

East Herts Housing Strategy 2012 -2015



Draft

10/8/2012

The Council has developed an Equality Impact Assessment Toolkit which is a framework for conducting a systematic review of service activities, policies and practices with regard to all aspects of equalities (i.e. gender, race, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion). This Strategy is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment which will be available separately once the Strategy has been agreed.

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Foreword from Councillor Linda Haysey, Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support

I am pleased to introduce this new Housing Strategy for East Herts which provides a plan of action over the next three years. It sets out how we will all work towards improving existing housing and build new additional homes.

The Council recognises that having good housing is at the heart of keeping our communities vibrant and sustainable. This strategy sets out how we will respond to the challenges we face in meeting housing need over the next three years.

This housing strategy can only be delivered in partnership with others and many different partners have a role to play in making this happen. I look forward to the next few years as the plans within this strategy are put into place.

Executive Summary

To be completed once adopted

1.0 Introduction

Local authorities were until recently required to have a Housing Strategy. Although this legal requirement was removed councillors recognised the benefits of maintaining a strategy to inform and direct the council's activities in this important area. The Housing Strategy sets out "a vision for housing in its area" and "objectives and targets and policies" that explain how it will play a leading role to:

- assess and plan for current and future housing needs of the local population,
- make the best use of existing housing stock,
- plan and facilitate new supply,
- plan and commission housing support services which link homes to support and other services that people need to live in them, and
- have working partnerships that secure effective housing and neighbourhood management.

This Housing Strategy is an overarching strategy which sets out the Council's priorities to meet local housing needs and aspirations thereby contributing to the overall long-term aim to improve the quality of life for all the residents of East Herts. These priorities are translated into a series of Strategic Objectives and Actions.

East Herts Council no longer owns any Council housing having transferred the homes to two housing associations, Riversmead and Stort Valley (now South Anglia) Housing Associations in 2002. However, the Council still has the responsibility to be the strategic leader of housing in the district.

National Government Policy

In May 2010, a government committed to lowering the national deficit came to power. Public spending was reduced including funding to local government by 26% nationally over a two year period. The Formula Grant to East Herts was reduced in 2011/12 and will be reduced further in 2012/13. The Coalition Government has developed, consulted and put into law a number of changes to housing and social housing. These include the Welfare Reform Act, the Localism Act, the Energy Act and the Military Bill, which includes the military Covenant, and also the governments Housing Strategy for England 'Laying the Foundations (2011)'. Not all of these changes are directly relevant to East Herts and a brief summary has been included in the Appendices. However those that do will have a significant impact on the way housing is developed, allocated and managed in East Herts. The Council will ensure it carries out targeted consultations on the changes that affect the way it allocates the affordable homes in the district to both the residents and partners affected.

Housing Strategy for England 'Laying the Foundations'.

'Government recognises that housing should provide a secure foundation for people's lives: the ability to find the right home in the right place is vital for family life and for sustainable employment. The government identifies four main types of household: aspiring homeowners who are in the private rented sector, younger recent homebuyers who cannot 'trade up' to a better home, older 'established homeowners' and 'lifelong renters' especially in the social sector.'

It introduces new approaches and interventions, including:

- A mortgage indemnity scheme for purchase of new build property
- Support for locally-led large scale development
- Further efforts on public sector land release
- Provision of development finance for stalled sites
- Further support for custom-build (self-build) housing
- The next steps for council housing finance reform
- Clearer intentions around reinvigorating the Right to Buy
- Clarity on guidance around allocation of social housing
- Support for investment in new private rented sector homes
- Additional financial support to tackle empty homes
- Consideration of ways to improve housing options for older people.

There are a number of consultations that the government will be issuing regarding these changes. The Strategy can be found on the Communities and Local Government website at: <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/housingstrategy2011>

Welfare Reforms and Housing Benefit Changes

Welfare reforms have reduced the Housing Benefit awards available to private sector tenants, by changing the way the maximum amount of Housing Benefit payable is calculated and setting further caps on these amounts that affect high rent areas. There are plans to restrict awards to single private sector tenants aged 25 to 34, and to social housing tenants of working age living in a home larger than their household needs. There are further changes due in 2013 that will cap the total amount of benefits payable to claimants, Universal Credit, and bring the rate of increases in benefits into line with the Consumer Prices Index, a measure of inflation that has fallen well below rental inflation in recent years. These changes are likely to increase the demand for advice services and see a growth in Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) in East Herts.

Funding for affordable housing development

The grant available for affordable housing development over the period 2011-15 is about 50% less than during the previous four year period. Aiming to sustain development despite this, the government developed a new tenure, known as 'Affordable Rent', whereby registered housing providers charge rents at up to 80% of local market levels and use the increased rental income to support additional borrowing to compensate for reduced grant. Grant will not be available for affordable housing developed as a condition of planning permission. New models of funding

affordable housing development may emerge, with approaches relying on selling some homes on the open market to ensure viability.

Housing reforms

At the same time as reducing spending to housing-related areas, the government has announced and started implementing proposals that have given housing a new prominence on the political agenda. The Localism Act which became law in late 2011 makes provision for social housing providers to give new tenants fixed term tenancies that are subject to regular review. It outlines discretionary powers that will allow local housing authorities to exclude those with no statutory priority for social housing from applying for it and to offer private sector tenancies to homeless households. These provisions are intended to help ensure that affordable housing better meets need, but allow housing providers and local authorities to adopt solutions they consider will most effectively meet need in their localities. The government is currently consulting (until 30 March 2012) on a document called 'Allocation of accommodation: guidance for local housing authorities in England'. The guidance consults on proposed new statutory measures to local housing authorities on the allocation of social housing. One of the key objectives of the paper is to change the current allocation of social housing. The government wants to free up the existing system and to give greater powers of determination to housing authorities, and to increase clarity and transparency around their allocation system.

Regulation of social housing

A final change in housing policy relates to the regulation of social housing. The Tenant Services Authority (TSA), created following a 2007 review, has regulated Housing Associations from December 2008 and Council housing from April 2010, emphasising customer-focused outcomes and introducing a model whereby social landlords agree "Local Offers" with tenants. The Localism Act abolishes the TSA, shifting its regulatory role to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), whilst altering that role so monitoring powers are deployed only where (risk of) serious failures affecting tenants are identified.

National and Local Planning

The Localism Act has introduced a number of changes to the planning system including at the national level replacing Planning Policy Statements (PPS) with a single and shortened National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and removing the regional tier of planning by abolishing regional spatial strategies such as the East of England Plan (pending). At the local level, whilst the principles of the Local Development Framework (LDF) are being retained, it is being rebranded as the District Plan. A new, albeit voluntary, tier of statutory planning has also been introduced at the parish level called neighbourhood planning. This enables town and parishes to prepare their own plan for their area setting out where new housing should be located. Another element of the Localism Act is the Community Right to Build (CRtB). This enables communities to directly retain the benefits of any development.

East Herts Council is currently progressing with its District Plan which will set the overarching principles for development in East Herts to 2031. This document will identify the broad locations for new housing and set out the Council's affordable housing policies.

To ensure that housing and planning policies are based upon comprehensive and robust evidence the Council worked jointly with other neighbouring districts to carry out a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) for the London Commuter Belt (East)/M11 sub-region. SHMAs provide local authorities with information to develop a strategic approach to housing through consideration of housing need and demand in all housing sectors (owner occupied, private rented and affordable). It also considers the key drivers and relationships within the housing market. Preliminary work is being undertaken to refresh the SHMA to update it and take into account housing reforms.

New Homes Bonus

To encourage delivery of additional housing the Government has also introduced an incentive scheme called the New Homes Bonus. The Government will match the council tax raised for each new home for the first six years after that home is built. An additional amount is payable for every additional affordable home. The bonus also applies to empty properties bought back into use as well as Gypsy and Traveller plots. East Herts Council receives 80% of the New Homes Bonus (20% goes to Hertfordshire County Council) and of this, 25% is given to the relevant parish council. The premise of the New Homes Bonus is to ensure that the economic benefits of growth are returned to the communities where growth takes place.

National and Local Public Health Framework

The government is creating a new public health system, embodying localism, with new responsibilities and resources for local government. The framework of this new national approach is directed at improving health and wellbeing of local populations. Local authorities will commission public health services for their populations, resourced by a ring fenced grant, and put health and wellbeing at the heart of all their activity.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

For Hertfordshire, following on from the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, Hertfordshire County Council and the Primary Care Trust in 2008 prepared and published an assessment of relevant needs in the area. This needs assessment was updated in 2011. Ensuring consultation with each District Council in future developments is essential to aligning the work of district councils with this evidence based approach, and is required by the Act.

The focus of the national Public Health Outcomes Framework 2013-16 (DoH January 2012), is on achieving positive health outcomes and reducing inequalities in health. Public Health indicators will measure improvements in the wider factors that affect health and wellbeing. Housing repair, improvement and adaptation, and our work to improve standards in Houses in Multiple Occupation are all wider health determinants which affect the health and wellbeing of residents.

The Health and Social Care Act requires the establishment of Health and Wellbeing Boards which will be a forum for key leaders from the health and social care system to work together to reduce health inequalities and improve the health and wellbeing of their local population.

Hertfordshire has formed a shadow Health and Wellbeing Board, to enable understanding of our local community's needs, agree priorities and encourage all parties to work together to provide more joined-up services.

Drawing on information gathered for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), the shadow Board has proposed eight priorities across Hertfordshire where evidence suggests a joint approach will have the most effective impact on the Health and Wellbeing of the population of Hertfordshire, upon which it is consulting from April to the middle of July 2012.

The new health arrangements are due to come into place formally from April 1st 2013 and the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board will be central to the delivery of this function. The JSNA will be the source of evidence based data to inform and direct local delivery which will drive the local priorities of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The County Council has appointed a Director of Public Health (DPH) who is responsible for putting the plans in place and being accountable for the public health progress locally including identifying solutions to any problems that may arise.

Public Health action through housing and environmental health work is a vital component in improving these wider determinants of health. Officers from Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Councils are working together to seek to inform and influence the Board's priorities. The Housing Strategy priorities need to reflect the new Health and Wellbeing Board priorities and address the wider housing determinants of health so it can be a driver in reducing health inequalities locally.

East Herts adopted a Public Health Strategy 2008-13 with annual action plans involving inputs from internal and external health partners. The second strategy will need to bridge any gap between local health needs and those identified as County wide priorities. The document can be found on the following link:

http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/media/pdf/1//East_Herts_Public_Health_Strategy_2008-2013_FINAL.pdf

Section 2 - East Herts in Context

The district of East Herts covers an area of 477 square kilometres (184 square miles) and comprises around one third of the area of the County of Hertfordshire. It is predominantly a rural district, with attractive towns and villages set in a rolling landscape.

