

A vision for County Durham

2019 - 2035



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County Durham in 2035

The purpose of this proposed vision is to provide a shared understanding of what everyone wants County Durham to look like in 15 years' time. It is to provide direction to key public, private and voluntary sector organisations that make up the County Durham Partnership enabling them to work together to improve the quality of life of our residents. A shared understanding of the issues we face and our vision for the future will help organisations work together, removing boundaries and co-delivering services for the benefit of our residents.

County Durham is a forward thinking area with a strong sense of community. Our friendly people, fascinating history and beautiful natural environment, from the dales to the coast, are what makes our county great. We have rebuilt and reinvented our economy and communities to overcome past challenges. We are passionate about building a better future for all and forming a new relationship between the County Durham Partnership and everyone who lives in, works in or visits our county.

County Durham is well-connected and welcoming, and a centre for innovative business and manufacturing. Our distinct identity and sense of community offers something different for people and businesses. The county has fast and reliable links by road, rail and air to the rest of the country and internationally. We are a skilled and dynamic area which develops ideas and products that support progress across the county, the North East and beyond.

Our vision is powered by people. It builds on our strengths and opportunities whilst recognising our challenges. It sums up our optimism and ambitions for the future. It feels real and is owned by the people of County Durham. It is an ambitious vision. We do not profess to have all the answers. In some cases, it will mean us having to develop new and innovative solutions, together with our communities, in order to progress and achieve the level of improvement we want for our residents.

It is forward-looking and is aligned to our spatial plan: the County Durham Plan.

Durham: Powered by People

We have listened closely to local communities and partners to develop this vision, underpinned by a series of objectives, to reflect the voices of the people of Durham.

We want to work together with the people of County Durham to help shape our communities and provide help to those who need it. We recognise that achieving a vision is beyond the grasp of any one organisation. In times when resources are scarce, it is important to collaborate. History has taught us that the best outcomes are always achieved when

we work together with communities to achieve our goals. We believe that the future is bright for Durham. Together, we can tackle the challenges that we face more effectively and through harnessing the potential of the people who live in County Durham, we can achieve great things together.

We have developed a vision and three strategic ambitions to develop County Durham over the next 15 years.

Vision statement

Our proposed vision for 2035 is that County Durham is a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive.

More and better jobs

Our young people will achieve their full potential by having access to good quality education and training to prepare them for employment. We will work together to help them find rewarding work and reduce the number of people living in poverty.

We will help people to create more and better jobs by developing major employment sites across the county to build a strong, competitive and lower carbon economy, establishing the county as a premier place in the North East to do business.

We will build on our successful tourist economy through culture-led regeneration to broaden the leisure experience for residents and visitors to the county. Our visitor experience will compete with the best offered by other comparable destinations.

People live long and independent lives

Our children and young people will have the best start in life and enjoy good health and emotional wellbeing. We will work with families to make sure that children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities can achieve the best possible outcomes.

We will design the physical environment to give people greater opportunity for exercise, and to cycle and walk more for everyday journeys. We will reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the impact of climate change on people's lives.

We will promote positive healthy behaviours and help people to stop smoking. We will tackle the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health, build more resilient communities and promote positive mental health.

People will be able to live independently for longer. We will further integrate the work of health and social care organisations to improve the lives of people receiving these services. We will also deliver more housing to meet the needs of older people.

We will work to tackle health inequality across the county and close the gap in healthy life expectancy between our communities.

Connected communities

We will deliver new high-quality housing in a range of house types and tenures including affordable homes that are accessible and meet the needs and aspirations of our residents.

Properties in our communities will be well used. We will work with owners to help bring more empty homes back into use and ensure that privately rented homes are well managed.

Our town and village centres will be well used, clean, attractive and safe.

Our transport network will support cycling and walking and provide good access to workplaces, retail and leisure opportunities and will be relatively free from congestion. Widespread use of electric vehicles will reduce noise and improve air quality.

