

A vision for our future

Refreshing the county's vision –
Emerging findings



Purpose

A number of key public, private and voluntary sector organisations who make up the County Durham Partnership agreed a vision for County Durham in 2009. This vision of an Altogether Better Durham has served the county well for the last nine years and the partnership working that it has engendered has led to a large number of successes.

Many of the long-term aspirations that we set ourselves as part of this vision have been achieved or we are in the process of implementing now.

- We have worked together to increase employment in the area. 71.5% of the working age population are now in employment compared to its lowest point of 64.6% in 2010 following the global financial crisis of 2007-08.
- Smoking is a major contributor to a range of long-term limiting health conditions. We have worked together on smoking cessation and education schemes to reduce the smoking prevalence from a position where over 22% of the population of County Durham were smokers in 2012 down to current levels where only 14% of people in the county smoke which is comparable with national levels¹.
- We have worked together to half the teenage pregnancies in the county in the last five years².
- We have also worked together to protect the environment and have engaged in a number of initiatives to reduce carbon emissions in the county by over 45% in the last 10 years³. Less than 5% of household waste collected is now sent to landfill compared to over 60%, 10 years ago⁴.

The world has changed since 2009. Technology has developed at a pace in the last nine years and residents have come to expect that services will be provided digitally and will be available on a 24/7 basis. Most people conduct at least a proportion of their shopping online now and companies have invested heavily in this side of their business. This is starting to impact on high streets nationally.

The government's programme of austerity has led to reductions in public spending on a scale not envisaged when our vision was developed. There has been a history of good partnership working in County Durham. In a time when resources are scarce, it is even more important that organisations work more collaboratively and that our efforts are focused on the right things.

We therefore want to review our vision for the future of County Durham. We need everyone to be signed up to a new vision and so we would like your help in identifying what our future priorities should be.

We regularly consult and engage with the public on a whole range of issues. We have therefore looked at existing feedback from all of our different consultation exercises that have recently been carried out. This information has also been supplemented by focus groups with members of the public, frontline staff and businesses.

We have also examined what data we have available in terms of how we are performing as a county and looked at things like forthcoming national policy changes that we need to take into account in helping us identify future priorities.

The results of this work are presented in this document.

Following dialogue with the public and partner organisations we will produce a draft vision document which we will consult on to ensure that we have captured what is important to everyone.

Who makes up the County Durham Partnership?

- Durham County Council
- County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service
- Durham Constabulary
- North East England Chamber of Commerce
- Durham University
- Voluntary and community sector
- NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups
- Public Health
- Office of the Durham Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner
- Housing organisations

Approach

Consultation and engagement

The County Durham Partnership has a wide range of mechanisms that we use to consult and engage with residents and service users. The following sources of resident and public opinion were used to produce this document.

You have said

The 14 Area Action Partnerships (AAPs) cover the whole of County Durham. AAPs were set up to give people a greater choice and voice in their local affairs and how services are provided in their communities. They also give the council and other organisations such as police, fire and health the chance to speak directly to local communities. All AAPs regularly consult residents within their area on their local priorities. This was carried out most recently in October 2018.

The council regularly consults the public on how it spends its budget. Comments were invited from the public on the budget for the current year through 85 community meetings, events and drop-in sessions across the county and over 3,300 people provided us with their views.

We have recently carried out an extensive public consultation on the County Durham Plan. This is our spatial plan for development of the county up until 2035 covering things like housing, leisure and employment opportunities as well as the necessary transport, schools and healthcare infrastructure required to support it and how it impacts on the environment.

We undertake regular consultation with children and young people. Last year over 10,300 school pupils from primary and secondary schools in the county took part in our student voice survey providing us with opinions on school life and a range of issues to do with their health, feeling safe, lifestyle choices and how connected they feel to their communities. A specific engagement exercise on the County Durham Plan was also recently undertaken with young people aimed at getting them to think about the future of their county and give us their views. School pupils were also surveyed on AAP priorities.

