



DARLINGTON

Borough Council

Private Sector Housing Strategy

2022 – 2027

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FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce Darlington's Private Sector Housing Strategy which sets our plans for the next 5 years.

The Council recognises that the reason for this strategy is not just about bricks and mortar - it is also to improve health, wellbeing and quality of life for all local residents. A person's home is the foundation to enable someone to achieve their potential in terms of health, wellbeing, education, employment and participation in the community.

Our overall vision is to provide homes that meet your needs where you want to live and that enable a decent quality of life. In some areas we are starting from a strong base where there are a relatively low proportion of poor private homes, overall energy efficiency rates are high and there are few empty properties. In other areas this is not the case, poor conditions can still be found and there's always more we can do to ensure homes are fit for the future.

This Strategy aims to be ambitious to raise standards to support residents and communities with a focus on housing that:

- is safe, clean, affordable, healthy, secure and sustainable to support the most vulnerable in our community;
- meets standards that reduce fuel poverty and work towards achieving net zero to combat climate change.



Reflecting on our achievements over the last few years, some of our key successes have been achieved through partnership working and innovation.

- Northgate initiative: as part of an area-based action scheme we have helped many households with property disrepair issues.
- Reducing Long Term Empty Homes: empty homes are a wasted resource that should be used to provide housing and often cause problems in our neighbourhoods.
- Reducing Fuel Poverty: many residents are struggling with the cost of living and have faced substantial increases in their energy bills, projects such as the Home Upgrade Grant are making a big difference to residents' homes to reduce fuel poverty through lower energy bills.

This strategy sets out the framework to ensure that we are focused on the right priorities for Darlington and make the best use of the limited resources that we have. The impact of changes in legislation and financial challenges within the context of the likely cost of living crisis will require the Council to make very difficult decisions and choices.

These substantial challenges will require more innovative and different approaches. The success therefore of this strategy will be dependent on partnership working and the support of all involved in contributing to its delivery.

I would like to thank everyone involved in the development of this Private Sector Housing Strategy.



Councillor Mike Renton
Cabinet member for Stronger Communities

INTRODUCTION

What we need from housing may differ from person to person and can change throughout our lives. What doesn't change is the need to live in a healthy environment in a home which is affordable, safe, secure and warm, with support when we need it.

This strategy has provided an opportunity for a review of the delivery of the Private Sector Housing service to formulate a new approach, wholly aligned with the Council's vision of maintaining and sustainably improving the quality of life for everyone growing up, living, visiting or working in Darlington.

The Private Rented Sector performs an essential role in supporting Darlington's economic viability and meeting housing needs. Office of National Statistics data indicates that Darlington's private rented stock is at 20.77%, higher than the national average and the highest in the Tees Valley region. A more diverse range of households, including families with children, are now living in the sector. For many it is providing long-term rather than short-term accommodation. In the future we expect to see an increase in the growing market of build to rent properties and Park homes.

The Private Sector Housing Team provides a service to all residents of Darlington within the Private Sector, this strategy has been written both for homeowners and private rented occupiers. We continue to work reactively to respond to the needs of specific residents, but new proactive approaches will target resources on demographic groups and geographic areas which have been identified as priorities. The focus of the strategy has been to ensure that homes are healthier for their occupants and all future occupants.

While we welcome the increasing contribution of rented properties can make to meet local housing needs, standards need to reflect those expected in Darlington and this needs to be managed to ensure homes fit for a future housing market. This strategy therefore seeks to fulfil our aspirations which are summed up in our Housing Vision:

*"We aim to increase healthy home environments that maximises well-being and life opportunities
for all residents and future residents in Darlington."*

This strategy presents some of the key challenges facing the Private Sector Housing team. There is a focus both on current initiatives and future intentions to ensure that the living conditions of our residents continue to improve.

Despite powers for intervention through penalties and barring of the rogue operators, coupled with greater consumer empowerment, the quality and decency of the private rented sector still lags behind the social rented sector in many areas.

Each area in Darlington will have their own similar but particular focus and this strategy lays out clearly the objectives for Darlington Borough Council in the next 5 years. The strategy runs until 2027 but is a living document that will be reviewed regularly to track progress and ensure it remains fit for purpose.



HEALTH INEQUALITIES

Nationally we are going through a substantial period of change and challenges that we have never seen before. We all know, now more than ever, the quality of homes we live in can have a significant impact on every aspect of our lives.

“The broad social and economic circumstances that together determine the quality of the health of the population are known as the ‘social determinants of health’

The Marmot Review ‘Fair Society, Healthy Lives’ states that action on health inequalities requires action across all of the social determinants of health.

