

**The County  
Durham Housing  
Strategy  
Rural Proofing  
Report 2019**

*Altogether better*



## **Rural Proofing Report**

This document sets out the context to the rural proofing exercise that was carried out on the Housing Strategy as a tool to ensure that the appropriate responses are directed to our rural areas. It gives an overview of the County Durham context, population of County Durham, and some key challenges and opportunities in rural communities that the Housing Strategy can consider.

Rural Proofing is important as it aims to make certain that the needs of, and issues affecting, those living and working in rural areas are considered in all key messages and outcomes set out in the Housing Strategy. Rural issues have been identified as a cross cutting theme in the Housing Strategy. Many housing issues have a rural dimension and it is important to ensure rural housing related issues are addressed and opportunities in a rural context are realised.

Rural proofing is not about special treatment for rural areas, but about understanding the fact that urban solutions will not necessarily work in rural areas with their dispersed population, settlements and economic markets.

## **County Durham Context**

County Durham is an extensive county extending over 862 square miles and home to around half a million people. It extends from the North Pennines Area of Outstanding Beauty in the west to the Durham Heritage Coast in the east. Around 43% of the population are based in rural areas, from remote and sparsely populated rural areas in the Pennine Dales to larger villages located in the former coalfield communities in the centre and the east.

It is recognised that rural settlements in County Durham need to be able to evolve and sustain themselves. Providing balanced opportunities will enable people to live and work in their own rural town or villages and the support of local services is a crucial factor to securing sustainable rural communities.

Rural settlements across the county are diverse, differing in their scale and their ability to sustain growth. Larger settlements generally offer more service provision as they incorporate more houses, jobs, existing infrastructure, better public transport provision and community facilities. These settlements can provide a critical service centre role for a wider surrounding area and have the ability to accommodate and sustain proportionally higher levels of allocated growth, allowing them to build on their key service centre role, typical to the function of a traditional market town

It is important to recognise that some smaller settlements also have an important role to play as localised service centres for their immediate surrounding area, particularly if they are relatively remote from one of these larger settlements.

## **Population**

The County covers an area of 862 square miles and is the 19th largest County in the United Kingdom; 90% of the total area of County Durham (222,600ha) is rural. The total population of County Durham is 513,242; 45.1% of the population (231,417 people) live in rural

Durham. This means that large areas of the county are sparsely populated due to this it follows that access to services will be more limited than in the rural areas. As such there will be a greater reliance on the private car to be able to access these services as and when required.

It is important that the Housing Strategy's approach to address rural issues are in line with the wider key measures and strategic delivery of the outcomes.

There are key challenges and opportunities in rural communities for the Housing Strategy to consider. These include:

**Ageing Population** - The population is ageing; government aims to enable people to live in their own homes for longer but the health care requirements associated with this delivered in partnership with Primary Care Trusts will require increased funding and place a greater demand on the service provision.

There are considerations over whether it is possible to adequately adapt homes in rural areas to enable this; and furthermore the viability of older persons being able to stay within their communities if living in their home is no longer possible.

**Accessibility** -The County's dispersed, small, rural settlements, an increasing population, low levels of car ownership and high levels of incapacity and health needs all create major challenges to accessing essential services, leading to poor quality of life and social exclusion for many local residents.

Residents, particular the elderly, living in rural areas are particularly dependent on the car, with rural transport deprivation linked to difficulties in accessing key services.

This rural character of the county creates issues and challenges relating to provision and access to facilities and services. Given the threat to facilities such as post offices, shops and public houses in smaller settlements planning policy that offers protection may need to be explored.

**Affordable Housing** -In certain parts of the County in-migration has raised house prices, pushing younger people away from rural areas and accentuated the population imbalance. Rural areas are attractive as primary homes for commuters and retirees, or for second homes, but we need to ensure that local people (including young people) are not excluded from the housing market. Also, people who work in rural areas may be unable to afford to live in these areas. This situation is sometimes exacerbated by the existence of 2nd homes. The Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) has recognised a shortfall of affordable housing of 829 dwellings.

**Accessible Housing**- People with disabilities and accessibility issues need homes that are accessible to get to, get into and move around and live in. As people's circumstances and needs change throughout their lives this could mean adaptations or further adaptation may be needed.

