



**South
Cambridgeshire
District Council**

Health & Environmental Services

Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy

July 2007

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Glossary

| | |
|------------|---|
| CAB | Citizens Advice Bureau |
| CPCT | Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust |
| DCLG | Department for Communities and Local Government |
| DFG | Disabled Facilities Grants |
| EEC Scheme | Energy Efficiency Commitment Scheme |
| GO-East | Government Office for the East of England |
| HA | Housing Association |
| HHRS | Housing Health and Safety Rating System |
| HIA | Home Improvement Agency |
| HMO | Houses in Multiple Occupation |
| HRA | Home Repairs Assistance |
| LAA | Local Area Agreement |
| LASHG | Local Authority Social Housing Grant |
| LDF | Local Development Framework |
| OT | Occupational Therapist |
| PFI | Private Finance Initiative |
| RRO | Regulatory Reform Order |
| RSL | Registered Social Landlord |
| SCDC | South Cambridgeshire District Council |
| SHW | Solar Hot Water Heating |
| SPV | Solar Photovoltaics |

Introduction

1.0 Introduction to South Cambridgeshire

- 1.1 South Cambridgeshire is a mainly rural area of approximately 350 square miles completely surrounding the city of Cambridge. Besides being a thriving agricultural area, it is a leading centre for world-class businesses in information technology, telecommunications, biotechnology and e-commerce.
- 1.2 The district comprises approximately 52,180 households, and has an estimated population of 130,000 people. The majority of the housing is owner occupied (75.2%)¹, with the Council owning 11.3% and the remainder being either registered social landlord properties (3.2%)² or private rented (8.1%)³
- 1.3 The population is set to increase dramatically over the next 10-15 years, with significant housing being built in four main locations: -
 - 2,400 new homes will be built on the edge of Cambridge City -not Green Belt
 - 2,000 new homes will be built on the edge of Cambridge-ex Green Belt
 - 10,000+ new homes will be built at the New Settlement of Northstowe
 - 10,050 new homes will be built in the previously established settlements, rural centres +other villages
- 1.4 In 2004 the Council commissioned a “Private Sector House Condition Survey” which investigated the housing conditions of private sector housing in South Cambridgeshire and is the main source of evidence for this strategy.
- 1.5 In South Cambridgeshire there are approximately 47,300 dwellings in the private sector, with the remaining stock comprising of approximately 5000 being Council owned stock owned and less than 1000 in other tenures.

2.0 Why do we need a strategy?

- 2.1 A Private Sector Housing Renewal Strategy is needed if the Council is to deliver its corporate agenda as well as the key housing objectives of the Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement. It is recognised that the Council cannot deliver the strategy in isolation and a partnership approach with other agencies, bodies, groups and in particular Housing Associations is needed.
- 2.2 The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) Order 2002 (RRO), which came into effect in July 2002, places a duty to produce a Housing Renewal Strategy. It gives wider powers to authorities to use funding in whatever way they consider most appropriate to their area, the only exception is the £25,000 Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG), which remains mandatory.
- 2.3 This strategy has key links with other corporate strategies including the Forward Plan, the Community Strategy, the Local Area Agreement and the Local Development Framework (LDF), the Housing Strategy, and the Tackling Fuel Poverty Report 1999/2000.

¹ Private Sector House Condition Survey 2004

² Private Sector House Condition Survey 2004

³ Private Sector House Condition Survey 2004

3.0 Aim and Scope of the Strategy

- 3.1 Private sector housing needs to be distinguished from the housing provided by the Council. Private sector housing encompasses houses that are in private ownership, namely Owner Occupied Properties and Private Rented properties.
- 3.2 It is important to note that private sector housing activity is not limited to one department's service and this strategy pulls together numerous work streams.
- 3.3 The overall aim of the strategy is to improve housing conditions in the private sector in South Cambridgeshire. To achieve this the Council provides many services in relation to private sector housing. The main function currently relates to the standard of repair of properties. This function is the responsibility of Health and Environmental Services within the Council. The Council has a duty under the Housing Act 2004 to enforce Housing Standards in the district.

4.0 Consultation

- 4.1 In accordance with the decision of the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health (24 January 2006) the strategy was sent to the following for comment:
 - Housing associations and Registered Social Landlords
 - Voluntary Sector organisations involved with housing and homelessness issues
 - Private landlords that the Council is aware of
 - Tenants of private landlords
 - South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust
 - GO-East
- 4.2 The consultation exercise produced few comments from the organisations consulted.

Executive Summary

1.0 Private sector housing includes all housing not owned by the Local Authority; it includes homes owned by private landlords, Registered Social Landlords and Housing Associations as well as houses in other ownerships such as almshouses. It includes empty homes and houses in multiple occupation.

1.1 Consultation on the draft strategy was carried out in early 2006 and the results have been incorporated into this draft.

2.0 Chapter One – Partnerships and stakeholders

2.1 If the strategy is to be delivered it is important to work with and get the support from other outside agencies and organisations. The work to improve private sector housing lies both inside and outside the scope of current council services.

3.0 Chapter Two – National and Local Requirements

3.1 Private sector housing is subjected to a number of new national initiatives, from the housing health and safety rating system, Decent Homes and Cleaner Neighbourhoods. Local Authorities are best placed to have the broad understanding of housing issues but will need to engage stakeholders in order to realise improvements.

3.2 Locally affordable housing is a key corporate objective of the Council, and forms a key objective of both the Community Strategy and the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement

4.0 Chapter Three – Stock and Occupant Profiles

4.1 The South Cambridgeshire private sector housing survey reveals that 5% of properties in the private sector in South Cambs have serious hazards, namely excessive cold (1,100 dwellings) (45% of defective dwellings), and damp and mould growth (800 dwellings) (33% of defective dwellings). With the vagaries and uncertainties of public funding, the most likely assumption is that there will never be enough public funding to cover all the estimated works required.

4.2 Most of the hazards due to excessive cold are affecting our most vulnerable residents, particularly those on low incomes. It is these groups that are going to require the help with finances to make improvements. The private rented sector also has issues but these are less in number and could be rectified by stronger enforcement on landlords.

5.0 Chapter Four – The Current Approach

5.1 Generally the number of properties with serious hazards in the district is low and the majority of the work of the Home Improvement Agency has been related to Disabled Facilities Grants.

