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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.

WAVERLEY TOPS ANNUAL RURAL AREAS QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY

Residents of Waverley have the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain, according to the 2013 Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey.

Set in the south west corner of Surrey the borough of Waverley tops the survey for 2013, with Uttlesford in Essex in second spot and neighbouring East Hertfordshire in third.

Why Waverley is a great place to live

Taking its name from Waverley Abbey, reputedly the first Cistercian abbey in England, the heavily wooded borough contains an area of outstanding natural beauty in Blackheath Common and is bordered by the North Downs.

Waverley residents tend to be fit and healthy, with an average male life expectancy of 80.6 years and 96.7% reporting general good health. Many are comparatively wealthy, enjoying high weekly average earnings of £888 and an employment rate of 79.9% – both substantially above the UK average of £609 per week and 70.2% respectively. At the same time average house price in the area is 5.6 times local annual gross earnings, which is below the average house price to earnings ratio for all rural areas of 6.0.

Martin Ellis, housing economist at Halifax, commented:

"Waverley has performed consistently strongly across a wide range of indicators for a number of years, and the latest survey found residents here now have the best quality of life in rural Britain.

"While Waverley is not the top area in any one indicator, its strength is that it performs strongly across the board. The average resident has a high weekly income, enjoys above average health and life expectancy and low crime rates. But while they also benefit from a big home with central heating, living there does not come with a hefty price tag, with house prices relative to earnings below the average for rural areas.

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"It is the combination of factors taken together which ensure that residents in Waverley enjoy the highest standard of living in rural Britain."

Rural residents in South East and East enjoy good quality of life

The Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey found the best rural areas to live are again dominated by the East of England and the South East, with Rushcliffe and South Northamptonshire in East Midlands the only local authorities not from these two regions inside the top ten.

In total nearly a third (16) of the top 50 rural local authority districts (LADs) with the highest quality of life are in the South East, just ahead of the East of England (13) and the East Midlands (11). The remaining LADs in the top 50 are from the South West (five), Yorkshire and the Humber (three), and the West Midlands (two).

North South divide

Rural LADs in the North typically perform better on school exam results and lower house price compared to local earnings. They also tend to perform best on environmental measures such as low population densities and traffic flows. Whereas rural areas in the South tend to receive stronger ratings for factors such as employment, earnings, health, and weather.

Key Facts

Employment is highest in Suffolk Coastal (85.8%) in the East of England, followed by Ribble Valley (84.7%) in the North West, and Taunton Deane (83%) in the South West.

Average earnings are highest in the South East, with Chiltern (£912 per week) and Waverley (£888) taking the top two spots, ahead of East Hertfordshire (£813) in the East of England.

The biggest homes are found in Chiltern (South East), Uttlesford (East of England) and Rutland (East Midlands) where the average house has 6.4 rooms.

The most affordable rural local authority district for residential property is Copeland in the North West, with an average house price to annual gross earnings ratio of 3.0, ahead of East Ayrshire (3.6) in Scotland and North Lincolnshire (4.0).

The lowest percentage of vacant properties is found in Waveney in the East of England.

The lowest burglary rate per 10,000 households are found in the Orkney Islands (1.0) in Scotland, ahead of the Western Isles (5.4) and North Norfolk (7.3)

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The South East has **highest level of households with access to fast broadband** in Great Britain, led by Chiltern (94.6%), Mid Sussex (94.1%) and Thanet (92.4%) all having a download speed of at least 2Mbps.

Good health scores are highest in Chiltern, West Berkshire, and South Cambridgeshire, where 97% of households rate themselves in good, or fairly good health. Six out of the top ten areas in this category are local authority districts in the South East.

Nevertheless, residents of East Dorset (82 years) have **the highest life expectancy** in Great Britain, ahead of North Dorset (81.6 years), and Rutland and East Cambridgeshire (both 81.5 years). Four out of the top ten areas on this measure are found in the South West.

Traffic flows are lowest in Scotland with the top six districts and eight of the ten best ranked districts on this measure. The lowest traffic levels are found on Western Isles.

The lowest areas of population density in Britain are also to be found in Scotland, with the top seven districts and eight of the top ten ranked districts on this measure. Western Isles has just eight people per square km. At the other end of this scale Thanet, in the South East, has the highest density with 1,301 people per square km.

