

state
of the
county
debate '05

**summary
report**



Making a difference where you live

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Introduction

The County Council's constitution allows us to call public debates about the state of life in County Durham. These discussions help us to learn what local people think about their County, the Council and what we are doing to improve quality of life where people live.

The debate

On Monday, 17 October 2005, the County Council marked the beginning of national Local Democracy Week by holding the 2005 'State of the County' debate. Over 150 people took part in the event in a packed Council Chamber in County Hall, Durham.

Councillor Ernie Foster, chairman of the County Council welcomed people to the event and Mark Lloyd, the Council's new Chief Executive provided a scene-setting presentation.

Political journalist and former BBC Look North correspondent Tony Baker, then facilitated an hour long debate in which members of the public were able to raise issues, make comment and explain their concerns about life in County Durham and how the Council provides services and spends their money.

Cllr Ken Manton, Leader of the Council, Cabinet Members, other Councillors and senior Council managers were present to listen and learn from what people had to say.

Issues raised

During a wide-ranging debate, the following issues were raised and discussed by members of the audience:

- The timing of school holidays.
- The continuing role of the North East Assembly, in the context of last year's referendum vote against a regional assembly and moves to include Chester-le-Street in the Tyne and Wear city region.
- The County Council's interest in the building which was identified as a potential headquarters for a northern assembly.

- Withdrawing council funding from the North East Assembly.
- Environmental management, in particular the maintenance of grass verges and street lighting affecting natural habitats.
- Butchers being charged to dispose of unsold or unwanted meat.
- Protecting greens in villages from development in order to maintain villages' identities.
- The state of bus services in outlying villages compared with Durham City.
- Lack of consideration by bus drivers to the needs of disabled people, elderly or infirm passengers.
- How can the Council address the dirty, down-to-earth problems experienced by people who use public transport.
- Lack of consideration and respect for young people using public transport.
- Unitary local government in County Durham.
- The quality of footpaths and cycleways to encourage people to use non-motorised forms of transport.
- Education, unemployment and how we provide opportunities for young people educated in the County to fulfil their aspirations here.
- The state of the County's footpaths and poor quality repairs.
- Forgotten villages and a sense that west Durham is becoming a dumping ground.
- The location of wind turbines and the impact on local residents.
- Encouraging more people to cycle.
- The decline of local shops and businesses creating ghost towns.
- Encouraging community or social enterprise and what the Council can do to support local community initiatives.
- The impact of supermarkets on small businesses.
- Parking in Bishop Auckland and the impact that parking charges have had on local shopkeepers.
- Council Tax bill increases outstripping inflation and the impact on pensioners on fixed incomes.
- High direct labour costs of council workers.
- Increases in the size of the Council's workforce and a sense that the County Council employs people needlessly.
- The future of the farming industry and the impact decline will have on the landscape of Durham.

- The Council's procurement policy and buying products locally.
- The closure of police stations during the evening and early mornings.
- Fear of crime and older people frightened by youths taking control of the streets.
- The North East Assembly's 'Shaping the North East' strategy and the concentration of prestige employment sites in Sedgefield.
- What happens with waste collected for re-cycling.
- Getting people actively involved in community affairs instead of just demanding action.
- The Sky Bowl putting Durham on the map.
- The Police and a no camera policy.
- How this debate will be followed up and maintained throughout the year.

During the course of the debate, we used a 'speech to text' transcription service to enable people with hearing impairments to follow what was discussed. We have attached as appendix one, the full transcription from the debate so that you can see what people actually said.

Feedback

Ninety two percent of people rated the Council Chamber as a good venue for the debate. Eighty five percent of people rated the organisation and administration of the debate as good.

Seventy nine percent rated the scene-setting presentation as good; 20 percent rated it is neither good nor bad. Eighty percent rated the facilitator as good; 18 percent rated him as neither good nor bad. Fifty nine percent rated the quality of the discussion as good; 30 percent rated it as neither good nor bad and 11 percent rated it as bad.

In addition, it should be noted that the event was over-subscribed and a number of people expressed disappointment at not being able to take part in the debate this year.

Appendix One: transcript of the debate

This is the transcript of the State of the County debate. It was taken as the debate happened as part of the 'speech to text service' provided during the debate.

We have checked the transcript for minor errors, such as place name spellings and so on, but in the main, it remains a direct record of what people said.

NEW SPEAKER: Ladies and gentlemen good evening if I can call you aboard I will just introduce myself my name is Tony Baker it's my pleasure tonight to be facilitating the debate. And to welcome you to this state of the county debate 2005. This I think is going to be a remarkable evening because leading councillors and leading officers are sitting in this front row here tonight will remain largely silent. And the reason we are remaining largely silent during the course of the evening is of course we want to hear your views on a range of topics between now and about half eight, so I hope you are not shy and as soon as we get into the debate you will raise a hand and indicate you want to speak and join in the debate. A couple of items of housekeeping to get through before we go much further first of all emergency procedures {...as read...} there will be a Speech To Text transcription going on during the course of the evening so text comes up there on this screen to my left. If you are on my right there are a couple of signers so if anyone does need signing during the course of the evening if you indicate it to us. I will remind you again it is going on for the first part of the evening in any case. And later on towards the end of this evening, as it is rather unusual, we will ask you to fill in evaluation forms on how you think the evening has gone if you just leave those in the boxes at the back on your way out, I am most grateful.

Can I please ask councillor Ernie Foster Chairman of Durham County Council to say a few words.

NEW SPEAKER: Good evening everyone, I am Ernie Foster Chairman of the County Council. For those of you who have not been here before to the council chamber in County Hall. This is the room where councillors sit and take decisions about the services you receive and how your money is spent. Tonight we are using it for a different purpose. This is our first ever state of the county debate, where we give the floor over to you members of the general public. In a moment you will hear from Mark Lloyd, our new Chief Executive and Tony Baker will lead the debate and discussion.

Although this event is very much about you and what you think about this council of ours, councillors and council managers are present to listen and learn from what you have to say. Don't be shy, speak up, enjoy yourselves, and swing on the lights {laughter} and thank you for coming. Mark. {applause}.

NEW SPEAKER: Thank you Chairman and good evening everybody from me. During Local Democracy Week it is fantastic to see the council chamber full of people who have a genuine interest in the way County Durham is and more importantly what we can make County Durham in future, so add my thanks to you for coming along today. Tonight as Tony has said it's very much about discussion. My job is to set the scene and I will do five things. First describing why we are here. Secondly as we are sitting here in Durham County Council's chamber I will remind us just what it is councils do and thirdly remind us of some of the great things about County Durham (that's the easy part) and fourthly to provide balance, I will remind us of some of the challenges here in Durham and finally remind us of some of the things happening already to make Durham a great place to live work and bring up a family. First why are we. Here, tonight as Tony says, it is an event for myself as new Chief Exec of Durham County Council and senior members of the council here, officers and unelected members to listen. It's a chance for citizens of the county, you, to debate issues important to you and for us to listen. As people, we have one mouth and two ears and we aim to use them in that proportion during the evening. Democracy is not a spectator sport and only works from you in the ballot box and at events like this.

