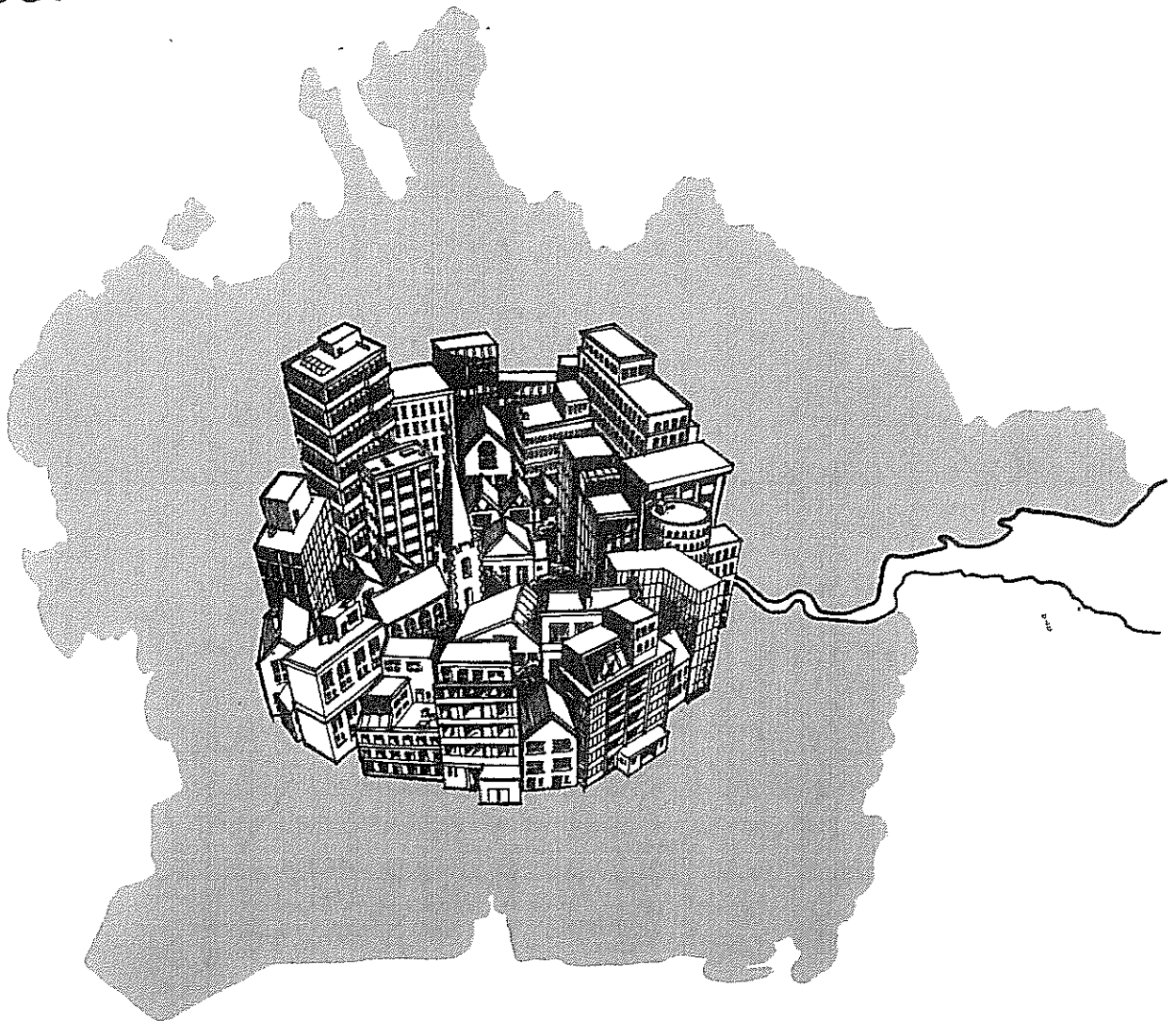


CPRE Matter 6(3a)

APPX 2

# GREEN BELTS

CONFLICT MEDIATION IN THE URBAN FRINGE



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### *Green Belt Rehabilitated*

The new Conservative Government of 1970, as one of its first acts, revised the scheme for local government reorganization and in a White Paper in 1971 proposed the creation of a two-tier system throughout the Country. The new system created smaller metropolitan areas and attempted to respect pre-existing local authority boundaries in the shire counties. As a result the West Midlands Metropolitan County had a boundary tightly drawn around existing built-up limits to the south and west, and Greater Manchester had its southern boundary with Cheshire drawn close to the limits of development south of the City. This new pattern represented, on the whole, a victory for the shire Counties. As Goldsmith notes, the original Maud proposals were urban-oriented and, if implemented, would have resulted in a concentration of local political power in town and city hands at the expense of rural areas.<sup>31</sup> The reforms introduced by the Conservatives both contained the urban areas and thus the scope of their political power, and largely maintained the power of the shire Counties and thus the green belts they had promoted.

