

# **Uttlesford District Council**

## **Housing Strategy 2009 – 2012** *(Draft, February 2009)*

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# Chapter 1 – Summary and Introduction

Uttlesford District Council's Housing Strategy provides the overall framework for housing activity and investment by the Council and its partner organisations. It sets out the long-term vision for housing in Uttlesford up to 2012 and beyond. It is concerned with housing in all tenures and is the overarching strategy for a number of plans, strategies and policies developed by the Council. The strategy also develops links from national, regional, sub-regional priorities to local priorities for Uttlesford.

This Strategy statement is in three parts:

- The first part sets out the strategic priorities for housing at a National, Regional, Sub-Regional and Local level. It includes the strategic context within which Uttlesford addresses local housing needs and shows how housing links to many other wider agendas.
- The second part of the Strategy sets out a summary of data and information we and our partners hold on housing need, demand and stock condition and also present and future supply of housing in Uttlesford. It identifies the interrelated factors that affect the availability and affordability of housing and the quality of life for all the residents living in Uttlesford.
- The third and most important part details what we have done and what we intend to do, working with a range of partner agencies, to meet local housing issues and the resources available to carry them out. These activities are grouped under three strategic objectives which have been developed with our London Commuter Belt Sub-Regional Partners and will be embedded in the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy which is currently under review:
  1. Maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes to meet diverse needs
  2. Improve the condition of the housing stock both public and private
  3. Build sustainable and thriving neighbourhoods and communities and ensure that vulnerable people are supported in the community

The Housing Strategy is inevitably broad in its scope and its implementation will depend on strong partnership working with a wide range of organisations. The priority actions are set out in an Action Plan (Appendix 1).

The pace of change in national, regional and local policy frameworks means that specific content in the Strategy could be updated periodically and at this stage we have set a 2 year review period into this document.

## **Introduction**

Uttlesford District Council agreed that a local strategy was still of great importance in determining key objectives and future priorities for the Uttlesford District. Progress has been made since the last Housing Strategy was published in 2004. These include the production of an Empty Homes Strategy and a Homelessness Review and Strategy. Work has also taken place on an Affordable Housing Strategy – Guide for Developers and RSL's and a Strategic Housing Market Assessment.

This strategy and those of our 14 sub regional partners will be used to inform and develop the London Commuter Belt Sub Regional Housing Strategy which will be published in 2009. The London Commuter Belt Sub Regional Housing Strategy will establish key areas where joint working across local authority boundaries can deliver economic, effective solutions to common identified issues. Local issues will be dealt with independently in this document, our local housing strategy.

### **1.1 Economic Climate**

The Council is aware that this strategy has been written during an unpredictable time in the housing market. Figures from the Nationwide Building Society<sup>1</sup> show that house prices fell by 2.5% during May 2008, the largest recorded monthly fall in the history of the Nationwide monthly index. At seven months, it was also the longest consecutive period of monthly falls since 1992. Prices have fallen 4.4% since this time last year, the biggest annual fall in house prices since December 1992. The decline in prices is caused by the difficulties created for potential house purchasers by the rapid rise in house prices in the last few years, a squeeze on spending power and the reduction in credit availability.

The Council of Mortgage lenders<sup>2</sup> in their Housing and Mortgage Market forecasts: 2008 May 2008 bulletin, forecast a rise in the number of loans in arrears of more than three months from 129,800 at the end of 2007 to 170,000 at the end of 2008 and the number of possessions taken by first-charge mortgage lenders to rise from 27,100 in 2007 to 45,000 in 2008.

Statistics from NHBC<sup>3</sup> reveal that the number of applications from builders to start new homes fell by more than a quarter year-on-year during the three-month period from February to April 2008, as the effect of the credit crunch forces more builders to slow down activity on site.

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<sup>1</sup> Nationwide Building Society House price press release May 2008

<sup>2</sup> Council of Mortgage lenders , Housing and mortgage forecasts 2008

<sup>3</sup> National House Building Council news release 6 June 2008

NHBC statistics show that there were 37,762 applications to start new homes in the UK in the three months from February to April 2008 - a 27 percent decrease on the same three month period a year ago (51,465). Of that total, 28,492 related to private sector activity (i.e. excluding housing associations), showing a 32 per cent decrease on the same three month period in 2007 (41,736).

Housing association figures fell less sharply in the three months to the end of April, with applications totaling 9,270, a decrease of five per cent on the same period a year ago (9,729).

This could all have a significant impact on the amount of social housing built in the District from private developments that are through planning obligations.

### **1.2 Scene Setting the Local Authority - Uttlesford**

Uttlesford is a sparsely populated rural locality in Northwest Essex. The District borders Hertfordshire to the West and Cambridgeshire to the North. It is the largest District in Essex at 63,752 hectares and is mainly rural in character with four market towns - Saffron Walden, Great Dunmow, Stansted Mountfitchet and Thaxted and 56 parishes.

Uttlesford has a population of 71,400 (ONS 2006) which is set to increase over the next 10 -15 years with new housing development. 45% of residents are aged 30 – 59 with relatively few residents aged 20 -29 (9%) compared with the county average. The proportion of younger (0 – 19) and older (60 plus) residents is on par with the County (2001 Census)

There are good road and rail links into London, Cambridge and Harlow from settlements in the Stansted-Cambridge and Stansted-Braintree corridors, although public transport in the more rural locations is poor. Stansted Airport lies within its boundaries.

There are approximately 30,216 dwellings in the district, made up of the following tenures:

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Nos.</b>
Social Rented-Local Authority owned	2,878
Social Rented-Registered Social Landlord	1,287
Stock owned by other Public Bodies	687
Private Sector (rented and owner occupied)	25,364
<b>Total</b>	<b>30,216</b>

Source: HSSA April 2008

The attractive rural nature of the district and its good accessibility to employment

opportunities has led to high house prices. Unemployment remains low at 0.90% and household incomes are relatively higher than the national average.

This tends to give an initial impression of an affluent district with little or no need. However, because of high house prices there are some members of the population, particularly younger people and those on low to modest incomes, unable to access the housing market. This has led to an increasing pressure for more subsidised affordable housing. The average house price in Uttlesford is £302,756 (Local Knowledge, April 2008) significantly higher than the national average of £183,626 (Local Knowledge, April 2008)

High housing costs have also led to a growing number of households who do not necessarily require subsidised affordable housing but, due to inflated house prices, are financially restricted from entering the private housing market. This applies particularly to 'Key Workers' and other workers on modest incomes who are key in providing public services and supporting the commercial businesses on which sustainable economic growth depends.

### **1.3 Sub-Regional Context**

#### The London Commuter Belt Sub-Region

The sub-region comprises fifteen district councils, all ten district council areas of Hertfordshire (Broxbourne, Dacorum, East Herts, Hertsmere, North Herts, St. Albans, Stevenage, Three Rivers, Watford and Welwyn and Hatfield) and five district councils in Essex (Brentwood, Chelmsford, Epping Forest, Harlow and Uttlesford), two county councils, and approximately thirty social housing providers. The overall population for these fifteen districts is just over 1.5 million based upon the most recent census information.

Across such a large sub-region there is clearly a range of diverse settlements varying from small rural villages to urban towns. London has an impact upon the housing requirements for the districts within the sub-region but there are also other areas to the north, east and west of the sub-region's boundaries that also create a source of both inward and outward migration. The large geographical scope of the London Commuter Belt brings with it a greater potential for joint working, for example between those districts that are based around the M25 arc, such as Brentwood, Broxbourne, Epping Forest and Three Rivers, or between the urban and new town settlements of Harlow, Stevenage, Welwyn and Hatfield and Watford.

This variety is reflected in the sub-region's housing markets. The average cost of a one-bedroom flat in the sub-region is about £130,000 but prices vary from one district to another, the lowest being below £110,000 the highest nearly £150,000 (source Hometrack). Levels of homelessness as recorded by each local authority

also vary significantly, between approximately 70 to over 700 cases of people seeking advice and assistance and from 50 to over 200 cases of families being statutorily homeless (2006/07 figures).

Since the last sub-regional housing strategy the extent of joint working between the local authorities across the sub-region has increased significantly. A sub-regional approach has been adopted in tackling homelessness, bringing empty homes back into use, developing more affordable homes, identifying and promoting good practice and achieving savings by way of joint procurement, where the opportunities arise. All of the districts are now involved in identifying and understanding local housing markets, with the knowledge that as issues vary across the sub-region so too will the levels and type of responses required from each district and its partners.

#### **1.4 Consultation and Partnerships**

Through consultation and partnership working we aim to deliver the targets set within the action plan. Consultation will be carried out through this draft document with:

- Housing Association partners (development and management)
- Developers operating in Uttlesford
- Tenant Forum
- Housing Initiative Task Group
- West Essex Primary Care Trust
- Local estate agents and private landlords
- West Essex Primary Care Trust
- North Essex Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust
- Essex County Council Social Care (Adult Services)
- Essex County Council Social Care (Childrens Services)
- Essex County Council Supporting People Team
- Citizens Advice Bureaux operating within the District
- Voluntary Groups
- Parish Councils

The responses received will be considered and taken into account when producing the final version. A copy of the *Consultation Draft* is also being published on the Council's website, which users will be able to download in PDF format

## **Partnership Working**

Strong partnerships are an essential part of this strategy and ensures that key projects can be delivered even with limited resources. Partners include all of the Local Authorities in the London Commuter Belt Sub Region, the Stansted Area Housing Partnership, Housing Association partners, the Homes and Communities Agency, Government Office for the Eastern Region, Essex County Council and the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) Another key partner for Uttlesford is its Local Strategic Partnership, Uttlesford Futures which is the key driver for Uttlesford's Community Strategy.

## **Partnerships**

### **The Local Strategic Partnership**

Under the Local Government Act 2000, local authorities have been given an overarching role of community leadership and are required to prepare Sustainable Community Strategies in consultation with the local community and stakeholders.

Uttlesford Futures is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for the District. Their vision for Uttlesford is:

“to sustain a high quality of life in which the benefits of the unique character of the district are equally available to all residents, workers or visitors”

In June 2008, the LSP published the “Sustainable Community Strategy: A vision for our future – 2018”. This presents the vision for the future of Uttlesford and sets out what the Partnership will deliver over the forthcoming years.

