

1a RURAL DEFINITIONS: GENERAL SURVEY

The Development of Rural Definitions in UK

(1) Scott Committee on Land Utilisation in Rural Areas (1942)

A "compact" grouping over 1,500 people was a town. Villages were classified according to structure, layout, plan & economic purpose. [A. Russell "The Country Parish" (1986) p.4]

In trying to create "village" as a meaningful category - quantitatively and qualitatively - it was necessary to distinguish "village" from "town" and *other types of rural settlement*. E.g.

A.W. Ashby (1944) gave the following definitions:

A village is a collection of houses, larger than a hamlet, in a country district, usually an ancient district, containing a church, with one or more service institutions such as a school or shop, and forming the residential nucleus of the parish. A hamlet is 'a small group of houses in a country district, containing only a small proportion of the local population, and meagrely supplied, if at all, with service institutions'.

Quoted in Gorringe "Theology of the Built Environment" (2002) p. 125

Thompson (1954) contrasted village & hamlet in terms of social complexity as well as size: *'The village was a little world in itself; the hamlet was but a segment.'*

Quoted in Gorringe "Theology of the Built Environment" (2002) p. 125

(2) Professor Dudley Stamp (WW2 period) A. Russell "The Country Parish" (1986) p.4

A population of 500 was the *minimum* size for a village

(3) R.J. Green (between 1942 and 1977) A. Russell "The Country Parish" (1986) p.4

A population of 5,000 marked the watershed between rural & urban

(4) Unknown Author (1977) A. Russell "The Country Parish" (1986) p.4

Rural populations were defined as those living outside the radius of 5 miles from an urban centre of 20,000 and 10 miles from a metropolitan centre of 100,000. By this estimate, the rural population (of England?) in 1977 totalled 6.4 million.

(5) Unknown Author (post-1977) A. Russell "The Country Parish" (1986) p.4

Statistical thresholds varied enormously, with some authorities choosing population figures as high as 12,000 as the threshold between a town and a village.

There were, and are, many villages that are not 'simply' rural, e.g. fishing, mining, quarrying & mill villages; in fact numerous villages were based around one local industry. Even rural villages were never entirely non-industrial, but the advent of mass production & mechanised agriculture destroyed many of the "industrial" trades to be found in rural villages. But even though size, and degree of self-sufficiency, is (or was) an important part of defining a village, it misses a key point ... the fact that villages aren't socially & culturally homogenous. Villages differ from each other, and within a single village there

isn't homogeneity. At least some of these factors are generally taken into account in more recent definitions of 'rural'.

(6) The so-called "Tarling definition" (1993)

This was a series of working definitions provided for the Rural Development Commission (Tarling et.al. "The Economy of Rural England", RDC, 1993), and which was widely used by both local & national government:

- Metropolitan Districts
- Urban Districts
- Coalfield Areas (both current & former)
- Accessible Rural
- Remote Rural

The Countryside Agency (and the Rural Development Commission from which it was created) took the two 'rural' categories identified in this study and used them to refine their designation of 'rural' England at the level of Local & Unitary Authorities.

(7) Rural "Lifestyle" definitions (1994, but based on earlier work, in 1986)

Research exclusively related to rural areas in England was carried out & published (Clope et.al. "Lifestyles in Rural England" RDC, 1994). More detailed categories than before were used, which were identified specifically in relation to rural areas. The original work of 1986 was refined in the 1994 publication, in providing a 'comprehensive rurality measurement', the purpose of which was to provide a 'scale of rurality' by which to classify (rural) district councils. The earlier - 1986 - study was correlated with information obtained from both 1971 & 1981 national censuses. All the areas chosen for the 2nd study - published in 1994 - fell within the Rural Development Commission's "Rural Development Areas" and were correlated with preliminary results from the 1991 Census.

Altogether 16 variables were used in the classification scheme. These related to population directly (e.g. levels, density, distance from large urban centres) and to more social factors (e.g. local amenities). The result was a fourfold classification of rurality:

- Extreme rural
- Intermediate rural
- Intermediate non-rural
- Extreme non-rural (close urban shadow)

Helpful though such a classification may have been, it failed to provide useful descriptive tools at the most specific levels of community; it was only applicable at district level (for which it was designed) being based on census figures & information *at the local district level*.

