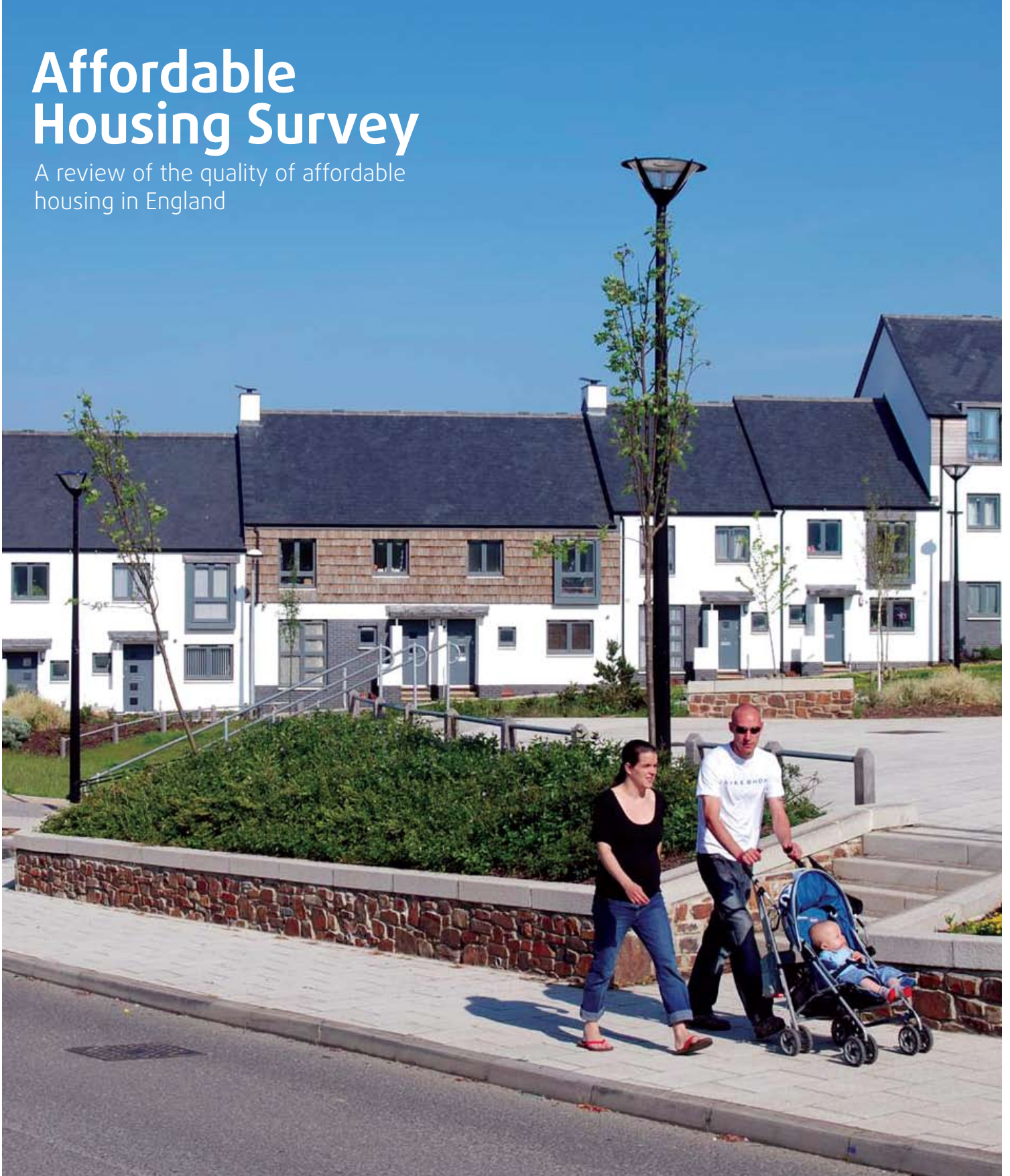


# Affordable Housing Survey

A review of the quality of affordable  
housing in England



The then Housing Corporation commissioned CABE in early 2007 to survey the quality of the affordable housing it funds. The survey used the same approach as CABE's first three housing audits (which took place between 2004 and 2006) of new homes built by market sector housebuilders across England, some of which also included homes for Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) procured via planning agreements.

<b>Foreword</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Findings</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>26</b>

# Foreword

Launched on 1 December 2008, the Homes and Communities Agency is now responsible for the National Affordable Housing Programme, previously administered by the Housing Corporation.

This survey has been delivered for the then Housing Corporation, as a client, and looks at affordable housing schemes which were either built by RSLs or provided for them by market developers as part of planning agreements. As in the first three audits, the schemes are judged against the Building for Life criteria.

The then Housing Corporation, as a partner in the Building for Life initiative, made a commitment in 2007 to minimum levels of design quality in the housing it funds, through its Design and Quality Strategy and Design and Quality Standards. These placed a requirement for Building for Life compliance at the heart of the Corporation's guidance on place making, helping all involved in the design and procurement of affordable housing to deliver great new places to live.

The purpose of this audit was to establish an understanding of the quality of schemes delivered prior to the introduction of Building for Life in 2007 to enable the impact of introducing the new standard to be evaluated in the future. The survey therefore included schemes that were completed before the end of 2007. The findings of the audit should be considered within this context.

The survey highlights the factors that have enabled RSLs and their market developer partners to achieve excellence. It includes case studies where high aspirations and teamwork have led to successful places to live and identifies the factors that will help all affordable housing providers reach these quality levels in the future. However, improving design quality is not just about increasing the number of exemplar schemes – it is about eliminating poor schemes. The survey therefore also looks at the lessons that can be drawn from Building for Life criteria where scores have been low with the aim of helping affordable housing providers to avoid design pitfalls in the future.

Building for Life does not just assess the quality of the buildings within a development. It also looks at the whole place, including the streets, play spaces, recreation areas, transport and so on. It should be obvious from this that good design has to be a team effort. RSLs have to specify good design but the local planning authority, the highway and transport authority, developer partners and others all play their part in making places that are good to live in. The whole team has to want good design and work to deliver it.

RSLs, who were partners in this survey, are committed to improving quality. CABE is already working with the Homes and Communities Agency to ensure that high quality design is central to all of its future developments. The Homes and Communities Agency's work with CABE to set new standards of quality and sustainability will ensure that, despite the economic downturn, the affordable housing being built now and over the next funding round can achieve high levels of quality that all those living in social housing want and deserve.

# Executive summary

---

## Headline findings

The results of the audit show that the design quality of new-build affordable housing is mixed.

Nationally, when adjusted to be comparable with CABE's audits of market housing, 18% of schemes were found to be either good or very good. Nearly two-thirds (61%) were judged average and a fifth of schemes (21%) were assessed as poor. These findings are based on site visits and desk-based assessments of 218 schemes, which is a nationally representative sample of the output of current RSL development partnerships. These figures have been adjusted to ensure that the findings are predicated upon the same questions underpinning the previous market sector audits.

RSLs, or their market housebuilding partners, have a substantial influence over the quality of their schemes. However, local planning authorities too have influence, especially over aspects of place making and layout where lower quality was found.

---

## Areas of strength and weakness

The features of housing developments that are assessed by the Building for Life criteria fall into two categories:

- Those that are directly related to the nature of the scheme
- Those that are related to how the scheme fits within its wider context.

---

## Nature of the scheme

### Areas of strength were:

- Architectural quality, including using buildings to define streets (Q2 and Q3)<sup>1</sup>
- Public realm (Q12)
- Providing a suitable tenure and accommodation mix for the scheme's context (Q18 and Q19)
- Out-performing statutory minimum criteria, such as building regulations (Q13).

### Weaker areas were:

- Creating distinctive developments which are responsive to their context (Q1)
- Providing design which is specific to the scheme (Q11).

---

## Relationship of the scheme to its wider context

In terms of the relationship of the scheme to its wider context i.e. the features that are mainly influenced through the planning process. Areas of strength included:

- Creating pedestrian, cycle and vehicle-friendly streets with well integrated parking (Q7 and Q8)
- Access to public transport (Q16).

### Areas of weakness included the extent to which:

- The buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around (Q4)
- The scheme exploits existing features of the site (Q5) - such as existing buildings, landscape or topography
- The scheme integrates with surrounding development including streets and paths (Q9)
- The layout of buildings took priority over roads and parking (Q6)
- The development provides access to local amenities and such as community facilities such as schools, parks and play areas (Q20).

Many of the affordable homes surveyed formed part of larger market-led housing developments. In two-thirds of cases the affordable homes were indistinguishable from the private homes. Furthermore there was no significant relationship between the design quality of an affordable housing scheme and the affluence of the surrounding area.

However, there was still a small minority where tenure could be distinguished, which leaves residents potentially open to discrimination from the wider community.

## Lessons for the future

The formation of the Homes and Communities Agency gives the affordable housing sector an opportunity, unprecedented in recent times, to eradicate poor design and to create exemplar schemes. These can not only meet the needs of their residents but also drive higher standards across the industry and increase environmental performance (with the Code for Sustainable Home an important tool in delivering this).

This survey found that both RSLs and local planning authorities had a significant influence on design outcomes.

---

<sup>1</sup> A numbered list of questions is included at the end of this report.

The timing of RSL involvement with a scheme is important. Where the design was agreed with the local planning authority before an RSL became involved in the scheme, quality was lower. The research showed that there were a large number of schemes, arising from Section 106 agreements, over which RSLs could exert little or no influence over the design approach adopted.

We recommend that RSLs and local planning authorities should work together, ensuring that RSLs get involved with schemes as early as is necessary to enable them to work as true partners in the development process.

Joint working between RSLs and local planning authorities was a driver for increasing quality overall, reducing the number of poor schemes and increasing the number of good and very good schemes.

Where design guidance (for example development standards) were in place, design quality was higher although the research shows that only 39% of schemes had been guided in this way. We recommend that design guidance should be developed and applied to schemes by RSLs as part of a palette of tools for increasing design quality.

A design brief and guidance from the local planning authority is also associated with increased quality.

---

#### **For RSLs and their market housebuilder partners**

- RSLs should have input into the design of all elements of the scheme from early on, using the full range of mechanisms available to them: design guides and codes; design briefing; good working relationships between key players from an early stage; and design quality control processes to reject or change poor design
- It is vitally important that RSLs and market housebuilders take responsibility for ensuring that features which reduce environmental impact are incorporated early in the design process
- RSLs need to increase staff expertise on urban design issues, especially the understanding of how to integrate developments with their existing context and how to create places with more distinctive character.

---

#### **For local planning authorities**

- Local planning authorities should use their influence to ensure that RSLs become involved in projects as early in the design process as possible
- Local planning authorities and RSLs need to strengthen their working relationships to increase design quality, particularly in terms of layout and place making.

---

#### **For central government**

- Government should take advantage of the body of information that will be generated by local authority assessments of housing design quality that will, in the future, be included in local annual monitoring reports, to monitor improvements in design quality.

---

#### **For the Homes and Communities Agency**

- It is vital that RSLs receive the support they need to enhance the design quality of affordable housing. This includes supporting RSLs in turning down schemes offered through Section 106 agreements and off-the-shelf surplus market stock if they do not meet quality standards.

---

#### **CABE**

- To support the use of Building for Life as a mainstream tool in local authorities CABE aims to embed 500 trained Building for Life assessors across all authorities by 2011
- CABE will continue to support the expansion and development of regional design review panels.



