



tcpa

Peterlee

The Place to...Bee



A new future for Peterlee - Prospectus, December 2023



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1. Introduction

1.1 An ambition for change

Peterlee was built to provide a vision of 'the good life' for the mining families of Durham. The founders wanted their children to have the very best in everything from homes and jobs to education and the arts, and with nature on their doorstep.

Today, Peterlee has the opportunity to reconnect with that hope and ambition, and could aim to be the healthiest and greenest place to live in North East England. There's no doubt about the challenge in achieving that goal given the lack of investment there has been in the town and its infrastructure. There's also no doubt that many will be cynical about whether change is possible. It is true that change will take time, but the first step on that journey is for the town to share a common vision about its future. We all need to approach that task with ambition and courage. We have to aim high if we are to achieve anything. In any case, what is there to lose in thinking big? And when better than the town's 75th birthday?

All of the actions suggested in this prospectus have been delivered somewhere in the UK already, they are designed to be realistic and achievable. At the same time, we must be clear from the start that many of these things requiring change will need investment.

To secure investment you first need to sell a long-term positive vision of the town not just to national Government but private sector investors. That's where a strong positive vision can really help shape the successful bids that can secure the cash to make change happen.



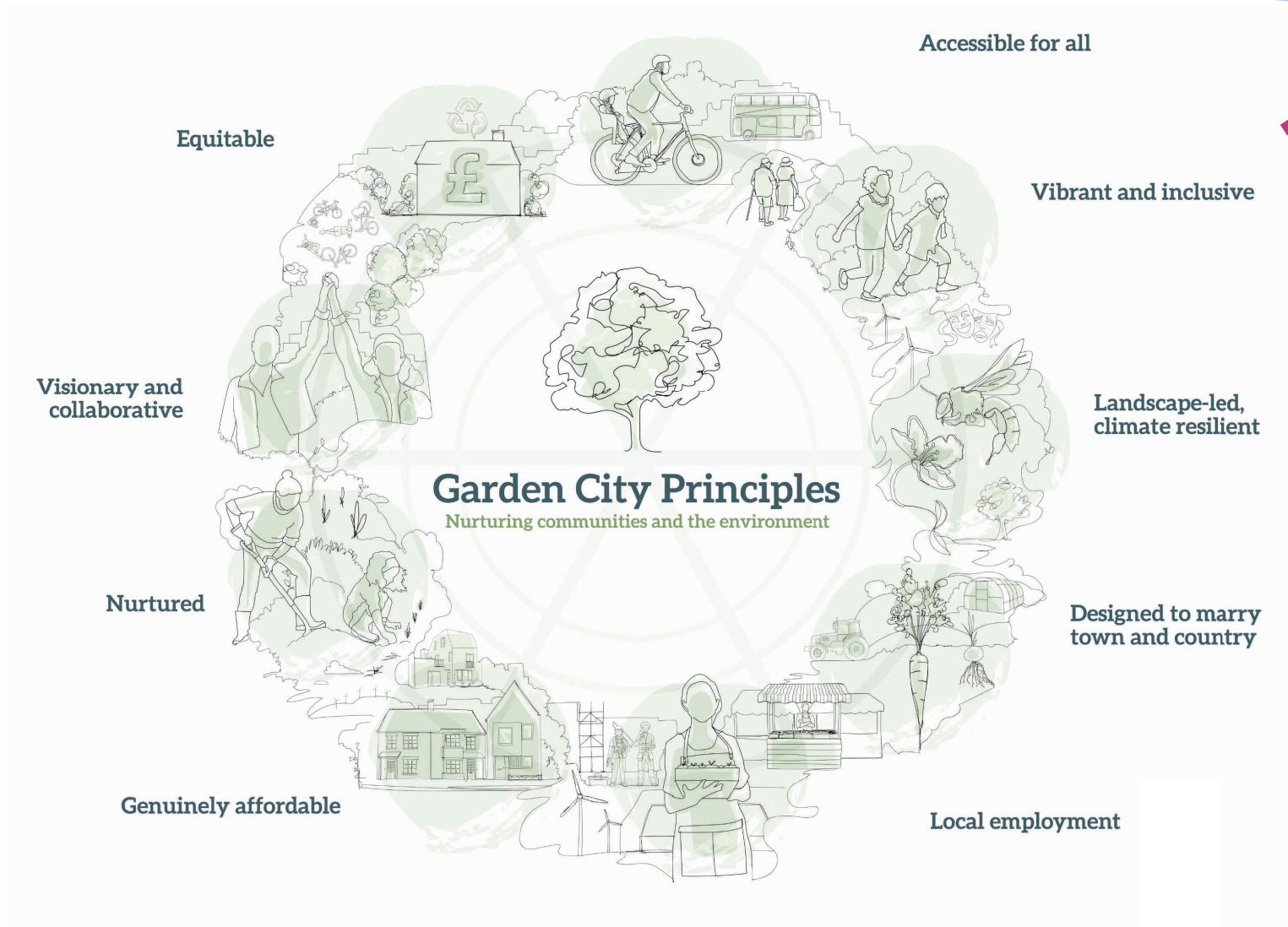
1.2 About this prospectus

This prospectus is designed to be ambitious and provoke a conversation about the future of the town. It is not a blueprint to be imposed on Peterlee but a contribution from an organisation who wants to support positive change in one of the UK's most ambitious new towns.

The TCPA has been working with the Town Council in Peterlee for several years to help explore the future direction of the town. Our vision draws on the TCPA's Garden City Principles and workshops with Councillors, students, and community representatives. It reflects our understanding of existing renewal masterplans and the 2022 report of the High Streets Task Force. It focuses primarily on the town centre and green infrastructure, along with strategic issues such as governance.

We hope it will provide the Town Council, County Council and others to start a conversation locally about the future of Peterlee. It draws on the experience of many other organisations and case studies we have worked with through the recent Tomorrow125 project and beyond, from Incredible Edible to East Durham Creates.





More on Garden City Principles at: <https://www.tcpa.org.uk/garden-city-principles/>

2. Peterlee's context – an overview

Like every living place, the context in Peterlee is complex, but this prospectus has been guided by the following observations, drawn from published reports and data, and TCPA's work in the town.

2.1 Peterlee's strengths

- Natural assets and green infrastructure network – from town parks to Castle Eden Dene Site of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserve, and links to the Durham Heritage Coast at Horden.
- One of Country Durham's large towns, Peterlee remains a significant employment and commercial centre for east Durham.
- Strategic accessibility – the town centre has good transportation links including its proximity to the A19 and good public transportation links.
- The town centre includes provision of some public services (health facilities, legal firms, bus services).
- There remains a presence of 'national value' brands and tenant mix in the town centre.
- Some investment has already taken place in the town centre (relocation of the library and investment in the leisure centre).
- Parts of Peterlee retain a strong New Town architectural and artistic legacy.
- Education offer including East Durham College.

2.2 Peterlee's weaknesses

- Fragmented land ownership across multiple agencies and no legacy of infrastructure and funding have resulted in a disjointed approach to managing the town.
- Anti-social behaviour is evident in the town centre including in town parks and through the vandalism of office blocks.
- Need for new and renewed housing stock.
- The 2011 Census reported that 'general health' in Peterlee is below UK New Towns and UK averages and unemployment slightly higher than the national average.
- Management of green infrastructure is expensive for the town council and suffers from wider issues of safety, accessibility and biodiversity.
- The leisure offer is weak, in the town centre this provides a challenge for daytime and nighttime economy.
- Located within a large unitary authority, Peterlee persistently missed out on investment from central government.
- Parts of Peterlee's architectural legacy divides opinion.
- Peterlee lacks social infrastructure compared to other UK New Towns. Around 8 in 10 of Peterlee's residents lives in a 'Left Behind Neighbourhood', defined as the worst ten per cent in both the community needs index (CNI) and index of multiple deprivation (IMD).

2.3 Opportunities for Peterlee

- The new train station at Horden improves access for passengers on the Durham Coastline and connects it with Tees Valley and Tyne and Wear conurbations, though is poorly connected to Peterlee town centre.
- Some housing is planned. Commitments are already underway at a large site at Low Hills, and another site allocated at North Blunts. Renewal of the North East Industrial estate is also being pursued.
- Emergence of new community groups since COVID such as 'The Wombles' and 'Keep Peterlee Tidy' litter picking groups.
- Town centre owners Praxis are engaged in discussion about the future of the town and have developed a masterplan to attract levelling-up funding.
- Renewal masterplan in place for the town, though this is now 10 years old.
- Links to Sunderland and Hartlepool and part of the North East Local Economic Partnership.

2.4 Threats to Peterlee's future

- The changing nature of retail and work patterns has not been considered in existing masterplans.
- The impact of the climate emergency.
- The ageing population of the town.
- Competition for funding opportunities such as levelling-up funding.
- A changing political landscape locally provides uncertainty.
- Vacant shops and anti-social behaviour impacts on perceptions of the town centre.



3. A vision of Peterlee in 2030

3.1 Vision statement

A shared vision for Peterlee is something only the community of Peterlee can determine. This statement outlines just one possibility. Drawing on its heritage as a northern utopia for working people, Peterlee will be an exemplar of innovation and sustainability. Our vision is that by 2030 Peterlee will be the Northeast England's healthiest and greenest town. This vision is the golden thread of the town's future development as a thriving, self-confident community.

A walk-through Peterlee in 2030

The town centre will be thriving, with an emphasis on independent local businesses, a new town centre hotel and a range of employment opportunities. The clock tower will tell the time, and urban greening initiatives will make the town centre a nice place to linger, and pick some free food, if the mood takes you. Repurposed office blocks will hold the new hotel, some affordable and accessible homes, along with a mix of creative spaces and workshop units run in partnership with East Durham College. People of all ages will begin to use the town centre as a safe and creative hub from daytime to nighttime.

The town centre will be accessible for everyone through safe walking and wheeling routes from residential areas. Reliable bus services will move people around by public transport.

The town will be wrapped in a network of safe and accessible parks and green areas which provide safe places to work and play, and fantastic habitats for wildlife. Dene Park will provide a welcome break from shopping in the town centre or for hanging out on your lunchbreak. Clear routes from Peterlee to the railway station and heritage coast beyond will attract visitors and link renewal in Peterlee and Horden. Greenspace and the public realm will be managed by a charitable trust, who not only look after greenspace but run social events across the town as part of a holistic programme of community development and ensure the town can be looked after into the future. Peterlee will meet its housing needs through sustainable growth – new homes developed by Peterlee Housing Co-operative, perhaps. Industrial areas will be better connected to the town, with green jobs and strategic investment.

Peterlee will build on its unique cultural assets to secure a new North East Museum of modernist architecture that will draw people to the Apollo Pavilion, and working with the College and Universities to offer an international learning programme about the town. With a focus on biodiversity, in 2030, Peterlee could be the place to...bee!

4. What might that look like?

4.1 Restoration of nature and healthy places

Peterlee's landscape character is one of its strongest yet underutilised assets. In addition to Victor Pasmore's influence on the landscapes of the Sunny Blunts area, the original mature landscape features of the town's area were incorporated into the design of its early estates. Its planned structure has created a core of landscape corridors and avenues beside principal access roads. Castle Eden Dene forms an important natural resource close to the town and woodlands link it to the town centre.

Renewal might focus on three themes:

- Promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of the town's extensive greenspace by making them accessible and safe.
- Using the generous green space of the town to promote biodiversity and climate resilience.
- Ensuring the community is at heart of the ownership and management of green space through a long-term stewardship body.

Making Peterlee's Green Infrastructure network accessible and safe has multiple benefits for health and wellbeing. A new entrance to Dene Park, linking it to the Town Centre would immediately make it more usable. A desire line already leads through the trees showing a natural short-cut. Working with the local Integrated

Care System, a new community health hub in the town centre could co-ordinate services and act as a focus for the community and include a mixture of health practitioners and other forms of community support, such as charities offering companionship, exercise classes, benefits support, clubs, community kitchens, and other forms of 'social prescribing'. Greening the town centre through green walls, planters, rain gardens and more will help with climate resilience and provide opportunities for people to meet around the theme of food. Embedding renewable energy and a circular economy approach to building design will help Peterlee be a zero-carbon town.

Municipal grassland in Peterlee's housing estates is important for landscape character but some could be re-purposed for food growing, providing some homes with gardens, and for biodiversity enhancement. This would also provide habitat corridors connecting the town's many natural assets. Early consideration of a stewardship strategy for the town means the renewal process, including land ownership considerations, can assist in the development of a stewardship body to manage Peterlee's green infrastructure along with other community assets.

Key Projects

- **Greening the town centre by growing plants up walls, raised beds and tree planting.**
- **Consideration of a health hub using new green facilities as a form of social prescribing.**
- **New entrance to Dene Park from town centre.**
- **Re-use of municipal grassland for local food and biodiversity with consideration to adding garden space to existing homes.**
- **Renewable energy on new and existing buildings.**
- **Linking walking, cycling and wheeling as part of a movement strategy for the town.**
- **Ensure local facilities are within a 20-minute walk of housing.**

If established at an early stage this can generate a revenue stream for ongoing management, maintenance and community development activities.



Greening Peterlee Residential area

(Above image: Peterlee today, Right Image: Peterlee transformed for biodiversity, food and recreation – indicative only)





What a new entrance to Dene Park and arts and community centre could look like

(Below image: Peterlee today – NW along Bede Way (Google Street View), Left image: Peterlee transformed with access to Dene Park and repurposed office block – indicative perspective only)



4.2 An empowered community

Peterlee's transformation could have community empowerment at its heart. As was the case with many local authorities at the 2022 local elections, the voter turnout for Peterlee was relatively small. This suggests that local people in Peterlee, like many other places, feel disconnected from local decision-making.

Durham County Council, in partnership with Peterlee Town council, can play an enabling role in transforming this. This involves building trust through transparent processes of planning and decision-making and embedding local people in creating a vision for the town. A town charter, developed through a Citizen's Assembly for Peterlee, could set out commitments on everything from citizen's rights to priorities for growth and regeneration. The council can build on the goodwill of networks which have developed during the pandemic such as the 'wombles', nearby Incredible Edible networks, and the work of Citizens UK. Drawing on the town's artistic heritage, organisations such as No More Nowt (formerly East Durham Creates) could be partnered with to raise funds for arts and community engagement activities.

Managing Peterlee's green infrastructure and other community facilities through a long-term stewardship vehicle can also assist in putting local people at the heart of decision-making and generating revenue for management and maintenance. Developing a strategy for stewardship in Peterlee should start as soon as possible and is a staged process which can be integrated with community engagement.

Key Projects

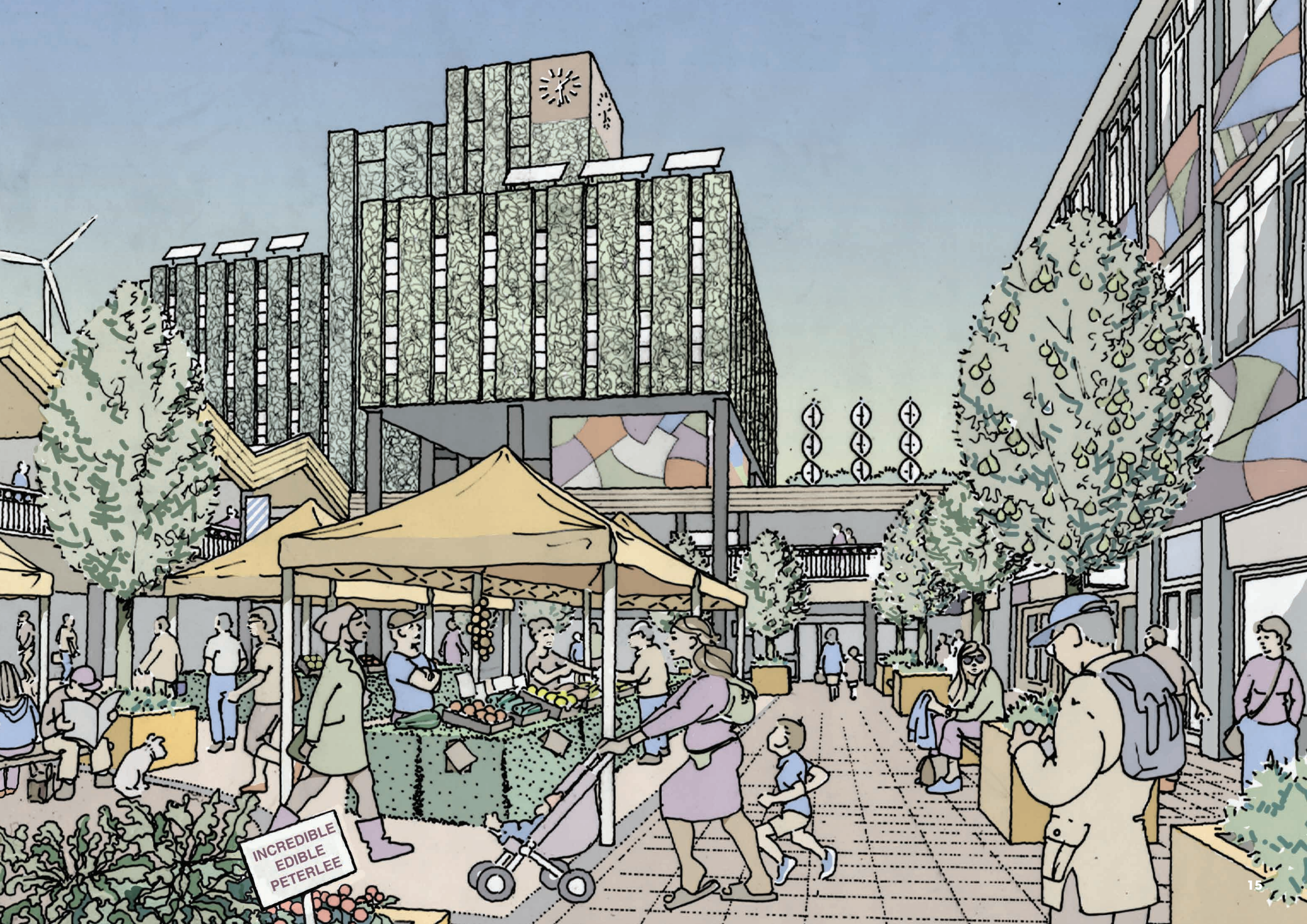
- **A Citizen's Assembly on the future of the town with parallel youth Parliament hosted by the college.**
- **A commitment to stewardship and associated strategy from Durham County Council.**
- **Development of a stewardship strategy which considers different governance options.**
- **Development of a new town charter to state intent.**
- **In the short-term a focus on the power of small actions; celebrating and encouraging mutual aid - from food banks to litter picking groups; developing public art in the town centre to engage people and brighten up their day.**

Durham County Council could make a commitment to enabling community-led housing through the Local Plan. This would provide people with the opportunity to have genuinely affordable homes and new ways of living intergenerationally, as the population ages.



Greening Peterlee Town Centre

(Above image: Above image: Peterlee town square today, Right image: A greener town centre - indicative only)



INCREDIBLE
EDIBLE
PETERLEE

4.3 A strong local economy for the long-term future

Peterlee has a strong employment offer focused on the town's industrial estates but many of those jobs aren't held by local residents. Giving Peterlee a strong offer around health, wellbeing and culture as well as considering expanding its housing offer are essential to keep more money in the local economy.

To build a successful future the community needs more direct control of key parts of the foundational economy (i.e. those services and parts of the local economy which are essential for everyday life – from health services to food). That should begin by taking more control of key parts of the town centre estate and particularly the two derelict office blocks which have a major negative impact on the town. The ambition shouldn't stop there, with a major opportunity to bring clarity to the ownership of so much of the green space in the town and manage it more effectively for the public benefit. This might include the current debate on the future of Shotton Hall being supported by The Plunkett Foundation. Building on local identity and cultural assets, the town's architectural heritage could provide an economic catalyst, encouraging a tourist economy and longer-term investment through a link to education and learning.

Working with a wide range of bodies from Homes England and local landowners and the Integrated Care Service, to Durham Council and Natural England the Town Council should explore opportunities for establishing a regeneration body which can acquire land and transfer to public ownership for the purposes of renewal. Such a body has the potential to generate real social value and draw down a wide range of Government and philanthropic investment. There are choices to be made about how this stewardship body should operate from a modernised development corporation like the one which built the town, to a charitable trust or community benefit society like those in Bournville or Letchworth Garden City.

In the short term it means working with Praxis to explore opportunities for 'quick wins' in the town centre; fixing the lift, making the clock work, greening the public realm, enabling meanwhile uses in vacant shops as part of the public visioning exercise; giving the impression someone cares about the town. It means mapping or sharing data on land ownership and negotiating on the public acquisition of key buildings such as the Ridgemount House office block.

Key Projects

- Quick wins in the town centre – fixing the lift; greening the public realm; meanwhile uses for small businesses and creative activities.
- Working with Homes England and other local partners to explore regeneration models. Community development corporation to lead renewal then transfer assets to a stewardship body.
- Development of a long-term stewardship strategy which considers the role of delivery organisations such as a housing company and food co-operatives.
- Explore Compulsory Purchase of key buildings in the town centre for re-purposing.
- Exploring the future of Shotton Hall with the Plunkett Foundation.
- Educational programme with East Durham College – skills in architecture and biodiversity.



5. Making it happen

There is no doubt that Peterlee needs big investment to realise the vision of being the North East's healthiest and greenest town. There is also no doubt that the town has missed out on successive rounds of Government investment which has been demoralising for the council and the people of the town. Having a strong vision will help persuade Government that the town deserves a hopeful future, but it would be a mistake to wait for Westminster. We need practical action now and a great deal of this vision can be achieved through two other approaches:

- Community led mutual aid projects, such as food growing on the Incredible Edible model. This requires modest investment to empower people to make the change for themselves.
- Exploring funding from charitable trusts and foundations and considering social impact bonds like the model being used by The Skill Mill to support young ex-offenders into employment in Peterlee. These models have the potential to support the foundation of both individual social enterprises and wider benefits of a regeneration and stewardship body for Peterlee.

In both cases a strong and credible vision for town is key but so are low-cost measures to enable community action not least by finding out who owns land and brokering its use, temporary or otherwise, for community led social value generation.

5.1 Next Steps for Peterlee

1. Commit to joint-working process between County Council, Town Council, local business leaders such as East Durham College, landowners and community level representatives such as Groundwork Northeast and No More Nowt and the local Integrated Care Services.
2. Commit to a visioning process (take advantage of offer from High Streets Task Force/Design Council or further work with TCPA).
3. Identify a clear strategy for engagement. This includes a Citizen's Assembly for Peterlee and stakeholder meetings with public/private sector interests and beyond.
4. Map land ownership.
5. Develop a long-term stewardship strategy.
6. Implement quick wins (e.g. town clean-up/greening town centre/events/meanwhile uses in town centre/public art/toilets in bus station) and in particular ask Incredible Edible to help kick start a discussion on local food growing.
7. Consider planning mechanisms such as a masterplan, or Design Code by Durham County Council. Seek external funding for a Neighbourhood Plan process, which may include a Business Neighbourhood Plan for the town centre.

6. Conclusion

This vision for Peterlee represents just a fraction of the kind of possibilities that might be achieved in Peterlee once the community starts to talk about the future and tap the talent of its citizens. We need to think like the generation who founded Peterlee. They faced just as big a challenge but despite all the problems they reached out for a better future. We need think big with the same determination, courage and good will as that post war generation of Peterlee pioneers.





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