



East Cambridgeshire District Council

HOUSING STRATEGY 2008 – 2010

Updated from the housing strategy 2003-2006

This strategy updates the housing strategy 2003-2006, which was produced after wide consultation with partners and residents. Consultation for a fully revised housing strategy will commence in 2009.

The Council has not translated the whole of this document into other languages. If you require a copy of this document in other languages, it can be made available on request.

This document can also be made available in large print or on audiotape if required.

Please contact Jane Hollingworth on 01353 665555 and we will try to accommodate your needs.

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1. Links to other local strategies:-

This strategy is linked to a number of other council strategies:-

- 1.1 **East Cambridgeshire Sustainable Community Strategy** sets out the aims of the East Cambridgeshire strategic partnership and brings together plans from many local agencies into an overarching plan to increase the environmental, social and economic well-being of the district. It can be viewed on:-
<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/html/compages.asp?servid=53&title=Sustainable+Community+Strategy&hier=Community>
- 1.2 **East Cambridgeshire Homelessness Strategy 2008 -2011**, available on the web site
<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/docs/publications/housing/homelessstrat08.pdf>
This strategy was fully revised and approved by Strategic Development Committee on 17th June 2008. It provides an overview of homelessness in the district and an action plan on homelessness for the next five years.
- 1.3 **East Cambridgeshire housing strategy for BME groups, gypsies and travellers and migrant workers**. This is also available on our web site
<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/docs/publications/corpservices/bmsehstrat.pdf>
This document provides an overview of the housing circumstances of BME groups, migrant workers, gypsies and travellers in the district and an action plan.
- 1.4 **East Cambridgeshire older peoples housing strategy** is being written and will be submitted to councillors for approval in spring 2009. This strategy will cover actions from the review of sheltered housing, disabled facilities grants and home improvements, aids and adaptations for people with disabilities and other priorities relating to the ageing population of the district.
- 1.5 **Cambridge sub-regional strategic housing market assessment** was completed in 2008 and forms the basis of housing needs assessments, this strategy and the revisions of the housing strategy. This can be viewed on the Cambridgeshire horizons web site at
http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/programme_det.asp?id=3678

2. The national policy agenda

2.1 National planning policy for housing

The Government's third planning policy statement about housing (known as PPS3) published in November 2006 sets out the planning policy framework for delivering the Government's housing objectives across England. In PPS3, the Government's strategic housing objectives are to:

- Achieve a wide choice of high quality homes, both affordable and market, to address the requirements of the community.
- Widen opportunities for home ownership and ensure high quality housing for those who cannot afford market housing, particularly those who are vulnerable or in need.
- Improve affordability across the housing market, including by increasing the supply of housing.
- Create sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities in all areas, both urban and rural.

PPS3 sets out strategic planning outcomes which the planning system should deliver. These are:

- High quality homes, well-designed and built to high standards.
- A mix of market and affordable housing to support a wide variety of households in all areas: urban and rural.
- Enough housing supply to meet need and demand, and to improve choices.
- Housing developments in suitable locations offering a range of community facilities and access to jobs, key services and infrastructure.
- A flexible, responsive supply of land, including previously-developed land.

2.2 Sustainable communities: settled homes; changing lives

Published in March 2005, the government's strategy to tackle homelessness aims to expand housing opportunities, including for those who need additional support and for disadvantaged sections of society. We will reduce homelessness by offering a wider range of preventative measures and increasing access to settled homes, halving the numbers living in temporary accommodation by 2010. This will be achieved by:

- Preventing homelessness.
- Providing support for vulnerable people.
- Tackling the wider causes and symptoms of homelessness.
- Helping more people move away from rough sleeping.
- Providing more settled homes.

2.3 Homes for the future: more affordable, more sustainable

Published in July 2007, priorities in the housing green paper which recognised the need to provide more homes for England's ageing, growing population. It set out a long-term ambition to deliver:

- A new housing target for 2016 of 240,000 net additional homes a year to address the serious affordability issues caused by a long-term mismatch between supply and demand
- A target to deliver 3 million new homes by 2020 and 2 million by 2016
- £8bn investment in affordable housing, delivering at least 70,000 more affordable homes a year by 2010-11
- At least 45,000 new social homes a year by 2010-11 and over 25,000 shared ownership and shared equity homes a year
- 200,000 homes to be delivered on surplus public sector sites by 2016
- More sustainable homes – all new homes to be built to zero-carbon standards from 2016, introducing mandatory ratings against the Code for Sustainable Homes and new standards for water efficiency

Facing the housing challenge: Action today, innovation for tomorrow gives an update one year on, showing progress on these commitments, including:

- Almost 200,000 additional homes in 2006-07 – an increase of more than 50% compared with 130,000 in 2001-02.
- Provisional figures show that around 30,000 social rented homes were delivered in 2007-08.
- Around 24,000 households were helped into low cost home ownership in 2007-08.
- Identification of suitable surplus public sector sites with capacity for some 140,000 homes.
- 104 out of 150 Local Area Agreements include housing supply as a priority and 102 with affordable housing as a priority.

It also sets out the challenges ahead, which include:

- A changing economic backdrop to government housing plans. Economies across the world are now facing a more difficult environment, with international economic instability and continued disruption in global financial markets means that the UK economy.
- Over the past decade the UK economy has become increasingly resilient with an unprecedented period of growth and record levels of employment. Past increases in house prices mean that many home owners now have substantial equity in their homes. Employment levels remain historically high and interest rates low. And the long-term demographic drivers of demand remain strong. This strength puts the UK economy, and the housing market, in a good position to face the current challenges.
- The reduced availability of credit has increased costs for first time buyers and those remortgaging. The turbulence in the global credit markets is creating real problems in the housebuilding sector. As a result the government is taking action to assist first-time buyers, those needing high-quality rented accommodation, those with mortgages and the housebuilding industry.

- Action to assist these groups must be combined with work to enable us to meet long-term challenges. The impact of higher life expectancy and social change on housing demand will continue – and there remains substantial unmet need for housing in Britain. In a testing economic context, we must not lose sight of the need to act now to provide for the homes and communities of the future.

The Government's objectives over the next year are identified as:

- Provide greater help for first time buyers.
- Help existing homeowners facing difficulties due to problems in the international mortgage markets.
- Keep housing supply, particularly affordable housing supply, as high as possible to keep on track to meet our targets.
- Maintain capacity and create the right conditions for recovery and long-term growth.

This strategy highlights how east Cambridgeshire is working to help meet these objectives.

2.4 Lifetime Homes, Lifetime Neighbourhoods

This national strategy for housing in an ageing society was published in February 2008 by the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions.

The ageing of the population will be one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century for housing. This strategy sets out our response to this challenge, our plan to create Lifetime Homes in Lifetime Neighbourhoods.

The strategy outlines the government's plans to make sure there is enough appropriate housing available in future to relieve the forecasted unsustainable pressures on homes, health and social care services. This includes sections on:

- A better deal for older people today
- The growing role of home improvement agencies
- Providing for people with disabilities: modernising the disabled facilities grant, creating more flexibility and speeding up delivery
- Ensuring the efficient use of existing accessible housing
- Building homes to lifetime homes standards
- Inclusive design excellence – homes, interiors and adaptations
- Making the most of the planning system
- Incentives and rewards: the role of housing and planning delivery grant
- Neighbourhoods for a lifetime: present and future possibilities
- The triangle of independence – housing, health and care
- A new future for specialised housing
- Where we want to be in five years time

2.5 Creating strong, safe, prosperous communities

Published in July 2008, this statutory guidance sets out the government's thinking behind:

- A new relationship between central and local government, partners, citizens and community leadership.
- The role of Local Strategic Partnerships.
- A new duty for local authorities to involve local communities.
- The role of Sustainable Community Strategies and how they relate to other local plans and strategies.
- Establishing priorities through Local Area Agreements, and involving partners in co-operating when setting targets.
- Delivering outcomes.

Under the government's new performance framework set out in *Creating strong, safe, prosperous communities*, local authorities have adopted a new way of working together within county boundaries. The Cambridge housing sub-region includes five Cambridgeshire and two Suffolk districts, so we need to refer to two separate sets of partnerships and documents for this agenda. This framework includes:

- Forming and building local strategic partnerships (LSPs). These bring together the views of local private, voluntary and community sectors to create a sustainable community strategy, and turn this strategy into reality. LSPs can help services to be delivered in a more joined-up way by bringing together partners from the public, private and voluntary sectors. LSPs should also link neighbourhood level activity and influence strategic priorities and resource allocations.
- Creating a sustainable community strategy. This is a document setting out a long-term and sustainable vision for an area and its people, which aims to address economic, social and environmental needs.
- Forming local area agreements (LAA). Using the sustainable community strategy for its agenda, this sets out a 3-year agreement between a local area and central government. It describes how local priorities will be met by delivering local solutions, and contributes to national priorities set out by the Government. The agreement is negotiated between the local strategic partnership and the regional Government Office, and includes specific targets.