The type of housing mix in rural areas means that people with disabilities and accessibility needs in rural areas may not live in a house that can be adapted, this includes for example, widening doorways, extending buildings, adapting layouts, and gaining disabled access up to the house including parking. This could also be the case in urban areas but in rural areas there is a more limited stock of existing housing, and new housing as an alternative.

**Accessibility to fuel-** Rural areas are more likely to be located off the gas network, therefore relying on more expensive and carbon intensive fuel sources for their energy needs. There are opportunities to improve energy efficiency of properties to ensure County Durham has a stock of warm, healthy and energy efficient homes through:

- The council's award winning Warm Homes Campaign that co-ordinates delivery of the County Durham Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan by raising awareness, uptake and delivery of all local and national energy efficiency and fuel poverty programs to residents in County Durham;
- The Managing Money Better Service, which provides free and impartial advice to save money on energy bills and to keep residents homes warm.

A distinction can be made between the rural coalfield communities closer to the A19 and A1 corridors, and the more isolated rural areas in Teesdale and Weardale. For example areas in the east are closer to larger urban areas but have more concentrated pockets of population suffering employment deprivation.

**Gypsy and Traveller Communities** -There are established Gypsy and Traveller Communities in parts of County Durham. Evidence shows that authorised sites are close to capacity following recent upgrading. However unauthorised encampments are overwhelmingly seasonal with negligible numbers over the winter backed up by the Traveller Site Needs Assessment – 2018

**Employment / Education** – County Durham has a narrow economic base as well as a lack of well-paid employment. Rural productivity (measured by Gross Value Added) is relatively low.

In terms of employment, education and skills the most significant consideration is a need to provide for improvements in the county's low skills base – which impacts upon the number and range of employment opportunities.

Rural areas face the same problems as urban areas in regard to flooding; however their very nature means that they often have to cope with greater scales of difficulty. Flooding comes in the form of fluvial, marine/ tidal, surface water, sewer, groundwater and a legacy from deep coal mining.

As such we are using Rural Proofing as a process that seeks to highlight such opportunities that may arise through sustainable development in rural areas so that we do not miss them. One of the roles of rural proofing is also to ensure that the key measures in the strategy allow for enough flexibility to allow sustainable rural development.

## **Conclusion**

Through the consultation process the rural proofing exercise has clarified that:

- Rural issues are a cross cutting theme in the Housing Strategy.
- Many of the key measures and outcomes have a general applicability and don't have a bias towards or against rural areas in County Durham, this is both in the document and in the delivery behind these key measures and outcomes.
- That some of the questions within the Rural Proofing Exercise need to be addressed through joint and partnership working beyond the key measures and outcomes in the Strategy.
- There has been scope to modify some outcomes and finer detail in the delivery of these to take into consideration the rural context.

The full rural proofing exercise report is attached below.

Aims	Objectives	Outcomes	Consideration	Rural Context	Does the Housing Strategy Address this?	
					Yes	No
Better Housing Support for County Durham Residents	To provide housing advice, assistance & support for older and vulnerable people	Provide care and support for older and vulnerable people including adaptations to properties	Will adaptations be done in keeping with rural housing? Will adaptations include wider grounds adaptations such as accessibility to houses in rural areas, where access limited?	<p>DCC Housing Market Assessment Position Statement has identified key groups for consideration regarding housing. These are: older persons, people with mental health issues and people with learning disabilities, single person homelessness.</p> <p><b>Older person-</b> The proportion of people needing care and support services rises with age and due to the demographics of County Durham, including in rural areas. It should also be noted that whilst consideration must be made regarding how care and support can be provided for older people, older people will also relocate to rural areas out of lifestyle choice, such as the north west of County Durham. The number of older people in rural areas is increasing in line with the County, a proportion of those may be made up of people who have relocated in older age by choice.(ONS 2011, ONS 2017 <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/collect/section/rural-urban-classification">https://www.gov.uk/government/collect/section/rural-urban-classification</a> )</p> <p>Whilst, many older people would prefer to stay in their own home for as long as possible with support as</p>	<p><b>Older Person-</b> At home adaptations will benefit older persons in rural areas to stay within their homes in their communities for longer. This would alleviate concerns regarding being displaced to another area as a result of lack of care and support available to them.</p> <p><b>Homelessness-</b> The council’s housing team offer home/offsite visits where they can (they also have access to make appointments at various building across the county); they carry out many telephone appointments (based on availability of customer and staff) but extra measures would be only offered based on vulnerabilities as opposed to where they live. It must be stressed they do not expect anyone (rural or not) to attend an appointment at council offices to access the service.</p> <p>A strategic and joined up planning for and providing care and support for these groups within rural areas will be significant so that they do not have to move to where the nearest services are,</p>	

