



Babergh & Mid Suffolk
District Councils

JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY

October 2022



Refresh: October 2022

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have produced their joint Homes and Housing strategy to provide focus and show their ongoing commitment to meet and address the housing challenges across the districts.

The 2019-2024 Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and the accompanying Delivery Plan were adopted in March 2019. They set out how the Councils would meet the changing needs of residents across both districts over the next 25 years with our partners and key housing stakeholders. The Strategy was published alongside the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019 - 2024.

Much has changed locally, nationally and globally since 2019; the Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted society and the economy; a climate emergency has been declared by both Councils, there is an emerging cost-of-living crisis and new government social housing policies introduced.

To reflect these changes, The JOINT HOMES AND HOUSING STRATEGY has been refreshed and the Delivery Plan has been refocused to ensure that both documents remain relevant and to address new and emerging housing challenges.

The Joint Homes and Housing Strategy and the Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy documents detail the Councils' commitment to working pro-actively and collaboratively with public and voluntary sector organisations, to better equip residents to make more informed choices about their housing, to help them live better-quality lives into older age and remain independent for longer.

In working towards achieving our housing vision and strategic priorities we will continue to:

- Work in partnership to maximise resources
- Deliver efficient and effective services, and operate within our means
- Target scarce resources to those who are most in need
- Prioritise the protection of essential services
- Seek out opportunities to influence government policy to meet our rural districts' housing needs
- Collate the right sort of evidence to ensure we put in sound bids for all new funding sources related to housing as they become available.

The Homes and Housing Strategy has links to the Council's [Well-being Strategy](#) and the Council's [Communities Strategy](#) and Housing is a strategic priority within Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's Corporate Plan (2019-27):



Introduction

We all need and deserve somewhere to live and call home. Having a place to call our own provides belonging, contributes to positive health and well-being, and strengthens community spirit.

Our housing vision is for residents to live in affordable and high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

As we all enjoy longer lives, our local population is projected to increase by almost 24,000 by 2043 ; so, ensuring we have enough homes of the right type and in the right place is important. Our strategy therefore focuses on ways to improve the quality, choice and supply of homes for current and future households.

Our strategy is underpinned by four principles:

- We will work with anyone that wants to develop and deliver the right homes, in the right place at the right time to provide much needed new homes; making more effective use of existing homes; and developing innovative solutions to the housing needs of our residents and communities.
- We will create a new relationship with residents which is based around their need and experience, rather than the processes of individual agencies. We will empower residents with more choice.
- We will adopt a 'one public sector' approach, working together in a more linked up way with our public sector partners to deliver better, more effective and efficient services.
- We are committed to being open and transparent, providing frequent information as to how we are performing against the plans. This will ensure residents have the information at their fingertips to engage with us and ensure we deliver on our priorities.

The details of why, how and what we will do to make this a reality is explained in this document and the comprehensive Delivery Plan. We invite you to support this vision by working with us.

Background

Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts are predominantly rural areas comprising approximately 200 parishes, each one a local community with a unique identity and network of connections to each other.

Across the districts there are many outstanding natural and built environments providing places and spaces which offer an excellent work and life balance –for residents, commuters, visitors, small business start-ups, entrepreneurs or large multi-national companies.

There is something on offer for everyone with a diverse range of cultural heritage, unique retail outlets in popular villages, restaurants, museums, theatres, festivals, attractions and activities appealing to all age groups – set against a backdrop of inspirational scenery, scattered with churches and archaeological monuments.

The market towns of Sudbury (60 miles northeast of London) in Babergh and Stowmarket in Mid Suffolk are the largest centres of population in the districts. Connections to the Midlands and London are excellent with rail travel to London just over 90 minutes from the northernmost boundary of Mid Suffolk.

A significant percentage of our populations are aged 65 years or above and it is predicted that this age group will account for 1 in 3 people living in Suffolk, compared to 1 in 4 in England over the next 20 years. As a population ages there will be increasing and different demands on services and facilities, especially housing, transport, medical care, and social care services.

Across both districts, house prices are around 10 to 11 times above the average earnings of residents, making rural parts of the districts unaffordable for many to buy, especially younger and first-time households. This means an increase in demand for affordable housing options and private rented accommodation.

Both Babergh and Mid Suffolk are classified as predominantly rural areas. Although deprivation levels are low compared with national levels, across Suffolk 28% of those identified as income deprived live in rural areas. Living in a very rural area is widely considered to cost households on average about 20% more than a similar household living in an urban area.

This Strategy, alongside our Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy, sets out how the changing housing needs of residents across both districts will be met by the Councils, our partners, and key housing stakeholders to ensure our communities continue to thrive.

Who is our homes and housing strategy for?

Our Residents and Communities:

We will continue to facilitate opportunities for a mix of new homes which local people can afford, additionally support people with identified specific needs and actively support community representatives wanting to help residents create sustainable, thriving places to live.

Ourselves:

To make sure housing makes a significant contribution in the ambitions and delivery of the Joint Local Plan, addressing housing need and protecting and enhancing 'quality of place' whilst continually adjusting to becoming more financially self-sufficient district councils.

Our Partners

Both Councils are determined to show the sort of leadership required to encourage the delivery of new homes of the right type and tenure, in the right places and at a price that people can afford. We intend to make the most of every opportunity available to work with our partners and stakeholders in seeking new and imaginative ways to do just this.



Vision

Our vision is for residents to live in affordable, high-quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe and healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities.

Strategic Aims

There are nine strategic aims that underpin delivery of our housing vision:

1 The housing market functions effectively, providing homes which are as affordable as possible; to meet the needs of residents and support the local economy.

2 There is a wide and varied choice of good quality, sustainable homes of different sizes, types and tenures, to meet the needs of a wide range of different households.

3 Homelessness is prevented and our services provide positive and planned interventions.

4 Babergh and Mid Suffolk is an effective social landlord known for delivering quality services.

5 Homes are in high quality, sustainable environments, served by jobs and community facilities, appropriate green spaces, effective transport links and other necessary infrastructure.