5.2 The current HMO registration scheme has registered a small number of properties (there are only a few properties in the district which require registration). The number of HMO's in the district is unknown and more proactive work is needed if they are to be identified.

5.3 Work is underway on updating the empty homes strategy to bring empty homes back into use.

- 5.4 Demand for disabled facilities is increasing as the population increases. Decisions on priorities for spending will need to be kept under review, as it is not going to be possible under current arrangements to finance all the grants that are likely to be needed.
- 5.5 Energy efficiency work has continued with grants for insulation and solar from energy companies now actively promoted. There is no data capture system in use within South Cambridgeshire, which makes the precise calculations of CO₂ reduction difficult.
- 5.6 With the continued pressures on the housing infrastructure and the new growth agenda it is important that new housing is build to a decent standard. The Council is in active negotiations with developers and RSL/HA's to ensure there is an appropriate mix of affordable housing provided in the District.

6.0 Chapter Five – Other Private Sector Housing Services

- 6.1 Physical housing defects are only part of the work on private sector housing; this strategy also looks at homelessness, provision for Travellers, affordable housing, as well as home securing and anti-social behaviour.

7.0 Chapter Six – Access to Quality Services

- 7.1 The Council is committed to providing a quality service for all it's residents, and the "service first" initiative will improve the standards of services available and improve customer satisfaction.
- 7.2 The Council is working on the needs of disadvantage groups, and has produced a disability strategy. Travellers remain the largest ethnic minority in the district and as such have specific needs, which are being addressed. The proposed policies have been screened in relation to the 3 goals of the race equality duty (eliminating unlawful discrimination, promoting equal opportunities and promoting good race relations). The proposals are designed to promote good standards for all occupiers, and to prioritise low income and disabled households, and therefore positively support the Councils equality duties and commitments.

8.0 Chapter Seven – Future Priorities

- 8.1 This strategy is key to achieving the Council's medium term strategy. The chapter outlines the key options that can be taken to improve the standard of private sector housing within the district and improve the health of residents. The proposed options are constrained by the current financial climate and this chapter should be read in conjunction with chapter eight.

9.0 Chapter Eight - Resources

- 9.1 Financial management is going to be key and difficult decisions will have to be made. Opportunities for funding from external sources will have to be explored if the strategy is to be delivered.
- 9.2 It is recognised that the private sector housing stock is a public asset. Nonetheless, it has to be emphasised that homeowners are responsible for maintaining their properties and most will have to pay for their repairs without grant aid. As we will only be able to assist a small proportion of those in need, assistance must be carefully targeted.

10.0 Chapter Nine – Implementation and Monitoring

- 10.1 Consultation with stakeholders will continue in order to ensure effective delivery of the strategy. The Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health approved this strategy in draft and gave a strategic direction as to the Council's priorities for private sector housing in January 2007. The agreed priorities are contained in Appendix One.

Chapter One – Partnerships and Stakeholders

1.0 Partnership Working

- 1.1 If the strategy is to be delivered it is important to get support from other outside agencies and organisations as the work to improve private sector housing lies both inside and outside the scope of council services.
- 1.2 The key stakeholders for this strategy include:
- Residents of South Cambridgeshire (owner occupiers, tenants of private landlords, tenant of social landlords, owners of empty dwellings)
 - Registered Social Landlords (RSL) and Housing Associations (HA). 4% of the houses in South Cambridgeshire are owned by RSL/HA's
 - South Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Agency. The Council's in-house Home Improvement Agency service (HIA) is available to all clients. The HIA team oversee all grant works from the initial visit by a caseworker, assessment of likely financial contribution by the applicant, through to the completion of the work
 - Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust (CPCT). The CPCT works in partnership with an number of organisations including SCDC on a number of housing related services including; integrated community teams, delayed transfers, vulnerable peoples programme, community living and falls prevention
 - SCDC is one of several partners who commission the Supporting People programme, it aims to support vulnerable people and supports them to live independently at home
 - As part of the East of England, South Cambridgeshire is experiencing unprecedented growth in the housing market. As such services and infrastructure need to be made and maintained at a regional and sub-regional level through a range of government agencies and NDPBs
 - Often the Council is not the first "port of Call" for housing advice and it is important to work with the Cambridge Council for Voluntary Services, Age Concern, and the Citizens Advice Bureau etc.
 - Other multi-agency groups include the Older People's Planning Forum, The joint South Cambridgeshire & Cambridge City Improving Health Partnership, the Falls Collaboration to name but a few

2.0 Service Delivery

- 2.1 In order to provide a comprehensive and inclusive private sector housing service it is vital to work with and include the above stakeholders in the development and delivery of the strategy.
- 2.2 It is critical that the private sector housing services available are publicised to all stakeholders.

Chapter Two – National and Local Requirements

1.0 National Context

1.1 Nationally the Government has introduced four main initiatives:

- The Decent Homes Standard for private dwellings
- The Housing Health and Safety Rating System
- Licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO's) and Private Sector Landlords
- Re-occupying vacant properties

2.0 Decent Homes

2.1 In 2000 the Government set a target to bring all social housing up to the Decent Homes standard by 2010. In 2002, the decent homes standard target was broadened to encompass 70% of vulnerable households in the private sector living in Decent Homes by 2010. Vulnerable Households are defined as households being in receipt of any one of a specified range of means-tested benefits or tax-credits. One of the new Performance Indicators for the Home Improvement Agencies in the county measures the contribution towards achieving decent homes in the private sector from April 2005. At present the Council does not have a robust monitoring mechanism for ascertaining the numbers of non-decent homes occupied by vulnerable households and uses the Government "ready reckoner" as an estimate.

2.2 The initiative recommended that one key vehicle for delivering these increases is to give local authorities the power to provide assistance for repairs and improvements

2.3 A "decent home" should, as a minimum, meet the following four criteria:

- a) It must meet the current minimum standard for housing
- b) It must be in a "reasonable" state of repair
- c) It must have reasonably modern facilities and services
- d) It must have a reasonable degree of thermal comfort

2.4 In aiming to achieve the target, we will take into consideration:

- a) The definition of "decent"
- b) The scale of the problem
- c) The various mechanisms for funding delivery – available grant funding, Private Finance Initiative (PFI), any extra funding made available by Government
- d) The Implications of the Public Service Agreement Plus Review undertaken in 2003 and the recent studies by the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission.
- e) The link between the Decent Homes target and other parts of the Government's Sustainable Communities agenda.

