



**Worcester**  
CITY COUNCIL

# Housing Enabling Strategy and Delivery Plan

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## 2023-2026

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## 1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Affordable housing need has been increasing in Worcester, whilst affordable housing supply has not been increasing at the same rate. The Housing Enabling Strategy (HES) provides the strategic vision, methodology and increased focus on the provision of affordable housing. It is a recognition that a co-ordinated and robust approach is required to meet the challenges posed and to promote a co-ordinated and effective response to maximise the opportunities to deliver more affordable housing.
- 1.2 The HES underlines the importance placed on increasing the supply of affordable housing in Worcester and sets out the intention to collaborate jointly with the Council's partners to achieve this goal. It includes a Delivery Plan that sets out specific actions that need to be taken to support the ambitions of the HES. The HES has a lifespan of three years which enables building blocks to be put in place to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing.
- 1.3 The HES is a live document and is reviewed and updated annually. The Delivery Plan is a management tool, which is under constant review and is updated on an ongoing basis during each year and reflected in departmental, team and individual action and performance plans. The Delivery Plan is also formally reviewed quarterly to provide an update on progress against individual actions.
- 1.4 The HES has been developed as a follow up to an assignment which the Council commissioned from ARK Consultancy. The brief for that assignment was to consider how the Council might enhance its approaches and interventions in order to increase its affordable housing production. The study considered existing and potential interventions and reported ARK's key findings along with clear recommendations to the Council about the measures and actions which ARK believed were appropriate and would offer good efficacy and results.
- 1.5 To make the recommended changes ARK reported that: "a significant but manageable level of commitment from Worcester City Council and its partners" would be required.
- 1.6 The HES and its Delivery Plan turn the identified measures in the ARK report into more detailed, achievable and measurable steps, prioritising actions and providing realistic timescales.
- 1.7 Progress has already been made with a number of the recommendations in the ARK report, these include the establishment of the Affordable Housing Development Group, which has representation across the council from key housing related functions and is intended to provide a corporate approach to maximising affordable housing delivery. A Registered Provider Liaison Group has also been established which has held some initial meetings.

- 1.8 The HES and Delivery Plan have been subject to consultation with key stakeholders.

## 2 THE SCOPE OF THE STRATEGY

- 2.1 The HES is a cross cutting strategy. It is not specific to a particular council department, recognising that in order to be successful the entire council must own it. It reflects objectives included in other strategic documents, including the City Plan, the Town Centre Master Plan and the South Worcestershire Local Plan (SWLP). It also represents the joint working the Council undertakes with both public and private sector partners.
- 2.2 It is focused on new build supply both in the Council's administrative boundaries and the urban extensions, the latter are areas for development outside of Worcester City's administrative boundaries, but are intended to assist in meeting Worcester City's housing and employment needs. The urban extensions are an important part of the Council's overall housing delivery. The HES also covers regeneration, conversions and repurposing of existing stock which lead to an increase in affordable housing.
- 2.3 The HES is not a housing strategy in the traditional sense, as it has a specific focus on the Council's enabling role in relation to affordable housing. The draft Worcestershire Housing Strategy 2021-2040, which the Council is a party to, addresses wider housing issues. The HES reflects the vision and priorities of the Worcestershire Housing Strategy.
- 2.4 The HES compliments other sub-regional and local strategies, including the Draft Worcestershire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2022 – 2025 and the Council's emerging Community Engagement Strategy. It has been developed in the context of the emerging SWLP, with one of its key roles being to influence policy development and turn policy objectives into deliverable actions.
- 2.5 The HES not only raises awareness of affordable housing need but demonstrates that, with the right commitment and resources, affordable housing can be a driver of change. This includes attracting up-front funding to unlock difficult development sites and playing a significant role in regeneration.

