

Chapter 1: Introduction

Why does Swindon need a Housing Strategy?

In the words of the Economic Strategy: To Deliver the Right Homes in the Right Place.

Housing has a key role to play in helping the Council to achieve a wide range of strategic aims. This varies from boosting local economic activity in construction and related industries, improving the wellbeing of all of our residents, providing sustainable communities where people want to live and work, providing opportunities for younger households to access home-ownership, and helping people to achieve and maintain independence and live healthily for longer.

Housing is a cross-cutting theme in many key areas of the Council's work, and this is reflected in the Strategy.

About this Housing Strategy:

- This strategy sets out the role of housing in helping the Council to achieve its strategic aims, with the following priorities based on the evidence:
 - Responding to the changing housing market - Improving standards in private rented housing
 - Affordability – improving the offer
 - Managing demand - promoting and maintaining independence
 - Supporting further economic growth – increasing the quality and diversity of our housing stock
- The Strategy covers the period from 2014 to 2026, matching the timeframe for the Local Plan.
- This is a working draft for consultation.
- Once in place, the Council will then undertake high level strategic reviews at 4 year intervals.

This Strategy has been developed alongside senior Planning Officers, and aims to not only set out the role of housing in meeting the Council's strategic priorities, but also provide a vision of how the Local Plan can be implemented to maximum benefit of the town in the future.

Until the recession in 2008 Swindon had a track record of delivering high numbers of new housing. Swindon is still the 5th fastest growing Local Authority in the country¹, and this high level of housing supply means that nearly 40% of dwellings in Swindon have been built after 1980. Following this rapid pace of delivery, the Council's view is that future housing growth must be more carefully managed to ensure that it contributes to the town's wider ambitions.

Swindon's Economic Strategy of 2013 identifies the provision of the right housing in the right locations as a key objective in underpinning economic growth. Swindon's housing offer is not sufficiently developed at higher income levels to support the types of jobs that the town needs in terms of continued growth and bolstering the regeneration of the town centre. This is evidenced by analysis of recent housing supply which shows that the housing market in Swindon has almost ignored higher earners over the past 2 decades. This lack of offer also hampers our ability to sell Swindon more widely and convince both employers and employees that Swindon can meet their aspirations in terms of opportunity and lifestyle.

Like much of the country Swindon is experiencing substantial growth in our older population. Public sector resources will remain constrained, which combined with increasing demand on our services makes the role of housing critical in responding to demographic change. The Council recognises that it must maximise all the assets at its disposal to reduce dependency and improve health outcomes for its citizens. The role of housing in achieving this is critical, both in terms of ensuring that sufficient choice is available, but also in terms of making it easier for people to remain independent for longer.

The role of future housing development must be accompanied by a renewed focus on the part that existing housing provision has to play, especially the 10,500 units of social housing stock in Swindon. It is essential that such a sizeable asset contributes to the overall objectives and success of Swindon, whilst continuing to look after our existing tenants.

This Housing Strategy brings these diverse priorities together and outlines how the existing and future housing stock of the Borough will maximise its contribution to the overall success of Swindon economically, environmentally and socially.

¹ ONS

Chapter 2: The Council's Vision: What is Housing in Swindon Like in 2026?

Swindon is a large town with over 115,000 homes, and 250,000 people and is no longer associated with bland urban sprawl.

Companies are no longer put off investing in the town by a poorly designed public realm. Thanks to its strategic location and improved housing stock the town is securing new investment driving further improvements in the built environment, as well as improved employment opportunities for the growing population.

Run down areas have been regenerated, and a more commercially confident population no longer accepts poorly designed housing. The town is more ambitious, and people are attracted to the town because of its excellent education, affordability, employment opportunities, and great cultural and leisure activities.

The town centre has benefitted from regeneration, and a more economically diverse population supports a lively town centre. Run down, empty office blocks have been demolished, and replaced with well-designed homes for a growing community who call the town centre home.

The Kimmerfields office development offers employment opportunities for people who want to live and work in the town centre. The new Art Gallery is the hub for a broader cultural offer in the town.

Wichelstowe is a desirable neighbourhood, home to a thriving intergenerational community. Its high quality housing and facilities have created a place where local people and those working in the town choose to visit and aspire to live.

Targeted investment has delivered a great transport network, enabling our larger population to move freely about the Borough.

Swindon's has safeguarded its excellent green spaces, which contribute to improved wellbeing for the larger town population.

Swindon has attracted higher earners who work in the town to live in the town, ensuring that money earned in the Borough is spent locally.

There is a diverse offer for people looking for housing across the Borough. Swindon has a wide range of properties to buy, a well-managed private rented sector, and a range of affordable housing options to meet everyone's needs.

Housing acts as the base for strong communities where people feel safe, have opportunities to work and where people want to remain.

There is a range of housing options to support people through life, and older people who wish to downsize from their family homes. This includes a community at the heart of Middle Wichel. As a result older people live independently and healthily for longer. This has boosted the volunteering capacity of the town.

Nobody with a disability is accommodated out of the Borough for want of appropriate housing. People with disabilities feel part of communities, and there is a range of housing to meet people's needs irrespective of age, and disability.

The high level of development means that Swindon is still comparatively affordable, and is recognised as a great place to move to for work and to start a family. Swindon is a place where young people can feel optimistic about their chances of setting up their own home.

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Chapter 3: Housing Strategy 2009 to 2014

The previous Housing Strategy was focussed largely on the council's statutory housing role, containing the following priorities:

- Delivering affordable homes within a balanced housing market
- Tackling homelessness and worklessness
- Supporting people, promoting choices, improving health and social care
- Optimising existing housing stock
- Getting the best from social housing in Swindon

The Strategy set a target of 300 affordable homes a year. This target was not always achieved following the economic difficulties after 2008. However, a strong partnership with Housing Associations maintained momentum and ensured delivery was maximised. The Swindon Strategic Housing Market Assessment was updated, and has formed the main evidence base for this Strategy. The number of affordable homes delivered is as follows:

2009/10 = 395
2010/11 = 181
2011/12 = 309
2012/13 = 168
2013/14 = 212

There was a spike in 2009/10 where excess privately developed housing was absorbed by social housing providers to maintain delivery and prevent ghost estates, and a subsequent large fall in 2010/11. Some of this is due to negotiations with developers, where to ensure that stalled sites can be brought forward the delivery of Affordable Housing will be towards the later stages of development.

