

# Huntingdonshire District Council Housing Strategy 2020 -2025

## Foreword

Huntingdonshire District Council have clear ambitions to address the housing needs of Huntingdonshire now and in the future. These are shaped by the rich diversity of the District, comprising market towns, large and small villages, and dispersed rural settlements. The growing economy is also shaping future housing needs, with the area connected to Greater Cambridge in the south, the Peterborough economy in the north and the Fens to the north east<sup>i</sup>. Looking to the future the District forms part of the Cambridge, Milton Keynes, Oxford Arc, identified as a significant area for future economic growth<sup>ii</sup>, with the mixed-use Enterprise Zone development at Alconbury significant nationally. Improvements in transport links, the rerouting of the A14, planned improvements to the A428 and A141 and the potential for an East/West rail link with a station at St Neots, improve the connectivity of Huntingdonshire both within the District, and to other destinations.

With economic growth come new housing pressures to provide homes for a growing workforce, in a range of tenures that can be afforded, of a quality that will attract businesses concerned with the housing options for their future employees. The Huntingdonshire Local Plan <sup>iii</sup>shows the need for 20,100 additional homes between 2011 and 2036 with a 40% requirement for affordable housing on sites of 11 or more units, subject to viability. The Huntingdonshire Local Plan demonstrates that this is achievable and deliverable.

Future housing needs must be balanced with addressing the needs of the existing population in Huntingdonshire. With the 20% of the population aged over 65, and a prediction that these numbers will grow significantly over the next 10 years<sup>iv</sup>, anticipating the future housing needs of older people will be important. At the same time prices for both rented and market housing remain unaffordable for those on lower or average earnings and the need for affordable housing will grow, whether because the economy grows and house prices increase or the economy suffers a downturn and incomes drop. Homelessness remains a challenge.

Huntingdonshire District Council have a pivotal role to play in shaping the housing market in Huntingdonshire. In addition to their statutory role as the planning authority the Council have a wider place shaping role that requires working collaboratively with national and regional partners. This means building strong relationships with key players who are engaged in the delivery of new homes as well as those who contribute to the quality and management of existing homes and provide for the wellbeing of residents.

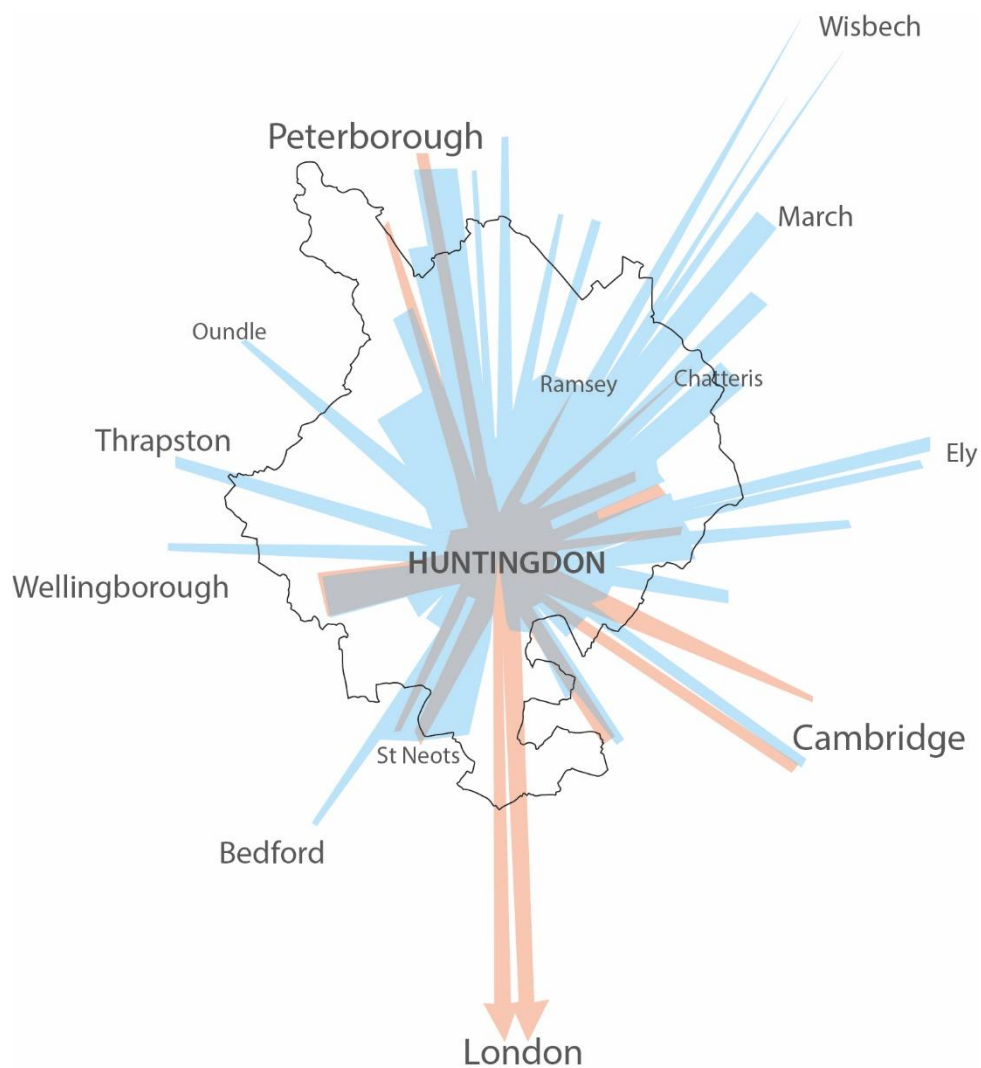
The housing strategy is being written at a time when the impact of Covid-19 on housing and the economy cannot be fully known. It is too early to predict the full impact on employment or income levels, which in turn will affect house prices for market sales, and the demand for affordable housing. The Government have also announced a suite of new policy papers relevant to housing, yet to become legislation. With this in mind the Action Plan will be drawn up for the first year and will be reviewed annually.

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## Strategic Context.

This strategy has been developed to deliver the priorities agreed in the Council's Corporate Plan, summarised below, and to identify and agree actions to take forward additional emerging priorities. The Strategy is also written in the context of national and regional policy that are relevant to housing and the ambitions for Huntingdonshire and the emerging Huntingdonshire Place Strategy to 2050. The following travel to work chart, based on the 2011 census, gives an indication how the broader economy impacts on those who live in the Huntingdonshire.



