



**Building Safe, Sustainable Communities:  
HOUSING STRATEGY  
2011/12 to 2014/15**



## **C O N T E N T S**

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## **i Foreword**

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**By Councillor John A Wilson, Cabinet Member for Community and Leisure Services and Alison Broom, Chief Executive**

To be inserted after completion of the consultation process.

## **ii Executive Summary**

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To be inserted after CMT 24/05/11

## **1. About this Strategy**

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### What is the Purpose of the Housing Strategy?

The Strategy contributes to the key aim of “Developing Maidstone borough’s urban and rural communities as models for 21<sup>st</sup> century quality and sustainable living”<sup>1</sup>. It is an overarching plan that guides the Council and its partners in tackling the major housing challenges facing the borough. The Strategy looks ahead for four years, covering 2011-2015 to coincide with the Homes and Community Agency’s 4 year development framework.

Our ambition is to ensure that all people in the Borough have access to good quality homes that are affordable for them and meet their needs. People should be able to live in communities that are clean and healthy, are pleasant to live in and within which they feel safe. In seeking to achieve this aim our actions will not be directed purely at the affordable housing sector but on influencing the whole of the housing market. Every council has a responsibility to understand what matters most to its local communities and to respond to this through investment, service planning and delivery. We also have to take into account national and regional aspirations and sometimes this requires a balance with local priorities.

The Council cannot achieve all of the priorities contained in this Strategy without working in partnership with other statutory and voluntary organisations, including the Housing Sounding Board, elected Members and a broad range of stakeholders and partners. (A list of our partners can be found at [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk))

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<sup>1</sup> Maidstone Borough Council Sustainable Community Strategy

## **2. National Context**

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### **New Political Leadership**

Britain has been going through a state of change having just come out of a recession and entering a new political environment. The election in May 2010 resulted in a hung parliament and a subsequent coalition government forming between the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Parties. The coalition government has stated their top priority is cutting Britain's budget deficit, "with the main burden of deficit reduction borne by reduced spending rather than increased taxes".

In May 2010, the Government published 'The Coalition: our programme for government' which outlined the key policy areas, with an emphasis on 'freedom, fairness and responsibility' creating the Big Society, giving citizens, communities and local government a central role in enabling a new approach to sustainable, low carbon economic growth. To enable some of these changes, the Government has introduced the Localism Bill to devolve greater powers to Councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities greater influence over budgets, housing and planning decisions

### **Planning and Housing**

The Government is undertaking reforms to the planning system with the aim of giving neighbourhoods more ability to decide what the local area in which they live should look like, within a strategic framework provided by the Local Development Framework Core Strategy. Local people will determine where best to build the new homes and the local facilities they know are necessary to make their communities successful. The Community Right to Build will allow an application for planning permission to go ahead where there is overwhelming community support for the project. Regional Strategies will be abolished and decision-making on matters such as housing targets and planning are now made by local Councils in the Core Strategy and related documents. Changes to the national planning framework for planning policies are also to be introduced in the future.

A range of significant changes are proposed to social housing tenure and other reforms to existing housing legislation, including access to affordable housing. As a result changes will be made to the way social housing is delivered with public investment in affordable housing being more targeted.

### **Localism Bill**

The Localism Bill has been introduced to enable many of the changes proposed above. The bill proposes to give council's a general power of competence, whereby as long as an activity is not unlawful, they are empowered to carry it out if they wish to. Community groups and social enterprise organisations will be encouraged to have an active role, including taking over and delivering public services.

The bill also brings changes to social housing, allowing Local Authorities greater freedom to set their own lettings policies and for housing providers to offer tenancies on a fixed term basis rather than the previous policy of a home for life. This will allow Local Authorities to ensure that the housing supply is used where it is most needed. The bill will also allow Local Authorities to meet their homelessness duty by placing someone in suitable private rented housing.

The Community right to build will give groups of local people the right to bring forward small developments including new homes, businesses and shops, the profits from which remain in the community. The Bill also introduces a requirement for developers to consult communities prior to submitting planning applications for large scale developments giving local people a real say in their area.

