



Lewes District Council

Building Better Council Housing

Housing Delivery Programme

2024 - 2028

New Homes Principles



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Lewes District Council

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Foreword

When we first became the administration in 2019, we made building council homes a priority, and now as Leader with responsibility for building council homes since May 2023, we have continued this.



Over the last five years we have completed and developed a pipeline of over 250 council properties and are amongst only 25% of councils in the country who have built any council houses at all in the last 10 years. It is a source of immense pride for me and all my colleagues to see local families from the council's housing register move into these new homes.

From the outset, our approach has been underpinned by a determination to build better and in the right locations, placing great emphasis on sustainability and climate resilience, high construction standards, and low running costs for our tenants. This key document explains how we are formalising this approach and committing the council to a series of New Homes Principles.

The principles were devised following a dialogue and partnership working with the Tenants of Lewes District and will mean that a new framework now supports the design and delivery of all future council homes.

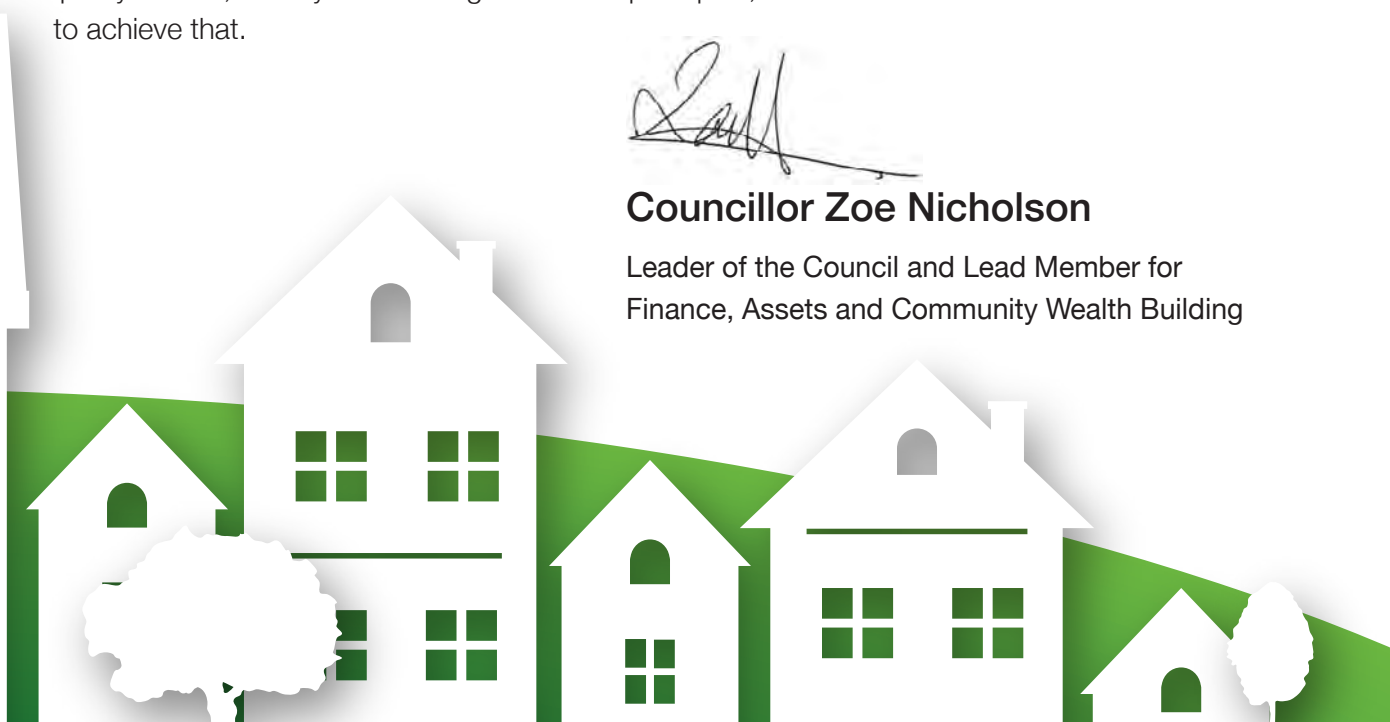
Local authorities like Lewes District Council that are tackling the housing crisis face multiple challenges, not least the lack of financial support from government.

