Statistical Digest of Rural England:

1 – Population

April 2024

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Cover photos

		Ward 2011	**Rural-Urban Classification**
TL	Helmsley marketplace	Helmsley	Rural Village and Dispersed in a sparse setting
TC	Horton-in-Ribblesdale train station with Penyghent behind	Penyghent	Rural Village and Dispersed in a sparse setting
TR	St Giles Church, Skelton	Rural West York	Rural Town and Fringe
CL	Fishing Boat, Marske-by-the-Sea with Hunt cliff in the distance	St Germain's; Saltburn	Rural Town and Fringe
CR	Thornton Force Waterfall, Ingleton Waterfalls Trail	Ingleton and Clapham	Rural Village and Dispersed in a sparse setting
BL	Farmer working the fields in Knapton	Rural West York	Rural Town and Fringe
BC	Remote pub at Ribblehead viaduct	Ingleton and Clapham	Rural Village and Dispersed in a sparse setting
BR	Glamping pod in the North York Moors	Pickering East	Rural Town and Fringe in a sparse setting

All cover photos provided by Martin Fowell.

Contents

About the Statistical Digest of Rural England

The Statistical Digest of Rural England (hereafter the Digest) is a collection of statistics on a range of social and economic topics and provides broad comparisons between Rural and Urban areas by settlement type. For more information on our classifications, including maps and diagrams explaining the classification, see Appendix 2: Defining Rural areas.

The Digest has been restructured into thematic reports and incorporates the previously separate publication the Rural Economic Bulletin.

The Digest consists of the following thematic reports:

1. Population
2. Housing
3. Health and Wellbeing
4. Communities and Households
5. Connectivity and Accessibility
6. Education, Qualifications and Training
7. Rural Economic Bulletin
8. Energy

In March 2024 the content relating to energy that was previously split across the Housing and Communities and Households chapters has been consolidated into a new Energy report. Appendix 1 shows the sub-themes within each of the 8 Digest reports. Thematic reports will be updated individually and not every report with be updated every month.

Please note: there is no new statistical content, but all subsections have been refreshed with new summaries in this edition to be more convenient for users.

Official Statistics

These statistics have been produced to the high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which sets out eight principles including meeting user needs, impartiality and objectivity, integrity, sound methods and assured quality, frankness and accessibility.

More information on the Official Statistics Code of Practice can be found at: Code of Practice for Statistics.

This publication has been compiled by the Rural Statistics Team within the Rural and Place Team in Defra:

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There is a 2011 Census version of the Digest which looks at the data from the 2011 Census and where possible makes comparisons to the 2001 Census results.

This can be found at https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-census-results-for-rural-england

Analysis of the 2021 Census will follow the release of a 2021-based Rural-Urban Classification.

Population

This part of the Statistical Digest of Rural England focuses on Population and covers the following:

- population levels and evaluating changes over time (Section A).

- proportions of the population within each age group (Section B).

- ethnicity (Section C).

- internal migration (Section D).

- population at Local Authority level (Section E).

While data are available from the 2021 Census, the Rural-Urban Classification has not yet been revised and updated. Population analysis using the 2021 Census will not be published until a 2021-based Rural-Urban Classification is available.

The key findings from this chapter are summarised with the following set of headline clouds:

Population Level and Change: age and type – key findings

Almost 10 million people live in Rural areas

17 out of every 100 people in England live in a Rural area.

More people live in Urban areas outside of the Major Conurbations than live within them

The population living in Rural areas grew by 6% between 2011 and 2020

Population Age Profile: additions – key findings

In Rural areas, more people are aged 50-59 years than any other age group

In Urban areas, more people are aged 30-39 than any other age group

The average age in Rural Villages is 46 years – 6 years older than in England overall

One in four people living in Rural areas are at least 65 years old – almost 2.5 million people

The average age in Urban areas is under 40

The average age in Rural areas has been over 40 for some years

Ethnicity – key findings

97 out of every 100 Rural residents consider themselves to be 'white' compared to 82 out of every 100 Urban residents

Close to half of the 'non-white' Urban residents identify themselves as part of the Asian community

One in three of the 'non-white' Rural residents identifies themselves as part of the Asian community

Internal Migration – key findings

In 2019/20 there was net migration to Rural areas of almost 100,000 people

Net internal migration to Rural areas in 2019/20 was more than double what it was in 2010/11

Net migration to Rural areas is largest amongst those people in their 30s

There is net internal migration away from Rural areas for young people aged 15-19

Local Authority population estimates – key findings

Half of the population of England live in Predominantly Urban areas outside of London

More people live in Predominantly Rural areas (12 million) than live in London (9 million)

North Norfolk is the only Local Authority where more than a third of the population are aged 65 and over

The Rural population is split 40:60 between Mainly Rural and Largely Rural areas

Manchester is the only Local Authority outside of London where less than one in ten people are aged 65 and over

A. Population Level and Change

Around 10 million people live in Rural areas, however the Rural population is growing at a slower rate than the Urban population.

Summary

In 2020 the mid-year population estimate for England was 56.6 million, of which 9.7 million (17.1%) lived in Rural areas and 46.9 million (82.9%) lived in Urban areas. In absolute terms, Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) level Rural population increased from 9.1 million in 2011 to 9.7 million in 2020. However, the proportion of the total population living in Rural areas fell from 17.2% to 17.1% over the same time-period because the Urban population increased at a faster rate between 2011 and 2020.

Between 2011 and 2020, the population of Rural areas in England increased by 6.0%, but in Urban areas the increase was 6.6%. In Rural areas the population grew faster between 2016 and 2020 than it did between 2011 and 2016, but the reverse is true for Urban areas. The more Rural an area the slower its population grows and conversely the more Urban an area the faster its population grows.
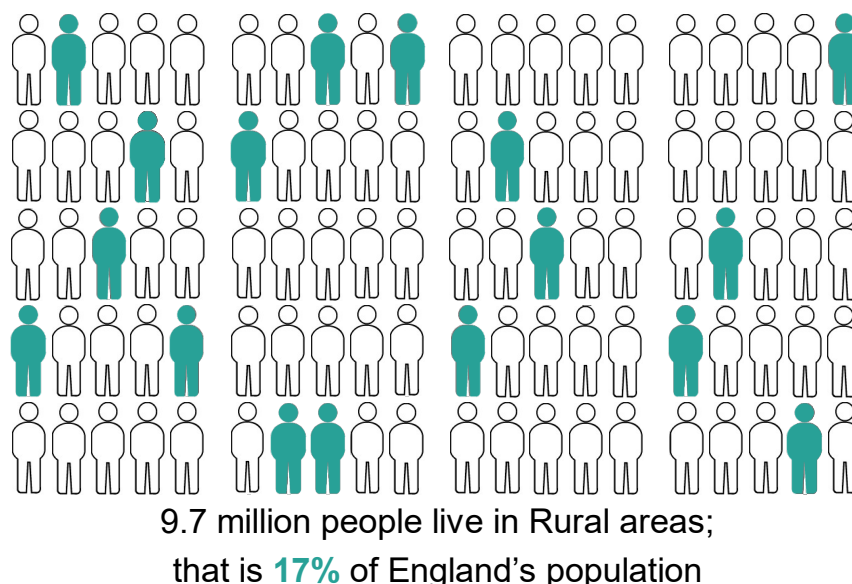
Mid-year population 2020

In 2020 the mid-year population estimate for England was 56.6 million, of which 9.7 million (17.1%) lived in Rural areas - as shown in Figure A-1 - and 46.9 million (82.9%) lived in Urban areas.

Figure A-1: Proportion of the population living in Rural areas in 2020.

9.7 million people live in Rural areas;

that is **17%** of England's population

In 2011, using more granular Census output areas, the Rural population was estimated to be 9.3 million (17.6%) while the mid-year population estimate based on Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) was 9.1 million (17.2%) (Note A-1). In comparing population estimates at LSOA level there was an increase in the Rural population from 9.1 million in 2011 (LSOA-based) to 9.7 million in 2020 (LSOA-based), however the proportion of the total population has fallen from 17.2% to 17.1% over the same time-period as the Urban population has increased at a faster rate.

Table A-1 describes the proportions of the population which reside within each settlement type of the Rural-Urban Classification. We see that 0.5 million people in lived in sparse Rural settings in 2020 (0.9% of the total population of England), compared to just under 0.1 million people in sparse Urban settings (0.2% of England's population).

Table A-1: Proportion of the population within each area described in the Rural-Urban Classification, based on 2020 mid-year estimates of LSOAs in England.
Data is rounded to the nearest 100 people.

	Population	Proportion (%)
Rural total	**9,683,300**	**17.1**
Rural Town and Fringe	5,240,300	9.3
Rural Town and Fringe in a sparse setting	197,600	0.3
Rural Village and Hamlet	4,443,000	7.9
Rural Village and Hamlet in a sparse setting	304,600	0.5
Urban total	**46,866,800**	**82.9**
Urban Major Conurbation	20,275,900	35.9
Urban Minor Conurbation	2,031,500	3.6
Urban City and Town	24,559,400	43.4
Urban City and Town in a sparse setting	91,700	0.2
England total	**56,550,100**	**100.0**

Population change

In Figure A-2 and Figure A-3, the population for 2011 is indexed to "100" (meaning 100%) so that any year post-2011 can be measured for percentage change. Figure A-2 expresses the population change in Rural and Urban areas of England, as well as in England overall. Figure A-3 describes the population change in Rural areas in more detail using the Rural-Urban Classification.

Figure A-2: Index of population change by Rural-Urban Classification, in England, 2011 to 2020
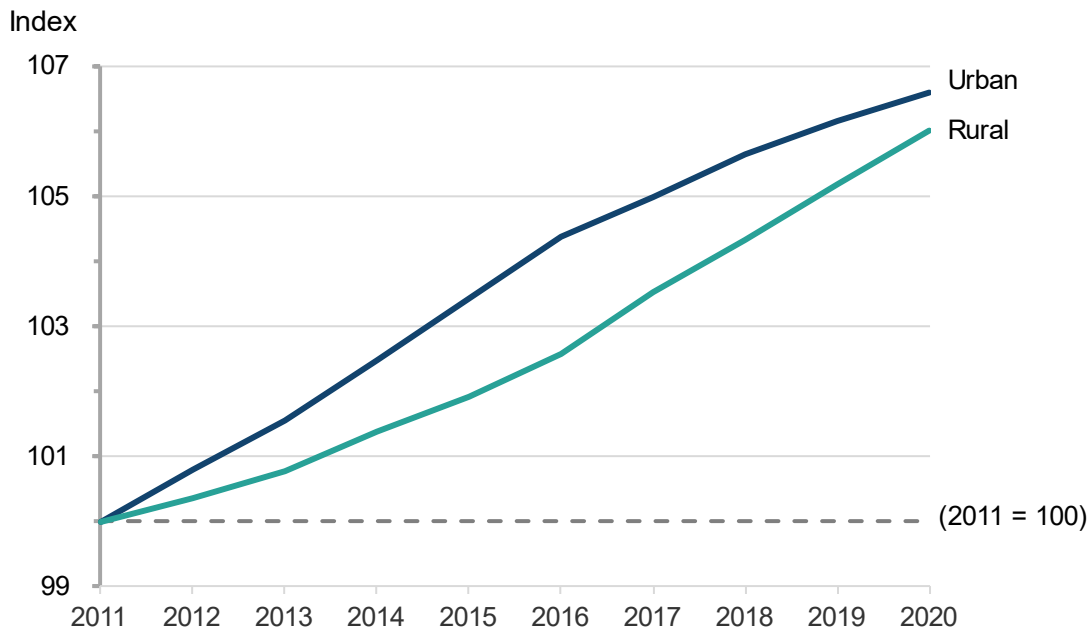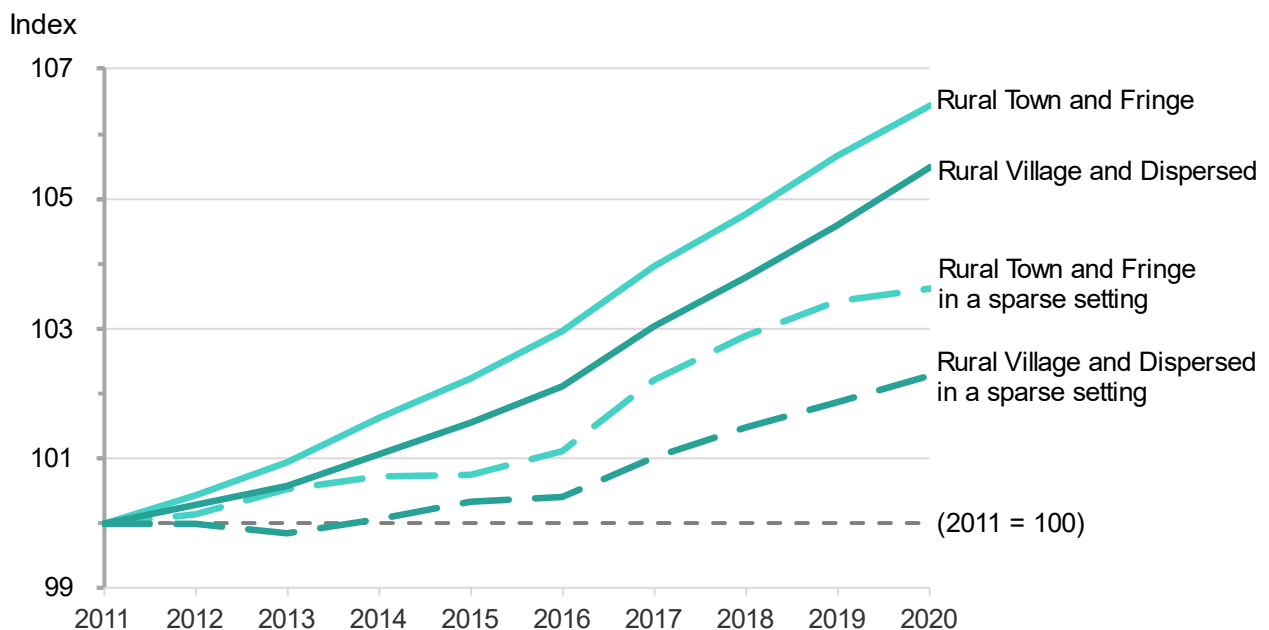
2011 = 100, as shown by the horizontal dashed line

