

## Section 2: The Strategic Context

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### National Policy Context

- <sup>2.1</sup> In 2003, the government set out their current vision for housing in the Communities Plan. This publication has led to a period of significant change in planning systems across England and Wales. The current housing policy document is Planning Policy Statement 3 (PPS3) and the accompanying Delivering Affordable Housing (Nov 2006).
- <sup>2.2</sup> The objectives of the Communities Plan are that our communities:
- are economically prosperous;
  - have decent homes at affordable prices;
  - safeguard the countryside;
  - enjoy a well-designed, accessible and pleasant living and working environment; and
  - are effectively and fairly governed with a strong sense of community.
- <sup>2.3</sup> PPS3 supplements these aims with the strategic policy objective that people should also live in a community where they want to live. An important series of definitions are also presented in PPS3, of which several are detailed in the panel below.
- <sup>2.4</sup> Notably, one of the six principles of PPS3 is that an evidence-based policy approach to housing provision is taken:
- Local Development Documents and Regional Spatial Strategies policies should be informed by a robust, shared evidence base, in particular, of housing need and demand, through a Strategic Housing Market Assessment.*
- <sup>2.5</sup> To deliver the Communities Plan the Government tasked the nine English Regional Assemblies with producing a Regional Spatial Strategy. The Eastern Region was the first to publish its spatial strategy – The East of England Plan 2008. This Plan takes account of and builds upon the Regional Economic Strategy and the Regional Sustainable Development Framework. The Regional Housing Strategy 2005-10 and the London Commuter Belt Housing Strategy 2005-08 will also be considered in this paper.

### Housing definitions presented in PPS3

**Housing Need:** The quantity of housing required for households who are unable to access suitable housing without financial assistance.

**Housing Demand:** The quantity of housing that households are willing and able to buy or rent.

**Affordable Housing:** Social rented and intermediate housing, provided to specified eligible households whose needs are not met by the market. Affordable housing should;

- meet the needs of eligible households including availability at a cost low enough for them to afford, determined with regard to local incomes and local house prices; and
- include provision for the home to remain at an affordable price for future eligible households or, if these restrictions are lifted, for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision.

**Social rented housing is:**

Rented housing owned and managed by local authorities and registered social landlords, for which guideline target rents are determined through the national rent regime. The proposals set out in the Three Year Review of Rent Restructuring (July 2004) were implemented as policy in April 2006. It may also include rented housing owned or managed by other persons and provided under equivalent rental arrangements to the above, as agreed with the local authority or with the Housing Corporation as a condition of grant.

**Intermediate affordable housing is:**

Housing at prices and rents above those of social rent, but below market price or rents, and which meet the criteria set out above. These can include shared equity products (e.g. HomeBuy), other low cost homes for sale and intermediate rent. These definitions replace guidance given in Planning Policy Guidance Note 3: Housing (PPG3) and DETR Circular 6/98 Planning and Affordable Housing.

The definition does not exclude homes provided by private sector bodies or provided without grant funding. Where such homes meet the definition above, they may be considered, for planning purposes, as affordable housing. Whereas, those homes that do not meet the definition, for example, 'low cost market' housing, may not be considered, for planning purposes, as affordable housing.

**Housing Market Areas:** Geographical areas defined by household demand and preferences for housing. They reflect the key functional linkages between places where people live and work.

## Affordable Housing

- 2.7 As set out in Delivering Affordable Housing, national government's affordable housing policy is based around three main themes:
- providing high quality homes in mixed sustainable communities for those in need;
  - widening the opportunities for home ownership; and
  - offering greater quality, flexibility and choice to those who rent.
- 2.8 The Barker Review of Housing Supply recommended that there should be an increase in social rented housing to cope with the growth in need for it and the loss of stock through Right to Buy. Subsequently, since the 2004 Spending Review, the government has increased funding for the provision of social housing, and made it a priority in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review.
- 2.9 Delivering Affordable Housing (CLG 2006) emphasises the importance of a strategic approach to housing by local authorities, balancing housing provision with future housing demand. Local authorities can improve delivery through creative use of their own resources, or through working with other providers. Housing provision may be direct, through Housing (Private Finance Initiative (PFI)) or through giving planning permission or land to new providers, helping them to deliver innovative grant free models. To ensure an effective delivery of a shared vision, close working with regional bodies and with delivery partners through Local Housing Partnerships is essential.

## The East of England Plan

- 2.10 The East of England Plan (2008) sets policies and targets up to 2021 but also sets a vision, objectives and strategy for the longer term. Note that the terms East of England Plan and the Regional Spatial Strategy are the same thing and both terms are used in this report.
- 2.11 The overall vision of the East of England Plan is *to provide a high quality of life for its people, including meeting their housing needs in sustainable and inclusive communities while at the same time reducing any adverse impact on the environment*. The main objectives are to:
- reduce the region's impact on, and exposure to, the effects of climate change;
  - increase housing opportunities for people in the region;
  - realise the economic potential of the region and its people;
  - improve the quality of life for the region's people; and
  - improve and conserve the region's environment.

## Overall Housing Provision

- 2.12 Policy H1 in the Plan states that in the East of England as a whole, provision will be made for at least 508,000 dwellings between 2001 and 2021. The minimum regional housing target 2006 to 2021 is 402,540.
- 2.13 Individual Local Authority target should be considered as the minimum to be achieved and Councils are encouraged to aim to exceed annual average rates without breaching environmental limits or infrastructure constraints by:

- increasing density (consistent with criteria in PPS3);
- encouraging the use of previously developed sites; and
- providing affordable housing in rural areas by making the best use of exception site policies.