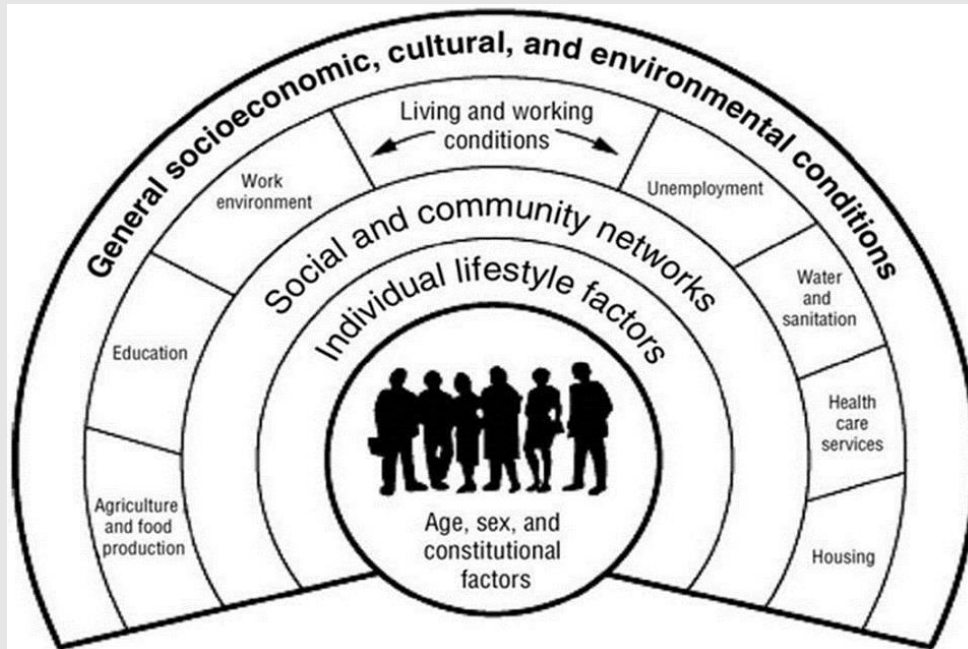


Diagram Source: Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991)

Tackling health inequalities is at the core of this strategy, as is making modifications to improve a home to ensure a healthy standard of living for all. This can lead to enhanced health and wellbeing that not only benefits the individual but also brings wider social and economic benefits.

Addressing the intergenerational burden of disadvantage caused by poor housing is particularly important for reducing inequalities and helping to prevent the continued accumulation of disadvantage throughout a life course.

Poor housing conditions, overcrowding and affordability will all have an adverse effect on public health and wellbeing and exacerbate health inequalities. Research tells us that poor housing is associated with an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, respiratory diseases, depression and anxiety. The quality of your home has a significant impact on health: a warm, dry, secure home is associated with better health.

HOUSING PERSPECTIVES

On a national scale the size of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) has more than doubled in the last 15 years and now accounts for almost one-fifth of all dwellings in the UK. This rapid expansion has been recognised and subsequently reflected in a number of national strategies and the introduction of new legislation. This strategy takes these policy changes into account and has directly influenced our thinking in certain areas.

Housing Act 2004

The main piece of legislation controlling housing standards is the Housing Act 2004 but there are numerous other provisions used by local authorities to support residents living in poor conditions. For example, the introduction of new powers to improve the quality and management of PRS properties via licensing schemes, to return long-term empty homes back into use, and to remove hazards from properties.

Healthy lives, healthy people: Improving outcomes and supporting transparency, 2013

The Public Health Outcomes Framework identifies two high level outcomes:

- Increased life expectancy
- Reduced difference in life expectancy and healthy life expectancy between communities.

The framework sets out desired outcomes for public health and how they will be measured. Many of the measurements have links to housing, some of the more relevant being:

- Falls and injuries in over 65s
- Fuel poverty
- Excess winter deaths



The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015

Since 1 April 2018, it became unlawful for landlords to grant a new tenancy or renew an existing tenancy for a property that does not reach a minimum energy efficiency standard (MEES) of Energy Performance Certificate rating band E. If the EPC rating is an F or G, the landlord must improve the rating to a minimum of EPC E or register an exemption (if applicable) before they are able to let the property.

From 1 April 2020, the regulations have applied to all domestic rented properties regardless of whether or not there has been a change in tenancy (again, exemptions may apply but these must be registered by the landlord on the PRS exemptions register). Following this strategy, in 2030 it has been proposed that all private rented properties should have a minimum energy efficiency standard of C where they are in fuel poverty.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 introduced powerful new controls focused on tackling criminal activity in the PRS. This includes:

- allowing local authorities to apply for a banning order to prevent a particular landlord/letting agent from continuing to operate where they have committed certain housing offences;
- creating a national database of rogue landlords/letting agents, which will be maintained by local authorities;
- allowing tenants or local authorities to apply for a rent repayment order where a landlord has committed certain offences (for example continuing to operate while subject to a banning order or ignoring an improvement notice); if successful, the tenant (or the authority if the tenant was receiving universal credit) may be repaid up to a maximum of 12 months' rent;
- introducing a new regime giving local authorities an alternative to prosecution for offences committed under the Housing Act 2004, including all HMO offences.