				<p>required, some older people would like to move house and live in accommodation that is better located, more accessible and easier to maintain. There has often been the lack of housing options for older people with sheltered housing or residential care often being the only choices available. There is consideration to be made about the differing types of rural areas. Rural areas in the east of Durham may be able to offer more flexible support as they are closer to urban settlements.</p> <p><b>People with mental health issues and people with learning disabilities-</b> The council is committed to improving access and availability of suitable accommodation and services to support people with a range of needs including learning disabilities and mental health problems to enable them to live as independently as possible in the community. This client group is anticipated to see the largest increase in numbers, coupled with the largest rise in funding requirements.</p> <p><b>Single person homelessness-</b>The Housing Solutions Team have seen</p>	<p>which in a rural context could result in them becoming displaced.</p> <p>The council will seek to better understand the specialist care needs of its residents by working with health professionals and other partners to develop a Housing Market Position Statement. This will focus on the needs of the groups highlighted in this section. However, the needs of other groups will also be considered as the HMPS develops, including considering the needs of families and children, including these groups in rural areas and the context of their needs as a result.</p> <p>As part of the Homelessness Strategy, an assessment of the current voids with Registered Providers that own housing supply will also be undertaken to ensure that both we as an Authority and housing associations are making their properties work for them and our client base.</p>	
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				<p>the largest increase in its client base of single persons. It is evident that these persons are presenting with more and more complex support needs. Due to this, it is becoming harder to place these clients within appropriate accommodation. Issues relating to drug and alcohol dependency, coupled with mental and physical health problems has resulted in this client base becoming one of the most difficult and costly to house and support.</p> <p>There are people who present themselves to the team from rural area, albeit low figures, however this will represent the low population of the area and so the proportion of the population presenting as homeless should also be considered, and also it misses the hidden portion of homelessness such as 'sofa surfing'.</p>		
		Addressing poverty and the impacts of welfare reform in a housing context	Will the Housing strategy address poverty and the impacts of welfare reform in a housing context?	People in rural areas may be more likely to depend on seasonal work and so have multiple jobs. These jobs may be low paid jobs and welfare/ top-ups may be relied upon in the interim between jobs, there will be an added impact as a result of U/C introduction, which alters as income does. This could have a potential greater impact on people	The County Durham Poverty Action Steering Group developed an action plan covering five themes: Attitudes to poverty and raising the profile; Focus on child poverty; Credit and debt; Understanding further welfare and benefit changes; Work and personal wellbeing, sense of worth. The Housing Support group, made up of all agencies and housing providers in	It isn't clarified if these groups take into account the differing context of rural areas concerning-living expenses, work rotations and U/C impact.



				<p>in rural areas where some living costs (fuel and transport) are more expensive). In rural areas benefit changes such as the bedroom tax may hit rural residents harder as there is less choice of suitable dwellings to move to. A review and option appraisal of the triage to assist clients in financial difficulties who are struggling to meet their rent payments is being carried out</p>	<p>County Durham which meets regularly. Poverty, and its key themes, have been an agreed priority for this group. The council's Housing Solutions continue to work closely with housing providers across County Durham to understand the welfare changes and the potential impact and to coordinate a joined up approach. An action plan is in place for the next two years and includes;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of the council's Financial Assistance Policy to consider if low interest loans or other financial products could be made available</li> <li>• Review the existing performance information in relation to rent arrears, housing demand and empty properties.</li> </ul>	<p>Promotion to people in rural areas to raise awareness. Joined up approaches to sign-posting these initiatives could be widened.</p>
		Prevention of homelessness in County Durham	Will the prevention of homelessness in County Durham include in rural areas?	<p>The IPPR reports: In rural areas, shelter is limited and emergency hostels are rare, with individuals reporting sleeping in tents, barns, cars and outhouses. It can be harder to access support services provided by councils and charities; communities are more isolated and public transport is often infrequent and expensive. Outreach work is also more of a struggle for professionals working in remote locations, where</p>	<p>The council's Homelessness strategy sets out its approach to addressing homelessness, which include three overall aims, to prevent homelessness through early intervention, Increase the supply of accommodation for those who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, provide a range of support services to reduce risk of households becoming homeless and an action plan that spans County Durham. There isn't any discrete section that</p>	<p>There are monitoring processes and development that will take place as part of the strategy including gap analysis, which may identify this as an area that needs</p>