Figure A-3: Index of population change in Rural areas by settlement type within the Rural-Urban Classification, in England, 2011 to 2020

2011 = 100, as shown by the horizontal dashed line

In Figure A-2 both Rural and Urban areas have seen an increase in overall population between 2011 and 2020; the population in Rural areas has increased by 6.0% and in Urban areas by 6.6%.

In Figure A-3, the greatest rate of population increase within Rural areas between 2011 and 2020 was in Rural Town and Fringe areas (6.4%); within Urban areas it was in Urban with Major Conurbation areas (7.3%). Rural Villages and Hamlets in sparse settings showed the lowest rate of increase within Rural areas (2.3%); in Urban areas it was Urban City and Town in a sparse setting (1.2%).

Population level and change explanatory notes

- **Note A-1**

While the indicators we use for population estimates are broadly in line with Census level population data, there are minor differences relating to the area classifications: Census population data are based on output areas (OAs, approx. 300 people), and mid-year population estimates are based on Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs, approx. 3000 people). The larger the area the more likely it is to contain an urban settlement and be classified as Urban. Analysis using LSOAs may slightly under-estimate the Rural population.

- **Note A-2**

Analysis of the 2021 Census is not yet available. This will be subject to the release of detailed Census results by the Office for National Statistics and the production of a new Rural-Urban Classification.

- **Note A-3**

The estimated resident population of an area includes all those people who usually live there, regardless of nationality. Arriving international migrants are included in the usual resident population if they remain in the UK for at least a year. Emigrants are excluded if they remain outside the UK for at least a year. This is consistent with the United Nations definition of a long-term migrant. Armed forces stationed outside of the UK are excluded. Students are taken to be usually resident at their term time address.

- **Note A-4**

Data in Table A-1 is available in a table of the mid-year population estimates broken down by detailed Rural-Urban classification covering 2011 to 2020 in the [population supplementary data tables](#).

- **Note A-5**

Data presented in Figure A-2 and Figure A-3 are available in a table of indexed population change broken down by detailed Rural-Urban Classification covering 2011 to 2020 in the [population supplementary data tables](#).

B. Population Age Profile

The more Rural the area the older the average age and the faster this average age is increasing.

Summary

The average age of the population is affected by several factors including birth rate, mortality rate, and migration. Internal migration is important in determining the age profile of specific regions.

The population in Rural areas has a higher proportion of older people compared with Urban areas. In Rural areas, the 10-year age band representing the greatest proportion of the population is age 50 to 59 (15.7% of the rural population). Whereas in Urban areas the 10-year age band representing the greatest proportion of the population is age 30 to 39 (14.1% of the Urban population). In 2020, the mid-year population estimate of the population aged 65 and over in Rural areas was 2.5 million, whilst in Urban areas it was 8.0 million. This means that in 2020, 25.4% of the Rural population was aged 65 and over, but only 17.1% of the Urban population was aged 65 and over.

In 2020 the average age in Rural areas was 45.1 years, almost 6 years older than the average age of 39.4 years in Urban areas. In Rural areas this 2020 average age is 3.6 years older than the average Rural age of 41.5 years in 2002. For comparison the average Urban age increased by only 1.3 years over the same period. In Rural areas, the more Rural the area the higher the average age and in Urban areas the more urban the area the lower the average age.

Population by age

Figure B-1 shows that the population in Rural areas has a higher proportion of older people compared with Urban areas.

In 2020, the most prominent age groups in Rural areas are "50 to 54 years" and "55 to 59 years" with 7.7% and 8.0% of the Rural population, respectively, while the most prominent age groups in Urban areas are "25 to 29 years" and "30 to 34 years" with 7.2% and 7.2% of the Urban population, respectively.

Figure B-1: Percentage of population within age bands of 5-year intervals from 0 to 90+, by Rural-Urban Classification in England based on LSOA level data, 2020
The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the bars
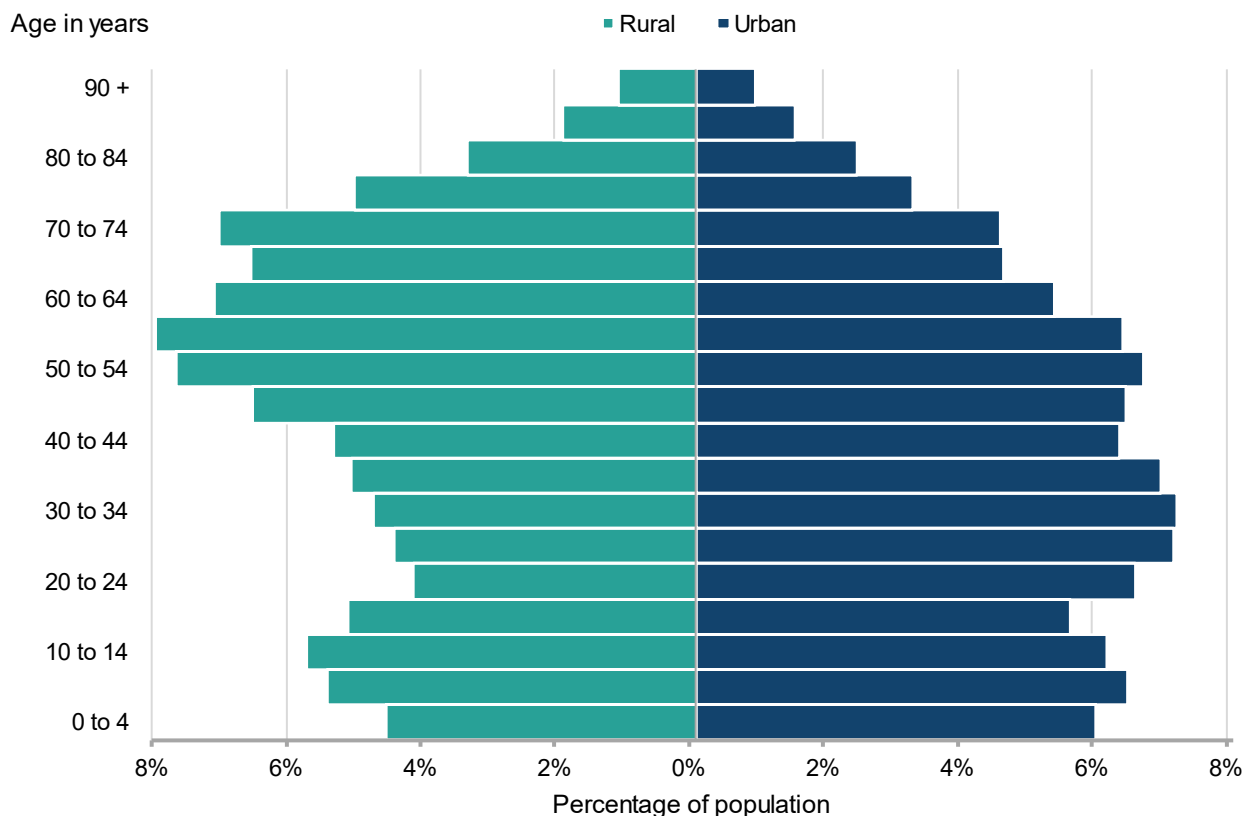
We can use a more detailed version of the Rural-Urban Classification at LSOA level to analyse the age profile of the population within each settlement type.

Figure B-2 (top chart) shows that the population of areas in a sparse setting have the highest proportion of those aged 65 and over, particularly settlements that are Rural Village and Dispersed in a sparse setting which have 30.7% of their population aged 65 and over.

Figure B-2 (bottom chart) shows that the population of Urban City and Town in a sparse setting has the highest proportion of those aged 65 and over, at 29.7%.

Figure B-2: Percentage of population aged 65 and over by settlement type within the Rural-Urban Classification (LSOA) in England, 2020

Rural areas are plotted on the top chart, whilst Urban areas follow on the lower chart.
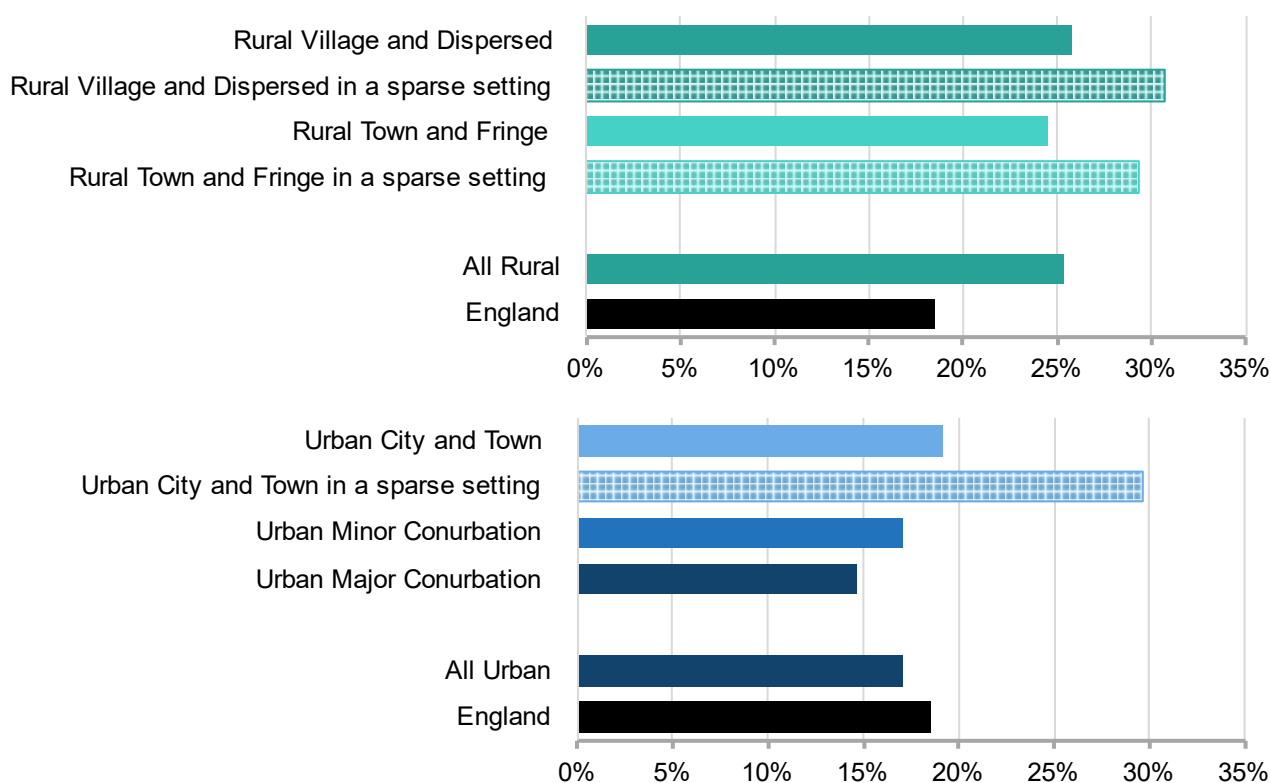
Overall, the Rural population has a higher proportion of those aged 65 and over, at 25.4%, compared with the Urban population where 17.1% are 65 and over.