6 Best use is made of private sector land and private accommodation across the Districts.

7 People live in vibrant and well-connected communities; and homes and communities continue to meet the changing needs of residents.

8 Everyone has a suitable home, and residents are able to live as healthily, safely and independently as possible within sustainable communities.

9 Both councils have strong relationships with residents, developers and other partners that enable us to deliver housing, infrastructure and services effectively, and to innovate where appropriate.

National and Local Context

Much of the way in which housing services are delivered is governed by legislation and national or local policies. More details can be found in Appendix 2: National Context and Appendix 3: Local Context. Significant key events also affect delivery and provide challenges as well as opportunities. The following have, and will continue to have, a major impact on Housing and Housing Services:

Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 Pandemic is a global event on an unprecedented scale. It has impacted on all areas of life in the UK and its consequences continue to be felt. From a housing perspective it has had ramifications for all aspects of housing and the long-term effects of this are still to be fully understood. The response to the pandemic led to societal changes and changes in government policy. For example, but not limited to:

- The 'Everyone In' campaign saw everyone rough sleeping or at risk of rough sleeping being offered temporary accommodation
- The ban on evictions and court proceedings gave some temporary peace of mind to those experiencing financial hardship as a result of redundancy and furlough
- The stamp duty holiday saw an increase in the number of people looking to move house
- House prices and rents increased
- Disrepair issues were heightened as property visits were banned for periods of time
- Overcrowding and high-density housing were associated with greater spread of COVID-19,

The long-term effects and the length of recovery from the impacts of the pandemic are still yet to be fully realised. Actions to support the next steps post-Covid 19 are woven into the Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan (Appendix 1). It is vital that all aspects of housing continue to be alert to respond to the ongoing challenges and opportunities of Covid-19 recovery.

Climate Emergency

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils declared a Climate Emergency in 2019; An Environment and Climate Change Task Force has since been established to address the climate challenge the districts face.

We have been given a target of 2030 to meet the Government's Clean Growth Strategy, which sets an ambition to upgrade all Social Housing to an energy performance rating of at least C.

The Government has also set a target for all new homes to be "net zero" in relation to carbon emissions by 2030. Actions to support the Carbon Neutral ambitions of Babergh Mid Suffolk District Councils are woven into the Homes and Housing Strategy Delivery Plan (Appendix 1).

Cost of Living Crisis

A wide variety of factors, including the war in Ukraine, market volatility, costs associated with supply chains and inflation rates, have converged and resulted in a cost-of-living crisis in the UK.

Predictions from a range of think tanks, including the Office for National Statistics, is that living standards will significantly fall and the Bank of England has warned that inflation could rise to more than 13% and the country could enter a recession. This will impact on some people and communities more than others and many households face stark financial challenges with increasing food and energy bills.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils have recently approved a five-point action plan to support residents through the cost-of-living crisis. [The Cost of Living Crisis Action Plan](#) brings together a suite of measures that focus on providing advice and support, maintaining people's health and building on work already underway since the launch of the Councils' Communities and Well-being strategies.

The Cost-of-Living Crisis Action plan will be regularly reviewed (initial refresh scheduled for Autumn 2022 in preparedness to tackle winter pressures) as there are many unknowns and potential challenges ahead that cannot be fully predicted at the present time given the global challenges, market volatility, rising inflation and the everyday changing landscape regarding people's household budgets.

Strategic Aim 1:

The housing market functions effectively providing homes which are as affordable as possible; to meet the needs of residents and support the local economy

- We will create the conditions for effective planning and development
- We will increase new housing delivery

Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Published robust viability testing of the Joint Local Plan which gives confidence that both infrastructure and affordable housing needs could be met• Improved our approach to discharging planning conditions, by providing additional clarity on the information we require from developers in order to discharge conditions effectively• Implemented a smarter and improved pre-application process.• Encouraged and supported self-build and custom- build developers by setting out positive policies in the Joint Local Plan
On Track	<p>We continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Engage with developers and registered providers and keep housing evidence up to date, in order to ensure that new supply meets housing needs• Maximise delivery of affordable housing, via planning obligations on all qualifying sites, in accordance with the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and local policy• Ensure that planning applications are determined on time and section 106 agreements are signed off promptly• Review stalled sites to ensure blockages and delays to development are resolved.• Develop new open market homes through Council owned housing companies• Develop new affordable homes through the Housing Revenue Account
Target Next	<p>We aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Produce a Joint Local Plan to provide clear policy and direction for new development, with site allocations that are deliverable, supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan.• Publish a new Joint Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document to provide detailed information about the type of affordable homes we want to see delivered.• Build/ acquire 65 new homes in each district per year for each of the next 6 years.

The Government produced its Housing White Paper in February 2017, 'Fixing our Broken Housing Market'. This identified that housing is increasingly unaffordable with difficulties for those trying to get onto the housing ladder, especially younger households. In addition, it acknowledged that Planning Authorities had issued more planning permissions for new homes but that delivery of these homes through "spades in the ground" was generally slow.

Since this time, the level of housing development has improved in both Districts, with the Councils' Joint Annual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR) 2020 – 2021 noting housing completions for the period 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021 being 402 dwellings in Babergh against an annual target of 403 dwellings, and 672 dwellings in Mid Suffolk against an annual target of 513 dwellings. The annual target is set by a national standard methodology.

The AMR also noted that as at 1st April 2021, there was 4,928 dwellings with an outstanding planning permission in Babergh and 7,444 dwellings in Mid Suffolk. Not all of these dwellings will come forward in the following five years, but the Councils' housing land supply position statements for 2021 identified that Babergh could demonstrate a 6.86-year supply against its five-year requirement, and Mid Suffolk could demonstrate a 9.54-year supply against its five-year requirement.