### **Homelessness Partnership**

Following the successful homelessness stakeholder forum the Council have set up a homelessness partnership that meets quarterly. This is the forum for partnership working and to discuss and implement the Action Plan of the Homelessness Strategy. Partnership working underpins the delivery of a comprehensive and holistic housing options and homelessness service.

Invariably the delivery of sustainable housing solutions requires the addressing of non housing problems, this requires a multi agency approach. As advice and support services can be delivered by an often complex and fragmented range of organisations, without partnership working and a co-ordinated approach, it is easy for people to slip through the net.



## **Private Sector Landlords Forum**

Locally and nationally some of the worst housing is in the private rented sector, and the Council has recognised the need to work proactively with landlords and letting agents to achieve improvements. The Council organises a private sector landlord forum once a year. Topics have included the Housing Health and Safety Rating System, licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation, tenancy deposit protection schemes, the Local Housing Allowance and bringing empty homes back into use.

## **Stansted Area Housing Partnership**

Stansted Area Housing Partnership (SAHP) was developed as a partnership between Harlow, Uttlesford, Braintree and East Herts councils following the granting of planning permission by Uttlesford to British Airports Authority (BAA) to increase passenger throughput to 25 million. BAA Stansted contributed £2.2 million towards the funding of affordable housing within a ten mile radius of the airport. A key feature of SAHP is the development of a cross boundary nomination agreement, giving the opportunity for residents of the four councils to move across local authority boundaries.

## **Housing Initiative Task Group**

The Housing Initiative task group was set up to champion housing issues within the authority, to monitor the Housing Strategy and Business Plan and work on specific time limited housing projects. The group are currently progressing the redevelopment of Holloway Crescent, redevelopment of a number of garage sites and a future Housing Options appraisal. The group includes Councillors, Tenant Forum members and Council officers and reports to the Community Committee and Uttlesford Futures, the Local Strategic Partnership.

## **The Tenant Forum**

Tenant Participation is seen as a vital link between the Council and its tenants. There is one Forum representing Uttlesford, made up of 12 Council tenants and one leaseholder from within the District. The Forum members are consulted on a multitude of different areas of the Housing Service including rent setting, repairs, housing policy, etc.

Two tenants from the Tenant Forum (one of whom is the Chairperson) also sit, as non-voting members, on the committee covering housing issues. Two tenants also sit on the Housing Initiative Task Group and five tenants attend the Councils Area Panel meetings.

## Chapter 2

**The strategy identifies linkages to national, regional, sub-regional and local priorities. Whilst Uttlesford is part of the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region, the influence of other sub-regions and the Eastern Region as a whole is recognised, as is the influence of the London – Stansted – Cambridge - Peterborough growth corridor.**

### **2.1 National Policy**

It is recognised at a national level that everyone should have the opportunity to live in a decent home at a price they can afford and in a community where they feel safe and want to live and work. Policy guidance and legislative changes developed at a national level have set the framework for action at a local level.

In December 2000 the Government published its first housing green paper - *Quality and Choice: A decent home for all*- in which it set out a wide range of policy proposals. This was followed up in 2003 with the publication of - *Sustainable Communities: building for the future* (commonly referred to as the 'Communities Plan'), which put forward proposals for tackling the fundamental problems of affordable housing supply, homelessness, housing conditions and for creating sustainable communities. It was followed in 2005 by the publication of two related documents—*Sustainable Communities: Homes for all* and *Sustainable Communities: People places and prosperity*. The former placed an emphasis on increasing social rented supply and expanding choice based lettings, improving the quality of private rented accommodation and of housing for vulnerable people generally in the private sector, and further assisting people to own their own home. It also commits the government to reducing the numbers of long term empty properties by 25,000 by 2010, and to raise the average energy efficiency of all dwellings by a fifth compared to 2000 by 2010.

In 2006 the Communities and Local Government department published *Delivering Affordable Housing*, setting out proposals for providing high quality homes for those in need within mixed sustainable communities, further widening home ownership opportunities and offering greater choice and flexibility for those who rent. That year also saw the publication of *Planning Policy Statement 3 (Housing)* aimed at improving the supply of housing including affordable housing through the planning system and reinforcing the drive to create sustainable and prosperous communities.

In October 2006 the Local Government White Paper, *Strong and prosperous communities* was published, setting out the Government's aim of giving local communities more power and influence. It further reinforced the local authority role as strategic leader and 'place shaper', operating through Local Area Agreements, and promoted the importance of community cohesion to address

the challenges of an increasingly diverse society. Going beyond achieving purely housing outcomes Housing is also seen as making an important contribution to both social and environmental objectives such as health inequalities.

The White Paper was followed by the publication, in January 2007, of the Hills Report into the future role of social housing in England. The report generally endorsed the current approach to social housing provision but flagged up a number of issues that needed to be addressed - notably low resident satisfaction, poor estate environments, lack of tenant mobility, high levels of worklessness within the sector and increasing social polarisation. The Government responded to this by acknowledging the need to continue to build social rented homes and to maintain tenants' levels of security but also by making a commitment to improve social mobility and employment prospects, increase housing options for households in need, give tenants more powers to tackle poor management services and improve the links between housing, training and employment services.

June 2007 saw the publication of the outcome of the review, carried out by Professor Martin Cave, of the regulation of the social housing sector –*Every Tenant Matters*. In addition to establishing a new regulatory body for registered social landlords, its proposals include new responsibilities for local housing authorities as place shapers, working with other social housing providers to better meet the needs and aspirations of tenants.

In July 2007 the Government published its Housing Green Paper -*Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable*- in which it set out proposals for tackling housing supply. The paper proposed a significant increase in new homes, with an additional three million units by 2020 (240,000 p.a.), and 70,000 more affordable homes p.a. up to 2010/11 of which 45,000 will be social rented units. The Green Paper also introduced a new housing and planning delivery grant to encourage Councils to identify land for housing development and increase supply in their areas, and set a requirement for all new homes to be carbon neutral by 2016.

In February 2008, the government published *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods –A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society*, with an aspiration for all new housing to be built to Lifetime Homes Standards by 2013, and emphasising the importance of disabled facilities grants to provide adaptations to allow continued independence at home.

Energy efficiency targets began with the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995 requirement to report on progress in improving energy efficiency of residential properties, and since 2000, on plans to reduce fuel poverty. The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy in 2001 sought to end fuel poverty for vulnerable households as a priority, followed by tackling fuel poverty in other households.

A key goal of the Energy White Paper in 2003 was to 'ensure that every home is adequately and affordably heated', with energy efficiency an important element to achieve this.

The main priorities, from these documents, which are relevant to Uttlesford and need to be understood and actioned locally, are:

- Providing greater choice and opportunity for people wanting to enter the housing market or move to a home that meets their changing needs through the introduction of new home ownership schemes such as intermediate rent.
- Ensuring that social housing meets the decent home standard by 2010, and contributing to the national target to increase the proportion of private housing in decent condition occupied by vulnerable groups to at least 70%.
- Preventing homelessness and reducing the number of homeless households in temporary accommodation
- Building new homes to balance housing supply and demand
- Helping vulnerable people to improve their quality of life through the supporting people and adaptations programmes
- Improving energy efficiency and reducing fuel poverty.

In April 2009, The Homes and Communities Agency replaced both the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships along with a new regulatory agency Tenant Services Authority which will regulate RSL's and is now looking to regulate Local authorities.

## **2.2 Regional Context**

The Communities Plan introduced Regional Housing Boards in 2003 and the first East of England Regional Strategy 2003-2006 was published in June 2003. The second Regional Housing Strategy for the East of England 2005-2010 sets out the strategic direction for the delivery of housing in the East of England. It aims to meet the challenges of growth and regeneration in the Region, and inform the recommendations for public investment in affordable housing in the region. The Eastern Regional Housing Forum have steered the development of the Regional Housing Strategy, with the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) Housing and Sustainable Communities Panel agreeing and endorsing the final Strategy in May 2005.

The Regional Housing Strategy 2005-2010 is based on a vision of the region where "everyone can live in a decent home which meets their needs, at a price they can afford and in locations that are sustainable".

The Regional Housing Strategy recommends investment themes for public money allocated from the Single Regional Housing Pot to the region and how the money should be distributed across the themes and also to the sub-regions. The themes are;

- Growth:
- Local Needs/homelessness:
- Regeneration:
- Rural:
- Key workers:
- Supported Housing:
- Existing stock:
- Black and Minority Ethnic.

These themes are key to the delivery of both the sub regional and local housing strategies.

### **2.3 Sub-Regional Context**

Uttlesford sits within the London Commuter Belt sub-region and the 2005-2008 Strategy identifies five priorities:

- Maximising the delivery of affordable housing
- Developing the intermediate market
- Improving stock condition
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable groups
- Achieving social inclusion

All the sub-regional partners are currently in the process of developing a Sub-Regional Housing Strategy for 2009 and onwards.

The Government is encouraging local authorities to undertake joint working on LDFs. Uttlesford is currently working jointly with five other authorities in the M11/East LCB sub-region to undertake a Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) technical study to inform housing policies in the partners' LDFs. In line with Government guidance, the SHMA will look at both housing need and demand across the study area.

### **2.4 Essex County Council Context - LAA**

Local Area Agreements (LAA) are three year agreements between central government, local authorities, local strategic partnerships and other key partners. They set out targets to deliver national outcomes in a way that reflects local priorities. The local government white paper, Strong and Prosperous Communities, established the principle that LAAs should effectively be the delivery plan for local authorities' Sustainable Community Strategies. They require that County and District or Borough Councils and local partners prepare a

LAA and deliver against the priorities it contains. The LAA contains both mandatory outcomes and indicators set by central government and local outcomes and indicators agreed by local partners. A copy of the current Essex LAA is available on <http://www.essexpartnership.org/vip8/com/Community/dis/content.jsp>.

## **2.5 Uttlesford District Context**

### **Corporate Plan**

The vision is for Uttlesford to *sustain a high quality of life in which the benefits of the unique character of the district are equally available to all residents, workers or visitors.*

The council has four priorities for **2009-12**, which are supported by a number of key objectives:

Finance – Effectively managing our finances and operating a decreasing budget so as to achieve a use of Resources score of “2” by 2011

Partnerships – Working to deliver effective and coordinated services with partners and others at reduced cost while helping those in hardship

People – Consulting and engaging fairly with staff and customers, and helping those in hardship

Environment – Protecting and enhancing the environment

### **The Local Development Framework Core Strategy**

The Core Strategy is one of the key documents in the new local development framework for Uttlesford. The LDF sets out the Council’s strategy for managing development and growth alongside the day to day planning policies for determining planning applications. It is an important component in delivering the spatial elements of the sustainable community strategy.

