



Darlington Housing Strategy 2012 - 2017

July 2012



Foreword

Welcome to the Darlington Housing Strategy 2012-2017, which sets the overarching vision, ambitions and objectives for improving the availability, accessibility and quality of housing across all tenures within the Borough. It translates broad strategy into practical and deliverable actions that will: contribute to Darlington's economic prosperity; support the health and wellbeing of residents and, provide a framework which encourages and allows people to make their own choices to live independently for as long as possible.

The Strategy seeks outcomes that are realistic given the difficult economic climate and the depressed state of the housing market, both of which are forecast to continue for the next 5 years. It needs to generate commitment from our partners to ensure that it is used as a practical tool to focus resources in delivering a range of housing to meet the needs of all residents. As such the Strategy will be expected to deliver more, using fewer public sector resources, than the current Strategy. Nevertheless, the Strategy identifies positive actions which will deliver more houses, improve the existing stock (making it safer and more energy efficient) and, regenerate several locations within the urban area. The Strategy is not only about "bricks and mortar", it's also about the people who live in the houses. Therefore, there are actions designed to ensure that residents are aware of emerging reforms, are informed about their options and are supported in their decisions.

Preparation of a new Strategy is timely as we aim to respond to the Government's recent National Housing Strategy and to the significant changes to Housing Benefits and Welfare reform. These changes present a significant challenge to landlords, their tenants and local authorities responsible for meeting housing needs in an area. This is a challenge that Darlington Council and its partners are now ready to meet.



Councillor Veronica Copeland
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Executive Summary

In 2003, the Government placed a legal duty on all local authorities to develop housing strategies. The current Strategy expires in 2012 and we, therefore, need to prepare a new Strategy incorporating an Action Plan for the next five years.

Context

The national housing strategy is set out in *Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England*, published in November 2011.

The national policy drivers for housing are to:

- Increase the number of houses available to buy and rent, including affordable housing
- Improve the flexibility of social housing (increasing mobility and choice) and promote homeownership
- Protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged by tackling homelessness and support people to live independently
- Make sure that homes are of high quality and sustainable.

In addition to publishing a national housing strategy, the Government is making significant changes to Welfare Benefits, introducing a Universal Credit system (designed to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives) and introducing a cap on benefits payable. These changes present a significant challenge to landlords, their tenants and local authorities responsible for meeting housing needs in an area.

The Housing Strategy does not stand alone. It is linked into a number of other local documents including the Sustainable Community Strategy “One Darlington Perfectly Placed, the Local Plan, and the emerging Economic Strategy. In addition, and reflecting the Council’s Business Model for “Darlington 2015”, the Housing Strategy will inform its commissioning intentions through the Priority Action Plan.

What have we done?

Darlington has a good track record in delivering housing and housing improvements, including:

- £2.6m of investment in private sector financial assistance, provision of disabled facilities grants and energy efficiency measures, over three years.
- Completed a comprehensive programme of improvements to all the Council's sheltered housing costing approximately £9m and a further £6.5m in the rebuilding of Linden Court and Dinsdale Court sheltered housing schemes.
- Completed a programme of development of 4 Extra Care Schemes at a cost of £10m
- Secured £3.86m to fund the development of 106 energy efficient Eco-homes at Beaumont Hill, offering several home ownership options.
- Completed a programme of modernisation of Council stock that was based on tenants aspirations and exceeded the Decent Homes standard.
- Built 65 council houses between 2008 and 2012
- Invested £11.5m in kitchen, bathroom and heating replacements between 2008 and 2012.
- Completed the regeneration of Parkside.
- Delivered an extensive programme of stock improvement that included designing out unpopular or unsuitable property and replacing them with high demand family properties.
- Developed 262 units of social rented accommodation with RP's for £9m.
- Commenced the £9m Cockerton Regeneration Programme.

Our challenges

Despite significant progress, many serious challenges remain. The Strategy identifies 14 challenges which relate to four key themes:

- How do we and our partners deliver more housing with fewer resources in a difficult housing market?
- With limited resources, how do we improve conditions and reduce the number of non-decent homes?
- With an increasingly ageing population, how do we support vulnerable and older people to live independently for as long as possible, but also provide sufficient specialist housing?
- In the light of the Government's Welfare Reforms, how do we mitigate the detrimental impacts and prevent crisis situations arising for those 20,000 Borough residents on benefits?

