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Introduction

1.1 The state of the countryside report

This report aims to be a 'first call' for those seeking quantitative information on social, economic and environmental issues in rural areas. It also adds commentary on the information that we show, and on the trends that are emerging. This report is one of the ways in which the Commission for Rural Communities (CRC) seeks to deliver the 'watchdog' and 'advisor' roles set out for CRC in the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

We hope that this report provides a valuable resource for policy makers and for those who live in, and care about, rural England.



1.2 The evidence

The report seeks to present as wide a range of evidence as is possible on issues relating to rural England. This means that our analysis is necessarily broad rather than being highly detailed on any individual topic. The report does not aim to set out the detailed policy positions of the Commission. It does, however, comment on issues that may be of concern. In particular, the discussion chapter raises challenges that those governing rural England may need to bear in mind. We try to present information so others can draw policy related conclusions in the knowledge that information has not been selected to 'make a point'.

We look for information that can give a reliable and quantitative picture providing insight into the different conditions across rural England and into the key recent trends. As such, most of the evidence is from:

- Nationally collected data.
- Large scale national surveys.
- Selected information from other research reports.

What's new for 2007?

There has been a wealth of new information available for this report, and we have been able to include many new areas of analysis. These include:

- Indicators of health levels and healthy lifestyles.
- Indices of accessibility to services.
- Air quality mapping.
- Carbon emissions.
- Indices of competitiveness.
- New indicators of economic well-being.

Many indicators that we have used in the past are very stable, and we have summarised what is known rather than replicate previous analyses. We have included pointers to tables and figures used in the previous two years' reports at the end of each section so that readers can access further information on specific topics.



1.3 Analysis and presentation of the evidence

Evidence comes from a variety of sources. The amount of information that we can analyse from an rural/urban perspective has grown very rapidly in the last few years. This has been largely due to the increasing amount of information that others place in the public domain, and the increasing use of geo-coding (attaching detailed locations to data). This has meant that we can classify many more pieces of information as 'rural' or 'urban'.

Defining and classifying rural areas

In this report we concentrate on two classifications that have been recognised by government – the Office of National Statistics' categorisation of small areas, and Defra's Classification of District and Unitary Authorities.

i) Office of National Statistics (ONS, 2004) Definition.

This is the primary definition that we use. It defines settlements of over 10,000 people as 'urban' and places smaller, 'rural' settlements, into three categories; 'town and fringe', 'villages', or 'hamlets and isolated dwellings'. In addition settlements are defined as to whether they are in 'sparse' or 'less sparse' areas.

Figure 1.1.1 shows the populations (from the 2001 census) that are in each of these areas.

Figure 1.1.1

Populations of rural and urban England, 2001

Area definition		Population	%
Less sparse	Hamlet and isolated dwellings	1,380,115	2.8
	Village	3,285,346	6.7
	Town and fringe	4,230,458	8.6
	Urban >10K	39,527,964	80.4
Sparse	Hamlet and isolated dwellings	145,234	0.3
	Village	246,448	0.5
	Town and fringe	217,811	0.4
	Urban >10K	103,126	0.2
Rural		9,505,412	19.3
Urban >10K		39,631,090	80.7
England		49,136,502	100.0

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2001, Census.

