



# **‘Looking Forwards’**

## **Durham as a Creative and Sustainable City**

A companion document to the Neighbourhood Plan  
consisting of community initiatives arising out of public consultation

presented by

**The City of Durham Parish Council**

**Durham City Neighbourhood Plan Working Party**

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# **‘Looking Forwards’**

## **Durham as a Creative and Sustainable City**

### **Introduction**

1. ‘Looking Forwards’ is a companion document to the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan and has been developed by the City of Durham Parish Council Neighbourhood Plan Working Party. It is built on the aspirations and views as expressed by local people for their City during the five years of preparation of the Plan. It looks forward to greater involvement of the community in making Durham a more creative and sustainable City. The initiatives arising from that process have been included in this document, and cover matters that do not primarily relate to the statutory policies of the Plan or its implementation. Although both documents have resulted from the plan making process, it is necessary to separate the two documents as they will be subject to completely different demands, procedures and timescales.

2. The justification for the preparation of this document can be found in the vision of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan which states that "Durham City's potential as a beautiful historic City will be realised through policy and action" and that it will be "enriched by community engagement in its future". The Neighbourhood Plan sets out the policies and this document represents a commitment to action to help realise the City's potential. The aspiration is that organisations such as the County Council, Parish Council, Durham University, community organisations, grass-roots bodies and individuals should work collaboratively and creatively together.

3. Many of the suggestions put forward by the public during the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan have no direct bearing on statutory planning and are therefore outside the scope of the policies of the Plan. However, they do have a strong bearing on the future of Our Neighbourhood and they are set out as a series of initiatives under the six themes of the Plan. For an initiative to be included there has to be a discernible and realistic potential for community involvement. It is important that partners in prioritising and progressing the initiatives are confident that, for the most part, the initiatives would be welcomed by the community. Indeed, the vision statement for Theme 6 of the Plan, 'A City with an Enriched Community Life states:

*Durham City will have a proactively supported community life, including health and well-being, with an enriched artistic and cultural life for the benefit of residents and visitors alike. Residents will be supported and encouraged to be active citizens with a keen interest in their neighbourhood and how it develops.*

### **Durham as a Creative and Sustainable City**

4. The vision of a more sustainable future is strongly supported. A sustainable future would be one where the community attaches weight and significance to all economic, environmental and social outcomes of change in achieving a fair balance where no single outcome prevails to the detriment of other potential outcomes. An approach that takes full account of sustainability in turn benefits from full community engagement and support.

5. Towns and cities across the UK are experiencing dramatic transformations and, as retail patterns change, fundamental questions are being asked about the future of the places where we live, work, shop and socialise. The initiatives in this document have been developed with the intention of enabling the community to become a recognised, valued and influential part of the processes of change in Our Neighbourhood. To achieve this would require a huge change in attitudes, expectation and behaviour on behalf of both public bodies and the local community. To imagine Durham as a creative City where people would think, plan and act with imagination in order to harness opportunities in the City and/or address the City's seemingly intractable challenges is the task ahead.

6. Cities have always been places where creativity thrives but the challenge is how to release it to effect positive transformation in Durham in pursuit of sustainable urban development. It was evident from views expressed throughout consultations that there was widespread dismay among local people at their inability to influence the nature and scale of change now occurring in the City. For this to change completely and for local people to create and control the City's destiny requires confidence to create a new brand and indeed, a new personality for the City. Enabling the natural creativity in the City to drive change is ambitious and must include not only artists and those involved in the creative economy, but crucially, anyone who addresses issues in an inventive way, be it a social worker, a business person, a student, a scientist, a member of the public. The frequently overlooked wishes and talents of schoolchildren and young people have to be understood and given prominence if the City of the future is to be a truly creative place. Creativity is not only about having ideas, but also the capacity to implement them.

7. A wealth of experience and skills across the City is to be found in the many bodies that could potentially be involved, either individually or in partnership. A creative city would build on existing successful collaborations and learn from their success. These bodies in Durham include, but are not restricted to: Durham County Council; the Durham City Action Area Partnership; the City of Durham Parish Council; the County Durham Local Access Forum; Durham University; the Cathedral Dean and Chapter; Durham Energy Institute; Durham BID (The Durham Business Improvement District Committee); the Chamber of Trade; the North East England Chamber of Commerce; businesses in the City; housing associations; Culture Durham; County Durham Cultural Education Partnership; Visit County Durham; The Empty Shop; Durham Wildlife Trust; community associations and residents groups; The City of Durham Trust; Transition Durham; the Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust; local charities; religious organisations; schools and students unions.

8. An overarching requirement in encouraging creativity is to develop a City Centre Hub which provides welcoming spaces for meetings, courses and events where people can think, plan and act with imagination. A City centre facility which advertises all that the City has to offer would be a focal point for the whole community, including permanent residents, students and visitors. This central facility is more fully described in Initiative 20 'The Development of a City Centre Hub'.