## Huntingdonshire Corporate Plan Housing related priorities

### People

Priorities	Key Actions	Performance Indicators
<p>Enabling independent and accessible living through the provision of adaptations and accessible housing.</p> <p>Meeting the housing and support needs of the population</p>	<p>Early intervention to prevent homelessness</p> <p>New Homelessness and Letting Policy</p> <p>Eradicate the need to place homeless families in B&amp;B</p>	<p>Numbers of homeless preventions achieved</p>

### Place

Priorities	Key Actions	Performance Indicators
<p>Supporting economic growth in market towns and rural areas.</p> <p>Facilitate the delivery of infrastructure to support housing growth.</p> <p>Planning and delivering decent market and affordable housing to meet current and future needs</p> <p>Creating well designed, good places to live and work</p> <p>Ensuring a supply to meet objectively assessed needs</p> <p>Working with partners to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour</p> <p>Well-designed schemes that promote a sense of place</p>	<p>Prepare options for redevelopment of bus stations in St Ives and Huntingdon.</p> <p>Work with partners to secure resources to facilitate the delivery of new housing.</p> <p>Prepare 'Prospectuses for Growth' for Market Towns and support the delivery of St Neots masterplan</p> <p>Adopt and deliver a Housing Strategy annual action plan</p> <p>Facilitate the delivery of new housing and necessary infrastructure</p>	<p>Number of new affordable homes delivered in 2020/21</p> <p>Net growth in number of homes with a Council Tax banding</p> <p>These have been prepared and adopted by CPCA in March 2020</p>

The Council is a member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Sub-Regional Housing Board and has signed up to delivering against the following 4 priorities - New Homes and Communities; Homes for Wellbeing; Existing Homes; Housing Need and Homelessness

The most recent national housing policies influencing this strategy are summarised below.

#### **The Housing and Planning Act 2016<sup>v</sup>:**

- Introduced Starter Homes as a new affordable housing product.
- Proposed the extension of the right to buy for Housing Association tenants – still in the pilot phase.
- Introduced a range of measures to tackle rogue landlords and address poor practice in the Private Rented Sector.
- Encouraged Self-build and Custom Build and required all local authorities to hold a register of applicants.

This was followed by **the Housing White Paper in 2017<sup>vi</sup>** entitled ‘Fixing our Broken Housing Market’ with an emphasis on accelerating the delivery of new homes, with a target to build 300,000 new homes a year. It also widened the definition of affordable homes.

The **Housing Green Paper in 2018<sup>vii</sup>** entitled ‘A new Deal for Social Housing’ was heavily influenced by the Grenfell disaster. It had a strong emphasis on giving social housing tenants a stronger voice. It also looked at accelerating supply and a broader range of home ownership products.

Although the White Paper and Green Paper did not progress to legislation they are reflective of Government concerns to increase delivery and widen the market for entry level market housing.

The Government announced on 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 that they would be bringing forward several housing related papers <sup>viii</sup> - a detailed Housing Strategy; a Renters Reform Bill; a Social Housing White Paper; and a Planning for the Future white paper. The last of these has been published at the time of writing, entitled **White paper: Planning for the Future** <sup>ix</sup>. The White Paper is out for consultation until the end of October 2020. It proposes a radical overhaul of the current planning system, whereby Local Plans would become shorter documents, produced over a 30 month period (42 months for a Local Plan agreed within the last 3 years), showing areas zoned under 3 categories:

- Growth- suitable for substantial development, where outline planning permission would be automatically granted, with the forms and types of development specified in the plan,
- Renewal – suitable for some types of development
- Protected – where development would be restricted.

The document anticipates a faster process for seeking planning permissions, with clear rules, design codes and build standards including energy efficiency measures that anticipate the move towards zero carbon homes. Currently Section 106 agreements are the main route

to delivering affordable housing, whereby the local planning authority negotiates the contribution that a developer will make. This would be replaced with a formula for an infrastructure levy which would pay for affordable housing, together with other requirements like roads, schools, and green space. The paper suggests that developments of 40-50 homes could be exempt from this levy as a temporary measure.

The White Paper consultation also promotes First Homes as a for sale product with up to a third discount. It also supports Community Land Trusts, self-builders and small and medium-sized builders' contribution to building more homes.

It is too early to know how this might translate into legislation and when, but at the earliest the requirement for a new Local Plan which may change some of the policy requirements in this Housing Strategy for Huntingdonshire is likely to be 4-5 years from now. The proposal for an Annual Action Plan relating to the Housing Strategy is designed to create flexibility to adapt to new requirements.

Other national legislation of relevance to this strategy relate to specific areas of activity:

**The Care Act 2016<sup>x</sup>** required closer working between health, housing, and social care agencies to meet the assessed support needs of adults, underpinned by the pooled Better Care Fund, managed through Health and Wellbeing Boards. This incorporated the Disabled Facilities Grant, previously provided directly as a separate allocation.

**The Homeless Reduction Act 2017<sup>xi</sup>** introduced a requirement for Councils with housing responsibilities to review homelessness in their area and formulate a Homelessness Strategy to:

- address the causes of homelessness in the area;
- introduce initiatives to prevent homelessness wherever possible;
- provide sufficient temporary accommodation for those households that are or may become homeless; and
- ensure that appropriate support is available for people who have previously experienced homelessness in order to prevent it happening again.

Regionally, the priorities of the Combined Authority for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, to accelerate delivery, create prosperous places where people want to live, and expand housing choices support the delivery of Huntingdonshire District Council's priorities. In September 2018 the Combined Authority published an **Independent Economic Review** <sup>xii</sup> which identified the importance of housing in underpinning economic prosperity, and the vital role that market towns play in supporting economic vibrancy. This review is currently being updated in light of COVID-19.

Looking further afield Huntingdonshire is a part of the **Oxford, Milton Keynes, Cambridge Arc**, backed by Government in recognition that this is an area of economic strength with huge economic potential, supported by housing delivery ambitions to create good places to live and work.

## Housing Priorities for Huntingdonshire

This evidence-based Strategy has three overarching themes, shaped by the broader policy context described in the preceding section.