In spite of the recession the number of homeless households in Swindon has reduced dramatically, showing how with the right interventions and partnership working can help to improve outcomes even in the toughest of circumstances. The number of households in temporary accommodation fell from a high of 881 in December 2005 to 182 in June 2013.

The Council's housing stock underwent a detailed options review in 2011/12. Significant investment shortfalls were identified despite the change from pooled Housing Revenue Accounts to self-financing for council housing nationally. Following the appraisal the Council balloted tenants on whether to transfer to a purpose made Housing Association. Council tenants voted to retain the current model.

Chapter 4: Strategic Drivers

The Housing Strategy is part of the wider context to which it will both contribute and respond. The table below summarises the major strategic drivers and the implications for the Housing Strategy. It focuses on the relationships between the strategies and how housing provision will contribute to their implementation.

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The National Housing Strategy In 2011, the Government announced a new Housing Strategy for England setting out a package of reforms to address the deficiencies of the housing market. The areas of focus in the strategy are :	The Local Plan Swindon's draft Local Plan is the main planning policy document for the Council, providing the planning policy framework to deliver sustainable growth up to 2026 and beyond. It sets out how much development Swindon needs and identifies when, where and how it will take place. The plan is currently in draft form. A Planning Inspector has been appointed to determine its soundness. The draft Local Plan sets out 10 strategic objectives:	The Corporate Strategy The Corporate Strategy is the key strategic driver within the Council. It is a 3-year strategy adopted by full council in November 2012. The Strategy details the council's response to the challenge of addressing rising demand for its services whilst available resources are reducing. It has five priorities:
Improve environmental standards and design quality	To provide a network of multi-functional green spaces linked to the surrounding countryside To ensure that development respects, protects and enhances to existing built environment and heritage of Swindon	Work with residents to create well cared for neighbourhoods
Get the housing market moving again Lay the foundations for a more responsive, effective and stable housing market in the future	Meet the education need of a growing population High quality, sustainable development to improve image of Swindon Meet the infrastructure needs of the Borough To improve the local economy To support Swindon's growth through the provision of a comprehensive and sustainable transport network offering choice to users	Right skills, right jobs, in the right places
	To promote healthy lifestyles and meet the need for community and health facilities	Together, find new ways to reduce vulnerability and improve health for all
Support choice and quality for tenants	Meet the Borough's housing needs To enable provision of cultural and leisure facilities commensurate with a town growing such as Swindon as and enable it to become a regional leisure destination	Work with people and families to help them fulfil their potential
		Make the best use of Swindon's resources inside and outside the Council

<p>The Economic Strategy.</p> <p>Swindon's first Economic Strategy was adopted in 2013 and clearly sets out the priorities for Swindon's future growth focusing on creating 19,600 additional jobs up until 2026 through its 6 priorities:</p>	<p>The Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2016</p> <p>The Health and Wellbeing Strategy was commissioned by Swindon's Health and Wellbeing Board and developed by a steering group of key stakeholders. The strategy sets out the vision and the long-term improvements in local people's health and wellbeing that we want to achieve in Swindon. These are :</p>	<p>How will the Housing Strategy Contribute?</p>
	<p>Creation of sustainable environments in which communities can flourish</p>	<p>The development and maintenance of quality housing stock including rented housing in well-designed neighbourhoods makes a significant contribution to the care and appearance of local neighbourhoods. The Housing Strategy will reflect the need to create neighbourhood, which are good places to live and work.</p>
<p>Developing Swindon's higher education provision</p> <p>Position Swindon as a hub of technology and advanced manufacturing</p> <p>Revitalise Swindon's town centre</p>		<p>The Local Plan sets out the provision of future housing in terms of numbers of homes required their type and design.</p> <p>Housing is a key component of economic growth both through maintaining and increasing the supply of affordable and rented housing in Swindon and through improving the offer for the upper end of the market to encourage people to live and spend their money in the town.</p> <p>The Housing Strategy will support the delivery of the vision of the Local Plan and focuses on both of these aspects and hence seeks appropriate housing provision to support economic growth</p>
	<p>Every child and young person in Swindon has a healthy start in life</p> <p>Adults and older people in Swindon are living healthier and more independent lives</p> <p>Improved health outcomes for disadvantaged and vulnerable communities</p>	<p>Housing has a significant impact on health and wellbeing. Research shows the link between poor housing and poor health outcomes including asthma, respiratory infections and increased hospital admissions.</p> <p>The Housing Strategy will specifically focus on improving health outcomes through appropriate housing interventions in the existing owned and rented housing stock and new homes. There will actions to maintain and promote independence for adults and older people. This will include increasing the number of adults with learning disabilities who live in supported accommodation rather than residential care</p>
<p>Creating a place of opportunity for young people</p> <p>Establish Swindon as a regional leisure destination</p>	<p>Improved mental health, wellbeing and resilience for all</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy will recognise that a regenerated town centre offering an enhanced cultural and leisure offer will support both the current and future populations to thrive in Swindon.</p>
<p>Create Low Carbon Swindon</p>		<p>The Housing Strategy will address the need to maintain and improve the quality of the existing housing stock including rented housing, alongside high quality new sustainable development and an enhanced rental offer as the best chance to optimise use of all available existing resource. This will also contribute to delivering the low carbon agenda.</p>

Chapter 5: Evidence summary

This section explores some statistics behind the key housing issues in Swindon. It highlights key trends relating to the housing market, housing need, housing conditions and homelessness. The section also highlights some key statistics regarding the housing needs of vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities and older persons.

