

County Durham  
**Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities  
Paper**

Feedback Report for the Housing Conversation  
October 2023



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# Introduction



# Introduction

- This Feedback Report is an overarching summary of the findings and messages from the comprehensive engagement carried out through the Housing Conversation as an input to the County Durham Housing Strategy
- It includes analysis of the findings from the three surveys (residents, young people and industry) and insights from the conversations (meetings and events, presentations with Q&A, and workshops)
- It includes a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis with facts and figures, diagrams, charts, tables and text
- It sets out the process, summary of the engagement, and key messages and areas of focus. The following sections then summarise the findings of the Housing Conversation with detailed sections for the residents, young people and industry surveys and the key themes from the consultation events. Finally, it sets out what this means for the Strategy

# Timescales and next steps



# Housing Conversation

# The Housing Conversation

## Webpage statistics

- Page Views – 1039
- Unique Page Views – 789
- Average time on the page 253.72
- Entrance to page – 551
- Bounce rate – 42.06%
- % Exit – 66.22%

## Twitter

- Number of tweets: 22
- Total impressions: 23,102
- Total engagement: 205 (70 link clicks)

## Facebook Ad

- FB advert started 28 July
- Total reach: 22,248
- Total engagement: 953 (859 link clicks)

## Facebook

- Number of posts: 6
- Total reach: 16,924
- Total engagement: 166 (51 link clicks)

## Surveys Returned

- Residents: 368
- Young People: 257
- Industry: 15

## Internal Promotion

- Intranet News item 7 Aug
- Buzz weekly 11 Aug

## Facebook/Instagram stories

- Total reach on FB stories: 8099
- Total reach on Insta stories: 3471

## Events

- 13 AAPs Attended
- 9 Partnerships Attended
- 2 Online Events
- Rural Housing Event
- Scrutiny Workshop
- CDALC

# Main messages

- Overwhelming support for the vision, principles and priorities
- Concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime is illustrated by 34% of respondents to the resident survey disagreeing that they thought that their area was safe
- Support for the delivery of homes to meet needs, including homes for older people, families and affordable homes
- The importance of adaptation of houses to meet changing needs over a lifetime illustrated by 1 in 3 respondents to the residents survey stating that they did not think their home would meet their needs in the future
- Energy efficiency improvements to the existing housing stock and high standards in new housing that both help the environment and reduce bills was seen as very important shown by 91% of respondents to the resident survey stating that they wanted to live in an energy efficient house in the future
- Financial pressures were clearly expressed, for example 27% of respondents disagreed that they thought they would be able to afford to keep their home warm in the future
- Concerns raised about the impact of concentrations of private rented properties, which can be associated with anti-social behaviour, empty homes and absent landlords



# Main messages (cont..)

- Support for regulation of landlords, including through selective licensing, but also an ask for more recognition of good landlords
- Local schemes to improve our towns and villages was recognised as an important future priority
- Whilst recognising that meeting the needs of all groups is important the impact of student housing on mixed and balanced communities was raised by many respondents
- Recognition of the rising issue of homelessness in the county expressed by 1 in 10 young people agreeing that they or their family was homeless or at risk of homelessness
- 48% of those with a disability disagreed that their home allowed them to live independently
- Importance of bringing empty homes back into use but also recognition that some properties are beyond their useful life and demolition may be appropriate
- Agreement that good quality housing is a significant factor in supporting health and wellbeing outcomes
- A recognition that new housing needs to be provided alongside sufficient infrastructure to accommodate the impact of the development including schools, doctors, parking etc.

# Surveys

# Residents survey

# Overview of Respondents



**368**

residents  
responded

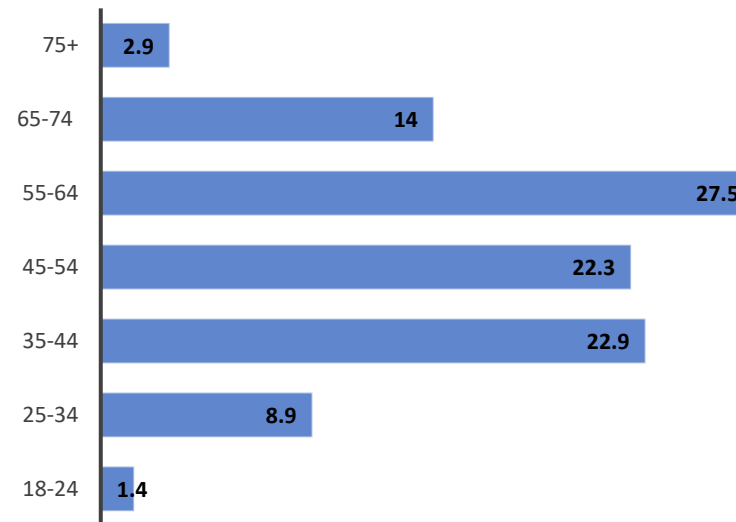


**70% Female**  
**28% Male**  
**2% Non-binary/other**

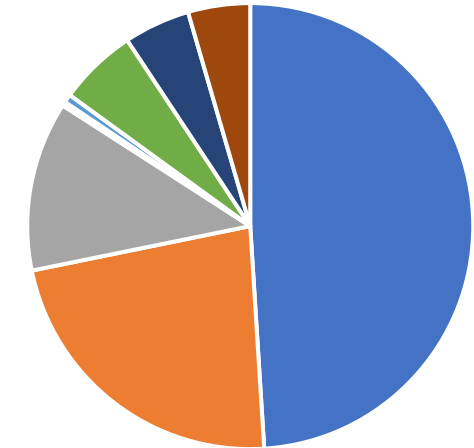


**22% of  
respondents  
identified as  
disabled**

**The majority of respondents were  
aged over 45**



**Most respondents were in full  
time employment**



- In full time employment
- Retired
- In part time work
- Unemployed
- Full time student
- Self Employed
- Long term sick
- Other

# Housing Condition

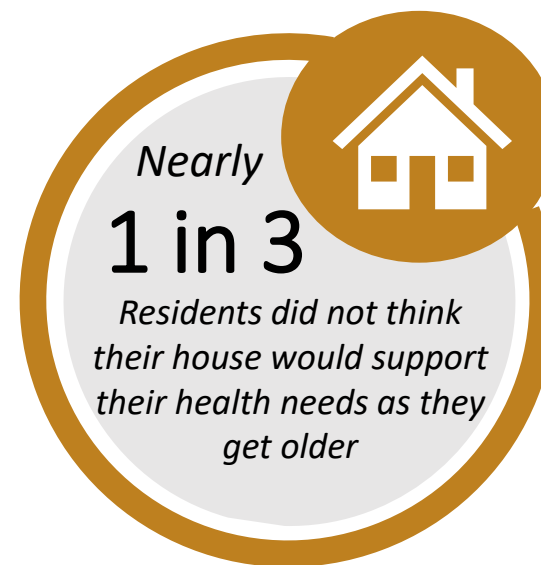
“My house is not fit for aging people. It needs too many repairs that I can’t afford.”

“We have damp and mould in multiple rooms.”