1. New homes to meet the needs of Huntingdonshire now and in the future
2. Homes to enable people in Huntingdonshire to live independent and healthy lives
3. Working in Partnership to achieve shared objectives

### 1. New Homes to meet the needs of Huntingdonshire now and in the future

#### *Housing targets*

Huntingdonshire has the greatest number of households of all the districts in Cambridgeshire, with a population set to grow by 20% in the next 20 years <sup>xiii</sup>. The Council does not own and manage Council Housing, which means that their direct influence on the housing market is through working with housebuilders, developers and registered providers. In response to the requirement to build for the changing needs of the existing population, and future households, the Local Plan has an objectively assessed target to achieve 20,100 homes, an average of 804 each year, between 2011 and 2036, and ambitions to exceed this target. In previous years delivery has not been as strong as it could be and in response Huntingdonshire District Council agreed a Housing Delivery Test Action Plan <sup>xiv</sup> which identified key actions that the Council would take to accelerate delivery. These relate to site constraints including land and viability related issues; supply issues that impact on the capacity to build and release new homes; planning processes including speed and accuracy of processes and the status of the Local Plan; and the delivery of key infrastructure services including transport and the provision of other essential services. The most recent housing delivery target results demonstrate that 110% of the required target was met last year.

Priority Action for Housing:

- 1.1. The Council will continue to monitor the achievement of delivery targets in the Annual Monitoring Plan and take action as appropriate.**

## Affordable Housing

The National Planning Policy Framework (2018) define affordable housing as:

- Affordable housing for rent (at social rent levels, and affordable rent levels usually at LHA rates)
- Starter Homes. (New homes or conversions to be sold at a minimum of 20% below market value with costs capped)
- Discounted market sales
- Other schemes which help prospective buyers

For many people either living or working in Huntingdonshire buying their own home or renting on the open market is not affordable. House prices in Huntingdon, although lower than in the Greater Cambridge area have seen a steady increase. In the last 5 years the average cost of buying your own home has increased by 19.6%, just below the national average of 20.9%<sup>xv</sup>. Affordability is measured by looking at the ratio of earnings to prices. The latest published figures for December 2018 show that for those on the lower quartile earnings the lowest quartile house prices were 9.3 times earnings, and for median income and house prices the affordability ratio was 7.0<sup>xvi</sup> This has contributed to the current trend in Huntingdon with a net migration in from Greater Cambridge where prices are higher, but a net migration out to areas north of Huntingdonshire where house prices are cheaper<sup>xvii</sup>

The picture for rental property shows the same trends with the average cost of renting a home above the Local Housing Allowance set by Government, widely used as an indicator of affordable rent.

Bedrooms	Median weekly PRS rents Dec 19 (£pw)	LHA rates for 2020/21 (£pw)
1 bed	138	130
2 bed	173	161
3 bed	207	189
4 bed	288	253

Recognising the importance of delivering affordable housing the Council has set the percentage requirement for affordable homes on all sites of 11 or more homes at 40% or 7,900 over the lifetime of the plan equating to an average of 316 a year. The delivery of affordable housing has shown a steady increase over the last 3 years, reflecting the priority given to this target, with 440 affordable homes achieved last year.



## Affordable Housing Completions

Year	Total	Affordable Rent	Shared Ownership
2019/20	440	292	148
2018/19	268	190	78
2017/18	165	134	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>873</b>	<b>616</b>	<b>257</b>

In Huntingdonshire the delivery of new build for affordable homes has focused on affordable rent as subsidy in the form of grants is only exceptionally available for social rent. Affordable rent is typically pegged at 80% of market rent or the Local Housing Allowance levels (the amount used to work out the limits for Housing Benefit or Universal Credit payment for rent), whichever is the lower. Current policy requires 70% of all affordable housing to be rented with the remaining 30% of affordable housing to be shared ownership as a discounted market housing product.

Huntingdonshire District Council expects that the majority of affordable new housing will continue to be rented and shared ownership as described above, but is keen to explore alternative and innovative models of low cost ownership to assist those that need a step up to being able to own their own homes. This will include consideration of starter homes where viable, and consideration of emerging options such as the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority £100k home<sup>xviii</sup>. As these will count as affordable homes under the National Planning Policy Framework this will involve decisions regarding trade-offs in meeting different housing and infrastructure needs.

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 1.2. The Council will work with developers and registered providers to prioritise the achievement of 40% affordable housing.**
- 1.3. The Council will explore the potential and barriers for delivery of starter homes and other Discounted Market Housing models.**

### ***Entry level housing***

In some ways the needs of older people looking to downsize and the needs of younger people wanting to become homeowner coincide, in that both will benefit from smaller new build homes, although older people will have different design requirements, as discussed in the section on specialist housing. Currently the tendency is for the market to deliver larger units for sale on new sites.

The Government have recently introduced a new provision for entry-level exception sites, to support the delivery of this type of affordable homes for sale. The Council is currently exploring the potential for the development of an entry level site, which aligns with the priority given to developing options for entry level homes for sale and rent. In considering Entry Level Exception Sites the Council will need to be mindful of overlaps with Rural Exception site policy.

Shared ownership is a well-established and successful product providing entry level affordable housing in Huntingdonshire. The Council will explore a wider range of entry level products and evaluate their feasibility alongside shared ownership. These newer products include the provision of Starter Homes introduced in the Housing and Planning Act 2016, and the £100,000 home recently launched by the Combined Authority.

Priority Actions for Housing

- 1.4. To prioritise the delivery of at least one entry level site.**
- 1.5. To evaluate alternative models for entry level housing alongside shared ownership.**

### ***Market Rent and Build to Rent***

The private rental sector makes up about 15 % of housing in Huntingdonshire.

The Council wishes to explore the options for developing good quality private rented accommodation. The options for using the Councils' own assets to secure the development of private rental properties are explored in the section on working in partnership in this report.

Build to rent is a distinct asset class within the private rented sector, at an early stage of maturity, often with institutional investment funding, with an element of affordable rent included (typically 20%). This market is well established in the student accommodation market, but less developed for other potential renters. The objective assessment of need for rented property in Huntingdonshire identifies low demand. Nevertheless Savills<sup>xix</sup> predict this to be a growing market and one to keep a watching brief on, particularly in the light of the Council's ambition to create competition in the housing market to address high rents.

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 1.6. The Council will be open to exploring the options for institutional investment in the Private Rented Sector on suitable sites, including those owned by the Council.**

### **New homes to meet specific needs.**

Some housing needs to be designed with particular needs in mind. This relates to both the size or design and designating homes for a specific group of people.