# Introduction

---

## Building for Life

Building for Life<sup>2</sup> is the national standard for well-designed homes and neighbourhoods, supported by the Homes and Communities Agency, CABE, the Home Builders Federation, the Civic Trust and Design for Homes. It is the basis of an awards scheme celebrating best practice and highlighting and promoting design excellence in the housing building industry but it is also used as a tool for assessing design quality. It can be used before a scheme is built to assess plans (as is now required by the HCA) or after completion (as required for local authority annual monitoring returns<sup>3</sup> and as used by CABE in its market housing audits).

In this survey we applied the 20 Building for Life criteria<sup>4</sup> to a sample of 218 recently completed affordable housing developments across England. The schemes were drawn from recent completions by lead partners in active RSL development partnerships. Urban design specialists applied the Building for Life criteria in a consistent, detailed and objective way during site visits. Further data was requested from the developing RSLs to allow assessment across the full range of the Building for Life questions. A full methodology is set out in Appendix A.

The Building for Life criteria mainly address the urban design issues that are crucial factors in sustainable place making. They assess the quality of the place, rather than simply the aesthetic or construction merits on individual homes, although these are considered. Results are categorised in terms of four levels:

- **Very good:** an overall score of 80% or more – likely to merit a Building for Life gold award, which is given to exemplary schemes
- **Good:** an overall score of 70% or more – likely to merit a silver award. This is the baseline for good design which CABE believes every scheme should achieve
- **Average:** an overall score of 50% or more – not entirely without merit but represents a wasted opportunity to generate value and create sustainable places
- **Poor:** an overall score of less than 50% – meeting fewer than half of the criteria that characterise good design as set out in PPS3. These schemes are not, in our view, good enough to have been granted planning permission.

---

## Policy context

This survey is being published at a time when design is becoming increasingly embedded in housing policy and delivery. Policy statements have demonstrated the government's commitment to good design, major institutions have provided guidance and the HCA continues to demand high-quality design in its requirements for new homes.

The policy lead from the government came in 2005 with Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development<sup>5</sup>, which said that good design should contribute positively to making places better for people and that we should not accept design that fails to take the opportunities available for improving the character and quality of an area.

In 2006, Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing<sup>6</sup> (PPS3) stated that planning authorities should ensure the provision of well-designed new homes, further establishing the government's commitment to good design.

These two documents underpin the delivery of the government's strategic housing policy objectives.

In August 2008, the Building for Life standard was included in the government's updated annual monitoring report guidance for local and regional planning authorities, pushing them to meet the aspirations outlined in the policy statement<sup>7</sup>.

PPS3 highlighted tools, such as Building for Life, that can help developers and planning authorities. Other recent guidance, such as Manual for Streets<sup>8</sup> and the Urban Design Compendium<sup>9</sup>, is helping housing providers achieve improved design of streets and public realm around their buildings which enables them to fit better into the local context.

Significantly for the affordable housing sector, the then Housing Corporation published new design and quality standards in April 2007 for all new homes that receive social housing grant. These requirements included the use of both the Code for Sustainable Homes and Building for Life as methods to ensure that funding is given only to schemes with carefully considered designs.

This policy context is also reflected in the formation of the new Homes and Communities Agency. Alongside the delivery of new homes, its policy remit includes contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and good design. The agency's chief executive, Sir Bob Kerslake, has already publicly expressed his commitment to these objectives.

---

2 [www.buildingforlife.org](http://www.buildingforlife.org)

3 Communities and Local Government 2008, Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Framework: Core Output Indicators – Update 2/2008

4 Building for Life, 2005, Delivering Great Places to Live: 20 Questions You Need to Answer

5 Communities and Local Government, 2005, Planning Policy Statement 1: Delivering Sustainable Development

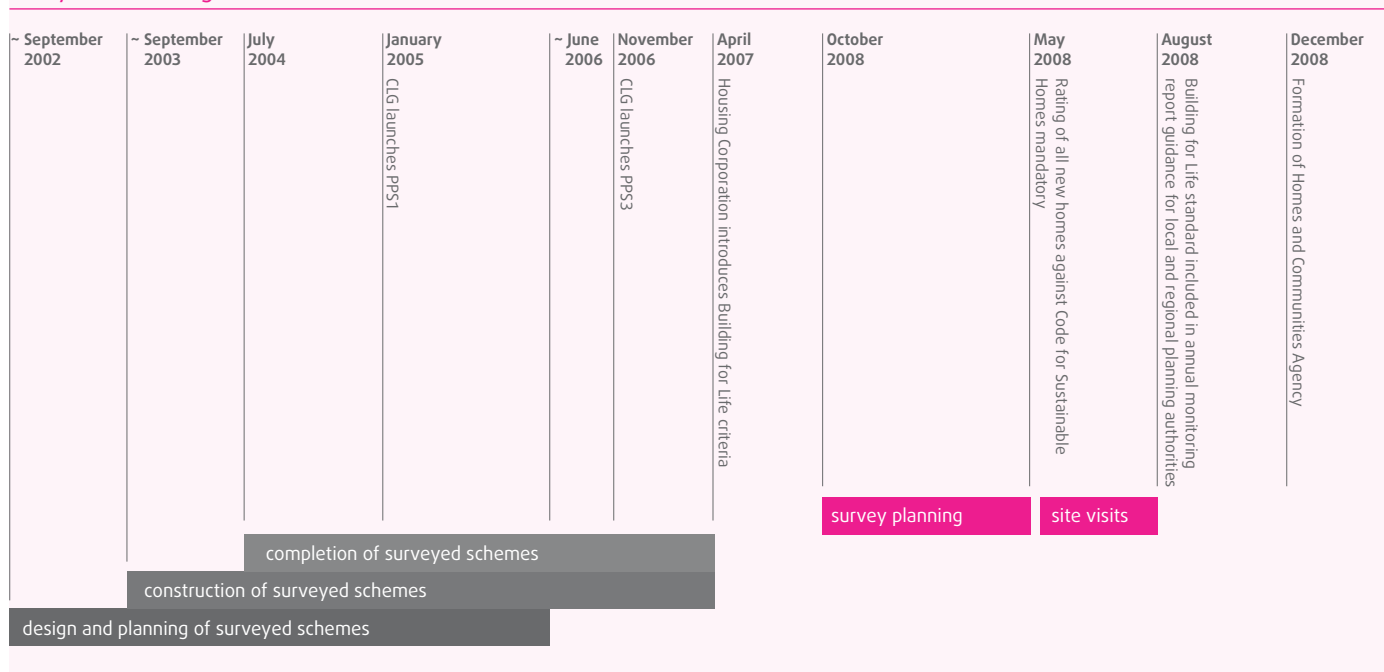
6 Communities and Local Government, 2006, Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing

7 Communities and Local Government, 2008, Regional Spatial Strategy and Local Development Framework: Core Output Indicators – Update 2/2008

8 Department for Transport, 2007, Manual for Streets

9 English Partnerships (2007) Urban Design Compendium 2: Delivering Quality Places

## Policy Timeline Diagram



### Aims

This survey was conducted to provide an independent assessment of the design quality of new affordable housing in England using Building for Life criteria. The purpose was to provide a benchmark of quality prior to the introduction of Building for Life as a funding criterion by the then Housing Corporation. However, the research also aimed to identify areas of design strength and weakness and the factors influencing them and to make recommendations to support the Corporation, its RSL partners and others in raising design quality.

Areas of particular interest were design approaches to mixed-tenure schemes (with RSLs particularly interested in those procured under Section 106 agreements) and rural and infill schemes. We also wanted to see if patterns identified through the CABE market housing audits were also seen in affordable housing and, if so, why.

# Findings

## Design quality of affordable housing, nationally

The results of the audit show that the design quality of new-build affordable housing is mixed.

Schemes were assessed, in the main, on site, against the Building for Life criteria. Some criteria, such as those regarding tenure mix or internal layout, are difficult to judge on site and require background information. This information was provided by the RSLs.

In contrast, this background information was not fully available for the previous CABE market housing audits. Therefore, in order to make a fair comparison between the two audits, those criteria that could not be judged on site have been excluded from the findings shown in figure 4.1.

A full list of criteria assessed wholly or in part through RSL questionnaires is included in Appendix A.

The unadjusted results from the full assessment, given in figure 4.2, show that nationally, only 8% were found to be good or very good. More than two-thirds (68%) were judged average. And almost a quarter of schemes (24%) were assessed as poor.

Whilst the standard of schemes was more consistent than that revealed by CABE's audits of market housing, with fewer poor developments, the proportion of good and very good schemes was slightly lower.

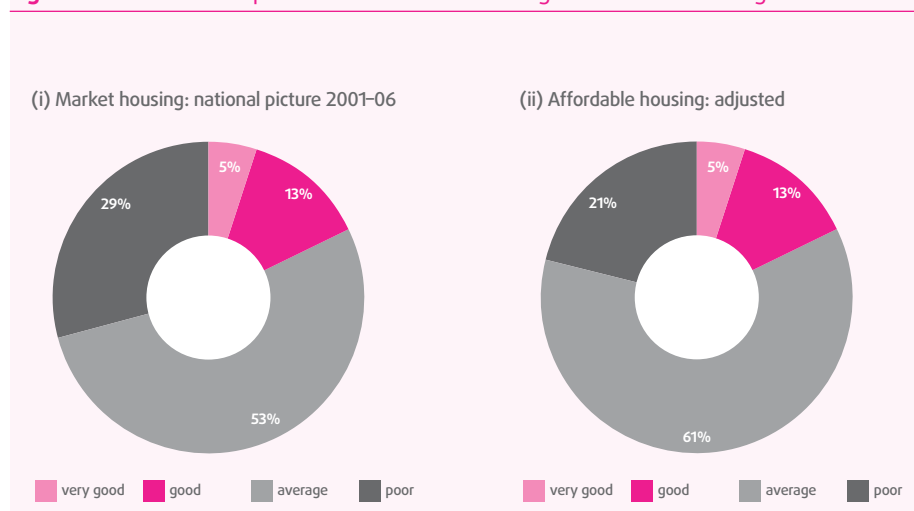
## Urban design findings

So, what factors lie behind this variation in design quality between schemes and how can they be addressed better in future? We looked at the influence of factors including the urban, suburban or rural context, greenfield and brownfield sites, land values and size. Many of the trends are similar to those that CABE identified in the audits of market housing. In addition, since much affordable housing is procured through Section 106 agreements, or bought off-the-shelf from market developers, we looked at the effect that this procurement type had on quality.

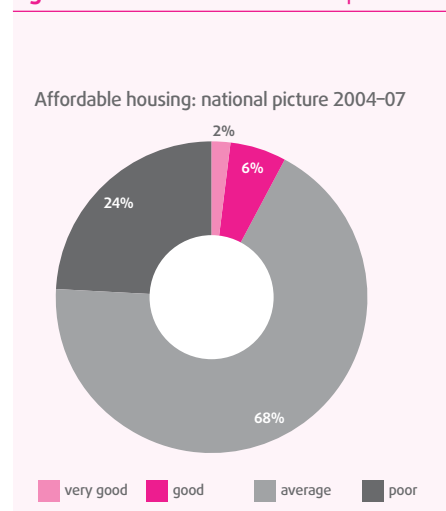
The quality of urban design is inextricably linked to the actions of the parties who influence the design process. Clearly RSLs (and, by proxy, bodies such as the then Housing Corporation) are key players in affordable housing schemes and their design aspirations will have a significant influence on quality. The actions of local authority planners, too, can have an important impact on the quality of a scheme, either directly (for example via joint working – see page 18) or through local development frameworks, which will influence the type of sites which will become available to RSLs (see below). We have therefore analysed the Building for Life questions that relate to urban design in two groups: design aspirations and planning influence.