Effectively, local authorities now have a choice whether to prosecute or impose a penalty with a maximum fine of £30,000. The local authority can also retain the money recovered, which is not currently the case with fines imposed in the magistrates' court.

The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020

The regulations require landlords to have the electrical installations in their properties inspected and tested by a person who is qualified and competent, at least every 5 years. Landlords have to provide a copy of the electrical safety report to their tenants, and to their local authority if requested. The regulations are intended to ensure that tenants are able to enjoy a safer living environment.

Since 1 July 2020, landlords issuing new tenancy agreements must have an Electrical Installation Condition Report (EICR) carried out. The report must also be given to all tenants, while any remedial work required work should be carried out. From 1 April 2021, EICRs became mandatory for all tenancies.



LOCAL PERSPECTIVE

The Council Plan 2020 - 2023 focuses on creating the conditions for safe and strong communities, working in partnership with residents and local agencies to identify and address localised and borough-wide issues. Economic growth is a key lever to deliver the long-term vision for the borough.

“Darlington is a place where people want to live and businesses want to locate, where the economy continues to grow, where people are happy and proud of the borough and where everyone has the opportunity to maximise their potential.”

This strategy links to the Housing Strategy first published in 2012, which when it was written simply stated, *“Improve conditions in the private housing sector.”*

Around 80 percent of Darlington’s 51,885 homes are in the private sector, which equates to 43,589 dwellings. This includes around 8,875 properties rented from a private landlord.

The strategy incorporates an Action Plan which will create the conditions for successful delivery of the Private Sector Housing Strategy, including:

- Supporting the most vulnerable
- Encouraging the transition to Net Zero
- Addressing health inequalities
- Communicating the progress and outcomes of our work to residents, partners, and stakeholders
- Understanding resource requirements and developing plans
- Information and evidence held about the private rented sector will be improved to ensure that our approach is targeted to areas where it will be the most effective
- Adapting and growing the capabilities of the Private Sector Housing Team



AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Aim 1 Decent quality homes in the private rented sector

- A** **Reactive Housing Standards:** the Private Sector Housing team work to ensure standards are maintained and take action where these standards are not met by providing a reactive response to complaints about poor property conditions. By dealing with these issues we reduce accidents and illness in the home and help to reduce health inequalities and improve life chances across Darlington.
- B** **Area based action:** to tackle health inequalities in communities where housing conditions are worst.
- C** **Inspecting Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs):** administering the scheme for Mandatory Licensing of relevant HMOs. Safeguarding residents living in multiply occupied properties through successful licensing and proactive property inspection.

Aim 2 Enable growth in the private rented sector

- A** **Management of private rented properties:** the private-rented sector makes an important contribution to the borough's housing, provided it is well managed.
- B** **Empty Properties:** making best use of all our homes. We cannot allow homes to stay empty while housing is in short supply. Increasing activity to bring long term empty homes back into use.
- C** **New homes:** with a growing population and changing lifestyles we need to provide additional homes that are affordable for our residents, in the right place, and of the right quality to meet future demand.

Aim 3 Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington

- A** **Green Homes:** exploring and developing energy efficiency. Energy-efficiency is good for the borough and can save households money and make people healthier. Delivering warm home solutions to alleviate fuel poverty.
- B** **Encourage and support owner occupiers to maintain safe homes:** by advising of financial assistance that is available to homeowners.
- C** **Meeting the needs of residents living in Park Home Sites and Residential Caravan sites, the including the travelling community:** by proactively improving the licensing conditions of existing licensed sites.

Aim 1 Decent quality homes in the private rented sector

A Reactive Housing Standards

The Private Sector Housing team work to ensure standards are maintained and take action where these standards are not met by providing a reactive response to complaints about poor property conditions. By dealing with these issues we reduce accidents and illness in the home and help to reduce health inequalities and improve life chances across Darlington.

The Rationale

The majority of landlords and agents maintain a good standard of accommodation. However, there are a very small number who flout the law.

One of the key aspects of our work within the private rented sector is to ensure that homes are safe places to live, and the majority of our time is spent dealing with service requests.

The means of assessing housing standards is primarily the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS). Officers use it to risk rate the severity of a problem in a dwelling by determining how serious the health effect of that problem would be on residents or their visitors.

When problems causing a health and safety implication are found in rented properties, the landlord will be required to put these right, or otherwise face enforcement action. This action would follow guidance from the Housing Health and Safety Rating System or other housing, environmental or public health legislation that we use.