## **The Initiatives**

9. The 22 initiatives so far identified are a starting point for action resulting from a process of consultation with the community on ways of creating a satisfactory future. A priority survey of

the public's view was carried out in June and July 2015 which asked the three questions: 'What is good about Durham City?', 'What is bad?', 'What needs to change?'. Similar but small-scale consultations targeted to specific groups were carried out subsequently. The results of these consultations can be seen at: <http://npf.durhamcity.org.uk/your-views/priorities/> The individual concerns and suggestions for improvements from these consultations that had no direct bearing on statutory planning and were therefore outside the scope of the policies of the Plan were grouped together under the Plan's themes and developed into 'projects to improve the economic, social and environmental realm'. These projects were included as an appendix in the draft Plan that went out for consultation in November and December 2017. The comments about these projects were very supportive, and additional suggestions to improve existing projects or to set up new projects were given. The results of this consultation can be seen at <http://npf.durhamcity.org.uk/your-views/2017consultation/> These projects were then rewritten to incorporate these comments and became the initiatives below.

10. These initiatives are of widely different nature, scale and complexity and the Parish Council and other bodies may well decide on different priorities. Nevertheless, the six themes remain the link with the statutory Neighbourhood Plan. As this point, the initiatives are a rich mix of ideas, opinions and proposals deserving of serious consideration by the many individuals and potential partner organisations. A possible way forward is:

- as a first step, the Parish Council should publicise and promote 'Looking Forwards' as companion document to the Neighbourhood Plan, without, however, taking responsibility for each individual initiative;
- a next step would be for the Parish Council to bring together interested parties including potential funding bodies to identify initiatives that have a realistic chance of success;
- at any stage, encouragement should be given to organisations that might wish to adopt any of the initiatives and take them forward.

## **Theme 1: A City With A Sustainable Future**

### **Initiative 1: Durham as a Sustainable City**

**The Proposal:** In order to encourage greater awareness and understanding of the importance of a sustainable approach to change in the City, it is vital that the City of Durham Parish Council gives leadership on the key selected initiatives and develops the partnership arrangements to kick-start those requiring support. An early parallel task would be to create a 'State of the City' report as a baseline against which monitoring of all change resulting not only from the initiatives, but also from development, and changes in the quality of the environment. An overriding concern must be to respond with urgency to the extremely damaging consequences of climate change and to find a suitable local response to it, and in particular in relation to carbon emissions from vehicles and space heating. Annual reporting on changes to social, environmental, and economic realms would indicate the extent to which the City is moving towards or away from a sustainable future. The assessment would include both quantitative and qualitative measures which could then be benchmarked against the UK Sustainable Cities Index or a similar appraisal system.

**Public Engagement:** A successful start would be dependent on involving as many organisations, businesses and individuals as possible in all the selected initiatives. The public engagement aspect would be to encourage individuals, groups and organisations to submit to the Parish Council views and recommendations about changes to the social, environmental and economic realms. The public would be the eyes and ears of the Parish Council in monitoring the sustainability of the City.

## **Initiative 2: Clean Durham**

**The Proposal:** It is clear from consultations that local people want to live in a clean public realm where air, water and land quality is as clean and natural as can be achieved. Currently concern is greatest in respect of air quality and this is covered separately in Initiative 3 'Clean Air Durham'. The other important aspects of environmental quality that have been identified as requiring major and sustained improvement include:

- cleanliness of streets and public spaces;
- storage and collection of waste from City centre properties where a new and innovative approach is recommended. Tighter controls on careless use of wheelie bins elsewhere, including that of student accommodation where landlords should be held to account;
- removal of accumulated waste from the weirs and river banks;
- regular reporting of monitoring of river water quality and programmes for improvement.

**Public Engagement:** Consultation with potential partners and community groups will be important in identifying suitable priorities for a cleaner Durham. Local existing and future partnerships could facilitate education and awareness-raising including events to establish where interventions towards achieving higher standards could best be made.

## **Initiative 3: Clean Air Durham**

**The Proposal:** Concern is escalating internationally about air quality in cities which breach World Health Organisation standards and equally EU and national standards. Although there are multiple standards and protocols in force, all require a local and effective response to known impacts on local health and well-being. In Durham City there is concern arising from impacts particularly on children on their way to school and at school, in addition to impacts from the trapping of pollution in the narrow streets of a medieval City, and therefore health impacts on people who work in and visit the City. Regular monitoring and publishing of air quality readings around Our Neighbourhood would be a useful first step which could justify the declaration of a Clean Air Zone (CAZ) or a Low Emission Zone (LEZ) and action to deal with emissions in accordance with Air Quality Directive 2008/50/EC and any other relevant standard. A further point is that advantage should be taken of all opportunities to reduce impacts, and indeed to make significant improvements such as in the redevelopment and replacement of existing infrastructure including the provision of the new Durham City Travel Centre and the new County Hall and car park.

The introduction of the first Ultra Low Emission Zone in the U.K. in London within its existing central Congestion Charging Zone is a useful pointer for Durham City which has the potential for a similar initiative resulting from its installation of number plate recognition technology when it became the UK's first Congestion Charging Zone, albeit for the small area of the Peninsula.

The initiative could be for the City of Durham Parish Council to promote the potential for a CAZ or a LEZ and the area within the City which it might be possible to protect in cooperation with Durham County Council.. A major incentive would be that World Heritage Site would be a natural location for an exemplary scheme which encourages transition to less polluting forms of transport including private vehicles, taxis and service vehicles including buses.

**Public Engagement:** For any improvement to be made it is essential that there is strong local willingness and support to press the County Council for an assessment and the case for a clean air or low emission zone. Involvement by local people in the design and the timing of the introduction of such a scheme will be essential to its acceptability.