(Continued on page 9).

**Figure 4.1** Headline comparison of affordable housing with market housing



**Figure 4.2** Overall results – all BfL questions





## East End Extra Care, Plymouth

- East End Extra Care scheme, Cattedown Road, Plymouth
- Setting: Urban brownfield
- Lead partner: Spectrum Housing Group  
Developing RSL: Signpost Housing Association
- Local authority: Plymouth City Council
- Procurement: Design and Build basis using a JCT98 form of contract
- Funding: The project received funding from the Housing Corporation, and Thames Valley Housing Association secured the bulk of the finance through private finance. The scheme was delivered through the planning system through a Section 106 agreement.
- Dwellings: 30 affordable rented sheltered flats, one and two beds, and community facilities.
- Parking: 10 (three disabled spaces) on-street. Secure mobility buggy store on the ground floor. Bicycle parking.
- Overall assessment score: 90.6%. (very good)

The scheme is part of a broader project to transform a run-down part of Plymouth dominated by roads and a scrap yard into the East End Community Village. It scored especially well in the sections of the survey covering character and design and construction, with top marks for having a design specifically tailored to the scheme and well-designed public space with suitable management arrangements in place. Sunny communal fourth-floor roof terraces take advantage of views to the River Plym tidal basin and complement the ground floor sheltered courtyard garden and terrace. Residents have access to a new nearby park, shops, a pharmacy and a doctors' surgery. The area also includes mixed-use and business enterprise schemes and additional affordable housing aimed at first-time buyers.

*“Visually, the whole masterplanned area has the air of an established community.”*

Most of the flats have living spaces with shallow balconies with glass balustrades. These allow for summer ventilation and also give residents – who may remain seated for much of the day – generous views of the tidal basin to the south or north across the new park.

The entrance is placed centrally and is clearly signalled by a recessed open porch, aiding orientation for residents or visitors with visual impairments. The rendered upper parts echo the palate of existing nearby housing while the masonry ground floor adds interest and reduces the visual impact of the height of the building, which is on the edge of a predominantly low-rise residential area. The massing of the building works well with the rest of the masterplan.

The ground-floor stonework forms part of a palate of robust, high-quality materials used in both the building and the public realm. The residents' courtyard is private but the common palate ensures that the scheme does not appear insular. Visually, the whole masterplanned area has the air of an established community.



## Fox Lane, Chertsey

- Fox Lane, Chertsey, Surrey
- Setting: Town/village centre brownfield
- Lead partner: Thames Valley Housing Association
- Local authority: Runnymede Borough Council
- Dwellings: 93 flats including 24 for shared ownership
- Parking: Basement
- Overall assessment score: 86.1% (very good)

The Phoenix Apartments are in four new buildings situated around a raised residents' courtyard, which provides a focus for the community. The garden is gated and planted with aromatic herbs. Many of the apartments also have their own balconies with terraces on the ground and top floors, creating a variety of public and private and soft and hard spaces for residents. The exterior of the buildings features soft red brick and white rendered elevations. Overall it feels like a place with a distinctive character, with buildings exhibiting architectural quality and a well structured building layout that is easy to find your way around.

The Fox Lane scheme was built on the site of an old petrol station and the new space creates a focus for the streets around. It is part of a bigger development called the Chertsey Opportunity, a partnership between Countryside Properties and

Runnymede District Council to revitalise the town centre of Chertsey and breathe new life into a rundown area of 4.4 hectares near the railway station. It includes more than 14,000 square metres of office accommodation in five separate buildings as well as 93 mixed-tenure homes called the Phoenix Apartments, a new town square and retail units. Retail units and restaurants are at the front of the scheme with a basement car park behind.

The town centre location means that the development has easy access to the nearby train station, community facilities and shops. The project has created a new

landscaped, pedestrianised public space around some existing listed buildings and a new café. Car parking is situated beneath the raised, semi-private garden, a clever idea that uses the slope of the site well, although there are some problems with access into the parking space that leave unused, uncomfortable recesses and are reliant on stairs. Environmental features include the use of insulated render that has a high thermal value and reduces noise.

*"A raised residents' courtyard is gated and planted with aromatic herbs."*



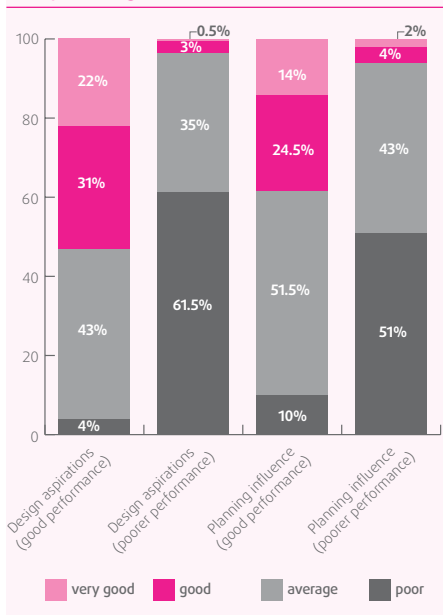
### Design aspirations

In terms of the architectural quality of the buildings (Q2), definition of streets by a well-structured building layout (Q3), design and management of public space (Q12) and provision of a suitable tenure mix for the local community (Q18) schemes score particularly well, with over 50% of schemes rated as good or very good. They also score well on out-performing statutory minima (Q13) – 49% of schemes were good or very good – and regarding provision of a suitable accommodation mix (Q19) – 43% good or very good.

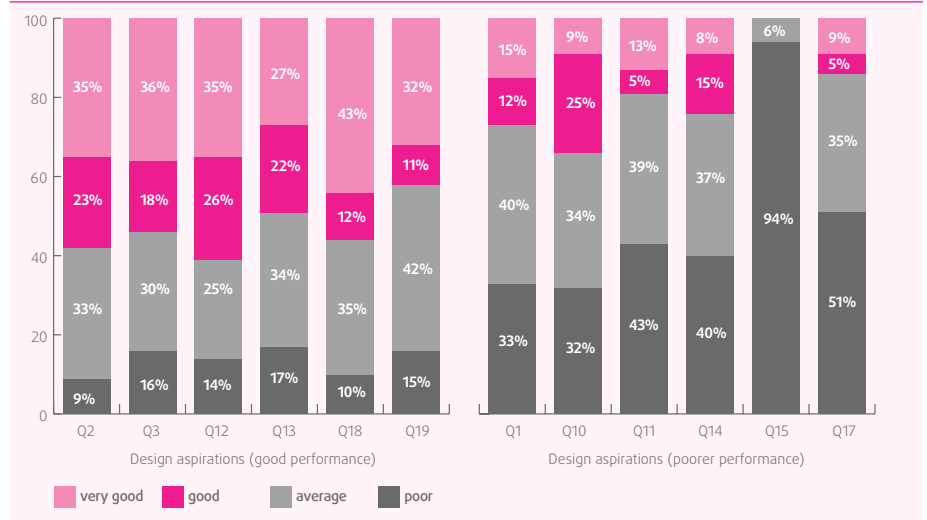
### Design aspirations theme – strengths

- Q2 Do buildings exhibit architectural quality?
- Q3 Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?
- Q12 Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?
- Q13 Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as Building Regulations?
- Q18 Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
- Q19 Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?

**Figure 4.3 Quality of design aspiration and planning influence themes**



**Figure 4.4 Quality by Building for Life question – design aspirations**



### Design aspirations theme – weaknesses

- Q1 Does the scheme feel like a place with a distinctive character?
- Q10 Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?
- Q11 Is the design specific to the scheme?
- Q14 Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness?
- Q15 Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?
- Q17 Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?

### Architectural quality

It is clear from the high scores for question 2 (do buildings exhibit architectural quality?) that RSLs have high expectations in terms of the quality of the architecture of their schemes. However, there is room for improvement. The second group of questions, on the right of figure 4.4, shows that whilst a number of schemes still scored well, that there is a larger proportion of poor schemes – especially for question 15, which we look at in greater detail below. The first three questions particularly relate to architectural quality, addressing distinctive character (Q1), façade design (are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe – Q10) and design being specific to the scheme (Q11).

These are areas where RSLs should focus their effort to improve the quality of future schemes: a significant increase in quality could be seen. Looking at the differences between the top 20 and bottom 20 scoring schemes (overall) the largest difference for any question was that for the provision of design which is specific to the scheme – scores were separated by 57%.

Yet specific design need not be a significant cost: creative design using stock building elements, careful building massing which is responsive to context and a thoughtful approach to landscape design can be successful without the need to use expensive bespoke elements. The scheme at Penggon Coombe in Cornwall (see page 10) is a good example of a distinctive scheme, specifically tailored to its site and which responds well to context.

The findings that schemes provided a suitable accommodation (Q19) and tenure mix (Q18) should not be a surprise given the function of RSLs, nor should it be surprising that affordable housing schemes tend to out-perform statutory minima (Q13) as this was a requirement of funding agreements with the then Housing Corporation.

(Continued on page 12).



## Pengegon Coombe, Cornwall

- Pengegon Coombe, Laity Fields, Camborne, Cornwall
- Setting: Suburban greenfield
- Developing RSL: Devon & Cornwall Housing Association on behalf of Coastline Housing
- Local authority: Kerrier District Council
- Procurement: Purchase of serviced plots and parking squares plus design and build contract with developer to complete the properties
- Funding: Housing Corporation, Section 106
- Dwellings: 82 including six two-bed flats and 11 two-bed houses
- Parking: Mix of bays and garages and central parking court
- Overall assessment score: 73.8% (good)

Pengegon Coombe establishes a distinctive character with its references to the vernacular. The three-storey blocks of flats pick up architectural references to the mining heritage of the Camborne area with stone stairwells and brick arch windows, echoing the old mine buildings in parkland nearby. A relatively high proportion of three-storey dwellings raises the profile of the street and breaks the lines of two-storey houses. Open space is minimal within what is a relatively high-density development but is simple in design with seating and paths and a small village green works well in one quarter.

*“The flats pick up architectural references to the mining heritage of the Camborne area with stone stairwells and brick arch windows.”*

The scheme feels like a place with a distinctive character, it has buildings that demonstrate architectural quality and it has streets defined by a well-structured building layout. However, it rated less well in the survey questions on design and construction and environment and community. Devon and Cornwall Housing Association had little input into the design except in, for example, increasing the specification to meet funding requirements.

Dwellings are built close to the roads and overlooking parking bays. The roads do not dominate but loop through the development to a central parking court with properties backing on to it. A variety of complimentary high-quality materials are used in the public realm, although these mostly comprise paving and hard landscaping because the development is relatively high density.



## Park Central, Birmingham

- Zone 5a and 5b, Park Central, Birmingham
- Setting: Suburban brownfield
- Lead partner: Bromford Partnership
- Developing RSL: Optima Community Association
- Local authority: Birmingham City Council
- Procurement: Housing Corporation Funding
- Funding: Optima Community Association, Birmingham City Council, Housing Corporation, central government and the Arts Council
- Dwellings: 99 apartments (27 affordable) and 40 houses (31 affordable)
- Parking: A combination of parking methods across the development
- Overall assessment score: 68.7% (average)

Part of the Park Central development in Birmingham, zones 5a and 5b are part of the wider Attwood Green regeneration. Park Central is a scheme based around a dramatic open space that centres on a piece of public art, The Sky Mirror by Nayan Kulkarni. This 12-metre-wide pool of water, over dark granite, reflects the sky above, and also provides an interesting central focus to the development. As well as a water feature, it can be drained and used as a stage for performances. The provision of this new public park includes planting to encourage wildlife such as a wildflower meadow. It was designed and managed by Birmingham City Council.

