

This chapter provides a brief history of Green Belt policy and the historical background to the Cambridge Green Belt

3.1 A Brief History of Green Belt Policy

3.1.1 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. The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act enabled local authorities to designate areas that should be protected from development, including Green Belts, in their development plans. The Ministry of Housing and Local Government gave advice to local authorities on Green Belts in Circular (42/55). This stated the three main functions of a Green Belt:

- to check the growth of a large built up area,
- to prevent neighboring settlements from merging into another; or
- to preserve the special character of a town.

3.1.2 Further advice was set out in Circular 50/57 which established the principle of ‘white land’. This was land that, although not allocated for development could be developed later without prejudicing the Green Belt.

3.1.3 A government publication in 1962, *The Green Belts* gave more detailed advice on the purpose of Green Belts. It emphasized the strict control of development and that there should be a presumption against building, although development which would not interfere with the open character of the land might be permissible. It emphasized the recreational value of Green Belts and the need to maintain and improve the landscape.

3.1.4 Circular 14/84 set out further advice, including the definition of detailed boundaries in Local Plans. It states the essential characteristic of Green Belts is their permanence and that boundaries should be altered only in exceptional circumstances.

3.1.5 PPG 2, *Green Belts* originally published in January 1998 draws upon previous advice, and explicitly extended the original purposes of the Green Belt to add:

- to safeguard the surrounding countryside from further encroachment;
- to assist in urban regeneration

3.1.6 The concept of Green Belts remains an important aspect of planning policy today and the total area protected by Green Belts has increased by 25,000 hectares² since 1977 with a further 12,000 hectares due to be announced in local authority plans. Green Belts now cover 13% of England.

3.1.7 Although Green Belts are widely held to be one of the most effective planning policies for protecting the environment around cities, there are concerns about their impact and appropriateness in effective spatial planning. Both the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) have called for a review of Green Belt policy. While both organisations support Green Belts, they considered an assessment should be carried out to determine how far they could contribute to the achievement of the Government’s objectives of sustainable development. For example, there has long been a concern that tightly drawn Green Belt boundaries, as around Cambridge, have resulted in development ‘leapfrogging the Green Belt’ and thereby increasing both the length of commuting journeys and car dependence.

² Ministerial announcement 29 March 2004

- 3.1.8 Additionally, both the RTPI and TCPA raise concerns about the impact of Green Belt designation on the rural economy. Strict interpretations about what development is considered appropriate is viewed as ‘unimaginative’ and ‘restrictive’ and both organisations seek to promote more effective and positive land uses in the Green Belt.
- 3.1.9 The Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) is a strong supporter of Green Belts and is marking their 50th anniversary by promoting the need to ensure the permanence and openness of the Green Belt and by resisting development within it. The CPRE believes that greater effort should be made to improve the attractiveness and value of the Green Belt to people living in nearby rural areas.
- 3.1.10 It is clear that Green Belts will continue to be an important feature of national and local planning policy, albeit one that will provoke debate about their purpose, role and extent at both a national and local level.

3.2 Historical Background to the Cambridge Green Belt

- 3.2.1 Locally the development of the Cambridge Green Belt began when the Cambridgeshire Town Planning Committee established a Regional Planning Committee in May 1928 to

‘.. make a general enquiry into the present state of the County and to emphasise its principal features with the two fold purpose of preserving its native character and providing for its proper development’

- 3.2.2 This Committee produced the *Cambridgeshire Regional Planning Report (1934)* prepared by W.R. Davidge. It proposed an ‘open belt around Cambridge’ and the phrase ‘Green Belt Reservations’ is used as a page heading. One recommendation was:

‘In order to preserve the natural beauty of the background of the town a chain of reservations is proposed which would, in effect, keep a generally open belt of country encircling Cambridge’.

It went on to suggest a number of places to be preserved under 3 headings of national, regional and local importance. ‘Fenland’ was specifically identified as of national importance and this included much of the area now within the Green Belt in ECDC area (see Figure (i)). Interestingly the reason given for inclusion was primarily because of ‘the unsuitability of their character for general building development’, and not because of any purpose now associated with Green Belts.

