

NRS – Background Information

Settlements and Localities

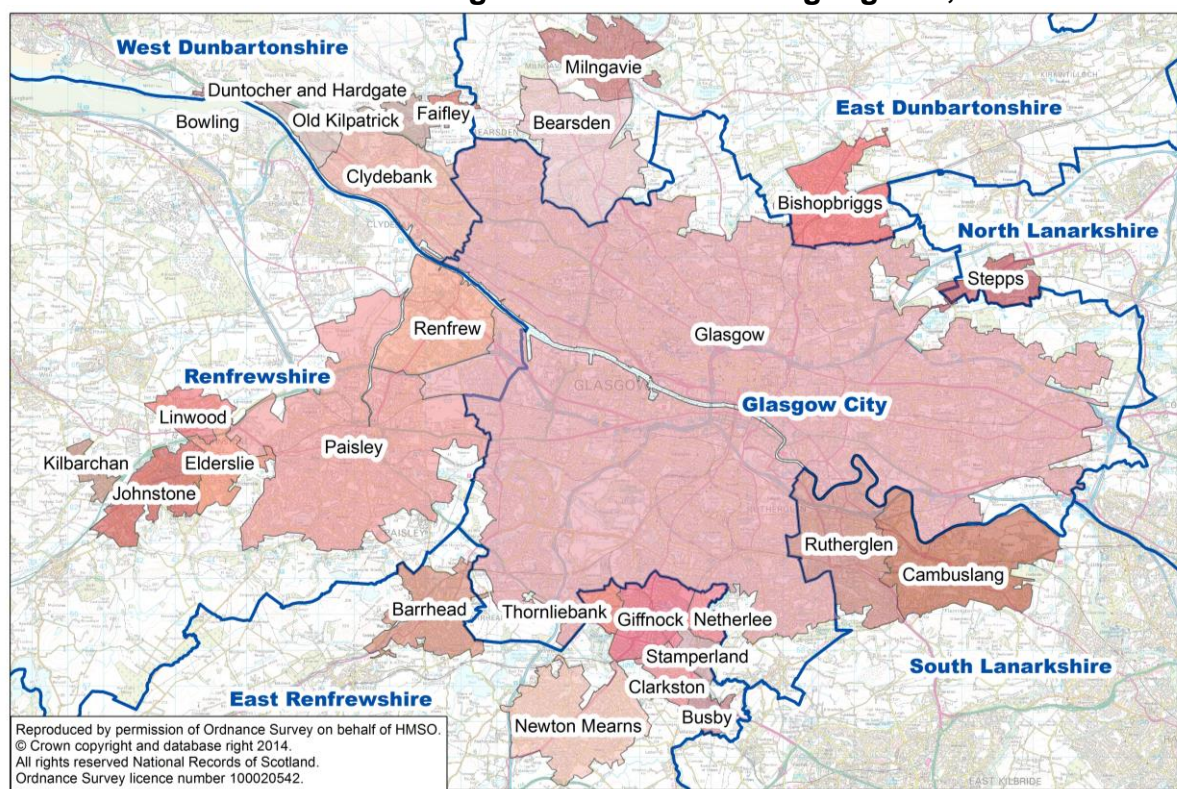
Following the re-organisation of local government in May 1975, smaller local authorities, known as large and small burghs, ceased to exist. There was, however, an ongoing need expressed by census users to know the population (and the characteristics of the population) of such areas.

The National Records of Scotland (NRS), produces 2 datasets biennially which are designed to show the boundaries of urban areas in Scotland: these datasets are Settlements and Localities.

While settlements can go a long way in defining the towns and cities in Scotland, some are very extensive and group together some very large populations.

As an example, the settlement of 'Greater Glasgow' has a large population which covers several towns and cities including Clydebank and Paisley as well as Glasgow. Accordingly, since 2001, the larger settlements have been divided into localities using as a basis the areas so designated in the 1991 Census report 'Key Statistics for Localities in Scotland' (ISBN 0-11-495736-3)¹ and the 2001 Census report 'Key Statistics for Settlements and Localities Scotland' (ISBN 1-874451-68-0).

The Settlement of Greater Glasgow with Localities Highlighted, 2012



Footnote

- 1) Note that the 1991 Census publication on localities is out of print. It should be available in main reference libraries.

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Localities

In 1981, the method used to define localities in Scotland was, in effect, based on built-up areas. More specifically a locality was defined as:

‘A continuous built-up area that had a population of approximately 500 or more at the time of the 1971 Census.’

In deciding whether one built-up area joined on to another, gaps of more than about 1 km were considered to form a break. In addition, those areas that had existed as former burghs were separately identified, even if they were joined to other localities. In most cases the old burgh boundary was used to make the division. However, localities did not coincide exactly with the former burghs if the latter were not wholly built-up.

Urban growth between 1971 and 1981 was reflected in the planning of the 1981 Enumeration Districts (EDs)² so that each locality was an aggregate of one or more EDs. During the ED planning, the new local authorities were asked to confirm that the localities based on the 1971 Census would be valid for the purposes of the 1981 Census.

The process identified 540 localities and following an examination of the 1981 Census output for Localities, the Scottish Office identified a further 17 urban areas which had populations of less than 500 at the time of the 1971 Census but which should have qualified in 1981 as localities because of population growth.

By the time of the Census in 1991, NRS had digitised the boundaries of postcodes, which made calculation of population densities possible within postcodes.

A postcode was defined to be urban if:

- It was assigned to a locality in 1981, or
- If had five or more people per hectare.

Otherwise it was classed as rural.

The method used to identify localities in 1991 was a three stage process:

1. Postcodes were classified as urban or rural.
2. Groups of adjoining urban postcodes were identified.
3. Local authorities were asked to suggest any changes needed to refine the above.