Key Factors

- We need to make sure housing repair and maintenance is sustained.
- We need to tackle poor housing conditions as this does not have to be expensive and has multiple benefits to society as a whole. It makes economic sense to invest in improving housing rather than pay for the consequences of poor housing through the NHS and other agencies.
- We need to promote good quality housing, as everything else will follow, with proven gains in asset value, health, wellbeing, life chances and economic performance. Housing improvements are generally one-way gains and will accrue benefits long into the future.



Aim 1 Decent quality homes in the private rented sector

A Reactive Housing Standards

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
1.1	Adapt and grow the capabilities of the Private Sector Housing Team as regulations or legislation that we enforce changes.	<p>The HHSRS is used to assess a range of potential hazards in rented properties, such as damp, excess cold and electrical faults as well as fire and falls. The Government plans to carry out a review of HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating system), and as part of this review, will consider the interconnections and alignments between other regulations and the HHSRS.</p> <p>This will involve the retraining of Private Sector Housing Officers.</p>	Currently all staff in the Private Sector Housing team can competently use the system to risk assess properties.	<p>As legislation changes or is introduced.</p> <p>For each officer to receive training appropriate to their grade and time in employment within the team.</p>	
1.2	To carry out a Private Sector Stock condition survey.	To provide an up-to-date picture of housing conditions across Darlington.	The last Private Sector Stock condition survey was carried out in 2009.	March 2023	
1.3	<p>Regulate more robustly and act against the worst landlords and agents.</p> <p>We will adopt a Civil Penalties protocol to assist with consistent and proportional legal action.</p>	<p>Enforcement action to protect the health and safety of tenants, occupiers and others will sometimes be required.</p> <p>The initiation of formal enforcement action will only occur when other measures have failed to produce the necessary response, or where there is an urgent need for action.</p>	The Private Sector Housing Team currently use the Regulatory Services Enforcement policy and have delegated powers to investigate housing, environmental or public health legislation.	June 2023	

Aim 1 Decent quality homes in the private rented sector

B Area based action

Area based action to tackle health inequalities in communities where housing conditions are worst.

The Rationale

Darlington includes areas of affluence and areas of deprivation. It has hidden rural poverty and wards identified as within the 10% most deprived in the country. It is the latter where the team intends to focus its attention over the lifetime of this strategy and in particular the wards of Bank Top and Lascelles, Park East, Northgate and North Road.

The Northgate initiative commenced in 2019 and will continue until 2024.

The Private Sector Housing team continues to operate on a reactive basis but increasingly officers are working to pro-actively inspect the Private Rented Sector which recognises the reluctance many tenants have to complain about their living conditions.

Key Factors

- We need to understand the changing pattern of landlords and letting agents especially the business model of landlords and lettings agents with poor quality stock and inadequate property management.
- We need to ensure there is up-to-date information on the changing size and condition of the sector as a whole and its sub-elements – some landlords are rebranding their offer as ‘hotels’ and ‘hostels’, while others are moving into the short-term let market and exempt accommodation.
- We need to know which parts of the private rented sector are functioning effectively and which are problematic (and, therefore, should be the centre of attention) considering whether there are opportunities to improve the evidence base.

Aim 1 Decent quality homes in the private rented sector

B Area based action

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
1.4	Support and work with landlords and property agents as part of the Northgate initiative to help them improve their properties.	We have been undertaking an Area Action pilot study in Northgate to pro-actively engage with residents living in an area with a high proportion of older private sector housing.	Compliance with Housing Regulations where an HHSRS inspection has taken place and has initially been low.	Monitor and review cases to ensure a positive outcome is achieved. September 2024	
1.5	Encourage and support landlords and agents to reduce the number of serious hazards (those rated as Category 1) in private rented homes with a particular focus on poorest performing areas.	Private rented sector is growing and the overall standards are worse. We need utilise the area based action taken in Northgate and use the what worked well to ensure the sector is fit for purpose in other areas in Darlington.	The last Private Sector Stock condition survey was carried out in 2009.	To reduce the gap between the best and worst performing areas by 2026. March 2027	

Aim 1 Decent quality homes in the private rented sector

C Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Inspecting **Houses of Multiple Occupation** (HMOs) and administering the scheme for Mandatory Licensing of relevant HMOs. Safeguarding residents living in multiple occupied properties through successful licensing and proactive property inspection.

The Rationale

Some privately rented houses are let to people from several different families, either as flats, bedsits or as shared houses. Any rented property with three or more people living across two or more households and sharing common facilities are known as houses in multiple occupation or HMO.

