

# **Darlington Borough Council**

## **Homes Strategy 2025 -2030**

### **Foreword**

[By portfolio holder]

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## Executive Summary

The Homes Strategy provides a framework for the actions of the Council and its partners with regards to housing. It provides our strategic direction to maintain and improve the quality of housing to meet local needs and to address the boroughs housing challenges. It is designed to inform officers, members, partners, key stakeholders, and residents of our approach and priorities on a range of housing matters.

The strategy sets an overall vision to provide high quality homes and three key objectives which are set out below. There are also a number of associated priorities and outcomes which we aim to achieve over the next five years (summarised in appendix 1). These have been established utilising a comprehensive evidence base and existing Council policy. They have also been set to address the challenges and opportunities identified.

### Housing Vision

A vision for housing in the borough:

***Providing high quality homes in attractive places across all tenures; meeting the housing needs of residents and ensuring access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all.***

**Objective 1: Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

**Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

**Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

The strategy recognises the importance of delivering new homes, including affordable, social and new Council owned housing. It is also vital to provide the right infrastructure and community facilities to ensure good placemaking. It is also not just about new housing but upgrading existing stock and ensuring homes are energy efficient, safe and secure.

Residents in Darlington should have fair and equal access to good quality housing that meets their needs. This includes addressing the needs of specific groups including children in and leaving care, people with disability, those with health issues and older people. A range of specialist and supported housing should also be available for those who need it. Through partnership working with other agencies, we also strive to minimise the risk of homelessness and effectively support those who become homeless back to a stable home and an independent life.

High quality homes are vital for our residents and communities, providing indirect benefits for health, the economy and the environment. The Council will aim to strengthen these relationships and achieve the actions and outcomes set out in this document.

## Introduction

The overall aim of the Darlington Homes Strategy is to create positive outcomes and actions for housing related matters in the borough, putting people first and focusing on the housing needs of our residents. The strategy contains a vision to provide high quality homes, three key objectives and a number of associated priorities which are to be achieved over the next five years. These points set out the Council's housing priorities and approach to certain housing issues. The document provides a strategic framework for the actions of the Council and its partners.

A vision for housing in the borough:

***Providing high quality homes in attractive places across all tenures; meeting the housing needs of residents and ensuring access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all.***

**Objective 1: Building homes with an emphasis social and affordable provision , to meet local needs**

**Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

**Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

Good housing can have indirect benefits to many issues and there are dependencies between them. For example, high quality homes can improve standards of living, improve health, provide a safe community, and enhance education attainment and therefore work prospects. A key link is supporting job opportunities in the borough. This provides more wealth to people and gives access to more housing options. This relationship also works in the other direction. The right type of homes in the right places supports economic growth by attracting investors and new businesses. Providing good quality housing for existing and new residents who are economically active.

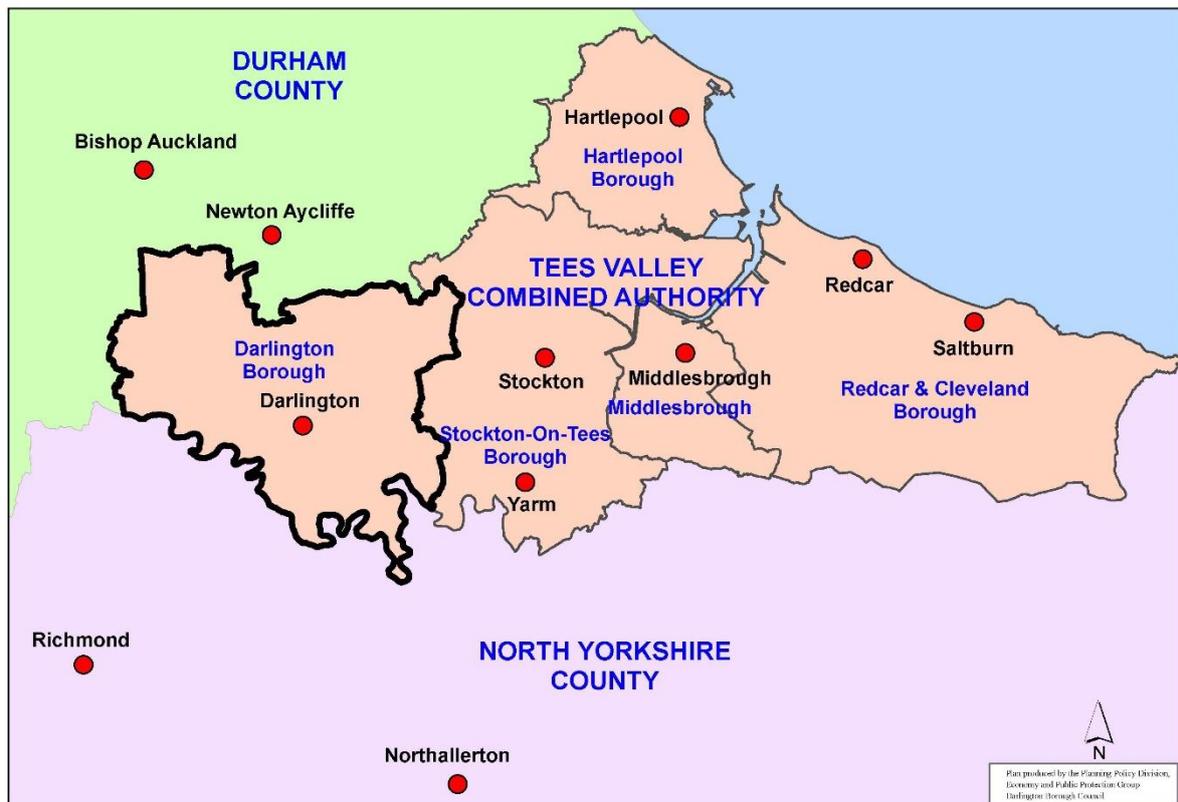
Housing and health are also very much interlinked. We know that the homes and the places in which people live is a key determinant of their overall health and wellbeing. High quality homes with access to open space, sustainable transport links and community facilities can encourage healthy lifestyles. Whereas poor accommodation can reaffirm declining health and health inequalities. The Homes Strategy aims to enhance and improve the positive relationships between these issues and matters above.

## Darlington Borough Overview

Darlington Borough is a unitary local authority which is situated at the western end of the Tees Valley Combined Authority Area.

### Key Features

- Historic market town, surrounded by open countryside and a number of villages.
- The town's development has been closely associated with the railway age and manufacturing.
- The local economy has performed strongly over recent years, shifting to a more resilient base of specialist engineering, the service sector and public sector employment.
- The borough has excellent local transport links with a well-used public transport network and active travel routes as well as local rail and strategic transport links by rail (East Coast Main Line), road (A1M) and air (Teesside International Airport).
- The town centre provides employment, shops, and services for residents and for parts of North Yorkshire, Durham and Tees Valley.
- Evidence indicates that the borough is generally a self-contained housing market. This is the area in which a substantial majority of the employed population both live and work, and where those moving house choose to stay.



## Demographics

The borough has a growing population. In 2021 it was at approximately 107,800, consisting of 48,900 households. This has increased from 105,560 and 46,670 households in 2011, representing a 2.1% rise in population and a 4.8% rise in households (2011 & 2021 census).

The different components of population change have varied over previous years. However, the general trend in natural change for Darlington since the early 2000s has been more births than deaths. In terms of migration, this tends to vary a lot more but over the same period there has been a general trend of net in migration into the borough.

According to the latest census the trend of the population ageing has continued in England and Wales with more people than ever before in the older age groups. Darlington follows this trend. This has been caused by people living longer and declining birth rates. Approximately 20.5% of the Darlington population is over 65, with 17.1% under 15 years and 62.5% 15 to 64 years. In 2011 the over 65 category was 17.4%, indicating a rise of 3% (2011 and 2021 census).

With more people living longer, household growth will be a key driver of housing need. As people grow older, they tend to live in smaller households, meaning that average household size falls as the population ages. This can be seen in the 2018 household projections which estimate that average household size in Darlington will decrease from 2.2 in 2018 to 2.05 in 2043. This does not necessarily mean that the future need is for smaller housing.

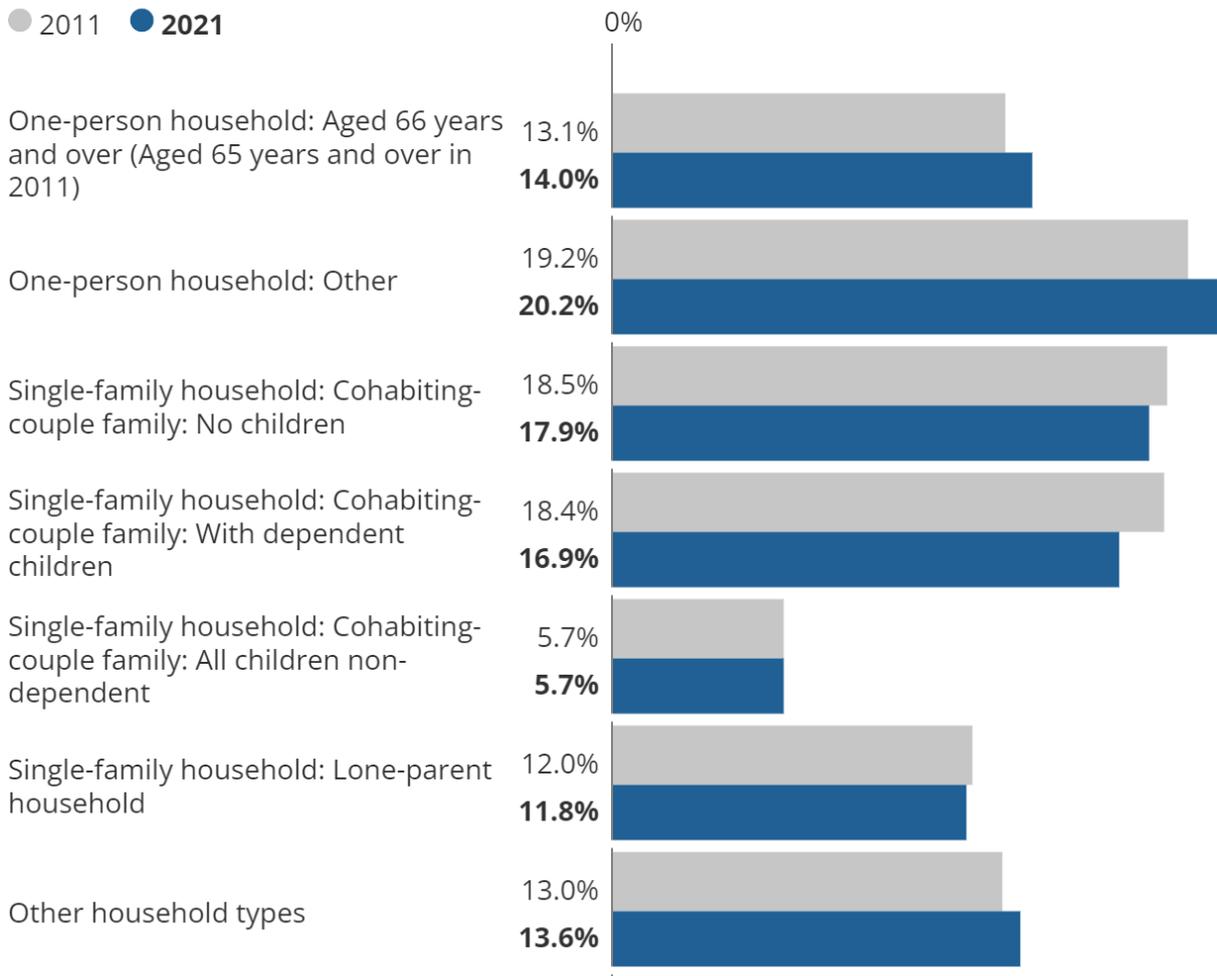
There will be a requirement for some specialist accommodation for older people, however most will wish to remain in their existing homes for as long as possible. This links in with Government social policy to maintain people's independence at home. Household growth will still tend to be driven by younger people such as couples and families who will require largely family homes.

