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This is the second **Halifax "Rural" Areas Quality of Life Survey**. It tracks where living standards are highest in Great Britain's rural local authorities, by ranking local performance across key indicators of the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education and health. The index examines data at local authority (LA) level. In all 114 rural local authorities have been identified and analysed in this survey. An area is defined as rural if it lies in a town or village of less than 10,000 residents. A rural local authority is one where the majority of residents live in rural areas. Data has been gathered from sources including the ONS, DEFRA, the Met Office, the Department for Transport and the Halifax house price database.

## **Residents of Mid-Suffolk have the best quality of life in Britain's rural areas**

- **Mid-Suffolk has the best quality of life amongst rural local authorities in Britain with some of the healthiest and longest living residents**
- **South Cambridgeshire and East Hertfordshire follow Mid Suffolk in the top three rural areas**
- **House prices trade at a premium to the average house price in their region in 22 of the top 30 rural local authorities with the best quality of life; the largest premium being in Chiltern (£124,370)**
- **The East of England region has seven rural local authorities in the top ten**
- **Harborough in the East Midlands has the best quality of life outside the south of England. Aberdeenshire and Monmouthshire have the best quality of life in Scotland and Wales respectively**
- **Fourteen of the top 30 rural authorities in this survey are also in the top 30 of the quality of life survey for all local authorities in Britain.**

**Martin Ellis, economist at the Halifax, commented:**

"Residents of Mid Suffolk have the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain. They tend to be healthy, with one of the longest life expectancy rates, and live in larger than average houses. Mid Suffolk also has good school results and the weather is better than average. Significantly, average house prices in Mid Suffolk trade at an average of £9,810 below the regional average. Therefore, an excellent quality of life comes at a relatively reasonable price in Mid Suffolk."

### **KEY FINDINGS**

**Residents of Mid Suffolk have the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain.** In the survey, residents of Mid Suffolk are some of the healthiest and have one of the highest life expectancy rates of 80 years for newborns. The majority of householders are owner-occupiers (77%), while houses are larger than average (6.0 rooms). GCSE results are also above average (67.5% with five GCSEs grade C or above). The area sees two hours more sunshine per week (30.3. hours) than the average for all rural local authorities.

**At a regional level, the East of England region has the best quality of life.** Apart from Mid Sussex, Chiltern and West Berkshire, the rest of the top ten rural areas are in the East of England. Twenty-six of the top 30 by quality of life score are in southern England.

**Harborough in the East Midlands has the best quality of life outside the south of England,** ranked 14th in the survey. In Harborough, houses are larger than average, life expectancy is very high and GCSE results are some of the best in Great Britain.

**Table 1: Quality of Life Rankings – the top 30 Rural Local Authorities in Great Britain**

Local Authority	Region	Rural Quality of Life Ranking 2008
Mid Suffolk	East of England	1
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	2
East Hertfordshire	East of England	3
Uttlesford	East of England	4
Mid Sussex	South East	5
Mid Bedfordshire	East of England	6
Chiltern	South East	7
St. Edmundsbury	East of England	8
West Berkshire	South East	9
South Norfolk	East of England	10
Waverley	South East	11
Vale of White Horse	South East	12
Babergh	East of England	13
Harborough	East Midlands	14
Huntingdonshire	East of England	15
Broadland	East of England	16
West Oxfordshire	South East	17
South Oxfordshire	South East	18
East Dorset	South West	19
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	20
North Wiltshire	South West	21
Aylesbury Vale	South East	22
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	23
Test Valley	South East	24
Wealden	South East	25
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	26
Castle Morpeth	North East	27
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	28
Cotswold	South West	29
Tewkesbury	South West	30

**The top ranked rural local authorities in northern England are Castle Morpeth (27<sup>th</sup>), Congleton in Cheshire (34<sup>th</sup>) and Hambleton in North Yorkshire (35<sup>th</sup>).** These areas have a high employment rate, high owner-occupation rate; GCSE passes above the national average and healthy residents.

**The top Scottish rural local authority is Aberdeenshire (47<sup>th</sup>).** Aberdeenshire has the highest gross average earnings, a high employment rate, high secondary education grades, and low traffic and crime levels.

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**Monmouthshire has the best quality of life in Wales.** Monmouthshire has the highest gross average earnings and employment rate in the Principality; more residents own their own home, enjoy good health and live the longest.

**Fourteen of the top 30 rural authorities in this survey are also in the top 30 of the quality of life survey for all local authorities in Britain.** An assessment of quality of life in all (both rural and urban) local authorities in Britain revealed that that almost half of the rural authorities in the top 30 are also some of the best places to live in Britain in terms of quality of life.

**House prices trade at a premium to the average house price in their region in 22 of the top 30 rural local authorities with the best quality of life.** On average, this premium is £50,692, or 25% above the average house price in the region<sup>1</sup>; the largest premium is in Chiltern (£124,370 or 50%).

