



# HOUSING STRATEGY 2024 - 2029

Executive summary



# OUR VISION IS:

A strong housing offer that provides affordable, accessible, sustainable and suitable choices for all life stages.

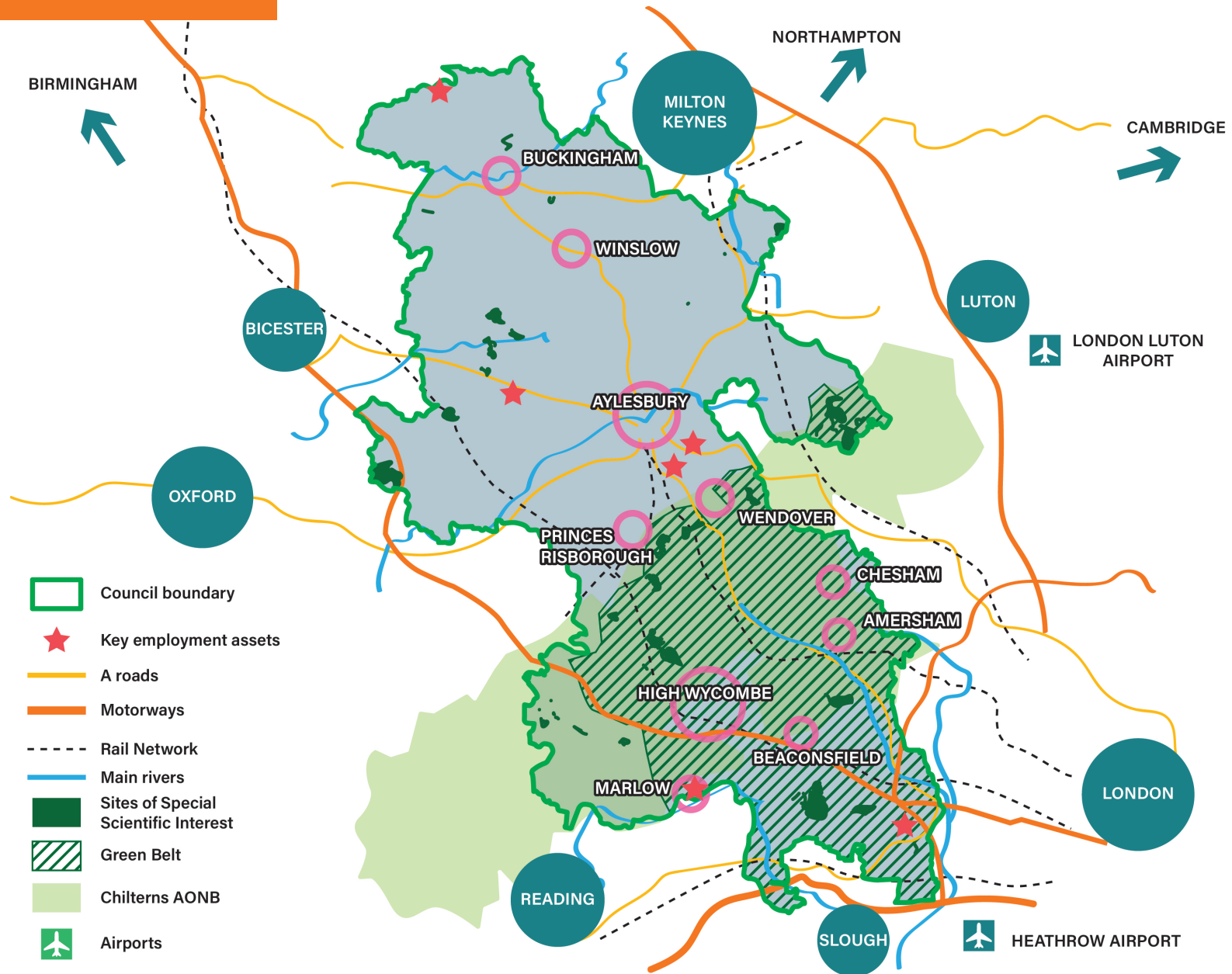
*Images on front cover:*

*Top right - Queensmead Road, High Wycombe*

*Bottom right - Aylesbury*



# BUCKINGHAMSHIRE



# THIS IS THE FIRST COUNTYWIDE HOUSING STRATEGY FOR BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

**The strategy has been developed with the input and support of a wide range of partners and will be delivered through continuing partnership working.**

Buckinghamshire is a richly diverse, enterprising, and attractive county located in the heart of a growing and innovative region. Boundaries stretch from Greater London in the south to the East Midlands in the north, from Oxfordshire in the west across to Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire in the east. With a population of over half a million people, the county is one of the traditional Home Counties, bringing with it great connections into central London and ready access to international gateways at Heathrow and London Luton Airports. From quintessential rural villages and a backdrop of beautiful countryside to urban based living in our network of diverse towns, Buckinghamshire is a sought-after location. It is a beautiful place to live and work, famous for its natural environment and its quality of life. As a place to raise a family, we benefit from top-performing schools, family friendly communities, and a variety of accessible cultural attractions on our doorstep. Residents of Buckinghamshire enjoy active healthy lifestyles with health and wellbeing better than the English average.