### **The Housing Strategy**

The Housing Strategy is an overarching housing document delivering future priorities for housing over the next 3 years – The homeless strategy, empty homes strategy and affordable housing strategy all sit underneath this document.

### **The Vision and Priorities for Housing**

- Maximising the delivery of new affordable homes to meet diverse needs
- Improving the condition of the housing stock both public and private
- Build sustainable and thriving neighbourhoods and communities

## **The Strategic Housing Service**

As Uttlesford is a small local authority, the strategic housing service functions across a number of departments and meets fortnightly to discuss progress, future projects and new initiatives. The service encompasses housing enabling, policy and strategy, homelessness and housing options, environmental health and empty homes. It also has the accountable officer role for Supporting People across the District.

## **Strategic Housing Services Inspection**

The Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate undertook an inspection of the Council's strategic housing functions in January 2008. The Audit Commission formally published its report on the Council's strategic housing services and scored the services the Council provides under these areas as being **fair (one star) with poor prospects for improvement**. From receipt of this the Council has developed an improvement plan which can be found in appendix.....

# **Chapter 3 – Housing Needs, Demand and Supply**

## **3.1 A profile of the District**

### **Population**

Uttlesford has a population of 71,400 (ONS 2006) which is set to increase over the next 10 -15 years with new housing development. 45% of residents are aged 30 – 59 with relatively few residents aged 20 -29 (9%) compared with the county average. The proportion of younger (0 – 19) and older (60 plus) residents is on par with the County (2001 Census)

### **Employment and Salary**

The average full-time wage for people in employment who live in the District is £30,016 per person per annum. However the average full-time wage for people who work in the District (and may not necessarily live here) is £25,959 per person per annum. Unemployment is low in Uttlesford, standing at 0.90% in

October 2008 (source: Local Knowledge) however this could change due to current market conditions.

## The Housing Market

There are approximately 30,216 properties in the Uttlesford District. 84% of these are in the private sector and almost 10% are owned and maintained by the Council. Smaller numbers are owned by housing associations and the Ministry of Defence.

## Rented Housing

As with most areas, there are three main types of landlord in Uttlesford – The Council, Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) and Private Landlords. The Government's subsidy system for building and maintaining Council and RSL homes leads to them being able to charge a lower rent than most private landlords. The average weekly rent in Uttlesford and for our surrounding districts is:

	<b>LA Rent (Weekly)</b>	<b>RSL Rent (Weekly)</b>	<b>PS Rent (Weekly)</b>
Harlow	£63.32	£77.66	£128.82
Epping	£67.82	£89.41	£161.97
<b>Uttlesford</b>	<b>£69.51</b>	<b>£80.69</b>	<b>£137.16</b>
East Herts	N/A	£77.10	£139.64
Broxbourne	N/A	£79.57	£153.74
Brentwood	£71.27	£87.41	£155.06

Source – [www.dataspring.org.uk](http://www.dataspring.org.uk) (2006/07 data)

The attractiveness of Uttlesford as a place to live has led to high house prices in the District. A high percentage of dwellings in the Uttlesford district are owned. However as can be seen in the table below, house prices have decreased in the last 6 months due to the current financial climate.

<b>Property Type</b>	<b>Average House Price, 2004</b>	<b>Average House Price, March 2008</b>	<b>Average House Price, September 2008</b>
Flats	130,861	£171,222	£152,430
Terraced	195,217	£237,322	£224,934
Semi Detached	242,651	£258,725	£261,216
Detached	415,446	£448,339	£425,312

Source: HNS update 2004, Local Knowledge March 2008 and September 2008



## **The condition of housing**

The Council commissioned a Housing Stock Condition Survey in 2003, which comprised of a physical survey of 722 dwellings. This assessed properties in Uttlesford against the then fitness standard, the Decent Homes standard, the then proposed Housing Health and Safety Rating System, as well as focusing on levels of disrepair and energy efficiency.

- The Stock is generally in good condition, partly due to the nature of the stock, but also to effective past investment decisions
- Due to the age characteristics of the stock (77% constructed prior to 1975) the required investment levels in the coming years will be relatively high
- The SAP energy rating is well above the UK average at 71.18, reflecting what has been one of the main priorities of the Housing Strategy
- The catch-up repairs for Uttlesford District Council are £1,251,651, which equates to £407 per unit over the 30-year profile. When compared to other Authorities this figure is lower than average demonstrating a good past maintenance regime
- Some repairs/replacements such as kitchens and bathrooms have been replaced on a piecemeal basis, as and when required, and not as planned replacement, as a consequence high expenditure on these elements is required.

The database of stock information is kept up to date using the information from the planned and responsive work programmes thus enabling the stock condition survey data to become an active property database informing all future investment decisions.

The Council are currently commissioning a new survey which will be complete mid 2009.

### **3.2 Housing need and demand**

Housing need and demand is measured and assessed from a variety of sources, this can include formal studies and information already held by the Council.

#### **Identifying Housing Needs**

For some years, Government guidance on housing and planning has emphasised the requirement for local authorities to assess local housing need and develop strategies to address that need. This assessment process has generally been achieved by conducting Housing Needs Surveys. The Council last undertook a District-wide Housing Needs Survey in 2002, covering the period from 2002 to 2007 and an update of this work took place in 2004. In 2006 a

framework was introduced under Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) for carrying out Strategic Housing Market Assessments, with final guidance published in March 2007. These assessments continue to provide information on the level of need and demand for housing locally, but they also contribute to the sub regional and regional levels of planning.

### Strategic Housing Market Assessment

A Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) analyses the entire local housing market, which is likely to be wider than the local authority boundaries. It forms a crucial part of the evidence base that informs the Local Development Framework. Uttlesford District Council is within the Eastern region for planning purposes, and part of the London Commuter Belt (LCB) sub region. The LCB sub region comprises 15 local authorities and was considered too large an area for the production of a detailed and meaningful study. Six districts in the sub region, including Uttlesford, joined to form London Commuter Belt (East)/M11 and commissioned Opinion Research Services (ORS) to undertake a comprehensive SHMA. The other five districts in the SHMA area are Brentwood, Broxbourne, East Herts, Epping and Harlow. The research used secondary data from sources such as the UK Census, Homes and Communities Agency, HM Land Registry and the Office for National Statistics, along with a qualitative consultation programme with a wide range of stakeholders. A draft report was published in November 2008 and the key findings are as follows.

- 31,100 households are considered to be unsuitably housed, including 3,300 in Uttlesford. The term 'unsuitably housed' is used to encompass households that are homeless or have insecure tenure; households that are 'mismatched' to the dwelling they live in; households living in dwellings that lack amenities or are in a poor condition; housing with social needs that can only be resolved through a move.
- 5.5% of households in the LCB M11 east are overcrowded.
- It is predicted that across the study area there are 4,800 households in housing need, 400 of those are Uttlesford residents.
- Around a quarter of all households contain only pensioners while nearly 50% contain an adult couple with or without children. Over a fifth of households contain only one adult in the form of a single person or lone parent. Younger people tend to dominate the private rented sector.
- Over the 15 year period between 2006 and 2021 it is projected there will be an additional 46,500 people living within the SHMA study area. In Uttlesford, the number of people aged 65 or over is projected to increase by 6,200 over the period, 2,200 of those people being aged 80 or over.

The SHMA report identifies that Uttlesford is an area that residents who live outside of the District aspire to live in. The table below shows the following net migrations occurring over the period 2002 – 2007.

LA Area	Net inward migration to Uttlesford.
Brentwood	120
Broxbourne	230
East Hertfordshire	1,140
Epping Forest	1,230
Harlow	810
Total	3,530

Net migration to London Commuter Belt (East)/M11 2002/07(p80)

The research has shown that Uttlesford has gained population from all other authorities in the study area. It has also gained 2,760 population from London.

The SHMA report has identified a shortfall of 4,900 affordable homes in Uttlesford between 2007 – 2021. The figures are broken down into the requirement for market housing, intermediate housing and social rented housing which are generally defined as follows:

**Market housing** is private housing for rent or for sale, where the price is set in the open market

**Intermediate affordable housing** is housing at prices or rents above those of social rent, but below market price or rents, and which meet the criteria for affordable housing set out above. These can include shared equity products (such as HomeBuy), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent.

**Social rented housing** is rented housing owned and managed by local authorities and registered social landlords (housing associations) for which guideline target rents are determined through the National Rent Regime.

**FIGURES ON HOUSING REQUIREMENT AND SIZE ARE STILL AWAITED FROM THE RESEARCH. THE ABOVE FIGURES ARE STILL A DRAFT.**

### **The Housing register**

As at February 2009, there were 1305 applications on the housing register, of those applications, 1033 were in housing need and had been allocated points. This number has increased considerably over the last 12 months.

In 2006 the Council agreed that a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme should be developed for Uttlesford. The government has set a target that all housing

authorities should be operating a CBL scheme for allocating social housing by 2010. The government considers that CBL schemes can enhance mobility between areas and tenures and provide a balance between the needs of prospective tenants and choice and so may contribute to sustainable neighbourhoods. The Council joined a Consortia of five other Local Housing Authorities (Broxbourne, Epping Forest, Chelmsford, East Herts and Brentwood), and 25 registered social landlords and successfully bid for government funding to assist with the development and initial set-up of a CBL scheme. The CBL scheme went live in November 2007 and is proving to be a great success. An evaluation of the scheme is currently being carried out.

## Homelessness

The Council has recently set up a Housing Options/Homelessness team. The main objective of this service is to provide a comprehensive housing options service for people with housing needs. The focus is on the prevention of homelessness, which it is hoped will reduce the numbers of people who have to go on to make an actual homeless application.

### Outcome of Applications 2005 – 08

	Outcomes of applications					
	Eligible, unintentionally homeless and in priority need	Eligible, homeless and in priority need but intentionally so	Eligible, homeless but not in priority need	Eligible but not homeless	Not eligible	total
2005/06	45	6	6	11	0	68
2006/07	54	3	1	10	3	71
2007/08	31	8	2	5	0	46

Source P1E Data

As can be seen in the above table, the number of homeless applications is low compared to other Districts in Essex and the wider sub region. The increase in figures during 2006/07 was due to the arrival of the evacuees from the Lebanon.

