

Rural Urban Classification (2021)

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1. Background

The 2021 Rural Urban Classification (RUC) is a statistical classification which provides a consistent and standardised method for categorising geographies as either rural or urban according to data from the 2021 Census. The classification is based on:

- address density
- physical settlement form
- population size
- relative access to major towns and cities (populations of over 75,000 people).

The classification has been applied to local authority districts and statistical geographies including Middle Super Output Areas, Lower Super Output Areas and Output Areas. This marks a change from the 2011 classification which was also applied to upper tier authorities, parliamentary constituencies and electoral wards.

2. Classification of Districts

Local authority district classifications are divided into four categories based on their populations:

- Majority Rural: had at least 50% of their population residing in rural Output Areas
- Intermediate Rural: 35-50% of their population residing in rural Output Areas
- Intermediate Urban: 20-35% of their population residing in rural Output Areas
- Urban: 20% or less of the population residing in rural Output Areas

Each category is then split into one of two relative access categories. If more than 50% of a district's population lives in 'Nearer a major town or city' Output Area, it is deemed 'nearer a major town or city'; otherwise, it is classified as 'further from a major town or city'.

Figure 1 shows the classification of Gloucestershire's six districts:

- Cheltenham and Gloucester are classed as 'Urban: Majority nearer to a major town or city'.
- Stroud and Tewkesbury are classed as 'Intermediate urban: Majority nearer to a major town or city'.
- Cotswold is classed as 'Majority rural: Majority nearer to a major town or city'.

- Forest of Dean is classed as 'Majority rural: Majority further from a major town or city'.

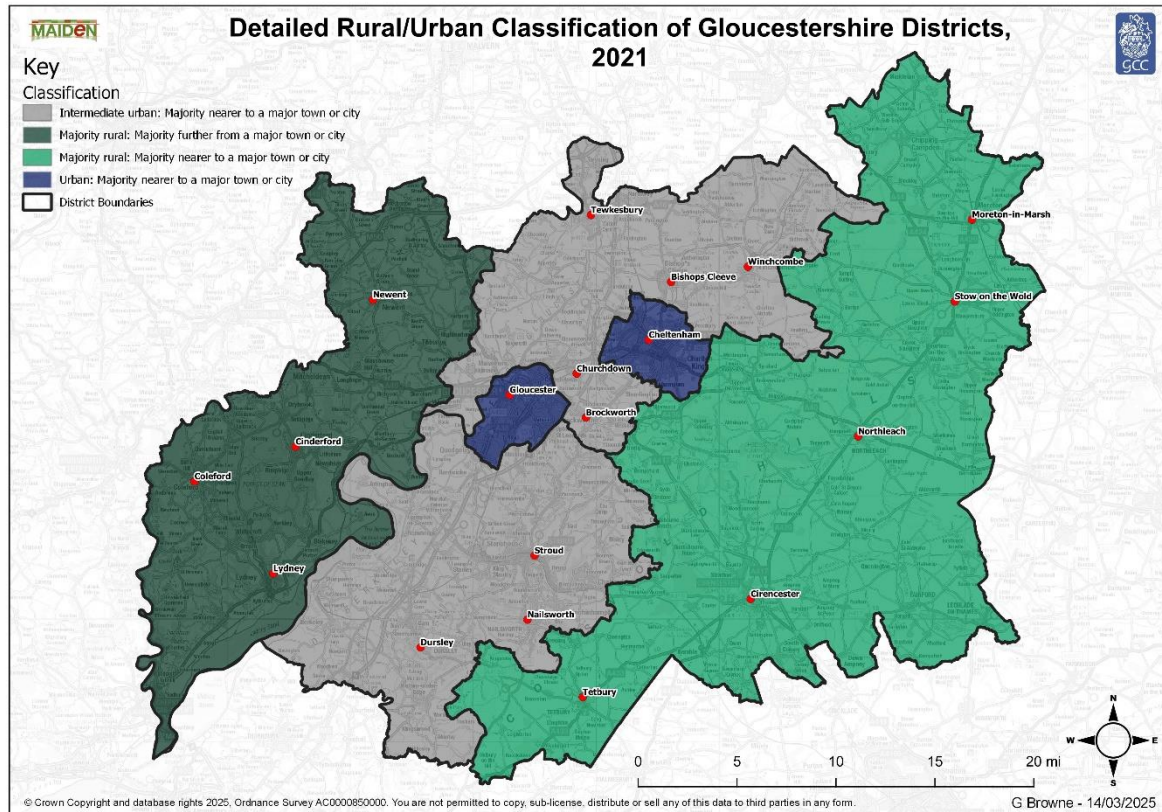


Figure 1: Detailed Rural/Urban Classification of Gloucestershire Districts, 2021¹

3. Classification of small areas

A more detailed view of variations across districts is shown in Figure 2. This is based on the classification of Output Area geographies². Output Areas are defined as urban if they have a high density of residential addresses, or if they intersect with Amalgamated Built Up Areas (ABUAs) with a resident population of 10,000 or more³. Output Areas that intersect with ABUAs with populations less than 10,000, or that have lower densities of addresses, are assigned to larger or smaller rural settlement categories.

