



# Somerset Strategic Housing Framework 2018 - 2022



## Priorities and Ambitions for Homes and Housing in Somerset CONSULTATION DRAFT - FEBRUARY 2018

Deadline for comments: 30th April 2018



SSDC planting, courtesy of SSDC and Stonewater



Housing in Taunton



Cottages in West Somerset

# Consultation on our strategic housing priorities

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Left: National Citizens Service (NCS) Summer 2017 Project, Lyngford Park Children's Play Area, courtesy of TDBC

Right: Blackthorn Gardens, 'Pocket Park', courtesy of TDBC

## Why do we need a strategic housing framework and who is it for?

Local authorities have a broad role to play in supporting and regulating the housing sector. All agencies, including the NHS and Social Care are impacted by issues of housing availability, quality and suitability. The economy relies on a sufficient supply of housing in order to attract and retain a skilled workforce.

Tackling our housing crisis is not something that one service or organisation can achieve alone. Everyone's budgets are under pressure, with demand for our services on the increase. Providing leadership and direction is now critical. It is also more important than ever to have effective partnerships built on trust and mutual respect. This Strategic Housing Framework will help us to galvanise the necessary leadership, and make sure that we are working with the right partners and that we are each supporting each other to achieve our ambitions.

We also aim to make our services simple to access and provide support that really works. At the same time, we have to be realistic about the challenges that we face and prioritise the limited resources that we have. We wish this document to be a catalyst to enable people and communities to help themselves by making sure that people know what we do and what they can expect from us.



**Ric Pallister OBE**

South Somerset District Council, Chair of SSHP



**Terry Beale**

Taunton Deane Borough Council



**Andrew Gilling**

Sedgemoor District Council



**Keith Turner**

West Somerset Council



**Nigel Woollcombe-Adams**

Mendip District Council

## Consultation on our strategic housing priorities for Somerset

The Somerset Strategic Housing Framework is prepared by the Somerset Strategic Housing Partnership (SSHP), comprising representation from the five Somerset local housing authorities, Housing Associations, Exmoor National Park and the County Council including Adult Social Care, Public Health and Strategic Planning.

The process of developing this Framework began in 2017. We produced a 'Housing Benchmarking Report' that established key data and facts relating to the local housing market. We used this and other evidence to produce district based and county wide Housing Market Profiles. These were published in July 2017, which coincided with a 'stakeholder conference' where 100+ people representing the local housing market met to discuss key topics of concern, and to suggest possible priorities and ideas. This information can be accessed via [www.mendip.gov.uk/somersethousingstrategy](http://www.mendip.gov.uk/somersethousingstrategy). We have now gathered and analysed all this information to shape the content of this draft Housing Framework which seeks to identify the key priorities and ambitions for housing within Somerset.

We now welcome feedback and comment. Have we highlighted the relevant issues and challenges? Have we proposed the correct priorities and ambitions? Are some more important than others? Have you any suggestions on how we may progress these priorities and ambitions, through specific actions?

At the end of this document we ask questions concerning specific aspects of housing. There are also a range of more general questions. All questions, together with details of how to respond, can be found on page 17.

The closing date for responding is **April 30<sup>th</sup> 2018**.

## Introduction

The Somerset Strategic Housing Framework comprises the housing strategy and district based housing action plans for the County of Somerset. The Framework sets out the strategic direction for housing activity in the County, dealing with housing need, supply and our approach to quality and management of existing and new housing stock. It enables us to have clear multi-agency ambitions on how to tackle the major housing issues that affect the people of Somerset. There are a range of partners involved to help solve these issues, including residents, local voluntary and community sector, housing associations, district councils, the county council (including public health, adult social care), developers, planning agents, private landlords and their agents, and government and their associated partners.

The current Framework was published in 2013 and is in need of review. We now need to identify our priorities and ambitions for the next five years, and decide how we should focus our combined resources.

Since we last reviewed the Somerset Strategic Housing Framework, the government has recognised housing as a top national priority and has introduced a flurry of legislation and policy (with more to follow):

- Welfare Reform & Work Act (2016) – universal credit; capping of benefits; 1% rent reduction on social housing; freeze on Local Housing Allowance; spare room subsidy etc
- Housing and Planning Act (2016) – empowered the Government to introduce Right to Buy for Housing Association tenants; phasing out of life-time tenancies; Starter Homes etc
- Housing White Paper (2017) – various measures to empower local authorities to deliver more homes through the town and country planning system; housing infrastructure fund etc
- Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) to be soon followed by a revised code of guidance – extension of prevention duties
- Stamp Duty (2017) – to be removed for first time buyers buying a property under £300k

Some of these changes have presented opportunities. The Homelessness Reduction Act will enable the delivery of more effective prevention services to support those at risk of homelessness. But funding remains a concern. The Housing and Planning Act provides additional powers to deal with rogue landlords. Other initiatives such as 'Help to Buy' enables first time buyers to access a deposit for a mortgage.

