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# A Housing Design Audit for England

## Greater London

There has been resurgence of interest in the design quality of new housing in recent years. Revised in 2019, guidance in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) now states that, “permission should be refused for development of poor design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area and the way it functions.” However, over the past decade, there has been no systematic evaluation of design quality of new developments within England. The last was conducted by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in 2004-2007. CABE found ‘an uncompromising and unflattering picture of new housing design quality.’ In light of the recent emphasis, CPRE and Place Alliance recognized it was high time for another review. Our report, ‘A Housing Design Audit for England’ evaluates over 140 residential development schemes built during 2014-2019 and compares results to those of the previous CABE audits. Overall, we found that two of every ten housing developments scrutinised should have been refused planning permission outright based on poor design principles. A further 50% should not have been granted permission without significant improvements to the proposals being made first.

This factsheet provides a regional breakdown of report findings for Greater London.

### **Methodology**

Following broadly the same methodology as audits conducted by CABE, the housing design audit evaluated developments against seventeen criteria in four categories – Environment & Community; Place character; Streets, parking and pedestrian experience; and Detailed Design and Management. It also considered Environmental Impact. Each criterion was scored on a five-point scale with five categories from ‘5 - very good’ to ‘1 - very poor’. Aggregated scores were then assessed against the total available score to give an overall standard for the development – with a score of more than 80% of the total possible score being classed as ‘very good’, and less than 40% being classed as ‘very poor’.

Twenty schemes were assessed in Greater London, reflecting the ‘typical’ volume housebuilder product and encompassing a range of projects including brownfield and greenfield; different socio-economic contexts; and inner-urban, suburban and more rural settings.



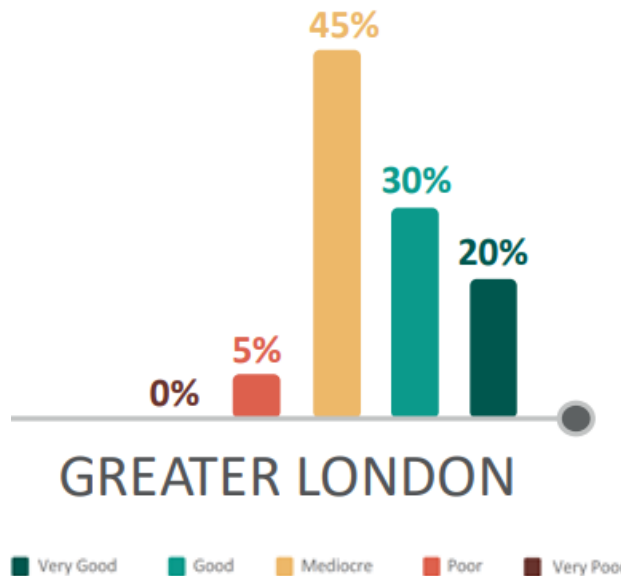
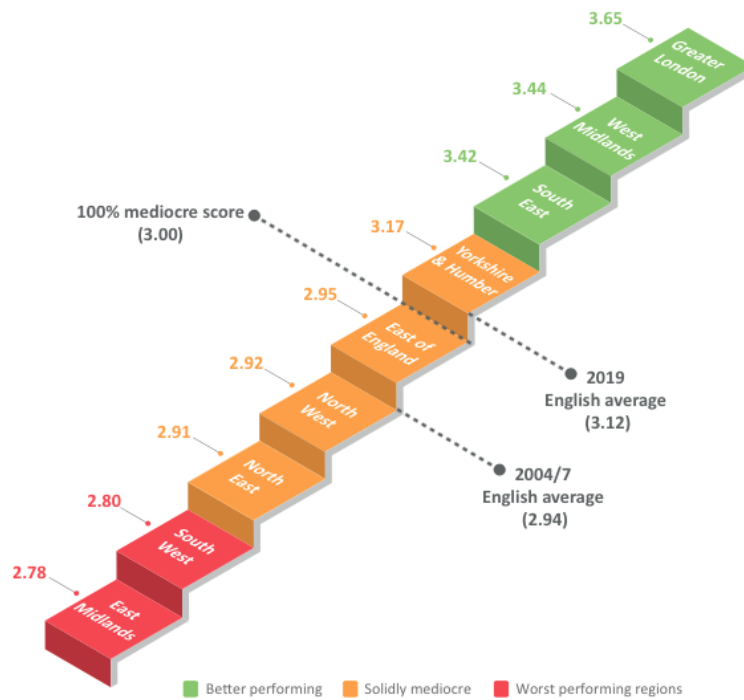
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## Results

Developments in Greater London had the best design quality overall, with an average score of 3.65 for design quality (classed as 'mediocre') the highest out of all the regions, and also slightly higher than the national average of 3.12 (also 'mediocre'). Half of developments in this region feature across the two highest categories ('good' and 'very good').

The region is the best performing in both this and the CABE audits. There has been a significant improvement in design quality since 2007, with the proportion of lower scoring developments (poor and very poor) down 10% and the proportion of higher scoring developments (good and very good) up 32%.



