



East Northamptonshire Housing Strategy

2006-2009

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1. Introduction

Welcome to East Northamptonshire Council's Housing Strategy for 2006 – 2009.

Our last strategy was published in 2002, and since then we have seen many changes in housing at a local and national level.

Probably the biggest priority in all of our lives is to have somewhere that we can call home - a safe, warm, and decent place to live. We want to be close to our family and friends, to be able to access a good range of services and employment, and to feel part of a community. This is about a lot more than just housing, but having access to a decent and affordable home plays a big part.

This is an exciting time for housing in Northamptonshire. The area is growing, and with new partnerships and increased funding in place to take this forward, we are faced with many new opportunities.

We also face a number of challenges:

- House prices are continuing to rise, making it harder and harder for people - especially first time buyers - to access the housing market.
- The region is experiencing continued growth and popularity.
- Household growth is increasing, pushing up housing need.
- Development opportunities are scarce and land prices expensive.

Delivering an effective housing programme in light of these issues will be challenging; but is something that we must strive for if we are to contribute to a thriving district where people want to live. Our key priorities and how we will achieve them are set out in chapter 7.

We recognise that a strategy cannot be effectively delivered in isolation, and that we will need to work with a range of organisations - and of course with our communities. We have consulted widely on the content of this strategy and on the key priorities – details of our consultation arrangements can be found in chapter 3.

We hope that you enjoy reading this document, and would welcome your views - comments can be sent to us using the Feedback form at appendix 3.

Above all, we hope that the implementation of this strategy will make a real difference to people's lives.

Yours faithfully,
David Oliver, Chief Executive.

2. East Northamptonshire Profile

East Northamptonshire is one of seven districts within the county of Northamptonshire. The district is predominantly rural with differing characteristics in the North and South. The North is made up of a network of small villages, served by larger settlements, and the market towns of Oundle and Thrapston. The South is more 'urban' with the larger towns of Raunds, Irthlingborough, Higham Ferrers and Rushden.

The population of the district is approximately 81,000, with Rushden the largest town of around 28,000 residents. There is some traditional industry in the south of the district - consisting of light engineering and footwear manufacturing – and warehousing/distribution industry close to the trunk roads.

There is good access to road links, in particular the A14 which provides links to the M1 and A1 as well as a good network of other main roads. A major rail line is accessible at Kettering and Wellingborough, which provides a fast service to London.

East Northamptonshire Council is no longer a landlord, having transferred its housing stock in 2001 to East Northamptonshire Housing, now called Spire Homes. Further details can be found in chapter 4.

As is the case in most parts of the country, house prices in the district have risen sharply in recent years – particularly in our villages. This trend is likely to continue, following the identification of Northamptonshire as a 'growth area'.

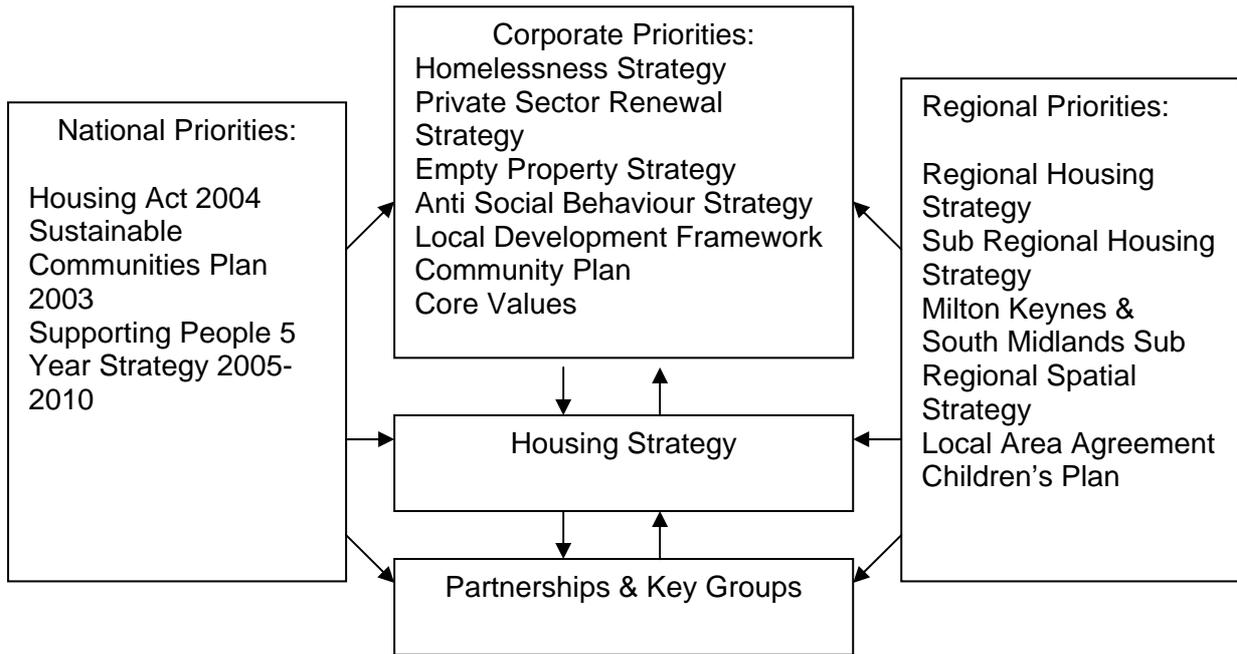
Our housing market is changing significantly – people are migrating into the district, attracted by the countryside and good road links; whilst at the same time more and more local people are being forced out of the villages where they grew up.

During the life of this strategy, and much further beyond, it will be vital for us to respond to the changing market by providing the right supply of new housing, in the right location. However, we are also aware that this needs to be balanced with services and provision for our ageing and vulnerable population.

3. The Strategic Setting

The Housing Strategy alone cannot deliver our objectives for housing, for us to do this it is essential that we work in partnership – and that the strategy links with the existing framework of national, regional, local and corporate policies and strategies. Consideration of the priorities contained within these is essential to ensure its success.

The diagram below shows where the Housing Strategy sits, in relation to other strategies, policies and partnerships.



National Priorities

In 2003 the Government published “Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future”, which sets out the vision for housing for the next 15-20 years. It outlines a wide range of objectives aimed at addressing housing needs, as part of a wider commitment to raise the quality of life in our communities. Priorities for reducing inequality, better public services, better health and education, and tackling anti-social behaviour are also included.

These priorities are set out under 5 key areas:

- Sustainable Communities
- A step change in housing supply
- New Growth Areas
- Decent Homes
- Countryside and Local Environment

As part of the future vision, the document identifies four key growth areas for targeted major new development over the next 20-30 years. Northamptonshire falls within one of these – the Milton Keynes South Midlands Growth Area. This area has been

identified as having a potential for growth due to the identified capacity for economic success. This could mean the provision of 300,000 new jobs, and 370,000 new homes up to 2031.

The preferred option is to concentrate this growth on the main urban areas:

- Milton Keynes
- Luton/Dunstable/Houghton Regis
- Bedford
- Northampton
- Wellingborough/Kettering/Corby

The plans for growth have been carried forward in the Milton Keynes South Midlands Sub Regional Strategy, and the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East Midlands. It is proposed that the North Northamptonshire area, comprising of the districts of Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby and East Northamptonshire, could accommodate approximately 52,100 new homes and 43,800 new jobs up to 2021.

Regional Priorities

To deliver the national priorities at a regional level, the Government has set up Regional Housing Boards for each of the regions in the country. These boards, made up of representatives from key organisations such as the Government Office and the Housing Corporation, are responsible for identifying and delivering housing priorities. These priorities are contained within Regional Housing Strategies.

The Regional Housing Strategy for the East Midlands was published in 2004, one of a number of key strategies making up the Integrated Regional Strategy. It sets out 16 policies aimed at delivering the vision for housing in the period up to 2010. The East Midlands is a diverse region, presenting a number of challenges such as housing affordability and supply, economic change and varying house conditions. The region also experiences varying levels of demand - with high demand and therefore high house prices in the south, and low demand and the need for regeneration in the north.

The strategy also outlines the sub-regions of the East Midlands, borne out of Regional Planning Guidance. Sub-regions are areas which are considered to share the same housing market characteristics, and cut across county boundaries. All of the districts of Northamptonshire fall within the Southern Sub-region. The Southern Sub-Region is one of the most thriving in the East Midlands; good transport links and attractive, accessible countryside - among other things - make it a popular place to live and work.

Sub-Regional Priorities

Local Authorities, partner agencies and other key organisations in the Southern Sub-Region have worked together to produce an action plan, to take forward the priorities set out in the Regional Housing Strategy in a way which is relevant to the area. It was agreed that 5 of the 16 priorities were of most relevance to the sub-region, and represented the key challenges. These can be seen below.

Southern Sub-Region 'Priority A'	Regional Housing Strategy Policy Number
Sustainable growth for the MKSM growth area	7
Access to housing and related services in rural areas and market towns	12
Meet decent homes and decent neighbourhoods standards across all tenures	5,6
Tackle causes of homelessness	9
Appropriate high quality affordable housing for all communities	1

Actions were also identified to meet the remainder of the Regional Housing Strategy priorities, and are contained within the plan.