But many of these changes present real challenges. House prices have risen steadily faster than earnings during the past five years. Building activity from the Housing Association sector has slowed down due to concern around a number of issues such as reduced rental income, the impact of welfare reform and the availability of support services. Meanwhile, homelessness and rough sleeping remain major concerns.

In response to the national housing crisis, the Chancellor's Autumn Statement announced a range of further measures relating to planning and housing. We will be watching closely as further details are released in order to evaluate the impact of these initiatives and take advantage of any new opportunities.

## Draft Somerset Strategic Housing Framework

The local scene is also complicated by a number of factors including the rural nature of the county, and the impact of Hinkley Point C. Rurality makes it difficult and expensive to deliver services. It also makes Somerset a desirable location for internal in-migration, fuelling local property price increases and contributing to the ageing demographic among many of our rural communities. Lack of affordable housing contributes to the challenges of retaining younger people, and their skills, within Somerset. This impacts on all sectors, including public services. Meanwhile, the sheer volume of workers at Hinkley Point C (5,600 on-site at peak construction) presents real challenges to the housing sector – private sector rents are steadily rising, as is the number of unlicensed Houses in Multiple Occupation. The site is also a major draw for local construction talent. How will this play out for local growth aspirations? To help mitigate these impacts EDF have provided £7.5m of funding towards additional housing capacity across West Somerset, Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and North Somerset. Meanwhile, the recent designation of Taunton as a Garden Town presents a real opportunity to deliver a step-change in how we plan for a more inclusive / healthy housing environment.

### **Leadership**

All major political parties agree that housing is a top national priority. That presents an opportunity for local authorities and their partners to deliver strong leadership, leadership that brings together communities, housing, town and country planning and health and social care. We are striving for a combined commitment to improve this complex system for the benefit of our residents. We are already positioning ourselves to ensure improved governance arrangements around these inter-related agendas. Leadership features strongly in this draft Framework. We hope that the development of the Framework will be a catalyst for creative thinking, innovation and an approach that designs solutions alongside the residents and communities that we are seeking to help.

## About Somerset

Somerset is one of the most rural counties in England with a population density of **1.5 people per hectare** (4.1 hectare England average)

**8,230** live applications as at 31 March 2017 (Homefinder Somerset)

**23.5%** of the population are aged **65 and over** in 2015 (ONS 2015 mid-year estimate) and set to rise to **25.3%** in 2020 and then to **31.5%** in 2035 (ONS population projections 2014)

**99.5%** increase in the private rented stock from 2001 to 2011 (Census)

**10%** of children in income deprived families are concentrated in **0.07%** of the County area (Somerset County Council)

**549,000** population (ONS mid 2016 population estimates) and projected to rise **2.5%** by 2020 to **563,000** (ONS population projection 2014)

**2,600** new dementia cases in 2015 and it is projected to rise to **4,800** new cases in 2035 (Somerset Dementia Needs Assessment)

Autumn estimates of rough sleeping has fallen - **50** in 2014, **56** in 2015 and **48** in 2016. The highest numbers of rough sleepers were in Mendip and Taunton Deane for 2015/16.

**20,000** new homes by 2020. Exceeded growth plan of **2,857** by **54** in 2014 (Somerset Growth Plan)

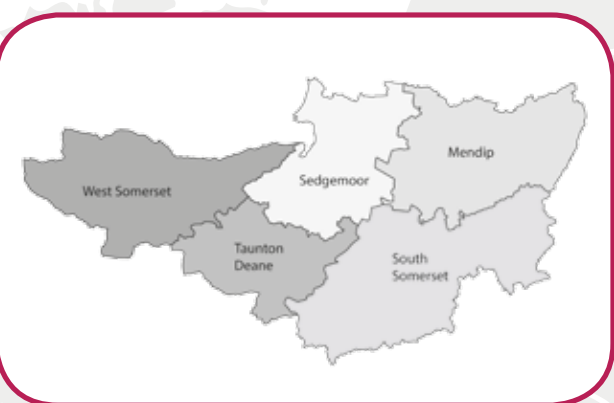
**£210,000** median price paid **£162,000** lower quartile price paid (House Price Statistics for Small Areas Mar 2017)

Average household size is projected to fall from **2.26** in 2014 to **2.13** in 2039, slightly below the national average of **2.35** in 2014 (ONS population projection)

Almost **8,000** homes in Somerset are without central heating (Census 2011)

Median income for full time workers in Somerset was **£25,299** in 2016 (ASHE)