*“A 12-metre-wide pool of water, over dark granite, reflects the sky above and provides an interesting central focus.”*

The two zones feature a mix of houses and blocks of one- and two-bedroom apartments. The houses themselves are fully convertible to wheelchair use and conform to Lifetime Homes criteria. The internal spaces are flexible, with all internal walls as non-load bearing. Kitchen and bathroom walls are plywood lined to enable easier conversion without concern over fittings.

The environmental and community aspects of the community are particularly strong. Zone 1 of Park Central won a Building for Life gold award in recognition of its role in physically economically and socially regenerating what was formerly a wasted and dangerous no-go parkland area. In addition to the nearby park, sustainability has been a priority with the environmental impact of the development will be reduced by a planned central heating and power plant. The housing all qualifies for a ‘good’ or ‘very good’ EcoHomes rating.





## Complexity

The fact that some schemes remain poor can in part be explained by the complexity of the environment in which RSLs operate. Design teams increasingly require specialists to deal with changing legal and statutory requirements (such as those resulting from the government's policy response to climate change), funding requirements, and construction techniques (see below).

As might be expected, a significant influence on quality was the point at which the RSL became involved with schemes and the degree of influence they had over decision making. This is addressed in more detail below.

For example, eight schemes that were bought off-the-shelf by the RSLs scored poorly. They did not comply with the then Housing Corporation's scheme development standards (SDS) or fall within the normal housing quality indicators (HQIs) unit size range although they did have an EcoHomes rating – we looked to these indicators as evidence of the schemes having exceeded statutory requirements. However these same schemes scored well on accommodation and tenure mix, suggesting that they were purchased to meet a specific need.

## Construction techniques

Two areas where there were also marked contrasts in quality were the use of advances in construction or technology to enhance performance, quality and attractiveness (Q14) and the inclusion of features that reduce environmental impact (Q17).

When looking at advances in construction and technology we assessed two aspects. First, we asked RSLs to report on the construction of the scheme and we looked for evidence that the original design was failing, such as consistent remedial works to dwellings across the scheme. This was an area in which the schemes performed well, with about 60% being scored as good or very good. Second, we asked about their use of advances in technology. A third of schemes reported their use to some degree (very good, good and average) and this is consistent with the then Housing Corporation's aims at the time. It should be noted that this is an area which is constantly evolving; the use of bathroom and kitchen preplumbed 'pods' was an innovative approach until fairly recently, and is now an accepted construction technique.

RSLs also reported on whether schemes had any features that would reduce environmental impact (Q17). At the good and very good end of the scale the results were essentially consistent with the reported ecohomes accreditation. However, the RSLs performed slightly better in terms of poor ratings, suggesting that perhaps schemes had some features that were insufficient to earn an EcoHome rating. However, the difference in score is relatively small (7%). Nonetheless some schemes took environmental concerns into account, such as at Park Central where, for example, the site allowed for planting to support biodiversity.

The environmental performance of homes is of significant concern and so the relatively poor scores are disappointing. CABE noted that market housebuilders may have to change fundamental aspects of their product to achieve zero carbon standards<sup>10</sup>, and this equally applies to affordable housing, especially those procured via Section 106.

## Adaptability

A large proportion of schemes involved apartments and this may be seen as a partial explanation for poor performance in this category. Where houses are built with gardens, extensions and room-in-the-roof conversions may be possible, depending on the roof structure. However, these are not generally possibilities for apartments. Where schemes scored well this tended to be on aspects of the Lifetime Homes standards and on ground floor spaces being capable of conversion, such as where floor to ceiling heights were sufficient to make them suitable for conversion to live/work units, retail or other commercial use.

(Continued on page 14).

---

<sup>10</sup> CABE, 2007, Housing Audit, Assessing the Design Quality of New Housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South East, p3

## Broadclose Farm, Bude

- Broadclose Farm, Bude, Cornwall
- Setting: Suburban greenfield
- Lead partner: Devon and Cornwall Housing Association
- Developing RSLs: Westcountry Housing Association and Guinness Trust
- Local authority: North Cornwall District Council
- Procurement: Partnering (PPC2000 contract)
- Funding: Housing Corporation, North Cornwall District Council
- Dwellings: 173 homes, with two-thirds for affordable rent or shared ownership and one-third for private sale
- Parking: Radial and semi-radial parking courts plus on-street bays
- Overall assessment score: 83.3% (very good)

Rated very good in the survey, Broadclose also won the Richard Feilden Award in the 2007 Housing Design Awards. The site was owned by North Cornwall District Council, which chose to control the design and development process rather than sell to the highest bidder. The homes feature white render elevations with grey timber windows and dark grey brick. But panels of cedar boarding or timber shakes lift the monochrome pallet and porches are detailed for the seaside location, with portholes that also aid surveillance. The massing of the units decreases towards the edge of the site to give first-floor views out to the coast and countryside.

Although it is not a designated Homezone, Broadclose works on the same principles, with shared surface streets that give equal priority to cars, pedestrians and cyclists. Stone-walled planters and sand-blasted concrete seating provide traffic calming. Shared surface routes lead through radial and semi-radial parking courts to more landscaped streets with planters and on-street bays. A series of interconnecting cycle routes and footpaths give youngsters a safe route to school.

A landscaped park features amphitheatre seating to create a welcoming access to the scheme. Environmental features include a series of underground tanks that collect rainwater from roads and gutters for use in flushing toilets. This is expected to save residents 20% on their water bills. The project also incorporates a sustainable drainage system with swales and surface ponds and particular attention paid to the detailing of block-paved areas. The scheme scored top marks in the survey for features that reduce its environmental impact and mixes of tenure and accommodation that reflect the needs and aspirations of the local community.



© Tribal

“Although it is not a designated Homezone, Broadclose has shared surface streets that give equal priority to cars, pedestrians and cyclists.”

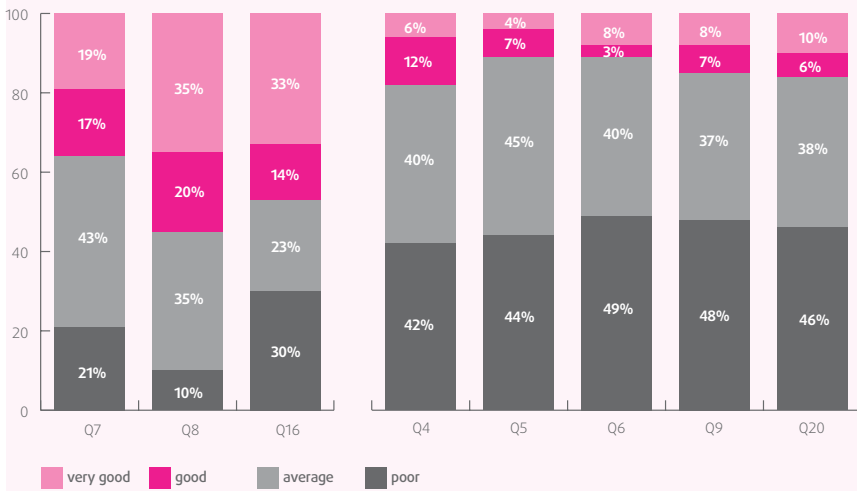


© Tribal



© Trewin Design Partnership

**Figure 4.5 Quality by Building for Life indicator – planning influences**



**Planning authority influence**

The actions of local authority planners can have an important impact on the quality of a scheme, either directly or indirectly. Like the questions regarding design aspirations those which show the impact of planning authority influence on quality can also be split into those with good performance and poorer performance.

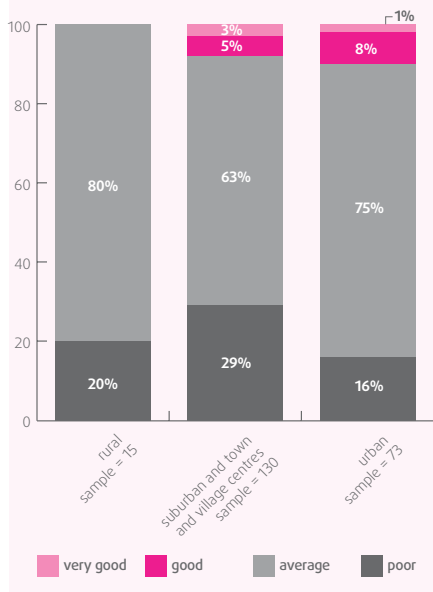
**Strengths and weaknesses**

Where good scores were seen this was through pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly streets (Q7) and well-integrated parking, which supported the street scene (Q8). Access to public transport (Q16), which was highly dependent on the context of the site, also produced good scores.

In fact all of the ‘planning influence’ questions were highly site dependent. Poorer performance was seen in terms of navigability (Q4 – Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?), sensitivity to existing features (Q5 – Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?), building layout (Q6 – Does the building layout take priority over the roads and car parking, so that highways do not dominate?), movement network

(Q9 – Does the scheme integrate with existing roads, paths and surrounding development?) and access to community facilities (Q20). It is worth considering the effect of site selection on design outcomes – an RSL’s choice can be highly dependent on planning policy, directly or indirectly, through planning gain or local development frameworks – on quality before considering more process based planning (and RSL) influences in more detail.

**Figure 4.6 Variation of overall quality with location**



**Site influences**

**Urban, suburban and rural sites**

As with the CABE market audits, there were marked differences in quality between schemes in urban, suburban and rural locations. Urban schemes performed best, with the most good and very good designs and the fewest poor ones. Suburban areas had the largest proportion of poor schemes but also had the largest proportion of very good ones. It appears at first glance from figure 4.6 that rural schemes had no good nor very good schemes but this result was affected by the small sample size (as we also saw with schemes under 20 units, which we will look at later), which also makes it difficult to compare them with urban and suburban schemes. However, it is possible to draw some conclusions about the differences between urban and suburban schemes by examining the Building for Life questions on which they scored highest and lowest.

Unsurprisingly the most significant difference was access to public transport (Q16), followed by access to local services and facilities (Q20). For both questions urban schemes scored more highly.

Urban schemes were also more likely to:

- have greater distinctiveness in design (Q1), exhibit greater architectural quality (Q2) and more site-specific design (Q11)
- use newer construction techniques (Q14)
- be easier to find your way around (Q4).

While some urban schemes integrated well with existing roads and footpaths beyond the scheme boundaries, a larger number did so very poorly (Q9) and a similar trend was seen for the integration of features to reduce the schemes’ environmental impact (Q17).