#### **Initiative 4: Our Neighbourhood Local Energy Research Group**

**The Proposal:** Our Neighbourhood is fortunate to have within the University a unique collaborative research facility in the Durham Energy Institute. Its uniqueness arises from its strong social-science involvement which is recognised internationally for its importance in creating community-based solutions. The proposal is to find a way in which this expertise can be harnessed for the mutual benefit of the Institute and local people. Initially, the proposal is to set up a panel of volunteer local residents that are broadly representative of residents in Our Neighbourhood in respect of housing type, conditions and socio-economic range.

**Public Engagement:** The Panel would decide its focus on how local people can best be helped to deal with a future with higher energy costs with advice from the Institute. This could be as basic as a combination of information and practical steps any group of individuals might take. The results could serve a wider purpose in terms of its applicability to other communities. A key result could be the setting up of demonstration projects showing how the local community could become more resilient to increasing costs and scarcity of energy sources. With serious purpose from the community and the Institute, funding ought to be available to aid this research. Linkages with other initiatives could be made, for example, in bringing HMOs (houses in multiple occupancy) back into family use, and the whole burden of public expenditure on energy use and procurement as, for example, in street lighting.

## **Theme 2. A Beautiful And Historic City**

#### **Initiative 5: Identification, Protection and Enhancement of Heritage Assets, Green Assets and Views in Durham City**

**The Proposal:** To undertake a comprehensive review of the heritage assets and green assets in Durham City in order to: (i) identify those which are not protected by an appropriate designation, and to seek such designations for these unprotected assets; and (ii) enhance the management of such assets, and give publicity to threats including those to habitats and species.

##### ***Heritage and cultural assets***

Comprehensive review of the status, management and use of all buildings and structures with heritage value in Durham City which are currently non-designated. These assets would also include modern buildings, structures and artworks of aesthetic, visual and architectural interest whose appearance, character and cultural value will contribute to the future heritage of Durham

City. Much of this has already been done for the Durham City Conservation Area character appraisal: Appendix C in the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan gives a list of non-designated heritage assets in Our Neighbourhood describing the context as known at the time of writing. An appraisal of the characteristics of Our Neighbourhood outside the Durham City Conservation area needs to be undertaken along similar lines.

### ***Open spaces and other green assets***

Comprehensive review of the status, management and use of all open space and other green assets, including mapping of green corridors, and producing a comprehensive record of species. Appendix D in the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan gives a list of landscape, biodiversity and natural environment assets and open spaces in Our Neighbourhood describing the context as known at the time of writing.

### ***Views***

The identification, protection, restoration, and improvement of traditional views of the World Heritage Site, and of other views valued by the public within the Durham City Conservation Area and within the rest of Our Neighbourhood. New views from within new developments need to be created to compensate for the decline and loss and of such views as has occurred in recent years.

**Public Engagement:** Designating assets is the function of bodies such as Durham County Council (local lists of heritage assets, area designations, assets of community value, local wildlife sites, local nature reserves) and Historic England (national heritage listing and listing of buildings at risk). A database of views (with photos) that are valued by local people would be valuable to assist decisions on planning proposals. Such a database could be created by Durham County Council in association with the Parish Council. However local communities have a wealth of knowledge about their area and the heritage and green assets, and views, particularly the smaller and less obvious assets and the lesser known views. Additionally, their knowledge of the management status of these sites is likely to be more up to date. Individuals, residents' groups and interest groups can work with local experts to produce the required information which can then be submitted for designation as appropriate. They can also forward through Parish or County Councillors any concerns about the management of the sites, damage to views and problems that need to be addressed. Friends groups, which become involved in day to day management activities, already exist for some important sites, and more could be set up. The Parish Council, working with local volunteers, could set up a mapping website where comments could be entered onto the map providing the types of information noted above, including threats to local habitats and species. This would be in addition to providing such information by writing or by personal contact. Such a mapping website would also be useful in particular for initiatives 16 and 17, but also for other initiatives

## **Initiative 6: Setting up the Emerald Network**

**The Proposal:** A project to set up the Emerald Network, Policy G3 in the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan. The project's implementation strategy would comprise:

- setting up a management group;
- writing an implementation plan;
- engaging the local community (local residents and friends' groups, schools, university and colleges);

- liaising with key stakeholders, such as Durham County Council, the City of Durham Parish Council, the Durham City Area Action Partnership, the Woodland Trust, the Durham Wildlife Trust;
- negotiating with landowners, e.g. the Cathedral, Durham University, owners of individual Local Wildlife sites etc., owners of land incorporating footpaths;
- seeking funding to carry out assessments of existing sites and paths and need for new sites and paths, and then for site and path management and maintenance, marketing, signposting and interpretation boards, and leaflets.

**Public Engagement:** The Emerald Network project could be a community-led initiative via community action by individuals, wildlife interest groups and friends groups developing partnerships with statutory and other relevant bodies. This core alliance would then need much wider community engagement to stimulate interest in the Emerald Network, obtain local knowledge about sites, and encourage volunteers to carry out some of the necessary work in creating the Emerald Network, and in the future to act as guides. The Emerald Network is complementary to the Friends of the Durham Green Belt's proposal for an informal city park in the Green Belt in the wider Durham City area.