As part of the group responsible for delivering the actions set out in the plan, East Northamptonshire Council will contribute towards meeting these priorities through this strategy.

The environment in which the growth agenda and priorities for housing will be delivered is changing. Structure Plans and Local Plans are being replaced by a suite of documents that will eventually make up a Local Development Framework. The Local Authorities in North Northamptonshire are working through a Joint Planning Unit to prepare a Core Spatial Strategy for the area. The preferred options for the strategy look at a range of issues, such as the location of new development and its integration with infrastructure, quality and sustainability of design, and biodiversity.

The council's planning and strategic housing teams are working closely together to ensure that new housing development is in line with the proposed strategy.

The councils in Northamptonshire, together with other statutory and voluntary agencies – including the Police, Primary Care Trusts, and the Probation Service – have all entered into a Local Area Agreement. This is a form of partnership working, introduced by Central Government - which promotes the alignment of priorities, work programmes and funding. The aim is to deliver better services and achieve better outcomes for customers and communities, building on the approach of the existing Local Strategic Partnerships.

There are four main 'blocks' to the Northamptonshire Local Area Agreement:

- Stronger Safer Communities
- Economic Development, Enterprise and Growth
- Children and Young People
- Healthier Communities and Older People

Within each of these blocks, specific targets have been identified - the majority of the targets relating to housing fall within the Economic Development, Enterprise and Growth block. The overall aim of these targets is to increase the supply, quality and condition of housing in Northamptonshire.

Partnerships

Housing is only one of a number of issues affecting people's quality of life. If we are to be successful in creating and maintaining sustainable communities then partnership working is essential. This involves joint working across a number of partnerships and groups, and across a number of different areas – from local to county-wide and regional. The following are the key partnerships and groups, which include housing related issues:

East Northamptonshire Local Strategic Partnership – the LSP, known as Enable, is split into a number of sub-groups: Health and Housing, Education and Lifelong learning, Environment and Infrastructure, Economic Development, and Community Safety. Each of these groups has identified a number of priorities which are set out in the 2005-2010 Community Strategy. This strategy is committed to help deliver the priorities set out under Health and Housing block of the strategy. The specific cross-cutting targets are:

- Improving access in health and housing
- Increasing prevention measures to reduce homelessness

North Northamptonshire Development Company (formerly North Northants Together and Catalyst Corby) – this is a partnership of councils, government agencies, business, health, education and voluntary sector organisations who have come together to co-ordinate regeneration and growth in North Northamptonshire.

County Housing Strategy Officers Group – this comprises Housing Strategy Officers from each of the Local Authorities in Northamptonshire. It considers strategic housing issues, identifies possible measures and solutions, and commissions research where required. Research to date includes a Key Worker Housing Needs Study, and a Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs Study. A Housing Market Assessment study is currently being conducted.

Chief Housing Officers Group – this is made up of senior housing officers from each local authority in Northamptonshire, and looks at housing issues at a strategic level.

Supporting People Core Group/Cross Authority Members Group/Commissioning Body – these Supporting People Groups agree priorities for the Supporting People Strategy, and implement these priorities at various levels.

Welland Homelessness Officers Group – the Welland group of Authorities has been working together for a number of years, looking at measures to reduce homelessness.

Learning Disability Partnership - this county wide group works to ensure that adults with learning disabilities can have greater access to choice in all aspects of their lives. The Ordinary Living Group is a sub-group tasked with bringing together housing and personal care & support providers, with the aim of enabling more people with learning disabilities to live in their own homes.

East Northamptonshire Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership – this is a multi agency group, which works towards reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

East Northamptonshire Domestic Violence Forum – a district wide group which meets to discuss issues relating to domestic violence. A representative from this group sits on the countywide forum.

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Regional Housing Group – this group meets to discuss Housing Renewal issues and implement consistent policies; including grant funding enforcement, licensing and dealing with empty properties.

NEEP – Northamptonshire Energy Efficiency Partnership; this group delivers countywide energy efficiency initiatives and seeks to assist in reducing fuel poverty.

MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Advisory group; looking at the resettlement of high risk offenders leaving prison.

Partnership working is one of the Council's core values, and will continue to underpin all of our strategies and activities.

Corporate Priorities

The Council's Corporate Plan for 2004-2007 sets out four key priority themes, these are:

- To provide a **cleaner** environment
- To achieve **safer** communities
- To encourage **healthier** communities
- To support and develop a **prosperous** local economy

These priorities are carried forward through a number of key policies and strategies, including the Housing Strategy. Those of particular relevance to this strategy are:

- The Community Strategy
- The Homelessness Strategy
- The Empty Property Strategy
- The Private Sector Renewal Strategy
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy.

The priorities contained within each of these strategies are outlined in chapter 4.

In addition there are a number of key Planning Policy documents, which are crucial in driving forward appropriate housing supply. The priorities contained within all of these are detailed later in this strategy.

Consultation

Consultation is a vital part of any new process, service, or strategy. It ensures that the community we are here to serve drives forward what we do. It can also highlight the full range of issues that need to be addressed, enabling us to focus our priorities effectively.

East Northamptonshire Housing Strategy

An event was held on 3 March 2006, to consult on the priorities for housing in East Northamptonshire. Over 60 people attended, representing a wide range of views – from statutory agencies, Parish Councillors, Housing Associations, the voluntary sector, and East Northamptonshire Councillors. A full list of consultees is available at appendix 1.

Those who attended contributed actively towards the priorities contained in this strategy. Some of the key issues raised on the day are highlighted below.

Area	Feedback	Action Plan Outcome Number
Housing supply	Lack of affordable housing generally. Appropriate S106 thresholds should be set, to ensure a supply of affordable housing from open market developments.	13
Location of affordable housing	Housing should meet local needs first; enabling people to live close to their families and places of work.	14
Housing Needs	Comprehensive needs information should be available and utilised. More accommodation is required for those with disabilities, and vulnerable people. We need to take on board aspirations, as well as need.	9
House type & size	Should reflect local needs. Homebuy values should reflect local incomes. Should provide for family growth and/or change in circumstances.	14
Infrastructure & Services	Appropriate infrastructure and transport links should be in place, to support additional housing. Development should only take place where it is sustainable – i.e. supported by services such as schools.	1
Regeneration	In addition to providing additional housing, we should also ensure that existing stock is of a decent standard.	7
Design	Affordable housing should be indistinguishable from open market housing. Density should make best use of available land, but also be appropriate to surroundings. Where possible, communities should be consulted on the design of housing. House design should be flexible; to enable future needs to be met.	14
Planning	Affordable housing should be prioritised over other forms of development, where there is an acute need. We need to encourage realistic expectations of land value.	13

East Northamptonshire Housing Strategy

Area	Feedback	Action Plan Outcome Number
Private Sector Housing	Private sector housing can also play an important part in meeting affordable housing need.	7,8

The action plan priority number relates to the priorities contained within the action plan in chapter 7, and shows how we have taken the issues forward in this strategy.

In addition to this consultation event, we have carried out further consultation at various stages of putting the strategy together. Other local authorities, and key housing agencies such as Supporting People, have commented on earlier drafts of this document.

We will review and update this strategy annually, assessing how well we are delivering the priorities contained within the Action Plan (chapter 7). For each review, we will actively consult with our partners, stakeholders and community to ensure that we are delivering what is needed.

Delivering National, Regional and Sub-Regional Objectives: Priorities:

To take forward national, regional and sub-regional priorities we will:

- Seek to take forward the priorities and actions outlined in the Sustainable Communities Plan, the Regional Housing Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the Sub-Regional Action Plan.
- Actively engage with partner organisations and key stakeholders to drive forward the growth agenda for the Milton Keynes South Midlands area, and in particular Northamptonshire.
- Work towards, as part of a wider partnership, meeting the housing targets set out in the Local Area Agreement.

To continue working in partnership we will:

- Actively engage with existing partnerships and groups, through joint working to deliver agreed objectives.
- Seek to set up new partnerships or joint working arrangements, where a need for this had been identified.

To effectively align the Housing Strategy with our corporate priorities we will:

- Actively engage with the Local Strategic Partnership, to agree priorities for housing within the Community Strategy.
- Take full account of the priorities contained within other key corporate documents, such as the Empty Property Strategy, where cross-cutting issues have been identified – and work with the appropriate department to help deliver these.

To continue actively consulting with residents, partners and key stakeholders we will:

- Review and update the Housing Strategy annually, assessing progress against the timescale for each priority.
- Publish this progress in an annual Housing Strategy Update Bulletin.
- Engage in full consultation with partners, stakeholders, and the community for each annual review.

4. Housing Services

Following a Stock Options Appraisal, the council took the decision to transfer its housing stock in 2001 to a Registered Social Landlord – Spire Homes. Spire remains the largest Registered Social Landlord owning properties in the district. Several others also own properties; including Paradigm Housing, Touchstone Housing Association, and Rockingham Forest Housing Association. In total, as at April 2006, there are 4795 units of affordable accommodation in the district; 4758 of which are rented and 37 shared ownership.