In Huntingdonshire as homes to rent or buy increase in price the retention of key workers in the District must be addressed. Early discussions with local hospitals have identified a need for key worker housing for those on lower incomes. The Council will want to look at options for providing for key workers, including on sites in its ownership and on other sites.

Older people households make up a significant proportion, one in five, of all households in the District, and in the next 20 years older households between 65-75 are likely to increase by a third.<sup>xx</sup> The changing housing aspirations of this group need to be better reflected in future housing development. Studies show that whatever type of housing older people live in the majority prefer to live within mixed age communities<sup>xxi</sup>.

There is a requirement for smaller units, attractive to older people looking to downsize, that are accessible and easier to manage. Older people tend to spend more time at home and may require more storage space and future proofed adaptable space. This includes smaller homes where older people can remain close to familiar networks and communities, including new build on rural exception sites, and homes within or close to market towns which benefit from being close to shops, services and social networks. The requirement in the Huntingdonshire Local Plan for new dwellings to be accessible and adaptable, and a proportion suitable for wheelchair users anticipates this growing trend. Newer models of provision will also be explored, like retirement villages which have a mix of general needs housing, supported and extra care, and care homes. For Registered Providers having a good mix of size and type of housing to offer older people helps to make the best use of housing portfolios and gives existing and potential residents choices to downsize or move into specialist accommodation to meet their needs.

There will continue to be a requirement for specialist housing for vulnerable groups such as care leavers or younger adults who require specialist housing with some level of support. The recent draft Hearn report concludes that there is a 16% shortfall in the numbers in specialist housing. Huntingdonshire District Council's Local Plan identifies a need between 2016 and 2035 for 4000 specialist homes or older people and 2,000 extra care beds. Some existing specialist housing in the area has proved more popular than others, and lessons need to be drawn from the type and location of specialist housing, both in Huntingdonshire and elsewhere, when planning for new provision. As discussed in the next section models of care and support are evolving, with a much greater emphasis on enabling people to live independently in their own homes. Keeping abreast of models of care and support through engagement with health and social care partners will mean building the right kind of specialist accommodation for the future.

The Council will work pro-actively with developers and registered providers to deliver the right type of specialist provision, in the right locations, with the right tenure mix. This should provide for different levels of income and equity, reflecting the demographics of the area and will include identifying external funding where available to improve the viability of building specialist accommodation.

Priorities for Actions for Housing:

**1.7. Exploring options for key worker housing, including on own sites.**

- 1.8. Working pro-actively with developers and housing associations to achieve the targets for homes built to M4 (2) and M4 (3) standards as set out in the Local Plan (LP25).**
- 1.9. The Council will engage with Health and Social Care partners to align requirements for specialist housing with future models of care and support.**

### ***Strategic sites and regeneration of market towns.***

Market towns must be living, growing places that can thrive now and in the future. New homes for people to live in is an essential component for growing and sustaining the economic success of Huntingdonshire's market towns, keeping high streets viable and providing employment in the locality. In Huntingdonshire the medium sized and larger strategic sites for housing development in the Local Plan will help to sustain market towns as vibrant and attractive places to live, work and visit.

Successful strategic developments will bring new employers to the area, alongside existing employers and the context for this will be set out in the Council's Economic Growth Strategy. The quality of available housing, which will include new developments, is often an important consideration for companies looking to relocate to an area, together with other quality of life factors. Planning policies which ensure good design and build standards are a means to ensure a consistent approach to the quality of housing delivered.

The Council's forthcoming Climate Change Strategy will reinforce the importance of energy efficiency in new homes, as well as existing homes, anticipating changes in the energy market to meet the Government's Net Zero Carbon target. This is a fast-changing area where future policies are likely to have implications for building new homes able to accommodate the shift from fossil fuel energy sources to favour electricity and new forms of energy generation such as heat pumps. The energy efficiency of homes where it reduces costs can help lower income households to avoid fuel poverty.

The recent trend towards homeworking in response to the threat of the coronavirus pandemic has reinforced the need for good digital and fibre connections and the value placed on gardens and other green space. If the need to travel to work is reduced for many commuters, then market towns will offer many advantages in providing a valued quality of life.

The Local Plan has designated Alconbury Weald, North of Huntingdon and the developments east of St Neots as strategic expansion areas with mixed use developments delivering significant housing and employment growth on major sites in close proximity to market towns. The Council have embarked on work, sponsored by the Combined Authority, to create a long-term vision for the future of all its four market towns. St Neots was the first market town to secure support for 'Masterplanning for Growth'<sup>xxii</sup> from the Combined Authority. This approach will be extended to other market town expansions in Huntingdonshire. Huntingdon is already at the first stage of having a 'Prospectus for Growth'<sup>xxiii</sup> setting out an overall vision for the town. Well planned new housing settlements

will be an essential element of this long-term visioning for strategic sites now and in the future.

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 1.10. **The Council will continue to work with developers to maximise delivery on sustainable strategic sites.**
- 1.11. **The Council will refresh its Design Guide.**

### ***Small sites to meet local needs***

Smaller sites for housing development in villages and towns can also play a vital role in maintaining the vibrancy of places, providing affordable homes for families who might otherwise be priced out of the area, and smaller homes to meet the needs of first time buyers and those looking to downsize. Huntingdonshire District Council will encourage the development of smaller sites that meet the needs of the local community, or a need for specialist housing, (see previous section). Thought will be given to the integration of small sites into existing communities and how new developments will relate to existing settlements.

New homes in villages can help to sustain village life, meeting the changing needs of those who live in the village and others with a local connection, and the Council will encourage the development of village housing supported by or led by the local community. Small village sites that might not otherwise get planning permission can be brought forward as Rural Exception Sites if they can demonstrate that they meet local needs. Exception Sites are intended to provide affordable housing in perpetuity. In Huntingdonshire 11 Rural Exception Sites have been completed since 2000, with a further four currently on site. There are ten in the pipeline, at varying stages of development. Gaining agreement for Exception Sites can be a lengthy process, requiring a demonstration of need, and planning permission. To simplify the planning requirements for Exception Sites Huntingdonshire District Council have set a standard 60:40 of net developable area split between affordable and market housing. This innovative approach is resulting in more sites coming forward.