“I was very disappointed that my new home didn't automatically come with a heat pump and solar PV as standard.”

**Over 4 in 5 respondents felt that the home they lived in currently met their needs**

**48% of those with a disability disagreed that their home allowed them to live independently**



## Housing safe to live in

Over 80% thought their home was well maintained and safe to live in



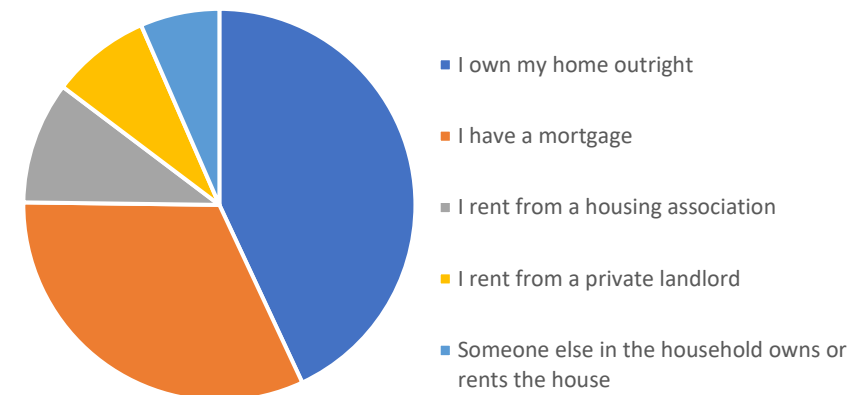
## Energy Efficiency

Nearly 60% disagreed that their home was energy efficient

# Tenure and Affordability

**Three quarters** of tenants agreed that their landlord is fair and ensures the terms of their tenancy are met

“I have a good landlord but he’s looking to sell and our future is uncertain.”



In the future I will be able to:	Agree or strongly agree	Disagree or strongly disagree
afford to pay my mortgage or rent	67%	13%
afford to keep my house warm	56%	27%
afford to pay all my monthly household bills	61%	20%

“My house is poorly insulated and needs a new boiler but I need help to pay for it.”

“Mortgages, heating and all other expenses have increased dramatically in the last few years, very worrying times for anyone with a mortgage.”

# Place, the local community and services

Residents were generally positive about the area where they live with 73% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the place they live in meets their needs. Comments on why included, a good environment, had good access to schools and other facilities or was close to family. Access to enough outdoor space close by was particularly valued with 90% agreeing or strongly agreeing that they had enough close by. However, a significant number of respondents (37%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they have access to good public transport links.

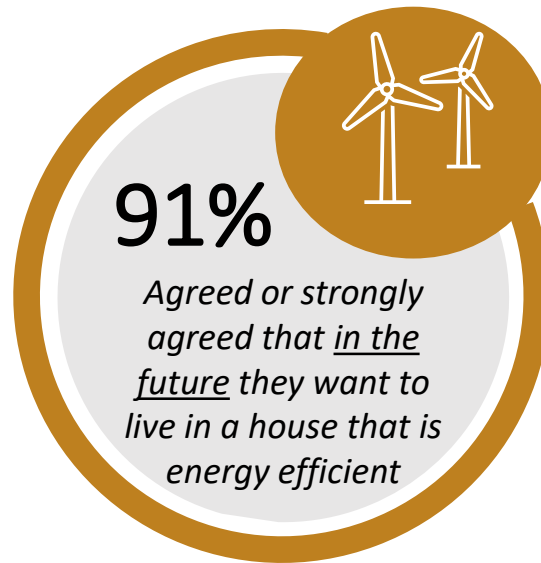
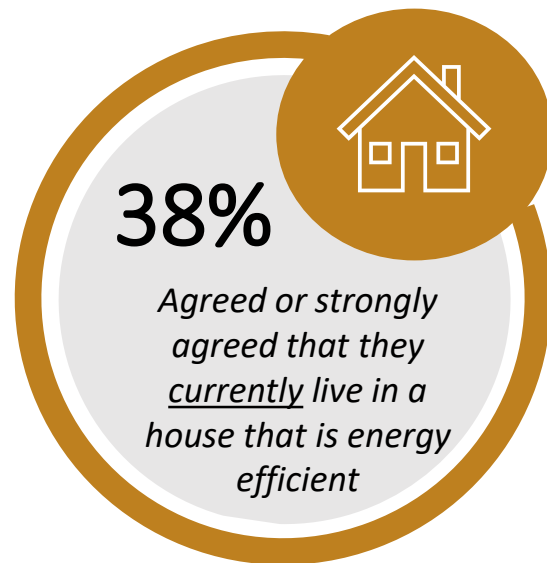
There were mixed views on community and safety. A higher proportion of residents strongly agreed or agreed (66%) that where they lived was safe and had a sense of community. However, a significant minority (34%) had concerns about anti-social behaviour in their area.



# Energy Efficiency

The survey asked residents whether they considered that their property was energy efficient and therefore lowers bills and helps the environment. The number of respondents that did was quite low at only 38%. However, when asked whether they wanted this to be the case in their future home 91% agreed or strongly agreed.

We also asked what technologies they would be interested in to help achieve this solar panels, electric car charge points and air or ground source heat pumps were the most popular.



## Do any of these technologies interest you?

Solar panels	72%
Home electric car charge point	47%
Air or ground source heat pump	43%
Battery storage	39%
External wall insulation	38%
Cavity wall insulation	31%
Internal wall insulation	31%
Loft insulation	24%



# Future Plans

Over half of residents (54%) want to stay in their current home for many reasons including proximity to friends and family, they like the house or the area, it has good access to services, facilities and public transport, they have invested in improving the property or they cannot afford to move. Nearly a quarter (24%) liked the area they lived in but wanted a different house because they want to be closer to services and facilities, want a smaller or larger house or a bungalow, want more outside space or parking or want to buy their own house. A further 12% want to move somewhere else in County Durham either because of a lack of facilities, for family reasons, want a more rural or more urban location, want to move from an area dominated by students or to avoid anti-social behaviour. Finally 10% want to leave County Durham altogether because of a lack of jobs, family reasons, areas are neglected, cost of living is too high or lack of community spirit.

## Do you plan to stay in the area you currently live in?

Yes, I want to stay in the house I live in now	54%
Yes, but I want to move to a different house	24%
No, I want to move somewhere else in County Durham	12%
No, I want to move out of the county	10%

"I live in a convenient location, with good neighbours and easy access to green space."

"I am getting older and may need to move to smaller property or bungalow."

"I want to move somewhere with better transport links."

"There are very limited employment opportunities in County Durham."

