

A black and white photograph of a young boy standing in a doorway. He is wearing a dark t-shirt with the text 'WARNING I HAVE AN ATTITUDE AND I KNOW HOW TO USE IT!' and denim shorts. He is holding the door handle with his right hand and has his left hand on his hip. The background shows a brick wall on the left and a dark door with a window pane.

A sense of place

What residents think
of their new homes

Contents

Executive summary	2
Introduction	4
Broadening perspectives – who are the consumers of new housing?	
Findings	
What do residents of new developments experience?	6
How does design quality influence residents' perceptions?	
Satisfaction with the home and development	13
Satisfaction and design quality	
Is satisfaction high enough?	
Why do some consumers buy poor quality homes?	
Comparing the views of residents and professionals	20
The relative importance of different aspects of the design	
Reconciling differences between residents' and professionals' views	
General perceptions of new build	25
Conclusions	26
Appendices	27

Published in 2007 by the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment.

Graphic design: Duffy

Written by Philippa Westbury
Edited by Julian Birch
Photography by Jon Walter

Although every care has been taken in preparing this report, no responsibility or liability will be accepted by CABE, its employees, agents or advisors for its accuracy or completeness.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, copied or transmitted without the prior written consent of the publisher except that the material may be photocopied for non-commercial purposes without permission from the publisher.

CABE is the government's advisor on architecture, urban design and public space. As a public body, we encourage policymakers to create places that work for people. We help local planners apply national design policy and advise developers and architects, persuading them to put people's needs first. We show public sector clients how to commission buildings that meet the needs of their users. And we seek to inspire the public to demand more from their buildings and spaces. Advising, influencing and inspiring, we work to create well-designed, welcoming places.

Executive summary

A sense of place reports on a survey into the views of 643 residents living in 33 new developments, conducted by Ipsos MORI on behalf of CABE in autumn 2006. In addition, 704 residents took part in census surveys at six case study developments.

The 33 new developments were assessed during the most recent phase of CABE's national housing audit, which exposed the poor urban design of many new developments¹. This three-year research programme revealed schemes which failed to create a sense of place, had weak layouts and poorly designed and maintained public space.

That picture is obviously incomplete without knowing the views of residents. This parallel study will therefore help all those involved in delivering housing to understand better how the quality of a place impacts on residents' attitudes and experiences.

The survey findings across the 33 developments showed that residents were overwhelmingly satisfied with their homes but much less so with the neighbourhood. This was consistent with most of them being owner-occupiers who had chosen to live there; other existing research literature clearly explains why people would be unlikely to admit their home was less than ideal. However, when they were asked about specific aspects of the wider development, very significant numbers expressed negative views.

For example, although 82 per cent of residents thought that their development was attractive and 69 per cent found it had a pleasant road layout:

- 40 per cent thought that there was not enough public open space in the development
- 48 per cent thought there was not enough play space
- 34 per cent thought the layout of their development was unsafe for children to walk, cycle or play in the streets
- 45 per cent say that they live in the kind of neighbourhood where people mostly go their own way rather than doing things together and trying to help each other
- 30 per cent thought that their development did not have a distinct character
- 43 per cent thought that the internal spaces and layout of their home would not allow them to adapt, convert or extend their homes.

Dissatisfaction was also greater among residents who had lived in a development longer:

- 18 per cent of residents who had lived in the development for longer than one year were dissatisfied, in comparison to 10 per cent who had lived there for less than a year.

¹ CABE (2007) *Housing audit: assessing the design quality of new housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and South West*. Audit carried out by professional assessors (EDAW).



'The fact that homes on a new development do sell is no guarantee that the experience of residents living there will be entirely good, or that the development will be successful in the long term'

Views tended to be more positive if residents were living in well-designed schemes, as illustrated by the findings from surveys carried out at the six case study developments. These showed that:

- 50 per cent of residents living in the two case study schemes rated good by the housing audit were very satisfied with their development, in comparison to 28 per cent² of residents across the four case studies rated poor or average
- A 'good' case study scheme was the only one where residents were highly satisfied with both their home and development³.

Furthermore, when asked unprompted what they most liked about the development, residents in the well-designed schemes were more likely to respond with aspects relating to design quality, rather than 'bigger picture' factors such as location or quietness. Interestingly, we found that being highly satisfied with the home does not necessarily imply a high degree of satisfaction with the development, or vice versa. It is also important to note that design quality appears to be one of the factors driving satisfaction, along with other social and physical factors.

The survey findings across the 33 developments showed that professionals and residents view some, but not all, aspects of the design in a similar way. Residents living in places that were assessed by professionals as attractive, distinctive and/or well-integrated were more positive about these aspects than those living in places that were not rated as highly by the professionals. There was a weaker shared understanding between residents and professionals on aspects such as layout of the scheme or the relationship of a scheme's design with its context. However, good design is clearly fundamental to the ability of a scheme's layout to offer qualities that are important to both residents and professionals, such as safety and security and 'sense of place'.

People value well-designed places and they like homes in developments with character that create a sense of place. Yet homes in poorly designed developments still sell well enough to allow housebuilders to deliver sufficient short-term shareholder value and planners to meet their government targets for new homes.

The fact that new homes sell is no guarantee that the development will succeed. It is also no guarantee that the experience of residents living there will be good, and still less that the development will be successful in the long term from the point of view of the community as a whole.

The paradox of poor products selling is of course explained by lack of choice. Buyers are often constrained by both the

availability of suitable homes in high-quality developments and by practical constraints on where they can live and what they can afford. Social housing tenants in a new development will have had even less choice about where they moved to.

CABE would encourage all those involved in delivering new housing, including planners, housebuilders, councillors and highway engineers to take on board the positive impacts of high-quality places on both current and future residents and on the wider community. We should not view the initial purchaser of the home as the only consumer of new housing. A shared understanding of what constitutes a good quality place is essential in ensuring that everyone with a stake in new housing development benefits in both the short and longer term, whether they are residents or the wider community, or the councillors, planners and housebuilders responsible for delivering new homes. And using a common tool which we all buy into, such as Building for Life, can enable this to happen.

² Unweighted finding – see appendix for further explanation.

³ Based on a quadrant analysis of the question 'Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this development?'



Introduction

CABE's housing audit has built up a national picture of the design quality of new homes created by the development industry over the last five years⁴. In the view of the professional assessors who conducted it, new developments all too frequently fail to focus on urban design. This has resulted in schemes that fail to create a sense of place and have weak layouts and poorly designed and maintained public space if it was provided at all. The opportunity to create residential environments that fully meet the needs of people, are visually attractive, safe, accessible, functional, inclusive, and improve the character and quality of the area, has been missed.

Things are changing. A new policy framework is in place, not least planning policy statement 3 (PPS3), which puts much stronger emphasis on the quality of residential design and layout. This commitment has been reinforced by the recent housing green paper. Combined with the introduction of design and access statements and the *Manual for streets*, we are well placed to see an improvement in design quality in the future. Yet the fact remains: much of what has been built has simply not been good enough in design terms.

But what do people actually living in new developments think of them? And what implications do their views have for those involved in delivery of new homes, including developers, councillors and policy makers? This paper is based on recently completed research carried out with Ipsos MORI that adds to CABE's existing work^{5,6}. It provides a fuller picture of how aspects of design quality, in combination with other factors, influence the attitudes and experiences of residents living in new housing developments. It compares residents' and professionals' views on developments. Finally, it discusses the findings within the wider framework of why the creation of good quality places is important to all 'consumers' of new homes.

Customer satisfaction surveys carried out by housebuilders tend to concentrate on residents' attitudes to a product (the home) rather than to the place (the development). They also consider residents' experiences at a certain point in time – soon after their purchase, for example – to investigate their attitudes to after-sales service.

This research focuses more on the wider development, although aspects of the home are also addressed, and considers residents' views over a longer time period. The research scope and method is presented more fully in appendix A1. It considers only the residents of new homes completed within the last three years living in developments assessed using the housing audit and the implications of this are discussed in appendix A2. The Building for Life criteria used in the audit and in some of the questions in this research are described in appendix A3.



‘What do people actually living in new developments think of them? And what implications do their views have for those involved in the delivery of new homes?’

⁴ CABE (2007) *Housing audit: assessing the design quality of new housing in the East Midlands, West Midlands and South West*. Homes assessed by the audit were designed and obtained planning approval prior to the publication of the government's recent planning policy statement 3 (PPS3).

⁵ CABE (2005) *What home buyers want: attitudes and decision making among consumers*.

⁶ CABE (2005) *What it's like to live there: the views of residents on the design of new housing*.

Broadening perspectives – who are the consumers of new housing?

Consumer preferences in the housing market contain many contradictions. Home buyers make decisions based on a series of trade-offs rather than a clear list of neatly prioritised criteria. This is because housing is a complex good, composed of many attributes or characteristics, each of which commands a price⁷. These include localised goods such as schools and access to open space as well as the overall quality of place.

However, the ability of households to benefit from various attributes is limited by what they can afford to pay and by what is available in the market. As a result, home buyers are forced to make trade-offs. Especially when choice is constrained, they often have to trade off quality of place against location, price and the internal layout of the home⁸.

In contrast, where they do have a choice, potential purchasers make a conscious decision to move to better quality developments⁹. The more enlightened housebuilders are realising that their future competitiveness depends on their ability to create well-designed places. Local authorities and social housing providers are increasingly demanding good quality design. Consumer awareness of and knowledge about design and environmental issues is growing. And design is a means of adding value as build costs increase¹⁰.

It is important for all those involved in delivering new housing to appreciate how urban design quality influences the longer-term experience of residents as well as its influence on the market. The initial purchaser of a home is not the only 'consumer'. People living in the same development, or in the neighbourhood, are also affected by that home and how it relates to its surroundings. In turn, the purchaser is affected by their wider surroundings. Indeed people buying into the development at a future point in time as second-hand buyers are also consumers and are also affected by the quality of the products and places we create today.

The design quality of a development influences the experience of residents as much as the design of individual homes. It supports residents' immediate practical needs

and activities, and helps to create successful, sustainable and distinctive places¹¹, which in turn influence quality of life. For example, good quality urban design has a role in creating places where residents will want to stay long term and contribute to the life of the community. Where the built environment is well designed: 'Irrespective of tenure, households will want to stay longer in the area or will commit themselves more to the neighbourhood, thereby ensuring greater social cohesion.'¹² An appropriate mix of housing sizes and types, or flexible homes which can be extended or adapted, will also provide the potential for residents to stay in the same community as their needs change. Conversely, where housing developments have inadequate community infrastructure, some residents tend to spend little time in the locality, and isolation and inadequate social support networks reduce local community wellbeing¹³.

Good urban design also has a role in attracting future residents to a community. In a weaker housing market, it may become much harder to sell a home in a new housing development to a second-hand buyer, particularly in the case of lower quality dwellings with insufficient space¹⁴. It may be particularly difficult to sell a second-hand home if the surrounding environment is of poor quality or ages badly¹⁵. This raises some fundamental questions about the ability of low-quality developments to create and maintain socially and economically sustainable communities, particularly if market conditions change.