2.14 Policy H1 in the Plan also sets out the distribution of dwelling provision across the sub-region for the period 2001-2021. Figure 6 summarises this distribution for LCB (West).

Figure 6

**Policy H1 –Distribution of Dwelling Provision for LCB (West) 2001-2021.** Note: Figures are overall net requirements. (Source: East of England Plan, 2008, Government Office for the East of England)

Local Authority Area	Minimum to Build April 2001 to March 2021		Of which Already Built April 2001 to March 2006		Minimum still to build April 2006-March 2021	
	Total	Annual Rate	Total	Annual Rate	Total	Annual Rate
Dacorum	12,000	600	1,860	370	10,140	680
Hertsmere	5,000	250	1,080	220	3,920	260
St Albans	7,200	360	1,830	370	5,370	360
Three Rivers	4,000	200	1,010	200	2,990	200
Watford	5,200	260	1,410	280	3,790	250
Welwyn Hatfield	10,000	500	2,730	550	7,270	480
<b>Total</b>	<b>43,400</b>	<b>2,170</b>	<b>9,920</b>	<b>1,990</b>	<b>33,480</b>	<b>2,230</b>

- 2.15 Local authorities are required to plan beyond 2021 (assuming the same rate of growth as for 2006-2021) and where it is not possible to identify specific development sites for the whole of the 15 year period, the identification of broad areas of growth after 2021 will be sufficient.
- 2.16 Policy H1 emphasises the importance of co-ordination and consistency of approach between neighbouring authorities in delivering sub-regional objectives and the coordination of development with necessary transport and other infrastructure provision.
- 2.17 It is important that new development not only provides the required additional housing stock but also meets the sustainable patterns of development set out by the strategy. Additionally, alongside supporting the regional economy, the region's environmental and ecological assets must be protected.
- 2.18 Policy SS3 recommends that, to achieve sustainable development, new development should be concentrated in one of 21 identified locations known as Key Centres for Development and Change (KCDC). In the London Commuter Belt (West) this includes Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City, Watford, and Hemel Hempstead.
- 2.19 Policy LA1 states that within the London Arc Sub-Region there is an emphasis on retention of Green Belt restraint, however, there are exceptions at Hemel Hempstead and Hatfield and Welwyn Garden City where strategic Green Belt Reviews will be undertaken to allow further expansion of these new towns as Key Centres for Development and Change. Policies LA2, LA3 and LA4 set out the specific guidelines for each KCDC in LCB (West), as detailed in the relevant sections of this paper.
- 2.20 The provision of the required number of dwellings faces several challenges. New physical and social infrastructure provision (i.e. road capacity, waste, water and education and health facilities), appropriate economic interventions in some areas and increased delivery rates by the construction industry will all be needed to meet the challenge of accelerated growth in new build homes.

## Affordable Housing

- 2.21 Policy H2 sets out requirements for affordable housing. It states that Local Development Documents should set appropriate targets for affordable housing taking into account the need to set specific, separate targets for social rented and intermediate housing. At the regional level, the target is that 35% of housing will be developed as affordable housing as a result of planning permissions granted after the adoption of the RSS. To achieve this it will be necessary for local authorities to set local targets and thresholds taking into account the regional target and the findings of this SHMA. The actual level of delivery of affordable housing on any particular site will also need to take account of the economic viability of a particular scheme.
- 2.22 The widening ratio of house prices to incomes makes it increasingly difficult for those on low incomes to obtain decent accommodation in reasonable proximity to their workplace. It is recognised that good, affordable housing is essential for the quality of life of those who cannot afford to compete in the open market.
- 2.23 Affordable Housing Studies on behalf of EERA in 2003/04 identify that there is a need for approximately 11,000 new affordable homes annually in the region (7,200 social rented, 2,400 intermediate rent and 1,320 social rented backlog). In addition, a further 13,200 units are required for unmet needs such as homelessness and families in over-crowded accommodation.

## Green Belt

- 2.24 New housing developments need land and although most of the green belt in the East of England is to remain unchanged, the Green Belt boundaries will need to be reviewed around some urban areas. The areas where the East of England Plan identifies a need for a green belt review include Stevenage (involving land in Stevenage and North Hertfordshire), Hemel Hempstead (involving land in Dacorum and probably St Albans District), Harlow, and Welwyn Hatfield (involving land in Welwyn Hatfield District and potentially St Albans District). However, a High Court challenge to the East of England Plan resulted in the quashing of the housing growth figures for Dacorum and Welwyn Hatfield. The Government Office, acting on behalf of the Secretary of State, will now respond to the judgement. There is, therefore, some uncertainty at the current time as to the extent of any Green Belt review in these locations.
- 2.25 The Green Belt review at Stevenage should identify a compensating strategic expansion to the Green Belt in North Hertfordshire. The review at Harlow should identify a compensating strategic expansion in East Hertfordshire. A co-ordinated approach will need to be taken where reviews cover more than one local authority area.
- 2.26 All such green belt reviews will need to ensure that sufficient land is identified to avoid the need for further review to meet development needs before 2031. In the case of Hemel Hempstead and Welwyn Hatfield a strategic review of the green belt will be required to allow scope for continued growth to 2031 through urban extensions.

## Transport

- 2.27 The provision of a good transport system in the county is an important consideration when planning new housing developments. The Hertfordshire Local Transport Plan's vision is *to provide a safe, efficient and affordable transport system that allows access for all*. Therefore, all new dwellings should have good access to employment, shopping, education, everyday facilities, leisure and health

facilities. However, it should also be noted that maintaining the best use of existing infrastructure and providing new networks that are efficient, affordable and integrated is emphasised in the plan's objectives.

