Article

Coastal towns in England and Wales: October 2020

Data and analysis on seaside and other coastal towns in England and Wales.

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1 . Main points

- Over 5.3 million residents live in coastal towns in England and Wales, of which 3.5 million live in seaside towns (those with a beach and visitor attractions) and 1.9 million in other coastal towns.

- Coastal towns have experienced lower rates of coronavirus (COVID-19) related deaths during 2020 than non-coastal towns.

- 71% of coastal towns had both slower population and employment growth than the England and Wales average over the 2009 to 2018 period; this compares with 47% of non-coastal towns.

- Between 2009 and 2018, 50% of coastal towns had a decline in employment compared with 37% of non-coastal towns.

- Seaside towns have higher shares of self-employment and part-time employment than non-coastal towns as well as a lower share of residents with degree-level qualifications.

- Population declined in almost one in three (32%) smaller seaside towns between 2009 and 2018 compared with only 16% of small non-coastal towns.

- 30% of the resident population in small seaside towns were aged over 65 years old in 2018 compared with 22% in small non-coastal towns.

- Experimental data on population density, based on Facebook app (with location enabled) data, illustrates the influx of visitors to seaside towns during July and August this year.

2 . Location of coastal towns

This article analyses 169 coastal towns in England and Wales split by size and by seaside towns and other coastal (non-seaside) towns. Seaside towns are those with a tourist beach and associated visitor attractions while the other coastal towns include those focused on other activities such as being a port town or industrial town (for more details on the definitions see the Section 9: Glossary).

Table 1 shows that over 5.3 million residents live in the 169 coastal towns examined in this article, according to the mid-2018 population estimates, of which 3.5 million live in seaside towns and 1.9 million in other coastal (non-seaside) towns. Split by size, approximately 1.0 million live in smaller towns and 4.3 million in larger towns.

There is an interesting geographical variation seen in the split between seaside and non-seaside coastal towns. The seaside towns are found predominantly in the south of England or East Midlands with only 21 of the 99 English seaside towns located in the three regions of the north of England. However, the north of England is home to a majority of England's other coastal (non-seaside) towns. This is particularly the case for the larger non-seaside towns, of which 16 out of 21 in England are located in the three north of England regions.

Table 1: 2018 population estimates and count of coastal towns by type and region or country
Office for National Statistics – Mid-year population estimates 2018

Type	Total population 2018	Count of towns	Count of towns in North East, North West, and Yorkshire and The Humber	Count of towns in East Midlands, East of England, South East, and South West	Count of towns in Wales
Smaller seaside town	609,777	57	10	40	7
Larger seaside town	2,859,524	51	11	36	4
Smaller other coastal town	415,783	37	12	16	9
Larger other coastal town	1,479,314	24	16	5	3
Total	5,364,398	169	49	97	23

Source: Office for National Statistics - Business Register and Employment Survey 2018

Because this output focuses on towns, it does not include some of the largest coastal cities in England and Wales such as Brighton and Hove, Southampton, Portsmouth, Plymouth or Liverpool. In line with the previous towns article, to qualify for inclusion in the towns list, population must have been below 225,000 in 2011 (according to the Census) with the town boundaries used being either built-up area boundaries or built-up area subdivision boundaries. The coastal towns that are included in the article are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The majority of seaside towns are located in the south of England

Locations of coastal towns in England and Wales

3 . Deprivation

Using a framework proposed in our previous Office for National Statistics (ONS) towns article, the 169 coastal towns in England and Wales have been grouped according to their workplace and residential characteristics.

First, they have been grouped into three categories depending on their level of job density: working towns (with high job density), residential towns (with low job density) or mixed (with medium-level job density). Then, they have been grouped on the levels of income deprivation among residents (lower deprivation towns, mid-deprivation towns and higher deprivation towns)[1]. Combining these two approaches creates nine groupings for the towns, and Figure 2 shows the distribution of the four most distinct categories comparing coastal with non-coastal towns.

Figure 2: Coastal towns are more likely to be higher deprivation towns than non-coastal towns

Share of towns by workplace (job density) and residential (income deprivation) characteristics, England and Wales, 2018

Figure 2: Coastal towns are more likely to be higher deprivation towns than non-coastal towns

Share of towns by workplace (job density) and residential (income deprivation) characteristics, England and Wales, 2018

Source: Office for National Statistics – Coastal towns in England and Wales: October 2020

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

The share of coastal towns that have low deprivation (as measured by the income domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation) is smaller than for towns overall. Only 4% of the coastal towns are both "working" towns (that is, towns with high job density) and low deprivation towns. This compares with a 19% share among non-coastal towns. The coastal towns in this group are Lymington, Portishead and Sidmouth in England and Bangor, Penarth and Llandudno Junction in Wales.

A further 9% of coastal towns are both "residential" towns (that is, towns with low job density) and low deprivation towns compared with 18% of non-coastal towns. These lower deprivation residential coastal towns are spread across England and Wales and include Formby, Hoylake, Seaton and West Kirby in the North West region; Whitley Bay in the North East; Burry Port, Llantwit Major, Porthcawl and Rhoose in Wales; Budleigh Salterton, Netley, Plymstock, Saltdean and Stubbington in the South of England; and West Mersea in the East of England region.

By contrast, coastal towns include a high share (31%) classified as "residential" and high deprivation with the equivalent share among non-coastal towns at just 14%. In total, 53 of the coastal towns are classified as residential and high deprivation of which 4 are in Wales and 49 in England. 22 of these English coastal towns are found in the three north of England regions, but there are also 14 towns in this group in England most prosperous region, the South East.

Overall, two in every three (67%) of the coastal towns are in the higher income deprivation category (including the higher deprivation towns shown in the "other" category) compared with just over one in every three (36%) non-coastal towns. Along the east coast of England (encompassing the regions of East of England, East Midlands, Yorkshire and The Humber and North East) the share of coastal towns in the higher income deprivation category is particularly high at 85% (39 towns out of 46). It is also high in the North West of England where 16 out of 21 coastal towns are in this higher income deprivation category. Overall, over 3.8 million out of the 5.4 million who live in coastal towns in England and Wales live in one of the 114 higher income deprivation towns.

Figure 3: Smaller coastal towns have higher deprivation levels than smaller non-coastal towns in all domains except for crime

Percentage of population living in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in England according to the domains of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019, by type of town

Figure 3: Smaller coastal towns have higher deprivation levels than smaller non-coastal towns in all domains except for crime

