

MIDLANDS

# Why Rutland is one of the best places to live in 2021

From Oakham to Uppingham, the towns and villages here are well-schooled in the finer things of life



Best Places to Live in the Midlands: Rutland Water has been a haven for anyone seeking solace  
ALAMY

The Sunday Times

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**E**ngland's smallest county may have lost the battle to remain a McFlurry-free zone when a drive-in branch of McDonald's opened on the Oakham bypass last November, but it has won the war when it comes to ploughing its own delightful furrow. All rolling green fields and pretty villages, it's every bit as

charming as the Cotswolds, but a good deal less smug about it (and far cheaper, too): in short, the perfect option for country-style family living, within reach of London and the cities of the Midlands.

The twin market towns of Oakham and Uppingham remain the friendly, defiantly independent hubs they've always been. They are happy reminders of the days when "small town" wasn't an insult and the butcher and baker knew your name and exactly what you'd like. It may be traditional, but it's not backward-looking, just discerning. The pace of life is slow, but the quality of everything is high, from the pork pies at Leeson Family Butchers (£9.99 for a proper whopper) and the designer clothes at Cavells (brands include Dubarry and Veja) in Oakham, to the art on display at Goldmark Gallery in Uppingham. Its owner, Mike Goldmark, has launched an internet TV channel ([goldmark.tv](http://goldmark.tv)) to keep people interested during lockdowns; it has broadcast interviews with Nigel Slater, the Rev Richard Coles, Ralph Steadman and others.

Scandi-style good taste is much in evidence — there have been queues round the block for the cinnamon buns from Scandimania Coffee House in Uppingham (£2.20) and at Fika in Oakham you can get sleek homewares along with homemade doughnuts.

It's too much to expect a global pandemic to pass by unnoticed, but Rutland hasn't fared badly. The tracks around Rutland Water have been a haven for wildlife watchers, solace-seekers and those in need of exercise, whether on two legs or two wheels. And, according to Tim Hart, co-owner of Hambleton Bakery, Oakham has at times felt almost normal — apart from the socially distanced chatting in the queues for the shops.





The small town of Uppingham may be traditional, but it is not backward looking, just discerning

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What Covid has done is given local businesses the chance to step up and show their adaptability. Otters deli was online and delivering veg boxes (£15) in a flash, Hambleton Bakery is selling pheasant pasties (£2) to use up the glut of game that would usually end up at restaurants — this is serious farming country and local produce is a big deal here. The gourmet wholesaler Uppingham Fine Food is keeping locals supplied with staples as well as hard-to-source specialties: lotus leaves by Thursday? No problem. Oakham dry cleaner John Porter offers collection and delivery from a liveried van.

There have been good deeds too, of course. Oakham and Uppingham schools made enough PPE shields to supply all the county's care homes. Pubs have been providing free dinners — the Old White Hart inn in Lyddington has supplied more than 30,000 meals at cost to a hospital and food banks — while Grubs Up, a non-profit community venture, has been supplying home-cooked food to heat at home.

For Debbie Clark, who runs the Hollies, a boutique B&B in Uppingham, it's the small gestures that have made the difference. "We've really appreciated those who have continued to dress and even light the windows of their unpeopled shop. It makes such a difference from merely pulling down the shutters. And the Friday market here in

Uppingham is an absolute lifesaver, with queues all down the high street. It's the highlight of the week."

## You'll love living here if

You like muddy fields and market towns like they used to be.

## Best address

A country house in one of the pretty villages close to Rutland Water — Hambleton for maximum cachet. If you want to be closer to what passes for action, Uppingham high street is packed with handsome old homes.

## HOUSE PRICES

**Starter home** £200,000

**Mid-market** £299,950

**Top end** £799,000

**Average rental price** £725 pcm

*Source: TwentyCi*

## Connections

Oakham station has (infrequent) direct trains to Birmingham (from 1 hour 21 minutes), Stansted Airport (from 1 hour 58 minutes), and

Peterborough and Leicester (both about 30 minutes) for connections to London (about an hour) and the north. Oakham station does have one direct train a day to London St Pancras International. An easier route to the capital is via Corby, a 25-minute drive away: there are more regular trains to London St Pancras International (from 1 hour 6 minutes). By car it's 40 minutes to Leicester and an hour to Nottingham.

## Broadband

While superfast coverage is good at around 95 per cent, this is lower than many other areas now. There is some full fibre (one in seven properties) in the area from Gigaclear or the Openreach network, but this is patchy and interspersed with addresses where speeds will be below 15 Mbps.

## Schools

Ten schools in Rutland feature in *The Sunday Times* [Parent Power guide](#) and there are two famous independents: **Oakham School** (from £7,225 per term) and **Uppingham School** (from £7,990 per term). **Harington School** in Oakham is the 12th-best sixth form college in the country, according to the guide. The secondary **Catmose College** in Oakham has been judged outstanding by Ofsted, which inspected it in 2012, the same year it converted to an academy; it is yet to have a full inspection. **Whissendine Church of England Primary School** (inspected in 2013), **Ketton Church of England Primary School** (2010) and **Great Casterton Church of England Primary School** (2016) are also outstanding.

## Air quality

Good.

## Don't miss

The bread. Rutland is blessed with brilliant bakeries, among them Baines Bakery in Uppingham and Hambleton Bakery, which bakes its loaves in wood-fired ovens using flour ground at a local windmill.

## What's the catch?

Plans for a huge development of up to 2,000 homes on the former barracks site of North Luffenham, near Rutland Water, have stirred up

vociferous opposition from locals, who fear it will make their rural idyll less rural and less idyllic.

► Covid restrictions were in force when this article was published

## Best Places to Live 2021

*Find out if your neighbourhood made the cut in [this year's list](#) — and get the expert view on the other [best places to live in the Midlands](#)*

## Have your say

*Do you live in Rutland and have any tips? Let us know in the comments below*

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