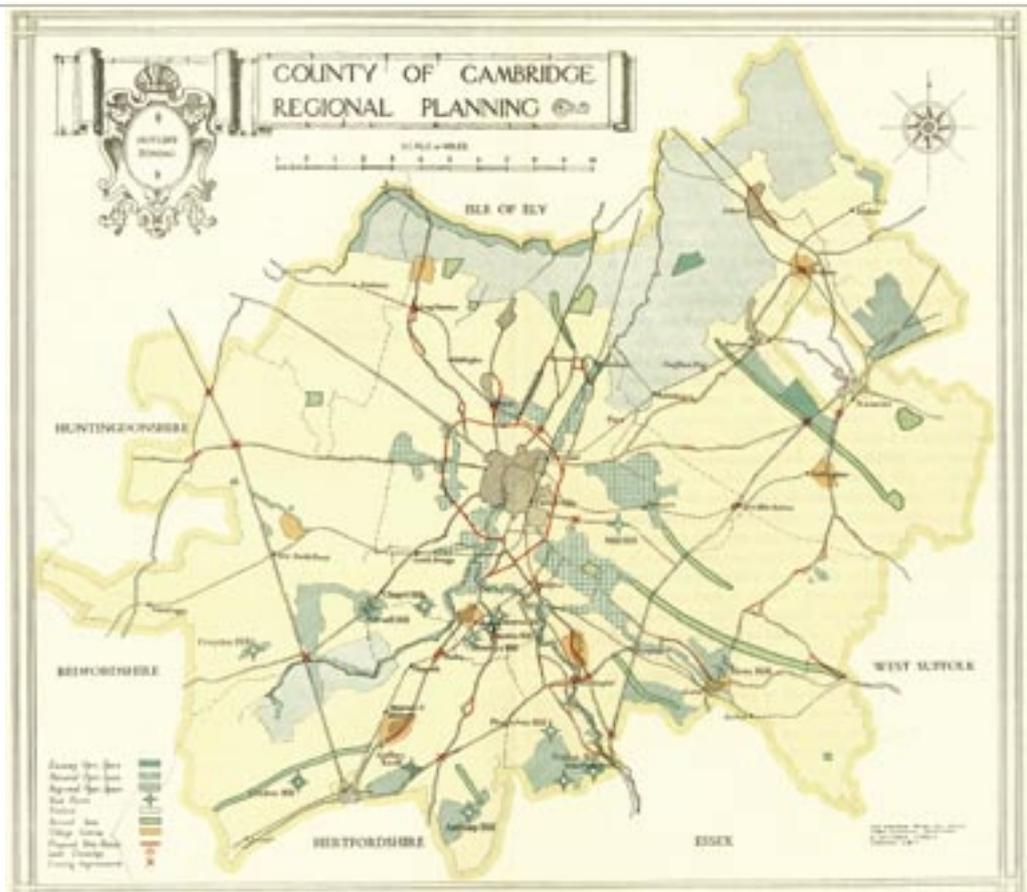


Figure (i) Plan from Davidge Report

3.3 Holford Report 1950

3.3.1 The origins of what was to become the Cambridge Green Belt go back to the plan for the city produced by Sir William Holford and H. Myles Wright in the *Holford Report* 1950. They recommended that the city:

‘..should be kept at a level that will retain the special advantages of Cambridge and future development should be compact rather than sprawling’ (paragraph 426)

3.3.2 They defined the qualities that should be retained and suggested a ‘green line’ beyond which building should not be permitted. The result was a concept of a city with a special character, with an optimum size and whose qualities and setting should be protected by a ‘Green Belt’.