Demographic analysis

According to the most recent projections the population of Swindon in 2011 is estimated at around 209,700 with this figure due to increase to 253,490 by 2026 (SBC, 2014). In addition to a general increase in the overall population, a series of significant changes in the population profile of Swindon are also projected, most notably the proportion aged 75 plus is projected to increase by 65% by 2026. In addition to changes to the age and size of the local population, the average household size in Swindon is expected to decline from 2.35 persons to 2.29 persons over the same period. The combination of a growing and ageing population and declining household size will bring a series of significant challenges for future housing provision in Swindon.

Housing tenure

As is the trend nationally, the most common tenure in Swindon is owner occupation with a mortgage, which makes up around 40 per cent of all households. This and those living 'rent free' are the only tenures that have reduced in size in Swindon since 2001, with significant increases in the number of social and private renters, and owners without a mortgage.

Stock profile

Terraced housing, both Victorian and modern, makes up the highest proportion of Swindon's housing stock and is 10 per cent higher than the region. The proportion of detached homes is 9 per cent lower than the regional average. The implications of this upon Swindon's growth ambitions are discussed later in this strategy.

Since 2001, Swindon has outperformed the region and England in terms of net additions to its housing stock and has had a significantly larger growth in purpose built flats than the Region or England.

In terms of age, Swindon has a relatively new housing stock when compared with the rest of England and the region as a whole. There has been continued growth and between 1981 and 2010 a total of 33,992 new dwellings were completed, averaging 1,172 per year, most of which have been in the urban area.

House prices

House prices in Swindon tend to be below national and regional averages. In January 2011 taking into account sales and valuations over the previous three months, was £187,000. This compares to a regional average of £239,500.

Housing need and affordability

In 2011, the Borough Council commissioned an update to the 2006 sub-regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA). One of the core outputs of this study is an analysis of the level of housing need in Swindon, based on issues such as affordability and specialist housing requirements. The key affordability and housing need findings and recommendations of this study were as follows:

In 2010 35 per cent of first time buyers in Swindon were unable to afford a to buy a lower quartile priced flat, 55 per cent were unable to afford a local quartile terrace house and almost 64 per cent a semi. (These figures assume a mortgage based on three times salary).

Housing affordability is worse for families than other household groups. Lone parent households are likely to experience greatest problems of affordability and are expected to grow by 67% in Swindon between 2008 and 2033, a total of 4,000 additional households or 160 per year.

There is significant unmet demand for affordable rented housing from one person households and couples. Almost two thirds of households on the Council's housing register need one bed accommodation

DCLG estimates indicate a further 1,300 additional households between 2011 and 2021 containing a person aged over 85. This will have implications for care services, the suitability of existing housing in the private sector and demand for social housing. At the current rate of household formation, housing supply and backlog waiting lists there will be a shortfall of affordable housing for an average of 800 households each year in Swindon

There is evidence to suggest that intermediate tenure products, such as shared ownership and intermediate rent, have a role in meeting some of the identified housing need in Swindon

Housing demand

The SHMA update also featured an analysis of current and future demand for market housing, the key findings and recommendations are as follows:

In the longer-term demand for housing will outstrip supply as a result of demographics. CLG estimate an additional 232,000 households per year in England. Average net additions to the housing stock in England over the last two decades average 160,000 per year.

Population growth in Swindon is likely to increase demand from all household types although the greatest growth will be from one-person households, and those over the age of 85. According to ONS projections approximately 1300 new homes per year

will need to be delivered to meet the need from new households. Almost half of these will be for older people downsizing from family houses. If only a small proportion of these actually downsize, the difference will need to be made up by new family housing.

The Borough Council has revised its housing targets to 2026 to 25,000 dwellings, or 1,188 new homes on average per year, as a result of lower economic growth resulting in fewer new jobs, fewer economic immigrants, lower population growth, and lower rates of household formation. In the early years to 2016 the proposal is to limit the annual target to 850 homes. This is likely to reduce the amount of affordable housing being delivered through s106 agreements.

Housing supply

Since 2008 the numbers of houses built in the Borough has fallen every year to the point that during 2012 / 2013 just 520 houses were completed in Swindon. This represents just 26% of the completion rate that was being achieved in 2007/2008. There were 42 Council houses built during the last 3 years and house building by housing associations has also remained at a minimal level so the bulk of new construction remains within the private sector.

In terms of future housing growth, the Council have set out in their emerging Local Plan a level of proposed housing growth for the period 2011 to 2026 for 22,000 houses. In terms of the five year housing land supply (2013-2018), the Council have demonstrated there is sufficient land to meet anticipated growth, with supply of approximately 8,311 houses which mainly comprises of sites that have planning permission, proposed strategic allocations and potential sites identified through the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (published in 2013).

Empty homes

Despite housing shortages across Swindon, a certain proportion of the housing stock has been vacant for periods longer than six months, often for reasons that include repossession, legal disputes over ownership and inheritance, and a lack of funding for repairs.

Housing stock condition

In April 2011, the Building Research Establishment (BRE) prepared an assessment of the condition of private sector housing stock in Swindon. The results indicate that: the Swindon private sector housing stock is better than the national average 15% per cent of private sector dwellings in Swindon have a category one hazard as defined under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System. A category one hazard is such that it may cause death or serious injury. The national average is 24%.

The most common hazard amongst the private housing stock in Swindon is excess cold, with single pensioners and lone parents most likely to live in hazardous conditions.

The results also show that the proportion of non-decent homes is highest in the town wards of Eastcott, Central, and Gorse Hill and Pinehurst, and the rural wards of Blunsdon and Ridgeway.

The highest distribution of vulnerable households in non-decent homes is in Central, Penhill, Gorse Hill and Pinehurst, Parks, and Eastcott.

The BRE study indicates that there are 7,595 properties with thermal comfort failures requiring a total of £36,680,000 to make decent.