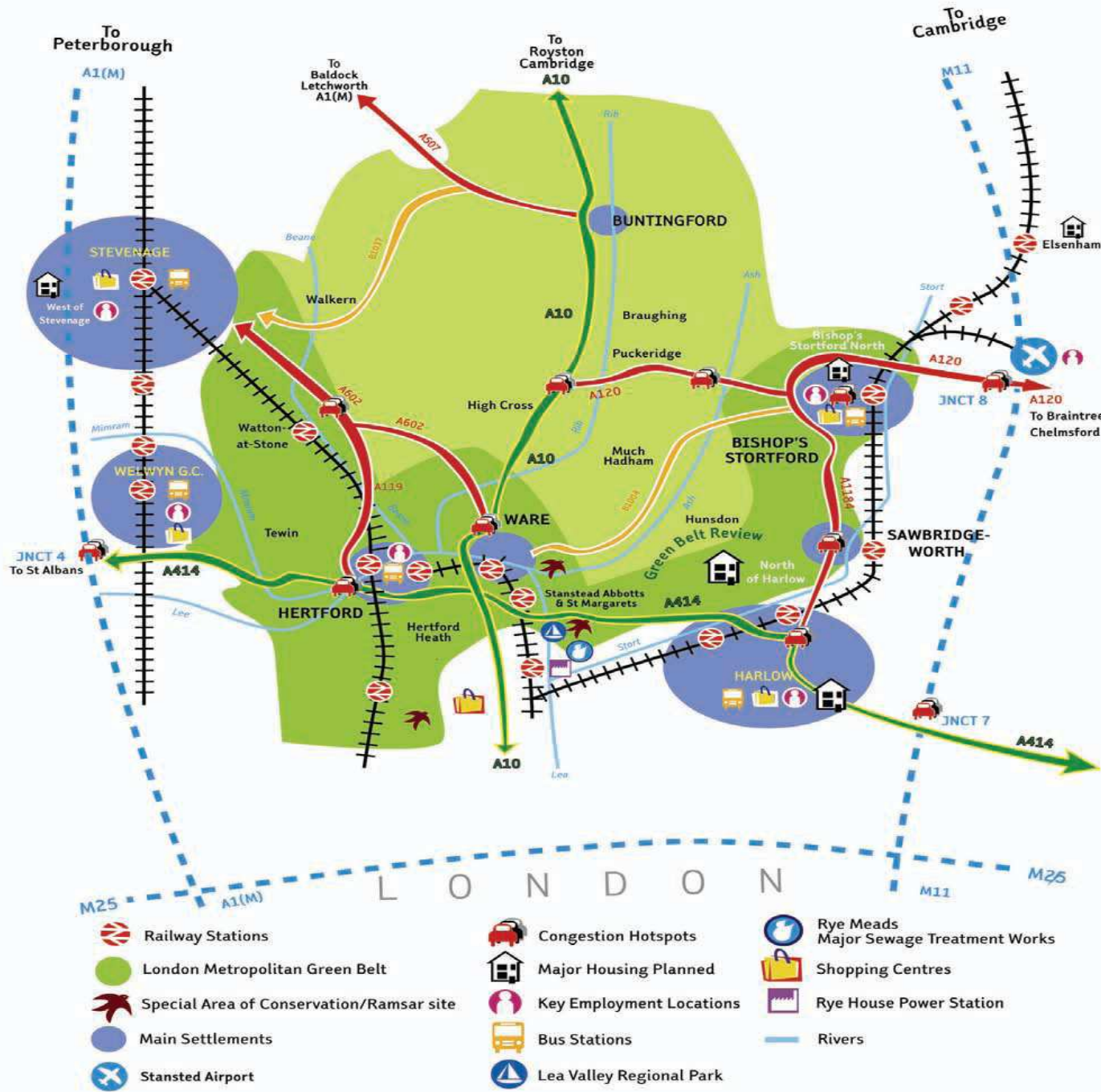
East Herts has a dispersed settlement pattern that includes the five market towns of Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware. Each of the towns provides a range of services to the surrounding rural area. There are also some hundred villages and hamlets of varying sizes.

East Herts has the most significant rural economic profile in the county. There are 433 holdings in East Herts in total occupying 34,647 hectares. This is significant in terms of farming, land and diversification alone. Many of these businesses have diversified and have a second income stream.

The district is heavily influenced by the presence of major settlements beyond its borders. The three New Towns of Stevenage, Harlow and Welwyn Garden City are located immediately on the East Herts district boundary, and there is pressure for expansion of these settlements. There are also substantial cross-boundary influences from Cambridgeshire to the north and Essex to the east.

Historical development of the transport network has resulted in the district being largely bypassed by strategic road and rail corridors; with the M11 and the West Anglia Main Line between London and Cambridge to the east; and the A1(M) and East Coast Main Line to the west. The M25 London Orbital Motorway lies further to the south. Within the district, the main road routes are the A10, which bisects the district roughly in half on a north-south axis; and the A414 in the south of the district, running in an east-west direction. The A120 also runs east-west from the A10 at Puckeridge to Bishop's Stortford and beyond, and the A602 links the A10 from Ware with the A1(M) in Stevenage. Stansted Airport, whilst outside the district, is immediately to the north-east of Bishop's Stortford and has strategic implications for the area.

Approximately the southern third of the district lies within the London Metropolitan Green Belt (17,530 hectares). The rural nature and scattered settlement pattern of the district in addition to high levels of affluence has resulted in high levels of car ownership with 66% of the working population traveling to work by car.



East Herts Population and Housing

There were a total of **58,148 dwellings registered for council tax purposes in East Herts at 1st April 2010**¹. The Office for National Statistics in 2011 records 87% of East Herts' dwellings as being owner occupied or privately rented compared to 82% for England. The social rented sector accounted for 13% of the housing compared to 18% for England.

East Herts generally provides an attractive residential environment and this creates a high level of demand for housing in the district. This demand is reflected in higher than average house prices for the region compared to the rest of the Eastern Region and a Council housing register that is increasing year on year and no significant 'difficult to let' problems. Average house prices are high and the result is that many people who grow up in the district and those needing to move into the area are unable to buy.

East Herts' private rented sector has traditionally been limited (7.2% recorded by 2001 Census) but is growing. This is consistent with the recognised national trend of more Buy To Let properties. Rent levels are high and market demand is strong. There is significant demand from company relocations and high earners on short-term contracts. Access to the sector for local people on lower incomes can therefore be difficult.

The district has witnessed significant population growth in recent years. Between 1981 and 2006 the population increased by 21% and is expected to increase from approximately 135,700 (55,000 households) in 2006 to 148,200 in 2021². Significantly 62% of this growth is anticipated to be aged over 65 years with population decreases in the 15-24 and 35-44 age groups³.

Figure 1: Population and household projections

| Population projections | 2001 | 2008 | % inc | 2012 | % inc | 2021 | % inc |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| East Herts | 128,900 | 135,700 | 5% | 139,000 | 2% | 148,200 | 7% |
| Hertfordshire | 1,034.0 | 1,083.9 | 5% | 1,118.7 | 2% | 1,203.4 | 7% |

Source: Census 2001, Office for National Statistics Sub-national 2008 population projections

| Household projections | 2001 | 2008 | 2013 | 2023 | 2033 |
|------------------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| East Herts | 52,200 | 56,000 | 59,000 | 66,000 | 72,000 |
| Hertfordshire | 421,000 | 446,000 | 471,000 | 525,000 | 574,000 |

¹ HSSA return April 2010

² Office for National Statistics Sub-national 2008 population projections

³ Office for National Statistics Sub-national 2008 population projections

Source: Communities and Local Government household estimates and projections Table 406 and CLG 2008 based Sub-national Household projections.

By 2016 it is projected that in East Herts the number of married couple households will decrease whilst that of cohabiting couples and one person will increase⁴.

According to the 2001 Census the Black & Minority Ethnic (BME) population accounts for less than three percent of the population of East Herts and is made up of a mix of primarily Chinese and Indian. There has been a steady increase in the percentage of BME population in East Hertfordshire. In 2010 the Office for National Statistics reports that 14% of the population in East Herts were of an ethnic minority. The figures show a steady increase in White Other ethnic population in East Herts from 2.7% in the Census to 4.7% of total population in 2010. The Council is aware of this increase being primarily amongst the Polish and Portuguese communities in East Herts and has tailored a number of its services to meet the needs of this population primarily through its Community Team meeting with local community and faith leaders.

East Herts – The Economy

East Herts is a prosperous district with higher than average earnings and a low unemployment rate at 1.8% compared to 2.8% for the East of England and 3.5% for Great Britain⁵. Of the 354 districts in England, East Herts is ranked as the 18th most affluent/successful, although this disguises pockets of relative deprivation within the district⁶. Educational attainment is generally very high with nearly three quarters of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades at A* to C⁷. There is a recognised need to ensure that the skills of the workforce are appropriate for the businesses in the district. It is therefore important to maximise opportunities for life-long learning through links with further education providers. This is of particular importance in the rural area where access to these facilities is limited.

The district has a sound economic base built on small and medium-sized firms including engineering, high-tech computer companies, brewing, printing, food processing and distribution, and Stansted Airport related service industries. Both local government and the pharmaceuticals industry are major employers in East Herts. There is also a small but significant presence of employment in the district's rural area. Given the district's proximity to London and transport links approximately 17% of the working population commute to and from the Capital⁸.

Like elsewhere, East Herts has felt the impact of the recession, but there is evidence of economic resilience in the district with the vast majority of businesses successfully continuing their trade. However, whilst the five town centres offer a range of high street and independent

⁴ Communities and Local Government household estimates and projections

⁵ National Statistics (NOMIS) November 2010

⁶ CLG (2008) Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2007

⁷ East Herts Local Development Framework Core Strategy Consultation Document 2010

⁸ East Herts Local Development Framework Core Strategy Consultation Document 2010

shops and services, there is competition from neighbouring centres offering a greater retail choice.

East Herts - Safer Communities

East Herts has a relatively low crime rate and has no areas with severe or longstanding crime and disorder problems. Nevertheless, anti-social behaviour, crime and the fear of crime causes distress to individuals and is destructive to communities.

The Council as a member of the East Herts Community Safety Partnership identifies and implements effective initiatives. The partnership brings together key statutory and non-statutory agencies, including the police and social landlords, to identify and implement initiatives to improve the safety of the community. The East Herts Community Safety Plan sets out the priorities of the partnership and targets for reducing the impact of crime and anti-social behaviour in the district.

Current initiatives carried out between the Council and its partners include Visual Audits and Street Briefings, which are carried out with the significant housing associations as well as the Police and Council officers and concentrate resident consultation to improve neighbourhood areas by addressing the specific concerns of residents.

Section 3 The Vision for East Herts

The Council's corporate vision is:

To improve the quality of people's lives and preserve all that is best in East Herts.

The Council's Corporate Strategic Plan 2012-16 sets out the overall vision and direction for the council over the next four years. It highlights the high level priorities for the council and identifies the key outcomes that will be achieved. The plan forms the basis for the council's performance management activities and will drive the distribution of resources. The Council has adopted a new framework of priorities to ensure that it continues to provide high quality services and remain committed to the community it serves. As part of this the Council has agreed three priorities. They are:

- **People** – Opportunities for everyone to contribute to and access the council's services
- **Place** - Safe and Clean
- **Prosperity** – Improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities

Service Plans are produced every year by Heads of Service, agreed by the council's elected members and set out what key actions need to be undertaken to deliver the outcomes contained in the Corporate Strategic Plan. These actions are linked to key performance indicators, so achievement can be measured and tracked. The Corporate Strategic Plan and Service Plans then feed into a four-year budget-planning model, which the council uses to plan its expenditure and make sure that financial resources are available to fund actions in priority areas. The Council's Corporate Strategic Plan 2012-16 can be found at:

[http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/media/pdf/4/7/Corporate Strategic Plan 2012-13 - 2015-16.pdf](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/media/pdf/4/7/Corporate_Strategic_Plan_2012-13_-_2015-16.pdf)

There are a number of other strategies and plans that have had a direct influence on the development of this strategy. They include the following:

a) The Sustainable Community Strategy and District Plan

The vision for the District is set out in the Council's Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2024: Everyone Matters (SCS) and repeated in the Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation document (2010). The SCS's vision for East Herts' future is to:

Create a thriving, fair and inclusive East Herts that safeguards and enhances our unique mix of rural and urban communities, where people choose to live, work and visit because:

- *It is safe, clean, green and well connected;*
- *Everyone matters and can take part in decisions that affect their lives;*
- *There are sustainable economic and social opportunities that improve quality of life and are available to all.*

During 2008 the Council undertook two rounds of consultation engagement on the East Herts Local Development Framework (now District Plan). Although not a statutory requirement, this initial consultation forms part of continual and ongoing engagement of the community and stakeholders in the preparation of the District Plan. The first round of consultation during Winter/Spring 2008 was not specific to planning or the District Plan. It involved asking residents what they liked and disliked about where they live and what they thought were the issues and opportunities facing East Herts.

| Like about East Herts | Dislike about East Herts | Issues & Opportunities |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| Rural nature of the District | Conditions of roads and pavements | Maintaining quality of life |
| Historic character | Parking | Provision of infra-structure alongside new development |
| Safe | Noise & traffic from Stansted Airport | Location of new development |
| Good schools | Too many flats | Affordable housing |
| Location near to London | Lack of passenger transport, especially in rural areas | Local economy |
| Friendly people | | |

The Issues and Options Consultation Document (2010) identified the key issues and options facing the five towns (Bishop’s Stortford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth, and Ware) and the villages (as a whole) by each of the SCS themes. The District Council is currently preparing the next stage of the District Plan for consultation in January 2013.

b) The Local Investment Plan

The Local Investment Plan (LIP) for East Herts sets out the principles and priorities for joint investment by East Herts Council (EHC) and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to deliver East Herts’ overarching vision and related strategies for housing, regeneration and economic development. The plan identifies the strategic context for investment and summarises the evidence base that will be used to direct investment and determine the outputs and outcomes expected from HCA, the Council and wider stakeholders. The plan is not a standalone document and has been aligned with the Council’s existing strategies particularly the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS), The Housing Strategy and the Local Plan 2007 together with the emerging District Plan.

