

City of Durham CLP Report – November 2018

Welcome to my November 2018 Parliamentary report. In here you'll find a brief round-up of some of the activities I have been involved in both in the constituency and Westminster, and some of the campaigns I have supported over the last few months.

As usual, I hope that this gives you an idea of the issues that I have been working on as MP for the City of Durham, and if you have any questions about anything in this report, please get in touch on mail@roberta.org.uk.

Best wishes



Conference 2018



During the last week of September, I once again attended the Labour Party Conference, which this year took place in Liverpool.

As in recent years, the conference was incredibly well attended, and it was fantastic to see the energy and enthusiasm of the delegates in attendance.

During my time at conference, I was as busy as ever speaking at a number of different events. These included a RIBA panel discussion on skills, diversity and the built environment, an RTPI event on how infrastructure can help to deliver housing, as well as a series of meetings and discussions linked to planning and education.





Roberta launches Planning Commission at Conference



Roberta officially launches Labour's Planning Commission

As well as my other commitments at Conference, I was delighted to formally launch Labour's Planning Commission.

As you will know from my previous report, this body will help set out a range of planning policy options for the next Labour Government. This is a really important and intensive piece of work that is going to take up a lot of our time, with monthly regional meetings to organise and attend with planners, developers and residents as part of this evidence gathering

exercise. There are also regular meetings of the Planning Commission in Westminster.

It was wonderful to see so many people in attendance at the launch, and I was really pleased to welcome our own CLP Chair, Angela Hankin as well as other members. Their support was greatly appreciated.

The Commission will continue to meet over the next year to examine the issues that different regions are facing, and my thanks go to everyone who came along to the launch.

Planning Issues in Durham

MP calls public meeting to discuss Milburngate House

There are a number of planning applications due for determination soon relating to the former Milburngate House, namely for the hotel and office elements of the development.

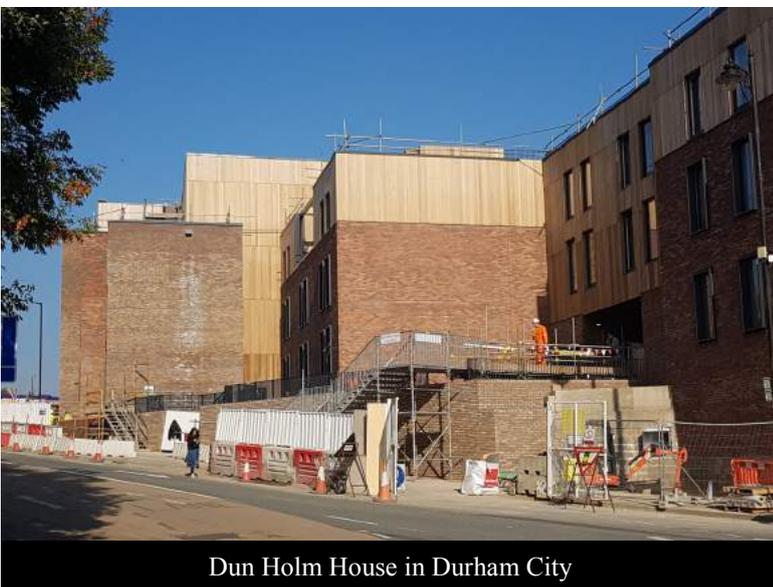
Several residents have raised concerns about this scheme, and so I called a meeting for people to share their views on this development with me.

It was clear during the meeting that many constituents were concerned about the design and height of the proposed buildings, but there was also significant disquiet about the proposal to include an access road into the site from Framwelgate Peth. This junction would include traffic lights and a right turn both into and out of the site, directly opposite Highgate. This could potentially have a hugely negative impact on traffic flows around Durham. I have passed these concerns on to the developers and Durham County Council, and asked them to look at this again.



Roberta raises concerns about Dun Holm House PBSA

Following correspondence I received regarding conditions in Dun Holm House, the new Purpose Built Student Accommodation that recently opened on the site of the Gates shopping centre, I invited representatives from Durham County Council, Fresh Student Living, the Health and Safety Executive, Sir Robert McAlpine and Durham



Dun Holm House in Durham City

Students Union to join me in visiting the development.