# Future priorities

Residents were asked to rate the importance of what do you think the council and its partners should do to support you and your local community's housing needs. The top 3 areas were:

- Making our towns and villages safer and more attractive
- Energy efficient improvements
- More affordable housing

They were also asked for any other suggestions and the most popular were:

- Limit student housing
- Enforcement of selective licensing
- Improving infrastructure
- Build more bungalows
- More jobs
- Reduce rents/Council Tax
- More brownfield not greenfield land for building

## What do you think the council and its partners should do to support you and your local community's housing needs?

Local schemes to improve our towns and villages making them cleaner, safer and more attractive places to live	53%
Energy efficiency improvements and advice which helps reduce bills and is good for the environment	52%
More affordable housing	50%
Bring empty homes back into use	47%
Raise property and landlord standards in the private rental sector	40%
More older persons housing	26%
Provide adaptation schemes for older people and people with disabilities	20%
Provide supported accommodation to meet the needs of relevant groups e.g. children's homes, older persons, independent living for adults with learning disabilities	15%

# Industry survey

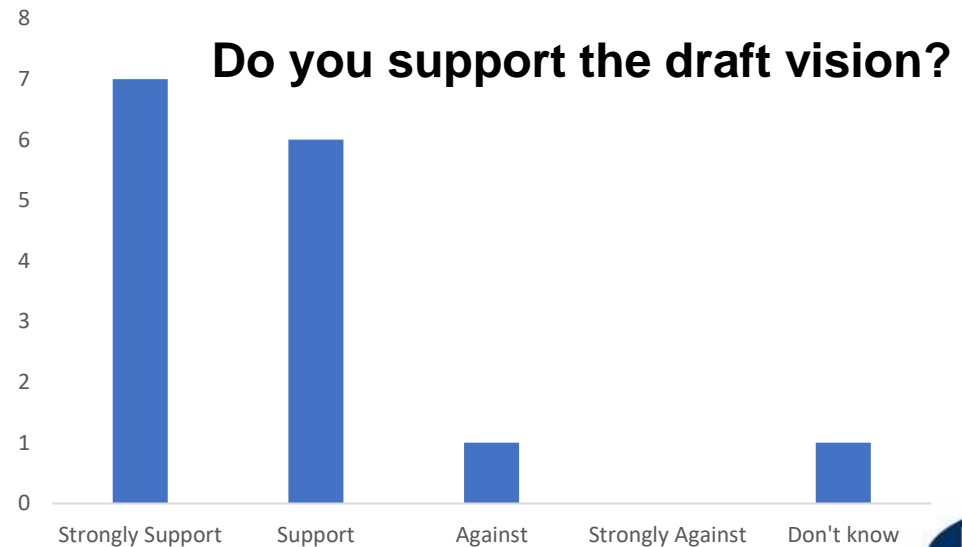
# Vision

## Is there anything else that should be included?

- “prefer - within communities connected with attractive active travel links.”
- “The provision of active travel facilities and renewable energy.”
- “more of a discussion on temporary housing for those in immediate need.”
- “a reference to safety and security.”
- “climate change/carbon reduction, and large-scale housing renewal.”
- “recognition of the importance of infrastructure in supporting new housing.”
- “refurbishing older assets and repurposing already-existing buildings as fresh housing stock.”

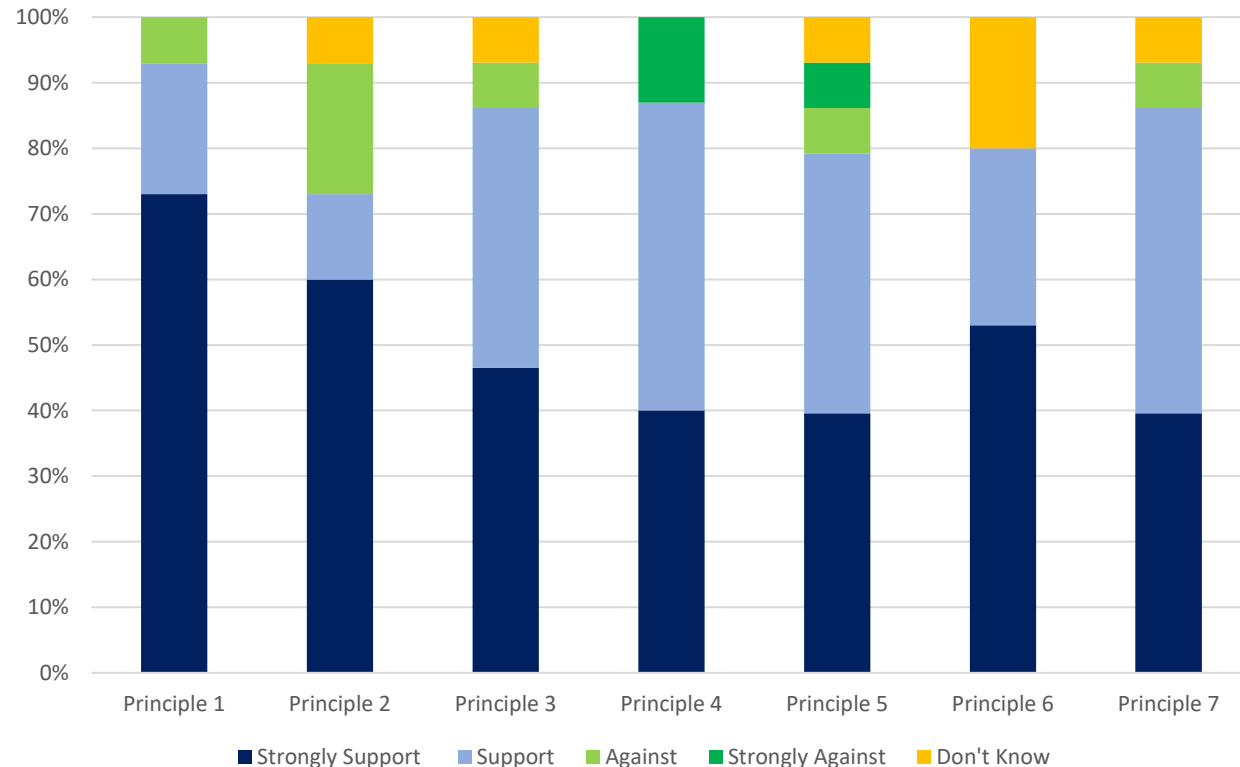
## Do you have any views on the vision?

- Rural areas should not be forgotten
- Subjective and lacks precision
- Should include the location of housing sites
- It is not attainable
- Support the vision but how would it be delivered?
- It reflects what is effectively been done now
- Support the elements of affordability, sustainability, mixed and balanced communities



# Principles

The Principles in the Housing Strategy establish the foundation and rationale underpinning decisions and actions to deliver the vision. We asked the industry for their views on the seven proposed principles. The graph below shows strong support for all of the principles and in particular for **Principle 1 (Everyone has a right to a warm, safe and decent home)**, **Principle 2 (Everyone should have access to a home that is affordable to them)** and **Principle 6 (Existing and new communities should be physically, digitally, culturally and economically connected to support the creation of sustainable, mixed and balanced communities, including bringing empty homes back into use).**



Although limited across the board there was some disagreement with the principles, in particular with **Principle 2 (Everyone should have access to a home that is affordable to them)** and **Principle 5 (All new homes should be accessible, tenure blind and provide flexible living for different stages in a person's life, always aiming to allow people to be independent, including remaining in their home for as long as they desire)** and **Principle 4 (The strategy will be for the county, not the council, and will promote local solutions underpinned by community engagement)** which seems to have caused some strong feeling against.