### Provision for Gypsies and Travellers

- 2.28 *Accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in the East of England: A Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England* (July 2009) forms part of the strategic planning framework for the East of England. The document is the final outcome of a single issue review of the RSS for the East of England and it addresses the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople in accordance with the requirements of Government policy in Circular 01/2006, Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites and Circular 04/2007, Planning for Travelling Showpeople.
- 2.29 The policies and supporting text are now a part of the RSS for the East of England. They replace 'Policy H3 – Provision for Gypsies and Travellers' and paragraphs 5.11 and 5.12 in the East of England Plan. The policies require local authorities to make provision for additional residential and transit pitches for Gypsy and Traveller caravans and plots for Travelling Showpeople. The policies provide a regional framework to inform the preparation of Local Development Documents, which must be in general conformity with the RSS.

### Black and Minority Ethnic Groups

- 2.30 There is a significant growing Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) population in the East of England and therefore all service providers are required to ensure that the housing needs of Black and Minority Ethnic communities are recognised and catered for within housing strategies. The East of England BME Housing Needs Study 2006 was commissioned by the Housing Corporation, GO-East, The East of England Regional Assembly and the East of England Development Agency to develop an innovative research methodology to address the gaps in existing knowledge and understanding.
- 2.31 The East of England BME Housing Needs Study recommends that all housing providers should ensure that they meet statutory and regulatory requirements, implement relevant codes of practice and guidance and introduce monitoring and recording systems consistent with those of other organisations. There should also be discussions held between partner agencies and organisations to ensure that postcode and ethnicity categories are recorded in datasets and to develop protocols that would enable this data to be shared with regional housing agencies.

### Refugees

- 2.32 A Housing Needs Study was commissioned by EERA along with regional partners and carried out by ECOTEC in 2004-05 to inform the regional housing strategy of refugee needs.
- 2.33 Refugees may apply as homeless and seek housing once they have been granted refugee status. Local authorities help to home refugees if they have lost National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation. The ECOTEC survey however found minimal evidence of homeless refugees being allocated social housing. They are most likely to be homed in the private rented sector.
- 2.34 Key issues for refugees include difficulty in accessing affordable private rented accommodation and claiming housing benefit. It was suggested by stakeholders that private providers could play a vital role at this stage. Some refugees also thought they had been discriminated against or had bad

experiences with local authorities. Therefore, there is a demand for local authorities to communicate with refugees more effectively and to provide more useful information and guidance.

- <sup>2.35</sup> Local authorities in the region accommodated or provided support to 1,324 asylum seekers (Feb, 05). The areas with the largest number of cases are Essex, Hertfordshire, Luton, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. NASS proposed that accommodation for 800 asylum seekers is needed from 2006 across the region, however owing to instability in the many factors involved, it is recognised that this figure could change.

### Regional Housing Strategy

- <sup>2.36</sup> The Regional Housing Strategy (RHS; 2005-2010) for the East of England, along with the East of England Plan and the Regional Economic Strategy, aims for change and improvement of quality of life in the region. The vision of the RHS is that there will be *more, sustainable housing provision, in high quality homes and environments, creating inclusive communities*.
- <sup>2.37</sup> It is recognised that owing to an increase in the existing population and in-migration, the East of England will see an increase in households resident in the region. Although this is seen as necessary to support the region's economic growth and the sustainability of the region's communities, it will inevitably put further pressure on the provision of suitable housing.
- <sup>2.38</sup> Although provision of new housing is currently seen as the region's most pressing issue, the RHS points out that as most of the households will be living in the present housing stock, this should be of greater long-term importance. Therefore, the improvement and maintenance of existing housing stock is also a key purpose of the RHS.
- <sup>2.39</sup> Of the estimated 23,900 new homes provided annually it is thought that 11,000 of these need to be affordable. In order to achieve this the region must overcome a series of challenges and the RHS sets out measures to reduce land and construction costs, reduce average subsidy requirements and maximise public investment resources available.
- <sup>2.40</sup> To meet the Government's Decent Homes Standard within existing residential areas there should also be action on the quality of the surrounding environment including reusing empty homes, derelict land and properties and providing more green space.
- <sup>2.41</sup> The RHS recognises the importance of creating sustainable inclusive communities where there is social inclusion and community cohesion. The importance of creating a balanced community, with a mix of housing tenures and integration of Black and Minority Ethnic communities into the wider community is also stressed.

### The Hertfordshire Structure Plan Review

- <sup>2.42</sup> The Structure Plan was adopted in April 1998 and, prior to the adoption of the East of England Plan 2008, set out the housing requirements for each District for the period 1991-2011. One of the key priorities for the county was to *'provide homes through high quality development within existing built up areas - seeking in the process to make our towns more attractive and convenient places in which to live and work, as well as to minimise the need for further green field development'*

## Planned Development

- 2.43 The Structure Plan defined the settlement pattern of Hertfordshire as being characterised by a number of small to medium sized towns, each with a range of facilities and surrounded by accessible open countryside. Of particular relevance to this SHMA, the Structure Plan also noted that in parts of the County, notably the south and west, the bands of countryside between towns were narrow and would only be maintained by strict implementation of Green Belt policies. None of the County's towns are completely self-sufficient in terms of providing a full range of employment, social, leisure and shopping facilities for their residents and that there was and still are, high levels of interaction, and therefore movement, between the towns. It is this pattern of distinct and diverse communities, each capable of supporting an appropriate range of housing, employment, leisure and shopping facilities, on which the development strategy in the Structure Plan sought to build. The principal element of the strategy was to continue to concentrate development within the main existing urban areas through a process of 'planned regeneration'.

