

## **HOUSING STRATEGY**

### **East Herts Housing Strategy 2022-2027**

***Draft version incorporating proposed amendments in response to the comments of Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 January 2022***

*Cover to be designed at the same time as the overall design of the final document once it has been approved by Council*

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## Foreword

Since 2016, when the last East Herts Housing Strategy was published, the world has changed radically. The Covid19 pandemic, the climate change agenda, the UK departure from the European Union, advancing home-based technology and demographic changes all have major implications for housing needs, housing aspirations and housing supply in East Herts.

Our population is growing and it's no wonder – East Herts is a very attractive place to live. The Halifax Quality of Life Survey 2020 rated us the UK's Best Place to Live!

Given the benefits of living in our district, it's not surprising that demand for housing is very buoyant. At the time of writing, the average house price stood at just over £423,000, some 47% above the England-wide average. That fact alone suggests the need for affordable housing is high.

I'm particularly pleased that growth in the number of affordable homes in East Herts continues at pace. Along with our partners, we have enabled an increase of 10.2% in the number of affordable homes in the district over the last ten years compared with an England-wide increase of 3.4%, a really significant achievement.

However, our track record of delivery is no reason for complacency, especially when we know there are pockets of deprivation in East Herts and increasing numbers of households turning to the council either because they are facing homelessness or their current home is no longer suitable for their needs.

The East Herts Housing Strategy for 2022 – 2027 is based on a systematic review of evidence gleaned from a range of sources and partners including the comprehensive study of affordable housing in the district we commissioned from the Housing Quality Network in 2020.

The facts and figures reveal the different dimensions of need in the district but put simply, I believe the Housing Strategy demonstrates the need for four key priorities to:

- **deliver more affordable homes**
- **enable a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable residents**
- **enable high quality housing options for older people, better suited to their needs**
- **improve the sustainability and quality of homes.**

We have involved as many people and organisations as possible in developing this new Housing Strategy. I would like to thank everyone whose views and recommendations have helped to shape our plans. We value the relationships we have with our partners and look forward to working together to turn our aspirations into reality.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Peter Boylan".

Peter Boylan

Cllr Peter Boylan

Executive Member for  
Neighbourhoods

## **Chapter 1: Introduction: a new housing strategy for new challenges**

East Herts faces a wide and diverse range of housing challenges, some newly arising and some more familiar. Homelessness, homes in poor condition or with low levels of energy efficiency and an insufficient supply of affordable homes continue to pose challenges. We also see new challenges emerging due to demographic trends and changes, including the impact of the Covid19 pandemic.

This strategy is evidence-based and has been subject to extensive consultation including:

- a public consultation in August and September 2021 which elicited a total of 118 responses
- a stakeholder consultation with a range of organisations including parish councils, Hertfordshire County Council, East Herts Citizens Advice Services and Hertfordshire Chamber of Commerce
- interviews with eight key registered providers who develop and manage affordable homes in the district.

### ***1.1 The overall role of the Housing Strategy***

Although there is no legislative requirement for East Herts Council to produce a housing strategy, a comprehensive strategy for the district provides an opportunity for us to set out our approach to tackling the housing needs identified. In this way, we hope this document makes clear how partners can work with us and what we aim to achieve together.

East Herts Council does not own or directly manage any general needs housing, as we transferred our housing stock to two registered providers in 2002. Without a housing revenue account, that is, an ongoing budget based on council housing rent net of outgoings, we are not in the position to easily develop affordable homes directly. Unfortunately, nor do we have significant sums to invest in the improvement of existing homes across tenures. In other words, we are enablers of new and improved homes rather than providers. This, however, has not diminished our appetite to address the housing problems our residents face.

The East Herts Housing Strategy therefore aims to:

- ensure a co-ordinated approach to housing activity in East Herts, linking a suite of policies and strategies to deliver the council’s ambitions
- maximise opportunities and resources to meet housing needs and aspirations, using council resources and partnership opportunities
- promote the role of housing in delivering corporate priorities and wider objectives including health and wellbeing and sustainable economic growth
- ensure that East Herts Council meets its housing obligations under the Equality Act 2010 and meets a diverse range of housing needs.

## **1.2 The Housing Strategy in context**

The East Herts Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027 is part of a suite of housing-related policy documents produced by the council. This includes the following.

- **East Herts Council Tenancy Strategy 2021 to 2026** – this provides the framework for how East Herts Council works with its registered provider partners on the rent levels and the tenancy types which are offered in affordable housing in the district.

- **East Herts Council Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Review and Strategy 2019 to 2024** – this provides evidence on the actions which are being undertaken to both prevent and tackle homelessness and rough sleeping in the district.
- **East Herts Council Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy 2021 to 2031** – this details the way in which the council provides financial and other assistance to owners and occupiers of private sector housing within East Herts.

Further policy documents adopted by East Herts Council and Hertfordshire County Council which have particular relevance to the Housing Strategy include the following:

### **The Corporate Priorities for East Herts Council**

- The council’s corporate plan has four priorities:
  - Sustainability at the heart of everything we do
  - Enabling our communities
  - Ensuring economic growth
  - Digital by default.

### **Assisting vulnerable people and households**

- Hertfordshire Supporting Adults with Complex Needs Strategy 2019

### **Planning and use of land**

- [East Herts District Plan 2018](#) – the District Plan (the statutory Local Plan) sets out the planning framework for the East Herts district for the period 2018 to 2033. The plan sets out the framework for new homes, new jobs, new facilities and infrastructure across the district.

### **Transport and Infrastructure**

- [Hertfordshire County Council – Hertfordshire's Local Transport Plan](#) 2018 to 2031

### **Climate Change and Environmental Sustainability**

- [East Herts Council – Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document 2021](#)
- [East Herts Council – Environmental Sustainability Action Plan December 2021](#)
- [Hertfordshire County Council – Sustainable Hertfordshire: Strategy and Action Plan 2020](#)

- [Hertfordshire County Council – Air Quality Strategy 2019](#)

### **Economic Growth**

- [Hertfordshire County Council – Good Growth in Hertfordshire](#)

## Chapter 2: The East Herts district

The district of East Herts covers an area of 477 square kilometres (184 square miles). It constitutes around one third of the county of Hertfordshire.

The district has a dispersed settlement pattern that includes the five market towns of Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware. Each town provides a range of services to the surrounding rural areas. There are also approximately one hundred villages and hamlets of varying sizes.

### **2.1 A relatively prosperous district with pockets of deprivation**

East Herts is widely acknowledged as an attractive, prosperous and desirable place to live. This was confirmed by the award in January 2020 of the title of the UK's Best Place to Live in the Halifax Quality of Life index survey.

According to the survey: *"Known for its many popular market towns, such as Bishop's Stortford and Hertford, East Herts in the East of England achieves its crown thanks to strong exam results, high life expectancy, excellent health and happiness scores, and high average earnings."*

The relatively prosperous nature of the district is further reflected in the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 in which all 32,482 lower super output areas (neighbourhood-sized areas) in England are ranked according to ten measures of deprivation. East Herts contains a total of 83 lower super output areas of which 35 (39%) are ranked in the 10% most affluent neighbourhoods in England.

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2019 also show, however, that there are pockets of deprivation in the district:

- 22 neighbourhoods are ranked in the 30% most deprived nationally in terms of barriers to housing and other services;
- three neighbourhoods are ranked in the 30% most deprived in terms of income-related deprivation.

### **2.2 A growing population**

Population statistics show significant growth in recent years. In fact, the number of residents in East Herts increased by 8.8% during eight years to 2019, with some eight of our thirty wards seeing population growth in excess of 10%.



