

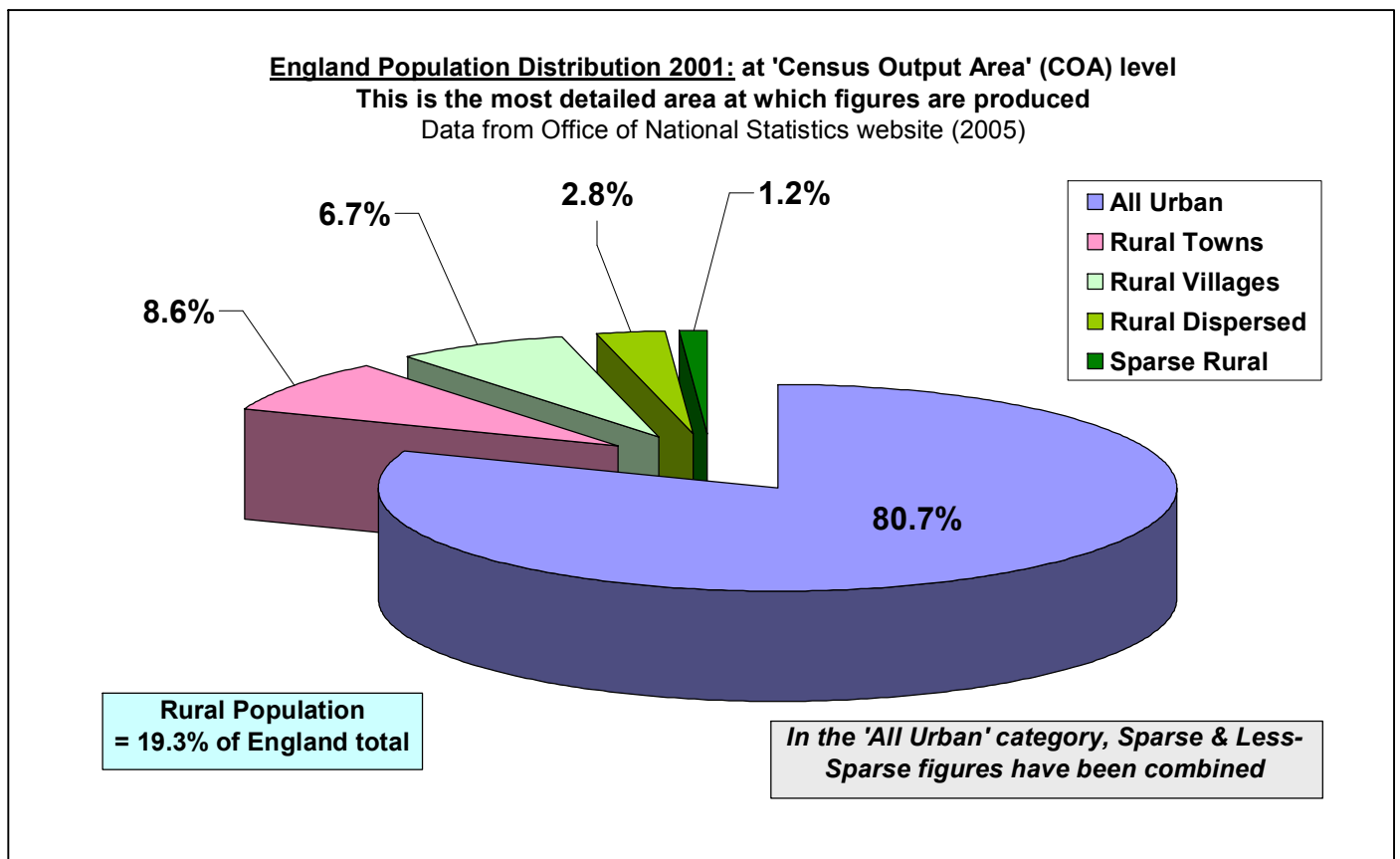
2 RURAL STATISTICS: A SUMMARY

2.03 Rural Definitions and Rural Numbers

As highlighted already, the actual size ascribed to the rural population of England will depend very much on what is considered to be 'rural'. The more communities & settlements included under this heading, the higher the effective rural population. This is not merely a matter of language, since the apparent size & distribution of England's rural population will have profound effects on government policies (local, regional & national), especially economic policies, and on the extent & effectiveness of the delivery of rural services.

