



Demographic Change in Rural England

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Introduction

This paper analyses the ageing population of rural England. It details changes in the age structure over the past decade, and sets out projections for 25 years hence. These trends are placed in the wider context of demographic change, including migration out of and into rural areas. The underlying causes of why rural areas have a somewhat older population have changed significantly over the past century. Once it was almost entirely due to a rural exodus – especially of young adults who then raised families in urban areas. In more recent years, the effects of this exodus have been compounded by the ‘counter-urbanisation’ of retirees and the middle-aged. Demographic ageing is, in fact, a nationwide phenomenon, but it is merely more pronounced in rural areas because of these age-specific migration flows. In a sense, therefore, rural England – along with the seaside and spa towns that were the traditional destinations of retirement migration – has been acting as the pioneer in the nation’s population ageing and is now at the cutting edge of this deepening trend. Hence it provides early experience of the challenges and opportunities that arise when at least half of the population are aged 45 or over, as is likely to be the case nationally by around 2050 - rural England will have passed this particular waymark at least a decade earlier.

The chapter begins with a broad overview of the major patterns of population change affecting rural England, emphasising the extra effect of age-specific migration over and above the general ageing trend. It then goes into more detail about what is meant in this context by ‘rural England’, taking the opportunity to introduce the new official classification which was formally adopted in 2005 by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The latter’s six-fold classification of local authority districts (three rural and three urban) is then used to categorise demographic change across rural England in comparison with urban trends, looking first at the recent past and going on to describe the emerging picture provided by the official population projections through to the year 2028. Clear differences are revealed between the three rural types nationally, as well as systematic variations at regional

and local scales. This is reflected even more graphically in the patterns of migration evident from the 2001 census. The Chapter concludes by emphasising the sheer scale of the accelerating trend towards rural ageing and some of the policy implications that are a consequence of change in the rural population's age structure.

Population change in rural England: an overview

There are currently five major aspects of population change affecting rural England. The most important is the general progression of the demographic regime, including increasing life expectancy and falling fertility. Some suggest that this amounts to a 'second demographic transition' within the long-term shift from natural increase to natural decrease of the population. Second is the phenomenon of 'counter-urbanisation', whereby a net population exodus from the countryside has been replaced by net in-migration from urban areas. This is a process that is qualitatively different from local suburbanisation and dates back to the 1960s in England, although its scale has fluctuated over time. Thirdly, in spite of this switch from net migration loss to net gain, rural England continues to be affected by the exodus of young adults. Indeed, as participation in higher education has been growing and as the social structure of the countryside has been shifting towards the middle classes from which university students are still predominantly recruited, this is likely to be an accelerating driver of rural change. Fourthly, in recent years there is some evidence that rural England is beginning to be affected directly by the surge in net migration from overseas, though the largest cities and other entry points remain the most pressurised areas. Finally, there is the impact of past fluctuations in birth rates, with the main twentieth-century 'baby-boom cohorts' now moving into old age. This section provides some background information on each of these five aspects as a prelude to examining their effect on the population size and age structure of rural England.

1. The new demographic regime

Over the past four decades or so, Europe has entered a new phase of demographic development, variously referred to as a 'second demographic

transition' (Lesthaeghe and van de Kaa, 1986), 'a new demographic transition' (Faus-Pohl, 1995) and even a 'demographic revolution' (McLoughlin, 1991). In the most basic terms, this appears like a continuation of the (first) demographic transition, primarily because the headline trends remain those of longer life expectancy and lower fertility. However, several aspects are very different. In particular, according to van de Kaa (1987, 2003) and McLoughlin (1991), the move to the second transition also involves a generational switch in attitudes and values from 'altruism' to 'individualism' and a shift in gender power towards the female, both greatly assisted by the 'pill' and altered sexual and partnership behaviour.

Certainly, the emerging demographic regime contrasts greatly with that of 40-50 years ago. Among the main differences are increasing cohabitation, rising levels of couple separation, slower (even negative) natural population increase and surging net immigration from other countries, especially those with weaker economies and those still experiencing the first transition. Alongside these changes and partly linked to them are major changes in population profiles and structures. Population ageing is perhaps the most direct and significant outcome, but others include the growth of ethnic diversity, the reduction in average household size, the decrease in traditional family households and the rise of other household types. These developments have been particularly well documented for those countries which started to move towards this new regime in the 1960s, most notably those in Northern and Western Europe, including England (Coleman, 1996; Hall and White, 1995; Noin and Woods, 1993; see also Champion, 1992 and 2001a).

2. Counter-urbanisation

The process of 'counter-urbanisation' involves the shift of population out of urban areas into the countryside, a process described as a 'cascading of population down the settlement hierarchy', with the most rural areas experiencing the strongest rates of net in-migration and the most urban areas seeing the highest rates of net out-migration (Champion, 1989, 2001b).

Traditionally, the main element in this shift was the movement of people at or close to retirement age, adding to the numbers of older people living in the

countryside (Rees, 1992; Champion *et al*, 1998). More recently, the age spread of this urban-rural shift has broadened to include not only greater numbers of early retirees and people 'downsizing' into self-employment and less demanding jobs but also household groups considered as quintessential 'suburbanisers', i.e. families with school-age children and mainly from middle-class backgrounds (Fielding, 1998; Champion and Atkins, 2000; Champion and Fisher, 2003). Whilst this latter group does help rejuvenate the age structure of rural areas, the effect is short term. This is because in family households which have relocated to a rural area the parents tend to stay put and become 'empty-nesters' who 'age in place' and their grown-up children move away.

3. The exodus of young people

Children leaving their parental homes in rural England are very largely bound for urban areas, and there is little movement in the opposite direction. Few urban school-leavers move into rural areas, apart from students moving to those universities and colleges with campuses in rural settings and people in very specific lines of work with rural sites such as the armed forces. The types of jobs suitable for school-leavers are much more plentiful in urban areas, appropriate housing is also cheaper and more accessible, and there is also the lure of the 'bright city lights' as opposed to the perceived dullness and lack of privacy associated with life in villages and small towns. The movement of young adults thus constitutes a very efficient process of rejuvenation of city populations - one that will be reinforced if they remain in urban areas when they start their families.

4. The impact of international migration

Until recently the English countryside would not have been thought of as a destination for international immigration. Indeed, the contemporary history of rural areas has almost invariably been one of emigration – as much to the New World as to the growing industrial cities nearer to hand. The notable exceptions were not typical immigrants but would include, for example, the occupants of prisoner-of-war camps and US military bases. Latterly, however, the English countryside has begun to have an immigrant presence. Just as

migrants have pushed across the Rio Grande into the USA and across the Mediterranean into Southern Europe to take up low-paid, casual and often seasonal work in agriculture, forestry and tourism, so a similar process has begun in England. Evidence remains largely anecdotal, especially where this relates to undocumented entries and overstaying visitors. The Worker Registration Scheme and other special arrangements for arrivals from the European Union Accession States in Eastern Europe and elsewhere are, however, indicating that a proportion of these are finding work in rural areas. There have also been a number of well-publicised cases of asylum-seekers being placed in the countryside, sometimes on disused military bases. However, immigrants settling in rural areas – insofar as they are documented in migration and population statistics – are few compared to those reported in urban areas and are probably a great deal more transient. Instead, the much more important effect of international migration on rural England is an indirect one – the larger the numbers of immigrants accommodated in cities, the larger it seems is the volume of ‘counter-urbanisation’ from those cities, with London being the supreme example of this relationship.

5. The legacy of past baby booms

In contrast to these four essentially long-term trends, a proper understanding of what has been happening to England’s age structure recently, and what is destined to occur over the next quarter of a century, must take account of the legacy of past baby booms (and busts). As an example, the effect of the nation’s biggest ever baby boom has virtually run its course. The major peak in births in 1900-1914, which became even more pronounced in its subsequent effects due to the high attrition of the previous ‘birth cohort’ in the First World War, was responsible for the massive increase in people reaching retirement age in the 1960s and 1970s and the doubling of England’s very elderly population since the 1980s. The baby booms that are now beginning to affect the elderly population are that of the mid 1940s and the one that began in the later 1950s and peaked in 1965. Numerically, the latter is by far the more important, rightly focusing minds on the potential challenges to pension system by the 2020s as this group ages into its sixties. The immediate post-war baby boom, however, is also having a substantial impact

on the older population, because it is taking the place of the much smaller birth cohorts of the wartime years and of the economically depressed interwar years before that. Currently just reaching pensionable age, the members of this earlier boom will be entering their eighties by the end of the 2020s. The legacy of these birth cycles is now accelerating the population-ageing effects of the longer-term trends described above.