The transfer of the Council's housing stock has brought a number of benefits to the residents of the properties. These include:

- Properties managed by an organisation dedicated solely to housing.
- Access to the wide range of services offered by Spire Homes, such as their Tenant Forum.
- A £30m improvement programme delivered since 2001, including updating of, and repairs to, properties.
- Development of a 15 unit supported housing homelessness hostel.

Although no longer a landlord, the council still has many important statutory duties, responsibilities, and priorities in a number of housing service areas.

Homelessness

Reducing homelessness is a national priority for the Government, and there are a number of current key objectives:

- To reduce the use of Bed and Breakfast accommodation to zero.
- To keep levels of rough sleeping as close to zero as possible.
- In January 2005, the Government announced a target to reduce the number of households living in temporary accommodation by half, by 2010.

Homelessness is also a regional priority in the East Midlands. A Regional Homelessness Forum was set up in 2005, and already has membership from a wide range of statutory and voluntary organisations. The Government Office for the East Midlands is currently putting together a Homelessness Action Plan, which will build on the key issues identified through the forum, and set out key actions for addressing these.

The Regional Housing Board announced, in April 2006, that it would provide funding towards the co-ordination and production of a County Homelessness Strategy. This strategy will seek to look at reducing homelessness at a county level – looking at approaches, initiatives and best practice. East Northamptonshire will be fully involved, in both the production of the strategy and its implementation.

Levels of homelessness in East Northamptonshire have been steadily falling over the last 3 years:

Year	Applications	Acceptances
2003/04	334	81
2004/05	289	83
2005/06	235	95

There are many reasons why someone might find themselves homeless; the main ones in East Northamptonshire being:

- Parental / relative / friend eviction.
- Relationship breakdown.
- End of assured shorthold tenancy.

We are committed to continuing to reduce homelessness, and plan to do so through the improvement of our housing and advice service. The central focus of this will be on prevention, and will include the following:

- Measures such as the deployment of more staff on prevention, than on applications and investigation.
- Initiatives such as introducing home visits to homelessness applicants.
- Promotion of Mediation, Rent Advance, and Damage Deposit schemes.
- Tenancy support.

In addition, we have a specific initiative in place which aims to reduce the number of victims of domestic violence from becoming homeless – whilst at the same time providing support and a safe environment. ‘The Sanctuary Scheme’ provides funding and other resources to secure the homes of victims from the perpetrators of violence. The scheme only started in April 2006, but has already generated a great deal of interest, and we hope that it will be of benefit to those in this vulnerable position.

If - when a person is accepted as being homeless by the council - there are no available affordable rented properties, it is often necessary to place them into temporary accommodation. This is a far from ideal situation, often leading to further problems for the resident as they spend longer out of an unsettled home environment. We have made a commitment to meet the Government’s target of reducing the use of temporary accommodation by 50%, by 2010. We plan to achieve this through the active prevention of homelessness, and the increased use of permanent settled accommodation for all homeless people.

The council’s homelessness and housing advice service is currently run by the Paradigm Housing Group, based at the Rushden Centre in Rushden. This will be reviewed as part of the new Choice Based Lettings system of allocating affordable housing (see below), and the measures listed above will be implemented as part of the new contract.

The Council has a Homelessness strategy in place, which will be reviewed and updated in 2006. We will be inviting our partners and stakeholders to be fully involved in this process.

Choice Based Lettings

Choice Based Lettings is a way of allocating affordable housing stock. It enables those in affordable housing need to 'bid' for available advertised properties, rather than properties being allocated to them. It still ensures that those in the greatest need are given priority in accessing accommodation – but introduces an element of choice.

The Government has set a target for all local authorities to move to a Choice Based Lettings system by 2010.

The council has decided to move forward with implementation now, as we believe it will bring the following benefits:

- Easier to understand allocation process.
- Reduced voids and turnaround times.
- Generation of higher levels of interest in properties.
- More transparent decision making.
- Better information on need and demand to inform new developments.
- Creation of more settled and sustainable communities.

We will keep our residents, stakeholders and partner organisations fully informed as we move to the new system, and will be reviewing its success at all stages of implementation.

The Private Sector

Private sector housing has a crucial role to play in meeting housing need. At the same time as meeting the needs of those seeking to rent a home on the open market, it can often provide an alternative to affordable rented properties.

In 2005 there are an estimated 34,500 dwellings in East Northamptonshire, of which 78% are in private ownership. The stock is more modern than the national profile with almost 50% of the dwellings built after 1964. The majority of stock consists of detached properties, making it difficult for first time buyers to enter the property market or to find low cost private rented accommodation. This is inevitably contributing to the pressure on the affordable housing stock.

There is evidence, gathered from our Stock Condition Survey (see below), to suggest an increasing number of migrant workers in the district. The planned increase in distribution warehousing is likely to increase the number further. Given the low paid nature of the work, many of these workers may be seeking very low cost and relatively short term rented accommodation. The current limited number of single private rented properties is likely to severely limit the opportunities for the workers to find accommodation close to their employment and instead commute from surrounding towns such as Corby, Wellingborough and Kettering.

The above pressures highlight how important it is to maximise the number of available rented dwellings, and to ensure that what is available is in a decent state.

The council recently commissioned consultants, PPS, to carry out a House Condition Survey. This has now been completed, and the report issued. The report describes a number of key characteristics, which highlight why it is so important to maintain private sector stock.

- The age profile of the residents of houses in East Northamptonshire shows a higher proportion of people in the 60 -74 age group than the national average. Older residents are the most vulnerable group for much of the housing health and safety risks and are more likely to be in fuel poverty. Many of the elderly residents may be equity rich but cash poor, which will have implications for their ability to undertake repairs or maintain homes.
- There is a strong association between residents with disabilities and income; 35.3% of households which are home to someone with a disability also have a household income below £10,000 per annum. The residents of these dwellings may be disadvantaged both in terms of physical difficulty dealing with repairs and affordability of an alternative. People with disabilities may choose a range of accommodation options depending on their need, social circumstances and income. Occupiers may adapt their homes to allow them to remain independent and this is often the preferred option. If adaptations occur at an early stage it can reduce the risk of further disabilities and the need for supported or residential care.

The council provides financial assistance to the most vulnerable residents through a series of grant funding schemes. At present they are targeted at people on disabilities, low income households and the over 65s to help people carry out repairs and undertake energy efficiency measures. In addition to this, the council also gives grants for security measures and to help landlords repair properties.

The council's private sector housing team plans to further develop the grant schemes, to look at other initiatives such as equity release schemes and loans.

The stock condition survey went on to look at the general condition of stock across the district. The Housing Act 2004 introduced a new regime for assessing the suitability of housing for occupation. The new system moves away from the old fitness standard, which looked at certain features such as damp or structural stability to a risk based hazard assessment approach. The stock condition survey has shown that 7.4% of the stock i.e. 2200 homes fail to meet the minimum standard as they contain 1 or more category 1 hazard. As can be expected the older dwellings (i.e. pre 1900) have the highest failure rate, along with converted flats. All of these dwellings are within the private sector.

The private sector housing team will be giving careful consideration to how the council, other agencies and partners can assist people in maintaining their homes to a safe and healthy standard.

The council uses enforcement as a last resort when all other attempts to resolve problems have failed or where there is an emergency. The new powers of the Housing Act 2004 will assist the Council in making its decision on the most appropriate action on a case by case basis. The private sector housing team will review the housing enforcement policy to ensure it is consistent with the new powers, and is addressing the worst housing.

Empty Properties

The rehabilitation of empty properties is seen as a key part of future housing supply and an important element of the Council's Housing Strategy. Bringing empty properties back into use is a sustainable way to meet housing demand and can also regenerate surrounding communities.

Empty properties represent waste, financial expense and missed opportunity. They can attract vandals and squatters, devalue neighbouring properties and tie up the resources of local authorities. East Northamptonshire Council has a corporate commitment to work together with the private and public sector agencies to bring empty property throughout East Northamptonshire back into use. The East Northamptonshire Empty Property Strategy provides a programme for action to address identified needs.

The total number of empty properties in England was estimated by local authorities at 680,412 in 2005. According to the recent stock condition survey there may be around 740 empty dwellings across the district; however according to Council Tax records there are currently 247 properties which are registered as being long term vacant. We are currently working on an extended database, and ways of informing this, to enable us to target empty properties more effectively.

The council has developed the following objectives, contained within the Empty Property Strategy.

- Provide a framework within which an empty property and redundant buildings initiative can be developed to bring properties back into use.
- Work with a broad based partnership, utilising the skills of all sections of the community to enable a minimum of 5 homes or units to be brought back into use each year.
- Raise awareness of empty property issues

Particular importance will be placed on properties which have been empty for 6 months or more, and those which are becoming increasingly problematic within the community. In order to tackle such properties the council will establish a preferred course of action following complaints, through consultation with, and advice to, owners on various courses of action.

