

The 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Local Authority Districts in England

- Local authorities are categorised as rural or urban based on the **percentage of their resident population** in rural areas or 'rural-related' hub towns.
- In 2011 in England, **11.1 million** people (20.9% of the population) lived in local authorities defined as **predominantly rural**.
- 42 million people lived in local authorities defined as **predominantly urban** or **urban with significant rural** (79.1% of the population).

- It is important to distinguish between rural and urban areas when analysing **social and economic statistics**, as their populations and businesses can differ in composition (for example, rural areas tend to have higher proportions of older people).
- The **opportunities, challenges and barriers** for **businesses**, the **services** people receive and their **quality of life** can also differ between rural areas and larger towns and cities.

- Wherever possible the **Rural-Urban Classification** should be used for statistical analysis.

- Datasets at higher spatial resolution should be analysed using rural-urban classifications for small area geographies, including **Output Areas (OAs)**, **Lower-Layer Super OAs (LSOAs)**, **Middle-Layer Super OAs (MSOAs)** and **electoral wards**.

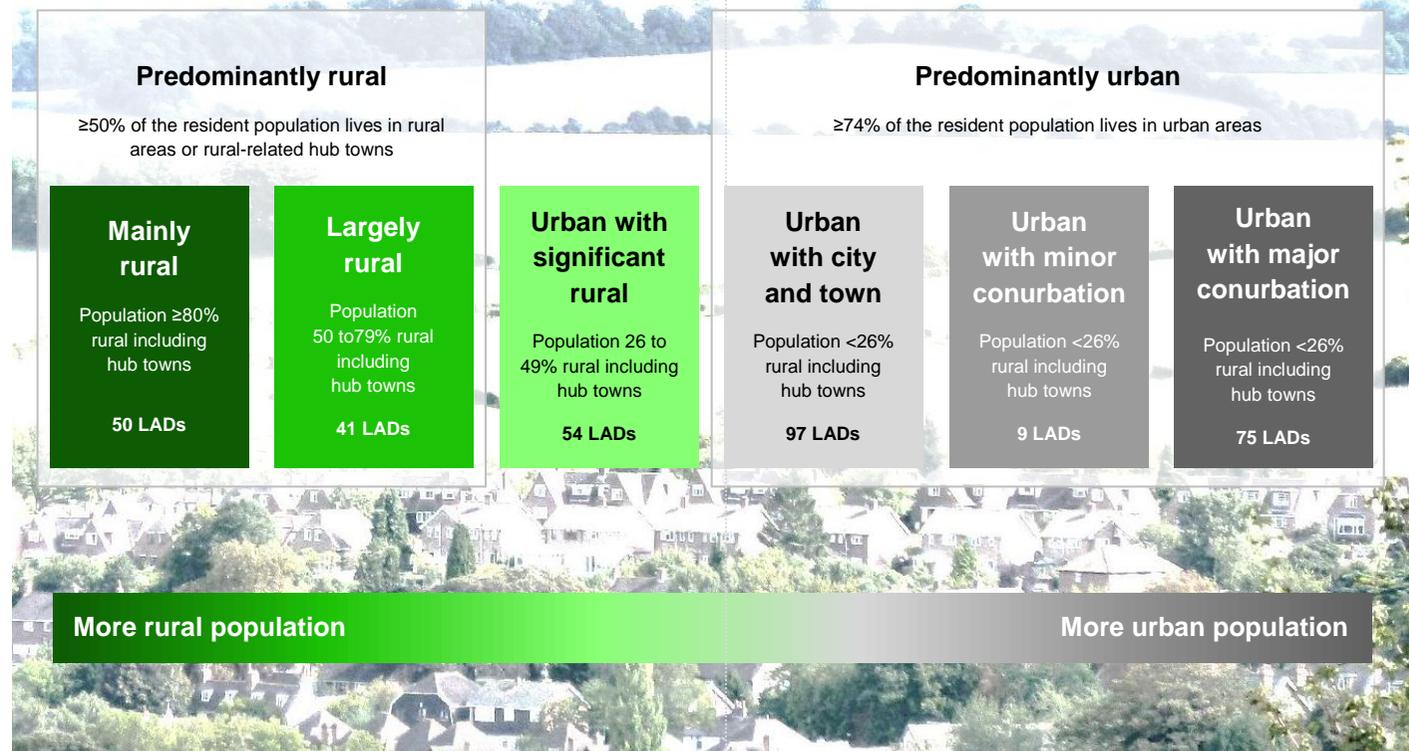
- The Rural-Urban Classification is based on **resident population**. It is **not** based on land-use, policy or financial characteristics.

