



DYNAMIX

Decoupling growth from resource use  
and environmental impacts

# DYNAMIX policy mix evaluation



Conserving rural land in England

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## Acronyms

ALC	Agricultural Land Classification
DCLG	Departments for Communities and Local Governments
EIA	Environmental Impact Assessments
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
Mha	Million hectare
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
PPG	Planning Policy Guidance
PPS	Planning Policy Statements
RSS	Regional Spatial Strategies
SEA	Strategic Environmental Assessments
TCPA	Town and Country Planning Act

# 1 Resource/Issue

*Name of resource targeted (or focus of the case study, if the policy mix is broader than the specific resource(s) we have decided to analyse).*

This case study looks at the set of policies which govern the use of rural land for built development in England. Land is a multifunctional resource. It can provide food, fibre, timber, and fuel alongside environmental benefits for biodiversity, climate regulation, water quality, soil functionality, flood management and cultural landscapes for leisure and recreation. It can also be used for residential and industrial purposes, from energy production, manufacturing, water and waste infrastructures to transport and communications (Hart et al. 2013).<sup>1</sup> In the case of England, there is increasing pressure on rural land for built development. To oversee land use developments and ensure that rural land is used efficiently and sustainably, a set of policies, primarily in the area of land use planning, have been introduced in England. These will be identified and their effectiveness will be analysed in this case study.

## 2 Geographical area of policy mix coverage

*Country name, and region or city if appropriate (if policy mix is applied regionally or locally)*

The broad geographic scope of the case study is the UK; owing to the different evolution of land use planning policy in the different countries within the UK the focus is England within the broader context of developments at national level in the UK.

## 3 Policy context

### 3.1 Needs assessment: The environmental problem /resource challenge

*What is the environmental problem/concern (consider both quantity and quality), e.g. soil erosion, excessive use of non-renewable or renewable resources and the crossing of environmental thresholds/tipping points for impact, resource scarcity concerns?*

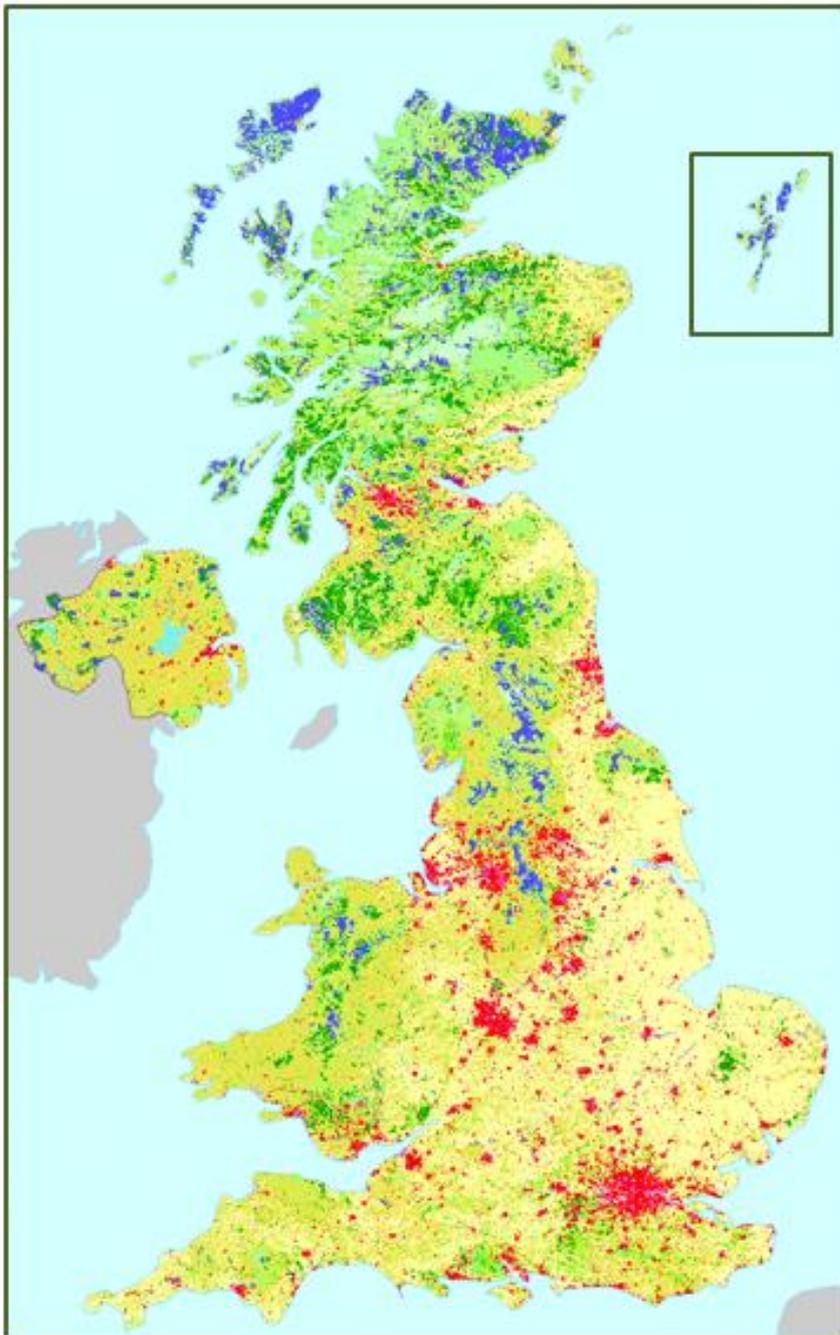
*Are there any economic or social problems related to the issue and environmental problems – e.g. is there important price volatility, (risk of) unavailability of resources for the economy or society?*

*Who is the target group affected that have been, are or will be beneficiaries of the policy response?*

The share of land allocated to different land uses in the UK has remained relatively stable in the last 50 years with agricultural land use outweighing land used for other purposes,

accounting for 66 per cent (16 Mha) of total land use. The total land used for built development amounts to about 12 per cent of land use in the UK of which 5 percentage points are for residential purposes, 2 percentage points are for transport and communication networks and the remaining land is allocated between industry, energy, construction, mining, community services and recreation. The most common land cover in the UK is grassland (42 per cent of land cover) with a large share of this located in Scotland. Cropland is the second most common land cover, accounting for 21 per cent with the largest share of this located in east England (see Figure 1) (Hart et al. 2013).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 1: Land cover in the UK, 2006**





Source: CLC. 2006. "Corine Land Cover 2006 dataset", <http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/corine-land-cover-2006-raster-1>

Despite the relatively stable allocation of land use and land cover in the UK, there is on-going and increasing pressure on rural land, as the predominant area to be used for built development. Land in the UK is a relatively fixed resource and increased demand for land for built development has been driven by a growing population; changing household composition (i.e. greater single occupancy resulting in a greater number of houses); and rising incomes (leading to demand for larger homes and services such as schools, hospitals, universities, etc., more retail space and greater infrastructure) (Barker 2006)<sup>3</sup> (see Section 4 **Error! Reference source not found.**). The need to protect the countryside and rural areas from built development is to ensure the on-going protection and enhancement of natural resources and environmental services they provide. In a recent study (Hart et al. 2013),<sup>4</sup> the potential capacity of different types of rural land to deliver ecosystem services is discussed in detail. The findings show that rural land is essential to the provision of 'food, timber and energy feedstocks, clean water, healthy soils, carbon sequestration, biodiversity and recreational space' (Hart et al. 2013).<sup>5</sup> In contrast, land used for built development delivers fewer benefits

for biodiversity, it contributes to deteriorating soil health (particularly soil sealing) and subsequent reduced capacity to provide clean water and sequester carbon. Equally, land used for built development provides less food, timber or energy feedstock (UKNEA 2011).<sup>6</sup> To address these needs, land planning in England has evolved taking a containment approach to protect the countryside and its respective resources and services from urban sprawl and built development. This approach first emerged in the post-war years in which agriculture was viewed as the principal function of the countryside and principal source of income. Farmers were considered stewards of the countryside and the main threat to the countryside was seen as urban sprawl and its impact on agricultural production and the countryside landscape. With on-going socio-economic pressures to expand developed areas, an important question to consider is how can the environmental impacts of built development in the countryside be minimised? In particular, so that economic development does not impede the delivery of environmental services such as the protection of biodiversity, soils, water, landscape and areas for recreation. The pressure to intensify agricultural systems to meet food and fuel demands should also be considered in land planning, not as a need to protect rural land from built development *per se* but as a need to protect and enhance the natural resources and environmental services associated with rural land.

