

Cabinet

15 January 2025

**Strategic Place Plans: A
Vision for Durham City and
Wider Programme Roll Out**

Key Decision REG/2025/004



Report of Corporate Management Team

Amy Harhoff, Corporate Director of Regeneration, Economy, and Growth

Councillor Elizabeth Scott, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Economy, and Partnerships

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide Cabinet with an update on the Durham City Strategic Place Plan and to agree the vision.
- 2 To provide Cabinet with an update on the development of the Strategic Place Plan pilots in Spennymoor, Shildon and Newton Aycliffe.
- 3 To outline the future programme of Strategic Place plan development.

Executive Summary

- 4 Strategic Place Plans (SPPs) have replaced Masterplans in line with the principles and priorities of the Inclusive Economic Strategy (IES) & its Delivery Plan (approved by Cabinet December 2022 & November 2023 respectively) and subsequent reports to Economy & Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny in January and July 2024 setting out the process to be applied and position to-date.
- 5 The SPP process is underpinned by the co-development principle embedded within the Inclusive Economic Strategy. Central to this methodology is empowering local communities to be at the heart of shaping the future of their towns and villages, collaborating with local people, businesses, and stakeholders to establish shared visions for each place. This agreed vision is the foundation on which spatial,

investment and action plans will be developed to create SPPs across the County following a co-design approach, outlined in Appendix 2.

- 6 Durham City Strategic Place Plan was identified as a further SPP Pilot and approved as part of the Inclusive Economic Strategy Report by Cabinet in November 2022.
- 7 The co-design of the Durham City Vision began with a launch on 30 September 2024 and continued to 25 November 2024. The co-design activity has followed the approach adopted across all the pilots aiming to maximise input and ensure open transparent co-design principles are embraced.
- 8 Building on an established town centre regeneration programme, Spennymoor has been selected to receive £20 million of funding through the Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) programme which requires a co-design approach to create a local vision and investment plan. The Government paused the previously agreed submission date of 1 August 2024 prior to the announcement of the General Election and recently confirmed the programme will continue with reshaped priorities.
- 9 Following the recent General Election, the new government has confirmed that the work started under the Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) programme will continue as part of a wider regeneration programme. The government is currently finalising a revised prospectus that will outline new priorities and potentially additional funding opportunities. The council will continue to involve the community in the decision-making process and will use additional capacity building funding to develop and refine the investment program during 2025/26. The main regeneration programme is expected to begin in 2026/27 and will continue to focus on the built-up area of Spennymoor.
- 10 The final pilot SPP will continue with Shildon and Newton Aycliffe. This area has been identified as a pilot SPP based on the National Heritage Lottery Fund selecting the towns to participate in the Heritage Places initiative which seeks to engage communities and develop partnerships which unlock regeneration opportunities from the heritage.
- 11 The Heritage Places programme requires extensive community engagement to develop a vision and priorities for the area in line with our SPP. The first stage bid for development phase funding was submitted earlier this year with £250,000 of funding confirmed by the National Lottery in November to progress plan development with the expectation that the full programme could secure up to £10 million of external funding over the next 10 years.

- 12 Building on the experience of these pilots, the SPP programme will now be progressed to ensure all main towns benefit from commencing the SPP approach over the next 14 months. This focussed local engagement will also provide the opportunity to develop pipeline activity for future funding submissions and lay the foundations for the four-year network plans to be developed from 2025 onwards as part of the transformation of the Area Action Partnerships into Local Community Networks.
- 13 As with the masterplans they replace, once completed the SPPs will identify priorities for the future delivery of schemes and will provide a basis on which future grant funding could be sought and business cases for investment considered.

Recommendation(s)

- 14 Members are asked to note:
 - (a) The vision and priority themes of the Durham City Strategic Place Plan;
 - (b) The initial priorities and direction identified through the co-design of the Spennymoor Strategic Place Plan;
 - (c) The identified ambition and heritage priorities for Shildon and Newton Aycliffe which will be incorporated into the wider SPPs for the two towns;
 - (d) Proposals for the roll out of the wider SPP development process in line with the Inclusive Economic Strategy & Delivery Plan.

