

# **Appendix 5**

## **IES Econ-versation Feedback Report**



County Durham  
**Inclusive Economic Strategy**  
Feedback Report for the Big Econ-versation



Introduction

Surveys

Residents  
survey

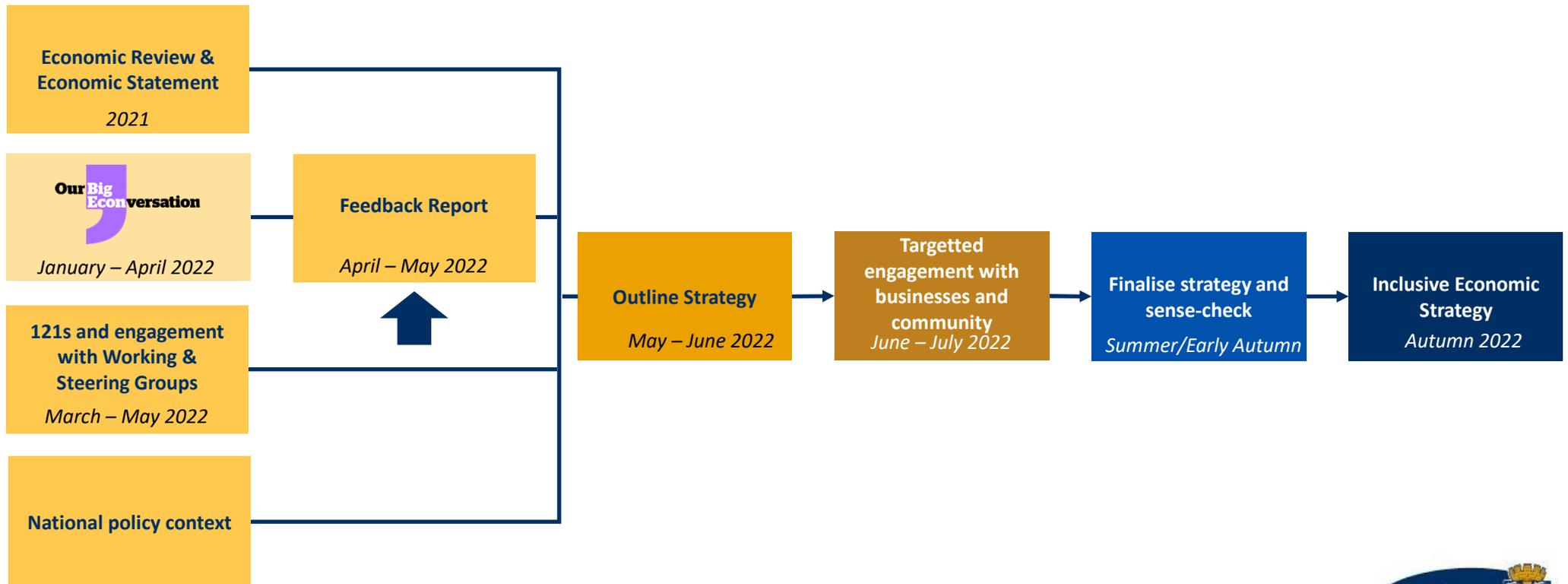
Business  
survey

Young people  
survey

Conversations

What does  
this tell us

# Overall process



# Big Econ-versation process to date



- Engaged Gardiner Richardson to lead Big Econ-versation campaign
- Designed survey and developed stakeholder engagement plan

- 3 surveys: residents, business & young people
- From 31<sup>st</sup> January to 22<sup>nd</sup> April
- Widely publicised and available online and offline

- Conversations with businesses, partnership, anchor institutions and partners, and community groups and residents
- Included meetings & events, presentations with Q&A, and workshops

- Analysed survey results
- Developed qualitative insights from free text answers and feedback from the conversations

- Brought this together into the Feedback Report – a key input to the County Durham Inclusive Economic Strategy

# Summary of the Big Econ-versation



1,455 surveys  
completed



70 organisations  
and over 1,500  
people engaged  
through conversations



86 conversations



Business, partnerships, anchor  
institutions & partners,  
community groups & residents &  
DCC staff engaged