Table B-1 shows an alternate representation of the information given in Figure B-2, including both percentages of the population distribution and absolute numbers.

In 2020, the mid-year population estimate of the population aged 65 and over in Rural areas was 2.5 million; the Urban total was estimated at 8.0 million.

Table B-1: Population aged 65 and over as a percentage of total 2020 mid-year population.
Data is rounded to the nearest 100 people.

	Population aged 65 and over	Proportion aged 65 and over (%)
Rural total	**2,454,800**	**25.4**
Rural Town and Fringe	1,238,200	24.6
Rural Town and Fringe in a sparse setting	57,900	29.3
Rural Village and Dispersed	1,065,200	25.7
Rural Village and Dispersed in a sparse setting	93,500	30.7
Urban total	**8,009,200**	**17.1**
Urban Major Conurbation	2,958,900	14.6
Urban Minor Conurbation	346,800	17.1
Urban City and Town	4,676,400	19.1
Urban City and Town in a sparse setting	27,200	29.7
England total	**10,464,000**	**18.5**

Figure B-3: Map showing the geographic areas where the percentage of population of people aged 65+ are most concentrated in Rural England, based on LSOA-level data, 2020
White areas on England map indicate Urban LSOAs, which are given in Figure B-4 instead.

Population age breakdown

20% or less of the population is aged 65 and over

Between 20% and 30% ofthe population is aged 65 and over

More than 30% of the population is aged 65 and over

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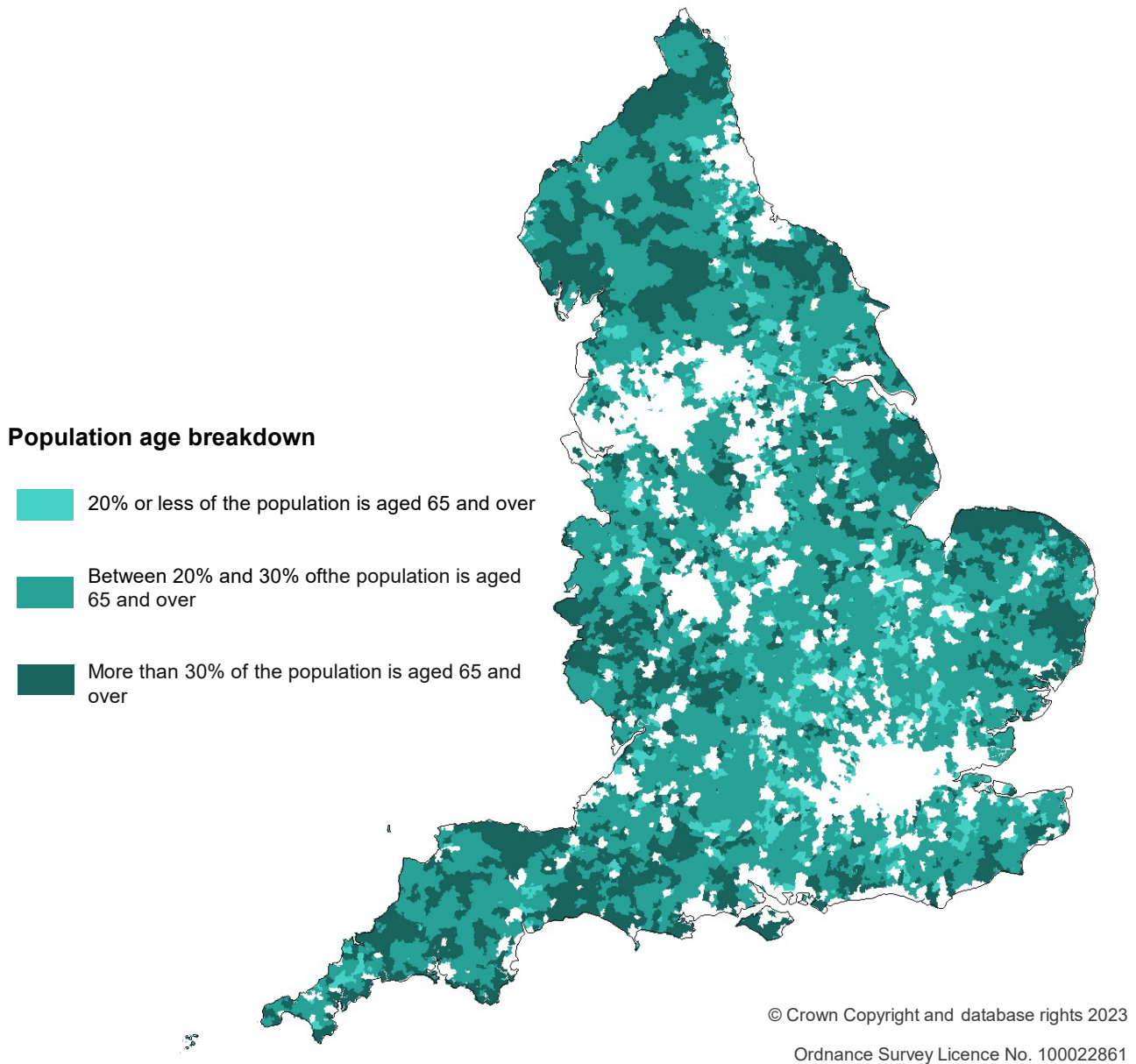Ordnance Survey Licence No. 100022861

Figure B-3 maps the geographic distribution of the population of people aged 65 and over in Rural areas at LSOA level based on the 2011 Census data. In this map, the darker the colour, the higher the proportion of over 65-year-olds live within the LSOA. It should be noted that LSOAs in Rural areas can cover a large area and hence show a large area with the same characteristic. The darkest green areas (where more than 30% of the population is aged 65 and over) are evident particularly in coastal areas. This is shown similarly in Figure B-4 for Urban areas. Figure B-4 also shows that the larger Urban centres tend be dominated by areas where less than 20% of the population is aged 65 and over.

Figure B-4: Map showing the geographic areas where the percentage of population of over 65-year-olds are most concentrated in Urban England, based on LSOA-level data, 2020

White areas on England map indicate Rural LSOAs, which are given in Figure B-3 instead.
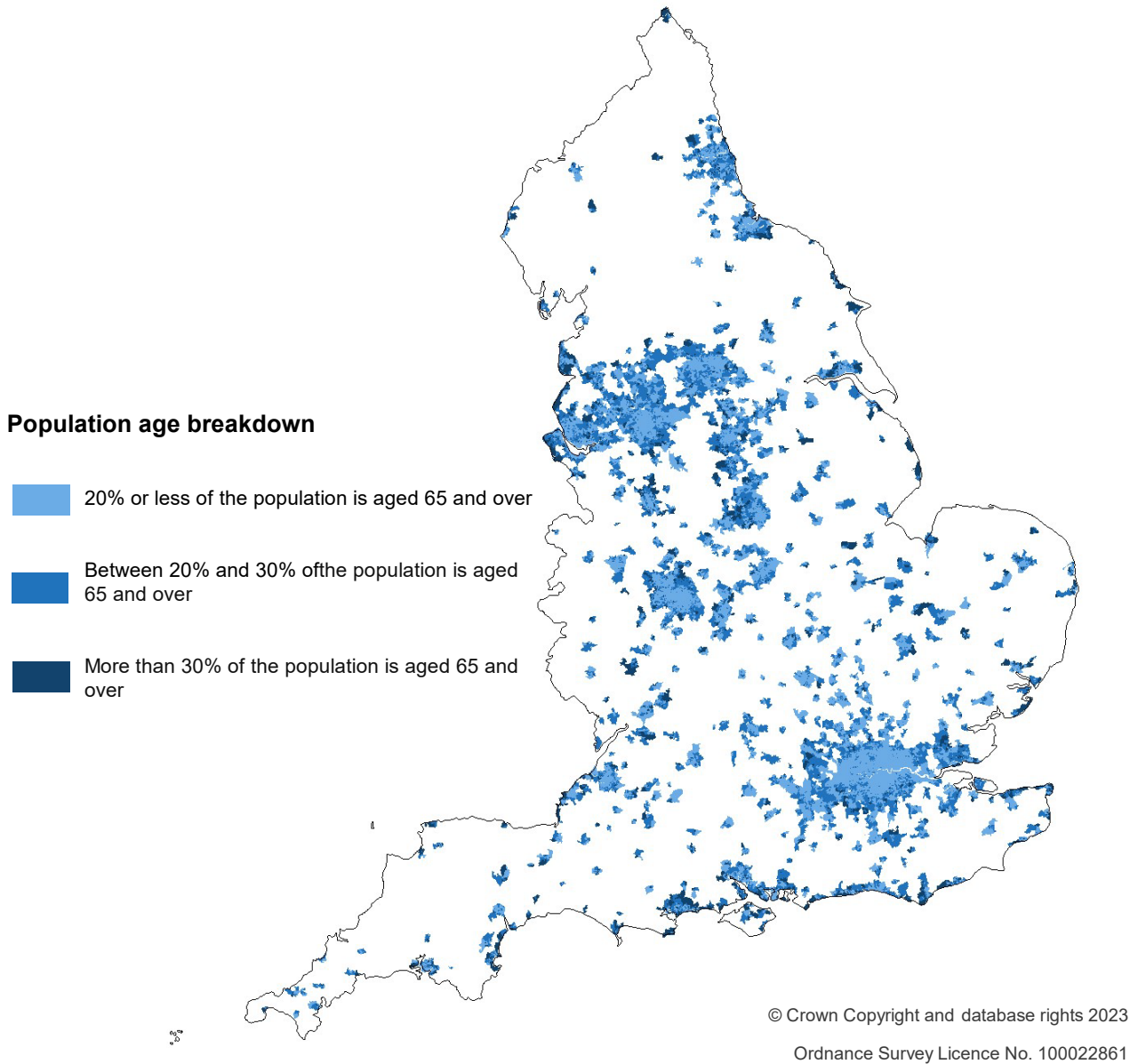
Population age breakdown

20% or less of the population is aged 65 and over

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More than 30% of the population is aged 65 and over

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Average age of the population

The average age of the population is affected by birth rate, mortality rate, and migration. Internal migration is discussed in section D below. Life expectancy is discussed in digest part 3 – Health and Wellbeing (Section A).

Figure B-5 (top chart) shows the average age of the Rural population from 2002 to 2020. In 2020 the average age was highest in Rural Village and Dispersed areas at 45.9 years. In Rural Town and Fringe areas the average age was 44.3 years, and for England overall it was 40.3 years.

Figure B-5 (bottom chart) shows the average age of the Urban population from 2002 to 2020. In 2020 the average age was lowest in Urban Major Conurbations at 37.8 years, and highest in Urban City and Town areas at 40.6 years – 0.3 years above the national average.

Between 2002 and 2020, the average age in Rural areas has consistently been higher – and has also increased faster – than in Urban areas; the average age across all Rural areas was 45.1 years in 2020: 5.7 years older than in Urban areas. The gap in average ages between Rural and Urban areas widened from 3.4 years in 2002. The average age in England increased by 1.6 years between 2002 and 2020, but in Rural Town and Fringe areas it increased by 3.2 years and in Rural Village and Dispersed areas by 4.0 years.

