# DURHAM SU COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Durham SU is led by its values. Three principles guide everything we do:

## We champion students

We’re a student rights organisation. Our collectivism makes us stronger. We know students make the best decisions about things that affect them. We trust our members.

## We’re proud of Durham

We always recognise success but we always strive for better. Our collegiate University means we do things differently here. We like that.

## We make the future better

We’re a students’ union with a purpose. We’re relentless in pursuit of our mission. We make change for students, with students, in their interests.

Any organisation with these principles would want to take action to make student life better even where Durham students, unwillingly or unknowingly, give rise to some of the reasons for change. Durham students show leadership and balance their rights and their responsibilities.

This community strategy informs Durham SU’s outward facing activity and brings together existing priorities in ‘Forwards’, the Durham SU strategy to 2022, with new and important programmes of work designed to shape our City and influence those with power to make student life better at Durham.

## Our vision is of a community where we live well together, sharing space and interests, shaping our collective future.

# WHY IS THIS STRATEGY IMPORTANT?

Durham University, and its students, have a significant impact on the City of Durham and the wider region. Students and the longer-term resident community have long known the challenges created by a high-turnover population in a small national-heritage City but, recently, a sharper focus on the progress of the University strategy has identified unanticipated and unaddressed consequences to student life. A number of changes have happened *to* students. Durham SU believes that every student should have the power and opportunity to transform their time at Durham. We’re bringing our attention and resources to making changes in the broader City in the interests of students, with students.

# WHAT DO WE INTEND TO ACHIEVE?

The vision of the Durham SU community strategy will be achieved by meeting our longer-term goals:

* Good public services
* A vibrant economy
* Community safety
* The opportunity to share community activity
* An end to homelessness in Durham
* Regulation of high-quality student homes
* A competitive and fair private rented sector market
* Presence, participation, and respect for students in local decision-making bodies
* Representatives committed to our priorities

# WE’LL LOVE OUR CITY

## The student view of a ‘good’ Durham needs to be part of the conversation

We think people love the place they live when they feel welcome and safe, but we’re not sure that this currently describes Durham. There is an apparent tension between the student population of Durham and its longer-term residents. For whatever reason, discussions of ‘what Durham *should* be’ can be dominated by a language which excludes students. A ‘perfect’ Durham is being presented too often as one without students, or one in which students are neither seen or heard.

Community services aren’t designed with the future needs of (more) students in mind. We’re uncomfortable with the use of the Police force to ‘manage’ student excesses and what this might mean for students who want a public service to help them feel safe. Demand and supply of health services are finely balanced and need longer-term planning. The Durham economy faces national and local pressures, certainly, but we’d hope students could get what they need at fair prices in the day and can enjoy nights out safely; without purposeful planning, these basic expectations won’t be met.

These negative views aren’t fair, or realistic, but silence on our part, and to some extent the University, has allowed this discourse to settle. We need to urgently challenge a view that students have no right to decide what sort of City they wish to live in. We want to present a positive vision for student life in Durham. Students want simple things, often the same as longer-term residents: good public services, a vibrant economy. Our job is to make these happen.

## Specifically, we will:

* Publish a ‘Good Student City’ manifesto, giving a single focus to our ambitions.
* Bring the University, City, and local health care providers together to ensure longer term planning addresses growth in student numbers.
* Reset our relationship with the Police, helping them to protect rather than regulate students.
* Maintain relationships with the Durham Business Improvement District, focussing on developing a mixed day and night economy.

## 2019/2020 actions

## Consult on a public facing ‘Good Student City’ manifesto and launch it to stakeholders.

* Introduce student priorities for community safety to candidates for Police and Crime Commissioner in County Durham, and the new Chief Constable.

# WE’LL CONTRIBUTE OUR BEST TO OUR CITY

## Students give so much to each other, and we can share more with our community

A core part of ‘Forwards’ is the Durham SU Stronger Communities Strategy, which focusses our ambitions for the social capital built by and between Durham students. The strategic intent in this document is brought into this Community Strategy.

Durham SU wants students to know that they’ve come to Durham for their higher education – not just a beautiful yet generic cathedral city. We want students to know the benefit of choosing Durham over Bath or Norwich or Exeter. The cultural assets that students create through music, drama and sport and volunteering are considerable and we think we can help our student groups articulate their contribution better. The fantastic year-round experience of living in Durham would be poorer without students and without the local community we find ourselves in. We want to see these opportunities curated and promoted as a whole.