The Government's annual Housing Delivery Test, which measures housing delivery in a local planning authority area, was again passed in both Districts. The Councils however continue to maintain a Housing Delivery Test Action Plan.

The Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan is progressing through Examination, with the proposal for housing site allocations to be addressed in a Part 2 document. Detail of its delivery will be set out in the Councils' Joint Local Development Scheme.

Alongside the Joint Local Plan, many areas have adopted or are in the process of producing Neighbourhood Plans, which when adopted form part of the Development Plan for the Districts, and in some instances identify housing site allocations.

Strategic Aim 2:

There is a wide and varied choice of good quality, sustainable homes of different sizes, types and tenures, to meet the needs of a wide range of different households

- We will ensure good quality, sustainable homes are built.
- We will regularly review housing needs to ensure appropriate provision.

Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved

We have:

- Provided advice and encouragement to community-led housing schemes on the formation of Community Land Trusts, with the objective of delivering new affordable housing
- Published a framework for making investment decisions to increase the overall supply of affordable housing, making use of the Housing Revenue Account and working collaboratively with housing associations.

On Track

We continue to:

- Enhance the data we hold on our own housing stock, in order to improve our maintenance plans
- Expand the air source heating programme for our own council housing

Target Next

We aim to:

- Adopt an Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document to detail the circumstances in which we would take a flexible approach to tenure mix to maximise delivery
- Make recommendations for future alternative uses for low demand or unsuitable garage sites
- Commission research into the contribution which an increased supply of private rented accommodation could make to meeting overall housing needs, to inform housing enabling and development decisions.
- Work with partners to produce an enhanced affordable housing stock database, to support housing enabling and development decisions.
- Review and update our local connection criteria to enable some of the affordable homes secured through Section 106 agreements to be prioritised for those with a local connection, where appropriate
- Ensure efficient use of the Council's housing stock by creation of a new policy to encourage tenants to downsize

Both this Homes and Housing Strategy and the Homelessness Reduction & Rough Sleeping Strategy recognise the growing numbers of families and single person households with a current affordable housing need within the districts. We will ensure our limited resources are focussed on where we can have the most impact. By understanding the market better, we can see where our interventions could have a positive effect and avoid waste, duplication or cost.

The Ipswich and Waveney Area Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2017 (with a partial update in 2019) indicates a need for at least 110 affordable homes per year in Babergh and the requirement for new affordable homes per year across Mid Suffolk is at least 127.

Population projections show that the number of people aged 65 or over is expected to increase by more than 50% in each District. This is a faster increase than the growth of the population as a whole, meaning that older people will form a much larger proportion of the total population. We also expect a growing number of households to include one or more persons with a disability and more households with people living with long-term health conditions.

An ageing population means we must continue to respond to the changing needs of older people and those who have specific complex needs. We will achieve this through new homes developments and refurbishments to existing homes. When planning for new homes we will remain mindful of the increasing proportion of over 65s living in our most rural settlements and both Councils are actively looking to increase the numbers of homes which are better suited to enhancing the health and well-being needs of an ageing population on new developments and regeneration or refurbishment sites.

These types of homes are also ideally suited to families with young children and other groups of people with specific housing needs requiring well designed, easily managed and accessible homes.

Places with a mix of housing types, tenures and sizes are better able to meet the changing needs and aspirations of residents as they move through different life stages, changes of income and changing household numbers.

We are keen to enable greater housing choice in local housing markets as it increases the opportunities for households to remain within their communities promoting social equity and inclusion by reducing geographical constraints on the search for the 'right house in the right place'.

The affordability of housing has also worsened, both nationally and locally. House prices and rent levels have both increased significantly since the Homes and Housing Strategy was first adopted, and more recently, increased inflation has reduced the amount of income which households have to cover housing costs.

The Joint Local Plan (JLP) will set out requirements for new residential developments by stating they should maintain provision of and contribute to a mix of housing types, tenures and sizes to help support the creation of truly sustainable communities. To achieve this step change in the housing market the JLP must include building homes to meet the needs of an ageing population, and should include smaller properties, single storey properties and opportunities for self-build and custom-build.

Homelessness Facts:

01/04/2018 - 31/03/2022	Babergh	Mid Suffolk
Homeless applications taken	2277	2023
Households accepted as homeless	192	134
Main reasons for homelessness (of those accepted as homeless)		
Fleeing violence including Domestic Abuse	43	31
Family no longer able to accommodate	39	26
Loss of private-rented accommodation	41	20
Relationship breakdown	26	16
Other	43	41
Reason for Priority-Need (of those accepted as homeless)		
Dependent children	79	51
Mental health	38	30
Physical ill health or disability	30	17
Fled violence	7	11
Other	38	25
No. of rough sleepers recorded in 2021 'count'	2	1
Cases where homelessness has been prevented	560	508
Cases where homelessness has been relieved	167	170
No. of temporary accommodation units as of 31st March 22*	62	44
*Includes domestic abuse satellite refuge units & rough sleeper units		

Strategic Aim 3:

Homelessness Is Prevented And Our Services Provide Positive And Planned Interventions

- We will prevent homelessness and end rough sleeping
- Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved

We have:

- Developed and implemented a comprehensive online advice service for clients to access housing options advice
- Developed a process for offering short term support and ongoing contact to monitor the progress of clients and reduce the risk of repeated homelessness from temporary accommodation.
- Created a multi-agency panel to manage, monitor and find housing solutions for the hardest to house clients
- Rebranded the Rent Deposit Scheme and expanded the Central Suffolk Lettings provision

On Track

We continue to:

- Audit the Council's Housing Solutions (Homelessness) Service
- Work with Public Health to support services for vulnerable adults and provide data as required
- Work closely and meet with the DWP and CAB to tackle the impacts of welfare reforms
- Monitor repayment agreements and the number of evictions for rent arrears in order to consider the success of our budgeting advice and affordability checks, so we can help clients to manage their income effectively.
- Support the recommissioning of Housing Related Support Services, in partnership with other Suffolk authorities.
- Ensure continued workforce training and development on the links between homelessness and mental health, drugs and alcohol, PREVENT, gangs, county lines, Making Every Contact Count and Domestic Abuse
- Ensure that everyone in temporary accommodation has access to appropriate health services
- Ensure that all temporary accommodation is regularly inspected to ensure it meets all regulatory standards
- Ensure that we make suitable provision for rough sleepers in extreme weather conditions under Severe Weather Emergency Provision
- Ensure contact is made with all rough sleepers within 24 hours of being notified of them

Target Next

We aim to:

- Review the current Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy and produce new Joint Strategy and Delivery Plan ready for adoption and publication in 2024.
- Support the objectives of the Cost of Living Crisis Action Plan, as the plan evolves and more detail is known.
- Develop a housing forum to ensure better coordination with partners, to identify ways of educating partner organisations, and help us to better manage cases on an ongoing basis.
- Review the effectiveness of our pathway plans to ensure that they help the most vulnerable client groups to access services at an earlier stage
- Create a programme of pre-tenancy assessment and training for new tenants, intended to help tenants manage their properties and their own finances.
- Quantify accommodation needs for under-35s, including the private rented sector and lodging schemes, and set out an ongoing investment programme
- Review temporary accommodation to ensure there is a sufficient supply to reduce the usage of bed and breakfast accommodation

Strategic Aim 3 of the Homes and Housing Strategy is linked directly to Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Council's [Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2019-2024](#).

The Joint Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy sets out 6 priority areas:

- **Prevention of Homelessness**
- **End rough sleeping**
- **Supporting vulnerable households to secure and maintain accommodation**
- **Mitigating the impacts of Welfare Reform**
- **Increasing access to suitable accommodation**
- **Raise aspirations of positive health and well-being amongst homeless people**

These are based on the key priorities set by Elected Members for 2018/19, the Councils Joint Strategic Plan 2016-2020 and new duties as prescribed in the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, which was enacted in April 2018.

The Homelessness Reduction and Rough Sleeping Strategy is a statutory document and is to be reviewed every five years. The strategy will be formally reviewed in 2023/24 and following consultation with all relevant stakeholders and residents, a new Strategy and Delivery Plan will be published in 2024.

Strategic Aim 4:

Babergh and Mid Suffolk is an effective social landlord known for delivering quality services

- We will be an excellent landlord.
- We will ensure that all council owned social homes are fit for purpose

Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Included measures to improve the environmental performance of our housing stock within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) business plan and capital programme.• Put in place measures to ensure we learn from every complaint• Put in a place a new approach to managing complaints of anti-social behaviour and have put greater emphasis on mediation as a means of resolution.• Reviewed our approach to managing void/redundant stock and identified measures to make better use of such properties.• Reviewed our housing stock profile and commenced a programme to dispose of properties that are expensive and/or low demand.
On Track	<p>We continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Implement a rolling Tenant Satisfaction Methodology to drive business change.• Determine the feasibility and cost of a range of 'Smart Home' measures, to improve environmental performance, support vulnerable tenants, reduce operating costs and enhance the customer experience.• Review internet usage amongst our tenants to understand barriers to usage and develop measures to enable and increase internet usage.
Target Next	<p>We aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Co-create, develop and launch a Tenant Engagement Strategy• Establish compliance with the Social Housing Regulations to ensure that Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils is a compliant landlord and tenants are able to see how we are performing against the standards.• Bring forward innovative redevelopment opportunities for redundant and under used sheltered accommodation.• Build on the work of the Complaints Task force to learn lessons and continually improve• Refresh the Councils' Income Strategy to ensure that we are best placed to meet the needs of our tenants who are experiencing financial difficulties• Work with our tenants to continually improve the ways we communicate with them about matters affecting their homes and neighbourhoods.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils are landlords to 6,885 homes (Babergh 3,565 and Mid Suffolk 3,320 as at August 2022). The rental income generated by these homes is approximately £35.5 million each year. These funds are ringfenced to the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and are dedicated to the management of our landlord service, maintenance of council homes and building more council homes.

The recently approved [HRA Business Plan](#): sets out the main priorities for the next 30 years:

- **Increase the stock of social housing owned by the HRA through an ambitious development programme.**
- **Develop new homes that are built to the highest standard, contributing to the Council's effort to ensure carbon neutrality.**
- **Improve the quality of existing homes and communal areas and reduce the carbon footprint of existing council homes through investment in assets, community led regeneration and working with communities and individuals.**
- **Ensure that our homes, and the management of them, maintain and improve well-being outcomes for individuals, families and communities alongside other Council services and partners.**

We recognise that some residents feel there is a stigma of living in a home provided by a social housing landlord and the Charter for Social Housing Residents is trying to address this through its chapter on being treated with respect. We are also planning to address the topic of tenant stigma and stereotyping through the delivery plan of our Tenant Engagement Strategy.

It is important that we understand our residents' aspirations. This will help us to evaluate how we currently deliver services, and then tailor our services in the future to ensure our residents have the best opportunities to meet and exceed their aspirations.

We will take meaningful steps to break down inequalities in social housing. Supporting residents to meet their aspirations also has a business benefit. When residents are supported to fulfil their ambitions, they will be more likely to sustain their tenancies. This reduces demand on our landlord services through supporting self-service and reductions in demand management, for example, managing residents rent accounts.

Everyone deserves a good quality home, from young families to retired people and those who struggle to find affordable suitable homes in the current market. A home is the foundation of everything, so providing the very best homes for tenants is a role we take seriously. In the longer term and with continuing support some residents may find themselves in a position where they feel ready and able to move on from social housing, vacating their home for another social housing tenant.

As a business with a social mission, we aim to enhance, rather than hinder our residents' ability to fulfil their aspirations and are committed to supporting tenants to take their first step to home ownership.

