

30/03/2015

**NOT FOR BROADCAST OR PUBLICATION BEFORE 00.01 HRS ON MONDAY 30<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2015**

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 local authorities. 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.

## Want to Escape to the Country? Try Rutland, Britain's best rural area for quality of life

**Residents of Rutland enjoy the best quality of life of any rural area in Great Britain, according to the 2015 Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey.**

Quietly nestling in the tranquil East Midlands countryside, Rutland is well known for Rutland Water and an array of unspoilt villages and charming market towns. As an idyllic rural destination it has many attractions for tourists and is now officially Britain's best rural place to live.

The annual Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey takes a wide range of factors into account, including residents' good health and life expectancy, crime rate, weather, employment, school results, broadband access, and personal wellbeing. This is the first time Rutland has come top, although prior to this the East Midlands had made the top ten on three separate occasions, coming second in 2014, and seventh in both 2013 and 2012.

### Why is Rutland such a good place to live?

- Residents tend to be fit and well – over 96% reporting good or fairly good health.
- The employment rate is high with four out of five of 16-64 year olds in occupation, with many residents enjoying high incomes with weekly average earnings of £623.
- Inhabitants live in relative security with one of the lowest crime rates in the country.
- Residents enjoy a relatively good climate - less rainfall per year than the national average (681 mm against 879 mm) and more weekly sunshine hours (30.4 hours against the national average of 29.5 hours).
- 98% of all households have a good level of broadband access – compared to 87% for the Britain as a whole.
- Importantly, the ONS survey on personal well-being indicates the Rutland adult population is among the most happy, satisfied and content in Britain.

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On the flip side, the cost of living in Rutland is higher than in many other parts of Britain - with an average house price that is 6.7 times the average annual pre-tax local income, compared to the national average of 6.2.

### **Chiltern second most desirable place to live**

Chiltern has moved up six places in 2015 to second place, up from eighth place in 2014. The inhabitants of this Buckinghamshire local authority district tend to be in good health, with a high average life expectancy of 82.2 years and 97% reporting good health. The employment rate is 80% and those in full time occupation typically enjoy high incomes with weekly average earnings of £941 – the highest amongst rural areas in this survey. School performance is also strong with 85% of 15+ year olds achieving five or more GCSE results at grades A-C.

There were several other big climbers in the top 20, with Huntingdonshire rising thirty six places to ninth spot, South Oxfordshire up nineteen places to tenth, Babergh in South Suffolk moving from forty-second position in 2014 to eleventh in 2014 and West Oxfordshire moving twenty seven places to thirteenth position. The main reason for these changes is that personal well-being of adults has improved since the last survey; adults are more satisfied, happy and less anxious about their lives. (See Table 1)

### **Craig McKinlay, Mortgages Director, Halifax, comments:**

“Rutland has moved up eleven places to the top spot in the 2015 Halifax Rural Areas Quality of Life Survey. Taking a wide range of economic and social factors into account residents here can now lay claim to having the highest standard of living in rural Britain.

"In terms of personal wellbeing and general good health, Rutland residents score among the highest in Great Britain. And while house prices relative to earnings are above the rural average, Rutland still performs strongly in terms of average weekly earnings and a high employment rate."

### **Three out of five top 50 areas for the best places to live are in southern England**

The top 50 rural places to live in Britain are again dominated by the South East with fourteen districts found in this region, followed by East of England which claims ten of the top 50 spots.

Areas from outside the south in the top 50 besides Rutland include South Northamptonshire (4<sup>th</sup>), the Orkney Islands (21<sup>st</sup>), Hambleton in North Yorkshire (22<sup>nd</sup>) and Malvern Hills (25<sup>th</sup>).

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.

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## Key facts

### Labour Market

- **Employment** is highest in Eden in Cumbria at 87.0%, ahead of North Dorset (85.2%) and Uttlesford (84.6%). The GB average is 72.2%.
- **The highest weekly average earnings** are in Chilterns of £941 per week, followed by Waverley at £903p/w and South Oxfordshire £845 p/w. The GB average is £623 p/w.
- **The proportion of adults (16 years and over) with the highest level of qualification gained** (such as a degree, NVQ level 4 and above or professional qualification) is Chiltern (55%) followed by Rushcliffe in Nottingham and Waverley both 54% – all significantly above the national average of 34.8%.

### Housing

- **The biggest homes** are in Uttlesford in Essex, Chiltern in Buckinghamshire and Rutland which all have an average of 6.4 habitable rooms. The average number of habitable rooms in Great Britain is 5.5.
- 100% of homes in East Ayrshire have **central heating**; the national average is 96%.
- The lowest **average house price to earnings ratio** in Copeland and East Ayrshire (both 3.8) and East Riding of Yorkshire (5.1). The national average is 6.2.
- **80% of local area districts households have access to superfast broadband**, i.e. where download speed is greater than 25 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 (i.e. a download speed of 2Mbps is regarded as the minimum for good broadband service).

