

DRAFT WEST SUFFOLK HOUSING STRATEGY 2018-2023

Strategy will be designed following consultation

18 October 2018
Draft for Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Foreword

When we talk about housing, what we are really talking about are people's homes. They should be a place of sanctuary, a place of comfort, a place of safety and stability where people can live as part of a wider supportive community.

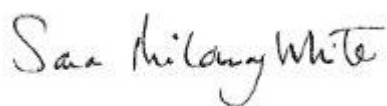
The place that people call home can have a huge impact of their lives not least in terms of their physical and mental health and wellbeing. Poor housing is estimated to cost the NHS £1.4 billion a year in terms of treating the resultant conditions and patients unable to return to unsuitable homes.

Housing also underpins the success and growth of our local economy – without the availability of homes that people can afford, businesses may struggle to attract new employees and to keep the staff that they have.

Put simply the importance of housing – of homes in all their many forms – cannot be understated.

Home is where the start is. It is important that new housing is built, that we make the best use of the homes we have and that empty homes are brought back into use. By doing this we can ensure that young people can afford to stay in the area if they wish, that companies can continue to compete by attracting and retaining their workforce, and that housing is available and adaptable to meet the requirements of our aging population.

This Housing Strategy sets out our vision for improvement in the quality and delivery of housing to meet local needs, not just now, but for decades to come. The Council is of course, just one partner in all of this but through this Strategy, which will be supported through a range of other plans, we will play a significant role in delivering new homes and making the best use of existing ones. It's a role that supports our residents, our local families and communities including our many businesses – and which will ensure that West Suffolk not only continues to be a place where people want to live, but also a place where they can.



Councillor Sara Mildmay-White
Cabinet Member for Housing



Councillor Lance Stanbury
Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth

1. Introduction

- **Executive summary**

At West Suffolk councils we know that good housing plays an important role in the health and wellbeing of people in our area. Our residents need access to suitable housing that is affordable in order to establish a settled home and achieve their ambitions for family life, career development, a fulfilling retirement and other goals. The right housing options are also vital to realising our ambitions for inclusive economic growth.

Providing appropriate housing for our residents can only be achieved by using a number of delivery routes, whether that be at a local level through our own plans and policies, with partners or through our use of legislation. We are committed to using all the powers and levers we have available to enable the delivery of housing and to achieve our housing priorities. This relies on providing new build housing but also making the most of our existing stock through improvement, adaption and bringing empty properties back into use.

We will continually seek to improve the quality and supply of new housing being built, to provide greater choice of the types, location and prices of new homes to meet residents' aspirations and needs. This will include ensuring that there is appropriate housing to meet the needs of older people, young people, vulnerable people and those who are disadvantaged are also delivered alongside our partners.

This supports the health and wellbeing of residents, families and communities, both in our towns and in our rural areas because a decent home can improve quality of life. Our work is aligned with the aims of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy for Suffolk and the Suffolk Growth Strategy. To respond to this challenge the [Homelessness Reduction Strategy 2018-2023](#) was adopted.

Through this Housing Strategy we are also responding to the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2018 which seeks to boost the supply of land for housing development in the right places and ambitions to increase the rate of housing delivery.

2. Our vision

West Suffolk councils are committed to increasing the supply, range and quality of housing for our current and future residents.

This Housing Strategy sets out how we, along with our partners, will respond to the housing challenges we are facing in order to provide a range of housing options so that we can respond to and plan for the growing need for additional housing in West Suffolk. We are doing this through a period of change, brought about not only through new legislation but also the significant financial challenges and increased demands on public services. Furthermore, the government has an ambitious target to deliver more than 300,000 new homes each year by 2025.

Our Strategic Framework 2018-2020 sets out our vision for the local area and contains strategic priorities that we are committed to in order to deliver this vision. Our strategic priority which specifically focuses on housing is to:

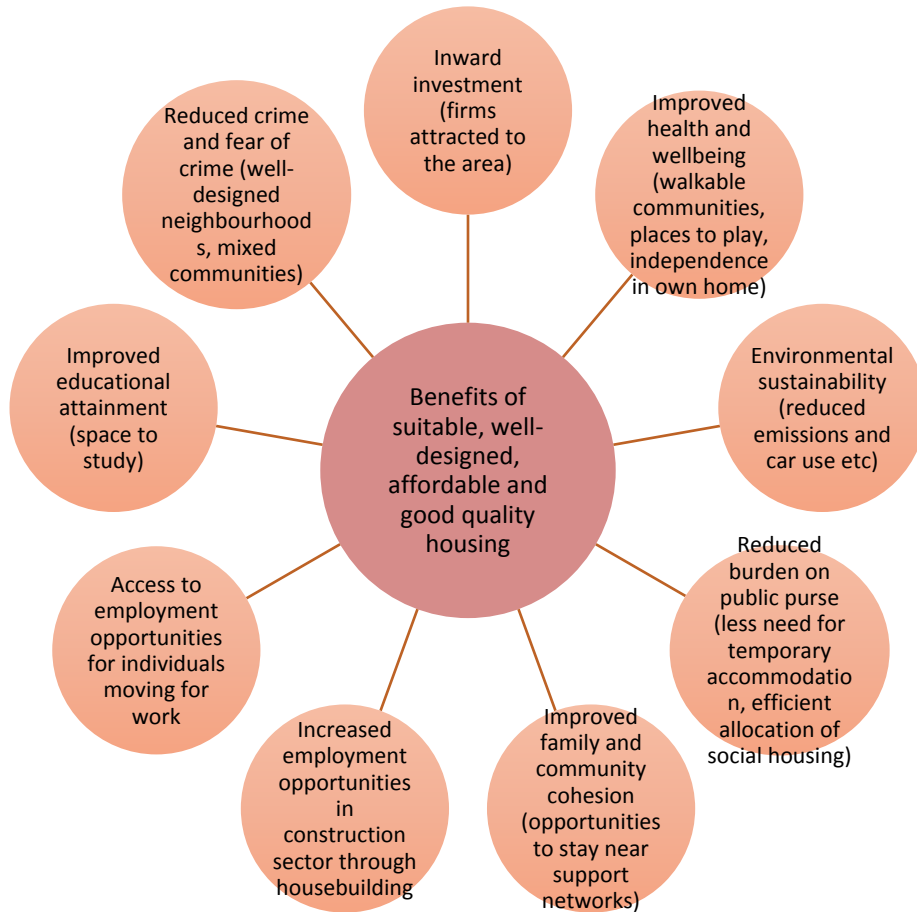
Increase and improve the provision of appropriate housing in west Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas.

To deliver this strategic priority, we will use our role as a local housing and planning authority, a regulatory, an investor and local influencer to:

- Housing priority one: Plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is properly supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks.
- Housing priority two: Improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents.
- Housing priority three: Enable people to access suitable and sustainable housing.

Wider benefits of housing

The benefits of improved housing in West Suffolk are far reaching, as demonstrated in the diagram below. Our aspiration to address the challenges we face are therefore fundamental to the achievement of a range of other priorities both within West Suffolk and in partner organisations. We cannot deliver this strategy alone and it is dependent upon joint working with a number of other organisations and on the achievement of West Suffolk's Strategic Framework 2018-2020 and our Medium Term Financial Strategy.



3. The West Suffolk context

- **Links to strategies and plans**

The diagram below identifies the key documents that inform and underpin this Housing Strategy in the context of West Suffolk.



- **Wider links to health**

Good quality housing is critical to health and wellbeing. A safe and settled home is the cornerstone on which individuals and families can thrive. In financial terms, a well-housed population helps to reduce and delay demand for NHS services. It is estimated that the cost of poor housing to the NHS is £1.4 billion per year¹.

NHS organisations and local government across Suffolk are working together to improve the health and care of our communities. Partnerships such as the Suffolk Health and Wellbeing Board have identified health and housing as a key focus and we are working with colleagues to tackle issues such as improving energy efficiency in homes and ensuring there is support for people to maintain tenancies. The Housing and Health Charter for Suffolk is part of the health and wellbeing agenda. The charter was developed to ensure a shared approach and understanding of the issues across Suffolk and to facilitate partnership working and sharing resources. The charter is focusing on areas such as specialist housing for older people, tackling homelessness, supply and access to affordable housing and increased access to decent homes.

¹ Kings Fund, 2018

- **Housing tenure**

When considering housing it is important to bear in mind that there are different types and tenure of housing available. Our role is to ensure that there is a wide a choice as possible so that people have options as to the housing best suited to their circumstances. Appendix A provides an illustrative summary of the types of housing as well as our role in supporting the delivery and availability of each of these options.

- **Housing market area**

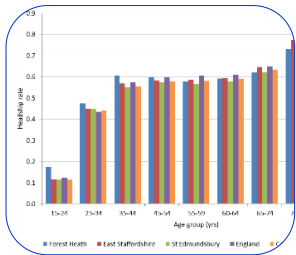
The Cambridge Sub-region Housing Market Area² comprises the local authority areas of Cambridge, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland, Forest Heath, Huntingdonshire, South Cambridgeshire and St Edmundsbury, as shown in the map below:



- **Key data**

Key facts relating to West Suffolk's population and housing are provided on the following page. Further data which was used to support the development of this strategy is included in the evidence base attached as Appendix B.

