

# Introduction

Durham City, with its range of housing and employment, the quality of the environment and its unrivalled heritage is an attractive place to live, work and visit. It also has real economic potential. With strategic investment and sensitive planning, Durham can become one of the most important centres for economic growth in the north east. To help realise that potential, we have produced this Framework to outline the strategic context for how we see the city developing, the principles which should guide investment and the programmes of regeneration and investment activity which are underway or planned.

The Framework provides a strategic overview and narrative for Durham City to ensure we meet the needs of our communities and partners and maximise the city's economic potential. It also maps all significant current and future development to give an understanding of the synergies, phasing, relationship and physical linkages between them and how these could be improved to the benefit of the city and wider county.

# Strategic Context

The Vision for County Durham, set out by the County Durham Partnership, is that the county is a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive. It provides direction to key public, private and voluntary sector organisations 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 can help organisations work together.

The County Durham Plan reflects the Vision and seeks to ensure that County Durham is a successful place to live, work, invest and visit by focussing on supporting and creating vibrant communities by delivering:

- more and better jobs and sustained economic growth;
- a wide choice of high-quality homes that supports economic growth and meets the needs of all people
- a high quality built and enhanced natural environment; and
- the necessary supporting infrastructure including transport, health and educational needs.

The Plan identifies a high-quality office development at Aykley Heads which is supported by further opportunities at Belmont Industrial Estate, Abbey Woods and Dragonville. These sites will allow the city to continue its role as an important employment centre and a location of choice for the economy's growth sectors. A number of housing allocations and major new developments at Sniperley Park and Sherburn Road, will provide the high-quality housing and significant numbers of affordable housing that the county needs.

The Durham City Neighbourhood Plan includes a number of policies which are complementary to those of the County Durham Plan and provide a further level of detail to guide new development in the city.

The Council is currently preparing a County Durham Economic Strategy which will set out the future direction for growing the county's economy. This will focus on economy recovery and future growth identifying key sectors and institutions with an emphasis on place, investment and employment. This Framework reflects the priorities of this emerging work and will complement and support its future delivery.

Durham County Council on behalf of Culture Durham, a partnership of organisations backed by businesses and including Beamish Museum, Durham Cathedral, Durham University and Locomotion has recently launched a bid to be named UK City of Culture 2025. It is hoped that success will bring a significant increase in visitor numbers to the area and increased investment, with the opportunity to create and develop new economic and employment opportunities across the county and in particular in Durham City.

# Vision and Key Principles

The county wide Vision which applies equally to Durham City is for a place where there are more and better jobs, people live long and independent lives and our communities are well connected and supportive.

In support of the Vision this Framework identifies a number of key principles that will help guide the future development of Durham City:

- provide a sustainable and vibrant city centre with a focus on deliverability, creating key opportunities for change by removing constraints and promoting new development, redevelopment and refurbishment of land and premises;
- maintain a diverse pipeline of priority projects that are deliverable and reflect market demand, but which also ensure we are well placed to access future public sector funding opportunities;
- promote the diversification of the economy and employment growth, including increasing the size and diversity of the private sector, for Durham City's benefit and for that of the county as a whole;
- develop the tourism and leisure offer by investing in the city's established tourism assets in the short term and seeking to introduce new, family-orientated attractions and events in the future in order to increase dwell time and overnight stays;
- improve the cultural/leisure economy, including building on the reputation of the Castle and Cathedral World Heritage site;
- promote a growth in finance and the business services economy including supporting an enterprise culture;
- ensure that ambitious economic growth is sustainable including providing adequate and necessary infrastructure to facilitate such ambition;
- develop sustainable and efficient transport and digital infrastructure for the city including good-quality cycle and walking links and efficient and affordable public transport;
- secure the provision of high-quality residential neighbourhoods that are cohesive, sustainable and affordable;
- build upon our successful reputation for higher education, including facilitating the appropriate growth of Durham University and encouraging student retention including through supporting spin-off businesses and new start-ups;
- optimise the environmental, social and economic sustainability of Durham and through design and the implementation of green infrastructure and low carbon energy initiatives to adapt to and reduce the causes of climate change; and
- raise Durham's profile in order to stimulate further, appropriate investment activity, recognising and respecting fully the sensitive nature of the historic and natural environment.

