

National impact assessment report 2006-07



THE NATIONAL AFFORDABLE HOMES AGENCY



October 2007

Acknowledgements

Our thanks and appreciation must go to the numerous housing associations, their staff and residents who assisted with the impact assessment process, in particular with the site visits. Their support, knowledge and insight were invaluable to the project. We would also wish to thank all the local authorities, and the town and parish council representatives, who gave freely of their time to assist with this Impact Assessment programme.

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1. Introduction

This report summarises the main findings of the National Impact Assessment Programme for 2006-07. A significant number of Housing Corporation staff carried out the impact assessment visits and questionnaires that underpin this report. Another key data source for this report was the residents' questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were also obtained from housing associations and local authorities.

The report suggests some key lessons for future years.

Objectives

A key objective of the methodology for the 2006-07 Impact Assessment Programme was to collect data in a quantified format.

The underlying objective for this methodological shift was to obtain a clearer picture of what has either worked well, and can be further disseminated and what significant issues have arisen that require further enquiry, research and improvement.

The 2006-07 Impact Assessment Programme was based around the following themes:

- high density – to be defined as 80 dwellings per hectare;
- extra care – defined as sheltered with extra care; and

- intermediate rent – defined as new build options falling between social rent and private outright sale, i.e. all low-cost home ownership.

Within these themes, a number of potentially common topics were identified including the following:

- parking;
- security;
- EcoHomes;
- flats served by lifts;
- family housing in flats;
- maintenance;
- pepper-potting;
- Lifetime Homes;
- Section 106 Standards; and
- modern methods of construction (MMC).

Process

The impact assessment process involved the selection of Corporation funded schemes, which were completed between two and three years ago, against the key issues set out above.

Impact assessments differed this year as those carrying them out were not obliged to produce individual written reports, but instead it required the completion of a number of detailed questionnaires aimed at specific groups. The Housing Corporation assessors all received specific Building for Life training to equip them for this exercise.

There were four questionnaires and these are set out below:

- Housing Corporation questionnaire (completed by the Housing Corporation assessor);
- resident questionnaire (completed by the Housing Corporation assessor);
- RSL questionnaire; and
- local authority questionnaire.

In particular the questionnaires were developed to assess design and quality issues and to gauge their impact on residents. They were also developed to collect quantifiable data that would be more amenable to analysis. The majority of questions either required a 'yes' or 'no' response or a number chosen from one to five, where one corresponds to a low/unsatisfactory position and five corresponds to a high/very satisfactory position. These questionnaires have been carefully analysed and the findings are evaluated below.

Theme analysis

Each of the Corporation's field offices selected schemes based on the agreed criteria, i.e. high density, extra care and intermediate rent. Some themes had a greater representation in particular fields which may explain some of the differences between the fields' reports.

Selection by field

	High density	Extra care	Intermediate rent	Other	Total
South	4	5	3	7	19
West					
South	9	3	10	3	25
East					
North	1	7	12	1	21
London	16	4	9	11	40
Central	1	8	6	0	15
Total	31	27	40	19	120

It should be noted that the impact assessment process is a 'snapshot in time'. It has involved a selection of schemes built two or three years ago which were possibly designed more than five years ago. A number of housing associations commented that, given this time span, they had already acknowledged the lessons learnt and have since made improvements to their designs and procedures. One comment received appears to sum up the situation: "The scheme was cutting edge when it was designed but it has now been open for three years and does not reflect all the new thinking on older persons' accommodation."

2. Findings

2.1 Housing Corporation questionnaire

The Housing Corporation questionnaire is based primarily on Building for Life standards (see www.buildingforlife.org.uk) and is concerned mainly with external design and the environment. It is divided into six distinctive sections:

- character;
- roads, parking and pedestrians;
- design and construction;
- environment and community;
- Building for Life score; and
- general.

Character

Regarding the question ‘Does the building exhibit architectural quality?’, the national survey indicates that the majority of new developments exhibit such quality. Nationally our data indicated that just under 70% of our schemes exhibited architectural quality – the North field’s schemes reflected a score of 86% (Building for Life Gold standard) whereas London, South East and Central fields all scored around the 60% mark. The fact that the majority of the North’s schemes are intermediate rent may have had a bearing on this result.

Nationally, schemes appear to have ‘streets defined by a well-structured building layout’ (69%) and perform strongly with respect to ‘the buildings and the layout making it easy to find your way

around’ (85%). The national score for schemes that ‘exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography’ was 66%. This is especially so in the South West (84%) where designers have often had to overcome particularly difficult topographical problems.

The South West also scored well on schemes contributing to ‘places that feel like one with a distinctive character’.

Roads, parking and pedestrians

In considering the ‘building layout taking priority over the roads and car parking’, the national score was 63%. The South East, North and Central fields indicated that about half of their schemes complied with this standard.

Nationally most schemes appear to ‘integrate with existing roads paths and surrounding developments’. However, car parking in the North and Central fields scored below 60% for schemes ‘integrating well into the street scene’, whilst in both the South West and London, these two fields both scored over 80%.

Most interestingly, all the fields have indicated strongly that ‘the public spaces and pedestrian routes are overlooked’ and ‘they feel safe’. The national score for this Building for Life question was just over 80%. This may be testimony to the success of the Secured by Design initiative introduced by the police and supported by the Housing Corporation over the last ten years.

Design and construction

The survey revealed that ‘design being specific to the scheme’ is the case for the majority of development nationally, and ‘generally public space is well designed and has suitable management arrangements in place’. However, schemes where ‘most buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima such as building regulations’ scored 62%. This score should have been higher given that schemes using Housing Corporation funding must meet Scheme Development Standards which look to exceed the statutory minima.

The most striking statistic in this section is that nationally most consider that the majority of schemes have not ‘made use of advances in technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness’. The national percentage for this Building for Life question was 38%. This could be because those undertaking the survey have not appreciated that the technology available when schemes were first designed is not what is available today. Other reasons might be the expense of using advanced technology and possible conservatism on behalf of developers and associations.

One of the few Building for Life questions that considers internal design is ‘Do the internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?’ Nationally it appears that internal spaces generally don’t allow for such changes – and the percentage of schemes was just 38%.

Environment and community

All of the schemes for London and the South East have ‘easy access to public transport’. However 5% or 6% of schemes in the North, the South West and Central fields do not have such access, possibly due mainly to houses being located in more rural settings. Importantly, the vast majority of developments nationally also provide (or are close to) community facilities such as schools, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafés.

The survey indicated that a substantial majority of the schemes viewed nationally do not have ‘any features that reduce its environmental impact’. This may have been due to a misunderstanding of what was meant by ‘reducing environmental impact’. The South West field scored highly on this question (almost 100%) because its interpretation, legitimately, included such features as utilising energy efficient lights.

The national survey reveals that in the vast majority of cases ‘tenure mix reflects the needs of the local community’ and that there is ‘an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community’.

Building for Life elemental score

Nationally schemes fared reasonably regarding their Building for Life elemental scores. If an individual scheme meets 14 out of the 20 questions (70%), it is eligible to apply for a silver standard. Schemes that score 16 out of 20 (80%) are eligible to apply for a gold standard. Of the scheme

sample, 66% were assessed as meeting 14 or more of the 20 elements and were potentially equivalent to Building for Life silver standard.

General

Whole life costs

Nationally the majority of housing associations did not monitor whole life costs when they were designing the assessed schemes. However, many associations reported that they do now monitor whole life costs as a matter of course for all new developments. From the 2004-06 bids round, bidders have been questioned on their whole life cost performance.

Noise pollution

Noise pollution can be either caused by poor sound insulation between homes or else excessively noisy neighbours. Our survey did not distinguish between these causes. The survey looked to address the sound insulation between homes issue. It revealed that at the national level, without differentiating between the different themes, there appears to be a satisfactory level. The national average score was 3.9 out of a possible 5 for total satisfaction with respect to this issue. However, when the high density schemes were analysed in isolation, this national average score dropped to 3.0. The majority of the high density schemes were situated in London and the South East fields where it would be fair to assume that flats were the prominent type of home.

Extra care

Both the quality of the fixtures and fittings in extra care schemes and their attractiveness and homeliness produced high scores nationally: 4.3 and 4.4 respectively out of a possible 5. It was only in London where the scores for both of these aspects dropped below 4.0. Extra care schemes, on the whole, reflected a good level of quality which translates into resident satisfaction as indicated by the high national scores.

Parking

Parking has been a contentious issue for many years and impact assessment questionnaires appear to point to it continuing to be so. A comparison of high density schemes with intermediate rent schemes indicates that parking is far more of a problem for the former. This again points to London and the South East having the most parking issues. The North had with-in curtilage parking for the vast majority of the schemes surveyed, which were mostly intermediate rent/sale.

The apparent lack of use of 'specifically designed non-curtilage parking' was also evident. Nationally, this question scored 2.6 out of a possible 5. Analysing the high density and intermediate rent themes separately showed that both themes scored below 3.0 for this question: the scores were 2.3 and 2.8 respectively.

It was also interesting to note that the provision of appropriate car parking scored highly – nationally this score was 3.9. This would suggest that parking problems may be more of a management issue than a design/provision issue.

The survey results also show that the majority of the schemes surveyed in the North (4.6) and the South West (4.8) have ‘appropriately provided car parking’. The lowest field scores were London (3.3), South East (3.5) and Central (3.3).

It is interesting to note here that there is one scheme in the South West, Topsham First School, where there is no car parking available on the scheme at all, but both the housing association and the residents feel that car parking is appropriately provided, there being a shopping centre, bus and a train service within walking distance, and the opportunity to join a car-sharing club.

Outdoor spaces

The impact assessment survey indicated that, nationally, schemes were considered to provide attractive places to live. The national average for this question was just over 4. Again, there was a difference between high density and intermediate rent schemes whose scores were 3.5 and 4.0 respectively. Extra care schemes indicated a slightly higher level of attractiveness, scoring 4.2.

In contrast, the issue of residents taking ownership of the outdoor spaces indicated a score of around 3.0 for all fields apart from the South West, which scored a high 4.9. The ownership of outdoor spaces more or less coincided with the satisfactoriness of outdoor areas/open spaces. However, the North field reflected the greatest disparity between these two elements. Across all themes in this field, residents taking ownership of outdoor spaces scored 3.1 compared with a score of 4.1 for the satisfactoriness of outdoor areas/open spaces.

Practical issues

The national score for clothes drying provision – across all theme types – is 3.6, which suggests that overall the suitability of clothes drying provision is fair to good. However, London and the South East have the lowest scores for this provision, at 2.8 and 3.2 respectively. Drilling down into the theme types further reveals that the root of these scores seems to be consistent with the greater proportion of high density schemes in these two fields. For this theme the scores are 2.5 and 2.6 for London and the South East respectively.

