

Introduction to Consultation on our Homes Strategy

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are proud to have produced their first draft Joint Homes Strategy, for public consultation. This draft has been developed with and informed by the views of a wide range of partners at consultation events. This has helped to shape and inform the priorities in this draft strategy, based on our understanding of local current and future housing market challenges.

Our housing vision is for residents of Babergh and Mid Suffolk to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe & healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

We now want to gather your views on the draft Strategy. During October and November 2018, a further consultation will be conducted that is specifically targeted at partner agencies, Town and Parish Councils, communities and key stakeholders.

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Foreword

We all need and deserve somewhere to live and call home. Having a place to call our own provides belonging, contributes to positive health and wellbeing and strengthens community spirit.

Our housing vision is for residents to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

As we all enjoy longer lives, our local population is projected to increase by 16,600 by 2036; so, ensuring we have enough homes of the right type and in the right places is important. **Our strategy therefore focuses on ways to improve the quality, choice, and supply of homes for current and future households.** This is a long-term strategy, aligned to the timescales in our Joint Local Plan to 2036.

It is supported by a detailed action plan to be delivered between 2019 to 2024 as a step change is needed to meet the challenge of reaching the ambitious priorities set out in this Strategy against a backdrop over the next few years of a shrinking public purse, increasing resident expectations, demographic pressures, and Britain's exit from the European Union.

Our strategy is also underpinned by four principles:

- We will work with anyone that wants to develop and deliver much needed new homes; making more effective use of existing homes; and developing innovative solutions to the housing needs of our residents and communities.
- We will create a new relationship with residents which is based around their need and their experience, rather than the processes of individual agencies. We will empower residents with more choice.
- We will adopt a 'one public sector' approach, working together in a more linked up way with our public sector partners to deliver better, more effective and efficient services.
- We are committed to being open and transparent, providing frequent information as to how we are performing against the plan. This will ensure residents have the information at their fingertips to engage with us and ensure we deliver on our priorities.

Insert photographs and signatures: Cabinet Members for Housing Cllr Jan Osborne BDC and Cllr Jill Wilshaw MSDC

Introduction

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts are predominantly rural areas comprising approximately 200 parishes, each one a local community with a unique identity and network of connections to each other.

Residents overwhelmingly tell us they 'love to live' here (92%) and intend to stay (90%) – 2014 Suffolk Housing Survey. Our districts have a high number of outstanding natural and built environments providing places and spaces which truly offer an excellent work and life balance – whether for residents, commuters, visitors, small business start-ups, entrepreneurs or large multi-national companies.

There is something on offer for everyone with a diverse range of cultural heritage, unique retail outlets in popular villages, restaurants, museums, theatres, festivals, attractions and activities appealing to all age groups – set against a backdrop of inspirational scenery, scattered with churches and archaeological monuments.

The market towns of Sudbury (60 miles north east of London) in Babergh and Stowmarket in Mid Suffolk are the largest centres of population and both are predicted to grow by a third over the next 25 years. Road connections to the Midlands and London are excellent with rail travel to London just over 90 minutes from the northernmost boundary of Mid Suffolk.

In May 2018 the Government's ONS 2016-based sub-national population projections were published and these show a projected population increase of 16,600 between 2018 and 2036, within our districts. The number of jobs is also projected to grow by 10,090 over the same period.

A significant percentage of our populations are aged 65 years or above and it is predicted that this age group will account for 1 in 3 people living in Suffolk, compared to 1 in 4 in England over the next 20 years. As a population ages there will be increasing and different demands on services and facilities, especially housing, transport, medical care, and social care services.

Across both districts, house prices are around 10 to 11 times (latest, April 2018, House price to workplace-based earnings ratio: ONS: Table 5a) above the average earnings of residents, making rural parts of the districts unaffordable for many to buy, especially younger and first-time households. This means an increase in demand for affordable housing options and private rented accommodation, and acts as a brake to a previously buoyant housing market.

In Babergh 69% of the population and in Mid Suffolk 75% of the population live in a rural area. Although deprivation levels are low compared with national levels, across Suffolk 28% of those identified as income deprived live in rural areas. Living in a very rural area is widely considered to cost households on average about 20% more than a similar household living in an urban area.

Some residents are concerned that their current homes may not be suitable for their changing needs ten years from now. Many also tell us they are very concerned about the lack of new homes in their villages for local people and the affordability of homes, both of which are causes of outmigration of young people – the next generation.

This Strategy, alongside our Homelessness Reduction Strategy, sets out how the changing housing needs of residents across both districts will be met over the next 25 years by the Councils, our partners, and key housing stakeholders to ensure our communities continue to thrive.

Why have a Homes Strategy?

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils do not have a statutory obligation to produce a housing strategy, but to provide focus and show commitment to meeting the housing challenges ahead, have decided to produce one. The Strategy sets out how the changing housing needs of residents across both districts will be met over the next 25 years by the Councils, our partners, and key housing stakeholders.