We want our communities to remain welcoming, accept one another and build new relationships to support each other. Children will have a safe childhood and victims of crime will have easy access to the services and support that they require.

Consultation feedback

This proposed vision has been built on an extensive public consultation. Residents, businesses and specific groups, such as people with a disability and children and young people, were asked what they would like to see in a new vision for County Durham. A separate consultation report details the results from this exercise. A summary is below.

Main areas highlighted during consultation



People wanted to see a thriving economy in County Durham with more and better jobs for everyone.



Residents were rightly proud of the history and heritage of the county and its beautiful countryside. They felt that the county could be further developed as a place for tourists and residents to visit, stay and return to.



There is a strong sense of community spirit in County Durham. People wanted to build on this and ensure that people support each other within their own communities.



Everyone wanted County Durham to continue to be a great place to grow up. This involves making sure children are safe, healthy and have access to good education so that they are well placed to access jobs.



Local people highlighted the importance of people helping themselves and adopting healthy behaviours to keep themselves fitter for longer. Residents were also concerned about mental health problems in some communities.



Transport is a key issue across the county. It should support a thriving economy and ensure that our towns and villages are vibrant and well used.



People wanted to see a range of good quality housing that meets our future needs. The need for more affordable housing, including good quality rented accommodation and more specialist housing to suit the requirements of older and vulnerable people, was also highlighted.



There was a recognition amongst those consulted that the growth in online shopping in recent years is leading to store closures in our high streets and that this is a national problem. We need to think more innovatively around mixed uses for our high streets and town centres and initiatives to make them more vibrant and well used.

The symbols used here are reflected throughout this document and show how these priorities are being addressed.

More and better jobs

Our ambition is to continue with the economic renaissance of the county. By 2035, our aim is for County Durham to enjoy a thriving economy with more and better jobs, better employment opportunities for all and reduced levels of poverty and deprivation.

We will build on our existing portfolio of businesses specialising in leisure and tourism, green technologies, creative industries, financial services, pharmaceuticals and advanced engineering and technologies. We will support a low carbon economy, encouraging the use of low carbon technologies and renewable energy sources.

County Durham has some of the most beautiful countryside and coastal landscapes in Britain, a fascinating history, a wealth of attractions and regular events programme. Over the last 10 years, great strides have been made to improve our tourist economy. Our aim is to have County Durham recognised nationally and internationally as a leading centre for culture, with a range of experiences that match and exceed the best offered by England's premier destinations.

A number of our villages were developed around collieries and homes were built to house the population boom at the peak of coal production. These communities have suffered a decline following the demise of these industries.

We want to work with these communities to address the underlying causes of deprivation and socio-economic inequality.

Six specific objectives will help us to achieve more and better jobs across the whole county. These objectives have been developed following consultation with the public and our partners.



1.1 We will deliver a range of accessible employment sites across the county

New and expanded employment sites across the county which are accessible to our labour market will attract new employers, allow expansion of existing businesses and respond to the changing needs of the business sector. These sites will be located in areas of the county that offer good opportunities to attract investment, in line with the County Durham Plan (the spatial plan for the county).



1.2 We will have a strong, competitive economy and County Durham will be a premier place in the North East to do business

Our aim is to bridge the gap between the economic performance of County Durham, initially with that of other parts of the North East and following this, the rest of England. This will be achieved by creating and sustaining employment, improving productivity and competitiveness of our businesses. We will build on the growth over the last 10 years in green technologies, creative industries, financial services, pharmaceuticals and advanced engineering sectors. We will continue to work in partnership with the government to explore opportunities for more local control by devolving housing, transport and planning powers and funding. We will continue with the rollout of superfast broadband to stimulate growth in our economy and open up new economic sectors. Our plans will support rural growth whilst preserving the quality of what makes these areas distinctive.