The first incumbent at the new Environment Ministry, Peter Walker, announced at the Conservative Party Conference in 1970 his wish to clarify the position over green belts. Declaring strong support for the concept, he promised early decisions on existing proposals, the majority of which had been with the Ministry for nearly 10 years.<sup>33</sup> In the South East, consideration of the Strategic Plan for the Region had by 1971 clarified a number of issues sufficiently for large parts of the London Green Belt extensions to be approved.<sup>34</sup> In August 1972 it was announced that the Surrey extensions would be approved (adding 20 per cent by area to the original Belt), and in September, that additions in Buckinghamshire and Kent would also be approved (adding a further 15 per cent). These were to be areas of firm restraint in the long-term.

The intention to approve the West Midlands Green Belt was also announced in 1972 but it was to be three years before this took full effect. A Sub-Regional Strategy for the Coventry-Solihull-Warwickshire area had reported in 1971 suggesting major peripheral development on the south western edge of Coventry, in the Aldridge-Brownhills and Sutton Coldfield areas in the north of the conurbation, and at Solihull in the South.<sup>35</sup> During the 1972-4 period a further period of 'debate' between the Economic Planning Council, the shire Counties, and central Government ensued over the vexed question of the scale of long-distance dispersal. A 'balance' was again negotiated in 1974 by which significant peripheral development was to be allowed in the main conurbation, but in which the Coventry-Solihull-Warwickshire situation remained unresolved. Reflecting this the defined Green Belt (Figure 2.3) consisted of 1262 square kilometres of land of fully approved status, and 684 square kilometres of interim status (including