### **3. Local context**

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#### **Maidstone the place**

Maidstone is an exceptionally green Borough with a number of parks, the largest of which is Mote Park, which is Grade II on the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and home to thriving rugby and cricket clubs. There are numerous smaller parks and squares within the town and villages which have benefited from a major playground and sports facility investment programme in recent years. We recognise the importance of maintaining a quality environment for residents including our heritage and conservation areas. The attractive country side offers high quality landscape and biodiversity and a wide range of informal recreation opportunities.

Maidstone Borough is considered a good place to live and work with high rates of employment, relatively low levels of adults claiming incapacity benefits and a higher proportion of residents who have a degree than the South East average. Larger numbers of people commute into than out of the Borough. The Borough has a very mixed business sector with large numbers of small and medium size businesses with particular strengths in professional services (law and accountancy) and construction. There is a growing media industry led by Maidstone Studios and the Kent Messenger Group. Maidstone has an extensive further education campus (Mid Kent College) and a growing higher education offer with both the University for the Creative Arts and Mid Kent College seeking to increase their range of courses and facilities. Residents living in the Borough have relatively high wages (although many higher earners commute out of the Borough to achieve these). Maidstone came out as the top destination for business in the 2010 study of locations for business in Kent.

Maidstone's Local Strategic Partnership has carried out work in 2010 looking at how public money is spent locally. They have identified that £602 million has been spent in Maidstone in 2010 by various bodies including Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Kent Police and the local Primary Care

Trust. Just over 35% of the money is spent on health and social well-being, nearly 17% is spent on education and 15% on housing.

### **Maidstone Sustainable Community Strategy 2009-2020:**

The Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS) is the topmost level of policymaking in the Council. Our SCS was published in April 2009, and it contains the following vision and long term objectives for the Borough agreed with our partners:

***"We want Maidstone Borough to be a vibrant, prosperous 21st century urban and rural community at the heart of Kent, where its distinctive character is enhanced to create a safe, healthy, excellent environment with high quality education and employment where all people can realise their aspirations".***

In Maidstone sustainable communities mean a place where people want to live and work, now and in the future. We involve the local community in a range of ways to ensure that people can share their views housing services, and priorities for service development. We already encourage our housing services customers to tell us what they think and suggest how we can do things better, for example through stakeholder meetings, community events (e.g. annual Housing Stakeholders Event) and public consultation events for policy changes e.g. choice based lettings, housing needs review. We continue to look for other ways to improve customer involvement and particularly where there may be communication barriers. It is important that we continue to engage with our residents and customers to ensure our knowledge remains up to date and we can respond to changes in local issues.

### **Population and household change<sup>2</sup>**

South-East Plan<sup>3</sup> population projections indicate that Maidstone's population will increase by around 13.2% between 2010 and 2026, which represents an increase of 19,520 people.

Regeneration is vital to transform the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the Borough and the need to integrate new developments with existing communities is critical. Two of our neighbouring authorities are the 'Growth Areas' of Ashford and the Thames Gateway: huge public and private investment in housing, the economy and the environment is being channelled into these areas and there is a risk that Maidstone will be left behind if its offer to investors and entrepreneurs does not improve.

Estimates of housing need are provided by Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMAs)<sup>4</sup>. Maidstone's SHMA was published in April 2010 and

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all data in this section is derived from Maidstone Borough Council Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) 2010. Go to [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk)

<sup>3</sup> This regional planning document will be abolished by the Localism Act

following the methodology set out in SHMA practice guidance, there is estimated to be an annual need for 1,081 affordable units in Maidstone borough area.

<b>Summary of housing needs assessment model</b>	
<b><i>Element</i></b>	<b><i>Number</i></b>
Current need	339
Current supply	237
<b>Net current need</b>	<b>102</b>
Future need	1531
Future supply	552
<b>Net future need</b>	<b>979</b>
<b>Total net annual need</b>	<b>1081</b>
Total gross annual need	1870
Total gross annual supply	789
<b>Total net annual need</b>	<b>1081</b>

### **Tenure mix**

Maidstone Borough Council has regularly kept up to date on the levels of housing need in the borough, with the most recent Strategic Housing Needs Survey being reported in March 2010. The supply and demand analysis that sits alongside the SHMA gives helpful information on mismatches between the supply of certain types of homes and the demand for them locally.