				<p>resources are stretched and where there are often concerns about the safety of lone workers. These challenges increase during bad weather. Severe travel disruption can cut off entire rural communities, preventing people from reaching more sheltered locations, and essential shops and services. Plummeting temperatures are more keenly felt in the absence of the residual heat of urban centres.</p>	<p>targets homelessness/or threat of homelessness, in a rural context or how the aims will be actioned in a relevant way to the nature or rural homelessness, however there are figures recorded of people presenting as homeless across rural areas, although as a caveat to these figures In rural areas homelessness may be a hidden issue. More space in rural housing could mean that there is 'sofa surfing' and staying with friends. People may not be rough sleepers but are homeless nevertheless. However, services are county wide and flexible to take into account location and differing context and need as detailed above.</p>	<p>to be addressed in further depth.</p> <p>Promotion to people in rural areas to raise awareness. Joined up approaches to sign-posting these initiatives could be widened</p>
	<p>Improve access to housing</p>	<p>Ensure Durham Key Options Choice Based Lettings is accessible and easy to use for the residents of County Durham</p>	<p>Does DKO reach rural areas? Will DKO be accessible and easy to use for residents in rural areas?</p>	<p>There is the increased risk of implications regarding access to DKO for people in rural areas due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geographical location of rural areas- This will make it more difficult and take longer to, for example access and attend DKO or RP offices, as travel time is extended and ability to travel at certain times may be impacted.</li> <li>• Limited transport infrastructure-</li> </ul>	<p>DKO works in partnership schemes that span across the county, including County Durham Housing Group, which parents Dale &amp; Valley Homes and East Durham Homes, Karbon Homes, Livin and North Star Housing. A further 15 RPs are signed to a nomination agreement with DKO to allocate 50% of their homes through DKO. This is aimed at providing the DKO service as an easily accessible service throughout the county. Social housing stock is held across Wear Valley, Teesdale, Sedgefield, Derwentside and East</p>	<p>Joined up approaches to sign-posting these initiatives could to be widened.</p>