Earlier this year we carried out a public art project called “The Message Wall” where we asked people to tell us what they valued about County Durham. Over 1,000 residents and visitors took part in this and their words were used to create four large artwork canvasses. The comments provide a valuable insight into what people treasure about County Durham.

We also commissioned a number of focus groups to gather the views of people who don't normally engage in consultations, and have consulted with council frontline staff and businesses.



The County Durham Partnership has a wealth of data about the county. We are required to carry out ongoing assessments of the current and future needs of our residents regarding health and wellbeing, housing and crime and disorder.

We continually monitor our performance, the state of the county and how we compare with others. This information has also been used to help us identify priorities for improvement.

National issues

We also looked at current issues that we will need to address in order to keep pace with what is happening nationally and improve things for the people of County Durham

A number of issues were identified from this analysis, some of which were also highlighted by residents and users through our consultation and engagement activity.

A national issue affecting the county is the demographic pressures caused by the 1960s baby boom. The ageing population will mean that a quarter of our population will be aged 65 and over by 2039. This will result in a greater demand for services relating to older people such as adult social care and will also reshape the way that we deliver other services such as housing, leisure and culture.

Healthy life expectancy in the county is static and is significantly lower than England. Life expectancy in the county is increasing so this means that the number of years that adults spend in poor health is increasing. Without action, this will put further financial strain on the NHS and local authorities for health and social care services for older people. One way of tackling this problem is to encourage people to make healthier lifestyle choices at an earlier stage in their life in things like smoking, drinking, drug taking, diet and exercise which will mean that they will remain healthier for longer.

Whilst the Chancellor has announced funding increases for the NHS, spending on unprotected services like councils, police and fire are projected to flat line over the next five years and actually reduce by 3% in terms of spend per head of population.

The government's proposed fair funding review of grant funding to local authorities was also seen as a risk. The current uncertainty around how the exit of the UK from the European Union will affect the local economy and future funding opportunities is also a risk.

Issues relating to the environment and climate change have potential impacts on how all households dispose of their rubbish. There is a likelihood that the government will want to see more recycling in our management of waste. There is also a lot of interest in the use of plastics in society and the public now expect that unnecessary use of plastics by public sector organisations is reduced.

Climate change brings with it extremes of temperature and more extreme weather events. This will impact on the whole population, but especially people who are vulnerable. Investing in improvements to the energy efficiency of our buildings and vehicles not only makes economic sense but will also reduce the impact that public services have on the environment.

The increasing demand for children's social care services that has been experienced in County Durham over the last few years impacts on budgets and increased demand for local authority and other public sector services. This is a national trend that is likely to continue.

What are Durham's strengths?

People overwhelmingly identified the beautiful countryside and coast as being a strength of County Durham. The county has a great heritage and history and the city of Durham was seen as a physical embodiment of this being internationally recognised with UNESCO inscribing Durham Cathedral and Castle and the Palace Green area as a World Heritage Site.

"The people are great. We have a close-knit community. We have coast and countryside and you've got Durham City – beautiful."

County Durham Resident, Focus Group, October 2018

There is a strong sense of pride amongst residents in the place and in its people. Visitors to the area have commented on the friendliness of our people.

"When I've been away anywhere and I see the sign – Land of the Prince Bishops – I feel emotional. Thank God I'm back."

County Durham Resident, Focus Group, October 2018

Children and young people report high levels of feeling safe and being happy⁵.

Durham performs well in a number of areas. The county enjoys high standards of cleanliness and low levels of pollution in comparison with other areas of the country⁶. Residents praised the council for maintaining a good level of service around litter picking⁷.

We have some of the lowest house prices in the country and affordability is not the issue that it is in some parts of the UK⁹.

The NHS and council work well together in providing a seamless service in terms of health and social care for older people. One of the government's national priorities is to reduce delays in accessing social care for patients when ready to leave a hospital. Durham is one of the best performers in the country at this delayed transfers of care measure¹⁰.

Early years and primary school education is good in County Durham at foundation stage and Key Stage 2¹¹.

The Department for Transport rates the council as one of the best highways authorities in the county¹².