Where advice has not led to re-occupation of a property and where nuisance exists the council will take enforcement action. This is likely to be in the form of an Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) which will provide the council with powers to secure occupation of privately owned homes left empty without good reason. This course of action is seen as a last resort and every attempt will be made to develop new initiatives and incentives to help owners bring empty homes back into use voluntarily.

Housing Services: Priorities:

To work towards continually reducing homelessness we will:

- Work towards meeting the Government's targets regarding the use of bed and breakfast accommodation, rough sleeping, and reducing the use of temporary accommodation.
- Improve our homelessness and housing advice service, through a number of measures, with a central focus on prevention.
- Work with the East Midlands Regional Homelessness Forum to help deliver the Homelessness Action Plan.
- Contribute fully to the production and implementation of a County Homelessness Strategy.
- Review and update our Homelessness Strategy in 2006/07.

To reduce the use of temporary accommodation we will:

- Actively seek to reduce homelessness, through the measures outlined above.
- Utilise only permanent affordable housing stock where possible.

To improve our affordable housing allocation system we will:

- Introduce a Choice Based Lettings system in January 2007.
- Monitor – with our residents, partners and stakeholders – the progress and success of the new system.

To maximise decent private sector housing stock we will:

- Continue to provide financial assistance, targeted primarily at the most vulnerable properties, and most vulnerable people or those on low incomes, to carry out property repairs and undertake energy efficiency measures.
- Work towards a reduction in the number of homes which fail to meet the decent homes minimum standard.
- Continually review the Enforcement Policy, to ensure that it is addressing the worst condition housing.

To reduce the number of empty properties in the district we will:

- Work in partnership with the community towards bringing at least 5 empty properties per year back into use.
- Develop an empty property and redundant buildings initiative.
- Continually monitor and update our Empty Property Strategy.

5. Housing Needs and Housing Markets

East Northamptonshire seems a relatively affordable place to live, when compared with the rest of the East Midlands Region. The majority of the seven districts and boroughs of Northamptonshire are also considered to have 'accessible' housing markets, when compared to some parts of the country.

The split of households by tenure, across the district, is shown below:

Tenure	Owned Outright	Owned with a Mortgage	Shared Ownership	Rented from RSL*	Private Landlord	Other
Total Percent	37.4	45.3	0.2	11.7	3.6	1.8
Total Households	12,425	15,040	67	3,905	1,209	584

Source: Outside Research and Development Housing Needs Survey 2004.

* Registered Social Landlord (often known as Housing Association).

The level of households either owned outright or owned with a mortgage, of 82% - compared to the national average of 70% - would seem to indicate that there are no affordability problems within the district. However this is not the case. Research has also shown that 62.5% of single person households in East Northamptonshire cannot afford to buy their own homes.

The statistics also hide geographical differences. There is a huge difference in house price - and therefore accessibility - between the villages in the north of the district, and the towns in the south of the district. This is forcing local people to move out of the villages where they may have been brought up and where their families live. This is particularly the case for those on average, or below average incomes. In turn this can have a detrimental effect on the villages themselves - such as the loss of a strong local community, and a decline in local services as properties are purchased by those from elsewhere.

Housing and Accommodation Needs

Robust housing needs information is crucial to understanding future requirements, and there are a number of information sources available to us for this purpose. In 2004 Outside Research and Development published their Housing Needs Survey of the District's existing and predicted affordable housing needs. The survey looked at a number of key pieces of data - ranging from the migration patterns of the District's population, to income levels in relation to houses prices.

The overall conclusion for the **annual** requirement of additional affordable homes is shown below:

Backlog of Existing Need	205
Newly Arising Need	557
Supply of Affordable Units	360
Overall Shortfall Surplus	402

There are a number of factors influencing the level of need for affordable housing. As property prices continue to rise it is becoming harder for those on low or average incomes to buy their own home. This can be seen through the increasing level of interest in low cost home ownership products. The District is becoming an increasingly popular place to live, and this is putting pressure on the existing homes available, leading to a knock-on effect on affordable housing. In addition, there are an increasing number of new households forming; during the two years leading up to the publication of the Housing Needs Survey, there were 1,602 new households created.

The Housing Needs Survey, whilst a very useful information source, is based upon information available at the time it was undertaken. We recognise that it is important to maintain an ongoing understanding of the housing market, and are therefore involved in commissioning a Housing Market Assessment (as at Spring 2006). The assessment covers, and is being led by, the four Local Authority areas of North Northamptonshire – Wellingborough, Kettering, Corby and East Northamptonshire. It is hoped that the study will provide us with, among other things, a full breakdown of housing needs at town and village level. The assessment is due for completion in autumn 2006, and we will use the findings to inform our future development programme.

Not everyone has the same housing needs, and it is often necessary to undertake research for specific groups. A study has recently been commissioned by the seven district and borough councils of Northamptonshire, to look into the needs of Key Workers. This included those public sector workers employed in Education, the Police, and the Health Service. The full report is available on the website of Kettering Borough Council at www.kettering.gov.uk. We will be using the research findings to inform our development programme. A study looking at the needs of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities has recently been completed, and the findings will help our future planning.

In addition to this, there are a number of other information sources available to us, which help us to keep our information up-to-date. These include:

- Housing Register – this tells us how many people are looking for housing, where they want to live and what type of house they require.
- Village Housing Needs Surveys – these are carried out in specific villages, in consultation with the Rural Housing Enabler and the Parish Council.
- Other agencies – we work closely with other organisations such as the Probation Service, Supporting People, and the Learning Disability Partnership to understand the needs of vulnerable groups - such as children at risk.
- We are planning to conduct a review of housing for older people within the next 12 months, to help better inform our development plans. This will look at the need for housing and support for older people, where this should be and what type of accommodation is required.
- House Condition Survey – the Council recently commissioned a survey of all private sector housing. The findings have provided us with a great deal of information relating to private sector housing stock in the district; including dwellings profiles, stock condition and suggested next steps for improvements. More information relating to this can be found in chapter 4 – Housing Services.
- Choice Based Lettings – when the new system of allocating properties is implemented, we will have access to a new range of information relating to preferred house types and areas.

Information on housing needs from all of these sources is, and will continue to be used, to inform what housing we should be providing on affordable housing developments.

Gypsies and Travellers

The Housing Act 2004 placed new statutory requirements upon local authorities from 2006, regarding Gypsy and Traveller accommodation.

In addition to this, the Government has made a commitment to work towards the better and fairer treatment of Gypsies and Travellers, and has set out new objectives including the following:

- Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community living peacefully together.
- More sites in sustainable locations.
- A planning system which is fair and is effectively enforced.

The requirements for local authorities arising from the new legislation include assessing the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers, and producing a strategy to meet these needs.

The Housing Market Assessment for North Northamptonshire will look at all aspects of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs, and the conclusions will be used to inform a separate Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Strategy in 2007.

There is an additional requirement for local authorities, to identify suitable sites for Gypsies and Travellers in local development plans. The council will seek to identify suitable sites as and when need is demonstrated, by the Housing Market Assessment and other future studies.

The East Midlands Regional Housing Board recently held a bidding round for funding to improve existing sites and develop additional sites. We do not have sufficient information relating to the needs of gypsies and travellers in East Northamptonshire at this time, to be able to tap into any of this money. However, there is a second bidding round planned for the autumn of 2006 and we are hoping to have enough information from the Housing Market Assessment to submit a bid.

In the meantime, a number of interim arrangements will be in operation. We will seek to identify 'hotspots' – areas where there may be particular pressures – and alleviate these pressures in a way that best meets the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community.

In the year ending 31 March 2005, there were 12 unauthorised encampments in East Northamptonshire - 4 of these were on privately owned land, and 8 on council owned land.

Rural Housing

Affordable housing need is often most acute in villages and rural areas, where property prices are at their most expensive. This is particularly apparent in East Northamptonshire – a predominantly rural district. A lack of affordable housing in rural areas can have a number of detrimental effects, including the following:

- People cannot afford to remain in the villages where they grew up, and are forced to move elsewhere – often away from their families and employment.
- Creation in some cases of ‘commuter villages’, whereby all the residents work – and undertake shopping and recreational activities – outside of the village.
- A potential decline of village services and facilities.
- The risk of unbalanced communities.

We will work with Parish Councils and the Northamptonshire Rural Housing Enabler, to identify affordable housing needs in villages and rural areas. Where a need exists we will work with Registered Social Landlords and Developers to deliver affordable housing, specifically for local people.

The Rural Housing Enabler is a person employed by Northamptonshire ACRE to work with villages to bring forward affordable housing where needed. Over the next 12 months, we will be working with the Rural Housing Enabler to develop a protocol for delivering housing in rural areas. This will address issues such as the process for identifying housing need, and consultation.

Special Needs

Some people require additional support to help them to retain their independence. Housing related support services are funded through a national programme called ‘Supporting People’.

Supporting People aims to enable vulnerable people to retain or achieve independent living, through supported or sheltered housing. This includes services for older people, the homeless, young people, people with mental health problems and people with learning disabilities. Support can take a number of forms, from residential care such as sheltered housing, to what is known as ‘Floating Support’. Floating Support is support which is provided to people in their own homes, by a dedicated support worker.

