

City of Durham CLP Report – November 2015

Constituency & Community News

Lumiere Festival comes to Durham

This year, Durham played host to the 4th Lumiere festival.

The installations this year were better than ever and, despite some adverse weather, it was wonderful to see so many people visiting the city and enjoying the fantastic displays spread throughout Durham.



The festival was a huge success, with over 200,000 people in attendance over the weekend. Congratulations must go to Durham County Council, Artichoke and all those working at the event for making this a festival to remember.



Roberta attends Memorial Opening - Esh Winning

I was honoured to recently have the opportunity to attend the unveiling of the memorial statue commemorating the miners who lost their lives in local collieries.

This statue is located outside the Woodland Road Communal Hall in Esh Winning, and features a miner and his young family.



Roberta with local Councillors Cecelia Wharton and David Bell

It was great to see so many people attend the unveiling, with Durham Miners' Association General Secretary Dave Hopper performing the duties.

I offer my congratulations and thanks to the Esh Winning Miners' Memorial Group for all their hard work.

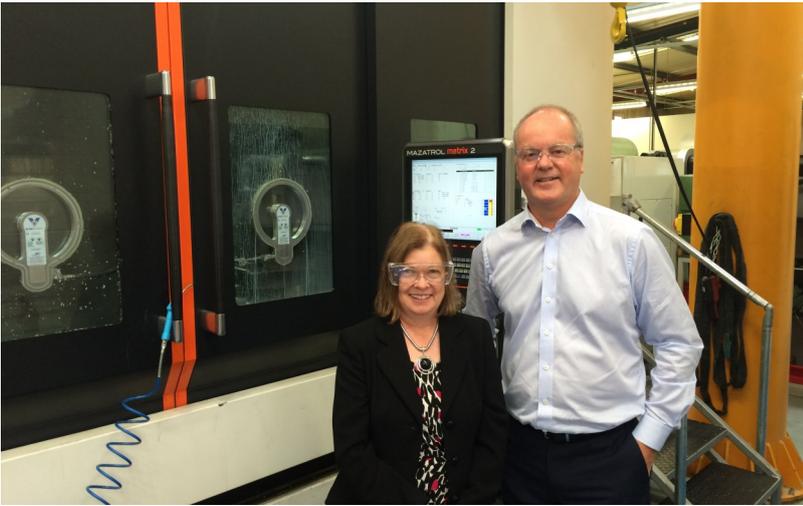
Advice Surgery Sessions



I have continued to notice more people than ever attending my advice surgeries over the last year. With the Government's cuts to local services many of my constituents are finding it incredibly difficult to make ends meet.

I will continue to work to help those in our communities who need support, and I am committed to helping local residents who are dealing with the effects of the unfair and divisive policies being pursued by the Conservative Government.

Visit to Altec Engineering



Roberta with Alastair Waite, Director of Altec Engineering

In September, I had the opportunity to visit Altec Engineering, which is based on the Bowburn North Industrial Estate.

Altec manufactures components for the automotive, aerospace, mining, defence, oil and gas sectors, and provides high quality jobs within Durham.

I very much enjoyed seeing how this successful business carried out it's work, and have subsequently put Altec in touch with Hitachi to see if a working relationship can be developed between the two companies.

Robert visits Godfrey Syrett

I also recently had the chance to visit Godfrey Syrett, based on Littleburn Lane in Langley Moor.

Godfrey Syrett manufacture high quality furniture for educational establishments and offices, and I was delighted to see first hand the work they are doing.

It is great to see local businesses thriving in such uncertain times, and I look forward to visiting again in the future to see how they are developing their business.



MP supports Small Business Saturday

In November, I joined local business representatives and councillors to celebrate the arrival of the Small Business Bus to Durham.

Small Business Saturday is an annual event which celebrates the contribution small businesses make to our economy, and I am always happy to lend my support to this campaign.



Roberta with the Small Business Saturday Campaign Bus

The UK's small businesses between them provide 60% of private sector jobs, and it is important to recognise how critical they are to providing employment opportunities in Durham. I look forward to supporting this campaign again in the future.

Foodbank Collection

Tesco recently teamed up with national charity The Trussell Trust and food redistribution charity FareShare to hold the sixth Neighbourhood Food Collection in Durham, and I joined staff at Tesco Extra in Dragonville to take part in their collection of donations for local foodbanks.



Roberta with Tesco staff and volunteers collecting food donations

This collection was hugely successful, with over 230 trays of food being donated by Tesco customers.

It was great that Tesco once again got behind this collection, and my congratulations go to the Trussell Trust, FareShare and Tesco for their hard work supporting people in need.

Brandon Miners' Welfare Hall

In October, I had the chance to attend the relaunch event at the Miners' Welfare Hall in Brandon.

The management committee has recently accessed funding for renovations within the building, and held a fabulous event to celebrate the continued success of the hall.



The Reg Vardy Brass band were in attendance, and entertained all those who came along with some wonderful music. I look forward to visiting the hall in the future, and hearing about the continued success of this important community asset.

MP speaks at North East Combined Authority Event

I recently spoke at the National Housing Federation North East Devolution Summit in Teesside.

A number of different topics were covered relating to devolution in the North East, and I spoke on the political effects such a move could have on the region.

Devolution could offer the North East the chance to decide how and where it invests funds, as local people often have a better knowledge of the pressing needs of their communities than central government.

This must however be led by properly funded local authorities, and the current plans put forward by the Government will force a number of measures on councils, such as imposing mayors on the devolved regions, that will make this process much harder.

