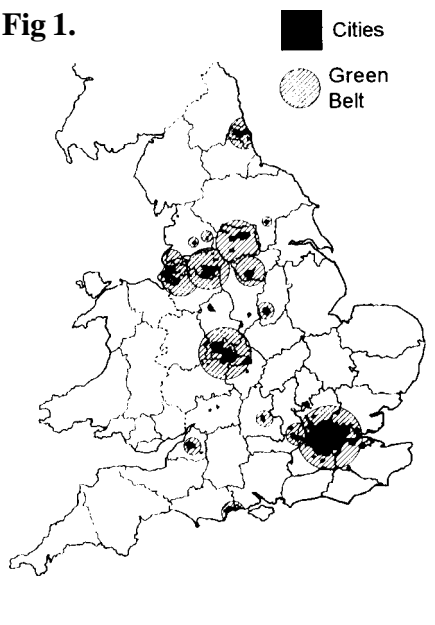




Birmingham International Airport and the Green Belt

Fig 1.



What is a Green Belt?

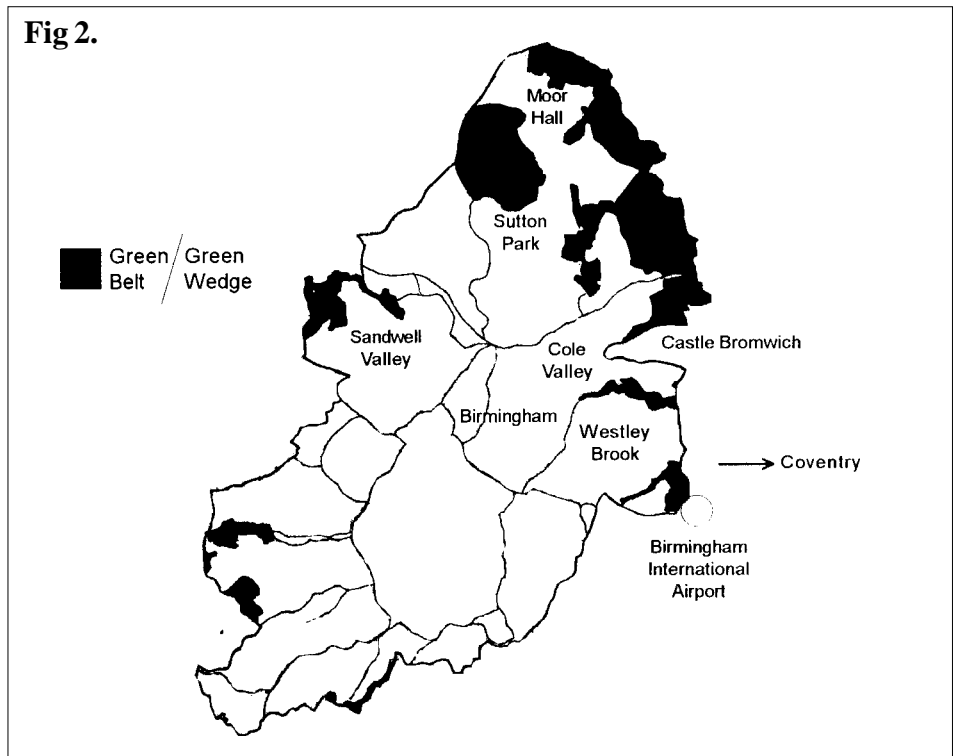
A Green Belt is an area of countryside between adjoining cities (Fig 1). Within Green Belts development is severely restricted.

Green Belts have been a cornerstone of planning policy for more than 35 years. They were introduced around London as a result of the **1947 Town & Country Planning Act** and over the past 15 years the extent of fully approved Green Belts in England has doubled to over 1,550,000 hectares. In Scotland approved Green Belts cover just under 200,000 hectares.

The Purposes Of Green Belts

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas .
- To safeguard the surrounding countryside from further encroachment.
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another.
- To preserve the special character of historic towns.
- To assist in urban regeneration.

Fig 2.



The West Midlands Green Belt

The West Midlands Green Belt covers 209,200 hectares and forms a large area of open countryside between Birmingham and Coventry (See Fig 2).

In addition to its general purposes, the West Midland's Green Belt is important because of the need to protect good agricultural land, maintain important sites of nature conservation and provide increasing opportunities for sport and recreation. The stated purposes for which new buildings and changes of land use will be permitted include:

- Agriculture and Forestry
- Sport
- Cemeteries
- Institutions standing in large grounds
- Other uses appropriate to a rural area

However, it is generally accepted that there are circumstances in which Green Belt policies can be overridden for national and urgent regional needs.

The general **decline of manufacturing** which has occurred across the country has had particularly severe effects on the economy of

the West Midlands, which lost a total of 300,000 jobs between 1979 and 1992. General investment in the region was also 10% below the national average. In an effort to diversify the region's economic base, expansion of both the **Birmingham International Airport (BIA)** and the adjacent **National Exhibition Centre (NEC)** have been seen as essential and funding for the latter has been received from the **European Union (EU)**. The NEC is seen as the region's most important basis for stimulating business tourism (Table 1).

Table 1.