*Kite Meadows, Buckinghamshire*

We are a thriving county, but like many other places within the UK, this creates challenges for people looking for housing. Buckinghamshire has house prices and rents which are higher than the English average.

Parts of our county are fast-changing - demographically, economically, and environmentally. This puts even more pressure on the availability of affordable housing and highlights a growing need for a healthy built and natural environment. There is a need to make sure future growth is accommodated in well-connected sustainable locations, providing high-quality, low carbon, affordable, accessible, and adaptable homes. We must ensure our future housing need is met through a greater proportion of high quality accessible, low-carbon and digitally enabled homes, including a range of tenure for all, in the right locations. We must employ methods to minimise the barriers for accessing these homes, such as affordability, accessibility, and housing condition.

Buckinghamshire Council has clear corporate priorities: to strengthen our communities, protect the vulnerable, improve the environment, and increase prosperity. Housing is vital to delivering these. A secure and affordable place to live provides a foundation for our ability to take part in society – to work, to learn, to be healthy and to develop a sense of community. This strategy sets out how all the partners involved in delivering housing in Buckinghamshire will work together to ensure that the housing offer delivers the housing our residents need.

**This Housing Strategy is a vital step to delivering those commitments. It sets out in one place the housing challenges we face, the opportunities we can seize, and how we are all responding to these.**

# THE HOUSING STRATEGY PRIORITIES

## **PRIORITY ONE**

Responding to the needs of our diverse population

## **PRIORITY TWO**

Better homes: good quality, sustainable and matched to need

## **PRIORITY THREE**

New homes: affordable, accessible and appropriate



*Longwick, Buckinghamshire*

# PRIORITY ONE: Responding to the needs of our diverse population

## Buckinghamshire Council will:

Understand and respond to the housing issues and needs.

Enable the fair, consistent, and effective allocation of tenancies for affordable housing via Bucks Home Choice Register.

Adopt an effective and proactive approach to address Temporary Accommodation (TA) and homelessness increases in number of placements and costs.

Identify, specify, and deliver housing options for groups with particular needs.

## Critical Success Factors:

- Housing Strategy Adoption.
- Local Housing Needs Assessment for the Local Plan (Expected 2024).
- Deliver a new Allocations Policy.
- Deliver a new Tenancy Strategy.
- Achieve a 100% compliance with our nomination rights with registered providers.
- Ensure applications are processed within three months from submission.
- On average, placements in 'Nightly Paid' accommodation are kept to a set maximum level.
- Maximise 'Substantive Placements' for Temporary Accommodation with a target of 90%+ occupancy.
- Ensure effective 'Move on' options are in place to reduce Temporary Accommodation placement durations.
- Options development for specialised housing solutions for care leavers, key worker persons leaving the Armed Forces, older people, persons with a physical and/or learning disability or mental health needs.

# THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

- The proportion of people living in Buckinghamshire who are aged 65 or over increased as a percentage of the population from 16.6% in 2011 to 18.7% in 2021 – this is in the context of the overall increase in population. The overall number of persons aged 65 and over rose from 84,151 in 2011 to 103,713 in 2021, a 23.2% increase. The proportion of people aged 50 – 65 also increased during the same period.
- The number of older people living in Buckinghamshire is expected to increase in line with averages for England as a whole: a 23% increase in those aged 65+ and a 42% increase in those aged 85+. This means there will be increased demand for housing suitable for older people; many will not require specialist schemes but may need homes suitable for those with reduced mobility.
- According to the Census 2021, a significant change from 2011 to 2021 is the increased number of those who are retired in Buckinghamshire – the figure almost doubled with the percentage increasing from 13.3% to 21.6%. There was a corresponding drop in the number of people who were in employment.
- Census information shows the growth of the number of older people in Buckinghamshire. This is likely to correspond with an increase the demand for Disabled Facilities Grants to improve the accessibility of accommodation and enable households to remain in their existing accommodation for longer. An increase in demand has also been noted for adapted accommodation among households containing children with disabilities.