2.6 Cambridgeshire's Vision: countywide sustainable community strategy 2007-2021

Cambridgeshire's Vision is for high-quality, cost-effective public services that meet the needs of local people. Priorities are structured around five areas: growth, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, equality and inclusion, and communities.

3. The regional policy agenda

3.1 England is divided into nine regions. The Cambridge housing sub-region falls into the East of England region. The East of England's Regional Assembly (EERA) promotes the economic, social and environmental well-being of the region through a partnership of elected and stakeholder representatives. Along with the East of England's Development Agency (EEDA), EERA coordinates and produces a range of strategies guiding activity across a range of agendas.

3.2 Regional Spatial Strategy: The East of England Plan

By 2021 the East of England will be realising its economic potential and providing a high quality of life for its people, including by meeting their housing needs in sustainable inclusive communities. At the same time it will reduce its impact on climate change and the environment, including through savings in energy and water use and by strengthening its stock of environmental assets.

3.3 Regional Housing Provision 2001 to 2021

Local planning authorities are to facilitate delivery of at least 508,000 net additional dwellings between 2001 and 2021 across the Region. Taking account of completions of 105,550 between 2001 and 2006, some 402,540 homes still need to be built across the Region between 2006 and 2021. District allocations (see table) are minimum targets to be achieved, rather than ceilings which should not be exceeded. Local planning authorities must plan housing delivery for at least 15 years from the date their development plan documents are adopted.

Minimum dwelling provision 2001 to 2021			
	Min to build 2001 to 2021	Of which already built 2001 to 2006	Still to build 2006 to 2021
Cambridge City	19,000	2,300	16,700 (1,110 pa)
East Cambridgeshire	8,600	3,240	5,360 (360 pa)
Fenland	11,000	3,340	7,660 (510 pa)
Huntingdonshire	11,200	2,890	8,310 (550 pa)
South Cambridgeshire	23,500	3,620	21,380 (1,330 pa)
Forest Heath	6,400	810	5,590 (370 pa)
St Edmundsbury	10,000	1,960	8,040 (540 pa)

3.4 Affordable Housing

Within the overall housing requirement set out above, Local Development Plan Documents should set appropriate targets for affordable housing taking into account:

- The objectives of the East of England Plan.

- Local assessments of affordable housing need, as part of strategic housing market assessments.
- The need where appropriate to set specific, separate targets for social rented and intermediate housing.
- Evidence of affordability pressures.
- The Regional Housing Strategy.

3.5 The Regional Housing Strategy

The vision of the regional housing strategy is to ensure everyone can live in a decent home which meets their needs, at a price they can afford and in locations that are sustainable. Among other aims, this means more, sustainable housing provision, in high quality homes and environments, creating inclusive communities. Themes covered by the strategy include:

- More, sustainable housing provision - bringing about a step-change in delivery and ensuring sustainable provision
- High quality homes and environments – outlines the quality deficit, the balance of quantity, quality and cost, achieving the decent homes standard in existing homes, quality environments and regeneration, empty homes, and how housing can improve health and well-being.
- Creating inclusive communities - including assessing need, inclusion and community cohesion, providing mixed communities and widening choice, factors for rural communities, homelessness and supporting people.
- Recommendations for public investment including the balance between investment in existing and new homes.
- Implementation, managing and monitoring the RHS - setting out priorities for delivery in the short-term and at a local level, how delivery will be managed and monitored, risk and contingency planning, and an action plan.

There are now plans to review and update the regional housing strategy in 2009.

3.6 Regional Housing Investment Plan

The Regional Housing Investment Plan sets out four work streams for significant investment from 2008-11, shown below:

• National Affordable Housing Programme	£711m
• Public sector decent homes	£38m
• Private sector renewal, regeneration and mixed communities	£49m
• Gypsy and Traveller site grant	£27m
• Total	£825m

The Housing Corporation has moved away from allocating all resources at the beginning of the national affordable housing programme but instead has introduced continuous market engagement so bidders can apply for funds to build new homes throughout the programme. The total size of the

cumulative 2008 to 2011 programme for the East of England to date is £247.1m, which will deliver 3,729 new rented homes and 3,682 new low cost home ownership homes (including 2,287 open market homebuy). Of these, some 6,227 homes will be completed in 2008 to 2011 and a further 1,184 in 2011 to 2013.

The Regional Housing Investment Plan 2008/11 sets out the strategic framework for this new programme, indicating regional spatial and thematic targets and sub-regional priorities.

3.7 Regional Economic Strategy (RES)

During 2006-08, the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) has been leading the development of the new, regional economic strategy (RES) for the East of England 2008- 2031. The strategy sets out a vision with bold targets and priorities so that we can drive forward as a globally-competitive region. The RES shows where we want to go and how we will get there. The strategy is owned by the region and will be delivered through the collective work of political, business and community leaders and institutions.

The vision for the region is for it to be:

- Internationally competitive with a global reputation for innovation and business
- A centre for growth.
- A region that harnesses and develops the talents and creativity of all.
- At the forefront of the low-carbon and resource-efficient economy.

and known for:

- Exceptional landscapes, vibrant places and quality of life.
- Being a confident, outward-looking region with strong leadership and where communities actively shape their future.

3.8 Housing and the RES

Highlights of the RES for housing include its key role in ensuring the region is an attractive place to live, work and do business; and in creating sustainable places for people and businesses, a priority which “focuses on the need for the region to have a balanced approach to the provision of homes and jobs to support economic growth and regeneration”. Housing’s key function in ensuring a strong, healthy and just society is acknowledged, and its importance in enabling the region to succeed as part of the Greater South East.

3.9 Supporting People East of England Regional Strategy (SPERG)

Housing-related support works with a range of vulnerable groups to help them live independently. There are twenty one different Supporting People client groups ranging from the young single homeless to older people. Some individuals have complex needs and meet the criteria for more than one client group. Supporting People

grant is used to pay for services aiming to help vulnerable people live independently in their homes, and can include:

- Life skills training, such as support to acquire domestic skills.
- Assisting people with dealing with others such as landlords, neighbours, and a range of professionals.
- Assisting people with personal budgeting.
- Support with moving to more independent accommodation.

Strategic objectives for supporting people across the Eastern Region are to:

- Raise the profile of supporting people.
- Ensure supported housing services meet future needs.
- Secure access to housing support services for vulnerable people.
- Support the development of shared practices across the region.
- Ensure supported housing services meet future demographic changes.
- Ensure service users have equal access to services across boundaries.
- Support providers & service users to adapt to changes in models of service.

The SPERG strategy links with other key strategies including the Regional Housing Strategy, Regional Spatial Strategy and Regional Strategic Plan for Reducing Re-offending. The new integrated regional strategy will affect, and be affected by housing issues although its initial focus is on economic and spatial issues. We need to ensure housing contributes fully to the debate.

4. The Housing Strategy in East Cambridgeshire

4.1 East Cambridgeshire District Council recognises the importance of good quality housing that is affordable to its occupants. Furthermore, we recognise the role that housing plays in the wider community and the contribution it makes to people's quality of life. Therefore this Housing Strategy is closely linked to, and a sub-strategy of, the Sustainable Community Strategy, which aims to address the wider issues that residents of East Cambridgeshire associate with their 'home'. These might include crime and the fear of crime, good health, community integration, and other socio-economic factors.

4.2 In 1993, the Council transferred its housing stock to Hereward Housing which has since merged with the Sanctuary group to become Sanctuary Hereward. Since then, the Council has retained an important strategic and enabling role. This means that the Council is responsible for intervening in the housing market in order to balance housing need with housing supply. We do this to try and achieve our overall vision of the Housing Strategy, which is:

**That everyone can live in a decent home at an affordable cost
in a sustainable and socially inclusive community**

4.3 Achievements Against 2003 Action Plan and Subsequent Service Plans

- A new comprehensive strategic housing market assessment has been developed for the Cambridge sub-region, including a housing needs assessment for East Cambridgeshire
- A new Local Development Framework is being developed and is going to public enquiry in 2009
- New nomination agreements for section 106 sites and for rural exception sites have been developed
- The Council has engaged with the rest of the Cambridge sub region to form Home-link, the new choice based lettings scheme for the whole sub-region. As well as improving the service to the public this will produce more accurate information about demand for properties in particular parishes as the system develops
- All shared ownership properties are now dealt with by the Homebuy Zone agent, Keyhomes-East, and Council staff meet regularly with Keyhomes East to manage and monitor this process

- The Rural Housing Enabler is still part funded by the council and is working with parish councils to carry housing needs surveys in rural villages
- A new post of development and enabling officer is working to identify land which can be used for both exception sites and other development of affordable housing, this has become particularly important during the economic downturn and “credit crunch”
- Since 2004 the Council has exceeded its target of 150 new affordable units per annum. This may change during the economic downturn but new sites are still being identified
- The housing advice service has been completely remodelled, now providing a comprehensive housing options and homelessness prevention service. Details of this can be found in the Homelessness Strategy
- This council contributed to the Cambridge sub-regional assessment of housing needs for gypsies and travellers. Details can be found in the BME housing strategy
- The Council has contributes to the expansion of Portland house in Newmarket, providing another 8 spaces for vulnerable young people
- A new allocations policy has been developed
- A new rent deposit scheme has been developed and has been operating successfully since 2004. Details of this can be found in the homelessness strategy
- The council has access to a small portfolio of privately leased properties providing settled accommodation for families who were at risk of homelessness.
- An empty homes strategy has been developed and an empty homes officer appointed
- The council continues to fund East Cambridgeshire Care and Repair to provide services to improve homes in the private sector
- An older peoples housing strategy is being developed following the best value review of sheltered housing. One of the aims of the review, to provide more extra-care housing in Soham, is being realised through the expansion and redevelopment of Keith Leonard House.