Other less significant differences were that:

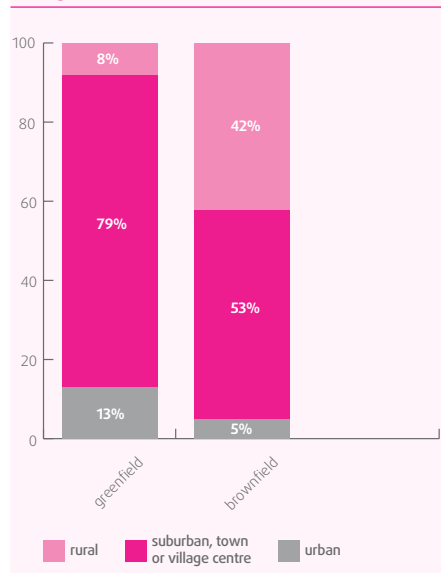
- urban schemes had better structured building layouts (Q3) in which the building layout was more likely to take priority over roads and parking (Q6) and were more likely to exploit existing features on site (Q5)
- suburban schemes had a lower proportion very good and poor schemes with regards to being pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly (Q7), and were also more likely to be average when it came to integrating car parking so that it didn't dominate the street scene (Q8)
- public space was less well designed with less suitable management arrangements in urban areas than in suburban areas
- suburban schemes were more likely to be average when it came to outperforming statutory minima (Q13)
- urban schemes performed slightly less well in terms of providing a suitable tenure (Q18) and accommodation (Q19) mix.

In general these trends are broadly in line with those found for market housing. Urban sites can provide a stronger context in which a designer can work and can require a higher level of design response as they are often less amenable to standard housing types and layouts. It is also possible that suburbs have not received the same degree of attention as urban areas. A great deal of energy has been devoted to reviving cities but it would appear that relatively less effort has been made in suburban locations.

### Greenfield vs brownfield

Just over three-quarters of the schemes surveyed were brownfield developments. Unsurprisingly, these were more likely to be in urban locations whereas greenfield sites were more likely to be rural or suburban. The four greenfield sites in urban locations were relatively large. One consisted of 101 homes while the other three were of 20, 32 and 40 homes set within larger market developments.

**Figure 4.7 Location of brownfield and greenfield sites**



There was little difference in overall quality between greenfield and brownfield schemes. However, some very large differences can be seen at the level of the individual Building for Life questions.

More greenfield schemes were rated as good in terms of having well-designed public space (Q12) and as average on creating a scheme that feels like a place with a distinctive character (Q1) and that integrates well with existing roads, paths and surrounding development (Q9). However, proportionally more greenfield schemes rated as poor in terms of access to public transport (Q16) and community facilities (Q20), as would be expected since most greenfield sites are in rural or suburban locations. Breaking down the questions still further confirms the pattern that might be expected: greenfield sites score least well on having a choice of public transport options, though routes to public transport feel safe, whereas brownfield sites score near consistently across all public transport categories.

The relationships between quality and urban context and between quality and greenfield and brownfield sites are both similar to those seen in CABE's market housing audits. However here are a few aspects of sites which are either peculiar to affordable housing, or where the results differ.

### Land values

CABE's second audit of market housing noted a correlation between design quality and the affluence of the area in which the scheme is located. Analysis of the top 20 and bottom 20 schemes, combined with the Acorn<sup>11</sup> classification for their location, suggested that poorer schemes tended to be found in less affluent areas and that this resulted from their lower land values, projected sale values or the attitudes of planners. However, the third phase of the audit<sup>12</sup>, covering the South West and East and West Midlands, showed that schemes with a high social housing or regeneration component, or where the local authority had the mechanisms in place to demand good design, bucked this trend.

<sup>11</sup> An ACORN rating is 'A Classification Of Residential Neighbourhoods'. The dataset is by postcode and split into five categories: 1 wealthy achievers; 2 urban prosperity; 3 comfortably off; 4 moderate means; and 5 hard pressed.

<sup>12</sup> CABE, 2007, Housing Audit – Assessing the Design Quality of New Housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West, p16

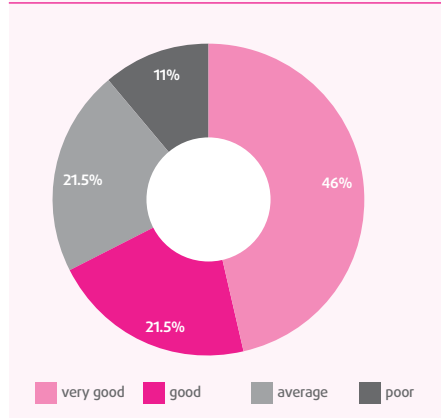
For the survey of affordable housing we conducted an analysis of both the top 20 and bottom 20 schemes, and the full dataset, against the Acorn ratings of their locations. This showed that there was no significant relationship between the design quality of an affordable housing scheme and the affluence of the surrounding area.

### Tenure of mixed schemes

One goal of housing and planning policy is to encourage the development of more mixed communities. Delivery mechanisms such as Section 106 help to ensure that many affordable housing schemes are part of larger, market developments and good design will concentrate on creating a coherent community and avoiding differentiation between tenures.

In two-thirds of cases the affordable homes were indistinguishable (or nearly so) in design terms from the market ones. There was still a minority – just over one-tenth – where tenure could be distinguished, which leaves residents potentially open to discrimination from the wider community. Interestingly, we found that the distribution of the homes – whether they were broadly distributed throughout the wider scheme in clusters – appeared to have no significant effect on whether or not the tenure of the units was distinguishable.

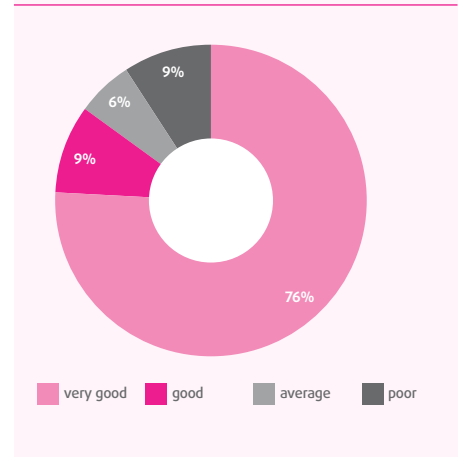
**Figure 4.8** For schemes which are part of a larger market development, is the design such that tenure cannot be distinguished?



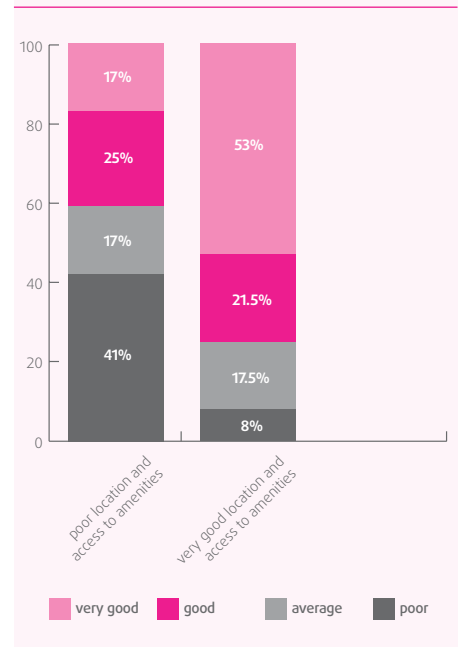
A better picture emerged in terms of location and access to amenities (Q20). In a larger proportion of schemes (85%) the affordable homes were not discriminated against in terms of access to amenities. However, there was still a small proportion (9%) where they were. Unsurprisingly, schemes with less access to amenities were also less likely to be tenure blind, which is just one example of how less thoughtful design in one aspect of a scheme is likely to mean poor design in a number of areas.

(Continued on page 18).

**Figure 4.9** For schemes which are part of a larger market development, is the design such that affordable units are not discriminated against in terms of location and provision of amenities?



**Figure 4.10** Are units with poor location and access to amenities tenure blind?





## James Road Regeneration, Portsmouth

- James Road Regeneration, Chatfield Road, Portsmouth
- Setting: Suburban brownfield
- Lead partner: Swaythling Housing Society
- Developing RSL: Portsmouth Housing Association
- Local authority: Gosport Borough Council
- Procurement: Housing Corporation funded, NAHP
- Funding: Housing Corporation
- Dwellings: 50 two-, three- and four-bed houses plus 33 one- and two-bed flats. Rental and shared ownership
- Overall assessment score: 84.8% (very good)

This redevelopment scheme saw the demolition of 50 steel-framed Steane homes that had come to the end of their life and construction of 83 new homes in clusters of blocks surrounded a central square and play area, which give a central focus for the new housing. The quality of the streets helps give a coherent character to the development, which makes up part of a larger residential estate. The scheme achieves a successful balance between being pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly and both buildings and the layout are easy to find your way around.

“High-quality streetscapes help create a clean, focused scheme that links well into the existing area.”

The central road is defined both by raised paving, and limited on-street parking, demarcated to break the visual line. The uneven line of the roads edges is a deliberate traffic calming measure. The streetscape is uncluttered by cars, with off-street parking available in interestingly accessible blocks. These are mostly buffered from the housing by private back gardens. Refuge storage is also hidden in discrete shelters, often incorporated into the blocks.

Mature trees have been kept on the site, supplemented by additional planting, which makes the space appear more permanent, and helps link into the existing housing in the area. The square in the centre of the scheme provides a strong focus, sited on the road that links both sides of the scheme. Higher blocks of flats overlook the central square and play area, giving surveillance and providing legibility.

The architect consulted existing residents and people from nearby streets and this helped the local authority ensure that the new estate linked into the existing housing. Portsmouth Housing Association ran proposals through internal design review panels, a tenant approval group and a design appraisal panel prior to planning application and these have helped create a scheme that is architecturally and spatially successful.



## Section 106

A large proportion (figure 4.11) of affordable housing schemes result from Section 106 agreements between private developers and local planning authorities. Section 106 agreements are legally binding agreements or planning obligations to deliver affordable homes and other community facilities.

Before the research got underway the researchers ran two workshops with RSLs. All those who were the lead partner in development partnerships were invited and a list of attending RSLs is given in Appendix B. One area of particular interest to the delegates was the influence of Section 106 and the knock-on effect on the amount to which a landlord could influence the design (and therefore quality) of these schemes. We asked them about these factors as well as for information on off-site aspects of the Building for Life questions.

Just over half of schemes surveyed were subject to a Section 106 agreement. However, RSLs also noted another important sub-group: schemes purchased off-the-shelf or on the open market that were not necessarily the result of Section 106.

A direct comparison shows that the schemes that were neither Section 106 nor off-the-shelf had more good and very good designs, and fewer poor ones. Non-Section 106 schemes that were part of larger, market developments achieved better results than non-Section 106 stand-alone schemes. However, Section 106 schemes that were part of larger market developments also showed the greatest proportion of both very good and poor schemes.

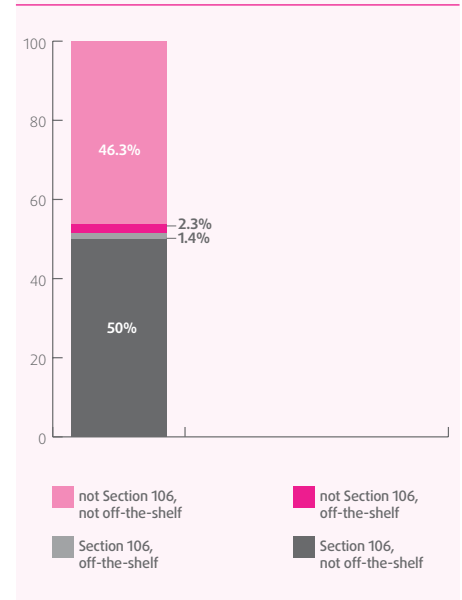
In three-quarters of cases involving Section 106 or off-the-shelf schemes, the design had been agreed with the local planning authority before the RSL became involved. However, there was also a minority (16%) where the RSL did have involvement. For schemes that were neither Section 106 nor off-the-shelf, the opposite was true. We look in more detail at the effect of RSL involvement in design on quality below.