The highest distribution of thermal comfort failures and associated Category 1 hazards are in the wards of Parks, Penhill, Blunsdon, Central and Eastcott. 4,200 households are in 'fuel poverty' across Swindon

Homelessness and rough sleeping

The causes of homelessness are hugely varied; leaving the armed forces, fleeing domestic violence, being evicted or repossessed (many times through no fault of their own), and family and relationship breakdown. All of these situations can lead to people suddenly finding themselves in need of housing advice and assistance. The council has a legal duty to secure accommodation for some individuals who find themselves in this situation and meet certain criteria.

Official figures collected by Swindon Borough Council show that a total of 32 households were registered and accepted as homeless during 2012/13. This represents a decrease of 72% on the figure for 2004/05 and 76% for the period 2005/06.

The current figures show a consistent downward trend as prevention work has increased. The main recorded reasons for homelessness in Swindon are: parents no longer willing to accommodate, relationship breakdown (violent and non-violent), and loss of private sector tenancy

Numbers of homeless have reduced significantly over the past ten years however; this masks significant on-going demand for assistance with access to housing from the Council. The continued numbers of 'acceptances' to the housing register is indicative of the future challenges that the council is posed with when preventing homelessness, given the present economic climate.

Demand for Council Housing

As of July 2014 there were 7378 households assessed as being in housing need on Swindon's Housing Register and this figure has been rising steadily over recent years.

Concealed households, i.e. those staying with friends, family or other relatives, made up approximately 44% of the total, and flats for single people and couples along with 2 and 3 bed houses are the most in demand. Those housed from Band B on the Housing Register (categorised as those in urgent need of accommodation) were

waiting an average of 1 year longer in 2013 (over 3 years) before being housed than similar households in 2008

Specialist housing needs

Swindon Borough Council owns approximately 1,500 units of sheltered housing for older people, and a further 1,000 approximately are owned by Registered Providers. Data indicates that one and two-bedroom bungalows are in greatest demand but the greatest supply is of one-bed flat

There are currently 1,809 households on the Council's Common Housing Register for sheltered housing, of whom 504 have been assessed as having a priority need for housing. We do not know how many of these can afford to resolve their housing need through the market as Council does not take into consideration income and savings when allocating housing.

In 2011 approximately 298 older person households on the Housing Register were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance and 105 of these already living in Council housing. In 2011 there were 986 households registered on the Council's Housing Register where a member of that household was in receipt of Disability Living Allowance, 298 of these required older persons housing.

In terms of supply, 4 fully wheelchair accessible affordable properties have been delivered since 2008/9. This appears to be low, but adapted properties are generally low demand. Ensuring that supply and demand is matched for households in need of adaptations is vital, to ensure that households are supported to live as independently as possible. Depending on individual circumstances accommodation needs range from houses with downstairs bedroom and bathroom facilities to ground floor flats and wheelchair-adapted bungalows.

Chapter 6: The Council's priorities:

The Housing Strategy responds to the strategic drivers of the national and local strategies as outlined. It needs to help bring jobs to Swindon, support economic activity through increased housing supply and providing sustainable communities, promote independence, reduce revenue liabilities in the public sector and ensure the most vulnerable are protected. However, in the current financial situation the strategy balances resources against outcomes when formulating actions.

Responding to the changing housing market – Improving standards in private rented housing:

The private rental market is largely a collection of small scale enterprises. There are no notable large scale institutions offering a private rental service across the country, unlike countries such as Germany and France where renting is seen as a long term option for families and is backed by a legislative framework that supports such a choice. In the UK, the Montague Review was commissioned to explore methods of increasing institutional investment into the private rented sector through build to let. Montague's recommendations included better using the affordable housing requirements of the Planning system on larger sites to enable private rented housing to come forward and using public land to pilot such an approach.

The Council's own land holdings, including Wichelstowe, offer the possibility of undertaking a pilot project for an enhanced private rental offer aimed at working households, and based on the principles of good quality homes, long term tenancies, predictable rent rises based on inflation allied with a reliable and high quality management and maintenance service. Analysis of the English Housing Survey of 2012-13 shows that only 13% of private sector tenants who moved that year were able to buy a home, and furthermore that 78% of new private sector tenancies that year were people moving from other private sector tenancies.

Whilst the provision of a new form of institutional private rent will be an asset to the town, such provision will be relatively small in early years compared to the 16000+ private sector homes already in existence. The support for the establishment of a new private rented sector offer as stated in the Action Plan would be expected to drive up standards across the sector in Swindon through the action of normal market competition. However, it is clear that the normal market dynamics do not always operate in the private rented sector in the way we may expect. In the internet age, it is expected that potential customers are able to discover what other consumers have experienced in terms of customer service from product and service providers. However, potential tenants have little way of obtaining legitimate feedback on their prospective landlords meaning that normal market mechanisms and incentives do not operate as they should. Furthermore, initiatives such as the Stable Rental Contract from Shelter that offer opportunities for both landlords and tenants are unable to be disseminated effectively through a lack of widespread engagement. The Council should therefore investigate the possibility of implementing certain changes within the local private rental market to address this market failure. Landlords that we have spoken to are broadly supportive of reasonable steps being taken to promote

good standards in private rented housing, whilst reminding us that tenants can cause them serious financial distress.

The most extreme intervention would be a comprehensive licensing system. This has been implemented in other areas for example Newham. Such a licensing scheme is self-financing from landlord's registration fees. Such fees should not be onerous and be used only for the cost of running the scheme including monitoring of standards. Such licensing should cover areas including contact details for landlord, tenancy deposit arrangements, property standards (including safety checks) and complaints procedure. There is a risk that this will deter landlords from investing in Swindon. Also, there is little evidence to support such an intervention, which would be necessary to secure the statutory approval from the Secretary of State.

A less intrusive approach is reputational regulation. This could be through several methods including offering landlords the opportunity to sign up to a standards charter that commits them to certain standards of service in their lettings. This is similar to the service Unipol offer in Leeds, Bradford and Nottingham. Another option would be to consider the provision of web-based feedback site for tenants to allow the market to operate better through allowing tenants information on prospective landlords akin to the information that landlords can access on prospective tenants through services such as TenantVet. This could be alongside the establishment of separate private sector tenant and landlord groups to allow better intelligence to be gathered on the operation of the sector.

