

# Angus Local Housing Strategy 2022-27

## Topic Paper: Placemaking and Communities

Sustainable and successful places are places where people want to live and will continue to offer a high quality of life to future residents. They will combine high quality buildings with surrounding spaces that are accessible, enjoyable to experience, and support growth in our communities. A vital feature of the LHS will be to outline the role of housing in our communities and how housing can make a positive contribution to place-making, removing inequalities and encouraging growth.

### 1. National Strategic and Policy Context

#### 1.1 Creating the Concept

It has long been acknowledged that many of Scotland's communities require intervention to help reverse their economic, physical and social decline. The Scottish Government's vision was outlined in the regeneration strategy [Achieving a Sustainable Future \(2011\)](#), with focus on supporting the most disadvantaged communities to ensure they are sustainable and promote well-being.

The vision was further enhanced by [Creating Places \(2013\)](#) (*Scottish Government policy statement on architecture and place*) which outlined our collective responsibility to preserve and create where people prosper. It asserted that places should be considered as an agent for change rather than remaining as a means for how we live our lives. It encompasses 6 key principles for place-making in Scotland to encourage successful, sustainable places:

- Distinctive
- Safe and pleasant
- Easy to move around
- Welcoming
- Adaptable
- Resource efficient

#### Defining *Place*

- An environment in which we live
- The people that inhabit these spaces
- The quality of life that comes from the interaction of people and their surroundings

Together these principles underpin the national approach to delivering good places that will become valued by communities, retained and emboldened for growth.

That same year the [Town Centre Action Plan \(2013\)](#) was set in motion to encourage growth in our town centres. The plan was to stimulate a range of activity to revitalise town centres through collaboration and investment which include or are led by local communities. In support of the Plan, Scotland's local authorities agreed the **Town Centre First Principle** whereby all those with a vested interest 'put the health of town centres at the heart of decision-making processes'. The principle is not duty-bound, instead offering flexibility to ensure local needs and circumstances are considered by:

- adopting an approach to decisions that considers the vibrancy of town centres as a starting point
- ensuring that the health of town centres features in decision-making processes

- open, measured and transparent decision making that takes account of medium to longer-term impacts on town centres
- recognising that town centre locations are not always suitable and making sure that the reasons for locating elsewhere are transparent and backed by evidence

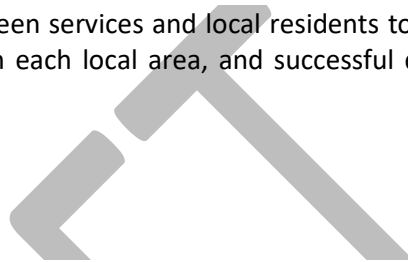
Almost a decade has passed since its inception, and the national plans and principles have been embraced at local levels to steer change and prioritise town centres in the wider decision-making process.

## 1.2 Place Standard

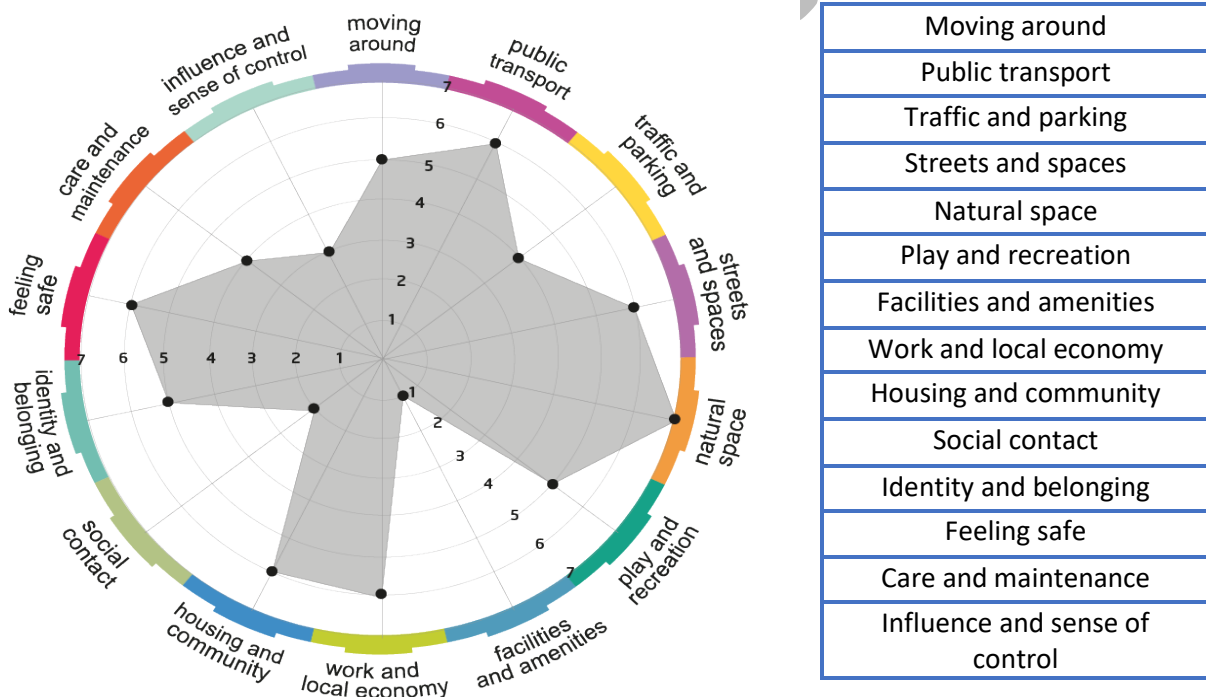
More recently the [Place Standard Tool](#) was launched by the Scottish Government to help evaluate the quality of any given place. It provides a simple framework and can be used to assess a range of places whether they are being planned, well established or undergoing change.

The approach encourages collaboration between services and local residents to identify and design solutions that will deliver better outcomes in each local area, and successful delivery is therefore dependent on:

- a shared vision,
- the appropriate skills, and
- working together



It embraces both the physical and social elements of a place, inviting contributors to rate a place based on 14 different elements. Contributors record a rating for each element on a scale of 1 to 7, with 1 meaning there is a significant room for improvement, and 7 meaning there is little room for improvement. Using such assessment can help identify both areas of strength and weakness, allowing local authorities and their partner organisations to plan and prioritise activities and action.