The Northamptonshire Supporting People team have produced a 5 year strategy (2005 to 2010) which sets out their priorities for each of the vulnerable groups mentioned above. They will work with their partners, all of the local authorities in Northamptonshire plus statutory agencies and providers, to deliver these priorities.

The key priorities contained within the strategy are shown below:

Client Group	Priorities
Older People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Commissioning of further Very Sheltered Housing schemes, to include services for people with higher level needs. - Increase Extra Care Services. - Fund more floating support or dispersed warden services.
Learning Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Extend low-level floating support services. - Expand the availability of shared ownership properties. - Develop shared models of support and care.
Physical Disabilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduce the level of funding in high cost units. - Part-fund a new transitional supported housing scheme in Northampton.

East Northamptonshire Housing Strategy

Client Group	Priorities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improve the ability of services to meet the needs of service users.
Mental Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure consistent availability of low-level floating support. - Ensure that services are focused on maximising independence. - Improve quality of life, by reducing the number of shared accommodation in any one scheme.
Domestic Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure floating support services are available in each district in the county. - In the long-term, possibly part-fund a service to meet the needs of men who are victims of domestic violence. - Ensure that service providers link effectively with housing agencies, particularly when looking at move-on accommodation.
Young People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure floating support services are available to young people across the county. - Expand and remodel existing inappropriate supported housing. - Reduce the number of services where large numbers of young people are living in one location.
Teenage Parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased services for teenage parents across the county.
Homelessness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensure that supported provision remains available across the county. - Reshape existing provision to ensure services are delivering good quality.
Ex-Offenders/At Risk of Offending	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop a countywide floating support service for at risk offenders. - Improve the ability of services to work with and support low and medium level offenders.

* Source: Northamptonshire Supporting People Five Year Strategy 2005-2010. Please note that the above is not an exhaustive list of the Supporting People priorities.

We will work with Supporting People towards meeting the priorities in the five year strategy. We will also continually monitor the needs of, and provision for, vulnerable groups in the district - through means such as the Housing Market Assessment and specialist studies.

A national review of Supporting People has recently been carried out, and it is likely that the outcome of this will have implications for the way that support is delivered. It is too early to know what, if any, changes will be put in place – but we are committed to working with the Northamptonshire Supporting People team through the transitional period, to ensure that the needs of vulnerable people are met.

The council is currently involved in, or planning, a number of projects - which seek to deliver outcomes for vulnerable people through partnership working.

Homelessness – we are continually monitoring levels of homelessness, and identifying specific areas of need. In April 2005, we started more in-depth measuring through the Homelessness Forum – looking at patterns of homelessness using a number of criteria such as age, address and family situation. This is helping us to target homelessness prevention activity effectively, and also informs new developments.

Learning Disabilities – the council is part of the Northamptonshire Ordinary Living Group, which seeks to enable more people with learning disabilities to live in their own home. An Ordinary Living Locality Group has been set up for East Northamptonshire, to take forward the aims at a local level. The key priorities are:

- Identifying those with a learning disability in the district, who need or wish to receive support in their own home.
- To look at ways of enabling better access to services and advice for people with learning disabilities.
- To look at ways of securing accommodation.

Ex Offenders / At Risk of Offending – we are part of the Eastern Area Prolific and Priority Offender Management Group. This group seeks to take forward a co-ordinated approach, between all parties involved, to preventing offending and rehabilitation. The council is a founder member of the Rose Project (formerly HOPE – High Offending Prisoner Enterprise), which is a locally based initiative looking to support offenders and ex-offenders through positive changes to their lifestyle.

Older Persons – over the next year we will be conducting a review of accommodation for older people in East Northamptonshire. We are aware that some of the existing provision is outdated, unpopular or unsuitable. We will seek information relating to the housing needs and aspirations of older people in the district, and look at options for meeting these. Such options could include the provision of new replacement accommodation which is more suitable, or working with support agencies to enable older people to live independently in their own homes.

There are a number of groups for which we do not have specific projects set up. The needs of these groups will be addressed through our ongoing collaborative county-wide work with partners and stakeholders. We will seek to develop specific initiatives where the need is identified.

Housing Needs and Housing Markets: Priorities:

To we have robust housing need information we will:

- Conduct, as part of the North Northamptonshire group of local authorities, a full housing market assessment of the North Northamptonshire area.
- Analyse the information arising from the recent Key Worker Housing Needs and Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs studies.
- Conduct village housing needs surveys, in conjunction with the Northamptonshire Rural Housing Enabler and Parish Councils.
- Analyse the findings of the recent House Condition Survey, to better understand the need for work within the private sector.
- Utilise the new Choice Based Lettings system, to gain information on housing needs and aspirations.
- Assess, through the Housing Market Assessment, the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, and produce a strategy for meeting these needs.
- Use the information arising from all of the above, to inform affordable housing developments which fully respond to local and sub-regional needs.

To meet the needs of vulnerable groups we will:

- Work closely with Supporting People, statutory organisations, and voluntary bodies, to understand the needs of vulnerable groups.
- Work with Supporting People to take forward the priorities outlined in their 5 year strategy.
- Develop, as part of the East Northamptonshire Ordinary Living Locality Group, priorities and actions for those with learning disabilities.
- Conduct a review of housing for older people in the district.
- Develop specific projects to meet the needs of other vulnerable groups, where the requirement for this is identified.

6. Resources and Development

Resources

The Government has embarked upon a long term strategy to achieve a step change in the supply of affordable housing, and funding has increased significantly as a result. Furthermore, following the recommendations in Kate Bakers Review of Housing Supply, there is a commitment to look at increasing it again as part of the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review.

The national housing budget for 2006-08 is known as the Single Capital Pot. The Single Capital Pot is managed and administered regionally by bodies known as Regional Housing Boards. The total amount of funding available for the East Midlands Region for the next two years is £268.1m.

The East Midlands Regional Housing Board has consulted upon a set of recommendations for allocation of this funding. The key areas agreed for expenditure are:

- £39,475,000 to bring Local Authority owned properties up to the 'Decent Homes Standard'.
- £42.5m to enable Local Authorities to meet the target of 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector to be living in decent accommodation by 2010.
- £18.5m for the development of pilot projects to address areas affected by low demand.
- £1m to support the work of sub-regional housing groups.
- £165,075,000 to support the delivery of new affordable homes.
- £0.5m to support a programme of housing research.
- £1,050,000 to fund increased provision for gypsies and travellers.
- A balanced spread of funding between villages and market towns, with a target for additional affordable homes of 800 units.
- A minimum of £10m to be invested in Supported Housing schemes.

A breakdown of the funding can be seen below:

	2006-07	2007-08	Total
Decent Homes in the Social Sector	£20,000,000	£19,475,000	£39,475,000
Renewing and Revitalising the Private Sector	£21,000,000	£21,500,000	£42,500,000
Low Demand and Housing Market Renewal	£9,250,000	£9,250,000	£18,500,000
New Affordable Housing	£73,275,000	£91,800,000	£165,075,000
Role of the sub-regions	£500,000	£500,000	£1,000,000
Provision for Gypsies and Travellers	£525,000	£525,000	£1,050,000
Research	£250,000	£250,000	£500,000
Total	£124,800,000	£143,300,000	£268,100,000

* Source: "Investment in Housing in the East Midlands" 2006-08 – Regional Housing Board Recommendations.

The majority of the funding will be administered by the Housing Corporation, through the National Affordable Housing Programme (NAHP) – this was known in previous years as the Approved Development Programme (ADP). For the 2006-08 period, the Housing Corporation is looking to allocate £3.9bn nationally - the largest programme in its history – with approximately £179m going to the East Midlands. It is hoped this will result in around 4,300 new homes. This is a significant increase in funding for the region, which was £126m for 2004-06.

This funding is split further into sub-regions; areas which have been identified as having similar characteristics and/or housing markets. East Northamptonshire falls within the Southern sub-region, which has an indicative grant allocation for 2006-08 of £70m.

Bids were made to the Housing Corporation in November 2005 by Registered Social Landlords, and Local Authorities were asked to provide information and comments on these.

The following developments in East Northamptonshire, totalling £6.2m of grant, are to be funded in 2006-08:

Location	Proposed Units	Tenure
Rushden	74	Rent and Homebuy
Stanwick*	48	Rent and Homebuy
Woodford	20	Rent and Homebuy
Raunds	13	Rent and Homebuy
Irthlingborough*	18	Homebuy
Oundle	15	Rent and Homebuy
Individual Units	8	Rent and Homebuy
Total	196	

* Reserve Bids. These will be funded subject to the developments progressing satisfactorily, and the Housing Corporation having sufficient funding available.

In addition to the above programme, there are also a number of other ways in which we can maximise investment into affordable housing in the district.

East Northamptonshire Council has a Capital Budget for expenditure on affordable housing. It is planned that this will be spent over the next three years in line with the following agreed priorities:

- Rural Exception Sites. These often cannot attract funding through the Housing Corporation bidding process, as typically they take longer to develop than non exception site developments.
- Developments which seek to meet a special requirement – such as a hostel or provision for older people.
- General developments, where projects are not available which meet the above criteria.

