



The countryside charity
London

Green Belt: a critical environment policy?

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Alice Roberts, Head of Campaigns, CRPE London

alice@cprelondon.org.uk



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Housebuilders tend to say the Green Belt has nothing to do with the environment...

e.g. – as opposite “The Green Belt .. is designed to prevent urban sprawl...Though the Green Belt .. purposes ..mostly on mitigating urban sprawl, many Brits mistakenly conflate the policy with environmental protection...”

... whereas other commentators point to the devastating environmental (as well as economic and social) impacts of urban sprawl.



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What is the Green Belt planning policy?

The Green Belt is a longstanding planning policy designed to prevent urban sprawl and retain the openness of the countryside.

It's part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and was introduced back in the 1930s, barely evolving since. [Looking at the Green Belt map](#), you'll find Green Belts in various parts of England, the most prominent being the Metropolitan Green Belt, which spans over 500,000 hectares of land.

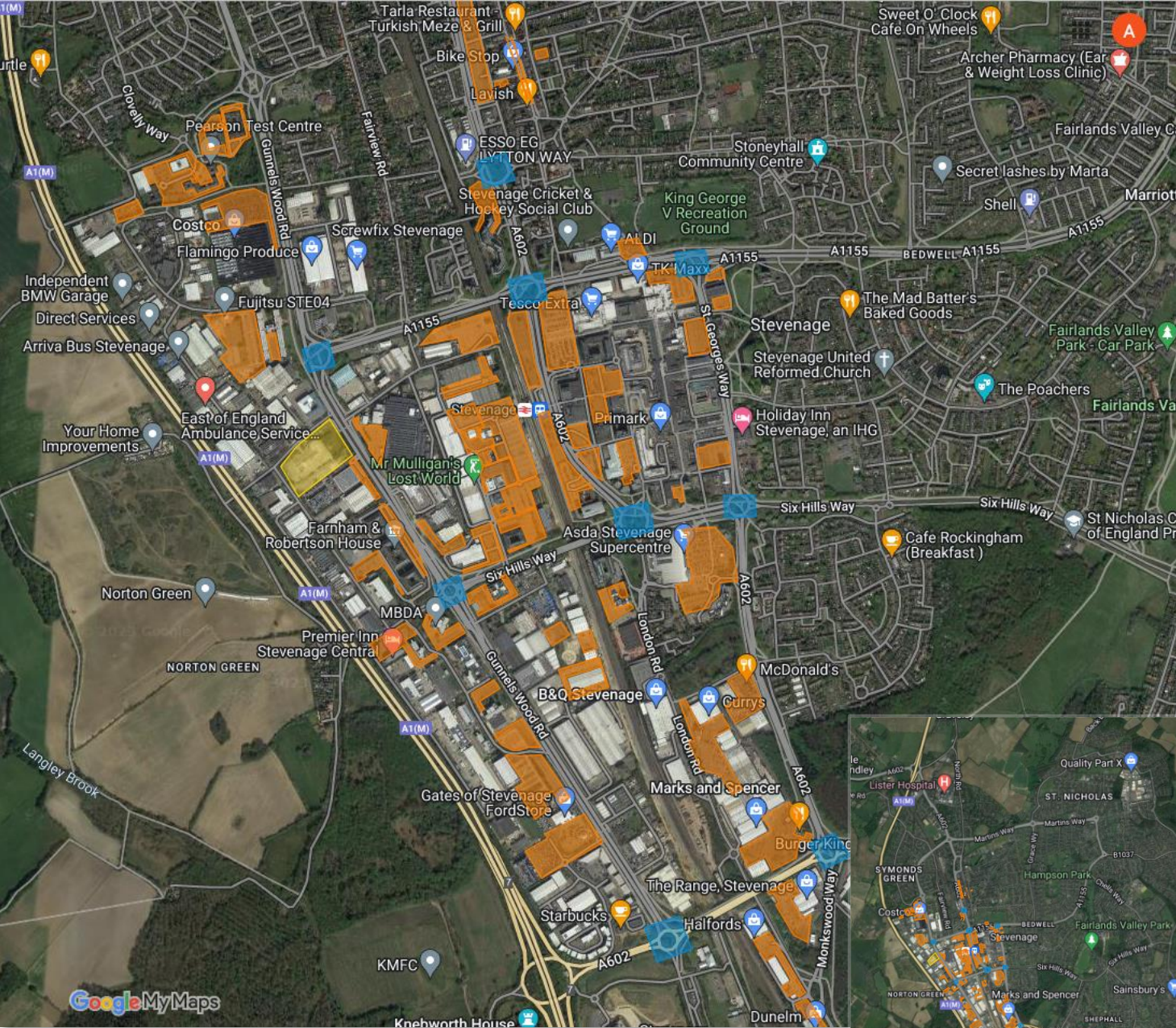
Though the [Green Belt has five core purposes](#) that focus mostly on mitigating [urban sprawl](#), many Brits mistakenly conflate the policy with environmental protection. This has earned the Green Belt hordes of passionate supporters who believe the strict Green Belt rules that prohibit property development shouldn't be loosened, even to meet the dire housing needs of this country.

