

East Herts District Council

Housing Stock Condition Survey 2009

Executive Summary

Introduction

1. This report presents the findings of a housing stock condition survey carried out for East Herts District Council.
2. The work has been undertaken with due regard to Government guidance, especially:
 - ❖ *'Collecting, Managing and Using Housing Stock Information – a good practice guide' (DETR) (updated 2000).*
 - ❖ *A Decent Home: The definition and guidance for implementation*, ODPM, February 2004, updated in June 2006
 - ❖ *'Decent Homes: Capturing the standard at the local level - A supplementary annex to Collecting, Managing and Using Housing Stock Information - A Good Practice Guide (DETR 2000)'*, ODPM, 2002.
 - ❖ *Housing Health and Safety Rating System Operating Guidance: Housing Act 2004 Guidance about inspections and assessment of hazards given under Section 9*, ODPM, February 2006
3. The data presented is based on surveys completed at over 1,100 randomly selected dwellings through East Hertfordshire district and the results have been adjusted to reflect the composition of the housing stock in the district.

The results are statistically robust and provide an accurate reflection of housing conditions in the stock during 2009.

Fieldwork was carried out between May and July 2009 and included owner occupiers, private rented households and dwellings owned by a registered social landlord (RSL)

6. The data is presented in terms of seven sub areas that were representative of the key settlements in the district of East Hertfordshire along with the rural areas.

The table overleaf shows which settlements were in which sub area for the purposes of the survey.

Table EX.1

Sub Area	Settlements
AA Bishop's Stortford	Bishops Stortford and Thorley
BB Hertford	Hertford
CC Ware	Ware
DD Sawbridgeworth	Sawbridgeworth
EE Buntingford	Buntingford
FF Rural North	Albury, Ansley, Ardeley, Aspenden, Aston, Benington, Braughing, Brent Pelham, Buckland, Cottered, Datchworth, Furneux Pelham, Great Munden, Hormead, Little Munden, Meesden, Puckeridge, Standon, Stocking Pelham, Walkem, Westmill and Wyddial
GG Rural South	Bayford, Bengo Rural Area, Bramfield, Brickendon Liberty, Eastwick, Gilston, Great Amwell, Hertford Heath, Hertingfordbury, High Wych, Hunsdon, Little Berkhamstead, Little Hadham, Much Hadham, Sacombe, St Margarets, Stanstead Abbots, Stapleford, Tewin, Thundridge, Wareside, Watton at Stone and Widford

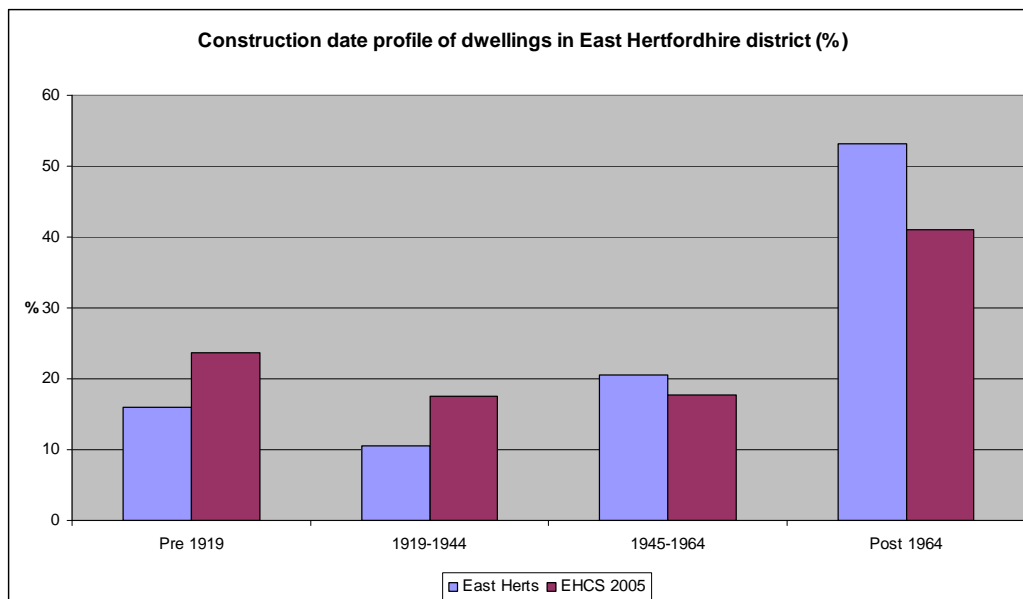
Results

Stock Profile

7. There are approximately 59,000 private sector dwellings in East Hertfordshire district, of which nearly 3 out of 4 dwellings are in owner occupation (the remainder being privately rented and in RSL ownership).
8. The private sector housing stock can be considered to be slightly newer than the national average with a greater proportion of dwellings built since 1945 than found in England as a whole.