The objective of the Local Investment Plan (LIP) process is to maximise effectiveness and value for money from public and private investment by focusing on agreed local strategic priorities for the district as a whole.

The East Herts Local Plan 2007, emerging District Plan, SCS and the Housing Strategy 2012-15 together provide a comprehensive picture of the vision for East Herts and the current and future challenges and how these can be met. The LIP has four thematic strategic objectives:

1. Maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes, including affordable, whilst ensuring the best use of existing housing
2. Meeting the needs of a growing elderly population
3. Meeting the needs of vulnerable people and stronger communities
4. Economic Development, Employment and Skills

c) Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)

Hertfordshire has recently received approval from Communities and Local Government to establish a county-wide Local Enterprise partnership following its submission in August 2010. It is one of only 27 LEP proposals to have been so far agreed across the Country. The Government see LEPs as providing the clear vision and strategic leadership to drive sustainable private sector-led growth and job creation in their area.

The proposal is based on an analysis which shows there is no overriding economic geography encompassing Hertfordshire. In the absence of such, the most practical and pragmatic approach is to build on the successes of the established county wide economic partnership, *Hertfordshire Works*, and form a LEP which is coterminous with the county boundaries. The proposal, which has been accepted, acknowledges that local economic geographies are dynamic and ever changing. The existing partnership, Hertfordshire Works, provides a sound basis to form a LEP and it is intended to establish a shadow LEP Board from the existing partnership.

Section 4 - Strategic Housing Objectives

The East Herts Local Plan 2007, emerging District Plan, SCS and the LIP together provide a comprehensive picture of the vision for East Herts and the current and future challenges and how these can be met. The Council has identified three key strategic housing themes that crosscut the Local/District Plan, SCS, the LIP and this Housing Strategy. These are:

1. Maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes, whilst ensuring the best use of existing housing
2. Meeting the needs of a growing elderly population
3. Meeting the needs of vulnerable people and stronger communities

Strategic Housing Objective 1: Maximise the delivery of new affordable homes, whilst ensuring the best use of existing housing

There is a significant affordability problem in the District. This is a result of many factors but predominantly due to high prices in comparison to income levels. This in turn is placing greater

pressure on the existing affordable housing in the District. There is simply not enough affordable housing to meet the increasing need of the District's residents.

The Council and its partners must continually seek to secure opportunities for the development of new affordable housing, to maximise access to existing affordable housing through nomination agreements with Registered Providers (RPs) and to make effective use of existing affordable rented homes through management of the housing register.

What we know:

i)Affordability

One of the key issues facing the district is the affordability of housing; with the Herts Observatory recording East Herts had the 3rd highest ratio in Hertfordshire of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile earnings in 2010. The lower quartile home cost 10.2 times more than the lower quartile earnings for a household in East Herts in 2010 compared to 7.7 for the Eastern Region and 6.7 for the Country⁹. This is in contrast to 2008 when house prices were 11 times more than lower quartile earnings. However despite this small drop housing in East Herts remains unaffordable to many households especially newly forming ones. The high cost of housing in East Herts is a significant issue in rural areas given the structural changes to the agricultural and rural economy in more recent years where house prices are higher and rural wages are lower.

Figure 2: House prices comparisons

| Property Type | Average Price Second Quarter 2011 Hertfordshire | Average Price Second Quarter 2011 East Herts |
|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Flats & Maisonettes | 182,925 | 187,180 |
| Detached | 578,603 | 525,496 |
| Semi-detached | 366,522 | 320,659 |
| Terraced | 243,581 | 242,406 |
| All Properties | 323,358 | 328,831 |
| Annual change in house price | -3.9% | -1.6% |
| Quarterly change in house price | +2.8% | +0.6% |

Source Herts Observatory 2012

Information suggests that even during the current economic climate that the East Herts housing market remains buoyant, house prices have not fallen significantly and affordability remains an issue.

⁹ CLG (2010) Housing Statistics , Table 576

In 2008 consultants started work on a joint Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) on behalf of the London Commuter belt (East/M11 Sub-region) including East Herts. The results and the final report were published in January 2010. The purpose of the SHMA is to assess current and future housing demand and housing need, and how the distribution of need and demand varies across the district. It also considers future demographic trends and identifies the accommodation requirements of specific groups. The SHMA draws the following conclusions about the level of affordable housing provision, tenure split and housing size mix across East Herts:

- 55% - Market Housing Requirement
- 45% - Total Affordable Housing Requirement

Of which:

- 34% - Intermediate Affordable Housing Requirement
- 12% - Social Rented Affordable Housing Requirement

The SHMA study found that 75% of the affordable housing requirement for East Herts is for intermediate affordable housing, i.e. housing at prices above those for social rent but below market prices or rents, such as key worker housing. This finding effectively reverses the Council's current approach to tenure split that seeks 75% social rented and 25% intermediate affordable housing. This recommended tenure split is based on the theoretical modelling that underpins the SHMA which seeks to 'balance' the housing market; i.e. ensure that the availability of all housing (supply) meets both housing need and demand. However a refresh of the SHMA is being undertaken.

Notwithstanding the findings of the SHMA, the Council's corporate priority at the current time remains to seek to reduce the housing waiting list. In order to best achieve this, the Council requires 75% of properties to be rented and 25% of properties to be intermediate housing. The New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief, February 2012 (Appendix 5) sets out the requirements for affordable housing in new development. The findings of the SHMA (2010) and any future refresh will be considered through the preparation of the District Plan in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (paragraph 50), and the Commissioning Brief will be updated if appropriate.

ii) Housing Register

At 1st April 2011 2,740 households were registered on our Housing Register. Numerically the greatest need is for smaller properties but when account is taken of social rented housing availability and the statutory preference categories for housing it is clear that there is a significant shortage of 2 and 3 bedroom properties. There is a particular pressure on meeting the transfer needs of current social tenants as their household size grows.

Since 2008 the Council has also managed the transfer applications from existing social tenants that require a move to more suitable accommodation. Strategically this allows the Council to understand the complete housing need picture. The Council operates a Choice Based Lettings Scheme 'HomeOption' which is administered by Locata, an outside agency. Homeseekers on the Housing Register can search for available vacant social homes across

the district where the Council has nomination rights. Vacant properties are advertised every fortnight and applicants can 'express an interest' in them and use their Housing Register points to 'bid' for up to three suitable properties of their choice.

In March 2012 the Council moved away from paper based housing register applications and has developed with three other partners a joint on-line housing register application form with Locata. Aside from the clear benefits to the Council in-terms of administration of applications, applicants will be able to manage their housing register application process easily and effectively on the web based application. It will also allow more effective management and analysis of the strategic housing data held by the system.

iii) Homelessness

The Council's aim is to prevent homelessness and to respond to homelessness applications in accordance with statutory requirements, efficiently, effectively and fairly, helping homeless people to secure appropriate accommodation. The Council has a range of temporary accommodation options available to it, to try to best suit a household's needs including accommodation for clients with mental health issues, experiencing domestic violence and a council owned hostel. The Council has recently remodeled its one remaining hostel into 11 units of high quality self contained accommodation. The Council successfully met the 2010 target for placing households in temporary accommodation a year early and has consistently kept the figure below the target of 33 households.

The Council has published its second Homeless and Homeless Prevention Strategy 2008-2013 in July 2008. The overall purpose of the Homeless and Prevention Strategy is to ensure that as a Council we address homelessness strategically by ensuring suitable accommodation, support and advice is available and accessible to all client groups and to encourage a multi-agency approach to preventing homelessness. The Council has range of options that it works with clients to ensure a best fit. The document can be found at: www.eastherts.gov.uk

iv) Stock Condition

There are nearly 50,000 homes in the private sector¹⁰. The condition of properties in the private sector is primarily the responsibility of its owners but the Council recognises limitations on some owners' ability to maintain, heat and improve their homes. The demographic trends in the district are particularly important for housing in the private sector as an ageing population is more at risk from excess cold, maybe less able to afford to maintain their homes and require greater assistance to do so.

A House Condition Survey was carried out in 2010. The Housing Strategy and Assistance Policy will be reviewed in the light of the findings. Some of the key findings are as follows:

- Decent Homes: The government defined a decent home as "one which is wind and weathertight, warm and has modern facilities", and established an aspirational Decent Home Standard, with targets for reducing the proportion of vulnerable households living in dwellings failing the standard.¹¹ The survey estimated that 49.2% of all dwellings are

¹⁰ HSSA 2010

¹¹ ODPM. A Decent Home: the definition and guidance for implementation. Feb 2004, updated June 2006

non-decent, and 3 in 5 in the rural south are non-decent. More than 75% of dwellings constructed prior to 1919 are non-decent. Nationally around 37% of all dwellings fail the standard. However, due to modelling for excess cold, the national figure is an underestimate. Ninety percent of non decent dwellings were due to category 1 hazards, i.e., significant hazards assessed using the statutory Housing Health and Safety Rating System. As a proportion of all dwellings, 45% failed due to a category 1 hazard, and nearly 1 in 6 were not in reasonable repair. The most common category 1 hazard, as expected, was excess cold. The prevalence of the hazard for falling on level surfaces was highest in rural areas, particularly the rural north, where 9.1% of hazards recorded were for falls on the level. Rates of non-decency in the private rented sector of 53.7% were slightly higher than for owner-occupied dwellings, whilst rates in the RSL stock are lower still at 40.9% - a result of housing association's investment programme specifically to remedy non-decency. An estimated 4,800 vulnerable private sector households (43.1% of vulnerable private sector households) live in non-decent homes.

- Repair: in terms of repair, conditions are worse in the private sector, with average repair costs significantly higher in the private rented sector, particularly for required urgent repairs. Of all tenures, conditions are best in the RSL sector, significantly so for average repair costs. Levels of disrepair are significantly worse in the rural areas.
- Energy Efficiency: Overall energy efficiency of stock is better than average, with RSL stock performing better than other sectors. The average energy performance of the stock is still a long way short of that required to meet Government targets of domestic CO2 emissions and to future proof properties from the impact of fuel price rises. The survey indicated the need for continued investment to improve energy efficiency and affordable warmth to protect the vulnerable. The numbers in fuel poverty had increased since the last survey, largely as a result of increases in fuel tariffs. Despite availability of heavily subsidised energy efficiency measures, cavity wall insulation was found to be needed in over 40% of homes, and a similar proportion appeared to require loft insulation. 21.1% of homes were found to not have a cavity wall, therefore internal or external wall insulation should also be encouraged, and boiler replacements where appropriate.
- Disability: The survey revealed high numbers of disabled and elderly households, and considerable potential demand for Disabled Facilities Grants

What is happening?

a) Developing new affordable housing

The Government has introduced significant changes to the way in which affordable housing will be funded in the future. From April 2011, the level of grant available from the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) to build new affordable housing was significantly reduced. A number of Registered Providers (RPs) now offer tenants a rent known as 'Affordable Rent' whereby rent levels are set up to a maximum of 80% of the local market rent. It is expected that this approach will generate an increased rental stream for RPs to fund new build developments, reducing the need for grant funding. The RPs that are operating in East Herts

have different approaches to the introduction of affordable rents and differing implementation timings and policies. The Council disseminates the information it holds to residents to assist them make informed choices when bidding for housing under CBL.