### **Initiative 7: Identifying, Conserving and Improving Footpaths In and Around Durham City**

**The Proposal:** A recent initiative promoted by the Ramblers' Association is to enable local communities to focus attention on making their neighbourhoods more walkable. Signing up to the 'Charter for Walkable Neighbourhoods' could be a useful step towards a greener and more pedestrian-friendly future and give effect to the wishes of the community expressed during consultations. Action would include:

- mapping current footpaths, particularly traditional routes, in Durham City that are not designated as public rights of way and to seek such designation;
- auditing the management status of all footpaths in Durham City, including public rights of way;
- supporting the complementary proposals made by the Friends of the Durham Green Belt for improving existing footpaths and linkages to the network of attractions in the Green Belt in the wider Durham City area.

**Public Engagement:** Creating a public right of way is the role of Durham County Council. A list of existing public rights of way can be seen at <https://durham.gov.uk/definitivemap> It should be noted that unrecorded footpaths and bridleways created before 1949 need to be recorded before 2026. Individuals, residents groups and interest groups have knowledge of the footpaths in their area and their current management status, and can collect the necessary information needed to request Durham County Council to make a footpath a public right of way. They can also forward through Parish or County Councillors any concerns about the management of footpaths and public rights of way, and suggestions for improvements. Support for overall improvement of paths and trails in the Green Belt in the wider Durham City area as proposed by the Friends could be undertaken by local communities.

## **Initiative 8: The Durham Design Guide**

**The Proposal:** The concern raised at all stages of preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan is captured in the Design Council's (formerly CABE) advice that: "The built environment is a cultural asset. It is essential to design it well and to manage and maintain it to high standards. People must be at the heart of any strategy for the built environment." It continues: "Buildings, streets and public spaces cannot be seen in isolation from each other. To be successful they must work together on robustness, or durability; usefulness, or efficiency and beauty, or the ability to delight people ... and will help us all to live and work sustainably." In a city such as Durham, renowned for its World Heritage Site and its townscape and its historic buildings, it is vital that elected representatives are trained in the skills needed to insist on quality. Measures such as Building for Life (used for housing) allow schemes to be rated for design quality. It is possible to check schemes against well-established design principles on which there is consensus from designers who use widely varied styles.

**Public Engagement:** Approaches to engaging local people directly in the design process, such as 'Inquiry by Design', are also useful in improving design quality. It is particularly important that understanding is developed towards innovative design and the use of contemporary materials to avoid copies or pastiche of existing buildings. To provide clarity on styles, materials and finishing touches, the County and Parish Councils could jointly commission the production of a design guide appropriate to the designated areas and the rest of Our Neighbourhood. A contribution to the Guide could be made by residents on elements of good design by way of images on a database, and further analysis made possible by schemes receiving architectural awards from the City of Durham Trust. Indeed, an enhanced role for the City of Durham Trust as an independent and respected organisation should be pursued which could assist positively in all stages of the process of design to achieve better outcomes.

## **Theme 3. A City With A Diverse And Resilient Economy**

The 'Making Places' programme in Scotland provides funding and support to communities wanting to participate in and lead design events such as workshops. The aim of the pilot programme begun in 2017 is to help support the delivery of a variety of projects through shared learning within communities and their local authorities, development of a peer network and forum, signposting to organisations and key agencies to provide additional support. Projects can range from major regeneration to street design, or more modestly to share and learn from each other on how to make physical change happen within communities.

Although there is no financial support in England, it is a model worth piloting in Durham where the need to build community capacity in order to play a bigger role in designing the future has been fully demonstrated in this document. Although a number of initiatives could be a suitable pilot scheme, it may be preferable to select and support a pilot project that is less complex than a full City centre initiative. It is important that statutory bodies recognise that 'Making Places' initiatives must be genuinely community-led and are not to be subsumed into a County Council promoted development project where the community contribution is only welcome in-so-far as it is generally supportive of the Council's preference.

## **Initiative 9: North Road Regeneration ‘Making Places’ Pilot Study**

**The Proposal:** To engage the public in a reconsideration of the comprehensive refurbishment redevelopment including the bus station and post-war shops and offices, and improvements to the street scene prior to any further attempts to initiate change. There is support in the community for improvements to the bus station on its existing site, including a new frontage and better café, waiting area, toilets and public transport information and services.

**Public Engagement:** This approach has been tried and tested and works well in creating good solutions and trust between the public and the major players with development interests. To pilot the ‘Making Places’ model in North Road would be timely and valuable, particularly as earlier proposals have largely been controversial and slow to proceed. A series of smaller scale, interlinked practical initiatives which have public support would have a clear advantage over the uncertainties of a large-scale single comprehensive redevelopment opportunity in a time of declining commercial interest in city centre retailing. A facilitated event might be a start in releasing the enthusiasm and creative talent that exists in the community and lead to a new understanding and agreement and a programme of improvements that can be implemented as funding opportunities arise.

## **Initiative 10: Durham City Centre ‘Making Places’ Study**

**The Proposal:** With the decline of traditional shopping centres now a widespread phenomenon, it is vital that there is a new initiative to work creatively with ideas arising from the local community in stimulating the vitality of the City centre. ‘Making Places’ could be the means through which local people could put forward ideas and press for incremental change through improvements to the quality and safety of the public realm, green spaces, paths, pavements, cycleways, riverbanks, parks, information, and events and to examine new proposals and plans as they arise.