Background

- 15 Developing a suite of SPPs is a central element of the Place proposals of the Inclusive Economic Strategy. The SPP pilot phase includes the development of plans in Spennymoor, Durham City, Newton Aycliffe and Shildon as reported previously.
- 16 SPPs represent a significant change from the previous suite of masterplans, which have been developed, adopted, and periodically refreshed to provide strategic guidance to align regeneration efforts in the main centres of County Durham since 2010.
- 17 Masterplans have been used to identify current and future development activity across the public and private sectors to provide a coordinated approach to delivery and to maximise opportunities for funding. They have been developed by drawing on published and primary data which provides an economic context for the study area along with primary surveys, looking at factors such as retail occupancy, car parking capacity, pedestrian, and cycle routes/nodes as well as streetscape and environmental quality.
- 18 While the geographical focus of masterplans can vary from town to town, they have been undertaken to reflect the overall spatial vision, development objectives, spatial parameters, design, and delivery principles for each of our main centres, SPPs reflect a wider whole town approach.
- 19 Despite the council's extensive powers and resources, it is recognised that widespread change at a local level can't be delivered without partner and property-owner buy in. A variety of levels of ongoing engagement and consultation are therefore built into the development of SPPs resulting in a process of co-design.
- 20 SPPs will be developed as a suite of documents for each place, with local visioning documents supported by spatial plans, reflective of core components of previous plans and linking in with the established policy framework of the County Durham Plan. However, in line with the approach adopted for the IES, each SPP can also include a Delivery Plan and Investment Plan.
- 21 The development of the SPP visioning documents also provides the opportunity to reflect the IES delivery plan promotion theme and the emerging place narrative and brand identity which builds upon a shared place led narrative and active collaboration.
- 22 Factors for consideration in order of developing plans for the remaining towns is outlined within the report. As with the initial pilots, further

awards of external funding may impact on the scheduled order of delivery.

Durham City Strategic Place Plan

- 23 The IES delivery Plan specifically referenced progressing the SPP in Durham City as part of the pilot phase and a programme of work has progressed through 2024. Initial scoping of the co-design programme commenced in the spring with stakeholder and community engagement programmes commencing late summer.
- 24 To date twenty-five key stakeholder interviews have been completed alongside a series of on street engagement opportunities, community drop ins and attendance at Durham Market. Engagement events have sought to include specific opportunities to engage young people through primary/secondary school sessions, at Belmont Community School, Framwellgate Secondary School, and Finchale Primary School, as well as youth groups, community and residents' groups and sessions with Students from New College, Durham Sixth Form Centre, and the University.
- 25 Engagement has taken place using a range of methods including direct mailshots, QR codes linked to online surveys, social media posts and both individual and group sessions being delivered face to face. These sessions have been delivered by council teams, specialist co-design consultants or a mix of both.
- 26 As at November 397 surveys have been completed online and paper with over 895 people engaged through public drop ins, street engagement, interviews, and individual and group sessions.
- 27 The focus of these initial engagement sessions is to provide a description of Durham City as seen now and the aspirations for Durham City in 2035.
- 28 These sessions have highlighted the perceived strengths and areas for improvement across the City including the following:

Key Strengths	Areas for improvement
Heritage and cultural offer	Reducing Anti-Social behaviour
Compact Nature of the city contributes to the sense of community	Encouraging a stronger retail offer

River Walks	Population Imbalance
Natural beauty	Transport connectivity especially walking and cycling
Independent businesses	Community & play spaces to make the city more family friendly
	Access to affordable housing

29 From the engagement sessions some consistent themes and ambitions have developed which have been reviewed to ensure wherever possible they provide a distinctive view of Durham City rather than simply reflecting generic town and city centre issues. The Priority themes for the Durham City Vision are:

- a) A friendly city that is welcoming to all;
- b) A city that is home to students and proud of its world class university;
- c) A modern and thriving heritage city framed by green spaces and rivers;
- d) A well-connected compact city;
- e) A city gateway to a county filled with culture;
- f) A city at the heart of its surrounding communities;
- g) A safe family focussed city centre;
- h) A city centre with thriving independent businesses and world class events;
- i) A city centre where people work, live, learn and play.

