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Britain's best rural places to live revealed

- **Orkney Islands crowned Britain's best rural place to live**
- **Wychavon in Worcestershire scoops second spot**
- **Derbyshire Dales, Hambleton and Purbeck in Dorset make up the top five best rural places to live**
- **Waverley, Sussex has the highest average weekly earnings (£939)**

The Orkney Islands enjoy the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain, according to the 2017 Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey.

The annual study examines key factors in determining quality of living across the nation, with employment, education, social and environmental factors helping measure the rural communities with the best quality of life on offer.

The Orkney Islands scores strongly in employment rate, average earnings and average spend per pupil on education, as well as low anxiety levels, crime rates, and high scores in factors related to well-being and leisure. Although there is an abundance of space, Orkneys has some of the smallest houses in Britain with an average of 4.5 habitable rooms per home.

Wychavon second most desirable place to live

The inhabitants of Wychavon in Worcestershire have the second best quality of life, scoring well on a number of measures, with a high average male and female life expectancy of – 81.2 years and 84.5 years respectively, and 95% of adults report themselves to be in good health.

Wychavon residents have some of the biggest homes in rural Great Britain with an average of 6.1 habitable rooms of which 98% have central heating and 92% of all houses have superfast broadband.

Wychavon also does well on low levels of CO₂ emissions (1.8 tonnes of CO₂ per household), a high employment rate (79%) and those in full-time employment typically enjoying high weekly average earnings (£609).

School performance is also strong with 65% of 15+ year-olds achieving five or more GCSE results at grades A-C. Adults of Wychavon are amongst the happiest in Great Britain with a high level of life satisfaction.

Derbyshire Dales, Hambleton and Purbeck in Dorset complete the top five – all performing well in the Personal Well-Being Survey as well as long male and female life expectancy.

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Martin Ellis, economist at Halifax, said: “With one of the lowest population densities and traffic levels in Scotland, some of the most stunning scenery in the British Isles and the lowest levels of anxiety and highest life satisfaction ratings, the Orkneys offer a quality of life unmatched elsewhere in rural Britain.

“While the employment rate is significantly higher than the national average, there is more and more emphasis being placed on achieving a good work-life balance. The 2017 Rural Quality of Life Survey includes a leisure category for the first time. This shows that residents in the Orkneys have a good choice of pubs from which to choose.

“Rural areas in the South tend to receive higher ratings for weekly earnings, the weather, health, and life expectancy, while in the rural north areas score well on education in terms of grades and smaller class sizes, lower house prices in relation to earnings, and both lower traffic flows and population densities.”

Southern England and the East Midlands well represented

The top 50 rural places to live in Britain include 11 districts in the South East, nine in the South West with eight each in the East of England and East Midlands.

Some of the areas outside these regions making the top 50 include North Yorkshire’s Hambleton (4th) and Richmondshire (21st), as well as Shetland Islands (15th) and Monmouthshire in Wales (24th).

Last year’s winner, South Oxfordshire, has dropped to 10th in the 2017 survey, but still scores strongly on earnings, employment rate and a low crime rate. This is mainly due to the inclusion of the two new categories – number of pubs and the availability of health clubs and leisure centres – as well as some methodological changes in the ONS Personal Well-Being Survey to refresh Quality of Life Survey rankings with a broader scope.

KEY FACTS

Labour Market

- **Employment** is highest in Shetland Islands, at 89.4%, and Derbyshire Dales in the East Midlands (87.7%). The GB average is 75.3%.
- **The highest weekly average earnings** are in Waverley (£939 per week), followed by Uttlesford (£909 p/w) and Chiltern (£905 p/w). The GB average is £646 per week.
- **The proportion of adults (16+ years) with the highest level of qualification gained** (such as a degree, NVQ level 4 and above, or professional qualification) is the highest in the Chilterns (55.0%), followed by Waverley and Rushcliffe (both 54.0%) – all significantly above the GB average of 35.6%.