### 3.2 Policy context and policy needs

*What policy challenge(s) did the problem pose and what policy challenges does it still pose?*

*What is the policy context related to the policy mix being evaluated? What policies have been put in place to address the issues, what policies are currently in place and which ones are already foreseen for future introduction (e.g. to address past, existing and future objectives)?*

*What sort of policy response did (and does) the problem call for?*

#### Policy challenge and context

The Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) was introduced in 1947 and marked the beginning of land planning policy in the UK<sup>i</sup> (Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1947).<sup>7</sup> The discussions at the time were focused on establishing “a strategy for the decentralisation and dispersal of industry and population from the large cities” whilst ensuring that agricultural land, as “a priceless national asset”, was protected from built development and that production levels were optimised (Barlow Report 1940, Scott Report 1942).<sup>8</sup>

The TCPA placed the onus for development on the county councils who had from that point control over the grant of planning permission thus meaning that ownership of land no longer conferred the right to develop. The development of the TCPA was influenced by various factors including the work of the Barlow Commission (1940) which looked at the distribution of industrial populations. The Barlow Commission observed the ill-health, noise, pollution and congestion associated with over-crowded cities, and the damaging effects of urban sprawl on agriculture and the countryside. The subsequent Barlow Report also reflected an existing fear

<sup>i</sup> The TCPA was first applied to England, Wales and Northern Ireland with Scotland subject to its own Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1947. In 1991, Northern Ireland passed the Planning (Northern Ireland) Order (1991) establishing their own planning policy. Further yet, following the three devolution Acts passed by Parliament (the Scotland Act 1998; the Northern Ireland Act 1998; and the Government of Wales Act 1998 - later effectively superseded by the Government of Wales Act 2006) Wales too developed a separate land use planning policy. Due to this divergent evolution of planning policy across the UK, this case study focusses on England rather than the UK.

that the majority of both Britain's population and its industry were too tightly grouped together, a weakness which could be exacerbated by war. The Report concluded that it was necessary to limit localised congestion in large cities and to halt further uncontrolled urban growth. The Scott Committee (1941) looked at land utilisation in rural areas, revealing that between 1927 and 1939, an annual average of 25,000ha of land, including farmland, was lost to urban development. The Scott report advocated resistance to the pressures of urban encroachment and proposed to boost rural incomes with the provision of modern services to rural areas. This sentiment was central to the development of the TCPA 1947 which "accorded farming and forestry a pre-emptive claim over all other uses of rural land" with the intention of firstly regenerating British agriculture and secondly protecting the countryside from urban development (Lowe *et al.* 1986).

The development of the TCPA 1947 should also be seen in the light of the Agriculture Act 1947 and the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, with the former aiming to stimulate the productivity of the British agricultural landscape, and the latter aiming to designate specific areas for public enjoyment. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act led to the designation of conservation areas which include National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Beauty and Heritage coasts which directly interact with planning decisions. Whilst the Agriculture Act is indicative of a force driving for the protection of the countryside in terms of stimulating agricultural production, it did not directly affect land use planning. In 1966, the government introduced an Agricultural Land Classification (ALC) system for England and Wales with guidelines to determine which land is most fertile and capable of producing high yields compared to very poor quality agricultural land. This system has been revised and continues to be in place as a tool to inform land use planning decisions and protect rural land with high productivity potential from built development (MAFF 1988; Natural England 2012).

In the 1980s, during Margaret Thatcher's time as Prime Minister leading a Conservative government, a drive for urban regeneration emerged. It was felt that the planning system had become too burdensome and bureaucratic hindering private sector development. This 'anti—planning pro-market philosophy' led to the simplification of a number of planning procedures. This period also marked the beginning of a changing attitude towards the Green Belt system, starting with a government Circular in 1983 questioning the rigidity of the Green Belt system in relation to the development of the M25 (a peripheral motorway circling Greater London) (Gallent *et al.* 2008).<sup>9</sup> This changing attitude paved the way for Planning Policy Guidance which were introduced in 1988 and developed throughout the 1990s. Another development in this period which was conservative-led in the mid-1990s was a new focus on the development of previously developed land/brownfield sites in the 1990s<sup>ii</sup>. This was taken forwards by the New Labour government which came into power in 1997 with government targets to encourage the reuse of previously developed land for new dwellings and to increase the density of dwellings in developed areas. There is currently a minimum density range for developed areas of between 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare and since 1998 an annual target of 60 per cent of new dwellings to be on previously developed land.

<sup>ii</sup> "Previously-developed land is that which is or was occupied by a permanent structure, including the curtilage of the developed land and any associated fixed surface infrastructure." (DCLG, 2011b)

Until recently, land use planning in England was outlined in Planning Policy Statements (PPS) and Planning Policy Guidance (PPG). Those of most relevance to this case study are: PPG2 for Green Belts (DCLG 2005);<sup>10</sup> PPS7 for Sustainable Development in Rural Areas (DCLG 2004);<sup>11</sup> and PPS 9 for Biodiversity (see Box 1). Also in this time, planning systems were determined according to Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) which were brought in with the 2004 Planning and Compulsory Purchasing Act. This effectively enabled regional planning to overrule any planning decisions taken at a local level and led to subsequent conflicts between developers and local environmental concerns. Planning Policy Guidance Notes (PPGs) and the Planning Policy Statements (PPSs) were prepared by the government following public consultation in order to explain statutory provisions and provide guidance to local authorities and others on planning policy and the operation of the planning system. PPGs and PPSs also explained the relationship between planning policies and other policies relating to development and land use. Both PPGs and PPSs were replaced by the National Planning Policy Framework in March 2012 (see Annex 1).

### Box 1: An overview of Planning Policy Statements and Guidance

#### PPG2: Green belts

The PPG for Green Belts was initially published in January 1995 and the last version was released in March 2001. It states the following general intentions of Green Belt policy, including its contribution to sustainable development objectives;

1. "To reaffirm the specific purpose of including land in Green Belts as being the desire to keep the landscape free from encroachment;
2. To give policy a more positive thrust by specifying for the first time objectives for the use of land in Green Belts, including i) to provide access to open spaces within reach of urban areas, ii) to secure nature conservation interest, iii) to retain land in agricultural and related uses and iv) to retain attractive landscapes; and
3. To maintains the presumption against inappropriate development within Green Belts and refines the categories of appropriate development, including making provision for the future of major existing developed sites and revising policy on the re-use of buildings."

#### PPS7: Rural areas

PPS7 was introduced in August 2004 and replaced the Revised PPG7 entitled The Countryside - Environmental Quality and Economic and Social Development. PPS7 was intended to apply to a range of rural areas from urban fringes to country towns and villages to undeveloped countryside, and aimed to respond to specific government objectives for rural areas. The objectives concerned: i) increasing the quality of life and the environment through the promotion of thriving rural communities, ii) the promotion of sustainable development patterns through focusing development near to existing towns and villages, iii) developing the economic performance of rural England by improving opportunities for rural enterprise, and iv) encouraging the diversity and adaptability of agriculture through planning policy. PPS7 also recognises the unique architectural interest of rural settlements, and proposed that planning policy should respect local and traditional building techniques and styles.

#### PPS9: Biodiversity

PPS9 was introduced in 2005 to shape planning policies for the protection of biodiversity and geological conservation through the planning system. It placed a duty on local planning

authorities to ensure that the conservation and enhancement of biological and geological diversity were integrated into planning policy. Three specific objectives were stated in order to achieve this aim: i) the promotion of sustainable development, ii) the conservation, enhancement and restoration of wildlife and geology, as well as sustaining and, where possible, improving natural habitat, iii) the achievement of rural renewal and urban renaissance by enhancing biodiversity in public open spaces, recognising that this contributes to a better quality of life and can support economic diversification. PPS9 also requires that local authorities bear in mind the preservation of specific species, SSSIs, ancient woodland that is otherwise unprotected, and regional and local sites of specific interest and geological or biological importance.

### **PPS11: Regional spatial strategies**

PPS11 implemented the concept of regional spatial strategies (RSSs) which were established in 2004 to provide regional level planning frameworks for English regions outside London. RSSs were revoked by the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition in 2010.

The guiding principle of the RSSs was to develop a forward looking spatial vision and strategy specific to a particular region which might generally identify areas for development in both land use and travel planning for a period of around 20 years into the future. RSSs were intended to recognise the specific characteristics of a region, and to help determine the scale and distribution of new housing, investment priorities and environmental enhancement.

