



Housing

Where we are now

Most people in East Sussex are adequately housed in decent accommodation, and there are more owner-occupiers in the county than the national average.¹ However house prices have increased substantially over recent years making owner occupation less achievable for many households. Those that cannot afford to or choose not to buy their own home rely on the private rented sector or social rented housing. In 2007, the average price for a semi-detached house exceeded £200,000² with prices much higher in Lewes, parts of Rother and Wealden. High house prices and low average salaries make it difficult for many local people to compete with those moving from higher priced areas outside East Sussex. For example, someone in Rother may need to borrow up to 10 times the average county salary to buy a home there, compared to a national average of 6.9.³ There is therefore a need to develop affordable alternatives to outright purchase.

A countywide housing needs survey suggests that an extra 2,270 affordable homes, predominantly for rent, are needed each year to keep up with demand.⁴ This is 70% more than the total planned housing development in East Sussex⁵ as set out in the South East Plan which proposes 27,000 new homes by 2026.⁶ We have met targets for building on used land and housing density⁷, but not for affordable housing. However, building new homes is not the only solution. We should also improve housing by improving existing housing stock and developing alternatives to traditional purchasing and rental options. Nationally, 35% of private sector housing does not meet the Decent Homes Standard and a significant proportion of social housing falls short of this Standard. The proportion of private rented properties that are occupied by vulnerable people ranges from 3% in Wealden to 9% in Hastings. There are 8,500 empty properties in East Sussex, 3.7% of the entire housing stock.⁸ Local councils are tackling these issues through a range of policies, financial assistance and enforcement activities including a countywide Empty Homes strategy. Homelessness is an issue in all parts of the county. The District and Borough Councils are working to prevent people becoming homeless by providing accommodation, advice and assistance. Whilst the number of people registered as homeless has fallen⁹, hidden homelessness remains high, with young people and others 'sofa surfing' and evidence of rough sleeping continuing in some areas.

The Supporting People programme is critical to the success of this work. Since 2003, housing authorities, health, social care, probation and voluntary groups have enabled housing-related support to be delivered to a range of vulnerable people through this programme.¹⁰ We need to do more to support older people, people with learning disabilities and mental health concerns for example to live independently. We also need to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers¹¹ whilst striking a balance with the needs of the settled community.

The Challenges Ahead

Meeting the needs of homeless and vulnerable people, and delivering sufficient affordable housing are key challenges. But building houses and improving housing assets is not enough to create sustainable communities. Other infrastructure is needed such as schools, health facilities and roads. Green spaces and communal areas can help create a sense of place and community and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. As people live longer and more people choose to live alone, housing needs will continue to change. More needs to happen to tackle fuel poverty and climate change by making houses more efficient. All new grant funded social housing in the county will adopt the principles of sustainable construction and meet level 3 of the new Code for Sustainable Homes. We also need to manage the risk of flooding and coastal erosion.

Our strategic priority for 2026 is to provide affordable, good quality and environmentally friendly homes and housing for all

Our key tasks will be to:

- Increase the supply of homes and increase and diversify the supply of affordable homes, housing and tenures in all areas, both rural and urban
- Develop high quality, modern and efficient health, social care and housing support services for older people
- Minimise homelessness, especially hidden and youth homelessness
- Improve the quality of existing homes and help bring empty homes back into use to help people in housing need
- Increase energy and water efficiency of new and existing homes
- Plan infrastructure needs alongside housing developments, and ensure new developments do not increase flood risk
- Extend number and range of people receiving housing-related support
- Enable new sites to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

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¹ East Sussex County Council. Focus on East Sussex 2007 Annual Monitor (ESiF)

² “ “ “

³ East Sussex County Council: East Sussex in Figures – Table: Median Affordability Ratio 1997-2006 Districts

⁴ East Sussex Regional Assembly. South East Plan 2006-2026 (new Homes for east Sussex – SEERA – Table 9 proposed district housing provisions, existing structure plan requirements, and actual building rates)

⁵ East Sussex Regional Assembly. South East plan 2006-2026

⁶ East Sussex County Council. Focus on East Sussex 2007 Annual Monitor (ESiF) and South East Plan 2006-2026

⁷ East Sussex County Council. Focus on East Sussex 2007 Annual Monitor (ESiF)

⁸ East Sussex County Council: East Sussex in Figures

⁹ East Sussex County Council. Focus on East Sussex 2007 Annual Monitor (ESiF)

¹⁰ East Sussex County Council. East Sussex Supporting People Programme: Eligibility Survey 2006

¹¹ East Sussex and Brighton and Hove. Gypsy and Traveller Study: Executive summary 2005