All Output Areas are also distinguished by whether they are nearer to or further from a major town or city. The classification consists of:

¹ Rural Urban Classification, 2021, ONS

² Small area containing around 309 people (average of 132 households)

³ ABUAs are Built Up Areas (BUAs) within 200m of one another and with a direct road connection, representing larger conurbations

Rural

- Smaller Rural: Further from a major town or city
- Smaller Rural: Nearer to a major town or city
- Larger Rural: Further from a major town or city
- Large Rural: Nearer to a major town or city

Urban

- Urban: Further from a major town or city
- Urban: Nearer to a major town or city

Not unsurprisingly all the Output Areas in Gloucester and Cheltenham have been classified as urban, the remaining districts are made up of a combination of urban and rural classifications.

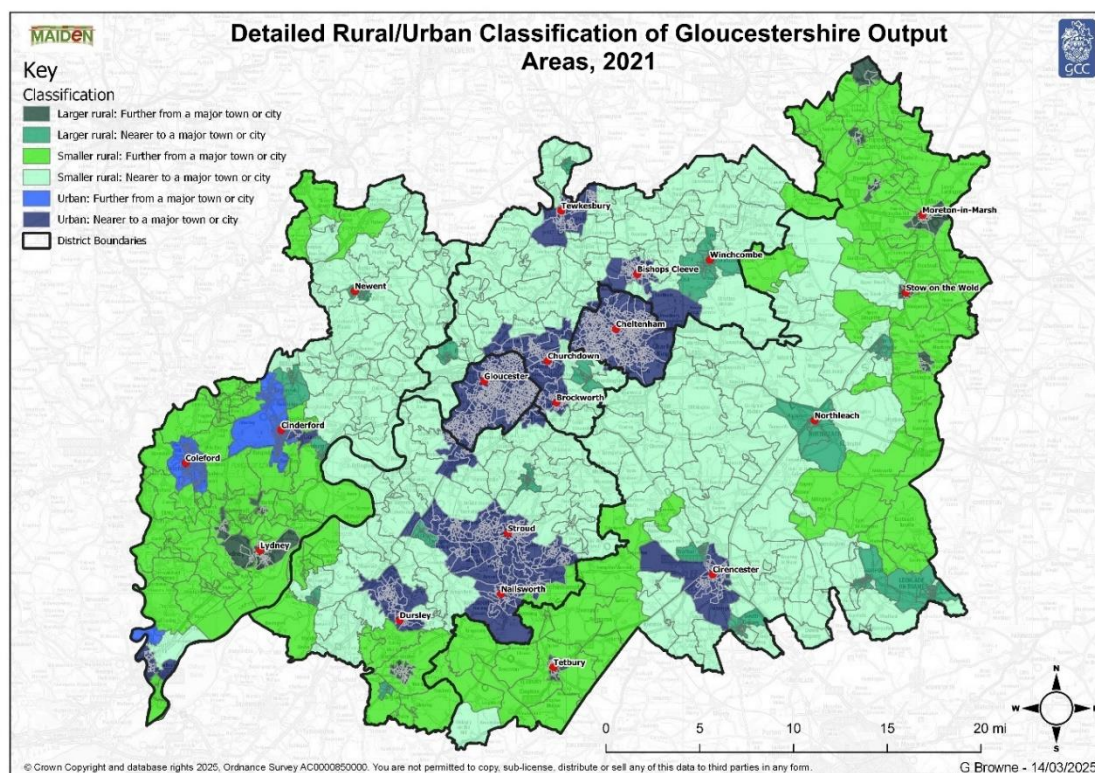


Figure 2: Detailed Rural/Urban Classification of Gloucestershire Output Areas, 2021⁴

⁴ Rural Urban Classification, 2021, ONS

4. Area and Population by rural/urban classification⁵

The rural and urban classification can then be used to analyse population and other data, to allow comparisons between rural and urban areas.

An analysis of Gloucestershire's geographic area showed the majority of the county (87.5% of the total area) comprised Output Areas that are classified as rural⁶. However, in 2022 only 29.2% of the county's population resided in Output Areas that fell into this category. Gloucestershire's urban Output Areas accommodate the majority (70.8%) of the county's total population⁷.