Strategic Aim 5:

Homes are in high quality sustainable environments, served by jobs and community facilities, appropriate green space, effective transport links and other necessary infrastructure

- We will ensure Infrastructure exceeds expectations

Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved

We have:

- Ensured our Homes and Housing Strategy is aligned to our Economic and Communities Strategies and complements our commitment to stimulate housing led growth and economic prosperity
- Reviewed the Community Infrastructure (CIL) Expenditure Framework
- Developed an Infrastructure Delivery Plan and reviewed it in 2020, which accurately assessed the future infrastructure needs across all our communities
- Delivered two separate Infrastructure Funding Statements for both Councils (2019/20 and 2020/21) which detail the infrastructure projects that CIL will be spent on in each District.

On Track

We continue to:

- Work in partnership with local people, communities and other partners on environmental improvements to neighbourhoods.
- Review our Community Infrastructure Levy Charging rates
- Ensure delivery of sufficient infrastructure to meet requirements arising from new developments
- Investigate the viability of installing electric vehicle points on our housing estates and the development of sustainable transport solutions to meet the needs of our residents
- Support the development, with partners, of the Suffolk Design approach

Target Next

We aim to:

- Produce a Joint Local Plan to provide clear policy and direction to all involved with site allocations that are deliverable, supported by an Infrastructure Delivery Plan
- Prepare for 'Biodiversity offsetting' when Biodiversity net gain becomes compulsory in 2023;

We want homes to be in high quality environments that meet our residents needs and aspirations. However, we recognise the need to ensure we or other key stakeholders can provide the necessary infrastructure at the most appropriate time to ensure critical services and infrastructure do not become either oversubscribed or under provided for particularly where growth is occurring.

It's no secret that we face a housing shortage, both across the whole country and in Babergh and Mid Suffolk. But even as we meet that challenge, we have to ensure that our infrastructure keeps pace therefore we will ensure that the mechanism for supporting infrastructure is refreshed and updated to ensure it meets the needs of our communities and stakeholders.

The Councils fully appreciate that the delivery of new homes and jobs needs to be supported by suitable infrastructure, including a wide range of transport options, utilities, and community facilities. Indeed, enabling the provision of the necessary infrastructure to support residents, businesses, communities, the environment and individuals and prioritising investment into strategic services and infrastructure are key objectives of the Councils.

Without appropriate infrastructure, the growth would be regarded as unsustainable. As such, the Babergh and Mid Suffolk Infrastructure Delivery Plan has been developed and continues to be reviewed and updated to inform and support the emerging Babergh and Mid Suffolk Joint Local Plan.

This document is aligned with the strategic priorities identified in the draft Joint Local Plan, which is currently at Examination, as it is imperative to consider all infrastructure needs to enable sustainable development and growth, when they are likely to be provided, by which provider, and how they will be funded.

The term 'infrastructure' covers a wide range of services and facilities provided by public and private organisations such as schools and other educational facilities, health and social well-being, transport, emergency services, utilities, digital connectivity, waste, community and leisure facilities, and green infrastructure.

Infrastructure planning is the process for ensuring the physical needs of an area can be delivered to keep pace with its population's requirements. This document also includes the involvement of a variety of service providers, agencies and partners, which are involved in the provision and implementation of the required infrastructure. It is a legislative requirement for both Councils to produce and publish an Infrastructure Funding Statement each year (introduced in September 2019).

These documents not only include a return to the Government each year on how much CIL s106 and Neighbourhood CIL has been collected allocated or spent but it also provides an Infrastructure List for both Councils which indicates which projects CIL will be spent on.

To view the Infrastructure Delivery Plan and infrastructure section of the emerging Joint Local Plan, please view the Planning Policy section of the Districts websites.

Strategic Aim 6:

Best use is made of private sector land and private accommodation across the districts

- We will optimise Private Sector Homes

Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved

We have:

- Established Central Suffolk Lettings - A Private Rented Sector lettings and rent guarantee scheme which allows our Housing Solutions Team to both prevent homelessness and discharge the main housing duty which in turn contributes to reducing overall homelessness figures.
- Increased the number of long-term empty homes which the Councils have supported back in to use. Supported by a new policy and toolkit that was approved in July 2022.
- Worked with other Suffolk authorities to develop and implement a new approach to delivering Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs)
- Developed and implemented a project to increase awareness of the availability of support for private tenants in respect of housing conditions and energy efficiency standards, to ensure we take more effective action against landlords.
- Held a mini conference with landlords to advise them on how they can improve EPC ratings and reduce fuel poverty for tenants.

On Track

We continue to:

- Build relationships to better understand the private rented sector in our districts, including the challenges and opportunities it presents to stakeholders.
- Support private landlords through grants.
- Support the proper management of Homes in Multiple Occupation through effective licensing
- Support the development, with partners, of the Suffolk Design approach

Target Next

We aim to:

- Encourage and support the development of more private rented accommodation.
- Establish a Landlords Forum, to advise and assist landlords in respect of legal responsibilities, grant availability and Universal Credit, to build better relationships and increase access to the private rented sector.
- Promote and support energy efficiency in homes by targeting all F & G energy performance rated properties in the private rented sector.
- Increase the number of grants awarded to private landlords to install modern and efficient heating and insulation systems, to improve the health and well-being of residents and the energy efficiency of the homes.
- Review our approach to HMO and HMO licensing and develop a targeted approach to engaging with a broader range of properties.

The private rented sector makes a significant contribution to the housing offer in any area, supplying households with more choice and flexible options which directly supports an inclusive growth economy. Younger households often choose this type of tenure to trial a job/training opportunity, or a location before making a decision to settle down.

We also know most private renters have aspirations of becoming owner occupiers at some stage, although saving for a deposit and affording a mortgage even on entry level market homes in our districts remains financially out of reach for many.

The private rented sector remains the second largest tenure in England. In 2020-21 it accounted for 19% of households, and it has grown in the last 20 years across all age groups. We want to encourage a housing sector that has the optimum levels, of all types, of tenure that meet the needs of residents.