However, we remain determined. We have a duty to our tenants to provide them with good quality homes, and by establishing these new principles, I am confident we will continue to achieve that.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Zoe Nicholson', with a horizontal line underneath.

Councillor Zoe Nicholson

Leader of the Council and Lead Member for
Finance, Assets and Community Wealth Building



Introduction

The Reimagining Lewes District: Corporate Plan 2024-2028 has a clear focus for housing - building new homes that are energy efficient, climate resilient, adaptable and that local people can afford.

Background

Lewes District Council successfully developed and delivered a pipeline of new sustainable council homes for local people during the period of 2019-2023. This followed a lengthy period of very minimal homes being built by the council and as social housing stock numbers continued to reduce due to the statutory Right to Buy. The new homes included different house types to meet target need, built in a range of locations across the district, including in more rural areas.

The whole housing development programme, a combination of new build homes and residential acquisitions, takes advantage of local opportunities – utilising both council-owned land as part of a community wealth building strategy and sourcing third-party sites that might support housing growth as part of wider regeneration initiatives.

The inclusion of sustainable house building methodologies have also been a priority as part of the evolving housing pipeline. The council has been able to develop its own internal knowledge, skills, and understanding of sustainable development in the context of corporate priorities and the needs of residents.

Context

The Reimagining Lewes District Action Plan developed five pillars of community wealth building, using the power and influence of the council as an anchor institution to build a platform for greater local and community ownership including the socially productive use of land and assets.

In July 2024, the council approved the Climate and Nature Strategy 2024, a refresh of the Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy 2021, developed after the declaration of a climate emergency in 2019 and which committed the council to be net zero by 2030.

The Lewes District Council New Homes Principles have been developed with the Tenants of Lewes District (TOLD) creating a single



context for new council housing, ensuring delivery is consistent in meeting core objectives and standards. All new build development schemes will be delivered against these principles and support in future decision-making.

Core Values

The principles have been developed against a set of central values:

1. **Accountability** – the council will make ethical, transparent, and well-intentioned decisions in relation to the use of land for housing, specifically targeting brownfield sites, and with consideration of climate and nature objectives.
2. **Accessibility** – the pipeline will reflect the different needs of residents and those on the housing waiting list, taking into consideration factors such as location, individual design needs, adaptations, and the importance of community.
3. **Affordability** – all new council homes will be affordable to live in, taking into consideration household running costs as well as rent levels.

Baseline Re-set

In early 2024, Lewes District Council and TOLD re-set the baseline for new council homes:

- Build quality, including achieving fabric first, adopting Healthy Homes principles, and implementing carbon reduction measures, shall not be compromised on new homes in the context of increasing costs. This also includes objectives for achieving high levels of biodiversity net gain wherever possible.

- To balance viability where challenged, rents may be aligned to the current Local Housing Allowance. However, by futureproofing and investing in sustainable construction methodologies, the rent levels will be balanced with reduced household running costs. Business case viability on future schemes for approval will therefore focus on the overall household costs and not rents alone.
- In the assessment of scheme viability, options appraisals will be undertaken that also consider (where appropriate) the benefit of introducing mixed-tenure schemes including potential home ownership options to both support finances and to create balanced communities.
- Where a developer reasonably cannot identify a suitable Registered Provider to take on the affordable housing allocation on private development sites, the council will prioritise protecting those provisions through direct intervention and, where possible, seek to influence at an early stage the build quality through using our own Employer's Requirements.
- If a past decision (such as a council motion) is eventually superseded by wider changes in national regulations, policy, or good practice, then the principles will “reset” to the new minimum standard(s) and overturn that decision to ensure new homes continue to be built to the highest quality.