4.1 Geographic area

Gloucestershire (87.5%) has a higher proportion of its Output Areas classed as rural than the national average (84.5%) but a lower proportion than the regional average (90.7%). When compared to other county and unitary authorities across England and Wales, Gloucestershire is the 33rd (out of 179) most rural authority in terms of its geographic area, this puts it in the top 20% of authorities in terms of rurality.

When compared to its geographic and statistical neighbours⁸ the proportion of its geographic area classed as rural is slightly higher than average, with the county sitting in the top half of both cohorts.

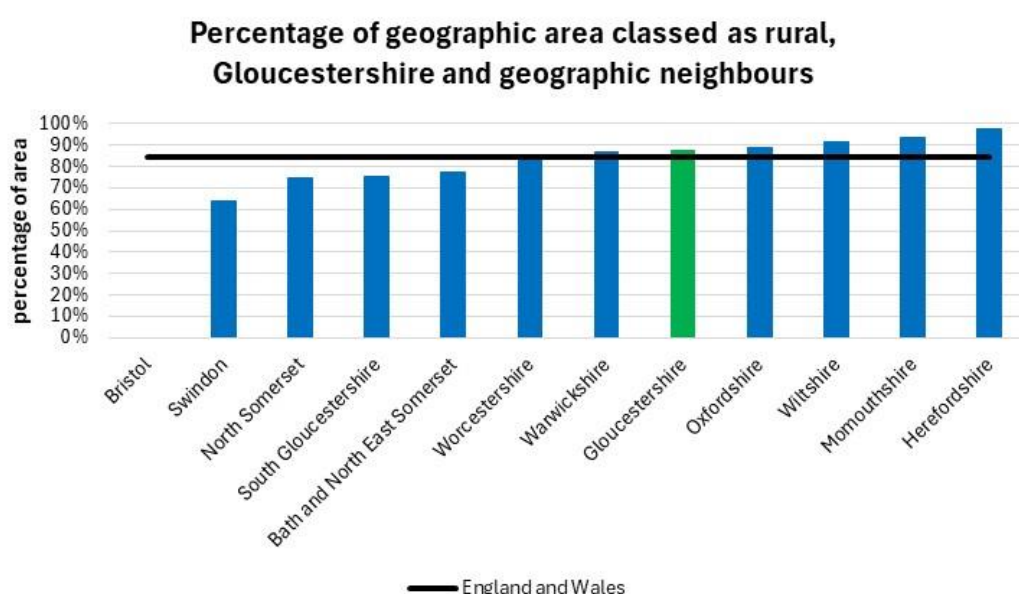


Figure 3: Percentage of geographic area classed as rural, Gloucestershire and geographic neighbours⁹

⁵ This analysis is conducted at the most granular level using Output Areas

⁶ Rural Urban Classification, 2021, ONS and Standard Area Measurements, ONS

⁷ Rural Urban Classification, 2021, ONS and Mid 2022 Population Estimates, ONS

⁸ Local authorities which may not be close to one another geographically but share similar characteristics meaning they are useful to compare to one another. This list is based on the 2024 CIPFA groupings.

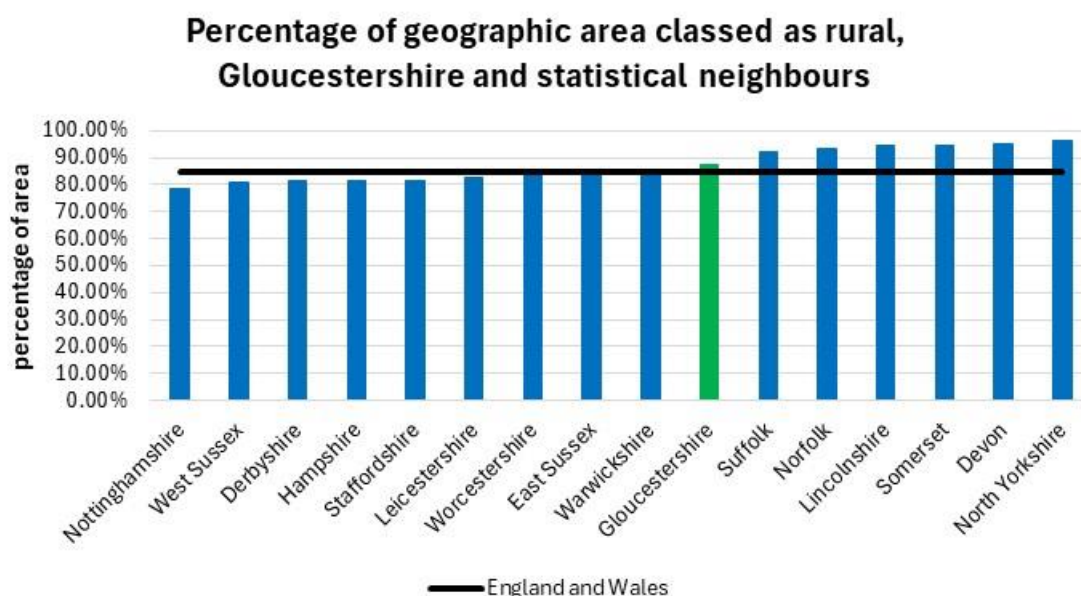


Figure 4: Percentage of geographic area classed as rural, Gloucestershire and geographic neighbours¹⁰