So, I said it's my second thing to remind us what councils do. County Durham is a little unusual in the North East. Here and in Northumberland we have two tiers of Local Government - district councils and one County Council serving the whole of the County. It makes us different to Gateshead, Sunderland and Hartlepool where they have one what we call unitary council. Because of the two tier arrangement, I thought it helpful as a start to remind us of some of the differences between the different types of councils. County Council have a responsibility for education and encourage adults to continue with learning. Colleagues in the District Councils look after matters to do with housing, look after matters in relation to getting an extension to your house and the County Council takes care of strategic planning things like open cast mining, transport highways overview and responsibilities for fire and on the next slide and then finally County Council takes care of social support needs and health in the county, provides libraries. Both we and district councils make a contribution to leisure in Durham and one of the quaint things about two tier Local Government - our district county colleagues collect waste from your homes and the County Council gets rid of it, so they hand it over to us. It tickles me that part. Environmental health and district councils as you know have responsibility for collecting council taxes and pass a share of it on to us.

I am not great a great fan of wordy presentations so most of what I say next I am going to rely on pictures. Let me do what I described as the easy bit to remind us some of the wonderful things about County Durham. I am a newcomer I am a child here, I arrived in 99. It must seem like yesterday to people who have spent their whole lives here. I've had the benefit of living in Shropshire, Wales, Birmingham before heading North to Durham and one of the things that is special about County Durham is its sense of community and identity, its togetherness, it is something I feel proud to be part of as demonstrated by the Miners' Gala or people's preparedness to take part in events like this. That is an event that took place in Stanley not very long ago.

One of the next things that really impresses me about County Durham is a beautiful rural landscape. That picture is one of a variety I could have selected in Teesdale. Of course if you are thinking about where to live in County Durham you are spoilt for choice, whatever you want, I believe this county can offer, as a place to live and enjoy, from rural at Weardale you see in my first picture through to towns like Bishop Auckland - Aidan has not put the slide up {laughter}. And of course, as part of the county we have the University of Durham, a world class facility. I am always careful as I am sure you are when I use words like world class, but in this case it's legitimate. First picture you see, Bachelor of Arts students graduating from the university as many do each year. Second picture is from the clean room in the physics department at Durham University. I show that to remind us universities are not just about teaching but very much about research and in Durham University or all universities in fact, all research activities are rating like hotels, up to 5 stars. In Durham's case, its 34 subject areas where research is assessed, 20 are 5 star or better. Imagine that in a hotel context. It's really something special for us and creates economic opportunity for our economic development in County Durham and North East. Finally, the university was announced 3 weeks ago as the Sunday Times university of the year. This is Durham University, our university, part of our county, the best in the country in the opinion of the Sunday Times, a well regarded brand name.

What about our connections? Durham I contend is well connected to the rest of the region UK and beyond. We see in the first picture newly refurbished Durham bus station. We are not far away are we from Newcastle Airport. Flights to many destinations including a link to North America, a direct link into JFK New York. Durham Tees Valley Airport and the airport again is growing and provides more links and opportunities for us tourism and business and critically for people to come to county too from tourism. And I put a map up, the graphics are not great but it reminds us County Durham sits on the A1(M) and the A 19 and East Coast Main Line, together with the roads that take us to the West. And finally issues around Durham's treasures. Again a wide range we start with Raby Castle and move to Bowes Museum in Teesdale take us into the centre of the county, the cathedral and down to the East and the coast of Durham. Since it's been reclaimed, it is a really special place to visit.

I promised some balance and this is where I need to set out some of the things that are challenges for us in County Durham. I will show you 6 maps and I will use a pointer to illustrate what I am doing. If we can pick up the red dot under income if it helps you catch it. It's clearly a map of County Durham in the centre here and you have Chester-le-Street, over to Stanley, Consett, seeing Peterlee, I drop down Newton Aycliffe, Bishop Auckland, Barnard Castle. The detail doesn't matter, it's the shading and what I am showing here first with income, it is County Durham cut up into 320 small areas each of those areas some are bigger because they are rural and some tiny because they are urban contain about 1,500 people and they are recognised communities in our county.

What I am showing you on the map in the darkest shading are those areas amongst the 10% worst off for income in England. The next dark is shading,

that sort of, sorry if you take it bad, the salmon pink colour, are those places in the worst 10 or 20% and lightest shading, worst 20 to 30% for issues of income in England in this case. What I am looking at are households dependent on Job Seeker's Allowance or use family Working Family Tax Credit, people with disabled persons tax credits, you can see in County Durham we end up with some fairly deprived wards in our county where we need to take action. The headline here if everything was fair about life I think 96 of those 320 areas in our county would be shaded in and that is 30% of them - 96 out of 320, 146 shaded on that diagram we have information about income deprivation. Let's turn it into non-statistician speak it means we earn less. Males in County Durham earn 78% of the UK average male income. Females in County Durham earn 91% of the average female income.

Take me to the second diagram I can pick up the speed, turning to employment what I am looking at here to get the shading is people who are registered unemployed, on Incapacity Benefit or receiving severe disability allowance and again, you see areas where it's worse in the darker shading 10 to 20% in that sort of colour and 20 to 30 in the paler shading. In Durham 230 of the 320 areas on there are shaded.

What does it mean as a headline? It meant means 32% of the people in this county of working age - 32%, a third of people of working age - are economically inactive - not working. To get back up to the same level of economic activity as UK average we need a headline figure of 18,000 extra jobs in County Durham. A third diagram and the one we pay attention to is around health. What we are looking at here is life expectancy and levels of illness and disability and emergency admissions into hospital. 240 of the 320 areas shaded in {inaudible} remember. What does it mean as a headline for me and you? Step away from the statisticians speak. It means men on average in County Durham die a year and a half younger than men elsewhere. Women on average die a year and a quarter younger than women elsewhere. I would quite like that year and a half! Then turn to education. Same legend same things apply, looking at how well young people perform in key stage 2, 3 and 4 the old A level stage and adults with no or low levels of qualifications. Headline is 36% of adults in County Durham have no qualifications compared to 29% last year and roughly a third or just under a third need extra support with literacy and numeracy and turning to crime or I will put some of these up in a moment, but welcome to Jon Stoddard, a good story here. Congratulations to Jon, you can see very little shading on the diagram. This measures burglary theft criminal damage and violence 41 shaded areas out of 320. Fact is Durham is one of the safest places in England but communities are concerned about crime. Next picture combines all of the issues and this is the overall picture of deprivation in County Durham. You can see areas that need the greatest help in the strongest red shading.

