

Housing Delivery Test Action Plan 2019



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Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Purpose of the Action Plan.....	3
3	Housing Delivery Context.....	4
4	Root Cause Analysis	7
5	Key Actions & Responses.....	19
6	Project Management and Monitoring Arrangements	22
7	Monitoring of the Action Plan	22
8	Appendices	23

1 Introduction

- 1.1 In 2017, the Government set out proposals in the Housing White Paper, “Fixing our broken housing market” to reform the planning system with the intention of delivering more housing, improving housing affordability and removing barriers to development. As part of these reforms, it proposed a new ‘Housing Delivery Test’ (HDT) as a monitoring tool to assess the extent to which each local authority is building enough homes to meet their housing need. The HDT was formally introduced in Paragraph 75 of the revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), published in July 2018 and updated in February 2019.
- 1.2 To support the application of the HDT, the Government have produced the Housing Delivery Test Measurement Rule Book (July 2018) which outlines the methodology to be applied nationally for calculating each local planning authority’s Housing Delivery Test performance. Further guidance on the application of the HDT is set out within the Government’s Planning Practice Guidance¹ (PPG).
- 1.3 The HDT is an annual measurement of the number of homes being delivered in an area. It compares the number of new homes delivered (net) over the previous three years against each local planning authority’s (LPA) housing requirement over the same period. The measurement rule book defines the formula, as below:

$$\text{Housing Delivery Test (\%)} = \frac{\text{Total net homes delivered over three year period}}{\text{Total number of homes required over the three year period}}$$

- 1.4 LPAs are required to submit housing delivery statistics for their authority area to the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) who will publish the delivery performance for each LPA in England in November of each year.
- 1.5 The HDT has been introduced in a phased approach across three years with the first reporting year being 2018. Once fully implemented, the following scenarios will apply:
- Where housing delivery over the previous three years falls below 95% of the housing requirement, the LPA will be required to prepare an action plan setting out the reasons for under-delivery, how to reduce the risk of future under-delivery and what actions are needed to increase delivery within 6 months of the results being published;
 - Where delivery has been less than 85% of the housing requirement, a 20% buffer must be added to the LPA’s 5-year land supply of deliverable sites;
 - Where delivery has been less than 75% of the housing requirement, the NPPF’s presumption in favour of sustainable development would automatically apply. During the transitional arrangements the presumption would apply if the housing delivery falls below 25% of the housing requirement in November 2018 and 45% of the housing requirement in November 2019.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-supply-and-delivery#housing-delivery-test>

Rochford District Council – Housing Delivery Test Action Plan (2019)

- 1.6 As stated in the PPG, these sanctions will continue to apply until an LPA's HDT performance shows that housing delivery over the previous three years has exceeded the required rate of delivery, or a new housing requirement is adopted for which the HDT will be re-calculated. If delivery exceeds 95% of the requirement, none of the above sanctions will apply.
- 1.7 In February 2019, the Government published the first set of HDT results. As set out in Table 1 below, the Council's delivery rate over the previous three years was reported to be 75% of its housing requirement. As such, the Council is required to produce an 'action plan' by August 2019 and to incorporate a 20% buffer in its 5-year housing land supply calculations.

Table 1 – Rochford District Council Housing Delivery Test Results (2018)

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2015-18
Homes Delivered	159	116	299	574
Homes Required	251	255	259	764
HDT (as %)	63	45	115	75

***Please note:** Columns and rows may not total due to rounding

2 Purpose of the Action Plan

- 2.1 This Action Plan has been produced to investigate and analyse the key reasons for the under-delivery of housing against the District's housing requirement over the last three years, as measured under the Housing Delivery Test (HDT). It will also identify and put in place a series of actions, where appropriate, to increase and accelerate the delivery of new housing moving forward.
- 2.2 There is ambition within the Council to not only deliver the number of homes needed in the area but to deliver housing that meets the needs of specific groups where there is evidence of need. This means delivering a suitable mix of homes that meet the needs of every household in the District, including both market and affordable housing, and forms of specialist accommodation.
- 2.3 The local housing ambitions are also reflected at the national level in terms of the Government's desire to boost the supply and delivery of new homes. The replacement National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (February 2019) highlights the importance of ensuring a sufficient amount and variety of land can come forward where it is needed, that the needs of groups with specific housing requirements are addressed and that land with permission is developed without unnecessary delay (Paragraph 59).
- 2.4 Paragraph 75 goes on to state that, to maintain the supply of housing, local planning authorities (LPAs) should monitor progress in building out sites which have permission. Where the HDT indicates that delivery has fallen below 95% of the LPAs housing requirement over the previous three years, the authority should prepare an action plan in line with national guidance, to assess the causes of under-delivery and identify actions to increase delivery in future years.
- 2.5 The aims of this Action Plan can be broken up into the following issues:
- Understanding the current situation with respect to housing delivery in the District;
 - Understanding the consequences of the under-delivery of homes in the District;
 - Identifying the information required for the purposes of preparing this Action Plan;
 - Undertaking root cause analysis, looking at the factors that have the potential to affect delivery, including:
 - The types of sites being delivered in the District;
 - The nature of development and developers in the District;
 - The overall deliverability of development in the District, including viability, land availability and constraints;
 - The performance of the Council with respect to planning decisions; and
 - The planning policy context in the District;
 - Taking the above factors into account and analysing the extent that they are affecting delivery along with the extent that the Council can influence these factors to improve delivery;
 - Identifying the key actions and responses based on the root cause analysis, setting out the actions to be taken to ensure quicker delivery;

- Setting out project management and monitoring arrangements, including how the actions in this Plan will be implemented, managed and monitored, and any relevant reporting arrangements. This will also put in place a process for the review of the action plan in line with the annual publication of the HDT results.

