

FOR A FORWARD-LOOKING, FAIRER, HAPPIER COUNTY DURHAM, VOTE GREEN

County Durham is a great place to live, but there's an urgent need for change if we're to protect the environment, lift people from poverty and make sure that everyone shares in the benefits of a greener way of living.

County Durham is classified as rural and most people live in the towns, villages and hamlets that are dispersed across the County. But public transport is currently failing! It does not enable movement of residents between villages and places of work and lack of provision has isolated non-car drivers such as older people. Elected Greens would push for public and active transport improvements, whilst recognising the need for private car ownership created by our dispersed settlement patterns.

Energy generation is at the heart of Durham's culture and industrial history. Our rural County provides ample opportunity for us to harness renewable energy to power the transition to a green economy, creating jobs for local people and helping in the fight against climate break down.

Most of our houses are poorly insulated which wastes energy, hitting householders hard in the pocket on heating bills and damaging our planet. Elected Greens will prioritise the insulation of the existing housing stock.

We need functional natural systems to exist! Plants provide the very air we breath, but County Durham (and the planet) faces an ecological emergency. We will work with the Council to establish a Nature Restoration Network to steer efforts to restore nature on a Countywide scale.

County Durham is known for its rural / farmed produce and elected Greens will support local food producers and help expand local markets. We already have excellent examples of restorative farming

in practice (e.g the Raby Estate) and we will work to roll out these practices across the County and nationally.

Greens strongly support the need for local people to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives. We will bring decision making closer to people by reforming the Council's decision making procedures, advocating participatory budget setting, and strengthening the role of residents associations and Parish Council's.

Your Green elected representatives fully acknowledge the reality of Climate Change and understand that we can't exist in Durham without addressing the connected Climate and Nature emergencies. Addressing these issues is at the heart of all the changes we hope to make.

EMPLOYMENT

SECURE EMPLOYMENT IN GREEN JOBS, WITH FAIR WAGES

Elected Greens would prioritise investment to rebalance industry, away from the high carbon past and towards the renewable future.

New technologies, along with huge expansions in renewable energy, will **create thousands of new, good quality, well-paid, secure jobs** in the County, with training for these funded by regional and national government. This investment in training and skills will prioritise communities hit hard by economic changes over recent decades.

We would aim to create a circular economy to underpin this green industrial revolution, designing out waste and pollution, keeping products and materials in use, and regenerating natural systems. **Recycling and repairing will be made easier for all**, reducing the need to buy new, expensive products on a regular basis.

We will seize the opportunity to attract other significant employers to the County. We will develop our links with Durham University and New College to **improve access to training and higher education** while acting as an incubator to the new technologies and employment of the future.

The Green Party supports the principle of a universal basic income – a subsistence minimum which everyone would receive, thereby removing the fear of being unable to afford essentials. In County Durham Greens will encourage the better sharing of wealth through Fair Tax accreditation making sure that companies pay their fair share of taxes. We will push for fairer pay and promote the benefits of the Real Living Wage (a wage to properly take account of current expenses, more than the mandatory National Living Wage). We will work towards Durham County Council becoming a Real Living Wage employer, leading by example.

HOUSING

DECENT HOUSING FOR ALL, ENERGY-SAVING FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

Council Homes will lead the way.

All new social housing will be built to **best in class standards** in a move that will save tenants in heating bills year after year and deliver homes that last. This will create decades of savings for the Council as expensive and disruptive retrofitting to meet new standards will be avoided.

A Green-controlled County Council would deliver **a refit programme for social housing that also creates training opportunities leading to well paid jobs.** We will support and develop the supply chain for products and services that refit homes to a consistently excellent standard, so that all home owners will have the opportunity to upgrade their properties. Residents will be able to apply for **Green loans to invest in solar installations and low energy heating systems**, using the money they save from utility bills to pay off the loan.

All new homes fit for the future.

The County Durham Plan needs updating with Supplementary Planning Documents. We will insist on the introduction of high-specification insulation, heat pumps and solar panels. This will ensure that **all new houses are built to the highest standards**, with the lowest utility bills and ready for our zero carbon future.

Enhanced private tenant protection.

The private rental market provides a significant number of homes in County Durham. **We will accelerate roll out of a landlord accreditation and registration scheme** to ensure that tenants can feel safe and secure in well maintained homes. The self-funded scheme will follow similar schemes that are in place in London and Wales.

RESTORING NATURE

WELLBEING FOR ALL, CREATING A GREEN LEGACY

We will deliver action to **reverse the ecological collapse** occurring everywhere.

We will ensure that planning decisions make space for wildlife, with **policies to restore natural habitats**. We will encourage the ‘rewilding’ of spaces to provide new habitats for wildlife. We will restore, expand and **join up the green spaces** that nature needs to thrive. Green councillors will drive the development of the **Durham Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)**. The LNRSs are a new set of locally-led, schemes for nature recovery across England.

We will ensure that all **children receive the basic elements of a good childhood**: a decent place to live, time and space to play, as well as opportunities to learn and develop, inside and outside of school. We will promote an appreciation of our natural world and the need to protect it.

We will **protect existing parks and green spaces through Deeds of Dedication**, and work with local communities to enhance them by forming “Friends of...” groups.