Conference 2015

Once again, the Labour Party Conference was a busy time, and it was fantastic to see the warm welcome that Jeremy Corbyn received as he took to the stage to deliver his first conference speech as Labour leader.

It was inspiring to see so many people enthused by his message of delivering a more inclusive politics and a fairer, more compassionate society for our country.



I spoke at a large number of events relating to planning and housing, highlighting the damaging effect that so many of the Government's policies will have on people throughout the UK.

It is vital that in these difficult times, hard pressed people have the Labour Party on their side, fighting the unfair and divisive policies being pursued by the Tories.

Roberta leads for Labour on the Housing Bill

In my role as Shadow Housing and Planning Minister, I have taken the lead on the Government's Housing Bill, which is currently at Committee stage.



The Housing Bill will have a hugely negative impact on the housing situation throughout the country. Housing Associations will be forced to sell off their stock, and the new affordable homes promised by the Tories are simply too expensive for working families to afford.

I will continue to work with my colleagues to press the Government into making much needed amendments to this Bill.

Home Office Questions

In November, I had the opportunity to ask the Home Secretary why so few of the perpetrators of sexual crime against 16 and 17 year olds have police action taken against them.

The Children's Society have recently highlighted the staggering scale of under reporting of sexual crime against this age group - much more than any other. I raised this with the Home Secretary and asked what effect any future cuts to the police service will have on the prevention and detection of this awful crime.

Sadly, the Home Secretary could not provide a meaningful answer on how the police force will be able to stamp out sexual exploitation of teenagers, and this is yet another example of how the Government are letting down young people across the UK.

Roberta meets pupils from St Leonard's School

In November, I was delighted to have the opportunity to meet with some pupils from St Leonard's School in Westminster.

The pupils had the chance to ask me questions on the work that MPs carry out in Parliament and their

constituencies, and

it was a pleasure to see so many young people engaged with politics, and keen to get involved in the democratic process.



Roberta meeting students from St Leonard's School, Durham City

MP attends annual Oxford Planning Seminar

I recently attended the Annual Oxford Planning Seminar, and delivered the keynote speech to a delegation of planning professionals.



During the conference I outlined the numerous problems with the Government's current approach to housing, and laid out the alternative approach that Labour would take in addressing the current housing crisis within the UK.

MP supports Bleed for England Campaign



Roberta supporting the Bleed for England Campaign

In October, I was delighted to lend my support the NHS Bleed for England campaign.

This campaign ran concurrently with the Rugby World Cup, and was a huge success, with over 101,000 people registering to donate blood.

It is so important to ensure the NHS has a supply of all blood types for future patients, and I look forward to supporting further campaigns encouraging people to donate blood in the future.

Roberta campaigns on Tax Credits

David Cameron had promised to stand up for hard working families, but the proposed Tory Tax Credit cuts would have cost working families up to £1300 per year from April 2016.

That is why I was happy to get involved in the Labour Party campaign to stop these unfair cuts, and to put families first.



Roberta with Seema Malhotra MP

Although it is good news that this campaign was successful, and the Government has backed down on Tax Credit cuts, I will continue to campaign against the cruel and divisive policies being pursued by the Tories.

Roberta campaigns to keep Sunday special



I was pleased to add my support to the USDAW campaign against the extension of Sunday trading laws.

For many working people in Durham, Sunday is the only day they get to spend quality time with their family, and it is vitally important that we

protect the work/ life balance for hard working people throughout the UK

Warm Park Homes campaign

In October, I attended the event for Age UK's campaign to support energy efficiency schemes for park home residents.

Age UK estimates that over 100,000 older people live in park homes throughout the country, but these can be more expensive to heat than other types of property.

Currently there is little support for park home residents wishing to make their properties more energy efficient, and this campaign calls on the Government to introduce a specific scheme for park home residents.



Roberta supporting Age UK's Warm Park Homes scheme

Roberta chairs panel on Research in Parliament



In November, I chaired a panel discussion for the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology (POST) on the impact academic research can have on Parliamentary process.

It was amazing to see so many people engaged with this important topic, and have the chance to share their experiences on how Parliament and academics engage with each other. I look forward to working on this topic in the future.

The Spending Review

25 November saw George Osborne deliver his Autumn Statement and although the scrapping of Tax Credit cuts is good news, and a victory for the Labour Party, there is still a huge amount of concern over the economic strategy being pursued by the Government.

Sadly, although people currently receiving tax credits will not be hit by a severe cut next year, all those throughout the country currently receiving Universal Credit will feel the full effects of this reduction.

The Government is still not doing enough to build affordable homes in the UK, and the Chancellor's announcement that the housing budget will be doubled still leaves us well below the levels of spending in 2010.

Once again, the Tories have demonstrated that they are not on the side of people and families who rely on vital public services, and Labour will continue to fight the policies of this ideologically driven Government.

New Members Event

Finally, I wanted to offer my heartfelt thanks to all members, new and old, who attended our new members event on Friday 6 November at the Miners' Hall, Redhills.

Over one hundred members came along on the evening, and lots of good food, drinks and conversation was in flow!

We had some wonderful speakers, and my thanks go to Councillors Maria Plews, Bill Moir and Paul Taylor for informing our new members on how to stand for election; and Val Hudson and Aurelia Smith for speaking on our campaigns, and how our branches work.

It was brilliant that so many people came along, and to see a large number of our enthusiastic new members taking part. I hope that we will continue to see such an excellent turnout at future events.



Roberta speaking at the new members event in the Miners' Hall