30 The draft visioning document setting out these key themes and supporting actions is attached at Appendix 3.

31 Alongside the Visioning document the Durham SPP will include a spatial plan, a retail and leisure gaps and capacity study and an investment plan. The SPP portfolio for Durham will also include the Conservation Area Management Plan which is currently subject to a separate consultation exercise.

Spennymoor Long Term Plan for Towns

- 32 Spennymoor has been identified as a SPP pilot following the Government's selection of the town as part of the LTPT Programme. In March 2024 Cabinet received an update on the early stages of development of the co-designed vision and accompanying investment plan which was originally due for submission in August 2024.
- 33 The co-design period commenced on 8 April and ended 31 May 2024 (online), however an extensive engagement programme has continued with the community, groups, businesses and four working groups have been created to develop and shape the project themes:

Theme 1 – High Street, Heritage, and Regeneration

This theme focuses on revitalising Spennymoor, and its town centre, by supporting local businesses, building on the town's heritage, and supporting new social and economic development. There will be a focus on enhancing the appeal and functionality of the town centre, encouraging more footfall, and increasing retail and leisure opportunities. By blending the town's heritage and existing offer with new and enhanced infrastructure and amenities, this theme aims to create a vibrant, economically prosperous town that attracts both residents and visitors, thus contributing to the town's thriving economy and inclusive community spirit.

Theme 2 – Safety and Security

Ensuring the safety and security of all of Spennymoor's residents is critical to fostering a strong community spirit and ensuring a high quality of life. This theme encompasses initiatives aimed at reducing crime and anti-social behaviour. This will be done by enhancing public safety infrastructure and supporting new programmes and initiatives. By creating a secure environment where people feel safe to live, work, and visit, the town can build community pride and encourage greater social cohesion, thereby supporting the overall vision of a supportive and inclusive community.

Theme 3 – Transport and Connectivity

Improving transport and connectivity is essential for linking Spennymoor's residents to opportunities and services within and beyond the town. This theme addresses the need for more efficient public transportation, improved road networks, and enhanced walking and cycling. By facilitating easier access to employment, education, and recreational activities, these initiatives will help integrate the community, attract visitors, and support economic growth, thereby ensuring Spennymoor is a well-connected, thriving place to live and work.

- 34 Although not a programme priority theme, the All together for Spennymoor Board overseeing the development of the LTPT programme adopted young people as a cross cutting priority and in support of this, a fourth thematic group has been developed linking with the input to the Board from the Youth Council representative.
- 35 Arising from the consultation and co-design processes the 10-year vision has been endorsed by the community and the All Together for Spennymoor Board.

The Town Vision was adopted 10 July 2024;

“Spennymoor will unlock its full potential as a premier destination to live, work, and visit. It will become a vibrant and inclusive town, boasting a thriving economy, a strong sense of community, and an exceptional quality of life for all residents.”

- 36 Following the General Election, we were advised of a pause in submissions while the new government reviewed the programme and its timescales. The November Budget announcements included confirmation that the LTPT programme will continue with allocations of approximately £20 million per identified town, although there is a suggestion that the priority themes may be adjusted to better reflect the new government’s priorities.
- 37 To support this realignment, the Government confirmed a further £200,000 capacity building funding is available for 2025/6 with an expectation the main programme will go live in 2026.
- 38 The original co-design programme was extensive and well received locally and any new thematic priorities will be built into the programme investment plan following a further co-design phase with stakeholders and the community.