According to the 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation Darlington has become relatively more deprived. Of the 317 Local Authorities in England, Darlington ranked 77th (previously 96th) most deprived based on average score of Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). Darlington now has 21 LSOAs (previously 16) within the 20% most deprived in England. This increase in relative deprivation is in line with rest of sub-region. There are a number of LSOAs within the 10% least deprived, this indicating a large gap in levels of deprivation across the borough. Overall Darlington remains the least deprived local authority area in Tees Valley.

## 2021 Census Data

The graphs, tables and bullet points below set out key data from the 2021 census which provides useful context on the population of Darlington and the existing housing stock within the borough. Some changes from the 2011 census are also highlighted.

### Percentage of households by household composition, Darlington



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

Household composition has remained fairly similar between the 2011 and 2021 census with small increases in the number of one person households and small decreases in single-family households.

<b>Accommodation type in Darlington</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Detached	8209	17.6%	9331	19.1%
Semi-detached	17835	38.3%	19148	39.1%
Terraced	14379	30.9%	13937	28.5%
In a purpose-built block of flats or tenement	5053	10.9%	5271	10.8%
Part of a converted or shared house, including bedsits	778	1.7%	743	1.5%
Part of another converted building, for example, former school, church or warehouse	-	-	172	0.4%
In a commercial building e.g. in an office building or over a shop	268	0.5%	240	0.5%
A caravan or other mobile or temporary structure	30	0.1%	78	0.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46552</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>48920</b>	<b>100%</b>

Accommodation type in Darlington has higher proportions of semi-detached (39.1%) and terraced (28.5%) properties. From the 2011 census the data shows that the proportions have remained relatively similar, with small increases in percentages for detached (1.5%) and semi-detached (0.8%) homes.

<b>Number of bedrooms in households</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 bedroom	4242	9.1%	4269	8.7%
2 bedroom	15645	33.6%	15883	32.5%
3 bedroom	19090	41.0%	19932	40.7%
4 or more bedroom	7590	16.3%	8832	18.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46567</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>48916</b>	<b>100%</b>

The number of bedrooms in households is largely 2 bedroom at 32.5% and 3 bedroom at 40.7%. The proportion of 2 bedroom households has decreased by 1.1% over the last 10 years with the proportion of 4 or more bedroom households increasing by 1.8%.

<b>Occupancy rating</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
+2 or more rooms	15682	33.6%	24332	49.7%
+1	18270	39.1%	14827	30.3%
0	11450	24.5%	8506	17.4%
-1	1149	2.5%	1106	2.3%
-2 or less	119	0.3%	145	0.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46670</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>48916</b>	<b>100%</b>

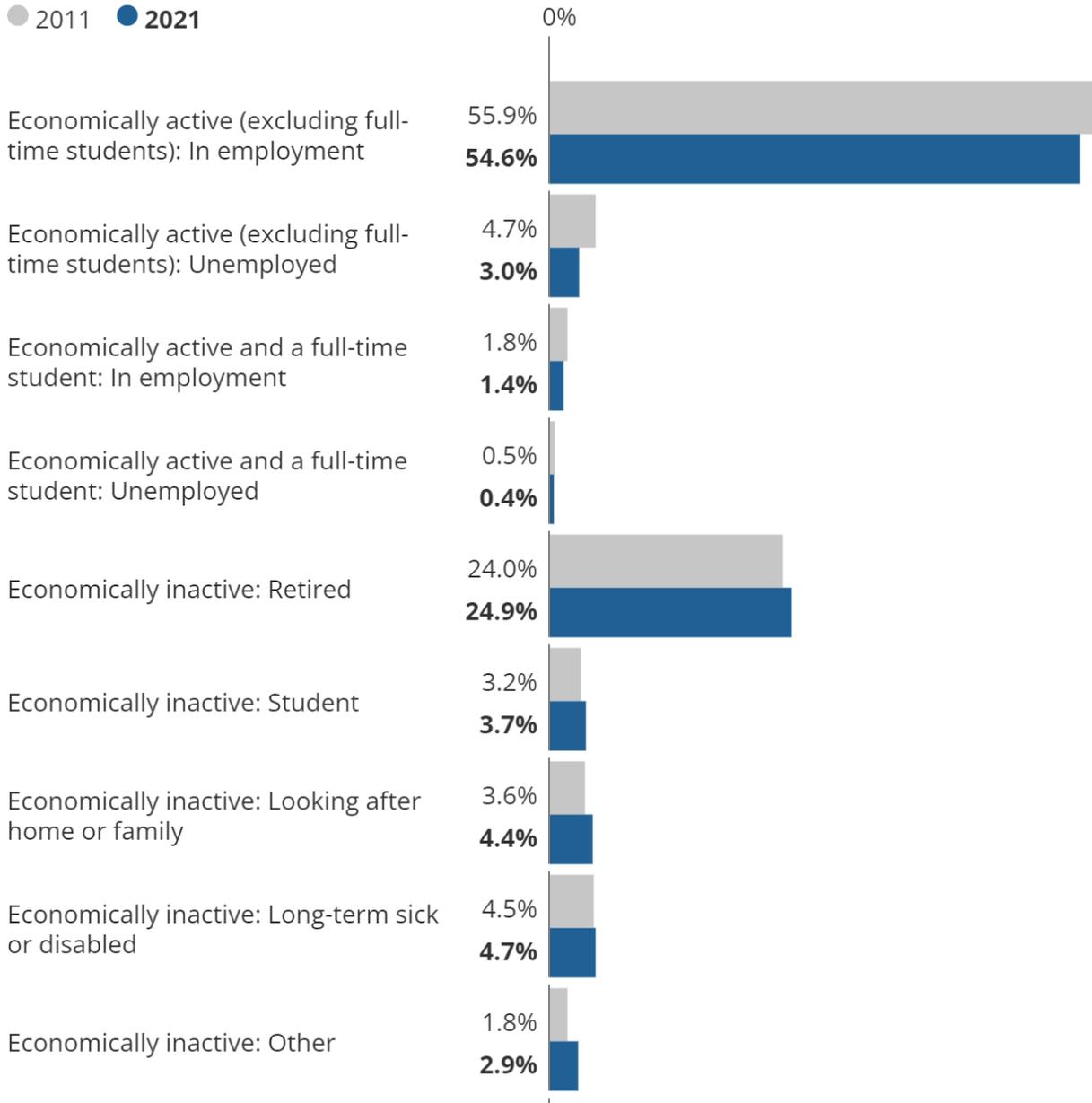
*(negative figure implies a households accommodation has fewer bedrooms than required - overcrowded, 0 the accommodation has an ideal number of bedrooms and plus figures accommodation has more bedrooms than required – under occupied)*

Occupancy levels in Darlington generally show low levels of overcrowding. The proportion of under-occupied households has increased from 72.7% to 80% between 2011 and 2021. The proportion of households with 2 or more bedrooms not occupied has increased fairly substantially from 33.6% to 49.7%, although the number with 1 bedroom not occupied has decreased from 39.1% to 30.3%.

<b>Tenure</b>				
	<b>2011</b>		<b>2021</b>	
	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Owned: Owns outright	13810	29.6%	16222	33.2%
Owned: Owns with a mortgage or loan	16479	35.3%	14474	29.6%
Shared ownership: Shared ownership	178	0.4%	190	0.4%
Social rented: Rents from council or Local Authority	5238	11.2%	5112	10.5%
Social rented: Other social rented	1990	4.3%	2819	5.8%
Private rented: Private landlord or letting agency	7758	16.6%	9035	18.5%
Private rented: Other private rented	755	1.6%	1043	2.1%
Lives rent free	462	1%	20	0.04%
<b>Total</b>	<b>46670</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>48915</b>	<b>100%</b>

A large proportion of homes in Darlington are owned (outright or with a mortgage) 62.8%. Private rented is the second largest category at 20.6%. The proportion of homes owned is less in 2021 than 2011 by 2.1% with the proportion private rented increasing. The number of homes owned outright has increased by 3.6% and the number owned with a mortgage or loan has decreased.

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over by economic activity status,  
**Darlington**



Source: Office for National Statistics – 2011 Census and Census 2021

The percentage of those who are economically active but unemployed in Darlington has reduced from 4.7% in 2011 to 3% in 2021 which is a positive change. The percentage for England in 2021 was 3.5%, showing Darlington is slightly better than the national level. Although those who are economically active and in employment has reduced slightly in Darlington over the period by 1.3%. The percentage of retired has increased by 0.9%, linking in with the data on the ageing population.

### **Other key points**

- 96.3% of people in Darlington do not have a second address.
- The majority of households have mains gas only central heating at 81.1%.
- A large proportion of communal establishment population is male aged 50 years and over (26.7%) and females aged 50 and over (57.5%).
- The management type of communal establishments are largely care homes with nursing included at 31.1% (percentage of the number of people within that category) and care homes without nursing 56.8%. Smaller proportions of type include children's homes (1.6%), mental health unit/hospital (4.9%) and hostels for the homeless (2.1%).
- In 2021, 45.5% of Darlington residents described their health as "very good", increasing from 43.2% in 2011. Those describing their health as "good" fell from 35.7% to 34.8% in that period.
- The proportion of Darlington residents describing their health as "very bad" in 2021 was 1.2% (similar to 2011), while those describing their health as "bad" fell from 4.7% to 4.5%
- 8.4% of Darlington residents were identified as being disabled and limited a lot in 2021. This figure decreased from 9.8% in 2011. Just under one in nine people (11.0%) were identified as being disabled and limited a little, compared with 10.8% in 2011. The proportion of Darlington residents who were not disabled increased from 79.4% to 80.7% over the ten year period.
- In 2021, 94.4% of people in Darlington identified their ethnic group within the "White" category (compared with 96.2% in 2011). 2.8% of Darlington residents identified their ethnic group within the "Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh" category, up from 2.1% in 2011. The 0.7 percentage-point change was the largest increase among high-level ethnic groups in this area.
- 95.4% of households, including all adults, have English as their main language in 2021.

### **ONS house price and earnings data**

Set out below is most recent data from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) for Darlington on median house prices and median earnings (released March 2024). The values shown both measures have been gradually increasing over time. Median house prices have dipped slightly since 2021. When looking at affordability, the ratio between median house price and median earnings, this is better in Darlington than in comparison to the national figures for England over the same period. The ratio figures are generally close to those of the northeast region with some small fluctuations.

