

29/02/2016

The **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, 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, and the Scottish Executive.

South Oxfordshire provides best quality of life for rural dwellers

Residents of South Oxfordshire enjoy the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain, according to the 2016 Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey.

Why South Oxfordshire takes top spot

As a result of improvements in the levels of personal well-being of adults in the area of South Oxfordshire, the local authority district (LAD) has risen up the rankings to claim the title for best rural quality of life, having only just made the top 10 last year (10th place). Residents here rate themselves as happy and content with a high level of life satisfaction and not a great deal of anxiety.

Residents of South Oxfordshire scored well in a number of the categories analysed, with health also being a significant factor: 97% of those living in the area report themselves to be in good health. Meanwhile, female life expectancy is also high, at an average age of 84.7 years, a full three years longer than males (81.7 years).

Four out of every five residents (81%) are classified as being employed, and those in a full time occupation typically enjoy high incomes, with weekly average earnings of £863. To top it all, the cost of living in South Oxfordshire is not much higher than in many other parts of Britain – with an average house price that is 6.9 times the average annual pre-tax local income – only marginally higher than for the rest of the country (6.8).

Chiltern second most desirable place to live

The inhabitants of this rural Buckinghamshire LAD also tend to score well, with a high average female life expectancy of 86.7 years, and 97% reporting themselves to be in good health.

The employment rate is similar to South Oxfordshire at 80%, and those in full time occupation typically enjoy high incomes with weekly average earnings of £912 – the highest amongst rural areas in this survey and 46% above the average for all rural areas. School performance is also strong with 75% of 15+ year olds achieving five or more GCSE results at grades A-C.

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Last year's winner, Rutland, is Britain's third most desirable rural place to live. Residents of the East Midlands LAD tend to be in good health, have a high employment rate, benefit from a low crime rate and enjoy a relatively good climate with less rainfall and more sunshine than the national average.

Movement in the top 20

There were several big climbers in the top 20, with West Dorset rising 47 places to 17th spot, East Hampshire up 35 places to 16th and East Dorset moving from 47 in 2015 to 20th in 2016.

Craig McKinlay, Mortgages Director, Halifax, said:

"Having scored strongly across a wide range of economic, environmental and social factors, residents of South Oxfordshire can now lay claim to having the highest standard of living in rural Britain.

"Many of the towns in the top 20 are either within commuting distance to the capital or another major city. With South Oxfordshire particularly, the residents can enjoy the financial benefits of working in London and still have the rural lifestyle. Importantly having an exceptional quality of life does not necessarily come with added costs, as house prices relative to earnings in the area are not much different from the average for the country."

Southern England and the East Midlands offer best rural quality of life

The top 50 rural places to live in Britain are again dominated by the south east with 16 districts found in this region, followed by east of England, which claims 12 of the top 50 spots, the south west with 10, and East Midlands with seven.

Areas from outside the south in the top 50 besides Rutland include Hambleton in North Yorkshire (18th), Wychavon in the West Midlands (24th), Monmouthshire (35th), the Orkney Islands (46th) and Ribble Valley in the North West (49th).

Southern areas tend to receive higher ratings for weekly earnings, the weather, health, and life expectancy. Whereas Northern 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.

KEY FACTS

Labour Market

- **Employment** is highest in the Orkneys Isles (86.3%) and Tewkesbury in the south west (84.1%). The national average is 76.3%.
- **The highest weekly average earnings** are in the Chilterns (£912 per week), followed by Waverley (£873 p/w) and South Oxfordshire (£863 p/w). The national average is £633 per week.

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- **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 national average of 35.6%.

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 two areas in the survey have an **average house price to earnings ratio** which is below the national historical long-term average of 4.0; Copeland (3.7) and East Ayrshire (3.9). The highest ratios are in Tandridge (10.8), North Devon (10.1) and East Dorset (10.0). The current national average is 6.9.
- **Households in 80% of LADs have access to superfast broadband**, i.e. where download speed is greater than two megabits per second (Mbps). They include Waverley and Isle of Wight. Across all areas of Britain the majority of households have a good level of broadband access (a download speed of 2Mbps is regarded as the minimum for good broadband service).