⁷ 'Hedonic' analysis is the technique by which attributes and their respective prices are identified. For housing, price is related to the characteristics of the house and property itself, the characteristics of the neighbourhood and community, and environmental characteristics.

⁸ RICS (1996) *Quality of urban design: a study of the involvement of private property decision-makers in urban design*, London, RICS.

⁹ RICS (1996)

¹⁰ Savills Research (2007) *The market for sustainable homes* www.savills.com/research

¹¹ ODPM (2003) *Sustainable communities: Building for the future*, HMSO: London.

¹² Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2003) *Neighbourhoods that work*.

¹³ Sustainable Development Commission (2007) *Building houses or creating communities?* (p.10 finding on community cohesion).

¹⁴ Forrest, R., Kennett, T. & Leather, P. (1997) *Home owners on new estates in the 1990's*, Policy Press (Conclusions): 'low income households bought the cheaper, smaller, lower quality dwellings...they are the households in the dwellings which have fallen most in value, are least saleable in the owner-occupied market, yet allow little or no opportunities for family growth'.

¹⁵ Winter, J., Coombes, T. & Farthing, S. (1993) *Satisfaction with space around the home on large private sector estates*, Town Planning Review, 64(1).

Findings

What do residents of new developments experience?

So how do residents of new developments really feel about them? For many reasons, including lack of choice and the inevitable trade-offs people make between affordability and quality, the answers to that question are not always obvious and can display both similarities and differences between the aspirations and expectations of residents and professionals.

We asked residents about aspects of the design of the development related to the criteria used in Building for Life (see appendix A3), which was used to assess developments in the housing audit. The findings below reveal that a sizeable minority of residents have negative views on various aspects of their development, despite the fact that the majority of them are owner-occupiers, and have chosen to purchase homes there. Well-designed places provide the potential for strong communities to develop, by making available good quality public open space, safe play areas and local amenities easily reached on foot. These findings, combined with those of the audit, indicate that this potential is not being realised. The survey also shows some of the contradictions that exist between professionals' and residents' aspirations, as explored in CABE's earlier research¹⁶, including the higher importance residents place on car parking provision and their limited use of public transport.

¹⁶ CABE (2005) *What it's like to live there: the views of residents on the design of new housing*



'A sizeable proportion of residents have negative views on various aspects of the development, despite the fact that the majority of them are owner-occupiers, and have chosen to purchase homes there'

Appearance

- **30 per cent** of residents consider that their development does not have a distinct character
- but **82 per cent** think their development is attractive.

Flexibility

- **30 per cent** think that the size of their home will give them no flexibility at all to stay there if their needs change over the next few years
- **43 per cent** think that the internal spaces and layout of their home will not allow them to make adaptations, conversions and/or extensions if they want to.

Layout of the development

- **36 per cent** think the layout of the development makes it difficult for people to find their way around by car; **19 per cent** think the layout makes it difficult for people to find their way around on foot
- **34 per cent** think the layout of their development is unsafe for children to walk, cycle and/or play in the streets
- **20 per cent** say the design and layout of the development do not help 'a lot' to make it feel safe at all, whereas **28 per cent** say the design and layout help 'a lot' to make it feel safe;
- but **69 per cent** agree that their development has a pleasant road/street layout.

Public open space

- **40 per cent** think there is not enough public open space in the development
- **48 per cent** think there are not enough play areas in the development
- **24 per cent** of those for whom the question is relevant¹⁷ think that public open space is not well maintained.

Roads and car parking

- **47 per cent** think there is not enough car parking attached to individual homes (for example, a garage and/or driveway)
- **62 per cent** think there is not enough other car parking and **41 per cent**¹⁸ think the location of this other car parking is inconvenient
- but **31 per cent** think that roads and car parking dominate their development¹⁹.

Public transport

- Although **91 per cent** of residents say buses are available locally, only **35 per cent** make use of them
- **53 per cent** make short journeys from their development by car, rather than public transport or walking.

Sense of community

- When asked what kind of neighbourhood they live in, **45 per cent** say that people mostly go their own way, rather than doing things together and trying to help each other (14 per cent) or a mixture of the two (33 per cent).

¹⁷ Based on all residents who gave non-neutral responses (482).

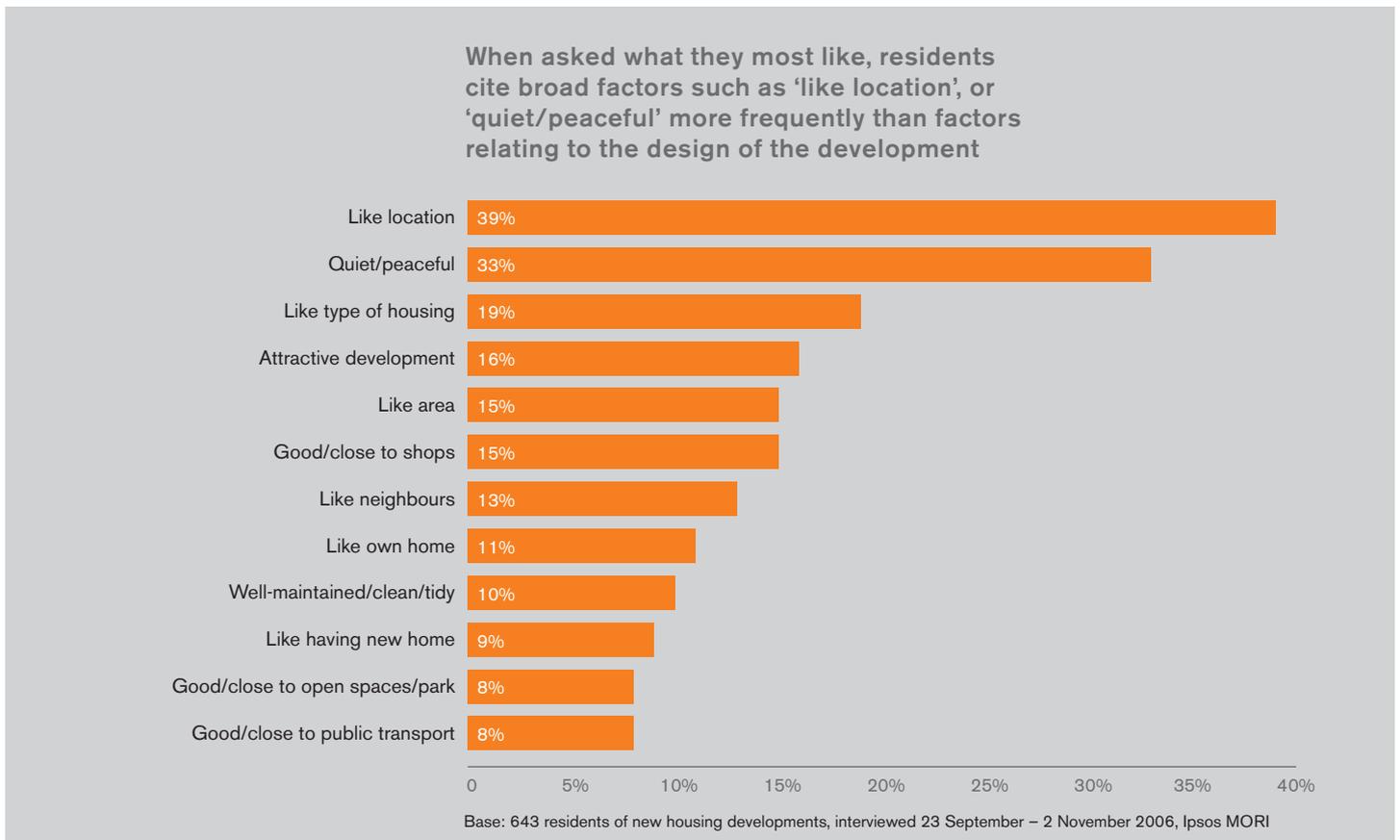
¹⁸ Base: All who live in a development which includes other car parking (622)

¹⁹ Based on the question 'To what extent would you agree or disagree that roads and car parking do not dominate this development?'

Towards the start of the survey we asked residents what they most liked about their development. The responses were unprompted and therefore not influenced by other questions about specific aspects of the development asked later on. Overall, likes most frequently seemed to reflect 'bigger picture' factors that related closely to residents' priorities, rather than the particular design of a development (Figure 1). This may be because the quality of design just does not exist for them to make a positive response. However, where nearby local services and facilities, public transport and public open spaces were present, and there were good levels of maintenance, these factors were acknowledged by residents. Residents also responded positively when they thought their own development was attractive.



Figure 1 What two or three things, if any, do you like most about this development? (combined survey)

