

Draft Housing Strategy

2017-2020

Foreword

Huntingdonshire has a resilient housing market. We have recovered from the market downturn, demand for housing remains high, house prices continue to rise, and developer interest in building new homes and communities in the district is strong.

The Council is committed to encouraging housing growth to meet the needs of our current and future population, and to support the economic prosperity of the district. We will continue to develop our Local Plan to 2036, which allocates land for at least 21,000 new dwellings over the period and we will continue to work positively and proactively with house builders and developers to bring forward the development of new homes. We are pleased to see new homes being delivered on the large strategic site at Alconbury Weald. This is a new community where at least 5,000 new households will eventually live. Our partnership work with the developers, house builders and housing associations is especially important to ensure that these new communities thrive as desirable and successful places to live into the future. The Council is committed to playing a significant role in ensuring that we are building communities; not just houses.

Government has outlined a new approach for affordable housing in the Housing and Planning Act 2016. Policies such as extending the Right to Buy to housing association tenants and the development of 'starter homes', reflect the Government's ambition to boost home ownership. Whilst we support initiatives that extend people's housing choice and welcome the encouragement of home ownership, we remain concerned that the development of homes that are truly affordable to those sectors of our local population who are unable to afford market level homes, are also a priority. Overview & Scrutiny colleagues have appraised the potential impact of these changes by considering the likely effect on us and our housing association partners. I commend their work in this important area.

Devolution will play a significant role in supporting the growth and economic prosperity of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. The availability of £100 million for affordable housing from the newly formed Combined Authority presents new opportunities for increasing the supply of affordable housing and accelerating the rate of housing growth in Huntingdonshire.

As ever, affordable housing remains in high demand and in May 2017, we had around 3,800 households on the housing register. We have seen an increase in homelessness caused by the loss of assured shorthold tenancies in the private rented sector. People in receipt of Housing Benefit at Local Housing Allowance rates or with low incomes are struggling to find affordable alternatives, and this is a national trend which is reflected locally. We were pleased to work in partnership with Luminus to open a new temporary housing project for 13 homeless households but we remain under pressure to build as many affordable homes as possible. We therefore actively encourage our housing association partners in their development efforts.

In the four years between 2008/09 and 2011/12 an average of 301 affordable homes were being completed each year. In the following four years this had dropped to 78 per year. However there was an increase again in 2016/17; although not to previous rates. Indications from the Huntingdonshire Annual Monitoring Report trajectory are that large strategic sites will soon start to move forward apace and this will lead to an increase in affordable housing delivery rates.

Looking to the future, the delivery of new affordable homes is likely to be one of our biggest challenges and I am pleased that a number of rural exception sites are being developed and that more work is planned to further promote this method of delivery.

We need to work proactively with housing, health and social care partners to meet the needs of vulnerable people and our ageing population. I am particularly pleased that a new extra care scheme for 55 frail older people was developed by Luminus and I am proud that the Council was able to help fund this important scheme via a £5.5m loan. However I remain concerned about the impact of the proposed cap on supported housing rents which has already caused a delay to the development of new supported housing schemes in our district.

We are in an era where public funding is under pressure and the Council is looking at ways to reduce costs, increase efficiencies and generate income. No service is immune from this scrutiny and we will need to reconsider ways to work innovatively to continue to deliver our Housing Strategy with the funds available. This updated Strategy is therefore realistic, and sets out our direction for the next three years. Given the current pace of change in housing and in local government in Cambridgeshire, the Housing Strategy Action Plan sets out the priorities for the first year of the Strategy to ensure that we remain at the forefront of providing local housing solutions. Huntingdonshire District Council is committed to enabling housing that truly meets local needs. I am proud of what we have achieved so far and I look forward to further successes over coming years.

signature

Councillor Ryan Fuller

Executive Councillor for Housing and Regulatory Services

Introduction and Key Messages

This document is written at a time of enormous change in the housing sector. The Housing and Planning Act 2016 has been enacted and whilst not legislation, on 7th February 2017 the Government published a new Housing White Paper 'Fixing our broken housing market'. We continue to see the impact of Welfare Reform, the Localism Act 2011, and the National Planning Policy Framework as well as significant reforms to the homelessness legislation under the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. These national influences impact on the way we run services locally. This document provides a short analysis of key changes and sets out our plans for working in partnership with others to help meet identified needs.

Analysis of our evidence base leads us to conclude that the high level strategic issues facing Huntingdonshire remain broadly the same as those in the 2012-2015 Strategy. In summary the key issues are:

1. Huntingdonshire needs housing growth

The need to plan for significant housing, population and employment growth in order to meet the needs of the growing population, rebalance the population structure to achieve a greater proportion of households of working age, and help to drive economic prosperity. Growth needs to be actively managed through delivery partnerships and the Council has the key role in providing the strategic vision for the delivery of growth and the creation of large new settlements.

2. There is a high level of need for new affordable housing

At the extreme end, the Council's ability to manage front line demand presented by homelessness is reliant on a steady and adequate flow of opportunities to re-house people into. These stem from affordable opportunities in the private rented sector together with re-lets of existing social rented stock, and newly built affordable homes. Changes in Government policy coupled with the reduced viability of developments have impacted on our ability to enable affordable housing in recent years.

As mentioned in the Foreword, over an eight year period the number of affordable homes enabled has varied with 301 homes completed each year in the first half of this period reducing to 78 homes in the second half. However, during 2016/17 the number increased to 188 completions, due in part to the completion of a 55 dwelling extra care scheme and the first phase of handovers on the strategic site at Bearscroft, Godmanchester. This is a good rate of delivery when compared to neighbouring districts, but the Council remains under pressure to enable affordable housing to help meet priority needs.

In addition to shortages in traditional forms of affordable housing, there is a disparity in local incomes to house prices and general affordability problems amongst much of our population. Increases in house prices in recent years indicates some imbalance between demand for and supply of dwellings.

Government announced their intention to tackle this via the provision of Starter Homes and there was a risk that this housing would be delivered at the expense of traditional 'affordable housing'. Therefore we were pleased to note the change to the Starter Homes policy in the

Housing White Paper limiting the speed at which the discount could be retained and removing the requirement to provide a minimum 20% starter homes on all sites.

The proposed introduction of the Right to Buy for Registered Provider tenants may reduce the affordable housing stock and in some areas, such as rural areas, it may be very difficult to replace those homes with new affordable stock.

3. We need to tackle Local Housing Needs and Homelessness

The number of households applying to the housing register that see social rented housing as their preferred housing tenure plateaued at 2100 – 2300 households following the last major review of policy in April 2013. Further reviews of the housing register have taken place and the policy amended in light of changes to national policy direction. The last of these reviews was in late 2015. In May 2017, the register had increased to just over 3200 households of which 12% are assessed as being in the highest housing need (priority band A).

The trend in homelessness in the district over the last three years has been similar to national trends, showing an increase in the number of statutory acceptances by the council. As with the national picture, homelessness as a result of households being evicted from the private rented sector through no fault of their own is now the single biggest cause of homelessness.

The welfare reform programme and continued increase in the cost of privately renting in the district has meant that more households see social/affordable rented housing as their only realistic option. This has undoubtedly contributed to the number of households applying to the housing register and approaching the Council for assistance when faced with homelessness. The lack of properties available within Local Housing Allowance rates in the private rented sector has meant that the opportunities to help households into this sector has reduced, affecting households on low incomes as well as those not currently in employment.

The wider impact of the welfare reform programme will potentially continue with the roll out of Universal Credit likely to be the next major event that may impact on housing implications for households in receipt of the benefit.

4. We will work in partnership to help meet the needs of our ageing population

Huntingdonshire has an ageing population. There is a need to boost the percentage of people of working age in order to achieve a more balanced population base. This is one of the drivers for enhanced rates of house building. The ageing population presents challenges for health and social care but 'housing' can also form part of the solution by ensuring that there are adequate amounts and types of accommodation on offer to support people as they age. Initiatives to help keep people fit and well in their own homes, as well as the remodelling of existing accommodation, and development of new housing forms part of our strategic response in partnership with housing, health and social care colleagues.

The provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) can contribute towards reducing admissions to and speeding up discharge from hospitals. They can also prevent/delay move to care homes as people are able to continue to live safely in their own homes.

The proposed cap on Housing Benefit to Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates in supported housing from April 2019 is a cause of major concern nationally and locally. Many supported

housing schemes charge rents above LHA rates to take account of the requirement to provide communal areas and more intensive management. This policy creates a risk that new supported housing schemes will not be built and that existing schemes will no longer be viable.

Current and Emerging National Influences

Below is a summary of the key legislative changes relevant to the housing sector and the significant impact the policies could have on the provision of housing in Huntingdonshire.