Following concerns that the planning system was too burdensome for private sector development, a new act was introduced in 2008 for major infrastructure beyond the scope of the PPS and PPG and known as the Planning Act 2008. It applies to any built development in energy, transport, water, and waste sectors and requires developers to seek consent for development in these sectors. Such projects are deemed to be of national strategic importance and therefore are subject to different planning requirements. Of note, the Planning Act 2008 is subject to the General Permitted Development Order 1995. This Order lists a number of building projects according to the Use Classes Order which do not require planning permission which has sometimes led to controversial results allowing built development on rural land. In terms of agricultural buildings and operations, Part 6 of Schedule 2 of the 1995 Order states that permitted development is allowed for:

*“(a) works for the erection, extension or alteration of a building; or (b) any excavation or engineering operations”*

There are restrictions and conditions which apply and amendments to limit certain types of development, such as Amendment 748 (2012) which restricts built development for fuel and waste storage buildings on agricultural land. This exemption for agriculture is in keeping with the idea that farmers are stewards of nature and the countryside thus agriculture is favoured perhaps unfairly in the planning system in terms of rural land use.

There are also tools in place which are designed to assess and minimise the environmental impacts of built development, these assessments are the Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEA)<sup>12</sup> and Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA).<sup>13</sup> SEA is a process to support policy making by identifying and evaluating the likely environmental impacts of public plans and programmes. These policies were first developed at the EU level and were incorporated as a statutory instrument within the English land use planning system under the

2004 Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations (SI 2004/1633)<sup>iii</sup> (Secretary of State 2004).<sup>14</sup> For example, in terms of agriculture, the EIA (Agriculture) ensures that any restructuring of an agricultural holding in relation to boundary features and recontouring of land is subject to environmental assessment before approval<sup>iv</sup>.

#### Policy response need

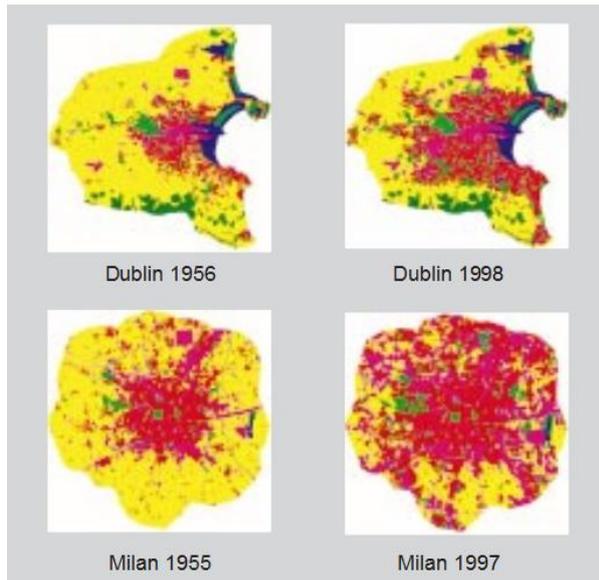
In order to control urban sprawl and protect the English countryside to stimulate agricultural production, the government introduced a number of policy instruments. Those which have been identified here, as outlined below, are thought to reflect the policy response need.

1. The Town and Country Planning Act (1947) which marked the **beginning of land planning policy** in the UK.
2. The National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act (1949) saw the first designation of conservation sites in England with the identification of **National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage sites**. This protected the rural landscape in areas recognised to be of particular importance.
3. The **Green Belt system** which was established in 1955, and continues to prevail, to prevent urban sprawl and protect open countryside. The benefits of such a policy are apparent when comparing the development of urban areas to other ones which do not have a containment policy (see Figure 2 and Figure 3).
4. The **identification criteria to classify best and most versatile land** was introduced in 1966 to inform land use planning decisions with regards to rural land to ensure that the most fertile land is used for agriculture rather than built development (Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food 1966).<sup>15</sup> This mapping instrument informs planning decisions and does not act the determining factor. This framework, the Agricultural Land Classification (ALC), has been continuously reviewed and continues to underpin land use planning decisions in rural areas to support agricultural production. It currently sits within the national planning policy framework.
5. **Targets to encourage development on brownfield sites** which have been in place since the 1990s to limit new development on greenfield sites.
6. The Planning Act (2008) which was adopted to oversee all **major infrastructure projects** and ensure that the national strategic importance of such projects and their impact is taken into consideration.

<sup>iii</sup> There are separate regulations for each of the devolved administrations.

<sup>iv</sup> <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/regulation/eia/#1>

**Figure 2: Uncontained urban expansion in Dublin and Milan**



Source: European Commission 1999

**Figure 3: The Green Belt of London, contained urban expansion**



Source: <http://musingsofanurbanist.blogspot.co.uk/2011/07/tightening-ones-belt-future-of-green.html> [last accessed 12.07.13]

A potential policy response need that has been considered in relation to planning in England but never adopted is the Land Valuation Tax (LVT). It is included here as an interesting example to consider alongside the actual policy response. It levies annual taxes from the land owner (and not the occupier) on land based on the “combined value of land, buildings and improvements thereon rather than the land per se”. The rationale for such a tax comes from the fact that as there is a relatively fixed supply of land, the value of land will increase with demand and land owners will benefit from the increased value. By introducing LVT, Connellan (2004, p.12) argues:

*“The community can capture in land taxes some of the values it has created, including those resulting from streets, schools and other facilities. This, it is maintained, would be a more equitable way of financing local government. Another argument is that the revenue from a tax on land would permit reducing taxes on buildings, which tend to deter new construction. A third argument is that higher land taxes would make for a more efficient use of land.*

*These arguments are developed on the supposition that a heavier tax would also change the conditions of ownership. The total collected from users would not change, but private owners of land would retain less and the public treasury more. The price system would still affect land use, subject to planning control. Taxes on improvements could then be reduced greatly. The tax relief on dilapidated buildings would be slight, but for high-quality buildings the reduction could be large relative to net return on investment.”*

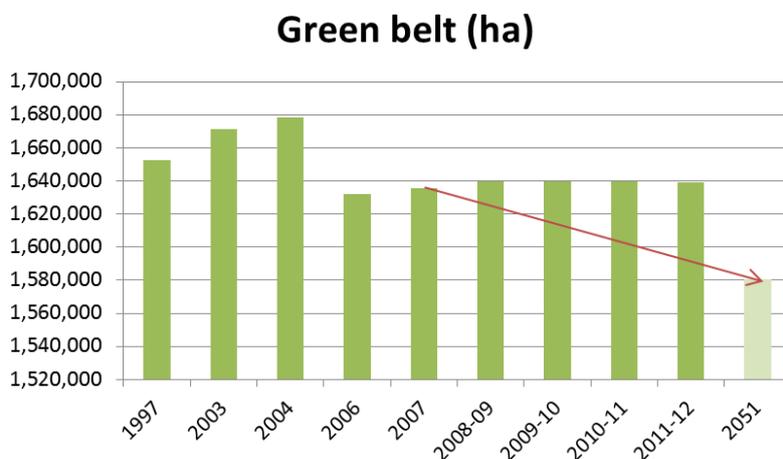
The question of whether or not such a tax could be applied in England is discussed in detail by Connellan; however, the LVT is not currently in place and nor is it likely to be adopted in the near future (Connellan 2004).<sup>16</sup>

### 3.3 Historical performance and projections into the future: Insights on decoupling

*What has been the trend vs. GDP (or other economic performance metrics, such as sectoral growth) and what type of decoupling has been achieved?*

Against the situation prior to the policy mix, the rate of rural land take for built development has declined. The average annual rate of rural land take for built development between 1927 and 1939 was approximately 25,000 ha which declined to 15,700 ha for the period between 1945 and 1975 and further still to 5,000 ha in 2009 (Bibby 2009).<sup>17</sup> Although the rate of decline has slowed, rural land continues to be taken for built development. For example, even with a slower rate of conversion, the area designated as green belt land is in decline and, based on historical trends, is likely to continue doing so (Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Area of green belt land in England, 1997-2012**



Source: Own graph and projection based on data from DCLG. 2011c. "Local authority green belt statistics for England: 2010 to 2011", Annex 3: regional trend in the area of green belt land since 1997 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-green-belt-statistics-for-england-2010-to-2011> and DCLG. 2012b. "Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics: England 2011/12". Planning Statistical Release, 30 November 2012.