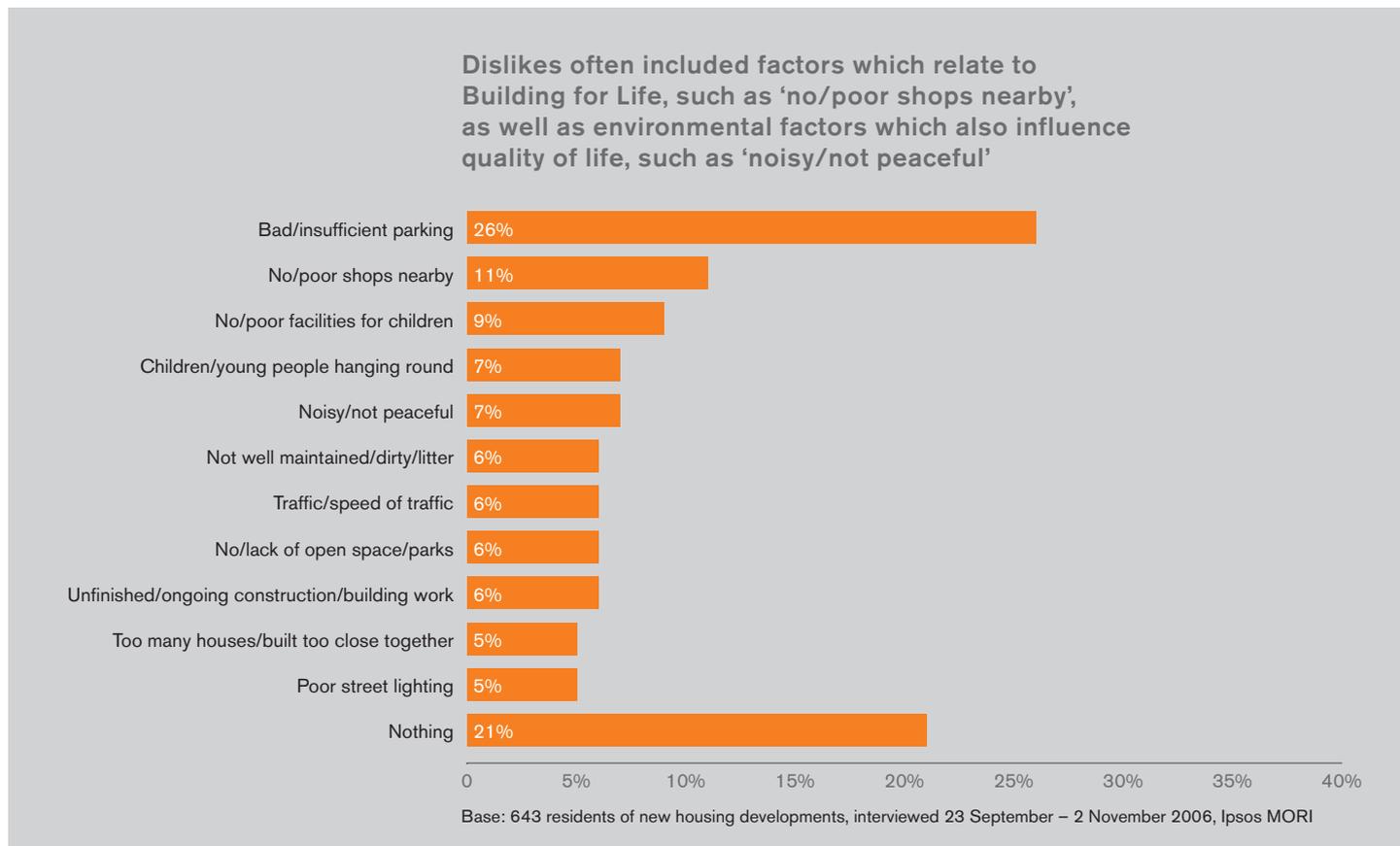


With the exception of 'bad/insufficient car parking', dislikes similarly included factors relating to Building for Life, such as 'no/poor shops nearby', 'no/poor facilities for children', 'not well maintained/dirty/litter' and 'no/lack of open spaces/parks' (Figure 2). They also included other factors that influence quality of life, such as nuisance ('noisy/not peaceful') and also 'traffic/speed of traffic', which may or may not be a consequence of design (and/or location). Unsurprisingly, people felt particularly strongly about inadequate car parking when they owned two or more cars²⁰.

²⁰ 47 per cent of residents interviewed own or have use of two or more cars; of these, 33 per cent cite 'bad/insufficient car parking' as something they least like (in comparison to 26 per cent overall).



Figure 2 What two or three things, if any, do you dislike most about this development? (combined survey)



How does design quality influence residents' perceptions?

The way in which design quality influenced 'likes' was examined across the six case study developments²¹. The design quality and predominant tenure for the six case studies is shown in **Table 1**. We found that the responses were different for the high-scoring developments, and related more closely to the design of the development rather than bigger picture factors, such as 'like location' and 'quiet/peaceful' (**Figure 3**). The differences between responses were particularly marked for developments that had a predominance of owner-occupiers – especially between the development assessed as good in the housing audit (Dukes Rise) and those assessed as average or poor (Fernwood, The Copse and Regency View). All these developments were in suburban or rural areas.

²¹ See appendix A1 for more details about the research method.

²² At Horfield, the top three responses are given as these had equal numbers of respondents.

Table 1. Case study developments (census surveys)

Case study	Design quality score	Predominant tenure
Castle Vale	77% Good	Social housing tenant (91%)
Dukes Rise	76% Good	Owner-occupier (60%)
Horfield	69% Average	Social housing tenant (75%)
Fernwood	57% Average	Owner-occupier (63%)
The Copse	54% Average	Owner-occupier (100%)
Regency View	33% Poor	Owner-occupier (96%)

Base: 704 residents of new housing developments, interviewed 23 September – 2 November 2006, Ipsos MORI

Figure 3 What two or three things, if any, do you like most about this development? Top two responses²² (census surveys – case studies presented in order of design quality)

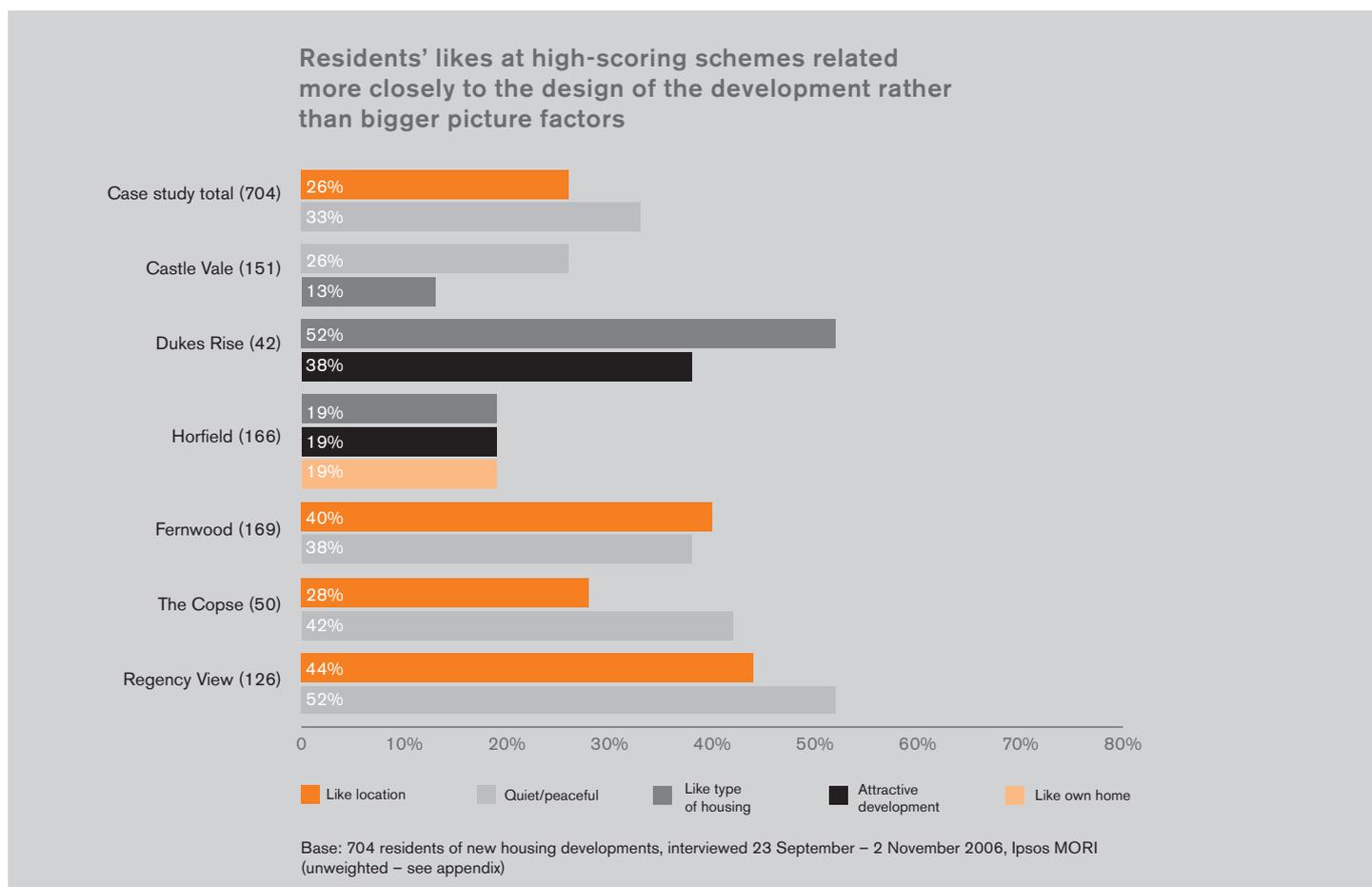
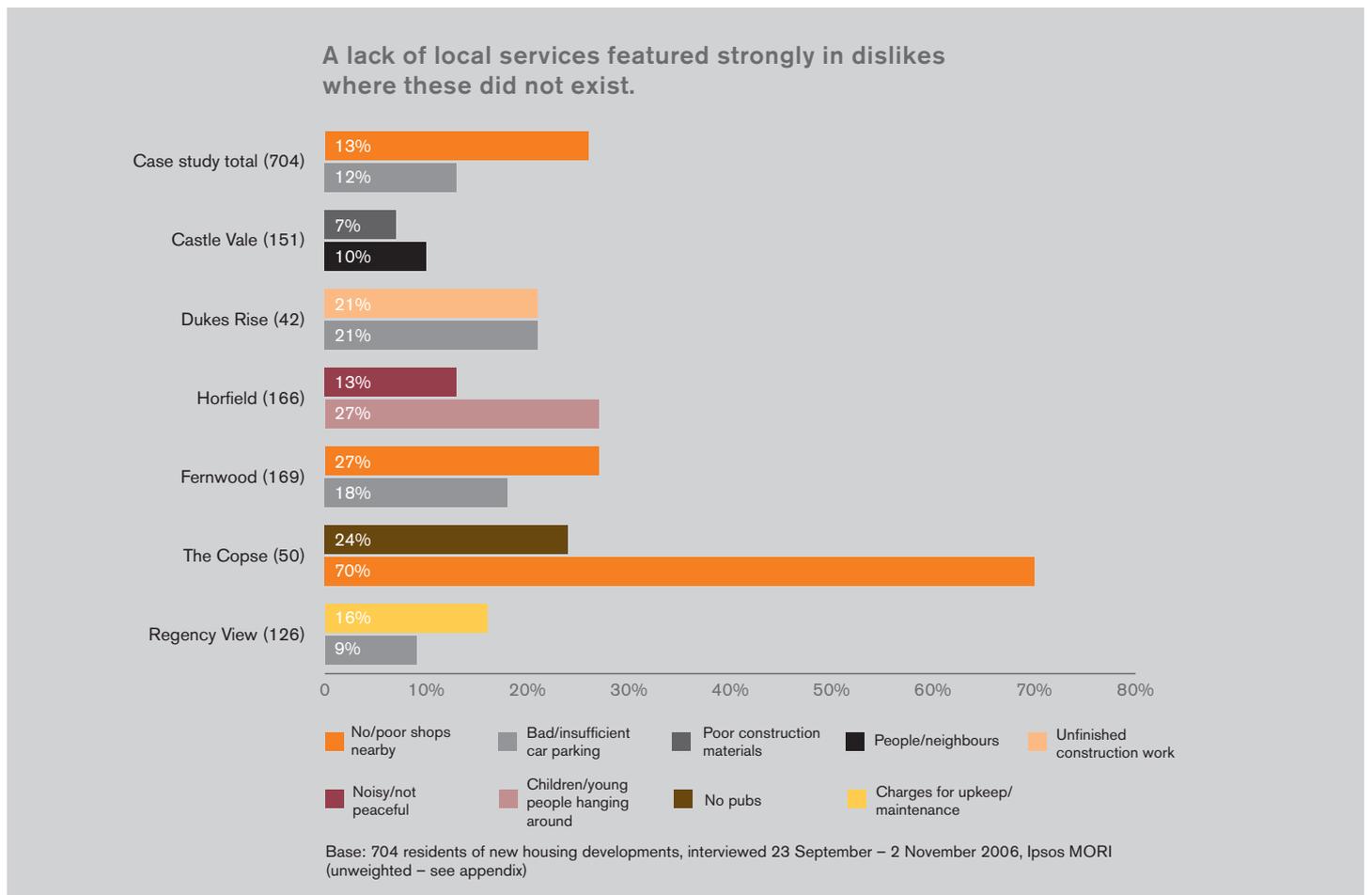




Figure 4 What two or three things, if any, do you dislike most about this development? Top two responses (census surveys – case studies presented in order of design quality)



At Dukes Rise, residents cited 'like type of housing' most frequently, followed by 'attractive development'. They still considered their development to be 'quiet/peaceful' (third most commonly cited response) and they liked the location (fourth). They thought that Dukes Rise was 'good/close to open spaces/park' (fifth) and liked its 'variety/different types of housing' (sixth). These responses also related to the design of the development and were more frequently cited than at the other case studies. Interestingly, residents at Dukes Rise were also more likely to cite 'environmentally friendly' as an important aspect of the development²³.