The Joint Homes Strategy focuses on the five-year period 2019 to 2024 in respect of action plans we wish to deliver, within the context of a longer timeframe aligned to the Joint Local Plan which will plan to 2036.

The Strategy will be published alongside the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy 2019-2024.

The Strategy will detail our commitment to work proactively and collaboratively with Public Sector organisations as well as the voluntary sector to better inform people to make more informed choices about their housing to help them live better quality lives in to older age and remain independent for longer.

In working towards achieving our housing vision and strategic priorities we will:

- Work in partnership to maximise resources so we can achieve the actions in this strategy
- Deliver efficient and effective services, and operate within our means
- Target scarce resources to those who are most in need
- Prioritise the protection of essential services
- Seek out opportunities to influence government policy to meet our rural districts' housing needs
- Collate the right sort of evidence to ensure we put in sound bids for all new funding sources related to housing as they become available.

Who is our Homes Strategy for?

Our Residents and Communities

We will continue to facilitate opportunities for a mix of new homes which local people can afford, additionally support people with identified specific needs, and actively support community representatives wanting to help themselves to create sustainable, thriving places to live.

Ourselves

To make sure housing makes a significant contribution in the ambitions and delivery of the Joint Local Plan, addressing housing need, and protecting and enhancing 'quality of place' whilst continually adjusting to becoming more financially self-sufficient district councils.

Our partners

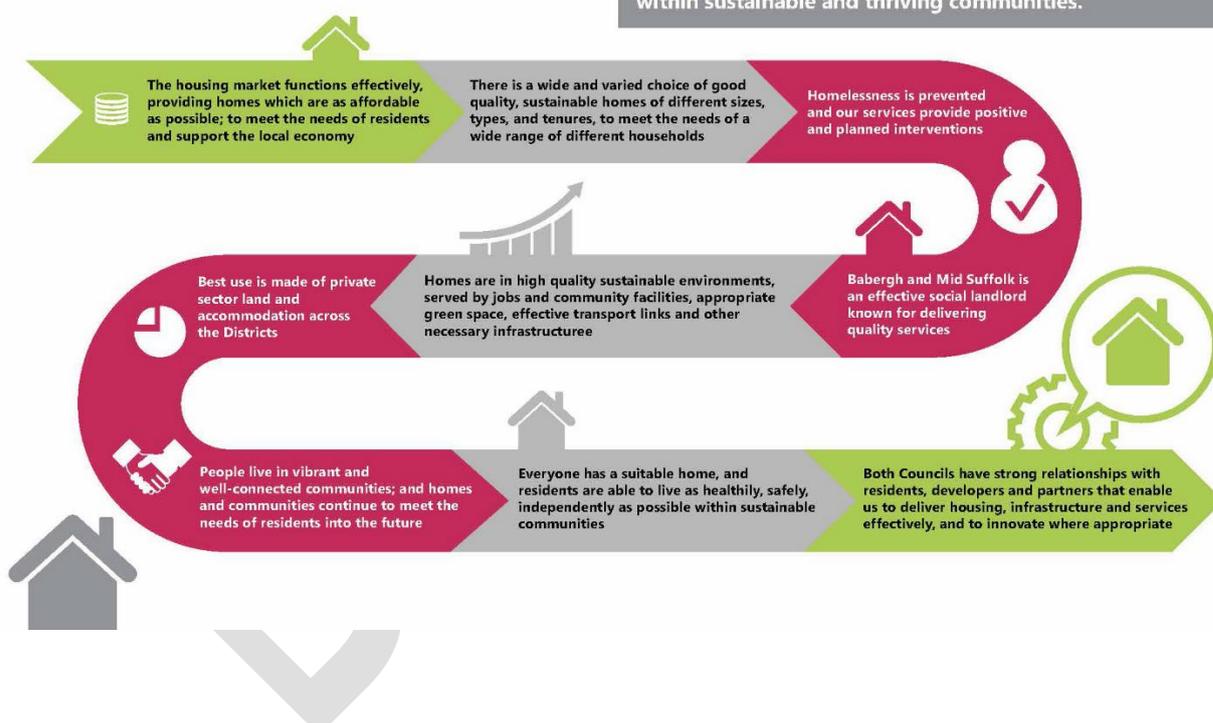
Both Councils are determined to show the sort of leadership required to encourage the delivery of new homes of the right type and tenure, in the right places and at a price that people can afford. We intend to make the most of every opportunity available to work with our partners in seeking new and imaginative ways to do just this.

‘Our vision is for **residents** to live in **affordable** and **high-quality** homes that enable them to build **settled, safe** and **healthy** lives, within **sustainable** and **thriving** communities’

We have developed 9 strategic aims that underpin delivery of our housing vision and key priorities for each of these strategic aims.

BMSDC Housing Vision

Our vision is for residents to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.