Housing and Planning Act 2016

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 makes the most radical changes to housing policy for many years. The main aspects are as follows:

Extension of Right to Buy to housing association tenants

The Right to Buy is due to be extended to housing association tenants. At the time of writing Government policy is yet to be finalised but there is a national pilot underway. The Voluntary Right to Buy is an option offered to Government by the National Housing Federation as an alternative to statutory imposition of the policy. It will allow the Boards of housing associations to decide which units they are prepared to sell and will require one-for-one replacement of any units sold.

There is considerable uncertainty about whether one for one replacement will be possible. The Housing White Paper reinforced the commitment to enabling housing association tenants to buy their homes however it did not provide any further details about how the scheme will be implemented.

In order to reimburse housing associations for the sale of their stock, it was intended that stock owning Councils would be required to sell off their higher valued housing stock. This aspect of the policy would not have an impact in Huntingdonshire as we transferred the housing stock in 2000 to Luminus.

The potential impact of this national policy on the provision of affordable housing in Huntingdonshire will need to be kept under review. Where stock is sold, we will be encouraging providers to replace the home in our district, as close as possible to the area where the disposal took place. This is particularly important in rural areas where there is less affordable housing.

Starter homes

Starter homes will be for sale to first time buyers aged under 40 years. They will be for sale at 80% of market levels, capped at £250k outside of London. The Act proposed that if sold within the first five years the owner has to pass on the discount to the next occupant. However, the Housing White Paper (February 2017) indicated that if a property is sold on to a new owner within 15 years some or all of the discount must be repaid. Starter homes will come within the definition of affordable housing. We will consider any requests to include starter homes on new development sites but we will be looking to ensure that new housing schemes deliver a range of housing products at different price points to ensure that provision is being made for all sectors of our residents in housing need.

End of Lifetime Tenancies

Flexible tenancies were introduced in the Localism Act and this new legislation proposes to end secure and assured tenancies. The national policy aims to make best use of the housing stock by offering short term tenancies to people in need with periodic reviews to ensure the household still requires the size of accommodation they are occupying. The detail is yet to be released by Government.

Self-build and custom built housing

Political aspirations are to increase the proportion of self-build and custom built housing. Local authorities are required to hold a register of applicants who are interested in self and custom build housing and to allocate appropriate sites through the planning system.

Measures to tackle rogue landlords in the private rented sector

Local authorities will be able to apply for a banning order to prevent a landlord or letting agent operating for a minimum 12 month period if they have committed certain housing offences. The Act also introduces a statutory requirement for a national database of rogue landlords/letting agents to be maintained by local authorities – further guidance/legislation is awaited.

Housing White Paper ‘Fixing our broken housing market’

Although it is not policy, the Housing White Paper proposes a range of initiatives and policies. Further detail is expected through introduction of new legislation. However some of the key housing matters are:

- A variety of planning reforms intended to speed up housing delivery.
- National policies will be strengthened to ensure that local authorities have clear policies for addressing housing requirements of groups with particular needs such as older people or people with disabilities and making it clear that local authorities should set policies using optional Building Regulation standards to address these needs.
- The paper announces a new Community Housing Fund to support community housing projects such as Community Land Trusts in rural areas.
- Seeking to diversify the market by encouraging more institutional investors into housing including for building more homes for private rent and encouraging family friendly tenancies. (Government also separately consulted on a new Build to Rent proposal).
- A proposal to set out and consult upon a rent policy for social landlords beyond 2020 (when the current 1% annual rent decrease ceases) to help them to borrow against future income.
- Encouraging local authorities to build homes and providing the tools to deliver, such as through Local Development Corporations and joint ventures, and tailored support packages will be made available through the Accelerated Construction Programme.
- Encouraging modern methods of construction in housebuilding and ensuring that homes built offsite can access finance on the same basis as traditionally built homes.
- Introducing a clear policy expectation that housing sites will deliver a minimum of 10% affordable home ownership units. Continuing to support people to buy their own home through initiatives such as Help to Buy and Starter Homes and confirming that starter homes will be acceptable on rural exception sites, subject to a local connection test.
- Confirming that the HCA Affordable Homes Programme 2016-21 has the flexibility to support a wider range of products including Affordable Rent as well as shared ownership.
- A proposal to improve standards for people in the private rented sector, particularly in relation to affordability and security and will consult on banning letting agents fees to

tenants. This extends upon the proposal in the Housing and Planning Act 2016 which seeks to ban the worst landlords from operating and enabling Councils to issue fines.

- An intention to consult on potential measures to make leasehold ground rents fairer and to tackle leasehold abuses. New leasehold houses can be marketed at a reduced price compared to freehold. But some purchasers are not aware at the point of sale that the associated costs of buying a new leasehold house can make it more expensive in the long run.
- Introducing a new extended definition of Affordable Housing in National Planning Policy Framework which introduces a new household income cap of £80,000 (£90,000 in London) on Starter Homes and introducing a definition of Affordable Private Rented Housing.

Changes to national rent-setting policy for affordable homes

In 2013, housing associations and Councils were given a ten-year rent guarantee by Government that they could increase rents by CPI plus 1% per year. However, in the Summer Budget 2015, this was changed and Councils and housing associations have been instructed to reduce their rents by 1% per year for four years. Not only does this result in rent losses of about 4% per year against previous projections, but it will also take a number of years for providers to recover their previous position.

This policy has an impact on our housing association partners' business plans, and their ability to fund new development in Huntingdonshire. From an initial appraisal, we are confident that there remains sufficient financial capacity within the local housing association sector to deliver the growth aspirations within Huntingdonshire. This issue was considered by a Scrutiny Group of Councillors in 2016.

One thing is clear – social landlords will have rarely faced such a tough environment in which to build new homes that are truly affordable for people on lower incomes'

Terrie Alafat, Chief Executive, Chartered Institute of Housing, Inside Housing

18.12.15

Homelessness Reduction Act

The Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 has now received Royal Assent. It is intended to reform homelessness legislation and ensure that people get the help they need before they become homeless by placing a duty on local authorities to take steps to prevent homelessness of anyone 'eligible' and threatened with homelessness. The new duties are expected to be in place from 2018 following publication by the Government of the relevant regulations and guidance. This is likely to increase the number of homelessness cases which we will be required to support. The impact of this will be closely monitored.

Welfare Reform

There is a further raft of welfare reforms to be implemented including the full roll out of Universal Credit. As part of the overall benefit cap, the amount of money available for people on low incomes to spend on their housing costs will be squeezed. Responsibility for the payment of rent will go to tenants and can no longer be paid directly from the housing benefit department to the landlord. This presents a potential risk to housing provider's debt recovery.

The Government has announced that housing association and Council rents will be capped to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate. For the majority of general needs housing stock this is manageable. However if this policy is applied to supported housing, it will result in many schemes being unviable because supported housing rents usually exceed LHA rates as a result of the cost of providing communal spaces and enhanced management and support services. The Government has delayed the introduction of the cap on supported housing for one year, until April 2019. They have also undertaken a consultation on the funding of supported housing and indicated that a top up fund will be provided to local authorities to bridge the gap between the LHA and the cost to provide the service. This policy presents a significant risk to vulnerable tenants, and also to the providers of supported housing in our district if it goes ahead.

Reclassification of housing associations

As of November 2015 housing associations have been reclassified as 'public sector bodies' by ONS. However, both the Housing & Planning Act 2016 and the Housing White Paper subsequently proposed a range of deregulatory measures to classify housing associations as private sector bodies, encouraging housing associations to explore every avenue for house building and to improve their efficiency. The impact will be kept under review.

Potential Impact of Government Policies

Overview & Scrutiny established two Working Groups that considered housing issues. The first was concerned primarily with the provision of housing in rural areas. Recommendations from this study have fed into the action plan for this Strategy.

The second study considered the potential impact of new Government policies listed above on the housing associations who work in our district; the implications for new housing development; and the potential impact on current and future tenants. Members concluded that the new Government policies could have a significant impact on the provision of affordable housing in Huntingdonshire. We can potentially expect:

- Loss of housing association homes to rent through Right to Buy (which may, or may not be replaced in our area, depending upon the regulations);
- Less housing association capacity to develop new affordable homes because of the negative impact on their business plans arising from the rent reductions.
- More low cost home ownership models as housing associations will need to review the tenures on new developments in order to generate more income to make schemes viable.
- Introduction of 'starter homes' for sale on new development sites which may be developed instead of traditional forms of affordable housing. These will not be 'affordable' to our households in need and redirect affordable housing products away from the poor and vulnerable households towards higher income groups.

- Less social/affordable rented homes will be developed as a result compromising our ability to meet the need for priority homeless families.
- Additional risk to meeting objectively assessed need in the Local Plan (a challenge arising from the National Planning Policy Framework).

Huntingdonshire's Local Context

Geography

Huntingdonshire lies within the London/ Stansted/ Cambridge/ Peterborough Growth Area. Huntingdonshire is still predominantly rural in character with an area of approximately 350 square miles.