This can be seen in the chart below.

Figure EX.1



The predominant building types are semi detached houses, terraced houses and detached houses.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

9. The new measure of housing standards is the housing health and safety rating system introduced by the Housing Act 2004.

The system sets out 29 hazards that are found to most commonly occur in dwellings. The basis of the estimates of the severity of the hazards is based upon extensive technical evidence, to which inspectors are required to have regard.

A hazard score is generated for each hazard from an assessment of the likelihood that a hazard will occur and have adverse outcomes and the spread of harm outcomes which is an indication of how serious the adverse outcome would be if it did occur.

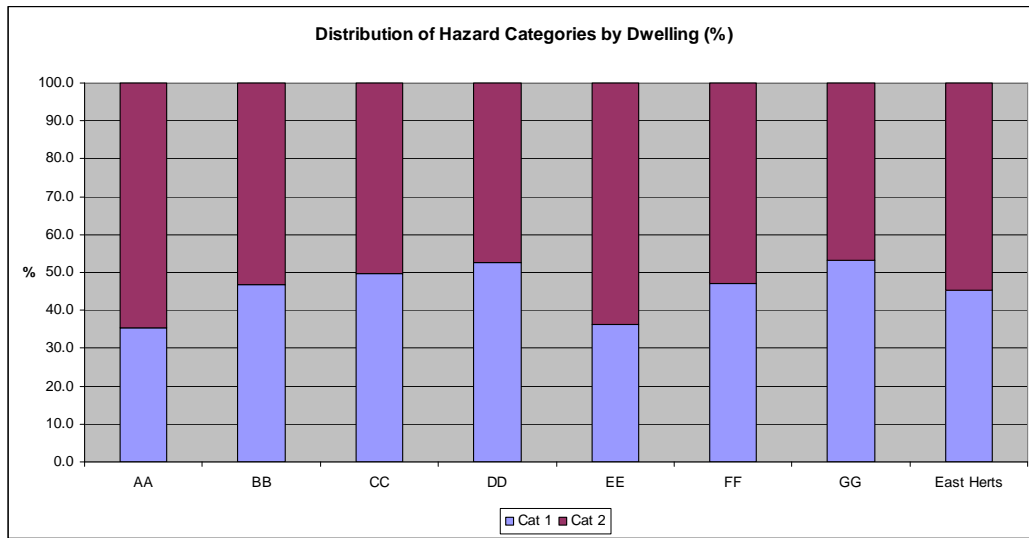
10. The Act places a duty on the Council to initiate action to seek to resolve what are known as Category 1 hazards. These are identified hazards that are considered to provide the greatest risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of the occupants, based upon the hazard score (which in the case of Category 1 hazards will be more than 1,000).
11. In East Hertfordshire, key Category 1 and Category 2 hazards identified in the survey were associated with excess cold and various fall and trip hazards.

It should be noted from the outset that the Guidance to which inspectors are required to have regard (*reference stated above*) states that the average dwelling in England built before 1980 has a likelihood and spread of harm outcomes that produces a Category 1 hazard in relation to the excess cold hazard (i.e. a score of 1,023). This has a significant bearing on all the HHSRS results (across the country).

12. Slightly less than 1 in 2 dwellings in the dwelling stock in East Hertfordshire were identified as having a Category 1 hazard, representing about 26,600 dwellings. Practically all dwellings with a Category 1 hazard were affected by the threat of excess cold and this is often associated with older harder to heat dwellings.

In a much smaller proportion of dwellings with Category 1 hazards the issue was due to the potential for falls on stairs, steps and ramps. This equates to about 1,300 dwellings.

Figure EX.2



AA	BB	CC	DD	EE	FF	GG
Bishop's Stortford	Hertford	Ware	Sawbridgeworth	Buntingford	Rural North	Rural South

Decent Homes

13. The Decent Homes standard was introduced in order to deliver a government commitment and to encourage the improvement of housing standards in, initially, the social sector.

