

**Committee:** Local Plan Leadership Group

**Date:**

**Title:** Housing Study

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## Summary

1. A Housing Study was commissioned by the District Council and Braintree District Council to inform future local plan policies and forthcoming reviews of the Councils' Housing Strategies. The Study was intended to consider, amongst other matters, the issue of the affordability of housing and the need to help younger people get on the housing ladder. This report sets out the key findings that are relevant to Uttlesford and asks the Group to note the findings.

## Recommendations

2. The Group is invited to note and comment on the findings set out in this Housing Study.
3. The Group confirms that the Study is added to the evidence base of new local plan.

## Financial Implications

4. Costs associated with implementing recommendations in the report will be the subject to future reports as part of the preparation of the local plan and a Review of the Council's Housing Strategy

## Background Papers

5. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report:
  - Full Report on the Housing Study

## Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	N/a
Community Safety	N/a
Equalities	The Study addresses equality issues in

	considering housing strategy,
Health and Safety	N/a
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The proposed approach is in accordance with statutory planning requirements.
Sustainability	The approach is consistent with the Council's objectives on sustainability.
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	N/a

## Situation

7. Officers in the Planning and Housing Departments worked together in commissioning the Study. The work was originally commissioned when Uttlesford and Braintree Councils were planning to deliver Garden Communities, one of which straddled the District Boundary between the two Councils. After the Study started Uttlesford withdrew its plan from the examination process (Braintree also withdrew the part of its local plan that proposed a Garden Committee on the boundary with Uttlesford). The Study brief was consequently amended to omit the reference to specific development sites.
8. The Study therefore considers housing in new communities and other strategic scale developments (1,000+ new homes). The Consultants consider that many of the Garden Cities principles can be applied to strategic scale development and to a lesser extent smaller scale schemes. Their recommendations fall into two broad categories; those which can be taken forward immediately and others which only relate to the delivery of large-scale housing schemes.
9. This Study has been informed by two Listening Events that were held in October 2019 and takes account of evidence provided by the councils and others. Interviews were conducted with the promoters of North Uttlesford Garden Community, Easton Park and West of Braintree; and with the operators of Chesterford Research Park, Stansted Airport and Stansted Chamber of Commerce. Evidence has also been taken from work undertaken by Cambridge University Hospital and from the Wellcome Trust.
10. The Study considered different housing options at different ages and stages in life with the value of providing choices and offering flexibility.
11. The preparation of the technology section of the Study predated the Covid-19 pandemic and the events of the last few months have highlighted the importance of technology in maintaining the quality of life and the very real and current need to plan homes and places to enable people to work and study from home.

12. Another consideration is the commitment the District Council is giving to addressing the Climate Change and Biodiversity Emergency. Cabinet are due to consider informal Planning Guidance on Climate Change on 9 February and these new planning policies will also shape the future of housing within the District.

## **Findings of the Study** (Executive Summary attached as Appendix)

### New Homes

- a. For those at the beginning of the housing ladder (households with low incomes who do not have suitable accommodation) there is an ongoing need for rented affordable housing and this should ideally be part of all new housing schemes. Community led housing schemes could be encouraged to provide rented affordable housing.
- b. For those on higher incomes and at other end of housing ladder there is a need for a diversity of housing to recognise peoples' changing housing needs as families grow and then decrease. There is a role of custom and self-build housing and for market rented accommodation. Build to rent funded by institutional investors can meet a range of housing needs and offers a more secure form of renting as the investor is looking for long term returns. Demand for rented accommodation will be highest in locations near to large employment areas. It is suggested that the Council test the market with an interested developer.
- c. For those on intermediate incomes (in the middle of the ladder) the Study recommends looking at a range of options - a local Living Rent; shared ownership; equity share.
- d. For those with specialist housing needs, some will access social rented options. The District Council is producing a Housing Strategy which will consider such needs along with retirement housing and housing with care options.
- e. Councils will need to work with gypsy & traveller organisations to deliver the identified needs.

### Housing Need and Demand

- f. In terms of affordable rented accommodation, highest need is for 1 or 2 bedrooms.
- g. There are benefits of developing housing for the older person in strategic sites as design of housing can be adaptable and of wider environment accessible by foot, cycle or mobility scooter.
- h. Early engagement with site promoters to discuss housing mix is suggested

## Employment

- i. The Study found demand for private rented accommodation from people working at Stansted Airport and Chesterford Research Park who do not want a long-term housing option. There were similar findings from surveys undertaken by Cambridge University Hospital and the Wellcome Trust. For those looking to settle and with incomes of £32,000-£50,000 there is interest in low cost home ownership.
- j. The planning of new communities and strategic development should consider job opportunities and housing needs of people who live and work locally.