It is clear that students were allowed to move into this facility far too early, with works still ongoing. While steps have been taken to address these issues, there are still some areas of concern, and the Health and Safety Executive will be working closely with the developers and operators to ensure that these issues are dealt with as soon as possible.

Licensing Issues in Walkergate



As there are ongoing concerns about the proliferation of late licenses in Walkergate, I joined Durham police to look at the situation on a Wednesday night – traditionally student night in the city.

While I am pleased to say that there was a significant security presence, the revenue these evenings generate mean this level of security is unsustainable in the long run. I am very concerned that the number of security staff will be cut, and people will be put at risk in the future.

The police are also worried about the demands that will place on their resources should late licences be granted in the Milburngate House development, and I will be raising all of these issues with Durham County Council as part of the Licensing Policy review that is due to commence in the new year.

Education Issues

MP writes to Secretary of State over school funding

School funding continues to be a major issue in Durham and I wrote to the Secretary of State in support of Cllr Olwyn Gunn, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People's Services, who recently contacted the Government with her grave concern over education funding in County Durham.

Cllr Gunn highlighted the unprecedented level of demand for support services for vulnerable children, and also the concerns the local authority over the current funding settlement for small secondary schools, particularly in rural areas.

In both cases, it is clear that the current arrangements are unsustainable, and so I wrote the Secretary of State to support the position of the council, and to urge the Government to look again at funding for schools and support services, and to ensure that the education system is put on a sustainable footing for the future.

Roberta speaks at North East Education Summit

I recently joined over 100 school leaders, staff, governors and parents at the National Association of Headteachers North East Education Summit.

This summit focused on school and nursery funding, and I spoke about the issues that schools in Durham are facing, with three secondary schools in the constituency in desperate need of rebuilding, but there is no money in the short or medium term to allow this to happen.

There is huge concern about the funding arrangements for schools, and I will continue working with Labour colleagues to press the Government to properly fund our education system.



Roberta celebrates success at Kelloe Primary School



Roberta in the sensory room at Kelloe Primary

Following some excellent recent results, I was really pleased to receive an invitation to visit Kelloe school, and have a guided tour by the Headmaster and the Head Girl and Boy.

I was treated to a fabulous display of singing and dancing by the early years pupils, and was very impressed by the sensory room that the school has created.

My congratulations go to all the staff and pupils at the school for their hard work. I really look forward to visiting the school again in the future.

Constituency Events & Speaking Engagements

Roberta speaks about impact of Brexit on women in Durham

Our MEP Jude Kirton-Darling recently organised a panel discussion in Durham to discuss the impact that Brexit may have on women and their rights.

The EU has been at the forefront of progressive reforms that play a vital role in improving women's rights both in society and at work, and there is a real risk that the gains we have made in these areas will be under threat. It was great to take part in such a thought provoking discussion, and my thanks go to Jude for organising this event.



Remembrance Day



Once again, I was honoured to attend the remembrance service at Durham cathedral, and the march through the city centre to remember those who gave their lives in service to the country.

As we commemorate the centenary of the end of World War One, it is particularly important to remember the sacrifices that so many families made in not only this, but other conflicts around the world as well, and this very affecting service and march were a fitting way to honour those who died in battle.

Roberta attends Coxhoe History Group Play

I was really pleased to be able to visit Coxhoe recently and see Keep the Home Fires Burning, a fabulous play written by local member John Hepplewhite recalling life in Coxhoe, and the challenges faced by the local community during World War One.

It really was wonderful to see so many people come along to enjoy this fantastic event, and there were some great performances from local residents and councillors too.



My congratulations go the Coxhoe History Group for putting on such a wonderful evening of entertainment, to all those who took part in the performance, and of course to John for writing the play!

Constituency Campaigns

MP brings Queen's Commonwealth Canopy to Esh Winning

This year, to help celebrate the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy project, I joined pupils and staff from Esh Winning Primary School to plant trees in the school grounds.

The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy is a network of forest conservation initiatives to mark the Queen's long service to the Commonwealth, and has raised over £7 million for the planting of more than 3 million trees across the UK since 2004.