In terms of the historical performance of the brownfield targets, prior to the target to ensure that at least 60 per cent of new built development for housing is on previously developed land, more greenfield land was being used. Moreover, by using previously developed land there is often no need to introduce supporting infrastructure and community services required to support the new housing, thus resulting in a reduced need for land for built development (Green Balance 2011).<sup>18</sup> The brownfield target has been met and since 1998 there has been an increasing upward trend so that the share of new development on previously developed land for 2008 was 78 per cent. In the decade prior to the introduction of the 60 per cent target, this share had been steady at around 50 per cent. However, the success of this target in terms of actually benefiting the protection of the English countryside is limited in some aspects. First, the use of greenfield land for development continues<sup>19</sup>; and, second, the government reported in their impact assessment that there is sufficient brownfield land for 100 per cent of new housing to be built on brownfield land, thus the data indicates that the target

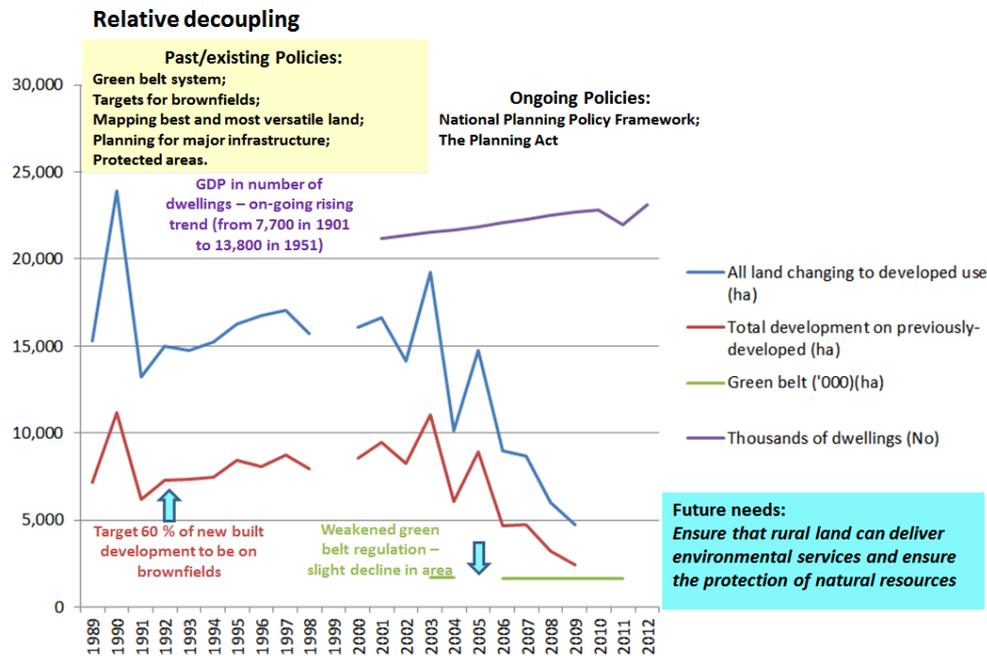
rate of use for brownfield land is 40 per cent below its' potential. Of note also, the number of new dwellings has significantly dropped since 2007 following the economic recession, from 175,560 in 2007 to 103,300 in 2010. It is unclear what the implications of this might be for meeting the brownfield targets but it is considered quite likely that once the economic recession has ended the rate of built development on brownfield and greenfield sites alike will increase (Green Balance 2011).<sup>20</sup>

In more qualitative terms, the historical changes to the rural landscape over the second half of the twentieth century include:

- Increased woodland area resulting in mostly non-native coniferous planting of lower biodiversity and heritage value. Note that there has been a growing share of native broadleaved woodland more recently.
- Deterioration in the number and quality of boundary features. Although now a stable trend, the biodiversity and heritage value of these features has declined.
- Overall stable utilised agricultural area (UAA) but changing proportion of cropland to grassland favouring the latter. The trend since post-war years has been agricultural intensification (higher inputs and water and soil pollution) resulting in a loss of habitat and a loss of historic features.
- Demographic shifts, greater facilities out of town in rural areas particularly with trends of urban out-migration.
- Loss of semi-natural habitats to recreational areas.
- Decline in the number of designated conservation sites from between 1950 and 1990
- Reduced number of traditional farming buildings.
- River and coastal management resulting in increased development on flood plains. Water quality has gradually been improving but invasive species are growing in these areas (Gallent et al. 2008).<sup>21</sup>

The outlined changes to the rural landscape in qualitative terms indicate that despite the controls and containment policies in place, pressures from built development are affecting the rural landscape and its capacity to deliver environmental services. In terms of the degree to which decoupling of rural land from built development has been achieved, whereby the provision of built development (such as new housing and infrastructure) is decoupled from the loss of rural land, I would argue that relative decoupling has been achieved. This is based on the fact that a significant share of new built development has occurred without impinging on rural land as evidenced by the number of new dwellings built and the amount of built development carried out on brownfield sites as opposed to on greenfield sites. It is worth noting that the degree to which absolute decoupling can be achieved in this sense is highly questionable given the finite nature of land as a resource (see Figure 5). In terms of decoupling built development from the environmental services rural land provides, I would argue that very limited decoupling has occurred if at all, as evidenced by the changing rural landscape since the 1950s and subsequent deteriorating biodiversity and heritage value of the English countryside (Gallent et al. 2008).<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 5: UK land policies and instruments and their actual performance for decoupling, 1989-2012**



Source: Own diagram (data sourced from Land Use Change Statistics, 2012; DCLG. 2011a. "Land Use Change Statistics in England": 2010 provisional estimates. Planning, Statistical Release, July 2011, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/11437/1955706.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/11437/1955706.pdf); DCLG. 2011c. "Local authority green belt statistics for England: 2010 to 2011, Annex 3: regional trend in the area of green belt land since 1997" <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/local-authority-green-belt-statistics-for-england-2010-to-2011>; DCLG. 2013. "Dwelling Stock Estimates: 2012, England". Housing Statistical Release, 25 April 2013, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/192063/Dwelling\\_Stock\\_Estimates\\_2012\\_England.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/192063/Dwelling_Stock_Estimates_2012_England.pdf))

## 4 Drivers affecting change: resource use/ environmental issues

*What are the drivers affecting resource use (driving demand for the resource and leading to resource overuse) or other environmental impacts?*

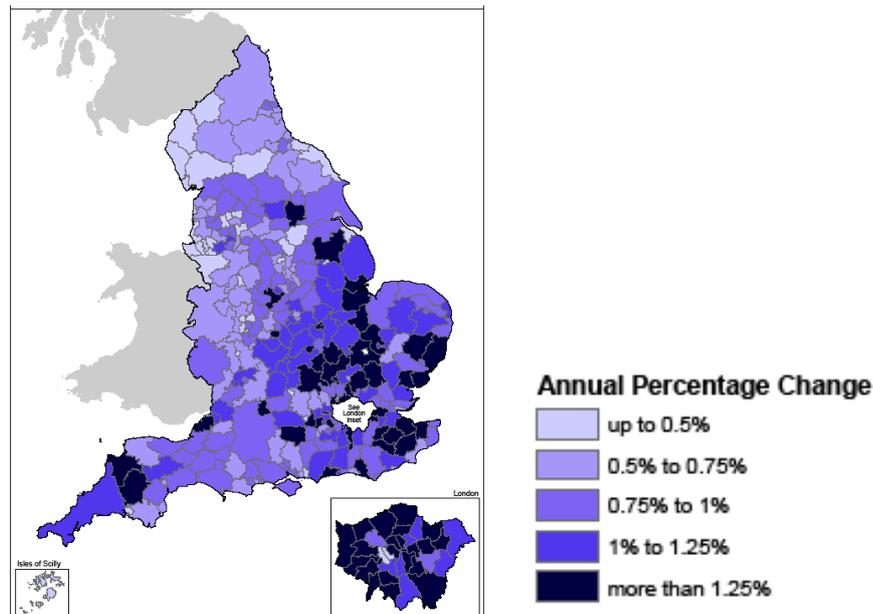
Exogenous drivers to land planning policy affecting change for rural land use include demographic shifts, changing household compositions, rising incomes and, pressures for economic growth.

The population in England and Wales grew by 3.7 million from 2001 to 2011 resulting in a total population of 56.1 million (53.0 million in England and 3.1 million in Wales)<sup>v</sup>. This growth

<sup>v</sup> The population census for Scotland and Northern Ireland are carried out separately by the National Record of Scotland (National Records of Scotland 2013) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (see website: <http://www.ninis2.nisra.gov.uk/public/Theme.aspx>).

is predominantly caused by a greater life expectancy, increased fertility rates and migration. In addition to this, the rise in single occupancy households has grown and is projected to continue growing, affecting demand for the number of houses. The number of households in England is expected to grow by 10 per cent (2.2 million) from 2011 to 2021 (see Figure 6) (DCLG 2013a).<sup>23</sup>