### Homelessness Partnership

Following the successful homelessness stakeholder forum, the Council have set up a homelessness partnership that meets quarterly. This will be the forum for partnership working and to discuss and implement the Action Plan of the Homelessness Strategy.

Partnership working underpins the delivery of a comprehensive and holistic housing options and homelessness service. Households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness can present with a wide range of often complex issues which in addition to their lack of housing can make it difficult for them to access and maintain support networks.

Invariably the delivery of sustainable housing solutions requires the addressing of non housing problems, this requires a multi agency approach. As advice and support services can be delivered by an often complex and fragmented range of organisations, without partnership working and a co-ordinated approach, it is easy for people to slip through the net.

Those invited to join the Homelessness Partnership include:

- Social Services
- Connexions
- CAB
- Youth Services
- Probation
- Youth Offending
- Drug and Alcohol Services
- Womens Aid
- Community Mental Health
- PCT
- Intouch
- King Street Housing Society
- Relate
- Leaving and After Care
- Elected Members
- Service Users

### **Preventing Homelessness**

One of the aims of the Homeless strategy is to prevent homelessness by providing good quality advice, early intervention strategies and increased housing options. This will be done through:

- ❖ A new Homelessness and Housing Options Team
- ❖ Developing a mediation service
- ❖ Introducing the Settled Homes Initiative – Private Leasing Scheme
- ❖ Through the use of Choice Based Lettings
- ❖ Landlords Forum

## **Accommodation**

The Council do not currently have specific facilities available for those becoming homeless in the District. Temporary accommodation is provided in the form of either bed and breakfast or a council hard to let property. This was an issue identified in the last Housing Strategy and work has been ongoing in identifying a site to provide accommodation for those found to be homeless in the District.

The Council has already gained planning permission for a purpose built facility in the village of Stansted which is an area well served by local services and with good transport links.

The Council will be providing the land and will work in partnership with Flagship Housing who will access funding and build the accommodation. Chelmer Housing Partnership will then have ownership of the building whilst the Council will be responsible for the day to day management.

The accommodation will consist of a maximum of four bed-sit units but because of the layout of the first floor of the building it will be possible to open two of the units up to provide one larger unit of accommodation. Each unit will have their own self contained kitchen and bathroom facilities. There will be shared laundry facilities provided and on site storage will be available.

The units will be let on licences and the accommodation will be used as an alternative to bed and breakfast. There will be office space in the building which will be used by the floating support service who will also offer support to the residents. The accommodation will be for short stay use only whilst homelessness applications are assessed. Clients will then be moved to further temporary accommodation or to a permanent housing solution if one is available.

Clients will be charged a weekly rent for the accommodation for which they will be able to claim housing benefit.

The facility has been designed to be suitable for use by families or single people and with the provision of support services will help Uttlesford meet both the Government objectives and our local priorities on the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation. The development is due to complete in June 2010.

## **Households living in Temporary Accommodation**

The Council has implemented a temporary accommodation plan in order to help it meet its Government target of reducing numbers in temporary accommodation by half by 2010. The Uttlesford target is 20, half the number in temporary accommodation as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2004.

## Vulnerable people and supported housing

### Who and what are Supporting People?

Supporting People (SP) is a central government programme which funds and determines strategic priorities for housing related support in local areas and monitors and reviews housing-related support services for vulnerable people.

#### *Definition of housing related support*

*Communities and Local Government (CLG) Grant conditions state:*

*"Support services which are provided to any person for the purpose of developing that person's capacity to live independently in accommodation or sustaining his/her capacity to do so." These can be long or short-term services and are tenure neutral.*

Housing-related support works with a wide range of vulnerable groups to help them live independently. There are 21 different Supporting People client groups ranging from the young single homeless to older people. Some individuals have complex needs and therefore meet the criteria for more than one client group. For example, a homeless person may also have a drug dependency as well as a mental health problem.

In addition to the number of different client groups Supporting People generally works with three different types of need:

- People in receipt of care with support;
- People living independently with support only; and
- People experiencing, or at risk of, social exclusion.

Again, these are not discrete or exclusive categories. Some people could be included in more than one, and others will move between them.

Delivery of the Supporting People programme for Uttlesford is administered directly by the Essex County Council Supporting People team. Further details can be found on <http://supportingpeople.essexcc.gov.uk>

## Older Persons Housing

The Government's strategy *Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods – A National Strategy for Housing in an Ageing Society* has five themes or priorities for change which are:

- A new national housing advice and information service with strengthened local housing information services
- More widespread rapid repair and adaptation services including the provision of Handyperson schemes and Home Improvement Agencies
- Modernisation of the Disabled Facilities Grant process

- All homes to be built to Lifetimes Homes standard by 2011 in the public sector and 2013 in the private sector.
- Strengthened relationships between housing, health and care services.

The Council recognises that housing has a key role to play in maintaining independent living for older people for as long as is feasible and in helping to prevent unnecessary admission to residential care or hospital. For individuals, living at home is usually the preferred choice. The Council can assist with a range of measures from low level interventions such the provision of a community alarm, or fall detectors, through to Disabled Facilities Grant, or assistance with minor or major repairs, to high level interventions such as a transfer to more suitable independent housing or assistance in a sheltered or frail elderly scheme.

### Projected Future Population

As can be seen in the table below, the number of people over 65 living in the Uttlesford District will grow considerably in the next 20 years with older people living much longer.

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2025</b>
<b>People aged 65-69</b>	3,500	3,800	4,700	4,100	4,500
<b>People aged 70-74</b>	2,800	3,000	3,500	4,400	3,900
<b>People aged 75-79</b>	2,400	2,500	2,700	3,200	4,100
<b>People aged 80-84</b>	1,700	1,900	2,100	2,400	2,800
<b>People aged 85 and over</b>	1,600	1,700	2,000	2,400	2,900
<b>Total population 65 and over</b>	<b>12,000</b>	<b>12,900</b>	<b>15,000</b>	<b>16,500</b>	<b>18,200</b>

Source: Projecting Older People Population Information System (POPPI)

The Council currently has 18 sheltered housing schemes which consist of 467 units of accommodation in the District. We recognise that some of the schemes are no longer fit for purpose and have begun a programme of regenerating and modernising older persons housing in the district.

Projects that have been completed or are currently underway:



### **Vicarage Mead, Thaxted.**

This scheme was a hard to let sheltered housing block in the village of Thaxted. Built in the early seventies on the fringe of a conservation area, the building had fallen into decline and was in need of major modernisation. The scheme consisted mainly of small undesirable bedsits that were hard to let.

Funding was secured through the decent homes programme with the design and implementation undertaken in house. Design was very important and residents now have walk in shower rooms, a separate bedroom and open plan modern kitchens.

The development was nominated to the National Home Improvement Council and was awarded a certificate of merit for outstanding achievement in encouraging home improvement.

### **Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding**

The Council currently has in its ownership a hard to let sheltered housing scheme in Leaden Roding. The scheme has been difficult to let for a number of years due to its bed sit style accommodation and its rural location and has recently become empty. The scheme also has 5 x 1 bedroom bungalows that are attached to it which are fully let. The Council are working with Swan Housing Association to design a scheme that meets the needs of those living in the bungalows and fits in with the rural nature of Leaden Roding.

### **Future provision of an Extra Care Scheme**

Research has shown that there is a need for an extra care scheme in Uttlesford. This would provide higher levels of care than sheltered housing. There is an opportunity to reconfigure a sheltered scheme in the Council's ownership that is no longer fit for purpose and this will be investigated during 2009/10.

### **Supporting People Older Persons Review**

Within the Supporting People 5 Year Strategy (2005-2010) it was acknowledged that the strategic review process would *...look at all services in terms of their quality, cost effectiveness and their strategic relevance* and provide an opportunity to *'learn from the way original contracts enable or inhibit the delivery of services to service users'*.

*SP 'is determined to change its mix of services to better reflect the needs of the different client groups, and to improve delivery of its services to end users'.*

The findings of this review will be available in March 2009. The Council will work with Essex Supporting People team to implement the findings of this review in Uttlesford.

## **The Council's review of sheltered housing**

A review of the Council's Sheltered Housing Services is currently underway and is due to be completed mid 2009. This review of the Sheltered Housing and lifeline services is being undertaken to ensure that services provided are of the highest possible standard, represent excellent value for money and will be responsive to the changing needs and aspirations to current and future customers.

### **Lifeline alarms service**

Lifeline provides emergency assistance to any resident of any age who would like to feel safer and more protected or independent in his or her own home. It is particularly useful for the elderly or disabled or vulnerable people. The Lifeline unit works alongside a telephone and is operated by a discreet radio trigger supported by a 24-hour response service 7 days a week, 365 days a year. Once alerted the response centre automatically knows who is calling, their address and can retrieve health and details of relatives and carers etc.

The County Council will be conducting a review in 2009 into the Council's dispersed alarms service. This will ensure that the service will continue to be available to those who need it, and fits well with new Telecare developments.

## **Young People**

Preventing homelessness can have a huge influence on a young person's life chances. Good housing and support means that they are more likely to enter training, get a job, have a better standard of health and be able to take advantage of opportunities that they are offered.

In the Homeless Act 2002 the government strengthened the statutory duty for young people. All 16 and 17 year olds and care leavers aged between 18 and 20 have a priority need for housing if they become homeless through no fault of their own.

Accommodation currently available:

### **Bromfield House, Saffron Walden**

The Council continue to work with St Matthews to develop Bromfield House as a first class facility offering supported housing to 16 – 25 year olds. It will be staffed 24 hours and residents will have support plans which they will work on with staff and which will be regularly reviewed to ensure that goals are being achieved.

Staff meet with Council staff on a monthly basis to update on residents progress and the Council will facilitate move on accommodation when clients are ready to move out of a supported environment.

Remedial work is currently being carried out to the outside and inside of the property, including decoration, new furniture and the installation of CCTV.

Future schemes for young people will include the following:

### **Nightstop**

Work has already been carried out on investigating the possibilities of setting up a Nightstop project within Uttlesford. The lead for this is being taken by the local churches together group and the Council has facilitated meetings between representatives from the Nightstop organisation, Barnardos and church group leaders. Work will continue on this project over the coming year.