Figure B-5: Average age of populations in Rural areas (top chart) and Urban areas (bottom chart) in England, by Rural-Urban Classification, 2002 to 2020

Average age (years)
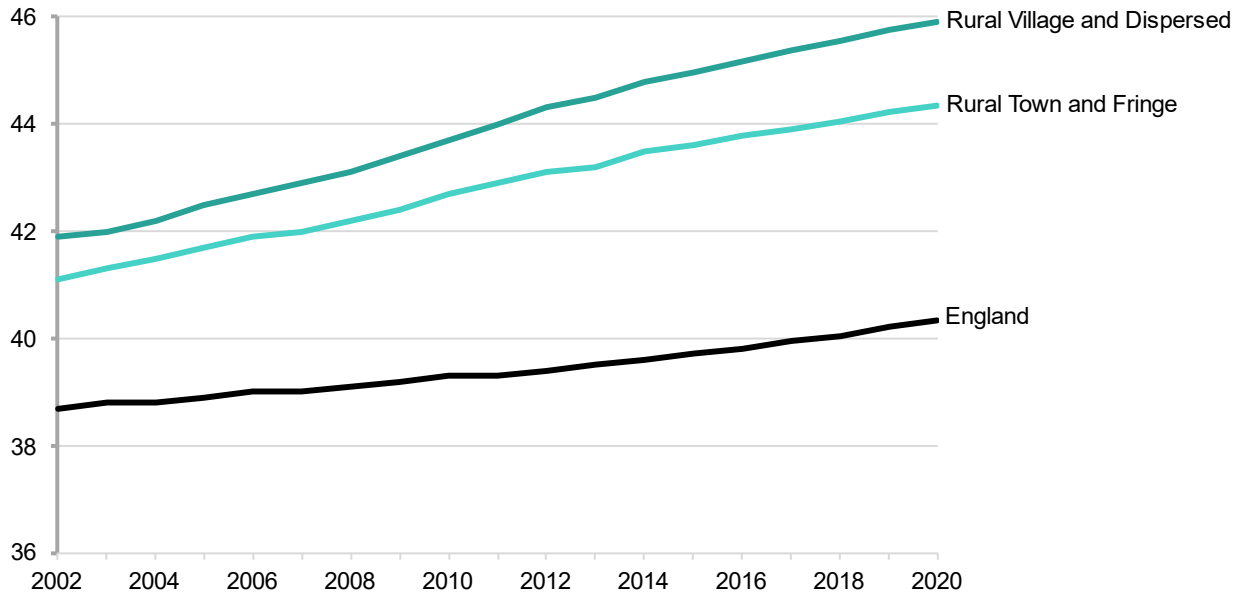
Average age (years)
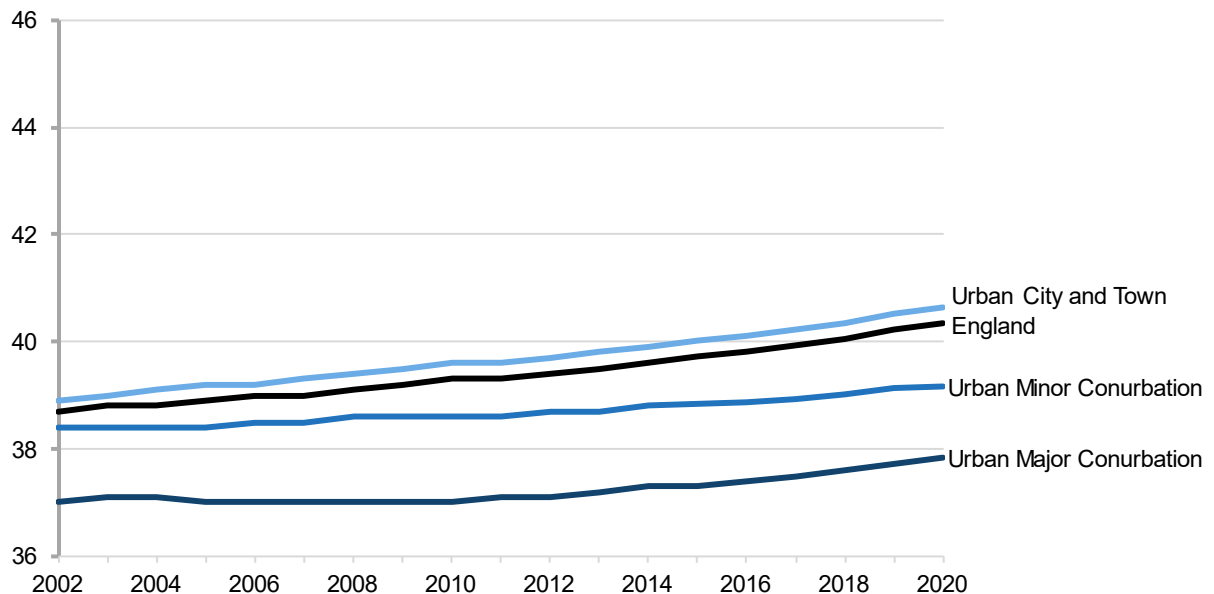
Population age profile explanatory notes

- **Note B-1**

Data in Figure B-1 is expressed in a table of 2020 mid-year population estimates broken down by age band and detailed Rural-Urban Classification, available in the [population supplementary data tables](#).

- **Note B-2**

Figure B-4 and Figure B-5 has been produced by Defra using ONS mid-year population estimates for 2020 at LSOA level.

- **Note B-3**

Data in Figure B-6 is expressed in a table of average age broken down by detailed Rural-Urban Classification covering 2002 to 2020, available in the [population supplementary data tables.](#)

- **Note B-4**

The label "Rural Village and Dispersed" is used within the analysis to comprise two smaller RUC categories: "Rural Villages" and "Rural Hamlets and Isolated Dwellings".

C. Ethnicity

Overall, 'white' is the majority ethnic group in both Rural and Urban areas, however Urban areas tend to be more ethnically diverse than Rural areas.

Summary

Ethnicity is a measure of cultural affiliation. It is not a measure of race, ancestry, nationality, or citizenship. Statistics about ethnicity give information by the ethnic groups that people identify with or feel they belong to.

In 2020, the 'white ethnic' group accounted for 96.8% of the Rural population, compared with 81.7% in Urban areas. Both Rural and Urban areas were slightly more ethnically diverse in 2020 than they were in 2016. In Rural areas there is no dominant secondary ethnic group, whereas in Urban areas, Asian is prominent as the second largest ethnic group.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity is a measure of cultural affiliation. It is not a measure of race, ancestry, nationality, or citizenship. Statistics about ethnicity give information by the ethnic groups that people identify with or feel they belong to.

Overall, 'white' is the majority ethnic group in both Rural and Urban areas, however Urban areas are more ethnically diverse than Rural areas. In 2020, the 'white ethnic' group accounted for 96.8% of the Rural population, compared with 81.7% in Urban areas; this is shown in Figure C-1.

Figure C-1: Ethnic groups as a percentage of population in Rural and Urban areas, England, 2016 and 2020
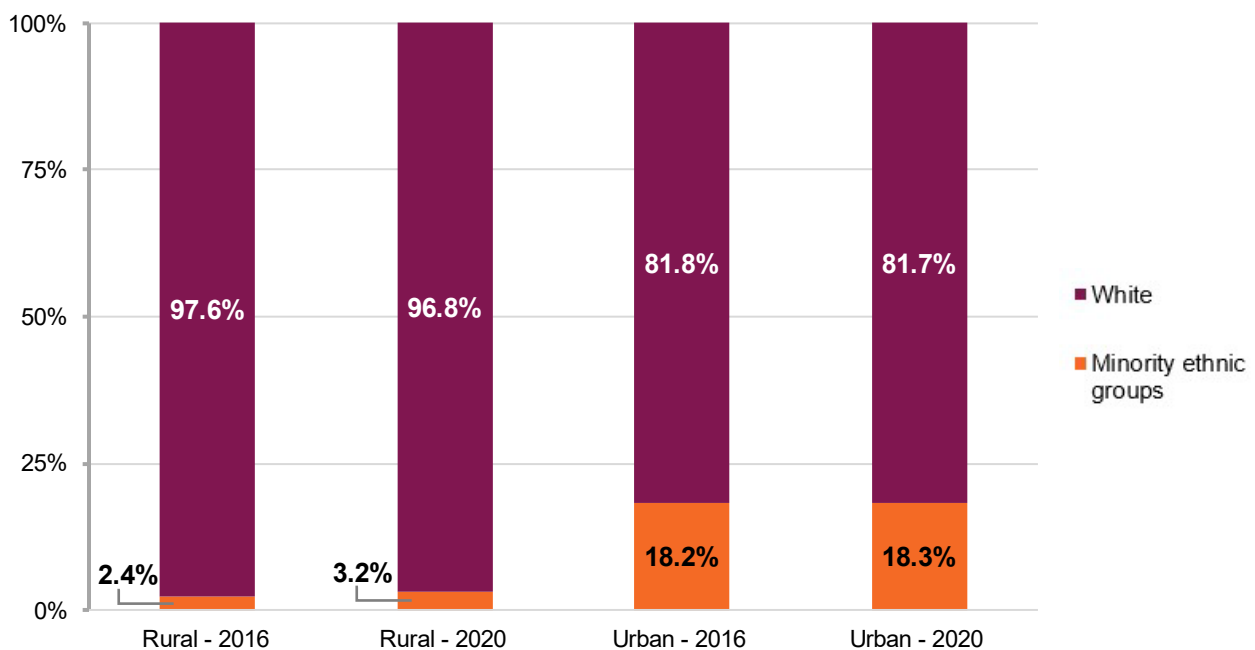The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the bars

Figure C-1 also shows that the proportion of 'minority ethnic' groups has risen slightly over the last 5 years in both Rural and Urban areas, increasing by 0.8 and 0.1 percentage points respectively since 2016.

Diversity of 'minority ethnic' groups differs between Rural and Urban areas. In Rural areas the second largest group is the 'Mixed / Multiple ethnic group' while in Urban areas it is the 'Asian ethnic' group. The smallest group proportionally in Rural areas is the 'Black, African, Caribbean or Black British' group, while in Urban areas it is the 'Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups'. This is shown in Figure C-2.

Figure C-2 also shows that in Urban areas between 2016 and 2020, the proportions of people within the 'Asian / Asian British' and 'Chinese, Arab and Other ethnic' groups have decreased, whilst the proportions of people within the 'Mixed / Multiple ethnic' and 'Black / African / Caribbean / Black British' groups have increased. However, in Rural areas, the proportions of people within the 'Black / African / Caribbean / Black British' and 'Asian / Asian British' groups saw decreases between 2016 and 2020, whilst the proportions of people within the 'Chinese, Arab and Other ethnic' and 'Mixed / Multiple ethnic' groups increased.

Figure C-2: Proportions of all minority ethnic group populations in Rural and Urban areas, England, 2016 & 2020

The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the bars
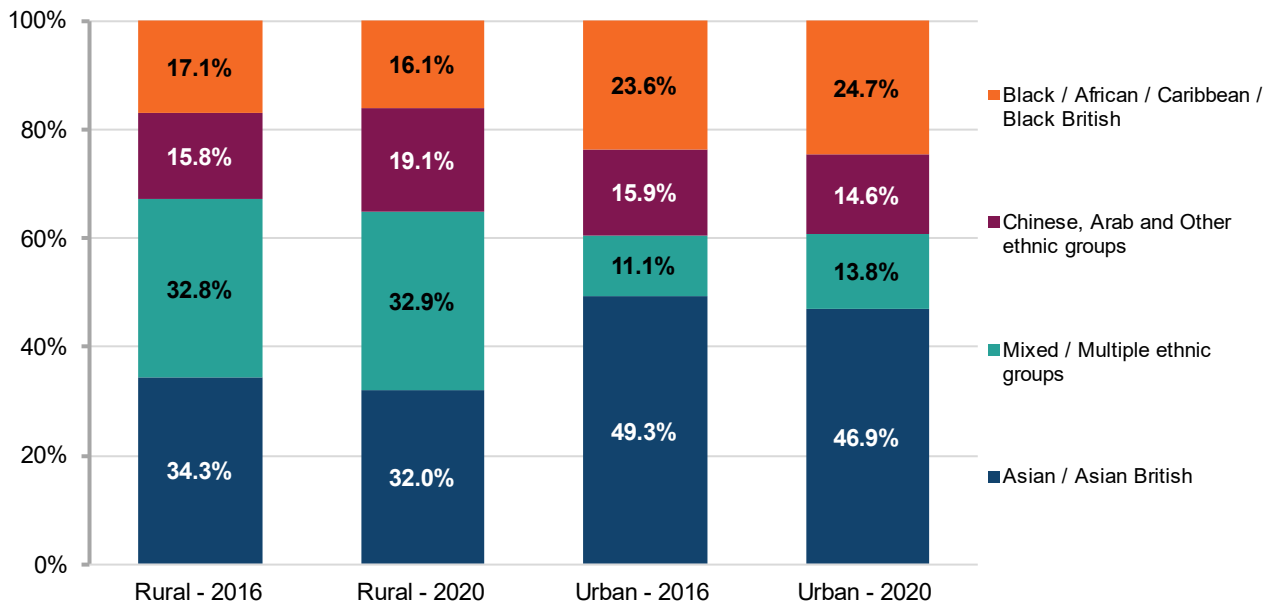
Ethnicity explanatory notes

- **Note C-1**

Tables detailing ethnic groups in Rural and Urban areas in 2016 and 2020, and a more detailed Rural-Urban breakdown for 2020 are available in the population supplementary data tables. This is the information seen in Figure C-1 and Figure C-2.