Above all else, the Place Standard amplifies the significance of housing as a building block of our communities. It is an essential part of local infrastructure, as well as a foundation for health and wellbeing. Therefore, to deliver housing that meets local needs we must all support and contribute to place-based approaches.

### 1.3 A Fresh Approach - Housing to 2040 and the National Planning Framework (NPF4)

The Scottish Government recently published the [Housing to 2040](#) national strategy which sets the vision for housing in Scotland over the next 20 years and a route map detailing how we will get there. The aim is to ensure that by 2040, everyone has a safe, high-quality home that is affordable and meets their needs in the place they want to live.

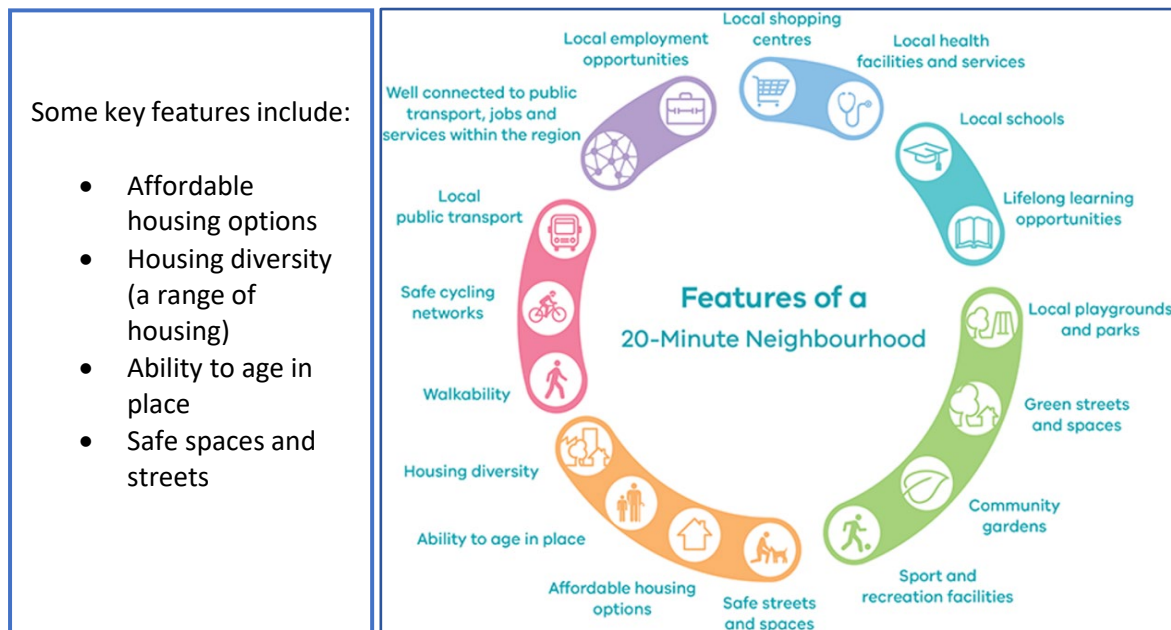
It is recognised that a place-based approach underpins this aim, ensuring that homes and places work seamlessly together, and people can live in communities that meet their needs and support their health and wellbeing. A number of actions were identified to help deliver this approach and contribute to a well-functioning housing system within our sustainable communities.

#### More homes at the heart of great places

- Promoting placemaking and community involvement, encouraging town centre living whilst also supporting our rural communities to be sustainable and thrive
- Shifting the planning approach to focus on people and the quality of places in which they live (eg...promoting reuse of derelict and vacant land; adopting an infrastructure first approach)
- 20-minute neighbourhoods – giving people the ability to meet most of their daily needs nearby
- Focus on improved standards such as a new tenure neutral standard for all new & existing homes, energy efficiency, connectivity, and outdoor space

A key aspect of creating great places is adapting how we plan and design housing and places. Placemaking should be at the heart of our housing programmes, ensuring that housing investment is not in isolation, instead where possible combined with other funding and concepts for a collective response to improve local neighbourhoods. So whilst a high quality, safe, warm and affordable home is of great importance, equally prominent are the streets, local parks, town centres and sense of identity that these collectively convey to make local people feel that they can live well locally.

The **20-minute neighbourhood** concept builds on a number of existing national priorities such as the wellbeing economy, place, sustainable transport, town centres, and empowering communities.



These components are further supported by the [National Planning Framework 4 \(NPF\)](#) which is focused on delivering mixed developments and places which produce better outcomes for people, wellbeing and the environment. The focus is on people and the quality of places in which they live, taking a more directive approach to where new development should take place, including by applying the 20-minute neighbourhood concept. This means:

- A brownfield first approach, promoting reuse of vacant and derelict land and discouraging greenfield development
- An infrastructure first approach, encouraging more homes in areas where there is already existing capacity, ie...in schools or health services
- Planning places to reduce car mileage
- Supporting accessible, quality homes that meet people's needs
- Simplifying the system, promptly setting out land requirements for housing
- Harvest masterplan consent areas that will accelerate delivery, provided the homes meet place-making requirements.

Together these priorities and actions outline the central role that housing plays in determining the quality of life, emphasising that evidence-based community-led decisions can build stronger and more vibrant places with quality homes at that heart. Applying these principles alongside better-quality homes will help remove the inequalities and create fairer communities enjoyed by all.

## 2. The Local Context

### 2.1 Local Development Plan

The [Angus Local Development Plan \(ALDP\) 2016](#), sets out the strategy for Angus to 2026 and allocates land for development and protects the environment and assets. There is a requirement for LDPs to be closely aligned with the LHS, most notably in the provision of a generous supply of effective land for

the supply of housing. However, by reflecting national planning policy and using the principles of successful places, there is strong emphasis on Design Quality and Placemaking (LDP Supplementary Guidance 2018) with 5 elements identified which all development proposals should adhere:

- **Distinct in Character and Identity**  
*Development fits in with the local character, providing coherent spaces and physical structures, whilst retaining and integrating important features*
- **Safe and Pleasant**  
*Where all structures and spaces are designed to be accessible, safe and attractive, and new open spaces are well-linked to existing green space*
- **Well Connected**  
*Where development connects pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles with the surrounding area, ensuring access and parking is fully addressed*
- **Adaptable**  
*Where development is designed to support a mix of uses and accommodate changing needs*
- **Resource Efficient**  
*Where development makes good use of existing resources and is located and designed to minimise environmental impact and maximise the use of the local climate and landform*

The Guidance was aimed at developers, interested members of the public, and also elected members and planning officials, to inform their decision-making.