The numbers of older people in East Herts are growing. Population projections from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) predict that the numbers of people aged 60+ will grow from 37,317 in 2021 to 48,855 in 2035. The same population projections predict that the numbers of people aged 75+ will grow from 13,400 in 2021 to 18,917 in 2035.

In September 2020 a total of 7,180 European Union nationals living in the district applied for settled status. The highest numbers of countries of origin were Italy, Poland and Romania.

In September 2020, 11.1% of East Herts' working age population claimed disability benefits. This is compared with the 6.4% of the United Kingdom workforce who, in August 2021, claimed Employment and Support Allowance which is the main benefit for a person of working age who is disabled or has a health condition (*source: Department for Work and Pensions*). Our partnership working with Hertfordshire County Council will provide further evidence of the need for housing which is accessible for disabled people.

### Chapter 3: The Housing Strategy in action

From our analysis of the local context and our extensive consultation, we have identified four overarching priorities which will drive the strategy over the coming five years.

These priorities are so fundamental to addressing local needs that they will remain relevant over the coming five years.

The East Herts Housing Strategy will, however, need to be agile and responsive to the changing national, regional and local contexts for housing-related work over its five year lifetime as it is to be expected that new legislation, population trends and economic developments among other things will all pose newly emerging issues. As a result, action plans will be produced for each of the priorities and progress will monitored and reported on at least annually.

#### *Housing Strategy priorities*

Strategic priority 1: **deliver more affordable homes**

Strategic priority 2: **enable a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable residents**

Strategic priority 3: **enable high quality housing options for older people, better suited to their needs**

Strategic priority 4: **improve the sustainability and quality of homes**

In the following chapters, we will explore the issues relating to each priority in turn and describe what the evidence indicates should be the objectives relating to each one. The objectives will then inform a series of detailed action plans which will flow from this strategy.

## **Chapter 4: East Herts Council's strategic priorities for housing**

### **4.1 Strategic priority 1: Deliver more affordable homes**

The identification of the strategic priority to deliver more affordable homes is based on evidence from a wide range of data sources, including:

- the UK House Price index from the Land Registry
- the national Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)
- Office for National Statistics (ONS) data on market rents by local authority
- East Herts Council's records on the development of affordable housing for rent and low cost home ownership
- the 'Affordable Housing Provision in East Herts' report commissioned by East Herts Council from the Housing Quality Network (HQN) in 2020.

### ***The housing market***

Chapter 2 described the relatively affluent nature of East Herts. The desirability of the district, with its good quality of life and easy commuting distance to London, is reflected in local housing prices.

Reviewing median average house price data produced by the Land Registry quickly shows just how expensive the local housing market is.

Table 1 shows that property prices in East Herts outstrip those in the rest of the East of England region and, apart from flats and maisonettes, are significantly higher than the England-wide average. This confirms that East Herts is an area characterised by particularly high house prices.

**Table 1: Median average property prices at September 2021**

	East Herts	East of England	England
All properties	£423,177	£327,982	£287,895
Detached house	£796,834	£501,722	£447,617
Semi-detached house	£474,678	£334,906	£273,470
Terraced house	£383,561	£277,590	£236,797
Flats or maisonettes	£249,451	£204,995	£241,884

Source: UK House Price Index, Land Registry

Using the Land Registry data, it is possible to estimate the minimum level of income required to purchase homes of different sizes in East Herts. This is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Income required to purchase a property in East Herts**

Property type	Average price September 2021 - Source: <i>The Land Registry</i>	Min income required with 10% deposit and mortgage x3.5 of income	Min income required with 20% deposit and mortgage x3.5 of income
All property types	£423,177	£108,817	£96,726
Detached home	£796,834	£204,900	£182,133
Semi-detached home	£474,678	£122,060	£108,498
Terraced home	£383,561	£98,630	£87,671
Flat	£249,451	£64,145	£57,017

Source: analysis by East Herts Council based on Land Registry data and the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE)

The key question here is – how do local incomes compare with the salaries required to buy a local home? To investigate this, incomes for East Herts recorded in the

national Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings have been analysed.

<b>Table 3: Local earnings</b>	
Earnings decile	Weekly median of gross earnings per individual
Lowest 10%	£399.00 £20,748 per year
Lowest 20%	£479.10 £24,913 per year
Lowest 25%	£506.30 £26,328 per year
Lowest 30%	£543.10 £28,412 per year
Lowest 40%	£611.20 £31,782 per year
Median average	£714.70 £37,164 per year

*Source: Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) for full-time employment in the East Herts district 2020*

The survey shows that the median income from full-time employment among East Herts residents in 2020 was £37,164 a year. This is well below the income required to buy a property in the district even with a 20% deposit.

A household containing two full-time earners on a median income could afford an average priced flat in the district but not an average priced house. Of course, there will be less expensive properties that bring home purchase within the reach of those on average earnings. Comparison of the

figures in Tables 2 and 3, however, illustrates how difficult it is to purchase a home locally, especially first time buyers without significant equity built up in an existing home.

### ***The private rented market***

Those unable or not ready to buy a home for whatever reason, including because they are saving up to buy their first home, will typically look to the private rented market.

As house prices are high in the district, it follows that private rents will be too as private landlords typically set rents to give a certain return on their investment. This is known as the rental yield.

Nationally published rental property yield data are currently in short supply, possibly because of the impact of Covid 19. That said, the longstanding Knight Frank 'UK Residential Investment – Yield Guide' reports, for March 2021 (the latest month available), provides an average yield in 'Greater London Prime' areas of 3.5% - 3.75% and in 'South East Prime' areas of 4%.

Using median average rent data, it is possible to estimate the minimum level of income required to rent homes of

different sizes in the private rented sector in East Herts. This analysis is presented in Table 4.

<b>Table 4: Private sector rents in East Herts</b>			
Property type	Median monthly rent 1 October 2019 to 30 September 2020	Minimum annual income at 30% of gross income	Minimum annual income at 40% of gross income
Room	£358	£14,320	£10,740
Studio	£650	£26,000	£19,500
1 bedroom	£800	£32,000	£24,000
2 bedroom	£1,000	£40,000	£30,000
3 bedroom	£1,350	£54,000	£40,500
4+ bedrooms	£1,680	£67,200	£50,400

*Source: Office for National Statistics Rental markets statistics in England October 2019 to September 2020*

It can be seen that incomes need to be approaching or a little in excess of average levels to afford all but the smaller private rented properties in the district.

### ***The scale of need***

There are currently just over 64,000 dwellings in East Herts. The Office for National Statistics' latest projection reports the district's population to be 150,745, with a further projected growth to 156,583 by 2030. This will itself lead to an on-going growth in the need for new housing. Alongside this, national planning policy guidance and government direction indicates the need, nationally, to significantly increase delivery to meet assessed need.

Analysis undertaken to inform the District Plan 2018 – 2033 concluded that East Herts' need for additional housing to 2033 is 12,200, with 34.4% of these extra homes needing to be affordable housing, that is 4,200 new affordable homes over the District Plan period.

The council's District Plan seeks 40% of new homes on all but the smallest developments to be affordable. Indeed, East Herts Council has an enviable track record of ensuring a good supply of affordable homes, when compared with the rest of Hertfordshire and indeed England as a whole.

**Table 5: Affordable housing numbers 2010 - 2020**

	Rented affordable housing – council and registered provider homes combined		Difference	% diff
	2010	2020		
East Herts	7,572	8,343	771	+10.2%
Hertfordshire excluding East Herts	77,641	79,889	2,248	+2.9%
England	4,029,084	4,166,276	137,192	+3.4%

Source: Department of Levelling up, Housing and Communities

The national figures in Table 5, collated by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities each year, show that in the ten years to 2020, the number of affordable homes in East Herts, that is new build net of any sales, rose by some 10.2% to over 8,300. Over the same period, the affordable homes in the rest of Hertfordshire increased by only 2.9%, and 3.4% across England.