Storage space has long been a contentious issue for tenant satisfaction surveys – given the choice people would always like more. Yet again the North and the South West fare best. However, nationally, almost a third of all residents class their storage situation as ‘not very good’ or ‘poor’. An analysis of the theme types again indicates that high density schemes score least well for storage space.

Flats

On the whole, lifts are provided in just over half the three and four storey buildings surveyed. Most of these lifts have been designed to accommodate both wheelchairs and carers. The additional cost of lift provision is well documented but so too is the inconvenience of living in three storey and above buildings without the provision of a lift.

Many associations have a policy not to house young families in flats, or only house them on the ground floor. Thus the question 'Do families in flats appear to be happy with this type of dwelling?' does not apply to the majority. However, where families are housed in flats the survey shows that they are generally happy, particularly in the South East and the South West. London and the North field showed the greatest level of dissatisfaction with this housing arrangement – the survey indicated that dissatisfaction existed in one out of three schemes in London, whereas this level rose to just over 50% in the North field.

The majority of residents consider the communal parts of the properties to be maintained somewhere between 'satisfactorily' and 'very well'. However, there are a number of residents, particularly in the North, who consider the communal areas to be badly maintained.

Section 106 schemes

In both the South East and the South West about 50% of schemes selected for the Impact

Assessment Programme this year were Section 106 schemes. It is less for the North, Central and London fields.

In the South West the survey has revealed that the majority of the S106 schemes are fairly indistinguishable from the sale units on the same site.

MMC properties

The survey aimed to find out whether or not the standard of finish and build of MMC properties is better than conventionally constructed buildings. We found that nationally, with the exception of the South West, 54% of the schemes that used MMC did not produce a better standard of finish and build quality. One scheme in the South West was perceived to have produced a lower quality finish.

The survey did not distinguish between the different definitions of MMC and so it is not possible to conclude exactly if there is an issue with MMC. It is possible that the sub-assembly definition was used to label the scheme as MMC, when in reality it would have been fairer to categorise it as a conventional scheme. It may also be the case that current use of MMC has ironed out any performance issues.

However, the indication from the survey certainly points to a need for the Corporation to gain greater assurance of the 'as built' performance of MMC methods.

2.2 Resident questionnaire

The resident questionnaire is a simple checklist that has been introduced to ensure that the views of the people living in properties, usually over a number of years, can be taken into account in future bidding rounds. The national results will now be explored.

1. Is the area you live in and the appearance of the homes attractive and convenient?

The survey information shows that residents in the South West and the North feel most positive about the appearance of their homes and the convenience of them. The survey has also revealed that very few people are completely dissatisfied.

2. How adequate is the size and layout of your home?

Most residents interviewed have indicated that they are generally happy or fairly happy with the size and layout of their home. There remains a small minority, of approximately 5%, who are not happy with their home.

3. Is the sound insulation in your home satisfactory?

It has been recognised that sound insulation has long been a problem for residents, particularly those living in flats or maisonettes. Our surveys have indicated that despite changes in the building regulations, which have led to some improvement,

residents have informed us that there are still substantial problems in this area, with none of the fields coming out particularly well and the South East faring the worst, with 41% of the properties surveyed coming below average. Nationally, 20% of the residents surveyed deemed their homes to be below average in terms of sound insulation.

4. How easy is it for you and your visitors to get around your home?

The general indication from the survey was that there is room for improvement in accessibility standards although this was less so the case in the South West and the North fields.

5. How safe do you feel in your home?

The residents in the North and South West fields feel themselves to be the safest in their homes. Those living in the South East and Central fields felt a little less safe where as those living in London feel the least safe. The national average score for this question was 4.18 (out of 5).

6. How aware are you of any environmentally friendly features in your home?

Nationally only about 20% of those surveyed were aware of the environmentally friendly features in their homes, with 35% completely unaware of such features. Those in the North were the most uninformed at 48%.

7. Are you satisfied with the design of the outside of your home such as the garden and paths?

Overall, on a national scale the survey showed that 16% of residents are not satisfied with the outside of their houses, including the gardens and paths, and there are very few who are very happy with them – excepting the South West. This may perhaps be due to the survey's large percentage of flats, particularly in the South East and London fields. Please see Appendix B for further details.

8. Do you consider your fuel and water bills are reasonable?

Just over half the residents interviewed in the South West and North fields consider their bills to be reasonable. Nationally most people considered their bills to be satisfactory.

9. Are your bills less than in your previous home?

This was a difficult question for some people to answer for a number of reasons. Many people came from a different sized or different type of house or from living with parents etc. However, it appears that nearly 35% of people interviewed by the London field office do not consider their bills to be less than in their previous homes. Perhaps the recent fuel price rises have cancelled out any of the benefits of insulation improvement.

10. Would you like more services provided by your housing association?

This question caused a certain amount of confusion. People often replied by asking what they could have. However, the survey has revealed that the type of additional services people would most like from their association are:

- window cleaning;
- gardening services;
- assisted decorating services;
- more cleaning in communal areas;
- a better repairs service;
- more than one parking space; and
- a hairdresser.

11. Would you be prepared to pay for more services?

The results of this question were fairly varied with some people quite willing to pay more for the additional services they wanted and others definitely not willing to do so.

12. Are you aware since moving to your home of opportunities to become involved in resident or local community activities organised by your housing association?

Approximately 45% of residents interviewed nationally were aware of opportunities organised by their association, and some had become involved with local activities. However, this did

vary nationally, with associations in the South West and the North fields being better at this. Many residents spoke about regular newsletters and correspondence from their association, while others were involved in their neighbourhood watch or resident associations.

13. If not, would you like to have been involved?

The interesting point raised from this question is that residents seem to want to be more involved with the activities of their associations – particularly in London and the North fields, where almost 25% of those questioned replied that they would like to have been involved.

14. What features of your home could be improved?

The question coupled with the one below, i.e. what features residents liked, produced an array of often conflicting messages. Consequently, the results from these two questions are best summarised in respective lists which can be found at Appendix B.

15. What features do you like?

Please see list in Appendix B for details.

2.3 Local authority questionnaire

An important part of the National Impact Assessment report is the input from the local authorities. In the region of 100 local authority representatives were interviewed as part of the process and they revealed various lessons learnt, both for themselves and the Housing Corporation.

‘Good communication’ and ‘partnership working’ from very early on in the development of a scheme, between all the partners and stakeholders including the local authority, the RSL, the developer, the community and the Housing Corporation, was deemed to be most important for a successful scheme. It is also seen as vital for ‘resolving unforeseen difficulties’ and for creating a sustainable allocation policy.

The most difficult relationships to manage appeared to be those between the developer and all the other parties. ‘The negotiation with the developer was difficult.’ Some local authorities explained how they have difficulty managing developers and are looking to the Corporation for more guidance and assistance – for example with legal agreements – in order to help ensure affordable housing is delivered. One local authority felt that the Housing Corporation should ‘stress to developers that strategic housing needs must be met if grant funding is required’. Another local authority representative was concerned that developers are controlling the housing programme, as development is ‘so Section 106 dependent’

at the moment. 'If the housing market dried up, then the developers would be calling all the shots.' There were also concerns about housing associations not being able to compete with developers over land and the fact that often local authorities don't have very much land of their own.

One local authority representative felt that there was currently 'downward pressure on grant and an aggressive drive for efficiency'. Other local authorities suggested the Corporation could be more flexible, as the housing markets can change rapidly and this can 'compromise what appeared to be robust schemes'. However, others considered that the fixed grant allocation process had been 'difficult and bureaucratic in the past and caused delays', but that the Corporation's new approach is much improved.

There was also a strong plea to continue to make funding available to assist smaller housing associations, and others talked about refurbishment schemes playing an important role in urban renewal and the provision of quality homes. Others wanted to bring back into use derelict buildings in order to serve the needs of communities.

The Corporation itself was provided with some good advice by the local authorities. For example, one local authority believed that the Corporation should do more to encourage including energy efficient features in new homes and to try and

make sure that housing associations are then able to manage such features effectively. More service user consultation was also deemed very important.

Many local authorities felt that the Corporation should be more involved in large developments at an earlier stage. Others thought that the Corporation should showcase successful schemes so that other housing associations are encouraged to build schemes of a similar design quality.

Local authorities were generally very pleased with the work of the housing associations. However one local authority representative felt that in the past housing associations 'were more proactive in consulting with residents, but now there is more emphasis on delivery'.

However, a number of local authorities suggested that the lessons had 'long been learnt' and that impact assessments should be done earlier, in order to ensure 'lessons are learnt quickly and to make sure there is value in the information gathered'.

Local authorities recognised how important the work of the Corporation is: 'Keep giving grant – successful working with the Corporation makes balanced, sustainable schemes.' Another council representative said that without Corporation funding the RSL would have been unable to set rents at social rent levels, which was the key to the success of the scheme. Another local authority

was very complimentary about the Corporation: ‘The Housing Corporation played an essential role in making the scheme work. It recognised the scheme made a valuable contribution to its aims and objectives and gave clear and consistent advice to both the local authority and the RSL.’

To conclude, it would appear that the local authorities are generally happy with the work of the Corporation and housing associations, but recognise that there may sometimes be problems working with developers. They also understand the value of partnership working with all their development partners and are striving to achieve balanced communities.

2.4 RSL questionnaire

In the main, housing associations indicated that they had nearly achieved all their schemes’ objectives or had fully done so. This was a self-assessment questionnaire. A synopsis of these assessments is provided below.

A critical impact of the provision of new housing must be to contribute towards the goal of sustainable communities. A key indicator of this goal, but not cause, is residential churn or turnover. The RSL survey indicated that the majority of the lettings were from local authority nominations. The number of re-lets for this sample ranged from no re-lets to 50% of the number of units re-let from October 2003 to January 2007. More critically, though, is the average void period.

RSL	(All)
Theme	(All)

Data	Field							Minimum	Average
	London	South East	South West	Central	North	Total			
Average of overall HQI	69	65	55	62	66	64	None	None	
Average of unit size	53	46	35	41	50	46	41	56.3	
Average of unit layout	58	48	47	54	55	52	32	57.2	
Average of HQI services	65	54	55	52	61	58	33	61.4	
Average of HQI accessibility	72	68	53	76	77	68	31	70.7	
Average of HQI energy	61	59	45	50	58	56	71	79.0	

This averaged 18.45 days and the outlier for the number of re-lets indicated that their voids were filled immediately, which could either mean that there was very high housing demand in this area or that these new build units were easy to re-let, as is normally the case owing to their popularity. (Please see Appendix C for graph.)