If the property has five or more people living across two or more households and sharing common facilities, it is classed as a large HMO and must be mandatory licensed. The HMO licence requires the landlord to demonstrate that they are meeting their obligations and that arrangements are in place to ensure that the property is properly managed and maintained.

While standards are poorest in the private rented sector generally, the very worst standards can be found in HMOs. This form of housing is traditionally focussed on deprived areas and can be problematic due to poor fire safety standards; overcrowding; inadequate facilities such as the lack of affordable heating; and poor management standards.

HMOs represent higher risk accommodation particularly when considering fire safety. Houses converted into bedsits have an annual risk of death per person of 1 in 50,000 (six times higher than in a single occupancy houses).

Key Factors

- We need to understand the changes in the HMO market and how this will change. In Darlington in recent years there has been a growth in HMO accommodation, particularly targeted at professionals and consequently of a generally high standard. It reflects the fact that rents are high in the area and professionals are choosing to live in shared accommodation rather than spend large sums on rent.
- We need to improve the quality of affordable HMO accommodation. HMOs provide a valuable source of affordable rented housing to primarily single people in our area. HMOs can also provide affordable housing options for some of the most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in society including benefit claimants or those on low incomes, students, and asylum seekers. For many of these individuals HMOs represent the only housing option available. However, the rapid turnover and the vulnerable nature of tenants in HMOs means that poor standards and the minority of bad landlords can escape the attention of the local authority.

Aim 1 Decent quality homes in the private rented sector

C Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs)

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
1.6	Find and licence all large Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) across the borough.	<p>There are currently 35 Mandatory Licensed HMO properties.</p> <p>Identifying, inspecting and licensing of HMOs became more challenging when the requirement to licence was extended in October 2018.</p> <p>There was no previous requirement to register these dwellings and despite promotion amongst landlords, communities and other professional bodies we still believe there are more unidentified unlicensed properties in the borough.</p>	<p>A stock condition survey in 2009, estimated 450 HMOs within the borough.</p> <p>At the start of 2021 there were 35 licensed HMOs.</p>	<p>Proactively work to identify properties in multiple occupation that need a licence.</p> <p>Annual Target to identify two licensed properties.</p>	
1.7	Increase the number of proactive inspections.	<p>Due to the pandemic no proactive HMO inspections have taken place.</p> <p>Proactive inspections are vital to identifying risks to vulnerable occupiers.</p>	<p>Before 2020 around 30 proactive HMO inspections were carried out each summer in addition to maintaining a schedule of Mandatory HMO checks.</p>	<p>Annual Target to inspect 30 HMO properties</p>	
1.8	Consider the need to extend licensing of HMOs to smaller HMOs	<p>Private rented sector is growing, and the overall standards are worse. We need to ensure the sector is fit for purpose for years to come.</p>	<p>Darlington currently has no additional or selective licensing areas.</p>	<p>March 2027</p>	

Aim 2 Enable growth in the private rented sector

A Management of private rented properties

The private rented sector makes an important contribution to the borough's housing, provided it is well managed.

The Rationale

The private rented sector continues to change.

As a result of the legislative changes proposed, it is thought some landlords may choose to leave the sector. In many cases, we expect the property could be bought by another landlord. However, in some cases it may result in the property moving to the owner occupier sector (resulting in a shift in the supply/demand balance of the private rented sector).

Most landlords and lettings agents offer a good service and tenants are happy with the property and its management.

Therefore, the focus should primarily be on tackling the issues created by a small number of landlords and lettings agents and affecting the most vulnerable groups in society.

There is a relatively small number of landlords and lettings agents operating in an unsatisfactory manner. This is often referred to in the media as rogue/criminal landlords. However, research has indicated that it is a more complex situation. For instance, accidental landlords with a lack of knowledge of rights and requirements may require support rather than formal enforcement action.

Key Factors

We need to further promote landlords' responsibilities to carry out their statutory duties to:

- ensure the property is fit for human habitation and free from hazards at the beginning of the tenancy and throughout;
- abiding by the provisions in the Tenant Fees Act 2019 which bans charging unfair fees to tenants in connection with a tenancy and caps tenancy;
- protect tenancy deposits in a government-approved scheme;
- provide tenants with a copy of the "How to rent: the checklist for renting in England" (How to rent guide);
- keep the property in a good state of repair;
- carry out gas safety checks and giving a copy of the certificate to the tenant(s) before the start of the tenancy;
- obtaining an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC), if required, and giving a copy to the tenant at the earliest opportunity. EPCs must show a minimum rating of no lower than E is met;
- ensuring electrical installations and appliances are safe;
- installing smoke and carbon monoxide alarms;
- make sure that tenants have the correct contact details for their landlords and/or their agent including a telephone number they can use in case of an emergency.