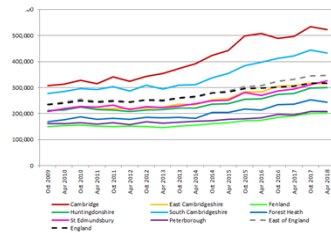
² In 2013, a Strategic Housing Market Assessment was undertaken for the Cambridge Sub-region and this analysed a range of economic and housing market indicators to define a Cambridge Sub-region Housing Market Area comprising all of Cambridgeshire and the Western part of Suffolk.



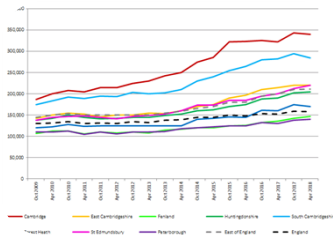
West Suffolk's population. 179,200 (Nomisweb 2017)



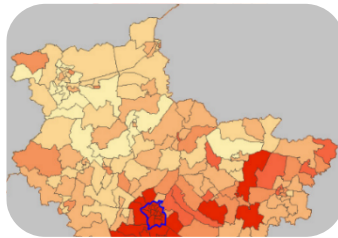
New homes needed by 2031: 18,280 in West Suffolk



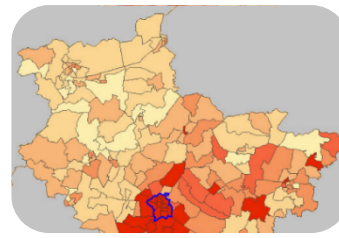
Average house price across West Suffolk: £284,363 (April 2018)



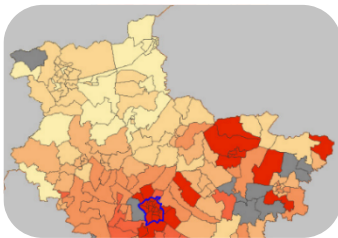
Lower quartile house price: £195,000 (April 2018)



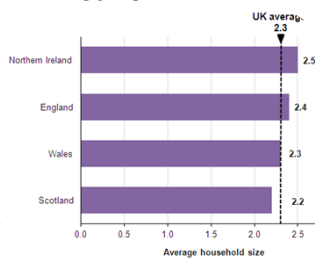
Ratio of median house prices to median incomes for West Suffolk : 7.7



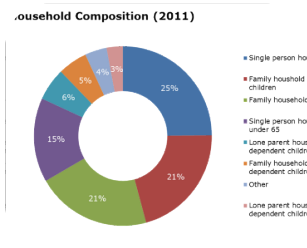
Ratio of lower quartile house prices to lower quartile incomes for West Suffolk: 10.6



Weekly median private rents: 1 bed = £144 2 beds = £217 3 bed= £230 4 bed = £320



Average household size: 2.4 people



Proportion of West Suffolk households aged 75 and over: 8.5%



HomeLink
Approx. number of households on social housing register: 2,313



There are 4918 homes with planning permission which have not started or are currently under construction (March 2017)



Number of affordable housing completions in West Suffolk in the past five years: 842

Unless otherwise stated, all data was taken from the [Housing Market Bulletin](#), published in June 2018 and using data from April 2018.

5. Housing priorities 2018-2023

This five year strategy covers the period 2018-2023, and seeks to further strengthen the partnership working in place in West Suffolk and to increase the supply of, and access to, suitable housing. This will help to improve the health and wellbeing of local people, strengthen the resilience of families and communities, and realise our ambitions for inclusive economic growth. This will be achieved through the adoption of the following three priorities. Key actions across each of the three priorities are detailed in the implementation plan attached as Appendix C.

Housing priority one: plan for housing to meet the needs of current and future generations throughout their lifetimes, that is properly supported by infrastructure, facilities and community networks.

We have a real opportunity to explore new ways of increasing the rate of housing delivery and be more creative in encouraging the development of new types of housing that meet the current and future needs and aspirations of our residents.

It is clear that the rate of housing delivery lags well behind the number of planning applications that are being approved. Nationally nine out of ten planning applications are passed and there are twice as many unfulfilled approved applications than those that are currently being built.

We know no-one can live in a planning permission. We need to find new innovative ways to help developers speed up the rate that they build new homes, through making the planning system as efficient as it can be, supporting the provision of required infrastructure and using all the powers we have to act where housebuilding has been significantly delayed or slow to come forward.

