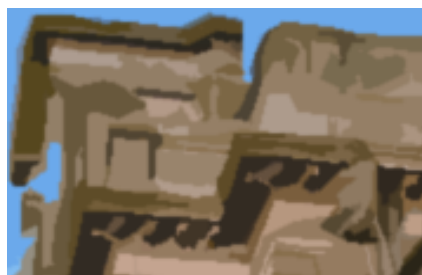
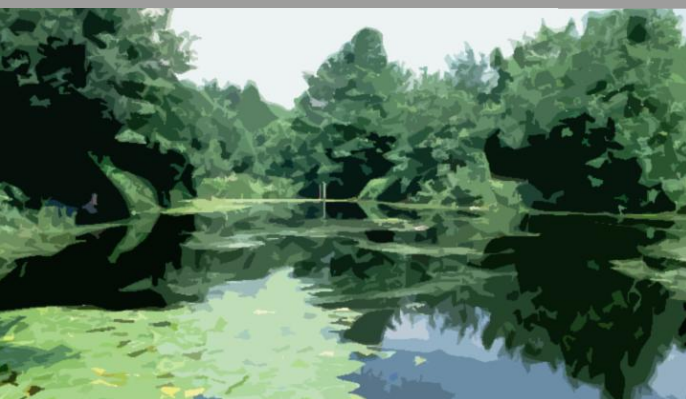




Bury Local Plan

Topic Paper 11: Green Belt

June 2026



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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Topic Paper is one of a series that has been prepared as part of the process of evidence gathering to support Bury's emerging Local Plan. It sits alongside a range of other Topic Papers covering the following:
- Climate change and carbon reduction
 - Housing
 - Economy
 - Centres
 - Tourism and culture
 - Communities
 - Transport
 - Built Environment and Design
 - Green infrastructure
 - Open space, sport and recreation
 - Water and flood risk
 - Air quality, pollution and hazards
 - Other infrastructure
- 1.2 The principal aim of the Topic Paper is to set out current key policies, plans and strategies relating to this topic area that forms the framework for the development of the Local Plan and to present a profile of the Borough that will highlight key issues, problems and challenges that the Local Plan should seek to address and which have helped to shape and influence the direction and focus of the Local Plan's policies and designations.

2. Background

- 2.1. Green Belt is a strategic planning designation that plays a fundamental role in shaping patterns of development and protecting the open countryside around urban areas. Its primary purpose is to ensure that land remains permanently open and to manage the growth of towns and cities in a sustainable manner. The concept of Green Belt was introduced to prevent urban sprawl, avoid the coalescence of neighbouring settlements, protect the countryside from encroachment and encourage the recycling of previously developed land within urban areas. Green Belt designation is therefore

concerned primarily with openness and permanence rather than the quality of the landscape or the public accessibility of the land.

- 2.2. The strategic context for Green Belt in Bury has recently been shaped by the adoption of the Places for Everyone (PfE) Joint Development Plan. PfE establishes the strategic framework for growth across Greater Manchester and included a number of Green Belt boundary changes and site allocations to support housing and employment needs.
- 2.3. Nevertheless, the majority of Bury's Green Belt remains protected and continues to perform an important function in achieving a sustainable balance between growth, environmental protection and the preservation of the Borough's distinctive settlement pattern.
- 2.4. As a result, the Bury Local Plan is being prepared within an updated Green Belt context and will provide more detailed local policies to guide future development and protect the function of the remaining Green Belt.

3. Context

- 3.1. One of the key early stages in the process is to review other policies, plans and strategies which are of relevance to this particular topic area and which help to inform and influence the direction of the Local Plan. There is a need for the Local Plan to be consistent with planning policy at different levels.
- 3.2. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) sets out Government policy in respect of planning matters, and this is supported by Planning Practice Guidance (PPG). This sets out the broad planning framework within which development plans are produced.
- 3.3. Sub-regionally, the Places for Everyone Plan joint plan (PfE) establishes strategic policies and site allocations across nine of the ten Greater Manchester districts. Following its adoption in March 2024, PfE is now a key part of Bury's development plan that sits alongside the Local Plan.
- 3.4. There are also a range of other plans and strategies that, whilst not being policy, are of relevance to the Borough from a Green Belt perspective.