Aim 2 Enable growth in the private rented sector

A Management of private rented properties

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
2.1	Increase awareness of landlords and tenants' rights, responsibilities and the support available.	Lack of knowledge is the main cause of poorer standards in the private rented sector. As well as the current service we need to adopt a more digital approach by developing web-based support for the most common types of complaint.	Around 60% of landlords own just 1 or 2 properties and can lack knowledge around responsibilities before letting a property and during a tenancy and ending a tenancy. Individual private landlords are not required to belong to a redress scheme where they provide services directly to tenants and so many are not aware of their responsibilities.	March 2023	
2.2	To promote the requirement for new legislation in tenancy management including Electrical Condition Safety certificates where an HHSRS (Housing, Health and Safety rating System) inspection has taken place.	To promote consumer regulation within the private rented sector increases safety and reduces the requirement for formal action being taken.	The need for landlords to provide an Electrical Condition Safety certificate is a new requirement however the majority of letting agents provided certificates to new tenants before needing to.	March 2023	
2.3	To support local and national landlord groups.	By providing relevant, timely information to landlords should help to reduce the requirement for formal action being taken.	Information is currently given by Email on changes.	September 2022	

Aim 2 Enable growth in the private rented sector

B Empty Properties

Making best use of all our homes. We cannot allow homes to stay empty while housing is in short supply Increasing activity to bring long term empty homes back into use.

The Rationale

We are under no legal requirement to deal with empty homes but do have a duty to deal with unsafe homes linked to poor housing standards.

There are many reasons an empty property remains empty after 6 months including being renovated, for sale, offered for rent, etc. Some will, however, be empty for no obvious reason and will need some level of intervention if they are not to remain empty for the foreseeable future. In most cases this is because the owners need assistance, support, information, or encouragement to help return empty properties to use.

Empty properties represent a wasted resource and can cause a number of problems for the owner and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Empty homes become a political concern when new properties are being built on green field land while properties remain empty and neglected, cause damage to adjacent properties, and health issues for neighbours through a lack of maintenance.

There is recognition of the value of bringing an empty home back into the housing stock when compared to building a new house.

Key Factors

- We need to promote the advantages to bringing empty property back into use.
 - For the owners it unlocks potential capital if the property is sold; it will produce rental income if the property is let and there is the potential for an increase in property value, it reduces the Council Tax/Business Rates burden as the longer a property remains empty, the greater the obligation.
 - For local residents – it reduces the opportunities for vandalism, fly-tipping and antisocial behaviour in all its forms.
 - For the local economy – bringing an empty property back into use can contribute to the regeneration of an area, increasing spending in the local economy and helping to protect the value of surrounding properties.
- We need to promote the risks of leaving the premises empty for any extended length of time are great as if left empty, properties can:
 - Fall into disrepair, and/or become ruinous or dilapidated
 - Become an eyesore in the neighbourhood
 - Attract vandalism, anti-social behaviour and crime

Aim 2 Enable growth in the private rented sector

B Empty Properties

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
2.4	Maintain a database of empty residential properties.	Increase understanding as to why properties are left empty to reduce the number of empty properties in the borough.	The number of empty residential properties has been increasing over the last three years. In 2020, there were 697 vacant homes in Darlington that had been empty for at least 6 months.	Ongoing reduction in long term empty properties by 2026. Annual target of a reduction each year	
2.5	Encourage owners of privately owned empty homes to bring them back into use by providing an investors list of potential buyers, keen to purchase empty properties in the borough.	Empty homes are a waste of resources and by targeting empty homes it maximises the new homes bonus and increases the number of affordable homes in the borough.		June 2023	
2.6	Use the full range of enforcement powers to target and bring problematic properties back into use, through cross departmental working, focussing primarily on those empty for more than two years.	There are many long-term empty properties in the borough that have had legal notices served and works have been carried out in default by the Council. Typically, these properties are some of the most problematic.	Where we are unable to work with owners to reinstate their property, we will take the appropriate enforcement action, to ensure the property meets all required standards	Target empty properties that cause a significant detrimental impact to the area. September 2024	

Aim 2 Enable growth in the private rented sector

C New homes

With a growing population and changing lifestyles we need to provide additional homes that are affordable for our residents, in the right place, and of the right quality to meet future demand.

The Rationale

By building new sub-standard housing it will be very difficult to repair, improve or replace.

With a growing population and changing lifestyles we need to provide additional homes that are affordable for our residents, in the right place, and of the right quality to meet future demand.

People need a well-designed and managed environment to achieve their full potential. Decent and affordable housing is an important catalyst and a first step towards a sense of individual and community well-being with benefits around the stable home environment, improved health and better educational and employment opportunities.