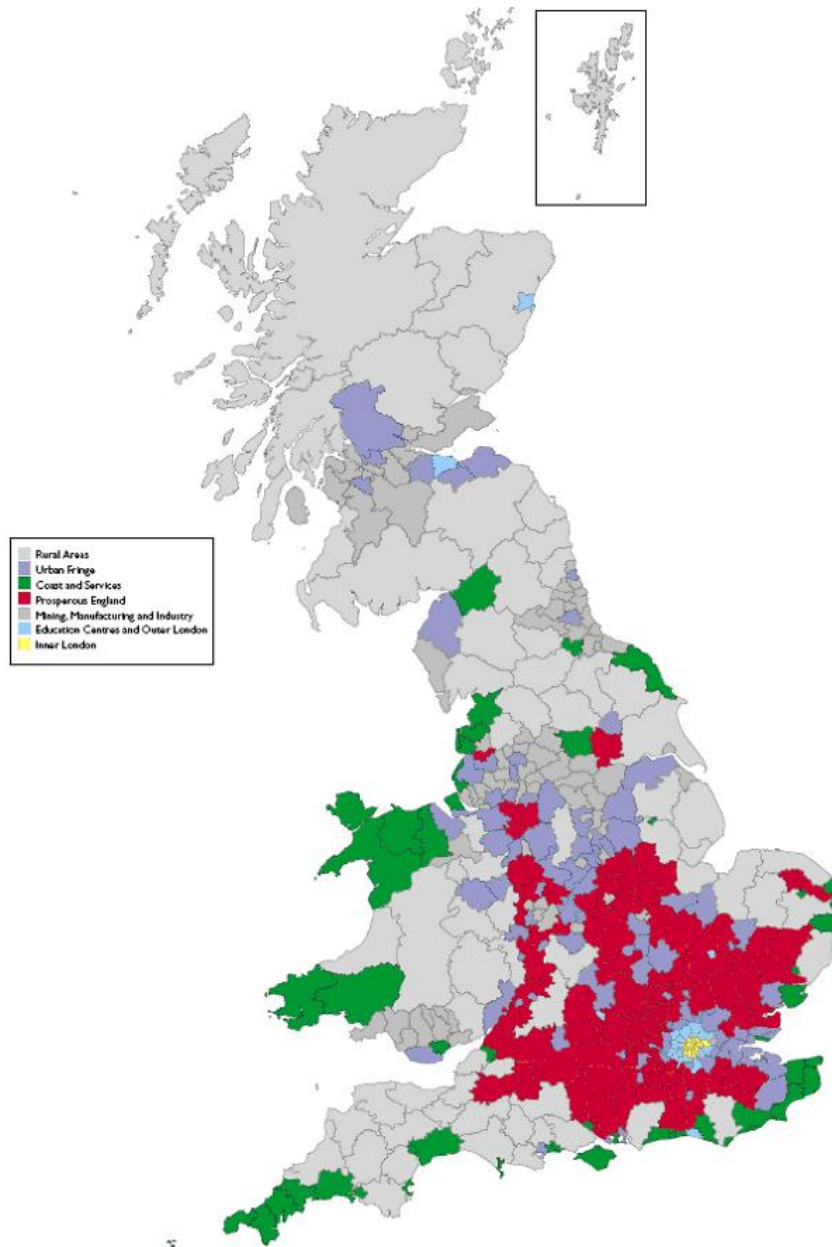
(8) Local & Health Authority Categorisation (Office of National Statistics, 1999)

In "The ONS classification of Local & Health Authorities of GB: revised for Authorities 1999" the pre-existing structure of Local Authorities (358 in England) was overlaid with a classification that produced a detailed list of categories (based on combined socio-economic & geo-political considerations) into which all Local Authorities could be placed. The results were 15 'groups' (e.g. "rural amenity", "most prosperous" & "manufacturing centres") which themselves could be allocated into the following 7 general 'families':

- Rural Areas
- Urban Fringe
- Coast & Services
- Prosperous England
- Mining, Manufacturing & Industry (or, simply, 'Industry')
- Education Centres & Outer London
- Inner London

Once again, this had its benefits, but still worked only with local authority-sized units, or larger. Also, contemporary alternative working definitions of 'rural' included areas - even whole local authorities - *not* designated 'rural' by the parameters of this set of definitions.