Shortfall of **£145.86** between B&B charge and Housing Benefit paid per week



**Lambrook & Halcon** in Taunton and **Sydenham Central** in Bridgwater are the top 3 most deprived areas in Somerset (Index of Multiple Deprivation 2015)

**48%** of Somerset live in rural areas (Census 2011)

The proportion of Somerset households in fuel poverty decreased for the first time in four years, from **12.4%** in 2014 to **11.6%** in 2015, though this is still higher than that of 2013 which was **11.2%** (Fuel poverty sub-regional statistics 2015)

**236,500** households projected in 2015 (ONS)

# Key Challenges

Hinkley causing an increased demand for all forms of accommodation within commutable distance of Hinkley Point C

The life expectancy gap between residents in the most and least deprived areas in Sedgemoor is significant at 8.1 years for men and 3.6 years for women (Sedgemoor Health Profile 2017, Public Health England)

High proportion of population aged over 65 - challenge of providing suitable housing of the right type and quality in the right locations due to mismatch of properties

In migration of 40+ year olds seeking lifestyle change, using capital asset of homes in higher house price areas to outbid / out compete local people and out migration of younger people for education and work

The ratio of house price to earnings is greater than the national average in all the Somerset housing authorities

Low pay economy in comparison to other regions, causing a growing affordability gap with significant consequences for both young people and families

Housing supply remains an issue, especially for one-bedroom properties due to increase of single-person households, especially older persons and the single under 35s on the shared accommodation rate

Social isolation of people in poorer communities due comparatively small and dispersed market towns / urban areas

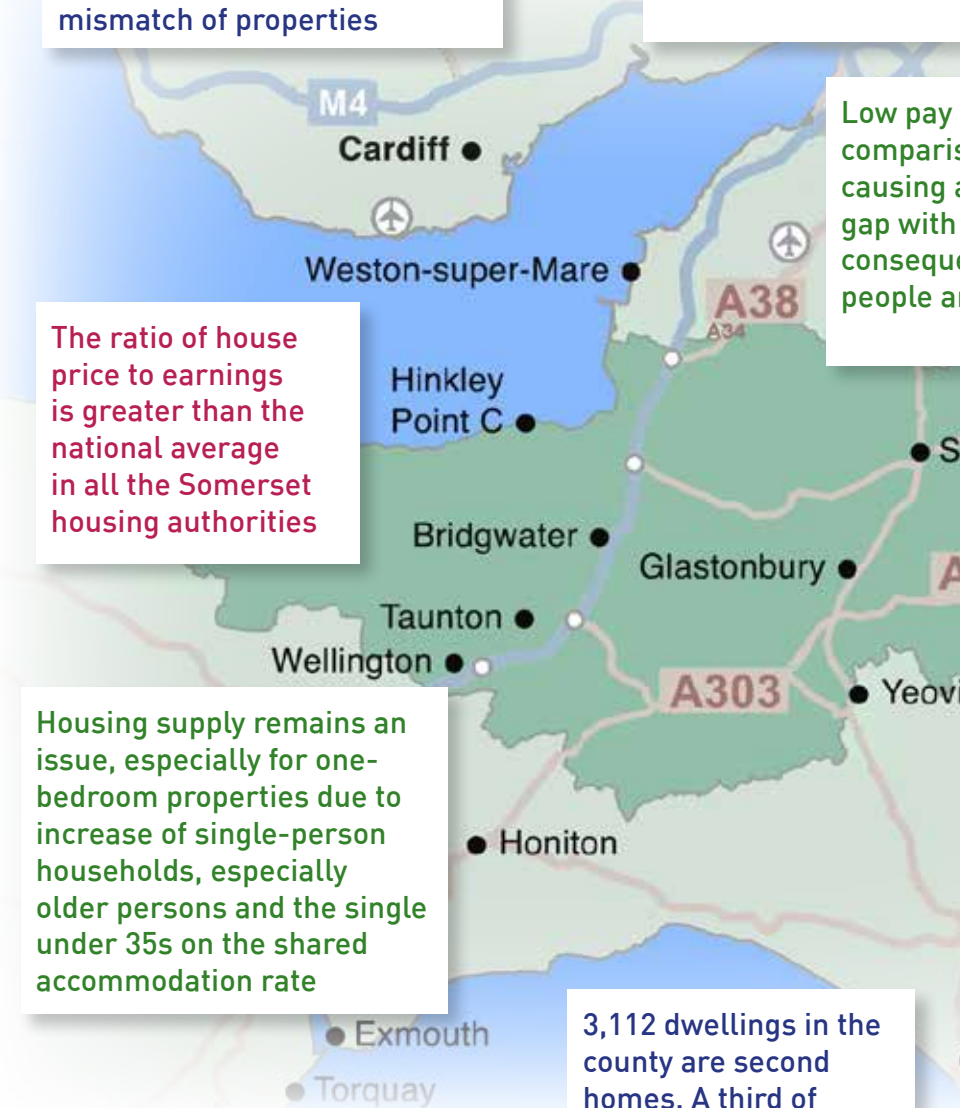
All the net need for new housing in the next 20 years will be for the households over 65 necessitating the need for more flexible models of supported housing which enable independent living

