

MALMESBURY NAMED BEST PLACE TO LIVE IN THE SOUTH WEST

Latest news from Malmesbury Town Council

Malmesbury has been named as the best place to live in the South West of England in the annual Sunday Times Best Places to Live guide.

Revealed this weekend (March 20 and 22) Malmesbury has taken the top regional spot in 2026 after being named among the top ten places to live in the South West last year. The prestigious guide evaluates locations across the UK before selecting regional winners, with Malmesbury now going forward to be considered for the national title.

Town mayor Cllr Stephen James said:

“I’m delighted Malmesbury has been recognised nationally as one of the best places to live in the country. This reflects so well on the many citizens who give up their time to run clubs and activities, the people who run our businesses and institutions, and the volunteers who tirelessly promote our heritage and culture. We all know it’s the best place to live, and now the rest of the South West knows it too!”

Cllr James himself moved to the town over ten years ago with his family and it’s a decision he’s never regretted. Within two years, he decided to step up and volunteer some of his own time to support and enrich his community.

“I came here a decade ago so that one of our children, then 13, could attend a really good school (Malmesbury School) and it was such an excellent decision. We are a vibrant and active community and I’m proud to be part of it.”

The judging process involves detailed research and on-the-ground visits from judges who assess a wide range of factors that influence quality of life. These include house prices, the quality of local schools, transport links, broadband speed, mobile signal, access to green spaces and the health of the high street, alongside the strength of community life and local amenities. Last year the overall title was taken by Chew Valley in Somerset.

Malmesbury’s combination of historic character, commitment to community and the arts has helped it stand out among strong competition across the South West. The town, which is England’s oldest borough, is known for its thriving independent high street, strong sense of community, multiple events and festivals and for its historic ambiance including the world famous Malmesbury Abbey, the Market Cross and the volunteer-run Athelstan Museum.

The Sunday Times writer said:

“Empty shops are rare and fleeting, new businesses are springing up all the time — a co-working space here, a wine shop there — and you can get everything you need and a lot of what you want, often served by a friendly face who knows your name. No wonder there’s such pride in shopping local.

It helps that it's such a beautiful spot. The magnificent abbey dominates, but there are ancient buildings and timeless countryside views at every turn — fitting for a town that claims to be England's oldest borough and home to its first king: Athelstan, who took the throne in 924.”

Local residents and businesses have long championed the town's unique character, with independent shops, cafés and cultural events contributing to a vibrant town centre.

David Drake, Chair of Malmesbury Town Team and co-Director of Caerbladon gallery and arts shop said:

“Malmesbury prides itself on a strongly forged sense of community, independent spirit and friendliness. It was those qualities that attracted my wife and I to live in Malmesbury and to establish a creative business on the High Street which has gone from strength to strength. As small market town that punches well above its weight, Malmesbury shows that heritage, creativity, innovation, and community partnerships can transform rural places into cultural centres of excellence”.

The Sunday Times Best Places to Live guide is widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive quality-of-life surveys in the UK. Regional winners from across the country will now be considered for the overall national title, which will be announced alongside the full guide. In 2025 the Best Place to Live in the UK was Saffron Walden, Essex.

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