

## 2,400 acres of green belt lost each year

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An average of 2,400 acres of undeveloped green belt is being built on each year, the Government has admitted in a parliamentary written answer.

This is a total of more than 15 sq miles - bigger than the city of Lincoln - between 1997 and 2001 alone. This does not include the brown-field sites that are built on in the green belt each year.

Five major green belts are currently being reviewed to accommodate more housing, answers to parliamentary questions have disclosed.

Green belts, which are intended to restrain towns from sprawling outwards, are under review between Nottingham and Derby, around London, Bristol and Bath, in south-east Dorset, around Poole and around Cheltenham and Gloucester.

Boundaries have already been moved by the Government to accommodate more housing in Tyne and Wear, Greater Manchester and Merseyside, around London and Cambridge.

Figures show that 162 planning applications in green belts went unchallenged by the Government between 1997 and last year and that four per cent of all house building between 2000 and 2002 was in the green belt.

In the last year for which figures are available, 111 acres of green belt were lost in the North East; 271 in the North West; 148 in Yorkshire and the Humber; 172 in the east Midlands; 185 in the west Midlands; 123 in the east of England; 36 in London; 1,062 in the South East and 284 in the South West.

Caroline Spelman, the Conservative spokesman for local government and communities, who asked the parliamentary questions, said: "We should be safeguarding the green belt but sadly the Government is moving in the opposite direction by removing swathes of the green belt and transferring powers to the unelected regional assemblies to bulldoze England's green fields."