### Urban Environment

- The Western Isles and Highlands takes the top spot for lowest **population density**, with just nine people per square kilometre, compared to a national average of 264. At the other end of the scale, the most populated rural areas per square kilometre are Thanet on the east Kent coast (1,323) and Arun in West Sussex (692).
- The lowest **traffic levels** are found in the Western Isles with just 67 vehicles per square kilometre, Highland (100 vehicles/km), Isle of Scilly (125 vehicles/km) and Argyll & Bute (126 vehicles/km). The GB average is 8,792 vehicles/km.

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- Orkney Islands has the **lowest burglary rate per 10,000 people (1.0)** followed by Western Isles (5.4), North Norfolk (7.3), Broadland in the East of England (8.0), and Eden in the North West (8.1).
- **The lowest CO<sub>2</sub> emission** is in St. Edmundsbury in West Suffolk, Taunton Deane and Mid-Devon all with 2.1 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per household. The national average is 2.3 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita.

## Physical Environment

- **The lowest average annual rainfall** (561 mm) is in Maldon in Essex. Eight of the ten driest districts in Britain are in the East of England. In the UK average annual rainfall is 878.8 mm.
- Conversely, **the sunniest place in the UK** is the Isle of Wight where residents enjoy an average of 36.9 hours of sunshine a week. The national average is 29.5 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 South Cambridgeshire (83 years). The GB average is 79.3 years.

## Education

- **Primary school class sizes** are smallest in Scotland, with seven of the 10 local authority districts with the smallest primary school classes here. The Western Isles has the lowest in the UK with 17.0 compared to a national average of 26.4.
- **The best GCSE results** in England and Wales are in North Lincolnshire where 89.4% of pupils achieved five or more GCSE grades A-C followed by Denbighshire in Wales (88.8%). All are above the UK average of 82.4%.

## Personal Well-Being

- **Personal well-being is based on four categories – life satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety:**
  - Adults (16 and over) in Orkney have the highest average rating for **life satisfaction** in the UK. Based on a score out of ten, the adults in Orkney had an average rating of 8.2. The GB average is 7.5.

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- With a rating of 8.3 (out of ten) adults in Babergh in Suffolk believe what they do in life is **worthwhile**, the highest average rating in Britain. The national average is 7.8.
- Babergh adults are also the **happiest** with all having an average rating of 8.2 – significantly higher than the GB average of 7.4.
- Adults in Richmondshire in North Yorkshire are the least **anxious** with an average rating of just 1.8. The average for GB is 2.9.

Table 1: 2015 Halifax Quality of Life Rankings – the top 50 areas based on annual data

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2015
Rutland	East Midlands	1
Chiltern	South East	2
Uttlesford	East of England	3
South Northamptonshire	East Midlands	4
Rushcliffe	East Midlands	5
Waverley	South East	6
South Cambridgeshire	East of England	7
Mid Sussex	South East	8
Huntingdonshire	East of England	9
South Oxfordshire	South East	10
Babergh	East of England	11
East Hertfordshire	East of England	12
West Oxfordshire	South East	13
South Kesteven	East Midlands	14
East Cambridgeshire	East of England	15
North Kesteven	East Midlands	16
Aylesbury Vale	South East	17
Tonbridge and Malling	South East	18
Wealden	South East	19
Mid Suffolk	East of England	20
Orkney Islands	Scotland	21
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	22
Richmondshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	23
Selby	Yorkshire and The Humber	24
Malvern Hills	West Midlands	25
Harborough	East Midlands	26
New Forest	South East	27
Vale of White Horse	South East	28
Wychavon	West Midlands	29

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Tewkesbury	South West	30
South Derbyshire	East Midlands	31
St Edmundsbury	East of England	32
Tandridge	South East	33
South Staffordshire	West Midlands	34
South Norfolk	East of England	35
Ryedale	Yorkshire and The Humber	36
Test Valley	South East	37
West Berkshire	South East	38
East Riding of Yorkshire	Yorkshire and The Humber	39
Shetland Islands	Scotland	40
Cherwell	South East	41
Suffolk Coastal	East of England	42
Cotswold	South West	43
North Dorset	South West	44
Wiltshire	South West	45
Monmouthshire	Wales	46
East Dorset	South West	47
Newark and Sherwood	East Midlands	48
Aberdeenshire	Scotland	49
Herefordshire	West Midlands	50

Source: Halifax

**Table 2: Rural with the Best Quality of Life in each region in 2015**

Local Authority	Region	Ranking 2015
Rutland	East Midlands	1
Chiltern	South East	2
Uttlesford	East of England	3
Orkney Islands	Scotland	21
Hambleton	Yorkshire and The Humber	22
Malvern Hills	West Midlands	25
Tewkesbury	South West	30
Monmouthshire	Wales	46
Ribble Valley	North West	56
Northumberland	North East	76

