

West Suffolk Council Housing Delivery Action Plan 2020

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1. Introduction and purpose

- 1.1. At West Suffolk Council we are aware of the important effect that good housing can have on the health and wellbeing of our residents. Our residents need access to appropriate and affordable housing where they can establish a settled home in a community. We want our residents to have the choice of the right home in the right location and be able to realise their ambitions and potential for the future. The right housing options are also vital to realising inclusive economic growth.
- 1.2. As such housing is a priority in our strategic framework, which commits to 'Increase and improve the provision of appropriate housing in West Suffolk in both our towns and rural areas'.
- 1.3. Our Housing Strategy 2018-2023 says "we will use our role as a local housing and planning authority, a regulator, an investor and local influencer to deliver our this priority" and that "We have a real opportunity to explore new ways of increasing the rate of housing delivery and be more creative in encouraging the development of new types of housing that meet the current and future needs and aspirations of our residents."
- 1.4. As such and in the knowledge that responsibility for achieving this is a joint one shared with partners, house builders and developers we have committed to preparing a housing delivery action plan. This sets out the actions and commitments we will take to help increase delivery. Through consultation and engagement, we are seeking to validate these actions to ensure they are right and make most impact.
- 1.5. We commissioned a housing delivery study, published in March 2019, which informed both our housing strategy and this piece of work. The study sets out actions that can be taken to boost overall housing delivery and provide greater choice in the types and tenures of new homes.
- 1.6. Our approach supports the thrust of government policy, who set a target to deliver 300,000 new homes annually across the United Kingdom by the mid-2020s. They advocate local authorities as well as central Government, need to understand whether they are delivering the required number of new houses and introduced a new 'housing delivery test' in July 2018 to measure local authority performance against centrally set targets.
- 1.7. Councils are expected to achieve a target of at least 95 per cent and latest figures were published on 13 February 2020, West Suffolk achieved a 105 per cent rate of delivery. As a new authority in April 2019, rates were also published for each separate former authority.
- 1.8. Subsequently the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on people's everyday lives and businesses globally, the housing sector and construction industry has not been immune to this. During lockdown measures we have seen many construction sites suspend work on site, staff being furloughed and the industry having to find new ways of working from home. It is too soon to anticipate what the overall impact will be, as the pandemic is far from over.

- 1.9. However, the preparation and ongoing commitment to this housing action plan, will also now play an important role in recovery and will provide focus for our continued dialogue with the housing market and partners as things continue to evolve.

2. Timeframe, monitoring and performance

- 2.1. In determining appropriate actions we have looked back at the performance in the previous three years as measured in the housing delivery test (HDT) and also looks forward five years at its anticipated housing delivery in the five-year housing land supply (5YHLS), which together span an eight-year timeline.
- 2.2. The action plan sets out a range of actions that will be reviewed against the identified timescales and against the overall housing delivery rate, along with an annual review. Regular review is particularly important as we enter a post Covid-19 recovery and continue to monitor impacts on housing delivery.
- 2.3. For the monitoring year 2019 to 2020, 901 net dwellings were constructed in the district. When combined with the communal accommodation component, the total number of homes built exceeded the housing need in the last monitoring year. The housing delivery test is based on performance over a three-year period and based on housing completions up to 31 March 2020. It is therefore anticipated that our next HDT will meet the housing need test. However, and given the potential risks on the housing market from Covid-19, it is important that we continue to look toward the future in our planning and understand where we can act to most make a difference.

3. Methodology

- 3.1. West Suffolk Council has undertaken the following key steps to prepare an effective housing delivery action plan that is collaborative, proportionate, effective and fit for purpose.

Tasks	Methods and steps taken
1 Turley report identifies actions to boost housing delivery in West Suffolk	This report identifies actions that West Suffolk can take to boost housing delivery and provide greater choice in the types and tenures of new homes.
2 Engage with registered providers, developers and stakeholders	Engagement with stakeholders to understand issues and reasons for delays, stalled sites and possible actions to address the issues.
3 Consult on draft plan	To engage with developers and registered providers for feedback on the plan and to identify the range of issues that WS can support to increase housing delivery.
4 Produce final plan	West Suffolk to have a robust action plan which will be used to increase housing which meets the needs of residents and can build new communities for the future.

4. Action plan

- 4.1. The table below sets out the work West Suffolk Council has identified to increase housing delivery to meet the requirements of the housing delivery test.

Objective	Action	By who	By when
Streamline the planning process	Annual monitoring report on interventions and outcomes for applicants when West Suffolk has provided, early, clear and timely pre-application housing advice for planning applications.	Strategic housing and development management	Current and ongoing
Effective planning processes to ensure West Suffolk is fit for purpose during and after Covid-19	Review statement of community involvement (SCI) due to Covid-19 to ensure effective engagement on planning applications. To continue to keep the SCI under review.	Strategic Planning	August 2021
To develop intelligence on pace of delivery and facilitate market as far as possible in unlocking barriers	To undertake quarterly reviews with developers and applicants on site progress and anticipated delivery rates from all sites over 10 homes in West Suffolk. This will include identifying specific Covid-19 related issues.	Strategic planning and housing	Current and Ongoing
To facilitate delivery of sites in a timely and effective manner where there are market issues	West Suffolk Council to identify sites which the council may need to consider use of powers such as compulsory purchase order to support land assembly. This action will enable unlocking redundant or previously developed sites suitable for residential homes.	Strategic planning	November 2021
To develop intelligence on pace of delivery and facilitate the market as far as possible in unlocking barriers	By engaging with registered providers, applicants and developers we will compile an issues log against all housing sites over 10 homes in West Suffolk, which is agreed by both parties.	Strategic housing	September 2021