The housing market is considered balanced if the local population is adequately accommodated. A household is considered adequately housed currently unless:

- They are in unsuitable housing (as defined by CLG Guidance) and cannot resolve this unsuitability without moving to a new property;
- Their property is overcrowded (according to the bedroom standard).

Currently about 5.5% of households are classified as inadequately housed. Lone parent households are the household group least likely to reside in adequate accommodation, with multiple pensioner households the most likely. Pending final agreement on local house building targets, the following analysis is based on the previous South-East Plan target of 11,080 homes.

### **Affordable housing**

Affordable housing refers to a range of tenures that includes socially rented, intermediate or affordable rent and a variety of shared ownership products.

The SHMA suggests that there is a need for affordable housing of all sizes, and a significant need for rural homes. Smaller (one and two bedroom) units account for almost 45% of the need, but larger (three and four bedroom) homes comprise over 55% of need. Opportunities for securing family sized

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<sup>4</sup> SHMAs were introduced in November 2006, with final guidance on how to undertake a SHMA published in August 2007.



accommodation (typically 3+ bedrooms) must be maximised where site and scheme particulars allow.

At present the Maidstone Affordable Housing Development Plan Document requires developers to provide 40% affordable housing on sites of 15 units or 0.5 hectare or greater. Within the 40%, the tenure split is expected to be 60/40 socially rented/intermediate tenure accommodation respectively. As the Core Strategy is developed further, more flexibility concerning the proportion of affordable housing may be needed to ensure development viability.

### **Flexible tenure**

Flexible tenure allows shared owners to decrease their equity in their home, potentially selling all their equity and becoming assured tenants. For landlords flexible tenure is optional but strongly encouraged. Flexible tenure is not a legal right and is pendant on a financial assessment. The money realised through decreasing equity can only be used to clear mortgage arrears.

Maidstone BC responded to the '**Local Decisions; a fairer future for social housing**' consultation document and made the following comments in relation to flexible tenure: MBC welcomes the ability to make better use of social housing stock which should promote mobility and help to reduce under occupation; however, this should not be at the expense of creating balanced and sustainable communities nor should it act as a disincentive to tenants obtaining employment and self improvement.

### **Lifetime Homes**

A Lifetime Home should be accessible and incorporate built-in or designed provision for a range of adaptations that will respond to the needs of any member of the household who has, or develops a disability or impairment, which could include the need to use a wheelchair within the home. Maidstone Borough Council expects affordable dwellings to be constructed to full Lifetime Homes Standards.

Dwellings built to wheelchair housing standards are designed specifically to meet the diverse and changing needs of wheelchair users and the multiplicity of impairments that some wheelchair users experience. Lifetime Homes, while suitable and offering choice for some people with impairments will not have the additional spatial requirements all wheelchair users need to access every room and facility of the dwelling in order to maximise their potential for independence. Therefore the Council will seek a proportion of new affordable dwellings to be designed for full wheelchair use to respond to the needs of housing applicants who are in need of wheelchair accessible housing. The detailed design and specification requirements of wheelchair housing will be sourced from relevant specific guidance documents.

#### 4. The Corporate Priorities:

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The Council has identified the following three priorities and six outcomes to deliver the vision for Maidstone over the next four years:

<b>Priorities</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>
1. For Maidstone to have a growing economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• A transport network that supports the local economy</li><li>• A growing economy with rising employment, catering for a range of skill sets to meet the demands of the local economy</li></ul>
2. For Maidstone to be a decent place to live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Decent, affordable housing in the right places across a range of tenures</li><li>• Continues to be a clean and attractive environment for people who live in and visit to Borough</li></ul>
3. Corporate and Customer Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Residents are not disadvantaged because of where they live or who they are, vulnerable people are assisted and the level of deprivation is reduced</li><li>• The Council will continue to have value for money services that residents are satisfied with</li></ul>

We want Maidstone to be a place where people enjoy where they live and a key part of this will be having access to affordable and decent housing as we understand that good housing promotes educational attainment, better health outcomes and employment opportunities. Decent means housing that meets residents' needs in terms of availability and size as well as meeting the national decent homes standard.