4.4 Consultation

This Strategy has been endorsed by the Council’s Strategic Development Committee as an update of the 2003 to 2006 housing strategy which was developed with extensive consultation. During 2009 there will be a period of consultation with key stakeholders, partners, residents of East

Cambridgeshire and users of the Housing Service to develop a new housing strategy for 2010 to 2013.

4.5 Corporate Context

The Council's Corporate plan for 2008 (<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/docs/publications/corpservices/corpplan08.pdf>) sets out the following purpose for the Council:-

“Working for the wellbeing of the community, with partners, to plan and deliver high quality, customer centred services”

The housing services delivered under this Strategy span two directorates within the Council: Development Services (Housing Services) and Environmental Health.

The **Housing Service** is responsible for the strategic and enabling services including:

- Affordable housing development,
- Supported housing and Supporting People
- Housing Strategy
- Homelessness and Homelessness prevention
- Housing advice
- Managing services delivered by partner organisations, such as Hereward housing and other housing associations, including the council's housing register and allocations system
- Liaising with other bodies at regional and sub-regional level to ensure that funding and support is available to meet this council's housing objectives

The purpose of the Housing service is:-

To enable all residents of East Cambridgeshire to have access to housing suitable for their needs, and to ensure that support and advice are available to achieve that objective.

The **Environmental Health Service** is responsible for the following housing services:

- Private sector housing renewal
- Home improvement in the private sector
- Energy efficiency
- Mobile home sites
- Traveller liaison
- Pest infestation

- Disabled Facility Grants (DFGs)
- Monitoring and regulation of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

The purpose of the environmental health service is:-

To protect and enhance public health and the environment

The Housing Strategy fits with all three **Corporate Objectives**:

1. **To champion accessible public services to protect and enhance a high quality of life for all residents and ensuring effective and efficient use of resources**
2. **To work with our partners to deliver continuous improvement through effective challenge and learning and achieve the development of an informed, involved and united community**
3. **As one of the fastest growing districts in the country, we aim to stimulate and properly manage the social, economic and environmental impact of growth to meet the needs and aspirations of the whole community**

4.6 Performance Management Framework

In February 2008, the Council agreed a revised set of Corporate Objectives which describe the priority areas of work for the Council until 2011. These objectives build on the existing corporate objectives and re-state the importance of managing growth, working in partnership and delivering high quality services. These corporate objectives have been informed by consultation carried out by the Council on service priorities, and consultation carried out by the *East Cambridgeshire Strategic Partnership* to develop the recently published *Sustainable Community Strategy*.

The *Sustainable Community Strategy* is managed by the *Local Strategic Partnership*. It contains objectives for the housing service:-

- **We will provide new housing and ensure the best use is made of existing housing stock to enable all residents of East Cambridgeshire to have access to housing suitable for their needs. We will work with Parish Councils to support the development of Rural Community Land Trusts as a means to creating long-term affordable and sustainable development.**

- **New development will reflect and/or be sympathetic to the distinctive character and appearance of the local area through design, the use of materials, layout and landscaping.**
- **We shall support initiatives to reduce and prevent homelessness and to reduce periods of occupation in temporary accommodation, particularly for households with children.**

And number of housing-related key measures for success:-

- Number of affordable homes delivered (gross) (PSA 20, NI155).
- Net additional homes provided (NI 154).
- Number of long term empty properties (part PSA 20 NI 154).
- Number of households living in Temporary Accommodation (PSA 20, N1 156).
- Households who considered themselves to be homeless or at risk of becoming homeless (local indicator).
- The average length of stay in hostel and bed and breakfast accommodation of households which include dependent children or a pregnant woman and which are unintentionally homeless and in priority need (Local Indicator).

The Council sets clear priorities for improvement through the service planning process and these priorities clearly underpin the ambitions set out in the corporate objectives. Such priorities are determined by consultation with all sections of the community, and the extensive use of research that is used to develop Council policies.

These priorities are translated into actions in Service Plans, which link the corporate objectives to actions on the ground. This link is like a golden thread that runs through the service planning process and ensures that the Council's ambitions are communicated and acted upon all the way through the organisation. Service plans are approved by council annually and can be found in the agendas of council meetings, or a copy can be obtained from the Head of Housing (email: housing@eastcamb.gov.uk)

4.7 Resources

The Council's decision-making process for capital and revenue is linked to the Service Planning process. Draft Service Plans are drawn up and reviewed in October and demonstrate how the Council will meet its Corporate and Service Objectives. Service improvement objectives are identified at this point and reported to the Strategic Development Committee along with risk assessments and financial appraisals for improvement bids.

Members prioritise these bids in light of the Corporate Objectives and

Medium Term Financial Strategy at the Policy and Resources Committee when it agrees the draft revenue and capital budget. Following this process, budgets are agreed and Service Plans finalised and improvement objectives remain in the Service Plans as either funded or unfunded items.

For a summary of housing budgets and spend in 2007/07 and a budget for 2008/09 please see Appendix 1

5. Geography of East Cambridgeshire

5.1 The District of East Cambridgeshire covers approximately 650 square kilometres and is the third largest district in Cambridgeshire in terms of land area. The district lies approximately 60 miles north of London, on the western edge of the East Anglia region and is essentially rural in nature with three market towns of Ely, Littleport and Soham. The City of Ely, with its outstanding cathedral, is an attraction for national and international tourists. There are also many attractions in the countryside, with 78 County Wildlife Sites and 19 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in the district, including Wicken Fen, Chippenham Fen and the Ouse Washes.

5.2 Population

East Cambridgeshire has the smallest population of the five districts within Cambridgeshire, estimated at 76,400 (County Council's 2006 mid year estimate), with 45% of these living in the market towns of Ely, Soham and Littleport. However as East Cambridgeshire remains one of the fastest growing districts in the country, the largest single factor affecting the area is the impact of population growth. Growth is expected to continue with an estimated population of 81,300 by 2021 (Cambs County Council population forecasts).

Such rapid population change brings challenges in many of the areas that the Strategic Partnership sees as priorities in the district. Recently, due to the job opportunities available in the farming and packaging industries locally, there has been an increase in migrant workers in the district. There are currently no accurate population figures to support the largely anecdotal evidence of the impact of this growth, or the needs of these communities, however, latest estimates and a summary of issues raised can be found in the BME Housing Strategy.

5.3 Quality of life

Overall, the quality of life in East Cambridgeshire is good. The 2006 *Quality of Life Survey* found that more than four out of five residents said that they were satisfied with their neighbourhood as a place to live. At the top of the list of what makes people glad to be here are factors like the social and health services available, quality of surrounding countryside, and the availability of housing. When measured using the National Index of Multiple Deprivation (that records average ward scores), East Cambridgeshire is ranked 318 out of 354 authorities (with 1 being the most deprived). While the district is relatively prosperous, there are differences across the area. Some parishes have "pockets" of deprivation that exist as a result of the declining traditional industries, limited public transport access and rural isolation.

5.4 Economic Activity

Although unemployment is lower than the regional and national average and economic activity rates are higher than average, there are still significant economic issues to be addressed. A high proportion of economically active residents (over 49%) commute out of the district to work, and a high proportion have good qualifications and high skill levels. Retaining these workers through the development of appropriate work opportunities is vital for the future growth and sustainability of the local economy.

A relatively high proportion of the workforce has no formal qualification. This needs to be addressed to ensure that all parts of the community are able to enjoy access to appropriate employment opportunities, and the workforce is sufficiently skilled to support future economic growth. The long-term economic health of the market towns – particularly Soham and Littleport - is a key issue for the community and the organisations that make up the *ECSP* are already working to ensure that viable market towns remain at the heart of the local economy.

