

New Labour in power in the English Countryside 1997 – 2010:

A Social Democratic Moment Forgone?

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Abstract

An unprecedented number of Labour MPs was elected in rural areas in England in 1997. This study examines critically examines the making of rural policy and the implications for rural politics over the life-time of New Labour in power between 1997 and 2010.

The analysis begins by evaluating New Labour's representative role in the countryside after the 1997 election and considering the basis for the party's claim that it represented rural areas. It then provides a critical assessment of how the New Labour governments operated in relation to the countryside, setting out frames within which to analyse policies for the countryside and discussing programmes such as rural proofing. The study then critically evaluates whether New Labour was ever able to throw off the accusation of opponents that it was an urban construct which marginalised the rural, and discusses how events and crises such as the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak impacted on the approach to rural areas.

The body of the research analyses the approach to policy-making adopted by New Labour to investigate whether 'externalisation' and 'decentralisation' were important in how policy was made and the extent to which the wider New Labour mantra of modernisation affected the countryside. It also evaluates the extent to which temporal and spatial features played a part in how rural policy and politics evolved, and the extent to which this helped explain the course that the government pursued in the countryside.

The research concludes by considering whether there was a 'social democratic

moment' that opened up possibilities for important policy intervention in the countryside, and if so whether this opportunity was taken or missed.

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Fourth, I would like to put on the record how much I owe to Stroud Constituency Labour Party for having selected me as their Parliamentary Candidate on six occasions. Without that opportunity this research would never have come about and the experiences I have had would never have occurred.

Declaration

I declare the work presented in this thesis is my own and that this thesis was carried out in accordance with the Regulations of the University of the West of England.

Signed.

Dated. August 2016

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Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ACRE	Action for Communities in Rural England
BMA	British Medical Association
BSE	Bovine Spongiform Encephalitis
CA	Countryside Agency
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CC	Countryside Commission
CLA	Country Landowners and Business Association
CoSIRA	Council for Small Industries in Rural Areas
CRC	Commission for Rural Communities
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
DCLG	Department of Communities and Local Government (also ODPM – Office of Deputy Prime Minister)
DEFRA	Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
DETR	Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions
DOH	Department of Health
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry (also BERR – Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform)
DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
EA	Environment Agency
EBPM	Evidence-based policy-making
ERDP	English Rural Development Programme
FMD	Foot and Mouth Disease
GO(R)s	Government Offices (of the Regions)
HOC	House of Commons
HOL	House of Lords
LAD	Local Authority District
LANTRA	National Training Organisation for the Land Based Industries

LGA	Local Government Association
MAFF	Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food
NALC	National Association of Local Councils
NE	Natural England
NERC	Natural Environment and Rural Communities
NFU	National Farmers Union
OA	Output Area
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PAT	Policy Action Teams
PIU	Performance and Innovation Unit
PLP	Parliamentary Labour Party
PSA	Public Service Agreement
RCC	Rural Community Council
RDA	Regional Development Agency
RDC	Rural Development Commission
RDPE	Rural Development Programme England
RDS	Rural Development Service
RPA	Rural Payments Agency
RRAF	Regional Rural Advisory Forums
SEU	Social Exclusion Unit
SIGOMA	Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities
SOA	Super Output Area
TIFF	Total Income From Farming
VIRSA	Village Retail Services Association

The New Labour Chronology

This chronology highlights some of the main events that occurred during the period 1997 – 2010 and developments in policy and party matters. The events chosen are not exhaustive but give an indication of the major issues and constraints that New Labour faced and some of the ways in which they responded to them, both in policy and political terms.

Events	Dates	Policy issues and party development
Election of Blair and start of New Labour	1994	
General Election with New Labour winning clutch of rural seats rarely if ever held before	1997	MAFF retained Backbench Group of Rural MPs set up
Campaign of the Countryside Alliance intensifies against hunting ban Regional Development Agencies Act	1998	Strategy for sustainable development for the UK Enhance to regionalism results
Rural Audit report of the Rural Group published	1999	Creation of the Countryside Agency PIU report 'Rural Economies' Rural White Paper launched Regional Development Agencies come into being
MAFF staff incorporated within Government Offices of the Regions	2000	Publication of Rural White Paper Final Report of the Burns Enquiry into hunting with dogs The CROW Act
The fuel protests Foot and Mouth outbreak General Election with New Labour losing very few rural seats	2001	Defra created Defra Select Committee comes into existence Setting up of the independent Food Standards Agency
	2002	The Curry Commission into Farming & Food reports
	2003	Haskins Review Select Committee reports upon rural schools and broadband The reform of the CAP initiated for completion by 2005
Hunting Act passed Planning Act passed with impact upon rural housing provision	2004	Defra Rural Strategy launched Setting up of Regional Rural Development Frameworks alongside strengthened Rural Affairs Forums
General Election with more rural seats lost	2005	Social and economic rural development functions transferred from Countryside Agency to RDAs
	2006	NERC Act passed – CRC and NE replace Countryside Agency Goodman report upon affordable rural housing Functions of Countryside Agency transferred to Natural England and CRC
Brown replaces Blair as PM	2007	Planning for a Sustainable Future White Paper RDPE published Major problems with the RPA Treasury/Defra document Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy launched
Financial crash	2008	Taylor report upon affordable rural housing Select Committee report upon rural economy following intervention of the rural advocate New Planning Act passed The Potential of England's Rural Economy debate
General Election defeat	2010	New Labour loses Election

Chapter 1 – New Labour and rural policy - the purpose of the study

1.1 The researcher's role in New Labour and his position in relation to the study

The New Labour government was elected in 1997 with 418 MPs, a majority of 179. Of those 418 MPs 180 of them purported to represent rural or semi-rural seats (see Appendix 1). This included MPs in constituencies such as The Forest of Dean, High Peak, Leicestershire North-West, Norfolk North-West and Stroud, where I was elected and remained as MP through successive Labour administrations until defeated in 2010, and I lost my seat (See Appendix 2 for the list of rural seats won in 1997, and what happened to them subsequently). Though the figure of 180 is now disputed (interview with Bradley)¹, and very few of the seats that were captured were in the deepest rural category, defined as 80 per cent of their population living in remote rural areas (Bibby & Shepherd 2004), winning so many rural constituencies was still a major achievement.

My interest in the issues tackled in this thesis resulted from a long-term involvement with rural matters as a Labour Party activist, as a Councillor and then as Stroud's MP². I was somewhat unusual for a Labour MP in that my main areas of interest were agriculture and rural affairs. During the 13 years I was in the House of Commons I was a member of the Select Committees for Agriculture, Fisheries and

¹ Peter Bradley set up and chaired the Rural Group of Labour MPs, which was created to provide a focal point for rural issues amongst Labour Backbenchers, and to capitalise on the presence of so many rural MPs, through publications, campaigning and Parliamentary activities.

² I was elected as both a Labour and Cooperative MP. The Cooperative Party is a sister party of the Labour Party and runs joint candidates, and elected upwards of 20 representatives during my time as MP. The aim of the Cooperative Party is to protect and enhance cooperative values in the fields of production, distribution and consumption, which gave me a slightly different insight into rural politics compared to other Labour MPs.

Food, and Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and was also an officer of Parliamentary Labour Party Committees concerned with rural matters. From 2002 onwards I chaired the Rural Group of Labour MPs, and made many speeches and wrote numerous articles on the subject of rural affairs both within and outside Parliament.

Being so directly involved in rural issues meant that I had a unique opportunity to study at first hand the policy-making processes of New Labour, and how it attempted to deliver programmes in the countryside. During that time I had access to ministers, special advisers, and colleagues, as well as a more indirect relationship with civil servants. I was also able to meet and discuss rural matters with academics and practitioners who specialised in this field. Though there was only one major Defra Select Committee enquiry into the countryside (2008), there were other relevant reports, and rural did feature widely as a contingent in issues such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (2007), environmental concerns (2007), and the performance of subsidiary bodies, especially the Countryside Agency (2002).

After I lost my seat I retained an active interest in the countryside, being a candidate and councillor for most of the 2010 – 2015 Parliament. I also decided to turn my hand to writing up a narrative of my experiences, in the form of this thesis. Losing an election can be a life-changing experience – Shaffir and Kleinknecht (2005) refer to it as a near-death episode, whilst Theakston et al (2007) describe the difficulties that former MPs have in trying to return to a normal life. For myself, I decided to turn my knowledge and expertise to some benefit by exploring in an academic way an area where there is little primary research and few secondary sources which directly refer to the politics of rural affairs, and how New Labour made policy for the countryside.

This is in some ways an ethnographic but not an auto-ethnographic piece of work (Bryman 2012). However there are strong elements of self-reflection and reflexivity contained throughout the text, particularly with regard to the collection of data through semi-structured interviews with key individuals (see Chapter Three).

I was in the fortunate position of having ready access to major actors who were involved in the policy process at the time. Many of these were known personally to me, having developed a relationship with them during my period as an MP.

Therefore it was crucial that I sought to retain objectivity during the process of evidence-gathering. Most interviews were conducted between 2010 and 2012 to optimise actors' memory of events, and to contemporise the study by reinforcement of evidence by use of triangulation in parallel to my own recollection of events.

I decided at the outset not to concentrate on the issues of the hunting ban, or the reform of agriculture. Though these were of great importance, if not notoriety, over the thirteen years, they are comparatively well documented and analysed in detail elsewhere (Lowe & Ward 1998, Milbourne 2003a, Ward & Lowe 2004, Woods 2008b). Instead this research focuses upon the politics and policies of the rest of the rural domain, which has been far less well investigated. It also focuses on England only, for reasons of coherence and simplicity. The study is principally interested in the actual period of New Labour government. While reference is made occasionally to the period before 1997, and post-2010, the thrust of the study is about New Labour in power and how that impacted upon the countryside.

1.2 The nature of New Labour

There is an extensive academic literature on the genesis, values and operational activities of New Labour (Beech 2006, Bevir 2005, Driver & Martell 2006, Finlayson

2003) (See Chapter Two). This concerns to what extent New Labour was able to mount an effective take-over of the Labour Party, how it was able to turn this into a very successful electoral strategy, and what means it used to capture and stay in office for 13 years. Of particular interest is the degree to which New Labour represented a hegemonic shift in political, social and cultural relations and how it was then able to cultivate its use of power and influence to govern in the countryside as well as the city (Wickham-Jones 2003).

There is widespread consensus amongst academics that New Labour appeared to be a fundamentally different force than its predecessor parties or administrations on the left. Certainly the advocates of New Labour left nothing to chance in distancing themselves from Old Labour (Blair 1996, Giddens 1998, Gould 2011, Mandelson & Liddle 1996). This mattered in the countryside, where Labour's remit had traditionally been weak, and where its grasp on representation had been limited outside the years following the 1945 landslide.

To appeal to rural voters, particularly those who embodied 'Middle England', required something quite different and exceptional (Hargreaves & Christie 1998). That was why the Blair effect was so profound – it sought to govern for the many with no no-go areas, reaching out from Labour's traditional heartlands to embrace voters who had never before voted Labour, or who had long deserted the Party. Though rural voters were never crucial to New Labour winning power the success of the electoral operation was such that it captured so many rural constituencies and then had to take a much more proactive stance in relation to representing the countryside (See Chapter Four). How it performed in response to this challenge provides the basis for this study.

New Labour's rural characteristics cannot be easily disentangled from the rest of the Party's schema. It could not just wish away the constraints that had debilitated previous Labour administrations (McKibbin 1983, Shaw 2002a). However there are some ways in which New Labour's performance in the countryside was quite different. To begin with, New Labour had no great aspiration for the countryside, which was not true of the 1945 government and that of Wilson after 1964. Prior to 1997, little campaigning had focused on rural seats – indeed very few rural constituencies were targets, and the 1997 manifesto was minimalist in its commitments to the countryside (Labour Party 1997) (See Appendix 3). The size of the majority and the number of rural seats gained forced a major re-think to reflect the new-found mandate and support the successful representatives, now firmly ensconced in their seats. They at the very least had the authority to speak for part of the countryside.

The accomplishment of New Labour was in its pragmatism and its ability to react expeditiously to opportunities and events. Thus it quickly saw the benefit of courting those rural voters who had placed their faith in the party. Hamstrung initially by the moratorium on extra spending, as soon as this was over the government quickly prioritised getting a programme in place, initially through embracing the recommendations of the Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) report on Rural Economies (1999), followed by the Rural White Paper (DETR/MAFF 2000). This sudden warming to rural was partly a positive enjoiner to those now in positions of power in the countryside but also a riposte to those such as the Countryside Alliance, who accused New Labour of being the same old urbanist Labour Party, given the criticism it faced in the countryside over the handling of the ban on hunting and the Foot and Mouth (FMD) crisis (See Chapter Five).

There were other differences as well. Whilst New Labour prided itself on the comprehensiveness of its message of modernisation and renewal, it was clear from the outset that reform in the countryside would be taken at a slower pace. This was partly out of necessity – there were not the same opportunities for economies of scale in rural areas – nor did the authority of New Labour ever run as easily or smoothly in rural communities (see Chapter Seven).

This had an effect on two themes which are studied extensively in this thesis. First, the degree to which the tardiness with which reform occurred in the countryside was part of a deliberate bifurcation of policy from urban Britain. Certainly between 1999 and 2004, the nature of New Labour's involvement in rural can best be described as social democratic interventionism, in marked contrast to the reliance upon neo-liberalism in other places. Admittedly this was only for a time, and was largely reversed after the Haskins' Review (2003), but it is important to recognise the different temporal approaches.

Second, how policy was delivered could also be differentiated. Whereas from early days in office New Labour became a highly centralised and centralising operation, policy-making and delivery in the countryside was about externalising responsibility. Thus, the Countryside Agency was created to take on this function and ministers and civil servants operated mainly as delegators (Derounian 2006). Again this changed after 2004 but the fact that there was a distinctly rural cutting edge to this process, is worthy of critical evaluation and explanation. This divergence came about not just because MAFF/Defra chose to pursue this route but because of the relative marginality of rural and government's prioritising of agriculture, environment and food. Given that much of rural policy was decided by the main spending departments of health, education and social security anyway, the role of rural came

under scrutiny with specific regard to whether there should be a separate Rural Affairs Ministry – something that in the end New Labour fudged with the formation of Defra (Ward 2000).

Examining whether New Labour was able to make a convincing case for its rural credentials involves a study of the politics and policy-making framework alongside the role of actors and institutions, in defining the structure and agency that contextualised the New Labour operation in the countryside.

1.3 Research aims and research questions

This research has one central aim that is pursued through five research questions. The main aim is to provide a critical evaluation of New Labour's approach to the politics and policy-framework in the English countryside. As has already stated this is under-researched and therefore this study seeks to fill gaps in knowledge and provide a narrative for further examination of this subject-area.

The research aim was to develop a hypothesis which explores a number of key themes, reflecting on the perspectives of actors involved with New Labour's activity in the countryside, culminating in the idea that there was a social democratic moment, but that this passed by 2004.

The original intention of this research was to pursue a case study approach, but it soon became clear that this did not provide sufficient rigour in critically evaluating the subject-matter or robustness in providing an overarching narrative. The case study approach was therefore replaced early on by a thematic study.

The approach to the selection of research participants and interview subjects were chosen partly to reflect their knowledge of the subject area associated with certain

case histories. However each interviewee was also questioned about more general issues concerning New Labour's performance in the countryside.

Five research questions were developed after careful consideration of the evidence that was accrued from the initial probing interviews (see Chapter Three), my own knowledge of the period, re-examination of some of the material I kept from my time as MP for Stroud, and extensive reading of the secondary source material from both politics and rural studies.

These five research questions are:

1. To what extent did New Labour's success in the 1997 general election translate into a greater interest in rural policy and political development in the countryside?
2. How did the reputation of New Labour as an urban construct affect its relationship with the countryside, and impact upon the government's ability to undertake rural policy-making and delivery?
3. In terms of New Labour's strategic approach in what ways did the tension between (a) centralisation and decentralisation and (b) externalisation and internalisation of power impact upon policy-making and delivery in the countryside?
4. In what ways did New Labour's wider strategy of modernisation of the state have an impact on rural areas and how important were these themes in rural policy and political activity?

5. To what extent was New Labour's approach to the countryside affected by both temporal events and spatial awareness, and how did this affect the manner of policy-making and delivery, and the political context within which it was operating?

This thesis is a hybrid, covering both a study of both political science, and rural studies, and is a contemporary inquiry that also draws on literatures in the fields of economics, philosophy, social studies, cultural studies, geography, history and linguistics (see Chapter Two). The approach is empirical and mainly relies upon an analysis that has been informed by techniques influenced by ethnography but with some reference to constructivism/interpretivism. Whilst it is not principally aimed at greater theoretical understanding it does refer to the works of Gramsci, and his concept of hegemony (1971, Pearmain 2011) and Lukes and his dimensions of power, particularly the third dimension (2005). Other concepts and their authors are referred to where appropriate (see Chapter Two). This gives substance to the area of study whilst recognising that this examination is about contemporary themes, studied from the perspective of someone embedded at the time, and who had unique access to the main agents of change, then and since (Cruickshank 2003a&b).

New Labour has been extensively studied from many perspectives. However there are very few academic audits of New Labour's performance in the countryside with the notable exception of Woods' book (2008a). Whilst the literature covers an interesting number of topic areas and provides a cogent analysis of the policy direction of New Labour, it does not evaluate the deeper political engagement of the government, nor does it try to disentangle the different political perspectives behind the New Labour Project, as it affected the countryside.

The central aim of this research is therefore to overcome this lacuna, and in so doing present the New Labour years in the countryside in a different and more compelling light.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis has eight chapters with the core chapters four, five, six and seven addressing the research questions in turn, except for the fifth research question, which is a cross-cutting theme referred to throughout the text but specifically covered in Chapter Eight. After this introduction, Chapter Two provides a framework for the critical assessment of the politics of rural areas during the New Labour years. It offers a critical review of the literature focusing upon the themes of hegemony, power and New Labour's schema and frames for policy-making, making reference to the work of Gramsci and Lukes. A number of specific themes are pursued during the chapter, including the relevance of New Labour, the third way, and other key 'philosophical' traits associated with New Labour (Bevir 2000, Finlayson 1999). Rural schema play a major part in helping position New Labour in relation to these ideas, to draw out what were the cynosures that the government followed to try to maximise the advantages of being in office, and with what effect on the wider developments in the countryside. Concepts that include the contested and the differentiated countryside are introduced to question what influence they had upon New Labour thinking, and how it then applied itself to governing in rural communities (Cloke 1997, Marsden et al 2005).

Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study and reflects on the research methods used, principally ethnography and employing semi-structured interviews of elite witnesses. The chapter considers whether this was the best way to elicit

information and looks carefully at the safeguards that were put in place to ensure objectivity, confidentiality and protecting the anonymity of the respondents as part of a discussion upon ethical issues.

The fourth chapter critically evaluates the topic of New Labour's representative role in the countryside, starting with an examination of whether the scale of the New Labour victory in the countryside gave the Party the legitimacy to believe that it could speak for the countryside. The chapter then assesses how New Labour came to terms with its new-found authority including the role that backbenchers sought for themselves, how the government responded to that, and to the responsibility for governing in the countryside. Account is taken of how to measure rurality including the attempts that the government made to develop expertise at data-collection techniques to drill down into how best to make policy and implement that policy in rural areas. As a consequence it has been possible to better determine the true level of support New Labour had in rural areas.

Chapter Five focuses on the extent to which Labour's traditional urban bias meant that rural was neglected. This embraces whether New Labour was genuinely different from Old Labour in its attitudes towards the countryside and if this was the case, how did this help form New Labour's politics and its making and implementation of policy in the countryside. It probes the nature of the policy-making process and how this was communicated to rural residents and to what effect. The chapter therefore reflects on how New Labour was perceived in the countryside, particularly with regard to some of the big events of the day.

Chapter Six assesses the policy-making process and seeks to find out what impact the externalisation of some policy-making had upon government, parliament, and

other actors. In particular, it examines the relationship between the parent ministries, MAFF and then Defra, and its countryside non-governmental organisations, and how that changed over time. It goes on to highlight the importance of the churning of people, institutions, structures and issues, and how this impacted upon the way in which New Labour performed and was perceived as performing. The chapter concludes by reference to the wider centralism-decentralism debate that raged within New Labour circles to assess the extent to which the same results applied in the countryside as elsewhere. Finally examination is made of the regional debate, and the impact of the EU, as they affected rural England to ascertain the extent to which this is of telling importance as to the policy debate.

Chapter Seven, explores modernisation and how this key New Labour programmatic schema bore down on aspects of life in the countryside. In this chapter there is a study of what elements of country living were subject to reform, how was this carried out, who was affected, and what were the consequences, both over the short and medium term. Specific reference is made to the wider New Labour trope of the competition state to examine the extent to which these were concurrent themes along with other developing features that affected the British economy and society. This chapter concludes with an assessment of the relative success of this aspect of New Labour beliefs, behaviour, and performance.

Chapter Eight provides a conclusion to the thesis by discussing the findings of the research. It deliberates over whether the research questions posed at the outset are appropriate and whether the evidence backs up the suppositions made. This chapter interrogates the importance of the temporal and spatial features of this study, examined as a cross-cutting theme in the other chapters, making direct

comment on the influence of events on how New Labour acted and reacted and the extent to which the government ever really came to terms with the different interpretations of how the countryside exists and functions. Specific attention is paid to the importance of class, power, and elites, and the creation and re-creation of structure and agency in this regard (Parsons 2010). Some proposals are made for the future direction for research alongside some personal reflections on the value of the research as a whole.

The thesis is accompanied by a number of appendices which give a fuller description of how a rural constituency is defined, a description, in outline, of who was interviewed, and some additional material on New Labour.

Chapter 2 – Rural politics and the politics of the rural during the New Labour era

2.1 Introduction: the context of New Labour and the countryside

Drawing on Gramsci's idea of hegemony and Lukes' conception of power this chapter examines the academic literature on New Labour and the countryside in relation to the research aim and five research questions. The chapter addresses how answering the research questions helps to explain the narrative behind New Labour's actions and how this dictated how policy was made, who by, and to what effect, and what repercussions this had on the politics of rural areas.

It juxtaposes how the importance of events created the environment in which New Labour's performance can be judged against the changing structure and agency that came to symbolise the New Labour years in office. In particular it confronts whether New Labour ever came to terms with the complexity and changing nature of the countryside and how its understanding of rural affected its ability to govern successfully there. This chapter also critically examines the extent to which New Labour's operation in the countryside was subject to temporal forces, including whether it sought out distinctive social democratic policies, and if these stood the test of time.

The chapter then evaluates a critique of New Labour, and relates this critique to how it performed in the rural areas before examining the typologies that define the English countryside and how that relates to dimensions of power. Each research question is then discussed from the perspective of what secondary source material says about each theme, and the chapter then synthesises the schema, frames and other notions that help explain and exemplify New Labour's performance in the

countryside. Within this thematic approach a number of issues appear that arise generally through the New Labour years such as regionalism, welfare reform and new forms of governance. These are approached from the perspective of their impact on the countryside though it is difficult to extrapolate rural implications from the wider national scene in some cases.

2.2 The influence of hegemony and power

Wickham-Jones (2003) argues that New Labour was a hegemonic force that replaced Old Labour, and reconstituted British social democracy. Responding to the attack of Przeworski (2001) that New Labour had morphed social democracy into a force for resignation and remedialism, Wickham-Jones preferred to describe New Labour's social democratic instincts as reformist and revisionist. His analysis begs the question of whether the notion of hegemony suitably defined New Labour's relationship with the Labour Party; how much that explained the way in which New Labour prepared for office; saw its operation in government evolve; what impact that had on its regard for the countryside, and the manner it approached rural policy.

Gramsci's notion of hegemony (1971), as part of a wider study of power in the countryside, has attracted interest from a number of academics (Shucksmith 2012, Varley & Curtin 2013). This political concept defines and explains the manner by which social classes derive domination over other classes by a series of alliances and arrangements, as a result of mutually advantageous discourses and intellectual leadership. These may be unstable and shift over time resulting in new power relationships evolving, as groups redesign their interests and cultural identity (Anderson 1976, Femia 1987, Joll 1977). Hegemony has periodically been applied

to the English countryside to explain social relationships there and to seek to demonstrate class differentiation (Parker & Ravenscroft 2001, Pratt 1996).

Gramsci's derivation of hegemony and its relevance to the politics of New Labour is important for a number of philosophical, methodological and ideological reasons. First, Gramsci's ideas had gained traction amongst the New Left in the latter-part of the twentieth century. This influenced the Labour Party, and though it was not an antecedent of New Labour thinking, Gramsci's legacy should not be dismissed (Maguire 2010). Second, Gramsci's version of Marxism, especially his historicism, realism, humanism, reference to civil society, and his extensive study of the state gave epistemological and ontological grounding to the New Labour project (Cruickshank 2003a&b, Gill 1993, Hall (Stuart) 1987, Hoffman 1984, Johnson 2007, Lewis 2003, Morera 1990, Ransome 1992, Simon 1982). Third, Gramsci's concept of an historic bloc, and the wars of manoeuvre and position gave meaning to the possibility that New Labour could capture the prevailing political discourse of the time, winning over converts that had previously been agnostic to Labour, or even antagonistic, and helping to marginalise opposition. This was of direct relevance to the situation New Labour faced in the countryside where new opportunities presented themselves because of the wider appeal that New Labour had achieved (Holub 1992).

The value of Gramsci's ideas is that none of phenomena discussed are impermeable – indeed there is a great deal of overlap, mutual inclusiveness and cross-fertilisation of ideas, and none is sacrosanct – for improvements in the understanding of hegemony and how it relates to the study of power are continually being made. The ideas of Lukes' (1991, 2005 & 2006), is of relevance here. The election of a New Labour government with such a dominant position nationally meant that it had a

freedom to act legislatively, policy-wise, and politically, unknown since the 1945 Labour government, and in some respects New Labour had even fewer constraints upon it. The question posed of New Labour was how far it was prepared to wield that power and to what effect. Lukes' in his book *Power* (2005) dwells on the differences between 'power over' and 'power to', and this was of importance to New Labour's relationship with the countryside. It clearly had the power to be an agenda-setter, even in rural areas where its electoral strength remained weaker than in the cities. The imposition of the hunting ban was indicative that it was prepared to exert 'power over' to deliver on the manifesto promise. However in other ways it was not even willing to use 'power to' rebalance the existing inequities and unfairness that existing in rural England. This became particularly true after 2004.

In his study of power in relation to political parties, Rye (2014) uses an account of Labour during the 1980s and 1990s to draw together ideas on how New Labour was formed and used the explicit exercise of power to build, retain and increase support both within the party and outside. This community power debate has its antecedents in the Marxist discourse on structure and agency and the degree to which agents can evolve strategies independently of structures. This is important in the context of New Labour and the countryside for it would determine what freedom the party had to manoeuvre, if it chose to try to change the prevailing power structures there. The situation in rural England reflected Lukes' third dimension of power whereby those rural working class and disadvantaged groups faced hidden power as their interests were suborned by those in authority. New Labour could, if it wished, choose to do something about that rebalancing power relationships.

Lukes' analysis is not entirely accepted by all political scientists. Hay (1997) criticises it in terms of his assumption that there is an easy distinction between real

and perceived interests, and accuses him of a value-laden approach. In Lukes' defence Doyle (1998), argues that there is merit in the idea of three-dimensional power for it has much to say on conflict, and the removal of conflict and this can be a useful analysis to apply in some situations. New Labour's relationship with the countryside would seem to be one such situation.

The New Labour hegemony

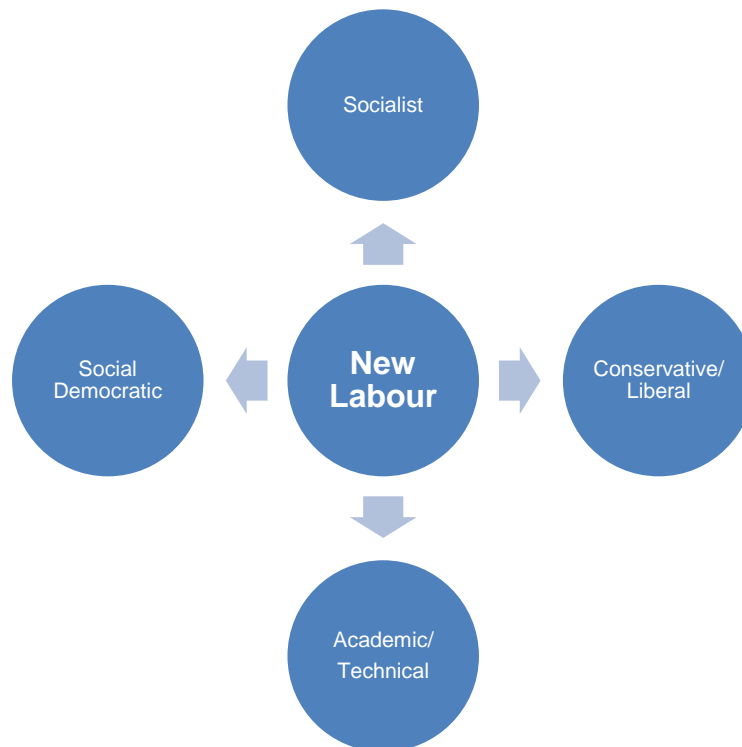
There are many books and articles that cover the 'capture' of the Labour Party by New Labour. Central to this process were issues such as the responsibility of New Labour in the modernisation of the Labour Party as a response to four general election defeats; the role of Thatcherism in shaping New Labour; the re-emergence of economism, and the importance of globalisation to New Labour; the relevance of social democracy, and how that fared against neo-liberalism; and whether New Labour was a centralising or a decentralising force.

Of specific interest is the book by Pearmain (2011) that investigates New Labour from a Gramscian perspective, identifying the key traits of New Labour's origins as a response to the dominance of Thatcherism, a directional shift shared by some in the New Left (Bevir 2005, Finlayson 2003, Hall & Jacques 1989, Panitch & Leys 2001).

There are four major critiques of New Labour from different political perspectives, as shown in Figure 2.1:

- The socialist critique – which saw New Labour as purely a tool of neo-liberalism and Blair's route to power mainly as an accommodation with Thatcherism (Bewes & Gilbert 2000, Gilbert 2004, Hall 1979 & 2003, Heffernan 2000 & 2011, Panitch & Leys 2001, Pearmain 2011).

Figure 2.1 – The Four Critiques of New Labour



Source: Author

- The social democratic critique – that argued that New Labour lost its way in its pursuit of power, losing its soul and its commitment to social democracy along the way (Bevir 2000, 2005 & 2007, Driver & Martell 1999 & 2006, Fielding 2003, Finlayson 2009, Giddens 2010, Hattersley 2005, Hay 2002 & 2003, Shaw 2002, 2007, & 2012, Smith 2000, Wickham-Jones 2007)
- The conservative/neo-liberal critique – that New Labour was merely an intermission to the continuation of Conservative Governments, increasingly market-focused and no matter how much New Labour aped governments of the Right, the New Labour project would end in failure (Atkins 2011, Evans 2008, Kerr et al 2011, Seldon & Snowden 2005, Taylor-Gooby & Stoker 2011)

- The academic/technical critique – which examined the manner of the New Labour takeover including the investigation of membership, representation and representatives, and party democracy (Beech 2006, Freedon 1999a&b, Russell 2005, Scott 2000, Seyd & Whiteley 2002 & 2004, Temple 2000, Wring 2005).

These critiques take radically different approaches to New Labour, its evolution and how it maintained its hold over the Labour Party, but it is possible to identify a number of key themes which relate directly to this thesis, specifically representation, urbanism, centralisation and modernisation (Lee 2000). These themes are further examined in *Section 2.3*.

Such was the scale of the New Labour victory in 1997 that there was a conjunctural moment in British political history. Labour had never won so many seats, many of them in constituencies that it had not won before, or had only acquired in the 1945 landslide. The number of seats and vote share achieved by the Conservatives was also historically low. The scale of New Labour's success meant that it had many advantages that previous Labour administrations did not possess. The incoming government had carefully constructed its vision for government (if not for the countryside), though not its detailed proposals, given the minimalist manifesto that it had produced. Nevertheless its commitment to a small number of philosophical points of view and principles by which it would govern formed the backcloth to its operation.

New Labour's affinity to the third way (Driver & Martell 2000, Finlayson 1999, Temple 2000, White S 1998 & 1999) and communitarianism (Driver & Martell 1997, Fyfe 2005) was evident in the style of government, if not the purpose of all policies,

programmes and proposals it advanced. Overall its policy style could be best described as eclectic (Bara & Budge 2001, Davies 2006, Gilbert 2004, Larsen et al 2006, Wickham-Jones 2007). Its approach would heavily trail schema incorporating economism, heightened reliance upon executive authority, an emphasis upon implementation as well as formulation of policy, incentivising the use of networks and markets in place of hierarchies, and a process of continual renewal of structures, institutions and people (Barber 2007, Bevir 2005, Burch & Holliday 2004, Elliott 1993, Jessop 2003, Mandelson & Liddle 1996, Marsh & Smith 2000, Shaw & Eichbaum 2014). It also recognised implicitly that the hollowing-out of the state would continue, and that was bound to affect rural as well as urban areas (Edwards et al 2001, Rhodes 1994, Skelcher 2000).

This backcloth of motivation would be ever-present throughout New Labour's period in office though the emphasis placed on each would vary or change from time to time as political and electoral circumstances altered. The most important aspect of New Labour's instrumentality was the pragmatic nature of its approach, and the extent to which it was driven by personalities and events.

Chapter Four explores the claim that New Labour represented the countryside after the 1997 general election, a situation that continued for the following two elections. There was disputation over numbers, definitions of rurality, reasons for the shift to voting Labour, and what justification New Labour MPs had in believing that they could speak on behalf of rural communities. However the importance of possessing such a large number of MPs that represented rural and semi-rural constituencies did have a profound effect upon both New Labour and the balance of electoral power in the countryside (Denver et al 1998, Evans et al 1998, Fisher 2004, Johnston et al 1998, Pattie et al 1997). This presented both opportunities and challenges to the

government, but the presence of so many rural Labour MPs was not something it could ignore. The creation of the Rural Group (see Chapter Four) was evidence of this.

With the support that it was able to garner, New Labour could push ahead with its agenda, not only in its traditional heartlands, but also in the newly gained countryside territories. Thus rural policy was empowered, with a programme that included modernisation of structures and procedures, decentralisation of powers, an emphasis upon new forms of governance, regular updating of institutions and people, as well as an enthusiasm for the delivery as well as creation of policy (Goodwin 2008, Lowe & Ward 2001, Pearce et al 2005, Ward 2006, 2008a&b, Ward & Lowe 2007b).

2.3 New Labour and the dimensions of power in the countryside

This section deals first, with the typologies that define the English countryside, and second, examines the major dimensions of power that contextualise the countryside, including who wields power, the nature of that power, and the changing circumstances around that power.

The Labour Party was faced with considerable difficulties when trying to build support from key groups such as the rural poor, disadvantaged and those who worked in, and on, the countryside. Until 1997 the hegemonic situation in rural areas considerably disadvantaged the Labour Party (with so many seats occupied by Conservative and Liberal Democrat MPs), and the dimensions of power meant that Labour was unable to easily build a corpus of support. Part of this was due to the perception that Labour was principally an urban party (see Chapter Five). However other barriers were erected not just by Labour's traditional opponents, but also by

those who might have been thought to have provided the bedrock of sustenance for Labour in country areas (Heley 2010, Hoggart 1997, Shucksmith 2012). For instance support for hunting transcended class lines, and this placed the government in direct opposition to some who might have been supportive of New Labour in other ways (Cox & Winter 1997, Milbourne 2003a&b). Likewise the inability to deliver affordable rural housing was the direct result of adversarial campaigns by those who wanted to protect rural space, crowding out the needs of others (Satsangi et al 2010, Sturzaker 2010).

Nevertheless 1997 opened up possibilities that had not previously existed. There was strong support amongst public sector workers and professionals in the countryside, who wanted to see the back of the Conservative government. Lukes' analysis of how power is distributed and the resulting relationships that develop is helpful in explaining how difficult it still was for New Labour to reach out to some in the rural electorate, and provides a useful backdrop for the thesis.

There are three main typologies that have been developed to analyse the English countryside in academic literature. They are; the contested countryside; the differentiated countryside; and England as a non-rural country. These are now examined in turn.

The Contested Countryside

The notion that the countryside is contested is not a new one. However it has received much more attention since the academics Macnaughten & Urry (1998) and Burchardt and Conford (2008) used it to postulate epistemological and ontological meanings to rurality and the evolution of human activity there. Other writers have also entered into this debate including Cloke & Little 1997, Frouws 1998, Halfacree

1997, Marsden 1998, Olsen 2008, and Woods 2005. Together this has provided a much clearer understanding of the concept and how this has shaped rural living (Burchardt 2008, Macnaughten & Urry 1998, Murdoch & Marsden 1994, Winter 1996, Woods 2005 & 2011b).

The gravamen of who contests the countryside, with what effect on the people living there, and how has this shaped spatiality remains crucial in comprehending the way in which rurality has evolved in England. The situation remains complex, sometimes contradictory, and often obtuse (Cloke 2003, Kiley 2006, Murdoch 2006, Yarwood 2005). The features that underline this are location, including landscape and the cultures that arise from topography, social class, positionality or situatedness, functionality, and regulation. To cover each of these in turn;

'Location' concerns the arguments over who lives in the rural environment, who wants to live there, what are the landscape and resulting cultural implications, including what the relationship is to urban England. The debate over location or place has been dominated by the issue of counter-urbanisation – the wish of those who live in the countryside to defend it from the intrusion of urban landscapes and consciousness (Champion & Hugo 2004, Newby 1986, Pennington 2000). The debate was at its most acute when it is addressed in the liminal areas close to major urban centres, and through the role of market towns, with the perceived threat of increased urbanisation impinging on these territories (Powe et al 2013, Schoon 2001). In this respect the arguments were not necessarily about development itself, but the scale of that development and the fear of urban sprawl. New Labour's attitude towards the spread of urbanisation was complicated, if not contradictory. On the one hand it did little to encourage development in the open countryside – indeed it made strides to further defend what it deemed vital landscapes such as the

National Parks (Defra 2004b&c, Thompson 2008, Woods 2006c). On the other, its determination to build an additional 4.4million homes inevitably impinged on the urban-rural fringes, and the market towns. Conflict over housing development became a constant theme of opponents seeking to make political capital against New Labour in the countryside (Local Government Chronicle 1998a&b, Satsangi et al 2010, Shucksmith 2013a&b, Sturzaker 2010, Sturzaker & Shucksmith 2011).

Social class will be referred to in greater depth in the next Section. However, whilst New Labour did valuable work in confronting some of the deep-seated problems faced by some rural areas, (especially homelessness, long-term unemployment, inaccessibility, service loss, and low incomes), there was little desire to reverse the underlying and greater unfairness in the class system, made worse by the previous Conservative government (Freedden 1999a, Lister 2001).

Allied to class was the positionality or situatedness of individuals, groups, networks and communities. New Labour was wary about taking on rural elites, preferring to seek consensus and mediation rather than conflict. The reason was because New Labour was keen not to tarnish its reputation of speaking to and for middle England, much of which existed in the countryside (Halfacree 2007, Murdoch 2000, Ward & Jones 1999). There were exceptions - the hunting ban and the right to roam were the completion of long-held Labour canonical commitments – but even here New Labour obfuscation and procrastination indicated a willingness to compromise with, rather than resist opponents (Reed 2008, Woods 2008b).

New Labour acquired power at a time of unprecedented change in the English countryside with the prominence of issues such as post-productivism and the rise of the consumption economy; the acceleration of globalisation; modernisation;

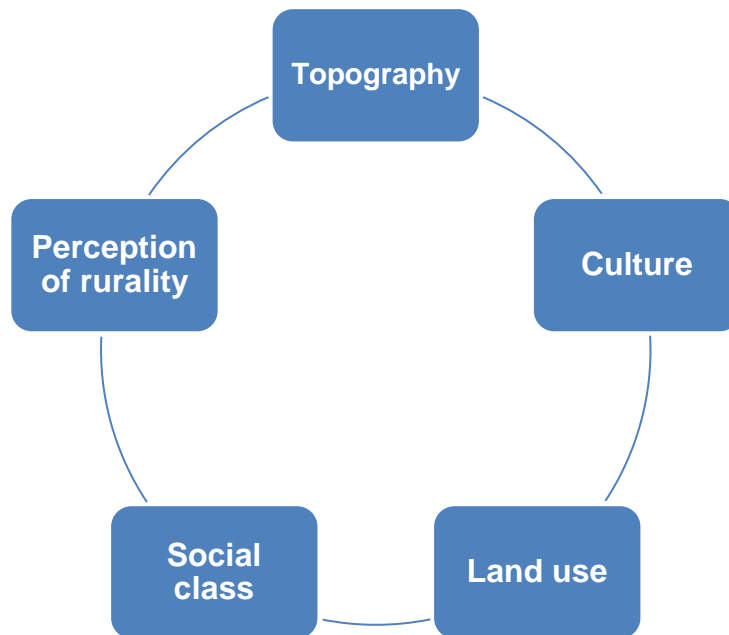
regionalism; massive strides forward in technology, and the societal adjustment that the political, cultural and economic world demanded, alongside the new micro-politics of rural development, to the fore (Evans et al 2002, Hamin & Marcucci 2008, Ilbery & Bowler 2014, Pearce et al 2005, Ward et al 2003, Woods 2006b & 2007). New Labour was keen to associate with, and advance these causes, integrating the countryside into appropriate strategies. This raised hackles with traditional interests, especially some farming interests, but New Labour closely guarded and was keen to advance its modernist character.

Regulation was not just about what control the state should exert over activities in rural areas, but about what role the state should play there (Hood et al 2000). New Labour favoured the private sector as part of the competition state, but unlike in urban settings it was much less willing to impose this on rural communities (Goodwin et al 1995, Goodwin 1998, Marsden 1998 & 1999, Perkins 2006). Rather it sought alternative scenarios whereby it could progress modernisation (see Chapter Seven), partly out of necessity – there were far fewer financial benefits that existed in the countryside – but also it chose a softly-softly approach, rather than confrontation (Cruickshank 2009).

The Differentiated Countryside

This typology is based on the idea that there is not one English countryside, but many, determined by topography, culture, land use, social class and perception of rurality, as shown in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2 - The Differentiated Countryside



Source: Author

Each feature encapsulates a different formulation of how power is captured, distilled and exerted (Halfacree 2006 & 2007, Heley & Jones 2012, Hodge & Monk 2004, Lowe et al 2005, Murdoch 2006). That countryside is continually changing due to societal movement especially in-migration (Berry 2000, Champion et al 2009, Halfacree & Rivera 2012).

New Labour struggled with the concept of differentiation, with its underlying power structures, and specifically how it could handle the idea policy-wise (Howkins 2003, Lowe et al 2005, Murdoch 2006, Taylor 1979). Whilst it was willing to intervene where there was specific evidence of disadvantage, (including homelessness, unemployment, inaccessibility, and to protect service loss, where it would hit the vulnerable hardest), it largely failed to address economic disparity and did little to exploit new social, cultural and political opportunities (Anderson 2000, Bell & Jayne 2010, Cloke 1997, Marsden & Sonnino 2008, Winter 2003). Despite the

incorporation of the variable to bring lagging rural districts up towards the norm for economic activity in Public Sector Agreement 4 (PSA4) (See Chapter Four), this seemed to be of little consequence in terms of policy, even after the Haskins' Review. There was little grasp of how this objective could be accommodated within the drive for greater productivity, and few additional resources applied to make it a reality. The inadequacy of the government's response to this challenge was highlighted by the Defra Select Committee Report (2008).

New Labour's unwillingness to pursue a more aggressive line in developing the untapped economic potential of the countryside was due in part to latent disinterest, and also because of its unwillingness to defy existing centres of power. This meant that the trend towards an older, richer, and less socially and economically diverse countryside, (which had begun post 1945), actually accelerated under New Labour (Phillips 2002a&b). The government did little to combat this directly and rising house prices in villages exacerbated the plight of the poor and disadvantaged. Instead attempts to intermediate through intervention in housing and planning policy were too little and too late (Evans & Hartwich 2005, Home 2009, Marsden et al 2005, Satsangi et al 2010).

Some changes were made. For example, the introduction of the area-based single farm payment scheme, (which assisted rich landowners at the expense of tenant farmers), and horsiculture (paying landowners to keep horses on paddocks, rather than farmers for farming), resulted in further negative social stratification. This strengthened the grip of those who wanted to maintain the dream of the rural idyll and the protected and preserved conception of rurality (Marsden et al 2005). New

Labour's response was to put greater store by the governmentality³ of the hybrid neo-liberal market state and active communities, disregarding the potential downside of depoliticisation (Burnham 2001, Gardner 2008, Rao, 2005). The emphasis also moved to greater payments for environmental measures (Evans et al 2002, Marinetto 2003a&b, Marsden & Sonnino 2008). After the Haskins' Review (2003) New Labour became even more driven by technological and efficiency concerns, and even less inclined to challenge the societal status quo. Rather than the control of agriculture over the wider rural economy diminishing, the trend was reversed (Wakeford 2005).

England as an Urban Country

The OECD in its 2011 Rural Policy Review argued that England was essentially an urban country, the countryside having been marginalised to such an extent that it was totally reliant upon the urban (OECD 2011). If that alone was one of the main legacies of New Labour's time in power, then that is a sad reflection of how little the government achieved in policy terms. Whilst this blunt assessment did not tell the whole story, it did indicate the scale of the problem that New Labour had faced in trying to shape rural policies and politics, let alone change existing structures of power.

The observation of what is rural, and whether England can be considered as rural has long exercised academics. Hoggart (1988 & 1990) provocatively postulated that where rural had the same characteristics as urban, they should not necessarily be separated. Halfacree (2006) further added to the debate by arguing how difficult it

³ Governmentality is a concept invented by Foucault to refer to the way in which the state exercises control over, or governs its people (Nadesan 2008).

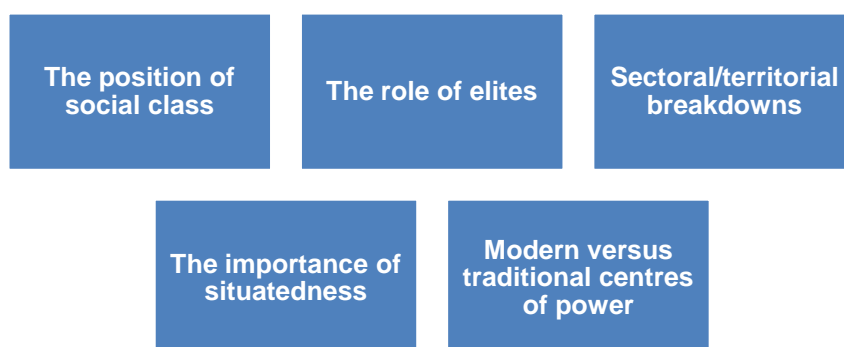
was to define rural and identify rural space, the term suffering from structural incoherence and representative and representational lacunae. In that sense the rural/urban debate is postmodernist and post-structural (Murdoch & Pratt 1993, Pratt 1996). Together this added to the sense that the countryside was a place of little importance in the wider economy, society and culture.

Notwithstanding these discrete descriptions of rurality, the importance for New Labour was how it envisaged its relationship with the countryside, for this determined its willingness to contra-pose rural dimensions of power. Being arguably a largely urban Party (see Chapter Five) did not prevent New Labour from making serious overtures to rural. However it did mean that there was an undercurrent of urban distrust and denial of rural matters within New Labour ranks. As much as there were many more rural Labour MPs, there were a large number of new urban MPs.

Categorising the Rural Dimensions of Power

There is no definitive list on how people in the countryside can be classified in relation to the distribution of power. However there are some obvious headings that cover the major groupings as shown In Figure 2.3 below. These are; in no order of importance;

Figure 2.3 - The Rural Dimensions of Power



Source: Author

Each of these is now considered:

The position of social class

New Labour was unwilling to demonstrably confront the issue of social class. This was not a 'new' Labour position as the Party had traditionally shied away from the issue of highlighting the rural working class as it saw few votes to be gained in the countryside, and for fear of alienating farmers (Flynn 1989). Moreover key to much of New Labour's rationale was its classless appeal and its desire to reach out to Middle England, many of whom resided in the countryside (Heley 2010, Hoggart 2007, Phillips 1998a&b & 2007, Urry 1995). Some national policies such as the minimum wage were of great value in rural areas, and the government was not indifferent to the issues of disadvantage and poverty (Shucksmith 2003, 2004 & 2012). However it preferred to attack these via its social exclusion agenda, which it felt was more palatable and less adversarial. Language and symbolism was deemed crucial to the New Labour presentational case (Geddes & Root, 2000 MacLeavy 2008, Shucksmith & Chapman 1998).

The downside of such a subliminal message was that those who stood to gain most from the government's intervention were often oblivious to the benefits of the policies targeted at them. For instance, the SureStart programme in rural areas was more keenly exploited by middle class rather than working class parents, which defeated some of the covert social engineering that the scheme intended (Asthana et al 2009, Fahmy et al 2004, Garbers et al 2006, Tipping 2007, Willan 2007, Wilson 2006).

The excuse that the better quality of life in the countryside made up for the inadequacies working-class populations encountered was scant consolation (Glendinning et al 2003).

The role of Elites

Rural elites took different overlapping forms – the traditional landed estates; producers, especially those represented by the National Farmers Union (NFU); the new monied class that came into the countryside from business; hunting classes; professional classes who chose to live in the countryside and work elsewhere, or who retired to the countryside; and counter-urbanists who moved to the countryside because of their disdain for the city. Power and influence was wielded by these groupings in different ways and at different times (Budge 2006, Hoggart et al 2014, Hoggart & Buller 2015, Howkins 2003, Woods 1998). New Labour was not anathema to all of them – indeed it is probable some individuals from groupings represented here must have voted New Labour in 1997, and subsequently, because of the number of rural seats won by New Labour (See Chapter Four).

New Labour's approach to rural elites was to largely sidestep them to avoid antagonising them (Little 1999). There were exceptions – hunting and the right to roam brought them into conflict with landed estates, the hunters and their followers. However, with the housing Nimbys, found mainly amongst the counter-urbanists, New Labour signed an early retreat notice as it failed to build anything like the number of houses that it predicted it would in the countryside (Heley 2010, Mitchell 2004, Phillips 2010).

In taking this approach New Labour failed to make anything other than a cursory glance at the covert submission of the rural working-class and disadvantaged. Admittedly some policies, such as greater labour market protection, when they bore fruit over the longer-term, would benefit lower income groups socially and financially, but there was little regard for the idea that the hegemony of rural elites was

challengeable. New Labour was therefore complicit in its accommodation with rural elites. This situation demonstrated Lukes' third dimension of power with working class and disadvantaged groups continuing to face discriminative manipulation of their livelihoods as rural elites continued to exploit their position of 'power over' them.

Sectoral/territorial breakdowns

Under New Labour the shift from traditional forms of agriculture continued, though the extent can be exaggerated. The BSE scandal, followed by the FMD debacle, had a searing effect upon how New Labour viewed farming and farmers. New Labour commissioned not just the Haskins' Review but also the report by Don Curry (2002) which encouraged farmers to seek out new food-chain possibilities and become more business-orientated. These changes were reflected in the UK government's contribution towards the reform of the CAP. The presence of the Treasury in these developments cannot be underestimated as evinced by its role in the document 'A Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy' jointly authored with Defra but as the Select Committee discovered, largely written by Treasury officials (Defra Select Committee 2007b). This was indicative of a move back towards rural as a subset of farming, tied in with New Labour's care not to antagonise farming organisations. The CLA and the NFU were privy to information throughout all the discussions that led to the area-based payment system – a controversial move which had a mixed response from the wider farming community – but both organisations were largely supportive at the outset (interview with Practitioner 25, Greer 2008). FMD showed how dependent the countryside was on non-farming activities when many parts of it were closed during the outbreak. However it was noticeable how much compensation was paid to farmers (of the £6bn total cost) in recompense,

again indicative of how cautious New Labour was to go against the power that farming communities still possessed (Donaldson et al 2006, Haskins 2001, Scott et al 2004, Ward & Ward 2001). Whilst post-productivism led to a greater appreciation of territorial taxonomies of the countryside, the balance of power still remained with productivist approaches. Nevertheless New Labour embraced new developments on alternative uses for the countryside and boosting rural policy provision was one such. However in failing to clearly discriminate between territorial divisions and the new identity politics, New Labour unnecessarily upset some in the countryside, (for instance it lumped together many who disagreed with aspects of policy as hunt supporters when that simply was not the case), and gave credence to the point of view that the government didn't really understand rural issues (Muir 2007, Woods 2008e).

Thus the opportunity to encourage the distinctive development of market towns as part of the economic and social development of the countryside was missed as New Labour struggled to come to terms with these new regimes of rural politics (Caffyn 2004, Morris 2012). This could have led to a much stronger identification of New Labour with trends that would have benefitted the wider rural community. The government not only failed to recognise this but was lax in how it communicated its message. Therefore it was criticised for territorial shortcomings – particularly over the house-building debate, inadequately explaining why more homes were needed in the countryside – whilst not spelling out the advantages of investing in the future of market towns and their rural hinterlands.

Situatedness

Outside of those rural constituencies that had been captured by New Labour in 1997, the government possessed few advantages that would allow it to gain traction in the wider rural community. This was the paradox of New Labour. Though it talked in terms of One Nation, its remit outside of either traditional rural Labour strongholds or the newly gained seats remained relatively weak. Isolated pockets of Labour representation such as in Cornwall and Shropshire suffered because of the impotence of New Labour not only on the ground but in wider forums such as local authorities and enterprise bodies (Phillips 2000). This demonstrated that New Labour's hegemonic influence only went so far in the countryside as it was incapable of building a wider historic bloc, even though from 1999 to 2004 it did receive widespread support from many associated with the countryside. This did not transcend into more remote rural areas however.

This resulted in there being very little shift in the real balance of power despite the immediate ramifications of the landslide (See Chapter Four) and culminated in New Labour losing credibility and influence, even when national policies were of benefit to many of those based in rural communities (an obvious example would be the attempts to improve rural transport). Those MPs who were elected were in the unfortunate position of often being the sole representative of government present in the locality and therefore took the full weight of criticism by opponents. Whilst some targeted assistance was nearly always given, this did not prevent the feeling of abandonment and powerlessness (Faucher-King & Le Gales 2010, Stoker 2004a, Teles & Landy, 2001).

Modern versus traditional centres of power

New Labour was elected as a modernising and modernist force. In taking this stance it inevitably ran into opposition from more traditional elements operating in the countryside. This not only included the usual sources of displeasure at the prospect of a Labour government – landed estates, hunters, the farming community – but also those antipathetic to aspects of New Labour's reform programme. Over time it became clear that the introduction of many of these proposals were obstructed in the countryside (house building being the most obvious, even though many village communities stressed the requirement of a pocket of affordable houses in their Parish Plans to keep their community vibrant) . This was both a consequence of the powerlessness of New Labour against local elites and rural power-brokers but a mixture of lack of perseverance and guile in how it exercised its approach to making change (Mawson & Hall 2000, Ward 2008a&b, Woods 2003).

There are numerous examples in housing, transport and economic development of how commitments were left unfulfilled or policies unimplemented as New Labour could not get the grip it needed to effect real change and modernise rural communities. Therefore the reform programme in rural England was greatly behind that of its urban counterparts. Whilst marketisation was less prominent in a rural setting, this was at the cost of resource allocation, which left the disadvantaged parts of rural society even more out on a limb (Clarke 2005, Gardner 2008, Oakley 2006, Whitfield 2006). In this respect New Labour neither challenged the extant power in rural areas, nor was willing to heavily invest in those areas to effect a dramatic improvement in services and so show those communities what was possible under a New Labour government. This situation deteriorated further after 2004 (Milbourne 2008, Shucksmith 2012).

2.4 The New Labour operation in the countryside

New Labour's representative role in the countryside

Research question One critically examines New Labour's representative role after 1997 and evaluates the claim that after the landslide victory it had become the party of the countryside. Chapter Four adduces evidence for greater New Labour involvement taking different forms, including the setting up of the Rural Group, the spike in rural policy after 1999, the attempts to better define rural, and the formal recognition of rural in the creation of Defra, all of which is explored fully in Chapter Four (Bibby & Shepherd 2000 & 2004, Huby et al 2007, Woods 2009).

Notwithstanding the political vicissitudes that affected New Labour over the thirteen years in power, it was significant that it did retain significant representation in rural England up until 2010 (Ward 2008c, Woods 2008d).

At the core of this analysis is the counterfactual that if New Labour was different from earlier Labour administrations because of additional rural representation, how did this affect the government's attitude towards the countryside, and how did this work through in terms of policy and politics there?

Throwing off the shackles of urbanism?

The second research question directly confronts the issue of whether New Labour was really different from its predecessors and had managed to transcend the characterisation that it was still an urban construct. Admittedly there were very limited expectations about what New Labour wanted to do for the countryside when elected in 1997, so low was the bar that it had set itself in the manifesto and in its campaigning (Labour Party 1997) (See Appendix 3). Whilst New Labour was a

different party to Old Labour, in one respect there was still a similarity – that Labour governments governed largely for its supporters in urban areas – and that was where its emphasis would lie (Lowe & Ward 1998 & 2001, Newman 2001, Ward 2002, Woods 2003).

Yet after two years in power, as soon as the moratorium on public expenditure had been lifted, New Labour executed a dramatic shift in policy which demonstrated that whilst not ‘born-again ruralists’, a message of intent in the countryside had been delivered. The reason for this change of heart was partly the reactive requirement of responding to the travails of the period 1999 – 2004, (which was at the height of the campaign against the ban on hunting, and the FMD outbreak), and partly because of New Labour’s new-found authority in the countryside, with so many rural MPs elected. However it was also the result of a calculated attempt to extend its reach into rural areas because of the opportunity afforded by 1997. That this period of intense interest in the countryside largely disappeared after 2004 begs the question of why New Labour took this path, and how much was it able to offset the traditional image of Labour governments as being principally urban-inclined (Ward 2002).

There were a number of themes that New Labour pursued in order to demonstrate its rural credentials. Ideas such as Vital Villages, which centred upon revitalising village life through community development, had been around for some time. What the government did was to fund and encourage these initiatives through the conduit of the Countryside Agency.

Ward and Lowe (2007a&b) describe how New Labour’s modernising zeal found the countryside not an unhelpful test-bed for experimentation. Admittedly most initiatives had been fully trialled in urban settings first, but there was evidence of some

sensitivity being shown to the needs of rural areas in policy-formulation and implementation (Martin & Sanderson 1999). After 2004, at what Ward and Lowe (2007a&b) saw as the destructive Haskins' Review the 'grand project' of modernisation was replaced by 'technocratic managerialism'. In this regard it is possible to see the New Labour operation as novel, counter-intuitive, well-meaning, and radical, albeit eventually failing. That it fitted one of the core objectives of New Labour – to reform and update the British state as part of national renewal was both resonant with, and a compelling reason for, the rationale behind New Labour's involvement in the countryside (Ward 2008c).

How much this performance in rural areas was substantive rather than superficial depends on the stance taken towards the wider *modus operandi* of the government. The Rural White Paper (2000), and the provision of an additional £1bn alongside a much more interventionist stance largely carried out by the Countryside Agency, marked a significant watershed (Derounian 2006). However matters went into reverse after 2004, which left a great sense of unfulfillment and the belief that the opportunity for rural to reassert itself in relation to the rest of the country had been tossed away, with urbanism again in the ascendency (Columb 2007, Grant 2006, Raco & Imrie, 2003 Ward 2008c Wilson & Hughes, 2011, Woods 2008e).

How far was New Labour dependent upon decentralisation and the externalisation of rural policy?

In the third research question the idea is posed that much of New Labour's approach to the countryside was dependent upon a decentralised approach with an emphasis upon externalised decision-making. Generally New Labour policy-making was complicated, often contradictory, and multi-dimensional, targeting different audiences

at the same time (Driver & Martell 2006, Newman 2001, Savage & Atkinson 2001, Shaw 2002b). This was very true of the rural domain.

From the outset New Labour was determined not to be captured by producer interests and to encourage competition wherever possible, whilst centring on new forms of governance through active citizenship and participation, prioritising markets and networks over more traditional hierarchies in modes of decision-making. In rural areas the position was even more complex, with many more actors, agents, and labyrinthine structures (Curry 2009b & 2012b, Stone 1989).

When 'rural' was fully absorbed within 'agriculture', (which it was for most of the twentieth century), decision-making could easily be described as command and control (Cox et al 1986, Flynn et al 1996, Self & Storing 1962). New Labour broke radically from that position, at least for a time, having given much of the authority for policy-making and delivery to the Countryside Agency. Though ministers oversaw the general strategy, most of the initiation for new policies, programmes and projects came directly from the Agency (Countryside Agency 2006, Derounian 2006, Warburton 2004). It was this that Haskins' was so critical of, believing it to be an inefficient and ineffective mode of operation, which was excessively costly and provided poor value for money. Haskins' cleavage of policy-making from implementation (which was clearly demonstrated in his evidence to the Defra Select Committee Enquiry (2003c)) and the abolition of the Countryside Agency pulled what was left of the government's programmes back within Defra. In so doing what happened to rural matched the re-centring of government policy-making in order to focus on fewer targets and to get control over delivery mechanisms (Barber 2007, Lodge & Muir 2010, Richards & Smith 2006).

The issue of the externalisation of policy-making could not be isolated from the decentralisation/devolution debate which was at the heart of New Labour's reforms of the state. This mattered because much of the administration of programmes and projects passed from the Countryside Agency to the Regional Development Agencies (RDAs). In theory this placed rural issues closer to the decision-makers but in reality rural communities actually felt increasingly distant from those in power (Deas & Ward 2000, Ethier 1998, Hewitt 2011a, Lynch 1999, Mawson 1998, Tomaney 2000 & 2002, Tomaney & Ward 2000, Webb & Collis 2000).

Much of the academic material on the subject of New Labour's externalisation of policy in the countryside focuses upon individual case studies based around the major topic areas of government. There is little analysis or evaluation of the New Labour measures in practice – more about the discrete areas of policy-making, the role of regulation, and the impact of participative models on both producers and consumers. This was against a scenario of rapid change in the countryside, a constant backcloth, and a major determinant of what happened to the rural over this period (Askins 2006, Greer 2005, Marsden et al 2000, Yarwood 2005, Woods 2008d).

The political instrument that New Labour employed most to enable this activity was evidence-based policy-making – 'what is best is what works'. This pragmatic (though some would argue it was more ideological) desideratum was referred to as an act of faith, and crucial to what it portrayed as its non-ideological dependence upon the third way. However it was also a practical guide as to how ministers, special advisers, civil servants, and others who advised government, should dovetail their efforts to provide practical solutions to often wicked problems, and communicate the mantra that this was different and better than what had gone

before (Nutley & Davies 2000, Nutley & Webb 2000, Shortall 2013, Southern 2001, Wilkinson 2007). The problems arose when the evidence was unclear, incomplete or fallacious which led to policy churn and a somewhat chaotic agency/structure arrangement. There was no better example of this than the fate of the Countryside Agency (see Chapters Five and Six) (Gallent & Andersson 2007, Ward 2008b, Woods 2009).

The mantra of modernisation

Research question Four emphasises the importance of modernisation to the New Labour project. Though the 1997 manifesto was light on commitments, details and vision on the countryside, the document as a whole implied that New Labour's modernising zeal would extend country-wide, including in rural areas. This meant updating the system of agricultural support, reforming and improving public services, and making broadband available to rural as well as urban Britain (Davies & Crabtree 2004, Moseley & Owen 2008). Though ruralities stood to gain from national measures – the minimum wage, the welfare to work programme, extra spending on health and education, and the roll-out of infrastructure investment - modernisation of the rural economy, society and culture, appeared as secondary to the drive to improve the cities (see Chapters Five and Seven).

Subsequent manifestos became more explicit on how the modernisation of rural areas was catered for in the government's agenda, with a greater stress upon choice, economic renewal, including modifying the food chain, and guaranteeing the quality of life through a rural services standard (see Appendix 3). These were highlighted in the 2000 Rural White Paper and in rural manifestos. For example the

2010 manifesto was explicit on the building of 10,000 new homes in the countryside by 2011.