Percentage of population living in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in England according to the domains of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019, by type of town
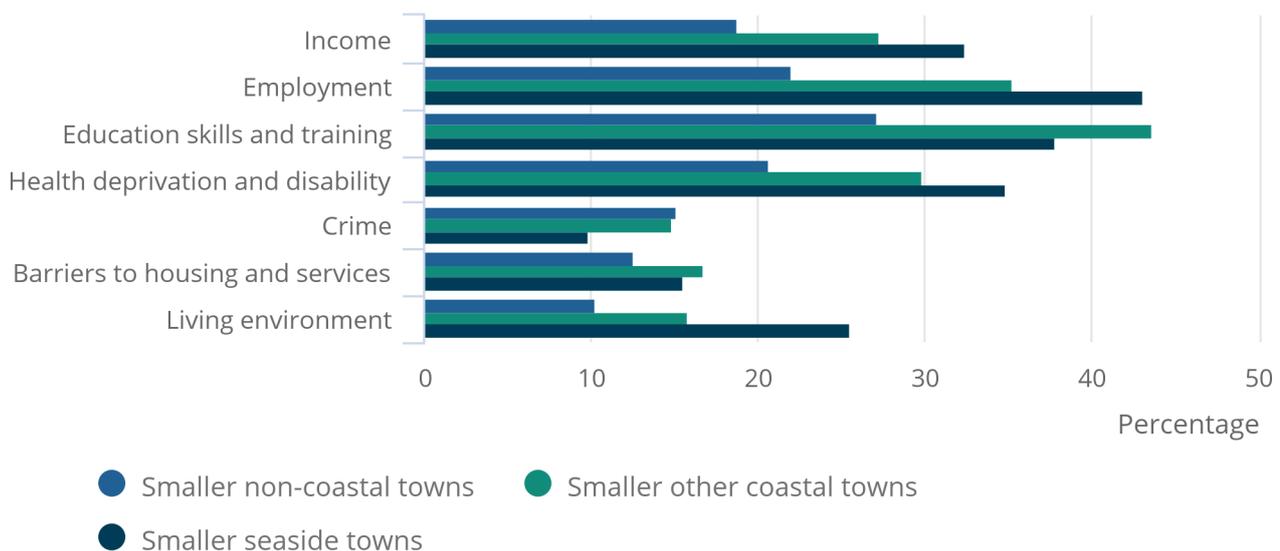
Source: English Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019

Notes:

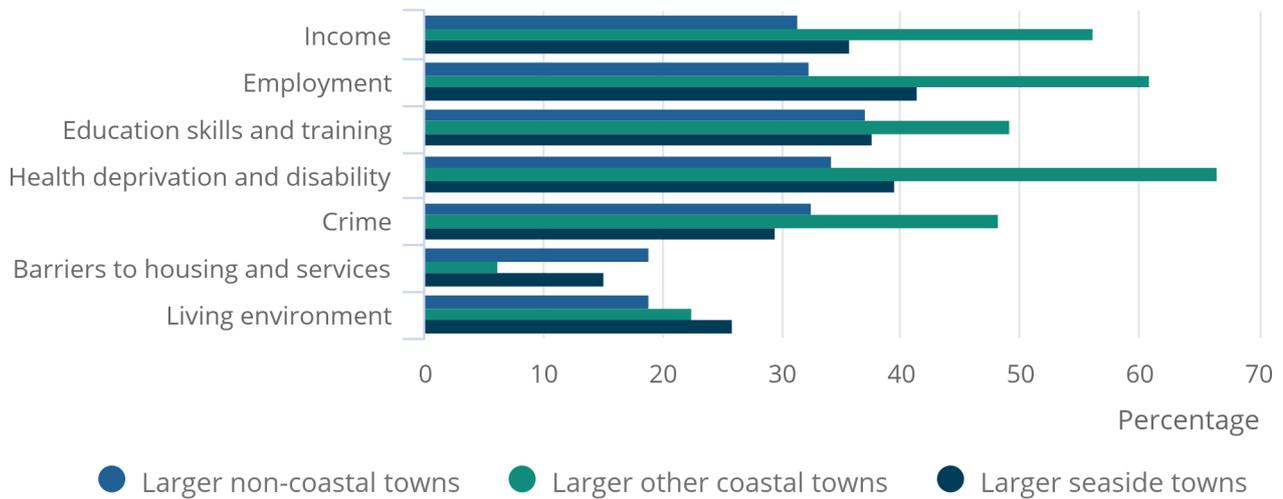1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Comparing small towns, the seaside towns tend to be more deprived than the non-coastal towns in all domains except crime. The biggest difference occurs within the employment domain where 43% of population in small seaside towns live within the 30% of neighbourhoods in England with the highest employment deprivation compared with 22% of population in non-coastal towns.

Figure 4: Larger other coastal towns have higher deprivation levels in all domains except for Barriers to housing and Services and Living Enviroment

Percentage of population living in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in England according to the domains of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019, by type of town

Figure 4: Larger other coastal towns have higher deprivation levels in all domains except for Barriers to housing and Services and Living Enviroment

Percentage of population living in the 30% most deprived neighbourhoods in England according to the domains of the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019, by type of town

● Larger non-coastal towns   ● Larger other coastal towns   ● Larger seaside towns

Source: English Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Comparing the larger towns, the deprivation in seaside towns is similar to that in non-coastal towns across most of the domains. However, deprivation is greater than both seaside and non-coastal towns within larger other coastal (non-seaside) towns. This is the case across five of the domains with the only exceptions being the living environment domain and barriers to housing and services domain.

Notes for Deprivation

1. The income deprivation measure is taken from the income deprivation domain of the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD). The measure is based on the proportion of the residential population in a town experiencing deprivation relating to low income. For each country, all coastal and non-coastal towns have been ranked based on the income deprivation score and then split according to these rankings into the higher, middle and lower deprivation categories.
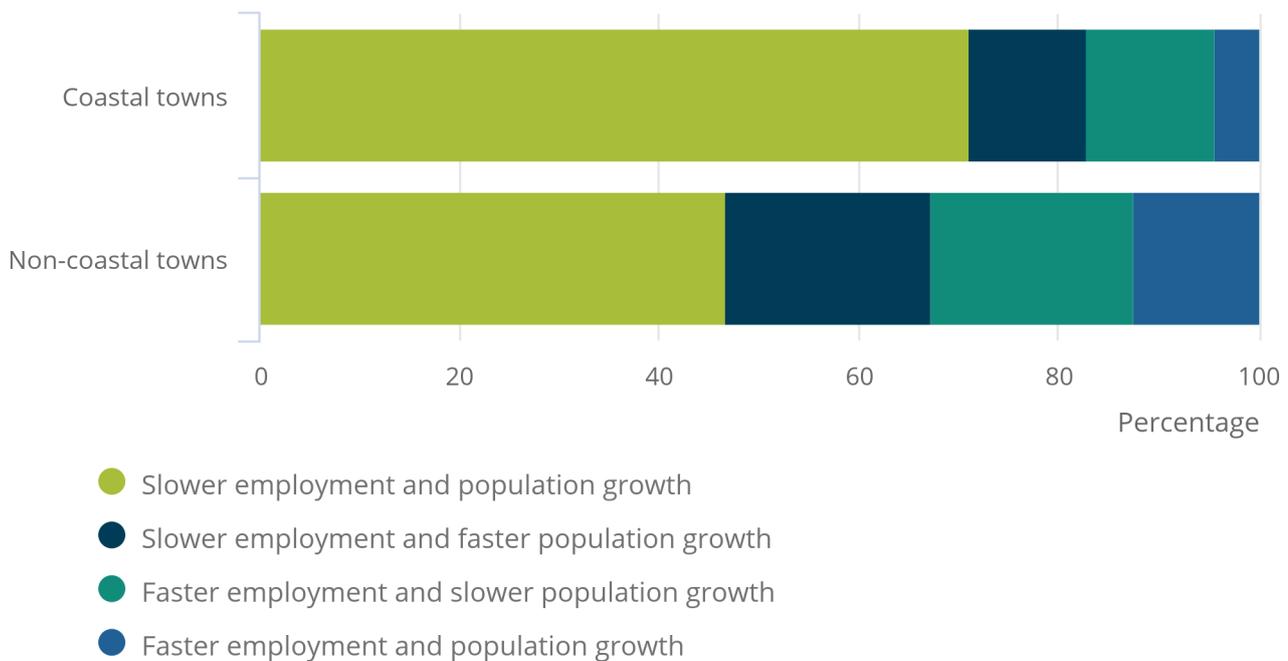
4 . Population and employment growth

71% of coastal towns had both slower population and employment growth compared with the England and Wales average over the 2009 to 2018 period. This compares with 47% of non-coastal towns. By contrast, only 4% (7 towns out of 168) had above average growth in both population and employment over the period with this list including five towns in the south of England (Bournemouth, East Cowes, Falmouth, Hayle and Portishead) and two in Wales (Llandudno Junction and Penarth).