This will hopefully provide some additional affordable housing, above that to be funded by the Housing Corporation.

Development

The council owns little land or property with the potential for residential development, but seeks to 'enable' the provision of affordable housing through the function of the strategic housing team. This involves working closely with Registered Social Landlords, private developers, landowners and others to build up an ongoing programme of housing developments.

It is not possible to give an absolute definition of affordable housing, as it depends on a number of factors – such as the local housing market, and the income levels of those looking to purchase in a particular area. We can, however, set out the following guidelines:

- Affordable Housing should enable those who are struggling to access the private rented sector, or purchase their own home, the opportunity to do so. Therefore we would expect the rent or open market value of an affordable property to generally be below that of the private rented sector or open market – for comparable properties in any given area.
- Variance to this will normally only be acceptable where the affordable housing is targeted at a specific needs group, such as key workers, where affordability will be calculated in accordance with income.
- Affordability levels for low cost home ownership developments should be agreed with the Strategic Housing Team - and will be based upon evidence relating to income levels, comparable open market property values and housing needs information.
- Affordable housing, to be defined as such, should remain so in perpetuity, and arrangements should be in place to ensure that this is the case.

In the last two years, 140 units of affordable housing have been, or are in the process of being, delivered, by Registered Social Landlords working in partnership with developers. The completed and ongoing developments are shown below:

Location	Units	Tenure
Little Addington	3	Shared Ownership
Easton-on-the-Hill	8	Rent & Shared Ownership
Higham Ferrers	33	Rent & Shared Ownership
Collyweston	9	Rent & Shared Ownership
Brigstock	14	Rent & Shared Ownership
Denford	3	Shared Ownership
Deenethorpe	5	Rent
Woodford	18	Rent & Shared Ownership
Nassington	9	Rent & Shared Ownership
Irthlingborough	12	Rent
Individual Units	32	Rent & Shared Ownership
Total	146	

It is expected that the proposed housing 'mix' for each development is agreed in response to local housing needs and circumstances. In addition to providing housing which is affordable, we will encourage all new developments to respond to other requirements – such as the needs of older persons, or those with a disability. Housing should be designed so that it is as 'flexible' as possible – able to provide not only for the first tenants or owners, but also for those in many years to come.

The range of affordable housing products available has increased significantly over the last few years, and now offers more flexibility than the traditional rent and shared ownership options. This is intended to provide increased opportunity to access good quality, appropriate affordable accommodation - and allow more people to purchase their own home. The product range currently available includes:

Rented Homes:

- Rent – permanent housing for rent, at a subsidised level.
- Intermediate Rent – housing for rent at a level between affordable rent (above) and market rent. This is usually offered as part of a development for Key Workers.

Homes for Sale:

- Shared Ownership – a percentage of a property is purchased by the applicant, with rent paid on the remaining part. This product is no longer funded by the Housing Corporation.
- Social Homebuy – available for current affordable housing tenants who would like to buy an equity share in their home, and pay rent on the remainder.
- New Build Homebuy – as per shared ownership; new properties which are available for applicants to purchase an equity share, and pay rent on the remainder.
- Open Market Homebuy – provides a loan to purchase a home on the open market. The loan is usually around 25% of the purchase price. A mortgage is secured for the remaining 75%.

The New Build Homebuy and Open Market Homebuy products will be managed by a single organisation, known as a Zone Agent. This organisation will be the main point of contact for anyone interested in these home ownership options, on behalf of the developing Registered Social Landlord. They will take on all of the marketing activities - such as providing information and advice to potential applicants, and managing a waiting list for their 'zone'. The Zone Agent for Northamptonshire, for the 2006-08 period, is Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association (BPHA). BPHA will work closely with the Council, and with Registered Social Landlords developing new housing across the County.

This arrangement will give people looking to access low cost home ownership a much simpler way of finding out what is available, and then making an application. It will also provide valuable data on levels of need for these products, which will help to inform future developments.

Our priority, in looking at tenure and house type, is to create mixed and balanced communities. We will seek not only a mixture of house types to meet local need, but also a mix of tenures to ensure that communities are made up of households with varying income and other circumstances. This will ensure better integration into the existing area, and future sustainability. Sites coming forward for development must propose a balanced mix to meet this priority.

Regeneration

There are a number of areas within the district which have been targeted for regeneration. One of these is the Highfield Road area of Rushden, which is part of a specific regeneration initiative – the 'Highfield Improvement Project'.

The project is seeking deliver a improvements in a number of areas - including health, education, community involvement, and the living environment. There is an action plan in place, and the strategic housing team is fully committed to help the steering group to meet the targets set out in it.

Any development in regeneration areas will be considered carefully in conjunction with the Council's regeneration priorities; to ensure that it meets wider priorities.

Planning

The Council's Strategic Housing Team sits within Planning Services, and so is able to work closely with the Planning Policy and Development Control Teams to maximise affordable housing provision.

As outlined above, Housing Corporation funding has been secured for up to 196 homes in 2006-08, but this is clearly insufficient provision to meet either the targets set out in the Core Spatial Strategy – or the continually increasing need.

The planning system has a crucial role to play in housing provision, not just in terms of housing supply – but also through the creation of mixed and balanced communities. To provide a national planning policy framework for housing, the Government is currently consulting on a new Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3): Housing. This will eventually replace Planning Policy Guidance Note 3 (PPG3), and Planning Circular 6/98: Planning and Affordable Housing. Some of the key areas addressed through PPS3 are summarised below:

- **Local Development Frameworks** – these should set out a strategy for housing provision, within the context of relevant sub-regional housing markets. Development plan documents relating to housing should have regard to local strategies, and local needs information.
- **Allocating and releasing land for housing** – site allocation development plan documents should always include at least five years supply of land for development, with an overall 15 year projection.
- **Efficient use of land** – in particular a target for at least 60% of additional housing to be provided on brownfield land by 2008. Local authorities should develop density policies for their local area, in consultation with local stakeholders and communities.
- **Appropriate household type** – planning at site level should seek a broad mix of house types and tenures in accordance with identified need.
- **Affordable housing** – there are a wide range of objectives under this heading; ranging from determining overall targets for provision at a district level, to site thresholds and the creation of mixed communities.
- **Rural housing** – local authorities should make sufficient land available for housing, with a focus on development in rural service centres and Market towns.
- **Quality of design** – local authorities should develop a shared vision, with their local communities, of the type of residential environments they wish to see. These should then be implemented with the aim of creating places which meet people's needs, promote safe and inclusive layouts, and positively improve local character.
- **Greening the residential environment** – housing development should be based upon robust landscape and ecological surveys. Applicants should be encouraged to apply the principles of sustainable and environmentally friendly design and construction to all new developments.

The 'Preferred Options for North Northamptonshire' document – produced by the North Northamptonshire Joint Planning Unit - sets out objectives in working towards a joint core Spatial Strategy. It puts forward, as part of the development of the Core Strategy, preferred options for the distribution of new housing across Northamptonshire to 2021, and the housing numbers proposed for East Northamptonshire are shown below.

Settlement	Preferred option for distributing housing growth	Additional growth implied on Greenfield extensions (inc. within figures in left column)
Smaller Towns		
Higham Ferrers	1020	190
Irthlingborough	1700	660
Rushden	2370	0
Rural Service Centres		
Oundle	610	140
Raunds	1100	850
Thrapston	1140	200
Network Villages		
East Northants Rural	1460 (max)	0
Total	9,400	

* Source: 'Preferred Options for North Northamptonshire', November 2005.

This distribution is considered to be the most sustainable in terms of focussing the majority of development on towns and rural service centres considered able to facilitate it. It takes into account housing already in the pipeline, housing already completed since 2001, and existing local plan allocations. It also assumes that development in rural areas will continue at a rate no higher than in recent years.

Taking the total number of units, 9,400, gives development per year of 470 units. Assuming that 40% of all housing development should be affordable, results in an annual target for affordable housing of 188 units per year. However, we realise that not all sites will meet the threshold for affordable housing and that realistically this will be difficult to achieve. We aim though to maximise affordable development and ensure that we get as close to this target as possible.

The council, in anticipation of taking these objectives forward, is currently reviewing a number of its key planning policy documents. The Local Plan will continue to provide a framework for guiding development, until it is replaced by a new suite of documents in 2007-8.

The first of these key documents is the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan, which focuses comprehensively on environmental, social and economic issues in the predominantly rural northern half of the District. The Plan sets out detailed policies for development, regeneration and planned growth, and includes the identification of sites for specific purposes such as housing and conservation.

The Plan sets out a number of key objectives for affordable housing, which can be applied to all areas of the District. These include:

- Appropriate development density – local planning authorities are required to ensure that the most efficient use is being made of available land. An overall target of 35 dwellings per hectare will be sought for the Plan area, but this may be higher in the towns.
- To redress the balance between the number of affordable dwellings and the number of dwellings for open market sale being developed, it is proposed to lower the threshold at which an affordable housing requirement applies. The

proposed new thresholds are 15 dwellings in the towns, and between 5 and 10 dwellings in the rural areas. Any developments larger than these numbers would be required to provide affordable housing. It is also proposed to increase this requirement from 30% to 40%.