## The London Commuter Belt

- 2.44 The vision for the London Commuter Belt Sub-region Housing Strategy 2005-2008 is to enable growth and provide for those who are homeless or can't afford market housing, create sustainable communities with social inclusion and to make the best use of existing stock, all whilst protecting the environment.
- 2.45 Across the whole of the London Commuter Belt, it has been estimated that there is a need for 2,500 new affordable dwellings per annum to keep pace with household growth and 8,700 a year just to meet existing housing need. It is recognised that to meet these needs local authorities have to make land available, provide funding, secure maximum returns from private developers and make the best use of existing housing stock.
- 2.46 Protection of Green Belt land still remains a priority in this sub-region. The continued pressure to meet housing need and demand is a balancing act with the need to maintain the protection of the Green Belt. Exception policies help to provide for affordable housing within rural areas with an identified need.
- 2.47 The document sets out 5 identified priorities in the sub-region, firstly, affordable housing. Joint commissioning models that make the best use of resources to maximise the delivery of affordable housing have been developed with the London Commuter Belt and are considered good practice. For example Watford and Three Rivers' Housing and Regeneration Initiative (HARI), which has had £23 million invested into it over five years, provided 301 affordable homes in 2003/04. Joint working with private developers is also seen to be significant.
- 2.48 Alongside the need for affordable housing there is also increasing pressure to deliver intermediate housing for those who want to enter into the owner market but cannot afford to do so.
- 2.49 Another key priority in the sub-region is to improve stock condition. The proposed courses of action are to monitor stock condition, work jointly with all councils and RSLs in all areas to deliver cost effective improvements to the housing stock and to improve engagement with the private sector and develop partnership working.



- <sup>2.50</sup> The fourth sub-regional priority is to meet the needs of vulnerable groups. Here the proposed course of action is to pursue joint working with other agencies such as the Herts Young Homeless Group, NHS trusts, RSLs and others. In regard to those with disabilities, promoting disabled adaptations and creating a register of adapted properties and disabled people needing accommodation are the recommended actions.
- <sup>2.51</sup> A fifth priority is achieving social cohesion of marginalised and excluded groups such as young people without settled family homes, people with disabilities, people with mental health, drug or alcohol problems, street sleeping homeless people and Gypsies and Travellers. BME groups are even more likely to become socially isolated owing to living in deprivation or poor quality housing, be unemployed or on low incomes. The language and cultural barriers may also lead to discrimination. The proportion of BME groups in Hertfordshire is relatively low compared to England as a whole, apart from in Watford where it is around 14%. Again, the recommended course of action is to develop a sub-regional approach and it is suggested that a sub-regional working group is formed. This encourages the sharing of information through local authorities, RSLs and the voluntary sector all working together.

## Local Policies

### Hertfordshire Forward

- <sup>2.52</sup> The Hertfordshire Forward partnership is the Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) for Hertfordshire. It brings together key agencies with an interest in improving quality of life in the county. Hertfordshire's sustainable community strategy, Hertfordshire Forward 2021: A Brighter Future, identifies priority areas for improvement. These include jobs, prosperity and skills, affordable housing and quality neighbourhoods, children and young people, an aging population, health and well being, transport and access and promoting sustainable development.
- <sup>2.53</sup> The County LSP co-exists with the 10 LSPs at the District Council level and aims to co-ordinate and disseminate best practice. They have a role feeding into their councils' Corporate Plan and Budget. Recently they have been tasked with overseeing Local Area Agreements – a contract between the Council and its partners and Central Government to deliver essential improvements to the quality of life locally.

### Dacorum Borough Council (Update in Preface)

- <sup>2.54</sup> Policy LA2 in the East of England Plan (2008) sets out an overall housing growth of 12,000 at Hemel Hempstead (as a Key Centre for Development and Change) and elsewhere in Dacorum by 2021. Development will need to be on both urban brown field land and as extensions to urban areas (possibly in St Albans District). In order to allow for growth up to 2031, a strategic review of Green Belt will need to be carried out. There should also be provision for substantial employment growth and services such as health, education, transport and quality of life.
- <sup>2.55</sup> Dacorum Borough Council's Local Plan makes provision for the 7,200 additional dwellings required under the Hertfordshire Structure Plan between 1991 and 2011. The Council aims to achieve this through retaining existing dwellings and providing new dwellings (new builds and conversions) that meet the needs of the population in terms of size and affordability, built within residential areas at high densities.