In rural areas there was a tension between New Labour's preference for the competition state and how it might deliver this in the countryside. The mechanisms of marketising, outsourcing and tendering of services, alongside the vehicle of New Public Management was rarely available in rural areas, unless it was part of a much larger regional or sub-regional arrangement (Christensen & Laegreid 2006a, Gains 2003, Pollitt 2009). Rural areas were rarely situated in action zones or neighbourhood renewal areas and struggled to obtain the larger sums of money allocated for major service change. Therefore the schools' academy movement was much slower to take hold in rural communities and even in health, where the government had a more radical modernising agenda, the pace of change was nothing like that in urban England (Asthana et al 2002, 2003 & 2009, Asthana & Gibson 2008, Power et al 2004, Power & Whitty 1999, Whitty 2008 & 2009). Instead counterproductively the consequence of modernisation elsewhere in the country, was usually the closure and loss of services in rural areas, victims of the drive towards more efficiency (Curry & Moseley 2011, Farrington & Farrington, 2005, Higgs & White, 1997, Marsden et al 2005, Mungall 2005, Paddison & Calderwood 2007). This was in marked contrast to what was promised in the Rural White Paper where service standards were guaranteed.

Other New Labour modernising ideas were less controversial and more widely welcomed, especially its interest in governance. The idea of joined-up government, cross-cutting procedures and networking aimed to drive up participation and favour the citizen and consumer over the producer (Clarence & Painter 1998, Needham 2007). Much of this chimed with rural communities as it worked with the grain of

self-sustenance, voluntarism and bespoke-ness, rather than one-size fits-all statism (Coulson, 2004, Stoker, 2004a, Taylor 2007). Additionally there were many segments of village life that were in need of reform – although not accepted by all parts of those communities – but there was a large element of consensus over the requirement to deal with the shortcomings of local councils, the funding of voluntary organisations, and the way some services were delivered - or not - to rural localities (Pratchett 2004).

The government's involvement was welcomed by ruralities for three reasons. First, the recognition that rural mattered and was now receiving attention was seen as long overdue, and compared favourably to the Thatcher/Major period. Second, from the early 2000s reform was accompanied by the provision of real resources. Third, the countryside itself had changed – large parts had voted New Labour, and the growing bond with New Labour MPs was exploited to good purpose. At least some in New Labour recognised that and capitalised on this providential moment (Ward 2002).

The means by which this was achieved was by a mixture of clever positioning as the propagators of change, communication, exhortation, incentivising opportunities, and soft threatening of recalcitrant elements who would not agree or compromise.

However it was the resource issue that was most prominent – which made it all the more difficult for the government after the reductions in expenditure from 2004 onwards, especially after 2008, as the financial crisis began to bite (Ahmad & Broussine 2003, Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones 2000, Satsangi et al 2010 Ward & Lowe 2007a, Woods 2003 & 2008c).

The effect of temporal and spatial features on New Labour in the countryside

The fifth and final research question refers to how events and geographical factors affected New Labour's performance. From the outset New Labour struggled to come to terms with legacy issues especially BSE and the collapse in farm-gate prices (see Chapter Four). Though the decision to push on with the hunting ban was popular with most Labour MPs and party members the time it took to see through the ban was unhelpful to the government's wider programme in the countryside. This, with the right to roam brought to a crescendo its focus on the countryside, but one that divided countryside opinion (Milbourne 2003a&b, Wallwork & Dixon 2004, Williams 2001).

Then there was the recognition that the problems of the countryside were deep-seated and complicated, brought home to the government by the foot and mouth outbreak of 2001. This was an event both of huge temporal and spatial implications – delaying an election, and changing the face of much of the countryside for the short-term (Anderson 2007, Houghie & Dickinson 2000, Ward & Lowe, 2007b).

Between 1999 and 2004 New Labour became expert at systematically and symbolically identifying and targeting social ills in the countryside – homelessness, joblessness, inaccessibility, and service decline. Its approach was marked by its willingness to pursue an overtly social democratic agenda. However policy interventions were usually short-term, ad hoc and superficial, especially after it lost focus after 2004. This left the spatial and cultural dimensions of life in the countryside largely untouched, resulting in growing inequality, worsening housing disparity, and a poorer quality of living for lower income individuals, families and communities (Cloke 2003 & 2006, Shucksmith 2003 & 2012, Woods 2008c&d).

An increased concentration on economic and business solutions to the countryside's shortcomings from 2004 onwards led to a skew away from the societal issues that a more traditional Labour government might have grappled with, and was scant consolation for rural communities. The sense of a policy vacuum was all too obvious after 2004 (Webber et al 2009).

2.5 Schema, frames and other notions to explain New Labour's countryside policies and modes of delivery

The New Labour approach nationally prioritised modernisation, economism, electoralism, devolution of power within a one-nation state, strong executive decision-making, alongside effective modes of delivery, and encouragement to the concept of competition state tied up with its Europeanism and support of globalisation (Diamond & Radice 2010 & 2011, Finlayson 2003, Watson & Hay 2003). Where the opportunities in the countryside fitted these objectives the belief was that rural areas should share in the pursuance of these objectives, though not necessarily at the same time, or in the same way. Therefore the schema, frames and notions of New Labour's operation in the countryside were derived largely from the party's overall perspective on government, but there were some important differences and variability in how those objectives were applied.

New Labour's schema or the organised pattern of thought and behaviour associated with that thought was sometimes difficult to disentangle. Hay (1999) argues that much of New Labour's underlying philosophy was associated with how it tried to come to terms with the post-Keynesian world and class de-alignment (Evans & Tilley 2012). Whilst not wholly neoliberal in outlook, the tools of analysis had more in common with Thatcherism than with previous Labour governments (Driver & Martell

1999, MacLeavy 2007). As such, though New Labour still described itself as social democratic, socialism was social-ism or social liberalism (Buckler & Dolowitz 2000a&b, Freedon 1999a&b, Hale 2006, White 2001).

Fairclough's (2001 & 2010) examination of New Labour through discourse analysis, text and metaphor confirmed how far New Labour had departed from traditional modes of operation, a view confirmed by others (Benwell & Stokoe 2006, Hewitt 2009, Reisigl 2008). Together these debates were at the crux of whether New Labour had become entirely accommodationist with Thatcherism or at least had the pretense of being a social democrat party or something quite else (Chilton 2006, Hall (Stephen) 2003, Joseph 2006, Leggett 2007, Mair 2000).

This mattered to New Labour's modus operandi in the countryside as it strongly influenced not only its approach to policy-making and politics there, but also contextualised how New Labour was perceived by others. Thus the framing of New Labour's case determined its agency, how it responded to existing structures and institutions, and indicated its robustness in seeking change. This framing was measured against a backcloth of attempting to retain the support of Middle England, effective crisis-management, the application of evidence-based policy-making, and pursuing the main New Labour governmental themes. Where the countryside figured in terms of the ongoing debate between neo-liberalism and social democracy was a constant feature of how these frames should be understood and how New Labour used language as part of its hegemonic project (Atkins 2011, Fairclough 2001, Lister 2003, Matthes 2011, Newman 2001).

2.6 Summarising New Labour's approach to the countryside after 1997 – the relevance of Gramsci and Lukes'

This chapter has considered the academic literature on New Labour in relation to the aims and research questions with an emphasis on the extent to which the government came to terms with its rural responsibilities. Overall this research critically evaluates and reflects upon the role of agency in the countryside and how that affected structures, institutions, processes and procedures.

The thesis is not a theoretical study, but it has reflected on the ideas of Gramsci and Lukes which will be referred to later in this Section. It has also made reference where appropriate to the social construction that gives meaning and reality to the performance and behaviour of people and institutions when challenged by the confluence of events and spatial features that contextualised New Labour's time in office, and how that impacted upon developments in rural policy and politics.

Chapter Four discusses the opportunities that increased representation brought to New Labour. This came in the form of being able to use its parliamentary numbers as a riposte to those who argued that Labour had no legitimacy in rural areas and largely misunderstood rural issues. Given the heightened interest in the countryside because of the hunting and right to roam debates New Labour was able to point to its electoral success as a reminder to those who used those issues to attack the government that they did not have a monopoly of support.

As important was the practical benefit of having representatives who were willing to go out and argue New Labour's case. This was why the Rural Group was so influential, at least for a period, because it gave a symbolic and substantive meaning

to what New Labour could stand for in the countryside (see Chapter Four). Woods' (2008) book goes some way to exploring this; the thesis builds on that knowledge.

What the Rural Group did was to open up a dialogue with countryside organisations and campaigners, which was a useful conduit for government to exploit. Coming as it did in parallel with other contributory developments – the PIU report, the Rural White Paper and the setting up of the Countryside Agency – New Labour found itself in the fortuitous position of being seen by some from 1999 onwards as a positive force for good in the countryside and actively courted.

In this sense New Labour was able to build on the hegemonic position in the countryside that it found itself in after 1997. This hegemony had not come about through anything other than chance, though the conjunctural antecedent of the social and economic circumstances of the time allied to the political and electoral collapse of Conservatism must not be underestimated (Atkins 2011). New Labour had no great ambitions for the countryside prior to 1997. Yet it now had captured many more rural seats than it had anticipated and had a strong reason to want to be seen to be doing something in the countryside.

Two problems arose. First, it had little experience on how to govern in rural areas – this at least explains why it was willing to externalise so much of the rural operation to the Countryside Agency. Second, its focus on the countryside was very much events-led. As soon as the controversy around the hunting debate in particular died down, so New Labour's interest in the countryside waned. Other features compounded that loss of interest – the decline in importance of the Rural Group; the government's concentration upon delivery, focusing on its main public service areas; the decision of Defra to marginalise rural; the cuts in budget; the growth of

regionalism and the limited role given to rural – all meant that rural after 2004 became far less important in the eyes of ministers and civil servants and that was the perception that was communicated to the countryside.

Counterfactually New Labour could have done much more to use its hegemonic position. Certainly in terms of Lukes' analysis of dimensions of power New Labour had the chance to use its agenda-setting power to continue to make in-roads into the rural economy, society and culture. Though it did not haemorrhage rural seats until 2010, when it lost the general election, it could have done much more to support rural Labour MPs if it had continued with the programmes it had put in place from 1999 until 2004. That it chose not to do so signalled that it had regressed to become much more urban-focused after 2004 and displayed how tenuous its relationship with the countryside was.

The greatest disappointment in this was that New Labour betrayed the very people that it could have done so much to help if it had carried on with its social democratic intervention between 1999 and 2004. This meant trying to rebalance power in the countryside in lieu of supporting those who faced suppression (consistent with Lukes' third dimension of power) – the working class and disadvantaged – their problems were at least equal to those of their urban counterparts. This required New Labour taking on the rural elites and those with power in rural areas. However this was something that had not really occurred to ministers, was seen as too difficult to encompass, or had undesirable consequences, such as heightened attacks by the Countryside Alliance. This was a serious weakness of New Labour's approach to the countryside. Yet the essence of what the Countryside Agency had provided through its programmes and activities during its short existence was just such a radical departure. However these improvements largely disappeared when the

Agency was abolished. So did New Labour's social democratic intentions in the countryside. Also it lost the goodwill and support that it had built up in the academic and practitioner community – its own historic bloc. That this was sacrificed did not seem to unduly concern the government – it dallied with the idea of not needing a replacement for the Countryside Agency before settling for the much reduced CRC. This summed up New Labour's lack of chagrin as it turned away from rural. The tragedy was that having promised so much (through the very encouraging Rural White Paper), and put in motion a decent policy-mix and effective programmes for delivery on the ground, this was cast aside for little good reason other than the cost overruns (that did admittedly damage the reputation of the Countryside Agency). It is surprising that there has been so little investigation into the role of the Countryside Agency apart from a review of the Agency by Derounian (2006).

The short-sightedness of this approach not only confirmed in the eyes of critics that New Labour was really an urban construct and also impaired the government's ability to deliver its wider programme in the countryside. Thus modernisation appeared to be far less successful in rural areas than in the cities. This might have prevented the wholesale marketisation and privatisation of services, but it also led to lower investment into key provision such as health, child care and telecommunications. Rural areas lost out two-fold. First, the gap with urban centres grew in a number of fields, especially in the more remote parts of the countryside. Second, rural areas faced a disproportionate loss of services, as the modernising tendencies of government sought closures of inefficient rural services to compensate for increased investment elsewhere. The demise of many rural post offices is an exemplar of this and a further manifestation of the hollowing-out of the state in rural

communities. For this Labour MPs in rural seats would get all the blame and little credit for what had been accomplished by the government.

That was the legacy of New Labour in the countryside. The disappointment was that what had been achieved between 1999 and 2004 was not only a lost opportunity, but had proved that a very different legacy could have been left if New Labour had persevered with what it had started at the end of the twentieth century.

Chapter 3 – Methodology and methods

3.1 The methodological standpoint

Ethnography has been of growing importance as a methodology in both political science and rural studies. In terms of political research, ethnography has added to the diversity of the study of politics, even if still understudied and is now accepted as a valid way of eliciting information from actors, which can then be interpreted, and conceptually analysed (Anyero 2006, Baiocchi & Connor 2008, Brewer 2000, Burnham et al 2008, Johnson & Reynolds 2003, Schatz 2009, Schram & Caterino 2006, Silverman 2007). For the investigation of rural, ethnography has been a vehicle for the development of the cultural turn as an alternative to the positivist epistemology, which the subject-matter used to be prescribed by (Cloke 1994 & 1997, Hughes et al 2000, Milbourne 2002, Previte et al 2007).

Ethnography, with its links to participant observation, was the methodology of choice for me as the researcher. I was fortunate in that I had direct experience of the field and events and had access to individuals that others might have been precluded from (Lewis & Russell 2011, McGinty & Salokangas 2014, Murchinson 2010). This also brought challenges in that as an insider I could find it difficult to detach from my own prejudices, and as some of those interviewed were friends, this could cause its own difficulties over objectivity (Grills 1998, Hammersley & Atkinson 2007, Handwerker 2001, Owton & Allen-Collinson 2014). This unique positionality, if used carefully, can still be highly advantageous, permitting the researcher to reach places and people that would otherwise remain unstudied. The ontological relationship between researcher and respondent can add considerably to the shared episteme to allow a richness of evidence to be forthcoming. Provided this is validated, it can

provide a compelling narrative on the temporal and spatial elements at question in the research, and a robust empirical defence of what is discovered (Creswell & Miller 2000, Denzin 2004, Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

The building-block of ethnography is that it is a study of agency, within the context of the evolution of events that can then be conceptualised and interpreted, to look for causation and consequences (Patterson & Monroe 1998). In the case of this research most of those interviewed were elite actors, active in the public realm and with positions to defend (Harrison 2001, Hughes A & Cormode 1998, Odendahl & Shaw 2002, Smith 2006, Woods 1998). As Chapter Two has intimated it is not just a question of collecting data and creating a narrative, but also then interpreting what has been said. Actors are subject to social constructions, based on their past experiences, prejudices, and the parameters of the milieu in which they are operating. This study strongly confirmed that state of affairs (Burr 2015, Parsons 2010).

The centrality of ethnography in this research places the enquiry within the hermeneutic strand of discovery whereby emphasis is put on the need to understand the meanings people attach to social behaviour (Bevir & Rhodes 2003, Furlong & Marsh 2010). The study is largely concerned with what Geertz (1973) refers to as 'thick description', whereby a narrative arises through the application of ethnographic techniques deriving social constructions to actions and influences. In this way the research can attain both objectivity and realism.

My approach throughout has been to be overt, and to be clear on any ethical caveats – to explain exactly why I was undertaking the research - and to limit my report to textual exposition, not referring to my opinions on the interviewee, what they said,

and to the semiotics of the interview. I made the occasional note of what was said outside of the formal interview, in passing, but as participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, unless explicitly asked otherwise, this was never misused (Bryman 2012, Christians 2011, Denzin 2009, Farrimond 2013, McAreavey 2013, McNabb 2004). That is why the research is not auto-ethnographic, for although interviews were dialogic, as there was not the power imbalance that might have been faced by an outsider who had not been immersed in the field, and reflexivity, self-reflection and symbolic interactionism⁴ were key elements in my learning, the focus was on the unfolding story, and narrative, rather than analysing feelings, emotions, and values in the interrelationships (Alvesson & Skoldberg 2009, Anderson 2006, Atkinson 2006, Chang 2008, Holliday 2002, Lewis & Russell 2011, Vryan 2006).

Using ethnography as a single source of investigation has had its critics (Hammersley 2013). There is always a danger of bias, in who is chosen as respondents, the partiality of their knowledge and discourse, and the manner of the textual analysis (Halperin & Heath 2012, Peters 1998). This is why I was keen to validate by use of archive materials, secondary evidence, and triangulate, by cross referencing between the different interview sessions to draw out points of common agreement (Ball 2003, Bleich & Pekkanen 2013, Davies 2001). Eventually, however, ethnography can be distilled down to the trustfulness of the individuals involved and the authenticity of the evidence. I was pleased by how frank those who I interviewed were, but surprised that even when being told something in confidence, more often than not the point at issue was already in the public domain. To have details

⁴ Symbolic interactionism is defined as a theoretical perspective in sociology and social psychology that views social interaction in terms of the meanings actors attach to action and things (Bryman 2012).

confirmed is nevertheless important, and can enhance epistemological comprehension (Pennings et al 2006).

What the use of ethnography crystallised in terms of this study, was the benefits of a thematic approach over case studies, and specifically the importance of the diachronic shift from social democracy in the countryside after 2004, following the seminal Haskins' Review (2003). The responses of participants also highlighted the differential between politicians and others interviewed. Whereas practitioners, academics and to some extent civil servants could specialise and stay with the rural for some time, politicians rarely had that luxury, as other issues intervened, and new responsibilities beckoned. This was not helped by ministerial churn and institutional change (see Chapter Six).

Interviews also highlighted the changing structure and agency in the countryside with hierarchies being replaced by networks, and to a lesser extent markets. The value of ethnographic enquiry remains that the researcher can extract these ideas to help form the research hypothesis, linking the evolving narrative to the dialectical process of interpretivist analysis (Bryman 2012, Heyl 2001). The ultimate test is whether this methodology can be an improvement against other forms of enquiry. However the very fact that voice has been given to those who previously have been ignored, and that this can be epistemologically, and ontologically justified, suggests that ethnography will grow in importance in the future in both political science and rural studies, and will further elucidate the study of power and how policy is created in the countryside (Weeden 2010).

3.2 The methods: primary, secondary and academic sources

The thesis has employed a mixed-methods approach. Whilst relying principally upon evidence from semi-structured interviews, recourse was made to archive material, as well as my own memory of people and events. Together this allowed me to triangulate, in order to get the fullest confirmation possible of accuracy, validity and relevance.

Semi-structured interviews

The principal method involved the application of semi-structured interviewing of elite actors. This evidence was entirely primary and five categories of research participant were chosen. In total 139 interviews took place. The numbers for each category are given below:

- Ministers and special advisers (8 +2)
- Members of Parliament; Lords; Councillors; and Labour activists (11; 4; 3; 5)
- Civil Servants (10)
- Academics (10)
- Practitioners (a) National 47; (b) Local 39.

The rationale for choosing these categories is explained in Section 3.3. However these people were the key players in making and delivering rural policy, and major actors in the wider rural political scene. The numbers for each category and an explanation of the different categories is to be found in Appendix 4.

Semi-structured interviews gave the advantage of flexibility in questioning, permitting respondents to range over issues they wished to talk about, as well as answering prompted questions. The first set of interviews – the scoping interviews - aimed to

confirm that the research study was one worthy of investigation, that individuals contacted would be willing to participate, and that it would be possible to devise an interview schedule that would yield good evidence. At this stage I interviewed a couple of MPs, one of which was Bradley, and three practitioners, all of whom were well known to me.

The rationale was less about detailed consideration of the issues, and more about a conversation to establish whether they thought this was a worthwhile project, and how I might best go about obtaining appropriate information, and from whom. Already I was trying to establish a suitable narrative, and interpret what we had discussed.

From that first set of scoping interviews, a substantive interview but bespoke schedule was arrived at and logistical planning put in place (though this sometimes meant pulling it all together on the train journey before the interview). For these major interviews, I would have to be less conversational, and more structured, and organised in how I approached them. However throughout the process, the emphasis was upon open questioning exercised in a dialogic manner. Every attempt was made to pursue biographical stories to permit a narrative to arise, through the cross-referencing of ideas, issues, events and personalities, to develop the theories and concepts in order to further the research aims. Over time the sequence of questions asked took on greater significance, becoming more definitive, including elements of counterfactual prompts, about how things might have transpired differently if alternative scenarios had been progressed (Ritchie & Spencer 2002, Wengraf 2001).

The intensity of undertaking detailed open-ended questioning meant that though I chose the boundaries of the research, within that respondents were able to range quite widely over the terrain of their experiences. In this they acted as explainers, defenders, problematisers, postulates, truth-seekers, sharers and deniers (Manheim and Rich 1981, Johnson and Reynolds 2003). Most sessions lasted for an hour – a time frame I thought was appropriate (for both parties), and was occasionally followed up by email or phone, to check on details. Interestingly a number of meetings concluded by participants expressing how pleased they were to be asked questions about their experiences, and how much they enjoyed being cross-examined, as they had never been debriefed on leaving office. Only on two occasions did the interview turn into an excursus of justification, which had to be brought to an end by myself due to saturation (interview with Minister 1 & Practitioner 1, Mason 2010). Otherwise the emphasis was on adding to knowledge, sharing experiences and devising appropriate understanding of this period in history. In that, there was the distinct advantage that the research study ended in 2010, so anyone continuing in office could be more open about what they had to say (Berg 2009, Heyl 2007).

Crucial to the exercise from the scoping interviews was the use of the technique of triangulation⁵, to validate the data collected, and help the interpretation of that data, by cross-checking the material accrued from the different sessions (Baiocchi & Connor 2008, Denzin 2009, Kubik 2009, Peters 1998). This material was later compared and complemented with evidence from documentary sources (Peters 1998, Bryman 2012). As the number of people interviewed increased and the

⁵ Triangulation is the method by which you draw together at least three pieces of empirical evidence in order to be able to construct moderately complex theoretical concepts (Denzin 1970).

evidence snowballed, and more people came recommended to me as being useful participants, it became possible to identify specific themes (Berg 2009). These themes were subsequently confirmed, edited or discounted, to allow other lines of enquiry, and to recalibrate the research process, including further finessing the interview schedule.

To summarise, the interview process was divided into three phases:

First, were the scoping interviews, which gave structure to the process and created enquiry boundaries (Robertson et al 2012). Second, came the substantive interviews, which detailed who, what, when, how and where people were interviewed and evidence accrued. These occurred from 2010 to 2012. This phase continued over a couple of years, though the bulk of the interviews were completed by 2011. The third phase was a follow-up stage, when a small number of people were re-interviewed, sometimes over the phone, or by email, and details were checked out by recourse to correspondence. Given the number of interviews undertaken, some 139 overall, gave confidence to me that there was sufficient data from which to draw conclusions, and to minimise the risk of subjectivity (Grills 1998, Hammersley 2006, Kvale 1996).

Documentary Sources, including personal papers

Government, its agencies, parliament and the media provide plentiful written accounts delivering an abundance of contemporary material made freely available to the researcher. It is a moot point whether this evidence is primary or secondary – particularly as I was a participant in some of the proceedings. In terms of the approach taken to the research, an early effort was made to capture, use and apply

material from parliamentary debates, questions, and reports that fitted the subject-matter of rural affairs (Ihalainen & Palonen 2009, Scott 1990).

In addition, I retained a small number of personal papers, which were helpful in reminding me of events I was involved with, and assisted in the contextualisation of the narrative.

Participant observation

This research could not utilise the method of participant observation as such, because the topic-area was historical. However, it was important not to discount the knowledge-base of the researcher, having been an active player in many of the events described, and having personal recollections of the actors involved, and the decisions that they took (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

In particular, the involvement with the Backbench Group, where the author was a committee member throughout, and latterly the chair, alongside long-time membership of the most relevant select committees, was of assistance in helping contextualise the study. In this sense, the research made limited use of auto-ethnography.⁶

⁶ Autoethnography is a form of qualitative research, studied from a critical realist perspective, combining interpretivist epistemology, and constructionist ontology (McNabb, 2004, Bryman, 2008). Autoethnographic enquiry is unusual in that it can be both a method of research in itself, but also the written product of that research (Atkinson 1990, Bryman 2008). It links directly to discourse analysis, and fits what is called the hermeneutic circle which reinforces *verstehen*, or understanding, through dialogic reasoning (McNabb 2004, Caterino 2006). Overall autoethnography permits researchers to indulge in highly individualistic empirical investigation, referring back to some personally derived research hypotheses, which the mode of research can aim to substantiate through the gathering of evidence. It cannot prove that the research hypotheses are correct according to Popperian falsification theory, or even establish causation (Denscombe 2002).

Academic sources

The research work is dualistic in combining two fields of enquiry, political science and rural studies. Both areas have an extensive research base, but there is only very limited overlap. This lacunae helped inform the gathering of primary material and set the parameters for secondary resource investigation.

For political science there is an abundance of texts which explain what are the appropriate research methods in politics, political science and policy-making, and how best to apply these. Initially this meant that it was necessary to undertake a broad review. The most helpful starting point was Marsh and Stoker (2010), though others were studied, from the perspective of general methods (Burnham et al 2008, Harrison 2001, McNabb 2004), empirical analysis (Manheim and Rich 1981) and comparative studies (Pennings et al 2006, Peters 1998). As part of this investigation into research methods, the necessity for specific lines of enquiry became evident, such as in Chapter Four, which examines how a rural constituency is defined.

For rural research methods, it was necessary to seek out a more eclectic mix of sources, which explain how rural studies has been influenced by the cultural turn, driven by new methodologies, particularly ethnography. Two key texts are; Cloke (1997) and Hughes et al (2000) which these synthesise this alongside economic, sociological, cultural, linguistic and geographical features.

3.3 The nature, form and structure of the interviews

The interview process with elite actors

This section considers the detailed rationale behind the interviews that took place, and how this both shaped the interview process itself, and the wider research study.

The five categories identified in *Section 3.2* were chosen for a couple of straightforward reasons. First, the number of different categories gave breadth to the enquiry, giving balance and robustness to the evidence-gathering. Second, research participants were mainly known to me, which gave the advantage that I came to the interview with some common ground and experiences already established. Most were elite actors, though some had a local, rather than a national persona (Cochrane 1998).⁷ Only the civil servants were strangers to me, though even here our paths had sometimes crossed at select committee hearings, seeing them in the box⁸ and at meetings with ministers. The large number of practitioners that I chose to interview resulted from my belief that it was important to investigate the implications of government policy amongst those who were empowered to deliver those policies. This explains why local as well as national practitioners were cross examined so that the impact on the ground was explored. There was also a limit on how many politicians, civil servants and academics available who could usefully add to the research, so practitioner participation was vital.

⁷ Practitioners consisted of those people working in local government, in professions, in the third sector and pressure groups, and a good many had achieved high status within the local rather than the national field of expertise and experience.

⁸ At question-time and in debates civil servants sit in a row at the back of the of the chamber in the House of Commons, so that they can be there to pass notes to ministers, to advise on answers made and to help clarify the government's agenda. This is known colloquially as 'The Box'.

The numbers involved meant I had a valid sample that overcame the threat of bias, given that the list was hand-picked (Handwerker 2001). Anonymity and confidentiality was assured except in two cases, Bradley and Haskins, where because of the importance of the content, I asked the individuals to go on the record. Subsequently as a result of the work I undertook on defining rural constituencies, Bibby also agreed to be mentioned by name.

Notwithstanding the issue of how elite is defined, many in the list were obvious choices because of their roles over the thirteen years of New Labour's rural responsibilities (Odendahl & Shaw 2002).

Deciding to include a number of actors from the 'local' scene widened and deepened the research effort, and gave reinforcement to the process of triangulation. (Cochrane 1998, Hughes & Cormode 1998, Richards 1996).

Interviewing elite actors can lead to special problems, some practical, some methodological. Practical considerations include persuading individuals to give interviews and them finding the time to participate. Methodologically there is the danger that interviewees are more concerned with defending their own position, rather than adding to the sum total of knowledge (Delaney 2007).

Such concerns come to a head in the form of power relationships, and the danger of bias, as both interviewer and respondent can attempt to manipulate the process to their own benefit. This was something I became acutely aware of (Barniskis 2013, Leech 2002b, Lewis & Russell 2011, McGinty & Salokangas 2014, Smith 2006). My experience is that the many advantages of ethnography outweigh these difficulties.

All initial interviews including the scoping interviews were conducted according to Chatham House Rules (CHR)⁹, the research agreement that best befitted my relationship with the individuals in question. Given the issue of how individuals would be described to maintain their anonymity I checked the nomenclature to ensure that they were happy with this, which was a slight deviation from the 2002 CHR clarification on affiliation. Later interviews, when I was formally enrolled for the doctorate involved informed consent forms, to be fully compliant with university research procedures. Venues were nearly always chosen by the respondent, though some meetings occurred on 'neutral' territory. Usually the interview was undertaken in their office, though in the case of politicians the hospitality rooms of the Palace of Westminster were often preferred. Only one person could not be interviewed – through diary difficulties rather than non-acceptance. I had the distinct advantage that in many cases the interviewee dealt directly with me, rather than through a gatekeeper (Goldstein 2002). This meant that I was able to negotiate directly the terms of our meeting, and prepare some of the groundwork first-hand rather than it being passed on by a third party. Over time because I dealt directly with

⁹ My choice of CHR was a consequence of my own experiences as a Parliamentarian in meetings and being interviewed, recognising that politicians tend to respect this approach as one where the trust and integrity of the relationship is such that there is greater respect for the use of material, and any outcome than ensues.

CHR are clear and explicit:

'The Chatham House Rule is a system for holding debates and discussion panels on controversial issues....At a meeting held under the Chatham House Rule, anyone who comes to the meeting is free to use information from the discussion, but is not allowed to reveal who made any comment. It is designed to increase openness of discussion.

The rule which was further defined in 2002 now states:

When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed' (The Royal Institute of International Affairs 2014).

participants, I was able to prompt them for suggestions on which other individuals I might interview, so an element of snowballing occurred (Christopoulos 2009).

A small number of interviews were conducted by phone or email (Shuy 2003).

Largely I decided that it was preferable to meet interviewees in person though I did follow up by more indirect means, to check on details, or to pursue a specific point that did not arise in the meeting. From time to time the interviews involved more than one respondent. This was always at the instigation of the chosen interviewee, who requested that someone else (who was interested in my project) be present in order to add their own views to the discussion. This added to the richness of the interview (Davies 2001, Frey & Fontana 1991). I have only counted this as one interview, so in reality I interviewed more than the 139 subjects stated.

From the outset, I chose to take field notes rather than to record interviews. This was for a number of reasons. First, it was a personal decision, given that I have been interviewed on many occasions, including by research students, and I felt that the presence of a tape recorder somewhat changed the dynamics of the interviewer-interviewee interface. Second, the venues chosen were not always conducive to the application of recording technology. This was especially true when in a parliamentary setting. Third, given who was being interviewed, I believed that those individuals would be happier to talk more freely if I did not have a recording of what they had said (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). This required careful listening, accurate field notes, and the evolution of a codified system that could later be analysed and interpreted (Aberbach & Rockman 2002, Berry 2002, Rubin & Rubin 2012).

The large number of quotes in the text came from me checking assiduously exactly what the respondent said – even if that meant interrupting the flow of the interview for a short time. I also, as a matter of course, typed up the interviews immediately afterwards, always allowing time for this. Given the number of train journeys I undertook this was a useful opportunity to keep to this rule. Very occasionally I went back to the individual to check a detail, especially the accuracy of a quote.

I had two further advantages. First, the language, terminology or idiolect was not alien to me, being well versed in government and parliamentary procedures (Wengraf 2001). Second, power relations were somewhat different to the usual researcher-interviewee relationship, as I tended to be treated as an equal in recognition of my previous role (Harrison 2001, Leech 2002a, Smith 2006).

The ethnographic methodology identified that there were as many differences within groupings as there were between them. One example of this was the split between Old and New Labour MPs¹⁰, who took a somewhat different approach to the role of government in rural areas. I also included a small number of councillors, parliamentary candidates and political activists in the process. This was partly to give a different perspective but also to get a grounded view of New Labour's achievements or otherwise from those who had direct experience of policies in action (see Chapter Five).

At the outset it was my intention to pursue a case study approach. However this soon proved to be unsatisfactory and was replaced by a thematic analysis. This did

¹⁰ The nomenclature of Old and New Labour is not easy to define. Perhaps it was better to refer to those who were more Blairite in persuasion, though the conflict with Brownite supporters added certain piquancy to who was interviewed and why.

not invalidate all the earlier interview material as much of the material was still of interest (Pennings et al 2006).

Ethical issues

Given the close personal relationships that existed with some of the interviewees, ethical issues were bound to arise. There was never any attempt by me to hide this fact and I would not in any way dissimulate, or expect anyone to participate, other than as a willing volunteer, and in the knowledge of what they were taking part in (Grills 1998, McNabb 2004). Research ethics were never sacrificed because of friendship and the position of the interviewee was reinforced by the additional provision of informed consent, after the early use of Chatham House Rules (Ayres & Pearce 2004, Manheim & Rich 1981, Pettigrew et al 2004, Rothman et al 2009). I became aware of the threat of the 'Rosenthal effect'¹¹ and moved to mitigate that. Hammersley (2013) and Potter and Hepburn (2005) have pointed out some of the pitfalls that ethnographic accounts can fall into from the ethical perspective. First, that the interviewee is less inclined to give an objective account of their role in the historical process, but more likely to try to position themselves in a favourable light. This is defective psychology in people's experiences, which is socially-culturally constituted. This is why triangulation is so important – to try to minimise the impact of excursus.

¹¹Given the familiarity of the researcher to the interviewees the issue of bias was a real one. That again was a reason for choosing so many different people, to minimise this risk, so that as objective an account as was reasonably feasible could be achieved. Academics refer to this as the 'Rosenthal effect' (Halperin & Heath 2012), or more simply described as the danger that the researcher can influence or bias the results, because of their proximity to interviewees (Denscombe 2003, Farrimond 2013, Owton & Allen-Collinson 2014, Peters 1998, Yin 2009). The intention would be to try to be dispassionate in all interview situations, making sure that I did not intervene into narratives, other than to push the respondent for more detail or further explanation.

Second, there is always a danger that the researcher/interviewer nexus will dominate from 'a conversational analytic and discursive psychological perspective' (Potter and Hepburn 2005: 291) setting the framework in such a way that the evidence is interpreted or construed to fit the research aims of the ethnography (Atkinson 1990, Atkinson & Silverman 1997, Cannella & Lincoln 2011, Silverman 2007). To overcome this I made sure that there were always some set questions to the interview (Hopf 2004).

Trust remained vital throughout the process including over how that material was subsequently interpreted, the subject of *Section 3.4*.

3.4 Towards a Thematic Approach

The original conception of this research involved taking a case study approach. As a starting point I would still argue that case studies have merits. They can be an invaluable method for extracting material to help create a theoretical framework, and give direction for further empirical evidence-seeking. Despite the paradoxes of misunderstandings that sometimes constrain the case study approach (Flyvbjerg 2006 & 2011), case studies remain an invaluable research tool being both pragmatic, and flexible, and very applicable to ethnographic investigation (Denscombe 2003, McNabb 2004, Peters 1998, Yin 2009). Though this approach was to be abandoned, the material accrued from the interviews and research enquiries, has still proven to be extremely helpful in contextualising the research methods, and the hypotheses to be tested, giving the thesis a strong comparative dynamic with plenty of material which is still ripe for application.

However as *Section 3.3* identified case studies proved unsatisfactory failing to give sufficient robustness to the research and after due consideration and extensive

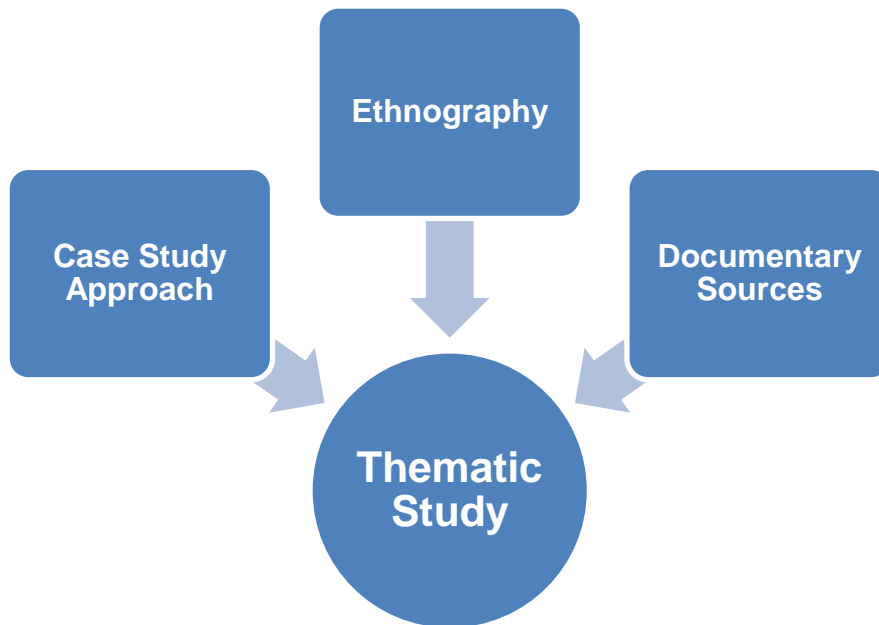
discussions with supervisors it was decided that the case study approach did not offer suitable research questions, and would not make the best use of the research evidence.

Nevertheless the topics that were initially chosen for the case studies; the decline of the rural post office; the right to roam; parish governance; affordable rural housing; and public service reform in the countryside, were invaluable as prompts to participants, who were able to recall their role, responsibilities, knowledge and experiences on these topic areas.

There were three major reasons for changing to a thematic approach.

First, this was not a dramatic paradigm shift in the research approach, rather an evolution to something more appropriate. The shift was underwritten by a process of iteration, which gave some clear lines of enquiry to follow, and more flexibility in how the research might develop. In so doing, it clarified the relationship between the research questions, the epistemological and ontological standpoints, and the methodology to be applied. Using a thematic approach does not exclude the application of case study evidence but permits it to be incorporated as part of a more solid conceptual model, which tries to capture the underlying features affecting those topics. It also built on the nexus with ethnography and exploitation of documentary sources identified in Figure 3.1 below.

Figure 3.1 - Towards a Thematic Study



Source: Author

Indeed, there is a long history in rural studies of using case studies to exemplify thematic and theoretical understanding. For example Cloke and Milbourne (2000) have used enquiries into homelessness to highlight the clashes between social classes in the countryside. Lowe and Ward (2009) have vested considerable time in drawing out the distinctions between ‘rural’ and ‘agriculture’ by employing specific case study evidence around the themes of Europeanisation and regionalism.

Second, the thematic approach made it easier to integrate some complex lines of enquiry, which did not make for easy comparison, or for straightforward interpretation of the data. An example of this include the extent to which New Labour’s embracing of modernisation merely masked greater marketisation of public services, or if there was genuinely a third way between public and private sectors (see Chapter Seven).

Thematic studies have the advantage of seeking out emergent ideas, which can then

be fully analysed and evaluated. In turn, this allows the data to be indexed, according to criteria, which are, systematic, contextual, diagnostic, evaluative and strategic (Ritchie & Spencer 2002).

Third, it is possible to develop typologies around the different themes that transcend the normal case study approach, operating diachronically over longer time scales than is the norm, in spaces that would otherwise be prohibited, capturing empirical data that might, using other methods, go untapped. Wengraf (2001) explains how it is possible to go beyond the contingencies found through the interview texts to provide more general phenomena by interpretation that can then be developed into typologies. This links with the grounded theories of Glaser and Strauss (1967) - a technique I have employed before - reinforcing understanding of what really matters in rural policy and politics, and how government may help or hinder the development of those ideas.

This can encapsulate why actors matter, institutions develop, and how they influence the relationship between structure and agency, getting the researcher closer to identifying important features and making assertions, which can help validate whether the hypotheses are sustainable (Burnham et al 2008, Creswell & Miller 2000). The in-depth interviews permitted the exploration of the meaning behind different typologies such as social class, locational isolation, and the role of elites, grounding through a series of ideas, questions, and conclusions which linked to the investigation of archive materials, and created the core rationale for the research.

An evolution and refinement of the thematic approach recognised that qualitative research was less about trying to trace patterns of causation, but more concerned with cross-case analysis, to draw out both similarities and differences among cases,

where the outcome or process studied allowed inferences to develop clearer explanations and help create better hypotheses (Rihoux & Ragin 2009).

Adopting a thematic approach required reworking the interview schedules. However, the key themes of representation, urbanisation, externalisation and modernisation had already been identified as key ideas, even under a case study emphasis.

Grounded theory was constitutive throughout the research, and gave me the confidence to feel that the themes identified were valid, and helped in the evaluation of the ethnographic life histories. Discussion of the themes widened and deepened the epistemological and ontological rationale for the enquiry, placing it within the context of the temporal, spatial, territorial and institutional tropes of that period (Berg 2009).

3.5 Summary: How the methods chosen are appropriate for addressing the research objectives

To recap the research relies principally upon the employment of ethnography as the methodology, and open-ended semi-structured interviews as the main method. The reason for this approach is that this makes best use of the researcher's special position as an embedded insider with unique access to the number and range of respondents. Given the novelty of this research area, and the relative lack of source materials, both primary and secondary, it was vital that the research methodology and the methods chosen mediated the importance of the interrelationships at work to permit self-reflection, reflexivity and symbolic interaction.

The use of semi-structured interviews encouraged the fullest evidence base to be compiled. In the collection of data it was possible to differentiate not only between

classified categories, but also within each category to demonstrate that despite the complexities present in the research, it was possible to gather evidence that approximated to the thematic themes identified in the research questions (Cladie 1999). Interview material was supplemented by personal recollections and papers, with use, where necessary, of secondary source material, much of it from Parliament. This justifies the argument for choosing a thematic approach that defines an analytical framework, a compelling narrative, and appropriate interpretation of the evidence.

The reliance upon semi-structured interviews as the dominant technique for primary data collection can be criticised. However such is the breadth and depth of this research enquiry, that it is possible to justify this concentration on one method as the best way of eliciting information that otherwise would be ignored. Though highly personalised the discourse has been substantiated by use of techniques such as triangulation, to arrive at an account that now adds considerably to the subject-matter. Great care has been taken to keep the study as objective and ethically sound as possible.

This investigation of government policy-making and politics fits directly with a wish to capture more from an inside knowledge of the inner workings of the political process, by making greater use of embedded research. Combining this with a contemporary political study of the countryside adds to the store of knowledge in a neglected area.

Using these ethnographic tools the thesis will now examine the four thematic factors, representation, urbanism, externalisation and modernisation, to highlight how this caused New Labour's operation in the countryside to evolve.

Chapter 4 – New Labour’s representative role in the countryside after 1997

4.1 Introduction

This chapter, on representation, is the first of the four thematic chapters, and as such provides a bridge through to the subsequent chapters on urbanism, externalisation and modernisation.

This chapter critically examines the repercussions of the New Labour landslide in 1997, with many more rural and semi-rural constituencies won by Labour MPs. It is centred on research question One, evaluating the extent to which the presence of a large number of Labour rural MPs impacted upon the approach of the New Labour government towards the countryside, helping determine policy and politics.

First, it investigates how rural constituencies are defined, and considers why the government spent time and resource on improving the understanding of rural, using evidence-based policy-making as the mechanism for achieving this.

Whether New Labour was able to claim that it did represent the countryside after 1997 is analysed, and with what effect on the formulation of policy, and evolution of political activity in *Section 4.3*.

The Chapter then examines more directly the actual process of policy-making, critically evaluating whether the increased representation of Labour MPs made a tangible difference to the development of individual policies and the overall policy remit of New Labour for the countryside. The section also probes the effect of the Haskins’ Review (2003) on New Labour policy-making and implementation, and so provides findings in relation to research question Five on the temporality and spatiality of the government’s performance in the countryside.

4.2 What is a rural constituency?

When New Labour came to power there was no definitive measure of what a rural constituency was. Whilst there will always be differing opinions on what constitutes a rural constituency, providing a better understanding of the classification of different types of parliamentary seats is not a pointless activity. Rather, the process of defining rurality helped expand electoral comprehension, and gave a better micro-analysis of how individual constituencies behaved.

New Labour was determined to use evidence-based policy-making (EBPM) as the cornerstone to its modus operandi (Parsons 2002, Sanderson 2002a, Wells 2007). Therefore setting about gathering and interpreting rural data became a key element in helping develop policy in the countryside and was something in which Defra took particular pride (interview with Civil Servant 8).

The positive critique of EBPM was that when policies were introduced, those policies could be better justified if the substantive evidence backed them up (Burton 2006, Davies et al 2000, Solesbury 2001, Sanderson 2002a &b, Shortall 2013). Problems arose sometimes in the manner EBPM was exploited. Any piece of evidence was subject to interpretation and possible misuse. EBPM could never be an alternative to political decision-making, and would not be applicable for use in all cases. EBPM might also add significantly to the complexity of the policy-making process, which made decisions more difficult to take (Parsons 2002).

Establishing that New Labour was a Party of the countryside was contingent upon its ability to gain and sustain rural representation, and that could be achieved only by demonstrating a commitment to those rural areas, through research, data collection,

application of knowledge, effective targeting of resources – all necessary to help devise and implement well thought-through policies.

British parliamentary history points to the fact that many constituencies have deep roots, some keeping the same name, and a similar geographical area, over centuries, despite the electoral map of the UK forever changing¹². This is caused by population movement reflected in the periodic reviews of the Boundary Commission¹³.

There are two traditional ways of clarifying the description of constituencies (1 & 2), and two modern interpretations (3 & 4). These are:

1. Geographical or functional representation of the type of seat.
2. Parliamentary division of seats into borough or county constituencies.
3. Geodemographic segmentation of the electorate.
4. Output Area Classification/Local Authority Districts.

Each of these typologies is described fully in Appendix 5. Defra invested heavily in typology 4, in order to provide better distinctions not just between urban and rural areas, but also within the categorisation of urban and rural. This was seen as a crucial bench-mark for a better understanding of the needs of different types of area, which would help in the better targeting of resources (Bibby & Shepherd 2004).

¹² Amongst those that still have the same name from the 1832 Great Reform Act include Ashton-under-Lyne, Cambridge, Cheltenham and Gloucester, though some of these had more than one MP for part of their early history (Cheffins et al 1998).

¹³ The Boundary Commission has overall responsibility for defining the status, make-up and number of voters allocated to each constituency. It works in parallel with the Electoral Commission and is an independent legal entity.

Subsequently Defra's data collection and handling processes was a crucial reason for winning funding and other support from the Treasury (Elton 2011).

The importance of Defra as a centre of excellence in the field of data collection, handling, and interpretation was that ministers and civil servants were now much better equipped to be able to definitively argue the case for rural, and what mattered in rural areas. This was instrumental in being able to make a stronger case with other government departments for additional resources for rural, and also meant that Defra was better able to deflect criticism from organisations such as the Countryside Alliance that New Labour had no interest in the countryside (interview with civil servant 8).

4.3 The 1997 General Election result and the impact of New Labour's greater representation in the countryside

The sheer scale of the 1997 landslide with 418 MPs elected on 43 per cent of the popular vote, a majority of 179, and a 10 per cent swing from Conservative to New Labour meant that there were now Labour MPs representing parts of the country that previously had never had a Labour MP, except possibly in the landslide of 1945.

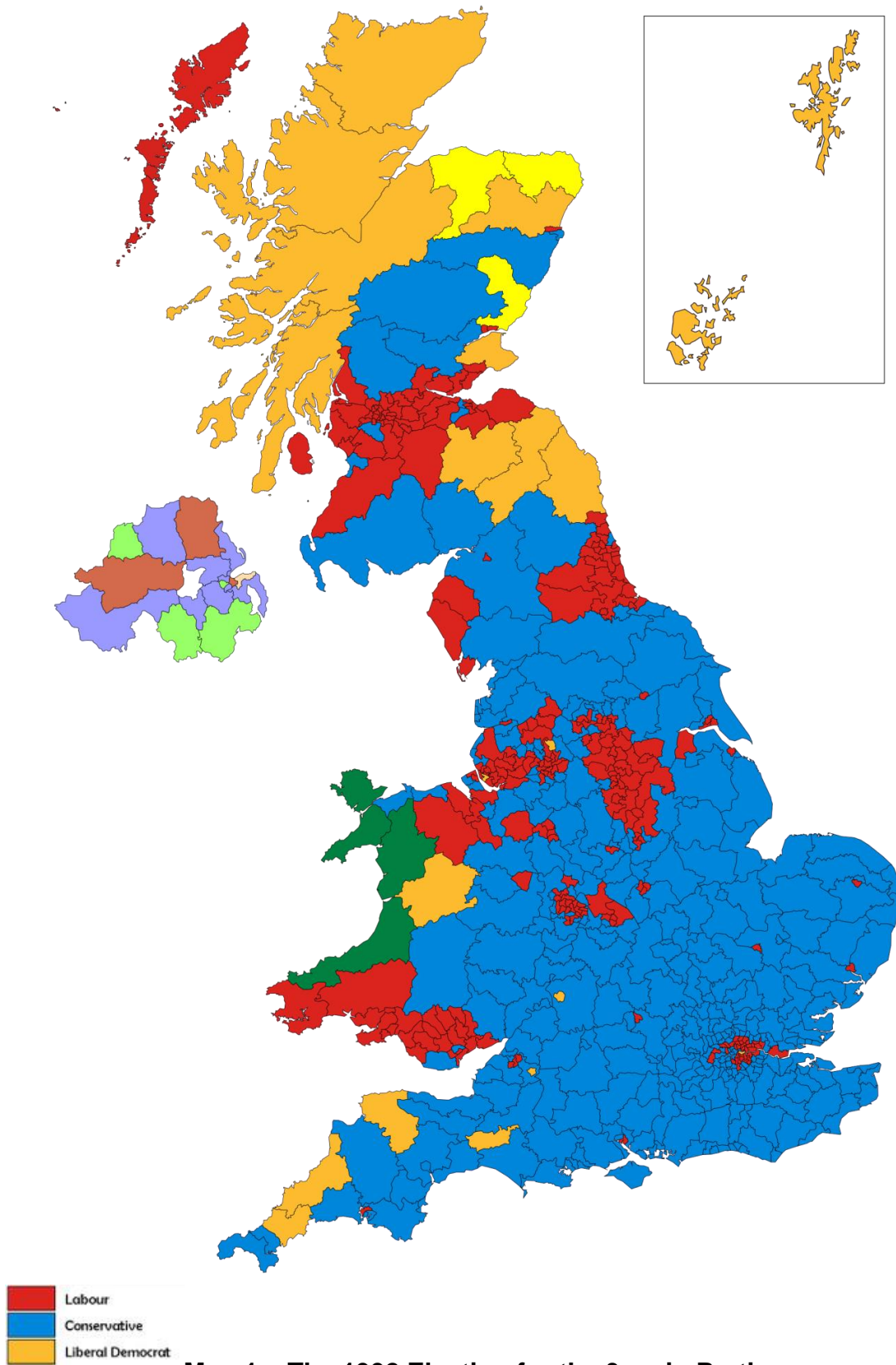
In England, this included many rural constituencies and dramatically changed the electoral map (see Maps 1 & 2). Even an area like the South-West that had traditionally been alien territory for Labour now had significant splashes of red (see Map 3). Though Labour had a tradition of representing rural areas in Scotland, Wales and the North, it was rare for the party to win seats in the countryside in the Midlands and the South of England. Such was the scale of the 1997 victory that among constituencies captured was Stroud, The Wrekin, Falmouth and Camborne, North-East Somerset, Waveney and Wyre Forest. Some of these rural seats stayed

with Labour until 2010, indicative that New Labour had traction that previous Labour governments lacked (Norris 1997, Pattie et al 1997, Ward 2002). Importantly New Labour had done little to target many of these seats as winnable.

The Party listed just over 100 seats as part of its Key Seat list, which it needed to win in order to be sure of a majority. These were decided purely by relative marginality. Other features including the strength of the local party membership did not matter (Seyd & Whiteley 2002). Most of the seats on this list were urban, or suburban and little campaigning was undertaken in rural constituencies. Maps 1 and 2 demonstrate the dramatic increase in red due to the scale of Labour's victory.

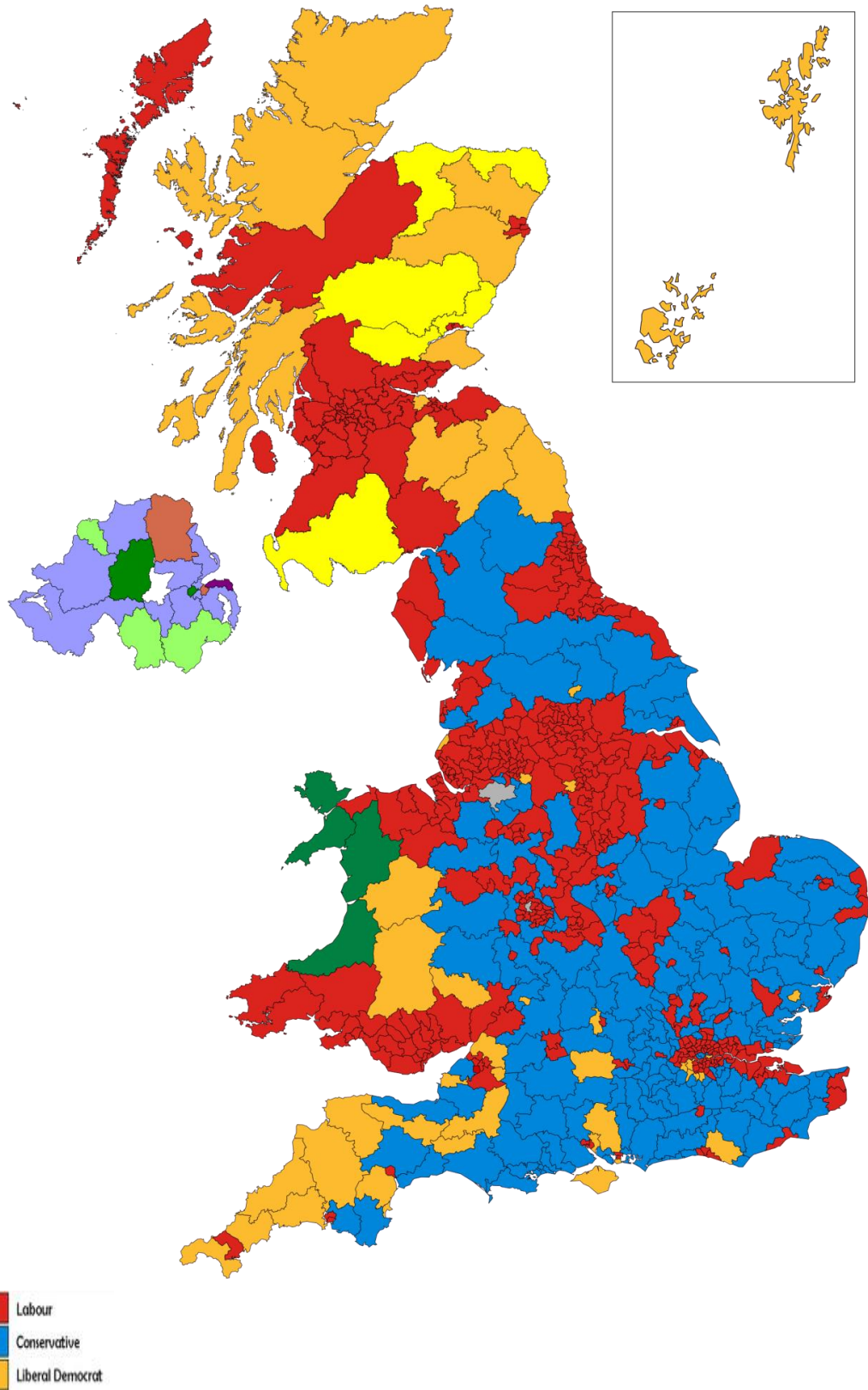
Such was the scale of the landslide that many more rural constituencies were captured (Denver et al 1998, Denver & Hands 2004, Evans et al 1998, Fisher et al 2011, Whiteley & Seyd 1994). Appendix 2 identifies the non-traditional rural seats held by New Labour MPs in 1997, and what happened to those seats in subsequent general elections. Figures 4.1 & 4.2 taken from Woods (2008e) highlight the limited reaction against the New Labour government in rural seats in 2001 and 2005 elections.

The presence of so many Labour MPs in rural these seats had two major repercussions. First, territorial ownership of rural England constituted a three-way battle between Labour, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. Second, there was now a cohort of Labour rural MPs keen to display their credentials as effective rural representatives, and to make their mark in Parliament, in the wider Labour Party and in their constituencies.



Map 1 – The 1992 Election for the 3 main Parties (reproduced

from https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:UK_General_Election,_1992.svg) License CC BY-SA 4.0. By permission of Mirrome22. <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>



Map 2 – The 1997 Election for the 3 main Parties (reproduced from

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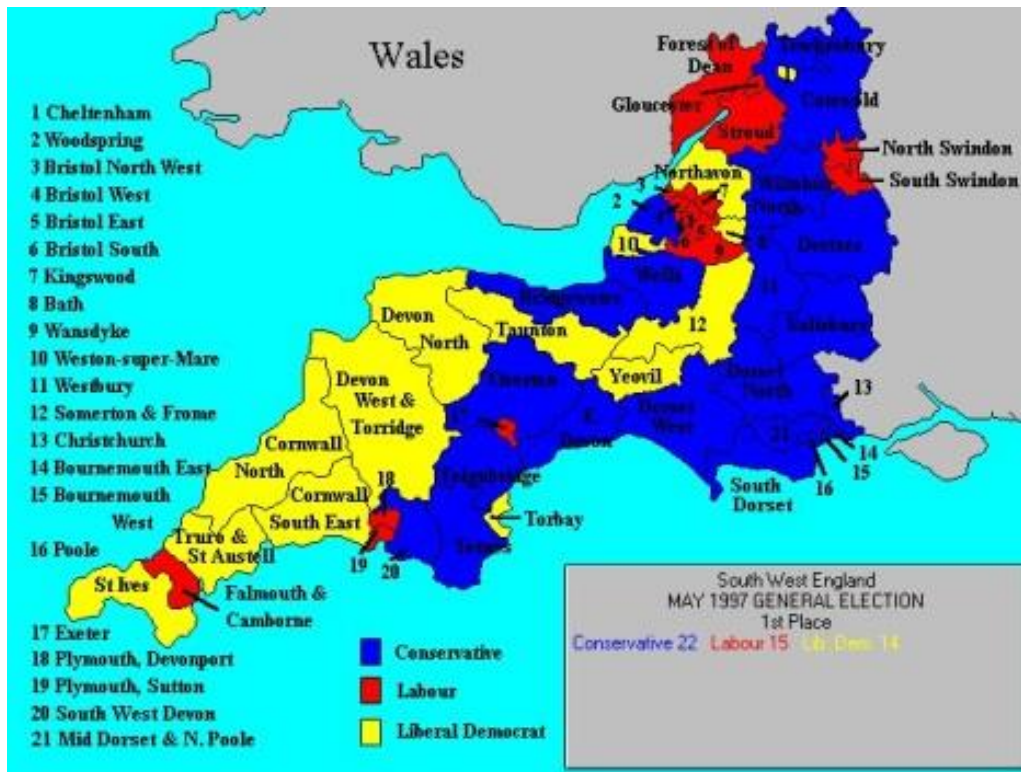
Figure 4.1 - Labour vote in selcted rural constituencies at the 2001 general election

Constituency type (number of seats)	Labour vote 2001	Change 1997 - 2001	Swing Lab - Con	Labour seats 2001	Change on 1997
Hunt kennels in seat (159)	30.5%	-1.6	+2.1	48	-3
Three of more hunt kennels in seat (34)	23.3%	-2.4	+3.1	6	-1
Top 20 farming seats (20)	21.4%	-2.3	+2.8	2	-1
One or more cases of FMD in seat (93)	36.2%	-2.5	+2.5	46	=
20 or more cases of FMD in seat (19)	30.6%	-3.3	+3.7	7	=
High car ownership and low population density (19)	25.5%	-1.8	+2.9	5	-2
Partially rural seats on ACORN classification (76)	25.5%	-1.2	+2.3	15	=
All GB constituencies excluding Northern Ireland (641)	42.0%	-2.2	+1.8	412	-6

Figure 4.2 - Labour vote in selected rural constituencies at the 2005 general election

Constituency type (number of seats)	Labour vote 2005	Change 2001 - 05	Swing Lab - Con	Labour seats 2005	Change on 2001
Hunt kennels in seat (159)	26.3%	-4.2	+2.4	40	-8
Three or more hunt kennels in seat (34)	20.4%	-2.9	+2.1	2	-4
Top 20 farming seats (20)	20.2%	-1.2	+0.7	2	=
Partially rural seats on ACORN classification – England and Wales only (60)	22.1%	-3.6	+1.8	5	-5
All GB constituencies exluding Northern Ireland (628)	36.2%	-5.8	+3.2	356	-56

Source: Woods (2008e) pages 265 and 266, reproduced by kind permission of Professor Mike Woods



Map3 - The 1997 Election in the South-West – reproduced from

www.ukelect.co.uk by kind permission of Tim Bickerstaff

The optimistic mood amongst rural Labour MPs led to one of their number, Peter Bradley, the MP for the Wrekin, to set up the Rural Group of Labour MPs, early in the 1997 Parliament (Woods 2008d). The Group sought to lobby government for positive changes to countryside policies and the creation of new ones, to help organise campaigning activities - within and outside of the Party - and to mobilise opposition, when Labour was under attack from other parties for being out of touch with countryside issues.¹⁴

¹⁴ There were frequent debates called by both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats during the first two New Labour administrations. A snapshot of these debates taken from Hansard comprised; 'Rural Life' – 4th November 1997 Vol 300, cols 176 – 200; 'Rural Economy' – 10th December 1997 Vol 302 cols 927 – 47; 'Agriculture' – 4th November 1998 Vol 318 cols 934 – 84; 'Rural policing' – 16th January 2001 Vol 361 cols 1 – 15WH; 'Rural broadband services' – 25th March 2003 Vol 402 cols 31 – 56WH.

In his foreword to the Rural Audit (1999), the inchoate publication that signalled the Group's existence, Bradley claimed a potential membership for the Group of 180 Labour MPs of which 97 actually joined the Group. The Group was able to point to various successes. Amongst these were; pressed the demand for a Rural White Paper, achieved in 2000 (DETR/MAFF); brought forward a Ministry that at least in part was a focus for rural issues with the creation of Defra in 2001; and got the Labour Party to embrace the idea that rural mattered, evident through the holding of rural conferences, more focused campaigning in rural areas, and the production of specific rural manifestos from 2001 onwards (Lowe & Ward 2001). As Bradley commented to me as part of this research;

I was determined that rural would mean more than just farming and fox-hunting. It was about persuading the media that life existed beyond the M25. That's why the publications and conferences mattered so much. It was about drawing a distinction between urban and rural – even if the same issues applied, and getting fair funding in rural areas (interview with Bradley).

The inception of the Rural Group was not without its problems. There was opposition to its formation from within the Parliamentary Labour Party, and initially ministers were somewhat wary of giving outright support. For instance Bob Ainsworth, the Deputy Chief Whip tried to persuade putative members of the Rural Group, that the PLP Agriculture Committee would be a sufficient vehicle for rural MPs to raise their concerns. Others, despite representing rural seats, did not see the point of belonging to a separate Group. A personal anecdote was that I was assigned to try to encourage Dennis Skinner to join the Group. I was told in the most unparliamentary of language that he was a mining MP and not a rural one, despite Bolsover being categorised as rural, according to any of the different classifications

(See Appendix 5). Likewise some rural MPs preferred to associate with city politics, their seats being contiguous with urban areas. As a colleague commented for this research;

We were both active members of SIGOMA. We rarely discussed rural. We were members of SIGOMA to get a fair deal for our area and felt that this body was the best way to achieve this even it was largely a metropolitan construct. Rural would rarely carry the same weight (interview with MP 2)¹⁵.