## 3 NATIONAL AND LOCAL CONTEXT

### 3.1 National Context

- 3.2 The market disruptions and volatility in recent years have undoubtedly had an impact on housing supply both positively and negatively. The HES needs to remain flexible in order to adapt to a housing market now operating in the context of higher inflation and borrowing costs, along with significant economic uncertainty, the latter forecast to prevail for some time.



- 3.3 There are considerable financial and economic pressures on private developers and Registered Providers (RPs) the latter having had their financial capacity constrained through the introduction of a rent cap on existing tenants' rents for the financial year 2023/24 and with uncertainty remaining regarding rent increases in future years. The degree to which affordable housing production is impacted depends on RPs' continued appetite for development and the housing market's response to adverse economic conditions.
- 3.4 There remains a lack of clarity around planning policy impacts in relation to proposed changes to both housing supply and delivery mechanisms on affordable housing production.
- 3.5 The impacts of climate change and meeting net zero carbon targets in new developments and the impact and resources associated with retrofitting existing stock in the private and public sector remains a pronounced challenge.
- 3.6 **Local and sub-regional context**
- 3.7 The Council does not have sufficient available and suitable land within its administrative area to meet its long-term housing need. This need is being met through the development of the urban extensions located outside of its boundaries. The Council works jointly with Malvern and Wychavon district councils to meet its housing requirements through the SWDP, which is currently being reviewed, with an intention that the new plan will be adopted in late 2023.
- 3.8 The Strategic Housing Market Assessment updated in 2021, shows that across the South Worcestershire area there is a need for 26,360 new homes in the period 2021 – 2041. Of these an average of 906 homes per annum need to be affordable homes. Worcester's need is for 458 affordable homes per annum.
- 3.9 The average number of affordable homes completed in the last five years, in Worcester City and the urban extensions that specifically contribute to meeting Worcester's housing needs, is c170 dwellings per annum. Of these c100 affordable homes have been developed within Worcester City's administrative boundary. This clearly shows a significant gap between affordable housing need and supply, underlining the requirement for the HES.

## 4 STRATEGIC GOALS

- 4.1 The key themes of the HES are:
- Increasing the supply of new housing, but specifically affordable housing;
  - Understanding housing need and ensuring that the extent of housing need is widely recognised as a significant issue;
  - Ensuring that affordable housing supply is strategically important and is addressed in policy and delivery frameworks;

- Making more direct interventions where necessary to address any dysfunction in the operation of the housing market which impacts on the development of new affordable housing.
- 4.2 The strategic goals flow from the themes, from the analysis and findings of the ARK report and through consultation with stakeholders and colleagues.
- 4.3 The Strategic Goals are as follows:

Strategic Goals	
Goal 1	Maximise affordable housing provision across all development sites where there is a residential use.
Goal 2	Put in place a strategic housing and enabling function that supports the objectives of the HES.
Goal 3	Ensure that corporate objectives and planning policy and practice support the delivery of new affordable homes.
Goal 4	Build strong relationships with key partners leading to deliverable and quantifiable outcomes.
Goal 5	Maximise resources available from the public and private sectors to investment in affordable housing.
Goal 6	Promote and raise awareness of the benefits of affordable housing in the wider social and economic context.
Goal 7	Shape and action the Council's engagement in land promotion activities.
Goal 8	Establish the Council's appetite and explore the opportunities for joint venture working.

## 5 OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

- 5.1 Given the uncertainties in the external environment there are clearly a number of threats to the delivery of the strategic goals, however, there are also opportunities. The following summarises these opportunities and challenges.

### OPPORTUNITIES

- Establish sufficient resources to enable the delivery of the strategic goals;
- Building on existing good relationships with stakeholders;
- Build on existing sub-regional/county forums already established e.g. SWLP and the countywide housing forum;
- Work proactively with public sector funders (such as Homes England and

- DHLUC), building on existing good relationships;
- Share good practice and learning with partners;
- Pilot new initiatives;
- Use limited resources in a more effective way through joint working;
- Explore opportunities where county council owned land might offer a solution;
- Purchasing land to unlock development opportunities;
- Understanding more fully (and implementing as appropriate) land promotion activities;
- Being open to potential joint ventures;
- Continued access to borrowing for the development of affordable housing;
- Less competition in the land market as a result of adverse economic conditions;
- Town centre regeneration;
- Urban extension sites and sites proposed in the draft SWDP.

