

A Rural/Urban Classification of Parliamentary Constituencies of England and Wales 2007

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In 2005-6 the RERC produced an urban_rural classification of the Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs) of England and Wales used in the 2001 and 2005 General Elections. The procedure used was similar to that applied in creating the rural_urban classification of local authorities but with slightly different criteria to reflect the larger number and more complex geographical configurations of Parliamentary Constituencies compared with local authorities (www.rerc.ac.uk/findings/rural.html).
- 1.2 This note describes a rural_urban classification of the revised PCs for England and for Wales which came into force on 27 June 2007 and 11 April 2006 respectively.¹ The impact of the changes was to increase the number of PCs overall from 569 at the 2005 General Election (529 in England, 40 in Wales) to 573 in 2007 (533 in England, 40 in Wales). Although the eventual change in the *number* of PCs was small, changes to *boundaries* were widespread and often substantial. Only 63 PCs in England and 18 in Wales remained unchanged from their configuration in 2005.
- 1.3 As with the previous classification, England and Wales are treated as a single set of PC areas for classificatory purposes. The main difference compared with the previous classification is that the *order* in which criteria are applied now follows that for the revised local authority classification². A more minor change is that the criterion for consideration as a 'Significant Rural' PC is a minimum rural population of 33 percent compared with 26 percent in the 2005 classification.³
- 1.4 As in the previous classification the three largest urban areas in Wales (Cardiff, Swansea and Newport) are assigned to the 'major' and 'large urban' settlement categories on lower population criteria compared with

¹ By the *Parliamentary Constituencies (England) Order 2007* and the *Parliamentary Constituencies and Assembly Electoral Regions (Wales) Order 2006*. In this note we refer to the new constituencies by date as '2007' and the 'old' constituencies as '2005' the date of the last General Election.

² *Defra Classification of Local Authorities in England*, Updated Technical Guide, April 2009, paragraph 1.4.

³ This is brought about by the different overall distribution of the rural population across the new Constituencies. The figure of 33 % emerges from a close scrutiny of 'break points' in the distribution of percentages.

those for England on grounds of the differences in scale between the two urban systems.

2 The PC Classification Procedure

- 2.1 The main principle underlying the classification is the identification of the proportions of the total population of a PC in settlements ranging from those defined as 'urban', through smaller (rural) towns and their fringes, to villages, hamlets and dispersed dwellings. These proportions are derived from the Urban_Rural Definition 2004.⁴
- 2.2 The classification is implemented in two main stages.

Stage 1

Census Output Areas (COAs) within PCs are assigned to four broad classes according to whether they are located within one of the following types of area:

- the six 'major' urban areas with more than 750,000 population in England and the two with more than 250,00 population in Wales,
- the 17 'large' urban areas with between 250,000 and 750,000 population in England and one with 116,000 population in Wales,⁵
- an urban area over 10,000 population which is *not* identified as a 'larger market town', and
- the remaining 'rural' set of COAs deemed to be 'rural' under the new rural/urban definition and including those COAs comprising the 'larger market towns'.⁶

⁴ See <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/geography/nrudp.asp>

⁵ The Major Urban Areas and Large Urban Areas defined for these purposes are listed in Annex A.

⁶ The ONS urban/rural definition identifies all settlements with more than 10,000 population as 'urban'. However, some towns larger than this should be considered 'rural' in functional terms. For the purposes of the LAD/UA classification 207 urban areas with between 10,000 and 30,000 population were identified as of functional importance and were included in the 'rural' element of the population for classification purposes. Further details can be found in the papers relating to the LAD/UA classification.

Stage 2

Parliamentary Constituencies are allocated to one of six groups using the following criteria applied in the following order. As noted in paragraph 1.3 these criteria are slightly different to those applied in the classification of the pre 2007 PCs.

- the identification of PCs which have at least 75% of their population living in COAs classified as rural under the rural definition (called *Rural 75 PCs*),
- the identification of PCs with 50% to 74.9% of the population living in rural COAs (called *Rural 50 PCs*),
- the identification of PCs with 33% to 49.9% of the population living in rural COAs (called *Significant Rural PCs*),
- the identification of LAs which contain at least 50% of their population within one of the 6 Major Urban areas in England or 2 Major Urban Areas in Wales as defined above,
- the identification of LAs which are entirely within, or which contain at least 50% of their population within or one of the 17 Large Urban areas in England or one Large Urban Area in Wales as defined above, and
- the identification as 'Other Urban' of those PCs which have less than 33% of their population in rural areas *and* are not part of a Major or Large urban area in England or Wales.

3 The Classification – A Summary

- 3.1 The numbers of PCs that result from the application of this classification are shown in Table 1. A map of the new PCs classified is given in Annex B.
- 3.2 Because of the widespread changes in PC boundaries and the application of slightly different criteria compared with the pre 2007 PCs, direct comparison between the two classifications is not possible, even for those PCs which did not change.

Table 1: The Classification of Parliamentary Constituencies of England and Wales According to Rural_Urban Characteristics.

PC Type	England & Wales		England		Wales	
	2010	2005	2010	2005	2010	2005
Major Urban	176	185	169	177	7	8
Large Urban	70	77	68	75	2	2
Other Urban	127	111	116	103	11	8
Significant Rural	54	53	47	49	7	4
Rural 50	58	55	52	52	6	3
Rural 75	88	88	81	73	7	15
Total	573	569	533	529	40	40

3.3 Finally, it should be noted that the priority given to the percentage 'rural' in the order in which the criteria are applied in Stage 2 results, in some PCs, in an 'urban' percentage noticeably larger than the 'rural' percentage which classifies that PC. This is generally due to a high degree of polarization in the types of settlements making up a PC. An example with regard to PCs with a high percentage of population living within COAs located within Major Urban areas but nevertheless classified as 'Significant Rural' is given in Table 2.

Table 2 The Effect of the 'Rural' Prioritization of Criteria on Certain PCs

Constituency	Total Population	Major Urban	Major Urban %	Total Rural	Rural %	Type
St. Helens North Boro.	98188	56786	57.8	41402	42.2	Sig_rural
South West Hertfordshire Co.	100733	55640	55.2	45093	44.8	Sig_rural
Tatton Co.	80407	34104	42.4	33840	42.1	Sig_rural
Neath Co.	71437	44277	62.0	23586	33.0	Sig_rural

3.4 The 'Large Urban' class also contains some PCs of this type whilst the 'Other Urban' category, as a residual can have a range of different types of urban and rural populations. In applications of the classification in which a high level of analytical detail is required or where localized analyses are being carried out, the full range of settlement characteristics of a PC should be taken into consideration. It will be noted in Table 2, for example, that the numbers of rural dwellers in each PC is also large.

Annex A

Major Urban Areas

(a) England

Greater London Urban Area
West Midlands Urban Area
Greater Manchester Urban Area
Merseyside Urban Area
West Yorkshire Urban Area
Tyneside Urban Area

(b) Wales

Cardiff
Swansea

Large Urban Areas

(a) England

Nottingham Urban Area
Sheffield Urban Area
Bristol Urban Area
Brighton Urban Area
Portsmouth Urban Area
Leicester Urban Area
Bournemouth Urban Area
Reading/Wokingham Urban Area
Teesside Urban Area
The Potteries Urban Area
Coventry/Bedworth Urban Area
Birkenhead Urban Area
Southampton Urban Area
Kingston upon Hull
Southend Urban Area
Preston Urban Area
Blackpool Urban Area

(b) Wales

Newport Urban Area

Annex B

The New Parliamentary Constituencies Classified by Urban_Rural Characteristics.