Interestingly the bulk of the Group was not immersed in rural politics prior to election. Bradley, for example, had made his reputation as a Westminster Councillor, the scourge of Dame Shirley Porter¹⁶. Most truly rural activists were based in unwinnable constituencies, but the strength of the embryonic Rural Group was to give confidence to the wider Labour Movement. As one MP noted;

We quickly learned the benefit of campaigning in our own rural areas, and then to spread out into other non-Labour constituencies. We wrote materials that spoke to the rural electorate rather than the usual urban-inspired newsletters that the wider Party splurged out. The hope was that if we helped other constituencies their activists would return the favour and come back to help us at the next general election (interview with MP1).

Despite the barriers it faced the Group proved adept at publicity and the wider party began to turn to it for advice and leadership on rural issues. One such instance was

¹⁵ SIGOMA stood for Special Interest Group of Metropolitan Authorities, made up of Labour MPs, and councillors based in and around the great cities of the north. SIGOMA became a very effective lobbying organisation influencing New Labour on issues such as city regions.

¹⁶ Porter was pursued for surcharge due to maladministration as Council Leader. She later fled to Israel.

when the Group was consulted over whether to postpone the 2001 general election because of the ongoing foot and mouth outbreak – advice that proved crucial in the election being delayed. Over time the Group lost both members and influence as the number of rural seats fell in successive general elections, and the focus of Group members drifted to other interests. Key to this was the defeat of Bradley in the 2005 election, his driving-force never being successfully replaced.

Even though the Rural Group never regained the ascendancy it had up to 2004, overall its role was symbolic of how the Party had undergone a positive transformation in relation to the countryside, and how it had exploited the new-found electoral legitimacy. As Woods has commented;

The Rural Group of Labour MPs established following the 1997 election has been active in highlighting a (wider) range of issues including poverty, social exclusion, services, transport and crime – an agenda which was incorporated into the Rural White Paper for England in November 2000. In this way, Labour has attempted to forge a non-Conservative coalition in rural Britain that should in theory enable it to retain as significant proportion of rural constituencies for the foreseeable future (2002; p 226).

It certainly gave New Labour something upon which to build its rural reputation, from the low base of the disinterest shown before 1997, culminating in the minimalist manifesto commitments where rural was concerned. This paid dividends, for although 1997 was the high water mark for Labour's rural representation, there was a remarkably small swing against the governing parties in the countryside in 2001

and 2005 (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2) (Ward 2002)¹⁷. For Bradley this was due to the hard work put in by rural MPs, reaching parts of rural constituencies that their Conservative predecessors had never bothered with (interview).

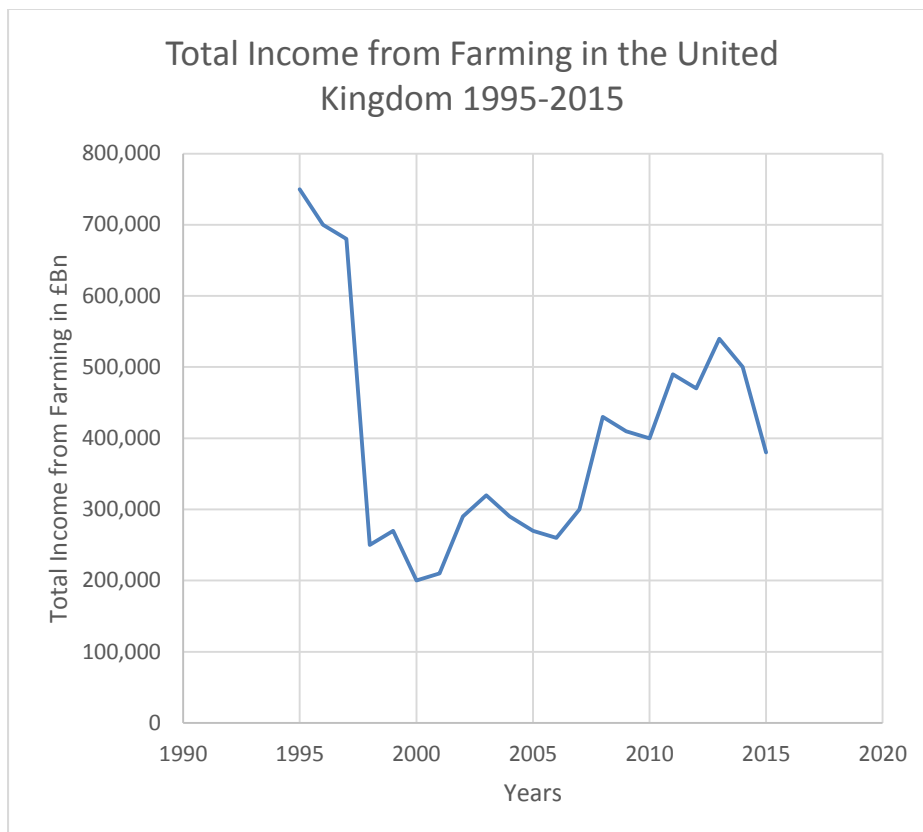
This did not mean that rural Labour MPs were immune from criticism. They were targeted by political foes, especially those opposed to the hunting ban. The fiercest adverse reaction came from the Countryside Alliance, the organisation established to lead opposition to the ban. This drew in broader support by pursuing a much wider agenda of rural grievances against the government such as higher fuel prices, the farming crisis, and the threat to rural services. Of these the collapse in farm prices presented the greatest ongoing threat to New Labour, (though the antecedents predated the arrival of the Blair government), the legacy of falling world prices, the rise in the value of the pound, and the embargo on British beef exports, because of the BSE/beef on the bone scandal. Figure 4.3 shows that prices had not recovered even by 2015 and were again heading in the wrong direction. The picture is made more complicated by the reduction in the level of support payments to farmers.

The acme of this were three massive demonstrations, alongside major publicity operations against the government, and the ongoing harrying of individual Labour MPs (Anderson A 2006, Lusoli & Ward 2006, Marsh et al 2009, Reed 2008, Woods 2008c,d&e). New Labour responded to this criticism by pointing to its new-found strength in rural England. For instance Angela Eagle, a junior DETR minister replying on behalf of the government to a debate on Rural Life, referred directly to the number of Labour rural MPs and how New Labour was now the true representatives of rural areas.

¹⁷ Using the RERC research criteria seat descriptors from OA/LAD New Labour retained 67 rural seats in 2001, and 55 in 2005 (Shepherd 2006).

The rump that the Tory Party parades as an outdated caricature of town versus country can only do damage to the countryside, while Labour in the one nation party (Hansard 4th November 1997 col 210).

Figure 4.3 - Total Income from Farming 1995 - 2015



Source: Defra - from Farming National Statistics 28th April 2016 (First estimate – taken from p2) by kind permission of Defra.

Attacks by opponents cemented the sense of solidarity amongst rural MPs (interviews with MPs 6 & 7), and gave them greater credibility in the eyes of ministers. This was one strong reason for the positive response by the government to the request for a Rural White Paper to coincide with that planned for urban England (interview with Civil Servant 6, and Practitioner 1; Hewitt 2011a). The protection of the new-found rural base also became a useful argument for ensuring

that service loss in the countryside was minimised, resulting in policy changes including the network subsidy for rural post offices, an embargo on shutting rural primary schools, and monies to help preserve shops and pubs (interview with MP 9, Moseley & Owen 2008, PIU 2000, Woods 2006c).

The Rural Group was also useful in that it developed good links with many countryside organisations, some of whom were persuaded to put their name to the Rural Audit (1999), the inaugural publication of the Group. This relationship burgeoned over time and served as a helpful conduit for government (interview with Bradley). This influence was also felt over issues such as whether there should be a stand-alone rural ministry following the FMD debacle. Though opinions were divided in the Group on the viability of and reasons for such a move, there was agreement that MAFF had to be replaced (interview with Bradley & Minister 6, Farmers' Weekly, 1998). Defra was the compromise arrived at, even though this broke the commitment made in the 2001 manifesto for a fully-fledged Department of Rural Affairs (Labour Party 2001 – See Appendix 3 and Defra Select Committee Report on The Role of Defra 2002b). The aim and objectives of Defra (See Appendix 6) already highlighted that rural would be more marginal to the new set up than some had hoped for.

Activities outside of the Group, but spear-headed by Group members gave rural matters a higher standing in Parliament, Party, and outside. The Defra Select Committee also undertook major enquiries into rural schools, and access to broadband in the countryside (2003a&b).

There was additionally the presence of the Countryside Agency which began to build itself into a very powerful lobbying, policy-initiating and delivery body in rural

communities (interview with Practitioners 1, 26 & 27). Much of the evidence-base for the Rural White Paper was collected by, and reinterpreted by, members of the Agency, who produced most of the copy material (interview with Civil Servant 6 and Practitioners 1 & 27). It was important that the government had set up the Agency in 1999 and given it so much power as an externalised voice alongside (but often in place of) that of government. Likewise it was manifestation of the growing prioritisation of rural that one of the first Performance and Innovation Unit reports was into Rural Economies (1999; interview with Academic 1). Taken together all these developments represented a dramatic shift in how New Labour treated rural. However, this situation was not to last.

Following the Haskins' Review (2003), and the Rural Strategy (Defra 2004a) which followed from that Review, and accepted virtually all of the Review's recommendations, there was a marked change in the government's emphasis. These are discussed in more detail in *Section 4.4*. Instead of the social democratic, proactive, interventionist approach that had become the byword of New Labour's rural regime, there was a reversal in policy and political activity after 2004. Ward and Lowe (2007a&b) saw this as the destruction of New Labour's rural grand project, and blamed Haskins for something Ward later described as vandalism (Ward 2008b).

Four reasons have been advanced for this apparent volte-face. First, the pressure of events associated with the countryside had begun to recede. The hunting ban was seen as a *fait accompli* (Milbourne 2003a&b, Ward 1999, Woods 2008b); the memory of FMD had started to fade, partly helped by the generous compensation payments given to those affected (interview with Academic 2; Convery et al 2005,

Haskins 2001); other problems such as the debacle of the Rural Payments Agency¹⁸ impacted upon a much more limited audience (Defra Select Committee 2007c, Ward 2006, Ward & Lowe 2004). Second, the influence of the Backbench Group waned – Bradley was appointed as Alun Michael’s¹⁹ Parliamentary Private Secretary, and resigned as Chair – and the Group as a whole became less effective and focused. As one leading Labour rural councillor told me for this research;

I was disappointed at the failures of the backbench group. The conferences were useful but the notion of Labour as a rural party never quite took hold. This came on the back of ineffective rural ministers after Alun Michael, who was very good. There were many warm words, but little of substance came as a result (interview with Labour Rural Councillor 1).

Third, the Countryside Agency came under heavy attack for poor leadership, excessive expenditure, and unnecessary bureaucratic interference in the countryside (Derounian 2006). Removing initially its authority, and eventually its very existence, was a vital explanandum for Haskins’ (interview with Haskins). It was only after it had been abolished that the organisation’s value was truly appreciated (Ward & Lowe 2007a&b).

Fourth, the government was in political retreat in the countryside, a mixture of perceived electoral weaknesses there, and the greater attention it paid to urban issues from the second period of government onwards. This was partly a reversion

¹⁸ The Defra Select Committee investigation (2007c) identified that the RPA had failed as much due to poor implementation and lack of accountability as the wrong original concept. The Agency was bedevilled by inadequate management, IT failings, and major cost overruns, which led to a loss of confidence from farmers. It took an inordinate amount of ministerial time to try to fix these problems, a legacy that continues through to the current time (King & Crewe 2014).

¹⁹ Michael became Rural Affairs Minister in the new Defra Ministry after 2001. He was also tasked with taking the Hunting Bill through Parliament.

to type, but also was due to its concentration prioritising delivery of the key policy areas in health, education, law and order, and transport, and militated against rural (Barber 2007). The financial crash post 2008 deepened this schism.

In terms of New Labour's reputation over rural matters this undid most of the good that had been achieved from 1999 – 2004. Whether the peradventure of the Rural Group, together with the fortuitous circumstances that presented themselves in those years had really changed Labour from being mainly an urban construct is discussed in Chapter Five. What remained problematic in terms of New Labour's history in the countryside were the antinomies of the way in which New Labour had approached the countryside before and after 2004.

4.4 How did New Labour's greater representation in the countryside influence government, its policy-making and delivery, and the prevailing political situation?

1997 heralded a new era for Labour in government, and that was as true for the English countryside as for the rest of the country. Juxtaposed with the government's apparent new enthusiasm for an entrée into rural matters to assuage its own representatives was the requirement that it had to be seen to be responding to the needs of rural communities, reacting to events, and devising a clear strategy. This was achieved by effective policy development and careful implementation of those policies. Initially this responsibility was mainly arrogated to the Countryside Agency. However after Haskins' Review Defra took back the authority for making policy as it was felt that more direct control was required (interview with Minister 3 and Practitioner 1).

In this respect New Labour's relationship with the countryside can be divided into three distinct periods. 1997 – 1999; a period of disinterest in the countryside, with little preparation having been made to cope with rural issues. 1999 – 2004; maximum involvement in countryside matters, with the Party reverting to a social democratic agenda, to deal with a raft of problems that it was faced with. 2004 onwards; after which there was a steep decline of interest in rural matters. A case can be made out for a further period after Brown's ascendancy to the premiership after 2007, when there was a more precipitous fall off in interest, heightened by the financial crisis and greater cuts in public spending.

*New Labour's discovery of rural policy, the forms that it took, and the repercussions:
1999 - 2004*

New Labour, as the previous section adumbrated, entered government with few plans for the countryside. The 1997 manifesto commitments involved tinkering rather than radical reform (see Appendix 3). In the run-up to the election New Labour took little interest in rural areas, and Blair made few visits to the countryside as part of campaigning activities (interview with MP 7, Labour Rural Councillor 2).

This made it all the more surprising that after two years of government, as the moratorium on additional expenditure came to an end, New Labour began to look seriously at rural policy. Admittedly a serious investigation of change in the countryside chimed directly with the Blairite themes of modernisation, and the politics of the 'third way' (See Chapter Seven), but nevertheless the government went further than might have been expected of it, beyond what was needed to keep rural Labour backbenchers happy, and Countryside campaigners at bay.

The measures that were introduced over the period 1999 – 2004 were a mixture of policy and programme initiatives, with institutional and structural change. Policies were formal courses of action undertaken by the government, whilst programmes tended to be more ad hoc, decided upon in a more participative manner of operation, and usually time-limited. Chief amongst those measures were:

- Presumption against closing village schools 1998
- New bus and community transport provision 1998
- Creation of the Countryside Agency 1999
- The Performance and Innovation Unit Report on Rural Economies 1999
- Protection of rural post office branches 1999
- Introduction of a sparsity factor initially into school funding, and then policing, 1999 & 2000
- The Rural White Paper 2000
- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
- The creation of Defra 2001
- Beginning the Mid-Term Review of the CAP 2002
- The Quality Parish Council Scheme 2003

Taken together these measures gave a signal that the government was willing to intervene to protect and enhance services in rural England, and provide more equitable distribution of services with urban England, bear down on rural disadvantage, and encourage new forms of governance and decision-making using networks, partnerships and collaborations (Ward 2008c, Woods 2008e). This sought to tackle at least some of the divisions that existed between the physical and human environment, economic and social ruralities, farming and non-farming activities, and

between the protectors of the countryside, and those who wanted development there (interviews with Practitioner 23 and Minister 3, DTI 1999, Flynn et al 1996, Local Government Chronicle 1998a&b, Moser 2004).

Of particular importance were the PIU report (1999), and the Rural White Paper (2000) that quickly followed it, because this put in place a new rural regime with clear commitments laid down by government on how it would support, fund and oversee rural communities (interviews with Practitioners 1 & 27 and Civil Servant 7). As one civil servant remarked about the White Paper;

There was a Cornish backlash against what was seen as excessive urban influence upon the government. John Prescott came to Cornwall on holiday each year and so we organised, when I was working there prior to entering the civil service, to invite him out for the day to experience real rural life with all its problems. After that day Prescott appeared to become absorbed with issues involving rurality and I believe it was this that persuaded him to become an enthusiastic supporter of the need for the Rural White Paper (interview with civil servant 6).

Whatever the reasons behind the genesis of the White Paper, the impact upon New Labour was dramatic. Major programmes were launched in transport, housing, education, health, the rural environment, and parish governance – largely under the instigation of the Countryside Agency. Key to this was the additional funding of £1bn. Much of this was new money allocated from the Treasury, but some came from within DETR, at the insistence of the Deputy Prime Minister, a decision not

welcomed by all in his Department (interview with Minister 3)²⁰. However there were other crucial developments which arose from the White Paper, principally the beginning of rural proofing of policy across government and its agencies. This is covered in detail in Chapter Seven – suffice to say that this was a symbolic representation of modernism in action, ensuring that rural was bound into wider changes (interview with Bradley).

The Rural Group were keen advocates of the need for a White Paper to sit alongside what was proposed for urban England. This stimulated other activity. The successful lobbying of Charles Clarke to introduce a sparsity factor into block grants, - initially at education, and then at police - ran in tandem with the issue of the White Paper (interview with Bradley). The Treasury was a surprising ally in this, and helped to broker deals on a number of occasions (interview with Practitioner 27). Together with Defra ministers, and their special advisers, a rural demarche was launched. This met with a positive response from at least some in the rural academic and practitioner community, who were excited by the new possibilities (interviews with Practitioners 5, 9, 12, & 19, and Academic 7). As one prominent academic said to me;

Labour made some real progress up to 2001 with its rural policy because of its substantially increased representation, and despite the presence of the Countryside Alliance who were always trying to attack the government's legitimacy in the countryside. However the FMD outbreak did at least partly undermine this (interview with Academic 1).

²⁰ Nick Raynsford the Housing Minister was reported as livid at the cuts he was asked to make to the housing budget as a result (interview with Minister 3).

Though there was a degree of cynicism that the government was merely responding to events there was willingness by some to look beyond this superficiality. Without doubt this enthused and encouraged ministers to think and act more about rural matters and they began to realise the advantages of the changed electoral circumstances and different political and cultural environments then present in the countryside (interviews with Practitioners 2, 4 & 7, Minister 4). This period is still regarded with fondness by some;

I was proud of what New Labour achieved and in particular what the Commission for Rural Communities (and previously the Countryside Agency) did for rural communities. It put rural poverty on the agenda, recognising that poverty did not just occur in urban England. What New Labour did was to pay attention to alternative models of decentralisation responding to local needs and priorities (interview with Practitioner 9).

Notwithstanding what occurred after 2004, New Labour succeeded in establishing its credentials as a party that took rural policy seriously and its pragmatic approach in trying to come to terms with the English countryside in the twenty-first century found some surprising admirers (interviews with MPs 3, 6 & 7; Goodwin 2008). Even the Countryside Alliance complimented some of the agenda, provided the topic of hunting was side-stepped, as was said to me by their operatives on numerous occasions. Woods concurs with this point of view (2008d pp 264 – 66).

Post 2004 – The decline in rural activity

By the early years of the new century New Labour had produced a framework for a social democratically-based rural policy, and had begun to focus on the fields which needed attention, as set out in the Rural White Paper. In more deprived ruralities,

communities became eligible for funds that stimulated neighbourhood renewal, as part of national programmes. There was also help for pre-school provision through SureStart and targeted support for education and health (Ward 2008a&b).

Particular programmes that were widely praised included Vital Villages – which enabled rural communities to undertake aspects of community development and renewal. Also important are:

- Parish Transport Grants – that encouraged parish councils and local groups to seek out innovative solutions to their accessibility needs
- Quality Parish Councils – permitting those councils who wanted to, to professionalise themselves and streamline decision-making
- Affordable Rural Housing – putting facilitators such as rural housing enablers onto a sounder financial footing to drive up the numbers of houses
- The Market Towns Initiative – which emphasised the importance of market towns to their rural hinterlands, and funded their development
- Food chain initiatives – following the Don Curry Commission (2002) grants were put in place to improve links from ‘plough to plate’ and this gave rural businesses an incentive to be part of this (interviews with Practitioners 20 & 29, Academics 3 & 7):

Having accomplished so much in a relatively short period of time, it was all the more unexpected that New Labour’s rural policy went into first abeyance, and then reverse, after 2004. Yet that was exactly what happened, and the research evidence gathered from the interviews supports this proposition. Some of the reasons for this have already been explored above but central to the explanation was the government’s unhappiness with the outcomes from the FMD debacle, especially the

massively over-budget recovery costs of £6bn. To learn from these mistakes, once it had overcome the immediate aftermath of FMD, government commissioned three separate pieces of work with an aim of preventing such a reoccurrence.²¹ It also turned its attention to an overhaul of rural policy with three other initiatives – the review of the Rural White Paper (Defra 2004b); a rural data study from Birkbeck College (Rural Evidence Research Centre 2004); and the Haskins' Review (2003). Each of these were major pieces of work, and together they entailed a dramatic shift in Defra's direction of travel away from social democratic interventionism towards a more neo-liberal, business-orientated approach. The White Paper Review stressed the need for Defra to focus upon sustainable development, regionalism and the redesign of the food chain. The rural data study likewise, as this chapter has already pinpointed, focused Defra's efforts upon data collection, handling and interpretation. Of the reviews however the most prescient was undoubtedly Haskins' - though this did parallel much of the critique in Defra's own investigation - demanding a shake-up in the structural and institutional make-up of rural affairs. This highlighted the difficulties caused by the lack of quantification of data, poor integration between policy objectives, and between layers of government, and the fact that some of the White Paper was aspirational rather than deliverable (Defra 2004b). Haskins' primary proposal was the separation of policy-making from delivery, the former to be clearly located within Defra itself. Given that Haskins was given a free hand by Blair (interview with Minister 2), he was able to put an unchallengeable imprint on the

²¹ There were three reports that covered the aftermath of the FMD outbreak. They were the Don Curry Commission (2002) on 'Farming & Food: A sustainable future'; the Ian Anderson Report (2002) 'Foot and Mouth Disease: Lessons to be Learned Inquiry Report'; and the Royal Society Inquiry (2002) chaired by Sir Brian Follett.

direction he thought rural policy-making and delivery should go. As such he produced a comprehensive, if controversial blueprint for the future of the countryside, which was heavily biased towards business, and economic performance and took as its lead, a private-sector approach to rural matters (Elton 2011). It also clipped the wings and expenditure of Defra's agencies with the abolition of the Countryside Agency, to be replaced by an integrated agency that was to become Natural England. In addition it promoted a regional agenda. Haskins himself was adamant that part of his argument was misunderstood, or misinterpreted by government so that the emphasis he put on devolution and decentralisation was less prominent in the government's response than he had hoped for. As he commented in interview to me;

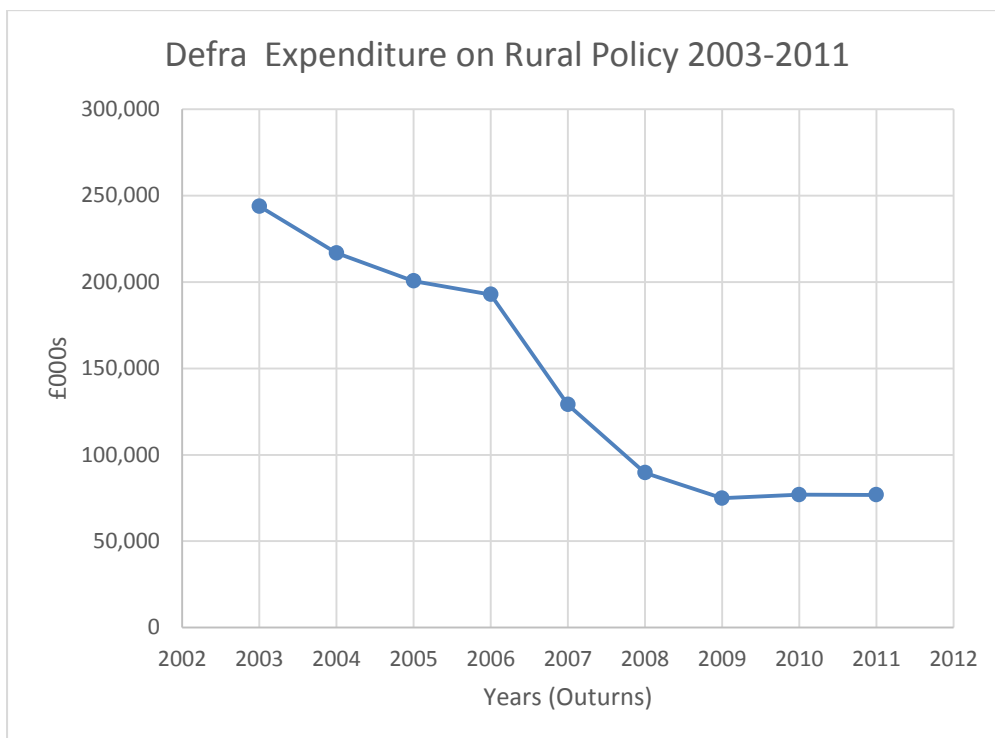
It wasn't a brilliant report. I had intended that ministers and the civil service would have got the message for more decentralisation. They found it difficult to let go (interview with Haskins).

Others were far less charitable (Ward & Lowe 2007a&b). Nevertheless the government's response was to accept nearly all of his recommendations, and the review formed the basis of its new Rural Strategy (2004a) which supplanted the Rural White Paper. Haskins' therefore marked a turning point in New Labour's rural policy ambitions, after which rural policy was much more narrowly focussed, far less ambitious, and the social democratic edge had all but disappeared.

The aim of the resulting Strategy (Defra 2004a) was to move towards a sustainable countryside built on; economic prosperity distilled into strong communities; equitability, facing up to social disadvantage; and protection of the countryside. The stress was firmly upon the economic, with greater reliance placed upon business and

the private sector (Haskins before the Defra Select Committee 2003c, and interviews with Ministers 2 & 3, Academics, 1 & 7). The problem with the change in direction was that it was accompanied by major cuts in spending as Figure 4.4 clearly demonstrates, a situation that was predicted to continue through the remainder of the government's life.

Figure 4.4 – Rural policy spending



Source: Defra Departmental Report 2007 p 196 by kind permission of Defra

The government dovetailed this approach with its review of CAP expenditure. In line with the Commission it supported a speeding up of a move away from direct payments by bolstering Pillar 2 of the CAP which incorporated rural matters, but sought to do so much more quickly than other EU member states. This did not necessarily provide more help for rural communities however. Though supposedly more money was going to be allocated through to rural initiatives via the Rural

Development Programme for England (RDPE), as England had traditionally underfunded rural through this mechanism, and as the basis for the new arrangements was historic, the situation of underfunding rural was set to continue (Elton 2011).

The new Strategy abandoned most of the policy initiatives outlined earlier, as the money dried up, and there was no strong advocate to protect those schemes (with the demise of the Countryside Agency). Just as damaging was the backtracking over the protection of rural services. The subsidy for rural post office branches was curtailed, followed by two programmes of substantial closures, which adversely affected those MPs representing rural seats (interviews with MPs 2 & 3). One MP said in interview;

Post offices were a bloody nightmare. The issue was very difficult to handle with people campaigning to keep them open, but then not using them. Lots of post offices were going to close anyway. I tried hard to save some but this was against the odds. The government just didn't get it in terms of the reputational damage done to rural Labour MPs (interview with MP 6).

In parallel were other threats to rural services, particularly health, where community hospitals came under attack, alongside small maternity units and village GP practices. This was because of an insensitive national medical model that emphasised the benefits of size and specialisms, through ideas such as polyclinics, that were simply not practicable in a rural setting (interviews with MP 2 and Academic 4, Pollitt 2007). As a result government came under attack and this caused rural Labour MPs to be put on the defensive in their constituencies, on a

topic that should have been one of Labour's strongest because of the extra resources being invested into the NHS (interview with Practitioner 30).

Evidence of the government's harder-edged economic approach, with an emphasis upon business, enterprise and improving productivity was the growing reliance upon Public Service Agreements. Public Service Agreement PSA 4, the main objective Defra was given by the Treasury, required the Department to:

reduce the gap in productivity between the least well performing quartile of rural areas and the English median by 2008, demonstrating progress by 2006, and improve the accessibility of services for people in rural areas (Defra 2004c).

Though PSAs were only a passing phase in New Labour's increased obsession with target-driven culture and top-down directed reforms (Bevir 2005, Faucher-King & Le Gales 2010, Miller et al 2006), they did give a clear indication of the government's intentions and this directional shift strengthened over time. PSAs also featured at local as well as national level (Entwistle & Enticott 2007). It also indicated the greater traction that the Treasury were exerting over Defra, evinced by the reform proposal for the CAP, The UK Government's Vision for the Common Agricultural Policy, which was largely written by the Treasury (Defra Select Committee 2007b). Elton refers to this as the Treasury becoming a meta-governor, acting as an overseer of Defra policy, including its relationship with the EU (2011).

Defra seemed especially ill at ease with this process and admitted its slowness in moving towards these targets, the gap in productivity scarcely altering (Agarwal et al 2009, Annibal & Boyle 2007, Curry 2009a & 2012a, Defra 2007, Huggins & Clifton, 2011 Lowe & Ward, 2007 Rizov & Walsh 2011, Webber et al 2009, Curry & Webber

2012). As the Defra Select Committee remarked, targets remained unattainable when the Department had so few levers to pull (2008). The prize of exploiting the untapped potential of between £236bn - £347bn in the rural economy as highlighted by the Rural Advocate's report (CRC 2008), was barely recognised by Defra, as the Select Committee reported (2008). Others were less charitable and described the PSA and the productivity issue as a 'dog's breakfast' (interview with Practitioner 3), merely exacerbating the opinion that Defra had hardly any influence over the wider policy-making agenda of government and little involvement in its own right over rural policy. This negative view strangely was even the stated view of the government itself in its own internal investigations of the performance of Defra (Office of Government Commerce 2007).

The increased emphasis upon the regional level seemed to further complicate matters and add to the sense of disconnection from rural areas (interview with Practitioner 8; Bosworth & Venhorst 2015, High & Nemes 2007, Terluin 2003, Thompson & Ward 2005, Ward 2012). Geographical problems were made worse by the increased complication in decision-making (Curry 2009b & 2012b, Woods 2011a). This is examined in more detail in Chapter Six.

It was not as though Defra was short on advice on possible remedies for these difficulties, for it commissioned work to study and make recommendations on what to do (Agarwal 2009, Dey-Chowdhury & Gibson 2008, Gibson et al 2009, SQW 2006). Unfortunately, it did not seem to take much notice of this advice, and largely adopted a position of resignation (Defra 2005b). This put Defra at odds with other parts of government which now centred on the five drivers to improve productivity identified by government as a priority – skills, enterprise, innovation, investment and competition – which did not easily transcend into a rural setting (interviews with

Bradley & MP 2; Porter & Ketels 2003). Neither did it appear to embrace the advantages of bottom-up endogenous development, outside of programmes it was committed to deliver through the EU, especially the LEADER programme (Defra 2007, Ray 2000, Shucksmith 2000). So it failed to exploit the new rural paradigm trumpeted by the OECD amongst others, preferring to pursue its own direction of travel (Bryden 2000, Dwyer et al 2010, Fraser et al 2006, OECD 2006).

Where there were new initiatives after 2004, the outcomes were often unclear and contradictory. For instance there were two major enquiries into why it was so difficult to deliver affordable rural housing. The Goodman (2006) and Taylor (Matthew) (2008) reports came up with many practical ideas and solutions to this difficult issue but neither were properly implemented (interviews with Practitioners 43 & 44, and Bradley). The Rural Pathfinder programme which empowered rural communities to set their own priorities and targeted resources on a decentralised basis ran from 2005 onwards, but this only affected a relatively small number of communities (Local Government Chronicle 2004). Rural proofing continued and was supplemented by mainstreaming rural, but neither scheme got much traction over the wider public sector (Atterton 2008, Connelly et al 2006, Curry & Owen 2009, High & Nemes 2007, Marsden 2009 Marsden et al, 2005 Shucksmith 2010). The views of Bibby were shared by many other interviewees;

I persuaded Alun Michael of the value of the spatial analysis approach. For a time he took a very active part in encouraging other ministries to buy into this idea, but when he departed Defra went back to being a rural backwater, and this was seen as purely an academic exercise (interview with Bibby).

This situation deteriorated further after 2007. As one colleague said in despair;

We tried for ages to get Gordon (Brown) to put some boots on, and for him to go into the countryside. The boots were always at the ready. Sadly he said he was too busy and could not be prevailed upon to at least make this gesture of being mildly interested in rural (interview with Minister 4).

Why this happened and how New Labour's rural legacy became symbolically associated with this growth of disinterest and eventual the loss of rural seats is the subject of the final section.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has critically evaluated the first research question in terms of how far the increase in New Labour representation accounted for a heightened level of interest by the government into rural policy-making and politics. This was measured not only in terms of greater policy and political engagement, but also by a much better understanding of what rural constituted, through collection and interpretation of data. It has also covered the temporal and spatial features identified in the fifth research question, based around the synchronic period 1999 – 2004, and what occurred after that time.

In *Section 4.3* four reasons were identified for New Labour's turn away from rural: that rural events were no longer a pressing problem to the government; the decline in importance of the Rural Group; the abolition of the Countryside Agency as a symbolic gesture that the government would be less inclined to intervene in rural; and the arguments why New Labour focused its attention away from rural, with a subsequent massive reduction in budget, to focus on the core areas of health, education, transport and law and order; and to target urban as the most appropriate

location, until the financial crash meant that all areas had to make financial sacrifices.

The research evidence points to why these reasons, though individually important, were collectively compelling, explaining why the progress made after 1999 was not maintained. Though individuals stressed different emphases for why this was the case, the overall impression of the discreteness of the post 2004 era was clear.

Bradley in his interviews adduced that it was increasingly difficult to promote the rural case after 2004, as rural issues just did not have the same traction and there was not the same opportunity to voice rural opinions, his tangible disappointment crystallised around the loss of his own seat²². Defra ministers and civil servants referred to the problem that the Department faced, with a Secretary of State who prioritised the environment and agricultural reform, with rural being marginalised (interview with Ministers 2 & 5, Civil Servant 7; Kay 2003, Ward & Lowe 2004 & 2007b). This sense of desuetude was picked up on by many of the practitioners talked to, whose sense of regret over the decline in interest and activity after 2004 was palpable. As one said in interview:

The loss of the Vital Villages scheme did immense harm, not just in terms of the immediate loss of activity in those villages which had engaged with it, but in the sense that rural was once again being side-lined in policy innovation terms (interview with Practitioner 29).

²² Bradley put his defeat at the 2005 General Election at least partly down to the antics of Vote OK a hunting-front organisation intent on punishing pro-ban MPs, and the lack of support and protection he received from the wider Labour Party (Kite 2005, and in interviews with Bradley).

Brown's premiership and the financial crash worsened this sense of depression at what had been achieved, and then lost (interview with Minister 4 and Civil Servant 5).

Chapter Two made reference to the literature search in this diverse subject-area and Chapter Four has more fully developed this in terms of the importance of representation to explain why its new-found representational strength triggered its greater involvement in rural policy and politics. Together these chapters underline why New Labour was able to demonstrate that it was different in the way in which it treated rural matters, but that standpoint did not remain extant beyond 2004. This directly questions whether New Labour was able to provide a distinctive rural approach, or whether it was drawn back towards its urban strength, which is now considered in Chapter Five.

Chapter 5 – Urban governance and the neglect of rural?

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five critically evaluates the extent to which New Labour marked a disjuncture from Old Labour in so far as it had a legitimate claim that it represented the countryside and was not solely dependent upon urban Britain (and specifically urban England) for support.

It explores the second research question as to the extent to which New Labour was able to escape from the perceived urbanist dominance of the Labour Party and governments (Johnston & Pattie 1989). In this chapter recourse also is made to the underlying importance of temporal and spatial features as they affected New Labour's performance in the countryside.

Section 5.2 considers the counterfactual proposition that New Labour was still really an urban party, and did little to weaken the domination of urban elements within it.

Section 5.3 then investigates the relationship between Old and New Labour, to examine the extent to which that rural and urban they can be differentiated, and if this influenced how the government approached the countryside.

The chapter then critically examines in *Section 5.4* the policy-making apparatus, to probe the extent to which this was different under New Labour, and if so, how; and then, in *Section 5.5* explores the role of communication, to highlight how the government tried to get its message across, what language it used, and at whom was its message aimed at?

The penultimate section, *Section 5.6*, seeks an understanding about events and crises as they affected the direction New Labour took in relation to the countryside

and how that changed its attitude, behaviour, performance and status in respect of the countryside. The chapter concludes by re-examining the main proposition to assess the extent to which the urban-rural juxtaposition had been addressed by New Labour.

5.2 To what extent was New Labour after 1997 just an urban government?

In Chapter One it was noted that New Labour had not prepared to govern with anything other than cursory regard to the countryside. Whilst New Labour was strong on the rhetoric of 'One Nation Britain' which would include rural England (Campbell 2007, Mandelson & Liddle 1996, Newman 2001), the countryside was not going to be a priority of the government. As one MP said to me;

We didn't expect to have so many Labour MPs elected in rural areas. The outside perception of Labour as an urban Party was shared by many within. Tony Blair didn't think much about rural as I witnessed as a member of the Parliamentary Committee.²³ Issues such as affordable housing in rural areas were just never raised (interview with MP 9).

The obverse of this was that New Labour negotiated the 1997 election with a central belief that its very purpose and being was to regenerate urban Britain. This was seen as crucial to the country's economic and social recovery (Colomb 2007, Pearson 2012, Regan 2000, Rogers R 1999). Sometimes its use of language and its general disposition made it prey to opponents' attacks that it was principally interested in an urban affairs (Fairclough 2000, Ward 2002, Woods 2008b). As one Labour activist with a background in rural campaigning put to me;

²³ This is the body part elected by the PLP that holds the leadership to account in parliament. It meets on a weekly basis when parliament is sitting. I was a member for a short period during the Brown administration.

The Party always appeared unwilling to campaign and put resources into rural areas since the 1980s. A few lone voices highlighted the needs of rural areas but they were drowned out by the many more urban ones (interview with Labour activist 2).

The view reinforced the notion that the divide between urban and rural England was so great that nothing could easily bridge that gap politically, socially, geographically, culturally and economically (Benton 2007, Wiener 2004, Williams 1973).

One advantage that New Labour possessed was that it had no great reputation to live up to in the countryside. The conviction that Labourism had been built on urban values meant that few would have given much thought to producing a comprehensive programme for the countryside, other than as part of national priorities. Certainly that was the New Labour view up to the 1997 election, borne out by the very limited commitments made to rural areas prior to the election. This was a view shared by those selected as candidates in rural and semi-rural seats as one colleague explained;

There was just an unwillingness of the Party to campaign in rural areas. Admittedly it was hard work to win over the villages, but it could be done. Sadly there were no high profile rural champions and we couldn't get the scale of the operation in the countryside right (Labour activist and PPC in a rural seat).

New Labour's antecedents in the countryside

To what extent had Labour and particularly New Labour become urban-dominated?

There is no straightforward answer to this, and this remains an area of under-researched academic enquiry.

From its earliest days, Labour had always taken an interest in the countryside through its core beliefs in trying to protect working people, eradicating poverty, and supporting the most vulnerable (Pelling 1965 & 1983). Even Labour's first administration, the 1924 government, identified rural accessibility as a major issue, alongside the urban dimension²⁴. This was because Labour always drew some support in the countryside from groups such as farm labourers, public service workers, miners and some in manufacturing. It was able to achieve support if not a breakthrough on the back of this. Whilst its pockets of rural support were concentrated largely outside England Labour did consistently win seats in the north, and occasionally where a rural hinterland surrounded an urban setting, such as the Kent coastal ports.²⁵

Some of the dramatic changes to the rural landscape in the twentieth century were the result of Labour governments, especially the 1945 administration, which laid down the structure of agriculture for thirty years²⁶ until the UK's accession to the Common Market in 1973 (Self & Storing 1962). This set in stone the separation

²⁴ The Housing (Financial Provisions) Act, 1924, was the centre point of the first Labour government's achievements, and made particular reference to help rural areas, short of housing.

²⁵ An example of this was the Faversham Labour Party which succeeded in obtaining a Labour MP for every election between 1945 – 66 (Black 1998).

²⁶ The 1947 Agriculture Act pioneered by the Labour Minister, Tom Williams, put in place the deficiency payments funding system, which subsidised British farmers to increase production, whilst keeping prices low.

between the human and physical environment of the countryside, a situation that remained extant until New Labour re-integrated the two, with its institutional changes in 1999 (Rogers A 1999). As one interviewee said to me;

The '45 Labour government created the structure of the modern British countryside. In dividing the countryside into human and physical aspects, manifest through the creation of two separate rural organisations, the Countryside, and the Rural Development Commissions we had 50 years of discrete policy-making. It was somewhat ironic therefore, that it was the Blair administration that re-integrated them through the setting up of the Countryside Agency (interview with Practitioner 14).

It was not as though countryside issues didn't pervade Labour's being for four key dilemmas dominated much of the inter-war and post war period. These were, hunting with dogs; land reform, including whether to nationalise; the resolution of the tied cottage issue (as a marker of support for agricultural labourers); and the protection of the countryside from unwanted development (Flynn 1989, Tichelar 2002 2003a&b, 2004 & 2006). Labour's relationship with the countryside was seared by its attitude towards farming, farmers, and those who worked on the land, and was contextualised by relationships of conflict. Whilst it was always difficult for Labour to get much traction where farmers were concerned (Johnston 1987, MacKintosh 1970, Self & Storing 1962 pp 193 – 211), it was also not unknown for disagreements to arise with farm labourers and their representatives, who did not necessarily see the Labour Party as natural bedfellows (Griffiths 2007, Johnston 1972, Judge 2013, Mansfield 2006). This was counteracted by the fact that farmers were not seen as quite the lost cause that might have been anticipated because of the notion that developed in the inter-war years that farming could be classed as a public service.

This was a reason why Labour thought it ill-advised to neglect farmers and their voting power in the countryside and took measures to avoid falling into this trap (Griffiths 2006)²⁷. Regionally Labour was constrained. For instance the south-west was seen as very inhospitable territory for the Party, with the preponderance of rural voters there (Thorpe 2005), and there remained in popular culture at least, the view that the countryside was a no-go area for Labour.²⁸ Howkins (2008) argues that Labour from the 1920s onwards made more progress in rural areas than was sometimes appreciated. However it still had many barriers to cross before it could be seen as an effective party in the countryside.

With Blair's accession to the leadership in 1994, Labour had much to gain and little to lose in terms of reputational damage, if it chose to seek a rapprochement with the countryside. There were reasons why this happened, albeit after an uncertain start. The background to this has much to do with where New Labour placed itself in relation to Labour's history. Blair's New Labour was keen to present itself as new and different and willing to take on difficult challenges in hostile territory (Mandelson & Liddle 1996). However this oversimplifies the juncture of history, traditions and nostalgic linkages between the Old and the New. For New Labour was only too willing to represent itself as a successor to some strains of Labourism, and found it impossible to escape from other elements. As Griffiths (2011) has written:

²⁷ I am always reminded of the story told to me by Ian Cawsey, (the former Labour MP for Brigg and Goole), about an old farmer he knew who claimed that farmers would enter the polling booth and vote Tory to a man, but then came outside would hold their coat collar and pray to God that Labour won (on the understanding that they always got a better deal under Labour governments).

²⁸ In two Radio 4 programmes commissioned to celebrate the 60th anniversary of *The Archers*, entitled *the Politics of Ambridge*, no mention was made of any Labour politicians in the popular series (Dobbs 2011).

Against a disputed heritage of talismanic policy commitments, leaders' betrayals, and the perennial dilemmas of reconciling values, pragmatism, interests and ideology, the Party's sense of its own history has served as one means of defining and justifying Labour's existence as an enduring political formation (p283).

Therefore New Labour's entrée into the countryside was not the disjuncture it might have first appeared and had something to do with its own dependency on traditional, heritage and nostalgia (Drucker 1979, Hay 2003, Jobson 2012, Robinson 2013).

What caused New Labour's interest to arise was the intercession of events which required government intervention in the countryside. Consequently New Labour soon grasped that its programme for government could help the party to make further inroads into rural areas beyond the immediate electoral success. It had the advantage that as there was little expectation of New Labour involvement in the countryside so any potential presence there could be perceived positively.

There are three elements to this. First, the incoming government had quickly to realise that its programme - focused on the hunting ban, the right to roam, the protection of some village services, and the reform of the CAP - would cause tension in the countryside. On top of this, the fuel crisis of 2000 and the foot and mouth outbreak 2001 would require substantive government responses (Greer 2003, Woods 2008d).

Second, the creation of the Rural Group encouraged the government to adopt policies to placate these members. So a decision was taken, after some hesitation, to welcome and assist the Group, and to use the presence, expertise and enthusiasm of Group members to help devise an effective rural programme.

Third, much of the government's agenda could be adapted to operate equally well in rural settings. National policies which included SureStart, the regeneration of local communities, and public service reform applied to ruralities, just as much as it did to the rest of the country. On the back of the Rural White Paper (DETR/MAFF 2000) ministers began to comprehend that rural areas required specific assistance. The idea of rural proofing was born to prove that government cognisance of rural would become an essential ingredient of policy-making. The Countryside Agency defined this as;

...thinking about whether a policy will have any significant differential impacts in rural areas. It aims to encourage government departments and others to 'think rural' by taking account of the characteristics and needs of the countryside when making and implementing policies (2005a).

By 1999, after the fallow first two years of the Blair administration, which affected most aspects of government other than health and education due to the self-imposed embargo on additional expenditure, New Labour introduced a raft of institutional, structural, policy and programmatic measures which sought to appeal to the countryside. The logic was to try to neutralise the negative perceptions of urban bias, and the realisation that the government's authority and reach, could deliver rewards in rural England.

This took many different forms, but was galvanised by the comprehensive Rural White Paper (DETR/MAFF 2000) which sought active rural communities and strong local economies (Lowe & Ward 2001). The White Paper received many plaudits. One academic interviewee referred to the White Paper in the following way;

The White Paper was an excellent piece of work, coming on the back of other initiatives which gave good value for money. During this time New Labour was in the ascendency in rural areas dealing with the issues that really mattered. More than anything rural communities had access to real resources rather than the promised monies – that usually failed to materialise – a situation they had become accustomed to (interview with Academic 3).

A Defra civil servant interviewee added;

It is important not to underestimate the importance of the White Paper. The Rural Services Division became a key player and rural proofing was to stand the test of time. Civil servants, who worked on this, were buoyed up by it, and felt good to be part of something positive (interview with Civil Servant 7).

By the early part of the new century New Labour had made great strides to modify its relationship to the countryside. Though it had not won over all – the hunting ban meant that there was still the entrenched opposition of some – many rural communities had seen the benefits of the government's willingness to engage with those communities. Amongst the tangible improvements made available were funded schemes to boost rural transport, incentives to develop village housing, parish plans, alongside empowered local councils.

One practitioner said in interview;

1997 marked a sea-change as far as parish councils were concerned, and the White Paper consolidated and further stimulated the opportunities that councils could now seek out to update themselves, make governing more

democratic, more professional, and much more a functioning layer of government (interview with Practitioner 12).

Other opponents, such as those who alleged that New Labour wanted to abolish Parish Councils, found the opposite to be true (Bevan 1999, Howard 2002).

The inroads that New Labour had achieved in the countryside made it all the more surprising that there was a volte-face after 2004 following the Haskins' Review. This led to a sense of disappointment, if not betrayal. One interviewee described this as;

There was a real loss of impetus from the earlier White Paper of 2000 and the government completely lost the plot after the 2004 Rural Strategy. There were problems with a disempowered civil service, ministers went off on their own, and the CRC had little authority over the rural agenda (interview with Practitioner 21).

The positives of the five year period were almost completely negated by a government that wanted to return to trend, rediscovering its indifference to the countryside. Whether this was just the consequence of the changing events of the time or whether this was a return to a more traditional Labour stance is open to question. However the most disappointing repercussion was the cynicism this engendered (interview with Practitioner 1), reinforcing the pessimistic view that at least parts of the countryside were destined for continued decline (Bell et al 2010, Howkins 2003), a situation that New Labour had for a time at least, appeared to have forestalled.

5.3 The Old Labour/New Labour Schism and did this make New Labour a different party in rural areas?

Chapter Four established that New Labour's triumph in 1997 gave it the mandate to govern in the countryside as well as the town. Though its overall majority meant that it faced few direct challenges in Parliament, the additional representation in rural constituencies gave New Labour the confidence to develop a rural strategy, with bespoke policies. In theory at least, unlike previous Labour administrations, New Labour could govern in rural areas with few inhibitions, at least at the start of its period in office. Even with the emergence of difficult issues, New Labour had reason to believe that it could count on the support of large parts of the countryside which had chosen to vote New Labour in unprecedented numbers. With the benefit of hindsight this political reach was exaggerated but it was still true that New Labour could justify its political appeal to the countryside by reference to this new found representative authority.

New Labour – a different sort of Party?

Events interceded to make New Labour realise that it had to adopt a different tenor in its relationship with the countryside. There were three principal reasons why this challenge fitted the Blairite agenda more easily than predecessor administrations.

First, though New Labour was committed to urban regeneration, a traditional Labour mind-set (Theakston and Gouge 2004), and embraced the findings of the Rogers Urban Task Force (1999), urban renaissance was also relevant to parts of rural England (CRC 2008). Second, much of the government's third way agenda (Giddens 1998, Gould 1998, Mandelson & Liddle 1996), and emphasis upon community, neighbourhood renewal, and active citizenship, found resonance in rural

communities, keen to find a new start, via bottom-up development (Clarke 2005, Davies 2012, Levitas 2000, Marinetto 2003b, Tiesdell & Allmendinger 2001). This chimed with the strong neo-endogenous direction EU and OECD rural policy was moving in (OECD 2006).

Third, New Labour was eager to pursue policies that would bear down on poverty, disadvantage and social immobility. The rural domain gave plenty of opportunities for policy evolution to match what was planned for the cities. Together, these ideas encapsulated New Labour's leitmotif, of modernism and one-nationism, wrapped within a caring persona (Imrie & Raco 2003).

New Labour was helped in its new found identification with the countryside by two other factors. First, the Rural Group changed the dynamics of the politics of the countryside, at least for a time, as it became adept at skilfully using its authority both within parliament and outside (see Chapter Four).

The second factor was the changing nature of rural areas themselves. Much has been written about how rural England had altered due to in-migration, the decline of the predominance of agriculture, and the increased squeeze put on the countryside by urbanisation, and the counter-urbanisation reaction. Bell et al (2010) refer to the material, symbolic and relational practices of the rural, and how this defines rural power structures. By the changed class complexions of the British countryside (Phillips 2007, Woods 2006a) New Labour gained by being able to appeal to non-traditional Labour voters, who were both tired of the Conservatives and seduced by the Blair effect.

As Bradley commented to me;

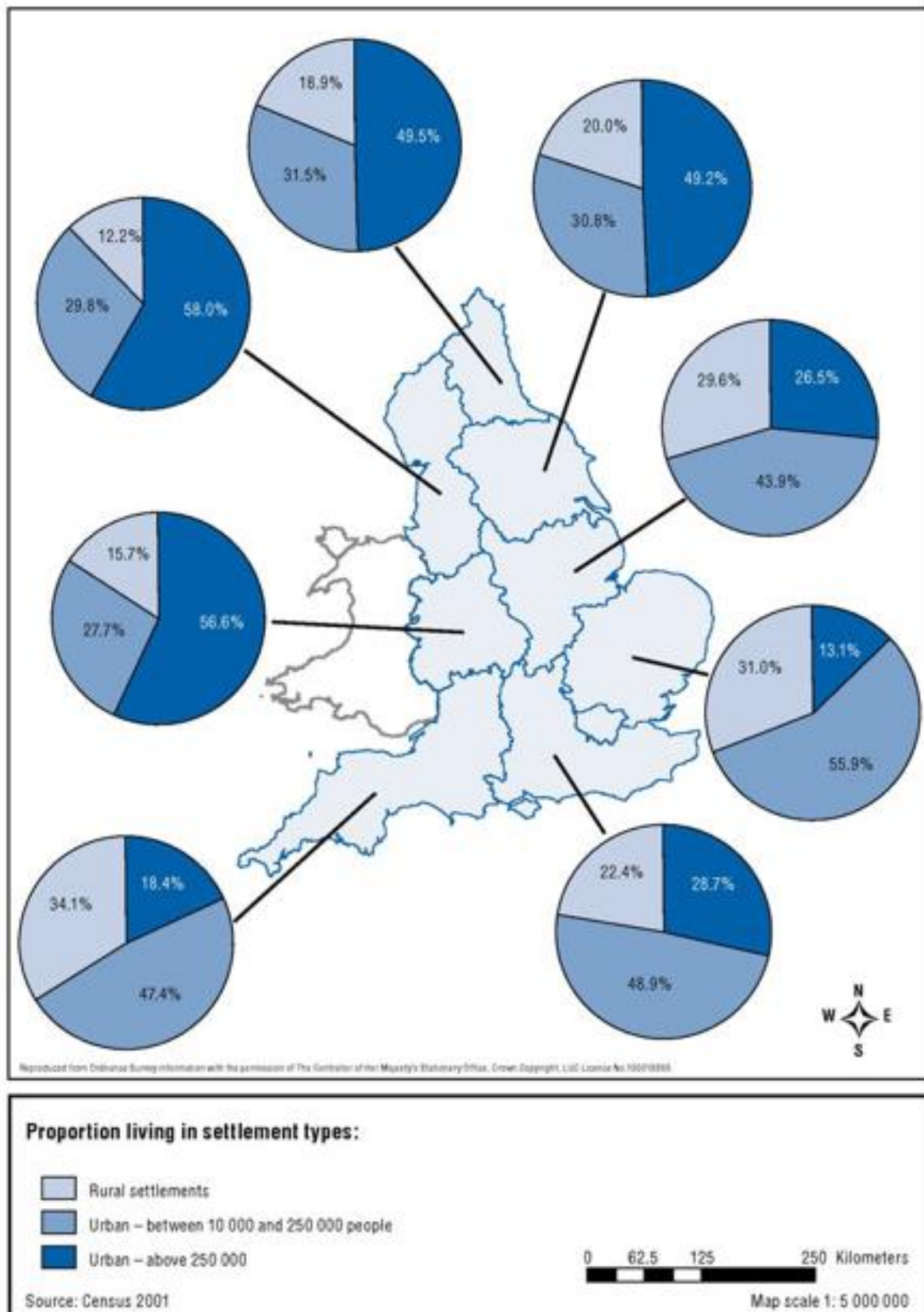
Rural voters had the same concerns as the urban electorate. They worried about jobs, housing and their kids' education. Fox hunting was only a minority pastime, enjoyed by the rich few. New Labour and Blair in particular, captured their imagination (interview with Bradley).

Part of New Labour's dilemma in how it could best communicate with the countryside was made more difficult because of the very unequal regional distribution of Population (see Figure 5.1). Rural Labour MPs struggled against blocks of their urban colleagues in parts of the country such as the North-East.

The problem was that this support proved to be electorally fickle after 2005, as rural voters increasingly turned against New Labour (Cutts et al 2012, Johnston & Pattie 2011), particularly as the government ran into difficulty over public service reforms (Asthana et al 2009, Gray et al 2006, Henderson & Taylor 2003, Parr et al 2004, Shucksmith & Chapman 1998). This damaged New Labour more than the rural protest movement, even though the latter got most attention at the time (Reed 2004). Other negative issues included the commitment to build an extra 4.4m homes, which impinged badly on the countryside, and did untold damage to the government's reputation, for it neither delivered anything like the promised number of houses, nor was able to mitigate the perception that this was just an imposition by an urban government (Gallent 2008).

In this sense New Labour was not the same party as Old Labour. It took a different view to traditional Labour governments on how it should approach the countryside and with what purpose. This was due to a mixture of opportunism and circumstance, which led it to a position whereby it was more open to building relationships with

Figure 5.1 – Regional Distribution of Population 2001



Source: OECD Rural Policy Review of England (2011, p52) by reproduced by kind permission of OECD.

rural communities. Whether this stance stood the test of time, will be examined in the rest of this chapter.

5.4 Rural policy making and delivery?

New Labour's period in office in relation to the countryside can be divided into three distinct time frames, 1997 – 99; 1999 – 2004; and 2004 – 2010.

Policy-making and implementation was radically different between the three periods, demonstrable by an analysis of actors, institutions, structures, processes, and events. Much of the operational context to New Labour's performance in the arena of policy is covered in Chapter Six, but in this Chapter it is important to understand how the rural-urban dynamic affected the nature of policy, the institutional context, and how actors performed in relation to the roles and responsibilities assigned them. The first period was of no real consequence because of the moratorium on public expenditure which meant that there were no funds available to enhance rural policy. The one exception to this was the creation of the Countryside Agency which though it was officially formed in 1999 much of the work to amalgamate the different contributing organisations predates that. That is why 1999 marks the paradigm shift.

1999 – 2004, and the dominance of the Countryside Agency

In 1999 New Labour fastened onto rural policy both from a position of strength, but also weakness. It was strong in that the election of so many Labour MPs in rural constituencies gave it the authority to speak directly to rural communities. It was weak with regard to its defensiveness in the face of the pressure it was placed under by its opponents in the countryside, principally in relation to hunting. The response of the government was usually to attempt to head off opposition by taking on-board

the complaint, seeking out the brightest and the best to find solutions, revising policy accordingly, and then do all it could to get rapid introduction of the changes necessary. This was classic Blair 'big tent' strategising (Kavanagh 2007, Mulgan 2005c).

A classic example is the initiative to launch Quality Parish Councils. Under attack from those who argued that New Labour wanted to abolish Parish Councils (Pickles 2003), the government chose to bolster and encourage their existence in an attempt to wrong-foot the sceptics. To achieve this it worked closely with the National Association of Local Councils, the representative body and a useful bulwark against its critics, and a new front through which to engage with rural communities (interview with Practitioner 12; Pearce & Ellwood 2002, Poole 2010, Skelcher 2003). This not only answered those critics who argued that Labour had no right to interfere with Parish Councils but was useful in that it provided a building-block for the later Lyons Review on Local Government, which specifically recommended an enhanced role for them (2007).

The government's pragmatism when it had a fight on its hands proved remarkably successful and won people over to its side. One practitioner in interview commented;

New Labour showed some deft touches in rural policy-making for which it didn't really receive the praise it deserved. Sadly it seemed to believe its own propaganda that it was an urban party, when it achieved much in rural areas. Sadly it could have achieved a lot more, if it had pushed on with reforms such as the removal of the dreadful Right to Buy (interview with Practitioner 14).

This pragmatism was displayed elsewhere in fields as diverse as housing, planning, transport, education and health. Not all areas were successfully navigated however, and the ongoing dispute over hunting did show the limits of this strategy. Blair did try to rebuild fences with those so offended by the ban, but this failed²⁹. Overall the dispute over hunting was seen by some as highly deleterious to relationships in the countryside and undid many of the positive measures that the government had accomplished (interview with Practitioner 31).

During most of this period the government effectively delegated policy-making and delivery to the Countryside Agency (see Chapters Four and Six). The Agency was given the role of overseeing aspects of rural proofing policy (2001c), from the Rural White Paper (2000). The move towards rural proofing was a significant departure from what might have been expected of an urban government with the potential to make the most difference on the ground (Caffyn & Dahlstrom 2005, Lowe & Ward 2007, Pearce et al 2005, Woods 2006a).

Rural proofing was not a new idea. It derived from the Canadian Rural Lens procedure (Bollman 2005, Bradford 2008, Partridge & Olfert 2008, Sandwell 1994, Williams & Kulig 2012). However the manner of its introduction and the comprehensive nature of its application made it a significant contribution towards valorising rural alongside other aspects of government policy. The process of rural proofing involved a number of elements, which impacted on people, organisations and businesses.

²⁹ In his memoirs Blair (2010) made clear that he was never personally in favour of the ban, but felt he could not thwart the PLP, and most Labour MPs who strongly supported it.

First, policies in the countryside would be more coordinated, with the aim of listening to the concerns of rural communities, bringing in local people, and rurally-inclined professionals, for their knowledge and skills, especially in relation to the NHS (Asthana et al 2003, Baird & Wright 2006, BMA 2005, Swindlehurst et al 2005). This included an annual report by the Countryside Agency on the rural aspects of policy, a rural 'check-list' to be filled in by government departments, better regional co-ordination through government regional offices, integrating MAFF staff into those teams, and the establishment of national and regional sounding boards. The Rural Advocate - a post filled by an appointee of Number 10 - was tasked to listen to rural communities and argue their case within and outside of government³⁰. Training of those required to carry out those functions was given to raise awareness of rural, and improve the skills set of those handed this responsibility. Second, the activity of rural proofing was carefully laid down and administered at each level of government to ensure proper reporting and scrutiny of decisions. This incorporated the English Rural Development Programme, which was signed off by the EU Commission. These measures were overseen by a Cabinet Committee. Third, and crucially, budgets were co-ordinated to promote rural proofing alongside the enhancement of the economic, social and environmental well-being of local areas and communities. The presumption was that this would help the move towards more sustainable rural economies (Lowe & Ward 2007).

As a concept rural proofing had considerable merit. It raised the profile of rural, getting many more parts of government to take the issue seriously. It certainly, in theory, rebalanced rural against urban. The extra resources inculcated the notion

³⁰ Initially it was Ewan Cameron, the Chair of the Countryside Agency, and he was succeeded by Stuart Burgess, Chair of the CRC.

that rural mattered, and no policy, programme or project proceeded, without in theory being fully evaluated for the effect upon the countryside (Anderson et al 2005, Eales et al 2005).

The problem came in the practical application of rural proofing. The procedures for operation were seen as bureaucratic, time-consuming and difficult to scrutinise (Atterton 2008, Curry & Owen 2009, Munday 2008, Pugh et al 2007, Shucksmith 2012). Too many parts of government paid lip-service to the demand that they completed the process of rural proofing in advance of making a decision, which usually meant that the obligation was fulfilled only retrospectively, by which time it was too late to adjust. Regionalism further complicated the mechanism, and led to greater circumvention (Jeffrey & Mawson 2002, Ward et al 2003). As one civil servant commented in interview;

The Rural White Paper committed the government to rural proofing all policy. The problem was that it was introduced against a background of rationalising resources. It really became part of Defra's cross-cutting initiatives but there were always tensions with other departments on how much notice should be taken of it. Mainstreaming rural further strained relationships – it was all seen to be too complicated and bureaucratic (interview with Civil Servant 3).

As rural became less prominent overall following the 2004 turn, so did the importance of rural proofing, to such an extent that by the middle of the decade, government moved on to the idea of 'mainstreaming' rural policy (see Chapter Six). This did not replace rural proofing but gave a new twist to the place rural occupied in the derivation of policy. Rather than see the inclusion of rural as being part of a bureaucratic overlay, in theory rural was positioned at the centre of how policy was

made, and policy-makers would be expected to specify the rural dynamic in policy formulation (Connelly et al 2006, Lowe & Phillipson 2006, Tomaney 2002). Practice was something else altogether however.

Not every aspect of rural policy-making was abdicated to the Countryside Agency and government kept hold of funding, especially those departments outside of the rural domain who guarded their wider empire closely. Thus changes in schools, post offices, police and health funding which affected ruralities were driven by the parent department and not by MAFF/Defra, or one of its agencies. Nevertheless, much of the rural prerogative for direct intervention in the countryside was externalised to specialist rural providers, especially the Countryside Agency, which became an effective bulwark against the notion that only urban mattered. This resulted in there being a cogent rural voice, but not always an uncontroversial one (Derounian 2006).

2004 – 10: The demise of rural policy

By 2004, New Labour had established a novel, highly interventionist, and radical rural policy, which had accomplished a number of key objectives. First, it had diluted the impact of campaigns by its opponents by being able to demonstrate its rural credentials through active policy-making and delivery. Second, it had continued to keep many of its new found supporters in rural England on board, so there was no major rural backlash in the 2001, or even in the 2005, general elections (Woods 2002, Worcester et al 2005 pp 257 - 8). This caused some rural MPs to hang on to their seats when they might have been expected to lose. Third, it had made progress in delivering wider government policy aspirations in rural, as well as urban England.