Shildon and Newton Aycliffe

- 39 Shildon and Newton Aycliffe have been identified as a pilot location for Strategic Place Plans following their selection by the National Lottery to form part of the first wave of Heritage Places, a £200 million initiative aimed at engaging communities and develop partnerships which unlock possibilities from the heritage.
- 40 Through this programme, The National Lottery aims to improve communities by bringing together cultural, community, and civic organizations, using heritage to regenerate areas, make them more sustainable, and create jobs. By combining their expertise and resources, it is hoped these organizations can transform these areas into better places to live, work, and visit.

- 41 As one of the first Strategic Heritage Places nationally, the towns are due to receive around £10 million over the next ten years, taking forward priorities and opportunities which flow from a scoping study. This work is community led with support from a project manager who will be based within the community.
- 42 Initial stages of developing this programme are focussed around developing an evidence and baseline document, a theory of change model and the scoping of the future development of local heritage assets. As with the Spennymoor LTPT programme there is a strong focus on Children and Young people and how to engage them as change makers and future community leaders.
- 43 This early-stage engagement work has led to the development of a partnership ambition:
- “[that] through this 10-year programme, the people of Shildon & Newton Aycliffe will feel pride in their connection to heritage reflecting both the innovation and entrepreneurial spirit of our globally significant past, as well as looking to our future”.
- 44 This overall ambition is supported by a further three priorities:
- a) for Shildon, the World’s first railway town, to be recognised as a World Heritage Site;
 - b) for our Children and Young People and others to have access to heritage professions and skills, and
 - c) for sustainable heritage-led regeneration that boosts the local economy.
- 45 Confirmation of the first phase feasibility award of £250,000 was received in November with the feasibility works to be undertaken between December 2024 and June 2026.
- 46 Given the heritage focus of the lottery programme additional engagement sessions will be included to provide a more common input into the eventual Shildon and Aycliffe SPPs including town centre gap and capacity studies.

The ongoing development of future Strategic Place Plans

- 47 Early evidence for the three pilot areas has demonstrated a significant level of stakeholder and resident interest in the process, with engagement far exceeding that seen under the previous masterplan process.

- 48 Reflecting the IES delivery plan ambition to replace the existing suite of masterplans with SPPs the options to progress this work have been considered. This includes both Prioritising SPP development by existing staffing and the procurement of co-design specialists to lead the development of the remaining plans.
- 49 The range of issues and the breadth of engagement in the SPP process also provides opportunities as part of the evolving dialogue with communities around their priorities and how to address them. The realignment of the Area Action Partnerships to Regeneration Economy and Growth along with the agreed transition of the AAP structure into the new Local Community Networks provides further opportunities and capacity to support the future SPP development process and to reflect the approach to identifying place priorities across our wider network of towns and villages.
- 50 With their renewed focus on Community engagement and with the development of four-year network plans an early priority, the Local Community Networks and their capacity provide a valuable additional resource to assist with engagement at a local level.
- 51 This capacity alongside existing teams and the use of specialist consultancy where required (Retail gaps assessment, specific co-design activities) provides the opportunity to accelerate the production of SPPs.
- 52 To prioritize areas for SPP development, several key factors will be considered. These include the level of deprivation, as indicated by relevant indices, to identify areas of greatest need. The number of high street vacancies will also be a significant factor, particularly in areas with high concentrations. The age of existing masterplans will be assessed, with priority given to areas with outdated plans. Additionally, the size and population of settlements will be considered, with a focus on larger, more populated areas.
- 53 Strategic impact will also be considered, prioritising district centres and areas with wider catchment implications. Finally, opportunities and challenges will be identified, with a focus on places with specific issues that may attract external funding or require targeted interventions.
- 54 Reflecting these factors, we propose commencing the Community Visioning element of all the SPPs over the next 14 months as outlined below.

