

Press Release

**Embargoed until:
00:01 05.05.08**



Not for broadcast or publication before 00:01 Hrs Monday 5th May 2008

This is the first **Halifax Estate Agents "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. 117 rural local authorities have been identified and analysed. An area is defined as Rural if it lies in a town or village of less than 10,000. A rural local authority is one where the majority of people 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 Chiltern have the best quality of life in Britain's rural areas

- **Chiltern has the best quality of life amongst rural local authorities in Britain with the healthiest and best paid residents**
- **Rural areas with the most expensive properties are Chiltern, Waverley and Tandridge – these are also the top three areas in the rural quality of life survey**
- **House prices trade at a premium to the average house price in their region in 37 of the top 50 rural local authorities with the best quality of life**
- **Thirteen rural local authorities in the top 50 offer good value for money in terms of properties, these include Breckland, Broadland, South Norfolk and Huntingdonshire – all in the East of England**
- **The South East region has the best quality of life with seven rural local authorities in the top ten**
- **Rutland in the East Midlands has the best quality of life outside the south of England**

Performance in each local authority (LA) across Great Britain was scored across a range of indicators which influence the quality of life. These variables include employment, earnings, housing quality, weather, carbon emissions, crime, education performance and health. (See Notes to Editors and also separate technical report for more details)

KEY FINDINGS

Residents of Chiltern have the best quality of life in Great Britain. In the survey, residents of Chiltern are not just the healthiest but they also have the highest life expectancy rates of 80 years for newborns. They are also well remunerated with the highest average annual salary (£45,000) of any rural local authority in the top 50. The majority of householders are owner-occupiers (80%), while houses are larger than average (6.3 rooms). GCSE results are also above average (68.8% with five GCSE's grade C or above). The area sees slightly more sunshine per week (28.6 hours) than other rural local authorities.

The South East region has the best quality of life. Apart from South Cambridgeshire, Rutland and Uttlesford, the top ten rural areas are in the South East. Thirty-two of the top 50 by quality of life score are in southern England. Of the rest, nine are in the East Midlands, three in West Midlands and in Yorkshire and the Humber, and one in the North West, North East and Scotland.

Rutland in the East Midlands has the best quality of life outside the South of England, ranked sixth in the survey. In Rutland, houses are larger than average, life expectancy is very high and GCSE results are some of the best in Great Britain.

House prices trade at a premium to the average house price in their region in 37 of the top 50 rural local authorities with the best quality of life. On average, this premium is £52,974, or 25% above the average house price in the region. In Chiltern, the average house price is £503,226, a premium of £211,083 (72%) to the average house price in the South East.

Table 1: Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 Rural Local Authorities in Great Britain

Local Authority	Region	Quality of Life Ranking 2007
Chiltern	South East	1
Waverley	South East	2
Tandridge	South East	3
West Berkshire	South East	4
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	5
Rutland	East Midlands	6
Uttlesford	East of England	7
Vale of White Horse	South East	8
Mid Sussex	South East	9
Aylesbury Vale	South East	10
Babergh	East of England	11
South Norfolk	East of England	12
Test Valley	South East	13
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	14
East Dorset	South West	15
Huntingdonshire	East of England	16
North Wiltshire	South West	17
East Hampshire	South East	18
Harborough	East Midlands	19
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	20
Cotswold	South West	21
Tewkesbury	South West	22
West Wiltshire	South West	23
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	24
North Dorset	South West	25
North Kesteven	East Midlands	26
St. Edmundsbury	East of England	27
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	28
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	29
Congleton	North West	30

Local Authority	Region	Quality of Life Ranking 2007
Melton	East Midlands	31
Wychavon	West Midlands	32
Broadland	East of England	33
South Kesteven	East Midlands	34
Cherwell	South East	35
Wealden	South East	36
Maldon	East of England	37
New Forest	South East	38
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	39
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	40
South Holland	East Midlands	41
Breckland	East of England	42
East Northamptonshire	East Midlands	43
Castle Morpeth	North East	44
Herefordshire	West Midlands	45
Bridgnorth	West Midlands	46
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	47
Rother	South East	48
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	49
West Dorset	South West	50

Thirteen rural local authorities in the top 50 offer high value for money property (i.e. with an average house price below the regional average). Eight of these rural authorities trade at a discount to the regional average house price of over £20,000 and, therefore, offer the best value for money for homebuyers. These are Breckland (discount of £69,964), Broadland (£43,789), South Norfolk (£28,000), Huntingdonshire (£25,646) and St. Edmundsbury (£20,540) - all of these are in the East of England. The remaining three are: Rother (£24,692), Cherwell (£23,206) and New Forest (£23,063) - all of which are in the South East.

The leading eight rural authorities are also in the top 20 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 the leading eight rural authorities are also some of the best places to live in Britain in terms of quality of life.