Green Belt and environmental protection



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- Impact of urban sprawl
 - High carbon
 - Transport emissions
- Space for critical eco-system services
 - Water management
 - Habitat
 - Carbon sequestration
 - Urban temp
- (additionally many related social issues e.g. transport deserts, space for sports / recreation, inactive and de-communitised lifestyles leading to health issues)



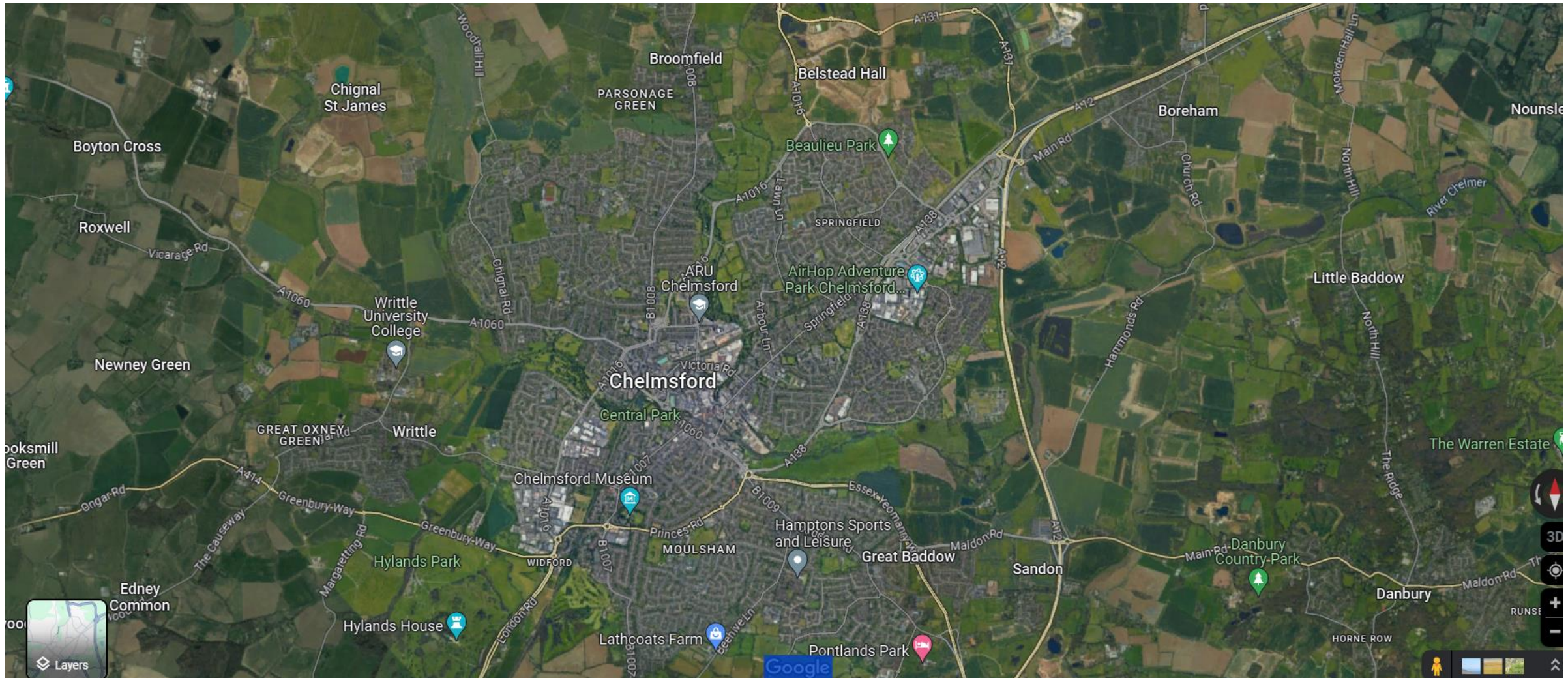
Stevenage's surface car parks (orange) and roundabouts (blue)