Urban Environment

- The Western Isles and Highlands share the top spot for lowest **population density**, with just nine people per square kilometre, compared to a national average of 274. At the other end of the scale, the most populated rural areas per square kilometre are Thanet on the east Kent coast (1,344) and Arun in West Sussex (699).
- The lowest **traffic levels** are found in the Western Isles with just 69 vehicles per square kilometre, Highland (102 vehicles/km), Isle of Scilly (125 vehicles/km) and Argyll & Bute (130 vehicles/km). The Great British average is 9,459 vehicles/km.
- Orkney Islands has **the lowest burglary rate per 10,000 people (5.1)** followed by West Oxfordshire (5.3), Ceredigion (6.7) and Western Isles (7.0). The national average is 29.6 per 10,000.
- **The lowest CO₂ emissions** are in Taunton Deane (1.9) and St. Edmundsbury in West Suffolk, Huntingdonshire and Mid-Devon – all with 2.0 tonnes of CO₂ per household. The national average is 2.1 tonnes of CO₂ per household.

Physical Environment

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- **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.
- **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 national average is 29.8 hours.

Health

- **The healthiest district** is 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 17.4, compared to a national average of 26.8.
- **Nine of the 10 LADs with the lowest secondary school pupil teacher ratio areas are in Scotland.** The Shetland Islands has the lowest secondary school pupil teacher ratio of 8.6, compared to 15.5 across Great Britain.
- **The best GCSE results** in England are in the Chilterns and Aylesbury Vale (both 75.2%). Both are above the national average of 68.3%.
- **The highest average school (both secondary and primary) spend per pupil** is in the Shetlands (£10,821) – more than twice Great Britain's average of £4,559.

Personal Well-Being

- **Personal well-being is based on four categories – life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety:**

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- Adults (16+) in the Western Isles 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 8.4, compared with the national average of 7.7.
- With a rating of 8.6 (out of 10), adults in West Somerset and Staffordshire Moorlands believe what they do in life is **worthwhile**, the highest average rating in Great Britain. The national average is 7.9.
- The **happiest** adults are in the Ribble Valley, with all having an average rating of 8.2 – significantly higher than the Great Britain average of 7.5.
- Adults in the Western Isles are the least **anxious** with an average rating of just 2.07. The average for Great Britain is 2.8.

Table 1: 2016 Halifax Rural Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 areas based on annual data

Local Authority Districts (LAD)	Region	Ranking 2016
South Oxfordshire	South East	1
Chiltern	South East	2
Rutland	East Midlands	3
Waverley	South East	4
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	5
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	6
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	7
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	8
Mid Sussex	South East	9
St Edmundsbury	East of England	10
Uttesford	East of England	11
Vale of White Horse	South East	12
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	13
North Kesteven	East Midlands	14
New Forest	South East	15
East Hampshire	South East	16
West Dorset	South West	17
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	18
West Oxfordshire	South East	19
East Dorset	South West	20
North Dorset	South West	21
Harborough	East Midlands	22
West Berkshire	South East	23
Wychavon	West Midlands	24
Mid Suffolk	East of England	25
South Norfolk	East of England	26
Wealden	South East	27

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Test Valley	South East	28
East Hertfordshire	East of England	29
Purbeck	South West	30
Huntingdonshire	East of England	31
Tandridge	South East	32
Babergh	East of England	33
Tewkesbury	South West	34
Monmouthshire	Wales	35
Aylesbury Vale	South East	36
Mendip	South West	37
Mid Devon	South West	38
Arun	South East	39
South Kesteven	East Midlands	40
Maldon	East of England	41
Cotswold	South West	42
Derbyshire Dales	East Midlands	43
East Devon	South West	44
Broadland	East of England	45
Orkney Islands	Scotland	46
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	47
West Somerset	South West	48
Ribble Valley	North West	49
Cherwell	South East	50

Source: Halifax

Table 2: Rural with the Best Quality of Life in each region in 2016

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2016
South Oxfordshire	South East	1
Rutland	East Midlands	3
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	5
West Dorset	South West	17
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	18
Wychavon	West Midlands	24
Monmouthshire	Wales	35
Orkney Islands	Scotland	46
Ribble Valley	North West	49
Northumberland	North East	91