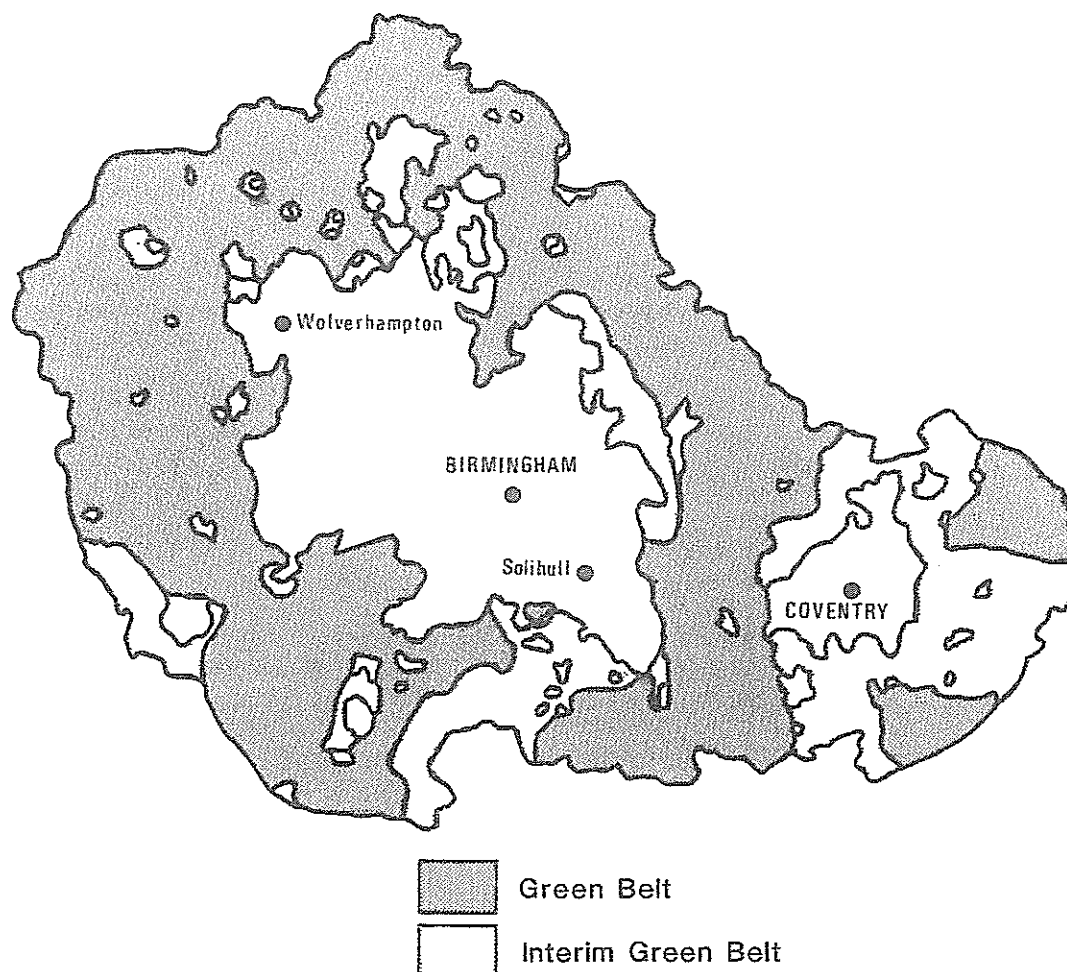


Figure 2.3 The West Midlands Green Belt 1975

Source: Adapted from Gregory, D. 'Green Belt Policy and the Conurbation', in Joyce, F. E. (ed.) *Metropolitan Development and Change* (Teakfield: Farnborough, 1977), p. 245

corridors north, south and east from Coventry), pending the preparation of structure and local plans.

Although by the early 1970s population projections had declined, and the amount of potentially mobile industry was reducing, the state of the property market belied such evidence. A relaxation of credit controls with consequent rapid wage and price inflation saw land become a precious investment commodity, and the well-known boom of 1972–3 developed. In the South East, and to a lesser extent in the West Midlands, there was renewed concern over the adequacy of land releases for housebuilding. Whilst this situation probably represented one of too much capital chasing the land available, rather than an increase in housing need, the Government were not slow to act.<sup>36</sup>

Circular 10/70 had asked local housing authorities to review their land holdings with a view to disposing of any surplus for private housing.<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey Rippon's White Paper *Widening the Choice: The Next Steps in*

London Green Belt for 25 years. Wishing to allow for local needs for housing after 1986 (the end-date of the local plan) the District proposed leaving areas between the land allocated for housing and the Green Belt boundary. These would be Interim Green Belt. The Ministry objected claiming Interim Green Belt could only apply, according to Structure Plan Note 5/72, *until* a local plan was approved.<sup>22</sup> As a result Broxbourne have altered their plan notation to one of 'Area of Special Restraint' (see Figure 4.1) with a new policy wording:

Until such time as the land . . . is shown to be needed for development in a development land availability statement or a review of (the) plan, there will be a presumption against development (other than would be allowed in the Green Belt).<sup>23</sup>

This appears no different to the notation, current between 1973–9 in the County, of white land where green belt policies apply.

Another method has been to prepare non-statutory green belt boundaries. Tyne and Wear County produced such a document in 1978 to provide 'an adequate basis for deciding on applications on specific sites'. It consisted of a line defining an Interim Green Belt and six 'insets' which 'cover areas where some land may be required for development or be held in reserve for possible future use' (Figure 4.2). Green belt policies would apply in the insets while detailed studies were carried out to define boundaries, and until replaced by an approved local plan.<sup>24</sup> However objections from landowners, developers, and residents' groups, uncertain of what the notation implied, led to its withdrawal.

In some counties the definition of boundaries has been a two-stage 'narrowing-down' process. In this situation the county prepares a minimum strategic green belt which the districts 'refine' by adding small areas of land in their own subsequent local plans. This method is found in Warwickshire where the County have defined a Green Belt which replaces the former regime of fully-approved and interim Green Belt with fully-approved Green Belt and 'Policy Boxes' around the main towns (Figure 4.3). The policy boxes are areas where Green Belt policies will apply until boundaries are defined in a district-prepared local plan.<sup>25</sup> Even at District level the narrowing down process is unlikely to achieve full clarity. On the northern boundary of Stratford Upon Avon the policy box has been narrowed in the draft Local Plan to two categories of land – Green Belt and an 'Area of Special Restriction' where existing uses are to remain undisturbed during the Plan period.<sup>26</sup>