Purpose

Lewes District Council's housing delivery programme will directly contribute to the needs of residents and those on the Housing Waiting List. The new homes will create long-term, quality, and sustainable places to live for those most in need within the district.

Quality design is essential to creating thriving and sustainable communities – placemaking, a process through which places that people want to live, work, or explore are created, is an essential part of supporting those communities. Creating pride in place, health and wellbeing opportunities, community-driven spaces, and safe and secure homes, which improve the lives of our residents.

This **Lewes District Council New Homes Principles** have been developed to ensure we are 'building better council housing'. The principles provide a framework to support in the design and delivery of an ambitious and collaborative programme - creating a clear and strong set of standards to 'raise the bar' and make people proud to live in the district.

These principles contribute to the strategic brief for the project manager and design team. It builds upon the objectives of the Corporate Plan and acts as an introduction to the detailed Employer's Requirements. The principles apply to all new homes directly built by the council.

The principles also reflect best practice, guidance, and policy, both local and national. The principles are also designed to work alongside existing council policy.

Market Overview

At the time of developing the principles, the operating environment for house building, specifically in the public sector and especially for local authorities, is incredibly challenging. The impacts of global and national changes, including

the aftermath of the COVID-19 global pandemic, have continued to add pressures in the following key areas:

- Inflation – significant increases to costs impacting on financial viability.
- Supply chains – labour shortages delaying programme delivery.
- Land and property values – increases affecting affordability.
- Fuel prices – increases impacting our residents and their household affordability.

The Housing Revenue Account remains under significant financial strain due to increases in costs and the social housing rent cap implemented by Government for 2023/24 without any compensatory financial support to local government.

The council has access to other delivery vehicles including Aspiration Homes Limited Liability Partnership, a joint venture with Eastbourne Borough Council, to deliver increased affordable housing options. That vehicle has a number of benefits, including the ability to use Right to Buy receipts, which can support with scheme viability.

The cost-of-living crisis is also very much at the forefront of the council's agenda, as we try to support residents during this incredibly volatile and uncertain time, providing increased support options through our public services.



Policy Framework

The **Lewes District Council New Homes Principles** have been developed in the context of current national and local policy:

National

- National Planning Policy Framework
- Building Regulations 2010 (as amended)
- Climate Change Act 2008
- Building Safety Act 2022
- Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023
- Equality Act 2010

Following the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023, the Regulator of Social Housing has also introduced new standards from 1st April 2024 as follows:

- Safety and Quality Standard
- Transparency, Influence, and Accountability Standard
- Neighbourhood and Community Standard
- Tenancy Standard

Homes England also adopted a new Strategic Plan 2023-2028 with a greater focus on regeneration and placemaking alongside new housing supply. There is also more emphasis on sustainability and social value.

Local

- East Sussex Environment Strategy 2020
- Reimagining Lewes District Corporate Plan
- Lewes Local Plan (including Neighbourhood Planning)
- South Downs Local Plan
- Climate Change and Sustainability Strategy
- Reimagining Lewes District Action Plan

Future Homes Standard

The Code for Sustainable Homes (the Code), a voluntary national standard to improve the overall sustainability of new homes, was withdrawn by central government in 2015. The Code was replaced by new technical standards incorporated into the Building Regulations, which came into effect in June 2022 and subsequently formalised by the Building Regulations etc. (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2023.

The uplifts to the Building Regulations were designed to increase the energy efficiency of homes as an interim step to the eventual specifications of the new Future Homes Standard

(the Standard). Subject to further consultation, it was anticipated that the construction industry would be better placed to meet the specifications of the Standard in 2025 through improved supply chains, skills, and construction practices.

This may change following the new government in July 2024.





Stowe Place and Mews, Newhaven



Principle 1

Creating places, communities, and homes that our residents need

We will...

