BUILDING FOR LIFE

HOUSING AUDIT
ASSESSING THE DESIGN
AUDIT QUALITY OF NEW HOMES

London, the South East
and the East of England

cabe

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October 2004

PREFACE

The pressure is on to increase housing supply. But while the attention is on 'quantity', what do we know about the 'quality' of our new housing stock? What does the standard of recent completions tell us about what we are to expect of the homes that are yet to be built?

This audit of 100 recent housing developments assesses their quality in terms of layout, urban design and place-making, and uncovers the processes that helped to shape them.

The evidence shows that the design quality of the majority of new supply is average. If we carry on this way we will leave a sorry legacy to future generations. That is why CABE is working with the House Builders Federation and the Civic Trust on the Building for Life campaign. Through the Building for Life Standard and best practice library we have already recognised a large number of high quality exemplar housing developments. It can be done.

This audit goes further, to find out if the lessons from the very best feed into the bulk of the industry's product. It reveals that the flagship projects that appear on the covers of corporate brochures and annual reports often mask a raft of mediocrity.

This is not an exercise in blame. The industry and local authorities have shown that they can get it right, and this should be applauded. But the conflict that too often arises in the development process – between developers and councils, between planners and highways – is stifling creativity and quality. In our haste to build new homes it would be a crime if future generations have to suffer the consequences of a lack of ambition to achieve design quality.

The best case studies in this report demonstrate how good teamwork, design championing and consensus can deliver good housing. I would urge local authorities and house builders to learn from them – in order to provide the quality of housing that everyone deserves.

Richard Simmons
Chief Executive, CABE
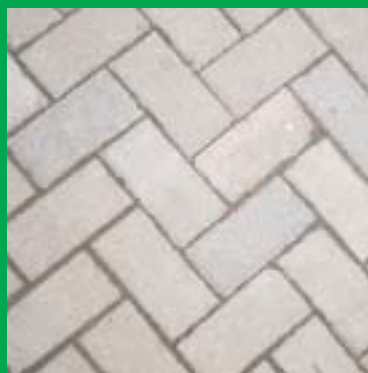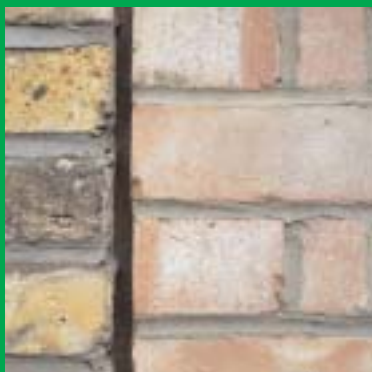
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Government plans to create over a million new homes in London and the South East by 2016*. This cannot simply be a matter of quantity. To create sustainable communities, we need to ensure that the houses and neighbourhoods are well designed and are of sufficient quality to be places of which we can be proud.

Many of these new homes are to be built in the housing growth areas of the south of England (London, the East of England and the South East). In these areas, many local authorities face the challenge of allocating large sites for housing development to meet these growth targets. Authorities are also charged with steering the volume house builders – who will deliver the bulk of these homes – towards producing the high quality sustainable communities that are envisaged. But this same industry has sometimes been accused of failing to meet the design standards that are increasingly being expected by professionals and homebuyers alike.

In order to assess how well these key players are meeting the challenge, this audit – the first of its kind – has looked at the design standards of 100 schemes completed by volume house builders between 2001 and 2003 in these critical regions. The assessment was made against criteria based upon the Building for Life (BfL) Standard, which is a joint initiative of CABE, the House Builders Federation and the Civic Trust.

BfL sets a national standard for housing and neighbourhoods and is awarded to new housing projects that demonstrate a commitment to high design standards and good place-making. The BfL Standard assesses the schemes under four main criteria. These are:

- Character
- Roads, parking and pedestrianisation
- Design and construction
- Environment and community

This Standard rewards builders of high quality new developments and aims to increase awareness of the importance of good design, architecture and landscaping to the house building industry and those members of the public who are buying new homes.

Findings

Of the 100 schemes we audited, the overwhelming majority (61%) were assessed as 'Average'. Almost a fifth (17%) we judged as 'Good' or 'Very Good'. That shows what can be achieved, although over a fifth (22%) were judged to be of 'Poor' quality, illustrating that there is still much to be done to improve the current situation. Clearly, not all housing will be exceptional. But neither should we settle for a majority of the mediocre.

We discerned a common pattern of positive and negative trends across all the assessed schemes. On the positive side, it is clear that a number of urban design principles, including the appropriate use of scale, the creation of active frontages and the forging of identifiable relationships between public and private space are becoming the norm. This is particularly evident in the schemes audited in London.

*Regional Planning Guidance Note (RPG) 9, DETR, 2001 and Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future, ODPM, 2003

On the positive side, it is clear that a number of urban design principles, including the appropriate use of scale, the creation of active frontages and the forging of identifiable relationships between public and private space are becoming the norm.

But on the negative side, the dominance of highways infrastructure and the limited evidence of bespoke design are alarmingly evident. In particular, there is a continuing tension between urban design principles and highway standards. Too often here, highway standards win out, resulting in a preponderance of hammer-head turns, over-scaled roundabouts and separate surfacing for pedestrians and vehicles.

When we compared schemes built before and after the introduction of Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 'Housing', DETR, 2000 (PPG3), which sets out design principles for residential developments, we found that while overall quality appears to be improving, the same problems of a dominance of highway infrastructure and a lack of specific design solutions are still being repeated in practice.

While these general trends are reflected across the three regions, some variations and specific issues were evident in each. London schemes tend to follow good practice in layout requirements. For example, they often featured good connections to the surrounding area and frontages to streets. In particular, they tended to score positively in the following areas:

■ Character, in particular providing appropriate enclosure, demonstrating appropriate scale relative to their context

■ Roads, parking and pedestrianisation, most prominently the servicing arrangements, demonstrating that refuse storage was well integrated and utility infrastructure was combined in one location, often out of the sight of the public

■ Environment and community, in particular access to public transport

Those schemes identified as 'Poor' performed badly on nearly all criteria. They suggest individual cases of failure of both the design process to bring forward sound proposals and the planning regulatory regime to intervene and improve submitted proposals.

The Essex Design Guide, Essex County Council 1973 continues to have a strong influence on housing layout and approaches to highway design in the East of England, where schemes tended to perform well in terms of 'character', parking and pedestrianisation. However, there were some particular problems, with schemes judged 'Poor' achieving a low score in:

■ Design and construction, most prominently the lack of vernacular design or site-specific design. In particular, schemes often appear to use a heavy-handed and superficial application of a general 'historicist' or 'rural' style

■ Environment and community, in particular the way in which detail in street and public space design has been addressed, detracting from achieving good quality environments, particularly in relation to accommodating vehicular service or access requirements

The South East region has more 'Very Good' schemes than in the Eastern region, although over half achieved only 'Average' scores. The architectural quality is generally at an acceptable level, with greater variation of styles than seen in the Eastern region.

As with the other two regions, the South East region schemes tended to address 'character' adequately, but also 'design and construction' – namely the provision of public amenity. Schemes judged 'Poor' accounted for 24% of those audited and were particularly weak on:

■ Roads, parking and pedestrianisation, in particular avoiding highway dominance

■ Design and construction, most prominently the lack of vernacular design or site-specific design

The great majority of the 'Average' or 'Poor' schemes in the audit had poor highway and car parking design as a key contributor.

Case Studies

Six case studies looked in greater detail at the background to some of the findings of the wider audit. Interviews with local authorities and volume house builders revealed that where local authorities had the appropriate skills and had engaged with developers, including the advance preparation of planning briefs, this had led to improved results. However, where local authorities lacked sufficient skills to enter into dialogue with house builders, and where house builders had sought to implement a generic design solution with a limited regard to the unique characteristics of a site, this had led to several costly and time-consuming design revisions. Even then, the result had not always proven satisfactory.

Recommendations

The audit shows a huge variety in the quality of new housing in the designated growth areas, and highlights important issues for volume housing to address, if the aim of truly sustainable communities is to be realised. We believe that there are four priorities for action. They are:

1. SKILLS

The skills of developers, their advisors and of local authorities are a critical factor in delivering high quality housing, and there are five areas where skills shortages need to be addressed:

■ Strategic planning skills, particularly in local planning authorities, to inform the production of development plans, Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) and development briefs

■ Urban design, to lead, manage and advise the planning and production of new developments

■ Project management, to provide clients with the confidence to take on complex, mixed-use schemes that combine commercial and residential elements and the related infrastructure

■ Management and maintenance of local development partnerships and management of community involvement

■ Experience and expertise in project appraisal and financing

What would have a significant impact on the quality of new housing produced? The development of a programme of training and skills with existing local authority officers and members, and the employment of more design-trained staff.

2. CAR PARKING AND HIGHWAYS

Highway considerations have often outweighed other elements of good design. The result is often that the public realm effectively becomes a 'technical' area for storing and manoeuvring cars, rather than spaces or places in their own right. The great majority of the 'Average' or 'Poor' schemes in the audit had poor highway and car parking design as a key contributor.

And yet, in developments where efforts have been made to improve the highway quality, these are often hampered by the application of existing highway design standards. The creation of permeable, well-connected developments with a network of routes goes against established approaches to highway design, which emphasise limited junctions and access onto main routes.

Furthermore, existing statute law, regulations and design guidance are often out of tune with the priority now given to streetscape, with standard practice giving primacy to vehicle movement, because of the fear of prosecution if accidents occur. Much of the existing policy, legal and technical framework in force is not geared to the delivery of better quality streets. To try and address this scenario, the ODPM has previously suggested the withdrawal of Design Bulletin 32 and its companion guide, *Places, Streets and Movement (DETR, 1998)*, replacing them with a new 'Manual for Streets', along with other legislative changes.