1.3 We will broaden the experience for residents and visitors to the county

We will protect and enhance our core heritage and natural assets and provide a programme of cultural and sporting events to promote the whole county. We will support and enhance visitor accommodation, towns and villages and we will improve the quality of visitors' post-arrival experience by developing green, visitor-friendly transport options connecting the county's main visitor attractions.



1.4 Young people will have access to good quality education, training and employment

We will strive to ensure that children and young people achieve the best possible education and will pay particular attention to improving the educational attainment of vulnerable children and young people. We will reduce inequality in educational outcomes across the county and support young people to gain the necessary qualifications, skills and experience to progress into sustained employment.



1.5 We will focus our efforts on helping all people into rewarding work

We will increase the number of apprenticeship opportunities across the county, particularly within growth and labour intensive sectors. We will increase employment of young people, older people, vulnerable and disadvantaged people by creating and building pathways to help them into education, training and employment.



1.6 Fewer people will be affected by poverty and deprivation in the county

We will work to continue our economic renaissance in the county and help regenerate areas suffering high levels of deprivation. We will work with communities to help to tackle the impact of welfare reform and support individuals and families affected by these changes. We will also develop programmes of work to build stronger families and support workless households.

People will have long and independent lives

Good health is central to people's happiness and has a significant impact on the economy. Health is determined by several factors, many of which are not based on an individual's behaviour or choice but are a consequence of where they live, their environment, access to a good natural and built environment, high quality education and jobs, and a supportive network of friends and family.

Seven specific objectives will help support people to have long and independent lives. These objectives have been developed following consultation with the public and other interested parties.



2.1 Children and young people will enjoy the best possible start in life, good health and emotional wellbeing

Childhood is the springboard to a successful adulthood. It is the foundation on which our lives are built. We will provide the best support to expectant mothers, mothers of new born babies and older children, as well as high quality nursery and primary education. We will improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people and help children and their families achieve and maintain their optimum mental health and wellbeing.



2.2 Children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities will achieve the best possible outcomes

We will secure high-quality support to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families, and ensure that they are well prepared for adult life and can live independently.



2.3 We will create a physical environment that will contribute to good health

We will maximise the quality of our local environment and clean air with opportunities to be physically active and achieve a healthy weight. We will reduce our carbon emissions and mitigate against the impact of climate change on our residents and communities. We will encourage transport choices that are the most sustainable by improving the attractiveness of these modes of transport including cycling and walking for everyday journeys.



2.4 We will promote positive behaviours

We will create a smoke-free county for our residents. We would like our children to have a future free from harm due to drug and alcohol misuse.



2.5 We will tackle the stigma and discrimination of poor mental health and build resilient communities

County Durham will be a county where mental health is seen as equal to physical health and where discrimination relating to mental health issues is challenged. We will implement a programme called 'Mental Health at Scale' where we will tackle the stigma and discrimination of mental health focusing on young people, the workplace and the community to build more resilient communities and promote positive mental health.



2.6 Better integration of health and social care services

Our residents will be able to live independently for longer with support from a more integrated health and social care system. We will ensure that health underpins all public sector policies and plans so we can make better connections between health, employment, housing, education and community safety.



2.7 People will be supported to live independently for as long as possible by delivering more homes to meet the needs of older and disabled people

The number and proportion of older and disabled people is forecast to increase in the future. We will develop housing and care options specifically to meet the needs of the older and disabled people within our communities. This will include building appropriate types of housing. Where residential or nursing care is required, we will ensure that it is safe.

Connected communities

Our residents are rightly proud of their heritage and values. We want to have a caring and welcoming county where everyone is valued, where we can help each other and we support our vulnerable people. We want communities that give everyone the opportunity to realise their potential. We also recognise that communities are not just geographical. Social networks can be an important part of people's lives and be a force for good, reducing social isolation, providing a sense of belonging and playing a big role in building communities and catalysing neighbourhood cooperation and social action.