# Views on the Principles

## **Principle 1: Everyone has a right to a warm, safe and decent home**

- Should be acknowledged that damp and mould can be caused by lifestyle as well as the condition of houses
- Consideration of additional safety features would be useful, for example, the installation of sprinkler systems
- Second line should include reference to neighbourhoods not just homes
- A revision to recognise that domestic abuse can be oppressive or coercive
- An Additional Licensing Scheme should be introduced in Durham City

## **Principle 2: Everyone should have access to a home that is affordable to them**

- Everyone should have access to a safe roof over their head not a home. It's not quite the same thing
- Bringing empty homes back into use is critical to prevent the loss of agriculture or recreation land
- it is ignorant to suggest that more houses need to be built for those who can afford to purchase a home
- Other groups also require affordable housing, such as older people and students, this should be made explicit in the principle
- There should be some mention of affordable social housing as a tenure of choice not just affordability
- It would benefit from something around ability to sustain their homes when we talk about affordability, energy affordability is crucial

## **Principle 3: Housing is the cornerstone of communities and should support improved health, educational attainment and the local economy**

- Infrastructure is the cornerstone, not housing, it must be improved first
- Health and wellbeing and life opportunities should be the same for all residents of County Durham
- Housing should be in the correct location, considering issues such as accessibility to jobs and education facilities
- Should include a commitment to the principles in the Anti-Social Behaviour pledge

# Views on the Principles

## **Principle 4: The strategy will be for the county, not the council, and will promote local solutions underpinned by community engagement**

- Engagement should be much broader than just the County Durham Partnership
- Presumably, the intent is for the Strategy to be for the benefit of residents rather than the Council
- How will the strategy be delivered in left behind neighbourhoods like Horden?
- We need to understand better how we can jointly develop "local solutions" and how community consultation/engagement mechanisms will develop

## **Principle 5: All new homes should be accessible, tenure neutral and provide flexible living for different stages in a person's life, always aiming to allow people to be independent, including remaining in their home for as long as they desire**

- Tenure blind - conflicts with need for varied housing market in Principle 2
- This principle will push up costs and reduce supply in practice
- Include accessibility features where there are no cost implications
- Building new houses that will encourage older people to remain in three and four bedroom houses, supported by an entire care apparatus, and not downsize is counter to the principles of sustainability

## **Principle 6: Existing and new communities should be physically, digitally, culturally and economically connected to support the creation of sustainable, mixed and balanced communities, including bringing empty homes back into use**

- Should be more incentives for owners to bring properties back into use
- Focuses too heavily on bringing empty homes back in to use. Should recognise that some of the housing stock is not sustainable for the long-term and that renewal or demolition is sometimes necessary
- Need to identify ways to recover HMOs into family homes

## **Principle 7: The strategy will support energy efficiency and carbon reduction in existing and new housing and contribute towards the council's Climate Emergency Response Plan**

- Many of the green initiatives are unviable, ineffective, uneconomic and potentially more or as harmful to the environment as the status quo
- Locating new estates with public transport options in mind will also help to tackle poverty

- Should be a greater focus on climate change/carbon reductions through the strategy
- The minimum is the strategy should mandate is that all development is sustainable, has to produce less waste including land use, minimises impacts on local biodiversity and promote wider net biodiversity gain, more use of renewable energy sources and lowering lifecycle environmental impacts

# Other Comments on the Principles

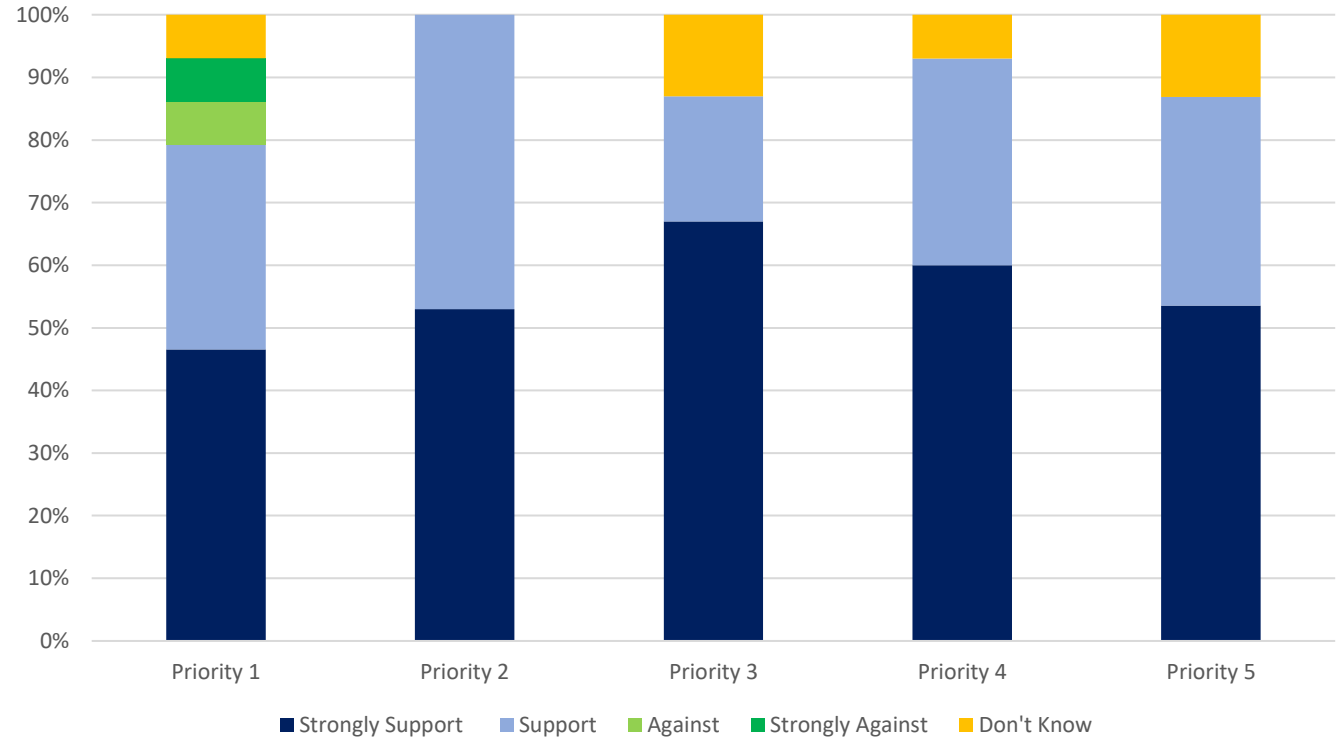
- There should be a strong principle of equal treatment for privately owned and tenanted properties
- It should be recognised that there is increasing evidence that access to green space and biodiversity benefits health and well-being and so can reduce the burden on the NHS
- Welcome the sentiments but how will the masterplan for Horden be delivered?
- New housing should be designed so that the active travel options are so good that owning a private motor vehicle is considered an unnecessary expense
- Should be an additional principle that anticipates and seeks to target future transport poverty by ensuring all homes have fast, direct, safe and segregated active travel routes to major destinations



# Priorities

The Priorities are where we will focus our actions and activities to deliver the vision. We asked the industry for their views on the five proposed priorities. The graph below shows strong support for all of the priorities and in particular for **Priority 3 (Ensure high quality homes and landlord services)** and **Principle 2 (Ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that meets their needs)**.