Gordon Edwards, Managing Director at Halifax Estate Agents, commented:

"People living in Chiltern have the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain. They tend to be healthy, live in larger than average houses and have relatively high earnings. Chiltern also has good school results and the weather is better than average. However, living in Chiltern comes at a price with house prices £211,083 above the average for the South East.

"Thirteen rural local authority areas have a high quality of life combined with lower than average house prices, therefore offering good value for money property."

Quality of Life and House Prices

- **Chiltern, Waverley and Tandridge, the top three ranked rural local authorities by quality of life also have the most expensive properties.** The average house price in Chiltern in 2007 was £503,226, 11% higher than Waverley (£453,811) and 23% higher compared to Tandridge (£408,564).
- **The average house price in the top three rural authorities trades at an average premium of £163,057 (56%) to the regional average.** Properties in Chiltern trade at the highest premium of £211,083 (72%), followed by Waverley (£161,667) and Tandridge (£116,421).
- **Average house prices in the top ten rural areas trade at an average premium of £77,730, or 30%, to the region's average house price.** For those rural areas ranked 11th to 20th in the quality of life survey, the premium drops significantly to £24,504 (12%).
- **The average house price in the rural authorities with the highest quality of life in each region of Great Britain trades at a premium to the region's average house price.** This premium is, on average, £33,231 (16%).
- **There are clearly identifiable areas offering high value housing in most regions.** Thirteen rural authorities in the top 50 areas for the quality of life have an average house price at a discount to the regional average. Only in the East of England, which has eleven rural local authorities in the survey, do average house prices trade at a discount to the region (about -£3,000).
- **In the East Midlands, there are nine rural local authorities in the survey where average house prices trade at a premium of £48,125 compared to the regional average.** This is followed by the South East which has an average premium of £39,369 between fourteen rural authorities in the survey and the South West which has an average premium of £33,915 over seven rural authorities.

Table 2: Top 50 Local Authorities for the Quality of Life - House Prices

Rural Local Authority	Region	Quality of Life ranking 2007	Average House Price £s Dec 2007	Premium to region £s Dec2007	Premium to region % Dec2007
Chiltern	South East	1	503,226	211,083	72%
Waverley	South East	2	453,811	161,667	55%
Tandridge	South East	3	408,564	116,421	40%
West Berkshire	South East	4	300,377	8,234	3%
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	5	294,962	42,221	17%
Rutland	East Midlands	6	286,995	112,118	64%
Uttlesford	East of England	7	345,160	92,419	37%
Vale of White Horse	South East	8	313,391	21,247	7%
Mid Sussex	South East	9	305,476	13,333	5%
Aylesbury Vale	South East	10	290,698	-1,446	0%
Babergh	East of England	11	260,895	8,154	3%
South Norfolk	East of England	12	224,741	-28,000	-11%

Table 2: Top 50 Local Authorities for the Quality of Life - House Prices

Rural Local Authority	Region	Quality of Life ranking 2007	Average House Price £s Dec 2007	Premium to region £s Dec2007	Premium to region % Dec2007
Test Valley	South East	13	296,061	3,918	1%
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	14	262,852	10,112	4%
East Dorset	South West	15	301,141	71,307	31%
Huntingdonshire	East of England	16	227,095	-25,646	-10%
North Wiltshire	South West	17	228,941	-893	0%
East Hampshire	South East	18	345,965	53,821	18%
Harborough	East Midlands	19	253,014	78,136	45%
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	20	249,008	74,130	42%
Cotswold	South West	21	338,197	108,362	47%
Tewkesbury	South West	22	223,227	-6,608	-3%
West Wiltshire	South West	23	216,212	-13,622	-6%
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	24	240,223	-12,518	-5%
North Dorset	South West	25	265,279	35,444	15%
North Kesteven	East Midlands	26	177,695	2,818	2%
St. Edmundsbury	East of England	27	232,201	-20,540	-8%
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	28	298,942	6,798	2%
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	29	230,616	55,739	32%
Congleton	North West	30	214,768	42,500	25%
Melton	East Midlands	31	220,865	45,988	26%
Wychavon	West Midlands	32	244,667	59,973	32%
Broadland	East of England	33	208,952	-43,789	-17%
South Kesteven	East Midlands	34	207,371	32,493	19%
Cherwell	South East	35	268,938	-23,206	-8%
Wealden	South East	36	319,195	27,052	9%
Maldon	East of England	37	267,415	14,674	6%
New Forest	South East	38	269,081	-23,063	-8%
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	39	210,322	38,027	22%
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	40	231,029	66,107	40%
South Holland	East Midlands	41	180,857	5,980	3%
Breckland	East of England	42	182,777	-69,964	-28%
East Northamptonshire	East Midlands	43	200,605	25,728	15%
Castle Morpeth	North East	44	260,358	105,539	68%
Herefordshire	West Midlands	45	233,026	48,331	26%
Bridgnorth	West Midlands	46	263,979	79,285	43%
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	47	192,551	27,629	17%
Rother	South East	48	267,451	-24,692	-8%
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	49	174,755	9,833	6%
West Dorset	South West	50	273,246	43,412	19%

Quality of Life Rankings

- **The top ranked rural local authority in Northern England is Congleton (30th).** Congleton has a high employment rate and a high owner-occupation rate.
- **The top Scottish rural local authority is Aberdeenshire (39th).** Aberdeenshire has a high employment rate and low traffic and crime levels.