Key Factors

- We need to promote housing options for those who need accessible homes.
- We need to promote suitable heating provision in new dwellings.
 - The UK Government’s ambition for the next 10 years is to phase out the installation of mains gas in new and existing homes, starting with new ones.
 - In England, under the Future Homes Standard (to be introduced by 2025), a typical new dwelling should either have a heat pump as its central heating source or receive heat from a community (or district) heating scheme.
- We need to promote sustainable ‘build-to-rent’ properties.
 - Since 2015, 8 percent of new housing units in England have been created by converting offices into flats.

Aim 2 Enable growth in the private rented sector

C New homes

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
2.7	<p>We will promote new properties being built with the concept of inclusive design.</p> <p>Providing information to developers with ideal property development standards which will ensure that new homes are accessible and adaptable.</p>	<p>Poor quality housing standards, safety issues and lack of adequate arrangements for refuse collection.</p> <p>Property conversions can lead to properties that do not meet space standards and are not of the size that is needed. For example, studio flats rather than a mix of one-and two-bedroom units.</p>	We currently provide planning consultation advice to property developers.	September 2024	
2.8	For newly developed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO): for properties that do not require planning permission we will promote the Darlington mandatory standard licensing conditions as the ideal for all HMO properties.	<p>This will ensure that space and amenity standards are met in all HMO properties.</p> <p>This should reduce the need for formal action being taken where poor housing conditions are identified during reactive and proactive HMO inspections.</p>	We currently provide advice to property developers that proactively approach the Private Sector Housing Team.	September 2024	

Aim 3 Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington

A Green homes

Exploring and developing energy efficiency. Energy-efficiency is good for the borough and can save households money and make people healthier.

The Rationale

In June 2019, the UK government became the first major economy to legislate for net zero greenhouse gas emissions. The target requires the UK to bring all greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050, compared to the previous target of at least an 80% reduction from 1990 levels.

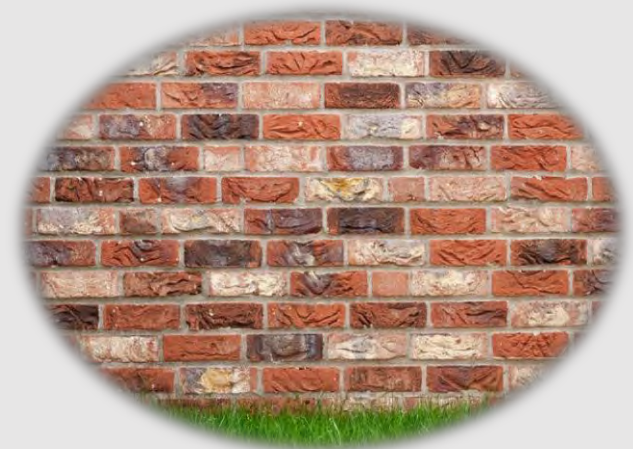
Homes are responsible for 15% of UK greenhouse gas emissions (or around 22% including electricity consumption) at present.

Private Rented Sector properties are among the least energy efficient in the domestic housing stock, costing over £6bn in energy bills in 2018 and producing GHG emissions of around 11 megatonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (MtCO₂e) per annum across the UK.

Fuel poverty levels when last recorded in 2018, showed 9% of households in Darlington were in fuel poverty representing 4,402 households, an improvement from 2015 when it was recorded as 14.1%. 4.48% of residential properties in Darlington (as of June 2020) are in the lowest EPC bands of F and G.

Key Factors

- We need to improve energy efficiency in homes to help to prevent excess winter deaths each year. By helping to ensure homes are adequately heated through reduced heat loss and improved heating systems will also reduce carbon emissions.
- We need to encourage the improvement of energy efficiency of rented dwellings because the people who live in rented accommodation depend on their landlord to ensure that their home is of a sufficient standard. Property type, condition and heating will all influence a home's energy efficiency standard and the occupant's ability to afford adequate heating.



Aim 3 Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington

A Green homes

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
3.1	To remove all F and G rated privately rented properties, where an exemption does not apply, from occupation.	The Minimum Energy Efficiency standards (MEES) regulations make it unlawful to let a Privately rented property with an EPC rating below E, subject to various exemptions which must be registered online.	There are an estimated 477 non-compliant rented properties. Using open-source EPC data alone we have identified 276 privately rented properties that are non-compliant with MEES regulations.	June 2023	
3.2	To reduce the number of E and D rated privately rented properties (where an exemption does not apply) from occupation where the tenants are in fuel poverty.	Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards is an aim of the Clean Growth Strategy to have as many private rented homes as possible being upgraded to EPC Band C by 2030, where practical, cost effective and affordable.	9% of households living in the private sector are in fuel poverty.	Annual target of reduction each year	
3.3	Maximise funding opportunities through the Home Upgrade Grant and the Green Homes Scheme and by promoting ECO4.	The overall energy efficiency in Darlington is good, however, there are some disparities in performance between wards. ECO funding has been extended across the time of this strategy to 2026.	All wards in line with the current EPC rating of a D rating but some areas/sectors/house types showing poorer performance.	To help a minimum of 200 homes/year improve the energy efficiency of their homes creating sustainable warmth and decarbonising heat where suitable.	