National Planning Policy

- 3.5. All development plans must be prepared within the context of the Government's planning policies. These are primarily set out within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)¹ which sets out the

¹ [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

Government's planning policies for England and how these should be applied. The NPPF provides a framework within which locally prepared plans for housing and other development can be produced.

- 3.6. The NPPF is supported by separate policy documents related to waste² and traveller sites³ as well as more detailed information in Planning Practice Guidance⁴.
- 3.7. The NPPF 2024 transitional arrangements set out in paragraph 234c apply to the Bury Local Plan, because it is a plan which includes policies to deliver the level of housing and other development set out in a preceding local plan (such as a joint local plan containing strategic policies) adopted since 12 March 2020. As a result, the Bury Local Plan will be examined under the relevant previous version of the Framework (i.e. the NPPF December 2023).
- 3.8. Central to the NPPF is the Government's objective of achieving sustainable development and it highlights that achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways:
- **an economic objective** – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
 - **a social objective** – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
 - **an environmental objective** – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.
- 3.9. The Government attaches great importance to Green Belts. The fundamental aim of Green Belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; the essential characteristics of Green Belts are their

² [National Planning Policy for Waste](#)

³ [Planning policy for traveller sites](#)

⁴ [Planning Practice Guidance](#)

openness and their permanence. Chapter 13 of the NPPF is dedicated to protecting Green Belt land.

- 3.10. Green Belt serves five purposes:
- 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.
- 3.11. The general extent of Green Belts across the country is already established. New Green Belts should only be established in exceptional circumstances, for example when planning for larger scale development such as new settlements or major urban extensions.
- 3.12. The NPPF is clear at paragraph 145 that once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. Strategic policies should establish the need for any changes to Green Belt boundaries, having regard to their intended permanence in the long term, so they can endure beyond the plan period.
- 3.13. Exceptional circumstances in this context include, but are not limited to, instances where an authority cannot meet its identified need for homes, commercial or other development through other means. If that is the case, authorities should review Green Belt boundaries in accordance with the policies in this Framework and propose alterations to meet these needs in full, unless the review provides clear evidence that doing so would fundamentally undermine the purposes (taken together) of the remaining Green Belt, when considered across the area of the plan.
- 3.14. Before concluding that exceptional circumstances exist to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries, the strategic policy-making authority should be able to demonstrate that it has examined fully all other reasonable options for meeting its identified need for development. This will be assessed through the examination of its strategic policies, which will take into account the preceding paragraph and whether the strategy:
- a) makes as much use as possible of suitable brownfield sites and underutilised land;

- b) optimises the density of development, including whether policies promote a significant uplift in minimum density standards in town and city centres and other locations well served by public transport; and
 - c) has been informed by discussions with neighbouring authorities about whether they could accommodate some of the identified need for development, as demonstrated through the statement of common ground.
- 3.15. Strategic policy-making authorities should consider the consequences for sustainable development of channelling development towards urban areas inside the Green Belt boundary, towards towns and villages inset within the Green Belt or towards locations beyond the outer Green Belt boundary.
- 3.16. When defining Green Belt boundaries, plans should:
- a) ensure consistency with the development plan's strategy for meeting identified requirements for sustainable development;
 - b) not include land which it is unnecessary to keep permanently open;
 - c) where necessary, identify areas of safeguarded land between the urban area and the Green Belt, in order to meet longer-term development needs stretching well beyond the plan period;
 - d) make clear that the safeguarded land is not allocated for development at the present time. Planning permission for the permanent development of safeguarded land should only be granted following an update to a plan which proposes the development;
 - e) be able to demonstrate that Green Belt boundaries will not need to be altered at the end of the plan period; and
 - f) define boundaries clearly, using physical features that are readily recognisable and likely to be permanent.
- 3.17. If it is necessary to restrict development in a village primarily because of the important contribution which the open character of the village makes to the openness of the Green Belt, the village should be included in the Green Belt. If, however, the character of the village needs to be protected for other reasons, other means should be used, such as conservation area or normal development management policies, and the village should be excluded from the Green Belt.
- 3.18. Once Green Belts have been defined, local planning authorities should plan positively to enhance their beneficial use, such as looking for opportunities to provide access; to provide opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation; to

retain and enhance landscapes, visual amenity and biodiversity; or to improve damaged and derelict land.

