

**Committee:** Planning Policy Working Group

**Agenda Item**

**Date:** 22 February 2017

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**Title:** Housing White Paper

**Author:** Richard Fox, Planning Policy Team Leader      **Key decision:**

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## **Summary**

1. This Report provides an initial analysis of the Department for Communities and Local Government's ("CLG") Housing White Paper ("HWP"): 'Fixing our Broken Housing Market' which was published on Tuesday 7 February 2017.
2. Publication of the much-anticipated Housing White Paper provides significant statements on government policy and the approach to improving the supply and affordability of housing at a national level.
3. Locally, the potential measures announced within the Housing White Paper will not all have immediate effect and the majority are subject to further consultation. However, publication of the Housing White Paper is a milestone in terms of how local authorities may be required to approach plan-making (and also decision-taking on planning applications) in future years.
4. The summary provided by this report gives an initial assessment and overview of potential implications from the Housing White Paper, particularly in relation to the Uttlesford Local Plan.

## **Recommendations**

- a. PPWG note the publication of the Housing White Paper and the initial assessment of its potential future implications for preparation of the Uttlesford Local Plan
- b. Officers of the Planning Policy Team prepare a response to the CLG Housing White Paper for presentation to Cabinet in March 2017 prior to submission to government

## **Financial Implications**

5. The White Paper proposes that local authorities will be able to increase planning application fees by 20% from July 2017 if they commit to invest the additional fee income in their planning departments. The Government is also minded to allow an increase of a further 20% for those authorities who are delivering homes.
6. Members are advised that any subsequent implications will be the subject of ongoing assessment. Subject to further government consultation and any implementation of measures introduced through the Housing White Paper funding implications may subsequently arise. The outcomes of this for Council funding streams and other sources of infrastructure funding cannot be directly identified at this time.

## Background Papers

7. None

## Impact

8.

Communication/Consultation	The measures proposed In the White Paper are subject to consultation
Community Safety	N/A
Equalities	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A
Human Rights/Legal Implications	N/A
Sustainability	There are proposals relating to climate change, flood risk, noise and onshore wind energy in the White Paper.
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	N/A

## Situation

9. The Department for Communities and Local Government's ("CLG") Housing White Paper ("HWP"): 'Fixing our Broken Housing Market' was published on Tuesday 7 February 2017. Officers have undertaken an initial analysis of the HWP and its supporting evidence. The Council's assessment of the HWP and its future relevance in the District has also benefitted from the recent meeting between Officers from the Planning Policy Team and advisors at CLG on 15 February 2017.
10. The release of the HWP has been anticipated for some months and the delays to its publication mean that while useful it does not yet provide full certainty on matters relating to the Local Plan. Given the limited time since publication, this review has not yet been able to fully consider the potential implications of the approach outlined in the HWP.
11. Having said this, the HWP clarifies the government's policy direction on a range of housing issues and refers specifically to earlier announcements and Written Ministerial Statements as well as existing policies. Decision-makers (and to some degree those preparing Local Plans) will need to quickly establish the weight they should give the HWP as a material consideration.
12. The government's HWP identifies four broad (but interrelated) themes under which to identify current problems with the housing market and through which

it proposes certain solutions. These can broadly be summarised as follows (with chapter headings from the HWP in parentheses):

- Meeting housing needs, effective strategic planning and making land available for housing (“Planning for the Right Homes in the Right Places”)
  - Improving the rates and pace of housing delivery (“Building Homes Faster”)
  - Restructuring the housing market to provide increased supply (“Diversifying Housing Market”)
  - Improving affordability and meeting a wider range of needs (“Helping People Now”)
13. Each of these is relevant to the local context in Uttlesford and it is necessary to consider the HWP as a whole.
14. Strong protection for the Green Belt will be retained. The HWP also emphasises the need for Local Plans to be kept up-to-date, subject to regular review, and able to justify housing targets against objectively assessed need. Exceptional circumstances to justify the release of Green Belt land will only exist where all other reasonable alternatives have been explored.
15. The HWP introduces only a limited range of measures that are intended to have immediate effect in looking to address the issues identified in the housing market. For local authorities this principally relates to a new ‘Housing Delivery Test’ from November 2017.
16. The way in which the ‘Housing Delivery Test’ will apply in Uttlesford is of great importance to the Council. The ‘test’ will be triggered where the number of new homes being built in a given district is below expectations. Introduction of this test does not depend on further consultation. It is a separate assessment to the calculation of Five Year Housing Land Supply and is designed to highlight which the delivery of housing is above or below identified requirements. From November 2017, if no up-to-date Local Plan is in place, the official household projections will form the base for the ‘delivery test’. Authorities that under-perform against the ‘Housing Delivery Test’ will be required to prepare an Action Plan to assist in improving supply.
17. For the Local Plan it is important to note the proposed introduction of a standardised methodology for calculating housing need. Consultation on the Housing White Paper seeks views on what ‘reasonable justification’ may be provided for departing from the standardised methodology. The government also proposes to make it possible for those preparing neighbourhood plans to obtain a figure for housing requirements in their local area directly from the local authority. Greater emphasis on the specific housing needs of older people is also intended to make sure the right type of supply is provided to meet these needs.
18. The HWP reiterates a firm expectation that authorities will continue to cooperate on cross boundary matters and address the strategic priorities for plan-making. Measures are proposed that would require completion of

Statements of Common Ground between authorities that set out how cross-boundary matters will be approached.

19. The HWP encourages Local Plans to bring forward a wide portfolio of sites, including smaller and medium-sized sites, to provide homes to help rural communities thrive, and to bring forward brownfield land. Proposals set out that Local Plans should contain policies to support 'windfall' provision and provide at least 10% of allocations as smaller sites. The HWP also reiterates support for new planned settlements.
20. The government is proposing to broaden the statutory definition of affordable housing as part of measures in the Housing White Paper. This retains a commitment to the delivery of 'Starter Homes', but as part of a broader mix of products including support for affordable private rented tenures.
21. It is important to note that publication of the HWP has not in itself brought about any immediate change to national planning policy, although revision of the National Planning Policy Framework is expected to take place in 2017. The extent of the proposals and scope of the HWP is less than some anticipated which reduces the level of certainty in the details provided at this time.
22. A 'Fixing our broken housing market: consultation' has been launched alongside the HWP and gives all interested parties an opportunity to comment on specific questions related to topics raised in the HWP. This consultation runs until 2 May 2017 and is of significant importance. It is important that Uttlesford District Council submits a detailed response to this consultation.
23. This will be informed by a full and complete assessment of the HWP in terms of its relevance in Uttlesford. A draft of the proposed consultation response will be presented to Cabinet prior to submission in time for the consultation deadline.
24. Based on the broad approach set out in the HWP it is important that the Council's consultation response set out how the specific measures should be implemented so far as they affect the ability to better meet housing needs and support the housing market in Uttlesford.

## Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
3. That the Council does not meet the Planning Delivery Test.	Possible	3. Significant	Ensure sufficient deliverable sites are allocated in the Local Plan.

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.