

GREEN BELT

What is Green Belt & why do we have it?

The Green Belt aims to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open and undeveloped. Its original purpose was to halt the outward and uncontrolled spread of London following the 1920s-1930s building boom as a result of railway expansion. It also prevents neighbouring towns merging into one another, assists in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment and protects the setting and character of historic towns. It is not an environmental policy that seeks to protect biodiversity or landscapes.

The Epsom and Ewell Green Belt is a critical part of the borough. It has an important function and contributes to the borough's character and appearance. Land designated as Green Belt can also provide a wide variety of publically accessible open spaces – although it must be stressed that these additional open space uses are not a requirement for it being designated as such.

The Green Belt policy has been highly successful; not only has it stopped uncontrolled urban sprawl it has also ensured the continuous regeneration and renewal of London.

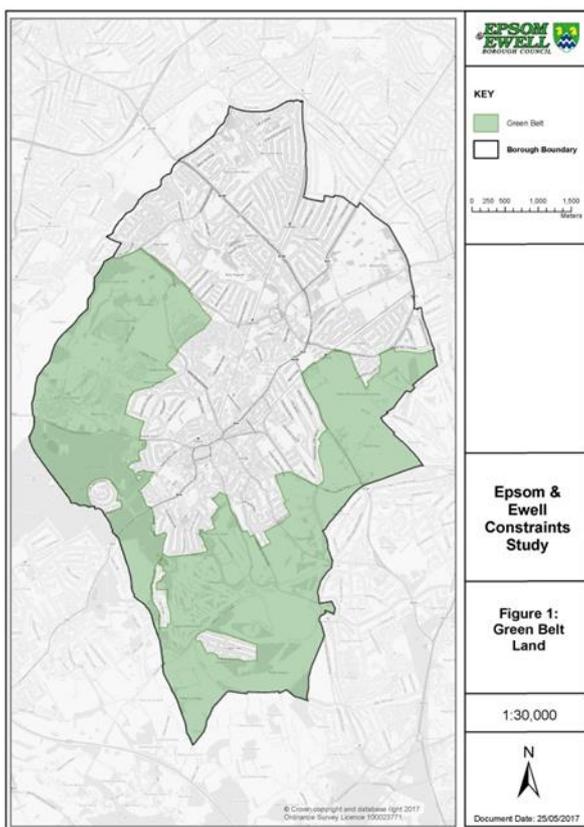


Figure 1: The current extent of Epsom & Ewell's Green Belt, extract from the Constraints Study 2017

Can Green Belt be altered?

Yes, Green Belt boundaries can be amended, national planning policy states that this should only be in 'exceptional circumstances' as part of the review of a local plan.

Government has recently proposed guidance on what might be considered to be 'exceptional circumstances'. The advice is that the boundary should only be amended once all other reasonable options for meeting identified development needs have been fully examined, this includes:

- Making effective use of brownfield land
- Making use of underused land, including surplus public sector land
- Optimising density of development
- Exploring whether other boroughs can help to meet some of the identified development requirement

This is important for Epsom & Ewell because we don't have many opportunities for new housing. We have looked at the government's guidance very carefully when considering our supply of housing sites. Option 1 of the Issues & Options paper address these points. Additionally, there are fewer than 300 empty homes in the borough and even fewer truly long term empty as some are within probate or awaiting development or refurbishment.

There is very limited public sector land available within the borough; the majority of what we have has been included in our land supply (for example, the territorial army site in Ewell and the remaining opportunities at the former hospital clusters in Stamford).

Our Green Belt boundary has not changed since the 1940s when it was originally drawn. Previous local plans have never had to contemplate making changes to the Green Belt. However, we are now under increasing pressure to consider changes because there are ‘exceptional circumstances’ of housing need, particularly affordable housing need, which have never been experienced before and there is no other reasonable option to accommodate the amount of new housing required.

Review of Green Belt Performance

The Council has prepared a [Green Belt Study](#) for the Borough. The study provides evidence of how different areas perform against the Green Belt purposes as set out within the National Planning Policy Framework. It is a technical document that provides an objective assessment of the performance of the Green Belt in the Borough. In order to achieve this the study took a ‘policy off’ approach and solely assessed the extent to which land designated as Green belt performed against the 4 relevant purposes set out in [national policy](#). The relevant purposes are;

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment; and
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.

Any future consideration of the development potential of any Green Belt land would need to be supported by a comprehensive ‘policy on’ assessment of the parcels. This will enable the identification of areas of land not affected by constraints (see below) that would prevent development taking place as well as locations where it would not be possible to mitigate impacts. The Council will be carrying out this further work over the next few months. The results will inform the consideration of whether exceptional circumstances exist to amend the Green Belt boundary. This could include the removal and/or additions to the boundary. The initial Green Belt Study document can be viewed on the Council’s website.

Other Designations and Constraints

The National Planning Practice Guidance states that relevant constraints including environmental constraints need to be addressed when formulating policies and in particular in responding to the challenge of meeting the Objectively Assessed Housing Need (OAHN).