However, the introduction of affordable rent will have a significant impact on affordability as many local residents may struggle to meet increased rental costs. It may also have an impact on the bidding profile from applicants on the housing register. We will therefore continue to work closely with RPs to ensure that new social rented housing remains affordable for local residents on our Housing Register.

j) Delivering new affordable housing

In terms of developing new affordable housing the Council’s role is that of an ‘enabler’ which consists of identifying housing need and bringing together key partners to generate new opportunities for affordable housing development. The Council’s aim is to maximise and increase the amount of good quality affordable housing in the District, in the form of rented housing and shared or intermediate home ownership.

The Council’s 2007 Adopted Local Plan Policy HSG3 – Affordable Housing stipulates that on residential developments of 15 dwellings or more or on sites over 0.5 hectares in any of our six main settlements up to 40% affordable homes should be included. In our designated Category 1 and 2 Villages, Policy HSG3 requires up to 40% affordable homes to be built on sites proposing three or more dwellings or sites over 0.09 hectares. The Council’s ‘New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief (2012)’ sets out East Herts Council’s requirements for the affordable housing element on new developments in East Herts District. A copy of the document is at Appendix 5. In order to go some way to meeting the identified need for affordable housing in East Herts, the Council requires up to 40% of the new properties built being affordable. Of the 40% affordable housing the Council requires:

- 75% of the properties to be rented;
- 25% of the properties to be intermediate housing this is primarily shared ownership.

Local Plan Policy HSG 6 expects that 15% of all new homes constructed will be to Lifetime Homes standards.

A total of 38 affordable homes were completed during the monitoring year which represents 13% of all completed dwellings in the District. On sites above the Adopted Local Plan affordable housing thresholds, 37% of completed dwellings were affordable.

Figure 3: Gross affordable home completions

| | 2007/08 | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Gross Housing Completions all dwellings | 599 | 597 | 489 | 304 |
| Total gross affordable home completions | 177 | 145 | 142 | 38 |
| % of total gross completions | 30% | 24% | 29% | 13% |

| | | | | |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| % of total net completions from eligible sites | 44% | 35% | 30% | 37% |
|--|-----|-----|-----|-----|

Source: Annual Monitoring Report 20010/11

In addition to delivery of these affordable units through the planning system, a further 22 affordable dwellings were delivered through a government backed scheme called HomeBuy Direct where buyers are assisted to purchase their homes using an equity loan.

ii) Size, type and tenure

In recent years, there has been a predominance of flatted-developments built in East Herts: 71% of gross completions in 2009/10 were flats. There are a number of reasons for this including high land values; the costs associated with developing town centre sites; the policy aim of prioritising Brownfield sites as opposed to Greenfield land; and the desire within the housing industry to match supply with the demand for smaller properties. However the Annual Monitoring Report for 2010/11 indicates that the type and size of dwellings completed during 2010/2011 is more balanced than in previous years.

Figure 4: Comparison of Housing Need – number of housing register applicants by property size needed

| | 01 April 2008 | | 01 April 2010 | | Difference 2008-2009 | |
|---------------|---------------|-----|---------------|--------|----------------------|--|
| | Number | % | Number | Number | Percentage | |
| One bedroom | 1,414 | 59% | 1,582 | +168 | +12% | |
| Two bedroom | 711 | 30% | 757 | +46 | +6% | |
| Three bedroom | 241 | 10% | 303 | +62 | +20% | |
| 4 or more | 33 | 1% | 57 | +24 | +73% | |
| Total | 2,399 | | 2,699 | +300 | | |

Source: East Herts HSSA 2010

In addition the SHMA, based on demographic forecasts estimates the housing size mix to meet the needs of future households as follows:

| | |
|---------------------|-----|
| One bedroom: | 15% |
| Two bedrooms: | 27% |
| Three bedrooms: | 41% |
| 4 or more bedrooms: | 17% |

However whilst the Council seeks to influence the size and type of market housing that gets built it is unable to dictate what should be built.

The SHMA modelling shows that in East Herts, there is a lack of housing that can be afforded by households earning between £20,000 and £35,000 per annum. Below £20,000, households

may be eligible for housing benefits to subsidise their housing costs. This finding needs to be robustly discussed before the Council decides to amend any current planning policies.

iii) Affordability

The Council recognises that affordability is a key issue for the district especially amongst newly forming households. There is concern about some areas of the housing market, particularly the low percentage of first time buyers. According to the Council of Mortgage Lenders (CML), mortgage lending in July 2011 fell by 6% compared to July 2010. The CML believes the housing market will remain subdued in 2011 due to uncertainty surrounding the economy and the ongoing mortgage rationing by lenders. The level of activity in the mortgage market is expected to drift lower over the coming months. Current constraints are a particular problem for first-time buyers, especially those unable to provide a substantial deposit. The preference for low loan to value mortgages is therefore expected to continue to restrict first time buyers in the current financial environment. As a result of the recession and the adverse affect on the local economy and the housing market, a number of Local Authorities are trying to take a proactive approach in supporting the local area.

Rather than entering into the residential mortgage market ourselves the Council is exploring the possibility of entering into a partnership with residential mortgage lenders, with the remit of minimising the financial impact on ourselves, and at the same time taking advantage of the expertise already available from existing mortgage providers. In September 2009, Sector Treasury Services set up a pilot scheme to assess the viability of a new Local Authority Mortgage Scheme (LAMS), including the legal and accounting issues surrounding a financial indemnity of this nature. 11 Local Authorities initially sponsored the pilot scheme.

The scheme is aimed at first time buyers, providing help for potential buyers who can afford mortgage payments - but not the initial deposit – to get on to the property ladder. Under the scheme, each Local Authority are able to specify three qualifying criteria; the maximum level of indemnity, the maximum loan size (based on 95% of maximum property valuation) and the qualifying post codes. The scheme is standardised as much as possible. If a potential buyer meets the strict credit criteria applied by the lender, and meets the criteria set out by the Local Authority to qualify for a mortgage under the scheme, the Local Authority will provide a top-up indemnity to the value of the difference between the typical LTV (i.e. 75%) and a 95% LTV mortgage. The potential buyer will thereby obtain a 95% mortgage on similar terms as a 75% mortgage, but without the need to provide the substantial deposit usually required.

The Council's Executive has agreed that the Council provide £1m to support the LAMS scheme in East Herts and that the following parameters be set:

- a) The Scheme to apply to all post code areas within East Herts
- b) The maximum loan per property be set at £160,000

It is anticipated that this could assist a maximum of 32 households.

iv) Rural Affordable Housing

Almost 24% of the population of East Herts live in rural settlements.¹² Affordability in our rural communities is a significant issue given the structural changes to the agricultural and rural economy in more recent years where house prices are higher and rural wages are lower. As a result there is a lack of accommodation for newly forming households and many young people are leaving rural areas, with communities having an increasing proportion of retired people and wealthy commuters.

In order to address these issues the Local Plan Second Review 2007 includes a Village Development Strategy that apportions limited growth to the larger and more sustainable settlements, in tandem with lower thresholds for affordable housing provision. Rural Exceptions Affordable Housing for 100% affordable schemes may also be permitted. In 2010/11 53 additional dwellings were built in villages and rural areas, excluding the five towns.¹³

b) Making better use of existing housing both public and private

In addition to the provision of new affordable homes the Council wishes to make better use of existing housing to ensure we are effectively using what is already available.

i) Empty Homes

Long term empty homes in the private sector present a potential resource to the District. East Herts is fortunate that it has a relatively low number of long term empty homes. Figure 5 compares 2010 levels for East Herts with the total for England, and for the Eastern region.

Figure 5: Empty homes comparisons 2010

| | Total empties | Percent of stock | Private empty for more than 6 months |
|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|---|
| England | 662,105 | 2.88% | 285,808 |
| East of England | 55,810 | 2.20% | 25,906 |
| <i>East Herts</i> | 1,145 | 1.96% | 575 |

Source: CLG collation off Local Authority HSSA returns 2011

In 2010 the Council adopted its revised Empty Homes Strategy. A staged approach to tackling empty homes, from identification through prioritisation, encouragement with support and a range of incentives, through to enforcement where appropriate supports a target of bringing 10 empty homes back into use each year as a result of our action.

Private Lease Agreements Converting Empties (PLACE) is a scheme targeted at helping the owners of long term empty homes return their properties to use, to support homeless prevention. East Herts is working in partnership with Chelmsford, Epping Forest, Harlow,

¹² East Herts Local Development Framework Core Strategy Consultation Document 2010

¹³ Annual Monitoring Report 2009/10 – This figure excludes 2 dwellings built in the parish of Buntingford which includes the built-up area of the town itself.

Hertsmere, Uttlesford, and Watford Councils and Pathmeads Housing Association. The scheme offers high level grant funding to repair properties and in return the housing association will lease the property for three years making it available to a household in housing need, generally below Local Housing Allowance levels. The scheme has recently been modified to provide more flexible funding options and to support the authorities funding some enforcement work where this is the most appropriate action.

A partnership for Empty Dwelling Management Orders and private sector leasing has also been negotiated by our Empty Homes Officer for East Herts and other neighbouring authorities.

ii) Underoccupation:

While tackling under-occupation may not increase the overall supply of housing it can have the effect of improving the match of the supply of homes available to those most in need. The Council is aware, based on information held and rolling audits by our two main stock transfer housing associations, that there is significant under-occupation in social housing. They have both recently revised their incentive schemes for encouraging and assisting tenants who wish to move to smaller accommodation. They both offer financial incentives but also practical assistance.

The Council also recognises its allocations policy as a method to give priority to those existing tenants wishing to move to smaller accommodation. The Councils Allocation Policy gives twenty points for every bedroom an existing transferring tenant is willing to give up to move to smaller accommodation. This is the same number of points as those that are given to applicants on the register that are lacking a bedroom for their household.

iii) Improving the quality of the existing housing stock

a) In the Private Sector:

- Energy Efficiency: Following a successful joint bid for £6.6 million of government funding, the ten district councils in Herts, together with five Essex local authorities, have been working together through the Herts and Essex Energy Partnership (HEEP) fuel poverty and carbon reduction scheme to deliver heavily discounted energy efficiency measures to help reduce their residents' fuel bills. As the scheme draws to a close, options are being appraised to prepare the participating authorities for the government's proposed Green Deal initiative. Home energy efficiency and available schemes are promoted through various means, such as targeted mail shots, use of thermal imaging, mail-outs to benefit recipients etc., advice, and cross referrals with partners such as the Home Improvement Agency. The Warm Homes Healthy People project in the first quarter of 2012 will include promotion and provision of measures to help households keep warm. An equality impact assessment has been carried out for the council's affordable warmth strategy. The strategy is due to be reviewed and updated in 2012. However, given the many important changes being proposed for the way energy efficiency measures will be funded nationally, this will be a light touch review pending greater certainty over future regimes.