- To plan for sustainable and mixed communities, only an appropriate mix of house types and tenures will be supported on any development site. This mix must reflect identified local needs, and should be agreed with the council's Strategic Housing Team.

A further Plan – the Three Towns Plan - which will cover Rushden, Higham Ferrers and Irthlingborough is currently being produced. This, and then the Raunds Area Plan, will provide a set of agreed preferred planning policy options for the district.

The above objectives are also carried forward in a supplementary planning document on developer contributions. This seeks to provide guidance on the range of contributions required as part of new developments.

In certain circumstances it may be difficult for the requirements to be met, and in those cases we would consider negotiating an off-site payment (known as a Commuted Sum) in lieu of affordable housing. This can then be used for provision elsewhere in the district. However, agreement to this will only be given in exceptional circumstances where there is evidence to suggest no alternative. As a starting point, we expect the affordable housing delivered through a section 106 agreement to have a nil grant or very low grant requirement.

Rural Housing Development

We recognise that affordable housing is harder to deliver in rural areas, and that this is also where the most chronic affordability problems are being experienced.

We will work with the Northamptonshire Rural Housing Enabler and Parish Councils, to look at developing affordable housing where it is needed. As part of this process, the Parish Council will be encouraged to select an appropriate Registered Social Landlord to work with, but only at the stage where need levels and a potential site have been identified.

In villages where a Local Housing Needs Survey has identified a need for affordable housing, and where a site is available, we will consider allocating such sites specifically for affordable housing development only. This could be done through identifying the site as a 'site of social diversity', or developing it as an exception site. Either of these options would restrict open market development, to ensure that a balance of open market and affordable housing is available in villages.

Resources and Development: Priorities:

To maximise funding for housing development in the District we will:

- Work closely with the Regional Housing Board and the Housing Corporation to build up an ongoing programme of housing developments to be funded from the National Affordable Housing Programme.
- Utilise our Local Authority Capital Housing Budget for developments which meet our identified priorities for addressing housing need.
- Seek to respond to any other National or Regional funding opportunities which may arise.
- Ensure that all developments represent value for money and quality.

To meet the wide range of different housing needs we will:

- Ensure that all affordable housing developments are 'affordable', by continually monitoring local information.
- Enable a minimum of 196 new affordable housing units over the 2006-2008 period.
- Work closely with developers and Registered Social Landlords to ensure an appropriate mix of house type and tenure on every new development.
- Encourage the development of 'flexible' homes, which can meet a wide range of needs – both now and in the future.
- Seek to enable greater levels of home ownership, through the provision of Homebuy units on new developments.
- Work closely with the Zone Agent for Homebuy products in Northamptonshire, to provide a wide range of low cost home ownership options.

To plan for sustainable, long-term housing provision we will:

- Deliver as many additional affordable housing units as possible – continually working towards the Core Spatial Strategy target of 188 per year.
- Continue to develop and implement policies to maximise affordable housing through the planning system.
- Seek to deliver the objectives set out in these policies - such as those outlined in the Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Plan, and the PPS3 document.
- Work with Parish Councils to develop affordable housing projects on sites of social diversity or exception sites, where a need is evident.
- Seek to take forward the recommendations arising from the North Northamptonshire Housing Market Assessment, in terms of responding to increasing housing need - and other growth pressures.

7. Action Plan

The action plan below takes the priorities contained throughout the strategy, and sets out in greater detail how we intend to progress them. The outcomes are not listed in order of importance.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Strategic							
1	Effective Partnership Working.	% of partners rating partnership working as good or better.	100%	<p>We will:</p> <p>Take forward the priorities and actions outlined in the Sustainable Communities Plan, the Regional Housing Strategy, the Regional Spatial Strategy, and the Sub-Regional Action Plan.</p> <p>Actively engage with partner organisations and key stakeholders to drive forward the growth agenda for the Milton Keynes South Midlands area, and in particular Northamptonshire.</p> <p>Work towards meeting the priorities contained within other key corporate documents, such as the Empty Property Strategy, where cross-cutting issues have been identified –and work with the appropriate department to help deliver these.</p> <p>Conduct a customer satisfaction survey to measure our success in partnership working.</p>	Customer satisfaction survey – summer 2007.	Strategic Housing Team.	<p>The strategic housing team will monitor:</p> <p>Progress of our priorities against the timescales for action set out in wider strategies and policies.</p> <p>Engagement with key steering groups and forums.</p> <p>Progress against cross-cutting priorities.</p>

East Northamptonshire Housing Strategy

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Strategic							
2	Up-to-Date and Fit for Purpose Housing Strategy	Government Office rating of the Housing Strategy.	Fit for Purpose.	<p>There will be a full annual review against each of the priorities, assessing outcomes and progress against timescales.</p> <p>Full stakeholder consultation will take place - a workshop will be held, and the update bulletin will be circulated for comment prior to publication. Update bulletin to be produced by the Strategic Housing Team.</p>	First annual review and update bulletin – summer 2007.	Strategic Housing Team	The strategic housing team will ensure that the annual review takes place.
Housing Services							
3	Reduction in homelessness.	<p>Number of people who declare themselves homeless in the district.</p> <p>Number of people sleeping rough.</p>	<p>10% reduction per year.</p> <p>No rough sleepers.</p>	<p>We will work towards continually reducing homelessness, through delivery of a homelessness service which actively focuses on prevention.</p> <p>We will contribute to the production of the Northamptonshire County Homelessness strategy, and work in partnership to ensure its delivery.</p> <p>The current initiatives, set up to prevent homelessness - such as the Rent Deposit Scheme – will continue.</p> <p>The council's Homelessness Strategy will be reviewed and updated in 2006/2007.</p>	<p>10% reduction by April 2007, and then annually thereafter.</p> <p>County Strategy to be produced by Spring 2007.</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Review to start October 2006.</p>	Strategic Housing Team	<p>The strategic housing team will monitor homelessness statistics quarterly.</p> <p>The County Housing Strategy Officers will monitor the progress of the County Homelessness Strategy.</p> <p>The strategic housing team will monitor the take-up of initiatives, and the progress of the Homelessness Strategy at the annual review.</p>

East Northamptonshire Housing Strategy

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Housing Services							
4	Reduction in the use of Bed and Breakfast Accommodation.	Number of occurrences of bed and breakfast used.	No use of bed and breakfast	We will continue with our policy of no use of bed and breakfast accommodation, except in unavoidable cases of extreme emergency	Ongoing.	Strategic Housing Team.	There are Government targets in place to measure performance in this priority area.
5	Reduction in the use of temporary accommodation.	Number of units of temporary accommodation used.	Temporary housing stock to be reduced by 6 units per year, to a total reduction of 25 units, to 2010.	We will reduce our temporary housing stock through a number of measures such as increased prevention activity (see chapter 4).	Annual reduction to 2010.	Strategic Housing Team.	Central Government monitor performance against bed and breakfast and temporary accommodation targets.
6	Improved system of allocating affordable housing.	% of customers rating the service good or better.	100%	We will introduce a choice based system of allocating the social housing stock in the district. This service will be delivered by an external contractor; with a new contract for the Housing Register and the Homelessness Service to be let simultaneously.	January 2007	Strategic Housing Team.	Formal monitoring measures will be incorporated into the new contract, which will be monitored by the strategic housing team.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Housing Services							
7	Housing stock to be of a decent standard.	% of housing stock meeting the decent homes standard.	100%	<p>We will:</p> <p>Continue to provide financial assistance, targeted primarily at the vulnerable or those on low incomes, to carry out property repairs and undertake energy efficiency measures</p> <p>Work towards a reduction in the number of homes which fail to meet the decent homes minimum standard.</p> <p>Continually review the Enforcement Policy, to ensure that it is addressing the worst condition housing.</p>	Ongoing	Private Sector Housing Team	The private sector housing team will monitor take-up of the grant funding; and progress against decent homes targets.
8	Reduction in the number of empty properties.	Number of properties empty.	Reduction of 5 per year.	<p>We plan to work in partnership with the community to bring at least 5 empty properties per year back into use.</p> <p>We will develop an empty property and redundant buildings initiative, and continually monitor and update our Empty Property Strategy.</p>	31 ST March 2007, and then annually.	Private Sector Housing Team.	Progress against the targets set out in the Empty Property Strategy will be monitored by the private sector housing team.