Another option available to individuals wanting to build new homes is self-build or custom build homes on small plots. The interest in self-build and custom build in Huntingdonshire has been significant. By 30<sup>th</sup> October 2019 there had been 198 registrations of interest for self or custom build since HDC instituted the register in April 2016 and 172 exemptions have been granted from the Community Infrastructure Levy on the grounds of the development being for self or custom housebuilding. The Council will consider the disposal of small parcels of land in its ownership for self-build if they are not suitable for larger housing development.

Huntingdonshire District Council is supporting the development of the first Community Land Trust in the District at Great Staughton<sup>xxiv</sup>, a development that will be owned by the local community and managed and developed by a Registered Provider, with the aim of providing

a mix of affordable rent and shared ownership. The Council will evaluate the progress of the first Community Land Trust in Huntingdonshire, learning the lessons from what has worked well and less well in bringing this forward, in order to support future initiatives of this kind.

Villages, small and medium size enterprises and individuals benefit from the advice and guidance provided to them by Council officers for these various types of essentially community-based developments. This type of housing can make an important contribution to delivering much needed homes, particularly as a means of sustaining village life, and enabling villages to adapt and evolve without losing their essential character. Recognising this the Council will reflect on how we can improve the guidance we provide, including signposting to other advice hubs supporting community led housing

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 1.12. The Council expects that where affordable housing is contemplated typically Rural Exception sites will be progressed, but will also support the development of suitable smaller sites supported or led by the local community or meeting a need for specialist housing.**
- 1.13. The Council will strengthen the guidance and support provided to community led or supported sites to assist in accelerating delivery.**
- 1.14. The Council will consider the use of its own assets for key worker housing, and for self-build where these are not suitable for larger developments.**

## **2. Homes to enable People to live independent and healthy lives**

Having a decent home of your own is the bedrock to creating stability and security in life. This section looks at various pathways through which people can achieve this, acknowledging that a home can take a variety of forms, depending on people's circumstances or preferences.

The broader environment in which people live also contributes to their sense of health and wellbeing. Building well designed good places to live which retain the vitality of towns and villages, connecting people to those things that are important to them, is a theme that ran through the first section on building new homes.

The basic requirements for a home have changed over time as expectations change. The experience of lockdown in response to the threat of a Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the importance of digital connectivity for working, staying in touch with friends and family, and providing technological support to keep vulnerable people safe in their own homes. It has also increased the value of gardens and nearby green space for a sense of wellbeing when people are spending more time in their homes. The extent to which these changes will be long term and will require new approaches to the requirements within a home environment is a future challenge for all tenures.

## ***Homelessness and rough sleeper prevention***

### Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Strategic Priorities for Huntingdonshire

#### Priority 1: Preventing Homelessness

Priority 2: Providing appropriate temporary accommodation and aiming to reduce its overall use by securing accommodation for people who are homeless

Priority 3: Establishing effective partnerships, working arrangements and support to those threatened by homelessness, to improve their resilience and reduce the risk of homelessness occurring

The Homeless Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) has brought about a shift in approach to addressing homelessness in Huntingdonshire, placing a much greater emphasis on prevention and co-operation with other agencies. The Council's Homeless and Rough Sleeping Strategy<sup>xxv</sup> sets out this new approach within the national and local context.

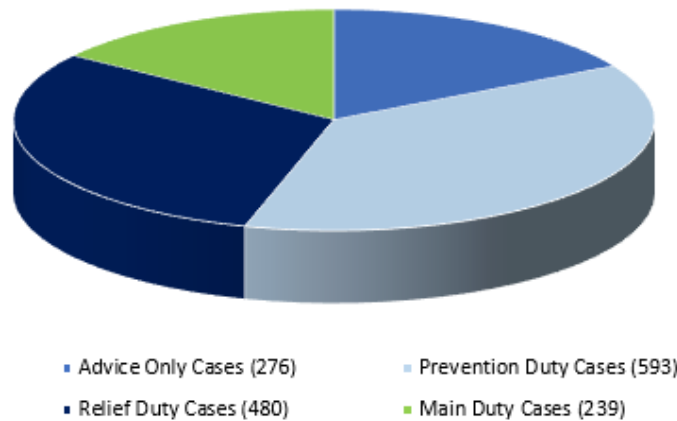
The Council invested in a restructured and increased homelessness prevention service at the time of the introduction of the new Act, working collaboratively with other public agencies engaged in the prevention and resolution of homelessness. Local policies, projects and transformative programmes adopted in Huntingdonshire shaped the public service response to homelessness.

Key amongst these has been:

- The Homelessness Trailblazer Programme – reviewing the pathways through which people become homeless and establishing new pathways to prevention.
- Working with the County Council on their Housing Related Support Strategy and the possible opportunities to redesign or reconfigure models of delivery.
- Adopting a “Think Communities” approach which seeks to transform multi-agency working together, and “Project Pathways” which aims to restructure services for vulnerable individuals to prevent a revolving door of presentations to different agencies.

The HRA requires local authorities to go through staged interventions with households presenting as homeless. The following chart shows the split of households that were assisted at each of these stages of intervention

## Number of Homeless Applications Opened At the Various Duty Stages, Huntingdonshire 2018/19



This staged approach gives the opportunity for the Council, working with other agencies, to resolve a household's potential homelessness in a wider range of ways, detailed in the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Review and Strategy. For those households that reach the relief stage and those that go on to the main duty stage, where the Council has a statutory duty to provide accommodation, the availability of socially rented housing is a key determinant to securing accommodation, underscoring the impact that housing delivery has on homelessness.

The Lettings Policy is in the process of being revised as a joint document, with other local authorities in the sub-region, in the light of the Homelessness Reduction Act, and is due for completion in 2020. The Letting Policy ensures that those households that legislation states must be prioritised, including those owed certain homelessness duties, are offered sufficient priority.

The Council has committed to ending the use of Bed and Breakfast for homeless households for whom it owes a duty to provide emergency accommodation. Huntingdonshire District Council have successfully worked with Housing Associations in the district to increase the availability of temporary housing, and also increased the use of nightly paid self-contained units and are on track to achieve this target. A further short-term let scheme is in the pipeline to be delivered in 2020 with a partner housing association, by redesigning and redesignating an outdated elderly persons scheme. This will add further to the stock of short-term units available to the Council.