Promoted via web,  
social media, bus &  
radio



Inclusive – diverse  
representation and  
online/offline reach

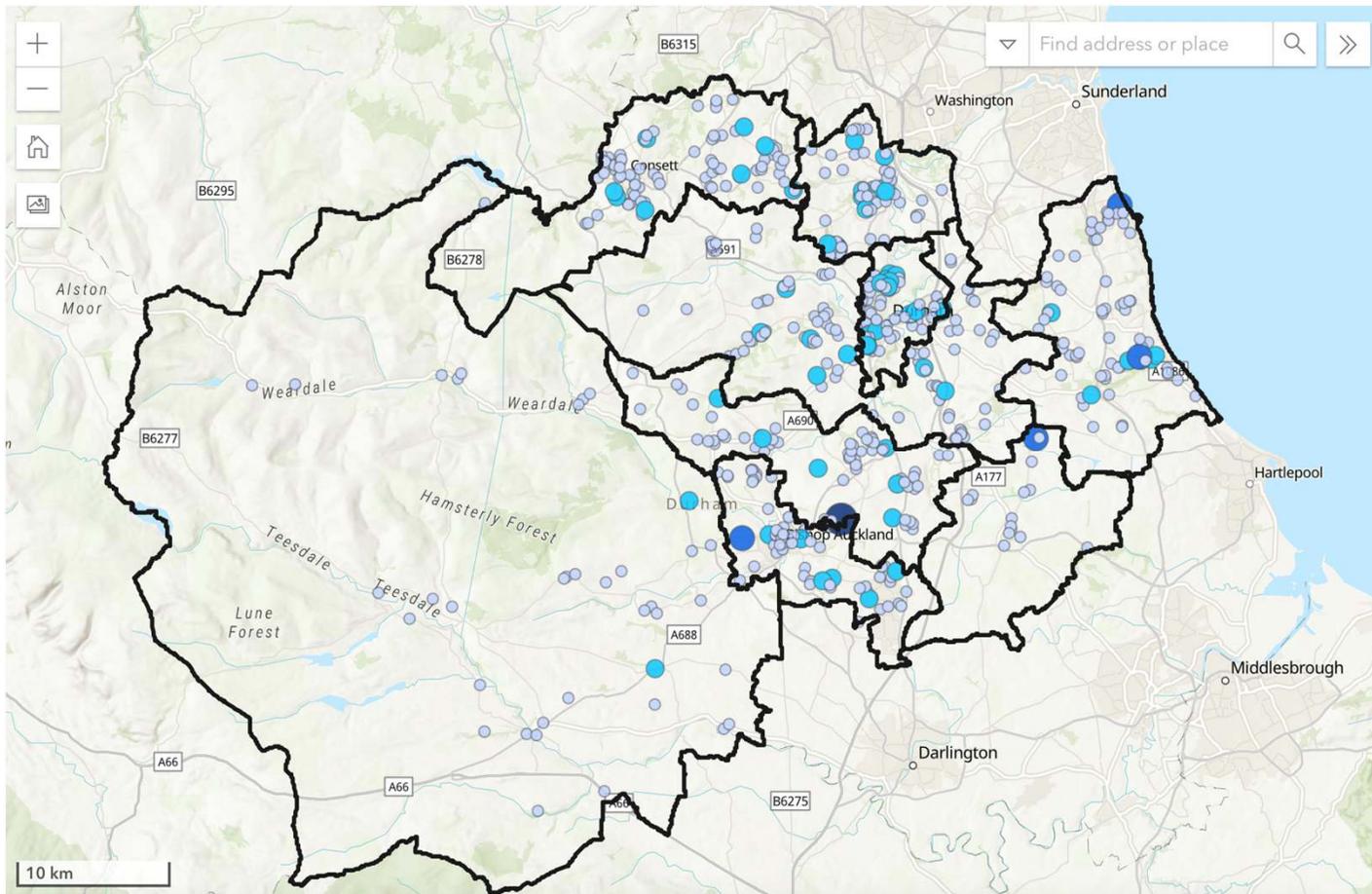
**Our Big  
Econ** **Conversation**

# Surveys

# Approach to surveys

- There were 3 surveys as part of the Big Econ-versation:
  - **Residents** – covering education, training and jobs; transport and digital connectivity; place, town centres and communities; tourism; environment and climate change; and services
  - **Businesses** – motivations for basing a business in the county; advantages, challenges and barriers in the county; opportunities for growth; and climate change
  - **Young people** – understanding their future plans and ambitions; jobs and business ideas; values; and barriers to work

# Map of respondents



# Our Big Econversation

Residents survey

# Overview



## 918

residents  
responded

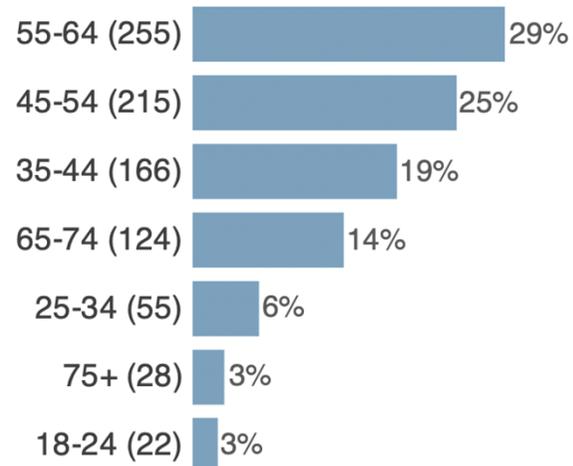


**63% Female**  
**36% Male**  
**1% Non-binary/other**

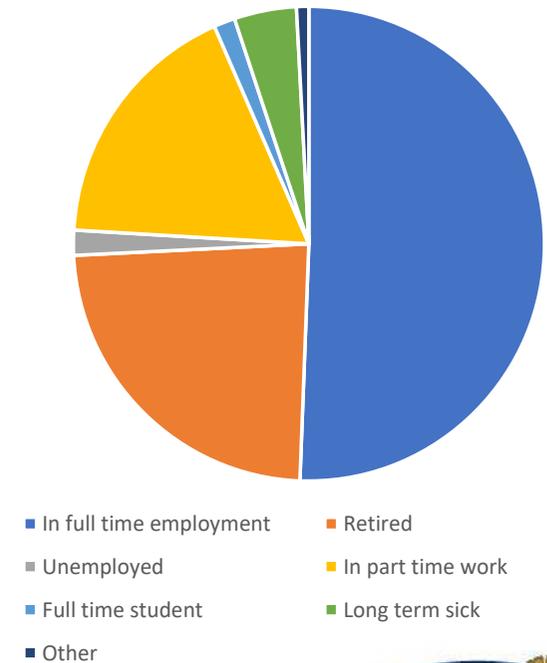


**20% of respondents  
identified as disabled**

## The majority of respondents were aged over 45



## Most respondents were in full time employment

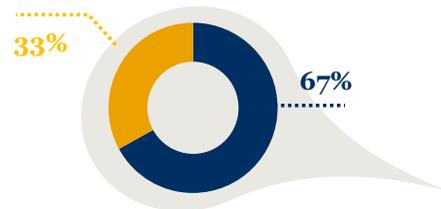


# Summary

“Most people I know travel large distances to their place of work or study, often in other counties.”

“There are not enough well-paying, high skilled jobs so many people commute for work or leave.”

“There has been a historic lack of investment in the area compared to other parts of the country.”