1. The housing market functions effectively, providing homes which are as affordable as possible; to meet the needs of residents and support the local economy

We will Create the conditions for effective Planning and Development by:

- Producing a Joint Local Plan to provide clear policy and direction to all involved with site allocations that are deliverable, supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Ensuring a smarter and improved pre-application process
- Ensuring applications are approved on time and Section 106 agreements are signed off promptly
- Discharging planning conditions promptly to ensure development can commence
- Viability testing of all proposed land allocations at plan making stage
- Reviewing stalled sites to ensure blockages and delays to development are resolved
- Creating a flexible approach to tenure mix to accelerate delivery.

We will increase New Housing Delivery by:

- Developing new private homes through Council owned housing companies
- Developing 200 new council homes in Mid Suffolk and 214 in Babergh through the Housing Revenue Account in the period up to 2022
- Preparing a new Joint Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document to provide detailed information about the type of affordable homes we want to see delivered
- Developing a comprehensive 5-year new affordable housing investment programme which will seek to maximise the development capacity and investment from both Housing Revenue Accounts and housing associations active in our districts
- Delivering a specific programme of housing development tailored to meet the needs of rural communities this could include space standards, accessibility standards
- Increasing the supply of Specialist and Accessible housing through enhanced policies within the Joint Local Plan
- Using Compulsory Purchase Order powers, where appropriate, to unlock stalled sites and/or land allocations

The Government produced its Housing White Paper in February 2017, “Fixing our Broken Housing Market”. This identified that housing is increasingly unaffordable with difficulties for those trying to get onto the housing ladder. In addition, it acknowledged that Planning Authorities have issued more planning permissions for new homes but that delivery of these homes through “spades in the ground” is generally slow. Babergh and Mid Suffolk have approximately 4,000 outstanding planning permissions for dwellings in both Districts and a key focus of our strategy will be to understand this issue in more detail.

Our Annual Monitoring Report noted a supply of housing land in excess of five years as at July 2018 in both Districts. Since that was reported Government policy has revised the way that land supply is calculated and placed an extra emphasis on the delivery of new homes. Housing land supply and deliverability are likely to be challenging issues and will close monitoring in order to keep on track. We are committed to working to achieve a robust supply of land for new homes and to helping see these delivered. This will be supported by the development of our Joint Local Plan and effective Neighbourhood Planning which will ensure that sufficient land is allocated until 2036.

In its consultation document 'Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places', the Government has set a new housing delivery test, and this results in an annual requirement from 2018 to 2036 of 420 new homes in Babergh and 590 new homes in Mid Suffolk.

2. There is a wide and varied choice of good quality, sustainable homes of different sizes, types, and tenures, to meet the needs of a wide range of different households

We will ensure good quality, sustainable, homes are built by:

- Supporting the creation of the ground-breaking "*Design Guide*" for building and development in Suffolk and award-winning designer Wayne Hemmingway
- Expanding the air source heating programme for our council housing
- Exploring the development of a passivhaus standard for some new builds
- Maximising delivery of affordable housing provision by securing the policy requirements for affordable housing on all qualifying sites
- Leading by example on our own developments, including adopting a Lifetime standard that are adaptable over time, wherever possible
- Ensuring new developments provide funding to secure supporting infrastructure, including minimal car use by promoting sustainable transport, consideration of water supplies, and other facilities to maintain / enhance quality of life.

We will regularly review housing needs to ensure appropriate provision by:

- Understanding the housing market better ensuring efficiencies and effectiveness in the Councils' aims and objectives to ensure that new housing meets housing need
- Providing a housing allocations policy that best meets the needs of local people
- Working with partners to develop an enhanced housing stock database which allows us to review the longer-term viability of our housing stock
- Ensuring everyone contacting the Councils' Housing Solutions service receives in depth advice and assistance on their housing rights and housing options.

Both this Homes Strategy and the Homelessness Reduction Strategy recognise the growing numbers of families and single person households with a current affordable housing need within the districts. We will ensure our limited resources are focussed on where we can have the most impact. By understanding the market better, we can see where our interventions could have a positive effect and avoid waste, duplication or cost.

The Ipswich and Waveney Area Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2017 indicates a requirement for at least 73 new affordable homes per year across the Babergh district and 94 new affordable homes per year across Mid Suffolk district.

The overall requirement was identified in the SHMA which informed the Joint Local Plan Consultation in August 2017. However, a new housing requirement will be published when confirmed, following the release of revised Government household projections and confirmation of the Government's standard methodology for calculating housing need.

Population forecasts for both districts show the increase in over 65s is 20% over 20 years. In addition to the older population predicted to rise we also expect a growing number of households to include one or more persons with a disability and more households with people living with long-term health conditions.

Increasing life expectancy means we must continue to respond to the changing needs of our older population and those who have specific complex needs. We will achieve this

though new homes developments, refurbishments to existing homes and improving access to the full range of housing options.

When planning for new homes we are mindful of the increasing proportion of over 65s living in our most rural settlements and are looking to increase the numbers of homes on new developments and on regeneration or refurbishment sites which are better suited to the health and wellbeing needs of an ageing population.