## Influence of size

Clearly a small site can only accommodate a small number of homes, so the size of scheme is worth considering alongside other site characteristics.

About two-thirds of the schemes we visited were part of a larger, market development. The rest were standalone affordable schemes. We analysed the effect of the size of the development on design quality and found no significant relationship. It should be noted that the sample of very small schemes – fewer than 20 homes – was small, so the lack of good or very good schemes is not a significant finding: further research would be needed to further explore the issues regarding smaller schemes, which make up a significant proportion of the sector's output.

**Figure 4.11 Make-up of sample: Section 106 and off-the-shelf**



## Influencing design quality – RSL influence and joint working

The RSLs who were surveyed were asked a number of questions about the development process. They were asked:

- To what extent they were involved with the design of their schemes (the buildings, the public realm and the layout – which was one of the areas where we noted planning influence and also poorer quality)
- Whether the local planning authority worked with the RSL to enhance design quality
- Whether the design was agreed with the local planning authority prior to the RSL's involvement with the scheme (as can happen on mixed-tenure or off-the-shelf schemes).

(Continued on page 20).

## Hornsey Street, London

- Hornsey Street HN1-4, 9-17 Hornsey Street, Islington, London N7 8GE
- Setting: Urban brownfield
- Lead partner: Newlon Housing Trust
- Local authority: London Borough of Islington
- Procurement: Design and build
- Dwellings: 164 flats, 44 for general needs rent, 64 for intermediate rent, 56 for shared ownership
- Overall assessment score: 71.6% (good)

Hornsey Street HN1-4 is the fourth of eight sites developed by Newlon Housing Trust in partnership with Arsenal Football Club as part of the wider regeneration of the area around Holloway Road and provision of the affordable housing element of the Emirates Stadium development. The mixed-use project comprises four linked buildings ranging from seven to 11 stories containing a total of 164 flats. Each flat has a private balcony or small terrace garden. Some 2,000 square metres of commercial space is at ground floor level.

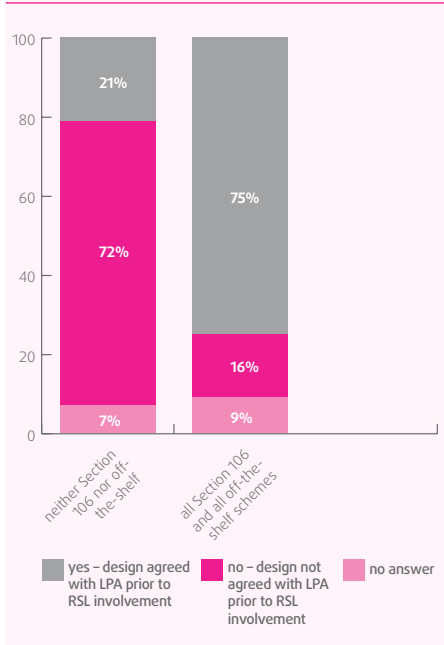
Hornsey Street makes use of advances in construction and technology to enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness and has a design that is specific to the scheme. Innovations include a cast in-situ concrete system providing the structural frame, a prefabricated panelised internal walling system and prefabricated bathrooms and a unitised cladding system. This enabled faster on-site construction and greater quality control.

“Innovations enabled faster on-site construction and greater quality control.”

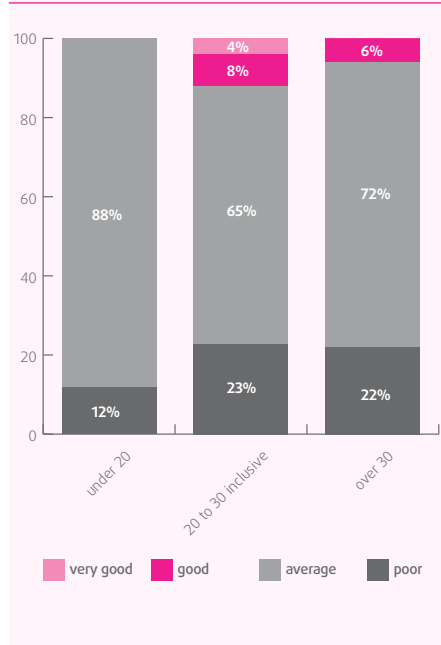
The scheme is close to community facilities and shops, and features a communal roof terrace area at first-floor level between a small under-fives play area. Proximity to the bus routes and underground station on Holloway Road helps ensure easy access to public transport. The scheme was built on land previously occupied by light industrial units, most of which had fallen into disuse.



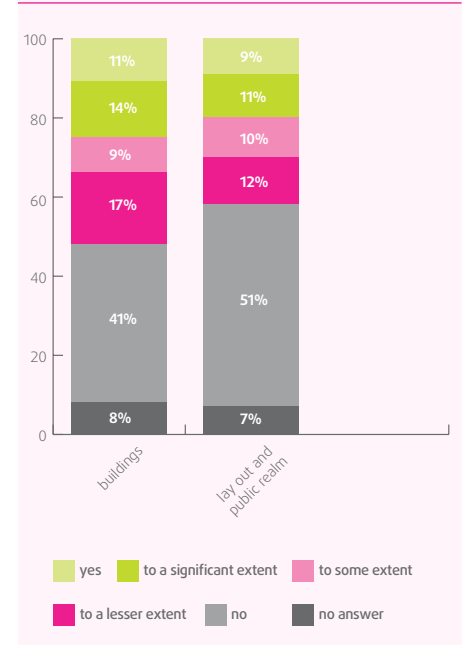
**Figure 4.12** Design agreed with planning authority prior to RSL involvement with the scheme



**Figure 4.13** Influence of scheme size on quality (standalone schemes)



**Figure 4.14** Degree of RSL involvement with the design of buildings and the layout and public realm



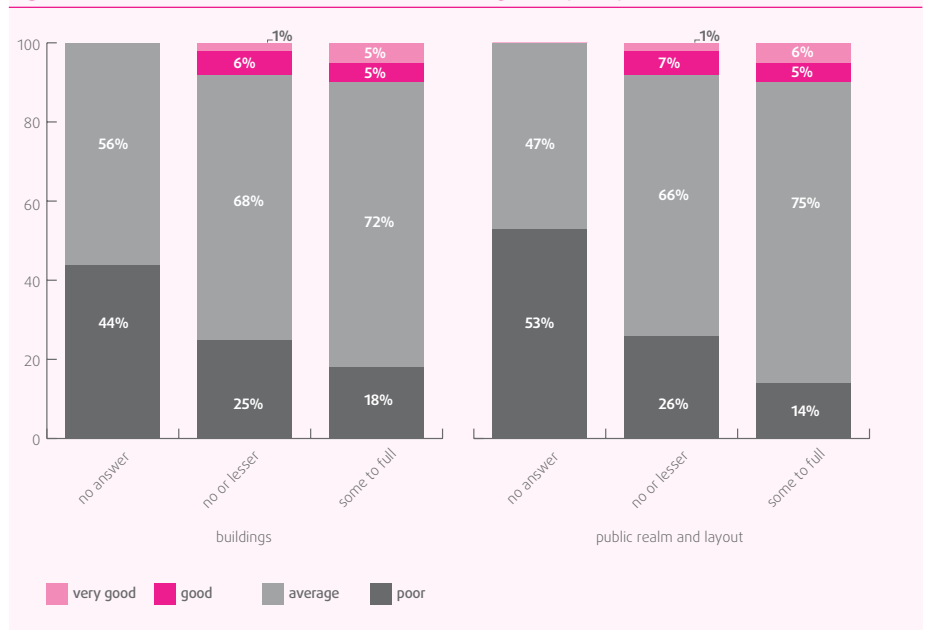
They were also asked about parking and highway design:

- Whether the amount of parking for the scheme was fixed by the local authority, and what the parking arrangements were
- Whether the local authority's highway standards were applied flexibly
- Whether the application of the local parking and highways standards had a beneficial effect on the quality of the scheme.

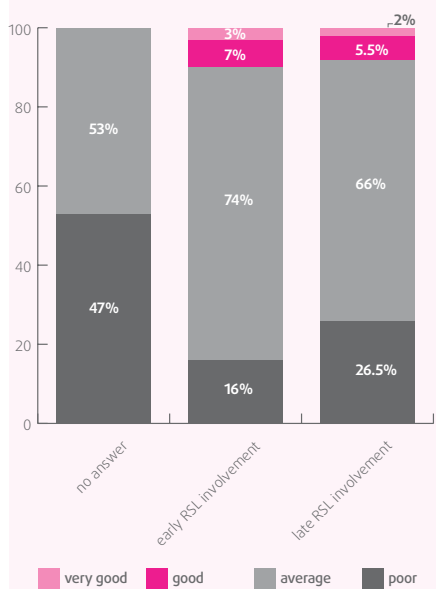
We found that RSLs were more likely to have been involved in the design of buildings than in the design of the public realm and the layout and also that, if an RSL was involved with the design of the buildings, that they were more likely to have also been involved in the design of the public realm and the layout. However, there are still a large number of Section 106 schemes over which RSLs can exert little or no influence. This needs to change as RSL involvement is a driver for quality and in particular helps to reduce the number of poor schemes.

As might be expected, the timing of RSL involvement with a scheme is also important: quality was lower where the design was agreed with the planning authority prior to RSL involvement in the scheme.

**Figure 4.15** Influence of RSL involvement in design on quality



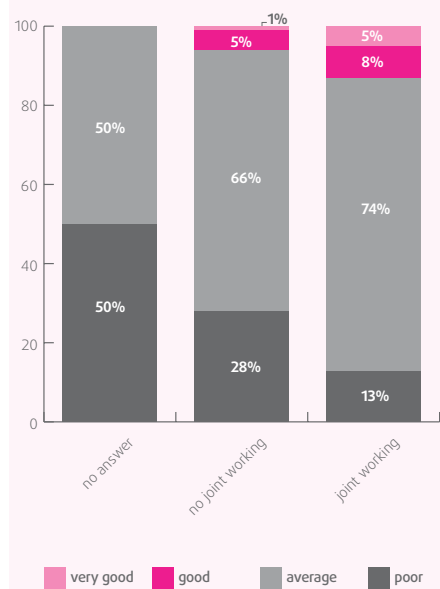
**Figure 4.16** Was the design agreed with the planning authority before the RSL was invited to take the scheme on?



Schemes for which the design was agreed prior to RSL involvement tended to be Section 106 schemes (79% of sample), but there was still a significant minority of schemes where the RSL became involved earlier in the design process. RSLs and local planning authorities should work together to ensure that RSL involvement with a scheme is as early as possible.

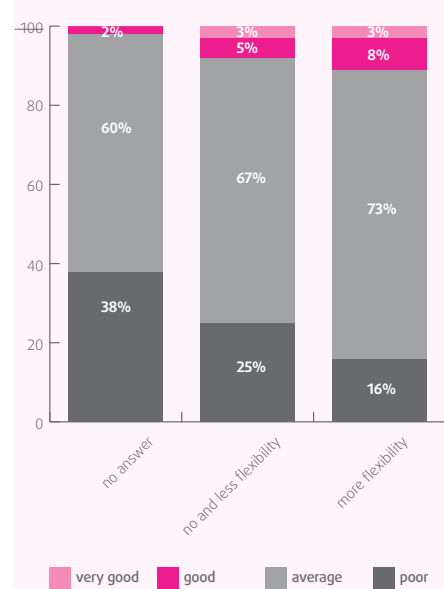
Joint working between RSLs and local planning authority was also a driver for quality overall, reducing the number of poor schemes and increasing the number of good scheme and, in particular, very good schemes.