Defining rural England

So far this chapter has presented 'rural England' as a general concept, but it is important that a clear definition is established before demographic statistics are analysed in detail. However, defining 'rural' is not straightforward. Indeed, some academics consider that in cultural, social and economic terms the notion of 'rurality' in a country such as the United Kingdom is outdated (Hoggart, 1990). This view serves to underline the difficulties of definition, but the notion of 'rurality' continues to re-assert itself, not least in the policy domain in, for example, considerations of how a dispersed population might be most efficiently provided with health and care services; or where, and how best, to subsidise public transport links; or how to identify the rate at which 'rural' land is being developed. Such concerns require clear geographical definition. The problem is that there is more than one way of doing this, partly because of the contested nature of ideas about 'rurality' but also because different users have different needs. There is no sharp dividing line on the ground between what is rural and what is urban that all users are prepared to subscribe to (for detailed discussion of this point, see Champion and Hugo, 2004) and ideas about rural territory depend greatly on the scale of area at which analysis is taking place, potentially ranging from individual plots of land to a local labour market area or wider region.

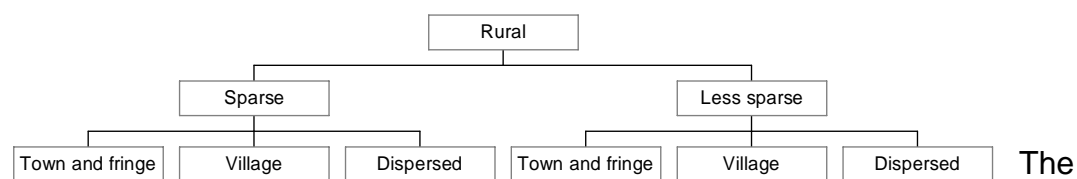
It was dissatisfaction with the notion of a definition based upon a simple classification of places as *either* urban *or* rural that led to a comprehensive review of the use of definitions for official purposes (SERRL, 2002). More significant, however, was the fact that there was a number of different rural definitions in use across government which lacked consistency and clarity in

the criteria used. A review was therefore undertaken which recommended that the new definition should be based upon the relatively enduring basis of *settlement structure* rather than the more rapidly changing demographic, social or functional (e.g. existence of a certain number of shops or, say, primary school) characteristics of places.

1. *Classifying rural areas*

In 2004 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published a new definition of rural areas covering England and Wales, launched alongside DEFRA's rural strategy (DEFRA, 2004). At the most detailed level - that of 2001 Census Output Areas (COAs) - areas are identified, first, as lying within settlements of more than 10,000 population in which case they are termed 'urban' COAs. The rest are called 'rural' COAs and these can be further classified, according to the type of *settlement* in which the majority of the population of a COA lives, as 'rural town and fringe', 'village' or 'hamlet/dispersed'. Rural COAs are also classified by the broader population *context* in which they are located which may be 'sparse' or 'less sparse' according to the average number of households at three geographic scales (i.e. 10km, 20km and 30km) around any location. 'Sparse' COAs meet the criterion at all three scales. 'Sparsity' at 10km, which roughly represents a longer than average journey to work, is typical of areas like south Wiltshire, the Cotswolds and the Peak District, whilst 30km (perhaps a longer range 'call-out' for the emergency services) is typical of north Norfolk, the North York Moors and most of Cumbria. The settlement and context dimensions combined give a six-fold classification of rural COAs as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: The Structure of the Classification of Census Output Areas



The same principle is used to classify the 'higher-level' census geographies of Super Output Areas and Census Wards, although the size and configuration of these in terms of population distribution does not make it feasible to

distinguish between the 'dispersed settlement' and 'villages' categories. At census ward level, for example, there is a four-fold classification of 'rurality' that, firstly, separates rural towns from villages and dispersed settlement and, secondly, distinguishes these two categories according to whether they are located in 'sparse' or 'less sparse' areas.

2. Rurality and local authorities

Although not part of the formal 'definition' of rural areas, a classification of local authority districts has also been developed for England, prompted primarily by the fact that a large amount of administrative and other data is available only at this level. England's 354 unitary authorities and local authority districts (collectively termed 'LADs') have been allocated to one of six main types. Three – 176 LADs in all - are overwhelmingly urban in nature, and are called 'Major Urban', 'Large Urban' and 'Other Urban'. The rural types, of which there are 178, are called 'Significant Rural', 'Rural-50' and 'Rural-80', according to the proportion of people in rural settlements. Thus 'Rural-80' LADs have between 80 and 100 percent in rural settlements and 'Rural-50' LADs have more than 50 percent, while 'Significant Rural' have more than the national average of 26 per cent. Table 2.1 gives the population breakdown as of 2003, the latest year for which official population estimates are available.

Table 2.1 England's population distribution, 2003, by district type

District type	Number of LADs	Residents (thousands)	% England's total residents
Major Urban (750,000+ pop)	76	17,497.7	35.1
Large Urban 250,000+pop)	45	7331.0	14.7
Other Urban	55	6,817.1	13.7
<i>Urban total</i>	<i>176</i>	<i>31,645.8</i>	<i>63.5</i>
Significant Rural	53	6,516.2	13.1
Rural-50	52	5,480.5	11.7
Rural-80	73	5,842.2	11.7
<i>Rural total</i>	<i>178</i>	<i>18,198.9</i>	<i>36.5</i>

England total	354	49,844.7	100.0
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The relevance for rural policy of this classification lies, in broad terms, in the geographical pattern and location of LADs and the nature of settlement within them. As illustrated in Figure 2.2, the Significant Rural LADs are mainly interspersed with urban England and generally represent the parts of the countryside that are accessible to the larger urban centres or which have a number of smaller urban areas within their boundaries. The Rural-50 LADs are broadly grouped around these, with particular concentrations across southern England and around the edges of the more heavily populated areas of the Midlands and into East Yorkshire. Population in rural settlements – small towns, villages and dispersed dwellings – is in the majority here, and issues of service planning and delivery become increasingly important to more scattered populations. Finally, the Rural-80 LADs mainly occupy those areas generally regarded as being ‘deeply rural’, including substantial parts of the South West, East Anglia, Lincolnshire, Cumbria and Northumberland. These are the rural areas that have particularly attracted older in-migrants and second home buyers.