It's important for us in how we make County Durham a greater place. What are we doing about it? Durham is an ambitious positive place, we are looking to the future with pride and confidence. People let's say let's work together on this, let's prioritise our actions and in that light, we have a vision for the future, a vision developed by something called the County Durham Strategic Partnership, working together across public private voluntary and community

sectors to identify what we need to do to make this a dynamic place for the future. That partnership believes there are 12 challenges and we are working on these 12 challenges now actively right now to ensure for us a brighter future and for our children. I won't go through all 12, let me go through a few highlights. If I move first to knowledge economy, try and make sure we develop intelligence and know-how, things we can sell internationally in the same way we used to manufacture and sell internationally. What we have here is the handing over to Professor John Anstee, by some guy on the left, (not sure who he is!) {laughter} handing over on behalf of the Prime Minister, NetPark Research Institute, an institute housing two research functions at University of Durham. Doing very very clever things, world leading things happening in County Durham to create future wealth and prosperity. You will see in the press more things about future science coming to NetPark. Secondly coming to tourism. Of course County Durham is kind of a secret place, isn't it? It has so much to offer in terms of tourism, it is a well kept secret. Things like Beamish Museum and controversially, perhaps things like the Durham Sky Bowl which I am sure will be a debating topic later this evening.

{...as read....} how we encourage people to come and visit us. Let me touch upon issues to do with housing and maybe neighbourhoods we need to make sure we have decent homes for all of our people. In the County Council, we are making sure we pay particular attention to our homes for older people. This is one of our extra care homes created in County Durham to enable older people to retain independence, while living in the community.

The second picture is a world premier, especially for tonight, it's how the fleet of buses operating on the Durham Park and Ride will look like as the livery is provided in the next few weeks and if I can turn finally to education and young people. I should pause really - it's what I think it is all about - making sure we get it right for young people so they have a brighter future. First picture is a centre that opened gosh 2 or 3 weeks ago. It's the regional science learning centre, a centre at Framwellgate School in Durham. It's created and invested in by the County Council and will ensure science teachers are able to excite and motivate young people in science learning critical for future success.

Secondly the new Oaks School at Spennymoor, opened last month helping children with learning disabilities aged 11 to 19. I thought I would finish with a picture of young people reminding us we need to get it right, so we know what the priorities are for the bright future for the children of our county.

Thank you for attending. The County Council is just at this stage thinking about its priorities and its investments for the future and hearing what you have to say this evening, this evening will be a critical part of the information that feeds into that debate about priorities. Please enjoy the night - it's your show.

NEW SPEAKER: Mark thank you very much indeed and as Mark says it's now over to you. I hope during the course of this debate I might call for a few straw polls from time to time to get a measure of what people are thinking on particular issues. If you want one shout at me and I will organise one. I hope it's fairly informal. If past experience of such events is anything to go by we

might have a slow start and might have a gallop at the end. If you do want to make a point jump in quickly is my advice to you. We did get from some of you a paper which shows some of the themes some people want to talk about tonight. You won't be surprised to know they cover every area of services in which the County Council is involved – highways, transport, community development, cohesion issues strategic planning, health, all kinds of other things as well.

Let me take a straw poll to begin with how many people think County Durham is a good place to live? Virtually unanimous. How many people think the County Council could do better? Virtually unanimous. Let's {laughter} perhaps try and find out how and as we skate across these issues what I would like to try and do is finish each section perhaps with a little vote or some kind of positive outcome from the kind of things you are suggesting so we give your elected representatives and officers something to take away and consider. Who will start it off? Gentleman here.

NEW SPEAKER: I would like.

NEW SPEAKER: Can you speak into the microphone.

NEW SPEAKER: Tell us who you are.

NEW SPEAKER: John Eric from Wingate I would like to say I wonder if they could save a million pound a year they are looking for ways to save money why don't you restructure school holidays instead of getting seven weeks in the summer give them 3 weeks in the summer it's ample you only get a fortnight from work 2 weeks in the holiday in the summer and put the rest of the weeks on to winter time you are saving school meals electric water wardens teachers school transport buses and everything in a few weeks a year and by the end of 1 year doing that you will be close on to a million pound you imagine every infant school junior school comprehensive it's a lot of money.

NEW SPEAKER: Set a pattern for the nation there any thoughts on doing that. This is, tell us who you are, I spoke to Ashleigh Greathead on the phone the other day she is taking the debate forward.

NEW SPEAKER: It's lack of understanding is what you were talking about, there are you saying cut six weeks holidays and cut them down to 3 or have them at different times of the year.

NEW SPEAKER: Well, work it out in the summer you don't have to have fire and heating on winter times you do so obviously through the holidays to the winter time from the summer the schools are going to be closed in the winter time not using heating oil or electricity and therefore all the heating and everything to do with winter time from the summer won't be used.

NEW SPEAKER: First idea for people on the county to take away and think about gentleman at the back has a point. Get the microphone to you.

NEW SPEAKER: The problem I think with.

NEW SPEAKER: Can you give us your name.

NEW SPEAKER: Ian Wilter from Bishop Auckland. Right economics factor I think is outweighed by sort of negative economics of everybody having to go on holiday at the same time 6 or 7 weeks of holiday I suspect peoples holidays can be spread across a number of weeks there is additional cost for the school holidays as opposed to going in June for example indirect cost of that is far outweigh the cost for the county council and therefore ratepayers.

NEW SPEAKER: Any particular points from Bishop Auckland you wanted to raise from your own town.

NEW SPEAKER: Not especially from Bishop Auckland I am here answering questioners on behalf of the County Council it's coming along to night to see how things progress I didn't have a particular agenda or.

NEW SPEAKER: Thanks for the contribution. Gentleman here.

NEW SPEAKER: My question is nothing to do with holidays or schools. My concern is with the role of the North East assembly in our government at the moment. It seems to me {applause} we rejected a North East Assembly but still have an Assembly which is having its powers extended. For instance the document 'Shaping the North East', claimed North East Assembly are determined how much development will take place in the region and where it will take place. What's the role of the County Council in it? What's happened between the relationship between County Councils and District Councils, For instance Chester-le-Street where I come from, I represent the residents association, we read that Chester-le-Street is simply included in the Tyne and Wear city plan. We are not Tyne and Wear city, we are County Durham. Where does county stand with this sort of statement coming?

NEW SPEAKER: Can I take it further are any of you in favour of the abolition of the current unelected assembly and passing all the power.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes I think I would I would like to have it explained but I think on the whole that the North East Assembly doesn't do a great deal. I think the Assemblies of the North East Councils, the other one does do some good work.

NEW SPEAKER: What's the measure of agreement for the gentleman in the room. If you agree that the assembly has outlived its usefulness please raise your hand if you do - perhaps half the room. I would like to quickly jump in there and change the topic entirely I am not sure I can get you a precise answer to that Mark Lloyd mentioned what was a very controversial issue certainly in the media in the last few weeks that's the bowl - people were talking about, some called it the largest ashtray in Europe.

NEW SPEAKER: Excuse me sir why can't you give me a reasonable answer to what is the County Council's stance to a North East Assembly attempting to move Chester-le-Street into a Tyne and Wear city?

NEW SPEAKER: I will put that question to Mark Lloyd on your behalf, Mark.