NEC - Key economic statistics 1992-3

EVENTS	183
VISITORS	3.4m (7% from Birmingham) (19% from Rest of W.Mids) (71% from Rest of UK) (3% from Overseas)
DIRECT EXPENDITURE	£329m
RETAINED INCOME	£135m
FULL TIME EMPLOYEES	12,200

Economic impact of the airport

Airports have become important elements of local and regional economies and are vital in developing and sustaining industry, commerce and tourism and providing both direct and indirect employment.

There are currently some 4,300 people directly employed at the airport. In addition, indirect employment arises as a result of expenditure by those directly employed at the airport and those involved in the production of goods and services sold at the airport.

Table 2 illustrates the importance of Birmingham International Airport in relation to its other major competitors.

Table 2.

DEPART	TERMINAL PASSENGERS IN 1993 (millions)
Heathrow	47.601
Gatwick	20.054
Manchester	12.832
Glasgow	5.014
Birmingham	4.032

Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council (MBC), who are responsible for the stretch of Green Belt in this area, have therefore been under considerable pressure to adopt policies which would facilitate expansion of both the airport and the NEC. In addition, a **basic housing requirement** of 83,000 dwellings between 1988 and 2001 is expected to be met by house building in Metropolitan districts and Solihull has been expected to play its part. Within the general policy of house building in the inner city, it is clear that some new housing will need to be built on green field sites. Successive economic surveys have also shown that the West Midlands has lagged behind in the **development of hi-tech industries**, for which the following are seen as important:

- Easy access to the motorway system
- Close proximity to Birmingham or Coventry
- Ready accessibility to the city work forces (preferably by both public and private transport)

Such sites are expected to be in attractive settings and will necessitate development to a very high standard, for example:

- Low density of buildings
- Low site cover
- High quality buildings
- Extensive landscaping and generous parking facilities.

Since many of these requirement correlate with the nature of the West Midland Green Belt, high-

technology industries such as electronics companies have been vigorously pursued by Birmingham City Council.

Faced with such pressures, there is evidence that developments which would in the past have been restricted, are increasingly being accepted (Table 3).

Table 3. Number of Planning Decisions

Use applied for	1988-90		1990-92	
	Approved	Refused	Approved	Refused
Housing	33	87	51	54
Business/ Office	11	2	17	11
Manufacturing /Warehouse	12	8	22	6
Retail	1	6	6	4
Leisure	n/a	n/a	42	28
Other/Mixed	12	26	24	27

Housing approvals will have little impact since they almost always involve extensions to existing dwellings. However, the increasing percentage of business and leisure applications are expected to have much more dramatic effects.

In 1991 Solihull MBC published its **Unitary Development Plan** which included proposals to include the whole of the NEC along with any land which might be needed for its expansion within the Green Belt. Birmingham City Council and the NEC joined forces in opposing Solihull MBC and this resulted in two Public Inquiries. At the first Public Inquiry the Inspector made a number of recommendations based upon criticisms of Solihull's plans:

- 1) That, in drawing its Green Belt boundaries, Solihull MBC had not taken sufficient account of the number of new houses which needed to be built. He recommended that some of the proposed Green Belt land should be allocated for such housing.
- 2) That the NEC should be excluded from the Green Belt. This, of course, would make it much easier for the NEC to gain planning permission for any extensions.

Solihull MBC accepted both of these recommendations and the joint forces of the NEC and BCC succeeded in gaining a further allocation of land to be used solely for the possible expansion of the NEC.

BCC and the Airport Company successfully argued that Solihull's inclusion of parts of the airport (runways and adjacent strips) was not consistent with the government's policy on Green

Belts nor did it provide a sound planning basis for the airport's future development. The Inspector at the second Public Inquiry supported the City Council in recommending that the airport should be wholly excluded from the Green Belt, but reassured Solihull that any development within the boundaries of the airport would be solely restricted to airport-related uses. This reflects Solihull's concern that, once outside Green Belt protection, the huge area of land within the airport could attract many potentially harmful uses which would never normally be allowed within the Green Belt.

This case study clearly illustrates some of the processes involved in the designation and management of Green Belts. Borough and City Councils may have quite different priorities. Here, by attempting to include both the NEC and the airport within the Green belt, Solihull Borough Council sought to control two huge developments on its doorstep; Birmingham City Council however viewed both developments as vital in continuing the economic regeneration and restructuring of the West Midlands. Joining forces with both the NEC and the Airport Company the City Council succeeded, through public enquiries, in keeping both developments out of the Green Belt, therefore allowing greater freedom to develop.

Exam Hint - Case Studies or detailed examples are usually an essential ingredient of a high scoring exam script. Such case studies, however, must above, all, be made relevant to the actual questions. In essence, this will mean that the actual facts and statistics which you select from any case study will be different for different questions. The strongest candidates select their information carefully rather than merely regurgitate 'chunks' of information almost regardless of what slant the question wanted.

Acknowledgements;

This Geo Factsheet was researched and written by Kevin Byrne.

*Geo Press
10 St Pauls Square
Birmingham
B3 1QU*

Geopress Factsheets may be copied free of charge by teaching staff or students, provided that their school is a registered subscriber.

No part of these Factsheets may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any other form or by any other means, without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISSN 1351-5136