The numbers of rough sleepers in Huntingdonshire are relatively small because rough sleepers tend to congregate in larger urban areas. In November 2019 the estimate was 4 men aged over 25. The Council successfully combined with East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire, neighbouring Districts with similar characteristics, to secure Government funding to pilot a homeless street outreach team, to support rough sleepers to address a range of issues. This initiative will be evaluated to consider the ongoing need for this type of service in the future.



Priority Action for Housing:

- 2.1. **The Council will monitor the achievement of the key objectives agreed in the Homelessness and Rough Sleepers Review and Strategy through an annual action plan and adapt as necessary.**
- 2.2. **The Council will adopt a revised lettings policy.**
- 2.3. **The Council will evaluate the pilot Rough Sleeper Initiative.**

### ***Housing with support***

#### ***Housing with support - definitions***

- General needs . People living in their own homes with or without support.
- Housing with Support. Usually with off-site or some on-site support that promotes independent living in retirement homes or sheltered housing.
- Housing with care –enhanced supported/sheltered housing with on-site support 24/7.
- Residential care bed spaces – provides intensive care and nursing support.

People can benefit from supported housing for a range of reasons where they may struggle to cope with living independently without some level of support. Sometimes this will have previously been provided by families, friends, or others. People can be supported in a number of ways, ranging from housing specifically designed with specific needs in mind to visiting support that promotes independent living. The earlier section on building new homes highlighted the necessity to work closely with Health and Social Care partners to ensure that new housing provision is designed with models of care in mind. Linked to this is the importance of Registered Providers who deliver and manage specialist housing for older people and other specialist needs being involved as partners in forward planning for future needs in Huntingdonshire.

The Council's Housing Options and Advice service is engaged in work with colleagues from the County and other agencies looking at options and future commissioning of services that help individuals or families to be able to sustain their accommodation, or set up their own homes, or live independently, or provide ongoing support. A Housing Related Support Strategy is due for publication shortly, and the implications for Huntingdonshire will need to be reviewed and understood.

Most older people continue to live in their own homes, with varying levels support to enable them to live independently. The majority of older people in Huntingdonshire are owner occupiers with 73% of 65-75 years old householders owning their homes outright, and a further 10% owning with a mortgage. The 18% that rent are most likely to be in socially

rented accommodation, particularly if they are a single person <sup>xxvi</sup> As models of care evolve it is becoming more typical for older people to be cared for in their own homes for as long as possible, and the size and design of homes is important in enabling this.

There are a range of choices for older people looking to move into accommodation that better meets their circumstances. Many are not aware that there are choices other than residential care for those finding it difficult to remain in their existing homes. To help people explore and understand the options that are available the Council will support the Housing Options for Older People (HOOP)<sup>xxvii</sup> initiative to enable residents to make informed choices.

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 2.4. **When published, review the implications for Huntingdonshire District Council of the County Council's Housing Related Support Strategy.**
- 2.5. **The Older Peoples Housing Strategy will be updated to reflect changing patterns of care, identify gaps in provision, and determinants of successful schemes in Huntingdonshire District Council and elsewhere.**
- 2.6. **The Council will support and publicise the availability of the Housing Options for Older People scheme.**

### ***Helping people to live independently in their own home***

The Council is committed, working with our partners in Health and Social Care, to assist people to remain in their own homes and live independently, wherever possible. The Council has worked jointly with Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire Council to agree the 'Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations and Repairs Policy'<sup>xxviii</sup>. This policy recognises the crucial role housing can play in promoting physical and mental health and wellbeing, and outlines eligibility, and the criteria for improvements funded through the Disabled Facilities Grant. The policy aims to provide for a consistent approach across the County as to how councils meet their statutory responsibilities and make judgements about the best use of resources for all agencies involved in the care and support provided to enable adults and children to live independently in their own homes.

Huntingdonshire District Council is signed up to a County wide Handy Person's scheme which is a key contributor to enabling people to live independent and health lives, reducing falls in older people, and facilitating discharges from hospital. The service delivers low level interventions such as minor repairs and maintenance tasks, safety checks around the home, and referral services for additional help or support.

The allocation for Disabled Facilities Grants is passed on to District Councils via the Government Funded Better Care Fund. In 2019/20 Huntingdonshire received an allocation of £1.3m for the year, which was insufficient to meet demand and which was topped up by almost £1m directly from Council resources. This is a significant investment by the Council in aids and adaptations for the local population.

In Huntingdonshire residents who qualify for a Disabled Facilities Grant are encouraged to have the work carried out through the local Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency (CHIA)<sup>xxix</sup>. The Agency will assist people to apply for grants and loans, design and organise work, obtain quotes, supervise the work on site and complete all of the administrative support required to enable a person to maximise their independence in their own home, for which they charge of fee. The staff in the agency work closely with district council officers, Occupational Therapists, and other professionals.

The following table shows how the amount spent by the Council on Disabled Facilities Grants has increased year on year, with the proportion of direct investment by the Council increasing exponentially in the last 3 years. This is for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants only as the Council do not have the financial capacity for discretionary spend. There are historic reasons for this. Nonetheless with such a significant investment it is prudent for the Council to periodically review the reasons for this level of spend and any actions to either reduce spend or free up resources to accommodate greater flexibility.

Year	Better Care Fund Allocation	HDC DFG Budget	Final year spend	CHIA Fees (included in final year spend)
2015/16	£ 549,000	£ 1,545,000	£ 1,435,089	£ 142,756
2016/17	£ 1,018,751	£ 1,400,000	£ 1,584,398	£ 186,373
2017/18	£ 1,118,716	£ 1,418,716	£ 2,386,944	£ 325,443
2018/19	£ 1,150,583	£ 1,900,000	£ 2,395,552	£ 336,212
2019/20	£ 1,315,029	£ 2,246,000	£ 2,217,435	£ 318,795

Priority Action for Housing

- 2.7. The Council will review the reasons for higher Disabled Facilities Grant spend and scope to make changes.**

### ***Gypsy and Traveller sites and houseboat moorings***

Not everyone chooses to live in a bricks and mortar home, and in Huntingdonshire the Gypsy and Traveller Community and Houseboat dwellers will have specific requirements for their choice of living accommodation.

Huntingdonshire has well-established gypsy and traveller community and Council has an effective planning policy for granting permanent planning permission for sites which meet a criteria-based approach. 'The Cambridgeshire Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Assessment 2016' <sup>xxx</sup>assessed the need for additional pitches in Huntingdonshire. The five year target has been met by the Local Plan examination and as a consequence Huntingdonshire do not have any future sites designated for pitches. Applications for pitches in suitable locations away from existing settlements, but sufficiently close to local health services and primary schools, will continue to be considered against policy requirements.