- **Note C-2**

Data Source: Office for National Statistics, Labour Force Survey (Defra data request)

D. Internal Migration

Net internal migration within tends to be towards Predominantly Rural areas, and the rate of this migration has grown since 2011; the exception to this is amongst those aged 17-20 who are leaving Predominantly Rural in search of education and training opportunities.

Summary

Internal migration is defined as changes of usual residence within a country such as moving from one Local Authority to another within England. In some cases, these moves will mean moving from an Urban area to a Rural area or vice-versa. For Digest purposes all migration within the UK is considered interna; external migration is entering the UK from another country and is not included within our analysis.

Between 2004/05 and 2008/09 the general trend for internal migration in England was for net migration to Predominantly Rural areas and net migration from Predominantly Urban areas. Since 2008/09 there has been an increase in the rate of net migration to Predominantly Rural areas. In 2019/20 net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas increased the Predominantly Rural population by 0.8%

For 2019/20 in Predominantly Rural areas there was net (internal) migration inwards of 97,500 people. For Predominantly Urban areas there was net (internal) migration outwards of 149,100 people. Predominantly Rural areas saw net migration from Predominantly Urban areas of 84,600 people composed of 325,400 moving into Predominantly Rural areas and 240,800 moving out of them.

Net internal migration inwards to Predominantly Rural areas occurs for all age bands except those aged 17 to 20-year olds. In 2019/20 there was net internal migration outwards of 17 to 20 years olds of 34,100, primarily due to young people leaving their home in Predominantly Rural areas in search of education and employment opportunities in Predominantly Urban areas. The largest net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas for adults occurred for those in their 30s (25,300 people).

The latest migration analysis is for the year to June 2020, so it is mostly for the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
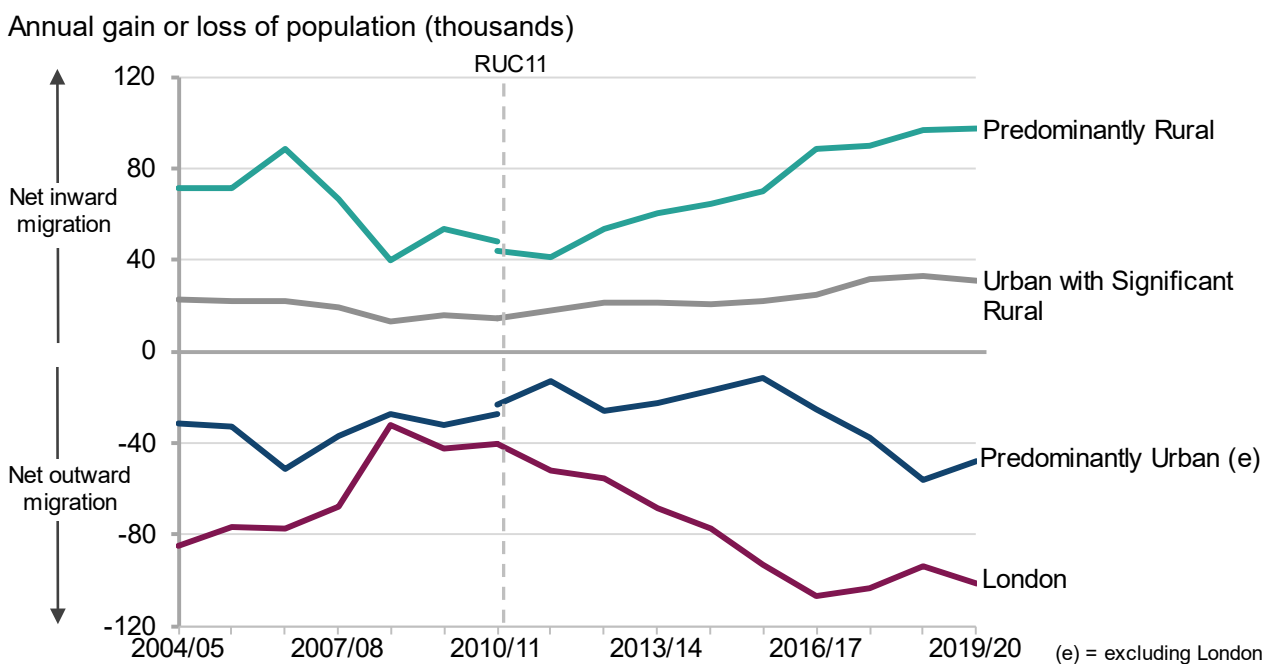
Long-term internal migration trends

In the analysis presented below internal migration refers to population migration occurring between Local Authorities within the UK and the outcome is shown for Local Authorities in England, including the results of migration to and from the rest of the UK. Migration between the same Rural-Urban Classification group will have no net effect on the population for that class and is excluded.

As the analysis is using data for Local Authority areas, it does not distinguish the type of settlement a migrant has moved to. So, in the case of migration to an authority classed as a Predominantly Rural area this could be migration to an urban settlement within that authority. Similarly, migration to an authority classed as a Predominantly Urban area could be migration to a rural settlement within that Predominantly Urban area.

The latest migration analysis is for the year to June 30th 2020 so it is mostly for the period prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Figure D-1 shows the internal migration trends from 2004/5 to 2019/20.

Figure D-1: Internal migration trends by Rural-Urban Classification in England, 2004/5 to 2019/20
Dashed line highlights the introduction of the 2011-based Rural-Urban Classification (RUC11)

Between 2004/05 and 2008/09 the general trend for internal migration in England was for net migration to Predominantly Rural areas and net migration from Predominantly Urban areas, although the extent of net migration to Predominantly Rural areas was falling.

Since 2008/09 there has been an increase in the rate of net migration to Predominantly Rural areas. Net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas in 2019/20 increased the Predominantly Rural population by 0.8%, compared with a 0.4% increase in 2010/11. Net outward migration from Predominantly Urban areas in 2019/20 reduced the Predominantly Urban population by 0.4%, compared with a 0.2% reduction in 2010/11.

Notes:

- The 2001 Rural-Urban Classification (RUC01) for Local Authorities has been applied to all data up to 2009/10. Data for 2010/11 has been classified using both RUC01 and RUC11 to show the comparison. From 2011/12 onwards the RUC11 for Local Authorities has been applied.

- In Figure D-1, "Predominantly Urban (e)" represents the Predominantly Urban areas of England outside of London.

Short-term internal migration trends

For 2019/20 in Predominantly Rural areas there was net internal migration inwards of 97,500 people. Within that, Largely Rural areas saw net internal migration inwards of 53,600 people and Mainly Rural areas saw net internal migration inwards of 43,900 in 2019/20 (which would include migration between these two categories).

In contrast, for Predominantly Urban areas there was net internal migration outwards of 149,100. This included net internal migration outwards from London which in total was 101,400 though this includes to other Predominantly Urban areas.

Table D-1 provides a matrix of the internal (within UK) migration movements between the different classes of authority in 2019/20.

Table D-1: Internal (within UK) migration between different classes of authority, 2019/20
Excludes migration within the same class of authority, denoted by '-'.

Outward	Inward					(thousands)
	Predominantly Rural	Urban with Significant Rural	Predominantly Urban	Rest of the UK	Total outwards	Net migration
Predominantly Rural	-	64.9	240.8	23.8	329.4	97.5
Urban with Significant Rural	81.1	-	184.1	16.6	281.9	31.3
Predominantly Urban	325.4	235.4	-	70.5	631.3	-149.1
Rest of the UK	20.4	12.9	57.4	-	90.7	20.3
Total inwards	426.9	313.2	482.2	110.9	-	0.0

Table D-2 shows that in 2019/20, net migration from Urban with Significant Rural areas to Predominantly Rural areas was around 16,300 people (81,100 inwards less 64,900 outwards). Table D-3 shows that Predominantly Rural areas saw net migration from Predominantly Urban areas of 84,600 people (325,400 inwards less 240,800 outwards).

There was a net outward migration from Predominantly Rural areas to the rest of the UK of 3,400 people, and from Predominantly Urban areas to the rest of the UK of 13,200 people.

Table D-2: Net internal (within UK) migration between Predominantly Rural areas and other classes of authority in England, 2019/20

Net migration between Predominantly Rural areas and…	(thousands)
Urban with Significant Rural areas	16.3
Predominantly Urban areas	84.6
Rest of the UK	-3.4
Total net migration for Predominantly Rural areas	**97.5**

Table D-3: Net internal (within UK) migration between Predominantly Urban areas and other classes of authority in England, 2019/20

| Net migration between Predominantly Urban areas and…	(thousands)
Predominantly Rural	-84.6
Urban with Significant Rural	-51.3
Rest of the UK	-13.2
Total net migration for Predominantly Urban areas	**-149.1**

Internal Migration by age

For some years there has been net internal migration (within the UK) inwards to Predominantly Rural areas. This has been the case across all age bands except for 17 to 20-year olds. In 2019/20 within the overall net internal migration to Predominantly Rural areas of 97,500, there was net internal migration outwards of 17 to 20 years olds of 34,100.

Net outward migration of 17 to 20-year olds can be anticipated as these are the ages when students are most likely to move from home for higher education, with the likelihood that higher education establishments will be mostly found in the more Urban areas.

Figure D-2 breaks the migration patterns down to equal 5-year age bands; in 2019/20 there was net outward migration for 15 to 19-year olds from Predominantly Rural areas of 25,400 which would include students moving elsewhere for higher education.

Figure D-2: Net internal (within the UK) migration for Predominantly Rural and Predominantly Urban areas, by age band, mid-year 2020, England
The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the bars (besides age band 15-19, which presents the opposite ordering to the legend)

29
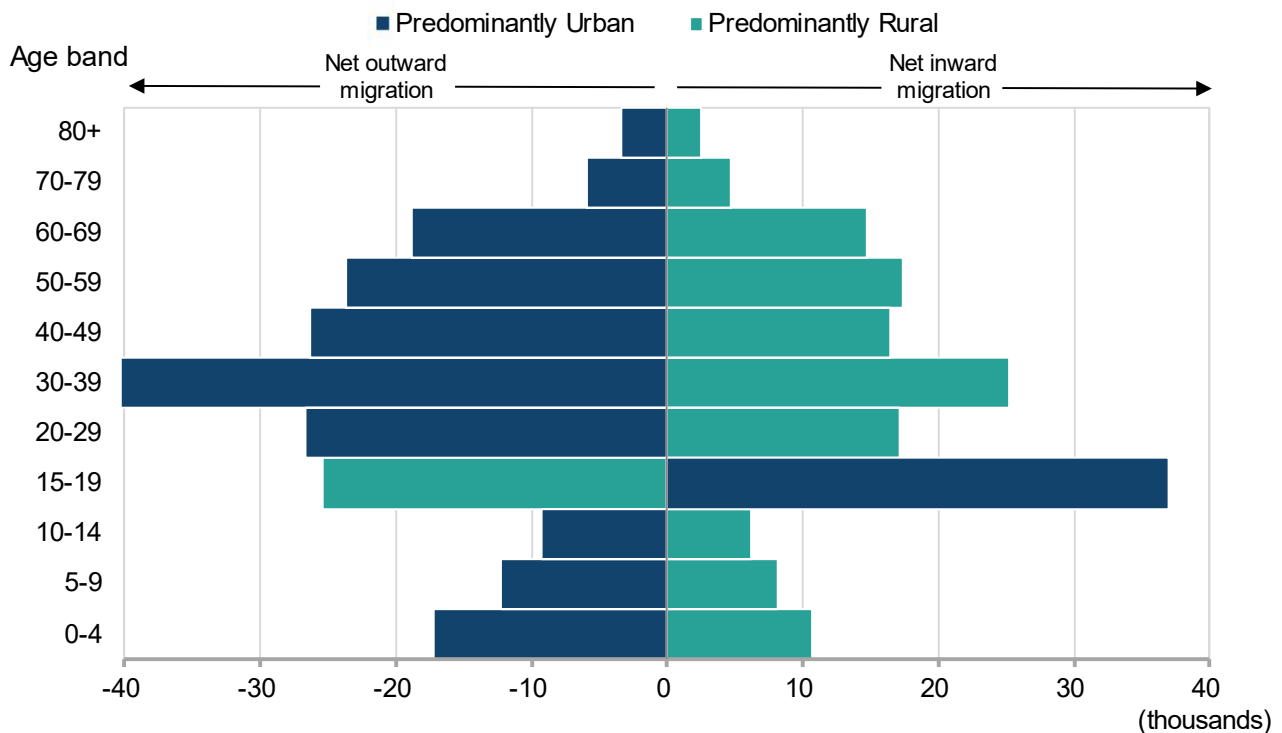
For the 20 to 24-year old age bracket the pattern of movement reverts to net inward migration of 9,600 to Predominantly Rural areas. There was net inward migration for 25 to 29-year olds of around 7,500.