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>If residents do not have use of their own means of transport reliance on public transport may be problematic as transport infrastructure is limited in rural areas. Attending meetings/appointments/numerous RP offices etc would be more problematic for residents in rural areas. Potentially limited DKO stock in rural areas- There are less houses in rural areas and so potentially less available housing stock through DKO or housing stock is sporadically placed across the area, which again may be problematic to access to view properties.</li> </ul>	<p>Durham as well as Durham City and Chester le Street.</p> <p>The aim of the council is to raise awareness of the scheme and attract more customers to DKO whilst improving accessibility to homes. Actions have been designed to improve DKO through: the use of evidence on an area by area basis regarding demand for social housing to analyse, scope and implement interventions; review the DKO application process; Investigate affordability for social housing in County Durham; and Improve the appearance and functionality of the customer website (including mobile site) to support access and ease of use for prospective tenants.</p> <p>Depending on the housing partner (eg Karbon, CDHG etc), the following is offered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Telephone applications</li> <li>Home visits</li> <li>Appointments at various access points (eg North Star just have one in Barnard Castle, as small provider in County Durham, but CDHG have workers across multiple offices)</li> </ul> <p>Online applications can be submitted by all clients or by advocates or support workers. East Durham Homes complete</p>	
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					<p>online forms with customers in their Peterlee access point. For those who do not have access to online bidding, they can be added to an auto-bid facility on the system based on their preferences (CDHG staff bid for these applicants instead of using auto-bid and EDH have a vulnerable persons officer).</p> <p>Evidence (eg proof of address/ID) can be photographed and sent by email or text. Only if we have reason to believe the documents are fraudulent would we ask to see originals at that point – we ask to see originals at future point of offer. All partners offer low call rate or free telephone numbers to ring, and have call back service. Livin have an online chat facility.</p> <p>All of the above is available to all and/or based on vulnerabilities as opposed to where applicants live, but it can mitigate some of the issues those in rural areas may have. Partners are accommodating (within reason) when arranging viewings with applicants.</p> <p>These actions could benefit residents in rural areas as evidence will be specific to the relevant area, rather than Countywide evidence informing decisions made for rural areas.</p>	
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					<p>Furthermore increased accessibility to the DKO site and support will benefit those in need of DKO in rural areas who are more likely to have accessibility or connectivity issues.</p> <p><b>Monitoring-</b> DKO carries out annual audits of all of its partners, which acts as an annual checking system against the DKO letting policy framework. Reports are circulated following analysis of these audits for partners to learn from and continue best possible practice. On-going assessment also ensures that applicants are in the most suitable dwelling available.</p>	
		Coordinate approaches to improve access to existing properties in County Durham for residents	Will these coordinated approaches include in rural areas?	As above	DKO works with its partners and neighbouring authorities to ensure a joined up approach in improving access to existing properties in County Durham. This will include coordination with these authorities and services and partners in rural areas. A proposed Local Letting Agency (LLA) will further improve access to existing properties that are decent and affordable for households on low-incomes, two issues which affects people in rural areas.	Joined up approaches to sign-posting these initiatives could be widened.
	Delivery of more homes	Provide housing	Will housing products	It may be that consideration needs to be given for which locations in	The Housing Strategy draws upon the Strategic Housing Market Assessment	The Housing Strategy does not

More and better homes	to meet housing need and demand	products specifically to meet the needs of older persons	specifically to meet the needs of older persons be provided in rural areas?	rural areas are appropriate for specialist housing for older people to ensure they are not displaced or isolated from their communities. Considerations need to be made regarding the infrastructure that will support the needs of older people. S.106 offsite contributions of older people's homes could also benefit rural areas as older people's homes are built in these areas as part of this.	(SHMA) that shows that there is variation in the housing options older people would consider. The Housing Strategy supports enabling older people to live as independently as they wish. Policy (15) in the County Durham Pre-Submission Plan supports this through a requirement for all new developments above 10 dwellings provide a minimum of 10 % for older people. In rural areas there will be rural exceptions whereby the 10 dwelling minimum threshold will be lower. Policy 15 also includes the provision of specialist housing to meet the needs of older people in an appropriate location.  <b>Monitoring-</b> Percentage of approved and completed housing units to meet the specific needs of older people by tenure type and in specific areas	specify how residents in rural areas will be affected by specialist housing. If the housing will be built in the existing communities for older people or if older people will have to move to another area or to an urban area to access products that specifically meet their needs.
		Delivery of high quality affordable homes to meet housing needs in County Durham	Will the delivery of high quality affordable homes to meet housing needs in County Durham include and	Affordability of housing may be an issue in some rural areas for a number of reasons: lower income of people working and living in rural areas and in need of affordable housing, higher value of housing stock in rural areas due to lack of stock, second/ holiday home ownership, people retiring to rural areas or people commuting from rural areas.	The Strategy will be operating under the County Durham Plan, which addresses affordable housing in Policy 15 of the plan. The policy proposes a tenure mix of 70% affordable rent and 30% intermediate products sought on sights with over 10 units. In rural areas the policy stipulates schemes between 6 and 10 units will provide financial contributions towards the delivery of affordable housing. Rural areas could	

