

County Durham Plan: Strategic
Environmental Assessment (SEA)
Screening and Scoping Report (June 2026)

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1. Introduction

- 1.1.1 Durham County Council is producing a new County Durham Plan (the Plan) in accordance with the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023). The Plan will set a framework to guide future development in the county. It will provide an up-to-date policy context which sets out a new spatial strategy and vision for the county which will inform the assessment of new development proposals. It will be a key influence in how the county will develop and prosper during the plan period and beyond.
- 1.1.2 To support the preparation of the new Plan, the Council started work on its Sustainability Appraisal (SA). SA promotes sustainable development by assessing the extent to which plans achieve social, economic and environmental objectives. A SA Scoping Report was produced for consultation with statutory consultees (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) in October 2025 which set out; relevant plans and their sustainability objectives; social, economic and environmental baseline information for County Durham; key sustainability issues and a draft SA Framework to assess the emerging Plan against.
- 1.1.3 Following the consultation on the SA Scoping Report the Government has since produced guidance on the implementation of a new plan making system which the Council will need to comply with.¹ The guidance recommends that progress is made on a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) if needed, before starting the 30-month plan preparation process. The Council should also have regard to the consultation draft of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which was published on the 16th December 2025 to help inform the early stages of plan preparation. Plan making policy 6 of the NPPF consultation draft, reiterates that in preparing plans, plan makers should use (strategic) environmental assessment to inform the preparation of plans, where legally required.²
- 1.1.4 To determine whether SEA is required, a screening assessment has been undertaken which is presented in Appendix D. The screening opinion concludes that SEA is required, although the opinion of the statutory consultees (the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England) will be required before a final determination is made. As it is considered probable that the statutory consultees will agree with the screening opinion, work on the first SEA Scoping stage has commenced.
- 1.1.5 As SA incorporates the requirements of SEA, much of the previous content of the 2025 SA scoping Report can be retained. This report, along with its appendices therefore aims to:

¹ [Create or update a local plan using the new system - GOV.UK](#)

² [Draft NPPF: PM6 General principles for plan-making \(criterion e\)](#)

- Present the SEA Screening opinion
- Re-present the previous SA Scoping content which is relevant to an SEA
- Respond to previous consultation comments,
- Provide updates to contextual and baseline information where necessary; and
- Present a new SEA assessment framework.

1.2 What is Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)?

- 1.2.1 Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) is a systematic process which aims to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes, with a view to promoting sustainable development.
- 1.2.2 The assessment should describe the likely significant effects of the Plan and its alternatives on the environment, including on biodiversity (flora and fauna), population, human health, soil, water, air climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage (including architectural and archaeological heritage), landscapes and the interrelationships between these factors.
- 1.2.3 Whilst Environmental Outcome Reports (EORs) were introduced as part of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) to replace the existing system of SA, SEA and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), secondary legislation and further guidance on the methodology for their implementation is awaited. SEA will therefore be the assessment tool used in accordance with the Government's new plan making guidance.

1.3 Stages of SEA

- 1.3.1 Once it has been determined that SEA is required, an SEA consists of five key stages, with the tasks associated with Stage A being collectively referred to as the Scoping Stage. The following table provides an overview of each stage, its purpose and an indication of when tasks will be completed if not fulfilled through the outputs in this report:

Table 1: Stages in the SEA process

Stage	Tasks	Purpose	Output in this report
Stage A: Setting the context and objectives, establishing the baseline and deciding on the scope	Identifying other relevant plans, programmes and environmental protection objectives	To document how the plan is affected by outside factors and to ensure that environmental protection objectives are taken into account throughout the development of the Plan	Relevant policies, plans and programmes at an international, national, and local level have been reviewed to identify implications for the Plan and the SEA

Stage	Tasks	Purpose	Output in this report
			(see Appendix A for full details)
Stage A	Collecting baseline information	To provide an evidence base for environmental problems, effects prediction and monitoring.	Tables summarising evidence (as far as information is currently available) against environmental issues and indicators is provided in Appendix B and described in sections 3 to 12 of this report.
Stage A	Identifying environmental problems	To help focus the SEA and streamline the subsequent stages, including the setting of the SEA Framework, prediction of effects and monitoring	A summary of the key environmental issues for County Durham is provided in section 13 of this report
Stage A	Developing SEA objectives	To provide a means by which the environmental performance of the Plan and its alternatives can be assessed	The SEA Framework is outlined in section 14 of this report.
Stage A	Consulting on the scope of the SEA	To ensure that the SEA covers the likely significant environmental effects of the Plan.	This report responds to the previous consultation on the SA Scoping Report (please see section 15 and Appendix C) and has been made available for any further comment as part of the Get Ready: Scoping Consultation prior to Gateway 1 in the new plan making process.
Stage B: Developing and refining alternatives and assessing effects	Testing the plan objectives against the SEA objectives	To identify potential synergies or inconsistencies between the objectives of the plan and the SEA objectives	Not applicable. This will be presented in a forthcoming Environmental report.

Stage	Tasks	Purpose	Output in this report
		and help in developing alternatives.	
Stage B	Developing strategic alternatives	To develop and refine strategic alternatives	As above
Stage B	Predicting the effects of the plan, including alternatives	To predict the significant environmental effects of the plan and alternatives	As above
Stage B	Evaluating the effects of the plan, including alternatives	To evaluate the predicted effects of the plan and its alternatives and assist in the refinement of the plan.	As above
Stage B	Mitigating adverse effects	To ensure that adverse effects are identified, and potential mitigation measures are considered	As above
Stage C: Preparing the Environmental Report	Preparing the Environmental Report	To present the predicted environmental effects of the plan or programme, including alternatives, in a form suitable for consultation and use by decision makers.	Not applicable. A draft of this report is expected to be completed in winter 2026.
Stage D: Consulting on the Draft Plan and the Environmental Report	Consulting the public and Consultation Bodies on the draft plan and the Environmental Report	To give the public and Consultation Bodies an opportunity to express their opinions on the findings of the Environmental Report and to use it as a reference point in commenting on the plan. To gather more information through the opinions of the public.	Not applicable. This report is expected to be made available for consultation in Spring 2027 prior to proceeding to the Plan Making Gateway 2 (early resolution of soundness issues)
Stage D	Assessing significant changes	To ensure that the environmental implications of any significant changes to the draft plan or programme at this stage are assessed and taken into account.	Not applicable. If further assessment is required, an additional Environmental Report will be prepared which is expected to be consulted upon in Autumn 2027.

Stage	Tasks	Purpose	Output in this report
Stage D	Making decisions and providing information	To provide information on how the Environmental Report and other consultees' opinions were taken into account in deciding the final form of the plan to be adopted.	Not applicable.
Stage E: Monitoring the significant effects of implementing the plan on the environment	Developing aims and methods for monitoring	To track the environmental effects of the plan to show whether they are as predicted: to help identify adverse effects	No applicable. Please note that monitoring proposals will be set out in the Environmental Report
Stage E	Responding to adverse effects	To prepare for appropriate responses if adverse effects are identified.	Not applicable. Monitoring will be undertaken post adoption of the Plan which is anticipated early 2029.

1.3.2 The following sections of this report provide an overview of County Durham and together with Appendices A, B and C document the information collated to fulfil the Stage A Scoping tasks. The information is grouped by the range of issues that need to be covered, as outlined in the SEA Regulations.

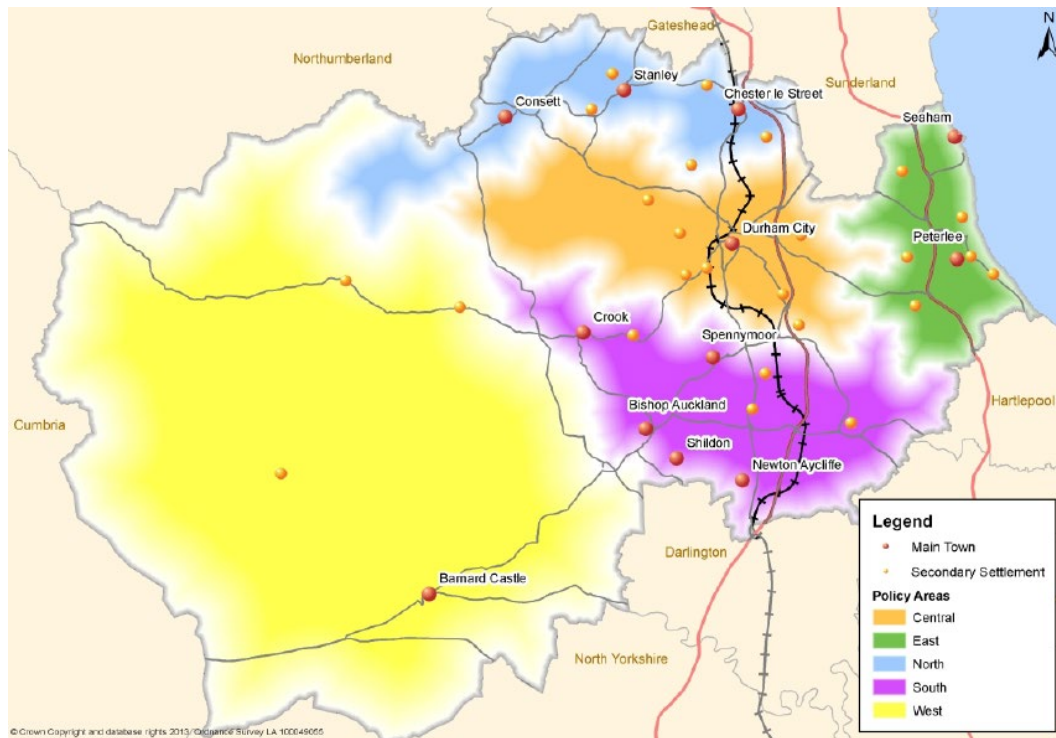
2. Overview of County Durham

- 2.1.1 County Durham lies at the heart of the North East region and is home to over half a million people, a fifth of the region's population. The county covers a significant geographic area, extending some 223,000 hectares (862 square miles) from the North Pennines National Landscape in the west to the Durham Heritage Coast in the East.
- 2.1.2 The many existing locational advantages of County Durham, including the A1(M), A19, A66, and the East Coast Main Line, provide ease of movement to the rest of the region and country for both business and tourism. This, coupled with good access to ports on the North East coast and to three airports within one hour of travelling time provide direct links to Europe and the rest of the world
- 2.1.3 The county is far from the usual pattern of a single large town surrounded by a network of agricultural villages. It varies in character from remote and sparsely populated rural areas in the Durham Dales, to the larger villages located within former coalfield communities. A key spatial legacy of the rise and fall of the mining,

steel and other heavy industries is the dispersed or multi-centred settlement pattern of small urban areas separated from one another by open countryside.

- 2.1.4 The County can be divided into five areas which broadly share similar characteristics as shown by the following map:

Figure 2: County Durham Areas



2.2 Central Durham

- 2.2.1 This area comprises approximately 20% of County Durham's population and includes some 30 plus settlements, from Lanchester in the west to Ludworth in the east to Sacriston in the north and to Coxhoe in the south.
- 2.2.2 The area includes the historic Durham City which is the area's largest settlement and home to Durham University. The City's unique character and setting, supporting the internationally renowned Cathedral and Castle World Heritage Site which forms one of the most stunning city panoramas in Europe, combined with the City's importance as an administrative, educational, employment, service and tourist centre belies its relatively small size. Outside the City, settlements range from large villages (many a product of the county's industrial past) with their own local centres to small agricultural hamlets with few facilities. This area has good access to the east coast main line railway and the A1(M).

2.3 North Durham

- 2.3.1 The North Durham area comprises approximately 26% of County Durham's population which is mostly concentrated in the three major centres of Consett, Stanley and Chester-le-Street. The area adjoins the green belt of the Tyneside

conurbation along its north eastern border, whilst to the south east lies the Cathedral City of Durham.

- 2.3.2 Formerly, the area was dependent upon coal mining and steel making, with Consett Steelworks once the largest of its kind in Europe. The last deep mine in the area and the Consett Steelworks both closed in 1980 and since then the economy has undergone restructuring, albeit deprivation is still an issue that needs addressing.
- 2.3.3 Chester-le-Street is one of the oldest market towns in County Durham, home to the Banks Homes Riverside International Cricket Ground, with good access to the east coast main line railway and A1(M).
- 2.3.4 Beamish Museum is located near to Stanley and is a world famous open air museum, telling the story of life in North East England during the 1820s, 1900s, 1940s and 1950s. The museum operates over a 140 hectare estate and is the first regional open air museum in England.

2.4 East Durham

- 2.4.1 The East Durham area comprises approximately 18% of County Durham's population with a mixture of urban and rural areas with two main towns, Seaham and Peterlee, and a number of former colliery and rural villages. The A19 trunk road and the Durham Coast Line form the main routes through East Durham linking it to Tyneside and Wearside in the north and the Teesside conurbation in the south.
- 2.4.2 Peterlee was founded in the late 1940's as a new town and is a significant employment base within the County accommodating considerable manufacturing employment on its large industrial estate. Seaham is located on the coast and provides the county's only dock. The Port of Seaham handles ships of up to 8,000 tonnes. Following the closure of Seaham's last remaining collieries in 1992, the town has witnessed substantial levels of physical regeneration activity. However, as with North Durham, deprivation is still an issue that needs addressing across the area.
- 2.4.3 The Durham coast is a unique asset in the East Durham area and forms part of the Durham Heritage Coast definition. The coast provides an attractive coastal landscape of magnesian limestone grasslands, cliffs and beaches in East Durham and includes two Special Protection Areas (SPAs) and one Special Area of Conservation (SAC) relating to coastal bird species and vegetated sea cliffs. A further SAC exists in the area pertaining to ancient Yew woodlands. These sites form part of the UK's national site network and are internationally important.

2.5 South Durham

- 2.5.1 The South Durham area comprises approximately 30% of County Durham's population which is mostly concentrated across the dispersed main towns of Bishop Auckland, Newton Aycliffe, Shildon, Spennymoor and Crook described as follows:

- 2.5.2 Bishop Auckland has roman and medieval origins with an attractive market place as well as important historical buildings such as Auckland Castle. The Auckland Project provides international tourism and cultural attractions including Auckland Palace, Auckland Gardens, Auckland Tower, the Spanish Gallery, Mining Art Gallery and Faith Museum. A live outdoor shown called Kynren which depicts vital moments in British outdoor history is also performed on a seasonal basis, involving 1,000 plus volunteers from the local area. The town is a major service centre and hub for South Durham and the Bishop Auckland Retail and Shopping Park located on the A688 provides a key retail destination. The town centre also features the Newgate Centre, which is undergoing upgrades and footfall could be improved through the provision of the Stack Development, a two-storey centre which will house local independent food traders and bars. The Bishop Line railway provides services to Shildon, Newton Aycliffe, Heighington and Darlington. The line also connects with the Weardale Railway, an 18 mile heritage line connecting Bishop Auckland to Wolsingham and Stanhope to the West in the Durham Dales.
- 2.5.3 Newton Aycliffe was one of the original new towns developed in the 1950s and is a reflection of the architectural style of that time. The town has become a major housing and employment centre in the area within close proximity to the A1(M) and A167. The town boasts the regionally significant Aycliffe Business Park which hosts more than 250 companies including the Hitachi plant, a major employer, employing workers assembling high speed intercity trains. Forrest Park is also located to the south of Aycliffe Business Park and is a new 48 hectare site providing opportunity for a further 1.7 million square feet of prime industrial floorspace.
- 2.5.4 Shildon is a small town, steeped in history due to its past as a historic rail centre and the role it played in the birth of the railways. The town incorporates a regionally significant tourism attraction at 'Locomotion' (part of the National Railway Museum) and serves its local community by offering a range of shopping complementary to the more extensive offer in nearby Bishop Auckland.
- 2.5.5 Spennymoor has benefited from several initiatives aimed at developing and improving the Town Centre in recent years and it plays an important role in providing a wide range of everyday good and services. The main attractions in Spennymoor are the local leisure centre, and Victoria Jubilee Park which was given to the people of the town by Queen Victoria to celebrate the jubilee of her reign and is sited on land which was once part of the Whitworth Hall estate of the Shafto family.
- 2.5.6 Crook is a historic market town and has close links to the surrounding villages and Weardale. The centre of Crook, a designated conservation area, features a good variety of shops and businesses.

- 2.5.7 Outside of the main towns, The North East Technology Park (NETPark) provides a premier UK science park in Sedgfield. Hardwick Country Park, also located near Sedgfield is a Visit England accredited attraction.

2.6 West Durham

- 2.6.1 West Durham comprises, the Durham Dales, primarily in the valleys of Teesdale and Weardale to the west of the A68. The area is characterised by attractive countryside and is relatively sparsely populated, comprising approximately 6% of County Durham's population. It contains a large proportion of the North Pennines National Landscape, a UNESCO Global Geopark, hosting internationally significant geology and more nationally recognised Dark Sky Discovery Sites than any other part of the UK.
- 2.6.2 A large proportion of the area is also designated for wildlife with three Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) and one Special Protection Area (SPAs) which hold much of the upland heathland of northern England, support the major area of blanket bog in England and the remaining UK resource of mountain hay meadows in addition to breeding pairs of Hen harrier, Merlin, Peregrine falcon, European Golden plover, Dunlin and Eurasian curlew. Teesdale is home to a unique and rare assemblage of plants found nowhere else in Britain.
- 2.6.3 The area includes the attractive historic market towns of Barnard Castle, serving much of lower Teesdale, Middleton-in-Teesdale, serving upper Teesdale and Stanhope serving upper Weardale. Barnard Castle in particular, is a significant heritage / tourism destination and is considered to be one of the top fifty most historically and architecturally important towns in Britain. Raby Castle, Garden and Deer Park, High Force, England's biggest waterfall and Killhope Lead Mining Museum also attract tourists along with the opportunities the area offers for walking, cycling and exploring nature.
- 2.6.4 Around Teesdale's and Weardale's larger settlements are numerous villages and hamlets with an agricultural and/or former mining heritage.

3. Population

- 3.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to the socio-economic, population characteristics of County Durham.

3.2 Policy Context

- 3.2.1 The draft National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that development plans should plan positively for future growth and change by seeking to meet the development needs of their area as a minimum and by providing new development in a way which promotes sustainable patterns of growth.³ Development plans are

³ Draft NPPF: S1: Positive Plan-Making

also expected to promote the creation of healthy and inclusive places, the provision, retention and enhancement of appropriate community facilities and public service infrastructure along with clean, liveable, safe places for people to live, work and visit.⁴

- 3.2.2 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

National

- Localism Act (2011)
- Equality Act (2010)
- Crime and Disorder Act (1998)
- Levelling up and Regeneration Act (2023)

Regional

- Interim North East Local Growth Plan (2025)

Local

- Council Plan (2025-2030)
- Poverty Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2026)
- Affordable Warmth Strategy and Action Plan (2018-2025)
- Safe Durham Partnership Strategy (2024-2029)
- Towns and Villages Investment Plan
- Adopted Neighbourhood Plans

3.3 Baseline Information: Demographics

- 3.3.1 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

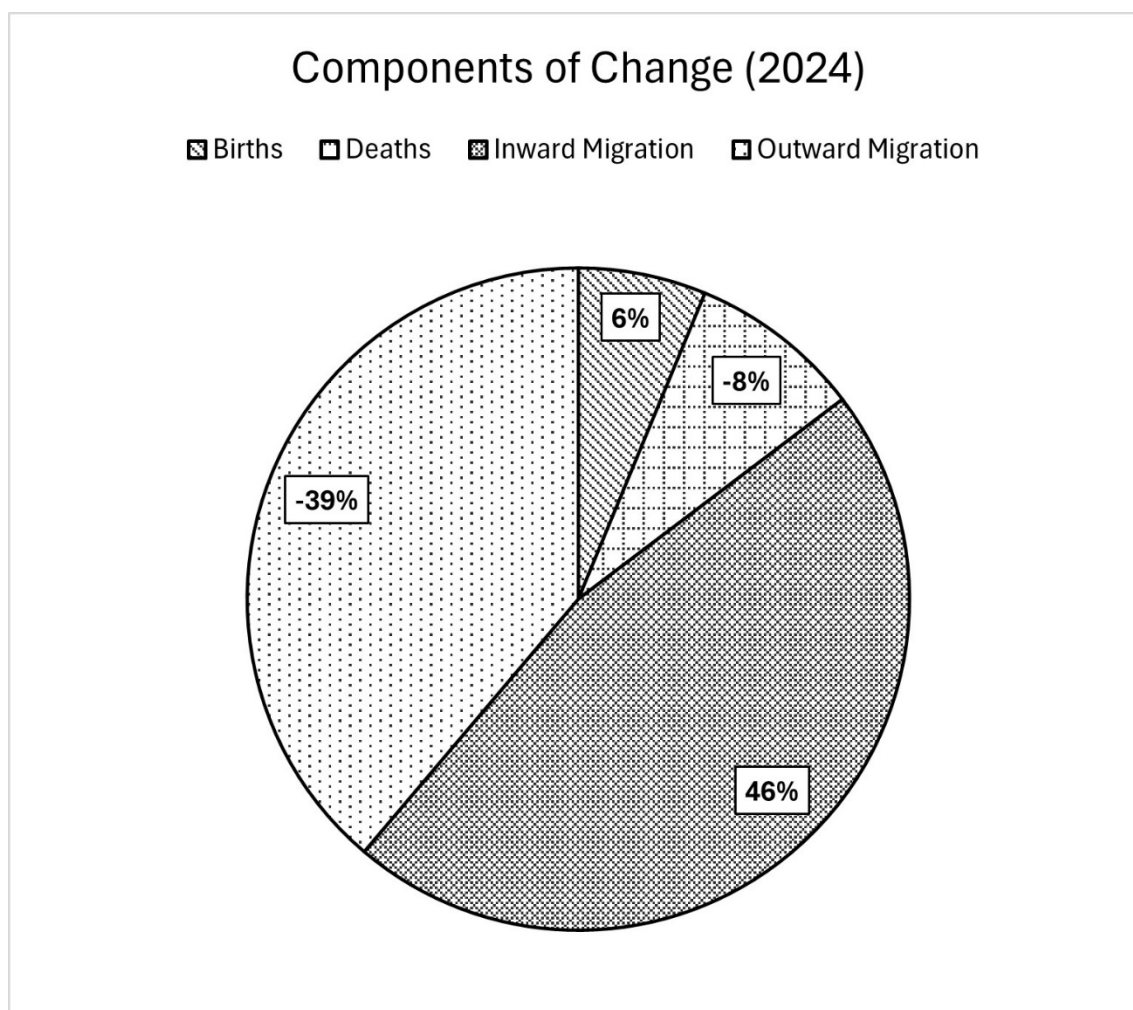
- 3.3.2 Compared regionally and nationally, County Durham has a lower population density (237 people per square kilometre), and a higher rural population share. However, within the county, approximately 90% of the population lives east of the A68 and are concentrated within the 12 main towns. More limited concentrations of population are distributed between the 300 smaller towns and villages, with the Durham Dales to the west of the county being the most sparsely populated area of the county.

- 3.3.3 County Durham's population is increasing and was recorded as 538,011 persons in 2024. The rate of increase (4.9% between 2011 and 2024) lags behind the regional

⁴ Draft NPPF – HC1: Planning for Healthy Communities and P1: Planning for clean and safe places

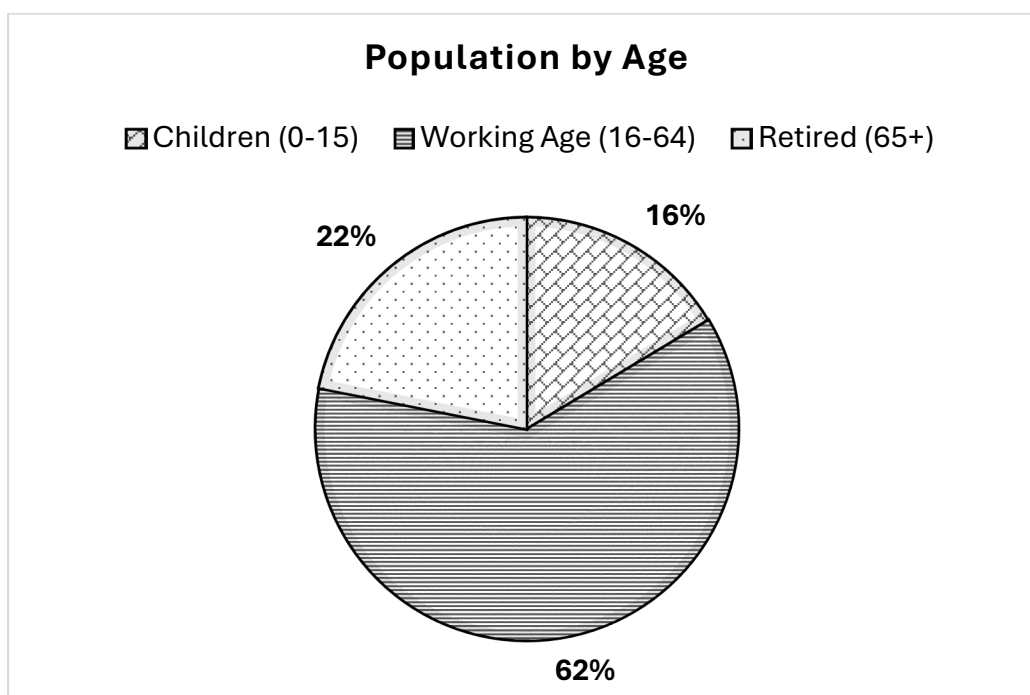
(6.3%) and national average (10.4%). Inward migration to the county, (of which 82% was internal inward migration and 18% international internal migration) was the main component of change to the county's population in 2024. Inward migration contributed 46% to the change (increase in population), followed by outward migration contributing 39% (decrease in population). Natural change (births minus deaths) contributed a further 14% of the change, however reduced the population by around 1,600 as there were more deaths than births.

Figure 3: Main Components of Change



3.3.4 The working aged population (16-64) currently comprises the greater proportion of County Durham's population. This is comparable with the regional and national picture.

Figure 4: Population by age group



- 3.3.5 Whilst the working age population currently comprises the greater proportion of County Durham's population, this has remained relatively static between 2011 and 2024. Across England this figure increased by 7.3%. The number of children aged 0-15 also remained relatively static in the county, whereas this group increased by 7.4% across England.
- 3.3.6 Comparatively, County Durham's retired population (aged 65+) has increased more significantly over the same time period by 26.6% and is slightly higher than the 25.8% increase across England. The increase in the number of people aged 85+ is also greater than the national average at 28% compared to 24.4% in England.
- 3.3.7 Population projections by 2032 predict an overall increase of 6% to the county's population by 2032 from a 2022 base (rising to 559,573 persons) with regional increases predicted at 4.8% and 6.4% nationally. However, within this increase:
- Children aged 0-15 are predicted to decrease by 7.8% (more than the regional decrease of 4.8% while nationally this age group is predicted to increase by 6.4%)
 - The working age population is predicted to increase to 4.7% compared to 6.2% nationally. In 2032, the working age population is predicted to account for 61% of County Durham's population.
 - The retired (65+) are predicted to increase significantly by 20.7%, similar to the region or national increases
 - Within the retired age group, those aged 85+ are set to increase by 36.5% compared to 33% regionally and 38% nationally.

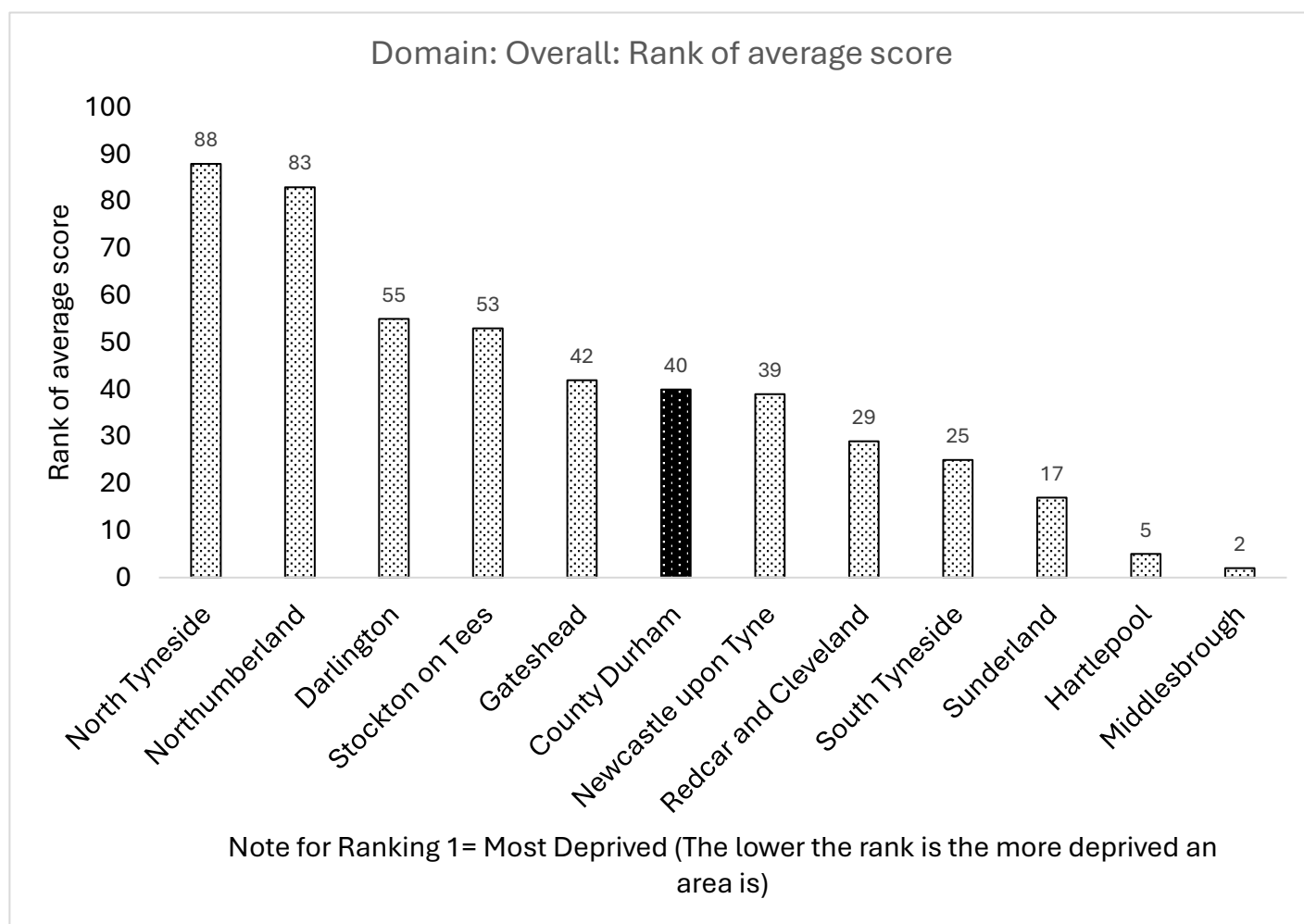
Key Issues

- Whilst a higher proportion of the county's population live in urban areas, the county has high levels of rurality. The Plan should ensure that new development contributes to supporting and improving the sustainability of rural areas and the rural economy.
- The predicted decrease in children and low growth in the working age population could have a negative effect on County Durham's economy. Attracting economically active populations to the county will be a key challenge.
- The changing age structure would suggest a significant increase in households of pensionable age and a greater need for older persons housing, along with healthcare and social services provision.

3.4 Baseline Information: Deprivation and Poverty

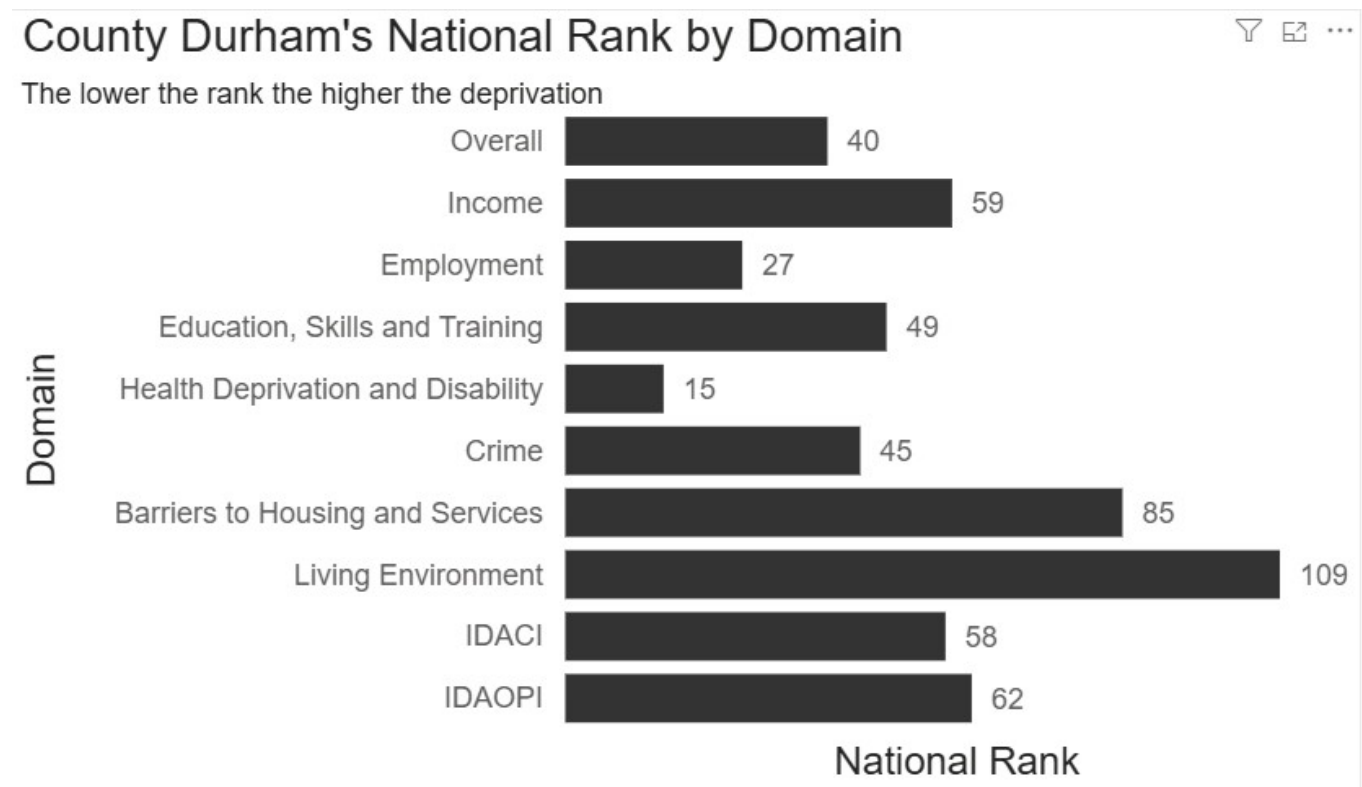
- 3.4.1 Since the 1970s the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and its predecessors have calculated various local measures of deprivation in England. The concept of relative deprivation reflects various socio-economic inequalities between and within areas. It is important because these indices attempt to describe the conditions in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age. These conditions influence a person's opportunity to be healthy, risk of illness and life expectancy as well as a host of other socio-economic outcomes.
- 3.4.2 In 2025, County Durham was ranked as the 40th most deprived upper-tier local authority out of 153 nationally. Compared with previous indices it is suggested that relative poverty within County Durham has increased over the last ten years. County Durham is placed in the third most deprived decile (10%) nationally and as the 7th most deprived authority in the region as shown by the following chart:

Figure 5: Overall regional rank of average score



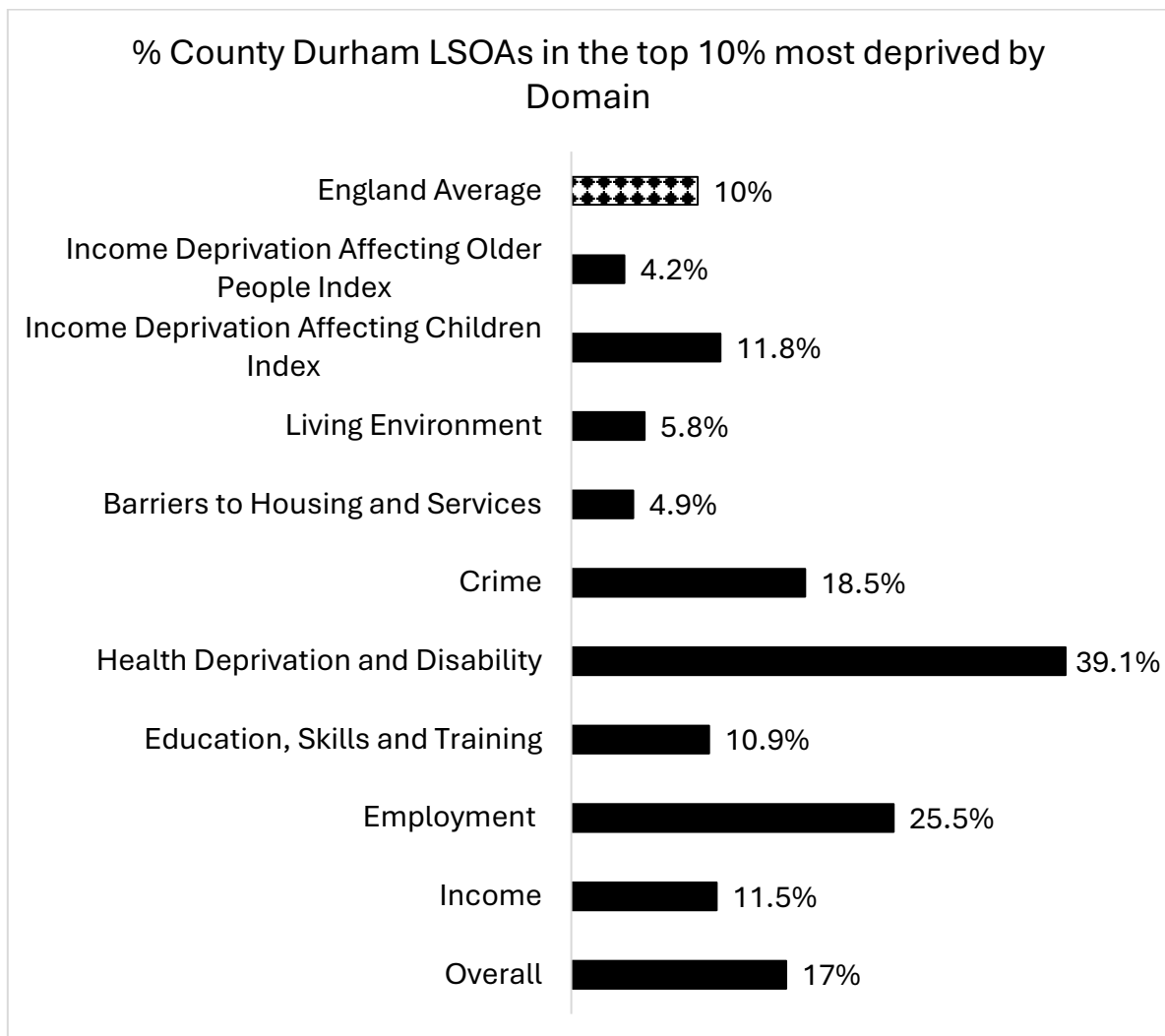
3.4.3 In terms of the different domains which are used to establish deprivation, the county is ranked the highest against health deprivation and disability (15th out of 153 upper tier authorities), followed by employment (27th out of 153 upper tier authorities). The county is ranked the lowest against the living environment domain (109th out of 153 authorities).

Figure 6: County Durham's National Rank by Domain



3.4.4 In the county's areas (lower super output areas) which are within the top 10% most deprived, the county is ranked more deprived than the national average against all domains with the exception of barriers to housing and services, living environment and income deprivation affecting older people index (IDAOPi).

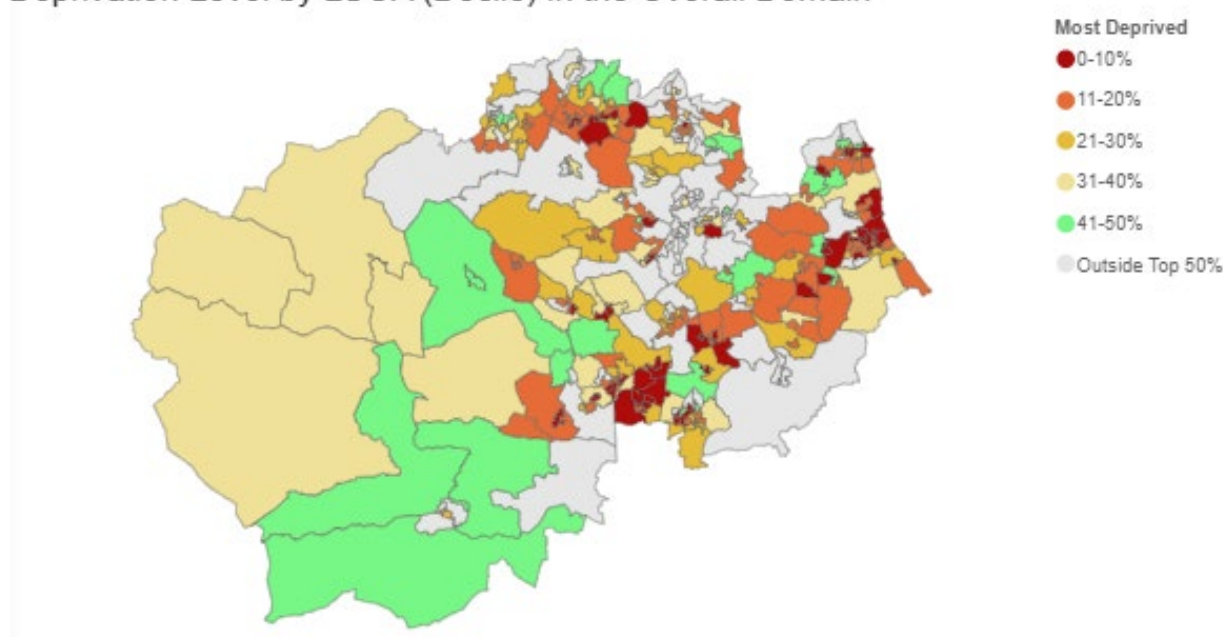
Figure 7: % of the county's Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in the top 10% most deprived by Domain



3.4.5 52.2% of County Durham's population live in the top 30% most deprived areas nationally (around 276,000 residents), 15.3% (around 80,000 residents) live in the top 10% most deprived areas nationally and 1.7% (around 9,000 residents) live in the top 1% most deprived areas nationally. The following map shows a concentration of top 10% LSOA in settlements along County Durham's coastline and in parts of north and south Durham. Whilst areas of deprivation exist in West Durham e.g. around Evenwood and Cockfield, there are no LSOAs in the top 10% deprived nationally in West Durham.

Figure 8: Deprivation by LSOA in County Durham (2025)

Deprivation Level by LSOA (Decile) in the Overall Domain



- 3.4.6 More recent data on children in poverty shows that County Durham has a higher percentage of children living in relative poverty after housing costs (29.2%) compared to the regional (28.9) and national (27.1) average in 2024/25.
- 3.4.7 On a positive note, the percentage of County Durham households in fuel poverty has reduced from 15.5% in 2019 to 10% in 2024. 10% of households is slightly above the regional average but aligns with the national average.
- 3.4.8 The Local Plan has an important role to play in addressing deprivation in the county through planning for the economy, job and education provision and seeking to improve environmental quality and associated determinants of health. In addition to this, warm and safe housing is particularly important in ensuring a healthy start in life, as well as a safe day-to-day environment. Housing which is in sustainable locations and with access to facilities, transport links and education institutions, as well as affordable housing requirements, can be planned for, ensuring communities have access to everything they need.

Key Issues

- High levels of deprivation, inequality and poverty is a persistent issue in County Durham that has a knock-on effect on quality of life and socio-economic outcomes.
- The county has particularly high levels of health and employment deprivation which are likely linked issues (please see next section)
- There are higher numbers of children living in poverty in the county than the regional and national average.

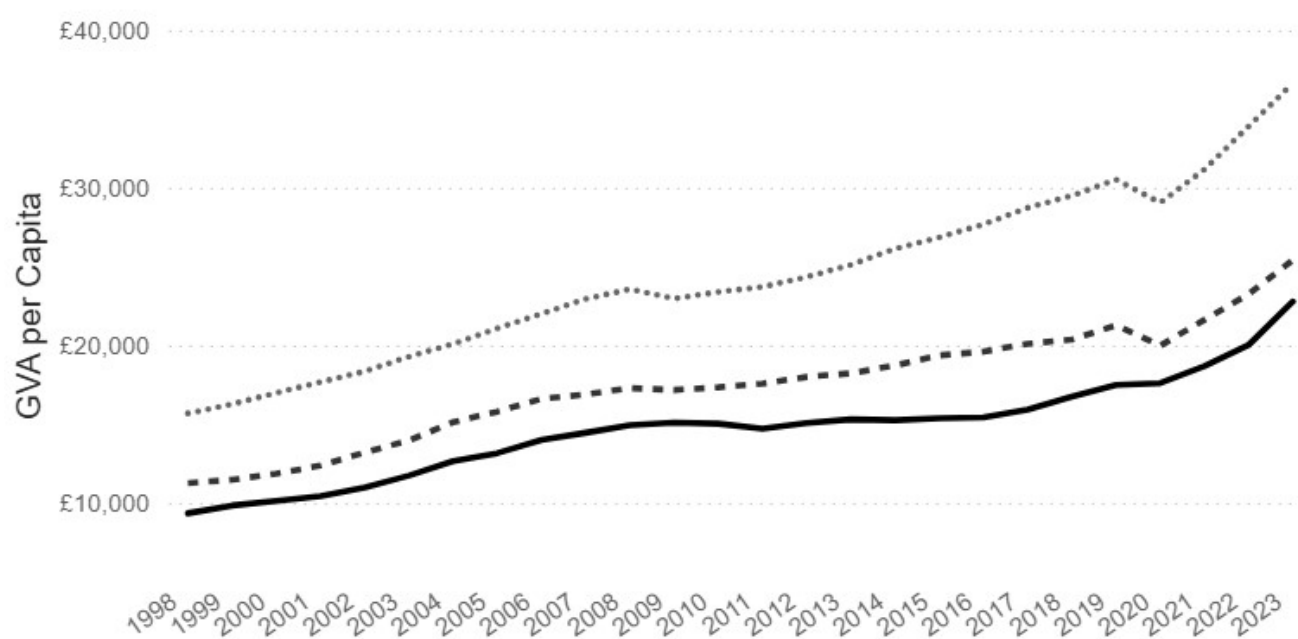
3.5 Baseline Information: Employment

3.5.1 The county's productivity, measured by Gross Value Added (GVA) per head of population was estimated at £22,779 in 2023, only 62% of the national average (£36,632) and also falls short of the regional GVA at £25,408. It has increased slower than the regional average and much slower than the national average, so that the gap between the county and national productivity has widened. In 2021, the gap between the county and England's GVA was £12,476 per head and this has increased to £13,853 in 2023. The lower productivity could be partly because a smaller proportion of people of working age are in employment in County Durham than the national average and partly because the industries worked in are less productive.

Figure 9: GVA per Head of Population

GVA per Head of Population

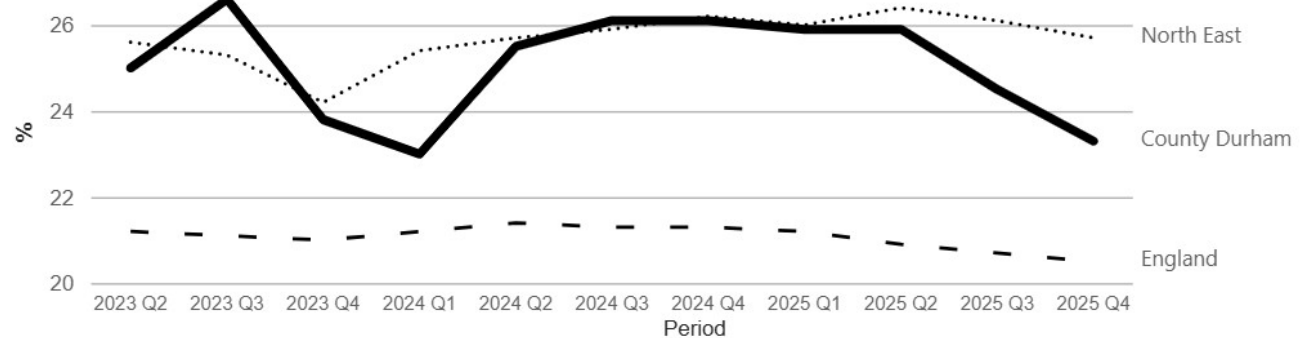
Region Name ● Durham ● North East ● England



3.5.2 Just over three quarters of County Durham's population aged 16 to 64 are in employment (76.7%). However, County Durham's rate of economic inactivity (23.3%), whilst lower than the region (25.7%) was higher than the national rate (20.5%) in 2025 and has been consistently so since 2021. Inactivity levels are mainly driven by long-term health conditions, with 22,600 people (29.7%) economically inactive due to long term health conditions and another 13,700 people (18.1%) due to caring responsibilities.

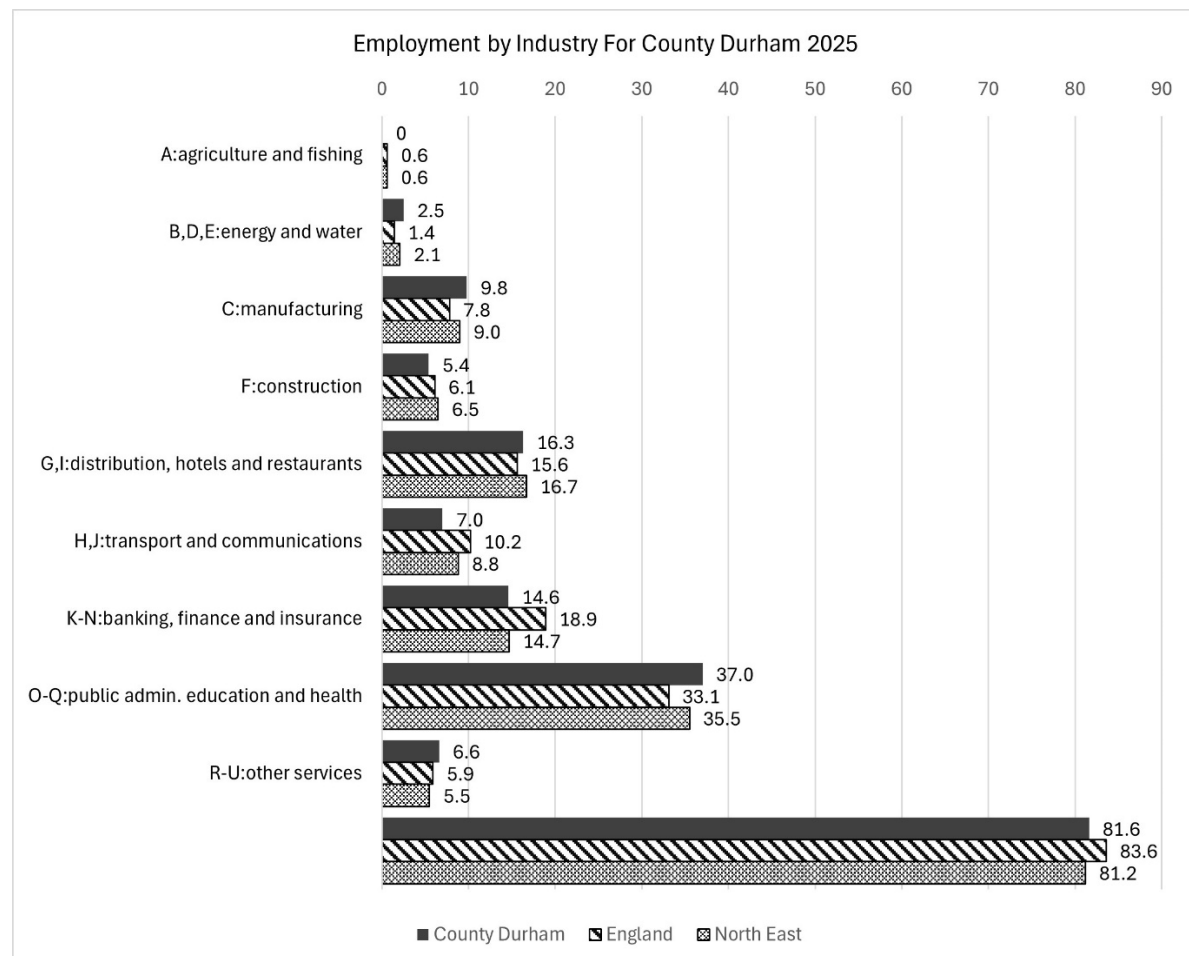
Figure 10: Economic Activity Rate

% who are economically inactive - aged 16-64



3.5.3 In 2025, County Durham's main industry of employment was public administration, education and health (37.2%). This is higher than regional and national averages, indicating a higher reliance on this sector. This is followed by hospitality, where employment in this sector is similar to the regional and national averages. County Durham has higher levels of employment in the manufacturing sector than the region or nationally.

Figure 11: Employment by Industry



- 3.5.4 Whilst improving, average annual wages in County Durham in 2025 at £29,718 are similar to the region (£29,584) but significantly less than nationally (£33,080) with a difference of £3,362 per year. In 2022, the gap between local and national wages was £1,968 which indicates that the gap is widening. Lower average earnings will result in less disposable income to meet needs and support the local economy.
- 3.5.5 If the county continues business as usual it's likely that some businesses, residents and places will be thriving, and others will be left behind. This is not a sustainable model of growth; already the county's economy is growing slower than the national average, productivity and prosperity are lower, and the gap is widening. The Plan should support and provide opportunities to close the gap with national performance to improve local wages and quality of life for all residents in all parts of the county.

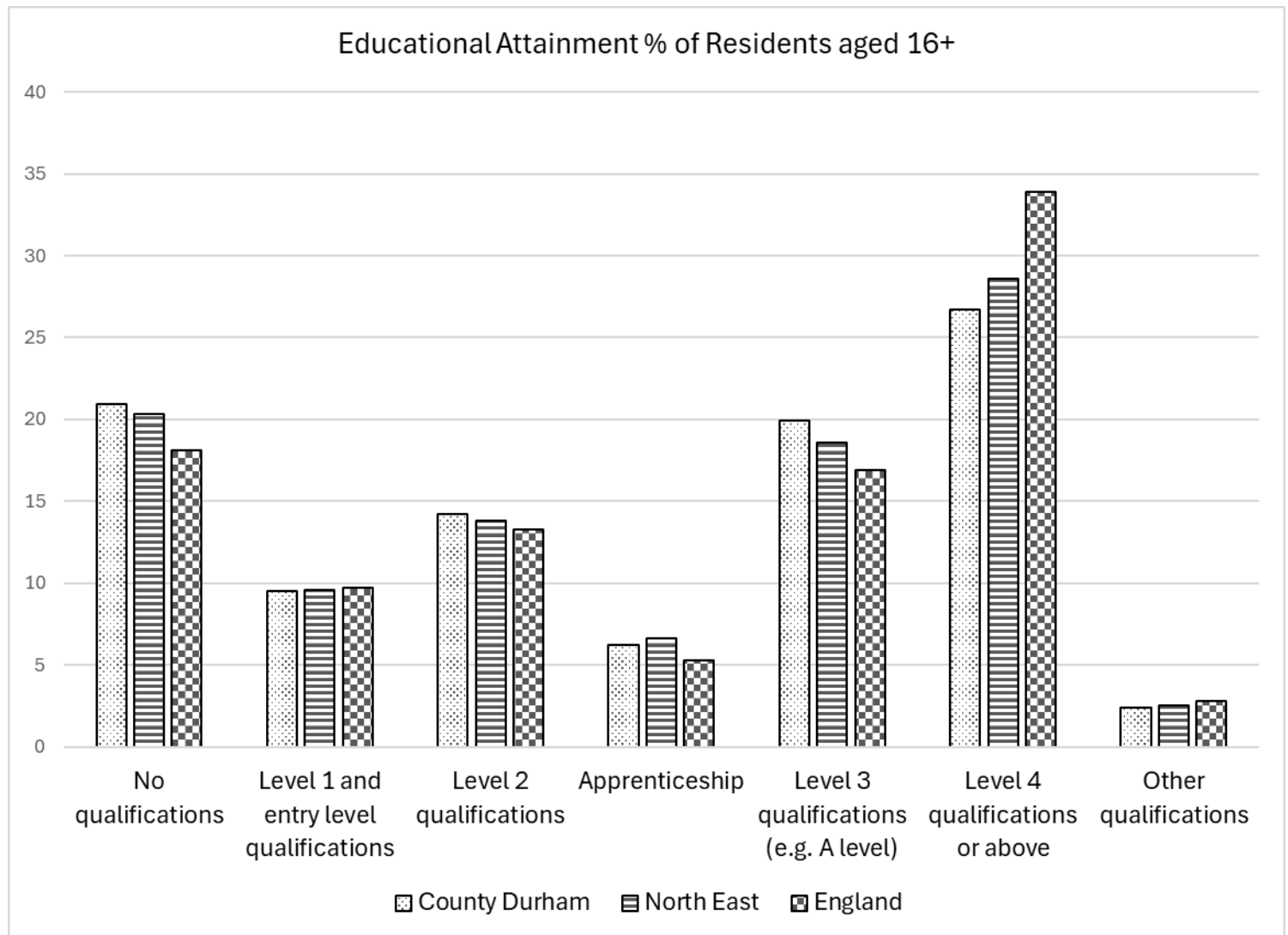
Key Issues

- County Durham's economic productivity had increased slower than the regional average and much slower than the national average, so that the gap between the county and national productivity has widened.
- County Durham's economic inactivity rate is consistently higher than the national rate. Economic inactivity levels are mainly driven by long-term health conditions.
- The County has an overreliance on employee jobs in the public sector and hospitality
- Significantly lower average wages than England and the gap is widening. Lower average earnings results in less disposable income to meet needs and support the local economy.

3.6 Baseline Information: Education and Skills

- 3.6.1 Educational attainment has strong links with employment and wider quality of life aspects. In particular, the profile of educational attainment has consequences for the future employment profile and the occupational structure of the County.
- 3.6.2 There have been improvements in aspects of educational attainment in County Durham. For example, the proportion of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) has decreased steadily and is now comparable with the national average. Educational attainment at level 3 which is A level equivalent is also better than the regional and national percentages. However, County Durham has a higher % of residents with no qualifications than regionally or nationally. Attainment of level 4 qualifications or above (e.g. higher apprenticeship / higher national certificate/diploma / foundation degree, degree, masters, doctorate) are below that of the region and nation.

Figure 12: Educational Attainment



3.6.3 The percentage of pupils achieving Grade 5 or above (a ‘strong pass’ e.g. a strong C or a low B) in English and Maths falls below the regional and national average and has reduced from 45.2% in 2021/22 to 40.6% in 2024.

3.6.4 Furthermore, 15.4% of County Durham’s school aged young people have recognised Special Educational Needs (SEN), that’s around 11,730 learners. The rate is increasing, with 33.3% more young people identified as having SEN in 2023/24 than 5 years ago, far more than regional or national comparisons which rose by 16.9% and 16.6% in the same time period.

3.6.5 Whilst educational attainment is impacted by factors outside of the scope of the Plan, the Plan has a role in ensuring sufficient school places to meet the needs of the new population including SEN provision and addressing disadvantage, for example by securing affordable housing and supporting economic growth. Without the Plan

school place planning may be more reactive to new housing developments which could result in a shortage of provision and impacts on educational attainment.

Key Issues

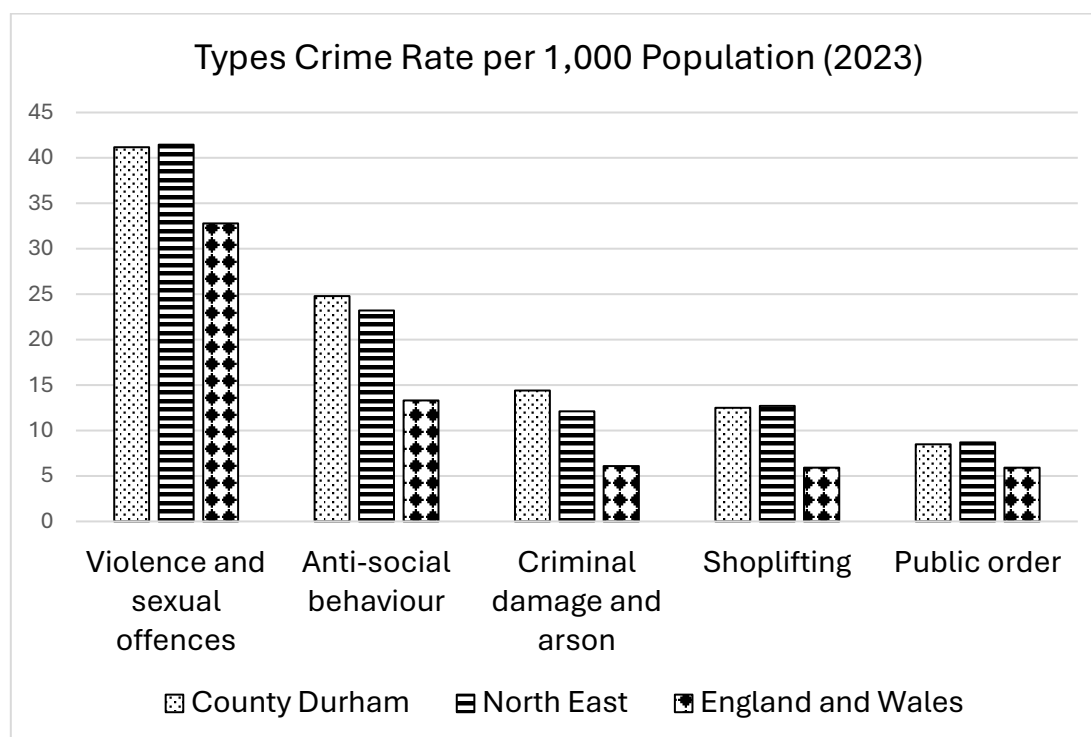
- County Durham has a higher percentage of residents without qualifications than the region or nationally and a lower level of higher educational attainment.
- The percentage of pupils passing English and Maths at GCSE level falls below the regional and national average and is getting worse
- Over the last five years, special educational needs identified amongst school aged children have increased by a third in the county. This rate of increase is significantly higher than the regional and national average.

3.7 Baseline Information: Crime and Safety

- 3.7.1 County Durham has an increasing crime rate and a crime rate that is higher than the national average.⁵ In 2023, 55,014 crimes were committed in the county, which accounted for approximately 19% of all crimes in the North East region. 103 crimes per 1,000 people were committed in the county compared to 88 crimes per 1,000 people in England and Wales. The crime rate for County Durham is just below that of the region which recorded 110 crimes per 1,000 people.
- 3.7.2 In terms of the type of crimes committed, County Durham follows similar trends to that of the region and nation in that the rates of violence and sexual offences are the highest and public order offences are the lowest. The rate of violence and sexual offences locally is more than double the rate of anti-social behaviour. County Durham has significantly higher rates in each type of crime than England and Wales and also surpasses the region slightly in levels of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage.

⁵ [England Crime | Crime Stats & Graphs](#)

Figure 13: Chart showing types of crime per 1,000 persons



3.7.3 County Durham’s increasing crime rate could be attributed to the socio-economic challenges within the county, including unemployment and low incomes. Improving the prosperity for residents may contribute to reducing crime. The following table shows the relative changes in offences between 2020 and 2023.⁶

Table 2: Change in Offences

Offence	Change
Shoplifting	70% increase
Public order	37% increase
Sexual offences	34% increase
Robbery	30% increase
Violence without injury	24% increase
Non-residential burglary	18% decrease
Theft from person	17% decrease
Stalking/harassment	14% decrease
Burglary	10% decrease

3.7.4 In relation to the numbers of children (aged 0-15) killed or seriously injured (KSI) in road casualties, the figures for the local, regional and nation all show an improving trend with numbers killed or seriously injured reducing. However, County Durham has a higher KSI figures compared with national and regional figures. Between 2021 and 2023 0.34 per 1,000 children were KSI in County Durham compared to 0.31 in the North East and 0.24 nationally.

⁶ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice>

- 3.7.5 These overall reductions can be put down to road safety education, infrastructure improvements, enforcement and legislation and improved vehicle safety technology. The Plan can seek to provide policies that encourage further infrastructure improvements to further reduce KSIs.

Key Issues

- County Durham has an increasing crime rate (21% increase between 2021 and 2023) and a crime rate that is higher than the national average.
- County Durham has significantly higher crime rates in all offence types than England and Wales and also surpasses the region slightly in levels of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage.
- The rate of violence and sexual offences locally is more than double the rate of anti-social behaviour.
- Whilst reducing, the number of children killed or seriously injured in road casualties in County Durham is higher than the regional and national average.

4. Health

- 4.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to health in County Durham.

4.2 Policy Context

- 4.2.1 The draft NPPF expects development plans to promote the creation of healthy and inclusive places through a combination of identifying requirements and allocating land for community facilities (including health care provision) and public infrastructure. Development plans should also set local standards for the provision of outdoor recreational land and identify wider opportunities to promote good health through for example, locating development where it will support active modes of travel.⁷
- 4.2.2 The draft NPPF also recognises that development plans should support efforts to avoid and mitigate risks from natural and man-made hazards, and to consider identifying wider opportunities to reduce air, water, soil and noise pollution through the spatial strategy and its policies.⁸
- 4.2.3 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

National

⁷ Draft NPPF – HC1: Planning for healthy communities

⁸ Draft NPPF – P1: Planning for clean and safe spaces

- Health and Care Act (2022)
- Sport England: Active Design (2023)
- Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework: Principles and Standards (2023)

Regional

- Better Health and Wellbeing for all. Joint Forward Plan. NHS North East and North Cumbria (2023-2028)
- Interim North East Local Growth Plan (2025)

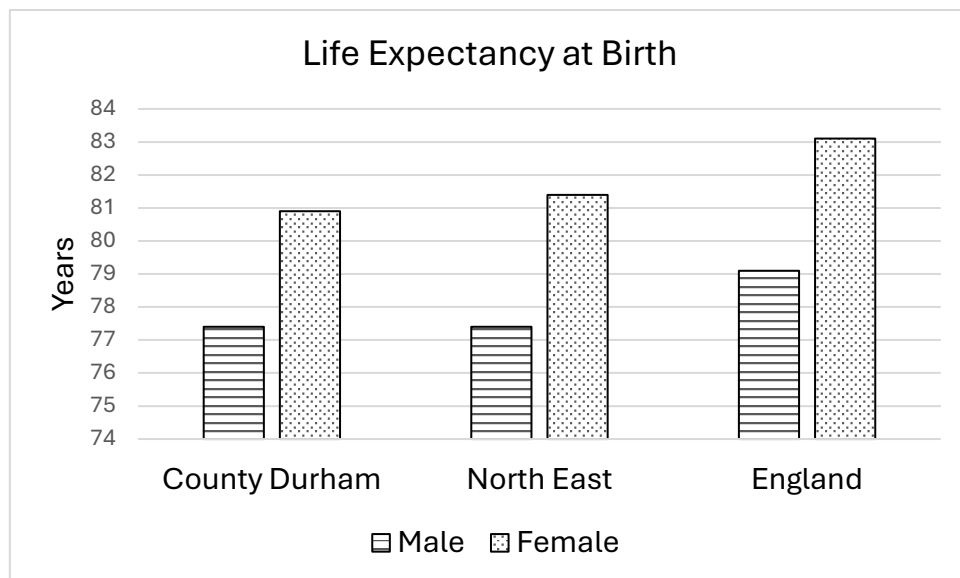
Local

- Council Plan (2025-2030)
- Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2023-28)
- Moving Together in County Durham. Our Physical Activity Strategy (2023-28)
- Open Space Needs Assessment (2018)

4.3 Baseline Information: Life Expectancy

4.3.1 Life expectancy and mortality can be used as important measures of the overall health of County Durham's population and as an indicator of inequality both between and within areas. For the period 2021-23, male life expectancy at birth was 77.4 years which is significantly lower than the national average (79.1 years). Female life expectancy was 80.9 years and is also significantly lower than the national average (83.1 years).⁹ Female life expectancy in County Durham is also below that of the regional average which is 81.4 years.

Figure 14: Life Expectancy



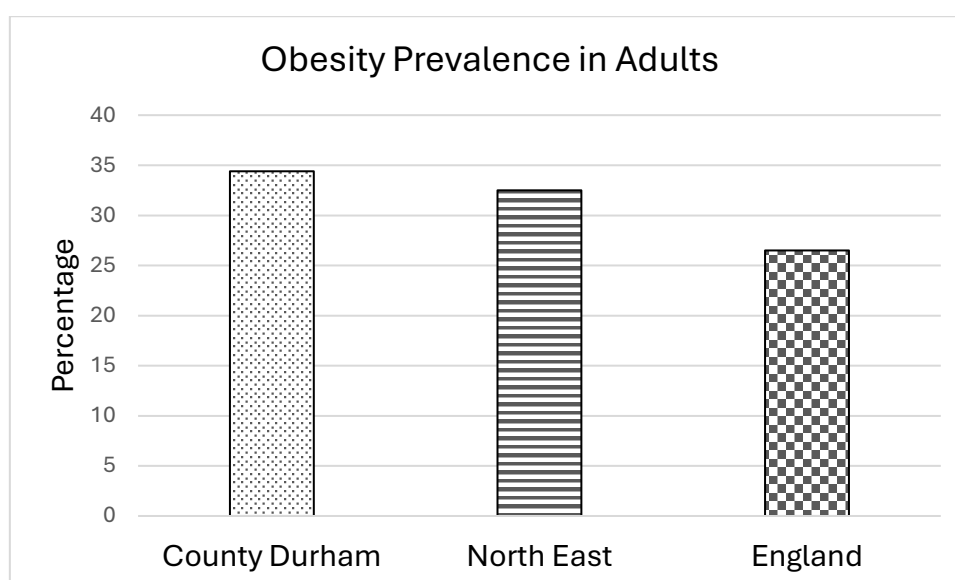
⁹ <https://www.durhaminsight.info/life-expectancy/>

- 4.3.2 Life expectancy is shorter in the most deprived areas of the county. For males, life expectancy is 10.2 years lower in the most deprived areas of County Durham and 8.8 years lower in women.
- 4.3.3 Despite the significant difference in life expectancy between the county and the nation, and locally between deprived and non-deprived areas, data from the 2011 and 2021 Census suggests that overall, the general health of residents has improved, with 92.5% of the County's population reporting that they were in 'Good to fair' health in 2021, slightly up from 91.8% in 2011.¹⁰

4.4 Baseline Information: Obesity

- 4.4.1 Helping people to achieve and maintain a healthy weight is one of the most important things that can be done to improve population health. Obesity is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, some cancers and high blood pressure. It is a chronic condition that can contribute to poor mental health and even early death. Obesity also has a social and economic impact, reducing productivity and healthy life expectancy, whilst increasing disability and demand for health care services.
- 4.4.2 In 2023/24, 34.4% of adults in County Durham were classified as obese. This is higher than both the regional average (32.5%) and national average (26.5%). Over the last 5 years obesity prevalence in adults in County Durham has increased by 16.6%. Over the same time period England has increased by 12.8% and the North East has increased by 14.8%. In 2023/24 obesity prevalence in adults in County Durham was ranked 17/153 amongst all local authorities in England (rank 1 being the highest for obesity prevalence in adults).¹¹

Figure 15: Obesity prevalence in adults



¹⁰ <https://www.durhaminsight.info/census/>

¹¹ <https://www.durhaminsight.info/healthy-weight/>

- 4.4.3 However, the percentage of physically active adults does not vary significantly from the regional or national average. 61.6% of adults were classified as physically active in County Durham in 2022/23 (an improvement of 1.7% over the last 5 years) compared to 61.9% in the region and 63.7% in England.
- 4.4.4 Overweight and obesity prevalence levels in children in County Durham are also significantly worse than the national average. 72.7% of reception children were a healthy weight in 2023/24, compared to 74.5% in the region and 76.8% in England. This drops to 60.9% of year 6 children being a healthy weight, compared to 60.1% in the region and 62.5% in England.
- 4.4.5 Over the last 5 years, the proportion of reception children in County Durham living with obesity has increased by 12.2% and the proportion of year 6 children in County Durham living with obesity has increased by 8.8%. Overweight including obesity prevalence is twice as high amongst children in the most deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas for both reception and year 6 year groups.
- 4.4.6 Whilst improving slightly, the percentage of physically active children and young people in County Durham in 2022/23 (45.6%) is less than that in the North East (48.4%) and England (47%).

4.5 Baseline Information: Access to Green Space

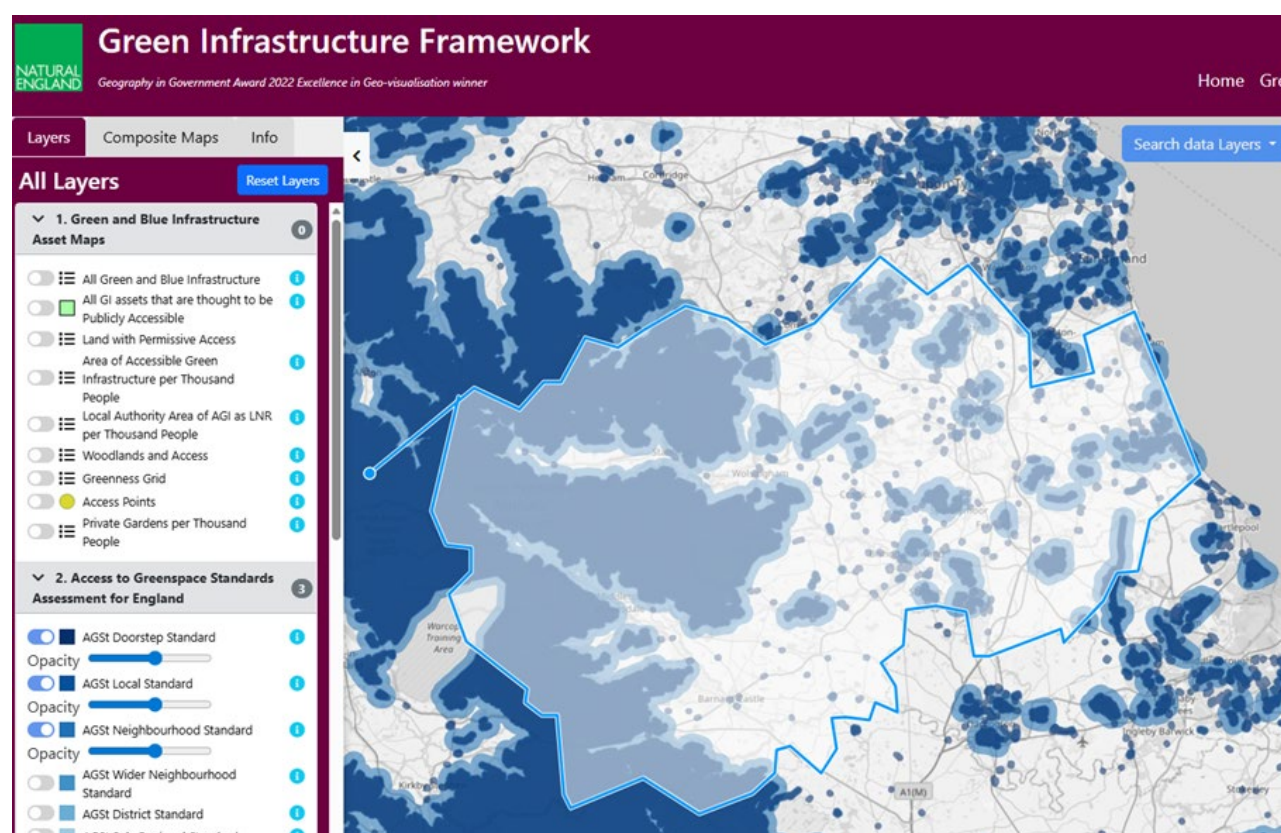
- 4.5.1 In addition to being an opportunity for exercise, green spaces can contribute to cleaner air, reduce the risks of flooding, reduce urban heat, and noise, all of which have clear health benefits.
- 4.5.2 To support the current County Durham Plan, the Council carried out an Open Space Needs Assessment in 2018.¹² The assessment concluded that access to green space across County Durham is mixed depending on typology:
- Natural and semi-natural green space – generally good access across much of the county. Access is particularly strong in West Durham, North Durham and rural and edge-of-settlement locations
 - Parks, amenity green space and play space (especially youth provision) – uneven and often poor accessibility, particularly in urban areas, high-density settlements and former mining communities.
- 4.5.3 The assessment highlights that many amenity spaces are “space left over after planning”, with limited recreational value even when they are accessible. The

¹² [Open Space Needs Assessment](#)

clearest conclusion of the assessment, however, was that young people were the least well-served group in terms of access to green space. Access to youth play space (teenage facilities) is described as consistently poor across the county with urban centres often having no accessible youth provision at all.

- 4.5.4 Whilst the assessment will need to be updated to support the new Plan, Natural England's Green Infrastructure Mapping Database indicates a high level of need within the county in terms of proximity to local, publicly accessible greenspace. This is defined by coverage by at least one of the first three Accessible Greenspace Standards buffers, i.e. Doorstep (at least 0.5ha within 200m), Local (at least 2ha within 300m) and Neighbourhood (at least 10ha within 1 km).
- 4.5.5 The white areas in the following map denote areas of the county that fall outside of the buffers and therefore do not meet the doorstep, local, or neighbourhood, accessible greenspace standards. There is a higher proportion of areas that do not meet the standard outside of coastal communities and the rural west. The table that follows the map shows the proportion of the area meeting each of these standards, with only half of the county area meeting the local standard.

Figure 16: Access to local Greenspace in County Durham (Doorstep, Local and Neighbourhood buffers)¹³



¹³ Source: [Natural England Green Infrastructure Framework Map](#)

Table 3: Publicly Accessible Green Infrastructure: Implied Area Need

Accessible Greenspace	Proportion of Area Meeting Standard	Implied Area Need
Doorstep Standard (At least 0.5 hectares within 200 metres)	52%	High
Local Standard (At least 2 hectares within 300 metres)	50%	High
Neighbourhood Standard (At least 10 hectares within 1km)	58%	High
Wider Neighbourhood Standard (At least 20 hectares within 2 kilometres)	70%	High

Key Issues

- Male and female life expectancy in County Durham is significantly below the national average and female life expectancy is also below that of the region
- For males, life expectancy is 10.2 years lower in the most deprived areas of County Durham and 8.8 years lower in women.
- Obesity prevalence in adults and children in County Durham is significantly worse than the national average
- Whilst the percentage of physically active adults is similar to the region and nation, the percentage physically active children and young people is below that of the region and nation.
- High levels of need within the county are indicated in terms of proximity to local, publicly accessible greenspace, particularly outside of coastal communities and the rural west.
- Well-designed places including good transport, housing, education, access to healthy food, social regeneration, education, leisure and greenspace provision and jobs should contribute to improving health outcomes. This includes options for children's play, active transport, co-location of facilities/walkable neighbourhoods and multifunctional open spaces.

5. Biodiversity

5.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to County Durham's biodiversity.

5.2 Policy Context

5.2.1 The draft NPPF requires development plans to protect and enhance the natural environment by, identifying the hierarchy of designated sites and environmentally sensitive features, recognising opportunities for habitat restoration and ecological

network improvement, and steering development towards areas of lower environmental value. It emphasises using robust evidence sources—such as Local Nature Recovery Strategies and protected landscape or river basin management plans—to inform decisions, limit harm to designated sites, avoid high-quality agricultural land where alternatives exist, and integrate high-quality green infrastructure into new development.¹⁴

5.2.2 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

International

- Convention on Biological Diversity (1993)
- UNESCO Global Geopark – North Pennines Geodiversity Action Plan (2022)

National

- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017)
- Natural England: Site Conservation Objectives for Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protected Areas (SPAs)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)
- Environment Act (2021)
- A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)
- Environmental Improvement Plan (2025)
- Natural England Technical Information Note TIN186: Nutrient Neutrality Principles (2022)

Regional

- Durham Heritage Coats Management Plan (2018-2025)

Local

- Council Plan (2025-2030)
- Draft Durham Local Nature Recovery Strategy: Statement of Priorities (2025)

5.3 Baseline Information: Biodiversity

5.3.1 The UK's wildlife is continuing to decline according to the State of Nature Report 2023.¹⁵ As a result the UK is now one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. Headlines include:

- Across the UK species studied have declined on average by 19% since 1970
- Nearly one in six species are threatened with extinction in Great Britain

¹⁴ Draft NPPF – N1: Identifying environmental opportunities and safeguards

¹⁵ <https://stateofnature.org.uk/>

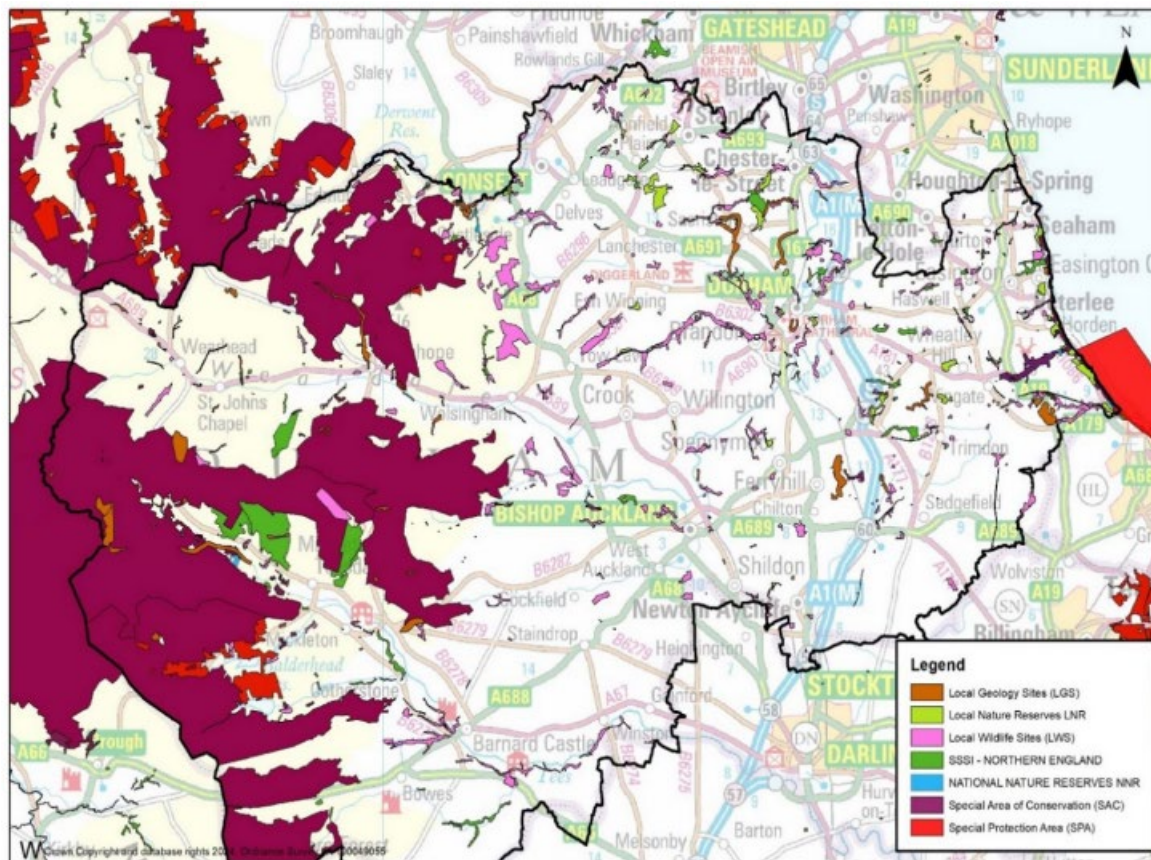
5.3.2 Changes in the way we manage our land for farming and climate change have been cited in the report as the biggest causes of wildlife decline on our land, rivers and lakes. To understand whether local trends follow national ones, necessitating the local declaration of an ecological emergency, an evidence paper on the local state of nature was prepared by Durham County Council.¹⁶ An ecological emergency was subsequently declared by the Council in April 2022 and the findings of the evidence paper is summarised as follows.

5.3.3 County Durham contains a high proportion of land designated and protected for its ecological value and geological interest including:

- 6 Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated for their important habitats and flora and 3 Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated for their role in supporting important breeding and migrating birds under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. These sites form part of the National Site Network (NSN). The coastal SPAs are also designated as Ramsar and European Marine sites.
- 1 UNESCO Global Geopark (the North Pennines Geopark) - all of the UK's Global Geoparks have internationally significant geology
- 88 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 16 of which are geological SSSI's. Six SSSI's are also designated as National Nature Reserves
- 324 Local Wildlife Sites
- The county also hosts Ancient Woodland sites, and European and nationally protected species.

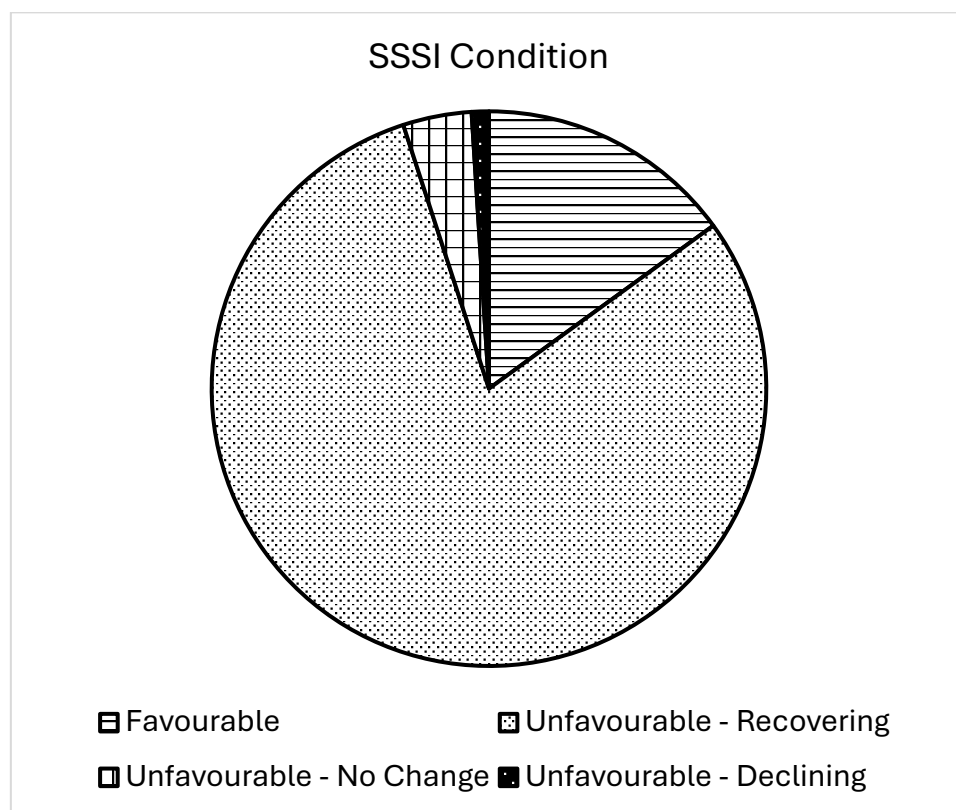
¹⁶ DCC – Appendix 2 – Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee Consideration of an Ecological Emergency

Figure 17: Map showing designated wildlife and geology sites in County Durham



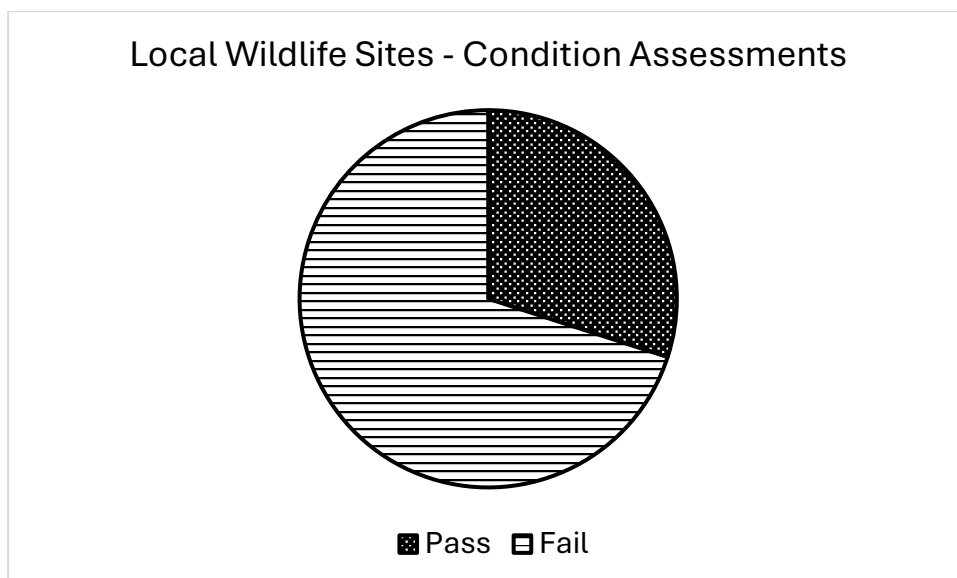
5.3.4 Whilst there has been a technical difficulty accessing the most up to date data from Natural England's Designated Site View website, data accessed in 2022 showed that 15% of County Durham's SSSI are in favourable condition with 85% in unfavourable condition in one of three categories.

Figure 18: Chart showing SSSI condition



- 5.3.5 With 35% of the UK's SSSI's in a favourable condition, the UK is not on track to meet its commitment to restore 75% of SSSIs to favourable condition by 2042. The condition data shows that County Durham's SSSI are in a poorer state than is evidenced nationally.
- 5.3.6 Of the 324 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) in County Durham, 42% have been surveyed providing a robust picture of the condition of the network of sites. Most LWS are made up of compartments of different semi-natural habitat types. These range from ancient and wet woodlands, ponds and swamps to magnesian limestone and acidic grasslands. The following chart provides information on the condition of all the compartments making up the LWS network regardless of habitat type.

Figure 19: Local Wildlife Site Condition



- 5.3.7 The data for broad habitat types shows a similar picture with the percentage of habitat compartments in unfavourable condition ranging between 60% for wetlands and up to 77% for woodlands. This shows that a significant proportion of all the habitat types represented within the LWS network are in poor condition and the network is in decline. The major reasons for a failure to meet condition criteria are the presence of invasive non-native species and a lack of management or inappropriate management.
- 5.3.8 Climate change also threatens biodiversity in multiple ways, including changes in species distribution and abundance, the timing of seasonal events and loss of habitat through droughts and wildfires for example. In addition to reducing water availability for species, drought can significantly impact aquatic biodiversity by causing elevated water temperatures and decreasing dissolved oxygen levels. However, nature-based solutions such as woodland creation in appropriate locations and peatland restoration can play an important part in addressing climate change and help with adaptation efforts e.g. flood water retention and natural cooling.
- 5.3.9 Ancient woodlands are represented within the LWS network and have also been subject to condition assessments. Ancient semi-natural woods (ASNW) are woods that have developed naturally and have retained broadleaf woodland cover for over 400 years. 77% of the ASNW fail condition assessments. The second category of ancient woodland are Plantations on ancient woodland sites (PAWS) which are ancient woods that have been felled and replanted with non-native species. Typically, these are conifers, but can also include broadleaved planting such as beech, red oak,

and sweet chestnut. 63% of County Durham's ancient woodlands are poor condition PAWS sites. Woodland cover in the county is also low overall at 8% compared to the national average of 10%.

5.3.10 The evidence paper also reviewed information from species atlases and species recorders to provide an indication of trends within the county. This is summarised in the following table:

Table 4: Species condition

Type	Summary	Trend
Birds	Farmland and upland birds are in decline. Greater declines amongst urban and garden and woodland birds. Coastal birds only showing slight decline	County Durham broadly in line with national declines in bird species
Herptiles	All reptiles are declining. Great crested newts might be stable but have not recovered from previous declines. The grass snake is likely extinct in County Durham, coastal slow worm populations are the most likely future population loss	Declining in line with national picture with the exception of grass snakes, which are likely extinct in the county but declining elsewhere.
Mammals	The otter became virtually extinct in Durham during the 1960's and 1970's due to pollutants and adverse riparian management; fortunately, this situation has been reversed and otters have recolonised the county. The water vole and red squirrel have undergone significant declines and there is little, if any, evidence of any reversal in their fortunes. Two other species, the pine marten and polecat suffered near extinction in the late 1800's / early 1900's and remain elusive to this day.	The lack of time series data informing the local Atlas means that it is difficult to compare the local and national pictures; but only one of the three species that we can show to have declined in our lifetimes has recovered. The water vole and red squirrel continue to be of concern in despite conservation efforts spanning decades
Butterflies	Of the seven Durham Biodiversity Action Plan species five have clearly undergone declines up to 2014. The remaining two species are both hairstreaks and are regarded as under-recorded making any determination of declines difficult, although it is thought that the White-letter hairstreak may have been in decline since the mid 2000's.	Butterflies are one of the species groups exhibiting alarming declines at a national level. This national pattern of declines amongst specialist species aligns with local data. All five Durham Biodiversity Action Plan species which we can show have declined are habitat specialists with only White-letter hairstreak being a species of the wider countryside. A decline in specialist

Type	Summary	Trend
	The Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Dark Green Fritillary have shown limited recoveries due to targeted conservation activity. Little change to the rate of loss to Dingy Skippers.	butterflies can be seen as a reflection on the state of our semi-natural habitats, as without the habitats to support them, species declines are inevitable.
Bumblebees	Since 1827 there have been 22 species of bumblebee recorded in County Durham, currently there are 18 extant species. 23% of our bumblebee historical fauna is either locally extinct or has significantly declined.	The concerns over the national status of bumblebee have led to seven species being listed as UK Priority Species, of which five have been recorded in County Durham, of these five, four are now extinct and one has undergone a significant reduction in distribution. Most bumblebees are not habitat specialists but are dependent on permanent flower-rich grasslands that they need to forage in. The loss of hay meadows and wildflower meadows especially in the lowlands is a major cause of declines and the likely explanation for the losses in the local area. Despite some positive news, bumblebee populations in County Durham have clearly undergone declines that mirror the national picture and the drivers for these declines are likely the same.
Salmon	Data indicates a decline in salmonids recorded moving through the Wear and Tees catchments. The trend in decline for the River Tees is more marked than the Wear. The concerns raised by the fish count data are reinforced by Environment Agency compliance assessments for the Rivers Wear and Tees against the management objective for salmon stocks.	The local appears to be in line with the assessment of the national status of stocks. Most salmon stocks in England and Wales remain in a depleted state.

5.3.12 Local data shows that County Durham's habitats are failing to meet condition assessments and targets. The county's semi-natural habitats are clearly under pressure. If habitats are in a poor condition and being lost gradually, it follows that County Durham's species will also be negatively impacted. Local evidence across the species groups, points to declines comparable with the national picture occurring in County Durham.

5.3.13 A Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for the county is being prepared and will agree priorities for recovery and map specific proposals for creating or improving habitats. Once adopted (expected Spring 2026) the LNRS will inform the delivery of mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) and guide local planning policy for nature recovery. The LNRS should help to slow and potentially reverse the trend of decline, but this will take time and is dependent on sufficient funding being made available through BNG and other sources.

5.3.14 In addition to the LNRS, new housing and other developments are currently restricted in the River Tees catchment area because existing nutrient levels are already too high, causing damage to the Teesmouth and Cleveland Coast Special Protection Area (SPA) habitat. To gain planning permission, developers must prove that their projects will not increase nitrate levels further (achieve nutrient neutrality), either by mitigating the pollution on-site or by funding land-use changes elsewhere in the catchment to offset the increased nutrients. The following map shows the areas within County Durham and surrounding local authorities within the catchment.

Figure 20: Nutrient Neutrality: River Tees Catchment Area



5.3.15 Parts of the county are also designated as Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) for surface water groundwater or combined impacts. These designations may require agricultural restrictions to improve and protect water quality in these areas.

Key Issues

- Whilst large parts of the county are designated for their international, national and local ecological and/or geological importance, significant declines in habitats and species are occurring which are broadly comparable to the national picture.

6. Landscapes

6.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to landscape character and quality within County Durham.

6.2 Policy Context

6.2.1 The draft NPPF strengthens the role of plan-making in safeguarding and enhancing landscapes. The key expectations are that:

- Plans must use strategic environmental evidence (e.g. protected landscape management plans) to understand local landscape character, environmental sensitivities and opportunities for enhancement.
- The scale and extent of development within protected landscapes should be limited.
- Growth should be steered to areas of lower landscape sensitivity that avoid harm to visual amenity and rural character.
- Plans should identify opportunities for the conservation, enhancement and recovery of landscapes and actively support landscape scale interventions such as woodland creation, wetland restoration and river corridor enhancement
- Plan makers must use design codes and policies that reflect local landscape character
- Plans should only alter existing Green Belt boundaries to enable development around stations or exceptional circumstances are evidenced and justified.

6.2.2 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

International

- European Landscape Convention (2000)

National

- Environment Act (2021)

- Natural England – National Character Areas Profiles

Regional

- North Pennines National Landscape Management Plan (2019-2024)
- North Pennines National Landscape (formerly AONB) Planning Guidelines
- Durham Heritage Coast Management Plan (2018-2025)

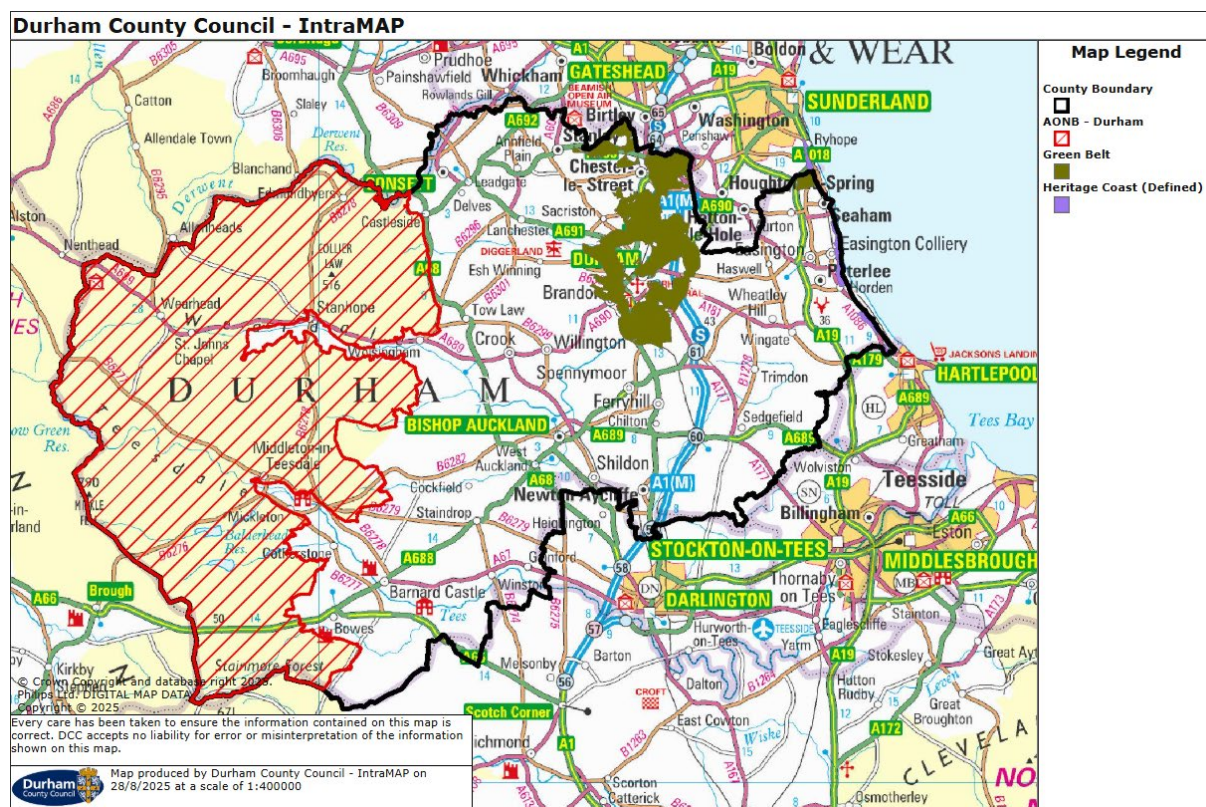
Local

- County Durham Landscape Strategy (2008)
- Council Plan (2025-2030)

6.3 Baseline Information: Landscape Designations

6.3.1 County Durham has a wide range of landscapes, from the Pennine uplands in the west through to the lowland plains and valleys of its major rivers to the limestone plateau in the east. Included in these areas are some of the most attractive landscapes in the northern England.

Figure 21: Landscape Designations (Please note that AONB is now known as National Landscapes)



6.4 Baseline Information: North Pennines National Landscape

6.4.1 The largest Natural Character Areas (NCA) in County Durham is the North Pennines which is designated as a National Landscape. National Landscapes are areas of exceptional beauty, formerly known as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) in the UK, designated to protect their unique characteristics for public benefit.

- 6.4.2 The North Pennines National Landscape covers almost 2,000km² and much of the west of County Durham. It encompasses extensive tracts of heather moorland and blanket bog, which at its most remote has a near wilderness quality and settled pastoral dale. Hamlets and farmsteads are dispersed and there are few villages. Buildings are mainly built from local stone. Evidence of a long history of mining is widespread. The geology of the landscape is internationally important and is designated as a UNESCO Global Geopark.
- 6.4.3 The landscape displays a trend of slow landscape change and cultural continuity. Improvements against several Super Landscape Objectives (SLO) are being delivered including for example, the reduction of conifer plantations. However, objectives considered to be in a poor status with little improvement include the need to Reduce grazing pressure and improve the ecological condition of lakes, ponds, fens and other waterbodies as important landscape features.¹⁷

6.5 Baseline Information: Durham Heritage Coast

- 6.5.1 The UK's Heritage Coasts are designated nationally in recognition of their national scenic importance. Much of County Durham's coast received Heritage Coast status in 2001. The Heritage Coast consists of three sections of undeveloped coastline covering almost 13km from Crimdon in the South to Salterfen Rocks in the City of Sunderland. The area represents one of the most successfully transformed landscapes in the county following the implementation of the Turning the Tide Project.

Easington Colliery 1992



¹⁷ [Landscape Change - National Character Area Profiles](#)



6.5.2 The following list of special qualities detail the unique “natural beauty” for which the Heritage Coast is defined as a nationally important protected landscape.

- Dramatic coastline with exposed cliffs of limestone and boulder clay, undulating series of small, sheltered bays and headlands
- Flower-rich magnesian limestone grassland
- Steep-sided wooded denes
- Sand dunes and beaches that support populations of waders and seabirds
- Wide, unspoilt and expansive panoramic views
- Strong influence of historic mining industry on both local culture and the landscape, in the form of ex-coal mining villages with distinctive surrounding areas of allotments and pony paddocks, reclaimed colliery sites, railways and industrial archaeology
- An intricate network of access paths and recreational routes
- Areas of tranquillity, distinctive natural soundscapes and visible movement

6.5.3 Some of the pressures to the Heritage Coast which are outlined in the Management Plan include development pressure, recreational impacts to biodiversity, anti-social behaviour, environmental crime, pollution, littering and dog fouling.

6.6 Baseline Information: Green Belt

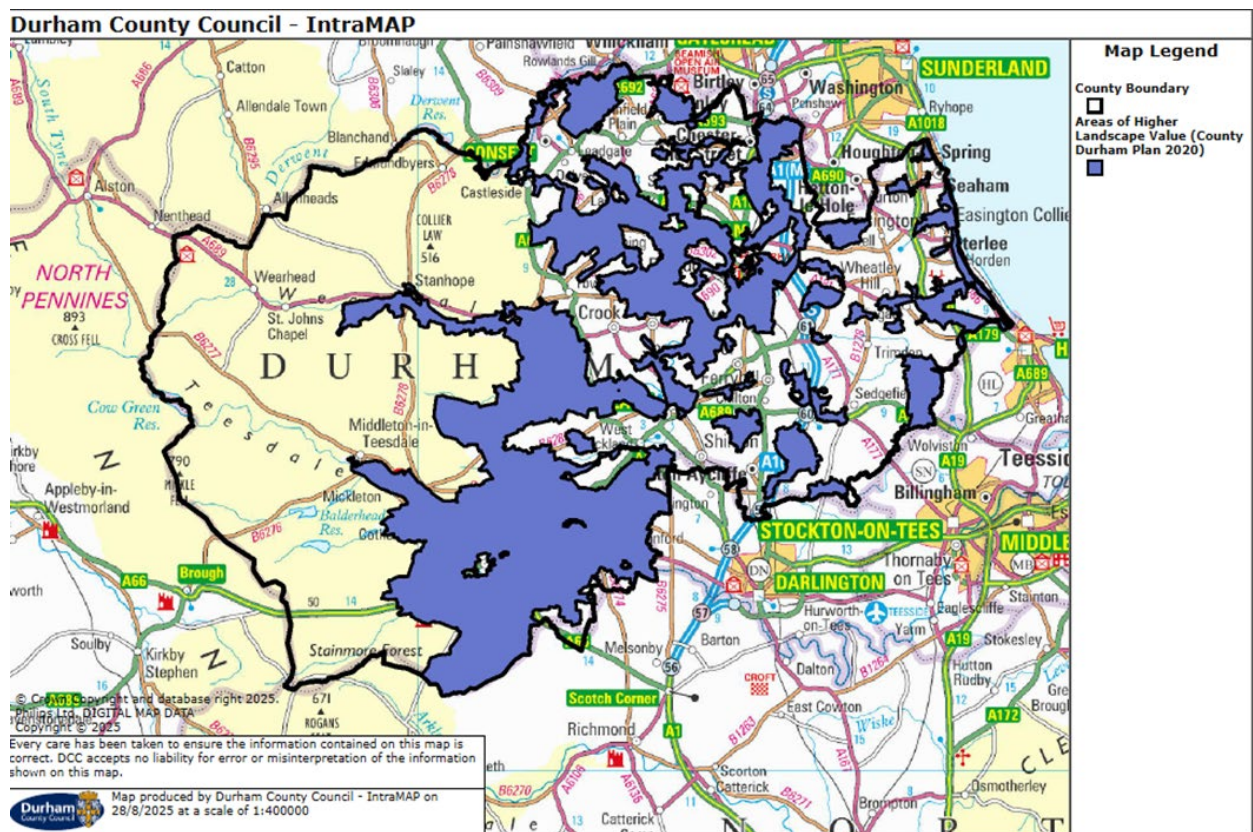
6.6.1 Whilst not a landscape designation per se, the purpose of a green belt is primarily to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land open and undeveloped. Green Belt boundaries have been designated in Durham City, Chester-le-Street and to the north of Seaham.

6.6.2 Green Belt boundaries should only be altered where exceptional circumstances are fully evidenced and justified through the preparation or updating of plans. They are therefore, relatively unchanging areas of land.

6.7 Baseline Information: Locally Valued Landscapes

6.7.1 Areas of high landscape value are landscapes designated as having high visual quality, distinctiveness, or other special qualities by the Council. Outside of the North Pennines National Landscape these include attractive, mature and undeveloped landscapes in the major river valleys of the Tees, Wear, Browney, Derwent and Team, together with much of the Durham coast and a number of coastal dunes.

Figure 22: Areas of Higher Landscape Value



6.8 Baseline Information: Other National Character Areas

6.8.1 In addition to the North Pennines NCA, County Durham is part of 5 other NCAs. Each NCA represents an area of distinct and recognisable character at the national scale. The following table provides a brief overview of each, and their associated landscape change trends as identified by Natural England. An interactive map, showing each NCA can be found here: <https://nationalcharacterareas.co.uk/>

Table 5: Landscape Change Trend

National Character Area	Summary	Overall Trend
North Pennines	This National Character Area (NCA) is at the northern end of the Pennine ridge. It has a distinct identity, with its remote upland moorlands divided by quiet dales. It has some of the highest and most exposed moorland summits in England. There are few settlements, creating a strong sense of remoteness	Mainly little change and some improving
Pennine Dales Fringe	Comprises upland moorland fringes and plateaux dissected by numerous river valleys, and changing climactic conditions may result in habitat stress and longer growing seasons for crops.	Mixed change, mainly improving
Durham Coalfield Pennine Fringe	A rolling upland landscape of broad, open ridges and valleys, is subject to numerous changes to its landscape including from housing and renewable energy development pressures. Varied rainfall and droughts may result in the deterioration of the water quality of River Derwent and Wear and may impact peaty soils and their carbon capacity. Climate change may result in greater fragmentation of semi-natural habitats, although recent restoration schemes seek to improve wildlife and ecosystem services and may alter the composition of existing habitats.	Mixed change, mainly declining
Tees Lowlands	A contrasting low-lying open plain with rural areas to the south and west and large urban areas around Tees Estuary, is subject to ongoing pressures from flood risk and housing development. The rising sea levels in the area may cause a coastal pinch effect, which could put pressure on internationally designated intertidal	Mixed change, mainly declining

National Character Area	Summary	Overall Trend
	habitats and may lead to the loss of mudflats, salt marsh, and sand dunes.	
Tyne and Wear Lowlands	An area of gently undulating or rolling land, incised by the valleys of the major rivers and their tributaries. It is densely populated and heavily influenced by urban settlement, industry and infrastructure. Between settlements there are wide stretches of agricultural land. Previous industry left its mark on the landscape with impacts on water quality, although restoration in recent years has led to improved habitat and recreation opportunity.	Mixed change
Durham Magnesian Limestone Plateau	Comprises open agricultural landscape, and its valued coastline is at risk of coastal erosion due to sea level rise and heavy rainfall. Drier summers may result in drought stress for semi-natural habitats and agricultural crops. Additionally, the locally important sources of water like the Magnesian Limestone aquifer and River Wear are subject to additional pressures from increased water abstraction.	Mixed change, mainly declining

Key Issues

- 6.8.2 County Durham has nationally valued and some of the most attractive and varied landscapes in the North East. However, outside of nationally protected areas, the landscape changes that are occurring are mainly exhibiting a declining trend.
- 6.8.3 Declines are largely related to the loss of tranquillity and dark skies because of development pressure and associated infrastructure (including renewable energy development), loss or fragmentation of field boundary features and patterns and the declining ecological condition of habitats which provide County Durham's landscapes their distinctive character and support natural beauty. The impact of a changing climate is also a threat to landscape features and associated habitats.
- 6.8.4 The Plan should ensure that new development contributes to delivering landscape enhancement in line with the opportunities outlined for each NCA, by the management plans for the North Pennines National Landscape, Durham Heritage Coast and by the Council's Landscape Strategy. Opportunities to aid nature recovery

in line with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, once adopted, will also support landscape enhancement.

7. Soil

7.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to soil and land within County Durham

7.2 Policy Context

7.2.1 The Plan making process should ensure that development proposals do not cause unacceptable levels of pollution to soils and that opportunities are considered to reduce existing sources of soil pollution. This includes allocating land for development where opportunities can be taken to remediate despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land.

7.2.2 Furthermore, the draft NPPF requires plans to avoid the use of higher quality agricultural land where land of poorer quality is available and to take a proactive approach in identifying suitable brownfield sites for development. The extent to which development plans are making as much use of previously developed land and using land effectively (through optimising density to reduce pressure on undeveloped soils elsewhere) to accommodate their identified need will be tested robustly during examination of the Plan.¹⁸

7.2.3 The draft NPPF continues to ban the extraction of peat and encourages peatland restoration in recognition of its ability to sequester carbon. Minerals planning policy encourages the use of secondary and recycled materials to reduce extraction impacts in land and soils.

7.2.4 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

National

- Environmental Protection Act 1990 (Part 2A)
- Environmental Permitting Regulations (2016)
- Environment Act (2021)
- A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment (2018)
- Environmental Improvement Plan (2025)
- Environment Agency: Land Contamination Risk Management (LCRM) (updated 2025)

Regional

¹⁸ Draft NPPF – L1: Planning for an effective use of land

- North Pennines National Landscape Management Plan (2019-2024)

Local

- Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy (2015)

7.3 Baseline Information: Contaminated Land

7.3.1 There are significant areas of potentially contaminated land in County Durham due to its mining and industrial heritage. There were 7,000 sites identified in the Council's Contaminated Land Inspection Strategy (2015) and 6,227 sites are currently identified on the Council's GIS mapping system. These include areas contaminated with tars, cyanides and other chemicals from old gas works; asbestos, oils, heavy metals and other chemical compounds from former factory sites; and mine tailings from former collieries. Minewater is a particular problem in the county. Over time, air can oxidise former pit heaps of colliery shale, dissolving metals out of the shale, and making the ground water acidic.

7.3.2 An active and successful programme of land reclamation over the years has resulted in all major pit heaps having been reclaimed, re-contoured and planted to match the surrounding original land forms. At many former deep mines, minewater is pumped out of the mines and treated (e.g. at Horden).

7.3.3 However, many potentially contaminated sites still remain in the county. Increased winter rainfall could lead to some of this material leaching from contaminated sites or being eroded from sites adjacent to river banks due to increased winter flows through the river channel and the removal of riparian vegetation along the river banks, destabilising the bank face. Hotter, drier summers can also reduce surface water flows and levels which can alter the impact of mine water discharges. During low flow, the concentration of contaminants from mine water is higher because there is less water available to dilute the discharged pollutants. This increases the risk of pollution to both soil and surface waters.

7.3.4 Similarly, increased sea levels could increase the release of hazardous material from former landfill sites located along the coastal margin, presenting both public health and safety and environmental risks at the point of discharge and more widely when dispersed into the sea.

Key Issues

- Whilst an improving picture, there are significant areas of land potentially affected by contamination in County Durham due to its mining and industrial heritage. Leachate from this land poses a wider environmental risk.

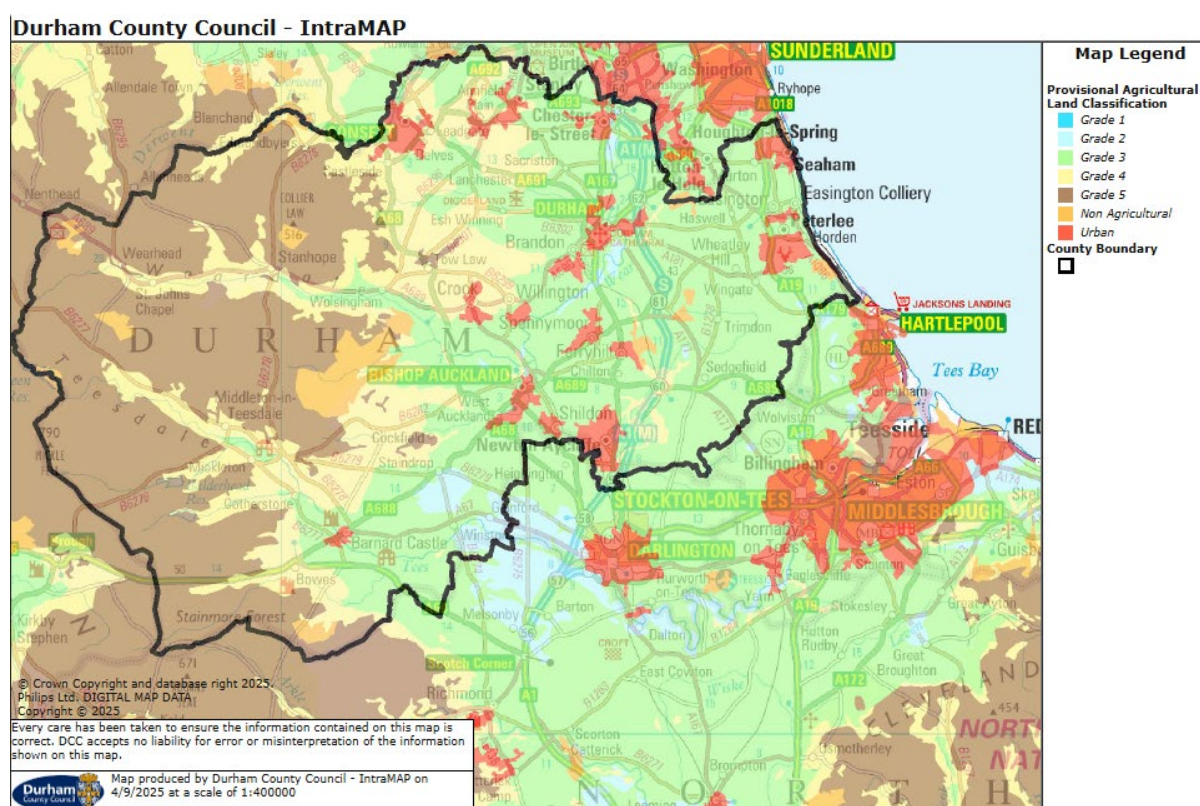
7.4 Baseline Information: Previously Developed and Agricultural Land

7.4.1 No data is currently collated in relation to the use of brownfield land in the county compared to greenfield for new development. This is something that could be suggested as a monitoring indicator for the new Plan. However, it is likely that the levels of brownfield land will have reduced in the county over time due to regeneration activities and initiatives. There will still be opportunities for previously developed land to be used for new development in the county though and where possible, viable and suitable, this should be preferred over greenfield sites.

7.4.2 Agricultural land which is considered 'best and most versatile' (BMV), refers to land grades as 1 (excellent), 2 (very good) and 3a (good) under the Agricultural Land Classification system. This is land with little to no physical or chemical limitations to food production, supporting a wide range of crops and yielding high results.

7.4.3 There is no Grade 1 land in County Durham and less than 2% of the County is classified as Grade 2. Approximately 38% of the County is classified as Grade 3 but it is not currently possible to differentiate the amount of grade 3a and grade 3b land as a comprehensive survey of grade 3 land is not available. This would need to be undertaken on a case-by-case basis.

Figure 23: Map showing County Durham's provisional agricultural land classification



7.4.4 The map shows that large areas of agricultural land to the west of the county are graded as 4 (poor quality land with limitations severely restricting agricultural use) and 5 (very poor quality land with severe limitations restricting agricultural use).

7.4.5 Given that large areas of the county are classified as Grade 3, it is expected that some may be grade 3a (BMV). Development pressure, with or without the Plan is likely to result in some loss of best and most versatile agricultural land either permanently or for a temporary period.

Key Issues

- There is a lack of data on the percentage of development built on brownfield /previously developed land in the County which should be addressed by the new Plan and its monitoring indicators.
- The upland areas of the Pennines generally have very poor agricultural land quality, but the Tees and Wear Lowlands have pockets of very good quality, and much of the eastern part of the county has good land quality. The best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected.

8. Water

8.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to water resources within County Durham.

8.2 Policy Context

8.2.1 The draft NPPF includes a dedicated chapter titled “Securing clean energy and water” (Chapter 10). This confirms that water supply, water quality, and water-related, environmental considerations form part of core national planning policies. Whilst a dedicated chapter is included, water is not treated as an isolated topic but as a cross-cutting theme essential to sustainable development, environmental enhancement, climate resilience and infrastructure planning.

8.2.2 Key requirements for plan making include:

- Gain a clear understanding of water supply, drainage, wastewater capacity and associated infrastructure provision.
- Can go beyond national minimum standards and establish tighter local water efficiency standards where justified.
- Identify opportunities to reduce water pollution and support compliance with water quality targets. This includes opportunities to enhance sensitive waterbodies.
- Should set standards for green infrastructure which also deliver water quality benefits.
- Green/blue infrastructure and sustainable drainage systems should be integrated from the outset of plan-making and design.

8.2.3 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A

summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

National

- Environmental Permitting Regulations (2016)
- Environmental protection Act (1990)
- The Nitrate Pollution Prevention Regulations (2015)
- Environment Act (2021)
- Environmental Improvement Plan (2025)
- The Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) England and Wales Regulations (2017)
- National Framework for Water Resources (2025)
- Plan for Water: our integrated plan for delivering clean and plentiful water (2023)
- Environment Agency: Protect Groundwater and prevent Groundwater Pollution (updated 2025)

Regional

- Northumbria River Basin Management Plan (2022)
- Northumbrian Water: Water Resources Management Plan (2025-2030)
- Northumbrian Water: Drainage and Waste Water Management Plan (Northumberland catchment)
- Northumbrian Water: Drought Plan (2022)

8.3 Baseline Information: Surface Water Quality

8.3.1 Surface water quality is assessed by the percentage of river length that has good chemical status, and good ecological status. County Durham is part of the Northumbrian river basin and is part of the Tees, Wear and Tyne catchments within the basin. A very low proportion of water bodies (15%) achieve good ecological status and none of the catchments achieve good chemical status. Achieving good chemical status for these catchments is also not anticipated until 2063. The Wear catchment, which covers Durham City, Chester le Street, Bishop Auckland, Peterlee, Seaham, Crook, Sedgefield and Easington is at a poorer ecological condition than the Tees or Tyne.¹⁹

8.3.2 The challenges identified by each catchment partnership are set out in the following table.²⁰

Table 6: Surface Water Quality Challenges

¹⁹ [England | Catchment Data Explorer](#)

²⁰ [Catchment Partnerships Northumbria](#)

Catchment	Current Challenges	Predicted Future Challenges
Tees	• Pollution from agriculture and rural areas - Sediment loss, land drainage, lack of buffer strips, waste disposal to land, poor infrastructure, farmed flood plain • Physical modifications - Land drainage and flood protection of agricultural land, barriers to fish migration • Pollution from waste water - Phosphorous and nitrogen nutrient load from industrial activity, waste water treatment works, combined sewer outfalls, misconnections	• Pollution from agriculture and rural areas – high sediment loading in river due to need for better soil management • Physical modifications - River flow, water quality and fish passage compromised and in parts restricted by modifications installed for historic industrial purposes or agriculture • Pollution from waste water - Improvement needed in infrastructure for waste water treatment for both domestic and industrial sources
Wear	• Physical modifications - Poor channel morphology fragments habitats negatively affects flow patterns, invertebrates, fish and wider biodiversity • Invasive non-native species - Displaces native species, creates erosion, reduces water quality, biodiversity and public access with wider economic impacts • Changes to the natural flow and water levels - High intensity rainfall and hard urban landscapes demand extensive natural flood management and urban drainage systems	• Pollution from agriculture and rural areas - The fragmented nature of the agricultural sector and ineffective enforcement makes large scale mitigation more difficult than pollution from the highly regulated water industry • Pollution from towns, cities and transport - Hardening of the urban landscape, direct drainage to watercourses, without intercepts, from buildings and highways and a failure to adequately address misconnections • Physical modifications - The cost of removing or mitigating channel modifications, particularly in the urban context with the complexity of contaminated land and buried utilities creates barriers.
Tyne	• Pollution from towns, cities and transport – densification of housing, commerce and infrastructure adds to the pressure. • Pollution from waste water • Physical modifications	• Changes to the natural flow and water levels • Pollution from towns, cities and transport • Pollution from waste water

8.4 Baseline Information: Groundwater Quality

- 8.4.1 County Durham also has four groundwater catchments within the Northumbria River Basin. These are the Skerne Magnesian Limestone, Wear Magnesian Limestone, Wear Carboniferous Limestone and Coal Measures and the Tees Carboniferous Limestone and Millstone Grit. Ground waters quality is assessed on both its quantitative status (the balance between groundwater abstraction and natural replenishment) and chemical status.
- 8.4.2 None of the county's groundwater catchments achieve a good overall status, although the quantitative status is good (in all but the Skerne Magnesian Limestone catchment), indicating that the catchments are predominantly failing chemical assessments.²¹
- 8.4.3 Groundwater quality within the Skerne Magnesian Limestone remains at poor status due to saline intrusion impacts at the coast near Hartlepool and also remains at risk from nitrate contamination and sulphate rich mine water. Measures are being developed to reduce risk of saline intrusion and understand the sources and pathways of nitrate. It is expected to take 20-30 years for the aquifer to recover from historic saline impacts. A 40 year management plan has been developed and agreed by the Environment Agency, the Coal Authority and Anglian Water to mitigate the impacts of mine water to this drinking water supply.
- 8.4.4 The Wear Carboniferous Limestone and Coal Measures groundwater bodies is designated as a drinking water protected area and is used throughout the catchment for small, local, private water supplies. The legacy of coal and metal mining is causing the poor status of this groundwater body. Despite measures to mitigate the effects of the groundwater impact on surface waters, this groundwater body will continue to fail due to widespread pollution. It is technically infeasible to clean up polluted groundwater at such a scale and hence has been given an alternative objective. It is only one of two groundwater bodies in England with an alternative objective.
- 8.4.5 Poor nutrient and livestock management attributed to agriculture and rural land management are the main reasons that the Wear Magnesian Limestone has a poor chemical status.
- 8.4.6 The Tees Carboniferous Limestone and Millstone Grit groundwater body lies beneath the upper Tees catchment to the west of Gainford and is designated as a drinking water protected area. This groundwater fails to achieve good status due to metal mine discharges impacting the Harwood and Hudeshope Becks and Eggleston Burn catchments in Upper Teesdale. This groundwater is also at risk from nitrate contamination.

²¹ [England | Catchment Data Explorer](#)

8.5 Baseline Information: Bathing Water Quality

- 8.5.1 Designated bathing waters in England have tough water quality targets to achieve. Concentrations of *Escherichia coli* (EC) and *Intestinal enterococci* (IE) are used to classify a bathing water. Bathing waters are classified as poor, sufficient, good or excellent based on 4 years of samples from each site. These bacteria can come from many sources including sewage, agricultural livestock, wildlife, birds and road drainage.
- 8.5.2 Testing of bathing water in County Durham takes place in three locations – Seaham Hall Beach, Seaham Beach and Crimdon. Bathing waters are currently classified as good at the Seaham testing locations and excellent at Crimdon (2024). There has been little change since 2021 in assessment outcomes.

Key Issues

- 8.5.3 County Durham's surface and groundwater quality is not achieving good status with the Wear Catchment and Wear Carboniferous Limestone and Coal Measures groundwater body being in a particularly poor condition. The surface water bodies for which, are not expected to reach good chemical status until 2063 and it has been stated that it is technically infeasible for the Wear Carboniferous Limestone and Coal Measures groundwater body to ever achieve good status. All surface and groundwater bodies in County Durham are failing chemical assessment.
- 8.5.4 Pollutants from the county's legacy of coal and metal mining is in part to blame for poor water quality. However, pollution from waste water treatment for both domestic and industrial sources, agriculture, run off from hardstanding direct to water courses and misconnection are also significant. Existing and potential future pollution sources increase risks to public and private water supplies, as well as water-dependent features (e.g. designated sites) that rely on ground and surface waters.
- 8.5.5 Consideration should be given to any increase in hardstanding in the county because of the Plan and the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDs) to slow down and hold surface water runoff so pollutants can be removed before they reach rivers, streams and the sea. The capacity of wastewater infrastructure to cope with new development will also need to be a key consideration.

8.6 Baseline Information: Water Supply and Consumption

- 8.6.1 To help to ensure that the country has a reliable water supply for years to come, the Government has set a target to reduce the amount of water used per person per day (p/d) to 122 litres by 2037/38 and 110 litres by 2050. The Northumbrian Water Operating Area which County Durham is part of consumed 151.8 litres of water per

person, per day (p/d) in 2024/25 which is almost 30 litres p/d more than the 2037/38 target. The operating area also consumed 14 litres p/d more than the national average of 137 litres in 2024/25. However, water consumption has decreased by almost 14 litres p/d in the Northumbrian Water Operating Area between 2020/21 and 2024/25.

8.6.2 In addition to reducing water consumption per person, Northumbrian Water have committed to reducing leakages by 55% from a 2017/18 baseline by 2050, going beyond the national target of a 50% reduction. Between 2017/18 and 2024/25 the amount of water lost to leakages reduced by 30.9 Megalitres (represents one million litres) per day (Ml/d) and is currently at 171.8Ml/d. This represents a 15% reduction from the baseline.

8.6.3 Northumbrian Water's Drought Plan also sets out how the company prepares for, monitors, and responds to droughts to ensure a resilient public water supply while protecting the environment. Water supply and demand is managed in areas known as Water Resource Zones (WRZ) and Durham is within the Kielder WRZ. The vast majority of supply within this zone comes from reservoirs, however the county also has a large number of private water supplies with no alternative sources.

8.6.4 In relation to reservoirs, climate change modelling undertaken by Northumbrian Water, using the UK Climate Projections shows that reservoirs in the Kielder Water Resource Zone are sensitive to climate change and that with less rain in the summer, we should expect to see our reservoirs reduce to lower levels before they refill again over the winter.²²

8.6.5 The Plan will need to ensure that planned growth is compatible with long-term water availability and resilient to increasing drought risk under climate change. The Plan can also assist with water efficiency through ensuring new homes are fitted with water efficient appliances and water meters. There may be some opportunity to address leaks when pipes connecting new homes to the network are supplied.

8.6.6 Furthermore, the Plan should ensure it protects and supports opportunities to improve water quality as the ability to treat available water is becoming harder and more costly.

Key Messages

- Water consumption is 14 litres per person per day higher than the national average and whilst leakage across Northumbrian Water's network has reduced by 15% there is a long way to go to meet the 55% reduction target by 2050.

²² [Water Resources Management Plan](#)

- The Plan will need to take full account of the risk of drought to water capacity and availability over the Plan period and ensure that measures are identified and implemented which minimise risk.

9. Air

9.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to air quality within County Durham.

9.2 Policy Context

9.2.1 The draft NPPF introduces strengthened wording on how local plans should address air quality. The key direction is that air quality should be considered strategically at the plan-making stage. Specifically, land allocations should not put occupiers and users of the development at risk from unacceptable levels of pollution and wider opportunities should be considered through the Plan to reduce air pollution and contribute to national objectives.²³

9.2.2 In practice, this will require a strategic, upfront assessment of air quality issues, integration of air quality objectives into spatial strategy choices (e.g. site allocations that avoid worsening Air Quality Management Areas) and embedding mitigation measures such as sustainable transport, green infrastructure and emission-reducing design measures.

9.2.3 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

National

- Environment Act (2021)
- Environmental Improvement Plan (2025)
- Air Quality standards (England) Regulations 2010

Local

- Air Quality Action Plan for Durham City (2025)
- Council Plan (2025-2030)

9.3 Baseline Information: Air Quality

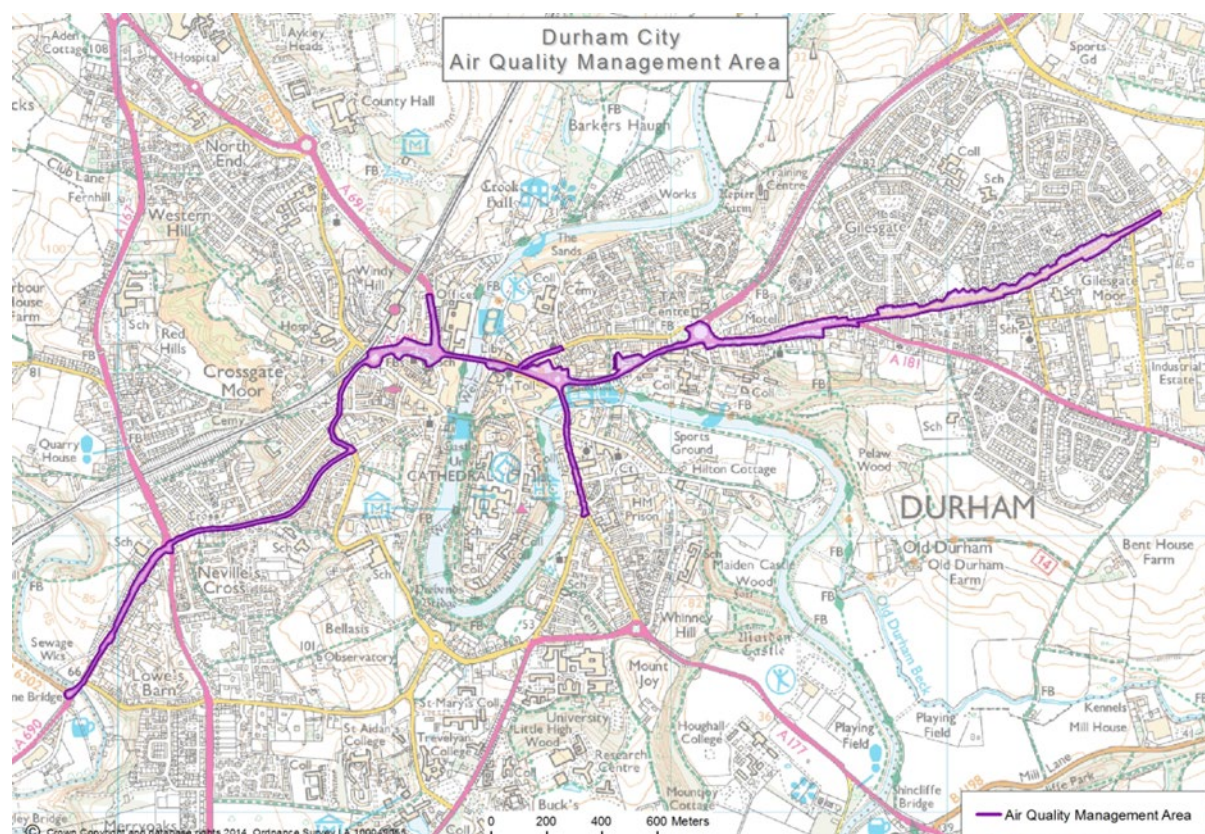
9.3.1 Air quality in County Durham is generally good. An improvement in air quality has also been observed at all 45 monitoring sites in the County between 2019 and 2023,

²³ Draft NPPF – P1: Planning for clean and safe spaces

discounting 2020 which saw widespread reductions in annual mean nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) concentrations due to Covid 19.

- 9.3.2 However, in 2011 Durham County Council declared an air quality management area (AQMA) in Durham City, due to monitored exceedances of the annual mean NO₂ Objective, with the primary source being from road vehicle exhaust emissions. The AQMA was further extended in 2014.

Figure 24: Air Quality Management Area in Durham City



- 9.3.3 For Durham City AQMA, a computer model has determined that the main contributors to poor air quality are diesel cars, LGVs, and buses (on specific roads), although petrol cars were also determined to be a significant contributor to particulate concentrations. Whilst air quality is improving, there are still locations that exceed, or are close to exceeding, the annual mean NO₂ objective within the AQMA. The Plan will need to consider how to best reduce exposure, particularly in relation to sensitive land uses (including residential, education and hospitals).
- 9.3.4 Air quality is expected to improve in County Durham with the implementation of the 2025 Air Quality Action Plan, phase out of petrol and diesel cars and the introduction of the EUs Euro 7 emissions standards from 2026. Whilst the UK will not automatically adopt the Euro 7 standard, domestic standards are likely to align as

manufacturers generally prefer to produce vehicles to a single set of standards for the European market.

Key Issues

- 9.3.5 Air Quality is good in the county except for Durham City. Any development proposed by the Plan in the city will require careful consideration of potential impacts on air quality. Planning policies may mandate the inclusion of low emission strategies such as low NOx boilers and or support for sustainable transport measures.
- 9.3.6 Whilst air quality is considered good in the vast majority of the county as it does not breach air quality objectives, designed to protect human health, many habitats are sensitive to air pollutants and can be harmed by concentrations that do not breach air quality objectives. This will also need to be taken into account by the Plan, its SA and HRA.

10. Climate

- 10.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to climatic factors within County Durham.

10.2 Policy Context

- 10.2.1 The draft NPPF has a dedicated chapter, setting out policies on climate change. The Government's consultation document describes this chapter (along with sustainable development) as being included toward the beginning of the NPPF due to its fundamental importance and because of the way it frames many of the policies in the chapters to follow.²⁴
- 10.2.2 For plan making, the NPPF expects development plans to take a proactive approach to mitigating climate change and supporting the transition to net zero.²⁵ This should be done through proposing development patterns which can help contribute to radical reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and through identifying opportunities for green infrastructure provision and nature-based solutions.
- 10.2.3 Plans should also take a proactive approach to adapting to climate change, taking into account the implications of extreme weather and long-term climate trends, including overheating, wildfires, drought, flood risk, coastal change, water supply, biodiversity and landscapes.
- 10.2.4 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

²⁴ [December 2025 NPPF Consultation.pdf](#)

²⁵ Draft NPPF – CC1: Planning for Climate Change

International

- Paris Agreement (2015)

National

- Climate Change Act (2008)
- Net Zero Strategy: Build Back Greener (2021)
- Carbon Budget and Growth Delivery Plan (2025)
- Environmental Improvement Plan (2025)
- Third National Adaptation Programme (2023)
- Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England (2020)

Regional

- The Tyne to Flamborough Head Shoreline Management Plan
- Northumbrian Water: Drought Plan (2022)
- Wear Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
- Tees Catchment Flood Management Plan (2009)
- North Pennines National Landscape Management Plan (2019-2024)

Local

- Climate Emergency Response Plan (2024 - 2027)
- Council Plan (2025-2030)

10.3 Baseline Information: Adaptation

10.3.1 The scientific consensus on the Earth's climate is that it is warming at an unprecedented rate, and that human activities are the primary cause of this warming. Multiple studies analysing peer-reviewed research in climate science show a near-unanimous agreement, with recent analyses finding a consensus of over 99% that human activity (releasing greenhouse gases) is driving climate change. This consensus is supported by leading scientific organisations worldwide and is reflected in the comprehensive reports of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

10.3.2 The Met Office Climate Data Portal provides tools and reports to help people better understand climate impacts in their local area. The report generated for County Durham recognises that changes to climatic conditions will depend on how much greenhouse gas the world emits. However, even in the most optimistic scenario, the county is likely to experience changing climatic conditions including:

- There is an increased chance of warmer, wetter winters and hotter, drier summers.

- Hot summers are expected to become more common. By 2050, every other summer may be hot as the record breaking summer of 2018.
- Although the trend is for drier summers in the future, there may be increases in the intensity of heavy summer rainfall events.
- Sea level will continue to rise in the 21st century even if greenhouse gas emissions are reduced rapidly.

10.3.3 The report states that the negative impacts of these changes may include:

- Heat – increased energy demand for summer cooling
- Health – increased risk to health from heat stress, although potentially reduced winter deaths due to warmer winters.
- Transport – increased disruption to transport due to heat e.g. rail buckling
- Sea Level Rise – increased risk of coastal erosion
- Drought – risk to water supplies from drought.
- Environment – increased risk to biodiversity.
- Heavy Rainfall – increased risk of river and surface water flooding.
- Drainage – increased disruption to urban drainage systems.
- Energy – infrastructure such as gas pipes are at high risk from flooding events.

10.3.4 As mentioned in paragraph 8.3.16, the county has numerous private water supplies with such households unlikely to have a readily available alternate water supply. A changing climate and drought and prolonged hot, dry weather in particular, makes these households more vulnerable. Good contingency plans need to be in place to ensure that the households have an alternative source identified, which is sustainable. Additional risks associated with lower water levels include:

- Lower dilution capacity leading to increased pollution
- Loss of recreation opportunities
- Risks to ecology and fish species
- Deterioration of designated sites reliant on water

10.3.5 The Council is undertaking several measures to help County Durham adapt to changing climatic conditions, such as working with communities to develop community resilience plans and working with Durham Community Action to equip community buildings with emergency kits and supplies. The Council's Public Health team have also adopted a Climate Change and Health Action Plan in recognition that climate change is a public health issue.

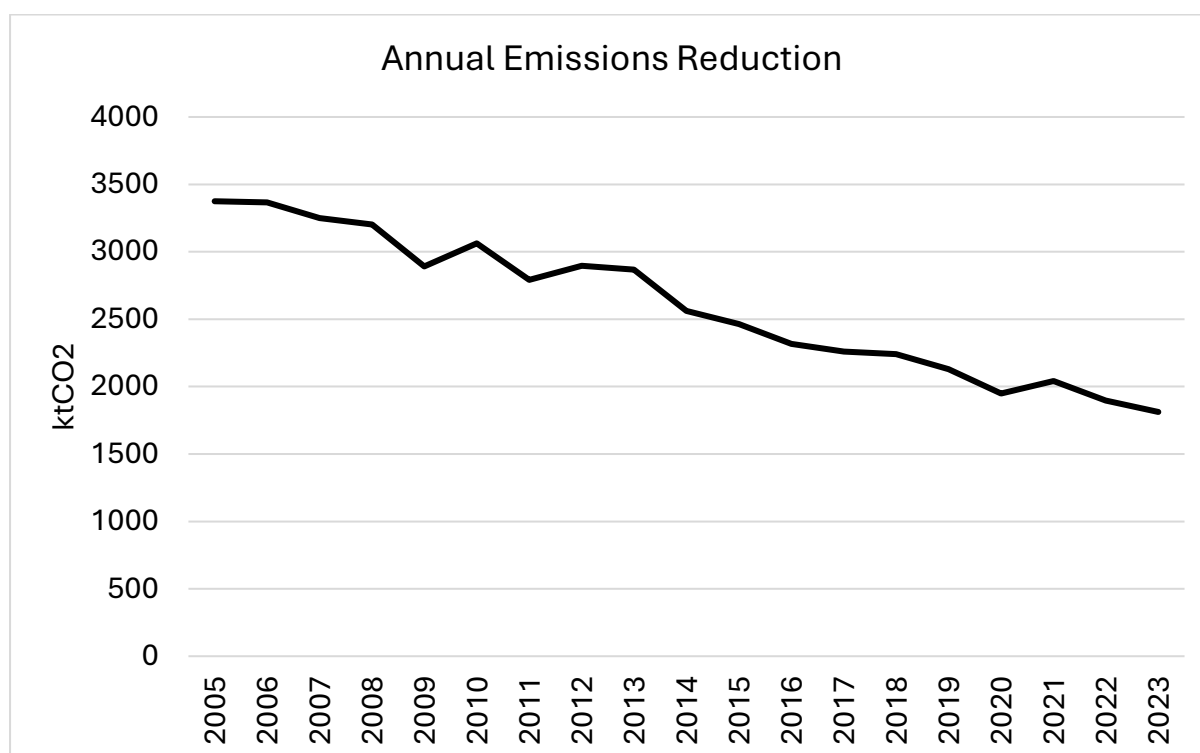
10.3.6 The Council will also need to produce a Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) to support the plan. This will analyse all potential sources of flooding in County Durham, considering climate change and future impacts. The 2018 SFRA identified that the chief sources of fluvial flood risk in the study area originate from the River Tees, River Wear and River Derwent. Due to the naturally high coastal elevations in the area and the presence of tidal flood defences, the risk of tidal flooding was low. Surface water

flood risk across the County was relatively wide-spread, although the majority of flows are primarily confined to the low lying fluvial corridors associated with the River Tees and River Wear.

10.4 Baseline Information: Climate Mitigation

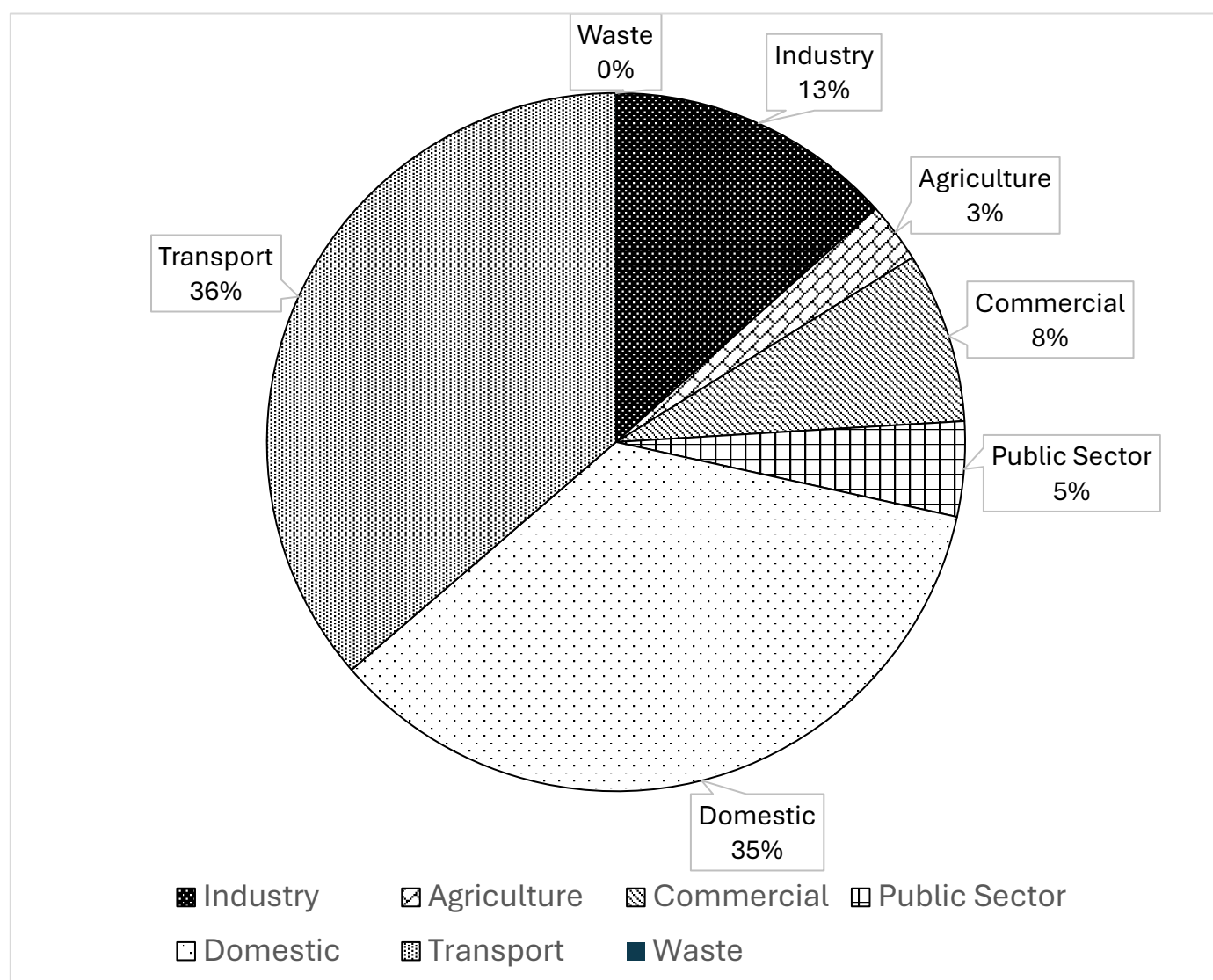
10.4.1 In 2023, greenhouse gas emissions totalled 1,811.9 kt CO₂e (kilotons carbon dioxide equivalent) in County Durham, representing a 61% reduction from a 1990 baseline. Performance outstrips the UK's overall reduction (46%) over the same period but is below that achieved regionally (67%). It is not appropriate to directly compare the national and local reductions however, as the national dataset includes additional sectors which have proven difficult to decarbonise, such as strategic highways, aviation and shipping. County Durham's per capita emissions have also halved over the last 18 years from 6.8 tonnes per person in 2005 to 3.4 tonnes in 2023. This is below the regional average (3.7 tonnes), although slightly above the national average (3.3 tonnes).

Figure 25: Annual Greenhouse Gas Emissions



10.4.2 The following chart shows that transport emissions (36% of total) followed by domestic emissions (35% of total) made up the greater share of County Durham's carbon footprint in 2023. Emissions from the waste sector contribute the least to the county's footprint.

Figure 26: County Durham's Carbon Footprint



10.4.3 County Durham's natural environment acts as a carbon sink and helped to reduce emissions by 144 kilo tonnes (kt) in 2023 overall, compared to 127 kt in 2005. However, the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) data for the county shows that carbon sequestered by woodlands has decreased by 7.45 kt between 2025 and 2023. Whilst important restoration work is being undertaken by the North Pennines National Landscape teams, peatlands are currently an overall emitter of carbon in the county as opposed to a sink due to their degraded state. Changes to land use from grassland to cropland is also an emitter. Together, peatland and cropland in County Durham emitted approximately 32 kt CO₂e in 2023 representing just over 1% of County Durham's total emissions.

10.4.4 Overall, it is anticipated that carbon emissions will continue to decrease as the grid decarbonises further in line with the Government's targets of greening the grid (clean power sector by 2035, with a 2030 'Clean Power' target for at least 95% of

power to come from clean sources) and phase out of the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2030. However, the rate of decrease locally may slow if efforts to decarbonise the county are not sustained.

Key Issues

10.4.5 The county needs to be ready for and resilient to the predicted impacts of climate change. The Plan can play a positive part in helping the county to adapt through for example, the design and orientation of new buildings and infrastructure, the protection and use of trees and habitats to provide shade and cooling, use of sustainable drainage systems etc. Ensuring that new homes are not located in areas of high flood risk will also be a key consideration.

10.4.6 The county has made good progress in reducing its emissions and national planning policy expects plans to contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions to help lower impacts. The Plan could support this in many ways including but not limited to:

- Protecting and increasing habitat cover
- Reducing the need to travel by ensuring good access to services, facilities and employment
- Requiring high levels of energy efficiency in new development
- Supporting the development of renewable energy in appropriate locations
- Encouraging the conversion and re-use of existing buildings
- Ensuring new homes facilitate the storage and ease of use of recycling facilities etc

11. Material Assets

11.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to material assets within County Durham.

11.1.2 In the context of a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), "material assets" refer to resources and infrastructure of natural or human origin that have economic or cultural value and can be affected by a plan or program. They include natural resources such as energy and minerals and the built environment like transport infrastructure and housing. An SEA examines the potential effects of a plan on these assets.

11.1.3 Please note that soil and water resources are covered under section 7 and 8 of this report.

11.2 Policy Context

11.2.1 In relation to energy assets, the draft NPPF outlines policies intended to support the development of energy infrastructure in ways which align with wider development,

clean power and net zero. Plan making policies W1 and W2 require development plans to support the transition to clean power by planning positively for the increased supply and use of renewable and low carbon energy and electricity network infrastructure, including identifying opportunities for heat networks and co-locating customers and suppliers of surplus heat.

- 11.2.2 Policy M1 (planning for a sufficient supply of minerals), also prohibits the identification of new oil and gas sites or extensions to existing sites outside of licenced areas. No new coal extraction sites should be identified.
- 11.2.3 In relation to non-energy minerals the draft NPPF requires Plans to provide for a sufficient supply of minerals of national and local importance and ensure these resources and associated infrastructure is safeguarded.
- 11.2.4 The National Planning Policy for Waste promotes natural resource protection by requiring development plans to drive waste up the waste hierarchy and plan positively for sustainable waste management. It also requires plans to identify suitable sites and areas for waste facilities where needed.
- 11.2.5 In relation to transport assets, the draft NPPF is clear that plans should align development patterns with sustainable transport accessibility and identify strategic transport infrastructure needs and locations.
- 11.2.6 In relation to housing, the draft NPPF requires plan-making to use the standard method housing need figure as the starting point, allocate land for housing through a clear spatial strategy whilst providing a diverse mix of sites and meet the housing needs of different groups e.g. older people, disabled people, students, travellers, affordable housing etc.
- 11.2.7 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

National

- Energy Act (2023)
- Powering Up Britain: Energy Security Plan (2023)
- Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (2024)
- The UK's Critical Minerals Strategy (2023)
- The Waste (England and Wales) Regulations (2011)
- National Planning Policy for Waste (2014)
- Waste Management Plan for England (2013)
- Infrastructure Act (2015)

- Environment Act (2021)
- Environmental Improvement Plan (2025)
- Decarbonising Transport: a better, greener Britain (2021)
- National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plan (2024)
- The Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (2022)
- Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking (2020)
- The 2nd Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy (2022)
- Housing and Planning Act (2016)
- Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (2024)

Regional

- Interim North East Local Growth Plan – North East Combined Authority (NECA) March 2025
- Transitional Regional Energy Strategic Plan (tRESP): North East and Yorkshire Context (NESO 2026)
- North East Local Transport Plan: Delivering Green Transport (2025)
- North East Active Travel Strategy (2023)
- Northeast Bus Service Improvement Plan (2023)

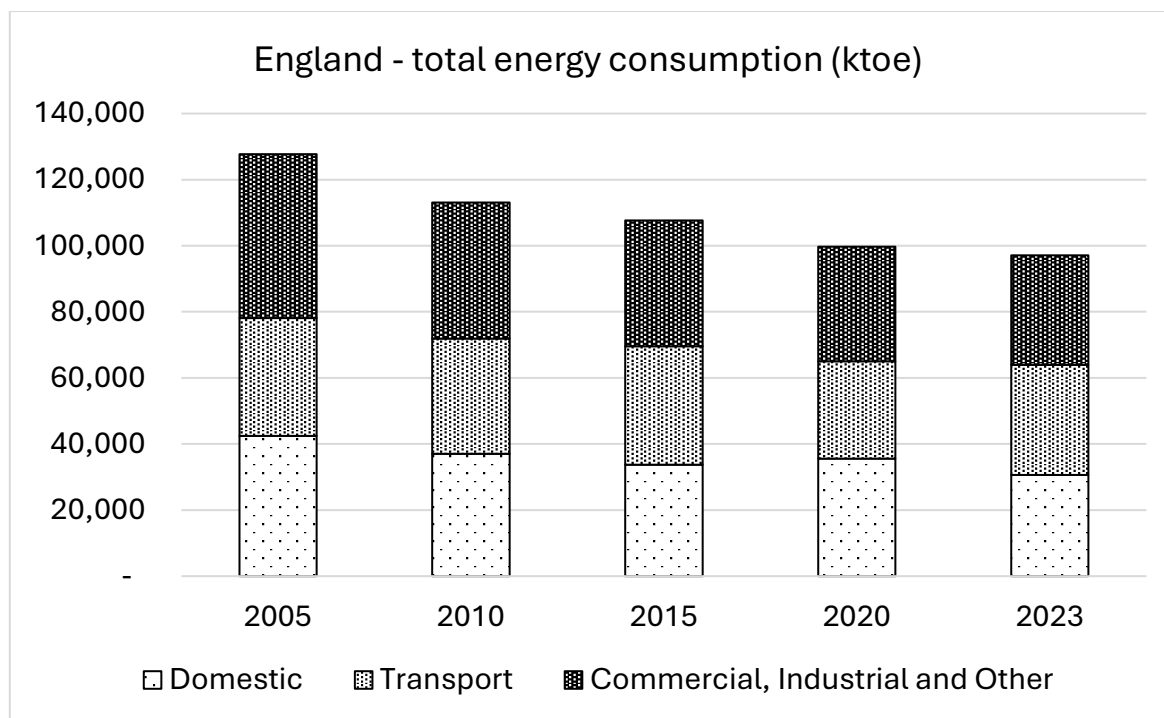
Local

- Heat Network Studies
- County Durham Local Aggregate Assessment (2023)
- Addendum to County Durham's Municipal Waste Management Strategy (2010)
- The Rights of Way Improvement Plan 2024-2034
- Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan 2019-2029
- Air Quality Action Plan for Durham City (2025)
- Council Plan (2025-2030)
- County Durham Housing Strategy (2025)

11.3 Baseline Information: Energy Use

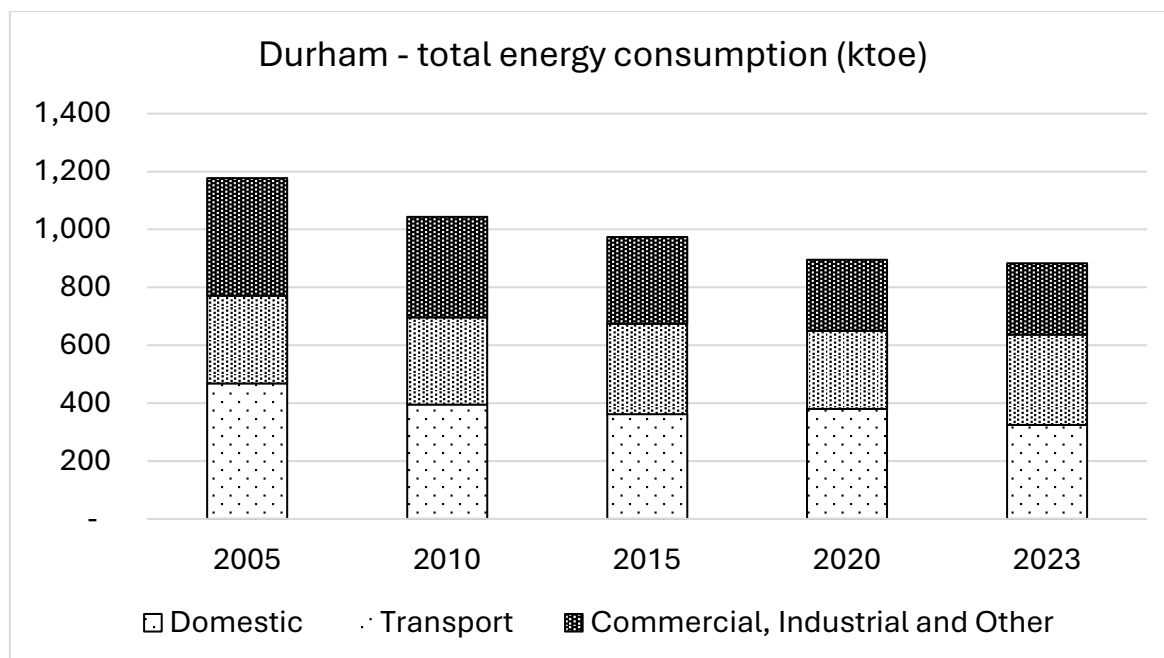
11.3.1 Energy consumption across England has been decreasing, the following chart shows the trend since 2005. Across England, the total energy used has dropped by 24%.

Figure 27: National Energy Consumption kilo tonnes oil equivalent (ktoe)



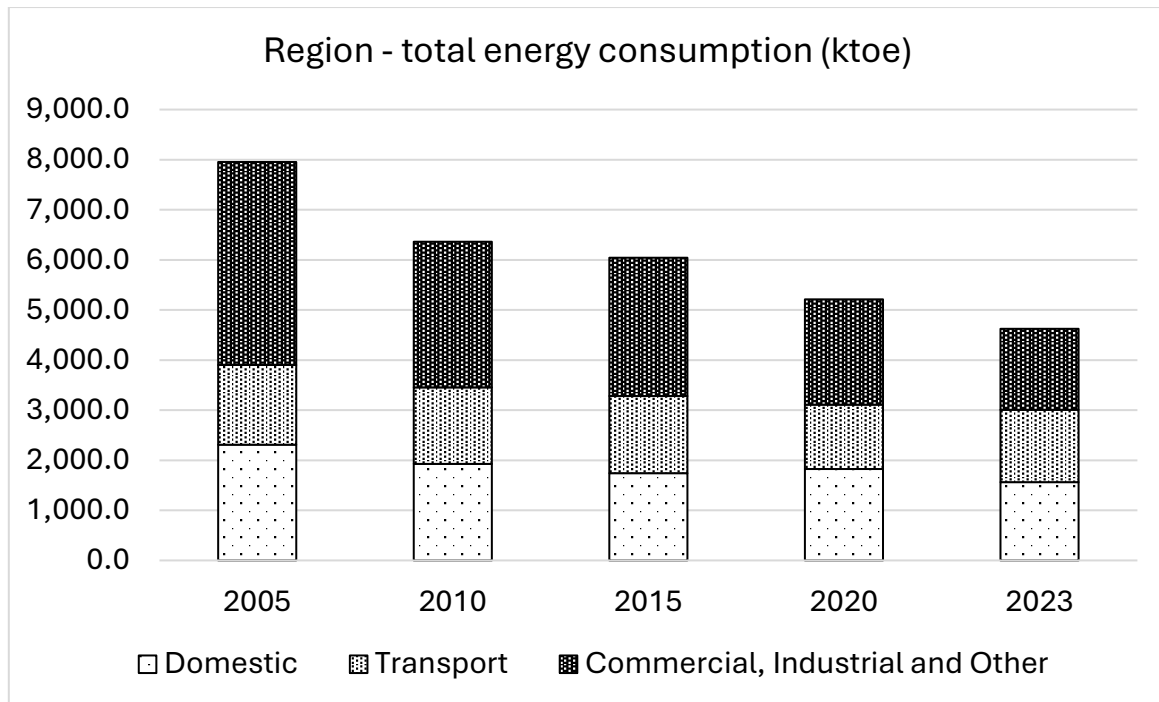
11.3.2 In 20025, County Durham used 1,177 kilo tonnes oil equivalent (ktoe) and in 2023 it used 884 ktoe, representing a 25% reduction.

Figure 28: County Durham Energy Consumption



11.3.3 The North East shows a slightly different pattern. Whilst domestic and transport patterns are similar, it is showing a significant drop (60% reduction) in energy use in the commercial, industrial and other category. This is likely because of industrial closures.

Figure 29: North East Energy Consumption

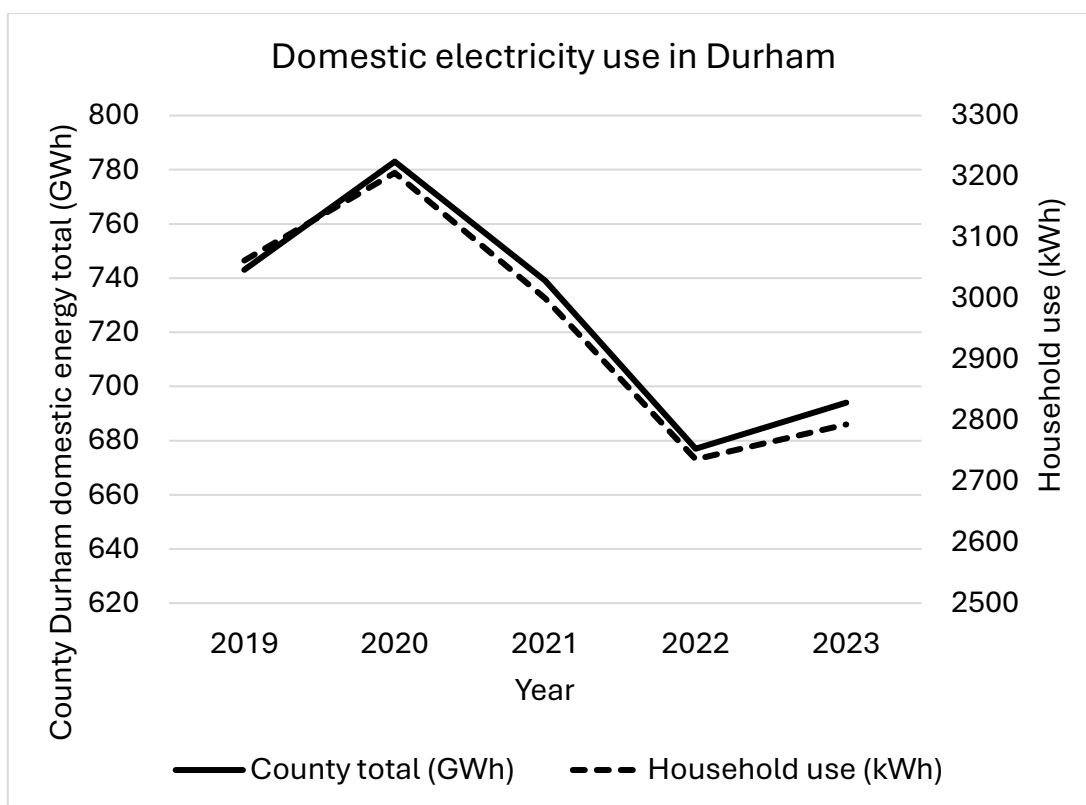


11.3.4 Overall, in Durham, the domestic sector uses slightly more energy (37%) than transport (35%), whilst commercial, industrial and other sources require 28% of the energy used. In recent years, domestic electricity consumption has dropped both at a household level and in total across the county.

11.3.5 In the future, energy demand trends are likely to continue but will be influenced by local and national policies. Domestic and commercial sectors are likely to require less energy. Transport energy use has remained relatively high but the Government's 2030 commitment to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars, and 2035 commitment that all cars must be fully zero emissions capable may reduce this. HGV energy use is less likely to reduce until technology improves.

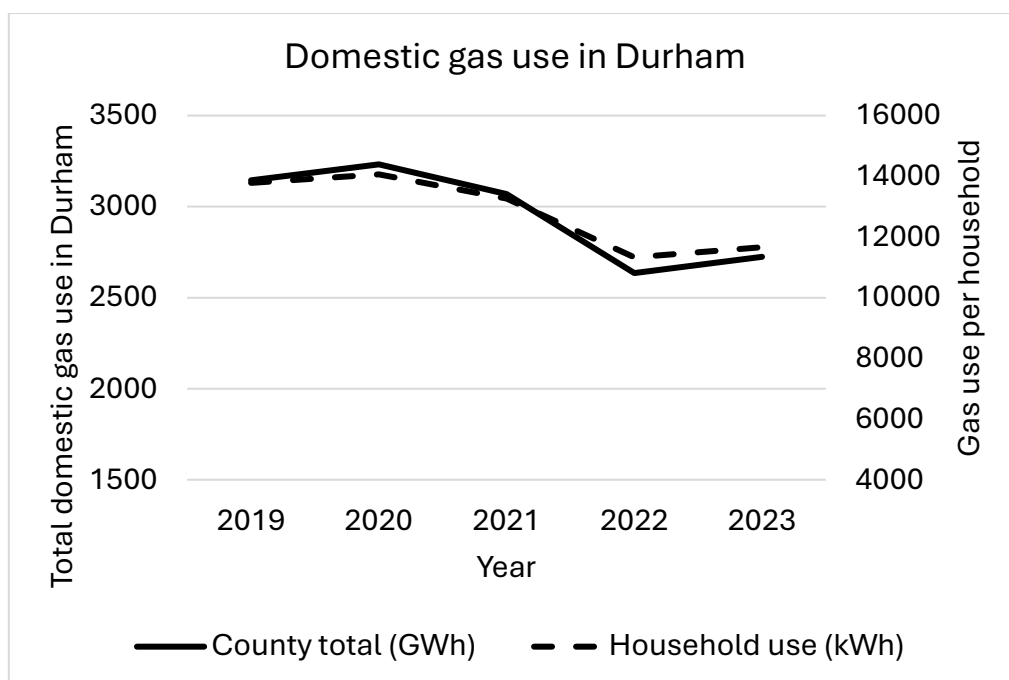
11.3.6 This chart shows reductions in the total electricity used by County Durham's domestic sector and how much each individual meter consumes. The increase in 2020 is a likely result of more people staying at home during the Covid pandemic. The decrease in 2022 is likely influenced by the rapidly increase in prices because of the war in Ukraine.

Figure 30: Domestic Electricity use in County Durham



11.3.7 The usage trend for domestic gas also follows a similar pattern with similar underlying influences in the county.

Figure 31: Domestic Gas Use in County Durham



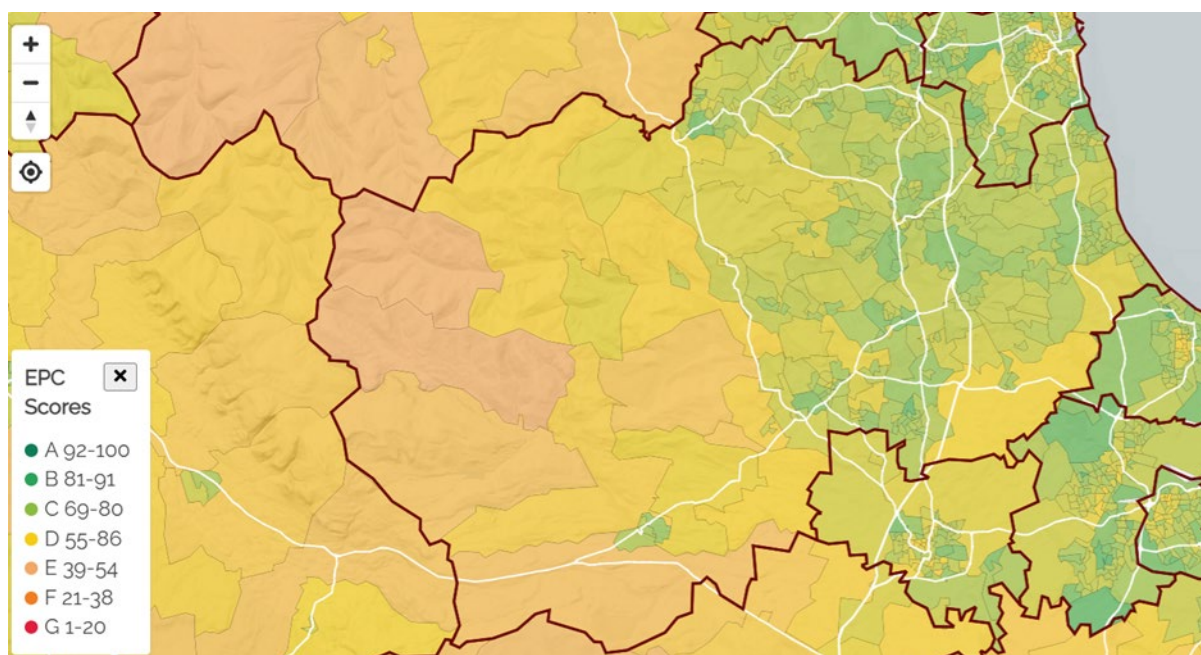
11.3.8 Natural Gas consumption for heating and hot water is decreasing. This is being facilitated nationally through grants for air source heat pumps and home

improvements and could decrease further as restrictions on heating options for new build domestic properties, take effect from 2025. This reduction in gas demand will be replaced by an increased need for electricity, however as heat pumps are more efficient than traditional boilers, the increase in demand of electricity will be a fraction of the decrease in gas.

11.3.9 There are also increasingly stringent minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) for properties being rented out. This will act to lower energy demand and encourage on-site renewable energy.

11.3.10 The % of houses in Durham with an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C or above is 47% which is similar to the North East (48%) and England (47%). Despite the County showing comparable average to others, there is a significant geographical distribution of ratings within its boundaries. The lower scores (less energy efficient) are primarily located in the rural West of the County, whilst the higher ratings are associated with urban areas.

Figure 32: Map showing variation in EPC rating across the county²⁶



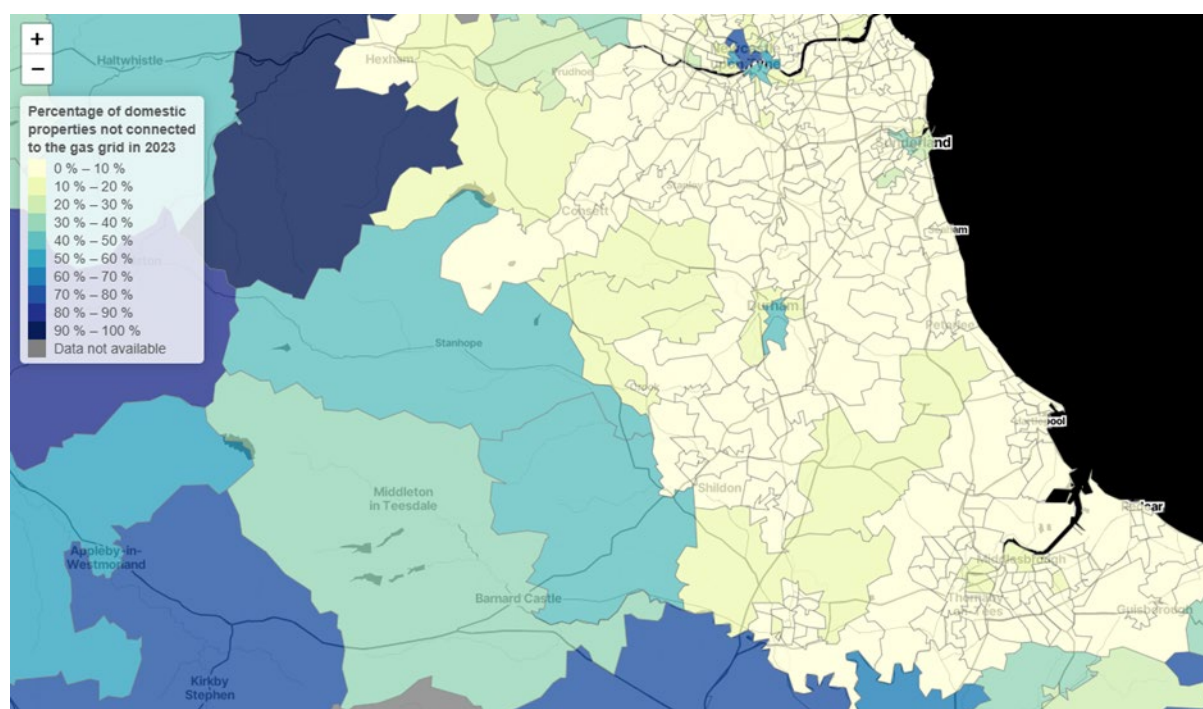
11.3.11 Fossil Fuel energy used in transport has remained fairly consistent for over a decade. Despite improvements in energy efficiency, the promotion of sustainable travel and the shift to Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV), overall fuel use has not changed significantly. As people shift to EV transport, the calculations of energy use should start to show an increase in domestic and commercial electricity use (from charging) and a decrease in the transport sector.

²⁶ Source: [Carbon and Place](#)

11.3.12 Geographically, energy demands area connected to population and business, but the transition away from fossil fuels could impact this demand pattern. For example, houses and businesses in the west of the county, which are currently off the gas network may present an increase in electricity demand as they adopt heat pumps and charging EV vehicles at home.

11.3.13 Across England, 15% of households are not connected to the gas grid. The equivalent number is 7% for the North East, and 6% for Durham. The impact of this is quite nuanced as many of the larger urban areas have a high percentage due to the number of high rise properties with electric heating e.g the Newcastle City Council local authority area has 15%, and the central city area in Newcastle is 76%. In County Durham the majority of off-gas properties are in rural locations and Durham City.

Figure 33: Percentage of properties not connected to the gas grid²⁷



11.3.14 Energy demand will increase proportionately as new developments are progressed. Aligning the development through the County Durham Plan with capabilities of the energy supply networks will provide cheaper, faster, more efficient delivery and help provide a more sustainable outcome.

11.3.15 Using the planning system to develop sustainable, balanced communities with varied peak demand times can reduce stress on supply. Proposals of significant size

²⁷ Source: <http://www.domesticenergymap.uk/>

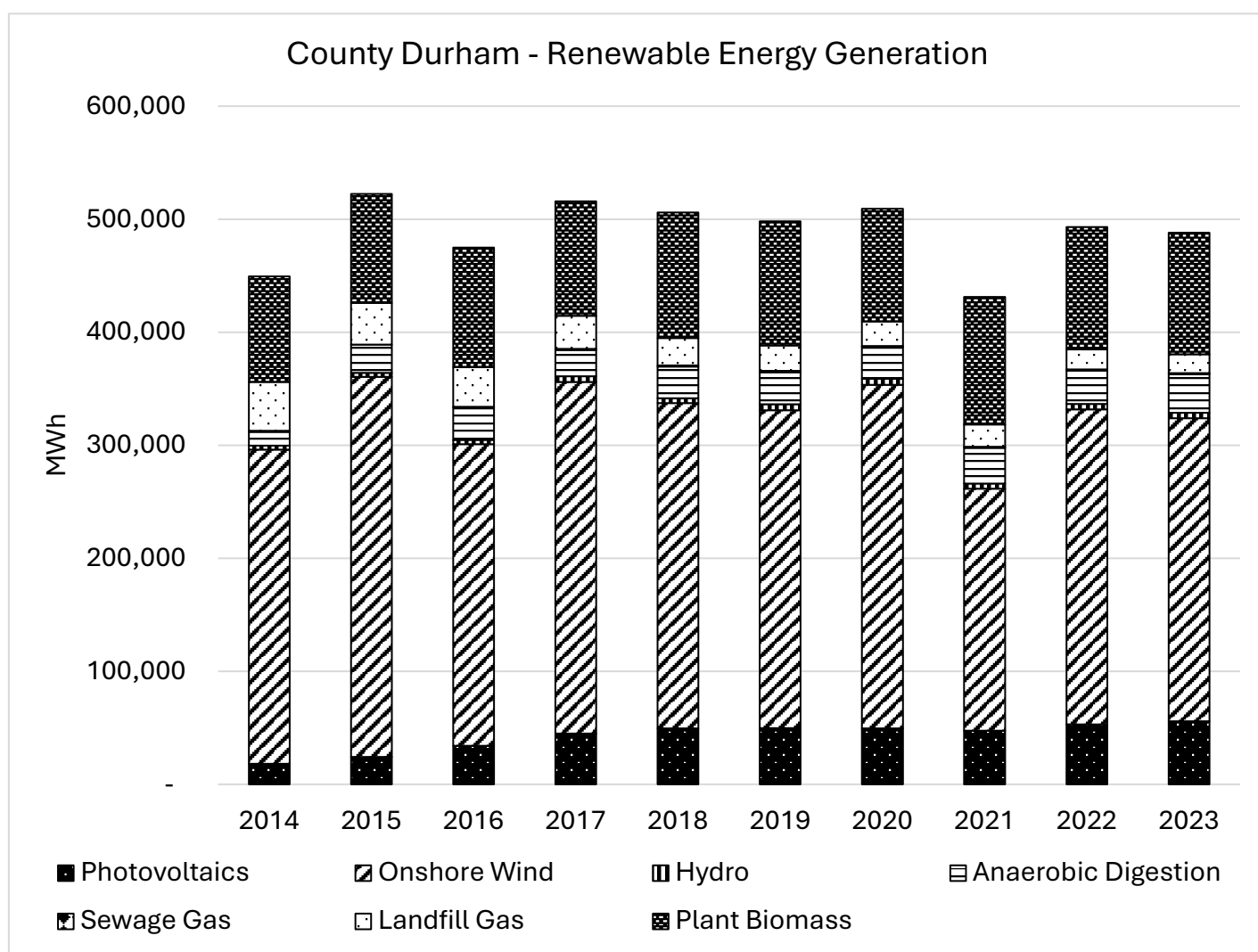
with larger anchor loads can be considered for heat networks and supported via the local authority and planning system.

11.3.16 The transition to Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEV) will increase electricity demand but a proportion of this can be shifted to periods of low demand.

11.4 Baseline Information: Energy Generation

11.4.1 Renewable energy generation in County Durham has increased over time. Between 2000 and 2010, there were a number of onshore wind farm developments across the county. This drove significant early increases in local renewable energy, but new onshore wind farms stopped coming forward around 2015 as national legislation in this area became stricter. Since 2014 overall generation has remained relatively flat, but subject to annual fluctuations and a similar pattern is reflected regionally and nationally.

Figure 34: County Durham Renewable Energy Generation



- 11.4.2 There has been a steady increase in the amount of solar generation. Until recently, most of this was connected to property and primarily roof mounted, but in recent years there has been increased interest in larger solar farms. The locations of these are driven by a number of factors, but access to a suitable connection point to the grid is important.
- 11.4.3 There is a single large biomass facility in the County. Opportunities for developing generation using wave/tidal, landfill or sewage gas, and hydro are limited in scope to develop as they are restricted by specific geographical factors. There is however, likely to be an increase in energy produced by anaerobic digester plants in response to separate food waste collections.
- 11.4.4 Nationally, the Government has stated its position with the Clean Energy 2030 Strategy which aims to significantly decrease the carbon intensity of electricity. Increasing renewable energy is a key factor in this proposal, as is strengthening the grid, storing and transmitting energy from locations of generation to those of demand. The National Energy System Operator (NESO) has launched its transitional Regional Energy Strategic Plan (tRESP) to inform the network investments by electricity distribution network operators between 2028-33.²⁸ This includes electricity generation ambitions for the North East and Yorkshire area which are likely to increase connection permissions for solar, wind and battery energy storage systems.
- 11.4.5 On-site renewable energy generation, primarily solar PV, is likely to increase. The impact of the Russia/Ukraine war on prices has made systems more viable for domestic and commercial/industrial operations. The appeal of larger solar, onshore wind and other technology is likely to be driven by the Clean Energy Strategy, ensuring low carbon energy is available at the right times through encouraging the appropriate technology and ensuring they have grid connections and planning permission.
- 11.4.6 To facilitate the planning process, at the end of 2025 the threshold for whether a planning application is considered a Nationally Significant Infrastructure Project and be referred to Government has been lifted from 50MW to 100MW. Below this level, the local authority is the appropriate authority.
- 11.4.7 The previous restrictions on onshore wind development have been rescinded, and some of the early developments in the county will be approaching the stage where they could be replaced with more modern, efficient systems. Changes to the planning regulations for domestic customers could increase on-site renewables, primarily PV. This will help reduce stress on the grid, but peak electricity demand is likely to occur when solar generation is low.

²⁸ [transitional-regional-energy-strategic-plan-tresp](#)

11.4.8 Locating storage and generation close to sub stations, locations of high demand or strategic recharging sites can reduce overall and peak grid demand. Coordinating developments, particularly the larger ones can ensure that the correct connection arrangements are in place from the outset, reducing costs, time and resources required.

11.5 Baseline Information: Other Related Activities

11.5.1 Durham County Council are a key partner in two current Heat Network Projects in the east of Durham: Seaham Garden Village and Horden Minewater Project. Both projects will use the geothermal heat in the flooded mine systems to heat water to be circulated around the network. In Seaham Garden Village this is being provided for a new housing development and for Horden this will feed to homes and businesses.

11.5.2 Additionally, the Council have undertaken feasibility studies on Durham City and Newton Aycliffe, both studies show that a heat network could be viable in the correct circumstances in these areas. In tandem with this study the Council acquired funding from the North East Combined Authority (NECA) to complete a Deep Geothermal Heat Study which looked at the potential deep geothermal possibility given the hot granite below Durham. The network shows potential as both heat and electric are needed in the vicinity and could be utilised by key partners such as the NHS at both the University Hospital and Lanchester Road Hospital, the University, and other public sector organisations in the city.

11.5.3 The projects in Durham and Aycliffe are moving to Detailed Project Development stage, and additional studies are being started for Peterlee, Chester-Le-Street and Consett as these 3 have the largest Industrial Estates with potential heat demand and key anchors that could make these areas suitable for Heat Networks. The Heat Network Delivery Unit have also identified heat network zones in Durham City, Bishop Auckland, Barnard Castle, Spennymoor, Tursdale, Stanely, Horden and Peterlee.

11.5.4 Hydrogen facilities are more likely to initially develop in areas with larger industrial demand and capacity. Carbon Capture and storage technology is still in early stages, but Durham University is a leader in this field and is looking to develop initiatives.

Key Issues

- Overall energy demand in County Durham has been decreasing over time particularly in the domestic sector. This trend is likely to continue.
- Energy use for heating and transport is likely to shift from fossil fuels to electricity produced from low carbon sources.

- The amount of renewable energy and storage required to meet national ambitions is likely to increase and there is likely to be an increase in demand for both on-site and grid connected developments in the county. The scale of the regional requirement is being led by Northern PowerGrid. However, please note that national planning policy (the NPPF) does not currently require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy.
- Growth in large scale generation will be partly influenced by the location of sub stations, customers and geography.
- County Durham's mine water and geothermal potential provides a unique opportunity to develop heat networks that could heat new homes, community buildings and businesses. The use of mine water heat from former coal mines also helps to leverage and honour County Durham's mining legacy. Potentially suitable locations for heat networks have been identified in East Durham, Durham City and Newton Aycliffe.

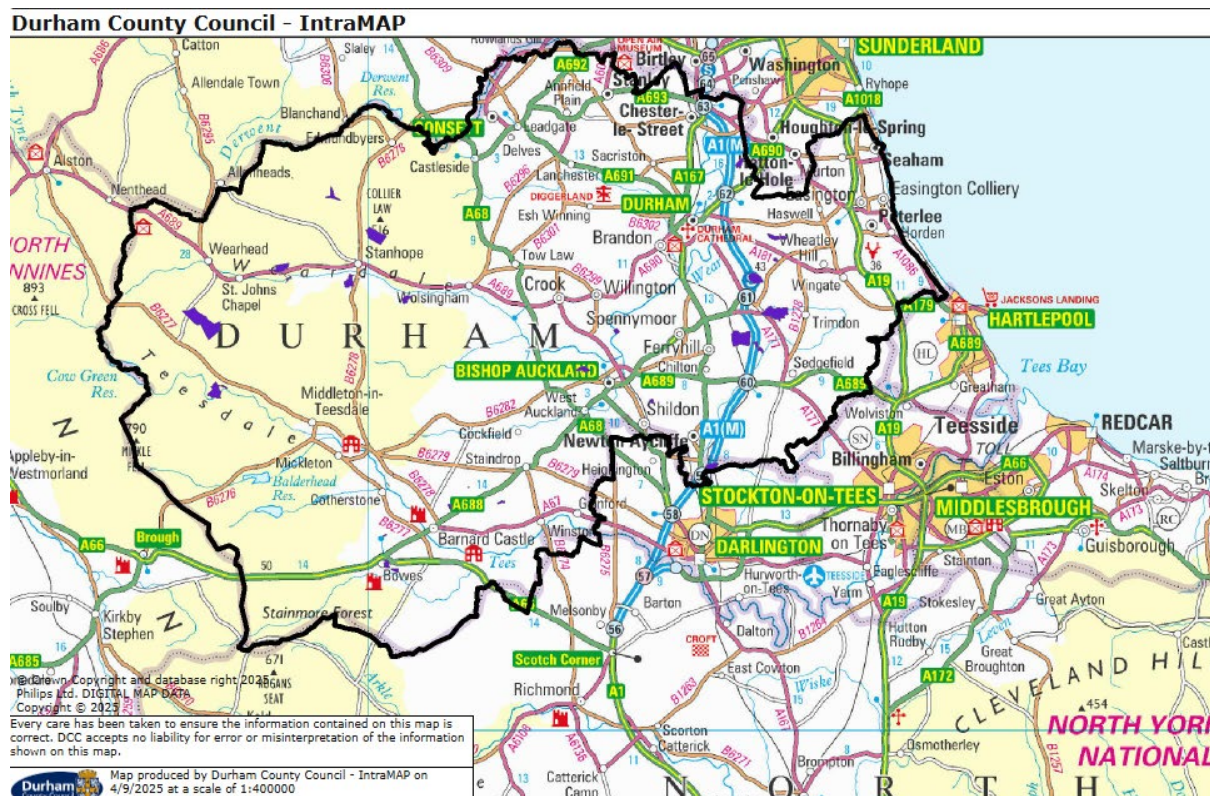
11.6 Baseline Information: Minerals

11.6.1 County Durham is a regionally important producer of minerals. To summarise the county has:

- Ten permian magnesian limestone quarries (six of which are active and a number of dormant quarries)
- Four carboniferous limestone quarries (three of which are active and several dormant planning permissions)
- One dolerite quarry
- Permission for the extraction of sand and gravel is granted at five quarries, three of which are active permian magnesian limestone quarries.

11.6.2 Broadly speaking, the permian magnesian limestone quarries are located in East, Central and South Durham, whereas the carboniferous limestone and dolerite quarries are located in the west of the county.

Figure 35: Location of Active Quarries



- 11.6.3 In addition to crushed rock and sand quarries, County Durham could become the UK's major producer of lithium. Lithium has been identified as a critical mineral by the UK i.e., a mineral with high economic vulnerability and high global supply risk.²⁹
- 11.6.4 Planning permission has been granted to build the UK's largest lithium extraction plant on the site of a former cement works in Eastgate in Weardale (West Durham). The facility will produce battery-grade lithium carbonate from geothermal groundwaters with plans to scale to a commercial production target of minimum 10,000 tonnes per annum in the coming years.³⁰
- 11.6.5 Northern Lithium is also developing a major domestic lithium supply project in the Northern Pennine Orefield, which includes Weardale and Teesdale. They intend to develop up to ten production sites across the Northern Pennine Orefield, producing 5,000-10,000 tonnes per year of battery-grade lithium.

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-critical-mineral-strategy/resilience-for-the-future-the-uks-critical-minerals-strategy#what-is-a-critical-mineral>

³⁰ <https://weardalelithium.co/2025/02/12/planning-permission-granted-for-uks-largest-lithium-extraction-facility/>

11.6.6 Additionally, there is also the opportunity for the lithium extractions (and other operations) to consider the extraction/provision of other critical minerals from groundwater (brines) in the future.

11.6.7 County Durham's quarries produced 3,009,979 tonnes of crushed rock aggregate in 2023, which was over half (56.9%) of all northeast crushed rock sales in 2023. The crushed rock landbank was 30.1 years at the end of 2023. In quantitative terms a landbank of this size is healthy and the NPPF requires minerals producing authorities to maintain a minimum ten year crushed rock landbank at all times. However, consideration is needed to be given to the distribution of these reserves between active and inactive sites, by resource type i.e. magnesian limestone, carboniferous limestone and dolerite, and across individual sites. A summary by resource type is given as follows:

Table 7: Crushed Rock by Resource Type

Resource Type	Comments	Trend
Permian Magnesian Limestone	It is expected that a steady and adequate supply of magnesian limestone aggregate should be able to be maintained over the Plan period to 2035. Beyond 2035 the steady and adequate supply of magnesian limestone aggregate will be in part dependent upon the continuing availability and the working of existing reserves including those contained within sites which are either inactive and/or require new schemes of working and restoration through their periodic review. Notwithstanding the working of these reserves, it is expected that further reserves will need to be granted planning permission to meet need and maintain productive capacity	Reserves and crushed rock landbank will fall. Without a new Plan the Council will not be able to provide certainty to industry for operational decisions. Certainty is needed given the long lead in times for quarrying
Carboniferous Limestone	It is now expected that further reserves will be required to be granted planning permission to meet need and maintain productive capacity over the new Plan period.	As above
Dolerite	Based on an understanding of the overall extent of crushed rock reserves which are sizeable compared to annual sales, it is expected that further reserves of dolerite may be required to meet need towards the	As above

Resource Type	Comments	Trend
	very end of the new Plan period (assuming it runs to 2045). However, whether future need can be met is uncertain due to the location of the dolerite resource within County Durham within the North Pennines National Landscape Area, and with most of the resource lying within Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. An important consideration is that reserves and resources of dolerite lie within other parts of the North East.	

11.6.8 The current adopted County Durham Plan was prepared using a 2016 base year. In 2016 crushed rock reserves were 131,389,000 tonnes which was equivalent to a crushed rock landbank of 46.8 years, this compares unfavourably to the position at the end of 2023 (30.1 years).

11.6.9 County Durham's sand and gravel quarries produced 460,200 tonnes of sand and gravel in 2023, which was equivalent to 53.1% of all northeast sand and gravel sales.

11.6.10 The sand and gravel landbank at the end of 2023 was 7.4 years (the NPPF requires a minimum seven year sand and gravel landbank to be maintained at all times). This is a key indicator that there is pressing need for further reserves to be granted planning permission. Without a steady and adequate supply of aggregates society's needs for construction materials will not be met.

11.6.11 It is expected that further reserves will be required to meet demand over the Plan period. Allocations will be required over and above those already allocated by the Council in the County Durham Minerals and Waste Policies and Allocations Document (July 2024). Plan policies will need to be prepared to enable both allocated and unallocated site to be granted planning permission.

11.6.12 In 2016 sand and gravel reserves were 7,610,000 tonnes which was equivalent to a sand and gravel landbank of 26.7 years, this compares unfavourably to the position at the end of 2023 (7.4 years).

Key Issues

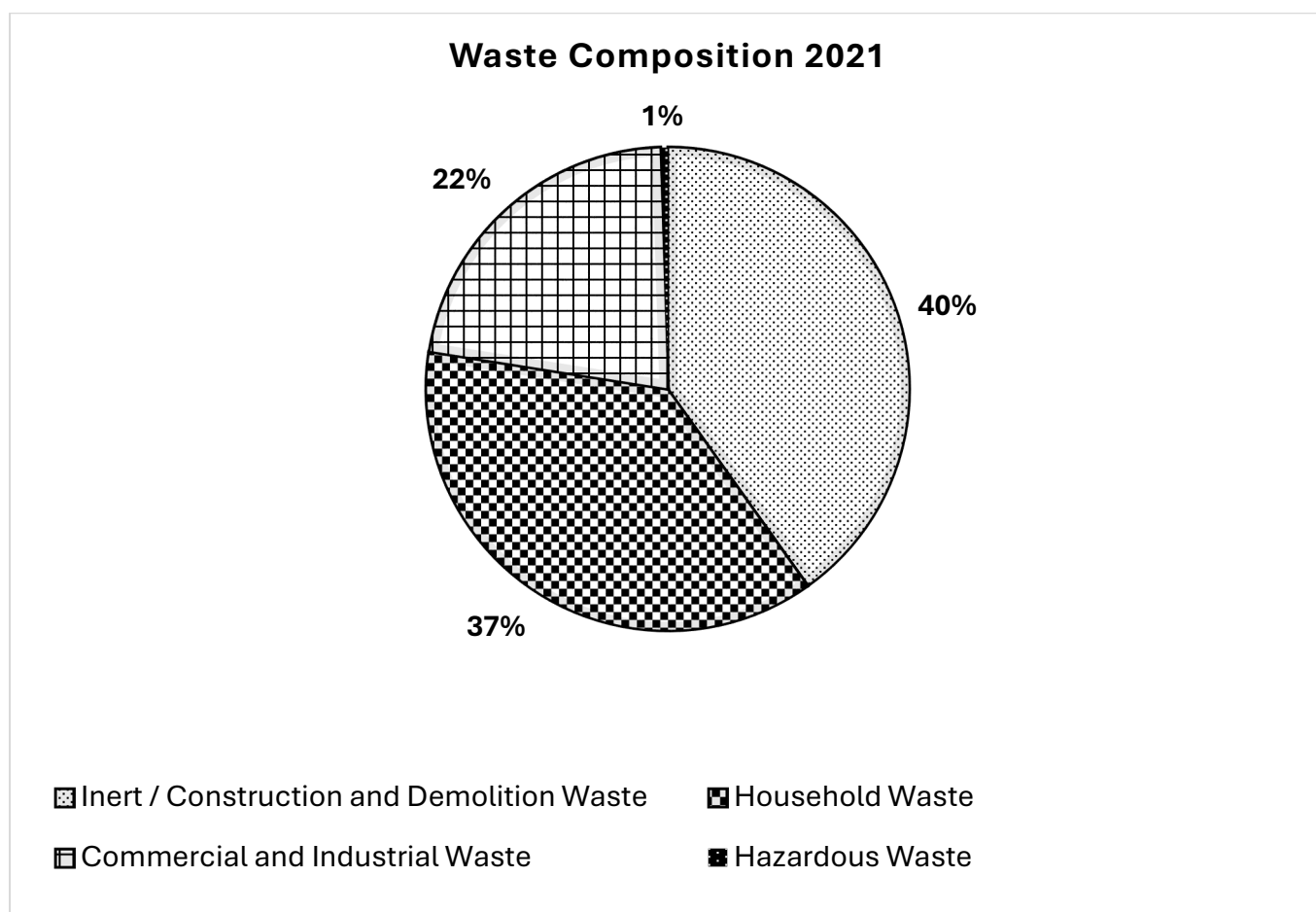
- County Durham is a regionally important producer of minerals. Further provision will need to be made over the Plan period for sand and gravel and crushed rock to

maintain steady and adequate supplies. Many social and environmental constraints will need to be considered when determining which sites to allocate in the Plan, including sustainable water use and ensuring continued water availability

11.7 Baseline Information: Waste

11.7.1 The largest component of waste originating in County Durham is inert, construction and demolition waste. In 2021, this accounted for 40% of the county's waste, followed by household waste at 37%.

Figure 36: Waste Composition



11.7.2 In relation to actual volumes of waste originating within the county, 780,731 tonnes was received in 2016. Over the last five years (2019 to 2023) volumes have remained similar with 818,768 tonnes in 2019, 764,334 tonnes in 2020, 656,786 tonnes in 2021, 820,393 tonnes in 2022 and 775,356 tonnes in 2023. There has therefore been little change since the CDP base year of 2016.

11.7.3 The county also plays an important waste management role for the region and wider country. In 2023, 2,081,553 tonnes of waste was received at waste management facilities within the county. There has been little change since 2020 in volumes of

waste received but these have increased overall since 2016 by 36% when 1,529,720 tonnes were received. A similar trend has also occurred at a North East level with approximately 12 million tonnes to 12.6 million tonnes being received annually between 2019 and 2022 before falling slightly in 2023 to 11.8 million tonnes.

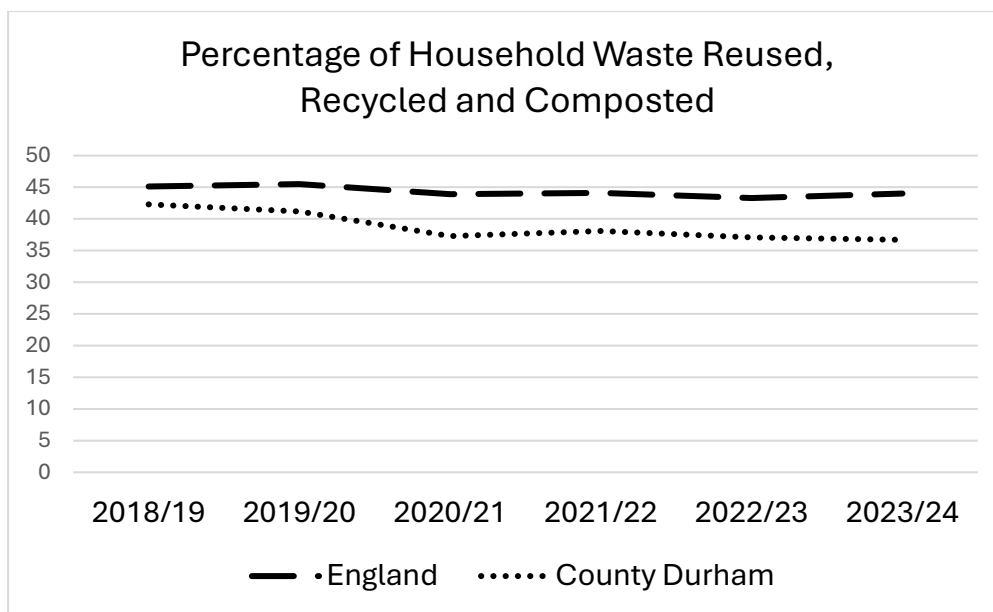
11.7.4 Whilst there is an ongoing need to move the management of waste up the waste hierarchy, not all waste can be prevented, reused or recycled. In terms of the capacity of waste management facilities to manage waste originating within or outside of the county, there are clear trends of declining inert and non-hazardous land fill void space across County Durham and the North East. These reductions in residual waste disposal capacity must be planned for. There is also currently a lack of capacity for major residual waste treatment capacity in the North East. This situation may be solved partially by a new Energy from Waste (EfW) plant in Redcar and Cleveland being procured by a consortium of Councils in the northeast including Durham County Council. This new facility could add 450,000 tonnes of residual treatment capacity into the North East waste market by 2030/2031.

11.7.5 In relation to County Durham's household waste, volumes have reduced by 16,018 tonnes (6.5%) between 2021 and 2024. In the same time period, household waste collected nationally has reduced by 1,403 thousand tonnes (6%). County Durham's rate of reduction is therefore slightly higher than the national level. However the volumes of household waste per person in County Durham at 571kg is 195kg per person higher than the national average (377kg).

11.7.6 County Durham's percentage of household waste which was reused, recycled or composted fell from 42.3% in 2019/20 to 37.3% in 2020/21 which was the first Covid year and has yet to recover to pre-Covid levels. It is currently at 36.7% (2023/24). This is understood to be changing patterns of behaviour and patterns of working.

11.7.7 The recent trends in this indicator for County Durham is comparable with the national assessment of change published by DEFRA (indicator J3: Municipal waste recycling rates) which indicated that from 2018/2019 to 2023/2024, a decrease in the recycling rate (from 45.1% to 44%) was observed for the household waste recycling rate. However, a much greater decrease in the recycling rate has occurred in County Durham (5.6% decrease) compared to nationally (1.1% decrease) Nonetheless County Durham has a higher percentage rate of household waste reused, recycled and composted than the North East which was 31.4% in 2023/24 compared to 36.7% in the county.

Figure 37: Percentage of Household Waste Reused, Recycled and Composted



11.7.8 The Plan must provide a permissive policy framework to ensure that County Durham’s residents and businesses needs for, and access to, a network of waste management facilities can be maintained. This network includes the Council’s existing Household Waste Recycling Centres, Household Waste Transfer Stations and Composting Sites. Additional waste management facilities may be required including to manage waste resulting from the Government’s Simpler Recycling Reforms i.e. for food waste. The design of new homes should also take into account the need to sore waste and recycling receptacles and ensure ease of access to these.

Key Messages

- There has been little overall change in the total volumes of waste originating within the county but some increase in imports over the years. The capacity of waste management facilities for inert and non-hazardous landfill void space is declining in County Durham and the region. There is also currently a lack of capacity for major residual waste treatment capacity in the northeast.
- Whilst reducing, the amount of household waste collected per person in County Durham is significantly higher than the national average.
- County Durham’s household waste recycling rates, whilst better than the regional average are yet to recover to pre-Covid levels and have reduced more than the national rate. At 36.7% in 2023/24 there is also much improvement needed to meet the Government ambition of 65% by 2035.

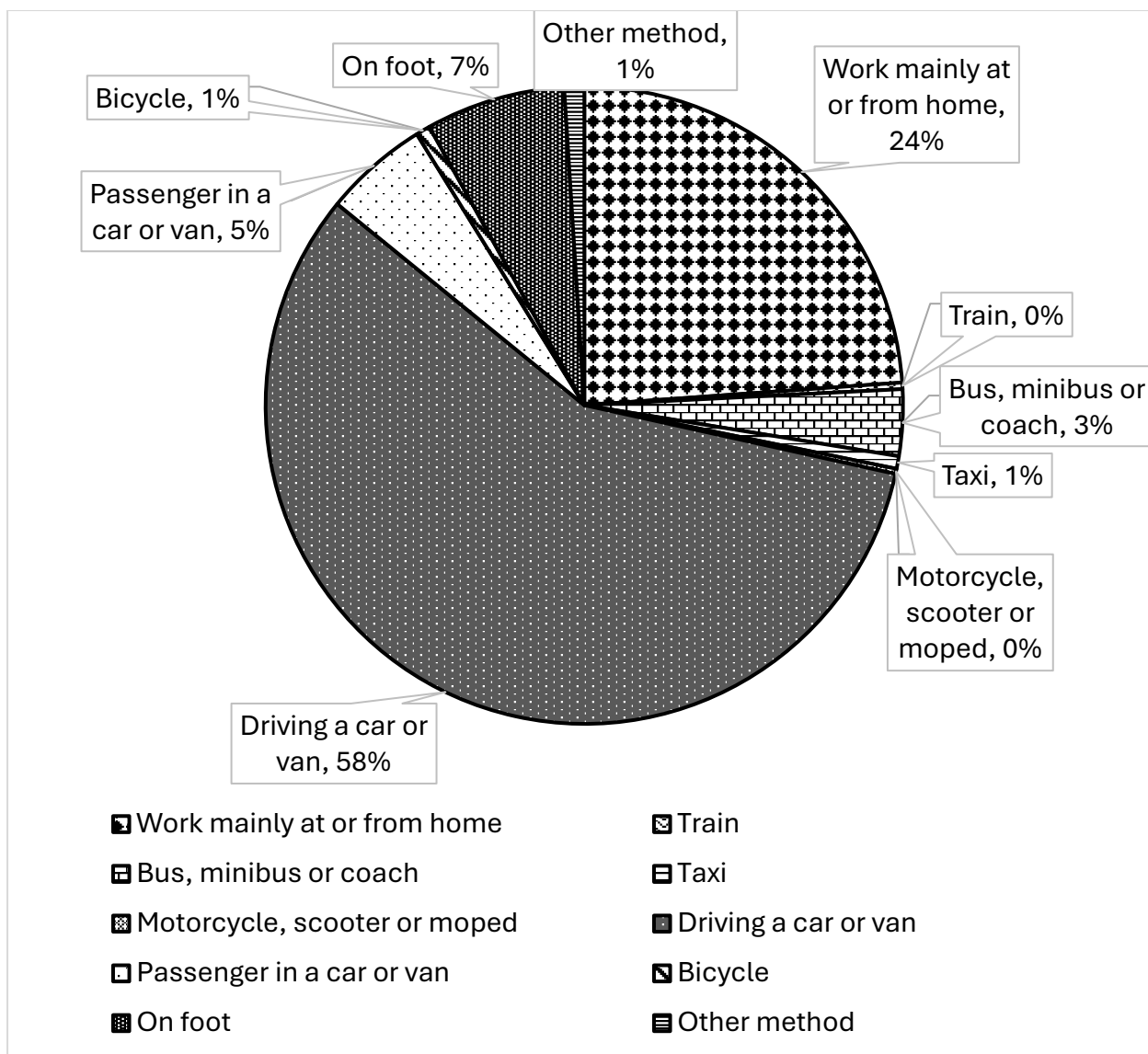
11.8 Baseline Information: Transport

11.8.1 Good transport provision can play an important part in supporting sustainable economic growth, increasing levels of active travel, reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions. A sustainable hierarchy of transport can be promoted which includes reducing the need to travel and prioritises walking/cycling, and public

transport above car use. This would help to prevent transport related exclusion for those who do not have access to their own vehicle.

- 11.8.2 In terms of walking, cycling and horse-riding infrastructure, County Durham has approximately 2,200 miles (3,500km) of Public Rights of Way (PROW), which includes footpaths, bridleways and byways. National cycling routes in County Durham include the long-distance Coast to Coast Cycle Route and the Weardale Way, while the primary national walking trail is the Pennine Way. Other notable routes for both walking and cycling include the Durham Heritage Coast, Teesdale Way and multi-user paths like the Derwent Reservoir Path. Many former railway lines have been converted into accessible walking and cycling paths, such as the Lanchester Valley Railway Path and the Derwent Walk.
- 11.8.3 Most people travel to work in County Durham by car or van (58%), followed by homeworking (24%), walking (7%), as a car passenger (5%) and bus (3%). Less than 1% use the train.

Figure 38: Travel to work method



11.8.4 The following table shows the changes in how people choose to travel to work between the 2011 and 2021 census. This shows that car use has increased the most by 19.2% followed by a corresponding 18.5% increase in home working since covid. There has been very little change in cycling, bus or train use to get to work in the last decade.

Table 8: Change in method of travel to work

Method	Percentage Change
Work mainly at or from home	18.5% increase
Underground, metro, light rail, tram	No change
Train	0.2% decrease
Bus, minibus or coach	0.2% decrease

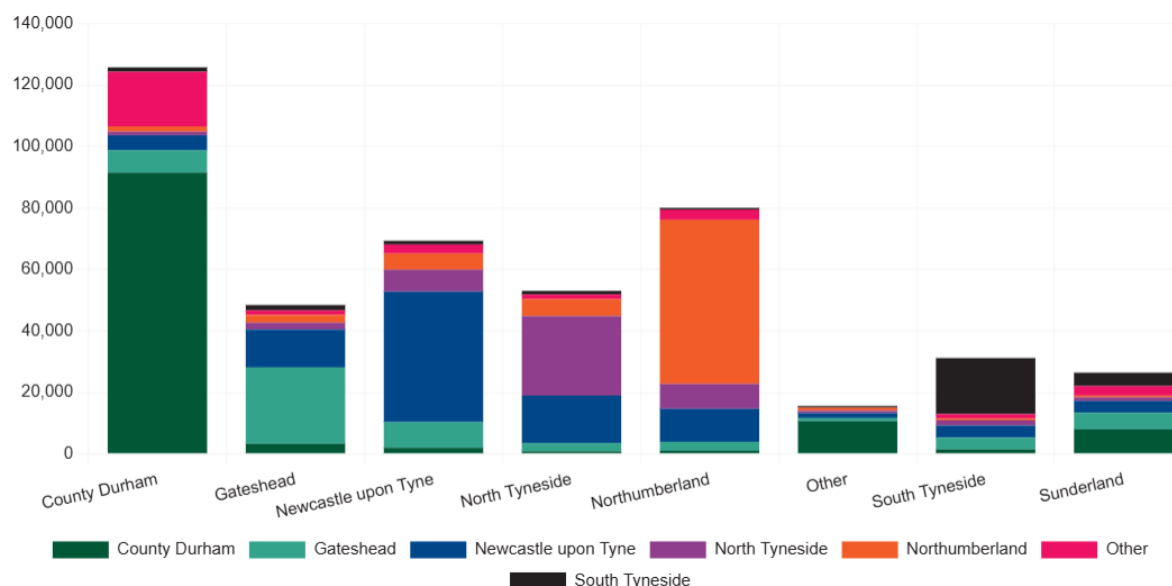
Method	Percentage Change
Taxi	0.2% increase
Motorcycle, scooter or moped	No change
Driving a car or van	19.2% increase
Passenger in a car or van	1.2% increase
Bicycle	0.1% increase
On foot	1.5% increase
Other method	0.7% increase

11.8.5 Car ownership has also increased slightly by 3% between the 2011 and 2021 census, although those who do not have a car or van in their household in County Durham (24.1%) is slightly higher than the national average (23.5%) but below the regional average (27.6%).

11.8.6 In terms of levels of self-containment within the county, data compiled by the North East Combined Authority (NECA) from the 2021 census shows that the county exhibits a fairly good level of self-containment with approximately 63% of residents both living and working within the county even when excluding home workers.

Figure 39: North East workers by home and workplace (excluding home workers)³¹

North East workers by home and workplace, excluding home workers (2021)



20/02/2024 Census 2021 Office for national statistics

11.8.7 In terms of out commuting patterns, it is likely that there will be strong commuting patterns from the north of the county to Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland, whilst South Durham is likely to have stronger commuting patterns with Darlington.

11.8.8 From previous analysis of the 2011 census, Durham City was identified as the largest internal and external draw of work trips in and to the county with 22% of all intra-county trips having the City as their destination and 25% of all cross boundary trips being into the City. Further analysis will be required to understand if this is still the case.

11.8.9 In some cases, outward commuting from the county could represent a shorter journey than inward commuting depending on location. However, Department for Transport data shows that the number of miles travelled on roads in County Durham overall has been steadily increasing. In 2024, 2.81 billion miles were travelled (all motor vehicles), surpassing 2019 pre-covid levels. Cars and taxis travelled 2.1 billion miles and are still slightly below what they were before covid. This may be due to an increase in home working within the county.

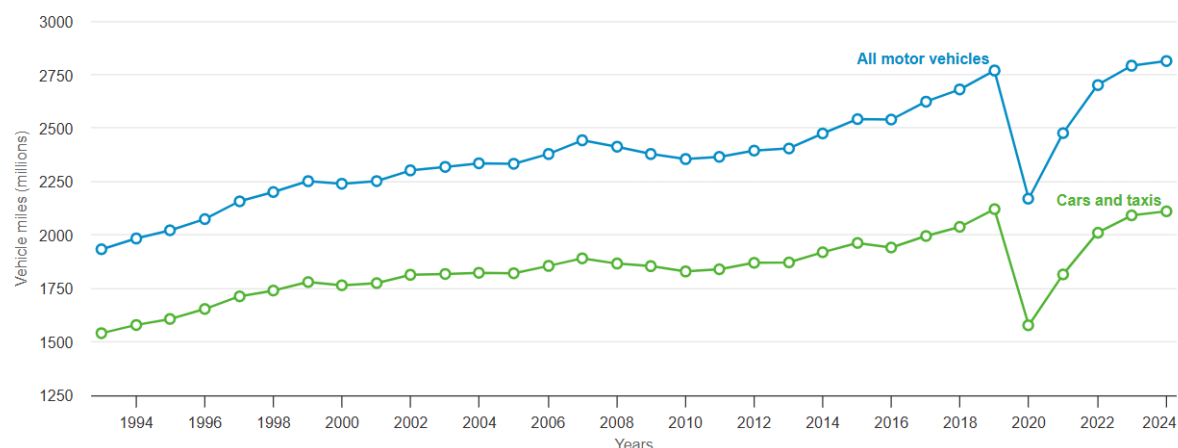
Figure 40: Annual traffic by vehicle type³²

³¹ Source: [North East Evidence Hub - Commuting Patterns in the North East](#)

³² Source: [Department for Transport - Road Traffic Statistics](#)

Annual traffic by vehicle type in Durham

Traffic in Great Britain from 1993 to 2024 by vehicle type in vehicle miles (millions)



11.8.10 In terms of fuel consumption, in 2023 33% of all fuel consumption in County Durham was by petrol cars with diesel cars accounting for 26.3%. HGV's accounted for 16% of fuel consumption and buses accounted for 3.9%.³³

11.8.11 However, there are an increasing number of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs) registrations within the County with numbers per 100,000 population surpassing the regional but not the national figures. This trend is expected to continue to increase as the UK phase out the sale of new petrol and diesel cars. County Durham is currently performing below the regional and national average in terms of the numbers of all chargers and rapid or above chargers installed. New homes and buildings are required to have EV charging points installed under Part S of the building regulations.

Key Issues

- County Durham has a well-established Public Right of Way (PROW) network which includes national walking and cycling trails. The impact of new development on this network will need to be taken into account.
- Car ownership and choosing a car or van to travel to work is increasing in County Durham (although counteracted to some extent by an almost equivalent increase in home working and increase in ULEVs)
- The county exhibits low and very little changes to the percentage of people choosing to cycle or use the bus or train to get to work
- The county exhibits good levels of overall self-containment (live and work within the county). Durham City potentially continues to fulfil a role as a key commuting destination for internal and inward commuting trips. However, increasing levels of vehicle miles travelled overall in the county.
- Petrol and diesel cars contribute to the highest levels of fuel consumption within the county

³³ Road Transport Fuel Consumption (2022): Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (DBEIS – 2023)

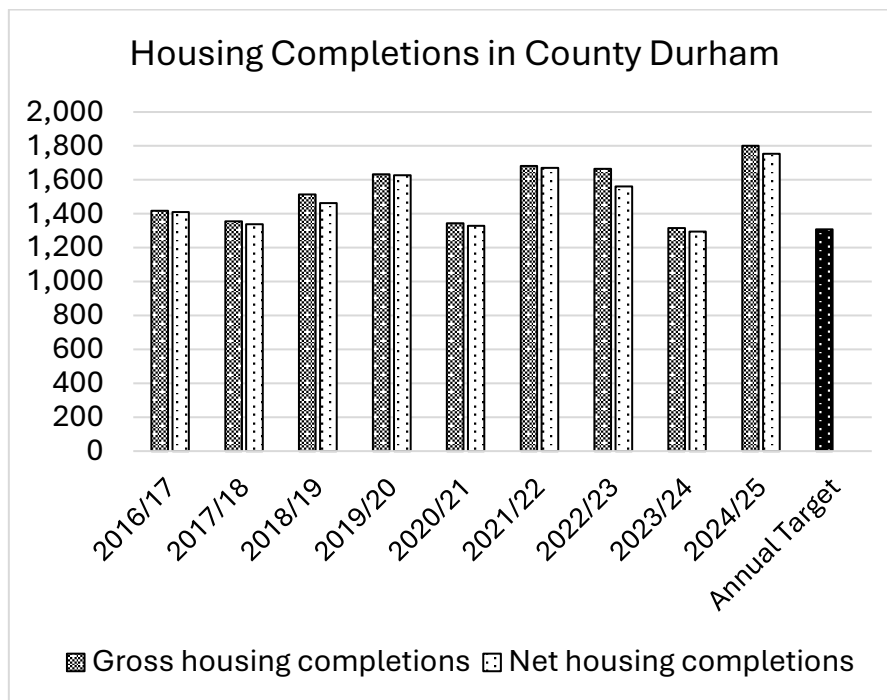
- Use of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles are increasing but may not be keeping pace with ChargePoint installations

11.9 Baseline Information: Housing

11.9.1 Providing good quality housing in a sufficient quantity and type, is important to meet the housing needs of County Durham’s current and future residents. The provision of housing can have a positive impact on other areas, including supporting economic development, improving health and reducing energy bills. Planning for an adequate supply and mix of housing is a key role of the planning system and for the new Plan.

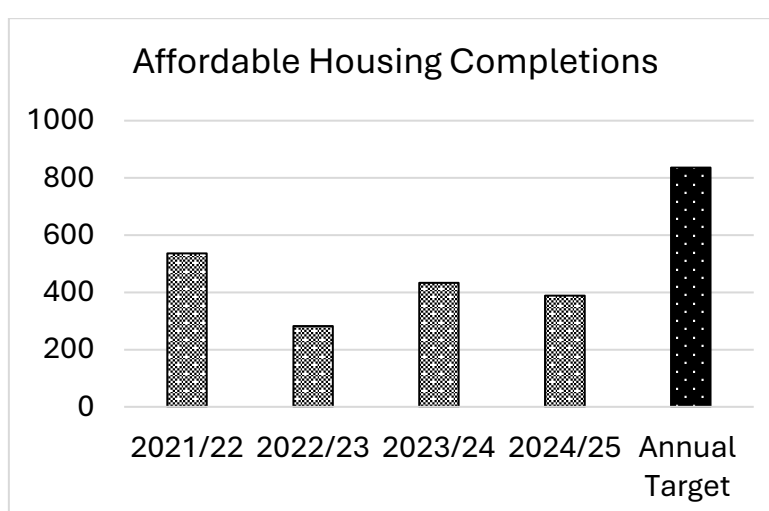
11.9.2 The current County Durham Plan targets the provision of 1,308 net additional homes per year and the new Plan will increase this target to 2,011 new homes. In 2023/24 the number of net additional homes provided in the county was notably lower than previous years at 1,295 homes and fell slightly short of the 1,308 target. County Durham’s performance in 2023/24 was similar to the regional and national picture which also showed a reduction in net housing completions. However, in 2024/25, performance in the county was much improved with 1,753 completions, 445 completions above target. This is the highest level of completions that have been delivered in the last 9 years. Regional and national figures for 2024/25 are not yet available for comparison. Some of the issues considered to be affecting housebuilding nationally, include weak economic growth and a stagnant housing market along with inflation in build costs and raw materials.

Figure 41: Housing Completions in County Durham



- 11.9.3 Future trends in the county are expected to continue in line with past delivery (average 1,500 net dwellings per year). Several large house building sites are now well underway and will start to record formal completions.
- 11.9.4 In December 2023, the median house price in County Durham was £125,000. In comparison, the average house price in the North East was £152,500 and £290,000 in England in 2023.³⁴ Since 2011, median house prices have increased more slowly in County Durham and the region compared to nationally. Prices have increased by 19.6% in County Durham, 25% in the North East and 58% in England. As such, affordability within the county appears to be good. Access to affordable housing affects where people live and work, and factors that influence health including the quality of the housing available, community cohesion and time spent commuting. A lack of affordable housing may negatively impact lower income families by reducing the amount they can spend on addressing other health and wellbeing needs.
- 11.9.5 The housing affordability ration confirms that County Durham has good levels of affordability. This is calculated by dividing the house price for a given area by its earnings. A higher ratio indicates that on average, it is less affordable for a resident to purchase a house whereas a lower ratio indicates higher affordability. In 2024, County Durham's affordability ratio was 4.6 compared to 5.0 for the North East and 7.7 for England. Housing continues to be more affordable in County Durham, than the region and for England. However, to meet existing housing need, 836 affordable houses are required every year over the existing County Durham Plan period. This is for people who lack their own housing or who live in unsuitable housing and cannot afford to meet their housing needs in the market, but historically delivery has fallen short of this. 388 affordable units were completed in 2024/25.

Figure 42: Affordable Housing Completions



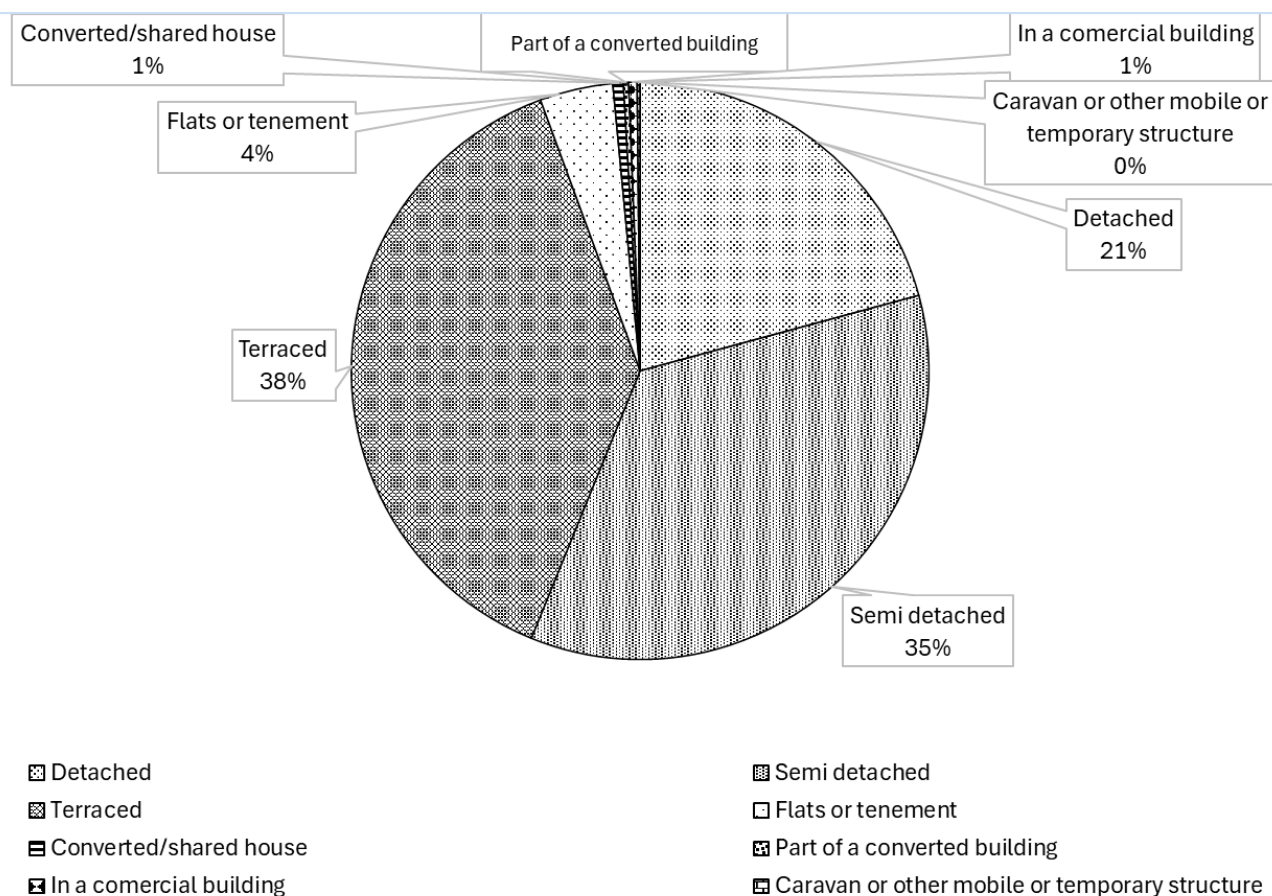
³⁴ Source: Durham Insight – Housing Reports

11.9.6 Delivery of affordable housing is considered to have decreased in the County, primarily due to tighter Homes England funding requirements. The new Plan will set new affordable housing targets and include policies to reach this on new developments.

11.9.7 County Durham's older person population is projected to increase substantially, and the supply of adaptable and specific older persons housing may need to increase over and above existing targets. The current Plan sets a target for 10% of private or intermediate housing provided on all sites to meet the specific needs of older people in terms of design, form and layout. This target has been met in all but the most recent year.

11.9.8 In relation to County Durham's current dwelling stock, 62.5% of properties are owner-occupied, 20% are social rented and 17.1% are private rented. Most dwellings in the county are terraced houses, which at 36% of the stock, is higher than the North East and for England. The mix of dwelling types in the county is changing with the proportion of bungalows in the county rising to 14%, higher than the region and national percentages. Detached dwellings have risen to 15%, again above the North East region of 12%. Of all dwellings, 5.9% have one bedroom/ bedsit, 35.2% have two bedrooms, 44.9% have three bedrooms and 16.7% have four or more bedrooms.

Figure 43: Dwelling Type

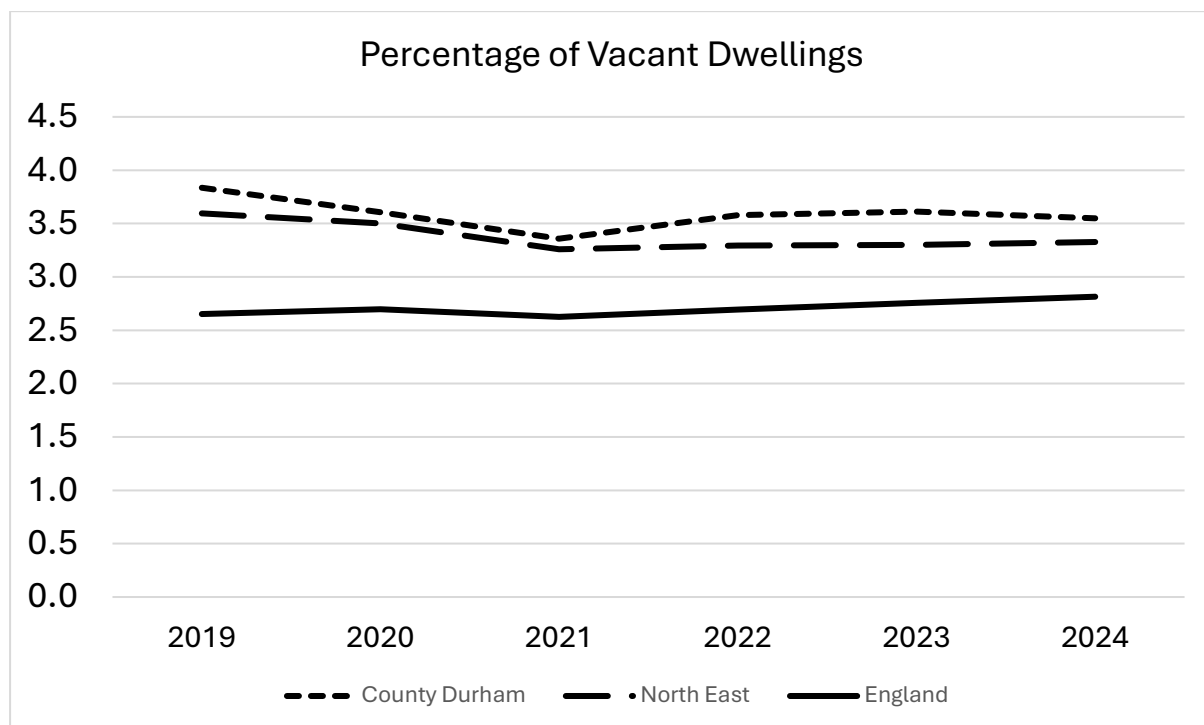


11.9.9 In terms of the age of County Durham's housing stock, a high proportion of properties (18.2%) were built before 1919 compared to 6.3% since 2005. Less than half (47%) of County Durham's existing housing stock has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or above and as mentioned in paragraph 3.3.16 a slightly higher proportion of households in County Durham are in fuel poverty compared to the region.

11.9.10 The conversion of vacant dwellings can make a useful contribution to housing supply, can help to bring heritage assets back into use and can reduce impacts associated with safety and anti-social behaviour that vacant housing can attract.

11.9.11 The following graph shows that County Durham has seen a consistently higher percentage of vacant dwellings when compared to the North East and England figures. Bowes and Middleton in Teesdale (West Durham) and Horden (East Durham) had the highest proportion of vacant dwellings in 2021. The reasons why a house remains empty are numerous. In West Durham vacancies may be higher due to an older housing stock and cost of renovations needed, making them difficult to sell or rent. In Horden, higher vacancies may be due to market failure.

Figure 44: Percentage of Vacant Dwellings



Key Issues

- The number of net additional homes completed in the county has dropped notably compared to previous years, although delivery is expected to improve in future years

and be more akin with previous years which have averaged 1,500 net dwellings per year. However, the new Plan is expected to include a target of 2,011 net additional homes per year, which will require performance to improve further on past, average delivery.

- Housing continues to be more affordable in County Durham, than the region and for England. However, affordable housing delivery remains significantly below identified needs.
- County Durham's older person population is projected to increase substantially and the supply of adaptable and specific older persons housing may need to increase over and above existing targets.
- High proportion of older properties and less than half (47%) of County Durham's existing housing stock has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or above.
- Consistently higher percentages of long term vacant dwellings compared to the regional and national picture.

12. Cultural Heritage

12.1.1 This section provides the policy context, baseline information, trends and key environmental issues relevant to County Durham's cultural heritage.

12.2 Policy Context

- 12.2.1 The draft NPPF recognises that heritage assets are an irreplaceable resource, that should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance, so that they can be enjoyed for their contribution to the quality of life of existing and future generations. The social, cultural, economic and environmental benefits of conserving the historic environment is emphasised, along with the importance of putting heritage assets to viable uses consistent with conservation.
- 12.2.2 Plans should take a strategic and proactive approach to the historic environment, setting out how they will support the conservation, enhancement and enjoyment of heritage assets. This should be based on a robust, accessible evidence base, including an up-to-date Historic Environment Record (HER).
- 12.2.3 New development should take opportunities to draw on the contribution which the historic environment can make to the character and quality of development and identify opportunities to enhance or better reveal the significance of conservation areas and World Heritage Sites. Locally specific policies should also be included where they are needed to preserve and enhance the Outstanding Universal Value of World Heritage Sites and their settings.
- 12.2.4 In addition to the draft NPPF, the following list identifies the most relevant plans, programmes and policies included in the context review (task A1) for this topic. A

summary of their objectives and implications for the Plan and its SEA is provided in Appendix A:

International

- UNESCO World Heritage Convention (1972)
- International Geoscience and Geoparks Programme (2015)

National

- Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act (1990)
- Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act (1979)
- Historic England Good practice Advice (GPAs) and Historic England Advice Notes (HEANs)

Regional

- North Pennines National Landscape Management Plan (2019-2024)
- UNESCO Global Geopark – North Pennines Geodiversity Action Plan (2022)
- Durham Heritage Coast Management Plan (2018-2025)

Local

- Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site Management Plan (2017-2023)
- Conservation Area Character Appraisals
- Council Plan (2025-2030)

12.3 Baseline Information: The First Settlers

12.3.1 County Durham is steeped in history from pre-historic times through Roman, Anglo-Scandinavian (Anglo-Saxons were further south) and Norman times, to the Industrial Revolution and the modern age. Thanks to its turbulent and lively history, thousands of important historical and cultural features remain in the county. The Historic Environment Record (HER) has evolved into a huge record which includes earthworks, aerial photographs, finds-spots, features on the landscape, as well as buildings. These records are dynamic and are constantly being updated.

12.3.2 The Romans were the first to make a significant and lasting impact on the county's settlements and communications. Having conquered the native Brigantes around 80 AD, they built Dere Street as their supply route from York to the Firth of Forth. The road remained in continuous use throughout the Roman period and a number of forts were built along its length. These included sites at Ebchester, Lanchester and Binchester in County Durham, Piercebridge in Darlington and Corbridge in Northumberland.

Table 9: Key Roman Heritage Assets in County Durham

Name	Description and Significance
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Binchester Roman Fort (Vinovia) Scheduled Monument	Located near Bishop Auckland, this site features one of the most important hypocaust (underfloor) heating systems in Britain and two well preserved bath-houses
Lanchester Roman Fort (Longovicium) Scheduled Monument	A large, upstanding fort that served as a key stage on Dere Street, notable for its extensive, complex water management system and aqueducts
Ebchester Roman Fort (Vindomora) Scheduled Monument	A fort site with visible ramparts, showing multiple phases of construction

Figure 45: Binchester Roman Fort (Source: Peter Schofield – Historic England - National Heritage List for England)



12.4 Baseline Information: Early Medieval / Dark Ages

12.4.1 During this time, County Durham transformed from a sparsely populated post-Roman landscape into a critical Anglo-Scandinavian religious, artistic, and defensive hub within the kingdom of Northumbria.

12.4.2 One of the greatest influences on the early Christian tradition was a former bishop of Lindisfarne, St. Cuthbert, the North's most revered and best loved saint. Cuthbert's story is inseparable from that of the founding of Durham City and County Durham. Cuthbert died in 687 AD and was buried on the island. His body remained there, miraculously uncorrupted, for two hundred years.

12.4.3 Increasingly frequent and severe attacks by the Vikings eventually brought about decline of the kingdom of Northumbria. In 875 AD the monks were forced to flee Lindisfarne, taking St. Cuthbert's coffin with them, settling in Chester-Le-Street (882 AD). Seeking a secure site, and according to legend the monks were told in a vision to take it to "Dun Holm" the 'hill on the island'. In 995 AD the monks built the "White Church" to shelter St. Cuthbert's body on the rocky peninsula of Durham, and this remained until it was replaced a century later by the new Norman cathedral.

Table 10: Early Medieval Heritage Assets in County Durham

Name	Description and Significance
Escomb Saxon Church Listed Building – Grade I	One of only three complete Anglo-Saxon churches remaining in Britain, dating back to the 7th century. The church was founded and built around AD 670–675, offering a rare and remarkable glimpse into early medieval architecture and life in England. Original Features: Many original Saxon features are still intact, including its stone walls, small windows, and a high, narrow chancel arch. Repurposed Roman Materials: The church was constructed using stones likely sourced from the nearby Roman fort at Binchester, including a stone inscribed with "LEG VI" (Sixth Legion) which is visible in the north wall. This demonstrates a unique link to the Roman past. Historic Artifacts: Notable internal and external features include a 7th or early 8th-century sundial on the south wall (believed to be the oldest in the country in its original position) and a 9th-century stone cross behind the altar. Architectural Style: The building features "Escomb Style" stonework and elements of early Christian architecture in Britain, offering valuable insight into the architectural practices of the time.

Name	Description and Significance
Legs Cross, Dere Street (Bolam) Scheduled Monument	Base and fragment of cross shaft. Probably C9. Sandstone. Rough, rectangular base about one metre high. Badly worn, tapering cross shaft, about 1.5 metres high, is said to have featured interlacing ornament at upper end of west face. Legs cross probably marked the subdivision of major Anglo-Saxon estate centred on Gainford village.
Deserted medieval village, moated site, and early medieval timber building at Castle Eden Scheduled Monument	The monument includes the remains of the medieval village of Castle Eden, a large moated site, and an early medieval timber building revealed by excavation in 1974. Excavation also uncovered an area of cultivation, thought to represent the remains of early fields in the area. An early medieval settlement at Castle Eden is mentioned in an 11th century document in which it is referred to as 'Iodene Australem'. The medieval complex at Castle Eden survives well as a series of buried features below the surface of the ground. The existence of an earlier medieval settlement, subsequently replaced by a nucleated village during the Middle Ages, adds to the importance of the monument

Figure 46: Escomb Saxon Church (Source: Alan Marsh - Historic England - National Heritage List for England)



12.5 Baseline Information: The Normans (Medieval)

12.5.1 In 1069, three years after landing in Britain, William the Conqueror finally subdued the North of England. William recognised the defensive potential of the rocky peninsula of Durham and a castle was founded there in 1072.

12.5.2 In 1093 work began on a magnificent cathedral to house the shrine of St. Cuthbert. The original rib vaulted church, and architectural innovation of great importance, took 40 years to build. Since then, the cathedral and St. Cuthbert's shrine have attracted pilgrims and travellers from around the world.

Table 11: Key Norman/Medieval Heritage Assets in County Durham

Name	Description and Significance
Durham Castle and Cathedral (UNESCO World Heritage Site)	Durham Cathedral was built between the late 11th and early 12th century to house the bodies of St. Cuthbert and the Venerable Bede. It attests to the importance of the early Benedictine monastic community and is the largest and finest example of Norman architecture in England. The innovative audacity of its vaulting foreshadowed Gothic architecture. The Cathedral lies within the precinct of Durham Castle, first constructed in the late eleventh century under the orders of William the Conqueror.

Name	Description and Significance
	Outstanding Universal Values: Architectural Significance (Criteria ii, iv): The Cathedral is deemed the most perfect, massive monument of "Norman" style in England. Its innovative 11th-century vaulting served as an experimental model that predated and influenced Gothic architecture. The adjacent castle features a rare 11th-century Norman Chapel. Historical and Cultural Significance (Criterion vi): The site is directly associated with the history of the Christian Church in England, specifically as the shrine of St. Cuthbert (evangelizer of Northumbria) and the Venerable Bede (father of English history). It also symbolizes the power of the Norman Conquest and the unique authority of the Prince-Bishops. Integrity and Continuity: The site has maintained 1,000 years of continuous use as a place of worship and learning. The dramatic, scenic, and fortified setting on the peninsula above the River Wear is maintained. Cultural Landscape: The site includes the Castle and Cathedral, the surrounding Palace Green, and medieval buildings, reflecting its role as a powerful, semi-autonomous spiritual and secular centre
Barnard Castle Listed Building: Grade I and Scheduled Ancient Monument	Barnard Castle is a medieval fortress dramatically overlooking the River Tees in County Durham. Its heritage reflects nearly a millennium of political intrigue, border conflict, architectural development, and noble ownership. • The castle was begun shortly after 1093 on a strategically important plateau controlling a major crossing of the River Tees • The first fortification was created by Guy de Balliol, a Norman knight rewarded with northern estates by William II. It began as a ringwork with timber buildings. • His nephew Bernard de Balliol expanded and rebuilt the site in stone, giving the castle and surrounding town their name ("Castrum Bernardi") • Major stone structures, including a magnificent round tower (c.1200), were constructed during continued Balliol family ownership. • The castle successfully resisted attack by Alexander II of Scotland in 1216, highlighting its strategic importance on the Anglo-Scottish frontier Surviving highlights include: • The 12th-century round tower • The Great Hall and Great Chamber

Name	Description and Significance
	Remains of the medieval chapel of St. Margaret
Battle of Neville's Cross (1346) Battlefield	The Battle of Neville's Cross was a major Medieval battle, fought on October 17th, 1346. It was a key conflict in the Second War of Scottish Independence and the Hundred Years' War, where an English force defeated a Scottish army, resulting in the capture of King David II. A Scottish army of roughly 12,000 was defeated by a smaller English force (approx. 6,000 – 7,000) led by Ralph Neville. Neville's Cross was a shattering defeat for the Scots. When, the next year, the English followed up on their victory, they were able to occupy virtually all of Scotland south of the Forth and Clyde rivers. It took a century for the Scots to recover all that they had lost. Only the western side of the battlefield remains undeveloped, but it has been enclosed and improved since 1346, when it was rough grazing land. Contemporary accounts tell of ditches criss-crossing the western area, perhaps marking the boundary of Beaurepaire, or Bearpark. It was only in the last century that buildings and the railway encroached upon the battlefield area.
Crook Hall Listed Building: Grade I	Crook Hall, in Durham City, is a Grade I listed, 14th-century manor house significant as a rare example of a medieval open hall, evolving over centuries into a mix of Jacobean and Georgian architecture. Key medieval features include: - Two cusped ogee-headed lancet windows - A garderobe tower - Thick sandstone wall construction - Early roof trusses that may date to the 16th century These elements provide important evidence of medieval domestic life and building practices.
Raby Castle Listed Building: Grade I	Raby Castle in County Durham is a premier 14th-century fortress, historically significant as the seat of the powerful Neville family and a centre of the failed 1569 "Rising of the North". It is renowned for its intact medieval architecture, including the Baron's Hall and a 14th-century kitchen, alongside its later role as a Parliamentary stronghold during the Civil War. - The core of the castle dates from the early to mid-14th century, with a licence to crenellate granted in 1379. - Its extensive curtain walls, nine perimeter towers (each retains significant medieval masonry, openings, and defensive design (e.g., loops, crenellations) great hall, kitchen, and keep (with 8-foot-thick walls, garderobes, wall chambers, original window openings, and vaulted ceilings) represent a remarkably complete medieval defensive complex.

Name	Description and Significance
	The castle preserves significant medieval interiors, including the kitchen (probably by John Lewyn), keep, and service hall, offering insights into great household life in the later Middle Ages.

Figure 47: Durham Cathedral (Source: Stan Laundon - Historic England - National Heritage List for England)



Figure 48: Raby Castle (Source: Alan Marsh - Historic England - National Heritage List for England)



12.6 Baseline Information: The Prince Bishops

12.6.1 For many years the Prince Bishops of Durham held ecclesiastical and political sovereignty over the palatinate of Durham - the area between the rivers Tyne and

Tees, together with land in Northumberland and Yorkshire. Their influences touched all aspects of County Durham life.

12.6.2 In Norman times the king, recognising the power and prestige already held by Durham's Bishops, conferred on them a special blend of civil and religious authority. In all but name they were kings, a strong political force designed to deter Scottish incursions into England's border country. The Prince Bishops had their own armies, minted their own coins, levied their own taxes and had their own courts. The Bishops' principal seat was at the castle at Durham, although their country residence was at Bishop Auckland. From Norman times onwards, local lords built additional castles throughout the county.

12.6.3 After the Medieval period, the Prince Bishops' power gradually declined. In 1536 Henry VIII drastically curtailed their independence, withdrawing much of their secular authority. The Palatinate Courts survived until 1971.

12.6.4 Key Medieval sites in County Durham include Auckland Castle, Barnard Castle, Bowes Castle, Crook Hall and Gardens, Croxdale Hall, Egglestone Abbey, Raby Castle, St Andrew's Church, St. Helen's church in West Auckland, and St. Mary's Church. Although many of the castles were originally motte and baileys, they were soon expanded, and many grew to be extremely large and well-protected strongholds, such as Raby Castle.

Table 12: Auckland Castle

Name	Description and Significance
Auckland Castle Listed Building: Grade I	Auckland Castle (now Auckland Palace) in County Durham, England, holds immense historical significance as the 900-year seat of the powerful Prince Bishops of Durham, who governed the region with quasi-royal authority. It is a premier site of ecclesiastical power, renowned for its 17th-century chapel, Zurbarán paintings, and ongoing role in regional regeneration as a cultural, art, and faith destination. The building demonstrates continuous architectural evolution from the 12th century to the late 20th century, including: • Medieval manor house origins with great hall and kitchen range. • 14th-century upgrades associated with Bishop Bek. • 16th-century additions, including a long gallery (Scotland Wing). • 17th-century reconstruction under Bishop Cosin (1664). • 18th-century transformation of state rooms and domestic areas. • 20th-century adaptations, including 1980s mezzanine insertions. This unusually deep chronological layering makes the building an important case study in the changing nature of elite ecclesiastical domestic architecture.

Name	Description and Significance
	Important medieval survivors include: • The medieval great hall, now the Chapel of St Peter. • Blocked splayed medieval windows in the private apartments. • Medieval pointed arch, garderobe chamber, and stone piers in the former kitchen range. • Deeply chamfered medieval doors and a late-15th-century door with inscription. • Evidence of early structure within the Scotland Wing.

Figure 48: Auckland Castle (Source: Robert Walton - Historic England - National Heritage List for England)



12.7 Baseline Information: The Industrial Revolution

12.7.1 From the 17th century onwards, farming techniques improved and agricultural production increased. The face of the countryside started to change as land was progressively enclosed. Where previously landowners had signalled their powers with the defensive might of their castles, they now demonstrated their wealth through attractive country houses, with the emphasis on comfort, not protection. Gradually, as standards of living improved, better housing became generally more widespread and fashionable. Many of the towns and villages started to take the form we know today - an attractive blend of simple but elegant buildings, often around the market place or village green.

12.7.2 In the 18th century, Northern England was a world leader in industrial innovation and enterprise and County Durham was at the forefront of these dramatic changes. The

county's industrial development was based on coal and iron. Coal was first worked in the shallower seams of West Durham, and shafts were later sunk to reach the deeper seams. Mining communities rapidly developed across the coalfields, which at its peak in 1913 had over 200 working pits.

12.7.3 The need to carry coal to markets led to major innovations in transport. Early wooden wagonways and horse-drawn wagons were replaced by iron rails and stationary steam engines and, finally, by steam locomotives. Railway pioneers included renowned engineers such as George Stephenson and Timothy Hackworth. Both helped to develop the Stockton and Darlington Railway, the world's first public passenger steam railway, which was open in 1825. The region became known as 'the cradle of railways' and developments pioneered here revolutionised transport throughout the world.

12.7.4 With its coal and ironstone, County Durham quickly developed an important iron and steel industry. Innovative techniques, developed in the Derwent valley, helped place County Durham at the centre of British steel making. By the mid 19th century the county had nearly 60 ironworks and blast furnaces which made a major contribution to the region's growing ship-building and engineering industry. Lead was mined in the Durham dales and numerous lead mines and processing plants were scattered throughout the rugged landscape. By Victorian times the North Pennines was the world's leading lead ore field.

Table 13: Key Industrial Heritage Assets in County Durham

Name	Description and Significance
Stockton and Darlington Railway Route (Shildon area – 'the cradle of the railways')	Numerous listed structures related to the world's first steam-locomotive railway. Soho House – Grade II* House, early C19, built for Timothy Hackworth, the pioneering engineer of early steam locomotives who played a significant role in the early success and international influence of the Stockton & Darlington Railway. Soho House forms part of a terrace of railway workers' housing which is amongst the earliest built anywhere in the world. Route alongside the River Gaunless – Scheduled Monument Standing, earthwork and buried remains forming most of the level section of George Stephenson's 1825 main line for the Stockton & Darlington Railway between the Etherley and Brusselton Inclines, including a short sample section of the 1856 Tunnel Branch. This part being of particular note because it was the principal section that was entirely hauled by horses; * Survival: particularly notable for the Hummer Beck Bridge, considered to be the best-surviving, least-altered representative example of the masonry bridges designed for the line by George Stephenson.

Name	Description and Significance
	* Rarity: retaining the abutments of Stephenson’s innovative iron bridge over the River Gaunless, the iron structure being preserved in the collection of the National Railway Museum. Railway lineside cabins known as Black Boy Stables – Grade II A group of four line side or plate layers' cabins sited at the junction of the original main line of the Stockton & Darlington Railway with two of its early branch lines, one cabin thought to pre-date 1839, potentially being a proto-signal box. Designated as: * nationally rare surviving examples of once very common lineside structures that were highly characteristic of C19 railways, these also being early examples; * Castle Cabin (the easternmost of the group of cabins) may be a proto-signal box, used by staff who oversaw the operation of the junction between the main line and the two branch lines before the development of the classic signal box from the 1860s.
Park Level Mine Jigger House and Crushing Mill Water Wheel (Killhope Lead Mining Museum) Listed Building – Grade II*	Jigger house and crushing mill water wheel. 1870. Restored circa 1980. Coursed rubble with ashlar dressings; quoins to wheel substructure; Welsh slate roof. Jigger house one storey, 6 bays. Blank north elevation save for 2 boarded doors under stone lintels; to right stone walls support the wooden frame for the 34 ft. diameter iron wheel; an arch allowed the water to drain away from the overshot wheel. South elevation has shuttered windows and boarded door and overlight, and small square vents below most windows.

Figure 49: Killhope Lead Mining Museum (Source: P Hampel- Historic England - National Heritage List for England)



12.8 Baseline Information: 20th Century

12.8.1 The 20th century was a period of dramatic industrial, social and economic change in County Durham. In addition to World Wars I and II, the century was shaped by the dominance and later decline of the coal mining industry, alongside wider shifts in labour, community life and economic restructuring.

12.8.2 At the start of the century (1900-1930s), County Durham was one of Britain's most important coalfield. Coal production peaked in 1913, with 170,000 miners working across the county, creating a dense landscape of colliery villages and mining communities. By 1923, the coal industry remained dominant and had a profound influence on public health, housing and the development of trade unionism, especially the powerful Durham Miners Association (DMA).

12.8.3 During the interwar period (1920s – 1940s) the influence of miners continued into labour politics and national social reforms. Many advances in labour law, safety regulations and minimum wages came from industrial disputes involving Durham miners. The DMA played a significant role in strengthening the wider trade union movement and supported the rise of the Labour party which first entered Government after WWI. During this period, the mining industry was still central to the county's identity, though early signs of pit exhaustion were emerging.

12.8.4 After the Second World War, the changes accelerated. In 1947, the coal industry was nationalised, becoming part of the National Coal Board. The town of Peterell was established in 1948 to provide modern housing and improved living conditions for coal mining communities living in poor quality accommodation across East Durham. Newton Aycliffe was also built to serve as a model post-war town, promoting modern

social planning. However, from the 1950s to 1960s, many coal mines closed due to lack of profitability and exhausted seams. Despite closures, coal mining continued to sustain the local economy, and miners were relatively well paid, spending wages in local shops, services and social clubs.

12.8.5 The late 20th century (1980s-1990s) was marked by major clashes and the end of deep coal mining. The Miners' Strike took place in 1984-85 as Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher sought to close subsidy reliant, unprofitable pits and break the political power of the Unions. Large-scale closures followed the strike, with the last deep colliery (Easington Colliery) in County Durham closing in 1993. The decline devastated many communities, prompting regeneration efforts and major shifts towards service-based and education driven sectors.

12.8.6 As mining declined, local organisations, museums and archives took on the work of preserving the county's industrial story, with sites such as the Beamish Museum and the Durham Mining Museum helping to interpret the life and labour of the county.

Table 14: Key 20th Century Heritage Assets in County Durham

Name	Description and Significance
Miners Hall, Redhills, Durham City Listed Building: Grade II	Durham Miners' Hall represents the peak of 20th century trade union power and working class democracy in the UK. As the former home of the Durham Miners' Association, it houses the 'Pitman's Parliament,' where delegates once directed the largest coalfield in the world. Key aspects of its heritage included: • The Pitman's Parliament: A unique, 297-seat, Edwardian Baroque chamber designed for democratic debate by miners. • Symbol of Power: Built using funds from 200,000 miners' subscriptions to demonstrate the economic and political power of working-class people. • Social Reform Legacy: The Durham Miners' Association used this site to pioneer early welfare, including care for the aged, healthcare, and education. • Cultural Hub: It serves as a central symbol of the Durham Miners' Gala (the "Big Meeting"). Recognised by Historic England as one of the nation's top ten landmarks for "power, protest, and progress", it is considered the finest trade union building in Europe
Gainford War Memorial Grade II Listed	Gainford War Memorial, which stands in the churchyard of the church of St Mary, is listed at Grade II for the following principal reasons: • Historic interest: as an eloquent witness to the tragic impact of world events on this local community, and the sacrifice it has made in the conflicts of the C20; • Architectural interest: a richly ornamented cross in the early-medieval style;

Name	Description and Significance
	Group value: with the church of St Mary (Grade I) and other Grade II-listed structures including 27 and 28 Low Green.
Pasmore Pavillion, Peterlee Grade II* Listed	A mid C20 public open space designed by Victor Pasmore as part of the Sunny Blunts residential development within the New Town of Peterlee. The focal point is the Pasmore Pavilion sculpture, designed by Pasmore in 1963 and erected in 1968. The Pasmore Pavilion, originally known as the Apollo Pavilion, stands towards the east end of the site. In Brutalist style, of two stories in reinforced concrete, it is constructed so as to cantilever over the lake to the west. The upper storey is designed to serve both as a bridge over the lake and as a roof for the main circuit footpath. The original steps at the north and south ends of the Pavilion which led to the upper storey have been removed. Pasmore designed the Pavilion to accompany the lake so that together they would form a visual and pedestrian centre for the housing area in Sunny Blunts; also to symbolise architecturally the idea of a modern New Town. The monumental sculpture served as an eyecatcher and as a visual link to the road bridge to the west, with the dammed stream serving to enhance the prospect.

Figure 50: Miners Hall, Redhills (Source: National Heritage List for England)



Historic England Archive: aa93_00983

12.9 Baseline Information: Durham Heritage Coast

12.9.1 Whilst a landscape designation, the Durham Heritage Coast is recognised for its cultural and historic significance. The Durham Heritage Coast contains cultural layers

from the Iron Age to World War defences, alongside its deep industrial heritage, giving it a distinct identity, worthy of protection.

12.9.2 Designated heritage assets falling within the Durham Heritage Coast include Hawthorne Dene Viaduct and Crimdon Farmhouse and attached farm building. Both of which are Grade II listed. There are no Scheduled Ancient Monuments, although Yoden mediaeval settlements and Dalden Tower are nearby.

12.9.3 Key World War Two era structures include a Vickers machine gun pillbox at Blast Beach near Seaham, another near the coastal path at Easington Colliery, and a pillbox at Hawthorn Hive

12.10 Baseline Information: Overview of Heritage Assets

12.10.1 In summary the county includes:

- 1 UNESCO World Heritage Site – Durham Castle and Cathedral
- 1 Registered Historic Battlefield - The Battlefield of Neville's Cross on the edge of Durham City. Neville's Cross was the scene in 1346 of a battle between David II of Scotland and the English forces of King Edward III. Much of the area of the battlefield has been developed over the centuries but a significant amount is open and protected from most types of development by the North Durham Green Belt.
- Over 3,000 listed buildings - The greatest number of listed buildings in the County belongs to the 18th and early 19th centuries
- 292 Scheduled Monuments
- 93 Conservation Areas – 36% have a conservation management plan in place
- 18 Registered Parks and Gardens within or partially within County Durham – the county is rich in historic park and gardens, particularly along the wooded valley of the River Wear and in the upland fringes. Some parks are of medieval origins (mainly deer parks), others designed landscapes surround country houses constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Historic Parklands are of great scenic value and are a living record of the evolving aesthetics of English landscape design. Some of the County's historic parklands are designated as Conservation Areas and many provide a setting for Listed Buildings.
- Numerous non-designated heritage assets. Durham County Council's Keys to the Past website, (an edited version of the HER) identifies 522 locally listed heritage assets.

12.11 Baseline Information: Supporting Tourism and the Local Economy

12.11.1 County Durham's cultural heritage, including its historic sites, museums, landscapes and cultural institutions are also a major driver of the county's visitor economy. According to the County Durham Visitor Economy 2024 report, many of the top twenty attractions are heritage based as set out in the following table³⁵:

³⁵ [Visit County Durham \(2024\) County Durham's Visitor Economy](#)

Table 15: Visitor Numbers to Cultural Heritage Assets in 2024

Asset	Visitor Numbers
Beamish Museum	801,756 (most visited of all attraction types in County Durham)
Durham Cathedral	373,165
Locomotion	125,014
Palace Green Library	110,560
Raby Castle	103,310
Ushaw College	74,347
The Bowes Museum	63,587
Crook Hall and Gardens	52,000
The Auckland Project	41,603
Durham Castle	30,785
Barnard Castle	23,442
Durham Town Hall	22,765
Killhope Lead Mining Museum	18,347
Oriental Museum	15,865

12.11.2 Recent investment in heritage sites has been credited with boosting the visitor economy further. Visit County Durham's updates show that major developments have significantly strengthened the county's tourism profile and appeal. These heritage led improvements are identified as key factors behind rising visitor numbers and economic performance.³⁶ They include:

- Raby Castle's 'The Rising' redevelopment
- Locomotion's New Hall expansions
- New experiences at Beamish Museum
- Growth of the Auckland Project

12.12 Baseline Information: Heritage at Risk

12.12.1 Seventeen listed buildings (0.5%) in County Durham were included on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register in 2025, showing a slight decrease from nineteen in 2015. The highest proportion of listed buildings are categorised as Grade II* and predominantly comprise church buildings, county houses and farm buildings.

12.12.2 Five Conservation areas (5%) were included on the heritage at risk register in 2025, which is a decrease from ten in 2015. However, of these five, only one conservation area (Bishop Auckland) has been identified as improving significantly.

12.12.3 Twenty three Scheduled Monuments (8%) were at risk in 2025. Four assets relating to the county's railway heritage were removed in this year. There are a greater number of scheduled monuments on the register than other heritage types in the

³⁶ [Visit County Durham Partner Update June 2025.pdf](#)

county but numbers have decreased slightly since 2015 when thirty scheduled monuments were on the register.

12.12.4 Only one Registered Park and Garden was on the register in 2025 which was also the only registered park and garden on the register in 2015. Grade II* Croxdale Hall, Croxdale and Hett Registered Park and Garden has been identified as declining since 2015.

12.12.5 It is assumed that further removals from the at-risk register will occur where assets have been assigned one of the following priority categories in the Heritage at Risk 2025 Entries spreadsheet:

- B – Action / strategy agreed but not yet implemented (where trend is declining or unknown)
- D – Slow decay; solution agreed but not yet implemented
- E – Under repair or in fair to good repair, but no user identified; or under threat of vacancy with no obvious new owner
- F – Action implemented / strategy underway/scheme in progress

12.12.6 There are 23 heritage assets at risk in County Durham assigned with these priority categories including, 2 Conservation Areas, 14 Scheduled Monuments, 2 Grade I listed buildings, 3 Grade II* listed buildings and 2 Grade II listed buildings.

Key Issues

12.12.7 County Durham's heritage forms a key part of the county's unique character and identity. Furthermore, it helps to attract tourism, boosts the local economy and provides valuable educational resources for understanding the county's rich history.

12.12.8 Whilst a relatively low proportion of the county's heritage is on the Heritage at Risk register, all heritage assets, including historic landscapes such as Durham Heritage Coast are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

13. Key Environmental Issues

14.1.1 Following the identification of environmental objectives from relevant plans and programmes (stage A1) and collection and analysis of environmental baseline information (stage A2) it is possible to identify key environmental issues for County Durham. This feeds into the development of the SEA objectives and Framework which helps to focus the assessment. The key environmental issues are as follows:

13.1 Population

- Whilst a higher proportion of the county's population live in urban areas, the county has high levels of rurality. The Plan should ensure that new development contributes to supporting and improving the sustainability of rural areas and the rural economy.
- The predicted decrease in children and low growth in the working age population could have a negative effect on County Durham's economy.
- The changing age structure would suggest a significant increase in households of pensionable age and a greater need for older persons housing, along with healthcare and social services provision.
- High levels of deprivation, inequality and poverty is a persistent issue in County Durham that has a knock-on effect on quality of life and socio-economic outcomes.
- There are increasing numbers of children living in relative and absolute poverty in the county and higher numbers than the regional and national average. The gap between the region and England is also widening.
- County Durham's economic productivity had increased more slowly than the regional average and much more slowly than the national average, so that the gap between the county and national productivity has widened.
- County Durham's rate of unemployment is consistently higher than the national rate. Economic inactivity levels are mainly driven by long-term health conditions.
- The County has an overreliance on employee jobs in the public sector and hospitality
- Significantly lower average wages than England and the gap is widening. Lower average earnings results in less disposable income to meet needs and support the local economy.
- County Durham has a higher percentage of residents without qualifications than the region or nation and a lower level of higher educational attainment.
- The percentage of pupils passing English and Maths at GCSE level falls below the regional and national average and is getting worse
- Over the last five years, special educational needs identified amongst school aged children have increased by a third in the county. This rate of increase is significantly higher than the regional and national average.
- County Durham has an increasing crime rate and a crime rate that is higher than the national average.
- County Durham has significantly higher crime rates in all offence types than England and Wales and surpasses the region slightly in levels of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage.
- The rate of violence and sexual offences locally is more than double the rate of anti-social behaviour.
- Whilst reducing, the number of children killed or seriously injured in road casualties in County Durham is higher than the regional and national average.

13.2 Health

- Male and female life expectancy in County Durham is significantly below the national average and female life expectancy is also below that of the region

- For males, life expectancy is 10.2 years lower in the most deprived areas of County Durham and 8.8 years lower in women.
- Obesity prevalence in adults and children in County Durham is significantly worse than the national average
- Whilst the percentage of physically active adults is similar to regional and national figures, the percentage of physically active children and young people is below regional and national figures.
- High levels of need within the county are indicated in terms of proximity to local, publicly accessible greenspace, particularly outside of coastal communities and the rural west.
- Well-designed places including good transport, housing, education, access to healthy food, social regeneration, education, leisure and greenspace provision and jobs should contribute to improving health outcomes. This includes options for children's play, active transport, co-location of facilities/walkable neighbourhoods and multifunctional open spaces.

13.3 Biodiversity

- Whilst large parts of the county are designated for their international, national and local ecological and/or geological importance, declines in habitats and species are occurring which are broadly comparable to the national picture.

13.4 Landscapes

- County Durham has nationally valued and some of the most attractive and varied landscapes in the North East. A large area within the West of the county forms part of the North Pennines National Landscape. However, outside of nationally protected areas, the landscape changes that are occurring are mainly exhibiting a declining trend.

13.5 Soil

- Whilst an improving picture, there are significant areas of land potentially affected by contamination in County Durham due to its mining and industrial heritage. Leachate from this land poses a wider environmental risk.
- There is a lack of data on the percentage of development built on brownfield /previously developed land in the County which should be addressed by the new Plan and its monitoring indicators.
- The upland areas of the Pennines generally have very poor agricultural land quality, but the Tees and Wear Lowlands have pockets of very good quality, and much of the eastern part of the county has good land quality. The best and most versatile agricultural land should be protected.

13.6 Water

- County Durham's surface and groundwater quality is not achieving good status with the Wear Catchment and Wear Carboniferous Limestone and Coal Measures groundwater body being in a particularly poor condition.

- Water consumption is 14 litres per person per day higher than the national average and whilst leakage across Northumbrian Water's network has reduced by 15% there is a long way to go to meet the 55% reduction target by 2050.
- The Plan will need to take full account of the risk of drought to water capacity and availability over the Plan period and ensure that measures are identified and implemented which minimise risk.

13.7 Air

- Air Quality is good in the county except for Durham City which exceeds national objectives for concentrations of nitrogen dioxide, with the primary source being from road vehicle exhaust emissions.

13.8 Climate

- The county needs to be ready for and resilient to the predicted impacts of climate change at the local level.
- Overall, good progress has been made on reducing County Durham's greenhouse gas emissions to date. The Plan will need to support further reductions and could contribute towards reductions in the transport and domestic sectors specifically, which make up the greater proportion of County Durham's carbon footprint. Transport emissions have not reduced much over the years and reductions could support air quality and health.

13.9 Material Assets

Energy

- Overall energy demand in County Durham has been decreasing over time particularly in the domestic sector. This trend is likely to continue.
- Energy use for heating and transport is likely to shift from fossil fuels to electricity produced from low carbon sources.
- The amount of renewable energy and storage required to meet national ambitions is likely to increase and there is likely to be an increase in demand for both on-site and grid connected developments in the county. The scale of the regional requirement is being led by Northern Powergrid. However, please note that national planning policy (the NPPF) does not currently require applicants to demonstrate the overall need for renewable or low carbon energy.
- Growth in large scale generation will be partly influenced by the location of sub stations, customers and geography.

Minerals

- County Durham's mine water and geothermal potential provides a unique opportunity to develop heat networks that could heat new homes, community buildings and businesses. The use of mine water heat from former coal mines also helps to leverage and honour County Durham's mining legacy. Potentially suitable

locations for heat networks have been identified in East Durham, Durham City and Newton Aycliffe.

- County Durham is a regionally important producer of minerals. Further provision will need to be made over the Plan period for sand and gravel and crushed rock to maintain steady and adequate supplies. Many social and environmental constraints will need to be considered when determining which sites to allocate in the Plan, including sustainable water use and ensuring continued water availability.

Waste

- There has been little overall change in the total volumes of waste originating within the county but some increase in imports over the years. The capacity of waste management facilities for inert and non-hazardous landfill void space is declining in County Durham and the region. There is also currently a lack of capacity for major residual waste treatment capacity in the northeast.
- Whilst reducing, the amount of household waste collected per person in County Durham is significantly higher than the national average.
- County Durham's household waste recycling rates, whilst better than the regional average are yet to recover to pre-Covid levels and have reduced more than the national rate. At 36.7% in 2023/24 there is also much improvement needed to meet the Government ambition of 65% by 2035.

Transport

- County Durham has a well-established PROW of way network which includes national walking and cycling trails. The impact of new development on this network will need to be taken into account.
- Car ownership and choosing a car or van to travel to work is increasing in County Durham (although counteracted to some extent by an almost equivalent increase in home working and increase in ULEVs)
- The county exhibits low and very little changes to the percentage of people choosing to cycle or use the bus or train to get to work
- The county exhibits good levels of overall self-containment (live and work within the county). Durham City potentially continues to fulfil a role as a key commuting destination for internal and inward commuting trips. However, increasing levels of vehicle miles travelled overall in the county.
- Petrol and diesel cars contribute to the highest levels of fuel consumption within the county by vehicle type.
- Use of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles are increasing but may not be keeping pace with ChargePoint installations

Housing

- The number of net additional homes completed in the county has dropped notably compared to previous years, although delivery is expected to improve in future years and be more akin with previous years which have averaged 1,500 net dwellings per

year. However, the new Plan is expected to include a target of 2,011 net additional homes per year, which will require performance to improve further on past, average delivery.

- Housing continues to be more affordable in County Durham, than the region and for England. However, affordable housing delivery remains significantly below identified needs.
- County Durham's older person population is projected to increase substantially and the supply of adaptable and specific older persons housing may need to increase over and above existing targets.
- High proportion of older properties and less than half (47%) of County Durham's existing housing stock has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of 'C' or above.
- Consistently higher percentages of long term vacant dwellings compared to the regional and national picture.

13.10 Cultural Heritage

- County Durham has a wealth of important heritage assets that contribute to its unique identity and sense of place. Whilst a relatively low proportion are on the Heritage At Risk Register, all heritage assets, including historic landscapes such as Durham Heritage Coast are an irreplaceable resource and should be conserved in a manner appropriate to their significance.

14. Appraisal Framework

14.1.1 Following the scoping of existing plans and programmes and considering the key environmental issues identified from the analysis of the baseline position, a set of draft objectives have been prepared as part of the appraisal framework and are presented below.

14.1.2 The appraisal framework provides the means to effectively appraise proposals and policies within the Plan and their likely effects. For each objective, decision making questions are included which will be used as a prompt to help consider how well a proposal contributes towards achieving the objectives. They are not intended to be a definitive list. The decision-making questions are also often cross cutting and can relate to several objectives.

14.1.3 Please also note that the framework has been informed by comments received from the Environment Agency, Historic England and Natural England on the 2025 Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report and its SA Framework.

Table 16: Appraisal Framework

SEA Topic	Objective	Decision making questions. Will the Plan...?
Population	1. To create strong, connected, safe and thriving communities	• Help those on lower incomes? • Contribute towards regeneration initiatives or benefit areas with higher levels of deprivation? • Support and sustain rural communities? • Protect and improve community facilities, local centres and contribute towards community cohesion? • Create and maintain safe, welcoming environments? • Deter / prevent crime e.g. through secured by design? • Reduce the adverse impacts of traffic on communities? • Encourage community involvement in local decision making? • Help cater for the needs of an ageing population? • Encourage young people to stay in the county? • Improve access to education and training opportunities? • Provide new employment opportunities?
Human Health	2. To reduce health inequalities and improve the physical and mental health and wellbeing of all	• Promote an increase in physical activity? • Improve access to healthcare, community and leisure services? • Contribute to the achievement of active and healthy places through green infrastructure provision? • Support access to healthy and affordable food? • Prevent and reduce environment related health risks e.g. urban heat stress, noise pollution, poor air quality etc?
Contributes to all SEA topics	3. To protect and increase good green infrastructure	• Promote the retention and creation of high-quality green infrastructure? • Address inequalities in access to green infrastructure and connect people with nature? • Provide a variety of well connected green infrastructure types and sizes that provide multiple benefits? • Ensure that green infrastructure responds positively to landscape and townscape

SEA Topic	Objective	Decision making questions. Will the Plan...?
		character and is safe, welcoming and accessible for all?
Material Assets and Population	4. To ensure the built environment meets County Durham's housing and economic needs.	• Contribute to addressing the housing needs of the county e.g. affordable, older persons etc? • Support the provision of a mix of housing types, sizes and tenures? • Site new housing in deliverable locations linked to identified need? • Decrease the number of unfit and vacant homes? • Improve energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty? • Support the provision of infrastructure needed for growth? • Improve the vitality and viability of our town centres? • Safeguard or create new economic development opportunities? • Provide sufficient employment land and high-quality sites to meet forecasted requirements? • Increase the quantity or quality of educational and training facilities?
Material Assets	5. To reduce the need to travel and promote use of sustainable transport	• Reduce the need to travel (e.g. by ensuring needs are met locally or through digital infrastructure)? • Help people to access jobs, services and community facilities easily? • Protect / increase the range of shops services, amenities and employment opportunities locally? • Encourage opportunities for sustainable modes of transport (e.g. walking, cycling and public transport)? • Ensure permeability and ease of movement within new neighbourhoods? • Ensure development is served by an appropriate level of transport infrastructure including public and sustainable transport networks and electric vehicle charging? • Move freight from road to rail/sea? • Protect and enhance the integrity of the Public Rights of Way network and national walking and cycling trails?

SEA Topic	Objective	Decision making questions. Will the Plan...?
Air	6. To protect and improve local air quality and reduce the potential for negative effects on human health and the environment	• Protect air quality where it is good? • Contribute to alleviating the causes of poor air quality in Durham City? • Contribute to improving or maintaining air quality, particularly on designated sites where the critical load for pollutants has already been exceeded?
Water	7. To protect and improve water resources	• Protect, maintain and improve surface & groundwater quality or the physical integrity of aquifers? • Address historic sources of water pollution and prevent pollution from new sources? • Contribute to the maintenance of good and excellent quality bathing water? • Reduce the amount of water consumed and improve water efficiency? • Ensure sufficient water infrastructure is in place to serve new development? • Reduce surface water run off encourage the appropriate use of sustainable drainage systems (SuDS)? • Encourage and increase rainwater harvesting in the county? • Encourage and increase green roofs and walls on buildings?
Soil	8. To protect and improve soil resources	• Improve areas of historic land contamination and prevent contamination to new areas? • Encourage the location of development on previously developed land of low ecological value? • Avoid the permanent loss of best and most versatile agricultural land? • Promote good soil management in land reclamation?
Climatic Factors	9. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the use of finite resources	• Protect, improve and increase nature-based solutions e.g. trees and woodlands, peatlands, green infrastructure etc? • Reduce the demand for energy or increase the energy efficiency of homes, businesses, industry and transport? • Support the development and wider use of renewable energy in appropriate locations? • Support the development of heat networks? • Minimise and reduce emissions that contribute to climate change?

SEA Topic	Objective	Decision making questions. Will the Plan...?
Climatic Factors	10. To help the county adapt to and be resilient to changing climatic conditions	• Minimise the risk of/ from flooding, drought, coastal erosion or wildfires? • Discourage inappropriate development in areas at risk from flooding? • Ensure that new development does not give rise to flood risk elsewhere? • Help to cope with climate extremes, e.g. design of buildings and urban areas? • Protect water infrastructure and encourage water efficiency? • Protect community buildings which can serve as emergency hubs during extreme weather events / power loss?
Biodiversity, flora and fauna	11. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity	• Contribute toward nature recovery and the delivery of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy? • Ensure net gains in biodiversity are achieved • Protect or enhance SACs, SPAs and Ramsar sites? • Protect or enhance nationally designated wildlife/ geological sites and protected species e.g. SSSIs and National Nature Reserves? • Protect or enhance UK and Durham Biodiversity Action Plan priority habitats and species? • Protect or enhance other areas of local importance for biodiversity or geodiversity e.g. Local Nature Reserves, ancient woodland etc? • Prevent deterioration and fragmentation of habitat and establish, enhance and maintain sustainable habitat networks (e.g. through promoting green roofs etc)? • Create new areas or sites of biodiversity/ geodiversity value? • Improve sustainable access to or understanding of local biodiversity/ geodiversity resources? • Encourage native species and protect against the introduction or spread of invasive non-native species? • Maintain a 30 metre ecological buffer zone between watercourses and the development site?

SEA Topic	Objective	Decision making questions. Will the Plan...?
		• Provide opportunities to increase the extent of wetted areas and de-culverting?
Landscape	12. To protect and enhance landscape character and quality	• Protect and enhance designated landscape areas (i.e. North Pennines National Landscape, Durham Heritage Coast) recognising their special qualities? • Contribute to the Environmental Opportunities identified for each National Character Area and opportunities to enhance identified in County Durham's Landscape Strategy? • Protect and enhance local landscape character and quality and locally valued landscapes? • Protect and maintain the openness of the green belt? • Maintain strategic countryside gaps and prevent settlement coalescence and ribbon development? • Ensure that new development reflects the distinctive character and appearance of the local area? • Encourage good quality design in new development? • Protect and improve the quality of public areas / discourage fly tipping and litter? • Help regenerate degraded built environments? • Contribute to the protection of important landscape features including trees, hedgerows, ancient woodland and field patterns? • Contribute to maintaining dark skies?
Cultural heritage	13. To protect and enhance cultural heritage and the historic environment	• Contribute to the protection of Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site, its Outstanding Universal Values, setting and pilgrimage routes? • Preserve, conserve and enhance the heritage significance of designated (i.e. listed buildings, conservation areas registered historic battlefields, registered parks and gardens, scheduled monuments) and non-designated heritage assets? • Provide opportunities to better reveal the significance of heritage assets

SEA Topic	Objective	Decision making questions. Will the Plan...?
		• Reduce the number of heritage assets at risk? • Promote the maintenance, sensitive adaptation and re-use of buildings? • Ensure the recording and appropriate protection of undiscovered archaeological features in areas of potential development? • Promote opportunities for furthering the understanding and enjoyment of the historic environment and wider cultural heritage?
Material Assets	14. To reduce waste and encourage the sustainable and efficient use of materials	• Move the management of waste up the waste hierarchy i.e. prioritise waste reduction, reus, recycling and recovery? • Help residents to increase the recycling of their household waste? • Encourage the use of recycled/reused and secondary materials? • Promote the maintenance, sensitive adaptation and re-use of buildings? • Provide sufficient waste management capacity to deal with waste arisings? • Reduce any adverse impacts of waste management facilities to acceptable levels?
Material Assets	15. To improve the sustainability of minerals extraction and use	• Ensure the efficient use of mineral resources? • Encourage the use of secondary aggregates and materials? • Avoid the sterilisation of economically important minerals resources? • Reduce any adverse impacts of minerals extraction, processing and transportation to acceptable levels? • Reduce the energy used in minerals extraction, processing and transport? • Promote good practice in land reclamation having regard to sustainable after use appropriate to the locality?

14.1.4 Over 800 sites have been submitted to the Council to be considered as potential housing allocations in the Plan. Due to the volume of sites and specific factors that can be considered when determining the environmental effects of housing, a tailored assessment will be undertaken. This assessment will collate individual assessments that are being undertaken by specialists and will also be informed by a digital software tool called Place Maker which the Council is using to help assess the

suitability of housing sites. The tool helps to show how each site relates to different constraints, including environmental ones.

14.1.5 The environmental factors that will be included as part of the tailored housing site assessment are tabled as follows:

Table 17: Housing Site Assessment

Environmental Factor	Source
Archaeological potential	Internal - Archaeology team
Conservation Areas	Internal – Design and Conservation team
Listed buildings	Internal – Design and Conservation team
Scheduled monuments	Internal – Design and Conservation team
Durham Castle and Cathedral World Heritage Site	Internal – Design and Conservation team
Battlefields	Internal – Design and Conservation team
Historic Parks and Gardens	Internal – Design and Conservation team
Non designated heritage assets	Internal – Design and Conservation team
Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)	Internal – Ecology team
National Nature Reserves	Internal – Ecology team
Irreplaceable Habitat (ancient semi-natural woodland)	Internal – Ecology team
Local Wildlife Sites	Internal – Ecology team
Local Nature Reserves	Internal – Ecology team
Habitat of Principle Importance	Internal – Ecology team
Watercourse within 30 metres	Internal – Ecology team
Special Areas of Conservation	Internal – Ecology team
Special Protection Areas	Internal – Ecology team
Ramsar sites	Internal – Ecology team
Nutrient Neutrality Catchment	Internal – Ecology team
Heat Network Zone	Internal – Energy Management and Sustainability team
Noise	Internal – Environmental Health
Odour	Internal – Environmental Health
North Pennines National Landscape	Internal – Landscape Team
Area of High Landscape Value	Internal – Landscape Team
Settlement form and character	Internal – Landscape Team
Coalescence of settlements	Internal – Landscape Team
Impact upon trees with Tree Preservation Orders (TPO)	Internal – Landscape Team
Valued landscape features	Internal – Landscape Team
Visual prominence	Internal – Landscape Team
Public open space	Internal – Landscape Team
Transport Connectivity	External Consultant - DfT Connectivity tool
Agricultural Land	Place Maker tool
Brownfield Land	Place Maker tool

Environmental Factor	Source
Flood Zone 2	Place Maker tool
Flood Zone 3	Place Maker tool
Flooding Surface Water More Likely	Place Maker tool
Greenbelt	Place Maker tool
Durham Heritage Coast	Place Maker tool
HSE Major Hazard Consultation Zone	Place Maker tool
Neighbourhood Plans local green space	Place Maker tool
Public rights of way	Place Maker tool
Safeguarded minerals and waste sites	Place Maker tool
Safeguarded minerals and waste zones	Place Maker tool
Air Quality Management Area	Place Maker tool

15. Overview of Consultation and Next Steps

15.1.1 As mentioned in the Introduction, a Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report was produced for consultation with statutory consultees (Natural England, Historic England and the Environment Agency) in October 2025. The comments received have been used to refine this SEA Scoping Report and are provided in full in Appendix C. They have been summarised as follows:

15.1 Environment Agency

- **Stronger policy coverage added:** The Environment Agency requested more national and regional environmental policies and guidance be referenced (e.g. groundwater protection, drought plans, contamination guidance). These have been incorporated throughout the updated report and Appendix A.
- **Water scarcity, drought and private water supply risks strengthened:** The Environment Agency highlighted the increasing risk from drought, reduced water availability, private water supply vulnerability and rising water temperatures. New paragraphs have been added to the report addressing these issues.
- **Minerals, groundwater and water environment impacts expanded:** The Environment Agency asked for wider recognition of critical mineral opportunities and stronger consideration of water-related risks from mineral extraction. Relevant sections have been updated and further emphasis has been given to sustainable water use and protection in response, particularly where dewatering is required.
- **Significant updates made to the Appraisal Framework:** The Environment Agency recommended multiple changes—adding questions on rainwater harvesting, green roofs, water contamination prevention, ecological buffers, de-culverting, invasive species control, and appropriate SuDS use. All were incorporated or amended as suggested.

15.2 Historic England

- **Strengthening historic environment context:** Historic England advised expanding the international, national, and regional policy context—especially UNESCO conventions and relevant heritage legislation. Sections of this report have been updated and documents have been repositioned accordingly.
- **Improved baseline information and accuracy:** Historic England requested clearer examples of designated heritage assets, updated Heritage at Risk data, corrections to site references, and inclusion of additional historic periods (e.g., 20th century); all of which were updated within this report.
- **Clearer representation of heritage significance:** Historic England recommended refining terminology (e.g., use “preserve, conserve and enhance”), referencing heritage significance rather than simply “protect,” and ensuring the Appraisal Framework reflects statutory language; changes were made as suggested.
- **Future engagement and management plans:** Historic emphasised ongoing involvement from conservation and archaeological specialists and recommended updating references to Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans as new versions are adopted. Agreed and upcoming updates are noted.

15.3 Natural England

- **Greater emphasis on green infrastructure (GI):** Natural England highlighted that the previous scoping report under-represented green infrastructure and its multiple benefits; in response, a new section on access to green space has been added, policy context has been expanded policy and related decision-making criteria has been expanded.
- **Creation of a dedicated Green Infrastructure SA Objective:** Natural England recommended GI be treated as its own strategic objective, with criteria addressing nature recovery, accessibility, inequality and multifunctionality. A new standalone objective has been introduced reflecting these points.
- **Enhancements to air quality, soil, climate and biodiversity objectives:** Natural England proposed additional or revised decision-making questions—e.g., avoiding permanent loss of best agricultural land, minimising emissions, and explicitly protecting designated wildlife sites. All have been accepted and incorporated into updated objectives
- **Commitment to continued engagement:** Natural England advised further consultation should the proposal evolve. This SEA Scoping Report will be re-issued for consultation, providing Natural England another opportunity to comment.

15.4 Next Steps

- 15.4.1 This SEA Scoping Report will be included as part of the County Durham Plan Scoping consultation which aims to set out what issues the Plan will address and invite feedback. This will provide opportunity for the Environment Agency, Historic England

and Natural England to provide their view on the SEA screening opinion and for further comment on this report, including public comment.

- 15.4.2 The feedback will be taken into account, and any additional amendments will be made to this report as necessary, before it progresses to Gateway 1 under the new Plan making process. The County Durham Plan Scoping consultation will be undertaken for eight weeks from the 22nd June to the 17th August 2026.