5.5 Ethnic Composition

According to the 2001 Census, East Cambridgeshire has a non-white population of just 2.1%. The largest ethnic population in the district is gypsy travellers, although they are not counted as a distinct ethnic group in the census and their actual numbers are therefore uncertain. There is more information about the changing ethnic composition of the district in the BME housing strategy

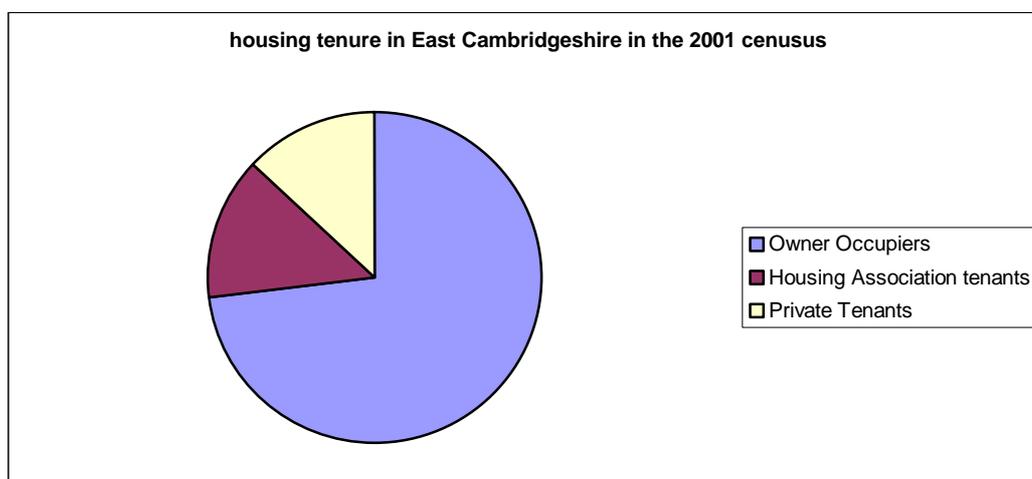
5.6 Gypsies and Travellers

East Cambridgeshire District Council employs a Traveller Liaison Officer. Every six months a caravan count is completed to enable the Council to effectively map the trends in this ethnic group and to report the findings to Communities and Local Government. This data confirms that Cambridgeshire has the largest traveller population in the country. Within the county, Fenland has the largest number of travellers, followed by South Cambridgeshire and then East Cambridgeshire. The council was a partner in the Cambridgeshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in 2005/6 and a discussion of this, the results of the survey work undertaken and the council's proposals for action can be found in the BME Housing Strategy.

6. East Cambridgeshire Housing Market

6.1 Introduction

The Cambridgeshire sub-regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment estimates that there were 4666 housing association tenants in the district in 2005/6. This is 13.6% of the total, approximately the same as the proportion in the 2001 census. Although the number of housing association properties has not changed significantly (properties are sold to tenants through the right to acquire almost as fast as new ones are built) the overall number of dwellings in the district has increased from 30,950 in 2002 to 34,300 in 2008



The percentage of private tenants may be higher now for two reasons, first, homes are less affordable. If people can't afford to buy, they may rent instead rather than staying at home, especially as the average age of first time buyers has also risen, and second, there has been a large increase in the buy-to-let market, which should mean there are more rental properties available.

6.2 Vacant Dwellings

Approximately 2% of all dwellings are recorded as vacant. This is lower than the national figure, which is just over 3%. According to data from the Empty Homes Agency, 3.06% of the national housing stock is empty and 2.53% of the houses in the East of England. However, each empty home represents a potential housing solution for a family threatened with homelessness, and for this reason dealing with empty homes is a priority for East Cambridgeshire. The Council's Empty Homes Strategy can be viewed on

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/docs/publications/envservices/ehstrat.pdf>

6.3 Houses in Multiple Occupation

East Cambridgeshire has a low number of houses which are known to be in multiple occupation (HMOs), 40 compared with nearly 4000 in Cambridge City. However, the law only requires the registration of HMOs which are three storey dwellings, or those with more than five occupants, and Fenland district, which is in many ways very similar to East Cambridgeshire, has over 300. Very little of the stock in East Cambridgeshire is of this type, and it is acknowledged that the council's official figures are probably an underestimate.

While HMO data provides some information on households in shared accommodation, it only includes larger properties i.e. three or more people in two or more households in the same dwelling. It does not include information on other types of shared accommodation such as people taking in lodgers. It is also probably not a complete data set and will require further research in the future. This will be carried out by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment team as part of a rolling programme of updates.

6.4 Housing Costs and Affordability

Cambridge Sub-Region's Strategic Housing Market Assessment summarises information on the prices of properties sold between January and March 2006. It is based on information held by the Land Registry. The review looks at the average, median and lower quartile (25%) house prices and "Entry Level" house prices in each area. The entry level is the lowest price band covering a reasonable number of sales in order to exclude properties sold below the market level (e.g. within a family).

Average Prices by Property Type in East Cambridgeshire Jan-Mar 2006 and as a percentage of the sub-regional average price				
Detached	Semidetached	Terraced	Flat/Maisonette	All Properties
£237,368	£162,858	£148,701	£113,565	£183,813
90%	94%	94%	86%	95%

Source: Land Registry

Average Prices, 1st Quarters (Jan to March) 2003-2006			
Av Price 2003	Av Price 2004	Av Price 2005	Av Price 2006
£158,149	£174,241	£185,455	£183,813

Source: Land Registry

This shows a comparison of the average house prices of properties sold in the first quarter of the last four years. They show a steady increase in most districts between 2003-2005 and a slight drop in 2006. In this period, the average house price in the sub-region increased by £862 (0.4%). The largest increase was in South Cambridgeshire (9.9%

or £22,322). The average house price in East Cambridgeshire, Huntingdonshire and Forest Heath decreased between 2005 and 2006. It increased again in 2007 but at 2008 is expected to show another drop due to the general downturn in the housing market.

6.5 Housing Affordability

The mean average house price can be distorted by a small number of very expensive sales. Using the median – where 50% of all sales fall below and 50% are above – usually produces a lower figure. Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire both had large differences between the median and mean in 2005 and 2005, and in both cases there were two sales for over a million pounds. The median price in East Cambridgeshire in 2006 was £184,029, not significantly different from the mean.

The entry level band is taken to be the bottom price band with more than 20 sales recorded. This means that the data omits some very low prices, which could reflect property exchanges between family members etc, and so provides a better picture of properties available on the open market. The entry level prices for East Cambridgeshire did not change significantly between 2005 and 2006. Entry level prices were between £100,000 and £120,000

Terraced properties comprised 47% of the lower cost properties in East Cambridgeshire (in line with the sub-regional figure).

6.6 House prices and Incomes

The average (mean) earnings in east Cambridgeshire in 2006 were £30,072. With the average house price at £183,813, the house price to earnings ratio is 6.11:1

The lower quartile earnings for the district in 2006 were £17,805, and the lower quartile house price was £134,700, a house price to wages ratio of 7.57:1. It is harder for people with lower quartile earnings to be able to afford a cheaper house than for people with higher incomes to afford a more expensive one.

A standard mortgage applies a ratio of approximately three times the household income, so if the ratio of house price to income exceeds 3:1 the property is not affordable.

6.7 The effects of the “credit crunch”

The East of England regional assembly published a housing market update in October 2008. This shows that over the whole of the eastern region:-

- The latest average house price has decreased by 11.4% to £163,000
- The lower quartile house price to income ratio has decreased to 6.4:1.
- The average time to sell a property has increased.
- The number of mortgage approvals has slumped to the lowest figure for 50 years
- The number of house transactions has dropped from 65,210 in July 2007 to 23, 520 in July 2008. This is continuing to decrease at October 2008

During September 2008 in East Cambridgeshire there has been a sudden increase in presentations to the housing advice service of people who are in mortgage arrears and fear repossession

The market is thus extremely volatile. It is hoped that a more helpful picture, which can provide the basis for a strategy plan to deal with the long-lasting effects, can be provided for the housing strategy update in 2009.

6.8 Private renting

The 2001 census showed that around 13% of people in the sub-region rent their homes privately, the majority from a letting agent or landlord. In East Cambridgeshire this figure was lower, at 11.9%

As in Forest Heath District, the private rented market in East Cambridgeshire is distorted, as a significant proportion of private lets are for USAAF, with some local letting agents specialising in this market, and also because of the horse racing industry in and around Newmarket.

There has been around a 10% increase in private tenancies nationally the past few years (see ARLA's report *Buy to Let: The Revolution – Ten Years On*). The Survey of English Housing shows an increase in the number of homes renting privately from 10% to 12% between 2001 and 2006.

Type of Landlord				
	Landlord/ Letting Agent	Employer	Friend/ Relative	Other
East Cambridgeshire	68.6%	14.9%	10.2%	6.3%
Sub-Region	71.3%	11.5%	8.4%	8.8%

Source: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, "The Modern Private Rented Sector," 2006

Across the sub-region as a whole, 71% of households in the private rented sector rent from a private landlord or a letting agent. Eleven percent rent from employers.