Figure 2.2

A Classification of Districts Based Upon Rurality

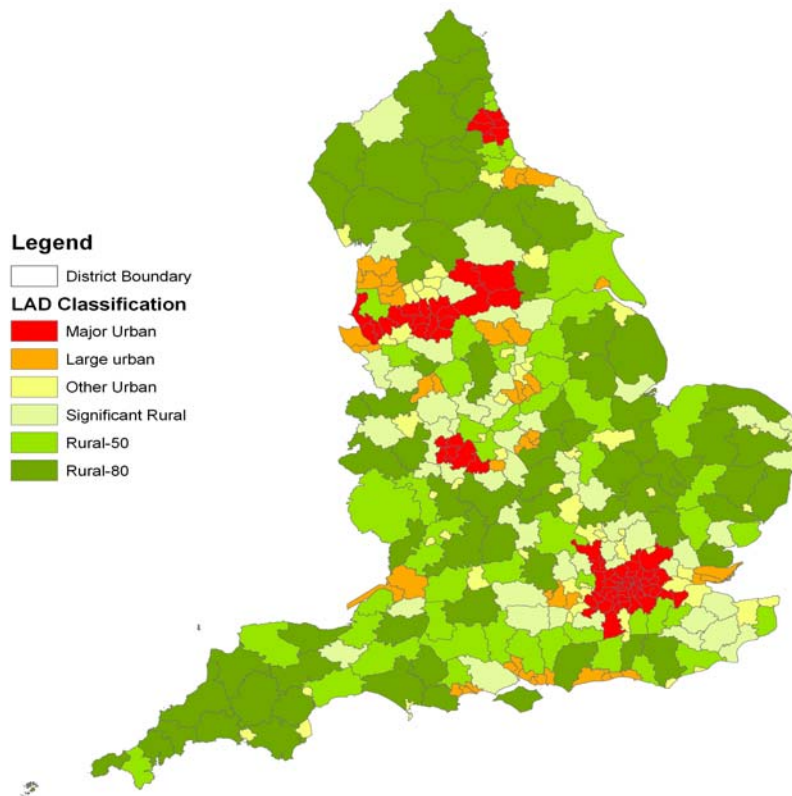
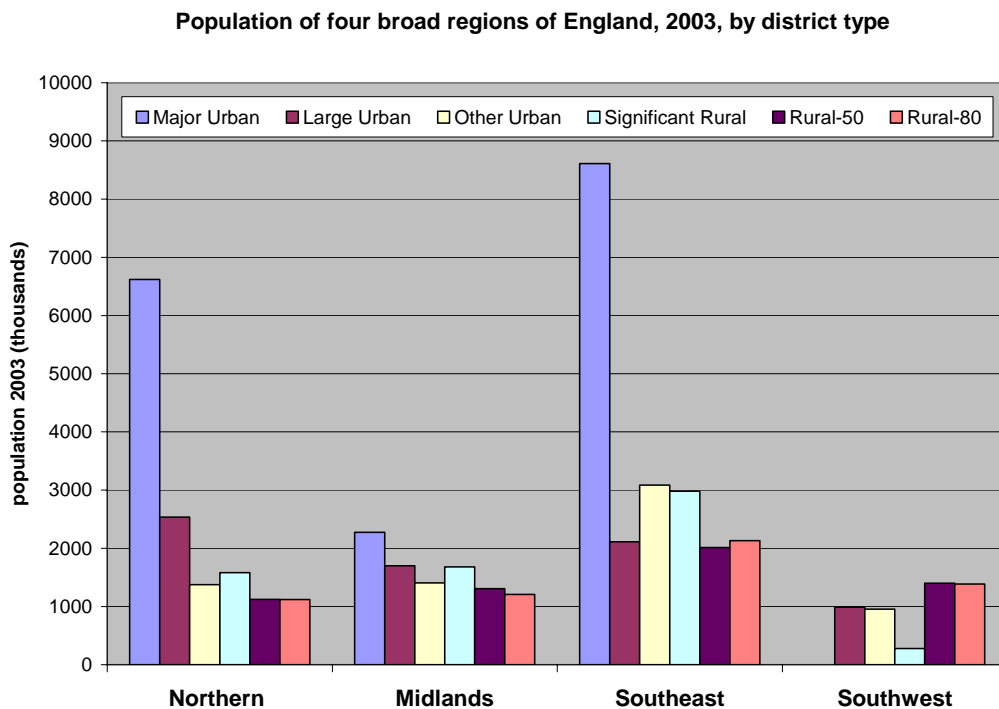


Figure 2.3 summarises these geographical patterns in terms of the population make-up of four broad regions defined in terms of Government Office Regions (GORs). The graph is dominated by the large number of residents living in the Major Urban LADs in Southeast England (comprising the London, South East and East of England GORs) and Northern England (North East, North West and Yorkshire and the Humber GORs). By contrast, in terms of their rural areas, the four regions are similar in the sense that their Rural-50 districts are quite evenly matched in population numbers to their Rural-80 districts. In three cases, too, the most important type in terms of population size is the Significant Rural, but it is the least important in southwest England. On this regional basis, it is Southwest England that is the most rural of the four. In

fact, over three–fifths of its population (61.3 per cent) lived in the three rural categories in 2003, well above the national figure of 36.5 per cent. Midlands England (comprising the East and West Midlands GORs) was also above the national figure at 43.8 per cent, while Southeast England (34 per cent) was marginally below it and Northern England (26.6 per cent) considerably lower.

Figure 2.3



NB. Southwest England contains no Major Urban districts

It is important to note that the picture of England’s rural population produced by this LAD-level classification is quite different from that derived from the finest-grained definition. Compared to the 2001 Census figure of 17.9 million people living in the three rural LAD types, the actual population of rural COAs (which is officially taken as the rural population) is just 9.5 million. This differential arises from the fact that, although many of the urban districts contain rural areas and residents, the effect is more than offset by the large numbers of residents in urban enclaves within rural districts, not least because of the decision to include ‘market towns’ as part of rural England. Given that the LAD classification forms the basis of most of the rest of this chapter, it is important to recognise that this chapter examines the populations

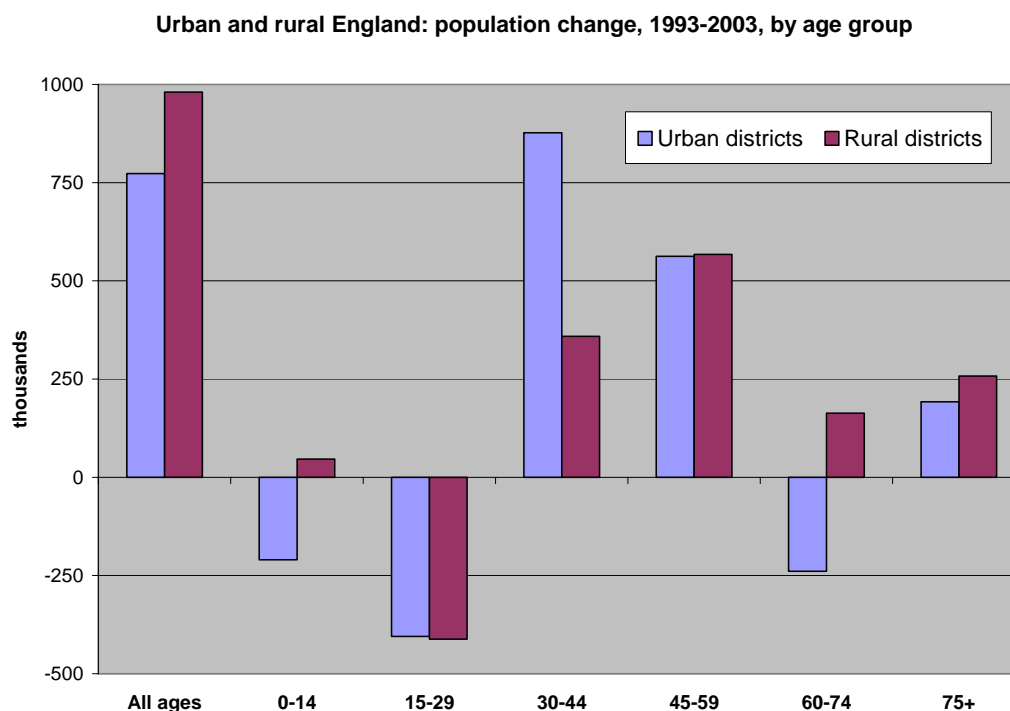
of what can be thought of as the broadly rural districts of the country rather than those of non-urban settlements strictly defined.

Population change in the recent past

The two main features of rural England are that its population is growing and that it is ageing at the same time. It is not unique in this, as the same two trends have been happening nationally, but both have been occurring more rapidly in the rural areas, making those areas increasingly distinctive from urban England. Moreover, the pace of these changes is generally greatest in the most rural locations and is pretty general across the regions. These recent trends can be clearly documented by comparing the official population estimates for 2003 with those of 1993. This period has been chosen because it is the most recent span of ten years for which such data is available; it also neatly dovetails with the 2003-based population projections. The official 2003 population estimates also provide the most reliable estimation of the population, because they take into account the undercounting and other deficiencies of the two most recent censuses and, more importantly they adopt a consistent definition of residents, most notably counting students at their term-time address throughout.

The picture of recent population change is presented in absolute terms in Figure 2.4. Over the decade 1993-2003 the three rural district types (as defined in Table 2.1) together added almost one million to their population, compared to just over three-quarters of a million people gained by England's three urban district types combined. In terms of how the difference was spread across the six broad age groups shown, urban England substantially outstripped the rural areas in their gain of people aged 30-44 years old, but rural England saw significantly larger increases in 0-14 year olds and 60-74 year olds and a somewhat larger increase in the number of people aged 75 and over. All districts were very closely matched in terms of their gains of 45-59 year olds and their loss of 15-29 year olds.