The upward trend in single-person households, coupled with private sector rents at record high levels, will potentially increase the number of households who apply for local authority assistance with their housing

3,112 dwellings in the county are second homes. A third of these are within West Somerset

Poor strategic transport infrastructure resilience with specific problems on the motorway (M5)/A38 and A358/A303

People are living longer but more of our lives are spent in ill health or disability





## Aspirations - looking ahead

Everyone should have access to a home that is affordable, suitable for their needs, warm, safe, and with security of tenure. Such homes can support our health, our economic wellbeing, our children's education attainment and our sense of belonging to a community.

This consultation asks for your views on the vision, priorities and ambitions for housing in Somerset as set out in the following pages.

## Equalities

The draft SSHF has been supported and informed by an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA). The EIA seeks to ensure that under-represented / vulnerable groups are considered within the development of strategy, policy and procedures. The process of developing an EIA (to directly inform the SSHF) is ongoing, and this current consultation provides an opportunity to challenge our thinking, and to deliver improvements to housing related interventions for the benefit of all. The EIA is hosted on the Mendip District Council website along with all other consultation material (see page 16) and we welcome your comments.



Children, courtesy of Yarlington HA

**Our vision for Housing within Somerset**

This Framework sets out our vision for housing in Somerset. It sets out three major themes and under each one, the priorities and ambitions that we want to achieve. Cutting across these themes is the drive for strong and effective strategic leadership across systems

**Strong and effective strategic Leadership:**

To deliver **leadership** across an integrated system that embraces communities, housing, health & wellbeing, social care and town & country planning

**A local Economy that provides opportunity for all:**

**Increase housing supply** across all tenures and **maximise the proportion of affordable homes** including **within rural communities**, to be constructed by a **skilled local labour force**

**Homes in Somerset are good for your Health:**

A **healthy living environment** with **secure and decent homes** that fosters **independent living** within **strong communities**

**A Society that supports the vulnerable:**

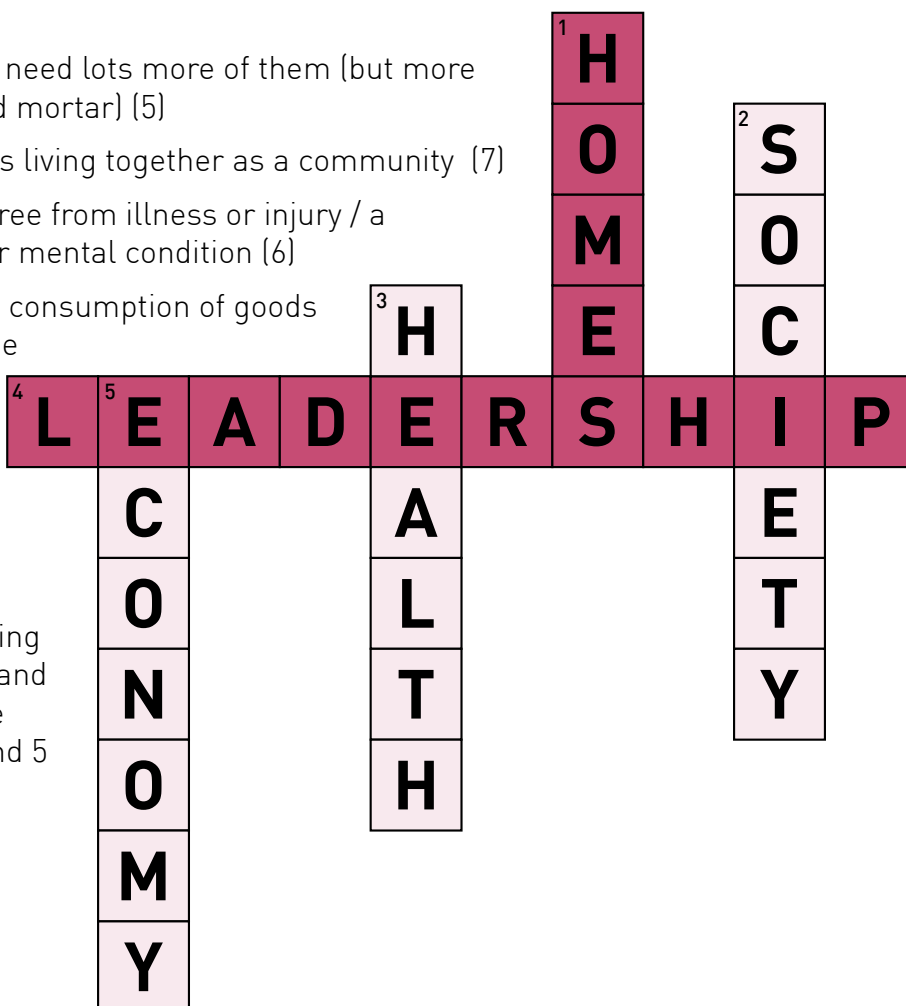
Coordinated support to individuals and communities to **reduce the impact of Welfare Reform**, to **prevent homelessness**, and to **facilitate a balanced housing stock** that meets the needs of all local people