Although the Corporation has been promoting the use of HQIs for a while, it was not until the 2004-06 bid round that minimum levels were set as a requirement. In addition to these minimum levels, average HQI scores were also set out for the 2006-08 bid round.

The table on the previous page sets out the HQIs achieved from the impact assessment sample with the caveat that these schemes were designed five to six years ago. Please see graph in Appendix C.

It is interesting to note that the national average for the impact assessment schemes (total column) for all the HQIs bettered the minimum required scores that were set for later bidding rounds, except for the energy indicator. The shortfall in the energy indicator is unsurprising since the minimum score represented the then recent move to EcoHomes 'very good', whereas the schemes in the sample were designed well before this became a requirement.

It was noted in the Housing Corporation questionnaire that Secured by Design contributed to the residential sense of safety. This was also borne out by housing associations'

self-assessment of this element. The national average score (out of 5) was 4.4 and no individual field scored lower than 4.3.

The RSL questionnaire indicated that the greater part of S106 activity takes place in London and both southern fields. It was also interesting to note that, although the percentage of schemes that were part of a S106 agreement was just over one in three (37%) for these fields, the percentage in terms of units was 50%.

A commonly perceived concern was the inability of housing associations to have an influence in terms of the design of these schemes. This concern would be increased if we viewed the figures in terms of units rather than schemes. The RSL survey also aimed to establish the veracity of this concern. The survey indicated that nationally the extent of equivalent standards between S106 schemes and others scored 4 (out of 5). The South West field scored highly (4.8), London (4.1) and the South East (3.3).

Parking, invariably, is always a contentious issue for residents. In the survey, housing associations were asked to comment on whether or not all tenures had equal parking provision. The housing associations' views were that, nationally, just over 60% of schemes provided equal parking provisions. The scheme design aim of not giving predominance to the car and providing sufficient parking is a tension that is also subject to residential behaviour and the desire to park as closely to one's front door as possible.

The survey indicated that 20% of the schemes were built to Lifetime Homes standard.

The questions relating to MMC in the RSL survey did not distinguish between the Corporation's different categories of MMC (see Appendix C). However, they did enquire into the extent of MMC used in the scheme sample selected and explored certain areas of received wisdom with respect to the sample, such as difficulty in acquiring a mortgage for this type of property. The indication from the survey was no difficulty in acquiring a mortgage for this type of construction.

Out of the RSL respondents, 23% asserted that MMC had been used in the survey scheme sample, whereas 32% of respondents claimed that MMC developments were of an equivalent standard to traditionally built schemes (see graph in Appendix C).

The rising house price market is reflected in the average increase of value in low-cost home ownership units. The initial equity share sold ranged from 35% to 50%, with more cases at 50% rather than the lower end of the range. The increase in value of properties coupled with a 50% share meant that, over a three-year period in a rising market, these residents have raised the equivalent of a significant deposit. This gives rise for the potential to move into the private market. However, there was also an appreciable movement in staircasing upwards with a number reaching 100% staircasing, i.e. buying outright. This course of action reflects a desire to remain in the location and has the effect of stabilising the area.

3. Key lessons

A number of important lessons were observed and noted by the Corporation staff undertaking the assessments. Please refer to Appendix D for a full summary.

Design

There were also a number of design issues raised with Housing Corporation staff, including issues such as families' preference for windows in their kitchens and bathrooms; appropriate provision of storage space; room for a table so that families can eat together; and combined kitchen/living rooms not proving popular with all tenants. It was also noted that the most popular design results are often achieved by involving tenants at a very early stage.

High density, extra care and intermediate rent

Sound insulation is often a problem for flats. Sensitive lettings, along with ongoing support, is crucial to the success of a high density scheme. For a successful extra care scheme to be created it is essential that good links are established with all the potential partners, especially social services, right from the start.

For intermediate rent schemes, a major barrier to staircasing up is the large increments, sometimes up to 25%. Increments of 10% would be more realistic and may encourage more investment overall. The Corporation could consider the levels

of rent to be charged on unsold equity. Also for many housing associations it appears to be easier to use the current Housing Corporation target, maximised into their modelling, without thinking about the actual income levels of the people affected.

When shared ownership and rented properties are separately located and treated differently, difficulties can arise in the community, e.g. when there is less car parking for the rented units.

Modern methods of construction

Nationally it appears that the standard of finish and build with MMC properties is not universally better than traditionally constructed buildings. Out of 28 relevant schemes, less than half were considered to be of a better finish or quality than a traditional build.

Section 106 schemes

The impact assessment raised some concerns regarding the difficulties of working on Section 106 schemes. These include local authorities not bringing housing associations on board early enough to influence the design and quality. One recommendation was for the Corporation to draft a national Section 106 agreement with local authorities. This would ensure that the Corporation's standards could be fully integrated into planning agreements.

Environmental awareness

Very few residents are aware of the environmental features in their homes, particularly in the North, where 48% of residents surveyed were uninformed. Perhaps the Corporation could work more closely with the housing associations to educate residents on energy saving and environmental features of their homes.

Resident involvement

Residents seem to want to be more involved with the activities of their associations.

More immediate impact assessments

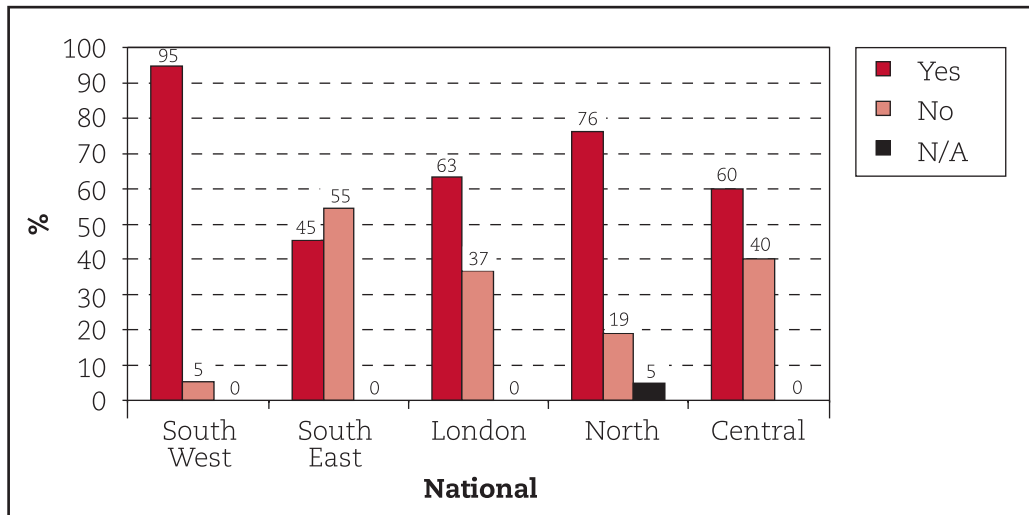
For future impact assessment programmes, it would be useful to consider changing from surveying schemes that are two-to-three years old to surveying those that are perhaps only one-to-two years old. This would mean best practice and important lessons could be learnt more quickly and the process could more easily link with the Compliance Audit process.

4. Appendices

Appendix A

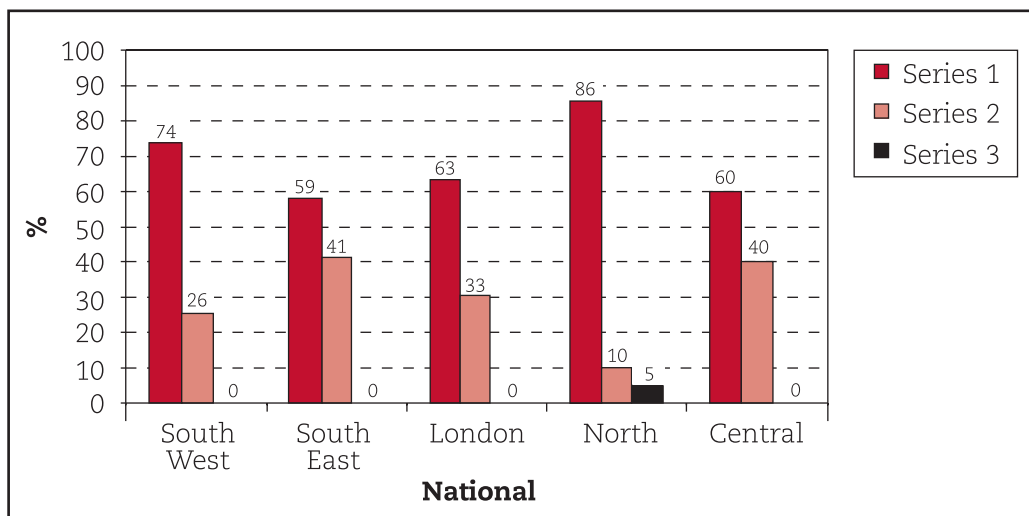
Question 1

Does the place feel like one with a distinctive character?



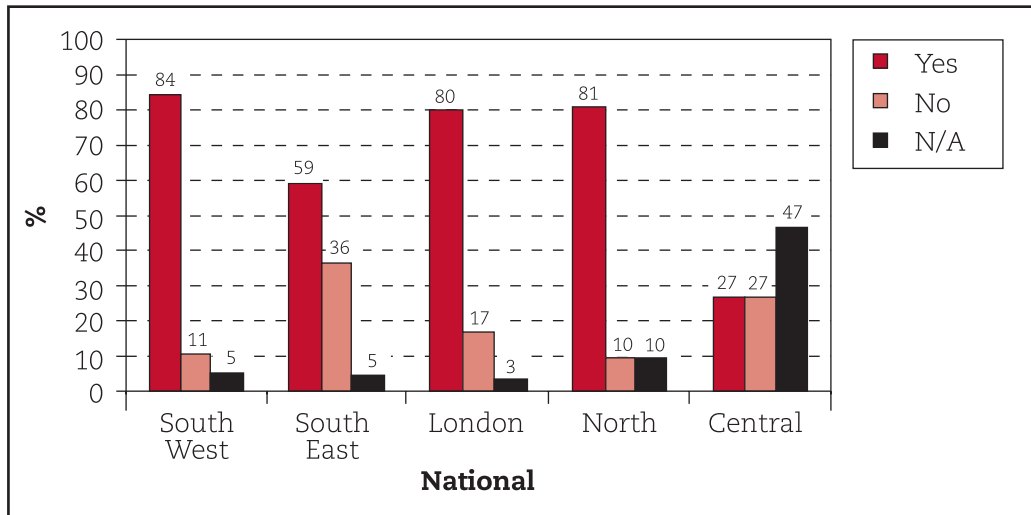
Question 2

Does the building exhibit architectural quality?