Quality of Life Performance by Category

Labour Market

- **South Northamptonshire has the highest employment rate (90.1%),** followed by the Cotswold (87.6%) and Melton (86.0%).
- **Average earnings are highest in Chiltern (£866 per week),** followed by Waverley (£728) and South Cambridgeshire (£705).

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 Rutland (6.25) and Uttlesford (6.24).
- **In Castle Morpeth (North West), 98% of houses have central heating, the most of any rural local authority in Great Britain.** In the majority of the top 50 rural local authorities, at least 90% of houses have central heating.

Urban Environment

- **Forty four rural local authorities have less than 5.0% of their dwellings vacant.** The vacancy rate of properties is lowest in Cherwell (1.7%). Eleven other rural areas have less than 3.0% of properties vacant.
- **Traffic flows are lowest in Scotland, with the lowest in the Aberdeenshire.** East Riding and Herefordshire have the next lowest traffic flows.
- **The lowest burglary rates are in Broadland in the East of England.** Followed by Breckland and East Dorset.

Physical Environment

- **Rural local authorities in the East of England are amongst the driest in the Britain,** with the top four areas having the lowest average annual rainfall. Maldon has the lowest average annual rainfall (535mm) followed by East Cambridgeshire (560mm), South Cambridgeshire (560mm), and Huntingdonshire (565mm).
- **The sunniest rural areas are in the South East.** The New Forest has an average of 32 hours of sunshine a week, the most in Great Britain, followed by Rother (31.9) and East Dorset (31.5).

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. Seven out of the top ten rural local authorities on this measure are in the South East.
- Life expectancy is highest in East Dorset of 80.9 years, followed by Chiltern, Uttlesford and South Norfolk with a life expectancy of 80 years. The top ten are dominated by areas from the South West, South East and East of England (three each).

Education

- The average primary school class size is smallest in Aberdeenshire (22.4 pupils), followed by Herefordshire (23.9).
- The best GCSE results in England are in Chiltern and Aylesbury Vale where 69 % of 16 year olds achieved five or more GCSE results, grades A-C, followed by Rutland (68%) and West Berkshire (65%).
- In Scotland, 85% of S4 students in Aberdeenshire 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 2007	Average House Price £s Dec 2007	Premium to region £s Dec 2007	Premium to region % Dec 2007
Rutland	East Midlands	6	286,995	112,118	64%
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	5	294,962	42,221	17%
Castle Morpeth	North East	44	260,358	105,539	68%
Congleton	North West	30	214,768	42,500	25%
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	39	210,322	38,027	22%
Chiltern	South East	1	503,226	211,083	72%
East Dorset	South West	15	301,141	71,307	31%
Wychavon	West Midlands	32	244,667	59,973	32%
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	40	231,029	66,107	40%

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

Group	Variable	Local Authority	Region
Labour	Employment rate %	South Northamptonshire	East Midlands
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	Chiltern	South East
Housing	Owner Occupation rate %	East Dorset	South West
	No of rooms in house	Chiltern	South East
	% of houses with central heating	Castle Morpeth	North East
Urban environment	Traffic flows per square km	Aberdeenshire	Scotland
	Burglary rate per 1000 population	Broadland	East of England
	% of Vacant Properties	Cherwell	South East
Physical environment	Average annual Rainfall	Maldon	South East
	Annual sunshine hours	New Forest	South East
Health	% in good health	Chiltern	South East
	Life expectancy at birth for males	East Dorset	South West
Education	No. of pupils in primary school class	Aberdeenshire	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 117 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 2007 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. A rural local authority is one where the majority of people 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 %	2006
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	Mar-06
Housing	Owner Occupation rate %	2001 Census
	No of rooms in house	2001 Census
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	2001 Census
Urban environment	Traffic flows per square km	2005
	Burglary rate per 1000 population	2005-06
	% of Vacant Properties	2006
Physical environment	Average annual Rainfall	Average 1971- 2000
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 1971- 2001
Health	% in good health	2001 Census
	life expectancy at birth for males	2003-2005
Education	No. of pupils in primary school class	2006
	% of 15yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2005-06

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