Many ideas have already been put forward which could be a starting point for identifying even more. It is recognised that there will be overlap with other initiatives, for example, transport initiatives. Ideas include:

- improve shopfronts through a shop front improvement grant scheme and update the Durham City shop front guide. Introduce a competition for best shop front displays based on themes arising from popular events such as Ice and Fire, Book Festival, Miners’ Gala, The Regatta, Brass Festival, Christmas Market, Easter, Armistice Day;
- use of empty shops by start-up businesses, temporary art installations and exhibitions and associated uses such as a crèche for shoppers’ children;
- improve the maintenance of street and pavement surfaces, back lanes, paths and property boundaries, and remove hazards to pedestrians from unnecessary street furniture and advertising boards, and improve surfaces for wheelchair users. Make better provision for disabled parking and make improvements to rear access for deliveries and waste collection;
- widen the appeal of the City centre by introducing a sign-posted shoppers’ route, the staging of more events, and opening attractions into the evening to bring a better balance to the range of choice of activities for all;
- introduce greater flexibility and innovation in the use of public and private car parking

- and provide disabled parking to access the Market Place and Palace Green;
- provide more for visitors including trail leaflets and interpretation boards for designated trails for example: Historic city routes, wildlife trails, Pilgrim paths (2020 is a Year of Pilgrimage for Durham and will include four new routes into the City from around the County). Historic soundscape on interpretation boards or an app, using recording of elderly residents' memories of the City and actors reading memories of residents from the past such as the Count, or Bishop Cosin, or a student at Durham University in the 1800's etc.;
- space for young people where they can gather other than in pubs and bars is a key social requirement in creating an amenable and safe City. Although space is at a premium in the City centre, space for safe play for young children would be a great attraction for parents in using the City;
- further restrict vehicular access to City centre streets to achieve higher targets in safety, appearance and air quality.

**Public Engagement:** A 'Making Places' for the City centre could be commenced if a pilot initiative proves satisfactory. The success of this initiative would be dependent on finding willing volunteers with skills and knowledge who could collect ideas and turn them into attractive workable proposals to arrest decline by improving vitality, diversity and accessibility. It would need to be backed by all bodies with a role in the City centre with funding for basic materials.

#### **Initiative 11: Durham City Northern Quadrant 'Making Places' Study**

**The Proposal:** The area encompassed by Aykley Heads, the new Aykley Heads Business Park, Wharton Park, the rail corridor, the Milburngate site, the riverside, Crook Hall, Frankland and the enfolding Green Belt is an area of change. Its great potential can be realised more imaginatively and acceptably if achieved through community-led design than if planned as separate commercial development opportunities. In this area, potential includes the possibility of extending Wharton Park into the current County Hall land to create a continuous City parkland landscape with more informal access to the Green Belt for health, recreation and leisure. A vital component of this mosaic of change would be the DLI Grounds Memorial Garden to the fallen of the Regiment and its harmonious relationship to other nearby uses. There is a major opportunity to harness the support of companies locating in the prestige Business Park in contributing to the management of the publicly accessible land for the enjoyment and health of their own employees and the public.

**Public Engagement:** The 'Making Places' approach can provide greater public benefits in terms of public access and well-being, sustainable transport and green spaces than a conventional development brief to serve the purpose of the developer in meeting local planning requirements. A 'Making Places' study should be carried out as early as possible if such opportunities are not to be lost and if mutual benefits for both the occupiers of the site and the public are to be achieved.

#### **Initiative 12: Fowler's Yard 'Making Places' Study**

**The Proposal:** An important contribution to increasing the vitality of the City centre is to improve and reclaim public open spaces. The potential of this network of spaces to contribute

to the attractiveness of the City for shopping, for strolling and sightseeing and for events is huge. Relatively modest but continuous improvement of these spaces would include Millennium Place, the Market Place, Reform Place and Fowler's Yard.

Fowler's Yard, described as Durham's Arts Quarter, has huge potential as a multi-use destination. It has successful creative businesses, a café, a micro-brewery and a small theatre and has hosted the Durham City Jazz Festival. However, the area is in urgent need of refurbishment, including overcoming the insanitary storage bins which overflow with food and other waste and which presently act as a back drop to events.

The poor connectivity with the City centre and the uninviting and dirty vennels which lead down from Silver Street require regular cleansing and maintenance, and a reformed arrangement for the storage and collection of waste. An investment that would make a major difference would be the installation of attractive signposting and wall-lighting to draw visitors down into the area. A future element of the Lumière programme could be engaged to provide permanent lighting innovation. However, such lighting would need to use a dark-sky design to protect the dark corridor along the river bank and to assist in preserving the night sky in the City centre.

**Public Engagement:** The gradual decline of these spaces is an opportunity lost. The Parish Council should bring together the creative businesses and the statutory bodies to establish priorities and an annual rolling programme of improvement. This study would certainly attract the talents of some of the most creative people in the City.

### **Initiative 13: Visitor and Tourist Business Fair**

**The Proposal:** Action is urgently needed to provide new and improved facilities for visitors and tourists to enhance the experience, lengthen the stay, help secure the future of the City as a tourist destination, and increase prosperity deriving from tourism expenditure. A useful step in creating a consensus on which of the many ideas received should be given priority would be for a 'Visitor and Tourist Business Fair' to be held by invitation to the industry, the local authorities, Tourism Durham, and community groups. The consultations included a wide range of proposals that could be explored at the Fair, such as:

- the potential for a new visitor centre or, perhaps initially, interpretation boards providing a service to local people and visitors including the story of Durham City and its people, also available on smart phones, tablets and other electronic devices;
- improved welcoming facilities including new digital displays and interpretation boards for visitors and tourists at 'gateways' to the City including the coach park and Millennium Place, the bus station, and park and ride terminals and through the new and improved public conveniences;
- heritage/leisure/arts trails including Christian and World Heritage Trail, Emerald Network Trail of riverside and countryside attractions, incorporating new signage and interactive interpretation boards, leaflets, booklets, art and design items with input from local arts and craft businesses;
- better coordination with other tourist and visitor attractions in County Durham including better transport connections.