Figure 2.4



The fact that rural districts contributed well over half of the total population increase over this period is remarkable, given that their share of the overall population of England was not much more than a third. Indeed, the rate of growth in rural districts (5.7 per cent) was more than twice that of urban districts (2.5 per cent) (See Table 2.2). The rural excess in growth rate over the urban districts is especially pronounced for the three older age groups, ranging from a 7 to a 12 percentage point difference. In contrast, the urban districts outstripped the rural districts in the growth rate of 30-44s and experienced a significantly smaller decrease of 15-29 year olds.

Table 2.2 Population change, 1993-2003, for broad age groups, by district type, per cent for decade

District type	All ages	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+
England	3.6	-1.8	-8.0	12.2	13.4	-1.1	13.5
Urban	2.5	-3.4	-5.9	13.4	10.9	-5.8	9.4
Rural	5.7	1.4	-12.5	10.0	17.4	6.4	20.0

Major Urban	2.7	-2.6	-4.7	16.1	8.8	-7.5	6.1
Large Urban	1.0	-5.9	-7.4	9.2	11.0	-5.4	10.3
Other Urban	3.7	-2.9	-7.1	10.9	16.3	-1.9	16.7
Significant							
Rural	4.1	0.0	-12.0	10.2	14.0	3.6	18.5
Rural-50	5.4	1.4	-13.6	9.2	17.4	6.3	20.5
Rural-80	7.8	3.2	-11.9	10.5	21.2	9.5	21.0

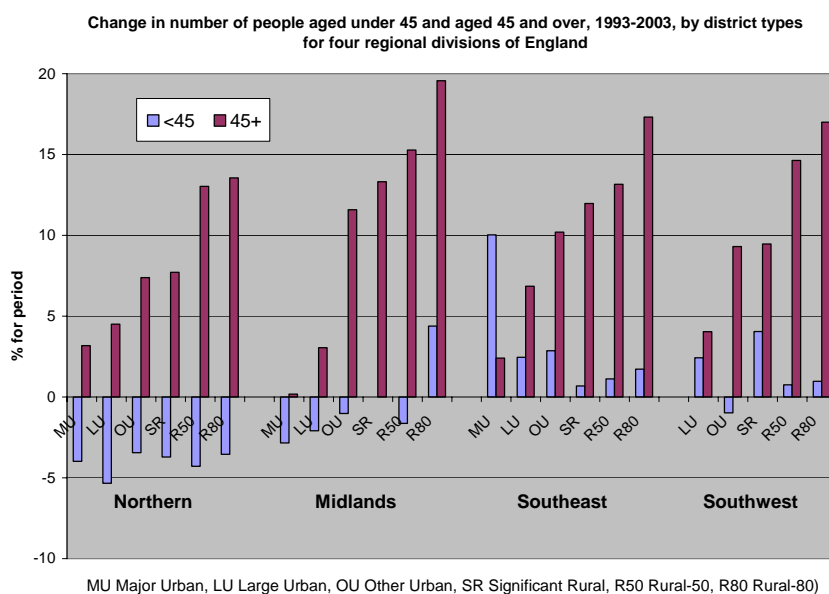
Table 2.2 also shows how far these patterns vary across the different types of rural and urban districts. The most striking feature is the extent to which increasing rurality is associated with the greater pace of growth in the number of the oldest people. For the 75+ group, for instance, it was the Rural-80 districts that saw the fastest growth, with their numbers up by 21 per cent over the ten-year period, followed by the Rural-50 districts and then the Significant Rural districts. Indeed, this relationship extends across all six district types, with the Major Urban type seeing the smallest relative rate of increase in very elderly numbers. The same pattern is found for the 60-74 year olds, with higher rates of increase with increasing rurality and higher rates of decline the more urban the district. The trend is also similar for the 45-59 group, except for the strong growth recorded by the Other Urban districts. Among the three younger age groups, however, only the under 15s come close to this graduation across the six types, with the main feature for the 15-29 year olds being the broad contrast between urban and rural and with the growth of the 30-44 age group being fairly uniform apart from the faster growth of the Major Urban districts.

Figure 2.4 and Table 2.2 both bear witness to the general ageing of the English population in the ten years up to 2003, with the overall contraction of the two under-30 age groups and substantial increases recorded by the 30-44, 45-59 and 75+ age groups. Moreover, it is an ageing process that is generally proceeding more rapidly in rural England than for the urban districts, with the former seeing the faster growth in people aged 45 and over and the greater rate of decline in the 15-29 age group. The under-15s provide the only sign of a rejuvenation of the rural population, but as we have already noted

and will see in more detail later, the effect of this is undermined by the high level of movement of young adults out of the countryside.

Finally, this pattern of population ageing is fairly general across the nation. This is shown in Figure 2.5, using the same four-region breakdown as in Figure 2.3 and highlighting the contrast in change rates for the under-45 and 45-and-over populations. In northern England all six district types experienced a clear population ageing between 1993 and 2003, with a rise in numbers aged 45 and over alongside a decline in the number of under-45s. But the pace of ageing was greater for the two most rural categories, because whilst the contraction of the under-45s was at quite a similar rate to that of the more urban districts, the rate of increase in the older populations was much higher. Elsewhere in England, the overwhelming picture is one where the older population grew faster than the under-45s (the only exception being London), with the growth-rate differential between these two broad age groups being greatest for the three rural types and especially the Rural-80 districts. For instance, southwest England's Rural-80 districts saw their number of people aged 45 and over rise by 17 per cent over the ten-year period compared to an increase of only one per cent for their under-45s.

Figure 2.5



The projected patterns of population change

The latest (2003-based) official population projections are for up to 2028. They indicate the continuation of the trends identified for 1993-2003; in other words, the population of rural England will continue to grow faster and age more quickly than that of urban England. This is perhaps not surprising in that these figures are based on projecting recent trends forward into the future with assumptions being made that the changes that have taken place in fertility and mortality in the last few years will be maintained into the future as will the age-specific patterns of migration. They do not allow for the influence of any policy measures or other developments that have not already been affecting population trends. What additionally the projections provide, however, is, firstly, the specific figures on the extra numbers in each age group and their changing shares of the overall population for each type of area and, secondly, an indication of the effect of the further ageing of the baby booms and busts of the past. Just as the 30-59 age groups swelled between 1993 and 2003 as the baby boomers reached middle age, so the projections reveal how these birth cohorts are likely to swell the numbers in their sixties, seventies and eighties by 2028. Perhaps the single most significant figure presented below is that, based on current trends, the Rural-80 districts as a group will find that almost half of their residents will be aged 50 and over by 2028, and the other two rural district types will not be far behind.

Table 2.3 shows the expected level of overall population change for the projection period 2003-2028 for England as a whole and for the separate district types. By 2028 England's total population will be over 55 million people, up by 5.5 million or 11 per cent on the 2003 level. By then, the share of the national total accounted for by the three rural types combined will have risen to 37.8 per cent, up by over one percentage point from its 2003 share of 36.5 per cent. The 5.5 million national increase will be spread almost equally between the urban and rural districts, but the rural districts will experience a considerably faster rate of growth - 15 per cent, as opposed to just under 9 per cent for the urban districts in aggregate. Looking across the six district types, the same pattern of growth rates is found as for 1993-2003. The highest

growth rate is expected to be recorded by the most rural type – Rural-80 – with a progressively lower rate of increase as one moves further up the urban hierarchy, with the sole exception of the Major Urban category whose ‘out of line’ performance is entirely due to the forward projection of London’s strong growth of recent years. Moreover, apart from this latter case, it is the most rural type that is expected to see the largest absolute increase in population numbers.