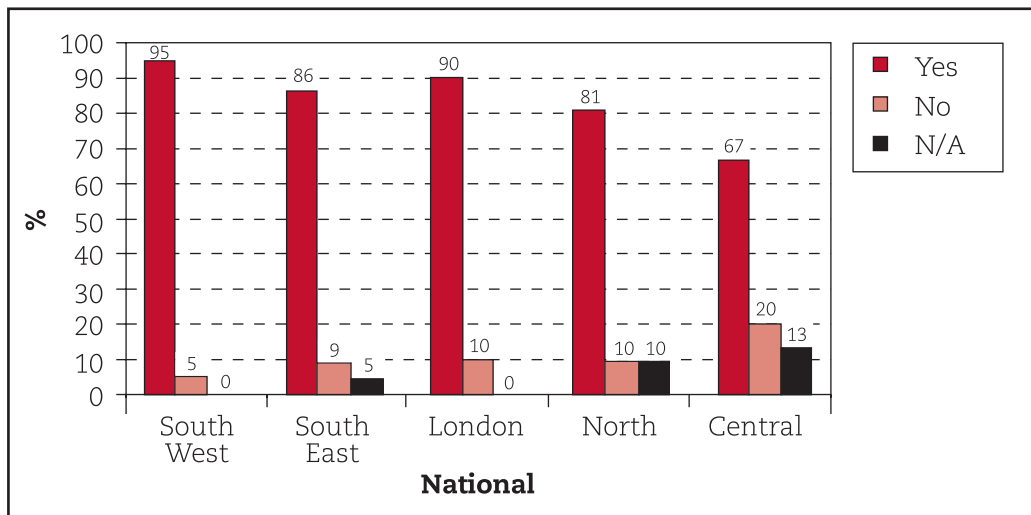
Question 3

Are the streets defined by a well-structured building layout?



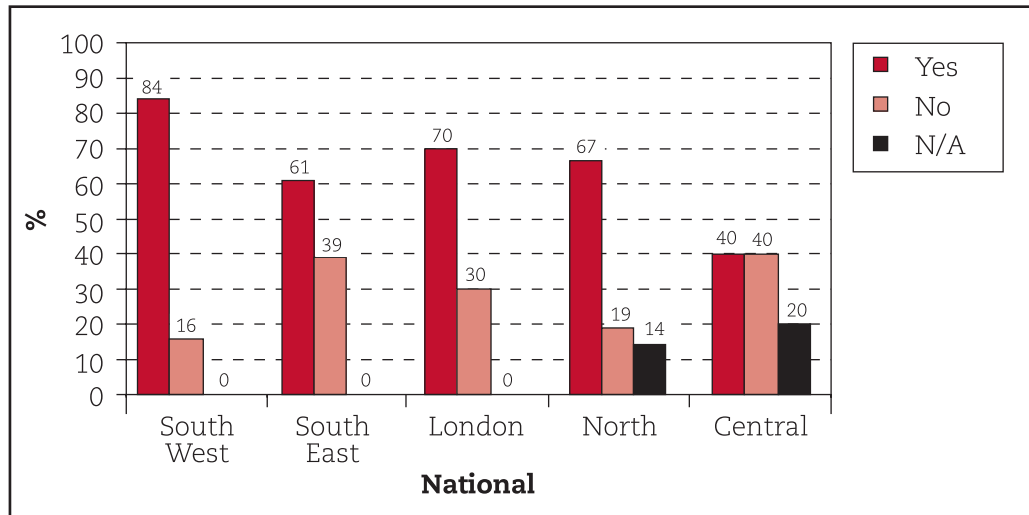
Question 4

Do the buildings and the layout make it easy to find your way around?



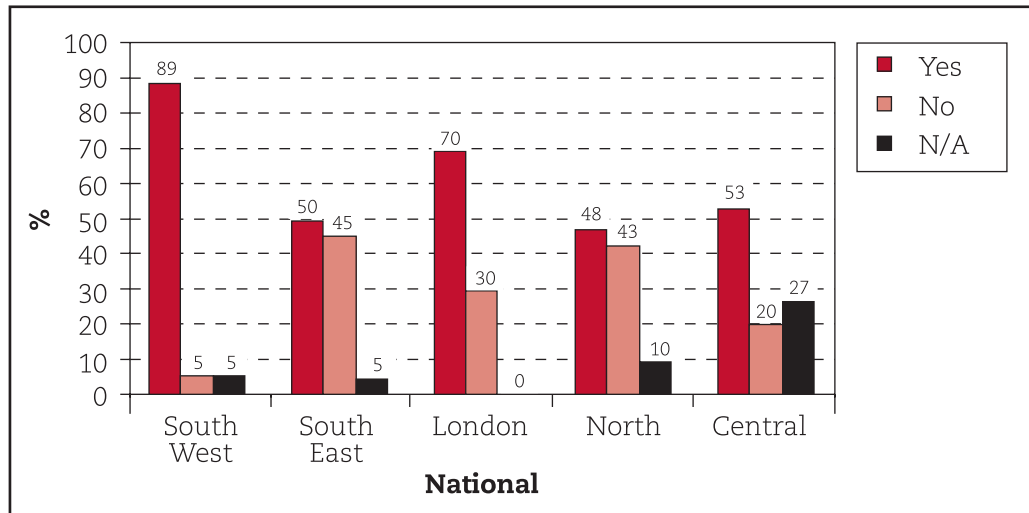
Question 5

Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?



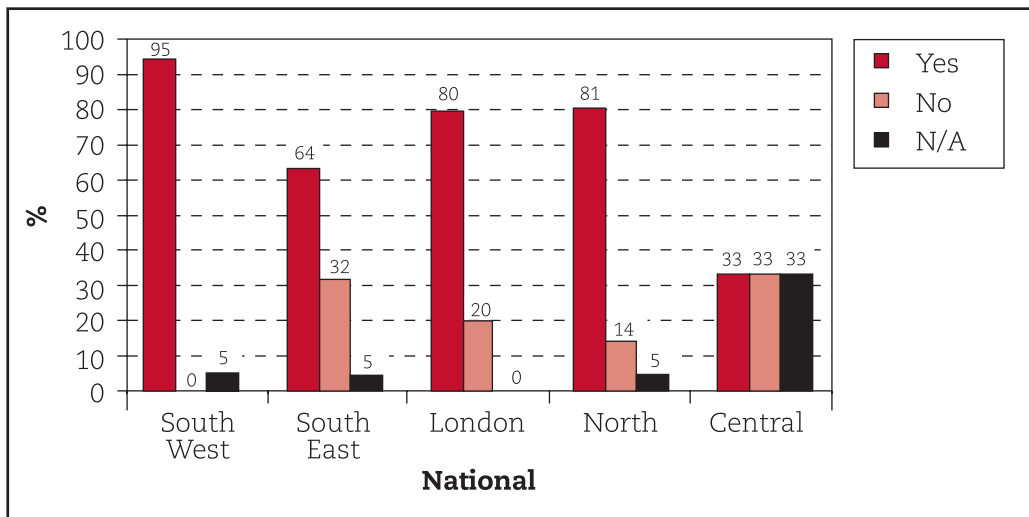
Question 6

Does the building layout take priority over the roads and car parking so that the highways do not dominate?



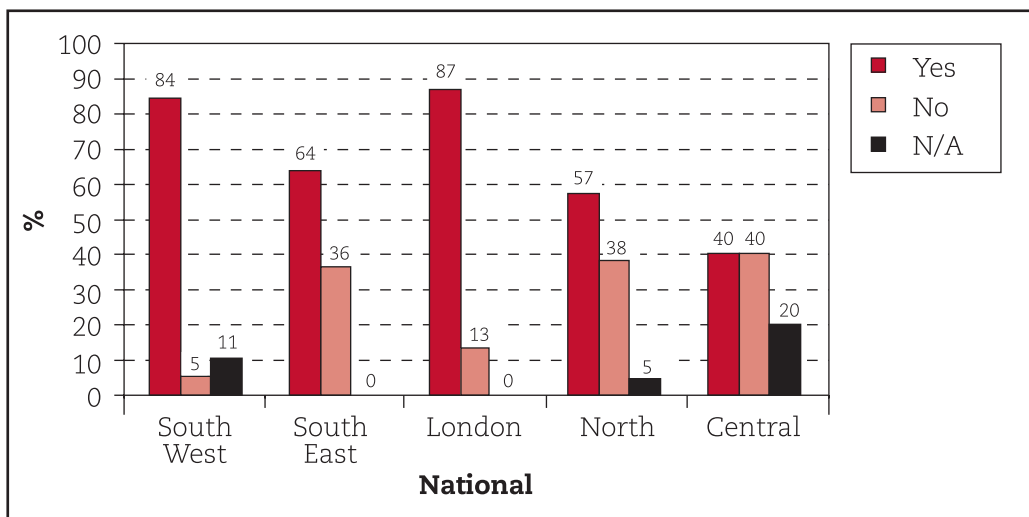
Question 7

Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?



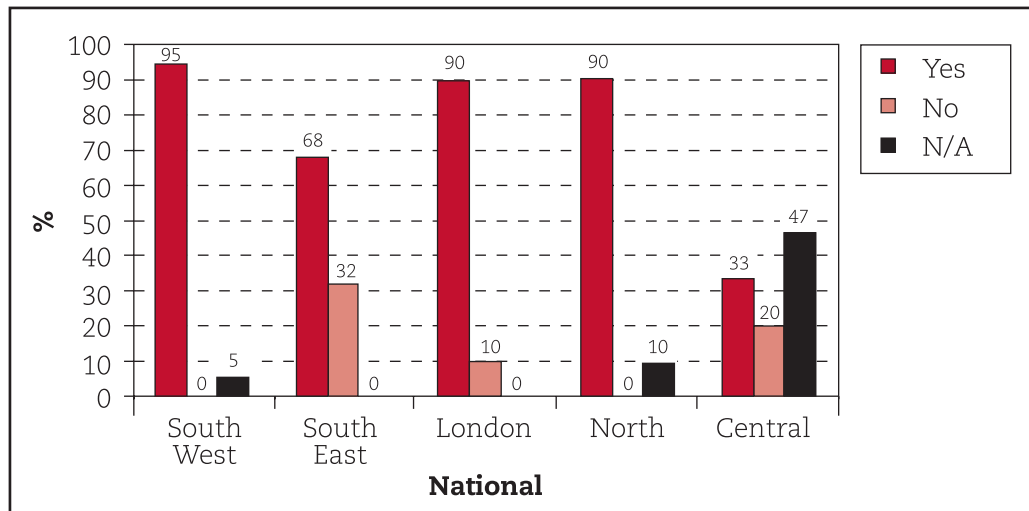
Question 8

Is the car parking well integrated and situated so it supports the street scheme?