# Opportunities

Durham City offers a number of opportunities and advantages that help attract investment:

- Durham City is a key settlement in County Durham, economically, socially and culturally. Durham City is the main employment centre for the county, accounting for around a quarter of the county's employment, providing access to employment and education, health and retail services for communities across the County;
- Durham City Centre is the county's main office location. The city centre and businesses parks within the town represent a distinct offer within the county. The Aykley Heads site forms a prominent, high profile, gateway site, within close proximity of Durham Railway Station.
- the City offers strong public transport and rail links, with Durham railway station on the East Coast Mainline with direct links to London, Edinburgh, Newcastle, Manchester and many other destinations and a new bus station, which together increase footfall in the city and provide access to large potential labour pools;
- Durham City is a key draw for visitors with its cultural, leisure and tourism offer including Durham Cathedral and Castle World Heritage Site;
- there has been significant investment in Durham City including the £30m redevelopment of The Riverwalk Shopping Centre including an improved retail offer, a multiplex cinema and associated leisure uses and new public realm opening up the riverside walkways. The £120m re-development of the former Milburngate House site to deliver mixed-use commercial, leisure and residential development will help to regenerate a historic part of the city;
- access to an outstanding historic and natural environment both within the city and nearby in the remainder of the county; and
- Durham University is a world class university which provides opportunities to link research and development with the business sector creating more and better jobs in County Durham supported by the developments at Aykley Heads and Milburngate.

# Challenges to Growth

Despite its numerous advantages, there are still some challenges to economic growth in the city that need to be overcome:

- the next few years are likely to be extremely challenging with the Covid19 pandemic compounding long term trends which are impacting on many sectors;
- with 43,000 residents, Durham City has a relatively small population compared with other 'historic' cities, such as York (174,000) and Lincoln (104,000). Furthermore, a substantial proportion of the population is comprised of students. Whilst the student population adds greatly to Durham life, it is by nature transient and creates some problems with the extent of city centre homes in multiple occupation. To address this, we need to deliver mixed communities including through some new housing;
- the city's employment profile is overly dependent upon public sector administrative functions reflecting the presence of major hospitals, police and council headquarters, which can make the city vulnerable to declining employment in this sector;
- although there has been some success in attracting occupiers such as Atom Bank, the private sector is under-represented in the city. This needs to be addressed by identifying sites for high-quality office space in and around the city such as Aykley Heads Business Park;
- within Durham City, the highway network currently experiences congestion and delay in the peak hour periods. This needs to be addressed by encouraging sustainable travel and high-quality digital infrastructure;
- the train station is located close to the city centre, but the topography provides an unattractive route to the centre which needs to be improved;
- the form of new development is influenced by the World Heritage Site and the conservation area, which can be challenging. Historic building footprints can be an issue for some potential occupiers. An innovative and flexible approach to design, recognising heritage principles, is needed to maximise opportunities for new occupiers;
- Durham City has a hilly topography which hampers movement and there is a risk of flooding posed by the River Wear in certain parts of the city;
- Durham City has relatively few major visitor attractions which limits how long visitors stay in the city and the number of overnight stays which are a significant benefit to the local economy. There is therefore a need to identify new opportunities for tourism development and visitor accommodation; and
- there are capacity issues on the East Coast Mainline (ECML) which could be partially relieved by reinstating the Leamside Line, which would increase the number of services as well as allowing this part of the ECML to be HS2 ready and support the vision for the Northern Powerhouse Rail network.

# Current and Future Projects

The Framework identifies a wide range of projects and initiatives that are already in place, planned or proposed. These include major projects and identified opportunities which have the potential to make a real difference to the city and achieve the desired levels of growth for the wider area including the redevelopment of Milburngate, a new business park at Aykley Heads, Durham University development and the new Cultural Hub at Millennium Place.

This Framework provides an understanding of timing and phasing of development across the city which will help identify synergies between emerging projects to maximise efficiencies around phasing and benefits of co-ordination. It also identifies future projects that provide opportunities for economic growth, improved connectivity (including between new developments) and enhance the city which can form the basis of a future pipeline of 'oven ready' projects.

# Funding Opportunities

County Durham needs significant external public sector funding to meet its objectives of increasing employment and employability to fully contribute to the National Industrial Strategy and the levelling up agenda set out by Government. However, we also need to ensure any funding is delivered in a way which meets the needs of County Durham residents and communities.

Because there will always be some uncertainty over how new funds will be made available, we need to progress development work in advance of formal funding announcements to allow a pipeline of proposals to be ready. The Durham City Framework will help identify projects to be included in the pipeline ready for them to be worked up in more detail when a funding opportunity arises.

The selection of suitable projects will obviously be influenced by the final guidance for new funds including devolution, levelling up fund and the shared prosperity fund, but it is important that we are prepared to act quickly, working with local partners, with processes to ensure only high-quality prioritised propositions are put forward. In order to successfully compete for new external funding to meet our economic objectives we must also dedicate sufficient resources to deliver the scale of new investment needed to attract the scale and nature of private sector investment required to create new and better jobs and increase productivity.