At district level 97.6% of Cotswold's geographic area is classed as rural, this makes it the 11th most rural district out of 318 district and unitary authorities across England and Wales. The Forest of Dean had the second highest proportion of its area classed as rural (91.7%) which saw it rank 57th out of 318 authorities, which put it in the top 20% of authorities across England and Wales in terms of rurality. Conversely none of Gloucester and Cheltenham's geographic area is classed as rural.

⁹ Rural Urban Classification, 2021, ONS and Standard Area Measurements, ONS

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

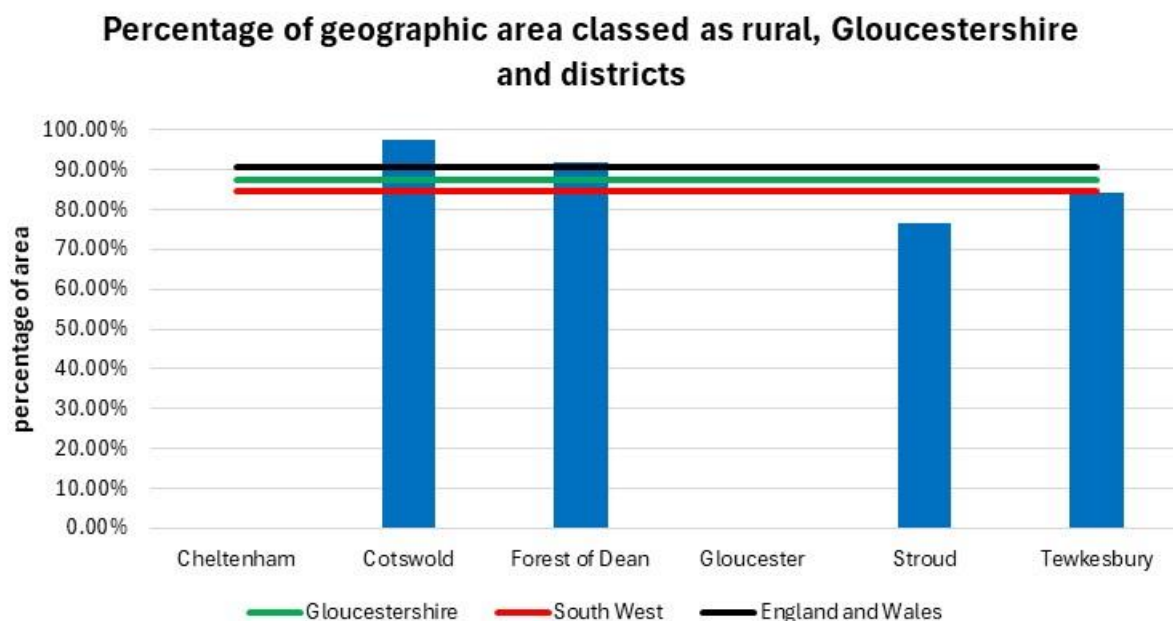


Figure 5: Percentage of geographic area classed as rural, Gloucestershire and districts¹¹

4.2 Population

Gloucestershire (29.2%) has a significantly higher proportion of its population living in Output Areas classed as rural than the national average (17.6%) but a slightly lower proportion than the regional average (30.3%). When compared to other county and unitary authorities across England and Wales, Gloucestershire is the 40th (out of 179) most rural authority in terms of its population, this puts it in the top 20% of authorities.