Table 2.3 Projected population change, 2003-2028, by district type, England

District type	Population 2028		2003-2028 change	
	thousands	% England	thousands	%
England	55,381.3	100.0	5,535.6	11.1
Urban	34,432.0	62.2	2,787.0	8.8
Rural	20,949.3	37.8	2,748.6	15.1
Major Urban	19,157.6	34.6	1,661.9	9.5
Large Urban	7,804.2	14.1	472.7	6.4
Other Urban	7,470.2	13.5	652.4	9.6
Significant				
Rural	7,331.2	13.2	813.1	12.5
Rural-50	6,699.4	12.1	859.9	14.7
Rural-80	6,918.7	12.5	1,075.6	18.4

This scale of population growth is primarily due to increases between 2003 and 2028 in the numbers of people aged 60 and over. For England as a whole, these are expected to rise by a total of 5.3 million people, and the 45-59 year olds by a further 0.6 million, while the three younger age group will contract or grow only marginally (Table 2.4). The rural districts combined account for significantly more than half of the rise in the total number of people aged 60 and over. At the same time, rural areas can expect to see the numbers of 30-44 and under-15 year olds reduce somewhat, thereby accelerating the ageing process, though this will also effect urban England,

which in aggregate seems destined to see some shrinkage of its 15-29 age group as well.

Table 2.4 Population change, 2003-2028, for broad age groups, by district type, thousands

District type	0-14	15-29	30-44	45-59	60-74	75+	All ages
England	-119.7	65.3	-350.6	601.4	2,982.0	2,362.0	5,535.6
Urban	-102.1	-39.3	-120.2	499.3	1,511.6	1,036.9	2,787.0
Rural	-17.6	104.6	-230.4	102.1	1,470.4	1,325.1	2,748.6
Major Urban	20.4	-11.3	35.8	429.0	740.5	445.3	1,661.9
Large Urban	-77.9	-30.4	-87.0	16.9	365.6	286.2	472.7
Other Urban	-44.6	2.4	-69.0	53.4	405.5	305.4	652.4
Significant Rural	-11.4	29.8	-75.5	33.1	441.4	400.3	813.1
Rural-50	-13.9	28.6	-81.7	25.0	472.4	429.0	859.9
Rural-80	7.7	46.2	-73.2	44.0	556.6	495.8	1,075.6

Note: totals may not sum exactly because the data for individual districts was rounded.

The increasing size of the older age groups appears even more significant when expressed in terms of their growth rates. Nationally (Figure 2.6, right-hand panel), in 2028 the number of people aged 75 and over is forecast to be more than 60 per cent larger than in 2003, and the number of 60-74 year olds over 40 per cent larger, due to the baby boomers having moved into old age; and on current trends the biggest impacts will be sustained by the rural districts. The rate of increase in the number of people aged 75 and over rises progressively across the urban-rural spectrum, with the Rural-80 districts expected to see almost a doubling in its numbers as opposed to the Major Urban districts' rise of less than 40 per cent. The gradient of growth rates for the 60-74 age group is similarly regular, though the gradient is less steep, rising to an increase of just over 60 per cent for the Rural-80 districts.

Figure 2.6

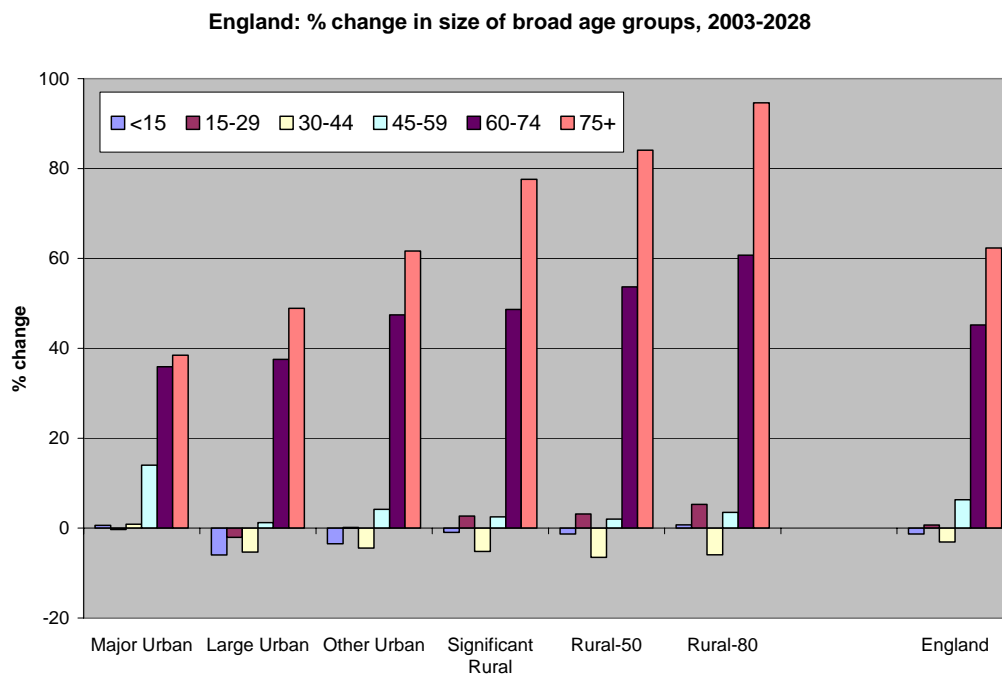


Figure 2.7 summarises the projected changes for all rural districts combined, using an age pyramid with five-year age groups. By superimposing the percentage distribution of 2028 on to that of 2003, this shows very clearly the way in which over this period the bulge of 30-59 year olds move up the age ladder to swell all the age groups from 60-64 upwards. It also shows the proportionate increase in the importance of each age group chronologically, being greatest for the 85-and-overs because a large increase in the share of this group is building on a relatively small base. Also striking is the greater proportionate elongation of the bars for older males compared to females. Traditionally there have been far fewer males than females at these higher ages, but this differential is beginning to narrow because of the faster gains in life expectancy for males in recent years. Note that, in absolute terms, the growth in numbers of the very elderly in rural England is higher than suggested in Figure 2.7, because of the fact that its whole population is growing strongly at the same time. For example, rural England's 85-and-over population is projected to rise by 180 per cent from 310 to 874 thousands, with the male component of this trebling in size from 114 to 345 thousands.