We will **protect people and places from toxic practices** by phasing out the use of glyphosate along with other toxic herbicides.

Our current Green councillor was instrumental in Durham County Council declaring an Ecological Emergency. Green councillors will push for and oversee the **development of an effective Ecological Emergency Response Plan**.

We will liaise with our water authority and environmental bodies to strictly monitor the release of toxins and sewage into our rivers and seas, **holding polluters fully accountable**. We will work to reduce the risk of flooding using natural measures, such as ‘slowing the flow’ and restoring riverside habitats.

FOOD AND AGRICULTURE

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE PRODUCING GOOD QUALITY FOOD LOCALLY

The farming community in County Durham is key to achieving many of our Green goals. We will work with farmers **to produce healthy, nutritious food while protecting and improving the natural environment.**

Land is managed for a range of purposes beyond food production, these include flood prevention and alleviation, carbon capture, promoting public access, **maintenance of wildlife habitats and improving biodiversity.** We will encourage practices which conserve and improve the health of the soil and enhance the wider environment, including water quality. We will lobby for national policy that gives farmers clear directives and support to farm in ways that do not deplete the environment.

We will **support smaller, local, and fair-trade enterprises** so limiting the concentration of

power and wealth to just a few big commercial stakeholders.

We will **seek to educate the population about food**, where it comes from; and the vital role farmers play in keeping us fed while caring for nature. We will **build links between farms, schools and the wider community.**

We will **encourage urban food growing** in community farms and allotments. We will connect people who have gardens and want to grow food with skilled individuals who can do the work.

In order for farming to flourish within the County, it is essential that we provide **sustainable employment within the sector**, decent livelihoods, career opportunities, good working conditions and ongoing training throughout the workforce.

TRANSPORT

INVESTING IN OUR PUBLIC TRANSPORT NETWORK, MAKING OUR ROADS SAFER AND CLEANER

Our transport system is built on fossil fuels. As well as destabilising our climate, this reliance traps us into stressful, unhealthy and expensive forms of travel. Car dependency contributes to congestion, road danger and air pollution whilst reducing physical activity. It doesn't have to be like this.

We will make our streets safer and healthier for all by creating **Low Traffic Neighbourhoods** in residential areas where people live, work or go to school. These changes would **reduce traffic, carbon emissions and the danger to people walking and cycling**. They would restore our streets to all people. They would form part of a wider commitment to the core principle of the Vision Zero campaign – that **there should be no fatalities or serious injuries as a result of road traffic collisions**.

We will make sure that the whole of the County enjoys **reliable and affordable bus**

services with proper connectivity, especially to hitherto neglected rural areas.

The government's own active travel targets for 2035, are that 50% of all in-town journeys should be by active modes, with a 16% reduction in car use. Greens believe the targets should be more ambitious, but it's a start.

Durham County Council has plans in place to make this happen. They have a Strategic Cycling and Walking Delivery Plan 2019 – 2029 and they are partners in the region's first Bus Service Improvement Plan. **More Green councillors are needed to ensure these plans deliver on the promises.**

We will facilitate the transition to electric vehicles through a **network of charging points**, particularly in the villages where they are still few and far between. We will also encourage car clubs and car sharing initiatives.

DEMOCRACY

BETTER DECISIONS BASED ON CONSENSUS, AND OPEN TO PUBLIC SCRUTINY

We will **improve decision making and transparency** by dropping the Leader and Cabinet model. The Cabinet model can allow a minority group to force through a raft of decisions that affect our day to day lives without the necessary checks and balances.

We would introduce a Leader and Committee system where a central leader guides overall strategy and decision-making, assisted by specialised committees who focus on the detail. **Open discussion and consensus will lead to better long term planning and greater stability.**

Decisions will be based on consensus rather than winner takes all, with collective accountability of the Council as

a whole. We will improve our procedures, so that **people are properly included in choices which affect them**, allowing them to directly input to Council decision making.

We will encourage residents to form working panels and assemblies, and to build on the good work done through Area Action Partnerships and other community led initiatives.

We will introduce more inclusive budgeting where everyone can have a say, **allowing local citizens to decide how to allocate part of the Council budget**, through identifying, discussing and prioritising public spending projects, and having real power to decide how money is spent.

RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

TRANSITION TO A STABLE AND SUSTAINABLE LIFESTYLE

We will **drive forward the County Durham Climate Emergency Response Plan (CERP)**, ensuring that it includes all types of emission including those associated with Council investments (such as pension investments), procurement and waste management.

We will **ensure that citizens' engagement in CERP is maximised**, so that all residents can hold the Council to account if county-wide decarbonisation is not within the Carbon Budget, and all can be fully consulted on measures to bring emissions down quicker.

We will address recycling and waste management by **increasing recycling rates from businesses and**

households. We will endeavour to prevent the export of valuable recyclable material abroad, so that we can both profit locally from this material and reduce carbon emissions arising from the transport. We can learn from the improvements made by the Welsh local government, in total 17 of Wales' 22 local authorities exceeded the overall recycling target of 64% for 2022/2023.

Reduce, Re-Use, Recycle is our priority. We will oppose the new incinerator - Tees Valley Energy Recovery Facility (TVERF). Incinerators generate pollution and remove the incentive for councils to reduce waste.

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