As has been seen from the case studies, very good results can be produced in certain conditions: very often where local authorities have the staff and skills to undertake this function, in conjunction with an able developer team.

In addition, better training and guidance is needed to encourage highways authorities and urban designers to work together more effectively. Clearly, these measures are still needed.

3. ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

Outside the London region, none of the schemes we audited showed a contemporary approach to design. Instead, there is a trend that has been evident for a long time, towards a generic 'vernacular' architecture, often unrelated to local building styles or materials. The effect has been to make new residential areas relatively indistinguishable from each other, without a true sense of place. There are few successful examples in this audit of contemporary buildings using local materials, and planning authorities could do more to encourage this, especially with volume house builders.

Another design issue is that there is a wide range of guidance available on development layouts, but very little on what constitutes good architecture. This may be due to a reluctance to get drawn into stylistic debates, but standards must progress beyond structural stability and address questions of workmanship and aesthetics.

4. POLICY, GUIDANCE AND IMPLEMENTATION

It is clear from this research that house builders and local planning and highway authorities can produce attractive and sustainable environments within the context of existing policy and guidance. Indeed, planning authorities are required to consider the principles of good design in relation to housing, as set out in a number of published documents. These are: Planning Policy Guidance 1: General Policy and Principles (PPG1, DoE, 1997), the draft Planning Policy Statement 1 – Creating Sustainable Communities (PPS1), ODPM, 2004 and in Planning Policy Guidance 3: Housing (PPG3, DETR, March 2000). Further guidance is provided in By Design: Better Places to Live (DETR, 2001), the companion guide to PPG3. However, as we have seen, good architectural and urban design is not the norm, and this suggests that the way policy and practice interact may need to be reviewed.

Guidance on the tools and mechanisms to bring forward substantial new neighbourhoods as truly integrated and sustainable additions to existing settlements needs to be re-emphasised. This could include the greater use of Development Briefs and Masterplans, and more collaborative approaches to establishing an overall vision and objectives for an area through 'Enquiry by Design' events. The requirements of the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act for greater levels of stakeholder involvement and wide-ranging sustainability appraisals represents a good opportunity to bring these practices more into the mainstream of planning.

Many house builders take an enlightened approach to new housing and great pride in the places they help create. Ultimately, however, it must be remembered that they are running businesses, with responsibilities to their shareholders. Subject to satisfying their customers' requirements, most will therefore take the line of least resistance to achieving planning permission. It is properly the role of the local planning and highways authorities to seek modifications to proposals that meet the objectives of good urban design and the wider needs of the community. As has been seen from the case studies, very good results can be produced in certain conditions: very often where local authorities have the staff and skills to undertake this function, in conjunction with an able developer team.

1.INTRODUCTION

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Housing has become one of the key policy issues facing central and local government. Nowhere is this more the case than in the south of England, where over a million new homes are to be built by 2016 to meet escalating demand*.

Expansion on this scale will necessarily create tensions between the need to build and environmental, social and economic sustainability. Consequently the pressures on local authorities to make land available will continue to meet resistance from local people who fear the onset of urban sprawl and additional pressure on local amenities. The Government is committed to housing growth, but the project is about more than simply building new houses; the task is to build new and sustainable communities.

The *Sustainable Communities Plan* recognises the nature of this challenge. As well as highlighting the need to accelerate the provision of new homes, the plan aims to create the conditions whereby private house builders will build more homes of the 'right type in the right places'. The aim, clearly, is not simply to build in high quantities, but also to high quality, to ensure that the new settlements created are sustainable in the long term. It is our contention that better architecture and urban design offers the key to resolving the tensions and securing the sustainable communities of which we will be proud.

There are many examples of excellent design, where the best principles of architectural and urban design are evident. Yet these often high value schemes are only a small part of the national house building programme. Little information is available on the relative quality of the majority of new housing produced in this country – the output of what are commonly termed the volume house builders.

Anecdotal evidence suggests quality can vary greatly. It is still possible to find a plethora of housing development schemes built as single tenure, similar sized, standard housing types arranged in cul-de-sacs, off feeder roads adjacent to bypasses on the edge of town, built at densities of less than 25 units per hectare.

This audit set out to assess the output of the volume house builders in the housing growth areas of southern England – but its findings will have lessons for all involved in creating new homes and new communities.

**Regional Planning Guidance Note (RPG) 9*, DETR, 2001 and *Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future*, ODPM, 2003

The project is about more than simply building new houses; the task is to build new and sustainable communities.

Above: Charter Quay, Kingston Below: Marshall Square, Southampton
Good quality materials and integration of the car

We looked at 100 new, mid-range housing schemes, assessing their quality against a range of criteria. We supplemented this with a review of six case studies. The schemes were all in the 'greater South East', comprising the Government Office regions for London, the South East and East of England, which the Government anticipates to be the main areas of growth over the next 15-20 years. The report investigates the relationship between existing policy and practice and the quality of schemes being produced by the top 10 volume house builders. Then, from these findings, we make recommendations on how national policy and practice can be refined, with lessons for both policy makers and the house building industry alike.

Figure 1 illustrates the approach to the research that was undertaken. Further details on the methodology can be found in Appendix B.

Audit criteria

The criteria applied in the audit were based on those used by Building for Life (BfL), a joint initiative of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), the House Builders Federation and the Civic Trust. Building for Life represents the national standard for housing and neighbourhoods and is awarded to new housing projects which demonstrate a commitment to high quality design and good place-making. The aim is to reward builders of high quality new developments and increase awareness of the importance of good design and architecture and landscaping to the public buying new homes.
[www.buildingforlife.org/standard]

BfL criteria consist of the appearance and quality or otherwise of 20 factors, which are grouped under the following four headings:

- Character
- Roads, parking and pedestrianisation
- Design and construction
- Environment and community

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

For each of the three Government Office regions:

- Select top 10 house builders by volume (based on most recent available data)

For each top 10 house builder all schemes were:

- Completed between 1Jan 2001 – 1Jan 2004
- Over 20 units in size
- Of 'Average' Sales price

▼

POOL OF POSSIBLE SCHEMES ESTABLISHED ▼

SELECTION CRITERIA

Three schemes per developer were selected from a pool with the overall selection balanced as far as possible as regards:

- Rural, Urban and, Suburban locations
- Greenfield and Brownfield development
- Small (less than 50 units) and large schemes
- Geographical spread of schemes within each region

▼

FINAL SELECTION OF 100 SCHEMES FOR ASSESSMENT

Figure 1

Top: An unwelcoming environment, Heron Island, Reading
Bottom: Poor relationship to the existing context, Regarth Avenue, Romford

The score adjacent above are broadly consistent with the methodology and approach applied in the BfL. However, for the purposes of this audit we have not used exactly the same criteria or method as would be used in awarding the BfL Standard. For example, it was felt that architectural quality, service provision and waste storage and management criteria should be added, as these elements contribute significantly to overall quality. In addition, some of the BfL criteria, such as Environmental Impact, Range of Tenure and Community Cohesion were excluded from this audit because the prime focus of the work related to urban design, rather than environmental and socio-economic issues that these criteria seek to explore. Consequently, it should not be inferred that those schemes assessed here as 'Good' or 'Very Good' would necessarily be awarded the Standard. Appendix B outlines the relationship of the BfL criteria to the study audit criteria.

Our scoring for the audit criteria (see the back cover flap for a full list of criteria and corresponding criteria) was based upon on-site judgements. The full list of BfL criteria and how they have been translated into this audit can be found in Appendix B.

By applying the thresholds used by the BfL, we established the following groupings for this audit:

'Very Good'
AN OVERALL SCORE OF MORE THAN 30 (OVER 81%)
Demonstrates a commitment to high quality design and good place-making. These schemes will have addressed most of the audit criteria (listed in the pull-out tab) to a very high standard.

'Good'
AN OVERALL SCORE OF MORE THAN 25 (OVER 76%)
Demonstrates good design and will have a good score for most of the audit criteria.
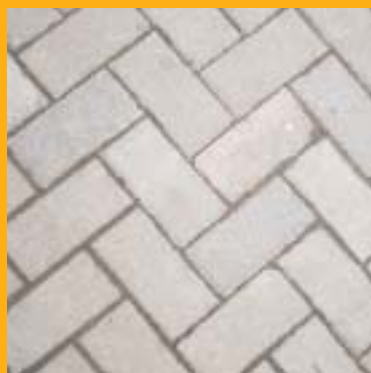
'Average'
AN OVERALL SCORE OF MORE THAN 0 (OVER 50%)
Has begun to address design criteria, but will not have addressed all of the audit criteria in a consistently positive way.

'Poor'
AN OVERALL SCORE OF LESS THAN 0 (LESS THAN 50%)
Has not begun to address the design criteria and will have achieved negative scores in most of the audit criteria.

2.FINDINGS

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In the majority of cases (61%), schemes achieved an 'Average' score. This suggests that the bulk of new housing is meeting the requirements of basic design principles. It might be tempting to accept this as satisfactory, but if genuinely sustainable communities are to be created, we cannot settle for the mediocre.

