

# Section One – Introduction

## 1.1 Setting the Scene

Malvern Hills District is predominately a rural area that runs down the western side of Worcestershire. The main urban centre of both population and employment is Malvern. The smaller market towns of Tenbury Wells and Upton upon Severn, as well as several large villages, also play a vital role in providing local services. The District has seen considerable growth in service and leisure provision, and enjoys ready access to road and rail networks from the larger centres of population. However, much of the District is rural in nature and public transport links are poor which makes access to everyday services difficult. A large area of the District is designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. There is a vigorous local economy and the District is firmly established as a target for new investment in high technology businesses and tourism. The West Midlands Regional Economic Strategy (January 2004) recognises the importance of the District with Malvern anchoring the Central Technology Belt. These factors combine to make the area a very attractive place to live and in consequence house prices have risen dramatically.

Malvern Hills District Council has a proud record of achievement in meeting the housing needs of the District. We have been rated consistently an 'above average' housing authority in terms of our performance by the Government and enjoy positive working relationships with both the Housing Corporation and GOWM.

The Council transferred its housing stock to a newly formed registered social landlord (RSL), Elgar Housing Association, in March 1995. Elgar HA is now part of the Festival Housing Group, based in Malvern, and with whom the Council works closely in partnership. The capital receipt from the sale of the houses has been invested in new and improved community facilities across the District. The Council has provided grants to RSL's well in excess of £9 million over the last ten years for the development of 581 additional units of affordable housing. During that period the Housing Corporation has also funded development of a further 389 new homes in the District in partnership with the Council and RSL's. Total capital investment in that time reached over £16.5 million. (See Appendix 13).

However, it is becoming increasingly difficult in a highly competitive housing market to find and secure suitable sites for new affordable housing to meet increasing housing need in the district. There is an increasing requirement to recognise the specialised housing needs of particular groups within the community and to improve private sector housing and achieve 'Decent Home' standards.

The Housing Strategy identifies the challenges that are ahead and sets out the Council's approach in partnership with others to address the priorities for action.

## **1.2 Consultation**

Local authorities are required under the Local Government Act 2003 to develop Housing Strategies at regular intervals. Draft strategies must then be submitted to the regional Government Office for a determination that it is 'fit for purpose'.

The Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM) agreed, in view of the statutory requirements to produce a Homelessness Strategy and a Private Sector Assistance Policy in 2003, that new Housing Strategies or Reviews would not be required from district councils in Worcestershire until 2004. Due to the timescale for development of the West Midlands Regional Housing Strategy it was subsequently agreed with GOWM that a revised Housing Strategy for Malvern Hills District would be submitted in late 2005. On September 27th 2005 full Council approved the Strategy, which was subsequently submitted to GOWM

Initial consultation for the Strategy took place during September and October 2004. It included focus groups, workshops for elected members, use of local press features and the Council's website, direct contact with the Local Strategic Partnership, meetings with Registered Social Landlords, Social Services, the Citizens Advice Bureau, and special interest groups, who are involved in the delivery of housing solutions to meet housing needs. A further round of consultation took place in May 2005 and culminated in a Housing Strategy Consultation Day in June. Following consideration of the consultation feedback (Appendix 12 provides details), amendment and Council approval, the Housing Strategy was submitted to the GOWM in September 2005.