**1 in 3 respondents have faced barriers to good skills training, jobs & career progression**

**Approx. one quarter of disabled respondents work full-time, compared to over half of non-disabled respondents**



## More good quality jobs

is a major priority. Skilled people are leaving or commuting outside the county. Good quality jobs in the county are often inaccessible to local people.



## Public transport

is a major priority. The main barrier to economic opportunities especially for rural communities.

# Quality of education, training and jobs

The survey asked about access to good quality education, training, jobs and career development in County Durham. 6 in 10 residents agreed or strongly agreed that they had access to good quality schools and education facilities.

Residents were mixed about whether they have access to:

	Agree or strongly agree	Disagree or strongly disagree
A variety of good jobs	36%	36%
Good training & apprenticeships	34%	28%
Good opportunities for career advancement	37%	29%

**Asked for comment on the reason for their response, residents said:**

**“There’s not enough good public transport links to get to training and skills centres.”**

**“There are too few good jobs available. Skilled people have to commute to County Durham or outside of the County.”**

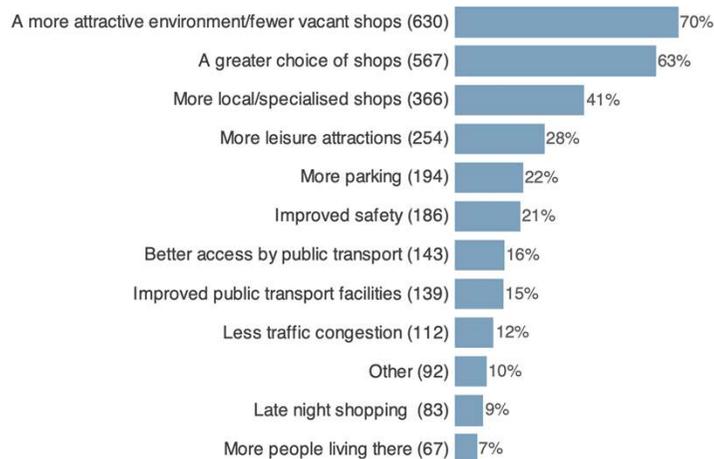
**“Re-training options for the older generation are poor, and for career development opportunities there are not enough day time courses.”**

**“There’s been little investment in the area for years, town centres and business are failing.”**

# Improving town centres, leisure and retail

*When asked what they felt was most important to improve town centres, 70% of residents reported a more attractive environment and fewer vacant shops; 63% said a greater choice of shops and 41% said more local and specialist shops.*

**Which THREE of the following do you feel are most important to improve the town centre that you visit the most?**



- Many residents said they would like to see **investment in town centres and high streets**.
- They also said **more events** would improve the local leisure and recreational offer.
- Many residents said they would like to see **investment in public transport and active travel** to improve connectivity around the county
- Increased **parking facilities** was also noted as a way to improve town centre accessibility

# Future priorities

Residents were asked to rate their priorities for the future across a range of areas.

The following 3 areas came out as top priorities for the future, with over 90% of respondents rating them as either important or very important:

- Improving town centres
- Training the workforce
- Supporting an ageing population

Important or very important

Improving town centres	93%
Training the workforce	91%
Supporting an ageing population	90%
Improving public transport	86%
Retaining young people	85%
Attracting higher paying jobs	83%
Improving digital infrastructure/broadband	82%
Encouraging entrepreneurship	78%
Focusing on the green economy/Climate Change	76%
Increasing & improving tourism offer	70%
Recovering from COVID-19	69%
Building new homes	46%

# Climate change

Almost half of residents rated focusing on the green economy and climate change as very important. The top 3 areas seen as important or very important for reducing climate change were: housing energy efficiency; reuse, recycling and compost; and businesses using local suppliers. Some saw the green economy as an opportunity, but others said they wanted a measured approach that protected jobs and other priorities. Increased use of electric cars and more working from home were areas where residents were less keen to make changes to their everyday lives.

	Important or very important
Making housing energy efficiency	92%
Reuse, recycling, and composting	91%
Businesses using local suppliers	91%
Maximising use of renewable energy	89%
Minimising energy use/reducing pollution	87%
Improving public transport and increasing public transport use	83%
Reducing commuting distance for workers	71%
Increased use of electric vehicles where possible	59%
Encouraging more working from home	57%

**"We need to lead the way in renewable energy infrastructure, EV charging points, heat pumps in homes, insulation, better public transport including more train services."**

**"We need more green jobs and must retrain those in carbon-heavy industries. Change is needed but not at the cost of people's livelihoods."**

**"Eco changes are vital. Schools need to lead the way in raising awareness and teaching environmental responsibility."**