NEW SPEAKER: Thanks Tony I will do my best to pick up the question. First to say that the North East Assembly does continue to have a role to play in the North East. Indirectly, the Assembly does still have responsibilities on

behalf of government, the specific responsibilities relate to things like transportation. Across the region is soon to be a regional transport board, established issues like housing across the North East, and there is a housing board in creation and making sure economic matters are addressed through the agency One North East. These are roles the government thinks need a regional view and invite people to come and give a view on those issues. I will try this microphone, it may be better. Just on the issue of the question which talked about Tyne and Wear city region and moving Chester-le-Street into Tyne and Wear, I am sure you are interested to know the government does have an interest following the Northern Way, a plan to improve economic performance of the North, to ensure cities in the North East make a full contribution to our economic prospects and prosperity. In developing a focus on making cities more successful, a wide definition has been used for a Tyne and Wear city region and a Tees Valley city region for the purposes of trying to ensure the North East has a strong economy. The gentleman is right to say Chester-le-Street, Durham, Easington and Derwentside are defined as being part of the wider Tyne and Wear economic unit and indeed when it comes to Tees Valley city region and the wider economic unit, it's deemed Sedgefield plays a contribution to that {inaudible} strong economies. But in terms of looking at local government, democracy and all the services I talked about tonight, County Durham is still County Durham, Chester-le-Street is still Chester-le-Street and will continue to be so.

NEW SPEAKER: I want to be fair to you and give answers to your questions I point out we are largely talking about performance of the council tonight and to some extent your question is about government policy.

NEW SPEAKER: No my question is about the County Councillors response. I got a partial answer, it was a fudged answer, but it was it was a partial answer.

NEW SPEAKER: Gentleman at the back.

NEW SPEAKER: Before we discuss, sorry Brian Clouston, before we discuss the bowl which has not been built can we please discuss the Northern Assembly headquarters that has been built and shortly to be occupied by the council staff at a lease of 3 and a half million pounds. It is a County Council issue. I say I would like an answer please.

NEW SPEAKER: Is that something Ken Manton could deal with.

NEW SPEAKER: We certainly have {inaudible} up the road here a building just about complete we are in negotiations with developers to take certain parts of the building over some of you may be aware certain parts of County Hall, really the annexe outside, that's come to the end of its working life and we are looking to locate many of the services there. Some may be coming into County Hall or into a facility at Spennymoor on the old Rothman's site. It means we are taking certain parts of the building up the road. It's not owned by us, we are renting part of it along with an arm's length company of the County Council - we are looking to re-locate it into the building as well. It's part of the council's property portfolio where best to put staff. The building itself does not belong to the County Council.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes, the County Council are negotiating space. It was built originally for the north assembly. The annexe that the councillor mentions was in fact offered to the Northern Assembly as a possible headquarters. But that now has been abandoned, it suddenly becomes a useless substructural building. I can't understand the council's logic, it takes a building at a huge expense to the taxpayer, everyone probably knows in this room it was built for the Northern Assembly.

NEW SPEAKER: The building was built by a private developer and that developer is looking to many people in the public and private sector to rent out rooms. It's common practise. We are in this particular case just renting part of the building, it may be a medium term of rent. We have no control who takes other parts of the building and obviously we are looking to {inaudible} to be used for something appropriate for this location.

NEW SPEAKER: Gentleman in the grey jacket.

NEW SPEAKER: Thank you Richard from Teesdale. I do have a great concern about Regional Assembly and the move to an unelected body controlling the area. Inevitably the cities in the region, simply because of the population and cities and the surrounding areas, will get the best cut of resources which is going to lead to further marginalisation of the rural areas that are already under threat. I am concerned with the way the regions {inaudible} structure is developing in that it is giving housing allocations to the rural areas, more for the need of an elderly population more than {inaudible} population. I don't think it's the way to go for a sustainable future. I think Durham needs to look after itself and not be satellite to Teesside, Wearside and Tyneside.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes what I would like to say I believe in October last year, the country as a whole voted, or this part of the region voted, against North East Assembly. I want to know why is it still in control? It was voted by the people for the people to be disassembled. It's apparently still in control, I plead to the councillors and this council in particular to withdraw funding towards a North East Assembly and get on with the job you are elected to do to look after our county {applause} {applause}.

NEW SPEAKER: Taking up your point there, can I ask how many people agree with that particular point about funding to the non-elected regional Assembly should be withdrawn? We have quite a majority, thank you very much indeed.

NEW SPEAKER: If I may then continue as a local farmer I am very worried about the environment at the moment and farmers are always getting wronged for not looking after the environment. I take it as a personal snub I would like to say to the environmentalists in the cabinet will they please get rid of and look after your grass verges {inaudible} came in 1952 apparently ragwort is still rife around the county's verges and whether its county or highways department something should be done about it. Your rubbish on your grass verges affects my livelihood. It needs to be taken care of.

I would also like to ask could you turn the street lights off on the main roads? It upsets the balance of nature, there is nowhere for the birds to roost, nowhere for rodents to hide to, it's constant daylight. Surely it's a matter of being able to drive and be able to see

NEW SPEAKER: Can I ask Maggie Bosanquet from Local Agenda 21 in the Environment department to give us some guidance on that.

NEW SPEAKER: Thanks, our wildlife in the county is incredible. It's one of the best resources we have and one of the key areas that could become a wildlife resource across the county is our verges. We've been looking at grass verges across the county, particularly in the dales, and identifying some of the most important species we have there. We are working to improve those and change grass cutting regimes so we can have corridors for wildlife to migrate up and down and increase wildlife species and we can do it along grass verges. It's a project going on at the moment and I hope it's very successful.

NEW SPEAKER: I would like to reply to Mr Crystal. He is concerned about the environment so much he was quite prepared to use his land as a tip and make a fortune out of it. Fortunately for us, it didn't come off.

NEW SPEAKER: Can I say something on the environment please.

NEW SPEAKER: Sorry where are we.

NEW SPEAKER: Your name.

NEW SPEAKER: Sticking with the environment I how come, just press it, yes? How come butchers are now being charged to dump because they can't charge to have their meat taken away, if it's not sold in the recommended time scale. Now we are having meat butchered carted around the county, I assume.

NEW SPEAKER: I don't know if there is anyone from the County Council team able to answer that specific question.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes, this is very much a matter of public health not something County Council has direct responsibility for. We have responsibility for waste management and disposal of the some of issues are our responsibility to clear up, but the City Council have responsibility of finding which material should be disposed of. It's not our direct responsibility to deal with the actual issue you refer to but we will try to see whether or not the agencies responsible have got this {inaudible}.

NEW SPEAKER: So it's a question that will be taken up and referred to by other authorities, we will get you an answer hopefully something to satisfy the point you raised.

NEW SPEAKER: Heather. It dismays me and upsets be we are losing the identity of our villages through buildings. We have lost all our greens etc I think it's getting worse I think greens in villages should be created instead of built upon.

NEW SPEAKER: What are you referring to particularly?

NEW SPEAKER: We didn't have much of a green in {inaudible} to start with and now the council has let a building be built on that little green and now like every other village we are just 1 street, no village greens, nowhere anyone can meet to see and be seen. We are losing our communities through housing being built in the middle of villages.