Source: Halifax

**Table 3: Rural areas with the Best Quality of Life in each category in 2015**

Group	Variable	Local Authority District	Region
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<b>Labour market</b>		
<b>Highest employment rate: 87.0%</b> (GB average is 72.2%)	Eden	North West
<b>Highest gross weekly earnings: £941</b> (GB average is £623)	Chiltern	South East
<b>% of adults (16+) with highest qualification gained: 55%.</b> This includes graduate and post postgraduate degrees, NVQ level 4 and above, and professional qualifications. (GB average is 34.8%)	Chiltern	South East
<b>Housing</b>		
<b>Highest average number of rooms in house: 6.4</b> (GB average is 5.5 rooms)	Uttlesford Chiltern Rutland	East of England South East East Midlands
<b>Largest % of houses with central heating: 100%</b> (GB average is 96%)	East Ayrshire	Scotland
<b>Lowest House price to average earnings ratio: 3.8</b> (GB average is 6.2)	East Ayrshire Copeland	Scotland North West
<b>% of households with more than 2Mbps – and where more than half of household have chance of having superfast broadband: 100%</b> (GB average is 87.0%)	Waverley Isle of Wight	Both South East
<b>Urban environment</b>		
<b>Lowest population density per sqr km: 9</b> (GB- 264 per sq/km)	Western Isles Highland	Both Scotland
<b>Lowest traffic flows per square km: 67 cars /km</b> (GB- 8,792 per sq/km)	Western Isles	Scotland
<b>Lowest burglary rate per 10,000 population: 1.0 per 10,000 people</b> (GB-37.3 per 10,000 people)	Orkney Isles	Scotland
<b>Lowest total Consumer CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions: 2.1 tonnes per household</b> (GB – 2.3 tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per household)	St. Edmundsbury Taunton Deane Mid-Devon	East of England South West South West
<b>Physical environment</b>		
<b>Lowest average annual rainfall: 561 mm per year</b> (GB average is – 878.8 mm per year)	Maldon	East of England
<b>Highest average weekly sunshine hours: 36.9 hours</b> (GB average is 29.5 hours per week)	Isle of Wight	South East
<b>Highest % of residents in good health: 97%</b> (GB average is 94.6%)	Isles of Scilly	South West
<b>Longest life expectancy at birth for males: 83.0 years</b>	South Cambridgeshire	East of England

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(GB average is 79.3 years)		
<b>Education</b>		
<b>Lowest average number of pupils in primary school class: 17</b> (GB average is 26.4 pupils per class)	Western Isles	Scotland
<b>Highest % of 15+ yr olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent: 94.3</b> (GB average is 82.4)	Shetland Islands	Scotland
<b>Personal Well Being</b>		
<b>Highest life satisfaction rating out of 10: 8.2</b> (GB average is 7.5 from 10)	Orkney Islands	Scotland
<b>Highest worthwhile rating out of 10: 8.3</b> (GB average is 7.8 from 10)	Babergh	East of England
<b>Highest happiness rating out of 10: 8.2</b> (GB average is 7.4 from 10)	Babergh	East of England
<b>Lowest levels of anxiety rating out of 10: 1.8</b> (GB average is 2.9 from 10)	Richmondshire	Yorkshire and the Humber

Source: Halifax March 2015

**Ends**

**Notes to editors:**

The Quality of Life index aims to quantify where living standards are highest Great Britain by ranking local performance across a range of indicators covering the labour market, the housing market, the environment, education, health and personal well-being. The index has been produced at a local authority district level for all 121 Local Authority Districts in Great Britain.

The quality of life reading for each local authority has been created by summing scores across 21 variables within 7 broad groups.

Each local authority district 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 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
<b>Labour</b>	Employment rate %	Jul 2013-Jun 2014
	Gross weekly Earnings £s	ONS April 2014
	% of adults(16+) with highest qualification gained	2011 Census data
<b>Housing</b>	Number of rooms in house	England & Wales 2011 ONS

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		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 2014
	Households with a good level of broadband access (i.e. a download speed of at least 2Mbps):	Point Topic June 2014
<b>Urban environment</b>	Population density per square km	2013 – ONS
	Traffic flows per square km	2013
	Burglary rate per 10,000 population	British Crime Survey 2011/12 Scotland 2011/12
	CO <sub>2</sub> Emissions per tonne per capita	2012 Department of Energy and Climate Change (covers period 2005-2012)
<b>Physical environment</b>	Average annual rainfall mm	Met Office Average 2009/2013
	Annual sunshine hours	Met Office Average 2009/2013
<b>Health</b>	% in good or fairly good health	2011 Census
	Life expectancy at birth for males	England, Wales & Scotland 2011/13
<b>Education</b>	Number of pupils in primary school class	January 2014 England; Wales, and; Scotland 2013
	% of 15yr+ olds with 5 or more GCSEs A-C grade or Scottish equivalent	2012/2013 England; 2013/14 Wales; Scotland 2013
<b>Personal Well-Being</b>	Life Satisfaction	April 2013-March 2014 ONS
	Worthwhile	April 2013-March 2014 ONS
	Happiness	April 2013-March 2014 ONS
	Anxiety	April 2013-March 2014 ONS

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