

**Altogether Better Durham-**  
The Cultural Strategy for County Durham

**2009 to 2015**

**Draft for Consultation**

## **Altogether Better Durham**

**“A County where strong economic growth is matched with a community that believes in itself and aims high, with pride in our past and confidence in our future. A place where everyone can achieve their potential and enjoy a high quality of life, without compromising the environment or the future sustainability of communities”**



## **Foreword**

Culture is the bond that unites communities. Local festivals, galleries, historic buildings and sporting teams are all sources of interest, entertainment, income, and local pride. People like to have local galleries to visit, buildings that capture the imagination and activities to enjoy. Parents want safe and exciting places close to home where their children can play. Fans want successful and entertaining local teams to follow and clubs with strong local roots. People feel better about themselves and where they live when they have these things.

While culture is valued highly by people for its own sake, culture is also a cultural economic driver. In addition, culture significantly contributes to improving people's health and wellbeing – especially young people – and community cohesion in general.

By making the most of sporting and cultural opportunities, we can create better lives for the people of County Durham.

Councillor Eunice Huntington  
Cabinet Member for Healthier Communities

Councillor Neil Foster  
Cabinet Member for Regeneration & Economic Development

## 1.0 Introduction: Opportunities and Challenges

*“Culture... is about improving the quality of life for all, allowing people both to derive pleasure and to fulfill their own potential and broaden their horizons. Equally cultural services play a crucial role tackling social exclusion, contributing to regeneration, to promoting safer communities, encouraging healthier lifestyles, providing opportunities for voluntary and community activity and stimulating life long learning”*  
Department of Culture, Media and Sport

*Altogether Better Durham* builds on the cultural assets and capabilities across the County: from the World Heritage Site to the distinctive local heritage. With committed public and private joint-working and investment, together with support from an active voluntary sector, Durham’s unique cultural foundations will support new opportunities in literature, music, performance and exhibition through existing and new facilities, through local and national initiatives, and will promote cultural opportunities in the North East of England.

*Altogether Better Durham* is ambitious, building on what has been achieved in order to provide a firm footing for delivery in the future. Its overriding purpose is to set a direction for cultural development in County Durham to 2015, underpinned by three strategic objectives:

1. Experiencing Durham
2. Getting involved
3. Creating wealth

## 1.2 Altogether Better Durham’s interpretation of culture

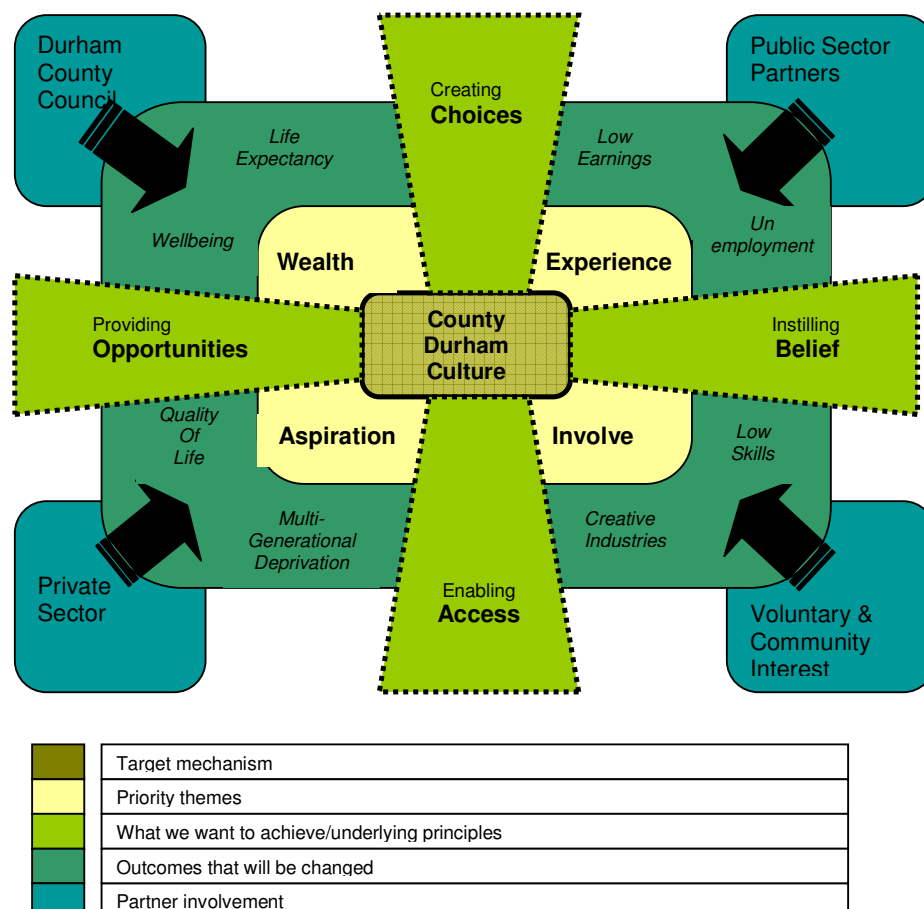
Culture is central to the lives of everyone in County Durham. Culture is about a shared sense of meaning(s) and understanding(s) – it is the sum of all those things that give context to and define our lives. Participation in culture is a way of expressing our personal and community identity through shared values, attitudes and beliefs. Culture defines our local, regional and national identity – whether this focuses on a sporting activity, a style of cookery, or an artistic tradition. Most people belong to innumerable cultural groups – global, national, religious, local, ethnic or even ones defined by age, such as youth culture. Culture informs our lives from reading newspapers in the morning to watching television in the evening; from visiting pubs and restaurants to shopping; from playing golf to taking a walk in the countryside or going to the theatre. Culture also shapes and is shaped by the character of an area. The landscape, built environment, agriculture and industry, the history, lives and leisure activities of its people all combine to form its ‘personality’.

Culture is a gateway to improving our sense of place, enabling a confidence in the area leading to enjoyment, aspiration and wealth generation. Culture encompasses a huge range of activity from high profile traditional performance on a national stage – the BBC proms – to the craft hobbyist producing individual decorative articles to put on the mantelpiece. Culture can lead to self improvement and personal fulfilment. It can be participatory and

observed, amateur and professional. It can be a way of earning a living. Culture appears in the visual arts, the performing arts, festivals and celebrations, sport and recreational and leisure pursuits. Crucially, *Altogether Better Durham* recognises the powerful role that culture can play in regeneration; helping to positively change perceptions of people and place, stimulate entrepreneurial activity, support a vibrant cultural industry, and diversify the local economy:

- Culture helps build investor confidence and generates economic opportunity.
- Culture affects how we feel, the quality of our lives, and helps support improved educational attainment.
- Culture has an acknowledged role in addressing health issues, whether it is the benefits of participation with people with mental health issues or the positive effects of singing for people with conditions, such as asthma or other acknowledged benefits.
- Culture unites different geographic communities and communities of interest; facilitating cultural exchange and diverse experiences.

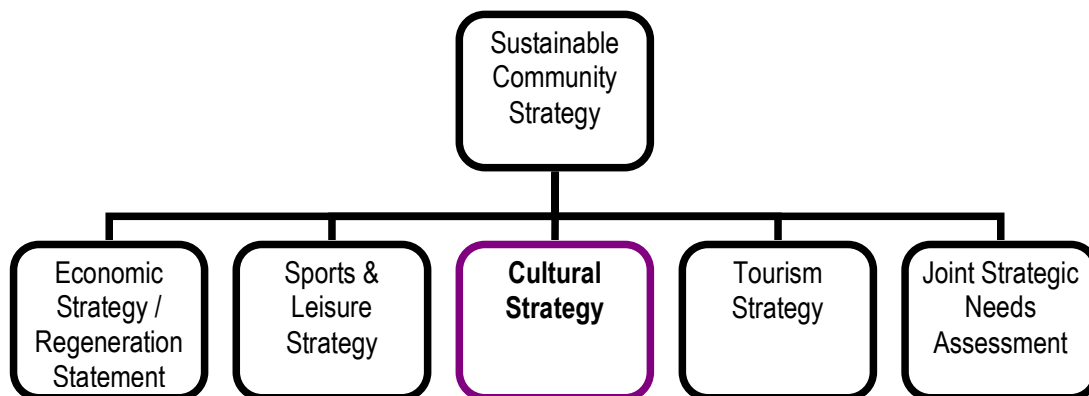
### The Role of Culture in County Durham



Located in the heart of the North East and strategically positioned connecting the two city regions of Tyne & Wear and Tees Valley, Durham is a hub of cultural activity. Acting as a regional economic driver, Durham City symbolises the cultural and economic potential. Durham is well placed in terms of connectivity, through the road (A1,) and rail (East Coast Mainline) networks to capitalise on wider links with other developed destinations, including Leeds, Edinburgh and London. The County has a population of 500,000 but this is further supported by an increasing population base in excess of 2.5 million people within 1 ½ hours travelling distance.

### 1.3 Strategic Alignment

*The Cultural Strategy* is strategically aligned and interwoven with the County's other major strategies, emanating from the Sustainable Communities Strategy, including: the emerging Sport and Leisure strategy with its themes of inspiration, excellence and participation, the Tourism Strategy sharing the aim of improving reputation and attracting visitors, and the Economic Strategy and Regeneration Statement sharing themes of wealth creation. It is also linked with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) and its themes of health and wellbeing, achieve, enjoy and economic wellbeing. Put simply, culture is a golden thread throughout Durham's strategic policy framework.



*Altogether Better Durham* will also provide the overarching framework for a variety of discrete elements of the cultural sector including; museums, festivals and events, public art, music, visual arts, interpretation and collections.

## 1.4 Cultural Infrastructure

County Durham was a power house of the industrial revolution; the birthplace of significant cultural-industrial innovations, yet, in the present context it is deeply immersed in the process of economic restructuring and global economic change. Consequently, Durham is a County that has a rich spiritual and industrial heritage boasting a stunning built environment and natural landscapes yet is at the bottom of the league table of English Counties when it comes to tourism, its population visiting libraries, museums and attending events. It is obvious; therefore, that significant potential exists.

County Durham represents a fantastic cultural opportunity: at its heart the City is an iconic regional asset yet its visitor economy hovers at the bottom of the league of English Heritage Cities; the County is home to one of the first UK World Heritage Sites and a range of innovative and evolving cultural attractions but low proportions, approximately 7,000 of its people are employed in the creative and professional sectors; it is the spiritual centre of the North East as well as home to a university that is in the top 3 in Britain and top 20 globally yet we need 40,000 more of our residents educated to Level 3 (A level) by 2020<sup>1</sup>.





#### Key

Tourist Information Centres

Boundary of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Durham Heritage Coast



### 1.5 Windows of cultural opportunity

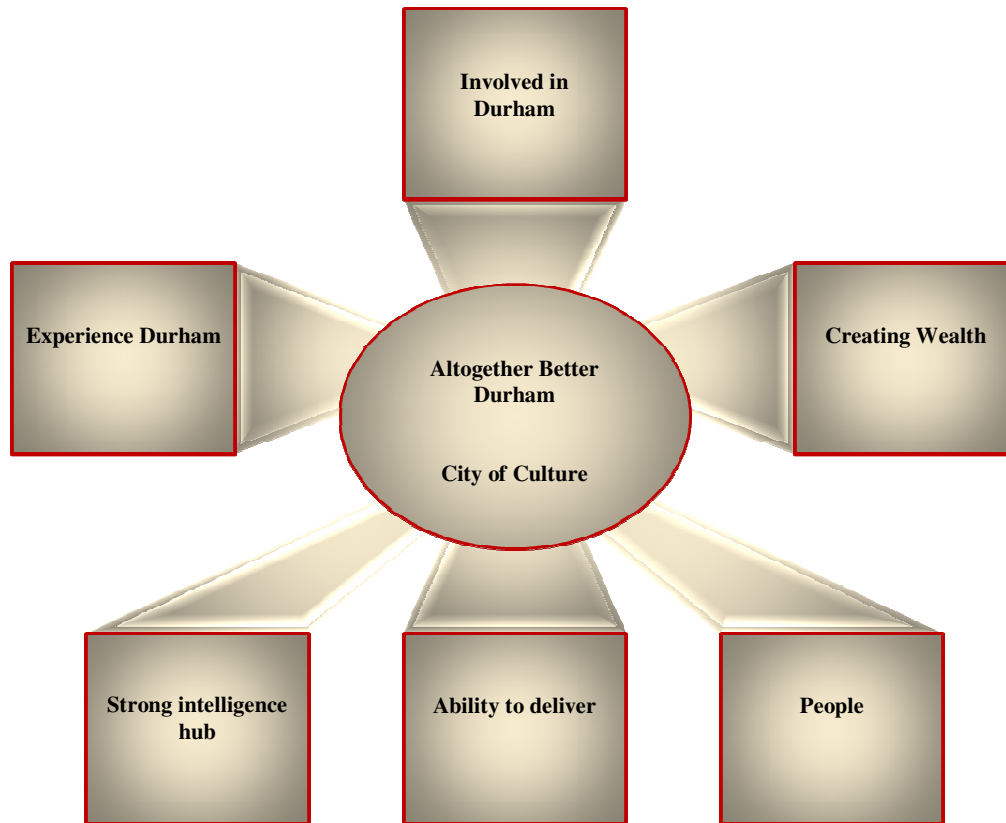
Over the past decade or so, County Durham's cultural infrastructure has experienced a significant renaissance, with, for example, the provision of the Gala Theatre in Durham, the development of Locomotion at Shildon in partnership with the National Railway Museum and the development of Durham County Cricket Club at Chester le Street Riverside. The development of key festivals such as Enlightenment, BRASS and the Book Festival has improved the cultural offer. However there are more opportunities to further develop the cultural infrastructure.

Three strands form the basis for capitalising on windows of cultural opportunity:

1. Experiencing the County
2. Getting involved
3. Creating wealth



## The Role of the Cultural Strategy



### Experiencing Durham:

Durham's cultural landscape is rich in its diversity. Its various cultural traditions and communities have a wealth of accompanying artistic expression. Durham has a wealth of historic assets. The cultural landscape has been enriched by the diversity of settlers throughout a rich history from the Prince Bishops to recent Industrial heritage.

The landscape which enables people to experience Durham comes from a host of cultural experiences, including; Festivals, Sport, Landscape and Heritage all of which, defines Durham's increasingly diverse and multi faceted cultural identity.

### Getting Involved:

The community and voluntary arts are major strengths within the cultural sector in Durham. They contribute to a sophisticated layer of artistic activity and provision across the County. The culture of the County as expressed through its performing arts, music, art, and the people who participate and

become involved in the County's cultural activities helps to define and identify both the place and its people.

By encouraging participation in cultural and creative activities, each individual's capacity to play a full and active role in the community can be enhanced, and their investment in society is maximised. Cultural activities also enhance both formal and informal learning processes, and promote lifelong learning, which is an essential element of social cohesion and longer term economic sustainability. Culture also has a significant role to play in supporting health and wellbeing.

### **Creating Wealth:**

A positive and affirming physical environment helps to nurture a sense of place and civic pride. A developed cultural infrastructure can be one of the key influencing factors when targeting inward investment and changing perceptions of the County amongst international decision makers. County Durham must communicate an image and identity which is built upon our unique offer, and which promotes a confidence and a desire to succeed as economic and cultural centre.

The cultural experience and involvement through both arts and heritage activity, is a valuable and unique aspect of the county's attraction as a tourism destination. While visitor numbers to the County are growing, this is still an area of huge potential to the economy. The Creative Industries offer significant scope to generate employment and contribute to the economic infrastructure. The development of cultural and creative sectors within both the commercial and the not for profit spheres, can be major contributors to the wealth of the County.

## **2.0 Strategy for Success**

### **Experiencing the County**

*To provide the experience to support creative activities:*

- Maximise the use and development of Durham's cultural assets and capabilities
- Develop a networked cultural infrastructure that connects with local people in a enjoyable, safe and accessible way

## Getting involved

*To encourage diverse communities to realise their potential:*

- Increase participation in and attendance at arts, culture and heritage events and opportunities for both residents of the County and visitors.
- Redefine the County's cultural identity as a centre of cultural excellence; reconnecting with a rich cultural past and shared future with a positive outlook
- Create an environment in which the individual, and particularly children and young people, are supported to achieve self expression, quality of life and well being through cultural activity

## Creating wealth

*To seize the opportunity for creative and cultural activity to generate wealth:*

- Expand the creative economy, including the creative industries sector and tourism, by supporting cultural practitioners
- Raise the profile of Durham by developing the external image and identity as a place in which to live, work and visit
- Maximise culture as a social driver for regeneration; improving community cohesion, health, learning and capacity building

## 3.0 Delivering the Strategy

Realisation of the vision set out in the Cultural Strategy will require new ways of operating, with both established and new partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors. This is reflected in the need for increased engagement with the private sector through innovative and meaningful channels.

The Cultural Strategy has been produced during a period of significant economic and institutional change. April 2009 saw the emergence of a new Unitary Authority for Durham. The Government's response to the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) is now published and presents significant opportunities for Durham, including the delegation of additional responsibilities to Local Authorities in focusing on Place – shaping.

## Delivery

The Strategy sets out what we believe culture to be and what it means in County Durham. It articulates a vision for the future and describes what needs to be achieved in County Durham. The aim of the Strategy is to set the cultural development for County Durham. In order to do this we believe that there is a need for close co-operation between all those involved in the provision and support of culture in County Durham. Culture is integral to people's lives and should be well integrated across the economy, people and the community.

Collective leadership spanning our strategic, delivery and investment partners will be the first step in achieving this. It is more than the allocation of resources, we shall draw together the actions and decision-making of all public, private, and voluntary and community sector partners: To deliver the Cultural Strategy requires this new approach to partnership working which will be decided by the County Durham Partnership.

## Developing an Action Plan

The development of an action plan is fundamental to understanding the lead responsibilities in delivering and developing actions to deliver recognised strategic objectives. The action plan will be delivered in line with the City of Culture bid and will incorporate the momentum gained from the development of the Cultural Strategy and the subsequent emphasis on culture across County Durham.

### **The Cultural Strategy and Action Plan will:**

- Form the cultural arm of the Community Strategy
- Provide a framework for the County's activity in the cultural field
- Guide service planning in the public services
- Form the basis for future funding bids
- Help validate action plans.

## 4.0 Performance

### How will we know we've succeeded?

- Durham will have utilised our unique cultural assets to increase our international and national profile and reputation, to become an important cultural tourist destination.
- Be a County where culture has no boundaries and no doors are closed allowing activities to take place in a wide range of places and spaces throughout Durham.
- Have a creative culture where volunteering and community engagement is highly valued and volunteering and participation opportunities are available for all.
- One of the top providers in England of a wide range of quality, innovative and diverse festivals/events and activities.
- Be a supportive, attractive place to live and develop as an artist for both professional and amateur practitioners.

## Appendix 1 Draft Cultural Strategy

Going forward it is vital to identify what Durham is currently doing well under each of the strategic objectives in order to understand what is necessary to make a cultural “step change.”

### Experiencing Durham:

*To provide the experience to support creative activities:*

**Identity and events:** local, national, and international festivals, events, and activities, which build on a distinctive cultural profile for Durham.

**A sense of place:** developing Durham’s cultural heritage, including the physical environment.

**Cultural assets:** literature, music, language, performing arts, dance, visual arts, intangible cultural heritage and practices.

**Connecting people:** transport infrastructures to support visitors and residents to enjoy cultural experiences.

**Infrastructure:** venues that are safe, accessible, and facilitate good practice,

**Resources:** venues for capital investment and new capital projects; able, skilled and well resourced staff; and collections and archives that are maintained, developed and well used.

### Achievements in Durham include:

#### Festivals and Events

- Durham has enjoyed considerable and successful expansion of its festival and events programme in recent years. Enlightenment, the Book Festival, Brass, the Durham Regatta and the Streets of... series are already generating audiences in excess of 60,000 people. There are also some eye-catching projects such as the Mystery Plays and a high-profile follow up to Enlightenment in development for 2010. That Enlightenment won the Best Overall Event category at the 2009 regional Journal culture awards is evidence that Durham is beginning to reveal its capacity to develop into a significant festival and event destination.
- Culture and major events enhancing the visitor offer and lengthening the traditional visitor season. Exciting and innovative programmes have targeted an increased dwell time, visitors spend and overnight stays.

- Brass Durham International Festival has grown from a small event reaching about 6000 people in 2006 to a major event attracting an audience of over 90,000 with a strong international profile in 2009. Drawing upon the talent of local people over 1,000 local musicians played in the 2009 BRASS Durham International Festival alongside professional performers from 12 different countries providing a major showcase of positive cultural activity and international partnership.

## **Sport**

- Durham County Cricket Club ( County Champions for two years running) is established on the national and international stage, hosting test cricket, 20/20 and in 2013 hosting an Ashes test. It has a well developed academy and strong outreach work.
- In other areas of sport the County has excellent facilities for gymnastics and there have been three world champions in Durham. There is also a strong tradition of rowing and the Durham Regatta has potential to further develop as an event to celebrate sporting excellence as well as bring the arts and sport together.

## **Heritage and Historic sites & buildings**

- The built environment plays an important part of building and strengthening communities by defining the identity and quality of place. County Durham has a rich heritage of buildings and structures, ranging from the World Heritage Site of Cathedral and Castle through to post war buildings, in total there are 3030 listed buildings across the County. This is combined with over 45 heritage sites and venues across the County.
- Durham Cathedral building itself is a unique reflection of the power of community and faith. It encompasses a wealth of cultural and religious traditions and historical memories associated with the early Christian saints, as well as the continuity of use and ownership of the site over the past millennium. The importance of the Cathedral and Castle has been recognised with its designation as one of the first UNESCO World Heritage sites in the country. It has been voted Britain's most favourite building and is a 'must see' attraction for over 600,000 visitors per year.

## **Landscape**

- A major reclamation programme has been operating in the County, led by Durham County Council since the early sixties to considerable effect. This project has reclaimed over 44 square miles of derelict land. The Durham Coast at one time one of the most despoiled in Europe, has been the subject of a major reclamation initiative in the 'Turning the Tide' project and much of it is now designated as a heritage coast. Many former colliery sites have been reclaimed for recreational purposes and are now used as golf courses, sports pitches and open



spaces and local communities have been directly involved in commissioning and creating public art which make some of our former industrial areas attractive and stimulating places to visit.

- The North Pennines AONB is the second largest in the United Kingdom covering almost 2,000Km<sup>2</sup> and is widely considered as one of the most remote and unspoilt places in England and is used for a variety of activities and leisure pursuits. The AONB was also the first in the U.K to be designated a UNESCO-European and Global geopark. The AONB partnership has spent over £130,000 in protecting, preserving and enhancing the area and has given over £61,000 in grants for sustainable development in the park.
- Durham is a rural County with a strong agricultural heritage. In recent years, our country shows have supported a renaissance of traditional rural crafts. As an example of success, Stanhope show attracted over 10,000 visitors this year.

### **Museums**

- The County has a wide range of museums including several with special significance;
- Beamish; a regional asset and recognised national attraction with over 300,000 visitors, as well as a major visitor attraction has excellent community links and offers "Community Cubes" to enable small heritage organisations to store their artefacts.
- Bowes holds designated collections of national importance and attracted over 100,000 visitors in 2008/9 despite undergoing major renovation and development. It expects to attract over 120,000 visitors in 2010/11.
- Durham Cathedral; Treasures of St Cuthbert collections that have regional and national significance for Christian Heritage;
- Killhope Museum is an award-winning rural museum and has worked on a number of national projects addressing issues such as social inclusion.
- Locomotion at Shildon; a successful award winning partnership with the National Railway Museum with potential for further development. The museum attracts a wide ranging audience and has an exciting educational programme It attracts nearly 140,000 visitors each year.

### **Recreation attractions**

- County Durham contains a number of recreation attractions, areas and linear route ways of County and National importance. These include walking routes such as Pennine Way which is a 270 mile route, the Sea to Sea cycle route and several country parks. Within the County there are 3,464 km of public rights of way, providing access to a variety of countryside.
- Other recreation sites play an excellent contribution to community and visitor impact. These include Hardwick Park with over 70,000 visitors,

Hamsterley Forest, with 80,000 visitors. Total investment within these areas has been over 2.3 million and represents a County wide drive to improve the recreation offer for County Durham.

### **Durham University**

- The university was one of Europe's leading centres of medieval scholarship and is the third oldest in England. It has an enduring tradition of research, creativity and scholarship and today, Durham University leads the way in classics, english, theology, chemistry, mathematics and physics.
- Alongside scholarship and research, the University has a strong sporting tradition, nurturing some of the country's most successful sports people and contributing towards the development of sport in the wider community. The University has hosted international cricket touring sides, international and world championship cross country events and the competition and spectacle of its annual rowing regatta attracts teams and visitors from across the country.

### **Getting Involved:**

*To encourage diverse communities to realise their potential:*

**Artists opportunities:** galleries and exhibition spaces for artists, including residencies; business support, training and marketing; the promotion of the arts, culture and heritage in schools as a career path; and readiness for work, employment and the retention of talent.

**Public Art:** contemporary commissions and community-driven site specific works.

**Increase participation:** develop aspirations, ambition and a sense of self-worth and pride at the individual and community level through increased participation in cultural activity.

**Support self expression and learning:** take a non-prescriptive approach to the definition and expression of culture, empowering individuals living and working in the County create their own culture.

### **Achievements in Durham include:**

#### **Art**

- The development of public art has been an important feature of a modern forward looking County Durham aiming to improve the quality, distinctiveness and design of the County's built infrastructure such as public buildings, housing stock, play equipment and street furniture and industrial estates.

- The existing body of quality public arts within the County by artists such as Andrew Goldsworthy, Richard Wentworth, Tony Cragg and Victor Passmore.

## **Music**

- Along with the rest of the North East a strong tradition of music making and appreciation; strong choral singing tradition signified by the Cathedral choristers and the residency of the national youth choir at Durham University; combined with a strong music department. Within the County's many communities singing and playing musical instruments form the major cultural pastime and singers and musicians from the County can be found performing professionally across the world.
- Music continues to play a significant role in supporting the health agenda, for example the successful Sing for Life project which is part of the Fit for Life GP referral scheme in South West Durham. Regular groups singing shows evidence of a range of physical and physiological health benefits.
- Over 1,000 local musicians played in BRASS Durham international festival in 2009 providing a major and unique resource for the County to call upon.

## **Performing Arts**

- There are a number of venues for Performance arts – Gala Theatre, a producing as well as receiving house, which also houses the Gala Youth Theatre. There is strong student involvement in performing arts at Durham University, which has a number of performance spaces. Other theatre spaces include Bishop Auckland Town Hall Theatre, Empire Theatre Consett, Lamplight Theatre, and Stanley. The Further Education colleges, schools and community centres all have spaces that can be used for performances.
- The County also boasts a vibrant rural touring scheme taking live performances into village halls and community centres. University of Durham performance spaces, Cathedral for appropriate events.
- It is vital that Durham builds on a good range of outdoor spaces to support performing arts and does not neglect the potential opportunities to develop further events such as the Bishop Auckland Food Festival (20,000 visitors), and also to develop these outdoor spaces as venues

## Adults and Young People

- Work in this area supports more opportunity for achievement across a range of other outcomes such as reducing childhood obesity, raising attainment, increasing engagement in education, training and employment, reducing alcohol and drug misuse, improving emotional well-being and reducing youth crime.
- Participation in positive activities can help to improve attitudes towards school; build social and communication skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. Within the County there are presently over 30 schools involved in the Arts Council's Creative Partnerships/Enquiry schemes, with over 180 schools involved in the Arts mark scheme with 73 schools achieving gold awards.
- Culture can be used to improve the quality of life and health and wellbeing for people with Learning Disabilities, for example the successful use of the arts for a consultation with people with Learning Disabilities on how they wished to see their service develop or the work with a group in East Durham which led to an exhibition in the Durham Art Gallery.
- Participation in cultural activities offers benefits to adults in general in improving their quality of life and wellbeing.

## Volunteering

- The role of volunteering is of significant importance in engaging individuals who are disengaged and the City of Culture bid for Durham could provide various volunteering opportunities for young people and these could be linked to specific skills development provision in generic and job specific areas. Volunteering could provide some of our young people with real life work experience and provide some of the integral skills required for the world of work, furthermore, opportunities in further and higher education could be explored.

## Creating Wealth:

*To seize the opportunity for creative and cultural activity to generate wealth:*

**Creating wealth:** support and develop creative industries which will contribute to generating jobs, innovation and productivity.

**Raise the profile:** project a positive image of the County internally and externally, on a local, regional, national and global scale.

**Cultural tourism and promotion:** attract local people and visitors both as participants and attendees.

**Community Regeneration:** a social driver for regeneration, improving community cohesion and capacity building.

**Achievements and opportunities in Durham include:**

## **Tourism**

- Tourism is worth £750m per annum to County Durham. 1.5m overnight tourists visited County Durham in 2008, plus an additional 16m day visitors. This supports over 13,000 FTE Jobs. Culture and major events can enhance visitor offer and lengthen the traditional visitor season. Exciting and innovative programmes can increase dwell time, visitor spend and overnight stays.
- A cultural programme can be a primary driver for visits to a location, in a 2004 study of The Edinburgh Festivals, 65% of all visitors to Edinburgh said the Festivals were their sole reason, or very important reason for coming.
- As well as directly increase visitor numbers, culture can raise the profile of a location through exposure in the media. The 2007 BBC Proms in the Park concert in Tees Valley helped to stimulate interest in the region by reaching over 17 million viewers and listeners worldwide. Large-scale, high profile cultural offer can support tourism by putting Durham on the international map, and bringing ourselves to the attention of a wider audience and focusing the spotlight on our unique Durham offer.

## **Creative Industries**

- According to regional research it is suggested that the creative industries sector could be an untapped source of entrepreneurial activity, which given its profile and distribution throughout the region could be well placed to foster economic and community development.
- Organisations – strength in event management with several Durham based companies working nationally on high profile events such as BBC proms and the Edinburgh Winter Festival.
- People – strong senior managers with significant experience and track records of success in cultural organisations and assets that are driving the cultural and sporting agenda.

## **Brand Implementation**

- Strong evidence of desire to change must be promoted to drive up levels of ambition, confidence, recognition, influence and pride to transform the image of the County within regional, national and international arenas. One of our first main steps will be to refresh the Durham brand to ensure we are taking maximising communication and investment opportunities.
- An option for County Durham is to focus on the 'Altogether Better' strap line of the new Council and to think this through in the partnership context. The 'New Council – New Focus' report considers this idea and proposes that the refocused vision is 'Altogether Better Durham'. This reflects optimism that can shape a better County taking advantage of the opportunities we now have, changing perceptions about the place and using enhanced influence to make sure that Durham's needs are heard and met.
- City of Culture is an early example of the enhanced ambition amongst the Council and partners to make Durham better.