Having played such a strong hand in rural policy, this made what transpired after the Haskins Review of 2004 all the more surprising. More unusual still, rural now had its own parent ministry (Defra) to bat on its behalf.

Yet part of the answer for the about-turn in the policy approach lay with the decision to set up Defra, formed out of the remnants of MAFF. Having presided over both the BSE and FMD scandals, MAFF was deemed not fit for purpose by New Labour. As Alastair Campbell stated in his diaries, there was little alternative but to replace it (2011, pp 558 – 567). The problem was with what? The 2001 manifesto committed New Labour to a new Rural Affairs Ministry, but that did not come to pass. Jack Straw's refusal to move a revamped DETR, and Margaret Beckett's insistence that she would only accept the Food responsibility if Environment was added, saw to that (interview with Minister 2). There was opposition to the idea of a standalone rural ministry anyway (see Chapter Five, *Section 5.4*).

In the event the new department treated rural as a theme that did not compare in importance to its responsibilities for environment, food policy, climate change and reform of the CAP. As a personal reflection, whilst a member of the Defra Select Committee I struggled to get rural onto the future business itinerary. In the nine years under New Labour, the Select Committee only conducted one substantive enquiry into rural matters, the investigation into the potential of England's rural economy (2008). What made matters worse, was that the rearrangement of the department and its main agencies was badly botched, with pay issues, uncertainty over where individuals would be placed, and budget cuts, dominating the early months of its existence (Heppell 2011). Whilst these were short-term maladies there was a much bigger question-mark over the government's commitment to rural matters.

Both Blair, and later Brown, had no real interest in rural (interview with Minister 6). What compounded this disinterest was that Beckett as Secretary of State shared their disdain. As one Minister said to me;

I would only ever see Margaret very infrequently, and she never engaged with rural. There was not a lot of ministerial sharing of ideas on rural within Defra. This meant that I had to look outside of Defra for support. This required me going to the territorial administrations to try to form a bulwark against English ministers and ministries where rural was concerned. This confirmed my prejudices that the urban-rural split was very real (interview with Minister 5).

This was in marked contrast to the team that oversaw the last years of MAFF. The then Secretary of State (Cunningham) had become a strong advocate of a Ministry of Rural Affairs to replace MAFF. He was thwarted in his ambitions by others in government (interview with Academic 7).

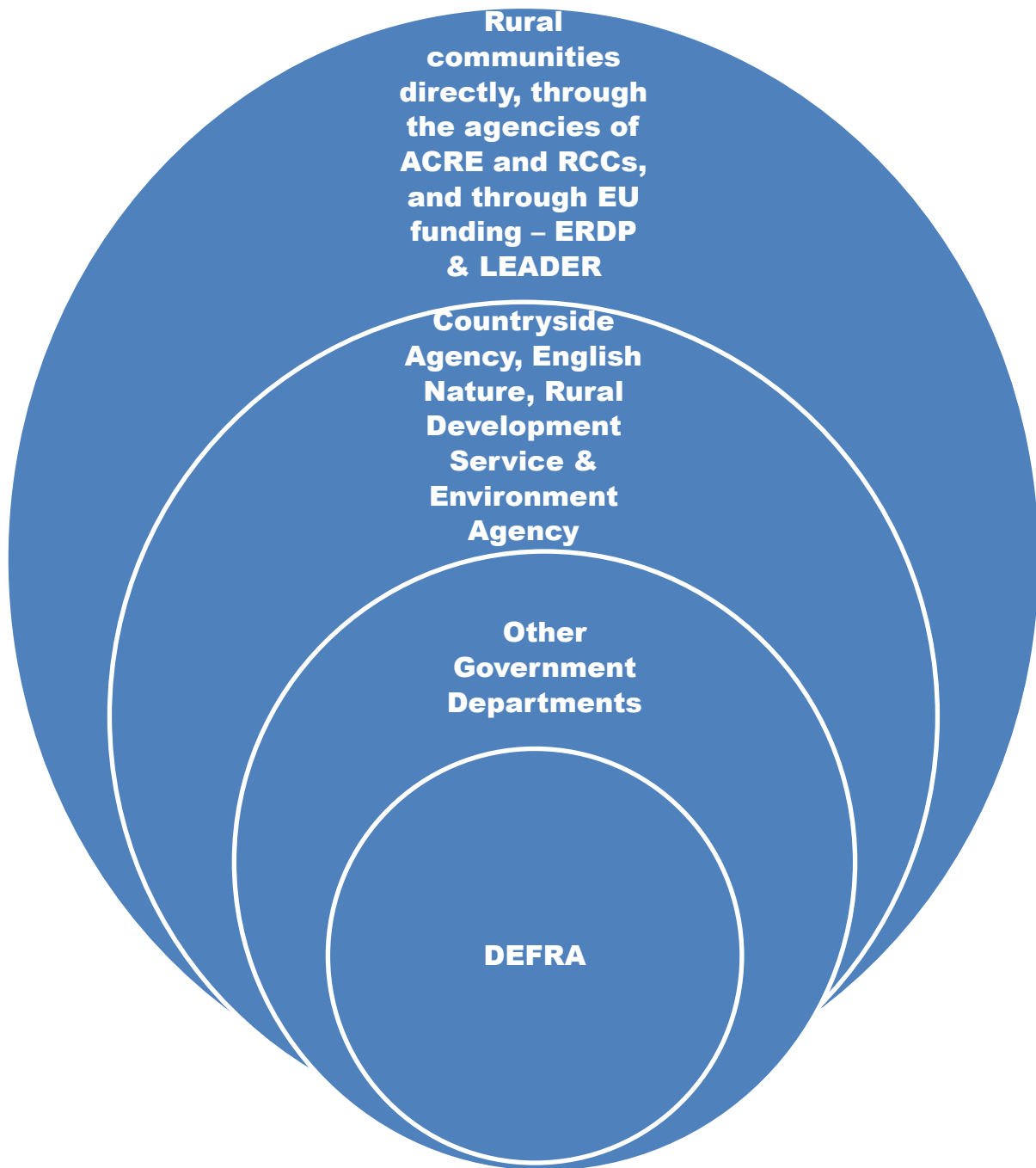
The context to this is important, for it explains the background to the Haskins' Review, and why he was allowed to take a cleaver to much of the government's work in rural areas. It explains why he was given such a free hand and why government readily responded to his recommendations, a mixture of deregulation, resetting of rural institutions, a business-favoured approach, and some degree of decentralisation, masked by his insistence on a greater role for the RDAs in rural areas (interview with Minister 2). Figure 5.2 gives an indication to the theoretical model behind Defra from its formation in that decision-making was supposed to flow outwards from the parent ministry. Haskins' argued that this was not the case in practice.

The trend, from the formation of Defra through to Haskins' and the Rural Strategy followed a route that led to the diminution rather than the strengthening of rural within government. This negated the promise of the Rural White Paper, and undermined the government's previous commitments. That might have been ascribed just to the easing of the pressure of events, to be seen to be doing something in rural England to take attention away from the hunting debate and FMD, but the stance of those involved went further than that, and marked a definite turn away from rural.

In this regard the post 2004 period was a reassertion of Labour as a mainly urban-focussed party. This situation consolidated because Defra itself was a weakened ministry, and rural played only a small part within that ministry. This limited the capability of Defra to command support from rural communities disillusioned by the forthcoming cuts in services and the lack of sensitivity shown towards them. As one civil servant commented in interview;

Rural was just tagged on the end of Defra. We had some clear aims, such as the need to improve land use planning and introduce a proper food policy, but lack of money was always a problem. The Rural Services Division started as a key player, especially under Alun Michael, who continually stressed his belief in social justice. However after he went, we were faced by reduced funding, disruptive reform, and everything apparently being in a state of flux. The Department became hamstrung between those who wanted to stress rural as an arm of business development, and the supporters of the CRC approach, who viewed rural residents as victims. The RDAs were never supportive of rural, and we had to rely upon local authorities as the main

Figure 5.2 – Defra’s model of operation from 2001 - 2004

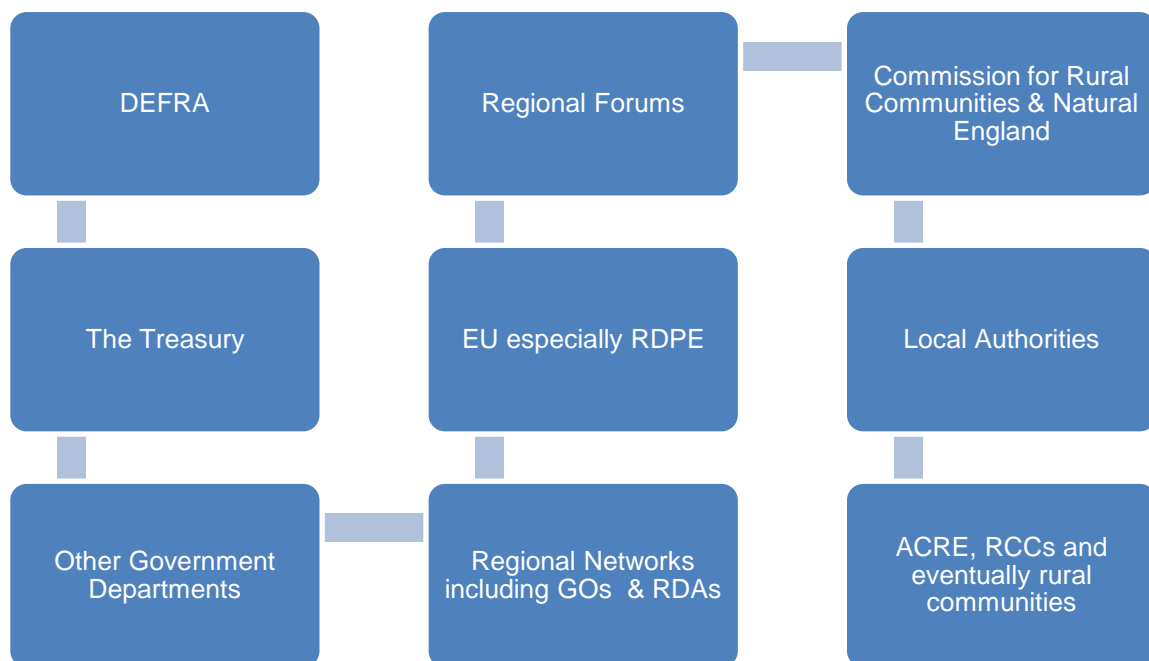


Source: Author

conduit for reform. Defra had little clout, and this diluted our bargaining power (interview with Civil Servant 7).

Some of the additional complexity is demonstrated in Figure 5.3 below. Internal tensions exacerbated matters. There was a troubled relationship with the Countryside Agency from the perspective of both civil servants and Ministers (interview with Practitioner 1).

Figure 5.3 – Defra and its relationships post 2004



Source: Author

There was a feeling, amongst some ministers at least, that far too much power and authority had been ceded to the Countryside Agency, and that Defra was weakened accordingly (interview with Minister 2). Overall there was a lack of an overall strategy, and poor leadership on rural from either Blair or Beckett (interviews with Minister 5 & 6).

Surprisingly there was little reaction from rural activists about the loss of the Agency or the cuts in funding. As with government itself, rural issues had been marginalised within the Labour Party. The Policy Forum that encompassed rural was merged with

industry and the economy, and therefore most attributes were buried deep within the texts of detailed documents and therefore inaccessible to all but the very committed member (Labour Party rural activist 3 interview).

The approach to rural policy from the end of 2004 onwards was to move resources from social support to economic regeneration, relying upon a reduced pool of advice – the CRC that replaced the Countryside Agency employed less than one tenth of the staff – and had to externalise funding allocations to the RDAs and the EU, where appropriate. In all but a small number of cases this marked a retreat from rural policy, rather than a revision.

In this regard New Labour's retreat from the countryside helps to illustrate Lukes' third dimension of power. The government's acquiescence to the status quo and unwillingness to contest the power that elites exerted over other groups particularly the rural working class was indicative of both a failure to understand the dynamics of the countryside, and an acceptance that its priorities lay elsewhere in the urban domain. This was marked by the rapid decline in expenditure on rural matters, connected to the removal of the Countryside Agency, and a loss of focus on issues such as homelessness, joblessness, and protecting service provision.

5.5 How did New Labour communicate its message to the countryside? Was this ever successful? Was it ever heard?

How did New Labour try to get its message across to rural communities?

New Labour prided itself on its ability to communicate directly with the electorate. The problem that it faced in rural areas was that it had no history of doing this, and no vehicle to carry it out, given that the media in the countryside had never been that

accessible to Labour. The New Labour operation used a mixture of public relations, branding and news reinterpretation – commonly referred to as ‘spin’ (Egan 1999, McNair 2004, Price 2010, White & de Chernatony 2002). Given New Labour’s disinterest in rural matters prior to the 1997 general election, few Party-orientated stories were focussed upon the countryside, other than those of a defensive nature needed to parry some of the attacks on its hunting policy.

This situation altered after 1999 as the government chose a more active relationship with rural communities. The regional and local press were particular targets of New Labour’s search for helpful media outlets, (though during FMD regional broadcasters were seen as very important), to try to allay some of the worst scare stories of the national media (Campbell 2011).

Most of the communication the government had with rural areas and electors happened through third parties. The most important of these was the Countryside Agency, and its replacement, the CRC. Later Natural England took on this mantle. This was because these bodies were able to reach rural communities more directly than either MAFF or Defra.

MAFF only really retained links with farmers and farming organisations such as the NFU. Whilst Defra did attempt to widen its communication beyond farming this was not an easy task because of the lack of media outlets, and the restricted nature of the information they aimed to deliver. One demonstration of how limited the government’s ability to access rural communities were came as a result of the publication of the Rural White Paper (DETR/MAFF 2000). Prompted by the Rural Group that it would be good if individual parish and town councils were sent a copy, the Group was informed that this would be difficult because the civil service had no

addresses of local councils, even though they were the first tier of British government. This hardly bode well for any government which wanted to have an active communication strategy with ruralities.

The loss of the Countryside Agency dealt a blow to the government's capability in terms of its communication strategy. Whilst there was conflict over the Agency's mode of operation (interview with Practitioner 1), the regular flow of reports, newsletters and bulletins on the countryside (as well as many issue-based conferences) did at least reach a wide audience. This was never to be replicated by the CRC, with the small budget it had. This loss was felt hardest by those in the voluntary sector who had regularly received information from the Agency to help them progress projects and access funding. Alternative arrangements, which included using local authorities and RDAs, proved to be scant consolation (interview with Practitioner 27).

After 2004, and particularly after the loss of the Countryside Agency, government found it more difficult to direct its message to rural communities, partly because it had less to say, and partly because it had lost the ear of those who had previously been willing to listen. This was compounded by the reduction of the number of rural MPs and the decline in relevance of the Rural Group (interview with Bradley).

Was the New Labour rural message heard?

During 1999 – 2004 when the government operated a vibrant rural policy the message began to sink in, (in some rural communities at least), that New Labour was different, and had an interest in rural issues. This message was not easy to deliver, and New Labour never received the credit it deserved for undertaking the activities it did. As one academic interviewee said;

It was difficult to tell why New Labour didn't do better in rural areas. After the (Rural) White Paper it was a very exciting time for those of us interested in the countryside. There was plenty going on and some very good influencers of opinion, such as the Backbench Group. However it was difficult to overcome the perception that Labour was centrist and urban. Quite simply the government did not get what it deserved, and post Haskins' the progressive message to the countryside disappeared again (interview with Academic 7).

One story that came from another academic interviewee summed up how difficult it was for the government to get a fair hearing in villages.

On the back of foot and mouth recovery monies, my village, which had been hit hard by the disease outbreak, was able to rebuild its community centre. Of the funding received nearly 70% came directly from government, via the FMD recovery fund; the rest from the county council, local council, grants, and community fund-raising. Come the day of the grand re-opening everyone was there to speak, and be formally thanked by the community – except Defra, or its representatives. Thus the biggest funder was totally ignored. This showed how difficult it was for government – any government, but particularly a Labour government to get praise and thanks from rural communities (interview with Academic 2).

Others interviewed were more critical of the government's performance, arguing that it made little effort to communicate policy aims, or explain the politics behind decisions (interview with Labour Councillor 5). Even former ministers shared this condemnation of the communication strategy believing that New Labour failed to reach out to its target audience in rural areas (interview with Minister 5).

One example here is the roll-out of the SureStart pre-school initiative into rural areas. Whilst the programmes and additional funding was largely welcomed by those involved with nursery education in the countryside, the nature of the programmes, and the language used to communicate how they would be introduced, was merely lifted from what was already underway in the cities. Much of it was not suitable for a rural setting, and practitioners had to work incredibly hard to make them bespoke (interview with Practitioner 8).

To further complicate matters, government was in competition for media coverage in rural areas with the Countryside Alliance. To maximise its appeal across the countryside and beyond its core hunting supporters, the Alliance sought through its media strategy to capture anyone who lived in rural England who had a grouse with the government including farmers, hauliers, those against housing developments, and people who campaigned against the loss of rural services (Anderson A 2006, Stoker 2002). This meant getting the New Labour message to possible positive recipients, was made that much more difficult (interviews with Ministers 2 & 3).

New Labour's communication strategy was not helped by its use of language. As Fairclough (2001 & 2010) has explored extensively, the use of New Labour rhetoric which repeated the mantras of modernisation, the opportunity society, and active citizenship, was not attuned to a rural audience. The slickness of the message did not compensate for the shallowness of content, and the inappropriateness of the words used. The discourse chosen was often ill-equipped to engage and persuade those who might otherwise have been interested in what was on offer (Fairclough 2010; Chapter 14). For instance New Labour continued to produce campaigning materials that were clearly written with urban settings in mind oblivious to the scepticism this encountered in the rural milieu. Where communication was written

directly for rural audiences, and the information was relevant to their lives, the result was more successful. Unfortunately this was not something that New Labour frequently took on board. As one special adviser noted;

There was so much in terms of good ideas that we could have communicated but unfortunately the New Labour democratic chemistry wasn't applied appropriately to rural England. You have to be counterintuitive in how you develop and nurture partnerships in the countryside. Our communication strategies lacked capacity and understanding (interview with Special Adviser 1).

Interestingly it was not just what New Labour said to rural communities – but what it did not. Largely through the mediated output of the Countryside Agency, difficult topics such as rural homelessness, the role of ethnic minorities, and others such as travellers were discussed and there was a willingness to embrace debates with rural communities themselves on how to progress policies to try to overcome these problems. However this only went so far. The issue of social class was rarely mentioned in documents, reports or statements, and having backed away from any confrontation for fear of the consequences, change in attitudes was not easy to achieve. As one academic interviewee bemoaned:

New Labour was so timid in many respects. People in rural areas have rights, just the same as those in the city. Take health – why should rural dwellers expect a worse service? Yet the government wouldn't take on these issues for fear of upsetting someone, somewhere. The rural poor and disadvantaged have the right to expect to be treated fairly, recognised, and listened to. Yet

New Labour's communication seemed indifferent to them and what they had to say (interview with Academic 4).

New Labour also had a tendency to undersell its success. Meacher's introductory comments to the second reading of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000) was a mastery of compromise and diplomacy – on a measure that Labour had campaigned on for over 70 years (House of Commons Hansard March 20th 2000, Col 720 - 731), and which many saw as a pivotal piece of legislation (Clark 2008, Mayfield 2010, Parker & Ravenscroft 2001, Parker 2008, Whitby & Falconer 1999). This underselling of the measure continued through into implementation, as there was little publicity to promote the extension of access in the countryside. So there was no real attempt to capitalise on greater opportunities for urban dwellers to migrate into the countryside on trips in line with Hoggart's charabanc excursions (1957).

New Labour had an opportunity to build better relationships with rural communities. For a time, between 1999 and 2004, it realised this and sought to communicate its message and reach out to the countryside. That it failed was not entirely its fault. However after 2004 it appeared to give up trying, and the consequences of this was that any message it delivered would never satisfy those who it wanted to hear it (interview with Academic 1).

5.6 Events, crises and rural politics during the New Labour years

The latter part of Blair's time as Prime Minister was overtaken by the issue of Iraq, and Brown's by the financial crash. This meant that rural affairs inevitably lost out. Funding cuts and further changes in strategy followed.

The lower profile of rural was due also to the waning importance of the two crises that had engulfed New Labour, the repercussions of the hunting ban, and the foot and mouth outbreak. The hunting ban had taken far too long to introduce and the longer the delay, the more strained relationships with some in the countryside became (Woods 2008b). As one Practitioner interviewee argued;

Hunting was very unhelpful to trying to build positive relationships between the government and the countryside. It marred the other achievements of New Labour such as the creation of two new National Parks. It meant that other more important rural concerns such as housing went untackled and put those of us who were supportive of the government on the defensive, as we then came under attack from the Countryside Alliance (interview with Practitioner 34).

Foot and mouth was different. It was a spontaneous, exogenous event which would have tested any government. The difficulty for New Labour was that it came on its watch (interview with Minister 8). FMD did enormous damage to the government's reputation for competence, and the cost of £6bn, (including the recovery funding), left an undesirable legacy (Donaldson et al 2006). Even though the political harm had been muted the ongoing hangover of this crisis would stay with Defra for the remainder of the New Labour administration (Greer 2003, Woods 2002).

These two major issues fuelled the claim by some that New Labour was really an urban construct with little feel for the countryside. The response by New Labour which predated but was heightened by its reaction to the FMD outbreak was to become actively involved in the countryside. This took many different forms, but can be summed up as reliance upon classic social democratic interventionism. The

question that has to be asked, is why this ended so peremptorily, and with what outcome?

The impact of the Haskins' Review

Section 5.4 explained the background to the creation of Defra, the Haskins' Review which radically pruned rural policy-making and delivery, and the resultant Rural Strategy. Rural policy was drastically curtailed because of this, and the level of activity greatly reduced. However these changes did not exist in isolation for there were other departures in government strategy which also compounded this situation.

Defra's diversion back to agriculturally-based rural, and the turn to regionalism

As much as the Haskins' Review was the dominant factor in the revision of rural policy, the importance of the enquiry conducted by Sir Don Curry (2002) must not be underestimated. This demanded a major transformation of British agriculture, with an attempt to get the farmer closer to the consumer, more willing to innovate and look for new market possibilities (interviews with Practitioners 25 & 35). Together these two reports, with the active encouragement of the Treasury, caused Defra to re-order its priorities back towards an emphasis upon agriculture and food production (interview with Minister 2).

Haskins' argued for a return to the primacy of land-based solutions to the ills of rural areas, on which farming was placed at the centre and this chimed directly with the views of Curry. The Treasury/Defra document published in 2005 defined its vision for agriculture for the following fifteen years, and had four key objectives based on competition, market-orientation, sustainability and environmental sensitivity, and high animal welfare standards. This signalled two developments. First, that Defra would

again subsume rural within agriculture and that the dominant concern of Defra would be CAP reform, which at best would crowd out other aspects of rural. Second, what was left of the reduced budget that rural areas expected, would be increasingly funnelled through EU monies, pitting against other priorities within the CAP regime (interview with Academic 1).

Most of this funding would be available through pillar two of the CAP on rural development, which was to be bolstered, partly to help rural regeneration (Lowe & Ward 1998, Ward & Lowe 2004). Though many rural areas had some experience of the LEADER and other similar programmes they had limited knowledge of all the ramifications involved in applying for EU support (interview with Practitioner 7). The situation was complicated by the unwillingness of the UK government to allocate sufficient matched funding to open-up opportunities for rural communities (Lowe et al 2002). Together this compounded rural communities' strength of feeling that the ground rules for funding schemes had been altered to their disadvantage (interview with Academic 7). Administrative problems that Defra encountered when it made the dramatic shift to an area-based payments scheme for the Single Farm Payment aggravated everything. The resultant turmoil in the Rural Payments Agency cost the government heavily in lost prestige and ministerial time, as Chapter Four explains (Defra Select Committee 2007c).

The extra barriers put in the way of rural communities, allied to a sense of drift where rural policy was now positioned, added to a sense of frustration amongst many rural practitioners (Lowe & Ward 1998). As Chapter Four suggests, part of the new direction was due to New Labour reverting to an economic approach, dependent upon business becoming the main instigator of change, especially to overcome the difficulties faced by lagging rural areas. Defra could not escape from further criticism

however. The skills-based emphasis did not seem to include some of the key players, which should have been tasked to carry out the transformation. As one practitioner interviewee said;

I just couldn't get LANTRA (the main rural skills training body) up the political agenda. The government talked about the importance of skills, training and improved productivity, but didn't put the words into practice (interview with Practitioner 10).

The suborning of rural was affected by a further major factor - the encouragement of regional development through the expansion of the RDAs. Despite the set-back of the lost referendum for a regional assembly in the north-east in 2004, the government's stated aim was to pursue a regional agenda, albeit not one underpinned by a direct democratic mandate. RDAs were central to that agenda, and Haskins' appointment to the Rural Delivery Review, signalled that rural policy would be increasingly integrated into the regional dimension.

Hewitt (2011a) refers to four Foucauldian discourses where regionalism is concerned. These are participatory development, administrative regionalism, participatory regionalism and regional autonomy. In terms of New Labour's approach it tried to move from the first two towards the latter two but was thwarted by a mixture of distrust of the government's political motivation and a lack of a clear agenda, which resulted in a vacuum which could only be overcome if grass roots pressure for change occurred. The reference to Foucault is apposite because this brings in the two concepts of governmentality and disciplinary power.

Governmentality (*see page 41*) is a helpful concept in that it in posits the underlying reasons behind how people are governed, and the notion behind how power

constructs the relationships that are constitutive as a result of that (Foucault 1986, Foucault et al 1991, Lemke 2002). Disciplinary power explains how people become subject to regimes of control sometimes overt, often covert, and the way in which this affects outcomes (Foucault 1986).

Regionalism was not popular with some rural advocates who saw it as a front for urbanism, and disliked the more complicated funding procedures which RDAs were keen to impose (Defra Select Committee 2005, Hewitt 2011a). However regionalism was a long-term objective of the Labour Party and so there should have been no surprise that this was still a priority of New Labour (Hobsbawn 1968 p253). RDAs' performance was viewed as patchy and complacent with regard to rural support (interview with Practitioner 5). This was despite each RDA Board being told to appoint a rural specialist. The Defra Select Committee investigation identified the variable performance in rural delivery between different RDAs (Defra Select Committee, 2008). Chapter Six covers this in more detail.

The implications of the drive to regionalism confirmed the prejudices of some, that this was a cover for greater urbanism, and could only further weaken the case for rural. Coming on the back of the changes announced by Haskins', and the Rural Strategy, the increased role and funding for RDAs was perceived as being bad news for rural communities (interview with Practitioner 5). With the other moves that the government had made, and with the signals that came from Defra that rural was only a small part of its responsibilities, the feeling that government had lost its way and had now retrenched both in policy and political terms, had grown steadily. The later actions, or inactions, of the Brown government merely validated that viewpoint.

5.7 Conclusion: To what extent did New Labour focus on urban areas to the neglect of the countryside?

This chapter has explored the extent to which New Labour was really an urban-inclined party that had more in keeping with traditional Labour, and so there was no clear disjuncture with the past. It therefore addressed research question Two and also has examined the underlining temporal and spatial features as they affected New Labour's performance in the countryside, in line with research question Five.

The research evidence points to a mixed picture for though New Labour's locus was not in the countryside there were sufficient grounds to argue that for a time New Labour was willing to invest heavily in rural policy and politics. Admittedly New Labour had the great advantage that it had little to live up to, reputation-wise, in the countryside. Previous Labour administrations had, somewhat unfairly, been tarred with the epithet of marginalising rural. However New Labour itself had no great ambitions for governing in the countryside as evinced by its limited commitments in the 1997 manifesto, and paltry efforts to campaign in, and win rural seats (interview with MP 2).

That the government performed a sharp about-turn as rural issues gained prominence early on in Blair's administration, was a credit to the pragmatic nature of New Labour and how it exploited opportunities that arose. It was also a tribute to the influence of rural backbenchers, particularly those who formed the Rural Group, to create a body of opinion in parliament and outside that rural mattered and that the government should respond positively to the needs of the countryside (interview with Bradley).

Between 1999 and 2004 the government adopted principles, policies and programmes that captured the imagination of those who believed in social democratic intervention in the countryside. Plaudits came from academics, practitioners, and those more directly involved in the political process. New Labour was acting counter-intuitively, aiming to prove wrong those who accused it of only being interested in urban areas, issues and voters.

Much that was novel and good was attempted during this period. Not all initiatives worked - some failed for reasons outside of the government's control. Nevertheless, by 2004 a strong agenda had been put in place and there was much that the government could point to in opposition to the urban jibe continually railed against it.

The reasons for the first shift were not purely positive. Attack was the best form of defence against the Countryside Alliance and it was easier to assuage nervous rural backbenchers than merely expect them to follow meekly behind the urban banner.

Yet much of what the government instigated was different – it responded to the needs and demands of rural communities in crucial areas requiring policy uplift in such areas as transport, education, housing, the protection of rural services, and the enhancement of enterprise. Whilst rural communities doubted the sincerity of some parts of the government offer – parish councils, for example were unsure whether the measures sought undue influence over their mode of governance (interview with Labour rural activists) – the extra monies alone were a sign that New Labour had begun to take rural policy more seriously than either the Thatcher/Major governments or predecessor Labour administrations (Ellwood et al 2000, Jones 2007).

From the end of 2004 however, there was a major reversal of these policy and political objectives, and New Labour retrenched back to type, as an urban construct in which rural matters were marginalised.

The analysis has evaluated why these two phases happened. In the first, the analysis brings forward evidence to show that New Labour was indeed different and more importantly came to be perceived by at least some in rural communities, as different. In this respect the government was able to throw off some of the epithets of being purely urban, and was not the same Old Labour centrally-driven, conurbation-dependent Party, as had traditionally been the case. Unfortunately it did not receive the kudos it deserved for making such a radical transformation (interview with Academic 7). However there was a caveat and this became all the more prevalent in the second phase. One minister in interview summed it up as follows;

There was a problem being a representative of a rural constituency on the edge of a big city. When my urban colleagues wanted support over an issue which affected their area they were only too willing to call upon my help and I dutifully trooped along to talk to ministers on their behalf. However when I needed them to intervene for me, on a rurally-inclined matter, there was silence. Therefore the process was just one-way. Until Labour realises that it has to reach out to rural representatives and the communities they represent, we will always be seen as an urban party regardless of what good work the then government is undertaking in the countryside (interview with Minister 7).

That symbolised the failure of New Labour in rural areas. It might have started to grapple for a time with the intricacies of rural life during the period 1999 – 2004 but those efforts were not sustained. The retrenchment that followed from 2004

onwards, combined with the loss of political and electoral significance in the countryside after the 2005 general election, did immense damage. This not only undermined what had gone before, but also confirmed the prejudices of those that felt that Labour would always be biased in favour of urban peoples.

There was not only a temporal shortcoming, but a spatial one as well. Chapters Six and Seven will further elaborate on this. However in terms of Labour's orientation towards urban, too often the government failed to grasp the importance of how long it took to effect change in the countryside. Too often policies were hand-me-downs from urban, and failed to be embedded or embodied in the proper rural sense, and therefore were far less successful there. Health changes clearly exemplified this. Too often the models applied in the countryside were merely adaptations of what was happening in the major conurbations, and lacked the sensitivity and precision, to work effectively in ruralities. There was also the downside that investment in urban resulted in closures of facilities in rural areas (Asthana & Holliday 2004). Affordable rural housing was another policy area where New Labour just failed to get a grip in the countryside (Satsangi et al 2010). In this, it mirrored a wider policy failing of the New Labour government, but this did not make it any easier to accept (Toynbee & Walker 2001, 2005 & 2010).

In this way New Labour was unwilling, and increasingly incapable of addressing the basic inequity and lack of social justice that existed in rural England, preferring to fall back on its urban comfort-zones.

Chapter 6 – Tensions between (a) decentralisation/centralisation and (b) externalisation/internalisation in the making of rural policy

Chapter Five argues that at least for a time New Labour broke free from the clutches of Old Labour's urbanist past, and had departed along a route that would take it into novel and interesting rural policy and rural political fields. This chapter explores the dualisms of centralisation/decentralisation and externalisation/internalisation of the policy-making and implementation framework and how that affected the New Labour performance in the countryside. The chapter therefore covers research question Three critically to evaluate the implications of the policy-making process. It also relates to research question Five, to investigate the temporal and spatial features that contextualised the making and delivery of policy.

Section 6.1 begins with a scoping exercise of how New Labour approached policy-making vis-a-vis the countryside, and how this symbolised the New Labour performance. This is followed in *Section 6.2*, by an inquest into the degree to which New Labour externalised responsibility for policy-making and implementation to other bodies both within government, and outside, and how this played with other departments and parts of government who were tasked with delivering public services in the countryside.

The chapter then addresses in *Section 6.3* the important factor of change, to interrogate the extent to which this had an impact upon how policy was made, and if the consistency of approach mattered. *Section 6.4* evaluates why New Labour preferred externalised decision-making to internalised processes and the extent to which this was a temporary or a permanent feature. Finally in *Section 5.5*, the chapter concludes with a re-examination of the extent to which the different ways of

making policy helped or hindered New Labour in its relations with the countryside and in particular how this arrangement worked with regard to other functioning bodies active in the countryside, including those in the voluntary sector.

6.1 Organisationally where did New Labour make policy and how did this symbolise the operation of government in rural areas?

In his book on the Labour Left, Seyd makes the observation that, “The Left needed a coherent programme yet it displayed ideological uncertainty, programmatic weaknesses, and strategic myopia” (1987, p175). This epithet could equally be applied to New Labour in rural England, for New Labour was dogged throughout most of the 13 years in government by a feeling of insecurity over the designation, direction, and locus of rural policy-making and delivery.

This was partly explained by the perception that it was driven by events, and not in control of policy, having apparently abdicated responsibility to outside agencies. The situation was complicated by the fact that notionally, the parent ministry for rural (initially MAFF, and then after 2001, Defra) was unable to gain much traction over many aspects of rural policy, as the entrustment for policy was vested elsewhere in government. This was a perennial problem for both rural ministers and civil servants (interview with Minister 5). This fracture was lessened only if the minister who had the rural affairs brief worked very hard to engage with those other Departments and governmental bodies. As a civil servant commented in interview;

Alun Michael, when the minister, worked incredibly hard at keeping other Departments informed about Defra’s intentions. This was particularly true around the issue of rural proofing. Take one example – there was a spat with DWP, a Department that would just not recognise rural, even though it had

launched a very interesting programme called Village Agents, which gave advice and help to older residents living in rural areas. This was only resolved by Alun (Michael) going directly to Patricia Hollis, the DWP minister, and getting some assurances that Defra would not be excluded from deliberations DWP were making that affected the countryside. This was typical of the role that the Rural Affairs brief involved. Unfortunately successor ministers were not as diligent as Alun, and so Defra often failed to get its own way (interview with Civil Servant 8).

The same individual went on to say that such was the impact of the loss of Alun Michael that New Labour's rural policy never recovered from it and was a signal to what would happen after 2004;

The loss of Michael was crucial. The only replacement who half measured up to him was Jim Knight and he was reshuffled as soon as he got to grips with things. The targets which Alun Michael had set became meaningless after he left and we got stuck with an undeliverable PSA. This mattered as it affected our funding through the CSR. We had a brief upturn when (David) Miliband arrived, but largely it was downhill once Michael had gone (interview with Civil Servant 8).

New Labour's rural policy 1999 – 2004 and the delegation of policy making and implementation to the Countryside Agency

The moratorium on no increased expenditure outside of health and education entered into by New Labour in advance of the general election gave scarcely any room for manoeuvre until 1999. This restricted MAFF on what it might have liked to

have done to update rural policy which was certainly the wish of the Departmental Team (interview with Minister 6).

In truth rural policy had altered little since the post war Attlee government which put in place the institutional arrangements, and the policy agenda and processes, which existed for the next fifty years (Manton 2006, Thompson 2008, Winter 1996). This dictated the split between the human and physical environment which had a marked effect on the way in which countryside programmes were administered (interview with Practitioners 14 & 23). Despite the Conservatives' Rural White Paper in 1995 (Department of the Environment), the view was generally shared that rural policy was a neglected policy area with agriculture given the emphasis (Blake 1996, Bullen 1995, Lowe & Ward 1998, Lowe et al 1995, Murdoch 1997).

If New Labour was to make any impact on rural policy-making and delivery it had to consider investing more resource, encouraging institutional change, and breaking rural away from agriculture, by a new policy-making approach.

New Labour's initial move was to create the Countryside Agency, an amalgam of the previous Rural Development and Countryside Commissions, but with enhanced powers, a wider brief, and considerably more resources (Derounian 2006, Murdoch 2006, Ward & Lowe 2007a&b). Though largely welcomed, the Countryside Agency was not without its critics (interview with Practitioner 23 and Minister 1).

I had unease with the Countryside Agency and its leadership. I regularly had to intervene to hold others back from direct criticism of its performance. It was too establishment-led, too close to landowners, and too self-satisfied. I was happy to support Chris Haskins, and his radical agenda for reform, including the abolition of the Countryside Agency (interview with Minister 1).

Another Practitioner in interview was also critical about the Agency's role;

Much of the Agency's work was not new in the sense that similar ideas have run for years in France and in the Walloons region in Belgium. The problem the Agency caused was it duplicated activity already underway in the countryside at excessive cost and kept interfering, often with little result. Take the special status of the Forest of Dean - it spent a £1m on this and after three years had got absolutely nowhere (interview with Practitioner 7).

A more measured account, but nevertheless still voicing criticism came in an interview with another Minister;

It was acknowledged that the Countryside Agency was a useful vehicle for change. However sometimes it ran ahead of itself and those at the top almost seemed contemptuous of ministers which meant when it came to its survival, there was no one to fight its corner (interview with Minister 2).

Supporters spoke to its strengths, as an interview with a practitioner suggested;

The Countryside Agency was a far-sighted vehicle, amalgamating the search for rural prosperity with protecting the beauty of the countryside. It pushed sustainable development forward. Richard Wakeford (the Chief Executive), was a visionary, cutting through the bureaucracy associated with rural issues (interview with Practitioner 26).

One example of the enhanced opportunities that the newly empowered Agency presented came in the planning field. Though village appraisals, which allowed small communities to future-scope their community's requirements, pre-dated New Labour, the improved mechanism for taking forward neighbourhood participation was

demonstrated by the evolution of village design statements, which later morphed into parish plans. Bottom-up forms of planning intended that rural communities take responsibility for change, to seek to overcome the excesses of nimbyism, to strive for sustainability, and to extend the accountability of local decision-making (Davies 1998, Moseley 1997 & 2002, Moseley et al 1996, Osborne & Tricker 1998, Osborne et al 2004, Owen 1998 & 2002). The Countryside Agency inherited many of the existing programmes of its predecessor organisations, but because of the additional resources it was given - £100m annual budget and 600 staff in total – it grew and expanded those programmes. Its specific responsibilities extended to overseeing the management of the National Parks and it led on the introduction of the right to roam (Derounian 2006)³¹.

Endogenous development was encouraged, overseen, and largely funded by the Countryside Agency, and there was widespread acknowledgement and support for the Agency in this aspect of its work, being seen as stimulating compared to previous stultifying processes. It was also a symbolic representation of counter-urbanisation and promoted issues including tackling social exclusion (interview with Practitioner 1; Bosworth & Willett 2011, Lowe et al 2005, Shucksmith 2000).

A problem arose however. Despite parish plans later being included within the statutory guidance of District or Unitary Development Plans, the disconnection with strategic planning procedures, practices, and outcomes was a recognised shortfall in

³¹ At the same time what the Countryside Agency became expert at the promotion of issues that hadn't tended to feature widely beforehand. This included the re-localisation of food (2001a), the protection of common land (2001b), diversity of peoples (2002), future trends for outdoor recreation (2005b), and linking landscape and biodiversity to aspects of human geography (2005c).

their operation (Owen et al 2007). This led to frustration on the ground. I led a deputation to talk to the then Planning Minister, Lord Falconer, to alert him to this lacunae, at the request of academics who had raised the issue, but little was done to avert the consequences with the two systems staying in conflict (interview with Practitioner 28). This salutary lesson was a blunt reminder of how weak the bargaining power of rural usually was, when it came up against intransigence from other parts of government. As one academic interviewee said to me;

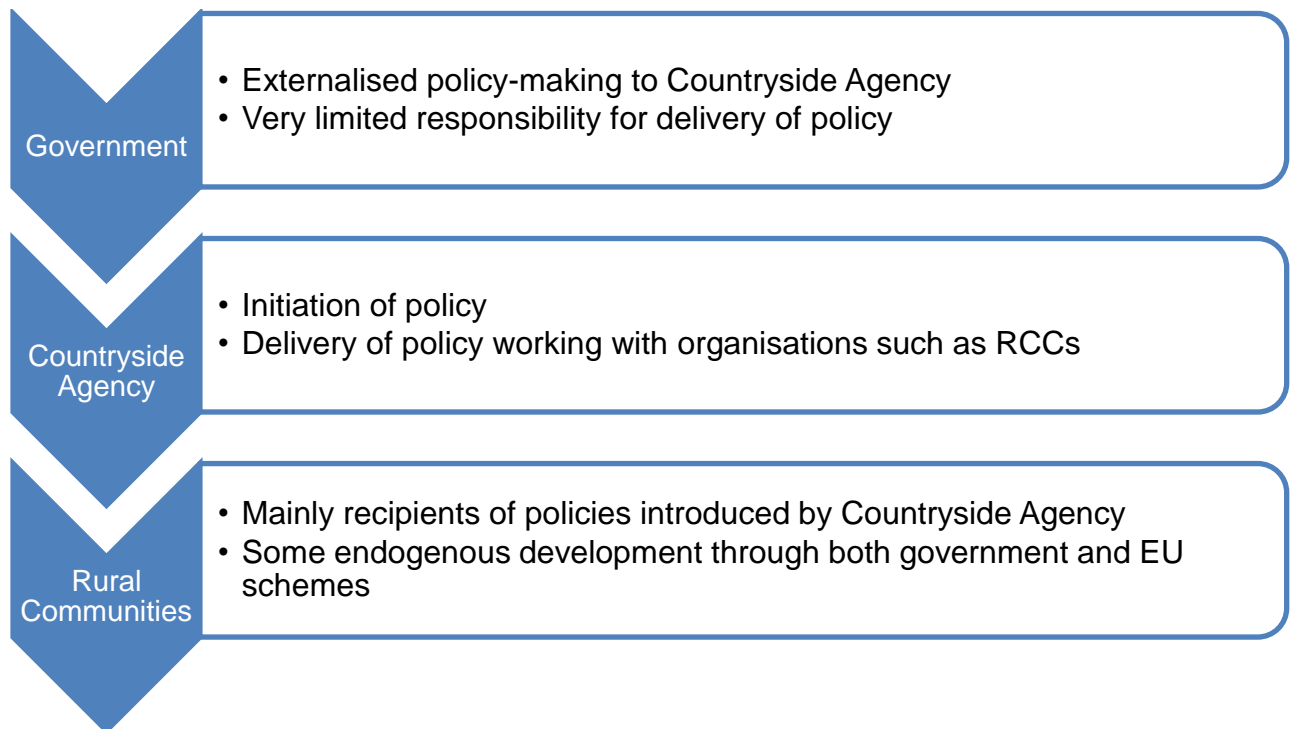
You just couldn't get the civil service to recognise the problem of this dislocation in the planning process. This was immensely disappointing for those working to resolve this conflict between bottom-up planning and the strategic planning process. You realised that the whole system was unaccountable, particularly to rural interests. The legislative framework for planning was at the heart of government, and no amount of lobbying seemed to make any difference to getting ministers and civil servants to see sense and make some minor modifications to procedures (interview with Academic 6).

The 2004 Planning Act did at least emphasise the value of bottom-up approaches to planning, and underwrote the importance of the Countryside Agency's involvement – though this was to be time-limited because of the intervention of Haskins'. Later planning legislation was more top-down and sadly undid much of the good intention in the 2004 Act (interview with Practitioner 37).

Alongside the Countryside Agency the government created the post of Rural Advocate, to be an independent voice representing the countryside and able to speak directly to Ministers, including the Prime Minister. Whilst a useful conduit to

outside organisations, the direct contact with ministers and civil servants seemed to get less the longer New Labour was in office.

Figure 6.1 – The delivery of policy



Source: Author

What marked out the relationship between government and the Countryside Agency was the degree of freedom that the Agency was permitted in initiating policy, developing programmes of activity and delivering them (see Figure 6.1). Effectively rural policy had been delegated to the Agency, and although the change was not perceptible until after the Rural White Paper of 2000 was published, when substantially more resources were made available, the externalisation of policy had already been put in place.

The Haskins' Review and the consolidation of policy-making within Defra

The creation of Defra signified a departure over where rural policy was to originate. Though not immediately apparent, for Defra took some years to establish itself, encumbered as it was with the legacy of FMD, internal staffing issues³², and the clear disinterest of the Secretary of State (Beckett) in anything rural (interview with Minister 5), a start had been made. Defra's mode of operation was also criticised. A practitioner said to me in interview;

I was against the idea of earned autonomy³³ and the increased top-down decision-making that Defra seemed intent on installing. What was worse was that there was indecision on what was meant by regional – city regions would have been a much better idea than the huge centralised regions that were set up. Rural always seemed to lose out because of urban pressures (interview with Practitioner 9).

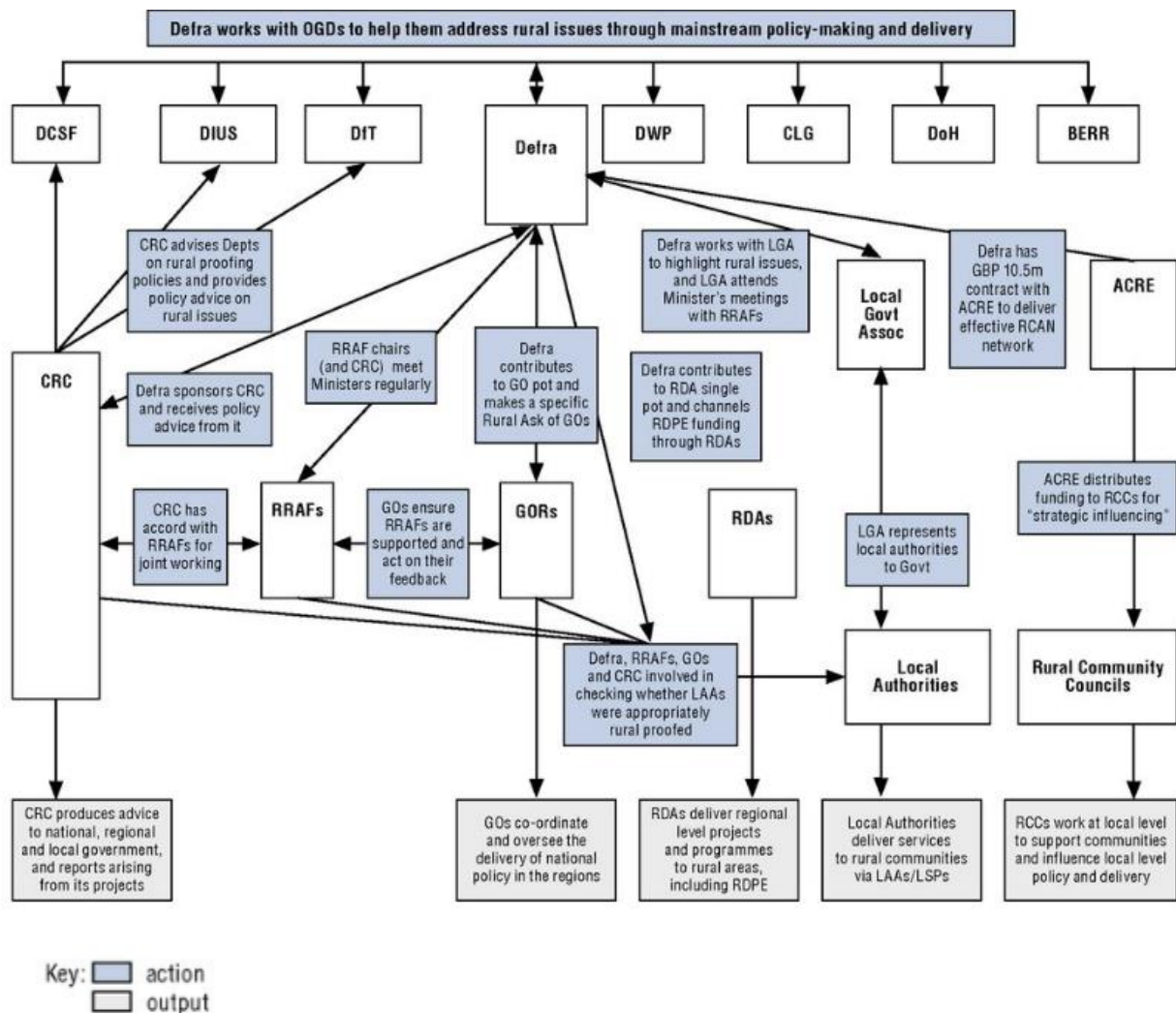
From the beginning Defra had a tortuous relationship with the many agencies that reported to it, as well as other parts of government and outside countryside bodies (see Figure 6.2) exemplifying the action and output functions associated with Defra. This included those listed in the diagram alongside other major organisations such as the Environment Agency, English Nature (after the NERC Act 2006, to become Natural England), Ofwat, the Forestry Commission and the Rural Payments Agency.

³² The DETR staff which came over to Defra as part of the Environment directorate were substantially better paid than their equivalents within MAFF. This led to a bitter dispute, which I was made aware of by PCS representatives. This got the new Department off to a bad start (interview with Civil Servant 5).

³³ Earned autonomy was a concept that evolved out of the public management reform agenda. The idea was that government would take a more nuanced and proportionate approach to bodies, both those inside of government, or those contracted or commissioned by it, so that those organisations could develop a greater degree of freedom of operation, provided they met performance targets (Flinders 2005).

Besides these, Defra was the parent body and regulating authority for parts of government as diverse as overseeing waste, including nuclear waste, the propagation of food policy, pursuing nature conservation, GMO policy, national parks, and veterinary support.

Figure 6.2 – Rural relationships



Source: Defra.

Source: OECD Rural Policy Review on England using information provided by Defra (2011, p122) reproduced by kind permission of OECD.

In the rural field, the Countryside Agency, and its successor body, the Commission for Rural Communities, were the main countryside organisations, though they were

low down Defra's hierarchy of importance. How this worked out in practice is demonstrated diagrammatically in Figure 6.2. This prescribed the operation of the Department given how much it was subject to externalised decision-making, testing the patience and ingenuity of civil servants and ministers (interview with Minister 6). As one civil servant recalled in interview;

There were so many NDPBs (Non-Departmental Public Bodies) that the Department was responsible for. This took a huge effort to get funding streams sorted, and to work out how each would report and to whom. Some of these bodies were completely a law unto themselves...for example the Environment Agency under Barbara Young was untouchable. Even Chris Haskins could go no-where near her empire (interview with Civil Servant 7).

To a great extent the setting-up, and rationale behind Haskins' Review, was a reaction by Defra to its own powerlessness. Though Haskins was appointed at the instigation of the Prime Minister (interview with Minister 2) he was given total support by Defra to completely re-jig the rural policy-making process (interview with Minister 5). The result of Haskins' was the centralisation of functions within Defra but with reduced funding and staffing overall (interview with Civil Servant 7). The residue would be passed on to a much-reduced countryside organisation (the CRC), Natural England, the RDAs, and some went into the EU budget for rural.

Haskins had two primary aims in his review. First, to make Defra itself, the body responsible for policy-making. As Haskins said to the Defra Select Committee;

...Defra should be a policy-making Department, full stop, and it has a pretty ambitious policy-making remit covering these four strands – agriculture, environment, the rural economy and rural affairs – that is what it should be

about and it should be concentrating on that (Haskins in evidence to the Defra Select Committee 2003c).

Second, to boost the power of the RDAs (Haskins was himself a member of Northern First RDA). The second of these propositions was at least questionable. As one Minister said in interview;

Passing the responsibility and funding over to the RDAs further marginalised the role of rural within Defra. Defra had hardly any control over the RDAs – I believe that RDAs could have unlocked some of the problems the countryside faced, but money for rural was frequently left unspent. The RDAs were immune to any pressure from Defra. What was galling was the fact that we could have used that money to kick-start an affordable rural housing programme, for instance, but instead it was lost into a black hole (interview with Minister 7).

A civil servant in interview was even blunter in his assessment of RDAs;

RDAs were often ambivalent towards rural. I was distrustful of them, to the extent that I held back part of the enterprise monies that I should have reallocated as I did not think that they would spend it on rural provision (interview with Civil Servant 7).

The issue over whether regions helped or hindered rural development was to be a perennial dilemma throughout the New Labour period (Deas & Ward 2000, Hamin & Marcucci 2008, Hewitt 2011b, Lowe & Ward 1998 & 2007, Pearce et al 2005, Ward et al 2003, Ward & Brown 2009, Woods & Goodwin 2003). This was highlighted by the Defra Select Committee enquiry which demonstrated the variability of

performance including the differential access granted to rural organisations (2008).

Much depended upon the capability of individual RDAs to demonstrate their commitment to rural (as Chapter Five) argues and not just provide another layer of bureaucracy with which rural areas had to contend (interview with Minister 4).

Question-marks remained over the legitimacy of RDAs, once democratic accountability was eliminated as an aim following the failure of the north-east referendum on a directly elected assembly and the lack of pressure for greater regionalism (Hewitt 2011a). Interestingly Bristol University commissioned by the South-West RDA to write its epitaph gave only cursory mention to that RDA's support for rural, even though it was one of the most rural English regions (2011).

In parallel with the devolution of rural delivery to the RDAs was a re-visitation of rural funding streams. Rural had long been a recipient of EU funding – as part of the CAP, but this route was to become even more important after 2004, for the domestic budget was about to be slashed and rural re-assimilated back into agriculture (interviews with MP1, and Academic 7). The link to the EU dovetailed with the thinking of the Secretary of State (Beckett) who pursued a strong line on CAP reform, including enhanced pillar two monies, largely to help rural communities through the LEADER programmes (interview with Minister 5). However there was a lack of clarity in the exact relationship between agricultural support and rural funding. Marsh and Smith's (2000) advocated the idea of a closed policy community (with the NFU being a useful ally to that), as against Knudsen's (2009) more open-ended description of government's approach, with the emphasis being upon social welfare and rural values in original policy design. This mattered in terms of potential outcomes in what resulted from the reforms of the CAP, and how that impacted upon rural matters (Elton 2011).

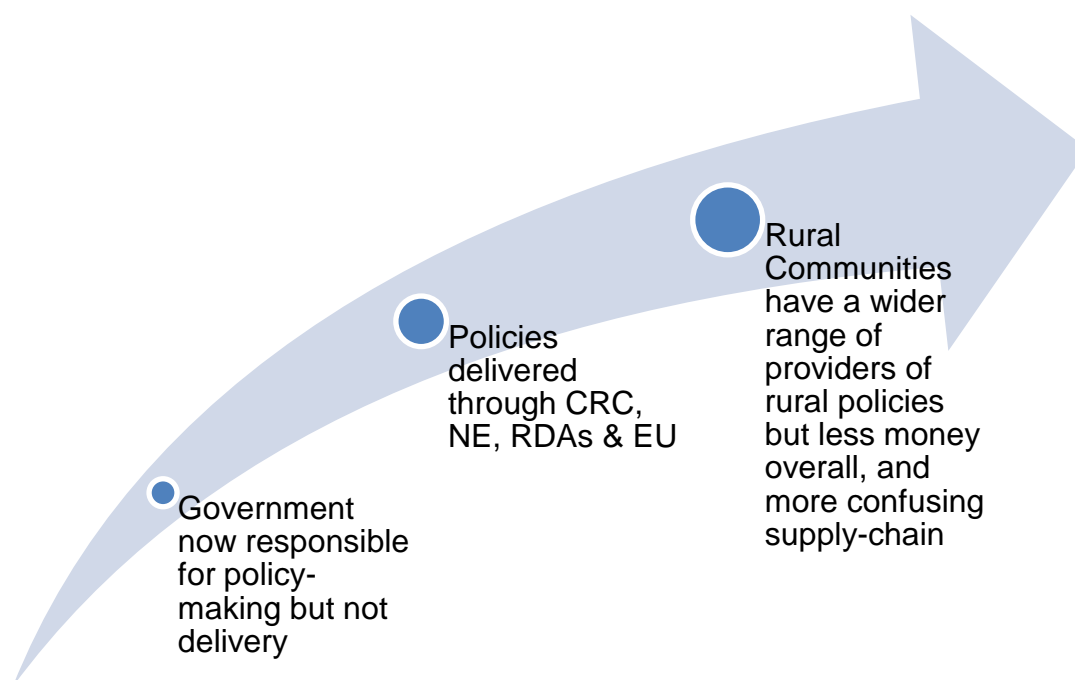
The increased ambivalence of the government to rural provision in England after 2004 added to the sense of drift and disillusion, manifested in the worsening relations with rural communities (interview with Bradley). Though the nature of these schemes was predicated upon networks, bottom-up development and endogenous development, the lack of funds and the limited accessibility to project managers undid much of the good that had been achieved through the Countryside Agency (interview with MP 6; High & Nemes 2007, Lowe et al 2002, Murdoch 2000, Ray 2000 & 2006, Valve 2002, Ward & Lowe 2004, Ward & McNicholas 1998).

The direction the government took after 2004 was to veer away from bespoke and specialised provision to alternative off-the-shelf arrangements (Ward & Lowe 2007a&b). That this was accompanied by a cooling of the relationship between government and the countryside only added to the suspicion that New Labour was becoming less interested in rural development. Defra post 2004 looked more like MAFF Mark II, with funding streams emphasising farming, rather than as a vibrant advocate for rural affairs (interview with Practitioner 23). Although decision-making was still, in the field of rural issues, principally external to Defra, now it had been delegated to the RDAs and the EU, rather than the Countryside Agency. Just as with its existence the demise of the Countryside Agency divided opinion. As one academic commented in interview;

There was a lot that was disappointing about the move from the Countryside Agency to the Commission for Rural Communities following the Modernising Rural Delivery Review. Elsewhere I have called it the vandalism of modernising rural delivery (interview with Academic 1).

What was absent from 2004 onwards was a specific agency tasked to focus principally upon rural matters acting as an arms-length, semi-autonomous body in the role of critical friend (to government). The integrated agency, Natural England which took its place, was never able to replicate the work of the Countryside Agency, nor did it have the budget to even try. Figure 6.3 indicates the direction of travel for policy-making and delivery with the separation of roles..

Figure 6.3 – The changes in policy-making and delivery after 2004



Source: Author

6.2 The role, responsibilities and performance of the most important countryside organisations and strategic bodies under New Labour and their relationship to Defra

Section 6.1 identifies the organisational framework of policy-making and implementation under New Labour in the countryside. This section builds on the assertion that policy-making and delivery was largely externalised, particularly from

1999 - 2004, but that there were always tensions with both ministers and civil servants keen to re-centre aspects of the policy-making agenda back with themselves as largely occurred after 2004.

The PIU report and the formulation of a rural strategy

The significance of the Performance and Innovation Unit Report, Rural Economies (1999), was two-fold. First, although it was produced at the same time as the Countryside Agency came into existence, and received little publicity, the prescience of the Report in persuading the Prime Minister to devise a rural strategy should not be underestimated (interview with Minister 3). Second, it was symptomatic of New Labour that the report was mainly authored by an outside academic, Neil Ward, from the University of Newcastle, rather than being the responsibility of MAFF, or another part of government. In this, it replicated much of New Labour's *raison d'être*, that it would go to the brightest and the best, to undertake such research (Clark 2002, Flinders 2002, Gains 2003, Lowe & Ward 2001, Ward 2008a). This corresponded with Blairite pragmatism, paralleled the desire to promote evidence-based policy-making and advanced the idea of the 'big tent' approach to policy development (Wilkinson 2011). The topic was chosen with an aim of deflecting attention away from the hunting debate but was a far-reaching document in its own right (interview with Academic 1). Without the PIU Report it is highly unlikely that the Rural White Paper would have been produced at the same time as the Urban White Paper (Ward 2008a). It also dovetailed successfully with the creation of the Countryside Agency.

The Commission for Rural Communities and Natural England

Haskins' originally recommended that the replacement Integrated Agency should acquire all those responsibilities not delegated to the RDAs and he saw no need for any continuing rural advocacy role (2003). However, such was the worry about a backlash from the countryside and rural organisations that Margaret Beckett relented and agreed to the setting up of the CRC. As one Minister said;

There was a dawning in government that may be the Haskins' Review had gone too far, and though there was a need to get the balance of institutions right, it might not have been such a good idea just to abolish the Countryside Agency. There was a worry that Natural England would not be able to cope with the workload – given that it had to endure heavy budget cuts as it came into being. The NERC Bill was full of holes institution-wise. That was why Margaret Beckett, under pressure from Alun Michael, changed her mind, and cobbled together the idea of the CRC – to at least assuage some countryside opinion (interview with Minister 2).

The CRC was a rump compared to its predecessor. It had a core staff of about 50, hardly anyone out in the field, and had much reduced budget and functions. With such a small workforce CRC was left to fulminate about aspects of rural life – usually issues related to disadvantage. This became a constant theme of its publications, and lobbying, to such an extent that civil servants reacted negatively to its portrayal of the countryside. As one civil servant argued;

The Rural Development Commission perpetuated the myth of the deprived countryside. The CRC merely replicated this, portraying the countryside as a victim. However the statistics do not bear this out – the countryside is

integrated with the city, and though it may suffer from similar problems, those problems are not of the same intensity. The CRC banging on about disadvantage did not help its cause (interview with Civil Servant 8).

Given this accusation it was surprising that the CRC's most important contribution was the Rural Advocate's Report on the potential of the English rural economy (CRC 2008). This stressed the opportunities that government missed by failing to pay sufficient attention to the rural economy and the inability to discriminate between those areas that were doing relatively well, and possessed even more potential for development, and those that lagged behind.

Haskins desire as part of his review to overcome what he saw as unnecessary duplication by creating one integrated rural agency was largely achieved with the creation of Natural England. This encompassed rural development, environmental protection, and biodiversity. Haskins argued that this would be a cost-effective and politically beneficial arrangement that would overcome the deficiencies of the Countryside Agency (interview with Haskins). Natural England came into existence after the NERC Bill was enacted in 2006 consisting of what was previously English Nature, the Rural Development Service³⁴ and parts of the Countryside Agency.

What Haskins had not envisaged on the human-centred side of the countryside was that there were four distinct difficulties Natural England (NE) encountered. First, Natural England's expertise was largely in the field of biodiversity, conservation management and landscape protection (interview with Practitioner 26). With the

³⁴ The Rural Development Service was created in 2001 and was made up of people who worked on practical schemes which assisted with rural development. The RDS was originally placed with Defra but most people transferred to NE, although some moved to the State Veterinary Service and others to RDAs.

abolition of the Countryside Agency many of the government's putative experts in the field of economic and social development of the countryside left or were reassigned (interview with Practitioner 32). Second, on inception the new organisation was faced with steep budget cuts, to an extent that it could no longer run many of the previous English Nature projects. This included a number of the contracts it had with Rural Community Councils, further antagonising that important sector within the countryside (interview with Practitioner 21).

Third, NE was bogged down with the practicalities of introducing the government's right to roam legislation, specifically the mapping exercise (interview with Practitioner 15). This proved both a technical and administrative nightmare to complete and eventually undermined the Agency's effectiveness. As one practitioner stated in interview;

Being given the responsibility for introducing the right to roam overwhelmed the Agency. The level of resource demanded and the time it took to manage this exercise, precluded other valuable work from going ahead, and meant that for a time, we were just focused on the implementation of the legislation (interview with Practitioner 32).

Fourth, Haskins' desire to strip policy-making away from delivery, leaving agencies only as deliverers, led to significant shortcomings and frustration as operatives found that they had little control over implementation, which practitioners struggled to resolve (interview with Practitioner 36).