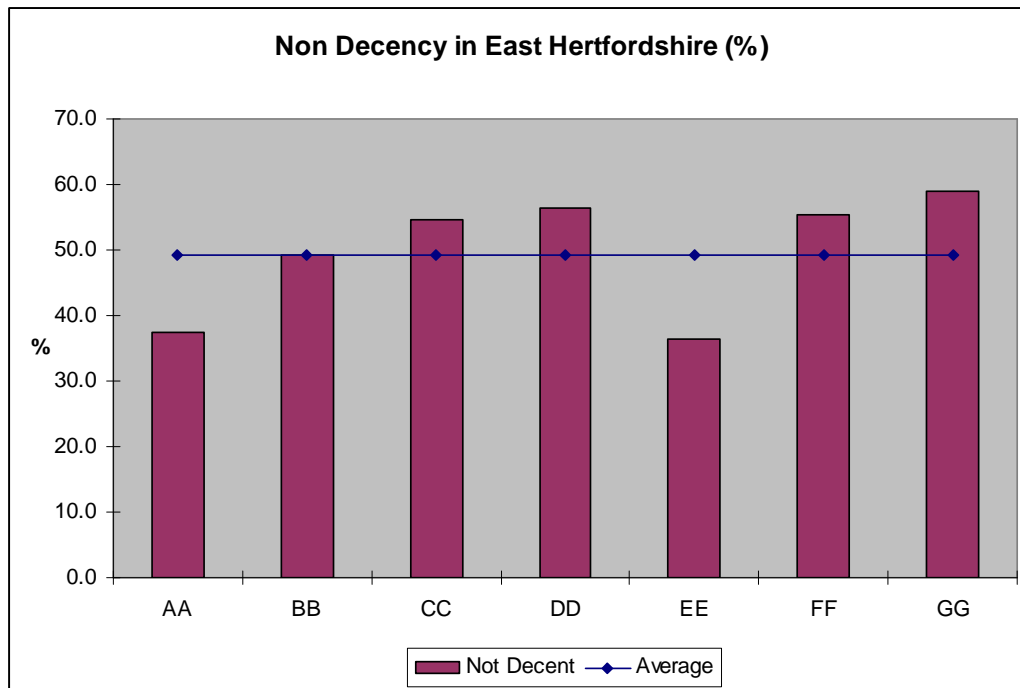
However, the standard was extended in 2002 to cover vulnerable households in the private sector.

14. The standard has four parts and guidance states that in order to be regarded as a Decent Home, a dwelling should:

- ❖ Be above the current statutory minimum standard for housing;
- ❖ Be in a reasonable state of repair;
- ❖ Have reasonably modern facilities and services; and
- ❖ Provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

15. Marginally less than half of occupied homes in East Hertfordshire fail to meet the Decent Homes standard, where the HHSRS is the current statutory minimum.

Figure Ex.3



AA	BB	CC	DD	EE	FF	GG
Bishop's Stortford	Hertford	Ware	Sawbridgeworth	Buntingford	Rural North	Rural South

16. Principal reasons for not meeting the standard are that the dwellings have a Category 1 hazard (i.e. are below the current statutory minimum) and/ or are not in a reasonable state of repair.

Liveability and Environmental Survey

17. The main environmental concerns are the adequacy of car parking, nuisance caused by street parking and the condition of roads and paths. There are further concerns regarding the amount of heavy traffic.
18. There is also some minor concern regarding the adequacy of street lighting.

Notably, the findings indicate only very minor problems with respect to vacant sites. Overall in East Hertfordshire there is no major occurrence of any problems arising from graffiti, industrial pollutants or industrial noise.

Energy Efficiency

19. The overall energy efficiency of the private sector housing stock (owner occupied, private rented and RSL's) in East Hertfordshire is better than the average across all tenures for England with an average NHER of 5.8 and an average SAP of 52. (The national average SAP across all tenures was 49.8 in 2007 according to the latest English House Condition Survey update report).

Fuel Costs and Affordable Warmth

20. The estimated annual fuel cost for the housing stock is an average of £1,603 per dwelling per year or about £30.83 per week. Affordable warmth has been defined as the ability to achieve a standard level of warmth for a fuel cost of no more than 10% of income. Alternatively, fuel poverty is defined as where fuel costs are more than 10% of income and in addition the terms severe fuel poverty and extreme fuel poverty are sometimes used to indicate where fuel costs are more than 20% and 30% of income respectively.