The largest net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas for adults occurred for 30 to 34-year olds (13,000 people) and 35 to 39-year olds (12,300 people). Net inward migration for the age bands from 40 to 44-year olds - 65 to 69-year olds, was between 6,100 and 9,100 people for each five-year age band.

Migration occurred between Predominantly Rural areas and Urban with Significant Rural areas and the rest of the UK, but the largest net inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas was from Predominantly Urban areas. Not surprisingly, the opposite migration patterns were therefore seen for Predominantly Urban areas. Indeed, for most age bands the equivalent opposite net migration was greater, reflecting migration also occurring between Predominantly Urban areas and Urban with Significant Rural areas and the rest of the UK.

The pattern of inward migration to Predominantly Rural areas has been consistent from at least 2011 onwards (the earliest year currently analysed by age band), as shown in Figure D-3.

Figure D-3: Net internal migration (within UK) to Predominantly Rural areas by age bands, mid-year 2011 to mid-year 2020, England
The legend is presented in the same order and orientation as the stacks in the columns for inward migration. The line crossing over the columns represents total net migration.
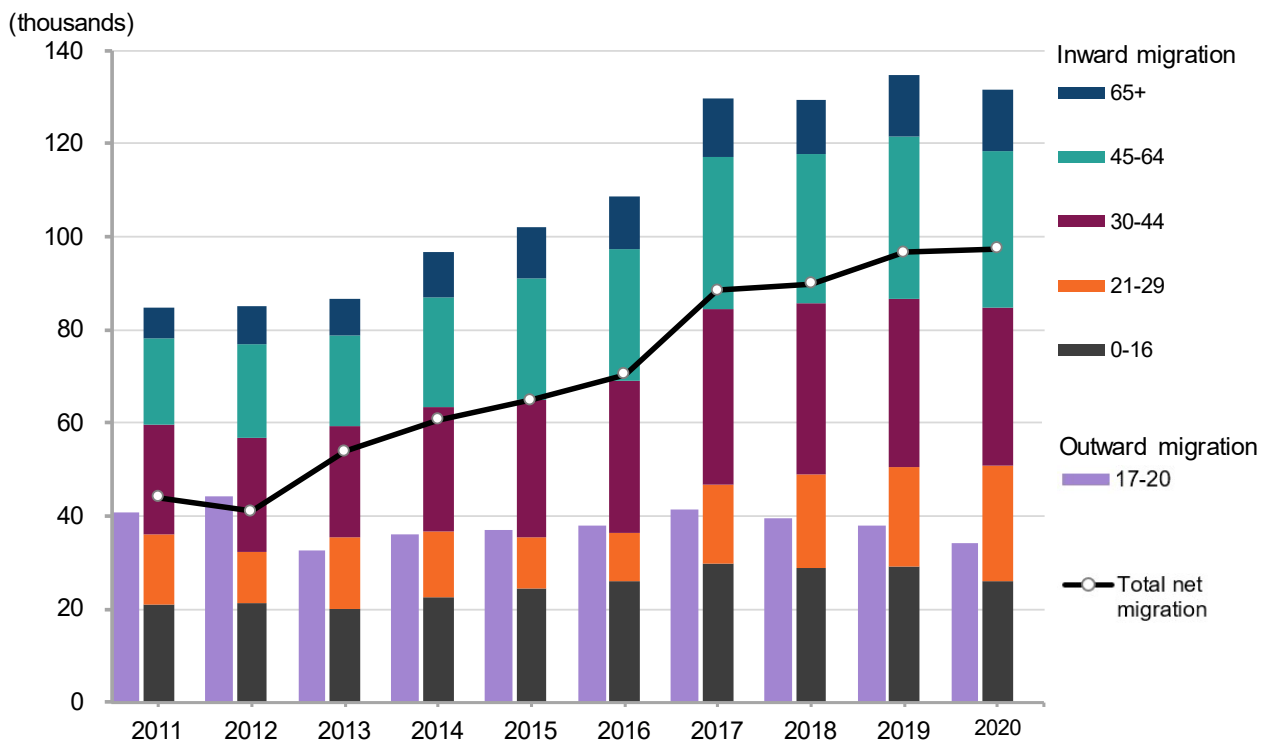
Notes:

- The category for people aged 17-20 years is plotted separately in Figure D-4 as this was the only group to show net outward migration (moving out of Predominantly Rural areas rather than into them); the bar showing migration for 17 to 20-year olds is plotted to the left of the bar showing migration of every other age group for each year.
- The line of total net migration was calculated using the net migration of each age band, where figures for 17 to 20-year olds were taken as negative, and every other age band was positive.

Internal Migration explanatory notes

- **Note D-1**

Data in Figure D-1 is expressed in a table of internal migration figures broken down by detailed Local Authority Rural-Urban Classification covering 2004/05 to 2019/20, available in the population supplementary data tables.

- **Note D-2**

Data in Figure D-3 and Figure D-4 is expressed in a table of internal migration figures for Rural areas broken down by broad age bands covering 2011 to 2020, available in the population supplementary data tables. A table using more detailed age bands is also available broken down by broad Local Authority Rural-Urban Classification for 2020.

- **Note D-3**

Internal migration is defined as residential moves between Local Authorities. Moves within a single Local Authority are excluded, as are international moves into or out of the UK. Further information on the data sources and methods, and their limitations, is available via the ONS internal migration methodology webpage (www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/specific/population-and-migration/internal-migration-methodology/index.html).

- **Note D-4**

Data source: Defra analysis of ONS data - Annual internal Migration within the United Kingdom to June 2020.
www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/migrationwithintheuk/datasets/internalmigrationbyoriginanddestinationlocalauthoritiessexandsingleyearofagedetailedestimatesdataset

E. Local Authority population data

12 million people lived in a Predominantly Rural Local Authority in 2020; this is 21.3% of the England population.

Summary

We provide Local Authority population figures because statistics are often compiled at Local Authority level. Local Authority level Rural and Urban populations are different to the population figures calculated using the more detailed Rural-Urban classification because Local Authority ones are based on whole Local Authorities. So, an Authority that is classed as Predominantly Rural will have the whole population counted as being in a Predominantly Rural area, even those living in an urban settlement within that Authority; while all those living in a rural area but within an Authority classed as Urban with Significant Rural or Predominantly Urban will not be counted in the Predominantly Rural figure.

In 2020, 12.0 million people lived in a Predominantly Rural area (21.3% of the England population). 37.4 million people lived in Predominantly Urban areas in 2020 (66% of the England population). Of those living in Predominantly Rural areas, 4.7 million people live in Mainly Rural areas and 7.3 million people lived in Largely Rural areas. Over the period 2001 to 2015, there has been a large decrease in the population aged 30 to 39 in Predominantly Rural areas accompanied by large increases for those aged 60 and above.

Population at Local Authority level

Some earlier sections show population using granular data at the level of LSOAs, whereas this section uses data at the level of Local Authorities. See Note E-1 for more detail regarding the use of Local Authority data.

In 2020, three times as many people lived in Predominantly Urban areas than in Predominantly Rural areas of England. However, it should be noted that a large proportion of this will be localised in London, where the 2020 population was 9.0 million (15.9% of England's population). The population of Predominantly Urban areas outside of London was recorded as 28.3 million in 2020, as seen in Table E-1.

Table E-2 shows the mid-year population estimates for Local Authority Districts and Unitary Authorities; in 2020, 12.0 million people lived in a Predominantly Rural area: 21.3% of the England population. This figure comprises the estimated population in Mainly Rural areas (4.7 million people, or 8.4% of England's population) and in Largely Rural areas (7.3 million people, or 12.9%). Nearly two-thirds of the Predominantly Rural population of England resided in Largely Rural areas in 2020.

37.4 million people lived in Predominantly Urban areas of England in 2020; this figure comprises the estimated population in Urban City and Town areas (14.8 million, or 26.2% of England's population), Urban Minor Conurbation areas (2.2 million, or 3.9%), and Urban Major Conurbations (20.3 million, or 35.9%). More than half of the Urban population of England resided in Urban Major Conurbation areas in 2020. 7.2 million people lived in Urban with Significant Rural areas in 2020; this is about 12.7% of the total population of England, and is almost the same as the total population of Largely Rural areas.

Table E-1: 2020 Local Authority District mid-year population estimates in Urban areas
Data is rounded to the nearest 1,000 people.

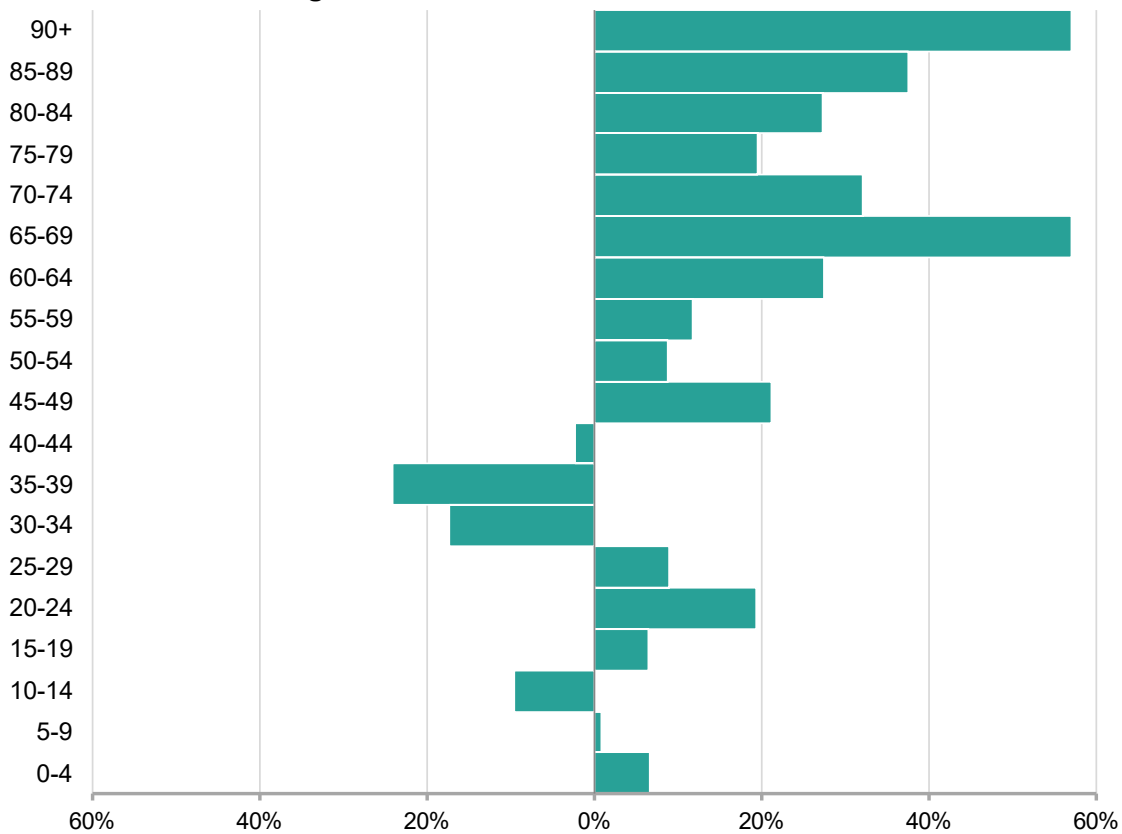|	Population	Proportion (%)
Predominantly Urban (excluding London)	28,347,000	50.1
London	9,002,000	15.9
Predominantly Urban	**37,350,000**	**66.0**

Table E-2: 2020 Local Authority District mid-year population estimates by Rural-Urban Classification
Data is rounded to the nearest 1,000 people. Both halves of the table individually sum up to the England totals.

|	Population	Proportion (%)
Mainly Rural	4,729,000	8.4
Largely Rural	7,291,000	12.9
Urban with Significant Rural	7,181,000	12.7
Urban City and Town	14,836,000	26.2
Urban Minor Conurbation	2,229,000	3.9
Urban Major Conurbation	20,284,000	35.9
Predominantly Rural	12,019,000	21.3
Urban with Significant Rural	7,181,000	12.7
Predominantly Urban	37,350,000	66.0
England	**56,550,000**	**100.0**

Longer-term comparisons highlight shifts in the age structure of the population of England; comparisons have been made between 2001 and 2015 to show this. Figure E-1 shows how Predominantly Rural areas have seen proportionately large falls in the population aged 30 to 39 and larger proportional increases in the older population between 2001 and 2015. The population aged 65 and over increased by 37% in Predominantly Rural areas between 2001 and 2015; across the same time period, Predominantly Rural areas have seen an increase of 7% in infants (0 to 4-year olds). Figure E-2 shows that, between 2001 and 2015, the population of people aged 65 and over increased by 17% in Predominantly Urban areas; there was a 22% increase in the population proportion of infants (0 to 4-year olds).