These figures are reinforced by high levels of affordable housing development in East Herts in recent years across both rented and shared ownership tenures.

**Table 6: Affordable housing development in East Herts**

Year	Affordable rented	Shared ownership	All affordable
2017/18	96	53	149
2018/19	116	105	221
2019/20	220	72	292
2020/21	104	135	239
All	536	365	901
Tenure split	59%	41%	

Source: East Herts Council development records

The analysis in Table 6 demonstrates that high house prices and private rents put considerable strain on the overall housing system in East Herts. Where a household is priced out of home ownership and even private renting, it is to be expected that they will look to the possibility of low cost home ownership or affordable rent from one of the seventeen registered providers with properties in East Herts.

So, it is important to consider, what forms of affordable housing are being delivered and what exactly is needed to address local needs?

### **Low cost home ownership**

With the exception of a small number of equity loan schemes, shared ownership is the dominant form of low cost home ownership in East Herts. Shared ownership aims to bring home ownership within reach of those whose incomes and savings are insufficient to buy a home otherwise.

The shared ownership tenure gives first time buyers and those who do not currently own a home the opportunity to purchase a share in a new home or resale property. The purchaser pays a mortgage on the share they acquire and then pays rent to a registered provider on the remaining share. Because the purchaser needs a mortgage for just the share they are purchasing, the amount of money required for a deposit is usually lower than when purchasing outright and the income required to make the monthly mortgage payments will obviously be lower than in the case of outright purchase. The purchaser has the option to increase the share they own during their time in the property via a process known as staircasing.

Table 7 gives data on the affordability of shared ownership in East Herts based on the average full open market values

of properties advertised for shared ownership in East Herts between August 2020 and October 2021.

**Table 7: Affordability of shared ownership properties in East Herts advertised between August 2020 and October 2021**

	Initial share of shared ownership property which is affordable*		
	1 bedroom flat	2 bedroom house	3 bedroom house
Full value of properties advertised for shared ownership	£240,000	£300,000	£415,000
Single salary at lowest 25% in East Herts	32%	21%	Cannot afford any share
One full time & one half time salary at lowest 25% in East Herts	69%	55%	29%
Single salary at East Herts median salary	65%	52%	23%
One full time & one half time at East Herts median salary	98%	79%	56%

\* Assumes:

- deposit of 5% of the value of share being purchased
- 25 year repayment mortgage rate of 4.5%
- mortgage capped at no more than four times gross salary



- rent payment of 2.75% of the unsold equity per year
- service charge for flat £100 pcm
- 40% of gross salary devoted to housing costs counted as affordable.

Table 7 presents the initial shares required to enable people on lower incomes in the district to access a shared ownership home. It demonstrates that the tenure is a useful means of assisting people in the district into home ownership, albeit only relatively low initial shares are likely to be affordable by many needing to buy a three bedroom home.

### ***Affordable rented housing***

Rented accommodation in the affordable sector is provided by a total of seventeen registered providers in East Herts. There are primarily two forms of such housing available which can be differentiated by their rent levels, either social rent or affordable rent.

**Social rent housing** is affordable rented accommodation with rents set in accordance with a government formula. The rent level will vary property-by-property as it is calculated according to the market value of the property, the size of the property and the local income levels in the

area in which the property is located. In East Herts, social rents determined by this national defined formula typically result in rent at around 50% to 60% of market rents in the locality.

**Affordable rent housing** was introduced 2011. Such properties are subject to a different mechanism for setting the rent. In this case, the registered provider may set a rent which, when combined with service charges if applicable, can be *up to a maximum of 80%* of the market rent in the locality. It is for the registered provider to determine the rent level, with the Valuation Office Agency overseeing the process.

The government's aspiration in introducing affordable rent housing was to afford registered providers a higher rental income against which to borrow as this would reduce their need for subsidy from the government (and now allocated through Homes England) thus reducing the call on the public purse. This was seen as a way of delivering more homes for the same overall amount of public subsidy.

At the same time as introducing affordable rent housing, the government enabled registered providers to switch the

rent for an existing property from a social rent to an affordable when it became vacant.

Unsurprisingly, different rent levels will have differing impacts on households with different characteristics. In 2020, the council commissioned the Housing Quality Network (HQN) to undertake a comprehensive study into affordable housing provision in the district.

HQN investigated how affordable the different rental products were for a range of different households. Key findings are presented below.

**Key to Tables 8 - 10**

- Y yes, the tenure is affordable as no more than 40% of gross income needs to be devoted to housing costs
- N no, the tenure is not affordable as more than 40% of gross income needs to be devoted to housing costs
- \* 40 percent of earnings/incomes, taking account of the impact of benefits and taxes
- \*\* Average social rent for the size of home needed and available between April and June 2020 (source: East Herts Council)
- \*\*\* Average affordable rent for the size of home needed and available between April and June 2020 (source: East Herts Council)

- ~ Two figures are used – shared room rate and one-bedroom unit rate
- ^ National living wage as calculated by Living Wage Foundation for the size of household
- ^^ Local median FT wage for year ended April 2019: £32,400 (Office for National Statistics [ONS] data)

**Table 8: Affordability outcomes for a single person**

	Maximum affordable cost *	Social rent **	Affordable rent ***	Market rent ~
Weekly cost		102.22	145.68	82.61 184.61
Under 35, benefits only	69.84	N	N	N
Over 35, benefits only	85.84	N	N	N
Government national living wage @8.72PH (per hour)	131.30	Y	N	Shared room only
Local average wage ^^	197.30	Y	Y	Y

**Table 9: Affordability outcomes for a lone parent**

	Maximum affordable cost*	Social rent**	Affordable rent ***	Market rent
Weekly cost		118.03	183.29	230.77
Benefits only	153.66	Y	N	N
Government national minimum wage @8.72PH P/T	188.82	Y	Y	N
Government national minimum wage @8.72PH F/T with childcare costs	171.33	Y	N	N
LWF national living wage@9.30 PH P/T ^	182.03	Y	N	N
Local average wage^^ P/T	205.77	Y	Y	N
Local average wage^^ F/Twith childcare costs	203.67	Y	Y	N

**Table 10: Affordability outcomes for a couple with two children**

	Maximum affordable cost *	Social rent **	Affordable rent ***	Market rent
Weekly cost		143.93	224.93	311.54
Benefitsonly	166.94	Y	N	N
1 Person F/T at governmentnational minimum wage @8.72 PH	279.60	Y	Y	N
2 People F/T at governmentnational minimum wage @8.72PH with childcarecosts ^	306.47	Y	Y	N
1 Person F/T and 1 person P/T at LWF national living wage@9.30 PH ^ (no childcarecosts)	308.80	Y	Y	N
1 person F/T at local average wage ^^	306.71	Y	Y	N
1 person F/T and 1 person P/T at local average wage, no childcare costs ^^	348.68	Y	Y	Y

The analysis by HQN indicates a very mixed picture in terms of the affordability of different rent levels. Of note, single people on benefits will struggle at all rent levels, with the national living wage required to afford even a social rent.

The affordability of an affordable rent for a lone parent is dependent on hours worked and the need to fund childcare, while couples are better placed to afford affordable rents.

### ***Seeking to match supply to need***

#### ***Rent levels***

The recent growth in affordable housing in East Herts discussed above has coincided with the introduction of affordable rent housing. The vast majority of new affordable homes have affordable rents. This is because as affordable rents are higher than social rents, a registered provider can afford to borrow more and thus pay the developer more for the new homes. It is the assumed income from registered providers that developers build into their viability models.