The fact that the audit found almost a fifth of new housing to be 'Good' (5%) or 'Very Good' (12%) shows what can be achieved, within what are often the same regulatory and market conditions. But the fact that almost a quarter (22%) of the schemes were judged to be 'Poor' highlights how much more house builders and authorities need to do to raise their game.
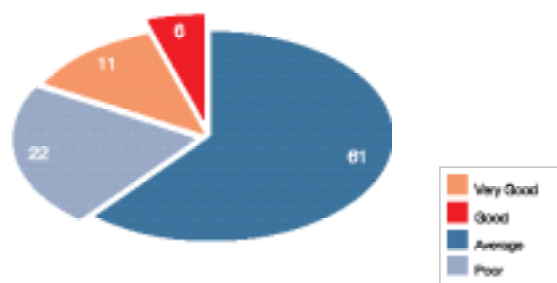

Figure 2.1 Overall Results

A common pattern of positive and negative trends across all the schemes and in all regions emerged. On the positive side, it is clear that a number of urban design principles, including the appropriate use of scale, the creation of active frontages and forging of identifiable relationships between public and private space, are becoming the norm. This is particularly evident in the schemes we audited in London.

On the negative side, the dominance of highways infrastructure and the limited evidence of bespoke design are alarmingly evident. In particular, there is a continuing tension between urban design principles and highway standards. Too often here, highway standards win out, resulting in a preponderance of hammer-head turns, over-scaled roundabouts and separate surfacing for pedestrians and vehicles.
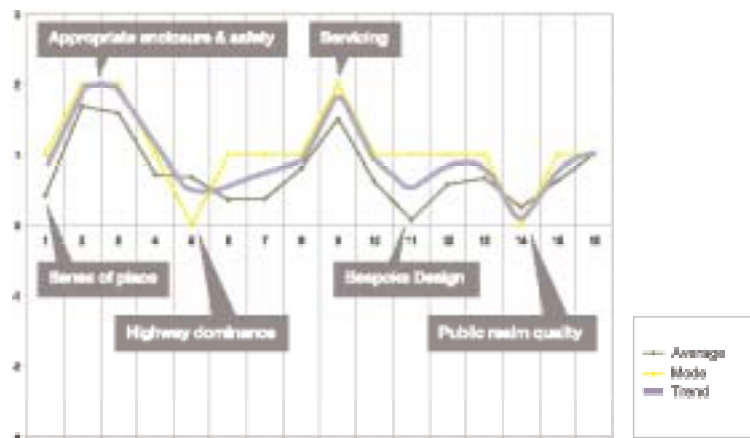

Figure 2.2: Overall trends

This figure illustrates an analysis of trends emerging from the audit. The 'Trend' line on the diagram represents the difference between the 'Average' and 'Mode' scores. This has been termed the 'best fit', and is explained below. The 'Average' score is derived from taking the total score for each criteria and dividing it by the number of schemes assessed i.e. 100. The 'Mode' score is the most frequent score, for example for criteria two, 'Appropriate enclosure', 48% of all schemes achieved a score of +2. The trend or best fit therefore takes into account different factors, such as frequency in the 'Mode' and anomalies in score for the 'Average'. The trend line illustrates the overall pattern across the 100 schemes.

There is a continuing tension between urban design principles and highway standards.

The Influence of PPG3

One of the key components of the regulatory framework underpinning good design in housing is PPG3. This sets out design principles and requirements for, amongst other things, increasing densities in residential development.

As the majority of the 100 schemes we audited were completed after the end of 2001, permission is likely to have been granted in the context of the tests described within this PPG. However, without precise details on when each scheme was designed and when it went through the planning process, it has not been possible to categorically state the extent to which it was influenced by PPG3. Our findings in this regard are therefore only indicative.

PPG3 was published in April 2000 and sought to:

■ Create places and spaces with the needs of people in mind; which are attractive and have their own distinctive identity but respect and enhance local character

■ Promote designs and layouts which are safe and take account of public health, crime prevention and community safety considerations

■ Focus on the quality of the places and living environments being created and give priority to the needs of pedestrians, rather than the movement and parking of vehicles

■ Avoid inflexible planning policies and reduce road widths, traffic speeds and promote safer environments for pedestrians

■ Promote the energy efficiency of new housing where possible

However, if we compare those schemes completed before the end of 2001 with those completed after 2001 when the PPG would have been in place, there appears to be little variation in performance. This suggests that, overall, the scores – either positive or negative - would have been the same in either case. There are, however, specific variations to this conclusion: for example, schemes did better on criteria under Appropriate Enclosure after the introduction of PPG3. On those criteria where volume house builders were already scoring poorly, however, there does not seem to have been much improvement.
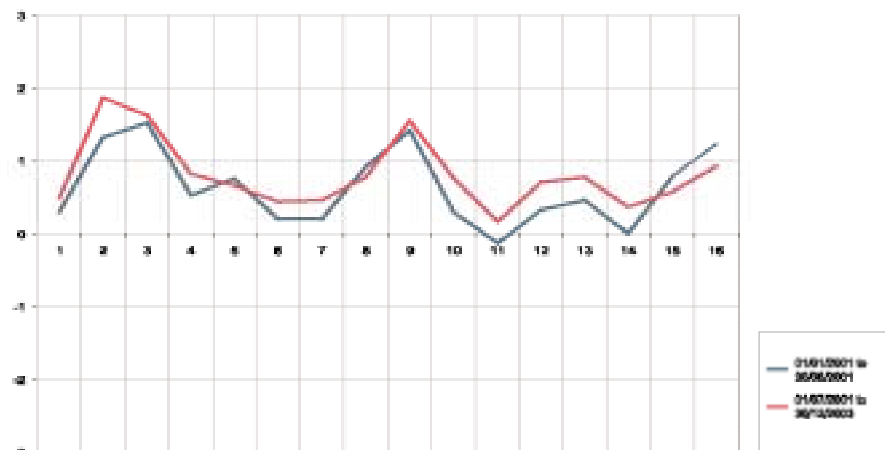

Figure 2.3: Case studies completed before and after the introduction of PPG3

Regional Differences

Although there are many common themes across the three regions, there are interesting and specific lessons to be learned by looking a little closer at each. London schemes, for example, out perform the other regions in avoiding the dominance of highways and access to public transport, though both may owe more to the accessibility of the capital city than to the deliberate intention for the development. The South East schemes outperformed the other regions on the provision of public amenity and the quality of the public realm. These differences are explored in greater detail in this section.
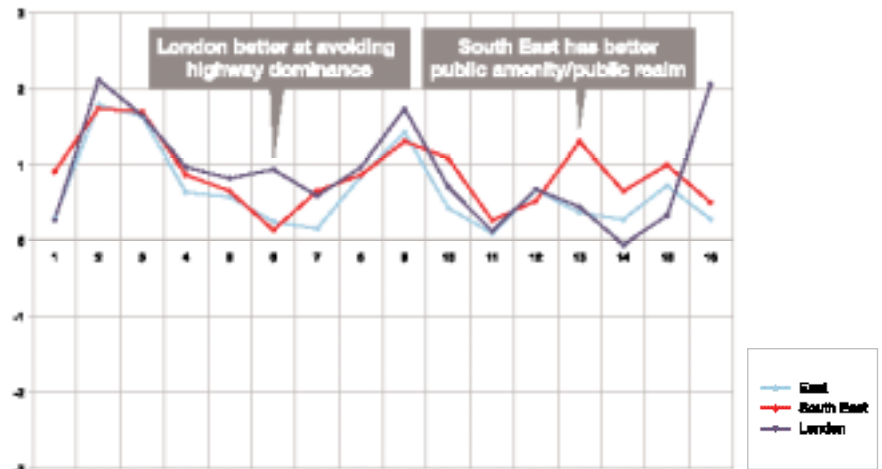

Figure 2.4: Average score by region

It could indicate that developers and local planning authorities have assimilated and are putting into practice the principles of good urban design, without necessarily taking the additional step to good architectural detail and design.

London Region

Of the London schemes, 4 (12%) achieved a 'Very Good' score and 2 (6%) achieved a 'Good' score. Over two-thirds (69%) achieved 'Average' scores, with 5 schemes (15%) achieving a 'Poor' score. This was slightly better than the overall findings, although it was mainly because of a higher incidence of 'Average', rather than 'Poor' schemes.

In large part, the London results might be due to the capital scoring higher against the criteria relating to access to public transport. Here, London schemes would be expected to score well, as London has exceptional access to public transport in comparison to the other regions.

Within the region, there is little consistency in the results across all schemes, suggesting a mixed performance by developers and local authorities. Indeed, 'Poor' schemes, while slightly less common, perform badly on nearly all criteria, suggesting individual cases of failure of both the design process to bring forward sound proposals and the planning regime to intervene and improve submitted proposals.

Over two-thirds of London schemes fall into the 'Average' category and demonstrated basic good practice in layout requirements, such as good connections to the surrounding context and having frontages to streets.

Similarly, they showed that they had introduced elements of mixed use where appropriate and a demonstrated a good relationship between the fronts and backs of houses. This is often enabled by a well-defined urban context which in itself dictates what the appropriate response should be. It could indicate that developers and local planning authorities have assimilated and are putting into practice the principles of good urban design, without necessarily taking the additional step to good architectural detail and design.

Indeed, there is a lack of attention to detail, both in the creative design process and the built execution of the proposals in many schemes. This applies to both the design of the buildings and public realm. In many cases, low quality materials were used and had a tendency to 'spoil' otherwise solidly thought-out and executed schemes.