- **Disrepair:** All requests from tenants to require landlords to improve the condition of their homes are investigated in accordance with the Council's enforcement policy, which advocates a staged approach, from advice through to enforcement as appropriate. Where enforcement action proves necessary, the Council will generally seek to recover costs associated with serving of notices and carrying out works in default. The Council has also helped fund essential works in owner occupied properties through its means tested Decent Home Grants. The Council has reduced its budget for these discretionary grants in order to prioritise use of dwindling resources. Their availability is under review, and currently is restricted to high risk cases or where some works are necessary alongside a Disabled Facilities Grant.
- **Houses in Multiple Occupation: (HMOs)** tend, locally and nationally, to contain some of the poorest housing, along with sharing of amenities, and the risk of harm to occupants in the case of fire is also higher. Therefore in addition to responding to complaints from tenants about their housing conditions, pro-active inspections are also carried out to properties known to be an HMO, and action taken according to assessed risk. When resources permit, contact is also made to properties thought likely to be an HMO. Certain larger HMOs are also required to be licensed, and conditions are generally attached to the licence to bring the property up to the required standard. The Council's HMO licensing fee is lower where the landlord pro-actively applies for a licence. Where the application is as a result of the Council's intervention, a higher fee is charged, reflecting the additional costs generally incurred in such cases.
- **Disability:** The Council provides mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) for adaptations recommended by an Occupational Therapist from the County Council. The applicant may choose to engage the services of the Home Improvement Agency, run by the Papworth Trust and based in Bishop's Stortford, to act on their behalf to produce their plans, obtain builders estimates etc. This process not only ensures the property is suitable to meet the needs of the disabled person and any carer, but also gives an opportunity to consider what other services the household may require, such as help with minor repairs through its handyperson service, or works to improve the energy efficiency of their home.

b) In the Public Sector:

The housing stock transfer in March 2002, of some 6,500 homes to Riversmead and Stort Valley (now South Anglia) housing associations, enabled the necessary investment in former Council housing to take place, with a resultant overall improvement in property conditions. The two housing associations agreed undertakings to carry out repairs and improvements within certain timescales and have completed a detailed programme of work since the stock was sold nine years ago. Included in this programme were works to modernise the homes and also to improve their energy efficiency. The two housing associations own approximately 80% of the social housing in the district and aside from ad-hoc properties where they have been unable to gain access they have assessed that all their stock is at decent homes standard. This is at odds with the findings of the House Condition Survey mentioned above, which estimated that 40.9% of social housing failed the decent home standard. This anomaly may be due to

grossing up from the survey sample selected, and modelling of the hazard for excess cold, the most common cause of failure of the standard, rather than the full HHSRS assessment completed for dwellings in the survey sample.

Key future priorities within this objective

- Optimise opportunities for increasing new affordable housing supply, particularly houses and family sized homes, and the range of affordable housing options through effective partnership working.
- Bring private sector empty homes back into use and use appropriate legislation
- Promote and assist our housing association partners to release larger homes that are under occupied
- Maximise funding opportunities for the delivery of new affordable housing.
- Achieve the right mix, tenure and proportion of affordable housing on new developments based need.
- Regulate private rented sector housing via advice, inspection enforcement, and House in Multiple occupation (HMO) licensing
- Review and update Affordable Warmth Strategy and action plan 2007-12, to ensure strategy is fit for purpose for Green Deal and HECA
- Work with partners to meet identified rural affordable housing needs
- Run a Housing Forum at least 3 times a year and consult on proposed housing reforms
- Hold an annual Private Sector Landlord Forum
- Launch the East Herts Council backed mortgage indemnity scheme.
- Generate new affordable housing policies for inclusion within the District Plan to replace current policies in the Local Plan.

Strategic Housing Objective 2: Meeting the needs of a growing elderly population

In order to plan for the provision of new homes in the future we also need to understand what the population will be like in 2031, not just in terms of absolute numbers but how its age structure may differ from today. East Herts has an ageing population and it is projected that two thirds of the population growth anticipated in East Herts between 2006 and 2021 will be people aged over 65 years. This will have a significant impact on the provision of both housing and services, with accessibility and the suitability of houses being key factors.

What we know:

The population of East Herts is forecasted to increase to 148,200 by 2021 and 157,900 in 2031¹⁴. There is a forecasted growth of population in the over 65 age group such that this population is estimated to increase to 27,800 by 2021¹⁵. This is a 58% increase on the 2001 census count of 17,601. The number of residents over the age of 75 on the 2001 census was 7,985 and is forecast to increase to 14,000 by 2021¹⁶. This is an increase of 75%. East Herts Housing Stock Condition Survey 2010 found clear evidence of an increasing proportion of elderly people in East Herts, with 42.8% of households having at least one person over 60 years of age. Given the resource demands often associated with very elderly people these are significant figures. In addition the latter group are likely to have care and support needs, which will need to be met by new and existing housing provision.

Although many older people own their own homes, meeting the costs of heating and repairs may become increasingly difficult over time for people on fixed incomes. East Herts Housing Stock Condition Survey 2010 found that older person households were more likely to live in unfit housing (ie houses containing a significant hazard) and housing in a poor state of repair than any other household type and twice as likely to experience fuel poverty. Related to this is the tendency for older people to under-occupy their homes often remaining in a family home for many years after their children have left. This is a problem both for older homeowners and tenants struggling to cope financially, and for those on the housing register for affordable housing, which is in short supply. We believe, however, that the best way of tackling under occupation by older people is by developing appropriate and attractive housing alternatives for them with our RSL partners, and by offering help to minimise the logistical difficulties of moving to a new home. However it could also include other changes, which are not incentives, to current policies such as the eligibility for adaptations, for example for the removal of baths and replacement with walk in showers, when other more suitable stock is already available.

What is happening?

The Council recognises that housing has a key role to play in maintaining independent living for older people for as long as is feasible and in helping to prevent unnecessary admission to residential care or hospital. Hertfordshire County Council, as the lead strategic body for the care needs of vulnerable groups including the elderly, works with its partners in the public sector, private sector and housing associations to offer a wide choice of 'accommodation solutions' for elderly people they range from staying in their current home to residential care.

The Council and its partners can assist with a range of measures from low level interventions through to Disabled Facilities Grant, such as the provision of a community alarm, fall detectors or assistance with minor repairs, to higher level interventions such as Disabled Facilities Grant to enable access into and around the dwelling and to use its facilities to interventions such as a transfer to more suitable independent housing or assistance in a sheltered or frail elderly scheme. There are a number of projects that the Council is either leading on or is a major partner to improve the available services and housing options for elderly people in East Herts.

¹⁴ Revised 2008 based Subnational population projections ONS published 2010

¹⁵ Revised 2008 based Subnational population projections ONS

¹⁶ Revised 2008 based Subnational population projections ONS

i) Accommodation

The Housing Registered Provider partners in East Herts have carried out appraisals of all their older people's accommodation and have robust Asset Management Strategies in place. They are working closely with East Herts Council and Herts County Council with the overall objective to update the elderly housing provision to modern standards including extra care or flexi-care. The advantage of flexicare housing is that care staff are based in the building, or very close by, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Care is available in an emergency or for short periods, for instance, after a hospital stay.

Where this is not feasible alternative clients for the accommodation or site is being considered. Not all existing sheltered schemes are suitable for flexicare and where schemes are popular the RPs are, in consultation with existing residents, continuing to update facilities and the standard of accommodation. Projects that have been completed or are currently underway in the District include:

- Regeneration of a sheltered scheme at Bircherley Court in Hertford to provide modern accommodation with additional services and community provision which will enhance the quality of life of the residents. The scheme which was completed in two phases and provides 70 one and two bed flexible care homes. The work was funded by Riversmead Housing Association, the HCA and East Herts.
- The demolition and redevelopment of the existing buildings of Calton House and Calton Court and replacing them with a flexi-care older persons living complex that will assist and support residents to live independently. The complex will comprise 55 one and two bed flats, guest suite for visitors, communal lounge and laundry, 24 hour community alarm, security door entry system and new community facilities including a doctor's surgery.
- Decommissioning of an unpopular and unsuitable sheltered housing scheme in Bishop's Stortford and its redevelopment to provide family housing using the registered providers own resources.

Herts County Council is the main strategic body that is directing the provision of older persons supported housing across the County. They have published a strategy on their required future provision of older person supported accommodation entitled 'Flexicare Housing Hertfordshire'. This strategy details district by district their predicted requirements for older persons housing to 2020/21.

ii) First Contact

First Contact is an information, advice and support service in Hertfordshire. It enables older people to access a wide range of community activities and services in their local area. First Contact has 12 Community Agents working across areas within the county. They will visit residents in their own home and discuss what type of services might be of assistance. They can then put residents in touch directly with organisations that can provide the services needed or advise on services available locally including local social events and activities. From 2012 this is being wound down and HertsHelp is now providing the network service.

iii) Disabled Facilities Grants

These are mandatory grants to adapt homes of people with disabilities so that they may have safe access into and around their home and to use facilities within it, and are a priority within the private sector strategy.

With a relatively elderly demographic for the district, demand for assistance with adaptations is high, and the Council's budget goes beyond the level of government subsidy for this purpose in order to meet demand without needing to operate a waiting list, recognising the importance of this service to vulnerable residents. The government announced additional national funding for DFGs of which East Herts was allocated an additional £29,837 for 2011/12 bringing our government grant to £257,837. In addition the Council anticipates spending £450,000 in 2011/2012 of its own funds.

iv) Ageing Well in Herts

This is a project run by the County Council to develop a place based approach to ageing well which is being piloted in East Herts, Stevenage and St Albans. The project aims to agree a model for engaging older people in the work of the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board and link it to district level older person forums and groups. The aim is to initially work with older people, in a specific locality within a district, to develop engagement structures with local public, voluntary and community sector services to help strengthen their preventative role and achieve a wider range of health and wellbeing outcomes.

Key future priorities within this objective

- Continue to work with our registered providers to assist in regenerating and making fit for purpose their sheltered housing stock
- To work with the County Council to identify opportunities within the district for flexi-care
- To introduce and monitor a fixed price tendering scheme for certain adaptation works through Papworth Trust Home Solutions.
- Continue with the Ageing Well Initiative and monitor the outcomes

Strategic Housing Objective 3: Meeting the needs of vulnerable people and stronger communities

East Herts Council is committed to helping to create and maintain sustainable neighbourhoods and communities. Strong communities require effective approaches both in terms of policies

to promote inclusiveness, assist the vulnerable, increase safety and the perception of safety and in ensuring the built environment and public space meet people's needs and aspirations.

The County Council has specific duties with regards to vulnerable adults and children. However as one of their key strategic partners we seek to work with them to develop future priorities for all the people in our local communities whether that be by directly providing accommodation or services, enabling or 'donating' an asset.

What we know:

Herts County Council's Accommodation Solutions Team is aiming to develop a longer term accommodation strategy for vulnerable clients. They are currently developing a template for individual District profiles (older persons, mental health, learning disability needs and population projections etc) so that data can be used for longer term planning. The districts are then to be consulted on the profiles and to work through any data irregularities. The aim of developing the District profiles is to provide an evidence base for a longer term commissioning strategy. The County Council's Commissioning teams are also involving the Hertfordshire Heads of Housing in the recommissioning and shaping of accommodation based services including those for Offenders and floating support.

a) Physical and Sensory Disabilities

The 2001 Census reported that 24.6% of households in East Herts contained somebody with a long term limiting illness or disability, which equates to 12,827 households. The main implication for housing is the need to promote independent living, mobility, choice and control by people with disabilities and to secure access to mainstream housing provision. There is a need to work with affordable housing providers to deliver specialist housing schemes, lifetime homes and ensure the best use of adapted properties.

In order to meet demand for adaptations to enable disabled residents to remain safely in their own home the Council funds an adaptation programme in excess of the government funding limits. However the nature of a person's disability and their personal circumstances may mean that they require rehousing. The Papworth Trust's Move On service checks which properties become available to rent and meets with the Council's Housing Options Team and the County Council's Occupational Therapists to identify people with disabilities and match them to properties that are already adapted or are more suitable for adaptation works.