Compared to social and open market homes, housing costs are particularly high in the private rented sector where the majority of low-income households spend at least but often more than 31% of their income on rent. This is likely to be exacerbated by the emerging cost of living crisis.

In Babergh and Mid Suffolk we intend to continue to support a well-managed and flexible private rented sector as it offers those looking for flexible, shorter term accommodation additional options in most parishes. However, we know we must understand more about this sector and their occupiers if we are to fully understand the challenges and opportunities to optimise good quality, affordable private rental accommodation which meets expectations in this part of the housing market.

In 2020 Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils established Central Suffolk Lettings (CSL) with the aim of increasing access to good quality homes in the private rented sector for eligible residents. CSL is a private rented sector lettings and rent guarantee scheme. CSL have been instrumental in improving relations with the private rented sector and are now fully operational in the sector and offer private landlords an alternative to using a high street letting agency. CSL are working with investors and private landlords on new housing developments and conversions to increase the supply of private rented accommodation in the districts.

There will be short periods of time when homes may be empty as part of the natural rhythm of the housing market. Long term empty homes, however, are a wasted resource as they deprive people of a much-needed home and contribute to the need for even more housing.

If properties stay empty for longer than 6 months without any renovation or alterations, they have the potential to cause problems to residents and communities attracting anti-social behaviour, devaluing neighbouring properties, preventing reinvestment and regeneration or being unsightly.

An Empty Homes Policy and comprehensive toolkit has recently been developed and adopted, which aims to reduce the number of long-term empty properties in the districts. The policy puts into place several long-term actions that will help property owners turn empty homes into safe and secure places to live, as well as a viable source of income and empty homes, once restored, will help ease the growing demand for homes for residents.

We will ensure housing meets standards set, where there is evidence of substandard accommodation we will incentivise or when necessary, take appropriate enforcement action to ensure owners comply and residents in our districts can access private rented accommodation of an acceptable standard.

Strategic Aim 7:

People live in vibrant and well-connected communities; and homes and communities continue to meet the changing needs of residents

- We will support the development of sustainable communities
- We will meet the specialist needs of residents now and into the future
- We will work with partners to deliver suitable pitches for Gypsy and Travellers to meet identified accommodation needs

Achieved

We have:

- Developed and adopted a Communities Strategy to encourage better participation and involvement.
- Reviewed our Housing Allocations Policy to consider how it meets the needs of older or vulnerable applicants.
- Ensured the emerging Joint Local Plan includes policies to increase the supply of specialist and accessible housing.

On Track

We continue to:

- Develop the Integrated Neighbourhood Teams to improve the way housing, health and care services are delivered with and for local people.
- Work with partners across Suffolk to deliver suitable and sufficient pitches for Gypsies and Travellers to meet identified needs.

Target Next

We aim to:

- Work with partners on the Suffolk Housing Board to produce detailed analysis of housing needs for older and vulnerable people; focusing on mix, type, numbers required and spatial distribution. Analysis to include downsizing opportunities and to consider alternatives to Extra Care Housing.
- Commission an Older People's Homes Development Strategy.
- Carry out a health check on our current lettings and allocation policy to ensure that the current arrangements continue to meet the needs of the councils and our residents.

The development of mixed and balanced communities will have a number of benefits. We want to see a mix of housing sizes, types and tenures to meet residents' needs because this will ensure changing needs through life stages are met. For example, changes to household shapes, sizes and incomes; enable higher-income social housing tenants to buy without leaving the area; help preserve age balance in our rural communities; older people can move to smaller or rented homes in their neighbourhood; promote resident and community stability through a variety of tenure mixes, including ownership.

There are currently 1 in 5 people over the age of 65 in Suffolk, this is expected to rise to 1 in 3 in 20 years' time. Suffolk has a significantly ageing population; some areas in Babergh will see more marked increases in the number of older people living there. Life expectancy has also increased over the last decade, however, there has been a fall in healthy life expectancy over the years.

Many of these years are therefore being spent in poor health or with disability. The increase in levels of dementia is a challenge, with the illness now affecting one in 14 people over 65 years of age and one in six people over 80 years of age.

There are strong links between older age, housing and health and this strategy will ensure that we recognise the interdependence of these. We need to develop links and systems that maximise the use of local expertise on housing and health, so we are far more responsive to addressing needs now and in the future.

It's clear that well designed, integrated services allow us to detect and respond early to signs of difficulty and this in turn helps to forestall problems which could lead to far more serious and costly consequences later on. We want to develop our early help offer to residents as well as tenants and for this to be a fully embedded way of working across services.

The development of our new Joint Local Plan is a critical lever in helping to design healthier homes and communities, the hallmarks of inclusive growth. The 2018 National Planning Policy Framework specifically refers to planning policies and decisions which enable and support healthier lifestyles. High quality, versatile and adaptable homes will be increasingly expected by new and existing residents. We are confident that this can be achieved without compromising new supply.

We have a long and successful history of delivering specialist accommodation for vulnerable client groups within the districts. However, some of this provision particularly our own housing stock which is leased to service providers is outdated, the residents occupying these schemes are much older and the models of service delivery no longer fit for purpose. We will work with Suffolk County Council and the service providers to review this provision and decide whether we should enhance this provision where there is clear evidence to do so.

It is widely acknowledged that there is a national shortage of suitable permanent and transit sites for Gypsies and Travellers. It is also widely accepted that unsuitable and poor accommodation can lead to poor health, low level educational attainment and lack of employment opportunities.

To seek to address these issues accommodation needs assessments are regularly updated and we work with the Norfolk and Suffolk Gypsy, Roma Traveller Service to manage unauthorised sites. Work is ongoing to facilitate temporary provision across Suffolk as well as permanent provision of sites in Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

It is important that detailed consideration is given to these issues, that we set strong leadership and a positive tone and that any new sites coming forward includes well managed communications.