Nationally private sector tenants are on average quite young with the largest age group being 23-30 year olds (*ARLA Survey of Residential Investment Landlords*, 2006). The 16 to 34 age band is the largest for renters in all Cambridgeshire areas except Fenland, which also has a high number of renters aged over 55.

6.9 Private sector rents and affordability

The CLG's Practice Guidance for SHMAs recommends using Rent Service data to calculate the cost of renting a property.

Local Reference Rents PCM by Number of Bedrooms, Oct-Dec 2006				
	Room	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed
	£320	£231	£449	£526

Local Reference Rents are the midpoint of the highest and the lowest "normal rents" in an area. This is the price that housing benefit will use to calculate how much to pay on any particular property.

However, average market rents are higher

Average Rent PCM by Size, Oct-Dec 2006				
Room	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 or more
£333	£537	£595	£758	£1,021

and lower quartile rents also are higher

Lower Quartile Rent PCM by Size, Oct-Dec 2006				
Room	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed	4 or more
£300	£458	£550	£650	£850

Average rents in East Cambridgeshire represent about 29% of median household income in 2006.

6.10 Housing Benefit

Housing Benefit in East Cambridgeshire has been out-sourced to Anglia Revenues Partnership, (ARP) based in Thetford. They provide a very speedy and efficient service, and as a result East Cambridgeshire are in the upper quartile of performance for Housing Benefit determinations for 5 out of 6 indicators.

The Performance Standards Framework, issued by the Department for Work and Pensions, is implemented by the Council. A statement of intent has been endorsed that sets customer care standards for ARP's work on

Housing Benefit and Council Tax.

6.11 Housing Need in East Cambridgeshire

The Cambridgeshire sub-regional strategic housing market assessment, completed in 2008, has used two different methods to calculate housing need. The methodologies are detailed in the assessment documents. Both methods show that East Cambridgeshire needs between 700 and 800 new units of affordable housing each year for the next 5 years to meet the backlog of need and take account of new housing need arising in the district. This work is being updated regularly and these figures may change due to the effects of the “credit crunch” and the economic downturn.

6.12 New affordable housing

The new core strategy document for the Local Development Framework will propose a new affordable housing policy which will propose that at least 35% of all housing provided in the district between 2008 and 2025 will be affordable. The type of affordable housing provided should meet identified local needs (currently identified in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment 2007 as a need for 70% rented social housing and 30% shared ownership).

Affordable housing is defined as 'housing which is affordable for those who cannot meet their housing needs on the open market'

New market housing schemes of 3+ dwellings will be required to make appropriate provision for an element of affordable housing, in accordance with the following principles:

- The proportion and type of affordable housing will be the subject of negotiation with applicants.
- On schemes in the south of the district, a minimum of 40% of the total number of dwellings to be provided will be sought
- On schemes in the north of the district, a minimum of 30% of the total number of dwellings to be provided will be sought
- Account will be taken of any particular costs associated with the development (e.g. site remediation and infrastructure provision) and other viability considerations.
- The precise mix in terms of tenure and house sizes of affordable housing within a scheme determined by local circumstances at the time of planning permission, including housing need, development costs and the availability of subsidy.
- Affordable housing should normally be provided on-site, except on small schemes where the applicant can demonstrate exceptional reasons for off-site provision or financial contributions in lieu.
- The affordable properties will be made available solely to people in housing need at an affordable cost for the life of the property

- On larger schemes the affordable housing will be provided in phases as the development progresses, and shall be mixed within the development in groups as detailed by the Council at the time of the development.

This proposal has been the subject of viability testing and needs to go through the public enquiry process. It may thus be altered before it becomes Council policy. However, the intention is to increase the proportion of affordable housing as follows:-

Future Delivery of Affordable Housing in the Cambridgeshire Sub-Region

	Overall Housing Target Emerging RSS 2006 to 2021	Current or Emerging Percentage of Affordable Housing	Affordable Housing Target	Realistic Yield on Non Exception Sites (taking into account thresholds and abnormal development costs)	Exception Sites (5.1% of total completions in rural districts)	Total Affordable Housing
Cambridge	16,700	40%	6,680	4,627		4,627
East Cambs	5,360	30%	1,608	1,319	329	1,516
Fenland	7,660	35%	2,681	1,979	471	2,449
Hunts	8,310	40%	3,324	2,453	511	2,964
South Cambs	19,980	40%	7,992	5,898	1,227	7,126
Cambs Total	58,010	35%	20,304	16,341	2,538	18,681
Peterborough	21,370	30%	6,411	4,731		4,731
King's Lynn & West Norfolk	9,610	30%	2,883	2,128	590	2,718
Forest Heath	5,590	35%	1,957	1,444	343	1,787
St. Edmundsbury	8,020	40%	3,208	2368	493	2,860

6.13 Homelessness and Temporary Accommodation are dealt with in detail in the Council's Homelessness strategy

6.14 Stock Condition in East Cambridgeshire

The Stock Condition Survey carried out in June 2002 used a stratified sample of 1,455 dwellings from the council tax list. The sample was stratified by area, concentrating on three areas of the district: Littleport and the northern portion of the district, Ely and the central areas and an area consisting of the remaining, Southern, parts of the district.

A further sample stock condition survey of the Cambridgeshire sub-region has been carried out by the BRE in 2008 and the results of this are awaited, and a full stock condition survey of the district is in development. The information in this section is based on the 2002 survey.

The table below gives a breakdown of the sample.

<i>Sample Groups</i>	<i>Totals</i>
<i>Littleport and north-district</i>	<i>485</i>
<i>Ely and Mid-district</i>	<i>485</i>
<i>South-district</i>	<i>485</i>

The sample size was selected in order to ensure that at an access rate of 55% a total of 800 full inspections would be achieved. The information gathered from the survey has been used to enable the council to prioritise its policies ensuring that those most in need such as the elderly, disabled and those on low incomes receive assistance to improving their homes.

6.15 Profile of the Housing Stock

The housing stock is considerably more modern than the national profile. A smaller proportion of the stock than the national average was built before 1919. A significantly larger proportion of the stock than average was built post 1964.

Detached houses constitute 44% of dwellings. Semi-detached houses constitute 34%, higher than the national average of 30%. There are correspondingly smaller proportions of terraced houses and purpose built flats.

6.16 Stock Condition / Unfitness

The overall unfitness rate for East Cambridgeshire is 6% compared to an unfitness rate of 7% nationally (1996 EHCS). This represents 1,800 unfit dwellings of which 300 (15%) are flats and 1,500 (85%) are houses.

The most common reasons for unfitness are failures associated with the following fitness categories: disrepair (39%), food preparation (40%), bath/shower (25%) and heating (25%).

One indication of the severity of unfitness is the number of items on which a dwelling fails the fitness standard. In East Cambridgeshire a disproportionate number of dwellings fail on multiple reasons for unfitness, suggesting that chronic unfitness is a greater problem than is usually the case.

The likely cost of improving an unfit dwelling to a standard the Council would require for a renovation grant would be an average of £11,700. Unfitness is usually associated with older heads of households, and this association is evident in East Cambridgeshire. The higher rate of unfitness is usually a reflection of older households' inability to afford repairs or renewal coupled with a lack of ability or a lack of desire to carry out the works.

Another common relationship is between low income and unfitness. This association is clear in East Cambridgeshire as occupiers of 35% of dwellings have a household income of below £10,000 per annum, but this

rises to 67% in the case of unfit dwellings.

Tackling unfitness and disrepair are priority areas for Council intervention.

6.17 Decent Homes

The government's Decent Homes target will be achieved for social housing before 2010 in East Cambridgeshire as the vast majority of social housing is owned by Hereward Housing and has been modernised under the LSVT agreement. However this is not the case for private sector housing, and the council

Other RSLs have confirmed that the Decent Homes target for stock in the district will be achieved before 2010.

Council intervention in the achievement of this standard is not therefore a priority although the Council monitors progress by liaison with the RSLs.

7. Strategic Aims and Objectives

- 7.1 The 2003 Housing Strategy had eight strategic aims to enable the Council to work towards the vision of the Housing Strategy, **that everyone can live in a decent home at an affordable cost in a sustainable and socially inclusive community.**

Of these eight strategic aims two are now covered by the Sustainable Community Strategy:-

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/html/compages.asp?servid=53&title=Sustainable+Community+Strategy&hier=Community>

These are:

**To promote healthy, safe and sustainable living environments,
and
To promote socially inclusive communities**

and a third, **to prevent homelessness**, is dealt with in detail in the Council's Homelessness strategy, although a summary of services is provided in this strategy

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/docs/publications/housing/homelessstrat08.pdf>

This strategy therefore deals with six strategic aims:-

1. To understand the housing needs of the communities in East Cambridgeshire and on the Cambridge sub-region
2. To increase the supply of affordable housing to meet the needs of East Cambridgeshire and the Cambridge sub-region
3. To prevent homelessness
4. To tackle unfitness and to bring empty homes back into use
5. To work in partnership with other agencies to meet the housing and support needs of vulnerable people
6. To continuously improve the Council's housing service and to involve stakeholders and the community in the development of the Council's housing strategy and services

Each strategic aim consists of a number of strategic objectives. The text below highlights what the Council currently does to achieve its aims. The Action Plan at Appendix 2 sets out what the Council plans to do over the next two years to achieve its strategic aims.