The place led approach seeks to ensure that new developments are based on an understanding of place and are designed to complement and enhance how a place functions. These ingredients align with the Place Making principles and are further enhanced by the Council's coordinated approach to integrate all the services that play a role in place making.

## 2.2 Place Strategy and Coordination

The Council's Corporate Leadership Team has agreed that a 'place coordination' approach will be taken forward to encourage more integrated policy and project development. While there are existing links between Housing, Planning and other services, this will formalise and extend these links to include wider service involvement to encourage development of sustainable, well-designed places and homes which meet people's needs.

One such example of this collaborative thinking is the recently announced Scottish Government Place-Based Investment Programme (PBIP) which, underpinned by the Place Based Tool and working in tandem with local plans, aims to ensure that all place-based investments are shaped by the needs and aspirations of local communities. To help ascertain these needs and aspirations, work is underway to develop a **Place Strategy** which will set-out the focus for the next 5 years in regard to:

- **Place/Regeneration/Area of greatest need** - The PBIP emphasises projects which address systematic weaknesses in areas without inequality, community wealth and economic vitality. It places importance on capital projects driven from a partnership perspective and evidenced plans.
- **Town Centres** - Applying the Town Centre First Principle, delivering projects that will increase footfall and attract people and businesses and economic activity in our Town Centres.
- **Community Wealth Building** – Place-Based Plans will outline a people-centred approach to local economic development to re-direct wealth back into the local economy.
- **20-minute neighbourhoods** - This concept is relatively new and will evolve by creating Local Place Plans. The basic concept is for people to meet their basic needs from a 20- minute walk from their home. This strand of the programme may fund novel service provision, consider more rural service provision or walking/cycling infrastructure, or fund satellite projects in the more rural areas of Angus.

The above criteria also apply to the PBIP four-year funding programme for which all projects must align.

Consultation and engagement with our communities will help determine which local place-based investment plans the Council will pursue. The distinctive approach supports and accelerates the ambitions outlined in Housing to 2040, recognising the vital role of housing and how our neighbourhoods are a focal point to building cohesive and resilient communities.

### 2.3 Community Planning

The [Angus Community Plan \(2017-2030\)](#) is the tool put in place to tackle things that matter most to people and make a positive difference to their lives. The aim is to ensure that people and communities are genuinely engaged in decisions made on public services which affect them and commits to ensure that organisations and services work together to provide better services. Based on the national objectives to make all places wealthier and fairer, smarter, healthier, safe and stronger, and greener, the objectives are underpinned by the cross-cutting themes of economy, people, and place.

[Locality Plans \(2017\)](#), required under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, laid the foundations for change and identified areas for action. Housing and Placemaking has an integral role to play, whether it be enhancing and protecting our built environment, reducing carbon footprints, or ensuring our neighbourhoods are safe, secure and vibrant. There are many housing and related services projects underway to help achieve those aims, from quality new build affordable housing options, bringing existing buildings back into use, helping improve the quality of existing homes, to enhancing the design and quality of our homes and the surrounding areas to ensure places are better connected to reduce inequalities and revitalise the relationship between the people and place. The LHS and the actions which derive from it are pivotal in the delivery of a successful community plans.

### 2.4 Engaging with Communities

Under Section 14 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, the Council is required to consider how to facilitate the right for communities to get involved in the production of [Local Place Plans](#) (LPP). As part of the new Scottish planning system, LPPs offer communities the opportunity to develop proposals in their local area for the development and use of land, expressing their aspirations and ambitions for future change. The idea being that communities are helped to discover their wider place-based direction, develop a positive identity, and improve local connections and capacity for community-based change. Above all, these plans should be prepared collaboratively and express a community's desire for change.

It is recognised that the application of the place and engagement standards could be improved in Angus, and therefore work is underway to develop engagement proposals for local place-based plans, with focus on using the place standards tool. The aim is to produce a cross-service, cross-partner, cross-themed, and cross-funded action for the towns highlighted within the Place Strategy, with communities at its core.

#### Issues for consideration

- The Housing role in LPPs – more early collaboration and engagement requirement for all housing projects?
- Further investment in the concept of 20-minute neighbourhoods – but how will/should this work locally?

Collaborating and engaging with our communities is core in the development of LHS 2022-27, with housing and related issues a mainstay in peoples lives. To inform the LHS action plan and policy

direction we will be engaging with communities to find out not only about their housing circumstances, but also their housing aspirations and their ideas for beyond their front door that would be of benefit to their local community. The engagement will be developed in collaboration with the planning and communities service and instead of considering housing in isolation, will build on the foundations of the place-based initiatives and the wider housing role for improving places, encouraging growth and empowering local communities.

### 3. The Angus Approach

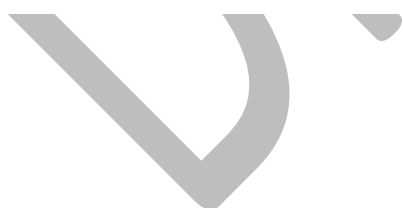
#### 3.1 Our Area

Angus consists of 7 main towns containing a range of housing, retail, leisure, hospitality, business and schools. There are also a number of other smaller settlements within the rural hinterland which are predominantly a range of housing serviced by local shops and schools.

Market Area	North	East	South	West
<b>Main Town(s)</b>	Brechin, Montrose	Arbroath	Carnoustie, Monifieth	Forfar, Kirriemuir
<b>Other Settlements</b>	Edzell	Inverkeillor, Friockheim	Newtyle, Tealing, Birkhill	Letham, Glamis, Kingsmuir

There are an estimated 116,200 <sup>1</sup>people living in Angus, a marginal increase of 790 (<1%) from 2010, and they form an estimated 54,378 <sup>2</sup>households. Around 84,000 Angus residents reside in the 7 main towns, meaning there are around 32,000 people residing in what would be regarded as rural areas, just over 1 in 4 of the population.

