

The thoughts of everyone connected with St Helens Borough Council and St Helens Labour are with Her Majesty the Queen and the Royal Family following the sad news that HRH Prince Philip has passed away. He led an extraordinary life, and as a mark of respect the Union flag on the town hall is being flown at half mast. We have also opened an online book of condolence - find out more at www.sthelens.gov.uk/dukeofedinburgh.

Businesses across the borough have reopened their doors this week and I wish them all the best of luck. It's up to all of us to support them by spending our money locally and taking advantage of the great offers on our doorstep.

I went down to my local pub with friends this week and it was great to see the beer garden full and everyone enjoying the good weather. My son has also just started back at both Cubs and sports and it's brilliant to see him and friends being able to mix safely again.

The number of children and young people suffering mental health problems in the last year has risen by a quarter, while the number of 18-24 year olds claiming unemployment-related benefits has risen by a staggering 124% between February 2020 and February 2021. For their sake we simply must get things back open safely and the economy moving again.

The council has continued to update the advice and information on our website and if you visit www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelensisopen you can read all the latest guidance as well as check out a comprehensive directory to find out what's open near you.

We've got so many excellent businesses here. Our online directory includes cafes, bars, restaurants, hairdressers, trade and repairs and lots more, and if you own or know of a business that isn't included drop us a message at mediateam@sthelens.gov.uk and we'll add it to the list.

I took a socially-distanced walk around the town centre last week with John Tabern, chair of the St Helens Town Deal Board. The exciting Imperial Quarter development is well underway, redevelopment is continuing at pace of the Bridge Street Post Office, independent businesses are booming on Barrow Street, and the demolition of Chalon Way car park opening up of the historic canal area is ahead of schedule. It really is great to see so much going on.

Let's get behind our local businesses and spread the word - St Helens is open!

Best wishes to all Star readers.