Although still limited the only priority which generated any disagreement was **Principle 1 (Increase the delivery of new homes, including secure, affordable housing to meet needs and to provide a Housing First approach, along with the infrastructure required)**.



# Views on the Priorities

## **Priority 1: Increase the delivery of new homes, including secure, affordable housing to meet needs and to provide a Housing First approach, along with the infrastructure required**

- New homes should only be built on brown field sites
- Accommodation should be able to access local facilities and shopping without incurring additional costs
- More supported housing is required
- There is a need for a much better approach to the impact of new homes on supporting infrastructure and communities
- The priority should reference working more collaboratively with RP partners
- Housing first relies on engagement and good support, it is unlikely to be successful in all cases
- The council should encourage the use of local construction labour with apprenticeships for building trades

## **Priority 2: Ensure that everyone has access to appropriate, safe and secure housing that meets their needs**

- For housing to be safe it needs to have appropriate safety measures in place, as part of the design or retro-fit, for example sprinkler systems
- Rather than being about "management of Durham Key Options" it should be about "working collaboratively with partners to deliver through DKO
- Prevent landlords marketing properties for the following academic year only a few weeks after students arrive in Durham

## **Priority 3: Ensure high quality homes and landlord services**

- This means higher rents
- Suggest it is only 'Ensure high quality homes'. Forgets that the condition of properties is also the responsibility of tenants
- Supporting landlords to help them understand their safety obligations would be useful
- An Additional Licensing Scheme should be established in Durham City
- The final bullet point should read "Registered Providers "will continue" to ensure that the condition of their housing is maintained and improved where necessary

# Views on the Priorities

## **Priority 4: Ensure a comprehensive range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, disabled people and children and young people, including specialist accommodation and support**

- The priority needs to be wider and inclusive of other agencies/providers
- Should make it clear that it includes victims of crime, antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse and people involved in the Criminal Justice System, and in particular prison releases

## **Priority 5: Ensure high quality placemaking, creating great and sustainable places to live**

- New homes are required but should prioritise brownfield sites
- Giving thought to the safety and security of housing developments, as well as making places accessible and aesthetically pleasing can contribute towards sustainability
- Does not go far enough to address CO2/climate emergency issues in current housing stock or ensuring new development is sustainable
- Should include the use of Council land resources to deliver best value to neighbourhoods through a high-quality place strategy
- Needs greater consideration/emphasis on housing renewal
- Need a detailed strategy or Supplementary Planning Document which recognises the challenges that are faced by mixed student / non-student communities
- Should recognise that student accommodation can be blended with visitor, short stay, and / or young professional accommodation to make efficient use of the land that accommodation is built on

# Other Comments on the Priorities

- Higher priority being given to already deprived and left behind neighbourhoods where decline has increased more recently.
- Active travel to ensure that people are not trapped in transport poverty
- Housing renewal needs to be included as we need to recognise some of the County's housing stock just isn't sustainable for the long-term and that it is not where people want or aspire to live
- How will the Strategy be used to address housing delivery needs or regeneration activities through the new Combined Authority?

# Other General Comments

## How can housing contribute to the Council's Climate Emergency?

- Assist landlords to provide energy efficient homes
- By building to the highest possible environmental standards
- Retrofit existing homes with renewable energy solutions
- Move towards net zero/passivhaus standards for all new build homes
- Undertake a large-scale education campaign for all County Durham households
- Build to net zero standards now, not wait for Government compulsion
- Design for maximum active travel

## How can we prevent homelessness in County Durham?

- Encourage private landlords, rather than taxing them with unnecessary licensing schemes
- Temporary accommodation is an absolute must for County Durham
- Fill the empty houses
- There are very few homeless people but there are a number of rough sleepers that choose to sleep outside either due to substance issues or feeling unsafe within their home
- By continuing to work with other providers on those people greatest at risk and ensuring early interventions to prevent homelessness
- By ensuring that tenants are getting the best start to their tenancy, affordable accommodation, maintaining engagement, supporting vulnerabilities, easy access to services, better mental health support and sufficient short-term accommodation
- It should include victims of crime, antisocial behaviour and domestic abuse and people involved in the Criminal Justice System, and particularly prison releases

## How do we ensure a comprehensive range of housing options?

- Building more houses including for older people or single people
- A wider range of properties with accessible bathrooms or ramps
- By replacing ageing properties
- Reuse empty houses and other buildings
- Understanding the data of the County to provide the correct options in the correct locations based
- Priority should be given to appropriate housing schemes that meet the needs of the vulnerable, elderly, disabled and children and young people
- Through multi-agency working

## How can the delivery of housing support the local economy?

- A better question would be how on earth can the local economy support the massive number of houses which are being thrown up?
- If housing is in sustainable locations this would require less spend on housing costs, energy and transport, leaving more to be spent in the local economy
- Give priority to those new housing schemes that employ young people
- Good affordable housing will provide stable and sustainable communities that will feed into the local economy, people will want to stay, work, bring up families in their local area
- Ongoing development and delivery of a pipeline of new homes will support jobs and training opportunities leading to further investment

# Other Comments

## How can we ensure everyone has a warm, safe and decent home?

- The Council has statutory a responsibility for this so do not see it as a high enough priority
- By building to the highest possible environmental standards
- Making sure houses are actually repaired when needed
- Staying long enough in communities until matters are resolved in the most deprived areas
- Build more homes
- Expand selective licensing to the whole county including Durham City
- Through investment programmes and data led investment
- Implement the policy changes arising from the Renters Reform Bill

## How can we meet our need for affordable homes?

- Build more homes including family housing
- Have up to date data to indicate how many are needed
- Work with landlords more effectively
- A massive public sector and grant-aided private sector programme is necessary

## Is there anything else that should be included in the Housing Strategy?

- Bringing the most deprived areas up to a better standard rather than improving already more affluent areas
- I think there should be a principle that landlords should be treated equally to private owners on such matters as home insulation
- Include a target for how many homes you are going to have built in County Durham annually