Lower quartile house prices better reflect the entry level housing market prices. For Darlington in 2023 this was £105,000 with lower quartile gross annual earnings being £23,084. This resulting in an affordability ratio of 4.39. Nationally the ratio was 7.12 and the northeast region 4.16 in 2023. Again, this reflects better affordability in comparison to the national context and following the regional trend.

<b>Year (ending Sept)</b>	<b>Median house price</b>	<b>Median earnings</b>	<b>Median affordability ratio</b>
2012	122,000	23,206	5.26
2013	119,973	22,461	5.34
2014	124,950	26,231	4.76
2015	131,000	25,299	5.18
2016	133,000	27,514	4.83
2017	137,975	27,797	4.96
2018	139,000	26,445	5.26
2019	140,250	27,703	5.06
2020	150,000	27,039	5.55
2021	160,000	30,435	5.26
2022	155,000	29,146	5.32
2023	153,500	30,561	5.02

(ONS 2024)

## Local Context

This section provides some context to how the Homes Strategy interlinks with the Councils other existing and emerging plans and strategies.

### Council Plan (2024-27)

The Council Plan proposes a long term vision and ambitions for Darlington, with priorities for delivery from 2024-27. At the heart of the plan is the vision to be one of the best places in the UK to live, learn, work and invest – with a strong economy, healthy thriving communities and opportunities for all. Three core values feed into the plan which are:

- addressing inequalities;
- tackling climate change; and
- efficient and effective use of resources.

The plan then sets out six priorities for the Council for the next three years:

- economy
- homes
- living well
- children and young people
- communities
- environment

Key deliverables are set out for each of the six priorities and delivery will be through key strategies and plans. The Homes Strategy will align with and support the above values and priorities. It will also assist with achieving a number of the key deliverables such as meeting current and future housing needs, supporting vulnerable and homeless people and improving the quality of housing. In addition, it will also support growing the economy and delivering more homes particularly in the town centre.

### Darlington Local Plan (2016 – 2036)

The Darlington Local Plan was adopted by the Council in February 2022 and replaced the Darlington Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy (May 2011) and the saved policies of the Borough of Darlington Local Plan (1997, including adopted alterations 2001). It provides an up-to-date statutory development plan for the Borough under which planning decisions can be made.

The Government sets out in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that the planning system should be plan-led. All local authorities should aim to adopt succinct and up-to-date plans to provide a framework for addressing housing needs and other economic, social and environmental priorities. The Local Plan gives the Council control over the location, type and quality of new development. It gives capacity to resist development proposals which do not adhere to Local Plan policies. The Council can also be proactive in accommodating growth and supporting infrastructure through the development plan.

The policies, proposal and site allocations in the Local Plan are designed to address a range of specific issues and challenges. Successful implementation will contribute towards economic growth in Darlington and achieving sustainable development. The Local Plan outlines a number of strategic aims and objectives which are in line with the Council's Plan. It also sets out a number of policies which seek to deliver:

- A minimum of 492 net additional homes over the plan period to meet identified housing needs.
- Sufficient housing land allocations to meet the borough's needs including two sustainable garden communities at Greater Faverdale (Burtree) and Skerningham.
- Affordable housing via market led schemes and exception sites.
- Appropriate mix and size of homes including adaptable and accessible homes, specialised housing and custom and self-build housing.
- Sufficient site and pitch allocations for Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation to meet local needs.
- New employment land allocations and safeguarding existing employment areas.
- Protection and enhancement of our town and local centres.
- Regeneration of the Town Centre Fringe
- Protection and enhancement of our natural environment and heritage assets.
- Sustainable development and mitigation and adaptation to climate change.
- Supporting the health, wellbeing and amenity of the Borough's residents.
- Sustainable and accessible transport infrastructure.

The Homes Strategy is very much interlinked with the Local Plan and will support the delivery of a number of the policy requirements. The Strategy will however provide more detail in a number of areas in terms of the aims and aspirations of the Council. For example with regards to improving conditions of existing homes, supporting vulnerable residents, retirement living, and supported housing.

### **Relevant Council Strategies**

- Council Plan (2024 – 2027)
- Local Plan (2016 – 2036)
- Greater Faverdale (Burtree Garden Village) Design Code (2022)
- Skerningham Garden Village Design Code (2023)
- Design of New Development SPD (2011)
- Discount Market Sale Guidance (2023)
- First Homes Policy Position Statement (2022)
- Housing Services Allocation Policy (2023 – 28)
- Housing Services Repairs Handbook
- Housing Services Damp, Mould and Condensation Policy (2023-27)
- Housing Services Low-Cost Home Ownership Policy (2022)
- Private Sector Housing Strategy (2022 – 2027)
- Climate Change Strategy (2020)
- Housing Services Climate Change Strategy (2024-2029)
- Town Centre Strategy (2019 – 2030)
- Town Centre Fringe Masterplan (2013)
- A Strategy for Later Life (2008 – 2021)
- Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (2025 – 2030)
- Economic Strategy 2012 – 2026
- Adult Social Care Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy
- Adult Social Care Commissioning Strategy & Market Position Statement (2023- 2026)
- Looked After Children & Care Leavers Commissioning and Sufficiency Strategy Refresh (2022)
- Darlington Transport Plan (2022 – 2030)

## **Tees Valley Context**

This section provides some context to how this strategy interlinks with existing and emerging strategies and projects in the Tees Valley sub-region.

The Tees Valley sub-region consists of five local authorities, Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland and Stockton-On-Tees. The Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) was created in 2016. A combined authority enables a group of two or more councils to work together and take collective decisions. It can also take advantage of powers and resources devolved from central Government. TVCAs main remit is to drive economic growth and job creation in the sub-region. The local authorities work closely with the business community and other partners to support the growth of the economy.

The devolution deal signed with Government in 2015 included a 30-year agreement worth more than £450million plus a further £500million to invest in local projects over the following five years, allocated by Government. Powers and responsibilities passed to TVCA cover areas such as skills, business, investment, housing, transport culture and tourism. However, the Combined Authority is not responsible for the planning and delivery of housing across the sub-region. The individual Council's remain as the local planning authorities for their borough's.

TVCA produced a revised Strategic Economic Plan (SEP) for the Tees Valley in 2016. It includes a set of priorities to improve, diversify and increase growth in the local economy to benefit businesses and residents. The ambition of the SEP is to create 25,000 jobs and add £2.8bn to the economy by 2026. The main aims of the plan include increasing the supply of good quality housing, revitalising town centres and areas of poor-quality housing, and bringing forward brownfield land for development. It is important the supply and mix of new homes across the sub-region align with economic growth ambitions and support the aspirations of the SEP.

In order to achieve the aims and ambitions of the SEP on housing, TVCA are also creating effective relationships with key partners, including the five local authorities, registered providers, landowners, developers, private sector investors, Homes England, and Government. They are also trying to work with investors to stimulate new entrants to the market, including build-to-rent through the private rented sector. Opportunities for sustainable growth are also being explored through the principles of new garden village settlements.

## **National Context**

The housing landscape nationally is ever-changing, impacted by alterations to government policy, new legislation, periods of economic change, and other influences. This section provides some context to how the strategy links with matters at the national level.

The government have indicated over recent years that housing, in particular addressing the national housing crisis, is one of the country's key priorities. Some of the focus has been on reforms to the planning system, including revisions to the NPPF and associated Planning Practice Guidance. A recent change has been an alteration to the standard method for calculating housing need, a tool for local authorities preparing Local Plans. First Homes were also introduced in 2021, a new type of affordable housing aimed at first time buyers. More recently there has been an emphasis on delivering more social housing. Reforms have been focused on increasing the delivery of new homes and getting more people on the property ladder.

Reforms have also taken place in the welfare system, including the introduction of Universal Credit and reductions in the household benefit cap which have created challenges for tenants, landlords and local authorities. As of June 2023, over 73% of Council tenants were in receipt of some form of welfare benefits including Universal Credit and Housing Benefit. Of these over 1900 receive an element of Universal Credit.

The economic climate has been turbulent over the last two decades which has heavily impacted on many aspects of housing. The global financial crisis in 2008 constrained housing delivery for a number of years and people's ability to borrow and obtain mortgages. Levels of investment in affordable housing has put pressure on the availability of homes for those on lower incomes. When we talk about affordable housing in this strategy we follow the definition as set in national planning policy (NPPF). This covers social and affordable rent, affordable routes to home ownership and discount market sale housing, all of which can be provided for by the Council and Registered Providers.

More recently the pandemic and the political instability around Brexit and changes in government have affected the housing market with regards to delivery, demand and borrowing. This has also taken place against a backdrop of rising house prices and rents.

### **Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023**

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act aims to address geographic disparities across the UK. The Act has a number of parts which relate to housing. For example there are measures to increase transparency in housing and land markets, direct more developer and landowner profits to affordable housing, address empty homes, give smaller builders greater opportunities to enter the market and support for self-build/custom housebuilding. There are also elements to speed up and streamline the process of preparing Local Plans and changes to the Development Management system.

Before the Act can take full effect, the Government will work on the detail of regulations, policy and guidance associated with the legislation. They will consult on how a number of important provisions can be taken forward. The Housing and Planning Policy Teams will monitor and engage with this work as more information becomes available to ensure the Council can meet and address the proposals.

### **Social Housing Regulation Act 2024**

The Social Housing (Regulation) Act aims to facilitate a new, proactive approach to regulating social housing landlords on consumer issues such as safety, transparency, and tenant engagement, with new enforcement powers to tackle failing landlords. It aims to drive significant change in landlord behaviour to focus on the needs of their tenants and ensure landlords are held to account for their performance.

### **Government Funding**

The Council has been working with partners to obtain Government financial support for new housing developments such as the Brownfield Housing Fund (BHF). This initiative is funded by MHCLG (Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government). It aims to bring previously developed brownfield land back into productive use and helps regenerate areas. It also increases the delivery of housing stock in sustainable locations and supports the construction industry.

In summary, the Council supports the increased national focus on housing. The Homes Strategy has been prepared with the national context in mind and the Council will continue to work to meet housing needs, responding to wider reforms and challenges at the national level when needed.

## Recent Achievements

This strategy is an update and refresh of the Council's previous Housing Strategy. Some aspects of housing have changed since this time such as public sector funding, welfare reform, and national policy changes, however the fundamental issues in relation to housing in the borough have remained similar.

There have been a number of achievements since the publication of the previous housing strategy. This has involved partnership working and delivery of the Council's own housing stock.

Achievements have included:

- Over the period of the previous strategy approximately 1,800 net additional dwellings were built (2012/13 to 2017/18 financial years). Of these 558 were affordable homes.
- Since the end of the previous strategy (from 2018/19 to 2023/24) approximately 3,036 net additional dwellings have been built. Of these 605 were affordable homes.
- During the previous strategy 264 Council houses were built and since April 2018 156 Council homes have been constructed.
- The Council adopted a new Local Plan in February 2022 which sets out a housing requirement, site allocations, affordable housing requirements and requirements in terms of mix, type and size. This is a great achievement as it enables the Council to shape the strategic delivery of new homes which will meet identified quantitative and qualitative needs of the borough.
- Regeneration has taken place at Red Hall, Branksome and Firth Moor, including external wall insulation, solar panel installation and new external doors.
- Regeneration of the Central Park area and the creation of a thriving new community. A mixed-use development site including the delivery of new homes, education campus (Darlington College and Teesside University) and commercial development (Business Central and the National Biologics Manufacturing Centre).
- The Council worked in partnership with Keepmoat to deliver 81 new homes at Redhall (Fairway Development) which incorporated Healthy New Town principles
- During the period of the previous strategy (2012/13 – 2017/18) 1648 Council properties received upgrades, including work to heating, bathrooms and kitchens.

