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# A Housing Design Audit for England

## South 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 South 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’.

Sixteen schemes were assessed in the South 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.



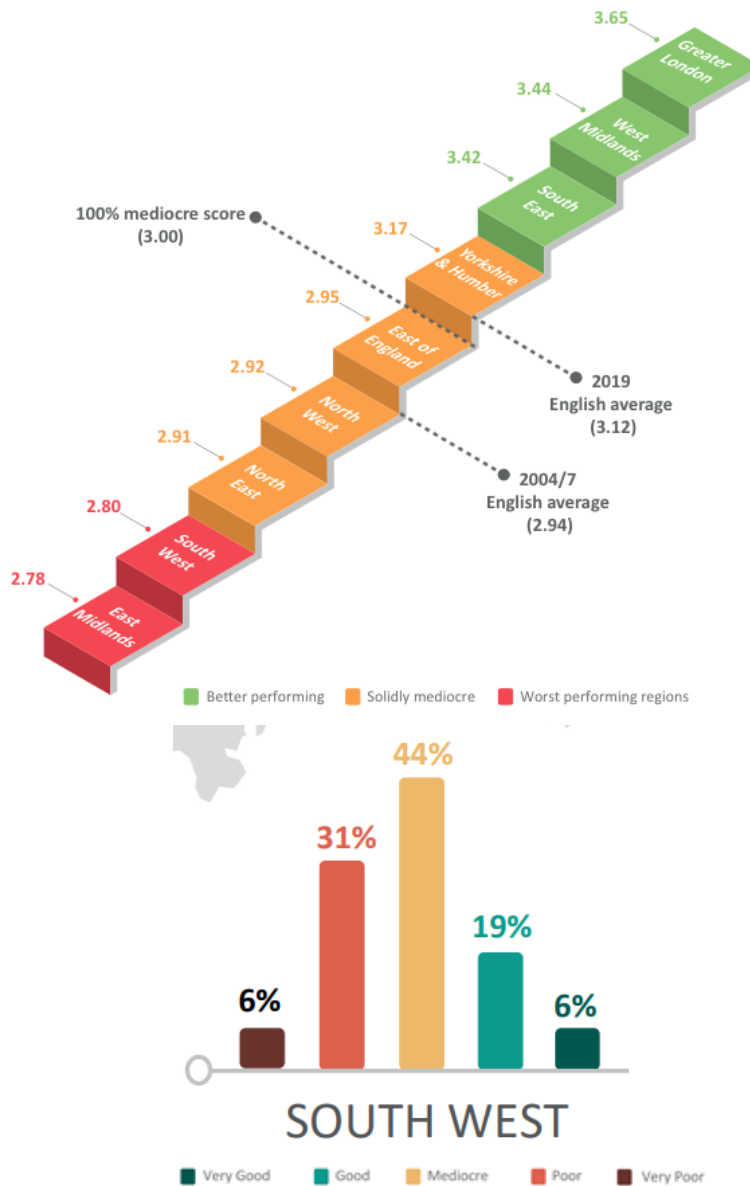
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## Results

Schemes in the South West exhibited results significantly skewed towards the lower scoring categories, with 32% of schemes classed as 'poor' or 'very poor'. At 2.80, the overall average design score for the region is significantly below the national average of 3.12, and falls in the bottom two out of nine regions assessed in England.

Comparing the 2019 results to those published by CABE between 2004 and 2007, there has been a decline in housing design quality in the South West. Over the past decade, the region's average design quality score has decreased from 2.84 in 2006 to 2.80 in 2019. While there has been a 13% increase in the number of good and very good schemes between the audit years, this has been outweighed by a disappointing 19% increase in the number of poor and very poor schemes.



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



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### Why is design quality poor?

Schemes in the South West performed least well in a number of criteria, including architectural response (assessing whether design is specific to the area), architectural quality, place character, and design and management of public, open and play spaces. With poor access to public transport, schemes also suffered from over reliance on cars and related infrastructure, which dominated developments at the expense of other design qualities. The region therefore scored poorly for highways design, street legibility (referring to how easy the development is to navigate), street definition, integration of car parking, and ease of use for pedestrians and cyclists. Developments in the region also came in the bottom two (out of nine regions assessed) for safety and security, although this was one of the most consistently well-performing criteria across all regions.

## Case Study

Homes: 148

Setting: Suburban

Site History: Greenfield

Audit Score: 32, Poor



This greenfield development is the first phase of a larger scheme of up to 750 dwellings.

### Selected audit observations:

- The case study site provides a mix of housing types including apartments, detached and semi-detached housing
- The integration of different tenures in a manner that obscures their tenure identity is not always successful.
- Poor access to community facilities; very few opportunities to work locally.
- Poor access to public transport.
- Lack of character and local distinctiveness; poor architectural quality in addition to inadequate landscape provision and design.
- The design (and management) of streets and spaces is poor; streets are not pedestrian-friendly or social spaces.
- Good levels of connectivity within and around the development.

### Planning process

Key policy objectives within national and local planning and design policies, including supplementary planning documents, informed the proposals. In addition, development of the masterplan included



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extensive engagement with council officers and local residents. However, despite the development having identified aspirations of sustainable design principles, integrated landscape proposals, and the creation of character areas, the actual outcomes in the first phase of development are markedly poor and few of the original design aspirations seem to have been carried through.

## Schemes Assessed

### Scheme

Hill Barton Vale  
 Traftaigar Road  
 Former Ibstock Brickworks Site  
 Colling Lane  
 Crediton Road  
 Saltram Meadow  
 North Prospect  
 Manor Rise  
 Oldbury Court  
 Lyde Green  
 Bilbie Green  
 Parkhouse Lane  
 Haywood Village  
 Seaton Neighbourhood  
 Former Runway, Plymouth City Airport  
 Tiverton Eastern Urban Extension

### Location

Exeter  
 Exeter  
 Exeter  
 Tidworth  
 Okehampton  
 Plymouth  
 Plymouth  
 Tidworth  
 Bristol  
 Bristol  
 Bristol  
 Bristol  
 Weston-Super-Mare  
 Plymouth  
 Plymouth  
 Tiverton



Above: Map of schemes assessed within the South West.