Housing in Maidstone town has traditionally been considered relatively affordable compared to the south east average, but this is not the case in rural Maidstone and for those on average or low incomes, home repossession is likely to become more frequent as a result of the recent economic climate. Maidstone has a fairly low level of households living in temporary accommodation provided under the homelessness legislation compared to the other districts in Kent and a significantly lower level than the average for England according to the 2010 Health Profile. The numbers have dropped each year. Maidstone is consistently above target for homelessness prevention.

## 5. Delivery through Partnership

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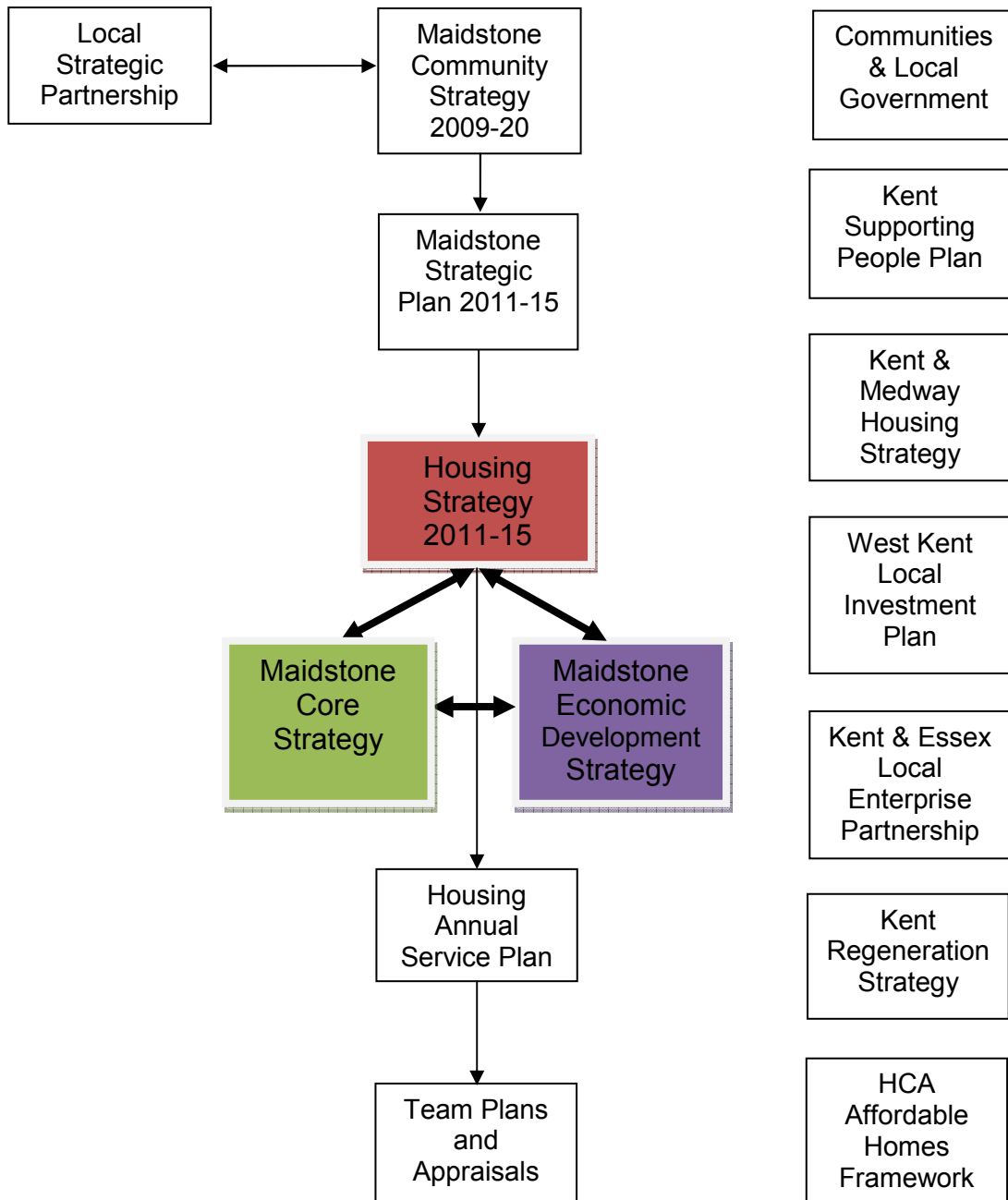
Maidstone Borough Council believes that partnership is the underlying principle of community planning and fundamental to the delivery of this strategy. Over the next four years we will ensure that partnerships continue to be developed to ensure that they focus on priorities and make effective use of resources. The Council is committed to working with key stakeholders to assist in meeting local housing needs.

