

West Suffolk Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan 2018-2023: addendum

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The [Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan](#) was adopted by Cabinet in December 2018. Since then, regular reviews of progress have been undertaken. This addendum sets out a formal review of the strategy taking into account progress made, ensuring the actions remain relevant and fit for purpose and the current situation in relation to housing post-pandemic.
- 1.2 The actions in the Housing Strategy are progressed through the [Implementation Plan](#) that identifies the main tasks that the council will take to help increase and improve the provision of appropriate housing over the life of the strategy.
- 1.3 As set out in the strategy, and as is good practice, we committed to reviewing the actions to ensure they remain relevant and are revised where appropriate. We have therefore undertaken this mid-term review to ensure we respond to the housing needs and continue to progress our housing priorities.

2. Our vision and housing priorities

- 2.1 [West Suffolk's Strategic Framework 2020-2024](#) 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 that specifically focuses on housing is to provide:

Increased and improved provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas.

- 2.2 Through the process of this mid-term review, our understanding of the local context and external pressures, we have determined that the priorities set out in the Housing Strategy 2018-2023 remain relevant, in order to deliver this strategic priority.
- 2.3 The 2020-24 West Suffolk Strategic Framework included a slightly amended set of housing priorities, as follows, but the Housing Strategy continues to support these, in a similar way to the priorities in place when the Strategy was adopted in 2018:

We will use our roles as a local housing and planning authority, a regulator, an investor and local influencer to:

- ensure a variety of new housing is provided in appropriate locations, that meets the needs of current and future generations
- improve the quality of housing and the local environment for our residents
- support people in accessing suitable housing, including by working in partnership to address their wider needs.

2.4 Further information about the review of our actions to deliver against these priorities is set out in section 4 of this document.

3. Changes since the Housing Strategy 2018-2023 was adopted

3.1 Coronavirus pandemic

3.1.1 The coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on people's everyday lives and businesses globally and the housing sector and construction industry have not been immune to this.

3.1.2 Through our ongoing commitment to housing delivery, West Suffolk Council has an important role in recovery and will provide focus for our continued dialogue with the housing market and partners as the situation continues to evolve.

3.2 The Suffolk-wide approach to recovery following the coronavirus pandemic

3.2.1 During 2020 to 2021 Suffolk's Public Sector, including West Suffolk Council, worked together to agree a strategic approach for how Suffolk will recover from the coronavirus pandemic. Suffolk Public Sector Leaders' priorities are physical and mental health, town centres, housing and homelessness, young people and climate and environment. Through this commitment, the aim is to improve outcomes for all Suffolk people and to reduce inequalities.

3.2.2 The proposals are focused around collaborative work to maximise benefits and will sit alongside individual organisations' plans to support recovery among Suffolk residents and businesses and capitalising on available resources.

3.3 Net zero carbon emissions by 2030

3.3.1 In June 2020, West Suffolk Council agreed a net zero emissions target for its operations, to be achieved by 2030. We also need to address the need to improve energy efficiency in housing and we will continue to respond to government policy and work with developers, registered providers and private landlords as we work towards this.

3.3.2 West Suffolk is a partner in the [Suffolk Climate Emergency Plan](#) that contains specific goals that we have adopted around reducing carbon emissions in the housing sector. In West Suffolk, we are developing plans to:

- Ensure higher energy performance in new build homes (all new builds should be zero carbon by 2025) through the development of the West Suffolk Local Plan and by working with developers.
- Home built under the Future Homes Standard should produce 75 to 80 per cent fewer carbon emissions compared with current levels and become net zero as the electricity grid continues to decarbonise.

We will access funding alongside our Suffolk partners to:

- Work with registered providers and private home-owners to improve their homes with energy efficiency measures;
- Enforce the Domestic Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard regulations which requires privately rented properties to have an Energy Performance Certificate E or better; and
- Bid for funding through the Green Homes Grant Local Authority Delivery (LAD) scheme to improve the efficiency of low-income households.