A number of Local Authorities have replaced their in house Landlord Accreditation schemes with a formal endorsement of credible national schemes, such as that provided by the National Landlords' Association. Such a scheme is able to offer greater benefits to landlords, for example professional training and advice. This is the advisable route for the Council to take.

Finally, it is clear that the Council's enforcement team that ensures that properties meet certain standards with regard to safety, amenity, repair and management cannot be expected to keep pace with the growth in the private sector without additional resources. Although the Council currently runs a Landlord Accreditation scheme, there are only 30 landlords currently registered and with the Law Commission estimating that only 2.2% of landlords belong to a professional body it can be argued that voluntary regulation has not moved the sector to the professional footing that it needs.

Swindon has a large amount of inward migration of working age households, for whom the private rented sector provides an opportunity for a place to live. To attract and retain economically active households Swindon should seek to improve standards in the private rented sector.

Affordability: Improving the Offer

Affordable Housing is housing made available at less than the market level. Newly built affordable housing will either be rented at 80% of market rent, or one of a

number of low-cost home ownership schemes allowing people to leverage up their earnings to purchase a home.

Of the 92,620 dwellings in Swindon approximately 15,170 are social rented homes owned by the Council and Housing Associations. Swindon Borough Council is by far the largest social landlord in the town owning two thirds of the affordable rented stock. The recent vote by tenants to stay under Council control has focussed the Council on achieving the best it can from the freedoms offered by the Housing Revenue Account reforms. Where there were central controls, there are now new flexibilities, so local direction for the existing and future Council owned housing stock must be established.

Over two thirds of Council tenants receive welfare benefits. Clearly, it is important to ensure that incentives exist for tenants to engage in economic activity (including volunteering, training and education) and all potential disincentives are removed. The recent adoption of the Tenancy Strategy and its changed prioritisation around allocation reflects this approach. Further work is necessary to maximise the benefit of national initiatives for Council tenants such as the Work Programme and opportunities to increase skills. The large scale construction of homes, employment buildings and regenerated areas of Swindon offer significant opportunities for local people. The size of the Council's stock holding results in a significant footprint in the local economy supporting shops and businesses on estates.

Affordable rented housing performs a vital function for those who either have no wish to own their own home or cannot afford to do so. The number of households assessed as being in need on the Housing Register and the estimated shortfall of affordable housing as measured by the Strategic Housing Market Assessment evidence the on-going need for more affordable housing to rent.

The Housing Revenue Account (HRA) has a borrowing headroom of approximately £31m (with an overall debt of £150.4m) as of April 2014 alongside a capital programme of expenditure for improvements upon the stock of £14.8m (up by over £10m compared to when the notional HRA was in place). A programme of Council house building is achievable, subject to viable business plans being assembled particularly in relation to rent revenue. Previous work has demonstrated that homes let at Affordable Rents can be constructed within the HRA and generate a surplus for the HRA after servicing debt charges and other management and maintenance costs. This approach would be supported by the Council's significant land holdings suitable for residential development both within the HRA and the General Fund. The Council will seek support for this from the Homes and Community Agency. It is unlikely that all £31m of headroom can be spent on development though, because there are significant works required on our existing stock which have yet to be accounted for in the Business Plan.

Land is a limited resource and whilst opportunities may exist for future land purchases to support Council house building, there will also exist opportunities to procure new homes on larger sites through the s106 process and one off purchases of homes that meet wider strategic benefits such as large, adapted bungalows for example.

Regardless of its own objectives around building more Council housing, the Council needs to continue to work with Housing Association partners to deliver more affordable housing across the Borough, maximising the resources they have available and better understanding their business plans. It will be essential for the purposes of maximising housing supply that housing associations will be able to offer high valuations of s106 affordable housing on larger sites. The Council will also encourage housing associations that are willing to act as master developer on larger sites by offering the same freedoms and flexibilities that would be available to private sector house builders. Furthermore, the Council will encourage housing associations to actively pursue private rent as part of their offer in Swindon to support improvements in that sector. Another potential area of housing association action is that of estate management of communal areas on large housing sites where the Council would like housing associations to consider providing these services and consider extending their offer into property maintenance for all residents irrespective of tenure.

The Town Centre

The Council Housing development programme will also offer regeneration opportunities in Swindon, and in particular the town centre.

The Town Centre Master Plan identifies a need for a greater offer of retail, and cultural activities. To support more economic life in the town there is a need to develop the housing offer in the town. A full list of the opportunities in the town centre can be found at Forward Swindon's website www.forwardswindon.co.uk.

The Railway Village is a key asset for the Council. It was a planned village constructed by the Great Western Railway Company in the 1840s to house the workers for its railway works recently constructed in Swindon. It was the birth of modern Swindon being two miles from the market town of the same name located where Old Town now stands. There are 320 homes built mostly of Bath Stone originally consisting of small two storey cottages along with communal facilities including the now derelict Mechanics Institute, a school (now demolished), church, park, shops (now closed), pubs, public baths, doctor's surgery and a community centre that formerly housed the GWR Medical Fund Hospital which is regarded as the inspiration behind the establishment of the NHS. It has recently been considered for World Heritage status and is central to Swindon's heritage and identity with its location between the town centre and the Outlet Village and its striking combination of materials and design. It is an almost perfect example of a model village designed to provide an industrial workforce with all of their physical, medical, moral and educational needs with virtually all of its significant features intact and predating other notable examples such as Saltaire.

In the 1960s the Railway Village was under British Rail's ownership and becoming run down and derelict. The Council bought the Railway Village and undertook a huge regeneration programme throughout the 1970s updating the properties for modern living standards and winning several awards along the way and saving the Railway Village from potential clearance.

