

The Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey tracks where living standards are highest in Great Britain by ranking local performance across key indicators covering the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education and health. The survey examines all 119 rural local authority districts and is based on data at local authority district (LAD) level. Data has been gathered from a number of sources, including Halifax, Point Topic (Broadband data), ONS, DEFRA, the Met Office, the Department for Transport, Department of Children, Schools and Families, the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Welsh Assembly, Northern Ireland Government and the Scottish Executive.

CAMBRIDGESHIRE TOPS ANNUAL RURAL AREAS QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY

Residents of East Cambridgeshire have the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain, according to the latest Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey. In fact, Cambridgeshire occupies two of the top three positions, with neighbouring South Cambridgeshire - last year's winner - in third place. Wychavon in Worcestershire in second place separates the two Cambridgeshire areas.

Why East Cambridgeshire is a great place to live....

Residents tend to be fit and well with 93% reporting general good health, and have the joint highest life expectancy amongst rural areas where life expectancy is 4 years more than the UK average. The employment rate is high, at 79%, and many residents enjoy relatively high incomes with weekly average earnings of £707. Residents also have the lowest domestic CO₂ emissions of all rural local area districts

On top of all this, enjoying a high quality of life in East Cambridgeshire does not come at a particularly high cost either. The average house price in the area is 5.3 times local annual gross earnings, which is below the average house price to earnings ratio for all rural areas of 5.9.

Martin Ellis, housing economist at Halifax, commented: "In recent years, East Cambridgeshire has performed consistently well against a wide range of indicators to demonstrate that its residents have amongst the best quality of life in rural Britain. In particular, health and life expectancy in East Cambridgeshire are amongst the highest of all rural areas.

"Even the rain falls less than the national average, adding to the general high performance of East Cambridgeshire in employment, average earnings and low CO₂ emissions. In addition, average house prices relative to local earnings in the area are below the average for rural areas, highlighting that a high standard of living doesn't have to come at a high price."

Rural residents in the South East typically enjoy a good quality of life

Elsewhere, almost a third (15) of the 50 rural local authority districts (LADs) with the highest quality of life are in the South East. The South East is followed by the East of England (13) and the East Midlands (12). The remaining LADs in the top 50 are in South West (4), Yorkshire & the Humber (3), Scotland (2) and the West Midlands (1).

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Rural areas in the North tend to receive high ratings on school exam results, environmental measures (such as low population densities and low traffic flows) and lower house prices compared to local earnings. Rural areas in the south of England typically perform better on average earnings, employment, health and weather.

Key Facts

Employment is highest in Shetland Islands (83.8%) followed by East Northamptonshire (82.0%). Also scoring well are Test Valley (81.4%) and Forest Heath, South Derbyshire and Aberdeenshire (all 80.9%).

Average earnings are highest in Chiltern (£893 per week) followed by Waverley (£857), South Oxfordshire (£825), and East Hertfordshire (£814).

The biggest homes are in Forest of Dean in the South West where the average house in this district has 9.0 rooms followed by Wychavon (7.4) and Derbyshire Dales (7.0).

The lowest percentage of vacant properties is in Waveney (0.1%). Three-quarters of rural local authority areas have 2.0% or less vacant homes.

The most affordable rural local authority district for residential property is Pendle with an average house price to annual gross earnings ratio of 3.5, followed by East Ayrshire (3.7) and North Lincolnshire (3.8).

East Hertfordshire in the East of England has the **highest level of good broadband** access with 87% having a download speed of at least 2Mbps. Rushcliffe in the East Midlands (86%) and East Hampshire (84%) have the next highest levels.

Traffic flows are lowest in Scotland, which has 8 of the 10 best ranked districts on this measure. The lowest traffic levels are in the Western Isles, the Highlands, Argyll and Bute, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Scottish Borders, Dumfries & Galloway and Moray.

The lowest burglary rates per 10,000 households are in the Western Isles (3.8) followed by Orkney Islands (5.0), West Devon (7.8) and North Norfolk (7.9).

The lowest per person CO₂ emissions are in East Cambridgeshire, South Derbyshire and Waveney (all 2.0 tonnes). Rutland, Tendring and North Kesteven have the next lowest emissions - all three areas emit an average of 2.1 tonnes per person compared with the national average of 2.21 tonnes.

The lowest population density in Britain is in the Western Isles and the Highlands (both have 9 persons per square km). Thanet has the highest density with an average of 1,279 persons per square km.

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The lowest average annual rainfall is in Maldon in Essex (552 mm). Seven of the ten driest districts in Great Britain are in the East of England.

The sunniest place in Great Britain is the Isle of Wight where residents enjoy an average of 37.4 hours of sunshine a week.

Good health scores are highest in South Cambridgeshire, Chiltern, South Oxfordshire, and West Berkshire with 95% of households rating themselves in good or fairly good health. Six out of the top ten areas on this measure are in the South East.

Life expectancy is highest in East Cambridgeshire, North Dorset, East Dorset and Rutland (all 82 years), followed by South Cambridgeshire and Purbeck in Dorset (both 81 years). Four of the top ten in this category are local authority districts in the South West.

Primary school class sizes are smallest in the Western Isles (14 pupils), followed by Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands (both 17). Eight of the ten local authority areas with the smallest average primary school class sizes are in the Scotland and two are in the Wales.