3 Housing Delivery Context

Spatial Characteristics

- 3.1 Rochford District is situated within a peninsula between the Rivers Thames and Crouch and is bounded to the east by the North Sea. The District has land boundaries with Basildon, Castle Point and Southend-on-Sea authority areas. It also shares marine boundaries with the authority areas of Maldon and Chelmsford.
- 3.2 Rochford District is a predominately rural district with the majority of its undeveloped land area designated as part of the Metropolitan Green Belt. The majority of sites that have been submitted through the Council's latest Call for Sites exercise fall within the designated Metropolitan Green Belt which presents challenges in maintaining a sufficient supply of suitable land to meet housing needs. The NPPF makes clear that, once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances, through the preparation or review of a local development plan.
- 3.3 The District is also rich in nature and heritage with more than 200 sites of archaeological interest, 14 ancient woodlands and several nature reserves across the District. Large areas of the District are of national and international ecological importance, with Sites of Special Scientific Interest totalling 12,986 hectares. Large areas of the District are also at risk of flooding from surface water, tidal and fluvial sources.
- 3.4 Cumulatively these spatial characteristics mean that a significant amount of the District's land area is constrained. This presents challenges in maintaining a sufficient supply of deliverable land for housing and necessitates a plan-led approach to ensure the development that takes place is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable.

Past Housing Delivery Performance

- 3.5 The Core Strategy, adopted in December 2011, established an annual housing target for the District of 250 homes a year over a plan period to 2025. Between April 2010 and March 2018, this equates to 2,000 new homes across the District.
- 3.6 Over the same period, 1,326 new homes have been built in the District. This represents an average annual delivery of around 66% of the homes expected to be built across that period.
- 3.7 In the three-year window to which the 2018 Housing Delivery Test results relate, 574 new homes were built in the District compared to a requirement for 764 new homes. This represents an average annual delivery of around 75% of the homes required to be built across that three-year period.

Table 2 – Past Housing Delivery Relative to Requirement (2010 – 2018)

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18
Plan Target / Housing Requirement*	250	250	250	250	250	251*	255*	259*
Actual Completions	52	93	33	243	331	159	116	299

*The Housing Delivery Test Measurement Rule Book sets out that where a plan target is more than five years old, delivery should instead be measured against an authority’s local housing need figure calculated using the Government’s standard methodology set out in the PPG²

Future Housing Delivery Performance

- 3.8 Table 3 below identifies that, based on the Council’s current housing land supply trajectory, housing delivery in the District is expected to increase in future years. This is largely due to a high number of major developments, including allocated sites, coming forward over this period.
- 3.9 In the context of the Housing Delivery Test, current comparison of projected delivery relative to housing requirements suggests that the Council’s HDT performance is expected to improve slowly but consistently to 2024. Unless housing delivery is increased, including through the uptake of actions identified in this Action Plan, it is likely that the Council will continue to need to prepare action plans and incorporate a buffer in its housing supply calculations, however it is unlikely that the Council would fall below the threshold of 75% such that the presumption in favour of sustainable development would begin to apply until at least the 2025 reporting year. It is recognised, however, that even if the presumption was to apply, it may not have a significant impact on the delivery of housing given the constrained nature of land within the District, including under the Metropolitan Green Belt, as described earlier in this chapter
- 3.10 It is recognised that the Council’s Housing Delivery Test performance beyond this period, to 2025 and beyond, is likely to deteriorate unless further sources of housing supply are identified, such as through the adoption of a new Local Plan or other development plan document. This is symptomatic of the nature of the District, being mostly Green Belt and having a scarcity of brownfield land, which means a significant proportion of new housing has typically been delivered on large-scale greenfield sites.

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/housing-and-economic-development-needs-assessments>

Table 3 – Future Projected Housing Delivery Relative to Requirement (2018 – 2024)

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Housing Requirement**	375	389	404	419	411	407
Estimated Completions	262	290	409	722	518	301
HDT Result Over Previous 3 Years (%)	75	76	83	82	117	134

**Calculated using the standard methodology set out in the PPG. Subject to change as new household projections and affordability statistics are published.

What are the consequences if not enough homes are built in the Rochford District?