In 2014, the Railway Village is still predominately owned by the Council and let to Council tenants (304 properties out of 320) with 85 bedsits and 18 x 1 bed flats. There has recently been a sensitive lets policy implemented in response to concerns raised by tenants and police about anti-social behaviour from alcohol abuse, increased drug activity and noise complaints. It has twice the amount of anti-social behaviour recorded than other areas around the town centre. It has by far, at 95%, the highest concentration of social housing in the town in properties that are difficult to heat, maintain and manage. The Council should work towards the next phase of the Railway Village and the area be put on a sound footing for the next century.

The Railway Village occupies a strategic location close to existing major regeneration taking place at the Mechanics Institute and Carriage Works. The Council will work with local residents and stakeholders to ensure that the Railway Village supports and benefits from this economic and physical regeneration.

Empty Homes

At a time of acute housing need, having properties empty for long periods of time is a waste of a valuable resource. At their worst they are a magnet for anti-social behaviour that can blight neighbourhoods. Swindon Borough Council has a positive track record of bringing empty private sector homes back into use through close engagement with owners where possible but also through direct intervention including Compulsory Purchase Orders when necessary. Whilst not actually obtaining an Empty Dwelling Management Order, the threat of their use has been a positive tool in our engagement with the owners of empty homes.

The inclusion of empty homes in the New Homes Bonus Incentive scheme ensures that resources remain available for this work. Each empty home brought back into use generates £7,764 in additional New Homes Bonus for Swindon (£9,864 if it used for affordable housing). This not only funds the intervention work itself but supports loans to empty property owners for small works to bring properties back into use.

Disrepair, Energy Efficiency & Improvement

Whilst the condition Swindon's private sector housing stock is better than the national average, there are still a significant numbers of homes falling below this standard. The council remains committed to improving conditions wherever these could affect the health or wellbeing of occupiers. Poor housing is known to be a key determinant of health and the council has a key role to play in reducing its effects through the various means at its disposal.

There is a need to assist our most vulnerable and disadvantaged owner occupiers keep their homes safe and suitable. We will continue to do this through a regime of advice, support and targeted financial assistance in the form of grants where this is the most appropriate and effective course of action. These will be aimed particularly at: Older housing in a hazardous condition; Improvements in energy efficiency; and to make sustainable use of our existing housing stock. Enabling older and vulnerable households to remain in their homes will remain a high priority as will be helping

households in fuel poverty or living in cold and damp housing. This can have a significant impact on the health, wellbeing and achievement of residents.

Private Rented Sector & Houses in Multiple Occupation

Swindon has a growing private rented sector and the council increasingly relies on this to accommodate those who are homeless or who present with other un-met housing needs.

Whilst the market demands that much of the private rented sector is of a good standard and meeting tenants' needs, there remains a significant proportion that is not. Many private sector tenants have little choice over their housing and the council has an important role in driving up standards wherever this is found necessary.

Particular focus is given to Houses in Multiple Occupation where some of the worst housing conditions are seen, but the council is committed to enforcing standards of safety and amenity wherever intervention is needed. Landlords will always be encouraged to improve their properties before formal action is considered, but the council will not shy away from taking appropriate formal action where tenants are in hazardous accommodation and landlords fail to address concerns. This is backed by a regime of support for landlords in the form of Accreditation which recognises good standards of management and encourages engagement through Forums.

Disabled Adaptations

Wherever possible the council will assist disabled occupiers to remain living in their own homes. This approach is taken regardless of tenure and assistance is given in the form of adaptations to the homes of our own tenants, along with means tested Disabled Facilities grants to others. In all cases it is recognised that disabled occupiers need responsive and informed assistance to best determine what is needed and to achieve the best possible outcome. This can include options for alternative more suitable housing as well as assistance in having their current home adapted. In all cases the process requires a holistic approach across council departments and a continued commitment to provide the funding necessary.

Meeting Housing Need

Swindon Borough Council is committed to maximising the affordable housing provided on qualifying sites through the s106 process. This helps us meet the high housing need in the town, including the households assessed as being in need on the Housing Register as well as those who are unable to afford to purchase their own home. It is important to recognise that this has to be balanced against the need to increase housing supply and must not act as a brake on development. The Council will always be prepared to discuss viability problems on sites on an open book basis to facilitate and accelerate delivery. However, the Council expects developers to recognise that the provision of 30% affordable housing on qualifying sites is a development cost and should be factored in when valuing land. It will not accept the affordable housing contribution being used as a buffer when bidding for

land on the assumption that a higher price can be offset against the amount of affordable housing provided.

It is accepted that local land values place added pressure on sites with regard to viability and the Council will work with developers to ensure that the affordable housing contribution attracts the highest possible value from purchasing organisations. Whilst not seeking to specify individual affordable housing providers for s106 affordable housing, the Council believes that those organisations which are part of the local affordable housing development process and have demonstrated high standards of management and maintenance offer the best chance of success. On larger sites, the Council would wish to see the number of affordable housing providers kept to a minimum and the developer to consider transferring estate management responsibilities to those organisations.

Affordable housing is provided on sites larger than 0.5 Ha or providing more than 15 homes. For larger sites the costs involved can be significant. For instance, on East Wichel, approximately 250 affordable homes were provided, out of a total of over 800, with an open market value of over £40m. Whilst the standard affordable housing provision of rented homes plus low cost home ownership meets existing housing need it does not always meet the most pressing social needs. The Council needs to identify specialist housing needs as early as possible through close work with the clinical commissioning groups. This will allow bespoke solutions to be offered as part of the s106 provision especially in areas such as Learning Disability accommodation. It will better meet emerging needs locally through supported living and hence avoid unnecessarily expensive residential care placements out of the Borough.

The number of households in temporary accommodation has dramatically reduced in Swindon. This mirrors national performance, although numbers do not seem to be rising yet in Swindon. Swindon does seem to lag national trends here, so it is not advisable to extrapolate the current trend line. This fall should not hide the fact that there is still considerable demand for housing assistance, so much as greater success in preventing homelessness and using alternatives to temporary accommodation.