Main Centre	Start	Estimated Completion
Durham	June 2024	June 2025

Spennymoor	April 2024	December 2025
Shildon	January 2025	June 2026
Newton Aycliffe	January 2025	June 2026
Peterlee	June 2025	June 2026
Consett	June 2025	June 2026
Stanley	September 2025	September 2026
Chester le Street	September 2025	September 2026
Crook	January 2026	December 2026
Barnard Castle	January 2026	December 2026
Bishop Auckland	March 2026	March 2027
Seaham	March 2026	March 2027

- 55 This development programme is provisional and as seen with the Spennymoor and Shildon / Newton Aycliffe pilots, may change should external funding opportunities present themselves.
- 56 Each SPP will continue to be developed through a co-design process and will lead to a visioning statement and investment plan supported by a strong evidence base and a spatial plan identifying key opportunity sites.
- 57 The Pilot SPPs are being taken forward utilising existing resource with some elements of capacity funding provided by external funding programmes. £250,000 Capacity building funding has been secured to date through the LTPT programme with a further £200,000 due to be released in April 2024. £250,000 of development funding has also recently been confirmed by the National Lottery for the Shildon / Newton Aycliffe Heritage Place programme.
- 58 To support the development of the SPPs across the county by March 2027, specialist co-design support and technical studies identifying retail and leisure gaps and opportunities in the main centres will need to be procured with an estimated cost of c£500,000, inclusive of room hire, communications, printing, photographer, events, and activities.
- 59 Once completed, SPPs will identify priorities for the future delivery of schemes. They will not however guarantee funding for the projects

identified but will provide a basis on which future grant funding could be sought and business cases for investment considered as part of future MTFP planning processes.

Background papers

Inclusive Economic Strategy, Cabinet Report December 2022

Inclusive Economic Strategy Delivery Plan Cabinet Report November 2023

Spennymoor Long Term Plan for Towns Cabinet Report March 2024

Masterplan Activity in County Durham, Report to Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee January 2024

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Strategic Place Plans, as with the current suite of masterplans will be presented for cabinet approval and will provide local context and priority as part of future decision making.

Durham County Council are identified as lead authority for the Spennymoor LTPT programme and operate as the Accountable body for the All Together for Spennymoor Board.

Finance

The Pilot Strategic Place Plans are being taken forward utilising existing resource with some elements of capacity funding provided by external funding programmes.

Once completed, Strategic Place Plans will identify priorities for the delivery of schemes. They will not however guarantee funding for the projects identified but will provide a basis on which future grant funding could be sought and business cases for investment considered as part of future MTFP planning processes.

To develop the Spennymoor LTPT process an initial £50,000 Capacity funding allocation was received in 2023/24 with a further £200,000 released in April 2024. A further £200,000 is due to be released in April 2025.

In Shildon/ Newton Aycliffe, an initial £250,000 development resource has been confirmed by the national lottery.

To support the development of the Strategic Place Plans across the county, specialist co-design support and technical studies identifying retail and leisure gaps and opportunities in the main centres will need to be procured with an estimated cost of c£500,000, inclusive of room hire, communications, printing, photographer, events, and activities to develop the full suite of SSPs by March 2027.

This £500,000 investment will be part funded from a combination of an Ear-marked Reserve held within REG (£300,000) and a grant from NECA towards (£50,000). The balance (£150,000) will need to be drawn from corporate contingencies in year as required.

Consultation and Engagement

Co-design is central to the Strategic Place Plan programme. Details of the engagement programme for each Strategic Place Plan will be agreed with the council's Corporate Communications Team and the Consultation Officers Group.

Future consultation mechanisms will be enhanced in line with the IES principles of co-development and following lessons learned as part of the Spennymoor and Durham City pilot processes.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Spennymoor LTPT as a publicly funded programme activities in developing and delivering this programme are required to support the public Sector Equality Duties

Climate Change

None

Interventions selected through the programmes may make significant contributions to both national and local net zero plans including the programme focus on reuse and repurposing of buildings including solar and energy, creation of new green spaces and improvements to town centre accessibility through enhanced walking and cycling opportunities.

Human Rights

There are no human right implications from the information within the report.