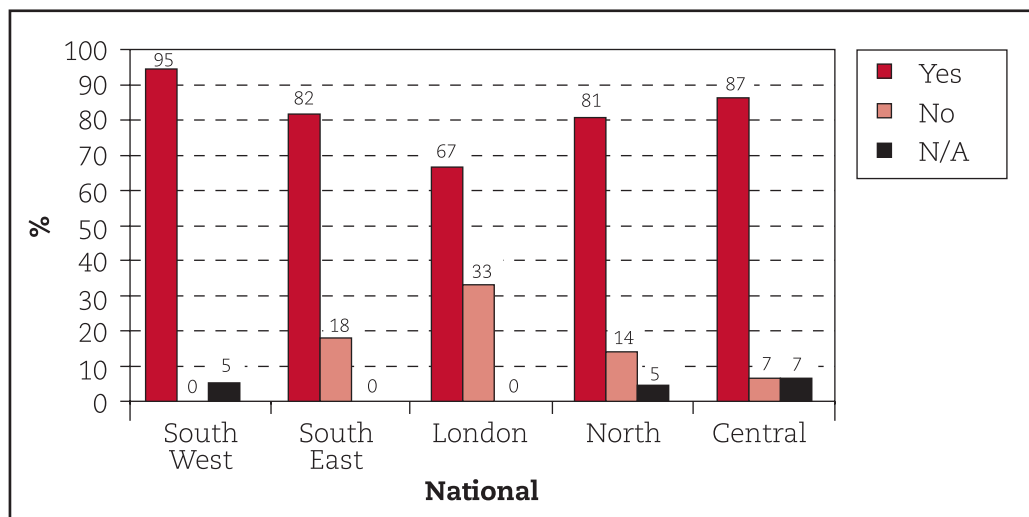
Question 9

Does the scheme integrate with existing roads, paths and surrounding developments?



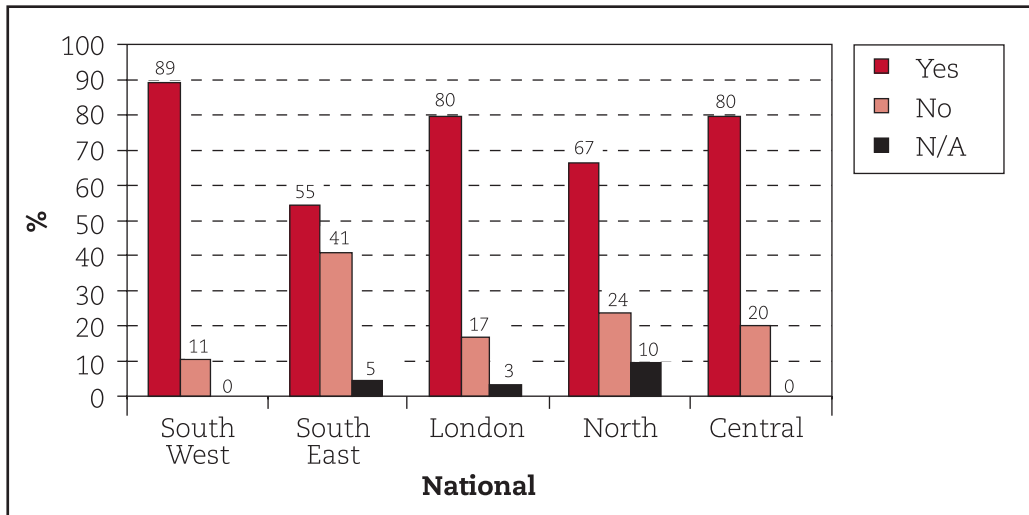
Question 10

Are the public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?



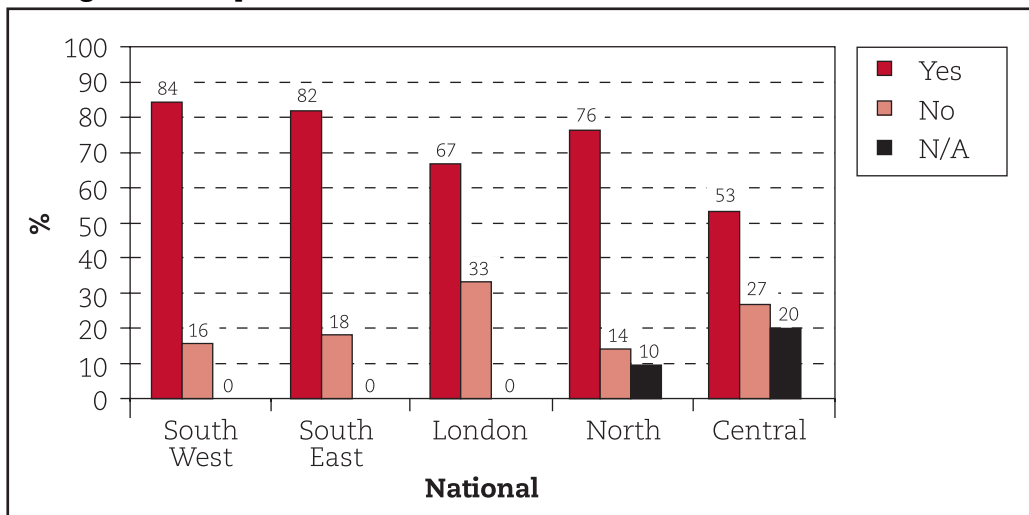
Question 11

Is the design specific to the scheme?



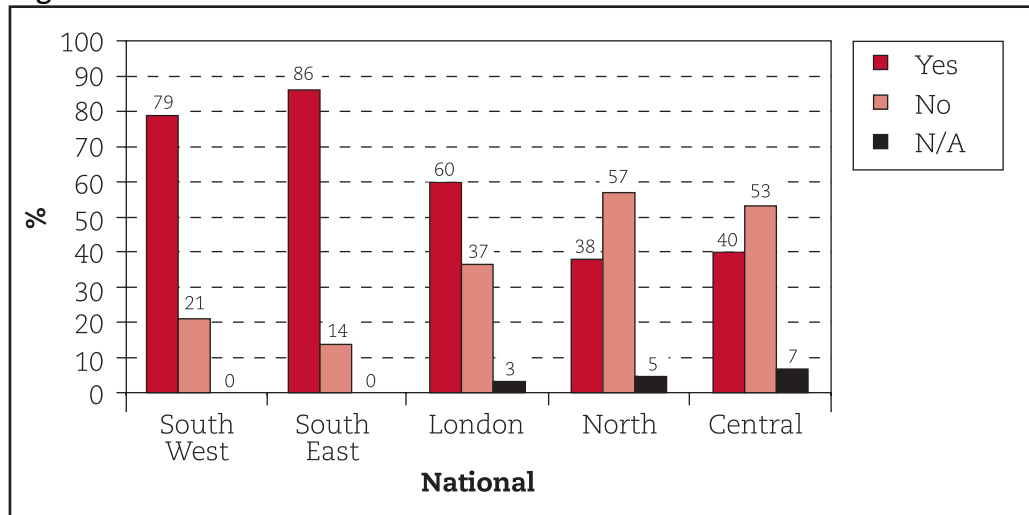
Question 12

Is the public space well designed and does it have a suitable management arrangements in place?



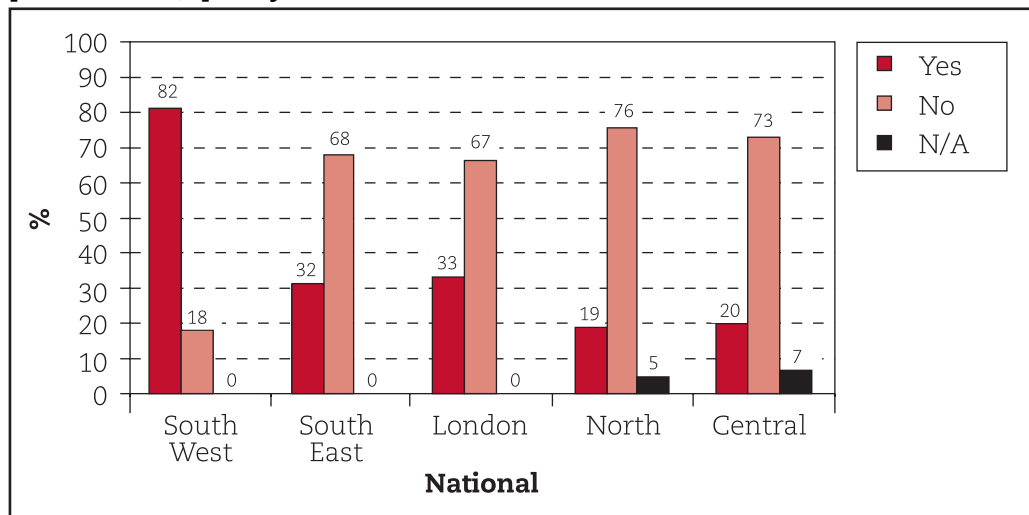
Question 13

Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as building regulations?



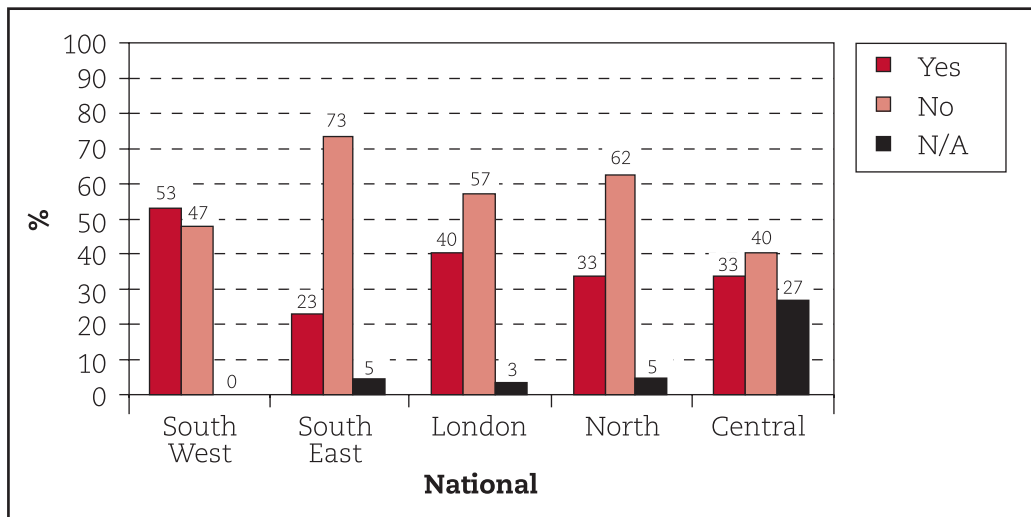
Question 14

Has the scheme made use of advances in technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness?