Durham County Council is known for its effective engagement with communities. It has won the Municipal Journal excellence in community engagement award in 2017 and was the good governance and scrutiny award winner in 2016, this latter award recognising innovative practice in mass local participatory budget and priority setting. Over £40m of grants have been awarded to County Durham community groups through the work of the AAPs.

"Durham County Council's engagement with all areas of the local community used a wide range of innovative and age-appropriate techniques..."

Andy Cook, Judge on the Municipal Journal
Excellence in Community Engagement Awards 2017

Durham Constabulary is ranked as being the best police force in England and Wales and the only force to be rated as outstanding for effectiveness¹³.

Levels of employment are improving⁸. There's a momentum and we're moving our economy forward with a total of £3.4 billion planned investment. We have strong partnerships across the county, we're collaborating and making things happen through premises, business support and finance; not only in manufacturing but in high-tech, space-related industries and professional services too.

The need for Durham City to be prosperous and the focal point of promotion was seen by residents as necessary⁷. The city was recognised as a driver for economic resurgence and the university and tourism, both in the city and across the county as key. Both of these areas have seen growth in recent years.

The county has good north-south transport links with the A1(M) and East coast mainline whilst east-west connections are seen as an opportunity for development.

What are some of the challenges?

Although County Durham has many strengths, residents and others identified some challenges and concerns.

Unsurprisingly, the business community highlighted economic development and regeneration as a key priority. Whilst employment levels are increasing in County Durham, we do lag behind regional and national averages. Young people identified having a range of jobs and opportunities as being important to help retain them in the area in the future. Youth unemployment (18-24 years olds) is higher than in other age groups in County Durham, which is a national trend⁸. Household income levels lag behind the rest of the country and have not kept pace with national trends indicating that there are too many low wage jobs in our local economy¹⁴.

Both elected members and residents identified the decline of the high streets in town and village centres as an issue in County Durham but recognise that this is a national problem with a number of large retailers embarking on programmes of store closures across the country as they invest more in their online businesses. Residents recognise that they have contributed to this trend through online shopping. Parliament has identified this as a growing trend and a select committee inquiry is looking into the future of high streets and town centres in England in 2030. Data shows that six of our town centres are enjoying better performance than national levels in terms of retail unit occupancy with Barnard Castle, Ferryhill and Crook topping the table¹⁵.

“The local towns have gone downhill – charity shops and betting shops. The centres are nothing to what they used to be.”

County Durham resident, Focus Group, October 2018

Elected members and local businesses have also highlighted the need for a range of good quality housing in Durham’s towns and villages. Better management of privately rented housing was also seen as important.

The county has an ageing population. One in five people are aged 65 and over and this is projected to increase to one quarter by 2039¹⁶. Residents highlighted the challenge of providing facilities and services for older people will increase, not only in terms of adult care services but also leisure and cultural opportunities to overcome social isolation and maintain good health and wellbeing.

“By 2039, one in four residents in County Durham will be 65 years old and over.”

The percentage of secondary schools that are ranked by Ofsted as good or outstanding is low in County Durham¹⁷ and educational attainment at GCSE is below the national average¹⁸.

Participation of young people in higher education is also low in County Durham¹⁹. Business leaders identified that any future vision needs to start with children.

Ofsted has highlighted that we are lagging behind nationally expected standards of good practice in terms of children’s social care services and that public sector agencies need to work together more effectively to support children whose circumstances make them vulnerable.

Health of our residents featured strongly in consultations. County Durham ranks poorly in comparison with the rest of the country across a range of health indicators such as life expectancy, healthy life expectancy and mortality rates associated with long-term conditions²⁰. This is partly a legacy of our history of heavy industry but also lifestyle choices. Obesity levels in County Durham are high²¹. Residents highlighted the importance of encouraging people to adopt healthier lifestyles in order to save money on health and social care services in later life. They also felt that poor mental health was an issue in the county.

Residents highlighted poverty and deprivation in the county and they felt that services to vulnerable people should be protected insofar as is possible and that no one should be left behind.