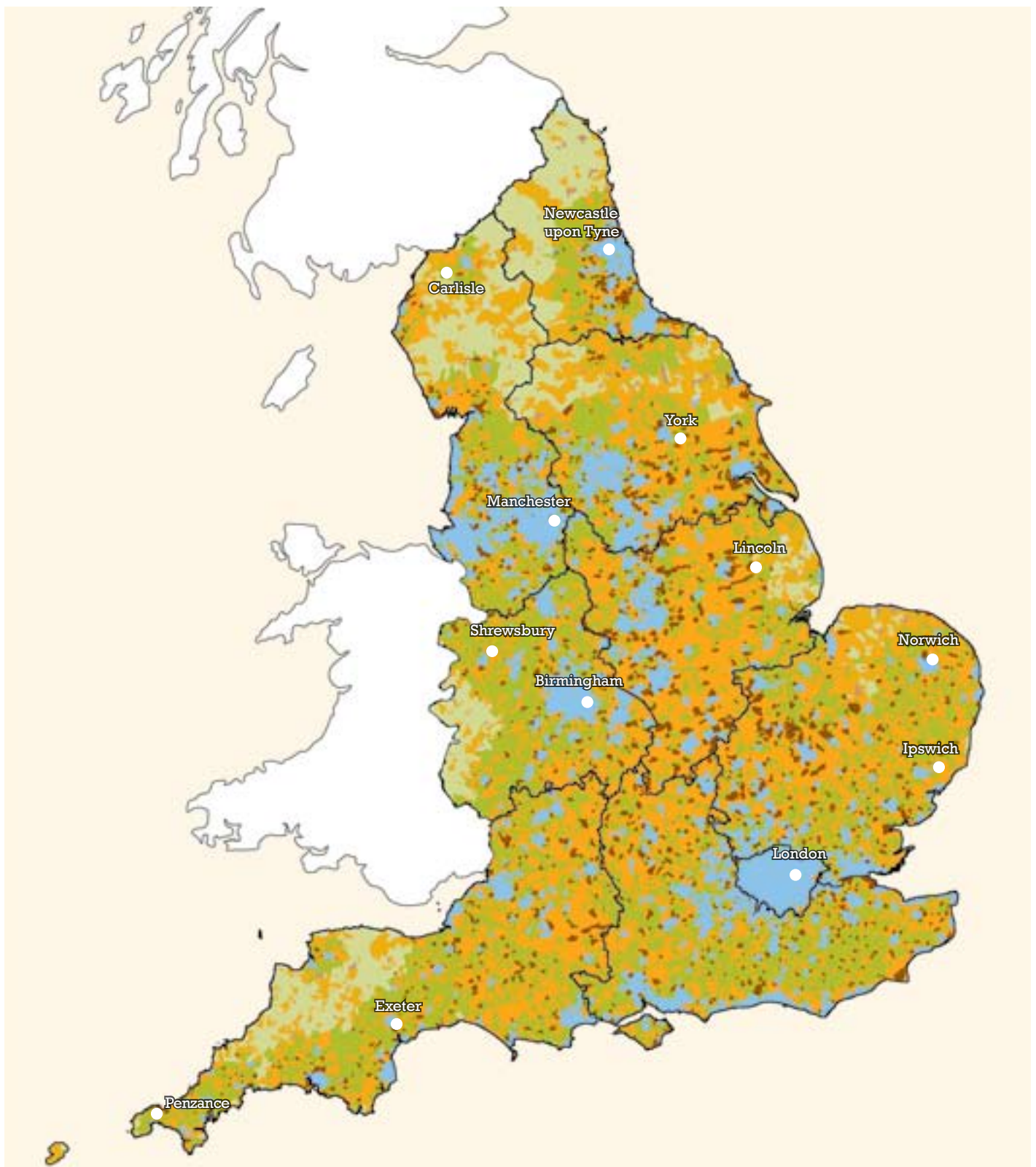


Figure 1.1.2
Rural and urban definition, 2004

Area definition

- Hamlet and isolated dwellings – Less sparse
- Hamlet and isolated dwellings – Sparse
- Village – Less sparse
- Village – Sparse
- Town and fringe – Less sparse
- Town and fringe – Sparse
- Urban > 10K – Less sparse
- Urban > 10K – Sparse
- Boundaries

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2004.
Rural and Urban Definitions.

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Under this definition rural areas comprise 19.3% of the population of England, about half of whom live in small towns. Only 3% live in settlements smaller than villages and only 1.4% are defined as living in sparse areas. Figure 1.1.2 shows how the definitions are distributed around England.

ii) Defra Classification (2005)

The ONS Definition cannot be applied to large geographical areas such as Local Authorities. To meet the need for a way of categorising such larger administrative units from a rural perspective, Defra produced a supplementary classification of Local Authority Districts and Unitary Authorities. This classification specifies six categories of authority from Major urban (the most urban) through to Rural 80 (the most rural).