## Key Challenges

Outlined below are some of the key challenges the Council will be facing on housing matters over the next five years. These issues have helped to inform the objectives and priorities of the strategy.

- Maintaining housing completions to meet the housing requirement particularly during periods of economic instability.
- Maximising the delivery of affordable housing when this can be constrained by development viability and the availability of public funding.
- Increasing numbers of people on the waiting list for affordable housing owned by the Council.
- Reducing levels of under-occupancy in homes.
- Ensuring housing investment contributes to the local economy.
- Raising standards in the private rented sector.
- Reducing the number of long-term empty properties.
- Increasing fuel poverty.
- Ensuring energy efficiency of new and existing housing.
- Increasing renewable energy technologies in homes.
- Continuing the physical regeneration of poorer quality housing areas and ensuring that this also provides economic and social benefits.
- Meeting the needs of vulnerable people.
- Increasing numbers of people presenting as homeless since 2020.
- Meeting the needs of an increasingly ageing population. Providing specialist accommodation for older people but also supporting them to live independently for as long as possible.
- Mitigating the impacts of welfare reform.
- Meeting governmental and regulatory standards i.e. Decent Homes Standards across an ageing housing stock.
- Economic climate – rising inflation, interest rates, resource costs and energy costs.

## Key Objectives and Priorities

The Homes Strategy sets an overall vision and three key objectives and associated priorities for over the next five years which are set out below. The objectives and priorities have been established utilising a comprehensive evidence base and existing Council policy and set to address the challenges identified. For each objective and priority, it is also outlined what outcomes and actions we aim to achieve over the following five year period (summarised in appendix 1).

The document provides a framework for the actions the Council and our partners will take to deliver, maintain and improve the quality of housing to meet local needs and to address the boroughs housing challenges. It is designed to inform officers, members, partners, key stakeholders, and residents of our approach and priorities on a range of housing matters.

### Housing Vision

A vision for housing in the borough:

***Providing high quality homes in attractive places across all tenures; meeting the housing needs of residents and ensuring access to safe, secure, comfortable and sustainable housing for all.***

### **Objective 1: Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

- Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents
- Ensuring a suitable housing mix
- Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent
- Helping First Time Buyers
- Promoting Modern Methods of Construction
- Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.

### **Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

- Ensuring high quality homes in the right places
- Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change
- Housing regeneration and renewal

### **Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

- Delivering quality retirement living
- Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs
- Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing
- Minimising the impacts of welfare reform

## **Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents**

The Local Plan sets the minimum number of homes required each year (housing requirement) over the plan period (2016-36). It ensures that a sufficient amount and variety of land comes forward for housing where it is needed, in sustainable locations.

The housing requirement figure of 492 net additional dwellings, a total requirement of 9,840 dwellings for the plan period was calculated and evidenced as part of the SHMA (2017).

The housing requirement will be delivered through a combination of completions on existing development sites, housing land allocations set out in the Local Plan and other windfall sites which gain planning permission over the period. The spatial distribution of the allocations has followed the existing settlement hierarchy, focusing largely on the main urban area. Sites are situated within the main urban area and as urban extensions, mainly to the north east and west. This strategy ensures that housing is focused in areas that provide or will be able to provide the level of services, facilities and employment opportunities that are required to support communities. Housing is not planned for in isolation. The Local Plan also considers and plans for local community facilities and infrastructure setting specific requirements.

There are two large urban extensions in the plan which now have garden community status, Skerningham and Greater Faverdale. Both sites will deliver a large proportion of the plan's housing numbers, some of which will be developed beyond the plan period (Skerningham 4,500 dwellings and Greater Faverdale 2,000 dwellings approximately). These sites may seem overly large to some, however rather than pursuing piecemeal development the aim is to create well planned communities which are supported by the necessary infrastructure and community facilities, integrating them with the existing urban area.

For both Skerningham and Greater Faverdale, Local Plan policies require the Council to prepare design codes for the areas. Design codes have been prepared and adopted for both sites. The documents set out strategic design principles and requirements that development schemes must adhere to. The approach aims to create distinctive, sustainable, high-quality communities in which to live and work. Both design codes also reflect the requirements of the National Model Design Code (2021) which provides detailed guidance on the production of such documents to promote successful design.

The Council prioritises the development of brownfield land in line with national planning policy. There are however a number of greenfield allocations in the Local Plan. This is because there can be difficulties in bringing forward previously developed sites and allocations in the plan must be deliverable. There is also simply not enough brownfield land available to meet needs. The Council will continue to support and encourage development of brownfield land through the Local Plan and via other routes such as the brownfield land register and supporting partners such as TVCA to access central government funding streams. We will be proactive in removing obstacles to the redevelopment of these sites. A key priority for the Council is also the regeneration of brownfield land within the town centre which will be discussed further on in this document.

Developing sufficient housing of the right type and in the right places is also important for supporting the local economy. The Council is committed to supporting the economic growth of the borough and the authority is active in attracting new businesses and industries to the area. It is vital to retain and grow the working age population in order to increase employment and stimulate economic growth. The housing requirement reflects projected employment growth for the borough over the plan period (7,000 new full time equivalent jobs) and the additional workers required. Not delivering sufficient homes to support growth could result in economic and social decline.

The Local Plan will be reviewed every 5 years or sooner in line with national policy. This will help to ensure that Darlington’s needs and aspirations for housing are met. Supporting guidance and evidence base documents will also be reviewed/produced over the lifetime of the homes strategy. Opportunities will be sought where possible to help assist and promote housing delivery.

**Ensuring a suitable housing mix**

The SHMA 2020 assessed the type and size of houses within the current housing stock in the Borough. Whilst not highlighting any significant imbalances it does outline a greater proportion of need for 3 bedroom market homes and 2/3 bedroom affordable homes. The policy approach in the Local Plan (policy H4 Housing Mix) encourages a mix of new homes consistent with the need identified in the most recent SHMA. The overall mix suggested (affordable and market) in the assessment is set out below.

1 bed	6.5%
2 bed	32%
3 bed	50%
4+ bed	11.5%

Ensuring an appropriate mix of housing can also assist with maintaining balanced occupancy levels. As mentioned above census data shows that Darlington generally has low levels of overcrowding but the proportion of households with 2 or more bedrooms not occupied is high at 49.7%. At the end of 2024 the Council estimated that there were 319 Council homes underoccupied (36% of total stock).

Building an appropriate mix of homes in terms of size, type and quality can give residents more opportunities to downsize or move into more suitable accommodation such as shelter/extra care. This can potentially free up larger family homes in the market. The Council will continue to monitor the levels for occupancy rates and look at ways in which to positively influence this issue. There is the possibility within the Councils own house building programme and joint venture arrangements to influence the mix of housing types which has a potential to reduce under occupation. We can also look at further opportunities for new retirement living.

Self and custom build homes have been encouraged by central government more recently. In general terms self and custom build is where an individual or group builds their own home or contacts a builder to design a 'custom built' home for them. Such properties bring benefits as they help to diversify the housing market and increase consumer choice. Self-build and custom housebuilders choose the design and layout of their home and can be innovative in both its design and construction.

The Council promotes self and custom build and launched the Self & Custom Build Register in April 2016 . In February 2025 there were 55 registrations, with 4 of these on Part 1. This indicates some interest in schemes in Darlington, but a large amount of land would not be required to meet the

need on the register at this time. Also, many small housing schemes contribute to self and custom build provision and these will continue to arise as windfall schemes in the future. The Council will however work with developers and landowners to ensure that some plots come forward.

We will also promote the register and self-build more generally. Monitoring demand and assisting where possible, linking up those with an interest on the register with permissioned sites. A number of Local Plan policies encourage and support the delivery of this type of housing. Site specific policies for Skerningham and Greater Faverdale require self/custom build on these large allocations and so delivery is expected in these locations in the longer term.

### **Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent**

The Council is the largest provider of affordable housing in the borough and delivery of new affordable homes is a key priority. Affordable housing provides opportunities for people who cannot afford to rent or buy on the open market and also for those people who work in different aspects of the economy. It also assists in reducing homelessness and overcrowding. We are committed to exploring all opportunities to increase the number of affordable homes in the Borough.

The SHMA (2020) identified a substantial need for affordable homes in the borough. The assessment identified a need of 233 affordable dwellings per annum. This is broken down into households unable to afford (163 dwellings per annum) and households aspiring to home ownership (70 dwellings per annum).

The Council recognises that to address this need affordable homes are required in the borough and is therefore active through a range of measures including delivery. We are committed to building sustainable, safe communities and have a strategic ambition to deliver mixed tenures. Our homes offer a high standard of accommodation that meets the Decent Homes Standard and we provide a range of quality services to tenants. The Council’s housing stock comprises of 5269 homes. A breakdown of the house type and number of bedrooms is set out below.

<b>Dwelling Type</b>	<b>Number</b>
Bungalow	344
Flat	2333
House	2580
Maisonette	12
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>5269</b>

<b>Number of Bedrooms</b>	<b>Number</b>
1-bed	2073
2-bed	1671
3-bed	1483
4-bed	40
5-bed	2

The great quality of our homes and the services provided mean they are in high demand, which is why we have an ambitious programme to build new Council homes in Darlington. Our new build programme is funded through capital receipts from right to buy sales, grant funding from Homes England and through prudential borrowing. For 2023/24 the Council’s capital programme includes £15.673m to deliver our new build Council housing programme.

Current new build projects include developments at Neasham Road, Sherborne Close and 12-18 Skinnergate. The Neasham Road site is currently under construction and the Council are building 130 affordable properties to rent and 20 Rent to Buy homes through Council (Housing Revenue Account) and Homes England funding. Development partner (Esh) are delivering the remainder of the properties on-site. Several new build opportunity sites have been identified and are currently being explored and worked up in detail to seek planning permission. The Council will continue to progress its ambitious build programme, however this will be subject to national economic challenges such as the rise in inflation and issues in the construction sector such as a reduced supply of workers.

It is recognised that there has been a recent focus from Government in prioritising social rent housing. The Council are supportive of this as social rent is set via a formula linked to local incomes and can better address affordable needs. We will therefore look to maximise the delivery of new homes for social rent through Council led schemes and through Council involvement in other developments. Recognising that for some Council led schemes this may sometimes best be achieved through the receipt of a commuted sum for the building of homes for social rent elsewhere.

The Council operates a choice-based lettings system, which allows residents, including existing tenants to apply for affordable properties to meet their housing needs. The Council’s Allocation Policy 2023-28 explains how our affordable homes are allocated, based on an assessment of the housing needs of applicants. It also outlines how we advertise and let the majority of our available homes via the choice-based letting scheme. Registered Providers (RP’s) also let an agreed number of their available homes in Darlington on the scheme. Applicants are able to apply for homes both for rent and low-cost home ownership options.

We have implemented a new lettings system ‘Darlington Home Search’ which went live in June 2023 <https://darlingtonhomesearch.housingjigsaw.co.uk/> As part of this we are currently analysing the demand data from the waiting list. This will feed into a detailed housing needs assessment which will inform the type and size of new affordable homes we deliver in the future. Recent data from the system is set out below and shows the breakdown of all live applications for Council housing by house size and by priority banding at the end of 2024 (band 1 being the highest priority).