The relationship between rent levels and borrowing and thus how many homes a registered provider can afford to buy from a developer also works in the reverse. Thus, if a developer was compelled to only sell properties to a registered provider charging social rents, the registered provider could not borrow so much because there would be less rental income to cover the borrowing costs. Thus, the registered provider could only afford far fewer homes than if affordable rents were allowed.

Put simply without additional subsidy, the system of providing affordable housing on private, developer-led sites can deliver:

- more homes with affordable rents ***or***
- fewer homes with social rents.

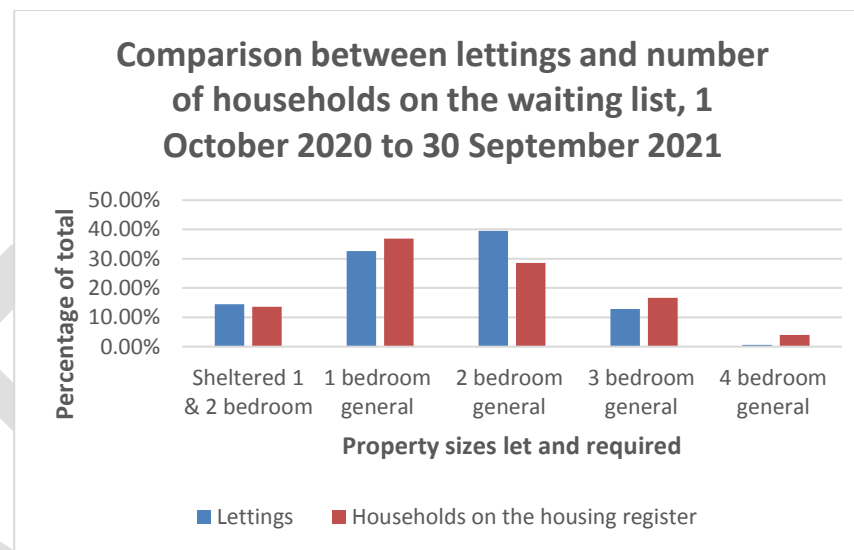
In overall terms, affordable housing built before 2011, and not subject to having the rent switched to an affordable rent when vacant, will have a social rent. Analysis of lettings in East Herts shows that over the 12 months to September 2021, the council nominated people to 522 vacancies in existing and new properties put forward by registered providers. Of these properties, 280 (53.6%) had a social rent and 242 (46.4%) had an affordable rent.

In summary, while there are both properties with social rents and affordable rents available in the district, there is clearly a need to preserve if not increase the supply of properties with a social rent, through whatever funding streams are available, so as to enable a full range of housing options for those unable to buy or rent privately and not in a position to buy a shared ownership home.

### **Size**

East Herts Council's housing register of those looking for affordable rented housing provides a key source of evidence about local need. At 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021, there were 2,152 households on the housing register, of which 1,856 require general needs housing. The remaining 296 require older persons' accommodation which is discussed in Chapter 5 below.

The greatest need registered with the council is for smaller properties. In total, 43% of those needing general needs accommodation require a one bed property with another 33% needing a two bedroom property.



*Source: East Herts Council*

This evidence also shows that although one and two bedroom need dominates both the housing register and supply, the supply of three and four bedroom lettings falls below the proportion of those on the housing register requiring this size of property. Thus, to more equitably meet need, there is a requirement for an increasing supply of larger homes.

### **Location**

Table 11 lists the location of general needs properties, these being non-specialist older persons' homes, let in the

district during the 12 months to September 2021. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there are more lettings available in the five market towns as compared with the more rural parts of the district. Given the paucity of housing options in the district's villages, especially to enable younger people to remain living near family members for support, there is a need to enable more rural development.

**Table 11: Location of general needs homes advertised through Choice-Based lettings in the 12 months to September 2021**

Property size	Total lettings	East Herts Towns*	East Herts villages
Studio	10	9 90.0%	1 10.0%
1 bed	175	126 72.0%	49 28.0%
2 bed	251	197 78.5%	54 21.5%
3 bed	87	66 75.9%	21 24.1%
4 bed	4	3 75.0%	1 25.0%

\* Bishop's Stortford, Buntingford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth and Ware

Source: East Herts Council

### **Modern methods of construction**

Modern Methods of Construction are increasingly being promoted as a means of accelerating the delivery of housing, and notably affordable housing given the need for increased supply, as that the major components can be manufactured off-site.

East Herts Council is a member of the Hertfordshire Off-Site Manufacturing Consortium together with other local authorities and registered providers. The aim of the consortium is to amass a pipeline of affordable housing development for which an off-site manufacturer could provide homes at a lower price as a result of economies of scale.

While the council is not a developer of new affordable housing, we are keen to keep abreast of innovations in this area and promote new construction methods among our registered provider partners. Methods which are particularly promoted are fully modular pre-fabricated homes and timber frame homes. Modern methods of construction can provide the following advantages: a shorter time scale for construction and new homes which have a high level of energy efficiency.

## Objectives arising from the evidence

The evidence discussed in this section suggests that in order to address the strategic priority to **deliver more affordable homes**, the following objectives should apply for the coming five years:

- increase the supply of new homes offered with (a) social rents or (b) affordable rents at or very near to between 50% and 60% of market rents
- enable a range of low cost home ownership products in the district
- improve the focus on housing needs in our rural communities
- assist households in accessing the private housing market
- gather and publish up-to-date housing need and supply data.

## **4.2 Strategic priority 2: Enable a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable residents**

The evidence used to inform the discussion in this section has been gathered from the following sources:

- the council's records of homelessness applications
- the council's Rough Sleeper Count Autumn 2021
- Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency
- discussion with Hertfordshire County Council's commissioning teams.

### ***Housing options and homelessness prevention***

The council is legally required to assess and prevent homelessness in the district as part of the Government's focus on homelessness prevention. With growing affordability issues and consequently fewer housing options as discussed earlier in this strategy, preventing homelessness is an increasingly difficult challenge and one that needs to be tackled in several different ways.

There has been much research at the national level that demonstrates that homelessness has a particularly detrimental effect on people's health and wellbeing. Of

particular note, long stays in temporary accommodation can severely impact a child's development, education and health and well-being.

To address the issue of homelessness, co-ordinate the council's work to support homeless people and guide our partners, the council has adopted the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 – 2024. This strategy sets out the council's strategic priorities for reducing homelessness and rough sleeping. Our overall approach is built on:

- strong and effective partnership working
- early targeted intervention and advice to prevent the loss of accommodation
- effective action to relieve homelessness and sustain tenancies to prevent repeat homelessness
- protecting and increasing local housing options.

Despite the council's efforts, there has been a steady increase in homelessness in East Herts in recent years as various welfare reforms have taken hold and the opportunities to access the private rented market have decreased. Landlords can be fearful of accepting tenants in receipt of universal credit while the freezing of local housing allowance rates up to March 2020 meant that the



private rented sector has become increasingly unaffordable in recent years.



Source: East Herts Council

The council provides a range of services to help meet the needs of homeless people and those facing homelessness. This includes:

- offering rent-in-advance and deposits
- using Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP)
- funding East Herts Citizens Advice Service to provide bespoke debt advice.

The council has 31 units of temporary accommodation, with two additional self-contained units currently being developed and due to be available from Spring 2022.

### ***Rough sleeping***

The rough sleeper count conducted each November in East Herts by the council utilising the Government’s methodology records the following number over the last six years.