2.5 It should be noted however, that a report ordered by the House of Commons concluded that:

- a) The Decent Homes standard was in danger of not being met, and
- b) The standard was set at too basic a level and that by 2010 it will be seriously out of step with reasonable occupier expectations

3.0 Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

- 3.1 The Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) gives scores for individual hazards rather than giving a simple fit/unfit judgment. The HHSRS scoring system combines the probability that an accident will occur with the spread of likely outcomes, thus if an accident is very likely to occur and the outcome is likely to be serious (e.g. a major or fatal injury) then the score will be very high. This will then determine the type of enforcement action required.
- 3.2 Scores over 1000 will determine the presence of a category 1 hazard, which imposes on the Council a duty to take action. Scores below 1000, category 2 hazards, empower the Council to act if appropriate.

4.0 HMO and private sector landlord licensing

- 4.1 The Act also places a duty on the owners/managers of certain types of houses in multiple occupation to apply to the Council for a licence. The Council will also have power to introduce selective licensing of other residential accommodation where there is a need to do so, although it has not decided to do so yet as there is no evidence to support a need.

5.0 National Priorities

- 5.1 The Government has introduced several schemes that need to be delivered at a local level, all of which have a relationship to private sector housing issues.
- 5.2 These schemes include; the eradication of Fuel Poverty, Safe and Sustainable Communities, Environmental Crime such as graffiti and fly tipping, Improving the Health of our residents and reducing energy use.

6.0 Local Context

6.1 The Council Corporate Objectives

The relevant Councils Corporate Objectives and policies are as follows: -

- **High quality, accessible, value for money services**
For example:
Ensuring equal access for all e.g. adequate provision for homeless people to contact the Council, adequate information on available grants for owner-occupiers.
- **Quality village life**
For example:
Provision of affordable housing e.g. using other means of finance including partnerships to replace the Local Authority Social Housing Grant (LASHG).
Reducing fear of crime e.g. bringing empty properties back into use.
Cleaner villages e.g. improving the street scene through housing repairs and improvements.
- **A sustainable future for South Cambridgeshire**
For example:
Influencing design of new build housing in the major development areas in South Cambridgeshire.
Enabling owner-occupiers to improve the levels of energy efficiency thus reducing fuel poverty

- **A better future through partnership**

For example:

An underpinning ethos of the Council, recognising that not all of services can be delivered in isolation e.g. provision of new social housing by working in partnerships with RSL's etc

7.0 The Sustainable Community Strategy for South Cambridgeshire

7.1 The Sustainable Community Strategy paints a picture of our district, as we want it to become over the next 15 or more years. It takes account of the changes and challenges facing the district, including creating the new town of Northstowe. The strategy is currently being reviewed and a new version will be produced mid 2007.

8.0 The Housing Strategy

8.1 This Strategy also addresses one of the key priorities in the Councils Housing Strategy and as such this strategy should be read as an appendix to the main Housing Strategy.

8.2 It includes commitments to:

- a) Help vulnerable owners through targeted grant assistance
- b) Target policies to improve health
- c) Improve energy efficiency
- d) Help people with disabilities
- e) Ensure private rented accommodation is safe and fit

9.0 The Tackling Fuel Poverty Report 1999/2000

9.1 The link between health and decent housing is well documented. Fuel poverty is defined as where a household has to spend more than 10% of income, after housing costs have been met, in order to achieve a heating regime adequate for health and comfort. The Fuel Poverty report outlines the health consequences to people living in Fuel Poverty and outlines the various initiatives the Council should be taking to reduce the levels of Fuel Poverty across the District.

9.2 A joint action plan to reduce levels of fuel poverty has been developed between South Cambridgeshire District Council, the then Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and Cambridge City Council. A new post of Strategic Lead for Community Living has been established and is jointly funded by both South Cambs, Cambridge City and Cambridgeshire County Councils, and by Cambridgeshire PCT. The post has a responsibility for the health and well being of older people of which fuel poverty is a key duty.

9.3 Increasing the number of properties that are energy efficient means fewer properties will fail the adequate warmth requirement of the decent homes standard.

9.4 As well as these main strategies there are also these other underpinning and linking strategies:

- a) Community Safety Strategy
- b) Homelessness Strategy
- c) Empty Homes Strategy

Chapter Three – Stock and Occupant Profiles.

1.0 What are the Specific Housing issues by way of Tenure?

This chapter outlines the issues for each of the housing tenures (Owner Occupied, Private Rented, Housing Association, Other tenures e.g. tied dwellings).

2.0 Profile of the Private Sector Stock

2.1 Age of the stock

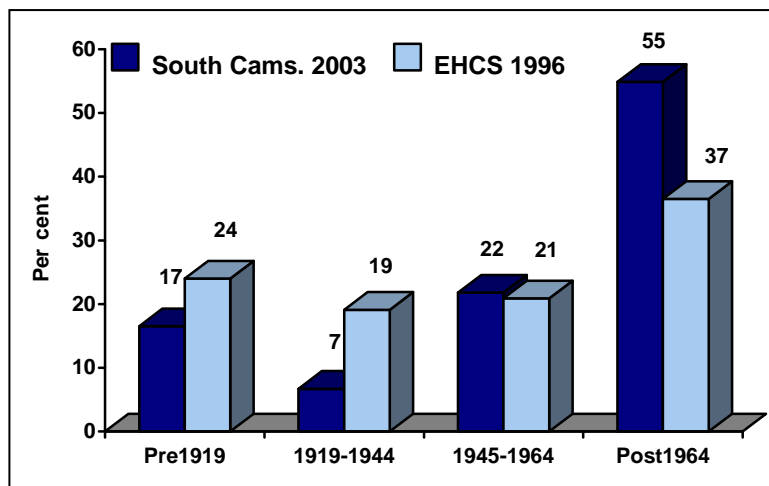


Figure 1: Dwelling age profile (national and local)

The age profile suggests that it is considerably more modern than the national average. This will continue to increase with the new growth in the district