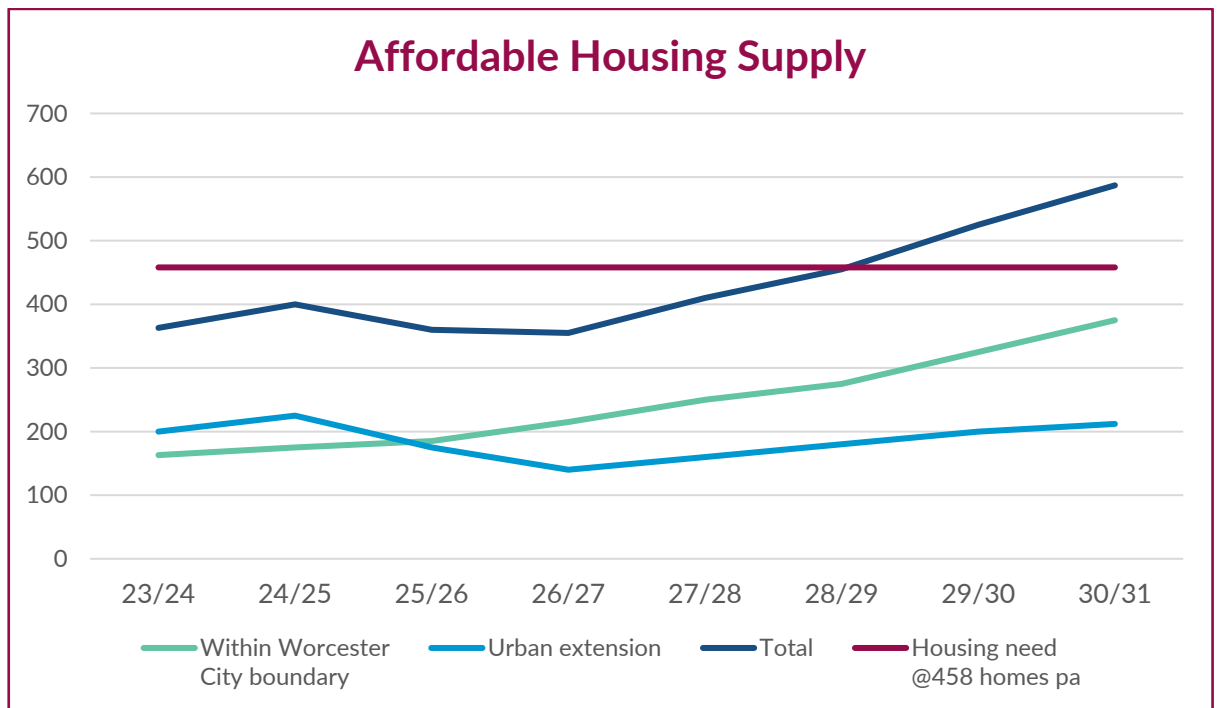
#### CHALLENGES

- External market conditions;
- Geographical constraints of Worcester City;
- Reliance on third parties to deliver new affordable housing;
- Reliance on land in other South Worcestershire authority areas to meet housing need;
- Uncertainty in national planning policy;
- The focus of national policy on levelling up, which to date has a particular focus on northern areas;
- Changes in national policy;
- Pressures on council budgets, meaning that there is a lack of resource to support the delivery of the strategic goals;
- Inability to source sufficient skills and expertise;
- Lack of commitment from partners;
- 'Silo working' amongst partners;
- Establishing and maintaining affordable housing as a corporate priority;
- Diminished appetite and capacity for development amongst RP partners.