**Down**

- 1. A 'basic need' – we need lots more of them (but more than just bricks and mortar) (5)
- 2. A body of individuals living together as a community (7)
- 3. The state of being free from illness or injury / a person's physical or mental condition (6)
- 5. The production and consumption of goods and services and the supply of money – but interventions needed so that all can benefit (7)

**Across**

- 4. Critical for addressing complex problems and for coordinating the delivery of 1, 2, 3 and 5 (Down) (10)



## Housing and Economy

### Vision: A local Economy that provides opportunity for all

#### Context

- There are **not enough homes (all tenures)**
- A **growing affordability gap** with significant consequences for both young people and families
- A **growing private rented sector** that is getting more difficult to afford
- Increasing numbers of workers at **Hinkley Point C** are placing pressure on the private rented sector, fuelling rent increases (1 and 2 bed properties)
- There is **net out-migration of young people**
- **Net in migration of 40+** seeking lifestyle change, using capital asset of homes in higher house price areas to **outbid/out compete local people**
- Lack of opportunities for **social mobility** is a major issue across West Somerset
- **There is delay in construction** at key sites due to market financial changes
- There is a **skills shortage** within the construction sector
- **Poor transport infrastructure resilience** with specific problems on the motorway (M5) / A38 and strategic (A358/A303) network, and insufficient bus/rail link/A road links within much of the county

#### Priority 1: Maximise the number of affordable homes (all tenures)

**Ambition:** Each local authority will prioritise the delivery of new housing (open market and affordable) and provide community leadership at the highest level to make this happen

**Ambition:** Maintain up to date local plan coverage and ensure a five-year housing land supply within each district area and Exmoor National Park

**Ambition:** Make use of all available funding streams from Central Government such as Housing Infrastructure Funding and New Homes Bonus

**Ambition:** Each local housing authority to have current information about housing need across its locality

#### Priority 2: Provide more affordable homes to support rural economies and communities

**Ambition:** Support the rural economy and the creation of sustainable rural communities by meeting demonstrably identified needs for affordable housing

**Ambition:** Improve the percentage of affordable homes in rural developments tied to local plan allocations. Increase the choice of supported accommodation

**Ambition:** Maximise land value of rural exceptions sites. Ensuring that provision remains affordable in perpetuity for future generations or for the subsidy to be recycled for alternative affordable housing provision

## Somerset Strategic Housing Framework

**Ambition:** Increase the number of Community Land Trusts across Somerset, particularly within rural communities

### Priority 3: Use our assets to increase the supply of homes

**Ambition:** Maximise Hinkley Point C legacy and long term benefits

**Ambition:** Work with One Public Estate and identify opportunities to reuse released land and buildings to meet housing needs

### Priority 4: Upskill the local labour force

**Ambition:** Align our activities with the Somerset Growth Plan and promote the establishment of a University, apprenticeships and a skills based academy for the construction sector

**Ambition:** There will be an increase in rates of self-build and custom build

**Ambition:** We shall work to see the introduction of off-site / modular construction



Top left: Rural scheme at Meare, courtesy of MDC

Top right: Opening of Creechbarrow Road Play Area, courtesy of TDBC

Bottom: Community Land Trust, Norton Sub Hamdon, South Somerset, courtesy of Yarlington Housing Group

## Housing and Health

### Vision: Homes in Somerset are good for your Health:

#### Context

- Growing **health inequalities** due to geography, age and financial capability
- An **ageing population** with specific housing requirements
- 75% of the elderly **own their homes**, but **12%** of older people aged 60+ **live in poverty**
- 10% of **children in income deprived families** are **concentrated in 0.07%** of the county area
- There are **14,300 children** and **20,000 older people in low income households** in Somerset
- **33,500** people in Somerset **aged 65 or older live on their own** (1 in 7 households)
- **27,000 one-person households** in which the resident has a **long-term health problem or disability**
- **30,000+ homes with Category 1 hazards** (and the **highest** proportion in the **Private Rented Sector**)
- **1 in 3** households do **not have gas central heating** (1 in 2 in **West Somerset**)
- **11.6%** of households living in **fuel poverty** (11.0% England average)
- There are **major financial costs to health, social care and housing services** due to trips and falls, excess cold, damp, dementia, domestic violence, homelessness and delayed hospital discharges
- There is a need for more flexible models of supported housing which **enable independent living**