There is no need to repeat previous details about rural definitions. Suffice to illustrate the issue by comparing two sets of figures:

- Up to and including "**The State of the Countryside 2004**", the Countryside Agency worked with rural definitions generating a rural population for England - based on the 2001 National Census - of *13.4 million* (or *28.5%* of total). This definition, using Local Authority categories, effectively included settlements of up to 25,000 people.
- In "**The State of the Countryside 2004**" the Countryside Agency indicated what the same 'population' would be (again using data from the 2001 National Census) based on the new government rural definitions: *9.5 million* people (or *19.4 %* of total). This definition, when applied at a Local Authority level, does not count settlements of over 10,000 - *including* the 207 'key/large market towns' that have significant rural 'character' and yet have populations of 10-30,000. (These were discussed in Unit 1.1 of this module.) [[CLICK HERE](#) -> for table of these settlements]

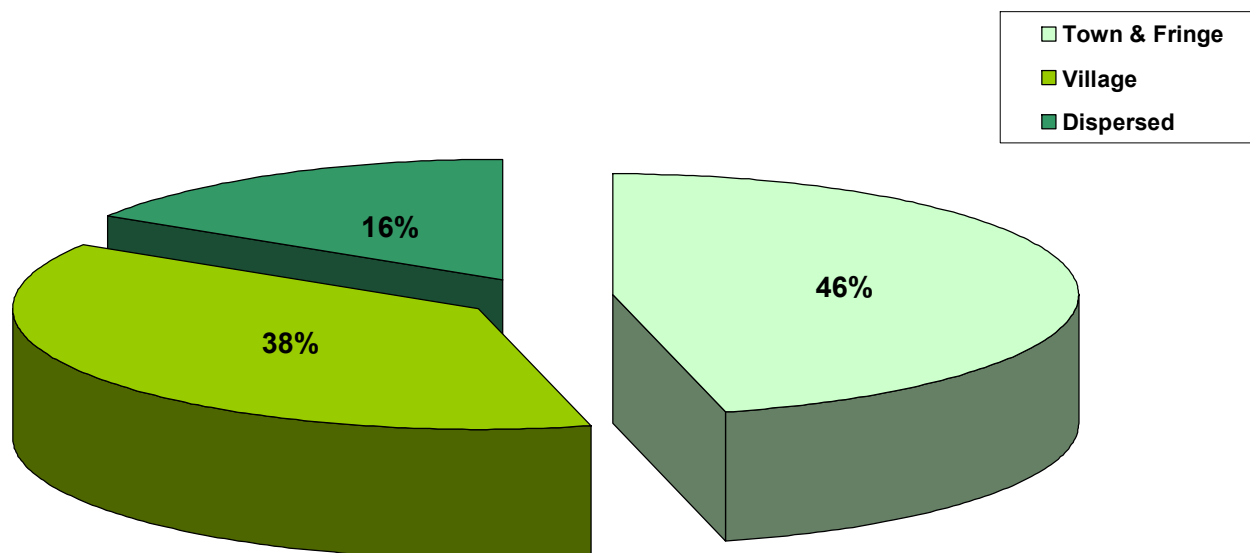


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This is a substantial difference - 30% removed from the rural population with one calculation! The primary reason for the difference lies with the new 'cut-off point' chosen for rural settlements, which has dropped to a population of 10,000. This can be seen quite easily from 2001 Census information, which reveals that the 'key/large market towns' have a total population of just over *3.7 million* (7.9% of the total population of England). This figure is very close to the difference (*3.9 million*) between the previous rural population (*13.4 million*) and the newly-defined rural population (*9.5 million*).

RURAL ENGLAND POPULATION PROFILE

data from Brunwin et.al. "Attitudes to Rural Disadvantage" (CRC, 2006)



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

Within the 9.5 million rural population of England, as can be seen from the chart above, nearly half (ca. *4.4 million*) live in the newly-defined "Town & Fringe" category while well over one third (ca. *3.6 million*) live in the "Village" category. The remainder (ca. *1.5 million*) live in the "Dispersed" category - hamlets and isolated settlements & dwellings.