In contrast, there was no clear pattern to responses to the question about dislikes, which tended to be more site-specific (**Figure 4**). However, at two out of three developments where transport and social infrastructure did not exist previously (Fernwood and The Copse), a lack of local services featured strongly in dislikes. This was particularly marked at The Copse, where 70 per cent of residents cited the lack of shops nearby as something they least liked.

The findings indicate that owner-occupiers living in a high-quality development are more conscious of good design, and are perhaps more likely to have higher aspirations for good design, including high environmental design standards. Their experience of living in a development

is enhanced by their appreciation of their well-designed surroundings, which is reflected in higher levels of satisfaction with both the home and the development (see next section).

The aspirations of the majority of owner-occupiers we interviewed were perhaps limited by the availability of well-designed developments. They were therefore prepared to buy a home in a low-quality development because their choice was constrained.

However, the findings show that the experience of living in the development, for both owners and renters, is adversely affected by a lack of local amenities, public transport or public open space and, especially where sense of community is important to residents, by a lack of community facilities²⁴. They also miss out on the positive experience of living in a development that provides a strong sense of place.

²³ When asked about what the three or four most important aspects of the development were, in relation to its design, 36 per cent of residents at Dukes Rise cited 'environmentally friendly' in comparison to 21 per cent across all the case studies.

²⁴ This was particularly experienced at the The Copse, a new rural settlement, where residents not only missed having pubs (24 per cent cited 'no pubs' as something they most disliked) but also one in ten residents cited specifically 'no community meeting point'.



Satisfaction with the home and development

Satisfaction and design quality

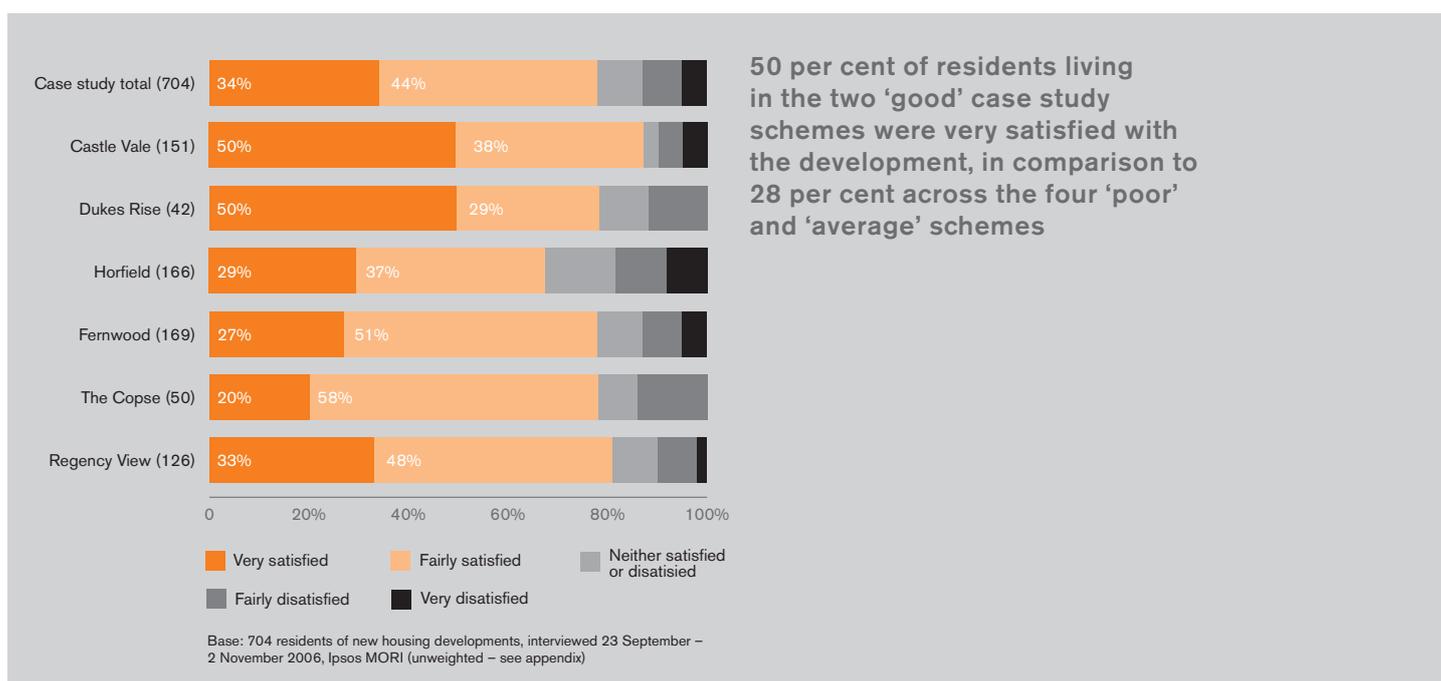
The positive experience of living in a well-designed development is reflected not only by the way in which 'likes' are expressed, but also by relatively high levels of satisfaction at the two highest scoring case study schemes. At Castle Vale and Dukes Rise, 50 per cent of residents were 'very satisfied' with their development, in contrast to 28 per cent of residents across the four case studies rated poor or average (Figure 5)²⁵. Only at Dukes Rise were residents highly satisfied with both their home and their development (Figure 6).

It was also possible for residents to be highly satisfied with their home but not the development. This was particularly the case at The Copse, where a lack of shops, pubs, public transport and community facilities led to low satisfaction with the development. Satisfaction with the home by itself does not give the full picture. It is important to know about satisfaction with the development too.

²⁵ A similar but weaker pattern exists across the combined survey data. Most of the good and very good schemes in the combined survey are located in urban areas, with average and poor schemes in suburban and rural areas. However, the sample of residents living in good and very good schemes is not large enough to be able to distinguish the effects of design quality from type of area on satisfaction.

'The positive experience of living in a well-designed development is reflected by relatively high levels of satisfaction'

Figure 5 Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this development? (census surveys – case studies presented in order of design quality)



Findings from the combined data, which examined responses from residents at 33 developments, indicated that factors other than design quality also play a role in influencing satisfaction with the development. These include tenure, location and length of time spent living in the development. We found that:

- social housing tenants tended to be more satisfied than owner-occupiers or private tenants
- rural dwellers were more satisfied than suburban or urban dwellers
- residents who had lived in a development for more than one year were less satisfied than those who had lived in a development for less than one year²⁶.

It was evident that other factors were also likely to be driving residents' satisfaction, so we examined how the dislikes of residents who are dissatisfied with the development differed. Dissatisfied residents were more likely to cite environmental factors such as 'not well-maintained/dirty litter', but also 'bad/insufficient car parking',

'no/poor facilities for children', 'too many houses/built too close together' and 'no sense of community'²⁷.

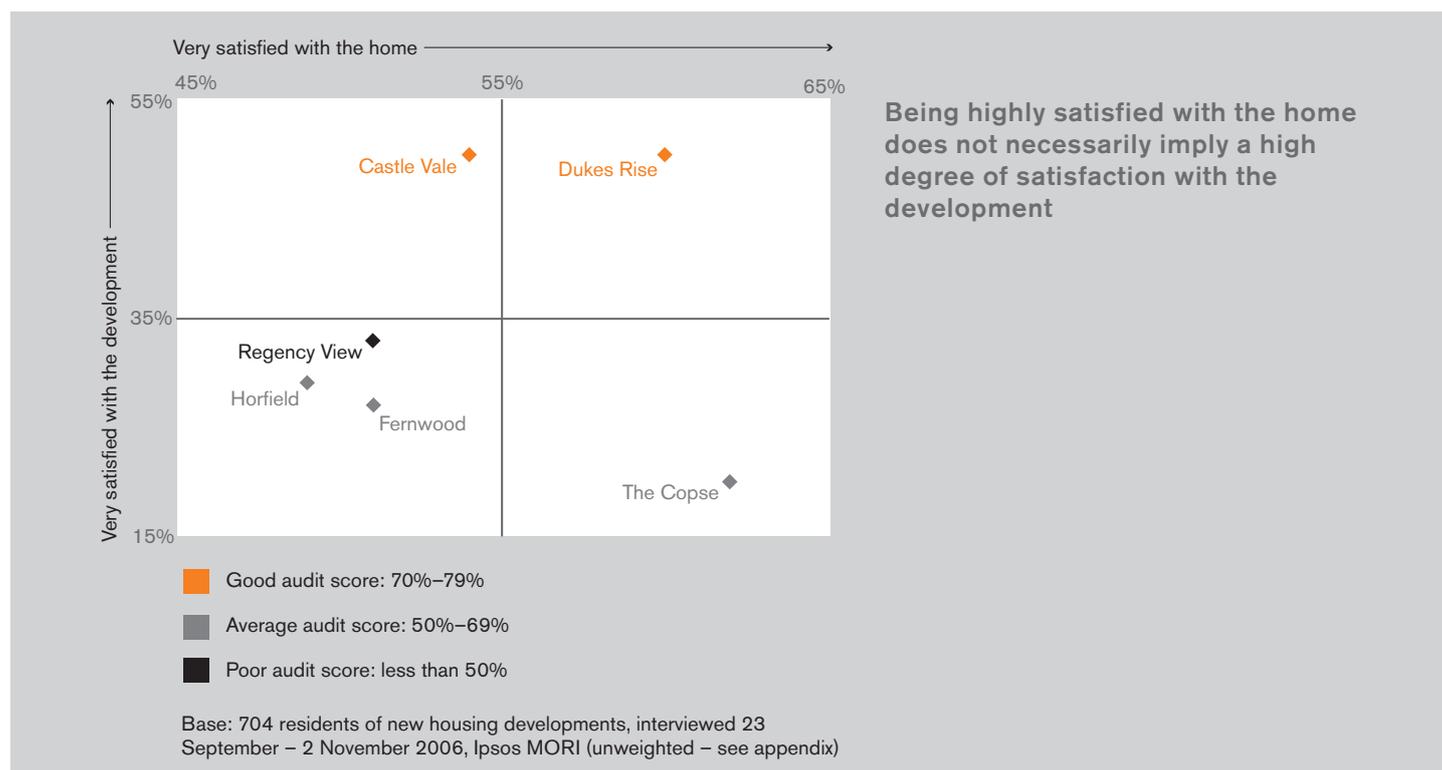
Some of these issues are perhaps a result of a poor design response to the density and car parking requirements of planning policy guidance 3 (PPG3). They may reflect the inflexibility of some standard house types to fit within developments at higher densities or within non-standard layouts²⁸, as well as residents' frustrations with insufficient or inconvenient parking. Interestingly, it appears that a small proportion of dissatisfied residents are particularly disappointed with the lack of a sense of community, which could be ameliorated by the provision of community facilities, such as those for children.

