

Engagement and Consultation Activity Report

Essex County Council Housing Strategy 2021-2025



Essex County Council

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Introduction

Consultation with internal and external stakeholders played an important role in the development of the final strategy. In developing the strategy:

- National housing policy and local housing strategies were reviewed;
- Public consultation carried out on the draft strategy in 2020; and
- Key partners were engaged, including
 - ECC officer workshops
 - ECC Cabinet members
 - Essex County Council Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee (Jan 2020 and Jan 2021)
 - Essex Housing Officers Group (Mar 2020 and Feb 2021)
 - Essex Developers Group
 - Essex Housing Portfolio Holder's meeting (March 2020 and Feb 2021)
 - Housing Essex Development Seminar (March 2020).

A summary document setting out the draft approach, goals and high-level actions for the housing strategy was produced and shared with partners for comment.

A public consultation¹ on the ECC Housing Strategy commenced on 3rd March 2020. Given the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic what was intended as a six-week consultation (end date 14th April 2020) was extended until 26th May 2020 allowing respondents 12 weeks to provide feedback. A total of 36 responses to the survey were received (33 through Citizen Space website; 3 sent via email).

The strategy was updated based on responses to the consultation and in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. A second engagement exercise on the draft strategy with officers across ECC – to refine goals and actions - and with external partners was carried out in January and February 2021. Activity as part of this second round of engagement has included discussion at: Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee, Essex Housing Portfolio Holders meeting, Essex Developers Group and Essex Housing Officers Group.

The strategy reflects the consultation feedback and a consideration of national and local evidence, to set out a coherent framework for our engagement with our partners on housing issues. Successful delivery will depend on continued collaboration with an even wider set of partners including the community, through delivery and annual review of the action plan.

A summary of the survey responses and arising actions are outlined in Part 1 below.

¹ <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/rci/essex-county-council-housing-strategy>

Part 1 Strategy content responses

Summary

The public consultation indicated a mixed opinion on the strategic goals outlined in the draft strategy summary document. There were positive responses to the chance to work collaboratively with ECC on wider housing issues. However, a number of residents raised concerns about planned housing growth in their areas.

Notable areas of concern and opportunity raised through the consultation were:

- The need to deliver infrastructure alongside housing growth
- Highlighting the role that housing and development of new places plays in meeting wider environmental goals around climate change, habitat and biodiversity loss.
- The importance of affordable housing to those who cannot access properties to rent, or buy
- Opposition from several respondents to specific garden community proposals
- Concerns from residents over the planned level of housing growth in Essex and whether this was responding to local needs
- The need for regeneration of existing housing stock and specific locations.
- The need for close working with housing partners to realise outcomes and a need for ECC to be clear on its role and how it will support district partners to deliver their statutory responsibilities.

Responses from housing partners

We received seven responses from housing partners e.g. Local Housing Authorities and housing associations.

- All partners highlighted the need for close partnership working to realise outcomes including maximising the use of existing foras
- A number of suggestions were made for actions that ECC could take to support housing growth which have been considered through development of the action plan
- One housing partner disagreed with the draft strategic goals and actions requesting greater clarity on ECC role and tangible actions to be taken to support delivery of local housing authority partner's statutory responsibilities
- The need to reference work on the regeneration of existing housing and infrastructure was raised.

Responses from individuals

We received 29 responses from individuals, comments received included:

- A number of respondents from Braintree and Colchester focused their response on opposition to garden community proposals especially with respect to North Essex
- Concerns raised over the level of housing growth planned across Essex

- Highlighting the role that housing and development of new places plays in meeting wider environmental goals around climate change, habitat and biodiversity loss
- The need to deliver infrastructure alongside housing growth
- The importance of affordable housing to those who cannot access properties to rent, or buy.

Responses to Consultation questions and summary of action taken

Question 1. *Do you agree or disagree with the strategic goals outlined in the strategy?*

There were 35 responses to this part of the question. 39% of respondents answered that they agreed, or strongly agreed with the strategic goals of the strategy and 39% that they disagreed, or strongly disagreed with the strategic goals of the strategy. 19% answered that they neither agreed, nor disagreed with the strategic goals.

Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	5	14%
Agree	9	25%
Neither agree nor disagree	7	19%
Disagree	5	14%
Strongly disagree	9	25%
Not Answered	1	3%

An analysis of the reasons given by the 39% who disagreed with the goals of the strategy (Question 2, below) shows that the majority focussed their responses on opposition to specific Garden Community proposals, and/or the planned level of housing growth in Essex. The concerns about specific Garden Community proposals are noted, but these are determined through the Local Plan process and outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy. Housing targets are informed by government methodology on housing needs and as per adopted Local Plans. This process is outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy, but ECC will continue to work with Local Planning Authorities to deliver housing targets.

Question 2. *If you disagree, which strategic goals should be included?*

There were 23 responses to this question. 13 of the respondents had answered that they disagreed with the strategic goals of the strategy in *Question 1*; 5 agreed with the strategic goals and 5 who neither agreed nor disagreed.

The majority of the responses related to issues within Strategic Goal 1 *Growing Essex while protecting the best of the county*.

Issues raised and actions taken are summarised in the table below:

Category	Notes
Garden Communities (referenced in 12 responses)	Questioning the need and desirability of developing garden communities (9 responses). The North Essex Garden Community proposals were specifically mentioned in 3 responses.
<p>Response: Seven of the respondents who indicated they disagreed with the strategic goals in Question 1 noted their opposition to garden community proposals. Eight of these respondents were from Braintree, or Colchester indicating specific opposition to the North Essex Garden Community Proposals.</p> <p>ECC support delivery of new housing growth which meets garden community principles and as progressed by local planning authorities via Local Plans. The concerns about specific Garden Community proposals are noted, but these are determined through the Local Plan process and outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy.</p>	
Housing numbers/need (7)	Questioning the need for additional housing and concern over high housing targets. 5 respondents noted issues with specific sites proposed for development.
<p>Response: Seven respondents raised concerns over the planned level of housing growth in Essex and whether this was responding to local needs.</p> <p>Housing targets are informed by government methodology on housing needs and as per adopted Local Plans. This process is outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy, but ECC will continue to work with Local Planning Authorities to deliver housing targets</p>	
Infrastructure (7)	The importance of providing sufficient infrastructure to support housing growth at an early stage
<p>Response: Infrastructure to enable the sustainable development of new communities and meets existing communities' needs has been included as an outcome in the strategy. Actions include work to increase infrastructure funding realised through development and from government.</p>	
Affordable housing (5)	The importance of increasing affordable housing was noted in 5 responses.
<p>Response: Supporting local housing authorities to deliver new affordable homes has been included as an outcome in the strategy.</p>	
Environment (7)	The importance of housing in meeting wider environmental objectives generally was noted by a number of respondents (3) with specific references to the importance of promoting sustainable and active travel as part of new developments, maintaining and improving biodiversity/wildlife (2) and zero carbon homes (2).
<p>Response: A new outcome 'New housing developments are built - and existing homes retrofitted - to meet net zero carbon requirements' has been added to the strategy. Actions include the emerging work in response to the Essex Climate Action Commission recommendations.</p>	

Brownfield first policy (5)	Protecting the countryside and open spaces was noted in 3 responses and prioritising the development of brownfield sites in 2.
Response: On open spaces the strategy links with relevant activity in the Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy. A new outcome on locally led regeneration schemes incorporates work to re-develop brownfield land and under/dis-used buildings.	
ECC's role (3)	The need for ECC to be clear on role in the housing system and the importance of partnership working to achieve goals. (3)
Response: We have added greater clarity on ECC's specific roles and activity through production of the strategy and action plan.	
Green Infrastructure (6)	The important role of green infrastructure was noted
Response: The importance of Green Infrastructure is referenced in the strategy and links are made to the relevant areas of the Essex Green Infrastructure Strategy.	
Health and Wellbeing (3)	The role of housing and place in promoting good health and wellbeing.
Response: The role of housing and development in supporting Health and wellbeing is referenced throughout the strategy. As well as being central to Strategic Goals 2 (<i>Enabling people to live independently throughout their life</i>) and 3 (<i>Supporting people facing homelessness or rough sleeping</i>) there are links to actions to promote sustainable and active travel and green infrastructure.	
Regeneration/existing stock improvements (2)	Greater recognition of the need for regeneration and improvements to the existing housing stock were noted in 2 responses.
Response: A new outcome has been added reflecting ECC's involvement in Locally led regeneration schemes to deliver economic, social and environmental benefits in key localities. Exploratory work to assess how ECC can support partnership working on bringing empty homes back into use and in raising standards in the private rented sector is included in the action plan.	
Collaboration (3)	Role of ECC in working with housing delivery partners.
Response: The importance of partnership working is referenced throughout the strategy. We have added greater clarity on ECC's specific roles and activity through production of the strategy and action plan.	
Accessible housing (3)	The need for lifetime homes and for ECC to be clear on housing needs of groups requiring housing with support was raised (3)
Response: A specific outcome on the need for homes to be adapted and use of digital technologies to support independence has been included as an outcome under Strategic Goal 2 with reference to work that ECC is supporting to achieve this as part of the action plan.	

