

# Housing audit

Assessing the design quality of  
new housing in the East Midlands,  
West Midlands and the South West



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**'The gap between aspiration and delivery needs to close as a matter of urgency. This challenge is one of CABE's top priorities. We are now heavily engaged, working with both public and private sector partners to address the problems'**



# Foreword

Housing minister Yvette Cooper has called for a revolution in housing design. The housing industry has said it is up for the challenge. I believe there has never been a better opportunity to achieve it. The policy framework is largely in place. Planners and developers alike increasingly recognise the value of good design. And nothing else will achieve the government's target for all new homes to be zero carbon within 10 years.

But CABE's housing audits – with this edition completing the English national picture – show that the revolution can't come soon enough. The housing produced in the first few years of this new century is simply not up to the standard which the government is demanding and which customers have a right to expect. Our research indicates that some things are improving. But the improvement is too little and too slow, given the scale and the pace of the building programme. The gap between aspiration and delivery needs to close as a matter of urgency.

This challenge is one of CABE's top priorities. We are now heavily engaged, working with both public and private sector partners to address the problems. CABE is now offering expert, practical advice to teams across the housing growth and market renewal areas. We are engaging closely with the major volume housebuilders. Every planner in the country now has access to design guidance from CABE. And we are using our design review service to drive up the quality of the most significant housing developments nationwide.

Now is the time to look holistically at planning and design practice and build new homes that are not just technically capable of reducing energy use but also a part of beautiful and practical places to live. The kind of development that we have found in this audit is not good enough. Housebuilders may have to change many fundamental aspects of their standard product as well as the layout and accessibility of new neighbourhoods to achieve zero carbon standards. But I believe there is every reason to hope that, when we revisit this research in the next few years, we will find a much more encouraging picture.



**Dr Richard Simmons**  
Chief executive, CABE

# Executive summary

## Headline findings

This report completes the first national audit of the design quality of new private housing development in England. It paints an uncompromising and unflattering picture of the quality of new housing built over the past five years. There is far too much development that is not up to standard – a standard that CABE has agreed with the trade body for developers – and far too little that is exemplary in design terms. In short, there is a long way to go before new housing is something of which we can be proud.

Across England, we have found that only 18 per cent – fewer than one in five – of developments we audited could be classed as ‘good’ or ‘very good’. Perhaps more importantly, the quality of a substantial minority of developments – 29 per cent – is so low that they simply should not have been given planning consent. The four southern regions of England outperform the national picture, with 24 per cent of developments classed as good or very good. Conversely, developments in the two Midlands regions are disproportionately classed as ‘poor’. These findings are based on site visits to nearly 300 developments in total – approximately 33 in each of the nine regions.

Across the three regions covered by this report – the East Midlands, the West Midlands, and the South West – only 8 per cent of developments were judged good or very good. A startling 40 per cent were found to be poor. To take each region in turn:

- **East Midlands.** Over half the developments were assessed as poor. No schemes rated good, and only one was very good
- **West Midlands.** 15 per cent of schemes rated as good or very good and almost half as poor
- **South West.** While only 6 per cent of schemes were classed as good or very good, there were more average schemes than poor, in keeping with the national picture

**‘Fewer than one in five developments we audited could be classed as good or very good. The quality of a substantial minority of developments is so low that they simply should not have been given planning consent’**

All of the very good schemes were located in urban rather than suburban or rural areas. Furthermore, most of the good or very good schemes were either social housing or regeneration projects, or located in an area where the local authority had the mechanisms in place to demand good design. We also found that the poorest market housing schemes tended to be located in less affluent neighbourhoods, as in the previous audit.

The audit uncovered specific weaknesses in the urban design of poor schemes, including:

- **Place making:** Many of the poorly performing schemes failed to create a sense of place. They did not take advantage of their surroundings and fit the local context, nor did they create a sense of identity or a distinct character
- **Layout:** Schemes frequently had a poorly structured layout, leading to a poor quality streetscape, a lack of distinction between public and private realms, and a development that was difficult to navigate
- **Public realm:** Dominant roads and poorly integrated car parking resulted where the highways design dictated layout, rather than the buildings. Public open space was often poorly designed or maintained.

## Getting it right

To investigate in more detail the decisions that lead to good and bad design, we looked at six case studies drawn from the schemes audited. From these, we identified four lessons for how the development process supports or undermines the creation of high-quality developments:

- Good or better design will result where at least one agency – landowner, local authority, social landlord or developer – has strong aspirations for achieving good design, and the resources to deliver it
- Collaboration creates the potential for good design but only if the urban design skills exist in one or more of the partners
- Development frameworks, briefs and masterplans are a necessary condition for delivering good design but they are not enough on their own
- Highway design can have a negative impact on design quality when considered in isolation from a strategy for place making.

These insights underpin the importance of all development partners sharing high aspirations and a common language, so that bad engagement processes which diminish design quality are understood and avoided in the future.

## What needs to change?

Much has already been done to change things for the better. We warmly welcome recent changes to the planning system, notably planning policy statement 3 (PPS3), issued in December 2006. This guidance puts design at the top of the future housing growth agenda, and should have a considerable positive impact on design quality. However, action is needed from all parties if we are to deliver the change required. All parties need to work towards delivering the agenda and commitments set out in PPS3. Not least, we need a new dialogue between the architectural profession and the housing industry. Given the challenge of climate change and the need to develop zero carbon homes, it is essential that new housing development must be as sustainable, and therefore as well-designed, as possible.

Our recommendations can be summarised as follows.

### For local planning authorities

- Local authorities need to ensure that they develop thorough local design policies, setting out what they expect of developers, as required by PPS3
- Every local authority should adopt the Building for Life criteria as a mechanism to raise the quality of proposals that are brought to planning committees; and, critically, seek to enforce these standards once planning permission has been secured
- Every authority needs to be sure it has access to sufficient urban design skills, either in-house or through a shared resource with others; members and officers involved in the planning process should have sufficient design training; and authorities without a design champion should consider appointing one immediately.

### For developers

- Housebuilders should focus on using design quality to generate development value
- Most volume housebuilders need to strengthen their capacity to deliver good design consistently across every regional business unit; they should use the Building for Life criteria as a mechanism for raising the quality of development proposals; and those that have yet to do so should appoint a design champion, thereby making a public commitment to improving the quality of the places they help to create
- Regional chairmen, or those with an equivalent responsibility, should be incentivised to deliver good design; the additional management information this would generate could also enable housebuilders to monitor design quality as effectively as they manage their cost base and monitor margins, completions and customer satisfaction
- To achieve zero carbon standards, many developers

need to review fundamental aspects of the design of their core housing product.

### For central government

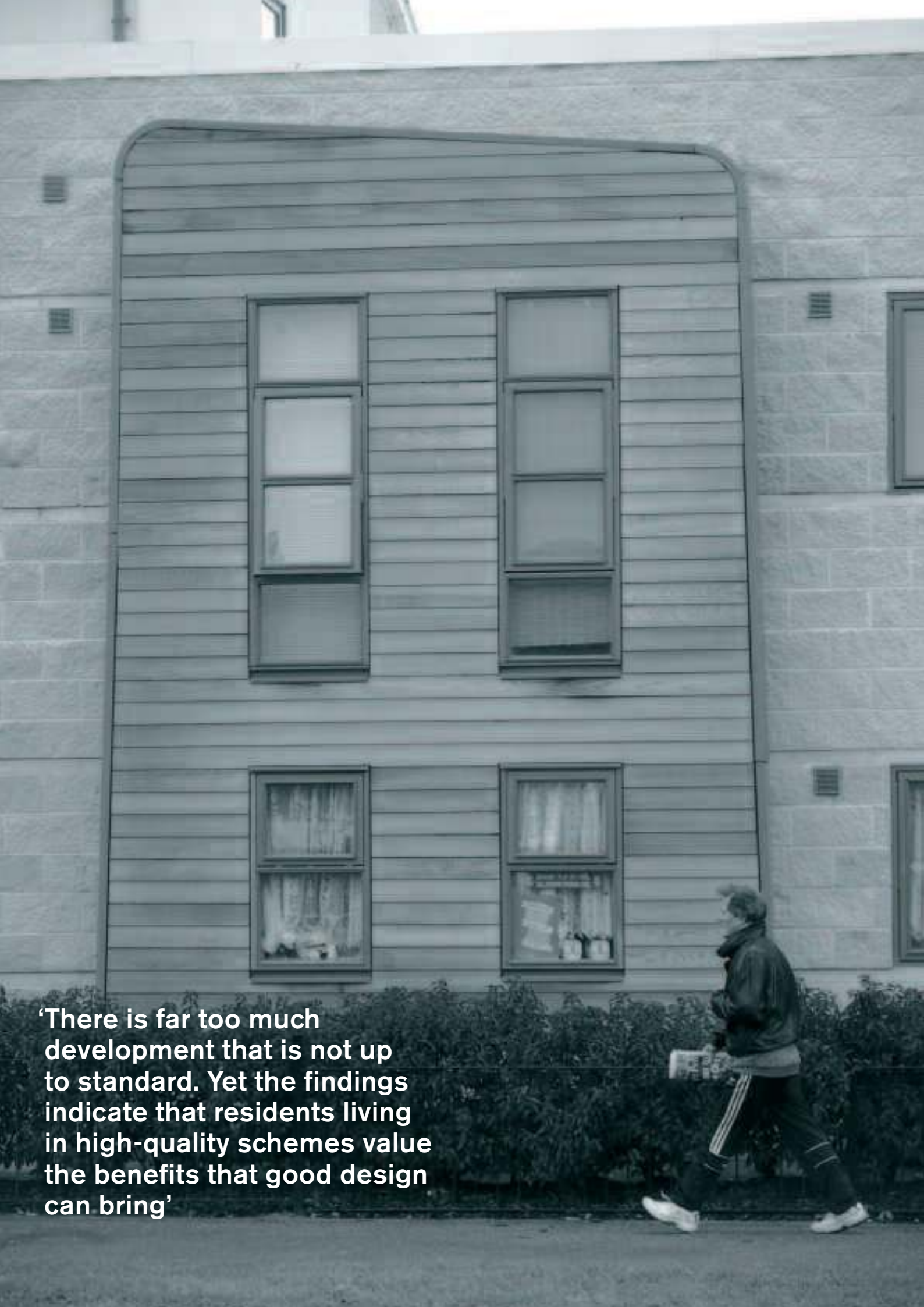
- The welcome inclusion of design quality within monitoring returns under the new PPS3 should be backed by a robust and lightweight mechanism for measuring it
- Housing and planning delivery grant should be tied to design quality outcomes, as well as to the delivery of housing numbers
- The government should ensure that new policy initiatives are adequately funded to provide sufficient urban design capacity; with CABE, it should investigate the feasibility of making available shared design advisory services to smaller local planning authorities.

### For public bodies

- Government offices, regional development agencies and regional assemblies should set out what they expect in terms of design quality; government offices, in particular, must make certain that the regional spatial strategy and each local development framework makes these requirements clear and explicit
- All public bodies should apply rigorous design policies when disposing of public land, and enforce them through covenants
- Regional organisations and networks should be given sufficient support to raise aspirations and build the skills and capacity required at a local level
- Registered social landlords are increasingly operating as developers in their own right; they need to seize the opportunity to create exemplars of what can be achieved.

### For CABE

- CABE will now use its design review service to influence every significant housing development nationwide; we will also continue to support the expansion and development of regional design review panels
- CABE will work with the team establishing Communities England to ensure the new organisation has the capacity and commitment to deliver high quality design in every programme
- CABE will publish guidance for using Building for Life at pre-planning stage, and provide additional training for local authority design champions
- CABE will prompt the professional bodies responsible for training architects, planners and surveyors to revisit both their initial training and professional development programmes to ensure they embed sufficient knowledge and skills to secure high standards of housing design.



**‘There is far too much development that is not up to standard. Yet the findings indicate that residents living in high-quality schemes value the benefits that good design can bring’**

# Introduction

This report completes the first national audit of the design quality of new private housing development in England and looks specifically at the East Midlands and West Midlands and the South West. Like our previous reports, on the South East<sup>1</sup> and the North<sup>2</sup>, it paints an uncompromising picture of the quality of new housing built over the past five years. The findings for these three regions are consistent with those for the rest of England. There is far too much development that is not up to standard and far too little that is exemplary in design terms. Yet the findings indicate that residents living in high-quality schemes value the benefits that good design can bring. In short, there is a long way to go before new housing is something of which we can be proud.

<sup>1</sup> CABE, 2004, *Housing audit: assessing the design quality of new homes – London, the South East and the East of England*

<sup>2</sup> CABE, 2005, *Housing audit: assessing the design quality of new homes in the North East, North West and Yorkshire & Humber*

## Building for Life

This audit is based on the Building for Life (BfL) criteria<sup>3</sup>, which have been agreed with the housing industry through the Home Builders Federation. These criteria are now established as the leading measure of housing design quality and provide an objective assessment of architectural and urban design quality in housing. They are also consistent with requirements for design set out in planning policy. A full methodology can be found in appendix 2. As in previous years, we applied a version of the BfL criteria to a sample of 100 recently completed developments (all completed between 2003 and 2006) across three regions – the South West, the East Midlands and the West Midlands. The developments assessed were drawn from the output of the 10 largest developers in each region, predominantly from the mid range in terms of price. Our aim was to investigate the design quality available to most home buyers.

The developments were assessed by urban design specialists, who applied the BfL criteria in a consistent and objective way during detailed site visits. The criteria mainly address urban design questions, assessing the quality of the place, rather than simply the aesthetic or construction merits on individual homes, although these are considered. We focus on urban design issues as these factors are crucial in making a place sustainable. There is a massive amount of housebuilding expected over the coming decade, certainly a step change from recent, historically low levels of completions. In housing growth hotspots across the south of England, as well as in the major regeneration areas covered by the housing market renewal pathfinders, we will see development that will dramatically change the physical and social structure of Britain.

## Changes to the planning system

Given the period in which the audit was undertaken, our findings suggest that planning policy guidance 3 (PPG3), while effective in increasing the density of new residential development, has so far failed to raise the bar on design quality. That is why we warmly welcome recent changes to the planning system, notably the new planning policy statement 3 (PPS3), that put design at the top of the housing growth agenda.

PPS3 places a much stronger emphasis on the quality of residential design and layout, and it underlines that good design is fundamental to the development of high-quality new housing. Good design should contribute positively to making places better for people and design which is inappropriate in its context, or which fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions, should not be accepted. Local planning authorities should develop a shared vision with their local communities of the types of residential environments they wish to see and develop design policies aimed at creating places, streets and spaces which meet the needs of people, are visually attractive, safe, accessible, functional, inclusive, have their own distinctive identity and improve local character.

The success of PPG3 in raising average density shows that central government can make a difference to local delivery. New instruments, such as PPS3, design and access statements, and the Department for Transport's forthcoming *Manual for streets* are well placed to make a difference, capitalising on the willingness of all concerned to make things better in the future.

**‘We warmly welcome recent changes to the planning system that put design at the top of the housing growth agenda. Central government can make a difference to local delivery’**

<sup>3</sup> Building for Life, 2005, *Delivering great places to live: 20 questions you need to answer*

This audit, therefore, is not simply a matter of intellectual curiosity. It is about changing things for the better. Our recommendations (see page 55) identify what we think needs to change to ensure that design quality improves. A great deal of progress has been made but the findings set out in this report, and the audit as a whole, show there is still an urgent need for improvement. This is needed also because of the contribution that design makes to mitigation and adaptation to climate change. The change required is the responsibility of all involved in delivering new housing – government, developers and local authorities – because this is not an exercise in blame. All parties are now saying the right things. We believe that there is a genuine willingness to improve the design quality of new housing, based on a recognition that it matters. The new commitment is based on enlightened self-interest and so has the potential to be realised.