The Local Plan evidences a shortfall of 15 plots for Gypsies and Travellers in the Local Authority area. In order to reduce the likelihood of illegal encampments as has been seen elsewhere, it is prudent for the Council to plan for a site to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers who live in the Borough.

Promoting and Maintaining Independence

The contribution of good housing, support services and technology to enable active ageing and improved wellbeing has been convincingly established over recent years and in many studies. Much of what has been achieved in the housing sector has been born out of the public health movement of the 19th century as the link between disease and housing conditions was established. Swindon Borough Council recognises the contribution that well-designed, safe and warm accommodation can

make to enabling and maintaining independence in potentially vulnerable groups. The Council is facing the same financial pressures as other local authorities, especially from increasing demand for social care services such as support for the elderly and people with learning disabilities and must use the current and future assets at its disposal as intelligently as possible to promote independence and improve health outcomes.

Older People

Demographically, Swindon has an ageing population but less so than neighbouring areas and has a high proportion of home owners. However, for many, these homes no longer meet their needs due to their design as homes for young families, exacerbate isolation and may not hold sufficient asset value to enable the occupants to have real choices and options. Furthermore, these under-occupied family homes are a brake on the local housing market as they would be the equivalent of new supply if they became available.

One of the blockages to this process is the lack of affordable and attractive choices and clear pathways to navigate through them. Superficially, Swindon has an excess of supply of sheltered housing (2700 against a calculated requirement of 1800) but this does not address the quality of the offer and its ability to attract a new generation of downsizers. Furthermore, these bricks and mortar considerations cannot be divorced from the services that are needed alongside whatever accommodation is required. The support and care offer must be more closely integrated into the design of future development so that it can add to the choices available.

The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Housing and Care for Older People points out that meeting the housing needs of the older generation leads to solutions for the younger age group. Local Planning Authorities should play a key role to ensure delivery of desirable housing in great places, tuned in to local need and demand.

Underpinning these recommendations, the HAPPI Panel stressed the importance of design, identifying ten elements that are critical to achieving age-inclusive housing:

- Generous internal space standards
- Plenty of natural light in the home and in circulation spaces
- Balconies and outdoor space, avoiding internal corridors and single-aspect flats
- Adaptability and 'care aware' design which is ready for emerging telecare and telehealthcare technologies
- Circulation spaces that encourage interaction and avoid an 'institutional feel'
- Shared facilities and community 'hubs' where these are lacking in the neighbourhood
- Plants, trees, and the natural environment
- High levels of energy efficiency, with good ventilation to avoid overheating
- Extra storage for belongings and bicycles
- Shared external areas such as 'home zones' that give priority to pedestrians

The HAPPI exercise concluded with four key recommendations:

- The time has come for a national effort to build the homes that will meet our needs and aspirations as we all grow older.
- We should all plan ahead positively, creating demand for better choice through a greater range of housing opportunities.
- Housing for older people should become an exemplar for mainstream housing, and meet higher design standards for space and quality.

The revenue costs associated with different housing solutions is a major determinant of the policy position decided upon. A report for the Homes and Community Agency in 2010 demonstrated that specialist housing provision for older people can save £444 per older person per year. Recent Extra Care housing research in East Sussex and Dorset has consistently demonstrated considerable savings against all other forms of provision including domiciliary care in the recipients' own home as well as improved outcomes for the service recipients. Demonstrating the enhanced value using HAPPI principles can enable care and health partners to invest in services that will, in the medium to long term, tackle the challenge of the increasing demand for intensive interventions resulting from the changing population.

Extra Care is housing designed with the needs of frailer older people, or people with complex disabilities in mind and with varying levels of care and support available on site. People who live in Extra Care Housing have their own self-contained homes, their own front doors and a legal right to occupy the property. Extra Care Housing is also known as very sheltered housing, assisted living, or simply as 'housing with care'. It comes in many built forms, including blocks of flats, bungalow estates and retirement villages. It is a popular choice among older people because it can sometimes provide an alternative to a care home.

It is likely, due to the weight of evidence available, that the extra care housing model will include the provision of large extra care villages consisting of up to 250 homes in a single complex offering facilities such as a shop, restaurant, bar, library, gym, events space, and more as part of the overall scheme. The expansion areas at Wichelstowe and the New Eastern Villages offer the opportunity to integrate such provision into the district centres for such schemes offering a range of benefits:

- Ensuring older people are at the centre of new communities and promoting intergenerational activity and reduced isolation
- Supporting local shops and services
- Improving the ease of access for essential services such as GP surgeries and pharmacies
- Offering co-located and shared facilities between the extra care scheme and the local community – e.g. community space, library etc. allowing reduced costs and better community cohesion.

The Council owned expansion area at Wichelstowe is already planning to deliver on this agenda and has secured a HCA grant to support the new provision.

Learning Disabilities

Swindon has a low proportion of adults with learning disabilities who live with their own family and a high spend on residential care compared with comparator

authorities. However, the evidence also shows that this has been changing and that younger people are far more likely to be accommodated in supported living arrangements. Evidence shows that specialist housing solutions can offer savings of £6,764 per year for commissioning authorities through such arrangements.

There is a particular challenge for the transitions process where young people with learning disabilities move into the remit of adult social care. It is essential that such individuals are planned for in terms of future accommodation needs so that the right solution can be provided when needed rather than crisis solutions being provided at the last minute which can be both unsuitable and expensive. Furthermore, local solutions planned well in advance with the service user and their family can offer significant savings in both capital (if provided through a s106 agreement or existing/new Council stock) and revenue if the family can offer some support that otherwise would be paid for by the commissioning authority.

It is more difficult with some of the expensive out of Borough placements that already exist as people may be settled into accommodation and it may prove far too disruptive and upsetting to relocate them to Swindon. However, this must be looked at on a case by case basis to examine whether local services could be designed to bring people back to Swindon, improve their experience and reduce expenditure. This group, along with other specialist housing groups such as mental health and physical disabilities, should be part of determination process when the Council establishes its own HRA development programme and decides upon appropriate s106 affordable housing provision as these offer the potential to address significant housing need at minimal cost to the Council whilst offering bespoke solutions to the client involved. This should also be part of considerations for the re-letting of void affordable housing stock and any HRA acquisition programme.