Since the adoption of the Local Plan in April 2007, most planning applications are considered by a dedicated occupational therapist employed by the County Council who works closely with the Papworth Housing Trust and East Herts Council, to assess the validity of the lifetime home provision. The Local Plan Policy HSG 6 expects that 15% of residential provision should be to lifetime home standard.

b) People with Learning disabilities

The identification of accommodation needs and support for this client group is part of Herts County Council's Adult Care Services remit. The main contribution that the housing enabling role can make is in facilitating appropriate supported living opportunities. We have two schemes one in Bishop's Stortford and another in Hertford where RPs have developed general

needs accommodation and a number of the units have been set aside for 13 residents with learning disabilities who receive support from their social workers as and when required. These schemes have generated increased independence for the residents as well as freeing up the higher support accommodation they occupied previously.

Similar projects will be considered on other sites which come through the planning system.

c) Mental Health

In the housing context it is important to ensure that people with mental health issues are not placed in more restrictive environments than their needs or risk assessment indicate. The development of additional housing related support services, such as floating support, can enable more individuals to move into independent living thereby freeing up resources.

Current provision in East Herts includes supported short-term and long term accommodation, primarily in the Hertford area, and access to the County Council's floating support service in general needs accommodation. Herts County Council is currently developing a Mental Health Strategy. It is likely that the Strategy will identify a short fall in accommodation, particularly in the East and North of the District, and a need to develop a move on protocol from current accommodation based services to general needs accommodation with off site floating support. There are currently no specific accommodation requirements for East Herts developed by the County Council but East Herts is willing to work with the County Council and partner RPs to develop a nominations protocol for a number units of general needs accommodation with floating support, whether this be pepper potted across the district or a small group of flats.

d) Rough Sleepers

There is no evidence of significant levels of rough sleeping. A more prevalent occurrence is that of 'sofa surfing' where people move from one friend or relatives sofa to another.

Although the number of rough sleepers is small, the Council recognises that they are an extremely vulnerable group. It is essential that those who may wish to access housing and other services are provided with appropriate information, and that a wide range of organisations that come into contact with them can 'signpost' them to appropriate services.

More generally, the issue of rough sleeping emphasises the importance of improving access to general needs affordable accommodation and there being sufficient floating support to help people make a success of their tenancies.

e) Drug and Alcohol Misuse

Vale House Stabilisation services are not currently delivering rehabilitation Services in the East of the County although the Floating support aspect continues to be delivered but capacity is limited. For Drugs and Alcohol the County Council are in the process of procuring countywide accommodation services whereby the Vale House Stabilisation rehabilitation building in Hertford may be utilised for a 'recovery' type accommodation provision.

f) Victims of Domestic Violence

The crime of domestic violence is one that crosses all social, geographical

and cultural groups. Domestic violence is a significant cause of homelessness within East Herts. There have been some significant developments of housing services to help Tackle domestic violence, provided either by the Council or its partners:

- domestic violence is now a specific ground for repossession in the two stock transfer housing associations tenancy agreements
- a 'Sanctuary' scheme began in 2006 following a pilot period
- a floating support service shared with Broxbourne Council
- The 'Home Improvement Agency' scheme has been expanded to enable victims to receive improved help with home security through the Hertfordshire Home Safety and Security Scheme. The service provides home security checks and fitting of home security measures, free of charge, actual or potential home burglary victims, and residents referred by the police service or victim support, as well as those aged over sixty, single parents, and vulnerable or housebound residents. Following a recent re-tendering exercise by the County Council it is expected that this aspect of the Home Improvements Agency's service will move to another agency although cross referrals between for example the Agency's handyperson service and the new Home Safety service are likely.

The Council has a valued relationship with Safer Places an independent charity which provides a comprehensive range of services to adults and children affected by domestic and sexual abuse. It is also a significant partner on the East Herts and Broxbourne Multi-Agency Referral (MARAC).

g) Offenders and people at risk of offending

The Council is a key partner on the Multi-Agency Protection Panel (MAPPA) whose membership includes local RSLs, the Probation Service Local Authorities and the Police. In addition the Probation Service is a valued member on the Council's Homelessness Strategy Group.

The County Council's Youth Inclusion Support Panel (YISP) have panel meeting where young people aged 8-16, who have been identified as at risk, by agencies such as schools or the Police, can appoint a YISP Worker to the young person and recommend a package of support for the family such as Parenting Classes and activities for the young person.

The County Council is leading an Offenders Project Group that aims review both the services and available accommodation across the County. The County Council are currently reviewing the accommodation and support, provided across the County, to this group and are in the process of tendering for a new contract(s).

h) Gypsies & Travellers and Travelling Showpeople

In line with the provisions of Circular 01/2006, an Accommodation Needs Assessment was carried out jointly in 2006 with four neighbouring authorities and the County Council. This study identified a need for 5 permanent pitches to be provided within East Herts by 2011.

This study and those covering the other authorities in the Eastern Region were used by EERA to inform the preparation of the RSS Single Issue Review. RSS Policies H3 and H4 were subsequently published by the previous Government in 2009. Given the recent revocation of the RSS and impending revision of Circular 01/2006, current Government advice on the quantification of future provision for the district is presently uncertain. However, it should be noted that four private pitches have been granted planning permission in 2008, equating to an increase of over 50% in the previous district-wide number of pitches. More recently, in December 2010, an additional six pitches have also been granted planning permission at High Cross. Furthermore, the matter of provision features within the current Core Strategy Issues and Options consultation. The Council will fully consider the accommodation needs of both Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople throughout the District Plan process, as appropriate.

In terms of location, the process will take into account the existing evidence base including, among other things, the report carried out by Scott Wilson on behalf of the Northern and Eastern Hertfordshire Partnership as Stage 2 of the Accommodation Assessment in 2007 (which sought to find suitable areas in which pitches could be provided to meet Gypsy and Traveller accommodation). Other key issues include land availability; sustainability criteria; the potential for inclusion within large-scale development opportunities to aid delivery; and planning permissions granted in the interim.

i) Rural communities

East Herts is a predominately rural district with over a hundred villages and hamlets. Approximately 30% (2001 Census) of the population live outside of the five main towns. Such a large and dispersed rural population has significant impacts on the provision of housing services. Also many rural properties are not very energy efficient and particularly for those without access to mains gas, fuel costs can be high.

In order to address these issues the Local Plan Second Review 2007 includes a Village Development strategy that apports limited growth to the larger and more sustainable settlements, in tandem with lower thresholds for affordable housing provision. Rural Exceptions Affordable Housing for 100% affordable schemes may also be permitted.

j) Young Persons

The lack of any supported housing for Hertford and Ware's vulnerable young people is a major concern of the Council. Currently, homeless and vulnerable youngsters have to move into supported accommodation in either Stevenage or Broxbourne, or to the YMCA Project in Bishop's Stortford. However places are limited and often mean that a vulnerable young person is placed a considerable distance from family support which is exacerbated by limited public transport.

What is happening:

a) In the Communities

i) Building Sustainable Homes

Long-term we cannot afford to be building homes that have a negative impact on our climate and that are unable to adapt to changes in demographics and lifestyles.

Ensuring that a minimum of 15% of residential dwellings are built to lifetime homes standard will enable us to develop homes that are suitable for residents now but can be adapted with ease and at minimum cost to meet the changing requirements of our community in the future. This will help to meet the needs of our future population by reducing the long-term cost of adaptations.

ii) Mobility and Choice

In March 2008, East Herts introduced a Choice Based Lettings Scheme called HomeOptions for people applying for social housing and for existing social tenants needing to transfer to another home. Applicants are required to register for accommodation and then bid for properties suitable to their needs. The main benefit for current and future social housing tenants is that the scheme enables them to register their interest for a home they want to live in rather than the Council choosing the property for them.

The Government's Localism Act puts a greater requirement on social landlords to sign –up to a national Homeswapper scheme to facilitate current social housing tenants to move due to family or work needs rather than through, what can be perceived, as a less efficient Council's housing register that may restrict moves across local authority boundaries.

iii) Safer Communities

East Herts has a relatively low crime rate and has no areas with severe or longstanding crime and disorder problems. Nevertheless, anti-social behaviour, crime and the fear of crime causes distress to individuals and is destructive to communities.

The Council as a member of the East Herts Community Safety Partnership identifies and implements effective initiatives. The partnership brings together key statutory and non-statutory agencies, including the police and social landlords, to identify and implement initiatives to improve the safety of the community. The East Herts Community Safety Plan sets out the priorities of the partnership and targets for reducing the impact of crime and anti-social behaviour in the district.

Current initiatives carried out between the Council and its partners include Visual Audits and Street Briefings, which are multi-agency and resident consultation on improving area and addressing concerns of residents in specific locations.

vi) Empty Homes

Empty homes can be unsightly and lead to problems with vandalism etc. The Council has done some excellent work to encourage owners to repair and bring these properties back into use. Consultation has revealed support for the Council to make greater use of enforcement powers for appropriate properties and to publicise that action, to encourage owners who are less willing to co-operate. Such actions will improve the sustainability of affected communities.

b) For Individual needs within the community

Communities are made up of individuals and the Council, along with its partners, needs to develop policies and practices that are accessible and effective to make a house a home. This is especially so for the more vulnerable members of our communities. Other projects and policies include:

i) Community Alarms

In East Herts Riversmead Housing Association give advice on and supply Community Alarms to any older or disabled member of the community.

A community alarm enables vulnerable people to stay in touch with an emergency control centre, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. The community alarm service can be used by anyone who feels at risk in his or her home because of age, disability, illness or isolation.

ii) Disabled Facilities Grants

These are mandatory grants to adapt homes of people with disabilities so that they may have safe access into and around their home and to use facilities within it, and are a priority within the private sector strategy.

With a relatively elderly demographic for the district, demand for assistance with adaptations is high, and the Council's budget goes beyond the level of government subsidy for this purpose in order to meet demand without needing to operate a waiting list, recognising the importance of this service to vulnerable residents.

In recent years, the demand for the service to grant aid adaptations in properties owned by Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) has greatly increased, and this, together with the removal of the means test for adaptations for families with disabled children, has significantly affected workload.

In addition to mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs), the Council also offers discretionary means tested DFGs for larger schemes costing in excess of the statutory maximum grant, for certain non-mandatory adaptations such as adaptations to allow a disabled person to work at home, and to cover the cost of moving home where this would provide a better solution.

East Herts Council works in partnership with the County Council to deliver these grants. The County Council, as the Welfare Authority, are responsible for assessing what adaptations are necessary and appropriate, and East Herts Council is responsible for determining whether the recommended works are reasonable and practicable, and where eligible, to provide the Disabled Facilities Grant in accordance with the legislation. The County Council is re-organising its Occupational Therapy services, and is liaising with the district councils over potential process improvements.

iii) Home Improvement Agency

The Papworth Trust has operated a Home Improvement Agency (HIA) in East Herts since 2002. East Herts Council and Herts County Council's Adult Care Services and Supporting People are the main funders of the service, and are part of the agency's strategic development group. Residents benefit from a holistic range of services. In addition to traditional core HIA services of assisting applicants with disabled facilities grants and grants to repair their homes, the agency provides a handyman and home security service, fire safety checks, and provides referrals to other services such as for home energy efficiency or dispersed alarms.

However, from April 2012 the HIA will no longer be funded by the County Council. The County Council will instead fund a new countywide Home Safety Service, focusing on home security, fire safety and falls prevention. Papworth however have increased resilience by expanding into other areas of Herts and Essex, and aim to continue to provide core and handyman services in East Herts, using fee income from paid for services to support subsidised services for vulnerable households. The Council values the HIA services in support of vulnerable households, and therefore although funding is being reduced in 2012/13, the Council and HIA are together reviewing future service and funding options.

