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# A Housing Design Audit for England

## North West

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 West.

### **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’.

Fourteen schemes were assessed in the North West, 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.



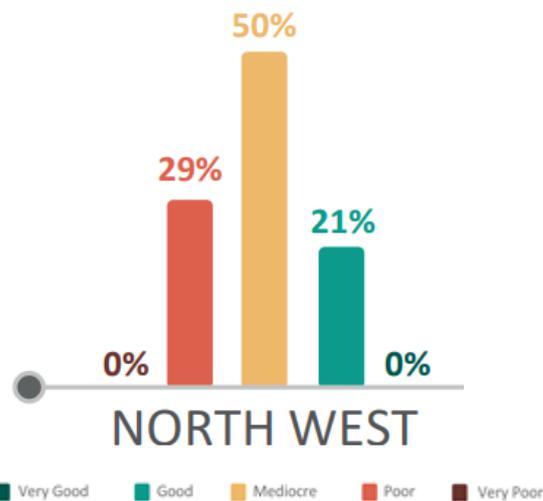
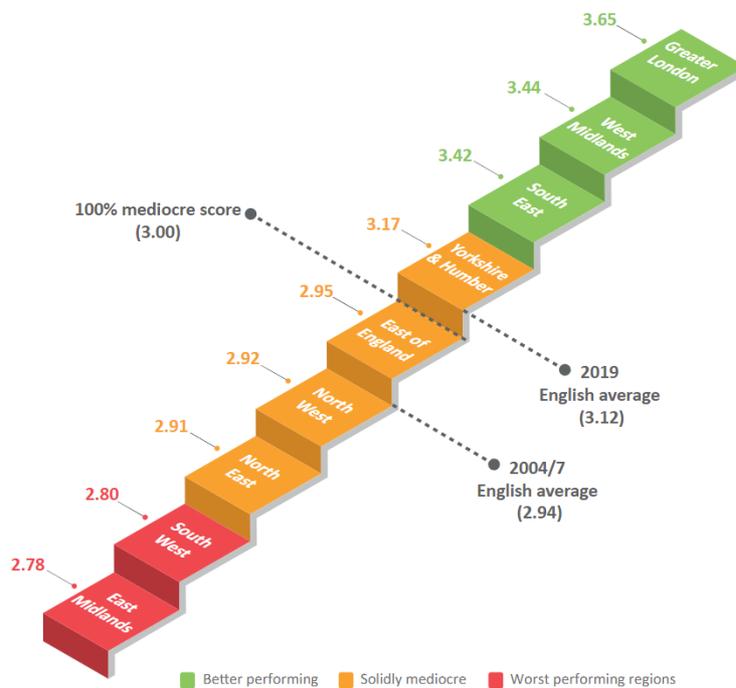
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## Results

Developments in the North West are dominated by mediocre scores, with over half of schemes scoring this classification. At 2.92, overall design quality for the region is solidly 'mediocre' and is just below the national average of 3.12 (also denoting 'mediocre').

The region has seen a 7% increase in the portion of good and very good schemes since the 2004-2006 CABE design audits. However, at the other end of the scale, there has been a disappointing 5% increase in the numbers of schemes falling into poor and very poor categories, which explains the mediocre overall standard. The North West has plummeted in regional rankings of average design score between the two studies, from second place in 2007 with a score of 2.97, to sixth place in 2019.



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



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### Why is design quality only mediocre?

Development in the North West is particularly let down by under consideration of several design factors, with schemes in the region performing worst for provision and maintenance of public, open and play spaces. Developments also scored poorly for ease of cycle and pedestrian use, connectivity to existing urban areas and services, and for architectural quality of housing.

More positively, schemes in the North West scored better for access to public transport and for provision and integration of storage spaces, such as for bins and bicycles, which can improve character, aesthetics and cleanliness of residential areas.

## Case Study

Homes: 83 (no affordable units)

Setting: Suburban

Site History: Greenfield

Audit Score: 41, Poor



This greenfield development project aims to reflect a 'village' typology with five 'character areas' and a landscaped open area. It provides no affordable housing.

Selected audit observations:

- Limited range of housing types and sizes – properties are either semi-detached or detached, and all have either 3- or 4-bedrooms.
- No local community facilities within the development.
- The architectural design of the development is standardised, with a limited variety of architectural treatments and materials.
- The pedestrian environment is poor; vehicles take priority within the site, and the design and materials used for the pavements are inconsistent.
- Access from the main road is adequate, but there is very poor connectivity to surrounding areas.
- The landscape of the open areas is limited to an area of grass and lacks play features.

Planning process

The case study site was formerly in use as farmland. An initial planning application for development of the site was refused due to the lack of affordable housing and public open space provision, alongside concerns that the development would compromise the rural character of the local area. A second outline planning



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application was submitted the following year; pre-application engagement with council officers and public consultation was undertaken as part of the process, which resulted in non-determination and appeal. Upon review by the Planning Inspectorate, it was established that due to increasing demand for housing in the locality, greenfield land would need to be developed. Permission for the development was subsequently granted by the Planning Inspector as part of the appeal, which was heavily influenced by the need to meet housing requirements in the face of under-delivery of housing in the area.

## Schemes Assessed

Scheme	Location
Clarence Street	Manchester
Adelphi Wharf	Manchester
Oakwood	Manchester
Stamford Brook	Altrincham
The Window Farm	Wigan
Bridgefield Forum	Liverpool
Blundell's Wood	Wigan
Cotton Meadows	Bolton
Scholars Field	Liverpool
Speke Hall Avenue	Liverpool
Summerhill Park	Liverpool
Magnolia	Blackpool
Rigby Road	Blackpool
Ryscar Way	Blackpool



Above: Map of schemes assessed in the North West.



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