In the UK, this project is run by the Woodland Trust and Sainsbury's, and I was so pleased to meet up with pupils from Esh Winning Primary School to help support this valuable enterprise. If you would like to find out more about the Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, you can visit <https://queenscommonwealthcanopy.org/>



Roberta and schoolchildren planting trees in Esh Winning Primary School

Roberta supports National Campaign Day in Durham

Following the budget, I was delighted to join Labour members in Durham Market Place to continue the campaign to highlight the devastating effect Government cuts are having on local services.

It was great to see so many members out campaigning, and also pleasing to see that many of the people we spoke to were receptive to the

message that, despite the promises of the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, vital public services remain underfunded and under threat.



Roberta and local members campaigning in Durham

Advice Surgery Sessions



I have continued to notice more people than ever attending my advice surgeries over the last few months, especially as Universal Credit has now been fully rolled out in Durham.

More and more people and families are being pushed into financial difficulty by this poorly administered and unfair system.

As well as problems with benefits, I have continued to see people who need help with such issues as social housing, problems accessing health services and immigration issues.

It is clear that people are facing more urgent and complex issues,

and I will continue to work to help residents who need support, and who are struggling to deal with the effects of the unfair and divisive policies being pursued by the Government.

Roberta comments on Brexit deal



The key issue facing Parliament at the moment is of course Brexit, and as you will know the Government has finally released details of the draft agreement for leaving the EU.

After two years of trying to negotiate a deal, the Government has put forward a plan that is simply not good enough, and does nothing to protect jobs, the economy, workers rights or national security. This is clearly a bad deal.

I had already questioned the Prime Minister about how close the Government was to reaching an agreement with the EU, and it is clear that now the document has been released, it offers little clarity for the future, completely fails to meet Labour's six tests, and leaves the door open for a hard Brexit.

There are of course serious concerns about the ramifications of this deal for Northern Ireland, and it is important that this deal is rejected by Parliament.

The Budget

On Monday 29 September, the Chancellor delivered the 2018 budget, with a promise from the Prime Minister that austerity was over.

Following the Chancellor's speech in Westminster however, it is clear that austerity is not over, and this budget will do very little for communities across Durham.

Social Care is once again in the spotlight as, despite the promise of an extra £650 million pounds, this is simply not enough, with an estimated deficit of £1.5 billion next year alone.



Roberta speaking in the Budget debate

Our schools are also set to continue suffering under this Tory Government. The Chancellor promised £400 million for what he called 'little extras', but schools are seeing falling staff numbers, and are struggling for basic supplies. I spoke in the Budget debate to challenge the Government on the cuts to school funding and to emphasise the importance of properly funding our education system.

Roberta welcomes Government decision on Miner's Claw ruling



Roberta, Laura Pidcock and the DMA at the DWP to meet Ministers earlier this year

One good piece of news to come from the budget however is that Dupuytren's contracture is to finally be recognised as a work related injury.

Dupuytren's contracture causes the fingers to curl over into a claw-like state and is often called Miner's Claw, as this incurable condition is common amongst former mine workers.

Despite being accepted as a work-related injury by the IIAC in 2014,

the Government decided that it would not be recognised as an industrial disease. I campaigned with the DMA and Laura Pidcock to have this decision reversed, and I am so pleased that this hard work has finally paid off and the Government has backtracked on its original decision

Although it has taken many years to get to this point, I hope that this decision will make a difference to the many former miners and other workers in Durham and elsewhere affected by this debilitating disease. My thanks go to the DMA for their tireless campaigning on this issue.

BBC Sunday Politics interview on Devolution and Local Government

This month, I appeared on the BBC's Sunday Politics North East and Cumbria.

A range of topics were covered during the programme, including the future of the former SSI site in Teesside, devolution in the North East and of course the ramifications of the budget.



I was joined by our Women's Officer Jessie Jacobs, who spoke about the role philanthropy plays in society.

I was pleased to have the chance to challenge the Government's position that austerity is over, as our councils, police, NHS and other vital public services remain drastically underfunded.