**Public Engagement:** An occasional 'Visitor and Tourist Business Fair' could be promoted by the Parish Council to encourage all operators and the representatives of the local communities to meet, exchange ideas and create new partnerships around specific themes as chosen by tourism businesses in the City.

#### **Theme 4. A City With Attractive And Affordable Places To Live**

##### **Initiative 14: Re-conversion of Some Houses in Multiple-occupation Back to Family Homes and General Housing**

**The Proposal:** There are a number of possible mechanisms for taking this forward, including:

- use of Section 106 monies;
- developers of private PBSAs (purpose built student accommodation) and of University colleges donating into a fund, the level of the donation as a proportion of the number of beds in the PBSA/college;
- purchase of properties by housing associations – to renovate and bring back into normal use;
- forming a regeneration trust or company – the Durham City Regeneration Company – that acquires HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) in a pilot area, converts them to be suitable for families with children, young couples starting-out, and older people, and recycles the resultant capital or revenue into further project areas. The Viaduct area of the City is proposed as the first such pilot area.

**Public Engagement:** This initiative is central to seeking balanced and sustainable communities. All of the above possible mechanisms must not only engage with but also genuinely involve the local community. Residents' groups, other community organisations, landlords, letting agents and the County and Parish Councillors for the area need to come forward with ideas and suggestions for particular sets of properties to be tackled, and to support each scheme through from genesis to successful occupation by families, young couples, or older people.

##### **Initiative 15: Mechanisms for Controlling the Impact of Student Accommodation**

**The Proposal:** The issue of greatest concern to consultees on the preparation of the Neighbourhood Plan was the control of impacts of existing and future student accommodation. Student houses and flats represent 30% of all residential properties in Our Neighbourhood, well above the 10% figure for a balanced community, and streets in the Viaduct and Crossgate area have over 90% student residencies. The causes of concern are noise from parties, unkempt gardens, overflowing wheelie-bins, cars parked for months, and isolation. The proposition is for a mechanism to be created that allows local people to articulate and support actions that will guide and ameliorate impacts. Actions proposed during the consultation period were:

- *Article 4 (Planning) Direction:* The extension of the Article 4 Direction to cover the rest of Our Neighbourhood in anticipation of widening pressure for HMOs (houses in multiple occupation) and purpose built student accommodation (PBSAs) resulting from the growth of demand for student accommodation;
- *'To Let' Sign Control:* Stricter control and enforcement of regulations and introduction of e-innovation in advertising and in particular 'To Let' and 'Have Let' boards. The

prospective Article 7 (Planning) Direction should be extended to cover the whole of Our Neighbourhood to control 'To Let' and 'Have Let' boards;

- *Student car parking limit:* If accommodating 5,000 additional students is a serious challenge to the fabric of the City, then provision for cars is beyond contemplation. A firm believe is that there is an absolute limit to the number of student vehicles, and in most, if not all parts of Our Neighbourhood, this has already been exceeded. This limit should be agreed and then managed to give priority to students with essential car travel requirements.

**Public Engagement:** This initiative will be strengthened by harnessing local knowledge to monitor the effectiveness of the policy. This will include tracking the emergence of new HMOs (both overt and covert) and compliance or otherwise with the controls on 'To Let' and 'Have Let' boards. Annual re-surveys of the areas covered by residents' associations will be a useful insight into the level of accuracy of the Class M (Hall of Residence) and Class N (wholly occupied by students) Council Tax exemptions data. Public lobbying led to the creation of the policy and will continue to be needed to counter future resistance and deviations.

## **Theme 5. A City With A Modern And Sustainable Transport Infrastructure**

### **Initiative 16: Walking and Cycling Durham**

**The Proposal:** Walking and cycling are by far the most beneficial modes of travel in terms of the environmental, societal and health impacts, and with the increasing availability of e-bikes cycling is not such an unlikely proposition in Durham as it once was. This initiative proposes a programme of physical improvements and other measures to achieve a greater shift to active travel modes and reduction of traffic conflicts. Measures would include: better protection for pedestrians including those with pushchairs, the disabled and cyclists from motor vehicles; improved crossings; separation of pedestrians and cyclists on certain routes to improve safety; a rebalancing of traffic priorities to favour active travel; along with improvements to accessibility for people with disabilities. Re-engineering of roads and junctions to discourage unsafe driving might be necessary, as well as introducing 20mph limits on residential streets and on roads alongside schools or with high levels of foot traffic. Signage could be reviewed and improved to increase awareness of Durham's extensive path network.

**Public engagement:** From 2017, the County Council has been required to produce Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) to access central government funding available for active travel. The guidance for this process expects strong stakeholder engagement at the earliest stages to inform the development of the LCWIP. Community activity to identify the routes and crossings requiring improvement could involve individuals, residents' associations and special interest groups, facilitated by the Parish Council. The process should build on the information gathered through public engagement when preparing the transport policies in the Neighbourhood Plan <http://npf.durhamcity.org.uk/your-views/priorities/> The public could also be encouraged to identify needs for cycle parking, hand rails, benches, new pedestrian crossings, dropped kerbs, and other minor alterations.

## **Initiative 17: Healthy and Active Streets**

**The Proposal:** Streets should serve a variety of functions beyond transport needs. They can be a social space where people meet and children play, as well as the setting for architecture and public art. Space in the City's streets is used predominantly for car parking, often to the detriment of other functions. Over the plan period there will be many changes in the supply and demand for car parking, including potential increased car ownership, more electric vehicles, and the impact of 6,000 additional students resident in the City entailing new colleges, HMOs and PBSAs. Through a series of reviews of each controlled parking zone, the initiative would seek to balance the conflicting needs, which will often be controversial, including many proposed in the public consultation exercises:

- improvements to accessibility for people with disabilities;
- better protection for pedestrians and cyclists from motor vehicles, improved crossings, separation of pedestrians and cyclists on certain routes to improve safety, and a rebalancing of traffic priorities to favour active travel;
- reducing the visual impact of car parking on historic streets;
- creating safe areas for children to play on residential streets;
- introducing trees and planting to improve the environment;
- extending the CPZ to a greater part of the City with more resident-only areas;
- more pedestrianisation to encourage sustainable transport;
- provision of more electric car charging points;
- aiding access to businesses by better management of short-term parking;
- relocating or reducing parking when it is desirable to improve sustainable transport, such as by widening pavements or introducing cycle/bus lanes;
- reviewing access and parking for contractors and the issue of business permits.

**Public Engagement:** Changes to parking arrangements and street design are often politically contentious. A community-driven process is essential to ensure that changes are well thought through and take account of local needs. A co-design philosophy involving urban design professionals working closely with communities is one possible approach. This can be facilitated by using inexpensive features such as planters to trial different configurations of the street space. Local people can provide valuable information about how a street is really used and which needs are not currently being met, and ideas for solutions.

## **Initiative 18: Durham Sustainable Travel Forum**

**The Proposal:** The 'Durham City Sustainable Transport Delivery Plan' will form the basis of the County Council efforts to manage and rebalance traffic within the City during the plan period. This initiative would set up a forum made up of a wide range of stakeholders to share good practice and develop solutions which would further the plan's objectives. The forum would include major employers, representatives of City centre retail and leisure businesses, educational providers, members of the public and civic groups within the City, and public transport operators, supported by the Parish and County Councils. Topics could include:

- monitoring and development of travel plans (including travel survey results);
- bus routes and frequencies;
- the Park and Ride service;
- access for disabled people;

- taxis;
- integrated ticketing;
- publicity and information (such as a bus map, live departure screens or a travel app);
- managing deliveries;
- the congestion charge;
- public procurement of zero emission or hybrid vehicles.

**Public Engagement:** The initial development of the Neighbourhood Plan included a number of projects relating to improving transport within the City, many of which were beyond the remit of a Neighbourhood Plan or even the Parish Council. Yet the responses to the public consultation show there is great public interest in the problems of transport in the City, with suggestions being made regarding such diverse aspects as heavy vehicles in Saddler Street, reducing motor vehicle traffic, taxi management and bus subsidies. In 2019 there is no means for citizens to get involved in this important area of policy. Bearing in mind that transport accounts for over a quarter of UK carbon emissions, there is an urgent need to deliver sustainable transport, and a public forum could provide the necessary impetus.

### **Initiative 19: Sustainable Transport Partnership in Practice**

**The Proposal:** The most complete and widespread failure both in transport policy and practice is the inability to turn sustainable transport theory into practice, and this needs to be recognised and urgently acted upon. The replacement bus station proposal from 2016 has been set aside in favour of improving the bus station on its existing site (see Initiative 9 'North Road Regeneration 'Making Places' Pilot Study'). This will be the key to re-imagining the whole network with fewer buses terminating in the bus station to reduce vehicular space requirements in favour of greatly enhanced conditions for passengers. The introduction of a circular route around the City linking main destinations by electric-only vehicles could be a key element, as could electric and hybrid buses on longer distance services using the bus station. The whole question of recharging will need the installation of fast recharging facilities at the bus station, at the park-and-ride sites, and other termination points in and around the City.

**Public Engagement:** For many years, the voice of the public in the quality and frequency of their services has declined with the reduction of public financial support to operators. The public now gets what the operators are prepared to provide with competition and profitability being the decisive considerations for all bus companies. To bring about a change as fundamental as that proposed here would require a complete rethinking of the relationship between the public, the County Council and the bus operators. With the possibility of an improved bus station, a twin initiative to attempt such a reconciliation and realignment of ambition would be timely. Agreement by all partners requires that there needs to be a shared starting point. The common understanding will be that places which embrace sustainability principles and convert them into practice will be winners. The role of the 'Durham Sustainable Transport Forum' as proposed in Initiative 18 will be important in deciding the scope of this exercise.