Greater Manchester Strategy 2025-2035

- 3.19. The Greater Manchester Strategy 2025–2035⁵, titled “Together We Are Greater Manchester”, sets out a shared vision for the next decade: to create a thriving city region where everyone can live a good life. It is built on the principle that economic success and social progress must go hand in hand, so growth should benefit all people and communities across Greater Manchester.
- 3.20. The strategy focuses on two interconnected priorities:
- Growing the economy by attracting investment, supporting businesses, creating high-quality jobs, driving innovation, and building on Greater Manchester’s strengths in sectors such as technology, advanced manufacturing, research, culture, and the visitor economy; and
 - Ensuring people can live well by improving the foundations of everyday life, including housing, safety, transport, education, health, and support services. The strategy aims to tackle inequalities, strengthen communities, and improve wellbeing across the city region.
- 3.21. To create a thriving city region where everyone can have a good life, the Strategy focuses on seven key workstreams:
- Healthy homes for all
 - Safe and strong communities
 - A transport system for a global city region
 - A clear line of sight to high quality jobs
 - Everyday support in every neighbourhood
 - A great place to do business
 - Digitally connected places and people

⁵ [Greater Manchester Strategy 2025-2035](#)

Places for Everyone

- 3.22. Places for Everyone (PfE) was prepared as a Joint Development Plan Document of nine of the ten Greater Manchester local planning authorities (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan). The plan was formally adopted in March 2024.
- 3.23. PfE is the strategic spatial plan that sets out a collective planning policy framework for the nine constituent boroughs. All policies within the plan are ‘strategic policies’ and it forms a key part of Bury’s wider development plan and is used to determine individual planning applications. As such, Bury’s Local Plan will need to be consistent with PfE.
- 3.24. As a strategic plan, Places for Everyone does not cover everything that Bury’s Local Plan would. Therefore, Bury’s Local Plan will set out more detailed policies reflecting local circumstances.
- 3.25. PfE demonstrated exceptional circumstances to release Green Belt for development and make additions to the Green Belt. It resulted in a 4.1% reduction in the size of the Green Belt across the plan area and set a new Green Belt boundary for the plan area, including Bury (see Figure 1).