However, this process of gradually 'drawing-in' the green belt boundary is not an immutable rule. In the case of the North Staffordshire Green Belt the approved Subject Plan defines a boundary which will subsequently be 'drawn back' in district-prepared local plans.<sup>27</sup> The Inspector

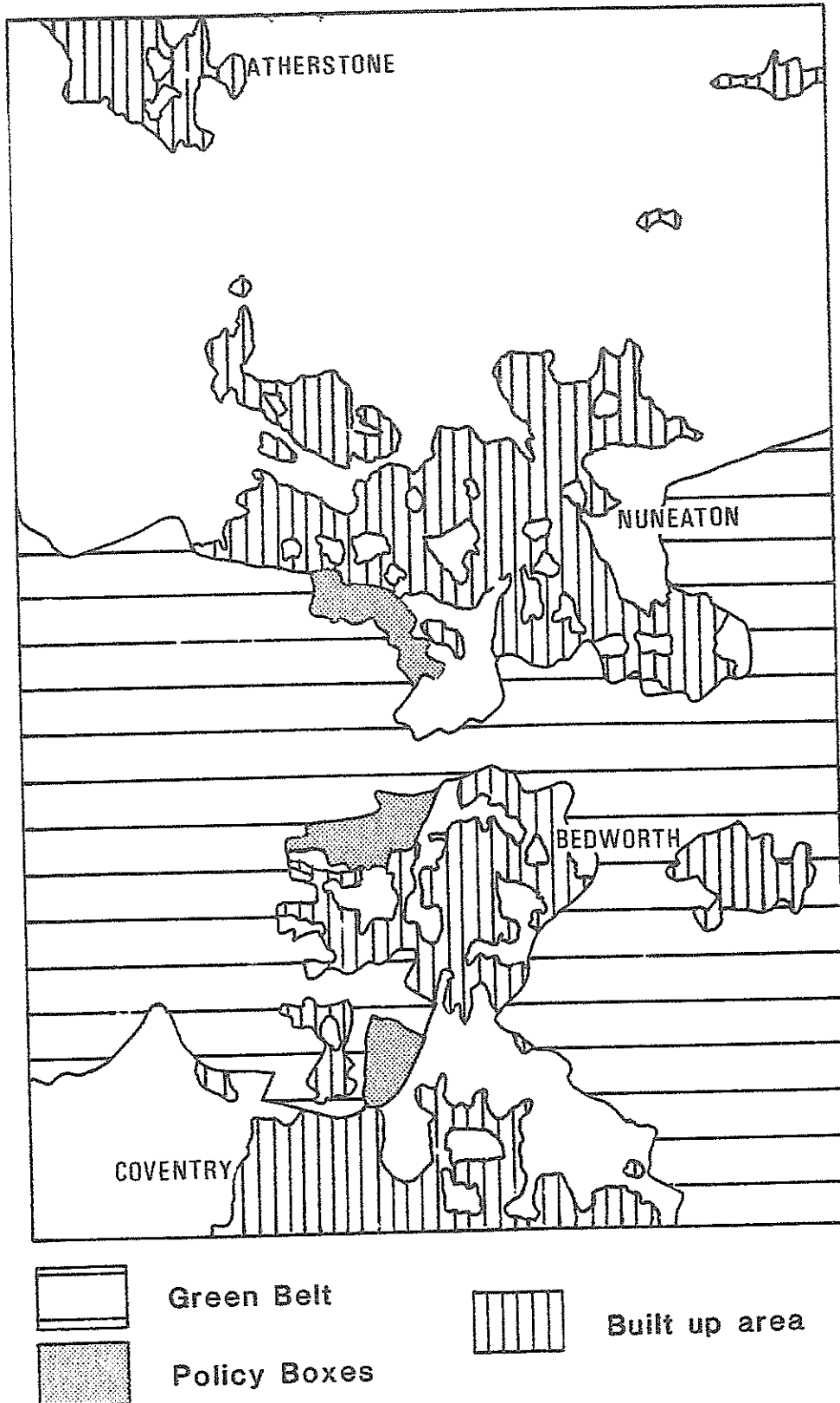


Figure 4.3 Policy Boxes in Warwickshire  
 Source: Adapted from Warwickshire County Council *Green Belt Local (Subject) Plan for Warwickshire* (WCC: Warwick, 1982), proposals map