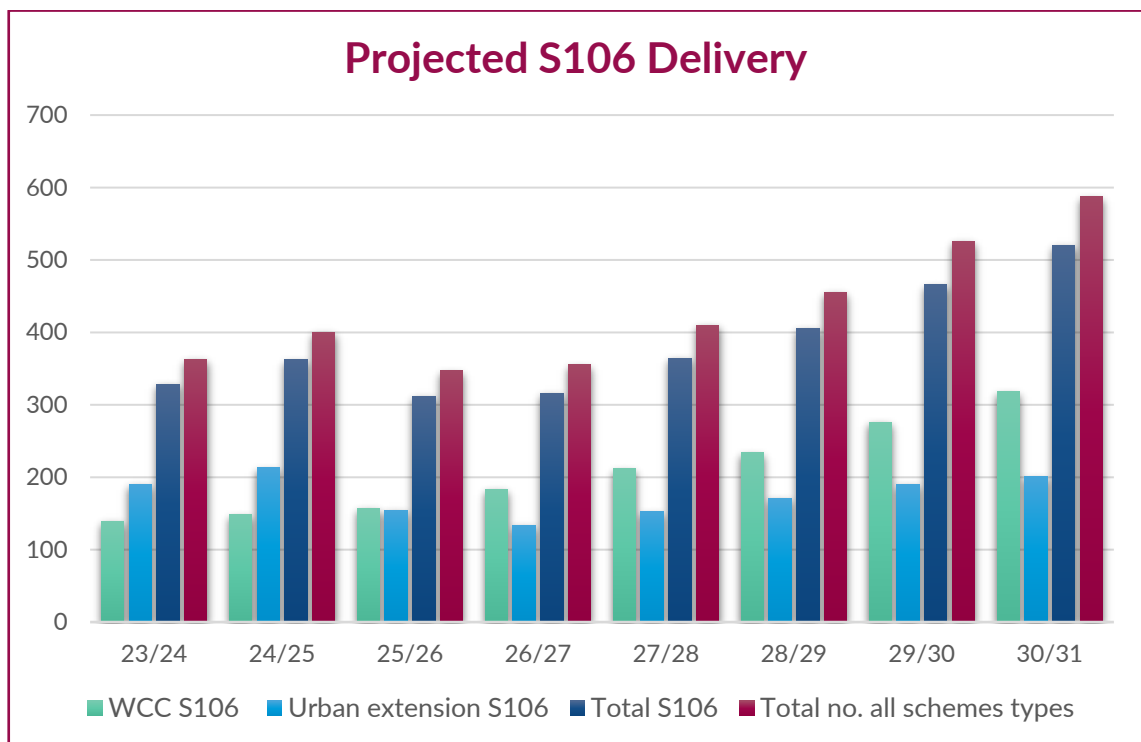
## 6 DELIVERING THE STRATEGIC GOALS

- 6.1 Among the most crucial factors in achieving the Strategic Goals are ensuring that there is effective leadership and ownership at strategic and operational levels in the Council, that the HES is aligned with corporate objectives and that it is adequately resourced. This means that at member and senior management level through to teams and individuals, increasing the supply of affordable homes needs to be recognised as a major priority.
- 6.2 The process for ensuring that the goals set out in the HES can be achieved is critically important. At the heart of this is the HES Delivery Plan. This provides detailed actions that need to be taken, focused specifically on year one for now. More detailed actions to be added for later years based on an annual and rolling review.
- 6.3 The Delivery Plan is set out in [Appendix 1](#).
- 6.4 It provides details of:
- The tasks that need to be undertaken
  - The allocation of responsibility for specific tasks
  - Key milestones and forecast completion dates
- 6.5 To optimise performance it is the intention to create a golden thread running from the Worcester City Plan, through relevant strategies to team work, action plans and individual performance plans. Objectives and tasks will reflect the strategic importance of delivering new affordable homes at optimum levels.
- 6.6 [Increasing Supply](#)
- 6.7 The current levels of annual affordable housing production are not meeting the forecast affordable housing need as detailed in the 2021 Strategic Housing Market Assessment. The HES and the Delivery Plan focus on the next three years but increasing affordable housing supply in order to meet identified need is a longer term project. The HES lays the foundations and provides the pathway to significantly escalate supply. Based on the overall land supply for residential development identified in the SWDP, both in WCC's boundary and with the contribution made by the urban extensions, the targets set out in the Delivery Plan should be achievable.
- 6.8 The following graph shows the potential to gradually increase supply year on year through the lifetime of the HES, as well as demonstrating the increasing supply trajectory over the following years. The graph illustrates that the supply has to be greater than housing need in the latter years to make up for shortfalls in the early years.