*Buckingham*



- Research has shown that there is a continuing high need for appropriate homes for people with mental health needs, people with learning disabilities and/or autism, and people with physical disabilities. This will likely correspond to an increase in demand for supported housing, independent living, and extra care facilities.
- There are also other groups with a particular housing need including: keyworkers such as in emergency services and health, those leaving the Armed Forces, and adults with special educational needs.
- In line with national trends, the number of households requiring temporary accommodation has significantly increased over the past year.
- There has been an increase in refugee and asylum seeker households in housing need in Buckinghamshire since April 2022. By early 2023 the numbers who were resident in the county were as follows: 1,607 Ukrainian guests (763 households), 56 Afghan relocated citizens (15 households), 73 unaccompanied asylum seekers aged under 18, and a total of 188 asylum seekers.



*Sidney Close, Buckinghamshire*

# OUR ACTION

- We are managing the social housing allocations process through Bucks Home Choice.
- We are providing a homelessness and housing advice service under Part VII of the Housing Act.
- We are providing temporary accommodation to homeless households.
- We are producing an updated Allocations Policy for Buckinghamshire. This will ensure robust processes are in place for delivery of the Bucks Home Choice scheme and allocations process, including clear workflows and regular monitoring and cross checking of applications to ensure consistency of approach and fairness.
- We are meeting with Registered Providers on a regular basis and as part of the Buckinghamshire Housing Management Forum.
- We are working with Registered Partners and private developers to deliver suitable adapted/adaptable dwellings through planning obligations and other opportunities.
- We will produce a new Tenancy Strategy including guidelines for registered providers on Affordable Rent levels.
- We will develop a Supported Housing Strategy which will include prospective housing delivery for older persons, persons with physical disabilities, and other types of supported housing.
- We will achieve the targets for developing affordable housing options as set out in the Buckinghamshire Adult Social Care Accommodation Market Analysis November 2022.
- We will work with Registered Providers and other housing developers to understand the role played by sheltered housing and other accommodation for older people in the area and whether some housing schemes should be remodelled to better meet current needs. Consider innovative new options for specialist housing (for example, extra-care villages with a dementia inclusive design).
- With our partners, we will produce a housing options guide for younger people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); ensure appropriate advice and signposting is available to make good choices.
- We will explore ways of increasing the number of one bed properties available in the private and social rented sectors which would be suitable for young people, including care leavers under the agreed Pathways Protocol.

## PRIORITY TWO: Better Homes: good quality, sustainable and matched to need

### Buckinghamshire Council will:

Ensure that Registered Providers are actively maintaining and improving the quality of their homes.

Ensure that the Private Rented Sector maintains and improves the quality of rental properties.

Work to ensure that best use is made of existing housing.

Improve the accessibility of new and existing homes.

### Critical Success Factors:

- All Registered Providers have current asset management strategies and investment plans.
- All Registered Providers have a net zero carbon road map in place.
- Enforcement and subsequent remediation of housing condition issues as they emerge, in line with the Council's Enforcement Policy.
- Effective and Enforced Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing through intelligence-led enforcement with key partners.
- Under-occupation strategy for social housing developed.
- Effective Allocations Policy and Tenancy Strategy.
- Disability Facilities Grants Programme Delivery Deliver accessible and adaptable new housing through planning decisions.

# THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

- From 2035, all homes in the Social Rented Sector must meet a specified level of energy efficiency (Energy Performance Certificate Level C). Social landlords in Buckinghamshire are undertaking energy efficiency programmes to achieve this.
- From 2025, compliance with the Future Homes Standard will become mandatory. New homes built from 2025 will produce 75-80 per cent fewer carbon emissions than homes built under 2012 regulations.
- From November 2022, providers of affordable housing are required to provide detailed information on their methods for identifying properties affected by damp and mould, and their strategies for responding to customer complaints for remedying cases of damp and mould.
- Energy prices have increased significantly. The energy price cap (the maximum that an average consumer should have to pay) more than doubled between October 2021 and October 2022.
- Increases in materials and labour costs correspond to increases in costs for the refurbishment of existing stock and new construction.
- The Renters Reform Bill, including abolition of fixed term assured shorthold tenancies, imposing obligations on landlords and temporary accommodation. Introduced in Parliament in May 2023, the Bill includes new duties for enforcement for housing authorities.
- The introduction of a new Decent Homes Standard is progressing, which, when introduced, has the potential to have a significant financial implication for all landlords.
- Recent expansions of permitted developed for residential conversions can lead to poor quality developments for example, poor location and lack of amenities, poor standard of conversion, low level of noise insulation etc.