## QUALITY OF LIFE PERFORMANCE BY CATEGORY

### Labour Market

- **Test Valley has the highest employment rate (88.5%),** followed by the St. Edmundsbury (87.4%) and Tewkesbury (87.1%).
- **Average earnings are highest in Waverley in Surrey (£862 per week),** followed by Chiltern (£813) and West Berkshire (£784).

### Housing Market

- **The owner-occupation rate is highest in East Dorset and Harborough (84%),** in the South West and East Midlands regions respectively.
- **Chiltern has the biggest houses in Great Britain,** where the average house has 6.34 rooms, followed by Uttlesford (6.24).
- **In Castle Morpeth, 98% of houses have central heating, the most of any rural local authority in Great Britain.** In the top 30 rural local authorities, at least 90% of houses have central heating.

### Urban Environment

- **Forty five rural local authorities have less than 3.5% of their dwellings vacant.** The vacancy rate of properties is lowest in Cherwell (1.7%).
- **Traffic flows are lowest in Scotland, with the lowest in the Western Isles.** Highlands and Argyll and Bute have the next lowest traffic flows.
- **The lowest burglary rates are also all Scotland, with the lowest in Western Isles.** Followed by Scottish Borders.

### Physical Environment

- **The lowest recorded rainfall is in the East of England.** Maldon has the lowest average annual rainfall (535mm) followed by Tendring (551mm) and Fenland (559mm).
- **The sunniest rural areas are in the South East.** The Isle of Wight has an average of 34.2 hours of sunshine a week, the most in Great Britain, followed by Shepway and Thanet (both 33).

Note <sup>1</sup> – average house price over 12 months to December 2008.

## Health

- In Chiltern, West Berkshire and South Cambridgeshire, 95 per cent of households rate themselves in good or fairly good health, making these residents the healthiest in rural Britain.
- Life expectancy is highest in East Dorset of 81.4 years, followed by South Norfolk and New Forest with a life expectancy of 80 years.

## Education

- The average primary school class size is smallest in Western Isles (14.3 pupils), followed by Argyll and Bute (19.1).
- The best GCSE results in England are in East Hertfordshire where 75.4 % of 16 year olds achieved five or more GCSE results, grades A-C, followed by Castle Morpeth (73.9%) and Congleton (73%).
- In Scotland, 83% of S4 students in Aberdeenshire and Argyll and Bute gained 5 awards at level 4 or better.

**Table 3: Local Authority with the Best Quality of Life in each region**

Rural Local Authority	Region	Quality of Life ranking 2008
Castle Morpeth	North East	27
Congleton	North West	34
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	35
Harborough	East Midlands	14
Wychavon	West Midlands	38
Mid Suffolk	East of England	1
Mid Sussex	South East	5
East Dorset	South West	19
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	47
Monmouthshire	Wales	65

**Table 4: Local Authority with the Best Quality of Life in each category in 2008**

Group	Variable	Local Authority	Region
<b>Labour</b>	Employment rate %	Test Valley	South East
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	Waverley	South East
<b>Housing</b>	Owner Occupation rate %	East Dorset	South West
	No of rooms in house	Chiltern	South East
	% of houses with central heating	Castle Morpeth	North East
<b>Urban environment</b>	Traffic flows per square km	Western Isles	Scotland
	Burglary rate per 1000 population	Western Isles	Scotland
	% of Vacant Properties	Cherwell	South East
<b>Physical environment</b>	Average annual Rainfall	Maldon	East of England
	Annual sunshine hours	Isle of Wight	South East
<b>Health</b>	% in good health	Chiltern	South East
	Life expectancy at birth for males	East Dorset	South West
<b>Education</b>	No. of pupils in primary school class	Western Isles	Scotland
	% of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade	Aberdeenshire	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 level for 114 rural LAs in Great Britain.

The quality of life reading for each local authority has been created by summing scores across 14 variables within six broad groups.

Each local authority 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.

House prices used in the research are arithmetic annual average prices of houses – otherwise known as crude averages - on which an offer of mortgages has been granted. These prices are not standardised and therefore can be affected by changes in the sample from year to year. The data covers the period to December 2008 and has been extracted from the Halifax House Price database.

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 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
<b>Labour</b>	Employment rate %	2007
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	Apr-08
<b>Housing</b>	Owner Occupation rate %	2001 Census
	No of rooms in house	2001 Census
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	2001 Census
<b>Urban environment</b>	Traffic flows per square km	2007
	Burglary rate per 1000 population	2006-07 England & Wales 2007-08 Scotland
	% of Vacant Properties	2006
<b>Physical environment</b>	Average annual Rainfall	Average 1971- 2000
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 1971- 2000
<b>Health</b>	% in good health	2001 Census
	life expectancy at birth for males	2004-2006
<b>Education</b>	No. of pupils in primary school class	2007
	% of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2007 England & Wales 2008 Scotland

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**For further information please contact**

Helpline No: 0845 6045404

Email: [Groupeconomics@hbosplc.com](mailto:Groupeconomics@hbosplc.com)

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