Population Growth

The Census figures¹ state that the population grew from 156,954 in 2001 to 169,500 in 2011 representing growth of 8%. The Household Projection figures published on 27th February 2015 by Office of National Statistics (ONS) estimated that the population of Huntingdonshire in 2015 was 175,080 and the projected population in 2036 will be more than 200,000².

The Census figures¹ show that the number of households has increased from 63,062 in 2001 to 69,600 in 2011 representing an increase of 10.4%.

The Council must ensure that its services are geared up to respond to increased demand as a result of the increased population.

Population Structure³

The structure of the district's population is changing. In the near future there are expected to be fewer younger people and more older people. In 2011, 56% of the population was younger than 45, but this is expected to drop to 49% by 2036. Similarly, the proportion of under-25s is expected to decline from 30% of the population in 2011 to 26% in 2036. However, recent experience has demonstrated that new housing developments attract younger residents and as a result, over time, we expect an increase in children on new housing developments with the associated requirement for educational, nursery and other family facilities.

Ageing population³

It is anticipated that there will be significant increases in the 65+ age group, from 16% of the population in 2011 to 27% in 2036. People are living for longer and are getting frailer. Rates of dementia are on the increase. Just over a quarter of people aged over 65 live alone and this increases in later age groups.

The ratio of people aged 65+ to those aged 0-64 is due to increase. This presents challenges for future workforce planning and for housing related services to help people remain independent in their own homes, and to facilitate provision of other forms of housing with care and support where needed.

Ethnicity

5.2% of the district's residents described themselves as non-white in the 2011 Census compared to 2.85% in the 2001 Census¹. This is low when compared to 14.5% nationally. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – Cambridgeshire Travellers 2010⁴ report estimated that in Cambridgeshire there were 5702 Gypsy/Travellers, making them one of the largest

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/index.html>

² <http://huntingdonshire.gov.uk/planning/new-local-plan-to-2036/monitoring-research-and-evidence-base/>

³ <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/population-and-demographics/population-forecasts>

⁴ <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/currentreports/travellers>

minority ethnic groups in the area. A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment⁵ was published in October 2016. The findings will be used to inform the Local Plan and are summarised later in this document.

Housing Stock⁶

There are an estimated 72,800 dwellings in Huntingdonshire (Mid 2013). The dominant tenure type is owner occupation (71%), followed by social renting (13%), then renting privately (15%) in the 2011 Census. The stock is generally in good condition, more modern than the position for England as a whole. To help the Council understand the condition of stock in the private sector and inform its investment plans, a comprehensive stock condition survey was completed in 2010. This survey found that although there are properties which are unfit or in substantial disrepair, these are few in number and the survey has confirmed the Council's belief that an area renewal strategy for the private sector is not necessary as there is no spatial concentration of properties in poor repair. A total of 13.8% (7,910 dwellings) failed due to the presence of a category 1 hazard and 10.8% (6,210 dwellings) due to thermal comfort failure. The Council's interventions in these areas remain important.

House prices and Affordability⁷

The average price (December 2016, based on sales and valuations) was £274,783. Prices rose by £17,157 in the last year alone. Affordability remains a serious problem in Huntingdonshire with average house prices 6.8 times average incomes. When looking at the poorest households, affordability is even more of a problem as lower quartile house prices were 9.6 times lower quartile incomes in December 2016. The development of new homes and new affordable housing in particular to meet a range of income groups therefore remains a priority.

Objectively Assessed Housing Need

In April 2017, Cambridge Research Group and Cambridgeshire County Council produced a technical report² to support HDC in objectively assessing and evidencing development needs for housing, both market and affordable. The primary objective of identifying need is to identify the future quantity of housing needed, including a breakdown by type, tenure and size.

The report which was based on evidence of population forecasts, economic forecasts and market signals, identified an overall need for 20,100 new homes up to 2036 and an affordable housing need for 7,897 new homes.

Huntingdonshire District Council Corporate Context

The Council's Vision is: *'We want to continue to improve the quality of life, deliver economic growth and provide value for money services for the people of Huntingdonshire'*

This Housing Strategy supports the delivery of a number of corporate priorities and objectives which will be monitored through our performance management framework. The

⁵ <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing/gypsy-and-traveller-accommodation-needs-assessment>

⁶ <https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/1340/housing-condition-survey.pdf>

⁷ <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/Housingmarketbulletin>

corporate priorities are used to drive the service plans and individual key performance areas (KPAAs) which are monitored quarterly.

The Corporate Plan 2017/18⁸ Performance Indicators and Key Actions which will be delivered through this Housing Strategy are set out below and further actions are also included in the Housing Strategy Action Plan. The Housing Strategy Action Plan will be constantly monitored and an annual update report will be presented to Members to ensure that we meet our key objectives.

Enabling Communities	
Support people to improve their health and well-being	<p>KA10 Prevent homelessness where possible by helping households to remain in their current home or find alternative housing.</p> <p>KA11 Work with partners to deliver the homelessness prevention 'Trailblazer Project' across Cambridgeshire.</p> <p>KA12 Update the Huntingdonshire District Council Homelessness Strategy.</p> <p>PI6 Average length of stay of all households placed in B&B accommodation</p> <p>PI7 Participation at targeted services including for: older people; long term health conditions; disability and young people (healthy weight)</p> <p>PI8 Average time between date of referral of DFGs to practical completion for minor jobs up to £10,000.</p> <p>Working to reduce the number of residents in fuel poverty by facilitating residents' access to available energy funding.</p>
Delivering Sustainable Growth	
Support development of infrastructure to enable growth	<p>KA26 Continue to work with partners and influence the Local Enterprise Partnership and Combined Authority to secure resources to facilitate delivery of new housing and drive economic growth and to mitigate any negative impacts of this.</p>
Improve the supply of new and affordable housing, jobs and community facilities to meet current and future need	<p>KA30 Prepare the submission of the Local Plan.</p> <p>KA31 Facilitate delivery of new housing and appropriate infrastructure on the large strategic sites at St Neots and Alconbury Weald.</p>

⁸ <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/1390/corporate-plan.pdf>

	<p>KA32 Maintain a five year land supply position.</p> <p>KA33 Adopt a new Housing Strategy and delivery the associated Affordable Housing Action Plan.</p> <p>KA34 Prepare 'Masterplans' for the Market Towns.</p> <p>PI18 Percentage of planning applications processed on time.</p> <p>PI19 Number of new affordable homes delivered.</p> <p>PI20 Net additional homes delivered.</p>
Becoming a more Efficient and Effective Council	
Become more efficient in the way we deliver services	<p>KA38 Introduce more online self-service delivery on the council's website ensuring we focus on customer need</p> <p>PI26 Average number of days to process new claims for Housing Benefit and Council Tax support</p> <p>PI27 Average number of days to process changes of circumstances for Housing Benefit and Council Tax support</p>

Members influence on the formation of the Housing Strategy

During 2015-2016 in response to the huge raft of legislative changes proposed by Government and the reduction in the supply of new affordable homes, HDC Members established two Working Groups.

Affordable Housing Working Group⁹

In November 2015, an Affordable Housing Working Group reviewed an extensive amount of information to consider how to deliver affordable housing and explore ways to encourage more affordable housing in rural areas. The Group examined opportunities to deliver affordable housing and reduce the number of families waiting for affordable housing. Viability issues which were impacting the number of affordable units that developers were able to provide were considered.

Analysis of the Housing Register by band and dwelling size was presented to the Group and formed the background to discussions on steps that could be taken to manage demand for affordable housing and reduce the size of the Register. The Group also reviewed the

⁹<http://applications.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/moderngov/documents/s74491/Affordable%20Housing%20Working%20Group%20Report.pdf>

Elphicke-House¹⁰ report (which was a review into the local authority role in housing supply) giving particular consideration to examples of actions that others were taking to provide more affordable housing. Investment in Community Land Trusts (CLTs) was discounted although the Group recognised that CLTs are a model for delivery where local communities so choose.

Conclusion

The Group concluded that options for addressing demand for affordable housing through management of the Housing Register were limited. Initiatives to prevent homelessness were working but were likely to be affected by increasing difficulty in securing private tenancies.

Actions

The Group therefore recommended the following actions to increase the supply of affordable housing:

1. The Council should actively promote the provision of affordable housing on exceptions sites to town and parish councils.
2. Where a parish council does not support an exceptions site, the Council should continue to fulfil its duty to meet identified affordable housing need.
3. A systematic assessment should be carried out of all land to identify potential sites for affordable housing to then be matched to needs (strategic housing land availability assessment).
4. The threshold for developments on which affordable housing can be sought should be lowered from 15 to 10.

These recommendations were considered and are reflected in the action plan attached to this Housing Strategy.