Question 3. *Do you agree or disagree that the draft goals measure progress on the three strategic themes outlined in the strategy?*

There were 33 responses to this question. 29% agreed with the draft goals and 44% disagreed.

Option	Total	Percent
Strongly agree	4	11%
Agree	10	28%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	8.5%
Disagree	9	25%
Strongly disagree	7	19%
Not Answered	3	8.5%

Of the 16 respondents who disagreed, or strongly disagreed that the draft goals measured progress on the three strategic themes:

- 11 had also indicated disagreement with the strategic goals themselves (Question 1); and
- The remaining five had either agreed with or expressed no opinion on the strategic goals suggesting a perceived disconnect between the strategic goals, outcomes and actions in the strategy.

We have updated the final strategy to include a more detailed action plan. For each outcome we have also highlighted how we will monitor progress.

Question 4. Have we identified the appropriate areas of activity in the draft high-level action plan?

There were 31 responses to this part of the question. 50% of respondents did not think that the appropriate areas of activity were included in the draft action plan.

Option	Total	Percent
Yes	9	25%
No	18	50%
Not sure	4	11%
Not Answered	5	14%

The action plan presented in the consultation document was high level and non-exhaustive. We received a number of suggestions for actions (Question 5, below) through the consultation and engagement internally and externally that have informed the creation of a more detailed action plan for the final version of the strategy.

Question 5. If no, what areas of activity are missing?

There were 17 responses to this part of the question. These responses have informed the development of the final action plan. Below is a summary of four major themes that emerged in response to this question and how we have acted on these.

Affordable housing and use of land/assets

Selected responses

"ECC using its strategic assets to assist directly in the delivery of more affordable homes to meet crisis level demand across Essex"

"A significant policy shift in relation to financial contributions through the planning system, exempting any scheme which is delivering wholly affordable homes."

"Direct engagement with affordable housing providers with the aim of aligning adult care provision and purchasing policies more closely with housing approaches designed to encourage downsizing and the maximisation of the existing affordable housing stock."

"Delivery of affordable housing to rent and buy."

"The work through One Public Estate and use of publicly owned land to facilitate housing delivery is worthy of mention in the document and action plan."

ECC have plans to develop affordable housing – alongside market and specialist homes - on publicly owned land through Essex Housing. We have included an action for ECC to investigate ways to support partnership work that seeks to increase affordable housing delivery in Essex.

Environment

"Protection of the environment and action on climate change."

"Protection of established public footpaths / open spaces / ancient trees and landmarks"

"There do not appear to be any metrics to measure the environmental impact of housing growth."

We have included actions to progress agreed Essex Climate Action Commission recommendations impacting on housing e.g. new homes and communities; existing buildings and urban regeneration; transport; land use and green infrastructure. We have included actions linked to the Essex Green Infrastructure strategy.

Infrastructure

"Infrastructure first – roads"

"Address infrastructure deficit rather than funding new infrastructure to 'unlock' new homes"

"Issues with specific site in Colchester – overdevelopment."

"Objections to planned Garden Communities."

We have incorporated actions seeking to increase infrastructure funding realised through development and from government.

Partnership working

"It would be helpful to understand how ECC feel that they will contribute and add both practical and tangible contributions to the outcomes where there is no direct role e.g. temporary accommodation and maintenance of housing"

"We would welcome an inclusion of those tangible actions that Essex are responsible for delivering and lead on, to feature in the high-level action plan"

"There is no mention of the Strategic Framework for housing delivery and local priorities as set out in Local Plans Local Housing and Homelessness strategies in Essex. We would welcome stronger illustrations of how the Strategy contributes to the delivery of these ambitions."