Figure (ii) Plan
from Holford
Report

3.4 Cambridge Town Map 1965

- 3.4.1 The inner boundary of the Green Belt was defined for the first time in the reviewed Town Map (Cambridge City) (Amendment No 2) which was approved in 1965. The boundaries around the necklace villages were defined in a parallel review of Town Map No. 2. This was never formally approved by the minister, but he advised that its provisions should be treated as a material consideration and that planning applications should be determined as if the Green Belt were formally approved.
- 3.4.2 The Written Statement states that the special character of Cambridge would be prejudiced by further development outside the areas permitted by the Town Map and hence the Green Belt had been defined to protect the rural character of the surrounding area.
- 3.4.3 The outer boundary was defined as a broadly rectilinear shape and without reference to local authority boundaries or physical features and was regarded as unsatisfactory. In practical terms the outer boundary was defined by 'the Cambridge Study Area' established by Holford and also known as the boundary of urban Cambridge.



Figure (iii)
Cambridge Town
Map 1965

3.5 A Study of the Cambridge Sub Region 1974

- 3.5.1 In *A Study of the Cambridge Sub Region* Professor Parry Lewis reviewed planning policy for the Cambridge Sub Region and refers briefly to the impact of Green Belt policy. He describes the policy as 'Green Belt and Satellites' which had allowed the expansion of villages but at the cost of increased reliance on the car to allow people to continue to be employed and shop in Cambridge.
- 3.5.2 Bottisham is specifically referred to as an example of a village that has grown in such a way that its appearance had changed 'dramatically and disastrously'.