The demand for residential houseboat moorings is relatively small and is similarly assessed against policy criteria which ensure that granting permission for permanent mooring is assessed against the impact on nearby settlements and access to services for houseboat dwellers.

A review of the Gypsy and Travellers accommodation needs is underway - including houseboat dwellers, and the findings will be taken into account once completed.

Priority Action for Housing:

- 2.8. **Continue with existing policies as agreed in the Local Plan with clear signposting to policies on the Council's website.**
- 2.9. **Have regard to the conclusions of the Gypsy and Travellers Review.**

### **3. Working in Partnership to achieve shared objectives**

In the delivery of housing to meet the needs of the District the Council have a statutory role as the planning authority. But the influence that the Council can have is potentially much wider than this and depends to a large extent on the approach the Council takes to working with other agencies with a role in the provision of housing. Building strategic relationships that support the delivery of the Council's housing ambitions is part of a long-term commitment to work collaboratively with partners for the benefit of Huntingdonshire. This section selects those that will be key to supporting housing delivery and to addressing the housing needs of existing residents. Annex 2 sets out a fuller map of key partnerships and forums.

### ***Working Strategically to accelerate delivery***

The Council's housing ambitions are shared by other agencies, unsurprisingly as Huntingdonshire's housing market operates within a much broader national and regional context of housing supply that is insufficient to meet demand. This is evidenced through complementary strategies that encompass Huntingdonshire. The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority Housing Strategy 2018<sup>xxxi</sup> has a target to deliver 100,000 new homes by 2022, of which 40% are affordable. Its strategic priorities include accelerating delivery, placemaking and expanding housing choices. The Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority recently commissioned an Economic Review which confirmed the strategic importance of Huntingdonshire, particularly its market towns, for the delivery of housing to support economic growth. Looking wider the Government have set out ambitions for the Cambridge, Milton Keynes Oxford Arc identifying Huntingdonshire as an area with significant potential.

Affordable Housing in Huntingdonshire is delivered through Registered Providers, mainly Housing Associations. Registered Providers are increasingly consolidating their developments in target geographic areas, and in Huntingdonshire these are the Housing Associations whom the Council wants to build and sustain a good long term working relationship with, based on an understanding that there a shared aim to deliver much needed affordable housing and low-cost home ownership in the District. A productive relationship will be built on mutual respect, an ongoing dialogue, and clarity of shared strategic objectives.

Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have other key fora concerned with housing issues as Annex A shows. The Housing Board for Cambridgeshire Peterborough and West Suffolk which brings together local authorities, including Cambridgeshire County Council, and housing association representatives has been notably instrumental in developing a consistent sub-regional approach where this is beneficial, and provides a forum to reflect and learn from good practice. This has provided a useful platform to agree strategic joint working between agencies, and has paid real dividends in areas like homelessness, understanding the links between housing health and social care, and delivering build standards that help to maintain those who need support in their own homes as long as possible.

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 3.1. The Council will continue to build and sustain long term strategic relationships with key partners in the delivery of housing ambitions.**

### ***Accessing Funding***

Funding streams evolve over time, and Huntingdonshire District Council will make sure that it keeps up to date with available funding and any new or emerging funding priorities. This is not an entirely passive process. The Council will have an ongoing dialogue with funding agencies to make them aware of ongoing housing pressures, and where funding can be best

targeted. For housing delivery funding from Homes England, the Combined Authority and the National Infrastructure fund all provide potentially valuable resources to access. This can be for direct delivery of housing in the form of grants, for infrastructure and to unlock sites, and to facilitate a joint approach to housing delivery through support for Joint Ventures. The Council has worked in collaboration with Registered Providers to secure investment for 100% affordable housing on sites in the District. More can be achieved if the Council works to facilitate funding that addresses ambitions or gaps in provision in the District.

New funding streams are emerging at the time of writing to redress the economic impact of the Covid-19 lockdown. The Government have announced a Green Homes Grant to retrofit existing homes also which also contributes to the Net Zero Carbon target and have indicated the importance of construction industry contribution to re-stimulating the economy. The Government have also announced an intention to provide a decarbonisation fund for social housing.

Priority Actions for Housing:

**3.2. The Council will take a pro-active approach to securing funding to assist the delivery of housing development.**

***Use of Assets***

Huntingdonshire District Council own several small and medium sites within the District with the potential for a small number of homes. The Council is evaluating how these can be used to further the priorities for housing. A number of options will be considered, and the Council will want to make sure it makes the best use of these assets to deliver against its priorities. This is most likely to mean exploring options for delivering affordable housing and market rental housing, self-build and custom build, and key worker housing, encompassing a range of potentially different products.

In the case of market rented housing companies experience elsewhere has shown that once costs such as voids, arrears and management costs are factored in local authority housing companies with modest portfolios cover their costs but rarely make a significant profit from rents, in large part because of the requirement to pay back borrowing incurred to finance the build. (Borrowing rules for the Public Works Loans Board are also changing to make it much more difficult for local authorities to make a profit from borrowing and reinvesting). The Council will continue to explore alternative options for delivering the ambition of providing good quality market rental housing on its sites, alongside other priority tenures.

Bringing sites forward is a complex process which includes gaining planning permission, site investigations, design and build out of the site and management of the properties. The Council does not have the capacity or expertise in-house to develop or manage these sites directly itself and will be looking to do this in partnership with others. Furthermore, in today's uncertain economic climate the Council is better able to control risk with an experienced partner.

The form of partnership working entered into will depend on final decisions as to how many sites are assessed as suitable for development, and whether this is sufficient to warrant the cost and complexity of forming a separate legal entity to deliver housing on sites, or whether better outcomes can be achieved through partnership agreements on individual sites with Registered Providers. The earlier section on productive partnership working is worth reflecting on here. Ultimately the Council will enter into the type of agreement that best delivers the housing outcomes sought. Different sites are likely to lend themselves to different mixes of tenure.

The primary motive for the use of these sites is to deliver housing, rather than to deliver a capital return from sale, unless from sales to improve the viability of schemes. The Council will agree a timetable for testing the option of a partnership with a Registered Provider, and/or other providers specialising in market rental homes, to deliver a mix of housing that reflect priorities.