NEW SPEAKER: I think that will probably be a policy carried out by district council rather than County Council.

NEW SPEAKER: It's County Council, ground.

NEW SPEAKER: So the land was sold by the County Council perhaps one of the officers can take note of it and come back to you.

NEW SPEAKER: Vince Perkins, I feel like a thorn between the roses here on the front bench. First I didn't realise why I was asked here tonight. Lady mentions about greens. On villages I am involved in 2 villages in my ward and the green is very important I suggest to this lady to get in touch with her local district councillor as well as county councillor, district councillors should be able to do something about it for her. We intend to keep them.

NEW SPEAKER: Thank you very much indeed. Perhaps to get a better understanding between the county and District Councils over the protection of some of our assets like village greens. Once they are gone they are gone forever. Everyone takes the point.

NEW SPEAKER: Hello, about transport, county councillors are on about all the posh buses they are going to have. We came today to this meeting on what I call a tin can on wheels. This is what we have from mainly the outlying villages dreadful conditions on our buses I think it's about time the villages were looked at instead of just Durham.

NEW SPEAKER: You mean old and rather decrepit.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes the seats are OK if you were size 8, 2 people could sit on the bus, but if you are bigger than size 8 you have to have a seat each.

NEW SPEAKER: {laughter} What would you say is the solution to that, perhaps for the County Council to insist on better standard from the bus companies.

NEW SPEAKER: You are having all the new buses come through Durham Park and Ride, we have to drive into Durham first to Park and Ride, what are they doing for us who need our cars?

NEW SPEAKER: So how could the County Council help in improving the bus services, any news on that may be a positive for the council team to take away tonight.

NEW SPEAKER: Ashleigh.

NEW SPEAKER: It's no disrespect to all of the people from the {inaudible}.

NEW SPEAKER: Be as disrespectful as you like.

NEW SPEAKER: Money spent on the sky bowl could be spent on improving the bus services {applause}.

NEW SPEAKER: Gentleman at the back in the red jacket.

NEW SPEAKER: I don't use the bus service because when I go on a bus, being disabled in a wheelchair and blind, sometimes the bus has started off before I have got sat down. It doesn't make me any more confident than what I already am. Often I hit my head on something if the bus stops, it stops at a jolt or takes a bend too quickly and I have to hang on in a bus seat or in my wheelchair. I think drivers should have awareness training for disabled people like myself and make them feel more confident while travelling on a bus.

NEW SPEAKER: I would like to bring in Harriet Gibbon, chief officer of Age Concern Durham, I know has concerns about the ways in which signing at bus stops could be improved and generally lack of transport.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes, we are currently involved in a research project with University of Durham looking at how people get around County Durham - the project is called 'Getting Around'. Doing research in Tees Valley one of the findings echoes the point the gentleman made but it's not just people who have a disability we are worried about before someone has sat down, it's a concern for elderly people too and we are concerned that bus drivers should be trained to take more consideration of elderly and infirm passengers.

NEW SPEAKER: Some of it can be laid at the door of the bus companies perhaps less so than the doors of the County Councillors. Our officers taking away any thoughts tonight 1 piece of advice you can offer.

NEW SPEAKER: I think certainly needs to be more awareness training for staff in transport it is a major issue such as lack of taxi provision for people who live in rural areas 1 lady talking she has difficulty getting transport to the area.

NEW SPEAKER: Mark mentioned two airports, great facility.

Sometimes it's difficult to get to the airport. Can I ask Cameron Gordon to join in the debate. Cameron is managing director of New Answers and Chairman of County Durham Strong, Safe and Healthy Communities Partnership.

NEW SPEAKER: Thanks Tony I think the thing the County Council can do positively to address these issues is to look at the very dirty down-to-earth problems real commuters really face. I have the honour and privilege of sitting on the local transport planning forum, or something of its type, and weighty issues are discussed on the accessibility and the reliability and the provision of integrated transport and that is very good. Then I have a lady write to me to say I have had to put up with people using foul language, listening to sexual exploits, urinating at the bus stop, people not queuing and pushing straight in. And this is the 8 30 in the morning and the 5:00 at night bus. If these issues can be taken on with as much seriousness as the strategic ones, answers people are wanting can be received.

NEW SPEAKER: We were talking about this beforehand, everybody seems to think all the trouble on buses Cameron is talking about, is caused by young people. Perhaps it's not the case all the time and perhaps Ashleigh and Michelle from Investing in Children could talk about some kind of new code bus drivers have to learn so they don't throw young people off.

NEW SPEAKER: Hi, we were thinking of something to have, like, an awareness day for bus drivers to respect young people for {inaudible} some training days to see if training is acceptable because some of the treatment young people get on buses is, well, we don't agree with it.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes 1 thing amazes me is we never look back enough I can remember some of my friends here used to have a man called a conductor and to be honest he was quite a decent chap. He also used to help old ladies with baggage and shopping baskets. It wasn't such a bad idea to have someone do the job.

NEW SPEAKER: Looking here tonight we can see a vision of the future, for Durham County 23 was it. You all agree with me, we should go for a unitary authority. Getting rid of the stock transfer with the housing, we see how little

is left for the district council to do if we get rid of the housing and given the fact when you complain it's always Durham's fault, regardless of the referendum, should we not be looking to a unitary authority.

NEW SPEAKER: I wonder if that issue is completely..... Ken Manton on this it's something he and I discussed what's the future of Local Government if we get an Assembly we won't get 1 are we still left with a need to change the local authority areas like this county and Northumberland or is it going to settle back into what it was, can you give us some thoughts on that.

NEW SPEAKER: Following the Regional Assembly vote government made a commitment saying unitary government changes were off the table. As everyone in the room knows change has taken place to many forms of Local Government services - you are aware police are under consultation about regional police services and Primary Care Trusts are looking to merge. The driving force is economies of scale - how much do you want to pay for back office services as opposed to frontline services. We made a case for one unitary authority as the best option and devolved services wherever possible where Parish Councils are not appropriate. Does the County Council want to get involved in every village in the county? It's not something for the County Council to decide if you want to get Local Government changed. What I can say it's unfinished business and we believe government is still considering it's position on the issue and I can say to the questioner watch this space.

NEW SPEAKER: What's the feeling in the room, do people in the room want to keep the system as it is a County Council and 7 District Councils or like the two forms of Local Government amalgamated. Please vote if you would like to keep things as they are. And those who would like change perhaps an amalgamation. It's just about in favour of change I think.

NEW SPEAKER: It goes back to transport. I am often worried about quality of the footpaths in the area and the lack of cycleways and non-motorised transport I wondered if there is any possibility we can improve these forms of transport.