Source: Halifax

Table 3: Rural areas with the Best Quality of Life in each category in 2016

Group	Variable	Local Authority	Region
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		District	
Labour (GB average is 74.3%)	Highest employment rate: 86.3%	Orkney Islands	Scotland
(GB - £633 per week)	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £912	Chiltern	South East
(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 - 6.9)	Lowest house price to earnings ratio: 3.7	Copeland	North West
(GB - 86%)	% of households with more than 2Mbps – and where more than half of household have chance of having superfast broadband: 100%	Waverley Isle of Wight	Both South East
Urban environment (GB - 274 per sq/km)	Lowest population density per sq/km: 9	Western Isles Highland	Both Scotland
(GB - 9,459 cars/km)	Lowest traffic flows per sq/km: 69 cars/km	Western Isles	Scotland
(GB - 29.7 per 10,000 people)	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 5.1 per 10,000 people	Orkney Isles	Scotland
(GB - 2.1 tonnes CO ₂ emissions per household)	Lowest total consumer CO₂ emissions: 1.9 tonnes per household	Taunton Deane	South West
Physical environment (GB - 864 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	Isle of Wight	South East
Health (GB - 94.6%)	Highest % of residents in good health: 97.0%	Isles of Scilly	South West

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Male life expectancy (GB - 79.5 years)	Longest male life expectancy at birth: 82.8 years	East Dorset	South West
Female life expectancy (GB - 83.2 years)	Longest female life expectancy at birth: 86.7 years	Chiltern	South East
Education (GB - 26.8 pupils per class)	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 17.4	Western Isles	Scotland
Secondary Education (GB - 15.5 pupil to teacher)	Lowest secondary school pupil/teacher ratio: 8.6	Shetland Islands	Scotland
Secondary Education Exams (GB - 68.3%)	Highest % of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 94.3	Shetland Islands	Scotland
Per pupil spending (primary and secondary) (GB - £4,559 per pupil)	Highest per pupil spend: £10,821	Shetland Islands	Scotland
Personal Well Being (GB - 7.7 from 10)	Highest Life Satisfaction rating out of 10: 8.4	Western Isles	Scotland
(GB - 7.9 from 10)	Highest Worthwhile rating out of 10: 8.6	West Somerset Staffordshire Moorlands	South West West Midlands
(GB - 7.5 from 10)	Highest Happiness rating out of 10: 8.2	Ribble Valley	North West
(GB - 2.8 from 10)	Lowest levels of Anxiety rating out of 10: 2.1	Western Isles King's Lynn and West Norfolk Richmondshire	Scotland East of England Yorkshire and The Humber

Source: Halifax March 2016

- Ends -

Notes to editors:

The 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, Point Topic (Broadband data), ONS, DEFRA,

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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 24 variables within 7 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.

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.

Group	Variable	Period covered
Labour	Employment rate %	Jul 2014-Jun 2015
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2015 (up-rated by average weekly earnings index to September 2015)
	% 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
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	England & Wales 2011 ONS Census Data Scotland – housing Conditions Survey 2009/11
	House prices to Earnings ratio	12 months to November 2015
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic June 2014
Urban environment	Population density per square km	2014 – ONS
	Traffic flows per square km	2014
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	British Crime Survey 2014/15
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per capita	2013 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2012)
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 2013/14
	Life expectancy at birth for females	England, Wales & Scotland 2013/14
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	England and Wales 2015, Scotland 2014
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2013/2014 England; 2013/14 Wales; Scotland 2013
	Average state school (primary and secondary) spending per pupil	England 2014/15, Scotland 2013 and Wales 2015/16
	Secondary school pupil teacher ratio	England 2015 (adjusted class size data), Wales 2014 and Scotland 2014

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Personal Well-Being	Life Satisfaction	April 2014-March 2015 ONS
	Worthwhile	April 2014-March 2015 ONS
	Happiness	April 2014-March 2015 ONS
	Anxiety	April 2014-March 2015 ONS

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