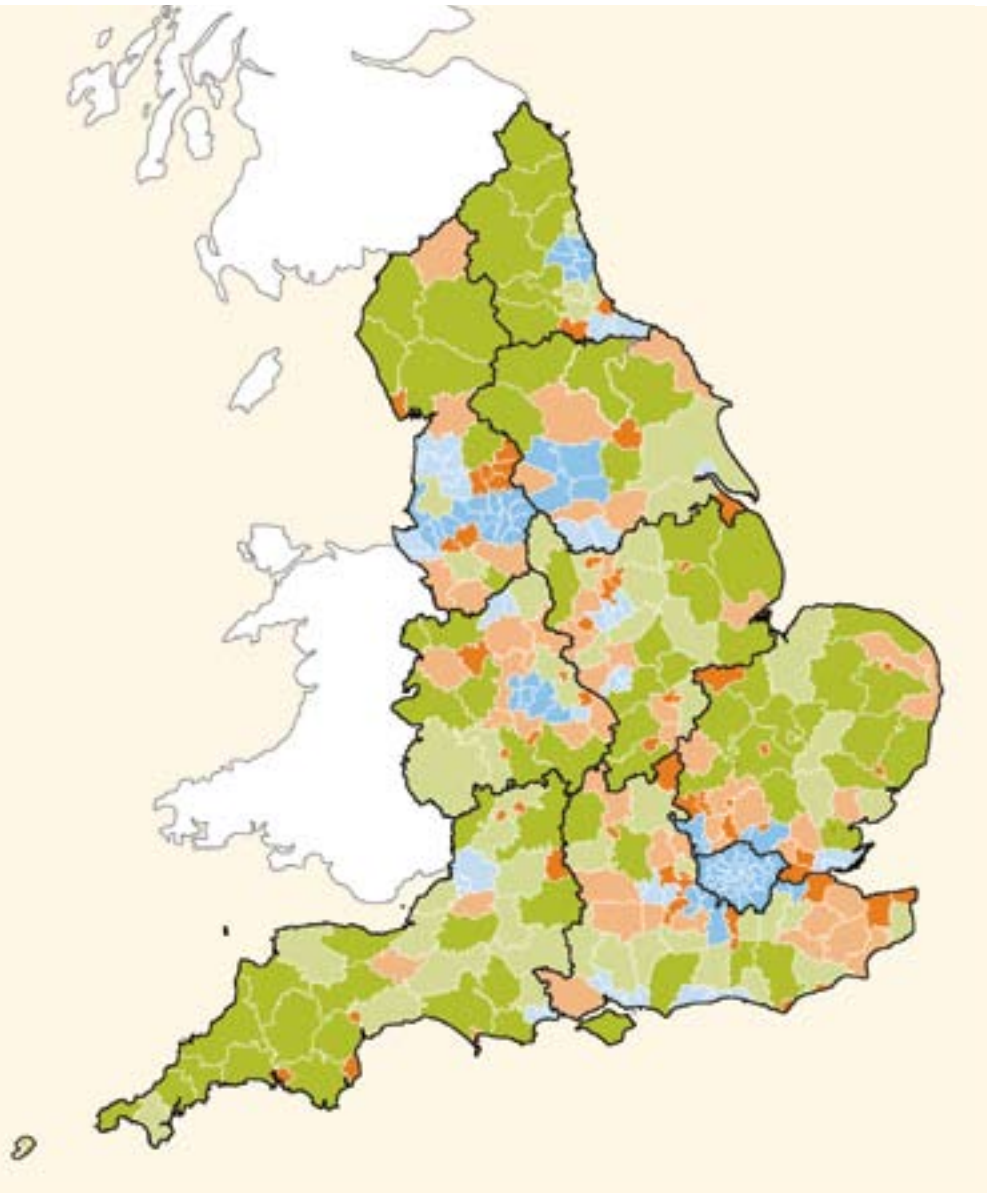
Figure 1.1.3
Classification of Local Authority District and Unitary Authorities, 2005

Area classification

- Rural 80
- Rural 50
- Significant rural
- Other urban
- Large urban
- Major urban
- Boundaries

Source: Defra, 2005. Classification of Local Authority District and Unitary Authorities.

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The maps in this report

In addition to applying the different classifications, we also use maps, where the data allows it, to show how conditions vary across England. There are certain patterns that emerge that can help show whether variation in what we measure relates to, say, settlement size, region of the country, economic performance of an area, or other factors. This helps us to understand whether any variation in recorded conditions might be related to specific localities or to factors such as peripherality or settlement size.

This year we are showing maps that have detailed level data as full page maps. Maps showing information for local authorities are shown at a smaller scale and, where possible, the presentation indicates the 'best' and 'worst' Districts for any given topic. For example, as shown in Figure 1.1.4, we may indicate the highest and lowest values for 'rural' areas (i.e. the Rural 80 and Rural 50 categories), for 'mixed' areas (i.e. the Significant Rural and Other Urban categories) and for 'urban' areas (i.e. the Large Urban and Major Urban categories).