### Priority 1: Maximise positive health impacts through housing development and the lived environment

**Ambition:** Promote the use of Health Impact Assessments within housing development and the lived environment, so that new developments provide the opportunity for healthy living

**Ambition:** Foster partnerships with developers around the delivery of lifetime homes / space standards to ensure well designed homes that are built for changing life circumstances and adaptability

**Ambition:** Taunton Garden Town development will be an exemplar project that will deliver positive health impacts through creative design. Lessons will be learned to inform other major developments throughout the county

### Priority 2: Improve the existing housing stock

**Ambition:** Work with private rented sector landlords to improve the conditions of the homes which they let

**Ambition:** There is a coordinated approach to combat poor quality or unsuitable homes of any tenure, specifically addressing fire risk, cold homes, disrepair, and accessibility. Members of the public know how to access support to combat poor housing conditions

### Priority 3: Match lifelong independent living with appropriate property solutions

**Ambition:** Improve the matching of need (relating to physical/mental disability) with available property through Homefinder Somerset

**Ambition:** To ensure that all households in Somerset have access to coordinated information and advice and related services to enable them to live independently in a home which meets their needs

**Ambition:** To ensure that individuals with particular, additional and / or complex support needs have the necessary support to live independently in a home that meets their needs

**Ambition:** To exploit the potential of new technology to enable people to live independently in a home that meets their needs

### Priority 4: Promote an asset-based approach to building healthy and strong communities

**Ambition:** To adopt an asset-based approach to working with local communities by identifying talent, ideas and skills. To deliver person centred services/ supports that are designed through co-production (communities and partners working together). To enable healthy, strong and self-supporting communities that are partnered by effective service delivery.



Top left: New housing in South Somerset

Bottom left: Mother and child

Above: Priorswood Resource Centre in Taunton

## Housing and Society

### Vision: A Society that supports the vulnerable

#### Context

- Significant levels of **homelessness** and **rough sleeping**
- Ongoing **welfare reform** and **Universal Credit** roll-out
- Particular concerns for the **under 35s** who often struggle to access housing due to challenging benefit regime and high cost of open market housing
- **Lack of supply of 1 bedroom properties** for which there is significant demand
- Some communities in rural areas (principally in West Somerset) have further pressures due to **high levels of second home ownership**
- There are very **high levels of long term empty homes** in West Somerset
- **Mismatch** between the provision of larger properties, increasingly smaller households and **changing demographics** (particularly within Exmoor National Park where there is a predominance of larger, detached homes)
- There is an **increased demand for all forms of accommodation** within commutable distance of **Hinkley Point C**
- There is **hidden housing need** particularly within **rural communities**
- There is **no strategic transit site for gypsies and travellers** and a general under-provision of all pitches across the county
- Further **rises in mortgage rates** could increase the number of repossessions

#### Priority 1: Support communities with the impact of welfare reform

**Ambition:** Work as partners to share best practice and consolidate / improve awareness of benefit changes and what it means for families and individuals to help prevent incidence of debt and rent arrears

**Ambition:** Develop suitable housing options for the under 35s

**Ambition:** Housing and support services working with under 35s to have a focus on assisting people into work, and utilise initiatives such as Social Impact Bond to enable providers and landlords to build links with employment, education and training initiatives

**Ambition:** Promote sources of advice and training that are available to private sector landlords, existing private tenants, and residents considering renting, to include 'accreditation'/'tenant ready' schemes

#### Priority 2: Reduce Homelessness and Rough Sleeping

**Ambition:** Prepare and implement a new statutory county-wide Homelessness Strategy, to include the requirements of the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and to foresee changing economic circumstances including rising interest rates that could increase repossessions

#### Priority 3: Create and sustain thriving communities

**Ambition:** As Local Plans are reviewed, they are to include appropriate policy responses that address the demands of changing demographics including specialist needs

## Draft Somerset Strategic Housing Framework

**Ambition:** Communities are supported to develop community led plans (Neighbourhood Plans/Parish Plans) to help identify community housing needs, sites for future housing and promote inclusive high quality design

**Ambition:** Revise and update the existing Somerset Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and increase the amount of available Gypsy and Traveller pitches across the County, exploring opportunities to use public sector land to make residential and transit site provision