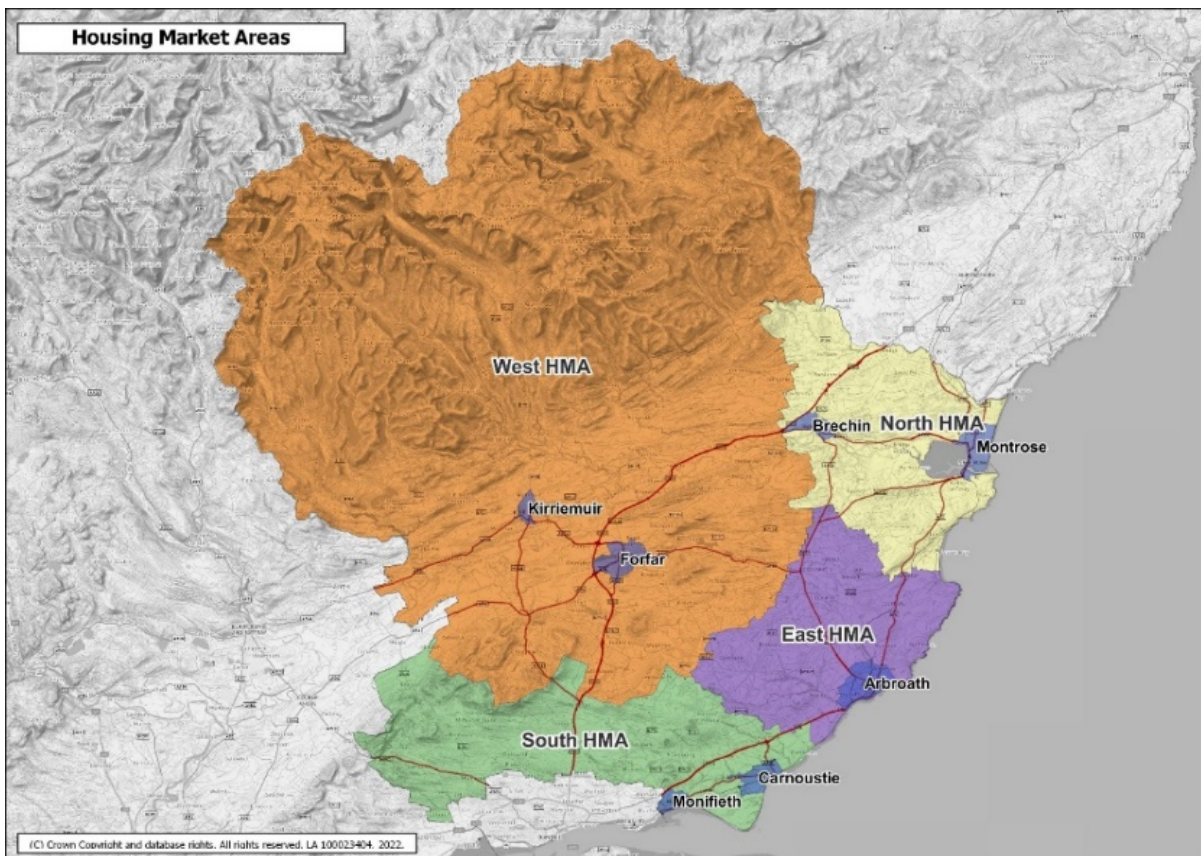
The National Records of Scotland (NRS) estimates that the Angus population may in fact marginally decline over the next 20 years with a significant drop in the number of children, young adults and working-age people, but also anticipating a large increase in the number of people aged over 65. This comes as no surprise, particularly the significant increase in the older population which will be experienced across Scotland. It does however also highlight that whilst people in the local area may choose not to start a family, younger working age people may opt to migrate from Angus and this will have consequences for our communities.



<sup>1</sup> Source: National Records of Scotland, Mid-Year Population Estimates (2019)

<sup>2</sup> Source: National Records of Scotland, Household Projections (2018-based)





The expansive Angus geography presents many challenges. Covering 842 square miles, with mountainous sparsely populated areas in the north and west, to rolling hills in the south and east, it is considered a mainly rural authority out-with the 7 main towns. Public transport is generally good between the main settlements although not all are directly connected, whilst the other settlements naturally rely on a more moderate service due to their rural location. The population distribution is almost evenly split between the 4 housing market areas (HMA) and the sheer volume of settlements within each HMA can often stretch Council resources, with each local community distinct in character, qualities and 'sense of place', meaning what may succeed in one area may not be appropriate elsewhere.

This does however also present opportunities. Encouraging and enabling local engagement can help establish a greater sense of place and identity and create opportunities for community cohesion. The Council vision that 'Angus is a great place to live, work and visit' is profoundly reliant on the function of the many smaller settlements which in turn are part-reliant on the 7 main feeder towns, and it is the inhabitants of all those communities who can influence positive change by participating in place-making.

Our places need to serve the needs of the people, not only providing the services and employment opportunities to encourage economic growth but also deliver positive physical and social characteristics, such as housing and related services, to sustain the population and retain the people who will be proud to call it home.



### 3.2 Functioning Town Centres

As home to around 63% (84,000) of the population, our 7 main towns are central to the fabric of Angus. Attracting people, business and economic activity to our towns is essential to encourage growth and remove the inequalities that blight our communities.

Having such a geographical structure does however come with its challenges. A key employment sector in Angus is agriculture, forestry and fishing, and although there are significant other key employment industries such as professional, scientific and technical, and construction, the nature of our towns does not lend itself to larger industries establishing roots. Furthermore, the [Business Register and Employment Survey \(2019\)](#) highlighted that in Angus just over one-third (11,200) of all those in employment (32,600) are part-time workers and the average weekly pay is around £52 lower than that for Scotland. The [Gross Value Added \(GVA\)](#) per head in Angus is £43,373 – significantly below that of Scotland, £52,549.

Town	Estimated Population
Brechin	7,200
Montrose	14,000
Arbroath	23,500
Carnoustie	10,700
Monifieth	7,500
Forfar	14,000
Kirriemuir	6,000

Although there is significant economic activity in Angus, the lack of larger industries, the prominence of part-time employment patterns and the low GVA (which measures the contribution of economic productivity) does lend itself to greater occurrences of deprivation. In 2016 there were 2 Angus data zones in the top 15% most deprived areas in Scotland. By 2020, this had increased to 6 data zones, all of which are located within town boundaries. In total there are 11 Angus data zones which feature in the top 20% most deprived areas in Scotland. They are in Arbroath (8), Brechin (1), and Forfar (2).

Recognising the significance of the issue, the Council took steps to confront the growing inequalities by supporting the most disadvantaged communities through various projects, including the regeneration and provision of new quality affordable housing within our main towns.