## Improving processes

However, despite this, our audit shows that things have still been going wrong. If developers, planners and highways departments are truly committed to improving design quality, then other factors must be preventing better outcomes. We have previously argued that the policy framework is broadly right. It is the structure of incentives – the carrots and sticks that influence decision making at each stage in the process – coupled with a shortage of skills and resources that leads to failure. In this audit, we use six case studies to show where things go right or wrong and suggest ways in which the processes can be improved to ensure that, in future, the design quality of new housing supports the creation of great places.

Before moving on to discuss how things might be improved in future, we set out the detailed findings of the audit in the South West, East Midlands and West Midlands, comparing performance there to the national picture. We also identify particular areas of concern, as well as some reasons for optimism.

**‘All parties are now saying the right things. We believe that there is a genuine willingness to improve the design quality of new housing. The new commitment is based on enlightened self-interest so has the potential to be realised’**



**'This performance presents a serious challenge to developers, to the local authorities concerned, and to the government; not least because significant development is planned in the two Midlands regions'**

# Findings

This audit reveals that the design quality of new homes in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West is disappointingly low. Across the three regions, only 8 per cent of schemes were assessed as good or very good. In the two Midlands regions half of schemes were rated poor. This result is particularly disappointing given their place in the housing growth and housing market renewal programmes.

Adding these results to those of our two previous housing audits (see map) gives us a national picture. Across England as a whole, only 18 per cent of developments we audited could be classed as good or very good and there was a substantial minority of schemes whose quality was so low that they should not have been given planning consent.



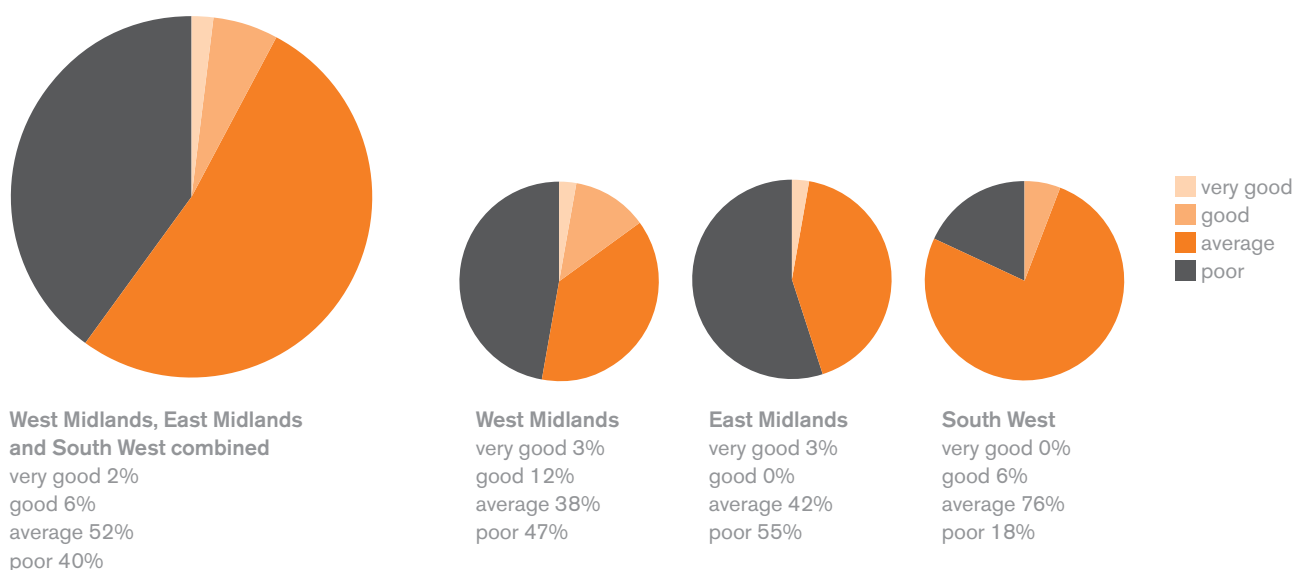
## Design quality in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West

The design quality of new housing in the South West, East Midlands and West Midlands is overwhelmingly disappointing. Across the three regions covered by this report, only 8 per cent were found to be good or very good. A startling 40 per cent were found to be poor and the remaining 52 per cent are characterised as average. As with previous audits, we assessed a total of 100 schemes across the three regions (33 per region).

These findings are more discouraging than in the other six regions of England in one important respect. While the number of schemes rated good or very good are broadly comparable, there is a far higher proportion of poor developments than average ones.

The assessment in this audit is based on the BfL criteria, which provide an objective benchmark for design quality. Essentially each description corresponds as follows:

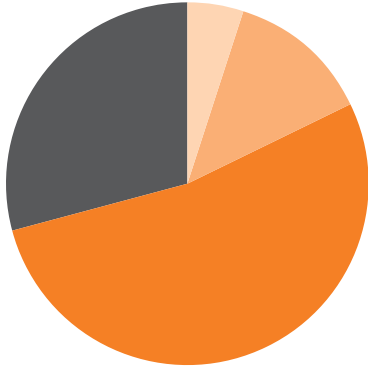
- **very good** – of a standard which would merit a BfL Gold Standard award, which is given to exemplary schemes.
- **good** – of a standard that would merit a BfL Silver Standard award. This is the baseline for good design, which every scheme should achieve, and which the government has recognised in its interim Thames Gateway plan.
- **average** – of a standard that would not merit a BfL award, and a wasted opportunity to generate value and create sustainable places.
- **poor** – meeting less than half of the criteria that characterise a good development, as set out in PPS3. These schemes are not, in our view, good enough to have been granted planning permission.





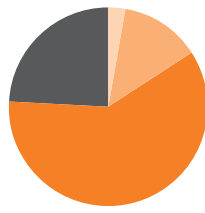
**‘Not enough new housing developments adequately address the design standards set out in Building for Life, which have been agreed with the industry and which are consistent with the new PPS3’**

very good  
good  
average  
poor



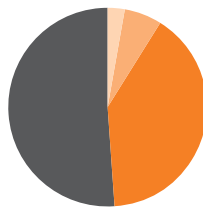
**The national picture**

very good 5%  
good 13%  
average 53%  
poor 29%



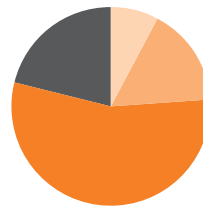
**Northern regions**

very good 3%  
good 13%  
average 60%  
poor 24%



**Midlands regions**

very good 3%  
good 6%  
average 40%  
poor 51%



**Southern regions**

very good 8%  
good 16%  
average 54%  
poor 21%

Northern regions:  
North West, North East, Yorkshire & Humber  
Midlands regions:  
East Midlands, West Midlands  
Southern regions:  
South East, East of England, London, South West

For the most part, this audit was conducted in the same way as assessments for BfL awards. However, some criteria are difficult to judge on site and require full background information (see methodology, appendix 2), not least on environmental sustainability. Despite contacting all the developers to request this information on schemes included in the audit, only a small proportion responded, so we were unable to assess performance across the board in this critical area. Having said this, some schemes for which responses were obtained did address the criteria relating to environmental design to varying extents, or had employed sustainable construction methods such as waste management. These have been acknowledged in appendix 1.

Willans Green by Redrow Homes, one of the schemes in the West Midlands, is the most notable example, with an ecohomes rating of excellent and a BREEAM<sup>4</sup> ecohomes award. In the light of the code for sustainable homes and the government’s commitment to making all new housing zero carbon within a decade, developers need to take the issue much more seriously.

Overall, the performance of these regions presents a serious challenge to developers, to the local authorities concerned, and to the government; not least because significant development is planned in the two Midlands regions as part of both the housing growth agenda and the housing market renewal programme. To take each region in turn then:

- **East Midlands.** The most disappointing performance, with over half the developments assessed as poor. No schemes were classed as good and only one was rated as very good. This development was in an urban location in Leicester.
- **West Midlands.** Not much more encouraging, with 15 per cent of developments rated as good or very good and almost half as poor.
- **South West.** Performed marginally better. While only 6 per cent of schemes were classed as good or very good, notably there were more average schemes than poor, making this region more in keeping with the findings for other regions.

<sup>4</sup> Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method



## The national picture

This report completes the national audit on 293 schemes (approximately 33 per region) completed between 2001 and 2006, and we are now able to present the picture across England.

Nationally, we have found that only 18 per cent – fewer than one in five – of developments we audited could be classed as good or very good, or in other words potentially worthy of a BfL award. This shows starkly that the design quality of 82 per cent of new housing schemes across the country is not good enough. Not enough new housing developments adequately address the design standards set out in the BfL criteria, which have been agreed with the industry and which are consistent with the new PPS3. There are virtually no 'exemplars'.

Perhaps more importantly, there is a substantial minority of developments that simply should not have been given planning consent because their quality is so low. Clearly, performance has to improve markedly and urgently, with the emphasis on ensuring that no poor schemes are built in future. The task is not one of doubling the number of exemplar schemes, but eradicating the unacceptable.

We can see that the four southern regions perform marginally better than nationally, with 24 per cent of good or very good developments. The three Northern regions have a relatively small proportion (16 per cent) of good or very good developments. This is also the case in the two Midlands regions but on top of that the proportion of poor developments is much higher than in the rest of England. This makes these two regions the worst performing in the country. Indeed, the pattern for the Midlands regions is considerably out of step with the national average. The South West is much more in keeping with both the national picture and the wider 'south' more generally – although it is performing worse than the other southern regions.

## Lessons for the future

What then is causing this pattern of disappointing development? In the next chapter we investigate the development process in six case study developments to learn lessons from them. Before moving on to that, though, it is worth considering some alternative factors that might explain the differences in design quality. This is important, as much of the housing we have audited is predominantly market housing. Are there market factors that explain the range of outcomes we have described?



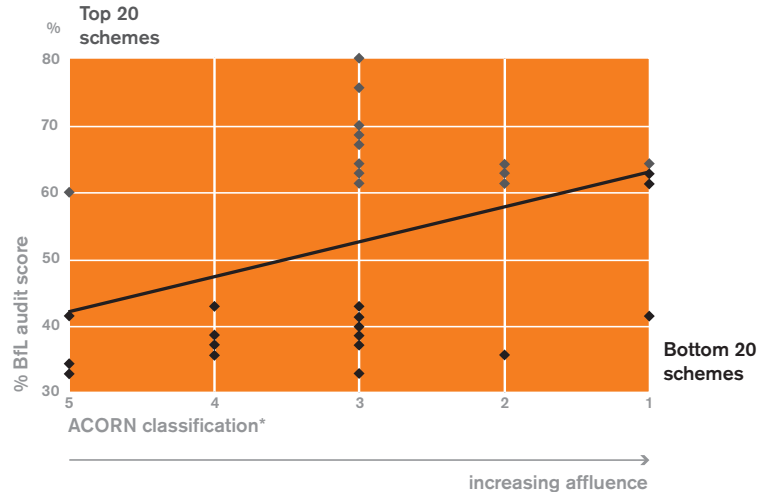
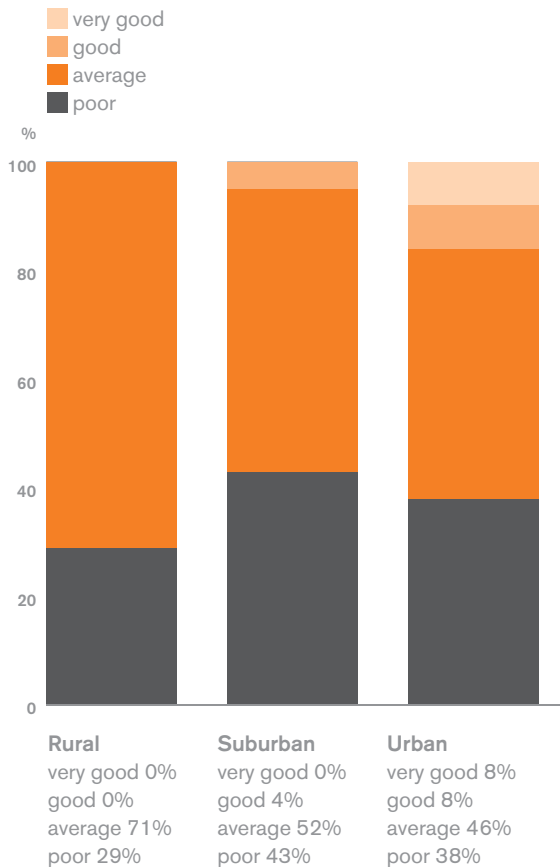
## The influence of land values

First is the question of land values. Do developers simply invest more in design quality in areas that are likely to yield better returns and decide not to in other areas? Or are there other locational factors at play? In the report on the audit of the three northern regions, we noted a correlation between design quality and affluence. This finding was derived from an analysis of top 20 and bottom 20 schemes and the Acorn<sup>5</sup> classification for their location. The findings suggested that poorer schemes tended to be found in less affluent areas, either resulting from the lower land values, projected sale values or the attitudes of planners. To test this finding we again ran the analysis in the three regions covered by this report.



<sup>5</sup> ACORN is an acronym for 'a classification of residential neighbourhoods'. The ACORN dataset classifies almost two million UK postcodes into five general categorisations: 1 wealthy achievers; 2 urban prosperity; 3 comfortably off; 4 moderate means; and 5 hard pressed.

**‘One of the lessons of this audit is that it is time for a suburban renaissance, to complement the transformation that is happening within our cities’**



The scatter diagram above points to a distinct pattern in which the better-performing schemes tend to be located in more affluent areas, while the poorer-performing schemes tend to be located in less affluent areas.

At first the correlation appeared less clear cut. Indeed, all of the good and very good developments were in areas characterised as of moderate means, hard-pressed or, at best, comfortably off. None were found in those described as wealthy achievers or urban prosperity. However, this can be explained in a fairly straightforward way. The good and very good schemes in this audit were mainly the result of either social housing or regeneration projects or located in an area where the local authority had the mechanisms in place to demand good design. In other words, they had close public sector involvement.

Once we removed schemes which we knew to have a high social housing component or to be regeneration projects, the correlation was similar to that found in the Northern audit, with the better market schemes tending to be in more affluent areas and the poorer market schemes in less affluent areas. This is also borne out by the demographic profile of residents interviewed living in schemes included in the audit<sup>6</sup>. A higher proportion of residents who owned their own homes and were living in poor schemes were from social classes D or E in comparison to the proportion living in average or good/very good schemes.

<sup>6</sup> CABE/Ipsos MORI survey of residents living in new housing schemes covered by the audit, to be published by CABE in 2007

## The influence of urban, suburban and rural context

We also tested the correlation between design quality and the setting of the development, in terms of urban, suburban and rural places. All of the very good schemes are located in urban areas. Similarly, good developments are over-represented in urban areas, although there are approximately equal proportions of average and poor schemes in urban and suburban areas. No good or very good schemes were found in rural areas, although the number of rural schemes was much smaller.

But why should suburban developments score so poorly in relation to urban schemes? In part, this can be explained by looking at the criteria on which urban schemes scored better than suburban schemes. Unsurprisingly, these included factors corresponding to the provision of local services and facilities, and public transport.

However, urban schemes also tended to out-perform suburban schemes on distinctiveness, architectural quality and site-specific design, on their ability to exploit existing buildings, landscape and topography and on layout. The constraints of urban sites and their connections make it much more likely that developments there will follow the existing, often stronger context. New road layouts in suburban

areas are less likely to be constrained by an existing street grid, although there is no reason why suburban developments could not create well-structured and legible layouts. Furthermore, the constrained nature of urban sites requires a higher level of design solution, often less amenable to standard housing types and layouts.