6.2 Strategic Aim: 1

Understand the housing needs of the communities in East Cambridgeshire and the Cambridge sub-region

6.3 To understand the housing needs of the communities in East Cambridgeshire

The authorities in the Cambridge sub-region have formed a partnership to achieve the aim of increasing the overall supply of affordable housing. The sub-regional Strategy has come as a result of this work. A Sub-Regional housing Market Assessment for the whole of the Cambridgeshire sub-region, including a detailed housing needs assessment for each district, was completed in December 2007. This assessment will be regularly revised and updated and is kept as a live, updated web document on

http://www.cambridgeshirehorizons.co.uk/programme_det.asp?id=3678

6.4 A stock condition survey was carried out in 2002 by consultants PPS, the conclusions of which are at Appendix 3. The study covers the period 2002 to 2007. A new stock condition survey is due to be commissioned during the life of this updated strategy.

6.5 To use intelligence gathered on housing need to inform the Housing Strategy, Local Plan Review and s106 negotiations

The draft core strategy documents for the Local Development Framework are based on a wide range of local information including the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and a number of site viability tests. these documents can be viewed on: -

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/html/ldfpages.asp?servid=6&title=LDF+%2D+an+Overview&hier=LDF> and its associated pages.

The Local Development Framework (LDF) is reviewing the thresholds on which affordable housing s106 obligations apply and the percentage of affordable housing sought on relevant sites, as well as a wide range of other policies. The LDF will be examined at a public enquiry during 2009 and is likely to become council policy after that date.

6.6 To monitor the demand for new housing through the housing need register

Hereward Housing maintains the register for the Council. This is now administered as part of the sub-regional Choice based lettings scheme, called HomeLink. Demand for social rented housing is strong with over 1,400 households on the register. Home-link has been in operation since February 2007. It is providing detailed data on the demand for different sizes of house and for individual villages, which will be used to inform the 2010 to 2013 housing strategy. At present the data is incomplete and data reporting systems are still in development.

6.7 To increase the number of homes provided on rural exception sites

As housing associations cannot purchase land on the open market at a price which enables them to build affordable housing they are reliant on cheap or subsidised land or high levels of housing corporation grant, or both. The Council has worked closely with parish councils to identify land outside of the development envelope for rural exception sites. There has been a successful programme of building new affordable housing on rural exception sites and this is set to continue. During the 2008 “credit crunch” and economic downturn rural exception sites have become much more important as a source of new affordable housing in this predominantly rural district.

New Affordable Housing Built On Rural Exception Sites

Completion date		Number of new houses /flats
2004/5	Orchard estate, Little Downham	2
2004/5	Harry Palmer Close, Fordham	13
2005/6	Bancroft Close, Soham	18
2005/6	Lady Frances Peyton Court, Isleham	16
2006/7	Brinkley road, Burrough green	8
2006/7	Hawes lane, Wicken	8
2007/8	Weatheralls close, Soham	22
2007/8	Newmarket road, Burwell	20
2008/9	Stretham road, Wilburton	2

There are other possible exception sites which are currently being appraised by the Forward Planning team for their suitability under the Rural Exception Policy of the Local Plan and three rural villages are investigating the possibility of setting up Community Land Trusts, to build and manage their own affordable housing scheme.

The Council also works with Cambridgeshire ACRE, The Housing Corporation, Local Registered Social Landlords and the Countryside Agency to employ a Rural Housing Enabler who works with parish councils and assists the Council in the identification and negotiation of rural exception sites.

6.8 To work with the market towns masterplanning process to provide new and innovative solutions to the problem of shortage of affordable housing

The Council is developing masterplans for the market towns of Ely, Littleport and Soham. These will form the basis of the development and expansion of these towns for the next couple of decades. In autumn 2008 there is extensive consultation underway to develop these masterplans in accordance with the wishes of the local community. The

Head of Housing will work within the process of masterplan development to develop more affordable housing for local people, and to provide a wider range of solutions, which may include self-build schemes and specialist supported housing schemes, for example.

6.9 **Strategic Aim 2:**

Increase the supply of affordable housing to meet the needs of East Cambridgeshire and the Cambridge sub-region.

6.10 To work with housing association partners and the Housing Corporation to attract the maximum amount of Social Housing Grant into the district

The Council has been very successful in attracting the Housing Corporation Social Housing Grant into the district under the investment themes of Growth, Rural and Rural Market town housing, and has just attracted nearly £4m of capital finding for the redevelopment and expansion of the extra-care scheme at Keith Leonard house in Soham. The Affordable housing completions since the 2003 strategy have been as follows:-

Year	Rent	Shared ownership	Funding sources
2004/5	38	44	73 units grant funded
2005/6	81	109	107 grant-funded, 18 units funded in recycled grant (from houses sold under the right to buy)
2006/7	93	97	183 grant-funded
2007/8	100	98	113 grant-funded

The council has a development programme and a target of 150 new units of affordable housing per annum. This has been exceeded for three years; just under 200 units have been completed each year, but the current economic downturn and credit crunch is going to make this difficult to achieve for the next three years and the focus is much more on exception sites and less on “section 106” sites, which are in short supply in the current market.

New planned developments are as follows:-

Predicted Affordable Housing Completions, 2008/9

Scheme	Rent	Shared ownership
Prickwillow road Ely	16	12
Kings Avenue Ely phases 1 to 4		33
Willow grange, Ely	18	12
Parsons Lane Littleport	33	
The Birches, Soham	9	4
Berry close, Stretham	3	4
Travellers Rest, Soham	10	9
Totals	99	74

Predicted Affordable Housing Completions, 2009/10

Scheme	Rent	Shared ownership
St Peters Field Bottisham	10	4
New barns Avenue Ely	4	2
Prickwillow road Ely	5	3
Dane Hill Road Kennett	7	3
Parsons Lane Littleport		14
Bridge Road Mepal	4	2
Totals	30	28

In addition these will be some completions which are currently scheduled for 2010/11 and other open market Homebuy and first time buyer initiative completions, and there are two other possible sites in discussion which could complete in 2009/10. However the target of 150 for 2009/10 may be not be reached

The following table is a projection for 2010 to 2011 and is subject to change. These sites are mostly at discussion stage and some have no planning permission at present, and as with the previous year, there are likely to be further completions which are not listed. It is likely that the target will be reached or exceeded in 2010/2011.

Possible Affordable Housing Completions in 2010/2011

Scheme	Rent	Shared ownership
High St/Bell road, Bottisham	7	3
Newmarket rd, Burwell possible phase 3	14	6
St Johns road Ely	5	
Haddenham	7	3
Isleham	20	
Mowfen Drove, Littleport	10	3
Wisbech road, Littleport	20	10
Little Downham, RES	4	2
Little Downham site 2	2	2
Fordham road, Soham	10	5
Keith Leonard House, Soham	35	15
Ely Road, Sutton	10	3
High street, Sutton	20	10
Station rd, Wilburton	6	2
Barton close, Witchford	16	4
Totals	186	68

6.11 Additional affordable housing and the credit crunch

In addition to the sites listed above the council is working to increase the number of new homes built, investigate the possibility of housing associations buying some unsold private market development and

encourage investment in other affordable housing schemes such as open market Homebuy.

Discussions are under way with the housing corporation to try to

- Increase the per unit grant rate in this sub region to enable sites to start during the credit crunch
- Find new ways of enabling people to buy, including open market Homebuy and rent-to-purchase schemes
- Enable more development on rural exception suites by encouraging rural repurchase schemes and similar schemes which keep affordable housing affordable in perpetuity

6.12 The Government's Housing Market Package

The government is taking steps to mitigate the worst effects of the market downturn and this Council is fully supportive of these initiatives. Steps proposed include:-

- A one year freeze on stamp duty for purchases of residential property of £175,000 or less.
- Reforms to the system for paying Income Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI). For new working age claims from April 2009, the waiting period before SMI will be paid will be shortened from 39 weeks to 13 weeks and, in addition, the upper ceiling for the size of mortgage that will be met will be raised to £175,000.
- £200m for a mortgage rescue scheme aimed at those families who can no longer afford their mortgage repayments and who would be eligible for homelessness assistance. Local authorities are to have a major role in this scheme, helping to assess applications. Depending on their circumstances, eligible home owners will be offered one of three options:
 1. Shared ownership: a registered social landlord (RSL) buys a share and converts the property to shared ownership by issuing a shared ownership lease
 2. Shared equity: an RSL provides an equity loan enabling the householder's mortgage payments to be reduced
 3. Sale and rent back: an RSL clears the mortgage debt completely, and the resident accepts a tenancy and pays rent to the RSL
- £300m for a "Home Buy direct" scheme to assist first time buyers into affordable home ownership. Eligible buyers, with household incomes of under £60,000, will be offered an equity loan of up to 30% of the value

of a newly built property, co-funded by the government and the developer, and free of charge for five years.