These types of homes are also ideally suited to families with young children and other groups of people with specific housing needs requiring well designed, easily managed and accessible homes.

Places with a mix of housing types, tenures and sizes are better able to meet the changing needs and aspirations of residents as they move through different life stages, changes of income and changing household numbers as the younger generation flies the nest – this is especially important as we know that people living here are reluctant to leave because they enjoy the quality of life on offer.

We are keen to enable greater housing choice in our local housing markets as it increases the opportunities for households to remain within their communities and promotes social equity and inclusion by reducing geographical constraints on the search for the ‘right house in the right place’.

The Local Plan sets out requirements for new residential developments by stating they should maintain provision of and contribute to a mix of housing types, tenures and sizes to help support the creation of sustainable communities.

This includes meeting the needs of an ageing population, smaller properties, single storey properties, and opportunities for self-build and custom-build. However, this should not preclude the provision of larger executive homes to attract business leaders into the area thereby supporting our Open for Business agenda.

3. Homelessness is prevented and meets the needs of vulnerable people

We will end Rough Sleeping and Homelessness by:

- Supporting vulnerable households to secure and maintain accommodation
- Mitigating against the impact of Welfare Reforms
- Increasing access to suitable accommodation
- Raising aspirations of positive health and wellbeing amongst homeless people.

These priorities are detailed within the Joint Homelessness Reduction Strategy 2018-2023. The Homelessness Reduction Strategy sitting alongside this Joint Homes Strategy has its own detailed list of actions to accompany each of the priorities listed above.

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4. Babergh and Mid Suffolk is an effective social landlord known for delivering quality services

We will be an excellent Landlord by:

- Becoming a landlord of choice, reflected in an exemplar service to residents through meaningful performance indicators
- Implementing Estate Regeneration / Large scale improvement programmes including external insulation, and the refurbishment of some of our own developments
- Being efficient and effective in managing our business with an ambition to save 1% of our budget over the next three years, from the Housing Revenue Accounts (HRA)
- Trailblazing in our approach as a landlord, with an innovative approach to Housing Management
- Increasing customer satisfaction in our services, ensuring we learn from every interaction
- Introducing 'Smart Homes' to our own housing stock through the development of technology to reduce cost whilst enhancing the customer experience.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are landlords to 6676 homes (Babergh 3409 and Mid Suffolk 3267 as at September 2018). The rental income of approximately £32 million each year is ringfenced to the management of our landlord service, maintenance of the homes and building more council homes.

We will ensure that our homes are fit for purpose:

- built to a high standard with the aspiration of Lifetime homes
- maintained to the highest standards that can be afforded
- repaired and improved to meet and exceed customer expectations
- ensuring everyone has a 'Decent Home'.

The Government's recent announcements on the removal of the debt cap will allow us to potentially intensify our house building ambitions. Once we understand the details in relation to this we will develop plans to maximise the opportunities this policy change presents.

It is important that we understand our residents' aspirations for their families. This will help us to evaluate how we currently deliver services, and then tailor our services in the future to ensure our residents have the best opportunities to meet and exceed their aspirations.

We recognise that some residents feel there is a stigma of living in a home provided by us as a social housing landlord, and the recent Social Housing Green Paper highlights this issue. We take our role to provide affordable, good quality homes for those in most need very seriously. We wish to ensure that all our residents feel at home in their community rather than seeing it as just a place to live.

We will therefore take meaningful steps to break down inequalities in social housing. Supporting residents to meet their aspirations also has a business benefit. If residents are better equipped to fulfil their potential, they will be more likely to sustain their tenancies: This includes reducing demand on our landlord services through supporting self-service and reductions in demand management, for example managing residents rent accounts.

From young families to retired people and those who struggle in the market, everyone deserves a good quality home. A home is the foundation of everything, so providing that

home is a role we take seriously. If supported to fulfil their full potential, some residents may find themselves in a position where they feel ready and able to move on from social housing, vacating their home for another social housing tenant who may be in more need than them. As a business with a social mission, we aim to enhance, rather than hinder our residents' ability to fulfil their aspirations.

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5. Homes are in high quality sustainable environments, served by jobs and community facilities, appropriate green space, effective transport links and other necessary infrastructure

We will ensure Infrastructure exceeds expectations by:

- Investigating the viability of installing electric vehicle points on our housing estates and the development of sustainable transport solutions to meet the needs of our residents
- Producing a Joint Local Plan to provide clear policy and direction to all involved with site allocations that are deliverable, supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Developing an Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which accurately assesses the future infrastructure needs across all our communities
- Refreshing our Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and Regulation 123 spending policies
- Ensuring our Homes Strategy is aligned to our Economic and Communities Strategies and complements our commitment to stimulate housing led growth and economic prosperity
- Working in partnership with local people, communities and other partners on environmental improvements to neighbourhoods.

We want homes to be in high quality environments that meet our residents needs and aspirations. However, we recognise the need to ensure we can provide the necessary infrastructure before demand outstrips supply.