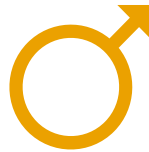
# Young people survey

# Overview of Respondents



**257**

young people  
responded

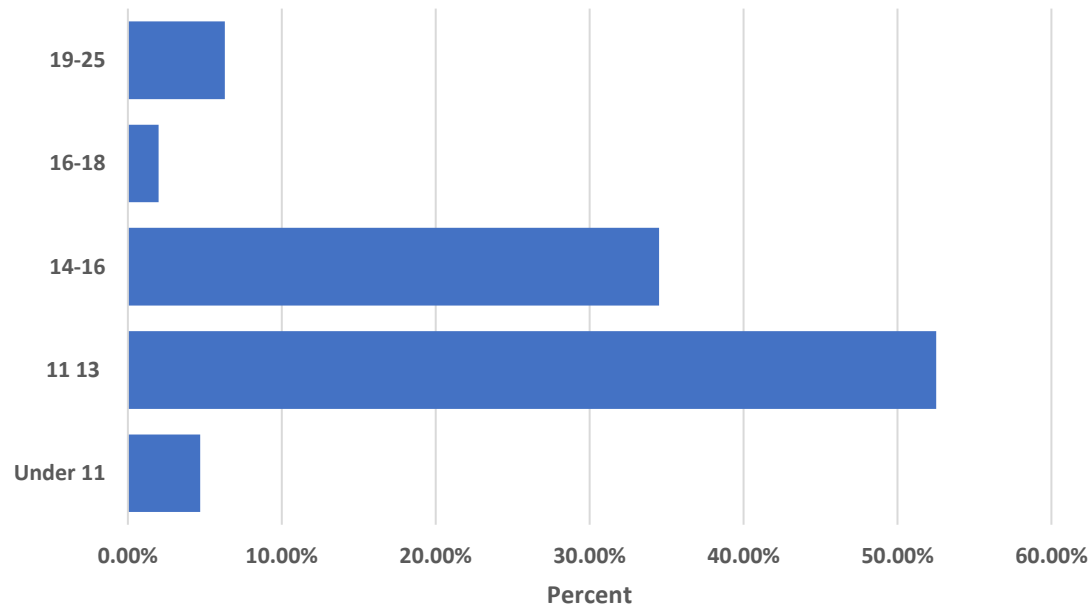


**48% Female**  
**45% Male**  
**8% non-binary or other**



**11% of respondents  
identified as disabled**

**The majority of respondents were aged between 11 and 16:**



Nearly  
**94%**

*lived with  
parents/guardian  
or family  
members*



# Housing Condition and Affordability

“I love my home, it is really cosy and warm”

“I love my house, it is my safe space.”

“My mam my brother my dog are living with my grandma because we cannot afford the expensive homes.”

“I like my house because it is quite big but we only have 3 bedrooms for 5 people which means me and my sister have to share a bedroom and we argue all the time as we don't have our own space.”

**Over 4 in 5 young people felt that the home they lived in had enough space for their family to live in**

**The most common comment regarding what they would change about their home was that they wanted their own room**

Over  
**1 in 10**  
Young people agreed they or their family was homeless or at risk of homelessness



## Housing safe to live in

Nearly 90% thought their home was well maintained and safe to live in



## Energy Efficiency

Over 30% disagreed that their home was energy efficient

# Place, the local community and services

Young people were generally positive about the area where they live with 92% agreeing that they could easily get to work, school or college, the shops and leisure facilities. Access to outdoor space was particularly valued with 94% agreeing they had enough access to outdoor space close-by. Comments on what they liked about the area they lived in included, good outdoor space, good access to shops, good transport.

There were mixed views on community and safety. Whilst 96% of young people felt their homes were in good condition and safe, a significant minority (19%) disagreed that the area they lived in was safe and had a sense of community, with comments on what they didn't like including, problems with the area being rundown, litter, fly-tipping and anti-social behaviour.

"Where I live is on a big street for people to play on and enjoy the sun."

"There are lots of people throwing rubbish or furniture like freezers out onto our street."

"I like my house but where I live the neighbours don't like each other and they are always fighting on the street."

92%



*Agreed they could easily get to work school or college, the shops and leisure facilities from the area they lived.*

84%



*Valued living close to their friends and family*

94%



*Agreed that they have access to enough outdoor space close-by*

19%

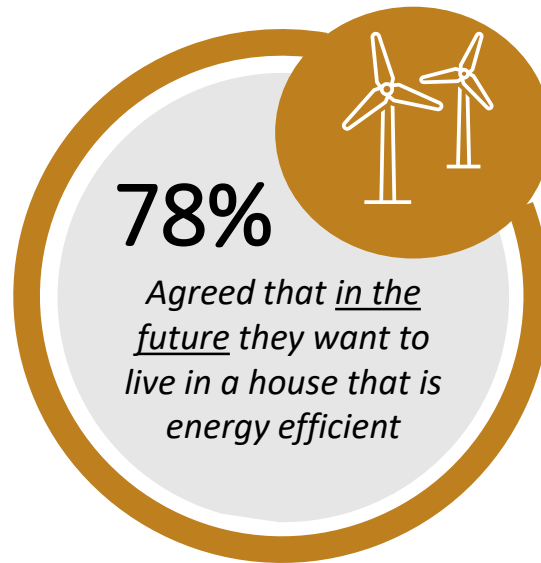
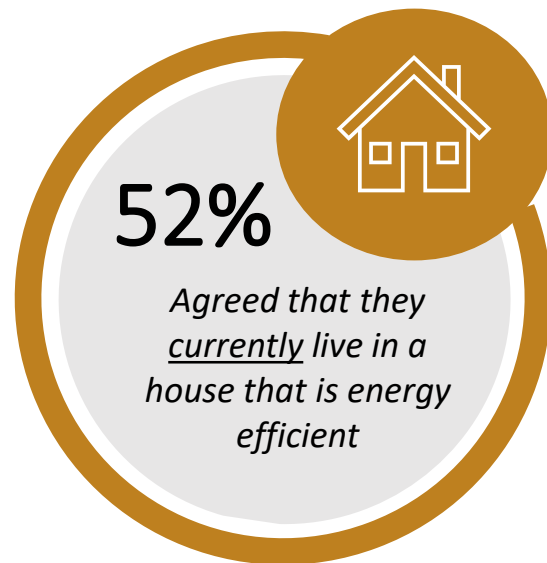


*Disagreed that they live somewhere safe*

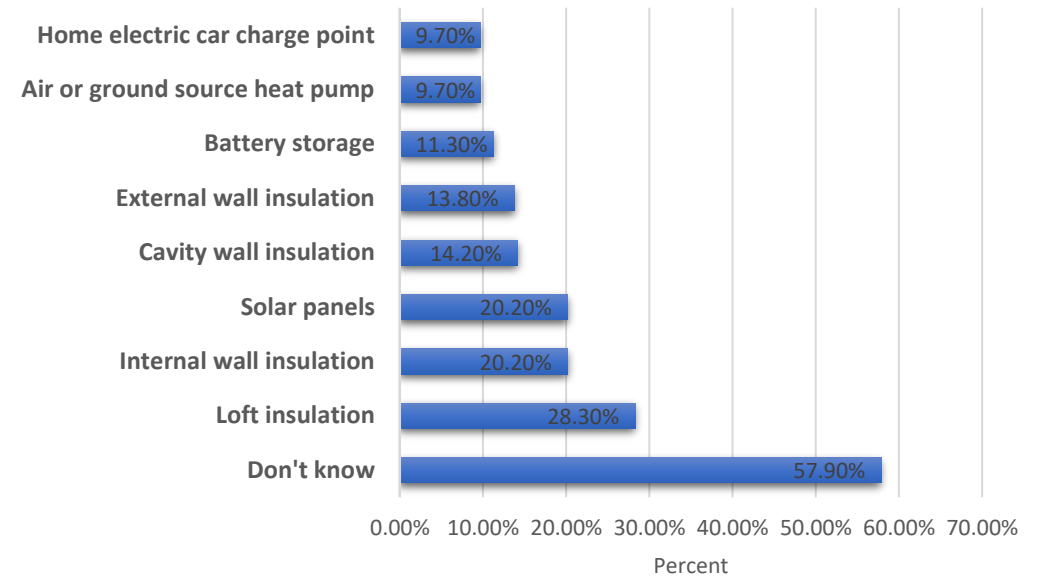
# Energy Efficiency

We asked young people whether they considered that their property was energy efficient and therefore lowers bills and helps the environment. The number of respondents that did was 52%. However, when asked whether they wanted this to be the case in their future home 78% said this was important to them.