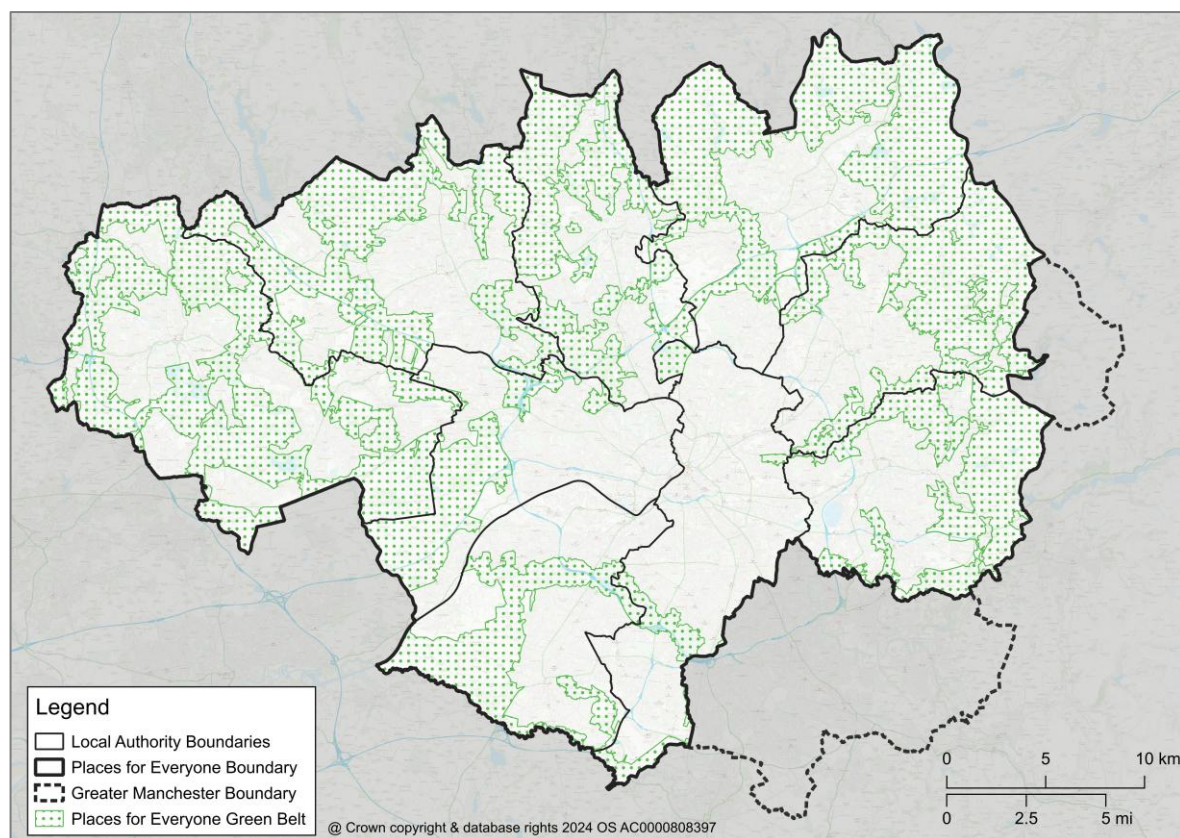


Places for Everyone

Joint Development Plan Document for Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale, Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan
2022 - 2039

Adopted 21 March 2024

Figure 1 - The Green Belt as identified in the Places for Everyone Joint Plan



- 3.1. Following the adoption of PfE in March 2024, a number of strategically important sites in Bury were removed from the Green Belt to support the borough's long-term employment, housing and infrastructure needs.
- 3.2. This included the Northern Gateway (Heywood/Pilsworth) allocation which is a major strategic employment site located between Junctions 18 and 19 of the M62 and straddling the boundary between Bury and Rochdale.
- 3.3. The most significant housing allocation is Elton Reservoir which is identified for around 3,500 new homes, together with supporting infrastructure, transport improvements and substantial areas of green space. PfE also allocated sites at Simister and Bowlee (1,550 homes), Walshaw (1,250 homes) and Seedfield (140 homes).
- 3.4. In amending the Green Belt boundary through this Plan, land which was not previously in the Green Belt was also added to the Green Belt to resolve boundary anomalies where the Green Belt does not follow a readily recognisable feature.
- 3.5. As a result, in Bury, the following additions to the Green Belt have been made:

- Policy Green Belt Addition 2: Pigs Lea Brook (Figure 2);
- Policy Green Belt Addition 3: Woolfold, Bury (Figure 3); and
- Policy Green Belt Addition 4: Chesham, Bury (Figure 4).