Figure 2.7

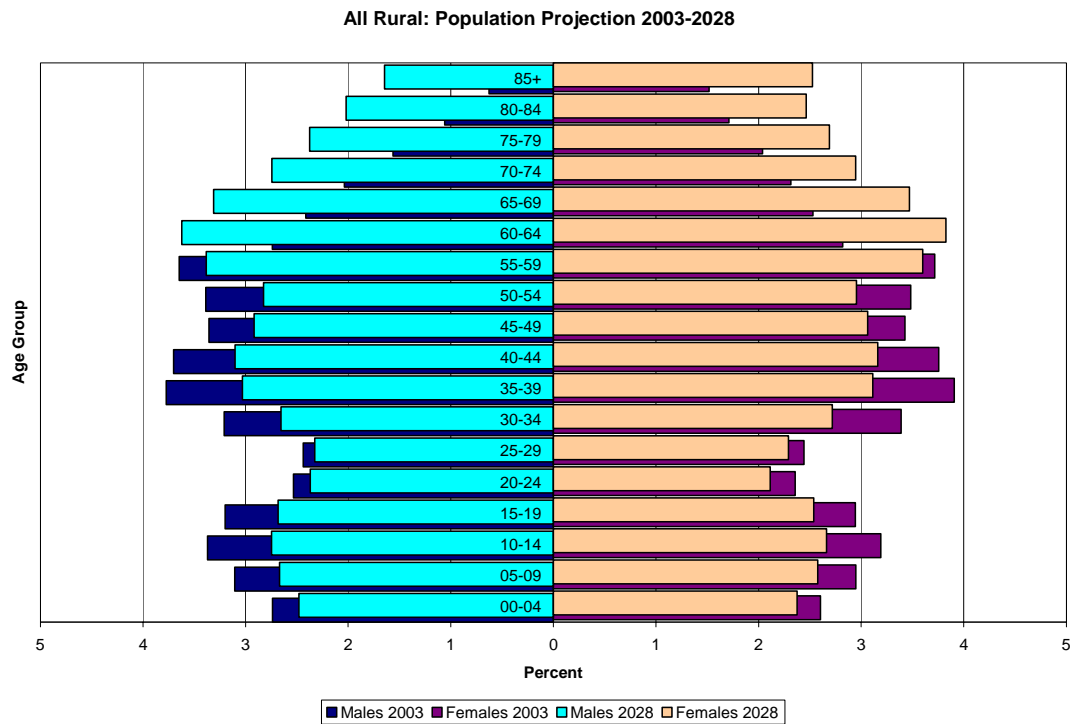
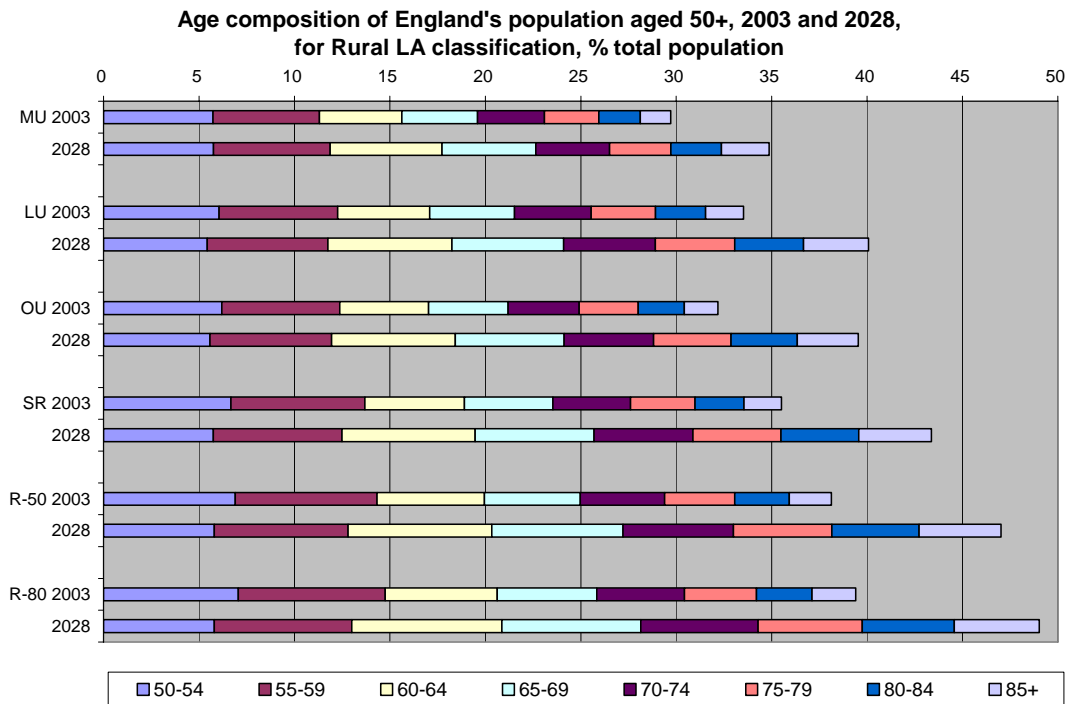


Figure 2.8 shows how the continued ageing of the population is projected to affect the age composition of the different district types. The Rural-80 type already had the highest share of people aged 50 and over in 2003 and this will become even more distinctive by 2028, when little short of half its population are expected to be at least 50 years old. The proportion for the Rural-50 type was a little lower than this in 2003, and consequently its percentage point increase is also just a little lower. Similarly, the Significant Rural type comes just slightly further behind on both accounts. In urban areas less than 30 per cent of the Major Urban type’s population was aged 50 and over in 2003, and the projected increase by 2028 is expected to be the lowest of all six types, at barely 5 percentage points.

Figure 2.8



Analysing these trends on a regional basis highlights clear variations in the proportion of older people and in the pace that this is growing. As shown in Table 2.5, in all four regions the rural population is currently older than the urban, and over the 25-year period to 2028 the proportion aged 50 and over is projected to increase faster for the rural districts. Southwest England currently has the largest proportion of its rural population aged 50 and over, while the Southeast has the smallest – a situation that is not expected to change. By 2028, 49 per cent of the rural Southwest's population will be of this age, compared to 44 per cent for the Southeast. The biggest increases in the proportion of older people in rural districts, however, look like occurring in the Midlands and Northern England, tending to close the gap on Southwest England.

Table 2.5 Proportion of population aged 50 and over, 2003-2028, for urban and rural England, by broad regional division

Broad region	2003		2028		% point change	
	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
Southeast	29.0	36.7	34.7	44.4	5.7	7.7
Southwest	34.0	40.4	39.2	48.9	5.2	8.5
Midlands	31.9	37.4	37.7	47.2	5.8	9.8
Northern	33.0	37.3	39.5	47.3	6.5	10.0

In all the regions it is the most rural district type that already has the highest proportion of older people and will continue to age the most rapidly.

Southwest Rural-80 districts are likely to see the proportion of people aged 50 and over reaching 51 per cent by 2028 (Table 2.6). Those of the Midlands and Northern England will not be far behind this.

Table 2.6 Proportion of population aged 50 and over, 2003 and 2028, for the three district types of rural England, by broad regional division

Broad region	Significant rural		Rural-50		Rural-80	
	2003	2028	2003	2028	2003	2028
Southeast	34.9	41.8	37.8	45.6	38.1	46.8
Southwest	36.7	41.9	39.9	48.1	41.6	51.0
Midlands	35.8	45.1	37.7	47.3	39.4	49.8
Northern	36.2	44.8	37.0	47.9	39.2	50.2

Individual districts vary considerably from these regional aggregates.

Altogether, 58 districts – almost one in six of the England total – are projected to have the majority of their population aged 50 and over by 2028. The ranking is led by Berwick-upon-Tweed, with an expected proportion of 62 per cent in 2028. The next oldest populations will be found in West Somerset, North Norfolk, Rother, East Devon, East Lindsey, West Dorset, South Lakeland, Tendring and Christchurch. All but one of these top ten districts are rural, six of them Rural-80. The exception is Christchurch, which is classified as Large Urban on account of it being part of the urban area of Bournemouth.

It is therefore clear that many rural parts of England are now overtaking seaside resorts and spa towns as the places with the oldest populations – although it should be noted that all the top ten are on the coast as well as being rural.

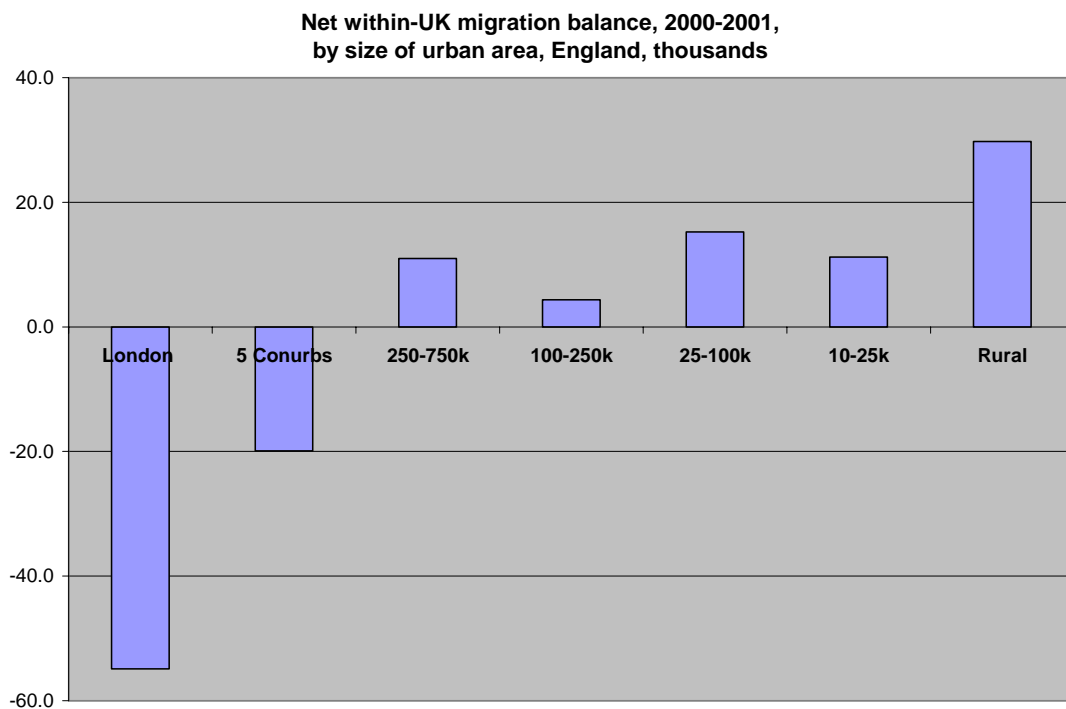
The role of migration in producing rural population ageing

