

The green noose

An analysis of Green Belts and proposals for reform

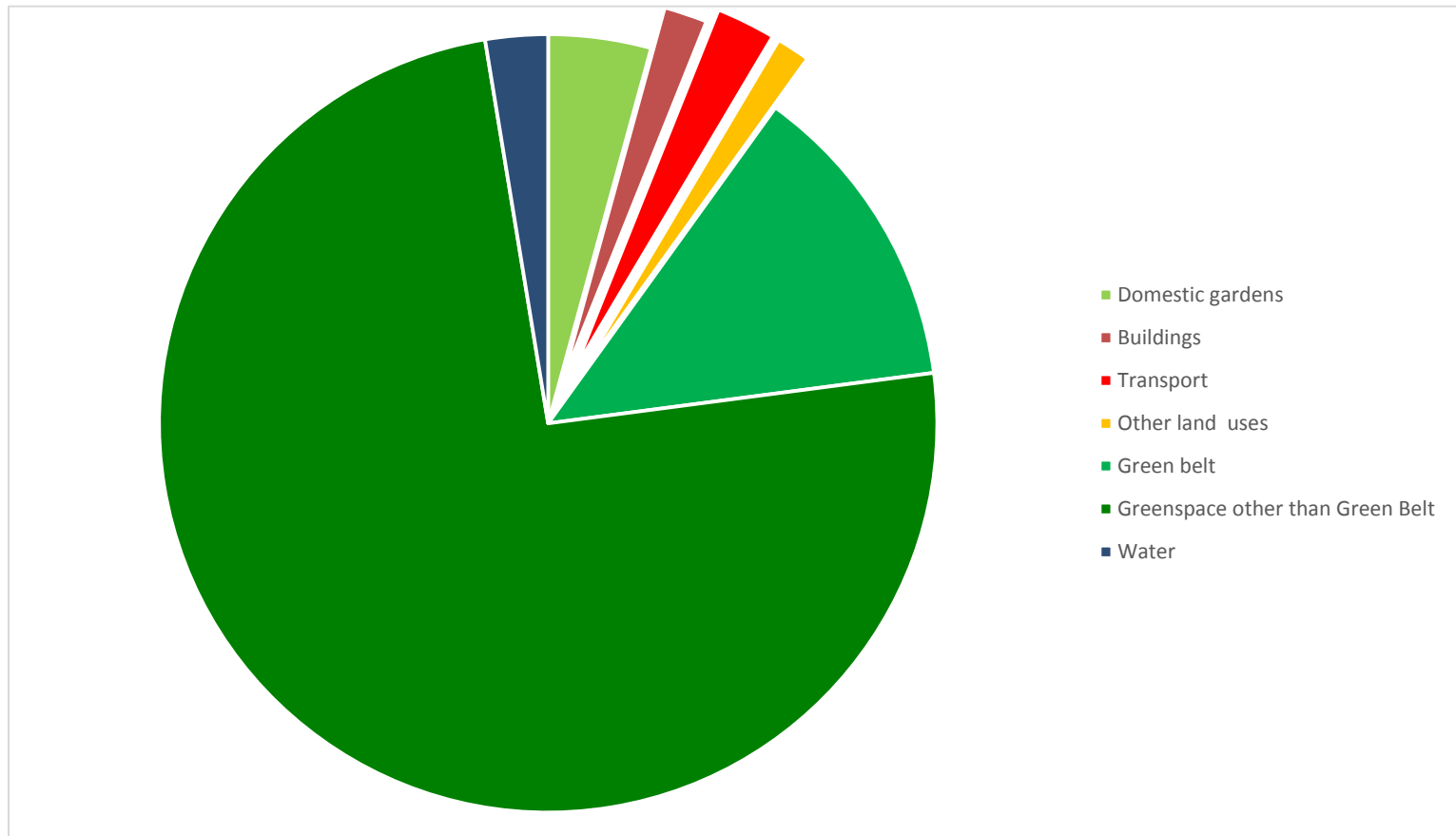
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Aim of the paper

- Critical review of Green Belt policy
 - Do we need urban containment policies?
 - Are Green Belts justified *in their own terms*?
 - Is popular support for Green Belts justified?
- The paper does *not*
 - Make detailed proposals
 - Solve all challenges to urban planning
 - Concentrate on non-housing development



Land use in England



Land use in international context

	Population density (p/sq km)	Percentage of land mass developed	Amount of built environment per capita (sq m/p)
Belgium	370	18.6	551
Germany	231	13.2	557
Italy	203	9.7	500
Japan	349	9.0	n/a
Korea, Republic of	517	n/a	n/a
Netherlands	498	17.0	363
United Kingdom	265	9.5	384
EU average	116.3	8.8	648



The root of the problem?

“Just under one in ten English adults (9%) think that three-quarters or more of the country is built on and 63% think that more than a quarter is developed, much higher than the true proportion of a tenth.”