# Our Big Econversation

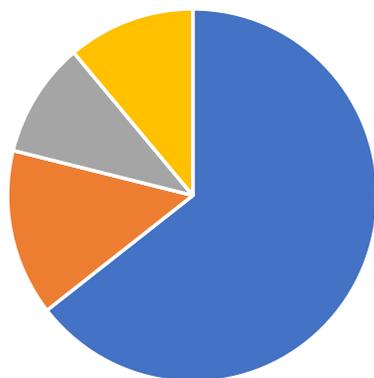
Business survey

# Overview

## 94

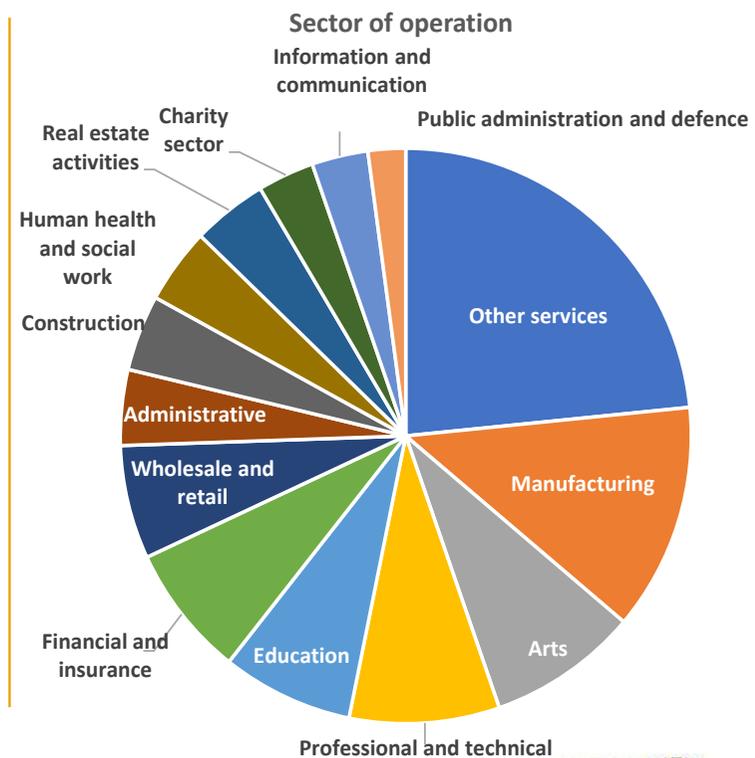
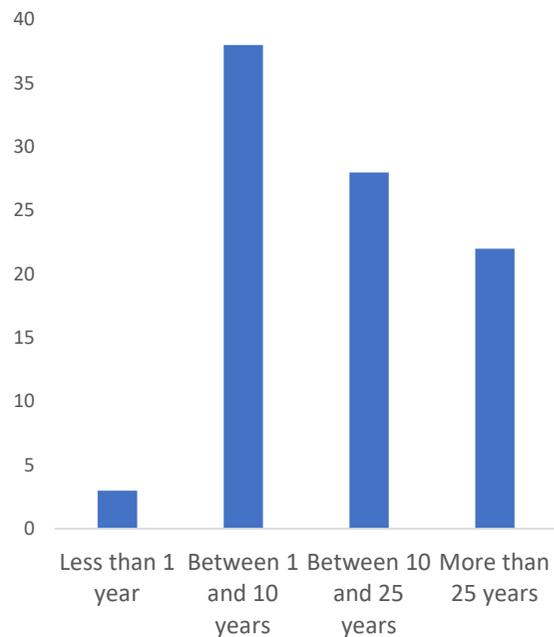
businesses  
responded

Number of employees



- Less than 10
- 10 to 49
- 50 to 249
- 250+

Length of business operation



# Summary

**“My business is in County Durham because I am proud of where I live. ”**

- Small education sector business

**“We have a good network and infrastructure for supporting businesses here.”**

- Large services business

## Raising capital

Was the rates as the biggest challenge faced by start ups

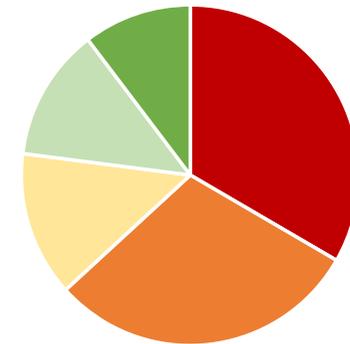
## A skilled workforce

Was viewed as the best way to improve productivity

## Skills, digital & transport infrastructure

Was seen as the key to economic growth

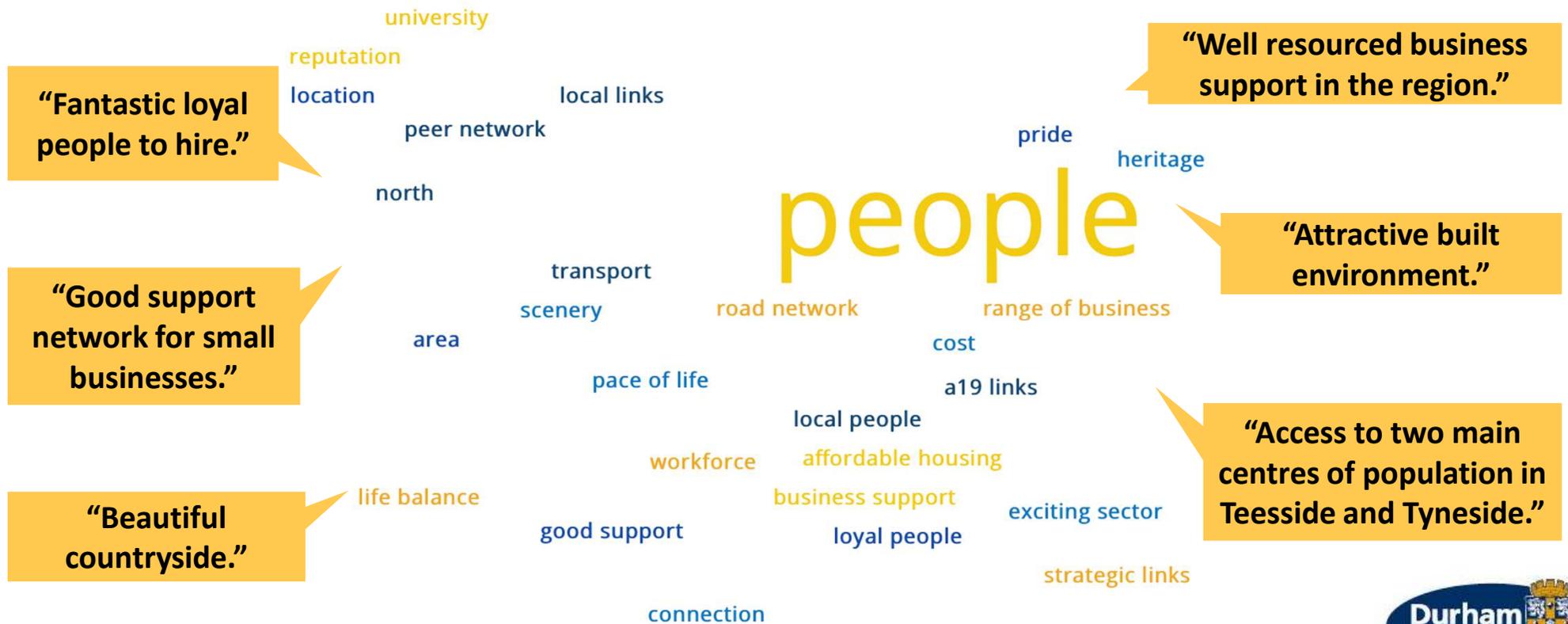
**One third** of businesses surveyed said that Covid-19 has had a major negative impact on the county