Alternatively, it may be that England's suburbs have simply not received the same degree of attention as urban areas. Indeed, a great deal of mental energy has been devoted to reviving our cities, the urban renaissance, while until recently the suburbs have not been subject to the same degree of scrutiny and creativity. During 2006, that tide appears to have turned, and suburbs are getting increased attention, politically and professionally. CABI has worked with English Heritage and the South East Regional Assembly towards a better understanding of how to develop new and existing suburbs while retaining the characteristics that have traditionally made them popular places. Perhaps one of the lessons of this audit is that it is time for a suburban renaissance, to complement the transformation that is happening within our cities. Suburbs can be tremendously successful – and very popular – places and it is incumbent on urban designers, local authorities and developers to ensure that their best features are replicated and enhanced in new development.

## **The influence of developer performance**

Another potential reason for the differences in design quality across the audit is the varying performance of regional teams within a particular developer. Here performance means both the average design quality of completed schemes and the variability in design quality. To test this, we explored the differences in performance of individual developers operating in three parts of the country (South, North and Midlands). This is a fairly crude analysis, as the geographical boundaries of teams do not coincide with these areas. However, we found some interesting patterns.

In any particular part of the country, developer performance was highly variable and there tended to be a considerable difference between the scores for the best and worst schemes produced by each developer. For example, in the case of Barratt Homes, its best scheme in the Midlands was the best overall, scoring an impressive 84 per cent, whereas its worst performing scheme in the Midlands was one of the worst overall, scoring 33 per cent.

We also found that scores for individual developers tended to be higher on average in Southern regions than Northern or Midlands regions, reflecting the findings overall. However, it is not clear whether this is due to variations in the capability of the regional developer teams to deliver high-quality design or whether it is caused by other factors such as land values or customer expectations.

As will be seen in the case studies, however, developers tend to rise to the demands made by local planning authorities. For the most part, the housebuilder business model is based on cost control and volumes rather than generating value. If local planning authorities do not require high standards of design, developers may not perceive a direct incentive to deliver it.

## **The influence of size**

Another factor that appears to influence design quality is the size of a development. Six of the seven schemes assessed as good or very good were from developments of 200 units or larger. This may suggest that where economies of scale make investing in design capacity worthwhile on the developer side, or where the scale and significance of the development justifies more detailed attention from planners, the resulting development achieves a higher level of design quality.

It is apparent from the evidence provided by this audit that a number of inter-related contextual factors influence design quality. These include geographical context, affluence of the area, size of development and urban/suburban/rural location. Further research is required to link these to the performance of local authorities and developers. The influence of the development process on design quality, which reflects the performance of the individual parties involved, is explored qualitatively in the case studies.

## **Urban design findings**

Finally, it is worth looking below the headline findings to examine where aspects of urban design are going wrong. As in previous audits, there are areas of urban design that clearly differentiate the good from the poor. The criteria where low-scoring schemes performed consistently worse than high-scoring ones related to character, site specific design, the design and management of public space and the design of car parking. These are summed up under three headings – place making, layout and public realm – each of which is followed by reference to Building for Life criteria and further analysis of how low-scoring schemes were failing.

### ***Place making***

**Many of the poorly performing schemes failed to create a sense of place. They did not take advantage of their surroundings and fit the local context, nor did they create an identity or distinct character (criteria 1, 2, 5 and 11)**

Housing developments in these categories tended not to adapt standard house types to suit their surroundings, nor did they use bespoke design that related to and enhanced the local context. There was little to distinguish one development from another, both within regions and across the country as a whole. In the East Midlands and West Midlands, schemes tended to express the local vernacular architecture through the basic use of materials such as red brick and tiled pitch roofs. However, there were generally only minor variations in the architectural approach, and little attention to detail.

Schemes frequently missed opportunities to exploit their surroundings, turning their back on adjacent parks or countryside, not retaining existing mature landscaping, or dealing crudely with topography. Problems with topography led to homes with unnecessary steps at the front door, which limit accessibility, and landscaping with untidy changes in level.

### ***Layout***

**Schemes frequently had a poorly structured layout, leading to a poor quality streetscape, a lack of distinction between public and private realms, and a development that was difficult to navigate (criteria 3 and 4)**

In low-scoring schemes, houses tended to be arranged with little consideration of how they would function within their wider setting, and contribute to a legible and safe townscape. Perimeter blocks were often employed, which on occasion resulted in strong building frontages and a permeable street network.

However, housing often did not relate well to the winding routes used to slow traffic, leading to a weak building line, unusable grassed areas and poor legibility. Typically, housing was set back with in the plot with driveway parking in front, which led to problems of poor street enclosure and a lack of differentiation between public and private realms. Insufficient consideration of how buildings should be orientated often led to blank walls and gable ends and inappropriate window placements.

Additionally, the interface between new and existing developments was not always well considered, resulting in exposed rear garden fences or spaces with little potential for passive surveillance.

### ***Public realm***

**Dominant roads and poorly integrated car parking resulted where the highways design, rather than the buildings, dictated the layout. Public open space was often poorly designed or maintained (criteria 6, 8 and 12)**

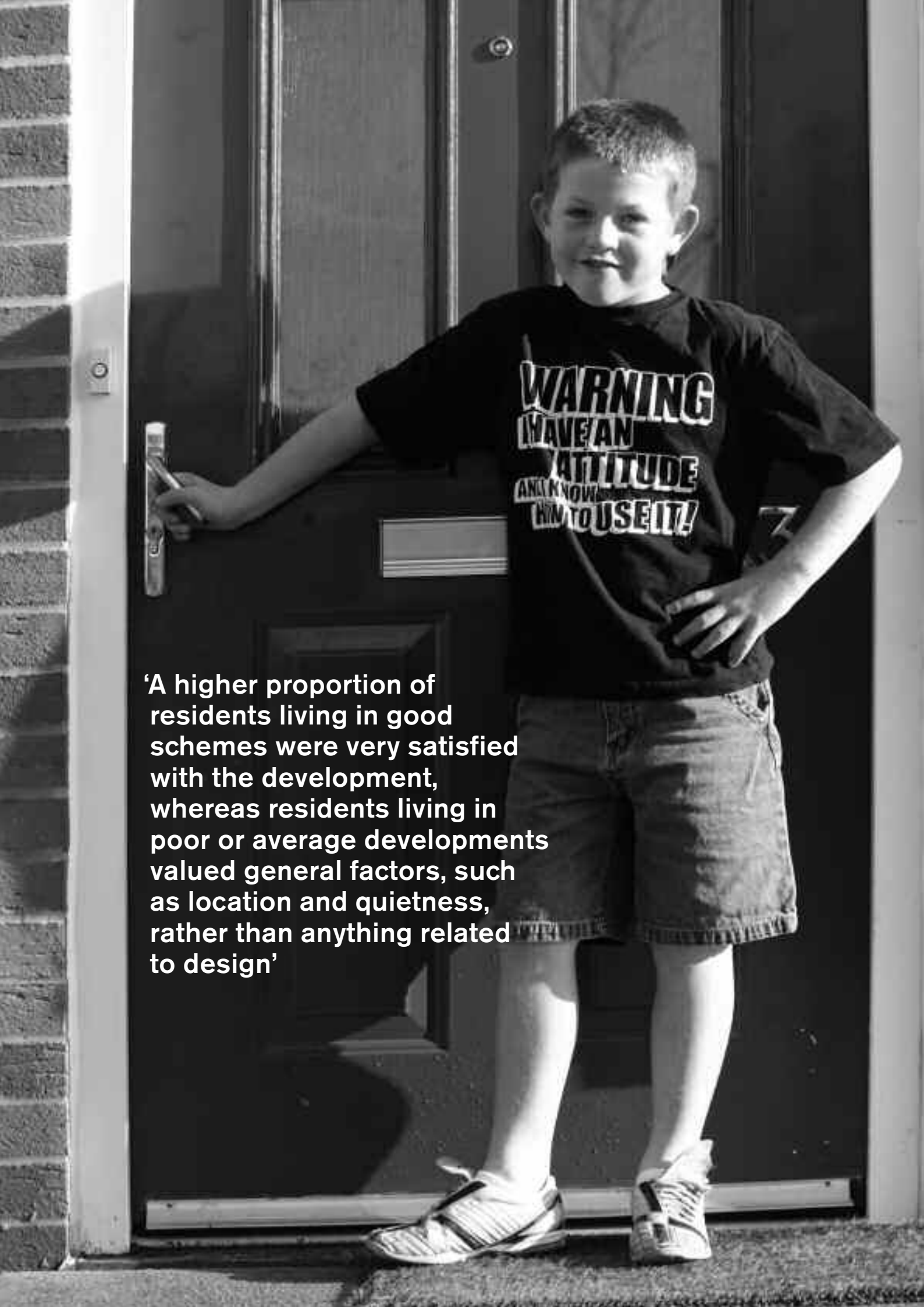
Most streets were of uniform size and designed with no clear hierarchy to help with legibility. Streets were often too wide, dominated by roundabouts and hammerhead turns, accentuated by an excessive use of tarmac. Speed bumps were often used to compensate for the ineffectiveness of winding road patterns used to slow driving speeds. On-plot parking rather than on-street parking has resulted in empty streets, allowing cars to speed, or poorly parked cars that obstruct cyclists and pedestrians.

Rear courtyard parking resulted all too often in large expanses of lifeless, unsupervised and under-utilised land to the rear of houses. Garages fronting on to pavements were often prominent, creating blank facades. Landscaping was not used in driveways and areas to break up car parking, and avoid cars dominating the street scene.

Public open space was often insufficient, or if it was provided, was poorly designed with no apparent thought to its intended use, or future maintenance.

Lessons for achieving good design have been examined in the previous audit, which used 12 development projects to explore the differences between successful and unsuccessful developments. More detailed analysis of individual schemes, scored good, average and poor, are given in the case studies in the next chapter.

**‘Developers tend to rise to the demands made by local planning authorities. If they do not require high standards of design, developers may not perceive a direct incentive to deliver it’**



**‘A higher proportion of residents living in good schemes were very satisfied with the development, whereas residents living in poor or average developments valued general factors, such as location and quietness, rather than anything related to design’**

# Case studies

To investigate in more detail the decisions that lead to good and bad design, we looked at six case studies drawn from the schemes audited. In previous audit reports, we used case studies to give a better understanding of the product. This time we were more concerned with process issues. We interviewed key players, alongside desk research, to identify ways in which the development process supports or undermines the creation of high-quality developments.

This chapter presents case studies on six developments:

- Farnborough Road development, Castle Vale, Birmingham
- Dukes Rise, Tadley Acres, Shepton Mallet
- Horfield regeneration scheme, Bristol
- Fernwood phase two, Balderton
- The Copse, Mawsley Village, Kettering
- Regency View, Tividale.

## How we chose the case studies

Two case studies were selected from each of the three regions – West Midlands, East Midlands and South West – studied in this audit. The schemes were chosen to illustrate a range of design quality scores – two are rated good, three are average and one is poor – and a range of development contexts:

- Farnborough Road and Horfield regeneration scheme are major regeneration schemes in urban or suburban areas, with 90 per cent and 50 per cent social housing, respectively
- Regency View, Tividale is on a former landfill site in a suburban area, and the scheme is purely housing for private sale
- Dukes Rise and Fernwood phase two are both suburban developments on the outskirts of market towns. The first is on greenfield, and the second on brownfield land, a former hospital site. Both are predominantly privately owned housing, with a component of affordable housing
- Mawsley Village is a new rural settlement and the audited phase comprises purely privately owned housing.

Details about the development process for each of the schemes were not known beforehand, although the research has confirmed that the schemes with the highest audit scores tended to have the most concrete and robust development processes in place.

These case studies are the stories of how six places came to be built. At the end of the chapter we draw together the lessons from these stories, highlighting common elements and key pressure points in the development process, which in turn inform our recommendations in the final chapter.

We conducted census surveys in each of the schemes to investigate the experience of residents. We asked residents unprompted which two or three things they most liked and disliked about their development and asked questions about their experience of aspects of the design corresponding to Building for Life criteria. Questions included whether they thought the scheme had a distinct character, was attractive and well-built, and what they thought of the layout, car parking, safety, public and private open space, sense of community and availability of local facilities and public transport. We compared the responses for individual case studies to the averaged responses from a quota survey carried out across a wider sample of 33 schemes included in the audit. In this chapter, we present findings for each of the six case studies, drawing out responses that are significantly different for individual sites from the responses across all schemes from the wider sample. For further details of the methodology see appendix 2.



# Farnborough Road development, Castle Vale, Birmingham

- Castle Vale Housing Action Trust recognised the importance of good design in regeneration, ensuring a design-led and participative approach
- The development process was robust: the development brief and masterplan contributed to the creation of a generally well-designed built environment, with a distinctive character and strong sense of place
- The design team and local authority planning team both had good urban design skills, although the local authority made only minor changes due to the strength of the proposed design
- The design team was retained by the housing action trust to guide and audit the work of the developer.

Local authority:	<b>Birmingham City Council</b>
Homes:	<b>237</b>
Developer:	<b>Castle Vale Housing Action Trust and Lovell Partnerships</b>
Overall score:	<b>77 per cent</b>
Acorn class:	<b>Five</b>
Setting:	<b>Suburban brownfield</b>



## Background

The Farnborough Road site is one of three major redevelopment areas within Castle Vale, which was the largest housing estate built in Birmingham in the 1960s.

Redevelopment was led by Castle Vale Housing Action Trust (CVHAT), a public sector agency set up to regenerate the estate and to reverse many decades of physical, social and economic decline. The trust was set up in 1993 and completed its 12-year, £300 million regeneration programme in March 2005.

The Farnborough Road site lay on an existing open playing field, and also replaced six tower blocks. The new development comprises 237 new flats, houses and bungalows, with the playing fields repositioned to the east of the development. Most of the homes provide accommodation for tenants of the social landlord. However, the rehousing programme was so successful in providing accommodation for former tenants that the trust was left with a surplus of homes. It was able to sell 26 on the private market and these sold extremely quickly.

## Overview

The original architecture, public art, diverse housing types and detailing of the buildings has resulted in a scheme with a distinctive character and a strong sense of place. The use of strong colours and differing scale at gateways and corner points makes the development legible and easy to navigate. A well-defined structure of perimeter blocks creates a successful public street scene whilst providing private space to the rear.

The scheme is very successfully integrated with the surrounding areas by numerous pedestrian routes connected with local play and sports facilities, and other neighbourhood services. It seeks to reduce its environmental impact through the use of rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling, solar heating and photovoltaic panels. Buildings overlook public areas and streets and the scheme is well-lit, making it feel safe.

The enclosure within streets is generally good, except in the streets with smaller-scale bungalows, where the road width tends to be excessive and the dominance of roads is exacerbated by the over-use of tarmac. There is also evidence of low cost and, in some cases, poor-quality materials

for the buildings, street materials and limited landscaping.

## Approach to planning and design

The importance of the role of good design in regeneration was recognised by CVHAT, which produced a development brief for the site in 1995 with Hunt Thompson Architects, in consultation with the local community. The brief set out the vision for the site and provided guidelines on density and urban form, hard and soft landscaping and public open space. For example, it said the majority of flats would be accommodated along the Farnborough Road, to create a strong street frontage and urban scale, with a more domestic residential character in the streets behind.

In 1997, following a design competition, Walker Troup Architects was invited to draw up a masterplan for the site. After a delay caused by the discovery of an underground gas leak, the masterplan was completed in 2001. Walker Troup put forward a contemporary approach to the design, which uses varied building forms and strong render colours to provide identity and legibility. This



**Far left** The original architecture creates a place with a distinctive character

**Left** A pedestrian-friendly environment has been created



**Above left** Rooflines and corners add interest and aid navigation around the scheme

**Above** Use of materials, colour and detail adds to the variety and interest of the design

approach was fully supported by the trust and residents.

The developer, Lovell Partnerships, was involved in the scheme from February 2001 until completion and regarded it as unique in its experience in terms of the design approach, dwelling types and use of contemporary materials. A planning application was submitted in October 2001 and the scheme was completed in March 2004.