The town was built with cycle infrastructure and it takes 15 minutes to cycle from the centre to the outer edge. But active travel is discouraged by overprovision of parking. These spaces should accommodate car-free or car-lite housing or mixed-use development instead.



Image: Roads Were Not Built For Cars | Where driving is easy, Brits drive

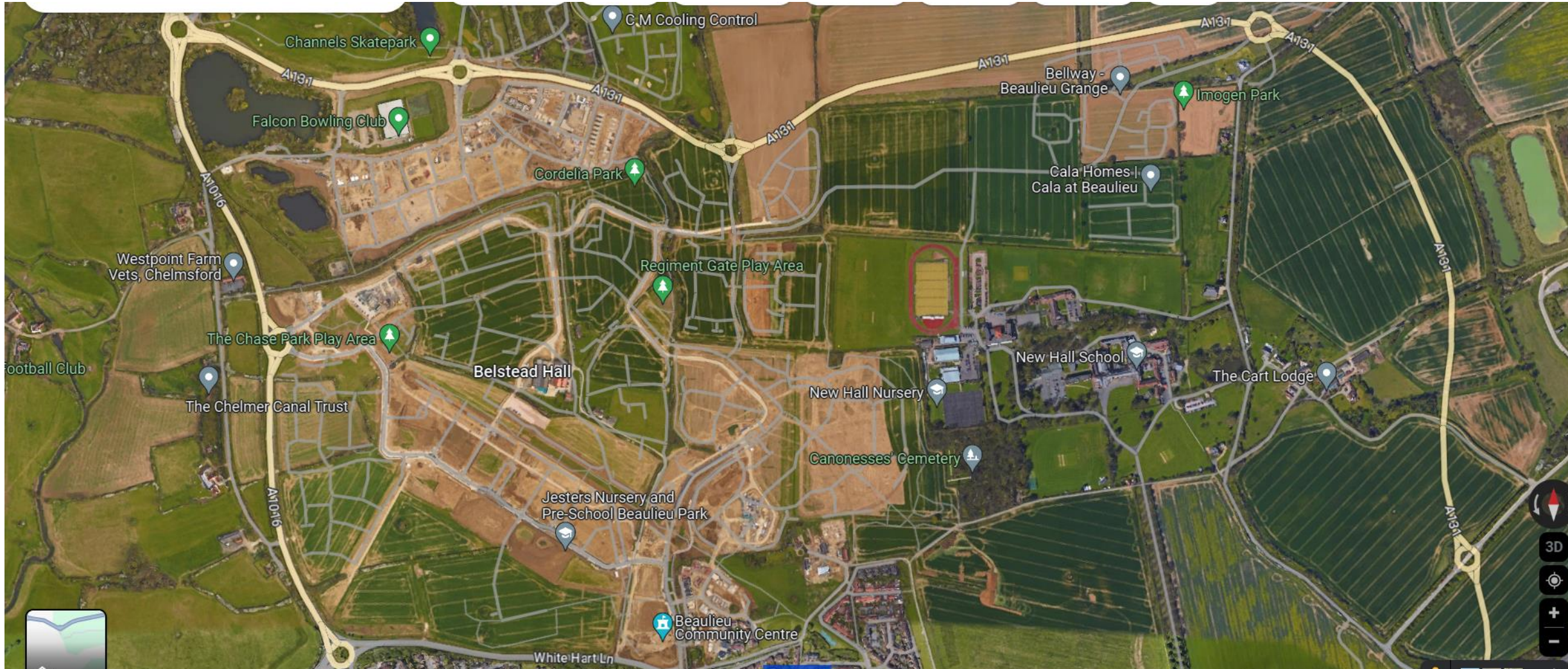
Chelmsford example: it should be easy to get around on cycle or by bus...