## Accelerating delivery

- k. The Study suggests having a variety of housing models to create diversity. Other means are selling plots in new communities and strategic sites to small and medium sized builders; use of modern methods of construction and self and custom build housing. In relation to the latter there is potential for the Councils to be more active in meeting this demand.

## Delivery of New Council Homes

- l. The Study sets out a route map that includes renewing the business plan to ensure maximum benefits are achieved, reviewing the council's objectives to be clear about priorities, developing strategic partnerships to secure land and deliver new council homes. It also suggests considering 'strip lease arrangements'<sup>1</sup> and the creation of a dedicated housing company to either increase the provision of affordable rented homes or deliver market rented homes that generate a long-term revenue stream for the council.

## Housing Registers and Allocations Policies

- m. The Study suggests that Uttlesford reviews its current eligibility criteria to widen access to affordable housing.

## Implications for new Uttlesford Housing Strategy

- n. Three key themes for the new strategy are suggested
  - *Choice* – pro-active housing options and advice service, new allocations policy and local lettings plans, innovation and variety in tenure and design

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<sup>1</sup> A very long term leasehold with relatively modest rental payments and tenant has option to buy back the real estate at the end of the lease for a nominal payment

- *Engagement, collaboration and partnership* – early engagement with promoters/applicants of major developments, ongoing engagement with communities and residents, engagement with employers to promote and understand housing preferences, and effective partnership working
- *Delivery* – of high-quality new homes to include a new, expanded council-house programme, pro-active facilitation of custom/self and community housing and new joint ventures.

### Housing and Technology

- o. The Study considers future working patterns. It comments on how we've seen people's homes become their office, classroom, gym etc. It suggests that all new communities should have digital infrastructure strategies and homes designed to provide space for work and Study for all family members.
- p. It also considers the role of co-working spaces offering flexibility and meeting spaces.

### Leadership and collaboration

- q. The Study suggests that the creation of new communities requires civic leadership and long-term relationships between councils, promoters and house builders, and others. The councils should create formal and informal working arrangements to ensure effective engagement between key parties.

## **Key Recommendations from the Study**

### Operational Changes

1. Create a one-stop shop housing options service to promote the full range of housing choices and tenures, alongside homelessness prevention.
2. Review housing partnership working arrangements in order to deliver greater choice of homes and include developers and housebuilders in strategic housing conversations.
3. Engage with 'target customers' to understand their housing preferences including older residents and people working in Uttlesford.
4. Publish a Prospectus that sets out priorities for mainstream and specialist housing.
5. Create a custom/self-build and community housing service with a dedicated officer or commissioned service to develop and bring forward schemes. A business case could be developed by the Council or third parties for the service to be self-financing with income through management fees for delivering each project.

6. Develop an Innovation Demonstrator Project through purchasing land on a large site. The project should be shaped by a local working group but, as an example, could include serviced plots for self-build or custom build, plots for local builders and land for affordable homes all to be built to Zero Carbon standards. The intention would be to generate a return whilst taking a patient approach to payments in order to facilitate flow for self/customer builders and local builders.

#### For Uttlesford Council Only

- a. Ensure the new Housing Strategy considers the housing needs and preferences of all those who live and work in the district, including a framework for Affordable, Sub-Market and Market Housing Options based on the Homes outlined in the Executive Summary.
- b. Develop a Business and Delivery Plan for New Council Homes based on the steps outlined in this Study.
- c. Develop an approach towards the use of Modern Methods of Construction, through site visits and discussion with Swan and other local housing associations.
- d. Assess the monetary and non-monetary value of a long-term lease arrangement with an institutional investor for delivery of social rented homes.
- e. Evaluate direct delivery or management of market rented homes by the council through a wholly owned company
- f. Amend the Allocations Policy to widen access to affordable housing, through easing the local connection requirements.
- g. Adopt the themes of choice, engagement, collaboration, partnership and delivery for the new Housing Strategy, lifting work from this Study as appropriate.

#### Planning, determining, and delivering new communities

7. Ensure the governance structures for new communities enable both internal public sector discussion and strategic dialogue with the promoter or developer.
8. Ensure planning policies encourage diversity of tenure and welcome innovation.
9. Set aspirational goals for accessibility, adaptability and connectivity to ensure your homes are fit for people of all ages and abilities; and enable home working and Study.
10. Encourage very early engagement to share information on the identified needs of particular groups including those with specialist housing needs, and Gypsies and Travellers.

11. Agree Local Lettings Policies for new communities in order to create balanced communities.
12. Ensure a monitoring and review system is in place for each new community in order to collect the evidence to underpin future planning decisions.

### Risk Analysis

13.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The findings in Housing Study may become out of date given emerging local plan policies	3 – Moderate risk given unforeseen issues arising from pandemic	3 – Failure could undermine achievement of Council objectives	Review findings in the light of changing circumstances.

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.