■ Major negative impact
 ■ Minor negative impact  
■ Little or no impact
 ■ Minor positive impact  
■ Major positive impact

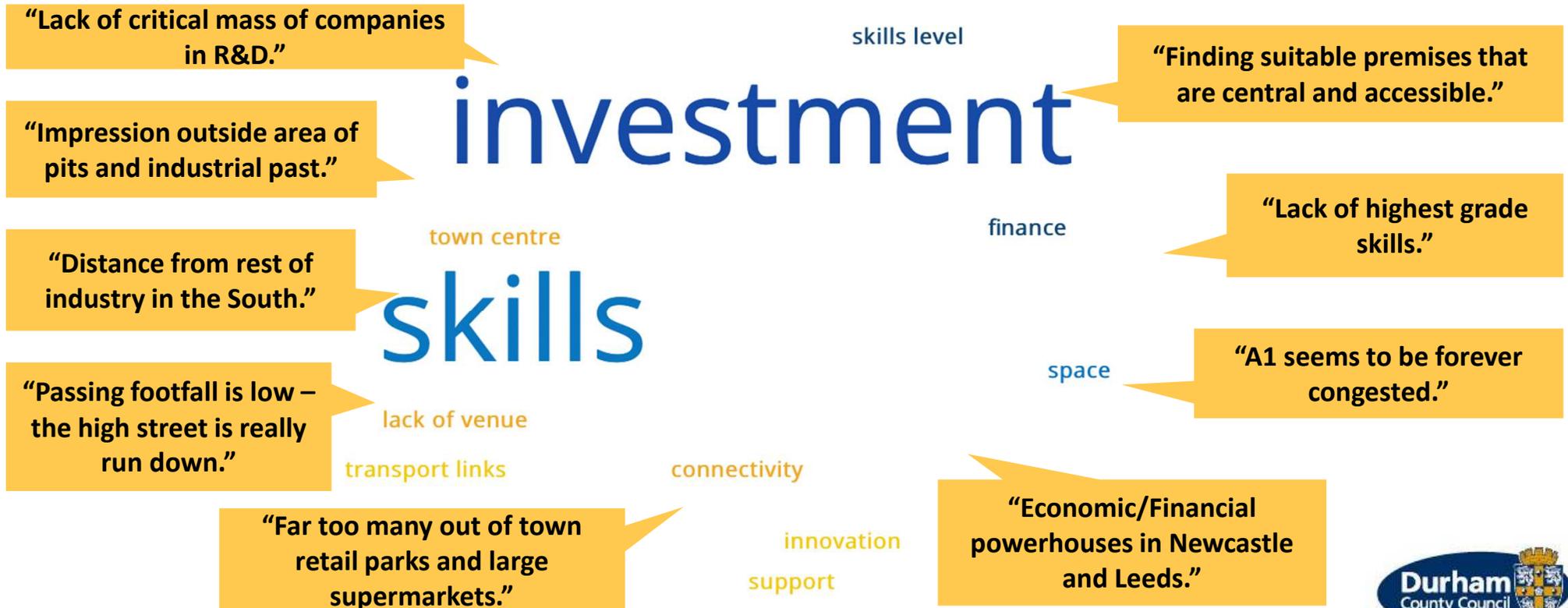
# Advantages of being in County Durham

When asked about the advantages of being in the county, businesses highlighted local people, quality of life, good business support and networks, and the transport links and location.



