



WHAT THE LOCAL PLAN SETS OUT TO DO

- Continue to make the best use of existing housing stock, by improving energy efficiency and remodelling to meet modern needs, in both older privately owned housing and public housing areas.
- Take steps to reduce housing vacancies and sustain vacancies at or below 3%.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED?

Remodelling: Regenerating the existing housing stock is key to improving the quality and availability of suitable housing in the Borough. A key milestone during the last year has been the completion of a housing regeneration scheme at Parkside following Council investment of £3.3 million over two years. The work included designing out unpopular or unsuitable property types and replacing them with high demand family properties through the conversion of 60, 1 bed flats into 30, 3 bedroom houses. The regeneration work also included rendering to external walls, roofing repairs, external fencing and footpath replacement, provision of off road parking and hardstands to 184 properties.

Regeneration: During 2011/12, the Council began internal maintenance of Council housing at Cockerton, the first phase of the Cockerton Regeneration Programme. The Programme is a major part of the Council's housing regeneration activity and plans involve a combination of improvements to retained Council housing (142 dwellings), demolition of 76 Council dwellings and delivery of new build units. The provision of 60 new affordable homes for rent which will be part funded by the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and provision of up to 24 homes for market sale will help to re-balance the housing offer in the area. Dunelm Property Services and Northstar Housing are the selected developers for the scheme. Improvement works undertaken in 2011/12 included the completion of kitchens, bathrooms, rewiring and central heating for 56 properties.



Modernisation of Rockwell House

The modernisation of 39 flats at Rockwell House sheltered housing scheme was completed in 2011. This included the refurbishment and improvement of all communal areas including the provision of a new communal entrance, buggy store, improved bin store, laundry facilities and a new coffee bar as well as improved external security with the provision of new gated entrance and perimeter fencing. All external gardens have been improved and landscaped.

During the last year, the Council has made provision for disabled adaptations to 320 Council properties, including flat floor showers, ramps, stairlifts handrails, grabrails and other adaptations. A further 281 Council properties have benefited from internal planned maintenance work such as kitchen and bathroom upgrades and rewiring.

Darlington Local Plan Annual Monitoring Report 2012

HOUSING REGENERATION FACT SHEET



Tackling Empty Homes: Council data shows that 3.7% of all homes in Darlington Borough were vacant in 2011 (Strategic Housing Market Assessment, June 2012). This is lower than the Tees Valley average of 4.7% but marginally higher than the Regional vacancy rate of 3.6%. This is also still slightly higher than the Local Plan target which aims to sustain vacancies at or below 3%. The Council is working to tackle long term empty homes (homes vacant for more than 6 months) across the Borough. The number of long term empty homes was recorded as 800 in 2011. The Council has made progress in a number of areas during the last year to try to tackle the issue of long term empty homes as set out below:

- A strategic approach for addressing long term vacancy is set out in the Councils' new Housing Strategy and accompanying Action Plan, published in July 2012;
- A dedicated Empty Homes Officer was appointed in early 2012, providing a dedicated resource to progress key actions;
- An empty homes database has been established. This uses Council Tax data to provide a comprehensive picture of empty homes across the Borough;
- The Council has continued to make contact with empty homes owners and to offer help and advice such as discussing options for private rental or sale of the property to the Council to allow re-use of the property as an affordable home;
- The Council held an Empty Property Forum in partnership with the National Landlords Association in October 2012. The forum provided opportunity for owners of empty homes to get advice about selling their homes and for buyers to find new properties which is a key part of helping to get empty homes back into use.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Within limited available resources, progress is being made in breaking down mono-tenure Council housing estates and widening the affordable housing offer. The availability of public funding will influence the range and extent of future intervention. Red Hall is identified as a priority for future investment and discussions with partners are due to commence shortly. It is anticipated that this programme of investment will commence following the completion of Cockerton.

As a result of the cuts in public sector funding over recent years, the Council is currently unable to offer private sector loans to home owners to assist in home improvements and refurbishments. Investment is being targeted at decent homes work within Council housing estates. Changes in the funding climate will trigger reviews of the housing investment programme.

A new database and dedicated resources will enable the Council to focus on making more progress on tackling long term vacancies.



Investment in Council housing estates



Housing Offer : Quality : Choice



MOVING THINGS FORWARD: KEY ACTIONS

- Work with Dunelm Property Services and Northstar Housing to build 60 affordable homes for rent and up to 24 homes for market sale in the Minors Crescent area of Cockerton over the next two years.
- Invest £3.2 million over the next two years (2012-2014) to continue maintenance work at Cockerton. During 2012/13, work will include new condensing boilers and central heating upgrades. Wider environmental works are also taking place, including repairs to structural elements and roofing in addition to boundary treatments such as new fencing and work to external pathways.
- Red Hall is identified as a priority for future investment and discussions with residents and key stakeholders are due to commence shortly to plan and identify funding for regeneration work at Redhall.
- Adopt the Empty Homes Strategy in January 2013.
- Explore opportunities to lever in private finance to lease and repair targeted empty homes in Darlington and continue to explore other opportunities for tackling empty homes (ongoing).
- Set up an Empty Property Investors' Register and an Empty Property Sellers' Register (ongoing).
- The Council will deliver energy efficiency whole house improvements to a sample of 8-12 Local Authority owned properties in the Borough as part of the £130k Department of Environment and Climate Change Demonstration project coordinated by Newcastle City Council. This is a pilot project in advance of the main 'Warm Up North' programme being delivered over the period 2013-2016 to deliver whole property measures to all housing tenures and public owned buildings across the Borough.
- The Council will explore options for the potential of establishing an Energy Services Company (ESCO), a non-profit organisation which could achieve bulk buy reductions in utility costs for utility supplies for the benefit of Council tenant households to help tackle fuel poverty. There is potential to extend it to other tenures in future years if the feasibility work delivers some positive outcomes.



Example of Council Housing Improvements

Contact Us: You can access more information on planning policy in Darlington at:

www.darlington.gov.uk/planningpolicy

If you are particularly interested in statistics and data for Darlington Borough, you can view these at:

<http://lis.darlington.gov.uk/>

Alternatively, contact the Planning Policy Team on **01325 388644** or email planning.policy@darlington.gov.uk

This document is available in different formats on request.