			benefit rural areas	<p>The provision of affordable homes also needs to be delivered in conjunction with meeting the needs of the residents and correct housing mix for rural communities and to safeguard rural communities.</p>	<p>also benefit from off-site provision of affordable housing from other developments.</p> <p>The strategy will work with RPs to maximise opportunities to deliver affordable homes in areas that need it across the county. RP's will be encouraged to 'buy back' previous right to buy housing stock, which could address provision of affordable housing stock within existing communities, including rural areas.</p> <p>Rural housing exception sites in Policy 11 of the Plan- Affordable housing which is being proposed should meet local needs and reflect demand for particular sizes, types and tenures of housing. It must be justified and demonstrated by appropriate evidence, including a local needs study. Those regarded as being in local need are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People who need to be housed but are unable to compete in either the open market for house purchase or are unable to afford private sector rents; and</li> <li>• People who are local to a village or a group of villages by birth,</li> </ul>	
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					<p>previous or current residence, employment or by virtue of having a close family member living in the area.</p> <p><b>Monitoring-</b> Percentage of affordable housing units delivered by viability area in specific areas. Affordable housing units approved and completed by tenure and viability by area.</p> <p>The CDP has windfall assumptions – smaller sites- up to 12 homes per site- expected about 80 sites</p> <p>Number of housing units approved and completed on exception sites.</p>	
		Meeting the housing needs of our residents across County Durham	Will the Housing Strategy meet the needs of residents in rural areas?	<p>County Durham has substantial rural areas, which are characterised by villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings.</p> <p>The differing context and demographic of rural areas will equate to differing needs of residents.</p>	<p>There may be circumstances where affordable housing is needed in these areas Policy 11 of the County Durham Plan regarding rural exceptions will allow the flexibility to deliver this housing by permitting development in rural areas either adjacent or close to existing settlements which would normally be contrary to planning policies.</p> <p><b>Recommendation-</b> Neighbourhood planning provides a further opportunity to consider local housing needs'</p>	



		<p>Delivery of infrastructure alongside housing development to support communities</p>	<p>Will the Housing Strategy deliver infrastructure alongside housing development to support rural communities?</p>	<p>The need for the development and delivery of appropriate infrastructure alongside housing development to support rural communities is recognised in the Housing Strategy. This element of the Housing Strategy is enabled by policies in the County Durham Plan. Rural communities will have the same needs as other areas such as social and green infrastructure however they will have different types and scale of need to urban communities due to geographical and accessibility issues. Infrastructure to support existing and expanding communities will be needed in rural areas as there are fewer neighbouring services and infrastructure to use.</p> <p>If rural areas are held to the same requirements as non-rural/urban areas it may not be realistic to achieve development/expansion/improvements in rural areas.</p> <p>A key issue for the delivery of infrastructure in rural areas is Physical infrastructure including utilities such as energy, as many people in rural areas will live off the</p>	<p>Smaller developments would be considered in rural areas with rural exceptions in Policy 11 taking into account the difference between rural and non-rural areas. Although this is on a smaller scale to many urban sites it does not necessarily equate to the delivery of infrastructure being a smaller or simpler task. Accessibility and marketability of delivering infrastructure will be a consideration. The County Durham Plan and the Housing Strategy allows for flexibility in rural areas where services such as GP surgeries and schools could be shared between neighbouring villages and settlements so that multiple areas could benefit from smaller sites.</p> <p>Exceptions could also be made regarding transport infrastructure. The terrain of rural areas means that many people depend on private vehicles to get around, additionally young people need to be able to access the education and further education system and services nearest to them.</p> <p>Remote villages may have specific development needs but at the same time cannot be expected to have a full range of services including public transport in order to make a</p>	<p>Providing fast fibre or broadband services to rural areas continues to be a challenge. As part the agenda to overcome this challenge the Council has been involved in running a Digital Durham Programme to provide County Durham homes, businesses and communities with access to fast, fibre broadband. The council's Rural Community Broadband Fund (RCBF) application was confirmed as successful in March 2014 with funds allocated to improve broadband in the</p>
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				<p>grid and Communications (2014 Northern Gas Network data). In rural areas people will rely on IT and telecommunications to stay connected, either for work, to run businesses or at home working, education for school use or remote learning and for social use. Policy 28 of the County Durham Plan will require all developers to ensure all new residential and commercial development is served by high speed broadband.</p> <p>People in rural areas have more limited access to services such as education and medical services so could benefit from IT and communication infrastructure improvements as a way to keep in touch with GP's, get prescriptions, online learning. However, the cost of supplying newer services to rural areas would be higher and so could exclude rural areas as organisations do not see extending such infrastructure to rural areas as viable.</p>	<p>development viable. Making use of and expanding and improving neighbouring infrastructure is a way to ensure delivery of many services that more rural residents could benefit from.</p>	<p>Teesdale and Weardale areas.</p> <p>As part of the Government's Rural Gigabit Connectivity programme business and residents in some of the hardest-to-reach places in the UK have been eligible for additional funding towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband to their premises when part of a group project.</p> <p><a href="https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2095/Digital-Durham">https://www.durham.gov.uk/article/2095/Digital-Durham</a></p> <p>Rural communities will continue to benefit from such schemes as</p>
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						<p>technology such as broadband continue to improve.</p> <p>Digital Durham has carried out a broadband consultation to help identify areas that may be suitable for future public funding for superfast broadband. The consultation closed on June 12<sup>th</sup> 2019. Following on from any responses received during the consultation, we will publish maps detailing the finalised 'intervention area'.</p> <p>This will be followed by the</p>
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						<p>launch of the Invitation to Tender (ITT) to suppliers to bid for the opportunity to fulfil a new contract to deliver further superfast broadband coverage.</p>
	<p>Maintain and improve standard across County Durham's housing stock and wider housing environment</p>	<p>Raise quality standards within the private rented sector</p>	<p>Will the Housing Strategy raise quality standards within the private rented sector that will benefit rural areas?</p>	<p>Quality of housing and standards of private landlords will be a consideration for all residents of County Durham in the rental sector. In a rural context the availability of affordability of home ownership and availability of rental properties can make demand for social housing and private rentals higher.</p> <p>Some rural have been included in the Council's approach to target areas across the county in a multi-agency approach to improve the standards in this sector, which</p>	<p>Past and current initiatives to raise the quality of private landlords have been, advice and guidance on legal rights and responsibilities, selective licensing in three pilot areas, targeting areas with multi-agency approach including in Dene Valley, East Durham neighbourhood initiative officer to help vulnerable people sustain their tenancies through financial advice. The council are in the process of developing an evidence base to inform the Selective Licensing approach, which will be consulted on.</p>	