- 2.56 Dacorum Borough Council's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2006-07 reports 5,581 completions since 1991 which implies that they are set to meet the Annual Structure Plan Requirement at this time. The East of England Plan reports that, by 2006, of the 12,000 required between 2001 and 2011, 1,860 had been completed leaving 10,140 remaining.
- 2.57 The AMR 2006-07 also reports an increase in affordable housing provision of 56 units per annum. However, owing to problems with delivering greenfield and previously developed land, this still falls below the council's target of 125 per annum. Conversely, the Plan's target of 85% of new dwellings to be provided at a density of 30 dwellings or more has been slightly exceeded at 86%.
- 2.58 Although lower than the county as a whole, the Council is attempting to reduce the rate of vacant properties in Dacorum (2%) by providing advice to private owners and operating a renovation grant scheme to encourage owners of long term vacant properties to bring them back into use.
- 2.59 In accordance with government guidance (then PPG3), the most sustainable option for the location of new housing developments is considered to be on the edge of existing residential areas (likely to be greenfield sites), or on previously developed (brownfield) rather than greenfield sites. The Council has set a target of 65% of completions to be built on brownfield sites and it is accepted that some green field land will be needed to meet the requirements.
- 2.60 The level of new housing completions with the local plan period will not meet the projected population and household growth within the Borough and consequently some households will choose to move out of the district to find market housing that is more suited to their needs at a price they are willing to pay. Thus the Government's objective referred to at the start of this chapter is unlikely to be met. However, affordable and special needs housing needs to be provided where the need exists.
- 2.61 The loss of housing land or dwellings will not be accepted apart from in exceptional circumstances (as listed in Policy 15), for example in General Employment Areas where the need for employment-related development rules out residential uses.
- 2.62 Dacorum Borough Council's housing programme comprises schemes which have already been identified and an estimate of likely supply from unidentified sites. Unidentified sites include the regeneration of towns and large villages, minor developments in rural areas and other windfall sites.
- 2.63 It is assumed in the Plan that the re-use of employment land will provide 267 dwellings. There are three areas identified in the District for this purpose including sites in and around the Plough site in Hemel Hempstead possibly providing 110 units. It is also assumed that 706 units will be provided in established residential areas, almost 100 of which will be in New Town Corporation estates in Hemel Hempstead.
- 2.64 Over the plan period the availability of housing land will be monitored and controlled to ensure a balance between sufficient supply and oversupply. It will be controlled by phasing the development of identified sites and managing the development of unidentified sites. This will enable the most effective use to be made of land in the long term. It also allows for coordination with infrastructure improvements.
- 2.65 To meet the needs of the local population, the Council encourages developments of a range of size and tenures of dwellings particularly with regard to the trend towards smaller households. Twenty five per cent of homes on sites of 25 or more dwellings should also be built to lifetime homes standards.

2.66 Providing particular criteria are met (set out in Policy 19), the conversion of existing buildings will be permitted, bringing old properties into more effective use and reducing the need for new developments. It is important that this is controlled to ensure a balance of size and types of dwellings.

### Hertsmere Borough Council

2.67 The policies in Hertsmere's Local Plan set out to:

- provide 4,600 additional dwellings between 1991 and 2011 (as prescribed in the Hertfordshire Structure Plan) incorporating a variety of housing sizes and types including affordable housing and housing for people with special needs;
- provide, as far as possible, new dwellings on previously used urban land, preferably close to town centres, to minimise the use of green field land;
- plan new developments that coincide with local infrastructure plans and in ways that encourage alternative transport to the private car;
- phase development over the whole period of the plan; and
- provide attractive, safe and accessible residential environments.

2.68 Between 1991 and 2001, 2,968 new dwellings were provided in Hertsmere which leaves a requirement of 1,632 dwellings to be provided by 2011 (significantly less than the previous ten years). The 2006-07 Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) reports 377 dwelling completions in that year and it is now expected that an average of 152 dwellings are now needed to meet the Structure Plan's target by 2021. It is even anticipated that there will be a surplus of 1090 dwellings by this time.

2.69 The East of England Plan requires Hertsmere Borough Council to provide 5,000 new dwellings between 2001 and 2021. By 2006 1,080 of these had been completed, leaving a remaining 3,920. Hertsmere Borough Council takes this into consideration in their Preferred Options Core Strategy which has recently gone through consultation. This strategy states that out of the target for 5,000 new homes between 2001 and 2021, 940 should be affordable, and the threshold for providing affordable housing on new sites was also lowered to 15.

2.70 In addition to national, regional and county guidance there is a strong local desire to protect the Green Belt in Hertsmere. Consequently developing on previously used urban sites (planned regeneration) is considered to be the most appropriate option in this district and only when there is no alternative should other options be considered.

2.71 Policy H2 lists potential sites for housing developments. The most significant of these is the former International University in Bushey (an estimated 307 dwellings). It is acknowledged that there may be other sites in addition to those already identified that could possibly be used for housing development if they became available for redevelopment or conversion. The identified sites are expected realistically to provide for 563 dwellings, however windfall sites are expected to arise providing some 300 dwellings.

2.72 Policy H5 proposes that planned development is phased in order to ensure co-ordination with improvements to infrastructure and that some of the developments are saved for the latter part of the planning period. However, it is important that there are not too many restrictions that suitable sites are prevented from coming forward.

- 2.73 It is recognised that it is important that the housing mix provided reflects the needs of the population, i.e. To cater for increases in smaller households. It is proposed that a proportion of housing should be built to 'Lifetime Homes' standards which ensures that homes are adaptable, flexible and accessible and that there are a variety of sizes and tenures.
- 2.74 A survey of local needs in 1994 and the subsequent report 'Affordable Housing – Assessment of Need 1995' identified that there was a significant need for affordable housing which was not being met. This was backed up by a further study in 1999. It is, therefore, important that local planning authorities should seek to negotiate a proportion of affordable housing on suitable sites with developers. A target has been set of 410 affordable housing units to be sought between 1998 and 2011 through the planning process.
- 2.75 Affordable housing on developments of 25 or more dwellings should comprise 25% of the total number of houses or 25% of the land. This will usually involve transfer of land to a Registered Social Landlord (RSL) who will ensure their future management.
- 2.76 There is also an identified need for affordable housing in rural settlements within the Borough and the council will support small scale affordable housing schemes.

