4.6 The council is also concerned that new housing should meet needs and demands in terms of affordability, size and type of homes, and ensuring those with special housing needs are provided for. These requirements, including those for households in need of affordable housing are set out in the Strategic Housing Market Assessment⁷, and are reflected in the policies below.

4.7 Housing plays an important role in the well-being of individual households and communities, and in the shaping of neighbourhoods. Housing must therefore be well designed and provide high quality living spaces and residential environments, and contribute to achieving sustainable residential communities. Localities in Westminster with high concentrations of social housing are also those which suffer the greatest deprivation. The council is working with partners to tackle deprivation, and improving the quality of housing, the mix of housing types and tenures, and the range of incomes in these neighbourhoods will contribute to these aims.

**OPTIMISING HOUSING DELIVERY**

4.8 The lack of large sites means that housing development in Westminster is usually small scale and involves changes of use and refurbishment and extensions of existing buildings. New homes are therefore expected to be delivered by change of use and redevelopment from commercial uses where their loss is appropriate and some redundant public sector uses, such as hospital sites; building to higher densities on existing housing sites, and housing required by the mixed use policy. In core commercial areas, residential use will grow alongside significant expansions in commercial floorspace as part of a mix of uses.

4.9 Westminster’s housing target set out in the London Plan⁷ is 1,068 new homes per year (equates to 21,360 units between 2016/17 and 2036/37). Westminster does not have land that it can ‘release’ for housing development so in order to ensure that there is a continuous five year supply of deliverable housing sites available to achieve the housing target, the council will engage in discussions with landowners to identify and bring forward sites for housing. The council has and will continue to participate in regional assessments of housing land availability and capacity, the London Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA). In order to meet future housing targets set out in the London Plan in the longer term, the council will take account of the evidence set out in the SHLAA, supplemented by local viability testing, and discussions with landowners to prepare the 6-10 and 11-15 year lists of developable housing sites. The housing land supply schedules will
also help facilitate housing development by providing guidance to potential developers about what will be expected from development sites, and instigating discussions with landowners of stalled sites. The housing land supply schedules of deliverable and developable sites will be updated through the Authority’s Monitoring Report.

**Policy S14 Optimising Housing Delivery**

The council will work to achieve and exceed its borough housing target set out in the London Plan.

Residential use is the priority across Westminster except where specifically stated.

All residential uses, floorspace and land will be protected. Proposals that would result in a reduction in the number of residential units will not be acceptable, except where:

- the council considers that reconfiguration or redevelopment of affordable housing would better meet affordable housing need;
- a converted house is being returned to a family-sized dwelling or dwellings; or
- 2 flats are being joined to create a family-sized dwelling.

Proposals for conversion or redevelopment of single family houses to flats will be assessed taking into account the character of the street and area; impact on residential amenity including parking pressure; and the mix of units proposed.

The number of residential units on development sites will be optimised.

The council will maintain a publicly available list of deliverable sites for housing development to ensure a continuous five year supply of deliverable sites with a 5% buffer, and 6-15 year lists of future developable sites.

**Reasoned Justification**

To achieve and exceed Westminster’s housing targets it is necessary to protect existing housing and bring forward new housing as appropriate across the city. This means that schemes which retain or increase the overall housing floorspace should not reduce the number of residential units as this would reduce the number of homes in the city.

Affordable housing is an exception as Westminster’s own housing stock is dominated by one and two bedroom units; whilst need is focused on two and three bedroom units. Formerly converted houses which would provide family-sized homes will also be an exception because of the shortage of family homes with gardens in the city and the benefits such ‘de-conversion’ would bring to providing a range of accommodation. This also creates a
flexibility and sustainability within the housing stock for different sizes and types of accommodation to be provided throughout a building’s lifetime.

![Graph showing housing trajectory]

**Figure 37 Westminster’s Housing Trajectory**

Westminster will be able to meet the London Plan target of 1,068 units from all sources. This graph is based on the 15 year Land Supply Assessment 2016/17 - 2036/37 included in the Authority’s Monitoring Report 2012/13, plus an allowance for windfall sites of 10 or more units and an allowance for sites yielding 1-9 units. It also includes sources of non-conventional housing: bringing vacant homes back into use and non-self contained housing. Westminster has local circumstances which justify including an allowance for windfalls and smaller sites, and that these can legitimately be included in the trajectory as set out in the spatial strategy. The justification is set out in Appendix 4, and is based on the following:

- The 15 year Land Supply Assessments include sites which are expected to deliver 10 or more residential units. However, 93% of housing sites in the city yield less than 10 units, and these small sites have yielded about 25% of new homes in the city.

- Historically, windfalls have accounted for 80% of housing delivered in the city. However, the 15 year Land Supply Assessments will now capture many of these sites and there will be less ‘windfalls’ from the loss of offices so a far lower proportion of new housing from this source needs to be projected into the future.
The inclusion of these windfall and small sites allowances reflects the advice in the National Planning Policy Framework as such sites have consistently come forward and will continue to provide a reliable source of housing. It is based on new development and conversions, and does not rely on development of residential gardens. The 5 year housing land supply includes an additional 5% buffer to ensure choice and competition, although as most sites in Westminster are available for housing, this will include an element of windfalls as set out above.