2.2 Type of stock

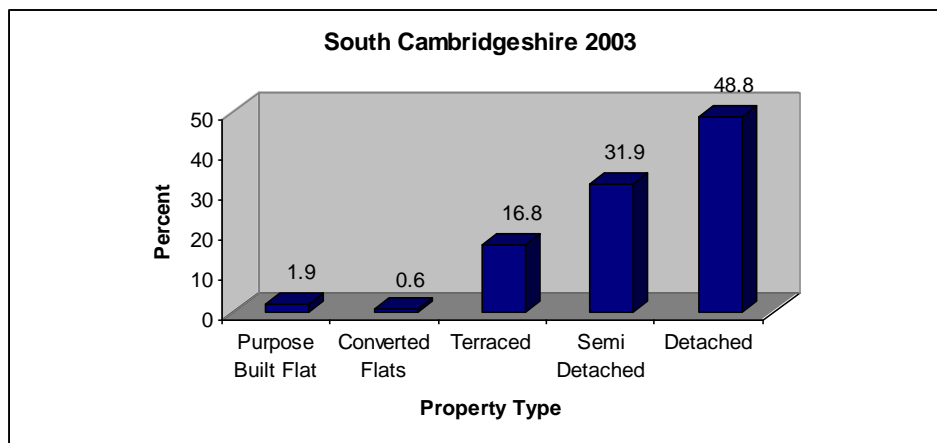


Figure 2: Dwelling type profile (local)

2.3 The property type profile for South Cambridgeshire varies considerably to the national with detached properties found at a higher rate (48% locally compared to 21% nationally)

2.4 Tenure

| | South Cambridgeshire 2003 | England 1996 |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------|
| Owner occupied | 40,900 | 86% |
| Housing association | 2,100 | 4% |
| Privately rented | 4,400 | 9% |

Table 1: National (1996 EHCS) and local tenure proportions

3.0 Serious Hazards

3.1 The total number of dwellings with a serious hazard is 2,100 (5%).

The most common serious hazards are⁴:

- excessive cold (1,100 dwellings) (45% of defective dwellings)
- damp and mould growth (800 dwellings) (33% of defective dwellings)

| Construction Date | % of stock with Serious Hazards |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|
| <1919 | 14 |
| Interwar | 8 |
| 1945-1964 | 2 |
| >1964 | 3 |

Table 2: distribution of serious hazards by construction date

3.2 Serious hazards take into account the age of the dwelling and the most vulnerable group for that hazard. For example if a dwelling has a 'falls on the level' hazard it scores greater if occupied by elderly occupiers.

3.3 The 2004 Private Sector House Condition Survey for South Cambridgeshire confirms that excessive cold for the over 60's is the major hazard and for younger occupiers the major hazard is damp & mould growth (both are heating, insulation and ventilation related).

3.4 The privately rented stock has the lowest rate of serious hazards at 3%, this compares to 5% for both housing association and for owner-occupiers dwellings. The major hazard for older occupiers (those residents over 60) is excessive cold. 55% of all serious hazards relate to excessive cold in the owner-occupied stock in this age group. In the private rented sector there are too few dwellings for meaningful analysis for this age group. In this sector other serious hazards are more associated with younger heads of household

4.0 Empty Properties

4.1 In April 2004 there were 1714 vacant private sector properties (of which 713 were known to have remained empty for more than 6 months). This represents 3.6% of the entire private sector housing stock, which is slightly above the average of 3% empty private properties shown in the English House Condition Survey. However, at least 300 "empty homes" are holiday/second homes in contrast to many other parts of the country. The main reason for empty properties appears to be "owner choice"; there is little that can be done to persuade owners to reoccupy their properties without significant financial input from the Authority.

⁴ 2004 Private Sector House Condition Survey

5.0 Decent Homes

- 5.1 Not Decent Homes numbers 23% in the owner occupied stock and rises to 40% in the private rented sector⁵. A poor degree of thermal comfort is the primary cause of failure of the Decent Homes Standard in the private rented sector. Failures in this category will be need to be tackled using Home Energy Conservation Act initiatives. Progress towards meeting the Decent Homes standard will be constrained by the Councils ability to fund grant aid for occupiers unable to pay for necessary works.
- 5.2 Having inputted the results of the last stock condition survey (with an assumption about the post 64 stock based on the English House Condition Survey) into the Department of Communities and Local Government's ready reckoner it shows that as at 2003 63.7% of our vulnerable households lived in decent homes which is only 1.3% off the required target of 65%.

⁵ 2004 Private Sector House Condition Survey

Chapter Four – The Current Approach

1.0 Grants to remedy Serious Hazards

- 1.1 The main areas of spend by the Council on private sector renewal is in the form of grants. The table below shows the amounts of spend of the Home Improvement Agency in 2004-05.

| Grant | Amount (£) |
|---|------------|
| Disabled Facilities (DFG) (Mandatory) | 600,675.00 |
| Disabled Facilities (DFG) (Discretionary) | 74,904.00 |
| Renovation Loan | 12,802.00 |
| Home Repairs Assistance | 84,626.00 |
| Returning Home Grant | 3,189.00 |
| Relocation Grant | 00.00 |
| Total | 776,196.00 |

- 1.2 Part of the money spent on DFG's comes as a grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Out of a spend of £600,675.00 in 2005 the DCLG contributed £180,000.00 leaving the council to find the other £420,675.00
- 1.3 The Council's in-house Home Improvement Agency service (HIA) is the main grant/loan-giving department within the Council. The available grants are:
- Disabled Facilities (DFG)
 - Relocation Grant
 - Returning Home Grant
 - Home Repairs Assistance (HRA)
 - Renovation Loans (to be phased out unless further funding becomes available)

Details of the grants can be found in Appendix Three

2.0 Empty Homes

- 2.1 Due to the housing demand in South Cambridgeshire there is a need to bring empty properties back into use. The Empty Homes strategy implements actions that address issues related to long-term empty properties and bring a small number of these properties back into use every year.
- 2.2 The Council has identified four strategic objectives to achieve this aim:
- To compile an empty homes database, which should be continually updated through ongoing research, liaising with other council officers and external partners and by encouraging the general public to provide information.
 - To identify ways by which empty homes can be brought back into use
 - To raise awareness of empty homes issues
 - To encourage owners of empty homes, through a range of incentives, to make their properties available to rent
- 2.3 Proactive work is currently carried out to meet the Council's commitment to the Empty Homes Strategy.