When asked if their home had energy efficiency products in their home, nearly 58% did not know. For those who did know, the most common products were loft insulation, internal wall insulation, solar panels.



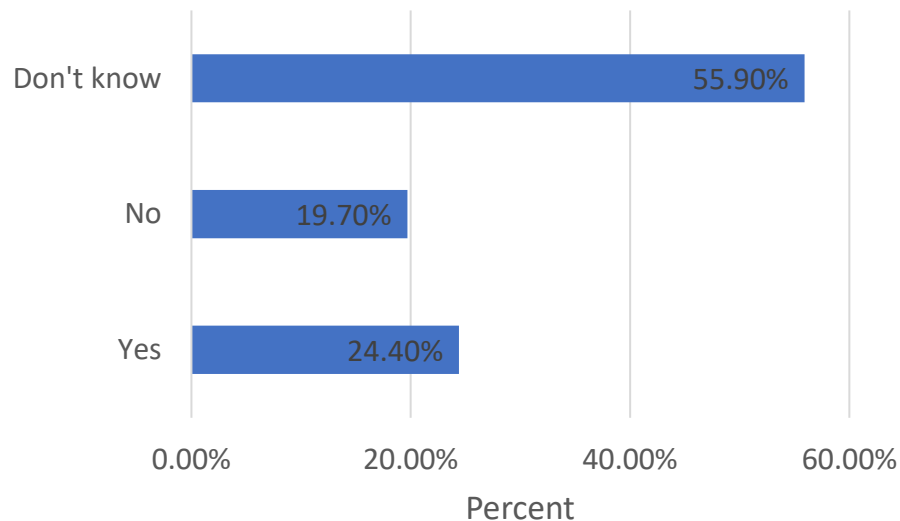
## Does your home have any of the following?



# Future Plans

Over half of the young people (nearly 56%) did not know if they wanted to live in the county when they left school or further education. Of those that answered Yes or No, 54% of young people planned to live in the county and 46% planned to leave. The reasons young people gave included wanting to explore the world or move to another country (21%), seeking better employment opportunities (16%), to be close to family (10%). The main reason for wanting to move was not feeling safe in the area they lived in with 31% of young people who stated they planned to leave the county citing the reason being the area they lived in was rundown or had issues with safety and anti-social behaviour.

**After you have left school or further education, do you plan to stay in County Durham?**



"I just don't like all of the anti social behaviour."

"I want to travel the world and explore."

"There are poor opportunities for young people here."

"The area I live in is aggressive and loud."

"There are very limited employment opportunities in County Durham."

# Future priorities

Young people were asked to rate the importance of what do you think the council and its partners should do to support you and your local community's housing needs. The top 3 areas were:

- More affordable housing
- Bring empty homes back into use
- Energy efficiency improvements and advice which helps reduce bills and is good for the environment

They were also asked for any other suggestions and the most popular were:

- Local schemes to make places safer, cleaner and more attractive places to live
- More affordable housing
- Affordability of living
- Homes for local people in need
- Outdoor play areas (football)

## What do you think the council and its partners should do to support you and your local community's housing needs?

More affordable housing	77.80%
Bring empty homes back into use	51.00%
Energy efficiency improvements and advice which helps reduce bills and is good for the environment	50.20%
Local improvement schemes that help bring buildings back into use, improve the local environment or make neighbourhoods cleaner and safer	38.10%
Provide supported accommodation to meet the needs of relevant groups e.g. children's homes, older persons, independent living for adults with learning disabilities	23.30%
Raise property and landlord standards in the private rental sector	20.20%
Provide adaptation schemes for older people and people with disabilities	20.20%
More older person's housing	19.10%

# Conversations

# Approach to the conversations

- As part of the Housing Conversation, conversations were held with a range of groups to ensure that the process was as inclusive as possible. This included, elected members, town and parish councils, partnerships and stakeholders. other interest groups and residents.
- The structure and format of conversations was varied and included attendance at meetings and events, presentations with Q&A, and workshops.
- Most conversations covered the challenges facing the groups and sought to capture a local perspective on housing issues and solutions, but topics and questions varied according to the type of organisation taking part in the event:

# Overview

- The Housing Conversation has:
  - Engaged with communities across County Durham to gain an understanding of local perspectives and priorities.
  - Sought the views of specialist organisations working with in the field of housing.
  - Captured the perspectives of related professions and sectors to ensure the Housing Strategy reflects a wider context and maximises its impact.
  - Engaged with groups and organisations representing those within our communities with specific and / or specialist housing needs.
  - Sought the views of key anchor institutions and partners, many of which will have a key role in the delivery of the Housing Strategy.

## County-wide and regional engagement

### Partnerships

Health & Wellbeing Board

Place, Health & Communities Board

Housing Forum

County Durham Together Partnership

GRT Executive

Poverty Action Steering Group

Mid Durham AAP

Spennymoor AAP

Weardale AAP

4 Together

3 Towns AAP

Chester le Street AAP

### Anchor institutions & partners

Durham County Council Members and officers

Believe Housing

Livin

### Community groups, residents and other stakeholders

County Durham Association of Local Councils

Virtual drop- in events

Rural Housing Event

GRT Wardens

### Area Action Partnerships

BASH

Durham AAP

East Durham AAP

GAMP



# Summary

- The conversations were active with high levels of engagement across all groups.
- Consultees emphasised that this should be a Housing Strategy for County Durham, not just a Council or public sector document.
- Consultees effectively provided a local perspective unique to their community.
- Consultees from a range of specialisms ensured their knowledge and expertise has informed the development of the Housing Strategy.
- Many of the themes raised in the conversations overlap and mirrored those raised in the surveys. Conversation participants were actively encouraged to also submit a survey response to expand upon and follow up on discussions.

## Key issues from across the Housing Conversation

- **The delivery of homes to meet needs** – including homes for older people, families and affordable homes.
- **The Private Rented Sector** – concerns raised about the impact of concentrations of PRS, which can be associated with ASB, empty homes and absent landlords.
- **Climate emergency** – New homes should incorporate new technologies and existing stock should be improved to support energy efficiency.
- **Housing and health** – good quality housing is a significant factor in supporting health and wellbeing outcomes
- **Infrastructure** – New housing needs to be provided alongside sufficient infrastructure to accommodate the impact of the development inc. schools, doctors, parking.
- **Regeneration** - Undertake regeneration including bringing empty homes back into use and considering demolitions where appropriate

# Overview and Scrutiny Workshop (1/2)

**An Overview and Scrutiny Workshop was held on the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023. A detailed overview of comments made at the workshop has been prepared and has fed into the consultation process. Below is a summary of some of the main points raised:**

## **Prevention of homelessness**

- Emphasis on access to early advice, support and assistance which is vital to ensure that homelessness is prevented as far as possible.
- Consider the use of empty homes to meet needs of vulnerable groups and those at risk of homelessness.