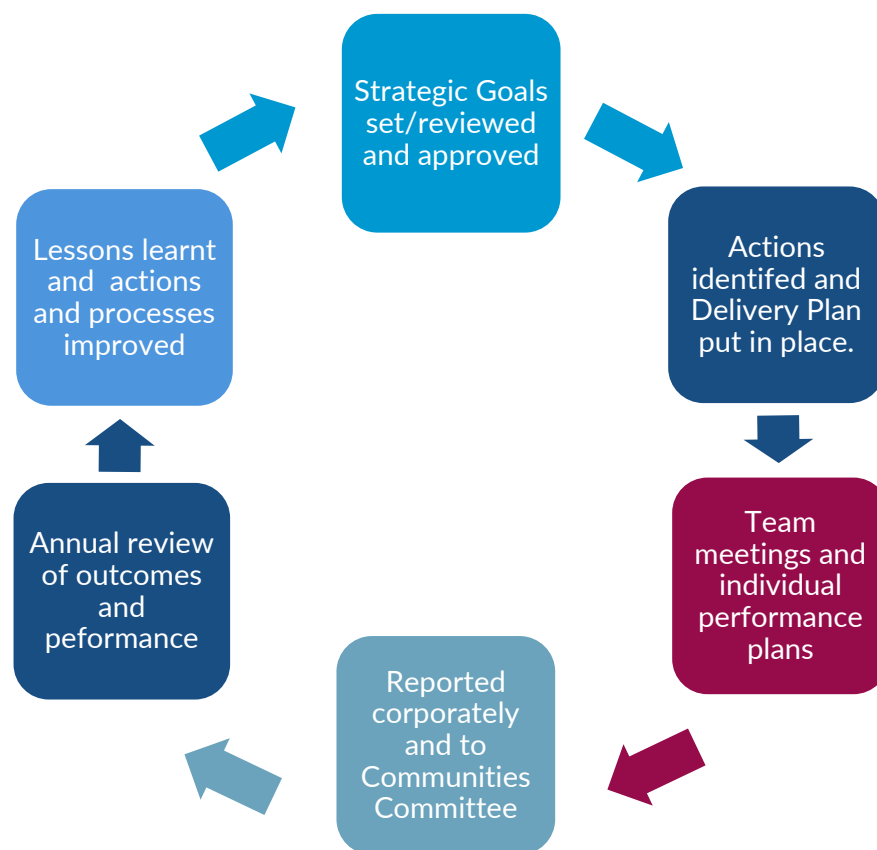
- 6.9 The data for the graph is compiled from a combination of actual identified schemes and pipeline sites based on the emerging revised SWLP.
- 6.10 The completions identified in the early years (23/24 and 24/25) are more certain, with known developers and timescales, hence the early years are not just a straight line increase but reflect the realities of development on site. In the years following 24/25 there is limited clear intelligence of actual physical delivery timescales for the pipeline sites. Therefore, the trajectory of affordable housing supply is based on expected delivery forecasts in the SWDP. The ability to achieve the increased supply needs to be seen in the light of the challenges identified in 5.1 above.
- 6.11 The following graph illustrates the forecast breakdown between affordable homes provided through the planning system (S106 homes) and those provided through other means. S106 homes result from a planning obligation being placed on a developer/landowner under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which requires a proportion of new dwellings to be provided as affordable homes. WCC sets out its affordable housing policy requirements in the SWDP.