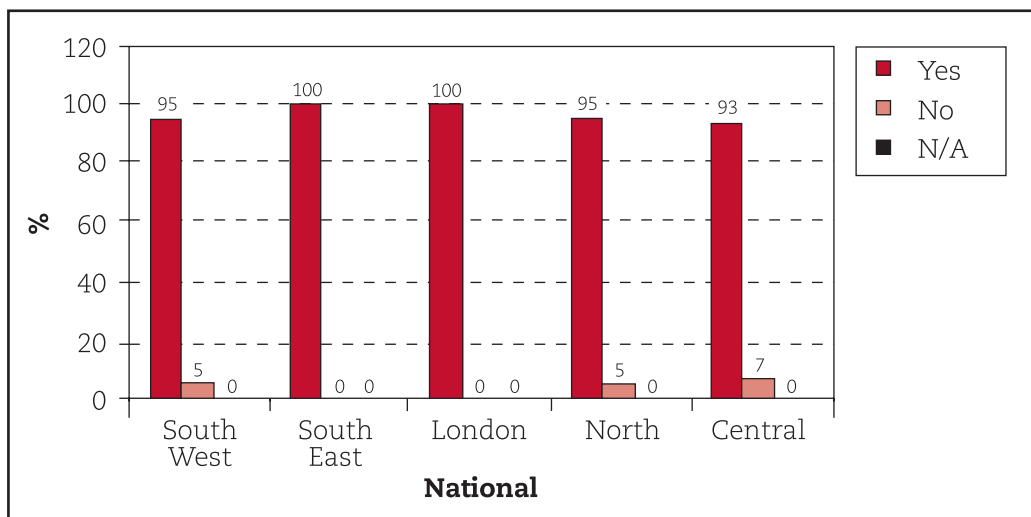
Question 15

Do the internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?



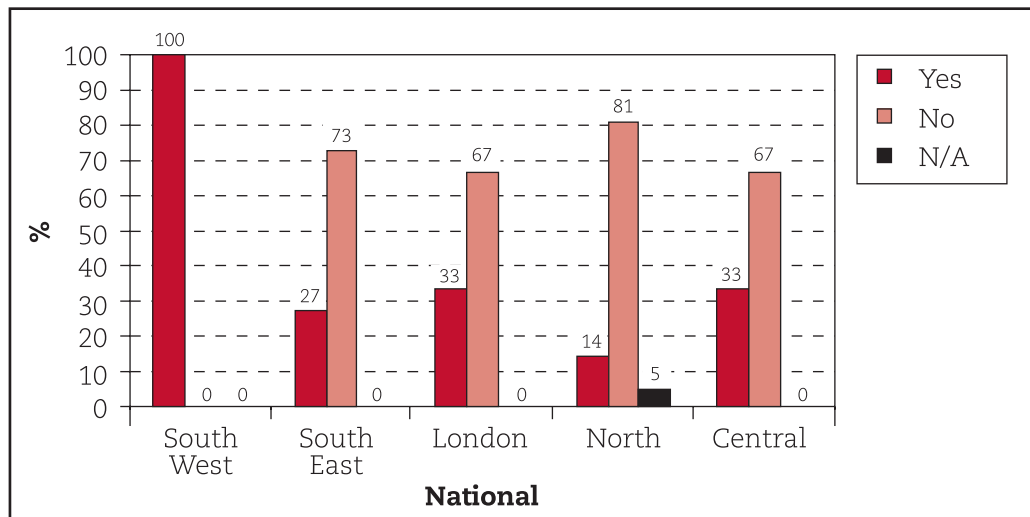
Question 16

Does the development have easy access to public transport?



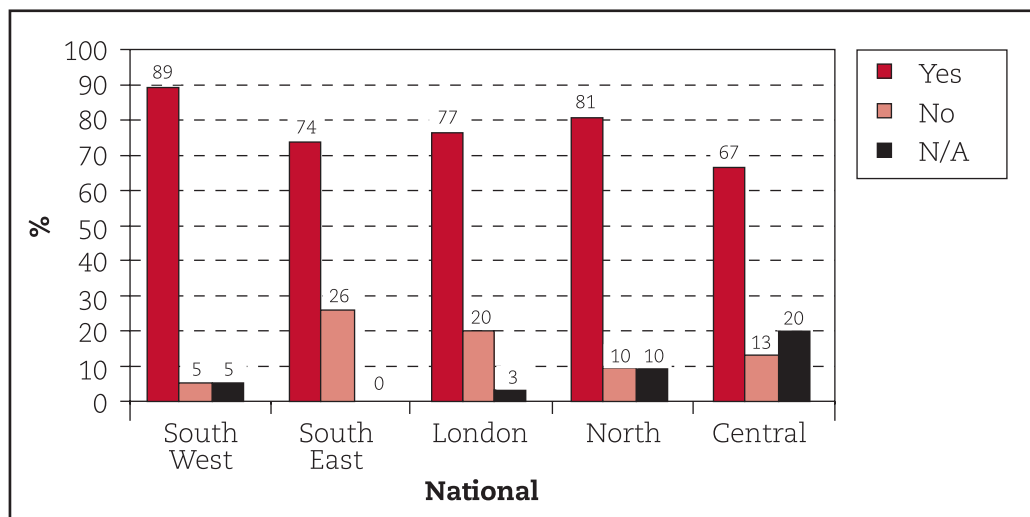
Question 17

Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?



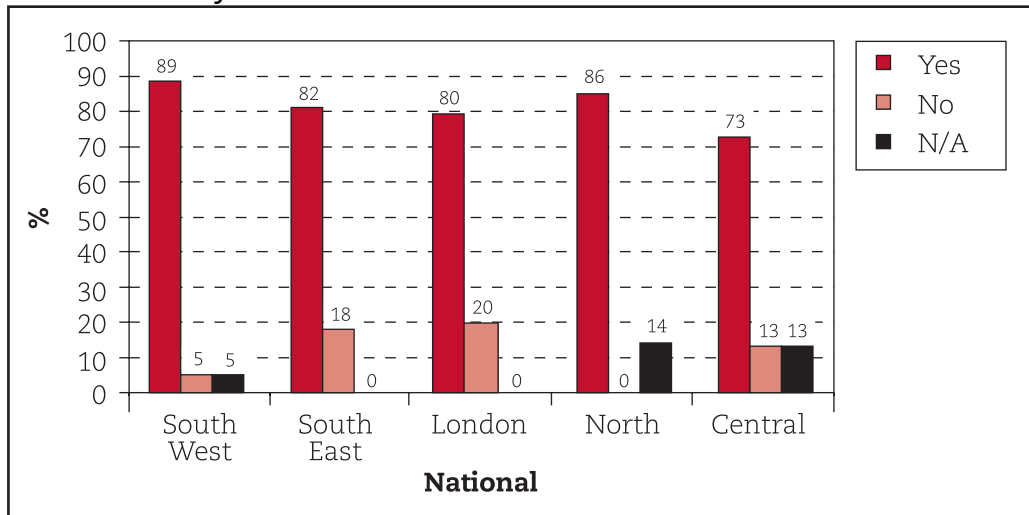
Question 18

Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?



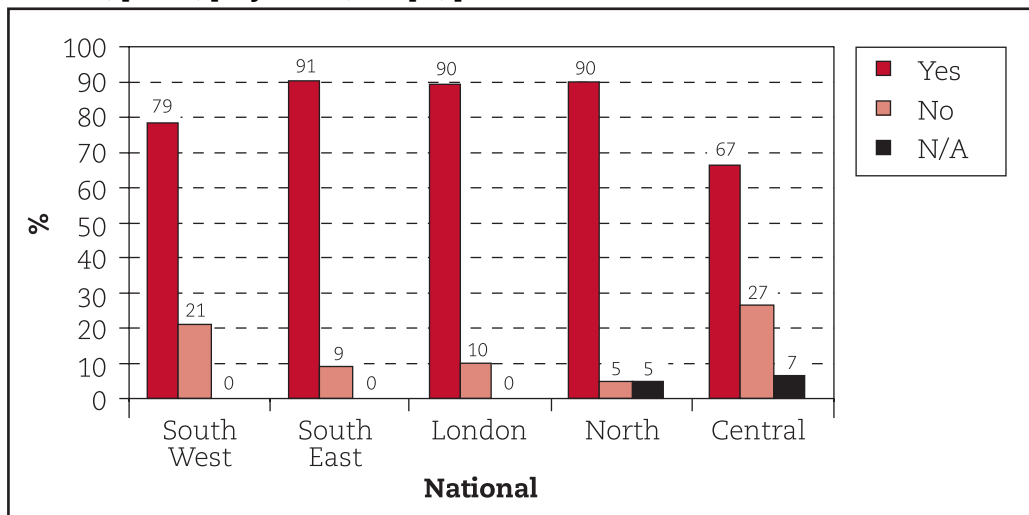
Question 19

Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?



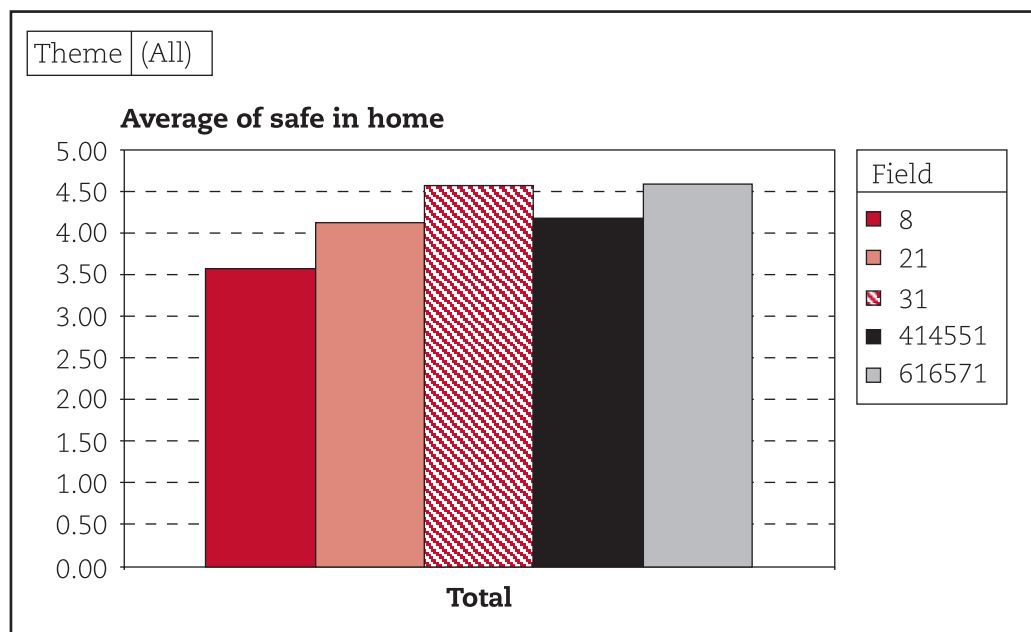
Question 20

Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities such as schools, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafés?