- 2.4 Despite identifying ways in which this could happen and encouraging owners to bring the properties back into use by publicising the issues, to date there has been little success. It is possible that this is partly due to the absence of any grants for this purpose. However, the Housing Act 2004 gives new powers in this respect that allow the council to make management orders for the purpose of having properties re-occupied.
- 2.5 Due to the very high costs of property in South Cambridgeshire, we can no longer depend on Registered Social Landlords (RSL's) acquiring properties, either after compulsory purchase or on the open market, as the relationship between costs and social rents means that it is poor value for money and the RSL's are unable to subsidise. The maximum grant that an RSL can get is fixed and, with the combination of expensive empty property plus expensive renovation works, the result is a loss.
- 2.6 Under the Housing Act 2004 the Council has new powers to ensure that empty properties are brought back into use. These powers include the making of Empty Dwelling Management Orders, however, these rely on approval by a Residential Property Tribunal and should be seen as a last resort.

3.0 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)

- 3.1 Currently HMO's make up less than 1% (0.6%) of the stock in South Cambridgeshire. A mixture of licensing, enforcement and education is used to improve conditions in HMO's. There is no indication of the number of properties that need to be licensed as little proactive work on identifying them has been undertaken.

4.0 Energy Efficiency

- 4.1 The council does not directly fund energy efficiency measures in the private stock, however, it does work with a number of partners to provide loft/cavity wall insulation and Solar Hot Water heating (SHW) and Solar Power/Solar Photovoltaics (SPV) at discounted prices.
- 4.2 The British Gas cash back scheme offers both loft and cavity wall insulation and is funded under the EEC scheme to the "able to pay" sector. Approximately 400 dwellings have been insulated using this scheme during 2005 - 2007. In return for using the scheme each client receives £50 cash back from British Gas. British Gas also pay a referral fee to the Council for each referral they receive, this money is then spent on further private sector housing projects
- 4.3 The HEAT Cambs project gives discounted loft and cavity wall insulation to the "able to pay" sector. Approximately 300 households have received discounted loft or cavity wall insulation in the last few years. HEAT Cambs also pay a referral fee, which is paid to Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust, and is spent on vulnerable peoples projects. South Cambridgeshire is a pilot for the British Gas cashback scheme that has been extended to cover solar initiatives including SHW and SPV.
- 4.4 Warmfront is the Government Scheme, which the Council supports and promotes. Grants are only available to those on certain income related benefit. Warmfront has insulated approximately 100 dwellings over the last few years

5.0 New Build

- 5.1 The planning service and developers work closely with the Environmental Health service on ensuring new build properties are as energy efficient as practicably possible. The new Local Development Framework (LDF) contains policies on both energy efficiency and renewable energy, which are further developed in the area action plans for each major development.
- 5.2 Developers are encouraged to reduce the amount of CO₂ m³/year emitted from the constructed dwellings above that required by Building Regulations when calculated by the elemental method as a minimum.

6.0 Enforcement policy

- 6.1 The Housing Renewal Policy refers to assisting homeowners by way of (a) funding, either by loan or by grant and (b) making home repair advice available. However, where these methods fail and unfitness persists, either due to lack of funding or lack of interest on the part of the owner, it may become necessary for the Council to intervene and use its enforcement powers.
- 6.2 As has already been observed, there will never be enough funding and owners have a responsibility to their properties. This includes landlords who have a duty to ensure that properties let by them are in a fit condition.
- 6.3 In order to ensure that enforcement is carried out in a fair and equitable manner, the Council has adopted an Enforcement Policy.
- 6.4 In March 1998 the Cabinet Office and the Local Government Association jointly published an Enforcement Concordat. This sets out a blueprint for fair, practical and consistent enforcement across the Country. South Cambridgeshire District Council has formally adopted the Concordat for all its enforcement based services and, in so doing, gives commitment to ensure best practice in enforcement policy and activities. This policy lays out the principles to be adopted by Officers and staff exercising any enforcement function within Environmental Health.

Chapter Five – Other Private Sector Housing Services

1.0 The Homelessness Strategy

- 1.1 The role of the private sector has been identified as a key area in meeting the council's homelessness strategy.
- 1.2 The Council has a separate detailed Homelessness Strategy and therefore this material will not be repeated here.

2.0 Travellers

- 2.1 South Cambridgeshire has approximately 340 caravans. The estimated Traveller population of 750 people can be considered to be the largest single ethnic minority group in South Cambridgeshire. National and international studies show there are inequalities in health experience between Travellers and the general population⁶.
- 2.2 The Caravan and Control of Development Act 1960 prohibits the use of land as a caravan site unless the occupier holds a site licence issued by the local authority. To insure the caravans are safe and meet minimum requirements South Cambridgeshire District Council will issue caravan site licences where appropriate and will impose conditions on:
 - The type of caravan, e.g. residential, static holiday or touring.
 - The permitted density (the number per acre/hectare) and the spacing between caravans.
 - Water supply and drainage; lavatory and washing facilities.
 - Fire precautions and electrical installations
- 2.3 Following the completion of a sub regional study of Travellers needs, the provision of further authorised sites is being progressed through a Gypsy and Travellers Development Plan Document (GTDPD) as part of the LDF process.

3.0 Affordable and Key Worker Housing

- 3.1 Key Worker housing is available to provide housing for key workers who are considered to be a first time buyer. As this is not directly part of the strategy it is mentioned in passing only.

4.0 Home security and crime reduction:

- 4.1 The Bobby Scheme is a charitable scheme, intended to reduce burglary by improving home security. It offers a service providing new locks, bolts, door chains and peepholes to persons 60 years and over who have been victims of burglary, potential victims of burglary (at real risk) and vulnerable persons (disabled or living in a high crime area) at no cost to the applicant.

5.0 Area renewal:

- 5.1 There is no evidence to show that there are any significant clusters of unfit properties that would make Area Renewal a feasible project in this rural area⁷.

⁶ South Cambridgeshire Health Profile 2002

⁷ 2004 Private Sector House Condition Survey

6.0 Further research

- 6.1 South Cambridgeshire District Council is co-operating with all of the other district councils in the Cambridge sub region to conduct a Housing Market Assessment, which will identify a wide range of needs in both the public and private sectors. The final report should be available in mid 2007.