- 6.12 S106 homes make up a significant proportion of affordable housing supply nationally and this trend is reflected locally, with 85% of affordable homes in WCC and 95% of affordable homes in the urban extensions forecast to be delivered through a S106 agreement.
- 6.13 This illustrates the critical importance of ensuring that affordable housing planning policy is robust, is complied with and given a priority in S106 negotiations with developers.
- 6.14 The percentage (5%-10%) of other affordable homes developed could come from sites directly developed by RP's, additional market homes purchased by an RP over and above the S106 requirement on a development site or through windfall sites. The latter are sites that have not been specifically identified in the SWDP, but could become available for development, including affordable housing development.
- 6.15 **Resources**
- 6.16 The HES recognises that in order to achieve the Strategic Goals an increased emphasis on support for enabling affordable housing delivery is required. The Council will need to re-organise existing resources and increase resources in certain areas to support the HES to achieve the pace of change anticipated. It is however, not expected that the Council would be solely responsible for resourcing the ambitions set out in the HES.
- 6.17 A number of the initiatives should be self-funding, although some initial investment may be needed. For example, in the case of the land promotion activities, a business case will need to be developed to demonstrate the added value that pro-actively engaging in strategic land promotion can bring. This spans both direct financial gain for the Council and opportunities to meet wider economic and social objectives.
- 6.18 By collaborating with partners it will be possible for activities to be jointly funded, or alternatively where a partner is taking the lead for them to provide the funding directly. The council through the HES will need to demonstrate the value for money and benefits to partners as a result of investment and involvement by those partners in supporting and delivering the ambitions of the HES.

## 7 MONITORING AND GOVERNANCE

- 7.1 It is critical that the HES and the Delivery Plan are monitored effectively and that they are live documents guiding both strategic and operational actions.
- 7.2 Accountability for overseeing the delivery of the HES is the responsibility of the Communities Committee. It receives the outcomes of the annual review of the HES and the updated Delivery Plan and considers and approves agreed changes. It monitors performance against the actions and timescales in the Delivery Plan on a quarterly basis.
- 7.3 The following flow diagram illustrates the monitoring and governance process.



- 7.4 This continuous circle enables the HES to be reviewed and rolled forward into future years.

# DRAFT

## Appendix 1 Housing Enabling Strategy Delivery Plan 2023 - 2026

Strategic Objective	Action	Lead	Timescale							
			Start	Finish	2023/24				2024/25	2025/26
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
<b>Goal 1</b>	<b>Maximise affordable housing provision across all development sites where there is a residential use.</b>									
1A	Deliver <b>1100</b> affordable homes in the lifetime of this Strategy.		Apr 23	Mar 26						
1B	Deliver <b>500</b> in Worcester City boundaries		Apr 23	Mar 26						
1C	Deliver <b>600</b> in the urban extensions		Apr 23	Mar 26						
1D	Deliver <b>360</b> homes in 2023/24 (including the urban extensions)		Apr 23	Mar 24						
1E	Work with the County Council to develop an agreed approach to affordable housing provision on the Shrub Hill development site.		Apr 23	June 24						
1F	Engage at an early stage in relation to strategic sites to ensure maximising affordable housing delivery		Apr 23	Mar 26						
<b>Goal 2</b>	<b>Put in place a strategic housing and enabling function that supports the objectives of the Housing Enabling Strategy.</b>									
2A	Review current roles/skill sets and reporting lines within the enabling and housing strategy functions.		Apr 23	May 23						
2B	Define clearly both the housing strategy and the housing enabling functions/roles specifically focusing on the need for early intervention in potential schemes and the unlocking of sites.		Apr 23	Jun 23						
2C	Design the job roles and identify any additional budgetary requirements.		Apr 23	July 23						
2D	Undertake recruitment exercise addressing identified skill gaps.		Jul 23	Sept 23						
2E	Establish a brief for the appointment of a retained specialist external advisor and undertake recruitment exercise.		Apr 23	Jun 23						
<b>Goal 3</b>	<b>Ensure that corporate objectives and planning policy and practice support the delivery of new affordable homes.</b>									
3A	Review the City Plan and other existing and emerging strategies to ensure that there is effective consistency and 'read across' between		Apr 23	Mar 24						