- 3.11 The Government’s standard methodology for calculating local housing need suggests that, over the next ten years, around 385 new homes will be needed each year in the District. The Council’s most recent Strategic Housing Market Assessment³ identified a range of between 331 and 361 homes per year, although this was based on a different methodology to that introduced by the Government.
- 3.12 Rochford District sits within a wider South Essex economy and population that is growing and will continue to grow in the future. The Association of South Essex Local Authorities (ASELA) has been formed to provide place leadership and strategic direction for South Essex, encompassing the authority areas of Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Rochford, Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. Over the next 20 years, the Government’s Standard Methodology for calculating housing need suggests that a minimum of 4,600 new homes will be needed each year across the area. Of these, a minimum of 8,000 new homes are likely to be required in Rochford over the next 20 years, of which capacity for around 3,200 homes is already identified.
- 3.13 If these new homes are not delivered, this may jeopardise the ability for the Council to deliver both the South Essex Joint Strategic Plan and the Rochford District Local Plan and, more broadly, may constrain the ability for the Council to create and sustain thriving communities and a more prosperous economy. It would also put at risk the ability to regenerate areas of the urban core, including the redevelopment of brownfield land, the ability to deliver high quality housing in neighbourhood areas and the ability to support villages in the rural area through new housing. The lack of the right homes in the right places could increase commuting to and from neighbouring authorities, aggravate traffic congestion and impact on air quality.

³ South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment Addendum 2017

- 3.14 Failure to deliver enough of the right type of homes also impacts the ability for younger communities and families to find suitable, affordable accommodation in the area.
- 3.15 There are further consequences for decision making and the level of influence the Council holds over development. As stated above, the NPPF has introduced the Housing Delivery Test in a phased approach over three years, starting in November 2018. The test is a percentage measurement of the number of the net homes delivered against the number of homes required. Once implemented, the test will have the following sanctions:
- If delivery falls below 95%, a requirement for the publication of a housing delivery action plan;
 - If delivery falls below 85%, a requirement to incorporate a 20% buffer on the Council's five-year land supply;
 - If delivery falls below 75%, once transitional arrangements have ended, the presumption in favour of sustainable development means that permission should be granted unless;
 - the site is in a protected area of importance (Green Belt, Local Green Space, irreplaceable habitats, Conservation Areas, Listed Buildings, non-designated heritage assets of archaeological interest which are demonstrably of equivalent significance to scheduled monuments and areas at risk of flooding); or
 - any adverse impacts of doing so would significantly and demonstrably outweigh the benefits, when assessed against the policies in the NPPF taken as a whole.
- 3.16 Given the nature of the District, the need to meet housing need must clearly be weighed against other national policy commitments, including the aims of maintaining existing strong protections for the Green Belt, the need to have fully explored every other reasonable option outside of the Green Belt, and the need to first make best use of brownfield sites to meet housing needs.
- 3.17 The consequences of the presumption in favour of sustainable development are not immediately clear given Rochford District has large areas of Metropolitan Green Belt, habitats sites, areas at risk of flooding and a moderate number of Conservation Areas and Listed Buildings. As things stand at present, it seems the government has excluded Green Belt areas from the presumption in favour of sustainable development, though it could be the case the Council will find it harder to resist speculative, inappropriate or unwanted development. This could also lead to a greater risk of planning by appeal, where developers seek to override the policies in the development plan through a reliance on the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

4 Root Cause Analysis

Methodology

- 4.1 Research for the Action Plan has looked at general themes relating to housing delivery within Rochford District, such as the local housing market*, the type of developers and housebuilders active in the area, the type of sites available for development, the planning policy and housing supply climate in the District and high-level constraints affecting land availability in the District. In conducting this research, use has been made of several data sources including monitoring records, emerging development plan documents and the evidence base behind it.
- 4.2 Engagement has also taken place with housebuilders active in the District to ascertain any barriers to delivery from their perspectives and experiences. These discussions took place by sending a pro-forma, attached at Appendix A, to agents and developers involved in housebuilding in the District to ascertain what they saw as the main causes of under-delivery of housing over the previous three years, and to identify what actions they saw as necessary to improve the delivery of housing in future years.
- 4.3 The Action Plan was further informed by internal discussions with members of the Council’s Development Management and Strategic Housing teams to identify any process or site-based factors affecting the delivery of housing in the District.
- 4.4 The research has also looked at issues at a site level. This has considered progress on individual sites in the Council’s five-year housing supply, including all allocated sites in the Local Plan and affecting them. It has also considered the number of planning permissions being granted for new housing development.

Issues arising from consultation with developers, housebuilders and registered social landlords

- 4.5 A summary of the key feedback points is listed below and placed under themes that emerged from the consultation:

Strategic Growth

- Enough housing land needs to be allocated ensuring housing delivery is kept broadly constant through an up-to-date development plan to support local and regional employment growth aspirations;
- Growth should be concentrated in locations well-served by public transport;
- Due to a high number of constraints, particularly the fact that the majority of undeveloped land in the District is designated as Green Belt, the overall amount of land available for development is relatively limited;
- A Green Belt review is required to facilitate growth;
- Highway improvements should proportionately support growth spatially, related to housing and employment growth;
- RDC should ensure that reliance on use of Section 106 agreements does not impede growth; and
- A review is required of under-utilised open space for development.