The factors which distinguish 'Very Good' schemes from others tend to relate to 'architectural' issues and the detailing of both buildings and public realm. The schemes we saw which had gone beyond basic functionality and created new pieces of townscape which were noteworthy and positively added to their context were mainly those which had taken the next step in addressing points of architectural design and attention to detail.
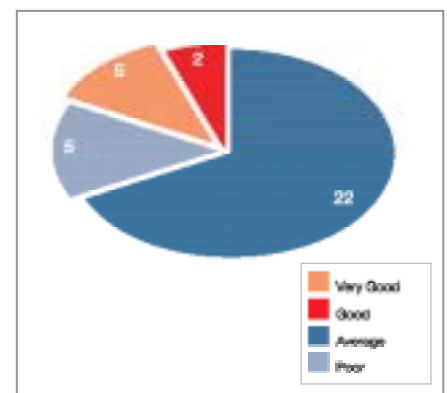

Figure 2.5: London Results

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Top: High quality in all aspects of design, John Harrison Way, Greenwich
Bottom: Good relationship with adjacent buildings, Lawn Lane, Vauxhall

Legible, well-connected developments with a permeable network of routes are infrequent, and internal streets often wind their way through the development in a complicated manner. These streets may calm traffic, but they also lose any sense of connection between areas.

Eastern Region

Compared to the overall results, results here were not encouraging. Fewer schemes achieved a 'Very Good' score in the East of England region, with a higher proportion achieving a 'Poor' score. But where there were 'Very Good' schemes, it was their 'simplicity of design' in terms of imaginative handling of parking and access and their overall architectural quality which appeared to be distinguishing factors; the Essex Design Guide clearly continues to have a strong influence on housing layout and approaches to highway design.

The problem aspects often appear to lie in a heavy-handed and superficial application of a general 'vernacular' or 'rural' style which may not be suitable to local context. At its worst, this expresses itself as a rash of pink rendered buildings in an otherwise unremarkable scheme.

This 'vernacular' or 'village style' of architecture is still being used in many schemes, and usually it does not correspond to the immediate context of the development. Often, these styles are used in an attempt to 'fit in' but at best often relate only to a general regional vernacular, with little opportunity taken to seek out and adapt the unique built form aspects of the particular local settlement or adjacent buildings.

Furthermore, there is little evidence that developers have sought to resolve the more complex design issues. The essential collaborative discussions between highway engineer and designers are not evident in many of these schemes.

In general, a lack of attention to detail in street and public space design is proving to be a major barrier to achieving good quality environments, particularly in relation to car parking or access. As with the South East region, parking arrangements were generally mixed, with 'Poor' schemes tending to be even less imaginative. Often they resulted in bleak parking courts which do not integrate well with the overall public realm. Legible, well-connected developments with a permeable network of routes are infrequent, and internal streets often wind their way through the development in a complicated manner. These streets may calm traffic, but they also lose any sense of connection between areas.
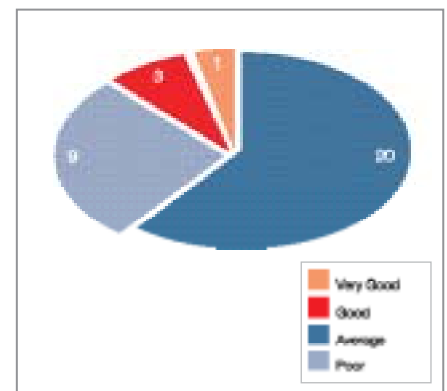

Figure 2.6: East Results

21

Top: Poor highway design, Queens Road, Teddington
Bottom: Poor relation of roads to building line, Swallowfields, Waverley

South East Region

Outside of the generally built-up fabric of London, housing developments tend to be less intensive in their use of land, with more houses and fewer apartments. This leads to an overall shift in the morphology which in many cases seems to be the result of what one might call the 'Poundbury Effect'. The Prince of Wales' high-profile experiment in recreating the character and patterns of piecemeal, incremental urban forms in new-build communities appears to have captured the imagination of developers and their customers, in a similar fashion to that created by the introduction of the first Essex Design Guide in the 1970s. 'Neo-Poundbury' seems to be 'catching on'.

This is a good thing in that Poundbury captures many of the key aspects of good urban design, often involving a substantial re-writing of the rules, particularly in relation to the design requirements of the highway. Developments in the South-East appear to have often mimicked Poundbury to greater or lesser degrees, with varying success. There are still, however, far too many 'standard developer schemes' which are bland and poorly structured.

In general terms, though, the South East has more 'Very Good' schemes than in the Eastern and London regions. It is also encouraging that the architectural quality is generally at an acceptable level and is much more varied than that seen in the Eastern region.

Parking arrangements are mixed, with no one form of parking dominating the appearance of an area. The better schemes tend to integrate parking with the built development and begin to use planting creatively as a way of softening its visual effect on the public realm. Conversely, the poorer schemes reverted to standard driveway and integral garage solutions which tended to dominate the street scene, even when few cars were present.

South Eastern schemes again showed a lack of attention to detail in street and public space design in the majority of schemes, particularly in relation to accommodating vehicular service or access requirements. The criteria relating to a 'sense of place' are often the key to better performing schemes. And again, what tended to distinguish 'Very Good' standard schemes from others was 'simplicity of design' in terms of imaginative handling of parking and access.
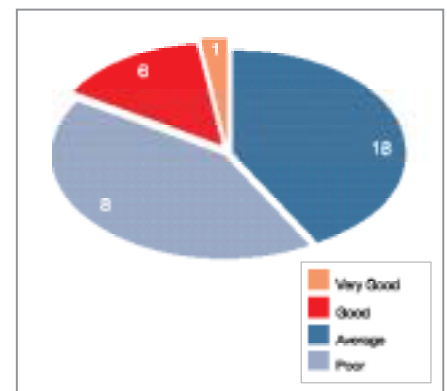

Figure 2.7: South East Results

Above and left: Poundbury: Close attention to detail has resulted in the successful application of the Dorset vernacular, and careful consideration to the highways has resulted in a pedestrian-friendly environment

Good examples of parking integration and street design.
Top: Bishops Mead, Chelmsford and bottom: Northshore, Medway

The implication is that quality is not a factor of a particular developer, nor of particular local authorities. As the overall findings suggest, all authorities and all developers are capable of producing good housing – and bad.

Developments are often served by a single access point with limited other pedestrian connections. Sometimes, developers seem to create permeable 'street block' layouts, while still adhering to a feeder road and cul-de-sac layout in reality. This suggests a conflict between the traditional settlement form that planning departments aspire to, in line with good urban design practice, and the standards required by highways departments for limited frontage and junctions on main routes.

The reliance upon meandering street patterns to calm traffic is less evident here than in the Eastern region, although the solutions used are often no more attractive. The chicanes, road-narrowing and speed humps used tend to give a road traffic engineering feel to spaces and streets. Instead, these often could and should be the place for low key, intimate public realm aimed more at the pedestrian.

Clusters

There were several particular concentrations of development activity in the areas studied. This gave us an opportunity to explore whether housing built by different developers in close geographical proximity – and therefore likely to be developed under similar circumstances of market perception and local authority control – exhibited similar trends in design quality. Two of these clusters were Ashford in Kent and Chelmsford in Essex.

Our analysis of these clusters did not indicate any local geographic patterns, which suggests that schemes can be very varied within similar constraints related to specific locations. The implication, therefore, is that quality is not a factor of a particular developer, nor of particular local authorities. As the overall findings suggest, all authorities and all developers are capable of producing good housing – and bad. The mechanisms, it would seem, are in place; what really matters is how those mechanisms are used.
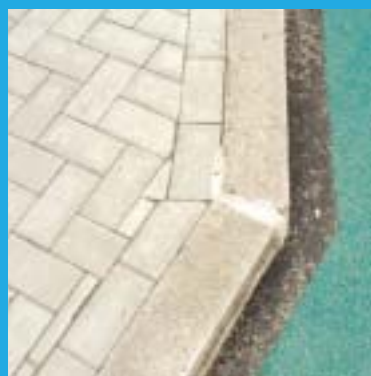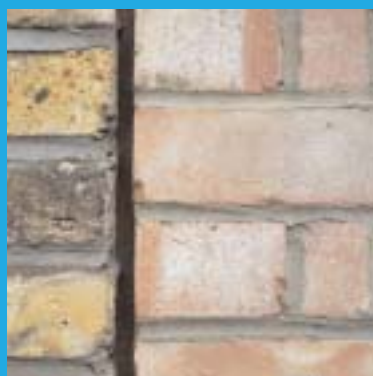
3.CASE STUDIES

3.CASE STUDIES

The issues we identified in the audit were explored in greater detail through a series of six case studies, which follow. These provide an insight into how the particular interactions of the site and development context, have combined to produce specific results when taken with the approach of the house builder and the local planning and highways authorities.

The case studies were chosen from the 100 original schemes, and included a low and high-scoring scheme from each of three developers. These were chosen to represent as far as possible the three regions and differing house types. The case studies were also selected on the basis of size, so that there was a range of large and small schemes. The six schemes are listed in the table (see right).

ADDRESS	LOCAL AUTHORITY	DEVELOPER	NUMBER OF UNITS	ASSESSMENT SCORE	SCORE CATEGORY
New River Head Amwell Street London	London Borough of Islington	St James	77	33	Very Good
Willow Court Windley Tye Chelmsford	Chelmsford Borough Council	Bellway Homes	21	32	Very Good
Beaulieu Park Chelmsford	Chelmsford Borough Council	David Wilson Homes	57	29	Good
Bolnore Village Haywards Heath	Mid-Sussex District Council	David Wilson Homes	21	5	Average
The Aspect Tysoe Avenue Enfield	London Borough of Enfield	St James	84	2	Average
Harrisons Wharf London Road Purfleet	Thurrock Borough Council	Bellway Homes	103	-1	Poor

New River Head

Amwell Street, London
St James
London Borough of Islington
Assessment Score: 33 ('Very Good')

Above: A blend of new and retained buildings

The New River Head scheme comprises approximately 77 units and is located on the site of the former Thames Water Hydra Building and Pumping Station (which is still in use). The site includes a listed building and is adjacent to a conservation area and has a density of 378 habitable rooms per hectare.