<b>Table 12: Rough sleeping in East Herts</b>	
Year	Number of rough sleepers recorded – annual count in November
2016	9
2017	3
2018	9
2019	15
2020	6
2021	5

Source: East Herts Council

The increasing trend in previous years appears to have been reversed recently which is likely to reflect the council’s efforts under the national ‘Everyone In’ and ‘Protect Plus’ initiatives brought in to protect rough

sleepers from the pandemic and subsequently provide more settled accommodation. As part of this work, in April 2021 the council opened its first temporary accommodation scheme specifically for rough sleepers or those at risk of rough sleeping which is providing six much needed self-contained units for this client group.

**People with complex needs**

Hertfordshire County Council’s ‘Supporting Adults with Complex Needs Strategy’ gives the following definition of an individual with complex needs:

An individual with two or more needs affecting their physical, mental, social or financial wellbeing. This can include mental health issues, substance misuse, domestic abuse, homelessness, physical ill health, learning or physical disability.

The strategic priorities in this Complex Needs Strategy are:

- preventing and reducing care and support needs
- preventing homelessness and reducing rough sleeping
- helping to support people to remain in their own homes and connected to communities

- improving health and wellbeing and preventing ill-health due to homelessness.

There has been an increasing number of households approaching East Herts Council for assistance under the homelessness legislation who have two or more needs.

**Table 13: Increase in homelessness for reasons most closely related to complex needs**

Quarter	Number of persons asked to leave by extended family or friends	Number of persons leaving an institution *
April to June 2020	5	5
July to Sept 2020	8	6
Oct to Dec 2020	16	5
Jan to March 2021	12	5
April to June 2021	18	3
July to Sept 2021	14	6

\* Definition includes people leaving a hospital, HM Forces, HM prison or local authority care

Source: East Herts Council

In addition, the Covid19 pandemic has played a role in increasing homelessness among single persons living on a

casual basis with extended family or friends, otherwise known as 'sofa surfing'.

### ***Cuckooing***

At the same time as the rise in homeless people approaching the council with complex needs, there has been an increase in the number of homelessness cases due to 'cuckooing', that is, the practice whereby individuals take over a person's home and use the property to facilitate exploitation which can involve dealing, storing or taking illicit drugs. The person whose home is taken over is often vulnerable, with complex needs. The police have suggested that the number of train lines radiating out from London into the district appears to be leading to a comparatively high concentration of 'cuckooing' in East Herts.

Closure Orders, prohibiting access to a home, are typically put in place when dealing with this issue. This approach, however, can result in homelessness for the legitimate tenant of the property.

### ***Learning from providing accommodation for people with complex needs***

The number of households in temporary accommodation remains high largely as a result of an increase in homelessness approaches from single person households with complex needs. This includes those with mental health problems and/or alcohol and drug misuse issues, and those who have reverted to sleeping rough. The following statistics show an increase among households presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness for reasons most closely related to those with complex needs.

Recent experience of managing temporary accommodation projects for single person households in East Herts has demonstrated the need for housing schemes with a high level of support for the most vulnerable. East Herts Council is working with partner organisations to examine the possibility of a supported housing scheme with a number of stages: initial support, intensive support, transitional support, step down and move on.

## Domestic abuse

Table 14 shows the increase in the number of households presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness for reasons of domestic violence over the last 18 months.

**Table 14: Number of households presenting as homeless or threatened with homelessness for reason of domestic violence**

Quarter	Number of households
April to June 2020	4
July to Sept 2020	19
Oct to Dec 2020	18
Jan to Mar 2021	16
April to June 2021	28
July to Sept 2021	31

Source: East Herts Council

Since 2019, the council has commissioned the Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) team based within Stevenage Borough Council to provide support and advice to victims and survivors of domestic abuse, and children living with domestic abuse. This includes providing help with housing and tenancy issues.

Over the last 12 months, 57 households have been referred to SADA for assistance and support.

The Domestic Abuse Act 2021 formalises the need for Hertfordshire County Council to provide accommodation based support to victims of domestic abuse and their children in refuges and other safe housing.

The Hertfordshire Domestic Abuse Partnership has produced its Domestic Violence Strategy for 2021 to 2025. It contains the following strategic priorities:

- act before harm
- identify and stop harm
- increase safety for those at risk
- support after harm.

The strategy also seeks *'to ensure that all victims of domestic abuse have access to high quality safe accommodation pathways and support, including support to remain in their own home if it is safe to do so and if they choose to do so'*.

Detailed actions for each of the four priorities will be published in early 2022. East Herts Council will be part of the Domestic Abuse Partnership Board which will be

responsible for operational delivery through an annually updated action plan.

As well as accessing services via SADA, the council works with the Future Living charity in Hertford which provide counselling and support to those experiencing or having experienced domestic abuse.

### ***Learning disability***

The council works closely with Hertfordshire County Council to research housing needs and solutions for residents with learning disabilities. Work to date has identified:

- there has been an increase in the population identified as living with learning disabilities in Hertfordshire since 2016. This is due partly to the introduction of Learning Disability registers in GP practices, so more people are being identified as having a learning disability.
- the degree to which people are returning to Hertfordshire having previously been accommodated out-of-county is increasing. This is largely due to the Transforming Care programme introduced nationally in 2015 to reduce

hospitalisation of individuals with learning disabilities and accommodate them closer to home

- in East Herts, those with learning disability in most need of housing options are typically young adults
- there is an expectation that people with low levels of learning disabilities should be able to live in the community on a relatively independent basis and indeed people with learning disabilities are clear that they want their own independent home as shared housing is no longer so popular
- some supported housing schemes are no longer fit-for-purpose, particularly as they often don't provide self-contained accommodation
- there is interest among some clients and their families in the possibility of shared ownership.

### ***Physical disability***

Hertfordshire County Council is leading work on producing a new accommodation strategy for adults with physical disabilities. This is in recognition of the fact that some districts in Hertfordshire no longer have the right type and quality of supported accommodation, and that new housing solutions and different types of accommodation are required. The Covid pandemic has also identified gaps

in provision. East Herts Council is working with the County Council on this important matter.

The far-reaching research is covering:

- needs assessments for different types of housing and locations that meets the needs of service users who are disabled
- identification of land and other resources to promote development for people with disabilities. Of note, this element of the work includes those with mental health, learning disabilities or other complex needs who are able to live in the community
- the production of demographic and demand evidence to inform Section 106 planning obligations, housing market assessments and planning documents produced by each district council in Hertfordshire
- the undertaking of market engagement with the aim of bringing forward a pipeline of new and refurbished accommodation that is fit for current and future clients.

The council provides Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) via the Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency (HHIA). The two registered providers who received the council's stock, Network Homes and Clarion Housing, also contribute to the costs of adaptations for disabled people.

Since April 2018, at which point the HHIA took over the management of DFGs, a total of 239 Disabled Facilities Grants have been awarded to East Herts residents, 150 aged 65 year or over and 89 aged under 65 years. The most common adaptations installed through Disabled Facilities Grants have been stair lifts, level access showers, extensions, and other bathroom adaptations. The tenures of homes in which Disabled Facilities Grants have enabled accessibility measures to be installed are shown in Table 15.

In addition, East Herts Council is committed to working with registered providers to encourage and enable them to make the best use of their existing stock so as to meet the needs of disabled people.

**Table 15: Tenure of homes in which Disabled Facilities Grants have enabled accessibility measures to be installed, 2018 to 2021**

Tenure	Persons aged under 65 years		Persons aged 65 years and over	
Owned	38	42.7%	106	70.7%
Social housing	47	52.8%	29	19.3%
Private rented	1	1.1%	10	6.7%
Tenure not recorded	3	3.4%	5	3.3%
Total	89	100%	150	100%

Source: Hertfordshire Home Improvement Agency and East Herts Council

### **Gypsies, travellers and travelling show people**

The East Herts District Plan 2018 to 2033 identified that an additional two pitches would be required up to 2022, with a further three required between 2022 and 2027. The District Plan identifies six sites within the district which are deemed suitable for the location of extra pitches.