"Need to provide information and data on what the ECC's strategic response to the Covid-19 pandemic will be in the final strategy. It is noted that there is good collaborative working on the pandemic already and that ECC is providing and sharing data on the responses around homelessness and rough sleeping across the county. Bringing district and borough council's together is essential to decide what we can do best together but it is also crucial to decide what we can do on our own or on a smaller-scale."

Based on this feedback we have clearly stated ECC's role (lead, partner, support) in connection with each action on the action plan.

Question 6. *What are the three top actions that ECC could take to support housing across Essex?*

There were 27 responses to this question.

The table below provides a summary of suggested actions for the strategy and how these have been considered as part of development of the final action plan.

Category	Notes
Infrastructure (15 suggestions)	Importance of early development of supporting infrastructure (strategic transport, schools etc.). Investment in existing infrastructure gap.
Response: Infrastructure to enable the sustainable development of new communities and meet existing communities' needs has been included as an outcome in the strategy. Actions include work to increase infrastructure funding realised through development and from government.	
Affordable housing (10)	Develop housing for rent and sale affordable to all. Access to housing for young people and homelessness referenced. Recognise impact of ECC requesting developer contributions and impact of this on-site viability and affordable housing delivery.
Response: We have included an action for ECC to investigate ways to support partnership work that seeks to increase affordable housing delivery in Essex.	
Garden Communities (10)	Nine responses suggest stopping garden community developments. One supportive.

Response: ECC support delivery of new housing growth which meets garden community principles and as progressed by local planning authorities via Local Plans. The concerns about specific Garden Community proposals are noted, but these are determined through the Local Plan process and outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy.	
Environment (9)	Suggestions of how housing can support action on climate change, protect environments and wildlife, encourage sustainable and active travel and deliver green infrastructure.
Response: We have included actions to progress agreed Essex Climate Action Commission recommendations impacting on housing e.g. new homes and communities; existing buildings and urban regeneration; transport; land use and green infrastructure. We have included actions linked to the Essex Green Infrastructure strategy.	
Non-categorised (8)	Incl. making case for good growth; training for unemployed; developers to build out landbanks; reduce inward migration and population growth; recognise diversity across the county.
Response: This feedback has been considered and informed development of the strategy	
Housing support services (7)	Accentuating ECC's role in assessing needs, commissioning and developing specialist and supported housing and housing related support services.
Response: A revised outcome 'Access to high quality specialist and supported accommodation for those who need it' has been added including actions relating to ECC's direct development and commissioning of new specialist housing and role in communicating needs information to inform local plan development and market delivery.	
Brownfield first (6)	Suggesting policy to promote brownfield development as priority.
Response: A new outcome on locally led regeneration schemes incorporates work to re-develop brownfield land and under/dis-used buildings referencing the projects that ECC is involved in across Essex. Also relates to actions in redeveloping public land for new homes through Essex Housing.	
Housing numbers (6)	Suggestions to reduce planned housing delivery and focus on meeting local needs
Response: Housing targets are informed by government methodology on housing needs and as per adopted Local Plans. This process is outside of the scope of the ECC Housing Strategy. ECC will continue to work with Local Planning Authorities to deliver housing targets	
Regeneration (5)	Housing as part of town centre renewal and tackling empty homes
Response: A new outcome on locally led regeneration schemes incorporates work to re-develop brownfield land and under/dis-used buildings referencing the projects that ECC is involved in across Essex. A separate action has been added to investigate ways that ECC can support partners to bring empty homes back into use.	
Use ECC owned land to deliver housing (4)	Role of ECC land and assets to deliver housing in addition to that delivered through Essex Housing
Response: Consideration of using redundant ECC land and assets for housing is considered as part of the disposal process. Action relating to the delivery of Essex Housing business plan targets is included.	

Collaboration (4)	Role of ECC in working with housing delivery partners.
Response: Delivery through partnerships is a recurring theme within the strategy. The action plan provides clarity on ECC's role within these partnerships e.g. Lead, partner, support.	
Consultation (3)	Need for meaningful consultation on housing growth plans.
Response: ECC support meaningful consultation on new housing growth plans through the planning system.	