What resulted was an inadequate solution to a problem that had existed only in the minds of some within government. Policy-making was now centred within Defra but little attempt was made to close the disconnection between Defra's attempts at

policy-making and the agencies' capability of delivering those policies. In fact the confusion, which already existed, became that much worse as a new regional level was incorporated (Defra 2004d). One Labour Party political activist who had inside knowledge of the operation of a RDA said to me in interview;

My experience was one of total confusion over policy-making and implementation. Take the Market Towns Initiative, a key programme. This was set up and originally administered by the Countryside Agency – however after Haskins' it passed to the RDAs. Whereas we could have learned from the Countryside Agency, we had to virtually start the programme again. RDAs and Government Offices had a real credibility and accountability problem, and RDAs struggled with the rural brief. There was a lack of strategy and policy coming down from government – evinced by the muddle over the FMD recovery monies. As time went on this got worse, not better (interview with Rural Political Activist 4).

The prevailing situation was exacerbated by the fact that Defra was by this time greatly weakened as a department. The rural team had been drastically cut in size within a department that was about to suffer further body blows, especially the removal of the climate change portfolio to DECC³⁵, and the onset of further crises over CAP funding and flooding (interview with Civil Servant 7). Defra was increasingly marginalised as government activity after 2004 was concentrated upon the key departments of the Home Office, Health, Education and Transport (Barber

³⁵ Given the importance of landscape mitigation measures and the impact of animal farming upon climate change, rural had been seen as a vital cog in climate change measures. However once the Department of Energy and Climate Change was created this nexus was largely lost. Defra did retain responsibility for adaptation but the division of responsibilities made little sense, and budget cuts further damaged the effectiveness of this vital aspect of policy.

2007, Clark 2002, Perri 6 et al 2002, Richards & Smith 2006). After 2004, rather than streamlining the decision-making process, if anything, it had become more complicated. Defra was now notionally at least responsible for policy-making. Yet much of the authority had really been syphoned off to the RDAs and the EU. Defra taking back control was a blunt instrument. It was not just the number and diversity of policies that mattered, let alone from whence they came, but their quality. With such a small departmental team, and limited access to special advisers (interview with Special Adviser 1), Defra ministers suffered from the new onus placed on them. As was said to me by one interviewee;

Though I represented a rural constituency I was not an expert in rural affairs. Yet I was expected to decide on really important issues, under pressure and with limited time frames. This was alongside all the other responsibilities I had to account for as part of my portfolio. Given that rural was already marginalised within the department, my involvement would make little or no difference (interview with Minister 7).

Splitting policy-making from implementation sounded feasible to operate in theory but was much more difficult in practice. What remained of the management of countryside organisations after 2004 suffered from a lack of clarity on what they should have been doing, and more than anything, from insufficient resource. In this respect what damaged rural policy was just not returning to more centralised top-down decision-making reminiscent of the MAFF days but the savage budget cuts that accompanied the organisational restructuring.

6.3 Did the churning of ministers, advisers, institutions, policies and implementation vehicles make a difference to where, and how policies were made, and by whom?

The derivation of rural policy underwent two substantial transformations during the New Labour era. Much of this was due to the government's pragmatic and reactive approach to events, but part was down to the government's insistent belief that change was synonymous with improvement – the modernising agenda (See Chapter Seven). The state of continual flux of people, structures, policies and institutions inevitably determined how New Labour operated in rural areas. However just examining the architecture of New Labour's rural policy fails fully to comprehend the groundings of policies, and implementation strategies. This Section critically examines the impact of change on Defra, key actors within the department, and on the institutional and structural frameworks.

Ministers

MAFF had two Ministers for Agriculture, Jack Cunningham and Nick Brown from 1997 – 2001. The successor department, Defra, had three Secretaries of State under New Labour, Margaret Beckett, David Miliband and Hilary Benn, and numerous other ministers who had some responsibility for rural affairs, usually as part of a wider role with farming and food (see Appendix 7 for the full list of Ministers). Only Elliot Morley was a minister in MAFF/Defra for any length of time though Michael Meacher was Environment Secretary for the first six years of the government and he oversaw the implementation of the right to roam legislation (interview with Minister 3). Cleary and Reeves (2009) identify the numerous

problems that the churning of ministers causes, and Defra's plight was symptomatic of that.

Defra may have come about only by happenstance (Heppell 2011), but rural affairs did at least now have its own departmental home, and clearer delineation of responsibilities.

Chris Mullin captures the futility of much of the work of junior ministers, with the memorable analogy of 'moving the deckchairs around', with very limited influence over policy-making (2009 & 2011). Ministers, in interview, frequently bore out this frustration (interview with Minister 5). Much depended on the relationship with, and ideas of, the Secretary of State (Theakston et al 2014).

Whilst Haskins' did try to centre policy-making within Defra, with limited success, as part of what some academics refer to as institutionalised path dependency (Kavanagh & Richards 2001, Marsh et al 2000), there were always counter challenges. Defra suffered from its lack of traction over so much of rural policy because other Departments held the purse strings and the responsibility for delivery. As was said to me in interview;

Defra was seen as a less important ministry. David Miliband did lift the profile for a while but he was mainly interested in climate change and so rural got further side-lined. Too often policy areas we needed control over such as rural bus transport grants were beyond us. I came to think towards the end of my time there that rural would have been better situated within CLG where ministers seemed to enjoy more authority (interview with Civil Servant 4).

Additionally Defra inherited MAFFs tendency to be subjected to immense pressure from external lobbyists, especially the NFU, and this curtailed its freedom for manoeuvre (interview with Civil Servant 8). So Haskins' may have been a pyrrhic victory for those who wished totally to subsume rural policy-making within the department – in reality this aim was never achievable.

Advisers

New Labour substantially increased the number of special advisers (SPADs) whilst in office, and relied heavily on this conduit for the formulation and delivery of policy (Elcock 2002, Gay 2000, Shaw & Eichbaum 2014, Yong & Hazell 2014).

Why SPADs mattered in terms of the policy-evolution process was that they were the bridge between ministers, their civil servants, officials in NDPBs, other SPADs (and therefore other ministers), the wider Party, including MPs, and interest/pressure groups. SPADs played a crucial role in the fetching and carrying of ideas and oversaw policy creation, implementation, and the monitoring of performance (Kelly 2001).

Defra suffered from three distinct disadvantages which hampered access to good quality advice. Firstly, there were very few sympathetic individuals who had the right skills match to provide the rural affairs team with appropriate support (interview with Bradley). Secondly, few SPADs stayed for a any length of time, which meant that there was little continuity in decision-making. Nevertheless some SPADs such as Sheila Watson³⁶ built up a formidable reputation as a political operator (interview with Special Adviser 1). SPADs were both part of the internal departmental structure –

³⁶ Watson was Margaret Beckett's SPAD, and was for all intended purposes the political eyes and ears of the Department always standing in when Beckett was not available. However she, like her master, had little interest in rural.

but they also dealt extensively with external agencies. In fact one of their weaknesses was that they came heavily under the influence of pressure groups (interview with Bradley). Thirdly given that the total number of SPADs available to government at any one time was limited, it was usual for Defra to have only a couple of SPADs, which severely limited its overall performance, and meant that it suffered in relation to other departments³⁷.

Institutions

New Labour was influenced by the ideas behind new institutionalism which helped frame its underlying political ideology (Bevir 2003 & 2005, Chhotray & Stoker 2009, Hay 1999, Lowndes 2010, McAnulla 2007, March & Olsen 2005). This gave New Labour the flexibility to draw on the delimits of the market and rationality, advocating the advantage of networks over hierarchies, alongside dynamic change, with new embedded normative rule-making approaches, integrative in style, rather than the traditional institutional stasis associated with British public office. Though largely drawing upon the economic and political theories of the New Right, there were elements of social democratic thinking applied in an eclectic manner, strongly evident from 1999 until 2004.

The new institutionalism and the principal-agent relationship neatly described Defra's delegation of policy-making, initially to the Countryside Agency, and then other rural organisations in the community and voluntary sectors, commensurate with self-governing models, and new forms of diverse leadership (Lowndes & Roberts 2013, Pollitt 2009). However with the unease that grew over cost and effectiveness of

³⁷ SPADS were only available to the Secretary of State and Ministers of State. Given that it was rare for Defra to have more than one Minister of State this was a constraint.

policy delivery, and the dramatic intervention of Haskins', it helped explain why policy-making was brought back into the ministry as a rational response to those concerns (Brousine 2009, Burch & Holliday 2000, Newman 2001, Peters 1999, Room 2011).

Even after the paradigm shift of 2004, Defra did not preclude experimentation to try to find new ways to expedite service delivery. Local government was potentially a useful ally in this. In the Rural Delivery Pathfinders initiative it attempted to create newly-integrated models of service delivery. A major part of this was the rolling out of local area agreements, part of the Rural Strategy, and a practical demonstration of how rural proofing and mainstreaming rural could be of mutual benefit. Unfortunately the Pathfinders' recommendations got little attention in wider government, displaying the limitations of the Department's reach (Defra 2008).

The shifting of institutional structures added to a sense of disorganisation and depoliticisation which New Labour was regularly accused of (Burnham 2001, Flinders and Buller 2006). Certainly a number of the institutional reforms did not seem to be well formulated, or were given insufficient time to work through properly. An example of this was the planning changes which whilst in theory being sympathetic to bottom-up rural development, contradicted this in legislative-terms. This meant that reform seemed superficial, if not counterproductive.

As one civil servant memorably commented to me in interview;.

Civil servants like to hear nothing more than when a new minister says he wants to reform the institutional arrangements of the department. We know that this means more money for us, new roles, and new nameplates on the doors. In a year they will be gone; reshuffled or demoted. And then his or her

successor, can start the process of reorganisation all over again - plus change (interview with Civil Servant 7).

Policies, strategies and their implementation

New Labour had no shortage of rural policies. It developed its own strategy (2004c) on the back of the Rural White Paper (2000). Implementation of these policies may have been a problem, but that was something that the whole government perceived as a perennial weakness, which was why Blair was so keen to address this (Barber 2007).

The main policies, reports and programmes are listed in the timeline on pages 12 and 13. Overall it was an impressive collection. In addition, rural was the recipient of policies that were nationally formed and directed, though not all national programmes necessarily reached the countryside, or were sufficiently tailored for it.

Institutional churn made an enormous difference to where policy was made, who by, and how those policies were then communicated to the countryside. The future of the rural post office branch network was one such example (See Chapters Four and Seven). The protection of village post offices was one of the few commitments in the 1997 manifesto, and the Rural White Paper (2000) gave explicit support to the idea of subsidising the network, with a presumption against the closure of individual branches, at a cost of £400m per annum (Midgley 2005). The policy was part of the government's financial inclusion strategy, alongside the provision of basic bank accounts, and the post office card account (Edmonds 2011).

Yet within a short period of time, rural communities saw this policy completely overturned as successive programmes of closure, Network Reinvention and Network

Change shut hundreds of rural post offices. This did great damage to the credibility of individual rural Labour MPs. As one MP interviewee stated;

Under Network Change three post offices were identified for closure in my rural constituency. I managed this process reasonably successfully. But after a post office was saved in the constituency of Castleford and Pontefract - the seat of Yvette Cooper - the Post Office, operating under the zero sum principle, came after another one here. Having originally sidelined my opponents they now came after me with glee. So we sacrificed one in a highly marginal constituency to save another in a rock solid Labour seat – just to assuage a minister. I went to see the Post Office Minister over this. He was just oblivious to the electoral consequences (interview with MP 2).

This story was replicated a number of times, as other MPs described to me the discomfort they experienced under the closure programmes. Lessons were hardly learned as Lord Mandelson³⁸, when back at the DTI, brought forward the part privatisation of the Royal Mail (Hooper 2008). Though eventually dropped, again the electoral repercussions for Labour rural MPs appeared dire as the proposals seemed like a killer-blow to the rural network (interviews with MPs, 3 & 6; Cowley & Stuart 2014, Parker 2013 & 2014).

These policy and strategy cleavages grew in the latter years under Blair, and worsened under Brown, and were taken as evidence of New Labour's growing disenchantment with the countryside. The post office example, was just one – which could easily have been replicated by others such as affordable rural housing,

³⁸ Lord Mandelson as Secretary of State at DTI commissioned the Hooper Review which recommended part privatisation of the Royal Mail. Most Labour MPs vehemently objected to this proposal, and opposition was at its strongest in the Rural Group.

transport or employment all of which demonstrated a mixture of frequently changing policies – but with little beneficial outcome for rural areas. This seriously questioned Defra’s capability, or even willingness, to intercede when rural interests were involved, a situation that was borne out by the critical comments of MPs about their ministerial colleagues. As one MP lamented to me;

The turnover of ministers and policies was counterproductive, as New Labour became more centralising – we went back to rural being synonymous with farming, and it just got marginalised. Civil servants seemed disengaged in the last few years of New Labour and Defra had no real authority within wider government, being overturned on a regular basis. This was disappointing as new initiatives such as Total Place (2010)³⁹ and the Quirk Review (2007)⁴⁰, could have given rural a role again (interview with MP 1).

Chapter Five examined rural proofing policies as an antidote to urbanism. Yet this was given little opportunity to bed down in practice because of Defra’s inability to enforce this across government. It was a similar state of affairs with mainstreaming rural (interview with Practitioner 4; Courouble 2011). By 2009, Defra in its annual departmental review failed to specify any Departmental Strategic Objectives which related to rural, and preferred to concentrate upon rural as part of the cross-cutting work of the Department (Defra, 2009d). Whilst the second Rural Development Programme for England 2007 – 2013 (2007) made great play of continuing activity,

³⁹ Total Place was a Treasury/CLG Joint Paper which brought forward the idea of ‘a whole area approach to public services’ encouraging the better integrated allocation of resources, with citizen empowerment being at the centre of the decision-making process.

⁴⁰ The Quirk Review looked at how to make increased and better use of public and community assets, work carried out on behalf of CLG.

in reality this was a much more limited operational framework than had been the case in the first programme.

Together with the cuts in funding and the lack of an ambitious programme this Section has illustrated the impact of the institutional turmoil which surrounded Defra and its constituent parts from 2004 onwards. This is not to dismiss the importance of where policy was made, who by, and how it was implemented, but that was of secondary concern compared to the reduction in resources, and the growing disinterest in the rural domain.

6.4 Why did New Labour have such little faith in internalised methods of policy formulation?

Rural policy-making in England was unusual in that it was at least partly outside of the traditional civil service – minister arrangement for policy-making. This derived from MAFF, the parent ministry already being so reliant upon EU monies. However it was also true that MAFF remained one of the few command and control departments where central direction of policy was still in force (interview with Academic 8). This led to a confused picture – but with so much rural policy being the responsibility of external agencies there was an interesting dynamic at work on the internalisation – externalisation continuum of where policy was made. What further complicated this picture was that New Labour, whilst it spoke the language of decentralisation from 2001 onwards, was intent on taking greater executive control in order to speed delivery of policies. This reached a head in rural areas after 2004.

The debate over whether this was a shift in strategy or a longer-term tendency that had just been dormant in New Labour, has been the subject of significant academic

interest (Bevir & Rhodes 2006, Burch & Holliday 2000, Davies 2000, Judge 2006, Lee 2000, Meredith & Catney 2007).

Labour's traditional distrust of the civil service

Many in the Labour Party had long distrusted elements in the civil service. This doubt in the civil service's objectivity grew after Labour had tasted office, and remained an ever-present belief amongst many in the Party through to the 1997 election and beyond. Both the Crossman (1979) and Benn (1996) diaries make much of this believing that the civil service tried to block radical manifesto commitments. There were countless reasons for this antagonism, and this has been written about extensively (Gamble 1996, Theakston and Gouge 2004). There was a strong sense of foreboding of what New Labour should expect of the civil service, from the leadership through to the grass roots, in the belief that Thatcher had politicised the civil service and put her own own placemen there (Theakston 1990). Blair himself was more concerned about inertia rather than outright opposition from the leadership of the civil service (Blair 2010), but that view was not widely shared by colleagues (Sinclair 2007).

So New Labour came to power generally sceptical about what support it would receive from the civil service. Given its radical agenda of public service reform, joined up government, and devolution and decentralisation, some element of preparedness would require strategems of how to confront this, to work around it, or to find alternative methods of policy-making and implementation. New Labour chose all three approaches. Despite these concerns, in its White Paper 'Modernising Government' (Cabinet Office 1999) New Labour set itself testing targets; more joined-up and strategic policy-making; a consumer-orientated focus; and high quality

and efficient public services relying upon evidence-based policy-making (Gray and Jenkins 1999, Rhodes 2000). This viewpoint pervaded rural policy-making, as it did the rest of the government.

This initially pushed New Labour towards externalisation of policy-making and delivery in rural policy to accommodate the modernisation discourse, alongside some recourse to managerialism, marketisation, agentification, a regulated polity, and decentralisation (See Chapter Seven).

New Labour also sought to encourage earned autonomy from its own agencies, and employed think tanks, community and voluntary sector organisations and external consultants to generate ideas (Schlesinger 2009, Taylor 2003). The creation of the Countryside Agency and funding third sector bodies such as the Rural Community Councils was the embodiment of this in practice (interview with Practitioner 4). Special advisers similarly acted as a counterweight to the civil service (Yong & Hazell 2014).

As a footnote to this narrative, somewhat in contradiction to the perceived wisdom, it was striking that all the Defra civil servants interviewed spoke about how much they had welcomed the New Labour government into office, after the increasingly sterile period under the Conservatives. This was true of Defra itself, where the focus upon rural up to 2004 was seen as an enlightening experience, the first time in their working lives that rural had been given the prominence that they believed it deserved. This made disappointment all the greater when New Labour's rural interest waned (interviews with Civil Servants 3 & 6).

The changing scene – the EU and globalisation

New Labour's period in office, was marked by major changes in the globalisation discourse, indicative of the new challenges that all governments faced at the turn of the millennium. A historicist appreciation of events at that time indicated that New Labour believed that it had to be seen to be taking a modernist approach as part of its break with Old Labour. New Labour did not just acknowledge the influence of the new global forces at work, it positively welcomed and argued the benefits of globalisation. At one level this was an esoteric and philosophical discourse, as evidenced by the speeches of ministers, and the texts of documents (L'Hote 2010). This centred around the inevitability of globalisation as:

a non-negotiable economic constraint in order to render contingent policy choices 'necessary' in the interests of economic rejuvenation (Watson and Hay 2003, p289).

Yet this debate had particular reverberations for the rural economy and society because the reform of agriculture, land use, and the food chain would be major planks in the government's ambitions. To New Labour this could occur only if the UK was fully bound into the EU – and the Party's European ambitions, were a crucial element in the recognition of the inevitability of globalisation (Holden 2002). This is why it embraced the post-productivist future of the rural landscape, whilst moving farming towards niche markets and multifunctionality (Curry 2002, Evans et al 2002, Ilbery & Bowler 2014, Lowe et al 2002, Marsden 2009, Marsden & Sonnino 2008, van der Ploeg & Roep 2003).

Juxtaposed with the shift away from a nationally-determined rural policy towards global and supranational structures, there was a counter movement to encourage neo-endogenous development at a local level (Ray 2006, Shucksmith 2010). In the EU this was partly encapsulated in LEADER programmes (Dwyer et al 2007, High & Nemes 2007, Marsden & Sonnino 2008, Ward & McNicholas 1998). Across the OECD countries it was referred to as the new rural paradigm (Horlings & Marsden 2012, OECD 2006, Sabel 2001). English rural policy was supposed to follow this directional shift, though the evidence was that England lagged behind other parts of the EU in terms of developing appropriate policies, the result of insufficient funds and lack of prioritisation amongst those tasked to deliver New Labour's agenda. This, rather than who by, or where the policy was made, was a major reason for unsatisfactory progress in rural development (Hoggart et al 2014, Moseley 2003).

New Labour's wider agenda – externalisation versus centralisation?

Rural policy-formulation did not exist in a vacuum. Defra, its agencies, and those Labour representatives who were interested in rural, were equally affected by the directional swings of Blair's government. Over the 13 years, whilst there were unpredictable movements in how New Labour approached policy-making, the direction of travel was towards greater executive authority, as the government attempted to streamline both policy-making and in particular policy-delivery (Barber 2007, Mulgan 2005a & b, Temple 2000).

In tune with its philosophical commitment to the politics of the Third Way the Blair government refused to be bounded by traditional Labour constraints, whether that be by giving preference to the private sector over the public one - when that was

thought appropriate and expeditious - or taking advice from as wide a cross-section of people, within government or outside (Blair 1998, Giddens 1998, Latham 2001).

Besides its emphasis upon pragmatism and open-mindedness New Labour had another reason why it came to rely so much on outside counsel in the rural policy-making field. Quite simply it did not have the internal expertise and experience to be able to fall back upon. The Rural Group did partly act as a counterweight to this (interview with Bradley). Defra did come to realise that with the abolition of the Countryside Agency it needed to develop much greater knowledge of data collection. This explained the foray into the Bibby/Shepherd research area (See Chapter Four). As one civil servant admitted in interview;

We needed to do something dramatic to separate the myths of rural life from the realities. So we decided for Defra to specialise in data collection and interpretation. We became second to none in this – and we were often able to get the better of other departments because our evidence base was so solidly worked through. For the first time we could define rural, and know what rural areas were really like – generally with high levels of satisfaction for those living there, but with specific problems that required targeted help (interview with Civil Servant 8).

So as a reaction to its previous reliance upon the research, data and interpretation of those external to the department, Defra responded by developing its own means of justifying its modus operandi. To Defra it was not just a simple case of centralisation and internationalisation versus decentralisation and externalisation – New Labour used the tools appropriate for the time and the policy in question. This might have added to the complexity of policy-formulation, and confused those not privy to what

was going on – indeed one of the shortcomings of the Bibby/Shepherd work was the lack of communication of the results (interview with Bibby). This did not necessarily mean that all the research was valuable, or came though into policy, let alone implemented (interview with Academic 1).

6.5 Conclusion: To what extent did the focus upon external sources for policy-making and delivery help, hinder or make little difference to New Labour's operation in the countryside?

This chapter has critically examined the case that New Labour abdicated rural policy-making and delivery to external agencies. The evidence points to this being the situation – but this only tells some of the story, and only refers to part of new Labour's time in power. In exploring research question Three what is clear is that on the axes of internalisation – externalisation, centralisation-decentralisation New Labour's performance in the countryside was confusing, contradictory and somewhat self-defeating. This did little to help Defra's reputation, and eventually was one reason why it led to rural policy being of diminished importance after 2004 and why the legacy of New Labour in rural areas is one of lost opportunities.

Such a state of affairs was not entirely of the government's own making. Certainly its response to the growing crisis in the countryside from the late 1990s onwards was commendable in terms of its pragmatism and positive reactivity. This was the apogee of New Labour's rural demarche. That it coincided with the period when the newly-formed Countryside Agency was at its greatest prowess possessing of a considerable budget was not accidental. Government ceded power, influence and authority to that body and in so doing unleashed an upsurge of activity, initiative and intervention. Given the social-democratic nature of this involvement it was easy to

portray this as a typical Labour response to a given set of problems. However it was much more than that, for New Labour transcended traditional boundaries to exploit possibilities in rural England that predecessor administrators could have only dreamt about.

It is a moot point whether agencies operate inside or external to government (Christensen & Laegreid 2006b, Talbot 2004). In its operation and performance the Countryside Agency gave the impression of playing it both ways. From the interviews, former staff made it clear that they thought that the authority of the Agency came as a result of its ability to portray itself as a wing of government. However they also felt it vital that they maintained their objectivity and semi-independence. As one interview practitioner said;

We valued our role in the Countryside Agency as being an independent voice within government. It was good that we could go directly to ministers and give them our advice, but this never weakened our resolve to be first and foremost the advocates of the countryside, telling the government what needed saying, no matter how unpalatable the message (interview with Practitioner 27).

Government agencies work to a policy and resources framework set-out by government. This was the Countryside Agency experience. Though it did have the power to make and launch policy this was only in conjunction with government. Policy-making was therefore a two-way process, rather than an agency making decisions in isolation. Where agencies do veer away from government is the time when problems tend to arise. The history of the Rural Payments Agency was a case in point – though the degree to which government was able to absolve itself from responsibility from the debacle of mismanagement and overspending was never

widely accepted given its support for the radically different approach to the Single Farm Payment (Defra Select Committee Enquiry 2007c). In this respect whether government delegated policy-making and implementation to an agency, or a third party, did not mean that government was not ultimately responsible for those policies.

This was the crux of the Haskins' Review. In demanding the separation of policy-making from delivery Haskins' view was that it must be the duty of a government department to dictate the policies – his criticism of what had happened under MAFF/Defra was that too much autonomy had been given to the Countryside Agency. In this he reaffirmed his support for the view of the Thatcher administration towards a 'next steps' approach (Gains 1999, Haskins 2003). Whether his recommendations would have been quite so stark if the Agency had been perceived to be better managed, and the rural subject-milieu less inclined to crisis, would have been an interesting, if hypothetical argument (Greer 2003, Lowe & Phillipson 2006, Taylor 2003, Ward & Lowe 2007a, Ward et al 2004).

Given that the period after 2004, was one of policy-making famine, it is possible to speculate that government by internalising the policy-formulation process weakened, rather than strengthened, its involvement with the countryside. However as has been argued there were factors that made the reduction in rural intervention inevitable anyway given the major budget reductions.

New Labour did not come to take on the rural mantle with any preconceptions on how it might operate so limited was its expectations both in representative and policy terms. However this did not mean it could start from a blank sheet of paper. As with any government it acquired policy from its predecessor regime. From this there was a

longstanding understanding that much of rural policy-making was already externalised. Government, in general, had therefore tended to have an arms-length relationship with rural policy-making (Phillips 1993, Rogers A 1999). It took a bold move in setting up the Countryside Agency but this also indicative from an early stage that New Labour had no confidence in MAFF (interviews with Academic 7 and Practitioner 23). This also recognised that policy and delivery were largely outside of the remit of MAFF, and even after the creation of Defra, this stayed the situation. As one practitioner interviewee stated;

There was a a great deal of 'policy wind' within Defra – and even CLG, but to get anything done in the countryside you needed the great offices of state, the Treasury, Health, Education, the Home Office and DWP on board (interview with Practitioner 9).

In this respect rural policy development had to a large extent always to be consensual, externalised, and the lead department always looking to work jointly with others. Defra had neither the influence within government to make things happen, let alone the resource to undertake the bigger initiatives (interview with Civil Servant 4; Defra Select Committee 2008).

The limited leverage Defra possessed, was illustrated by the struggle it had to get other departments to meet their obligations under rural proofing. This was a fine rhetorical device to demonstrate how important rural was to the government but devilishly difficult to get other departments and agencies to engage with.

It was the very powerlessness of Defra that led it to side with Haskins over the abolition of the Countryside Agency. In this regard, it was trying to assert some control over policy-making, given so much had been ceded externally, both to the

agencies and to the outside world. That this coincided with a drastic decline in the government's involvement with the countryside reflected the dangers of just internalising policy-making, without the means to carry it out effectively. For all the criticism advanced by ministers and others over the performance of the Countryside Agency, its replacement by a rural organisation shorn of power and influence, an integrated agency that was biased in favour of landscape conservation, and a Department which had neither the means nor the inclination to provide a resonance with the countryside, was hardly a great success.

In this way it appeared that it was less important where policy was made, rather it was a question of what resource had been given to pursue those policies, and the status afforded to those in charge of delivering it. As one civil servant interviewee concluded;

The problem was that the abolition of the Countryside Agency coincided with cuts to the Defra rural team and budget. Alun Michael, who had started as a centraliser, had learned that you got more done by delegating responsibility and monies. His difficulty was that he was saddled with handling the hunting brief alongside rural, so couldn't spend as much time on the countryside as he would have liked. By the time he was moved, we had a 'bugger's muddle' of a directorate, with a great deal of bickering with the RDAs. The government's strategy, let alone its tactics were wrong, not helped by the crises which always seemed to follow this part of government around. Too much time was spent on institutional changes and senseless initiatives. New Labour missed a golden opportunity to do something big on rural (interview with Civil Servant 6).

It was therefore the withdrawal of resources from rural that did more than anything else to harm New Labour's reputation in the countryside and as the analysis of research question Five highlights, the temporal and spatial limitations on how New Labour performed confirmed that what had started so brightly, deteriorated into something with no legacy worth defending.

Chapter 7 – Modernisation in rural policy

New Labour was created to demonstrate that the Labour Party had changed and was now a 'modern', forward-looking organisation that would be a modernising influence on politics, government, society and even internationally. From the outset of his leadership, Blair skilfully employed the language, textuality, metaphor and terminology of modernisation in his speeches, policy documents, and media appearances (Blair 1996). The 1997 manifesto referred to the word 'modern' 25 times (Labour Party 1997) and was replete with a narrative that was dominated by the management of change in the context of a fast-altering world demonstrating how far the Party had departed from the traditional stance of Labour (Savola 2006, Shaw 2009).

This chapter critically evaluates the role modernisation played in determining New Labour's rural policy and how temporal and spatial events helped shaped those policies and politics in the context of the modernisation discourse. The chapter explores research questions Four, and Five, to assess how influential the mantra of modernisation was in the context of the countryside, and how this was affected by time and events over the thirteen years of government. It also probes whether modernisation in the countryside had a particular flavour, which was different from elsewhere, and if this modified the way in which policy was made and implemented.

The analysis starts in *Section 7.1* with a discussion of why the New Labour Project was so bound up with the notion of modernisation and how this impacted upon the governance of rural areas, especially on the remaining role for the state there.

Section 7.2 then investigates whether the pursuit of modernisation by New Labour changed the dynamics associated with conflict in rural communities. The following

section then critically evaluates the successes and failures of New Labour's modernisation in the countryside and *Section 7.4* synthesises the arguments to ascertain how important modernisation was to the operation and performance of New Labour in rural areas. It addresses whether the changes made contributed much to the wider agenda that the government was progressing and also reflects upon the underlying philosophy of New Labour to explore where the reforms sat in relation to the social democratic – neoliberal continuum.

7.1 The antecedents of New Labour's interest in modernisation, and how did this affect the government's approach to rural areas?

New Labour's approach to modernisation

Blairism required the portrayal of New Labour as being new, exciting and distinct from Old Labour. This required New Labour to use metaphor and symbolism to make this shift, evinced by the removal of clause IV and reform of the Labour Party (Bevir 2005, Brivati & Heffernan 2000, Fielding 1997, Hay 1999, Panitch & Leys 2001, Shaw 2002a & 2009, Wring 1998). In parallel with this came a recognition that New Labour had to build confidence that it had changed in terms of economic responsibility. Therefore the Party came to accept economic constraints, such as the self-imposed two year moratorium on additional spending and keeping to the Major government's financial commitments (Glyn & Wood 2001, Hay 2004a&b).

Modernisation in relation to rural policy under New Labour was conspicuous by its absence. There was a marked reluctance to say anything about the countryside, and an unwillingness to engage with rural politics both with Blair and his predecessors (Gilg 2003). In comparison to previous Labour administrations, New Labour's proposals for the countryside, other than the hunting issue and the right to

roam, were mild and unambitious (Griffiths 2007, Pearlman & Pearlman 1996, Shoad 1987, Tichelar 2002, 2003a&b). This did not mean that passionate views were not held on particular issues. As one practitioner informed me in interview;

When the Right to Roam Bill was eventually enacted Barbara Castle threw a large party in the House of Lords. This was to remind everyone how integral access to the countryside was to the wider Labour Movement and in memory of the Kinder Scout mass trespass in 1932 (interview with Practitioner 39).

What faced New Labour in 1997, and how did this shape the government's modernising agenda in the countryside?

With such an overwhelming majority and such strong support across the country including rural areas, New Labour had every reason to want to extend its modernising agenda into the countryside, despite its previous ambivalence (interview with Academic 7; Woods 2006c & 2008a).

The political construction of rural Britain in 1997 has been described by Woods as; a space of resource, dominated by agriculture - even though the country was in a post-productivist phase; a romantic rural idyll; and a place of inequality and oppression (Woods 2008c). Dealing with these conflicting identities would inevitably be difficult as the rural terrain was contested and differentiated (Cloke 2003, Halfacree 2006, Marsden 1995 & 1998, Woods 2005 & 2006). There was the added lacuna that much of the narrative and discourse about the countryside was stylised if not mythologised (Cloke 1997 & 2003, Hodge & Monk 2004, Yarwood 2005).

What changed New Labour's attitude of indifference and gave it a hunger for reform of rural policy?

The research evidence points to four discernable features. First, New Labour had no alternative but to replace the discredited MAFF, a demise that was accelerated by that ministry's disastrous handling of the Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak of 2001 (interviews with Minister 1 and Civil Servant 7; Aldous 2000, Gerodimos 2004, Scott et al 2004, Thompson et al 2002, Ward et al 2004)⁴¹. Second, there was an ongoing review of the CAP and this gave New Labour the opportunity to progress new funding arrangements for rural through the EU conduit (Shucksmith 2000, interview with Academic 1). Third, Labour had triggered institutional change through its regionalist approach, specifically the evolution of Regional Development Agencies (Hamin & Marcucci 2008, Ward & Lowe 2002, Willett & Giovannini 2014).

Dovetailing this with a newly established Countryside Agency would give an important signal that rural England was also a site for institutional change and policy development (interview with Practitioner 1; Defra Select Committee 2002a). Fourth, paying attention to rural themes would act as a counterweight to the critics of modernisation. Hopefully it would also help bolster the credentials of those backbench Labour MPs elected in rural areas (Ward & Lowe 2007b, Ward 2008c) and re-inforce New Labour's one nation drive for public service reform, and redefinition of the state (Newman 2001, Parsons 2002, Tomaney 2000).

The potential for reform and modernisation in the countryside took different forms. In broad terms there were four typologies. These typologies then framed the policy debate;

⁴¹ Ministers and civil servants interviewed who had experience of MAFF were clear that New Labour was moving towards replacing MAFF with some form of Rural Ministry.

- Modernising service delivery
- Developing human and social capital
- Reaching out to disadvantaged groups
- Invigorating the rural economy

Modernising service delivery

Evidence suggests that the provision of public services in rural areas suffered from issues associated with accessibility, additional costs through the loss of economies of scale, lack of technology, and social and cultural barriers to change (Cloke 1985 & 2003, Edwards & Woods 2004, Shucksmith & Chapman 1998, Warren 2007, Wiener 2004). Though many myths existed about the ability to deliver services to rural areas (interview with Academics 6 & 9; Hodge & Monk 2004), there was a general presumption that living and working in rural England would involve some sacrifices, compared to conurbations. There was compensation in that some services were perceived as better in rural England. For example the quality of GPs in rural areas was regarded as better than in the cities (Asthana & Halliday 2004, Watts et al 1994).

New Labour was determined to harness the advantages that information technology and the internet permitted, so a programme of fast roll-out of broadband was an early priority. This included rural areas, though the nature and complexities of the programmes tended to mean that the countryside lagged behind, further accentuating the disparity from urban locations (interview with Practitioners 2 & 25; Galloway 2007, Rogers R 1999, Skerratt & Warren 2003, Warren 2007).

The invaluable advantage of the application of information technology was in being able to update services that had suffered from long-term decline. The introduction of the Horizon system into the postal service offered one such opportunity. This was later combined with the General Government Practitioner initiative⁴² which notionally gave rural areas enhanced access to government services (interview with MP 11).

Modernisation transcended the public sector to give additional assistance to struggling village services such as the shop or the pub. New Labour by working with Virsa, and later the Plunkett Foundation, was able to input additional resources and also generate new ways of working, encouraging mutual and social enterprise solutions (interview with Practitioners 20 & 40, Moseley 2000, Moseley & Owen 2008).

The drive for modernisation also occurred through New Labour's attempts to update parish councils – the Quality Parish Council launch. This protected New Labour from the accusation that it had an agenda to abolish local councils, and in addition gave a route into helping modernise planning, housing and transport in rural areas (Gardner 2008, Gray et al 2006, Lowe & Ward 2001, Rao 2000, Satsangi et al 2010). As one practitioner commented in interview;

1997 did represent a sea change in the attitude towards parish councils. The government recognised early on that local councils could be a valuable asset to help energise local democracy and was keen to work with the National Association of Local Councils (NALC - the representative body). This meant real monies coming into the sector, and a desire to delegate powers and

⁴² This initiative ran for a number of years in Leicestershire. It was discontinued and not rolled out nationally because of excessive cost and limited take-up.

responsibilities.....The government was keen to experiment as part of its modernising agenda, especially with regard to the introduction of Quality Parish Councils, and it possessed strong advocates for the sector in Michael Meacher, Alun Michael, David Miliband and Hazel Blears (interview with Practitioner 12).

As Chapters Five and Six have already described, New Labour's approach to the countryside was contextualised by both temporal and spatial developments. This was especially true of the government's modernising agenda. The factors which mainly influenced this were Defra's approach to policy-making, contextualised by its relationship with its constituent organisations, the impact of events, the government's wider agenda, and the role of the EU. Of particular significance was the development of the concept of mainstreaming rural. Figure 7.1 defines how this was applied in practice and to what effect.

Figure 7.1 – Mainstreaming rural defined

Mainstreaming recognises that there are differences between urban and rural communities, but is founded upon the certainty that the basic requirements of all types of community are fundamentally the same – everyone needs a high quality local environment, a decent home, a good education system, and access to good healthcare and other public services.

- Mainstreaming dictates that the needs and interests of rural people, business and communities should be *equitably* addressed through all mainstream policies and programmes
- Under mainstreaming *equitable* does not mean *equal* or *uniform* or imply a uniform approach to delivery of services.
- Mainstream policies and programmes are typically those that apply universally. They are generally developed at the national level, interpreted at the regional level and implemented at the local level.
- Under mainstreaming those designing the policy or delivering the programmes will determine the best delivery method.

Source: OECD (2009), *England Background Report*.

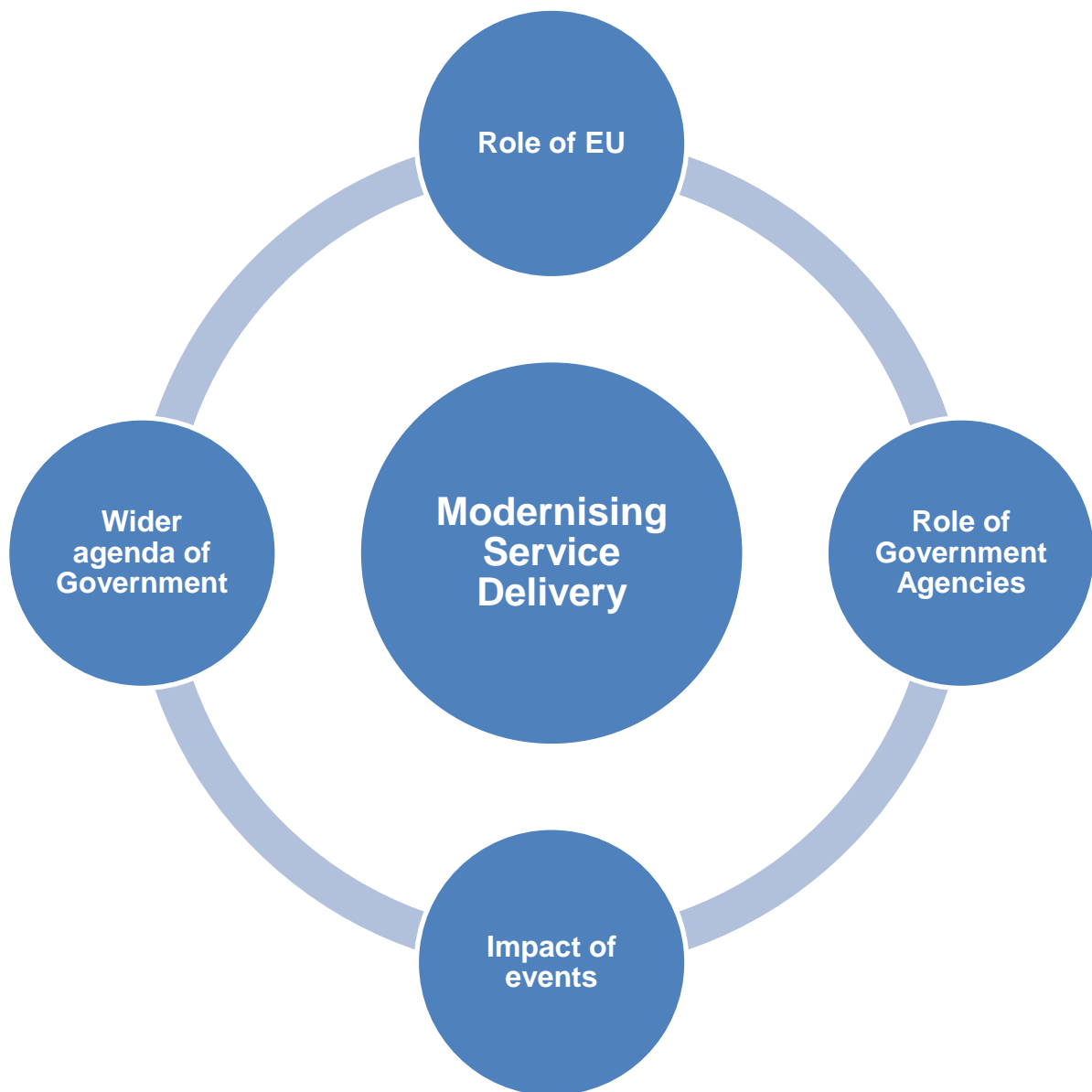
Source: OECD Rural Policy Reviews on England (2011, p111) by kind permission of OECD.

There were distinct periods when modernising was about expanding the role and responsibility of government, and times when it was not. Between 1999 and 2004 there was a definite tilt towards a social democratic stance, which characterised the uniqueness of this period with the introduction of measures from the Rural White Paper, especially rural proofing (See Chapter Five). Mainstreaming rural, which ran in parallel to it, whilst never being as convincing in policy-terms, did still represent an attempt to encompass rural within the wider government agenda, including reform of public services (Glendinning et al 2003). The problem was that it was never backed with the same resources (interview with Practitioner 29). The OECD report on England pointed to the uniqueness of mainstreaming rural, no other Member State having such a policy (2011). This pointed to the weakness of England in this regard, having no embedded history of promoting a strong rural policy. It spoke to the mantra of modernisation rather than the substance, implying inclusiveness and collegiality, but in reality making very little difference on the ground in the way that rural was perceived (Elton 2011).

The optimism of 1999 - 2004 was blunted by the Haskins' Review. Despite the keynote purpose of Haskins' being to modernise and rationalise the delivery of public services in rural England, Modernising Rural Delivery changed the focus of modernisation, with greater emphasis being placed upon the market and enterprise. Together with the Don Curry Commission (2002), which recommended a radically different approach to farming and food chains, government sought to dramatically alter the nature of its commitment to rural areas (interview with Practitioner 5; Ward & Lowe 2007a). Figure 7.2 shows the integral relationship between the influences on service delivery – these were increasingly centrifugal after 2004.

One further element was that key facilities were increasingly centred on the cities or large towns and this further deprived villages of development opportunities that were needed (Bovaird 2007, Diamond et al 2010, Ward & Brown 2009).

Figure 7.2 – Modernising Service Delivery



Source: Author

Developing human and social capital

New Labour came into power as disciples of two prevailing philosophies, the third way and the stakeholder economy (Giddens 1998, 2000 & 2002, Hutton 1995 & 1997), and communitarianism (Bevir 2005, Driver & Martell 1997, Etzioni 1993 & 1998, Hale 2006, Levitas 2000). Of these, the belief in strong communities and vibrant neighbourhoods advanced by Etzioni's version of communitarianism was particularly relevant to rural communities, where the sense of community remained a vital part of the fabric of village life (interview with Academic 7; Fyfe 2005, Rose 2000). Though New Labour's overt commitment to both the third way and communitarianism waned after the first term, the core philosophies were in evidence in many of its policy initiatives (Jordan 2010, Mouzelis 2001).

Ruralities stood to gain where they tapped into this ideology, utilising the opportunities to enhance community development and energise actor participation, through careful asset deployment. Examples in action could be seen through the evolution of the parish planning process (interview with Practitioners 2 & 21; Bishop 2010, Owen 2002, Owen & Moseley 2003), taking responsibility for transport and housing initiatives within villages (Clark et al 2007, Gardner 2008, Lowe & Ward 2001, Satsangi et al 2010), as well as more discrete occurrences such as Millennium Greens (Curry 2000 & 2001). Rural communities also took advantage of the national roll-out of programmes to completely modernise facilities – an example would be SureStart which aimed to revolutionise pre-school activities across rural as well as urban England (interview with Practitioner 8; Barnes 2007, Garbers et al 2006, Gustafsson & Driver 2005). Likewise rural communities were able to get the benefit of major capital spending programmes – the Decent Homes Standards which was committed to renovating and modernising existing council housing stocks was

illustrative of this, a far cry from the previous Conservative government's attitude (interview with Practitioner 46; Hills 2007). As was commented to me by one interviewee;

The Labour government was potentially a boon for local authority housing, and there were also plenty of grants for councils to work with social landlords to boost the level and quality of social housing for rent. The problem was that this still just touched the surface as there was a huge backlog and we were never able to satisfy demand (interview with Practitioner 46).

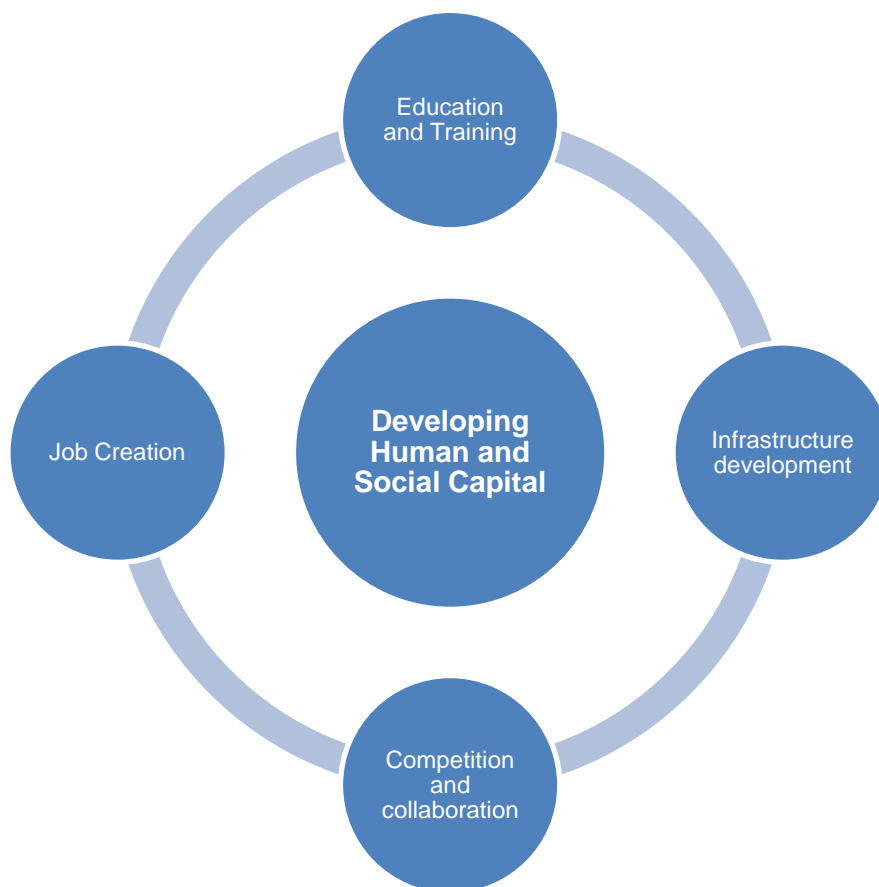
In addition the Rural White Paper (2000) catalysed community involvement with extra resources being targeted to the countryside, especially poorer communities. This was made manifest by the work of the Countryside Agency, and later the Commission for Rural Communities, which were given a steer by government to intervene through initiatives like Vital Villages and Rural Renaissance (interview with Practitioners 26 & 29, Academic 7; Allmendinger 2011, Caffyn 2004, Clark et al 2007, Lowe & Ward 2007, Pearce et al 2005). This spawned numerous examples of exciting opportunities for rural communities, and encouraged those villages to think laterally about future development. As one practitioner stated in interview;

Vital Villages was a really good story – how to empower rural communities.....This linked service renewal to appropriate housing developments, to parish planning – to get ruralities to plan their own future. If done properly it put value into the use of space and local home provision. Village appraisals, parish mapping, village design statements and parish plans were moved onto a more strategic level. The money that government

donated to kick-start this process was real value for money (interview with Practitioner 29).

Even the National Lottery was suborned, making available monies for the renovation of village halls, and other key community features. The Quirk Report (2007) gave a fillip for the reuse of community assets, and started the interest in asset-based community-development (interview with MP 1). There was also a place for rural communities within the Local Agenda 21 and Transition Towns process, which sought to link community empowerment with environmental and climate change requirements (Defra Select Committee 2007a, Hopkins 2010, Marsden 2009, Seyfang & Haxeltine 2012, Wild & Marshall 1999). Figure 7.3 exemplifies this.

Figure 7.3 – Developing human and social capital



Source: Author

Crucial to the prioritising of community development initiatives was the ability to substantiate this by the application of an evidence-base. In terms of the justification for the employment of community development models, a wealth of evidence was collected, interpreted, and utilised in various service sectors and used with categories such as infrastructure development, competition and collaboration, job creation and education and training. The pursuit of good practice which could be mirrored elsewhere was a consistent aim of the work of both the Countryside Agency, and government directly (Derounian 2006). As one practitioner said in interview;

All the evidence points to the successful implementation of initiatives being the result of voluntary effort being underpinned by state support – the arguments of Philip Blond – to do this required a good evidence base. 1997 was a huge paradigm shift in terms of active citizenship/community engagement. The government realised that you couldn't just leave it to the locals – there was a need for outside help (interview with Practitioner 2)⁴³.

Reaching out to Disadvantaged Groups

The Labour Party was created to fight for social justice, fairness and equality. The Party's very being consisted of a willingness to intervene on behalf of disadvantaged individuals and groups, and successive Labour governments sought to meet those objectives (Shaw 2002a).

New Labour was different to Old Labour in being more attuned to market solutions to problems, which demoted traditional social, if not the socialist aims of the Labour

⁴³ Philip Blond wrote the book 'Red Tory: How left and right have broken Britain and how we can fix it' (2010).

Party. Notwithstanding this change in emphasis, New Labour did support extensive programmes of support for less well-off individuals, families and groups. National programmes and legislative reform were as important in rural areas as in the rest of the country and substantial benefit was obtained by the introduction of the national minimum wage, tax credits and higher public spending on education and health in

Figure 7.4 – Reaching out to Disadvantaged Groups



Source: Author

particular (interview with Academic 7, MPs 3 & 4; Cartmel & Furlong 2000, Dolton et al 2010, Glasmeier et al 2008, Haynes & Gale 2000, Hills & Stewart 2005).

Targeted assistance also had an impact upon the countryside. Help to overcome homelessness, long-term unemployment, and poor housing was made available to individuals in rural England, as it was elsewhere. This included financial aid to rural foyers⁴⁴ (Beer et al 2005, Bevan 2000, Lovatt et al 2006), help-to-work schemes such as Project Jumpstart⁴⁵ (Shucksmith 2004, Storey & Brannen 2000), and making rural social housing eligible for grants to improve the stock under the Decent Homes Standard. This is categorised in Figure 7.4 above.

New Labour also chose to protect vulnerable groups – particularly between 1999 and 2004. For instance the embargo on the closing of village schools was introduced directly at the instigation of the Rural Group to help deal with the accusation that the government was more interested in closing public services than protecting them. This rarely received much prominence, and when it did the credit was as likely to go to the local council, even though it was the government that had promoted this policy.

As one minister said to me;

On schools and health we got very little recognition; for example the embargo on not closing village facilities. This seemed to spook the government, and meant that we couldn't get the minimum standards debate across to even our

⁴⁴ This was an idea adapted from France whereby homeless young people could be housed communally and given support, advice and protection. Foyers were a working and educational environment as well as a place to live to upskill individuals and bring their qualifications up to an acceptable standard.

⁴⁵ Project Jumpstart allowed unemployed young people who lived in remote rural areas to borrow a moped to get to work or training opportunities.

own supporters in rural communities. Therefore we experimented less and failed to develop ideas such as hub and spokes, which would have encouraged greater cooperation and mutual self-help. Altogether very, disappointing and it made a rural advocate like myself incapable of really getting the rural message into the heart of government (interview with Minister 4).

In this way New Labour acted social democratically with direct government intervention, recognising the state's responsibilities. The majority of these schemes reached their apogee during the years 1999 – 2004, under the watchful eye of the Countryside Agency, after which resources became scarcer and involvement declined. Whilst not fulfilling any real transfer of power New Labour did embark upon a campaign for greater intervention to face down social ills through increased public expenditure in rural communities.

As one interested practitioner recalled to me;

Project Jumpstart was a brilliant idea. It was lateral thinking recognising two of the great problems facing young people in remote rural areas – access to transport and work. By offering this help these people were given a chance. The only downside was the temporary nature of the schemes, as the managers had regularly to reapply for the monies (interview with Practitioner 7).

Invigorating the rural economy

Given that the PIU Report was entitled 'Rural Economies' (1999) and that economic regeneration featured widely in both the Rural White Paper (2000) and the Rural

Strategy (2004a) this aspect of the reform agenda would seem to be paramount. Yet as Chapters Five and Six have argued the economic standpoint was always of secondary importance until 2004, after which the government became less interested in social democratic intervention, and more inclined towards market-based solutions to rural issues. Key features of the economic approach were upskilling the rural workforce, improving rural productivity, and growing the numbers of jobs and businesses. There was recognition that some parts of the rural economy lagged behind, highlighted in PSA4 (Defra Rural Division 2007). The contributing factors are highlighted in Figure 7.5. They were tackling the supply-side features, looking for innovation and targeted help, overcoming the specific difficulties faced by ruralities, and facing up to the productivity problem, particularly in lagging districts (CURDS 2003).

Central to the economic dimension was the role of market towns, developed as service hubs, as locations for housing development, and as resource-centres for the rural hinterlands around, becoming the springboard for enterprise and innovation. Accordingly there were many initiatives which were focused upon market towns, and money became available to stimulate growth. The overall aim, as the Taylor Commission (2008) identified, was to maintain employment in rural towns and villages, to give incentives for appropriate housing and jobs, and to help create vibrant communities by ensuring that infrastructure and facilities were installed as part of wider economic improvements.

New Labour therefore followed in the footsteps of previous administrations, including Labour ones (interview with Practitioner 27 and Minister 2), which had invested

heavily in programmes such as CoSIRA⁴⁶, which re-located businesses and jobs to rural settlements, and tried to re-balance the overall economy by making sure that remote locations did not lose out (Rogers A 1999).

Figure 7.5 – Invigorating the Rural Economy



Source: Author

What marked the New Labour era out as being somewhat different from predecessor administrations was the scale of the changes planned in the economic field, the

⁴⁶ CoSIRA originated through the Development Commission (merged to form the RDC) and had the aim of encouraging the development of small scale industrial estates in rural areas to reduce unemployment there.

reliance upon advances in technology, and the particular focus upon productivity. This was the basis of New Labour's economic modernisation.

Structural and methodological reform of the state and public services in rural areas

New Labour was committed to modernising the British state and had very clear ideas on how this should be completed. Already advocates of New Public Management by the time it reached office, the government wished to widen and deepen its application (Driver & Martell 2006, Flynn 2001, Lane 2000, Newman 2000 & 2001). This led to an increase, rather than a diminution, in the amount of privatisation, externalisation, outsourcing, contractualisation, and flexibilisation of public service provision. Combining national service standards with whatever methodology best delivered efficient allocation of resources and maximised consumer satisfaction, New Labour put in motion policy frameworks that were different from that which might have been expected from a more traditional Labour administration (Cutler & Waine 2000, Foley & Martin 2000, Newman 2001).

Rural England was much less subjected to this agenda and the impact of marketisation and managerialism was often difficult to discern. Where it was present there was often heavy criticism of the manner of its operation and its unsuitability for rural areas (interviews with Academics 4 & 7, Practitioners 18 & 19; Ackroyd et al 2007, Broadbent & Laughlin 2001, Kilkauer 2013). The greatest impact upon rural areas usually occurred when a part of the countryside, contiguous with an urban centre, was included within an action zone or neighbourhood renewal area. Rarely was any attempt made to differentiate the elements of rural from the wider programmes and ideas such as new public management were seen as helpful in dealing with the perceived problems of the countryside (Ahmed & Broussine 2003,

Fergusson, 2000, Foley & Martin 2000, Perkins et al 2010, Pollitt, 2007 Power & Gewirtz 2001, Tunstall & Lupton 2003).

The only real benefit for rural areas came in the enhanced opportunities for the voluntary sector as an alternative to state-centred models (Clark et al 2007, Foley & Martin 2000, Osborne & McLaughlin 2004). Partnership working, something that became a tenet of the New Labour operation in the countryside meant that additional resources were pumped into voluntary sector organisations and this became a vital tool for the delivery of policy (Clark 2004, Edwards et al 2000 & 2001, Shucksmith 2010). As one practitioner highlighted in an interview with reference to the introduction of the right to roam legislation:

Partnership working became a crucial way in which we were able to implement this major piece of complicated legislation on the ground. This allowed us to draw in expertise, which we simply did not have in the Rights of Way Department of the County Council, and meant that we could play divide and rule with those opposed to its inception (interview with Practitioner 41).

More important to rural areas than structural changes were methodological ones. New Labour looked a much more participative form of democracy emphasising partnerships and networks rather than imposed solutions and hierarchies (Newman, 2001). This was sometimes fiercely contradicted by the drive towards greater concentration of decision-making to encourage better delivery (interviews with Practitioners 7, 10 & 12; Clark et al 2007, Jones 2000, Ray 2006, Smith 2002). However the reliance upon consensus frequently resulted in dispute and delay in the implementation of programmes (Curry 2009). Community-centred affordable rural housing developments often fell victim to this (Satsangi et al 2010).

Double devolution⁴⁷, pioneered by David Miliband when he was both at CLG and Defra gave a boost to this direction of travel, specifically through its appliance to rural (interview with Academic 7; Davies 2008, Hilder 2006, Jones & Stewart, 2006 Miliband 2006, Pearce et al 2005). Sadly neither Miliband nor these ideas stood the test of time, and there were other challenges that negated these ideas.

7.2 The contesting of New Labour's application of modernisation to the countryside – who by and to what effect?

The notion of the contested countryside was discussed at length in Chapter Two. That analysis allows a proper understanding of the differentiated nature of rural areas, highlighting the conflict over geography, physical and human boundaries, culture, social class, environmental concerns, and attitudes towards urbanisation. It also explains why 1997 was such a paradigm shift, more so than even 1945, as New Labour now had a substantial stake in rural constituencies (Ward 2002, Woods 2002 & 2008a) and dominance of the public sphere (Johnson 2007, MacLeavy 2007, Marinetto 2003a).

Winning rural seats was not the same thing as being able to represent and govern in those areas successfully. Much depended on the policies, activities, programmes and initiatives that New Labour proposed for the countryside. From the research evidence those who confronted New Labour had three different characteristics.

They were:

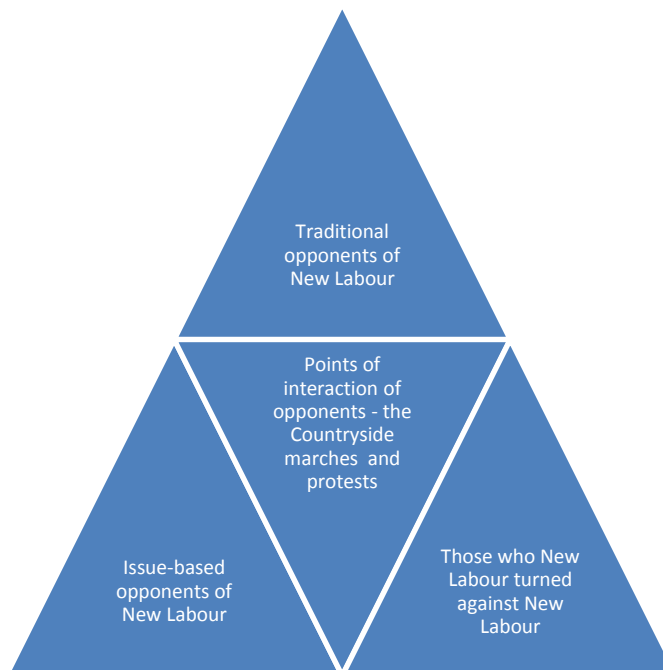
- Traditional opponents of Labour, both political enemies and those in social movements such as supporters of hunting

⁴⁷ Double devolution was based upon the notion of central government devolving to local government, which in turn would give more resources, power and authority to communities.

- Those who were against New Labour on one specific issue, though that opposition could become more general – for example those opposed to house-building in the countryside
- Those who had been generally supportive of New Labour, and may even have voted for its candidates, but who turned against the party because of policy or political changes, or different economic circumstances.

These groups are shown in the Figure 7.6 below.

Figure 7.6 – Opponents of New Labour in the Countryside



Source: Author

None of these groupings was discrete – as permeation of people between them was common, though the opinions of traditional opponents were obviously the most difficult for New Labour to shift. What the government had to do was to recognise that in order to achieve policy success it needed to marginalise, outwit, and where necessary, win confrontations. When the groups combined, electorally or otherwise,

the task that faced New Labour was heightened, as over the closure of village post offices and the proposed privatisation of the Royal Mail (Langford & Higgs 2010, O'Reilly & Webber 2007).

Traditional opponents

New Labour was under no illusion during its time in power that it would face outright opposition from some who lived, worked and played in the countryside. Despite New Labour winning so many rural seats, Conservatives were still in the ascendancy in most parts of rural England, particularly the more remote and agriculturally-inclined countryside (Dewdney 1997a&b – see Appendix 1).

Unsurprisingly the Conservatives, and to a lesser extent the Liberal Democrats, mounted attacks on the government on the basis that it was dominated by urban interests with little regard for the rural way of life. During the first two administrations there were frequent debates called by the Opposition on farming and rural life which aimed to destabilise the work of the government and undermine the credentials of rural Labour MPs. This was to be expected and was largely dealt with easily by the government (Woods 2008b).

More pressing and difficult to handle was the impact of the various social movements centred around the hunting ban and how those different groups, who vehemently opposed new Labour, were able to coalesce around certain issues and shared values (Anderson A 2006, George 1999, Lusoli & Ward 2006, Milbourne 2003a, Reed 2004, Wallwork & Dixon 2004, Woods 2003, 2004, 2008b & 2010).

For those opposed to New Labour the modernising agenda was symbolically and symptomatically contrived as an attack on all those values traditionalists stood for

and, more importantly, was seen as undermining the very fabric of English rural life. Both in terms of New Labour's language and its actions the threat of what the government planned for the countryside was ascribed to motives such as revenge, complete misunderstanding of rural life, and contempt for all those who were outside of urban centres. Woods (2008b) in his chapter on whether the hunting ban was a success points to these lines of attack. Therefore the very idea of modernisation became associated with all that was wrong with an urban Labour Party, New Labour or otherwise. As well as collective action, attention was also focused on individual Labour MPs representing rural areas that led to attempts to unseat those MPs, though this met with mixed success.⁴⁸

Eventually the hunt ban was implemented, though this process had been greatly delayed and taken many hours of Parliamentary time to enact. More than one minister and MP ruefully commented that this time could have been better spent. As one minister said to me;

The hunting ban did enormous damage to Defra's credibility in the countryside. The Home Office dumped this responsibility on Defra, and Alun Michael in particular. This should not have happened – the ban should have been introduced more quickly and earlier. We let opposition build when we should have grasped the nettle. The problem was that Defra then lost its slot for other changes that needed legislative time – all very counterproductive (interview with Minister 2).

⁴⁸ Bradley attributed a strong reason for his defeat in 2005, to the work of Vote OK, and hunt supporters, because of his strong stance on the hunting issue (interview).

The modernising agenda would never appeal to countryside traditionalists and forthright opposition to New Labour was to be expected. However the government did not handle the hunting ban well and its tactics allowed opponents to spin out the legislative process, and gain traction, which might have been prevented if a more speedy resolution had occurred (Woods 2008b). Much of this was due to Blair's own equivocation (2010, interview with MP 7). This stymied other attempts to modernise the countryside and side-lined rural matters.