### St Albans District Council

- 2.77 The St Albans District Plan Review 1994 was first adopted in 1985 and covers the period from 1981 to 1996. Although it is now out of date, policies included in this document still hold more value than any plan which has not yet been adopted and are therefore presented in this paper. In response to a consultation document in 2006, St Albans District Council prepared a Core Strategy Issues and Options Consultation (July 2007) in preparation for the next Local Development Framework after publishing a consultation document in 2007. At this point, the council have not yet come to any conclusions on the matters raised during the consultation.
- 2.78 The dwelling requirements in the plan however no longer apply and so figures are taken from more recent documents. The Hertfordshire Structure Plan sets a requirement in St Albans of 6,300 dwellings to be provided by 2011. The East of England Plan requires St Albans District to provide 7,200 new dwellings between 2001 and 2011. By 2006, 1,830 of these had been completed leaving a remaining 5,370.
- 2.79 St Albans Housing Monitoring Report 2007 reports a total of 6,410 dwellings completed across the district between 1991 and 2007, exceeding the County Structure Plan's proposal of 6,300 for the period 1991-2011, after only 16 years. This is mainly owing to a higher than expected number of windfall sites. The average annual rate of completions of 369 dwellings per annum slightly exceeds the proposed 360 in the East of England Plan for the period 2001-2021.
- 2.80 The original District Plan set out to minimise the use of Green Belt land and to provide more small dwellings. When the plan was reviewed in the early 1990s the inspector considered that the required numbers were not going to be met and there were calls to release more Green Belt sites. However, infilling produced an average of 400 new dwellings per annum in the late 1980s, putting the district ahead of its proposed rate.
- 2.81 The house-building rate in the District has remained relatively constant at 500-600 dwellings per annum since the 1970s and at the time of the Plan was thought likely to continue.

- 2.82 The District Plan does not allow for phasing of site development because the time scale is relatively short and it would not necessarily be making the best use of land (as recommended by the government).
- 2.83 When considering the nature and location of new housing development the council has three main objectives to:
- ensure development is in accordance with Plan's key structuring policies;
  - encourage the provision of a wide range of housing types, with particular emphasis given to the meeting of local housing needs; and
  - achieve a high standard of housing design and layout, and protect areas of special character.
- 2.84 There is a continued need for smaller dwellings owing to smaller household sizes, however a range of differently sized units should be provided including larger family properties.
- 2.85 On sites over 0.4 hectares or where 15 or more dwellings are planned the Council will seek to provide a proportion of affordable housing. All planned developments should be assessed for their impact on the surrounding area. Policy 7 states that the District hopes to provide 200 dwellings per annum thorough the building of new dwellings and conversions of existing dwellings. Affordable Housing in the Green Belt will only be permitted if there is a demonstrated need that cannot be met elsewhere and that it is reserved permanently for those with strong local connections.
- 2.86 The need to provide smaller properties in the district is key. It is suggested that the conversion of larger properties can encourage retention rather than demolition conserving housing land including Green Belt.
- 2.87 Proposed changes to the Draft East of England Plan 2004 included an additional 360 dwellings per annum in St Albans District. It also proposes major expansion of even more dwellings at Hemel Hempstead and Welwyn Garden City/Hatfield, both of which would involve some land within St Albans District. The District council have objected to both of these proposals.

### Three Rivers District Council

- 2.88 The main aim of the Three Rivers Local Plan 1996-2011 is to make provision for the needs of those living and working in the District, to protect and enhance the District's towns and countryside, and to provide for development whilst taking into account local and wider impacts.
- 2.89 In relation to housing, the main objectives of the Local Plan are to provide a sufficient supply of housing land during the plan period, to ensure that the type of housing built meets the needs of the population in terms of location, size and affordability and to ensure that housing development is not detrimental to the natural or built environment, or other land uses. The Local Plan also seeks to ensure that an appropriate amount of housing is affordable, that provision is made to suit people with special needs and that there is a diversity of size and types. It also sets out to increase densities and locate housing as near as possible to transport and services while still protecting the environment and residents' quality of life.
- 2.90 Local Plan policy GEN.2 states that major development should be located close to town centres, local centres, transport nodes and corridors. It is also desirable for there to be a mix of dwellings in terms of size and type across sites and neighbourhoods creating a more varied and integrated society and increasing the flexibility of the housing stock to accommodate changing households in the future.

- 2.91 The Hertfordshire Structure Plan identified that a net total of 4,000 new dwellings should be provided across Three Rivers between 1991 and 2011. 4,482 dwellings were provided between 1991 and 2008, exceeding the Structure Plan target.
- 2.92 The East of England Plan (adopted May 2008) identifies a target for Three Rivers of 4,000 new dwellings to be provided between 2001 and 2021. By March 2008, 1,595 had been completed leaving 2,405 remaining.
- 2.93 The Annual Monitoring Report 2007/08 shows that 92% of housing development between 2001 and 2008 had been built on previously developed land, exceeding the 60% target. However, in future a range of options are being considered through the Local Development Framework process to meet dwelling targets and this is likely to lead to identification of greenfield sites to meet dwelling targets.
- 2.94 Owing to the already congested nature of Three Rivers District, future housing sites identified to meet the East of England Plan targets will be phased to minimise the impacts of development. It is anticipated that housing sites on previously developed land will be developed in advance of greenfield and green belt releases which will be phased towards the end of the plan period.
- 2.95 In accordance with the findings of the 1999 Housing Needs Survey (which showed there was a great need for affordable housing that was likely to continue), Local Plan policy H6 requires approximately 30% of dwellings on suitable sites capable of accommodating 25 dwellings or more, or with an area of 1 hectare or more to be affordable. It is recognised that on some sites where there is an identified need and where the criteria set out in Policy H6 have been met, at least some if not all of the designated 'affordable' housing must be designed specifically for residents with special needs (those who are disabled or have learning disabilities).
- 2.96 In accordance with Planning Policy Statement 3: Housing, the Council's Executive Committee agreed in May 2007 to revise these thresholds and apply a threshold of 15 dwellings for affordable housing provision.
- 2.97 Local Plan policy H5 considers affordability in 'financial terms' rather than referring to a particular price or rent. While Circular 6/98 includes 'low cost market housing' within the definition of affordable housing, the Local Plan does not, as those considered in housing need would still not be able to afford these prices. In addition, Local Plan policy H7 sets out an exceptions policy for the provision of affordable housing in rural villages, providing strict criteria.
- 2.98 The Three Rivers AMR 2007/08 reports that 415 affordable dwellings have been completed between 2001 and 2008, 25% of the total. This is just short of the Local Plan target of 30% as a result of the large number of smaller housing sites that have come forward that fall below the Local Plan thresholds and therefore do not make any provision for affordable housing.