The trust, architect, developer and council officers worked closely on the evolution of the design, taking part in pre-application discussions, and all seem to have felt that the collaboration was successful. The council's supplementary planning guidance for residential development, *Places for living*, was just in place (March 2001), and the site's design responds to the guide's more generic guidance and objectives, including promoting permeability, legibility and security for car users, pedestrians and cyclists. At the time, the council had a well-established urban design team, and officers involved commented that they were generally pleased with the emerging design, and advised on minor design issues, rather than major changes.

A planning condition secured the 'Project Wagtail' route through the development, which provides a 9m wide boulevard for a footpath, cycle way and bridle path. A traffic-calming scheme has also been introduced. While the council officers wanted more soft landscaping, the choice of landscaping materials aimed to minimise construction and maintenance costs. The lack of enclosure in streets with bungalows may have been due to an over-rigid application of guidance on street widths by the development control officer and transport officer, combined with the design team's wish to cluster bungalows together. However, development control officers now have a much better appreciation of urban design issues.

CVHAT paid for Walker Troup Architects to be retained in a design guidance role after its initial contract had expired, to steer and audit work by Lovell. The developer found it useful to work with Walker Troup at later stages, as it was another set of 'eyes and ears' over the development of the scheme and was able to help the developer resolve a number of problems during construction. Both the client and developer felt that the degree

to which the developer was involved in community consultation, through attendance at public consultation events, helped to strengthen the working relationship.

The encouraging signal this development sends out is that it is possible to take an approach that is both design-led and cost-effective, allowing a high-quality, predominantly social housing scheme to be built on a relatively low budget in a regeneration area.

**'The housing action trust, architect, developer and council officers worked closely on the evolution of the design and all seem to have felt that the collaboration was successful'**

**Below left**  
Excessive road widths on streets with bungalows have led to a lack of enclosure in some places (photo: EDAAW)

**Below** Parking is kept to the front of dwellings either in driveways or on-street  
**Right** The scheme is immediately adjacent to playing fields



## What the residents think



### What they like most

- 'quiet/peaceful' (26 per cent)
- 'type of housing' (13 per cent)
- 'well-maintained/clean/tidy' (12 per cent)
- 'own home' (12 per cent)
- 'unusual/unique style of houses' (3 per cent)
- houses 'spacious/light/airy' (3 per cent).

### What they dislike most

- 'nothing' (42 per cent)
- 'people/neighbours' (10 per cent)
- 'poor-quality construction/materials' (7 per cent).

**'A much higher than average proportion (87 per cent) felt the development had a distinct character and that this character was positive'**

A noticeably high proportion (88 per cent) of residents expressed satisfaction with the development. And a much higher proportion than average (50 per cent) said that they were very satisfied with the development, rather than fairly satisfied, in comparison to 29 per cent across all the schemes.

While only a few residents picked out the distinctiveness of the development as one of two or three things they most liked, a much higher than average proportion (87 per cent) felt the development had a distinct character and that this character was positive. However, a lower than average proportion (57 per cent) thought the development was well built.

Unusually, car parking was not picked out as one of the two or three things residents most disliked. Reasonably low car ownership, combined with well-integrated car parking, are likely to have contributed to this higher than average level of satisfaction. There was also much higher than average satisfaction with public open space, partly relating to the proximity of green space and dedicated play space near to the scheme, which was perceived to be well maintained and well used.

Close proximity to local transport and local facilities and services was acknowledged, with most residents aware that they were near to a health centre, primary and secondary school, park, leisure facilities and pub, and that bus services were available. A much higher proportion than average (61 per cent compared to 35 per cent across all schemes) made use of local buses.

Residents liked the layout of the development. A higher than average proportion of residents (84 per cent) thought that the design and layout of the development helped to make it feel safe, either 'a lot' or 'a little'. A higher than average proportion also thought that the design and layout encouraged contact between neighbours. A sense of community is also apparent from asking residents what kind of neighbourhood they thought Castle Vale to be: a higher than average proportion thought people 'do things together and try to help each other', rather than 'mostly going their own way'.



# Dukes Rise, Tadley Acres, Shepton Mallet

- The landowner played the leading role in championing good design and employed a strong design team to develop the design brief and masterplan, which set out very clear design requirements
- The developer was willing to take on and deliver a project requiring a bespoke design solution
- The design team was retained by the landowner to oversee the developer's implementation of the masterplan and compliance with the design codes
- On later phases, where the landowner's influence has been greater, the quality of the development improved
- A lack of capacity and urban design skills in the local authority planning team was compensated for by the strength of the design approach from the landowner's design team.

Local authority:	<b>Mendip District Council</b>
Homes:	<b>109</b>
Developer:	<b>Bloor Homes in association with the Duchy of Cornwall and the Vagg family</b>
Overall score:	<b>76 per cent</b>
Acorn class:	<b>Three</b>
Setting:	<b>Suburban greenfield</b>



## Background

Dukes Rise is on the outskirts of Shepton Mallet in Somerset and has been developed as part of a joint venture between the Duchy of Cornwall and the Vagg family. The scheme is the southern extension to a larger development known as Field Farm and is the most recent phase. The Field Farm development comprises 360 homes and is intended to have the character of a self-contained community within the larger community of Shepton Mallet. The southern extension continues the design principles established in the earlier phases. It comprises both private and affordable houses and flats, employment uses and live/work units, as well as a site for a proposed school. The affordable housing includes small units and starter homes, to be distributed across the development.

## Overview

The resulting scheme, with its traditional architectural and landscaping approach, creates a strong sense of place. The development provides variety and interest through the use of well-detailed architectural features, and a range of high-quality materials, such as stone and timber. It has preserved existing mature trees, and makes good use of the topography, with views out of the development that aid legibility, along with the use of different building forms and colours to accentuate junctions. The street design and use of different paving material alert drivers to traffic-calmed areas, which helps create a pedestrian-friendly environment. Car parking is well integrated through the use of driveways and courtyards, and neither roads nor car parking dominate the development. Although there are some blank gable ends, public

spaces, roads and footpaths are generally well-overlooked and feel safe.

## Approach to planning and design

The development brief and masterplan for Field Farm, which was completed by Robert Adam Architects in April 1998, set out very clear design requirements. These included guidelines and model design standards for layout, landscaping, roads and car parking and building design. The use of non-standard materials, to be sourced locally, was also specified. The brief recognised that good design could be achieved without high costs, stating that: 'Building design and materials, by the consideration of the effect of building groups, can use standard house types and natural local materials to give added character and quality within normal construction prices.'



**Far left** Building layout dictates highway design rather than the other way around

**Left** Natural materials, which are locally sourced, have been used

**Above** The architectural treatment and landscaping features create a sense of place

The buildings themselves were designed by Tetlow King based on typical house plans, elevations and details in the design codes. Tetlow King completed the detailed urban design strategy and development principles for the southern extension in March 2003, based on Robert Adam's urban design principles and also implemented its original design codes. A planning application was submitted in June 2003, and planning permission was obtained in February 2004.

Bloor Homes developed most of Field Farm and its southern extension. Its involvement displays a willingness to take on and deliver non standard housing designs and bespoke solutions to building details such as windows and materials. The experience gained from developing this scheme is likely to have added to its skills base for future schemes.

Robert Adam Architects was retained by the Duchy of Cornwall to oversee implementation of the masterplan and to ensure compliance with the design codes. There was concern that earlier phases of the development were too standardised in their approach and that there was insufficient variety in house types for such a large development. However, in later phases where the Duchy of Cornwall had a greater interest in

the joint venture and was able to exert more influence on the development process, the overall coherence and quality of the development was improved. Furthermore, individual architects were engaged to design key buildings within the southern extension, in order to enhance the design quality and variety. The designer, local authority planning officer and developer all felt that the later phases of the development were of higher design quality than earlier phases, particularly with regard to the detailed design of the buildings.

The planning officer felt that the design of the proposal was strong enough, particularly with regard to layout and permeability, that additional design input was not required. He admitted that the local authority did not have urban design expertise at that time. The most significant contribution of the local authority to the scheme was the mix and spatial distribution of tenures, which were implemented through its supplementary planning guidance on affordable housing. The local authority also carried out checks on the overall highway design, pedestrian links and street lighting, and traffic calming. The highways officer felt that the vehicle, pedestrian and cycle links were good, and that access and parking were well handled, through an

innovative mix of adopted highways and privately maintained areas. Highway surface water run-off feeds into holding lagoons, which are a feature in the development.

The developer at Bloor Homes felt that working relationships with the local authority were positive and that close collaboration with the landowner ensured that the design principles were delivered and that in turn the development remained viable. Improvements to the design over time were also aided by the strong relationship with the landowner. The developer also felt that the landowner's flexible attitude to the cost price of the land ensured that a high-quality development was delivered. However, it felt that some elements of the development, for example the live/work units, were not as successful as other parts, due to a lack of demand.

**'The developer felt that working relationships with the local authority were positive and that close collaboration with the landowner ensured that the design principles were delivered and that in turn the development remained viable'**



**Far left** Parking is provided through driveways and courtyards  
**Left** A pedestrian-friendly environment has been created  
**Right** Open space is overlooked from adjacent buildings

## What do residents think?



### What they like most

- 'type of housing' (52 per cent)
- 'attractive development' (38 per cent)
- 'quiet/peaceful' (31 per cent)
- 'location' (31 per cent)
- 'good/close to open spaces/park' (31 per cent).
- 'variety/different types of housing' (12 per cent)

### What they dislike most

- 'bad/insufficient car parking' (21 per cent)
- 'children/young people hanging round' (19 per cent)
- 'unfinished/ongoing construction/building workers' (21 per cent).

**'An extremely high proportion felt the development to be distinct, attractive and well built'**

In comparison to the average response across all schemes, a similar proportion of residents in Dukes Rise were satisfied overall with the development. However, a much higher proportion was very satisfied (50 per cent in comparison to the average figure of 29 per cent, similar to Castle Vale). Furthermore, an extremely high proportion felt the development to be distinct, attractive and well built. A majority (67 per cent) felt the development was very attractive rather than fairly attractive, in comparison to 26 per cent on average.

While the legibility of the development was found to be reasonably good for pedestrians, a majority (64 per cent) thought that it was difficult for people driving to find their way around. Most residents felt that the development did not put the needs of car users first, and relatively few, in comparison to the average, felt that roads and car parking dominated the development. The layout was considered to be much safer than on average, with 100 per cent of

residents believing it to be safe for people, and 78 per cent believing it to be safe for children (against 55 per cent overall). A majority (57 per cent) were aware of the measures in place to encourage walking and cycling, in contrast to Horfield where very few were (see later).

Residents were for the most part satisfied with public open space: 71 per cent were satisfied at Dukes Rise against 49 per cent on average. This contrasts with somewhat lower levels of satisfaction with private open space. Residents were also generally aware of their proximity to a health centre, park, pub, leisure facilities and schools. While 81 per cent said that local buses were available, only 24 per cent said they made use of them.

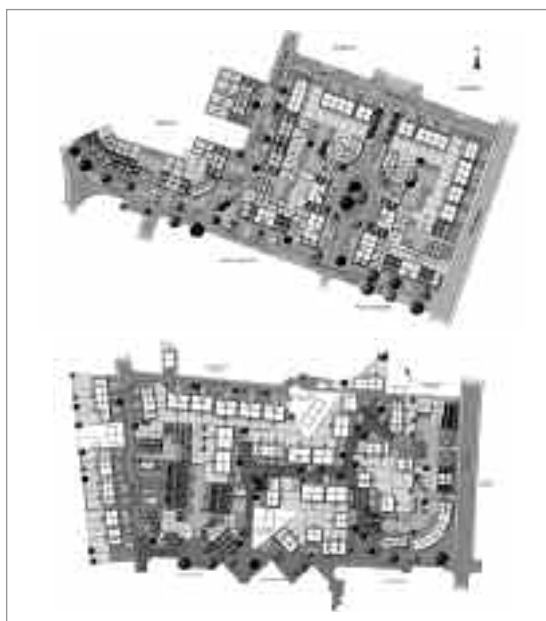
Residents' dissatisfaction with the level of car parking provision is common to many of the schemes in this audit. A much higher proportion than the average at Dukes Rise believe the car parking to be secure, although not necessarily convenient.



# Horfield regeneration scheme

- Bristol Community Housing Foundation recognised the role of good design in regeneration and commissioned a masterplan
- The masterplan was subsequently developed by the developer's in-house design team, in collaboration with the social landlord and city council
- In early phases, a lack of urban design skills within both the local authority and developer led to some weaknesses in the masterplan and its implementation
- Later phases are likely to benefit from a greater appreciation of urban design issues by all partners.

Local authority:	<b>Bristol City Council</b>
Homes:	<b>819</b>
Developer:	<b>Bristol Community Housing Foundation and Bovis Homes</b>
Overall score:	<b>69 per cent</b>
Acorn class:	<b>Three</b>
Setting:	<b>Urban brownfield</b>



## Background

The Horfield development replaces one of Bristol's oldest local authority housing estates, which suffered from major structural defects. In late 1997, following an open competition process that failed to come up with a viable plan for redevelopment, Bristol City Council created Bristol Community Housing Foundation (BCHF) to take the project forward. BCHF was given no public funding other than the free land and support from the council for covering the cost of acquiring old houses sold under the right to buy, home loss and demolition. The success of the partnership between the city council, BCHF and Bovis Homes has led to a number of awards including, most recently, the 2006 Guardian Public Service Award.

The development will eventually consist of approximately 50 per cent social and 50 per cent private

housing, with a mix of flats, houses and bungalows. The new social housing was funded by selling land to Bovis Homes for private housing and by raising private finance. Outline planning permission for the development was first submitted in September 1999, and the first phase of 213 homes went to site in 2003. Just under half of the development has been completed, with the remainder due for completion by the end of 2008/09.

## Overview

The use of block paving, planting and retained mature landscape elements, and the lack of defined kerbs, has undoubtedly produced a more attractive public realm than in many of the other sites visited in the audit. However, standard building types do not contribute to creating a particularly strong identity for the development, or sense of place. Furthermore, a lack of experience in the detailed design

of home zones has resulted in shared spaces that do not function entirely successfully to slow traffic down and create a safe environment for pedestrians and cyclists. The provision of shared spaces has also perhaps been at the expense of a dedicated and equipped play area for children, which is needed particularly as the shared spaces are not entirely suitable for children playing. The development does, however, connect well to the surrounding neighbourhoods. Buildings overlook streets and open spaces, giving the potential for good passive surveillance.

## Approach to planning and design

The council set objectives for the development as a condition of providing the land, including a requirement to develop a minimum amount of 400 social housing units, traffic calming measures and home



**Far left** The design aims to create a child- and pedestrian-friendly environment through the use of shared spaces

**Left and above** A variety of standard house types have been used but with little evidence of site-specific design

zones, and community consultation on the plans. The council did not itself draw up a development brief for the site. Instead Shepherd Epstein Hunter was commissioned by BCHF to develop a design guide that formed the vision and brief, and guided the design quality of the development. This masterplan set out the layout requirements, based on the existing street grid, and contained design guidance on building heights, massing and materials. Through community consultation, the architects found that residents wanted to get away from idea of 'an estate' and so the masterplan aims to create a series of neighbourhoods, with a low key, modest design solution.

Bovis was not involved in early stages of the masterplan. However, it formed part of the contract between Bovis and BCHF and allowed BCHF to insist on good design quality. Subsequently, Bovis's in-house design team proposed changes to the masterplan, in negotiation with BCHF and the city council. The density of the scheme has been raised, partly through the introduction of more flats, to comply with PPG3 densities and increase the commercial feasibility of the development. In addition, the amount of shared car parking has reduced, and open space has

increased. Bovis has used standard house types throughout, taking its cue for phase one from a design by Shepherd Epstein Hunter, in line with the existing detailed consent.