When compared to its geographic and statistical neighbours Gloucestershire's proportion of rural residents is similar, ranking mid place when compared to both cohorts.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

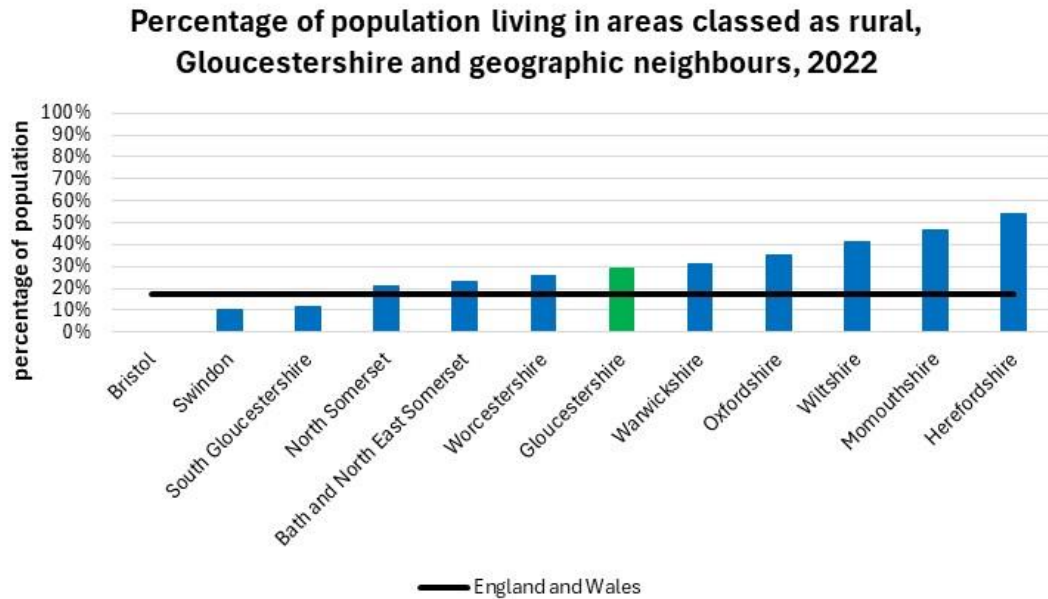


Figure 6: Percentage of population living in areas classed as rural, Gloucestershire and geographic neighbours, 2022¹²

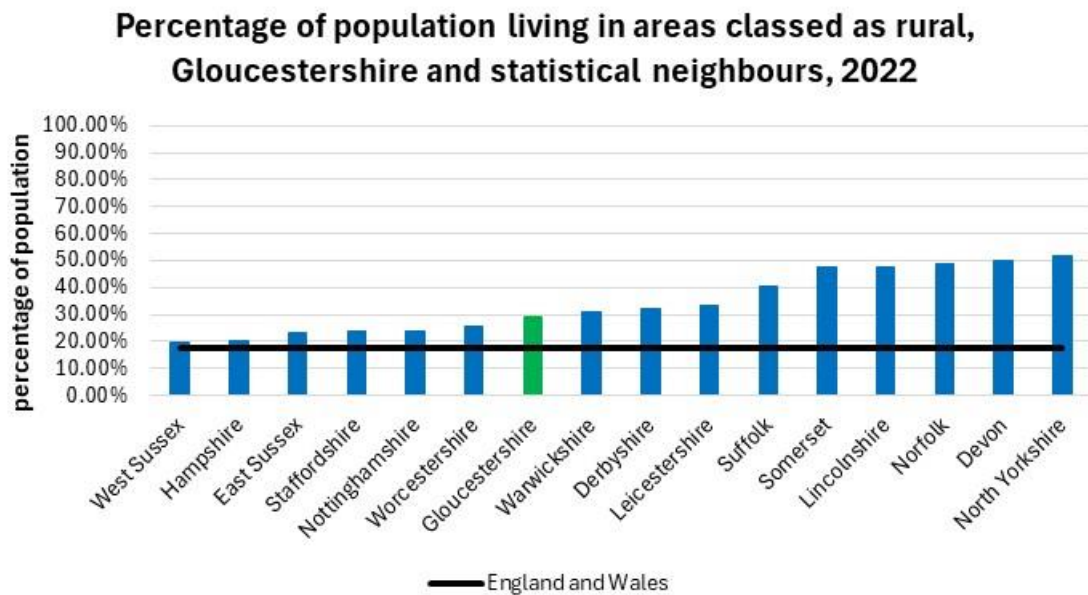


Figure 7: Percentage of population living in areas classed as rural, Gloucestershire and statistical neighbours, 2022¹³

At district level, 79.0% Cotswold's population live in areas which are classed as rural, this makes it the 6th most rural district in terms of population out of 318 district and unitary authorities across England and Wales. The Forest of Dean had the second highest proportion of its population living in areas classed as

¹² Rural Urban Classification, 2021 and 2022 Mid Year Estimates, ONS

¹³ *Ibid.*

rural (65.1%) which saw it rank 21st out of 318 authorities, which put it in the top 10% of authorities across England and Wales in terms of this measure. Conversely none of Gloucester and Cheltenham's population live in areas classed as rural.