We continue to work in partnership with our friends in the University’s Experience Durham Directorate. We developed our respective strategies in times when there was an unnecessarily combative tone in our relationship, but considerable efforts have shown the opportunities that exist in working together. We think this partnership will be instrumental in the success of changing how students contribute to the City of Durham.

We’re very proud of our fundraising efforts, through our raise-and-give group DUCK, and we think Durham students have more to give. We’re ambitious about using the time and talents of Durham students to make a difference to our City. We can give more than money to social problems: we think that we’ve got the potential to start a real game-change in UK students’ unions and we wonder if we can bring students together with community partners to tackle the scourge of homelessness.

## Specifically, we will:

* Support Durham SU’s student groups to flourish in the City.
* Support the development of a student community warden programme, in partnership with the University.
* Contribute to the University’s goal of 100000 hours per annum of student volunteering.
* Lead a student Great Challenge to address homelessness in Durham.

## 2019/2020 actions

* Incentivise student groups to stage activity in City venues, with the longer-term resident community.
* Scope opportunities to work with Durham Community Action in our everyday work
* Align our volunteer management systems with Experience Durham.

# WE’LL LIVE IN GOOD HOMES

## High quality and affordable housing is a right, not a privilege

‘Forwards’ considers the importance of wellbeing to student success. The Everyday Life strategy prioritises student housing, which is clearly important in any student Community Strategy. The sheer volume of national policy and campaign reports into the private rented sector, from government, Universities, charities and others, demonstrates the crises taking place across the UK. The City of Durham, of course, is a microcosm of this wider problem.

The quality of student housing, often derided, has become unsustainable. Durham SU’s 2019 research into student experiences in the private rented sector found that 15% of students had been made ill by the condition of their home. The market is broken, and there is little incentive for landlords to improve property supply when demand is frantic. The time for awareness campaigns has gone. We intend to tackle a broken market, through advocating for regulation and cultivating competition. Durham students have no confidence that voluntary programmes will have any success.

The causes of the Durham problem, however, are not typical. The University distorts the city, and consequently the housing market. Durham SU found that 10% of students were spending over 81% of their monthly income in rent. The University’s participation in the housing market, through College fees, has had unwelcome consequences. There has been active pushback from University leaders on accepting this fact, or any responsibility for taking action. Students must lead a change in University practice and secure a better situation for students.

## Specifically, we will:

* Develop a platform for students to review private rented sector housing, to expose shameful landlords and promote good options to other students.
* Present a case for regulation of housing of multiple occupancy in the City of Durham.
* Review competition in housing across Durham, to ensure that the market isn’t fixed against the student interest.

## 2019/2020 actions

* Collect housing reviews/ratings from students and launch an online rating scheme.
* Propose an accreditation scheme for landlords and agents, in collaboration with the University and Durham County Council.
* Challenge the culture of early-signing.
* Clearly associate increasing college accommodation costs with costs in the private rented sctor market.

# WE’LL WORK WITH PEOPLE WHO CHAMPION THE STUDENT INTEREST

## Our leaders need to talk about students in Durham in a way we’re all proud of

Durham SU’s Trusted and Respected strategy is a foundation strategy in ‘Forwards’; we know that we won’t have the impact we seek in making everyday life fairer and communities stronger without investing in our relationships with all of the people who have power over the way that students live.

Student participation in local democracy shapes the priorities of elected representatives. It really is that simple. A key priority will be electoral enrolment, development of manifestos, and voter turnout activity. We’ll continue to work with the City of Durham Member of Parliament. We’ll prioritise developing relationships with representatives in the County Council wards of Elvet and Gilesgate, Neville’s Cross, and Belmont. We’ll assert our interest in community safety by building new links with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner.

The City of Durham is in the heart of a large and varied County. Council policy doesn’t often take into account our needs, so we have to work hard with our representatives to ensure that the student interest is clear and respected. We haven’t been in the right conversations: we’ve prioritised providing outlets for the concerns of longer-term residents rather than working to develop policy and practice that makes living in Durham better for everyone. We’ll refocus our efforts from residents’ forums, into the local Area Action Partnership.

We support the University’s good intentions to build its community engagement work. We’ll work with colleagues to understand where we share collective interests and seek to influence the University in its priorities for shaping Durham.

## Specifically, we will:

* Play an active role in the Durham Area Action Partnership.
* Build relationships with Councillors, so they can promote our interests in County Hall.
* Build support for our ‘Good Student City’ manifesto among elected representatives.

## 2019/2020 actions

* Resource our participation in the Durham Area Action Partnership.
* Invite all elected representatives into Durham SU to meet and understand us better.