

# Crook Strategic Place Plan Engagement Findings

We have gathered your feedback from events, the survey, from schools and community groups and local organisations and employers and cross reference it with data and information we have about the town. We will then develop a draft vision for the town to share with you in the next phase.

## What you told us

We engaged with 432 people across a range of demographics:

- 74 survey responses representing residents of Crook, wider County Durham, visitors and businesses
- 344 people during 6 in person community events
- 10 young people engaged during a Jack Drum Arts drop-in
- 4 key stakeholders engaged during 4 interviews.

The key findings are based on themed areas of heritage and regeneration; transport; safety and security; housing; education, skills and opportunities; community spirit; and health and wellbeing.

A summary of what you told us about the town is below.

## Heritage and regeneration

### Strengths

- Strong local identity rooted in Crook's mining, farming, railway and market-town heritage, with valued landmarks and a recognisable traditional townscape.
- A compact, walkable town centre with a solid base of independent shops and everyday services, supported by a well-used Market Place and free parking.

### Challenges

- Widespread perception that regeneration is slow, limited, or absent, with frustration that change is concentrated in housing rather than the town centre.
- Declining parts of the townscape (empty units, run-down buildings, poor maintenance, broken paving, litter) and a high street offer perceived as narrow and increasingly dominated by takeaways and low variety uses.

### Opportunities

- Heritage-led public realm improvements (shopfronts, lighting, seating, greenery, murals, and art) and stronger interpretation and promotion of Crook's heritage to build pride and visitor appeal.
- Reuse of vacant or landmark buildings (including the old cinema) for cultural, creative, leisure and community use, alongside renewed support for events and animation of the Market Place

## Transport

### Strengths

- Crook is widely seen as walkable, with a compact centre and strong access to countryside routes, including former railway paths and links to surrounding settlements.
- Road connectivity to nearby towns is generally valued, and free and low-cost parking is seen as supportive of local shops and services.

### Challenges

- Bus reliability is a persistent concern (cancellations, lateness, and limited evening and Sunday provision), disproportionately affecting non-drivers and young people travelling for education and work.
- Parking pressure, congestion and poor parking behaviour, particularly around schools and key town-centre routes, create safety and accessibility issues and reinforce car dependency.

### Opportunities

- Improve bus reliability and service coverage (including evenings and weekends) and strengthen integration with rail connections via Bishop Auckland and Darlington.
- Targeted walking and cycling improvements (maintenance, lighting, signage, safer crossings) and clearer town-centre interchange and waiting environments.

## Safety and security

### Strengths

- Daytime safety is generally perceived as good, underpinned by familiarity, footfall, and a strong sense that residents look out for one another.
- Existing CCTV infrastructure provides a foundation to build on, even where confidence in monitoring is currently low

### Challenges

- Anti-social behaviour is consistently highlighted as a major issue (youth-related nuisance, intimidation, off-road bikes and e-scooters, vandalism and drug-related activity).
- Limited and inconsistent police presence, particularly in the evenings, drives a strong day–night divide in perceptions of safety, with many residents avoiding public spaces after dark.

### Opportunities

- More visible, community-based policing (including foot patrols) and stronger partnership working to rebuild confidence and deter nuisance behaviour.

- Improve lighting, CCTV coverage and monitoring, and the quality of public spaces, alongside preventative youth provision and safe social spaces.

## Housing

### Strengths

- Crook is still viewed as relatively affordable compared with nearby places, with a mix of housing types and tenures and some options suited to older residents.
- New housing has increased supply and introduced more modern options to the local market.

### Challenges

- Rising rents and house prices are reducing accessibility for younger people and first-time buyers, weakening Crook's affordability advantage.
- Strong concern that new development is not matched by infrastructure capacity (GPs, dentists, schools, transport, parking), alongside perceptions of poor-quality new builds and issues in parts of the housing stock.

### Opportunities

- Better alignment of housing growth with infrastructure investment and delivery of homes that meet local needs (including accessible housing, bungalows and affordable family homes).
- Regeneration of empty or derelict homes and stronger standards and enforcement for private rentals to improve housing quality and neighbourhood pride.

## Education, work, skills and opportunities

### Strengths

- Primary schools are consistently viewed positively, and Crook Library is recognised as a valued community asset for learning and skills development.
- Access to colleges and universities in nearby towns, though this is heavily dependent on transport.

### Challenges

- Lack of high-quality local jobs leads many residents to commute elsewhere or remain unemployed, reinforcing Crook's role as a commuter town and limiting progression.
- No secondary school in Crook and limited local post-16 provision create barriers to participation, aspiration and attainment, particularly for those without reliable transport.

### Opportunities

- Build on the library as a hub for adult learning, digital skills and support, by developing targeted community-led training initiatives.

- Create bespoke youth programmes linked to skills, work experience and confidence-building, with stronger links between regeneration activity and local pathways into work.

## Community Spirit and Cohesion

### Strengths

- Crook is widely described as friendly and welcoming, with strong informal support networks, volunteering and strong community anchors (including the library, community centres and local initiatives).
- Strong local pride and identity, reinforced through events and shared traditions.

### Challenges

- A perceived decline in cohesion, with increasing division and social tension; flags and banners are frequently referenced as contributing to a sense of exclusion or division.
- Limited youth provision and the loss or reduction of community events reduce opportunities for intergenerational connection and shared civic life.

### Opportunities

- Strengthen and support community groups and anchor organisations, improve promotion and coordination of activity, and develop inclusive shared spaces that bring people together.
- Expand youth clubs, family activities and safe places for young people as a route to improving cohesion and reducing anti-social behaviour.

## Health and wellbeing

### Strengths

- Good access to parks, walking routes and surrounding countryside supports everyday physical activity and quality of life.
- Valued community assets (e.g. Jack Drum Arts Centre, community groups and local initiatives) contribute to social connection and wellbeing.

### Challenges

- Closure and demolition of the leisure centre/swimming pool is viewed as a major loss; remaining leisure provision is seen as limited, less accessible and insufficient for town needs.
- Pressure on GP, dental services, and gaps in mental health support, especially for young people and working-age adults.

### Opportunities

- Strong appetite to reinstate a leisure centre and swimming pool as a cornerstone community health asset, alongside broader sports and youth provision.
- Improve active travel routes, develop wellbeing workshops and targeted support for isolated residents, and strengthen age-appropriate inclusive activities.

