

It was great to attend the unveiling of the new Sutton Manor Colliery banner at the Dream last weekend. The organisers including Jim Housley, Anita Shaw-Hancock, Paul Gerrard and many others did a superb job with the event and it was especially nice to see children from Willow Tree and Sutton Manor Primary Schools taking part with their own banners. Our heritage matters, and it's crucial we teach future generations about the hard work, industry and the people who built our communities.

The North West Miner's Heritage Association is on Facebook and I encourage people to join and take a look at the brilliant and important work they do.

This week we have announced a public consultation on a new 5 year Library Strategy which proposes significant changes to the service.

The way people use the library service has changed a lot in recent years. Loans of physical books are decreasing year on year, while digital loans have skyrocketed from 7000 in 2016/17 to more than 30,000 in 2019/20. Even before the pandemic our libraries were already offering a huge amount of services online, and throughout Covid this increased dramatically and was very well received. Library staff have also gone above and beyond to make sure customers without digital access still had access to books and resources through the Home Delivery Library Service and Schools Library Service.

As readers will know, public services including councils also have the pressure of budget cuts – central government gave St Helens £127m a year in 2010 but just £13m this year. Cuts of this size will inevitably have an impact on the services we can offer and the way we can deliver them, libraries included.

But because the way libraries are used was changing anyway, we can see this as an opportunity to review the service and make sure it's delivered in a way that doesn't just help us achieve a balanced budget (which we have to do by law) but in a way that meets the changing demands of users, and also continues to be outstanding, innovative, modern, and sustainable.

It's also an opportunity to support and work alongside community groups, Parish Councils, volunteers and all those who stepped up during the pandemic under the #StHelensTogether banner and together to make sure the library service provides support where it's needed and is accessible to all.

Please do take part in the consultation which begins on 7th June. You can find more details on the council website and social media and paper copies of the consultation will also be made available in libraries.

Best wishes to all Star readers.