

LEICESTER AND LEICESTERSHIRE STRATEGIC GROWTH PLAN
CONSULTATION DRAFT – JANUARY 2018
SUBMISSION FROM THE LEICESTER SHELTER HOUSING AID AND
RESEARCH PROJECT (SHARP)

Introduction

The Shelter Housing Aid and Research Project (SHARP) has been helping and supporting people who are homeless or poorly housed in Leicester and Leicestershire for over 45 years. Our housing aid service includes the provision of information, advice, practical assistance and advocacy to people in need. Specialist advice covers not only housing but also welfare benefits. We also provide intensive housing support to people who have previously been sleeping rough and are likely to experience difficulties in maintaining independent living. In addition, we provide information about housing and homelessness and carry out research when resources permit. We have a small number of paid professional staff and a number of volunteers.

Despite our best efforts and those of other organisations we work with, we continue to see a big increase in the number of people experiencing housing difficulties. More people are sleeping rough and more families are having to stay in bed and breakfast accommodation for far too long. Councils are struggling to provide homes even for the most needy. Too many people have no choice but to rely on privately rented accommodation but rents have been rising steeply and we are seeing more and more people who are living in very poor conditions. With the changes to the housing benefit system, benefit reductions resulting from the introduction of Universal Credit and the growth in the number of zero hour contracts, the demand for our services is greater than ever.

Many of these problems come back to the fact that there are simply not enough houses in the City and County to meet needs. With a growing population, a relatively young population and a significant increase in the number of households, there is a need for many more new dwelling units. Annual building rates need to be substantially above what has been achieved over the last 40 years or so. Most importantly, the City and County need a lot more affordable housing. Increasing the number of houses in total is crucial but for the vast majority of the clients we help, home ownership is not an option. Good quality housing for rent at affordable prices is what is needed most.

The Strategic Growth Plan

Our submission understandably focuses on the housing elements of the Plan.

Overall Housing Need

Page 5 of the Plan states a need for 96,580 new homes during the period 2011 to 2031 and 117,900 between 2011 and 2036. These are very large amounts but

SHARP believes that this number of new homes is required to meet need. We would therefore want to support and endorse these figures. One caveat on the overall numbers relates to assumptions which have been made about migration. Net migration into the City and County usually represents a significant component when calculating overall housing need. However, given the uncertainties currently surrounding the UK's leaving of the EU, putting a figure on net migration is very difficult. We would suggest therefore that the housing need figures will need to be revisited once the nature of the UK's departure from the EU is known.

The Need for Affordable Housing

Based on our experience of need, providing an appropriate supply of affordable housing will be vital to the successful implementation of the Plan. We believe that the Plan should include a commitment to ensuring that affordable housing is provided to meet identified needs. We appreciate that the detail of this will be covered in the Local Plans which district councils and the City Council will be preparing but a strong policy statement at the strategic level should be included in the Growth Plan. This commitment would then logically feed through to the Local Plans.

The Proposed Growth Areas

It is essential that any new homes are located alongside the necessary support services and facilities with easy access to employment opportunities. These must also be in sustainable locations. This is acknowledged in the Growth Plan and we would want to endorse this. Mindful of this and of the need to maximise use of brownfield sites and encourage regeneration, we would support the Plan's Primary Growth Area of Leicester. There is clearly significant housing need in the County towns so the Plan's growth points in these towns make sense. We appreciate that these locations will struggle to accommodate all of the housing planned so can understand the need for A46 Corridor development and other growth areas. However, any residential development must be linked to the creation of jobs and the provision of support services and facilities. To develop just the housing would be a recipe for problems in the future.

Ensuring Delivery

To build the number of houses planned within the timescale of the Growth Plan will require an annual build rate which has not been achieved for many years. We welcome the section in the Plan on "Our Commitment to Delivery". We support the partnership approach, the aligning of infrastructure and growth, digital connectivity and the request for Government funding for infrastructure. However, will this be enough to secure the building rates required? We believe that the Plan needs to give further commitments to delivery. Tying in with the importance of affordable housing, we would like the Plan (and the Partnership) to press for Government investment not just in infrastructure but in affordable housing as well. Investment in new Council housing and additional financial support for housing associations should go hand in hand with better ways of securing more affordable housing from the private sector and greater investment and commitment to affordable housing from financial institutions. Aside from meeting the sort of housing need which we experience, it is

only by doing this that the house building rates required will be met. The private sector alone will not be able to achieve these building rates. It is noticeable that the last time they were near to being achieved (in the 1970's) coincided with a large public sector house building programme. We appreciate that detailed matters of implementation may be beyond the scope of this Plan but would want the Plan to recognise these issues and include a policy statement which will help to deliver affordable housing and with it, the required building rates.

Frazer Robson

Chair of Trustee Board, Shelter Housing Aid and Research Project, Leicester

29 January 2018

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