



The
countryside
charity

PLACE
ALLIANCE
campaigning for place quality

A Housing Design Audit for England

North East

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 the North East.

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’.

Eleven schemes were assessed in the North East, 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.



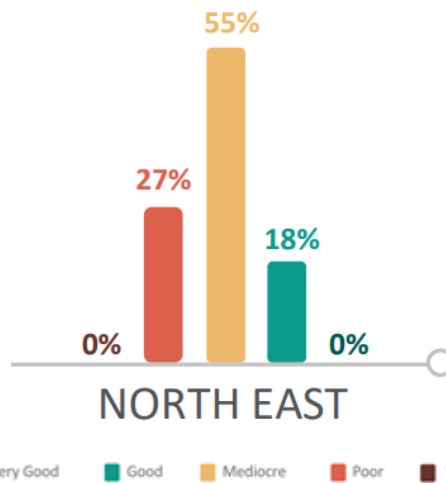
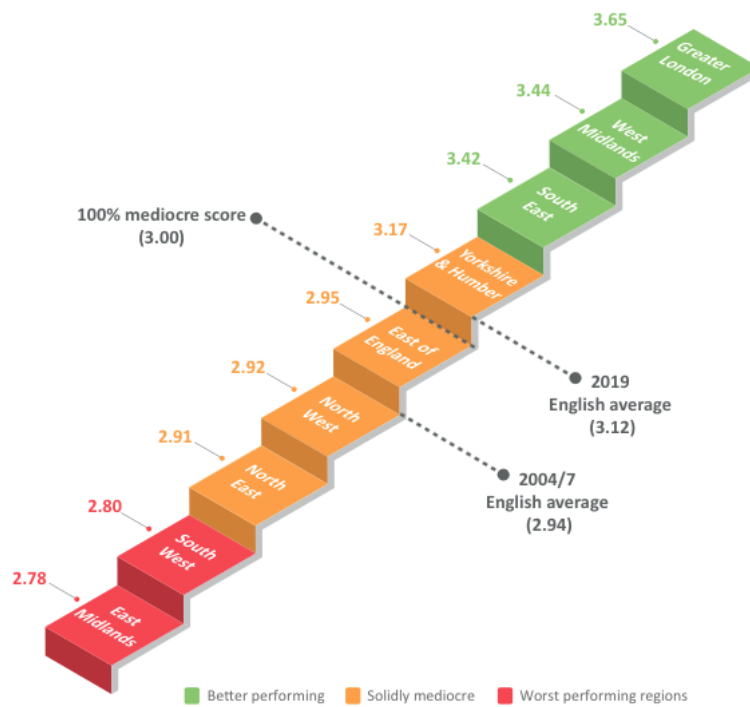
The countryside charity

PLACE
ALLIANCE
campaigning for place quality

Results

Developments in the North East are dominated by mediocre scores, with over half of schemes scoring this classification. At 2.91, overall design quality for the region is ‘mediocre’ and is just below the national average of 3.12 (also denoting ‘mediocre’).

While the region has seen a 12% increase in the portion of good and very good schemes since the 2004-2006 CABE design audits, there has also been a disappointing 4% increase in the numbers of schemes falling into poor and very poor categories. With only a marginal improvement in average design score, there has been no change in regional ranking for the North East over the past decade.



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



The
countryside
charity

PLACE
ALLIANCE
campaigning for place quality

Why is design quality only mediocre?

Development in the North East is particularly let down by under consideration of other design factors. The region is worst for sacrificing green landscape and biodiversity to create over-engineered developments, with a score of 2.27 overall and no 'good' or 'very good' scores for any of the eleven schemes assessed. This is especially concerning given a low average standard for this criterion nationwide that only just reaches 'mediocre' (3.00). Schemes in the North East also perform worst for diversity in housing types and tenures provided, and come bottom on street legibility and street definition, which refer to how easy it is to navigate through the development and how safe, walkable and social streets feel. Scores for provision of and access to community facilities; access and management of open, public spaces, and access to public transport are also significantly skewed to the lower ranges.

More positively, the region does come out among the top two for connectivity of the built environment to existing centres and development, which can help to facilitate more active travel, social exchange, economic opportunities and a safer built environment.

Case Study

Homes: 460, 115 affordable

Setting: Suburban

Site History: Greenfield

Audit Score: 39, Poor



This greenfield development project comprises residential housing and associated landscape and recreational improvements.

Selected audit observations:

- The scheme provides a range of housing types - including semi-detached, detached and terraced houses.
- No local community facilities within the development.
- It is possible to identify the tenures from the appearance, with the affordable units clustered within the most remote part of the development next to the main road.
- The structure and form of the development includes a high number of cul-de-sacs accessed from



The countryside charity



key roads within the development.

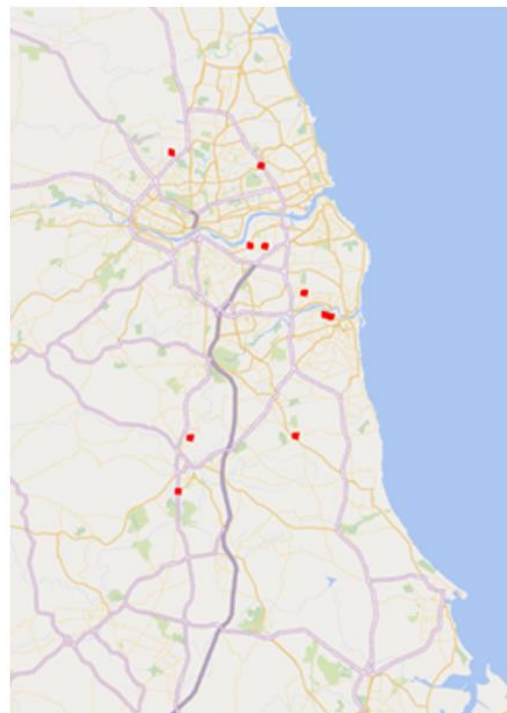
- The pedestrian environment is very poor; pedestrian links across and beyond the scheme are very circuitous.
- The townscape and landscape qualities of the scheme are poor.

Planning process

Two years after the original planning permission was granted for the site in 2013, a consortium was established and a new planning application was submitted in 2015 which largely retained the general layout, but sought to increase the number of dwellings from 450 to 460, whilst removing the proposed community facilities (and negotiating a financial sum in lieu as part of the Section 106 agreement). The approach taken by the consortium was to establish a set of design principles that would guide the development of the different parcels of land by the different house builders; however, this approach has failed to deliver on the aspirations for the site, and outcomes for the overall pedestrian environment are poor.

Schemes Assessed

Scheme	Location
The Rise	Newcastle Upon Tyne
Great Park	Newcastle Upon Tyne
<u>Lisburn Terrace</u>	Sunderland
<u>Lisburn Terrace</u>	Sunderland
Kidderminster Road	Sunderland
Newton Hall	Durham
<u>Middlewood Moor</u>	Durham
Murton Lane	<u>Easington Lane</u>
Holystone	Newcastle Upon Tyne
The Maples	<u>Hebburn</u>
Regent Drive	<u>Hebburn</u>



Map of schemes assessed in the North East.