Social housing has been clustered within the development, rather than pepper-potted. BCHF was insistent that the social housing should be in the best or equivalent locations to the private housing. There is very little visual difference between social and private housing but the social housing tends to be built to a higher environmental standard and have larger room sizes. Early phases of the social housing have been built to ecohomes minimum (pass) standard. Later phases of social housing will be built to ecohomes good (phase three) and very good (phase four) standards. The private housing has not had an ecohomes assessment.

According to the social landlord, residents tend to park on the streets, rather than making use of allocated parking spaces in communal parking areas, and have raised concerns about the safety of children playing in spaces shared by cars and pedestrians. The problems in the design of new build home zones stem from a general shortage in design expertise, both within the local authority and the

developer. This is acknowledged by all partners. The developer felt too that communication issues between stakeholders early on made it difficult to arrive at a consensus on design solutions, although communication has improved for later phases. It is attempting to raise awareness of the concept of home zone with local residents. Later phases will have a clearer hierarchy of vehicle streets and pedestrian-friendly streets.

The housing association, local authority and developer all expect that the design quality of later phases will be higher, with a design-led rather than standards-led approach learning from early phases about what works and what does not and an improved understanding of urban design issues by all partners.

**'The developer is attempting to raise awareness of the concept of home zone with local residents. Later phases will have a clear hierarchy of vehicle streets and pedestrian-friendly streets'**



**Far left** Home zones are signed, but not well detailed  
**Left** Public open space is well-maintained  
**Right** Good quality landscaping materials help to create an attractive public realm

## What do residents think?



### What they like most

- 'attractive development' (19 per cent)
- 'own home' (19 per cent)
- 'type of housing' (19 per cent)
- 'good/close to shops' (16 per cent).

### What they dislike most

- 'children/young people hanging round' (27 per cent)
- 'noisy/not peaceful' (13 per cent)
- 'bad/insufficient car parking' (11 per cent)
- 'no/poor facilities for children' (11 per cent)
- 'road layout/lack of walkways/narrow walkways' (11 per cent).

Although a similar proportion of residents found the appearance of the development to be attractive, a slightly higher proportion (36 per cent) than the average (26 per cent) thought the development was very attractive. However, residents did not think the development was any more distinctive or well built than the averaged response across all schemes. Overall satisfaction with the development is very slightly lower than the average.

Residents seem to be happy with their private outside space, with 78 per cent expressing satisfaction, similar to the averaged response across all schemes. However, a higher than average proportion of residents are dissatisfied with the public open space. This is partly related to provision, since half of all residents think there is not enough public open space and 60 per cent think there is not enough play space. It appears that residents do not perceive the shared space to be public open space, reflecting the difficulties with implementing the home zone concept. They also do not think the layout of the development is particularly for people generally to walk or cycle, or children to walk, cycle and/or play. Only 31 per cent think the development is safe for children in comparison to 55 per cent on average. The attempts to make this space pedestrian-friendly are also

reflected in the level of awareness of the measures to encourage walking and cycling, with only 10 per cent of residents aware of these, in contrast to 57 per cent at Dukes Rise.

The dissatisfaction with car parking mainly seemed to be related to the level of provision, rather than convenience or security, in spite of the fact that car ownership is lower than average. A higher than average proportion believes the car parking to be convenient.

Residents are aware of the availability of nearby pubs, schools and health centre, and of buses. A much higher proportion than average (65 per cent) make use of buses, and the majority make short journeys from the development by public transport or walking, rather than the car.

**'It appears that residents do not perceive the shared space to be public open space, reflecting the difficulties with implementing the home zone concept'**



# Fernwood phase two, Balderton Hospital, Newark

- A good working relationship between the developer and local authority resulted in a strong collaboration
- However, neither the developer nor the local authority had sufficiently high aspirations, or applied the necessary skills, to ensure that a really excellent design was delivered
- The development brief produced by the local authority contained broad guidance, but no detailed design guidelines
- A lack of collaboration between the local authority and county council resulted in a standards-led approach to highways design.

Local authority:	Newark and Sherwood District Council
Homes:	311
Developer:	David Wilson Homes
Overall score:	57 per cent
Acorn class:	One
Setting:	Suburban brownfield



## Background

The Balderton Hospital site is a former mental health facility close to the A1 on the outskirts of Newark, Nottinghamshire. Land had been allocated within the Newark and Sherwood local plan (1999), which was intended as a new self-contained community of 1,150 homes, along with recreational and community facilities, shops and a school. A business park was also planned adjacent to the new community. The outline planning application for a total of 1,150 homes was approved in March 1999 and reserved matters for Fernwood phase two (311 homes) were approved in July 2002.

## Overview

The former hospital site contained substantial landscaping, mature planting and some existing buildings that would be retained to contribute most to creating a sense of place in the new development. While there is some variety in house types and their architectural treatment, there is little variation in materials for such a large site, and the design of blocks of flats is relatively poor. A main spine road, which weaves a sinuous path through the development, dictates the layout, with cul-de-sacs branching off. The two gateways leading on to the main spine road are well defined by the retained mature trees and landscaping. Corner buildings aid navigation through the development, and views of the existing tower also help orientation, with open spaces acting as focal points. There is also a network of designated footpaths which provide access to the major

green space, and to the play and sports facilities. These are well-lit and overlooked in some, but not all, instances. Although the intention was for the community to be self-contained, it has resulted in a car-based development due to the proximity to the A1, which is highly convenient for commuters. Some of the local facilities have yet to be delivered.

## Approach to planning and design

The local authority produced a planning brief (revised version January 2000) which covered the broad development principles, including the symmetry of the site, the layout of the main spine road, areas of landscaping, the range and mix of uses and their location, and the housing types and densities. Other aspects of highway layout were the responsibility of the highway authority, Nottinghamshire County



**Far left** The scheme retains existing landscaping and mature planting

**Left** Car parking for town houses is provided as integral garages with driveways

**Above** Car parking is less well integrated elsewhere

Council. The brief specified that the important historical buildings and tower on site should be retained, along with strategic areas of open space and species-rich grassland. There was a requirement that at least 10 per cent of the overall development should be affordable housing. The plan was to build a series of neighbourhoods with different housing styles and densities. Phase two was intended to be more urban, with higher densities than other areas.

A masterplan was prepared by the housebuilder's in-house design team, which established the building phases, and led the way in the more detailed design elements of the scheme, including the housing types, elevations and materials. These aspects were developed iteratively with the local authority, through reserved matters.

The developer felt that the success of its design was constrained by the layout put forward in the development brief and it would have taken a different approach to road layout. Furthermore, it thought that the approach of the county council to highways design was standards-led, and provided little creativity in dealing with corners, turning heads and parking. The developer also felt that the local authority was inflexible on the use of materials, which led to the

overuse of red brick. It conceded that the design of the flats, which were chosen as the means of delivering the specified density, weakened the overall success of the scheme. However, it had less experience in building flats than houses and was still developing their standard designs.

The local authority planner felt that there might have been a lack of detail in the development brief to guide the detailed design of the development and that both the brief, and later stages of the design, needed a greater urban design input. The outline planning permission did go to committee (who had an interest in, but not great knowledge of urban design) but not phase two. The local authority does not have a separate urban design team and, while one individual did contribute to design elements included in the development brief, the potential to provide design input after he left was weakened. However, the conservation team was able to contribute in later phases to the palette of materials.

The local plan had set a minimum requirement for housing numbers on the site and for community facilities and services before the masterplan was developed and a full site appraisal had been carried out. The local authority planner felt

that the development brief and masterplan should have tested the requirements for the community facilities put forward in the local plan. He agreed that the highway engineering standards imposed a significant constraint on the final layout.

**‘The developer felt that the success of its design was constrained by the layout put forward in the development brief and it would have taken a different approach to road layout’**

**Left and below**  
Existing buildings become focal points and aid legibility but not all views achieve this potential

**Right** Roads and car parking dominate in some parts of the scheme



## What do residents think?



### What they like most

- 'location' (40 per cent)
- 'quiet/peaceful' (38 per cent)
- 'area' (22 per cent)
- 'own home' (17 per cent).
- 'good/close to open spaces/park' (13 per cent)
- 'close to motorway/road links' (8 per cent).

### What they dislike most

- 'no/poor shops nearby' (27 per cent)
- 'bad/insufficient car parking' (18 per cent).

**'A higher than average proportion of residents thought that the design and layout of the development encouraged contact between neighbours and that the layout was safe for children'**

Overall levels of satisfaction were similar to the average across all schemes, as well as responses to questions about whether the development had a distinct character, was attractive or well built. However, levels of satisfaction with public open space were higher than average. The majority of residents were satisfied: most felt there was about the right amount of public open space; 61 per cent felt there was about the right amount of play space (compared with 29 per cent on average); and most felt it was well used. A higher than average proportion of residents thought that the design and layout of the development encouraged contact between neighbours and that the layout was safe for children.

The dissatisfaction with car parking appeared to be related to levels of provision. However, a higher than average proportion of residents agreed that parked cars in the development obstructed pedestrians and cyclists, reflecting a lack of a well-integrated parking design.

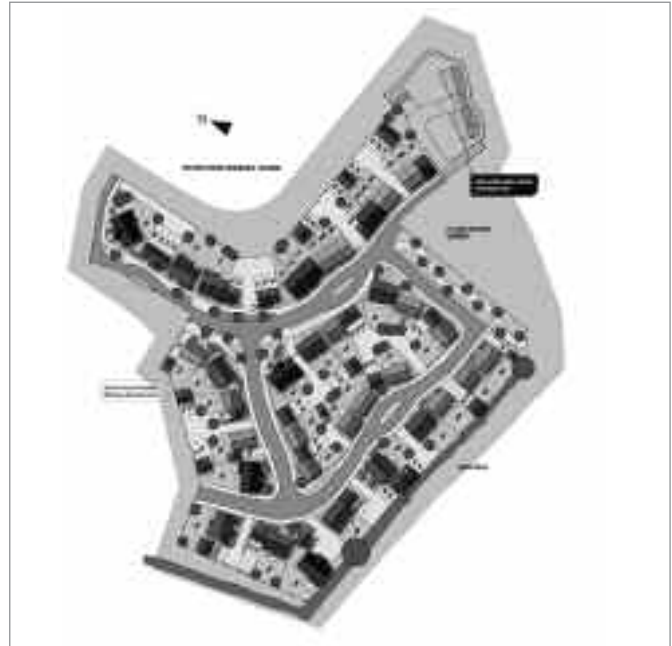
The availability of local services and facilities such as pubs, leisure facilities, health centres and schools seems to be much lower than average, with the exception of parks. Although bus services are available, 83 per cent of residents said that they tend to make short journeys from the development by car (versus 53 per cent on average), while only 14 per cent make short journeys on foot (versus 41 per cent overall), highlighting the dependence of the majority of residents on their cars. This perhaps reflects the lack of shops nearby, as well as the strength of the local road network. A higher than average proportion felt that the development put the needs of car users first, perhaps due to its proximity to main roads as much as the design of the public realm.



# The Copse, Mawsley Village, Kettering

- Useful pre-application discussions took place between the local authority and the developer
- The development framework provided indicative densities and character zoning, but did not provide sufficient detailed design information
- Although the local authority had a dedicated officer focussing on design at the start of the project, resources were not sustained in the later phases
- The developer successfully adapted standard house types but the arrangement of houses was weak
- The road layout was compromised by too rigid an application of highways standards by the county council.

Local authority:	<b>Kettering Borough Council</b>
Homes:	<b>88</b>
Developer:	<b>George Wimpey</b>
Overall score:	<b>54 per cent</b>
Acorn class:	<b>One</b>
Setting:	<b>Rural greenfield</b>



## Background

Mawsley Village is a new rural settlement a few kilometres to the south west of Kettering. In the early 1990s, the county structure plan for Northamptonshire identified a need for 1,250 houses in rural areas, and 6,000 houses in urban areas across Kettering borough. The location for the new village was selected through the local plan process in the form of a developer competition undertaken in the early 1990s. The bids were judged by a multi-disciplinary committee. The scheme comprises eight development parcels, each containing between 80 and 130 plots. Outline planning for the new village as a whole was obtained in May 1995, while approval of reserved matters for the development of 88 homes, part of the fifth phase, was obtained in July 2003. The latter comprises purely houses, all privately owned, with later phases due to include affordable homes.

## Overview

A mix of house types and architectural treatments, including the use of a variety of materials and colours, has resulted in a reasonably attractive and distinctive development. However, the hard landscaping uses uniform tarmac throughout, with a lack of attention to detail. The design quality of the development is let down by the poorly structured layout and a weak relationship between buildings and streets. The layout is difficult to navigate, with a lack of a hierarchy along streets leading through the development and little evidence of having created a series of events or spaces through the development. The building line is not consistent throughout the scheme but is broken by rear gardens and parking areas at the side of properties. Public open space, currently used as a play area by children, is designated for future development, and there is perhaps a missed

opportunity to create open spaces elsewhere in the development. Residents have access to local facilities, such as a medical centre and a primary school, but the development still lacks shops and a pub, as originally intended. Development of these amenities is reliant upon creating a critical mass of housing in the later phases.

## Approach to planning and design

The development framework for Mawsley Village gave indicative densities and character zoning, and presented the local authority's design aspirations for creating a high-quality village environment, but did not provide detailed design information. The gateways to the village were intended as lower density areas, with higher densities planned for the core of Mawsley Village. The original Kettering development framework proposed



**Far left** The scheme is part of a new rural settlement

**Left and above** A variety of standard house types, materials and detailing has been used successfully

densities that were below planning policy guidance 3 (PPG3) density thresholds but the developer submitted applications for housing in line with PPG3 densities. These were refused by the local authority, which wanted to keep the village below a maximum size of 750 homes identified in the local plan and to provide larger gardens and more generous space provision in this phase. The developer subsequently won on appeal.

According to the current planning policy officer, at the time of the application Kettering Borough Council had a development control officer with design experience dedicated to dealing with Mawsley to ensure the desired quality was achieved. However, it was difficult to maintain this resource, and the latter phases of the development did not receive as much input in design terms. The roads needed to conform to county council design standards for them to be adopted and there was a reluctance to deviate from the norm. While borough council planners did not want to see a standard highways solution in a rural location, they were unable to persuade county highways engineers and developers otherwise.

The local authority felt that, while it wanted sustainable design to be delivered, it had no means at that time through the local plan or the masterplan to enforce it. It is currently strengthening its in-house urban design expertise, with a working group now set up for major applications which includes transport specialists, urban designers, planners and landscape architects. In addition, training in urban design is provided to planners and councillors.

The developer used in-house designers for Mawsley Village and felt that the design of standard house types used in the development was strong. However, it thought the road layout, on which it had little influence, was poor in commercial as well as design terms. It felt pre-application discussions with Kettering Borough Council had been helpful until the issue of increasing the density of Mawsley Village arose. The developer also indicated that environmental sustainability was not a strong consideration for it and local authority at the time and that it would tend not to push this unless it was driven by the local authority.

**‘While borough council planners did not want to see a standard highways solution in a rural location, they were unable to persuade county highways engineers and developers otherwise’**



**Far left** Parking is provided in driveways or courtyards (photo: EDAW)  
**Left and right** The building line is not consistent throughout the scheme

## What do residents think?



### What they like most

- 'quiet/peaceful' (42 per cent)
- 'location' (28 per cent)
- 'neighbours' (24 per cent)
- 'attractive development' (16 per cent)
- 'safe/secure/low level of crime' (20 per cent)
- 'sense of community' (16 per cent)
- 'medical facilities' (8 per cent).

### What they dislike most

- 'no/poor shops nearby' (70 per cent)
- 'no pubs' (24 per cent)
- 'bad/insufficient car parking' (16 per cent)
- 'poor public transport' (10 per cent)
- 'no community meeting point' (10 per cent).