**Figure 6: Average percentage change per annum for the number of households in England (2011-2021)**

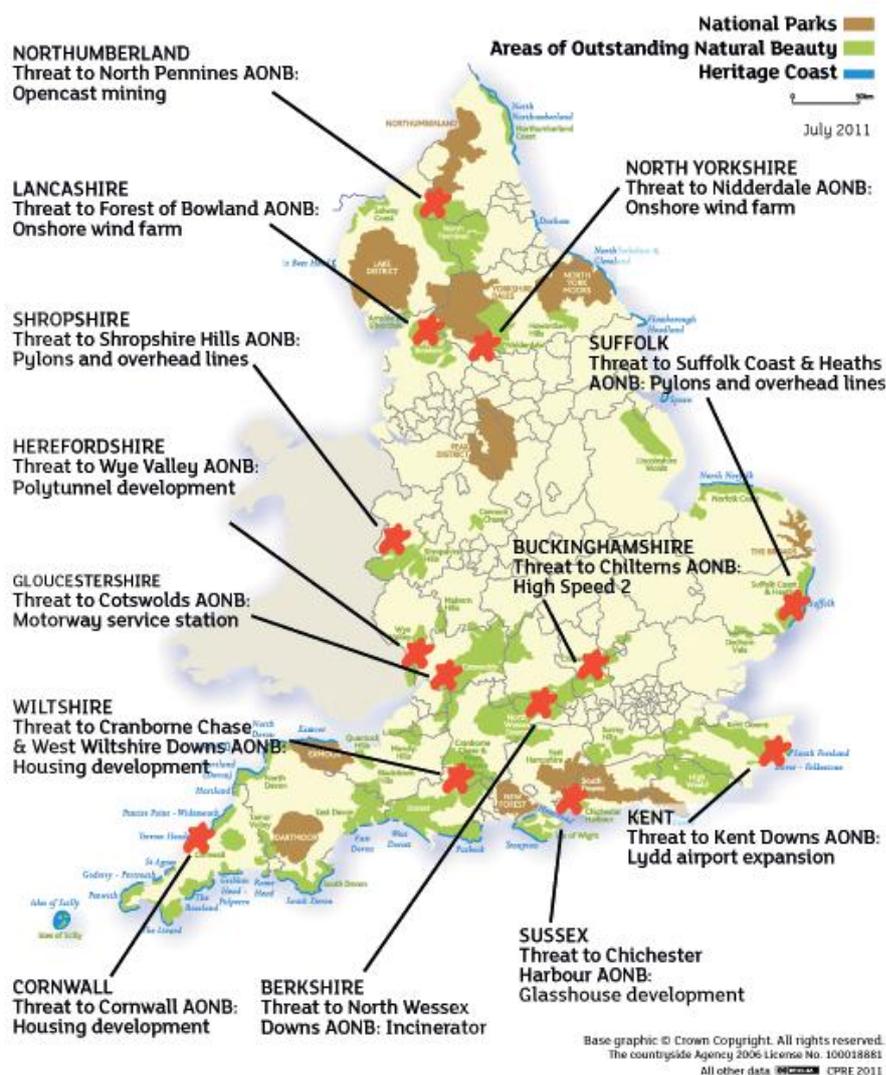


Source: DCLG. 2013a. "Household Interim Projections, 2011 to 2021, England". Housing Statistical Release, 9 April 2013 [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/190229/Stats\\_Release\\_2011FINALDRAFTv3.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/190229/Stats_Release_2011FINALDRAFTv3.pdf), p.8

Another exogenous driver is the impact of outmigration between urban and rural communities. Historically, the flow of outmigration was from rural to urban leading to a depletion of rural populations. This is depicted by the percentage change of labour force employed in agriculture from 1950 to 1970 in the UK which fell by 3.2 per cent (with 6.1 per cent employed in agriculture in 1950 and 2.9 per cent in 1970). This trend slowed significantly after 1970 so that the percentage change from 1970 to 1986 was -0.2 per cent (Robinson 1990 p.61). One identified cause for this rural outmigration is the decline in agricultural employment which feeds into a cyclical pattern where reduced employment opportunities leads to emigration which in turn leads to a reduced population (resulting in an older population and a lower rate of natural increase). This subsequently reduces demand for rural services which in turn reduces employment opportunities and so forth (Robinson 1990 p.85). More recently there has been evidence of counter-urbanisation, where urban migration to rural areas occurs. This trend of urban out-migration grew in the 1970s and 1980s. For example, in London, the population fell by 4 per cent between 1960 and 1980 (Robinson 1990 p.98). This urban out-migration is for the most part explained by second homes and retirement migration and acts as a driver for greater development in rural areas resulting in an increase of 800,000 people to rural populations in England from 1998 to 2008 (Taylor 2008). There is also evidence that urban outmigration is occurring as a result of people 'leapfrogging' the Green Belt restrictions (Gallent et al., 2008).<sup>24</sup>

An additional driver is the pressure to strengthen the economy and encourage economic growth which has resulted in an increase in the number of major infrastructure projects. The changing transport needs of the UK have had a small but not insignificant effect on land use and are also driven by demographic shifts (notably urban out-migration) and higher incomes. The total road length in Great Britain in 2012 was estimated to be 245.4 thousand miles, an increase of 2.0 thousand miles over 10 years. Although this represents only an increase of 0.8 per cent, 76 per cent of the 245.4 thousand miles is concentrated in rural England, with the South West and South East having the largest proportion of road length (DfT 2013). Moreover, new roads often fragment landscape negatively affecting biodiversity irrespective of the quantity of land taken. This driver encouraging new major infrastructure projects threatens the countryside including designated conservation sites. Figure 7 illustrates the impact on designated sites as protected by the National Parks 1949 Act. It includes examples of built development for energy (both renewable and non-renewable), transport, industry, farming and housing.

**Figure 7: England designated conservation sites ‘at risk’, 2011**

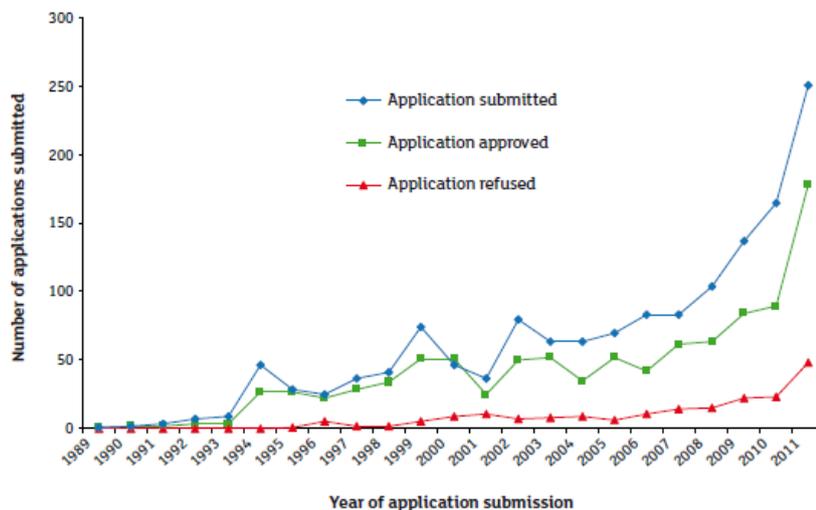


Source: CPRE. 2011. <http://www.cpre.org.uk/what-we-do/countryside/landscapes/update/item/2361-threats-to-areas-of-outstanding-natural-beauty>

There is also political pressure on land to deliver food security and energy; this drive for food and fuel production has led to more intensive agricultural systems and subsequently degraded rural land. This will likely have a significant impact on the socio-economic and environmental sustainability of land planning.

Climate change also directs land use change. In order to mitigate climate change, rural land will increasingly need to act as a carbon store and equally efforts will need to be taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through optimum land management and improved infrastructures. This could for example result in greater afforestation and expansion of grasslands in certain areas, greater supporting infrastructure for amenities and changes to rural buildings. There has also been a drive for more investments in renewable energy projects in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as evidenced by the number of planning permissions dramatically increasing in recent years (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8: UK progress of renewable technologies, including wind generation, through the planning system, 1989-2011**



Source: CPRE. 2012. "A CPRE policy briefing in advance of publication of the final National Planning Policy Framework", March 2012, p.5

## 5 Situation/trend prior to introduction of policy mix

*Information on the baseline situation before the policy mix was introduced.*

As outlined in Section 3.2, prior to the policy mix there was a significant share of rural land being taken for built development (1927/39: ~25,000ha pa); there were strong trends of rural outmigration and concerns that the agricultural sector was suffering; and there were indications of urban sprawl and ribbon development.

## 6 Description of policy mix

*This section presents the main policy mix that will be the focus of this ex-post assessment.*

**Lifecycle focus (point of application(s) of the policy mix):** Use of land

**Sector(s) covered:** Land

**Scale of application of policy mix:** National (England)

**Implementing body:** National guidance framework interpreted and applied by local level planning authorities.

**Objective of policy mix:** To protect rural land and the environmental services it provides from built development.

Land use planning policy in England historically takes a regulatory approach in a plan-led system as set out in the TCPA 1947. The policy mix identified here therefore consists of regulatory and planning instruments. These are:

- The green belt system, 1955;
- Best and most versatile land, 1966;
- Targets for the reuse of brownfield sites, 1990s;
- The Planning Act 2008 (for infrastructure planning);
- National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (includes conservation designation for National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and Heritage Coasts).