In 2022, East Herts Council will be commissioning an assessment of the accommodation needs of gypsies and

travellers and travelling show people in East Herts.

Recommendations regarding planning for this client group will be made on the basis of this study.

### **Objectives arising from the evidence**

The evidence discussed in the chapter suggests that in order to address the strategic priority to **enable a wider range of accommodation and support for our most vulnerable residents**, the following objectives should apply for the coming five years, to:

- work collaboratively with partners to maximise housing and support options for rough sleepers
- explore the provision of supported accommodation for single people with complex needs
- further develop services for households affected by domestic abuse
- work with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) on the provision of housing for adults with learning and/or physical disabilities.

### **4.3 Strategic priority 3: Enable high quality housing options for older people, better suited to their needs**

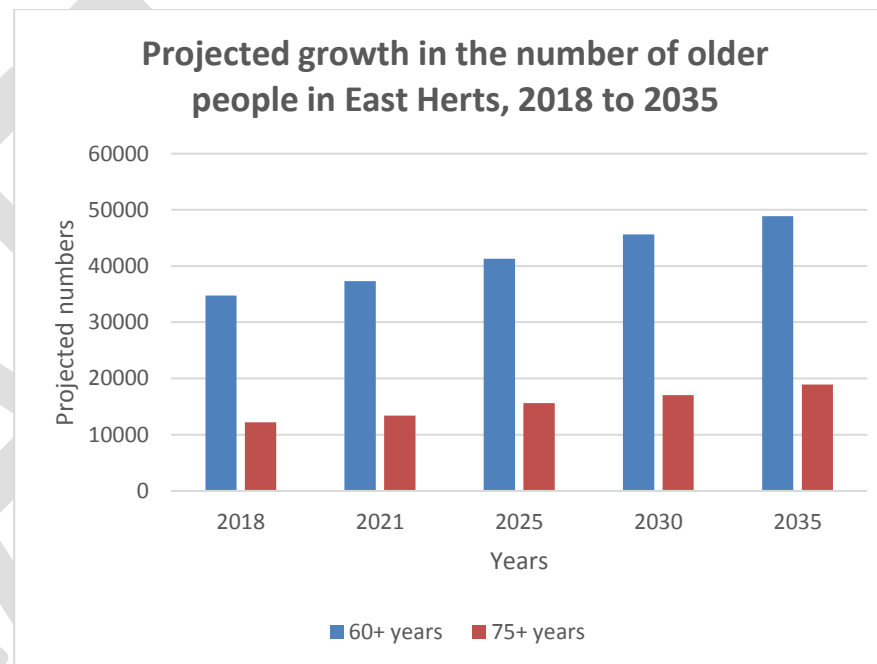
The evidence used to inform the discussion in this section has been gathered from the following sources:

- Office for National Statistics – population projections.
- Census 2011
- HousingCare.org – housing schemes for older people in East Herts
- Report on Under-occupation in East Herts – a review of the issues, challenges and possible solutions.

#### ***Growing older population***

East Herts' population grew by 8.8% from March 2011 to June 2019 (*Source: Census 2011 and Office for National Statistics mid-year population estimates by age*). Over the same period, however, the growth in the number of people aged 60 and over living in the district was estimated to have grown by some 20.6%.

In the next few years, East Herts will see a significant increase in the number of over 60s and particularly over 75s.



*Source: Office for National Statistics, population projections*

It is therefore essential that the council addresses the housing and health of this part of our population to assist older people live fully independent lives for as long as possible.



The council has a key role to play in working with housing providers and the commissioners of services, notably Hertfordshire County Council, to achieve this by enabling the right mix of housing and communities. Such work will include:

- extra care facilities
- high quality options for older people wishing to downsize from under-occupation notably in the social rent sector and among owner-occupiers with relatively limited equity in their property
- dementia-friendly schemes
- increasing use of a wide-range of digital and non-digital assistive technologies.

There is also clear evidence of need for more housing which can be adapted as people's needs change, including Lifetime Homes and fully wheelchair-accessible housing. Such housing allows people to remain living independently in their own home as they age and become less mobile.

Building more purpose-built older people's accommodation to 'Age Friendly' neighbourhood principles will also help to combat loneliness and prevent slips, trips

and falls, especially if homes are step-free and in accessible locations close to existing communities.

### ***Housing and dementia***

With a growing older population and predicted rise in diagnosis rates of dementia, the council needs to continue developing positive interventions to support those affected.

The council is proud to have been accredited by the Alzheimer's Association as a Dementia Friendly organisation and we devote much time and effort to furthering understanding of dementia among our partners and residents.

There is a need for extra care schemes and other forms of housing to be developed to meet the needs of those with dementia.

### ***Existing accommodation for older people in East Hertfordshire***

Accommodation specifically designed and provided for older people in East Herts consists of six care homes, 11 care homes with nursing and 46 schemes of self-contained

accommodation of which 31 are owned and managed by registered providers as affordable housing.

Data held by the council on the allocation of existing affordable housing for older people indicates that housing schemes built in the 1960s and 1970s are becoming increasingly difficult to let, as they no longer meet modern day needs and expectations, particularly in terms of size and layout.

### **Under-occupation**

The Census 2011 showed a high rate of under-occupation in East Herts among older age groups in terms of the number of bedrooms.

**Table 16: Under-occupation in East Herts**

	<b>Under-occupation by one bedroom</b>	<b>Under-occupation by two or more bedrooms</b>
<b>Age of head of household</b>		
Household head aged 50 to 64 years	29.7%	53.6%
Household head aged 65+ years	27.0%	59.2%
<b>Tenure</b>		
Owner-occupation (owned outright, owned with a mortgage and shared ownership)	34.8%	49.8%
Social rent	25.9%	11.0%
Private rent	36.9%	15.3%

*Source: Census 2011*

Research by East Herts Council has shown that providing downsizing options for older households who wish to move to a small home requires consideration of a wide range of factors, notably:

- the need for attractive and accessible smaller homes in the right locations
- financial incentives including help with, say, moving costs and decoration vouchers
- help with the moving process.

For some under-occupying owner-occupiers, the cost of a new, more suitable home, coupled with moving costs, outweighs the equity in their current home. A possible solution to this is Older Persons Shared Ownership, which enables households in relatively low value properties and/or with mortgages to pay off to move to a new home. Under this scheme a householder purchases just 75% of the home's value, with the remaining share retained by the property's owner, typically a registered provider or a local authority. The holder of the equity share would receive this as part of the Section 106 planning agreement. The purchaser is not typically required to pay rent on the unsold equity.

In December 2021, a total of 18 households headed by a person aged 60+ and currently renting their home in the social housing sector were registered with the council as they wish to move to a smaller property.

### ***Developing new accommodation for older people***

The council has worked collaboratively with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) on the County Council's strategy regarding housing for older people.

The key elements of this work are:

- a long-term programme to support people in communities (across Hertfordshire)
- bringing forward accommodation options which result in a decreasing reliance on nursing homes and residential care, for example, by increasing the provision of extra care housing
- enabling older people to access supported housing schemes in their own community where they can retain their support networks
- maximising the extent to which housing is future-proofed to meet the needs of people with dementia and/or mobility impairments.

The council has participated in work led by Hertfordshire County Council to produce design guidance relating to housing for older people.

East Herts is currently undertaking the following:

- devising plans, in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council, for additional extra care provision in the district
- exploring options to develop older persons' accommodation in the vicinity of existing extra care schemes to create a form of 'active older persons' villages' which provide a range of housing options for older people who wish to move to smaller accommodation.
- work with Hertfordshire County Council and other partners to explore housing options that address the needs and aspirations of people with dementia and their families.