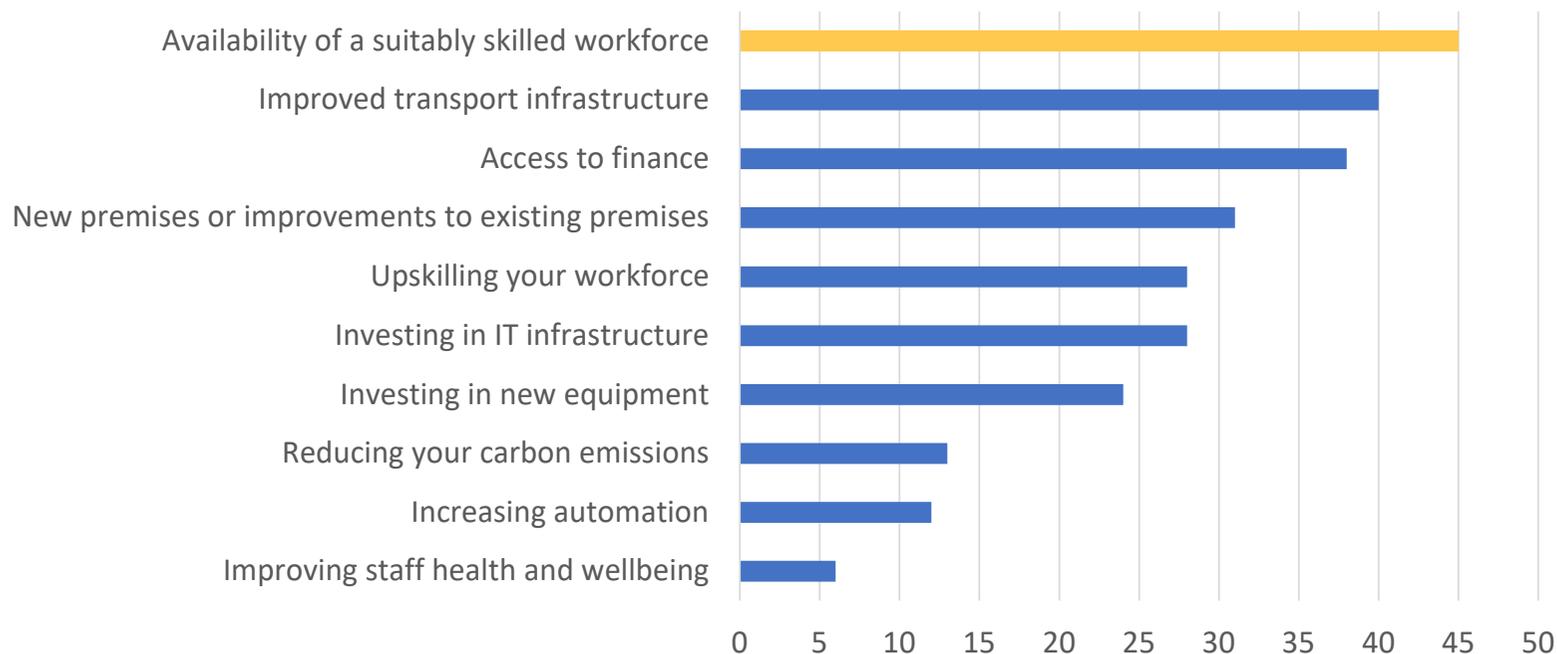
# Challenges of being in County Durham

One of the main challenges identified by businesses was investment, particularly accessing growth finance and support for staff skills training. Other businesses mentioned skills shortages, employment space, perceptions of the county, low innovation, and deprivation and town centre decline.



# Improving productivity

Businesses were asked what would improve the productivity of their workforce: 45% highlighted the availability of a suitably skilled workforce, 40% identified transport and 38% chose access to finance. Of the 21% that selected 'other', some respondents referred to business support and networking, and access to employment sites and land.



Data reported is from question 9 of the Business Survey.

# Future growth sectors

Many businesses see manufacturing as a future growth sector for the economy, highlighting green, renewables and electric vehicles. Tourism also featured, as well as financial services and digital.

**“Green engineering and manufacturing services.”**

- Large financial services business

**“There is substantial expertise in biotech and health in our universities.”**

- Small technical and scientific business

**“Health – this region has numerous examples of companies pulling together through the pandemic.”**

- Small manufacturing business

production  
battery e.v  
green manufacturing  
technology & space  
aerospace & defence  
digital tech  
tourism financial services  
visitors economy  
energy  
engineering renewables

# Opportunities for growth

The environment and green economy are seen as major opportunities for growth. Businesses also highlighted the importance of business support and networks, particularly for small businesses.

**“We hope that an environmental focus will encourage people to shop locally.”**

- Small retail business

**“The opportunities in skilled manufacture for the green economy are enormous.”**

- Small technical and scientific business

**“There is huge scope to grow supporting government initiatives and employer need.”**

- Large education sector business

Growth

**“Support networking and put me in contact with people who can support my business.”**

- Small services business

**“Understand spinouts and high-tech businesses – give them a hand to get going!”**

- Small technical and scientific business

**“Support tech training in colleges and create start-up tech culture.”**

- Small information and communication business

# Our Big Econversation

Young people survey

# Overview



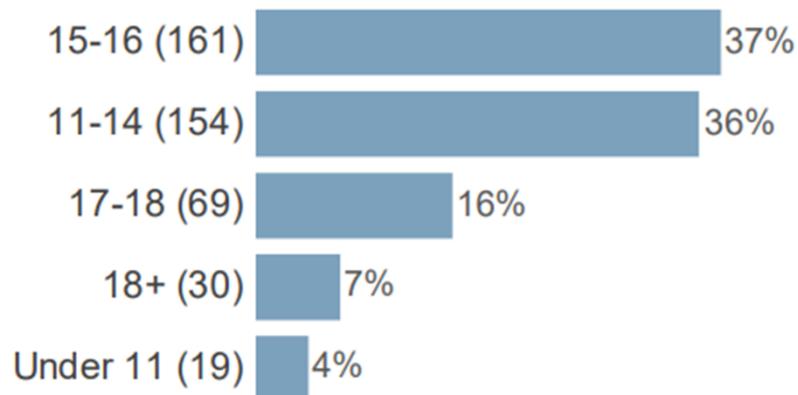
## 443

young people  
responded

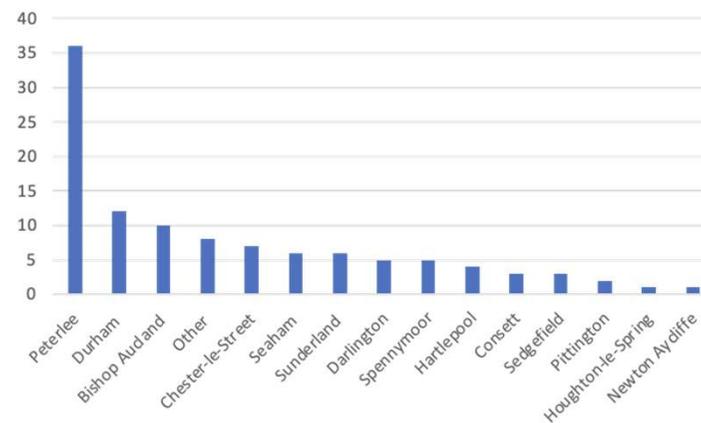


49% Female  
45% Male  
6% non-binary or other

The majority of respondents were aged between 11 and 16:



Most respondents lived near larger towns



# Summary

"I'd like to go to a University outside of the County as I would like to study something vocational & the University here is very academic."

