasing specific sites or locations or recommend land for release. However, it has provided an important source of information when considering the potential effects of Broad Locations for Growth being considered (where if confirmed, release will be expected in local plans) on the integrity of the remaining Green

Belt. The evidence is also a useful base upon which local studies can build upon to inform the preparation of Local Plans.

This, together with a wider range of evidence, including the other associated Green Belt studies, other analysis and impact assessments (e.g. transport, utilities) and development needs and capacity work has been used to inform the next London Plan's spatial pattern of development and approach towards Green Belt development.

What is the legal status of your Green Belt assessment?

The London-wide Green Belt assessment is a robust and comprehensive evidence base document used to inform the development of the draft new London Plan. The outputs of the assessment review do not constitute policy direction in and of themselves but have helped inform the development of London's proposed spatial strategy. The resulting reporting and findings will have the same, limited, legal status as any other planning evidence base documents.

How will the assessment influence Local Plans? Does it tell them what to do?

The assessment will help inform the more detailed process of amending green belt boundaries, but it is the new London Plan that will provide the strategic direction for doing so. The London Plan and the policies it contains will eventually be a formal part of an area's development plan which Local Plans must generally conform with, and which will be a significant consideration in the assessment of planning applications. Whilst the draft Plan has only limited legal weight at consultation stage, this will grow as it proceeds through consultation and examination until it formally replaces the 2021 London Plan.

How does the assessment define "low quality" for the purposes of Green Belt release?

The assessment itself does not propose or immediately justify Green Belt release. However, it does assess green belt performance and potential grey belt (which makes limited contributions to the national Green Belt purposes). The government has referred to grey belt as 'low quality' green belt land and in turn established the broad circumstances in which may be considered suitable for release/development. More widely – and outside the scope of this assessment – the definition of low-quality Green Belt land could also include wider considerations, for example areas which are not publicly accessible and/or have limited environmental or nature conservation value. These matters, alongside key factors such as ensuring that development has good access to public transport are vital considerations for planners in assessing the acceptability of release.

Why does the report identify areas of accessible green space, like parks, as grey belt?

Green Belt designation remains only one of many types of land use designation which may be applied to that same land given that it may also perform other functions or have other significance. This may relate to, for instance, its ecological, environmental, historic, cultural or

amenity value or function. It is often the case that land designated as Green Belt also contain various other designations, reflecting an area with multifaceted significance. The findings of this assessment are only related to the performance of the land against national Green Belt criteria – in accordance with national guidance and policy.

Does the assessment's identification of potential grey belt land mean that an area can be developed?

No. It should not be assumed that land which meets grey belt criteria would be appropriate for development or release from the Green Belt.

While grey belt status is a material consideration in planning decisions, full evaluation of proposals is still required against other policies and related objectives. This would consider for instance, whether the proposal would constitute a 'sustainable pattern[s] of development' or whether it minimises and manages environmental harm. The London Plan's approach towards the identification of sustainable locations for development prioritises factors such as transport connectivity over and above grey belt status to avoid a fragmented, unsustainable distribution of growth, as detailed in the associated Green Belt Strategic Approach report, available [online](#).

In addition, due to the strategic nature of this assessment, areas have only been provisionally identified as potential grey belt, with more detailed assessment still required at the local level, based on a specific proposal, for the final determination.

How were local communities represented in your Green Belt assessment?

There was no public engagement or consultation undertaken as part of the work. This is usual practice for a technical evidence base report, given its role and overall status (not representing a formal policy position, nor allocating land or including proposals for boundary changes). That being said, all evidence used to inform the draft London Plan is being made available as part of the consultation. Members of the public are invited to consider the findings of this evidence and how it has been applied within the draft Plan as part of any consultation response they wish to make.

Does the scope of your Green Belt assessment include the totality of Green Belt surrounding London, including that in the adjoining shire counties?

The assessment only includes land within the Greater London Authority administrative boundary. Any obvious contingencies or inter-relationships are noted as part of the assessment, but this has not entailed an assessment of parcels of Green Belt that are outside London's boundary.

Does the assessment also include a review of Metropolitan Open Land?

No. Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) was not included in the scope of this Green Belt assessment. MOL and Green Belt are two different land designations, with differing purposes.

The national Green Belt purposes set out in paragraph 143 of the NPPF do not apply to MOL, and vice versa, (the purposes of MOL set out in the London Plan do not apply to Green Belt land). Changes proposed in the draft London Plan make this distinction clearer with the aim of adding clarity to which policy tests should be applied to each type of land designation.

One of the associated assessments produced through this work has, however, reviewed areas of London's Green Belt to consider whether certain areas could potentially meet the criteria for a future redesignation as MOL. These findings are covered separately within the Green Belt to MOL opportunities report. Adjusting MOL designations is done by local authorities through their Local Plans / development plan documents in consultation with the GLA. As such this report is primarily aimed at Local Plans.

What is the difference between a green belt assessment and a review, and why was this work originally referred to as a green belt review?

The terms have tended to get muddled and used interchangeably as assessment does involve a type of what many people consider to be a review process – as it assesses Green Belt performance. The term 'Green Belt Review' was used in the government grant and associated procurement exercise. However, technical consultants and experienced professionals advised it is important to distinguish between the technical exercise of assessing performance, and the plan-making process of reviewing the appropriateness of green belt boundaries in light of overall growth needs and spatial strategy. As such, from early on in the process we started to use the term Green Belt Assessment, being clear that the review part was part of a separate broader and multi-faceted process, not contained within this piece of work.

Appendix 1 – Steering Group members

‘Commissioning’ boroughs (boroughs who jointly received grant funding and commissioned the work):

- LB Barking and Dagenham,
- LB Barnet,
- LB Ealing,
- LB Enfield,
- LB Haringey,
- LB Harrow,
- LB Hounslow,
- LB Newham,
- LB Redbridge (provided feedback on the development of the methods statement but not on detailed parcel assessments),
- LB Richmond upon Thames (provided feedback on the development of the methods statement but not on detailed parcel assessments),
- LB Sutton,
- LB Waltham Forest.

‘Participating’ boroughs (boroughs who applied for funding to develop their own evidence, but who were also party to the GLA’s study):

- LB Bexley,
- LB Bromley,
- RB Kingston upon Thames,
- LB Havering.

Other stakeholders:

- Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG)
- Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA)
- Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Historic England

GLA departments:

- Planning – London Plan policy
- Planning – Development Management
- Transport for London
- Regeneration
- Environment – Green infrastructure