- Deliver tenure blind (no explicit external indicators of tenure type in the design and layout of a development) new build developments that prioritise council rented accommodation, with some opportunities for low-cost homeownership in key identified areas, based on housing need and local demand.
- Develop homes to high accessibility and adaptability standards, working in partnership with Occupational Health to ensure we are meeting a range of local needs and enabling residents to live independently for longer.
- Work more closely with NHS Sussex and East Sussex County Council to find new supported housing solutions for the most vulnerable within the social care sector.
- Engage with Homes England and other central government departments to secure additional grant funding opportunities that will help to increase the quality of our new homes and neighbourhoods.
- Work with other public sector partners to ensure the necessary infrastructure and systems are in place to serve new build developments, ensuring our residents have access to local support services.
- Continue to review our existing social housing stock as part of our asset management and decarbonisation plans, identifying new opportunities to regenerate places by developing new council homes.
- Identify and support new opportunities for community-led housing – enabling our communities to contribute to places in line with our community wealth building objectives.
- Provide opportunities for custom build developments – providing choice for our residents to meet individual household needs.
- Engage with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders to ensure our developments meet the health and wellbeing needs of our communities.

“

The council is committed to delivering new homes that best serve our residents and communities, ensuring we are meeting the requirements of those most in housing need, whilst also creating vibrant, attractive, and inclusive places that people want to live in.

”





Palmerston House, Newhaven



Principle 2

Building quality and healthy homes

We will...

- Deliver all new homes in accordance with the council's Lettable Standard – ensuring high and consistent levels of property decency that will be easily maintainable.
- Strive to ensure that the principles of Healthy Homes are met – creating the highest quality places for our residents and future generations.
- Develop new build homes to nationally described and technical space standards – ensuring our homes are spacious, comfortable, naturally lit, and fit for purpose, including adequate storage provision.
- Build new homes with exemplary levels of fire safety and in accordance with current regulations and statute.
- Design homes for both current and future generations – promoting independence and considering the growth in multi-generational and co-living. Adherence to the nationally described and technical space standards as above may however need to be reviewed for 'non-traditional' housing types.
- New build homes should be designed with consideration of industry benchmarks and good practice in relation to safety and security, such as the Secure by Design standards – designing out crime and ensuring our residents feel safe within their homes.
- Provide outdoor and open spaces wherever possible – incorporating planted areas, growing spaces, and new community and urban gardening initiatives. Where this is not practical within the parameters of the development site, we will work with partners to link new homes to other existing open spaces.
- Increase biodiversity on all new housing developments – in excess of planning requirements, where practicable.
- Monitor and evaluate our new communities and neighbourhoods – learning lessons to inform future housing developments.



The council understands the value of living in a quality environment. It is important that our residents feel safe and secure in their homes, whilst also living in spaces that positively contribute to their health and wellbeing.





Mill Road, Ringmer (*top*)
Oakfield Lane, Plumpton (*bottom*)



Principle 3

Maximising social value in housing development to benefit local people

We will...

- Adopt the council's Social Value Charter to sustainably procure works and services – placing emphasis on other benefits in addition to cost alone.
- Develop local markets and supply chains – retaining wealth within the district in accordance with the Community Wealth Building Strategy.
- Use the council's Modular Housing Framework to deliver projects as part of a wider pipeline – accelerating delivery and focusing spend locally.
- Increase education and learning benefits – creating enhanced options for new skills development and employment opportunities, taking advantage of the various stages in the whole construction process.
- Strive to maximise additional benefits through our procurement processes – focusing on opportunities to improve existing and new community assets.
- Work collaboratively with the wider public sector – taking a 'One Public Estate' approach to property, land, and assets, finding new opportunities to repurpose sites to benefit new homes and communities.
- Promote new community-led design and housing opportunities – enabling new and existing community groups to improve our neighbourhoods, taking advantage of other council schemes such as the Revolving Loan Fund.
- Continue to build meaningful and lasting relationships with partners, stakeholders, and community groups – gaining a better understanding of community needs in a development area.
- Consider potential 'meanwhile' uses for sites going through the pre-construction stage – benefiting the community and the local economy.