### **Young Parents Scheme**

This scheme is in partnership with Brentwood and Epping Forest Councils and will provide 12 units of supported accommodation for young parents living in Uttlesford, Brentwood or Epping Forest. The scheme will be provided on a new development in Ongar and will provide the three Councils with nominations to the project. It will provide young parents with the skills they need to care for a child, access benefits and housing to ensure they can move on to manage their own tenancy.

As can be seen below, the Council do not have a significant problem with young parents presenting as homeless and could not justify a scheme in the District, partnership working with Epping Forest and Brentwood meant a more viable option.

	2004/5	2005/6	2006/7
Number of teenage parents presenting as homeless	5	3	3

Source: Council data

These figures only count those teenage parents who have actually made a homeless application they do not include those that have been housed prior to homelessness but who would have been better suited to supported housing had it been available.

### **Learning disability**

There are three learning disability schemes in Uttlesford, all based in Saffron Walden. They provide 12 units of accommodation at Ferguson Close (Family Mosaic), 3 at Gallows Hill (Family Mosaic) and 4 at The Squirrels (Places for People)

There is a requirement for a new scheme to replace the Squirrels as it is no longer fit for purpose. Officers are working with Adult Social Care, PCT and Places for People to identify possible locations for a new facility for those with a learning disability.

Officers from the Council are represented on the local Learning Disability group and housing sub group, this group looks at future and current need in the District and effective partnership working.

### **Mental Health**

There are two schemes for mental health consisting of 8 units at Station Street, Saffron Walden managed by Granta and 2 at St Edmunds Field, Great Dunmow managed by Springboard that are currently under refurbishment.

There is a requirement for a new scheme to replace the units at Station Street as it is no longer fit for purpose. Officers are working with Granta Housing Association to identify a future location for the scheme that will meet the needs of those with mental health needs.

### **Domestic Violence**

#### Accommodation

There is no specialist accommodation for those who have been victims of domestic violence in the District. The Council currently use facilities outside of the Uttlesford District. Further work needs to be completed to assess the housing needs of this client group. This work will be completed over the next year and proposals will be made to the Housing Initiative Task Group if a need is identified.

#### Specialist Support

Work will be undertaken under the umbrella of the Safer, Healthier Communities Group, a multi agency partnership, with a view to providing specialist support for victims of domestic violence within Uttlesford.

## Sanctuary scheme

A Sanctuary Schemes has recently been set up to help families to stay in their homes if they have become victims of domestic violence or hate crime. The security of the home is improved through a variety of measures. A Sanctuary Room is created to provide a safe room in the home, a number of security measures are provided, such as internal fire doors, additional locks into the premises and fire fighting equipment.

This has helped 3 families to stay in their homes over the past 12 months.

## Drug and Alcohol

The Housing Options/Homelessness team works with the Uttlesford Community Support Group and the Drug and Alcohol Strategy Group. Close working will be developed to assess the needs of those with drug and alcohol problems. Clients who are homeless with drug and alcohol problems are currently housed at Bromfield House along with clients with other varying needs. Research needs to be carried out by the Housing options team to assess if a specific scheme is required in Uttlesford. This will be completed during the timescale of the Homelessness Review and Strategy.

## Offenders

Further work needs to be completed to assess the housing needs of this client group and then work with partners to explore the options available within the District.

## Rough Sleepers

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

Although the number of rough sleepers is small, the Council recognises that they are an extremely vulnerable group. It is essential that they can access appropriate housing advice to resolve their housing situation.

## People with Physical and Sensory Disabilities

The 2001 Census reported that 27% of households in Uttlesford contained somebody with a long term limiting illness or disability, which equates to 7298 households. The main implication for housing is the need to promote independent living, mobility, choice and control by people with disabilities and to

secure access to mainstream housing provision. There is a need to work with affordable housing providers to deliver specialist housing schemes, lifetime homes and ensure the best use of adapted properties.

The Council's housing officers work closely with the County Council occupational therapists to identify those who require adaptations to their properties. However funding is limited and sometimes the nature of a person's disability and their personal circumstances may mean that they require rehousing.

The Council through its Accessible Homes SPD wants to increase the supply of wheelchair accessible housing in the District. In new housing developments between 10 and 20 units, the Council require at least one dwelling built to wheelchair accessible standards. This has meant that more wheelchair accessible units are becoming available on new development sites for those with physical disabilities.

## **Rural Housing**

### **Rural affordable housing schemes**

In working with the Rural Housing Trust, we have enabled in partnership with them, 210 rural affordable housing units since 1989. The most recent scheme in Leaden Roding has provided 10 homes.

We also have a good relationship with the Rural Housing Enabler working for the Rural Community Council for Essex and a recent scheme has delivered rural affordable housing in Thaxted during 2008. (insert pics)

Future schemes are planned in Langley, Newport and Aythorpe Roding.

Further rural development could be provided through greater community consultation, parish planning, greater involvement and capacity building within the local community.

### **Add pics of schemes**

### **Rural Excellence Programme**

The Council were successfully selected to take part in the Rural Excellence Programme for Strategic Housing and Affordable Rural Housing in 2007/08. This involved working with the Regional Development Agency, Government Office and Town and Parish Councils to solve the most important housing issues for the locality. It is also providing Uttlesford with the opportunity to lead the way in the development of rural housing.

Councillors, Parish Councils, key partners and officers took part in workshops and visits with experienced mentors to look at the following priority areas.

- Publicising the evaluation of affordable rural housing schemes in order to gain wider engagement and support for such schemes.
- Development of parish planning.
- Understanding of how, and ability to, influence the Housing Corporation to access funding.
- Relationship with Parish Councils to enable the communities to influence the planning policy frameworks.

From this programme, officers evaluated recent completed rural housing schemes in Ashton, Newport, Littlebury, Clavering and Hatfield Heath. The survey showed:

- 100% of respondents were allocated a property based on the local connection criteria
- 86% rated their property either excellent or good. 14% satisfactory.
- 95% of residents agreed that the affordable housing had benefited the local community
- 48% were attending local groups in the community

Residents commented that “It has offered the chance for local people to remain in their home village near family and is bringing children into the school”

A local Parish Council stated “Occupiers happy, houses first class, fit well into the environment, a credit to the village”

The research has given the Council a greater knowledge of what is successful/not successful in a scheme, has shown how it has allowed young people to remain in the village and that they were allocated to those with a local connection. It has also encouraged Parishes to move forward with affordable housing schemes in the District.

### **Black Minority Ethnic Groups**

The Council must promote and monitor the needs of those in minority groups. As part of this requirement, officers took part in the Essex wide research “Facing the Facts”. This was delivered through the Essex Housing Officers Group and looked at the housing requirements of the BME population in Essex. Sub regional Citizens panels were then set up to further engage with the community.

The current population of Uttlesford indicates the following:

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>%</b>
White : British	65,564	95.09
White : Irish	534	0.77
White : Other white	1,587	2.3
Mixed : White and Black Caribbean	119	0.17
Mixed : White and Black African	51	0.07
Mixed: White and Asian	169	0.25
Mixed: Other Mixed	119	0.17
Asian or Asian British: Indian	164	0.24
Asian or Asian British: Pakistani	22	0.03
Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi	153	0.22
Asian or Asian British: Other Asian	37	0.05
Black or Black British: Caribbean	48	0.07
Black or Black British: African	54	0.08
Black or Black British: Other Black	9	0.01
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group: Chinese	124	0.18
Chinese or Other Ethnic Group: Other Ethnic Group	192	0.28
<b>Total</b>	<b>68,946</b>	

Uttlesford has a very small BME population and the highest other ethnic groups are Chinese or other (192 people) white and Asian mixed (169 people), Indian (164 people) and Bangladeshi (153 people)

The Council recognises that the information it holds on needs and demand for this group is not complete and the SHMA should help fill the gap on our knowledge.

### **Economic Migrants**

There are 585 registered migrants from 'Accession 8' countries<sup>4</sup> working in Uttlesford (Essex Trends, 2007). 74% of these are from Poland, 11% from Slovakia, 7% from Czech Republic, 3% from Hungary, 3% from Latvia, 2% from Lithuania and 1% from Estonia. Migrants tend to work full-time in lower skilled and therefore lower income jobs. Agricultural and care work are common in Uttlesford. Only a small minority declare that they have dependants living with them in the UK.

### **Gypsy and Travellers**

Planning Circular 01/2006 *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites sets*

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<sup>4</sup> Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia



out guidance for local planning authorities to identify appropriate land for Gypsy and Traveller sites through the planning system in line with need in their area, to deal with the growing shortage of sites and prevent unauthorised sites in problem locations. The Gypsy and Traveller Sites Grant has made up to £56 million available nationally over the years 2006/7 and 2007/8 to fund new provision and refurbish existing sites. The grant is distributed through the Regional Housing Boards.

The following information is the formal numbers of travellers counted in Uttlesford over the last 3 years.

	Authorised sites (with planning permission)		Unauthorised sites without planning permission				Total all caravans
	Socially Rented	Private	No of caravans on sites on gypsies own land		No of caravans on sites on land not owned by gypsies		
			Tolerated	Not tolerated	Tolerated	Not tolerated	
July 2007	18	33	0	0	2	0	53
Jan 2007	18	33	0	0	2	0	53
July 2006	15	34	0	0	2	2	53
Jan 2006	18	34	0	0	1	0	53
July 2005	24	35	0	0	1	7	67

Source: <http://communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/138841>

Further publications are due from the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) and Essex County Council in the near future where a possible increase in official authorised sites may be required. The Essex Housing and Planning Officers Group have commissioned further research into this and we are awaiting the findings. Uttlesford District Council recognises the key importance of understanding the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and will engage fully into further delivery.

## **4.0 Strategic Objectives**

The Council has consulted and identified, with its partners, specifically the LCBSR, further developments it wants and needs to make to meet the housing need and aspirations of the existing and future residents of Uttlesford. As the national, regional and local drivers change, which they are bound to over the three year life of this Strategy, the Council will continue to adapt and take opportunities as they arise.

In collaboration with the London Commuter Belt Sub-Regional Housing Group we have identified three strategic objectives that are relevant to all the partners. The actions that contribute to the objectives are both agreed sub-regional ones and also local actions that are relevant to Uttlesford. The Action Plan is at Appendix 1 and contains both the Sub-Regional and the local actions. The Housing Strategies produced by the 14 partners in the LCB, all follow a similar format and will be amalgamated into a Housing Strategy for the London Commuter Belt Sub-Region in 2009. The Action Plan is a working document and may need to be adapted or amended as further instances of best practice emerge, or when the results of the SHMA and stock condition survey are known or if external drivers, such as significant changes in the national economy emerge.