Chapter Six – Access to Quality Services

1.0 Quality Services - Service Standards

- 1.1 South Cambridgeshire has introduced a set of service standards that aim to put customers first, deliver outstanding services and provide easy access to services and information. They place the customer at the centre of its service delivery.
- 1.2 The specific standards for private sector housing are:
We will:
- Offer advice to owners and landlords on house improvements and minimum housing standards
 - Investigate tenant complaints about accommodation
 - Routinely inspect mobile home sites including Traveller sites, to make sure they meet the conditions of their licence
 - We work to make sure that homes in the private sector are fit for human habitation, kept in reasonable repair and are not overcrowded.
 - Provide grants to help those most in need to adapt/improve their home.
 - Promote grants to improve energy efficiency.
- 1.3 The Contact Centre acts as a first point of contact for private sector housing enquires. The staff are trained to answer most questions on private sector housing issues. The contact centre also handle questions relating to social services issues allowing service users to be signposted to the correct service. The service is available 8.00 am to 8.00 pm six days a week. At the time of first contact with the Home improvement Agency the client is told of the timescale from approval to grant completion. From then on caseworkers are appointed to manage the grant process to help the client through the system.
- 1.4 Customer feedback is encouraged and welcomed. Each year the Environmental Health service carries out a Customer Satisfaction Survey, the results of which are used to improve customer service.
- 1.5 The needs of “harder to reach” groups has yet to be addressed and it hoped that the results of further consultation will be incorporated into the strategy in due course.

2.0 Access to Services

- 2.1 Information on private sector housing for South Cambridgeshire residents is being improved.
- 2.2 The Council, through its best value review on accessing services has identified the following groups whose access requirement need to be addressed:
- Working parents, commuters etc – i.e. busy people for whom time is the greatest constraint. They need to be able to contact the Council at a convenient time of day, quickly and easily. In some cases, such people may wish to use technology (email and website) but in other cases the opportunity to be able to speak to someone outside normal office hours would be valuable.
 - Low income groups – i.e. people who may find the cost of phoning the Council (particularly for long calls); travelling into the main offices; or the cost of some discretionary services prohibitive.

- People from different age groups. While wishing to avoid pre-judging the preferences of different age groups, the Council needs to provide for both new and more traditional forms of communication.
 - People living in outlying villages in South Cambs, including those that look more to the surrounding market town as they're nearest centre. Residents in such villages may find it difficult to come to see the Council (if it is something which cannot be dealt with by telephone) because of lack of public transport.
 - People with access to computers and those who don't. Electronic service delivery will have great benefits for many people and will also achieve efficiencies for the Council. It will continue to be necessary to ensure that people without computers are not disadvantaged.
 - People with sensory or other physical difficulties. The Council must continue to develop the means to enable all residents to have equal access.
 - People who don't have English as their main language or who may have other cultural differences.
- 2.3 In order to address these concerns the council uses a range of methods to make services as accessible as possible. These include-
- Wheelchair accessible offices with private interview facilities at Cambourne.
 - Translation and interpreting facilities when needed.
 - Website and email.
 - Contact Centre – with flexible and extended hours of operation.
- 2.4 The Council holds regular housing and benefit surgeries across the district that can give advice on benefits and homelessness issues.
- 2.5 Various leaflets are also available relating to specific areas of housing need or designed for specific groups e.g. grants for disabled people, and can be requested in other formats and languages.
- 2.6 The Council also relies on the non-statutory agencies such as the CAB and Age Concern to give housing related information. It is therefore important to keep these agencies updated, as the information given is only as up to date as the information provided by the Council.
- 2.7 The Council has produced a disability equality scheme that addresses the needs of disabled people accessing the Councils private sector housing services.
- 2.8 The Council is also reviewing its access to services and policies in relation to ethnic minorities in accordance with the Race Equality requirements and has produced interactive thematic maps of the area using Census 2001. The council has also worked in partnership with the Primary Care Trust to produce a health profile of the district using the DETR MID, the information is used to plan services based on the needs of the population.
- 2.9 The Council monitors the composition of the population particularly with regards to the ethnicity of the population. (Travellers form the largest ethnic minority in South Cambs).

2.10 The Council produces, upon request, letters/leaflets in other languages and formats including Braille and has a contract with Language Line to provide translation services for tenants/clients who first language is not English.

Chapter Seven – Future Priorities

1.0 The way forward – Medium term Council priorities

- 1.1 This chapter outlines the way forward for private sector housing improvements, and should be read in conjunction with Chapter Eight – resources.
- 1.2 In order to focus the Council's efforts and resources on a manageable agenda the Council has set medium term priorities for the period 2005/06 to 2007/08.
Priority 1 - To improve customer service
Priority 2 - To Achieve successful, sustainable new communities at Northstowe and other major new settlements
Priority 3 - To increase the supply of affordable housing
- 1.3 The principles of Priority 1 run throughout this strategy and are reflected in Chapter Six – Access to Quality Services. This issue of private sector housing in relation to Priority 2 and new build is outlined in Chapter Four, although not strictly housing renewal, private sector housing standards in new build areas is being taken forward through the planning system with key private sector housing officers working as part of the various sub groups that are delivering the growth agenda.

2.0 Other priorities

As well as the Council's Corporate Priorities there are other priorities relevant to Private Sector Housing Renewal contained in other strategies and service plans:

- Community Strategy
- Strategic Housing Services Service Plan
- Sustainability Service Plan
- Travellers Service Plan
- Health and Environmental Services Service Plan

This list is not exhaustive as it only shows the major service plans and strategies that have a direct relationship to private sector housing issues. There are other council strategies that are relevant but not directly linked such as the Community Safety Strategy; it is outside the scope of the strategy to go into further detail on these.

3.0 Strategic Direction for Private Sector Housing

- 3.1 In January 2007 the Environmental Health and Housing Portfolio Holders agreed the draft Private Sector Housing Strategy. The Council has decided it's strategic direction for tackling housing conditions in the private sector should be a mixture of giving grants/loans and enforcement where appropriate.
- 3.2 The council has discussed the available options to remedy the private sector housing problems, as identified by the 2004 Private Sector House Condition Survey, and decided the main priorities should tackle:
 - Affordable Housing (already a Council Priority), and
 - Fuel poverty and energy efficiencyThese are in addition to existing provisions of grants detailed in Chapter Four.
- 3.3 The options agreed by the Council are detailed in the action plan at Appendix Two.