Moving Forward

These challenges sit within economic and housing landscapes which are substantially different from those of the recent past. One way to future growth will be to make maximum use of the Borough's assets to unlock private sector investment, thereby contributing to housing numbers and creating job opportunities while, at the same time, reducing the number of empty properties and improving the housing stock. The Borough needs to promote its locational advantages, superior transport links and environmental quality, as a place to live.

The private rented sector (PRS) is increasingly being seen as an alternative tenure to homeownership and social housing. However, concern has been raised about the condition of the PRS and its ability or suitability to house those who cannot secure a mortgage or qualify for social housing. Darlington needs to build on its successful Landlord Accreditation Scheme which provides good quality properties and landlords.

To be successful, however, we need to ensure the housing market provides greater choice, opportunity and stability for everyone and vulnerable people are supported, if necessary, to allow them to make their own choices to live independently for as long as possible.

What will we do?

This new Strategy sets out our 15 year ambitions and our 5 year objectives and is supported by an Action Plan, in Appendix 1, which explains how we will deliver and make progress. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually. Appendix 2 sets out what will be measured, how and by whom to monitor our progress. Appendix 3 sets out a glossary of terms.

Delivery of the Strategy's objectives will require contributions from a range of agencies and organisations across all sectors. We will, therefore, build on strong relationships and develop new ones with these organisations to make best use of resources and to learn from best practice. We will consider using our land and assets to contribute to joint developments with registered providers and developers.

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Why a new strategy?

In 2003, the Government placed a legal duty on all local authorities to develop housing strategies. The current Strategy expires at the end of this year and we, therefore, need to prepare a new Strategy incorporating an Action Plan for the next five years.

It is also an opportunity for us to reflect on what we have achieved over the past five years and what we need to achieve in the following five years taking into account our vision to offer a range of housing to meet the needs of all residents.

This new Strategy replaces the Darlington Housing Strategy 2008-12, which outlined a clear holistic approach to sustaining a balanced housing market, providing choice and an accessible quality product, while contributing to broader socio-economic and environmental benefits. This new Strategy sets out our 15 year ambitions and our 5 year objectives and is supported by an Action Plan, in Appendix 1, which explains how we will deliver and make progress. The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually. Appendix 2 sets out what will be measured, how and by whom to monitor our progress. Appendix 3 sets out a glossary of terms.

Delivery of the Strategy's objectives, will require contributions from a range of agencies and organisations across all sectors. We will, therefore, build on strong relationships and develop new ones with these organisations to make best use of resources and to learn from best practice.

We have developed this strategy during a period of very challenging economic conditions, which are expected to continue. However, the revised Housing Strategy will be expected to deliver more, using fewer public sector resources, than the current Strategy. To achieve this, we will have to maximise the value of public assets, ensuring the best value for money, and securing maximum private sector leverage to support our shared ambitions.

Context

The national housing strategy is set out in Laying the Foundations: A Housing Strategy for England, published in November 2011. The national policy drivers for housing are to:

- Increase the number of houses available to buy and rent, including affordable housing
- Improve the flexibility of social housing (increasing mobility and choice) and promote homeownership
- Protect the vulnerable and disadvantaged by tackling homelessness and support people to live independently
- Make sure that homes are of high quality and sustainable.

In addition to publishing a national housing strategy, the Government is making significant changes to Welfare Benefits, introducing a Universal Credit system (designed to simplify the benefits system and improve work incentives) that includes Housing Benefits and introducing a cap on benefits payable. These changes present a significant challenge to landlords, their tenants and local authorities responsible for meeting housing needs in an area.

The sub-regional housing priorities are set out in the Tees Valley Sub-regional Housing Strategy which has been developed by the five Tees Valley local authorities as part of ongoing close collaborative working and as a consequence of the growing importance now being attached to sub-regional working by the Government. The principal objectives of the Sub-Regional Housing Strategy are to draw together housing issues that have a common thread across the sub-region, to facilitate partnership working between local authorities and housing providers and, to better inform other strategic plans. The Strategy also aims to assist the economic regeneration of the Tees Valley; through the delivery of a step-change in the type and quality of housing on offer; making the sub-region a more attractive place to live; working collaboratively on cross boundary issues and, procuring common services competitively. Because of its attractive urban and rural residential environments and town centre cultural and leisure facilities, the Borough will continue to help meet a sub-regional need for small numbers of top-end executive housing.