**Figure 4.17** Increased quality is seen where RSLs and local planning authorities work together



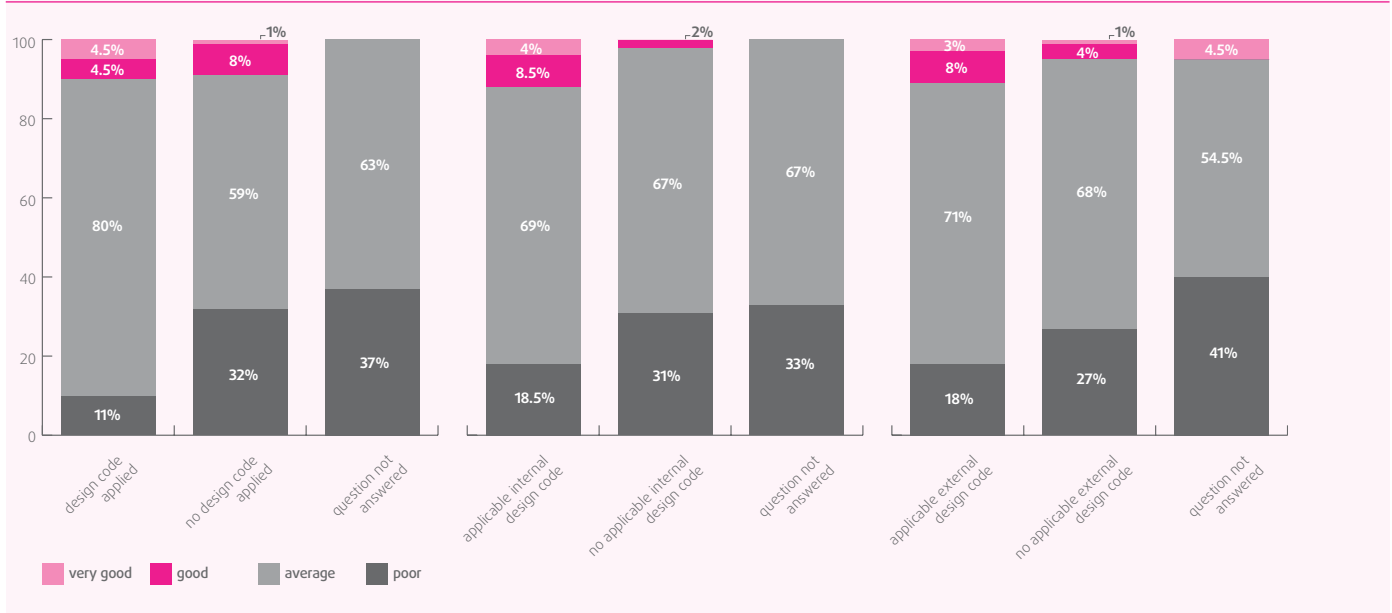
Looking again at the questions where planning influence was noted we see that they are substantially involved with the design of streets. We asked RSLs if the local authority's highways standards were flexibly applied to their scheme, and we saw a similar pattern as with the relationship with the local authority as a whole.

**Figure 4.18** Increased quality is seen where highways standards are flexibly applied





**Figure 4.19** Correlation of quality with design codes/guides



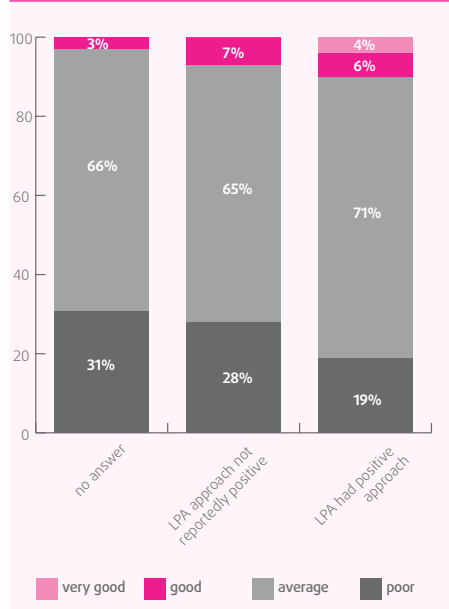
### Design guides, design briefing and quality control

So, assuming RSLs have influence over their schemes, and a good working relationship with the local planning authority and its highways department, what other actions can they take to increase design quality?

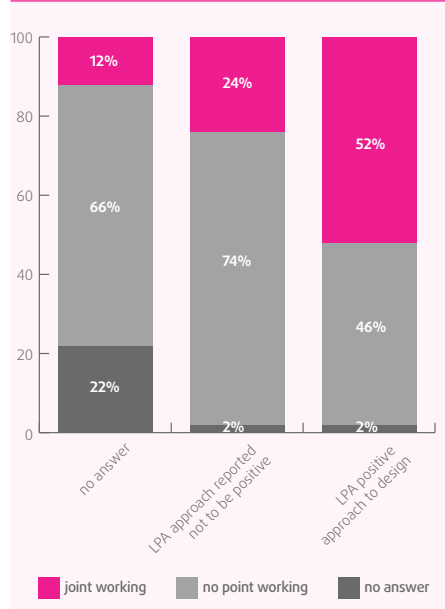
RSLs were asked whether their schemes had been subject to a design code or guide, about design codes for internal and external spaces, whether the scheme had a design brief and whether the RSL had a design quality control process. They reported that only 39% of schemes were subject to a design code or guide and since these development standards were a strong indicator for increased design quality (figure 4.19) it is recommended that RSLs should develop and apply them to all schemes.

We also saw that design briefs and guidance from the local planning authority was associated with increased quality and, unsurprisingly, that there was a reasonable correlation between this and the likelihood of a joint working.

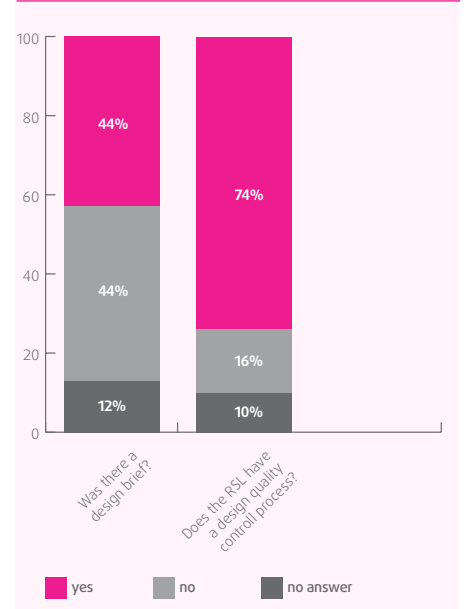
**Figure 4.20** Effect of local authority's approach towards design (design codes/guidance)



**Figure 4.21** Joint working for a given local authority approach to design (design codes/guidance)



**Figure 4.22** RSLs with design quality control processes; schemes with design briefs

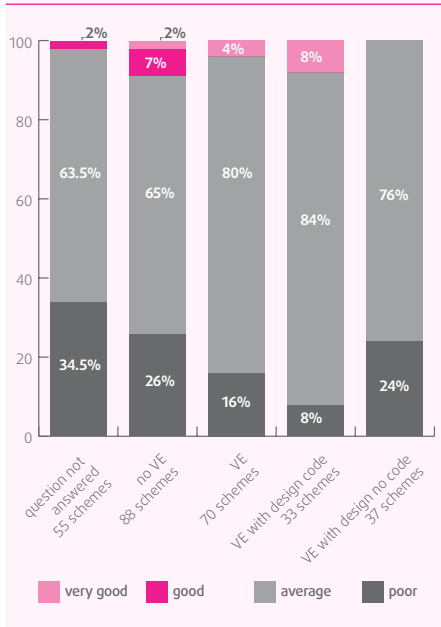


We also asked the RSLs if they had a quality control process, and if schemes had a design brief. Surprisingly, while most RSLs had a quality control process, only a minority of schemes were subject to a design brief.

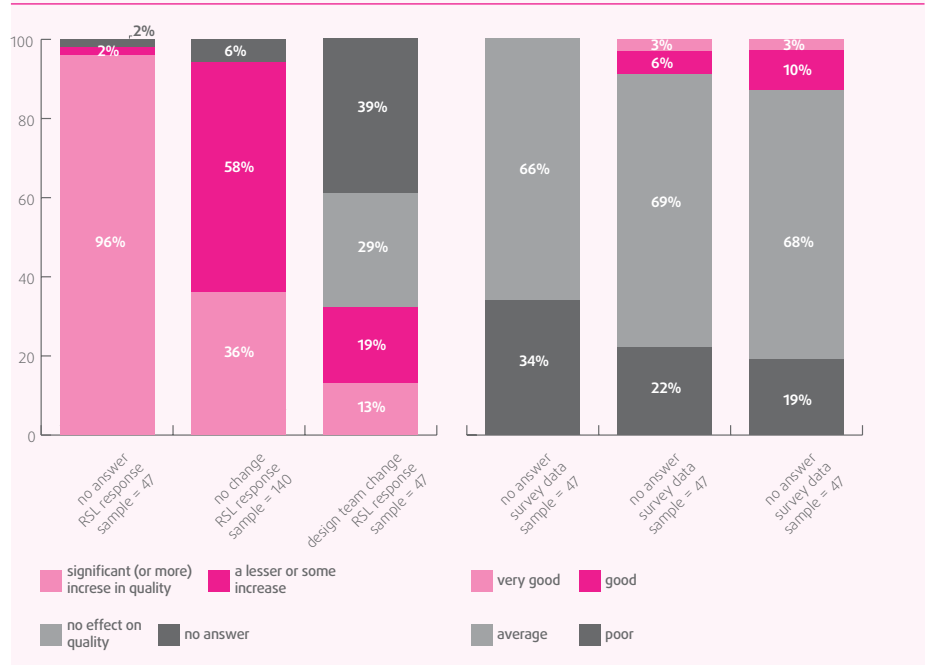
## Value engineering

Designers often feel that value engineering (a process of optimising utility for capital investment, sometimes thought of as cost cutting) poses a risk to design quality and that the vision for a scheme may be eroded by the need to cut costs. Our data shows that while value engineering reduced the overall number of good and very good schemes it also reduced the number of poor ones. However, it also appears that quality at the top end was protected where a scheme had a design code. Whether this is a causal effect is impossible to say, as it may be that RSLs who use design codes are more likely to have urban design skills and the motivation to protect excellence in design. Nonetheless other research has suggested that where client expectations are made explicit the client is better able to defend its requirements during value engineering<sup>13</sup>.

**Figure 4.23** The effect of value engineering; correlation between protective effect and a design code



**Figure 4.24** Effect of design team change on overall scheme quality



## Design team change

RSLs reported that in a minority of schemes (14%) the design team changed during the project and that this usually (68% of cases) resulted in an increase in quality, to a greater or lesser extent. Although there was a difference in quality seen in the survey data it was small and not significant, especially given the sample size.

This suggests that RSLs and their market housebuilder partners may be taking active steps to demand quality from their designers but that they are remedial measures only, to bring quality up to that of most affordable schemes.

However, it is difficult to say whether the decision to change design team was directly a result of a **managed** quality control process. While 81% of the RSLs with design team change had a quality control process (compared with 74% for the overall sample) the number of schemes with design team change was small and the difference equates to only two schemes. This is an area that would benefit from additional research.