Figure 5: Population and employment growth was slower than the England and Wales average in 71% of coastal towns over the 2009 to 2018 period

Employment and population growth, England and Wales, 2009 to 2018

Figure 5: Population and employment growth was slower than the England and Wales average in 71% of coastal towns over the 2009 to 2018 period

Employment and population growth, England and Wales, 2009 to 2018

- Slower employment and population growth
- Slower employment and faster population growth
- Faster employment and slower population growth
- Faster employment and population growth

Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Register and Employment Survey and Mid-year population estimates

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Examining population growth between 2009 and 2018, smaller seaside towns were most likely to have seen population either decline or grow below the England and Wales average. The number of residents declined in almost one in every three (32%) smaller seaside towns during that period compared with only 16% of small non-coastal towns. Meanwhile, only 12% of smaller seaside towns had population growth above the England and Wales average (30% for non-coastal small towns).

There was a similar pattern among large towns with large seaside and coastal towns more likely to have experienced below average population growth than large non-coastal towns.

Population growth, England and Wales, 2009 to 2018

Figure 6: Smaller seaside towns were most likely to have seen population decline between 2009 and 2018

Population growth, England and Wales, 2009 to 2018
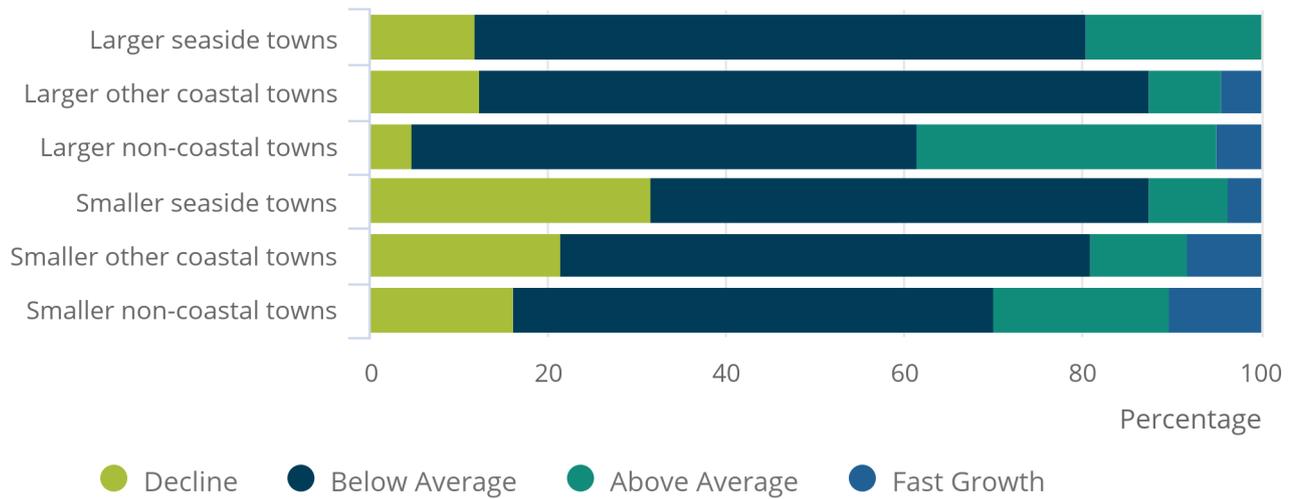
Source: Office for National Statistics – Mid-year population estimates

Notes:

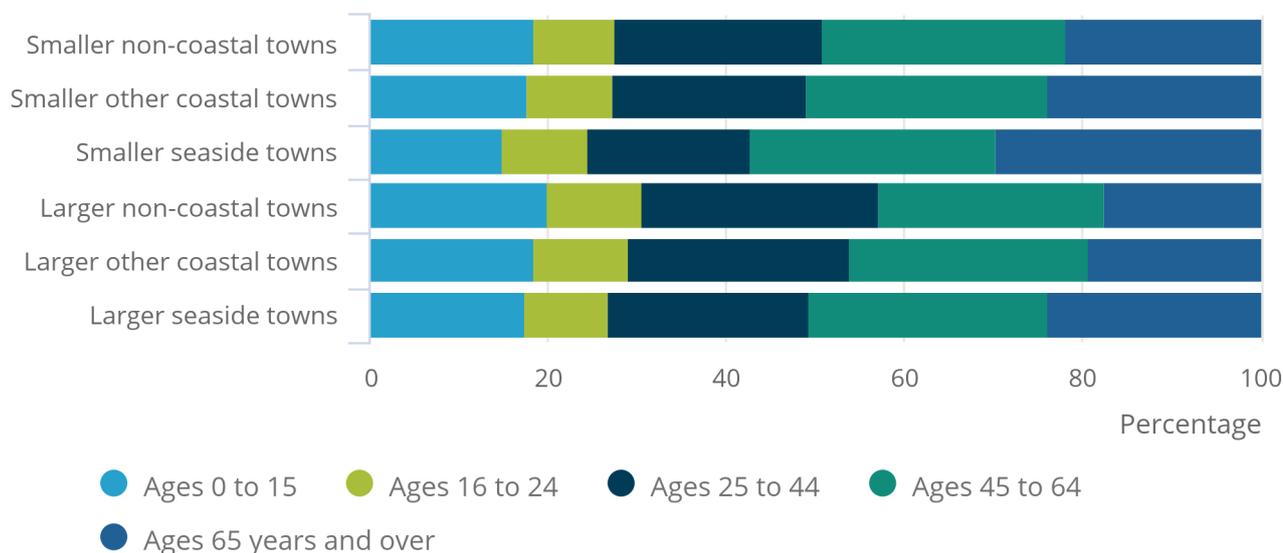1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Examining population by age group shows that coastal towns, both smaller and larger, are more likely to have higher shares of residents in the 65 years or over age group and lower shares in the 0 to 15 years age group compared with non-coastal towns. Figure 7 shows the age breakdown by type of coastal town in 2018 and compares this with the demographic structure of the non-coastal towns.

Figure 7: Smaller seaside towns had the highest share of population aged 65 years or over

Population by age groups, England and Wales, 2018

Figure 7: Smaller seaside towns had the highest share of population aged 65 years or over

Population by age groups, England and Wales, 2018

Source: Office for National Statistics – Mid-year population estimates

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

The older age profile of the coastal towns' resident population is particularly visible in smaller seaside coastal towns where 30% of the resident population was aged 65 years or over in 2018 in comparison with 22% in small non-coastal towns. The proportion of population aged 65 years or over was highest in Budleigh Salterton in Devon at 44%, with two other Devon towns, Seaton and Sidmouth, as well as Hunstanton in Norfolk having a 43% share.