Ipsos MORI, 9 May 2012

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“The term 'urban sprawl' is ... used loosely to refer to all that is bad about urban growth, and narrowly to describe specific aspects of urban growth which are considered undesirable.... The problem with some of these definitions is that they are based on misconceptions about how the land market operates. Since their premise is wrong, the policies they engender are often counter-productive.” - Richard Peiser, “Decomposing Urban Sprawl”, The Town Planning Review, Vol. 72, No. 3, 2001



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2. To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas
3. To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns
4. To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another

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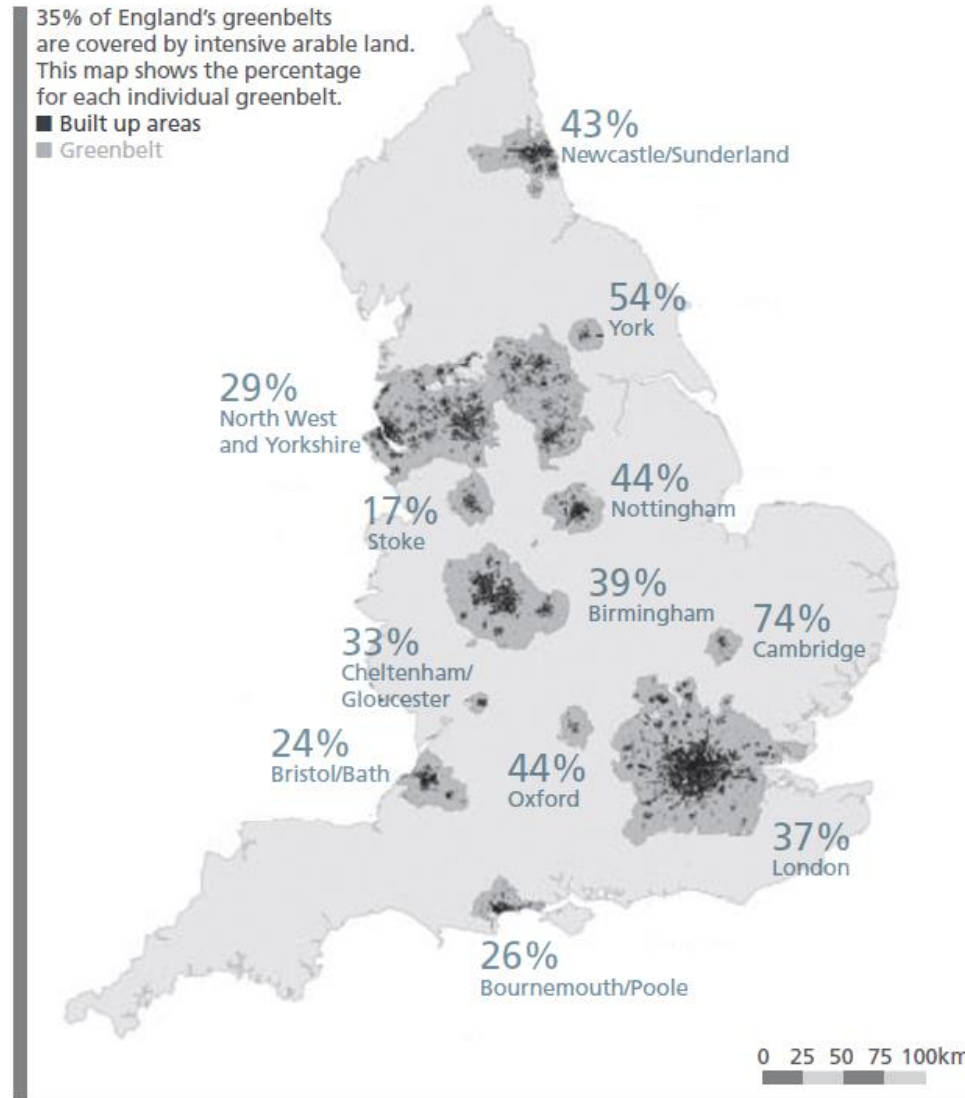
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“We now have a planning system directed to achieve precisely the opposite of what was originally conceived in 1947 – allow the mass of the urban population more space and a greener environment in which to live” – Paul Cheshire

Green Belt myth 1: Access to greenspace

Land type	Present benefit (per hectare per year, in 2001 £)
Urban core public space (city park)	54,000
Urban fringe greenbelt	889
Urban fringe forested land	2,700
Rural forested land	6,626
Agricultural extensive	3,105
Agricultural intensive	103
Natural and semi-natural wetlands	6,616

Green Belt myth 2: Environmental good



Welfare costs of the Green Belt

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6. Other economic benefits



Three proposals for reform

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“Green Belts constitute a major obstacle to development around cities, where housing is often needed. Replacing Green Belts by land–use restrictions that better reflect environmental designations would free up land for housing, while preserving the environment” - OECD



Three proposals for reform

1. Abolish and protect
2. Declassify all intensive agricultural land

Three proposals for reform

1. Abolish and protect
2. Declassify all intensive agricultural land
3. Limited declassification of intensive agricultural land near Green Belt railway stations

The Green Noose - summary

- UK is not over-populated or over-developed
- The official justification for Green Belts is based on dubious assumptions
- Green Belts do not deliver what people believe they deliver
- We should
 - abolish Green Belts
 - protect genuinely important sites
 - Build 1m extra homes by 2025