**What is Green Belt Land and Its Purpose?**

**Source:** <http://www.politics-greenbelt.org.uk/>

Green belt land refers to an area that is kept in reserve for an open space, most often around larger cities. The main purpose of the green belt policy is to protect the land around larger urban centres from urban sprawl, and maintain the designated area for forestry and agriculture as well as to provide habitat to wildlife.

Green belt offers a number of benefits for both urban and rural population. By preventing the urban sprawl, it helps protect agricultural activities and the unique character of rural communities. Urban population, on the other hand, is provided an access to an open space which offers opportunities for outdoor activities and an access to clean air.

Areas that are designated as green belt must not be built upon because green belt is defined as an open space, however, that does not mean that no buildings can be erected in green belt. Buildings for agricultural uses and sanitation facilities, for instance, are usually allowed. In some cases, it is also possible to change the use of land in green belt and even gain permission for structures that are officially not allowed in green belt. However, such cases are very rare and the local authorities grant permission only if no suitable site for the building can be found in the urban centre or outside the green belt and there is an accessible business electricity source.

Green belt policy may not work well in all areas and has been a subject of criticism in the recent years, however, its advantages by far outweigh its disadvantages. The UK government therefore encourages local authorities to protect the land around the towns by creating green belts. At the moment of writing, green belt land covers about 13 percent of total area in England, 16 percent in Northern Ireland and 2 percent in Scotland. Wales has only one formally designated green belt area which is located between Newport and Cardiff.

The UK benefited a lot from green belts in the last 50 years because only 12% of the total area is covered by forests making air quality and suitable wildlife habitat highly problematic. Things have been changing for the better over the last few decades by using eco-friendly heating by [charnwood stoves](http://www.woodburningstoves.co.uk/brands/charnwood-stoves) or solar panels, but the country is still lagging behind other European countries when it comes to percentage of forested land. Green belts do not solve the problem related to low forest cover in the UK but they significantly improve air quality and help combat a number of environmental problems.

# **Many Big U.S. Cities See Population Gains Slow Again**

**Source:** Wall Street Journal - <http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2015/05/21/many-big-u-s-cities-see-population-gains-slow-again/>

As the recession fades in the rearview mirror, many big U.S. cities that saw population gains when the economy was down are growing more slowly, even as suburbs remain stable or grow faster.

Population growth slowed in 33 of the nation’s 50 largest cities between July 2013 and July 2014 compared to the prior year, according to **Kenneth Johnson**, a demographer at the **University of New Hampshire**, who analyzed new **Census Bureau** data released on Thursday.

The latest data largely echo [trends from July 2012 to July 2013](http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303749904579576440578771478), Mr. Johnson says, when big-city population growth also eased. This spring, less-granular census data hinted that Americans are finally [starting to return to the suburbs](http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2015/03/26/recessions-ebb-fuels-a-slow-return-to-the-suburbs/)—and to even more far-flung areas called “exurbs.”

The brunt of the city-growth slowdown appears to be in the Northeast and Midwest, and in bigger cities and coastal areas. Twelve of the 14 largest cities in the North and Midwest saw smaller population gains than in the previous year, Mr. Johnson found. “The big-city slowdown is pretty clear,” he says.

However, the South and West—especially the nation’s Sunbelt—is a little different: Just 21 of the 37 largest cities in the South and West saw slower population growth, Mr. Johnson says.

**William Frey**, a demographer at the **Brookings Institution**, who also analyzed the data, says U.S. cities that are growing faster are primarily in the Sunbelt: Austin, Atlanta and Fort Worth, for example, saw population growth pick up, he says.

More broadly, however, among the 53 U.S. metropolitan areas with a million people or more, city population growth is “tapering down” and now on par with suburbs, he says. “Seven of the 10 biggest cities showed growth slowdowns last year,” he says. “A return to more traditional suburbanization may be in the offing.”

Population growth in the so-called “primary cities” or “core cities” of big metropolitan areas—the exact boundary between “city” and “suburb” is hard to define, leading to endless back-and-forth among demographers—is clearly bigger than in the 2000s. Mr. Frey says that, of the 53 one-million-people-plus metros he analyzed, 21 had “primary cities” growing faster than suburbs. That compares with just seven in the 2000s.

With crime down significantly in many city centers, young Americans—especially highly educated, relatively wealthy ones in bigger cities—are more likely to seek out urban or semiurban living, and less likely than their parents to want the suburbs.

Still, the [much-touted “move to the city” by young people](http://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2015/01/23/the-end-of-the-suburbs-and-four-other-american-migration-myths/) isn’t as powerful as is thought, and could partly be an adaptive response to economic stress and diminished labor-market opportunities stemming from the recession.

The moving patterns of Americans are highly local, so big generalizations about, say, what young people are doing are difficult to make. If there’s a big migration trend among young people, though, it’s probably not that they’re all moving to cities, but that they’re not moving that much at all.

The latest Census data add to evidence showing that, slowly, this may be changing.

As the economy improves—and, perhaps more importantly, as young Americans age, move out of parents’ homes, get jobs, raise families and enter their peak-earning years—flows from cities to suburbs could pick up significantly. (Unless, of course, we suddenly see a huge jump in affordable, spacious housing in big cities for millennial families, but that’s unlikely.)

“Overall, cities are still doing better than in the 2000s, but their growth no longer is markedly higher than the suburbs,” Mr. Frey says. Recent city growth “may have been largely an aberration of the postrecession, down-housing-market years of the early 2010s.”

1. ***Highlight (one color) or underline*** the issues with the planning, design and political organization of urban areas.
2. ***Highlight(second color) or circle*** sustainable design movements of smart-growth policies in respnonse to urban sprawl and urbanization.