Issue-based opposition

New Labour's skeletal programme for the countryside in 1997 was given more flesh as time passed. However as that programme developed and the countryside became worthy of greater government attention so did the possibility of conflict over certain policies and their delivery.

One of the most contentious policy areas was housing in rural areas and especially the drive substantially to raise the number of houses built. Prescott's plan to push for an additional 4.4m homes over two decades energised counter-urbanisation elements in the countryside (Balchin & Rhoden 2002, Lund 2002, Mullins & Murie 2006, Satsangi et al 2010, Simpkins 2005). Rural Labour MPs found this a very difficult issue to deal with (interview with MP 2). On the one hand there was a strong argument for more affordable homes in the countryside, but finding locations led to conflict (Best & Shucksmith 2006, Goodman 2006, Taylor 2008). As one MP said in interview;

Housing ended up as a poor issue for us. I was a big campaigner for park homes reform but the government did not want to listen. I could persuade people and groups of the need for more housing – especially affordable housing – in parts of

the constituency, and the need for housing repair in the rented sector was paramount. People were being driven out of their own villages. However there was little joined-up government policy, and we seemed to seek out unnecessary confrontation (interview with MP 6).

Similar conflicts arose over other issues such the right to roam where the government got stuck between those who wanted much more land to walk on, and landowners who wishes to limit access (Curry 2005, Parker & Ravenscroft 2001). This did result in considerable delay in the introduction of the coastal path access (Defra 2009c).

Modernising public services in rural areas played for high stakes. Whilst rarely at the front end of reform, changes to education, health, and employment support in the countryside often caused a dramatic reaction. Many MPs and ministers interviewed referred to having to face down large protests over reforms to schooling, hospitals, and even loss of job centres. The problem was that unlike in urban settings MPs in rural areas often had to stand alone against these protests, or seek to accommodate the wishes of protestors and then run counter to government policy. Neither made for an easy life and often was damaging electorally as issues became toxic (interviews with MPs 2 & 10, Practitioner 42; Allen 2009, Brown 2003, Hall 2003, Mays & Dixon 2011, Mays & Tan 2012, Newman 2002, Paton 2008, Ritchie L & Robinson 1998). As one practitioner interviewee argued;

Health brought out the insensitivity of New Labour to rural needs. There was little understanding of the value of community hospitals and what they meant to those communities. At least I was able, with others, to stop the onset of

Polyclinics in the countryside, after talking to Lord Darzi. This would have led to a raft of further closures of those hospitals, with little benefit to rural areas (interview with Practitioner 9).

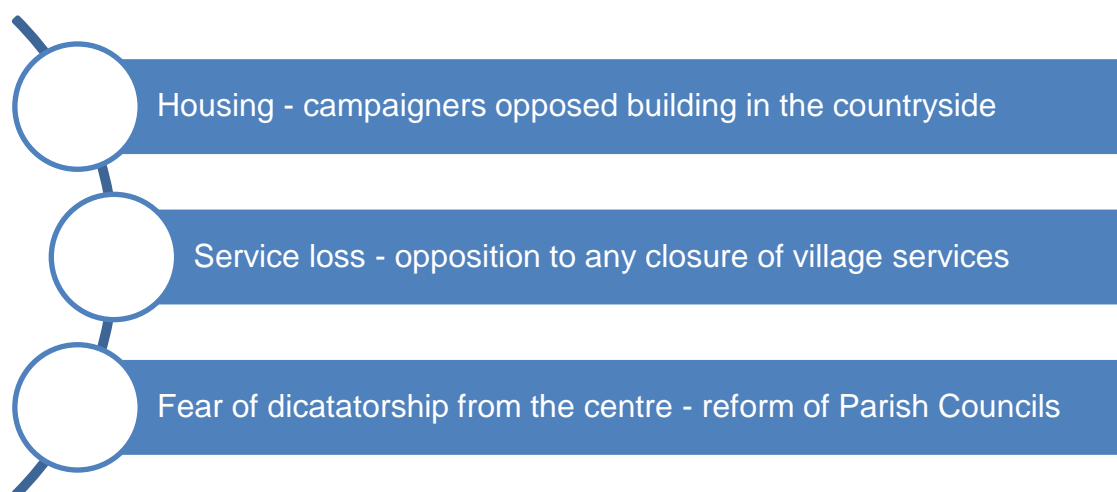
Policy U-turns, mistakes and opposition groups

The third grouping which grew disenchanted with New Labour arose because of disagreement with a policy or opposition to arguments over the performance of New Labour in rural communities as shown in Figure 7.7. Inevitably all governments make mistakes and policies can go awry, partly self-inflicted, but also due to the natural turn of events. Such was the plight of New Labour in the countryside.

The confrontations over maintaining the rural postal network has demonstrated that. Allied to unpopular closure programmes the lack of progress on devising a viable business model for rural post offices encouraging them to take on greater financial responsibilities reflected doubts about the network as a whole (interviews with Practitioners 17 & 43; Midgley 2005, Pollitt 2002, Shucksmith 2003, Wilson 2006). However it also demonstrated an unwillingness to confront other financial players, especially the banks. As one practitioner in interview argued;

The loss of Post Offices in rural areas meant that the community hub idea was stillborn. Sadly this showed a lack of concern by ministers – when there was evidence of demand for services and a willingness of the Post Office nationally to spearhead this as a way of modernising the role of post offices. It displayed the timidity of New Labour when faced with the intransigence of the banks who didn't want post offices as competitors, even though many of the customers concerned did not, would not, or could not, be catered for by banks (interview with Practitioner 31).

Figure 7.7 – Groups which turned against New Labour on Specific Issues



Source: Author

The removal of resources for the many and varied initiatives that the Countryside Agency pioneered led to annoyance, distrust and dismay (Lowe & Ward 2007, Ward 2012). Councils, who had used the funding to invest in minibuses and other community vehicles, were left high and dry when the revenue support was withdrawn. Service users felt similarly let down. In Stroud, the Village Link project (which was an interactive bus service whereby rural residents could pre-book a place on a community service vehicle which would take them to a mainline bus route) was peremptorily withdrawn, with resultant anger being totally explicable. Such tales were commonplace amongst MPs and trying to defend the policy vacuum that followed was impossible.

The Quality Parish Council scheme previously mentioned was evidence of a modernising brush that swept in new attitudes and opportunities. Whilst supported at national level by NALC and the Society of Local Council Clerks, this manifestation did not always translate to the grass roots of parish councils (Lowe & Ward 2001, Pearce & Ellwood 2002, Pratchett 1999, Skelcher 2003). The main reason was that

the bar set for councils to achieve quality status was too high in terms of training, auditing, and democratic⁴⁹ requirements, which was beyond many councils' capability and seen as an imposition. A later move to compel councils to introduce a statutory code of conduct before local councillors could take office compounded the sense that New Labour did not understand the voluntary nature of such bodies and used modernisation as a fig leaf for greater control of councils.

The common theme in this category of opposition to New Labour's modernisation was its pragmatic rather than ideological nature. Much of it resulted from expectations being dashed, policies being peremptorily altered, or funding withdrawn. The consequence may not have mattered in the individual case but collectively it led to the accusation of an uncaring government out of touch with the countryside and possessing of dubious competence (interview with Labour Activists 3).

7.3 The successes and failures of New Labour's modernisation, in rural areas

What were New Labour's successes?

New Labour's rural agenda was not easily presentable as a modernising one. Nevertheless within the interstices of the various programmes, policies and projects it was possible to interpret two clear achievements of New Labour's rural demarche. These were the benefits of novelty in how New Labour approached rural policy-making, and political activity, and secondly, the advantages of having created a new basis for structure and agency in the countryside.

⁴⁹ The aim was for Parish Councils to be made up fully of elected representatives rather than through co-opting when vacancies arose. However getting people to stand for office was a perennial problem and a costly one for the Councils themselves.

The benefits of novelty

New Labour came to power with few ideas on how to approach rural policy, and little apparent interest in the countryside. The government's programme was predicated upon the premise that it was elected to modernise the British state (Driver & Martell 2006, Finlayson 2003, Hindmoor 2004). Alongside the recognition of the value of the market to catalyse change in the public sector, New Labour was prepared to experiment with management styles which encouraged different attitudes towards government. Rather than devise its own methodological practices, New Labour saw the advantage of new styles of public management (Boyne et al 2001, Cutler & Waine 2000, Ferlie et al 1996, Lane 2000, Siltala 2013)

After the two year moratorium on increased public spending lapsed New Labour was able to develop an interest in rural policy with fewer inhibitions. Driven by events, principally the need for a response to the opposition exploitation of the hunting ban, and the incipient crises that regularly seemed to afflict the countryside, (first BSE, then, FMD), New Labour had to set about a comprehensive reform of rural policy through the Rural White Paper (Donaldson et al 2006, Greer 2003, Jasonoff 1997).

First and foremost, for the period 1999 – 2004 New Labour seemed only too willing to act as a traditional social democratic government in the countryside. The answer to the identified problems was intervention through government and increased public spending. This included invigorating the welfare state in rural areas, albeit in tandem with a modernisation of public services (Lavalette & Mooney 1999, Lister 2001, Mooney & Law 2007). Yet the background to New Labour's new-found enthusiasm for the rural was more nuanced and novel than was initially recognised.

For instance the creation of the Countryside Agency not only acted as the stimulus for a raft of initiatives in the field of social engagement but also triggered interest in landscape, biodiversity, and protection of the natural environment. The height of these endeavours was the designation of the two new National Parks.

The government's willingness to take on unpopular causes such as rural homelessness and poverty during this period reinforced the view that New Labour had found a purpose – one that it was happy to pursue in parallel with its urban programme. Its support of reforms to councils, to new forms of governance, and new ways of working, further accelerated the notion that New Labour was genuinely going to govern for the whole country including the countryside, even if this meant taking on opponents (Faucher-King & Le Gales 2010). It was also about consolidating the position of rural Labour MPs, who found themselves in the novel situation of being welcomed rather than shunned by rural communities – especially on the back of agreed improvements to countryside facilities. As Bradley said to me;

The 2001 general election proved two things. That the countryside was not off-limits to Labour MPs and that those MPs were in touch with their rural communities after years of being ignored by other Parties (interview with Bradley).

New Structure and Agency

The countryside had long been associated with hierarchical systems of operation. MAFF, which notionally at least was the rural ministry, functioned as a command and control organisation since its inception in the late nineteenth century (interview with Academic 8; Self & Storing 1962). Other facets of rural, diffused as they were

amongst many ministries, and other parts of government, tended to have policy and its implementation dictated to it.

With the formation of the Countryside Agency there was an attempt made radically to reform traditional structures and look to bring in new agents in order to facilitate different modes of performance. The idea was to create new networks, similar to what was being tried in urban settings, to encourage greater participation and active citizenship (Barnes et al 2004, Bevir 2005, Clarence & Painter 1998, Marsden & Murdoch 1998, Murdoch 2000). In this way popular themes of community, governance and neighbourhood were tied together by networks, and this transcended into rural regeneration (Osborne et al 2004). Localism, rather than being at odds with globalisation, could exist alongside it (Cerny & Evans 2004, L'Hote 2010, Watson & Hay 2003).

What was different about rural was that many networks already existed, albeit informally using the vehicle of voluntarism rather than reliance upon market-solutions. This built upon the idea of developing partnerships, both within and across sectors, and put a heavy emphasis on externalised policy-making, (outside of government directly), to maintain New Labour's partiality for decentralised ways of working and joined-up government (Bevir 2005, Clark 2002, Newman 2001). The government's essential discourse was post-modernist having recognised the discrete nature of much of the rural world and the inevitability of lateral decision-making that accompanied that, if not challenging centres of power and influence (Ollman 2001).

In this regard New Labour acted counter-intuitively negating the view of the OECD (2011) and others that England was just an urban country. Instead it sought to use new institutions like the Countryside Agency to engender change through a rural lens

that pictured a modernised rural economy and society as part of a vibrant modern countryside and a competition state (interview with Civil Servant 3; Cerny 1997, Cerny & Evans 2000, Hay 2004a).

The capture of the voluntary sector was crucial to this and became a compact in name and purpose (interview with Minister 1; Fyfe 2005, Haugh & Kitson 2007, Lewis 2005, Morison 2000, Osborne & McLaughlin 2004, Ross & Osborne 1999).

This was largely because the government wanted to tread gently so as not to raise unnecessary hackles and thus ruled-out wholesale marketisation, but also *realpolitik*, in that there would never be the same market opportunities in the countryside. This appealed, at least to some prominent in the rural voluntary sector. As one practitioner interviewee reflected;

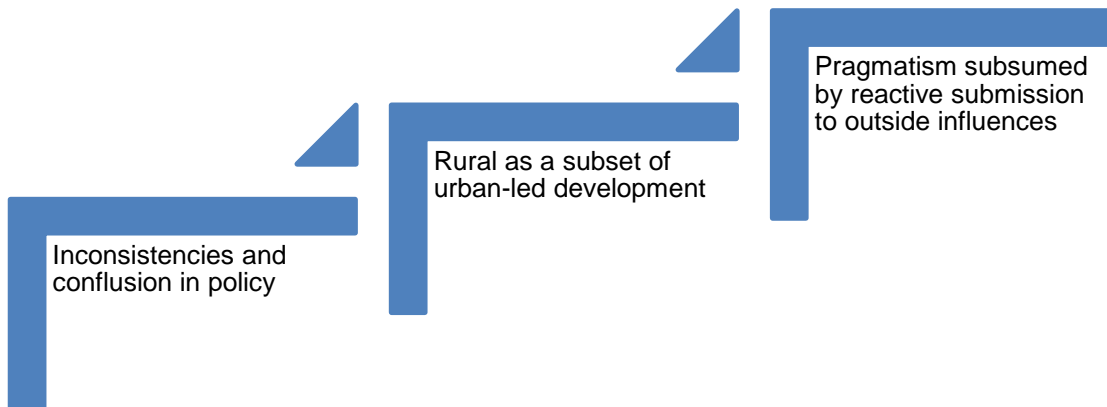
Recognising the role of Rural Community Councils was brilliant. It brought the voluntary sector right into the middle of rural policy-making, empowering Parish Councils and giving volunteers a real boost, making them realise that they could run and be responsible for vital rural assets such as the village hall. The difference from what previously existed was that funding possibilities now existed (interview with Practitioner 16).

What were the failings?

As much as there were some obvious plus points to New Labour's modernising crusade in the countryside, there were, somewhat inevitably and certainly over time, a number of critical failures. These were three fundamental fissures that developed as the government's tenure in office became shakier. Three were; inconsistencies and confusion in policy; rural gradually became a subset of urban-led developments;

and pragmatism subsumed by reactive submission to outside influences shown in the Figure 7.8 below.

Figure 7.8 – Three Failings of New Labour’s Rural Policy



Source: Author

Inconsistencies and confusion in policy

Much of New Labour’s modernising agenda in rural England suffered from short-termism, policy about-turns, language enigmas, and inadequacies in commissioning and implementation (Pollitt 2007). The distinct time periods which contextualised the New Labour operation in the countryside – were played out against this backcloth.

From 1999-2004 when there was an impetus behind policy development, the Countryside Agency was prominent, and rural had exercised a degree of wider traction over government. Under this guise rural was integrationist, involved active advocacy, was better defined, reached out more, and was better governed (Woods 2008e). After that, many of the exciting initiatives that had earmarked the government’s willingness to engage with rural were truncated and little was put in their place. However, government inconsistencies surfaced even during the intensive period of rural involvement. Of particular importance was the degree to

which New Labour was genuinely a decentralising influence or whether there was always a tendency to revert to a centralising approach (see Chapter Six: Cruickshank 2009, DTLR 2001, Powell 2004, Pratchett 2004, Stoker 2004a&b). This was exemplified by health, postal services and employment policies, which were subject to regular alteration by central diktat, a situation made worse by occasional over-selling of the true value of what had been accomplished (interview with Practitioner 5; Seldon 2007). New Labour's tortuous use of language in the missives it sent out to rural local authorities often exacerbated these difficulties, being unsympathetic to the nature of rural communities.

Too often those commissioned to oversee and manage change were given insufficient support, and not allowed enough time to carry through their duties before resources were cut. This situation caused resentment amongst rural communities and a loss of confidence in New Labour's motives, performance and true understanding of the countryside. It was the illusion rather than the reality of change and improvement (interview with Civil Servant 3; Ellison & Ellison 2006, Fenwick & Elcock 2004, Geddes et al 2007)

Ministers were regularly accused of a lack of leadership – not helped by regular reshuffling and institutional flux, especially the abolition of the Countryside Agency. This consolidated the feeling in the minds of rural communities that the government's grip was failing and its interest waning (interview with Practitioner 2). This lack of leadership was clearly demonstrated in the government's unwillingness to face up to the relevance of social class in the countryside, and the continuing power of rural elites (Abram 1998, Hoggart 2007, Phillips 2007, Shucksmith 2012, Woods 1998).

Rural modernisation – a subset of urban models

The second failing was that rural modernisation was too often the result of urban-inspired thinking rather than being self-standing and self-originated. The exception to this was the social democratic period, but after that and even towards the end of 2003/4 it became obvious that rural had again become subservient to urban. This meant that policies and strategies were not sufficiently sensitive to rural needs (Greener 2004). As one practitioner associated with a rural SureStart Centre said to me;

We were the only rural centre in phase one in this county. This meant that the bulk of the effort went into the urban areas. Much of the advice, and the back-up materials were written to comply with urban standards, and only partly adapted for a rural scenario. Often we were on our own, and we had to break the back of the project work – as there was no one with the knowledge and skills for rolling out pre-school provision in the countryside. This was a pity as SureStart was still a brilliant initiative, and with greater planning could have been as important in rural as urban areas in time (interview with Practitioner 8).

This undermined the early benefit obtained from the PIU enquiry 'Rural Economies' (1999) when rural seemed to have achieved a status under New Labour. However, it was symbolic that the Policy Action Teams, and the Social Exclusion Unit that followed the PIU, took almost an entirely urban-focus to their work⁵⁰ (Johnson & Osborne 2003). What recommendations that did carry across rarely had the feel of being rural initiated. Additionally only a small number of rural communities were able

⁵⁰ There were 18 PATs, none of which related to rural. In terms of membership there was only one civil servant from MAFF in the totality of the membership of all the PATs.

to gain direct benefit from the modernising penumbra associated with being in an action zone or neighbourhood renewal area (Barnes et al 2004, Clarence & Painter 1998, Foley & Martin 2000, Lister 2001, Painter & Clarence 2001). Despite rural proofing and mainstreaming rural, policy-development was heavily skewed towards the cities and conurbations (interview with Academic 5; Atterton 2008, Fahmy et al, 2004 Lowe & Ward 1998, Rewhorn 2014). If anything regionalism cemented the view that rural reform was dependent upon what happened in urban settings and rural was an afterthought. As one academic in interview lamented;

Regionalism rather than encouraging decentralism seemed to do the opposite – New Labour used it as an opportunity to reassert its control from the centre. And rural became even further from the levers of power (interview with Academic 2).

From 2004 onwards with the centre having grown in the ascendancy, the predicament of rural was further aggravated by the loss of confidence in new thinking. Double devolution came and went, and with that ideas which excited those who wanted to update and improve rural governance seemed to go too. Proposals that involved social enterprise, mutuality and cooperation which appeared ideally suited to parts of rural England were ignored or dispensed with (interview with Practitioner 18). The mood for experimentation had passed and so had the time for radical modernisation. Brown replacing Blair merely heightened the feeling of policy and strategy desuetude, and rural communities became more disengaged. What change that did occur gave a greater role to the market and a lesser one to the state.

Pragmatism and reactivity to outside influence

New Labour prided itself on careful political positioning in order not to alienate itself from other centres of power. Therefore it jealously guarded its relationship with business as well as trade unions, individuals and communities. Likewise it felt it could represent an aspirant middle class as well as be the Party for the less well off. In this it kept its predilection for the Third Way (see pages 32 – 33).

What it was not good at was withstanding pressure from organised lobbying, particularly by business interests. This was nothing new – most predecessor governments' agriculture policies had been heavily influenced by the effective intercession by the NFU. What transpired was modernisation that was strongly influenced by the activities of certain organisations, and influential individuals (Ball & Exley 2010, Schlesinger 2009). For instance the decision to move to shut small cottage hospitals was heavily influenced by lobbying from large urban-centred Hospital Trusts. It was a similar case with the move to an area-based Single Farm Payments Scheme, the result of intervention by the Country Landowners and Business Association (CLA). Some interviewees suggested that this was Blair acquiescing as a quid pro quo for the upset caused by the hunting ban and the introduction of the right to roam (interviews with Ministers 2 & 4 & Practitioner 15; Rowe 1998, The Economist 2001 & 2004). The problem was that the impact that it had on rural was either not factored in, or discounted, further marginalising it.

There was a similar feeling about housing development with a strong opinion amongst those rural communities threatened by predatory housing developers that the government had bowed to the developer wishes (interview with Labour Activist 3). That modernisation required large housing developments was evident, though

housing needs in rural areas required more affordable and social housing, rather than just more market-driven homes. Where there was not the same force of lobby, over an issue such as rural deprivation, the government was far less forthcoming in taking a robust stand.

The for and against checklist

There is no easy way of off-setting the accomplishments of New Labour's reform agenda against the failures that occurred. However, it is possible to recognise that modernisation in the countryside was contextualised by both time and spatial pressures, that this had a substantial influence on what transpired, and how New Labour's performance was accordingly constrained. Many of these obstacles predated New Labour. What made the New Labour era that much more difficult to assess was the fact that modernisation was seen as synonymous with the purpose behind New Labour's existence and therefore by the end of its time in power there should have been tangible signs of what it had achieved in this respect in the countryside.

If this was to be the only yardstick, then New Labour's period of office in the countryside was one of failure. However this is to deny the successes, minor in the main, but nevertheless to the government's credit, in the fields of child care provision, new and better forms of rural governance, and a whole series of initiatives in villages and small towns. The disappointment was that many of those initiatives were not sustained or built upon.

7.4 To what extent did modernisation have a key part to play in New Labour's approach to policy-making and politics in rural areas and how important was it to the government's bigger picture?

Modernisation of the rural economy and society was never as important to New Labour as in its urban programme, and what changes that occurred were mainly concentrated within the period 1999 – 2004. This was partly because of the different priorities of the countryside but also because the government's modernisation of the countryside derived from very disparate motivations. This was evinced by the limited emphases placed upon forging change in rural areas in manifestos, policies, programmes and delivery mechanisms and by the suspicion that New Labour calculated that it had only to respond to the pressures brought about by hunting and FMD, and that once it had seen them off it could re-locate countryside issues into the low priority order box (Larsen et al 2006).

In exploring research question Four the findings suggests that modernisation was a far less important as a theme in the countryside than in the country as a whole. However, to make this stark assessment is to deny what happened between 1999 and 2004 when modernisation of the countryside was a live topic and New Labour did make considerable inroads into changing the countryside in a direction that it felt was appropriate. The 2000 White Paper and the activities of the Countryside Agency at that time highlight what was possible for New Labour to achieve had it the will. That it failed to do so was the result of temporal and spatial circumstances bound up in research question Five.

The problem came from 2004 onwards when New Labour saw little purpose in persevering with its interest in the countryside, let alone prioritising a reform agenda

there (interview with Academic 1; Ward & Lowe 2007a&b). To explain why this was so says a great deal about New Labour, its objectives, and how it carried them through. In some respects, given that New Labour had chanced upon its interest in the rural its turn away from it was not a surprise.

However this again is to misunderstand what New Labour had achieved and why the disappointment of those interested in rural affairs was all the greater. Having believed that new Labour was different, going a long way towards the modernisation of the countryside would have been a considerable legacy to leave behind.

Much of the quandary about why rural was different from the rest of the country, and why the period 1999 – 2004 stood out, was that New Labour's response during that period was really social democratic. The response to the attacks on the government due to the unpopularity it faced in parts of the countryside was to be avowedly interventionist. This involved spending money on programmes and projects, working with the grain of community empowerment using the rural voluntary sector as partners and making adjustments to policy areas such as housing, health, transport, governance and service provision that would generate support and enthusiasm for its efforts.

Arguably New Labour's countryside policy was radical during that period – it was just that it did not compare with what was happening elsewhere in the country with the rush towards the competition state and the indifference to the further hollowing out of the state (Cerny et al 2005, Holliday 2000, Rhodes 1994 & 1997, Skelcher 2000). It was unashamedly populist and unlike in urban England the modernism it pursued in the countryside was community-driven rather than market-driven (Clarke & Newman

2007, Gilbert 2004, Hall (Stephen) 2003). This did not make it any less novel or exciting.

The problem was that this approach was transitory. Once Haskins' had reported and Defra had acquired its own dominance over policy-formulation in the newly designed Rural Strategy (2004a), then rural policy was subjected to the dominance of urban-centred solutions, and novelty was abandoned in place of safety-first, cost-effective and risk averse schema.

Other factors combined to make rural less important. Rather than encouraging a greater focus on rural the growth of regionalism and the role of the RDAs made it appear as even more marginal in terms of the government's outcomes (interview with Practitioners 1 & 31). This damaged the potential for experimentation as budgets were further squeezed, and there was little enthusiasm for making modernising rural areas a key plank in most RDAs' priorities. This negated one of the central arguments of Haskins' who had advocated that rural should be an important responsibility of RDAs, which he even later admitted was a failing of the outcome of his Review (interview with Haskins).

Therefore it was not just rural policy that took a backward step after 2004, but the crucial part that modernising policy in the countryside could play in energising and enthusing rural communities. The direction of travel with the greater emphasis upon economic renewal and market-centred solutions was just no substitute for what had been sacrificed in drawing back from the period of social democratic intervention.

Chapter 8 - Conclusion – New Labour and its approach to the countryside -

Was a social democratic moment achieved and foregone?

8.1 Assessment of the research questions

This thesis has one core aim that has been explored through five research questions. The aim has been critically to evaluate New Labour's approach to politics and the policy framework in the countryside during its years in power by examination of the role of key actors around a hypothesis that investigated some specific themes. The thesis has pursued an analysis that there was a social democratic moment during the New Labour era and sought to discover why this occurred and why this was only a temporary phenomenon. To re-iterate the five research questions, they are;

1. To what extent did New Labour's success in the 1997 general election translate into a greater interest in rural policy and political development in the countryside?
2. How did the reputation of New Labour as an urban construct affect its relationship with the countryside, and impact upon the government's ability to undertake rural policy-making and delivery?
3. In terms of New Labour's strategic approach in what ways did the tension between (a) centralisation and decentralisation and (b) externalisation and internalisation of power impact upon policy-making and delivery in the countryside?

4. In what ways did New Labour's wider strategy of modernisation of the state have an impact on rural areas and how important were these themes in rural policy and political activity?

5. To what extent was New Labour's approach to the countryside affected by both temporal events and spatial awareness, and how did this affect the manner of policy-making and delivery, and the political context within which it was operating?

Section 8.1 summarises the findings about these research questions before examining the extent to which those questions have helped explain how New Labour functioned in the countryside. *Section 8.2* examines the extent to which the study objectives have been met. The penultimate section, *Section 8.3*, critically evaluates the role of the researcher, given the nature of my embedded position during this period of history, and finally, *Section 8.4*, makes some recommendations of future areas for research, which will amplify the understanding of New Labour, its relationship to the countryside, and how this links with possible enquiries into progressive politics in the context of rural areas.

Research Question One – To what extent did New Labour's success in the 1997 general election translate into a greater interest in rural policy and political development in the countryside?

The research evidence for this question is clear. New Labour won a great many rural seats in 1997, only to lose virtually all of them by 2010, mainly to the Conservatives. The only seats they retained were traditional Labour rural seats, such as Bassetlaw, Bishop Auckland, Bolsover, North West Durham and West

Lancashire, (largely former mining communities), or some rural-suburban seats such as Gedling, or more industrialised rural areas like Chorley.

This thesis has argued that New Labour had no rural programme worth talking about in 1997, and left office in 2010 having left little lasting footprint in rural areas.

As was commented upon by an MP, and a Labour Activist, in interviews;

I was a so-called key seat in 1997, as I was in 1992 when I lost. Though I was a rural key seat, you might have thought that this gave me some particular characteristics. The fact was I was treated like every other key seat, throughout my candidacies, with no special targeting because I was in a rural area (interview with MP 7).

I was involved in a publication called 'Reforming Labour' published in 2001, as part of the Labour Reform pressure group. Part of our rationale was that Labour could win in rural seats, if more effort was made, and policies tweaked to appeal to rural voters. Rural areas have the same problems as urban Britain, and certainly have its areas of deprivation. Rural Labour Parties felt undervalued and activists were always being told to go and work in the nearest key seat. Because of this our constituency could never build up membership, undertake campaigning activities and get representatives elected, which was so disappointing. When we lost office in 2010 we were no further forward than we had been in the 1990s. This was a total lost opportunity demonstrating that the national leadership just didn't get rural (interview with Labour Rural Activist 3).

Yet this does not tell the whole story of the impact made by New Labour's increased representation, and how that impacted upon rural policy and politics, especially between 1999 – 2004.

In a sense New Labour's victory in 1997 led accidentally to a rural hegemony, such was the scale of the landslide in the countryside as elsewhere. Chapter Four has suggested that the number of seats won was exaggerated – indeed Bradley's claim that there were 180 rural seats is now disavowed by Bradley himself – but the implications of that rural representation cannot easily be dismissed (interview with Bradley).

Much academic opinion substantiates the importance of the change in rural matters, psychologically and culturally, as well as politically and socially (Ward 2008c, Ward & Lowe 2007a&b, Woods 2008e). The wealth of evidence from so many of the practitioner respondents that there was a new mood afoot in rural areas even before 1999 points to the potential paradigm shift that was underway.

New Labour's rural policy has been divided up into three distinct periods. From 1997 until 1999 when little happened, largely because of the moratorium on increased expenditure, from 1999 until 2004, when rural policy was at its height, and from 2004 onwards when there was a rapid decline.

Chapter Four identifies two major reasons for New Labour's volte-face in 1999 from comparative disinterest in the countryside to one of active involvement. First, the response was the epitome of a pragmatic reaction to the events of the time, with first the hunting debate and then FMD dominating not just the countryside, but national politics. To intervene in the countryside was both a clever way to build opinion and hegemony against opponents but also a strategy by government to fill the vacuum

left by the demise of the Conservatives. In addition it was classic Blairism – if a problem arose, fix it before it escalated into a full-blown crisis. Thus Campbell’s diaries are replete with descriptions of how New Labour tried to deal with the FMD outbreak by throwing resources at it, first, for the containment of the outbreak, and second, to overcome the aftermath, by offering (over-generous) compensation packages to those affected (Campbell 2011).

The second reason was that the increased number of Labour backbenchers was both a symbolic and practical way in which New Labour could demonstrate its new-found authority in the countryside. Chapter Four argues that this was a significant departure from Old Labour and though it proved to be transient, for some years it was a powerful influence on how New Labour governed in the countryside.

This influence took a number of different forms: the evolution of legislative, institutional, funding and system changes; acting as conduit for dialogue between the government and all manner of rural organisations;⁵¹ and developing a discourse on rural matters in Parliament through debates, questions and committee activity, and outside, as a channel for Party opinion on rural. These links were referred to regularly by interviewees as being a major contributor to better mutual understanding, and an effective way in which ideas could be progressed. As one practitioner in interview said to me:

⁵¹ This dialogue took on some surprising twists and turns. Organisations as diverse as the National Association of Small Schools, ACRE, for Rural Community Councils, the f40 campaign for the poorest funded Education Authorities, all found in rural areas, and the Rural Services Network all had strong links with Rural Group Of Labour MPs. Even more bizarre the Countryside Alliance kept the door open to the Rural Group, an arrangement helped by the fact that the majority of members of the Alliance’s executive were card-carrying members of the Labour Party, including the Chairman John Jackson, and the CEO Richard Burge for most of the early years of the Alliance’s existence.

What Labour backbenchers did was to get issues that were so far off the beaten track into the government's agenda, whether that was biodiversity, conservation, rural regeneration or countryside planning. This may not have affected the big picture of government but at local level it was of vital significance and for the first time asked questions of agri-environmental schemes, and the public benefit of the countryside. This was as much about politics as hunting ever was and those who expedited this process should be properly credited (interview with Practitioner 32).

New Labour also did much to develop better understanding of what was meant by the term 'rural'. Commissioning the research work by Bibby and Shepherd (2004) was an important indication of intent that the government would use an evidence-based approach having first researched the data in order to get a better understanding of the rural milieu, to permit drilling-down into what really happened in the countryside. This made the Countryside Agency, and then Defra, a repository for detailed knowledge of the rural landscape and gave a comparative advantage when it came to dealing with other Departments or third parties.

The fact that this stage in the development of rural policy was transitory as social democratic moment faded after 2004, should not underestimate what was achieved. As Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven demonstrate, the nature of policies, the way in which they were carried out, and the praise they received in at least part of the countryside was an important legacy. This made it all the more disappointing that the turn against 'rural' was as dramatic as the original turn itself. Much criticism has been placed at the door of Haskins and his review (Ward 2008a&b), though there were other doubts highlighted by interviewees about whether the upswing in rural enthusiasm would last.

The loss of key proponents for rural matters within government (Michael, Meacher, Tipping), and within the Rural Group (Bradley, Kidney, Mountford and Pickthall) all contributed to help downgrade rural. After Alun Michael had been moved there was less support for rural than there had been in the dark days of MAFF, where at least Cunningham, Rooker and Morley were keen exponents of the need for a proper rural strategy (interview with Minister 4). Of these, the loss of the drive of Michael from the post of Rural Affairs Minister was the most damaging development and from his departure onwards there was no dominant voice for rural in government (interview with Civil Servant 7).

As much as personalities, structures and institutional change played their part. It was also true that the government just ran out of steam where rural policy was concerned and increasingly had less presence to be able to make much difference on the ground. This was partly the nature of what vicissitudes in the countryside involved – longer-term consistent policy-making was required when most of New Labour's efforts were initiatives, projects or time-limited experiments.

Representation could go only part way to covering the cracks in the lack of holistic approach and the partial take-up of programmes in places. This was particularly because the monies grew much tighter after 2004, and New Labour had done little to really challenge the fundamentals of the countryside. This was no more clearly evinced than by the failures over affordable housing and accessible transport (interviews with Practitioners 5, 44 & 45 & interview with Civil Servant 4). The goodwill created by the activities of Labour backbenchers soon dissipated as a result.

It was the combination of these factors of lack of clear strategy, declining funding streams and fall in activity, allied to the loss of representation, that undermined and

eventually defeated the case for intervention in the countryside and left New Labour just as hamstrung as previous administrations.

Research Question Two – How did the reputation of New Labour as an urban construct affect its relationship with the countryside, and impact upon the government’s ability to undertake rural policy-making and delivery?

New Labour came into power with little history of interest in rural matters. More particularly its new-found legitimacy in the countryside came on the back of politicians who rarely had a background in rural affairs, and whose experiences were largely derived from urban experiences as councillors, trade unionists, political advisers or community activists. Even the Rural Group, and especially its leadership, was made up of individuals who had cut their political teeth outside of rural areas (interview with Bradley).

Therefore the government had no great rural expertise to call upon, and no pressing desire to involve itself with the countryside other than as the recipient of nationally-driven policies. Some of these had enormous positive repercussions for the countryside, the national minimum wage for example, and the residue for some changes that might prove of specific benefit to rural areas, such as the protection of the village branch post office network.

This lack of ambition identified in the 1997 manifesto (See Appendix 3) was partly the result of a disconnect with the countryside, and an insouciance about whether the countryside really mattered to New Labour, and a much greater expectation of its performance in urban centres, let alone the pressures of keeping an urban-dominated Party on board. One Parliamentary Candidate said to me;

Labour didn't set out to appeal to rural voters because it saw itself as an urban-inclined Party. Therefore the messages, materials and campaigns don't resonate with rural voters. The only way to overcome this is both to talk and act about issues that really matter in the countryside - affordable housing, better transport and green technology bespoke to the countryside (interview with Rural Activist 5 who was also a Parliamentary Candidate in rural constituencies 2005 & 2010).

What changed New Labour's attitude to rural areas was the confluence of events, and the realisation of unique opportunities presented to it. However there was a gradual comprehension that urban and rural were not necessarily opposite ends of a continuum, but locations that needed, and flourished, from each other. This was explained in the seminal work of Schoon (2001) which encapsulated how the urban-rural interface was mutually beneficial and has been widely explored by other academics (Allen 2003, Cloke 2006, Gallent & Andersson 2007, Harper 1987, Masuda & Garvin 2008, McCarthy 2007, Soini et al 2012, Tacoli 1998, Woods 2009). It became apposite because of New Labour's structural reforms including the drive towards regionalism (Hall & Stern 2009, Hamin & Marcucci 2008, Horlings & Marsden 2014).

Between 1999 and 2004 the transformation that occurred was both an example of New Labour reacting to events and pursuing a pragmatic line on rural issues. However the nature of the policy-mix and the evidence from interviewees demonstrates that New Labour went much further than might have been expected, if this was purely a cynical attempt to fool opponents and build temporary alliances.

New Labour, as Chapter Five critically explains, embarked upon a fundamental shift in orientation from being driven mainly by urban characteristics to one where rural mattered and derived its own field of activity. This combined institutional radicalism in the creation of the Countryside Agency accompanied other institutional and service reform in rural areas. The Rural White Paper (2000) instigated the introduction of policies including far-sighted ones such as rural proofing.

This forced a major reassessment of New Labour from some countryside campaigners who had traditionally only seen the Party as bolting on rural to urban. As one practitioner averred in conversation with me;

There was so much that was good that came from the early period following the creation of the Countryside Agency. So many bright ideas were encapsulated in the thinking of the time, and the Agency was given an annual budget of £100m and many more staff to operate with. People really wanted rural to work, and work in an integrated manner with localised decision-making and transferable models of good practice. Being around this was very exciting and we seemed to have everyone from the PM downwards on our side (interview with Practitioner 31).

The willingness of the government, Countryside Agency, and others in the employ of the state to delve into fields of rural disadvantage including homelessness, worklessness, and the difficulties caused by remoteness, was laudable. Though this paralleled what was going on in the urban sphere, most of the work was bespoke and drew up different schedules of activity than that prepared for the cities (Bambra & Popham 2010, Cloke et al 2001 & 2002, Dwyer & Hardill 2011, Green et al 2013,

Milbourne & Cloke 2006, Townsend et al 2013, Webster 2006, Wiggins & Proctor 2001).

However rural largely remained a subset of national policies and most rural policies were decided not by MAFF/Defra or the Countryside Agency, but by the great ministries of state. Even if there was an element of rural proofing or a specifically rural initiative in the form of the Village Agents, rural still had very little traction over what was put in place (See Chapter Six).

This situation worsened considerably after the Haskins' Review and the introduction of the Rural Strategy. Though Haskins denied that the downgrading of rural was ever his intention that was what government read into his report and responded accordingly (interview with Haskins). After Haskins', social policy lost out to economic priorities, the market and business dominated other organisational forms, and reform was heavily constrained by financial limitations (Ward & Lowe 2007a&b). There was never a discrete change by which urban again subsumed rural, but there was a noticeable lack of interest in rural affairs from 2004 onwards with the loss of many specifically rural programmes and the ending of tailored-policies from the national to the local which took proper account of the rural element.

Defra, which Haskins' insisted should be the appropriate policy-making agency marginalised rural rather than supported it. Beckett (Secretary of State for Defra) displayed no interest in rural matters, a situation that frustrated her own team, and gave a negative signal to civil servants who could hardly advocate the case for rural when their own ministry belittled it (interview with Minister 5). As one person disappointedly admitted to me;

Whilst it may be wrong to be overly critical of Haskins himself – he was after all given a job to do though it was highly questionable whether the problems he identified needing fixing in the first place - the result was that rural had by 2004 run out of time, money and policy-wind. The Rural Strategy that followed was less clear than what had gone before and the diversion of funds to the RDAs was just plain wrong. Local authorities just couldn't fill the gap that was left with the demise of the Countryside Agency, and we were all left feeling that we had reached the end of the line (interview with Civil Servant 7).

Cuts to the civil service rural team that exacerbated the impact of the abolition of the Countryside Agency just added to a sense of drift, and the feeling that rural was no longer a good place to be (interview with Civil Servant 4). Any sense of excitement about the rural agenda had all but disappeared, and ministers who fulfilled the rural affairs responsibility as part of their brief were given little encouragement (interview with Bradley).

At the same time urbanism was reasserting itself as the primary concern of New Labour after 2004. Changes to planning, housing, and infrastructure development were heavily weighted in favour of urban. This took the form of legislative and other reforms which heavily skewed government policy in that direction. Also New Labour had become increasingly obsessed with delivery as well as the creation of policy and concentrated its efforts on four main areas; crime reduction, improving health outcomes, raising educational attainments specifically in schools and trying to sort out the traffic congestion. Each of these saw resources targeted at urban centres (Barber 2007).

Rural was hit by a pincer movement in that Defra's priority moved to reform of the CAP, partly out of the necessity of the Mid-Term Review but also at the instigation of Beckett, who saw this - alongside the climate change agenda - as being her main concerns (interview with Minister 5). Allied to that, the increasing importance of regionalism and the enhanced role for the RDAs reduced the influence of rural. This culminated in a massive reduction in the budget for rural policy which alongside the loss of the Countryside Agency and its many programmes and initiatives meant that the countryside fared badly against the urban domain for the remaining years of New Labour's period in office.

In summary, New Labour had between 1999 and 2004 established a distinctive rural policy which countered the accusation that it was purely an urban-led party and government. However by the second part of the decade the government had regressed and no longer had the same interest in rural matters. It had substantially cut the budget meaning that its earlier impact on the countryside had been short-lived and it had little legacy to fall back upon for what might have been one of the more substantial achievements of the Blair administration.

Research Question Three - In terms of New Labour's strategic approach in what ways did the tension between (a) centralisation and decentralisation and (b) externalisation and internalisation of power impact upon policy-making and delivery in the countryside?

New Labour had undertaken little research into how it would conduct itself in the countryside and what it planned to do there. Prior to gaining office in 1997 its only real interest centred upon reform of the CAP and disentangling food policy from MAFF because of the BSE scandal. New Labour had used that scandal as one of

the brickbats to attack the Major government's incompetence and was determined to make a fresh start through the setting-up of the independent Food Standards Agency (Lang 1998 & 2000, Leach 1998, Randall 2009, Wales et al 2006).

The predilection of New Labour for solutions to crises based on the reports of independent bodies was a dominant theme throughout its period in office and characterised the rural policy area on more than one occasion (Larsen et al 2006). For instance, the aftermath of foot and mouth was investigated by three independent commissions (see Chapter Four) and the Haskins' Review had at least the pretence of being autonomous of government. This was an indication of its belief in evidence-based policy-making as part of a target-driven culture (Boaz & Nutley 2009, Hood 2006, Woods 2008e). This meant that rural was not unusual in that externalised policy-making was a crucial element in how New Labour operated in the countryside.

What made the situation more complicated was that rural policy was diffused across many parts of government even after it was given its own home in Defra. Before that, though MAFF had some responsibility for rural, most of the main policies were situated across the major spending departments. MAFF, whilst it tended towards command and control decision-making (interview with Academic 8), had abdicated much of the responsibility for rural to the EU. This was a mixed blessing for although this energised the development of neo-endogenous schemes in the form of LEADER (and later LEADER +) and rural development programmes that were always in partnership with the EU, the UK was noticeably reticent in properly funding these programmes or giving them the attention they fully deserved.

The difficulty was that funding streams were based upon historic payments and as the UK had been one of the lowest funders of rural within the EU this remained the

case even though the amount allocated to rural overall was rising. This resulted in rural being a marginal player even within agricultural financial arrangements that exemplified that having a degree of freedom of manoeuvre from the centre was not always a good thing (Lowe 2006, Lowe & Ward 1998, Lowe et al 2002, Marsden & Sonnino 2008, Ward & Lowe 2004). Under Pillar Two, monies were made available for rural development and regeneration, but England still had a lower percentage of funds distributed to rural than for most other EU countries. Also most of the money was still under the aegis of agricultural support measures, so rural was further marginalised.

The decision to create the Countryside Agency was as dramatic as it was surprising. No mention of this idea had been made in the 1997 manifesto and interviewees indicated that they were taken aback at the nature and speed of the announcement (interview with Minister 6). Though it remedied the split between the human and physical countryside introduced by the post-war Labour government and was something that rural campaigners had long fought for, the move was unprecedented (interviews with Practitioners 14 & 23). That it received the support of the MAFF ministerial team demonstrated their willingness to countenance a rural affairs ministry, of which the Agency's setting up was in many ways a stepping-stone (interview with Minister 6).

Given that there is little evidence beyond these reflections by interviewees what followed was all the more interesting. Government created a major arms-length body which had responsibility for both policy-making and delivery, and for the next five years it grew into a powerful countryside advocate with a clear vision, money and people to make rurality important and different.

Whether New Labour's period of greatest involvement with the countryside between 1999 and 2004, corresponding as it did with the life span of the Countryside Agency was coincidental or otherwise, the reality was that the role of the Agency did change rural areas by creating an effective interface. It did so largely from a perspective of social democratic interventionism, experimentation and novelty which was in the image of those appointed to run it.⁵² This took many forms, but was noticeable for an emphasis upon participation, networks and partnerships that was ideally suited for many ruralities. As indicated by two of the practitioner interviewees closely associated with it;

New Labour came in, in 1997 with little idea of what to do in rural areas. It was under no pressure as metropolitan journalists shared that disinterest in the countryside. It soon became apparent that an arms-length body (alongside the new Countryside Advocate) would make a bold statement about the countryside. This could combine policy-making with delivery and even some regulation. We were given every encouragement to go out and develop policies – New Labour liked the idea of community empowerment and we even got Royal approval.....We were really only catching up with what already existed in other European countries, but the key was we were autonomous from government but accountable to it (interview with Practitioner 1).

The Agency did build on what went before, but what was different was less the freedom to operate, but the resources to be able to make a real difference

⁵² Amongst people appointed was Richard Wakeford as Chief Executive. He was seen as one of the rising stars of the civil service (Riddell 1998). Also Margaret Clark became a director of the Agency, and was a long-time advocate of greater government involvement in rural affairs.

in the countryside. For that I hold the Treasury responsible as a friend to rural, and Labour deserves an awful lot of credit for the way in which it handled the Countryside Agency in its early days (interview with Practitioner 27).

Whatever the strengths and weaknesses of the Agency, the Haskins' Review was a threat to its existence and pulled policy-making back 'in-house'. Haskins' reiterated his view that policy-making was chiefly the responsibility of ministers and that the merging of roles with implementation was a fundamental weakness of the Agency's modus operandi, allied to its loss of focus and poor management style (interview with Haskins). However he also stressed that he was a decentraliser, and given that was one of the stated principles of New Labour, the outcome from the Review was at least contradictory and confusing. This uncertainty replicated what others both within government and operating on the ground, expressed to me in interviews, and added to the dislocation that was felt after 2004 (interview with Minister 2, Practitioners 4 & 7).

Whilst it is easy to point all the blame for the turn away from rural at the door of Haskins' and in particular his disdain for the work of the Agency, there were other factors at work. Haskins' recommendations did not just justify the need for increased regionalism, a more business-friendly approach, and clear executive decision-making, but was in league with New Labour's increasing neoliberal tendency (Bevir 2003, Fuller & Geddes 2008, Newman 2001). That rural had largely escaped from that fate was more by accident than design but from 2004 onwards policy-making was much more constrained by that ideological strand (interview with MP 2, and Practitioner 36). This did not happen in one discrete move - it was rather a sequence of events - that not only marked New Labour's cooling towards rural policy

but also a move away from the social democratic interventionism that had set it apart. Indubitably the centralising of policy within Defra was a sign of weakness rather than strength, (as was pointed out by various respondents), but that again was accompanied by reduced resource, a much smaller team to administer it and a limited strategy compared to the expansive Rural White Paper. As one interviewee noted ruefully;

After 2004 rural policy was beset with problems. Abolishing the Countryside Agency had been a question of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Though the idea of an integrated agency in the form of Natural England had merit it never had the resources necessary. Also a whole raft of other problems arose at the same time – the loss of the post office subsidy, increased difficulties in introducing the right to roam, the CAP reforms, and overall it was the loss of budget that hurt us. These were rather more important than where or who made policy (interview with Civil Servant 5).

The loss of confidence of civil servants was mirrored elsewhere. The churning of ministers hardly helped the stability of the policy-making process and, given the government's increasing obsession with delivery overall, especially affecting the main departments of state, rural became even more of a bit player (interview with Practitioner 5).

Thus it was this reduction in resource rather than the locus of where policy was made which bedevilled New Labour's rural approach after 2004. What was undoubtedly true however was that the reassignment of policy-making back into the parent department did nothing to advance rural and may in due course have seriously damaged ongoing initiatives like rural proofing and mainstreaming. In this

sense the loss of the Countryside Agency, the downgrading of pledges from the Rural White Paper and the repercussions of Haskins' all compounded the perception that New Labour had lost its way where rural was concerned and had failed to live up to its own expectation as a decentralising administration, making and delivering policy where it was most appropriate and effective. The conclusion of one practitioner in interview was as follows;

Defra had no real power to effect change in the countryside, because it relied so much on other Departments....Yet New Labour missed opportunities such as it could have relied to a greater extent upon the third sector, decentralising power, and improving the exercise of that power. It withdrew from the countryside preferring to fall back upon centralised decision-making and the government became a caricature of the OECD definition that England was just an urban country (interview with Practitioner 5).

Research Question Four – In what ways did New Labour's wider strategy of modernisation of the state have an impact on rural areas and how important were these themes in rural policy and political activity?

Chapter Seven identified why modernisation was so important to New Labour and how it permeated every aspect of the government's efforts in office. The corollary was that modernisation became code not just for revisionism but for neoliberalism and for a further rolling back of the state with surrender to globalisation (Allender 2001, Bevir 2005, Cerny & Evans 2000 & 2004, Geddes 2006, Hay 1999, Lister 2003, Panitch & Leys 2001).

The chapter also highlighted why modernisation, at least for the years between 1999 and 2004, took a different path in the countryside. Whereas in urban Britain

modernisation became associated with marketisation and managerialism, in rural England the drive for change was public and voluntary sector led and was much more about enhanced provision rather than the introduction of greater competition and choice. This was partly out of necessity - there were not the same opportunities for economies of scale and growing the number of suppliers in rural settings - but also because the government adopted a different strategy in the countryside, where it was more about protecting and reshaping existing services, as pretending they could be dramatically improved by greater competition (Ward 2008c).

This is not to imagine that the hollowing-out of the state was halted in rural areas during the New Labour period. At best there was a slowing of the rate of hollowing out. However, rather confront local populations over service change, because of overarching service priorities, New Labour in the main, avoided head-on disputes, preferring alternative strategies to effect reform in the countryside. This situation did alter after 2004 when economic pressures crowded-out social concerns, but for a time the aim on the back of the Rural White Paper was to try to raise service standards to those already achieved in urban communities (interview with Minister 6). Thus in a whole range of fields this became the service norm - child care, broadband, policing, not increasing the distance from a post office, access to affordable transport are some examples of where these service standards were laid down in the White Paper, put into Countryside Agency targets, and monitored by local authorities and others. This did not mean that all closures of services were prevented but both in theory and practice there was a form of rural proofing undertaken to calculate whether there were alternatives to closure, and if not, whether some ameliorating measures could be put in place to sugar the pill (interview with MP 1). As one MP intimated in interview;

I had to accept that I couldn't prevent all closures. Of the five post offices earmarked to shut under Network Change I could only argue for the retention of two of them. Of two village primary schools down for closure because of insufficient numbers neither deserved to stay open, but one did because of a vigorous campaign by pushy middle-class parents. Sometimes as an MP you had to manage expectations, and do what you believe was right in your heart, even if this was not popular (interview with MP 4).

In this sense modernisation in the countryside was much less about choice and diversity – the watchwords of New Labour elsewhere – and more about security and improvement, providing services where none previously existed and uplifting existing provision to be nearer to what was acceptable elsewhere. This pursuit of more equitable distribution of increased resources was crucial – which is why once the tap was tightened, if not turned off completely, rural policy went into decline after 2004.

There were exceptions to this – some parts of the countryside by dint of location were part of action zones or neighbourhood renewal areas, and so faced the same competitive pressures as the rest of the place where they were situated (Asthana et al 2002, Foley & Martin 2000, Painter & Clarence 2001). However in the main the countryside was rarely at the front end of New Labour experimentation, and so did not experience the same tensions that some of these programmes caused. Instead the countryside was usually several phases removed, and so was spared the worst excesses of trial and error, though this meant that what was then offered were hand-me-down policies from urban settings.

As one practitioner complained to me in interview;

As a health professional most health policies were devised in urban settings and largely came from the big city hospitals. There was always so much pressure to rationalise clinical services, and pull more resources to the centre and this left a huge debate around fairness, equity, effectiveness and efficiency. Reorganisation usually meant that rural would have to accept worse service provision and despite national standards, this required closures at local level in rural communities. Trying to go out and justify this on clinical grounds was never easy, and was the really unpleasant bit of my job, despite the NHS having more money overall to play with (interview with Practitioner 42).

Here modernisation had a negative context as reform in urban centres often meant that rural areas faced the closure of services, or deteriorating service provision. This wasn't just bad for rural practitioners but had political consequences as well. As one MP argued in interview;

In Yorkshire the DoH was looking for a site for a new hospital. There was a large former mental asylum in my constituency, which had a huge amount of land associated with it and would have been relatively easy to convert. For some bizarre reason Frank Dobson (Health Secretary) chose an inner city site instead. This had no justification whatsoever, and his successor Alan Milburn admitted to me that a mistake had been made but it was too late to rectify it. I just felt that modernisation to ministers and civil servants was synonymous with what was good for the cities and the rest of us could go and hang (interview with MP2).

In this respect modernisation of the state highlighted how small a part rural played in the great scheme of things. Likewise making community assets more available to those living in the countryside was promoted by Quirk (2007) as part of the drive towards asset-based community development but was never realised as too much stress was placed on the physical aspects of this opening rather than the human capital benefits that would ensue (interview with MP 1 and Practitioner 20).

The Report of Stuart Burgess, Chair of the CRC, on the potential of England's rural economy (2008) met a similar fate. So even where opportunities existed and chimed with government priorities of improving economic growth, driving up productivity, and sustaining a more business-friendly environment, rural lost out as time and resources were invested elsewhere, (as the Defra Select Committee Enquiry commented in 2008).

New Labour was often additionally handicapped by inappropriate use of language to help sell the idea of modernisation and reform. Fairclough (2001 & 2010) has emphasised New Labour's contrived discourse and how this was eventually to undermine its case because of the inadequacy of explanation, the blandness of phraseology, and the frequent recourse to untested technologism (See also Charteris-Black 2014, Jones 1999, McLennan 2004). Whatever the problems elsewhere, these concerns were magnified in rural areas. Failure to provide a rationale for the New Labour drive towards modernisation led to resentment and unnecessary opposition to what otherwise might have been consensually agreed. Reform of the town and country planning system in rural areas would be a metaphor for this with unnecessary conflict over how to implement change (interview with Academic 6). Where attempts were made to engage and include, with a stress upon participation by rural communities, building networks and partnerships, there were

good examples of what was possible (Clark et al 2007). Sadly these were just the sort of programmes sacrificed after 2004.

For the rest, rather than push on with reforms to make the lives of the rural disadvantaged better, New Labour too often sought accommodation with those in charge of traditional elites. Modernisation could have made a difference and government with its huge mandate had the legitimacy to contest the countryside on behalf of those unable to do so, but here New Labour flunked its responsibility. It was guilty of Bourdieu's idea (1991) of symbolic violence against those the Party was formed to protect, failing in its duty to recognise and bear down on inequality and class barriers derived from existing power structures (Atkin 2003, Shucksmith 2012).

Cruickshank (2009) takes a slightly different line, developing a post-structuralist theme in terms of the conflict between modernists seeking to develop the countryside and those whose main purpose was to protect it. In this the conflict operated through the Foucauldian concept of governmentality (Foucault 1978), and how that affects the governance of rural space and what room there is for local autonomy (Hewitt 2011a, Murdoch & Pratt 1993 & 1997).

Together these symbolic discourses demonstrate that though the countryside gained through not having to endure the excesses of marketisation under New Labour, it also lost out by a government failure to pursue an ongoing strategy of fairness, greater service equality and a re-balancing of power, of which more is said in the next section.

Research Question Five – To what extent was New Labour’s approach to the countryside affected by both temporal events and spatial awareness, and how did this affect the manner of policy-making and delivery, and the political context within which it was operating.

Research Question Five has been critically evaluated as a cross-cutting theme running throughout the thematic chapters. From those chapters the importance of time and space to the New Labour period in the countryside can be explored and assessed starting with the temporal analysis.

In the thesis New Labour’s countryside has been structured into three main periods of time (see page 135). Within these frames, there were specific events which mattered in terms of their timing including the production of the Rural White Paper, the presentation of the Haskins’ Review, and the derivation of the Rural Strategy. Time also was crucial because New Labour was very often event-driven – the hunting debate, the fuel protests, and the foot and mouth outbreak all conspired to force it to prioritise the countryside as each took on national importance.

New Labour’s strength, at least in the early years of administration, was the dexterity with which it dealt with negative events, a mixture of review, spin, compensation, and reflection (interview with Academic 7). The reality was that such was the strength of its hegemonic position, and the relative weakness of the opposition, that New Labour’s powers of recovery were undeniable (see Chapter Four). Nevertheless the manner of New Labour’s response from 1999 until 2004 went well beyond reactivity and reflexivity. Whilst intervention and pumping up spending may have seemed to be a clever tactical ruse, the repercussions went much deeper and the consequences put New Labour’s countryside operation into a very different light.

Simply, New Labour chose a path of social democracy to deal with the exigencies of the problems it faced in the countryside, and the repercussions of this approach should not be underestimated. Though led by the Countryside Agency, an arms-length organisation, the overall result was that the countryside was feted, funded and facilitated to at least make it feel for a time that it mattered (Ward 2008c).

Previous chapters have rehearsed the reasons behind the Haskins' Review, and its outcomes but in terms of temporal context it did fundamentally alter New Labour's relationship with the countryside, and there was no chance that this was ever recoverable afterwards.

In terms of spatial features, the story is starker. Challenged by crucial developments in the countryside of which the main features were counter-urbanisation, differentiation, contestation, and stylised fallacies based around the symbolic notion of rural, New Labour chose a mixture of accommodation, concession, and commission (Burchardt & Conford 2008, Champion 1999, Champion & Shepherd 2006, Cloke & Little 1997, Headicar 2013, Hodge & Monk 2004, Lowe et al 2005). When challenged on countryside issues the response of New Labour was usually to avoid confrontation. The one outstanding exception was hunting – but that was not just a countryside issue, it was just that most consequences were felt there and even then it was only the collective muscle of the Parliamentary Labour Party that forced Blair's hand (interview with MP 7).

For the rest, New Labour was either oblivious to the circumstances surrounding how the countryside functioned, including the relations of power, or saw the countryside as merely a bit player in a much bigger game, whether that be globalisation, Europe or regionalism. As one practitioner pointed out to me;

The problem with New Labour was that by 2004 it had lost the plot regarding rural. It had wasted an inordinate amount of time on a marginal issue – foxhunting – and turned away from a perfectly good policy – rural proofing – and largely replaced it with mainstreaming rural which was ‘like a limestone river disappearing down a hole’. New Labour just couldn’t grasp the key issues which is how to best manage and adapt to necessary change at local level in rural areas. Rural was suborned by regional dimensions and anything else that could possibly get in the way of just getting the basics right (interview with Practitioner 21).

This is not to say that New Labour did not engage with some issues of import, especially during the interventionist years. For instance the ideas, initiatives and programmes it advanced from 1999 onwards fitted neatly with the neo-endogenous developments in rural policy favoured by the EU and OECD. Some of these arose through LEADER, but others were home-grown such as the Vital Villages scheme. The desire to provide service protection and augment service standards to accompany other radical proposals, including rural proofing and mainstreaming, showed what was feasible. Though practically-bounded because of resource implications, these developments were ground-breaking and excited both rural communities and those executing the policies (Bosworth & Willett 2011, High & Nemes 2007, Ray 2006). If it had been able to commit fully to its decentralising agenda and capture an element of regionalism for the countryside the achievements would have been all the greater (Hewitt 2011a).

The countryside also benefitted from New Labour’s national policies, especially the national minimum wage, national childcare strategy and bus passes for pensioners – which drew attention to pockets of deprivation in rural areas and how income and

service minimum standards equally benefitted ruralities (Asthana et al 2009, Barnes 2007, Dolton et al 2008, 2010 & 2012, Gilbert et al 2001, Lavery & Millett 2015, Mackett 2013, Smith et al 2012)

New Labour improved the understanding of what was meant by rural to give a stronger handle on how to define place, and measure what was meant by rural. This helped not just politically and economically but geographically, culturally, sectorally and socially (See Chapters Four and Seven; Bibby & Shepherd 2004). It neatly matched New Labour's reliance upon evidence-based policy-making.

After 2004 in not facing up to the challenges of rural life in anything other than a time-bound and superficial manner New Labour missed a wonderful timeliness to use its electoral strength and putative support on the ground from activists, practitioners, academics and rural communities themselves, to start to move the dynamics of power, influence and opportunity in a different direction, to make the countryside a fairer, more just and better place. It had a particular blind spot when it came to remote rural, where the greatest economic and social investment was needed (Defra Select Committee 2008, Nemes 2005). As one civil servant noted to me:

From the middle of the decade (2000 – 10) we seemed to spend an inordinate amount of time on institutional change, and this came at the cost of good policy-making. So many things seemed to come and go – rural proofing, mainstreaming, double devolution – all good in themselves but not sustained and then the money was not there. There is always the danger that perceptions outdo the reality of the countryside, but if we had kept going and

retained the drive of Alun Michael we could have really started to make a difference in rural areas (interview with Civil Servant 6).

Much of the feeling of drift after 2004 came from the increased questioning of New Labour's ideological commitment (interview with Practitioner 21). New Labour's pragmatism in relation to the countryside may have seemed to be an immediate strength with how it dealt with events for much of its early period in office, but its lack of philosophical grip in how it approached difficult concepts like the contested countryside resulted in the government making little impression upon how power operated in rural communities and little had changed by the end of its thirteen years in office.

An integrated assessment

The five research questions do point to the complicated nature of New Labour's rural policy with numerous contradictions, the many twists and turns in how it was delivered in response to events, the unpredictable influence of the intervention of different actors, the impact of institutional and structural change, and the importance of how much time and resource the government was prepared to devote to it. In parallel with this there was the churn of politics, with the gradual weakening of political hegemony. Together they accounted for the view that New Labour had attempted something dramatic with regard to rural policy, at least for a time, but that by the end of its term in office it left a sense of unfulfilled possibility.

8.2 To what extent has the study met the aims set?

This study was developed with the purpose of giving New Labour's rural policy and politics closer attention. By reflecting on the perspectives of actors involved with

New Labour's activity in the countryside, the central conclusion is that there was between 1999 and 2004 a social democratic moment, but that this disappeared after 2004.

What the research has tested is the extent to which New Labour's rural policy and implicitly the direction of its political discourse, could be described as discernible, measurable and consistent. The notion was that there were distinct periods in how New Labour operated in the countryside, and that these were determined by political priorities, themselves issue-driven. This is not to deny that there were other factors at work which affected New Labour's relationship with the countryside, especially the government's economism, and societal objectives.

The investigation started from the premise that New Labour's increased representation, and specifically its greater number of rural MPs, profoundly affected New Labour's relationship with the countryside. However such was the scale of the landslide that this caused a rethink by New Labour of its approach to the countryside. Allied to this were the exigencies of two other factors - the intervention of events in the countryside that the government had to respond to, and the presence of a phalanx of MPs in the newly-formed Rural Group, who demanded attention. The research has continually highlighted these features.

What marked 1999-2004 out as a discrete time-period was the reaction of New Labour to the challenges it faced them. Rather than emphasise its accommodation with neoliberal instincts, the government chose a distinctly social democratic approach as to how it derived rural policy, and met its political objectives in the countryside. What made this all the more surprising was that New Labour was in the process of dumping social democracy in many other policy areas, preferring the

amorphous combination of the third way, communitarianism and pure pragmatism elsewhere (Nuttall 2006). This research has argued that was indeed New Labour's direction of travel, examined why this was the case and critically reflected upon the implications. That was the narrative from 1999 -2004, and this research adds to the understanding of why that was the case, and the implications for the English countryside over that period.