²⁶ These findings were based on regression analysis on the question 'Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the development?'

²⁷ Comparing responses of dissatisfied residents with satisfied residents: 'bad/insufficient parking' (42 per cent versus 21 per cent), 'not well-maintained/dirty litter': (12 per cent versus 5 per cent), 'no/poor facilities for children' (14 per cent versus 7 per cent), 'too many houses/built too close together' (13 per cent versus 2 per cent) and 'no sense of community' (11 per cent versus 3 per cent). See Figure 4 for responses across all residents.

²⁸ A. Hooper & C. Nicol (2000) 'Design practice and volume production in speculative housebuilding', *Construction Management and Economics*, 18, 295-310.

Figure 6 Does high satisfaction with the home imply high satisfaction with the development? (census surveys)



Is satisfaction high enough?

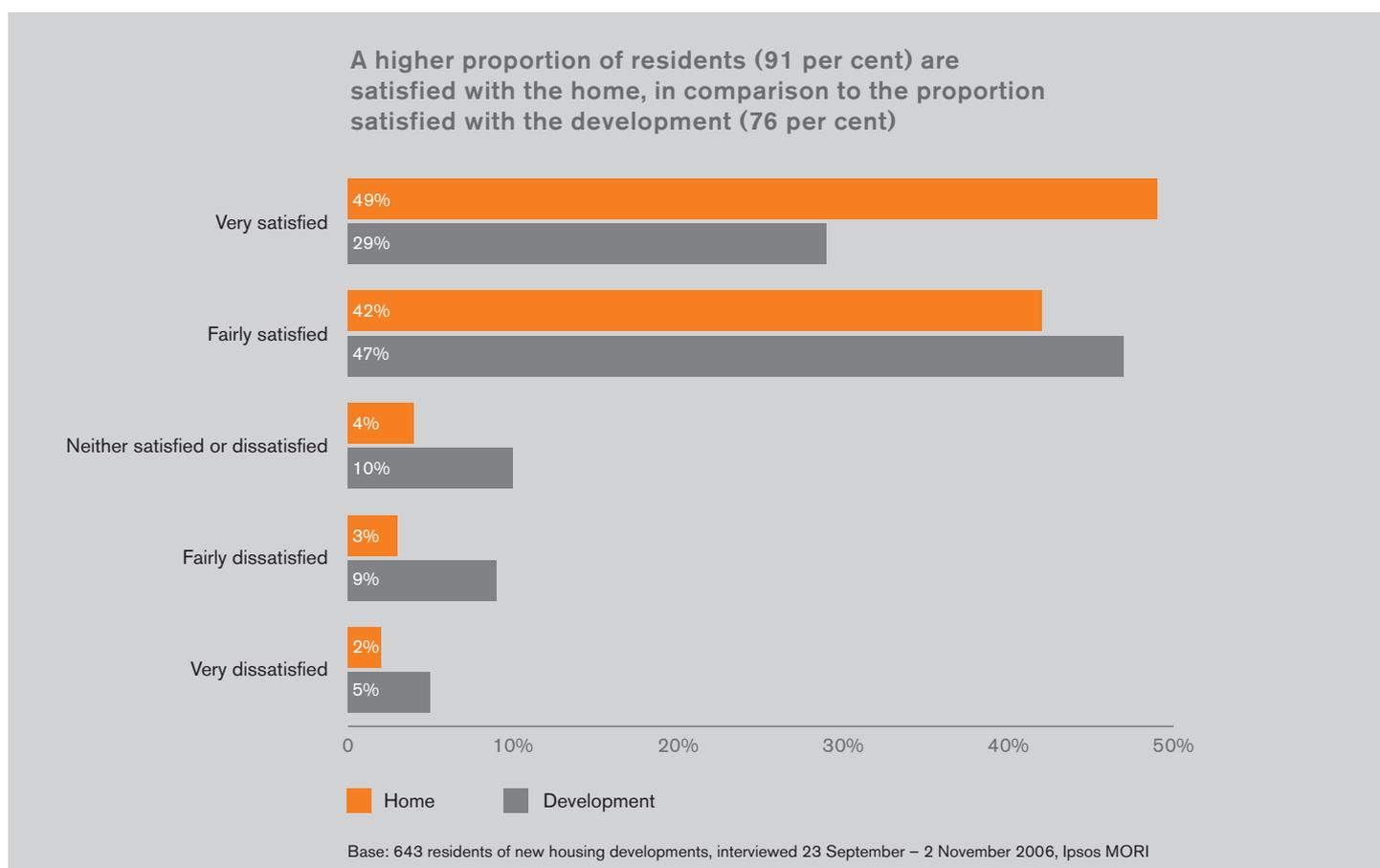
Figure 7 shows that general satisfaction with the home is high: 91 per cent of residents were satisfied overall (very satisfied or fairly satisfied). Half (49 per cent) were very satisfied with their home. This is similar to levels of satisfaction found by other studies²⁹.

Satisfaction with the development is lower in comparison. Three-quarters of residents (76 per cent) were satisfied overall, with three in ten (29 per cent) very satisfied.

Residents who have lived there for a longer period of time have had longer to form an impression of what it's like to live in the development and are more likely to have experienced changes to it over time. This is significant not only for building sustainable communities that will be successful in the long term, but also for housebuilders trying to maintain their share of the market and win repeat business.

²⁹ Based on data from the English house condition survey and Survey of English housing.

Figure 7 Taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this home? And taking everything into account, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with this development? (combined survey)



A number of researchers express reservations about using satisfaction with the home as a direct measure of the quality of physical environment. Donnelly³⁰ comments that: 'The house represents the wider [social, political and economic] system in which we all live and some elements of satisfaction will lie as much in that system as in the physical design of the dwelling itself.' Similarly with reference to owner-occupiers (rather than renters), Young³¹ suggests: 'Studies of satisfaction among recent movers raise the concern of a post-hoc rationalisation: having just made the biggest financial commitment that most households make in their lifetime, few would wish to admit that the house chosen was less than ideal.' Mumford and Power³² suggest that, even when considering satisfaction with the development, responses are likely to be relatively uncritical: 'People are commenting on something very personal to them – their immediate home and living environment – a central part of their lives, closely linked to their individual identity. For this reason they can feel uncomfortable being overly critical.'

In a recent survey of owner-occupiers for the Home Builders Federation³³, 76 per cent of residents were found to be satisfied with the quality of their home. This is similar to the proportion of owner-occupiers found

to be satisfied with the development in this study³⁴. However, both the Barker review and the Office of Fair Trading have deemed it to be inadequate, particularly when considered alongside other aspects of the experience of home buyers^{35,36}.

When asked about satisfaction with more specific aspects of the home, such as its quality, satisfaction rates tend to be lower. Satisfaction with specific aspects of the development was also lower: for example, 49 per cent were satisfied with public open space and with car parking. As has already been discussed, when residents were asked specific aspects about the design of their home and development, they frequently held negative views, in spite of the fact that in the main, they had chosen to live there.

³⁰ Donnelly, D (1980) *Are we satisfied with 'housing satisfaction'?* Built environment, Vol 6, No 1, 29-34.

³¹ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2002) *Consumer choice in house buying*, Ch. 5. Improving the image of new houses by Raymond Young.

³² Mumford, K. & Power, A. (2003) *East Enders: family and community in East London*, Policy Press.

³³ Home Builders Federation (2007) *National new home customer satisfaction survey*

³⁴ 74 per cent of owner-occupiers were satisfied with the development.

³⁵ Barker review final report (2004)

³⁶ Office of Fair Trading (June 2007) *Housebuilding – reasons for a market study* www.offt.gov.uk/shared_oftr/reports/comp_policy/oft934.pdf



Why do some consumers buy poor quality homes?

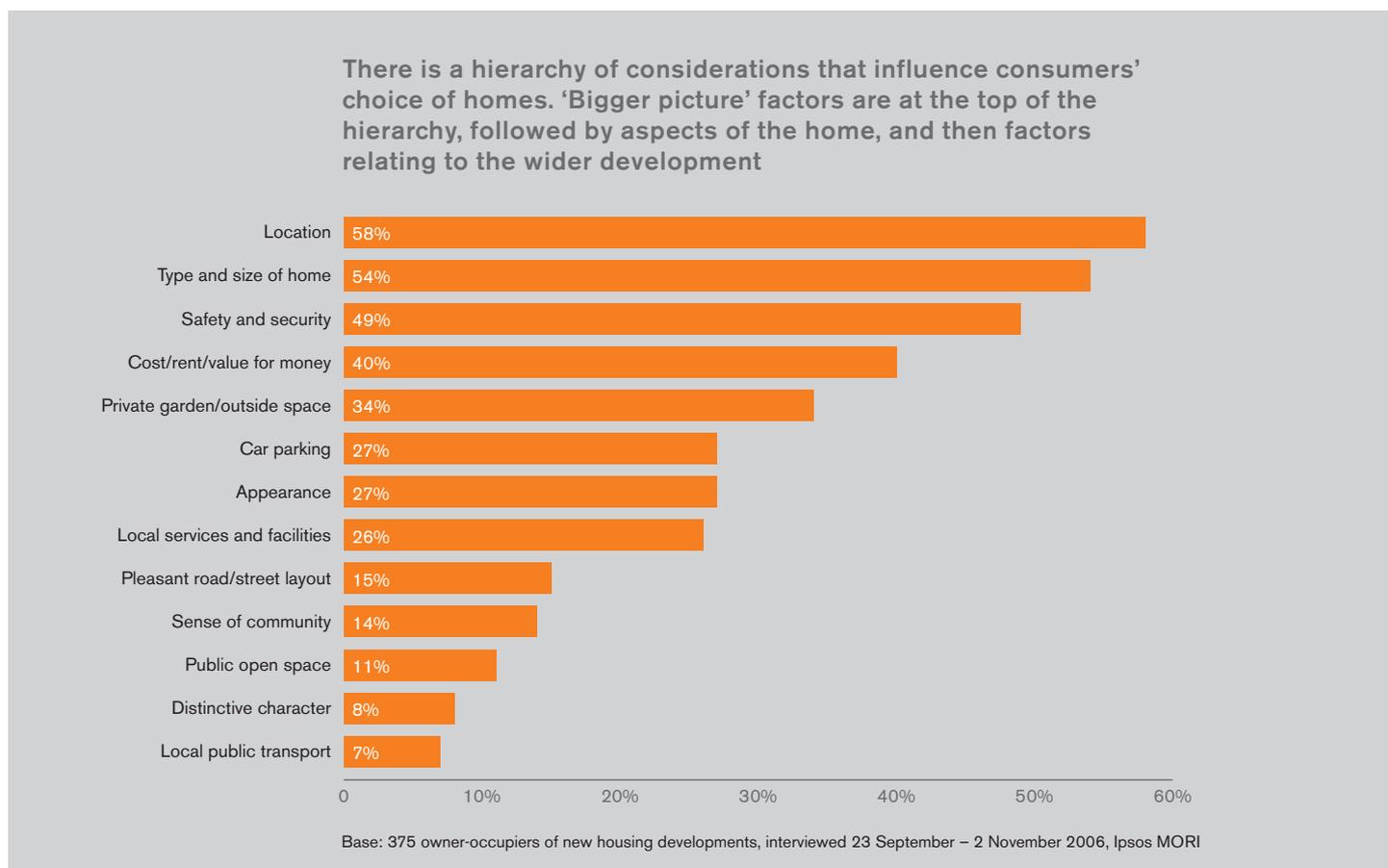
Housebuilders are aware of home buyers' basic requirements and their need to trade-off key factors, such as location, safety and security, type and size of home and cost/rent/value for money, against other factors. Buyers might wish for and benefit from other aspects of a development if these were available but they are forced to prioritise due to lack of choice.