Planning Issues

MP outlines Labour's Plans at Planning for Housing Conference

I was very pleased to have the opportunity to speak at the 2018 Planning for Housing conference, and annual meeting where the public and private sectors discuss how to deliver better homes in the future.

I outlined how Labour's Planning Commission will examine how to get land into the planning system, not only for development, but also for redevelopment and regeneration of brownfield land.



Roberta speaking at the Planning for Housing Conference

Labour will ensure that a better system is put in place to ensure that land value uplift is captured, and is more focussed on delivering the infrastructure communities need to be successful and sustainable in the future.

Roberta speaks about need to implement Hackitt review



Roberta speaking at the 100% Hackitt event

I recently had the opportunity to speak at the launch of the 100% Hackitt initiative. 100% Hackitt aims to provide opportunities for the industry to increase their efforts in improving safety, while keeping pressure on the Government to adopt all the Hackitt recommendations.

Following the Grenfell tragedy, Dame Judith Hackitt carried out a review of building regulations and fire safety. The Hackitt review was published on 17 May 2018 and contained 53 recommendations to government and the industry to improve and standards and safety.

It is so sad that it has taken the tragic events of Grenfell to push the issue of deregulation of building standards and regulations onto the political agenda, and the implementation of the Hackitt review is the step that is needed to fix the broken system of building safe high-rise buildings.

Higher Education

Roberta speaks at Chartered ABS Conference



Roberta answering questions at the Chartered ABS event

I recently spoke at the annual conference of the Chartered Association of Business Schools, and took part in a Q&A session following my speech.

I was particularly pleased to attend this event, as Durham Business School is situated in the constituency, and of course universities add hugely to our culture, civic life and communities.

I spoke about the extent to which business education helps deliver economic value, and the significant challenges that universities are facing from Brexit, the Post-18 education review, and over-regulation from the Office for Students.

It was good to be able to take part in the Q&A session afterwards, with delegates asking some very thought provoking and insightful questions about the future of the Higher Education sector.

MP delivers speech at the Higher Education Conference

In October I spoke at the Higher Education Conference about the future of student fees and university funding. I believe it is unacceptable that in 2017, the average rate of debt for the poorest students rose to £57,000.

Equally unacceptable is that the IFS has found that graduates in England leave university with the highest debts in the developed world due to high fees, increased interest rates (now up to 6.1%) & the replacement of maintenance grants with loans.



Roberta at the 2018 Higher Education Conference

While I am pleased the Government is carrying out a review of post 18 education, the review must look at the fact that three quarters of UK graduates will never pay off their full debt even if they are repaying it in their fifties.

This shows that we need a much more sustainable system of funding our universities, one that encourages a strong university system, and that supports all learners from all social backgrounds to reach their potential.

MP supports World Mental Health Day

10 October marked World Mental Health day, and I was pleased to be able to lend my support to the Labour Campaign for Mental Health, which is run in conjunction with the Community Union.

Approximately 1 in 4 people in the UK suffer a mental health problem every year, and so it is essential that our mental health services are protected and fully funded - something the Government continues to fail to act on.

I will continue to press the Government on the need for better mental health service provision in the future. You can sign up and support the Labour Campaign for Mental Health at <http://labourmentalhealth.org.uk>



Roberta supporting the Labour Campaign for Mental Health

Roberta backs LGA 'Breaking Point' Campaign



Roberta with the HCLG team and council leaders outside No.10 Downing St.

I recently joined my Shadow HCLG colleagues and Council Leaders from across the UK to support the Breaking Point campaign.

Since 2010, the Government has cut 60p out of every pound the last Labour Government was spending on councils, with over 500 children's centres and 475 libraries closed.

Austerity has caused huge damage to communities in Durham and across the UK, and we delivered a petition to

Downing Street calling on the Government to end the cuts affecting our overstretched councils.

MP calls on Governments to ban trophy hunting

I was really pleased to join Bill Oddie in supporting the campaign to Ban Trophy Hunting. This campaign calls on Governments to ban trophy hunting and the import and export of hunting trophies.

Killing animals for pleasure is cruel, unnecessary, and has no place in a civilised society. You can find out more about this campaign at <https://bantrophyhunting.net/>