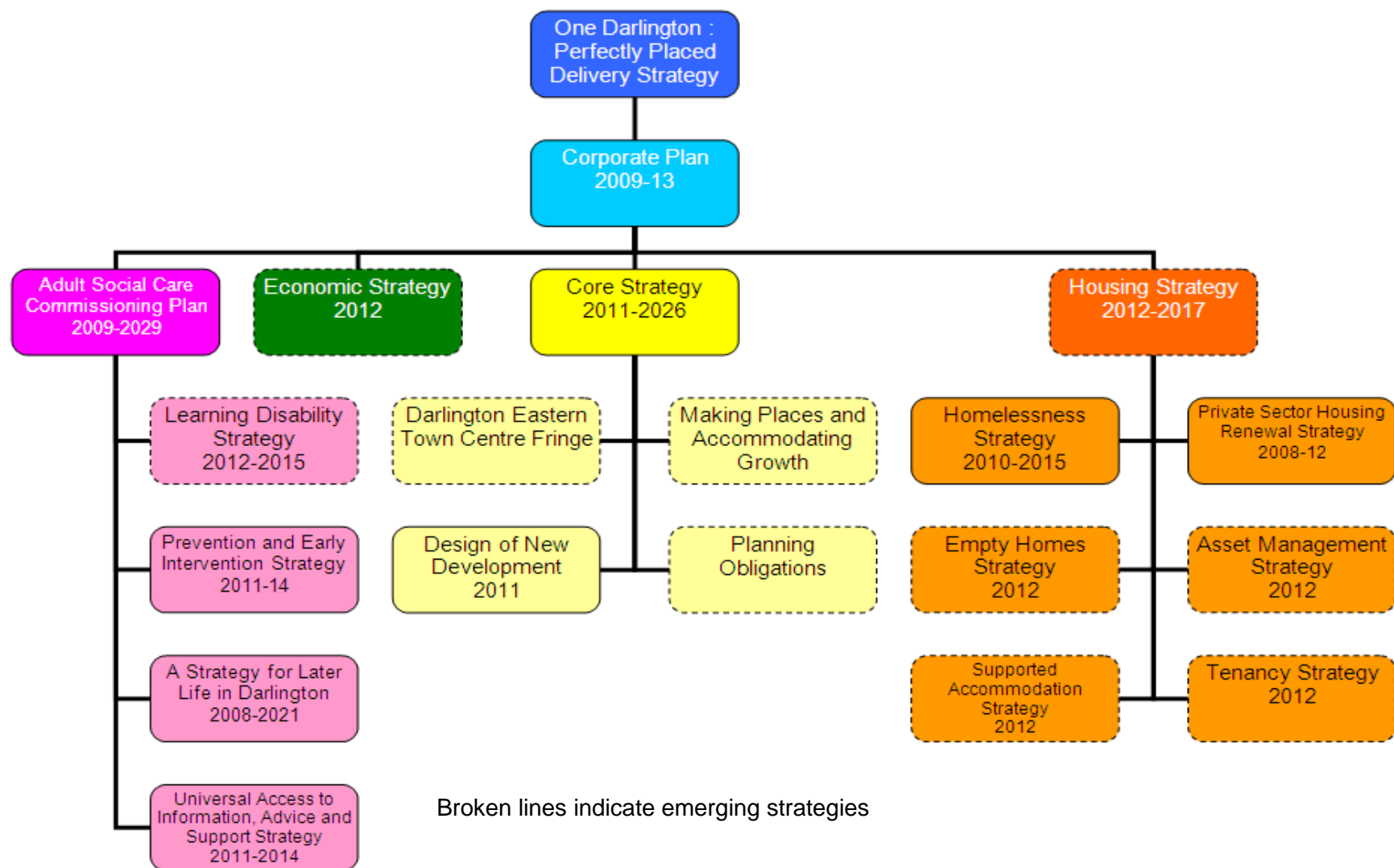
The 2009 Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has been refreshed in 2012. The SHMA identifies a need for:

- the ongoing delivery of new market and affordable housing to address need and support economic growth;
- diversifying the range of affordable tenures available to local residents;
- improving the condition and energy efficiency of existing stock and,
- addressing the requirements of an increasingly ageing population and vulnerable groups.