Three key partnerships are:

- The Kent Housing Group, set up to represent Kent's housing bodies, providing a 'Kent voice' to regional and national bodies. The aims of the Kent Housing Group are to:
  - **Provide strategic leadership - shaping and setting the housing agenda;**
  - **To build relationships and influence decisions for the benefit of Kent;**
  - **To draw in resources from both traditional and alternative sources.**
  - **To work together to improve the supply and quality of affordable homes.**
  - **To create sustainable communities in Kent.**
- the Kent Rural Housing Partnership, set up to enable borough and district Councils across Kent to work closely with Rural Housing Providers, and access Housing Corporation funding;
- West Kent Local Investment Plan - The Council, together with Tunbridge Wells, Tonbridge & Malling and Sevenoaks Councils and the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) have progressed the West Kent Local Investment Plan (LIA). The LIP is an agreed sub-regional investment programme which will determine where HCA and LA investments and interventions will be made. The process has aimed to ensure that all the partners are joined up and working to the same objectives, and that these reflect the HCA's objectives. . The West Kent LIP was agreed by all the partners in February 2011 and submitted in March 2011. The LIP was submitted in time to form the basis for the latest bidding round of the Affordable Homes Programme.

A full list of partners with whom the Council works on matters relevant to the Housing Strategy can be viewed at [www.maidstone.gov.uk](http://www.maidstone.gov.uk) .

## 6. How the Housing Strategy links with other plans and strategies



## **7. Our Housing Priorities and objectives**

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### **Priority 1 – Increase choice and improve the quality of life for vulnerable people**

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**Outcome: Ensure that vulnerable people are able to access the support they need at a time when they require it to help reduce homelessness, offending and reoffending, anti-social behaviour and admission to hospital or nursing care.**

#### **Why is this important to Maidstone?**

There are a considerable number of households in Maidstone that are unable to meet their immediate housing needs or who need support to enable them to live independently within the community. Overall there are an estimated 10,399 households in Maidstone Borough with one or more vulnerable people– this represents 17.0% of all households. The essential characteristics are households with support needs are:

- Housing need
- Low income
- Housing affordability
- Unsuitable housing
- Tenure

Households unable to access support when required are more likely to disengage with services and suffer ill health. This will be detrimental to education and employment opportunities, resulting in further inequality and isolation. We aim to make sure residents are supported to maintain their independence, minimising the need for more intensive institutional or residential type care.

Population projections indicate a significant increase in the retired population in Maidstone up to 2021 and beyond. Our ageing population will have an impact on private sector housing in the future and the Council has consequently identified as a strategic housing priority the requirement to address the housing needs generated by an ageing population.

Key to meeting vulnerable peoples' needs is the Supporting People programme, which provides a range of services and supported accommodation. We play an active role in the development and delivery of the Supporting People Programme for Kent. As a member of the Commissioning Body and Core Strategy Group we helped develop the current Five Year Strategy, as well as increasing specialist housing such as the new teenage-pregnancy supported housing project.

The SHMA 2010 found that, when given the choice, an overwhelming majority of disabled persons would prefer physical adaptations to remain in their home. Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG's) are mandatory for disabled residents regardless of tenure, to enable them to gain better access, move around freely or use the essential facilities within the home.