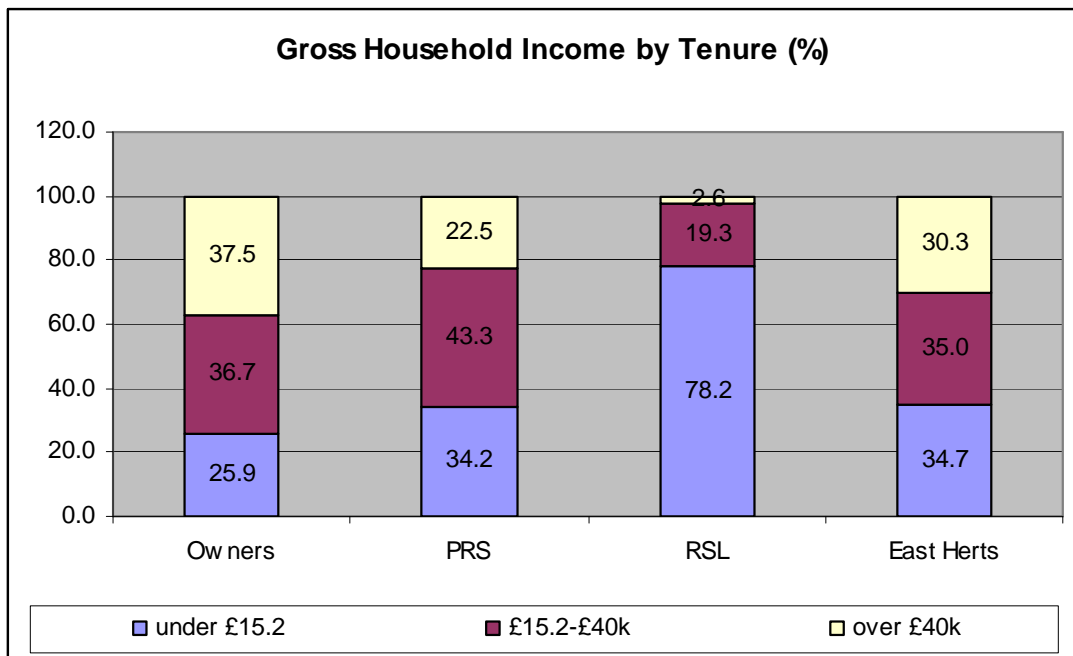
The total number of homes estimated to be at risk of fuel poverty (based on total income net of tax and National Insurance) is about 17,506. This suggests that 29.6% of households in the private sector (including RSL) dwellings are at risk of fuel poverty, with 6.3% at risk of severe fuel poverty and 2.2% at risk of extreme fuel poverty.

Socio-economic characters

21. As might be expected, household incomes are generally higher in the owner occupied sector and lower in the private rented and RSL sectors. However, it should be noted that about one quarter of owner occupiers are low income households, and slightly less than a quarter of private rented households are higher income households.

This is shown in the figure overleaf.

Figure Ex.4



22. A key finding is the relatively higher proportions of households in the RSL sector on low incomes.

However, given the eligibility criteria for RSL tenancies then this is not particularly unexpected.

23. As also might be expected, these findings carry over into benefit receipt with smaller proportions of owner occupiers and private rented tenants in receipt of means tested or disability related benefits and higher proportions in the RSL sector, especially housing benefit.
24. An estimated 42% of all households in the district overall reported negative or no savings whilst significantly higher proportions of households in the private rented and RSL sectors reported no savings (about 63 % and 64% respectively) compared with the owner-occupied is much lower at about 30%.

Costs to deal with identified problems

25. To tackle broad disrepair, using the Housing Act 1985 and English House Condition Survey approach would cost an estimated £245 million across the district over 10 years.
26. Some £45 million is identified as being required to deal with the issue of Category 1 hazards in housing stock across the district, with a sizeable majority of costs being associated with the remedying of excess cold hazards and falls.

27. Some £117 million is estimated to be required to remedy all non decency in the stock. However, much smaller amounts are needed to remedy non decency where owner occupied or privately rented households are vulnerable (using the definition in the Decent Homes guidance).

Recommendations

28. Whilst there has clearly been investment in the housing stock since the last housing stock condition survey we make the following recommendations.

Energy efficiency

29. However, **we would recommend that the Council redoubles its efforts in regard to energy efficiency improvements given its impact on supporting the wider health agenda and other strategic objectives.**

30. Specifically, targeted action through HHSRS will flag up excess cold issues as the biggest cause of Category 1 hazards and thus non decency in the private sector stock.

31. Additionally, poor energy efficiency and excess cold will also have a negative impact on Affordable Warmth policies as well as on the ability of the Council to continue to meet its remaining Home Energy Conservation Act targets and climate change obligations.

Action here will also help prevent excess winter deaths amongst older people, as well as contributing to NI 187 policies.

Disabled facilities support

32. The report identifies that about a fifth of households in East Hertfordshire contain a person with a disability, and there is potentially significant unmet need for disabled facilities grants.

33. **We would recommend that the Council continues to give priority in this area and to recognise the additional need that is likely to exist.**

Area targeting

34. It is worth noting that whilst poor housing conditions are found across the district, the rural areas should be kept in focus, and not overlooked due to the concentrations of disadvantage that might be found in some of the key urban areas.

35. **We would therefore recommend that the Council investigate the need to revisit its assistance for housing renewals policy in order to include the rural areas in its embrace alongside existing priorities.**