### **4.1 Strategic Objective One - Maximise the delivery of a range of new affordable homes to meet diverse needs.**

There is a growing affordability problem in the District. This is a result of many factors but predominantly due to high prices in comparison to income levels. This in turn is placing greater pressure on the existing affordable housing in the District. There is simply not enough affordable housing to meet the increasing need of the District's residents.

Ensuring a supply of new affordable housing is very difficult in the District due to the limited availability of suitable land at a price that will enable the development of affordable housing. The Council and its partners must continually seek to secure opportunities for the development of new affordable housing, to maximise access to existing affordable housing through nomination agreements with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) and to make effective use of existing affordable rented homes through management of the housing register.

What is already being done...

#### **A) Developing New Housing**

The East of England Plan Policy H1 – Regional Housing provision 2001-2021, sets out a minimum dwelling provision for Uttlesford of 8,000 new homes. The Regional Plan identifies at April 2008 that a minimum of 5,428 dwellings are still to be built.

Under the new planning system, introduced in 2004, each local authority is at a different stage in preparing its Local Development Framework (LDF). Uttlesford began preliminary work on its LDF Core Strategy in 2008 and anticipates adoption of this key strategy document in 2010/11. The Core Document will then be followed by more detailed Development Plan Documents, which will allocate land for different uses, including housing. In the interim period up to 2010, the Uttlesford Local Plan, adopted in January 2005, sets out the strategy for development across the District, including that for housing provision.

The Council's Adopted Local Plan policy H9 – Affordable Housing stipulates that the Council will seek to negotiate on a site to site basis an element of affordable housing of 40% of the total provision of housing on appropriate allocated and windfall sites, having regard to the up to date Housing Needs Survey, market and site considerations

Policy H11 – Rural Exception Housing states development of affordable housing will be permitted outside settlements on a site where housing would not normally be permitted, if it would meet all the following criteria:

- a) 100% of the dwellings are to be affordable and provided through a Registered Social Landlord;
- b) The development will meet a particular local need that cannot be met in any other way;
- c) The development is of a scale appropriate to the size, facilities and character of the settlement; and
- d) The site adjoins the settlement.

The Council has also recently adopted an Accessible Homes and Play Space Supplementary Planning document. This requires developers to provide new homes which are built to lifetime homes standard. These standards apply to all new homes including blocks of flats for both social housing and private sector housing.

In addition to the standard, the Council wants to increase the supply of wheelchair accessible housing in the District. In new housing developments between 10 and 20 units, the Council will require at least one dwelling is built to wheelchair accessible standards. It has also been agreed that lifts need to be provided in all new developments of flats above 2 storeys.

The full document can be viewed on our website.

## **Delivering Affordable Housing**

In terms of developing new affordable housing the Council's role is that of an 'enabler' which consists of identifying housing need and bringing together key partners to generate new opportunities for affordable housing development. The Council has 6 preferred partner RSL's that it works with on the delivery of affordable housing in the district. The objective is to provide homes of the right size, type and tenure that meet housing need and that are high quality, energy efficient and promote sustainable, balanced, mixed communities.

On affordable housing developments, the Council currently requires a split of 70% rented and 30% intermediate. Intermediate affordable housing is housing at prices or rents above those of social rent, but below market price or rents, and which meet the criteria for affordable housing set out above. These can include shared equity products (such as HomeBuy), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent.

### **Intermediate rent**

Due to the downturn in the housing market, those who were previously able to enter the market on a part buy part rent scheme have recently been unable to secure a mortgage.

This has meant that Housing Associations are having to review their future developments and offer a product that is more accessible to those on moderate or intermediate incomes. This is taking the form of an intermediate rent, lower than a private rent but higher than a social rent. Once the market picks up, residents will be given the opportunity to convert this to a part rent part buy scheme if they are able to secure a mortgage on the property.

### **Affordable Housing Programme**

The Council has an ambitious programme of affordable housing to deliver over the next three years. These schemes will be delivered by key housing association partners working in the District. These include Circle Anglia, Chelmer Housing Partnership, English Rural, Flagship, Hastoe, Moat, and Swan. The Council will continue to work with partners to develop innovative ideas and solutions aimed at providing affordable homes within Uttlesford.

Our targets as set out in the LAA (NI155) number of affordable homes delivered reflect the forecasts for development. This figure will be reviewed following the outcome of the strategic housing market assessment in mid 2009. The Council is on target to meet the 2008/09 figure.

<b>Year</b>	<b>No of units</b>
2008/09	100

2009/10	120
2010/11	130

The following developments are planned for 2008/11 and will contribute to the LAA targets for the District.

Scheme	Number of units	Timescale
The Poppies, Little Dunmow (Flagship)	35	2008/09
Dunmow Road, Leaden Roding (Moat, rural)	10	2008/09
Priors Green, Takeley (Flagship)	11	2008/09
Rochford Nurseries, Stansted (Moat)	71	2008/9 – 2009/10
Rochford Nurseries, Stansted (Circle Anglia)	79	2008/9 – 2009/10
Priors Green, Takeley (Swan)	50	2009/10
Broomfields, Hatfield Heath (Swan)	6	2009/10
Dunmow Library, Great Dunmow (Circle Anglia)	10	2009/10
Langley Upper Green (Hastoe, Rural)	8	2009/10
Weaverhead Lane, Thaxted (Chelmer Housing Partnership)	14	2009/10
Manor Road, Stansted (Flagship)	4	2009/10
Coney Acre, Rickling (Flagship)	3	2009/10
Village Centre, Little Dunmow (Moat)	39	2010/11
Bell College, Saffron Walden (Hastoe)	25	2010/11
Bell College, Saffron Walden	unconfirmed	2010/11
Holloway Crescent, Leaden Roding (Swan)	unconfirmed	2010/11

These figures are subject to change dependent on the housing market and current economic climate.

### **Affordable Housing Strategy – Guide for Developers**

The affordable housing strategy sets out the Council's role in delivering affordable housing and its requirements on Section 106 and rural exception sites. This document is available on our website.

## **The Stansted Area Housing Partnership**

A key partnership set up in 2004 with East Herts, Harlow and Braintree Councils to deliver affordable housing in partnership with Circle Anglia and Moat through the use of S106 monies from BAA Stansted. This has delivered 150 units of affordable housing and has future schemes in the pipeline. The partnership was hailed by the Homes and Communities Agency as innovative through its use of cross border nominations between the 4 Local Authorities.

The Partnership has recently gained £1.8 million of Growth Area Funding to deliver Eco Exemplar housing in the partnership area. A project group has been set up to work towards the first planning application. This project aims to deliver Eco Exemplar housing to meet Code 5 for Sustainable Homes.

### **Code for Sustainable Homes**

As well as increasing the number of new affordable homes provided, the Council and its RSL partners are driving to push up the environmental quality of the new homes. All new affordable housing must meet level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes that Government released in April 2007.

### **B) Making better use of existing homes**

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

Long term empty homes in the private sector present a potential resource to the District. The District is fortunate that it has a relatively low number of long term empty homes. The table below compares 2007 levels for Uttlesford with the total for England, and for the Eastern region.

	Total empties	Percent of stock	Private empty for more than 6 months
England	672,924	3.02%	279,281
East of England	61,028	2.5%	26,244
Uttlesford	1,093	4.3%	224

Nevertheless homes that have been empty for a long time are often in very poor condition and an eyesore blighting the local area. Whilst it is the responsibility of homeowners to maintain their own property, the Council has general legal powers to provide assistance to residents and landlords in order to repair, improve or adapt their homes

In 2008, the Council published its Empty Homes Strategy to address the problem of empty homes in the District. In order to achieve the overall aim of the Empty Homes Strategy, the Council are working towards 4 objectives:

### **1. Create and maintain a register of empty homes**

### **2. Raise awareness of empty homes issues**

By promoting the ways in which the Council is seeking to bring empty properties back into use, the profile of the issue can be raised throughout the District.

### **3. Develop partnership working**

Joined-up working within the Council will be developed across departments to identify and promote the ways to address the issues. Partnership working will also extend to the region, and sub-region, as well as RSL partners, to seek opportunities for external funding to bring empty homes back into use.

### **4. Encourage owners of empty homes to make their properties available for occupation**

Through working in partnership with relevant parties who have expertise and experience in renovating empty properties to decent home standard. This will help to address the high levels of housing need within the district.

Private Lease Agreements Converting Empties (PLACE) is a scheme targeted at helping the owners of long term empty homes return their properties to use, to support homeless prevention. Uttlesford is working in partnership with Chelmsford, East Herts, Epping Forest, and Harlow Councils and Pathmeads and Swan Housing Associations. The grant secured is for £3.5million over two years and the project is being run as a pilot. The project is aimed at tackling long-term empty homes that require significant renovation works before being brought back into use.

## **Overcrowding**

In December 2007 the government published a paper called Tackling Overcrowding in England: An Action Plan. In the paper they say that they want 'a new focus on overcrowding alongside homelessness to help improve homes for all'.

The government wants to see a substantial reduction in the number of households who are living in overcrowded conditions. They believe that this will provide better circumstances for individual households to achieve their ambitions and improve their life chances.

## **Under Occupation**

In November 2007 the council reviewed its allocations policy and this will now ensure the best use of the existing stock, for example by giving priority to

people wishing to move to smaller accommodation, therefore freeing up larger homes. An incentive scheme is also available.

Similarly the level of under occupation in the private sector is unknown, and further research is required. The suggestion is that there is a lack of suitable accommodation available for 'last time buyers' and filling this gap may result in fuller occupation of private sector homes

### **Nominations to existing social housing**

Nominations to existing affordable housing are how the greatest number of people in housing need is assisted. Uttlesford District Council has an agreement with all the RSL's owning affordable homes in the District. The agreement states how many homes the Council can nominate households from the housing register to in each of the RSL's different housing schemes. Standard practice is that the Council will nominate to 100% of all new properties the first time they are let and then to 75% of all subsequent vacancies occurring in a scheme.