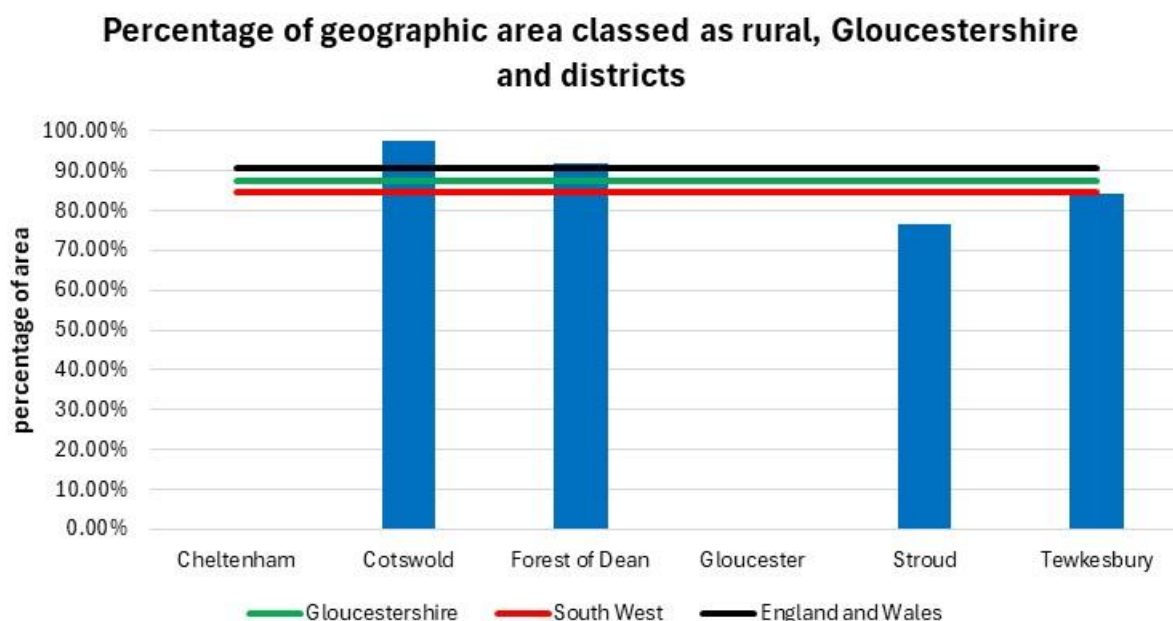


Figure 8: Percentage of population living in areas classed as rural, Gloucestershire and districts¹⁴

4.2.1 Population by age

Figure 9 shows that Gloucestershire's rural areas have a higher proportion of older people compared with urban areas. A similar picture is reflected at a national and regional level.

In 2022, the most prominent age groups in Gloucestershire's rural areas are "55 to 59 years" and "60 to 64 years" with 8.4% and 7.8% of the rural population, respectively, while the most prominent age groups in urban areas are "55 to 59 years", "50 to 54 years" and "30 to 34 years" with 7.0%, 6.8% and 6.8% of the urban population, respectively.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Percentage of rural/urban population by 5 year age band, Gloucestershire, 2022