This section sets out our key actions in the following areas:

- 1.1 Understanding our local housing market – key challenges for investment and growth
- 1.2 Planning policies that support the delivery of new homes
- 1.3 Increasing the speed of housing delivery
- 1.4 Ensuring the provision of infrastructure needed to support new homes
- 1.5 Building sustainable communities

1.1 Understanding our local housing market - key challenges for investment and growth

- **Overall housing requirements**

The current [Objectively Assessed Housing Need](#) report provides evidence and an assessment for development needs for housing, both market and affordable. The adopted St Edmundsbury and emerging Forest Heath local plans together plan for 18,280 new homes over a twenty year plan period to 2031 to meet the projected demands for new homes. As at 31 March 2017 West Suffolk has delivered 3268 homes since 2012 when the local plans started.

Housing need will in the future be assessed using the standard method, the full details of this will be published in the National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) alongside the NPPF 2018. The implications for West Suffolk will be considered when the details are available and this new method will inform the preparation of the West Suffolk Local Plan.

- **Land supply for housing**

We therefore know from this assessment that we need to build more homes each year in order to meet the needs and aspirations of people either currently living in West Suffolk or people who might want to move into the area. Data relating to the number of house completions is available in the evidence base at Appendix B.

West Suffolk has a number of environmental constraints with approximately 35% of the area having special designations, plus the presence of two large United States Air Force (USAF) airbases and horse racing restrictions around Newmarket. Further information relating to the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) is available in the evidence base at Appendix B.

Work is underway to prepare a Local Plan for West Suffolk. Through the new Local Plan we will ensure that the supply of housing meets the needs of the current and future population of West Suffolk.

Affordable housing requirements

Affordable housing includes social rent, affordable rent and intermediate accommodation, such as shared ownership (part rent/part buy). These terms, and affordable housing generally, are defined in [Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2018](#).

In 2016 West Suffolk had an identified need for 6,407 (or 320 per year) new affordable homes up to 2031. This need was based on a previous definition of affordable homes which has since been broadened for example by including starter homes and affordable private rent. From March 2013 to March 2018, 842 new affordable homes have been delivered in West Suffolk. Data relating to the number of affordable homes delivered each year since 2013 can be found in the evidence base at Appendix B.

- **Rural housing**

Approximately 43% of West Suffolk's population live outside of the major towns. The provision of rural housing is therefore vital for the creation and maintenance of sustainable communities.

Outside the five main settlements in West Suffolk, house prices for all property types are well above the West Suffolk median at £284,363, compared to the median of £247,741 for the five main settlements³. In addition, the availability of affordable properties for rent in rural areas is much lower than in our towns. The NPPF 2018 also introduces entry-level exception sites to support development of sites suitable for first time buyers.

³ Land Registry update, September 2018

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Through the creation of a new West Suffolk local plan, identify sufficient land to meet our current and future housing needs to give certainty for residents and developers.
2. Through the commissioning of a Housing Delivery Plan identify potential barriers and develop ways to accelerate delivery on the sites which are currently allocated in our local plans, including what is achievable through modular and new house building technologies
3. Work with developers to increase the supply of high quality homes in a range of sizes, types and tenures to meet the diverse needs and aspirations of our communities.
4. Explore different opportunities such as utilising surplus industrial and brownfield land, considering development on open space that no longer performs its original function and, in exceptional circumstances, explore the potential use of a small amount of greenfield land.
5. Where our current assets can be better used for housing, which is better attuned to the needs of the people who live or wish to live in our area, we will look to redevelop them.
6. Through our Asset Management Plan and the One Public Sector Estate, work with all public sector partners to proactively look for opportunities to create additional housing land.
7. Identify solutions to respond to specific housing needs such as first time buyers, key workers, affordable housing, self-build, Co-Housing, Community Land Trusts and specialist housing.

1.2 Planning policies that support the delivery of new homes

Our [Local Plans](#) highlight our ambitions for the area which seek to deliver significant economic and housing growth.

West Suffolk councils rely significantly on the market to provide a mix of open market and affordable housing, both open market and affordable, through landowners' Section 106 obligations. All practical steps are taken to ensure there is a timely delivery of housing in accordance with the supply forecasts which will be detailed within West Suffolk's Housing Delivery Plan.

- **Demand for affordable housing**

There continues to be an increased demand for affordable housing from those whose housing needs cannot be met by the open market, particularly young people, families on low incomes, vulnerable and older people.