# DRAFT

Strategic Objective	Action	Lead	Timescale							
			Start	Finish	2023/24				2024/25	2025/26
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
	strategies to optimise affordable housing delivery. Propose amendments.									
3B	Adopt Worcestershire County Housing Strategy.		July 23	Sept 23						
	Review, amend and approve the Asset Disposal Policy and associated processes to ensure that all assets that are declared surplus to requirements go immediately to the options appraisal process. (see <b>Action 3D</b> )		Aug 23	Jan 24						
3D	Design an option appraisal methodology to identify constraints and opportunities (including viability, planning and location) to assess the suitability of council assets, which are surplus to requirements, to support the prioritising of affordable housing delivery.		Oct 23	Dec 23						
3E	Once an asset is approved for use as affordable housing, design a detailed process to ensure that the repurpose/development is progressed in an efficient and timely manner; with suitable gateways and approval milestones in place.		Oct 23	Dec 23						
3F	Review the Asset Disposal Policy with a view to obtaining agreement that the council will consider disposing of assets at less than market value (having taken suitable legal and regulatory advice) where there is the potential to maximise affordable housing delivery.		Jan 24	Feb 24						
3G	Establish a policy reflecting the council's approach to the use of compulsory purchase orders.		Jan 24	Mar 24						
3H	Establish a policy reflecting the council's approach to land acquisition.		Jan 24	Mar 24						
3I	Keep under review affordable housing needs data, including waiting list trends. (checking that housing need is not being masked by processes for assessing and recording applications for the waiting list).		Apr 23	Mar 26						
3J	Establish a process for monitoring delivery against identified need requirements.		Apr 24	June 24						

# DRAFT

Strategic Objective	Action	Lead	Timescale							
			Start	Finish	2023/24				2024/25	2025/26
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
3K	Draw up and agree terms of reference and delegations, including attendance and decision making powers for the Affordable Housing Development Group Ensure the role of the Affordable Housing Development Group is defined in the process in <b>Action 3D</b> .		Apr 23	June 23						
3L	Review the contract with the existing planning viability consultant, to assess success in maximising the amount of affordable housing provided where planning applicants are proposing a reduction of affordable on viability grounds.									
3M	Depending on the outcome of <b>Action 3L</b> establish a brief and undertake a commissioning process to appoint a suitable consultant.									
3N	Implement agreed measures based on the developed business case to increase the supply of temporary accommodation.		May 23	Mar 24						
3O	Review with Sanctuary HA the successes and lessons learnt from the development of the Sansome Walk scheme and report to relevant teams.		Jan 24	Mar 24						
<b>Goal 4</b>	<b>Build strong relationships with key partners leading to deliverable and quantifiable outcomes.</b>									
4A	Draw up and agree terms of reference, including the definition of an agreed purpose, for the Registered Provider Liaison Group.		Apr 23	June 23						
4B	Explore with RP partners their requirements from the Council in order to enable to assist them in speeding up delivery of affordable housing. In addition establish how RP's can support the Council (including through investment and use of their resources) to increase affordable housing supply.									
4C	Engage with the senior leadership at key partner RP partners to build on the liaison outcomes and specific suggestions in the ARK report including exploring regeneration opportunities in Worcester city centre.									