Registered Social Providers Working Group

In April 2016, Overview & Scrutiny Panel formed a Working Group which had the following aims:

- to understand current legislative and regulatory changes affecting housing associations' Business Plans
- to consider the likely impact on development of new affordable housing in the district
- to evaluate the likely impact of the changes on tenants and other residents

Conclusions

The Working Group conducted a special meeting where seven housing associations were invited to attend to explain how the changes could potentially impact on their organisations. The Group made the following conclusions:

¹⁰

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/398829/150126_LA_Housing_Review_Report_FINAL.pdf

- The Housing and Planning Bill, together with changes in the Summer Budget 2015, Welfare Reforms, and changes to the HCA's investment policy have a significant, cumulative, and negative effect on the housing sector.
- Those on lowest incomes together with people in need of supported housing are likely to be hardest hit.
- Housing associations are independent businesses. Some have more resilience than others to adapt to the Government's changes. Housing association's financial position is influenced by their gearing, their legacy of debt, investment and growth and their future ambitions. All of our partners have had to respond to the rapidly changing policy environment.
- There are a good range of strong housing association partners active in Huntingdonshire all of whom have strong Board commitment, and resources to invest in our district. We have a range of partners who can deliver our housing aspirations. The providers have different specialisms including:
 - rural housing,
 - supported housing,
 - people-focussed non-housing services,
 - large scale development and growth.

The Working Group thought that the information received and the conclusions drawn from the study would be useful for Members when considering the emerging Housing Strategy.

Actions:

The Group recommended the following actions:

1. as part of the discussion the housing waiting list needs revisiting as there are residents on the list who are in band D and do not fall within one of the statutory 'reasonable preference' categories and, in reality, many may never receive a housing association property;
2. the Housing Strategy Manager, on behalf of the Council, will draft a letter to the Housing Minister about the effect the LHA rent cap would have on supported housing, and
3. the Panel use the knowledge and understanding of the Working Group on the issues in a wider debate about the Council's forthcoming Housing Strategy for 2016-19.

The actions of this Working Group were considered and implemented where appropriate.

Our housing priorities

Huntingdonshire District Council sets out its overall priorities for action in the Corporate Plan. We work in partnership with other local authorities through the Cambridgeshire Regional Housing Board¹¹ to identify the key housing issues affecting the sub-region. This Housing Strategy draws together our local priorities and the housing priorities set out in the CRHB action plan* and identifies four housing priorities for Huntingdonshire:

1. To increase the supply of new affordable housing and encourage sustainable growth
2. To identify housing need and improve health and well being
3. To improve housing conditions in existing housing
4. To work in partnership to improve outcomes

Priority 1: Increase the supply of new affordable housing and encourage sustainable growth

Local Plan

The Local Plan is a key strategic document produced by the council which sets out a vision and a framework for the future development of the area, addressing needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure – as well as a basis for safeguarding the environment, adapting to climate change and securing good design. They are also a critical tool in guiding decisions about individual development proposals, as Local Plans (together with any neighbourhood plans that have been made) are the starting-point for considering whether planning applications can be approved.

The Council's current Core Strategy¹² has a policy seeking a target of 40% of all dwellings on sites of 15 or more dwellings in towns and key service centres with a lower threshold in smaller settlements, to be provided as affordable homes to enable housing needs across the district to be met. The Core Strategy also enables the development of sites adjacent to smaller settlements to permit affordable housing in these settlements where a local need for such housing is proven. These two policies create the basis for the predominant supply of new affordable homes each year. In the last 3 years, 66% of new affordable homes have been provided as a result of these policies.

We have now started preparing a new Local Plan to 2036¹³. The new plan will replace the existing development plan documents, including the Core Strategy (2009), the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan (2011), the Local Plan (1995) and the Local Plan Alteration (2002). The purpose of the new plan is to set out:

- the strategy for development in the whole of Huntingdonshire
- policies for managing development
- details of sites for development to meet the needs of Huntingdonshire.

The development strategy in the draft Local Plan to 2036 seeks to promote approximately 70% of the overall new housing growth within the strategic expansion locations of Alconbury

¹¹ <http://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing/crhb>

¹² <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/planning/adopted-development-plans/core-strategy/>

¹³ <http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/planning/new-local-plan-to-2036/>

Weald and St Neots Eastern Expansion along with the four spatial planning areas focused on Huntingdon, St Neots, St Ives and Ramsey. The remaining 30% of new housing growth is expected to take place in the district's key service centres and small settlements to help promote their sustainability and support local services.

It is anticipated that the new plan will be adopted in 2019 and will include refreshed housing policies to support the provision of new affordable housing and custom and self-build housing. Evidence suggests that there is a need to provide some 21,000 new homes by 2036 including 7,897 new affordable homes. In view of the acute need to deliver more affordable housing, this Housing Strategy is intended to be a tool to accelerate the delivery of affordable housing and to identify actions to tackle increased homelessness in the District.

Accelerate the delivery of affordable homes and increase provision of temporary accommodation

To accelerate the delivery of new affordable housing will involve seeking to work with a broader range of Registered Providers. The following six priority areas have been identified as a starting point for accelerating affordable housing delivery:

1. Delivery as part of planning permissions

HDC currently seeks 40% affordable housing on sites providing 15 or more dwellings in towns and key service centres and 11 or more in smaller settlements. The provision of affordable housing on these qualifying sites has accounted for 66% of the total provision of affordable housing in the district in the three year period 2014/15-2016/17 and is a significant tool in increasing affordable housing supply. We will ensure the emerging Local Plan accords with Government policy and includes the maximum level of affordable housing requirement which is viable within the district.

2. Exceptions sites

Rural exception sites (RES) are sites which are not allocated for housing provision but are able to be brought forward specifically to meet evidenced local need. RES typically provide affordable housing although some market housing has been allowed where the scheme is otherwise unviable. We will continue to support the provision of RES and will ensure that the emerging Local Plan includes an appropriate policy to fully incentivise this supply. RES generally rely on willing land owners to release their land at less than market value so there are limited opportunities to deliver sites. In the three year period 2014/15-2016/17 homes on RES accounted for 9% of the overall supply of affordable housing so whilst they are not currently a significant proportion of new supply, they do provide homes which would not otherwise be developed for the purpose of affordable housing.

3. Devolution Housing Fund

The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority which has been established following devolution, has a budget of £100million for the provision of affordable housing. This fund will provide new affordable homes across the combined authority area and as such could provide a significant boost to the delivery of new homes in Huntingdonshire in addition to those homes which will already be delivered through planning gain and on RES.

4. Use Council money, or borrow, to increase provision of affordable housing and Temporary Accommodation (TA) in particular

The council will explore whether it can access money or borrowing to accelerate the delivery of affordable or temporary housing. This may include direct investment, purchasing land or joint ventures.

5. HDC offers some/all non-operational land to Registered Providers for TA/affordable housing

The council is currently reviewing its land assets to explore whether it has any land which can be developed for affordable or temporary accommodation. Surplus assets will be disposed of subject to appropriate due diligence and disposal options to achieve the “best value” consideration to support Council priorities. In respect of Market Housing, all consideration received (capital receipt) will be used to finance either the Commercial Investment Strategy or other capital asset activity. However sites made available for affordable or temporary housing might be disposed of for nil consideration to make such developments viable.

6. Explore HDC setting up as a Housing Company or Joint Venture with a.n.other(s)

The council will explore whether there is any merit in establishing a housing company or a joint venture for the purpose of accelerating and increasing the supply of additional homes, including affordable homes, in the district.

A further six additional priorities will also be explored where resources are available, they include:

7. Creative use of Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Low interest loans.

The council will explore whether there are opportunities to prioritise the use of receipts from CIL to facilitate the delivery of schemes which will provide affordable or temporary accommodation. Additionally the council could consider making low interest loans in instances where up-front costs and cash-flow are barriers to providing affordable housing.

8. We ‘overprovide’/allocate more land than is necessary to meet our objectively assessed need (OAN) as part of the new Local Plan to increase the number of smaller sites

The council could consider allocating more housing sites in the emerging Local Plan than evidence suggests are needed. The effect would be that more sites would come forward for housing development and because of the council’s policy to require an element of affordable housing on qualifying sites this would increase the number of affordable homes which can be provided through the planning process.

9. Bid for any available funding to help accelerate and/or deliver more affordable housing.

The council could explore more potential avenues to attract funding which supports or accelerates the delivery of affordable homes. This could include infrastructure funding to enable housing development.

10. Encourage empty homes to be occupied

The council is committed to reducing the number of empty homes in the district. We will increase Council Tax charges on any homes which have been empty for more than 2 years to discourage them remaining empty. We can explore other

opportunities to work with owners to get more homes back into use and where appropriate use our enforcement powers and obtain management orders.

11. Modular Homes

The council will explore whether using off site manufacturing will accelerate the speed of delivery and increase the number of affordable homes which can be built.