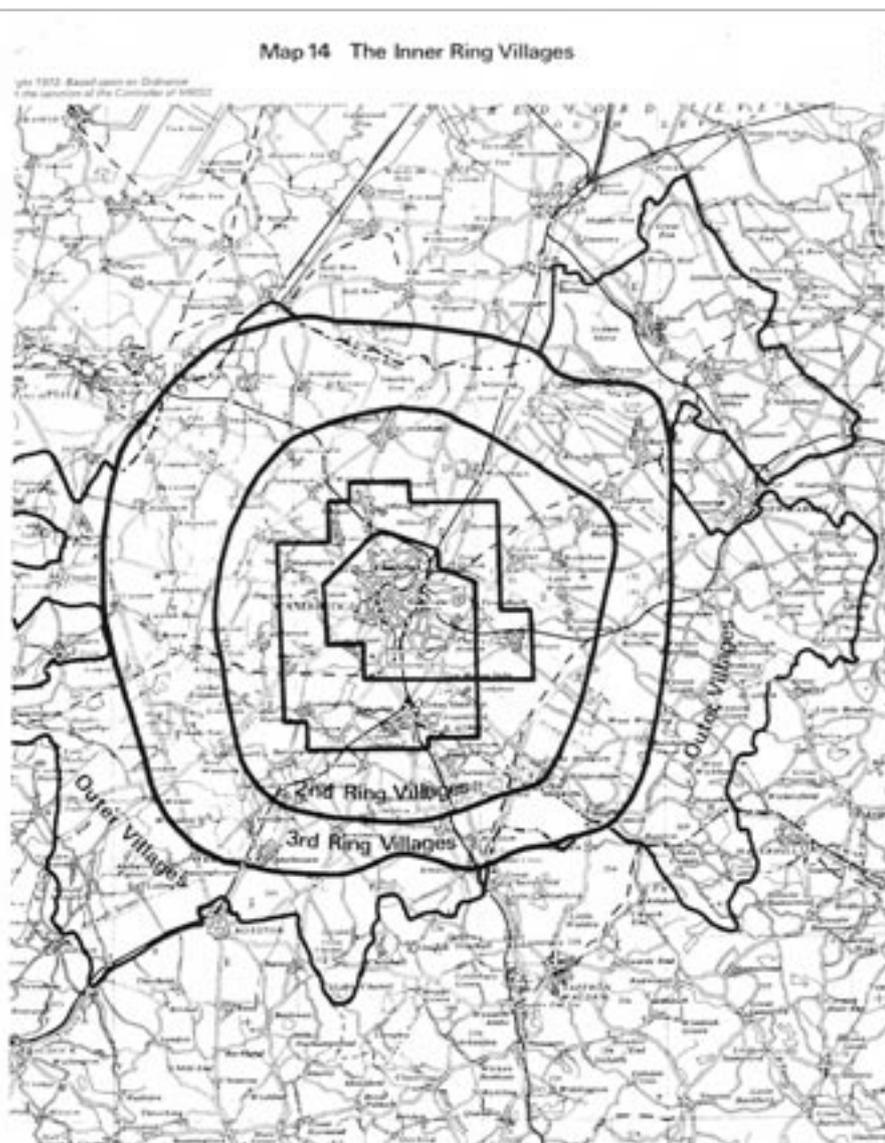


Figure (iv) Plan from Study of the Cambridge Sub Region 1974

3.6 Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 1980

3.6.1 The first Structure Plan for Cambridgeshire was adopted in 1980 and covered a period up to 1991. This recognised the development pressures facing Cambridge both from the city itself and externally. The Green Belt was seen as a way of helping to withstand these pressures, to protect the surrounding countryside and to prevent the coalescence of villages. Policy P19/3 stated:

‘A Green Belt will be maintained around the city of Cambridge having a depth of about 3-5 miles from the edge of the built up area of the city. The precise boundaries of the Green Belt will be defined in local plans’

3.6.2 The Secretary of State in his letter approving the Plan indicated that the main purpose of the Green Belt was ‘to preserve the unique character of the city and to maintain its present setting’.

3.6.3 Investigations to establish precise boundaries began soon after, but it was to take over 10 years before the Green Belt Local Plan was adopted.

3.7 Cambridgeshire Structure Plan 1989

3.7.1 By the time the next Structure Plan was adopted in 1989, which rolled forward the plan period to 2001, the Green Belt boundary was still not approved. Policy P20/4 was more detailed than the previous one and stated;

‘A Green Belt will be maintained around the city of Cambridge in order to contain its urban growth, preserve its unique character, maintain its present setting and prevent communities in the environs of Cambridge from merging into one another. The precise boundaries of the Green Belt will be defined in a Local Plan’

3.8 Green Belt Local Plan 1992

3.8.1 The *Green Belt Local Plan 1992*, which superceded the old style Town Map of 1965, was subject of a public inquiry in 1985 and approved by the County Council in 1987, but was not adopted until 28 August 1992 following an intervention by the Secretary of State who withheld approval until the question of sites for ‘new settlements’ in the vicinity of Cambridge had been resolved.

3.8.2 It was prepared by Cambridgeshire County Council in close collaboration with the relevant District Councils and the main aim of the plan was ‘to preserve the special character of Cambridge and to maintain the quality of its setting’. The plan (paragraph 1.18) had other more specific aims:

- To control the urban expansion of Cambridge
- To allow for the development of communities in accordance with Structure Plan Policies
- To prevent the further coalescence of settlements
- To enhance the visual quality of the area
- To balance the provision of suitable recreational and leisure facilities against the need of agriculture.

3.8.3 The basis of the outer boundary was dealt with specifically in the Local Plan (paragraph 2.1), which stated:

‘The setting of the city has an important role to play in protecting the character of Cambridge. The outer boundary, in defining the setting of Cambridge, has been determined primarily by the topography of the Cambridge ‘basin’, and thus includes all land which overlooks the city and forms the landscape in which the city lies. Where there is little or no physical relief, land has been included which has close social and economic links with the city, lying within the immediate sphere of influence of development pressures associated with Cambridge which the Green Belt seeks to control.’

3.8.4 The plan then sets out ‘secondary considerations’ on the outer boundary (paragraph 2.2 – 2.5):

- A depth of 3-5 miles, only exceeded where the physical setting due to topography is clearly wider;
- Preventing the coalescence of settlements, the outer boundary has taken into account land which is important in keeping settlements apart,
- Significant physical features, such as roads, trackways and streams.

3.8.5 In circumstances where a village straddles a physical feature that forms part of the outer boundary, the Green Belt boundary was drawn to exclude the village from the Green Belt.

3.8.6 The Plan also sets out policies to control inappropriate development and to promote appropriate development and uses that would enhance the Green Belt.

3.8.7 Subsequently the Green Belt has been considered in successive Structure Plans and Local Plans and has more recently been extensively reviewed to allow the urban expansion of Cambridge. The following chapter reviews this in detail.