Appendix B

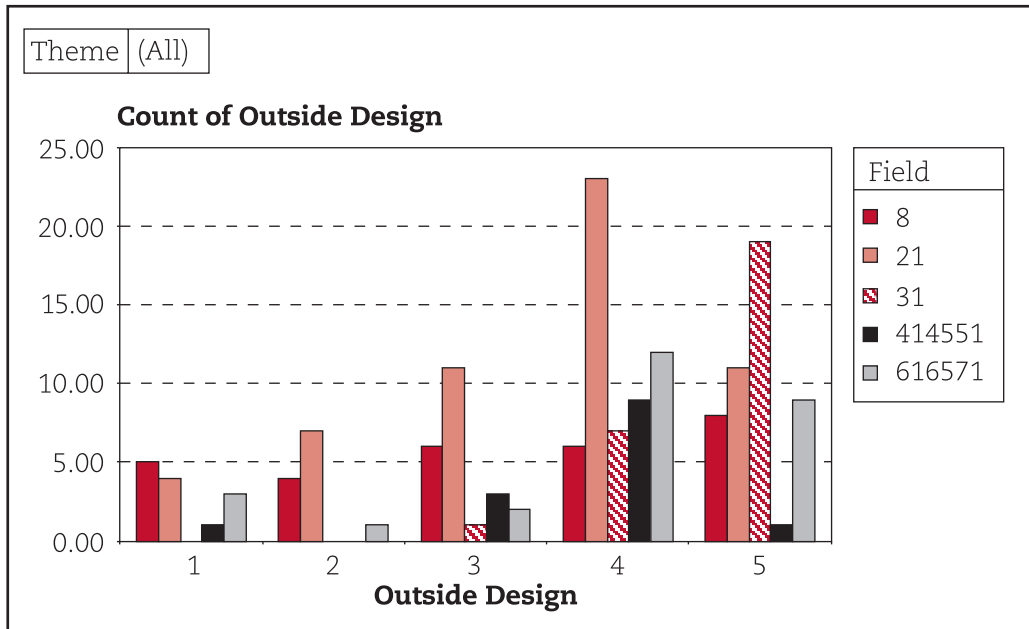
5. How safe do you feel in your own home?



Theme (All)

Average of safe in home	8	21	31	414551	616571	
Field	London	South East	South West	Central	North	Grand Total
Total	3.57	4.13	4.58	4.18	4.59	4.18

6. Are you satisfied with the design of the outside of your home such as the garden and paths?



Theme (All)

Outside design	8	21	31	414551	616571	
Field	London	South East	South West	Central	North	Grand Total
1	5.00	4.00		1.00	3.00	13.00
2	4.00	7.00			1.00	12.00
3	6.00	11.00	1.00	3.00	2.00	23.00
4	6.00	23.00	7.00	9.00	12.00	57.00
5	8.00	11.00	19.00	1.00	9.00	48.00
Total	29.00	56.00	27.00	14.00	27.00	153.00

13. What features of your home could be improved?

The features that people feel could be improved are numerous and varied, although a lot of people did state that they didn't feel there were any problems at all.

The features people pointed out include:

- lack of storage;
- inadequate windows;
- larger rooms wanted;
- problems with the garden;
- car parking problems (including objecting to paying for parking permits);
- design problems;
- safety and security concerns;
- objections to the safety flooring in the bathrooms and kitchens (difficult to clean);
- bathrooms and kitchens having no windows;
- noise;
- a proper shower;
- recycling bins and their storage;
- separate kitchen and living room wanted;
- problems handling heavy doors and window fastenings (especially for elderly);
- management issues, including high service charges;
- space for children to play;
- inadequate heating, warmth or insulation;
- not being on a transport route;
- problems with communal areas;
- location/neighbours;
- carpets and blinds wanted when moving in;
- more lifts wanted; and
- staircasing could be in smaller increments, e.g. 10% instead of 25%.

14. What features do you like?

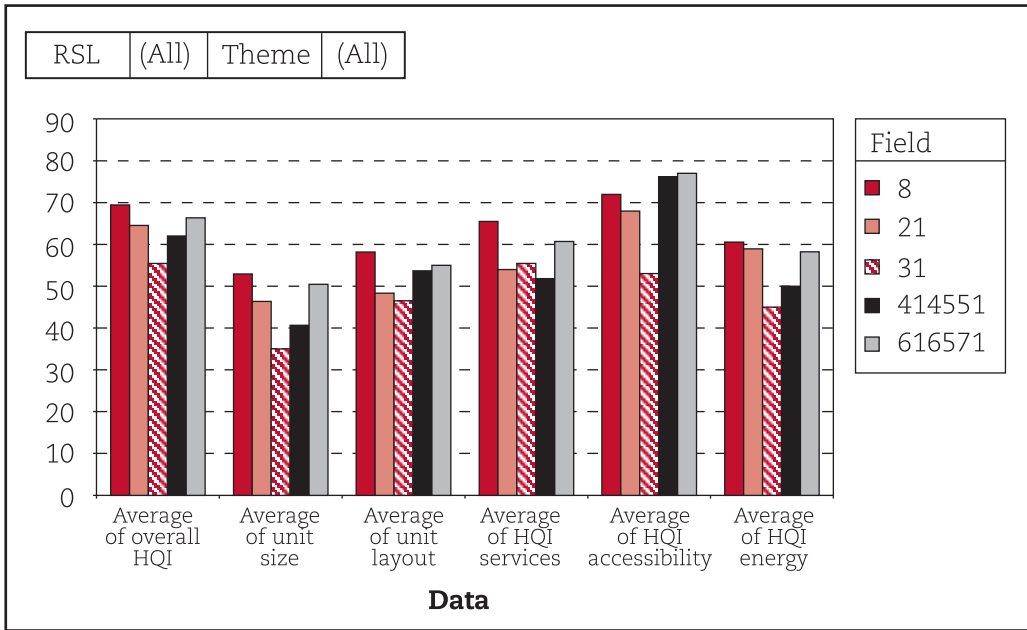
The features that people liked most can be summarised as follows:

- the size and space;
- the location;
- the whole house;
- the layout;
- management;
- storage;
- kitchen;
- the shower;
- heating;
- design;
- decoration;
- large windows;
- windows;
- privacy and safety;
- parking;
- downstairs WC;
- balcony;
- looks private;
- garden;
- facilities;
- second bedroom; and
- neighbourhood and community.

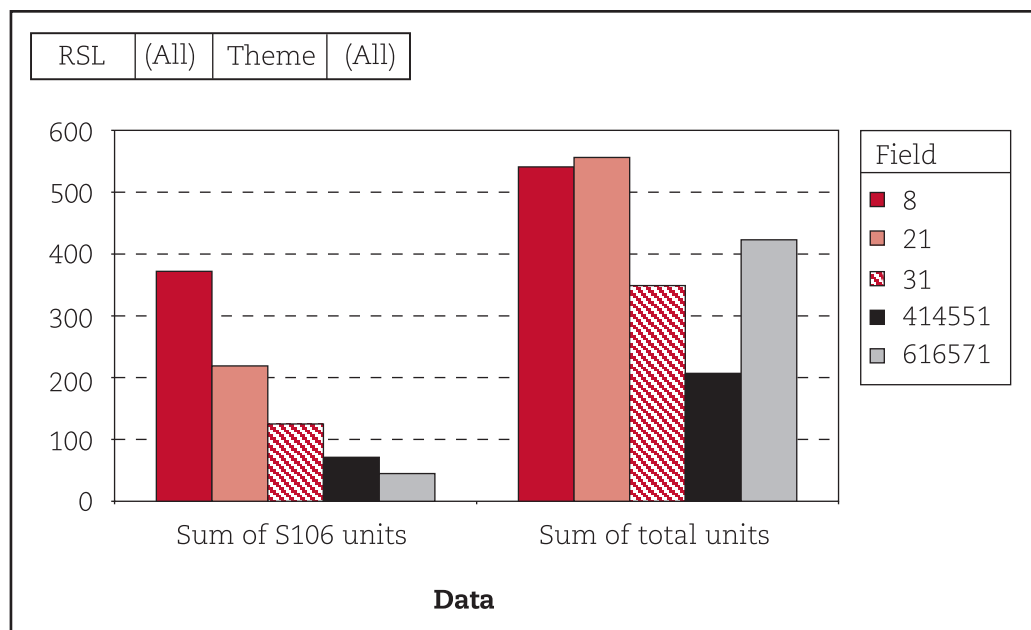
It is surprising to note that some of the same items feature in both the lists. Many people are very happy with their homes and there are only certain features that are disliked.