Strategic Aim 8:

Everyone has a suitable home, and residents are able to live as healthily, safely, independently as possible within sustainable communities

- We will reduce energy usage and costs through the use of more environmentally friendly sustainable alternatives
- We will empower residents in most need to maintain their independence and sustain their tenancies
- We will help residents to live independently for as long as possible in their own homes
- We will actively encourage and support people to lead active and healthy lives
- We will provide more choice in the housing market for older households and those requiring accessible homes

Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved

We have:

- Reviewed the way in which we provide information to help our tenants and customers to 'navigate' their way round the Suffolk system so that they can find the right support to help them when they need it.
- Identified strategic objectives for carbon reduction from our housing stock.
- Prepared and published a broad specification for new build council stock, which includes consideration of passive technologies and measures to increase accessibility.
- Developed our Active Well-being programme to enhance our physical activity offer, focused on older people and those living in rural areas to remain active and connected to their communities.

On Track

We continue to:

- Identify resources to bring forward environmental improvements to the council's estate, prioritising measures which support the health and well-being of our residents and encourage social interaction
- Work with partners across the Suffolk system, including health, to further develop measures to support vulnerable residents during winter.
- Work with local Dementia Action Alliances, to proactively support those living with the condition and their carers to remain active and engaged with a range of Dementia- friendly activities and opportunities.
- Collaborating with our partners to establish social prescribing schemes and non-medical referral options to improve well-being

Target Next

We aim to:

- Take forward measures to improve the environmental performance of our housing stock in order to reduce carbon emissions, meet national targets and contribute to climate emergency objectives.
- Expand the programme of upgrades to heating systems in council stock, replacing oil systems wherever possible and prioritising heat pumps where appropriate.
- Develop an 'Early Help Hub' that delivers effective, coordinated, multi-agency interventions - a more strategic approach that avoids service duplication and reduces long term service cost

We want to ensure that we provide the most sustainable and cost-efficient heating systems both in our housing stock and that of private landlords to support both the environment and support those on low incomes to reduce their fuel costs, this is especially important with the current cost of living crisis.

As part of the government's Clean Growth Strategy, ministers set a target that all social homes must have an EPC rating of 'C' by 2030. A comprehensive review has taken place, of all of our homes (in conjunction with the Energy Saving Trust), which has enabled us to plan and understand the cost of improvement measures, to each home, based on ensuring the use of the most cost-effective measures whilst providing the greatest level of enhancement to ratings.

We recognise that for those in most need being able to manage their home, tenancy and their finances can be difficult for multiple reasons. We will play a role alongside our partner agencies to provide targeted support which reduces future demand and prevents additional cost to the 'system' whether it be the cost of evictions, temporary accommodation, and the impact on families. We will ensure that residents have the necessary skills to maintain and manage their homes, supporting new skills acquisition when appropriate.

Suffolk has almost double the national average of people resident in rural areas and this rural population is older (higher percentage of those 65+) than its urban population. An All-Party Parliamentary Group inquiry HAPPI 4 (Housing our Ageing Population: Panel for Innovation) into rural housing shows people living in very rural areas like ours experience more limited social networks, isolation, and loneliness which can be exacerbated by poor transport.

Increasing life expectancy means we must continue to respond to the changing health needs of our older population and those who have especially complex needs. We will achieve this through encouraging more new-build homes to be adaptable to changing family requirements, refurbishments to existing homes and improving access to the full range of housing options.

In addition to the predicted rise in the older population we also expect a growing number of households to include one or more persons with a disability and more households with people living with long-term health conditions, because of ongoing innovations in the treatment of medical conditions.

Delivering improvements to unsuitable housing for people whose independence is compromised has been addressed by the establishment of Babergh and Mid Suffolk's Independent Living Service (ILS). The ILS provides advice, support and financial help to people living in the private sector. The service aims to encourage independence at home, by providing a supportive network across the county, focusing on creating suitable home environments for vulnerable residents, their families and carers. This includes listening to people and offering guidance on financial support, adaptations and relocation assistance.

The ILS co-ordinates delivery of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) and Minor Work Grants (MAGs). DFGs are subject to households means testing and are available to adapt a home of a disabled person or someone with a long-term chronic illness. Assessments are made by qualified occupational therapists. MAGs are not subject to a means test and are for lower value adaptations, they need to be supported by a letter from a suitable medical practitioner or recommendations by an occupational therapist.

Adaptations for both grants include provision of more suitable fittings or equipment, or changes to the fabric of the building to make everyday things easier which most take for granted, for example, getting into the home, bathing, preparing a meal or simply enjoying shared family time.

Between 2019 and 2022 198 homes in Babergh and 177 homes in Mid Suffolk have benefited from adaptations through the Disabled Facility and Minor Works grants.

We recognise the importance of the strategic priorities of our partners and will continue to support and endorse national programmes, such as winter planning for vulnerable groups, sharing local intelligence and novel ways to promote health awareness both to our vulnerable customers and to staff and partners alike.

When people fall ill, particularly when this includes a period in hospital, this can often delay and prevent them from returning home. This is not only stressful and inconvenient for the individual and their families, it can also be expensive, for a range of agencies. We need to be better prepared and more resilient as a system, to utilise our collective skills and resources to address gaps, delays and obstacles to the way we support people to get back to their homes.

We are committed to continuing to work together with our public sector partners, Suffolk County Council, the Clinical Commissioning Groups, Public Health, private, voluntary and community sectors to develop a fully integrated approach to housing, health and social care which harnesses the ambitions, experience and skills of all the partners and communities across Suffolk.

This means we need to understand how other services operate, how they deliver support and advice and what interventions they expect from others. We continue to share with partners what services we provide, for instance the benefits of housing adaptations and the risks of living in unheated homes and other hazards. We believe it to be important we reciprocate so others understand more about the home environment and how it might affect health so effective timely interventions can be better coordinated.