Figure 2 – Green Belt addition at Pigs Lea Brook

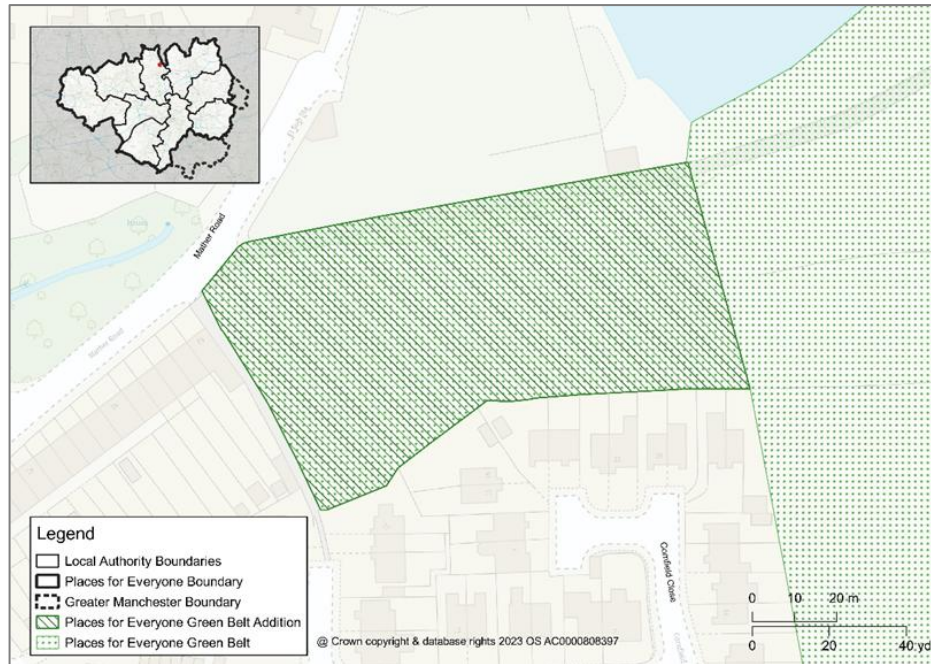


Figure 3 - Green Belt addition at Woolfold

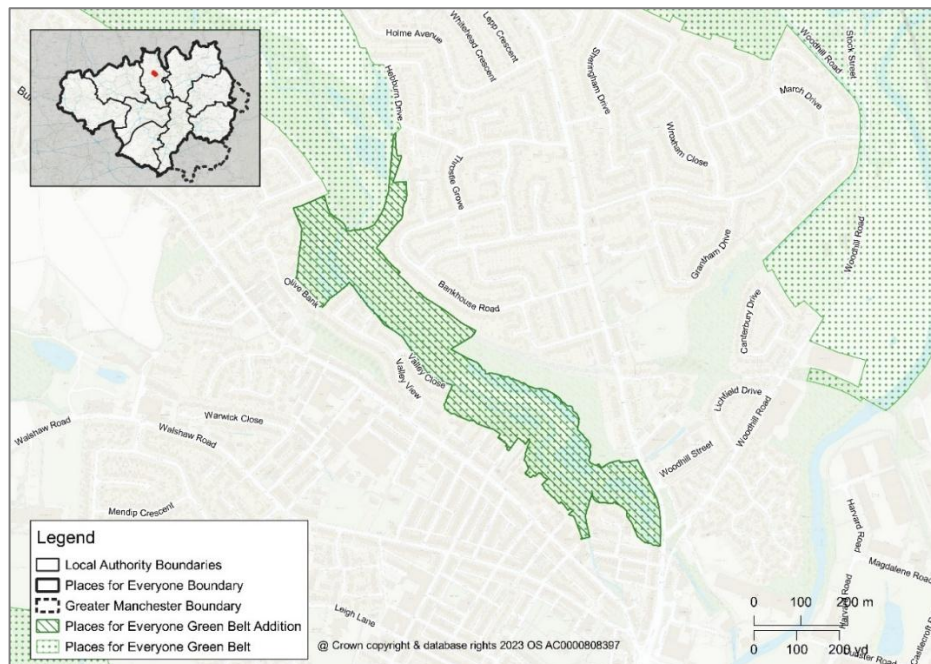
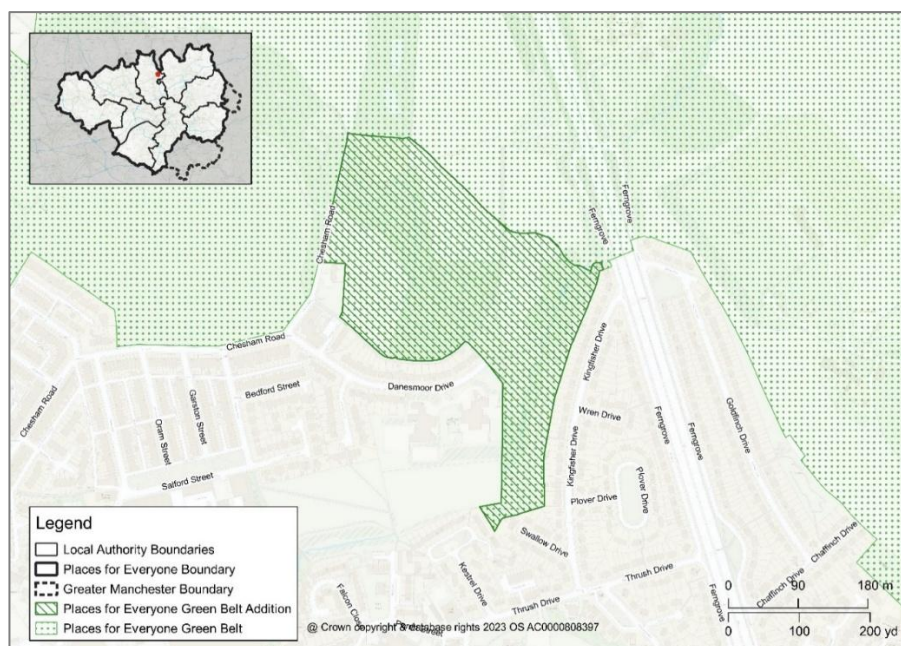