All too often, design effort by housebuilders is concentrated on particular aspects of the individual home – its 'kerb appeal' and the most eye-catching kitchens or bathrooms – rather than the wider development. Correspondingly, marketing efforts tend to be most closely focused on the product, not the place. Indeed, frequently very little information is given in marketing material for prospective purchasers about the development as a whole, beyond its location. A vicious circle exists in which the low availability of well-designed new homes results in low aspirations, since home buyers are either unaware of what kind of

design quality is possible or unable to demand it due to supply side failures. And unless home buyers demand good design, the market signals won't be present for housebuilders to respond to.

The survey findings for owner-occupiers illustrate the hierarchy of considerations that influence consumers' choice of homes. Residents were shown a card with a combination of 'bigger picture' factors and those that related to the design of the home and the development, and asked which three or four of these were the most important aspects they wanted from a development (**Figure 8**). 'Bigger picture' factors, such as location, how safe the development is perceived to be and the cost or value for money appeared at the top of the list. Aspects relating to the home were also important, such as type and size, private garden or outdoor space, and car parking. Aspects relating to the wider development and its context followed. The most important aspects relate to basic concerns: 'can I afford it?'; 'is it in the right place?'; and 'will my family fit?'.

Figure 8 Which three or four of these would you say are the most important aspects that you want from a housing development? (combined survey)



The overall hierarchy of considerations was similar for all types of resident, whether they were owner-occupiers, private landlord tenants or social housing tenants. However, the relative importance of some aspects of the development varied according to tenure, as well as household type and area. For example, location was less important to social housing tenants, who have less control over where they chose to live, but was more important to previous owners. Safety and security were more important to social housing tenants and private landlord tenants than to owner-occupiers. Type and size of home were more important to families, but less important to households with one or two adults under 60 and to flat owners. A private garden or outside space was more important to families, and less important to private tenants. Conversely, public transport was more important to private tenants³⁷ and less so to families who perhaps rely more on cars.

For owner-occupiers who have choice in where they live, those who are constrained by the need for a particular type and size of home, or the desire to have a garden (particularly families) are more likely to choose to live outside urban areas, where availability of the required house type and size, at an affordable price, is greater. However, the provision of public transport and other local services and facilities is less good and, in the case of new homes, the choice of homes in well-designed developments is limited³⁸.

Less affluent households are particularly constrained in this aspect of choice, since design quality tends to be lower at the bottom end of the housing market³⁹. Those who are less constrained by the type and size of home they require (particularly households without children) have more

flexibility to live in urban areas where there is a greater choice of well-designed new developments. There is a continuing need to provide good quality developments with appropriate amenities and access to local services, as well as appropriate types of accommodation, which will attract a greater mix of household types to urban areas. But equally well, there is a need to increase the choice of well-designed new homes available to those seeking a home outside city centres, which will permit the successful development of strong communities and support the potential for sustainable lifestyles.

Varying priorities are reflected in the demographics of those living in good and very good developments, which tend to be in urban areas and comprise a greater proportion of flats, and those living in the poor or average developments, which are mainly houses and are more often in suburban or rural areas (**Figure 9**). While the demographics of residents living in poor and average developments does not vary greatly, there is a marked difference in the demographics of residents living in very good or good developments. These have a lower proportion of families and a higher proportion of adult households under 60 (**Figure 9c**), and a greater mix of tenure types, including owner-occupiers, social and private tenants, rather than a predominance of owner-occupiers (**Figure 9d**).

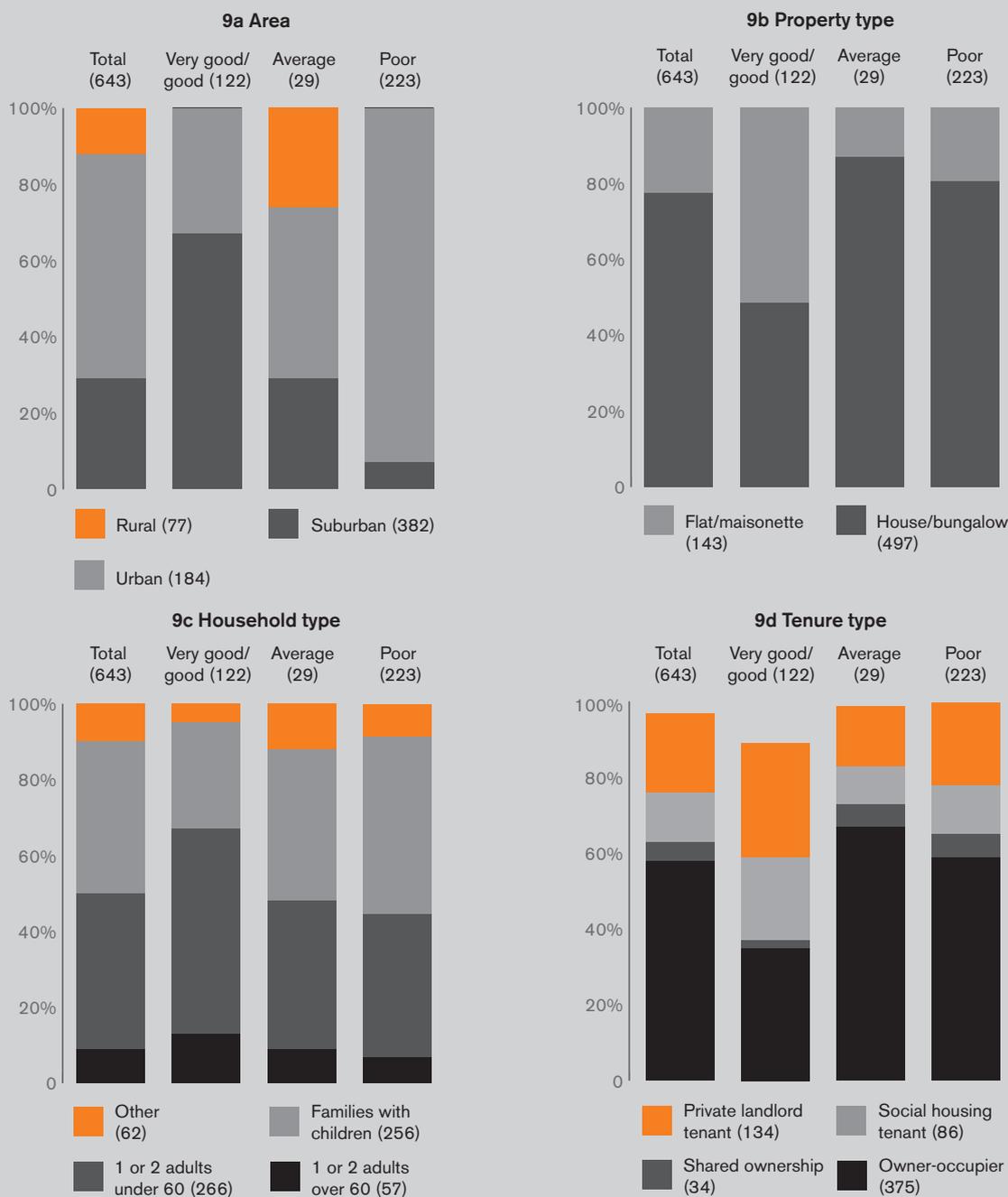
³⁷ Correspondingly, car ownership for private landlord tenants tend to be relatively low: 53 per cent of the private landlord tenants we interviewed own 1 car, whereas 18 per cent own 0 cars (in comparison to 11 per cent overall), and 28 per cent own 2 or more cars (in comparison to 47 per cent overall).

³⁸ CABE (2007)

³⁹ CABE (2007) The findings indicate there is a correlation between Building for Life score and ACORN classification, which is a measure of affluence.

Figure 9 Area, property type, household type and tenure of residents – overall and in good/very good, average and poor developments (combined survey)

Varying priorities are reflected in the demographics of those living in good and very good developments, which tend to be in urban areas and comprise a greater proportion of flats, and those living in the poor or average developments, which are mainly houses and are more often in suburban or rural areas



Bases: 643 residents of new housing developments, interviewed 23 September – 2 November 2006, Ipsos MORI

Comparing the views of residents and professionals

It is important to consider the views of both residents and professionals to get a full picture of how successful a place is. However, the types of knowledge held by each are quite different⁴⁰. Whereas professionals have a more abstract, global knowledge about urban design which they can carry from place to place, lay users tend to have a more practical, local knowledge of how places work. Both are needed to get the clearest impression of a place, and of how best to create successful, sustainable places in the future. But extracting this local knowledge in a form which informs urban design thinking, or in this case which allows us to compare residents' and professionals' views, is not necessarily straightforward. As Bentley comments: 'Most of the in-depth knowledge about urban places which lay people build up is practical, tacit knowledge, embedded in their everyday practices, and well below the threshold of consciousness⁴¹'.

Despite this, this study has demonstrated that residents' and professionals' views are similar on many aspects of design quality encompassed by Building for Life. Residents' responses across 33 developments were examined to see whether those living in developments which professionals

scored high or low on a particular criterion were correspondingly relatively positive or negative about that aspect. Residents and professionals had similar views on distinctiveness, attractiveness, integration with surroundings, the quality of the public open space, and the availability of public transport and local services and facilities. There was less of a clear trend on some aspects of layout, including the contribution of the layout to feeling safe. In this case, residents were perhaps less aware of the importance of 'eyes on the street'⁴², and were being influenced by more general perceptions of how safe their area was. In the case of car parking, residents seem to be more concerned about levels of provision than other aspects of the car parking design. There was also a less clear trend for some of the contextual aspects of the design, such as whether it exploited its surroundings, and whether it was specific to the development. These both perhaps represent more abstract, specialist concepts that are difficult to convey to non-experts within the constraints of the current survey method.