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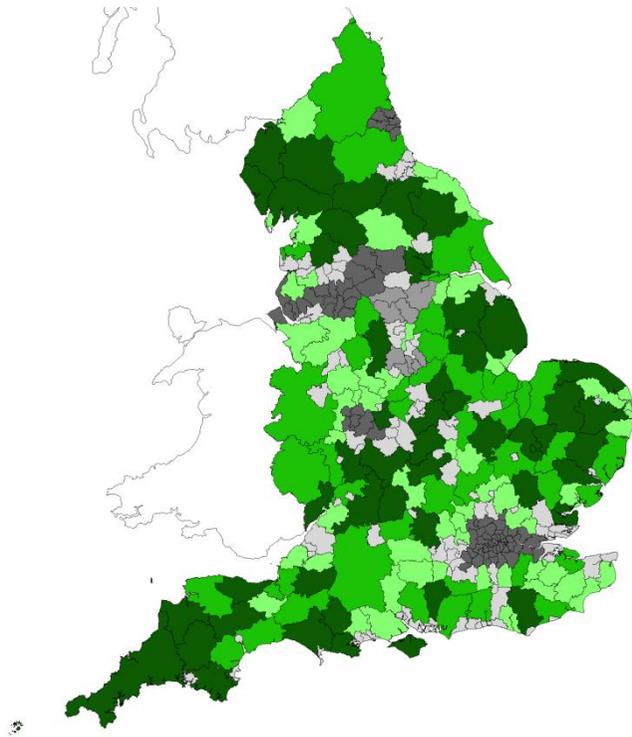
- This leaflet is about **lower-tier local authority districts, unitary authorities, metropolitan districts and London boroughs** (referred to here as LADs).
- LADs are categorised as rural or urban based on the **share of their resident population that is rural**.
- For this classification, the rural share of a LAD is calculated as the **population living in rural areas** plus the **rural-related population**.
- The **total rural population** is decided by the **rural and urban OAs** within a LAD. The *Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas* allows for the most detailed rural-urban 'view' of data (more details overleaf).

- The **rural-related** component of a LAD is the **resident population of hub towns**, which have the potential to be centres of business and service provision for a **surrounding rural area**.
- Hub towns** are **built-up areas** (from Ordnance Survey mapping) with a population of **10,000 to 30,000** (2011 Census) and a certain concentration of residential dwellings and non-residential establishments.
- Each LAD is assigned to a **rural-urban category** (shown below) based on its rural and rural-related population, with urban LADs further categorised by the presence or absence of a **conurbation**.

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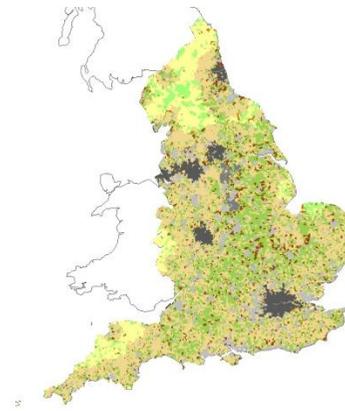
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Rural-urban category	Resident population	Percentage
Predominantly rural	11,058,000	20.9
Mainly rural	4,723,000	8.9
Largely rural	6,335,000	11.9
Urban with significant rural	6,898,000	13.0
Predominantly urban	35,057,000	66.1
Urban with city and town	14,078,000	26.6
Urban with minor conurbation	2,107,000	4.0
Urban with major conurbation	18,872,000	35.6
Total England	53,013,000	100.0

Source: Rural-Urban Classification applied to 2011 Census data

The 2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas in England



- The Rural-Urban Classification for LADs is built up from the **Rural-Urban Classification for OAs** (see map above), which consists of six rural and four urban settlement/context combinations (see table below).
- An OA is rural if its **population-weighted centre** falls outside a **built-up area** (from Ordnance Survey mapping) of **greater than 10,000 people**.
- The 'density profile' of dwellings in each 100m × 100m square in the country is used to identify a **settlement type** and **sparsity** for each OA.
- Further detail on the classification of OAs can be found in a separate leaflet (see *Useful Links* section).

Broad category	Sparsity	Settlement type	
Urban	Not sparse	Major conurbation	
		Minor conurbation	
		City & town	
Rural	In a sparse setting	City & town	
		Town & fringe	
		Villages	
	Not sparse	Hamlets & isolated dwellings	
		Town & fringe	
		Hamlets & isolated dwellings	

Warning: Local Authority Districts and Output Areas may cover a large area of open countryside and yet be urban if most of the population lives in an urban settlement. Rural is a matter of settlement form and dwelling density rather than the economic function or the character or use of the land.

Most local authorities classed as rural will include urban populations and vice versa.

This classification is very unlikely to be useful in supporting planning applications, and should be fully understood before using for any purpose beyond statistical analysis.

Useful links

- **2011 Rural-Urban Classification for Local Authority Districts** (user guide, methodology, lookup table and list of hub towns)
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification-of-local-authority-and-other-higher-level-geographies-for-statistical-purposes>
- **Leaflet on the Rural-Urban Classification for Output Areas** <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/rural-urban-classification-leaflet>
- **Office for National Statistics Open Geography Portal** (rural-urban classifications for small-area geographies, built-up area boundaries and local authority boundaries)
<https://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/geoportal/> (select 'Download Products')
- **Statistical Digest of Rural England**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-environment-food-rural-affairs/series/statistical-digest-of-rural-england>

The Rural-Urban Classification for Local Authority Districts is a Government Statistical Service product developed by the Office for National Statistics and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in collaboration with Sheffield and Nottingham Universities.

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