Figure E-1: Percentage change in population in Predominantly Rural areas by age bands between 2001 and 2015, England

For individual Local Authorities the proportion of the population aged 65 and over can vary by more than 25 percentage points. North Norfolk is the only Local Authority where more than a third of the population was aged 65 and over in 2020. Of the 49 Local Authorities where more than a quarter of the population were aged 65 and over, 40 of them were Predominantly Rural Local Authorities and 5 were Predominantly Urban. The Local Authorities with the smallest proportions of the population aged 65 and over in 2020 were all Predominantly Urban Local Authorities. Of the 10 Local Authorities where less than one in ten people was aged 65 and over 9 were in London and the final member of the group was Manchester.

Figure E-2: Percentage change in population in Predominantly Urban areas by age bands between 2001 and 2015, England
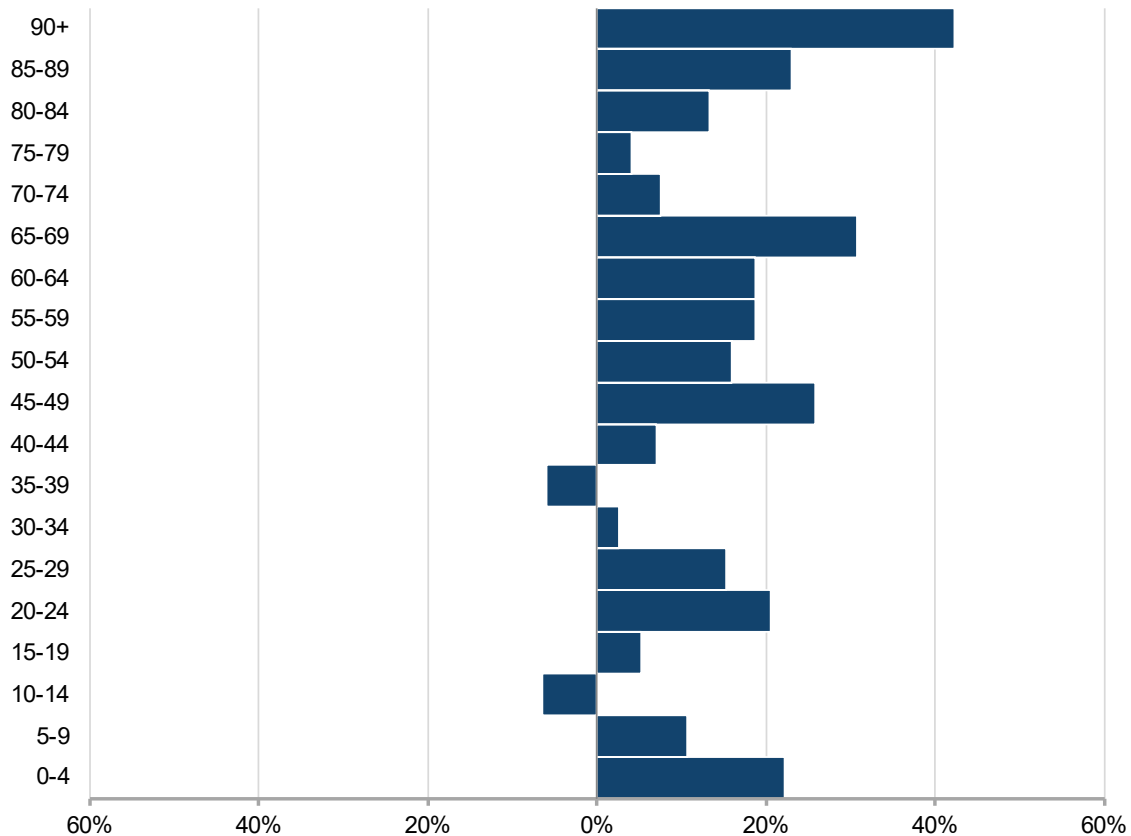
Local Authority population data explanatory notes

- **Note E-1**

Often statistics are compiled at Local Authority level, in which case the Rural-Urban Classification for Local Authorities is used. This is different from looking at the population using the more detailed Rural-Urban classification as it is based on whole Local Authorities. The whole population in an authority will be attributed to the class assigned to the authority. So, an authority that is Mainly Rural or Largely Rural and hence classed as Predominantly Rural will have the whole population counted as being in a Predominantly Rural area, even those living in an urban settlement within that authority, while all those living in a rural area but within an authority classed as Urban with Significant Rural or Predominantly Urban will not be counted in the Predominantly Rural figure.

- **Note E-2**

Further tables, including the data represented in Table E-1, broken down by detailed Local Authority Rural-Urban Classification covering 2011 to 2020 and broken down by age band for 2020 are available in the population supplementary data tables.

- **Note E-3**

A table broken down by broad Local Authority Rural-Urban Classification and age bands for both 2001 and 2015 and the change between the two years is available in the population supplementary data tables.

Appendix 1: The 8 thematic reports that make up the Statistical Digest of Rural England (and the topics included within them)

1. Population

A. Population level and change
B. Population age profile
C. Ethnicity
D. Internal migration
E. Local Authority population data

2. Housing

A. Housing stock: age and type
B. Housing stock: additions
C. House prices
D. Housing stock: affordable housing
E. Second and empty homes
F. Homelessness
G. Land use change for housing

3. Health and Wellbeing

A. Life expectancy
B. Wellbeing
C. NHS Dentistry provision
D. General Practices
E. Childcare provision
F. Loneliness
G. Volunteering and charity

4. Communities and Households

A. Deprivation
B. Poverty due to low income
C. Household expenditure
D. Police recorded crime and outcomes
E. Crime surveys: local police and businesses
F. Feelings about the local neighbourhood

5. Connectivity and Accessibility

A. Broadband
B. Travel behaviours
C. Access to personal transport
D. Access to services
E. Home working

6. Education, Qualifications and Training

A. Secondary education attainment
B. School inspections
C. Free school meals
D. Alternative and specialist education provision
E. Higher education
F. Apprenticeships and on-the-job training
G. Workforce education level

7. Rural Economic Bulletin

A. Employment
B. Earnings
C. Redundancies
D. Claimant count - Jobseeker's Allowance
E. Output and productivity measured by Gross Value Added (GVA)
F. Businesses - status, structure and composition
G. Innovation and investment

8. Energy

A. Fuel poverty
B. Energy Performance Certificates: average Energy Efficiency Score
C. Energy Performance Certificates: achieving energy efficiency category C
D. Energy Costs
E. Energy Consumption

Each of the 8 themes also has their own set of supplementary data tables that include the larger source data that could not be included in the presented document. The chapter headings above are hyperlinked to the home page for that specific digest theme. The supplementary tables can be accessed from these home pages.

There is a further document including the individual Local Authority data tables, which have been separated for ease of use.

Appendix 2: Defining Rural areas

Wherever possible, the Rural-Urban Classification is used to distinguish Rural and Urban areas. The Classification defines areas as Rural if they fall outside of settlements with more than 10,000 resident population.

Census Output Areas are the smallest areas for which data are available from Censuses. These Census Output Areas are assigned to one of four Urban or six Rural categories (Figure X-1) based on dwelling densities. Those described as "in a sparse setting" reflect where the wider area is sparsely populated (again based on dwelling densities). From Census Output Areas, other small area geographies can be classified based on how they map to Census Output Areas (such as Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs), Wards, and postcodes – Note 1).

Figure X-1: Classifying Rural and Urban areas for small geographical areas
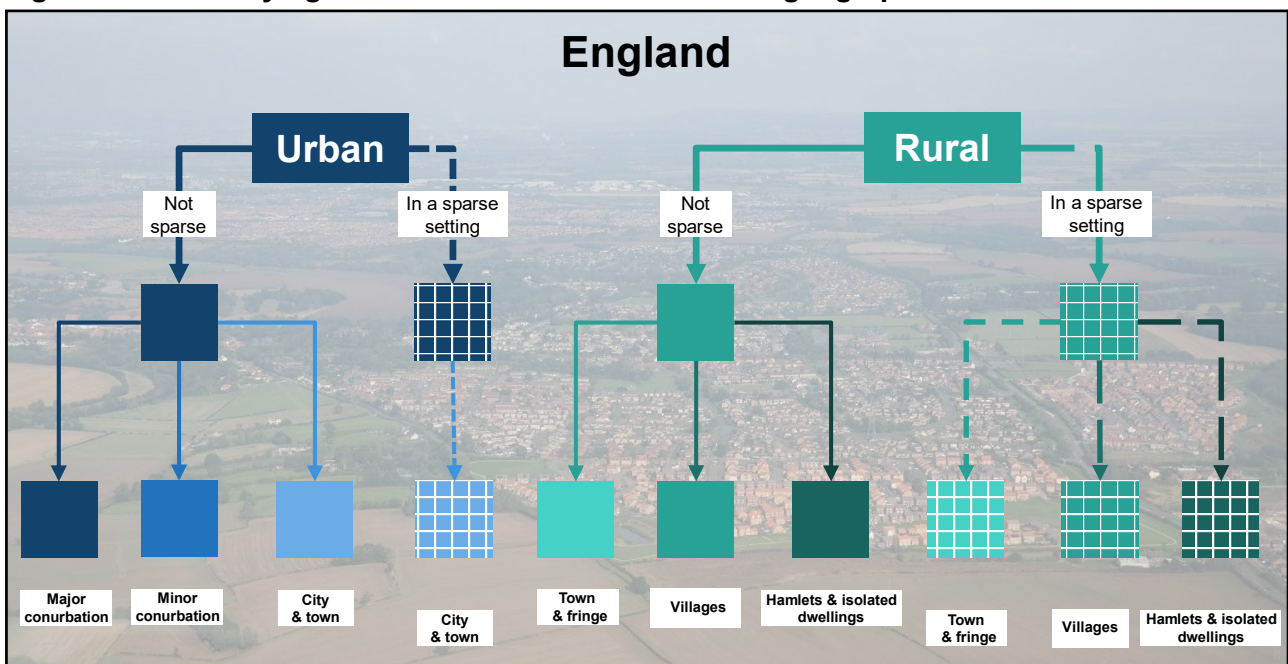
A map showing the distribution of the Rural and Urban Census Output Areas is shown in Figure X-2.

When data are not available at a small geographical scale, it may be possible to apply the Rural-Urban Local Authority Classification or a similar classification for other larger geographies. This classification categorises districts and unitary authorities on a six-point scale from Rural to Urban. It is underpinned by Rural and Urban populations as defined by the Census Output Area Classification. A map of the geographical distribution of the Rural and Urban Local Authorities is shown in Figure X-3.

However, the Local Authority Classification also considers some Urban areas as Hub Towns (with populations of between 10,000 and 30,000). These Hub Towns have met statistical criteria (based on dwelling and business premise densities) to be considered hubs for services and businesses for a wider rural hinterland and their populations are therefore classified as effectively Rural for the purposes of determining the classification of the authority.