[West Suffolk's current policy requirement](#) is for 30% affordable housing to be provided on all residential developments of 10 units or more. There are two main ways of delivering affordable homes: (i) by private developers through Section 106 agreements; and (ii) registered providers (RPs) building their own schemes through their development programmes.

The housing sector continues to operate in a climate of uncertainty and heightened risk, leading to more challenges over the financial viability of schemes. As a consequence there is risk that reduced levels of affordable housing is being delivered through Section 106 agreements. These financial uncertainties have also led to a number of RPs reducing their own development programmes.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Promote, develop and review planning policies to support affordable housing provision. Ensure that West Suffolk's emerging Local Plan contains robust planning policies and our Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document supports these.
2. Encourage innovation such as mixed use schemes in order to balance competing demands on well positioned sites. While much of the growth activity is focused around our major sites, we will encourage good quality, sustainable development on smaller sites where opportunities arise.
3. Work with developers to ensure that they are meeting the full affordable housing obligations through S106 agreements
4. Be creative and flexible in securing the levels of affordable housing needed and consider many forms and types of affordable housing within the context of new government policy, including affordable home ownership, affordable private rent, starter homes, discounted market sales housing, plus empty properties being refurbished and let at affordable rents.
5. Focus on 'stalled' sites with planning consent, and if necessary use Compulsory Purchase powers.
6. Support the development of neighbourhood plans to encourage local communities to identify solutions to address local housing needs.

1.3 Increasing the speed of housing delivery

- **Housing Delivery Plan**

We are playing a direct role in increasing the rate of housing delivery, which was demonstrated with the creation of the Councils' own housing development company, Barley Homes (Group) Limited in March 2016. Barley Homes is developing its first site.

We have commissioned an assessment of the past and current rates of housing delivery across West Suffolk. This information will be used to develop a Housing Delivery Plan. The plan will set out a wide range of interventions that West Suffolk can use in an enabling role to increase the rate of housing delivery on existing and emerging sites and local plan housing allocations. We recognise that we will need to do this in partnership with both the private sector and other public sector partners, in order to speed up the rate of housing delivery, in the short, medium and long-term.

- **Small to Medium Sized Enterprises and Self-Build**

With the government setting ambitious targets to accelerate the rate of housing delivery, there is a recognised lack of capacity within the larger and mainstream house builders. We will explore new ways of delivery, such as modern methods of construction and continue to work with Small to Medium Sized Enterprise (SME) builders.

The development of new homes using self-build in both the UK and West Suffolk has been very low compared to the rates in Europe. We will take positive action to support and advise SME builders and self-builders. There are a number of options we can pursue including bringing forward small sites and making them available to smaller builders, “de-risking” sites and making the planning process as straight forward as possible or offering sites with outline planning permission or planning in principle. This will be facilitated by using the Council’s self-build register and brownfield sites register. Where appropriate we may also offer financial assistance from West Suffolk’s Growth Innovation Fund.

Whilst the speed of delivery is important, this must not be at the expense of good design or quality and we will encourage developers to have due regard to the concepts set out in the emerging Suffolk Design Guide.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Identify a range of options to increase the rate of housing delivery by using the findings from the Housing Delivery Plan to work with public sector partners, Homes England, private developers and RPs.
2. Work with developers to encourage the sub-division of large sites where this could help to speed up the delivery of homes.
3. Adopt an enabling role to support conversations with statutory consultees, including SMEs and self or custom builders.
4. Re-establish a developers and agents forum to improve dialogue.
5. Work with site owners and developers to identify ways to restart or bring forward development on sites where the rate of build has significantly slowed or stalled. This will include consideration of Homes England funding to accelerate delivery and the renegotiation of planning conditions where appropriate.
6. Seek to support housing delivery using a range of pro-active interventions, but while we recognise we cannot do this on our own and will require the support of a wide range of partners.
7. Use our housing company Barley Homes (Group) Limited to bring forward housing development, including working with other public sector partners.
8. Explore opportunities to encourage SME builders to work collaboratively to bring forward the development of housing sites.

1.4 Ensuring the provision of infrastructure needed to support new homes

Effective planning and funding for infrastructure can unlock land for development, enable growth and enhance our local area. Good planning for infrastructure increases certainty, creates efficiencies, reduces costs and helps to manage the phasing of development. Infrastructure delivery depends on many

different public and private sector partners and funding often comprises a mix of investment solutions.