The scheme achieved 'Very Good' status, with a score of 33. It uses the existing assets of the site well and successfully integrates retained older buildings with modern new development, creating subtle local landmark buildings which aid legibility.

Development on the New River Head site had clear principles which were expressed in an adopted planning brief. There were detailed discussions between the planning officers, the conservation and design officers, the tree officers and the architects for the two new residential blocks on Amwell Street/Hardwick Street and Myddelton Passage (the Nautilus Building). The authority provided St James with a clear understanding of what was required for the scheme, including the level of affordable housing, and St James welcomed this clear and consistent approach.

The council has relatively low parking standards (less than 0.5 spaces per unit), which meant that the development was less likely to be dominated by the car. It therefore allowed for more public space which was more inviting to pedestrian and cycle users. St James has found that in inner London locations such as New River Head, fewer occupiers own cars, and reduced parking provision is not a deterrent to purchasers.

Above: New River Head site layout

Willow Court

Windley Tye, Chelmsford, Essex
Bellway Homes
Chelmsford Borough Council
Assessment Score: 32 ('Very Good')

Above: High quality public space

Above: Attractive and site specific built form

This Bellway Homes scheme comprises 21 units of three and four-bedroom detached, semi-detached and terraced houses on a 0.85 hectare site. It contains two small areas of open space with garage and parking areas set behind the building line. The overall density is 25 units per hectare and the scheme sits in a suburban location on the western edge of Chelmsford. The scheme scored well against all criteria, creating a series of pleasant spaces which defined the character of the place and were well defined by attractive and site-specific built form. Car parking is generally behind the building line and building frontages address public spaces, which were of a pedestrian scale.

A previous application by a different developer, which was refused at appeal on design grounds, in part because the development did not front onto a local park. Neither, however, did Bellway Homes' initial proposals have any units fronting onto the local park, and they did not, in Chelmsford's view, create any useable space within the development nor have adequate passive surveillance of footpaths.

Above: Willow Court site layout

In discussion with Bellway Homes, the council suggested a revised layout (essentially as is now built) which included fewer larger units in a more formal layout to achieve an appropriate scale and include development fronting onto the park. They suggested modifications to unit types to include balconies, and more windows overlooking public spaces. Bellway Homes responded positively to these suggestions.

Bellway Homes regards councils such as Chelmsford, which have the necessary skills and experience to suggest informed modifications to proposals, as a positive addition to a collaborative process. The house builder developed new unit types to work with the council's suggestions, which have now become part of the Bellway Homes range. The developer points out, though, that all of this was helped by a rising housing market which continuously eroded any risk to profitability that may have arisen from changes to unit type.

Chelmsford is a 'Beacon Council' for Urban Design, and it is clear that it has a sophisticated and well-established approach aimed at achieving high quality design in new residential development. This is born of a long history of best practice which can be traced back to the introduction of the first Essex Design Guide in 1973. Having said this, however, the cluster of schemes in Chelmsford (see section 3) did not show any consistent pattern of higher scores.

Development Control officers, together with officers from the Development and Design Co-ordination Team (containing Urban Design and Conservation specialists) and the Highways Department operate in a series of informal teams which regularly work together on applications. The Highways officers are leading much of the innovative thinking in public realm design, and modifications to schemes are often suggested through working sketch-design sessions with applicants.

Then, once a scheme is approved, implementation is closely monitored to ensure the developer does not change details such as materials, window and door specifications, paving details and even built form during construction. These changes, in Chelmsford's view, are often not deliberate and can arise through error, poor communication and the on-site misinterpretation of agreed details.

The Highways officers are leading much of the innovative thinking in public realm design, and modifications to schemes are often suggested through working sketch-design sessions with applicants.

For the council, good schemes are design-led, not standards-led. If the scheme 'works' it is not unduly worried about conforming exactly to density, open space, garden or parking standards. This is particularly true of highway and public realm design. The Essex Design Guide is seen as having had a major influence on creative thinking in this area. However, on the downside, a growing impediment to achieving good urban design solutions is seen as the perceived risk to pedestrian safety of innovative highway solutions. It will always be safer for a local authority to endorse the tried-and-tested, even when this does not work well. Where there is evidence to show that more informal public realm and car access arrangements are as safe, if not safer than more traditional layouts, this needs to be incorporated into revised best practice.

Beaulieu Park

David Wilson Homes
Chelmsford Borough Council
Assessment Score: 29 ('Good')

Above: Larger detached units

Above: Affordable housing component

This is a scheme of 102 units on a site of 3.7 hectares, forming part of the large new development of Beaulieu Park to the north-east of Chelmsford, which has been built by a number of developers. The project was carried out in two phases with an overall density of 27.6 units per hectare. In the main it comprises short terraces fronting onto roads and public spaces, centred on a public open space which features a mature oak tree, with detached units at the 'rural' edges of the scheme.

This scheme consistently scored well across all criteria, creating street enclosures in which the provision for cars did not dominate. Spaces were legible and felt safe and connected where possible to the surrounding route network, including a nearby bus route. The built form was of good if not exceptional architectural quality, was well-executed and was complemented by appealing and well-detailed public spaces. The scheme contains 20% affordable housing (in line with policy at the time) in two terraces, and these are indistinguishable from the private housing.

The local authority adopted a Planning Brief for Beaulieu Park in 1997 and produced a Beaulieu Park Northern Area Masterplan jointly with Countryside Properties (the principal developer) in 2001, as a response to the initial development ideas that were coming forward. This aimed to coordinate proposals from a number of developers and set out urban design and development principles to establish land uses, appropriate character, building heights, connections to surrounding developments and footpaths and the approach to townscape and highway design.

David Wilson Homes felt that the masterplan was very useful in making clear what the council's aspirations were. This masterplan also helped focus discussions on modifications to initial proposals. Working with the council, the general layout of the scheme was agreed, as were the details of the highway design, which included changes to continuous surfaces without carriageway delineation. There are strong similarities between the overall layout of the completed scheme and the character areas depicted on the masterplan.

Above: Integrating the car and the pedestrian

Above: Site masterplan

This scheme, like others at Beaulieu Park, adopts a range of styles, which the council felt represented the full breadth of Essex vernacular styles. Developers were comfortable with the approach, as the overall effect created an intimate character that is appealing to homebuyers. The council was planning post-occupancy surveys of some of the new housing areas to discover the occupiers' views of their residential environment.

Local authority officers enjoyed strong support from elected members, who originally led the drive towards higher design standards. This, coupled with integrated working by staff of all disciplines with the appropriate skills and experience, enables the council to promote good urban design principles and high quality materials in approved schemes. This has been followed through with on-site inspection to ensure developers build what is approved, an element which can be crucial to ensuring high quality. Developers are in turn willing to listen to the council's suggestions, knowing that these are soundly based, speed things up and afford them more certainty toward achieving planning permission.

The Essex Design Guide has had a strong influence in terms of 'trailblazing' innovative approaches to highway design, which is so crucial to the overall character of any scheme.

Above: Beaulieu Park scheme layout

Bolnore Village

Haywards Heath
David Wilson Homes
Mid-Sussex District Council
Assessment Score: 5 ('Average')

Above: an overview of the scheme

Bolnore Village is a large residential expansion of around 1,000 units in the south-west quarter of Haywards Heath. The majority of the scheme has been, and is continuing to be, developed by Crest Nicholson Homes. The David Wilson Homes component comprises a small section at the gateway to the second phase of the development, with 21 units, including both flats and houses.

The scheme achieved a score of 5, which falls into the 'Average' category of the audit. The main failings related to the car parking layout, which takes priority over the building form, and the design and finish of public spaces. Several detailing issues lowered the overall quality of the scheme, including sections of pavement which overlapped, and the demarcation of entrances to garages, as well as instances where details had been poorly executed.

However, the site had a number of significant constraining factors, including an adjacent area of copse and an attenuation pond (balancing pond) to the scheme's rear. In addition, Crest Nicholson had already determined the infrastructure, including the overall highways layout.

The second phase of the Bolnore Village development was significantly higher in density than the first, a factor which was welcomed by the local authority. The council also approved all other sections of the second phase in a single consent, with the exception of this part of the scheme. It was aiming for a unified approach to ensure that the various house builders involved in the second phase would not create too varied a range of styles. In the end, the local authority believed that this was achieved.

David Wilson Homes' initial application for the site was deferred because it was not considered to be consistent with the high quality design achieved in the rest of the scheme. In response to this, the West Sussex architect worked with the designer from David Wilson Homes to help develop the scheme.

The council felt that the application discussions and design development for the scheme took significantly longer than would be expected for such a small project. The authority's main issue of concern was the approach taken to the design of the prominent block of flats within the scheme.

Above: The flat block at the Northern corner

Above: Unco-ordinated detailing

The developer's view was that the over-dominance of the highways (such as the hammerhead created in the parking court) was a requirement from the County Highway Authority. A more flexible approach to the design and regulation of highways could have resulted in a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

The developer felt that communication between the County Council Highways department and the Local Planning Authority could be a cause of problems, as they have differing objectives. The Highways Authority emphasises safety aspects, while the local planning authority strives for good urban design. These objectives can sometimes be contradictory.

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Right: Bolnore Village scheme layout

The Aspect, Tysoe Avenue

St James
London Borough of Enfield
Assessment Score: 2 ('Average')

Above: The 'home zone' route to school

This scheme comprises 84 units on 1.3 hectares at a density of 65 dwellings per hectare. The scheme achieved a score of 2, which falls into our 'Average' category. But there were weaknesses in a number of areas, including the over-dominance of highways and the lack of identity or sense of place.