Among larger towns, seaside towns again have a higher share of population aged 65 years or over than non-coastal towns. The larger seaside towns with the highest population share aged 65 years or over were Bexhill (35%), Christchurch (34%) and Seaford (34%).

5 . Employment, skills and labour market

Between 2009 and 2018, 50% of coastal towns had a decline in employment compared with 37% of non-coastal towns. This difference was greatest among the larger towns with 63% of the large coastal (non-seaside) towns and 51% of the large seaside towns showing a decline in employment over this period compared with 31% of large non-coastal towns.

The share of coastal towns with employment growth above the UK average (10%) was 17% compared with 33% of non-coastal towns. The share was slightly higher for seaside towns than for the coastal non-seaside towns.

Overall, the data show many coastal towns struggled to grow employment over the 2009 to 2018 period, with the larger towns faring slightly worse than the smaller towns and the non-seaside coastal towns faring worse overall than the seaside towns.

Figure 8: Larger other coastal towns were most likely to have seen employment decline

Employment growth, England and Wales, 2009 to 2018

Figure 8: Larger other coastal towns were most likely to have seen employment decline

Employment growth, England and Wales, 2009 to 2018
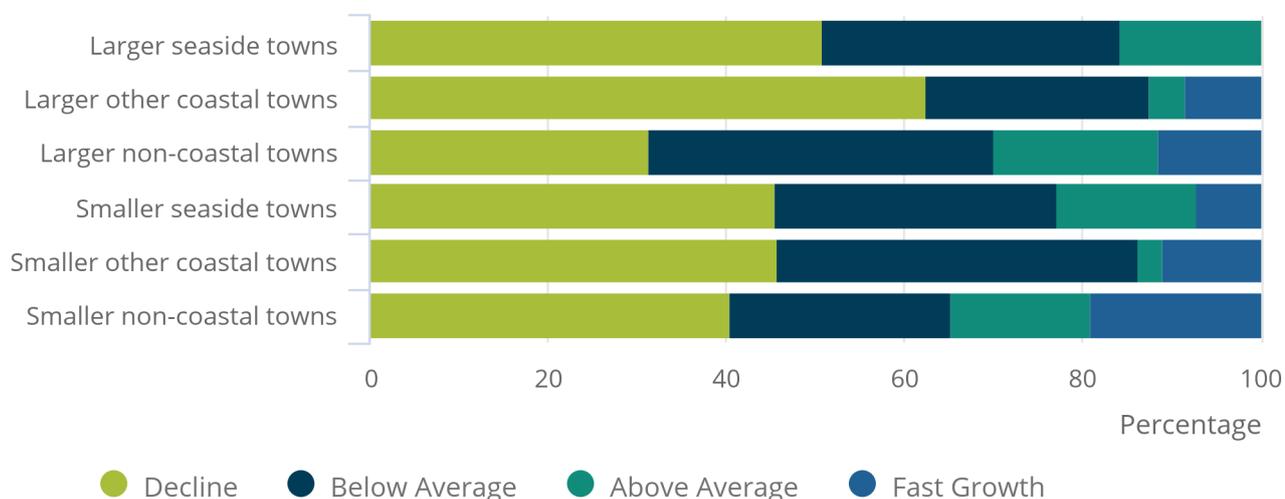
Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Register and Employment Survey

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

The rest of this section provides a range of further information related to employment and the labour market in coastal towns.

The industry group with the highest share of employment in small seaside towns in 2018 was the accommodation and food services sector (18.9%). By comparison, for non-coastal small towns this sector only accounted for 6.9% of employment while it was 8.4% for the other small coastal (non-seaside) towns.

Two other sectors for which small seaside towns had a higher share of employment than other small towns were the health sector and the retail sector. By contrast, small seaside towns had a relatively low proportion of employment in some high productivity sectors including manufacturing and professional, scientific and technical services.

The industrial structure of employment available within seaside towns impacts on the employment characteristics of the residents who work there, with higher part-time working and self-employment among residents as well as fewer degree-level qualifications (see following charts). The higher levels of income deprivation shown earlier in Figures 2 and 3 are also likely linked to the type of employment opportunities coastal towns typically offer.

For non-seaside coastal towns, industry structures are more similar to non-coastal towns than to seaside towns. The biggest difference is in the transport and storage industry, which accounts for 7.5% of employment in the small other coastal towns compared with 4.9% for small non-coastal towns. This reflects the existence of port towns among the other coastal towns group.

Table 2: Three largest employment sectors by type of town
Office for National Statistics – Business Register and Employment Survey 2018

	Largest sector and percentage of people employed	Second largest sector and percentage of people employed	Third largest sector and percentage of people employed
Smaller seaside coastal town	Accommodation and food services (18.9%)	Health (17.4%)	Retail (15%)
Smaller other coastal town	Health (13.3%)	Retail (11.4%)	Manufacturing (11.3%)
Smaller non-coastal town	Manufacturing (12.5%)	Health (12.4%)	Retail (11.3%)
Larger seaside coastal town	Health (18.8%)	Retail (12.9%)	Accommodation and food services (11.1%)
Larger other coastal town	Health (18.8%)	Retail (11.1%)	Manufacturing (9.9%)
Larger non-coastal town	Health (13.5%)	Retail (10.7%)	Business administration and support services (9.4%)

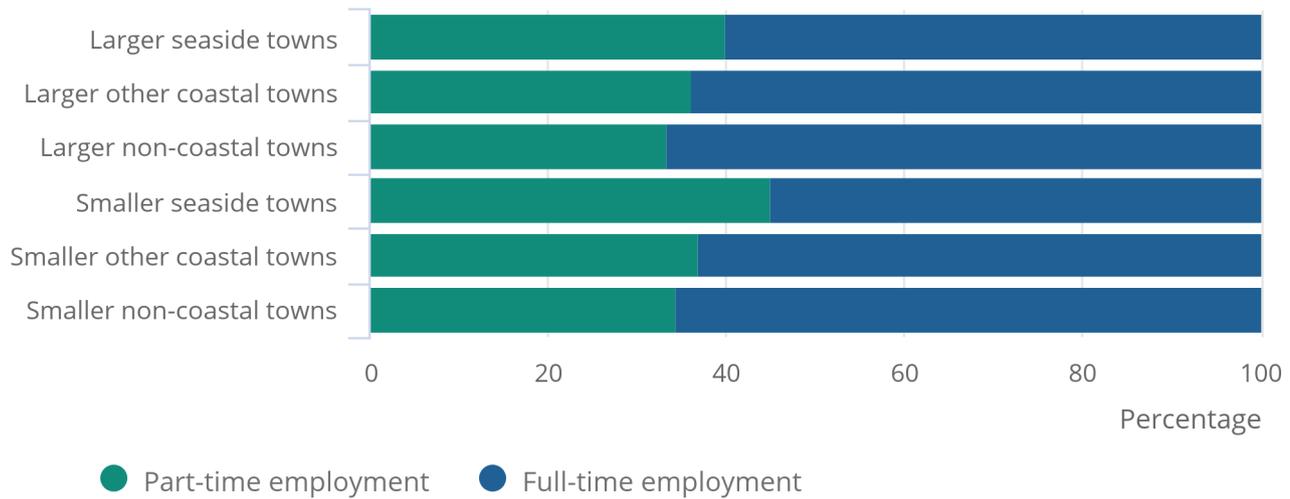Source: Business Register and Employment Survey (2018)

Figure 9 shows that part-time employment is much more common in small seaside coastal towns (45%) than in non-coastal small towns (35%). There is a similar pattern evident among the larger towns.