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Housing

- **The biggest homes** are in Uttlesford in Essex, Chiltern and Rutland, which all have an average of 6.4 habitable rooms. The smallest homes are in the Orkney Islands, East Lothian, Highlands, and Argyle and Bute (all with no more than 4.6 habitable rooms). The average number of habitable rooms in Britain is 5.4.
- 100% of homes in East Ayrshire have **central heating**; the national average is 97%.
- Only one area in the survey has an **average house price to earnings ratio** which is below the national historical long-term average of 4.0; Copeland in the North West (3.6). Some of the highest ratios are in Tandridge (11.3), Purbeck (10.8) and East Dorset (10.7). The GB average is 7.3.
- **Broadband** speed is based on the proportion of premises able to receive 5Mbps (mega bits per second). Harborough in Leicestershire is one of the best for internet access in (99%), closely followed by Test Valley and Arun (98%), and Tendring (97%).

Urban Environment

- The Western Isles and Highlands share the top spot for the lowest **population density**, with just nine people per square kilometre, compared to a GB of 276. At the other end of the scale, the most populated rural areas per square kilometre are Thanet on the east Kent coast (1,357) and Arun in West Sussex (705).
- The lowest **traffic levels** are found in the Western Isles with just 71 vehicles per square kilometre, Highland (105 vehicles/km), Isle of Scilly (125 vehicles/km) and Argyll & Bute (133 vehicles/km). The Great British average is 9,617 vehicles/km.
- Orkney Islands has **the lowest burglary rate per 10,000 people (2.3)** followed by Western Isles (4.8), Shetland Islands (6.0) and West Oxfordshire (6.9). The GB average is 28.7 per 10,000.
- **The lowest CO₂ emissions** are in Taunton Deane and Thanet (both 1.6) followed by 13 rural areas, including Huntingdonshire, Shepway, Waveney, St Edmundsbury and Arun with 1.7 tonnes of CO₂ per household. The GB average is 1.8 tonnes of CO₂ per household.

Physical Environment

- **The lowest average annual rainfall** (561mm) is in Maldon in Essex. Eight of the 10 driest districts in Britain are in the east of England. The national average annual rainfall is 864mm.

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- **The sunniest place in Great Britain** is the Isle of Wight where residents enjoy an average of 36.9 hours of sunshine a week. The GB average is 29.8 hours.

Health

- **The healthiest district** is the Isles of Scilly with 97% or more households rating themselves in good or fairly good health. Followed by Chiltern, South Cambridgeshire, West Berkshire and Aberdeenshire (all 96.8%). In Britain as a whole, 94.6% of households rate themselves as in good or fairly good health.
- **Life expectancy for males at birth** is highest in East Dorset (82.8 years). The average is 79.5 years.
- **Life expectancy for females at birth** is highest in Chiltern (86.7 years). The average is 83.2 years.

Education

- **Primary school class sizes** are smallest in Scotland, with nine of the 10 local authority districts with the smallest primary school classes here. The Western Isles has the lowest in Great Britain with 17.0, compared to a GB average of 26.9.
- **Nine of the 10 local districts with the lowest secondary school pupil teacher ratio areas are in Scotland.** The Western Isles has the lowest secondary school pupil teacher ratio of 13.2, compared to 20.8 across Great Britain.
- **The best GCSE results** in England are in Rutland (76.1%) and Chilterns (75.1%). The GB average is 69.7%.
- **The highest average school (both secondary and primary) spend per pupil** is in the Orkney Islands (£9,281) – more than twice Great Britain's average of £4,662.

Personal Well-Being

- **Personal well-being is based on four categories – life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety:**
 - Adults (16+) in North Kesteven have the highest average rating for **life satisfaction** in Great Britain. Based on a score out of 10, the adults had an average rating of 8.3, compared with the GB average of 7.7.
 - With a rating of 8.4 (out of 10), adults in Eden believe what they do in life is **worthwhile**, the highest average rating in Great Britain. The GB average is 7.9.
 - The **happiest** adults are in the Western Isles, with an average rating of 8.2 – significantly higher than the Great Britain average of 7.5.

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- Adults in the Orkney Islands are the least **anxious** with an average rating of 1.9. The average for Great Britain is 2.8.

Leisure

- Eden in Cumbria has the highest number of pubs per 10,000 adults (28.3) followed by Derbyshire Dales (26.7). The GB average is 10.1.
- For the active, Purbeck is the place to head to for health and fitness clubs where there are 3.7 clubs per 10,000 people. The GB average is 1.4.