The aims, requirements, role of each of these policies, and the logic of intervention are set out in the table below.

**Table 1: Overview of the UK land policy mix**

Policy instrument	Type of instrument	Aim	Requirements	Role in the mix	Logic of intervention	Additional comments
<b>The green belt system</b>	Regulatory - planning	“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.”	Once a green belt area has been identified, local planning authorities must incorporate it in local planning	Primary	Planning tool to contain areas of development	Exceptions allowing the construction of new buildings in green belt areas apply to: “buildings for agriculture and forestry”; extensions and replacements (conditions apply); outdoor recreation facilities; cemeteries; mineral extractions; local transport infrastructure.
<b>Targets for previously developed land</b>	Regulatory - planning (linked to quotas)	To regenerate urban areas with an initial target that over 60 % of the development between 1998 and 2008 is on previously developed areas (brownfield areas).	Local planning authorities to target brownfield land for built development, assuming it is not environmentally valuable. Targets are now decided at local level.	Primary	To incentivise with targets the regeneration of derelict/abandoned land	This planning instrument is more relevant to areas in England with a history of built development, such as London, South East, North West and West Midlands.
<b>Mapping best and most versatile land</b>	Regulatory - planning	To identify areas with fertile land with the potential for high yields to ensure that the land is used for agriculture. It also recognises less fertile land and thus is intended to protect soils and the value of nature.	To consider the economic (such as yield) and environmental (including climate, soils, site) advantages of the best and most versatile agricultural land by local planning authorities.  Natural England helps with the preparation of these plans	Secondary	To assess the economic and environmental benefits of land use	This mapping instrument is intended to inform planning decisions and does not act the determining factor.

Policy instrument	Type of instrument	Aim	Requirements	Role in the mix	Logic of intervention	Additional comments
<b>The Planning Act</b>	Regulatory - planning (linked to property rights)	To oversee new development for “major infrastructure projects” in energy, transport, water, waste water, and waste.	Developers must seek “development consent” for the project.	Secondary	To oversee infrastructure developments of national relevance to ensure appropriate design	N/A
<b>National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act</b>	Regulatory - planning	To protect and restore the natural environment (including landscapes, biodiversity, ecosystem services) as “thriving, living, working landscapes”.	Local planning authorities should give ‘great weight’ to areas identified as National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Heritage Coasts.	Primary	To protect the countryside from built development where conflicts have emerged between landowners and public interest.	Additional legislation includes: Sites of Special Scientific Interest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), Ramsar sites as designated under the Ramsar Convention (1971), and Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas under the Habitats Directive (1992)

## 6a. Supplementary context questions including elements pertinent to paradigm discussions in DYNAMIX

*Timeline for the different phases of the policy cycle (i.e. rationale and objective-setting; appraisal; implementation and monitoring).*

*Description of the government in power during each of the three following policy phases: rationale and objective-setting; appraisal; and implementation and monitoring.*

*Does the mix contain policies that are unusual or not typical of the country/ies or regional/local administration that implemented it?*

*Names of resource efficiency concepts, terms, models, ranking/classification systems, accounting methods etc. used or relied upon in each of the three phases of the policy cycle: rationale and objective-setting; appraisal; and implementation and monitoring, and how they were used (e.g.: ‘waste hierarchy’ – used in objective-setting to link policy objectives to more desirable uses for waste).*

Not available.

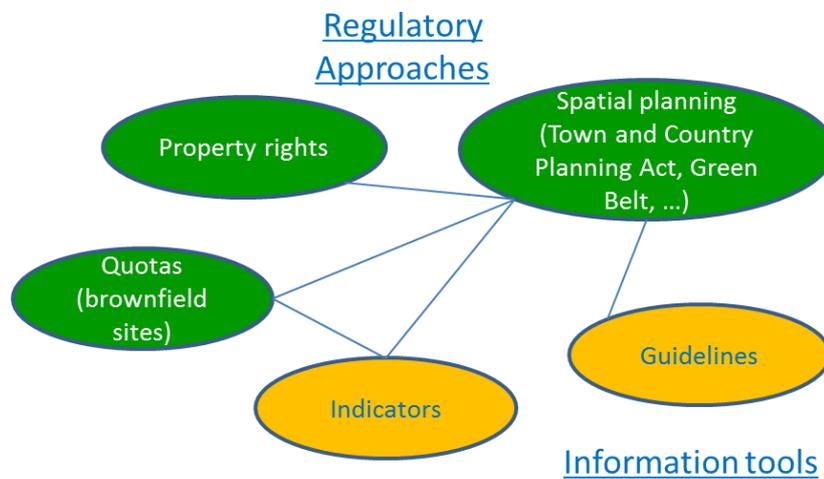
## 6b. Instruments and orientation of policy mix

*Instruments in the mix and whether one type of tool (i.e. regulatory, economic, information) is dominant.*

*For each instrument, what is its aim? What requirements does it place on relevant players (for example, phasing out a certain substance, meeting minimum recycling targets, etc.)? What reporting requirements exist?*

**The policy mix is based on a suite of regulatory planning instruments (see**

Table 1 and Figure 9). The principal instrument within this policy mix is spatial planning as all policy instruments within the policy mix are a form of spatial planning. Several additional instrument types have been included as influencing land planning policy but not consisting of the key components, such as property rights and quotas. “*In effect, the Town and Country Planning Acts nationalised land development rights and allow planning authorities to re-privatise those rights on a partial and discretionary basis*” (Corkindale 1997).<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the Planning Act (2008) stipulates that developers must seek consent for any major infrastructure projects they wish to undertake. The target to prioritise the redevelopment of previously developed land over built development on non-developed land is primarily a planning instrument, however it can also be perceived as a quota.

**Figure 9: Toolkit of UK land use policy instruments and their relationships**

Source: Own diagram

### 6c. Evolution of policy mix

*Evolution of the policy mix throughout its existence –details of the introduction of the first policy tool(s), then all subsequent relevant tools, and related revisions/reforms (e.g. progressive increases in rates applied through economic tools, broader extension of regulation requirements, etc.).*

The instruments selected for this policy mix have evolved separately throughout a sixty year time period with the TCPA 1947 and the National Parks Act 1949 underpinning the mix from the offset (see Figure 10). The roles of these policies in land planning were ‘streamlined’ in 2012 with the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework (see Annex 1), but continue to function as separate policies.

Figure 10: Evolution of the UK land policy mix

1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
1947: The Town and Country Planning Act	1955: National Green Belt System	1966: Agricultural Land Classification system (first introducing concept of best and most versatile land)		1988: Planning Policy Guidance notes first introduced	1996: Green Paper Household Growth 1997: Devolved administrations act 1990s: Planning Policy Statements and Guidance for England 1998: Targets announced for the development of brownfield sites	2001: SEA Directive 2004: The Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004: Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act (introduction of Regional Spatial Strategies) 2006: Barker Review (call for review of English planning system in 2005) 2008: Planning Act	2011: Localism Act (revoking the Regional Spatial Strategies) 2012: National Planning Policy Framework

Source: Author's compilation

## 7 Evaluation of policy mix: effectiveness (environmental sustainability)

*Does/did the policy mix result in a positive environmental outcome?*

*Were its stated objective(s) met? Were the instruments used sufficient to meet the objectives?*

*Did other, unforeseen/unintended positive outcomes or impacts (environmental, social, economic) result? Did other such negative outcomes or impacts result?*

*Were these objectives set at a level to meet environmental needs (e.g. avoid crossing environmental thresholds/tipping points or achieve more sustainable levels of resource use/extraction (e.g. maximum sustainable yield (MSY) in fisheries)?*

*Which sectors/actors were identified as having key impacts/influences on the problem/issue? (e.g. specific industrial/ business sectors, consumers, economy as a whole?) Did any of the instruments specifically target these key sectors/actors? Was there significant take-up/implementation of (voluntary) instruments by these sectors?*

*Was the policy mix applied to a sector previously not targeted by policies on the issue under question, or in a new area/issue – thereby aiming to stimulate change?*

*What were the anticipated and actual outcomes, impacts and effects of the policy mix on the behaviour of sectors and actors targeted? (e.g. reductions in emissions from industry, increased recycling rates, increase/decrease in certain product purchases, etc.).*

*Relationships between the instruments, identifying positive/negative influences on the overall policy mix or on key instruments in the mix, as well as any positive or negative impacts from changes to the mix (introduction or termination of instrument(s), increase or decrease in tax/levy/charge, etc.). Level of 'connectivity' (strong, weak) between each instrument and the primary one(s).*

*Are there any indicators, monitoring systems, review processes or other monitoring mechanisms in place to track progress?*

The identified enabling instruments for the protection of rural land from built development in terms of environmental sustainability are the selected policies for the designation of green belt areas and national parks and conservation sites and the reuse of previously developed land. The green belt system has helped to contain urban sprawl as evidenced by the reduced rate of rural land take for built development. The focus on previously developed land has also helped to reduce the rate of rural land take for built development. The larger share of previously developed land used for housing has reduced the area of greenfield sites under development both in terms of land needed for housing but also for the supporting infrastructure and local amenity services otherwise needed in newly established settlements. The designation of conservation sites has also played an important role in protecting rural land from built development; however, built development continues to pose a threat to such areas as illustrated in Figure 7. The on-going rural land take for built development indicates that, as a relatively finite resource, even with a reduced rate of land take, this trend is not environmentally sustainable.