⁴⁰ Bentley, I. (1999) *Urban transformations: power, people and urban design*, Routledge.

⁴¹ Bentley (1999)

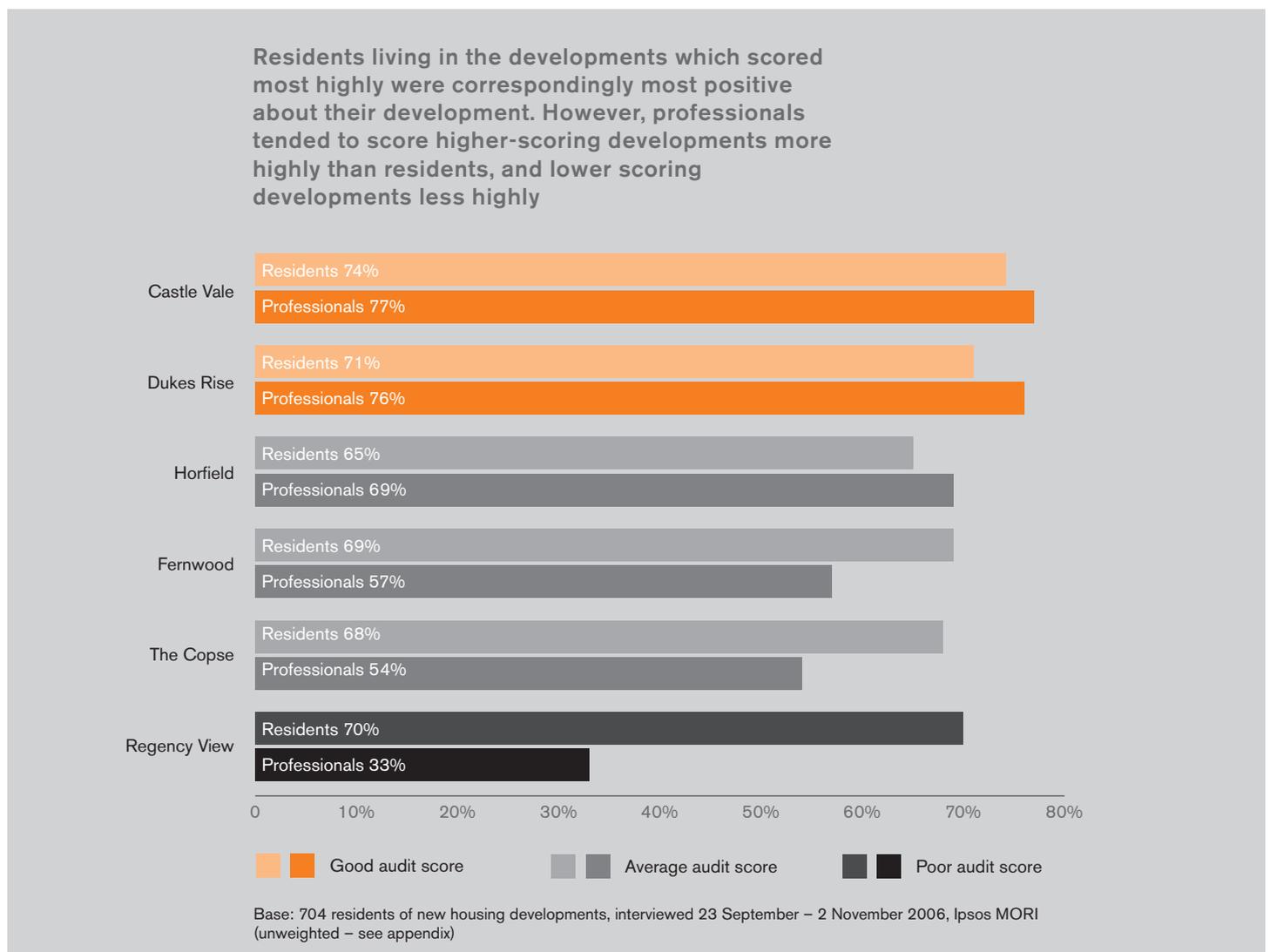
⁴² See also CABA (2005) *What home buyers want: attitudes and decision making among consumers*.



A comparison of overall percentage scores for the six case study developments indicated that those residents living in the developments scored highest by professionals (Dukes Rise and Castle Vale) were correspondingly most positive about aspects of the design of their development (Figure 10), as well as being most highly satisfied. However, in general residents living in the higher-scoring developments tended to be less positive in comparison with professionals, whereas those living in lower scoring developments tended to be more positive. The difference between residents' and professionals' scores was greatest for the lowest scoring development, Regency View.

The greater range of professionals' scores can partly be explained by them having the experience and the confidence to ascribe a wider range of scores. In contrast, the equivalent residents' score for a particular case study would require a full consensus on giving extreme responses (all residents giving the same very positive or negative response). This is virtually impossible given the range of opinions that are likely to exist. An exact correspondence between residents' and professionals' scores was therefore unlikely to occur.

Figure 10 Comparison of residents' and professionals' scores (census surveys)



It is likely that a combination of design quality and other physical and social factors are influencing residents' views on specific aspects of the design of their development, as well as overall levels of satisfaction. This is demonstrated by analysis of residents' views of two of the case studies, Regency View and Horfield.

At Regency View, although the audit scored design quality as 'poor', the proportion of residents who were 'very satisfied' with the development was no more or less great than the average for all schemes. When asked questions relating to Building for Life, residents scored aspects of the design relatively highly, including the cul-de-sac layout. And only a small proportion of residents cited maintenance charges for poorly maintained adjacent open space as something they least liked. Residents particularly liked the location and the peacefulness of the development, perhaps related to it being on a hill, adjacent to public open space, and with no through routes for vehicles. Furthermore, the scheme provided homes suitable for families, which we know from background research to the audit were needed in the area.

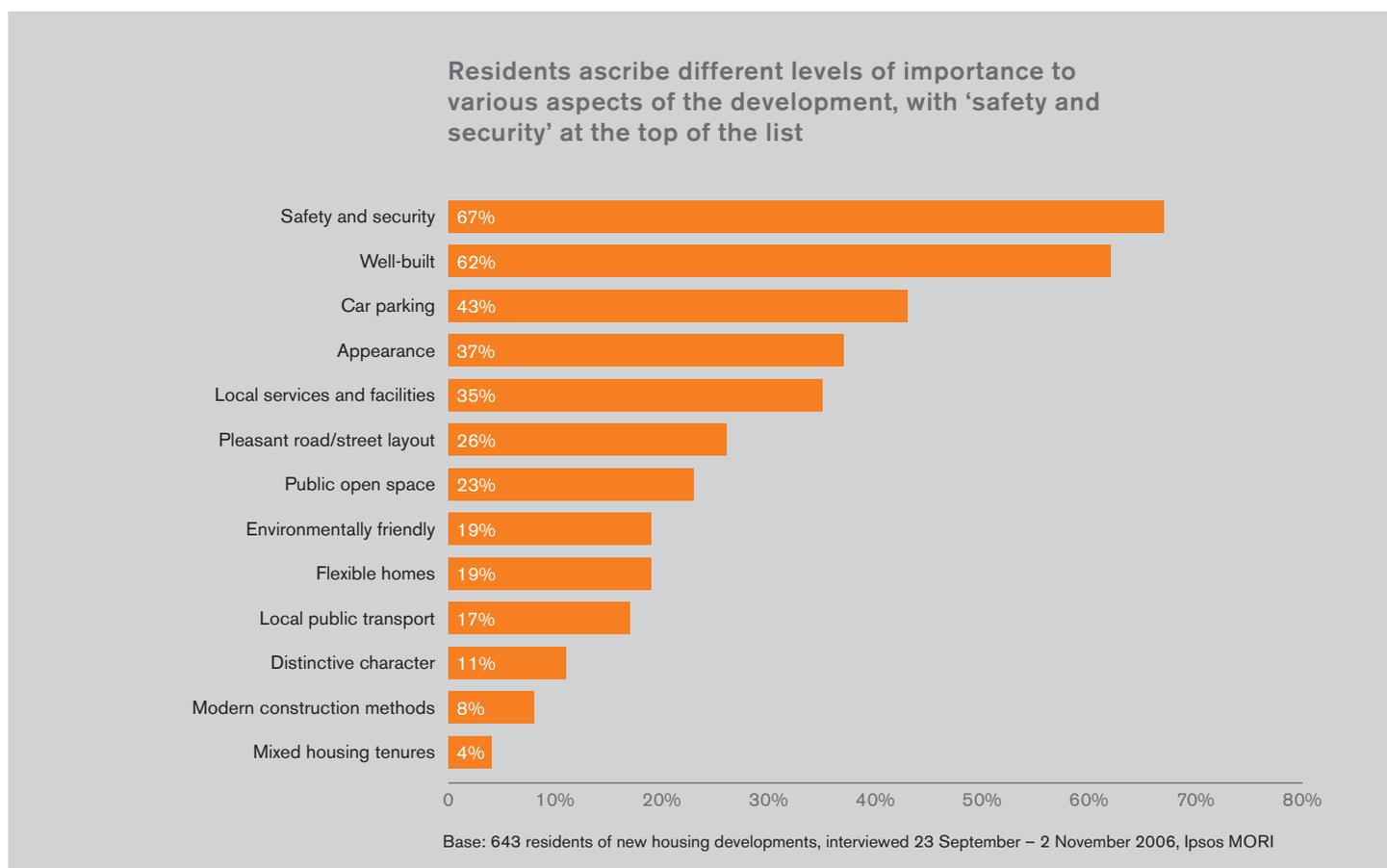
At Horfield, the case study was scored relatively highly by the audit (at 69 per cent it just missed the threshold for 'good'). However, residents, who were predominantly social tenants, were relatively less highly satisfied with the development. The dissatisfaction appears to stem partly from the combination of a high child density (which we know from background research to the audit) with insufficient play space and facilities for children. This resulted in residents perceiving there to be 'children/young people hanging round' and that the development was 'noisy/not peaceful'. However, the inadequacy of the play space is also linked to a not entirely successful attempt to implement the shared spaces, which were a key part of the original design concept for the development, and to communicate the operation of the shared spaces to residents. This led to residents holding a relatively negative view of the public realm.



The relative importance of different aspects of the design

We asked residents to select from a list of factors relating to the design of the development those aspects which were most important to them (Figure 11). This question is similar to that shown in Figure 8, but does not include 'bigger picture' factors and some factors relating to the home. The most notable feature of the findings is the range of levels of importance that residents place on different aspects of the design.

