

# The Telegraph

## Hart is where the heart is

The district of Hart in Hampshire has been rated as the happiest place in Britain to live.



Martin Ellis, an economist at Halifax, said: 'Residents of Hart in Hampshire enjoy the best quality of life in the UK' Photo: PA



By [John Bingham \(http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/john-bingham/\)](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/journalists/john-bingham/)

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With sprawling forests and heathland and villages dating to the Domesday Book – all within 45 minutes of London – the Hampshire district of Hart has long offered its residents a slice of the good life.

Now the affluent borough, centred on the town of Fleet, has been ranked, effectively, as the happiest place in Britain in a survey comparing areas by quality of life.

But, in a stark illustration of the UK's north-south divide, nowhere in the north of England, Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland made it into the top 50 most desirable places to live.

A total of 42 of top 50 locations, are to be found in southern or eastern England, according to the annual study by Halifax.

Even the Midlands barely featured with only Wychavon, Worcs, and Rushcliffe, Notts, making the top 20.

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One country alone – Surrey – accounts for five of the top 20 areas and most of the remainder are to be found in neighbouring Hampshire, Berkshire, Kent and Hertfordshire.

The survey ranked all 405 local authority districts in the United Kingdom by employment levels, the state of the housing market, educational standards, health and crime rates.

Other factors taken into account include the weather, levels of traffic congestion and access to broadband internet.

Hart, which is bounded by the M3 motorway and enjoys fast rail links to the capital, is a popular location for commuters.

City workers can enjoy a dose of rural tranquillity in villages such as Crookham, with its timber framed cottages, or Crondall, with its fine Norman parish church.

With average earnings of £841 a week, its residents are 40 per cent wealthier than a typical Briton, while local employment rates are among the highest in the country.

Despite its ageing population, 95 per cent of residents report good or fairly good health, a figure borne out in its higher-than-average life expectancy – 81.7 years for men.

Crime rates are among the lowest in Britain, local schools fare well in exams and even the weather is more benign, with lower-than-average rainfall, and 33 hours of sunshine a week against a national average of 29.7.

Elmbridge, just across the border in Surrey, was ranked second this year – having topped the table for the previous three years.

Ken Crookes, the Tory leader of Hart District Council, said that the study starkly illustrated the economic dominance of the south east of England.  
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"It has been the economic powerhouse of the country – not just central London but the South East – for quite some time," he said.

"The challenge that we have is to maintain that economic prosperity for the good not just of the residents but of the country as a whole."

The area with the highest employment level was Maidstone in Kent, with 84 per cent of the population in work, closely followed by the Shetland Islands, at 83.7 per cent.

For those in search of tranquillity, Shetland also had some of the lowest of traffic levels in the country after the Western Isles, Argyle and Bute and Orkney.

The Western Isles also had the lowest burglary rates, the smallest school class sizes – as well as the lowest population density.

The wealthiest people in Britain are to be found in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea in West London where the average weekly income is £1,521 – two-and-a-half times the national average.

Martin Ellis, an economist at Halifax, said: "Residents of Hart in Hampshire enjoy the best quality of life in the UK.

"They benefit from a combination of above-average weekly earnings, a low crime rate and good health amongst other factors.

"On the other hand, average house prices in the area are amongst the highest relative to local earnings, highlighting that a high standard of living often comes at a price."

Cllr Crookes added: "Because we have this very high level of quality of life in general, there is a risk that those people who are less well off will feel more isolated in an area like Hart, we are very conscious of that."

The top 50 local authority districts in the UK according to the Halifax Quality of Life Rankings 2011:

1. Hart, South East
2. Elmbridge, South East
3. Wokingham, South East
4. East Cambridgeshire, East of England
5. Brentwood, East of England
6. Wychavon, West Midlands

7. St Albans, East of England
8. Maidstone, South East
9. South Cambridgeshire, East of England
10. Epsom and Ewell, South East
11. Richmond upon Thames, London
12. Tunbridge Wells, South East
13. East Hertfordshire, East of England
14. Waverley, South East
15. Aylesbury Vale, South East
16. Rushcliffe, East Midlands
17. Guildford, South East
18. Uttlesford, East of England
19. Bracknell Forest, South East
20. North Hertfordshire, East of England
21. Hertsmere, East of England
22. Rutland, East Midlands
23. Wycombe, South East
24. Rochford, East of England
25. Mole Valley, South East
26. Chiltern, South East
27. Ashford, South East
28. Colchester, East of England
29. Winchester, South East

30. Kingston upon Thames, London
31. Kensington and Chelsea, London
32. Reigate and Banstead, South East
33. Fareham, South East
34. Huntingdonshire, East of England
35. South Oxfordshire, South East
36. North Kesteven, East Midlands
37. Dacorum, East of England
38. Sevenoaks, South East
39. Chelmsford, East of England
40. Test Valley, South East
41. Mid Sussex, South East
42. Vale of White Horse, South East
43. Horsham, South East
44. Maldon, East of England
45. Woking, South East
46. Tonbridge and Malling, South East
47. Basingstoke and Deane, South East
48. Central Bedfordshire, East of England
49. Gravesham, South East
50. Bromley, London