Applicants Band	1 Bedroom	2 Bedroom	3 Bedroom	4 Bedroom	Total Applicants
Band 1	124	112	55	11	302
Band 2	150	72	33	16	271
Band 3	75	109	80	45	309
Band 4	678	369	159	22	1228
Total					2110

The Council is also a registered landlord on Home Swapper <https://www.homeswapper.co.uk/> This is a nationwide mutual exchange service for affordable housing tenants. The service allows tenants to connect with potential properties to swap with and message other tenants.

Consistent with the key aims of the Governments 2020 ‘Charter for Social Housing Residents’ the Council also offers a range of low-cost options to help Council tenants buy their own home who would otherwise be unable to afford to purchase a property outright from the open market. Our

Low-Cost Home Ownership Policy 2022 explains the range of home ownership options available for our properties. It includes requirements, eligibility, costs, charges and how to apply. The options covered include:

- Right to Buy
- Rent to Buy

The policy aims to promote the options available and support those who would struggle to buy a property on the open market. It ensures a fair, consistent and effective approach.

In order to further meet needs and maximise delivery of affordable homes, the Council's Local Plan sets affordable housing requirements for market led schemes of 10 dwellings or more (policy H5 Affordable Housing). The level and type of affordable housing required is dependent of the location of the scheme but can range from 10% to 30% of the total size of the development. This is to reflect development viability and to ensure that the requirements do not stifle development. Housebuilders are expected to meet these affordable housing requirements. If they consider that they would make a scheme unviable, they must submit a detailed viability assessment to demonstrate this.

There is also a tenure split in the policy between affordable rent and affordable home ownership to ensure needs are met. Affordable home ownership can include discount market sale homes, usually sold at 20% below market value. The Council has prepared a guidance document on this type of housing which sets out the eligibility criteria for these homes. This includes a local connection to Darlington, such as already living or working in the borough.

Preference is for affordable homes to be provided on-site alongside market housing to create mixed and balanced communities. There are some exceptions where a financial contribution will be sought and will be used to meet affordable needs.

The Affordable Homes Programme will also contribute towards the delivery of affordable homes in the borough. This scheme provides grant funding to support the capital costs of developing affordable housing for rent or sale. It is issued by Homes England and is largely used by RPs. The Council will support and work in partnership with these organisations to maximise investment in new affordable housing. This will include supporting bids for grant funding in appropriate locations. This can involve assisting with demand data from our waiting list and discussing nomination agreements for RP properties.

We will support partnership working which will include organising an annual housing conference and forums for engaging social and community housing providers.

### **Helping First Time Buyers**

The Government are keen to increase home ownership and a key element of this is helping first time buyers get on the housing ladder. We recognise that many young people aspire to homeownership but can find this difficult due to a number of barriers, largely financial. Affordability in Darlington and the ratio between lower quartile house prices and lower quartile earnings are better than across England as a whole. However, costs of purchasing a home are still high and local people can find it difficult particularly as the government's Help to Buy loan scheme has ended at the present time.

The Council aims to assist first time buyers in a number of ways. For example, a number of the low-cost home ownership products which the Council provide are available to first time buyers (rent to buy and right to buy). More generally the affordable housing policy (H5) of the Local Plan also

requires a proportion of affordable home ownership products on market schemes, these can assist first time buyers.

We also have a First Homes Policy Position Statement (2022) which sets out a requirement that 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations should be First Homes. These are a type of affordable home specifically for first time buyers.

### **Promoting Modern Methods of Construction**

Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) is a wide term, embracing a range of offsite manufacturing and onsite techniques that provide alternatives to traditional house building. The process has been described as a way to produce more, better quality homes in less time. The Government has expressed support for MMC and as a way to help solve the country's housing crisis. This is an area of construction which the Council is exploring in order to increase our supply of high-quality sustainable homes.

There has been a recently a growing level of engagement with MMC across the housing-development sector, from existing house builders and housing associations, through to new SMEs setting themselves up specifically to exploit opportunities in MMC. However, it is still not a method which is widely used. As well as improving speed and efficiency in housebuilding it also has other advantages, for example, improved quality and building performance, environmental benefits such as reducing road traffic movements from construction vehicles, energy usage can be reduced both in construction and occupation of the homes and there are significant reductions in waste materials.

There are still numerous barriers to MMC such as public and developer confidence, concern from lenders, levels of investment and ensuring the workforce have the necessary skills. Despite this, we will continue to examine options of MMC and how they can be applied to our house building plans. In addition, we will also work with partners across the Tees Valley to help tackle the challenges and to ensure that MMC plays a role in delivering high quality, sustainable housing in the borough.

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.**

There is a long history of gypsies and travellers living within Darlington. There are numerous gypsy and traveller families residing in the borough and it is important that their accommodation needs are met. The Government's Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (2024) outlines that local planning authorities should identify the need for travelling sites, pitches and plots, then allocate sites to meet this identified need.

The Council undertook a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in 2017. This study identified a need of 5 residential pitches between 2017 – 2022 (1 per annum). Evidence showed a further need arising in the period 2022-37 which was calculated at 46 pitches (3 per annum). The assessment also identified a need for 6-8 plots for travelling show people over the plan period until 2037.

The above needs are reflected in the adopted Local Plan (2022) policy H9 and supporting text. To meet these needs two allocations are set out in the policy which are extensions to existing sites; Honeypot Lane (8 pitches) and Rowan West/East complex (25 pitches). The Local Plan also sets out that evidence over the last 18 years supports making an allowance for 4 pitches per year coming forward as windfalls.

Pitches and plots are monitored annually through the Council's caravan count which provides data on accommodation supply and an indication of unmet demand. We will also be looking to review the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment in the near future.

## **What we aim to achieve 2025 - 2030**

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents**

- Deliver a minimum of 492 net additional homes per annum.
- Work with developers to remove barriers to housing delivery, particularly on Local Plan housing allocations.
- Work with developers and partners to bring forward the garden village sites at Skertingham & Greater Faverdale.
- Review the brownfield land register.
- Work with partners such as TVCA on funding bids such as the Brownfield Housing Fund and the Brownfield Land Release Fund.
- Review the Local Plan and associated evidence base, such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, when required.

### **Ensuring a suitable housing mix**

- Ensure development schemes provide an appropriate mix of housing in terms of type, size and tenure.
- Explore opportunities via the Council's house building programme and joint venture arrangements to deliver an appropriate mix of homes and retirement living.
- Maintain and promote the custom and self-build register and linking up those interested with permissioned sites.

### **Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent**

- Continue to progress the Council's new build housing developments and explore opportunities for new sites.
- Maximise the delivery of social rent homes through Council led schemes.
- Develop opportunities to deliver new Council homes in schemes led by others.
- The purchase and lease of additional houses to use as temporary accommodation and homes for social rent.
- Ensure opportunities for current Council tenants and prospective tenants are easily available to apply for affordable homes that meet their needs.
- Identify opportunities to provide low cost home ownership properties in new build Council housing.
- Require between 10% and 30% affordable housing (on-site) on all appropriate market housing developments, in line with Local Plan policy.
- Secure the correct tenure split of affordable housing on market led schemes, as required by Local Plan policy.
- Work with partners to maximise the delivery of grant funded affordable housing in the borough.
- Organise an annual housing conference.

### **Helping First Time Buyers**

- Continue to promote the Council's low-cost home ownership homes (Council owned properties).

- Require 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations should be first homes.
- Require the appropriate proportion of affordable home ownership products on market schemes in line with Local Plan policy.

#### **Promoting Modern Methods of Construction**

- Explore opportunities for MMC in all developments, Council and private.
- Work with partners to develop and deliver MMC.

#### **Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.**

- Continue to monitor traveller accommodation via the annual caravan count.
- Review the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

## **Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

### **Ensuring high quality homes in the right places**

The quality and standard of existing homes in the borough is important across all tenures. We know that poor housing conditions greatly impact on the health and well-being of our residents, particularly those who are elderly, economically disadvantaged or vulnerable. Tackling poor housing conditions has multiple benefits including gains in asset value, health, wellbeing, life chances and economic performance.

Recent data released from the census showed in Darlington, the percentage of households in the social rented sector rose from 15.5% in 2011 to 16.2% in 2021. During the same period, the regional percentage fell from 23.0% to 22.0%. Whereas private renting in Darlington increased from 18.2% to 20.6%, while the rate of home ownership decreased from 64.9% to 62.8%.

There are many ways in which the Council improves the quality and standards of the borough's housing. Some of the main actions are set out below.

#### ***Private Sector Housing***

The Council's Private Sector Housing Team aims to raise standards to support residents and communities. Housing should be safe, affordable, warm, secure and sustainable to support the most vulnerable in our community. Standards should also be met in terms of reducing fuel poverty and working towards achieving net zero to combat climate change. The Private Sector Housing Strategy (2022-2027) sets out a number of aims and the related actions which the Private Sector Housing Team carry out.

It is important to ensure decent quality homes in the private rented sector and the team works to ensure standards are maintained. When problems causing a health and safety implication are found or complaints made regarding rented properties, landlords are required to put these issues right, or potentially face enforcement action. Standards are assessed against the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Guidance is followed from the HHSRS or other housing, environmental or public health legislation. More generally the team increase awareness of landlords and tenants' rights, responsibilities and the support available. This ensures safe habitable properties for tenants.

Officers also take area based action to tackle health inequalities in communities where housing conditions are worst. Focusing attention in more deprived wards such as Bank Top and Lascelles, Park East, Northgate and North Road. Officers work pro-actively with private rented properties (rather than waiting for complaints) as it is recognised that tenants can be reluctant to complain about their living conditions. The Council is also looking to introduce a landlord licensing scheme and voluntary landlord charter to hold them to account. This is in the early stages of development, and we are considering potential options.

Housing of multiple occupation (HMOs) can form an important part of the housing mix in terms of providing affordable, low cost housing. However, they can also cause amenity issues when concentrations of these properties form (e.g. parking, noise, bin storage). The Private Sector Housing Team inspect HMOs and administer the scheme for mandatory licensing of relevant large HMOs. Residents are safeguarded via successful licensing and proactive property inspection. HMO's that do not require a licence must still comply with appropriate standards. Given the issues HMO's can cause it is important for the Council to monitor the situation (existing and newly formed HMO's) through

data collected by private sector housing and planning. We are also looking to introduce additional controls for HMOs in order to address the issues which they can cause.

Empty properties represent a wasted resource and can cause a number of problems for the owner and the surrounding neighbourhood. In 2022, there were 623 long term vacant homes in Darlington that had been unoccupied for at least 2 years (MHCLG 2022). This represented 1% of the dwelling stock which indicates that this isn't a significant issue in the borough but there has been a rise in the amount of long term vacant by 16% from the previous year (MHCLG 2022). The Council is under no legal requirement to deal with empty homes but we do have a duty to deal with unsafe homes linked to poor housing standards. The Private Sector Housing Team aims to promote the advantages of bringing empty homes back into use (unlocking capital, reducing opportunities for anti-social behaviour and regeneration benefits) whilst also outlining the risks if premises remain empty for long periods of time.