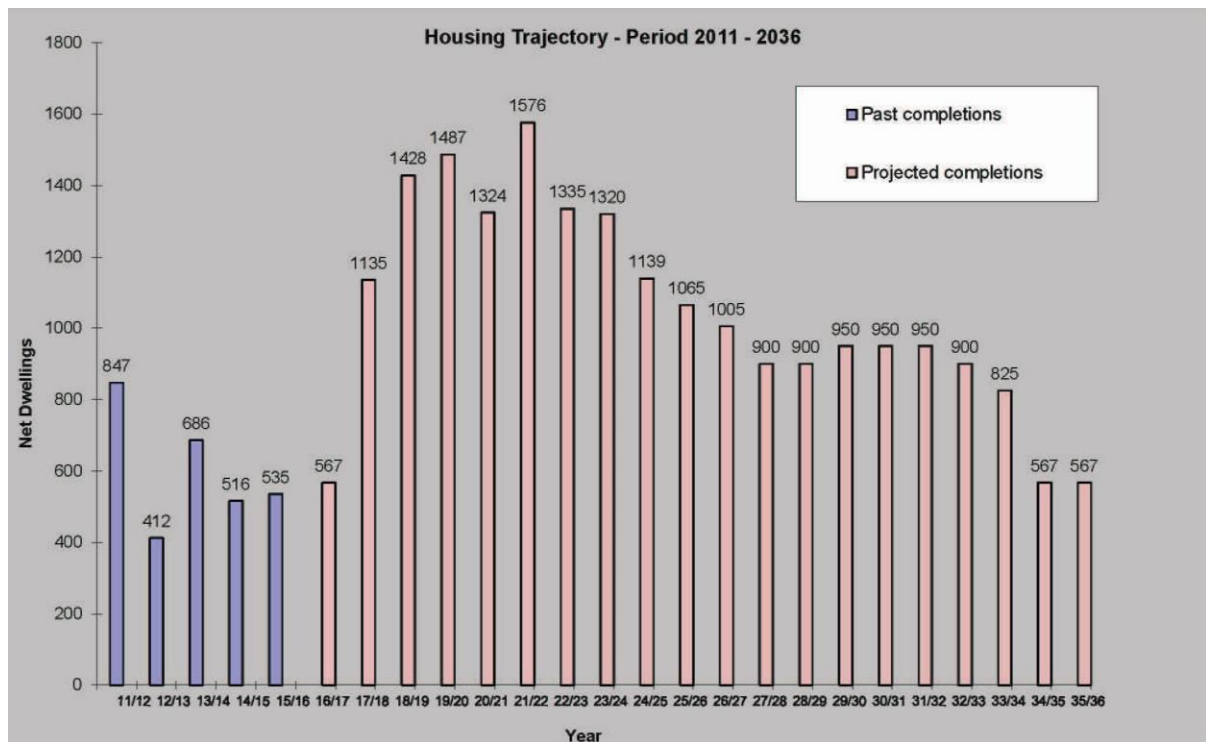
12. Support for other models e.g. Community Land Trust

The council will explore the appetite for community led development and support communities where possible to set up CLTs where it could deliver additional affordable housing.

Progress towards action on the top six priority areas to address the current shortage of affordable and temporary accommodation will be reported to Overview and Scrutiny Panel after adoption of this strategy.

Housing Delivery and Large Strategic Sites

The housing market in Huntingdonshire is strong with new housing completions being delivered in line with the expected trajectory. The Annual Monitoring Report (December 2016) provides a housing trajectory for 2011-2036, shown below.



Two main strategic expansion locations are being brought forward in Huntingdonshire which are expected to provide substantial new communities with employment, schools, local shops and services and green infrastructure being developed alongside the new homes. The largest is Alconbury Weald which is expected to provide at least 5,000 new homes by 2036; the first homes and primary school were completed in 2016. The second is St Neots Eastern Expansion which is expected to provide around 3,820 new homes by 2036 consolidating the growth area east of the railway started with Loves Farm.

Other strategic sites include Roman's Edge at Godmanchester where the first residents moved in at the end of 2016; this is expected to deliver around 750 new homes by 2024. The former RAF Brampton is expected to accommodate around 600 new homes in a similar timescale. In the slightly longer term other strategic sites are expected to include redevelopment of RAF Upwood for around 450 homes and land either side of Ermine Street to the northwest of Huntingdon for approximately 1,400 homes.

Housing to support economic growth

The Huntingdonshire Economic Growth Plan 2013-2023¹⁴ identifies that the proportion of the population of working age in Huntingdonshire is contracting and seeks to address the contraction in the workforce by implementing a set of projects that will attract new people to live in Huntingdonshire, as well as connecting people who live in Huntingdonshire who are not economically active with the benefits of economic growth and new job opportunities.

The Plan includes the following actions:

- To prioritise the delivery of new homes with a priority placed on quality family homes, in order to attract new working families to live in Huntingdonshire.
- To encourage in-migration and provide services to a growing population by delivering proposed development in Huntingdon West, St Neots and St Ives and to support the regeneration of these key service centres, in order to improve the quality of life offer of Huntingdonshire.
- To launch a marketing programme, in order to attract high-skilled, working families to relocate to Huntingdonshire.

This Housing Strategy encourages wide ranging housing growth to support housing need and economic growth.

Viability

Whilst house sales values have risen in recent years, build and other costs have also been rising. It remains the case that the viability of developments means that many cannot provide policy compliant affordable housing and the Council will take a flexible approach where appropriate to facilitate delivery.

Vacant Buildings Credit

In November 2014, the Government introduced a policy which excluded developments of ten homes or fewer, or 1,000 square metres or less, from the requirement to provide or contribute to affordable housing provision. A second element of the Ministerial Statement related to 'Vacant Building Credit' and introduced a policy which meant that affordable housing contributions need only be made on any net increase in floor area resulting from a development. Whilst these policies were quashed by the High Court in July 2015, the Government was granted permission to appeal against the decision which was subsequently successful. The vacant building credit has been reinstated. The impact of this policy in Huntingdonshire will be kept under review.

Supporting Owner Occupation

In pursuit of a balanced housing market with a range of products to meet the needs of a range of incomes, the Council enables owner occupation through the development of shared ownership on new Section 106 sites and supporting the Government's Help to Buy product

¹⁴ <http://www.investhuntingdonshire.co.uk/images/news/GrowthPlan.pdf>

range on new sites. Additionally, Starter Homes may be provided on appropriate sites, especially where they deliver affordable homes that would not otherwise have been provided (additionality). The Council is keen that new development sites continue to meet a range of needs on mixed tenure development.

Community Development

The Council is keen to encourage community development activity on all large sites. This is being implemented in partnership at Loves Farm where the Council has recently provided community buildings. At Alconbury Weald the Council is working in partnership to establish a Community Trust to take over the management of the community buildings where a dedicated worker is now based. Cross Keys have employed a community development officer to work on Bearscroft Farm and similar activity will be encouraged on other large sites.

Localism

We have put together a Neighbourhood and Community Planning Guide, aimed at town and parish councils, which sets out:

- the range of community planning tools available
- the council's support for town or parish councils wishing to prepare a neighbourhood plan and
- signposts to the wide range of advice and guidance currently available.

This has been publicised to Parish and Town Councils and we will support their housing and related initiatives where appropriate.

Rural Housing

The provision of rural housing is essential to support the vitality and sustainability of our rural communities. We have a rural housing programme and we support ACRE's Rural Housing Enabler. The NPPF enables a small percentage of homes to be delivered as private housing if this helps deliver the affordable homes and provides a sufficient incentive for the landowner to release the land. We have reviewed our Local Plan policy to incorporate and build upon the NPPF policy. During 2016/17 schemes at Warboys (19 homes), Alconbury (1 home) and Earith (11 homes) completed and we have built up a pipeline of future housing sites including Brington (12 homes) and Colne (10 homes).

Other sites are being progressed in the following locations:

- Ramsey St Mary
- Needingworth
- Offord Darcy
- Little Stukeley
- Great Staughton (potential community land trust)

Using Council assets to facilitate affordable housing

HDC sold the site at Earith to BPHA for the development of 11 homes for local people which completed in 2016/17

HDC has a further site in Little Stukeley, details of which have been sent out to housing associations for competitive bids in 2017, seeking to generate a capital receipt for the Council as well as enabling five much-needed homes for local people.

The scope of other land holdings within the Council's portfolio is being considered.

Priority 2: Address housing need and support health and well being

Preventing Homelessness

The number of households applying to the Council's housing register plateaued at between 2100-2300 following on from a major review of the Lettings Policy in April 2013. However, there has been a steady increase in the number of applicants on the housing register in the last few years and currently there are around 3,200 applicants. The promotion of other housing options remains a priority for the Council given the high levels of demand for social rented housing via the register and the limited number of properties available. However, many households on low incomes have limited options particularly due to their inability to access the private rented sector as a result of affordability issues. This is likely to be an increasing problem with the next raft of welfare reforms meaning that households that are reliant on help from Housing Benefit system to pay their rent will find it more difficult to afford rent payments in the private rented sector. Many of these households may see the affordable rented sector as their only realistic housing option.