**'Residents found legibility of the development to be poor: 72 per cent thought that it was difficult to find their way around when driving and 44 per cent thought it was difficult to find their way on foot'**

Levels of satisfaction with the home and development were similar to average levels. A similar proportion to the average also thought that the development was distinct or attractive. However, a slightly higher proportion (40 per cent) considered it to be very attractive when compared to the average (26 per cent). Furthermore, 100 per cent thought the development was well built, compared with 81 per cent overall. Levels of satisfaction with public open space were similar to the average. However, a larger proportion (70 per cent) than average (48 per cent) thought that there was insufficient play space.

Car ownership in the development is extremely high. Some 74 per cent own or have access to two or more cars, compared with 47 per cent overall. Satisfaction with car parking is no more or less than average levels, although a higher than average proportion (80 per cent at Mawsley Village, compared with 53 per cent on average) believed that 'parked cars in this development obstruct pedestrians and cyclists'. A large majority (90 per cent) said they tend to make short journeys by car, even though a bus service is available.

Residents found legibility of the development to be poor: 72 per

cent thought that it was difficult to find their way around when driving (versus 36 per cent on average); and 40 per cent thought that it was very difficult, compared to only 14 per cent on average. Furthermore, 44 per cent thought it was difficult to find their way on foot, against 19 per cent on average. This was one of the key weaknesses of the design found in the audit. In spite of its rural location, residents found the development no more or less unsafe for people generally to walk or cycle, or for children.

There was a much stronger sense of community than at other schemes. When asked about the kind of neighbourhood, more residents (30 per cent) thought that people 'do things together, and try to help each other' (compared to 14 per cent on average), and many fewer (12 per cent) thought people 'mostly go their own way' (compared to 45 per cent on average). Most (58 per cent) thought there was 'a mixture' of behaviour. This is also reflected in the things residents most liked about the development, which included 'like neighbours' and 'sense of community'. Perhaps because of this, they particularly missed having a community meeting point.



# Regency View, Tividale

- There was pressure to find a developer willing to develop this former landfill site, which probably deflected the focus away from achieving high-quality urban design
- The developer employed a standard-led, technical approach, missing the opportunities presented by the site
- A lack of urban design skills at the time meant that the local authority made few improvements to the design
- The management arrangements have failed to stop the decline in the adjacent open space, which detracts further from the quality of the housing.

Local authority: **Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council**  
Homes: **149**  
Developer: **Bellway Homes**  
Overall score: **33 per cent**  
Acorn class: **Five**  
Setting: **Suburban brownfield**



## Background

The site is in Tividale, overlooking Oldbury from the Rowley Hills, and sits within an existing housing area. Bellway bought the land, a former landfill site, in the late 1990s and finished the development in 2004. The original planning consent was given in January 2001 with a re-submission in November 2002 that added two further homes. The development comprises 149 houses, all of which are privately owned dwellings.

## Overview

The housing is laid out below the old landfill heap, which has undergone remediation to provide a large public park. The park serves several neighbourhoods but is in a poor state and offers very little in the way of recreation. Much of the new housing backs on to the edge of this park but is separated by a

tall fence. There was an opportunity to create a place that took advantage of the topography and views but the layout and orientation of the housing does not succeed in delivering this. Similar architectural treatments and building types have been used throughout the site and the somewhat ad hoc building line does not enhance the streetscape.

Navigation through the scheme is not aided by its design, nor is its key gateway well defined. Measures have been introduced to create a pedestrian-friendly environment. For example, there is a 20mph speed limit enforced by speed bumps and textured crossing tables, and red asphalt has been used to distinguish the crossing points.

The streets are overlooked in most places though blank gable ends are frequent, particularly at junctions. A footpath that links the site to the open space and beyond to a

neighbouring estate is not well maintained and is poorly signposted and unlit.

## Approach to planning and design

The inward-looking housing is typical of many schemes in this audit and represents an inability or an unwillingness at the time they were conceived to design to the specific conditions presented by the site, resulting in many missed opportunities. The lack of consideration given to the existing site and its fine setting is consistent when speaking to each party involved. Significantly, the architect from RPS Design expressed the view that Bellway and RPS Design had considered the site primarily from a technical aspect and had not carried out a thorough urban design analysis of the site. He indicated that they would still be producing schemes



**Far left** The qualities of the dramatic site have been ignored

**Left** Parking is generally provided as driveways and integral garages, with little attempt at integration

**Above** An ad hoc building line does not enhance the streetscape

using similar house types if it was not for tighter planning policy and a better understanding of design within the local authority. However, he felt that the approach to the site would be different now in line with changes in urban design thinking.

It is apparent from the assessment of this scheme that issues such as creating a sense of place, the relationship between public and private realm and legibility did not appear to have been addressed. The local authority planning officer indicated that there was political pressure to remediate the land as soon as possible due to its size and location within an existing housing area. The council was also keen on introducing new family housing into the area. The authority had designated this site in its unitary development plan for housing but found it difficult to find a developer willing to take on the potential liabilities of the land. It is likely that these factors perhaps deflected focus from urban design issues.

In addition, it is evident that there was not enough design expertise within the borough council to assess such schemes on design merit. There was also no supplementary guidance on housing design at that time. Both the developer and the planning officer indicated that there was very little change from the original layout to the finished built scheme. The Building for Life standard highlights many deficiencies in the scheme that could have been challenged by the planning department. However, the council now has an urban design team, which is consulted on new applications at an early stage and supplementary planning guidance on residential design, published in 2004. These both suggest a greater commitment to creating well-designed places.

The original design included some open space provision within the housing area but this was later excluded. The proposed large play areas in the adjacent open space were not successfully delivered. The planning officer felt that these

aspects of the design would now be addressed differently.

The local authority did not want to adopt the open space at the time and thus it is privately owned. The management agreement for the open space seems to have benefited no one and it is worrying that the deterioration of the public realm is so evident only two years after completion. The residents of the new housing are left with a financial burden for which they are gaining very little in return. The decline of the open space will detract further from the quality of the housing, as well as providing future problems for the borough council.

**‘The management agreement for the open space seems to have benefited no one and it is worrying that the deterioration of the public realm is so evident only two years after completion’**



## What do residents think?



### What they like most

- 'quiet/peaceful' (52 per cent)
- 'location' (44 per cent)
- 'type of housing' (25 per cent)
- 'neighbours' (21 per cent).

### What they dislike most

- 'nothing' (35 per cent)
- 'charges for upkeep/maintenance' (16 per cent).

**'Despite the availability of local services and facilities within walking distance, and of local buses, 76 per cent tended to make short journeys by car'**

Levels of satisfaction with the home and development were similar to the average, as were response to questions about how distinct, attractive or well built the development was. Satisfaction with car parking and public open space were also similar to the average, the latter despite the proximity of open space to the development. This reflects the higher than average proportion of people who thought that the public open space was not well maintained, reflecting problems with the management agreement. While attitudes to the level of provision of private car parking were similar, fewer people (40 per cent) than the average (62 per cent) thought that there was not enough other car parking. A slightly higher proportion of residents (29 per cent) thought that it was difficult for people to find their way around when walking in comparison with the average (19 per cent). However, a similar proportion to the average thought it was difficult for people to find their way around when driving. Although a similar proportion of residents felt

that the layout of the development for people generally was safe to walk and to cycle, a slightly higher proportion felt that it was safe for children.

Residents were aware that there were schools, pubs, a health centre and parks nearby. Despite the availability of local services and facilities within walking distance, and of local buses, 76 per cent tended to make short journeys by car, compared to 53 per cent on average, whereas only 20 per cent made short journeys on foot (41 per cent).

**Far left** Blank gable ends and walls reduce the potential for passive surveillance

**Left** One of several examples of 'space left over after planning' (photo: EDAW)

**Below** A poor management arrangement has led to a deterioration of the adjacent park





**'There is evidence that local authorities are strengthening their design policies and processes, as well as skills and resources, but there is still some way to go'**

# Lessons from the case studies

The case studies provide insight into how the design quality of housing schemes influences residents' experience of living in them. Four key lessons also emerge about the conditions that allow good design to be achieved and those that lead to poor design.

## Learning from residents

A higher proportion of residents living in schemes with good design (Castle Vale and Dukes Rise) were very satisfied with the development. Furthermore, they tended to acknowledge more strongly factors corresponding to design. For example, in both developments, residents recognised the contribution of the layout to safety. They were highly satisfied with public open space and valued its close proximity. Residents valued the distinctiveness of the design at Castle Vale and appreciated the attractiveness and high build quality of Dukes Rise.

Conversely, residents in the average and poor case study schemes appeared to value more general factors such as the location of the development, or its quietness, rather than anything related to its design. Where the development scored poorly on proximity of local services and facilities, this was strongly reflected in residents' experiences. Balderton's residents identified a lack of local shops as one of the things they most disliked and Mawsley Village's residents identified a lack of local shops, a pub and a community meeting point. Conversely, residents at Balderton appreciated the proximity of public open space. At Mawsley Village, the poor road layout contributed to residents' feeling that the development was difficult for both drivers and pedestrians to find their way around.

Provision of local public transport does not by itself influence whether residents will make use of buses rather than their cars. The survey suggests that residents tend to use cars even if local public transport services exist, unless they are living in an urban area or car ownership is low. Neither does the provision of community facilities by itself generate a strong sense of community. However, it is important to help residents to reduce car use or to take part in community activities. At Mawsley Village in particular, residents felt strongly the lack of being able to do this.

It is evident that post-occupancy research is important in understanding the quality and performance of new homes, and that this must play a role in the debate about design quality of new homes and neighbourhoods. CABE is publishing full findings from the residents' survey by Ipsos MORI in 2007.

## Are things improving?

PPG3, published in March 2000, first embedded the importance of good design in planning policy. This was superseded by PPS3 in December 2006. The case studies indicate how different stages of the development process relate in time to these changes.

Some of the case studies represent parts of large schemes whose early conception and outline planning permission pre-dates the publication of PPG3. However, individual phases assessed by the current audit have received detailed planning approval after the publication of PPG3 in March 2000. So, in theory, improvements in design quality, in addition to changes in density and parking provision, should begin to reflect changes in policy. While there is evidence that schemes have changed their density and parking provision, improvements in design quality have not always been delivered. A failure to address key design principles at early stages makes it much harder to deliver good design in individual phases later on in the development process.

There are some encouraging signs. At Horfield, the design quality of later phases has improved relative to earlier phases due to a greater level of experience among the development partners of how to deliver good design on the ground and a stronger commitment to good design. There is also some evidence from the case studies that local authorities are strengthening their design policies and processes, as well as skills and resources, to be able to drive forward good design, and they are aware of the design support available nationally and regionally that can help them achieve it.

Four key lessons emerge from the case studies about the conditions within the development process that allow good design to be achieved and those which tend to lead to poor design. The research shows that the schemes with the best design outcomes tend to have successfully encompassed most or all of these conditions and that those with the poorest design outcomes do not have many, or even any, of these in place.



**1 Good or better design will result where at least one agency – landowner, local authority, social landlord or developer – has strong aspirations for achieving good design, and the resources to deliver it**

The influence that a particular agency can have on achieving good design is particularly striking in the two most successful case studies. At Castle Vale, the housing action trust had a strong commitment to urban design that was fully supported by the local authority. At Dukes Rise, the landowner laid down strict design guidelines that the developer was required to follow and this compensated for the lack of resources within the local authority. The commitment by these agencies meant that the appropriate urban design skills were brought to bear on these schemes.

At Horfield, the social landlord also recognised the role of good design in regeneration, but not all the resources were present to deliver excellent design, particularly in the early phases of the project. However, the design is still considerably better than many of the other schemes assessed in the audit.

In contrast, at Regency View the local authority and developer had different priorities, and neither played a role in attempting to deliver a well-designed scheme. Poor design quality has resulted.

None of the case studies produced examples of the developer leading on good design. In fact, in a number of cases, it is evident that developers would not necessarily deliver good design (Regency View) or high environmental design standards (Mawsley Village; Horfield) unless other partners insisted on it.

**2 Collaboration creates the potential for good design, but only if the urban design skills exist in one or more of the partners**

At Castle Vale and Dukes Rise, a good collaboration between partners was complemented by strong urban design skills within the consulting design teams at the very least, if not always the developers or local authorities.

Pre-application discussions were useful for Mawsley Village and resulted in a close working relationship between the local authority planning team and developer. However, insufficient application of skills in the developer's in-house design team and an inability to sustain resources in the local authority have led to a scheme which succeeds in some but not all aspects of its design. Similarly, at Balderton, the working relationship between the local authority and developer was good but a need for better skills on both sides limited the success of the design.



At Horfield, consultation between partners did not compensate for the need for direction in early phases of the design. The deficiency of resources and commitment by the local authority at that time may also have contributed. Development partners also felt that the home zone concept was pushed forward with little understanding of how to implement it in practice. Once again, while collaboration did take place, there was a need for both better skills and resources to deliver excellent design.

### **3 Development frameworks, briefs and masterplans are a necessary condition for delivering good design, but they are not enough on their own**

At Regency View the complete lack of a strategic design approach has contributed to the poor design quality of the resulting scheme. Other case studies indicate that a strategic design approach will not be successful if the main tools – development frameworks, briefs or masterplans – are not sufficiently detailed or robust on design quality. At Balderton, the local authority's development brief provided guidance on the overall concept, highway layout, land uses and densities, but did not provide detailed design guidance. It was then up to the developer to work up the more detailed design elements of the scheme, and to

collaborate with the local authority to finalise these. Similarly, at Mawsley Village, the development framework gave broad rather than detailed design information, and there were no mechanisms in place to ensure that high quality and sustainable design was delivered, or that the densities originally specified could be retained. In both cases, this has contributed to the delivery of average rather than good or excellent design.

However, even if the framework or masterplan is sufficiently detailed it does not guarantee that good design will be delivered. To their credit, development partners have recognised this on a few occasions and have put in place steps to prevent design quality being compromised at a later stage. At Castle Vale, the housing action trust's design team were retained by the trust to guide and audit the developer in later stages of the design process and to ensure the masterplan was delivered as intended. All partners found this to be a useful experience. A similar step was taken at Dukes Rise, where the architect responsible for the masterplan was retained by the landowner to ensure that the development complied with the design code, and that sufficient variety and diversity of design was delivered. This was most successful in later phases, where the landowner had greater influence.

#### **4 Highway design can have a negative impact on design quality when considered in isolation from place making**

At Balderton and Mawsley Village the two (different) county council highway authorities were both seen as inflexible in their approach and application of standards by both the respective local authorities and developers. Furthermore, it seems that in both cases the highway layout has dictated the building layout, rather than the other way around. Both these factors have led to schemes in which the street network dominates and does not promote easy navigation of the site and there is a weak relationship between buildings and public realm. This is also true of Regency View, where a purely technical rather than a design-led highways solution has also been implemented. From the evidence of this audit, it is also likely to be the case for a high proportion of poor and average schemes included in the audit.

Horfield has a more attractive public realm than many of the other sites visited in the audit, as a result of a design strategy which identified streets as multifunctional spaces. This was achieved

through introducing shared spaces and integration with retained mature landscape elements. However, the design of the home zones has not been entirely successful as a result of insufficient experience amongst the development partners, including the local authority highways designers, about how to deliver them.

At Castle Vale, good intentions were marred by poor landscaping materials used because of constraints on development and future maintenance costs. An over-rigid application of the guidance on street design was perhaps to blame for over-dominant streets in some parts of the scheme, combined with the way in which the design team specified the massing of the buildings. However, development partners have worked together to ensure that the public realm provides a pedestrian- and cycle-friendly environment which connects well with its surroundings.

A rigorous design process led by the landowner and his design team meant that building layout dictated the highway design at Dukes Rise, rather than the other way around. This contributed to providing a well-structured layout and attractive public realm. Innovative elements were also introduced into the design, such as holding lagoons that are fed by highway surface water run-off and are a feature of the development. The interrelationship of publicly adopted highway and private areas was also flexibly handled to allow better place making. However, the approach taken in this case study is fairly atypical.