Figure 4 - Green Belt addition at Chesham



3.6. Places for Everyone Policy JP-G9: The Green Belt states that the Green Belt as illustrated on the policy map serves the five purposes set out in national policy to:

- 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;
- to preserve the setting and special character of historic towns; and
- to assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

3.7. The beneficial use of the Green Belt will be enhanced where this can be achieved without harm to its openness, permanence or ability to serve its five purposes. In particular, the enhancement of its green infrastructure functions will be encouraged, such as improved public access and habitat restoration, helping to deliver environmental and social benefits for our residents and providing the high-quality green spaces that will support economic growth.

Bury's 'Let's Do It!' Strategy

- 3.8. The Let's Do It! Strategy is Bury's long-term vision for the borough up to 2030, developed with residents, businesses, community groups and public services. Its aim is to make Bury a place with strong economic growth, lower levels of deprivation, and better life chances for everyone, while putting communities at the heart of decision-making.



- 3.9. At its core, the strategy is based on the belief that everyone has a role to play in improving the borough. Rather than focusing solely on council services, it promotes community power, partnership working and shared responsibility, encouraging residents, organisations and public services to work together to tackle inequality and improve outcomes.
- 3.10. The strategy is built around four key themes:
- Locally – strengthening neighbourhoods and townships, supporting prevention and early intervention, and helping communities become more resilient.
 - Enterprising – creating jobs, supporting businesses, investing in regeneration, improving skills, and growing a sustainable local economy.
 - Together – integrating services and strengthening partnerships between the council, NHS, voluntary sector, businesses and residents.
 - Strengths-Based – building on the strengths, assets and capabilities of people, communities and organisations rather than focusing on problems alone.
- 3.11. Overall, the Let's Do It! Strategy aims to create a healthier, greener, more prosperous and more inclusive Bury, where residents have greater opportunities, stronger communities, and improved quality of life.
- 3.12. Bury's Local Plan will play a key role in delivering the vision and aims of the Let's Do It Strategy and, as such, it is important that there is alignment between these two key local strategies.