- Bringing forward £400 million from existing budgets for affordable housing schemes, with the aim of delivering up to 5,500 affordable homes over the next 18 months. The Government has announced that, for the first time, local authorities with existing housing stock will be able to apply for this grant to build social housing, alongside RSLs.
- Working with Regional Development Agencies and the new Homes and Communities Agency to identify projects to support the most critical regeneration schemes with the most potential to transform their communities. The Government acknowledges that housing market conditions have led to some regeneration schemes slowing down or stalling and the projects will be aimed at alleviating these effects.

6.13 Strategic aim 3

To prevent homelessness, prevent homelessness and ensure adequate housing and support is available to homeless households and to ensure good quality, safe temporary accommodation is available in suitable locations for people that are roofless.

- 6.14 The council has redesigned its homelessness service and developed a new homelessness strategy which is available on <http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/docs/publications/housing/homelessstrat08.pdf>

The action plan for the homelessness strategy should be read in conjunction with the action plan for this housing strategy

- 6.15 East Cambridgeshire District Council works to prevent as many cases of homelessness as possible. Actions to do this vary widely from case to case and may include:-

- Mediation with landlords or families
- Provision of a rent deposit or rent deposit bond
- Debt advice or resolving housing benefit problems
- Resolving rent arrears
- Sanctuary scheme measures for domestic violence
- Provision of crisis intervention support to keep someone in their existing tenancy
- Assisting ex-offenders
- Action against illegal eviction and/or harassment
- Liaison and cooperation with hospitals, prisons, community safety partnerships, MAPPAs, lettings agencies, Citizens Advice Bureaux and many other agencies
- Provision of a review process for appeals against homelessness decisions
- Advice to both landlords and tenants
- Referral to floating support
- Referral to young peoples' floating support

6.16 Advice and help which the Council can offer

- Housing opportunities within the district including the private rented sector and the housing allocation scheme
- How to use the Home-link Choice-Based Lettings scheme
- Details of housing associations within the district that accept direct applications
- Assistance to find landlords and letting agents in the area which accept people on housing benefit
- Location and sources of appropriate accommodation
- Rights to welfare benefits
- Ways to maximise income and maximise benefits

- Advocacy with housing benefit
- Appropriateness and affordability of current rent levels
- Rent deposit and guarantee scheme
- Availability of the weekly property pages
- Availability of a telephone to make appointments to view property
- Provision of internet service to assist people to identify accommodation
- How to manage a budget
- Where to obtain inexpensive household furniture
- Where to obtain specialist support (e.g. drug and alcohol services, bereavement counselling, debt advice)
- Tenants' rights and rights of occupation
- What to do about illegal harassment and eviction
- Grants available for repairs or adaptations
- Mediation with landlords, tenants, families
- Specialist help for people fleeing violence and/or harassment
- Provide translators or translated information
- Refer to floating support for help to manage a tenancy
- Refer to young people's floating support
- Home visits
- Referral to environmental health
- Referral to East Cambridgeshire Care and Repair

6.17 Independent housing advice is provided by the Citizens Advice Bureau, by a specialist Shelter worker linked to Ely Citizens Advice Bureau and by local solicitors. These agencies met with the housing advice team in early 2006 to discuss and agree protocols for referrals and information sharing. The Citizens Advice Bureaux are supported by an annual grant from the Council. Citizens Advice Bureaux in Ely and Newmarket in particular deliver substantial services to people who are at risk of homelessness. Debt counselling, representation at court, advocacy with landlords and negotiation on rent deposits are undertaken and people can be referred to the Citizens Advice Bureaux by appointment through the housing advice service.

6.18 **Strategic Aim 4:-**

Tackle unfitness and bring empty homes back into use.

6.19 To increase the number of unfit properties made fit.

The Council has had an annual budget of around £1 million for this. The primary justification for public expenditure on the repair and renewal of privately owned housing is to assist people living in unfit properties to bring their homes up to a decent standard and therefore reduce their reliance on public housing. This approach also provides work for the local building trade and retail activity for local suppliers of building materials. Investment in private sector housing has resulted in a substantial decrease in the proportion of unfit properties in the district

6.20 The Regulatory Reform Order required the Council to adopt policies that reflect local need. The Council carried out extensive consultation, both with the public and other key stakeholders, such as the Primary Care Trust, Social Services, Care and Repair and Housing. The policies formulated are evidence based to meet local need and are targeted at the elderly, disabled and those on low incomes. These policies will be monitored and reviewed to ensure that changes in need are realised. The full policy document can be accessed at the Environmental Health web site www.eastcambs.gov.uk

6.21 To increase the number of empty properties brought back into use

The number of properties which have been empty for more than six months varies from year to year but is usually around 500. The Council's grant policies make grants available to bring empty homes back into use through private sector renewal and Listed Building Grants. The Council will be looking to increase the percentage of properties brought back into use by producing an empty homes strategy. The Council will look at ways of working with landlords and owners to try and encourage them to make homes available to meet housing need. Where properties are beyond repair the Council will take appropriate action under housing legislation that could lead to the demolition of these properties. The Council's Empty Homes strategy is available on

<http://www.eastcambs.gov.uk/docs/publications/envservices/ehstrat.pdf>

6.22 To provide advice and guidance on home maintenance and energy efficiency

The Council's energy efficiency officer increases the public's awareness of energy efficiency through a range of leaflets, home visits and road shows. The Council provides grants for landlords and owner occupiers to carry out energy saving improvements to their properties. The Council is looking at ways to encourage property owners to invest in their properties and carry out routine maintenance on a regular

basis. The Council will work in partnership with local suppliers and builders, looking at ways to offer practical advice. This could come in the form of leaflets, workshops or tool libraries. The Council already holds a list of local builders and damp proofing contractors which is available to the public.

6.23 To work in partnership with landlords to decrease levels of unfitnes within the private rented sector

The House Condition Survey highlighted the poor condition of the private rented sector. The survey found the majority of unfitnes is among the tied cottages in the district. As the Council's ability to provide private sector housing grants declines, the emphasis of the strategy will change from grant based reactive landlord service to a programmed inspection. Work on this has already started.

The Council is also identifying and inspecting HMOs. There are only 40 such properties in the district and very few fall into the definition suggested in the 2004 Housing Act for licensing. However the Council has recently adopted HMO standards that will be used to improve the conditions in existing properties. The Council will be looking to introduce a registration scheme for HMOs and other private rented accommodation.

6.24 To work in partnership with Care and Repair East Cambridgeshire, to enable people to remain in their own homes or find more suitable accommodation.

Care and Repair East Cambridgeshire was set up as a partnership between the Council, Cambridgeshire Social Services and the then Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authority. The agreement for joint finance included a commitment from the Council to progressively increase its funding over a four year period from 1998-2001. The Council has continued to commit funding to the agency, as have Social Services and the Primary Care Trust (PCT). In addition Hereward Housing have made funding contributions to the agency. Central Government grants have also made a significant contribution to the running cost of Care and Repair; this funding stream has now transferred to Supporting People and is administered at a local level. The agency makes a significant contribution to the housing options for people in the district through enabling elderly and disabled people and those on low incomes to maintain, adapt and improve their homes. The policies adopted by the Council tie in closely with the client group of Care and Repair.

The addition of a Handy Person Scheme has provided a much needed service. Funding for this scheme originally came through the PCT and additional funding has been agreed through the Local Public Services Agreement Reward Grant.

The role of the Care and Repair agency is evolving. The Council has worked closely with the agency in the formulation of its new grant policies. The agency realise that within the next few years they will need to be in a stronger position to offer financial advice as the Council moves away from the grant culture that exists at present. Other forms of funding will need to be looked at such as shared equity, Council loans, and other finance options. The Council realises that at present there are limited financial products on the market some of which will not be suitable for Care& Repairs clients. The Council will work with Care & Repair, banks and building societies to see what products could be made available. The Council will also look into funding The Home improvement Trust an agency that provides financial advice to people over 60 on funding choices, a requirement of the funding is that the work is over seen by a Care & Repair agency.