They were concerned about a decline in community spirit and that the values of looking out for each other are not shared by everyone. Fostering good relations between people was seen as important. Whilst the loss of some social hubs such as local shops, businesses, clubs and pubs were referenced as a barrier to this, the advance of social media was viewed as an opportunity for communities to connect with each other.

The dispersed and decentralised settlement pattern within County Durham is seen as a challenge for the provision of public services with Durham being made up of over 300 recognised

settlements including 21 settlements with a population of over 5,000.

Residents were concerned about whether austerity would continue. Council staff also highlighted the government's forthcoming fair funding review of grant funding to local authorities as a future challenge. There was a sense amongst residents that austerity had already noticeably reduced services provided by the local authority, the police and health services.

Suggestions in how to deal with future funding reductions included exploring new ways of working to generate income and achieve further efficiencies, explore further collaboration across the public sector and investing in prevention.

"I don't think the Council can do it by itself – it needs the government. You know that phrase 'northern powerhouse'? Well it feels like we're the northern poorhouse."

County Durham resident, Focus Group, October 2018

Durham 2030 - Proposed Ambitions

What do we want Durham to look like in the future?

People want Durham to retain those features that make the county unique and build on those strengths. They also want to see agencies have an effective plan to address the challenges that they have identified. The priorities that people have highlighted in recent consultations give an indication of what is important to communities and what residents would like to see changed.

The issues highlighted by residents and a review of all available information have been developed into a number of proposed ambitions to create a prosperous county for all.

A thriving economy that creates financially secure jobs

Driving growth in job opportunities for local people, promoting growth in business, and supporting small businesses to thrive which are vital to the local economy.

We need to ensure that the infrastructure, eg transport and broadband access, to support this growth is fit for purpose.

Access to a range of jobs, particularly for young people in order to retain their talent, was identified as a priority in a number of our consultations. Our young people need to be adequately prepared for the world of work to ensure that they can access these jobs and have ambitions to live and work in the county.

We need to build on the strengths of Durham City and University, together with our business parks across the County, to create an attractive place for investment and work. Investment in external, new and existing County businesses is necessary to create conditions that will promote high quality jobs and retain a well-trained young workforce in the County.

County Durham is a place to visit, stay and come back to

We are rightly proud of our history, cultural heritage, clean environment and beautiful surroundings. We need to capitalise on this and make Durham a destination of choice for visitors and a leisure opportunity for our residents. This will also boost the economy and provide jobs for local people.

A range of good quality housing is available to meet the future needs of the county

Good quality housing was also seen as important in retaining our people. Whilst the county enjoys good levels of housing affordability, this can mean that

some of our housing is of poor quality. Good quality housing is a critical factor in ensuring the health, safety and prosperity of our residents. We want to work with developers and housing providers to ensure that this sector must be effectively regulated to ensure that good housing standards and safe communities are maintained for all of our residents.

Vibrant town and village centres

Nationally, over 18% of retail business is now conducted online²² and this is projected to increase as it is cheaper than the traditional shop premises model to operate and hence more profitable for companies. E-business is also popular with shoppers due to its convenience and 24/7 availability. Historically, commerce has been a big driver in the development of towns.

Rethinking the role of town and village centres to ensure that they are relevant for the 21st century and are vibrant, safe and an attractive prospect was identified as being important by residents.

County Durham is a great place for children and young people to grow up

County Durham should be a great place for our children and young people to grow up. They should have access to a range of activities and facilities such as leisure, sport and recreation.

Young people identified mental health and access to the appropriate support as a priority. They said that they should be able to receive additional support with their emotional wellbeing when required.

We want to create an environment where children are safe and inspired to reach their full potential and play a part in achieving the county's ambitions.

People are supported to enjoy healthier and happier lives

Durham suffers from poor health outcomes and too many of our residents are living for too many years in poor health. We need to continue to invest in public health programmes to try to prevent this and help everyone lead healthy, active lives. Residents need to play their part and maintain a healthy lifestyle so that they will not suffer years of poor health in old age.

An ageing population will place additional and sometimes different demands on public services. Whilst this will result in higher demands for adult social care, the nature of a whole range of other services may need to change to ensure that people can enjoy greater opportunities to lead independent and active lives in their retirement.