The council has lost single family houses to conversion and redevelopment to flats, and now houses with gardens form only 10% of Westminster’s housing stock. These houses can meet the needs of families wishing to live in Westminster and often make an important contribution to the character and function of conservation areas. Whilst conversions and redevelopments of single family homes to flatted accommodation increases the number of residential units, they can also have a detrimental effect on character and function of streets and areas, lead to problems with residential amenity and may not provide an appropriate mix and size of units.

Land and buildings should be used efficiently, and larger development sites should optimise the number of units in schemes, taking into account other policies and objectives. Housing densities should reflect the densities set out in the London Plan. City Management policy will address housing densities to be applied to development sites in different parts of the city.

Policies relating to Special Policy Areas (Policy S2), the Opportunity Areas (Policies S3, S4 and S5), Core CAZ and the West End Special Retail Policy Area (Policies S6 and S7), North Westminster Economic Development Area (Policy S12) and Offices and other B1 Floorspace (S20) have other priorities instead of, or in addition to housing.

Cross-reference to Policy S1 Mixed Use in the Central Activities Zone; S20 Offices and other B1 Floorspace; Appendix 1 Proposals Sites: Strategic Sites for Housing.

**MEETING HOUSING NEEDS**

4.10 Westminster’s housing needs and demands are assessed in a regional and sub-regional context as this is how the housing market works in practice. These assessments inform the council’s policy approach.

4.11 Westminster has a lower proportion of residents aged under 20 and over 60 years than London or England as a whole. This is expected to shift over the period to 2028, with a growth in the numbers of children and young people, particularly children under five. 
Almost half of Westminster’s population live in one-person households, and about 12% of the population are in overcrowded homes. About 12% of households contain members with support needs i.e. have a physical disability, are frail elderly, or have a mental health problem\textsuperscript{viii}.

4.12 Westminster has the second highest house prices in the country, and the need for new affordable housing is significantly above the Inner London average\textsuperscript{x}. In terms of unit sizes, there are shortfalls for all sizes, but new two and three bedroom homes are particularly needed in both the affordable and owner/occupier sectors\textsuperscript{v}.

POLICY S15 MEETING HOUSING NEEDS

Residential developments will provide an appropriate mix of units in terms of size, type, and affordable housing provision to contribute towards meeting Westminster’s housing needs, and creating mixed communities.

Hostels, Houses in Multiple Occupation, and specialist housing floorspace will be protected. Provision of specialist housing will be allowed where this would contribute towards meeting local housing needs.

All specialist housing floorspace and units will be protected to meet those specific needs except where the accommodation is needed to meet different residential needs as part of a published strategy by a local service provider. Where this exception applies, changes of use will only be to residential care or nursing homes, hostel, Houses in Multiple Occupation or dwelling houses use.

Reasoned Justification

Housing developments need to provide an appropriate mix of units, in terms of unit size, type and tenure, including social and intermediate housing provision, to address Westminster’s housing requirements as set out in regional and sub-regional assessments\textsuperscript{xii}. These assessments include needs for specialist housing such as extra-care units for the elderly and housing for people using wheelchairs, or with other mobility impairments. This approach also recognises the need for hostel accommodation for vulnerable people, and the role that Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) play in providing affordable
accommodation in the city. Housing mix and specialist housing, including hostels and HMOs, will be considered in detail in City Management policy.

It is important to safeguard specialist housing because need is likely to increase in the future, particularly with an ageing population. However, this type of accommodation can become obsolete because of its layout, or changes in the delivery of local services or the client group it was intended to serve. Therefore flexibility is required in order to deliver the published strategies of local service providers.

**AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

4.13 Westminster is one of the most expensive places in the country in which to rent or purchase a home, with prices of £5 - £10 million not uncommon. Average house prices are double that for the whole of London and over ten times the average Westminster household income\textsuperscript{xii}. Because of this, Westminster has an acute need for affordable homes, in both the social and intermediate sectors. An additional 5,600 social rented homes (or other affordable housing to meet the needs of those eligible for social housing) would be required annually to meet demand\textsuperscript{xiii}. There is typically a waiting list of about 5,500 ‘households in priority need’ for social housing, and a further 20,000 households who do not qualify for social housing and cannot afford market housing.

4.14 Regional guidance sets out an objective of a 60:40 split for social and intermediate provision. Within this strategic framework, City Management policy will set out what proportions of social and intermediate housing will be applied to individual schemes.

4.15 Unlike other London boroughs, the high price of land in Westminster means that Registered Providers (RPs) are generally unable to purchase land in the city. Westminster, therefore, relies heavily on private housing development to provide opportunities for affordable housing in partnership with RPs, with such developments accounting for 94% of new affordable homes in Westminster\textsuperscript{xiv}. However, due to the highly built-up nature of Westminster and the shortage of large development sites, 93% of residential developments given planning permission between 2006 and 2008 were below the 10 unit threshold for provision of affordable housing\textsuperscript{xv}.

**POLICY S16 AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Affordable housing and floorspace that is used or was last used as affordable housing will be protected.

The council will aim to exceed 30% of new homes to be affordable homes, and will work with its partners to facilitate and optimise the delivery of new affordable homes.