Recently Papworth has extended its services to include a gardening service. The agency also has secured funding for a First Stop representative, to provide enhanced case work support, discussing various issues related to independent living, ranging from retirement housing schemes, referrals for equity release, to financial and legal advice.

iv) Affordable Warmth

a) Strategy

The Council's affordable warmth strategy was revised in 2007, and includes a range of initiatives to help those households who struggle to keep their homes warm. Assistance is available to all households, with additional schemes, including referrals to national schemes and funding such as Warm Front, targeted to those most at risk from being cold at home. The Council's energy efficiency grants were replaced by the Herts Essex Energy Partnership, which offered a wide range of free and subsidised measures. Under the HEEP scheme, by December 2011 some 1778 measures had been installed in East Herts homes, supported by £413,210 from the scheme funds. This saves an estimated 42,352 tonnes of Carbon Dioxide emissions over the lifetime of the measures, at an average cost of just £9.75 per tonne saved.

The strategy aims to help elderly and vulnerable households, and can improve the health and well being of residents, with wide reaching impacts, such as for education, for example by enabling children to study more effectively at home. The strategy runs until 2012, and a review is necessary as the government's major changes to the way energy efficiency works are funded develop.

b) Warmer Homes, Healthy People

The County Council, in conjunction with the District Councils in Hertfordshire, the Primary Care Trust, Herts Community Foundation and other partners, successfully bid for Department of Health funds to protect vulnerable households and homeless persons from the risks of excess cold early in 2012. The project includes provision of money, benefits

and energy advice, heaters, blankets, draught proofing etc, and is co-ordinated through the HertsHelp contact centre.

v) The Council's Housing Register Policy

At the time of writing this document The Government was consulting on new draft statutory guidance on social housing allocations for local authorities in England. The new guidance is intended to assist authorities to take advantage of the provisions in the Localism Act 2011 which gives local authorities the freedom to manage their own waiting lists, and make it easier for them to move existing social tenants to more suitable accommodation. It also encourages authorities to make use of the existing flexibilities within the allocations legislation.

Alongside the guidance, the Government is consulting on two sets of draft regulations relating to the Armed Forces. The regulations will ensure that former Service men and women who have urgent housing needs are given 'additional preference' (i.e. high priority) for social housing - so that they will be at or near the top of housing waiting lists; and that Service personnel who move from base-to-base do not lose their qualification rights.

The Council will be reviewing their current Housing Register and Allocations Policy following on from this consultation and the Localism Act coming into force later in 2012. Any changes we make will need to recognise the needs of the whole community and not just focus on specific client groups and proposed changes will be widely consulted on before agreed.

iv) Housing Advice and Options.

Since April 2005 the Council's housing advice, homelessness and housing register services have been brought together and are now provided by a new Housing Options Service based at both our Bishop's Stortford and Hertford offices.

The Council's Housing Option approach is prevention focussed and that relies heavily on the residents of East Herts being able to access timely, high quality advice and assistance to help them resolve their housing problems well before their situation reaches crisis point. The advice is free and includes the provision of specialist debt advice provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau from our Council offices two days a week. An integral part of this service is the assistance we provide to non-priority homeless households, such as single persons or couples, through our rent deposit scheme. Since the scheme began over 5 years ago we have housed on average over 30 households a year into suitable accommodation in the private sector. Many of these households had no priority for housing through the homeless legislation and would potentially wait a considerable time on our housing register. The majority were either homeless or would be shortly and a significant proportion had no fixed abode ie they were either sofa surfing between relatives and friend or were rough sleeping.

v) Young People

East Herts Council Executive has given its backing to a new scheme to build 24 supported flats for vulnerable young people aged 16 to 24 in Hertford. The flats are to be built on the Baker Street car park site. The new homes will provide accommodation, for up to two years, for local young people who have been forced to leave their family home or who are homeless

after leaving care including two units of young parent accommodation. The scheme is currently waiting for planning permission.

The council will sell the land, currently valued at £300,000-£350,000, for a nominal amount to Aldwyck Housing Association which will build the flats. Aldwyck Housing Association will provide the capital needed to fund the building of the scheme. It is anticipated works will start on site in April 2012 and complete mid to late 2013. Running and maintenance costs of £160,000 per year will be funded by the Crouchfield Trust, a Herts County Council administered trust fund designed to support vulnerable young people. This will eventually taper down to £100,000 per year with the balance made up by Hertfordshire County Council.

Key future priorities within this objective

- Continue to prevent homelessness through the provision of good quality advice, developing new solutions to housing need.
- Work with supported accommodation providers to provide and make effective use of supported accommodation and appropriate move on accommodation is available in the district.
- Monitor effect of changes introduced in April 2012 in the way Herts County Council deal with Disabled Facilities Grants, and liaise as appropriate to ensure effective joint service
- Review allocation of social housing in response to legislation changes and best practice and monitor outcomes to ensure fair access
- Produce EIAs for Housing's Strategies and policies
- Review at least annually the Housing Service web pages to ensure all information is up to date, helpful and user friendly.
- Produce a Tenancy Strategy for the District
- Review future HIA services and funding levels in conjunction with the HIA in the light of changing County Council services and reduced core funding

Section 5: Resources

The Council expects the provision of affordable housing to be funded from a range of sources, including:

- recycled grant funds held by RPs, grants recycled through the sale of shared ownership properties
- local authority funding, eg. cash receipts collected on an exceptional basis in lieu of affordable housing being provided on site
- developer contributions
- land valuations set at a realistic level to enable affordable housing to be provided
- grant funding where an exceptional case can be made to the HCA
- funds raised by RPs under the new affordable rent programme

East Herts Housing Capital Programme

In its enabling capacity the Council subsidises new affordable housing and has allocated £700,000 of capital funds for the development of affordable homes in the district in 2012/13. In addition following a full appraisal of options the Council has sold Thele House, which was once a Council run homeless hostel, and has agreed to invest the capital receipt of £530,000 in the development of future affordable housing in the district in 2013/14. There is no capital funding in the capital programme for affordable housing beyond 2013/14.

The Council continues to fund disabled adaptations through its Capital Programme, which in order to meet demand has for many years has exceeded the level of government funding for this purpose.

New Homes Bonus

Introduced in April 2011, funding from the New Homes Bonus provides an incentive for local authorities to provide new homes. For each new housing unit delivered or empty property brought back to use, local authorities will receive the national average of Council Tax for that property per annum over a period of six years. In addition, there will be an enhanced flat rate of £350 per annum payable over six years for each additional affordable home delivered, including market homes acquired to be used as affordable housing. Further information on the New Homes Bonus can be found at:

www.communities.gov.uk/housing/housingsupply/newhomesbonus/

Section 6 - Monitoring the Strategy

The Council will agree a timetable for when the Housing Strategy is to be reviewed. This will be at least annually primarily through the Council's Executive and Scrutiny Committees. Progress on the Housing Strategy will also be discussed at the Council's Housing Forums, which are held three times a year with the Council's external housing partners.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England

This is a summary of the government's strategy for housing, published on 21 November 2011.

Development

- £400m investment in new development, supporting house builders in need of development finance including small and medium sized builders
- Mortgage indemnity scheme designed with the Home Builders Federation and Council of Mortgage Lenders to offer 95% loan to value mortgages for new build properties in England, to support 100,000 households
- Free up public sector land with "build now, pay later" deals for developers, releasing enough land to build 100,000 new homes and create up to 200,000 new jobs in the construction industry
- A new £500m Growing Places fund to support infrastructure
- £400m earmarked for FirstBuy, to help 10,500 first time buyers with the help of an equity loan up to 20%
- Consultation on plans to force local authorities to re-think section 106 agreements signed before April 2010, in areas where development is stalled
- A Custom Homes programme worth £30m to help individuals build their own homes, offering short-term project finance for independent projects
- Restatement of the government's commitment to the New Homes Bonus, community infrastructure levy and local business rate retention, the community right to build and simplification of the planning system through the National Planning Policy Framework

Social housing

- Councils granted financial responsibility for their own housing stock through reform of the Housing Revenue Account
- Reform of social housing management through the Localism Act, creating a sector which uses social housing as a "springboard" for social mobility
- Average new tenancies granted for five years, with tenancies of between two and five years allocated in "exceptional circumstances"
- New for-profit housing providers to offer social housing: "The regulator is in advanced discussions with a number of publicly quoted companies who wish to set up a social housing subsidiary"
- Right-to-buy owners will be offered a discount of as much as half the value of their homes. Homes sold through right-to-buy will be matched by new homes developed for social rent
- Introduction of HomeSwap Direct, a scheme to enable social tenants to manage moving house themselves, plus the creation of 12 "mobility vanguards" - areas in which £1m will be invested to investigate new methods of mobility
- Local authorities granted the freedom to allocate stock in the way they see fit, including granting priority to working households

- Regulation of social housing will focus on "value for money", making boards accountable for how their organisations deliver the most from assets, such as increased specialisation or economies of scale
- Councils no longer obligated to have open waiting lists
- Social landlords to be given new powers to identify and recover properties that are being used fraudulently
- Housing providers can charge market rents from tenants earning "very high salaries"
- New measure to prevent people who already have a suitable home from seeking social housing
- Encouraging innovation and competition between landlords

Private rented sector

- An independent review of barriers to investment in the private rented sector
- New build-to-let models, where homes are built specifically for the private rental market, with funding from major investors
- Financial incentives for investment in private rent, such as major investors paying just 1% in stamp duty, and reform of real estate investment trusts
- Government will work with local authorities to "tackle the worst properties" – but no further detail on how this work will be carried out
- New factsheets to help private landlords understand the basic requirements of managing a property for rent

Empty homes

- £100m in funding to bring empty homes back into use, and a further £50m to tackle the worst concentrations of empty homes
- Consultation on an 'empty homes premium' added to council tax, payable if a home is left unattended for more than two years. Receipts from this additional tax used to bring homes back into use
- Government will encourage private landlords and housing providers to use funding attached to the Green Deal to renovate empty homes
- Changes to empty dwelling management orders to target long-term empty homes
- New Homes Bonus to be awarded to empty homes brought back into use

Vulnerable groups

- New deal for older people's housing – although no detail on the terms of this deal – and £1.5m invested in the FirstStop information service for housing options
- £51m invested in handyperson schemes for repairs and adaptations
- Work to be carried out with the financial services industry to create new equity release products for older people
- £400m allocated to homeless prevention
- A Ministerial Working Group has been created to address the causes of homelessness. It will also look at impact of criminalising squatting on the most vulnerable who squat rather than sleep rough
- £20m to implement the No Second Night Out programme across the country, and £10m to charity Crisis to support single homeless people
- Councils now able to discharge their duties to homeless people in the private rented sector

- Service personnel receive high priority for social housing, and will not lose their right to qualify for local housing despite moving from base to base during their careers
- Service personnel placed at the top of the list for all government-supported home ownership schemes
- Work with credit reference agencies to ensure service men and women are not disadvantaged by their prior living arrangements when securing a private mortgage

Design

- Grant communities a say over the design of new homes. Funding provided to the Design Council to support communities to shape development in their own areas
- All new homes will meet the Zero Carbon Homes standard from 2016
- Review of building regulations to improve energy efficiency and carbon emission standards for new buildings
- Commitment to the Green Deal to renovate existing homes and boost energy efficiency

The Energy Act

This is a brief summary of the changes to be brought about by the Energy Act:

The Energy Act 2011 made provisions for the development of a Green Deal and a new Energy Company Obligation (ECO) to replace the existing Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) and the Community Energy Saving Programme (CESP), which will both expire in 2012. Consultation on the scheme ended in February 2012, and although the government aims to introduce the scheme in October 2012, this may change as important issues such as private funding still need to be arranged.

The flagship policy in the Act is the 'Green Deal', a scheme whereby householders, private landlords and businesses would be given finance upfront to make energy efficiency improvements, which would then be paid for by energy bill savings. It is envisaged that the funding will be provided by the private sector in the form of loans tied to the electricity meter not the householder. A charge will be included in fuel bills to meet the loan repayments. A "Golden Rule" will be introduced to ensure that eligible measures are cost neutral. This means that the savings on fuel bills will be equal to or greater than the loan repayment. This will be a market led initiative rather than the current energy supplier obligation to reduce CO2 emissions through target setting by Government.