It's no secret that we face a housing shortage, both across the whole country and in Babergh and Mid Suffolk. But even as we meet that challenge, we have to ensure that our infrastructure keeps pace therefore we will ensure that the mechanisms for supporting infrastructure is refreshed and updated to ensure it meets the needs of our communities and stakeholders.

In February 2018 members of both Councils endorsed a joint Babergh and Mid Suffolk Open for Business Strategy, to help communicate our thinking and approach in support of economic growth. We will support economic growth across our joint authority areas, being flexible towards the needs and scale of different business sectors and seeking to find solutions which deliver economic growth. We recognise the synergies between economic growth contributing to increased housing delivery whilst housing delivery is required to ensure our residents can work and live relatively close to their place of employment.

As a result of our [Open for Business Strategy](#) we have developed a 'Vision for Prosperity' for both Sudbury and Stowmarket, which is intended to establish: a high-level aspiration, setting out the communities desires and wishes for the towns they would like to live and work in; the priorities for the towns - setting out the main targets, goals and achievements to focus limited resources; a delivery plan that identifies the intended key projects and action points, and sets out who will be responsible for their implementation, and when.

6. Best use is made of private sector land and accommodation across the Districts

We will optimise Private Sector Homes by:

- Building relationships to better understand the private rented sector in our districts, including the challenges and opportunities it presents to stakeholders
- Encouraging and supporting the development of more private rented accommodation
- Supporting private landlords through grants
- Supporting the proper management of Homes in Multiple Occupation through effective licensing
- Bringing long term empty homes back in to use
- Exploring a Private Rented Sector leasing scheme to support more people in to housing by providing a ready supply of private rented accommodation with a package of support for those wishing to access it
- Ensuring homes in the area meet at least the minimum standards, and where there is evidence of substandard accommodation we will incentivise or when necessary take appropriate enforcement action to ensure owners comply and residents in our districts can access private rented accommodation of an acceptable standard.

The private rented sector makes a significant contribution to the housing offer in any area, supplying households with more choice and flexible options which directly supports an inclusive growth economy. Younger households often choose this type of tenure to trial a job/training opportunity, or a location before making a decision to settle down. We also know most private renters have aspirations of becoming owner occupiers at some stage, although saving for a deposit and affording a mortgage even on entry level market homes remains financially out of reach for many.

The private rented sector remains the second largest tenure in England. In 2016-17, accounting for 20% of households, and it has grown in the last 20 years across all age groups.

In Babergh and Mid Suffolk the number of households using the private rented sector follows this pattern although the relative market share is less. Between 2001 and 2011 the number of households using the private rented sector had almost doubled, whilst the number of households renting in the social sector and owner occupiers have only seen very small fluctuations in their use. We want to support a housing sector that has the optimum levels, of all types, of tenure that meet the needs of residents.

Compared to social and open market homes, housing costs are particularly high in the private rented sector where the majority of low-income households spend at least and often much more than a 1/3 of their income on rent.

In Babergh and Mid Suffolk we intend to continue to support a well-managed and flexible private rented sector as it offers those looking for flexible, shorter term accommodation additional options in most parishes. However, we know we must understand more about this sector and their occupiers if we are to fully understand the challenges and opportunities to optimise good quality, affordable private rental accommodation which meets expectations in this part of the housing market.

There will be short periods of time when homes may be empty as part of the natural rhythm of the housing market. Long term empty homes, however, are a wasted resource as they deprive people of a much-needed home and contribute to the need for even more housing. If properties stay empty for longer than 6 months without any renovation or alterations, they have the potential to cause problems to residents and communities attracting anti-social behaviour, devaluing neighbouring properties, preventing reinvestment and regeneration or being unsightly. As at 2017/18 there were 294 and 292 long term empty properties in Babergh and Mid Suffolk respectively (23% of the long term empty homes in Suffolk). This is a reduction of 256 over the last 3 years.

We will ensure housing meets standards set, where there is evidence of substandard accommodation we will incentivise or when necessary take appropriate enforcement action to ensure owners comply and residents in our districts can access private rented accommodation of an acceptable standard.

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7. People live in vibrant and well-connected communities; and homes and communities continue to meet the needs of residents into the future

We will develop sustainable communities by:

- Developing a Communities Strategy which encourages greater participation and involvement
- Supporting the creation of the ground-breaking “*Design Guide*” for building and development in Suffolk
- Developing the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams to improve the way housing, health and care services are delivered with and for local people.

We will meet the specialist needs of residents now and into the future by:

- Commissioning an Older People Development Strategy
- Working with partners to develop an enhanced housing stock database
- Working in partnership with Suffolk County Council to review the current provision of specialist leased accommodation within the districts for clients with learning disabilities and mental health difficulties and its effectiveness in meeting demand
- Reviewing Housing Related Support contracts across the county through a funded post by all authorities within Suffolk to identify success, failure, and the most effective way providing this service beyond the current contract
- Finding out more about alternatives in respect of Extra Care Housing Provision, which provide more choice for residents
- Exploring “downsizing” development opportunities that support residents from all tenures to move to suitable accommodation, which meets their needs, wants and desires when wishing to downsize
- Understanding in more detail the demand and supply analysis of specialist housing needs to inform future development and investment
- Developing the Local Plan to provide for the provision of specialist housing and appropriate infrastructure which caters for the needs of older and vulnerable people
- Working with our partners across Suffolk to deliver suitable pitches for Gypsy and Travellers in order to meet the identified need.

