
DARLINGTON HOUSING STRATEGY 2008-11

**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Bill Dixon,
Community and Public Protection Portfolio**

Responsible Director(s) - Cliff Brown, Director of Community Services

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to set out the strategic housing plan for Darlington over the next three years, identifying the required resources, mechanisms to monitor local housing market conditions and, the means of delivering new homes to meet identified housing requirements across all sectors. A copy of the Darlington Housing Strategy 2008-12 is attached at **Appendix 1**.

Information and Analysis

2. Darlington's last Housing Strategy 2003 was one of the first strategies to be assessed as "fit for purpose" by the Government Office for the North East (GONE). Whilst GONE no longer require us to submit local housing strategies and instead require annual sub-regional strategies it is appropriate for our Housing Strategy to be updated. The new Housing Strategy, reflects the significant changes in the housing environment and interrelates to sub-regional and Regional Housing strategy priorities.
3. Much evidence underpins the conclusions of the strategy and, in turn, informs the strategic objectives for the local housing market. A Sub-Regional Strategic Housing Market Assessment was undertaken in February 2008 clearly identifying market pressures on Darlington from neighbouring North Yorkshire and Durham. Such influences are considered carefully when planning to deliver sustainable, mixed tenure and balanced communities in Darlington. In addition, consideration is given to the instrumental role the Housing Strategy can play in contributing to the economy, improving existing infrastructure, providing quality and choice in housing to counter outward migration and assisting in the "place shaping" agenda.
4. Key challenges for Darlington include the delivery of affordable housing illustrated by confirmed housing needs assessments in 2005 and 2008. The affordable housing targets are challenging and much has been done to address this through close partnership working between the local authority, private development partners and Registered Social Landlords culminating in the launch of the Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document which will remain a key delivery policy for future affordable housing. Increased investment is also actively sought through applications to the National Affordable Housing programme administered by the Housing Corporation.

5. Continued investment is required in the private sector housing market particularly in the four priority wards of Northgate, North Road, Bank Top and Central which are the focus of the Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy and the Financial Assistance Policy administered by Care and Repair. The Private Landlords Forum continues to flourish and membership is growing providing an invaluable resource for the Housing Options team. The Tees Valley growth bid also offers an opportunity to tackle sub-standard non-decent private sector homes through a programme of remodelling, clearance and new build to maximise land use and deliver homes in accordance with the Housing Corporation's Design and Quality standards. New means of invigorating the private sector housing market and increasing inward investment are being explored through potential joint venture initiatives.
6. Darlington's increasingly elderly population is also considered in the Housing Strategy with independent living, and, how this can be sustained, being a common thread in policy development. A range of options are explored from rehousing, purpose built accommodation, provision of adaptations and tailored support to address identified local requirements. Darlington continues to invest in its own housing stock with annual investment topping £10M per annum. Sheltered schemes have been revitalised, remodelled, refurbished and demolished and rebuilt alongside the creation of four Extra Care schemes for those residents who require additional support.
7. The Housing Strategy and how materials, services and products are procured is also at the forefront of quality and value for money. New partners have been appointed to deliver capital works to council homes, sub-regional energy efficiency measures in the private sector, return of empty homes in the private sector and stairlift contracts have all been agreed. Obsolete or low demand properties have and will continue to be targeted for remodelling investment, clearance and rebuild programmes to ensure the "housing offer" available to local people in housing need is matched with their aspirations.
8. The Housing Strategy continues to explore and assess the environmental impact of its activities in response to global warming and carbon dioxide emissions. Darlington embraces the concept of "zero carbon" homes and through common planning agreements aims to deliver enhanced energy efficient homes, reduce fuel poverty for the most vulnerable members of the community and reduce the "carbon footprint" of existing and future homes. Eco living seminars are planned to promote behavioural change and raise awareness of energy conservation and reduced wastage amongst residents, employees and the wider community.

Outcome of Consultation

9. The proposed scheme in line with Housing Business Plan priorities as agreed with tenants during the stock option appraisal process, and is aligned with the priorities for investment identified since that time. The Tenants Board were consulted on the Housing Capital Programme 2008-09 on 10 January 2008. The "Talking Together" community consultation events have provided an invaluable opportunity for the council to engage with the public and seek their views on future housing policy and strategic objectives.

10. Housing Strategy has been a partner in community consultation with Planners on the Local Development Framework, provision of Open space and, with Members, multi-agency partners and the voluntary sector on climate change. The Housing Strategy annual investment priorities are informed by annual tenant questionnaires and up to date housing stock condition information.

Legal Implications

11. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers needs to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

12. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is considered that some of the capital investment and improvements to building design will deliver a reduction in crime.

Council Policy Framework

13. The issues continued within this request do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

Decision Deadline

14. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this represents an urgent matter, in order that the housing Business Plan can be delivered and community housing needs are met.

Key Decision

15. This is a key decision because the delivery of the Housing Strategy commits funding and resources to deliver the three year strategy. A "golden thread" exists between Housing activity and each of the five themed groups of the new Sustainable Communities strategy, "One Darlington, Perfectly Placed" and, therefore, contributes to corporate performance.

Recommendation

16. It is recommended that Members approve the new Darlington Housing Strategy.

Reason

17. The recommendation is supported to:

- (a) enable Darlington to deliver its strategy and vision for 2008-11 while remaining aligned with the sub-regional and Regional Housing Strategies to maximise inward investment and realise economies of scale across local authority/sub-regional boundaries;
- (b) to ensure that there is a common understanding of housing markets and how they influence, relate to each other and how gaps in housing and/or supported housing provision can best be addressed.

Cliff Brown
Director of Community Services

Background Papers

- (i) Capital Medium Term Financial Plan 19 February 2008.
- (ii) Annual Housing Capital Programme 18 March 2008

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