3.3.3 The West Suffolk Local Plan is due to be adopted in July 2024. We are developing policies so that we can work with developers and homeowners to design proposals and make decisions about more energy efficient housing as we respond to the climate change agenda. As we develop the Local Plan this will provide the context for the development of more detailed planning guidance.

3.4 Housing Needs Assessment

3.4.1 A Housing Needs Assessment was adopted by the Cambridgeshire and West Suffolk district councils in 2021.

3.4.2 The assessment provides an understanding of West Suffolk's current and future housing market and how it relates to our housing growth and needs. It indicates how West Suffolk will respond to population increases through housing growth. It provides evidence to support the preparation of Local Plans, Neighbourhood Plans, and planning policies relating to the needs of groups with specific housing requirements to inform policy for the delivery of housing in West Suffolk between 2020 and 2040.

3.4.3 In particular, the assessment makes recommendations around the need for affordable housing, including social rent, the type of housing mix required, the needs of older and disabled persons, people who rent their homes, people who want to build their own homes and service families. Actions will be developed from the Housing Needs Assessment which ensure the council is focused on meeting the needs of our communities now and in the future.

3.5 Planning for the Future white paper

3.5.1 The white paper was published in August 2020 along with a consultation on the proposals. We responded to the consultation and are preparing for what the proposed changes could mean for West Suffolk.

3.5.2 These reforms to the planning system aim to speed up the rate of delivery of new housing and modernise the planning system. The key changes are around the following areas:

- Planning for development
- Planning for beautiful and sustainable places
- Planning for infrastructure and connected places

3.5.3 As government's plans develop, we will continue to be proactive and press government on what this will mean for West Suffolk.

4. Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan: mid-term review

- 4.1 A review of the Housing Strategy and Implementation Plan has taken place throughout 2021. This has involved detailed discussions with services and staff from across the council.
- 4.2 The Housing Strategy priorities remain appropriate and relevant. They continue to provide future direction as we take into account the new challenges we are facing around the coronavirus pandemic, the net zero carbon emissions target and Planning for the Future White Paper.
- 4.3 The Implementation Plan (attached as Appendix B) has also been subject to a thorough review. We have looked in detail at each action to understand impacts and as a result whether it is still relevant and fit for purpose. We have also assessed how we should continue to report progress, whether any actions have been completed or should be combined and if they can be reported through other mechanisms.
- 4.4 The revised Implementation Plan sets out the actions that we are working towards in order to deliver against our priorities. The plan includes commentary around how we will move forward with our actions following the review. The actions that will be removed, and why they are being removed, are also set out in the plan. There are minor wording changes to some of the actions in order to improve clarity.
- 4.5 In order to streamline our reporting practices and to utilise existing reporting mechanisms, the Implementation Plan contains detail around certain actions being reported through alternative routes in the future. The reporting routes are detailed in section 5 below.
- 4.6 Following this review we are also proposing that the Housing Strategy should be extended to 2024. This means the Housing Strategy will be aligned with the Strategic Framework 2020-2024. Also, a new Housing Strategy beyond 2024 will commence at the same time as the West Suffolk Local Plan which is due to be adopted in 2024. However, we will continue to monitor any new government policy, such as the Planning for the Future White Paper, and assess whether an earlier review might be necessary.
- 4.7 We are also taking this opportunity to reflect on our progress against the Housing Strategy 2018-2023 and the challenges we face, as set out at 4.9 and 4.10 below.
- 4.8 Detailed information about how we are working to prevent and reduce homelessness and rough sleeping is set out in the West Suffolk Council [Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy](#), attached as Appendix D to the Cabinet report with details of the delivery plan review. The council's Housing Strategy does not therefore contain specific actions to a reduce homelessness however there is a clear link between both strategies.