The local authorities were asked to bear in mind that stages 1 and 2 may have failed to include postcodes that were unpopulated but which should still be deemed urban, e.g. industrial estates. They were also asked to take into consideration that the

Footnote

2) Enumeration Districts (EDs) are used in Scotland for the purposes of census data collection. Each ED is created by combining a number of postcodes.

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process may have combined several areas into one locality when each was associated locally as having a separate identity, for example the villages of Limekilns and Charlestown in Fife have separate identities but are grouped together as the locality of Limekilns.

The Locality of Limekilns, 2012



The 1991 method identified 603 localities, 448 of which contained 1,000 residents or more, with the remainder containing a population of 500 or more but less than 1,000.

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Settlements

For the 2001 Census, National Records of Scotland had developed a new process to identify settlements in Scotland and the definition of a settlement was defined as:

‘A collection of contiguous high density postcodes bounded by low density postcodes whose population was 500 or more.’

A high density postcode had previously been referred to as an urban postcode but with a slightly different definition.

A postcode was defined as high density if at least one of the following applied:

- It had more than 2.1 residential addresses per hectare; or
- It had more than 0.1 non-residential addresses per hectare.

The second condition was included so that non-residential parts (for example industrial estates) of built-up areas could be identified.

These density thresholds were adjusted downwards for some Council areas (generally those withcrofting communities) in order to ensure that at least 95% of postcodes identified as localities in 1991 were selected as high density.

Having identified the individual high density postcodes it was then possible to identify groups of neighbouring high density postcodes containing in total more than 210 residential addresses. These groups were made to include any ‘holes’, that is low density postcodes entirely surrounded by high density ones. Estimates of the population in each group were made, and any group considered to have fewer than 500 residents was discarded.

The threshold densities of 2.1 and 0.1 were found to give a good approximation to the built-up areas identified in previous Censuses using the more traditional methods.

The threshold densities were adjusted in two Council areas, Eilean Siar and Shetland, wherecrofting and other factors such as settlement patterns vary considerably from the Scottish norm.

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2001 to Present

From the 2001 Census onwards, settlements have been created using the above methodology. Localities have been determined by first creating settlements and then assigning a locality value to each of the postcodes in the settlement based on whether they fall within a previous locality.

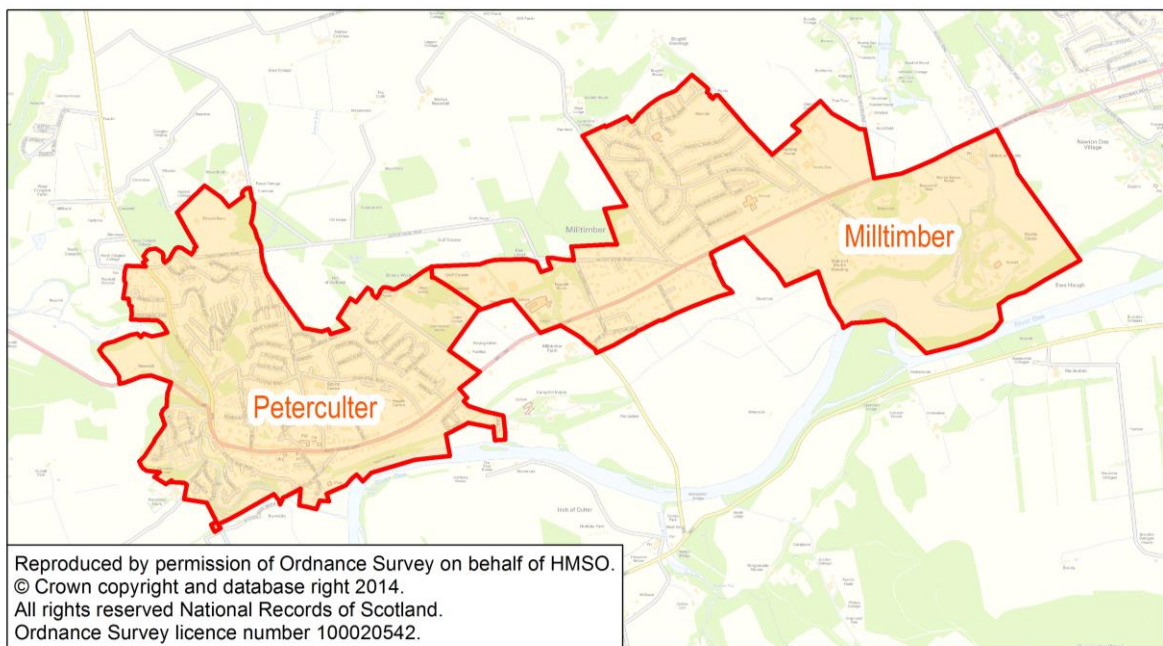
From 2003 onwards the same density thresholds were applied to all council areas and a third condition was added to identify high density postcodes, expanding the definition to:

A postcode is high density if at least one of the following applied:

- It had more than 2.1 residential addresses per hectare;
- It had more than 0.1 non-residential addresses per hectare; or
- The estimate of the population per hectare exceeds five people.

Postcodes with the same locality value are then aggregated together to form localities. Most settlement and locality boundaries are co-incidental, however, large settlements can be subdivided into two or more localities, as shown below.

The Settlement of Peterculter with the Localities of Peterculter and Milltimber, 2012



Further details on settlements and localities, including the methodology, can be found in the [Special Area Population Estimates: Settlements and Localities](#) section of the NRS website. Changes to the methodology and publication are consulted on through the [Population and Migration Statistics Committee](#).