Question 7. What are the opportunities for collaborative working to achieve these strategic goals?

There were 24 responses to this question of which 20 provided ideas for collaboration to deliver the strategy. The table below summarises the responses by category. These have been taken into account as part of the development of the final strategy where a partnerships section has been added. Each action in the action plan identifies the key partners and partnerships that ECC will work with.

Category	Notes
Engage with existing communities and businesses (8 suggestions)	Need to listen to existing residents about development plans and sites.
Collaboration through existing partnerships (3)	Strengthen existing partnerships – e.g. Essex Housing Officers Group etc.
Collaborating with local authorities to enable development (4)	Highlighting ECC's statutory roles in supporting local housing and planning authorities
Explore pooling of resources and funding (3)	On specific policy issues e.g. homelessness. To deliver additional affordable housing in partnership with housing associations.
Working with developers to improve quality of homes and places built (2)	Importance of working with development industry to improve outcomes.

Part 2. Demographic information

Question 8. *What is your age?*

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Under 16	0	0.00%
16 - 20	0	0.00%
21 - 30	1	3.03%
31 - 40	3	9.09%
41 - 50	7	21.21%
51 - 60	6	18.18%
61 - 70	5	15.15%
71 – 80	4	12.12%
81 – 90	1	3.03%
91 or over	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	4	12.12%
Not Answered	2	6.06%

Question 9. *To which gender identity do you most identify?*

There were 31 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Male	17	51.52%
Female	10	30.30%
Transgender Male	0	0.00%
Transgender Female	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	4	12.12%
Not Answered	2	6.06%

Question 10. *What is your marital status?*

There were 28 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Married	20	60.61%
Single	3	9.09%
Widowed	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	5	15.15%
Not Answered	5	15.15%

Question 11. *What is your sexual orientation?*

There were 28 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Heterosexual	18	54.55%
Gay	1	3.03%
Lesbian	0	0.00%
Bisexual	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	9	27.27%
Not Answered	5	15.15%

Other, please state

There was 1 response to this part of the question.

Question 12. *What is your religion/faith?*

There were 28 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Christian	10	30.30%
Muslim	1	3.03%
Hindu	0	0.00%
Buddhist	0	0.00%
Sikh	0	0.00%
Jewish	0	0.00%
None	11	33.33%
Not sure	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	6	18.18%
Not Answered	5	15.15%

Question 13. *What is your ethnicity?*

There were 28 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
White British	22	66.67%
White Irish	0	0.00%
White Other	0	0.00%
Gypsy / Roma	0	0.00%
Traveller of Irish Heritage	0	0.00%
Black or Black British African	0	0.00%
Black or Black British Caribbean	0	0.00%
Mixed White/Black African	0	0.00%

Mixed White/Black Caribbean	0	0.00%
Black Other	0	0.00%
Asian or Asian British Pakistani	0	0.00%
Asian or Asian British Indian	0	0.00%
Asian or Asian British Other	0	0.00%
Mixed White/Asian	0	0.00%
Asian Other	0	0.00%
Chinese	0	0.00%
Mixed Other	0	0.00%
Not Known	0	0.00%
Prefer not to say	6	18.18%
Not Answered	5	15.15%

Other, Please specify

There was 1 response to this part of the question – English White.

Question 14. *Do you consider yourself to have an impairment?*

There were 28 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Physical Impairment	3	9.09%
Sensory Impairment	1	3.03%
Learning Difficulty or Disability	0	0.00%
Mental Health Needs	0	0.00%
No Impairment	25	75.76%
Not Answered	5	15.15%

Question 15. *What district do you live in?*

There were 26 responses to this part of the question.

Option	Total	Percent
Basildon	0	0.00%
Braintree	6	18.18%
Brentwood	1	3.03%
Castle Point	0	0.00%
Chelmsford	2	6.06%
Colchester	16	48.48%
Epping Forest	0	0.00%
Harlow	0	0.00%
Maldon	0	0.00%
Rochford	0	0.00%

Tendring	0	0.00%
Uttlesford	1	3.03%
Not Answered	7	21.21%

Other – Norfolk, Kent, Cheshire

Appendix 1 – *Draft Summary Consultation document*

Located here: <https://consultations.essex.gov.uk/rci/essex-county-council-housing-strategy/>

Back Cover

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