# Recommendations

Our recommendations are based on the findings of this survey of affordable housing combined with insights from the then Housing Corporation's design and quality staff and from CABE's own practice and the first national audit of market housing quality.

These recommendations are for:

- RSLs, who procure affordable housing, either indirectly via Section 106 agreements with developers or directly
- Market housebuilder partners who work with RSLs and who deliver the majority of new housing and who can significantly influence the quality of affordable housing, especially where provision is required by planning
- Local authorities, who are responsible for requiring the best from RSLs **and** market developers, and who can have a direct influence on quality outcomes
- Central government, which sets the policy framework and incentive structure.

Design quality should be important to all. Specific recommendations on how to work towards it are highlighted in the text.

---

## Aspiration

Providing design which is specific to the scheme and, which should involve taking greater account of the context and situation of the scheme, was one area where we found lower performance.

**All housing providers need to recognise and embrace an approach based on the quality of a place.**

We noted in previous housing audits that the public sector has an important role in driving an increase in aspirations and delivery of well-designed homes and neighbourhoods through the requirements it places on funding<sup>14</sup>. This means that RSLs often operate in an environment where development funding depends on meeting higher performance standards than the statutory requirements the market sector has to meet. The affordable housing sector has an opportunity, unprecedented in recent times, to eradicate poor design and to create routinely high-quality schemes that not only meet the needs of their residents but also act as a driver for increased standards across the industry. This opportunity is strengthened by:

- The financial and advisory support that accompanies the funding requirements
- The increasing move among RSLs to act as developers in their own right

- The creation of the Homes and Communities Agency to combine the funding functions of the Housing Corporation and the broader development and regeneration role of English Partnerships
- The fact that RSLs are responsible for an increasing share of housing starts as the economic downturn reduces the number of market housing units built.

The monitoring commitment in PPS3 is a welcome driver for increased performance, while design and access statements and design coding<sup>15</sup> continue to be tools that local planning authorities can use to ensure that aspirations are met.

---

## Motivation

This survey has shown that some criteria appear to be easier for RSLs to meet than others and that a determining factor in this is the extent to which the RSL has control over the process. However, their degree of influence may vary according to the procurement method used or the circumstances of each individual scheme. For example RSLs will have been unable to influence the design of off-the-shelf schemes.

While RSLs, unlike market developers, do not need to make a return for private investors, funding for schemes is still restricted. Nonetheless both groups will need to review fundamental aspects of their core housing products to achieve zero carbon standards in the face of the government's policy response to climate change. All Building for Life criteria are pertinent to the creation of sustainable communities. However, **it is vital that those criteria regarding environmental performance (Q13 and Q17) are addressed.**

Joint working between RSLs and local planning authorities is a strong driver of quality outcomes. RSLs (and their developer partners) need to develop stronger working relationships with local planning authorities, and in particular with highways departments, to create effective, legible and safe street layouts where highways and vehicles do not dominate, and which integrate well with surrounding areas. This dialogue needs to take place early in the planning stages of any scheme to be most effective.

RSLs should be encouraged to develop **appropriate quality and sustainable development standards**, for both internal and external elements of schemes. These need not be lengthy and could reasonably be based on documents such as the suite of Building for Life guidance, the Manual for Streets, the Urban Design Compendium, Creating Successful Masterplans: A Guide For Clients, and the HATC publication Achieving Building for Life.

---

<sup>14</sup> CABE, 2007, Housing Audit, Assessing the Design Quality of New Housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West, p57

<sup>15</sup> CABE, 2007, Housing Audit, Assessing the Design Quality of New Housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and the South West, p56

# Appendices

## Appendix A – Methodology

### Selection of schemes

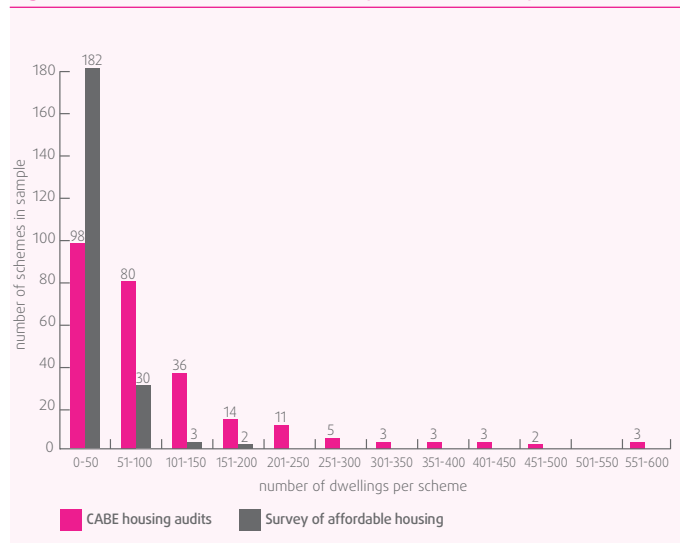
A total of 218 schemes were surveyed across the English regions, randomly chosen from the then Housing Corporation's dataset. Eligible schemes were those which were:

- Funded by the Housing Corporation in either the 04/06 or 06/08 funding rounds
- Complete (when the schemes were sampled at the end of 2007)
- Undertaken by a current development partnership, which existed in the same form (though potentially with a different name) during the two funding rounds
- New build.

The first two criteria were assessed from the Corporation's data and the second two were confirmed through consultation with the development lead partners (DLPs). A sample of schemes for survey were then randomly drawn from the list of eligible schemes for each DLP equal to approximately 30% of their total number of eligible schemes.

The Building for Life standard was originally developed to assess schemes of 20 units or more. However, the Corporation funded a large number of smaller schemes which were also required to meet minimum Building for Life criteria

**Figure 6.1** Size of schemes in survey and audit samples



It was therefore decided to include some smaller schemes in the survey, while most of the schemes assessed were to be of 20 units or more.

### Assessing design quality

The audit was based on the 20 Building for Life criteria, which are grouped under four overall headings:

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

The majority of criteria were evaluated through a site visit, with the surveyors completing a structured assessment that allowed them to score each of the criteria and record both photographic and written evidence.

The previous series of market housing audits started to identify factors for successful design and this survey developed these by further breaking down the Building for Life criteria to allow for a much finer grained analysis. Each criteria was broken down into a number of sub-criteria and each of these was marked on a finer scale than the self assessment, which is divided into 0, ½, 1 gradations.

Because of the good relationship between the then Housing Corporation and its partner RSLs, the researchers were able to evaluate those criteria which could not be ascertained on site (such as ones which required knowledge of internal layout) by obtaining back-up information through questionnaires.

The Building for Life questions where sub-criteria which were assessed wholly or in part through the RSL questionnaires were:

- Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe? (Was the scheme granted a Secured by Design award?)
- Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima such as Building Regulations?
- Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhances its performance, quality and attractiveness?
- Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?
- Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?
- Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
- Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?



- Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafés?

The questionnaire also explored issues such as the design and procurement process and the management over time of the scheme.

Prior to the main tranche of data collection, training visits were made to a number of schemes all members of the team present to ensure that a consistent scoring procedure was applied. At a number of points during the data collection period there were several training sessions at which the team reviewed all findings to date to check the consistency of scoring between surveyors (and to assure consistency over the remaining surveys) and to correct any anomalies discovered.

The scores are presented as percentages and the schemes categorised as:

- **Very good:** an overall score of 80% or more
- **Good:** an overall score of 70% or more
- **Average:** an overall score of 50% or more
- **Poor:** an overall score of less than 50%.

These bands are consistent with those used in the CABE market housing audits, and the Building for Life awards. However, off-site data was included in the assessment, and finer grain of data collected.

---

## Appendix B – Acknowledgements

The survey was researched on behalf of the then Housing Corporation and CABE by Tribal Urban Studio (formally part of Llewelyn Davies Yeang).

## We acknowledge with thanks the individuals from the following organisations who contributed to workshops at the beginning of the research:

Catalyst Housing Group  
 Chevin Housing Association  
 Circle Anglia  
 Devon and Cornwall Housing Trust  
 Family Mosaic Housing  
 Flagship Housing Group  
 Gallions Housing Association  
 Gentoo Group  
 HBW Partnership  
 Hexagon Housing Association  
 Hightown Praetorian & Churches Housing Association  
 Hyde Housing Association  
 Irwell Valley Housing Association  
 Islington and Shoreditch Housing Association  
 Jephson Homes Housing Association  
 LHA-ASRA Group  
 Look Ahead Housing and Care  
 Moat  
 Notting Hill Housing Group  
 One Housing Group  
 Orwell Housing Association  
 Paradigm Housing Group  
 Places for People Group  
 Swan Housing Association  
 The Guinness Trust  
 Town and Country Housing Group  
 Wandle Housing Association  
 Waterloo Housing Association  
 Westlea Housing Association.

**Thanks also must go to all the RSL staff and others who gamely dealt with requests for substantial amounts of information, and to those who contributed further information for the case studies:**

Peter Bowden, Thames Valley HA  
Mike Ford, Miller Hughes Associates  
Nick Hodges, Feilden Clegg Bradley Studios  
Barrington Hurrell, Newlon HT  
Andrew Lawrie, Spectrum HA  
Bernie McCullagh, Optima Community Association  
Caroline Redfearn, LHC  
David Savage, Trewin Design Partnership  
Deborah Teale, Cartwright Pickard Architects  
James Trewin, Trewin Design Partnership  
Andrea Veale, LHC (for East End Extra Care)  
Ryan Williams, MDA Consulting

**Advisory panel:**

Ruth Bloomfield, CLG  
Sara Cunningham, National Housing Federation  
Nick Johnson, CABE commissioner

Thanks also to Trewin Design Partnership and Tribal Urban Studio for additional photography.

**Project manager:**

Anne Dye, CABE

---

**Building for Life questions**

- 1 Does the scheme feel like a place with a distinctive character?
- 2 Do buildings exhibit architectural quality?
- 3 Are streets defined by a well-structured building layout?
- 4 Do the buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?
- 5 Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?
- 6 Does the building layout take priority over the roads and car parking, so that the highways do not dominate?
- 7 Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?
- 8 Is the car parking well integrated and situated so it supports the street scene?
- 9 Does the scheme integrate with existing roads, paths and surrounding development?
- 10 Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?
- 11 Is the design specific to the scheme?
- 12 Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?
- 13 Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as Building Regulations?
- 14 Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness?
- 15 Do internal spaces and layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?
- 16 Does the development have easy access to public transport?
- 17 Does the development have any features that reduce its environmental impact?
- 18 Is there a tenure mix that reflects the needs of the local community?
- 19 Is there an accommodation mix that reflects the needs and aspirations of the local community?
- 20 Does the development provide (or is it close to) community facilities, such as a school, parks, play areas, shops, pubs or cafés?

**Note**

Since the Affordable Housing Survey was undertaken, the Building for Life questions have been reformatted and they are now in a different order from those above.





**Homes and Communities Agency**  
110 Buckingham Palace Road  
London  
SW1W 9SA  
T 0300 1234 500  
E [mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk](mailto:mail@homesandcommunities.co.uk)  
[homesandcommunities.co.uk/affordable\\_housing](http://homesandcommunities.co.uk/affordable_housing)



The government's advisor  
on architecture, urban design  
and public space

**CABE**  
1 Kemble Street  
London  
WC2B 4AN  
T 020 7070 6700  
E [enquiries@cabe.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@cabe.org.uk)  
[www.cabe.org.uk](http://www.cabe.org.uk)