### 3.3 Targeted Investment in our Towns

The [Community Plan \(2017 to 2030\)](#) is the Angus Community Planning and Locality Implementation Partnership tool put in place to tackle things that matter most to people and make a positive difference to people in Angus. The Community Plan is informed by Locality Plans which, under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Angus Council were required to develop for places where people experience inequalities and ensure the needs and aspirations of the people that live and work in the communities are being met. The Locality Plans were informed by locality planning events and charrettes (2016) aimed at identifying key priorities for each area along with action plans for future activity.

A number of housing related projects formed the basis of the actions plans, with consideration given to prioritise key development and opportunity sites within and on the periphery on town centres (geography defined by [LDP town centre boundary](#)). Recognising the importance of the individual characteristics of each town, a number of housing projects have been planned and delivered to cement and encourage town centre living:

- 30 affordable new build units delivered in Carnoustie since 2017/18 (mix of social rent and shared equity)
- 29 affordable units delivered at Chapelpark, Forfar, in 2019 (refurbished disused school, comprising 24 flats and 5 new build townhouses, of which 6 are particular needs units)

- 40 affordable units delivered at Abbey Quarter, Arbroath (regeneration replacing unpopular multi-story blocks with a range of social rent properties, with 2 for particular needs)
- West Arbroath regeneration (Phase 1 & 2)– Muirton and Emslaw (51 units delivering a mix of new build housing, along with demolition and replacement with a range of houses and cottage flats)
- Over the past 4 years (2017/18 to 2020/21) around 80% (1168) of new build units were delivered in or around the 7 main towns of Angus

Completion activity highlights the support provided to the main towns via the delivery of new housing. Many of these recent projects stemmed from the [Locality Plans](#) developed in response to the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. The Plans enabled local people to get involved and shape their own community, and through consultation and engagement a number of areas were identified for action. Out-with Locality Plans, the Council consults with its tenants on all matters which materially affect them, which includes regeneration and new build housing. The main vehicle for these consultation activities are the Tenant Steering Group and the Tenant E-Panel. Ensuring that local residents and community organisations have a voice is central to improving the quality of life for local people.

Complementing regeneration and new build activity within our towns, the **Scottish Governments Town Centre Fund** awarded [£1.080m to Angus](#) for a range of activities and projects to stimulate and support place based investment and encourage town centres to diversify and flourish. Action Plans were developed to promote and sustain each of the 7 town centres, from which investments were identified, including new builds and wider regeneration, contributing to drive local economies and re-purpose our town centres to become more diverse, successful and sustainable.

#### **Town Centre Fund Investments**

- *Pathway improvements*
- *New playpark / park improvements*
- *Bicycle kennel installations*
- *CCTV and speed activated lights*
- *Public murals*
- *General town centre restoration*

#### **West Arbroath Regeneration**

Work continues on the final regeneration phases, **Timmergreens 3 & 4 (Fraser Path and Newton Crescent/Avenue)**. It is anticipated that 140 properties will be demolished and replaced with a range of new homes that will benefit the occupants from being energy efficient, own door properties, and improved outdoor space. The previous properties were unpopular 3 & 4 storey flats which lacked defined private space and were affected by poor quality environment such as shared spaces, communal refuse areas and low-quality amenity open space.

At the **Muirton and Emslaw sites**, new playpark facilities have also been provided, incorporating new foot/cycle paths through the parks to improve safe access routes for children.

Towns are central to the economic and social fabric of Angus with housing outputs ensuring that there is sufficient choice for Angus residents, reflecting a strong urban market that helps population growth whilst outlining the significant role housing plays in supporting town centres. It is however more than delivering high quality housing. These projects are also about improving town centre infrastructure and environment, making them more accessible and enjoyable for local people and reconnecting the town and its people.

#### Issues for consideration

- Use of the Place-Making Tool has been limited/lacking. How should we encourage and adopt extensive use of the tool?
- The (early) engagement process with communities. Work underway to compose the engagement tool – ensure Housing has central role.

### 3.4 Supporting our Rural Communities

Around 32,000 (28%) of the Angus population reside in rural or landward areas, indicating that there is a significant demand for rural living. However, as outlined by Housing to 2040, there are a number of unique challenges facing our rural communities to ensure they are sustained and provide good quality of life. Aside from delivering an appropriate volume of new homes they must also be of the right type and quality that encourages communities to grow, enable young people to stay in the areas they grew up in if they want to, and provide homes that meet the needs of new and existing residents. Housing to 2040 identified a number of actions and supporting policies to help improve and nurture our rural communities:

- Regulate short-term lets to help balance the needs of local residents and communities with wider tourism and economic interests
- New powers and finance aimed at tackling second homes and empty homes in rural settings
- New development rights to convert agricultural buildings to residential
- Bring forward more land for housing in rural areas

Where it makes sense for a particular area, much of what applies to the place-based approach and 20-minute neighbourhoods can translate to rural communities, but the key aspect is for local people to help decide how their communities can evolve in a way that meets their needs.

The LHS 2022-27 'Housing Delivery' evidence paper outlines in further detail the scale of rural housing delivery in recent years. There were 351 rural completions over the 5-year period 2017/18 to 2021/22 which represents around 18% of all delivery in Angus. Of those 351 completions, 30 were delivered via the Affordable Housing Supply Programme, equating to 9% of delivery.

A focal point to aid and encourage rural development was the establishment of four **Rural Service Centres (RSC)**. The [Angus Local Development Plan \(2016\)](#) identified these areas as appropriate for growth, owing to their existing services and larger populations. Small-scale development sites for housing were allocated in these locations to support and maintain local services, facilities and population.

HMA	Rural Service Centres	Recent Delivery (Total Units since 2016)	Potential Delivery (Units)
North	Edzell	13	50
East HMA	Friockheim	81	8
South HMA	Newtyle	34	62
West	Letham	49	50

This delivery has been complemented by the Scottish Governments **Rural and Islands Housing Fund (2016)**, offering financial aid to a wide range of potential applicants (private developers, community organisations, landowners, etc). Uptake has been slow across the whole county with only two completed projects in Angus, providing 12 units of housing for intermediate rent. The Council however welcomes the Housing to 2040 announcement that the fund will continue beyond 2021, recognising the value of such investment and that further effort is required to promote the positive outcomes it can deliver for our rural communities.