6.25 Strategic Aim 5:

Work in partnership with other agencies to meet the housing and support needs of vulnerable people

- 6.25 The council works to promote independence by pooling health and social care budgets to optimise impact for users and carers and ensuring that 'hard to reach' groups are not disadvantaged by having their needs for support considered alongside those of the large volume groups such as older people. The Council will produce an Older People's Housing Strategy in 2009 to focus specifically on the effects of demographic change and the expected increase in older and very aged people in the next twenty years.
- 6.26 The Council has published a BME housing strategy which deals with the needs of BME groups, migrant workers, gypsies and travellers.
- 6.27 The council works with the other local authorities in the Cambridgeshire sub region and with the Cambridgeshire PCT to co-ordinate the provision of services for hard-to reach and vulnerable members of the community. The council is a signatory to the Supporting People commissioning strategy and is working to increase the amount of supporting people funding in the district, particularly for:-
- Younger people at risk of homelessness
 - People with substance abuse problems
 - People with mental health problems
 - The ageing population
 - Ex-offenders

Supporting People is a central government programme, introduced in April 2003 to fund, monitor and review and improve housing-related support services. This is done in partnership with local housing authorities, social care services, health, probation, registered social landlords users and their carers and the voluntary and private sectors.

The housing-related support services that Supporting People pay for are aimed at helping people live independently in their homes and include things such as:

- Assisting people with the security of their homes.
- Assisting people with personal safety in their homes.
- Enabling people to undertake minor repairs and organise the servicing of their own equipment.
- Life skills training, such as support to acquire domestic skills.
- Helping people with social skills, such as motivational support and preventing loneliness and social isolation.
- Assisting people with dealing with other people such as landlords, other tenants and a range of professionals.
- Assisting people with personal budgeting.

- Supporting people with neighbour disputes.
- Support with moving to more independent accommodation.

6.29 The East Cambridgeshire supporting people strategy will be revised and published in 2009.

6.30 Learning Disability

The Cambridgeshire Learning Disability Partnership (LDP) has produced a supported housing strategy setting out its requirements for supported housing schemes in the next five years. Two of these schemes (12 bedspaces in total) will be required in East Cambridgeshire. These will be discussed further with the LDP before any commissioning decisions are made. Future schemes are dependant on the availability of Supporting People and other revenue funding. In addition the council is working to ensure that people with learning disabilities have access to the home-link choice base lettings scheme and are developing a shared ownership scheme for people with learning disabilities.

6.31 Disability Housing Strategy

The Head of Housing has worked closely with the county council to develop a Cambridgeshire disability housing strategy which is expected to be approved by the county council in winter 2008/9 and which will be available on the co Cambridgeshire county council web site

6.32 **Strategic Aim 6:**

To continuously improve the Council's Housing Service and involve stakeholders and the community in the development of the Council's Housing Strategy and Services.

6.33 The Council will be carrying out full consultation during 2009 to develop a new housing strategy for 2010 to 2013. Ongoing consultation will continue with service users and housing associations.

6.34 In 2004 the council underwent a Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) inspection. This was tested by the audit commission during a week-long visit involving interviews with elected members, partner organisations, managers and front-line staff. The audit commission concluded that "the way East Cambridgeshire district council is run and the delivery of its services is "good" (on the scale poor/weak/fair/good/excellent)".

The commission found that the council:-

- Knows what is important to local people and has shifted resources to priority areas
- Works closely in partnership with other organisation, which helps it to achieve more for local people than it could on its own
- Is responding to high population growth in the district
- Has delivered a range of improvements for local people

The full audit commission report is available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk

6.35 From 2008 strategic housing services are liable to be inspected by the audit commission at short notice under a new inspection regime.

Housing Strategy Action Plan 2008 To 2010

See also the *Homelessness Strategy Action Plan* and
The *BME Housing Strategy Action Plan*

Corporate Objective	Action	Priority	Time Scale	Lead Officer	Performance Measure	Resources
2,3	Ensure the Councils Homelessness Strategy is implemented, monitored annually and updated in association with key partners	H	Ongoing – see homelessness strategy action plan	Head of Housing	See homelessness strategy action plan	Head of Housing 1X senior housing officer 2x homelessness prevention officers 1x homelessness caseworker total budget £286,137
1,3	To work in partnership with other agencies to meet the housing and support needs of vulnerable people	M	Ongoing – to renew the Supporting People strategy for East Cambridgeshire by December 2009	Head of Housing	Renewal and approval of strategy	Head of Housing
1,2	Develop supported accommodation and a supported move-on scheme to enable ex-offenders to reintegrate into the community	M	By December 2010	Head of Housing	First supported clients in scheme	Hereward Housing DIP and DAAT Senior Housing Officer
1,2	Develop supported accommodation and	M	By December	Head of	First clients to	RSL partners

Corporate Objective	Action	Priority	Time Scale	Lead Officer	Performance Measure	Resources
	supported move-on scheme for people with substance misuse problems to reintegrate them into the community		2010	Housing	move into the scheme	DIP and DAAT Senior Housing Officer
1,2	Redesign homeless persons hostels to meet temporary accommodation targets and provide other new services	H	By December 2010	Head of Housing	Hostels modernised and part redeployed	Hereward housing Senior housing Officer
1,2	To implement and work to improve the Supporting People Strategy and oversee the scheme reviews in Cambridgeshire through attendance at 95% of CB, Member Group and DIG meetings	M	ongoing	Head of Housing	Approval of the new strategy in 2009/10	Head of Housing
1,2,3	To ensure that East Cambs meets its obligations in the recommendations of the sheltered scheme best value review and against the background of expected cuts in SP funding			Head of Housing		Head of Housing
1,2,3	Work with Supporting People, the PCT and the county to ensure revenue support for supported housing and extra-care schemes in East Cambridgeshire	H	By December 2009	Head of Housing	Revenue support provided for services as planned	Head of Housing
1,2	To produce a new Supporting People strategy for East Cambridgeshire in consultation with partners and other stakeholders	M	By March 2010	Head of Housing	New strategy produced	Head of Housing
1,2	To develop specialist accommodation in the district for people with learning disabilities in consultation with the LDP	M	By December 2010	Head of Housing	Accommodation required produced	Head of Housing Development and Enabling officer

Corporate Objective	Action	Priority	Time Scale	Lead Officer	Performance Measure	Resources
						RSL partners
1,2,3	To work in partnership with the County Council, planners and other partners to develop new pitches for gypsies and travellers	M	By December 2010	Head of Housing	New pitches developed and occupied	Head of Housing
1,2,3	Produce a new housing strategy for 2010 to 2013 in consultation with stakeholders	M	By December 2010	Head of Housing	New Strategy produced	Head of Housing
1,3	Older peoples strategy completed	H	By July 2009	Head of Housing	New strategy produced	Head of Housing
2,3	Review and update the SHMA in consultation with sub-regional partners	H	Ongoing	Head of Housing	Updates published on Cambridge horizons web site	Head of Housing
2,3	Work with the Home Link management board to develop data reports to support other strategic priorities	H	Ongoing	Head of Housing	Data reporting from the choice based lettings scheme	Head of Housing
3	To build at least 150 new affordable homes in the district every year	H	Annually, by March	Head of Housing	Number of new affordable homes completed	Head of Housing Development and Enabling Officer RSL partners Planners Parish Councils
1,3	Develop a community land trust in	M	By March	Head of	Community land	Head of

Corporate Objective	Action	Priority	Time Scale	Lead Officer	Performance Measure	Resources
	East Cambridgeshire		2010	Housing	trust in place	Housing Development and Enabling Officer RSL partners Planners Parish Councils
1,3	Work with partners to mitigate the effects of the economic downturn of the affordable housing development programme	H	ongoing	Head of Housing	Number of new affordable homes produced	Head of Housing Development and Enabling Officer RSL partners Planners Parish Councils
3	Work to put adequate affordable housing policies in the Local development framework and associated planning guidance	H	By 2009	Head of Housing	Robust and effective policies in the Local Development Framework	Head of Housing Development and Enabling Officer Planners
3	Work with the master planning process for Ely, Soham and Littleport to ensure that a mixed sustainable community is produced and affordable housing targets are met	H	By December 2009	Head of Housing	Robust master plans produced for the market towns	Head of Housing Development and Enabling Officer Planners Parish Councils
3	Number of new affordable homes built on rural exception sites	H	ongoing	Head of Housing	Number of homes built on	Head of Housing

Corporate Objective	Action	Priority	Time Scale	Lead Officer	Performance Measure	Resources
					Rural Exception Sites	Development and Enabling Officer RSL partners Planners Parish Councils
1	Work with Supporting People to ensure the Ongoing independence and success of east Cambridgeshire Care and repair	H	ongoing	Head of housing	Ongoing success of east Cambridgeshire care and repair	Head of Housing Head of environmental Services
1,2	Develop the Home Link Choice based lettings Scheme to widen the range of service improvements	M	ongoing	Head of Housing	Improvements in Home Link service	Head of Housing Sub-regional partners Hereward Housing
1,2,3	Revise the council's allocations policy	H	By March 2009	Head of housing	New allocations policy agreed	Head of Housing
1,2	Work with partners to mitigate the effects of any increase in mortgage repossession action due to the credit crunch and economic downturn	H	Immediate and ongoing	Head of Housing	Number of cases of homelessness prevented	Senior housing officer Homelessness prevention team
2,3	Commission a new stock condition survey	M	By 2010	Head of environmental services	Stock condition survey commissioned	Principal environmental health officer