Figure 9: Seaside towns have the highest percentages of part-time employment

Shares of full-time and part-time employment, England and Wales, 2018

Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Register and Employment Survey

Notes:

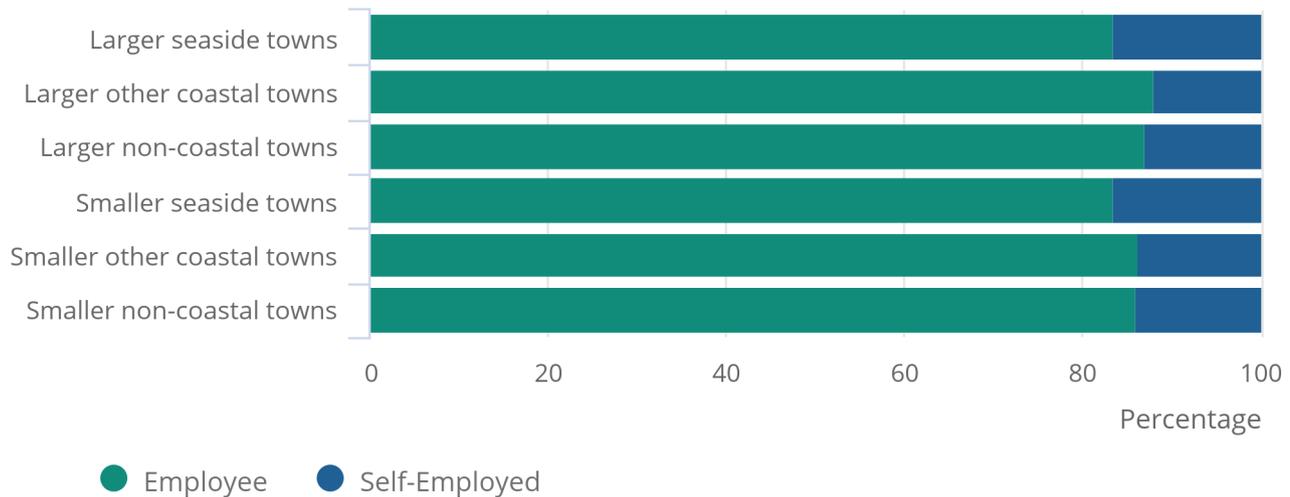1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Figure 10 illustrates that the share of self-employed is also higher among residents in seaside coastal towns (16.5%) than both other coastal towns and non-coastal towns.

Figure 10: Seaside towns have higher shares of self-employed

Shares of employees and self-employed, England and Wales, 2019

Figure 10: Seaside towns have higher shares of self-employed

Shares of employees and self-employed, England and Wales, 2019

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

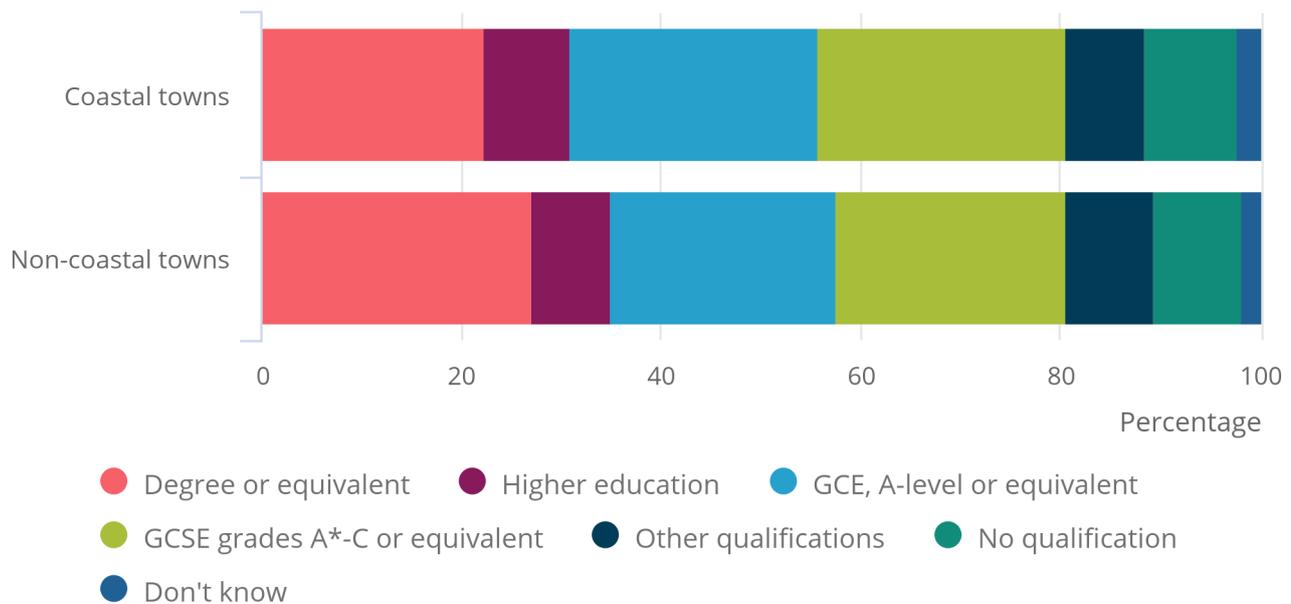1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

The share of coastal towns' resident population with a degree or equivalent level of education was 22% in 2019 compared with a share of 27% for non-coastal towns. The coastal towns have a higher share of residents who have achieved qualifications below degree level than non-coastal towns. The shares with no qualifications are similar in both coastal and non-coastal towns.

Figure 11: Coastal towns' resident population is less likely to have a degree or equivalent level of education

Highest level of education attained, England and Wales, 2019

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

Coastal towns have lower employment rates than non-coastal towns. Among small seaside towns and other small coastal towns, the employment rate in January to December 2019 was 74%, which was below the 78% average for small non-coastal towns. For larger towns, seaside towns had a similar employment rate to large non-coastal towns at around 77%.

It was, however, the larger (non-seaside) towns on the coast that had the lowest employment rate at 70%. Furthermore, employment rates in these larger (non-seaside) coastal towns have been consistently lagging through the period since 2012. As shown earlier in Table 1, these larger (non-seaside) coastal towns are mostly located in the North of England.