Although the SHMA does not identify any special needs, in terms of housing, for the Black and Asian Minority Ethnic Group, we are conscious that we need to understand the emerging needs of these communities and will work to build and maintain contact with them.

In preparing this Strategy several other documents provide supporting evidence, including the Homelessness Strategy 2010-2015, the Private Sector House Condition Survey 2009, the Asset Management Strategy 2011-2016 and the Strategy for Later Life in Darlington 2008-2021.

The Housing Strategy does not stand alone. It is linked into a number of other local documents illustrated below.



The Darlington Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) brings together a wide range of stakeholders, including elected members, public sector organisations, voluntary and community groups, and local businesses. The LSP produced the current Sustainable Community Strategy, “One Darlington: Perfectly Placed” in 2008 and provides the housing vision for Darlington which is to make sure that everyone has access to affordable, decent housing that meets their individual and family needs. The emerging One Darlington Perfectly Placed Delivery Strategy will maintain a strong influence over the priorities and direction of public services in the Borough and, thereby, informs the Council’s Corporate Plan. Reflecting the Council’s Business Model for “Darlington 2015” the Housing Strategy will inform its commissioning intentions through the Priority Action Plan in Appendix 1.

The Local Development Framework’s Core Strategy sets out how the Borough will develop over the next fifteen years (2011-2026), providing the spatial planning framework for the many plans and strategies, including the Housing Strategy, prepared by the Council and its partners. The daughter documents provide the detailed site allocations and policies for future development. Proposals for new housing should, normally, conform to the planning policies which guide future development to specific locations and provide supplementary guidance on design and the appropriate infrastructure necessary to make the development acceptable and sustainable.

The Economic Strategy sets out the vision, priorities and actions to support the growth of existing businesses and to attract new businesses to Darlington. As reported in the national Housing Strategy, “housing has a direct impact on economic output, averaging 3 per cent of GDP in the last decade (Office for National Statistics Construction Output). For every new home built, up to two new jobs are created for a year” (DCLG). Actions within the Housing Strategy can, therefore, have a direct impact on the local economy and vice versa.

The Adult Social Care Commissioning Plan explores a model of commissioning and investment and identifies our commissioning intentions. The daughter documents set out a strategy for preventing crisis and early intervention, as well as a strategy to ensure people have access to the information and advice they need to make informed choices about their support. The strategy for Later Life is designed to ensure that the Council and its partners pursue policies and modify services which take account of, and respond to, the specific needs of older people. These strategies have clear implications for people’s housing needs. The Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy focuses on prevention, promoting wellbeing, early intervention and recovery. It has been jointly developed by NHS Darlington and Darlington Borough Council. Complementing all the above strategies are the Supporting People Services which provide housing related support to vulnerable people within the borough. The focus of these services is on acquiring and sustaining affordable accommodation and providing effective support to

enable people to live independently in the community

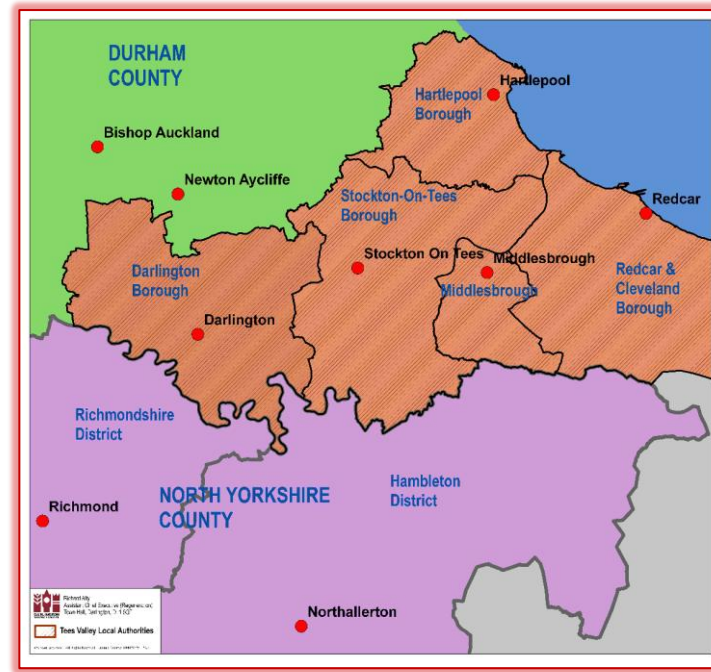
The Health and Social Care Act received Royal Assent on 27 March 2012. It transfers local health improvement functions to local authorities and gives them new functions to increase local accountability and support integration and partnership working across social care, the NHS and public health. It is widely recognised that housing conditions affect people's mental and physical health and wellbeing.