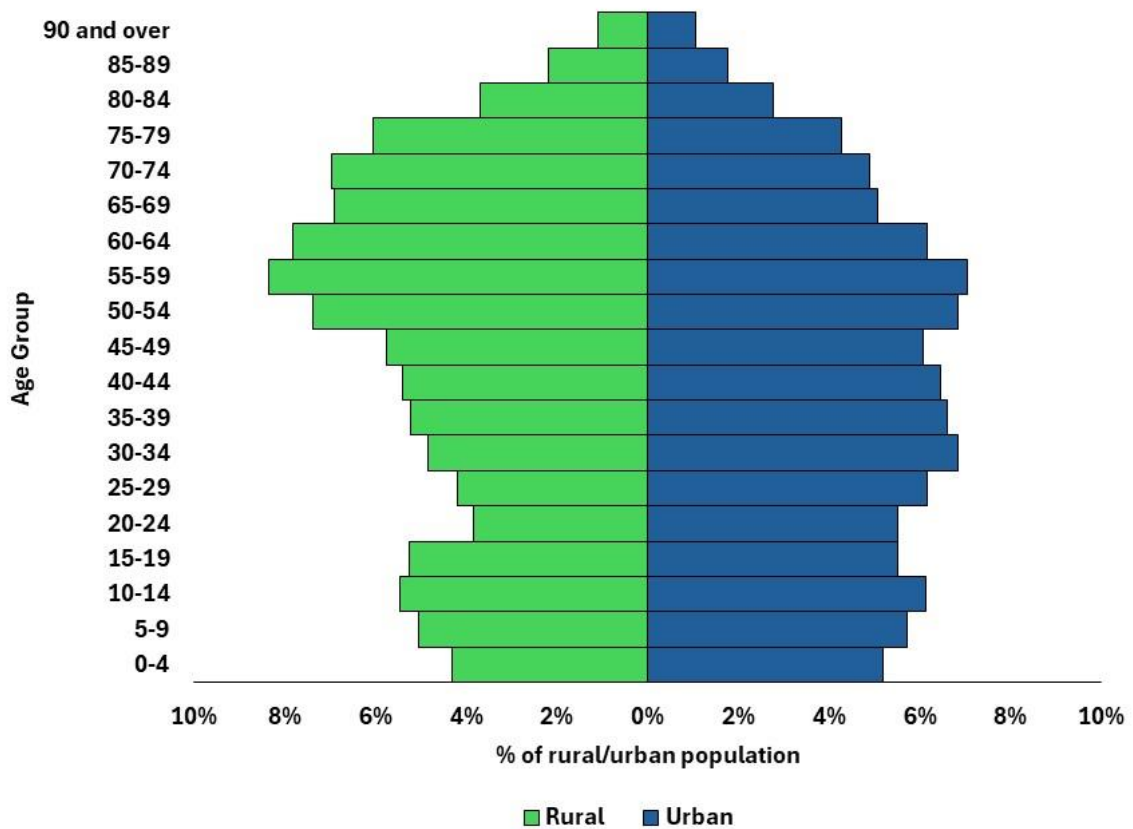


Figure 9: Percentage of rural/urban population by 5 year age band, Gloucestershire, 2022¹⁵

Figure 10 shows that at district level the population in rural areas is also more skewed towards older people, particularly in Cotswold and Tewkesbury.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