Officers maintain a database of empty residential properties to gain a better understanding of the reasons behind this. Owners of privately owned empty homes are encouraged to bring them back into use by providing an investors list of potential buyers, keen to purchase empty properties in the borough. Officers also use a range of enforcement powers to target and bring problematic properties back into use, through cross departmental working, focussing on those empty for more than two years. More broadly we are looking to review the Council's regeneration policy for empty properties across the town.

Generally, the team provide advice to property developers on matters such as design, safety standards and accessible and adaptable homes. They explore and support measures to improve energy efficiency in privately rented homes. By helping to ensure homes are adequately heated through reduced heat loss and improved heating systems, this will also reduce carbon emissions.

Officers also work with and support all residents in Darlington. We encourage and support owner occupiers to maintain safe homes by advising and signposting financial assistance that is available. The team are also proactive in improving the conditions of licensed park home sites and residential caravan sites, including the travelling community.

Through the work outlined above and by dealing with specific issues we raise standards in private sector housing. Reducing accidents and illness in the home and helping to reduce health inequalities, improving life chances across Darlington. Going forward this may also mean further Council intervention in properties and community partner involvement to raise standards.

### ***Council Housing Stock***

The Housing Services Team is committed to providing homes which are comfortable, modern, warm, energy efficient and of a good standard. We have a responsibility to ensure our homes are safe, healthy, and free from hazards. We are proud of our housing and want to continually improve so in addition to the day-to-day maintenance, significant investment is made in our housing stock each year to maintain and improve those standards. The great quality of our homes and a range of services provided, including responsive repairs and maintenance, lifeline services and emergency call out provision, mean they are in high demand.

Substantial investment in Council stock is being delivered for 2025/26 including £6.69m of revenue expenditure to fund our responsive repairs and maintenance service. Capital expenditure for the same year includes over £12.2m on improvements to homes including, heating system replacements, property adaptations, window and door replacements, kitchen and bathroom

replacements and delivering energy efficiency measures. Over the longer term (next four years) the Council's Housing Business Plan identifies a capital works budget of around £71m and a budget of £27m for responsive repairs and maintenance. This highlights the Council's commitment to continued investment.

Overall, we aid tenants who face difficulties within their household, including adaptations to our properties, gas and electrical safety checks and responding to over 15,000 repairs from our Council tenants each year. Over 50% of households in Council housing have one or more persons with a disability. We are therefore committed to providing good quality homes with generous space standards and lifetime homes principles to support people to live independently and maintain a good quality of life.

The Council's Repairs Handbook outlines tenants' rights to repairs and the responsibilities of Darlington Borough Council as a landlord. The Handbook enable's tenants to see what repairs the Council will attend to and what repairs tenants need to maintain. Housing Services also has a damp, mould and condensation policy (2023-27). We recognise the impact that these issues can have on the health and wellbeing of tenants. We have a legal responsibility to manage repairs and complete any work required to prevent damp, condensation and mould occurring.

In previous years, a percentage of our housing stock has been surveyed by an independent specialist organisation every five years, which has helped to inform our priorities. Overall, our properties have been assessed as being in good condition, reflecting our significant annual investment. Going forward, we have employed our own stock condition surveyors to undertake a three-year rolling programme of surveys to all our Council homes, to ensure we have a complete picture of the condition of our properties. All our properties reached the basic Decent Homes Standard in 2006 and continue to do so. The Decent Homes Standard is currently under review but as a service we will be working towards ensuring that we continue to have 100% of our homes meeting the standard or its replacement.

### ***Health Impact Assessments***

Health Impact Assessments (HIAs) are a process used in the planning system that identifies the health and wellbeing impacts of a development project. The assessment can recommend measures to maximise positive impacts, minimise negative impacts, and reduce health inequalities. The main focus is to put people and their health at the heart of the planning process.

The Council's Local Plan requires developments of 150 or more homes to submit an HIA as part of a planning application to explain how health considerations have informed the design. The process will help to provide better quality housing, address local health needs and tackle inequalities through influencing the wider determinants of health. Further guidance can be found at <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/planning-and-environmental-policy/supplementary-planning-documents-and-guidance/health-impact-assessments/>

### ***Healthy New Towns***

In 2016 Darlington was identified as a NHS Healthy New Towns (HNT) pilot site which included initial funding from NHS England. The programme explored how the development of new places could improve health and wellbeing through the built environment, healthcare, service design and strong communities. Evidence suggests that the places where people live impacts on mental and physical health.

A focus of the scheme was a Keepmoat housing site at Red Hall. Planners and developers came together to collaborate on how the built design and surrounding natural environment of the development could support a healthier neighbourhood. Keepmoat homes also adapted their existing home designs to reflect lifetime home principles which address the changing needs of occupants. More generally the HNT scheme strengthened models of primary and community care and the use of digital means to delivering health care.

The six Healthy New Town principles (shown below) seek to define what makes a great place to live that supports people's physical and mental health. Although the initial work of the HNT pilot has come to an end the principles have informed the suite of policies in the Local Plan which will continue to influence development; securing better health and wellbeing outcomes for all.

- **Blue/Green Infrastructure** – to promote recreation, exercise, play, good air quality, conservation and spaces for social interaction.
- **Local Healthy Food Choices** – through local retail options or facilities to grow your own food.
- **Placemaking** – a permeable, legible environment with landmarks, good wayfinding, creating sense of neighbourhood with natural surveillance and community.
- **Economy** – good links to employment and education. Economic growth goes hand in hand with new developments, job creation and increase in incomes.
- **Social Infrastructure** – healthcare/education, local services and facilities must be clustered together to create natural local centres within walking distance; enhancing opportunities for social integration and interaction.
- **Transport and Movement** – design that encourages walking, cycling and the use of public transport rather than the private car. Supporting access to employment, education, services and aids connectivity and social cohesion.

### **Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change**

The Council has acknowledged the threat of climate change and committed the Council to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2040. A Climate Change Strategy has been developed to set out the baseline of our own carbon emissions and an action plan (2021) sets out the key actions and intervention measures required to meet this commitment.

The declaration includes an emphasis on external engagement, using our position as a leader in the community to influence and persuade others to take action. We have added a new section on the Sustainable Darlington webpages to signpost developers to information and case studies of good practice <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/climate-change-and-sustainability/planning-and-climate-change/>

The target of net zero by 2040 means we need to reduce our use of fossil fuels such as gas that give off carbon emissions, reduce energy demand and opt for more environmentally friendly renewable powered measures such as solar and wind power. The strategy and action plan set out the potential actions the Council will take. Emissions from our built estate makes up almost 75% of our emissions. Tackling this is critical to us achieving our target.

A key action is to improve the energy efficiency of existing Council houses. This will reduce our carbon impact, help tackle climate change and reduce tenant's fuels bills. Our approach to improving the energy efficiency of our Council homes is set out in our Housing Services Climate Change Strategy (2024-29), approved by Cabinet in January 2024, which identifies what actions are required to work towards our Council homes being net zero. This includes ensuring the EPC rating of all our Council homes are at a minimum rating of C by 2030. Significant investment will be required but

the measures set out in our strategy, will help to reduce energy consumption which in turn assists with cost of living and fuel poverty. New build council housing also presents a unique opportunity to design and build net carbon zero buildings. This will involve prioritising carbon reduction in the design and build process and revising corporate building standards. It is cheaper to design low carbon at the outset than to retrofit in the future. Longevity should also be considered in designs, using materials which have long life spans.

The Council has already been successful in securing funding through the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) to deliver improvements to Council homes, as follows:

- The SHDF (wave 1) scheme delivered external and cavity wall insulation, Air Source Heat Pumps, loft insulation and solar panels to 23 Council homes using £0.24m of Government funding and £0.28m of capital expenditure.
- The SHDF (wave 2) scheme is currently delivering external and cavity wall insulation, solar panels, loft insulation, double glazing, and low energy lighting to 130 Council homes using £1.27m of Government funding and £1.27m of capital expenditure.

A further £4m investment has been approved for each year in the Council's housing financial planning, which will help to deliver energy efficiency measures to properties such as replacing timber front and back doors with composite doors, improvements to external wall insulation, installation of solar panels and air source heat pumps, and insulation upgrades. The Council has also been successful in bidding for over £3.5m of funding from the Government's Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (wave 3). In total, over £18m will be invested over the next three years for improvements to 1,600 Council homes.

More generally the Council will require that all house builders in the borough deliver good sustainable design which will help to reduce carbon emissions and increase resilience to the effects of climate change. This is largely done via planning policies in the Local Plan. Developments should demonstrate that the layout, orientation and design of buildings help to reduce the need for energy consumption. They should be energy efficient and implement measures to reduce carbon emissions.

A range of other requirements are also sought and encouraged to ensure housing developments are of a sustainable design. This includes:

- Building fabric which is suitable for a changing climate including increasing temperature and increasing storm events.
- Including renewable energy generation such as solar panels alongside heat pumps to minimise the energy use at the site.
- Prioritising sustainable urban drainage systems on schemes and using permeable surfacing materials to help alleviate surface water run off.
- Appropriate landscaping to maximise shade, carbon sequestration and biodiversity.
- Electric vehicle charging points.
- Cycle storage.
- Ensure that recent uplifts in building regulations parts L, F, O and S are taken into consideration.

In 2025 compliance with a new Future Homes Standard will become mandatory. This will be implemented through building regulations and aims to increase the energy efficiency of homes (homes will produce 75-80% less carbon than those built under the current standards). The technical

details of the Future Homes Standard are still to be confirmed. The Council's Building Control Team will enforce the new regulations when they come into effect.

More generally the Council will continue to encourage and promote enhanced sustainable design in new homes which exceed building regulations standards where possible.

## **Housing Regeneration and Renewal**

### ***Town Centre***

The town centre is a key priority and focus of the Council. Towns and cities across the UK have seen huge changes in the make-up of their local high streets. There has been closures of many prominent retailers, changing business models and changing shopping patterns. This has created a need for town centres to develop business investment plans and provide multiple uses such as, health, housing, arts, education, entertainment, leisure, business/office space, as well as retail.

The Council's Local Plan and Town Centre Strategy encourage housing development in the town centre on brownfield land, to create a choice of high-quality residential accommodation. This will help to improve the look and feel of the town centre and contribute to housing provision, economic growth and the evening economy. A master planning exercise has been undertaken to identify locations and opportunities for residential development. We look to work with private sector partners, including using our own assets, to increase the amount of residential properties in the town centre. We are also working with current owners to increase the number of homes above shops to contribute to a 'living town centre'.

Through the Town Centre Strategy and specific funding streams the Council is working on a number of targeted interventions in the town centre to develop new housing. Some of these are set out below.

- ***Skinnergate & The Yards*** – 16 new homes being developed. Encouraging more mixed-use buildings and increasing the number of homes in the area.
- ***Crown Street / Residential Quarter*** - regenerating vacant sites and premises whilst exploiting the potential to open up the River Skerne via high quality public realm improvements.
- ***Northgate Masterplan*** – opportunity for a residential led development close to the town centre, linking in with the wider North Road Gateway proposals.

### ***Town Centre Fringe***

The Town Centre Fringe (to the east and north of the town centre) is a priority location for brownfield development and regeneration within the Borough. It is an extensive area over 70ha and contains a mix of employment, residential, retail, leisure, car parking and other uses. The regeneration area is identified in the Local Plan and in 2013 the Council prepared the Town Centre Fringe Masterplan.