Objective	Action	By who	By when
Streamline the planning process and improve quality of design of our communities	Improve the way West Suffolk work with our stakeholders and to embed high quality functional design in all new developments. We will set clear design expectations at the outset and work in partnership to deliver homes, buildings, communities and places that work for all our residents both now and in the future.	Council with Suffolk Growth Programme board	September 2021
To develop intelligence on pace of delivery and facilitate market as far as possible in unlocking barriers	<p>From agreed issues log, create a site-specific action plan for all West Suffolk sites. This will include clear commitments on what the council and applicant and developer will do to into order to address blockages and speed up delivery.</p> <p>It will include the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early stallers – before full planning is granted. • Conditions stallers – between granting of full planning permissions and all conditions have been discharged ready for construction. • Late stage stallers – after the point construction can commence. <p>Continue to review sites</p>	Strategic housing	November 2021
To develop a programme of activity with strategic partners to accelerate housing delivery	Quarterly meetings with Homes England to West Suffolk review sites and identify opportunities for funding and government support.	Strategic housing	Current and ongoing

Objective	Action	By who	By when
To inform changes to legislation, policy and other government interventions to accelerate housing delivery	Engage with Local Government Association (LGA), MP's and Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) on key issues as appropriate. Annual monitoring report on actions and outcomes where appropriate.	All strategic departments	Current and ongoing
To increase and diversify opportunities to deliver housing in West Suffolk	As agreed by the council's rural task force, Community Action Suffolk has been appointed to work with several parishes to identify local housing need. This will be the first stage to help the council understand what further work is needed to improve housing delivery, particularly affordable and social housing in the rural areas in addition to the rural exception policy.	Strategic planning and housing	September 2020
To support the construction industry, sustain and grow. Also, to support growth of West Suffolk's local economy	To engage with the market to identify gaps in construction skills in West Suffolk and to find out what they are doing to support skills development in our area, for example, apprenticeships, school engagement etc. This work will inform any actions we need to take in order to address any issues identified.	Strategic housing and economic development	March 2021
To support the construction industry, sustain and grow	West Suffolk to integrate our local work on skills and other relevant work with Suffolk wide activity. Suffolk Growth Programme Board will undertake targeted work with the local construction and development industry post Covid-19	Council with Suffolk Growth Programme Board	Current and ongoing
To sustain and grow market confidence in West Suffolk and help diversify opportunities for housing	To capture and promote from developers and investors why they consider West Suffolk is a good place to invest in. Prepare videos to include on our growth website to encourage further investment and increase confidence for new market entrants.	All strategic departments	March 2021

Objective	Action	By who	By when
To help build sustainable local communities	Our strategic housing market assessment (SHMA), expected September 2020, will identify the different housing needs which need to be addressed in West Suffolk. For specific areas of need we will gather other best practice and intelligence on providers. This will be used to prepare for an event in April 2021 which showcases examples and encourages conversations with the market on how we can diversify housing needs on existing and future sites in West Suffolk.	Strategic planning and housing	April 2021
To support the construction industry, sustain and grow	We will explore the feasibility of the council establishing and facilitating a small builder and house builder network. This will explore issues such as financing, creating supply chains and partnership for larger contracts, best practice and pooling purchasing for materials etc.	Strategic housing	February 2021
<p>To develop intelligence on delivery of social housing and affordable housing to enable us to work with registered providers to unlocking barriers.</p> <p>To increase opportunities to diversify affordable housing products to meet our needs.</p>	West Suffolk Council to establish a quarterly registered provider forum to share best practice from outside and within West Suffolk to work through common issues. West Suffolk Council to ensure developing social housing and affordable housing is on the agenda for discussion.	Strategic housing	September 2021

Objective	Action	By who	By when
To sustain and develop expertise which will support housing delivery	West Suffolk housing officer specialisms and training and development to ensure we can offer advice and focus on specific areas including housing mix, first time buyer market, self and custom build, housing for older people and build to rent.	Strategic housing	Current and Ongoing
To increase and diversify opportunities to deliver housing in West Suffolk	Deliver the council's wholly owned housing company, Barley Home's business plan. This will deliver an additional 63 homes in West Suffolk over the next two years. In addition, the council will continue work on a pipeline of sites for future business plans.	Barley Homes	August 2021
To increase and diversify opportunities to deliver housing in West Suffolk	West Suffolk will explore opportunities to purchase land or sites as part of its asset management strategy to support the delivery of housing as they come forward.	Strategic property and place delivery	Current and Ongoing
To regularly and robustly monitor performance of the market and the role the council plays in that.	The plan will ultimately be measured by an increase in home delivery numbers. An annual review of the action plan to ensure viability and amendments can be made.	All strategic departments	August 2021