Top: Regional ranking by average design audit score. Above: Proportion of schemes in the five categories.



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### Why is design quality better?

Greater London was one of the highest performing regions. Overall, schemes came top by a significant margin for architectural response, or how much the scheme was tailored to the area; character, or how well all components of the development worked together to create a sense of 'place'; street legibility and definition, which refer to how easy it is to navigate through the development and how safe, walkable and social streets feel; and highways design, which evaluated road dominance in the development. Better scores were also supported by provision of community facilities and public, open and play spaces; good access to public transport; and a diverse mix of housing types and tenures, all of which were above national averages for these criteria.

However, it is important to note that the region comes top only against a very mediocre standard of competition from the other English regions. Poorly-rated schemes did occur in Greater London, and the region performed less well for integration of storage, such as for bins and bicycles, and for use of existing and new landscape features, such as site orientation, street trees, and microclimates.

## Case Study

Homes: 70 (28.6% affordable)

Setting: Suburban

Site History: Brownfield

Audit Score: 72, Very Good



This site, surrounded on four sides by a mix of residential, commercial and retail buildings, offers a mix of tenures and housing types, including 10% of dwellings designed to accessible wheelchair standards.

Selected audit observations:

- Well integrated with the surrounding area, but clearly distinct and legible
- Excellent access to healthcare and community facilities, including a new community hub on site – a multi-functional space suitable for working, community meetings, celebrations, and a nursery.
- High quality play space caters for ages 0-12 years, with sufficient private amenity space as well
- An obvious sense of pride in maintaining the landscape in the front of the houses and good integration of parking with the homes and in the streets
- Variety of housing types and tenures provided
- Buildings turn corners well, and are simply but well detailed with high quality materials and solar panels.



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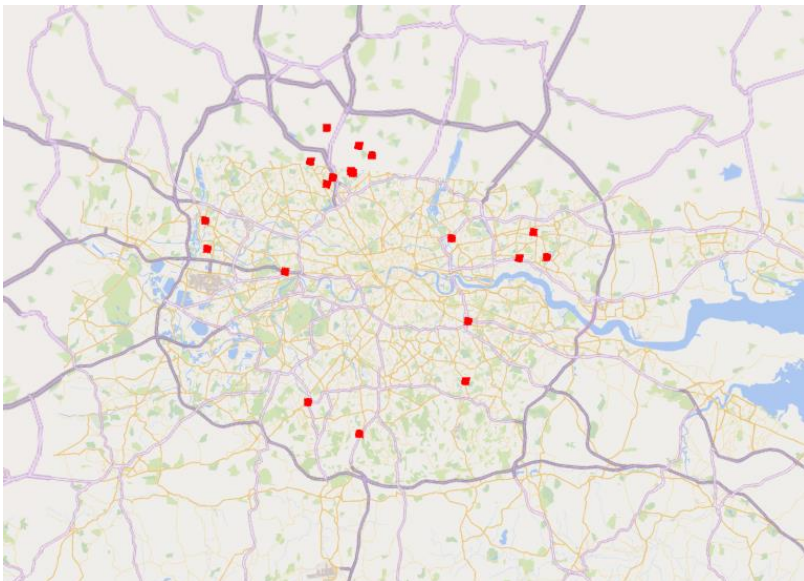


## Planning process

The scheme was developed following a public forum and pre-application discussion. After receiving outline planning permission, the development went through a detailed design process with two reserved matters applications, providing details of the external appearance and landscape design. A material amendment application varied the layout and building heights, and the design of the community hub was carefully negotiated with the council’s single design officer. Reference was made throughout the design process to various supplementary planning guides (including one on sustainable design and construction) and to a range of nationally published standards. Overall, the audit suggests that good quality design is supported by the use of proactive, site-specific, and independent design tools, such as design codes and reviews. As the best performing region, Greater London was the heaviest user of design review and a heavy user of design codes, and amongst the lowest user of more generic guidelines, such as Building for Life 12.

## Schemes Assessed

Scheme	Location	Scheme	Location
Hayworth House	Borehamwood*	Dollis Valley	Barnet
Castle Hill Eastern Quarry	Swanscombe*	Chobham Manor	Stratford
Wellington Drive	Dagenham	Raf West Drayton	West Drayton
Lymington Fields	Dagenham	Reynard Mills	Brentford
Mackintosh Street	Bromley	RAF Uxbridge	Uxbridge
Goresbrook Village	Dagenham	Former Colindale Hospital Site	Edgware
Kidbrooke Village	Kidbrooke	Trinity Square	Edgware
Cane Hill Park	Coulsdon	Millbrook Park	Inglis Barracks
Nescot	Epsom*	Millbrook Park Phase 4	Inglis Barracks
Chandos Avenue	Whetstone	Stonegrove & Spur Road Estates	Edgware



Above: Map of schemes assessed within Greater London analysis area.