Development Control / Management and Policy

- Planning delays can create consequent delay to other technical approval processes. For example, protected species licenses are often dependent on there being a detailed planning approval for a specific habitat;
- Resource constraints can impact on project work and caseloads and cause untimely decision-making;
- Staff turnover can mean in-depth project knowledge is lost. There needs to be an appropriate structure to ensure a working knowledge of the development;
- Referral of planning applications to Development Committee can create delays to the determination of planning applications;
- The number of planning conditions requiring later discharge as part of a planning permission was seen as delaying development and creating additional workloads within local planning authorities;
- Slow response rates from statutory and non-statutory consultees can create delays to the determination of planning applications;
- The need to avoid unnecessary procedural, bureaucratic processes. Developers highlighted the increasing trend for LPAs to place additional procedural processes onto developments prior to or post-application submission; and
- It was suggested that the Council should focus on ensuring that planning permissions and processes are streamlined to avoid placing unnecessary burdens in the way of housing delivery whilst retaining the same level of protections.

Viability

- The level of affordable housing required through policies should be viability tested to ensure it does not impact on the deliverability of new housing;
- The affordable housing mix sought on developments should also consider viability implications;
- Renewable energy requirements should be costed and factored into viability considerations; and
- Substantial increases in build costs in recent years relative to sale prices has reduced the overall viability of developing in the District.

Corporate

- The importance of delivery should be made clear and permeate through relevant parts of the Council, encouraging and empowering officers to work towards improving delivery

Stakeholders

- Creation of a key stakeholder forum could identify and address 'bottlenecks' to delivery via weekly conference calls or monthly meetings where specific items proving to be a barrier to development are talked through or time is dedicated to key projects

Issues arising from consultation with teams within the Council

4.7 A summary of the key feedback points is listed below:

Planning (Development Management)

- Some planning permissions, mostly small-scale windfall sites, are not built out as expected which may be influenced by uncontrollable external factors, for example, housing markets;
- Applications to vary conditions can contribute to delays in the delivery of housing;
- Delays can be caused by developers seeking to negotiate planning permission conditions;
- Greater pre-application advice take-up can enable more agreeable planning applications to be submitted which may help to speed up the application process and prospect of approval;
- A central Government initiative is required to ‘drive’ developers forward in the ‘build out’ process to housing completion status;
- Section 106 agreements appear to be a lengthy process, taking 1-2 years in some cases;
- Planning resources have historically been limited which may have contributed to development management delays.

Strategic Housing

- Land values and build costs are relatively high in the District, particularly for smaller sites where larger sites are considered more profitable options. This is considered to have a constraining impact on housing delivery
- Although there is a supply of available land, it may not always be suitable for a developer or registered social landlord. The availability of land, in context, from a social landlord’s perspective may need to be in proximity to existing stock, which if unavailable, may contribute to an unwillingness to develop affordable housing in other parts of the District. Examples are, Genesis, London & Quadrant and Estuary housing associations who all have stock only in the town of Rochford, and Swan Housing with stock only in the town of Rayleigh;
- To improve the delivery of affordable housing, sites which provide an element of affordable housing may need to be prioritised (fast tracked) in the planning system;
- Build costs have increased recently from £1,500 to £2,000 per square metre which appears to have negatively influenced housing delivery;
- Planning delays have an impact on housing delivery;

- There is a tendency amongst some statutory consultees to submit a standard response to all applications. It was queried whether it was strictly necessary to consult as a standard procedure, or whether consultation should be based on site-specific criteria. It was also highlighted that some statutory consultees have not been submitting responses until the end of the consultation period, delaying the determination of that application;
- Whilst planning conditions may be needed to ensure good development, in some cases too many are being imposed which may contribute to slowing down housing delivery. Conditions need to be flexible and only imposed where justified on the merits of that particular application;
- There appears to be an occasional lack of effective communication between social landlords and local authority officers which has evolved from enquiries and response delays. Social landlords have relayed that developers also experience the same issue;
- It is considered that the 3-year life span of a planning permission should be shortened to encourage developers to start construction earlier and improve build-out rates;
- Delivery of affordable housing has not been consistent in the District. There has been sporadic delivery in previous years in line with fluctuations in the delivery of market housing;
- Both the private rent and house sales market in the District are unaffordable for many first-time buyer residents; and
- The private rented sector has seen an increase in market rents, for example, a 3-bedroom house can demand a rent of £1,200 per month. The Local Housing Allowance rates excludes those on low incomes and reliant on state welfare benefits from entering this market.

Challenges and limitations of gathering information

- 4.8 Confidentiality of information has been a key challenge, due in part to factors such as the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), which may have implications for contacting or publishing data for the Action Plan if it was not provided for this purpose.
- 4.9 Despite the intended survey work, there is likelihood that there may be gaps in the knowledge on individual sites. This is because it has not been possible to contact all developers or landowners, and some chose not to respond. Where a site is not proposed to come forward in the short term, it may be difficult to predict certainty when a planning application is likely to be submitted and the timescale for implementation.