Appendix C

Housing Quality Indicators



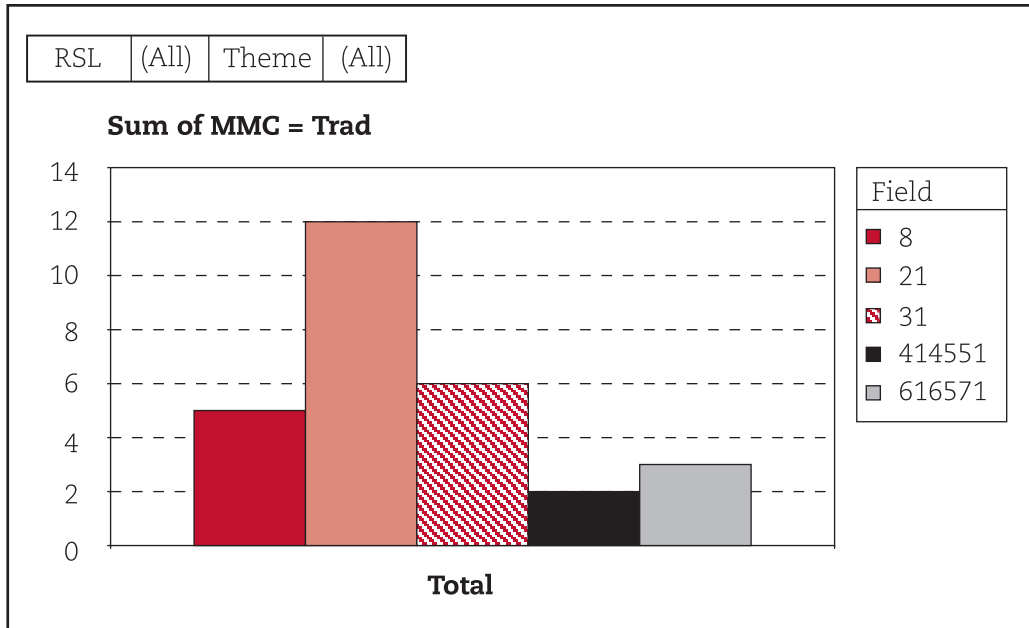
Section 106 schemes



RSL	(All)
Theme	(All)

	8	21	31	414551	616571	
Field	London	South East	South West	Central	North	Grand Total
Sum of S106 units	372	219	125	71	45	832
Sum of total units	541	556	349	207	423	2076

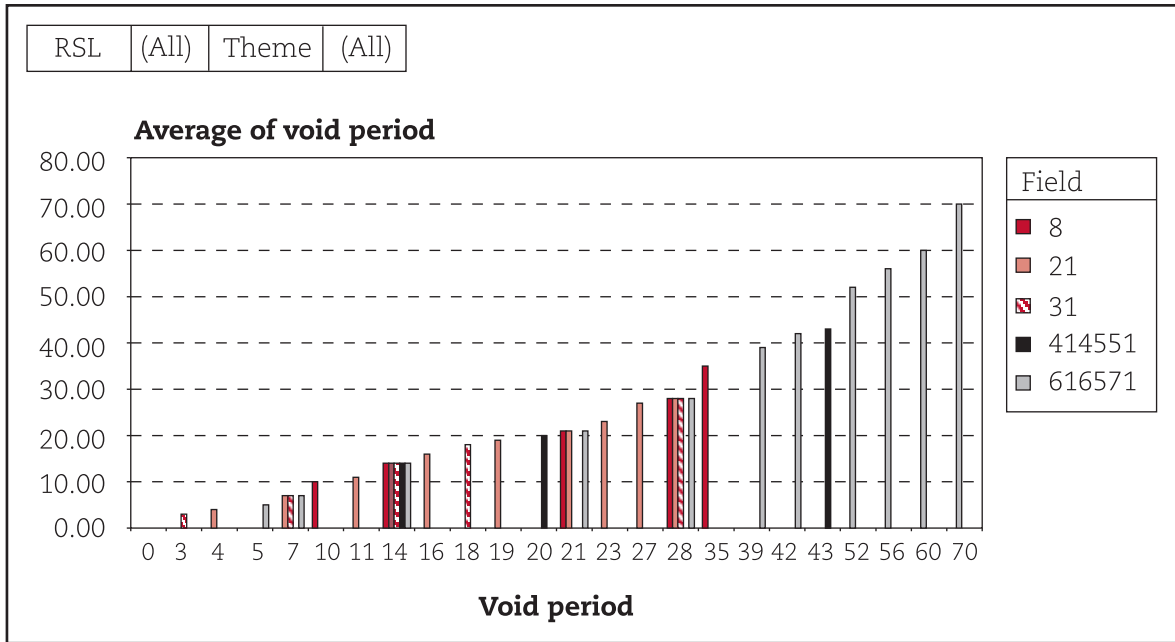
MMC equivalent standard to traditional build



RSL	(All)
Theme	(All)

	8	21	31	414551	616571	
Field	London	South East	South West	Central	North	Grand Total
Sum of MMC = Total	5	12	6	2	3	28
Count of scheme no.	19	22	19	8	20	88

MMC equivalent standard to traditional build



Average of void period	8	21	31	414551	616571	
Field	London	South East	South West	Central	North	Total
0	0.00	0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00
3			3.00			3.00
4		4.00				4.00
5					5.00	5.00
7		7.00	7.00		7.00	7.00
10	10.00					10.00
11		11.00				11.00
14	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00	14.00
16		16.00				16.00
18			18.00			18.00
19		19.00				19.00
20				20.00		20.00
21	21.00	21.00			21.00	21.00
23		23.00				23.00
27		27.00				27.00
28	28.00	28.00	28.00		28.00	28.00
35	35.00					35.00
39					39.00	39.00
42					42.00	42.00
43				43.00		43.00
52		52.00				52.00
56		56.00				56.00
60		60.00				60.00
70		70.00				70.00
Total	22.11	25.65	9.13	25.67	15.33	18.45

Appendix D

Views expressed – Full summary

Section 106 schemes

- “Although affordable housing is not always easily identifiable on a Section 106 site, it is usually built so that it all stands together instead of being ‘pepper-potted’ around and amongst the market homes.”
- “Often the RSL is brought in to the scheme too late to have any influence on the design and quality of the homes.”
- “When the main developer is allowed to control the design there is little opportunity for an RSL to influence and achieve more innovative features.”
- “Local authorities should try to achieve the highest standards possible through its planning process and insist on the RSLs being brought in at the earliest possible stage.”
- “Associations and councils feel that the Corporation could be more regularly involved with Section 106 meetings.”
- “Often developers can be inflexible regarding RSL design requirements. However, with a local developer who has a stake in the area there can often be good relationships and successful schemes.”
- “RSLs and the Corporation should resist pressures to compromise standards on Section 106 schemes.”
- “The challenge for RSLs is to improve design, quality, sustainability and environmental standards. To do this successfully they need to influence the design and specification of the development. To do this the RSL must be involved at the earliest possible point.”
- “The Corporation should examine the prospect of drafting Section 106 agreements with local authorities nationally to ensure that Scheme Development Standards (SDS) are fully integrated.”

Design

- “In many of the properties visited, especially in London and the South East, the residents spoke of not having enough room for the family to eat together, due to them having such small living/dining areas.”
- “Involving tenants in the scheme design from a very early stage can have significant influence on a scheme’s eventual success.”
- “Bathrooms and kitchens that don’t have windows are not liked by residents and are prone to condensation and mould.”
- “Most residents would appreciate the installation of a shower (not hand held).”
- “The non-slip flooring in the kitchens and bathrooms is ‘impossible’ to clean and is considered unattractive by many residents.”
- “Limited storage space is the feature least liked by the majority of residents.”

- “The use of low energy light bulbs is now widespread but residents often have problems getting suitable shades for them.”
- “There is a fashion for residents to install wooden/laminate floors instead of carpets. In some cases this contributing to noise complaints particularly in flats.”
- “A major issue for residents is the combined kitchen/living room which makes separation of two uses impossible e.g. the sound transmission of washing machines and there being no space for a table and homework.”
- “‘Curb appeal’ should always be matched by internal functionality.”
- “HQI scores do not give a good indication of a building’s architectural value. The Corporation should offer less grant to schemes which have short leases and take care when considering refurbishment of 1960s stock.”
- “If the Corporation is to work more closely with English Partnerships in the future, the restriction placed by them on the use of the land must be taken into account when bids are accepted.”
- “‘Practical’ Lifetime Homes has been introduced by one RSL which it claims is more is more sensible than the original version.”
- “English Partnerships requires sprinkler systems on all new developments. This reduces the need for internal partitioning.”
- “One RSL representative considered that the rainwater harvesting provided was too expensive, and tenants were not interested in energy efficiencies and would not be interested in providing feedback.”
- “One association developed using MMC through a partnering contract and found that it was difficult to deal with the latent defects, as it was difficult to get people to take responsibility.”
- “The provision of more cycle storage would encourage less need for car parking spaces.”
- “Boarding the loft space and installing an access ladder could improve storage.”

Innovation and best practice

- “One association visited is currently in discussions with a local garage regarding the introduction of a subsidised car-sharing scheme for its residents, possibly including an electric car.”
- “A suggestion from a housing officer was that there could be a separate funding source that people could go to if they didn’t have money for carpets when they first move into their houses.”

High density

- “For flat design, balconies should be encouraged in order to provide suitable high density living arrangements.”

- “Sensitive lettings and ongoing support is crucial to the success of a high density scheme.”
- “Sound insulation is always a particular problem for high density developments.”

Extra care

- “For a successful extra care scheme to be created it is essential that good links are established with all the potential partners, especially social services right from the start. The Corporation could possibly help to ensure that all the parties are correctly in place prior to building taking place, including knowing which people can make proper use of the facilities before schemes are financed.”
- “For one association there is a lack of confidence in the ‘identification of need’ in the community by social services. Closer working relationships by the Corporation and local authorities who can spread good practice and ensure robust database systems are used to identify housing need, could be used in order that more confidence is felt with the investment decisions that are made.”
- “Sometimes developments shouldn’t be age restricted, i.e. they could be suitable for disabled younger people.”
- “The Corporation should continue to provide funding to assist small housing associations to modernise facilities to meet modern standards for their residents, including for the provision of support and independence, which many older people require.”

- “Car parking should be estimated correctly, particularly with staff in mind.”
- “Having more than one lift should be considered, as residents who are lift dependent can feel isolated if the one lift is out of action even though it may happen infrequently.”
- “High window catches can present reach problems for less mobile residents.”
- “Small corner washbasins are difficult to access and should be avoided particularly if wheelchair access is required.”
- “Associations should have written confirmation that Supporting People funding is in place before commencing projects.”

Intermediate rent

- “For a shared ownership scheme to be really successful, marketing should be started at least six to nine months prior to completion.”
- “Good marketing and organisation enables properties to be acquired by local people at affordable prices.”
- “When shared ownership and rented properties are separately located and treated differently, difficulties can arise in the community, e.g. when there is less car parking for the rented units.”
- “A major barrier to staircasing up is large instalments, sometimes up to 25%. Intervals of 10% would be more realistic and encourage more staircasing.”

- “The Corporation needs to think about levels of rent to be charged on unsold equity. For many RSLs it appears to be a question of plugging the current Housing Corporation target maximum into their modelling without thinking about the actual income levels of the target groups.”
- “Scheme Design Standards should apply to shared ownership schemes and should include a clause ensuring that habitable rooms have some natural light.”
- “Care must be taken with key worker properties, for example, where properties are only allocated to teachers there have been instances of voids occurring between academic years. In future it may be wise to ensure schemes have a wider eligibility criteria.”
- “One question for future investment is the examination of the definition of temporary housing. In one case it was not intended to meet the needs of homeless or vulnerable groups but instead the RSL having acquired the property then sold it to a developer and leased it back on a short lease thus meeting the terms of our guidance.”

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National impact assessment report 2006-07

This report summarises the main findings of the National Impact Assessment Programme for 2006-07. It is the result of Housing Corporation impact assessment visits and questionnaires, plus responses to questionnaires by residents, housing associations and local authorities.

