

City of Durham CLP Report – July 2013

Constituency & Community News

Durham Miners' Gala

This years' Miners' Gala was a tremendous success. The superb weather helped to attract record crowds and I was delighted to speak with so many party members throughout the course of the day.

The Miners' Gala is an extremely important annual celebration for Durham and all of Britain's mining communities.



David Hopper addressing the Gala

The Big Meeting is a central part of Durham's history and our cultural heritage. The Gala was a great opportunity for the people of the North East to show their pride in our mining past.

I would like to say a big thank you to all the Durham City Labour Party Members and volunteers who helped with the day, particularly those who slaved away in high temperatures in the tea tent. Your support was really appreciated and we managed to raise a lot of money for the CLP.

Roberta visits Durham City Cricket Club

On Saturday 6th July, I attended a local cricket match at Durham City Cricket Club. During my visit to the ground I was able to speak with some of the volunteers and parents who run the club and heard more about the problems the club is facing.

The parents and volunteers do a brilliant job especially considering the club's limited funding. It is great for the community that they can provide junior and seniors with a place to play cricket, as well as offering cricket coaching and training for children as young as five. Following on from the meeting I will try to help the club to secure some more funding to enable them to upgrade their facilities and premises.



ElectricSafe Street Survey

On Friday 12th July, I met with ElectricSafe as they conducted a street survey in Durham's Market Place.

I, like them, am very concerned that recent Government changes to building regulations (part P) may leave consumers at risk from rogue traders.

To combat this ElectricSafe has put together a register of approved electricians to help the general public identify competent and safe electricians, and I welcome the work they are doing on this issue.



Roberta thanks Durham Johnston's Head Teacher

I would like to thank Carolyn Roberts for her dedication and hard-work whilst head teacher of Durham Johnston School.

Carolyn has been a fantastic head teacher. During her time at the school she has undertaken a huge amount of work to maintain and further the school's national reputation and top-class exam results.

I wish her the best of luck in her future position and look forward to working closely with the new head teacher to ensure that Durham Johnston continues to be an outstanding school.



Quarrington Hill Banner



I was very pleased to be invited by Quarrington Hill Banner Group to attend the unfurling ceremony of the new Quarrington Hill Banner at Cassop Primary School.

To mark the occasion there was a concert by a local school brass band. The children of Cassop school sang a number of North East songs which was a delight to listen to.

NHS at 65, North Durham CCG and North East Ambulance Service

In July we celebrated the 65th anniversary of the National Health Service. This is something that we are all incredibly proud of and this month I was able to meet with a number of different stakeholders from the region during this month.

On Friday 5th July, I met with the Chief Executive of the North East Ambulance Service to discuss response times and to hear what measures they are taking to ensure they continue to hit their targets.



I joined local campaigners in Durham's Market Place on Saturday 6th July to show my support for our NHS.

Unsurprisingly many of the people I spoke with were deeply concerned about changes being introduced by the Lib Dem/Tory Government, especially the increasing levels of privatisation in the NHS.

On Wednesday 24th July, I met again with the North Durham Clinical Commissioning Group this month. During this meeting I took the opportunity to raise a number of issues including some of those which came up when I met with local campaigners.

Neighbourhood Planning Forum

I am helping a group of Durham City residents to setup a neighbourhood planning forum. This is progressing very well and the chair has now been selected, and the group is working hard to get the forum up and running as soon as possible. This is fantastic news for residents in the city centre.



Lindisfarne Gospels

Monday 1st July saw the start of the Lindisfarne Gospels' three month loan to Durham from the British Library. There are many events and activities taking place over the summer to celebrate the return of the Gospels to the North East, and I would like to encourage as many of you as possible to visit the exhibition at Durham University's Palace Green Library before it ends in September.

On Monday 22nd July, I gave a reading at Durham Cathedral's Gospels Aloud event. The evening was celebrated the importance of the Lindisfarne Gospels as a Christian Book.

The evening was organised by the congregation of Durham Cathedral, and it proved to be a really enjoyable evening for all that attended.



Tesco National Food Collections

On Saturday 6th July, I collected food at Tesco in Dragonville for our local food bank as part of the national food collection initiative that is being run by Tesco, the Trussell Trust and Fareshare. While I think it is a travesty that so many people are reliant upon food banks it is unfortunately the case, and without food banks many people would go hungry.

The initiative asks customers to buy a few extra items during their shop to donate and then Tesco then top up all donations by 30%. So far this project has helped to provide 5.9 million meals.