Progress to date

4.9 We have made significant **progress** in a number of areas. The implementation plan contains detailed information and some key activities are listed below:

- Exceeded our Housing Delivery Test target of 95 per cent and achieved 112 per cent for the year 2020-21;
- Adoption of a Housing Delivery Action Plan (despite meeting our Housing Delivery Test target) in order to maintain our proactive approach to housing delivery which will enable more development where we want to meet local need;
- Continued progress on our commitment to develop a West Suffolk Local Plan by 2024. The next stage is consultation of preferred options in March 2022;
- Housing Needs Assessment finalised. This provides an understanding of the amount and type of housing that is needed across West Suffolk;
- Working towards the requirement that 25 per cent of all affordable homes delivered are First Homes, a type of discounted market sale housing;
- Barley Homes (council owned housing development company) has completed a development at Westmill Place in Haverhill and a Stonemill Park in Haverhill is due to be completed in early 2022;
- Build to Rent is being proactively progressed as an option to help meet local housing need;
- The Independent Living Suffolk (ILS) is in place which is a service provided by Suffolk County Council in partnership with local district and borough councils. Through this new model, in place since December 2020, local people are being supported to live safely, comfortably and independently in their own home for as long as possible;
- Continuing to improve standards in the private rented sector through innovative new ways of working with tenants and landlords;
- Providing effective advice, preventative and information services which has resulted in high homelessness prevention and relief rates and accommodating 196 individuals through the 'everyone in' initiative; and
- The Lettings Policy review has been completed with a revised and fit for purpose policy adopted across the Cambridge sub-region in summer 2021.

Challenges

4.10 West Suffolk Council faces some **challenges** in achieving the priorities set out in the Housing Strategy. A number of these are outside of our direct control but we continue to liaise with and influence our partners. We are working to address challenges in the following areas:

- Increasing the rate of housing delivery. We are taking a proactive approach to exploring new ways of increasing the rate of housing delivery and being more creative in encouraging new types of housing that meets the current and future needs of our residents;
- Delivering the right amount of affordable housing to meet local needs, including social rented properties;
- Understanding the level of need around adapted accommodation and undertaking an assessment of accommodation currently available;
- Working with partners to reduce the number of empty homes which will provide more accommodation for those in housing need and improve these to a higher energy efficiency standard;
- Working with developers to achieve the Future Homes Standard by 2025 to ensure that all new homes are carbon zero-ready;
- Improve energy efficiency in existing housing by working with registered providers, the private rented sector and privately owned home-owners;

5. Reporting against our housing priorities

5.1 We will use the following reporting mechanisms to evidence progress, and help us understand barriers, to deliver against our priorities.

5.2 Housing Delivery Action Plan

5.2.1 The council commissioned a Housing Delivery Study, published in March 2019, which informed West Suffolk's Housing Strategy and the [Housing Delivery Action Plan](#). The study 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. It includes actions that can be taken to boost overall housing delivery and provide greater choice in the types and tenures of new homes.

5.2.2 Increasing the rate of housing delivery is a key priority in our Housing Strategy with actions included in the Implementation Plan. These actions have been monitored through the Housing Delivery Action Plan and remain a priority in the Housing Strategy.

5.2.3 Our approach supports government policy, where a target was set to deliver 300,000 new homes annually across the United Kingdom by the mid-2020s. Local authorities as well as central Government need to understand whether the required number of new houses are being delivered. As such, a Housing Delivery Test was introduced in July 2018 to measure local authority performance against central government set targets.

5.2.4 We recognise that we will need to deliver housing 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.

5.3 Climate Change and Environment Taskforce Action Plan

- 5.3.1 West Suffolk Council declared a climate emergency and established a taskforce to help move forward with initiatives put in place to tackle climate change and reduce greenhouse gases. Our ambition is to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2030.
- 5.3.2 The taskforce focused on five main themes that includes housing (and planning). An [action plan](#) was developed that sets out a range of initiatives such as identifying rental properties that fail Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) and ensuring properties are brought up to standards as well as using the local plan process to improve the environmental performance of new homes.

5.4 Rural Taskforce Action Plan

- 5.4.1 Cabinet established this taskforce with a view to ensuring that the different issues facing residents, communities and businesses in more rural areas are taken into account by the council in all of its relevant future activities and decision making.
- 5.4.2 Following an engagement exercise, the taskforce identified three themes to focus on which included Appropriate and Affordable Housing. As West Suffolk Council develops the new local plan, the taskforce identified a number of actions to take forward as part of the plan such as space standards, design standards, housing mix and tenure, and sustainable heating solutions.