Clearly new technology changes how homes are managed and therefore how customers can be supported. The Council will continue to investigate how technology can be used both inside and outside homes to promote independence and reduce isolation.

Supporting economic growth - increasing the quality and diversity of our housing stock:

Construction of new homes is a significant contributor to the local economy, and this is a clear objective of national and local policy. The draft Local Plan seeks an average of 1,625 homes per year from 2016-26, a figure only achieved 6 times in 32 years despite Swindon being a town of high growth. The Housing Strategy supports the high level of delivery outlined in the Local Plan, this will help to meet projected household growth plus every home built adds £77,000 to the economy and creates 1.8 jobs both directly and indirectly².

² Economic Impact Database, CEBR, 2013

In recent years affordable housing has made up a high proportion of the output (at a high of 42% in 2010) reflecting the reduced mortgage availability following the credit crunch. With a second hand market consistently running at just over 2,000 homes sold from 2009-12 and a little higher at about 2,700 in 2013, overall transactions will need to rise by about 4,500-5000 taking into account affordable housing completions in order to achieve the level of new build required. However, the last time transactions were running at that level, gross mortgage lending was approximately twice the current level prior to the credit crunch (according to Council of Mortgage Lenders statistics) whilst prices have recovered to similar or higher levels in general.

Help to Buy is a national initiative from Government to help households who are in a position to afford mortgage repayments but are struggling to assemble the higher deposits that have become the norm following the credit crunch. The scheme allows households to purchase with a 5% deposit through an equity loan or a mortgage guarantee and access favourable lending rates. Recent figures show that 17,395 households have bought a home using Help to Buy in the first 9 months of the scheme, with 140 equity loans being taken out in Swindon. This is an annualised rate of about 23,200 (Swindon annualised rate – approx. 187) against annual residential property transactions in 2013 of 1,071,220. About 88% of purchasers were first time buyers and 86% were purchases of new build homes. The Government have announced that the equity loan scheme will be extended to 2020 for new build homes by which time they hope that a further 120,000 households will have purchased.

Research carried out with employers for the Economic Strategy and from the latest figures from the Government's Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings indicates that the average pay of those who work in Swindon is over £2,000 higher than those who live in Swindon. The data suggest there is a large group of people who earn their money in Swindon during the week but spend it elsewhere. Much anecdotal evidence has been suggested for this from employers and suggested issues include the design of new communities in Swindon not being attractive enough, the poor town centre offer, competition from attractive and historic towns and villages in Oxfordshire, Wiltshire and the Cotswolds and the lack of executive housing offer as illustrated above.

In order to improve the executive housing offer it will be necessary to incentivise the market to deliver the type of homes that are sought should the current market dynamics not support this. One possible method would be to reduce or remove the affordable housing requirements for sites below a certain density and allow any contribution to be in the form of a contribution towards delivery off-site. Furthermore, this could be a time limited policy further incentivising early delivery.

There are other segments of the market that can support a consistent high rate of house building including private rented homes and homes for older people which will be covered later. Typified by the role that affordable housing can play in supporting new delivery at times where the market may not be strong such as happened in East Wichel during 2008-10.

The key risks to increasing housing supply are the costs and timing of key enabling infrastructure and the related issue of site viability. Whilst some of the loan covenants of major house builders are easing in terms of profit required, it is still the case, and will continue to be the case, that margins play a key role in decisions around what to build and what pace to build at. Clearly any assistance to these issues that can be secured from the Local Growth Fund or Local Infrastructure Fund will be a major boost to delivery by de-risking larger sites and removing potential constraints allowing the market to deliver according to demand rather than other limiting factors.

Improving design can be a contentious issue with house builders who contend that their homes wouldn't sell if they weren't designed to meet the needs of the market, and that they are closer to their potential customers than anybody else. Swindon, as a Planning authority, shouldn't be prescribing arbitrary design standards that will impact upon costs and therefore margins and ultimately delivery. The Deregulation Bill requires that Local Authorities cannot stipulate design standards in excess of building regulations. However, that is not to say that design can't be improved but it will need to be done in a collaborative and continuous fashion using the Design Guide that is being produced by the Planning team as a basis for discussion and learning from how other areas have achieved this without impacting upon delivery.

Another method of increasing diversity and improving design is the custom or self-build route allowing large-scale involvement in the building process as happens more widely on the continent, in places such as Almere in the Netherlands, where serviced plots are purchased on planned streets and purchasers are free to then construct the home they want. This can break up the perceived monotony of urban expansions but conversely, the lack of uniformity can also come in for criticism. In the Netherlands 30% of homes are provided in this fashion with over 800 alone in Almere and the practice is even more widespread in other parts of the continent such as Belgium where it accounts for over 60% of new supply. Clearly there are other benefits for the self-builder as it typically costs significantly less than purchasing the equivalent home from a house builder.

Clearly the Council's position as land owner for one of the strategic urban expansion area sites in Swindon at Wichelstowe (capacity of 3,800 homes) offers a unique opportunity to deliver many of the Housing Strategy's objectives and demonstrate its underlying principle of maximising housing delivery whilst improving the quality of the offer. The Council intends to select a private sector joint venture partner to help deliver the Wichelstowe scheme and is already planning to diversify the offer to maximise delivery rates on site through private rented housing and housing for older people.

Chapter 7: Summary

The Council's Housing Strategy sets out its vision that the whole market for housing in Swindon will help deliver key aims for the town.

The Strategy sets out a number of actions, and the following key priorities:

- Responding to the changing housing market - Improving standards in private rented housing
- Affordability – improving the offer
- Managing demand - promoting and maintaining independence
- Supporting further economic growth – increasing the quality and diversity of our housing stock

The future, large scale growth planned for the town is a real opportunity to help Swindon become a key town in the region which can benefit residents in the Borough.

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