Table 1: 2017 Halifax Rural Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 areas based on annual data

Local Authority Districts (LAD)	Region	Ranking 2017
Orkney Islands	Scotland	1
Wychavon	West Midlands	2
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands	3
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	4
Purbeck	South West	5
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	6
Chiltern	South East	7
West Oxfordshire	South East	8
South Hams	South West	9
South Oxfordshire	South East	10
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	11
West Dorset	South West	12
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	13
Waverley	South East	14
Shetland Islands	Scotland	15
Eden	North West	16
Malvern Hills	West Midlands	17
Mid Devon	South West	18
Rutland	East Midlands	19
Ryedale	Yorkshire and The Humber	20
Richmondshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	21
Uttlesford	East of England	22
Maldon	East of England	23
Monmouthshire	Wales	24
Babergh	East of England	25
Vale of White Horse	South East	26
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	27
Mid Sussex	South East	28
Wiltshire	South West	29

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Harborough	East Midlands	30
East Hertfordshire	East of England	31
West Berkshire	South East	32
Aylesbury Vale	South East	33
North Kesteven	East Midlands	34
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	35
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	36
East Devon	South West	37
Newark and Sherwood	East Midlands	38
Craven	Yorkshire and The Humber	39
Tandridge	South East	40
Hinckley and Bosworth	East Midlands	41
New Forest	South East	42
Cotswold	South West	43
South Lakeland	North West	44
Broadland	East of England	45
Powys	Wales	46
Isles of Scilly	South West	47
Sedgemoor	South West	48
South Norfolk	East of England	49
Western Isles	Scotland	50

Source: Halifax

Table 2: Rural with the Best Quality of Life in each region in 2017

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2017
Orkney Islands	Scotland	1
Wychavon	West Midlands	2
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands	3
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	4
Purbeck	South West	5
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	6
Chiltern	South East	7
Eden	North West	16
Monmouthshire	Wales	24
Northumberland	North East	94

Source: Halifax

Table 3: Rural areas with the Best Quality of Life in each category in 2017

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour (GB average is 75.3%)	Highest employment rate: 89.4%	Shetland Islands	Scotland
(GB- £646 per week)	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £939	Waverley	South East

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(GB – 35.6%)	% of adults (16+) with highest qualification gained: 55.0%. This includes graduate and post graduate degrees, NVQ level 4 and above, and professional qualifications.	Chiltern	South East
Housing (GB – 5.4)	Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4	Uttlesford Chiltern Rutland	East of England South East East Midlands
(GB – 97%)	Largest % of houses with central heating: 100%	East Ayrshire	Scotland
(GB – 7.3)	Lowest House price to earnings ratio: 3.6	Copeland	North West
(GB – 94%)	% of households with more than 5Mbps: LADs with more than 95% of premises having broadband speed in excess of 5Mbps	Chiltern Harborough Tendring South Staffordshire	South East East Midlands East of England West Midlands
Urban environment (GB- 276 per sq/km)	Lowest Population density per sqr km: 9	Western Isles Highland	Both Scotland
(GB- 9,617 cars/km)	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 71 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
(GB-28.7 per 10,000 people)	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 2.3 per 10,000 people	Orkney Isles	Scotland
(GB – 1.8 tonnes CO ₂ emissions per household)	Lowest Total Consumer CO₂ Emissions: 1.6 tonnes per household	Tauton Deane Thanet	South West South East
Physical environment (GB – 863.8 mm per year)	Lowest average annual rainfall: 561mm	Maldon	East of England
(GB- 29.8 hours per week)	Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 36.9 hours	Isle of Wight	South East
Health (GB – 94.6%)	Highest % of residents in good health: 97.0%	Isles of Scilly	South West
Male life expectancy (GB - 79.5 years)	Longest Male life expectancy at birth for males: 82.8 years	East Dorset	South West
Female life expectancy (GB -83.2 years)	Longest Female life expectancy at birth for females: 86.7 years	Chiltern	South East
Education (GB-26.9 pupils per class)	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 17.0	Western Isles	Scotland
Secondary Education (GB – 20.8 pupil to teacher)	Lowest secondary school pupil – teacher ratio: 13.2	Western Isles	Scotland
Secondary Education Exams (GB- 69.7%)	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 91.7% (in Scotland % of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more SCQFs A-C grade)	Orkney Islands	Scotland