The development of mixed and balanced communities will have a number of benefits. We want to see a mix of housing sizes, types and tenures to meet residents’ needs because this will ensure we meet changing needs through life stages, household shapes, sizes and incomes; enable higher-income social housing tenants to buy without leaving the area; help preserve age balance in our rural communities; older people can move to smaller or rented homes in their neighbourhood; promote resident and community stability through a variety of tenure mixes, including ownership.

There are currently 1 in 5 people over the age of 65 in Suffolk, this is expected to rise to 1 in 3 in 20 years’ time. Suffolk has a significantly ageing population; some areas in Babergh will see more marked increases (up to 10%) in the number of older people living there. Life expectancy has also increased over the last decade, however, there has been a fall in healthy life expectancy over the years. Many of these years are therefore being spent in poor health or with disability. The increase in levels of dementia is a challenge, with the illness now affecting one in 14 people over 65 years of age and one in six people over 80 years of age.

There are strong links between older age, housing and health and this strategy will ensure that we recognise the interdependence of these. We need to develop links and systems

that maximise the use of local expertise on housing and health, so we are far more responsive to addressing needs now and in the future. It's clear that well designed, integrated services allow us to detect and respond early to signs of difficulty and this in turn helps to forestall problems which could lead to far more serious and costly consequences later on. We want to develop our early help offer to residents as well as tenants and for this to be a fully embedded way of working across teams.

We plan with our other Suffolk partners to commission a detailed *Homes for Older People Strategy* which will help to formalise the links between some of the other strategic plans which form part of our strong needs evidence based, particularly the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and Suffolk Strategic Needs Assessment. This will allow us to review the longer-term viability of our existing housing provision as well as exploring more innovative solutions with partners about what schemes and support services to commission

The development of our new Joint Local Plan is a critical lever in helping to design healthier homes and communities, these are the hallmarks of inclusive growth. The New National Planning Policy Framework specifically refers to planning policies and decisions which enable and support healthier lifestyles. High quality, versatile and adaptable homes will be increasingly expected by our customer and existing residents. We are confident that this can be achieved without compromising new supply.

We have a long and successful history of delivering specialist accommodation for vulnerable client groups within the districts. However, some of this provision particularly our own housing stock which is leased to service providers is outdated, the residents occupying these schemes are much older and the models of service delivery no longer fit for purpose. We will work with Suffolk County Council and the service providers to review this provision and decide whether we should enhance this provision where there is clear evidence to do so.

Gypsy and Travellers:

It is widely acknowledged that there is a national shortage of suitable permanent and transit sites for Gypsies and Travellers. It is also widely accepted that unsuitable and poor accommodation can lead to poor health, low level educational attainment and lack of employment opportunities.

We have identified an additional need of 9 pitches within Mid Suffolk and 1 pitch in Babergh for the period 2016 to 2036. Work is underway with our partners to plan for the provision of new sites as well as the effective management of existing authorised and unauthorised sites.

It is important that effective consideration is given to these issues, that we set strong leadership and a positive tone within these discussions and that any new sites coming forward includes the well managed process of communication.

8. Everyone has a suitable home, and residents are able to live as healthily, safely, independently as possible within sustainable communities

We will reduce energy usage and costs through the use of more environmentally sustainable alternatives by:

- Updating of heating systems in council stock – replacing oil where possible, with gas or air source heating
- Granting funds to private landlords to install affordable, efficient and controllable heating systems and energy efficiency works
- Making sure all Council housing to has an ‘EPC C’ rating or above.

We want to ensure that we provide the most sustainable and cost-efficient heating systems both in our housing stock and that of private landlords to support both the environment and support those on low incomes reduce their fuel costs.

We have considered the Government Green Paper on Social Housing and wish to set an ambitious long-term target to ensure all Council Housing has an EPC C rating or higher.

We will empower residents in most need to create independence and sustain their homes by:

- Enhancing our Financial Inclusion and Tenancy Support Service by working with other agencies to get the best results
- Developing a programme of pre-tenancy assessments and training for new Council tenants.

We recognise that for those in most need being able to manage their home, tenancy and their finances can be difficult for multiple reasons. We will play a role alongside our partner agencies to provide targeted support which reduces future demand and prevents additional cost to the ‘system’ whether it be the cost of evictions, temporary accommodation, and the impact on families. We will ensure that residents have the pre-requisite skills to maintain and manage their homes, supporting new skills acquisition when appropriate.