<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review DGF grant regime in order to ensure that the most value for money is gained from DGF grant</li> </ul>	MBC Change & Improvement Team KCC OT Bureau	Review completed by Autumn 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the role of the HIA in the delivery of Mandatory DFGs</li> </ul>	HIA HCA Supporting People Team	Review services by Autumn 2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Following the Southwark judgement work with Kent Social Services to jointly commission new forms of temporary accommodation and long-term solutions to youth homelessness</li> </ul>	Joint Policy & Planning Board; KCC; housing providers	Review annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>housing is a key risk factor to preventing offending behaviour; and Maidstone hosts a number of criminal justice establishments. It is in the community's interest to find solutions that reduces the likelihood of offending</li> </ul>	JPPB sub group on offenders & housing; Kent Probation; Youth Offender Service; outreach services	Review annually
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assist the SNP in developing and delivering an action plan to support survivors of domestic violence</li> </ul>	Maidstone Safer Neighbourhood Partnership	To be confirmed

## **Priority 2 – Develop sustainable communities**

**Outcome: The long-term balance of the housing market in the borough is improved to reflect local need and demand including an increase in the supply of affordable rented and shared ownership homes.**

### **Why is this important to Maidstone?**

The right mix of high quality housing in the right places contributes to social mobility across and within tenures and helps generate inward investment. People have different housing needs at different stages of their lives, and ensuring that people have the opportunity to access the right home for their needs at the right time means that real housing choices are available. The quality of a person's life is greatly influenced by the quality of their home. Good housing provides an economic impetus not only during construction, but thereafter by providing a secure base from which to seek employment and training

The need for affordable housing consistently emerges as a high priority in district-wide consultation. This is particularly important in the current climate where housing costs are high relative to income and large deposits are needed to purchase a property.

<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Targets</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Draft a Tenancy Strategy for the Borough in full consultation with partner RPs and other stakeholders</li> </ul>	West Kent LIP Partnership, RSLs, developers Action for Rural Communities in Kent HCA, KHG, RSLs	September
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring forward LIP Phase 1 sites</li> <li>Consider /research formation of housing delivery vehicle e.g. Local Housing Company link to Kent &amp; Medway strategy</li> <li>Review the Affordable Housing DPD</li> </ul>	HCA RPs West Kent LIP Partnership West Kent Development Forum	2011-13  By end 2011  By end 2011

**Outcome: A core strategy is adopted that delivers a range of market and affordable housing to meet a spectrum of need.**

Why is this important to Maidstone?

The foundation of a sustainable community and a thriving economy is the supply of good housing that is attractive and desirable to existing households and those that are economically mobile.

We want Maidstone to be a place where developers want to invest and our SHMA has indicated that we need a range of housing as set out in the table below.

<b>Tenure</b>	<b>Number of households</b>	<b>Percentage of households</b>
Market	55,726	83.2%
Intermediate	2,053	3.1%
Social rented	9,234	13.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,013</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

The table indicates that for the remaining period to 2026, to achieve the above tenure mix, around 62% of newly constructed dwellings should be market accommodation, around 21% social rented dwellings and around 17% intermediate housing, making a total of 38% affordable housing.

<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Targets</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure LDF/Core Strategy provides an appropriate policy framework</li> <li>• Engage with the Planning Policy and Development Control teams to bring forward the delivery of new housing</li> </ul>	Housing developers, land owners	2026, but reviewed on an annual basis to ensure progress is being made

**Outcome: The housing and related needs of people in rural areas are addressed**

### **Why is this important to Maidstone?**

Nearly 28,000 households (45% of all households in Maidstone BC) live in our rural areas. Maidstone BC is committed to ensuring that the rural areas of the borough remain vibrant and sustainable places to live. The availability of housing affordable to local people of all income levels is critical to achieving this. The 2010 SHMA showed that the highest income to purchase and private rental prices are in the rural areas in the borough and that levels of need for affordable homes are high in the rural parts of the borough, including the five main rural 'service centres'.

The rural affordable local-needs housing policy allows the development of affordable local-needs homes outside the built confines of villages where open market homes would not normally be permitted. Homes are restricted to occupation by people with local connections in perpetuity.

<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Targets</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure LDF/Core Strategy provides an appropriate policy framework</li> <li>• Complete the programme of rural housing needs surveys</li> </ul>	Action for Rural Communities in Kent Registered Providers Parish Councils HCA	18-24 months 10 affordable homes on rural exception sites Complete two surveys by 31/3/12

**Outcome: The housing needs of the gypsy and traveller community are addressed**

### **Why is this important to Maidstone?**

Maidstone Borough contains 168 legally authorised gypsy pitches. The most recent Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) for Maidstone Borough was



published in 2006, carried out as part of a wider study involving three neighbouring Local Authorities. The GTAA recommended that 32 new pitches should be built in Maidstone Borough in the 2006-2011 period which equates to an additional public site. This has been included in the identified housing need and will form part of the 40% affordable housing provision. This will require developers to make an offsite contribution from housing developments.