Emerging government guidance, *Manual for streets*, says that the character of a neighbourhood should inform street design rather than the other way around.

**‘At Balderton and Mawsley Village the highway layout has dictated the building layout, rather than the other way around. Both these factors have led to schemes in which the street network dominates’**



**‘We don’t just need more homes, we need better quality homes. Some of the houses that have been built so far are just not up to scratch and we must do better in future. I am issuing a challenge to everyone here to raise the bar on design standards’**

Ruth Kelly, communities secretary  
Thames Gateway Forum,  
22 November 2006

# Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on the findings of the three housing audits, combined with the insights of CABE's design review and enabling services, both of which operate nationally and cover all the housing growth and housing market renewal areas. These recommendations are addressed to:

- volume housebuilders, which will deliver the vast majority of the new housing required
- local authorities, which are responsible for demanding the best from the developers as custodians of their communities
- central government, which sets the policy framework and incentive structure.

Specific recommendations are highlighted in the text.

We address each of these parties because there is no one party who is responsible for the disappointing picture this audit has uncovered. All concerned – planners, developers and highways departments – must bear their share of the responsibility and all have to do more to make a reality of their stated aspirations. High design quality is, after all, in everyone's interests.

## Raising quality

The government now recognises that only by delivering on the quality can we deliver on the numbers and it made this explicit in the new PPS3. This is a fundamental insight we all need to embrace. As the housing minister, Yvette Cooper, said in launching PPS3 in November: 'We need to increase the quantity and improve the quality of new homes at the same time...These planning changes aim to support those areas to deliver the additional homes we need, whilst raising standards at the same time...PPS3 will underpin the delivery of the government's key housing policy objectives – to deliver more homes, but of higher quality and higher environmental standards to meet the challenge from climate change...PPS3 makes it clear that local authorities should turn down poor quality applications.'

**All parties need to work towards delivering the agenda and commitments set out in PPS3.**

As far as developers are concerned, some do now want to compete on quality, recognising that design excellence adds value wherever you are in the country. Furthermore they recognise that their brand matters: partly to homebuyers but, as importantly, to planning teams and committees, as the policy framework prioritises still further the design quality agenda.

And local authorities themselves want to see sustainable and appropriate development in their localities and are increasingly asking organisations such as CABE for help in delivering that through design excellence. For all these reasons, a step change in design quality to match the step change in housing numbers is in the interests of all parties.

However, if design quality is in everyone's interests, why are so many of the schemes audited by CABE so disappointing? It is hard to find anyone in the housing development process who will say that design quality is not important to them. And it is axiomatic that no-one sets out to create a development that is poor. Yet, despite this welcome commitment to improvement, new housing remains decidedly uninspiring. Why?

## Aspiration

The analysis of our case studies suggests that high aspiration, particularly by local planning authorities, is a key factor in delivering high-quality schemes. But the incentive structure within the planning system means that performance in terms of quality (as opposed to speed) is less thoroughly evaluated and barely rewarded. The publication of PPS3, with the high priority given to design quality and the commitment to monitor performance on it, should help here. Indeed, our audit

report last year called for just this change. Along with other elements of the new planning system, such as design and access statements and design coding, this should provide a good platform for improvement. But aspirations need to be raised still further.

One aspect of low aspiration is the paucity of examples of high-quality development to which people can aspire. Often planners and developers do not share a common experience or understanding of what is good. There is still a residual view that good design is a matter of taste, rather than something fundamentally based on a clear set of established principles. There is also an assumption in some quarters that good design is primarily achieved through expensive materials or bespoke solutions that by implication must necessarily impact on margins. Too many developers still regard design as an additional development cost rather than a means of increasing gross development value.

Furthermore, with the extraordinary challenge of climate change, and the imperative to ensure that sustainability considerations are embraced in all aspects of planning and construction, it is clear that new housing development must be as well designed as possible.

The Building for Life standard is an important tool in this, both because it showcases the best of ordinary, contemporary housing in a way that can be learned from, and because it sets out objective principles that can be used by developers and planners alike to ensure that good intentions are realised in bricks and mortar. Building for Life functions on three levels: as an award scheme; as an assessment tool, as in this audit; and as a predictive tool, against which development proposals can be judged. Local authorities and other public agencies are increasingly using this latter function to benchmark design quality before planning.

**We urge more local authorities to adopt this approach and signal their use of Building for Life explicitly in local planning policy and CABE will provide support and guidance to facilitate this. Government could include a field or reference to Building for Life on the proposed standard planning application form. We also urge developers to use the criteria, which have been agreed with their trade body, to inform and raise the quality of proposals that are brought to planning committees.**

Under the new PPS3, progress against design quality objectives will be reported on at a regional as well as local level. Regional government will therefore need to establish clearly what threshold it expects, and by sending a clear message, it can play an important role in raising the bar on what is acceptable. **At regional**

level, government offices, regional development agencies and regional assemblies need to set out clearly what they expect in terms of design quality.

**Regional organisations have an important role and should be given sufficient support to raise aspirations and develop the skills and capacity required at local level.** The regional centres of excellence and the architecture centres, working alongside the design networks of public and private sectors partners that have recently emerged within many regions, can help with the necessary change in culture. Networks, such as Designed Environment West Midlands, can help develop a common language of design quality used by all parties, so that bad design solutions and poor processes of engagement are quickly understood and routinely avoided in the future.

The public sector can also act to raise aspiration and expectation through its funding streams. In particular, **registered social landlords are increasingly operating as developers in their own right. They need to seize the opportunity to create exemplars of what can be achieved.** The audit shows that some are already beginning to do this. In much the same way that space standards across the sector were maintained by the example of Parker Morris in municipal housing, today's registered social landlords have the opportunity to lead the way. Given that they have a continuing commitment to their developments that many private developers do not, this will pay dividends. Good design will lower lifetime and management costs and so repay the investment in design quality.

With raised aspirations, **local authorities will have to become more proactive in setting out their demands. As a prerequisite, local authorities need to ensure that they develop thorough design policies, setting out what they expect of developers as required in paragraph 14 of PPS3.** They should be prepared to turn down planning applications on grounds of design quality. They should also make better use of masterplanning, which is a process as well as a product, and requires a good client, a good brief and good consultants to prepare it. This in turn requires sufficient and appropriate capacity and skills at every stage of the development process. The combination of thorough design policies and high-quality masterplanning is essential in making clear the kind of development required, strategically as well as in relation to specific sites<sup>7</sup>. And design policies in particular are essential to underpin an authority's decision to refuse planning permission on design grounds, should that decision be appealed. **We encourage local authorities without a design champion to consider appointing one, while**

<sup>7</sup> CABE, 2004, *Creating successful masterplans: a guide for clients*

**CABE will continue to undertake design training for design champions.** This will also help to increase the technical capacity of planning committees.

## Skills and capacity

The skills and capacity available to both 'sides' in the development process are central to the quality of new housing. **Developers need to strengthen their teams to be ready to meet the challenge of design quality,** both centrally and regionally, since its importance within the planning system is only set to grow. We welcome the fact that six of the top ten volume housebuilders have appointed design champions – Redrow, Taylor Woodrow, Crest Nicholson, Barratt Homes, Wilson Bowden, and Berkeley. These and others are working to ensure that they enlarge their skills bases, particularly around urban design. **We urge those that have yet to appoint a design champion to do so and make this public commitment to improving the quality of the products and places they produce.**

Similarly, the skills available to local planning authorities are critical. Particularly within smaller district authorities, it is often difficult to retain a critical mass of urban design expertise. Where this coincides with areas of substantial development, such as in some housing growth or market renewal areas, there can be problems of capacity. Within defined programme areas, **government should ensure that policy initiatives are funded to provide sufficient urban design capacity within the local planning authority. Alternatively, where individual councils are not able to retain their own expertise in-house, they should be encouraged to develop shared urban design resources, supported by agencies such as the Planning Advisory Service, CABE and the new Communities England being created from a merger of English Partnerships and the Housing Corporation.**

In addition, local authorities should routinely make use of design review panels to advise them on key sites of strategic importance. Support from an independent design review function has proved itself a powerful way of improving design quality. CABE has operated a national design review panel since its inception. This considers 350 schemes a year and 80 per cent of users say they find its advice helpful while 78 per cent alter their schemes in response to its comments. The government wrote to local authorities in December 2006 encouraging them to make use of the CABE design review service. Building on this success, CABE has recently been supporting the creation of regional design review panels to make the service more widely accessible. So far, five have been created. **CABE will continue to support the expansion and development**

**of regional design review panels, which in turn should prioritise significant housing developments whenever appropriate.**

More generally, the new **housing planning delivery grant should be tied to high-quality outcomes as well as to the delivery of housing numbers.** By awarding additional resources to those authorities that deliver better housing – as well as more housing – government can both incentivise design quality and enhance the design capacity within local planning authorities. Performance measures such as these are powerful drivers of behaviour.

## The policy framework

Good design is at the heart of the new planning policy framework. A great deal has been done since the advent of planning policy statement 1 (PPS1). But this commitment needs to be backed up with incentives for good design and penalties against poor design. Not least, local authorities need to be confident that the Planning Inspectorate will uphold at appeal local planning decisions that reject applications on the grounds of design quality. There is a real feeling among local planning authorities, particularly elected members, that their decisions will not be upheld at appeal and this makes them wary of turning down development on these grounds. The inspectorate, supported by CABE, has taken steps to address this concern, and CABE hopes to continue to work with it on removing this perception. Resolving the issue is, of course, dependent on local planning authorities setting out clear design policies, against which the inspectorate can make decisions.

Publication of the *Manual for streets* by the Department for Transport is imminent, and we urge developers and planners, as well as highway engineers, to engage with its provisions, which will be important for the layouts of new developments. **The *Manual for streets* is welcome, but it addresses only some residential streets. A similar exercise needs to be completed for streets of intermediate scale, where many people also live.**

**We also welcome the inclusion in PPS3 of the requirement to monitor design quality alongside other factors but it is important to ensure that a robust and lightweight mechanism is developed.** This requirement is also made at the regional level and agencies here will need to determine quickly what their expectations are for design quality.

Development on public land more generally should be led by high design standards to raise aspirations across the board. Over the past year, English Partnerships has moved to adopt the Building for Life criteria as a quality

threshold for proposed development and we would expect a similar commitment from its successor body, Communities England, which other agencies and authorities should then follow.

## Developer motivation

We have seen from the case studies that developers will comply with the requirements asked of them by the planning system – but in most cases will go no further. In part, this is a question of incentives. Developers need certainty and a level playing field that enables and encourages them to compete on quality. This will free the most forward looking to focus on using design to generate value and require the rest to raise their game. **In the case of climate change, many developers will need to review fundamental aspects of the design of their core housing product to achieve zero carbon standards.**

Incentives are also an interesting question within many companies. Most volume housebuilders operate through an organisational structure which is highly atomised. They may each have a large number of regional business units (Barratt Homes has 32, George Wimpey 26, for example), which frequently operate with a high degree of autonomy. This can ensure strong local knowledge and good local relationships. But it also places significant dependence on the abilities and commitment of a regional managing director to deliver good design.

It is noteworthy that reward systems within the major volume housebuilders rarely recognise the quality of what is created by each regional team. Rather, performance is historically appraised on the basis of margins and completions, with a new focus on customer satisfaction introduced in many companies after the first Barker report. Unsurprisingly, teams deliver what they are judged against, and this may need to change. Specifically, **regional chairs, or those with an equivalent responsibility, could be incentivised to ensure the delivery of good design as well as to deliver the numbers and manage their cost base efficiently. This could be done simply and cheaply by using the Building for Life criteria to judge a sample of schemes completed each year.** The process could be done in house, led by the design champion and facilitated by the design and technical team. This would create a new and valuable source of management information available to the board and embed the process of learning from what has been done and feed these ideas into the design and development process across the business. **CABE will continue to work with housebuilders to promote Building for Life as a tool for improving the design quality of developments, as well as an awards scheme for recognising and rewarding good design quality.**

# Appendix 1

## Schemes audited

### West Midlands

Location	Scheme	Local authority	Context	Housebuilder	Homes	Score*
Admaston	Dulwich Grange	Telford and Wrekin	Rural	George Wimpey North Midlands Ltd	66	49%
Birmingham	Ley Hill Farm Road	Birmingham	Suburban	Lovell Partnerships Ltd	150	60% <sup>1</sup>
Birmingham	Monyhull Hall Hospital Monyhull Hall Road	Birmingham	Suburban	Bellway Homes (Midlands) Ltd	600	67% <sup>2</sup>
Birmingham	Clarence Gardens former Highcroft Hospital	Birmingham	Suburban	Barratt Homes (West Midlands) Ltd	444	70% <sup>3</sup>
Birmingham	The Poplars Edgbaston	Birmingham	Suburban	David Wilson Homes Ltd	50	70%
Birmingham	Castle Vale	Birmingham	Suburban	Lovell Partnerships Ltd	240	77% <sup>4</sup>
Birmingham	Jupiter Phase 3 Sherborne Street	Birmingham	Urban	Redrow Homes (Midlands) Ltd	267	80%
Brownhills	Barrow close Off Coppice Road	Walsall	Suburban	Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd West Midlands Region	56	41%
Cannock	Off Heath Way	Cannock Chase	Suburban	George Wimpey West Midlands Ltd	81	41%
Droitwich	The Worcestershire Hotel St Andrews Road	Wychavon	Urban	George Wimpey West Midlands Ltd	96	64%
Kidderminster	land off Hoo Road/ College Road	Wyre Forest	Suburban	David Wilson Homes Ltd	76	53%
Leek	St Edwards Hospital Cheddleton	Staffordshire Moorlands	Rural	Redrow Homes (Midland) Ltd	352	57%
Lichfield	Victoria Park phase 5 Chesterfield Road	Lichfield	Suburban	Taylor Woodrow Development Ltd	32	63%
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Lyme Valley Allotments and Roselands Clinic	Newcastle-under-Lyme	Suburban	Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd West Midlands Region	129	39%
Nuneaton	The Lodge	Nuneaton and Bedworth	Suburban	George Wimpey Midland Ltd	402	36%
Nuneaton	King Edward Place King Edward Drive	Nuneaton and Bedworth	Urban	Taylor Woodrow Development Ltd	73	39%
Oldbury	The Wharf	Sandwell	Urban	Bellway Homes (Midlands) Ltd	70	33%
Rugby	Edward Street and Gladstone Street	Rugby	Suburban	Redrow Homes (Midlands) Ltd	24	67% <sup>5</sup>
Rugeley	The Birches Hednesford Road	Cannock Chase	Suburban	George Wimpey North Midlands Ltd	332	50%
Shipston-on-Stour	Tilemans Lane,	Stratford-on-avon	Rural	David Wilson Homes Ltd	127	59%
Smethwick	St Pauls Road and Marshall Street	Sandwell	Suburban	Lovell Partnerships Ltd	36	44% <sup>6</sup>
Solihull	Phase 4, Dickens Heath	Solihull	Suburban	Redrow Homes (Midlands) Ltd	96	61%
Stafford	Queens Court	Baswich	Suburban	Barratt Homes (West Midlands) Ltd	138	46%
Stafford	Pioneer Way	Stafford	Suburban	Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd West Midlands Region	29	51%
Stafford	Marston grove, r/o Marston Road	Stafford	Urban	Westbury Homes (Holdings) Ltd West Midlands Region	20	57%
Tamworth	Basin Lane and Blythe Street	Tamworth	Suburban	Lovell Partnerships Ltd	135	49%

\* Schemes were scored under Building for Life criteria (see appendix 2) with a score of 80 per cent or more being very good, 70 per cent or more being good, 50 per cent or more being average and less than 50 per cent being poor