**Ambition:** To refresh the Youth Housing Strategy and consider the impact on children and young adults due to poor housing standards, overcrowding, affordability and insecurity of tenure

**Ambition:** Commissioners and providers of housing and support services are to deliver social value and seek a social return on investment, in order to maximise the value of the Somerset £pound for the benefit and opportunity of local residents / voluntary and community sector

**Ambition:** Seek to create a downward trend in the number of Long Term Empty homes across all districts



Top left: Ground Cutting, Northwick Road, Mark, courtesy of South-Western Housing Society and SDC

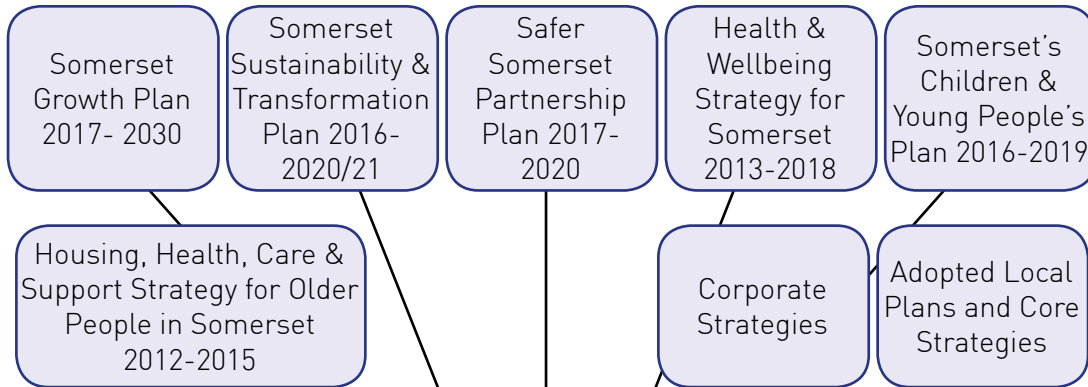
Top right: Working with local communities, Priorswood Community Centre, courtesy of TDBC

Bottom: Floral display of Mr & Mrs Beer, Woolavington, courtesy of Homes in Sedgemoor



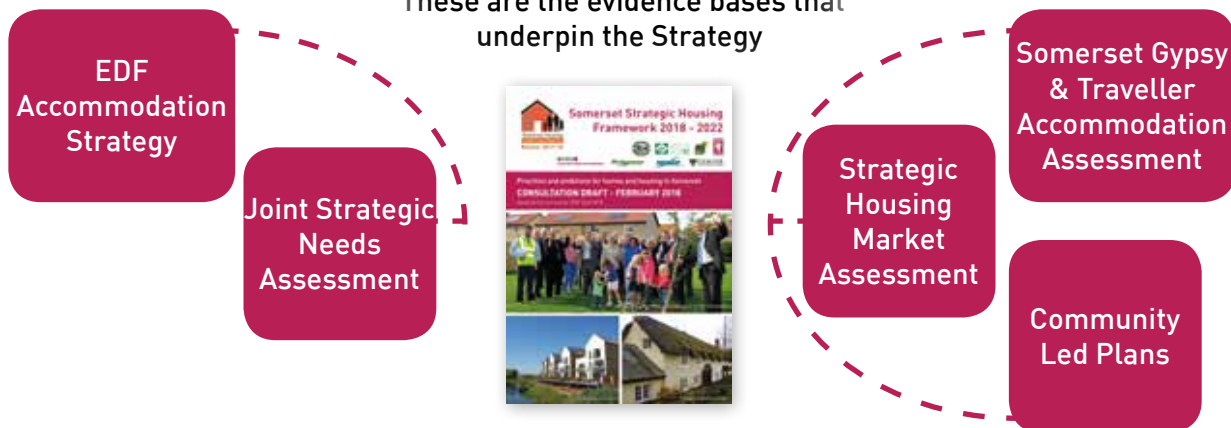
### High Level Strategies

These are the high level strategies and plans that the Strategic Housing Framework must conform with - i.e. they sit above the Framework