The Angus Housing Need and Demand Assessment (2021) highlighted that the Angus housing market is relatively self-contained, in that both purchasers and those aspiring to rent will seek properties within their current housing market area. It is therefore important that there are a range of affordable housing options, both existing and new build supply, across a range of tenures for rural dwellers.

**Issues for consideration**

- Sustaining rural communities – ensuring there is sufficient supply of affordable housing options (multi-tenure) – both new and existing stock solutions.
- Improved engagement with rural communities – applying the place-making tool.
- Rural empty homes – their role in increasing rural supply

## 4. Sustaining our Communities - the existing built environment

### 4.1 Empty Homes

It is estimated that (March 2022) around 3% of all stock in Angus is vacant and regarded as Long-Term Empty (LTE – vacant for over 6 months), equating to just under 1,700 properties. Of these around 450 are social sector and 1,250 are privately owned.

For LTE social stock, around 88% (395 units) are Council owned with the remaining 12% owned by RSLs. Whilst the volume is rather stark, the Council has acknowledged that some properties are unpopular or surplus to requirements and therefore a vast majority of these properties are pending demolition, as part of wider regeneration activities, or are being actively marketed for sale or let.

Most notable is the March 2020 position (+237 from March 2019), where the pandemic, lockdown and furlough may have discouraged or prevented owners from renting their properties, and deterred movers.

Year	Number of Private Sector LTEs
2017/18	1070
2018/19	968
2019/20	1205
2020/21	1065
2021/22	1248

The volume of LTE private sector properties is the equivalent of the HST for 4 years, and there have been fluctuations over the past 4 years:

Of the current 1,250 LTE properties:

- just over 400 of these have been empty for at least 12 months and they therefore receive the 100% surcharge, meaning they pay double Council Tax.
- Around 200 are company owned (estates, farms, local employers etc)

The volume of empty homes increased (+183) through 2020/21 to 2021/22. The current economic situation will not favour many vacant home-owners and new regulation in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) may impact supply in that tenure (April 2022 records show a -200 drop in registered properties from 2021). Together these may further impact the supply of affordable housing, and therefore a practical solution may be to establish a role for the existing stock to cater for housing need. Adopting such a solution may also help cater for rural housing need, helping sustain local communities.

In terms of location, we can also see some trends at HMA level.

PS LTEs	North	East	South	West	Angus
2017/18	369	214	195	292	1070
2018/19	289	190	200	289	968
2019/20	412	249	193	351	1205
2020/21	229	267	199	370	1065
2021/22	377	261	217	393	1248
%age change 2017 to 2022	+2%	+22%	+11%	+35%	+16%

The North and West HMAs each account for just under 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of PS LTEs, whilst the East and South HMAs each account for just under 1/5<sup>th</sup>. These proportions have remained relatively consistent throughout the 5 year period, however most notable is the sharper increase in LTEs in the West and East HMAs and the general upsurges in March 2020 and March 2022. Notably, the North HMA appears to be void of pattern, experiencing either significant decrease or increase each year, whilst other HMAs tend to follow a smoother trajectory.

The LHS 2017-22 committed to bring 20 empty properties back into use per annum. Over the 5-year period 2017/18 to 2021/22 total of 116 properties have been brought back into use, surpassing the annual target and making a significant contribution to the delivery of local housing. A vast majority of these were located in the towns and larger settlements where there is strong demand for housing, particularly the private rented sector.

#### Utilising Existing Stock Differently

The Council actively contributes to sustaining local communities via improving and increasing local stock, whether this be wholesale regeneration, stock restructuring or building acquisition and repurposing. Recent examples include repurposing surplus school buildings and grounds to create properties in existing buildings and where appropriate adding additional new build properties on a site or restructuring an existing block of flats into family houses. Such projects play an integral role in our new build programmes, bringing empty buildings back into use and are a critical element in wider town centre regeneration.

The Council do however recognise that over the same period there has been an increase in the total number of empty homes (+178, 16%) but without the aforementioned intervention the overall increase would have likely been nearer +300 over 5 years, a 27% increase. From the table above we can see that the volume of LTEs fluctuates with no clear patterns and whilst it is encouraging that LTEs are being brought back into use, there remains an ongoing issue relating to additional homes becoming empty.

The figures highlight that many empty home-owners are enduring financial penalties, including Council Tax surcharge and loss of income on assets, but also that these disadvantages are not acute enough to encourage change. There is of course a likelihood that some empty home-owners are not aware of the best approach to bring their property back into use and therefore, reaching out, offering assistance and encouraging change remains a key focus for the Council.

Prior to the publication of the last LHS, a number of key areas had been explored to encourage property owners to bring empty homes back into use. The Council introduced a successful Empty Homes Loan Fund helping bring 7 empty properties back into use, employed a Shared Services Empty Homes Officer, and published a comprehensive online suite of information and advice to help owners overcome any barriers to returning their property to use.

The shared services post has been concluded, with duties now absorbed by a larger team with members focusing on reducing empty properties in each individual HMA. Various tools have been developed to aid their work, such as:

- Matchmaker Scheme where empty home owners are matched to those who have indicated an interest in purchasing an empty home.
- Regular surveys to empty home owners (2016-18), feedback indicated a majority would be most interested in grant funding to assist them.
- Empty Home Loan & Grant Fund (£120,000 budget, launched 2020), offering finance to bring empty homes back into use in return for working with the Council to find a suitable tenant, and the property being let at an affordable rate for a minimum of 5 years.
- Continued comprehensive advice and information suite for owners to overcome barriers.

The wide policy approach can help reduce the number of empty properties, increase the supply of affordable housing and find a home for clients who are working with the Council's housing teams.

The Empty Homes Loan and Grant Fund is financed by the **increased income from the additional Council Tax levy** for properties unoccupied long-term (over 12 months). There are around 400 of these in Angus and whilst these are valuable homes not being utilised, the revenues generated do enable the Council to designate funding to a range of activities to support further housing delivery, help bring properties back into use and ensure other properties do not deteriorate into the position where they are no longer considered habitable stock. They include:

- Supporting the Council's Capital Investment Programme and contributions to individual affordable housing developments
- Funding toward our Trusted Traders Scheme which enables consumers to access trader details for a wide range of home improvement and related services
- Funding toward staff resource to enable affordable housing delivery (legal), and ensure existing properties meet minimum standards and remain part of active stock (environmental health)

Housing to 2040 also alludes to the Scottish Government direction of travel whereby we make best use of existing stock, from both a rational and environmental stance. From 2026 funding will be accelerated to bring existing stock into the affordable programme. It is important that with having current development programmes already in place, we acknowledge this course but also raise awareness of this transitional approach whereby we aim to maximise our existing stock and lay the foundations for change, and also recognise the greater environmental impact (carbon emissions) of new builds over refurbished existing stock, not to mention potential cost per unit savings.

There remains significant potential to increase the contribution from bringing more empty homes back into use:

- Maximise the housing stock, embracing the principles of Place Making and the improved social and physical elements of place
- Reduce the volume of LTE properties and the associated problems (ASB; local house prices; negative traits; disrepair issues including the impact for adjoining properties)
- Alleviate the effects of homelessness and waiting list pressures, improving the quality of life and place



### Issues for Further Consideration

- What more can we do to encourage empty homes return to use?
- Do we require more innovative funding ideas? More initiatives to assist owners?
- Should the issue of empty homes be more of a priority? – wide benefits from their return to use...return on assets for owners; increased footfall and local spend; improve aesthetics; sustaining places (urban and rural); more affordable housing options for locals
- Specific empty homes we should target? – long-term empties; town centre, rural; poor condition; areas of high demand – both affordable and/or market targets?
- How best to utilise Council Tax funding – and what options should we consider in our approach to reducing volume of LTEs?
- Should we explore a more active role in the empty home market – purchases?
- Housing to 2040 direction – accelerate bringing more existing homes into the affordable programme – the impacts on funding, how we work – and the transition period.

## 4.2 Safeguarding our Places and Improving Standards

A key aspect of sustaining our communities and ensuring we create places that improve not only the quality of life but also enhance the quality of place, is safeguarding the future of the existing built environment. There are many prominent **heritage buildings** throughout Angus that for one reason or another have served their original purpose to then become vacant and, in some cases, attract anti-social behaviours and fall into a state of serious disrepair, creating a negative impact on local communities.

Where redevelopment is proposed there are often many barriers, however by invoking a collaborative working approach to develop a shared ambition and understanding with the developers and local communities to highlight what a high-quality, sustainable and deliverable design solution may look like, a number of prominent buildings and sites have secured a positive future:

- Chapelpark, Forfar – transforming a B-listed former school building into 29 high quality affordable homes for rent (6 for particular needs), creating local employment and training opportunities, and a local spend of £1.3m with local companies.
- Ashludie, Monifieth – another B-listed building, a former merchants house and hospital was transformed into a vast range of market homes, 43 units of affordable housing with 12 of those mid-market rent.
- Sunnyside, Montrose – the A-listed former hospital was on the Buildings at Risk Register, transformed into a range of stunning market family homes as well as a range of affordable homes for rent and shared equity ownership.
- Seaview, Monifieth – the B-listed former primary school was on the Buildings at Risk Register. Located near the town centre, it is currently being restored to offer much needed town centre living with accompanying outdoor space.
- Strathmartine, South Angus – another listed building within a sprawling former NHS site. Planning has been approved for both conversion and private new build homes (196 units) and a further 28 affordable units for mid-market rent.

Each of these projects was enabled on the basis that they would have a positive impact, with the added approach that projects which deliver added value are prioritised for funding. The quality of design and development as well as the environmental impact were core to decision making, taking their roots from the LDP (2016) and the national Place Standards vision. As part of this decision-making process, stakeholders and communities were engaged early with successful events including workshop sessions to explore the potential for new development, online engagement hubs to

facilitate effective engagement across our rural areas, workshops with young people in schools, and various social media invitations for locals to get involved.

These projects offer more than just new quality homes, they also:

- improve appearance
- support and encourage economic growth
- improve safety and well-being
- improve the local environment via the provision of open space and enhanced landscaping
- improve quality of life – providing opportunities by offering mixed tenure housing, helping to create diverse places and alleviate inequalities

Other work underway to maintain and improve the existing built environment relates to **housing standards** and the **local housing stock condition**. These topics are explored in further detail in the LHS evidence papers ‘House Conditions’ and ‘Fuel Poverty, Energy Efficiency & Climate Change’, but it is important to outline the relationship and positive influence on place-making and communities. The legislative framework currently outlines the following standards for Scotland’s homes:

- all homes in Scotland are duty bound to meet the [Tolerable Standard](#), a basic standard for homes across all tenure.
- private landlords have a duty to make sure the homes they let meet the [‘repairing standard’](#) (which also includes the Tolerable Standard).
- social sector landlords must make sure that their homes meet the [Scottish Housing Quality Standard \(SHQS\)](#) and the [Energy Efficiency Standard for Social Housing \(ESSH\)](#).

There are new standards in the pipeline relating to private sector and all tenure homes. They are:

- minimum energy efficiency standards (EPC rating) for private rented properties, from 2025 (EPC Band D from 2025, then Band C from 2028)
- minimum energy efficiency standards for owner-occupiers – introducing regulations from 2025 with owners required to reach a minimum of EPC Band C by 2035
- a new common housing standard across all tenures, with a draft standard published in 2023

The legislation has been designed in response to the climate emergency and the need to lower the carbon footprint created by our homes, and to assist achieving the ambition that all homes are safer, warmer, greener and efficient. The pandemic has impacted the pace of the legislative launch, but local work has already commenced to ensure private home-owners and landlords are aware and well-prepared to make changes to their properties. Whilst there are the obvious cost implications for private home-owners, there is however the positive impact that the legislation will have on our communities and the improved quality of life that it will bring. There are many hurdles to overcome and it will require a cross-service approach and community engagement and collaboration to maximise minimum standards uptake and ‘sell’ the idea that the overall quality of our places will enhance the quality of life for the residents and help build cohesive communities.

Supporting an improved quality of life and place with the mutual benefits of an environmental perspective, a number of active travel audits were carried out in Angus under the auspices of TACTRAN (Tayside and Central Scotland Transport Partnership), and the **Angus Active and Sustainable Travel Strategy** was subsequently approved in 2021. Seeking to promote active travel for short trips in the main towns and surrounding areas, it sets out how the Council will deliver improvements to active travel networks (walking and cycling), infrastructure and supporting activities to encourage people to walk and cycle more. Key to the success is the attractiveness, safety and ample route opportunities, but also ensuring that design quality and open space components are routinely adopted for both existing neighbourhoods and new housing developments.

Further environmental protection projects include flood management, where the **Flood Risk Management Strategy** was developed to ensure our places can be protected and remain viable through changes in our climate. A Flood Protection Scheme was undertaken in Brechin, whilst Arbroath will soon also benefit, protecting residents and safeguarding businesses for years to come, and providing the secure foundations for wider placemaking and enhanced quality spaces.

Issues for consideration

- A shift in focus to be more climate conscious – environment first approach.
- Tie-in with empty homes – sustaining our existing communities as priority.
- The conversation with our communities – their views, desires and needs.
- The Council role in maximising value for the whole community – the area-based approach – our role to combine investment mechanisms/opportunities to promote positive environmental changes.

### 4.3 Compulsory Purchase Orders, Majority Share and Open Market Acquisition

It has not been necessary to use **Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO)** powers to date, although we have developed a process if this is necessary in the future. CPOs often arise from vacant private sector stock which can be run-down having been neglected or subject to anti-social behaviour. Council officers from the Building Standards and Environmental Health teams, as well as those who oversee the empty homes initiatives, often come across problematic properties. By engaging with owners however solutions are found prior to the need for any formal course of action such as CPOs.

The Council also has a range of regeneration schemes across the county, invoking an approach that reduces the need to use CPOs where demolition of existing stock for new homes and neighbourhoods has been approved. Known as **Buy-Backs**, the Council proactively seek to purchase former Council units that may come to the open market and where the units are in blocks where the Council have majority share or can facilitate regeneration. Such programmes create management efficiencies and saves costs incurred with repairs and maintenance as well as saving on administration time in negotiating common repairs costs with owners. Other added benefits include that the purchase may assist with reducing the number of abeyances and assist the Council in meeting [ESSH](#) requirements.

On the flip side, the Council also have a proactive **Disposal** programme for selling Council owned units which may either become void in multi-tenure blocks where we are a minority owner. The proceeds from these sales are recycled and used toward Buy-Backs, ensuring the wider programme is largely self-funded and offers value for money.

With purchases attracting grant subsidy of £250,000, over the past 5 years majority share programme activity has generated around £425,000 which presents a strong, healthy position for the programme as the Council looks further to enhance our stock profile, the quality of our homes, and thus improve communities and the quality of life.

Disposals (2017-22)	Buy-Backs (2017-22)
12	10
Income – £922,000	Total Costs – £496,000

The Council also operates an **Open Market Acquisition (OMA)** policy which is in place to assist the Council to meet an urgent housing need that cannot be accommodated within an existing planned development. Properties will typically be of the type where they meet a specific medical need, are adapted/adaptable, or are of a certain size depending on the location. Such acquisitions not only have a positive affect on the household due to the custom living space, but also propel the wider notion of

creating inclusive sustainable communities that can provide safe, quality homes for people with a range of different circumstances.

## 5. Summary

Place-making has never been so central to everything that we aspire to achieve. The impact of the pandemic enabled a period of reflection where we spent most of our time in and around our local communities, examining and absorbing our surroundings, appreciating the space or contemplating what might make this a better place. And it is these personal experiences that will be pivotal in how our places evolve.

National policy and legislation have been presented, from the 'Homes at the heart of great places' vision within Housing to 2040, to the National Planning Framework (4), both supporting the principles that we need to pause and think more about what is proposed, ensuring we prioritise quality, design, the wider environment, and the ability for local communities to be at the heart of decision making.

The concepts of place-making and 20-minute neighbourhoods relies heavily on shared ideas and vision, collaborative working, and ensuring that those involved have the suitable skillset to inform and produce change. These concepts are gathering pace in Angus through the development of the Place Strategy which will form the basis of our focus over the next 5 years. The approach will integrate policy and project development and build on the successful outcomes already achieved, binding the work of our services rather than developing outcomes in relative isolation.

In terms of the housing role, the delivery volume of new affordable homes remains promising with 570 units delivered (2017/18 to 2021/22) through the Affordable Housing Supply Programme (AHSP) in the 7 main towns, 32 of which in landward locations and 17 in our Rural Service Centres (RSC). Out-with the programme around 1,000 homes have been delivered in or around the main towns and a further 321 in landward rural settlements.

These developments provided high quality, energy efficient homes, ensuring the occupants can live in safety and comfort. But beyond the building fabric, place-design was at the forefront to maximise the quality and appearance of the open space, forming the links between the people and their environment through the provision of pathways, parks and open space.

We do however recognise that further work is required to reinvigorate town centre and rural living, via both new and existing stock. Engaging with local communities will be key to determining what may or may not work, and we must mature our cross-service collaboration to ensure that our ideas and plans complement and enhance other work streams and actions. New and improved housing can have far-reaching outcomes, but positive impacts can be further maximised if we build those links from the inception.

Making improvements to our existing places and buildings will also play a central role. We have a large number of vacant properties in Angus, with many hundreds lying empty for over a year. This makes no sense in a society where there is a shortage of homes. The owners are relinquishing potential income streams, and the communities lose footfall, economic benefits, and the opportunity to provide someone with a much needed home. We must examine more ways to engage with and assist empty home-owners to help provide more homes and sustain these communities.

## 5. Issues

- Delivery and Place-making (AHSP, RHF, Infrastructure Fund, Town Centre Fund, Council Tax capital) to delivery more affordable homes – multi-model approach, including utilisation of empty homes, encouraging more mixed-tenure development (affordable, MMR, Shared Equity, LCHO, & Self-build, where applicable)
- Bring more Empty Homes back into use – both town centre and rural. How can we best utilise Council Tax funds? How do we improve existing stock, ensuring stock remains active & ensure inactive stock becomes active? Specific targets?
- Ensuring there is ample effective land available to facilitate new builds – the rural element, repurposing existing buildings, more land, where suitable.
- The shift in focus to be more climate conscious – environment first approach, utilising existing stock (quality of design over quantity)
- The area-based approach – the Council role to promote and enable community-wide benefits – what could this look like? Our role to combine investment mechanisms/opportunities to promote positive environmental changes.
- Encourage the principles of Place-making in new development in any location, both design and development. Requirement to evidence use of Place Standard tool/engagement?
- Maximising community engagement and collaboration in decision-making process – the Housing role in LPPs, and what this may look like?
  - Explore opportunities to encourage more community-led housing and land ownership – potential route for self/custom build housing opportunities.
- Investing in the 20-minute neighbourhood concept
  - Sustaining rural communities – what else can we do? Affordable housing options.
  - Supporting the Town Centre First Principle