Migration plays an extremely important role in determining demographic structures across England, not least in terms of the number and composition of the older population. As has been demonstrated, the rural ageing process comprises three main types of migration. Whilst traditionally most attention has been given to the arrival of retirees and the exodus of young adults, more recently a third type has become much more important, though its effect on the proportion of older people in a community is not immediate. The main element in the emergence of ‘counter-urbanisation’ has been the high level of migration into rural England by pre-retirement groups, with the largest rural population gains being of 30- and 40-year-olds and their children. While many children leave for urban areas on or soon after leaving school, most of their parents’ stay for the rest of their lives, ‘ageing in place’ alongside the locally born and bred. In this section, a variety of analyses is used to illustrate these points, drawing very largely on ward-level data on within-UK migration obtained from the 2001 Census. This provides a more precise definition of settlements than the district-level classification used up till now – one which restricts ‘rural England’ to settlements of under 10,000 people and accounted for 18 per cent of England’s total population in 2001.

Figure 2.9 provides an introduction to the importance of England’s rural wards as the net beneficiary of internal migration. In aggregate, they gained almost 30,000 more people than they lost as a result of people changing address within the UK in the 12 months leading up to census day in 2001. This is a greater gain than for any of the other categories shown and indeed is larger than for all the urban areas of under 100,000 residents combined. The graph also shows clearly the classic ‘counter-urbanisation’ relationship, with the largest conurbations (namely London, West Midlands, Merseyside, Greater

Manchester, West Yorkshire and Tyneside) being substantial net losers of migrants and the medium-sized urban areas seeing net gains but not on such a large scale as rural and smaller urban areas. (Note: because the census provides no information about emigration overseas, this graph does not show the effect of net international immigration in helping to offset the within-UK migration losses of the largest six urban areas.)

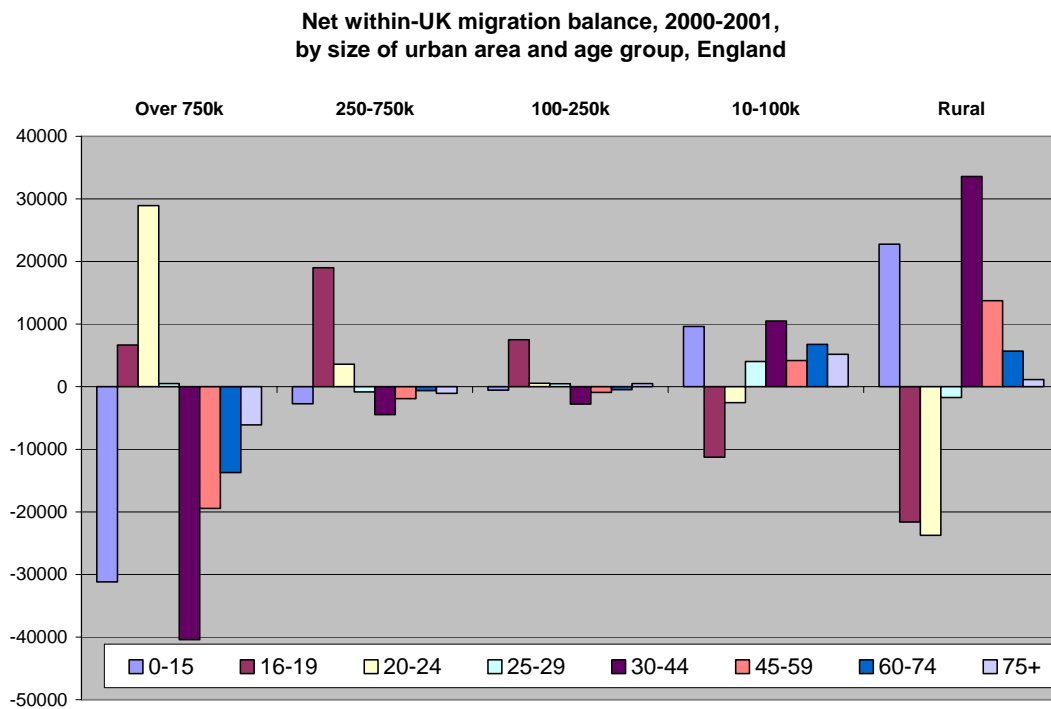
Figure 2.9



The age breakdown of this population movement reveals very clearly the three ways in which migration is contributing to the ageing of rural England. As shown in the far-right panel of Figure 2.10, the rural wards are net gainers of retirees and the immediate pre-retirement age group, but their main gain is from 30-44 year olds and the under-16s. In due course, however, many of the youngest in-migrants – together with local children – move out of rural England, as reflected in the large net losses of the 16-19 and 20-24 age groups, but once the 30-44 year olds have arrived, in net terms they stay and eventually contribute to the swelling of the ranks of older people living in the countryside. The pattern for the six largest urban areas combined (far-left

panel of Figure 2.10) is almost the mirror image of this, especially in relation to their net losses of children and the age groups of 30 and over. The two next largest size groups are distinctive only in their net gains of 16-19 year olds, this occurring presumably because of attracting more university students than they send to university elsewhere. Meanwhile, the urban areas of 10,000 to 100,000 people are largely a microcosm of the rural category, but they are bigger net attractors of the 60-74 age groups (and especially the over 75s). It would appear that the countryside and rural towns (of under 10,000 people) do not hold such a strong appeal for the very old when moving.

Figure 2.10



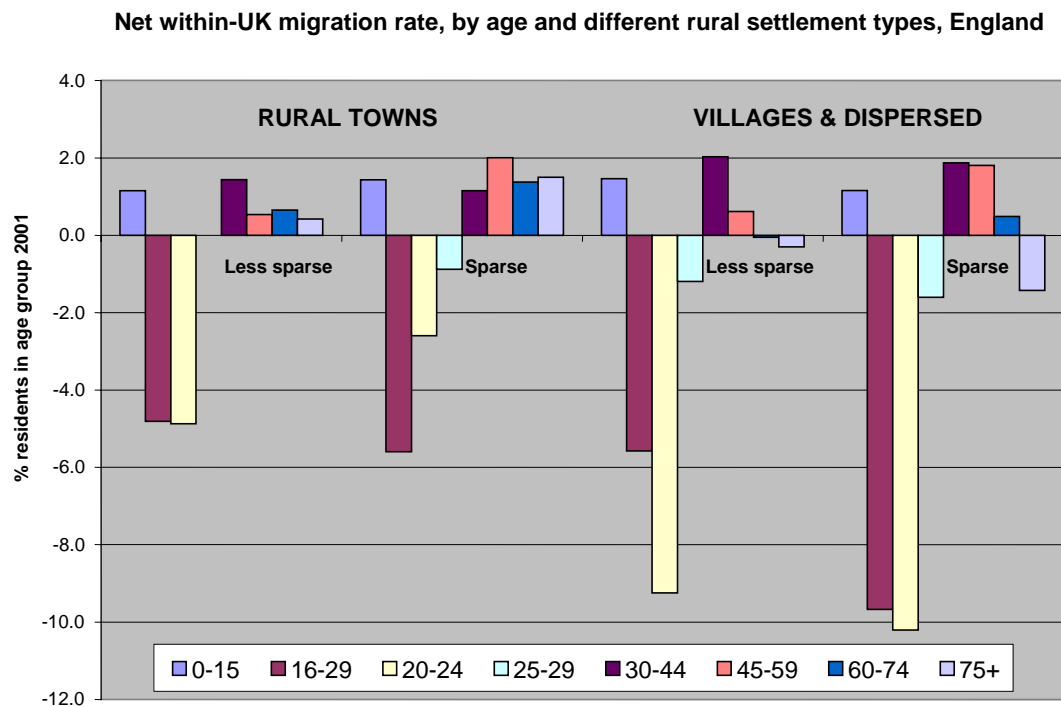
Rural England, as defined at the ward level, is therefore the key migration gainer of older people and the largest cities are the main losers, where ‘older’ now has to be defined as 30 and over. This is not to imply that the urban areas have experienced no population turnover. In fact, considerable ‘cascading’ has been taking place. Population is not just moving out of the largest cities directly into rural England; rather, much of the net movement out of the largest cities goes to the next level of the urban hierarchy, but the latter

then loses similar numbers to the next level down, and so on (Champion, 2004).