Figure 12: Larger other coastal towns have lower employment rates than seaside or non-coastal towns

Employment rate, England and Wales, January to December 2012 to January to December 2019

Figure 12: Larger other coastal towns have lower employment rates than seaside or non-coastal towns

Employment rate, England and Wales, January to December 2012 to January to December 2019
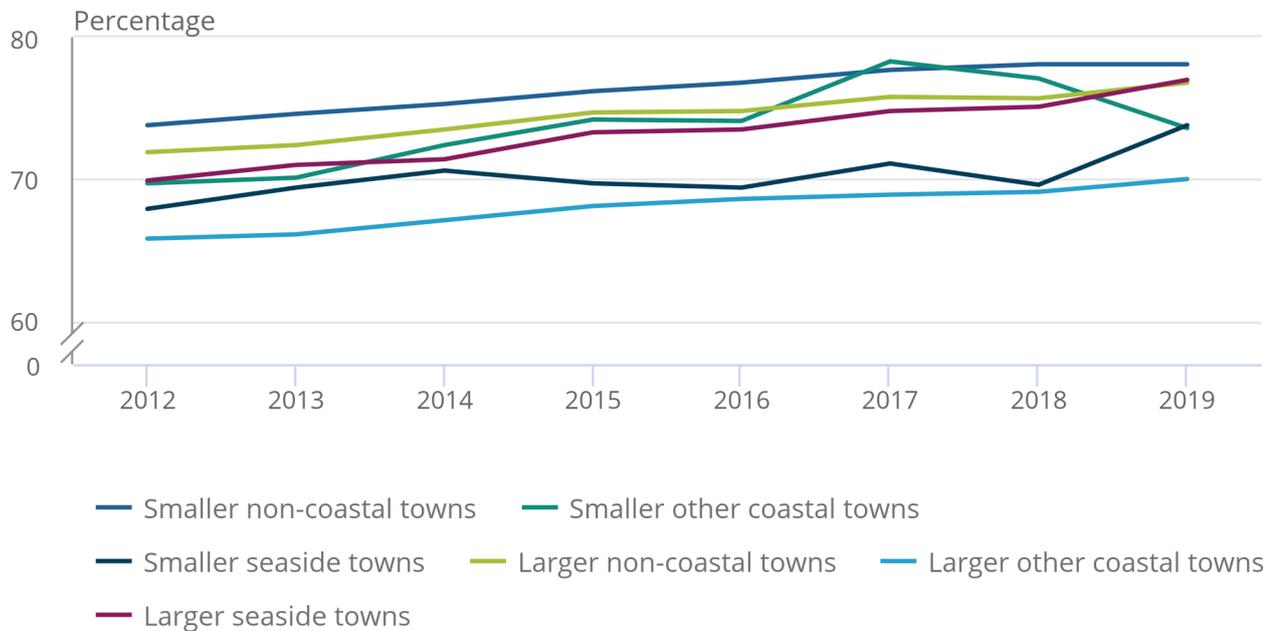
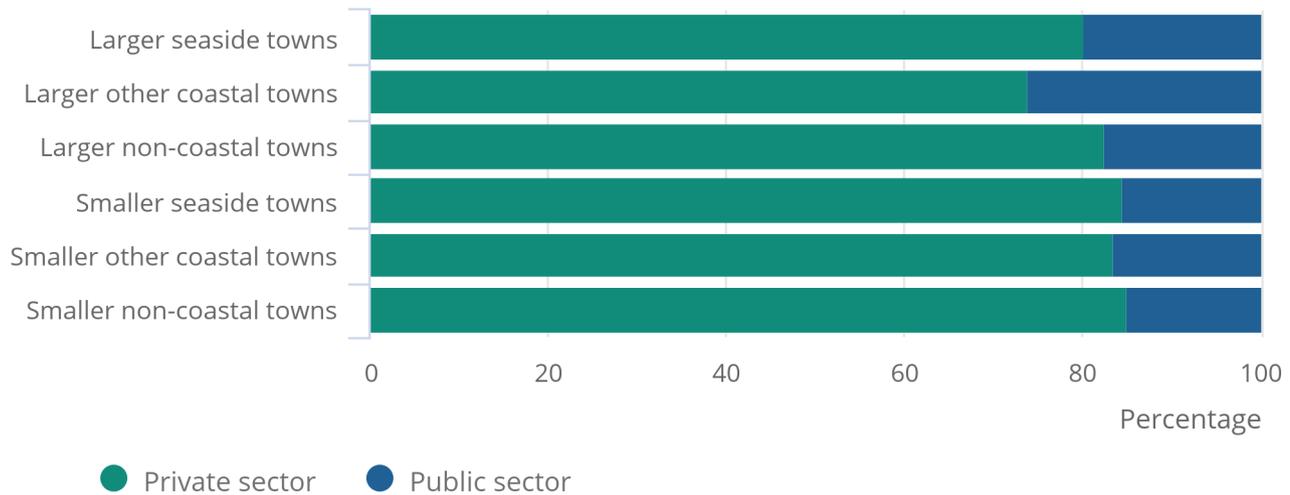**Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey**

As well as a lower employment rate among residents, the larger coastal (non-seaside) towns are also characterised by a relatively high share of public sector employment with 26% of jobs in this group of towns in the public sector compared with just 17.5% for large non-coastal towns.

Figure 13: Larger other coastal towns have the highest share of public sector jobs

Shares of private and public sector employment, England and Wales, 2018

Figure 13: Larger other coastal towns have the highest share of public sector jobs

Shares of private and public sector employment, England and Wales, 2018

Source: Office for National Statistics – Business Register and Employment Survey

Notes:

1. Percentages may not sum to 100 because of rounding.

6 . Coronavirus (COVID-19) deaths

During the year to date, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has published a number of outputs examining the counts of the number of deaths and age-standardised mortality rates involving the coronavirus (COVID-19) by local area. These outputs have included data by local authority, rural urban classification, and major towns and cities. In this article, we provide some additional analysis examining the data for coastal towns.

Figure 14 shows that age-standardised COVID-19 mortality rates up to 18 September were lower for large seaside towns (63.0 per 100,000 population) than for large non-coastal towns (102.2 per 100,000 population). For smaller towns, the respective rates were 57.3 per 100,000 for seaside towns compared with 84.4 per 100,000 for non-coastal towns.

Figure 14: Coronavirus (COVID-19) mortality rates were lower in seaside towns

Age-standardised COVID-19-related mortality rates, England and Wales, 2020
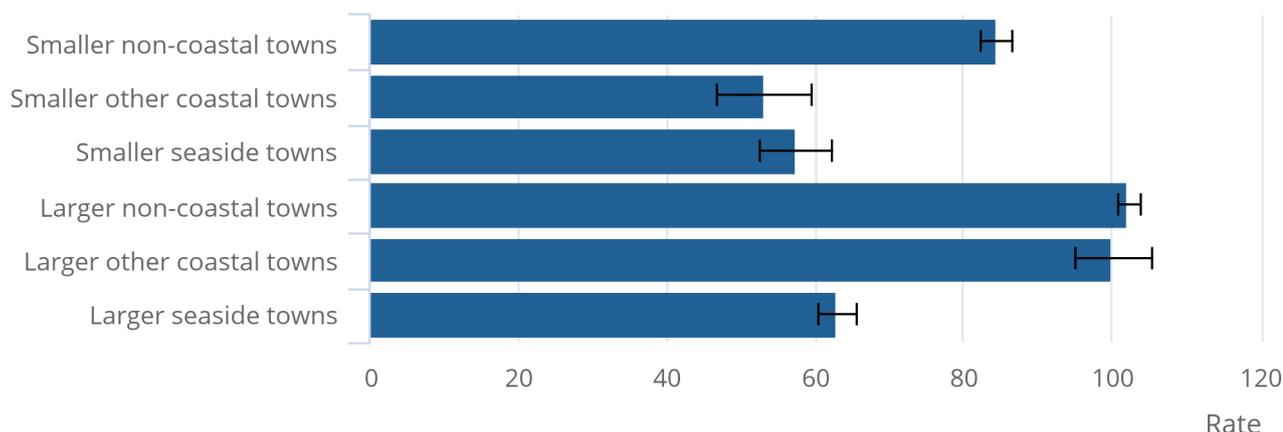
Source: Office for National Statistics – Deaths registered weekly in England and Wales

For the other coastal towns (non-seaside), the data differ by size of town. For the smaller towns, the COVID-19 mortality rate was similar to the small seaside towns and lower than the non-coastal small towns. However, for the larger other coastal (non-seaside) towns, the COVID-19 mortality rate was very similar to larger non-coastal towns and quite a bit higher than in the larger seaside towns.