4.0 Private Sector Housing Priorities

4.1 Health Outcomes – Decent Homes/Serious Hazards

4.2 Due to the increase in mandatory DFG's non-mandatory renovation and repairs Grants/Loans have ceased and the available finance switched to the DFG budget. For improving housing conditions in the private rented sector enforcement is the only option.

5.0 Disabled Facilities Grants and adaptations for independent living

5.1 Currently the provision to provide adaptations for independent living comes in form of Disabled Facilities Grants. These grants are mandatory and part of the cost is reimbursed by Central Government. These grants are currently over subscribed and extra finances are being diverted from non-mandatory grants to meet the Councils statutory obligations.

6.0 Energy Efficiency & Fuel Poverty

6.1 Currently the elimination of fuel poverty and improvements in energy efficiency are made via grants from Central Government (WarmFront) and Energy Suppliers (EEC2). The Council does not give grants in it's own right but acts a signposting service to available grants.

6.2 The Council has agreed to extend the provision of grants to cover replacement-heating systems for those not eligible for other schemes, subject to finance being made available.

7.0 Housing Supply/Homelessness

7.1 Housing in the district is in great demand especially affordable housing. The new growth areas will deliver most of the housing demand, however, evidence suggests that there are a large number of properties in South Cambridgeshire that are under occupied.

7.2 The Council has agreed to provide grants to convert large properties into flats, subject to finance being made available.

8.0 Feelings of Safety

8.1 There is no point in having housing of a good standard if the surroundings are inadequate or if people are afraid to live in them. South Cambridgeshire District Council in partnership with Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue, and the Environment Agency have set up a group to work on anti-social behaviour related to Envirocrime (fly tipping, graffiti, noise and abandoned vehicles etc). The Council also supports the Bobby Scheme and the Proof of Age Card scheme. As such the Council will continue with the Envirocrime agenda and work with partners to improve the street scene and environment.

Chapter Eight - Resources

1.0 The Council is committed to improving the condition of the private sector housing stock in the district and to reducing the effects of climate change and will increase the provision of private sector grants available if and when suitable funding becomes available. Until such funding becomes available the Council will raise private sector housing standards through a mix of enforcement, education and the continued signposting of residents to grants available from the Council or elsewhere.

2.0 Current Resources – Serious Hazards

2.1 The estimated spend on Improvement Grants (to remedy serious hazards) for 2006/07 is £47,080. This is a discretionary grant and will have to be reviewed in light of the increase in demand for Disabled Facilities Grants. Funding is allocated to the various types of grants. These are reviewed annually with a capability for mid-year adjustments as demand dictates.

2.2 The total cost of repair works to all dwellings with a serious hazard is £23 million, an average of £9,800 per dwelling⁸. To remedy all the items that make dwellings non decent in the private rented sector would cost an estimated £19,200,000⁹

3.0 Current Resources – Adaptations for independent living

3.1 Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) is the only mandatory grant we are obliged to offer. At the current rate of spend it would take the council 11-13 years to make all the adaptations which are currently needed¹⁰.

3.2 Disabled Facilities Grants remain a mandatory function and are available up to a value of £25,000. The Private Sector House Condition Survey looked at the number and types of adaptations that are needed across the district and are as follows:

| Type of adaptation needed | Number of properties requiring adaptation |
|----------------------------|---|
| Wider doorways | 50 |
| Stair lift / lift | 700 |
| Ramp | 550 |
| Grab rails / handrail | 1000 |
| Hoist | 150 |
| Redesigned kitchen | 50 |
| Redesign / relocation WC | 450 |
| Redesign / relocation bath | 600 |
| Door answering / opening | 300 |
| Emergency Alarm | 350 |
| Other adaptation | 100 |

3.3 Residents will only qualify for a disabled facilities grant (DFG) if they have been assessed by an Occupational Therapist as needing adaptations.

⁸ 2004 Private Sector House Condition Survey

⁹ 2004 Private Sector House Condition Survey

¹⁰ £8.1M/total spend on DFG's

- 3.4 Eligibility for assistance will be determined by means testing, unless the applicant is already in receipt of a qualifying benefit. As of December 2005, there is no means testing for adaptations for a child. This means that the entire cost of works, up to the mandatory £25,000 will need to come from the Council's Budget.
- 3.5 The total spend on Disabled Facilities Grants for 2006/07 was £557,000. This is divided into two:
- Mandatory DFG = £503,000
 - Discretionary DFG = £54,000
- This spending is likely to increase to keep up with demand. The budget estimate for 2007/08 is £850,000

4.0 Fuel Poverty and Energy Efficiency

- 4.1 The estimated spend on energy efficiency 2006/07 is £5,000. This is used for promotional work on reducing fuel poverty and improving energy efficiency only. Energy Supply companies and Central Government fund the grants.
- 4.2 There is a small income from referral fees from British Gas, which is estimated to be £3500

5.0 Estimate spend due

- 5.1 The amount we would have to spend to remove serious hazards and complete all adaptations is shown below.

| Remedy | Amount (£M) |
|---|------------------------|
| To repair all properties with a serious hazard under the HHSR | 23.00 |
| To bring all properties up to the decent homes standard | 48.00 |
| To fit all adaptations required under DFG | 8.10 |
| Total | 71.00 |

Chapter Nine – Implementation and Monitoring

1.0 Implementation

- 1.1 The action plan of initiatives to be undertaken in order to implement this strategy are given in Appendix Two and progress will be reported to the Portfolio Holder as per the agreed reporting procedure.
- 1.2 Any extra resources required to implement the strategy will have to be agreed on an individual basis and are subject to the Council's spending priorities and objectives.

2.0 Monitoring

- 2.1 The implementation of the strategy will be monitored and appropriate targets set. Consultation with stakeholders will be carried out when the targets are set and delivered.
- 2.2 The strategy will be monitored using a set of performance indicators including national best value indicators. The strategy will be monitoring in conjunction with the Housing Strategy and the annual service plans.