				<p>demonstrates the need to address raising the standards in rural areas.</p> <p>Some rural areas border onto targeted areas, for example in East Durham, where problems have been identified regarding some private landlords. This again highlights this as an issue that affects rural areas.</p>	<p>A private landlord accreditation scheme is in place, which is voluntary, all County Durham Landlords are encouraged to be part of the scheme, including Rural housing landlords.</p> <p>The council will continue to support and expand the scheme and make use of its evidence base in respect of stock condition to target interventions at areas most in need</p> <p><b>Monitoring-</b> Memberships are renewed annually and dependent on landlords behaving responsibly. Future activities will be based around the continuation of current ongoing actions in this area.</p>	
		<p>Develop an approach to selective licencing in County Durham</p>	<p>Will this benefit rural areas?</p>		<p>The council are in the process of developing an evidence base to inform the Selective Licensing approach, which will be consulted on. This will compliment other actions set out in the housing strategy to address: empty homes, homelessness, and mixed and balanced communities. There is an option of up to 100% selective licensing, which would cover rural areas too.</p> <p><b>Monitoring-</b> To progress a selective license designation, the council will undertake a consultation which will include local residents, including tenants, landlords and other members</p>	

					<p>of the community who live or operate businesses or provide services within the proposed designation. The representations made during the consultation will be considered before a further report is presented to Cabinet.</p>	
		<p>Bring empty homes back in to use to meet housing needs and to support communities</p>	<p>Will the Housing Strategy bring empty homes back in to use to meet housing needs and to support rural communities in rural areas?</p>	<p>There are pockets in rural areas that have higher than average proportions of empty homes. In 2016 County Durham 3.7% of all housing was classed as empty, with 2.3% classed as long-term empty Sub-County overview of long –term empty homes has shown West Durham, Westgate has a higher than average levels of long-term empty homes at 24.1% (26 properties), other areas that reported higher than average rates included Trimdon Colliery (South), Bishop Middleham and Trimdon Grange.</p> <p>Empty homes will put a further strain on limited housing stock in rural areas and have a cumulative impact on affordable housing, homelessness and mixed and balanced communities.</p>	<p>Multiple actions are involved in bringing empty homes back into occupation, including working with landlords to help them sell or rent their properties, through DKO or linking them with RPs or other landlords. This in turn will help Durham Key Options Choice Based Lettings in becoming more accessible and easy to use for the residents in rural areas of County Durham as more housing stock relevant to rural areas could be held by DKO. A subsequent increase in RP’s owning these empty homes could also improve the stock of affordable rented housing.</p> <p>S.106 contributions to support regeneration activities such as bringing existing properties back into use for the community in lieu of affordable housing contribution could also further benefit rural areas.</p> <p>The council will develop and monitor an evidence base which would inform future opportunities for targeted</p>	

