

Dear Amanda,

Is County Durham closed for business under the Lib Dem / Tory coalition?

Under Labour's leadership, County Durham was recognised as a great place to "do business". As the largest local authority in the North East, County Durham's economy is strategically important regionally and nationally. That's why Labour spent so much time and energy creating the right conditions for businesses to thrive here.

Our county is home to over 14,000 businesses, mostly small and medium-sized companies, employing 183,000 people. For many years our council worked in partnership with the private sector to deliver new developments across the county and our ambitious local plan was set to deliver 30,000 new jobs, 10,000 new homes for local families and generate billions of pounds in the local economy.

Over the last two decades, Durham's Labour leadership worked solidly to attract hundreds of millions of pounds of private investment to secure key sites such as Milburngate, Durham Riverside, the Durham University estate, Auckland Castle and Bishop Auckland town centre, Amazon at Integra 61, and Hitachi at Newton Aycliffe.

Our ambition and vision for the county led to public sector investment in NETPark, Horden Railway Station and other sites across the county to support strategic transport improvements. We opened up new business parks such as Forrest Park and Jade Business Park and designated Aykley Heads as a hub for hundreds of new jobs in the Fintech sector.

Under Labour our council put £33 million into the Durham Works Programme, invested £42 million in business support and £18.5 million for innovation projects.

And in response to the pandemic, we put rocket boosters under our plans for local economic growth with:

- £5 million Business Recovery Grant scheme
- £70 million new homes programme, creating over 10,000 new affordable council, rentable and privately-owned homes

- £25 million additional investment for towns and villages
- £75 million regeneration and health-focused leisure investment across the county.

But it is clear that your coalition is rudderless, failing to offer any direction for business. Indeed, it often appears to be anti-investment.

It is devastating to see how much damage your coalition has done over the last nine months to our standing as a great home for business. I have heard numerous reports from business leaders and potential investors in our county who tell me that Durham is no longer open for business.

The Council must address the following issues urgently, if you are to be taken seriously:

1. Provide clarity on the future of Aykley Heads and the Sands building. The cost of your delay has already cost the local council taxpayer over £1 million.
2. Stop stifling local businesses who want to invest in the visitor economy and new leisure, retail and entertainment sectors.
3. Lobby the government hard for the full investment required to restore the Leamside Line.
4. Focus all Levelling Up Fund applications on projects and infrastructure that will create good jobs.
5. Get serious about delivering new homes at Snipereley for our hard-working, local residents.

I urge you to get serious about Durham's future or step aside and allow Labour to lead, so our businesses can have confidence to invest in our county once again.

Councillor Carl Marshall