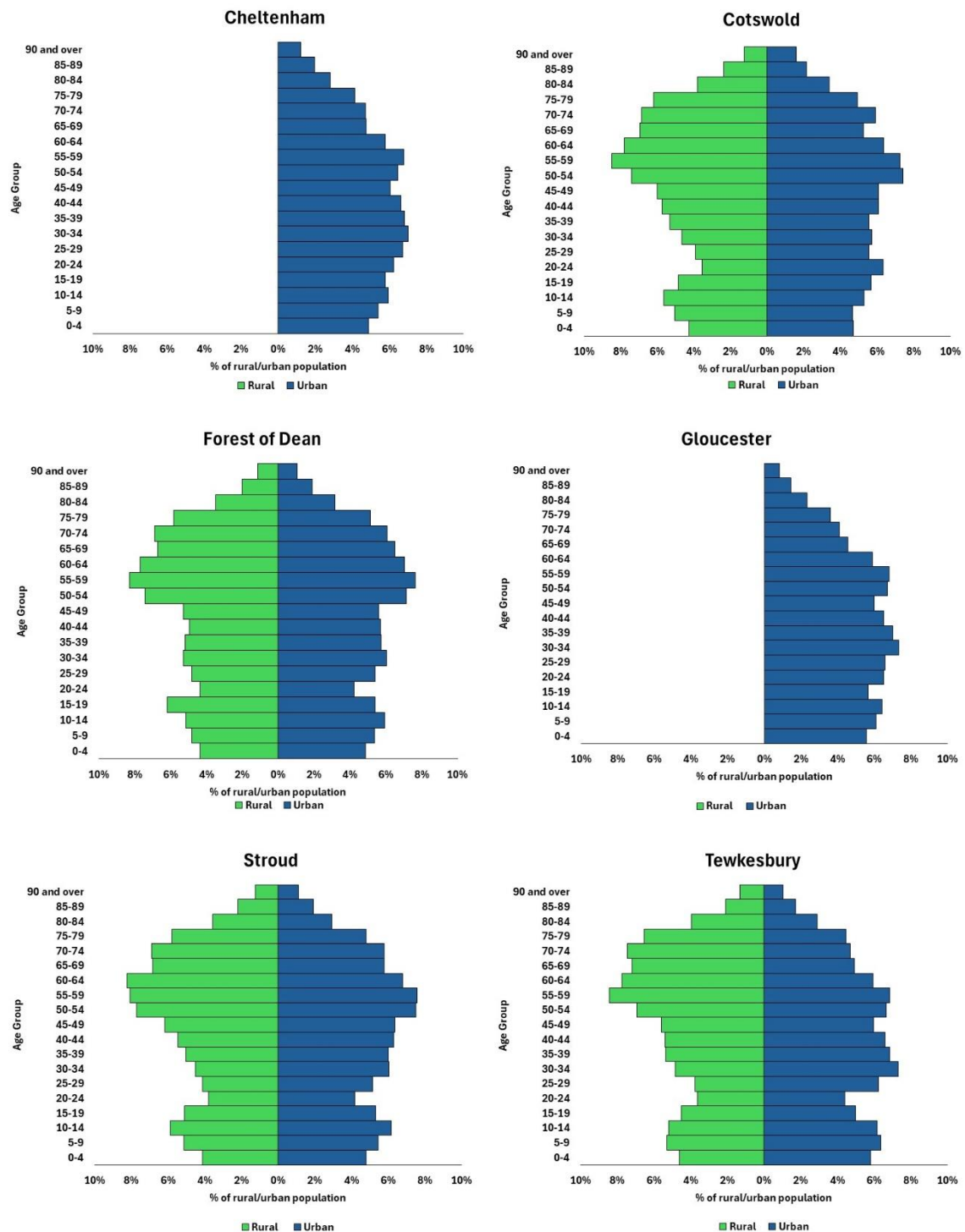


Figure 10: Percentage of rural/urban population by 5 year age band, Gloucestershire districts, 2022¹⁶

¹⁶ Ibid.

Figure 11 looks at the rural/urban population by broad age group. It shows the rural areas have a higher proportion of those aged 65 and over, at 27%, compared with the urban areas where 20% are 65 and over. Conversely the urban areas have a higher proportion of 0-15 year olds and 16-64 year olds, than rural areas. This difference is reflected across all geographies and will have implications for service demand and delivery.

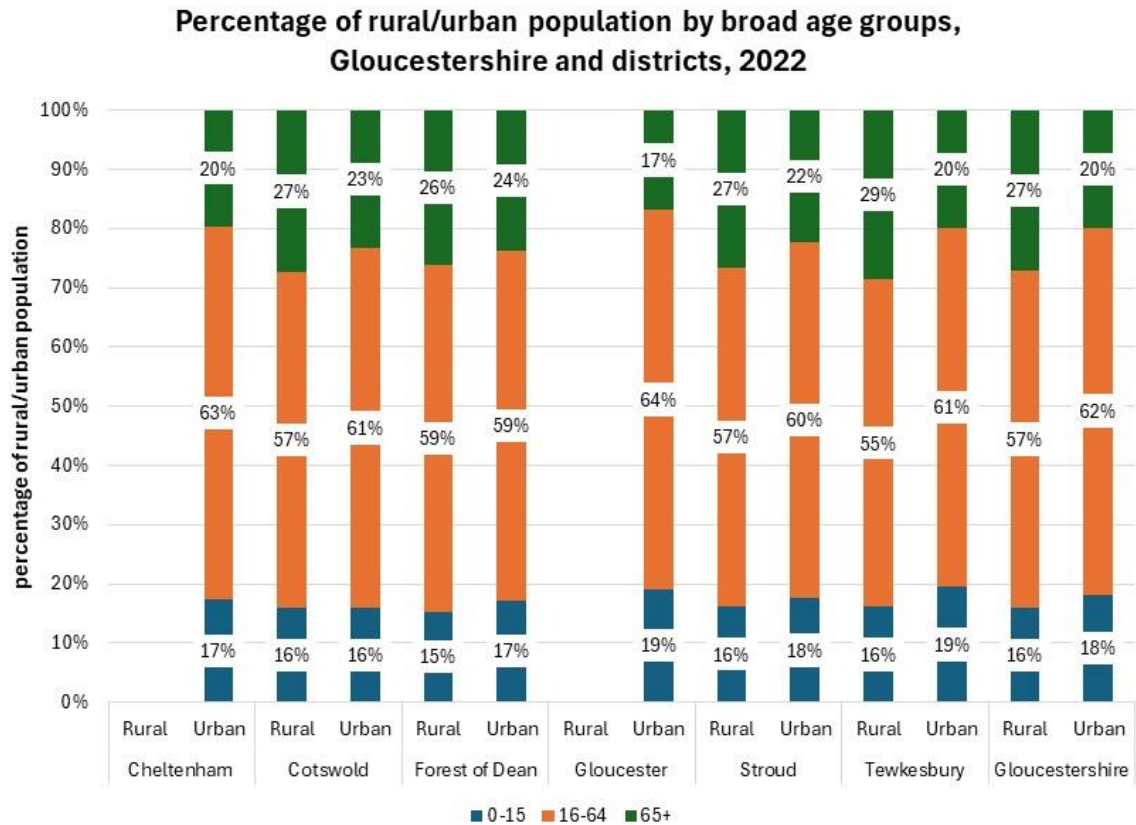


Figure 11: Percentage of rural/urban population by broad age groups, Gloucestershire and districts, 2022¹⁷

¹⁷ Ibid.