Seven of the top ten areas with **the lowest per person CO₂ emissions** are found in the East Midlands, with a further two from the East of England and one from the South East..

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

Primary school class sizes are smallest in Scotland, with nine of the top ten districts. Western Isles has an average of just 15.2 pupils per class.

The best GCSE results in England are found in North Lincolnshire where 89.7% of 15 to 16 year olds achieved five or more GCSE results Grade A-C. In Wales, pupils in Ceredigion had the best GCSE results (65%). In Scotland, the highest results for 16 year olds gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 4 are in the Shetland Islands (88.4%)

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Table 1: Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 rural areas in 2012

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life Ranking 2012
Waverley	South East	1
Uttlesford	East of England	2
East Hertfordshire	East of England	3
Chiltern	South East	4
Maldon	East of England	5
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	6
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	7
Vale of White Horse	South East	8
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	9
South Oxfordshire	South East	10
Rutland	East Midlands	11
Mid Sussex	South East	12
Aylesbury Vale	South East	13
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	14
West Oxfordshire	South East	15
East Dorset	South West	16
Tandridge	South East	17
Harborough	East Midlands	18
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	19
West Berkshire	South East	20
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	21
South Kesteven	East Midlands	22
St Edmundsbury	East of England	23
Huntingdonshire	East of England	24
Wychavon	West Midlands	25
East Northamptonshire	East Midlands	26
New Forest	South East	27
Wealden	South East	28
Test Valley	South East	29
East Hampshire	South East	30
Mid Suffolk	East of England	31
North Kesteven	East Midlands	32
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	33
South Norfolk	East of England	34

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Melton	East Midlands	35
Shepway	South East	36
Babergh	East of England	37
Tewkesbury	South West	38
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	39
Broadland	East of England	40
Cotswold	South West	41
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	42
Cherwell	South East	43
Malvern Hills	West Midlands	44
Hinckley and Bosworth	East Midlands	45
Forest Heath	East of England	46
Newark and Sherwood	East Midlands	47
Wiltshire	South West	48
Purbeck	South West	49
West Lindsey	East Midlands	50

Table 2: Rural areas with the Best Quality of Life in each region, 2012

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life ranking 2011
Waverley	South East	1
Uttlesford	East of England	2
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	7
East Dorset	South West	16
Wychavon	West Midlands	25
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	33
Northumberland	North East	65
Ribble Valley	North West	69
Monmouthshire	Wales	74
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	85

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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: 85.8	Suffolk Coastal	East of England
	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £912	Chiltern	South East
Housing	Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4	Rutland, Uttlesford, Chiltern	East Midlands, East of England, South East
	Largest % of houses with central heating: 100%	East Ayrshire	Scotland
	Lowest House prices to Earnings ratio: 3.0	Copeland	North West
	% of households with good level of broadband access (i.e. a minimum download speed of 2Mbps): 95%	Chiltern	South East
Urban environment	Lowest Population density per sqm: 8	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 65 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 1 per 10,000 people	Orkney Islands	Scotland
	Lowest % of vacant properties: 0.1%	Waveney	East of England
	Lowest Domestic CO ₂ Emissions: 2.2 per person	South Northamptonshire, Rutland	Both 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: 97%	South Cambridgeshire, Chiltern and West Berkshire	East of England and South East
	Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 82 years	East Dorset	South West
Education	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 15.2	Western Isles	Scotland
	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 89.7%	North Lincolnshire	Yorkshire and The Humber

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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 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 %	July 2011- June 2012
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2012
Housing	Number of rooms in house	England & Wales 2011 Census; Scotland HCS 2008/10; Northern Ireland 2011
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	England & Wales 2011 Census; Scotland HCS 2008/10; Northern Ireland 2011
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to November 2012
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic - December 2012
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2011 – ONS; 2009 for Northern Ireland
	Traffic flows per square km	2011
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	2011/12 Northern Ireland 2010/11

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	% of Vacant Properties	2011 England and Wales, 2010 Scotland, Northern Ireland
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2011 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2010)
Physical environment	Average annual rainfall mm	Average 2001/2008
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 2001/2008
Health	% in good or fairly good health	2011 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	2008/10
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	2012 January England; 2011 Wales 2011 Scotland; and 2010/11 Northern Ireland
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2011/12 England and Northern Ireland; 2009/10 Wales; 2011 Scotland

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