NEW SPEAKER: I would like to bring Harriet Gibbon back in on this, Harriet it's raised often by your members who are worried about levels of footpaths. Taking a tumble - it can be unpleasant for elderly people and the cost of hospital treatment can far outweigh replacing a broken kerbstone.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes falling and fracturing your hip, if you are an older person, can seriously affect the quality of your life. If you are lucky you will make a recovery. You may end up in hospital, need physiotherapy - cost to the National Health Service is about 12 to 15,000 pounds; 3 to 4 times that to the Local Authority if the person has to go into residential care. We agreed a National framework in 2001. Standard 6 of the framework is prevention of falls in older people and there is a requirement on the primary care trust and the Local Authority to put in preventative measures to prevent falls in older people I suggest it's in the County Councils interest to repair flags cost is likely to be less than the cost to pay for people who have sadly fallen and injured themselves. To be fair to the council, they have taken action to repair {inaudible} to have dropped kerbs, for local residents that have concerns about footpaths take it to the council or I am happy to do it on their behalf.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes Mr Chairman, Chester-le-Street, what I would like to refer to is the opening speech from the chief exec when you showed these fine charts. Apparently we have the finest university in the country and some of the finest schools. I do know this my children were well educated in Chester-le-Street area and all went to university, thank God. If I look at figures we have highest unemployment than other parts of the country lowest salaries than other parts of the country.

It seems to me we are going to have the greatest educated unemployed people coming out of education and schools. What can the County Council do to fulfil aspirations of the younger generation. {applause}.

NEW SPEAKER: Can I take a question from the gentleman there.

NEW SPEAKER: About the state of the footpaths, I want to raise my concerns regarding footpaths and the state of some of the county's footpaths due to the weeds coming in from the grass verges and destroying the tar. Footpaths are being broken up and my concerns are about the footpaths in the East of {inaudible}. I contacted the County Council via my County Councillor in September last year. The state of the footpath after the repair job is the mother of all botched up jobsstated by the people who got the tender minimum of 6 millimetres and levelled it off. They kept the 6 millimetres. Holes are still there and we have a footpath full of peaks and troughs and really dangerous to walk upon. The weeds are all through the tarmac smashing it to bits. If they are going to do a job they should do it damn properly.

NEW SPEAKER: Is that a 1 off.

NEW SPEAKER: No no no the County Council say they are not allowed to use certain weedkillers that are too strong they should take a leaf from the District Council. The grass is scorched and controlled in the county it is sad it really is sad.

NEW SPEAKER: Thank you very much.

NEW SPEAKER: I am a resident of County Durham I would like to know what the County Council is going to do with forgotten villages in the West of the county. We have 1 school no church no Post Office no doctors surgery no library no swimming pool or sports facilities we have {inaudible} financed by the County Council and apart from that we can't access our District Council offices millions are spent by District Council on swimming pools leisure centres and colleges none of which we can access. After the foot and mouth we had 50,000 slaughtered animals buried on our doorsteps 6 wind turbines in place, and 12 going through the process. Are we the dumping ground of Durham. Mark mentioned the rural landscapes are we spending money on our Eastern coasts.....inaudible.....

NEW SPEAKER: You make a powerful case I wonder if you could perhaps leave council members and officers here with thoughts about what you would like to see happen to redress the balance.

NEW SPEAKER: In the press today, I don't know if you have seen it, about wind turbines in County Durham the financial gain to be made by District Councils and tax relief by suppliers of the wind turbines. What are we gaining out of it cheaper electricity? Reduced house prices, industrial sites - put them

on industrial sites, not on our rural areas, on our lovely rural landscapes, put them on industrial sites.

NEW SPEAKER: I went to recently a public inquiry in the Lake District about wind turbines. There is controversy about putting wind turbines in that part of the Lake District and the argument boils down to government saying you need more wind turbines and on the other side, from residents who feel they are a terrible blot on landscape. I wonder if you can give us an assessment on the position in County Durham.

NEW SPEAKER: It's an incredibly difficult question. I don't know how many people feel like I do, terrified by the prospect of climate change - the most serious risk or danger facing us all and life in the future. We have to do something about it and find ways of creating energy that are renewable we can keep going forever without causing damage to the earth. Wind is one of those. You are absolutely right it has to be in the right place and {....as read....} {inaudible} we have to make sure wind turbines go into right place, sometimes it's off-shore or is within the county and we also need to make sure we benefit when turbines go in. It's something we need to explore more whether you should also be able to get cheaper or free electricity.

There are many other forms of energy. It's important if we don't address it we won't have a world for our children to go up in.

NEW SPEAKER: {inaudible} our area 92% of the people are against having the wind turbines, yet everyone said they are not against finding an alternative method. In the press today, however original figures was 450 {inaudible} megawatts {inaudible} going to produce 950 megawatts.

NEW SPEAKER: Gentleman here wanted to make a point.

NEW SPEAKER: Going back to the.....got some answer about pathways, I have had no response about cycleways. Today it was announced government was giving 2 and a half million to 5 different towns to improve cycle transport it seems a pity to go any distance you have to get public transport or a car. There seems benefit to encourage people to get on a bike.

NEW SPEAKER: David acting head of environment.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes, I thank you very much. It's something we've been asked for right the way through the local transport planning process in the last 5 years and it's one of the options the authority has and of course there are massive competing priorities on the budget, and we have been building a number of cycleways and they take time to produce and also it takes time for people to start using them. We have a very dispersed population and enormous distances to cover if we are to have effective cycle networks. The problem is we are a large rural area, we can only get a patchy network, it will take many years to create something highly effective and universally accessible to people. We are encouraged where we have put them in, we have had something like 60% increase in cycling in that vicinity so we can see it is effective. But it will take time and I get a sense from the meeting we must take more out of the budget for cycling and walking. If the government gives us money for a local transport plan. It doesn't come without strings, there are restrictions on what you can spend. I take the point made several times and I highly agree and endorse the idea we should provide more cycleways for people to use.

NEW SPEAKER: What I wanted to discuss was the idea of the wind turbines, I have been on {inaudible} District Council on quite a few occasions. We went to see a wind turbine in Hartlepool - horrendous looking thing, you can walk up inside it. Halfway up you would have to have a health test, this is a fact. We all had to wear hard hats. I think government should take a hand in what happens to these wind turbines. It is a big problem and it's not district councillors or County Councillors making money out of it, it's the landowners. These wind turbines sit on their land and these landowners make thousands, millions from it. It's not district or County Councils making money out of it.

NEW SPEAKER: Tony Hall Newton Aycliffe. I would like to extend a bit further, my friend here said about spoiling the environment. The point I would like to raise as local shops and businesses close and pubs etc, we are creating ghost towns where by people have to get their cars out to go to a supermarket, it's creating more gases from the shop. We used to walk or cycle to the shop. My nearest shop is 2 miles away. I get the car out. What I would like to say is there any action from anybody going to create businesses back into these ghost towns. You know parts of County Durham where I have been there is nobody, absolutely nobody in the streets at all, and when I moved up here in 1950 odd, the whole place was full of people walking around talking, now nobody talks. Are the council going to have it as local or funded by the government. Because something wants doing about ghost towns. Eventually you will get an awful lot of people travelling miles and miles just to get a bottle of milk. I know it comes from retail price maintenance, when everything was a standard price, you knew a loaf of bread in this town was the same in the next town. None of all this grab grab grab by the big supermarkets. They are grabbing everything. There is nothing sacred to anybody, now newsagents, Post Offices, milkmen, they are all going into the supermarkets and eventually there will be 1 supermarket miles away and we will drive there in thousands of cars.