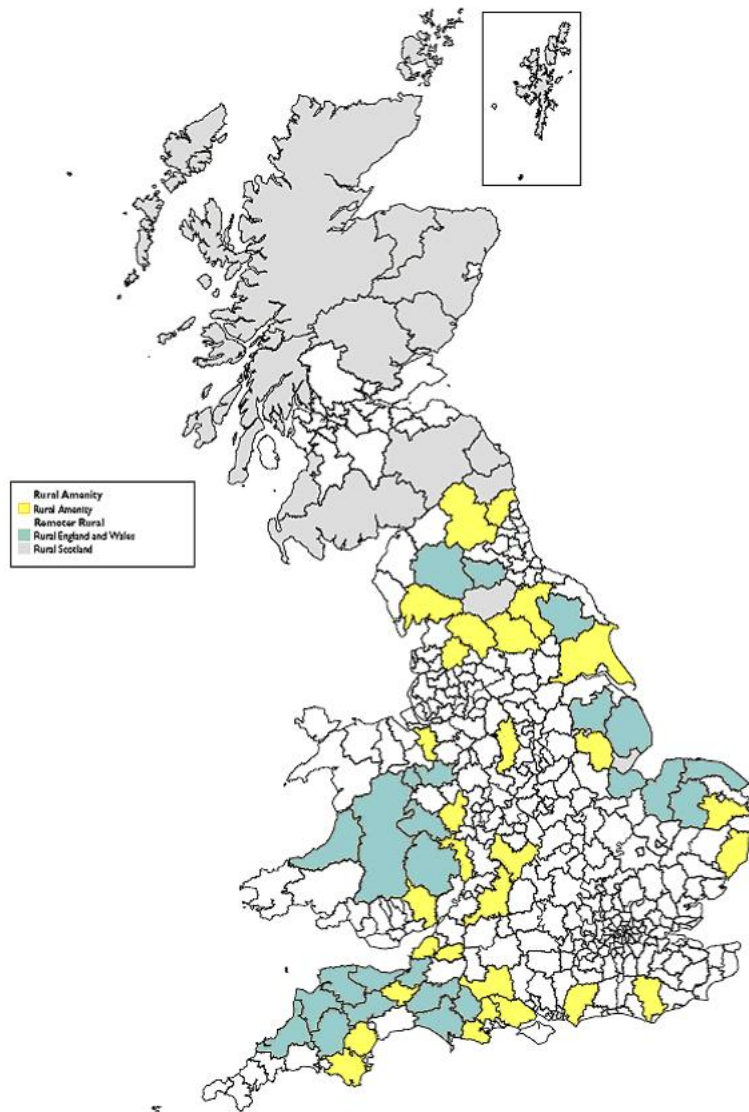
THE SEVEN "FAMILIES" OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS



From "The ONS Classification of Local & Health Authorities of Great Britain: revised for authorities in 1999" (ONS 1999)

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THE "RURAL FAMILY" OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS



From "The ONS Classification of Local & Health Authorities of Great Britain: revised for authorities in 1999" (ONS 1999)

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FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

What is the purpose behind defining 'rural'?
How is this relevant to contemporary government agencies like DEFRA?

(9) New "rural" definitions [CLICK HERE FOR](#) -> DEFRA "Rural Strategy 2004" Annex A
These have been introduced in an effort, amongst other things, to bring uniformity to the many agencies, research projects and publications that relate to rural England. They consider three basic criteria in identifying 'rurality':

- Settlement type specifically related to size
- Sparsity, or remoteness
- Function in terms of commercial properties within a given area

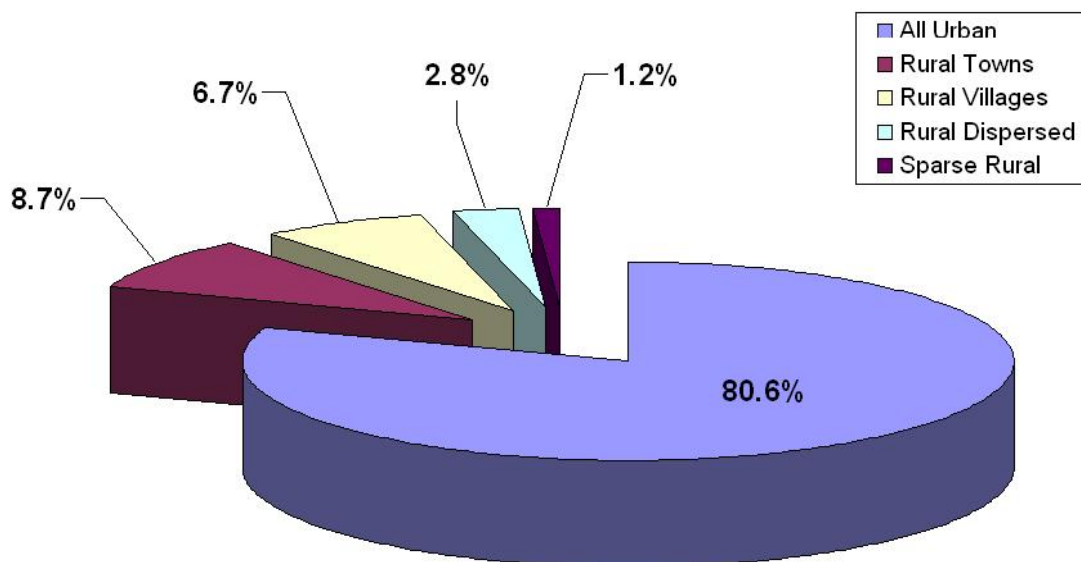
Some reports and research findings have now been published employing these new definitions, and "State of the Countryside 2005" will do so. [\[See "Addendum: August 2005"\]](#) The Office of National Statistics (ONS) is working to bring all national census data in line with these new definitions. The *full* definition gives an eightfold geopolitical classification:

| SPARSE | LESS SPARSE |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Urban | Urban |
| Small rural towns & fringe | Small rural towns & fringe |
| Rural villages | Rural villages |
| Dispersed rural settlements | Dispersed rural settlements |