The scheme is part of the wider land-use masterplan for the redevelopment of the area's former Thames Water Treatment Works. Originally, the site did not have a formally allocated land use within the masterplan, which was later amended to include a residential element. The council wanted to promote relatively high densities to make the most of links to the adjacent business park.

The access to the local school through the Tysoe Avenue site was an important influencing factor in the design of the scheme during the pre-application discussions. The council wanted the design solution to allow for parents dropping off their children and for car speeds to be slowed along the pedestrian route towards the school. This led to the introduction of the large roundabout/turnaround area, which the developer did not want, and an extensive use of bollards. Although the council wanted to introduce a 'Home Zone', following the requirements as set out in Design Bulletin 32, it did not have any detailed guidelines to work to, and these elements of the scheme were subject to many design revisions.

Above: Turnaround area entrance to the scheme

Above: Highway detailing

The developers' view is that whilst the route is safe in relation to traffic speeds, the roundabout/ turnaround area is unsuccessful because parents generally drive down to the school to drop off their children. For this reason, the developer has had to introduce gates to private parking areas adjacent to the school entrance to prevent them being used by the parents.

The council, led by members, originally sought a car parking standard of 1.4 spaces per unit. Through extensive negotiations with the developer, however, and supported by the affordable housing provider, it was able to reduce this to 1.2 spaces per unit. Nevertheless, the council attached a condition to the permission which requires the developer to implement a 'car club'. This has proved difficult to establish due to insufficient numbers to fully test the scheme, although the developer has used similar innovative methods of car pooling in other schemes in London. St James has also voluntarily introduced a significant public art element into the scheme, which relates to the lakeside setting.

Above: Site layout

Harrisons Wharf

Purfleet, Essex
Bellway Homes
Thurrock Borough Council
Assessment Score: -1 ('Poor')

Above: Frontage to River Thames

Above: Internal courtyard environment

This scheme of 103 flats overlooking the River Thames in Purfleet was the second phase of a development by Bellway Homes. The site is 1.06 hectares, giving an overall density of 96 units per hectare. Our assessment gave it an overall score of -1, which takes it into the 'Poor' category. Its failings were largely related to the dominance of car parking in the main internal spaces and the lack of direct pedestrian connections to the riverside walk and adjoining footpaths and roads.

The design of the scheme has to be seen in its context, however. When Phase One was brought forward in 1998, the site was an operating aggregates yard with major engineering constraints, surrounded by operational industrial uses, facing onto a semi-derelict riverside. Bellway Homes was the first house builder to develop a site in this area, and as such there was no active residential market.

The second phase scheme followed three years later, in 2001. The council had set an informal maximum height of four storeys on the riverside, in order to prevent the creation of a high-rise environment. The riverside flats were required to be set back 11 metres from the new river wall/flood defences. Phase One applied a car parking standard of 1.75 spaces per two-bedroom unit and 1.5 spaces per one-bedroom unit.

This was seen as an overprovision, based on surveys, and the second phase had an agreed reduction in standards to 1.2 spaces per unit. The council now feels that this is just enough for the actual level of use, since many of the flats are in multiple occupancy.

The original Bellway Homes submission only addressed the river. It did not feature any buildings framing London Road, a conservation area which is next to a listed building, the Royal Hotel. Part of the highway was stopped up to create sufficient space for development to front London Road. The council substantially designed this part of the scheme, which now successfully addresses the conservation area, although direct pedestrian access was not permitted on the basis that residents might be encouraged to park on this frontage at a relatively busy junction.

A design brief was not produced for this site, nor is this common practice for the council, due to limited resources. Remedial action has had to be taken to improve the development's connectivity with the surrounding area because of the absence of clear guidance from the local authority, and what was a limited amount of early communication with the developer.

Above: Frontage to London Road

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Above: Scheme layout

4.RECOMMENDATIONS

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Our audit shows, then, a huge variety in the quality of new housing in the growth areas of southern England and highlights important issues for volume housing to address, if the aim of truly sustainable communities is to be realised. With the bulk of new housing scored as 'Average', there is clearly much to be done to raise build quality.

That almost a fifth of new schemes are judged as 'Good' or 'Very Good' shows what can be achieved; but that over a fifth are judged to be of 'Poor' quality shows there is much to be done. As the case studies show, there are examples where developers and local authorities have all the skills and policy tools needed to work together to create new mainstream housing developments of the highest quality. Clearly, not all housing will be exceptional. But neither should we settle for a majority of the mediocre.

Many of the principles of good urban design, such as scale, active uses and frontages, and the correct relationships between public and private space, are becoming the norm, although there is at present very little contemporary design in house building outside London.

However, even within large developments built by a range of developers to an overall masterplan, the principles of legibility and permeability tend to be confined to the scheme. Ultimately, these new neighbourhoods do not usually connect directly into the public realm of the towns in which they are located, often being isolated by an inner ring road.

The planning of major new settlements or neighbourhoods must be integrated at the macro scale, or ultimately a collection of housing developments – however well designed they are – will not create a sustainable community.

Design standards do appear to be gradually rising, however, and some very attractive new environments are being created. This is particularly true where there is a strong tradition of high quality design guidance (Essex), or where exemplars (Poundbury) create a point of reference or a benchmark. All this proves that it can be done. In the context of major new development areas, the construction of exemplar projects would be a clear signal of intent and can physically demonstrate what can be achieved. This of course needs to be set in the context of the viability of the scheme that can be influenced by a range of external factors.

Top: Dominance of the car, Elizabeth Fry Place, Oxley Gardens, Woolwich
Bottom: A pedestrian friendly environment, Charter Quay, Kingston

When volume house builders are given design briefs that provide clear, understandable guidance, good schemes are very often the result. It is clear that much can be achieved where the appropriate skills and experience are present.

Skills

The skills of developers, their advisors and of local authorities are a critical factor in delivering high quality housing. Developers dislike prevarication and uncertainty. A local planning authority which has objectives that are well-founded in good design principles and which can articulate its requirements with clarity, will usually find developers who are willing to co-operate. This in turn requires a positive response from house builders.

The *Sustainable Communities Plan* has signalled the Government's intention to create communities which provide a high quality of life, and which are well designed. The CABE report, *Building Sustainable Communities: Developing the Skills We Need* (2003), has highlighted that there are 5 key areas where skills are lacking:

■ Strategic planning skills, particularly in LPAs, to inform the production of development plans, SPGs and development briefs

■ Urban design, to lead, manage and advise the planning of new developments and production of developments

■ Project management, to provide clients with the confidence to take on complex, mixed-use schemes that combine commercial and residential and the related infrastructure

■ The management and maintenance of local development partnerships and management of community involvement

■ Experience and expertise in project appraisal and financing

When volume house builders are given design briefs that provide clear, understandable guidance, good schemes are very often the result. It is clear that much can be achieved where the appropriate skills and experience are present. Where they aren't, this can significantly undermine a project's success. How can a significant impact be made on the quality of new housing produced? By developing a programme of training and skills with existing local authority officers and members, and by employing more design-trained staff.

Car Parking and Highways

Many promising schemes fail to adequately address the key issue of highway design. This has often created car-dominated environments, where the layout of roads does not promote the use of the street by pedestrians. Schemes we looked at frequently included the use of a roundabout for what should be a domestic-scaled junction with very low traffic flows. Highway and safety considerations have often outweighed other elements of good design, with the result that the public realm effectively becomes a 'technical' area for storing and manoeuvring cars, rather than spaces or places in their own right.

There are issues in respect of design advice and training, too. Engineers who are responsible for adopting highways may lack skills in urban design or may feel less able to take a firm stance on aesthetic rather than functional issues. Current legislation supports this contention, as described in CABE's *Paving the Way* (July 2002). Submitted or approved schemes often include a plethora of inconsistent paving styles and details. The result? Again, a poor public realm.

Much of the existing policy, legal and technical framework in force is not geared to the delivery of better quality streets.

These problems are compounded by attempts to incorporate off-street parking into dense development when an on-street solution might enable an enhanced design solution overall. For the developer, however, narrower streets can mean less expenditure and an increased amount of saleable land. Similarly, for the adopting authority, wider streets incorporating on street parking results in a maintenance liability.

A key issue here for overall quality relates to density. At densities below 25-30 dwellings per hectare (dph) it is easier to deal with the numbers of cars present, as it is at high densities (100 dph+) when parking is often underground or in basements. At the middle ground of 30-80 dwellings per hectare, however, development economics dictate surface parking, and sheer numbers can lead to a dominance of parking areas and parked cars. The design of these areas can be crucial to the perceived quality of a scheme. A well-designed courtyard which happens to have a lot of cars parked in it at night can be a very pleasant space during the day – whereas an empty car park is just that – and nothing more.

In developments where efforts have been made to improve highway quality, these are often hampered by the application of existing highway design standards. The creation of permeable, well-connected developments with a network of routes goes against established approaches to highway design, which emphasise limited junctions and access onto main routes. This is often most manifest where the detail of traffic calming measures are at odds with sinuous streets, intrinsically designed to aid easy vehicle movement. It would be better to design 'slower' streets as part of the original concept.

