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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 140 local authority districts and is based on data at local authority (LA) level. Data has been gathered from a number of sources, including the 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 CAMBRIDGESHIRE TOPS GREAT BRITAIN RURAL AREAS QUALITY OF LIFE SURVEY

The Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey has placed South Cambridgeshire in the top spot based on residents' health, life expectancy, employment, school performance and regional climate.

Why South Cambridgeshire is a great place to live:

- Residents tend to be fit and well with 95% reporting general good health
- Higher than average life expectancy (81.6 years).
- A high employment rate (79%) with many residents enjoying high incomes with weekly average earnings of £739.
- The level of school qualifications is above the national average - 75% achieve five or more GCSE results grades A-C, just ahead of the national average of 74%¹.
- Residents also enjoy a relatively good climate with significantly less rainfall per year than the national average (597 mm against 871 mm).

Residents in southern England generally enjoy the best rural quality of life with over two thirds of the top rated 50 areas being here. The South East rates highest with fifteen local rural areas placed in the top 50, followed by the East of England (14) and the South West (7). The remainder is split between nine in East Midlands, three in the West Midlands and two in Yorkshire and the Humber.

Rural areas in the North tend to receive high ratings on school exam results and environmental measures such as low population densities and low traffic flows. Rural areas in the south of England typically perform better on average earnings, employment, health and weather.

Note: ¹ 74% is the average for England and Wales.

Nitesh Patel, housing economist at Halifax, commented: "In recent years, South Cambridgeshire has performed well against the full range of indicators to demonstrate that its residents consistently have amongst the best quality of life in rural Britain. In particular, good health scores and life expectancy in South Cambridgeshire are the highest amongst all the regional areas on the survey. Even the rain falls less frequently than the national average in South Cambridgeshire, contributing to the general high performance of this area in employment, average earnings, school performance, health and life expectancy."

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Key Facts

Employment is highest in Ryedale in North Yorkshire and in the Shetlands (both with 86.0%). Also scoring well are the Orkney Islands (83.4%) and Forest Heath (82.3%).

Average earnings are highest in Chiltern (£833 per week) followed by East Hertfordshire (£824) and Waverley in Surrey and South Oxfordshire (both £822).

The biggest homes are in Chiltern, where the average house in this district has 6.4 rooms.

The lowest percentage of vacant properties is in Melton (0.1%). Three-quarters of rural local authority areas have 2.0% or less vacant homes.

Traffic flows are lowest in Scotland, which has 7 of the 10 best ranked districts on this measure. The lowest traffic levels are in the Western Isles, the Highlands, Argyll and Bute, Orkney Islands, Shetland Islands, Scottish Borders and Dumfries & Galloway.

The lowest burglary rates per 10,000 households are in the Western Isles (2.7) followed by North Wiltshire (6.2) and Orkney Islands (6.5).

The lowest per household CO₂ emissions are in Waveney, Tendring, Mid Bedfordshire and South Derbyshire. All three areas emit an average of 2.2 tonnes per household, compared with the national average of 2.5 tonnes.

The lowest population density in Britain is in the Western Isles and the Highlands (both have 9 persons per square km).

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

Good health scores are highest in Isles of Scilly, South Oxfordshire, South Cambridgeshire, Chiltern and West Berkshire with 95% of households rating themselves in good or fairly good health. Seven out of the top ten areas on this measure are in the South East.

Life expectancy is highest in South Cambridgeshire (82 years), followed by East Dorset and North Dorset (both 81 years). The top ten in this category is dominated by local authority districts in southern England.

Primary school class sizes are smallest in the Western Isles (14 pupils), followed by Orkney Islands and Shetland Islands (17). Seven of the ten local authorities with the smallest average primary school class sizes are in Scotland and the remaining three are in Wales (2) and South West (1).

The best GCSE results in England are in the Isles of Scilly, Teesdale and Wear Valley in County Durham where respectively 91% and 84% of 15 to 16 year olds achieved five or more GCSE results, grades A-C. In Scotland the highest results for 16 year olds gaining five or more awards at SCQF level 4 are in Shetland Islands (91%) and Orkney Islands (85%). In Wales, pupils in Powys had the best GCSE results (67%).