Greater Manchester Green Belt Assessment

- 3.13. An assessment of the Green Belt across Greater Manchester was undertaken in 2016⁶. The overall aim of the Study was to assess the extent to which the land within the Greater Manchester Green Belt performs against the purposes of Green Belts, as set out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The NPPF attaches great importance to Green Belts and stresses that their essential characteristics are ‘openness and permanence’. It also advises that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances through the preparation or review of a local plan.
- 3.14. The broad extent of the Green Belt in Greater Manchester was established in the 1981 Greater Manchester Structure Plan and detailed boundaries were introduced in the Greater Manchester Green Belt Local Plan which was adopted in 1984. Until 2016, a full assessment of the Green Belt boundaries in Greater Manchester had not been undertaken since the original boundaries were adopted in 1984, although there have been alterations through individual Local Authority development plans where exceptional circumstances have required amendments, or where additional land was added to the Green Belt through Local Plans in the 1980’s and 1990’s.
- 3.15. The assessment presents the ratings for the Strategic Green Belt Areas that lie entirely or partly within Bury, and a summary of the assessment findings for Bury (Figure 5).
- 3.16. In 2024, the Places for Everyone Plan was adopted by Bury Council. In doing so, this amended the Green Belt.

Figure 5 – Greater Manchester Green Belt Assessment conclusions on parcels in Bury

Green Belt Purposes	Summary of Findings
a) To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas	Green Belt parcels between Bury and Ramsbottom to the north, Bolton to the west and Radcliffe to the south play the strongest role in preventing further urban sprawl. Further south, along the edges of Radcliffe, Prestwich, Whitefield, along the Roch valley and east of the M66, parcels make a moderate- strong contribution to this purpose.

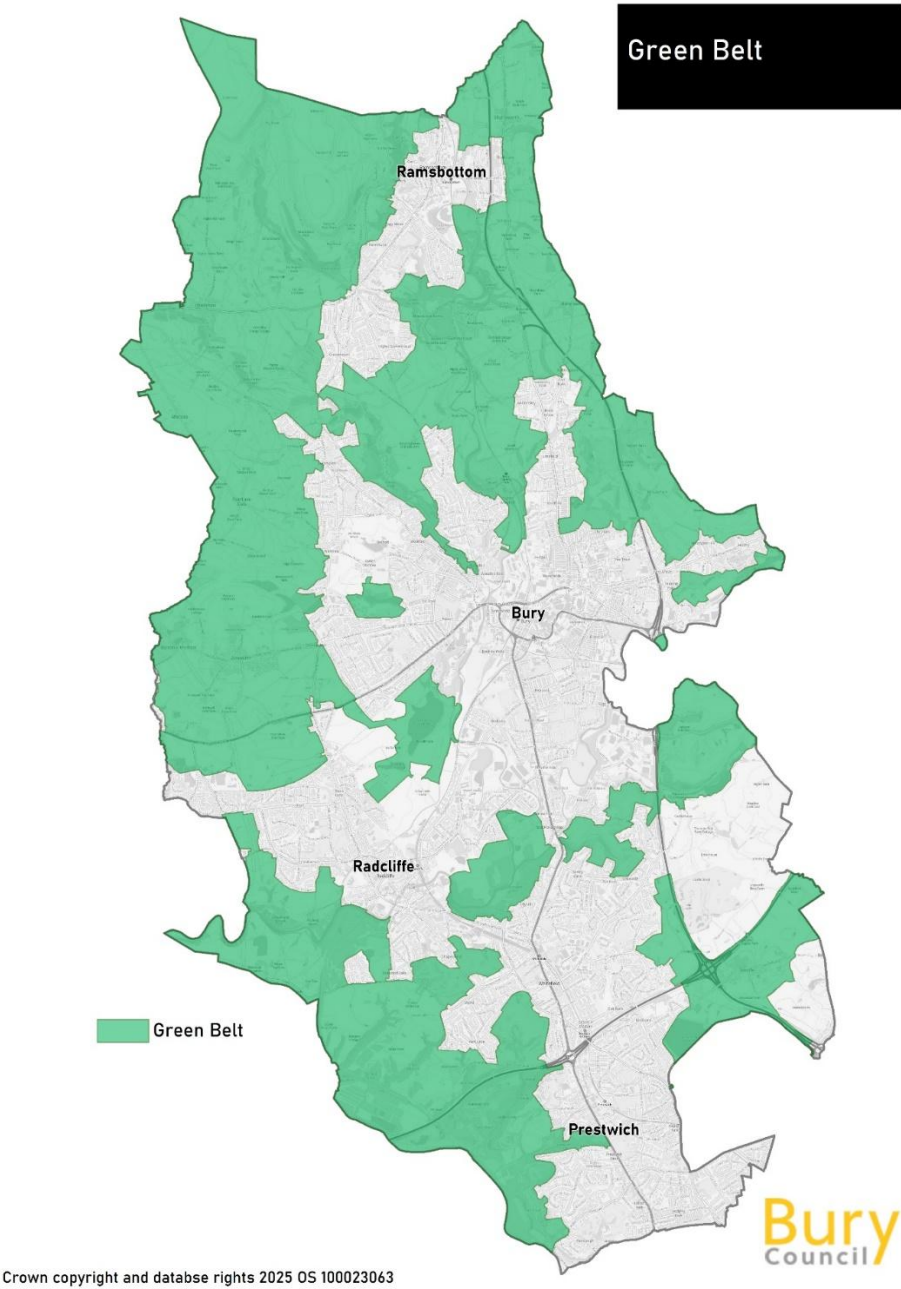
⁶ [Greater Manchester Green Belt Assessment](#)