### **Watford Borough Council**

- 2.99 Policy L4 of the East of England Plan (2008) identifies Watford as a Key Centre for Development and Change (KDDC) where there is a focus on continued strong economic performance and continuing regeneration and renewal that makes the most of urban development capacity. Unlike other KCDCs in LCB (West) the intensification of land use and continued defence of Green Belt land is central to this policy. There is also an emphasis on joint approaches, inside and outside the Borough, to the provision of affordable housing so that needs can be met where they arise. Policy H1 prescribes a total of 5,200 new dwellings for Watford which although lower than most KCDCs does not include

other settlements within the Greater Watford area, which would put Watford on a par with other Key Centres.

- <sup>2.100</sup> Watford Borough Council's main aims as set out in its adopted District Plan are to meet local housing need while seeking to improve the quality of life in the Borough. This will be achieved through balancing land use so that Watford residents do not have to travel for jobs or leisure.
- <sup>2.101</sup> The Hertfordshire Structure plan identified a need for 4,700 additional dwellings in the Borough between 1991 and 2011. 3148 dwellings were provided between 1991 and 2001, leaving a remaining requirement of 1,552 up to 2011. It is thought that sites identified, including small currently unidentified sites, will be adequate to meet this need for at least the next five years.
- <sup>2.102</sup> Watford Borough Council's Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) states that they are on target to meet and exceed both the Hertfordshire Structure Plan requirement by 2011 and the proposed EiP Panel Report by 2021. Additionally, 99.66% of completed dwellings were on previously developed land and 98% at a density of over 30 dwellings per hectare meeting and exceeding national and local targets.
- <sup>2.103</sup> The East of England Plan requires Watford Borough Council to provide 5,200 new dwellings between 2001 and 2021. By 2006 1,410 had been completed, leaving 3,790 remaining.
- <sup>2.104</sup> Owing to a decrease in average household size in the Borough there is a household size/dwelling size mismatch. The size and type of new dwellings should therefore be provided to meet current need. Mixed-use developments, including flats above shops, will be encouraged.
- <sup>2.105</sup> New developments will also be expected to meet the increasing need for specialist houses for the elderly and for those with mental or physical disabilities through the provision of lifetime housing standard dwellings. The Council also expect new developments to meet the shortfall of affordable houses in the Borough.
- <sup>2.106</sup> As affordable housing is in such high demand in the Borough, it is vital that once it is obtained, it is protected and developments which result in the loss of affordable housing will not be permitted. All developments of 25 dwellings or more must provide at least 30% of affordable housing. The Watford Housing Needs Survey 2001 identified a high demand for affordable housing at approximately 1,870 units required by 2006. Watford Borough has a very short supply of affordable units and in order to increase access to affordable housing the Council will seek to assist Registered Social Landlords in providing additional units through new build and renovation of existing properties. The 2001 study also identified a need for an additional 100 units to be provided at low cost market prices to cater for those only just able to afford market housing.
- <sup>2.107</sup> In response to housing needs and demand extending beyond Watford's boundary, Three Rivers District Council and Watford Borough Council, along with Registered Social Landlords have agreed in principle, through the Housing and Regeneration Initiative (HARI), to jointly fund affordable housing developments.
- <sup>2.108</sup> The Council also supports developments of Housing in Multiple Occupation (HMO) providing that they are not detrimental to the amenity of nearby residents and sheltered housing for older people is encouraged close to shops, services and local transport.
- <sup>2.109</sup> Policy SE1 recommends that 80% of new housing developments be built on previously developed land or from the restoration of empty properties. Protecting Green Belt land from an over-supply of

housing is particularly important in Watford owing to the relatively low level of open spaces and the need to continue to supply housing past 2011. Therefore, the Council will follow a 'plan, monitor and manage' approach to ensure sustainable development.

- 2.110 The plan also seeks to provide housing that is of a high standard whilst maintaining the quality of the environment. Housing should be integrated with other land uses encouraging alternative transport such as walking, cycling and passenger transport. Unless there are exceptional circumstances proposals that result in an overall loss of housing will not be accepted and instead a 'like for like' approach should be taken.
- 2.111 Policy H10 states that developers may be required to enter into a planning agreement with the Council to help meet any extra costs in relation to the need for additional school or other community facilities such as doctor's surgeries and libraries. Also, they may possibly be required to make a contribution to accommodate the extra demand.
- 2.112 It is recognised that if the required number of additional dwellings is to be met, without having to use Green Belt Land, developments will have to be built at higher densities and be well designed. However, quality of life must not be reduced by building at higher densities and the creation of open space is also encouraged by the Council.