“ The council believes passionately in the benefit of social value to our residents and communities. The Community Wealth Building Strategy sets out actions for enhancing social value, which will also be imbedded in our new home's programmes. ”





Danforth Way, Ringmer (*top*)
Old Brickworks Lane, Chailey (*bottom*)



Principle 4

Reducing environmental impact and making homes more affordable

We will...

- Target brownfield sites for redevelopment – minimising environmental impact and contributing positively and sustainably to house building targets.
- Adopt a fabric first approach - maximising the performance of building components and materials, futureproofing new homes for long-term living, and with the ability to adapt to the changing needs of existing and future tenants.
- Promote the use of Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) including modular – using the council’s Modular Housing Framework.
- Consciously and intentionally selecting building materials to create climate resilient homes – considering their carbon footprint, whole life cost, and ease of repair and maintenance.
- Remove the use of gas in new build developments – utilising electric as the main energy source.
- Prioritise the installation of appropriate renewable technologies that minimise energy bills to our residents whilst reducing carbon outputs – helping to tackle fuel poverty and the cost-of-living impact.
- Build homes with systems and technologies that are user friendly and easy for our residents to operate and maintain – providing literature, education, and guidance to residents on the completion and letting of new homes.

“ The council declared a climate emergency and implemented its latest Climate and Nature Strategy. It is essential that our new homes are climate resilient, not contributing to carbon emissions, and are designed to reduce household costs to our residents. ”

- Develop site waste management plans during the construction phase – setting out how materials and waste will be managed, maximising re-use and recycling.
- Actively engage with local construction training and education providers – helping to improve local skills in sustainable design and construction.
- Conduct post-occupancy monitoring – ensuring building performance and assessing how occupants can most effectively benefit from their home.
- Commit to establishing an appropriate benchmark and target for achieving future net zero carbon on new build council schemes, that aspires to exceed national minimum requirements, as anticipated and emerging new government policy, regulations, and standards in the sector become clearer and more certain.





Western Road, Newhaven (top)
Ashington Gardens, Peacehaven (bottom)



Principle 5

Optimising location, sustainable transport, and connectivity

We will...

- Build new homes across our geography including in rural areas – ensuring housing need is being met across the whole district.
- Strive to influence utility companies to ensure infrastructure meets the different requirements of new council developments and where service infrastructure is already under pressure.
- Design new neighbourhoods with consideration of the local area - enhancing the surroundings and protecting the local character of our towns and villages.
- Link new developments to existing open space, play opportunities, and other community assets – ensuring places become more than just ‘bricks and mortar’.
- Encourage sustainable transport choices – promoting active travel strategies and supporting investments in public transport, car clubs, and car-sharing.
- Promote walking and cycling - minimising unnecessary car journeys and incorporating where possible integrated on-site covered, secure cycle storage.
- Reduce the need for on-site parking provision for those developments within town centre locations and with access to local public transport links – enabling the council to maximise site density, increase biodiversity opportunities, and reduce ambient air pollution.
- Aspire to incorporate electric vehicle charging infrastructure in excess of the Building Regulations requirements – accelerating the future changes in the motor vehicle industry.
- Involve the local community throughout the development process – ensuring people feel involved in the proposals for their communities and places as part of managed consultation strategies.
- Purposefully identify, acquire, and utilise sites that already have access to good public transport links – unlocking dormant opportunities within the district and maximising sustainable locations.



The council recognises the diversity in the geography of the district, including a mix of urban and rural areas. It is therefore important that we are providing new homes in a range of locations, which make the best use of local facilities, and promote active travel strategies.





Lewes District Council

Building Better Council Housing



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