<b>What we plan to do</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Targets</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure LDF/Core Strategy provides an appropriate policy framework</li> <li>• Start on site</li> </ul>	Planning Policy HCA RPs	By 2012  By 2014

### **Priority 3 – Improve our existing homes**

**Outcome: Homeowners and private landlords are encouraged and supported to maintain and repair their homes; the grant programme is targeted to achieve community benefit e.g. nomination rights**

#### **Why is this important to Maidstone?**

Poor quality housing is known to have a detrimental effect on a household’s health, educational and emotional wellbeing. With nearly 86% of Maidstone’s housing stock in private ownership (both owner-occupied and privately rented), the borough has had to formulate mechanisms to tackle poor conditions including poor heating, overcrowding, improve energy efficiency and enable vulnerable and disabled households to remain in their homes. At the same time we must ensure that standards are maintained in the existing private rented sector and ensure that any investment results in a benefit to the Council and the residents of Maidstone.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engage small landlords to work with the council to improve the condition and management of their property through the accreditation scheme</li> <li>• Annual Landlords Forum</li> </ul>	National Landlords Association	

**Outcome: Use of existing stock is maximised by empty homes being brought back into use.**

#### **Why is this Important to Maidstone?**

The SHMA indicates that over 70% of households are in the owner-occupied sector, Whilst overcrowding in Maidstone is not problematical (some 1.9% of households are overcrowded, lower than the latest national and regional estimates from the Survey of English Housing of 2.7% and 2.0% respectively), the household survey indicates that in Maidstone 39.5% of households are under-occupied. Under-occupation is not evenly spread, with nearly half (45.4%) of all properties in rural parts of Maidstone Borough under-occupied compared to 34.7% in the urban area.

Whilst all social housing landlords operate some form of tenant incentive scheme to enable tenants in larger family accommodation to move to more suitable property, there are few incentives for elderly owner occupiers in large unsuitable houses to move into smaller accommodation. The SHMA indicates that relatively few older owner occupiers are intending to move to more suitable housing in the next two years due mainly to a perceived lack of choice.

Actions	Key Partners	Target
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bring Empty Property units back into use through grant activity and the RDBS</li> <li>Update the Empty homes strategy</li> </ul>	No Use Empty initiative CEN	

**Outcome: Energy efficiency fuel poverty have improved across all tenures**

**Why is this important to Maidstone?**

New housing has to make minimum impact on the environment. As well as national targets for carbon-neutral development, and regional plans and policies which include more specific requirements for ensuring sustainability, Maidstone seeks level 3 of the Code for Sustainable Homes on all new homes, or 'very good' under the EcoHomes Standard, and it is already a requirement for all new affordable homes.

In Maidstone around 4,230 properties (8.2%) are in fuel poverty. With an average household size of 2.32 persons, there are nearly 10,000 persons (1 in 15) living in fuel poverty in Maidstone. Fuel poverty is a result of the interaction of three factors – household incomes, energy prices and energy efficiency in homes. It is estimated that nationally a 1% rise in energy prices forces around 40,000 households into fuel poverty. A household is considered to be in fuel poverty if it needs to spend more than 10% of its income on energy costs to achieve an adequate level of warmth. Fuel poverty is strongly associated with single parent, elderly and economically vulnerable households.

Actions	Key Partners	Target
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase the average energy</li> </ul>		

efficiency of homes in the Borough • Tackle “hard to heat” & “hard to treat homes” in rural areas		
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**Priority 4- Improve access to housing advice and work to prevent homelessness and rough sleeping in Maidstone**

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**Outcome: There is an improvement in the quality and range of information relating to advice services that results in more households being prevented from becoming homeless**

**Why is this important to Maidstone?**

The Council has a duty to ensure that advice and information about housing, homelessness and the prevention of homelessness are available free to anyone in the district. We want to ensure that everyone is able to access this advice when they need it in a way that is convenient for them.