Planning Policy Context

- 4.10 The Council is in the process of preparing a new Local Plan, which will set the strategy for the future development of the District beyond 2025 – the end of the current plan period. The new Local Plan is expected to replace several of the adopted policy documents which form the local development plan for the District. The first stage of consultation on the Rochford New Local Plan, the Issues and Options document, took place between December 2017 and March 2018. A Feedback Report⁴ has been prepared which summarises the responses received and provides an initial response to the main issues raised.
- 4.11 There are several technical background documents which support the preparation of the new Local Plan. The development of the evidence base is ongoing and new documents will be added when they become available.
- 4.12 The Council is also supporting the delivery of a South Essex Joint Strategic Plan, in partnership with five other South Essex authorities (Basildon, Brentwood, Castle Point, Southend and Thurrock), and supported by Essex County Council. This Plan is expected to provide an overarching framework for the delivery of sustainable growth across South Essex including the quantum and distribution of strategic housing growth. The first stage of consultation on the South Essex Plan is expected to take place later in 2019.
- 4.13 Both the Rochford District new Local Plan and South Essex Joint Strategic Plan are expected to be adopted by 2022. The Council’s Local Development Scheme is in the process of being updated and is expected to be published later in 2019.

Housing Delivery Analysis

Comparison of Actual Delivery and Expected Delivery

- 4.14 The Council’s Core Strategy, adopted in December 2011, set the overarching strategy and vision for the District to 2025, including the Council’s approach to the delivery of strategic housing sites across that period. It is supported by an Allocations Plan, adopted in February 2014, which provides specific information on how these strategic housing sites will be delivered.
- 4.15 The Core Strategy identified a need to deliver an average of 250 dwellings per year up to 2025 – a figure originally defined in the East of England Plan (2008). The Core Strategy also identified potential sources of new housing as part of its strategy to meet this target, presented in Table 4 below:

Table 4 – Identified Sources of New Housing

Source	Dwellings by 2015	Dwellings 2015-2021	Dwellings post-2021
Housing requirement (at 250 per year) less actual completions	1632	1500	1000
Extant Planning Permissions	210	0	0

⁴ <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/issues-and-options-document-feedback-report-2018>

Existing Allocated Sites / Other Appropriate Sites Identified in the 2009 Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA)	671	506	0
Green Belt release required	751	994	1000
Housing requirement less identified housing supply	0	0	0

- 4.16 As the supply of housing from extant planning permissions and other suitable sites was insufficient to meet the District’s requirements in full, it was necessary to release land from the Metropolitan Green Belt for the purposes of delivering additional housing. The release of Green Belt land was achieved through defined Settlement Extension Allocations. These Settlement Extension Allocations have formed and continue to form the predominant source of new housing in the District across the current plan period.
- 4.17 The Core Strategy included an indicative trajectory for its Settlement Extension Allocations, presented in Table 5 below:

Table 5 – Settlement Extension Trajectory

Area	Dwellings 2008-2015	Dwellings 2015-2021	Dwellings post-2021
North of London Road, Rayleigh		550	
West Rochford	450	150	
West Hockley	50		
South Hawkwell	175		
East Ashingdon	100		
South West Hullbridge		250	250
South Canewdon		60*	
South East Ashingdon			500
West Great Wakering			250
Total	775	1010	1000

*Revised to 49 in Allocations Plan

- 4.18 Table 6 below sets out a comparison of actual housing completions with the housing trajectory set out in the Core Strategy. It indicates that the delivery of several strategic housing sites has been delayed relative to expectations – most noticeably at North of London Road Rayleigh, West Rochford and West Hockley. Furthermore, there has been an under-supply of housing from other sites relative to expectations, albeit such sites are now projected to deliver much higher than expected housing figures across the remainder of the plan period. These factors are reflected in the lower than expected rate of housing delivery over the plan period to date, which in part has necessitated the preparation of this Action Plan.

Table 6 – Settlement Extension Trajectory

Source		Dwellings 2008-2015		Dwellings 2015-2021		Dwellings post-2021	
		Projected (Core Strategy)	Actual	Projected (Core Strategy)	Actual/Projected (2018 AMR)	Projected (Core Strategy)	Projected (2018 AMR)
SETTLEMENT EXTENSIONS	North of London Road, Rayleigh	0	0	550	80	0	470
	West Rochford	450	0	150	423	0	197
	West Hockley	50	0	0	70	0	0
	South Hawkwell	175	72	0	104	0	0
	East Ashingdon	100	100	0	0	0	0
	South West Hullbridge	0	0	250	200	250	300
	South Canewdon	0	0	60	49	0	0
	South East Ashingdon	0	0	0	100	500	400
	West Great Wakering	0	0	0	200	250	100
Other sites (e.g. Extant permissions, Brownfield allocations, Windfall sites etc.)		881	608	506	805	0	660
Totals		1656	780	1516	2031*	1000	2127
Actual – Projected		-876		515		1127	

**574 completions as at March 2018*

4.19 Several factors may explain the delayed delivery of some of these sites relative to expectations, including longer-than-anticipated periods of negotiation between landowners and developers, unforeseen delays at the planning application stage and the need for amendments after the award of planning permission. Most of the District's housing supply is expected to be delivered through greenfield allocations in the development plan all of which have been acquired by developers and the majority of which have received planning permission. It is recognised that several identified brownfield allocations have yet to come forward as expected which may relate to particular obstacles associated with brownfield sites, including land assembly and the

need to remediate site conditions. These allocations will need to be reviewed as part of the emerging Local Plan process to consider whether development on these sites remains realistic, deliverable and viable. Even if these sites were not to come forward as expected, the Council expects to have a healthy short-term housing supply with the opportunity to review that supply as part of the emerging development plan.