#### **4.1.2 Action points for the future for tackling affordability and meeting housing need**

- Continue to work with partners to endeavor to increase supply of affordable housing including affordable rented housing and shared ownership. In particular we will set up regular forums to feed directly into the local strategic partnership which will help deliver our targets for the LAA.
- Maximise re-let nominations from Registered Social Landlord (RSL) partners and introduce robust monitoring arrangements
- Monitor the impact of the Council's Local Plan Policies on the delivery of new affordable housing and take action as appropriate
- Continue to negotiate on site provision of the maximum amount of affordable housing by private developers as directed by planning policy
- Continue to secure funding that provides the optimum mix of affordable housing in terms of type and tenure, in the right location
- To evaluate and monitor levels of affordability both district and sub-regionally
- Increase awareness of all housing solutions to those in housing need
- Continue to review the allocations policy and Choice based lettings system as further best practice emerges.
- Ensure CBL is not having any adverse impact on vulnerable groups in obtaining affordable housing
- Monitor the number of adapted properties being provided on new development sites and ensure that there is joint working between housing and planning to identify suitable people for those properties.



## 4.2 Strategic Objective 2 - Improve the condition of the housing stock both public and private

The Government Green Paper *Quality and Choice: a Decent Home for All* (2000) recognises that the condition of people's homes has wide implications;

Our homes influence our well-being, our sense of worth, and our ties to our families, communities and work. If we live in decent housing we are more likely to benefit from good health, higher educational attainment and better-paid work.

And that;

People who are decently housed have a stronger sense of security and place. Decent housing strengthens communities and provides a better setting in which to raise families. It improves health and educational achievement and provides a long-term asset that can be passed on to future generations.

In 2000 the Government set a target that by 2010 all social housing should meet a minimum standard of decency. The target was extended in 2002 to vulnerable households in the private sector with a trajectory of 65% decent by 2006/07, 70% by 2010 and 75% by 2020. The target for decent homes in the private sector has recently been abandoned by the government. Nevertheless, improving the condition of people's homes and ensuring that current stock is maintained for future generations is a priority for housing in the district.

### 4.2.1 What we know is happening...

#### a) The private sector

The condition of properties in the private sector is primarily the responsibility of its owners but the Council recognizes limitations on some owners' ability to maintain heat and improve their homes. The demographic trends in the district are particularly important for housing in the private sector as an ageing population may be less able to afford to maintain their homes and require greater assistance to do so.

The government's standard for 'Decent Homes' is that housing should

- a) meet the current statutory minimum standard for housing i.e. at that time, not unfit, but now to be free from significant hazards
- b) be in a reasonable state of repair
- c) have reasonably modern facilities and services
- d) provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort.

A private sector stock condition survey was carried out in 2006. It showed that the rate of unfitness within the district is 1.6%. The cost of immediate repairs to make the unfit dwellings fit for habitation in Uttlesford District Council Area is £3.5 million. The cost of putting the unfit dwellings into reasonable repair (carrying out immediate repairs to make fit and renewing elements which need replacement within 10 years) is £7.1 million.

6.7% (1,816) of the dwellings were found to be in substantial disrepair. The cost of repairs to those dwellings that were not unfit but were in substantial disrepair (i.e. needing works worth more than £2,500) up to a reasonable standard is £23 million. The total cost of bringing the private sector dwellings in Uttlesford District Council area up to a reasonable standard is £30 million.

The percentage of unfit dwellings within the private rented sector is 12%; this is equivalent to the national figure of 10.2%.

None of the HMO's inspected were unfit for habitation.

The average SAP (energy efficiency) rating for the private sector dwellings in Uttlesford District Council Area is 60, higher than the average SAP rate in the UK (51). 3.3% of properties have a SAP rating below 30.

### **Enforcement, HMOs, and Licensing**

House prices are high in Uttlesford, so a well maintained and managed private rented sector including its houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), is essential to the wellbeing of those who cannot, or do not wish to, access the owner occupied or social housing sectors. Buy to let mortgages and the expansion of Stansted airport are believed to have led to an increase in private rented dwellings and HMOs.

The Housing Act 2004 introduced a new evidence based approach to assessing the suitability of housing for occupation, by replacing the fitness standard with the Housing, Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). The HHSRS methodology involves assessing the likelihood of harm arising from certain hazards. New duties and powers relating to private sector housing were also introduced, bringing significant changes for local authorities and private landlords.

The Act also introduced mandatory licensing of HMOs with three or more storeys and five or more occupiers, with certain exemptions, such as buildings converted into flats. A licence is issued where the house is reasonably suitable for occupation as an HMO, the management arrangements are satisfactory, and the licensee and manager are fit and proper persons.

Publicity about HMO licensing has taken place and a presentation was given at the landlord forum.

The risk of dying in a fire in an HMO is greater than for other housing, and the risk increases for larger HMOs unless adequate fire precautions are in place. Furthermore, the condition and management standards of the HMO sector is worse overall than for other forms of housing, so mandatory licensing directs resources to those larger HMOs. There is a requirement for an HHSRS assessment to be carried out within five years of a licence being issued. The Council aims to do so within three years of issuing a licence, or before issuing the licence where possible, although priority is given to licensing applications received.

#### iv) Empty Homes

The Council's empty homes strategy sets out the Council's staged approach to tackling empty homes. As well as making better use of existing dwellings, these activities contribute to targets for decent homes.

### **B) The Council's Housing Stock**

The Council's housing stock, as at 31 March 2009 was ..... The stock consists of traditionally constructed houses, flats, and bungalows and is mostly low rise, although varied in archetype. There are no high-rise flats. All non-traditional build properties, such as Airey and PRC houses, have been re-built and over 98% of the stock meets the Government's decent homes standard.

In addition to the tenanted stock there are 120 right to buy leasehold properties that the Council continue to manage.

#### **The Decent Homes Standard**

The Government's policy statement 'The Way Forward for Housing' published in 2001 stated that all social housing would be made decent by 2010. A Decent Home is one which meets the following four criteria:

- 1. It meets the current statutory minimum standard for housing*
- 2. It is in a reasonable state of repair*
- 3. It has reasonably modern facilities and services*
- 4. It provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort*

Although the Government's targets for Decent Homes expires in 2010, the standard will continue as an ongoing requirement after this date.

#### **Stock Condition**

The Council has good information on the stock and investment decisions have ensured that the housing stock has been maintained in a good condition. Spending profiles and delivering programmed repairs on time and within budget

have been maintained by the council since the first stock condition survey in 1992. Various programmes of planned improvements over this time have included re-roofing, kitchen and bathroom refurbishments, re-wiring, central heating installations, PVCu window replacements, cavity wall and roof insulation and over-cladding schemes to non-traditionally constructed homes.

The introduction of the Government's decent homes standard highlighted the need to gather further data and in 2003 the Council commissioned Countrywide Surveyors to carry out a stock condition survey in accordance with DTLR good practice on collecting, managing and using housing stock information. The final report indicated the following:

- *The stock is generally in good condition, partly due to the nature of the stock, but also to effective past investment decisions*
- *Due to the age characteristics of the stock (77% constructed prior to 1975) the required investment levels in the coming years will be relatively high*
- *The SAP energy rating is well above the UK average at 71.18, reflecting what has been one of the main priorities of the Housing Strategy*
- *The catch-up repairs for Uttlesford District Council are £1,251,651 which equates to £407 per unit over the 30-year profile. When compared with other Authorities this figure is lower than average demonstrating a good past maintenance regime*
- *Some repairs/replacements such as kitchens and bathrooms have been replaced on a piecemeal basis, as and when required, and not as a planned replacement, as a consequence high expenditure on these elements are required*

The database of stock information is kept up to date using information from the planned and responsive work programmes. This enables the stock condition survey data to become an active property database which informs future investment decisions. A new stock condition survey is due to be carried out in March 2009.

### **Housing Revenue Account Business Plan**

The introduction of the Housing Revenue Business (HRA) Plan forced the Council to look at the long term viability of owning and retaining its stock. This has now developed into the Decent Homes Standard and the Stock Options Appraisal process, which aims to ensure that:

- *Tenants can expect a minimum level of decency in their homes*
- *Local Authorities invest in their stock*
- *The long term viability of an Authorities stock is objectively measured and assessed.*

Full details of the repairs and maintenance needs of the Council's stock over the next 30 years and resources for funding can be found in the Council's HRA Business Plan.

### **Decent Homes Planned Investment Programme**

Uttlesford District Council is fully committed to Decent Homes and meeting/keeping compliance with the standard is a key business plan target.

As at 31 March 2009 of the ..... Council owned homes, .... fail the Decent Homes Standard. This equates to ....% of the stock. These failures are mainly due to tenants' refusal to have certain improvement works carried out.

Whilst the Council has already nearly met the target in advance of the Government's target date of 2010 this does not mean that the stock does not need further work - it is estimated that between 4% and 5% of properties per annum become non-decent and these require investment.

The introduction of the decent homes standard caused the Council to re-evaluate its strategy so that a balance could be struck between meeting the Government's decent homes target and completing works identified in existing planned maintenance programmes.

Spending priorities were identified and an investment programme tied to broad maintenance headings aligned to Decent Homes is now in place for the next 5 years. The high focus on Decent Homes, and meeting the Action Plan targets, are likely to result in other, perhaps less urgent capital programmes, being addressed later in the future.

### **Energy Efficiency and Sustainability of the Council's Stock**

Local authorities have an important role in delivering real, perceptible improvements in the use of energy in their communities. Energy efficiency in housing – and action at the local level to achieve this – is vital if the UK is to achieve its climate change goals.

The Council has been very proactive in energy management issues and have completed insulation works and central heating upgrades on the entire stock. Results of these measures are SAP ratings well above those of the highest performing councils and place Uttlesford firmly in the Upper Quartile for both district councils and all councils. Works planned in future years capital programmes will further enhance this rating. The emphasis towards renewable energies means that in some cases funding is available to explore the feasibility of future programmes. This is an issue that must be reviewed as part of a long term strategy as there are a number of community heating schemes that the Council operates.

New repairs contracts endorse the requirement to use the following sustainable materials: European redwood timber, lead free solders, water based paint products, recycled pulp, chemical free UPVC, asbestos free materials. In addition energy saving condensing boilers are fitted whenever a boiler failure has been identified.