The impact of a buoyant housing market with increasing rent levels on low income households is apparent when analysing the causes of homelessness within the district. Since 2010/11 the number of households losing tenancies in the private sector and approaching the Council for assistance with homelessness has been on the increase with it becoming the largest single cause of homelessness in each subsequent year. This has added to the overall levels of homelessness within the district: 253 homeless applications were accepted during 2016/17 (73% of all presentations) and of those acceptances 26% were due to the end of a private sector tenancy. These local trends follow the national trends with the last published figures from the Department of Communities and Local Government showing this as the largest cause of homelessness nationally¹⁵

The Council continues to work with households in the private rented sector in an attempt to try and prevent them from losing their tenancies wherever possible, or helping find alternative private rented housing as a means of homelessness prevention. Affordability remains the key issue to achieving positive outcomes. Anecdotal evidence locally suggests that many landlords and agents have reservations about renting to households that may be reliant on the Housing Benefit system as a result of the welfare reform programme. This is supported by the Residential Landlords Association's report to the House of Commons Communities and Local Government Select Committee's inquiry into homelessness¹⁶.

In December 2016, HDC alongside other Councils and organisations in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough were awarded more than £736,000 to help us develop more effective ways of tackling homelessness. We have been given the task of helping to devise a new, multi-agency approach that has prevention and early intervention at its heart. The funding comes

¹⁵https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/486671/2015_Q3_Statutory_Homelessness.pdf

¹⁶ <http://news.rla.org.uk/>

from a new £20 million "Trailblazer" fund set up by the Government to establish "a network of ambitious areas across England" aimed at tackling the root of the problem.

The areas which were selected to pilot the new approach will look to engage with a wider group of people, not just those who are owed a statutory duty. We will work with the Government to identify what works best and to share best practice. The primary focus will be on spotting any early warning signs and improving coordination between all the various agencies to enable them to intervene earlier and provide the appropriate support. Emphasis will also be placed on working closely with landlords to help them maintain tenancies, resolve any problems with tenants and avoid evictions wherever possible. More attention will be given to making people at risk of becoming homeless aware of the various means of support that are available.

The increase in the number of people being accepted as homeless coupled with the reduction in the supply of new affordable homes has meant that some people are staying in temporary accommodation for longer. New measures introduced in the Homelessness Reduction Act are likely to increase the number of people we will support. Therefore we are looking at options to increase the availability of temporary accommodation within the district. However there is a risk to the sustainability of existing temporary accommodation and to the delivery of new temporary accommodation as a result of the proposed changes to funding for supported housing which will cap Housing Benefit at LHA rate which threatens the viability of some temporary housing schemes. To sit alongside this Strategy, the Council will be adopting a new Homelessness Strategy during 2017/18, incorporating the work of the Homelessness Trailblazer project to provide a co-ordinated approach across a wide range of partner organisations to identify and prevent homelessness at the earliest opportunity.

Demand for affordable housing

Demand for affordable housing remains high. There were around 3,200 households on the housing register in May 2017. Homelessness levels have increased and the Objectively Assessed Housing Need report² evidences the need for 7,897 additional affordable homes during 2011-2036 which represents 39% of the overall housing figure.

As the table below demonstrates, the programme has declined since 2012 when the completions on the large strategic site at Loves Farm came to an end. However during 2016/17 there was an increase in delivery. Efforts to deliver new affordable housing are also influenced by national changes to housing policy which until recently have favoured models of home ownership as opposed to traditional models of affordable housing. Given the high levels of need for new affordable homes, it is important that the Council maximises all opportunities.

Affordable Housing delivery rates:

	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Predicted	
										2017/18	2018/19
No. of new affordable homes per year	226	326	367	287	60	41	161	53	188	167*	90*

*Please note these predictions become less reliable in future years

It has been identified that there is a need for 316 additional affordable homes to be provided each year up to 2036 to meet need. We expect that a large proportion of these homes will be delivered as a result of the policies in our Local Plan. However, as we have mentioned earlier scheme viability can affect the level of affordable housing provision on some sites. The council will ensure that it maximises the opportunity to deliver new affordable homes on these sites and also by working in partnership with a wide range of Registered Providers and through the sale of HDC land where appropriate we will explore a range of other measures to achieve this target.

Health and well-being Board Cambridgeshire¹⁷

The purpose of the Health and Wellbeing board (HWB) is to promote the health and wellbeing of Cambridgeshire's communities, focusing on securing the best possible outcomes for all residents. The Board is responsible for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs); the Health and Well Being Strategy; and the Clinical Commissioning Plans for health services in the County. Housing has a key role to play in providing and supporting preventative services and contributing to good health outcomes. The strategy¹⁸ for 2012-17 focuses on the following six priorities to improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of Cambridgeshire residents:

1. Ensure a positive start to life for children, young people and their families.
2. Support older people to be independent, safe and well.
3. Encourage healthy lifestyles and behaviours in all actions and activities while respecting people's personal choices.
4. Create a safe environment and help to build strong communities, wellbeing and mental health.
5. Create a sustainable environment in which communities can flourish.
6. Work together effectively.

This Housing Strategy has a role to play in supporting each of these priorities.

Implementation of the Care Act

The Care Act 2014 is making big changes to social care; modernising the system so it is built around people's needs and what they want to achieve in their lives. It places a statutory duty on local authorities to promote wellbeing and introduces universal eligibility criteria for accessing social care support services which includes considering the suitability of a person's living accommodation. The Act:

- gives individuals and carers more control over their care and support
- clarifies what individuals and carers can expect from the care system
- sets a cap on the amount anyone will have to pay towards the cost of their care.

Cambridgeshire County Council is taking a new strategic approach to social work and social care, called Transforming Lives¹⁹. The vision for the new way of working is to:

- enable people to live independently

¹⁷ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/be-well/cambridgeshire-health-and-wellbeing-board/>

¹⁸ <http://www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/health/hwb>

¹⁹ http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20166/working_together/579/delivering_the_care_act/3

- support people in a way that works for them
- support the development of strong, connected communities
- recognise the strengths of individuals, families and communities and build upon these
- work in partnership to achieve this.

There is a growing pressure on the NHS and Social Care to move towards prevention and away from crisis interventions eg when older people are admitted to hospital. This Housing Strategy complements the Care Act 2014 by providing a range of options to increase the supply of new housing and options for people to remain safe in their existing homes. We will support the work of Cambs County Council to ensure there are integrated housing and advice services to prevent crises, manage them better when they do occur and therefore achieve the outcomes of the NHS, Public Health and Adult Social Care.

Meeting the needs of Older People

Our population is ageing. It is anticipated that there will be significant increases in the 65+ age group, from 16% of the population in 2011 to 27% in 2036. This brings challenges for housing and related services. In 2015 this Council signed up to the Cambridgeshire Older People's Strategy²⁰. The vision for this joint approach is that *Older people are more independent, more active and more engaged in their communities for as long as possible; knowing that if they need them, they can rely on services which are flexible, creative, coordinated and focused on keeping them well.*

By working together, the partners want to make sure that across Cambridgeshire:

- Older people remain independent, living in homes that are appropriate to their needs and actively engaged in their communities for as long as possible
- People retain or regain the skills and confidence to look after themselves and their families into older age
- Carers of older people are able to cope with and sustain their caring role and choose the support which is right for them
- Older people live with dignity, are safe and protected from harm and isolation.

Meeting the needs of the ageing population is a key theme for this document, given the ageing population within Huntingdonshire. We needed an additional extra care scheme in St Ives and we worked in partnership with Cambs County Council and Luminus to redevelop an outdated sheltered scheme in Langley Close St Ives. The new extra care scheme completed in 2016 and provides 55 self-contained flats for frail older people. The scheme was funded by Luminus, a £2.3m grant from DoH / HCA and an innovative £5.5m loan from this Council.

Through this Housing Strategy we will explore the options available to provide a range of new housing to meet the needs of older people and we will respond to the strengthened national policies referred to in the Housing White Paper to ensure we address the housing

²⁰ <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/working-together-children-families-and-adults/strategies-policies-and-plans/strategies-for-adults-and-older-people/>

requirements of older people. However the proposed cap on rents in supported housing schemes to LHA rates could make future schemes unviable.

Supported Housing for Vulnerable People

We are committed to working in partnership with housing health and social care colleagues to develop appropriate supported housing. We are aware of a need for additional supported housing for adults with learning disabilities and have developed proposals for new schemes in St Ives and Godmanchester. However the changes to the funding for supported housing may impact upon the viability of schemes and the delivery of these projects is at risk.