Site Typology Analysis

4.20 This section has considered the typology of sites being delivered in Rochford District over the previous three years to identify any possible causes of under-delivery relating to the nature of development coming forward. Development sites have been broken down based on site type (brownfield, urban and greenfield), site size (small, medium or large) and by location (urban area, settlement extensions and rural areas).

Table 7 - Allocated Sites and Windfall Sites

	Windfall Sites	Non-Windfall Sites (incl. allocations)
Dwellings completed (2015-2016)	53	106
Dwellings completed (2016-2017)	34	82
Dwellings completed (2017-2018)	61	238

4.21 Windfall sites which are mostly brownfield and comprise of smaller schemes in nature have been making a consistent but modest contribution to housing supply, coming forward during periods where planned delivery has been slow. Delays to the delivery of planned allocated sites which are mostly greenfield in nature due to a deficit in adequate brownfield sites within the District, have a significant impact on overall delivery given it makes up most of the supply as illustrated in Table 7 above.

Site Size

4.22 Residential development schemes can be divided into two categories: major schemes and minor schemes. Major schemes are those which comprise 10 or more residential units, whilst minor schemes comprise 9 or less.

4.23 In Rochford District, minor schemes often occur within existing residential areas – such as conversions, infills and intensification – whereas major schemes often occur on brownfield and greenfield sites that have been specifically allocated for residential development in the local development plan.

Table 8 – Minor and Major Schemes Dwelling Completions April 2015 – March 2018 (net)

	Minor Schemes (<9 dwellings)	Major Schemes (10+ dwellings)
Dwelling completions, April 2015 – March 2018 (net)	147	427

- 4.24 Table 8 above illustrates how major schemes make up most of the homes being delivered. Delays to these coming forward has a greater impact on overall delivery than individual minor schemes. This has had implications for the local housing market, including driving-up house prices and reducing affordability, which is now reflected in the market uplift that needs to be applied in the District as part of the Government’s standard method for calculating housing need. The standard method, introduced in paragraph 60 of the NPPF in 2018, is referred to in national policy as being the minimum annual local housing need figure and is applicable from 2018 onwards. When calculated, the housing requirement for the District for 2019-20 will be around 380, slightly higher than objectively assessed needs determined by the South Essex Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA).
- 4.25 Regarding site sizes, it is considered that few conclusions can be drawn. There appears to be a good mix of sites being brought forward that are suitable for different types of housebuilder.

Brownfield and Greenfield Land

- 4.26 Brownfield land, sometimes referred to as previously developed land, is defined in Annex 2 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2019. It is generally understood to refer to land that is or was last occupied by built development, save for some exceptions including agricultural and forestry buildings. By comparison, greenfield land is generally understood to refer to land that is not or has never been occupied by built development, such as an open field.
- 4.27 Analysis shows that around 56% of the total number of homes built between 2015 and 2018 were built on previously developed land or in urban areas. The remaining 44% of homes were built on greenfield sites, including greenfield sites allocated for housing in the development plan.
- 4.28 Over this period, the proportion of housing supply made up by brownfield and urban sites is moderately greater than that envisaged by the trajectory included in the Core Strategy, highlighting the impact that delays to the delivery of greenfield allocations has had on overall housing delivery.

Table 9 – Brownfield / Urban and Greenfield Dwelling Completions April 2015 – March 2018

	Brownfield / Urban	Greenfield
Dwellings completions, April 2015 – March 2018	321	253

- 4.29 Reliance on a larger proportion of brownfield sites has the potential to impact on delivery given the type of constraints normally associated on that type of land, as opposed to greenfield land. However, the use of brownfield and urban land is sometimes more sustainable than greenfield land and can also help to promote regeneration within the urban core and the general urban area. It is also an aim of national policy to encourage more development on brownfield land, especially in low value and low demand areas and housing delivery.

Site ownership

- 4.30 Most homes built in the District are brought forward by private developers on private land. In the previous three years, neither the Council, nor any other public body, has directly been involved in building homes in the District nor have any homes been built on publicly owned land.
- 4.31 In practice, this means that while the Council has a role to play in facilitating development and providing the necessary foundations for development to take place, there is little the Council can do to directly co-ordinate the delivery of housing.

Development Viability and Market Conditions

- 4.32 The Viability Report⁵ prepared to support the Council's Strategic Housing and Employment Land Availability Assessment (SHELAA) 2017 suggests that the District remains a very attractive location for developers to develop and housing development largely remains highly viable, particularly on the greenfield sites which make up the majority of the sites on which homes are being delivered. However, the stakeholder consultation highlighted that both land values and build costs are considered high in the Rochford District, particularly on smaller sites.
- 4.33 The only exceptions may be on previously developed sites where the viability of development is more marginal when full policy compliance is assumed. In such cases, affordable housing and other policies may have to be relaxed to ensure that housing developments remain viable as supported by the stakeholder consultation. The Council already takes a practical and pragmatic view to such cases, however, where a lack of viability is evidenced at the application stage.
- 4.34 Whilst on a site by site basis, viability considerations may influence the phasing and timescales associated with a development, when taking a holistic view, the market conditions and viability of development is not considered to be a significant factor impacting the delivery of housing in the District as a whole.