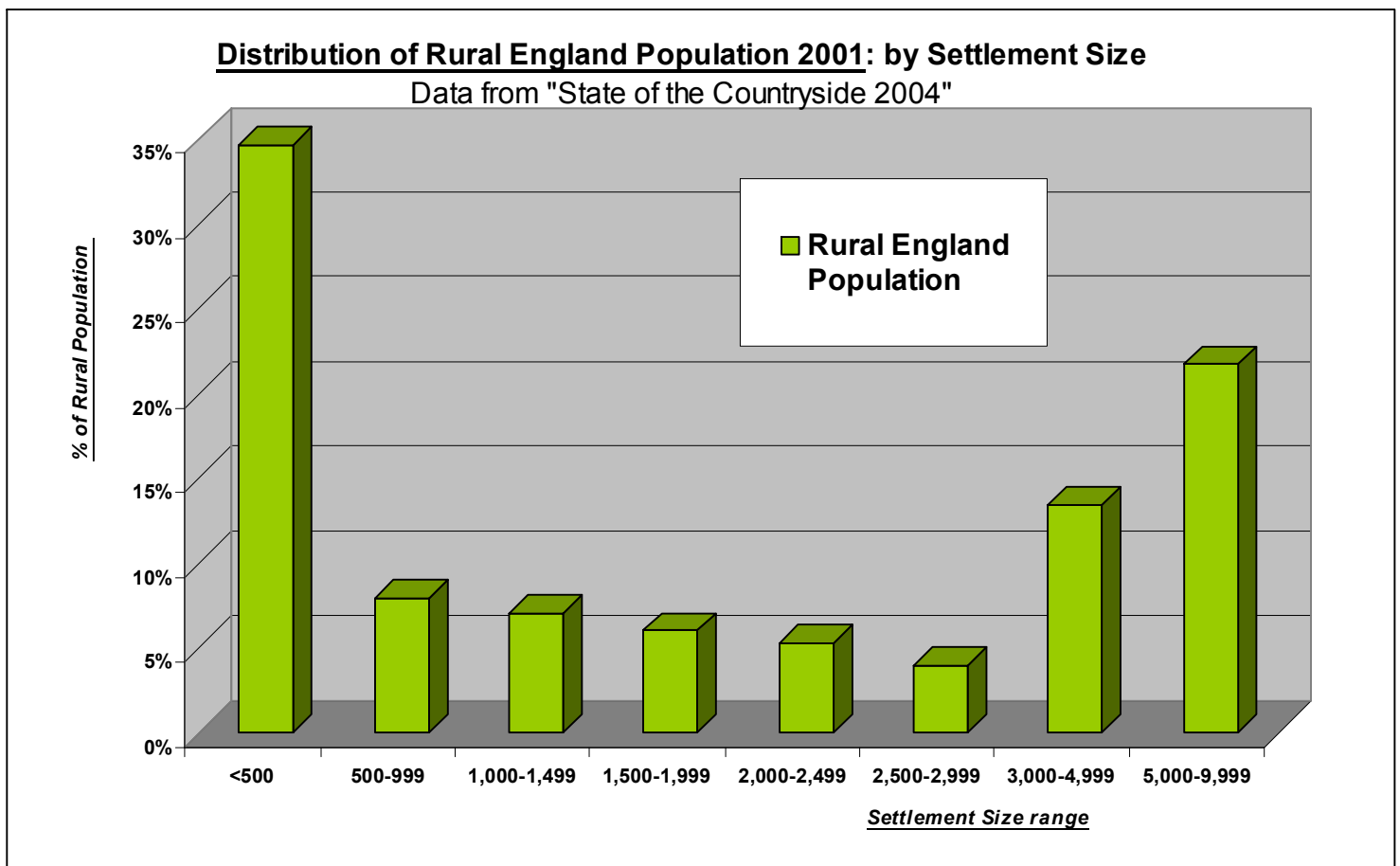
The figure of 19.4% for the proportion of the population residing in rural England, as newly-defined by the government, is also dependent upon the way in which the underlying 'census units' are combined. In the past, the *larger* the area chosen as a 'census unit' the *larger* the apparent rural population. The opposite is true with the new rural definition. The Office of National Statistics has provided a series of 'levels' at which population can be analysed. When combined with the figures from the 2001 National Census, we find the following rural populations 'generated' - in order of increasing 'census unit' size:

- **Census Output Area level** - rural population 19.3% [[CLICK HERE](#) -> for chart]
- **Super Output Area level** - rural population 18.9% [[CLICK HERE](#) -> for chart]
- **CAS Ward level** - rural population 18.5% [[CLICK HERE](#) -> for chart]

This is noted in certain government publications: *"It is important to note that analysing data at different spatial scales will yield different results. The official population of rural England, analysed at OA [Output Area] Level using Census 2001 data is 9.5 million."* ["Population & Migration: a State of the Countryside update" (CRC, 2007)]

In very general terms, we can also discover how the rural population is distributed. [Accurate local & regional figures are now available from the Office of National Statistics, based on the 2001 Census and employing the new rural definitions.] The population of England can be divided into 'slices' based upon the size of the settlement in which they are found. On this basis just over one-third of the rural population live in settlements of less than 500 people, while just over one-third live in settlements of between 3,000-10,000 inhabitants. As a result, the population of rural England is about evenly divided between the following categories:

- **Small villages & dispersed settlements** (less than 500 inhabitants)
- **Larger villages & smaller towns** (500-3000 inhabitants)
- **Market towns & larger rural centres** (3,000-10,000 inhabitants)



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

[CLICK HERE](#) -> for table of data underlying the chart

These figures (from SoC 2004) are only preliminary, based upon initial characterisation of the 2001 Census figures with the new rural definitions. But it does make it possible to designate a reasonably accurate 'rural-urban' divide by settlement size. From the data given above, all settlements with populations of less than 10,000 would be considered 'rural' and all those of 10,000 or more would be 'urban'. (This excludes the Key/Large Market Towns discussed earlier.) Using these figures, the results for England are:

- Rural Population (settlements less than 10,000) - *9.5 million* (19.4% of total)
- Urban Population (settlements 10,000 or more) - *39.6 million* (80.6% of total)

This matches well with the figures, discussed above, obtained from the newly-defined "Census Output Areas" (COAs) - registering a rural population for England of 9.5 million.

Of course, the general settlement categories employed in such 'slicing' of the population profile take us right back to the unresolved issue of the definitions of - and distinctions between - hamlet, village and town! Sadly, when considered in general terms (i.e. across England as a whole) such descriptions are little more than *qualitative* 'labels'. When we get down to the individual community or specific rural location, though, such terms gain far greater currency, since they form part of the self-definition of given rural communities or individuals.

The perception that rural dwellers have of their location is significant, and can sometimes (perhaps often?) be at odds with government definitions. This may be particularly true in the case of the comprehensive and recently-introduced definitions of rural. The Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) claims, concerning rural residents and these new rural definitions: "*Survey evidence tells us that 7.9 million (83%) of these people agree (more or less) with their classification.*" (unpublished CRC source, 2007)

This may be true, but other work from the CRC reveals that - when allowed to select for themselves a description of the type of area in which they live - substantial numbers of rural residents don't choose categories equivalent to the government definitions.

Description Chosen	Proportion	Actual Location Distribution		
		Town & Fringe	Village	Dispersed
Country Village	71%	59%	86%	62%
Town	19%	38%	5%	4%
Farm or Home in Country	5%	0	3%	33%
Suburbs/Outskirts of Big City	3%	3%	5%	0
Small City	1%	0	2%	0
Big City	<1%	0	1%	0
Don't Know	0	0	0	0

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

Using official government definitions, 38% of rural residents live in the official '**Village**' category, but in the survey from which the above results are taken ["Attitudes to Rural Disadvantage" (CRC, 2006)] 71% from the total of 1,010 rural residents described their location as "Country Village". Similarly, 46% of rural residents actually live in the '**Town & Fringe**' category, but in the survey only 19% chose the description "Town". In fact well over half (59%) of those who lived in government-defined '**Town & Fringe**' actually described themselves as living in a "Country Village". The survey shows up other disparities (detailed in the link provided above) between self-perception and government categories.