NEW SPEAKER: It's the issue, I think in the trade it's called social enterprise - where the Local Authorities or the local community as an entity can have some form of business activity within a community. I think there is great scope or certainly great need for that in my village of Langley Park. There is not a single place to sit and have a cup of coffee which means it's impossible to walk such a long distance without walking and not having a break means people take their car. If there is no-one in the private sector taking it on, there may be scope for community or social enterprise. It's actually my big idea - we as members of the public need to start, instead of asking what is the county going to do about it or the district going to do about it, but what can I, my colleagues and neighbours do about it and what can the Local Authority do to support us in that. I know a few Local Authority people nowadays, I think they are quite open to it and if we can come in with suggestions and ask for support, we may well get it. If we just say what are you going to do, you don't get that far. Social enterprise, big idea.

NEW SPEAKER: Right at the back.

NEW SPEAKER: I would like to bring it to the attention of the council of the danger of supermarkets. There is a report on television on what's

happening.....these supermarkets have driven out small businesses then up and left the town all together with the result there is no supermarket and no businesses and it seems to me the day the supermarkets up and go whenever they like it. We have no safeguard against it I wonder what can be done about it.

NEW SPEAKER: Lady in the black dress.

NEW SPEAKER: I am Pat Johnson from Burnhopfield, right on the edge of County Durham. I feel we get neglected because we have not got a North East postcode. We have formed a partnership and got together some money and wanted to provide planters to brighten the village up and we acquired money one way or another and had kind donations from local councillors {inaudible} from the county. Now we have to a position where we can't get anybody to take responsibility to insure the planters. They say there could be an accident. I understand there are a lot of claims now on insurance.

Derwentside say it's the county's responsibility and County say it's Derwentside's responsibility. A lot of effort has gone into it and we are trying to improve our village and don't seem to get any help from anybody.

NEW SPEAKER: That will be looked at, I promise you will get a response within a reasonable period of time.

NEW SPEAKER: Like a couple of the other speakers I also feel local issues are being pushed to 1 side. I was impressed with the Chief Execs opening remarks on plans for the future. As a Local Authority taxpayer we expect and accept they do the big things well, and I am quite convinced if they paid a great deal more attention to the small issues.

NEW SPEAKER: Examples.

NEW SPEAKER: Traffic, parking in my own town of Bishop Auckland. We have 7 shop units closed on our main shopping street and according to the local newspapers, the Cooperative may close down {inaudible}. Bishop Auckland's main street is massive and the effect it would have would be devastating on the town.....have imposed parking charges on all the off street parking made a tremendous difference to traffic flow in town. Shopkeepers are part of the community.

NEW SPEAKER: You are saying parking charges is having an adverse effect on the trade.

NEW SPEAKER: Reduced by a minimum of 20%.

NEW SPEAKER: Gentleman over at the back here kept waiting a while.

NEW SPEAKER: Complete change of subject. Could the chief exec please explain to me against an inflation rate of let's say 2 and a half per cent, why we have treble and quadruple increases in bills and once he has done that, me being on pension with fixed inflation, can he advise me what I have to go without to pay the over inflation increases - it's a serious question not a laughing one. {applause}

NEW SPEAKER: Apologies to everybody here, the sound is not working as well as it should, I hope we can get it sorted before we repeat the event. I assure the questioner every single elected member from the County Council takes seriously the whole issue of setting Council Tax. One of the things that

makes Local Government special is the 63 councillors are elected to make decisions for the communities.

{inaudible} I am sure the leader of the council will comment on it later. When it comes to inflation increases as everybody knows, it's not something we do without a huge amount of thought and very significant consideration to the impact on the full range of public services the council delivers. Question number one councillors ask is how can we do what we do more efficiently and take costs out to re-invest in services. Question number two are things we should stop doing, are there services we don't need any longer so we can re-invest. Only after asking those questions will councillors consider a budget rise. You also need to bear in mind the sort of services delivered by the council. Demand is increasing for them and the cost of delivering them is going up beyond inflation. The County Council is a major social care provider, we have an ageing population, there are more old people in County Durham now than there has ever been. Those people often turn to the council and say I have support needs, it's a growing client group, it's not our costs are going up for care, it's looking after more people. Subsidies in public transport, you talked the about earlier on. The County Council tries to make sure we have bus services in the county and fuel prices rocket {inaudible} and on we go through a whole range of issues. Big message - it's not something we do without great concentration.

NEW SPEAKER: Can you answer the question please.

NEW SPEAKER: I wish there were a simple answer to the issue of people on fixed income and what the County Council does do is make sure we have a team in place, our welfare rights team, thank you Ken, to help people who are on fixed income to make sure they claim all the income from the state they are entitled to.

NEW SPEAKER: So you can't answer the question.

NEW SPEAKER: I wish there were a simple answer to the.

NEW SPEAKER: It's simple if you stand there and say I can't answer the question.

NEW SPEAKER: I am not avoiding an answer to the question. I wouldn't be that insincere. I say the Council thinks long and hard before considering an increase in Council Tax.

NEW SPEAKER: Within the last 6 months I was bemoaning the fact direct labour costs were horrendous in doing a job locally. When I saw my local councillor and said it was an absolute abysmal waste of money he said yes I want to go to {inaudible} too expensive and too inefficient.

NEW SPEAKER: That's something people want to. I take the gentleman in the blue jacket and.

NEW SPEAKER: My concern is the escalating increase in staff numbers employed by the County Council currently 17,000 and it's gone up since the 97 election by 1,700. Other organisations, government organisations in the region are similar. As staff numbers increase, so do overall salary costs spiral, twice private sector increases this year, employment costs rise, relentlessly pension costs and also pension deficits rise. We now have 60% of all employees in the region employed by Local Government, government or public institutions. That's an unaffordable economy. The gentleman from

Chester-le-Street said what is the future, how can we have an enterprise economy. You certainly won't do it if 60% of people are employed in the public sector or 20% of the population are either on the dole or on invalidity benefit. Someone over here said the County Council do best on big jobs. Can someone please tell me why we have product of our education system where a third of the children are unemployable after we have spent 50,000 pounds on each of them after educating them. It's the responsibility of the County Council, employing people needlessly is the responsibility of the County Council.

NEW SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I can get you an answer to the question on qualifications from Neil Charlton. Can I before that take a comment from your near neighbour, gentleman in the grey suit and come to this lady.