Table 1: Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 Rural Local Authority Districts in Great Britain in 2010

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life Ranking 2010
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	1
East Hertfordshire	South East	2
Uttlesford	East of England	3
Aylesbury Vale	South East	4
Waverley	South East	5
Tandridge	South East	6
Mid Sussex	South East	7
Chiltern	South East	8
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	9
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	10
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	11
Vale of White Horse	South East	12
West Berkshire	South East	13
Huntingdonshire	East of England	14
Wealden	South East	15
Mid Suffolk	East Anglia	16
Wychavon	West Midlands	17
South Oxfordshire	South East	18
Mid Bedfordshire	East Anglia	19
East Hampshire	South East	20
Harborough	East Midlands	21
New Forest	South East	22
Test Valley	South East	23
East Dorset	South West	24
Malvern Hills	West Midlands	25
South Kesteven	East Midlands	26
Maldon	East of England	27
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	28
Melton	East Midlands	29
West Oxfordshire	South West	30
Rutland	East Midlands	31
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	32
Kennet	South West	33
North Kesteven	East Midlands	34
Tewkesbury	South West	35
St. Edmundsbury	East of England	36
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	37
Babergh	East of England	38
North Wiltshire	South West	39
Ryedale	North	40
Purbeck	South West	41
Forest Heath	East Anglia	42
Herefordshire County of	West Midlands	43
West Wiltshire	South West	44
South Bedfordshire	East of England	45
Cotswold	South West	46
Rother	South East	47
Broadland	East of England	48
North West Leicestershire	East Midlands	49
East Northamptonshire	East Midlands	50

Table 2: Rural Local Authority Districts with the Best Quality of Life in each region

Local Authority District	Region	Quality of Life ranking 2010
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	10
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	1
Castle Morpeth	North East	56
Congleton	North West	55
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	77
Aylesbury Vale	South East	4
East Dorset	South West	24
Monmouthshire	Wales	83
Wychavon	West Midlands	17
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	32

Table 3: Local Authority Districts with the Best Quality of Life in each category

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
Labour	Highest employment rate: 86%	Ryedale and Shetland Isles	Yorkshire and the Humber and Scotland
	Highest gross weekly Earnings: £833	Chiltern	South East
Housing	Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4	Chiltern	South East
	Largest % of houses with central heating: 99.7	East Ayrshire	Scotland
Urban environment	Lowest Population density per sq km: 9 persons per sq/km	Western Isles and Highlands	Scotland
	Lowest traffic flows per square km: 66 cars /km	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 2.7 per 10,000 people	Western Isles	Scotland
	Lowest % of vacant properties: 0.1%	Melton	East Midlands
	Lowest Total Consumer CO ₂ Emissions: 2.2 per household	Mid Bedfordshire, Waveney, Tendring and South Derbyshire	East of England and East Midlands
Physical environment	Lowest average annual rainfall: 552mm	Maldon	East of England
	Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 37.4 hours	Isle of Wight	South East
Health	Highest % of residents in good health: 95%	South Cambridgeshire, Chiltern, West Berkshire, South Oxfordshire and Isles of Scilly	East of England, South East and South West
	Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 81.6 years	South Cambridgeshire	East of England
Education	Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 14	Western Isles	Scotland
	Highest % of 15 to 16 year olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade: 91%	Shetland Islands and Isles of Scilly	Scotland and South West

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 140 rural LAs in Great Britain.

The quality of life reading for each local authority district has been created by summing scores across 15 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 2009-June 2010
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	April 2010
Housing	Number of rooms in house	2008-09. Regional data for 2001-08/09 used to project forward 2001 Census.
	% of houses with central heating and sole use of bathroom	2006. Regional data for 2001-06 used to project forward 2001 Census.
	Population density per square km	2009
Urban environment	Traffic flows per square km	2009
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	2009-10 England, Wales & Scotland
	% of Vacant Properties	2009
	CO ₂ Emissions per tonne per household	2008 Department of Energy and Climate Change
Physical environment	Average annual rainfall mm	Average 2001/2008
	Annual sunshine hours	Average 2001/2008
Health	% in good health	2001 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	2007-2009
Education	Number of pupils in primary school class	January 2010 - England 2009 -10 - Wales 2009 - Scotland
	% of 15 to 16 year olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2009-10 England & Scotland 2008- 09 Wales

"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 commercial purposes is done entirely at the risk of the person making such use and solely the responsibility of the person or persons making such reliance."

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