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Per pupil spending (primary and secondary) – (GB - £4,622 per pupil)	Highest per pupil spend: £9,281	Orkney Islands	Scotland
Personal Well Being (GB- 7.7 from 10)	Highest Life Satisfaction rating out of 10: 8.3	North Kesteven	East Midlands
(GB- 7.9 from 10)	Highest Worthwhile rating out of 10: 8.4	Eden	North West
(GB- 7.5 from 10)	Highest Happiness rating out of 10: 8.2	Western Isles	Scotland
(GB- 2.8 from 10)	Lowest levels of Anxiety rating out of 10: 1.9	Orkney Islands	Scotland
Leisure (GB-10.1 per 10,000 people)	Number of pubs per 10,000 population: 28.3 per 10,000 people	Eden	North West
(GB-1.4 per 10,000 people)	Number of fitness & Health clubs per 10,000 population: 3.7 per 10,000 people	Purbeck	South West

Source: Halifax

Ends

Notes to editors:

Halifax Rural 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, health, and personal well-being. The survey is based on data at local authority district (LAD) level and examines all 121 rural LADs in Great Britain. Data has also been gathered from a number of sources, including: Halifax, OFCOM (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, and the Scottish Executive.

The quality of life reading for each LAD has been created by summing scores across 26 variables within 8 broad groups. Each LAD is given a score out of 10 for each variable contained in the index. Scores within each of the broad groups are averaged and then the seven group scores are summed to create an overall quality of life score.

Note:¹ The British Beer & Pub Association represents Britain's brewers and pub companies, members account for some 96% of beer brewed in Britain today, and own more than half of the nation's pubs. These members are from international brewers, to market-leading managed pub companies, the nation's largest tenanted pub companies and historic family brewers.

² health clubs and leisure centres covers commercial health & fitness clubs and the other local authority leisure centres, local authority swimming pools with gyms and universities with access for the public. Source: Leisure intelligence analysis supplied by John Turner Leisure Marketing Limited t/a Leisure Lists

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 LAD is one where the majority of these residents live in rural areas.

"This report is prepared from information that we believe is collated with care, however, it is only intended to highlight issues and it is not intended to be comprehensive. We reserve the right to vary our methodology and to edit or discontinue/withdraw this, or any other report. Any use of this report for an individual's own or third party

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Group	Variable	Period covered
Labour	Employment rate %	Jul 2015-Jun 2016
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2016 Northern Ireland (NI) – April 2015, NISRA (both up rated by average weekly earnings index to August 2016)
	% of adults(16+) with highest qualification gained	2011 Census data
Housing	Number of rooms in house	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – Housing Conditions Survey 2009/11 Northern Ireland November 2015 Halifax data
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – housing Conditions Survey 2009/11 NI – Halifax Data to November 2015.
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to October 2016
	Broadband speed is based on % of premises able to receive 5Mbit/s (mega bits per second)	OFCOM 2016
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2015 – ONS
	Traffic flows per square km	2015
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	British Crime Survey 2015/16; Northern Ireland 2014
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2013 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2014) NI Local and Regional CO ₂ Emissions Estimates for 2005 - 2013
Physical environment	Average annual rainfall mm	Met Office Average 2009/2013
	Annual sunshine hours	Met Office Average 2009/2013
Health	% in good or fairly good health	2011 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	England, Wales & Scotland 2012/14; Northern Ireland 2011/13
	Life expectancy at birth for females	England, Wales & Scotland 2012/14; Northern Ireland 2011/13
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	England and Wales 2016, and Northern Ireland 2015/16; Scotland 2015
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2014/2015 England; 2014/15 Wales; Scotland 2014/15; Northern Ireland 2014/15
	Average state school (primary and secondary) spending per pupil	England 2015/16, Scotland 2014/15 and Wales 2016/17; NI 2013/14 – 2015/16
	Secondary school pupil teacher ratio	England 2015 (adjusted class size data), Wales 2014 and Scotland 2014
Personal Well-Being	Life Satisfaction	April 2015-March 2016 ONS

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	Worthwhile	April 2015-March 2016 ONS
	Happiness	April 2015-March 2016 ONS
	Anxiety	April 2015-March 2016 ONS
Leisure	Number of Pubs	2016 British Beer and Pub Association
	Number of Fitness & Health clubs	2016 Leisure intelligence analysis supplied by John Turner Leisure Marketing Limited t/a Leisure Lists

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