NEW SPEAKER: Richard Beckon from Teesdale again. I want to go back to where Mark Lloyd started at the beginning and showed slides of how beautiful the view is five miles from where I live. This county is facing a crisis in the near future in the farming industry. Increasing costs, a total collapse in our prices. I would have thought the common agricultural policy is going to leave more marginal farms in West of Durham and other parts of Durham in a state of crisis, that they won't be here in a few years time. Some of it is by the power of the big supermarkets, it's destroying microbusinesses all over the world because of domination of the market place. I want to make the County Council aware of what will happen. The landscape of Durham is not natural, it's been shaped by generations of farming families who maintained dry stone walls, put hedges up, created landscape for recreation and tourism. It's a big earner for our communities, far beyond the farming industry than perhaps on the surface. I know it's not a problem for the County Council, but I would like them to be aware of it and also to look at the procurement policy.....are all the products sourced locally? If they are not why not.

NEW SPEAKER: Thank you very much indeed lady here.

NEW SPEAKER: I would like to know why our police station has been closed from teatime till the next morning. There is no-one available and this is a town not a village.

NEW SPEAKER: Jon Stoddart from Durham Police is here and if I can come back to Ashleigh in a moment.

NEW SPEAKER: Yes in relation to.....what you have basically and in the 12 main police stations throughout the area, is a 24 7 policing service. We looked at the whole issue of delivery of policing services throughout the county and unfortunately we have, or had very high costs, in relation to the front of counter service we provide and very little in the way of public service provision. They were not being used at all, many of the front counters between midnight and 8 am have no callers at all. We had staff basically kicking their heels very expensively, police officers or police support staff and when we reviewed the service we reduced to 8 to 8. When we reviewed it we found demand for our police stations front counter service was even less and the biggest demand we have is for visible policing, community policing, and visible policing, our street safe programme, delivered us a good community based policing service and the reality is what do you want - people sitting in

police stations waiting on the off-chance people might come past and require a service or out there delivering frontline policing.....Our crime is among the best some of the lowest rates in the entire country and we can't afford to have expensive police officers in police stations where there is no demand for their service. They are open still providing a 24 7 police service, officers still going in and out every night, but we can't keep the front of house open.

NEW SPEAKER: You need to say it to the elderly. They can't use a telephone and are frightened and are behind locked doors. They are really frightened people. The youths have taken control of our streets. There is litter, vandalism, it's disgusting and the council asked recently if we wanted our town centres to be regenerated. No, I don't want my money wasted because the police have lost control.

NEW SPEAKER: I have to start rounding things up I am conscious people still want to make points. I would ask you to be as brief and to the point as possible I will try and.

NEW SPEAKER: I hope you don't mind if I return quickly to the 'Shaping the North East', the North East Assembly document. It states that all of Durham's prestige employment site developments are to be concentrated in Sedgefield. Was that a decision of the County Council?

NEW SPEAKER: I will ask Ken Manton to deal with it in his summary in a moment.

NEW SPEAKER: Paul of Willington, I am all for recycling. In fact I quite like the wind turbines, I think they look really pretty. My question is whether all this stuff we collect, is actually being re-cycled or just taken to the dumps through the back door. I would like to think it was being re-cycled but is it - that's my question.

NEW SPEAKER: My name is Bob Howard I live in Chester-le-Street and first of all I would like to thank the County Council for initiating this activity. It's the first time I have known the county to give the area a chance for people to speak.

NEW SPEAKER: I think everyone would echo it.

NEW SPEAKER: It's all very well people whinging and I don't mind whinging if there is a point for whinging. It has to be answered by something positive and many of the points made tonight have not been responded to with positive ideas. The County Council itself cannot do it, it's the people of the area that are real initiators of activity. Unless until we get people actively involved instead of demanding it of someone else, we have to take action ourselves and make sure we are part of the partnership as active people.

NEW SPEAKER: It's about the bowl, the Angel of the North put Newcastle on a big map. People look and can see the Angel of the North and they think about Gateshead and Newcastle. I think the bowl would bring the same sort of feeling to Durham and to be reflected in the sky.....

NEW SPEAKER: Quick comment.

NEW SPEAKER: It's about our police and a no camera policy in the area, and sustaining low accident rates. I think we have the lowest in the country haven't we, and lack speed cameras.

NEW SPEAKER: Finally Ashleigh.

NEW SPEAKER: Sorry, I think these questions I would like answering please. I would like to know what is the follow up from this debate, what kind of time scale is the council are looking at and how young people in this room can be involved in changing some of the things talked about tonight or shouldn't it be all year round we have things like this.

NEW SPEAKER: I applaud you I couldn't have rounded this debate better off myself . It remains for me to ask Ken Manton for a few final words and to respond to some of the points made over the past hour and a half. My apologies for those who didn't get in at the last minute I warned there is always a gallop at the end I hope we answered some of the concerns expressed this evening. Ken Manton.

NEW SPEAKER: It is difficult for me to answer all of the things that came in the last flurry. Certain things I would like to address, particularly the young lady asked is it the beginning or the end of local democracy. I think if the young lady consulted with her colleagues, she will find it's an ongoing thing - we have had sessions here for people with hearing and speaking difficulties in the past. Last year, we talked earlier on in the referendum on regional government, I was shadowed by a young lady from Newton Aycliffe. John Prescott came to North East of England dashed along to Peterlee, John Prescott was giving a public speech in the shopping centre and he knew in advance I was with this young lady, important to have young people involved in democracy, and invited the young lady to get up to speak. All day long she had been very chatty and lost her tongue. John Prescott was trying to coax her into saying something and finally asked do you want to be a politician and she said 'Not on my Nelly, not after seeing what you do all day'. It's never easy in this life coming out and speaking publicly. I would like to thank people for tonight. NetPark was raised earlier on, it's a prestige development, we put a lot of money into NetPark, we see it a way of spinning off new technologies and manufacturing in the county. It's very much speculative, in the last 5 or 6 years we see jobs coming about as a result of an investment in NetPark. It has not been at the expense of other forms of manufacturing or industry or commerce mentioned earlier on {inaudible}, there has been development of rural areas Barnard Castle, Teesdale other areas and highly successful at Bracken Hill in Peterlee, so other things are going on and something on another aspect education, we were asked about our Council Tax what you get for your money, we deliberately, in last 4 years, put extra money over and above what they are giving us - 1.4m pounds into schools - my money, your money. I can say we can show the education achievement of our children is going up year after year after year. The trick is to continue that way and make sure they stay in the county and don't leave the county and the prosperity is maintained in the county. To round up, I wanted to say to people thank you for coming along today. We are about to enter the budget round, a number of my colleagues have been listening around the room this evening and take on board what you have said and take these points on board in setting our

budget. Don't forget there are things you can do for yourself. How many said in the case of bus services you don't do enough or you want different things. Someone mentioned about shops closing down. Always remember the old saying 'use it or you will lose it'. Don't ask what we can do for you as councillors, ask what you can do for yourselves in your communities and we are here to help you do that.

NEW SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I want to apologise to the very many people in the room wanting to join in the debate but squeezed down by so many contributions. It's been a pleasure to see so many people in the room wanting to improve their county in one way or another. I am sure that many of the issues raised tonight will be seriously considered by your elected representatives. Thanks very much for your attendance {applause}

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