A further area of potential confusion over statistics and the new government definitions relates to **districts**. There are three rural categories, depending upon two factors:

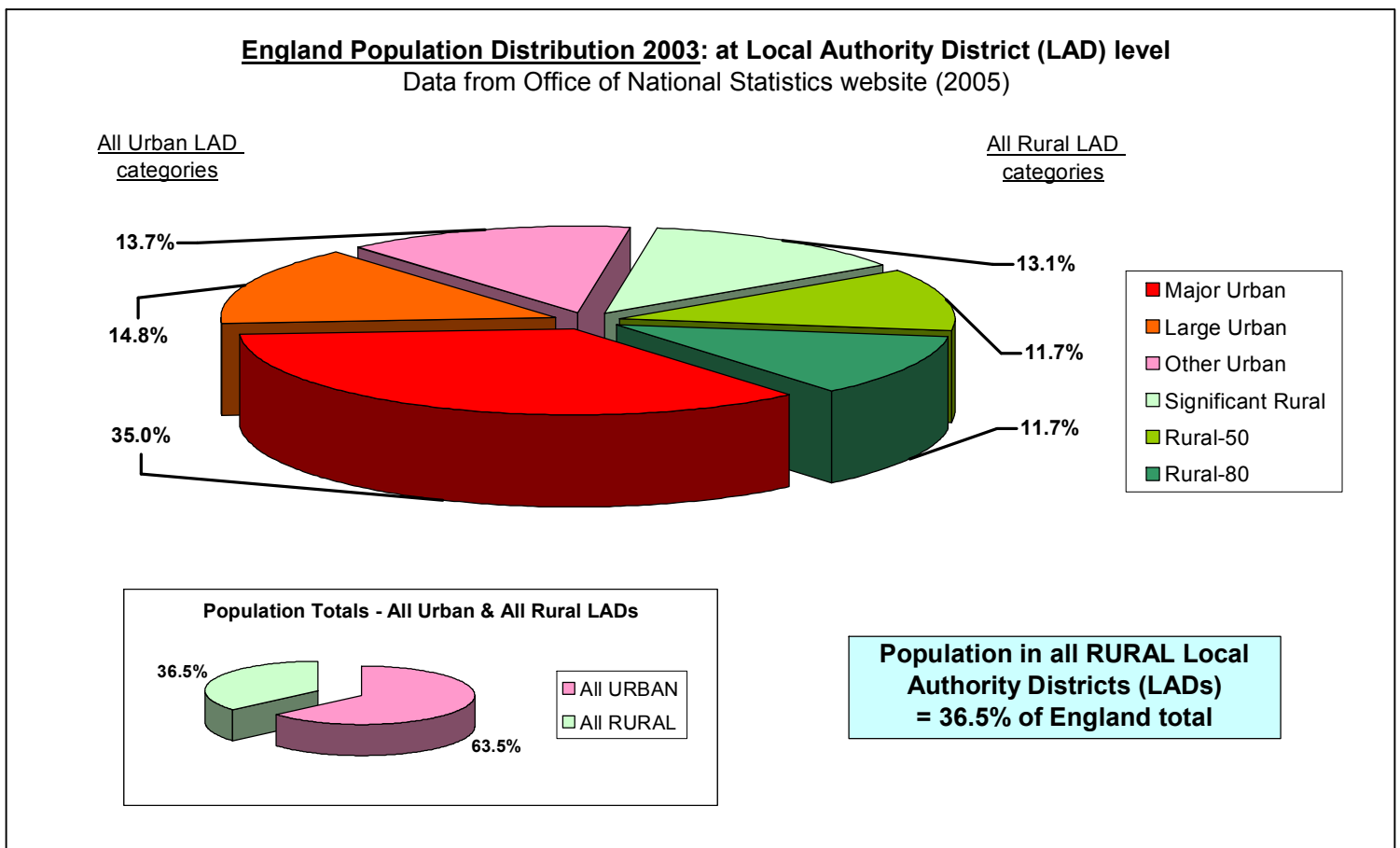
[[CLICK HERE](#) -> to go to definitions & descriptions of Rural Districts]

- The actual rural population of each district, based upon the most detailed level of the rural definitions (i.e. the **Census Output Areas, or COAs**)
- The presence of one or more of the 207 Key or Large Market Towns

[[CLICK HERE](#) -> to go to earlier discussion of rural districts & Key Market Towns]