Crime and Disorder

None

The Spennymoor LTPT programme identifies Safety and Security are a core theme and will be reflected in the subsequent investment plan.

Accommodation

None

Staffing

SPPs will be developed utilising existing multi-disciplinary staffing capacity, supported by specialist external consultants.

Risk

Detailed risk assessments will be undertaken at the individual place level.

Procurement

Any specialist input to the development of the Strategic Place Plans will be undertaken in accordance with the council's procurement rules and procedures.

Appendix 2: Co-design Approach



Open Brief	Shape vision	Consult	Adopt	Delivery Plan
<p>Direct engagement with Local people and stakeholders to define what they want for their area</p> <p>Open conversations highlight opportunities, challenges, constraints, propositions</p> <p>Wide range of engagement tools</p> <p>Developed through a series of workshops, events, activities Use of social media, questionnaire, public event(s), on street</p>	<p>Led by DCC working group</p> <p>Stakeholder groups and public develop draft vision</p> <p>Facilitated by DCC</p>	<p>Public engagement co-design based on the draft vision</p> <p>Continue through a series of workshops, events, activities Use of social media, questionnaire, public event(s), on street</p>	<p>Refine vision based on public engagement</p> <p>Cabinet adopt the vision</p>	<p>Develop a delivery plan based on adopted vision</p> <p>Owned by stakeholder</p>

Appendix 3: Durham City Draft Vision and Priorities

Durham City, a captivating blend of ancient heritage and contemporary culture, will be a beacon of warmth and vibrancy. Our vision is to foster a city where residents and visitors alike feel welcomed, inspired, and connected to the rich tapestry of our history and the beauty of our natural surroundings.

Key Themes and supporting priorities identified during the co-design with the community and stakeholders are;



Friendly City that welcomes all

- Promote Our City the heart of County Durham
- Celebrate our diverse neighbourhoods and communities
- Develop an inclusive and joined up approach to service delivery, ensuring residents have access to all the city has to offer
- Work with schools, Colleges, and the University to ensure young people have the skills to work and excel
- Attract and retain ambitious young people through our university
- Tackle anti social behaviour and street drinking
- Promote respectful behaviour




Events & Attractions

- Encourage better use of the city's parks, green spaces and riverbanks and work with communities and land owners to continuously improve and develop them
- Maximise the use of our heritage assets
- Use culture and creativity to transform perceptions of Durham City
- Seek to attract a family focussed visitor attractions to the city
- Animate and explore family events to target the post work early evening economy
- Maximise promotion of events



Business and Tourism

- Promote café culture through outdoor seating and well managed pavement licences
- Explore options for city centre play equipment
- Create a city centre which has a strong retail offer and diverse mix of uses to meet the needs of its residents, businesses, and visitors
- Continue support to business to enhance and refurbish our historic city buildings




Clean and Invested in

- Promote innovative development and regeneration of urban spaces and communities
- Enhance the public realm and tackle the run down and tired areas
- Target the city's historic buildings and work to bring older buildings back into use
- Support and drive forward inward investment



Proud of World Class University

- Attract and retain ambitious young people through our university
- Work with schools, Colleges, and the University to ensure young people have the skills to work and excel
- Work with the University to co-ordinate events and activities



River, Walks, Green Spaces

- Encourage better use of the city's parks, green spaces and riverbanks and work with communities to continuously improve and develop them
- Use the historic river walks and setting of the City to attract new activities and promote the use widely




Transport and Connectivity

- A well connected City
- Transport infrastructure to link the City to the county, region and beyond
- Safe and welcoming bus station
- Target and improve transport areas that make people feel welcome and safe



A City Centre where people Work, Live, Learn & Play

- Promote the City as a place to Live, Work, Learn and Play
- Promote the City as a gateway to a county filled with culture
- Use culture and creativity to transform perceptions
- Interlinks with all priority themes



Heritage

- Promote and develop the heritage offer working with partners
- Look forward and encourage new ways to celebrate and grow the City's heritage assets