Previous research into new housing developments has shown that the problems highlighted in this research are not new. *Paving the Way* outlined four main issues that affect new developments, in relation to highways. These were that:

■ Existing statute law, regulations and design guidance are often out of tune with the priority now given to streetscape

■ Local Highways Authorities rely on standard practice, giving primacy to vehicle movement because of a fear of prosecution if accidents occur. The use of official guidance is regarded as a best defence if faced with litigation

■ There is confusion about the relative status of the many statutes and documents relating to urban design

■ The powers granted to local authorities in their role as Highways Authority under the Highways Act 1980, including adoption procedures, are administered in ways that are often at odds with the aims of planning and urban design

Despite examples such as Chelmsford, it is clear that poor highway and parking design is a key contributor to the great majority of the schemes assessed being graded as 'Average' or 'Poor'. *Better Streets, Better Places: Delivering Sustainable Residential Environments* (July, 2003), published by the ODPM, concluded that there were substantial and widespread problems in highways authorities adopting streets designed to meet PPG3 objectives. Much of the existing policy, legal and technical framework in force is not geared to the delivery of better quality streets. The report goes on to suggest the withdrawal of Design Bulletin 32 and its companion guide *Places, Streets, and Movement* and its replacement with a new 'Manual for Streets'. In addition, the report suggests other legislative changes, alongside better training and guidance. Clearly, these measures are still needed.

The Fishing Village, Chatham

The Fishing Village in Chatham has been awarded a Silver Building for Life award. The alterations shown below would remove unnecessary and heavy-handed highway solutions and further improve a good scheme.

1. Hammerheads redesigned as courtyard

2. Street detailed design resolved

3. Roundabout replaced with crossroads

4. Built form and access re-sited to address open space

The experience in London (and in relation to more experimental sustainable schemes nationally) shows that there is a consumer demand for contemporary architectural design in new housing.

Architectural Design

The experience in London (and in relation to more experimental sustainable schemes nationally) shows that there is a consumer demand for contemporary architectural design in new housing. However, outside the London region, none of the schemes we audited had a contemporary approach to design. Instead, there is a trend, evident for a long time, towards a generic 'vernacular' architecture, often unrelated to local building styles or materials, and with very little modern interpretation of vernacular materials or styles.

There is a tendency from developers to see any planning aim for the 'use of vernacular' to mean 'historicist' style architecture rather than the term's intended aim of rooting buildings in their place, regardless of style. While the quality of this design has risen sharply, with some very attractive environments created, overall the effect is to make new residential areas relatively indistinguishable from each other, without a true sense of place.

There are few successful examples in this audit of modern buildings using local materials, and planning authorities could do more to proactively encourage this. There appears to be a lack of clear, up-to-date guidance relating to how 'local styling' or the vernacular of an area can be utilised by volume house builders. The reluctance to get drawn into stylistic debates is understandable, but standards must progress beyond structural stability and address levels of workmanship and aesthetic issues.

Policy, Guidance and Implementation

It is clear from this research that house builders and local planning and highway authorities can produce attractive and sustainable environments within the context of existing policy and guidance. Indeed, planning authorities are required to consider the principles of good design in relation to housing, as set out in Planning Policy Guidance 1: General Policy and Principles (PPG1), the draft Planning Policy Statement 1 – Creating Sustainable Communities (PPS1) and in Planning Policy Guidance 3: Housing (PPG3). Further guidance is provided in *By Design: Better Places to Live* (DETR, 2001), the companion guide to PPG3. But, as we have seen, good architectural and urban design is not the norm, which suggests that the way policy and practice interact may need to be reviewed.

It is properly the role of the local planning and highways authorities to seek modifications to proposals that meet the objectives of good urban design and the wider needs of the community.

Guidance on the tools and mechanisms to bring forward substantial new neighbourhoods as truly integrated and sustainable additions to existing settlements needs to be re-emphasised. This could include the greater use of Development Briefs, Masterplans and Urban Design Codes and more collaborative approaches to establishing an overall vision and objectives for an area through 'Enquiry by Design' events. The requirement of the new Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act for greater levels of stakeholder involvement and wide-ranging sustainability appraisals represents a good opportunity to bring these practices more into the mainstream of planning.

While many house builders take an enlightened approach to new housing and take great pride in the places they help create, they are also ultimately running businesses, with responsibilities to shareholders. Subject to satisfying their customers' requirements, most will therefore take the line of least resistance to achieving planning permission. It is properly the role of the local planning and highways authorities to seek modifications to proposals that meet the objectives of good urban design and the wider needs of the community. As has been seen from the case studies, where local authorities have the staff and skills to undertake this function, in conjunction with an able developer team, very good results, which meet all of the parties' objectives, can be produced.

APPENDIX A SCHEMES AUDITED

LOCATION	ADDRESS	LOCAL AUTHORITY	DEVELOPER	NUMBER OF UNITS	SCORE
Acton	The Vale	Ealing	Taylor Woodrow	42	12
Addiscombe	Lower Addiscombe Road & The Railway Line	Croydon	Bellway Homes	65	-5
Ampthill	Moor Pond Piece	Mid Bedfordshire	Wilson Connolly	30	13
Andover	Beckett Road	Test Valley	Wilson Connolly	50	-2
Baddow Hospital	Clarendon Park	Chelmsford	Barratt Developments	85	17
Barnham	Barnham Road	Arun	Bovis Homes	24	6
Basingstoke	Kempshott Lane	Basingstoke & Deane	Barratt Developments	290	12
Beaulieu Park	Beaulieu Park	Chelmsford	Wilson Bowden	57	29
Bermondsey	Magdalen Street	Southwark	Bellway Homes	54	15
Bicester	Bure Park	Cherwell	Wilson Bowden	105	22
Binfield	Wellington Lodge	Bracknell Forest	Barratt Developments	21	-11
Borehamwood	Armstrong Close	Hertsmere	George Wimpey UK	62	24
Bramley	Sherfield Road	Basingstoke & Deane	George Wimpey UK	85	3
Brize Norton	Poppyfields	West Oxfordshire	Wilson Bowden	30	8
Burstall	Bramford Road	Ipswich	Barratt Developments	112	16
Calvert	Mallard Grange	Aylesbury Vale	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	300	0
Cambourne South	Swansley Lane,	Cambridgeshire	Bovis Homes	57	14
Carlton Colville	Swallowfields	Waveney	George Wimpey UK	69	23
Caversham	Heron Island	Reading	Barratt Developments	46	18
Caxton	Tates Field,	South Cambridgeshire	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	3	-3
Chafford Hundred	Drake Road	Thurrock	McAlpine/Laing Developments	90	-7
Chantry	Pauls Sports & Social Club	Ipswich	Wilson Bowden	47	24
Chelmer Village	Bishops Meade, Chancellor Park	Chelmsford	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	101	27
Chelmsford	Chelmer Gate	Chelmsford	Bryant Homes Southern	93	6
Chelmsford	Willow Walk	Chelmsford	Bellway Homes	21	32
Chesterton	Kingsmead	Peterborough	Barratt Developments	40	13
City of London	Prescot Street	Tower Hamlets	Berkeley Homes	84	12
Clapham	York Road	Wandsworth	Fairview	133	34
Clerkenwell	Aldersgate Street	City of London	St George	82	20
Clerkenwell	Amwell Street	Islington	St James	77	33
Dartford	Powder Mill Lane	Dartford	Bovis Homes	77	-5
Drayton	Hanwell Fields	Cherwell	Bovis Homes	68	8
Eastcote	Eastcote Road	Harrow	Taylor Woodrow	36	21
Eden Park	South Eden Park Road	Bromley	Berkeley Homes	187	18
Edmonton	Picketts Lock Lane	Enfield	Laing Homes	241	1
Egham	Holbrook Meadow	Runnymede	Bryant Homes Southern	47	5
Ely	Kings Walk	East Cambridgeshire	Bovis Homes	78	-3
Erith	West Street	Bexley	George Wimpey	235	2
Farnborough	Royal Close	Bromley	Laing Homes	23	18
Great Baddow	Gloucester Avenue	Chelmsford	George Wimpey UK	24	-2
Great Leighs	Brick Barns Road	Chelmsford	Wilson Bowden	89	22
Greenwich	John Harrison Way	Greenwich	Countryside/ Taylor Woodrow	199	37
Greenwich	Shooters Hill Road	Greenwich	Fairview	123	12
Harlesden	Wellington Road	Brent	Berkeley Homes	25	36
Harrold	Eagle Way	Bedford	McAlpine/Laing Developments	39	-3
Haywards Heath	Bolnore Village	Mid Sussex	Wilson Bowden	21	5
Hendon	Rookery Way	Barnet	Barratt Homes	71	-1
Herne Bay	Bullockstone Road	Canterbury	Ward Homes	24	-3
Holloway	Caledonian Road	Islington	Fairview	24	13
Hounslow	Hanworth Road	Hounslow	George Wimpey	104	-5