In June 2010 the new Government announced changes to the housing benefits (HB) system, with the intention of saving £1.1b over 4 years. Housing Services monitor local market rent levels in respect of Local Housing Allowance payable, and will monitor the effects of these changes closely, including whether we experience an increase in applicants from London, or other more expensive parts of the South-East.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review our use of IT in the provision of housing advice.</li> <li>Review how we can improve the accessibility of our housing options services.</li> </ul>	Kent Homechoice Housing DCLG stakeholders	Within Year 1 of strategy

**Outcome: Work to prevent homelessness and end the need to sleep rough in Maidstone.**

**Why is this important to Maidstone?**

The Government is committed to tackling and preventing homelessness and so is Maidstone Borough Council. Activities aimed at the prevention of homelessness have a wide reaching benefit, including reducing the need for other agency services and costs to public finances as well as the obvious savings to the Council made from reduced use of Bed & Breakfast accommodation.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with our partners to increase the effectiveness of the Rent Deposit Bond Scheme.</li> <li>• Review the need to set up an emergency open access hostel</li> <li>• Develop and promote a Private Homeowner Incentive Scheme</li> </ul>	Housing Benefit, CAB, Shelter and Maidstone Mediation Supported housing providers Porchlight Day Centre	On-going

**Outcome: Access to affordable housing is improved and the range of housing options available to applicants is increased.**

### **Why is this important to Maidstone?**

Our Choice Based Lettings scheme, Kent Homechoice, has allowed households on the Housing Register to state an interest and 'bid' for the social housing available for rent. Priority is then given to the household bidding that has the highest level of need who has been on the list longest. In addition to advertising social rented properties on the Kent Homechoice website, we now include homes available for low cost home ownership and new mobility indicators highlight those homes which are adapted or particularly suitable for wheelchair users. In the future we are also looking to include the private rented homes of accredited landlords through Home Choice to provide a greater range of housing to households seeking alternative accommodation. However, we need to review whether this system is working for those in the greatest need and continues to provide value for money. The Allocation Scheme will be reviewed following the enactment of the Localism Bill and this provides an opportune time to evaluate the choice based lettings approach.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Target</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review the housing allocation</li> <li>• Develop Maidstone's approach to the Kent-wide Single Assessment Scheme</li> <li>• Review whether Choice Based Lettings is still the best way of people accessing social housing</li> </ul>	Kent Homechoice Housing stakeholders Service users	Autumn 2011

## **9. Implementation and Monitoring arrangements**

The Housing Department operates within a Council-wide performance management system which is structured around effective political and managerial leadership, a clear vision, action centred service planning, regular performance reporting and constructive challenge

To ensure that the Housing Strategy is delivered, the Council will review and monitor the Action Plan through various methods:

- The Housing Consultative Board is a Member constituted body responsible for advising Cabinet on all housing issues.
- Housing Sounding Board (HSB). The HSB will review the Action Plans and produce an annual Position Statement.
- Housing Services performance indicators reported quarterly to Senior Management Team, Portfolio Holder and Cabinet.
- Satisfaction surveys – Housing Services seeks the views of our customers and stakeholders through questionnaires.

Following the streamlining of the Council's priorities and objectives for the next four years the performance indicators that form part of the Council's performance plan have been reduced. A new balanced scorecard approach has been adopted this year across the performance management processes including reach the summit and strategic plan. The balanced scorecard approach seeks to measure performance in a more rounded and balanced fashion with indicators across four areas:

- Finance
- Learning and Growth
- Customer
- Internal Processes

<b>Performance Scorecard</b>		
<b>Element</b>	<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Customer	Percentage of residential planning applications granted a) Urban area b) Rural	Quarterly
	Average time taken to process residential planning applications	Quarterly
	Percentage of planning applications determined within statutory timescales (a Majors, b) Minors, c) Others	Quarterly
Internal process	Number of affordable homes delivered	Quarterly
	Number of homes made decent	Quarterly
	Percentage of new homes built on previously developed land (Location and Environment)	Annual
Finance	Average grant per MBC funded affordable home unit	Quarterly
	Cost of planning per head of population	Annual
Learning & Growth	Housing Strategy	Bi-annual
	Tenancies Policy (TBC)	Bi-annual