A range and choice of housing which is accessible, well designed and meets our future needs is key to the sustainability of our communities. This should include an appropriate level of affordable housing, a good standard of rented property and an increased range of new housing options. Our housing will be energy efficient for increased comfort and reduced running costs.

Many high streets across the country are facing a range of challenges including the growth of online retail and changes in consumer behaviour. High streets and town centres retain an important place in our society, but they need to adapt to ensure that they remain vibrant, safe and attractive social hubs that people want to use.

People also expect local travel to be convenient, with good quality direct links to major town centres, employment locations such as business parks and leisure opportunities. If we are to enjoy connected communities then they must be connected by an appropriate transport infrastructure.

Seven specific objectives have been developed to improve our communities in County Durham.



3.1 All children and young people will have a safe childhood

We will protect and support children and young people in need and make sure that they are safe. Social work practice and other support services to vulnerable children will be improved. We will provide excellent care for looked after children and care leavers and provide support to young offenders and young victims of crime.



3.2 Victims of crime will have access to the right level of support, with services available to address their needs

Victims of crime are often vulnerable people. Some suffer from poor mental health. Being a victim of a crime can also make you more vulnerable. All victims will be offered support to cope and recover from their ordeal at all stages and to engage in the justice system.



3.3 Standards will be maintained or improved across County Durham's housing stock

We will work with communities most affected by long-term empty properties, including owners and landlords to bring these homes back into use. An approach to selective licensing of private landlords will be developed to provide further powers to intervene where landlords are operating poor management practices and tenants are living in unsatisfactory conditions. The design of new development in rural areas will be sympathetic to the natural, built and historic environment and reflect local distinctiveness. More affordable low carbon homes will be delivered through a combination of housing for sale or rent, including housing that provides a subsidised route into home ownership. This issue is particularly acute in some of our rural areas.



3.4 Our towns and villages will be vibrant, well used, clean, attractive and safe

We will work together and take appropriate action to ensure that our town and village centres are well used for a range of purposes including retail, commercial, leisure, residential, cultural and service uses. Our towns and villages will be an attractive proposition to visit and spend time in. All generations will feel that they enjoy visiting them and will feel safe. Residents will be proud of the towns and villages that they live in and improvements will lead to a better quality of life.



3.5 People will have good access to workplaces, services, retail and leisure opportunities

We want a transport system that supports a thriving economy. People need access to employment in the region, places to shop and key services such as education, hospitals and leisure opportunities. Our transport network should be reliable, with buses and trains running on time and traffic congestion at a minimum. Large volumes of standing traffic in Durham City make it less attractive to visitors and residents and impact on air quality and health. We will consider further traffic interventions to boost our economy and to reduce congestion.



3.6 Communities will come together to accept and support each other

We will work together to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour adversely affecting our communities and to address the underlying causes of crime and community tensions. We will actively take steps to encourage community cohesion and mark specific events which encourage greater understanding of each other to promote good relationships. We want to work with communities to solve problems together and develop local solutions that will work.



3.7 We will deliver new high-quality housing which is accessible and meets the needs and aspirations of our residents

Our county needs to have housing with a range of house types and tenures which are in the right place and that meet the needs of all of our residents.

Delivery and next steps

This vision document will replace the current Sustainable Community Strategy for County Durham and will commence in 2019. A high-level action plan detailing the major changes that we want to make will be developed, together with a set of key performance indicators which will be used by the County Durham Partnership to monitor progress and measure success in achieving our vision.

We will deliver this vision together with our communities. We will operate to the following principles of working in order to improve the wellbeing of our residents:

- Solutions will be designed and produced together with service users.
- We will work with communities and support their development and empowerment.
- We will acknowledge the differing needs of our communities whilst acknowledging and building on their potential strengths.
- We will direct our activities where they can make the biggest difference to those who are most vulnerable and help to build resilience.
- We will tailor support to each individual's needs, ensuring they feel empowered and are not stigmatised.
- We will align our related strategies, policies and services to reduce duplication and ensure greater impact.