Figure X-2: Map of the 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Census Output Areas in England
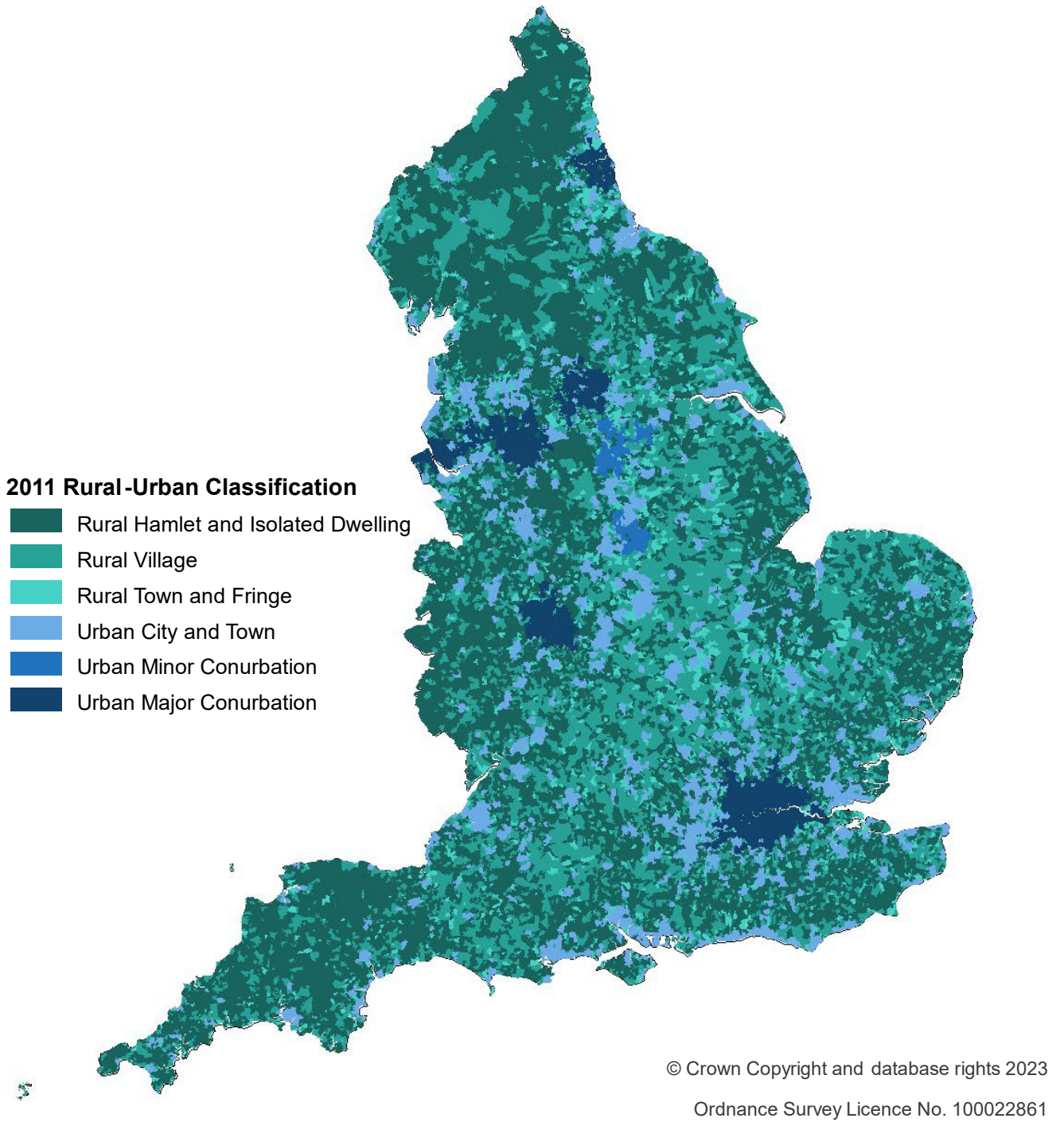

2011 Rural-Urban Classification

- Rural Hamlet and Isolated Dwelling
- Rural Village
- Rural Town and Fringe
- Urban City and Town
- Urban Minor Conurbation
- Urban Major Conurbation

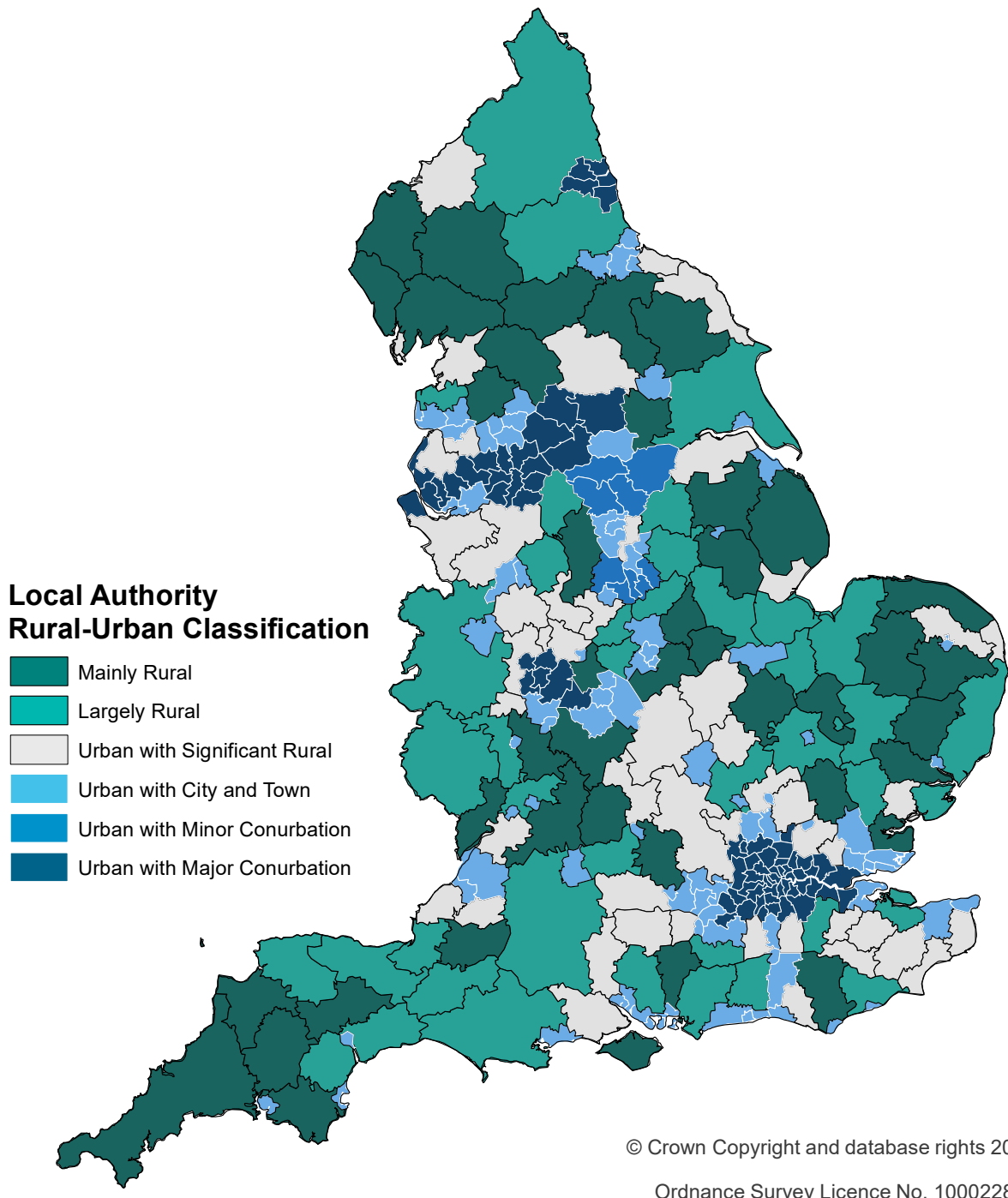© Crown Copyright and database rights 2023

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Figure X-3: Map of the 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Local Authority Districts and Unitary Authorities in England

Local Authority Rural-Urban Classification

- Mainly Rural
- Largely Rural
- Urban with Significant Rural
- Urban with City and Town
- Urban with Minor Conurbation
- Urban with Major Conurbation

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Under the classification, which is shown in Figure X-4, each Local Authority is assigned to one of six categories on the basis of the percentage of the total resident population accounted for by the combined Rural and Hub Town components of its population and its 'conurbation context'. The Local Authority Classification categories are frequently aggregated to 'Predominantly Rural', 'Urban with Significant Rural' and 'Predominantly Urban' as shown on Figure X-4.

Figure X-4: 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Local Authority Districts and Unitary Authorities in England
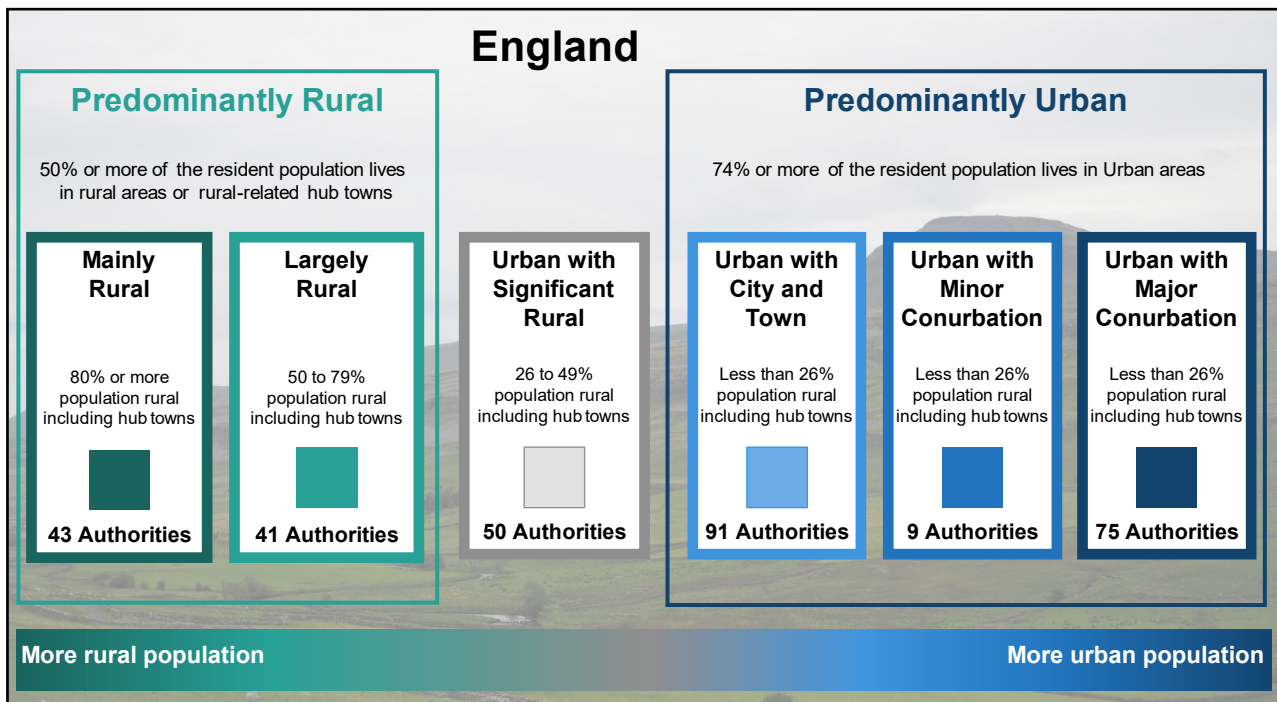
It should be noted that the Local Authority Rural-Urban Classification is based on populations and settlement patterns, not on how much countryside there is. Authorities classified as Urban may have wide areas of countryside and may have sizeable Rural populations. The classification has been made according to the proportions of the population residing in Urban settlements and outside Urban settlements. More information on the classifications can be found at: The Rural-Urban Definition.

Defining Rural areas explanatory notes

- **Note 1:** Defining Super Output Areas and Wards

Census Output Areas (OAs) were created for publication of the results of the recent Censuses. They cover around 125 households. In practice few datasets are produced at OA level. However, other larger geographies can be built up from OAs. These include *Lower Layer Super Output Areas* (LSOAs) which typically contain 5 OAs, so contain approximately 625 households or a population of approximately 1,500 and a minimum 1,000. Their Rural-Urban Classification is based on the majority category of OAs they contain. Some other geographies, for example postcodes are classified based on the location of their central point and the classification of respective OA.

- **Note 2:** Accessibility of Figure X-2

We accept that this map might not be accessible for all users, but it is difficult to develop a map containing six colours that will provide enough contrast between all colours to enable every user to see them, especially when the shaded areas are small. Separate maps (showing only three levels of shading) for Rural and Urban areas are available on request from: rural.statistics@defra.gov.uk