The daughter documents to this Housing Strategy include strategies for preventing homelessness, addressing the quality and standard of private sector housing (particularly private rented housing), reducing the number of empty homes and maintaining and improving the Council's own stock. The Council, as a Registered Provider of social housing, also has to have a Tenancy Policy which sets out how the Council lets and manages its own stock.

Where are we?



Location of Darlington



Darlington and neighbouring authorities

Darlington Borough is a unitary local authority area that lies at the western end of the Tees Valley, a sub-regional grouping also including the unitary authorities of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees. The Borough is regarded as the 'gateway' to the Tees Valley and the wider North East region of England, lying adjacent to the Yorkshire and Humber region, with which it shares a boundary, formed by the River Tees. Darlington station provides inter-city links to the rest of mainland Britain and Durham Tees Valley Airport provides links to Europe. The A1 motorway provides north/south links, while the A66 trunk road provides east/west links.

An examination of migration patterns for Darlington demonstrates a net inward migration, with particular housing market pressure being exerted by the neighbouring local authorities of North Yorkshire and County Durham.

Did you know?

- 1 Darlington has a population of 101,200 living in 46,100 households and the proportion of older people is growing.
- 2 The district is compact and no resident lives more than ten miles from the centre of Darlington.
- 3 There are approximately 48,500 dwellings in Darlington, 5,500 of which are Council houses.
- 4 Darlington needs approximately 5,800 new houses between 2011 and 2026. There is a particular need for: affordable housing; housing for people with disabilities; housing for older people and detached family housing.
- 5 Darlington has high average prices across all housing types compared with the rest of the Tees Valley.
- 6 Nearly 34% of the private sector stock failed the Decent Homes Standard, compared with 16% in Stockton, 35% in Hartlepool and 36% nationally.
- 7 All council housing has met the Decent Homes Standard and gone beyond that by meeting the higher Darlington Standard.
- 8 There are approximately 800 long term empty properties in Darlington (1.65% of all properties).
- 9 Darlington is a relatively prosperous town, although, there are pockets of deprivation comparable with those experienced elsewhere in the Tees Valley. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2010 analysis highlighted that ten of Darlington's 63 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) are among the worst 10% of LSOAs nationally.
- 10 Despite having higher than average house prices in the Tees Valley, Darlington residents have lower than average wages which suggests that houses are less affordable than in other parts of the Tees Valley. The Income : Price ratio makes some local housing inaccessible to local residents.

What have we done?

- ✓ Delivered the Single Housing Investment Programme (SHIP 3) – £2.6M of investment in private sector financial assistance, provision of disabled facilities grants, and energy efficiency measures over three years
- ✓ Implemented Choice Based Lettings system in partnership with the other Tees Valley Authorities in order to improve choice and better match housing needs and supply
- ✓ Completed the rebuilding of sheltered housing at Linden Court in September 2009, and the rebuilding of sheltered housing at Dinsdale Court in October 2009; a total investment of £6.5M
- ✓ In partnership with Age (UK) Limited, successfully secured match funding from Darlington PCT of £25,000 per annum for two years to appoint a Health and Energy Advisor
- ✓ Reviewed and restructured Lifeline Services to focus on supporting independence through strategic use of assistive technology along with the development of an enablement and preventative philosophy. These are delivered in partnership with the third Sector and have created both jobs and training opportunities

- ✓ Secured Kickstart Round 2 funding (£3.86m) from the Homes and Communities Agency to fund the development of Beaumont Hill which has delivered 106 two, three or four bedroomed, energy efficient, Eco-Homes offered through several home-ownership options
- ✓ Continued the improvements to sheltered housing by completing the remodelling of Windsor Court, and by improvements to Branksome Hall Drive, improvements to Rockwell House and improvements to Ted Fletcher Court. An investment of nearly £9M
- ✓ Built 65 council houses in the Borough between 2008 and 2012 supported by £2.9M of Homes and Communities Agency grant and a total investment of £7M
- ✓ The Council has invested £11.5M in kitchen, bathroom and heating replacements in the period 2008-12 within its own housing stock.
- ✓ The Council has completed the regeneration of Parkside, an investment of £3.3M over two years.
- ✓ Developed 262 units of social rented accommodation with RP's for £9m