### Objectives arising from the evidence

The evidence discussed in the chapter suggests that in order to address the strategic priority to **enable high quality housing options for older people, better suited to their needs**, the following objectives should apply for the coming five years, to:

- explore and keep under review the changing needs and aspirations of the older population in the district
- work with partners to bring forward high quality downsizing options
- work with Hertfordshire County Council and other partners on expanding the range of housing options for older residents

#### **4.4 Strategic priority 4: Improve the sustainability and quality of homes**

The evidence used to inform the discussion in this section has been gathered from the following sources:

- Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities: registrations of Energy Performance Certificates in East Herts
- Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities: Vacant Homes by local authority area.
- Office for National Statistics' population projections
- East Herts Council Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), March 2021
- East Herts Council District Plan 2018
- East Herts Council – council tax data

#### **National policy on sustainable housing**

In October 2019, the government published its [Heat and Buildings Strategy](#). The strategy states the following:

- the target will be for zero carbon emissions to be reached by 2050
- the installation of new natural gas boilers will be

phased out from 2035, and there will be no more fossil fuel heating systems installed in homes not connected to the gas grid from 2026

- future mainstream means of heating homes are likely to include ground and air source heat pumps and the use of hydrogen.

East Herts Council will continue to monitor closely all new initiatives for introducing new sustainable heating methods.

#### **Sustainability at the heart of everything we do**

In July 2019, East Herts Council unanimously approved the adoption of a Climate Change Motion which committed the council to, among other things:

- supporting the whole of East Herts District to become carbon neutral by 2030 and
- take actions so that the council itself becomes carbon neutral by 2030.

To this end, the council has established an ambitious [Sustainability Action Plan](#) which is a living document while

also establishing and servicing an East Herts Climate Change and Environmental Forum.

The East Herts District Plan 2018 contains a section on Climate Change which includes:

- recommendations on how homes in the district should be adapted to meet the challenges of a changing climate
- details of the mitigation measures will be undertaken to reduce carbon emissions
- guidelines on how the council will assess and permit the development of sources of renewable energy generation.

### ***Domestic properties' contribution to overall levels of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions***

We know that domestic properties in East Herts contribute some 15% of the total CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent emissions of 674,000 tonnes in 2019-2020. Clearly, residential properties are a significant source of greenhouse gases and work to reduce these emissions will make a major contribution to local and national emission reduction targets.

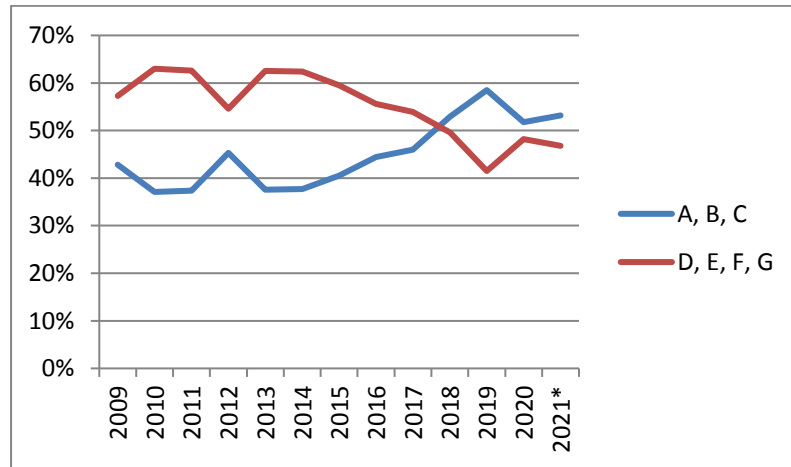
A SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating is the calculation that is required to predict the level of energy efficiency in a home. A SAP calculation indicates a score from 1 to 100 for the annual energy cost of a property, based on a number of aspects of the property. An Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) shows the SAP rating for a property. There are seven bands of energy efficiency, and an Energy Performance Certificate shows the band into which a property falls. Band A is the most energy efficient and band G is the least energy efficient. Of note:

- from April 2018, the Domestic Private Rented Sector Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard regulations banned private landlords from letting properties with an F or G rating
- in December 2020, the Clean Growth Strategy set a target for social housing providers to attain a minimum rating of EPC C for their rented stock by 2035 (2030 for “fuel poor” households).

The graph shows the percentage of Energy Performance Certificates registered for homes in East Herts between 2009 and 2021, grouping together A, B and C ratings and D, E, F and G ratings. There has been a steady increase in

ratings indicating a gradual improvement in domestic energy efficiency over the last 12 years

### EPC ratings in East Herts – 2009 to 2021



\* First three quarters of 2021

Source: DLUHC, Live tables on EPC registrations.

### Reducing emissions from social housing

East Herts Council works closely with its registered provider partners to monitor their energy efficiency programmes which cover their properties in the district.

Registered housing providers can apply to the government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund to

support the installation of energy performance measures in social housing. In addition, a national review of the Decent Homes standard for social housing is taking place between autumn 2021 and summer 2022. This will contain further recommendations on improving the energy efficiency of social housing.

### Reducing emissions from private sector homes

In 2017 the Building Research Establishment carried out research in East Herts to produce dwelling-level housing stock modelling on stock condition.

The research findings included:

- 23% of private sector homes had uninsulated cavity walls and 13% had inadequate loft insulation
- the SAP (Standard Assessment Procedure) rating used to estimate energy efficiency in a home records an average rating of 58 (EPC Band D) for East Herts within the spectrum of 1-100 which indicates a medium average energy efficiency rating. This is comparable to the average for England (57) and the East of England region (57).

The council's newly revamped Private Sector Housing Assistance Policy makes provision for tackling poor insulation and conditions, most notably by offering:

- energy efficiency grants
- home insulation grants
- loans for Decent Homes works criteria.

East Herts Council will monitor the availability of government initiatives which could be used to increase energy efficiency in the district. The government's Local Authority Delivery (LAD) scheme aims to raise the energy efficiency of low EPC rated homes (those rated at E, F or G), deliver progress towards reducing fuel poverty, phase out high carbon fossil fuel heating, and deliver progress towards the UK's commitment to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. East Herts Council has worked in partnership with Warmworks to introduce a new scheme using LAD funding. The scheme will offer assistance in the installation of energy efficiency measures to households whose homes have a D, E, F or G rating and whose annual household income is less than £30,000.

### ***Energy efficiency of new build housing***

The council adopted a comprehensive Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in March 2021 which sets out in considerable detail the expectations the council has of developers when they are seeking to make planning applications which are compliant with the energy efficiency and sustainability policies in the District Plan (the council's statutory local plan).

The SPD focuses on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. High quality sustainable developments require adopting a holistic approach to environmental, social and economic sustainability. The SPD focuses on the environmental dimensions of sustainability.

The SPD points out that one key means of reducing the carbon emissions of buildings is minimising the carbon locked in construction materials, known as embodied energy. The council's District Plan requires, where possible, the reduction of energy embodied in materials through re-use and recycling and the use of sustainable sources and local sourcing. Consideration of embodied carbon will



become increasingly important as society transitions to a low and indeed zero carbon society.

When sourcing materials for a development, developers should consider the following principles for improving the environmental performance of materials that should be used:

- environmental impact – use of materials that have low embodied energy, for example lime based products or timber, which have been manufactured through processes with low consumption of energy
- responsible sourcing – use of materials from sustainably managed sources
- re-use of materials – re-using materials from the development site and reclaimed or recycled materials for a range of uses
- transport – use of local materials to reduce transportation costs.

Consequently, the greatest opportunity for impact on embodied carbon comes at the design stage, in particular in the building structure.