The study investigates the degree to which New Labour was able to develop a distinctive approach to rural policy and politics and the extent to which it was able to overcome the accusation by some that it was purely an urban construct. It did this by a series of interventions, policy and programme-wise, the creation of new institutions, specifically the Countryside Agency, and by the active involvement of actors.

The research emphasises that the method New Labour preferred for the evolution of rural policy was to rely upon external agencies for both policy-making and delivery. The chosen vehicle for this was the Countryside Agency, which has been studied surprisingly little in its own right. It also keenly sought support from actors outside of government, largely in the voluntary sector, to pursue new forms of engagement with rural areas. Though modernisation was also important, as reforms to the countryside became an essential element in improving the lives of countryside residents, the research hypothesises was that it was markedly different from the market-driven approach taken in urban England.

The story does not finish with 1999 – 2004 however. Undoubtedly the primary evidence demonstrates that after 2004, New Labour took a radically different approach, putting rural policy effectively into reverse, with the restoration of a

strongly centripetal direction of travel. This coincided with the demise of the Countryside Agency, the reduction in budgets, and the re-centralising of decision-making within government itself, as a weak Defra tried to assert itself by taking the policy-making reins back from the Agency.

What this study critically discusses was that from 2004, rural policy and politics was again marginalised by New Labour, and the progress made from 1999 until 2004 was largely forgone. This did not mean that all rural programmes came to an abrupt halt after 2004, but there was much less emphasis upon the rural from that time onwards, and importantly, much less resource to call upon.

The study therefore meets its main aim of exploring this little-known but important part of history. In critically examining the five research questions there is now a better understanding of New Labour's relationship with the countryside. The research posits the view that New Labour's involvement with the countryside can be divided up into definite time periods. It also seeks to better explain how it tried to come to terms with spatial aspects of the countryside, but that this was of limited success.

The research further demonstrates the extent to which the New Labour operation in the countryside had distinctive features – to try to disassociate itself from being seen as purely an urban party, to seek out new forms of policy-making, and to carefully orchestrate aspects of modernisation. In so doing it has identified not just the causes and consequences of New Labour's actions, but also the contradictions and lack of coherence in what was attempted. This has been achieved by extensive recourse to interview material applied using the tools of ethnography. In this way it is hoped that a contemporaneous record will greatly add to understanding of the way in

which New Labour performed, albeit in this under-explored area, which may in due course stimulate further research.

8.3 Observations on the role of the researcher in the research

This research has recorded a highly personalised venture. It has resulted from my conviction, based upon experience, that there was a piece of research that needed to be carried out, in an area of study that was both neglected and needed attention. There were alternatives - a book, or collaborating with someone else's research, but I chose a PhD because of a sense of personal ambition and self-fulfilment, and to give greater status to the study's findings.

Being embedded in the research process has characteristics different from other forms of research (Adler & Adler 1987, Brannick & Coghlan 2007, Lewis & Russell 2011). First you come to the research directly from your own experiences or habitus. I cannot demur from the standpoint that ideas, opinions and discourses arose from my own deliberations during the period in question. Though I was not entirely wrapped up with rural issues it was my main area of domestic interest which flavoured what I have done subsequently (Labaree 2002). Second I was fortunate in that my address-book and the contacts that I subsequently made were impressive in number and quality in that I do not believe that anyone else could have attempted quite the same project, or certainly not have pursued it in quite the same way.

There are downsides to such an approach. Are the research, the research questions and the analysis too personalised and lacking in objectivity? Having the choice of the interviewees led to inherent bias? Was I swayed in my research by the desire to make a series of judgements that devalue the objectivity of the research but also undermine the case for future use of the research evidence?

My answer to each of these dilemmas is no - in that the rigour of a PhD forces the researcher to face up to these challenges and deliberately adopt an approach that avoids these pitfalls. Thus, I undertook interviews in number well beyond what is normally necessary in order to gather appropriate levels of evidence. By triangulation I have sought to present, if not vindicate, the analyses of those involved and have engaged in extensive secondary source gathering, given the relative paucity of the material in the field concerned. The incipient nativeness of politicians who have left or lost office was less of a problem than I had anticipated, but one that I was wary of, to circumvent prejudicing the evidence (Schneider 1993, Thompson 1987). Again the breadth and depth of the research lessened this as an issue, if not eradicated it completely.

From the outset I decided against any quantitative element to the research. Though I did toy with the notion of contacting other players such as Constituency Labour Parties in rural areas by questionnaire, I decided against this, as the likelihood of adding to the sum of knowledge was marginal, and it would have altered the research aims.

The other dominant issue was whether this research should have been auto-ethnographic given the highly personalised nature of it. Rural studies has made increasing use of ethnography and auto-ethnography (Gristy 2014, Heley 2011, Hillyard 2007). Likewise political science has grown to appreciate the value of this methodology (Denzin & Lincoln 2011).

One interesting aside was that on a number of occasions, respondents were keen to see me because they wanted to tell their story. None of the departing civil servants or ministers interviewed had received an exit interview at the end of the New Labour

period in office. They therefore felt deprived of being able to have their say on how they thought they had performed, what they had learned, and their views on policy, performance and process. The interviews gave this opportunity – to some it was a cathartic experience, which is why some sessions ran on longer than expected, and much good information was obtained from the discussion after the former interview had finished. I was pleased at how frank interviewees were with me – I respected their wish when they told me things in confidence, though interestingly bar a couple of occasions what was said was already on the public record, such had been the extensive coverage of New Labour in autobiographies, biographies, diaries, and academic material. Whether that level or quantity of material would have been forthcoming had I not been treated as an equal will be for others to judge.

The process of completing a PhD is time-consuming and managing work and personal time is never easy. I faced the additional pressures of standing again (unsuccessfully) for Parliament, which meant taking some time off mid-research and writing-up. However I did use this opportunity to keep in touch with the rural political scene, and this did harvest contact with some actors who, whilst I did not formally interview them, were helpful points of advice and information. Ensuring that I cut off from what occurred after 2010, was a danger, but making the research coterminous with New Labour in power, meant that I was able to avoid looking at what befell policy-making afterwards, even if this was of personal interest.

The researcher's role has therefore taught me of the value of pursuing a life-time interest, which has given me the enthusiasm to keep going and produce something which hopefully is of value. This is something I am already committed to following up with a number of people still active in the Labour Party, including the leadership, so hopefully this thesis will just not sit on a shelf at home.

8.4 Future Research

The basis of this research is that there is a dearth of political studies of the countryside and hardly anything written on the Labour Party and rural areas referring to contemporary history. Apart from Griffiths (2007), Thorpe's chapter in Worley's book (2005), Andrew Flynn's unpublished PhD (1989), some other historical work by Worley (2005a&b), and the article by Johnson (1972), studies on the Labour Party do not feature rural matters in any noticeable way. Contemporary studies which discuss the impact of New Labour on the countryside, with the notable exception of the book by Woods (2008a), are non-existent. What specifically is lacking is an analytical account of the politics behind the issues that influenced New Labour's performance in the countryside, and how the changed structure and agency affected the Party, its views and its organisation. The limited interest in how New Labour's policies operated at ground-level in rural communities is particularly disappointing. What research that exists was left to government itself, operating largely through its own agencies. Other research has either not been commissioned or published which leaves a real gap in understanding.

In some respects it is not surprising that there is little research upon the Labour Party and the countryside given the Party's own predilection for its urban prowess, and strength in metropolitan politics. This is to deny the interest among some rural constituency parties which have continued to make the case for Labour's involvement in policy-making, campaigning and general activism in countryside issues. This is worthy of further investigation, and could include the relationship of the Parliamentary Party to internal Party organisations such as Rural Revival and

Labour Coast & Country, to investigate how this has impacted upon the Policy Commission process through to Annual Conference.

There has been comment in recent times about the relevance of identity politics. Yet the left and progressive politics is greatly underrepresented in terms of their political involvement in the evolving political situation in rural areas. Given the importance of the countryside to the evolution of modern society and political environment, evinced through the works of EP Thompson (1963), Hoggart (1957), Howkins (2003) and Williams (1973), it is surprising that contemporary studies are so limited, and the role of the Labour Party deemed so unimportant. Interestingly the histories of the development of the Labour Party make play of how rural areas played a part in the growth of Labour – Pelling (1983), Pugh M (2010) - but that interest seems to end in the 1960s. That lacuna surely needs to be rectified.

This thesis has largely been limited to rural politics within England. Studying Labour in Scotland and Wales, where traditionally Labour has been stronger in rural areas and how that has influenced the direction of the Party in and out of devolved administration, and then making some comparisons with England would make for illuminating future research.

It would be wrong just to constrain any future interest to only Labour politics. Some further examination of the new institutionalism embraced by Labour, and present in initiatives that led to the creation of the Countryside Agency is worthy of future research. A more detailed and reflective study is needed, and an explanation into why ministers and civil servants became so antagonistic towards the Agency.

There are also the opportunities that wider research of progressive politics in the countryside would produce. The intervention of the Green Party into the countryside

is not unimportant, yet most studies of the Greens have been centred on other issues, and their more urban strongholds (Birch 2009, Spoon 2009). Likewise the importance of developments in the form of the Transition Towns movement and how taste has shaped left of centre politics is worthy of proper investigation. Though indirectly linked it is not insignificant that the Transition Towns locations tend to be based on areas where Labour and the Greens have some presence - Stroud, Calderdale and Totnes are examples of this (Barry & Quilley 2009, Connors 2010, Felicetti 2013).

It would also be appropriate to drill down to research into the implications for Labour, and possibly the Greens, of changes in food policy and territorial use of land. Whilst the growth of hobby farming and lifestyle choice re-location to the countryside has been pursued, the political implications of this are still relatively little understood (Home 2009, Lang et al 2009, Munton 2009). Future research could also explore how the changing employment breakdown in the countryside has impacted upon trade union representation there and what affect this has had upon trade union - Labour relations in the countryside. Inevitably the issue of relations of power, class and elites would impose upon this, but given the lack of interest expressed by Labour, some research into why this remains the case would be invaluable.

The battles over land-use should not be entirely encapsulated within the debate about counter-urbanisation (Halfacree 2012). There are other themes present which are worthy of examination including around bottom-up neighbourhood planning, community land trusts and social enterprise empowerment (Gallent & Robinson 2012, Moore & McKie 2012, Ridley-Duff & Bull 2015). Each of these has some political repercussions and should be studied both in terms of influence through the lens of governance, but also outside of the mainstream political process.

A final area for future research involves the role of local government during the New Labour years in the countryside. Though most of the politicians interviewed had a history as councillors, and a number of local authority officers were cross-examined, both directly as part of the research, and also for comments on ideas that I was mulling over, there is a paucity of evidence from this source. This is important for New Labour did radically reform local government during its period in office. Though most of the focus for this was in the cities, and urban authorities, an exploration of what happened in the rural areas is overdue. There are a limited number of investigations of parish and local councils, and recommendations on their future role did feature in the Lyons' Review (2007), but this field could be researched in more detail to great effect.

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Appendix 1: The Genesis of the Rural Group of Labour MPs - Correspondence between Bradley and the House of Commons Library to demonstrate the Parliamentary strength of Labour in the countryside

HOUSE OF COMMONS LIBRARY

Research Services

1 Derby Gate

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Tel: 0171 219 2454

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Our ref: 1997/6/116SG/RD

18 June, 1997

Dear Mr Bradley

Rural Labour MPs

You asked for a list of rural parliamentary constituencies with a Labour Member.

I have taken population density and agricultural employment as a measure of "rurality". The enclosed two tables (ranked within party and overall) do this for the current parliamentary constituencies in Great Britain, using data from the 1991 Census. The indicators used are:

- usual residents per hectare.
- the proportion of those in employment (employees and self-employed) in agriculture⁵³.

The tables show both absolute figures and a relative measure expressed as an index where the average for Great Britain is 100⁵⁴. A composite index is also given (final column) on which the ranking is based;

⁵³ old 1980 Standard Industrial Classification Division 0; includes forestry and fisheries.

this has been calculated simply by adding the two indices and dividing by two, so that the indicators have equal weighting⁵⁵.

On this composite measure, there are 180 constituencies which are more (or as) rural as Great Britain as a whole, and 461 which are less rural. This distribution is so skewed because the rural constituencies are "outliers" which have *very* low population density and high agricultural employment. The rural constituencies are much more rural than the urban constituencies are urban.

Of the 418 Labour constituencies, only 51 are more rural than Great Britain as a whole. Labour seats are, of course, generally more urban than those of other parties. The Liberal Democrats have especially rural seats, as, not surprisingly, do the SNP.

I hope this is useful. Please do not hesitate to get in touch if you would like this information presented in some other way.

Yours sincerely

Richard Dewdney

Social & General Statistics Section

Peter Bradley MP

House of Commons

⁵⁴ The index for population density shows constituencies with *fewer* residents per hectare than the GB average as greater than 100; the index for agricultural employment shows constituencies with *more* than the average in agricultural employment as greater than 100.

⁵⁵ However, there are more "outliers" for population density than agricultural employment, and this obviously affects the composite rankings. There are 12 constituencies (10 of which are in Scotland) which have a population density less than one-tenth of the GB average, while there are no constituencies where agricultural employment is ten times as high as the GB average. There is, however, quite a strong correlation between the two indicators, and places with very low population density also tend to have very high agricultural employment.

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Our ref: 1997/11/28SG/RD

10 November 1997

Dear Mr Bradley

Labour MPs in 'semi-rural' constituencies

Further to some previous work we have done for you⁵⁶, you asked for a list of Labour Members in constituencies which could be described as 'semi-rural' as opposed to rural.

As my colleague, Adrian Crompton, explained when you spoke to him last week, this exercise is somewhat arbitrary. In the first place, the analysis takes only two variables — population density and agricultural employment — as a measure of "rurality" and is obviously a simplification of a more complicated reality. Secondly, any cut-off point is a matter of (fairly subjective) judgement.

On this measure, there are 180 constituencies which are more (or as) rural as Great Britain as a whole, and 461 which are less rural⁵⁷; of the 418 Labour constituencies, only 51 are more rural than Great

⁵⁶ our ref. 97/6/116SG

⁵⁷ This distribution is so skewed because the rural constituencies are "outliers" which have *very* low population density and high agricultural employment. The rural constituencies are much more rural than the urban constituencies are urban.

Britain as a whole. You have decided to call these seats — which represent 28% of all (Labour and non-Labour) seats — ‘rural’.

Clearly, the seats at the bottom of the list are urban. Deciding which are ‘semi-rural’ is far more difficult. However, a useful cut-off are those which are *half as rural as the GB average* — that is, those with an index between 50 and 100. There are 54 such Labour seats.

Another approach would be to follow the analysis conducted by ONS after each of the last three decennial Censuses of grouping areas into ‘families’ based on socio-economic conditions. The latest (post-1991) analysis has six families, one of which is ‘rural areas’; within this family there is a group called ‘mixed urban and rural’, which covers two clusters (‘towns in country’ and ‘industrial margins’). Of the 457 local authorities in Great Britain⁵⁸, 137 (30%) are classified as ‘rural areas’ containing 10 million people (18% of the population).

The other five families in the post-1991 classification are:

- prosperous areas
- maturer areas
- urban centres
- mining and industrial areas
- Inner London

If you would like me to produce a list along these lines by best-fitting parliamentary constituencies falling within ‘rural areas’ local authorities, please get in touch. In the meantime, I enclose a summary table of these families and their components and a detailed list allocating each local authority to its family, group and cluster⁵⁹.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Richard Dewdney Social & General Statistics Section

⁵⁸ As at 1994; due to local government reorganisation, this analysis will have to be repeated for the new unitary authorities (and areas affected by associated boundary changes).

⁵⁹ Source: ONS *The ONS classification of local and health authorities of Great Britain*, Table 3.1 and Table F

Population density & agricultural employment by parliamentary constituency party: 1991 Census: GB (by party)

NOMIS	rank by "ruralness" s" (of 641)	Constituency	Party	Member	Absolute data		Index: GB=100		Overall	"ruralness"	Area	People	Density	
					Pop. density: residents per hectare	Agricultural employment % of all	Population density	Agricultural employment						
													Labour NOMIS??	
619	4	Inverness East, Nairn & Lochaber	Lab	Stewart,David	0.1	5.61	2,610	293	1,451	1	1	230,323	69,869	0.303352
641	5	Western Isles	Lab	Macdonald,Calum	0.1	7.01	2,527	366	1,446	1	2	91,945	86,495	0.940725
536	16	Carmarthen East and Dinefwr	Lab	Williams,Alan W	0.4	13.79	589	719	654	1	3	10,804	83,305	7.71057
540	27	Preseli Pembrokeshire	Lab	Lawrence,Jackie	0.6	11.47	391	598	494	1	4	7,077	79,584	11.24544
588	28	Dumfries	Lab	Brown,Russell	0.4	7.57	589	395	492	1	5	18,590	80,669	4.339376
636	30	Stirling	Lab	McGuire,Anne	0.3	3.36	791	175	483	1	6	2,729	86,302	31.62404
579	34	Carrick, Cumnock & Doon Valley	Lab	Foulkes,George	0.4	5.95	547	310	429	1	7	9,594	84,419	8.799145
537	35	Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire	Lab	Ainger,Nick	0.7	10.03	332	523	428	1	8	2,806	87,531	31.19423
532	47	Clwyd West	Lab	Thomas,Gareth	0.8	8.02	299	418	359	1	9	9,453	90,409	9.564054
582	53	Clydesdale	Lab	Hood,Jimmy	0.6	4.48	409	234	321	1	10	249,812	74,567	0.298492
531	56	Clwyd South	Lab	Jones,Martyn	0.8	5.87	298	306	302	1	11	7,896	86,720	10.98278
543	63	Monmouth	Lab	Edwards,Huw	0.9	6.01	264	313	289	1	12	5,114	82,628	16.15722
128	65	North West Norfolk	Lab	Turner,George	1.1	6.42	226	335	281	1	13	2,811	98,173	34.92458
499	70	Workington	Lab	Campbell-Savours,Dale	0.9	4.62	279	241	260	1	14	2,617	92,042	35.17081
382	72	Selby	Lab	Grogan,John	1.2	6.09	194	318	256	1	15	2,169	79,631	36.71323
369	76	Brigg and Goole	Lab	Cawsey,Ian	1.2	5.71	199	298	248	1	16	2,305	81,401	35.31497
250	80	Forest of Dean	Lab	Organ,Diana	1.3	5.56	185	290	238	1	17	6,746	84,490	12.52446
506	92	Bishop Auckland	Lab	Foster,Derek	0.9	3.61	254	188	221	1	18	10,382	84,107	8.101233
594	94	East Lothian	Lab	Home Robertson,John	1.1	3.98	226	207	217	1	19	4,853	86,267	17.77601
496	99	Copeland	Lab	Cunningham,Jack	1.0	3.09	249	161	205	1	20	69,849	84,752	1.21336
381	102	Scarborough and Whitby	Lab	Quinn,Lawrie	1.3	4.24	184	221	203	1	21	24,537	95,757	3.902555
585	107	Cunninghame North	Lab	Wilson,Brian	0.9	2.40	260	125	193	1	22	38,976	85,624	2.196839
275	114	Shrewsbury and Atcham	Lab	Marsden,Paul	1.5	3.89	156	203	180	1	23	1,948	82,308	42.25257
470	115	Lancaster and Wyre	Lab	Dawson,Hilton	2.0	4.59	120	239	180	1	24	9,714	87,843	9.042928
362	119	Newark	Lab	Jones,Fiona	1.5	3.57	156	186	171	1	25	10,767	86,069	7.993777
511	121	North West Durham	Lab	Armstrong,Hilary	1.2	2.68	197	140	168	1	26	2,279	81,373	35.70557
284	128	Staffordshire Moorlands	Lab	Atkins,Charlotte	1.9	3.30	125	172	149	1	27	2,339	89,167	38.12185
358	132	Bassetlaw	Lab	Ashton,Joe	1.8	2.92	134	152	143	1	28	2,559	86,801	33.91989
277	135	The Wrekin	Lab	Bradley,Peter	2.2	3.19	109	167	138	1	29	2,811	84,592	30.09321
351	140	Corby	Lab	Hope,Phil	1.7	2.32	144	121	133	1	30	13,732	80,674	5.874891
330	142	High Peak	Lab	Levitt,Tom	1.5	1.80	162	94	128	1	31	5,178	90,271	17.43357
252	143	Stroud	Lab	Drew,David	2.2	2.81	106	146	126	1	32	3,065	98,111	32.01011
477	145	West Lancashire	Lab	Pickthall,Colin	3.7	3.57	64	186	125	1	33	17,996	89,530	4.974994
476	146	South Ribble	Lab	Borrow,David	5.7	4.00	42	208	125	1	34	5,117	101,580	19.85148
138	148	Waveney	Lab	Blizzard,Robert	3.7	3.37	64	176	120	1	35	2,874	94,029	32.71712

533	152 Delyn	Lab	Hanson,David	2.4	2.64	98	138	118	1	36	2,388	99,066	41.48492
353	154 Kettering	Lab	Sawford,Philip	1.9	2.10	125	110	117	1	37	3,601	89,919	24.97056
620	155 Kilmarnock & Loudoun	Lab	Browne,Desmond	2.1	2.34	112	122	117	1	38	3,198	88,283	27.60569
471	156 Morecambe and Lunesdale	Lab	Smith,Geraldine	2.4	2.54	100	132	116	1	39	7,125	80,382	11.28168
629	160 Ochil	Lab	O'Neill,Martin	1.6	1.51	148	79	114	1	40	11,062	91,130	8.238112
370	162 Cleethorpes	Lab	McIsaac,Shona	2.7	2.63	89	137	113	1	41	5,549	91,044	16.40728
587	164 Dumbarton	Lab	McFall,John	1.5	1.08	162	56	109	1	42	4,351	86,243	19.82142
224	166 Falmouth and Camborne	Lab	Atherton,Candy	3.8	2.90	62	151	107	1	43	16,651	76,549	4.597261
367	167 Sherwood	Lab	Tipping,Paddy	2.8	2.44	86	127	107	1	44	3,739	87,901	23.50923
512	169 Sedgefield	Lab	Blair,Tony	2.2	1.97	109	103	106	1	45	20,190	96,504	4.779792
534	172 Vale of Clwyd	Lab	Ruane,Chris	3.4	2.63	71	137	104	1	46	15,135	88,599	5.853915
624	173 Midlothian	Lab	Clarke,Eric	2.3	2.00	103	104	103	1	47	21,026	84,525	4.020023
32	174 Braintree	Lab	Hurst,Alan	2.8	2.32	85	121	103	1	48	74,356	71,296	0.958847
548	175 Conwy	Lab	Williams,Betty	2.2	1.85	110	96	103	1	49	14,512	88,226	6.07952
278	176 Burton	Lab	Dean,Janet	3.1	2.43	78	127	102	1	50	2,652	90,618	34.16968
566	179 Gower	Lab	Caton,Martin	2.4	1.93	99	100	100	1	51	4,750	92,271	19.42547
332	186 South Derbyshire	Lab	Todd,Mark	2.8	1.99	86	104	95	1	52	70,129	81,345	1.159934
221	188 Wansdyke	Lab	Norris,Dan	3.0	2.07	79	108	93	1	53	11,314	86,995	7.689146
564	189 Vale of Glamorgan	Lab	Smith,John	3.2	2.10	75	110	92	1	54	23,587	88,154	3.737398
90	191 South Thanet	Lab	Ladyman,Stephen	5.5	2.66	43	139	91	1	55	4,109	86,395	21.0258
80	192 Dover	Lab	Prosser,Gwyn	4.2	2.38	57	124	91	1	56	5,841	82,674	14.15408
388	193 Barnsley West and Penistone	Lab	Clapham,Michael	3.6	2.01	66	105	85	1	57	6,969	97,857	14.04176
283	194 Stafford	Lab	Kidney,David	5.4	2.32	44	121	82	1	58	8,852	88,107	9.953344
342	195 North West Leicestershire	Lab	Taylor,David	2.9	1.55	82	81	82	1	59	45,408	90,402	1.990883
539	196 Llanelli	Lab	Davies,Denzil	3.1	1.63	76	85	80	1	60	5,612	91,066	16.22701
89	199 Sittingbourne and Sheppey	Lab	Wyatt,Derek	4.3	1.97	55	103	79	1	61	29,138	91,284	3.132816
640	201 West Renfrewshire	Lab	Graham,Thomas	2.4	1.07	99	56	77	1	62	5,763	89,303	15.49592
290	202 North Warwickshire	Lab	O'Brien,Mike	3.1	1.44	77	75	76	1	63	2,536	87,904	34.66246
125	203 Great Yarmouth	Lab	Wright,Tony 2	4.8	1.94	49	101	75	1	64	2,700	88,086	32.62444
325	205 Bolsover	Lab	Skinner,Dennis	3.9	1.69	61	88	75	1	65	1,564	76,372	48.8312
38	206 Harwich	Lab	Henderson,Ivan	7.0	2.20	34	115	74	1	66	1,907	78,917	41.3828
622	209 Linlithgow	Lab	Dalyell,Tam	3.4	1.48	70	77	74	1	67	35,765	85,269	2.384147
391	210 Doncaster North	Lab	Hughes,Kevin	4.1	1.69	59	88	73	1	68	12,145	98,975	8.149444
331	212 North East Derbyshire	Lab	Barnes,Harry	3.8	1.54	62	80	71	1	69	3,074	97,799	31.8149
591	213 Dunfermline East	Lab	Brown,Gordon	3.2	1.31	74	68	71	1	70	16,847	85,111	5.051997
294	214 Warwick and Leamington	Lab	Plaskitt,James	3.6	1.42	66	74	70	1	71	330,112	81,078	0.245608
576	216 Ayr	Lab	Osborne,Sandra	4.6	1.65	52	86	69	1	72	3,648	95,364	26.14145
530	217 Alyn and Deeside	Lab	Jones,Barry	4.7	1.67	51	87	69	1	73	68,908	91,170	1.323068
467	218 Chorley	Lab	Hoyle,Lindsay	4.8	1.68	50	87	69	1	74	6,876	93,003	13.52574
20	219 North East Milton Keynes	Lab	White,Brian	3.5	1.32	68	69	68	1	75	20,696	90,996	4.396792
495	222 Carlisle	Lab	Martlew,Eric	4.6	1.57	52	82	67	1	76	2,110	80,210	38.01422
424	223 City of Chester	Lab	Russell,Christine	5.9	1.79	41	93	67	1	77	16,144	92,709	5.742629
593	224 East Kilbride	Lab	Ingram,Adam	2.9	0.97	84	50	67	1	78	6,198	88,097	14.21378
272	226 Wyre Forest	Lab	Lock,David	6.1	1.77	39	92	66	1	79	2,253	86,623	38.44785
567	227 Neath	Lab	Hain,Peter	2.7	0.85	87	44	66	1	80	4,531	94,866	20.9371
434	228 Weaver Vale	Lab	Hall,Mike	5.7	1.68	42	87	65	1	81	33,873	80,138	2.365837
623	229 Livingston	Lab	Cook,Robin	3.3	1.05	72	55	63	1	82	8,867	94,645	10.67385

389	230 Don Valley	Lab	Flint,Caroline	3.5	1.11	69	58	63	1	83	8,838	88,040	9.96153
292	233 Rugby and Kenilworth	Lab	King,Andrew	3.6	1.11	67	58	63	1	84	15,250	86,424	5.667148
405	234 Calder Valley	Lab	McCafferty,Christine	3.1	0.94	76	49	63	1	85	25,326	94,555	3.733515
426	235 Crewe and Nantwich	Lab	Dunwoody,Gwyneth	6.1	1.61	39	84	62	1	86	148,429	80,492	0.542293
289	237 Tamworth	Lab	Jenkins,Brian	4.9	1.29	49	67	58	1	87	5,288	83,444	15.77988
472	238 Pendle	Lab	Prentice,Gordon	5.1	1.32	47	69	58	1	88	98,445	84,218	0.855483
602	240 Falkirk East	Lab	Connarty,Michael	3.8	0.96	62	50	56	1	89	5,937	90,235	15.19875
412	241 Keighley	Lab	Cryer,Ann	5.3	1.28	45	67	56	1	90	3,687	98,512	26.71874
291	242 Nuneaton	Lab	Oler,Bill	4.8	1.13	50	59	54	1	91	2,225	85,672	38.50427
26	243 Hastings and Rye	Lab	Foster,Michael	7.0	1.43	34	74	54	1	92	2,001	82,087	41.02299
410	244 Hemsworth	Lab	Trickett,Jon	6.0	1.32	39	69	54	1	93	4,355	74,726	17.15867
423	246 Wakefield	Lab	Hinchcliffe,David	6.1	1.32	39	69	54	1	94	9,198	98,843	10.74614
555	247 Ogmore	Lab	Powell,Ray	3.8	0.85	63	45	54	1	95	4,986	96,553	19.36482
580	248 Central Fife	Lab	McLeish,Henry	7.2	1.41	33	74	53	1	96	3,345	89,889	26.87265
565	249 Aberavon	Lab	Morris,John	3.7	0.81	64	42	53	1	97	2,511	86,864	34.59339
356	253 Wellingborough	Lab	Stinchcombe,Paul	4.9	1.04	49	54	51	1	98	1,603	91,791	57.26201
508	254 City of Durham	Lab	Steinberg,Gerry	4.3	0.92	55	48	51	1	99	1,675	92,948	55.49134
408	255 Elmet	Lab	Burgon,Colin	4.5	0.95	53	50	51	1	100	2,076	90,958	43.81407
377	256 Scunthorpe	Lab	Morley,Elliot	5.4	1.11	44	58	51	1	101	7,587	91,761	12.0945
544	257 Newport East	Lab	Howarth,Alan	5.8	1.15	41	60	50	1	102	5,726	87,458	15.27384
573	258 Airdrie & Shotts	Lab	Liddell,Helen	3.5	0.61	69	32	50	1	103	4,380	89,276	20.38265
494	260 Barrow and Furness	Lab	Hutton,John	5.0	0.99	48	52	50	1	104	2,296	86,774	37.79355
324	261 Amber Valley	Lab	Mallaber,Judy	5.7	1.10	42	57	50	1	105	6,505	78,404	12.05288
535	264 Wrexham	Lab	Marek,John	6.3	1.13	38	59	48	1	106	4,795	79,945	16.67258
399	265 Sheffield, Hillsborough	Lab	Jackson,Helen	4.9	0.92	48	48	48	1	107	4,174	81,718	19.57786
86	267 Medway	Lab	Marshall-Andrews,Robert	5.7	1.03	42	54	48	1	108	14,489	88,581	6.113672
516	268 Wansbeck	Lab	Murphy,Dennis	5.9	1.04	41	54	48	1	109	22,007	80,074	3.63857
586	271 Cunninghame South	Lab	Donohoe,Brian	5.8	1.01	41	53	47	1	110	4,555	84,317	18.51087
551	273 Bridgend	Lab	Griffiths,Win	5.4	0.93	44	48	46	1	111	76,560	87,521	1.143169
406	274 Colne Valley	Lab	Mountford,Kali	5.2	0.88	46	46	46	1	112	3,051	91,352	29.94166
553	276 Cynon Valley	Lab	Clwyd,Ann	3.7	0.48	64	25	45	1	113	4,158	93,160	22.405
387	277 Barnsley East and Mexborough	Lab	Ennis,Jeff	6.1	0.93	39	49	44	1	114	3,590	97,079	27.0415
592	280 Dunfermline West	Lab	Squire,Rachel	4.6	0.65	52	34	43	1	115	66,545	79,674	1.197295
475	281 Rossendale and Darwen	Lab	Anderson,Janet	4.4	0.61	54	32	43	1	116	30,476	95,509	3.133909
84	283 Gravesham	Lab	Pond,Chris	9.4	1.15	26	60	43	1	117	2,931	98,745	33.68987
481	285 Knowsley North and Sefton East	Lab	Howarth,George	10.7	1.17	22	61	42	1	118	32,927	87,980	2.671971
72	287 Stevenage	Lab	Follett,Barbara	10.0	1.11	24	58	41	1	119	17,904	92,383	5.159908
428	288 Ellesmere Port and Neston	Lab	Miller,Andrew	7.7	0.95	31	50	40	1	120	4,913	80,387	16.3621
355	289 Northampton South	Lab	Clark,Tony	5.2	0.66	46	35	40	1	121	4,709	90,068	19.12678
392	290 Rother Valley	Lab	Barron,Kevin	5.5	0.70	44	36	40	1	122	20,572	83,834	4.075151
260	291 North Swindon	Lab	Wills,Michael	6.1	0.79	39	41	40	1	123	24,758	86,199	3.481662
554	292 Merthyr Tydfil and Rhydney	Lab	Rowlands,Ted	4.8	0.57	50	30	40	1	124	103,948	84,072	0.808789
503	294 Redcar	Lab	Mowlam,Marjorie	3.9	0.35	61	18	40	1	125	19,894	89,891	4.518498
595	295 Eastwood	Lab	Murphy,Jim	4.9	0.58	49	30	39	1	126	2,795	90,517	32.38533
542	298 Islwyn	Lab	Touhig,Don	6.6	0.79	36	41	39	1	127	5,763	96,076	16.67118
263	300 South Swindon	Lab	Drown,Julia	7.0	0.82	34	43	38	1	128	45,557	78,559	1.724411
79	301 Dartford	Lab	Stoate,Howard	9.0	0.96	27	50	38	1	129	4,915	81,302	16.54161

584	302	Cumbernauld & Kilsyth	Lab	McKenna,Rosemary	6.0	0.68	40	36	38	1	130	14,522	87,851	6.049511
341	304	Loughborough	Lab	Reed,Andrew	6.3	0.70	38	36	37	1	131	4,384	84,107	19.18499
269	305	Redditch	Lab	Smith,Jacqui	9.9	0.96	24	50	37	1	132	16,403	86,748	5.288545
556	307	Pontypridd	Lab	Howells,Kim	6.4	0.70	37	36	37	1	133	2,642	90,737	34.34406
599	308	Edinburgh Pentlands	Lab	Clark,Lynda	8.4	0.84	28	44	36	1	134	2,684	94,287	35.12928
500	309	Hartlepool	Lab	Mandelson,Peter	9.6	0.90	25	47	36	1	135	2,369	82,911	34.99831
74	312	Welwyn Hatfield	Lab	Johnson,Melanie	6.9	0.68	35	35	35	1	136	3,569	90,232	25.28215
505	313	Stockton South	Lab	Taylor,Dari	8.0	0.76	30	40	35	1	137	3,072	80,518	26.21029
37	314	Harlow	Lab	Rammell,Bill	13.0	0.98	18	51	35	1	138	7,001	84,449	12.06242
376	317	Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle	Lab	Johnson,Alan	35.0	1.17	7	61	34	1	139	6,373	76,960	12.07595
65	318	Hemel Hempstead	Lab	McWalter,Tony	8.5	0.74	28	39	33	1	140	2,908	84,043	28.90062
30	319	Basildon	Lab	Smith,Angela	9.6	0.80	25	42	33	1	141	7,607	85,310	11.21467
432	320	Warrington North	Lab	Jones,Helen	10.7	0.84	22	44	33	1	142	6,178	78,765	12.74927
502	321	Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland	Lab	Kumar,Ashok	35.2	1.14	7	59	33	1	143	6,516	83,848	12.86802
416	324	Leeds North West	Lab	Best,Harold	12.1	0.88	20	46	33	1	144	5,532	89,915	16.25362
545	326	Newport West	Lab	Flynn,Paul	7.8	0.67	31	35	33	1	145	190,754	85,021	0.44571
621	327	Kirkcaldy	Lab	Moonie,Lewis	6.6	0.53	36	28	32	1	146	16,153	88,102	5.454219
489	328	St. Helens North	Lab	Watts,Dave	12.1	0.84	20	44	32	1	147	3,714	80,701	21.72886
603	329	Falkirk West	Lab	Canavan,Dennis	6.4	0.49	38	26	32	1	148	163,399	77,353	0.473399
347	331	Lincoln	Lab	Merron,Gillian	18.1	0.95	13	49	31	1	149	73,643	95,324	1.294407
517	332	Blaydon	Lab	McWilliam,John	7.7	0.60	31	31	31	1	150	15,122	81,782	5.408147
469	334	Hyndburn	Lab	Pope,Greg	10.0	0.72	24	38	31	1	151	72,537	89,428	1.23286
572	335	Aberdeen South	Lab	Begg,Anne	9.3	0.68	26	35	31	1	152	4,049	85,936	21.22401
329	336	Erewash	Lab	Blackman,Elizabeth	11.8	0.78	20	41	30	1	153	2,061	81,565	39.57545
637	337	Strathkelvin & Bearsden	Lab	Galbraith,Sam	6.2	0.42	39	22	30	1	154	2,569	83,173	32.37563
552	338	Caerphilly	Lab	Davies,Ron	6.9	0.50	35	26	30	1	155	6,497	69,148	10.64307
510	339	North Durham	Lab	Radice,Giles	8.1	0.59	29	31	30	1	156	2,284	86,208	37.74431
433	340	Warrington South	Lab	Southworth,Helen	10.0	0.68	24	35	30	1	157	19,169	94,642	4.937242
422	342	Shipley	Lab	Leslie,Christopher	9.5	0.64	25	33	29	1	158	9,348	88,592	9.477107
420	343	Pontefract and Castleford	Lab	Cooper,Yvette	12.9	0.77	19	40	29	1	159	204,462	89,410	0.437294
509	345	Easington	Lab	Cummings,John	8.8	0.60	27	31	29	1	160	116,183	85,313	0.734298
446	346	Heywood and Middleton	Lab	Dobbin,Jim	14.0	0.79	17	41	29	1	161	15,030	91,783	6.106653
546	347	Torfaen	Lab	Murphy,Paul	6.9	0.45	35	23	29	1	162	8,290	83,364	10.05597
439	348	Bolton West	Lab	Kelly,Ruth	11.3	0.71	21	37	29	1	163	15,970	91,415	5.72417
453	350	Oldham East and Saddleworth	Lab	Woolas,Phil	8.1	0.53	29	28	28	1	164	10,199	93,337	9.151583
372	351	Great Grimsby	Lab	Mitchell,Austin	32.4	0.94	7	49	28	1	165	49,572	88,612	1.787541
466	352	Burnley	Lab	Pike,Peter	8.2	0.53	29	28	28	1	166	30,401	87,101	2.86507
571	353	Aberdeen North	Lab	Savidge,Malcolm	7.5	0.47	32	25	28	1	167	21,655	85,046	3.927315
276	357	Telford	Lab	Grocott,Bruce	16.4	0.78	15	41	28	1	168	61,498	82,135	1.335572
71	359	St. Albans	Lab	Pollard,Kerry	12.9	0.69	19	36	27	1	169	27,938	85,279	3.052438
514	361	Blyth Valley	Lab	Campbell,Ronnie	11.2	0.62	21	32	27	1	170	7,196	93,004	12.92444
357	362	Ashfield	Lab	Hoon,Geoff	9.2	0.51	26	27	26	1	171	18,227	91,109	4.998574
375	363	Kingston upon Hull North	Lab	McNamara,Kevin	35.1	0.88	7	46	26	1	172	4,877	91,797	18.82243
618	364	Hamilton South	Lab	Robertson,George	9.9	0.54	24	28	26	1	173	55,209	91,189	1.651705
493	365	Wirral West	Lab	Hesford,Stephen	16.7	0.72	14	38	26	1	174	90,188	101,461	1.124994
45	366	Thurrock	Lab	MacKinlay,Andrew	10.9	0.57	22	30	26	1	175	3,144	93,175	29.63581
461	367	Worsley	Lab	Lewis,Terry	15.2	0.68	16	36	26	1	176	3,824	101,845	26.63311

464	368 Blackpool North and Fleetwood	Lab	Humble,Joan	32.7	0.84	7	44	26	1	177	8,505	100,174	11.77825
415	369 Leeds North East	Lab	Hamilton,Fabian	12.1	0.59	20	31	25	1	178	129,301	79,935	0.618209
281	370 Newcastle-under-Lyme	Lab	Golding,Llin	10.5	0.53	23	27	25	1	179	4,171	88,159	21.13618
460	371 Wigan	Lab	Stott,Roger	15.8	0.67	15	35	25	1	180	69,986	86,810	1.240391
271	372 Worcester	Lab	Foster,Michael	24.6	0.76	10	39	25	1	181	20,762	85,240	4.105577
541	373 Blaenau Gwent	Lab	Smith,Llew	6.7	0.25	36	13	24	1	182	62,392	91,993	1.474436
418	374 Morley and Rothwell	Lab	Gunnell,John	11.2	0.51	21	27	24	1	183	49,061	93,776	1.911416
19	375 Milton Keynes South West	Lab	Starkey,Phyllis	14.0	0.58	17	30	24	1	184	2,383	85,410	35.84138
492	376 Wirral South	Lab	Chapman,Ben	12.1	0.51	20	27	23	1	185	2,088	95,507	45.7409
279	377 Cannock Chase	Lab	Wright,Tony	11.7	0.49	20	26	23	1	186	2,852	89,576	31.40813
444	378 Eccles	Lab	Stewart,Ian	19.4	0.65	12	34	23	1	187	4,713	85,081	18.05241
385	379 City of York	Lab	Bayley,Hugh	33.7	0.74	7	38	23	1	188	12,790	80,394	6.285692
401	380 Batley and Spen	Lab	Wood,Mike	18.5	0.62	13	32	23	1	189	136,182	84,331	0.619252
419	381 Normanton	Lab	O'Brien,William	12.7	0.50	19	26	22	1	190	4,782	87,349	18.26621
583	382 Coatbridge & Chryston	Lab	Clarke,Tom	9.1	0.35	26	18	22	1	191	57,190	87,721	1.533852
561	383 Cardiff North	Lab	Morgan,Julie	16.7	0.57	14	30	22	1	192	23,576	90,567	3.841491
480	384 Crosby	Lab	Curtis-Thomas,Clare	17.2	0.57	14	30	22	1	193	27,798	80,566	2.898266
447	385 Leigh	Lab	Cunliffe,Lawrence	16.2	0.55	15	29	22	1	194	2,861	97,808	34.18665
113	387 Crawley	Lab	Moffatt,Laura	19.8	0.59	12	31	21	1	195	18,764	97,243	5.182424
122	390 Peterborough	Lab	Brinton,Helen	24.7	0.63	10	33	21	1	196	1,998	87,014	43.55055
407	391 Dewsbury	Lab	Taylor,Ann	16.4	0.52	15	27	21	1	197	2,276	91,758	40.31547
421	392 Pudsey	Lab	Truswell,Paul	16.3	0.52	15	27	21	1	198	3,155	84,750	26.86212
462	393 Wythenshawe and Sale East	Lab	Goggins,Paul	26.7	0.62	9	32	21	1	199	40,779	97,567	2.39258
230	394 Exeter	Lab	Bradshaw,Ben	20.5	0.57	12	30	21	1	200	108,938	87,339	0.801731
504	396 Stockton North	Lab	Cook,Frank	9.0	0.28	26	15	21	1	201	34,179	94,601	2.767811
557	397 Rhondda	Lab	Rogers,Allan	7.9	0.20	30	10	20	1	202	109,362	85,300	0.779978
440	398 Bury North	Lab	Chaytor,David	16.4	0.49	15	26	20	1	203	34,517	95,554	2.768317
3	399 Luton South	Lab	Moran,Margaret	16.2	0.49	15	25	20	1	204	79,510	80,944	1.018035
361	400 Mansfield	Lab	Meale,Alan	18.3	0.52	13	27	20	1	205	19,852	97,330	4.902781
490	401 St. Helens South	Lab	Birmingham,Gerry	15.3	0.46	16	24	20	1	206	83,634	87,070	1.041084
600	402 Edinburgh South	Lab	Griffiths,Nigel	29.5	0.61	8	32	20	1	207	4,954	79,605	16.06883
519	403 Houghton and Washington East	Lab	Kemp,Fraser	11.0	0.34	22	18	20	1	208	2,654	84,616	31.88244
463	406 Blackburn	Lab	Straw,Jack	19.9	0.52	12	27	20	1	209	2,152	95,680	44.46097
458	407 Stockport	Lab	Coffey,Ann	38.4	0.62	6	33	19	1	210	1,723	78,301	45.44457
400	408 Wentworth	Lab	Healey,John	10.1	0.28	24	15	19	1	211	1,665	77,020	46.25826
524	409 North Tyneside	Lab	Byers,Stephen	17.8	0.48	13	25	19	1	212	2,744	102,469	37.34293
417	410 Leeds West	Lab	Battle,John	28.9	0.57	8	30	19	1	213	1,681	69,312	41.2326
286	412 Stoke-on-Trent North	Lab	Walley,Joan	14.2	0.40	17	21	19	1	214	2,373	95,800	40.37084
374	413 Kingston upon Hull East	Lab	Prescott,John	34.3	0.59	7	31	19	1	215	2,379	90,351	37.97856
616	414 Greenock & Inverclyde	Lab	Godman,Norman	10.0	0.26	24	13	19	1	216	1,737	107,119	61.66897
23	415 Brighton, Kemptown	Lab	Turner,Desmond	20.8	0.49	11	26	19	1	217	1,677	70,049	41.77042
436	418 Ashton under Lyne	Lab	Sheldon,Robert	32.0	0.54	7	28	18	1	218	21,885	91,544	4.182956
166	419 Enfield North	Lab	Ryan,Joan	24.1	0.49	10	26	18	1	219	30,100	92,558	3.075017
208	420 Upminster	Lab	Darvill,Keith	13.6	0.35	17	18	18	1	220	7,833	91,725	11.71007
326	421 Chesterfield	Lab	Benn,Tony	18.8	0.44	13	23	18	1	221	2,500	103,882	41.5528
522	422 Newcastle upon Tyne North	Lab	Henderson,Doug	12.5	0.31	19	16	18	1	222	4,067	100,005	24.58938
520	423 Jarrow	Lab	Hepburn,Stephen	16.2	0.39	15	20	18	1	223	3,057	90,031	29.45077

411	424	Huddersfield	Lab	Sheerman,Barry	19.2	0.42	12	22	17	1	224	2,592	88,266	34.05324
457	425	Stalybridge and Hyde	Lab	Pendry,Tom	14.2	0.34	17	18	17	1	225	2,730	84,344	30.89524
507	426	Darlington	Lab	Milburn,Alan	31.6	0.51	8	27	17	1	226	3,009	85,618	28.45397
130	427	Norwich South	Lab	Clarke,Charles	24.5	0.47	10	24	17	1	227	92,216	88,600	0.960788
455	428	Rochdale	Lab	Fitzsimons,Lorna	13.5	0.32	18	17	17	1	228	142,726	80,170	0.561706
217	429	Bristol South	Lab	Primarolo,Dawn	42.7	0.55	6	29	17	1	229	26,763	80,324	3.001308
465	432	Blackpool South	Lab	Marsden,Gordon	41.5	0.52	6	27	16	1	230	154,953	74,778	0.482585
359	433	Broxtowe	Lab	Palmer,Nick	12.9	0.27	18	14	16	1	231	14,231	102,806	7.224088
129	434	Norwich North	Lab	Gibson,Ian	18.2	0.37	13	20	16	1	232	49,560	81,652	1.647538
429	436	Halton	Lab	Twigg,Derek	21.0	0.40	11	21	16	1	233	8,097	84,643	10.45362
78	437	Chatham and Aylesford	Lab	Shaw,Jonathon	59.2	0.53	4	28	16	1	234	93,250	86,381	0.926338
581	439	Clydebank & Milngavie	Lab	Worthington,Tony	10.2	0.16	23	8	16	1	235	30,134	93,280	3.095507
34	440	Castle Point	Lab	Butler,Christine	18.4	0.36	13	19	16	1	236	19,404	93,381	4.812461
12	441	Slough	Lab	Mactaggart,Fiona	36.9	0.48	6	25	16	1	237	8,205	81,122	9.886898
27	442	Hove	Lab	Caplin,Ivor	36.0	0.47	7	25	16	1	238	28,100	100,133	3.563452
529	443	Tynemouth	Lab	Campbell,Alan	30.1	0.44	8	23	15	1	239	59,961	91,749	1.530145
1	444	Bedford	Lab	Hall,Patrick	30.5	0.44	8	23	15	1	240	3,594	97,063	27.00696
213	445	Wimbledon	Lab	Casale,Roger	40.3	0.48	6	25	15	1	241	40,715	86,346	2.120742
598	446	Edinburgh North & Leith	Lab	Chisholm,Malcolm	45.7	0.48	5	25	15	1	242	15,724	85,448	5.434241
632	448	Paisley South	Lab	McMaster,Gordon	17.3	0.29	14	15	15	1	243	44,916	85,708	1.908184
11	449	Reading West	Lab	Salter,Martin	18.3	0.31	13	16	15	1	244	2,812	81,020	28.81223
216	450	Bristol North West	Lab	Naysmith,Douglas	19.0	0.31	13	16	14	1	245	5,481	77,670	14.17077
360	451	Gedling	Lab	Coaker,Vernon	21.1	0.34	11	18	14	1	246	3,446	92,716	26.9054
73	454	Watford	Lab	Ward,Claire	25.7	0.37	9	19	14	1	247	66,919	84,159	1.257625
482	455	Knowsley South	Lab	O'Hara,Eddie	19.4	0.31	12	16	14	1	248	2,533	83,653	33.02527
327	456	Derby North	Lab	Laxton,Robert	29.6	0.39	8	20	14	1	249	92,355	98,856	1.070391
232	457	Plymouth, Devonport	Lab	Jamieson,David	29.9	0.39	8	20	14	1	250	5,697	90,324	15.85466
596	458	Edinburgh Central	Lab	Darling,Alistair	38.8	0.42	6	22	14	1	251	17,889	86,967	4.861479
563	459	Cardiff West	Lab	Morgan,Rhodri	24.2	0.35	10	18	14	1	252	4,718	77,272	16.37813
365	460	Nottingham South	Lab	Simpson,Alan	26.9	0.37	9	19	14	1	253	34,780	76,207	2.191116
473	461	Preston	Lab	Wise,Audrey	26.1	0.36	9	19	14	1	254	2,567	92,303	35.95754
404	462	Bradford West	Lab	Singh,Marsha	27.0	0.36	9	19	14	1	255	3,033	87,580	28.8757
459	463	Stretford and Urmston	Lab	Hughes,Beverley	20.9	0.31	11	16	14	1	256	1,813	80,951	44.6503
570	464	Aberdeen Central	Lab	Doran,Frank	39.9	0.41	6	22	14	1	257	27,318	99,056	3.626034
338	465	Leicester East	Lab	Vaz,Keith	35.8	0.40	7	21	14	1	258	2,677	85,067	31.77699
441	466	Bury South	Lab	Lewis,Ivan	19.8	0.29	12	15	14	1	259	2,945	87,264	29.63124
364	468	Nottingham North	Lab	Allen,Graham	40.3	0.39	6	21	13	1	260	58,078	79,520	1.369193
314	470	Stourbridge	Lab	Shiple,Debra	33.0	0.36	7	19	13	1	261	2,288	83,568	36.52448
607	471	Glasgow Cathcart	Lab	Maxton,John	37.3	0.37	6	19	13	1	262	2,079	73,407	35.3088
178	473	Hayes and Harlington	Lab	McDonnell,John	21.0	0.28	11	14	13	1	263	2,500	86,609	34.6436
386	474	Barnsley Central	Lab	Illsley,Eric	19.6	0.26	12	13	13	1	264	3,323	81,755	24.60277
562	475	Cardiff South and Penarth	Lab	Michael,Alun	21.3	0.27	11	14	13	1	265	15,248	92,384	6.058762
626	476	Motherwell & Wishaw	Lab	Roy,Frank	16.1	0.20	15	11	13	1	266	10,339	99,753	9.648225
403	477	Bradford South	Lab	Sutcliffe,Gerry	22.4	0.28	11	15	13	1	267	2,945	89,868	30.51545
589	478	Dundee East	Lab	McAllion,John	34.4	0.35	7	18	13	1	268	8,437	96,989	11.49567
118	479	Cambridge	Lab	Campbell,Anne	27.2	0.31	9	16	13	1	269	32,634	91,694	2.809769
414	480	Leeds East	Lab	Mudie,George	26.2	0.30	9	16	13	1	270	31,741	85,044	2.679311

251	481 Gloucester	Lab	Kingham,Tess	24.9	0.30	10	15	12	1	271	5,187	86,756	16.72566
409	482 Halifax	Lab	Mahon,Alice	16.7	0.20	14	10	12	1	272	49,680	90,632	1.824316
219	483 Kingswood	Lab	Berry,Roger	28.1	0.31	8	16	12	1	273	2,864	77,860	27.18575
307	484 Coventry North West	Lab	Robinson,Geoffrey	24.6	0.28	10	15	12	1	274	4,695	86,560	18.43663
597	485 Edinburgh East & Musselburgh	Lab	Strang,Gavin	25.9	0.29	9	15	12	1	275	79,883	85,244	1.067111
233	486 Plymouth, Sutton	Lab	Gilroy,Linda	42.5	0.36	6	19	12	1	276	5,726	93,848	16.3898
181	487 Hornchurch	Lab	Cryer,John	20.9	0.25	11	13	12	1	277	13,499	91,632	6.788058
317	488 Walsall South	Lab	George,Bruce	28.9	0.31	8	16	12	1	278	18,106	87,724	4.845024
568	489 Swansea East	Lab	Anderson,Donald	16.3	0.18	15	9	12	1	279	6,516	84,577	12.9799
10	490 Reading East	Lab	Griffiths,Jane	34.6	0.32	7	17	12	1	280	13,061	91,179	6.981012
448	491 Makerfield	Lab	McCartney,Ian	15.5	0.16	15	8	12	1	281	10,858	92,484	8.517591
390	492 Doncaster Central	Lab	Winterton,Rosie	19.1	0.22	12	11	12	1	282	17,044	89,060	5.225299
610	494 Glasgow Maryhill	Lab	Fyfe,Maria	33.0	0.31	7	16	12	1	283	9,764	88,741	9.088591
167	495 Enfield, Southgate	Lab	Twigg,Stephen	30.5	0.29	8	15	12	1	284	24,938	86,227	3.457655
308	496 Coventry South	Lab	Cunningham,Jim	29.5	0.29	8	15	12	1	285	46,647	101,349	2.17268
328	497 Derby South	Lab	Beckett,Margaret	26.6	0.27	9	14	11	1	286	3,125	88,530	28.3296
394	498 Sheffield, Attercliffe	Lab	Betts,Clive	21.2	0.22	11	12	11	1	287	1,864	87,550	46.96888
521	499 Newcastle upon Tyne Central	Lab	Cousins,Jim	36.7	0.31	7	16	11	1	288	5,557	90,148	16.22242
165	500 Eltham	Lab	Efford,Clive	39.7	0.32	6	17	11	1	289	42,311	83,235	1.967219
396	501 Sheffield Central	Lab	Caborn,Richard	32.4	0.29	7	15	11	1	290	42,943	81,647	1.901288
438	502 Bolton South East	Lab	Iddon,Brian	27.6	0.27	9	14	11	1	291	94,859	91,540	0.965011
301	504 Birmingham, Northfield	Lab	Burden,Richard	41.2	0.32	6	17	11	1	292	57,204	81,093	1.417611
62	505 Southampton, Test	Lab	Whitehead,Alan	41.2	0.32	6	16	11	1	293	85,592	94,298	1.101715
617	506 Hamilton North & Bellshill	Lab	Reid,John	14.6	0.11	16	6	11	1	294	46,938	85,077	1.81254
303	507 Birmingham, Selly Oak	Lab	Jones,Lynne	38.0	0.31	6	16	11	1	295	48,130	83,306	1.730854
135	508 Ipswich	Lab	Cann,Jamie	28.3	0.26	8	14	11	1	296	96,518	90,461	0.937245
170	511 Finchley and Golders Green	Lab	Vis,Rudolph	46.2	0.31	5	16	11	1	297	61,349	92,325	1.504915
83	512 Gillingham	Lab	Clark,Paul	29.6	0.26	8	13	11	1	298	91,179	96,078	1.053729
61	514 Southampton, Itchen	Lab	Denham,John	31.6	0.26	8	13	10	1	299	4,966	90,498	18.22352
316	516 Walsall North	Lab	Winnick,David	36.0	0.27	7	14	10	1	300	3,637	89,008	24.47292
164	517 Edmonton	Lab	Love,Andy	51.5	0.31	5	16	10	1	301	3,918	96,720	24.68606
437	518 Bolton North East	Lab	Crausby,David	25.0	0.22	10	11	10	1	302	16,852	87,961	5.219618
323	519 Wolverhampton South West	Lab	Jones,Jenny	34.6	0.26	7	14	10	1	303	9,637	90,002	9.339213
451	520 Manchester, Gorton	Lab	Kaufman,Gerald	48.8	0.30	5	16	10	1	304	92,223	92,092	0.99858
141	521 Battersea	Lab	Linton,Martin	78.4	0.33	3	17	10	1	305	6,632	85,272	12.85766
218	522 Bristol West	Lab	Davey,Valerie	40.5	0.28	6	14	10	1	306	57,224	88,461	1.545872
322	523 Wolverhampton South East	Lab	Turner,Dennis	35.3	0.26	7	13	10	1	307	81,466	94,112	1.15523
201	524 Romford	Lab	Gordon,Eileen	27.5	0.22	9	11	10	1	308	89,654	95,966	1.070404
310	525 Dudley South	Lab	Pearson,Ian	30.9	0.23	8	12	10	1	309	66,092	83,236	1.259396
168	526 Erith and Thamesmead	Lab	Austin,John	33.9	0.24	7	13	10	1	310	12,620	93,799	7.432567
393	527 Rotherham	Lab	MacShane,Denis	21.7	0.17	11	9	10	1	311	16,880	93,768	5.554976
612	528 Glasgow Rutherglen	Lab	McAvoy,Thomas	24.9	0.19	10	10	10	1	312	138,686	104,338	0.752333
285	529 Stoke-on-Trent Central	Lab	Fisher,Mark	28.8	0.21	8	11	10	1	313	1,868	82,673	44.25749
413	530 Leeds Central	Lab	Fatchett,Derek	25.3	0.19	9	10	10	1	314	8,755	87,161	9.955568
523	531 Newcastle upon Tyne East and Wallsend	Lab	Brown,Nicholas	35.3	0.23	7	12	9	1	315	77,052	94,914	1.231817
58	532 Portsmouth North	Lab	Rapson,Syd	33.3	0.22	7	12	9	1	316	8,495	92,201	10.85356
24	533 Brighton, Pavilion	Lab	Lepper,David	28.5	0.20	8	10	9	1	317	3,733	95,904	25.69087

205	534 Tooting	Lab	Cox,Tom	82.3	0.30	3	16	9	1	318	25,239	94,210	3.732715
479	536 Bootle	Lab	Benton,Joe	41.0	0.24	6	13	9	1	319	12,686	87,059	6.862604
298	537 Birmingham, Hall Green	Lab	McCabe,Stephen	45.4	0.25	5	13	9	1	320	20,987	95,302	4.541002
169	538 Feltham and Heston	Lab	Keen,Alan	32.1	0.21	7	11	9	1	321	81,626	99,500	1.218974
215	539 Bristol East	Lab	Corston,Jean	38.4	0.23	6	12	9	1	322	1,724	73,558	42.66705
491	540 Wallasey	Lab	Eagle,Angela	37.8	0.22	6	12	9	1	323	1,107	86,758	78.37218
155	541 Croydon Central	Lab	Davies,Geraint	38.7	0.22	6	12	9	1	324	2,764	95,326	34.48842
452	542 Manchester, Withington	Lab	Bradley,Keith	41.4	0.23	6	12	9	1	325	1,065	98,619	92.6
148	543 Brentford and Isleworth	Lab	Keen,Ann	36.6	0.21	7	11	9	1	326	2,225	81,908	36.81258
483	544 Liverpool, Garston	Lab	Eagle,Maria	26.9	0.16	9	8	9	1	327	1,182	81,293	68.7758
297	546 Birmingham, Erdington	Lab	Corbett,Robin	44.5	0.23	5	12	9	1	328	1,688	73,732	43.68009
454	547 Oldham West and Royton	Lab	Meacher,Michael	31.8	0.18	8	10	9	1	329	1,527	81,542	53.40013
339	548 Leicester South	Lab	Marshall,James	45.7	0.22	5	12	8	1	330	2,851	104,278	36.57594
631	549 Paisley North	Lab	Adams,Irene	16.1	0.04	15	2	8	1	331	3,946	91,257	23.12646
398	550 Sheffield, Heeley	Lab	Michie,Bill	37.7	0.20	6	10	8	1	332	770	79,828	103.6727
287	551 Stoke-on-Trent South	Lab	Stevenson,George	26.9	0.15	9	8	8	1	333	2,580	88,810	34.42248
518	552 Gateshead East and Washington West	Lab	Quin,Joyce	31.2	0.17	8	9	8	1	334	2,035	78,537	38.59312
311	553 Halesowen and Rowley Regis	Lab	Heal,Sylvia	28.5	0.16	8	8	8	1	335	3,424	90,728	26.49766
321	554 Wolverhampton North East	Lab	Purchase,Ken	36.5	0.19	7	10	8	1	336	1,778	100,050	56.27109
614	555 Glasgow Springburn	Lab	Martin,Michael	34.9	0.19	7	10	8	1	337	2,796	108,303	38.73498
319	556 West Bromwich East	Lab	Snape,Peter	31.8	0.17	8	9	8	1	338	1,712	107,977	63.07068
526	557 Sunderland North	Lab	Etherington,Bill	35.7	0.18	7	10	8	1	339	4,127	97,401	23.60092
443	558 Denton and Reddish	Lab	Bennett,Andrew	34.2	0.17	7	9	8	1	340	1,854	79,563	42.91424
182	560 Hornsey and Wood Green	Lab	Roche,Barbara	62.0	0.23	4	12	8	1	341	1,604	95,900	59.78803
2	561 Luton North	Lab	Hopkins,Kelvin	47.0	0.20	5	11	8	1	342	1,846	103,689	56.16956
605	562 Glasgow Anniesland	Lab	Dewar,Donald	41.9	0.19	6	10	8	1	343	2,397	107,301	44.76471
158	563 Dagenham	Lab	Church,Judith	42.9	0.19	6	10	8	1	344	1,908	109,865	57.58124
177	564 Harrow West	Lab	Thomas,Gareth	41.0	0.18	6	9	8	1	345	1,802	96,509	53.5566
183	565 Ilford North	Lab	Perham,Linda	44.0	0.19	5	10	8	1	346	1,648	84,927	51.53337
296	566 Birmingham, Edgbaston	Lab	Stuart,Gisela	31.9	0.14	7	7	7	1	347	1,930	76,560	39.66839
144	568 Bexleyheath and Crayford	Lab	Beard,Nigel	36.8	0.16	6	8	7	1	348	3,670	88,573	24.13433
305	569 Birmingham, Yardley	Lab	Morris,Estelle	41.8	0.18	6	9	7	1	349	2,747	83,917	30.5486
300	570 Birmingham, Ladywood	Lab	Short,Clare	37.3	0.16	6	8	7	1	350	2,628	89,155	33.92504
304	571 Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath	Lab	Godsiff,Roger	61.7	0.21	4	11	7	1	351	3,046	97,660	32.06172
193	572 Mitcham and Morden	Lab	McDonagh,Siobhain	49.8	0.18	5	10	7	1	352	2,184	100,826	46.16575
402	573 Bradford North	Lab	Rooney,Terry	29.9	0.12	8	6	7	1	353	2,064	87,554	42.41957
173	574 Hackney South and Shoreditch	Lab	Sedgemore,Brian	81.9	0.21	3	11	7	1	354	844	91,775	108.7382
309	575 Dudley North	Lab	Cranston,Ross	34.1	0.14	7	7	7	1	355	1,098	89,879	81.85701
354	576 Northampton North	Lab	Keeble,Sally	34.2	0.14	7	7	7	1	356	1,065	106,649	100.1399
160	577 Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush	Lab	Soley,Clive	56.2	0.19	4	10	7	1	357	1,256	91,039	72.48328
306	578 Coventry North East	Lab	Ainsworth,Bob	41.6	0.16	6	8	7	1	358	2,734	105,567	38.61266
179	579 Hendon	Lab	Dismore,Andrew	30.9	0.12	8	6	7	1	359	2,325	95,342	41.00731
318	580 Warley	Lab	Spellar,John	44.7	0.16	5	8	7	1	360	3,677	77,055	20.95594
171	581 Greenwich and Woolwich	Lab	Raynsford,Nick	42.4	0.16	6	8	7	1	361	3,315	102,397	30.88899
203	582 Streatham	Lab	Hill,Keith	87.0	0.21	3	11	7	1	362	909	79,405	87.35424
527	583 Sunderland South	Lab	Mullin,Chris	38.1	0.14	6	7	7	1	363	3,736	78,050	20.89133
198	584 Putney	Lab	Colman,Anthony	56.0	0.17	4	9	7	1	364	1,656	102,732	62.03623