*Building energy efficient homes*

# OUR ACTION

- We are supporting the Buckinghamshire Council Energy Doctor scheme (funded by the Shared Prosperity Fund).
- We are supporting sustainable warmth upgrade grant programmes, such as the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2) and Solar Together, which are which are being carried out by Buckinghamshire Council.
- Through our work with houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), we are delivering increased levels of safe and secure accommodation for single people.
- The Buckinghamshire Disabilities Facilities Grants and Housing Improvement and Adaptations Policy is being updated to ensure that it continues to achieve the following:
  - Improve and promote the physical and mental health of residents.
  - Prevent accidents.
  - Enable residents to live safely at home, as independently as possible, for longer.
  - Reduce hospital admissions and enable speedy discharge from hospital.
  - Make best use of adapted and adaptable accommodation.
- We will work with Registered Providers and other care/support agencies to agree best ways to tackle under-occupation, including incentives where appropriate in order to generate more turnover in family-sized accommodation.
- With our partners, we will produce a housing options guide for younger people with SEND; ensure appropriate advice and signposting is available to make good choices.
- We will explore ways of increasing the number of one bed properties available in the private and social rented sectors which would be suitable for young people, including care leavers under the agreed Pathways Protocol.



*High Wycombe*

# PRIORITY THREE: New Homes: affordable, accessible and appropriate

## Buckinghamshire Council will:

Support and enable Registered Providers in delivering new affordable homes, including for those with special needs.

Explore the use of local authority assets and resources for the purposes of delivering additional new housing.

Ensure that Residential Development (including Affordable Housing) is considered in Regeneration Strategies, brownfield and redevelopment proposals for mixed use developments where appropriate.

## Critical Success Factors:

- Delivery of Affordable Housing (Target 500 new affordable homes per year).
- Achieve site targets for Affordable Housing in negotiations with developers in line with council policies and the Local Plan.
- Supporting site identification and funding options/opportunities (for example grants and Section 106 monies) in line with council policies.
- New Temporary Accommodation development.
- Using Section 106 monies to support the development of Affordable Housing.
- Incorporating Council held assets in redevelopment proposals (Target 500 by 2028).
- Consider different delivery vehicles (e.g., Joint Ventures or other collaborative models).
- Local Plan and site policies for residential development that prioritise brown before green and include strong Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and S106 Affordable Housing requirements.
- Working with Homes England including pursuing funding opportunities as they become available.

# THE CHALLENGES WE FACE

- House prices and market rents in Buckinghamshire are present affordability challenges to households. House prices and rents are relatively lower in the two major towns of Aylesbury and High Wycombe (see Appendix Two, Housing Supply – Market Housing).
- The demand for affordable homes of various types outpaces the annual delivery of new homes and re-lets, in some recent years by a factor of 3:1.
- Increasing cost of living pressures and lack of local affordable housing options corresponds with an increased number of adult children living with parents for longer.
- Private landlords are under new pressures with increasing interest rates and legislation changes such as the Rental Reform Act.
- The new Local Plan will set out the number, size, tenure type and location of new homes in the area, a proportion of which will be affordable. The plan will reflect the levels of housing need in different parts of the County and also reflect the availability of sites suitable for housing use. The Local Plan will also identify the need for accessible housing under Part M of the building regulations. This action plan therefore focuses on activity which can be delivered ahead of the implementation of the Local Plan, and on activity which will build on the Local Plan once it has been agreed.



*Queensmead Road, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire*

# OUR ACTION

- We are working with Registered Providers to facilitate delivery of new schemes, helping to identify sites and secure funding as appropriate.
- We are supporting Registered Providers with funding for garage-site developments.
- We are ensuring that housing (including affordable housing) is included in regeneration plans by the Council and partners.
- We will work proactively to ensure that the planning process accelerates delivery of affordable housing applications in acceptable locations.
- We will explore opportunities for the Council to deliver more housing utilising its land, property and financial assets, including any potential role for Consilio, the council's property company. (Consilio was set up by South Bucks Council in 2017 as a wholly owned local authority trading company to allow the council to facilitate income generation. It has now transferred to Buckinghamshire Council. It owns a limited number of property assets).
- We will identify three Council-owned sites to bring forward for new development and complete these developments by 2027. Three new developments completed and let by December 2027.
- We will agree priorities for capital funding (including commuted sums) and implement a list of priorities for section 106 monies to be developed.