LOCATION	ADDRESS	LOCAL AUTHORITY	DEVELOPER	NUMBER OF UNITS	SCORE
Hythe	Shore Road	New Forest	Wilson Connolly	176	21
Islington	Clephane Road	Islington	Copthorn Homes (now Countryside Properties)	33	20
Kennington	Ashbrook	Ashford	Bryant Homes Southern	127	12
Kennington	Goat Lees	Ashford	Ward Homes	57	13
Kennington	Guernsey Road	Ashford	Wilson Connolly	61	13
Kensington	Warwick Road	K & C	St George	236	17
Kensington	St Ann's Road	Hammersmith and Fulham	Copthorn Homes	61	22
Kilverstone Hall	Kilverstone Park, Thetford	Breckland	Wilcon Homes	85	1
King's Hill	King's Hill	Tonbridge & Malling	The Berkeley Group	89	18
King's Hill	Tower View	Tonbridge & Malling	Countryside Properties	74	27
Kingsbury	Honeypot Lane	Brent	Laing Homes	86	9
Kingsnorth	Bluebell Road	Ashford	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	42	-3
Kingston-upon-Thames	High Street	Kingston-upon-Thames	St George	224	33
Long Stratton	Edges Lane	South Norfolk	Wilson Connolly	39	25
Maidenhead	Raymond Road	Windsor & Maidenhead	George Wimpey UK	36	7
Marylebone	Rossmore Road	Westminster	Barratt Homes	288	26
Middleton-on-Sea	Greenfields	Arun	The Berkeley Group	22	-1
New Rackheath	Salthouse Road	Broadland	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	26	16
Newhaven	Mariners View	Lewes	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	40	3
Old Portsmouth	Gunwharf	Portsmouth	The Berkeley Group Plc	28	31
Peterborough	Sparrow Road	Peterborough	Bellway Homes	54	-9
Peterborough	West Lake	Peterborough	Bryant Homes Southern	65	1
Poplar	Aspen Way	Tower Hamlets	Barratt Homes	504	21
Purfleet	London Road	Thurrock	Bellway Homes	103	-1
Redhill	Earlswood Hospital	Reigate & Banstead	Barratt Developments	117	16
Romford	Regarth Avenue	Havering	Fairview	76	-4
Saxmundham	Brook Farm Road	Suffolk Coastal	Bovis Homes	161	23
Shoreditch	Pitfield Street	Hackney	Copthorn Homes	41	10
Southampton	Marshall Square	Southampton	Bryant Homes Southern	143	35
Southtown	Blake Drive	Great Yarmouth	Wilcon Homes	46	17
Stanhope	Millbank Road	Ashford	George Wimpey UK	50	-7
Stony Stratford	Mill Lane	Milton Keynes	Bryant Homes Southern	46	31
Sudbury	Fields View	Babergh	Bovis Homes	75	18
Teddington	Queens Road	Richmond upon Thames	Laing Homes	89	10
Thamesmead	Land north of Crossway	Greenwich	George Wimpey	189	4
Turnstall	Panteny Lane	Swale	Ward Homes	45	-6
Upper Helesdon	St Augustine's Gate	Norwich	McAlpine/Laing Developments	25	-1
Upper Upnor	Northshore	Medway	Countryside Properties	106	31
Uxbridge	High Street	Hillingdon	George Wimpey	64	-2
Vauxhall	Lawn Lane	Lambeth	Copthorn Homes	57	25
Waltham Cross	Tysoe Avenue	Enfield	St James	84	2
Waltham Cross	Bloomfield Road	Broxbourne	Bryant Homes Southern	64	8
Ware	Millbrook Court	East Hertfordshire	George Wimpey UK	24	9
Warlingham	Great Park	Tandridge	The Berkeley Group	169	35
West Winch	Moughton Court	Kings Lynn & West Norfolk	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	22	-1
Wheathampstead	Codicote Road	St Albans	Wilson Connolly	24	14
Woodford Green	Wensley Avenue	Redbridge	Bellway Homes	30	20
Woolwich	Woolwich Manor Way	Newham	St James	45	16
Wymondham	Bridewell Acres, Papillion Road	South Norfolk	Persimmon Homes (Wessex)	70	21

This study has been aimed at the volume housing market and therefore sought to exclude from assessment schemes which were at the top or bottom end of the scale. Eligible schemes were therefore those which fell within the range of plus or minus 25% of the average sales price for the region.

In response to available information, sales prices were those at the initial marketing of schemes, not final prices achieved on individual sales. The London region was further divided into four outer areas and one central area to counter the potentially high fluctuations of prices between central and outer London. Furthermore, to ensure a geographical spread in the London region, at least one scheme has been selected from each Borough containing an eligible scheme.

In the Eastern and South Eastern regions we employed a similar approach to geographic distribution. However, where the eligibility criteria identified concentrations of activity development 'hot spots', two clusters of schemes were selected (Chelmsford in the East and Ashford in the South East). This enabled a comparison of different schemes under similar circumstances such as policy constraints, design advice etc.

Above: Architectural Quality. A key component in Good and Very Good housing developments (Beaulieu Park)

Selection of Schemes
for Assessment

The selection of schemes for assessment was based upon a robust and rational methodology, related to the objectives of the study. As far as was practically possible, we chose a balanced selection of schemes for assessment, based on:

- Developer
- Development type (i.e. Greenfield/ Brownfield, Suburban/Urban/Rural)
- Size of development
- Geographic location

The selection of 100 case studies aimed to achieve three schemes by each of the 'top 10' developers within each region. The top 10 developers in each region were those with the largest number of units completed in the 2002/2003 period.

The initial pool of eligible schemes for the London Region was compiled by London Residential Research. For the Eastern and South Eastern regions the 'pool' of eligible schemes was provided by EMAP Glenigan, drawing on its established databases.

- In London, 89 schemes met all these criteria. 34 schemes were selected, representing a 38% sample of all eligible schemes

- In the South East, 243 schemes met all the criteria. 33 were selected, representing a 13% sample

- In the East, 201 schemes met all the criteria. 33 were selected, representing a 16% sample

A further six studies were selected for more in-depth research, primarily based on structured interviews with local authorities and developers

Assessment
Criteria

In this assessment, the attainable scores varied from -48 (a 'Poor' standard scheme) to +48 (a 'Very Good' standard scheme). Each of the 16 audit criteria could receive a score of +3 to -3, which were added together to make up the total.

For example, criterion two – Appropriate Enclosure – is scored according to how appropriate the enclosure of the scheme is, relative to its surrounding environment. If the scheme was felt to be too claustrophobic or too spacious for its urban, suburban or rural context, then it would receive a low score. Conversely, if the scheme related well to its context, then the scheme would score highly under this appropriate enclosure heading.

To ensure that the scoring was consistent throughout, we added a number of sub-sections to the audit criteria – these are listed on the flap on the inside back cover. Schemes which satisfied all of these would receive a good score – those which did not would receive a lower score.

Relationship of BFL criteria to audit criteria

BFL STANDARD ASSESSMENT CRITERIA	STUDY AUDIT CRITERIA	
Identity	1	Sense of place
Sense of place		
Street enclosure	2	Appropriateness of enclosure
Safety and ease of navigation	3	Safety
Extent of overlooked pedestrian routes	4	Legibility
Exploitation of site's assets	5	Exploitation of site's assets
Avoidance of highway dominance	6	Avoidance of highway dominance
Promotion of non-car travel	7	Promotion of non-car travel
Car parking	8	Car parking
	9	Servicing
Movement integration	10	Movement integration
Bespoke design	11	Bespoke design
	12	Architectural quality
Durability of public amenity	13	Public amenity
	14	Public realm quality
Buildings' out-performance of regulations		
Advances in technology		
Adaptability	15	Adaptability
Access to public transport	16	Access to public transport
Environmental impact		
Range of tenure		
Range of accommodation		
Community cohesion		

USEFUL CABE PUBLICATIONS

Design and Modern
Methods of Construction
June 2004

Design Review-ed: Urban Housing
Lessons learnt from projects reviewed
by CABE's expert design panel
June 2004

Housing Futures 2024
a provocative look at future
trends in housing
March 2004

The Use of Urban Design Codes
November 2003

Creating Excellent Buildings:
A Guide for Clients
October 2003

Building for Life Standard:
A Better Place to Live
July 2003

Building Sustainable Communities:
Actions for Housing Market Renewal
June 2003

Building Sustainable Communities:
Developing the Skills We Need
June 2003

A Commitment to quality
from Housebuilders
April 2003

The Value of Housing Design
and Layout: Full Report
January 2003

Building for Life Manifesto
July 2002

Building for Life: an introduction
February 2002

www.cabe.org.uk/library
www.buildingforlife.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1 **SENSE OF PLACE**

2 **APPROPRIATE ENCLOSURE**
- Main street
- Secondary street
- Tertiary street / lane / courtyard

3 **SAFETY**
- Is there active frontage on public spaces?
- Is there overlooking frontage on public spaces?
- Are the public spaces well lit?
- Is there fenestration on two elevations at corners?

4 **LEGIBILITY**
- Are there orientation markers?
- Is there a series of events/spaces?

5 **EXPLOITATION OF SITE'S ASSETS**
- Are existing buildings retained?
- Is mature planting retained?
- Does the layout respond to topography?

6 **AVOIDANCE OF HIGHWAY DOMINANCE**
- Do footpaths relate to building line?
- Does the carriageway width vary?

7 **PROMOTION OF NON-CAR TRAVEL**
- Is there a permeable network of routes?
- Are the streets designed to calm traffic?
- Are there dedicated bus/cycle lanes?
- Is there safe cycle storage, close to homes?

8 **CAR PARKING**
- Parking type
- Is it well integrated with public space?
- Is parking visually unobtrusive?
- Is it well integrated with planting?

9 **SERVICING**
- Is the waste storage unobtrusive?
- Are servicing arrangements well integrated?

10 **MOVEMENT INTEGRATION**
- Are there connections to existing footpaths?
- Are there multiple connections
  to the surrounding road network?
- Is there easy access to main routes?
- Does the development integrate
  with existing built development?

11 **BESPOKE DESIGN**
- Is bespoke design evident?
- Is the local vernacular employed?

12 **ARCHITECTURAL QUALITY**
- Are good quality materials used?
- Is attention to detail evident?
- Is there a good coordination of features?
- Is there human-scale detailing?
- Does the fenestration create rhythm?

13 **PUBLIC AMENITY**
- Is there any public open space?
- Is there any public art?
- What is the character of the streetscape?

14 **PUBLIC REALM QUALITY**
- Are good quality materials used?
- Is an attention to detail evident?
- Is there a good coordination of features?

15 **ADAPTABILITY**
- Does the building design allow for future adaptation?
- Is there the possibility of extension?

16 **ACCESS TO PUBLIC TRANSPORT**
- Is there a bus route through the development?
- If no, are bus stops within easy walking distance?
- Are there train / tram / underground links close by?