# DRAFT

Strategic Objective	Action	Lead	Timescale							
			Start	Finish	2023/24				2024/25	2025/26
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
4D	Meet with Malvern and Wychavon district councils focused on developing a more structured approach to maximising affordable housing delivery in the SWDP including how shared services arrangements for enabling are structured.		Apr 23	Mar 24						
4E	Linked to goal 2, ensure that WCC has the capacity to fully represent WCC's interests and support delivery of affordable housing on the SWDP sites.		Apr 23	Dec 23						
4F	Establish a working group with SWDP partners/WCC colleagues to put in place a new Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document.		Apr 24	Mar 25						
Goal 5	Maximise resources available from both the public and private sectors to invest in affordable housing.									
5A	Engage with Government agencies (Homes England and DHLUC) at both strategic and operational level through regular meetings/dialogue.		Apr 23	Mar 26						
5B	Clearly identify the” funding ask” in relation to affordable housing and articulate this to Government agencies.		July 23	Mar 24						
5C	Develop a better standard of engagement and understanding of the One Public Estate in relation to affordable housing.		Sept 23	Mar 24						
5D	Develop a compelling offer focusing on how WCC's enabling role will add value and instil confidence in partners to enable them to invest in Worcester. This could include assisting with pump priming/gap funding where this enables the increased delivery of affordable housing.		Sept 23	Mar 24						
Goal 6	Promote and raise awareness of the benefits of affordable housing in the wider social and economic context.									
6A	Work with colleagues in the Corporate Communication Team to formulate a Communication Strategy associated with the Housing		Apr 24	Mar 25						

# DRAFT

Strategic Objective	Action	Lead	Timescale							
			Start	Finish	2023/24				2024/25	2025/26
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
	Enabling Strategy which identifies target audiences, the most effective means and timeliness of communication.									
6B	Develop an effective market intelligence/information hub for stakeholders in the affordable housing delivery sphere (to include strategic priorities, information on housing need, funding support available and on the development of planning frameworks and infrastructure development).		Apr 25	Mar 26						
6C	Attend relevant meetings to ensure engagement and understanding of the implementation of the City Centre Master Plan. Ensuring that affordable housing has a key role and demonstrate its ability to attract investment and create diverse communities.		Apr 23	Mar 26						
6D	Undertake research to establish and promote how affordable housing can be a successful element of city and town centre regeneration.		Nov 23	Mar 24						
<b>Goal 7</b>	<b>Shape and action the Council's engagement in land promotion activities.</b>									
7A	Undertake a scoping event to establish a view of what a pro-active land promotion role would look like for WCC. This should cover agreeing the scope of a centralised land promotion function, how it could/should connect with linked council functions, who leads it (for example, is it quasi-independent led by the council, what resources can partners input and how might these be shared?)		Oct 24	Dec 24						
7B	Explore the options with the Registered Provider Liaison Group, establishing which partners are willing to develop ideas and explore the options further.		Jan 25	June 25						
7C	Develop a business case and establish the budgetary requirements for the land promotion activity, including which organisations are best placed to invest in this activity.		Jan 25	June 25						

# DRAFT

Strategic Objective	Action	Lead	Timescale							
			Start	Finish	2023/24				2024/25	2025/26
					Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4		
7D	Explore and establish appropriate leadership and governance arrangements, to ensure accountability.		Jan 25	June 25						
7E	Consider the resource required to enable the tasks in <b>Actions 7A - to 7D</b> to take place, bringing in third party expertise to drive these activities forward.		Jan 25	June 25						
<b>Goal 8</b>	<b>Establish the Council's appetite and explore the opportunities for joint venture working.</b>									
8A	Explore opportunities in relation to individual sites where the council owns land or where acquisition of land would aid development and increase the supply of affordable housing.		Apr 23	Mar 26						
8B	Put in place a process for assessing, evaluating and approving any joint venture opportunities that are presented by third parties, including examining and determining the council's approach to risk.		July 23	Sept 23						
8C	Explore the options with the Registered Provider Liaison Group.		July 23	Sept 23						