The Energy Act also introduces a range of other provisions:

- establishes the Energy Company Obligation (ECO): a new obligation on energy companies to help certain groups of consumers, who need extra support, with saving energy.
- facilitates the roll-out of smart meters
- widens access to energy performance certificates
- makes information on energy bills clearer
- introduces measures designed to help improve energy security and to encourage low carbon generation

Appendix 2

Glossary

ACS: Adult Care Services.

Affordability: A measure of whether households can access and sustain the costs of private sector housing. There are two main types of affordability measure: mortgage and rental. Mortgage affordability assesses whether households would be eligible for a mortgage; rental affordability measures whether a household can afford private rental. Mortgage affordability is based on conditions set by mortgage lenders, usually 2.9 times a joint income or 3.5 times a single income. Rental affordability is defined as the rent being less than 25% of a household's gross income.

Affordable housing: This includes social rented, affordable rented and intermediate housing provided to specified eligible households whose needs cannot be met by the market. Affordable housing should cost less than similar sized housing on the open market and be available at a sub market price in perpetuity.

Affordable rent: Affordable Rent is a form of social housing. Homes will be made available at a rent level of up to 80% of gross market rents. Gross market rents are generally expressed inclusive of any service charges.

BME: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic/Black and Minority Ethnic: people who would not describe themselves as being of White British origin.

Brownfield land: Previously developed land including both vacant and derelict land.

CBL: Choice Based Lettings: the aim is to allow households on the housing register to make informed choices regarding their future homes. Homes are advertised to eligible households people on the housing register who bid for homes they would like to live in. East Herts participates in a sub-regional scheme called HomeOptions.

CLG: Department for Communities and Local Government.

Core Strategy: The strategic planning document in the East Herts Local Development Framework that sets the principles of development and identifies broad locations for growth.

Decent Home: one which is free from category 1 hazards (see HHSRS below), in reasonable repair, has reasonably modern facilities and provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

District Plan: The District Plan is the name for the planning document that will shape the future of East Herts to 20131. It is a legal requirement for every Local Planning Authority to produce a plan, containing its planning policies for managing development proposals through the planning application process. The District Plan is the new name for the Local Development Framework (LDF) that the Council was required to produce.

Dwelling: A self-contained unit of accommodation where all the rooms and facilities available for the use of the occupants are behind a front door.

Flexicare: Very Sheltered Housing: self-contained housing with care for older people requiring at least 4 hours care per day. Also known as Extra Care Housing

Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS): the system used since 2006 for assessing house condition and enforcing housing standards, by evaluating potential harm from defined hazards. Councils have a duty to address high scoring or Category 1 hazards, and a power to deal with less significant or Category 2 hazards.

House in Multiple Occupation (HMO): a dwelling occupied by persons who do not form a single household, such as shared houses and bedsits. Larger HMOs with 3 or more storeys, containing 5 or more persons in 2 or more households sharing facilities are required to be licensed.

Household: One person living alone or a group of people who have the address as their only or main residence and who either share one meal a day or share a living room.

Housing Associations: Independent not for profit organisations registered with and regulated by the Housing Corporation. Also known as Registered Social Landlords or RSLs, and Registered Providers (RPs)

HCA: Homes and Communities Agency (HCA): the single national housing and regeneration agency for England.

Housing need: The situation in which households lack their own housing or are living in housing which is inadequate or unsuitable and are unlikely to be able to meet their needs in the housing market without some assistance.

Housing Register: A database of all individuals or households who have applied to a local authority or RSL for a social tenancy or access to some other form of affordable housing.

HSSA: Housing Statistical Appendix: An annual return on housing each Local Authority is required to complete and return to Communities and Local Government.

Intermediate housing: A generic term for a number of different types of housing which lie between social rented housing and market housing in terms of costs to the householder. Shared equity, sub market rent and low cost homes for sale are examples of intermediate housing.

LDF: Local Development Framework: see District Plan.

RSL or RP: Registered Social Landlord or Registered Provider: a landlord who has met HCA registration requirements – usually a housing association.

SCS: Sustainable Community Strategy prepared on behalf of the LSP the SCS sets out the vision for the area and agrees the priorities and mechanisms for delivering the vision.

Shared equity or ownership: A means of helping people into home ownership. The buyer purchases a share of their home, with the remaining share being held by another party, usually a housing association. The other party will redeem their share when the home is sold.

SHLAA: Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; technical work that identifies deliverable sites that are available, suitable and achievable for housing.

SHMA: Strategic Housing Market Assessment; technical study that assesses housing need and demand.

Social rented housing: Decent homes provided to rent at below market cost for households in need by Local Authorities or Registered Providers (RPs).

Supporting People: Supporting People is a partnership programme that was set up in April 2003 to fund, commission and monitor the quality of existing housing-related support services for vulnerable adults now absorbed into Adult Care Services often now referred to as Housing Related Support.

Sustainable communities: Places where people want to live and work, now and in the future. They meet the diverse need of existing and future residents, are sensitive to the environment, and contribute to a high quality of life. They are safe, inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

Under-occupation: An under-occupied dwelling is one which exceeds the bedroom standard by two or more bedrooms.

APPENDIX 3

Consultations

East Herts Housing Forums

The Council has in the past held annual Housing Conferences with its housing stakeholders however with the significant policy changes that are currently emerging this is not sufficiently frequent. It is intended that the Council will hold at least three Housing Forums a year to consult on housing, housing policy and strategies with its wider stakeholders. The first Housing Forum was held on 8th March 2012 and the discussion topic was the Council's Housing Strategy. Future items for discussions will include the Council's Tenancy Strategy and amendments to the Council's Housing Register and Allocation Policy but it is the intention that members of the Forum will also have an input into future discussion topics. The Housing Forum is chaired by the Executive Member for Health, Housing and Community Support.

Private Sector Landlords Forum

Locally and nationally some of the worst housing is in the private rented sector, and the Council recognises the need to work proactively with landlords and letting agents to achieve improvements. The Council organises two private sector landlord forums each year. Topics have included the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation, tenancy deposit protection schemes, the Local Housing Allowance and fire safety. The forums have also contributed to the review of the Council's private sector housing enforcement policy, amenity standards, and housing strategies

Housing Association partners

Regular six weekly meetings are held with our stock transfer partners registered providers Riversmead and South Anglia Housing Associations.

Appendix 4

| Settlement (Existing No. of dwellings - 2001 Census) | Completions and Commitments | | | | |
|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| | Built 2001-2011 | Unallocated sites with permission* | Allocated sites with permission* | Allocated sites without permission | Total |
| Bishop's Stortford (14,249) | 1,402 | 132 | 130 | 3,586 | 5,250 |
| Buntingford (2,069) | 121 | 68 | 134 | 7 | 330 |
| Hertford (9,468) | 1,016 | 268 | 287 | 0 | 1,571 |
| Sawbridgeworth (3,421) | 142 | 43 | 95 | 80 | 360 |
| Ware (7,321) | 911 | 176 | 83 | 0 | 1,170 |
| Villages / Rural Area (16,794) | 1,104 | 194 | 185 | 30 | 1,513 |
| Total (53,313) | 4,696 | 881 | 914 | 3,703 | 10,194 |
| | | | | | |
| East of England Plan | East Herts Housing Requirement | | | | East Herts 'To-find' Range (2001-2031 figures minus 10,194) |
| | 2001-2011 | 2011-2021 | 2021-2031 | 2001-2031 | |
| 2008 Plan | 6,000 | 6,000 | 6,600 | 18,600 | 8,406 |
| 2010 Draft Review | 6,000 | 5,500 | 5,500 | 17,000 | 6,806 |

*includes sites where planning permission has been granted subject to the signing of a S106 agreement.

East Herts Housing Numbers – updated to 31st March 2011

Appendix 5

Draft New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief – February 2012

Introduction

This brief sets out East Herts Council's requirements for the affordable housing element on new development in East Herts District.

It accompanies and should be read in conjunction with the Council's Affordable Housing and Lifetime Homes Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) and the Council's Housing Strategy and is underpinned by the Council's Housing Needs Survey 2004 (updated in 2005).

The New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief provides easy reference for both public and private sector developers. The brief can also be reviewed on a more regular basis and amended as appropriate to ensure that it remains up-to-date.

Affordable Housing Requirement

In order to go some way to meeting the identified need for affordable housing in East Herts, the Council requires up to 40% of the new properties built being affordable.

In accordance with Policy HSG3 of the Local Plan Second Review, the 40% requirement applies:

- On sites proposing 15 or more dwelling, or over 0.5 hectares in the six main settlements of
 - Bishop's Stortford
 - Buntingford
 - Hertford
 - Sawbridgeworth
 - Stanstead Abbots and St Margaret's
 - Ware

- On sites proposing 3 or more dwellings or over 0.09 hectares in the Category 1 villages of:
 - Braughing
 - Hertford Heath
 - High Cross
 - Hunsdon

- Much Hadham
 - Puckeridge
 - Tewin
 - Walkern
 - Watton-at-Stone
- On sites proposing 3 or more dwellings or over 0.09 hectares in the Category 2 villages of:
 - Aston (excluding Aston End)
 - Bayford
 - Benington
 - Brickendon
 - Dane End
 - Datchworth
 - Furneux Pelham
 - Great Amwell
 - Hadham Ford
 - High Wych
 - Little Hadham
 - Standon
 - Stapleford
 - Thundridge
 - Wadesmill
 - Widford

Tenure Structure

The Housing Needs Survey 2004 identified the tenure structure which will best meet the need for affordable housing. Therefore, of the 40% affordable housing the Council requires:

- 75% of the properties to be rented;
- 25% of the properties to be intermediate housing that being:
 - Properties at flexible levels allowing for subsequent 100% ownership;

Size Standards

Of all the affordable housing the Council requires the following proportions of each size of property:

- 1/3 1 bedroom 2 person
- 1/3 2 bedroom 3 and 4 person (ideally 2 bedroom houses)
- 1/3 3 bedroom 4 and 5 person (ideally houses or ground floor flats)
- where need is established a 4 or 5 bedroom may be requested.

Affordable Rent

The Council recognises that Registered Providers need to let new properties at a rent of up to 80% of the local market rent to enable the development of future new affordable homes, where they have an agreed offer under the HCA's Affordable Homes Programme 2011-2015. The Council encourages, where it is possible, rent levels that are below 80% to maximise the affordability of the accommodation to applicants on our housing register.

Design and Quality Standards

The accommodation must meet the relevant Level of the Code for Sustainable Homes and the Homes and Communities Agency Standards such that it would attract the Homes and Communities Agency funding and any available other public subsidy such as East Herts District Council capital funding.

Space Standards

East Herts Council expects all general purpose accommodation to be built in accordance with the Homes and Communities Agency standards applicable at the time. As of March 2011 these were:

- 1 bed 2 person units – 45-50 square metres
- 2 bed 3 person units – 57-67 square metres
- 2 bed 4 person units – 67-75 square metres
- 3 bed 5 person units – 75 to 85 square metres

Rural Areas and Exception Sites

The Council covers a wide rural area and shared ownership properties in rural areas are covered by a Designated Protected Area legislation which retains shared ownership properties in perpetuity through allowing only 80% ownership of the property to be bought.

Rural Exception Sites provide 100% affordable housing and are developed in conjunction with Policy HSG5 of the Local Plan.

Special Needs Requirements

In accordance with our Housing Strategy and Herts County Council Supporting People Strategy it may be necessary to seek specific affordable housing provision for those with a special need. This may be wheelchair standard accommodation or supported housing for specific needs group. Provision will vary from site to site and additional grant may be made available to assist in the cost of provision, subject to evidence that such a subsidy is required.

If you have any queries about East Herts Council's New Affordable Homes Commissioning Brief please contact the Council's Housing Development Manager