Our challenges

- > Given that housing completions are falling short of housing requirements, how do we facilitate delivery of market housing in a period of economic recession?
- > How do we meet targets for Affordable Housing when it affects the viability of the development and public funding is in short supply?>
- > Given that the Government's austerity measures are forecast to continue throughout the lifetime of this Housing Strategy, how do we and our partners deliver more social housing with fewer resources and make best use of our existing stock to meet changing needs?
- > How do we meet the needs of gypsies and travellers for additional pitches?
- > How do we ensure housing investment contributes to the local economy?
- > In the light of increasing fuel poverty, how do we increase the energy efficiency of the housing stock?
- > Given the need to reduce CO2 emissions in the Borough by 20%, how do we increase the number of homes with renewable energy technologies installed?
- > How do we raise management standards in the private rented sector and raise the standards of accommodation offered?
- > Given that there are widespread and significant problems with the private sector housing stock, how do we improve conditions and reduce the number of non-decent homes?
- > Given that empty properties are a wasted resource, yet offer an opportunity, how do we reduce the number of long-term empties?
- > How do we ensure economic and social regeneration is included in the physical regeneration of housing estates?
- > In the light of the Government's Welfare Reforms, how do we mitigate the detrimental impacts and prevent crisis situations arising for those 20,000 residents on benefits?
- > How do we meet the needs of vulnerable people?
- > Given the forecast increase in the numbers of older people, how do we meet their specific needs? How do we support them to live independently for as long as possible, but also provide sufficient specialist housing for the elderly?

Moving Forward

These challenges sit within economic and housing landscapes which are substantially different from those of the recent past.

The banking crisis has resulted in a severe restriction on the availability of mortgages and a requirement for larger deposits from first-time buyers. According to the Government's National Housing Strategy: "A rapid contraction of lending, both to aspiring homeowners and to housebuilders, has resulted in the housing market seizing up....." This has resulted in the lowest number of houses built, annually, since 1918.

The National Housing Strategy provides new measures aimed at having an immediate impact on the housing market including: supporting a new build mortgage indemnity fund; providing funding for essential infrastructure and for firms in need of development finance; providing short-term loans to people who want to build their own homes and providing financial incentives to local authorities through the New Homes Bonus.

In terms of funding social housing, the Affordable Housing Programme introduced the most significant change for a generation. To fund new build, Registered Providers now have to convert re-lets to Affordable Rents, which are higher than Social Rents. Several Registered Providers were successful in their bids to the Government's Affordable Housing Programme 2011-13, on sites in Darlington. The AHP allocation is sufficient to support the construction of 241 dwellings in Darlington. While the new self-financing model for the Council's housing stock may release funds to build new houses in the long-term, in the short-term, the need to pay for the one-off burden of extra debt will restrict the Council's ability to fund new houses. A further issue is the impact of the government's enhanced Right to Buy programme and the possible impact on the 30 year Housing Business Plan. At this stage it is difficult to predict the scale of sales and, consequently, the financial impact through loss of resources and the cost of providing replacement accommodation. Our initial assessment suggests that we have to sell 14 council houses to break even and then sell an additional 25 dwellings to build 10 new ones. Nevertheless, the Council will undertake an options appraisal for the development of new council housing.

One way to future growth will be to make maximum use of the Borough's assets to unlock private sector investment, thereby contributing to housing numbers and creating job opportunities while, at the same time, reducing the number of empty properties and improving the housing stock. The Borough needs to promote its locational advantages, superior transport links and environmental quality, as a place to live.

The private rented sector (PRS) is increasingly being seen as an alternative tenure to homeownership and social housing. However, concern has been raised about the condition of the PRS and its ability or suitability to house those who cannot secure a mortgage or qualify for social housing. Darlington will need to build on its successful Landlord Accreditation Scheme which provides good quality properties and landlords.