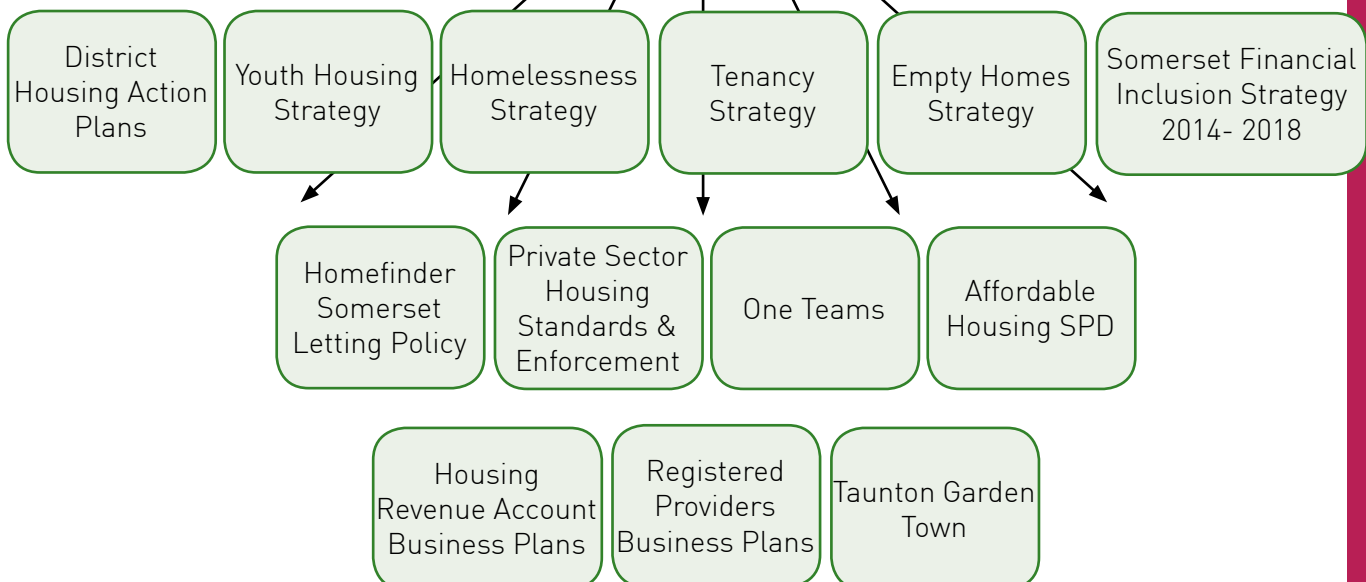
### Evidence Base

These are the evidence bases that underpin the Strategy



### Policies & Strategies that sit beneath

These are the policies and strategies that sit beneath the Housing Strategy and must conform to it



## Questions for you, and how to respond to this consultation

**There are several ways that you can tell us your views or seek further information:**

Please note that Mendip District Council are coordinating responses to this consultation on behalf of all Somerset district councils, the County Council and partner agencies

Complete the questionnaire on the back pages / or write to us and return it to:

Mendip District Council  
Council Offices  
Cannards Grave Road  
Shepton Mallet  
Somerset, BA4 5BT

Complete a questionnaire online at:

<http://www.mendip.gov.uk/somersethousingstrategy>

Email: [enablingteam@mendip.gov.uk](mailto:enablingteam@mendip.gov.uk)

Or telephone: **0300 303 8588**

**General**

1. Does this draft framework demonstrate a clear understanding of national and local housing issues?

- Strongly Agree       Agree       Neither Agree or Disagree  
 Disagree       Strongly Disagree       Don't know

2. Do you agree with the vision for housing in Somerset?

- Yes     No    If no, please explain how they need to change / what is missing

**Housing and Economy**

3. Do you agree with the context, priorities and ambitions for Housing and Economy? Are the ambitions clear? Are there any additional ambitions that we should consider? Are some priorities / ambitions more important than others?

- Yes     No    Please explain:

4. Are there any issues that might pose a threat/ barrier to delivery of the priorities and ambitions?

- Yes     No    Please explain:

**Housing and Health**

5. Do you agree with the context, priorities and ambitions for Housing and Health? Are the ambitions clear? Are there any additional ambitions that we should consider? Are some priorities / ambitions more important than others?

- Yes     No    Please explain:

6. Are there any issues that might pose a threat/ barrier to delivery of the priorities and ambitions?

- Yes     No    Please explain:

**Housing and Society**

7. Do you agree with the context, priorities and ambitions for Housing and Society? Are the ambitions clear? Are there any additional ambitions that we should consider? Are some priorities / ambitions more important than others?

- Yes     No    Please explain:



8. Are there any issues that might pose a threat/barrier to delivery of the priorities and ambitions?

Yes

No

Please explain:

### Delivery

Following the eventual adoption of the housing framework, we intend to develop a county-wide delivery plan to be supported by district / partner based action plans.

9. Do you have any suggestions / ideas (i.e. initiatives, projects, partnerships, campaigns etc) to help us deliver any of the priorities/ambitions? These can be county-wide or specific to particular districts.

### Equalities

10. The draft SSHF is supported by an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA). Do you have any comments on the content of the EIA?

### Any further comments

11. Do you have any further comments?

If you are happy to do so, please give your contact details below

Name:

Business / Community or Voluntary sector organisation (if applicable):

Address:

Telephone No:

Email:

