

Housing Strategy Principles & Priorities Paper

Introduction

The Council is preparing a new Housing Strategy to be adopted in March 2024. This Principles Paper is the first stage in the preparation of the Housing Strategy, and we are seeking your views on the issues and priorities we have identified.

The Housing Strategy will provide a strategic framework to inform the actions and investment of the Council and its partners. The Housing Strategy will be developed to ensure Durham County Council is well positioned to maximise future opportunities for funding support. The new Housing Strategy 2024 will replace the current [Housing Strategy 2019](#).

The Housing Strategy will reflect the County Durham Vision, which seeks to deliver new high-quality housing in a range of house types and tenures including affordable homes that are accessible and meet the needs and aspirations all of our residents.

The Housing Strategy will also link to the Inclusive Economic Strategy helping to ensure that housing is used as an economic enabler and reflecting that one of the biggest impacts on people's health and well-being is access to good quality housing.

Vision

The Housing Strategy is informed by a vision. The vision sets out the overarching ambitions of the Housing Strategy to inform principles and priorities. The vision is as follows:

By 2035 County Durham will be a place that has good quality homes that meet the needs of existing and future residents that they can afford. The provision and quality of housing will support economic growth, contribute to improved health, and create and maintain sustainable, mixed and balanced communities. People will live long and independent lives within connected communities.

Questions

1. Do you have any views on the Vision we have identified?

The City of Durham Trust supports this Vision and particularly welcomes the elements of affordability and of sustainable, mixed and balanced communities.

2. Is there anything else that should be included?

The City of Durham Trust would suggest that the Principles accompanying the Vision should 'unpack' the term "good quality" into net zero carbon footprint houses that are of the highest quality design internally and externally coupled with generous green spaces. We point these out in our comments on the Principles below.

Principles

Principles establish the foundation and rationale underpinning decisions and actions to deliver the vision. The Council is seeking views on the following core principles for the County Durham Housing Strategy.

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

Homes should be well maintained including being free of damp and mould. People should feel safe within their home, safe from domestic violence, anti-social behaviour

and their home should support positive health outcomes.

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

The Council will support the delivery of a range and choice of homes to meet housing need and demand, including market housing for those who can afford it and affordable housing for those who cannot. Alongside the provision of new homes, the Council will work to bring empty homes back in to use to meet housing needs. By ensuring a sufficient supply of all types of housing we can help prevent homelessness and reduce reliance on temporary accommodation. We will also make sure there is sufficient housing for other groups, including Gypsy and Roma Travellers, children's homes and student accommodation.

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

The Housing Strategy will align with the Inclusive Economic Strategy which recognises that housing is a major enabler to achieving economic growth and better social outcomes for our communities. The Housing Strategy will also support the aims of the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy which is the overarching health and wellbeing place-based plan for County Durham, the Growing Up in County Durham Strategy, which seeks to improve life opportunities for children and young people amongst other strategies and plans.

Principle 4: The strategy will be for the County, not the Council, and will promote local solutions underpinned by community engagement

The strategy will be a Council document as strategic housing authority; however, it will be a strategy for County Durham that will be developed and delivered in partnership. The Council will make use of the County Durham Partnership in developing and delivering the Strategy.

The Housing Strategy will promote community consultation and engagement as part of delivery of its priorities.

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

It is important that high quality homes are delivered to meet needs, are accessible, and that high standards are achieved across all tenures. There is an opportunity to support people, from children to older persons, to live independently and remain in their home for as long as they desire by ensuring homes are flexible to differing accommodation needs over a lifetime, including supporting family living and adaptability for older age. The tenure of a newly built property should not be identifiable by its exterior, with external finishings to affordable housing and market housing being indistinguishable.

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

It is important that the Housing Strategy reflects the diversity of communities across County Durham and differing issues and opportunities. The Housing Strategy has a role to coordinate activity of the Council, its partners and wider investment opportunities to support sustainable, mixed, and balanced and connected

communities. This includes regeneration within our communities, access to outdoor greenspace, and bringing empty homes back into use.

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

In line with the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan, we will maximise the opportunities available to address fuel poverty through combining advice schemes and heating improvements and targeting interventions at those most in need. New homes will be designed in line with current energy efficiency standards.

Questions

3. Do you have any views on the principles we have identified that will underpin the Housing Strategy?

Principle 1: Generous green space provision is essential for positive health outcomes.

Principle 2: In the examples of housing for other groups it would be good to include the elderly in body and/or mind.

Principle 5: High quality internal and external design standards for all housing will assist indistinguishable tenure.

Principle 6: In Durham city there are areas where 90% or more of the houses are student HMOs. The strategy needs to identify ways and means for recovering some of these properties so that they can once again be family homes.

Principle 7: Wherever possible, new homes should be built to the highest energy efficiency standards rather than just current standards. To support active travel there should be higher densities of housing near public transport routes.

4. Is there anything else that should be included?

Mention should be made that large housing estates need associated facilities.

Priorities

Priorities are where we will focus our actions and activities to deliver the vision. The Council is seeking views on the following priorities for the County Durham Housing Strategy:

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

Current actions and activities include:

- The Council House Delivery Programme.
- Implementation of the County Durham Plan.
- Council Managed Housing.

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

Current actions and activities include:

- Management of Durham Key Options choice based lettings scheme.
- Provision of Gypsy and Traveller pitches across six sites to supplement

private provision and to meet needs.

- Support to access accommodation in the Private Rented Sector.
- Utilising supported accommodation to meet the needs of relevant groups.

Priority 3: Ensure high quality homes and landlord services

Current actions and activities include:

- Implementation of selective licencing (*sp*) scheme in County Durham.
- Delivering new high-quality homes in line with the requirements of the relevant policies of the County Durham Plan, including Policy 16 (Durham University Development, Purpose Built Student Accommodation and Houses in Multiple Occupation).
- Registered Providers will ensure that the condition of their housing is maintained and improved where necessary.

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

Current actions and activities include:

- Undertaking a Needs Led Accommodation Review to consider longer term specialist accommodation needs.
- Undertaking adaptations to properties utilising Disabled Facilities Grant.
- Delivering the County Durham Homelessness Strategy including through the Housing First approach.
- Providing housing including, emergency temporary accommodation through the County Durham Letting Agency.

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

Current actions and activities include:

- Delivery of a programme of Housing Strategy Targeted Delivery Plans.
- Delivery of the Warm Homes Campaign.
- Advice, assistance and loans services to support homeowners and landlords to prevent homes become long-term empty and to bring empty homes back into use.
- Utilising the Council Managed Housing acquisition programme to bring empty homes back into use.
- Local Authority Delivery Scheme - Retrofit of Energy measures including renewable heating systems and insulation to properties across County Durham.
- Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund – Working with a consortium of registered providers to deliver energy efficiency measures to over 1000 social housing properties in County Durham.
- Delivering homes that produce lower CO2 emissions through the County Durham Plan, Building Regulations (2021) and the Climate Change Emergency Plan 2 (CERP 2)

Questions

- 5. Do you have any views on the priorities we have identified that will deliver the Housing Strategy?**

Priority 3: Durham city is not eligible for the Selective Licensing Scheme and therefore an Additional Licensing Scheme is needed to address the well-evidenced shortcomings of the

condition and management of HMOs (97% of the County's HMOs are in Durham city).

Priority 5: This expression of Priority 5 is a fundamental statement of values and is thoroughly endorsed by the Trust.

6. Is there anything else that should be included?

The Trust's areas of interest and concern are covered by the comments we have made above.

Your ideas

We'd now like to get your thoughts and ideas on a range of housing issues.

Question 33 How can housing contribute to the Council's Climate Emergency Response Plan?

Build to net zero standards now, not wait for Government compulsion.

Design for maximum active travel i.e. not the private car using fossil fuels.

Adopt the 15-minute neighbourhood principles. There are excellent examples (York, Denmark).

Question 34 How can we prevent homelessness in County Durham?

The County Council cannot alone solve this problem, but can significantly help via mental health services, family support services, and supported housing projects.

Question 35 How do we ensure a comprehensive range of housing options for older and vulnerable people, disabled people and children and young people?

Through a multi-agency compact.

Question 36 How can the delivery of housing support the local economy?

Affordable housing in sustainable locations for access to diverse job opportunities.

Question 37 How can we ensure everyone has a warm, safe and decent home and how will this support improved education, health and well-being?

Set the highest design, space and energy efficiency standards for housing development. This directly improves performance at schools, and personal and community health and well-being.

Question 38 How can we meet our need for affordable homes?

Insist on the requirements set out in County Durham Plan Policy 15. However, this will not reach the County Council's estimate of 836 units of affordable housing required per year over the County Durham Plan period (i.e. 12,500 affordable houses). So a massive public sector and grant-aided private sector programme is necessary.

Question 39 Is there anything else that should be included in the Draft Vision, Principles and Priorities Paper?

Covered above.

How to get involved

The Housing Strategy Principles and Priorities consultation will give all stakeholders a chance to influence how we develop a new housing strategy for improving housing and related services across County Durham.

Our Housing Strategy consultation will run from 26 June until 18 August 2023.

You can have your say by submitting comments via the survey at www.durham.gov.uk/consultation or you can email responses to: thehousingconversation@durham.gov.uk

You can also call us with any questions, to request further information or if you'd like the information in hard copy or an alternative format on **0300 026 0000**.

All comments should be submitted by **5pm on 18 August 2023**.

Next Steps

The comments received as part of the consultation on the Principles and Priorities Paper will be utilised to inform and develop a Draft County Durham Housing Strategy for consultation.