Gypsies and Travellers

A revised accommodation assessment for Gypsies and Travellers⁵ was commissioned jointly with seven other district Council areas during 2016. The findings were published in October 2016 and will be used to draft the appropriate policy which will aim to meet identified needs in the forthcoming Local Plan to 2036. The findings from the accommodation assessment in 2016 have been updated with the latest information as at May 2017 to provide the current position as follows:

In Huntingdonshire there is currently 1 public site with 20 pitches; 13 private sites with permanent planning permission with 37 pitches; no sites with temporary planning permission; 2 sites that are tolerated for planning purposes with 13 pitches; and 8 unauthorised sites with 10 pitches. There is no transit provision in Huntingdonshire.

There is a need in Huntingdonshire for 7 additional pitches between now and 2036 for Gypsy and Traveller households that meet the new planning definition; a need for up to 19 additional pitches for Gypsy and Traveller households that may meet the new planning definition – although if the national average of 10% were to be applied this could be as few as 2 additional pitches; and a need for 38 additional pitches for Gypsy and Traveller households who do not meet the new definition. There are no occupied Travelling Showpeople yards in Huntingdonshire so no current or future need.

Through the emerging Local Plan, we will adopt policy to address identified needs.

Priority 3: Improve housing conditions in existing housing

Private sector housing

A well maintained and regulated private rented sector makes a valuable contribution to community cohesion and the housing profile of the district. However, national and local housing surveys have consistently reported a significantly higher presence of housing health and safety hazards in the private rented sector than either the social rented and owner occupied sectors. In Huntingdonshire, we recognise the impact poor quality and inadequately managed housing can have on the health of tenants and the local community.

We are committed to working with landlords to improve the quality of the private rented sector and will continue to offer advice and guidance to the sector on matters such as the application of legislation, good management practice and other pertinent issues affecting the sector. The Private Landlords Forum and associated newsletter are an established and important aspect of our engagement with the sector and will continue to be supported.

Whilst we acknowledge that the overwhelming majority of landlords hold a desire to provide well managed quality housing, it is evident that not all property owners and agents are equally committed. Local housing authorities are empowered and in many cases, are duty bound, to take action to resolve issues of poor quality housing and inadequate management. Our approach to improving and resolving inadequate housing standards will continue to involve the use of regulatory tools where necessary including any mandatory requirements arising from the Housing and Planning Act 2016.

Empty Homes

Despite the need for new homes to be built in the district, there are also a number of empty homes in the district which are a potentially wasted resource. Refurbishing and repairing empty homes can help improve the look and feel of a neighbourhood. Derelict property can attract problems, such as fly tipping, vandalism and arson.

Councils in England can charge owners 50% extra in council tax if owners leave properties empty for two or more years which can be a key deterrent for some, but not all, owners.

Another power available to councils is a compulsory purchase order (CPO), which is only applicable if we can show we have tried to encourage the owner to bring a building back to acceptable use. But compulsory purchase is generally seen as an intervention of last resort given the difficulty and time associated with achieving a CPO.

Councils can apply for Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EMDOs), allowing us to take over the management of some residential properties that have been empty for at least two years and where there is no reasonable expectation of them being occupied in the near future. They also have to be proven magnets for vandalism, squatters and other forms of anti-social behaviour to qualify.

In Huntingdonshire there are currently around 120 dwellings which have been unfurnished and unoccupied for more than 2 years. The council applies 50% additional Council Tax on relevant properties. Given the relatively small number of empty homes in the district whilst we do encourage empty homes to be brought back into use we generally do not take further enforcement action or seek CPOs or EMDOs.

Adaptations, accessible housing, and support

The Council has demonstrated a strong commitment to enabling vulnerable people to live independently.

We worked in partnership with Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire District Council to form a shared service for Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) in April 2012. It generates some cost savings arising from a reduction in management and associated costs and generates some economies of scale with increased purchasing power of adaptations and equipment like stair-lifts.

The importance of housing adaptations in supporting people to live more independently in their own homes and communities has increasingly been recognised nationally as a way of reducing the cost of other more expensive institutional forms of care.

There has been a significant uplift in funding from Better Care fund in recent years and this is expected to continue to rise. The Better Care Fund aims to integrate health, social care and other public services and to create more joined up and sustainable services.

The provision of aids and adaptations form part of the strategic response to helping to keep vulnerable people in their own accommodation for as long as possible. There is high demand for DFGs in Huntingdonshire with approximately 200 DFGs completed per year. The budget for DFG is under pressure and we are committed to working with other agencies, including the County Council who administer the Better Care Fund, to review future demand and budgets for this work.

A Cambridgeshire DFG Review was completed during 2016 and made 3 key findings:

- New services are needed that consider people's needs in context, including early conversations and planning for the longer term: services need to engage with people before they need an adaptation, and should encourage people to think about whether the accommodation they are living in is suitable for the longer term.
- Existing services need to adapt to support a growing population: performance in many parts of the county is too slow in the implementation of adaptations funded through DFGs. It is recommended that the ability to 'fast track' commonly requested small adaptations (e.g. level access showers) be introduced and that a full review of existing processes and procedures is needed to speed up the DFG process.
- Funding arrangements across the system will need to change to support a shift in focus: the significant increase in capital funding offers new opportunities for the Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) to generate more fees and become financially self-sustainable.

County and District Councils in Cambridgeshire are working together to establish new ways of working to respond to and implement the findings of the review and to provide early intervention to enable the best solutions to meet customers' needs in line with the objectives of the Better Care Fund²¹.

Handyperson Service

Since April 2016, HDC has commissioned a Handyperson / Safer Homes service provided by Age UK which provides small repairs to people's homes to make them safer to live in, tackling issues that may cause slips trips and falls. The scheme has been funded by six partners and in its first year of operation has supported 255 households in Huntingdonshire by undertaking small works on their behalf and an additional 22 health and wellbeing assessments have been undertaken.

The majority of work (70%) undertaken was for owner occupiers and 27% for social housing tenants. The service is predominantly reaching the most elderly people in the population with more than 50% of the work being done for people aged over 80.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/607754/Integration_and_BCF_policy_framework_2017-19.pdf

The most requested work is the installation of grab rails, banister rails, galvanised rails and key safes. During 2016/17, 19 people were urgently supported by the Handyperson Service to enable their timely discharge from hospital.

Mobile Homes

The Council continues to own a mobile homes site at St Neots which is managed by Luminus. The scheme provides 50 plots of land for mobile home owners to rent. The scheme is popular and well run and provides a form of lower cost home ownership, helping to meet the needs of this segment of the market.

Fuel poverty

Fuel poverty in England is measured using the Low Income High Costs (LIHC) indicator. Under the LIHC indicator, a household is considered to be fuel poor if:

- they have required fuel costs that are above average (the national median level)
- were they to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

Fuel poverty data provided by BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industry Strategy) indicated that in 2014, there were approximately 4790 households (6.7% of the housing stock, across all tenures) in the district in fuel poverty. This is a small reduction from the figure published for 2013 which was estimated at 7%.

Fuel poverty is caused by several factors including high fuel costs, low income levels, poor thermal efficiency and under-occupancy of homes. A sustainable way of reducing fuel poverty is to improve the thermal performance of homes, which will enable affordable warmth, improve the condition of the housing stock, increase the well-being of residents and help to reduce the number of excess winter deaths. HDC is committed to reducing fuel poverty across the district as set out in the Corporate Plan 2017-18.

Affordable Warmth initiatives

Improving the energy efficiency of properties reduces carbon emissions, enables affordable warmth, alleviates fuel poverty and improves the condition of housing stock. Huntingdonshire is committed to continuing to encourage energy efficiency in residential accommodation.

The Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 obliges Councils to report current and planned activities by which it will comply with the Act. The latest HDC report²² prepared in March 2017 provides full details of HDC's activity. In summary; from 2013 to 2016 the Council worked in partnership with the other district councils in the County and Cambridgeshire County Council to provide our own Green Deal known as Action on Energy. By working in partnership, the councils were successful in bidding for a significant grant from the Government's Green Deal Communities fund. More than £860,000 was spent within Huntingdonshire delivering 210 measures in 199 homes, including owner occupied and private rented properties. The majority (80%) of the measures were solid wall insulation, a measure which traditionally has had very low uptake due to the high costs involved. Another particularly successful outcome was the insulation of 27 park homes, where householders are at significant risk of being in fuel poverty as they are often retired and on a fixed income

²² <https://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk/media/1265/home-energy-conservation-act-further-report.pdf>

and their properties are poorly insulated and heating significantly more expensive due to using propane gas heaters or electric storage radiators.

The Action on Energy consortium are aiming to deliver further energy conservation measures through the new Energy Company Obligation (ECO) schemes. The consortium is currently seeking commercial energy partners to deliver a quality energy saving scheme for residents.