7 . Monitoring population density in coastal towns using Facebook data

This section is based on experimental analysis that seeks to use new data sources to provide estimates of changes in population density in coastal towns through 2020. The experimental data we are using are based on the location of Facebook app users who have location services activated on their mobile device. These data have been analysed by researchers at WorldPop at the University of Southampton who have been granted access to the data as part of Facebook's data for good programme.

It is important to be aware that the data only include the share of the UK population who use the Facebook app (and have location services turned on). This will not be a representative sample of the UK population overall as Facebook users will be more common in certain age groups and population groups and less so in others. Therefore, some caution should be applied when interpreting the results. For more information on the Facebook data source, please see Section 10: Data sources and quality.

In most years, the interest in these data would be to get an understanding of the "seasonality" of coastal towns. In other words, the degree to which population rises during the summer months when tourism is at its peak, compared with the reduced population of many coastal towns during the off-season winter months. Coping with these fluctuations in population is a major issue for many coastal towns, and there are very little data available at present to help inform policymakers of the extent of the seasonality issues.

For 2020, however, there is the additional interest in these data that comes from understanding the impacts of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on coastal towns and towns and cities more generally. The increase in working from home, the impacts of lockdown and the major changes to tourism will all have impacted on the levels of population resident in coastal towns and other parts of the country during the year.

Figure 15 shows the population density of Facebook users by location as measured between 8:00am and 4:00pm each Saturday since mid-March 2020. Each data point is calculated as a percentage change compared with a baseline period. The baseline period was calculated as the mean average of values over a 90-day period from 11 December 2019 to 10 March 2020.[1]

The data show reductions in overall population density across much of the period from April to August. However, that trend should be treated with caution because it may be influenced by changes in the levels of usage of the app between different time periods or in the number of users with location services enabled, in addition to any changes in overall population density occurring in England and Wales. Where the data are more useful is in observing the differences that occur when comparing between the different types of towns and cities shown in the data.

Looking at the data in this way, immediately from the beginning of lockdown in mid-March there was a divergence in population density between the different types of town and city location shown relative to the baseline period. Population density increased relative to the baseline period in each of the small town groups (seaside, other coastal and non-coastal) and in larger coastal towns. By contrast, London and the major cities[2] had a decline in population density. The larger non-coastal and other-coastal (non-seaside) towns lay somewhere between the two groups.

This relative trend continued until the beginning of July with no further apparent shift towards coastal towns happening during May or June. From early July, however, a trend towards increased population in seaside towns and coastal towns relative to other towns became apparent. Both small seaside towns and large seaside towns witnessed sharp relative increases in population density in comparison to non-coastal towns. This trend was most distinct during July and August, but it also continued through September.

For the other coastal towns (non-seaside), there was also a small relative upward shift in population density relative to non-coastal towns during the July and August period albeit to a much smaller extent than for the seaside towns.

Figure 15: Population density increased in seaside towns on weekends during July and August 2020 and declined in non-coastal towns

Population density (of Facebook app users with location services switched on) by location measured between 8:00am to 4:00pm each Saturday since mid-March 2020 relative to the baseline period

Figure 15: Population density increased in seaside towns on weekends during July and August 2020 and declined in non-coastal towns

Population density (of Facebook app users with location services switched on) by location measured between 8:00am to 4:00pm each Saturday since mid-March 2020 relative to the baseline period
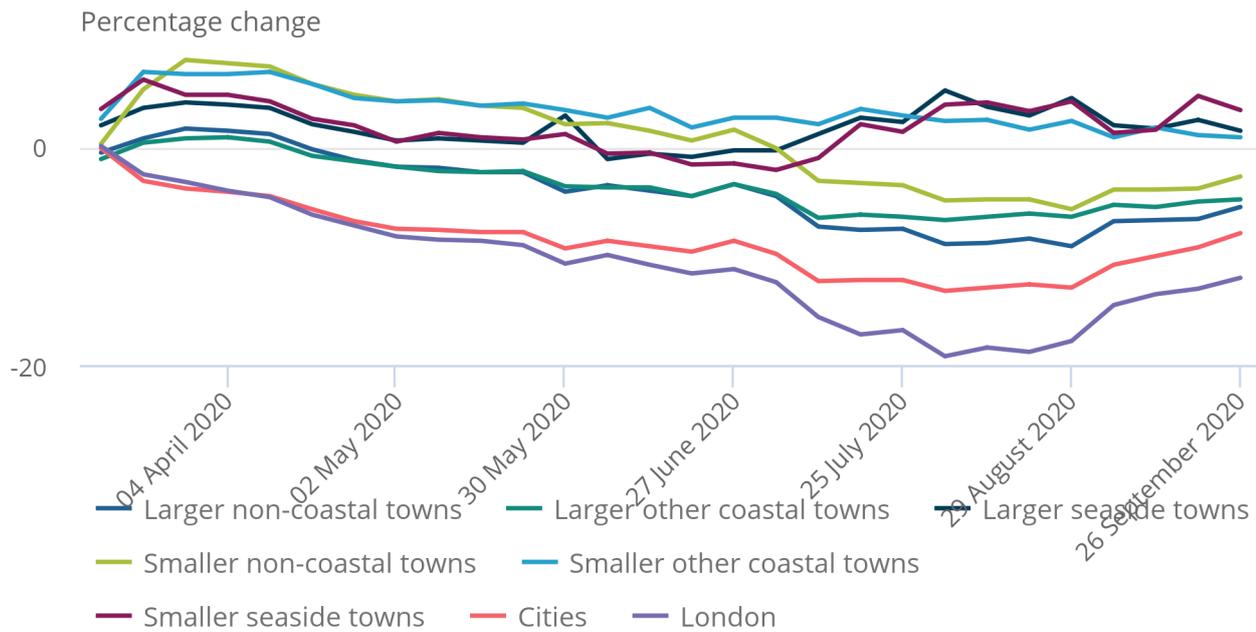
Source: Facebook data provided by WorldPop at the University of Southampton to the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The baseline period was calculated as the mean average of values over a 90-day period from 11 December 2019 to 10 March 2020.

Figure 16 shows the same analysis except this time it is for a midweek time period (Wednesdays from 8:00am to 4:00pm) rather than a weekend period. When compared with Figure 15, the weekday chart shows very similar trends with seaside towns and to a lesser extent other coastal towns, seeing a relative upward shift in population density compared with non-coastal towns during July and August.