Infrastructure Requirements and Delivery

- 4.35 Larger scale developments will be expected to contribute to the delivery of infrastructure improvements to help mitigate the impacts of the development. The stakeholder consultation emphasised that growth should, however, be concentrated in locations already well-served by public transport. The principal mechanism through which such contributions are secured is through legal agreements under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. The stakeholder consultation illustrated

⁵ <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/appendix-d-final-viability-report>

that reliance on Section 106 may impede growth and could, in extreme cases, take up to 2 years to negotiate before agreements were finalised. As of 2019, the Council does not operate a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL).

- 4.36 These contributions may relate to funding improvements relating to highways, public and sustainable transport, education, early years and childcare, healthcare, open spaces, play spaces and more.
- 4.37 The Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan and Topic Paper⁶ set out the defined infrastructure requirements related to large-scale developments. The contributions are agreed in consultation with infrastructure providers in line with this Topic Paper, or in the case of windfall developments, on an ad hoc basis.
- 4.38 Whilst the need to improve infrastructure capacity to serve a housing development may have an impact on the delivery timescales on a site-by-site basis, there is little evidence of infrastructure delivery being a cause of the under-delivery of homes at a macro-level. In practice, infrastructure improvements tend to be delivered during a development being built out, normally being finalised prior to occupation or, in the case of phased developments, prior to certain thresholds of occupation. This approach helps to avoid cash flow issues associated with needing to invest in infrastructure improvements up-front, prior to a developer being able to fund those improvements through the sale of homes.

Summary and Conclusions

- 4.39 The delivery of new homes is a complex process, from securing planning permission through to construction. Reflecting on past housing delivery in the District and engaging with key stakeholders, including housing developers, registered housing providers and Council officers, it is evident that delivery is constrained by a limited supply of deliverable brownfield and greenfield sites. This is largely contributed to by the District being predominantly Green Belt and also having significant parts of its land area subject to other constraints, including national and international ecological designations and areas at risk of flooding.
- 4.40 Through consultation, stakeholders have emphasised that enough housing land needs to be allocated through an up-to-date development plan to support local and regional growth, ensuring a broadly constant supply of homes, concentrated close to public transport.
- 4.41 Delivery of several strategic sites have been delayed which may have been resulted from prolonged landowner / developer negotiations, delays at the planning application stage, the need for unforeseen amendments after permission has been granted and the time taken to discharge pre-commencement conditions. To date, several identified brownfield allocations have also yet to come forward as expected and the Council will need to re-evaluate the deliverability of these sites through the ongoing plan-making process.

⁶ https://www.rochford.gov.uk/sites/default/files/planning_InfrastructureDeliveryTopicPaper.pdf

- 4.42 Due to the nature of the District, brownfield, urban and windfall sites are making a modest contribution to housing supply compared to that being made from larger, allocated greenfield sites. This highlights the disproportionate impact that unforeseen delays to the delivery of a relatively small number of greenfield allocations has had on overall housing delivery over the last three years.
- 4.43 Whilst development viability and market conditions can impact on housing delivery on a site-by-site basis, evidence suggests that the District remains a highly attractive and viable area to develop, particularly on greenfield sites, and a lack of viability is not considered to be a significant factor impacting the delivery of housing as a whole.
- 4.44 Section 106 Agreements for the provision of developer contributions are expected to support the provision of infrastructure improvements for large scale developments. The time taken to negotiate Section 106 Agreements can be a factor resulting in delays to the delivery of homes on a site-by-site basis and the Council does not operate a Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL). However, when taking a holistic view, there is little evidence of developer contributions being a major factor in the under-delivery of homes over the last three years.
- 4.45 It is recognised that whilst the Council has a role in facilitating development, it is largely dependent on able and willing private developers to build homes in the District. Over the previous three years, the Council may have itself contributed to delays in the delivery of housing where processing or determination periods have been protracted or untimely, however it is also recognised that the delivery of housing is dependent on a variety of factors and is not guaranteed to follow expectations even when all necessary permissions have been granted. At the current time, the Council does not itself develop housing in the District and, beyond seeking improvements to internal processes, the ability for the Council to directly influence the delivery of housing in the District is limited.

5 Key Actions & Responses

- 5.1 This Action Plan focuses on the intervention options open to the Council, recognising that a wide range of partners will need to be involved in helping to achieve the objectives of the Action Plan.
- 5.2 Considering the housing delivery analysis in the District contained within this Action Plan, it is apparent that the overall supply of deliverable sites is limiting increased and sustained delivery. The existing Local Development Framework Allocations Plan (2014) identifies that there are a limited number of brownfield sites within the District which have the potential to contribute to the District's housing requirements.
- 5.3 In the short-term, it is anticipated that the District's housing supply will improve, and it is expected to remain above 75% of its requirement until at least 2025. This is largely a result of a high number of strategic sites coming forward over this period.

- 5.4 Before 2025, additional sources of housing supply will need to be identified, which may include the allocation of new strategic sites through the development plan as appropriate.