For the private sector, the role of infrastructure costs in establishing development viability is critical. Sharing of information and being transparent about requirements and costs is essential. We take guidance from the NPPF and NPPG regarding viability. <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/planning-practice-guidance>

West Suffolk will have a proactive flexible approach to providing solutions to make development work and will explore further opportunities to assist on difficult sites. This may include using our [Growth Investment Strategy](#) directly investing to de-risk sites by addressing environmental and infrastructure issues or by securing outline planning permission.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Provide leadership by identifying how development strategies can be future-proofed by anticipating and making provision for new and emerging technologies such as information technology provision.
2. Ensure the planning process enables the Councils to negotiate with developers to guarantee the supply of new homes, including affordable homes.
3. Work with developers and public sector partners to directly provide funding through our Growth Investment Fund or to help to secure financing or grants for vital infrastructure such as Infrastructure funding and Get Britain Building Funding from Homes England.

1.5 Building sustainable communities

West Suffolk is committed to supporting the development and maintenance of balanced sustainable communities that support our residents. We will work with developers and RPs to encourage high quality and sustainable developments, which incorporate the concepts of quality design. This work is linked to section 2.4 in this document (communities that provide a better place to live).

Some of our residents are unable to afford their own home and rely on homes provided by RPs or from private landlords. Others may find themselves living in a home that does not meet their changing needs as they grow older or where they have requirements for specialist housing. We can help to address this situation.

- **Affordability**

Affordable Rent was introduced by central Government in 2011 to replace Social Rents, to provide a way in which RPs could deliver new affordable homes without public subsidy. Affordable Rents are generally set at 80% of market rents, which is the upper limit, as opposed to social rents, which are generally nearer to 65% of market rents. For some individuals and families even the Affordable Rent is unaffordable. This is particularly the case for larger homes, such as four

bedroom houses. It is our intention that new, larger homes, and in particular four bedroom homes, are set below 80% of market rents and ideally at social rents.

We acknowledge this may affect the financial viability of schemes, so any decisions about rent levels will be taken with this consideration in mind. In any event, through our Tenancy Strategy [\(include link when finalised\)](#) and Section 106 agreements we will seek to ensure that all new Affordable Rented homes are capped at no more than the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) levels. We will also work with RPs to explore the possibility of developing new social rented homes, particularly in areas where private rents are very high and well above LHA levels, which may involve direct funding from the councils.

- **Ageing population and people with care and health needs**

Appropriate housing that meets the decent standards plays a fundamental role in the health and wellbeing of residents.

West Suffolk's total population is expected to increase by 10% by 2039, compared with 11% across England. The growth in population for those residents aged 75 and over is expected to be much larger. For residents in West Suffolk aged 75 and over we are expecting to see 84% growth with resident numbers rising from 16,600 to 30,600. The growth of this age group across England is expected to be 76%.

The number of residents in the groups between 20 and 59 years of age is expected to decrease by 2039. The 60 to 74 age group will increase by 1%. Further details relating to population forecasts can be found in the evidence base at Appendix B.

In West Suffolk we mirror the national picture in that there is a real shortage of the right type of housing such as extra care housing, bungalows or smaller accessible homes to assist with down-sizing to meet the changing needs of our ageing population. Working with partners, providers and older people we will seek to ensure more housing choices become available to support the increasing ageing population or those with specialist housing needs.

Private Renting

Private rental rates in West Suffolk have increased significantly in recent years, reflecting the fact that demand is greater than supply. We are seeing this situation because home ownership is now out of reach for many, in particular young people.

Furthermore there is a high demand for private rented accommodation, in 2015 37.2% of Forest Heath's and 25.54% of St Edmundsbury's total housing stock was privately rented⁴. This is partly fuelled by many residents being unable to

⁴ <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/hmb-edition-37.pdf>

buy housing on the open market due to the inability to be able to access mortgage finance (including the need for large deposits) and because of the high house prices in the area, when compared to average earnings. The average house price in West Suffolk for December 2017 was £284,363⁵. The cost of private renting in certain parts of West Suffolk is also very high, largely influenced by the presence of two USAFE air bases that inflate rental levels.