b) To prevent neighbouring towns merging into one another	Significant parts of the Green Belt in Bury play a strong role in preventing neighbouring towns from merging with one another. This reflects the pattern of settlement growth which has resulted in a number of corridors and fingers of open land separating parts of Bury and surrounding settlements such as Ramsbottom, Radcliffe and Whitefield and towns in neighbouring council areas. There are also parcels to the north-west and south of Bury which make a moderate contribution to this purpose in recognition of the large degree of coalescence that has taken place between settlements to the extent that these are largely surrounded by existing development. They play a role in maintaining separation of parts of the same urban area, or towns that have already started to merge. A series of smaller parcels play a weak role in preventing town merging (e.g. to the north east of Bury), reflecting their size and the presence of other 'barrier' features such as motorway corridors which play a role in maintaining the separation of settlements.
c) To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment	Large parts of Bury's Green Belt play an important role in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment. Areas which perform most strongly in relation to this purpose include the Pennine fringes to the north of Bury and around Ramsbottom, and parts of the Irwell valley to the north and south of Radcliffe. Most other areas of Green Belt, including parcels between Bury and Bolton, Bury and Middleton and forming wedges of open land extending into Bury itself, play a moderate role in relation to this purpose.

4. Local Profile

- 4.1. In broad terms, the Borough's Green Belt covers the following areas:
- In the north and west of the Borough between Bury and Bolton incorporating open land areas to the west of Ramsbottom and southwards through the Hawkshaw, Affetside and Ainsworth areas to the Bradley Fold area of Radcliffe;
 - the Irwell Valley between Bury and Ramsbottom;
 - in the north and east of the Borough between Bury and Rochdale incorporating open land areas to the east of Ramsbottom and southwards through Shuttleworth and Nangreaves and to the east of Walmersley; and
 - in the south and west of the Borough between Bury and Salford incorporating open land to the west of Radcliffe and southwards through Outwood, Philips Park to the west of Prestwich.
- 4.2. As stated above, PfE provides the strategic context on issues such as Green Belt in addition to more detail around housing and employment land and associated infrastructure. PfE designates the Green Belt boundary for Bury and this is shown in Figure 6.
- 4.3. Bury's Local Plan will deal with local and more detailed matters connected to Green Belt policy. This may, for example, include development management policies applying to areas of Green Belt (as identified through the PfE), such as the approach taken towards development within village settlements, agricultural workers' dwellings and equestrian development and visual amenity.

Figure 6 – Bury’s adopted Green Belt



5. Summary of Key Issues

- 5.1. This Green Belt Topic Paper has highlighted several key issues that need to be considered in taking the Local Plan forward. These key issues are considered to be as follows:

- The Places for Everyone Plan was adopted in March 2024 and identifies the new Green Belt boundary for Bury.
- Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans.
- The Local Plan will need to deal with local and more detailed Green Belt matters.

Bury
Council