## Theme 6. A City With An Enriched Community Life

### Initiative 20: The Development of a City Centre Hub

**The Proposal:** During the process of consultation for the City of Durham Neighbourhood Plan there was a huge response from the public for the need for a central facility for sharing local information and for the provision of rooms for hire for meetings, courses and other events. A common response was 'no-one knows what's on.' In the 2017 Pre-Submission consultation, for example, the Durham Pointers committee wrote: "The proposed central hub offers the potential to provide a much-needed central information point which could hold and disseminate information on local county attractions and community events. Any such provision should embrace all modern media methods for the distribution of information but should also be a place for face-to-face encounters."

This initiative will begin the process of creating a new City Centre Hub. It is vital to make a start, however modest, and to build quickly on success in growing community use and support. The use of a small room could lead to integration with an existing compatible use, or to making use of an empty but publicly accessible building. Information sharing would make it possible to show in one place what the City has to offer, including courses, what's on at the theatres and cinemas, events, festivals, rooms for hire, information about independent shops, what University lectures are accessible to the general public. Looking for a room to hire? Then the City Centre Hub will provide that information from venues across the City. Where are the book clubs in the City? Again, the City Centre Hub will draw together that information from across the City. What's on tonight? You'll find out at the Hub! As well as the provision of information by printed leaflets and notices, a website, that would automatically harvest data from other the websites of other organisations, could be set up and managed by local volunteers. In addition, with sufficient finance, there could be a café and meeting rooms there.

The City Centre Hub would be at the centre of a Hub and Spoke network model, working with existing venues across the City, where rooms for meetings, courses and events already exist. These include the Miners' Hall, Redhills, (with its own ambitious plans for expansion as a hub for performance, practice and learning, as well as a place where community groups could meet and organise), Alington House, Shakespeare Hall, Clayport Library, Town Hall, Waddington Street Centre, Churches, cafes. The benefit of this whole City approach for the users is that once mapped out they will know what is available in each venue, what is distinctive, what is their function, which groups do they serve. The benefits for the individual venues are recognition of the work of the other venues, the recognition of potential gaps in provision and support and advice for each other.

**Public Engagement:** Supported by the Parish Council, a group of key stakeholders will be created to support this initiative, in order to write a feasibility study, a business plan, identification of potential funding sources, finding possible sites, engaging with the local community.

## **Initiative 21: The Development of a Durham City Arts and Culture Forum**

**The Proposal:** In 2014, the Arts Council England published 'The Value of Arts and Culture to People and Society.' The report outlined a range of benefits that can be observed at individual, communal and national levels, including enriching lives, boosting local economies, impacting positively on health and well being, contributing to community cohesion and improving educational outcomes.

In the introduction to Theme 6 of the Durham City Neighbourhood Plan, the City is described as having a strong cultural identity, rich in cultural events and festivals. During the process of consultation for Plan there was real appreciation of these festivals, as well as the concerts and events organized at the Gala, the University and Cathedral. However, a large number of gaps in provision for arts and culture were identified. The full list is available at <http://nfp.durhamcity.org.uk/your-views/priorities/> but it included the need for a City Art Gallery and Museum. (The County Council has since opened the Gala Gallery in Millennium Square.) For the residents of Durham the consultation identified the need for affordable rooms for meetings, courses and workshops (including improved opportunities for children to develop creative skills), affordable studios for practitioners, support for start-up creative businesses, and a more joined up, reciprocal and shared approach to improving facilities for the arts.

*In a nutshell, there is a lot of potential in the City – we just need imagination and enthusiasm to help the arts grow*

There are existing successful organisations working across County Durham including 'Culture Durham' which works with the County Council to create the conditions for arts and heritage to thrive in the County. 'Durham Creatives' run events and offer advice and support for anyone in the North East thinking of starting or already running creative businesses.

However, Durham is a small City and there are major issues and challenges that impact on our ability to progress residents' ambitions. At the present time, there is no whole City approach for improving facilities for arts and culture. This lack of a collaborative approach means that existing and potential providers of arts and cultural facilities compete for land, buildings and funding. It is desirable to develop a collaborative approach, where key stakeholders are committed to working together to "invest in creativity as a driver for sustainable urban development, social inclusion and cultural vibrancy." (UNESCO)

The focus of this initiative is to improve facilities for arts and culture at a local level – for the benefit of those residents of the City who are passionate about making and experiencing the arts. This would be achieved through the development of a 'forum' where ideas and views would be exchanged. It could also act as a showcase for upcoming events in the City.

It is important to understand the economic role that arts and crafts plays in the local economy and to recognise that the role and potential of people involved in creative businesses can be supported and encouraged. In many places local arts and crafts contribute to physical enhancements, interpretation of heritage, and in design advice for buildings and artefacts. Support could be facilitated by small scale grants from various statutory and charitable bodies

which would make a major difference to the quantity and quality of work, and the incomes of those who contribute to the enhancement of their City.

**Public Engagement:** Supported by the Parish Council, key stakeholders, local practitioners and interested members of the public would come together to plan the way forward for the development of the Forum, with the aim of improving facilities for arts and culture in the City and the support of the sector as an important part of the local economy.

### **Initiative 22: Local Sustainable Food**

**The Proposal:** Implementation of the principles of healthier food availability and local sustainable food production are important and popular actions when carried out, and are ever-more important in a world where food security will become a key problem even in countries with good agricultural systems and effective trading arrangements.

**Public Engagement:** On the principal that the best action that can be undertaken is to support and encourage existing bodies, the development of local action should best be through the already well-established 'Transition Durham'. The Parish Council could seek to partner 'Transition Durham' in identifying key priorities for practical action.