Figure 11 Which three or four of these would you say are the most important aspects that you want from a housing development? (combined survey)



Reconciling differences between residents' and professionals' views

As discussed in previous CABA research⁴³, residents' views are likely to be rooted in people's individual aspirations rather than being a reflection of society's broader priorities. So, for example, residents ranked 'local public transport' and 'environmentally friendly' homes relatively low in comparison to other aspects of the design. In contrast to professionals, residents are not prioritising the broader environmental, social and economic implications of poorly connected communities and poorly performing homes. This is unsurprising that they do have different priorities. However, it is important that residents are given information about the qualities of the places they are buying so that they are empowered to demand good design, and so that individual aspirations have a chance of reflecting broader considerations.

It is also possible that aspects of the design that professionals think are important would be considered more important by residents if they were aware of the implications. For example, residents ranked 'safety and

security' as the most important aspect they want from a development, but they did not always agree with professionals about whether the design and layout of developments made it feel safe. This may partly be due to the relatively limited experience of residents about how layout is related to safety, which in the case of professionals is based on a wider body of evidence and professional experience. Residents may also be influenced by general perceptions of the safety of the area in which they live. And yet, if professionals are right about the link between design and safety, a safe design as judged by professionals is something residents would be likely to value. Similarly, although residents ranked 'modern methods of construction' relatively low on their list of priorities, they may not be aware of the drivers behind developing these construction techniques, such as improving affordability of housing through increasing the rate of supply and providing consistent quality. However, we do know that cost and value for money is something residents think is important, as well as their home being well built.

⁴³ CABA (2005) *What it's like to live there: the views of residents on the design of new housing*.



General perceptions of new build

The research only investigates the views of residents living in new homes completed between 2003 and 2006. However, we know from other research that the new build sector does not appeal to the majority of potential purchasers⁴⁴. We also know that purchasers of new homes prioritise more strongly practical factors such as the convenience of buying a new house with all the fitments at a fixed price, and lower maintenance⁴⁵. Conversely, people who don't have a preference for new homes tend to be concerned about the poor design quality of new housing including lack of character and lack of access to facilities^{46,47}. When asked about the most important aspects of a neighbourhood, residents of new housing tend to prioritise more strongly factors relating to quietness, and less strongly those related to proximity to amenities or shops⁴⁸. Purchasers of new homes are therefore making a different set of trade-offs to those purchasing other types of homes.

A recent survey by Savills⁴⁹ has shown that perceptions of new homes are overwhelmingly negative. For example,

fewer than a quarter of respondents agreed that new builds are well built, and fewer than a third thought that new builds were well designed. Furthermore, fewer than a quarter of respondents agreed that new homes provide an enjoyable neighbourhood. However, respondents ranked 'neighbourhood' as the most important feature of their existing home. Good design may be a factor in influencing people who have negative perceptions of new homes to consider purchasing a new build, rather than an existing, property. This is particularly the case in areas of large-scale housing growth where whole new neighbourhoods are being created and where competition between housebuilders is high.

⁴⁴ New Homes Marketing Board (2001) 'New Homes Today' customer survey. This trend may be changing, as suggested in ref. 50.

⁴⁵ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2002) *Consumer choice in house buying*, Ch. 5. Improving the image of new houses by Raymond Young.

⁴⁶ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2002).

⁴⁷ IPPR 2006 *Gateway People: The aspirations and attitudes of prospective and existing residents of the Thames Gateway*.

⁴⁸ *English house condition survey/Survey of english housing*.

⁴⁹ Savills Research (2007) *Occupier demand survey*.



Conclusions

1. Understanding residents' views of design quality

- Residents and professionals hold different types of knowledge about a place. We need to consider both to create places that meet residents' immediate needs, and wider social, environmental and economic objectives. For this reason, design professionals need to be able to appreciate the differences in understanding between residents and professionals.
- Professionals and residents view some, but not all, aspects of the design of developments in a similar way. There was a weaker shared understanding between them on aspects such as layout or the relationship of a scheme's design with its context. However, good design is fundamental to the ability of a scheme to offer qualities which are important to both residents and professionals, such as safety and security and 'sense of place'.
- Tenure makes a difference. Owner-occupiers, social tenants and private tenants share the same broad hierarchy of concerns about what is most important in a development. However, design professionals also need to understand where their priorities do differ so that successful mixed communities can be provided to meet the needs of all types of resident.
- Consumers who can choose where they live need more detailed information about new housing schemes, for example in marketing material provided by housebuilders. This will enable them to recognise the wider aspects of good design, and to make more informed choices.
- It is also important to understand the differences between owner-occupiers who are prepared to buy new homes and those who are not. Good design is important in ensuring that new places attract people who would not normally buy into new developments. This applies particularly to areas of housing growth where whole new communities will be built and where competition between housebuilders delivering housing in the same area will be higher.

2. Broadening perspectives on the importance of high-quality places

- The fact that consumers buy into new housing schemes when they first come on to the market does not guarantee their quality of life or the long-term success of developments. Even short-term market success is unlikely to be guaranteed in future unless high-quality places are created.
- CABE would encourage all those involved in delivering new housing, including housebuilders, planners and councillors, to have a broad perspective on the positive impacts of high-quality places and not to view the initial purchaser of a home as the only consumer of new housing.
- As a way of strengthening the shared understanding of what makes high-quality places, we recommend that all partners involved in delivery should use Building for Life as a common tool for assessing quality of place. Developers, as well as local authorities, should be judged on quality of place.

3. Improving the experience of residents living in new homes

- Some consumers may be prepared to buy homes in poorly designed developments and may not have sufficiently high aspirations to demand good design. But that is not to say that they will have a positive experience of living there. The survey findings suggest that first impressions of a development tend to be more positive, with levels of dissatisfaction increasing over time. Consumers tend to be highly satisfied with their home, but both the Barker review and the Office of Fair Trading have shown that other aspects of consumers' experiences are less than satisfactory. Residents' attitudes to specific aspects of a home, such as its quality or flexibility to meet changing needs, and to specific aspects of a development, such as public open space and play space, or layout, are relatively negative.
- Overall, there is considerable scope to improve the experience of residents, whether they are owner-occupiers or tenants. It is in the interests of developers wishing to maintain and expand their customer base to understand how the wider development impacts on residents.

Appendices

A1. Research scope and methodology

By means of a combined survey⁵⁰ carried out by Ipsos MORI, the current study elicits the views of 643 residents living in 33 new housing developments that have been assessed by the most recent phase of CABE's housing audit. Census surveys using the same questionnaire have also been carried out at six case study developments, involving 704 residents⁵¹. The combined case study data has not being weighted to take into account the different sizes of the developments. Both owners and renters (social and private) are included. The questionnaire addresses what residents consider are the most important aspects of a development, what they most like and dislike about their development and how satisfied they are with both their home and development. It also focuses on attitudes to specific aspects of a development's design which have been assessed by professionals in CABE's housing audit, such as its distinctiveness and attractiveness, its layout and car parking, quality of public open space and proximity to local services and facilities⁵².

Residents' attitudes to the homes and developments in which they live are shaped by social factors as much as the physical environment. Differing personal experience, expectations and aspirations will influence attitudes. The

combined survey allows us to disaggregate differences in perceptions according to social factors such as tenure type and household type, and other related factors such as whether residents are living in urban, suburban or rural areas, or in houses or flats.

The design quality of the built environment is one of several key factors that influences the popularity and sustainability of places⁵³. However, the attributes of a neighbourhood are also determined by who actually lives there, either by choice or through decisions made by social housing providers. By focusing on the six case study developments at which census interviews were carried out, we were able to investigate how specific physical aspects of the developments in which people live, including design quality, shape their perceptions. But we are also able to speculate on how social as well as physical factors contribute to residents' perceptions.

⁵⁰ This comprised a quota survey at 27 developments (523 interviews) plus 20 interviews selected randomly from census surveys carried out at 6 developments (120 interviews).

⁵¹ These are the same six case study developments used in the audit to investigate how the development process influences design quality. For each census survey, an attempt was made to interview every occupant living in the phase of the development that was assessed by the audit.

⁵² Based on the Building for Life standard www.buildingforlife.org. See appendix A3

⁵³ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2003) *Neighbourhoods that work*.

A2. The implications of interviewing residents in new homes only

The demographics of residents living in new housing differ from those of residents of old housing. For example, there is a greater proportion of households with children⁵⁴ and of young households in new housing, particularly in the most recently completed housing (post-2002). Differing demographic factors reflect differences in priorities between those who chose to live in new housing and those who chose to live in old housing. It should therefore be born in mind that residents of new homes are not representative of the population as a whole. Furthermore, the majority of residents who have been interviewed have made the decision to buy homes in poor and average developments, as judged by CABE's housing audit. However, in order to learn about the experience of people living in new housing, and to compare their views with the views of professionals, we have focused our research on residents in new homes.

A3 Building for Life

The Building for Life criteria are the measure by which CABE assesses design quality in new housing and awards the Building for Life standard. The 20 criteria are also an invaluable tool for developers, planners, local authorities, architects and the public – anyone committed to improving housing and neighbourhood design. The criteria embody Building for Life's vision of what housing should be: functional, attractive, and sustainable.

The criteria cover four main themes:

Character

- Does the scheme feel like a place with a distinctive character?
- Do buildings exhibit architectural quality?
- Are streets defined by a coherent and well structured layout?
- Do buildings and layout make it easy to find your way around?
- Does the scheme exploit existing buildings, landscape or topography?

Roads, parking and pedestrianisation

- Does the building layout take priority over the roads and car parking, so that highways do not dominate?
- Are the streets pedestrian, cycle and vehicle friendly?
- Is car parking well integrated so it supports the street scene?
- Does the scheme integrate with existing roads, paths and surrounding development?
- Are public spaces and pedestrian routes overlooked and do they feel safe?

⁵⁴ Based on data from the English house condition survey and Survey of English housing.

Design and construction

- Is the design specific to the scheme?
- Is public space well designed and does it have suitable management arrangements in place?
- Do buildings or spaces outperform statutory minima, such as Building Regulations?
- Has the scheme made use of advances in construction or technology that enhance its performance, quality and attractiveness?
- Do internal spaces and a layout allow for adaptation, conversion or extension?

Environment and community

- Does the development have easy access to public transport?
- 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 a mix of accommodation 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, park, play areas, shops, pubs or cafes?

Examples of the very best schemes, which successfully meet Building for Life criteria, are shown on www.buildingforlife.org. More information about how to achieve good quality design is available from references given in the 'Further reading' section of the Building for Life criteria guide⁵⁵.

⁵⁵ Building for Life (2007) Delivering great places to live: 20 questions you need to answer

What do people living in new housing developments really think of them? And what implications do their views have for those involved in the delivery of new homes, including developers, local authorities and policymakers? This report is based on research by Ipsos MORI and provides a fuller picture of how design quality and other factors affects the experiences of residents. As England gears up to build three million new homes by 2020, a shared understanding of what makes for high-quality places is essential in ensuring that everyone with a stake in new development benefits both in the short term and the long term.

1 Kemble Street
London WC2B 4AN
T 020 7070 6700
F 020 7070 6777
E enquiries@cabe.org.uk
www.cabe.org.uk

Commission for Architecture
and the Built Environment

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