Actions Taken to Date

- 5.5 The Council has already implemented actions to accelerate the delivery of homes through the progress of its emerging Local Plan which will set the strategy for future development beyond 2025 – the current plan period. Once adopted, the new Local Plan will replace several adopted policy documents and contain land allocations for meeting future needs, including housing.
- 5.6 Furthermore, the Council is also preparing a Joint Strategic Plan with other LPAs in South Essex which will set out a new strategic spatial strategy for the whole South Essex sub-region, including the level of housing and its distribution amongst authorities. Upon adoption, the Council will be able to monitor its 5-year land supply and have the HDT applied over the whole of the joint planning area of South Essex, or on a single authority basis. Calculating the HDT across a joint planning area allows for under-delivery in one area to be balanced-out where there is over-delivery in another.
- 5.7 Other actions that the Council has taken to date include:
- Holding a '**Call for Sites**' process to gather information from landowners and developers about the potential availability of land that might be considered suitable for development including for housing to inform the Council's spatial development options in its new Local Plan;
 - Publishing a **Brownfield Land Register** which identifies suitable sites for housing in the District using previously developed land;
 - Establishing **Self-Build** and **Custom Build Register** to record the interest of those looking to build their own home in the District;
 - Progressing towards a **joint venture** with a private developer to re-develop Council owned land at Rayleigh Civic Suite and Rochford Council offices to provide market and affordable housing;
 - **Engaging** across Essex through the Essex Planning Officers' Association Policy Forum to gather and analyse local delivery trends and intelligence;
 - Ongoing internal and external **training opportunities** for officers.

Future Actions

- 5.8 Whilst the adoption of new development plan documents is likely the most important action needed to drive forward an increase in delivery, there are other actions that the Council should take in the short, medium and longer term to improve housing delivery. These actions include:

Short term actions (within a year)

- **Assessment of sites** with planning permission but which have not commenced work or have stalled and liaise with the developer, landowner and/or case officer to encourage commencement and assist with delivery if affected by other regulatory regimes or agreements;
- Encourage the uptake of the **pre-planning application advice** service (resources permitting) to reduce abortive work by developers to bring forward schemes;
- **Review the use of planning conditions**, for example, pre-commencement conditions to ensure these are being applied in a reasonable, justified and proportionate manner;

Medium term actions (1-3 years)

- **Increase** the uptake of voluntary **Planning Performance Agreements (PPAs)** to assist in the timely future delivery of potentially complex applications; and
- **Work more closely with developers, planning agents and landowners** to bring sites without planning permission forward for development and help identify and address issues and barriers to delivery.
- Undertake a review of evidence, including an update to the **Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment (HELAA)** to help in the identification of new deliverable sites for housing

5.9 Other longer-term actions that could accelerate delivery include:

Long term actions (3 years and more)

- Consider preparing **site specific masterplans** and **development briefs** for future new strategic site allocations in the emerging local plan or other development plan documents;
- Consider preparing **supplementary planning documents (SPDs)** to provide greater certainty on what is required as part of the planning application process and what should be provided within housing schemes;
- Develop an ongoing pro-active **dialogue with landowners and developers (including planning agents and registered providers)** of future development site options;
- Publish further **additions to the Brownfield Land Register** and consider whether sites in the Register would be suitable for a grant of permission in principle for housing-led development; and
- Adopt new **development plan documents** identifying further sources of housing supply, including new **land allocations** as appropriate

6 Project Management and Monitoring Arrangements

- 6.1 The main indicator used to assess the success of the actions detailed within this Action Plan will be future housing delivery and HDT performance. The earliest this performance will be apparent will be when the current reporting year's housing delivery figures from March 2019 to April 2020 are published and used to calculate the HDT result for 2020. The reason for this is that, as a result of the delay to the publication of the HDT results for 2018, and the subsequent 6-month timescale allowed to produce an action plan, this Action Plan will be published after the 2018-2019 reporting year has passed. As a result, the actions within this Action Plan will have no influence over the HDT results for 2019.
- 6.2 A full review and analysis of the Action Plan will still occur following the publication of the next round of HDT results as, based on current monitoring, it is considered likely that the Council will need to prepare a further action plan next year. Further steps or amendments to existing actions will be considered as part of any future action plan.

7 Monitoring of the Action Plan

- 7.1 The HDT is expected to be published annually by the Government based on statistics provided by local authorities. If required to prepare an action plan in the future, i.e. due to housing delivery falling below 95% in any future HDT results, this future action plan will need to reflect on progress towards the actions listed above.

8 Appendices

Appendix A – Housing Land Trajectory

The Council’s latest housing land trajectory is available to view at <https://www.rochford.gov.uk/authority-monitoring-report>

Appendix B – Stakeholder Consultation Pro Forma

1. Housing Delivery Test Action Plan Stakeholder Consultation Questionnaire

Type of Housing Provider	Perceived Root Cause Analysis (Aspects / Issues) to Housing Delivery Within the Rochford District or Generally
Volume housebuilder / developer Organisation name:	
Small medium enterprise housebuilder / developer Organisation name:	
Planning consultant / land promoter	

Organisation name:	
Registered Provider (housing association, housing trust) Organisation name:	
Local authority housing service Organisation name:	

2. Proposed / Suggested Actions that Could Assist with Improved Housing Delivery Within the Rochford District