Whilst we will seek to address this by taking concerted action to ensure there is a timely delivery of housing generally, and by focusing on the supply of more affordable homes, we are also exploring opportunities to encourage developers to provide affordable private rent homes.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Work with partners including the Clinical Commissioning Group and Suffolk County Council to identify the future need for specialist housing, including housing for the elderly, people with disabilities, Gypsy and Travellers, keyworkers and so on.
2. Adopt an innovative approach to new affordable housing provision, including exploring the opportunities for shared ownership housing, modern methods of construction, community led housing, custom and self-building and housing types to meet specific markets, such as supported housing (including extra care and for those with a learning disability), students, downsizers, sharers and young newly forming households.
3. Review the impact of affordable rents on demand and develop an approach to rent setting for affordable homes to ensure properties are affordable to target markets. (Further details can be found in the Tenancy Strategy.
4. Explore opportunities to develop new social rented homes, involving providing direct funding to facilitate the development in areas where private rents are well above LHA levels.
5. Explore innovative ways for how we can work with private developers and RPs to help older people who may wish to downsize.
6. Explore opportunities for the creation of co-housing schemes which support inter-generational living.
7. Work with developers to build homes that can be adapted to meet the needs of people throughout their lifetime, including the use of smart technology within homes to enable home environments to respond better to specific needs, supporting more independent living
8. Encourage a wider range of housing in the privately rented sector, including affordable private rent and student rented accommodation.
9. Set an ambition that all new housing built, will meet either building regulations accessible and adaptable or wheelchair user standards.

⁵ <https://cambridgeshireinsight.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/hmb-edition-37.pdf>

Housing priority two: Improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents

We are committed to maximising the use of the existing housing stock and to improving its quality and suitability. This can be achieved through our own actions and by working with partners. We have an important role to play in the prevention of poor health and the impact of poor health on the wider health and care system. We know that living in a decent home can significantly improve quality of life.

This section outlines our key actions in the following areas:

- 2.1 Suitable homes for disabled, vulnerable and older residents
- 2.2 Bringing homes back into use
- 2.3 Making homes safe in the private sector
- 2.4 Safe and vibrant communities
- 2.5 Improving energy efficiency and addressing fuel poverty

2.1 Suitable homes for disabled, vulnerable and older residents

Residents will be supported to live independently in their own homes, whether in their existing property or a more suitable one. Living independently may mean that adaptations need to be made to peoples' homes, through a Disabled Facilities Grants or other schemes relating to minor works and equipment.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Put the residents' needs first and work with health, social care and housing partners to help people maintain independence in their homes by providing the necessary equipment through works funded by Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG). We will utilise partnership working to pool funding to help residents' meet their housing needs. The wide ranging schemes, including adaptations, will also help to prevent hospital admissions and facilitate quicker discharge.
2. Review the way in which we deliver support for maintaining independence in the home through the Home Improvement Agency.

2.2 Bringing homes back into use

There are still too many long-term empty homes, therefore we will use all available tools to encourage and compel owners to bring their homes back into use.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Provide support, encouragement and funding to help owners of empty homes bring them back into use. Use enforcement powers as an option if negotiations fail.
2. Prioritise for intervention homes we most need by working with partners including Anglia Revenues Partnership (ARP) and ensure that the maximum Council Tax charge is levied for long-term empty homes.
3. Support landlords who want to improve standards in the private rented sector and work with us through the West Suffolk Lettings Partnership.
4. Use enforcement powers to bring empty homes back into use.

2.3 Making homes safe in the private sector

Our [Civil Sanctions Policy](#) is key to driving up standards in the private rented sector. Whilst we recognise that the majority of private sector landlords provide decent, safe and warm homes, we will target the landlords who do not meet the required standards.

Extended licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) will provide us with more opportunities to be proactive. Well managed HMOs provide much needed, affordable rented accommodation and we use these to relieve pressures from housing demand.

We have a Housing Assistance Policy designed to support vulnerable residents to live in a decent home.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Improve standards in the private rented sector by working with landlords to deliver best practice and target 'rogue landlords' through our Civil Sanctions Policy.
2. Improve much needed accommodation provided through HMOs. Work in line with licensing laws that raise the management and standards of HMOs.
3. Deliver our programme to improve fire safety of flats above commercial premises.
4. Review the purpose and scope of our Housing Assistance Policy.
5. Explore innovative ways to utilise funding to drive up standards and increase the supply of decent housing.

2.4 Safe and vibrant communities

The quality of the environment is also important to our residents and it is a key driver to what makes people feel happy, safe and secure. We ensure that individuals and communities are properly protected from environmental impacts such as noise, odour or smoke. We also want to use planning to support sustainable communities and well-designed places through the emerging Suffolk Design Guide (referenced in Housing Priority One).

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Take a more targeted approach to investigating complaints of nuisance, which can have an adverse impact on quality of life.

2. Work with partners to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime.
3. Use our [Families and Communities Strategy](#) to support and encourage resilient families and communities.
4. Protect the amenity of the local environment through our consultation work in the planning process.
5. Respond to the Suffolk Design Guide that aims to raise the quality of design being delivered in communities and neighbourhoods and ensure that good growth takes place across Suffolk.