The SPD goes on to describe in detail how new development can reduce the sustainable impact of building throughout their lifetime, notably regarding:

- energy use and carbon reduction
- adaptation to climate change
- water efficiency
- air and light pollution
- biodiversity
- sustainable transport
- waste management.

The SPD requires developers to explain how they are addressing each of these points.

It is recognised that the Environment Bill currently being considered by Parliament is likely, among other measures, to enshrine in law the need for developments to deliver a biodiversity net gain. The council, as necessary, will provide further guidance in light of the Bill being enacted.

### ***Energy efficient homes and Passivhaus***

East Herts Council wishes to promote housing schemes built to a high energy efficiency standard such as the Passivhaus model. There are five principles to the Passivhaus model:

- a superinsulated envelope to the home
- airtight construction
- high performance glazing
- thermal-bridge-free detailing
- heat recovery ventilation.

The airtight fabric of the building would allow a home to be heated “passively” by the sun, internal heat sources and heat recovery systems. Conventional heating systems would be rendered unnecessary, even in very cold weather.

Passivhaus has been popular in Germany and Scandinavia, however, building experts have expressed concern that the following may hinder widespread development in the United Kingdom: different construction skills, a lower level of understanding of building fabric performance, and a lack of legislative pressure, financial incentives and client demand. The council does not see these as prohibitive

barriers. We wish to see the rate of delivery of such homes accelerated.

### ***Housing Standards***

Since 2000, the Decent Homes Standard has been the target which all homes in the social housing sector must reach. Under the standard, all homes must:

- meet all the latest statutory minimum standards for housing
- be in a good state of repair
- be fitted with an acceptable range of modern facilities and services.

The government is producing a refreshed Decent Homes Standard. A review of the standard will conclude in summer 2022.

The conditions of privately owned housing are regulated by the following:

- the Housing Health and Safety Rating system which identifies a total of 29 hazards in the home
- the Fit for Habitation Act 2019 which defines the minimum standards for rented properties

- electrical and gas safety regulations
- the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for the private rented sector, under which a property for rent must have a minimum level of energy efficiency
- the Housing Act 2004 (updated 2018) governing the conditions in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), including regulations under which an HMO must be licensed by a local authority.

In 2017, the Building Research Establishment carried out research into the condition of privately owned housing in East Herts. Its principal findings were:

- 15% of owner-occupied properties contained a hazard deemed to be category one (the most serious) under Housing Health and Safety Rating System
- 14% of properties in the private rented sector contained a hazard deemed to be category one under the Housing Health and Safety Rating system
- 26% of privately owned housing had un-insulated cavity walls, making the home less energy efficient

- 834 houses were in multiple occupation in the district, of which 168 were licensable under the new definition introduced in October 2018.

### ***Private rented sector standards***

The size of the private rented sector in East Herts more than doubled between April 2001 and March 2011, from 3,578 homes (6.9% of the total housing stock) to 7,446 homes (13.2% of the total housing stock). It is expected that the Census 2021 results will show further growth in the size and percentage of this tenure.

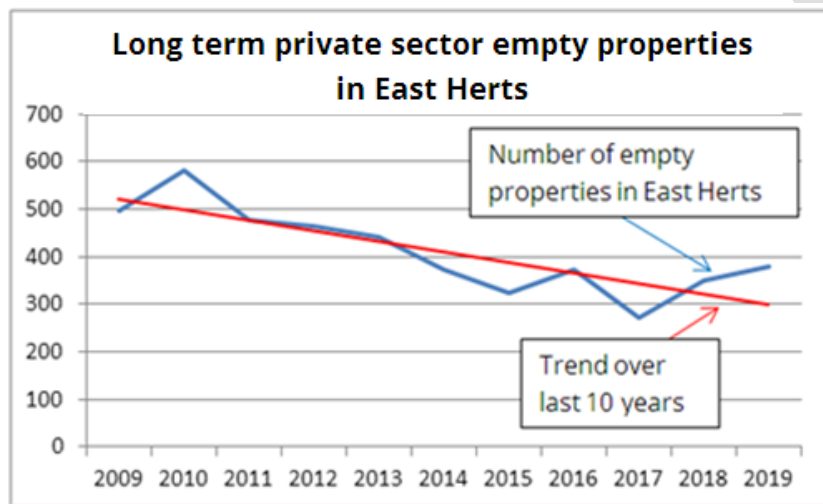
The council therefore has a keen interest in maximising the standard of these properties and the quality of their management.

Support, advice and enforcement work to maximise the quality of private rented sector homes is carried out by the East Herts Council Environmental Health Team. Between April 2018 and March 2021 a total of 64 houses in multiple occupation in East Herts were inspected and a total of 74 were licensed (although the Covid19 pandemic did limit the inspection programme in 2020-2021).

## Empty homes

East Herts Council recognises that empty homes are a wasted resource when housing need is so high while at the same time can be a cause of blight in neighbourhoods.

Government statistics record the number of homes in a local authority which are deemed to be 'long term empty', that is, they have been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for at least six months and not subject to an exemption.



Note: Calculated from all tenure figure minus registered providers' homes which are not available for letting

Source: Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

The graph indicates a steady downward trend in the number of long term empty properties in East Herts over the last ten years, although there has been an increase again more recently.

Since April 2013, local authorities have been permitted to add a council tax premium to properties which have been empty for *two years or more*. It should be noted that properties empty for six months to two years, while counted as 'long term empties' in the official statistics, cannot attract a council tax premium.

East Herts Council first introduced a premium, of 50% on top of the full council tax due, in April 2017. The graph would suggest, however, that this did not have an impact in bringing empty homes back into use.

Subsequently, in April 2020 the council raised the empty property premium to 100% thus doubling the council tax payable on long term empties. Then, from April 2021, the rates were further amended. Table 17 gives the latest rates and numbers of homes empty for two or more years.

**Table 17: Number of homes empty 2+ years and resultant council tax premiums**

Period empty	Number of empty homes	Council tax premium at April 2021 (on top of standard council tax)
2 – 5 years	100	100%
6 – 10 years	45	200%
10 – 20 years	12	300%
20+ years	10	300%

Source: East Herts Council

As yet, it is too early to fully gauge the impact of these amendments, but it is hoped that these significant uplifts in the amount of council tax payable will prove an incentive for owners to finally bring their properties back into use, especially when combined with advice by the council and signposting to grants and loans.

On occasion, the council can access funds to enable direct action including, for example, the compulsory purchase of an empty property for onward sale. Direct intervention, however, is an action of last resort given the time and resources on the council to achieve this. The council tax premium is the main part of East Herts Council's policy toward long-term empty homes.

Of note, in December 2021 there were 117 properties in East Herts classified as second homes or holiday homes, that is, furnished properties which are not the owner's main or sole residence. Unlike in some parts of the country, the scale of second homes is not considered, at less than 0.2% of all properties, to be unduly skewing the local market and thus meriting specific interventions.

### Objectives arising from the evidence

The evidence discussed in the chapter suggests that in order to address the strategic priority to **improve the sustainability and quality of homes**, the following objectives should apply for the coming five years, to:

- promote maintenance, insulation and energy efficiency of homes in all tenures
- promote sustainable construction of new homes
- promote good quality accommodation and standards of management in the private rented sector
- encourage owners to bring their empty homes back into use.

## **Chapter 5: Monitoring delivery of the Housing Strategy**

This strategy has set out a series of wide-ranging priorities based on an analysis of the evidence available and views of our partners which in turn have suggested more detailed objectives that need to be addressed.

To ensure this strategy informs the work of the council and our partners, we will draw up detailed action plans for each of the objectives and these will be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain relevant to the objectives outlined.

Delivery of the detailed action plans will be closely monitored and progress published.