We also understand the complexities of the health and support services system, so we want to focus on helping customers and their families who are unsure or anxious navigate their way around the many and varied local health, social care and voluntary services that are there to help.

Older people can find access to right information at the right time difficult for many reasons, including lack of access to the internet or because they have limited mobility. Developing a better system would help to address these barriers as well as supporting people to access the various voluntary sector groups within their communities.

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Older people's economic and social circumstances also impact significantly on their health and well-being. Older people with less income and fewer financial assets are more likely to be overweight or obese and have lower levels of physical activity; older people with few relationships and little engagement with the local community frequently experience isolation and associated health problems such as depression, dementia, anxiety and decreased mobility. Our aim is to enable support and networking groups to thrive so older and vulnerable people are less isolated.

General needs housing may be the most appropriate housing option for many older people. However, in order for older people to remain healthy in their homes, they may need more assistance to keep their homes in a good state of repair and suitable for their needs.

We know that older people want to remain in their own homes, within the communities they know, with connections to their networks, their family and friends. We also know they would prefer not to move into residential or nursing care when their needs become too great.

Some people make early plans for life in old age, they move to more suitable housing, they move to communities which allow them to access shops and a doctor, they have the economic means to make informed choices.

For some older people, the choices they have are more limited, ill health isn't anticipated and they have less time to make plans. It is much more difficult to provide the positive outcomes they need, and their families expect. Appropriate housing and location, the right care and support as well as other services, such as reliable public transport enables people to remain involved and live independently.

We will therefore develop our priorities to support the older and most vulnerable to have more choice on the type of accommodation available, its location, local infrastructure and support networks.

Strategic Aim 9:

Both councils have strong relationships with residents, developers and other partners that enable us to deliver housing, infrastructure and services effectively, and to innovate where appropriate

- We will build stronger relationships and partnerships

Since the publication of the Joint Homes and Housing Strategy in 2019:

Achieved	<p>We have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Promoted and supported the delivery of community-led housing schemes and the formation of Community Land Trusts• Worked with neighbourhood groups to encourage communities to develop their own development plans
On Track	<p>We continue to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide support to neighbourhood planning groups to create and 'make' effective plans which deliver the housing that communities want in the designated area.• Have active and regular engagement with registered providers, and potential new providers, to increase the supply of new homes, including from for-profit housing associations.
Target Next	<p>We aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Maintain and strengthen our relationship with Homes England in order to optimise the funding streams for which we are eligible, including borrowing within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).• Develop a neighbourhood strategy and policy setting out how we will work with our tenants to improve the areas they live.• Work collectively as local authorities, within Suffolk, to support the effective delivery of services in relation to housing through means of the Suffolk Housing Board.

Neighbourhood Plans enable communities to set out a positive vision for how their area can develop and change to meet identified local need. This can include allocating new sites for housing development.

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To date, 24 Neighbourhood Plans have been adopted across our two districts (10 in Babergh and 14 in Mid Suffolk). Many other local communities are also preparing plans. We will continue to work with groups to develop their own plans.

The Community Housing Fund empowers local groups to identify what housing is needed in their area, the best location for it and to work with partners to deliver those developments. We will work closely with community-led housing groups and other stakeholders – such as the Community Land Trusts network and Homes England – to put the best tools in place to ensure efficient delivery of new local homes for local people.

The Lavenham Community Land Trust is an example of one of these groups in action. The Trust, working in partnership with the Council's Strategic Housing Team and other stakeholders, developed 18 affordable homes for local people, either to rent or for part ownership. The scheme was made possible, and part financed by Babergh Community Housing Fund and capital grant.

We continue to work with Suffolk County Council to identify suitable sites for new homes and we will continue to be more proactive in this approach. We will explore how to create innovative housing solutions that provide financial benefits but more importantly social and long-term benefits for our residents.

The Suffolk Housing Board is an established mechanism for progressing shared priorities and is committed to ensuring the voice of housing can be fully embedded across the integrated health and care delivery model in Suffolk and ensuring partners can utilise their assets more effectively to address increased and changing housing demand.

The success of this Homes and Housing Strategy and its priorities will be reliant on the quality and timeliness of ongoing connectivity and communication with actions reflecting the critical importance of a 'joined up' approach to ensure we make a positive difference to the housing markets.

Monitoring and Governance

This housing strategy sets out the current housing priorities and how we will address them over the short term and sets the direction of future travel beyond. The strategy is supported by a comprehensive and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) Delivery Plan (Appendix 1). The four principles that underpin this strategy are:

- We will be open for business, working with anyone that wants to develop and deliver much needed new homes; making more effective use of existing homes; and developing innovative solutions to the housing needs of our residents and communities.
- A new relationship with residents which is based around their need and their experience, rather than the processes of individual agencies. We plan to enable residents to feel empowered and have more choices with regard to; more of the right homes, in the right places, of the right tenure, at the right price and at the right time.
- A one public sector approach working together in a more linked up way with our public sector partners across the districts to deliver better services. This will help us to deliver more effective and efficient services whilst making savings to the public purse.
- We are committed to transparency and information on how we are performing against the action plans. Updates will be regularly published online to ensure residents have the information at their fingertips to engage with us and ensure we deliver on our priorities.

The Homes and Housing Strategy will be reviewed annually at Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Delivery Plan will be monitored quarterly. We will ensure, going forward, that the way we work will be flexible enough to incorporate changes and take advantage of potential new funding opportunities as Central Government's housing, planning and social care policies around us change – in order to maximise benefits to our residents.

Our housing vision is for residents of Babergh and Mid Suffolk to live in affordable and high quality homes that enable them to build settled, safe & healthy lives, within sustainable and thriving communities. The detail of why, how and what we will do to make this a reality is explained in this document and expanded upon in the Delivery Plan (Appendix 1) and we invite our residents to support this vision by working with us.



Babergh & Mid Suffolk
District Councils

**JOINT HOMES AND
HOUSING STRATEGY**

October 2022