The Council owns other assets which currently provide an income to support delivery of Council services. If the pandemic has an impact of the viability of these other assets the Council may want to consider using some of them to deliver its housing priorities.

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 3.3. For Council owned sites the Council will determine the optimum approach for delivering against its strategic priorities.**
- 3.4. The Council will consider partnership proposals that provide best value and maximise the delivery of the Council's objectives.**
- 3.5. Owned sites that are not viable for development with a partner will be considered for disposed for self-build**

### ***Working with landlords***

The previous housing strategy concluded that a comprehensive stock condition survey carried out in 2010<sup>xxxii</sup> showed the Private Rented Sector (PRS) stock to be generally in good condition, and although there were a few homes that were unfit or in substantial disrepair, there was no special concentration and no need for an area renewal strategy. There is no evidence to suggest this position has changed.

Nevertheless, there are good reasons for the ongoing work with landlords. Typically, private sector landlords own a small number of properties<sup>xxxiii</sup> and may not be aware of their obligations and responsibilities to provide accommodation that meets statutory requirements. There are estimated to be around 500 Houses in Multiple Occupation of which 47 are licenced with the Council, with a further 7 in train. (Not all HMOs are required to be licenced). Important for the rented sector in general are the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and the requirement to meet statutory energy rating standards. The Council takes the approach of working with landlords to inform and educate about their obligations, only exceptionally taking formal enforcement action. There were 2 enforcement notices issued to landlords in the last 2 years, both speedily complied with.

A growing trend is the number of properties empty for more than 6 months in Huntingdonshire which has increased by a third in the last year to 577. The Council will monitor the interventions made by Environment Health in the private rented sector to maintain an up-to-date picture of conditions in this sector, to inform future approaches.

The Council is leading a project called the Huntingdon North Initiative<sup>xxxiv</sup> with other partners focused on the Oxmoor Estate, originally built as a social housing estate for London overspill, where the main landlord is the housing association Chorus. The estate is within the most deprived wards in Huntingdonshire. This initiative takes a multi-agency approach where services work together to build community resilience, taking a 'Think Communities' approach. This involves working collaboratively with the residents to support and maintain valued aspects of life on the estate and tackle some of the underlying challenges, encouraging community led solutions and interventions. A profile of the estate shows that the population on the Oxmoor Estate have a strong sense of community, are predominantly 'financially overstretched' and have suffered historic high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. An early result of this initiative has been a fall in recorded offences, and an identification of anti-social behaviour hotspots followed by targeted interventions. This approach to working with communities under pressure is being closely monitored and the evaluation will provide useful lessons for future work, including the role that landlords can play in improving the health and wellbeing of an area.

Priority Actions for Housing:

- 3.6. **The Council will collect data on private rented sector interventions to inform future focus.**
- 3.7. **The Council will seek to understand the reasons for the increase in empty homes and what actions, if any, could be pursued.**
- 3.8. **The Council will continue to lead the Huntingdon North Initiative including the evaluation of the effectiveness of this approach.**

### **Delivering on priorities**

This Housing Strategy sits within a suite of strategies for Huntingdonshire agreed by the Council to set clear pathways for the future. This is shown in Annex 1. The priority actions in this report are supported by an annual action plan which sets out how each priority will be delivered, responsibility for this, any key milestones, and delivery dates.



## Annex 1 Huntingdonshire District Council Strategies

Overarching Plans	Outcome Plans	Strategic Plans	Activity Plans
<b>Place Strategy to 2050 (Vision for Huntingdonshire)</b>	Local Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Asset Management Strategy</li> <li>Waste Strategy</li> <li>Housing Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate Plan</li> <li>Asset Management Plan</li> <li>Waste Minimisation Plan</li> </ul>
	Community Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Housing Strategy</li> <li>Consultation and Engagement Strategy</li> <li>Leisure and Health Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corporate Plan</li> </ul>
	Economic Growth Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Transport Strategy</li> <li>Climate Change Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Regeneration Plan</li> </ul>
<b>Vision for HDC</b>	Core Service Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workforce Strategy</li> <li>Medium Term Financial Strategy</li> <li>Commercial Investment Strategy</li> <li>Digital Strategy</li> <li>Leisure and Health Strategy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information Management Plan</li> <li>Service Plan(s)</li> </ul>

## Annex 2 Key Partnerships

Strategic	Service delivery	Housing Delivery
Cambridge and Peterborough Combined Authority	Cambridgeshire County Council	Developers including master developers
Oxford, Milton Keynes Cambridge Arc	Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency	Registered Providers including Housing Associations
Homes England	Letting Agents	Parishes
MHCLG	Private Landlords	Community Land Trusts
Housing Board for Cambridgeshire Peterborough and West Suffolk	Housing Associations	Self and Custom Build
	Home-link Board	Institutional Investors
Health and Wellbeing Board	Homelessness Trailblazer Programme	
Cambridgeshire Public Service Board	Project Pathways	
Planning Policy Forum	Huntingdon North Initiative	
	Registered Providers providing specialist accommodation	
	Ageing Well Board	

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- <sup>ii</sup> The Oxford-Cambridge Arc: government ambition and joint declaration between government and local partners. [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- <sup>iii</sup> Huntingdonshire Local Plan to 2036 (adopted 15<sup>th</sup> May 2019). [www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk)
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- <sup>v</sup> The Housing and Planning Act, 2016. [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
- <sup>vi</sup> Housing white paper 2017. [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)
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- <sup>viii</sup> MHCLG Planning for the Future statement released 20<sup>th</sup> March 2020 [www.gov.uk/mhclg](http://www.gov.uk/mhclg)
- <sup>ix</sup> MHCLG White Paper: Planning for the Future. 6<sup>th</sup> August 2020 [www.gov.uk/mhclg](http://www.gov.uk/mhclg)
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- <sup>xxv</sup> Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy to be published in 2020

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<sup>xxvi</sup> GL Hearn. Housing Needs of Specific Groups (draft April 2020, figures may change in final draft)

<sup>xxvii</sup> [www.HOOP.eac.org.uk](http://www.HOOP.eac.org.uk)

<sup>xxviii</sup> Cambridgeshire Housing Adaptations and Repairs Policy 2019

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<sup>xxxii</sup> Huntingdonshire Housing Strategy 2017-2020 [www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk](http://www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk)

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