As outlined in previous sections, in the initial years of this policy mix the principal argument for protecting the countryside was based on the need to protect rural vitality with a focus on stimulating agricultural production and thus strengthening the rural economy. The degree to which this has been achieved is discussed in the following section; first, the environmental sustainability is assessed. In addition to containing urban sprawl, the ALC system was introduced to ensure that the best and most versatile land for agricultural production was identified and mapped. The ALC system has been identified as a secondary tool in this policy mix as it is not binding and targets agricultural land rather than rural land more generally. Although this system has ensured the protection of a significant share of rural land, by favouring the protection of the most fertile land for agriculture, it could be argued that this puts less fertile land, often of more environmental value, under more pressure from built development. Furthermore, the identification of best and most versatile land for agriculture can lead to intensive farming systems which, despite being safeguarded from built development, fail to deliver the environmental services it is hoped to protect through the protection of the countryside from built development. Although not a conflicting instrument *per se*, the role of the ALC system in safeguarding rural land from built development should be limited and used in conjunction with other policy instruments. Similarly, the Planning Act can be conflicting and at times can result in negative environmental outcomes for rural land take where national strategic priorities have been given priority of local environmental ones. What is more, the fact that the Planning Act stipulates that no permission is required for farmers to demolish and erect new agricultural buildings poses a threat to the environmental sustainability of the policy mix.

There are multiple environmental benefits of protecting rural land from built development. The number of ecosystem services provided by rural land exceeds those provided by urban/developed land, particularly in terms of provisioning and regulating services (UKNEA 2011).<sup>26</sup> This ex post evaluation shows that there has been some success towards safeguarding rural land from built development, moreover that there has been success in improving the provisioning services of rural land in terms of increased agricultural yields since the 1940s. However, the regulating services provided by rural land have shown signs of deterioration in this period with the UKNEA reporting the deterioration of regulating services for pollination, hazards and soil quality. Across all land uses it reports that 30 per cent of ecosystem services are deteriorating. Beyond the need to protect land as a relatively finite resource, the need to protect land's capacity to deliver ecosystem services is equally important. Within the identified policy mix, the main instrument for delivering this is the designation of conservation sites as the green belt system and brownfield development targets are not explicitly designed for conservation purposes. Whilst the green belt system and the target to develop brownfield sites, for example, do offer environmental benefits, it is emphasised that this is not its primary concern and that safeguards for the environment exist outside of the planning policy (Barker 2006).<sup>27</sup> To improve the environmental sustainability of this policy mix, one possible option could therefore be to include relevant environmental targets with environmental performance indicators to monitor progress against these targets. Environmental factors which are affected by built development and could be targeted include higher surface temperatures, greater runoff levels and lower diversity in green spaces (Healey and Shaw 1994).<sup>28</sup>

## 8 Evaluation of policy mix: efficiency (economic sustainability)

*Is/was the policy mix considered cost-effective?*

*What has been the level of impact on resource use of the policy mix (the effect)?*

*What have been the costs of implementing the policy mix for target audience (e.g. business, households, etc.)?*

*What are the costs (financial, human) of implementing the policy mix for the implementing authority – i.e. the administrative/transaction costs?*

*Were sufficient resources made available to ensure an effective implementation of the policy-mix?*

*Was anything foreseen in the policy-mix to address competitiveness concerns (e.g. use of exemptions) or minimise transaction costs (e.g. thresholds below which monitoring wasn't required)?*

*Did the policy mix involve providing financial support (e.g. subsidies, low interest loans, tax breaks etc.) to key actors (e.g. sector, households, etc.)?*

*Did the measures generate revenues (e.g. in the case of taxes) and if so, was revenue recycled/re-injected into the economy, and to what levels and activities? Did revenue recycling have positive amplifying effects?*

*In synthesis - was the policy mix cost-effective?*

*What elements of the mix were (un)helpful in improving cost-effectiveness?*

*How was relative/absolute decoupling achieved?*

*Were resource limits or other thresholds taken into account and how were they addressed?*

The key argument for introducing planning policies to protect the English countryside from built development was to stimulate agricultural production to strengthen the rural economy and prevent rural out-migration. To this end, agricultural yields have significantly increased and the trend of rural out-migration has been reversed. However, the economic sustainability of the policy mix in terms of achieving decoupling of rural land take from built development has been subject to considerable debate.

At one end of the argument, the controlled planning approach which is central to this policy mix has been questioned for its economic sustainability. As outlined in the previous sections, such concerns emerged in the 1980s under a Conservative government which argued that the planning system was a hindrance to private sector development. These arguments have continued with concerns that it can restrict construction development and investment growth (Corkindale 1997, Barker 2006, OECD 2013).<sup>29,30,31</sup>

At the other end, it is argued that by containing urban sprawl and safeguarding the countryside, the economic value of the latter has improved. The economic impact of designated conservation sites is explored in a recent study by Ahlfeldt *et al* (2012) which looks at the relationship between the costs and benefits of properties located within such sites. Among the findings, the research shows that there is a price premium associated with properties within designated conservation sites with approximately 23 per cent calculated for an unconditional estimate and around 9 per cent for a conditional estimate. It is recognised that property within these sites do have higher prices even before designation but it is higher still once it is officially designated. Of note, property prices are dramatically lower in conservation areas which are 'at risk' of development (see for example Figure 7) with the price premium at around 4 per cent. Moreover, it is also recognised that the green belt system is considered to increase land value, making the land and development more attractive on the market (Monk *et al.* 2013).<sup>32</sup> It should also be noted that critics also generally contend that the green belt boundaries need to be constantly reviewed to manage growth effectively in the longer timeframe (Monk *et al.* 2013).<sup>33</sup>

Another factor to consider in terms of the economic sustainability of the policy mix is the efficiency of the planning system. There is emphasis on the importance of streamlining planning in order to reduce delay and uncertainty, with purported 'failures' in the planning system exemplified by the Thameslink 3000 project which required 30 planning consents under four different Acts, and took over eight years to approve (Eddington 2008). Policy proposals to rectify this include the introduction of a new Independent Planning Commission to take decisions on strategically important infrastructure projects under the Planning Act (Eddington 2008, Barker 2006).<sup>34</sup> It could be argued that the drive to make planning for major infrastructure projects more accessible and economically sustainable is disparate to the environmental agenda as evidenced by the large number of threats posed to designated sites from major infrastructure projects. It argued that this disparity is fundamental to a land-use control approach in planning and that spatial planning would be more effective for delivering multiple objectives across sectors with multiple outcomes.<sup>35</sup>

## 9 Evaluation of policy mix: welfare (social sustainability)

*What social impacts have you found associated with the policy mix? E.g. jobs created, reduced health impacts, distributional impacts etc.*

*Were social aspects included in an ex-ante impact assessment of the policy mix if one was undertaken? What were these?*

*Has monitoring of social impacts been included in implementation, to identify actual effects compared to anticipated ones?*

*Was the policy mix designed to not be socially regressive? What measures were undertaken to ensure this?*

*Were equity concerns addressed and, in case of re-structuring of the economy/sector, measures in the area of reskilling of the workforce foreseen?*

*What other public acceptability elements were addressed or considered?*

The prominent threats to social wellbeing posed prior to the policy mix include ill-health, noise, pollution and congestion. These threats are generally considered to be linked to overcrowded cities thus the importance of containing urban sprawl and strengthening rural economies to make such areas an attractive place to live. In terms of containing urban areas and rural out-migration, the policy mix has been relatively successful, as discussed in the previous sections. However, in terms of social sustainability, there is evidence to suggest that there is an apparent class divide between those benefitting from the countryside, with those in the low income bracket reportedly using green belt land for recreational purposes less than the middle and upper classes according to a 2009 survey (CPRE and Natural England 2010).<sup>36</sup> The implication is that the current policy mix might not deliver maximum social utility.

