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# A Housing Design Audit for England

## Yorkshire and Humber

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 Yorkshire and Humber.

### **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’.

Twelve schemes were assessed in Yorkshire and Humber, 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.



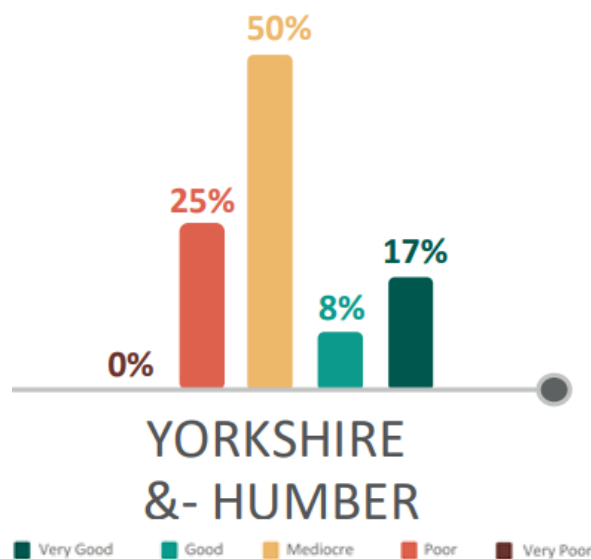
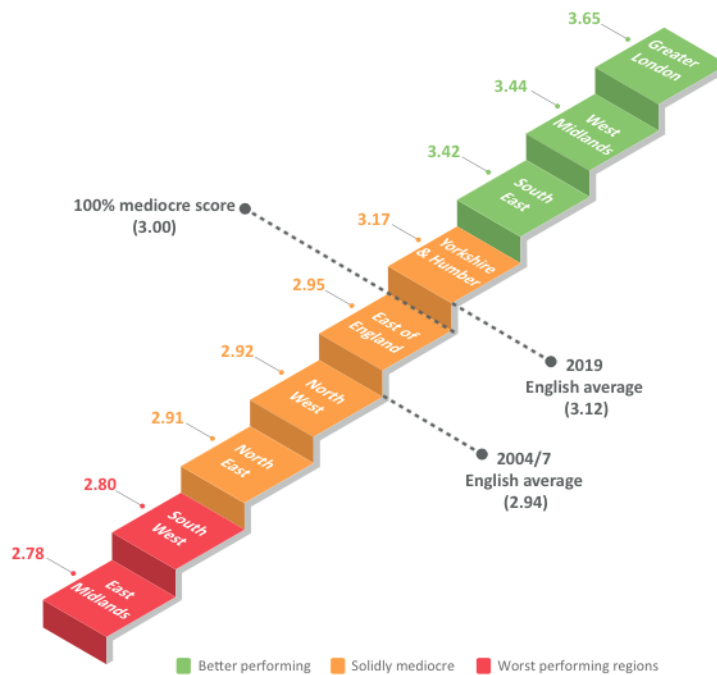
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## Results

The region is solidly mediocre, with an average design audit score of 3.17, just above the national average of 3.12 (also denoting ‘mediocre’). Two of the twelve schemes assessed were classed as ‘very good’.

Comparing the 2019 results to those published by CABE between 2004 and 2007, there has been a small improvement in overall housing design quality in Yorkshire and Humber. However, while there has been a 25% increase in the number of ‘good’ and ‘very good’ schemes, there has also been a disappointing 11% increase in the number of schemes in poor and very poor categories between the two audits.



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?

Schemes in Yorkshire and Humber were, for the most part, over-reliant on cars, scoring poorly for access to public transport, street legibility (referring to how easy the development is to navigate) and highways design (the relative dominance of highways over streets and public spaces). They were rated worst for environmental impact, place character and connectivity to existing development. The region also set a new low for criteria assessing storage considerations, such as for bins and bicycles, with schemes scoring an average of just 1.55 for this criterion.

Schemes in the region had slightly better but still mediocre scores for other criteria, for example safety and security (one of the top scoring criteria overall) and provision and maintenance of public, open and play spaces.

## Case Study

Homes: 170

Setting: Suburban

Site History: Greenfield

Audit Score: 69, Very Good



This development project comprises two parcels of land that accommodate 170 new dwellings out of the wider masterplan total of 741 proposed dwellings.

### Selected audit observations:

- The scheme provides a range of housing types and sizes, from 2- to 4-bedroom dwellings. All dwellings are 2 storeys, and are detached, semi-detached or terraced in form.
- The development segregates the different tenures; affordable units are located within their own parcel of land, situated closest to the local centre.
- Good access to community facilities; the local centre is well established and integrated into the development. Pedestrian access to the local centre is via a designated footpath and greenway at the edge of the scheme.
- The development includes a hierarchy of streets which are attractively designed, and comprise main vehicular routes, pedestrian priority routes and shared surfaces.
- Public transport has been successfully integrated into the wider development. The local centre is located within a 6-minute walk and accommodates a bus station with busses running approximately every 10 minutes.
- The design of individual homes is relatively standardised, so whilst these have a good level of architectural detail and quality, they do not contribute to local character or distinctiveness.



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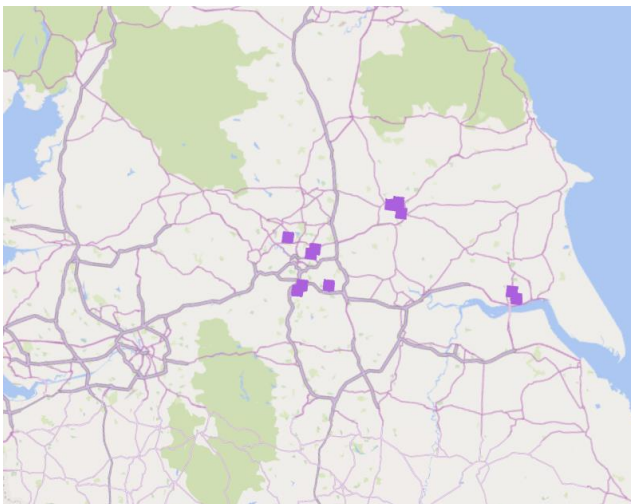


### Planning process

The two parcels of land that comprise the case study site forms part of a large urban extension (at the northern edge of a city) that was initiated in the 1990s. The aim of the overall development was to provide suburban housing, employment, shopping, leisure and community facilities. As only half of the original urban extension had been built or committed in the twenty years since permission was first granted, the decision was made to produce an Area Action Plan that would seek to ensure that any future development would respond to shifts in local and national planning policy, alongside the changing needs and aspirations of the wider local community. The masterplan for the development was approved as part of the outline planning permission and the principles of the overall masterplan helped to shape and guide the design of the case study site. As part of the planning process, pre-application engagement with council officers was undertaken, in addition to public consultation and meetings with councillors and ward members. The approach taken (within both the policy documents and the design process) to exploit and enhance the potential visual and townscape qualities of the development has resulted in a high-quality residential environment.

## Schemes Assessed

Scheme	Location
Former Lambsons Site	Castleford
Water Lane	York
Brecks Lane	York
Derwenthorpe Scheme	York
Park Drive	Wakefield
South Parkway	Leeds
Bodington Manor	Leeds
Sycamore Park	Leeds
Ruskin Avenue	Wakefield
Kingswood	Hull
Lowfield	Hull
West Hill	Hull



Above: Map of schemes assessed in Yorkshire and Humber.