### **Stock Options Appraisal**

The Council appointed Beha Williams Norman Ltd to undertake a Stock Options Appraisal in 2005. The report concluded that:

- *The Council can meet and maintain the Government Decent Homes Standard*
- *The Council can meet and maintain a higher Uttlesford Standard with a reasonable HRA revenue position*
- *If either of these Standards is acceptable, then no action is necessary*
- *However if a higher aspirational standard is preferred, then the only option is to work up a proposal to transfer the stock and consult then ballot all tenants on the principle*

The Council in partnership with its tenant representatives considered the report at that time and concluded that there was no immediate need to transfer the stock.

The Council have commissioned a further Stock Option Appraisal to report in the Spring of 2009.

This process will take place in close partnership with tenants. The Council will then review, in full consultation with its tenants, its policy regarding the future management of the stock.

### **ACTION POINTS FOR THE FUTURE OF PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SECTOR HOUSING**

- Ensure that all Council and RSL tenants live in decent homes, that meet the Governments Decent Homes Standard, through effective maintenance of the public sector housing
- Ensure that adequate information is obtained and updated on the condition of the public sector housing stock, through periodic stock condition surveys and procedures to record maintenance work undertaken
- Provide guidance and advice to tenants and landlords on their rights and responsibilities
- Monitor empty homes in the District and provide advice to owners about bringing their property back into use
- Continue to publicise guidance on HMO licensing

- Deliver against actions highlighted in the Private Sector Stock condition survey

## **4.3 Strategic Objective 3 - Build sustainable and thriving neighbourhoods and communities**

Uttlesford District Council is committed to helping to create and maintain sustainable neighbourhoods and communities. This section of the Strategy sets out how the Council and its partner agencies contribute to the development and maintenance of sustainable communities through housing-related activity. Achieving sustainable communities requires effective approaches both in terms of policies to promote inclusiveness, assist the vulnerable, increase safety and the perception of safety and in ensuring the built environment and public space people's needs and aspirations.

### **4.3.1 What we know is happening.....**

#### **Shaping Neighbourhoods**

It is important that when the Council is making large investments in areas and developing homes that this includes improving the local environment. Good public spaces and facilities are key to creating sustainable communities. It is about creating quality spaces in which people want to live and can be proud - and which others will respect.

The Local Plan is concerned with the delivery of sustainable development. The policies and proposals it contains have been written in the context of national, regional and Structure Plan guidance and provide the land use guidance for the Council and external strategies. These policies are currently being reviewed in the writing of the Local Development Framework.

#### **Growth**

The Regional Plan sets the scale of housing development in the East of England and for each local authority. It reflects the Governments Sustainable Communities Plan 2003, which brought a step change in housing delivery and identified the London-Stansted-Cambridge-Subsequently extended to Peterborough, Growth Area, which includes Uttlesford.

#### **Programme of Development 3**

Uttlesford is part of a partnership including neighbouring Council's, green groups, businesses and Harlow Renaissance to secure around £17million of funding for a raft of new initiatives to be carried out under the GAF3 Programme of Development. The projects include supported housing for older people, an eco-

homes scheme through partnership with the Stansted Area Housing Partnership (SAHP) and work to align the Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and s106 alignment project.

### **Mobility and Choice**

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

Through partnership working within our sub-region we will explore the possibility of developing CBL across our boundaries and also expanding it to other housing sectors such as private landlords.

### **Respect Agenda and Anti Social Behaviour**

The Council is working towards the key principles of the Government's Respect Agenda as follows:

- Continue to work in partnership with other agencies, through the Community Safety Action Team (CSAT) and the Joint Action Group (JAG) using a multi-agency approach to tackle Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) by individuals and to identify 'hotspots' as well as monitoring trends.
- Support Housing Associations through our Community Safety Team, where they have tenants with ASB.
- Look to reducing crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour in areas with community support officers.
- Housing Officers continue to deal and monitor complaints from tenants through the tenant complaint procedure and discuss/investigate ways of resolving ASB at JAG meetings and can also where necessary refer UDC tenants for external floating support.
- All new tenants are given an introductory tenancy, to help act as a deterrent to tenants perpetrating ASB.
- Ensure that Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 is adhered to when making housing decisions.



- Publicise through Tenants newsletters and Tenant Forum details of the Tenant Complaint Procedure and carry out a complaint satisfaction survey.
- Ensure when looking to provide family housing within new developments that there are leisure facilities for the young people to access.

### **Floating Support**

Since 2007, we have been referring clients who require support to InTouch Floating Support service. This service is funded by Supporting People and significantly helps to prevent homelessness, build safer and stronger communities, promote independence and social inclusion.

### **Disabled Facilities Grant's**

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

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

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

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

### **Home Improvement Agency**

The Council has worked in partnership with the Springboard Housing Association (now part of the Genesis Housing Group) since 1998 to provide a local home improvement service for elderly and disabled residents living within the District. Essex County Council Social Care and Supporting People also support the activities of the HIA and its Handyperson scheme.

The agency provides a peripatetic service covering the whole of Uttlesford from its offices in Newport and is well regarded by its clients who feel that it helps them retain their independence in their own home, improves their health and well

being and increases their peace of mind. The types of work can range from a comprehensive scheme to adapt a disabled child's home costing over £40,000, to a simple job fitting security locks costing under £100. The Agency's Handyperson scheme typically helps over a 100 people every year carrying out minor jobs using local tradesmen, in many cases the clients are happy to make a donation to cover the cost of the materials as it is the confidence from using a well regarded and locally supported scheme that makes all the difference.

### **Uttlesford Housing Renewal Assistance**

The Council has used the powers in the Regulatory Reform Order 2002 to provide a modest grant of up to £3,000 to owner occupiers on low income to carry out essential repairs and improvements to their homes (which is raised to £5,000 in the case of mobile home owners who also carry out thermal insulation works), an additional loan of up to £7,000 is also available, repayable at the time of any future sale. In recent years applications to 'top up' centrally funded Warm Front grants has made a significant impact on the budget available for these grants.

### **Warm Front**

The Council support the Warm Front scheme which gives government grants for central heating repairs and installation and other energy efficiency improvements. The main scheme is open to those in receipt of a qualifying benefit. There is also a £300 heating rebate for repair or installation of a central heating system available to all over-60s. Further information can be gained at <http://www.warmfront.co.uk>

### **Climate Change**

Climate change is the greatest challenge facing human civilization today. Globally we must reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases and also prepare for the changes to come.

In the Council's Climate Change Strategy, commitments have been made to:

- Reduce green house gas emissions
- Minimise the environmental impacts of new developments
- Make preparations for climate change impacts
- Measure monitor and manage the Council's other environmental impacts.

Priorities for the Housing service include upgrading Council housing to further reduce emissions, achieving the Council's 2010 HECA target and raising awareness among Council tenants on how they can reduce emissions and save money.

Further information can be found on our website.

### **Equalities**

Working towards sustainable communities involves reviewing existing and proposed housing provision and policies and their impact on the community. The Council is developing a programme of Equality Impact Assessments to ensure its services are fair and accessible to all.

### **Proposed priorities for sustainable communities**

- Promote community cohesion and support the local economy by providing housing that is affordable for local people
- Ensure that housing policies and practices promote equalities and diversity
- Encourage high quality of design and layout in new developments, including public health, crime prevention, community safety and energy efficiency maintaining the attractiveness of Uttlesford as a residential environment
- Review the implementation of Choice Based lettings and continue to review and develop the service as best practice emerges
- Maximise the opportunities to enhance and develop services to the vulnerable residents of Uttlesford
- Implement the actions in the Homeless Review and Strategy 2008-2013
- Work with health and care agencies to target vulnerable households in need of home improvements
- Implement the priorities of the Climate Change Strategy
- Improve the overall standard of all housing services in a way recognised by service users

## Chapter 5 - Resources

This part of the strategy sets out annual resources available for capital and revenue investment in housing services. This includes new homes, private sector renovation, disabled facilities, homelessness and homeless prevention and grants to other organisations that assist the Council in carrying out its housing functions and enhancing the services it provides.

There are two main areas in relation to funding:

- A. Capital** spending is used finance large scale projects and items that are expected to have a long life for example roof replacements to tenants homes or providing grants to RSL's to assist in funding new development.
- B. Revenue** funding covers all of the day to day running costs incurred in running a housing service for example emergency repairs, staffing costs etc.

If we are to deliver the priorities set out within this strategy and the Business Plan, we must consider all funding opportunities and due regard has been given to the following:

Funding opportunities requiring Council support

- Consider financial regulations which allow Councils to borrow money
- Consider, in partnership with our tenants, the various options available to manage our homes

Working with partners

- Continue to support RSL bids to the Homes and Communities Agency for new affordable housing schemes.
- Continue to make bids to the Government, local, sub regional, regional, and European bodies on various housing initiatives.
- Continue to work in partnership with neighbouring authorities, partners and stakeholders.

Maximise existing funding opportunities

- Ensure the major repairs allowance is used to full effect
- Ensure that private sector housing renewal grants are made available to those most in need
- Consider levying a charge on new services where appropriate

- Continue to negotiate planning agreements to secure 40% affordable housing on new developments
- Contribute to the Governments review of the HRA finance system that determines management and maintenance subsidy.
- Continue to monitor and bid for any additional funding to support our homelessness services.

### **Funding the Housing Service**

1. The Housing Revenue Account – Is funded from tenants rents and service charges, Government grants and other income and is spent on work to Council houses/estates and the provision of support to our tenants.
2. The General Fund – is funded from Government grants and Council Tax payments and is spent on all other housing related spending for example homelessness, improvements to qualifying private sector housing etc.

Details of the Council's housing revenue and capital spending can be found in the HRA Business Plan which is available on our website.

## Chapter 6 - Monitoring the Strategy and Performance Review

*This chapter describes how the strategy will be monitored, reviewed and further developed through a range of corporate and partner agency forums.*

The Strategy is a three year document with a review programmed after two years to coincide with the development of the revision to the London Commuter Belt Sub-Regional Strategy in 2011, and the Homes and Communities Agency currently programmed next bid round.

Each Strategic Objective within this strategy has its own timetabled action plan that sets outcomes, target dates, the lead organisations, partners and resources spanning the three years of the Strategy. Performance information is collected across a range of indicators to help monitor performance, identify trends and assess implementation of the strategy. This information is also used to benchmark our services against other local authorities.

Progress against the action plan and performance information will be reported as follows:

- Quarterly to the Housing Initiative Task Group
- Annually to the Council's Housing and Community Committee
- Annually to the LSP