"I don't know where I want to live; it will depend on work opportunities but I'd like to stay in Durham near my family and friends."

"Being happy and inspiring others are the most important things about work"

## Go to university

The most common aspiration for young people post-school/six form

**c. 57%**

of those who plan to go to a university, said they would go to one outside of the county

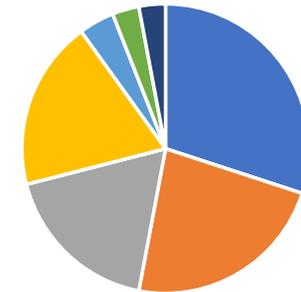
**54%**

said they could not or are unsure they could pursue their chosen career or business idea in the county

**67%**

said 'doing something interesting' mattered more than pay or location when choosing a career

What support young people would like to help them pursue their chosen career or business idea...



- More employment opportunities
- Wider choice of education/training courses
- More market leading employers
- More work experience/apprenticeship opportunities
- More equal opportunities
- Other
- Don't know

# Next steps after full-time education

Young people were asked about their plans after leaving full-time education:

- Almost one third of young people surveyed wanted to go to university
- Almost a quarter thought they would do an apprenticeship
- About one in five thought they would go into full-time employment

Of those that ticked 'Other', many respondents said 'College', reflecting the younger age of some respondents with 37% aged 15-16 years and 36% aged 11-14.

	% of respondents
University	32%
Don't know	25%
Apprenticeship	23%
Full time employment	21%
Travel	10%
Other	6%

# Future jobs and business ideas

Young people were asked about their future plans. They provided a wide range of jobs and business ideas, including teaching, working in public services, construction, law and the creative sector. However, the response to whether they thought they could get this job or start this business in County Durham was mixed, with 43% unsure. In response to what young people felt is needed in County Durham to help them get a job or start a business idea, suggestions included:



A **wider choice** of courses and opportunities to speak to entrepreneurs.



**Better awareness** around available opportunities in the county, work experience and apprenticeships through advertisements and job events.



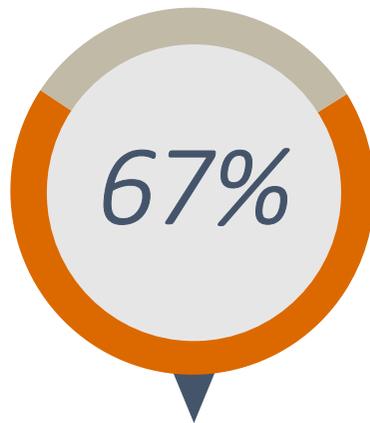
More **support** for girls and LGBTQ+ people, particularly in the science industries.



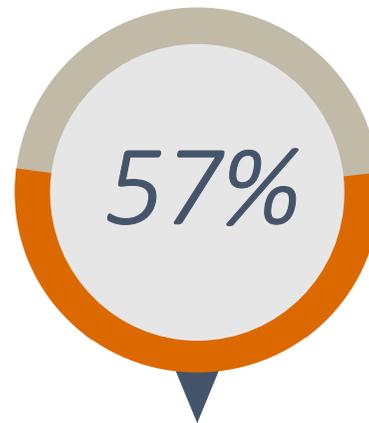
Better connections to **large, international companies**, and attracting them to locate in the county.

# Motivations for choosing a career

Young people were asked which aspect of work were most important to them when considering a job.



*Doing something  
interesting*



*Money you earn*



*Location and transport  
issues*

Others were motivated by job quality and culture, suggesting that **'being treated equally'** and **'enjoying what you do'** were the most important things in work.

# Barriers to work

When asked what barriers to work young people face after leaving school/college or training, the most common response was a lack of experience.

	% of respondents
Lack of experience	41%
Lack of local jobs	28%
Physical or mental health	27%
Too much competition for jobs	26%
Lack of qualifications	26%

Young people highlighted:

- The need for **better awareness of work experience** and apprenticeships
- More **collaboration** between businesses and education providers

This will ensure young people know what paths are available for them and can become work ready.



# Conversations



# Overview

## 86

conversations

with

## 70

organisations engaged

(Business: 21,

Partnerships: 14, Anchor

institutions & partners:

15; Community groups &

residents: 20)

And over

## 1,500

people engaged in total

## County-wide and regional organisations

### Business

Start Up Providers Network  
Visit County Durham Board  
North East Federation of Small Businesses  
North East England Chamber of Commerce  
North East LEP  
Engineering & Manufacturing Network  
House Builders Federation  
Business Durham Network

### Partnerships

Health & Wellbeing Board  
Resilient Communities Group  
Place, Health & Communities Board  
Housing Forum  
County Durham Together Partnership  
County Durham Economic Partnership Board  
Poverty Action Steering Group  
Climate Emergency Board

Net Zero Carbon Board

LA7

County Durham Association of Local Councils

### Anchor institutions & partners

Durham County Council Members and officers  
County Durham & Darlington NHS Foundation Trust  
Tees, Esk & Wear Valley NHS Foundation Trust  
Bernicia  
Believe Housing  
DAHMA  
Livin  
Karbon Homes  
North Star Housing

### Community groups & residents

Voluntary & Community Sector Group  
Community Champions  
Digital Durham Board

# Tackling poverty and levelling up

## **A complex, multifaceted challenge**

- It was widely recognised that deprivation has a wide range of causes. However, there was a view that efforts to date have focused more on addressing the consequences of poverty rather than its causes.
- Many noted that there are economic disparities within as well as between communities in the county. Investment is needed in smaller towns and villages.
- The cost of living crisis will make the task of levelling up the county even more difficult.