### **Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council (Update in Preface)**

- 2.113 The overall aim of the Welwyn Hatfield District Plan is to secure sustainable development in the District. It also aims to provide for changing local needs, in particular substantial employment growth and services such as health, education and training, transport, leisure and quality of life.
- 2.114 The Hertfordshire Structure Plan allocates Welwyn Hatfield a requirement of 5,600 dwellings between 1991 and 2011. Priority should be to build new developments on previously used land rather than on greenfield land. The District Plan has identified 23 possible sites for new developments, 90% of which are on previously used land. Annual monitoring identifies 5,533 completions from 1991 to 2006/07, exceeding the cumulative completion target of 4,480.
- 2.115 Policy LA3 in the East of England Plan (2008) identifies Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield as a joint Key Centre for Development and Change and sets out an overall housing growth of 10,000 in Welwyn Hatfield District between 2001 and 2021. The AMR identifies 3383 completions from 2001 to 2006/07, slightly exceeding the cumulative completion target of 3230.
- 2.116 Policy LA3 states that new developments will mostly be within existing urban areas but further urban extensions will also be required. The location of future growth in Welwyn Hatfield is a matter for determination through the LDF process. Any Green Belt review, however, should include coordinated work with St Albans District Council if the preferred option for expansion is to the West of Hatfield. Welwyn Hatfield has exceeded the national target that 60% of additional housing should be provided on previously developed land for the last 4 years. In 2006/07 99% of new dwellings were on previously developed land (AMR).
- 2.117 Welwyn Hatfield's Policy H6 states that all new developments of 5 or more dwellings, provided that they meet all other criteria, should be built at 30 to 50 dwellings per hectare (dph) and in central areas and areas with good accessibility, residential development will be expected to be close to or exceed 50 dwellings per hectare. In 2006/07, 98% of gross residential completions were completed at density of 30dph or more, the average density of new dwellings was 47 dwellings per hectare (AMR).



- <sup>2.118</sup> Policy H7 requires sites of 25 units or more or one hectare or more to include provision for a minimum of 30% subsidised housing. In 2006/07, of the 20 eligible sites, 15 (75%) met or exceeded the requirements of the affordable housing policy (AMR).
- <sup>2.119</sup> It is expected that new residential developments will include a range of dwelling types and sizes. The 2004 Housing Needs Survey identified that the principal need was for subsidised rented accommodation because low cost market housing was beyond the reach of the majority of newly forming households and those in need. Welwyn Hatfield also has a rural exceptions policy for the provision of affordable housing (policy RA14).
- <sup>2.120</sup> Major redevelopment is planned for Hatfield town centre (east), which is outlined in Hatfield Town Centre Redevelopment, Revised Planning Brief July 2002. The brief includes development plans for shopping, employment, housing and relaxing, covering an area of 3.3 hectares. It is noted, that in regard to housing, a proportion of key worker and affordable housing, to assist in addressing local housing needs, must be provided. However, due to current economic conditions (2009), regeneration of the town centre has been delayed.

### Summary of Key Points

- Government Practice Guidance on policy and planning emphasise the overriding importance of sustainable development in considering housing policy.
- Housing policy is focused on increasing the supply of dwellings with particular emphasis on the provision of affordable housing.
- SHMAs should provide a sound evidence base for the development of both regional and local housing development policies.
- The Barker Review of Housing Supply recommended an increase in socially rented housing and subsequently the government have increased provision and made it a priority in the 2007 Comprehensive Spending Review. CLG (2006) emphasises the importance of close working between regional bodies and delivery partners to ensure effective delivery of a shared vision and that housing provision is balanced with future housing demand.
- The East of England Plan also focuses on delivering sustainable communities and identifies four growth areas, three of which lie partially within the Eastern Region.
- The East of England plans sets a requirement for at least 508,000 dwellings between 2001 and 2021 (26,830 per annum from 2006). Authorities are encouraged to increase density, encourage the use of previously developed land and make use of rural exception policies to provide affordable homes in order to exceed annual average rates.
- The remaining minimum still to build between April 2006-March 2021 are set, in the East of England Plan at 10,140 for Dacorum, 3,920 for Hertsmere, 5,370 for St Albans, 2,990 for Three Rivers, 3,790 for Watford and 7,270 for Welwyn Hatfield.
- It is recommended in policy SS3 that, to achieve sustainable development, development should be concentrated on 21 locations known as Key Centres for Development and Change (KCDC), of which there are three in LCB (West). In three of these locations (Hemel Hempstead and Welwyn Garden City and Hatfield) Green Belt reviews will be undertaken to allow further expansion.
- The East of England plan requires that 35% of new dwellings will be affordable, and states that in some cases this may need to be higher.
- Previous affordable housing studies on behalf of EERA have estimated an approximate need for 11,000 new homes annually in the region and an additional 13,200 to meet the needs of homelessness and overcrowding.
- There is an urgent need to address the problems of site shortages for Gypsies and Travellers and related difficulties in families gaining access to housing, education, health and employment.
- The Regional Housing Strategy (2005-2010) emphasises the importance of the improvement and maintenance of existing housing stock as this is of greater long-term importance. It also recognises the importance of creating sustainable communities where there is social inclusion and community cohesion, including the mix of tenures and the integration of BME groups.
- It is estimated that across the whole of LCB there is a need for 2,500 new affordable dwellings per annum to keep pace with household growth and 8,700 per annum to meet existing housing need. This has to be balanced with a need to protect Green Belt land.
- The five priorities in LCB are: affordable housing provision, intermediate housing provision, improvement of stock condition, meeting the needs of vulnerable groups and achieving social cohesion.
- Dacorum Borough Council's Local Plan makes provision for 7,200 additional dwellings between 1991 and 2011. In 2001, 2,542 had been identified with a further 1,265 unidentified sites forecast. The 2006-07 AMR reports 5,581 completions since 1991 implying they are on target to meet the requirements at this time. However, they have fallen short of the council's target for affordable housing of 125 per annum, despite achieving 86% of new dwellings built at a density of 30 dwellings or more.