180	585 Holborn and St. Pancras	Lab	Dobson, Frank	87.4	0.20	3	10	7	1	365	1,968	86,541	43.97409
140	586 Barking	Lab	Hodge, Margaret	42.7	0.14	6	7	6	1	366	1,651	93,122	56.40339
569	587 Swansea West	Lab	Williams, Alan	22.0	0.04	11	2	6	1	367	727	86,352	118.7785
590	588 Dundee West	Lab	Ross, Ernie	32.1	0.10	7	5	6	1	368	745	77,332	103.8013
611	589 Glasgow Pollok	Lab	Davidson, Ian	30.3	0.09	8	5	6	1	369	942	103,316	109.6773
613	590 Glasgow Shettleston	Lab	Marshall, David	40.8	0.12	6	6	6	1	370	2,761	98,341	35.61789
340	591 Leicester West	Lab	Hewitt, Patricia	31.4	0.09	8	5	6	1	371	1,084	79,128	72.99631
95	592 Oxford East	Lab	Smith, Andrew	30.2	0.08	8	4	6	1	372	1,232	74,936	60.82468
302	593 Birmingham, Perry Barr	Lab	Rooker, Jeff	40.4	0.11	6	6	6	1	373	1,150	78,094	67.90783
161	594 Ealing North	Lab	Pound, Stephen	44.8	0.12	5	6	6	1	374	1,460	85,764	58.74247
211	595 Walthamstow	Lab	Gerrard, Neil	55.8	0.14	4	7	6	1	375	1,706	84,954	49.79719
176	596 Harrow East	Lab	McNulty, Tony	38.6	0.10	6	5	6	1	376	1,201	86,358	71.90508
484	597 Liverpool, Riverside	Lab	Ellman, Louise	34.6	0.09	7	5	6	1	377	2,607	86,991	33.36824
175	598 Hampstead and Highgate	Lab	Jackson, Glenda	72.5	0.16	3	8	6	1	378	8,455	104,283	12.33389
210	599 Vauxhall	Lab	Hoey, Kate	100.2	0.17	2	9	6	1	379	1,989	92,616	46.5641
206	600 Tottenham	Lab	Grant, Bernie	72.5	0.15	3	8	6	1	380	1,403	78,625	56.04063
174	601 Hammersmith and Fulham	Lab	Coleman, Iain	100.1	0.17	2	9	6	1	381	999	115,822	115.9379
150	602 Camberwell and Peckham	Lab	Harman, Harriet	103.7	0.16	2	9	5	1	382	3,772	100,683	26.69221
197	603 Poplar and Canning Town	Lab	Fitzpatrick, Jim	46.6	0.11	5	6	5	1	383	2,827	77,882	27.54935
363	604 Nottingham East	Lab	Heppell, John	43.6	0.10	5	5	5	1	384	4,548	78,445	17.24824
606	605 Glasgow Baillieston	Lab	Wray, James	23.2	0.00	10	0	5	1	385	1,150	100,060	87.0087
146	606 Brent North	Lab	Gardiner, Barry	43.7	0.09	5	5	5	1	386	1,753	80,070	45.67598
143	607 Bethnal Green and Bow	Lab	King, Oona	92.6	0.14	3	7	5	1	387	1,063	87,445	82.26246
478	608 Birkenhead	Lab	Field, Frank	38.5	0.07	6	4	5	1	388	1,366	99,066	72.52269
395	609 Sheffield, Brightside	Lab	Blunkett, David	39.6	0.07	6	4	5	1	389	2,859	97,163	33.98496
450	611 Manchester, Central	Lab	Lloyd, Tony	32.6	0.04	7	2	5	1	390	5,392	73,560	13.64243
163	612 East Ham	Lab	Timms, Stephen	53.6	0.10	4	5	5	1	391	2,754	76,102	27.63326
525	613 South Shields	Lab	Clark, David	42.3	0.07	6	4	5	1	392	1,006	100,826	100.2247
190	614 Lewisham East	Lab	Prentice, Bridget	60.8	0.10	4	5	5	1	393	1,536	85,710	55.80078
528	616 Tyne Bridge	Lab	Clelland, David	33.9	0.04	7	2	4	1	394	1,146	84,157	73.43543
449	617 Manchester, Blackley	Lab	Stringer, Graham	34.7	0.04	7	2	4	1	395	2,070	83,516	40.34589
189	619 Lewisham, Deptford	Lab	Ruddock, Joan	73.0	0.10	3	5	4	1	396	6,565	109,498	16.67906
501	620 Middlesbrough	Lab	Bell, Stuart	34.9	0.03	7	2	4	1	397	54,337	82,165	1.512137
191	621 Lewisham West	Lab	Dowd, Jim	67.9	0.09	4	5	4	1	398	57,816	92,331	1.59698
184	622 Ilford South	Lab	Gapes, Mike	56.4	0.08	4	4	4	1	399	21,505	103,240	4.800744
159	623 Dulwich and West Norwood	Lab	Jowell, Tessa	59.8	0.08	4	4	4	1	400	55,343	99,118	1.790976
172	624 Hackney North and Stoke Newington	Lab	Abbott, Diane	108.7	0.11	2	6	4	1	401	63,272	99,916	1.57915
147	625 Brent South	Lab	Boateng, Paul	53.4	0.06	4	3	4	1	402	17,955	88,555	4.932052
485	626 Liverpool, Walton	Lab	Kilfoyle, Peter	57.3	0.07	4	4	4	1	403	52,327	80,639	1.541059
560	627 Cardiff Central	Lab	Owen Jones, Jon	41.0	0.03	6	2	4	1	404	4,973	80,766	16.2409
486	628 Liverpool, Wavertree	Lab	Kennedy, Jane	55.5	0.06	4	3	4	1	405	9,875	100,465	10.17367
162	629 Ealing, Southall	Lab	Khabra, Piara	57.6	0.06	4	3	4	1	406	3,999	83,134	20.7887
609	630 Glasgow Kelvin	Lab	Galloway, George	47.2	0.04	5	2	4	1	407	2,811	80,248	28.54785
487	631 Liverpool, West Derby	Lab	Wareing, Robert	43.8	0.04	5	2	4	1	408	84,611	78,218	0.924442
192	632 Leyton and Wanstead	Lab	Cohen, Harry	58.7	0.06	4	3	4	1	409	27,688	91,174	3.292907
299	633 Birmingham, Hodge Hill	Lab	Davis, Terry	46.3	0.04	5	2	4	1	410	1,593	94,378	59.24545
185	634 Islington North	Lab	Corbyn, Jeremy	118.8	0.09	2	5	3	1	411	17,736	88,906	5.012742

145	635 Brent East	Lab	Livingstone, Ken	68.8	0.06	3	3	3	1	412	66,388	93,353	1.406173
608	636 Glasgow Govan	Lab	Sarwar, Mohammad	36.2	0.00	7	0	3	1	413	4,418	87,644	19.83794
456	637 Salford	Lab	Blears, Hazel	38.0	0.00	6	0	3	1	414	9,886	88,622	8.964394
156	638 Croydon North	Lab	Wicks, Malcolm	63.1	0.04	4	2	3	1	415	21,637	90,151	4.16652
199	639 Regent's Park and Kensington North	Lab	Buck, Karen	115.9	0.07	2	4	3	1	416	34,927	96,749	2.770035
212	640 West Ham	Lab	Banks, Tony	73.4	0.03	3	2	3	1	417	25,988	93,626	3.602663
186	641 Islington South and Finsbury	Lab	Smith, Chris	103.8	0.03	2	2	2	1	418	5,598	90,233	16.11879
497	13 Penrith and The Border	Con	Maclean, David	0.2	12.74	972	664	818		419	7,228	88,966	12.30852
515	19 Hexham	Con	Atkinson, Peter	0.3	7.11	800	371	585		420	7,512	88,549	11.78767
267	22 Leominster	Con	Temple-Morris, Peter	0.6	12.80	425	667	546		421	5,160	96,663	18.73314
273	23 Ludlow	Con	Gill, Christopher	0.5	11.18	495	583	539		422	8,065	96,084	11.9137
379	25 Richmond Yorks	Con	Hague, William	26.7	0.47	9	24	17		423	6,350	84,714	13.34079
383	26 Skipton and Ripon	Con	Curry, David	0.4	8.54	546	445	495		424	40,315	87,245	2.164083
380	31 Ryedale	Con	Greenway, John	0.5	8.85	504	461	483		425	35,546	91,486	2.573735
348	32 Louth and Horncastle	Con	Tapsell, Peter	0.6	10.46	385	545	465		426	3,224	95,358	29.57754
350	33 South Holland and The Deepings	Con	Hayes, John	1.0	12.40	234	647	441		427	3,668	89,609	24.42993
236	36 Tiverton and Honiton	Con	Browning, Angela	0.8	10.40	286	542	414		428	9,885	92,454	9.352959
345	37 Gainsborough	Con	Leigh, Edward	0.6	8.00	386	417	402		429	19,218	95,943	4.992351
498	39 Westmorland and Lonsdale	Con	Collins, Tim	0.5	6.64	440	346	393		430	13,269	93,399	7.038888
371	40 East Yorkshire	Con	Townend, John	0.8	9.17	295	478	387		431	4,769	90,924	19.06563
384	41 Vale of York	Con	McIntosh, Anne	0.7	8.51	325	444	384		432	58,506	87,080	1.488394
132	42 South West Norfolk	Con	Shephard, Gillian	0.8	8.53	317	445	381		433	45,613	92,703	2.032381
247	44 West Dorset	Con	Letwin, Oliver	0.8	8.43	300	440	370		434	2,372	85,364	35.9882
249	48 Cotswold	Con	Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey	0.7	6.77	354	353	353		435	38,234	124,577	3.258278
274	49 North Shropshire	Con	Paterson, Owen	0.9	8.38	258	437	347		436	39,080	78,841	2.017426
127	50 North Norfolk	Con	Prior, David	0.9	8.41	255	439	347		437	15,788	86,499	5.478781
344	51 Boston and Skegness	Con	Body, Richard	1.3	9.30	179	485	332		438	28,708	92,701	3.2291
244	52 North Dorset	Con	Walter, Robert	0.9	7.39	260	385	323		439	14,627	83,920	5.737335
349	54 Sleaford and North Hykeham	Con	Hogg, Douglas	0.8	6.40	306	334	320		440	15,238	90,879	5.963972
427	58 Eddisbury	Con	Goodlad, Alastair	1.2	7.56	206	394	300		441	6,478	90,497	13.9699
120	59 North East Cambridgeshire	Con	Moss, Malcolm	1.1	7.34	217	383	300		442	36,881	88,242	2.392614
134	61 Central Suffolk and North Ipswich	Con	Lord, Michael	1.1	6.93	224	361	293		443	39,532	82,784	2.094101
131	62 South Norfolk	Con	MacGregor, John	1.1	6.91	223	360	292		444	36,804	77,268	2.099446
126	64 Mid Norfolk	Con	Simpson, Keith	1.0	6.13	247	320	284		445	61,199	93,071	1.520793
368	66 Beverley and Holderness	Con	Cran, James	1.1	6.32	209	330	269		446	36,003	89,619	2.489209
343	67 Rutland and Melton	Con	Duncan, Alan	0.8	4.45	298	232	265		447	24,309	85,833	3.530914
259	68 Devizes	Con	Ancram, Michael	1.0	5.31	243	277	260		448	8,811	89,747	10.18579
17	73 Buckingham	Con	Bercow, John	0.9	4.84	258	252	255		449	22,373	91,692	4.098333
43	74 Saffron Walden	Con	Haselhurst, Alan	1.0	5.17	239	270	254		450	2,813	84,883	30.17526
239	75 Totnes	Con	Steen, Anthony	1.3	6.25	178	326	252		451	11,448	93,092	8.131726
333	77 West Derbyshire	Con	McLoughlin, Patrick	1.0	5.11	229	267	248		452	2,501	83,406	33.34906
293	78 Stratford-on-Avon	Con	Maples, John	1.1	4.95	223	258	241		453	1,498	91,291	60.94192
268	79 Mid Worcestershire	Con	Luff, Peter	1.6	6.42	145	335	240		454	2,603	89,975	34.56589
254	81 Bridgwater	Con	King, Tom	1.2	5.31	197	277	237		455	5,043	92,239	18.2905
110	82 Arundel and South Downs	Con	Flight, Howard	1.5	6.03	158	314	236		456	11,070	82,217	7.42701
124	84 South East Cambridgeshire	Con	Paice, James	1.2	4.93	207	257	232		457	42,233	83,515	1.977482
22	85 Bexhill and Battle	Con	Wardle, Charles	1.5	5.90	155	308	231		458	9,342	90,184	9.653607

288	88 Stone	Con	Cash,Bill	1.3	5.04	190	263	226	459	23,716	86,095	3.63025
112	90 Chichester	Con	Tyrie,Andrew	1.4	5.25	170	274	222	460	19,995	86,003	4.301225
474	91 Ribble Valley	Con	Evans,Nigel	1.3	5.02	180	262	221	461	2,554	94,253	36.90407
270	93 West Worcestershire	Con	Spicer,Michael	1.4	5.08	174	265	220	462	14,374	79,756	5.548629
139	95 West Suffolk	Con	Spring,Richard	1.2	4.53	196	237	216	463	25,149	92,869	3.692751
257	96 Wells	Con	Heathcoat-Amory,David	1.5	5.21	160	272	216	464	2,949	93,183	31.59817
137	97 Suffolk Coastal	Con	Gummer,John	1.2	4.51	194	235	214	465	2,195	90,383	41.17677
262	98 Salisbury	Con	Key,Robert	1.1	3.85	210	201	205	466	5,647	89,987	15.93536
40	100 North Essex	Con	Jenkin,Bernard	1.7	5.21	138	272	205	467	10,809	96,665	8.94301
352	101 Daventry	Con	Boswell,Tim	1.1	3.75	212	196	204	468	34,736	81,885	2.357353
373	103 Haltemprice and Howden	Con	Davis,David	1.7	5.08	138	265	202	469	20,358	85,567	4.203114
76	104 Ashford	Con	Green,Damian	1.6	4.83	149	252	201	470	58,849	89,602	1.522575
136	105 South Suffolk	Con	Yeo,Tim	1.3	4.05	190	211	200	471	58,133	99,856	1.717716
346	108 Grantham and Stamford	Con	Davies,Quentin	1.2	3.58	192	187	190	472	65,870	96,386	1.463276
261	109 North Wiltshire	Con	Gray,James	1.4	3.88	172	202	187	473	14,451	89,805	6.214449
29	110 Wealden	Con	Johnson Smith,Geoffrey	1.7	4.44	139	231	185	474	72,855	93,809	1.287612
5	111 North East Bedfordshire	Con	Lyell,Nicholas	1.4	3.77	168	196	182	475	9,880	93,566	9.470243
229	113 East Devon	Con	Emery,Peter	1.8	4.40	130	229	180	476	13,843	87,939	6.352597
235	116 Teignbridge	Con	Nicholls,Patrick	1.6	3.93	148	205	176	477	3,020	85,812	28.41457
98	117 Witney	Con	Woodward,Shaun	1.3	3.20	185	167	176	478	14,545	97,238	6.685321
121	118 North West Cambridgeshire	Con	Mawhinney,Brian	1.5	3.58	159	187	173	479	8,320	87,091	10.46767
264	120 Westbury	Con	Faber,David	1.6	3.57	152	186	169	480	2,400	77,201	32.16708
133	122 Bury St. Edmunds	Con	Ruffley,David	1.8	3.92	131	204	168	481	2,281	74,101	32.48619
97	123 Wantage	Con	Jackson,Robert	1.5	3.08	157	161	159	482	73,394	88,925	1.211611
81	124 Faversham and Mid Kent	Con	Rowe,Andrew	2.2	3.97	110	207	159	483	2,403	92,232	38.38202
94	125 Henley	Con	Heseltine,Michael	1.5	2.87	160	150	155	484	5,050	95,986	19.00713
123	127 South Cambridgeshire	Con	Lansley,Andrew	1.5	2.77	154	144	149	485	2,406	102,665	42.67041
60	130 Romsey	Con	Colvin,Michael	2.0	3.20	121	167	144	486	2,377	96,237	40.48675
115	133 Horsham	Con	Maude,Francis	2.0	3.07	117	160	139	487	3,489	86,996	24.93437
39	134 Maldon and East Chelmsford	Con	Whittingdale,John	2.0	2.96	121	154	138	488	11,387	80,938	7.10793
93	136 Banbury	Con	Baldry,Tony	1.8	2.70	133	141	137	489	120,643	81,422	0.6749
55	137 New Forest West	Con	Swayne,Desmond	2.1	3.01	114	157	135	490	103,792	101,803	0.980837
4	138 Mid Bedfordshire	Con	Sayeed,Jonathan	1.9	2.73	126	142	134	491	44,837	82,041	1.829761
69	139 North East Hertfordshire	Con	Heald,Oliver	1.8	2.57	132	134	133	492	4,777	98,125	20.54113
91	144 Tonbridge and Malling	Con	Stanley,John	2.4	2.89	101	150	126	493	23,428	89,739	3.830417
253	147 Tewkesbury	Con	Robertson,Lawrence	2.2	2.62	106	137	121	494	61,930	79,694	1.28684
103	149 Mole Valley	Con	Beresford,Paul	2.4	2.69	100	140	120	495	4,074	101,608	24.9406
82	150 Folkestone and Hythe	Con	Howard,Michael	2.6	2.81	93	146	120	496	3,455	97,234	28.14298
85	151 Maidstone and The Weald	Con	Widdecombe,Ann	3.2	3.13	74	163	118	497	17,052	83,704	4.90875
234	153 South West Devon	Con	Streeter,Gary	2.1	2.36	111	123	117	498	129,583	98,981	0.763842
56	157 North East Hampshire	Con	Arbuthnot,James	2.5	2.55	96	133	115	499	124,250	89,537	0.72062
54	158 New Forest East	Con	Lewis,Julian	2.1	2.19	114	114	114	500	88,644	81,335	0.917547
425	159 Congleton	Con	Winterton,Ann	4.0	3.22	59	168	114	501	13,641	83,866	6.148083
49	161 East Hampshire	Con	Mates,Michael	2.8	2.69	86	140	113	502	67,210	93,400	1.389674
77	163 Canterbury	Con	Brazier,Julian	3.3	2.90	72	151	112	503	43,002	97,347	2.263778
366	165 Rushcliffe	Con	Clarke,Kenneth	2.4	2.22	100	116	108	504	3,466	103,642	29.90248
119	168 Huntingdon	Con	Major,John	2.2	1.96	110	102	106	505	2,062	87,719	42.54074

246	170 South Dorset	Con	Bruce,Ian	2.3	2.01	104	105	104	506	3,202	79,840	24.93442
48	171 Basingstoke	Con	Hunter,Andrew	1.6	1.09	151	57	104	507	60,559	89,711	1.481382
282	178 South Staffordshire	Con	Cormack,Patrick	2.1	1.67	113	87	100	508	88,166	100,246	1.137014
33	180 Brentwood and Ongar	Con	Pickles,Eric	2.7	2.11	89	110	100	509	35,313	93,013	2.633959
57	181 North West Hampshire	Con	Young,George	4.1	2.68	58	140	99	510	37,449	86,053	2.297872
280	182 Lichfield	Con	Fabricant,Michael	3.0	2.15	80	112	96	511	81,193	94,423	1.162945
334	183 Blaby	Con	Robathan,Andrew	2.9	2.06	83	107	95	512	13,127	91,664	6.98286
430	184 Macclesfield	Con	Winterton,Nicholas	3.1	2.19	76	114	95	513	40,118	86,085	2.145795
106	185 South West Surrey	Con	Bottomley, Virginia	3.7	2.40	65	125	95	514	42,846	96,165	2.244434
468	187 Fylde	Con	Jack,Michael	3.7	2.38	64	124	94	515	80,827	98,075	1.213394
265	190 Bromsgrove	Con	Kirkbride,Julie	4.2	2.40	57	125	91	516	60,637	97,915	1.614773
223	197 Woodspring	Con	Fox,Liam	3.9	1.89	61	99	80	517	36,733	82,485	2.245529
335	198 Bosworth	Con	Tredinnick,David	3.1	1.55	78	81	79	518	111,808	93,353	0.83494
111	200 Bognor Regis and Littlehampton	Con	Gibb,Nicolas	16.2	2.73	15	142	78	519	3,720	91,047	24.475
88	207 Sevenoaks	Con	Fallon,Michael	3.6	1.59	66	83	74	520	211,718	94,473	0.446221
41	208 Rayleigh	Con	Clark,Michael	5.2	1.96	46	102	74	521	64,323	86,013	1.337204
99	211 East Surrey	Con	Ainsworth,Peter	3.6	1.47	66	77	71	522	61,865	95,571	1.544831
337	215 Harborough	Con	Garnier,Edward	4.1	1.54	58	81	69	523	28,545	86,410	3.02715
68	220 Hitchin and Harpenden	Con	Lilley,Peter	3.5	1.28	69	67	68	524	59,343	88,792	1.496251
92	221 Tunbridge Wells	Con	Norman,Archie	4.2	1.51	57	79	68	525	103,509	82,398	0.796047
102	225 Guildford	Con	St Aubyn,Nick	5.0	1.62	48	84	66	526	60,658	95,335	1.571681
87	231 North Thanet	Con	Gale,Roger	10.2	1.97	23	103	63	527	15,110	89,969	5.954269
243	232 Mid Dorset and North Poole	Con	Fraser,Christopher	4.9	1.49	49	78	63	528	22,318	87,503	3.920737
8	236 Maidenhead	Con	May,Theresa	5.5	1.40	44	73	58	529	95,605	91,563	0.957722
46	239 West Chelmsford	Con	Burns,Simon	4.5	1.15	53	60	56	530	17,692	65,781	3.718121
116	245 Mid Sussex	Con	Soames,Nicholas	6.0	1.30	40	68	54	531	15,606	73,494	4.709343
36	250 Epping Forest	Con	Laing,Eleanor	6.8	1.36	35	71	53	532	10,855	72,254	6.656287
66	251 Hertford and Stortford	Con	Wells,Bowen	5.2	1.14	46	59	52	533	300,474	64,775	0.215576
16	252 Beaconsfield	Con	Grieve,Dominic	4.9	1.08	48	56	52	534	13,923	75,527	5.424621
242	259 Christchurch	Con	Chope,Christopher	7.1	1.27	34	66	50	535	89,277	59,105	0.662041
117	262 Worthing West	Con	Bottomley,Peter	28.4	1.73	8	90	49	536	12,506	85,822	6.862466
14	263 Wokingham	Con	Redwood,John	6.4	1.15	38	60	49	537	1,682	68,931	40.98157
336	266 Charnwood	Con	Dorrell,Stephen	5.0	0.92	48	48	48	538	4,251	71,067	16.71771
21	269 Wycombe	Con	Whitney,Ray	6.7	1.13	36	59	47	539	3,938	83,705	21.25571
18	270 Chesham and Amersham	Con	Gillan,Cheryl	5.0	0.89	48	46	47	540	3,211	77,667	24.18779
15	272 Aylesbury	Con	Lidington,David	4.8	0.85	50	44	47	541	163,759	66,375	0.405321
108	275 Surrey Heath	Con	Hawkins,Nick	8.9	1.23	27	64	45	542	96,317	69,183	0.718284
70	279 South West Hertfordshire	Con	Page,Richard	5.6	0.84	43	44	43	543	179,005	63,094	0.352471
312	284 Meriden	Con	Spelman,Caroline	7.2	1.00	33	52	43	544	85,093	68,216	0.801664
104	286 Reigate	Con	Blunt,Crispin	7.4	0.96	32	50	41	545	83,376	66,449	0.79698
6	293 South West Bedfordshire	Con	Madel,David	7.4	0.91	32	48	40	546	30,120	65,532	2.175697
13	296 Windsor	Con	Trend,Michael	6.2	0.76	38	40	39	547	17,556	65,171	3.712178
42	299 Rochford and Southend East	Con	Taylor,Teddy	9.3	0.99	26	51	38	548	27,979	67,850	2.425033
109	303 Woking	Con	Malins,Humfrey	9.5	0.96	25	50	38	549	29,856	72,150	2.4166
51	310 Fareham	Con	Lloyd,Peter	13.3	1.03	18	54	36	550	10,058	66,177	6.579539
105	311 Runnymede and Weybridge	Con	Hammond,Philip	9.7	0.87	25	45	35	551	23,743	74,698	3.146106
67	322 Hertsmere	Con	Clappison,James	9.1	0.76	26	40	33	552	196,011	41,666	0.21257

101	323 Esher and Walton	Con	Taylor,Ian	11.9	0.88	20	46	33	553	16,140	76,895	4.76425
7	325 Bracknell	Con	Mackay,Andrew	10.2	0.81	23	42	33	554	82,902	74,989	0.90455
435	341 Altrincham and Sale West	Con	Brady,Graham	17.4	0.87	14	46	30	555	205,121	52,692	0.256883
64	344 Broxbourne	Con	Roe,Marion	16.7	0.85	14	44	29	556	26,473	72,455	2.73694
114	349 East Worthing and Shoreham	Con	Loughton,Tim	16.1	0.81	15	42	29	557	12,317	71,932	5.840058
196	354 Orpington	Con	Horam,John	12.3	0.71	19	37	28	558	9,788	76,348	7.800163
31	355 Billericay	Con	Gorman,Teresa	11.5	0.68	21	36	28	559	18,262	69,154	3.78677
25	358 Eastbourne	Con	Waterson,Nigel	12.3	0.68	19	36	28	560	12,914	83,188	6.441691
53	360 Havant	Con	Willetts,David	19.1	0.79	13	41	27	561	114,968	70,193	0.610544
107	386 Spelthorne	Con	Wilshire,David	15.9	0.54	15	28	21	562	9,958	78,344	7.867443
100	388 Epsom and Ewell	Con	Hamilton,Archie	18.7	0.57	13	30	21	563	4,866	79,231	16.28257
52	404 Gosport	Con	Viggers,Peter	24.4	0.57	10	30	20	564	3,258	71,811	22.04144
202	405 Ruislip-Northwood	Con	Wilkinson,John	17.2	0.49	14	26	20	565	11,732	80,512	6.862598
47	411 Aldershot	Con	Howarth,Gerald	16.7	0.45	14	24	19	566	19,848	66,815	3.366334
245	416 Poole	Con	Syms,Robert	24.9	0.51	10	26	18	567	28,728	91,410	3.181913
442	417 Cheadle	Con	Day,Stephen	23.5	0.49	10	26	18	568	10,297	65,266	6.338351
153	431 Chipping Barnet	Con	Chapman,Sydney	26.5	0.46	9	24	17	569	71,804	69,149	0.963024
241	435 Bournemouth West	Con	Butterfill,John	32.5	0.48	7	25	16	570	1,574	62,782	39.87678
313	452 Solihull	Con	Taylor,John M	27.0	0.38	9	20	14	571	9,003	67,529	7.500947
149	453 Bromley and Chislehurst	Con	Forth,Eric	23.1	0.35	10	18	14	572	8,050	74,574	9.264116
240	467 Bournemouth East	Con	Atkinson,David	32.2	0.37	7	20	13	573	22,556	78,438	3.477528
315	469 Sutton Coldfield	Con	Fowler,Norman	15.9	0.22	15	11	13	574	72,356	76,015	1.050574
157	472 Croydon South	Con	Ottaway,Richard	23.6	0.30	10	16	13	575	664,328	65,140	0.098054
295	493 Aldridge-Brownhills	Con	Shepherd,Richard	16.1	0.16	15	8	12	576	15,094	69,378	4.59642
142	509 Beckenham	Con	Merchant,Piers	34.5	0.29	7	15	11	577	119,804	75,811	0.632792
44	510 Southend West	Con	Amess,David	44.3	0.32	5	16	11	578	824,205	53,472	0.064877
152	515 Chingford and Woodford Green	Con	Duncan-Smith,Iain	38.6	0.28	6	15	10	579	196,763	85,874	0.436433
187	559 Kensington and Chelsea	Con	Clark,Alan	109.7	0.26	2	14	8	580	10,416	75,075	7.20771
195	567 Old Bexley and Sidcup	Con	Heath,Edward	33.4	0.15	7	8	7	581	6,509	66,541	10.22245
154	615 Cities of London and Westminster	Con	Brooke,Peter	56.3	0.10	4	5	5	582	138,752	81,054	0.584166
431	126 Tatton	Ind	Bell,Martin	2.4	4.00	101	209	155	583	7,731	70,305	9.094378
578	1 Caithness, Sutherland & Easter Ross	LDem	Maclennan,Robert	0.1	8.97	3,679	468	2,073	584	10,472	62,412	5.959722
634	2 Ross, Skye & Inverness West	LDem	Kennedy,Charles	0.1	7.58	3,099	395	1,747	585	76,884	70,552	0.917645
575	3 Argyll & Bute	LDem	Michie,Ray	0.1	12.49	2,434	651	1,543	586	11,369	66,323	5.833552
630	8 Orkney & Shetland	LDem	Wallace,James	0.2	13.74	1,407	717	1,062	587	52,444	77,173	1.471541
558	9 Brecon and Radnorshire	LDem	Livsey,Richard	0.2	13.13	1,107	685	896	588	199,784	80,895	0.404911
559	10 Montgomeryshire	LDem	Opik,Lembit	0.3	15.96	929	832	881	589	2,181	75,027	34.4069
635	12 Roxburgh & Berwickshire	LDem	Kirkwood,Archy	0.2	11.94	1,058	623	840	590	2,302	73,946	32.11873
639	14 West Aberdeenshire & Kincardine	LDem	Smith,Robert	0.2	6.41	1,097	334	715	591	20,441	66,225	3.239863
513	17 Berwick-upon-Tweed	LDem	Beith,Alan	0.3	9.48	787	494	641	592	14,992	68,265	4.553507
238	18 Torridge and West Devon	LDem	Burnett,John	0.4	12.25	535	639	587	593	28,406	81,160	2.857171
615	20 Gordon	LDem	Bruce,Malcolm	0.4	9.67	662	504	583	594	66,908	70,652	1.055962
638	21 Tweeddale, Ettrick & Lauderdale	LDem	Moore,Michael	0.3	5.29	847	276	561	595	17,448	85,344	4.891399
225	38 North Cornwall	LDem	Tyler,Paul	0.8	9.19	312	480	396	596	1,670	64,883	38.84675
231	43 North Devon	LDem	Harvey,Nick	0.7	8.10	331	423	377	597	2,799	72,583	25.93185
227	55 St. Ives	LDem	George,Andrew	1.5	8.51	161	444	302	598	1,556	71,021	45.65711
627	57 North East Fife	LDem	Campbell,Menzies	0.9	6.24	275	326	300	599	9,154	76,762	8.385294

226	69 South East Cornwall	LDem	Breed,Colin	1.2	6.04	205	315	260	600	2,357	69,476	29.48246
266	71 Hereford	LDem	Keetch,Paul	1.0	5.18	248	270	259	601	9,687	77,485	7.998592
255	83 Somerton and Frome	LDem	Heath,David	2.6	7.23	91	377	234	602	18,919	72,352	3.824279
256	87 Taunton	LDem	Ballard,Jackie	1.2	5.03	197	262	229	603	10,813	68,793	6.3623
258	89 Yeovil	LDem	Ashdown,Paddy	1.0	3.85	249	201	225	604	443,584	66,910	0.150839
63	106 Winchester	LDem	Oaten,Mark	1.5	4.34	163	226	195	605	1,598	66,967	41.90387
228	112 Truro and St. Austell	LDem	Taylor,Matthew	1.5	4.03	154	210	182	606	3,103	71,829	23.15056
28	129 Lewes	LDem	Baker,Norman	2.0	3.32	118	173	146	607	1,824	67,950	37.2539
9	131 Newbury	LDem	Rendel,David	1.5	2.49	157	130	143	608	1,784	64,648	36.23279
220	141 Northavon	LDem	Webb,Steven	2.3	2.90	105	151	128	609	1,244	58,716	47.2005
75	177 Isle of Wight	LDem	Brand,Peter	3.3	2.43	73	127	100	610	2,008	66,275	33.00104
222	204 Weston-Super-Mare	LDem	Cotter,Brian	6.0	2.10	40	110	75	611	2,269	68,684	30.26994
488	278 Southport	LDem	Fearn,Ronnie	20.4	1.45	12	75	44	612	2,691	67,106	24.93618
601	282 Edinburgh West	LDem	Gorrie,Donald	8.0	1.07	30	56	43	613	1,490	60,768	40.78964
50	297 Eastleigh	LDem	Chidgey,David	11.8	1.11	20	58	39	614	2,000	69,910	34.94819
378	306 Harrogate and Knaresborough	LDem	Willis,Phil	16.5	1.14	14	59	37	615	203,602	73,402	0.360518
445	315 Hazel Grove	LDem	Stunell,Andrew	14.2	0.98	17	51	34	616	6,525	64,967	9.957056
214	316 Bath	LDem	Foster,Don	10.5	0.87	23	45	34	617	4,787	70,112	14.64566
96	330 Oxford West and Abingdon	LDem	Harris,Evan	8.1	0.65	29	34	32	618	6,241	61,797	9.902477
237	333 Torbay	LDem	Sanders,Adrian	24.5	1.00	10	52	31	619	872,835	79,809	0.091437
35	356 Colchester	LDem	Russell,Robert	16.4	0.79	15	41	28	620	37,493	79,861	2.130034
248	389 Cheltenham	LDem	Jones,Nigel	24.9	0.63	10	33	21	621	9,759	64,746	6.634369
397	395 Sheffield, Hallam	LDem	Allan,Richard	10.6	0.36	22	19	21	622	19,687	67,177	3.412229
200	430 Richmond Park	LDem	Tonge,Jenny	0.4	8.87	535	463	499	623	23,144	76,795	3.31807
188	438 Kingston and Surbiton	LDem	Davey,Edward	35.6	0.48	7	25	16	624	26,287	61,185	2.327589
151	447 Carshalton and Wallington	LDem	Brake,Thomas	34.4	0.45	7	23	15	625	192,647	75,776	0.39334
204	503 Sutton and Cheam	LDem	Burstow,Paul	45.7	0.33	5	17	11	626	4,225	68,076	16.1132
207	513 Twickenham	LDem	Cable,Vincent	34.0	0.28	7	14	11	627	77,015	66,888	0.868509
59	545 Portsmouth South	LDem	Hancock,Mike	60.9	0.26	4	13	9	628	525,735	75,527	0.14366
194	618 North Southwark and Bermondsey	LDem	Hughes,Simon	71.9	0.10	3	5	4	629	43,618	70,178	1.608916
549	11 Meirionnydd Nant Conwy	PC	Llwyd,Elfyn	0.2	11.25	1,123	587	855	630	248,337	42,134	0.169664
538	15 Ceredigion	PC	Dafis,Cynog	0.4	14.18	677	740	708	631	3,953	63,654	16.10466
547	46 Caernarfon	PC	Wigley,Dafydd	0.7	6.87	360	358	359	632	3,889	67,284	17.30182
550	60 Ynys Mon	PC	Jones,Ieuan Wyn	1.0	6.53	248	341	294	633	140,459	74,006	0.526887
604	6 Galloway & Upper Nithsdale	SNP	Morgan,Alasdair	0.2	17.14	1,582	894	1,238	634	918,319	70,723	0.077014
628	7 North Tayside	SNP	Swinney,John	0.1	9.23	1,661	481	1,071	635	258,826	58,393	0.225607
625	24 Moray	SNP	Ewing,Margaret	0.4	7.67	607	400	503	636	217,611	65,661	0.301735
577	29 Banff & Buchan	SNP	Salmond,Alex	0.6	11.53	377	601	489	637	13,484	82,998	6.15535
633	45 Perth	SNP	Cunningham,Roseanna	0.5	5.47	453	285	369	638	224,597	63,314	0.2819
574	86 Angus	SNP	Welsh,Andrew	1.1	4.45	227	232	230	639	340,079	74,014	0.217638
320	610 West Bromwich West	SPK	Boothroyd,Betty	29.6	0.03	8	2	5	640	27,867	67,410	2.419014
209	535 Uxbridge		Vacant	27.6	0.19	9	10	9	641	313,362	29,600	0.09446
418												
Scotland (a)				0.63	2.92	377	153	265	7,885,703		4,998,567	0.633877
Great Britain				2.39	1.92	100	100	100	22,998,553		54,888,844	2.386622

England	3.61	1.78	66	93	80	13,037,186	47,055,204	3.609307
Wales	1.37	3.48	175	181	178	2,075,664	2,835,073	1.365863
						-162,966		

Note: (a) figures for Scottish constituencies include inland water (lochs, etc.).

Sources: *ONS New Parliamentary Constituencies - Monitors (November 1996)*
House of Commons Library Election Database

Appendix 2

Non-traditional English rural seats won by New Labour in 1997 and subsequent results in 2001, 2005 & 2010 (* indicates seats already held in 1997)

1997 constituency	2001	2005	2010
<i>Amber Valley</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Batley & Spen</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>
<i>Braintree</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Brigg & Goole</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Broxtowe</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Burton</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Calder Valley</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Castle Point</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Chatham & Aylesford</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Chorley</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>
<i>Cleethorpes</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Colne Valley</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Corby</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Dartford</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Elmet</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Erewash</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Falmouth & Camborne</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Forest of Dean</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Gedling</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>
<i>Halesowen and Rowley Regis</i> *	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Harwich</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Hastings & Rye</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>

<i>High Peak</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Keighley</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Kettering</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Lancaster & Wyre</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Medway</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Newark</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>North Warwickshire *</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>N W Leicestershire</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>N W Norfolk</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Pendle *</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Redditch</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Rossendale & Darwen *</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Rugby & Kenilworth</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>St. Alban's</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Scarborough & Whitby</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Selby</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Sherwood *</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Shipley</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Shrewsbury & Atcham</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Sittingbourne & Sheppey</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>South Derbyshire</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>South Ribble</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>South Thanet</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Stafford</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Stourbridge</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Stroud</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Tamworth *</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>

<i>The Wrekin</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Wansdyke</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Warwick & Leamington</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Wirral South *</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>
<i>Wirral West</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Worcester</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>W</i>	<i>L</i>
<i>Wyre Forest</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>	<i>L</i>

Appendix 3 – The Labour Party manifestos and the sections on the countryside: 1997, 2001, 2005 & 2010

1. Section on the countryside from the 1997 Labour manifesto ‘New Labour, new life for Britain’

Life in our countryside

Labour recognises the special needs of people who live and work in rural areas. The Conservatives do not. Public services and transport services in rural areas must not be allowed to deteriorate. The Conservatives have tried to privatise the Post Office. We opposed that, in favour of a public Post Office providing a comprehensive service. Conservative plans would mean higher charges for letters and put rural post offices under threat.

We favour a moratorium on large-scale sales of Forestry Commission land. We recognise that the countryside is a great natural asset, a part of our heritage which calls for careful stewardship. This must be balanced, however, with the needs of people who live and work in rural areas.

The total failure of the Conservatives to manage the BSE crisis effectively and to secure any raising of the ban on British beef has wreaked havoc on the beef and dairy industries. The cost to the taxpayer so far is £3.5 billion.

Labour aims to reform the Common Agricultural Policy to save money, to support the rural economy and enhance the environment.

Our initiatives to link all schools to the information superhighway will ensure that children in rural areas have access to the best educational resources.

Our policies include greater freedom for people to explore our open countryside. We will not, however, permit any abuse of a right to greater access.

We will ensure greater protection for wildlife. We have advocated new measures to promote animal welfare, including a free vote in Parliament on whether hunting with hounds should be banned by legislation.

Angling is Britain's most popular sport. Labour's anglers' charter affirms our long-standing commitment to angling and to the objective of protecting the aquatic environment.

2. The 2001 Labour manifesto extracts on the countryside 'Ambitions for Britain'

Rural Britain

The recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease has caused strain and distress in rural areas. Labour's priorities have been clear: to eradicate the disease as quickly and effectively as possible, to compensate those directly affected, and to protect the wider economy. As the number of new cases falls significantly, and the clean-up of infected areas gathers pace, we are committed to help the most affected regions with a recovery plan including advice on sustainable restocking, organic conversion, and early retirement and outgoer schemes. We will conduct a scientific review of how to prevent animal disease outbreaks from occurring in the future, and will introduce tough rules to back this up. But we must also learn some of the wider lessons.

Agriculture and fishing

Since the Second World War the economy of rural areas has undergone massive change. About two per cent of the national workforce are now employed in agriculture. But the industry is particularly important because of the links with food production, our landscape and our environment. Labour's aim is to promote economic renewal with a sustainable future for farming, strengthened communities and sustainable land use. Short-term pressures need to be met. Since the early 1990s, sectors of farming have been hard hit by BSE, the weakness of the Euro and falling world commodity prices. Labour has provided £1.35 billion in short-term relief for farmers, including aid for diversification, farm business advice, better marketing, small slaughterhouses and restructuring of the industry. We have minimised many regulatory burdens and improved the way food safety, environmental and animal health regulations are implemented. But British agriculture will only thrive in the longer term through a further, radical reorientation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), away from distorting Europe-wide production subsidies towards more national responsibility for domestic farming, environmental and rural development priorities. CAP reform is now more possible; Labour's engagement with the EU gives us the best chance of making it happen. We have begun the process of change with our farming strategy and our seven-year, £3 billion Rural Development Plans for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Labour will expand this programme so farming can become more diverse and responsive to consumers, and produce in a way that sustains and improves the environment. We have already increased payments for organic conversion from £0.5 million to £18 million, and will increase them further. We have set up an independent, open and consumer-focused Food Standards Agency to ensure that all food meets the highest standards. We will argue for the extension of food labelling, to give consumers more choice. Genetically modified (GM) foods and crops have caused concern despite stringent safety checks. There should be high standards of safety – regulation must be strict, to

protect the environment and promote public health and consumer choice – but we must use science to establish the facts, the opportunities and the risks before taking final decisions in an open way. It is also important to reform the Common Fisheries Policy to preserve fish stocks for the future. In the short term, Labour is providing more than £60 million in structural funds over the next three years to help the industry, including a new decommissioning scheme while also tackling the problem of ‘quota-hoppers’.

Economic renewal

The economic hub of a rural area is often a thriving market town. That is why Labour is committing an extra £100 million of public and private funding over the next three years for the renewal of market towns. RDAs will be charged with renewal of rural as well as urban areas. We will support village life with rate relief for pubs, garages and shops, as well as farmers who diversify part of their activity into other enterprises. Tourism is a vital, growing industry for Britain, with 1.8 million employees, and links to the museums, arts and heritage that people want to enjoy. Quality is our platform – which is why we now have a unified grading scheme for hotels and guest houses in England, and new training and New Deal opportunities. We will support well-targeted promotion, regional programmes linked to RDAs, and high-quality information via the internet. Traditional tourist resorts face special problems, so we have extended the assisted area map to include many seaside resorts and have negotiated an extension to the European Union regeneration funding so that seaside towns throughout the country can start rebuilding their economy.

Rural life

Labour is pledged to a rural services standard to set out specifically what rural people can expect from 21 public service providers – with annual auditing and commitments to service improvement. The rural school closure programme has been ended; 3,000 new, affordable homes a year are on the way; a £30 million police programme will help cut rural crime; £239 million over three years has been set aside for rural transport services; and the Post Office is now obliged to prevent closure of rural post offices except in unavoidable circumstances, with £270 million to help achieve this and recruit sub-postmasters. Labour is determined to protect Britain’s landscapes and wildlife. Planning, transport and energy policy all make a difference. We have also designated the first new national parks since 1948 and brought consensus to a large increase in access to open countryside. We will press ahead with an £8 billion programme for water companies to clean up rivers and minimise damage from waste. The dangers of coastal and inland flooding are now widely appreciated, and we are committed to investment in preventative solutions, including more sensitive use of agricultural land. We have increased the number of protected nature sites. We have also initiated important steps to improve animal welfare in Britain, and argued successfully for higher welfare standards for battery hens and pigs across the EU.

Leadership for the future

Labour is committed to support our countryside and the people who live and work in it. We are committed to create a new department to lead renewal in rural areas – a Department for Rural Affairs. Independent and wide-ranging views are essential to the development of strategic and long-term policy. We will set up an independent commission to advise on how we create a sustainable, competitive and diverse farming and food sector within a thriving rural economy which advances environmental, health and animal welfare goals.

3. The 2005 Labour manifesto extracts on the countryside – ‘Britain – forward not back’

Thriving rural areas

Since 1997, Labour has made it more difficult to close rural schools, put in £750 million to support rural post offices and introduced a 50 per cent rate relief on village shops. Through our £51 million Rural Bus Subsidy Grant we have delivered over 2,200 new bus services in rural areas this year.

We set targets for the creation of affordable homes in rural areas, which we have now exceeded. We will explore how to ensure a proportion of all new housing development is made available and affordable to local residents and their families.

Because of our success in achieving extensive reforms in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), 2005 will be the first year for decades when farmers will be free to produce for the market and not simply for subsidy. We will continue to push for further reform of the CAP in the next Parliament, starting with the sugar regime.

We will continue to promote the competitiveness of the whole food sector, and assure the safety and quality of its products. We will introduce an explicit policy for schools, hospitals and government offices to consider local sourcing of fresh produce. We will continue to improve the environmental performance of agriculture, rewarding every farmer in England for environmental protection and enhancement work through our new Stewardship schemes. We will also promote biomass, bio-fuels and non-food crops. We will work to tackle diffuse water pollution through addressing impacts across water catchments without the costs falling on water customers.

Under difficult circumstances, Labour is working with the fishing industry to create a sustainable long-term future for the fishing communities of the United Kingdom. We have reformed the Common Fisheries Policy and will continue to protect the marine environment and ensure fish stocks and their exploitation are set at sustainable levels.

We will introduce the Animal Welfare Bill as soon as possible in the new Parliament.

4. The 2010 Labour Manifesto extracts on the countryside ‘A future fair for all’

Valuing nature for everyone

For millions of people the British countryside, and the parks and commons of our towns and cities, provide solace from the pressures of modern life. The riches of Britain’s biodiversity – our native species, both rare and commonplace – depend on them.

We are committed not only to protecting but also to enhancing our natural environment, and enabling it to be enjoyed by all. The area of Green Belt has increased over the last decade – and we intend to sustain it. We will maintain the target that 60 per cent of new development should be on brownfield land.

We have created two National Parks in the New Forest and South Downs, and given the public a Right to Roam our mountains, moors and heaths. We will now extend this to the whole English coastline.

Competing pressures – from greater food production to housing and natural flood defences – are making the management of land resources ever more challenging. We will introduce a new framework for managing our land that can more effectively reconcile these pressures. We will put forward new areas for protected landscape and habitat status, focusing on green corridors and wildlife networks to link up existing sites. And we will commit to increasing the area covered by forest and woodland.

Our air, rivers and beaches are now the cleanest they have been since the height of the industrial revolution. We will continue to ensure progress. Having doubled spending on flood defence over the last decade we will bring forward legislation to improve floods and water management.

We have banned foxhunting and animal testing for cosmetics and tobacco, and we will bring forward further animal welfare measures. We will campaign internationally to end illegal trading in ivory and to protect species such as polar bears, seals and bluefin tuna, as well as for an EU-wide ban on illegally logged timber, banning it domestically if this does not succeed.

Sustainable farming, healthy food

We want British farming to be profitable and competitive. We need our farmers to produce more food, nurturing our countryside and biodiversity. We will continue to seek reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) to facilitate the creation of fairer and better functioning agricultural markets, enabling farmers to return a reasonable profit from food production at lower cost to the consumer.

In order to protect farmers and food suppliers from unfair and uncompetitive practices by major retailers, we will create a Supermarket Ombudsman. Consumers have the right to know where food comes from. We are working with the food industry and retailers to ensure proper food labelling, including tougher and clearer 'country of origin' information. This will also help to level the playing field for British farmers.

An economically viable and environmentally sustainable fishing industry is vital for our coastal communities. We will push for fundamental reform of the EU Common Fisheries Policy

Thriving rural communities

Those who live in rural areas are entitled to excellent amenities and services, as are those who live in towns and cities. Rural communities face unique challenges. We are committed to continued investment in frontline services in rural areas.

Already £3.9 billion is being spent on support for the rural economy and we will continue to provide specific support to rural businesses. We are building 10,000 homes in rural areas up to 2011. We are protecting rural bus services and making it more difficult for rural schools to be closed.

Rural businesses and communities must have the broadband connections they need. We are committed to universal broadband access, irrespective of location. The levy on fixed phone lines will pay for expansion of fast broadband connections to rural areas.

Rural villages should never be left without essential services. Councils now have to ensure that the importance of local services to the community is taken into account before granting planning permission to change their use, and we will strengthen this to protect viable shops, pubs and community facilities. We will continue to encourage and support imaginative solutions in rural communities to the provision of locally owned services.

Appendix 4 - Description of Research Participants

During the course of 2010, 2011 and 2012 some 139 interviews took place. Some re-interviews occurred and also respondents provided supplementary material. Where more than one participant took place in the interviews I have only referred to that as one interview, likewise where I met someone or talked to them over the phone, or emailed them I have referred to that as one contact, and so there were actually more interviews that occurred than the number given.

Ministers and Special Advisers

8 ministers and 2 special advisers were interviewed. All bar one of the ministers had direct responsibility for rural in government, and the individual who didn't was a key member of the Backbench Group both before and after his period in office, and was in a position to be able to influence rural policy. Ministers came from both the Commons and the Lords

None of the Secretary of States or equivalent were interviewed as their involvement with rural was less direct. However I have talked to them about rural issues when I was in Parliament, and have recalled some of the issues discussed.

The 2 special advisers both had key responsibilities for rural, and were able to point me towards other sources of information which meant that I was able to draw upon some specific exemplars of the role and importance of SPADs.

MPs, Lords, Councillors and Party Activists

11 MPs and 4 members of the Lords were interviewed. 3 Councillors and 5 Party activists were also questioned, and some of these had also been Parliamentary Candidates.

All the MPs bar one, were a member of the Rural Group, and were deliberately targeted for their particular knowledge of the activities of the Group. This number included Bradley, who agreed to be directly quoted in the text, such was his importance to the exercise. I also include reminiscences from my time as a Select Committee member, because of the relevance of that to the enquiry, but these are not directly quoted, and the individuals concerned are not identified in any way.

Besides the 3 councillors who were interviewed at length I have talked to many other councillors about their views and though not referred to directly their ideas and comments do provide a backcloth to the research. Likewise the Party activists represent a much larger cross-section of opinion from which I have drawn evidence. This has included conversations with individuals from both Rural Revival and Labour Coast and Country to two representative bodies that lobby on behalf of rural issues within the Labour and Cooperative Parties. Some activists wore more than one hat being both councillors and parliamentary candidates in rural areas, though they were principally interviewed because of their activist involvement.

Civil Servants

8 civil servants were interviewed and one clerk to the Defra Select Committee. The latter was chosen because he was involved in the enquiries into rural issues undertaken by the Committee. The civil servants identified all had specific responsibility for rural and overall were the main players in the evolution of rural policy during New Labour's period in office.

Academics

10 academics were interviewed. All have or had a direct interest in rural affairs and were chosen because of their knowledge of the field. Most of those interviewed also had a specific knowledge of the political aspects of countryside policy and the evolution of rural policy.

Practitioners

Respondents were divided into two groupings. First there were those responsible for running national organisations, both within and outside of government, and second, those who were involved at a more local level, principally within Gloucestershire, and so well-known to me.

47 interviews were undertaken of national figures and 40 of local elite individuals. Some people overlapped in that they may have had a national role and responsibilities but lived locally, and some who I have defined as local, had links with national organisations.

Included within the national category were those who had been important in running countryside organisations or who had had a specific rural brief. Amongst those located locally were representatives of planning, housing, education, health, transport, policing and the voluntary sector.

A specific line of the enquiry became the requirement to better define what a rural constituency is. With this in mind I met up on three occasions with Peter Bibby from Sheffield University who was tasked by government with providing a more adequate definition of rural. He is quoted personally as he agreed to be referred to as such. Though he is an academic he has been working for government for the last fifteen years, and such is the importance of his work (along with John Shepherd) that he is named in the research and treated as a practitioner.

Appendix 5 - Traditional and modern definitions of the different types of constituency (see Chapter Four)

Geographical or functional representation of the type of seat

The most straightforward method, the information gathered from statistics that are readily available and easy to interrogate. The source material is provided in the Office of National Statistics NOMIS database, which covers labour market and other related statistics collected from the census and other more up to date, data sets.⁶⁰

From the perspective of finding a rural constituency NOMIS permits a statistical search that ranks constituencies according to the level of sparseness of the population, or if seeking a functional analysis, how many people are employed in agriculture, as a percentage of the total employment. Using this method does involve making assumptions about the validity or relevance of agricultural employment as a measure of rurality but it is at least a starting point for determining spatial and functional representation (Flynn 1989, Self & Storing 1962).

The relevance of this approach was reinforced by the fact that when Bradley commissioned research from the House of Commons Library (Dewdney 1997a&b)⁶¹ on the number of Labour MPs in rural and semi-rural constituencies as part of the launch of the Rural Group, the methodology used by the researcher drew directly on this method. This gave the figure of 180 rural constituencies, although this refers to the total, rather than the number represented by Labour MPs, which was 51 and a further 54 in semi-rural seats.

⁶⁰ NOMIS database, ONS www.nomisweb.co.uk

⁶¹ The actual correspondence including the statistical evidence is in Appendix 1

Johnston et al (1997) have produced their own classifications of parliamentary constituencies, referring to clustering of features or variables, including defining rural seats by social class, functionality (such as a coal-mining area), number of retirees, and type of housing. This formed the basis of research to explain New Labour's landslide.

Parliamentary division of seats into borough or county constituencies

British Parliamentary seats are divided into either borough or county constituencies. Such designations predate the Great Reform Act of 1832 and have much to do with the way that Borough Status was achieved through the acquisition of a Royal Charter. While this may seem an historical anachronism this description is still used today. The Boundary Commission in its Fifth Review defined County Constituencies as places '*with largely rural populations*' (2007), though in reality any constituency with a rural hinterland becomes a county constituency. Therefore, the balance of county to borough constituencies has altered in favour of the former. Again, such a designation remains rule of thumb rather than scientific.

As Johnston states:

There are no absolute rules derived from first principles and applicable in all circumstances. The method of defining constituencies is very much a political decision.... the nature of the decision can have very significant electoral and political consequences (2001, p20).

It remains unclear how the designation of a particular seat may affect its relative winnability by a particular party, but perceptions can still play a part in helping determine electoral outcomes.

Geodemographic segmentation of the electorate

From the 1980s onwards, a new dynamic entered UK politics as British political parties employed the ideas and techniques of marketing, long the preserve of the US (Harris & Lock 2010, Lees-Marchment 2008, Newman 1999, Scammell 1999, Wring 1996). Though this did not alter the nature of constituencies, it resulted in political parties possessing a greater insight into the social make-up, views and prejudices of voters in rural seats, to assist in targeting support.

Geodemographic segmentation is described as a multivariate statistical classification for discovering whether the individuals of a given population can be categorised into various groupings, usually based around income brackets, housing types, consumption patterns, or locations they inhabit. The operation involving the allocation of people into specific taxonomies is then fine-tuned by making quantitative comparisons of the multiple characteristics that make up each of these, tested against other representative groupings. The assumption is that intra-group differences will be much less salient than inter-group differences, so that a definite pattern of typologies arises.

The Marketing Industry has made extensive use of this information over many decades, especially the application of algorithms to drill down to find the most appropriate fit for individuals within each category (Phillips et al 2010). Political marketing merely adopted and adapted those techniques so that its own fields of study could be encapsulated within this new science.

There is still some dispute about the effectiveness of these techniques (Bashford 2015, Lees-Marchment 2004). Used carefully they have the potential to change perceived relationships between leaders, parties and voters (Scammell 1999). After

some initial hesitancy New Labour, enthusiastically embraced political marketing and used it extensively for its campaigning (Harris & Lock 2005, Webber 2006, Wring 1996).

Two major developments crystallised the advantages of these new techniques in the political world. First, the creation of Geographic Information Systems, which allowed the tracking of individuals and groups, which after interpretation of the data became the basis for standardised classifications of people (Harris et al 2005, Pickles 1995). Second, the increasing sophistication of database management software allowed political parties to capture information about people on a mass scale, which can then be distilled and categorised to make assumptions about their future voting intentions, based on past political valences (Baines & Egan 2001, Jones 1997, Mancini 1999).

Political marketing and market segmentation can take many different forms. Here, the emphasis was how these techniques were employed in the battleground of marginal constituencies including in rural areas. This has resonance with the rational choice theory of politics and especially resource-advantage theory whereby parties try to maximise the efficient allocation of resources to gain the best possible vote in those locations, gaining the greatest electoral benefit (Baines et al 2002, 2003 & 2005, Webber 2006).

The best-known geo-demographic systems operated in the UK are the ACORN system (A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods), (Yorke & Meehan 1986) and the Experian MOSAIC UK system (Baines et al 2002, Butler & Harris 2009, Harris & Lock 2005, Lilleker et al 2006, Savigny 2005, Savigny & Temple 2010). MOSAIC was exclusively available to the Labour Party for political purposes and became a major tool in its campaigning activity. In MOSAIC, populations are divided

into 15 main socio-economic groups and within these 67 different identikit types or sub-groups are established.

Two of these socio-economic categorisations specifically refer to rural Britain; Group C Rural Solitude, and Group D Small Town Diversity. Under these headings come a variety of sub-groups such as 'squires amongst locals', 'country loving elders' (previously called countryside guardians), 'upland struggle', and 'jack of all trades'.⁶² Whilst these labels may seem somewhat pejorative, their real purpose is to provide descriptors to help parties identify potential voters by segmentation of the electorate.

Given the relative sparseness of population, more diverse neighbourhoods, and the greater difficulty in accessing and capturing sufficient quantitative data in rural areas, there remains a much less obvious read-over from standard definitions of identity-type in rural areas than in urban centres. Nevertheless Labour increasingly relied upon MOSAIC in seeking to add to its voter knowledge, even in rural constituencies. There was some tension between how the party centrally, and individual constituencies locally wanted to engage with aspects of direct marketing and market segmentation (Savigny 2005). Pressure was placed upon candidates and campaign teams to draw upon and exploit this information source (interview with MP 7).

Output Area Classification/Local Authority Districts

New Labour's determination to make evidence-based policy-making central to its operation is a consistent theme in this thesis. Therefore it was always searching for new ways of capturing and interpreting data, and was willing to commission work that would permit a better understanding of what was happening on the ground, and

⁶² MOSAIC is subject to regular updating and enhancement by Experian as it grows and improves the level of sophistication of the data sets it uses. Increasingly MOSAIC is employed with other software packages to speed up its application as a campaigning tool.

as a result how it could better target resources. New Labour was willing to challenge preconceived ideas - for example that either it did not matter if there was little discrimination between types of area, as England was fundamentally an urban country (OECD 2011), or that the process was too difficult (Scott et al 2007). Output Area (OA) based upon spatial analysis of different places was the result, divided up into individual Local Authority Districts (LAD).

Work on OA classification started early in the second Blair administration and the research continues to the present day. The review team established to pursue this work consisted of civil servants, representatives from government agencies and academics, and was led by the academics Shepherd and Bibby, and Allan of the Countryside Agency (interview with Bibby). The purpose was to devise a much tighter definition of what a rural (and urban) area is. The results of the research, whilst not being available in time for the Rural White Paper, did provide evidence that helped with the delivery of subsequent countryside policies, demonstrated in the Rural Strategy and elsewhere (Bibby & Shepherd 2004, Countryside Agency 2004, Defra 2004a&c and 2009a&b).

The derivation of OA came from a spatial analysis that looked at settlement distribution or morphology, literally measuring the spaces between dwellings at different chosen distances, cross-checking this against census information, postcode access files and ordnance survey maps (Allen 2008, Bibby & Brindley 2013a&b, Pateman 2010/11, Rabe 2011). From this, it was possible to devise relative sparsity of population in a specific area, referred to as output areas. If more than 26 per cent of the population of an area was defined as rural because of the spatial distribution of the population in that geographical area then the area as a whole was designated as rural (CLG 2006). There is also Super Output Areas (SOA).

OA classification was very much a bottom-up approach to settlement designation, and in its raw form was applicable only to specific locations, and so of limited value to wider policy development (ONS 2008). Consequently, the review team was encouraged to look at an alternative method, which aggregated their earlier findings to form a more definitive understanding of rural settlements. Account was taken of additional features, specifically the context of a settlement, or closeness to other settlements, functionality, including employment and perceptions of residents, and attitude to rurality (Defra 2009a&b).

This investigation focussed upon creating a better differentiation between urban and rural local government, though for parliamentary purposes, the process was more complex, and it was later applied only to constituencies (Defra 2005a, Department of Constitutional Affairs 2007, Shepherd 2006).

Six types within the typology of District/Unitary Authority or Constituency were acknowledged. These were later changed to better reflect that urban areas could be surrounded by significant rural hinterland, and to emphasise the role of hub towns on their rural populations (Bibby & Brindley 2014a&b). The original definitions, with the re-designations in brackets were:

- Major urban (Urban with major conurbation)
- Large urban (Urban with minor conurbation)
- Other urban (Urban with city and town)
- Significantly rural – whereby at least 26 per cent of the population lived in rural areas (Urban with significant rural)

- Rural 50 – whereby at least 50 per cent of the population lived in rural areas (Mainly rural)
- Rural 80 – whereby at least 80 per cent of the population lived in rural areas (Largely rural)

The Countryside Agency initially, and Defra subsequently, became increasingly interested in drawing a distinction between urban and rural England and became adept at collecting and interpreting statistics (Defra 2002). As one civil servant noted in the interviews;

After 1997 there was a new interest in rural but very little knowledge or understanding of service delivery and how well policies were working. To overcome possible conflict over policy and delivery there was a move for accurate statistics which is what Defra specialised in and became known for (interview with civil servant 8).

OA/LAD classification played an important part in helping enhance that process, and Defra saw the value of applying data that would give a better understanding of rural areas.

The relevance to this study of this development was the willingness of New Labour to bolster a greater comprehension of what constituted rural and then to use this knowledge to boost both policy-making and political engagement in the countryside.

Appendix 6 - Defra's Aim and Objectives 2001

Defra's aim is:

Sustainable development, which means a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come, including:

- A better environment at home and internationally, and sustainable use of natural resources;
- Economic prosperity through sustainable farming, fishing, food, water and other industries that meet consumers' requirements;
- Thriving economies and communities in rural areas and a countryside for all to enjoy.

Objective 1

To protect and improve the rural, urban, marine and global environment and conserve and enhance biodiversity, and lead integration of these with other policies across Government and internationally.

Objective 2

To enhance opportunity and tackle social exclusion through promoting sustainable rural areas with a dynamic and inclusive economy, strong rural communities and fair access to services.

Objective 3

To promote a sustainable, competitive and safe food supply chain which meets consumers' requirements.

Objective 4

To improve enjoyment of an attractive and well-managed countryside for all.

Objective 5

To promote sustainable, diverse, modern and adaptable farming through domestic and international actions and further ambitious CAP reform.

Objective 6

To promote sustainable management and prudent use of natural resources domestically and internationally.

Objective 7

To protect the public's interest in relation to environmental impacts and health, including in relation to diseases which can be transmitted through food, water and animals and to ensure high standards of animal health and welfare.