Many publications use the **District level** of statistical information. Sometimes this is because the information they are dealing with is only available at District level. (E.g. Department of Health data on people changing GPs when they move. This is used as the basis for analysing population migration within Britain). At other times, this is because only general trends are being considered, which are best studied at the level of the various districts in England. There are three ways this can be confusing, all demonstrating the care with which official publications & research should be prepared and used:

- It is important to remember, when using population information based upon the new definitions of rurality that the district classification system is *not* the basis on which rural population figures are provided. As seen in the following chart, the total population of all the districts in the three 'rural' categories is 36.5% of England's total population (i.e. 17.9 million out of 49 million). This is nearly twice the official 2001 figure for the rural population of England - 9.5 million.



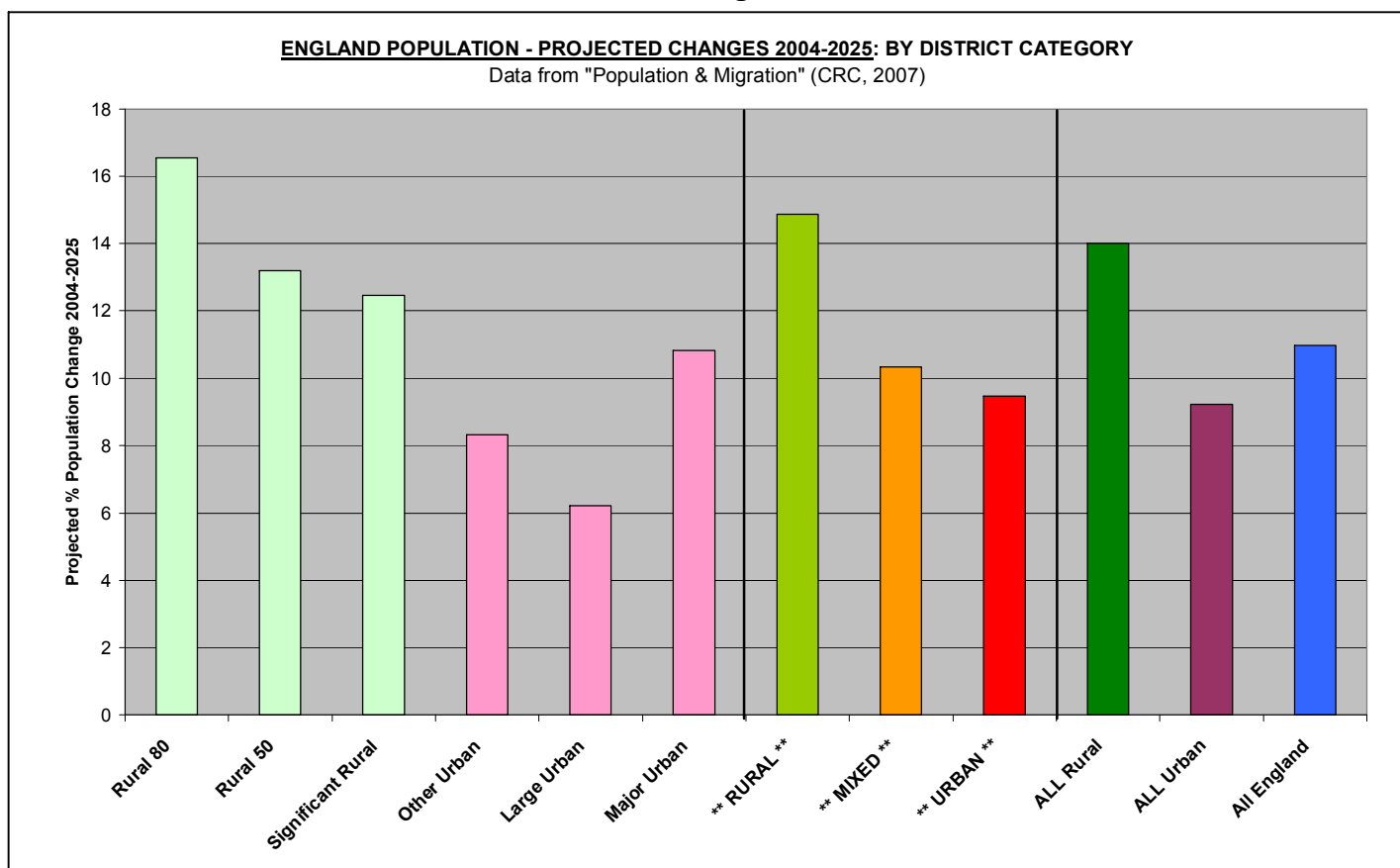
[[CLICK HERE](#) -> for larger image]