<sup>1</sup> The audit merited this scheme for timber frame construction, using ethical timber procurement and recycling construction materials

<sup>2</sup> Scheme merited for sustainable urban drainage scheme, managed grassland, enhanced ecology of watercourse and retention of mature oak trees; reduced construction waste; ecohomes 'good' rating achieved <sup>3</sup> Scheme merited for recycling construction materials and reduced construction waste

<sup>4</sup> Scheme merited for incorporating rainwater harvesting, greywater recycling, solar heating and photovoltaic panels

<sup>5</sup> Ecohomes award-winning scheme 2006 <sup>6</sup> Scheme merited for recycled materials and reduced construction waste

Location	Scheme	Local authority	Context	Housebuilder	Homes	Score
Tipton	Dudley Port Rolling Mills	Sandwell	Suburban	George Wimpey West Midlands Ltd	233	41%
Tipton	Conway Packaging Services Groveland Road Lower Church Lane	Sandwell	Suburban	George Wimpey West Midlands Ltd	70	40%
Warley	Off Poplar Rise, Tividale	Sandwell	Suburban	Bellway Homes (Midlands) Ltd	149	33%
Warley	Off Dudley Wood Road, Dudley Wood	Dudley	Suburban	Barratt Homes (West Midlands) Ltd	113	33% <sup>7</sup>
West Bromwich	Church Lane and Small Street	Sandwell	Suburban	Barratt Homes (West Midlands) Ltd	45	41% <sup>8</sup>
Wolverhampton	700 Stafford Road	Wolverhampton	Suburban	David Wilson Homes Ltd	24	60%
Worcester	Windermere Drive Fairfield Close	Worcester	Suburban	Lovell Partnerships Ltd	84	49%

<sup>7</sup> Scheme merited for use of locally sourced natural building materials

<sup>8</sup> Scheme merited for use of recycled materials and reducing construction waste

### East Midlands

Location	Scheme	Local authority	Context	Housebuilder	Homes	Score
Castle Donington	Station Road, Castle Donington	North West Leicestershire	Rural	Barratt Homes East Midlands	72	37%
Chesterfield	Hasland Hall Park Plots 401–443	Chesterfield	Suburban	William Davis Ltd	43	59%
Derby	Royal Highland Grange	Derby	Suburban	David Wilson Homes (North Midlands) Ltd	61	31%
Derby	Former Alexandra Hosiery Mills Site	Derby	Urban	William Davis Ltd	83	36%
Derby	off Blenheim Drive Allestree, Derby	Derby	Suburban	David Wilson Homes (North Midlands) Ltd	72	43%
Grantham	Riverside Park Opp Grantham Hospital	South Kesteven	Suburban	Morris Homes (East Midlands) Ltd	68	61%
Ilkeston	Land off Park Road	Erewash	Urban	George Wimpey East Midlands Ltd	42	34%
Kettering	The Copse Mawsley Village	Kettering	Rural	George Wimpey East Midlands Ltd	88	54%
Leicester	Newarke Close	Leicester	Urban	William Davis Ltd	163	49%
Leicester	Leicester Racecourse Straight Mile	Oadby and Wigston	Suburban	Jelson Ltd	50	54%
Leicester	254 London Road and 9 Elmfield Avenue	Leicester	Urban	William Davis Ltd	24	63%
Leicester	The Hermitage Court Hotel	Oadby and Wigston	Suburban	Taylor Woodrow Development Ltd	73	64%
Leicester	Freemans Meadow Upperton Road	Leicester	Urban	Barratt Homes East Midlands	475	84%
Loughborough	Mariners Quay Barnsdale Close off Derby Road	Charnwood	Urban	William Davis Ltd	72	49%
Loughborough	The Meadows South of Ashby Road	Charnwood	Suburban	Bovis Homes Ltd Central Region	57	49%
Mansfield	Cavendish Park Clipstone Drive	Newark and Sherwood	Rural	Bovis Homes Ltd Central Region	140	54%
Melton Mowbray	Adj Lake Terrace BRS Depot	Melton	Urban	Barratt Homes East Midlands	27	43%

Location	Scheme	Local authority	Context	Housebuilder	Homes	Score
Newark	Balderton Hospital	Newark and Sherwood	Suburban	David Wilson Homes (North Midlands) Ltd	311	57%
Newark on Trent	Emmendingen Avenue	Newark and Sherwood	Suburban	George Wimpey East Midlands Ltd	39	46%
Northampton	Riverside Wharf Southbridge	Northampton	Urban	Bellway Homes (East Midlands)	209	49%
Nottingham	Melbourne Court Nottingham	Nottingham	Suburban	William Davis Ltd	20	43%
Nottingham	High Pavement College/ College Walk	Nottingham	Suburban	Barratt Homes East Midlands	564	44%
Nottingham	Ashwood Green Sheepwash Lane	Ashfield	Suburban	Morris Homes (East Midlands) Ltd	103	46%
Nottingham	Potters Hollow Land off Leonard Street	Nottingham	Suburban	George Wimpey East Midlands Ltd	179	47%
Nottingham	203 Loughborough Road	Rushcliffe	Suburban	Barratt Homes East Midlands	40	50%
Nottingham	Kings Lodge Chetwynd Barracks	Broxtowe	Urban	Barratt Homes East Midlands	383	54%
Nottingham	Knighthayes – land adjoining Grantham Canal	Rushcliffe	Suburban	Bovis Homes Ltd Central Region	148	56%
Nottingham	The Walled Garden Off Main Rd	Rushcliffe	Suburban	Bovis Homes Ltd Central Region	47	56%
Nottingham	Mapperley Hospital Development Site	Nottingham	Suburban	David Wilson Homes (North Midlands) Ltd	47	63%
Oakham	South of RPC Containers Ltd	Rutland	Urban	Barratt Homes East Midlands	71	46%
Retford	Watersmeet Former Retford Paper Mill	Bassetlaw	Suburban	Bovis Homes Ltd Central Region	100	46%
Retford	Watersmeet off Albert Road	Bassetlaw	Suburban	Bovis Homes Ltd Central Region	25	49%
Sileby	Saddlers Lodge Brabazon Works	Charnwood	Suburban	George Wimpey East Midlands Ltd	34	56%
Worksop	Belgravia Court Raymoth Lane	Bassetlaw	Suburban	Persimmon Homes plc	110	41%

## South West

Location	Scheme	Local authority	Context	Housebuilder	Homes	Score
Bideford	Potblack Factory	Torrige	Suburban	Midas Homes Ltd	80	37% <sup>9</sup>
Branksome Park	Oakhurst	Poole	Urban	McCarthy & Stone (Developments) Ltd	54	54%
Bridgwater	Carnival Park	Sedgemoor	Suburban	Barratt Homes (Exeter) Ltd	266	37%
Bridgwater	Trinity Gate	Sedgemoor	Suburban	Persimmon Homes (South West) Ltd	220	43%
Bristol	The Park	City of Bristol	Urban	Bovis Homes Ltd	24	60%
Bristol	Horfield Regeneration Scheme	City of Bristol	Urban	Bovis Homes Ltd	819	69% <sup>10</sup>
Calne	Lavender View	North Wiltshire	Suburban	Bloor Homes Ltd	95	54%
Camelford	The Courtyards	North Cornwall	Rural	Persimmon Homes plc	23	57%
Chippenham	Fenway Park	North Wiltshire	Urban	Redrow Homes (SW) Ltd	136	59%
Christchurch	Riverland Court	Christchurch	Urban	McCarthy & Stone (Developments) Ltd	82	51%
Churchward	Mc Arthur Court	Swindon	Urban	Barratt Homes (Bristol) Ltd	262	46%
Exeter	Kings Heath	Exeter	Suburban	Barratt Homes (Exeter) Ltd	217	56% <sup>11</sup>
Exeter	Kings Heath	Exeter	Suburban	Persimmon Homes (South West) Ltd	104	57%
Exeter	Rougemont Mews	Exeter	Suburban	Persimmon Homes	73	57%
Frome	Ley Vale	Mendip	Urban	Redrow Homes (SW) Ltd	204	70%
Gloucester	Collingwood Crescent	Gloucester	Urban	Redrow Homes (SW) Ltd	254	59%
Gloucester	Copeland Park	Gloucester	Suburban	Bovis Homes Ltd	86	67%
Newquay	Pondsmere	Restormel	Suburban	Midas Homes Ltd	55	57% <sup>12</sup>
Penzance	Trafalgar Court	Penwith	Urban	McCarthy & Stone (Developments) Ltd	37	51%
Plymouth	Renaissance	Plymouth	Suburban	Barratt Homes (Exeter) Ltd	50	44%
Plymouth	Moorland Reach	Plymouth	Suburban	Persimmon Homes (South West) Ltd	41	53%
Shepton Mallet	Dukes Rise	Mendip	Suburban	Bloor Homes Ltd	109	76% <sup>13</sup>
Sidmouth	Stowford Rise	East Devon	Suburban	Midas Homes Ltd	47	34% <sup>14</sup>
Swindon	The Hamptons, Priory Vale	Swindon	Suburban	Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Ltd	89	54%
Swindon	Whytes	Swindon	Urban	Bovis Homes Ltd	156	54%
Swindon	Kelton Rise, Priory Vale	Swindon	Suburban	Bovis Homes Ltd	181	56%
Swindon	Abbey Manor, Priory Vale	Swindon	Suburban	Redrow Homes (SW) Ltd	132	60%
Swindon	The Nurseries, Priory Vale	Swindon	Suburban	Bloor Homes Ltd	246	61%
Swindon	Chantry Park, Priory Vale	Swindon	Suburban	Barratt Homes (Bristol) Ltd	65	63%
Swindon	Angel Ridge	Swindon	Suburban	Bloor Homes Ltd	252	63%
Tiverton	The Hayes	Mid Devon	Suburban	Bellway Homes (SW) Ltd	42	60%
Tiverton	Celebration Park	Mid Devon	Suburban	Barratt Homes (Exeter) Ltd	59	64%
Westbury	Leigh Park Development	West Wiltshire	Suburban	Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Ltd	33	50%

<sup>9</sup> Scheme merited for recycled materials and reduced construction waste

<sup>10</sup> Scheme merited for ecohomes good/very good standard on later phases of social housing

<sup>11</sup> Scheme merited for use of prefabricated modular units and recycled materials

<sup>12</sup> Scheme merited for use of recycled materials and reducing construction waste; sustainable drainage system

<sup>13</sup> Scheme merited for use of locally sourced natural building materials

<sup>14</sup> Scheme merited for use of recycled materials and reducing construction waste.

# Appendix 2

## Methodology

### Selection of schemes

A total of 100 schemes were audited across the three regions. Schemes that were eligible for auditing included those that were:

- larger than 20 units in size
- completed between January 2003 and August 2006 (the date of the audit)
- built by one of the top 10 housebuilders in the region, based on the number of units completed within the same period.

Barbour ABI identified the top 10 housebuilders, and provided the database of eligible schemes, based on planning applications. Numbers of completions were based on the estimated completion date provided in the planning application. There were 534 eligible schemes in total.

Initially, a sample of 135 developments (45 in each region) was randomly selected from the pool of eligible schemes, with probability proportional to size (PPS). The initial selection included 35 reserve schemes, which were substituted when schemes were found not to be sufficiently complete for auditing, resulting in the sample of 100. The sampling procedure ensured that the housing included was representative of completions in the three regions during the period of the audit.

### Assessing design quality

The audit was based on the 20 Building for Life criteria, which are grouped under four overall headings:

- character
- roads, parking and pedestrianisation
- design and construction
- environment and community.

The majority of criteria were evaluated by a site visit, with the audit team completing a structured survey that allowed them to score each of the criteria and record both photographic and written evidence. Each of the 14 criteria assessed by site visit were given a score ranging from one to five, where one was the lowest possible score and five the highest.

Before the audits took place, pilot visits to a number of schemes were carried out with all members of the team present to ensure that a consistent scoring procedure was applied. Once all audits were completed, the audit team reviewed the findings to check the consistency of the approach. Adjustments were made to the scores as part of this process.

The scores are presented as percentages and schemes categorised as very good, good, average or poor according to the following definitions:

- **very good:** an overall score of 80 per cent or more
- **good:** an overall score of 70 per cent or more
- **average:** an overall score of 50 per cent or more
- **poor:** an overall score of less than 50 per cent.

The good band has been adjusted to 70 per cent (rather than 75 per cent used in previous audits) to make it consistent with the Building for Life award scheme. However, this has very little effect on results obtained from previous audits. Results for all nine regions presented in this report incorporate the change.

The following criteria could not be assessed through a site visit:

- Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as building regulations?
- Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality or attractiveness?
- Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?
- Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?
- Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
- Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?

Instead, these were addressed through a questionnaire sent to each of the housebuilders whose schemes were included in the audit requesting information on those schemes. However, since the response rate was low (responses were received for 21 schemes only) it was not possible to use these findings in the aggregate scores for each scheme. Those that have responded on environmental design have been acknowledged in appendix 1.

## Investigating the views of residents

The views of residents were investigated by means of a survey by Ipsos MORI during autumn 2006, in 33 out of the 100 schemes included in the audit.

Census surveys, attempting to interview residents in every home, were conducted at each of the six case study schemes. A total of 704 residents across the six schemes were interviewed; the average adjusted response rate was 68 per cent.

Quota surveys were carried out at a further 27 schemes included in the audit. The sample was based on completing a target of around 20 interviews at each development, and incorporated two sets of quotas, property and tenure. The information for setting quotas was obtained from developers.

The combined data (referred to in the report as the averaged responses) are based on a total of 643 interviews, comprising 523 from the quota surveys and 120 from the census surveys (20 randomly selected from each case study).

## Acknowledgments

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The survey of residents was conducted by Ipsos MORI.

### **We acknowledge with thanks the individuals from the following organisations who contributed to the case studies:**

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Birmingham City Council  
Bloor Homes South West  
Bovis Homes (SW) Ltd  
Bristol City Council  
Bristol Community Housing Foundation  
Castle Vale Housing Action Trust  
David Wilson Homes  
George Wimpey East Midlands Ltd  
Kettering Borough Council  
Lovell Partnerships Ltd  
Mendip District Council  
Newark and Sherwood District Council  
Robert Adam Architects  
RPS Group plc  
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
Shepherd Epstein Hunter  
Walker Troup Architects.

Thanks also to the many residents of the case study schemes who gave up their time and agreed to be photographed for this report.

### **Advisory panel**

Yolande Barnes, FPD Savills Ltd  
Krystyna Blackburn, The Housing Forum  
Nick Dexter, DCLG  
Paul Doyle, HM Treasury  
Jenna Littler, DCLG  
John Stewart, Home Builders Federation  
Carolyn Whitehead, DEGW  
Derek Worthing, University of West England.

### **Regional partners**

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Regeneration East Midlands  
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RegenWM  
The Architecture Centre  
creating:excellence.

## Criteria used in this audit

### Character

- 1 Does the scheme feel like a place with a distinctive character?
- 2 Do buildings exhibit architectural quality?
- 3 Are streets defined by a well-structured layout?
- 4 Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?
- 5 Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape and topography?

### Roads, parking and pedestrianisation

- 6 Does the building layout take priority over the roads and car parking, so that the highways do not dominate?
- 7 Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?
- 8 Is the car parking well integrated and situated so it supports the street scene?
- 9 Does the scheme integrate with existing roads, paths and surrounding development?
- 10 Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?

### Design and construction

- 11 Is the design specific to the scheme?
- 12 Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?

### Environment and community

- 13 Does the development have easy access to public transport?
- 14 Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafes?

As England embarks on major housing growth, and we all face up to the challenges of climate change, the design of new homes and neighbourhoods has never been more important. This final part of CABE's national housing audit looks specifically at new developments in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West and also completes our assessment of the quality of new homes in England as a whole. It uncovers some disturbing evidence about the quality of some schemes, but also highlights some inspiring examples of what good design can achieve.

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