Reducing emissions from the domestic sector is essential if carbon reduction targets are to be achieved. In line with the Government's Green Deal, and in partnership with several local authorities, Darlington Borough Council will retrofit: loft and cavity wall insulation; solid wall and floor insulation; draught-proofing; smart meters, energy efficient boilers and renewable energy installations. The Warm Up North regional response to the green deal will be a major driver in this agenda.

Delivery of the Strategy's objectives will require contributions from a range of agencies and organisations across all sectors. We will, therefore, build on strong relationships and develop new ones with these organisations to make best use of resources and to learn from best practice. We will use our land and assets to contribute to joint developments with registered providers and developers.

To be successful, however, we need to ensure the housing market provides greater choice, opportunity and stability for everyone and vulnerable people are supported, if necessary, to allow them to make their own choices to live independently for as long as possible.

This Housing Strategy has been informed by feedback from consultees and by the results of an Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA). However, the design and delivery of the proposed Actions also need to include appropriate consideration of equalities impact.

What will we do?

Darlington offers a range of housing to meet the needs of all residents.

Our Vision

Ambition 1:

Contribute to Darlington's economic prosperity and health and wellbeing of residents by increasing the supply of housing and improving the current stock.

Ambition 2:

Provide a framework which encourages and allows people to make their own choices to live independently for as long as possible

Our Ambitions (15 year)

Objective 1

Increase the supply of housing to meet the needs

Objective 2

Improve the sustainability of housing

Objective 3:

Improve conditions in the private housing sector

Objective 4:

Invest in the regeneration of key locations

Objective 5:

Provide good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access

Objective 6:

Provide effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups

Our Objectives (5 year)

Priority Actions

Our Actions (2 Year)

Our Priority Actions

	Objectives	Actions	Priority Actions (not in priority order) 2 Years
1	Increase the supply of housing to meet the needs	Action 1	Work with residential developers and landowners to increase the number of houses
		Action 2	Work in partnership with Registered Providers to increase the number of affordable houses
		Action 3	Increase the number of council houses
		Action 4	Increase the number of pitches for gypsies and travellers
2	Improve the sustainability of housing	Action 5	Continue to effectively manage the council's retained stock
		Action 6	Implement the Asset Management Strategy
		Action 7	Work in partnership to deliver energy efficiency measures as part of the Green Deal from 2013.
		Action 8	Publicise the free availability of water conservation measures
		Action 9	Ensure new housing meets sustainable building standards as set out in the Local Plan to be resilient to climate change
		Action 10	Prepare and adopt a Tenancy Strategy and a Tenancy Policy for the Council's own stock
		Action 11	Conduct a review of the Allocations Policy
		Action 12	Introduce enhanced role of tenant engagement
3	Improve conditions in the private housing sector	Action 13	Increase the number of accredited landlords.
		Action 14	Increase the number of houses in multiple occupation which are free from Category 1 Hazards.
		Action 15	Reduce the number of non-decent homes.
		Action 16	Prepare and adopt a Private Rented Strategy.
4	Invest in the regeneration of key locations	Action 17	Reduce the number of empty homes
		Action 18	Agree and implement a revised master plan for Central Park.
		Action 19	Implement the remodelling plans for Cockerton.
		Action 20	Prepare and agree plans to regenerate Red Hall Estate.
		Action 21	Prepare a town centre fringe area master plan.

Our Priority Actions

	Objectives	Actions	Priority Actions (not in priority order) 2 Years
5	Provide good quality and timely advice to prevent crisis, increase choice and enable access.	Action 22 Action 23	Offer support to all households adversely affected by welfare reforms Integrate appropriate houses in multiple occupation into Key Point of Access System and maintain strong links with Bond Scheme to maximise the use of private sector housing
6	Provide effective support and opportunities for vulnerable groups	Action 24 Action 25	Prepare and adopt a Supported Accommodation Strategy Update and adopt a Homelessness Strategy

How will we know if we are making progress?

Appendix 1 sets out the detailed Action Plan required to implement the 25 Actions identified above. For each Action we explain the rationale, set out the milestones and explain exactly what we and our partners will do to ensure delivery.

Appendix 2 identifies what we will be measured, how and by whom. It is expected that the Strategy's Objectives will remain valid for about five years. However, the detailed Action Plan will be reviewed annually. At that point, completed Actions will be removed and any new Actions will be added before the Action Plan is re-issued.