Figure 1.1.4

Sample map – Expected risk of obesity, 2006

Highest		
A	Rural	122 Easington
B	Mixed	121 Corby
C	Urban	120 Knowsley
Lowest		
X	Rural	80 South Bucks
Y	Mixed	80 Chiltern
Z	Urban	63 Kensington and Chelsea

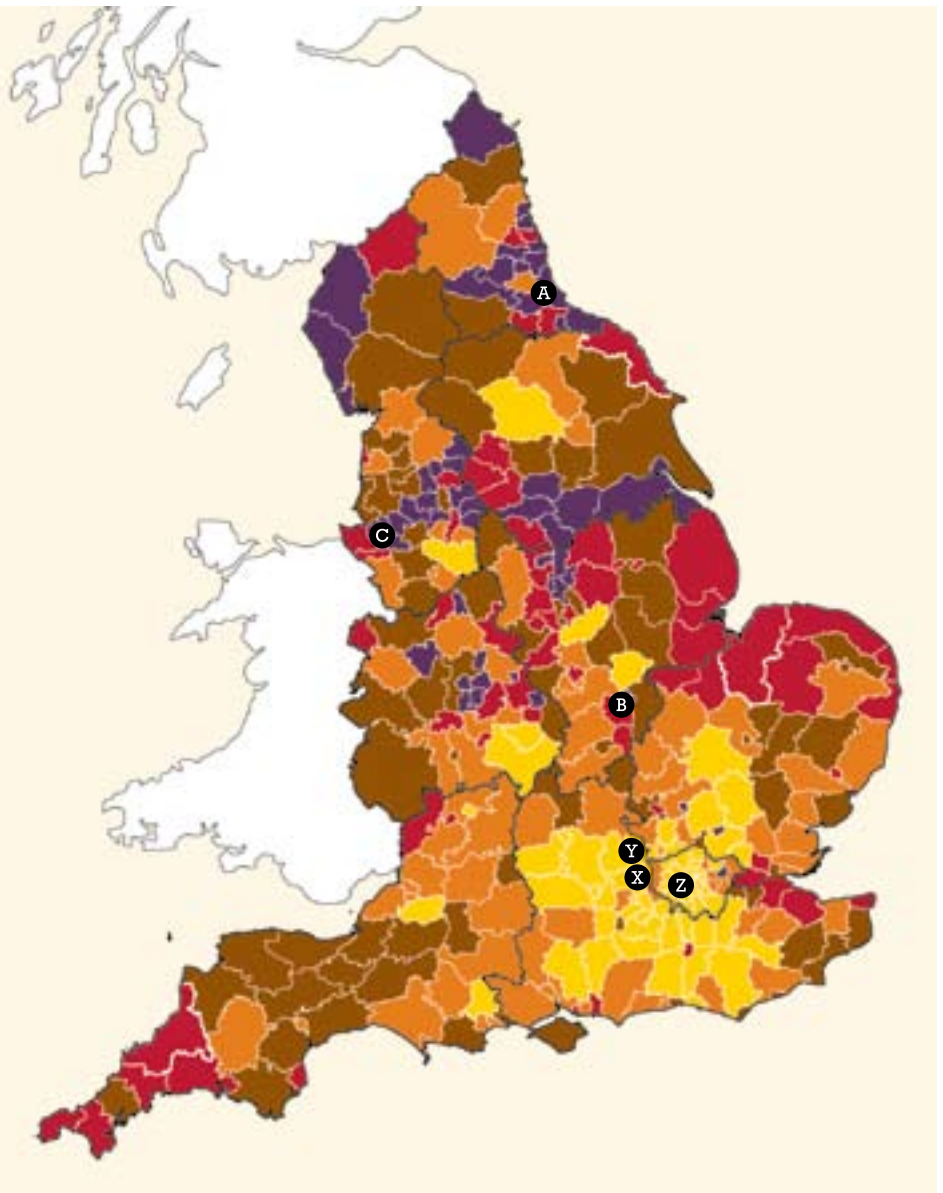
Index (100 = average risk of obesity)

	63 – 92
	93 – 98
	99 – 103
	104 – 108
	109 – 122
	Boundaries

Note:
 (i) The analysis by Experian and Dr Foster Intelligence used data from the Department of Health's Health Survey for England, Body Mass Index information from the British Market Research Bureau's TGI quarterly survey and MOSAIC lifestyle categories.

Source: Experian and Dr Foster. 2006. Risk of obesity index.

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The structure of the report

The three central chapters of this report now follow, which contain the bulk of information, dealing with:

- Living in the countryside (social issues).
- Economic wellbeing (economic issues).
- Land and environment (environmental issues).

We then conclude with a short discussion chapter which draws out some of the key themes that emerge from this report and then presents an assessment of current and future sustainability issues.