- Sometimes the rural population of districts in the three rural 'categories' ('Rural-80', 'Rural-50' and 'Significant Rural') are discussed with the population of any Key Market Towns *included*, in other cases the Key Market Town proportion of the population is *excluded*. This can make a big difference in the figure for the rural population of a district. For example, the district of **Breckland** in the **East of**

England Region is in the 'Rural-80' category. When Key Market Towns are included, 100% of the population is rural; when they are excluded, only 67.4% of the district population is rural. Similarly for Bath & NE Somerset, a 'Significant Rural' district in the South West Region. Excluding Key Market Towns, the rural population is 24.8%; including Key Market Towns, it is 45.9%. The potential for confusion here is noted in some government sources: "People living in Large [Key] Market Towns are defined as Urban in the Rural Definition. For the purposes of classifying Local Authorities these towns are considered to be Rural." [DEFRA website (2007)]

[[CLICK HERE](#) -> for table detailing 46 rural districts across England]

- There are differences between different agencies & groups regarding which district categories should *in reality* be included when discussing 'the rural'. This is potentially the major area of confusion, as it can prevent comparisons being made between different publications and pieces of work. One recent example is with the State of the Countryside update "Population & Migration" (CRC, 2007) [[LINK HERE](#)] which makes the following statement early in the document: "*Rural' combines the Rural-80 & Rural-50 categories; 'Mixed' combines the Significant Rural & Other Urban categories, and 'Urban' combines the Large Urban & Major Urban categories.*" So a proportion of rural districts, communities & individuals are actually excluded from consideration, as only two out of three rural district categories are included in its analysis. By contrast, a slightly earlier important survey of the rural population - "Demographic Change in Rural England" [[LINK HERE](#)] - also based on statistics at the district level, includes all three rural district categories in its analysis. This makes a difference, as can be seen in the following chart:



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

Firstly, the inclusion of only *two* rural district categories in the overall designation 'Rural' (the **** RURAL **** column in the chart) and only *two* urban district categories in the overall designation 'Urban' (the **** URBAN **** column in the chart) tends to magnify, or even exaggerate, the differences between 'the rural' and 'the urban'. Secondly, it makes it hard to compare publications & research that include differing numbers of districts in their 'rural' database. Thirdly, it makes it much harder for the 'casual' user of such information (like the sort of person using 'Life & Faith in Rural Communities') to get to the heart of what is being reported or described, and may even mislead them.

In conclusion, it might be claimed that the recently-introduced "Rural Definition", and the way it is employed, is as problematical as what it has replaced.

[CLICK HERE](#) -> for the "What is Rural?" from the Commission for Rural Communities (April 07)

FOR ACTION & REFLECTION/DISCUSSION

What is your own perception of the area where you live - or work - in terms of the types of 'categories' used to describe where the rural population lives?

What size of settlement (if any) do you live in?

Find out what a selection of other people from your community or area think.

Why might most rural residents consider themselves to live in a "country village"?

Is this true of your own area? What reasons can you suggest for this?

FOR ACTION & DISCUSSION

Log onto the DEFRA web page for Local Authority "Rural Focus Reports" [[LINK HERE](#)]

If you live in England, select your own **REGION** and then your own **DISTRICT**; otherwise pick a region & district that interest you.

What sort of information is available here about the district?

Is any of it helpful? What sort of information is this? Why is it helpful?

If it proves useful, you can download or print off a copy.

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

[CLICK HERE](#) -> to return to previous section of the unit, 2.02
"The Growth, Size & Distribution of the Rural Population"

[CLICK HERE](#) -> to move to next part of the unit, 2.04
"The 'Make Up' of - and Changes to - the Rural Population"

[CLICK HERE](#) -> to return to breakdown of Unit 2

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