.. And Chelmsford has lots of brownfield / underutilised space - surface car parks, which are linked to car-dependent planning (and related impacts) ...



... and yet it has seen loss of productive land for development (this site is now built out)



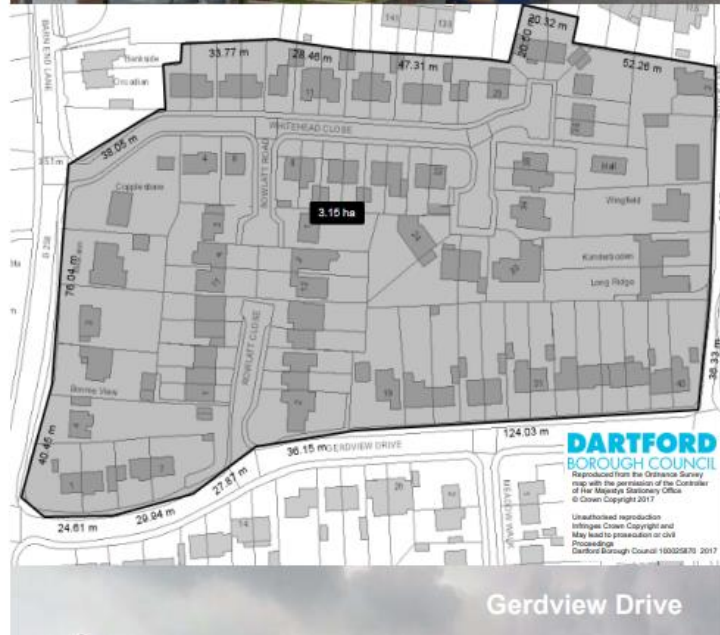
... to lock-in a high-carbon, car-dependent future.



Density is key e.g. bus services become financially viable with densities over 60 dwellings per hectare (dph) though good use of space would mean higher densities, upwards of 100dph.

These two examples show two areas: **25 dwellings per hectare** and **69 dwellings per hectare**

The final existing area is in Wilmington ward, with the first housing site example to the south of the A2 on Whitehead Close, Barn End Lane, Gerdview Drive, Rowlatt Road, Rowlatt Close and Stock Lane. Average house price value on Whitehead Close is £366,000.



Fact File:

- Site area: 3.15ha
- Residual Site Area: 3.11ha
- Homes: 79
- Density: 25dph
- Main housing type: semi-detached and detached
- Community facility

This site area is primarily made up of 3/4 bed semi-detached and detached properties. Houses and gardens are larger in size than previous case studies and others in the rural area.

Examples from: <https://windmz.dartford.gov.uk/media/20180606320100Housing%20Density%20Paper%202018.pdf>

Fact File:

- Site area: 3.269ha
- Employment/Community Space: 0.13ha
- Residual Site Area: 3.13ha
- Homes: 215
- Density: 69dph
- Main housing type: Terraced
- 16 Lock-up garages

This site is primarily made up of 2 and 3 bed terraced streets, with the average size of a 2 bed terrace on Church Road being 57m².

The site exceeds the CS guide of 35-55 dwellings/ha for other urban areas at 69dph.

Further terraces surround the area highlighted, along with Ebbsfleet Central site and station to the east, and a recreation ground and cemetery to the west.



Urban land-use planning: Green Belt policy goes is at the heart of environmental action

Compact cities with Green Belt

High density

Fewer than 30 cars per 100 households

Low carbon

Public transport financially viable

Active (healthy) lifestyles

Urban Sprawl

Low density

More than 50 cars per 100 households

High carbon

Car dependent

Inactive (less healthy) lifestyles