East Northamptonshire Housing Strategy

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Housing Needs & Housing Markets							
9	Robust Housing Needs information	% of available housing needs information collected.	100%	<p>We will utilise and analyse the various sources of housing needs information, as set out in chapter 5. We will then use this housing needs information to inform housing services, and affordable housing developments.</p> <p>We will conduct, as part of the North Northamptonshire group of local authorities, a full housing market assessment of the North Northamptonshire area.</p>	<p>Ongoing.</p> <p>Housing Market Assessment due to complete October 2006</p>	<p>Strategic Housing Team.</p> <p>Strategic Housing Team / North Northamptonshire Local Authorities.</p>	<p>The strategic housing team will monitor information gaps</p> <p>The Housing Market Assessment steering group, comprising of representatives from each local authority, will monitor progress against the agreed timetable.</p>
10	Adequate site provision for Gypsies and Travellers.	Reduction in the number of unauthorised encampments.	No unauthorised encampments.	<p>We will assess, through the Housing Market Assessment, the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, and produce a strategy for meeting these needs.</p> <p>An East Northamptonshire strategy will then be produced by the council's strategic housing team and private sector housing section, detailing how the needs will be met.</p>	<p>Housing Market Assessment due to complete October 2006</p> <p>Gypsy and Traveller Strategy to be produced by Spring 2007.</p> <p>Target for unauthorised encampments to be met by 2009.</p>	Strategic Housing Team.	<p>The Housing Market Assessment progress will be monitored by the steering group.</p> <p>Government Office to monitor progress of Strategy.</p>

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Resources & Development							
12	Sufficient funding to develop new affordable housing. Timely spending of funding.	£ % of funding, including the council's capital budget spent.	£6,214,367 (inc. reserve funding) to be taken up in 2006-08. 100%	We will work closely with the Regional Housing Board and the Housing Corporation to build up an ongoing programme of housing developments to be funded from the National Affordable Housing Programme. Funding will be made available from the council's capital budget to Housing Associations for the provision of new affordable housing, where developments meet our priorities as set out in chapter 6.	2006/08 for utilisation of Housing Corporation funding 2006/07 capital budget to be spent by 31 st March 2007.	Strategic Housing Team / Housing Corporation	The strategic housing team to monitor funding as part of the strategy's annual review.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Resources & Development							
13	Increased delivery of new affordable housing	Number of affordable housing units developed.	Minimum of 196.	<p>The Housing Corporation has allocated funding for 196 units over the 2006-08 period. We will work with Housing Associations to ensure that these developments progress to completion.</p> <p>We will also work to deliver additional new units, over the 196.</p> <p>We will continue to develop and implement policies to maximise affordable housing through the planning system.</p> <p>A number of objectives relating to affordable housing have already, or are planned to be, incorporated into the planning policy documents which will eventually make up the Local Development Framework. These objectives are set out in Chapter 6.</p>	<p>2006-08 for the building of 196 units to start on site.</p> <p>Development Plan Documents to be adopted late 2007/early 2008.*</p> <p>Supplementary Planning Document on developer contributions to be adopted June 2006.*</p> <p>*dates are subject to change</p>	<p>Strategic Housing Team / Housing Associations / Housing Corporation.</p> <p>Strategic Housing Team / Planning Policy Team.</p>	<p>The Housing Corporation monitors Housing Association performance against targets.</p> <p>The strategic housing team will monitor the progress of housing developments.</p> <p>The council's Planning Policy team to monitor progress of the policy documents. The strategic housing team will ensure input into the production of these.</p>

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Resources & Development							
14	Appropriate mix of new affordable housing development:	Monitoring of new housing development through ongoing monitoring activities.		We will:			
	* Tenure		Minimum of 30% of all new affordable housing units to be I	Work closely with developers and Housing Associations to ensure an appropriate mix of house type and tenure on every new development. We will seek to enable greater levels of home ownership, through the provision of Homebuy units on new developments.	31 st March 2007, and then ongoing.	Strategic Housing Team / Housing Associations / Developers	Strategic Housing Team to monitor.
	* Affordability	Affordability of new developments.	100% of new units to be affordable.	Ensure that all affordable housing developments are 'affordable', by continually monitoring local information.	Ongoing.	As above.	Strategic Housing Team to monitor.
	* Location	'Bids' made through the Choice Based Lettings system.	To be agreed when the new system is in place.	Work closely with developers and Housing Associations to ensure that affordable housing is only built in sustainable locations. Work with Parish Councils to develop rural affordable housing projects. To include arranging housing needs surveys, seeking a Housing Association and identifying land.	Ongoing.	As above.	Strategic housing team to ensure that Parish Councils are actively involved in all rural developments. To monitor at annual review.

Outcome Number	Outcome	Measure	Target	Actions	By (date)	Owner	Monitoring Arrangements
Resources & Development							
14	*Standard	Ecohomes, SDS and planning standards.	100% of new affordable housing to meet these standards.	Developments will be progressed on sites of social diversity or exception sites if appropriate and if no other land is available.	Ongoing.	As above.	The Housing Corporation and the strategic housing team will assess developments against the measures.
	* Flexibility	Void levels	RSL void levels to remain at current level, or improve.	Quality will be assessed through a number of measures - such as design, and using the Ecohomes standards.	Ongoing.	As above.	
		Assessment of flexibility	100% of properties to be assessed for flexibility.	Encourage the development of 'flexible' homes, which can meet a wide range of needs – both now and in the future. Assess the proposals for all new developments, to ensure that the best use has been made of available space, and that maximum flexibility has been obtained. For example – providing larger properties where possible to cater for family growth or adaptations for those with a disability.	Ongoing.	As above.	The strategic housing team will ensure that the most flexible unit types are considered when working on new developments.

8. Contacts

If you have any comments or queries relating to this strategy, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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This strategy, and the following documents, are available to download free of charge from our website.

- East Northamptonshire Homelessness Strategy 2003-06
- Supplementary Planning Document on Developer Contributions – Consultation Draft Feb 2006
- Rural North, Oundle and Thrapston Preferred Options – January 2006.
- East Northamptonshire Housing Needs Survey 2004.
- Northamptonshire Black and Minority Ethnic Housing Needs Study 2005.
- Northamptonshire Key Worker Housing Needs Study 2005.
- House Condition Survey 2005 Final Report
- East Northamptonshire Community Safety Strategy
- East Northamptonshire Local Plan

Please contact us if you require a copy of this strategy in large print, Braille, or another language.

9. Appendices

(a) Consultation Event – Represented Organisations

Oundle Town Council
Titchmarsh Parish Council
Rushden Town Council
Stanwick Parish Council
Raunds Town Council
Great Addington Parish Council
Collyweston Parish Council
Thrapston Town Council
Aldwincle Parish Council
Nassington Parish Council
Women's Aid
Government Office for the East Midlands
Housing Corporation
Supporting People
Daventry District Council
South Kesteven District Council
Spire Homes
Circle Anglia Housing Group
East Northamptonshire Local Strategic Partnership (ENable)
Rockingham Forest Housing Association
Servite Housing Association
Northamptonshire Rural Housing Association
Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association
Derwent Housing Association
Orbit Housing Association
Paradigm Housing Group
Minster Housing Association
Touchstone Housing Association
Aragon Housing Association
Bovis Homes
Stamford Homes
Northamptonshire ACRE
Northamptonshire Probation Service
Connexions

9. Appendices

(b) Glossary

Affordable Housing

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Hotel accommodation used to house homeless people under local authority statutory duty, when no houses are available.

Brownfield Land

Previously developed land which is available for redevelopment.

Corporate Priorities

The council's priority areas, although this does not mean that other areas are not important.

Decent Home

A property which is weatherproof, warm, and has 'modern' facilities.

Dwelling

A self contained unit of accommodation.

Ecohomes

An environmental standard for housing - which assesses factors such as energy efficiency, use of resources and environmental impact.

Government Office for the East Midlands

The office responsible for delivering the Government's and priorities in the East Midlands.

Greenfield Land

Land which has had no previous development.

Growth Areas

Areas of the Country which have been identified for substantial growth. These areas were first identified in the Government's Sustainable Communities Plan and include Milton Keynes South Midlands; Thames Gateway; London-Stansted-Cambridge-Peterborough; and Ashford.

Homebuy

A form of Low Cost Home Ownership which enables applicants to purchase a home, or part of a home, with Government assistance.

Homeless

Not having anywhere to live.

Housing Associations

Also known as Registered Social Landlords. These are organisations who develop and provide affordable housing.

Housing Corporation

A Government agency which regulates and funds Registered Social Landlords.

Housing Needs Survey

A survey which seeks to identify housing need in a given area.

Key Worker

A person employed in a specific public sector occupation. Includes police, nurses, fire-fighters, and teachers.

Regional Housing Strategy

The strategy which sets out the East Midlands Regional Housing Board priorities for housing in the region.

Registered Social Landlords

As Housing Associations, but registered with the Housing Corporation.

Section 106 Agreement

A legal agreement between a developer and the council's planning department, which sets out obligations such as affordable housing and education provision.

Stock Transfer

The transfer of housing stock from a Local Authority to another landlord, usually a housing association.

Supporting People

A programme which provides funding for housing support services, for vulnerable people.

Temporary Accommodation

Short term accommodation used to house homeless people.

9. Appendices

(c) Feedback Form

If you have any views, comments or suggestions please enter these in the section below and send to:

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East Northamptonshire Council
East Northamptonshire House
Cedar Drive
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NN14 4LZ

Or e-mail to: chartley@east-northamptonshire.gov.uk

Name:

Organisation/Representing:

Address:

Tel:

E-mail:

Response required: yes/no

Comments: