

Private Sector Housing Strategy

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Introduction

Breckland Council recognises that private sector housing, both owner occupied and rented, has a vital role to play in ensuring that there is sufficient accommodation for all its citizens.

Poor quality housing can have a direct impact on the health, safety and welfare of its occupants and a detrimental effect on life outcomes for those living in such housing. Breckland Council, through this Strategy, will address those factors that lead to poor quality housing and will seek to increase the supply of good quality housing by taking direct action to tackle failings in the current stock.

Where appropriate the Strategy will address national, regional and local issues to deliver its aims and to achieve quantifiable outcomes against defined targets.

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Aims of the Strategy

The aims of the Strategy are:

- To ensure the health, safety and welfare of all occupants of all private sector housing
- To increase the number of homes meeting the Decent homes standard
- To reduce the number of long term empty dwellings
- To reduce the number of households in fuel poverty
- To improve standards in Houses in Multiple Occupation
- To assist people to remain in their own homes by enabling adaptation of the dwelling to meet their needs
- To provide assistance to low income owner occupiers to maintain and improve their homes
- To contribute to ensuring a vibrant and thriving private housing sector
- To contribute to national, regional and local programmes to ensure the sustainability of local communities

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Strategic context

All enforcement, regulatory and advisory activity carried out by Breckland Council's Private Sector Housing Team is under the auspices of Acts of Parliament; Rules, Orders or Directions made there under; and Guidance, both statutory and advisory, issued by the appropriate National Authority. These, collectively, give either a duty or a power to the function.

Legislation

The principal legislation giving such duties and powers are:

Housing Act 2004

Governs housing standards, and the enforcement of those standards, through the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)
Provides for the licensing of Houses in Multiple Occupation and the selective licensing of other forms of private rented housing
Allows for the proper management of substandard dwellings and empty dwellings
Sets requirement for assessing needs of Gypsies and Travellers

Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

Gives statutory framework for provision of Disabled Facilities Grants

Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

Gives statutory framework to provision for financial, and other forms of, assistance to owners and occupiers of private sector dwellings

Home Energy Conservation Act 1995

Sets target for reduction of domestic energy consumption

Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960

Governs licensing of caravan sites

Public Health Act 1936

Miscellaneous powers relating to sanitary provisions and mobile dwellings

Building Act 1984

Miscellaneous powers relating to buildings

Environmental Protection Act 1990

Gives statutory framework for dealing with housing related nuisances

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

Governs control of illegal encampments

Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000

Duty to prepare fuel poverty strategy

Statutory targets

The Government has set a target that all social housing should meet the Decent Homes standard by 2010. In 2002 that requirement was extended to the private sector in relation to the percentage of vulnerable households in 'Decent Homes' standard dwellings. This was set at 70% by 2011 and 75% by 2021, (PSA 7 target).

In it's UK Fuel Poverty Strategy (November 2001) the Government set targets that, as far as is reasonably practicable, no vulnerable household should be in fuel poverty by 2010 and no household should be in fuel poverty by 2016. A household is deemed to be in fuel poverty if it has to spend 10% or more of its income on fuel costs.

Relationship to other housing strategies

The Private Sector Housing Strategy has direct links with National, Regional, sub-regional and local strategies and policies to ensure service delivery.

The Government has set out its housing strategy in Sustainable Communities: Building for the Future (ODPM 2003). Its priorities are:

- Ensuring communities are sustainable
- Tackling housing shortages and providing more affordable homes
- Providing starter and key worker homes
- Improving the standard of private sector housing
- Tackling homelessness and reducing bed and breakfast usage
- Bringing social housing up to the Decent Homes Standard by 2010
- Implementing the Supporting People programme
- Action to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour
- Employing modern methods of construction
- Addressing empty dwellings

At the regional level the East of England Regional Assembly has published its strategy for housing in Regional Housing Strategy 2005 – 2010. Its vision is:

To ensure everyone can live in a decent home which meets their needs at a price they can afford and in locations that are sustainable.

Contributing aims are:

- To use housing investment to support economic development
- To provide a sustainable environment and attractive places to live
- To promote social inclusion within sustainable communities
- To ensure that housing serves to improve the Region's health and well being and reduce inequalities

Sub-regionally the Rural East Anglia Partnership, (REAP – Breckland and North Norfolk District Councils and the Borough Council of Kings Lynn and West Norfolk), has developed three thematic programmes in it' Sub Regional Housing Strategy 2005 – 2009:

- Balancing the housing market
- A decent home for all
- Supporting independent living

At local level this strategy will form part of Breckland Council's overall Housing Strategy 2005 – 2010. In this context it will focus on helping to deliver the following Council objectives

Objective 1.3:

- To improve the fitness and fuel efficiency of housing by focusing on the needs of the most vulnerable

Objective 1.4:

- To maximise the use of the social and private housing stock

Objective 1.5:

- To enable independent living through the adaptation of homes to meet the needs of people with disabilities.

Objective 1.7:

- To reduce homelessness and support those who find themselves homeless.

Objective 1.8:

- To improve the facilities for Travelling and Gypsy communities

Sub-ordinate to this strategy will be Breckland's policies on reducing fuel poverty, reducing numbers of empty dwellings, licensing Houses in Multiple Occupation, housing renewal, Gypsy and Traveller site provision and its statutory duties in relation to housing defects and mobile home licensing.

Enforcement

All enforcement actions will be carried out in accordance with the National Enforcement Concordat, any relevant provisions of The Legislative and Regulatory Reform Act 2006 and Breckland's enforcement Policy.

Equalities impact

All policies and operational processes will be subject to a full Equalities Impact Assessment, (EIA), to ensure that, as far as is practicable, no inequalities arise from their implementation.

Breckland Council subscribes to INTRAN to ensure that all of its citizens are fully able to access all of its services and will include voice translation, document transcription and sign language where necessary.

Information distribution

This strategy will be available, as a document, on the Breckland Council website, (www.breckland.gov.uk). It will be available as a hard copy, on request, and a brief synopsis will be featured in the Council magazine, Breckland Voice.

All policies and subordinate strategies will also be posted on the website, be available, on request, as hard copies and will be advised in the Council magazine. In addition leaflets outlining the policies will be widely distributed.

Information will be made available, via the Council magazine, as an audio tape and can be translated if required.

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Evidence base

A district-wide stock condition survey was carried out in 2007 as part of a sub-regional survey. The survey was carried out to the Department of Communities and Local Government guidance across a 2% (1000 property) sample randomly selected within stratified age bands. For the purposes of the survey the district was sub-divided into 5 areas to better information targeting. These areas were:

- Rural northwest/Swaffham/Rural southwest
- Dereham/Rural northeast
- Central/Watton
- Attleborough/Rural southeast
- Thetford

In addition a sub-regional housing market assessment was also carried out in 2007.

An assessment of the housing and support needs of black and minority ethnic communities across the 7 Norfolk district council areas and that of Waveney district council in north Suffolk also reported in 2007.

A review of the Council's homeless strategy had been completed in 2006.

A Norfolk wide assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs was carried out in December 2006.

Private Sector Housing Stock

Breckland Council transferred its entire housing stock to Peddars Way Housing Association in 1993 and other than two homeless hostels possesses no housing stock of its own.

In July 2007 the total private sector stock stood at 54445 dwellings.

Breckland is a rapidly growing area and this is reflected in the stock age profile with 88% of the stock constructed post 1944 and 29.5% constructed post 1981.

77.5% of the private housing stock is owner-occupied, 7.1% private rented and 13.2% is owned by registered social landlords. The remainder is categorised as other tenure.

95.4% of the stock is houses or bungalows with only 4.6% as flats or maisonettes.

Generally household sizes are small, 23.8 % are 1 person and 47.8% are 2 person, and this is reflected in overcrowding figures of only 2.9% while 76.9% of households are considered to be under occupying based on bedroom availability. Therefore only 20.1% are deemed to match household numbers against required bedroom numbers.

The overall population is considered to be 127,100 as a mid-census estimate (2005).

While care needs to be taken when assessing ethnicity due to the difficulties of collecting data on numerically small or regularly shifting population it is assessed that 97.2% of the population is White British, 2.2% is White Other and only 0.3% is Indian or Black. Contained within the White Other category will be a significant number of migrant workers from Portugal, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and other A8 EU succession countries.

In only 50.6% of households is the head of the household considered to be in full or part time employment while in 40.9% the head of household is economically retired. There is considerable diversion from the national figures where 65% of heads of household are in employment with only 25.5% economically retired.

25.1% of households are in receipt of one, or more, income or disability related benefits and are thus considered to be economically vulnerable with 14.2% of households where the head has an income of under £7,800.

82.8% of the stock meets the Decent Homes standard and, overall, 76.6% of vulnerable households live in Decent housing indicating that Breckland has already achieved the 2021 PSA 7 target. However, more locally the figures indicate that only 67.7% of vulnerable households in the Thetford area live in Decent homes whilst, generally, only 53.7% and 48% of vulnerable households live in Decent homes in the pre-1918 and 1919 – 1944 age bands respectively.

Averaged across the district, 6% of the stock displays Category 1 hazard failures as identified by the HHSRS process. Category 1 hazards are a trigger for mandatory intervention

However, there is considerable geographical variation with that figure being 9.2% in Attleborough/Rural southeast and only 2.6% in Central/Watton. There is also considerable variation in age banding with 23.7% of pre-1918 stock having at least one Category 1 hazard compared with only 2.6% of post- 1981 stock having a similar hazard.

Housing Needs

A housing needs study was completed in 2007 as a joint project by the Rural East Anglia partnership (REAP).

The primary outputs from this exercise were an assessment of the overall requirement for affordable housing, in accordance with the approved Department of Communities and Local Government guidance, and an assessment of the housing market balance using Fordham Research's own model. The former looks primarily at trend data while the latter studies household's future aspirations, expectations and affordability.

Data collection was primarily by postal questionnaire with 1600 returns analysed. Extrapolations as to stock size, tenure types and distribution, age banding etc were all in line with the data extrapolated from the stock condition survey.

The study indicated that house prices in Breckland were 84% of the national average and slightly less than the average for the REAP area. Average rental costs are low compared with house prices and social rents are slightly less than half the rent for an equivalent property in the private rental sector.

There is an inflow of 4% more households into Breckland than leave each year.

Judged by the CLG's criteria of:

- Special needs/mobility
- Overcrowding
- Difficult to maintain
- Accommodation too expensive
- Repairs
- Harassment
- End of tenancy
- Lack of facilities
- Shared facilities

An overall 7.1% of households, (3,757), in the district are living in unsuitable housing. However this is not distributed equally by tenure:

Owner/occupied (no mortgage)	4.4 % (862)
Owner/occupied (with mortgage)	3.9% (806)
RSL	9.9% (725)
Private rented	4.7% (1,363)

It is clear that a significant number of households renting privately are in unsuitable accommodation that does not meet their requirements.

Planning Policy Statement 3 defines housing need as:

“The quantity of housing required for households who are unable to access suitable housing without financial assistance”.

The study indicates that 1,328 households are in housing need by that definition. Once again, however, the distribution is not equal across all tenures:

Owner/occupied (no mortgage)	0
Owner/occupied (with mortgage)	44
RSL	405
Private rented	879

The number of households in the private rented sector alone represents 66% of all households assessed to be in need.

There are an estimated 11,146 households, (21% of total), with one, or more, members in an identified special needs group:

Frail elderly	4,771
Physical disability	7,302
Learning difficulty	802
Mental health problem	1,390
Severe sensory disability	658
Other	1,131

Many of these households will be eligible for assistance through the Disabled Facilities Grant process representing a considerable financial commitment.

Housing and Support Needs of Black and Minority Ethnic Communities

This study covered the whole of Norfolk and Waveney district in Suffolk.

In comparison with the rest of England, (13%), Norfolk has a low BME population, (3.7%). However the total BME population in Norfolk has risen by nearly 51% between 2001 and mid-2004. The largest BME community is White Other, (46% of the total), which includes the bulk of the growth in migrant worker communities from Portugal, Poland, Latvia and Lithuania and more recently Hungary and the Slovak Republic. There are also significant populations of Chinese, (10%) and other Asian, (9%). Mixed race constitutes the second largest identified group at 16%.

The Gypsy and Traveller population in Breckland is relatively static with, as to be expected, temporary increases in numbers due to community members moving through the district.

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Operational Policies

The Private Sector Housing service is delivered through a number of policies reflecting operational areas. These policies have developed, historically, in response to legislative change, Government Best Value Performance Indicators, (BVPI), Government Public Sector Agreements, (PSA), Government Guidance, Audit Commission Housing Inspectorate Key Line of Enquiry 9, (KLOE 9) and Breckland Council priorities for service delivery. These policies are reviewed in response to changes in any of the above.

For each policy area indication will be given as to the primary and/or secondary legislation relevant to service delivery, any BVPI or PSA indicators and the relevant subset of KLOE 9 that the policy contributes to achieving. Where a separate, written, policy exists this will be indicated.

In all cases the policies will accord with the Enforcement Concordat and Breckland's Enforcement Policy and Breckland Council's strategies and policies covering, diversity, health and safety and corporate governance. All policies have been approved by Breckland Council through its Cabinet or predecessor administrative committees.

A) Housing standards

Primary legislation – Housing Act 2004

BVPI – nil

PSA 7 – Decent Homes

Written adopted policy - no

The “fitness”, or otherwise, of a dwelling for occupation is determined on the basis of an assessment of the hazards present in the dwelling – Housing Health and Safety Rating System, (HHSRS).

All Environmental Health Officers and Technical Officers are qualified to carry out risk assessments under HHSRS and to specify appropriate action to eliminate, or reduce those risks.

Action by the Council will follow the process laid down in its Enforcement policy, viz:

- Upon receipt of a complaint or other information a response will be made within 5 working days
- An inspection, in accordance with HHSRS will be carried out
- An assessment will be calculated to determine whether Category 1 or Category 2 hazards exist
- Based on the severity of those risks appropriate further action will be determined which will consist of:
 - Production of Safeguard report (see Housing Renewal)
 - Service of Informal notice
 - Service of Hazard Awareness Notice
 - Service of Improvement Notice
 - Service of Prohibition Order
 - Service of Demolition Order

Where appropriate and necessary that action could be immediate or deferred.

The Council has determined that it will take action against dwellings with Category 1 hazards, as required by its statutory duty under Section 28 Housing Act 2004, and also against dwellings with Category 2 hazards under the power given under Section 29 of the Act.

Where it is considered achievable the dwelling will be brought up to the Decent Homes standard.

The Council has further determined that priorities for action will be private rented properties.

Section 49 of the Housing Act 2004 allows for the charging for taking specified actions, including the service of specified Notices or Orders. The Council has determined that it will only exercise this option in relation to Notices or Orders served in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation, (see Houses in Multiple Occupation).

Once action is initiated it will be pursued to the conclusion of eliminating, or reducing, the hazard or ceasing the use, or demolition of, the dwelling.

Where any action is likely to result in the displacement of any occupier's early consultation will take place with officers from the Housing Advice or Homelessness teams. Occupiers, and other persons having an interest in the dwelling, will receive notification of the service of a Notice or Order and advice concerning any precursor action. Such advice will be made available in appropriate languages.

All actions carried out against individual dwellings will be recorded in property files and on APP to ensure accurate reporting against targets and provision of information to Government.

B) Houses in Multiple Occupation

Primary legislation – Housing act 2004

BVPI – nil

PSA 7 – Decent Homes

Written adopted policy - no

Houses in Multiple Occupation, HMOs, are defined in Sections 254 – 260 in the Act. There are three broad categories of buildings, or parts of buildings that fall within the definition:

- that is occupied by more than one household and there is sharing, or lack of, an amenity
- that is a converted building that is occupied by more than one household but is not divided into self contained flats whether, or not, there is sharing, or lack of, any amenity
- that is converted into self contained flats but does not meet the minimum standards as set out in the Building Regulations 1991 and, at least one third of the flats are occupied under short tenancies

The HHSRS applies to the individual dwellings comprising an HMO and the common parts that provide access, or service, to those dwellings. The processes and procedures outlined in section 'A' above are applicable. Additionally where Notices or Orders are served covering an HMO there will be a charge of £200 levied per Notice or Order. Where an HMO is licensed, (see below) and there has been a breach of licence conditions, or is not licensed and should be or the health and safety condition is satisfied, (i.e. there is a threat to the health, safety or welfare of occupiers of the HMO, or neighbours), then an Interim Management Order, (IMO), must be applied. An IMO lasts for a maximum of 12 months and may be succeeded by a Final Management Order, (FMO), if necessary.

Management Orders transfer responsibility for management, but not ownership, to a local authority that must perform the full range of duties as manager for the duration of the time that the Order is in force.

In addition HMOs are covered by a licensing scheme as provided for in Part 2, mandatory and Part 3, additional of the Act.

Mandatory licensing applies to all HMOs of 3, or more, stories with 5, or more, occupying persons in 2, or more, households.

The additional licensing is discretionary and subject to confirmation following an application to the Secretary of State. Breckland has made an application to the Secretary of State for an additional licensing scheme covering the whole of its administrative area for all forms of multiple occupancy, save those forms expressly excluded by legislation. Determination is currently outstanding.

A licensed HMO must be managed by a fit and proper person and will be subject to mandatory conditions applied by Schedule 4 of the Act and such additional conditions as the Council deems necessary to secure the health, safety and welfare of occupiers and for the prevention of anti-social behaviour and nuisance.

A licence will be subject to satisfactory application and the payment of a fee of £225. A licence will last, unless prior terminated, for a maximum of 5 years.

Specific regulations regarding management of HMOs are contained in the Management of Houses in Multiple Occupation (England) Regulations 2006. These cover the duties of a manager to provide information to an occupier, to take safety measures, to maintain water supply and drainage, to maintain common parts, fixtures, fittings and appliances, to maintain living accommodation, and to provide waste disposal facilities. Certain duties are also placed on occupiers.

The risks arising from fire are enhanced in HMOs and are covered by HHSRS for individual dwellings. HHSRS will also cover the means of fire warning and means of escape throughout an HMO linked to those individual dwellings. The Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service also have duties under the Fire Safety Order 2005 for the common parts of HMOs. In order that there may be commonality of enforcement process Breckland Council and Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service have signed a protocol designating a joint service level agreement between the two authorities. This sets out communication and enforcement procedures including which authority takes primacy in any particular HMO.

C) Landlords

Primary legislation - Housing Act 2004
Landlord and Tenant Act 1997

BVPI – Nil

PSA 7 – Decent Homes

Written adopted policy - no

Breckland Council will always try to work with landlords to ensure that the private rented sector remains vibrant and provides safe, secure and affordable accommodation for those choosing to rent rather than buy.

The Council maintains a mailing list which landlords can elect to join and regular mailings of the Council's newsletter, Rental Matters are sent to those on the list. This contains information on new legislation, tips and techniques for better business and other similar matters.

Breckland Council also operates a Landlord's Forum which meets once a year and also holds one or two training sessions per year. A wide range of speakers is always brought together to give informative presentations on matters of interest to landlords.

A Landlord's accreditation scheme has been developed to which landlords can subscribe. The idea of the scheme is to help drive up standards in the private rented sector by applying a set of standards, backed by rewards, to which landlords agree to abide. Regular, random checks are made to ensure standards are maintained and landlords are given the opportunity to rectify any failures found. Persistent failures will, however lead to exclusion from the scheme.

The Council maintains regular contact with Landlord groups to ensure dialogue about matters of joint concern.

D) Disabled facilities Grants

Primary legislation – The Housing Grants, Construction and Regeneration Act 1996

BVPI – nil

PSA – nil

Written adopted policy - no

Disabled Facilities Grants, (DFGs), help fund works of adaptation and alteration in occupiers own homes. These works can range from over bath showers to extensions housing a bedroom with specialist en suite sanitary facilities. DFGs are mandatory in certain specified circumstances and valid applications cannot be refused.

They are available to owner occupiers and private and social rented tenants.

Breckland Council works closely with Occupational Therapists from Norfolk County Council Adult Social Services to ensure that essential works are identified and carried out as speedily as possible.

Funding is based on a Specified Capital Grant from Government which covers 60% of allocation with 40% being match funded by Breckland Council. Breckland Council will also monitor demand and allocate further resources when available to tackle excess demand.

Applications for grant aid are prioritised by the Occupational Therapists from 1, the highest, to 4. Each priority has its own waiting list based on the referral date from the Occupational Therapist. The waiting lists are reviewed in October and March. All priority 1 complete applications will be processed within 60 days, maximum, with priority 2 applications being processed subject to available funding after the review dates. Priority 3 cases will then be processed on the basis of available funding. It is unlikely, at present funding levels, that priority 4 applications will be processed.

Breckland Council funds and supports a Home Improvement Agency, West Norfolk Care and Repair, to operate in its area. This provides a service to vulnerable households that include a full agency service for DFG applicants as well as provision of assistive technology and a handy person service.

Breckland Council also works closely with its main provider of social housing, Flagship Housing Association to ensure that its tenants receive appropriate adaptations, sharing funding costs between the organisations. Flagship also provides an internal agency to its tenants for DFG applications.

The DFG process will be subject to annual audit.

E) Housing Renewal

Primary legislation – The Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002

BVPI – nil

PSA7 – Decent Homes

Written adopted policy - yes

Following the introduction of the Order in 2002 local housing authorities no longer had any mandatory duties to provide grants for housing renewal. However, greater freedoms were given to provide discretionary schemes to householders to help improve their homes.

Breckland Council introduced three discretionary schemes – Safeguard, Enhance and Domicile.

Safeguard is an inspection based report giving householders an appraisal of the condition of their property highlighting any problems. Part of the report indicates appropriate remedial action and estimated costs. This allows the householder to avoid being exploited by “cowboy builders”. Signposting to sources of funding is also part of the report. There is no charge for this scheme and it is available to all owner occupiers.

Enhance is available to owner occupiers who are in receipt of an income or disability related benefit. It comprises two elements; a grant of up to a maximum of £2,500 or a repayable loan of up to a maximum of £20,000. Although not a chargeable scheme applicants are required to meet the cost of any setup fees and charges. Enhance is available to cover works associated with any of the following categories:

- Minor repairs
- Meeting the Decent Homes standard
- Energy efficiency
- Assistive technology
- Home safety and security

Enhance may also be used to pay for necessary work that is beyond the normal funding limit for a Disabled Facilities Grant.

Domicile is only available to landlords at the rate of 20% of the total cost, up to a maximum of £20,000 loan. Domicile is available to cover works associated with any of the following categories:

- Bringing an empty property back into use
- Meeting the Decent Homes standard
- Improvement works to an HMO
- Energy efficiency

The services of West Norfolk Care and Repair are available to applicants for Enhance.

Consideration is being given to developing an equity release scheme at regional level although this unlikely to be able to be introduced before 2011.

Enhance and Domicile processes will be subject to annual audit.

F) Empty dwellings

Primary legislation – Housing Act 2004

BVPI – 64 returning empty dwellings to use or demolish

PSA – none

Written adopted policy - yes

Empty dwellings are seen as a wasted resource at a time of a housing shortage. They can be a blight to neighbouring properties and a focus for anti-social behaviour.

Breckland Council will deploy a range of options to get empty dwellings brought back into use or demolished to free up land for new development. Opportunities to utilise these options to convert current non-domestic property into dwellings will also be included. Included in these options will be:

- Advice and guidance to owners
- Offer of grant/loan financial assistance
- Formal action through Improvement or Hazard Awareness Notices
- Formal action through Demolition Orders
- Formal action through Empty Dwelling Management Orders (EDMOs)
- Compulsory purchase and resale/improvement

Breckland Council will set annual targets for numbers of properties brought back into use, or demolished, and these will be reported back through the performance management system and be subject to audit to ensure that the targets have been achieved in accordance with guidance.

G) Caravan, Camping and Mobile Home sites

Primary legislation – (caravans/mobile homes) – The Caravan Sites and Control of
Development Act 1960
(camping) – Public Health Act 1936

BVPI – nil

PSA – nil

Written adopted policy - no

Where a site for the stationing of any number of caravans or mobile homes has been granted planning permission a site licence must also be granted. The licence will specify conditions that are required to be maintained on the site. The conditions will be based on the model standards.

All licensed sites for other than a single unit will be inspected annually for compliance with the standards for each individual site.

Tented camping sites are regulated under the Public Health Act and a licence will be issued with appropriate conditions attached which will specifically related to each site. However, the conditions will be in accordance with the model standards as appropriate.

H) Gypsies and Travellers

Primary legislation – Housing Act 2004

Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

BVPI – nil

PSA – nil

Written adopted policy – yes

Gypsies and Travellers have been a part of society in Breckland for many years working in a number of itinerant jobs, particularly agriculture and recycling.

There have been a number of traditional stopping places used and, as some of these have been developed for other uses new sites have developed.

In 1996 a 23 pitch site was opened in Swaffham. The Splashes is a wardened site owned and operated by Norfolk County Council and is for permanent occupation.

A number of Gypsies and Travellers have bought their own land and developed authorised, licensed, sites for family use.

A need for a Short Stay Stopping Place was identified in Thetford and is currently underdevelopment. This will provide space for 6 -8 caravans for short stays of up to 3 months.

The bi-annual caravan count has identified, consistently, a need for a further 12 pitches for permanent use and a suitable site is currently been sought for future development.

Breckland Council is a signatory to the Norfolk Gypsy and Traveller Strategy 2005 – 2008 and unauthorised encampments are dealt with in accordance with the Norfolk Gypsy and Traveller Protocol on Unauthorised Encampments. Breckland Council will investigate all reports of unauthorised encampments but will apply a policy of toleration except where unacceptable health, safety and welfare issues or possible anti – social behaviour risks arise.

Breckland Council fully participates in the Norfolk Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Group where various organisations associated with Gypsy and Traveller issues meet alongside members of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

The Council also retains a member of this community as a consultant.

A major event, the Watton Horse Fair, which attracts large numbers of Gypsies and Travellers, takes place twice a year and the Council liaises with the organisers and other agencies to ensure the event takes place with minimum disruption.

I) Energy Efficiency and Fuel Poverty

Primary legislation – Housing Act 2004

Home Energy Conservation Act 1996

BVPI – nil

PSA 7 – Decent Homes

Written adopted policy – Energy Efficiency – yes

Fuel Poverty – yes

The Home Energy Conservation Act, (HECA), required Local Energy Authorities, i.e. District and Unitary Authorities, to develop proposals to improve the energy efficiency of all housing stock in their area by 30% as measured by a reduction in CO₂ emissions over 10 years. Unfortunately this had not proved possible and an additional 5 year period was agreed ending 2011. Whilst progress is being made it is clear this will prove to be a significant task.

A range of programmes have been put in place including direct grant and loan aid through Enhance and Domicile, and joint working to promote WarmFront, Norfolk HEAT and Energy Aware programmes to deliver improved insulation and/or heating to owner occupiers and private sector tenants.

Breckland Council will give advice on energy efficiency and produces an annual wall chart containing appropriate information. A short video clip has also been jointly produced with a number of other local authorities and is viewable on the Council's website.

Breckland Council jointly owns, with the other Norfolk District Councils, and operates a mobile Energy bus which supports its promotional activities.

From 2008 the Council will also participate in the British Gas council Tax rebate scheme which will offer a £75 pound rebate where a council tax payer has energy efficiency work carried out by British Gas nominated contractor.

Breckland has developed a targeted programme aimed at lifting households from fuel poverty. A household is deemed to be in fuel poverty first if it has to spend 10% or more of its income on fuel costs.

Ward level data has been obtained from the Centre for Sustainable Energy and is being used for action based on the wards with the highest numbers in fuel poverty first. This is a joint project with Warm Front carrying out the work.

A “green village” initiative is also being developed from 2008 working with and through village institutions such as schools, churches, Women's Institutes etc to get their members to sign up for insulation improvements through EAGA Trust who will offer discounts on normal costs. The referral fee payable to the Council for each

Household uptake will be recycled into a “community pot” to be used for works that would, not normally, be eligible for assistance.

The Council has formed an internal Clean and Green forum to develop and promote sustainable initiatives to reduce the Council’s carbon footprint and to enable others to carryout similar works.

DRAFT