I know many party members volunteered at the store over the weekend and I was pleased to support this important project.



School Success

I have worked closely with Belmont Cheveley Park Primary School, local councillors and Northumbrian Water to resolve the issue of the school's flooded playing field. I am delighted to say that the school field is now fit for purpose and this summer the school's sports day was held on the field for first time in three years.

Because of the huge delays in resolving this matter I was able to negotiate with Northumbrian Water, who have kindly agreed to pay for a new Muga sports facility at a cost of £26,500 to compensate for the inconvenience caused to the school. This is a brilliant outcome for the school and its pupils, and I would like to thank councillors Patrick Conway, Bill Moir and Katy Corrigan for their continued support.

This month I also visited Durham Trinity School and Sports College's Flambard site to meet Julie Connolly, Head Teacher, and an officer from Durham County Council to go through the plans for the new school. A new school will be built on the site and this will offer fantastic facilities for the children.

Roberta questions PM on Tory donor links

On Wednesday 10th July, I asked the Prime Minister, David Cameron MP, to admit the extent to which large housing developers have been involved in drawing up the Conservative Party's planning policies. My question was part of a Labour onslaught to highlight the Tory party's funding. Large housing developers are major contributors to the Conservative Party along with hedge funds, banks and a number of individuals who have made millions in the City.



Since 2010, the Government has pushed through a series of policies that have been very popular with big developers but they have been widely criticised by local councils, environmental groups and planning experts.

Government set to privatise Royal Mail

I joined Communication Workers Union members in Parliament this month as they prepared for the news that the Government plans to privatise the Royal Mail.

The workers I spoke with were very concerned with the Government's determination to privatise Royal Mail despite the fact that the company saw their profits more than double in the last year.

Since meeting with union members the Lib Dem/Tory Government has outlined its plan to privatise Royal Mail. I believe that Royal Mail should remain in public ownership and Labour will continue to oppose these proposals.

SAVE OUR ROYAL MAIL

Smith Institute Report Launch

On Tuesday 16th July, I spoke at the launch of the Smith Institute report with my fellow Shadow Minister, Gordon Marsden MP.

The report looks at examples of best practice from Labour councils on apprenticeships, and how local government is making the difference.

Despite the disproportionate cuts to local government budgets this report highlights how Labour councils are leading the way in prioritising jobs and creating opportunities for young people across the country.



Labour Shadow Minister, Gordon Marsden, speaking at report launch

Government U-turns on plain packaging and minimum unit pricing

I am deeply disappointed that the Government is no longer support the introduction of plain packaging for tobacco products.

Smoking remains by far the largest preventable cause of cancer and in Government Labour did much to tackle this problem. I am proud to say that Labour brought forward legislation to ban smoking in public places and to ban the advertising of tobacco products.



The Government has also u-turned on its policy to introduce minimum unit pricing for alcohol. These announcements have been widely criticised by health campaigners and medical professionals.

Local Government Association Conference



Roberta and Jack speaking at LGA Labour group session

The Local Government Association's annual conference took place in Manchester between 2-4 and I was pleased to be able to join them for one of the days.

At the conference I took part in a panel discussion with another member of Labour's Communities and Local Government team, Jack Dromey MP. During the session we spoke about the work we have been doing as part of Labour's policy review and how Labour would look to address the current housing crisis.

Roberta questions the Government's promise of localism

On Wednesday 17th July, I spoke in a Westminster Hall debate on localism in planning.

I once again raised my concerns about the Government's policies and called upon the Planning Minister, Nick Boles MP, to explain why the Government has gone back on their promise to instil localism into the planning system.



A future Labour Government would ensure that local people and councils have greater powers in shaping their high streets. Our approach is a strongly localist one, and want to work with communities to deliver growth and development.

Update on planning policy development

As usual, I had a lot of meetings this month with organisations and stakeholders to discuss a broad range of issues that come under my portfolio as a Shadow Minister for Communities and Local Government.

This month was enlivened by two interesting and informative visits, one to Cardiff and the other to Poundbury in West Dorset. During these visits I met with local councillors and organisations to see firsthand some of the innovative approaches that they are taking towards planning and procurement in their communities.



New Welsh Assembly building



Poundbury – West Dorset

Labour Party News

John Hepworth

I am sad to announce the passing of a very active and much loved member, John Hepworth. John and his wife Claire have both worked for the party for a very long time. John was a very well respected and always a friendly face and I know that he will be sadly missed. Our thoughts at this time are of course with Claire and her family during this difficult time.