Aim 3 Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington

B Encourage and support owner occupiers to maintain safe homes

By advising and signposting financial assistance that is available to homeowners.

The Rationale

Promoting independence

Good housing can help to support other council objectives, such as helping older and vulnerable people to live independently and the council recognises the role that good housing can help to support this vision, such as helping older people and those with health and social care needs to live independently.

Older People

The need for home improvements and adaptations is set to increase sharply as the population ages and the number of disabled people increases. Without preventative action it is likely that large numbers of ill and disabled people will remain in poor condition homes. This is a serious concern as older homeowners on low incomes in low value properties may simply be unable to pay for essential home improvements that are crucial to their health and independence.

Key Factors

- With an aging population our ambition is to promote dementia friendly accommodation that is accessible for all.
- We need to encourage and support owner occupiers to maintain safe homes both homes and neighbourhoods, that will support people to live long, healthy, happy lives in their own communities.



Aim 3 Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington

B Encourage and support owner occupiers to maintain safe homes

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
3.4	Reduced proportion of category 1 hazards in dwellings in the poorest performing areas, households, and dwelling types.	Overall condition is relatively good, though some differences in performance exist between areas and building types.	The last Private Sector Stock condition survey was carried out in 2009.	To maintain and where possible improve the levels. March 2026	
3.5	Increased public awareness of the range of services available to encourage and support owner occupiers. For residents in older housing stock, we will promote disabled facilities grants provide a facility for adapting homes for those with disabilities.	Many owner occupiers do not know what information and advice is available.	The need for home adaptations to support independence in the home is consistent and with evidence that the district has an ageing population we have to expect that demand for this service will increase. The main types of adaptations needed include adapted bathrooms and toilets, lifts and level or ramped access. The Disabled Facilities Grant can be used to meet some of these needs but the amount available each year is limited.	Increase advice and information and signposting to relevant services in the poorest performing wards. March 2026	
3.6	To advise homeowners of ways to improve their properties during Immigration inspections.	Every home counts when we are improving the borough's housing stock.	We currently advise of space standards and the most hazardous issues in the property.	March 2026	

Aim 3 Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington

C Meeting the needs of residents living in Park Home Sites and Residential Caravan sites, including the travelling community.

By proactively improving the licensing conditions of existing licensed sites.

The Rationale

People living year-round in mobile (park) homes normally own their home and rent the land on which it is stationed from the site owner (paying a pitch fee).

Mobile homes, often known as park homes, are self-contained prefabricated buildings, transported to a licensed park home site where they are assembled. Once in place they are very rarely moved, but to comply with the law they must remain capable of being removed.

Local Authorities license various types of caravan sites under the provisions of the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960. Under the provisions of the Act, no occupier of land is allowed to permit land to be used as a permanent residential caravan site unless he/she is the holder of a site licence. The site licence is issued as a 'one-off' not on a yearly basis.

The Local Authority can attach any conditions to the licence which it sees as necessary or desirable in the interest of persons living in the caravans. These conditions apply to the site and its amenities, but not to the physical condition of the caravans themselves.

Key Factors

- We need to raise awareness of rights and responsibilities of residents.
- Ensure that site managers are 'fit and proper' to manage commercial residential sites.

Aim 3 Working with and supporting all residents in Darlington

C Meeting the needs of residents living in Park Home Sites and Residential Caravan sites, the including the travelling community.

Action Plan

	Objectives and outcomes	Why	Baseline	Target/date	What we have achieved
3.7	To assist with the implementation of the Fit and Proper person requirements of residential site management with the Licensing Team.	New legislation Mobile Homes (Requirement for Manager of Site to be Fit and Proper Person) (England) Regulations 2020 has been introduced that looks at the management of sites.	This legislation is new and will apply to around 15 sites across Darlington.	December 2022	
3.8	The Council-owned Gypsy and Traveller sites are to be reviewed.	The needs of the travelling community have changed for that of long-term occupation and to determine if it could be extended to provide additional pitches to meet the identified need.	Gypsy and traveller sites like any other infrastructure requires renovation and renewal.	March 2023	
3.9	A new programme of inspections is to be drawn up to ensure the residential sites in the borough are all inspected and any changes to licences made, to ensure legislative requirements are met.	Safeguard existing sites to ensure that existing needs continue to be met.	There are a number of privately owned traveller sites that have outdated conditions attached to their licences which no longer reflect the way in which the community live.	March 2023	