# Working with partners

The Council is currently engaged with a range of private sector developers and public sector partners in order to influence the pace and scale of development in Durham and to lever in maximum private sector investment, design quality and opportunity for residents. We have set out below a number of existing approaches we use across the county and in Durham City, but we are always keen to explore new and innovative ways to work with partners.

## Business Durham

Business Durham has the knowledge, experience and programmes to help businesses of any shape, size and age. Their support includes:

- helping to access funding, including Finance Durham, which is a £20m investment fund from the Council to help businesses in County Durham grow;
- helping to navigate regional and national innovation programmes and support;
- bringing together a network of partners, contacts and support to help local entrepreneurs turn their ideas into reality;
- using their extensive knowledge of the county to make connections and spot opportunities to catalyse business growth and success;
- providing innovation support to help attract inward investors;
- One-to-one business engagement – helping individual businesses spot opportunities to grow; and
- providing a range of programmes to meet the challenges business face including the Durham Business Opportunities Programme, the Durham Business Recovery Grant, the County Durham Growth Fund, Digital Drive County Durham and Durham Start-Ups.

More information on how Business Durham can help can be found here: [Business Durham](#)

## Durham BID

Durham City also has a Durham Business Improvement District (BID) which was established in October 2012. The Durham BID delivers around 50 events per year, including those such as Christmas InDurham and Fire & Ice InDurham. It also provides support to businesses. During the COVID-19 crisis, this has seen a considerable amount of information, advice and guidance disseminated to businesses, providing access to information and financial support where available. The Council is fully supportive of the BID and is a BID levy payer, holds two Board seats and is working as a partner to support emerging projects. More information on the Durham BID can be found here: [Durham BID](#)

## Local Communities

A number of groups representing sections of the community exist across the city including the Parish Council, the Area Action Partnership (including the Improving Our Villages and City Task Group), City of Durham Trust, the University's Community Engagement Task Force and local community partnerships such as St Nicholas' Community Partnership, Stockton Road Residents Group, Whinney Hill Residents Group, Crossgate Community Partnership. The Council will continue to engage with these groups and the wider community through traditional and modern methods to ensure their views are taken into account when progressing new development and initiatives.



## Durham University

Durham University makes a strong, positive contribution to the local, regional and UK economy, for example through direct investment, as a large employer, an extensive supply chain and staff and student spending. It produces high calibre graduates who in turn generate wealth. The University also participates in the Knowledge Transfer Partnerships, a UK wide initiative designed to enable businesses to access the knowledge and expertise available within UK Universities, and is a centre for research in its own right.

The Council recognises Durham University as a key partner in Durham City and the wider county and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University in 2017 (which is currently being refreshed). In it both organisations agreed to work together to raise the national and international profile of County Durham and Durham University with governments, businesses and others to attract talent, money and business and benefit local communities. It also commits both organisations to working together on the priority areas of economic development, research, culture and heritage and place, underpinned by communications.

In 2016 the University published a new strategy (to 2027) which identified the future size and shape of the University which will be needed to support their vision of 'world-leading in research, education and the wider student experience'. To enable this new Strategy the University also prepared an Estate Masterplan. This document provides a guide to how the University could develop its estate over the long-term. University projects including those relating to the University's Strategy and Estate Masterplan are included within this Framework and include plans for new academic buildings and student accommodation. There may also be the opportunity for University involvement in other projects, for example at Aykley Heads.

Durham University is one of the country's leading institutions, attracting the highest calibre of students. The University is committed to increasing both the number of students from the county and the graduates retained in the area. Working with the University provides a major opportunity and is a priority for improving the county's economy by providing adequate and appropriate space to facilitate investment related to the work and research of the University and the conditions in which graduates want and have the opportunity to stay within the county.

# Opportunities for branding and marketing

The Council and its partners are always exploring opportunities for branding and marketing Durham City and County Durham at an international, national, regional and local level in order to maximise exposure for the area and attract investment.

Powered by People is an initiative which focusses on the strength, creativity and resilience of the people of Durham and how that is good for business. It allows us to harness the enthusiasm, network and expertise of those companies that are already located and gives them the opportunity to tell the rest of the world what we have to offer. This campaign has been used widely, including on the London Underground, to encourage investment in the city and the county.

The UK City of Culture 2025 bid will also put Durham on the map and emphasise our successes and unique offer to those who may not be aware of the advantage Durham City and the county have for new investors. This will be even more effective if we were to be successful.

Durham Place of Light focusses on Durham and Durham City as inspiring places, where light connects science, art and technology to business, tourism and the beauty of our breathtaking landscapes.

Visit County Durham works closely with VisitEngland and a wide range of public and private sector partners and tourism businesses, both in Durham and across England, to grow the county's visitor economy. They also coordinate the promotion of the county nationally and internationally as a great place to live, work, visit, study and invest. We perform the roles of destination management, destination marketing and place marketing.