There is a strong body of evidence that has linked mental wellbeing with proximity to green areas (Barker 2006, White et al. 2013).<sup>37,38</sup> Whilst the identified policy mix encourages a wealth of green areas in the countryside, in terms of social sustainability it should be questioned whether this approach is sustainable for society as a whole. As identified by Roe and Mell (2013), a problem with planning policy in England is that it historically overlooks green development within urban areas due to a focus on the protection of green belts.

In addition, there is some potential conflict with the current policy objective of delivering short-term economic development and growth in rural areas and achieving social sustainability through the identified policy mix. Indeed, arguments that rural vitality needs to be developed to facilitate economic growth were present from the outset. This feeling has prevailed with a recent report stating that rural employment must be more equally considered alongside environmental considerations. In particular, there has been a significant political drive for job creation and economic growth following the economic crisis accompanied by the belief that appropriate infrastructure must be in place to support job growth in rural areas (DTI 2006).

## 10 Overall assessment

*What is your overall view on the success(es) or failure(s) of this policy mix?*

*How did the policy mix enable decoupling?*

*How could it have been improved to achieve its original objective(s) and to achieve absolute decoupling?*

The identified policy mix sought to decouple built development from rural land use. The principal policy instruments aimed to control built development and facilitate the containment of urban areas, densification of already developed areas and the protection of designated conservation sites. It also sought to strengthen the rural economy by prioritising agricultural production as the principal source of rural income in a bid to mitigate rural out-migration and meet growing demand for food and fuel. Agricultural production has increased over this time and the reversal of rural out-migration indicates that the policy mix was successful in strengthening rural vitality.

The policy mix has been relatively successful in limiting urban sprawl; however, the implications of later trends of urban out-migration and the declining area of green belt land should not be overlooked. There has been definite success in slowing down the rate of rural land take for built development over the course of the past century although in order for this policy mix to be environmentally sustainable, absolute decoupling is necessary.

## 11 Relevance to the EU and transferability

*Can the policy mix be applied at the EU level? Is it transferable to other Member States/countries?*

*What lessons are there that may be of general interest regarding policy mixes and what issues are there as regards transferability of the insights?*

The designation of conservation sites is common place across the EU as is support for agricultural production. Together these policies already offer a degree of protection for rural land from built development at an EU level. The controlled land planning approach to contain urban sprawl does offer certain benefits as discussed in the evaluation; however, it is a contentious issue with debate as to how much it might restrict construction development and investment growth. Due to these reservations, and in the current economic climate, it is questionable how much weight this approach would carry at an EU level.

## 12 Stakeholder contribution

*What insights did stakeholders provide?*

Not available.

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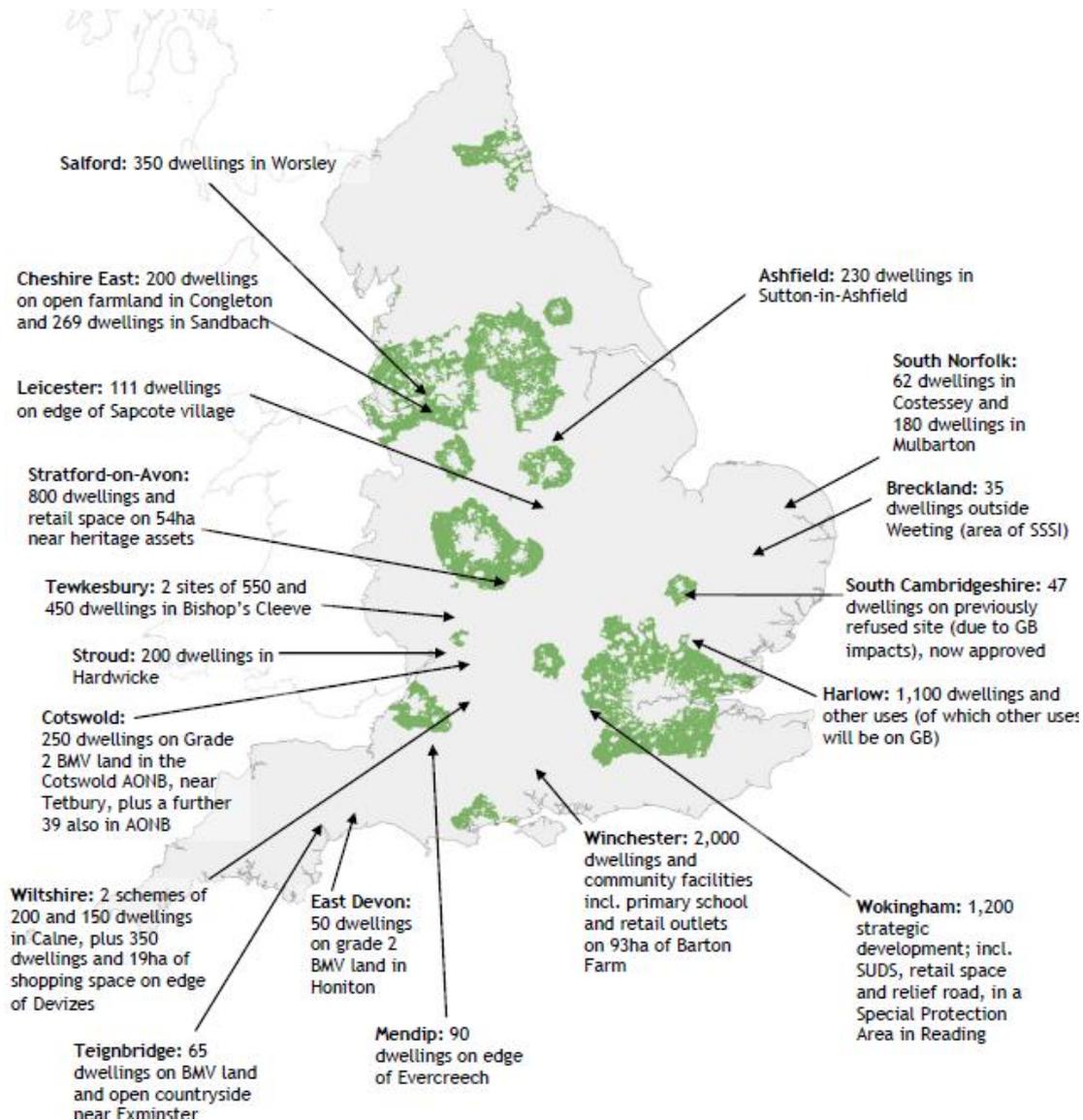
## Annex 1: Developments since the ex-post evaluation

In 2012, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was introduced in England. It must be pointed out, however, that even after the adoption of the NPPF, the system retains the historic focus of a plan-led planning system. It does not apply to infrastructure projects or waste management planning. Key elements for the protection of rural land from built development which have been incorporated in the NPPF include:

- Protecting Green Belt land (paragraphs 79:92);
- Classification of rural land so that the best and most versatile land for agriculture and the environment is accordingly prioritised and previously developed land is used for development (paragraphs 111:112);
- Protect areas identified as National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (paragraph 115)
- Carrying out a sustainability appraisal in keeping with SEA directive and ensuring compliance with required assessments such as the EIA, the Habitats Regulations Assessment and Flood Risk Assessment (paragraphs 165 and 192) (DCLG, 2012a).<sup>39</sup>

Despite efforts to support land use planning decisions at a local level with the Localism Act 2011 and the NPPF 2012, in practice it is found that built development is being carried out through developer's appeals to national planning actors. This is illustrated by a number of examples collated by CPRE of recent planning permissions granted for a number of built developments on rural land (see Figure 11). The planning permissions granted apply to open farmland (for example in Cheshire where permission for 200 dwellings has been granted), on land classified as best and most versatile (for example 65 dwellings in Teignbridge), and even on Special Protection Areas where permission for 1,200 dwellings in Wokingham has been granted. These decisions suggest that the interpretation of the current policy framework at a national and regional level prioritises economic development over environmental needs.

**Figure 11: Planning permissions granted for built development in England, 2013**



Source: CPRE 2013

There is also concern that localism is being undermined with arguments that the current framework has not provided sufficient time for local planning authorities to develop local plans. One year on and 52 per cent of local plans were not in place on time giving precedence to the regional plans. It is felt that there is a policy need for an extended transition period in such instances, particularly where there are strong conflicts between local and regional planning priorities, such as in Gloucestershire where there is a regional pressure for built development but local environmental constraints (CPRE, 2013).<sup>40</sup>

The degree to which the NPPF is a viable option for a truly sustainable development in environmental terms is heavily contested (CPRE, 2013; CPRE, 2012).<sup>41,42</sup> However, it should be stressed that this is a new policy framework and time is necessary to see how effective it will be.

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