2.5 Improving energy efficiency and addressing fuel poverty

Heating and powering homes in West Suffolk currently accounts for around 21% of total energy consumption and 23% of CO₂ emissions. Buildings and particularly homes are seen by many as the sector which councils and their partners are best able to influence in terms of improving energy efficiency and helping to deliver low and zero carbon energy. An estimated 8.6% of households in West Suffolk are in fuel poverty.

As set out in our Home Energy Conservation Report and Energy Framework, we wish to cut greenhouse gas emissions and secure affordable warmth for households and communities in West Suffolk.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Target vulnerable households to help improve energy efficiency and the household's circumstances, maximising the use of local and national funding including Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding.
2. Work with RP partners and private landlords to secure energy improvement in their property.
3. Provide home energy advice and support to residents and community groups on the benefits of energy efficiency and renewable energy.
4. Support community energy schemes for the provision of local renewable and lower carbon energy generation for heating and power supply.

Priority three: Enable people to access suitable and sustainable housing

We want to help people access suitable and sustainable housing. This can mean providing advice and support to find suitable accommodation or to help them stay in their current home. We work with partners to assist as soon as problems arise and respond when people find themselves in crisis situations, for example homelessness.

This section outlines our key actions the following areas:

- 3.1 Homelessness prevention and reduction
- 3.2 Housing allocations

3.1 Homelessness prevention and reduction

West Suffolk is committed to preventing and reducing homelessness, tackling the main causes of homelessness and supporting those in need. [West Suffolk Homelessness Reduction Strategy 2018 – 2023](#) sets out in detail the actions we will take to prevent and reduce homelessness. All the detail is available in the strategy but in summary our vision is to:

Deliver a focused and accessible service to prevent homelessness and assist homeless people to find a settled home.

The main objectives are to:

1. Provide a service with a focus on preventing or relieving homelessness ensuring those people have access to effective support services.
2. Ensure that homeless people are supported to secure a settled home
3. Work collaboratively in finding housing solutions for those people threatened with homelessness.

In order to achieve these objectives, we have identified five priorities to deliver.

- Homelessness priority one: Homelessness prevention
- Homelessness priority two: Tackling rough sleeping
- Homelessness priority three: Supporting vulnerable households
- Homelessness priority four: Increasing accommodation options
- Homelessness priority five: Supporting the implementation of welfare reforms

A [delivery plan](#) accompanies the Homelessness Reduction Strategy and sets out in detail the key actions that we will take to achieve our priorities.

3.2 Housing allocations

In West Suffolk, as in many parts of the country, social and affordable housing is scarce and demand far outstrips supply. We cannot house everyone that applies to, and is accepted on, our housing register (known as Home-Link). Our [Lettings Policy](#) sets out how we prioritise the allocation of social and affordable rented homes across West Suffolk and the Cambridge sub-region. The Lettings Policy ensures that applicants on the housing register, with the highest level of housing

need and/or urgent need to move are prioritised for housing/rehousing. As the supply of social and affordable housing remains scarce, it is a priority for the Council to allocate homes fairly, and in line with our Lettings Policy.

Having a settled home enables people to access support services, integrate into their local community and to obtain and sustain work and training. We will manage the expectations of customers and ensure that we maximise access and availability not only to social rented accommodation but to other housing options. We discuss the availability of private rented housing and opportunities for rent through our [West Suffolk Lettings Partnership](#). We support people to explore their housing options and help meet their aspirations.

In order to address these issues we will:

1. Operate an effective Home-Link service to provide access to affordable and social housing to those most in need.
2. Review the Lettings Policy, in conjunction with colleagues across the Cambridge sub-region, to ensure that it is fit for purpose.
3. Ensure that people are provided with effective advice, preventative and information services on a range of accessible housing options so they are supported to make the best choice for them and their families.
4. Increase access to the private rented sector, including through our West Suffolk Lettings Partnership.

7. Governance and implementation of the strategy

The Councils are committed to ensuring that together with partners, we have the skills, structures and infrastructure in place to be able to implement the actions to deliver on the strategy's priorities over the next five years.

The actions in this Housing Strategy will be achieved using the implementation plan (Appendix C) that identifies the main tasks needed to increase and improve the provision of appropriate housing over the next five years. Given the context of rapid change, the implementation plan will be reviewed every year to ensure that the tasks remain relevant and are revised where appropriate. A mid-term review is also planned for 2020.

Progress towards the Housing Strategy implementation plan (Appendix C) will be monitored with feedback, if necessary, on the barriers to delivering the Housing Strategy.

The implementation plan is being developed during the consultation period and will be finalised once the consultation has concluded.