The Fringe has many advantages for future development; it has a central location near the town centre, contains key buildings such as the Hippodrome and the River Skerne flows through it. However, before the potential of the area can be realised, there are significant issues to overcome, such as managing flood risk, changing the image of the area, tackling contamination and hazards, and improving connectivity across the inner ring road.

The area also has some of the town's poorest quality housing which can be isolated and divided by major roads. Much of the built form is industrial and currently housing is a secondary use. The quality of the streets and public realm is typically poor. Issues also include the thermal performance and structural integrity of the homes. Most are terraced and have no garden; many of which have front doors directly onto the street. There is a small amount of open space in the area and what exists is of poor quality. Anti-social behaviour and fly tipping has also been raised as problems in previous public participation work.

During the preparation of the original masterplan a number of options were assessed to improve the area in terms of housing. After consultation the preferred approach was to improve the existing stock. The refurbishment of homes to bring them up to standards of performance and amenity was explored in detail when the Council commissioned architects to prepare a package of measures. Examples included installation of extra insulation, replacement windows sympathetic to the area, improvements to the street environment and the creation of garden areas where appropriate. This would allow the existing community to remain in the area and retain the existing homes and historic street pattern. This approach is also supported in the Local Plan (policy TC6).

### ***Bank Top Station***

In close proximity to the Town Centre Fringe is Darlington train station (Bank Top) which is currently undergoing a major multi-million pound redevelopment project which will see significant improvements to the existing station building and surrounding area. The project is being led by the Tees Valley Combined Authority and Network Rail. New platforms, station building, footbridge and multi storey car park will form the main basis of the scheme. This will result in improved rail services for the town and wider area. Plans also involve improvements to the west side of the station on Victoria Road to create a pedestrian concourse in front of the building entrance. The redesign will create a safer, car free entrance to the historic station and general enhancements to the area.

The development project and masterplan prepared by Tees Valley Combined Authority also involves the delivery of new high quality housing on the adjoining Cattle Mart site. This will link in with the improvements on the western side of the station which is critical to enhance the area and arrival into the town. In support of this the Cattle Mart has been allocated for housing in the Local Plan. The redevelopment of this area links in with town centre and Town Centre Fringe, given the close physical relationship and this is recognised in TVCA's masterplan. Delivering on both of these regeneration schemes, the train station and Town Centre Fringe, will bring multiple benefits to the area.

## **What we aim to achieve 2025 -2030**

### **Ensuring high quality homes in the right places**

- Continue to improve standards and conditions in the private rented sector, increasing proactive and targeted working.
- Support all owner occupiers to maintain safe and comfortable homes.
- Maintaining and improving Council owned housing stock in line with climate change legislation and internal Climate Change strategies.
- Require Healthy New Town principles in new housing developments.

### **Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change**

- Improve heat efficiency in Council housing and secure further funding to implement related measures.
- Work towards the design and build of net zero carbon Council homes.
- Require that all developments in the borough deliver good sustainable design which will help to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change.
- Encourage and support the use of renewables in all new build homes and the retrofitting of existing properties.

### **Housing regeneration and renewal**

- Continue to identify opportunities and deliver residential development on brownfield sites in the town centre.
- Improve standards in the housing stock and local environment at the Town Centre Fringe.
- Review our current brownfield sites and work with TVCA and government to take advantage funding to release sites.
- Support the major redevelopment of the train station and related housing development at the Cattle Mart.

## **Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

### **Delivering quality retirement living**

As highlighted in the introduction, the population of Darlington is ageing, following the national trend. People are generally living longer. Between the last two censuses, the average (median) age of a Darlington resident increased by two years, from 41 to 43 years of age. The borough has a slightly higher average age than the North East as a whole in 2021 (42 years) and a higher average age than England (40 years). The number of people aged 50 to 64 years rose by just under 2,400 (an increase of 11.7%), while the number of residents between 35 and 49 years fell by around 2,400 (10.5% decrease). In 2021 approximately 20.4% of the Darlington population was over 65 whereas in 2011 it was approximately 17.4%, indicating a rise of 3% in this age category.

Data from the SHMA also shows a substantial increase in the older population during the Local Plan period 2016 – 2036. The population aged 75+ is likely to increase by around 6,046 persons. It is important to plan for housing which is suitable for this increase in older people within the population. A key requirement being to predict the type of housing which will best meet their needs.

The SHMA also makes an assessment of the demand for specialist older person housing products for those aged 75 or over, taking into account current stock, unmet demand and population growth. The provision of specialist accommodation will form an important part of the overall housing mix in the borough. A substantial need of just under 2,300 specialist older person additional housing units over the plan period are identified. This level of provision is unlikely to be achievable in full. However, we will work with both registered providers and private developers to increase the proportion of older person's accommodation within residential developments.

It is also acknowledged that it is not necessarily through specialist provision that the need will be met for older people, solutions can also be found from general housing and many older people may not want or need specialist accommodation or care. The aim is to shift away from a reliance on residential care homes to offer people a choice of support and care at home. Also exploring alternative models of care delivery and accommodation which promote independence.

Government policy is also focused on supporting older people and those with a disability to live independently at home. Supporting independent living can help reduce the costs to health and social services and providing more housing options for older people can free up homes which are under occupied. Meeting these needs is a challenge, however providing more accessible and easily adaptable homes will help people maintain independence for longer. It is for this reason that we have introduced standards in the Local Plan for accessible and adaptable homes. These standards are part of the optional technical requirements which exceed the minimum standards required by building regulations. A percentage of the total number of dwellings on housing developments are required to meet the higher standards (details can be found in policy H4 of the Local Plan).

The Council understands there are particular housing needs of older people and is therefore involved in the provision of a number of housing options for people over 55. The table below provides a breakdown of the type of over 55's accommodation we have currently.

### Council Over 55's accommodation

Type	Number	Bedrooms
Extra Care	113	1 & 2-bed apartments
Sheltered Schemes	242	1-bed apartments
Good Neighbour Properties	350	1-bed apartments

We operate three extra care schemes in the borough, Dalkeith House, Oban Court and Rosemary Court, but also work in partnership with Anchor Housing to provide a fourth scheme at Mayflower Court . This type of housing comprises of self-contained flats to rent with a range of communal facilities, warden services and on-site care.

The Council also offers sheltered housing for rent. These are one-bedroom apartments and bungalows with communal areas, social opportunities, scheme management support and everyday reassurance. Sheltered accommodation provide support but at a lower level in comparison to Extra Care, and residents live more independently. Another option is good neighbour accommodation which has a greater focus on a person's independence. These one-bedroom apartments are self-contained but have the benefit of a scheme manager and other support for emergencies. The difference is that the properties are not all under one roof like sheltered or extra care . Each scheme has a community centre close by where the scheme manager is located, and daily activities are provided.

More generally the Council also works with and provides support to private sector developers who are delivering accommodation for the elderly.

### **Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs**

Housing and the care and support of people are often interrelated. As a Council we will need to consider the diverse needs of all people in our communities to ensure they live independently for as long as possible. Working with residents, the voluntary sector and other partners to understand how we tackle complex housing issues is essential. The Care Act (2014) is clear that housing is a health and social care related service as it plays a vital role in supporting people to maintain good health and quality of life. Its key focus is supporting people to live independently at home.

Adult Social Care work towards a strength-based framework, which focusses on supporting the person to draw on their own strengths and assets, with support if required to enable a person to remain as independent as possible. This in turn is reinforced by our "home first" approach to support people to remain in their own homes or return home after an intervention. However, we need to explore what other options would strengthen this approach and reduce reliance on residential care.

Increasing housing options for people with care and support needs remains an important priority for the Council. Adult social care in Darlington is also experiencing significant pressures including increasing demand for support, complexity of needs, rising costs, workforce challenges and social care reforms. Data also indicates that Darlington's population is living longer but not healthier and there are particular issues that are significantly worse than national averages.

There are a number of ways in which the Council support residents in their own homes via a range of services. Some of which we deliver directly, whilst others are provided by specific companies. However, the Adult Social Care Team can assist in terms of assessing what support you may need and whether you are eligible for social care funded financial support. The types of services available are listed below and can assist a range of vulnerable people. Full details can be found on the Council's website <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/adult-services/living-independently/>

- *Home care services*
- *Rapid Response*
- *Adaptions and equipment*
- *Lifeline and telecare services*
- *Assistive Technology*
- *Reablement service*

These services are invaluable and aim to support residents to live independently in their own homes for longer. For example, Lifeline ensures residents have the security of knowing you can always get help if you need it. Support workers can be first responders to incidents, providing assistance even before emergency services arrive. We provide the Lifeline service to 1690 Council properties and to 1417 private homes. Lifeline attended 9312 emergency callouts in 2022/2023, highlighting the demand and importance of this type of support.

Each year, Housing Services also complete a range of minor and major adaptions to individual Council properties where a need has been identified by an Occupational Therapist. Works range from the provision of lever taps and grab rails to semi-permanent ramps, stair lifts, hoists and ground floor extensions.

Adaptations play a fundamental role in supporting vulnerable people to continue to live independently reducing the need for expensive care packages and prevent a premature move into residential or care accommodation. They can also be financed through Disabled Facilities Grant. A range of needs have also been considered in developing our new build housing programme and properties are built in accordance with Lifetime Homes standards.

The Council also offers short term support or intervention for people leaving hospital including reablement to allow people to regain or gain new skills. This provides support and reduces the need for premature or long term stays in residential care.

Digital technologies have a role to play in managing the demand for care and support services with the potential to maximise independence, improve outcomes and provide financial benefits. The Council has launched a Digital Darlington Strategy <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/media/22279/digital-darlington-strategy-2025-30.pdf> which sets out a vision for digital capabilities that meet the range of needs of our communities. There is also a separate Adult Social Care Digital Strategy <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/health-and-social-care/adult-services/darlington-digital-strategy/>

Digital tools can provide better access to information to make choices about care, assists with engagement, allows access to records and can have many benefits for support staff. It is about enabling and encouraging those who can use digital and online tools to do so but it is not about replacing our services with digital only options.

In terms of accommodation, as well as the models discussed linked to retirement living there are a number of other options with care and support in Darlington, including:

- Housing Related Support – including accommodation with care and support for people at risk of homelessness and people who have experienced domestic abuse
- Supported Living
- Intermediate Care, Respite and Short Stay beds
- Residential Care

Adult Social Care prioritise safeguarding actions under the Care Act. Working in partnership with local agencies including health, housing and providers of services for people experiencing or at risk of domestic abuse. This involves co ordinating short- and longer-term support including within housing options and reducing the risk of homelessness.

Supported living describes housing that includes the care and support people need to lead a healthy and fulfilling life. This type of accommodation is mostly used by people with learning disabilities and/or mental health conditions and can be shared or single tenancies within a complex of properties. Supported housing provides crucial help to some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. It can have an enormous positive impact on an individual's quality of life; from their physical and mental health to their engagement with the community. Supported accommodation is largely provided in Darlington as Homes in Multiple Occupation (HMO) or a house with support.

The Council and health partners also purchase a number of intermediate, short break stay and respite beds from service providers in Darlington to ensure appropriate support services are provided to people after leaving hospital or when they are at risk of being sent to hospital. In 2022/23, 369 people were placed in short break stays (332 older people and 37 working aged adults). This number has seen a large increase since 2017/18 when 279 people were supported in this way (249 older people and 30 working aged adults). Intermediate care helps people to avoid going into hospital unnecessarily and helps people to be as independent as possible.