## **Delivering a comprehensive range of housing options**

- A need to have the right mix of housing to meet housing demand. It was considered that there are few housing options for single people, single young people, older people, vulnerable and disabled people, although these are all groups who have increasing housing demand. New homes should be adaptable over time to meet changing needs and existing stock should be adapted.
- Supported housing is essential for those people with multiple and complex needs. Supported housing requires wrap around services for vulnerable residents and families, including health services, education, welfare benefits and transport connectivity.

## **Climate emergency**

- Housing should be built to the best possible standard with new technologies but, consider that the traditional view of 'sustainable locations' may have been overcome by new technologies supporting a reduction in travel to some extent.
- Concern that insulation and newer heating technologies are not as affordable as gas. Retrofitting existing stock is key but is also expensive. Upskill the sector lined to IES to support provision and maintenance of new technologies.

# Overview and Scrutiny Workshop (2/2)

## Housing and its relationship with the economy

- Ensure developers are employing people with the correct skills to build the new homes we need. Including in relation to greener technologies and capitalising on local supply chains.
- Utilise Council House Programme to create housing for communities and reuse derelict buildings and empty homes to support renewal also support the provision of executive housing to attract entrepreneurs in suitable locations

## Ensuring a warm, safe and decent homes to support improved education, health and wellbeing

- Note issues with mould through lack of ventilation/insulation, which can be an issue with the with design of buildings and older properties.
- Need effective complaints / escalation procedure for tenants or a prevention procedure (such as regular inspections).

## Meeting the need for affordable homes

- Needing to make sure people can afford housing and have sufficient disposable income to enjoy lives as well.
- Integrate affordable homes into developments in a 'tenure blind' manner

## Housing issues in communities

- Ensure a high standard of maintenance in housing, gardens and open spaces, use of S.215 notices where appropriate.
- Concerns about property investors / developers acquiring properties. A concern especially in former mining communities but also in Durham City in the context of student HMOs and the impact on communities. Important to work to prevent ASB.
- Need to ensure that existing stock is maintained and kept up to required standards.
- Ensure that infrastructure is in place to support new housing, and ensure affordable housing is affordable, including Durham City.
- Second homes are an issue in some parts of the county such as Weardale.
- An emphasis on actions and local level actions required, with a timeline for delivery communicated to members and the community.

# Area Action Partnerships (1/2)

**A presentation with a Q&A session was undertaken at the AAPs. The AAPs provide an opportunity to consider the principles and priorities of the Housing Strategy from a local perspective and with a range of stakeholders, community representatives and members of the public.** Below is an overview of some of the main points and common themes raised by the AAPs:

## **The Private Rented Sector**

- The AAPs reflected concerns about the private rented sector (PRS) in County Durham. PRS properties can often be associated with crime and ASB, particularly in areas with a predominance of PRS stock.
- Empty Homes and absent landlords were also cited as an issue in localities
- Selective licencing was a common point of discussion, some wanted its extension whereas others felt it was only partly solving problems and was less effective in transitional communities associated with vacant properties.

## **Housing needs**

- A need for older persons bungalows or housing suitable for older people. Ensure these are available for older people.
- A need for family housing and affordable homes to meet needs.

## **Infrastructure**

- AAPs reflected that new housing puts a strain on existing services, inc. schools, doctors and dentists. It can result in parking concerns, including amongst existing stock. A need to work with communities to understand infrastructure requirements.
- Seek to include more greenspace in new development.

# Area Action Partnerships (2/2)

## Student HMOs

- A major issue in Durham City. Empty HMOs but more are approved. Empty or occupied HMOs have a significant impact on communities.
- HMOs have impacts upon communities and can result in a loss of family homes. Air B and Bs can bring similar issues.

## Regeneration

- Older stock can be run down and associated with empty homes. Consider a demolition programme and bring new stock, utilise CPO powers more in this context.
- Address empty homes prior to introducing new build homes.

## Scope of strategy

- Cost of living has hit residents hard – the housing strategy needs to address poverty.
- Strategy should support work with delivery partners and reflect potential of devolution deal.

# County Durham Partnerships

The County Durham Partnership and other groups provide a valuable input into housing conversation. Presentations and discussions have been undertaken with the County Durham Together Partnership, the Housing Forum, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Place Health and Communities Board and the GRT Executive amongst others. Below is an overview of some of the main points:

## Importance of collaboration

- The value of collaboration between housing and other partners is recognised. The clear linkages between the quality of housing and other outcomes, such as health and wellbeing is recognised.
- Where possible, residents and communities should be involved in actions and decisions that will affect them so they can feel that we are doing things 'with' not 'to' them and that we are listening to them about what success looks like.

## Importance of housing on health outcomes

- Housing conditions have significant influence on people's physical health. Good housing also promotes positive mental health.
- The County Durham Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2028 references the importance of housing as a wider determinant of health and the HWB believes that the seven housing principles, and the five priorities support the vision that County Durham is a healthy place, where people live well for longer.

## Housing support and specialist accommodation

- The Housing Strategy should reflect the findings of the emerging Needs Led Accommodation Review and should cover care and supported housing.

## Cost of living

- Fuel poverty and cost of energy for caravans on GRT sites is causing fuel poverty. Caravans cannot benefit from energy efficiency measures applicable to brick-built homes and caravans are out of scope for energy efficiency grants.

# Rural Housing Development Event

The Housing and Development in Rural County Durham was held on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023 at Mickleton Village Hall. The event was introduced by Cllr Shuttleworth and Cllr Scott and covered a broad range of issues, including housing delivery, planning, economic and community matters, infrastructure, diversification and climate change. Below is an overview of some of the main points:

## Housing

- Insufficient affordable homes for local young people in rural communities. Also, a lack of accessible, energy efficient housing.
- Registered Providers (RPs) are not normally attracted to smaller scale developments, which can be challenging in viability terms; explore private rented sector to take units as an alternative option. Smaller sites can be challenging in viability terms.
- Locational sustainability for housing development in rural areas should be more flexible to recognise relative levels of access to services and facilities.

## Planning

- Problems with short term lets and second homes and issues of seasonality where people move out in the winter seasons.
- Exception policy doesn't allow for housing unless it is affordable

## Infrastructure

- Rural areas lack modern infrastructure which affects businesses and prevents people moving to the area as well as development opportunities.
- Schools – class sizes are reducing as people are moving away.

## Climate change

- Housing infrastructure in need of regeneration and retrofit; concerns around grid capacity and reliability of energy in rural communities.
- Disincentivise non renewables and incentivise renewables and consider relaxation of planning rules to accelerate net zero transition with regards to heritage buildings/assets.