Appendix One – Priorities for Action as Agreed by the Portfolio Holder (25 January 2007)

First Priority

A/T2

Increase the promotion of energy efficiency grants

A/T3

Give grants/loans for heating systems only, not covered by Government schemes

A/T8

Offer grants/loans as a Council for energy measures not covered by the existing grants, such as replacement heating and renewable energy grants

Second Priority

O/O4

Offer grants/loans to encourage the conversion of larger properties into smaller units to increase the private rented market or long term leasing (affordable homes priority)

Third Priority

A/T4

Run a training scheme for health visitors on the links between housing and health

Forth Priority

A/T9

Continue with the Envirocrime agenda and work with partners to improve the environment and street scene

Comments

Not dependent on additional funding, will be implemented in phase one

Dependent on additional funding, will be implemented if and when addition funding is secured

Dependent on additional funding, will be implemented if and when addition funding is secured

Dependent on additional funding, will be implemented if and when addition funding is secured

Not dependent on additional funding, will be implemented in phase one

Not dependent on additional funding, will be implemented in phase one

Appendix Two – Action Plan

| Timescale | Strategy area for action | Tenure | Solution | Resources | Performance Measure |
|---|--------------------------|----------------|--|--|--|
| Short term – by the end of 2 nd Quarter (September 2007) | Category 1 hazards | Owner Occupier | Extend client group to include households with children | Within existing budget | |
| | | | Increase promotion of energy efficiency grants | Within existing budget, most work can be resourced through partnership working | Number of articles in South Cambs Magazine and other media. Number of energy efficiency campaigns under taken |
| | | Private Rented | Increase enforcement action | Within existing budget | Number of enforcement actions both formal and informal taken |
| | | | Establish an HMO register (already happening) only for those properties which come under the definition of an HMO requiring registration under the act | Within existing budget | Register established and updated |
| | | | Increase promotion of energy efficiency grants | Within existing budget and using income from referral fees. | Number of articles in South Cambs Magazine and other media. Number of energy efficiency campaigns under taken |
| | | | | | |

| Timescale | Strategy area for action | Tenure | Solution | Resources | Performance Measure |
|--|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| | Feelings of Safety and Well-being | All tenures | Continue the work undertaken by the Envirocrime group to look at housing issues related to envirocrime | Within existing budgets and staffing | See Envirocrime workplan |
| Medium term | Risk of Fire | All tenures | Run campaign in SC Magazine on fire safety with the fire service | None, possible revenue income from the fire service if they sponsor an article or pay for an advert | Number of articles in South Cambs Magazine and other media. |
| | Condensation | All tenures | Run an education campaign of lifestyle issues particularly amongst vulnerable groups | Finances for a campaign are within the existing budget, although it will have to be fitted in within existing staff resources. | Number of articles in South Cambs Magazine and other media. Number of campaigns undertaken |
| Long term – by end of 2007-2008 | Category 1 hazards | Owner occupied | Offer grants for heating systems | Cabinet has agreed to this action, which will be implemented when suitable funding opportunities have been identified and become available. Estimated cost of £100,000 | Dependant upon resources being released from existing sources. |
| | | Private rented | Offer grants for heating systems | | |
| | Affordable housing | All tenures | Offer grants to convert large properties into smaller units | | |

| Timescale | Strategy area for action | Tenure | Solution | Resources | Performance Measure |
|-----------|--------------------------|-------------|--|-----------|---------------------|
| | Overcrowding | All tenures | Increase number of properties available for rent by offering grants to convert large properties into smaller units | | |

Appendix Three – Home Improvement Agency Grants

DISABLED FACILITIES – (Mandatory Grant up to £25,000 & Discretionary Loan for remaining works if over £25,000)

A DFG depends on referral by an Occupational Therapist, who will assess the needs of the applicant and determine the necessary works. Under the Regulatory Reform Order (RRO), this grant remains mandatory up to a value of £25,000. Any essential costs in excess of this must be met by the applicant and will be available as an interest free loan. Any loan will be placed as a Land Registry Charge on the property for recovery when the property is sold. Works should be completed within 12 months but this may be extended in special circumstances.

Eligibility for assistance will be determined by means testing, unless the applicant is already in receipt of a qualifying benefit.

RELOCATION GRANT - (Discretionary Grant)

This is available to assist DFG clients to move to a more suitable property where the Occupational Therapist (OT) indicates a need for adaptation works that are not feasible in the existing property. The maximum grant is £5,000. Eligibility for assistance is determined by means testing.

RETURNING HOME GRANT - (Discretionary Grant)

This is a grant which is processed quickly to carry out certain works to enable someone leaving hospital to return to their own home, e.g., access ramps or door widening to accommodate a wheelchair. The hospital's Discharge Management Team would normally make a referral. The maximum grant is £2000.

HOME REPAIRS ASSISTANCE - (Discretionary Grant)

Available to owner-occupiers and to private tenants who have lived at the property for at least 2 years. The 2-year habitation condition may be waived in exceptional circumstances. The applicant must also be in receipt of a qualifying benefit. The grant available is a maximum of £5000 over a 3-year period. Works should be completed within 6 months and may include energy efficiency measures, although referral for these may be made to WarmFront and the other grants available in South Cambs such as HEAT Cambs and The British Gas Scheme.

RENOVATION LOAN- (Discretionary Loan for Owner Occupied and Charitable Landlords)

Available to owner-occupiers, where a property is deemed by an Environmental Health Officer to have reached a particular hazard score (the score has yet to be determined). The maximum loan is £20,000. The applicant must have lived at the property for at least 3 years, although in exceptional circumstances, a case could be taken to the Portfolio Holder where the residency condition has not been fulfilled. Renovation loans are also available to charitable landlords up to 50% of the cost of works.

There is no existing appeals process, providing the property has reached the hazard score threshold and the applicant qualifies under the means test, we would have no reason to refuse the grant. The only exception to this would be where the budget is fully committed. In this instance the application would be deferred until the following financial year.

However, it is our intention to set up an appeals process so that we are prepared for any eventuality. In the meantime, any unusual cases can be presented to the Chief Environmental Health Officer and the Portfolio Holder. The Portfolio Holder will decide if a case should be presented to full Cabinet for consideration.

Works carried out must result in the property being deemed to have reduced the hazard score to an acceptable level (yet to be set). The loan is discretionary and will be placed as a Charge on the property for repayment when the property is sold. Where we are unable to offer grant aid a surveyor is available for a home visit to offer advice on necessary works.