Residential care also assists in meeting accommodation needs in the borough. Residents usually live in single rooms with access to 24 hour on-site care and support. This type of service can provide care to older people and working aged adults with a learning and/or physical disability or people with mental health issue. Within Darlington there are 20 residential care homes for older people, 19 of which are contracted under a Council framework agreement. For younger adults we currently have 37 properties with 7 on framework providers and also have people placed with 13 off framework providers.

More generally, good quality design is essential and specific standards for any proposed supported and specialist accommodation should be discussed and agreed with local authority commissioners. Specific guidance, requirements and design principles are set out in the Accommodation with Care and Support Strategy (2024). Future commissioning intentions for providers are also set out for the different accommodation types in the strategy.

The Adult Social Care Market Position Statement and Commissioning Strategy (2024/25) is also relevant and sets out our understanding of demand for care and support services and how that demand may change over time. The document outlines current supply issues and some of the major challenges facing the borough.

Overall, it is key that people have a clear and accessible overview of what care and support is available. Explaining basic housing rights and options and where people might go to get more information for different types of housing related concerns and needs. It is essential the Council and partners can provide this.

### **Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing**

Since 2015, the Council has successfully focused on homelessness prevention. This has been reinforced through national legislation and there is a statutory duty on Councils to prevent homelessness. We recognise the devastating impacts that homelessness can have on people's lives and that the best way we can help those people is to avoid them getting into that position.

In the past, the numbers found sleeping rough in Darlington in any year have generally been low in comparison to the major urban areas. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, the Council has continued to deal with a significant increase in demand for Homeless and Housing Options services. Whilst these services would normally work in a proactive way with clients to prevent homelessness, the increase in presentations and demand for emergency accommodation has meant that services have had to be more reactive to ensure that no-one is left homeless or having to rough sleep.

As well as the pressures created since the pandemic, the lifting of the ban on section 21 ("no fault") evictions in June 2021 has also created an increase in homeless presentations and requests for housing advice. In 2023-24, we received 1,357 homeless presentations to the Housing Options service, compared to 835 in 2019-20, an increase of 63%.

The use of temporary and emergency accommodation has also increased over the last few years and in some cases alternative accommodation has to be found. Our approach to dealing with homeless clients is unchanged in that every person matters and can, with the appropriate intervention, move from rough sleeping into long-term, sustainable accommodation.

The Housing Services Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2025-2030 sets out that every resident in Darlington should have a secure, affordable place to call home. It is important that the right support is in place at the right time and where homelessness occurs it is rare, brief and non-recurrent. The Council will work in partnership with other organisations to end homelessness in Darlington. We recognise that it is a complex issue and innovative responses are required.

The Council's Housing Options Team are the key point of contact if a person is or could become homeless. They will assess a person's current housing situation and will work out what their needs are, giving advice and support. The emphasis on prevention has enabled the Council's Housing Options team to find solutions for those seeking help that has meant that comparatively few people have had to go to the stage of making a homeless application. Details on the services provided for homelessness can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.darlington.gov.uk/housing/finding-a-home/homelessness/>

It is not unusual for applicants to be faced with multiple problems, such as financial issues due to unemployment, mental health issues, behavioural problems and addiction. In developing a solution that is lasting there may well be a need for other, non-housing services to become involved in finding a path for the applicant that will resolve the homelessness risk. The Council offers housing related support services for those at risk of homelessness which covers wider issues.

This has been an ongoing challenge for the Housing Options Team, finding suitable accommodation and support for those individuals with complex needs. Despite this, over the last couple of years we have recruited specialist housing officers to assist with mental health and domestic abuse needs. We have also linked up with public health to fast-track clients into drug and alcohol services and to more generally support the sleeping rough agenda. Four empty properties have also been purchased and refurbished to provide 8 units of temporary accommodation.

From a successful bid for funding through the Rough Sleeper Initiative we have also funded an Outreach Support Worker and recruited a Housing Options Navigator. Roles that support and prevent people from sleeping rough. A Rough Sleeper Co-ordinator, has also been appointed, working across the Tees Valley to support Local Authorities in delivering their homelessness and rough sleeping strategies, coordinating rough sleeper counts and analysing data and returns for Government.

More generally, the Council and our partners are committed to extending as much choice as possible to those households who require affordable rented accommodation. This is largely done through the choice-based lettings scheme discussed earlier in the strategy. The Council will ensure that the needs of residents, particularly the most vulnerable, are prioritised and the choice and access to appropriate accommodation is maximised.

### **Minimising the impacts of welfare reform**

Central Government changes to the welfare system have impacted on individuals on low incomes, local authorities and registered providers. In Darlington, Universal Credit (UC) went live in June 2018 and as of February 2025, approximately 2,360 Council tenants are in receipt of some element of UC. Sanctions are harder on UC in comparison to those on older style welfare benefits.

Managed migration to UC is rolling out across the country and is due to be completed by March 2026. In 2025, the process will move residents who receive Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) onto UC, which can only be applied for online. As such the numbers of public PC's were increased in the Town Hall to allow customers to use these for free to apply.

Housing Services has a dedicated Tenancy Sustainment Team who work with Council tenants around their UC claim. They offer advice, guidance and budgeting support. Other Registered Providers have similar teams to assist their tenants and Citizens Advice provide telephone and face to face support for those unable to complete forms online. The Council also support individuals with Discretionary Housing Payments and the Homeless Prevention Grant, which can assist with rent shortfalls and deposits.

## **What we aim to achieve 2025 -2030**

### **Delivering quality retirement living**

- Work with developers to maximise adaptable and accessible homes standards (M4 2 & 3) in new housing developments.
- Increase the proportion of older person's accommodation within residential developments.

### **Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs**

- Adult Social Care to continue to provide support through various means so people can live independently at home.
- Adapt more properties and assist people to access such properties.
- Identify, implement and support the use of new assistive technology, including digital technology, to assist residents to remain independent in their own homes.
- Work with partners to develop supported housing schemes for vulnerable people.

### **Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing**

- The Housing Options Team will continue to support and provide information to those people who are homeless or are threatened by homelessness.
- Review Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated actions.

### **Minimising the impacts of welfare reform**

- Assist with online welfare applications by prioritising public access to IT equipment through libraries and Council buildings.
- Continue to provide advice to Council tenants on Universal Credit, signposting to relevant welfare and advice agencies as appropriate
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Support Fund where appropriate to assist those in the most financial need.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Actions: What we aim to achieve 2025 – 2030**

#### **Objective 1: Building homes, with an emphasis on social and affordable provision, to meet local needs**

##### **Ensuring an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of existing and future residents**

- Deliver a minimum of 492 net additional homes per annum.
- Work with developers to remove barriers to housing delivery, particularly on Local Plan housing allocations.
- Work with developers and partners to bring forward the garden village sites at Skerningham & Greater Faverdale.
- Review the brownfield land register.
- Work with partners such as TVCA on funding bids such as the Brownfield Housing Fund and the Brownfield Land Release Fund.
- Review the Local Plan and associated evidence base, such as the Strategic Housing Market Assessment, when required.

##### **Ensuring a suitable housing mix**

- Ensure development schemes provide an appropriate mix of housing in terms of type, size and tenure.
- Explore opportunities via the Council's house building programme and joint venture arrangements to deliver an appropriate mix of homes and retirement living.
- Maintain and promote the custom and self-build register and linking up those interested with permissioned sites.

##### **Delivering high quality affordable homes, especially new Council homes for social rent**

- Continue to progress the Council's new build housing developments and explore opportunities for new sites.
- Maximise the delivery of social rent homes through Council led schemes.
- Develop opportunities to deliver new Council homes in schemes led by others.
- The purchase and lease of additional houses to use as temporary accommodation and homes for social rent.
- Ensure opportunities for current Council tenants and prospective tenants are easily available to apply for affordable homes that meet their needs.
- Identify opportunities to provide low cost home ownership properties in new build Council housing.
- Require between 10% and 30% affordable housing (on-site) on all appropriate market housing developments, in line with Local Plan policy.

- Secure the correct tenure split of affordable housing on market led schemes, as required by Local Plan policy.
- Work with partners to maximise the delivery of grant funded affordable housing in the borough.
- Organise an annual housing conference.

### **Helping First Time Buyers**

- Continue to promote the Council's low-cost home ownership homes (Council owned properties).
- Require 25% of all affordable housing units delivered by developers through planning obligations should be first homes.
- Require the appropriate proportion of affordable home ownership products on market schemes in line with Local Plan policy.

### **Promoting Modern Methods of Construction**

- Explore opportunities for MMC in all developments, Council and private.
- Work with partners to develop and deliver MMC.

### **Ensuring an adequate supply of travelling sites (pitches and plots) for existing and future needs.**

- Continue to monitor traveller accommodation via the annual caravan count.
- Review the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

## **Objective 2: Improving the standards of existing housing, achieving net zero carbon and revitalising neighbourhoods**

### **Ensuring high quality homes in the right places**

- Continue to improve standards and conditions in the private rented sector, increasing proactive and targeted working.
- Support all owner occupiers to maintain safe and comfortable homes.
- Maintaining and improving Council owned housing stock in line with climate change legislation and internal Climate Change strategies.
- Require Healthy New Town principles in new housing developments.

### **Achieving net zero carbon and adapting for climate change**

- Improve heat efficiency in Council housing and secure further funding to implement related measures.
- Work towards the design and build of net zero carbon Council homes.
- Require that all developments in the borough deliver good sustainable design which will help to reduce carbon emissions and adapt to climate change.
- Encourage and support the use of renewables in all new build homes and the retrofitting of existing properties.

## **Housing regeneration and renewal**

- Continue to identify opportunities and deliver residential development on brownfield sites in the town centre.
- Improve standards in the housing stock and local environment at the Town Centre Fringe.
- Review our current brownfield sites and work with TVCA and government to take advantage funding to release sites.
- Support the major redevelopment of the train station and related housing development at the Cattle Mart.

## **Objective 3: Meeting the needs of our ageing population and supporting people to live independently.**

### **Delivering quality retirement living**

- Work with developers to maximise adaptable and accessible homes standards (M4 2 & 3) in new housing developments.
- Increase the proportion of older person's accommodation within residential developments.

### **Assisting people to live independently at home and providing supported housing, particularly in relation to residents with high and complex needs**

- Adult Social Care to continue to provide support through various means so people can live independently at home.
- Adapt more properties and assist people to access such properties.
- Identify, implement and support the use of new assistive technology, including digital technology, to assist residents to remain independent in their own homes.
- Work with partners to develop supported housing schemes for vulnerable people.

### **Preventing homelessness and ensuring choice in housing**

- The Housing Options Team will continue to support and provide information to those people who are homeless or are threatened by homelessness.
- Review Darlington Preventing Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy and associated actions.

### **Minimising the impacts of welfare reform**

- Assist with online welfare applications by prioritising public access to IT equipment through libraries and Council buildings.
- Continue to provide advice to Council tenants on Universal Credit, signposting to relevant welfare and advice agencies as appropriate.
- Use Discretionary Housing Payments and Council Tax Support Fund where appropriate to assist those in the most financial need.