Figure 16: The increase in population density in seaside towns in July and August was also apparent in midweek periods

Population density (of Facebook app users with location services switched on) by location measured between 8:00am to 4:00pm each Wednesday since mid-March 2020 relative to the baseline period

Figure 16: The increase in population density in seaside towns in July and August was also apparent in midweek periods

Population density (of Facebook app users with location services switched on) by location measured between 8:00am to 4:00pm each Wednesday since mid-March 2020 relative to the baseline period
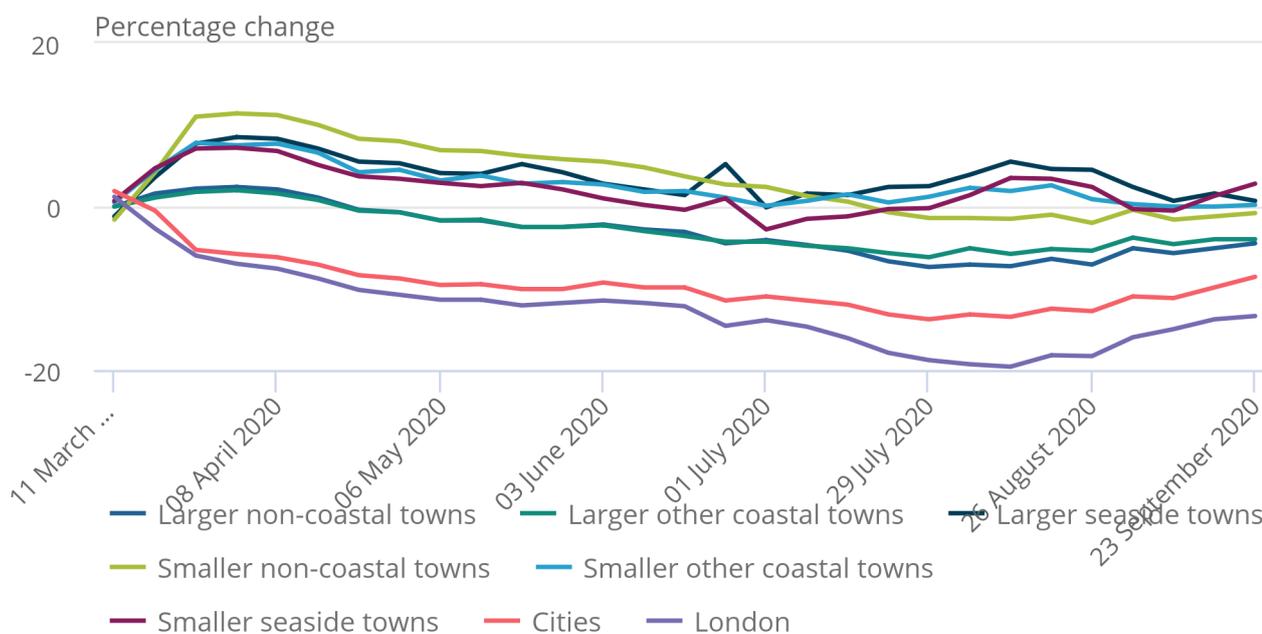
Source: Facebook data provided by WorldPop at the University of Southampton to the Office for National Statistics

Notes:

1. The baseline period was calculated as the mean average of values over a 90-day period from 11 December 2019 to 10 March 2020.

Looking ahead, it will be interesting to monitor these trends over future months and potentially to examine other trends in population density between and within UK towns using these data. As discussed earlier, it is important to be aware of the limitations of the data and the fact they are representative of Facebook users with location services active, rather than the UK population overall. Equally, however, the data provide information at a timeliness and disaggregation that is not easily available from more traditional data sources.

Notes for Monitoring population density in coastal towns using Facebook data

1. Please note that trends in the time series might partly reflect changes in the numbers of Facebook app users over time in addition to reflecting changes in population density. For this reason, the data are probably most reliable when used to examine the relative differences between areas, compared with baseline, on a specific date.

2. The cities category in this section is made up of the 19 cities in England and Wales not included within our towns analysis. These are cities with a population greater than 225,000 according to the 2011 Census.

8 . Coastal towns data

9 . Glossary

Seaside towns and other coastal towns

In this article, we have split the 169 coastal towns between seaside towns and other coastal (non-seaside) towns. To make the distinction between a seaside town and other coastal town, we have consulted several lists of seaside towns previously published as well as examining a range of information on each town ourselves. Our aim has been to split the towns depending on whether the town has a tourist beach and associated visitor attractions or whether the town is focused on other activities such as being a port town or a town with an industrial heritage.

Ultimately, there is a certain amount of judgement involved in creating the lists, and we would welcome feedback on the choices made via email to subnational@ons.gov.uk. The full list of towns and associated categories can be found in the dataset associated with this article.

Smaller towns and larger towns

In terms of town size, it can be helpful to analyse smaller towns separately from larger towns. Therefore, we have split the towns based on their 2011 Census population with towns with populations between 5,000 and 20,000 in the smaller town category and those with population greater than 20,000 in the larger town category.

10 . Data sources and quality

This article provides data and analysis on 169 coastal towns in England and Wales covering a range of economic, health and demography topics. The coastal towns examined in this output are a subset of the 1,186 towns examined in the 2019 Office for National Statistics (ONS) article, Understanding towns in England and Wales: an introduction.

For consistency across the employment and population metrics, this output has used data from the mid-year population estimates and the Business, Register and Employment Survey up to 2018. An updated version of the Understanding towns in England and Wales article re-examining all 1,186 towns is currently being developed for publication later this year. This will include updates of the population and employment data to 2019.

Because this article focuses on towns, it does not include some of the largest coastal cities in England such as Brighton and Hove, Southampton, Portsmouth, Plymouth or Liverpool.

In line with the previous towns article, to qualify for inclusion in the towns the list population must have been below 225,000 in 2011 (according to the census) with the town boundaries used being either Built-Up Area boundaries or Built-Up Area Subdivision boundaries.

Facebook data

The experimental data we are using in Section 7: Monitoring population density in coastal towns using Facebook data are an estimate of population density based on the location of Facebook app users who have location services activated on their mobile device. These data have been analysed by researchers at WorldPop at the University of Southampton[1] who have been granted access to the data as part of Facebook's data for good programme. The university's researchers are able to share the results of analysis or aggregation of these data and agreed to provide aggregated analysis of the data to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) based on our definitions of seaside, coastal and non-coastal towns[3] for inclusion in this article.

The Facebook population density data are made available to the University of Southampton on a grid basis, on $3km^2$ grids. These have been best fit to the town definitions used in this article. Data were available for 615 towns overall including 89 of the 169 coastal towns, and the analysis in Section 7 is therefore based on this sample of towns.

Real-time data sources such as these have the potential to provide very useful insights that might be more difficult to obtain from traditional statistical surveys. The benefits of the dataset for analysis include timeliness, geographic disaggregation and size of sample. However, it is also important to be aware of one main drawback of this type of data, which is that unlike traditional statistical survey data it is not based on a representative sample of the UK population. Instead, it only includes the share of the UK population who use the Facebook app (and have location services turned on). This will not be a representative sample of the UK population overall as Facebook users will be more common in certain age groups and population groups and less so in others.

In statistical terms, therefore, the analysis in Section 7 should be regarded as experimental and some caution should be applied when interpreting the results.

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11 . Future developments

This article is the second of a series of towns articles being produced by the Centre for Subnational Analysis at the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The next article planned will update the original Understanding towns in England and Wales: an introduction article with newer data on employment and population together with more in-depth spatial analysis. This is planned for publication before the end of the year with further articles on a range of topics related to towns in the early stages of development for publication in 2021.

12 . Related links

Understanding towns in England and Wales: an introduction
Article | Released 9 July 2019
The first in a series of articles that provide new data and analysis on towns in England and Wales, to help inform policy.

2011 Census: Coastal Communities
Article | 28 October 2014
An article examining Coastal Communities in England and Wales using 2011 Census data.