In practice, the likely outcome will be division into a fivefold working classification:

- (1) Urban (i.e. combining sparse & less sparse urban areas)
- (2) Small rural towns & their fringes
- (3) Rural villages
- (4) Dispersed rural settlements
- (5) Sparse rural (i.e. combining all non-urban sparse areas)

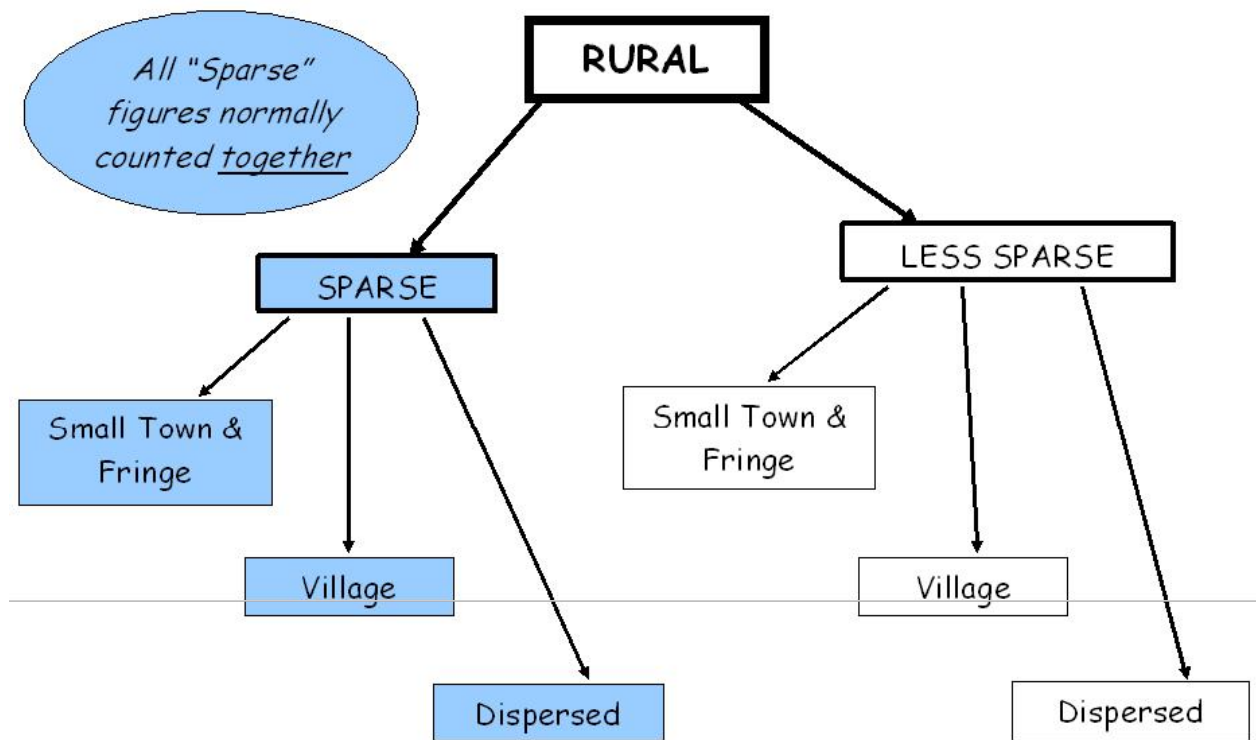
ENGLAND POPULATION 2001: ACCORDING TO NEW RURAL DEFINITIONS
 Data from Office of National Statistics website: 2001 Key Census Statistics (2004)



[CLICK HERE FOR](#) -> larger image

These new categories should affect government policy, especially as a new base for calculating & presenting rural statistics. Other agencies, NGOs & institutions should adopt this standard in the future.

BASIC STRUCTURE OF RURAL AREA CLASSIFICATION



[CLICK HERE](#) -> for larger image

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

Are there specific things that must be *included* in any description of 'rural'?
Are there any things that should be *excluded*?

[CLICK HERE](#) -> to return to the start of this section

[CLICK HERE](#) -> to move to next part of Unit 1a.

"New Government Rural Area Definitions & Classification"

[CLICK HERE](#) -> to return to breakdown of Unit 1a.