HDC continues to work with the Stay Well partnership, a countywide initiative with partners from NHS, Fire Service, County Council, voluntary organisations (particularly children and golden age groups) and district councils. The aim is to provide advice on reducing fuel and food poverty, living well and to provide small grants for energy efficiency improvements and advice on fuel debt.

Energy Efficiency Standards in rented accommodation

From April 2018, subject to a suitable funding stream being available, every new tenancy agreement entered into for private rented properties must meet Band E energy efficiency standard, as a minimum. From April 2020 these requirements will apply to all occupied properties in the domestic sector and from April 2023 in the non-domestic sector. Enforcement of these standards is the responsibility of Trading Standards within Cambridgeshire County Council. As private landlords are able to advertise their available properties to let on the HDC website, information and links are provided on the site so that prospective tenants are aware of the landlord's obligation to provide an energy performance certificate and Gas Safety certificate. This will also be highlighted to landlords through the HDC Landlords Forum.

Improving communities

Huntingdonshire District Council, like other local authorities, has a duty to respond to issues of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour within the district. Anti-social behaviour can take many forms from neighbour disputes to loud parties or misuse of alcohol and will effect communities differently.

HDC has strong systems in place for reporting, monitoring and acting on anti-social behaviour (ASB). Within HDC, the ASB team is now closely aligned with other services such as Community Development and Environmental Health to ensure that we utilise a wide range of legislative powers to tackle nuisance and disturbances.

The Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership enables a full range of partners, including the Police and registered providers to work in partnership with Community Enforcement Officers to discuss and put in place a response to individuals or families who are having the most impact within our communities. Housing is a theme in much of the work linked to community safety, whether this is through protecting the needs of victims of crime, including domestic violence, or through specific projects such as work on preventing child sexual exploitation, modern slavery and work with migrant communities.

The legislation that we utilise can require an individual to stop doing something as well as require them to do something that would result in a positive outcome. We believe that prevention is better than cure and a lot of our work focuses on early intervention and

diverting children and young people away from offending behaviour and ensuring that they are aware of the consequences should they choose to commit an offence.

The Huntingdonshire Community Safety Partnership is in the process of confirming its priorities for the coming three years and these will include protecting vulnerable people and locations. The ASB service looks at individual cases and also considers area-wide issues.

Priority 4: Work in partnership to improve outcomes

Cambridge sub-region – The Council works in partnership with other Councils in the Cambridge sub-region to co-ordinate work and share learning. The outcomes of this are set out in the sub-regional Housing Statement and action plans²³, with the two most significant achievements being the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and the Homelink choice based lettings system for the allocation of social housing across the sub-region.

Housing is key to everyone's health, well-being and employment opportunities. It is vital to a thriving, healthy local economy.

Across Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Huntingdonshire, Peterborough, South Cambridgeshire, Forest Heath and St Edmundsbury, the Cambridge sub-Regional Housing Board (CRHB) works with its partners to share learning and experience to:

- Deliver new homes and communities to support economic success.
- Ensure homes and services support better health and wellbeing.
- Improve standards in existing homes and encourage best use of all homes.
- Identify and meet housing need, extend housing choice and tackle homelessness.

Outcomes of joint work are available at :

<http://www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing/background>

Shared Services

Together with Cambridge City Council and South Cambs District Council, we have formed a three-way strategic partnership for the development of shared services. The Home Improvement Agency was the first service to be shared in this way and IMD, Legal, and Building Control have followed. The shared service agenda seeks efficiencies and enhanced resilience in services and more services integral to the delivery of this Strategy may follow in the future.

Devolution

Devolution is the statutory delegation of powers from central government to regions. During 2016, the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough devolution area was consulted upon and Huntingdonshire District Council, alongside Cambridge City Council, Cambridgeshire County Council, East Cambridgeshire District Council, Fenland District Council, Peterborough City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council supported a devolution deal for the combined area. During 2017 a Combined Authority was created and in May 2017 a new Mayor was elected. The first devolution deal includes decisions on things like housing, transport and major infrastructure projects. However, further devolution deals are expected to be negotiated in due course. The first devolution deal includes the provision of £100

²³ <http://www.cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/housing-resources>

million for affordable housing. Given the increasing number of people on our housing register and the difficulty of providing options for rehousing we are keen to maximise the opportunities which this funding will provide to deliver new affordable homes in Huntingdonshire. This joint approach to delivering services across the County will improve efficiencies and outcomes.

Registered Providers

The council works in partnership with Registered Providers who own and manage affordable housing stock in the district and those seeking to develop in the area. The largest provider of affordable housing in Huntingdonshire is Luminus Group who own around 7,000 homes in Huntingdonshire. Whilst the governance of Registered Providers is within the remit of the Homes and Communities Agency, we work in partnership with providers to support our shared aims to ensure the provision of high quality affordable homes which are well managed and contribute to improving communities. We have a long established system for allocating new and vacant affordable homes, which is administered by us, and ensures that homes are allocated as quickly as possible and contribute to meeting the greatest local need.

Annex 1: The sources of information on which the Housing Strategy is based includes:

- Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) which contains analysis of demographic trends, income, affordability, and objectively assessed housing needs;
- Housing Register information;
- Local Plan evidence including viability assessments, and Annual Monitoring Reports;
- Housing, Employment and Population Trends Technical Report;
- Intelligence on housing stock condition;
- Trends in service provision including demand for homelessness services and affordable housing;
- Needs for supported housing obtained from Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs), Health and Well Being Board (HWBB), and partnership work with the County Council and health colleagues;
- Delivery information obtained by building and maintaining relationships with delivery partners e.g developers, housing associations, third sector etc.

Annex 2: Feedback on achievements of the previous Housing Strategy 2012-15 (up to 31st March 2017) are set out below:

- Commencement on draft of Local Plan to 2036
- Implementation of Community Infrastructure Levy to increase the amount of funding from developers towards infrastructure
- Supported housing association bids seeking inward investment from the HCA
- Increased the provision of affordable housing with 500 new affordable homes being provided (2012/13-2016/17)
- Updated the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) as a key evidence base for the Local Plan
- Agreed package of infrastructure including affordable housing, enabling the first phase of Alconbury Weald to commence
- Approved additional pitches to meet assessed needs for Gypsies and Travellers
- Drafted an 'enabled exceptions' policy. This makes use of new powers in National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) enabling a proportion of private homes to be included on rural exception sites where cross-subsidy is required. The first of these sites (Brington) has been developed in phases and most of the homes are now occupied.
- Built a pipeline of rural exception sites including Brington and Warboys (completed), Colne On-site) and Earith (completed), Needingworth (planning application imminent), Ramsey St Mary (planning application submitted), Bluntisham, and a potential Community Land Trust at Great Staughton.
- Supported 1033 people to live independently through the provision of Disabled Facilities Grants (2012/13-2016/17)
- Updated the Housing Renewal Assistance policy to ensure it aligns with the objectives of the Better Care Fund.
- Introduced a joint Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations Agreement to implement the findings of a DFG Review.
- Reduced the impact of housing on the environment via publicity and promotion of energy efficiency measures in the Council's Green Houses; publicity of energy efficiency schemes including Warmfront and CO2Y Homes.
- Utilised the Government's Green Deal Communities Fund to access more than £860,000 to deliver 210 measures in 199 homes, including owner occupied and private rented properties.
- Brought a redundant office block back into residential use, and converted it into four flats with grant funding from the Homes and Communities Agency.
- Prevented 1349 households from becoming homeless by a range of interventions including rent deposit, advice and assistance, landlord liaison, and court advocacy.
- Developed a sub-regional under-occupation partnership as a co-ordinated response to welfare reform. This partnership spanned seven district council areas and included housing association and Council partners. It aimed to facilitate movement between landlords, making the best use of the existing housing stock.
- Grant funded a project with Luminus to extend a number of two and three bedroom houses into four bedroom properties to extend provision for large families.
- Produced a Tenancy Strategy to comply with the Localism Act 2011, setting out the Council's expectations of providers in respect of flexible tenancies.

- Completed two reviews of the Lettings Policy and completed a re-tender exercise for the sub-regional choice-based lettings housing register, resulting in a new provider and contract achieving savings on the current contract.
- Assisted 29 households to repair their homes via Repairs Assistance loans.
- Extended the provision of temporary accommodation by working in partnership with Luminus to purchase a 13 bedroomed property for use by homeless households.
- Improved housing conditions in the private rented sector by tackling category 1 and 2 hazards, investigating illegal eviction, and promoting good management standards through the private landlords forum.
- Adopted a new Design Guide as Supplementary Planning Document
- Following preparation of a Guide we launched a Neighbourhood and Community Planning offer and support localities who are interested in pursuing housing related initiatives.
- Successfully bid for £2.3m of HCA and DoH funding to redevelop an outdated sheltered housing scheme at St Ives with a new extra care scheme which opened in 2016.
- Hosted 10 private landlord forums and produced 10 landlord focused newsletters.