## **A long-term, holistic approach is needed**

- Need to build the economic resilience of the county so it can better withstand future crises and tackle the root causes of poverty.
- The economic strategy needs to go beyond a focus on business and jobs and include actions that focus on skills, health, housing, connectivity, and community wealth building.
- In order to level up we need to focus on improving digital connectivity and skills levels, the health, education and skills levels of the local population, public transport connectivity and the quality of housing and affordability.

# Creating better jobs

## County Durham needs more and better jobs

- Concerns around low-paid and insecure work and the impact of these on deprivation and mental health.
- Creating more well-paid and secure jobs seen as crucial to increasing local employment, life chances, wealth, the retention and attraction of talent, inward investment and overall growth.

## High value industry

- County Durham needs to build on its existing strengths in high value industries, including manufacturing, energy, digital, financial and business services, and supporting business and jobs growth.
- Supply chain support and investment in innovation and automation is required to grow the manufacturing sector.
- More innovation and business scale up programmes with neighbouring areas – Yorkshire and the Scottish borders – to support the growth of high value sectors.

# Improving skills provision for all

## **A more flexible skills and training offer**

- There was a sense that employers are not willing to employ older residents, and many noted the need for more upskilling opportunities for those already in employment and older residents.
- More support is required to raise the aspiration of younger residents and for them to have suitable experience for work.
- There should be a greater focus on building digital and transferrable skills to keep options open in a changing job market.

## **A tailored offer for vulnerable groups**

- Concerns around equality of opportunity, especially for those from more deprived backgrounds and vulnerable groups.
- There should be a tailored offer for vulnerable groups, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, and the long-term unemployed.

# Supporting businesses to thrive and grow

## **An unstable economic context, creating challenges for local businesses**

- Businesses are experiencing challenges around recruitment with fewer people applying for jobs, and regulatory changes caused by leaving the EU.
- Low business start up rates in the county due to a limited skills pipeline and lack of suitable employment space.
- The cost of living crisis is impacting businesses as well as residents, with rising overheads and contracted profits, especially in some sectors such as tourism.

## **Businesses need both short-term and longer-term support**

- Support is required to help businesses through the cost of living crisis and navigate the impacts of Brexit.
- Focus on retaining graduates, attracting talent into the county and encouraging previous residents to relocate or invest in the county.
- High quality office and industrial space with improved connectivity to key employment sites to attract workers and maximise supply chain opportunities.
- Ensuring investment benefits local businesses, for instance by creating supply chain opportunities.

# Reviving town centres and neighbourhoods

## Concerns around town centre decline in most towns and villages

- Consultees referred to diminishing footfall, vacant units, a low quality retail and leisure offer
- Acknowledgement of the significant investment in town centres, but felt that little had changed.
- Young people highlighted that more could be done to make a range of environmental improvements in their areas such as reducing pollution, litter and dog fouling, and creating better parks and public spaces.

## Reimagining and repurposing town centres

- A broader offer is needed with a mix of services, local shops and bigger employers, as well as a daytime and night-time offer. Many respondents mentioned the need for more events, markets and festivals.
- There was interest in repurposing empty units via 'pop-up' use schemes and more flexible tenancies, and for mixed use.
- Financial support is needed for local businesses that are interested in relocating to town centres.
- To bring people back into town centres, some consultees spoke about centres being more accessible through increased transport links and more parking.

# Improving transport and digital connectivity

## Poor connectivity creates barriers to accessing opportunities

- Poor transport links were reported in many parts of the county, especially rural areas, with infrequent, unreliable and costly services.
- There are concerns that poor transport is affecting the skills and employment prospects of younger residents, especially in rural areas, and contributing to town centre decline.
- Home-working creates opportunities for people to work in the county but this requires upgraded digital infrastructure and consistent provision across the country.

## A focus on public transport and improved digital connectivity

- Consultees prioritised more transport links to employment centres and town and village centres.
- People were open to embracing greener transport through more and better public transport links, and active travel schemes.
- Rollout of 5G and superfast broadband to all parts of the county was seen as key to support businesses and innovation.

# Promoting the county

## Challenges around retaining local talent and businesses

- County Durham has lots to offer but is currently underselling itself in terms of both inward migration and investment.
- It struggles to retain local talent and attract highly skilled migrants, which affect local growth and wealth building.
- Business start-up rates and survival rates are low.
- Cultural and positive perception of place were seen as important to creating an attractive lifestyle offer to attract new residents to the region.

## Promoting County Durham

- County Durham has a beautiful natural environment, diverse mix of city, towns, countryside and coast, a positive quality of life, and strong cultural and heritage offer. These should be selling points of the county.
- Important to promote and grow key sectors, especially in manufacturing and renewables, to attract investment and talent.
- The county's strong tourism offer, culture and heritage provide opportunities to increase the numbers of visitors and create related opportunities for businesses.

**Our Big  
Econ** **Conversation**

What does this tell us

# Lessons for the Inclusive Economic Strategy

- Residents, businesses and stakeholders were proud of County Durham for its beautiful natural landscapes, culture, heritage, people, innovative businesses and sectors, and saw many opportunities for county, including net zero, manufacturing, knowledge intensive sectors, and tourism.
- But many spoke of inequalities in the county with higher levels of deprivation and crime, declining town centres, and a lack of opportunity in some areas. Many also voiced concerns over the availability of good jobs and the ability for local people to access these, whether due to poor public transport or not having the right skills and work experience.
- This indicates that potential areas of focus for the Inclusive Economic Strategy include:
  - Supporting business growth and job creation, particularly in opportunity sectors
  - Improving public transport and access to facilities
  - Developing a lifelong learning offer for residents
  - Improving the health of residents and workers
  - Promoting County Durham
  - Building on recent investments to regenerate and reimagine town centres
  - Transitioning to net zero through a just, flexible and innovative approach that creates new jobs and safeguards existing ones