					<p>demolition, where it is considered that stock has reached the end of its life. This evidence base will be used to inform bids to government and to identify potential future regeneration opportunities.</p>	
		<p>Support and maintain mixed and balanced communities across County Durham</p>	<p>Will the Housing Strategy support and maintain mixed and balanced communities across rural areas in County Durham?</p>	<p>The demography of rural areas differs to non-rural and urban areas. The proportion of older people are high and proportion of younger people are lower. Rural residents are more likely to be economically inactive, although higher levels of retirees could contribute to this, and fewer rural residents have higher qualifications. Housing and infrastructure will be needed to support the existing, aging, population but also housing and infrastructure to support young people and families so that rural communities can be mixed and balanced and sustainable.</p>	<p>In the context of this outcome, localised and targeted delivery plans will be used to outline activities to support the creation and maintenance of mixed and balanced communities, including rural communities. The Housing Strategy will provide a framework to capitalise on and maximise opportunities for investment and regeneration within communities in the County. This will be supported through the council's evidence base to understand the localised natures and extent to which communities are 'unbalanced' and the measures required to 'balance' them.</p> <p><b>Monitoring-</b> The council will continue to develop and monitor evidence to understand the issues associated with balance and potential decline of rural areas and, where appropriate, localised and targeted delivery plans will be developed to consider issues and responses; developed with key partners and local communities.</p>	

		<p>Improve energy efficiency of properties to ensure County Durham has a stock of warm, healthy and energy efficient homes</p>	<p>Will the energy efficiency of properties in rural areas be improved to ensure rural areas in County Durham also have a stock of warm, healthy and energy efficient homes?</p>	<p>The energy efficiency of a property is impacted by the stock condition and issues related to fuel poverty. In a rural context many residents are on lower incomes, more likely to rely on more expensive energy supply (so higher outgoings), and potentially unable to benefit from in wall insulation. Fuel poverty also leads to isolation as people are more likely to stay in their homes and not receive visitors. Therefore they may be in greater need of support with energy tariffs and bills, fuel poverty grants, help for living in cold homes with cold related illness and signposting to other services.</p>	<p>The Housing Strategy incorporates multiple measures to improve the energy efficiency of properties via a combination of advice and guidance schemes, heating improvements and targeted interventions to those in most need. As part of the Council's Affordable Warmth Strategy a series of fuel poverty interventions have taken place such as Warm Up North and The Warm Front Programmes which provide grants for heating and insulation measures. Delivery in action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Managing Money Better Initiative- This service aims to reduce energy bills through finding a more competitive tariff and switching supplier, as well as offering fuel debt advice. This service is undertaken in partnership with the Prince Bishops Community Bank.</li> <li>• Warm Homes Campaign, which co-ordinates the County Durham Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan. It is a one-stop referral system for owner occupiers in County Durham to have warmer homes and lower energy bills. This award winning Campaign assists</li> </ul>	<p>Joined up approaches to sign-posting these initiatives will be ongoing; as will working further with local landlords / estate owners to assist in raising awareness of schemes.</p>



					<p>with delivery of the County Durham Fuel Poverty Strategy to assist low income and fuel poor households to have a warm and healthy indoor environment and lower energy bills by delivering grant programmes for energy efficient boilers, central heating, wall and loft insulation measures and accessing cheaper energy tariffs.</p> <p><b>Monitoring-</b> The Affordable Warmth Action Plan will run up to 2020.</p> <p>An updated Stock Condition Survey will give an up to date evaluation of housing stock in County Durham to help monitor progress made by these actions in the strategy.</p> <p>Also using a Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHRS).</p> <p>A geographically focused approach based evidence of those locations with high concentrations of Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHRS) issues, is considered appropriate. Interventions will also be informed by evidence on empty homes</p>	
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