The best GCSE results in England are in Herefordshire, Malvern Hills, and Wychavon. In all three areas, 86% of 15 to 16 year olds achieved five or more GCSE results, grades A-C. In Scotland, the highest results for 16 year olds gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 4 are in Shetland Islands (91%) and Orkney Islands (85%). In Wales, pupils in Ceredigion had the best GCSE results (65%).

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Table 1: Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 Rural Areas in 2011

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life Ranking 2011
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	1
Wychavon	West Midlands	2
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	3
East Hertfordshire	East of England	4
Waverley	South East	5
Aylesbury Vale	South East	6
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	7
Uttlesford	East of England	8
Rutland	East Midlands	9
Chiltern	South East	10
Huntingdonshire	East of England	11
South Oxfordshire	South East	12
North Kesteven	East Midlands	13
Test Valley	South East	14
Mid Sussex	South East	15
Vale of White Horse	South East	16
Maldon	East of England	17
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	18
East Northamptonshire	East Midlands	19
South Kesteven	East Midlands	20
Tandridge	South East	21
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	22
West Berkshire	South East	23
West Oxfordshire	South East	24
Harborough	East Midlands	25
St Edmundsbury	East of England	26
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	27
Forest Heath	East of England	28
Tewkesbury	South West	29
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	30
Wealden	South East	31
East Hampshire	South East	32
Melton	East Midlands	33
Forest of Dean	South West	34
South Holland	East Midlands	35
Mid Suffolk	East of England	36
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	37

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Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life Ranking 2011
Shepway	South East	38
Wiltshire	South West	39
Broadland	East of England	40
Shetland Islands	Scotland	41
South Derbyshire	East Midlands	42
East Dorset	South West	43
New Forest	South East	44
Babergh	East of England	45
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	46
North West Leicestershire	East Midlands	47
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	48
South Norfolk	East of England	49
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands	50

Table 2: Rural Areas with the Best Quality of Life in each region, 2011

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life ranking 2011
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	7
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	1
Northumberland	North East	64
Ribble Valley	North West	84
Shetland Islands	Scotland	41
Waverley	South East	5
Tewkesbury	South West	29
Monmouthshire	Wales	88
Wychavon	West Midlands	2
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	27

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Table 3: Rural Areas with the Best Quality of Life in each category

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour	Highest employment rate: 83.8	Shetland Islands	Scotland
	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £893	Chiltern	South East
Housing	Highest average number of rooms in house: 9.0	Forest of Dean	South West
	Largest % of houses with central heating: 90%	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest House prices to Earnings ratio: 3.5	Pendle	North West
	% of households with good level of broadband access (i.e. a minimum download speed of 2Mbps): 87%	East Hertfordshire	East of England
Urban environment	Lowest Population density per sqm km: 9	Western Isles and Highlands	Scotland
	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 65 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 3.8 per 10,000 people	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest % of vacant properties: 0.1%	Waveney	East of England
	Lowest Domestic CO ₂ Emissions: 2.0 per person	East Cambridgeshire, Waveney and South Derbyshire	East of England and East Midlands
Physical environment	Lowest average annual rainfall: 552 mm	Maldon	East of England
	Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 37.4 hours	Isle of Wight	South East
Health	Highest % of residents in good health: 95%	South Cambridgeshire, South Oxfordshire, Chiltern and West Berkshire	East of England and South East
	Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 82 years	East Cambridgeshire Rutland, North Dorset and East Dorset	East of England, East Midlands and South West
Education	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 14.4	Western Isles	Scotland
	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 91%	Shetlands Islands	Scotland

Editors' Notes:

The Quality of Life index aims to quantify where living standards are highest in Great Britain by ranking local performance across a range of indicators, including the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education and health. The index has been produced at a local authority

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level for 119 rural LADs in Great Britain. The number of local authority districts has fallen from 140 in the 2010 survey as a result of structural changes to local governments in April 2009, when a number of new unitary authorities were created by amalgamating district councils.

The quality of life reading for each local authority district has been created by summing scores across 17 variables within six broad groups.

Each local authority district is given a score out of ten for each variable contained in the index. Scores within each of the broad groups are averaged and then the six group scores are summed to create an overall quality of life score.

This analysis was undertaken using the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Urban Rural classification. This classification defines an area as a Rural Area if it lies in a town or village of less than 10,000, or as an urban area if it lies in a town or city of 10,000 or more residents. A rural local authority district is one where the majority of these residents live in rural areas.

See separate technical note for more information on methodology of index and data sources.

Group	Variable	Period covered
Labour	Employment rate %	April 2010- March 2011
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2011
Housing	Number of rooms in house	12 months to October 2011 -
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	12 months to October 2011 -
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to October 2011 -
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	December 2010
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2010 – ONS; 2008 for Northern Ireland
	Traffic flows per square km	2010
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	2010/11-
	% of Vacant Properties	2011 England and Wales, 2010 Scotland, Northern Ireland
Physical environment	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2011 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2009)
	Average annual rainfall mm	Average 2001/2008
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 2001/2008
Health	% in good or fairly good health	2001 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	2008/10
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	2011 January England; 2010/11 Wales 2009 Scotland; and 2010/11 Northern Ireland
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2010/11 England; 2009/10 Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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