Fair and supportive communities where everybody matters

An undeniable and strong theme from all of our consultation work is the pride that people have in both their county and community. There are historical, social and cultural aspects to this.

Whilst many visitors to the county have commented on the friendliness of its people, there have been a small number of examples where people have been less welcoming. More integrated communities where everyone can feel safe and included, regardless of their background or characteristics was seen as important and in the tradition of tolerance and acceptance of the North East people. Public agencies cannot achieve this alone. Everyone who lives in County Durham has a role to play.

County Durham fares well in comparison with other parts of the country in terms of the level of volunteering. We need to build on this and all work together.

There are large inequality gaps across a range of measures across the county and it was seen by many as important that we redouble our efforts on closing these gaps and ensuring that no one is left behind.

Underpinning factors

Underpinning these ambitions for the future are some conditions that residents believe should be present in order that communities thrive.

Firstly, residents would like their communities to be clean and free from things like litter, dog waste, graffiti and vandalism. This will help to engender a sense of pride in their surroundings and has also been shown to discourage things like crime and antisocial behaviour.

They would also like to live in communities, which do not suffer from the impacts of high levels of crime and disorder including antisocial behaviour and misuse of drugs and alcohol.

Next Steps

We need you to help us decide whether these ambitions reflect the priorities for County Durham.

We would also like your views on what actions we need to carry out and what you can do to help us achieve these ambitions.

We will consult on these emerging findings and draft ambitions between 22 November 2018 and 18 January 2019. To take part, visit www.durham.gov.uk/consultation

Consultation Questions

We would like your help in answering the following questions:

1. Are these ambitions the right ones?
2. What do we need to do to achieve these ambitions and how can you help?

Evidence Sources

¹Smoking prevalence in adults – current smokers (APS) in England 2016-2017, Public Health England

²Conception rate per 1,000 women under 18 in England 2011-2016, Office for National Statistics

³CO2 emissions estimates – per capita emissions (local authority influence) in England, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy 2007 -2017

⁴Percentage of municipal waste landfilled 2009/10 – 2016/17, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

⁵Student Voice Survey of Secondary Schools 2017 (~6,000 pupils) 87% of respondents were in the top four categories from 'very happy' to 'ok'
Student Voice Survey of Primary Schools 2017 (3,79 pupils) were in the top four categories of 'very happy' to 'ok'

⁶Durham County Council quarterly performance reports

⁷Feedback from qualitative research (October 2018)

⁸Nomis Official Labour Market Statistics, Office for National Statistics

⁹Ratio of median house price to median gross annual (workplace based) earnings 2017, Office for National Statistics

¹⁰Delayed Transfers of Care Data 2018-19, NHS England

¹¹(1) Percentage of children achieving at least the expected level across the Prime Areas of Learning at foundation stage, (2) percentage of pupils reaching the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 2 in reading, writing and mathematics, (3) Percentage of primary schools rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted, Department for Education

¹²Durham County Council named by Department for Transport as one of the top two performing highways authorities in the country scoring highly against all 22 set criteria for incentive funding for highways maintenance

¹³PEEL: Police effectiveness 2017 – A national overview, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (March, 2018)

¹⁴Gross disposable household incomes, Office for National Statistics

¹⁵Quarter Four 2017/18 Performance Management Report, Durham County Council (measured September 2017) (13 June 2018)

¹⁶Population Estimates for the UK, Mid-2017, Office for National Statistics

¹⁷Percentage of secondary schools ranked 'Good' or 'Outstanding', Ofsted

¹⁸Average Attainment 8 score in England 2017/18 (academic), Department for Education

¹⁹POLAR – Participation of Local Areas, Higher Education Funding Council

²⁰Local Authority Health Profiles, Public Health England, % children in reception year and year 6 who are overweight or obese, National Child Measurement Programme, NHS Digital

²¹(1) Estimated number of obese adults, Health Survey for England, Public Health England (2)

²²Online retail in Great Britain, Office for National Statistics (August 2018)