We will help residents to live independently for as long as possible in their own homes by:

- Working with Suffolk authorities to review, develop and monitor a successful approach to delivering Disabled Facilities Grants
- Developing an ‘Early Help Hub’ that delivers effective, coordinated, multi-agency interventions - a more strategic approach that avoids service duplication and reduces long term service costs (for example non-elective hospital admissions)
- Working with strategic partners within Health to support actions that contribute to effective winter planning for vulnerable groups.

Suffolk has double the national average of people resident in rural areas and this rural population is older (higher percentage of those 65+) than its urban population. A recent All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiry in to rural housing shows people living in very rural areas like ours experience more limited social networks, isolation, loneliness which can be exacerbated by poor transport.

Increasing life expectancy means we must continue to respond to the changing needs of our older population and those who have specific complex needs. We will achieve this

though new homes developments, refurbishments to existing homes and improving access to the full range of housing options.

In addition to the older population predicted to rise we also expect a growing number of households to include one or more persons with a disability and more households with people living with long-term health conditions.

Delivering improvements to unsuitable housing for people whose independence is compromised will be developed further within this strategy both within work which is commissioned by a County wide Home Improvement Agency, Orbit East, and supported by the Better Care Fund and through our own review of the use of Disabled Facilities Grants.

Disabled Facilities Grants are subject to households means testing and are available to adapt a home of disabled person or someone with a long-term chronic illness. Assessments are made by qualified occupational therapists. Adaptations include provision of more suitable fittings or equipment, or changes to the fabric of the building to make everyday things easier which most take for granted, for example, getting in to the home, bathing, preparing a meal or simply enjoying shared family time.

Between 2015 and 2018 almost 100 homes in Babergh and 85 homes in Mid Suffolk have benefitted from adaptations under this grant.

We do also recognise the importance of the strategic priorities of our partners and will continue to support and endorse national programmes, such as winter planning for vulnerable groups sharing local intelligence and novel ways to promote awareness both to our vulnerable customers but to staff and partners alike.

We will actively encourage and support people to lead active and healthy lives by:

- Embedding Making Every Contact Count (MECC) training and principles across our housing services and support.
- Emphasising our Active Wellbeing programme, enhancing our physical activity offer, focused on older people and those living in rural areas to remain active and connected to their communities
- Developing with others local Dementia Action Alliances, by proactively supporting those living with the condition and their carers to remain active and engaged through a range of dementia-friendly activities and opportunities
- Collaborating with our partners to establish social prescribing schemes and non-medical referral options to improve wellbeing
- Reviewing the way in which we provide information, helping our tenants and customers to “navigate” their way round the Suffolk system so they can find the right support to help them when they need it.

When people fall ill, particularly when this includes a period in hospital, this can often delay and prevent them from returning home. This is not only stressful for the individual and their families, it can also be expensive, the costs can be borne by a range of agencies. We need to be better prepared and more resilient as a system, to utilise our collective skills and resources to address gaps, delays and obstacles to the way we all work.

In line with our commitment to the Suffolk Health & Housing Charter we will continue to work together with our public sector partners, Suffolk County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Groups, Public Health, private, voluntary and community sectors to develop a fully

integrated approach to housing, health and social care which harnesses the ambitions, experience and skills of all the partners and communities across Suffolk.

This means we need to understand how other services operate, how they deliver support and advice and what interventions they expect from others. We continue to share with partners what services we provide, for instance the benefits of housing adaptations and the risks of living in unheated homes and other hazards. We believe it to be important we reciprocate so others understand more about the home environment and how it might affect patients' health so timely interventions can be better coordinated.

We also understand the complexities of the system, so we want to focus on helping customers and their families who are unsure or anxious navigate their way around the many and varied local health, social care and voluntary services that are there to help. Older people can find access to right information at the right time difficult for many reasons, including lack of access to the internet or because they have limited mobility. Developing a better system would help to address these barriers as well as supporting people to access the various voluntary sector groups within their communities.

It is also important for partners, particularly those within the health service to target their interventions to those most at risk, whether this relates to flu vaccinations or staying warm in winter. The opportunity to develop a wellbeing programme to tenants in sheltered accommodation will allow us to raise the awareness of the relationship between housing and health, how they can access advice and support, maximise their benefits, undertake physical activities and connections to voluntary groups such a dementia alliances or befriending schemes.

Older people's economic and social circumstances also impact significantly on their health and well-being. Older people with less income and fewer financial assets are more likely to be overweight or obese, and have lower levels of physical activity; older people with few relationships and little engagement with the local community frequently experience isolation and associated health problems such as depression, dementia, anxiety and decreased mobility. Our aim is to make older and vulnerable people less isolated.

Our [Leisure, Sport and Physical Activity Strategy](#) will develop a healthy ageing programme to encourage older people to take advantage of opportunities for meaningful activity, social interaction and physical activity, such as Otago strength and balance, chair-based exercise classes including dementia inclusive activities. We will also be seeking to develop our GP referral schemes which offer individualised exercise programmes in a supervised environment for those patients affected by clinical conditions.