The structure of England's settlements of under 10,000 people, can be analysed combining two two-way classifications. One separates out Rural Towns from the remainder of the countryside which, at the ward level used here, groups the Villages and Dispersed elements of the full rural definition, while the other distinguishes the geographical context of settlements in terms of 'sparse' and 'less sparse'. The resulting four-fold typology indicates considerable variation across rural England in overall migratory growth rates. In the year leading up to the 2001 census, the strongest performance was recorded by Rural Towns in sparse settings, with a net migration gain relative to their existing population of 0.92 per cent – over three times the overall rate of 0.29 for all of England's rural wards. Next highest, but a long way behind, is the 0.35 per cent migratory gain for the Rural Towns in less sparse areas, with the Villages and Dispersed category trailing far behind with rates of 0.17 and 0.14 per cent in less sparse and sparse settings respectively.

It is, however, in the behaviour of specific age groups that the differential performance of these four rural types is most marked. Of particular relevance to the older population is the greater appeal of town over village life for the very old. This is evidenced in Figure 2.11 by the net exodus of people aged 75 and over from the Village and Dispersed category, found in both sparse and less sparse contexts but especially the former. As seen previously in Figure 2.10, these are not leaving rural England, but are concentrating in the Towns, producing a 1.5 per cent increase in the 75+ population of those in sparse settings and also some growth in those situated in a less sparse context.

Figure 2.11



However, perhaps the most striking aspect of Figure 2.11 is the massive haemorrhaging of young adults. This is found for all four types of rural settlement, but is especially severe for the Villages and Dispersed category in sparse areas. The 10 per cent net migration loss of 16-24 year olds recorded in this one-year period from these areas is the equivalent of losing more than three out of every five of this segment of the population if repeated for the nine years of their passing through this age group (using compound rates). Even for the Villages and Dispersed in less sparse surroundings, on the basis of a 6 per cent annual loss of 16-19 year olds combined with an over-9-per cent loss for 20-24 year olds, the net shrinkage of the school-leaving cohort is over half. If it were not for the substantial net in-migration of older people and their children, the prospects for this type of settlement in rural England would be bleak indeed.

Similar analyses for Government Office Regions (not shown here) suggest that these patterns are prevalent across the whole of rural England. These include the net migration loss of the over 75s from Villages & Dispersed type

of settlement, the relative attractiveness of Remote Towns for the oldest age groups, the premium conferred by remoteness for the 30-59 age groups, and the high rate of loss of young adults by the sparse Village & Dispersed areas in particular. The pace of these migration changes varies between regions. In Yorkshire and the Humber, for instance, the sparse Villages & Dispersed wards lost almost 14 per cent of their 20-24 year olds in the pre-census year, considerably more than England's overall figure of 10 per cent. In contrast, in the East of England, the rate of loss was under 3 per cent.

It may be that the exodus of young adults will have been accelerating in recent years due to the increasing proportion of school-leavers going on into higher education. It may also be that the exodus of people aged 75+ from the deep countryside has been increasing, as this group will have been particularly disadvantaged by the closure of village shops and post offices and the rationalisation of rural bus services. However, the increased popularity of rural England for middle-aged and middle-class people, already with a 40-year history behind it, shows no sign of abating. Indeed, according to the evidence of the NHS Central Register, overall levels of net out-migration from the larger cities into the more rural counties have in recent years been running at some of the highest levels ever recorded since this data source came on stream in the mid 1970s.

Summary: the ageing of rural England

The purpose of this chapter has been to document the evidence in support of the central theme of this book. It has confirmed that the population of rural England is growing faster than that of the nation as a whole and that it is also growing older more quickly. These observations hold true whether looking back over the developments of recent years or examining the official 2003-based population projections covering the period through to 2028. Moreover, the figures which we have presented for rural England are very significant. Key headline statistics are:

- In the ten years to 2003, the number of people aged 75 and over living in the 178 local government districts classified as rural rose by 20 per cent, compared to the 9 per cent increase estimated for urban England.
- Between 2003 and 2028 the number of people aged 75 and over in English rural districts is projected to rise by around 80 per cent, and the number aged 60-74 will grow by around 50 per cent.
- At the apex of rural England's age pyramid, the number of males aged 85 and over is expected to treble, while the numbers of people in all the age bands below 60 will be smaller in 2028 than they were in 2003.

Of course, the projections are based on assumptions derived from recent trends in life expectancy, family size and migration, and there can be no absolute certainty about the future. Yet there are sound reasons for accepting this broad picture of the continuing rapid increase in the numbers of older people living in the countryside. In the first place, increasing longevity has been an ever present factor since the onset of the demographic transition some two centuries ago. Secondly, all those who will be in the older age groups in 2028 have already been born, so the only question is where they will be living. In that regard, there seems to be no diminution in the preference of those aged from their 30s upwards to live in rural areas.

Set against this argument, however, there are scenarios that could potentially challenge this pattern of projected rural population growth and ageing. One concerns choice of retirement area and the increasing tendency of people to seek out coastal and rural areas further south in Europe, which in itself would take some of the pressure of rural England. Alternatively, there is the possibility of a further tightening of housing markets in rural areas resulting from the passage of the post-war baby boomers into pensionable age. In relation to the latter, however, the majority of the people that not only desire a rural life style but are also in a position to achieve it are already living in rural England, having moved there in their 30s, 40s and 50s. What would be more

likely, in a situation of rising housing pressure, would be a slowdown in the rate of urban-rural migration by people at these younger ages, which would not reduce the number of older people living in the countryside for the foreseeable future but would merely serve to accelerate the rise in their proportion. Similarly, though it is not an aspect that this review of demographic change has dwelt on, this sifting of incomers would also have a socio-economic dimension, as less prosperous people (including younger people with less housing equity) would be squeezed out of the market.

The mention of housing pressures goes hand in hand with the recognition that rural England is not a single undifferentiated entity. Within the geographical frameworks used in this chapter, there are two major dimensions of variability. In terms of the three rural district types, it is the most rural – Rural-80 – that currently have the highest median age and are expected to see the largest increases in their proportions of older people over the next couple of decades. These tend to be located in the more peripheral and coastal parts of the country and contrast particularly with the Significant Rural category, much of which lies within commuting distance of larger cities. Secondly, there is the distinction between the rural towns and the deeper countryside of villages and dispersed settlements, which featured in our examination of migration patterns. The latter command the higher rates of migration gains for most of the older age groups and, combined with their tighter planning restrictions on new house-building, would see the greater impact of any increased trend towards the filtering out of less prosperous incomers. Besides these two dimensions, there is also much regional and local variation that this chapter has not been able to do full justice to. Suffice it here to draw attention to the likelihood of some districts having three out of five people aged over 50 by 2028 and the median age of all Southwest England's Rural-80 districts combined rising to 51 years.

Nevertheless, discussion of geographical variations should not let us lose sight of the advance of the ageing process along a broad front across England, as in so many other countries around the world but especially those that experienced a temporary baby boom in the middle of the last century. It is

simply that the rural areas are in the vanguard of this process, with their most rural parts lying at the cutting edge. It is just a matter of timing as to when a particular level of ageing will have been reached in any place, not whether it will actually occur. In due course, unless England goes on receiving large numbers of young immigrants from overseas or fertility rates move sharply upwards, urban areas too will eventually reach the situation described above for rural England. How rural communities cope with the ageing 'wave' over the next few years can be expected to pave the way for the rest of the country.

Acknowledgement

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For a detailed discussion on the new urban rural definition see http://statistics.defra.gov.uk/esg/rural_resd/rural_defn/Rural_Urban_Methodology_Report.pdf.

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