The Borough has undertaken an appraisal of the Constraints relevant to the Borough and produced a [Constraints Study](#). It focuses on ‘strategic primary’ constraints relating to important and high level land designations including flood zones, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance, Ancient Woodlands and Registered Parks and Gardens.

These designation constraints are strategic in nature and would prevent development taking place and are where it would not be possible to mitigate the impact

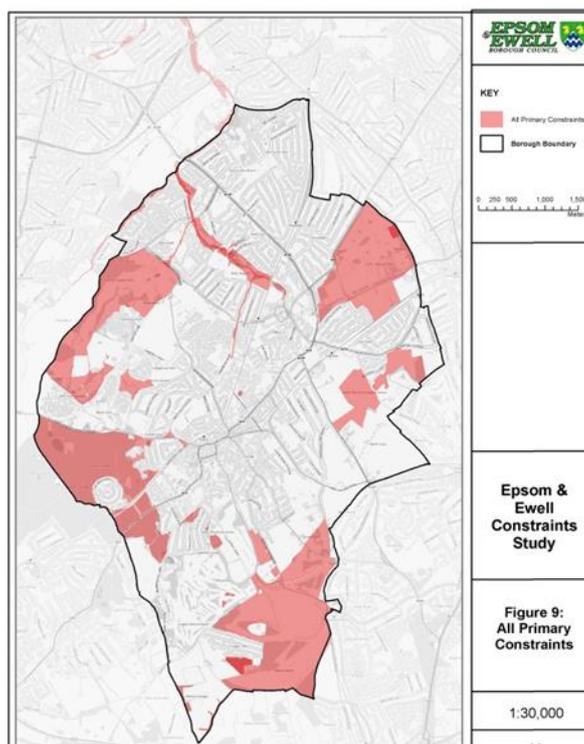


Figure 2: The extent of Primary Constraints in Epsom & Ewell, extract from the Constraints Study 2017

from development. A significant proportion of these designations are located within Green Belt land.

The Study maps out the constraints and identifies those parts of the Borough where development should be precluded as its impacts cannot be mitigated.

The mapping also identifies land that is not affected by Primary Constraints and therefore may have the potential to support future growth.

We propose that these areas form our Broad Areas of Search and be subject to further detailed analysis including a 'policy on' assessment of the borough's Green Belt land.

This further assessment of the Green Belt may identify land that is no longer suitable for Green Belt designation. If this is the case, its suitability for future development will also be further assessed.

Detailed assessment will ensure that any amendments to the Green Belt boundary are fit for purpose. The Green Belt designation going forward must be able to withstand scrutiny and we must place ourselves in a strong position to defend against predatory planning applications in the future.

The outputs of the Constraints Study and Green Belt Study will help us identify a rationalised housing target for our Local Plan and the possible locations for future housing.

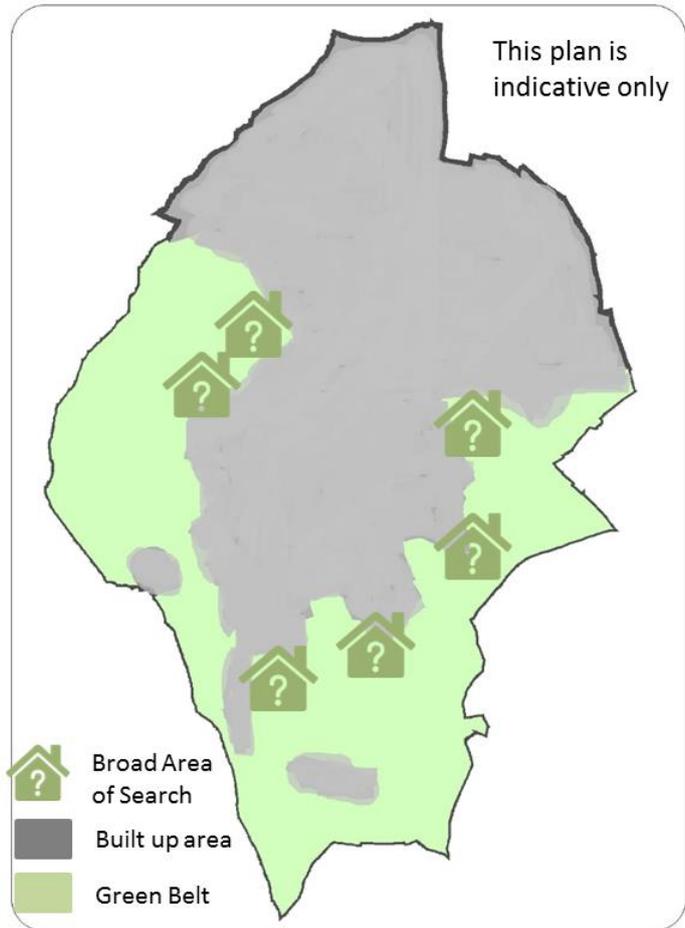


Figure 3: Broad Areas of Search within the Green Belt, extract from the Issues & Options Consultation Paper