

9. CONCLUSIONS: PART A OVERVIEW OF THE GREEN BELT

- 9.1. By virtue of its setting within the Thames Basin, with its major river estuary and varied geology, the landscape of the Study Area is very rich and diverse. It also provides an important resource for biodiversity and for recreation close to the urban population.
- 9.2. Land use within the Green Belt is dominated by farming, although other non-farming uses are becoming more prevalent. There have, and continue to be, significant threats to the Green Belt landscape from major development areas, the development of roads and other infrastructure. These pressures, together with the sub-division of landownership to create 'hope value', are contributing to a decline in the environment of the Green Belt.
- 9.3. Current policy focuses the main purposes of Green Belts but also emphasises the need to enhance the environment of the countryside around London and achieve its potential as resource for the benefit of people and wildlife.
- 9.4. The national and local policy objectives for the use of land in the Green Belt include:
 - Providing access for informal recreation
 - Providing opportunities for outdoor sport and recreation
 - Conserving and enhancing landscapes
 - Improving damaged and derelict land
 - Securing nature conservation interest
 - Retaining land in agricultural, forestry and related use close to the urban population
- 9.5. Environmental bodies have more ambitious aspirations for the countryside around towns, including:
 - Contributing to urban renaissance
 - Enhancing peoples' understanding of place
 - Providing an education resource
 - Helping to improve public health
 - Responding to climate change
 - A venue for holidays and tourism
 - Opportunities for renewable energy development

- Providing burial space
- 9.6. There are considerable opportunities to increase the amount of publicly accessible in the countryside around London and generally and to link fragmented areas of public open space, by both public transport and walking and cycling routes. There may also be opportunities to link different forms of public transport where rail links only go so far.
- 9.7. There are a number of local initiatives that seek to address environmental issues within the Green Belt and at the urban fringe. The Community Forests, for example, have realised many opportunities, such as the restoration of derelict farmland and former areas of mineral extraction.
- 9.8. Although often very effective, the existing initiatives do not form part of a cohesive whole. This fragmented approach at the local level is exacerbated regionally by the fact that the Study Area falls within three planning regions: London; the South East; and the East of England.
- 9.9. The benefits of a strategic approach to environmental enhancement of the Green Belt include:
- Environmental enhancement of the Green Belt could be achieved across administrative boundaries
 - Consolidation and integration of existing initiatives into a more cohesive framework
 - Development pressures of a strategic nature, such as the Growth Areas defined in the Sustainable Communities Plan, require a strategic response
 - The positive objectives and aspirations for the Green Belt would be realised more effectively.
- 9.10. Part B of this report looks specifically at the feasibility of the Green Arc concept, focussing in the Green Belt to the northeast of London. Part C presents a framework model that could be used for extending the concept around London.