We are also seeking to develop, as part of our emerging Communities Strategy, Social Prescribing and the wider link to the Localities and Partnerships Team at the Suffolk County Council.

We will provide more choice in the housing market for older households and those requiring accessible homes by:

- Reviewing the effectiveness of the Housing Allocations Policy as it relates to older or vulnerable applicants and tenants and make proposed revisions
- Developing the Local Plan to provide for the provision of specialist housing and appropriate infrastructure which caters for the needs of older and vulnerable people
- Developing more flexible forms of care and support for specified vulnerable client groups

General needs housing may be the most appropriate housing option for many older people. However, in order for older people to remain healthy in their homes, they may need more assistance to keep their homes in a good state of repair and suitable for their needs.

We know that older people want to remain in their own homes, within the communities they know, with connections to their networks, their family and friends. We also know they would prefer not to move into residential or nursing care when their needs become too great.

Some people make early plans for life in old age, they move to more suitable housing, they move to communities which allow them to access shops and a doctor, they have the economic means to make informed choices.

For some older people, the choices they have are more limited, ill health isn't anticipated and they have less time to make plans. It is much more difficult to provide the positive outcomes they need, and their families expect. Appropriate housing and location, the right care and support as well as other services, such as reliable public transport enables people to remain involved and live independently.

We will therefore develop our priorities to support the older and most vulnerable to have choice on the type of accommodation available, its location, local infrastructure and support networks.

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9. Both Councils have strong relationships with residents, developers and partners that enable us to deliver housing, infrastructure and services effectively, and to innovate where appropriate

We will build stronger relationships and partnerships by:

- Working with neighbourhood plan groups to encourage communities to develop their own development plans
- Creating a stronger relationship with Homes England and optimise the funding streams for which we are eligible, including borrowing within the HRA
- Promoting and support the delivery of community-led housing schemes & formation of Community Land Trusts
- Identifying opportunities to increase new homes supply with additional partners including for-profit organisations
- Encouraging and support Self and Custom build developers
- Working collectively as local authorities, within Suffolk, to support the effective delivery of services in relation to Housing through means of the Suffolk Housing Board
- Creating better opportunities for developing innovative use of redundant and underused sheltered housing stock
- Aligning strategies when there are clear synergies in regard of health and wellbeing, and housing matters.

Neighbourhood Plans enable communities to set out a positive vision for how their area can develop and change to meets identified local need. This can include allocating new sites for housing development.

To date, four Neighbourhood Plans have been adopted across our two districts - East Bergholt, Lavenham, Lawshall and Mendlesham. Many other local communities are also preparing plans. We will continue to work with groups to develop their own plans.

Community Led Housing empowers local groups to identify what housing is needed in their area, the best location for it and to work with partners to deliver those developments. We will work closely with community-led housing groups and other stakeholders – such as the Community Land Trusts network and Homes England – to put the best tools in place to ensure efficient delivery of new local homes for local people.

The Lavenham Community Land Trust is an example of one of these groups in action, who have begun construction on a new housing scheme of eighteen new affordable homes in Harwood Place, Lavenham with partners Hastoe Housing Association. This new funding will allow other communities across Babergh and Mid Suffolk to follow this example and bring forward housing to meet local needs in their areas.

We are already working with Suffolk County Council to identify suitable sites for new homes. We will continue to be more proactive in this approach. We will explore through the One Public Sector approach to land and sites how to create innovative housing solutions that provide financial benefits but more importantly social and long-term benefits for our residents.

The Suffolk Housing Board has developed and is taking forward a number of priority actions, such as developing a common approach to addressing fuel poverty and housing standards, how the voice and expertise of housing can be fully embedded across the new integrated health and care delivery model in Suffolk and how partners can utilise their assets more effectively to address housing demand. Our Strategy reflects the importance of ongoing connectivity and communication. These actions are reflected in this strategy.

Implementing the Strategy

We recognise that a step change is needed to meet the challenge of reaching the ambitious priorities set out in this Strategy against a backdrop over the next few years of a shrinking public purse, rising consumer expectations, demographic pressures, and emergence from Britain's exit from the European Union.

Therefore, we need to ensure all stakeholders are signed up to our ambitions, and to anticipate the challenges ahead and make our limited resources more responsive, effective and efficient, whilst delivering our residents expectations.

The three principles that underpin this strategy are:

- We will be open to business working with anyone that wants to develop and deliver much needed new homes; making more effective use of existing homes; and developing innovative solutions to the housing needs of our residents and communities.
- A new relationship with residents which is based around their need and their experience, rather than the processes of individual agencies. We plan to enable residents to feel empowered and have more choices with regard to; More of the right homes, in the right places, of the right tenure, at the right price.
- A one public sector approach working together in a more linked up way with our public sector partners across the districts to deliver better services. This will help us to deliver more effective and efficient services whilst making savings to the public purse.

We are committed to transparency and information on how we are performing against the plan will be regularly published online to ensure residents have the information at their fingertips to engage with us and ensure we deliver on our priorities.