

What a fantastic week it's been for St Helens.

Last Wednesday at Cabinet we agreed to consult on a new draft Housing Allocations policy, aiming to help local people access social housing, addressing the fact that more than 8000 people are currently on the waiting list in the borough; £650,000 for new provision to support children with special educational needs; and a comprehensive Economic Reset and Recovery Plan to support the local economy after Covid.

Then on Thursday we had confirmation that our Town Deal Board – a partnership between the council, our MPs, and representatives from local private, public and third sector organisations – has been successful in winning up to £25m funding for projects we submitted in our Town Investment Plan.

Projects include work on the Gamble, a new Youth Zone, town centre improvements, digital infrastructure to support businesses and development, and more. The offer of £25m is testament to the quality of the bid and the hard work of all those who took part, including not least the Chair of the Town Deal Board John Tabern, Cllr Richard McCauley and our MPs Conor McGinn and Marie Rimmer.

We now have up to 12 months to produce detailed business cases for each project before submitting these to government, so while things won't happen overnight it is without doubt a hugely positive step in the right direction for St Helens. With work continuing with English Cities Fund on masterplans for major town centre redevelopment, it's an exciting time for the borough.

You can read all the detail about the Towns Fund and our Town Investment Plan in full at www.sthelens.gov.uk/council/the-towns-fund/.

On Saturday at Wembley the mighty Saints lifted the men's Challenge Cup for the first time in 13 years. It was a fantastic occasion and of course as a fan I'm delighted, but I'm so happy for all the players and staff who I know, like us, have wanted this for so long. They've sacrificed a lot in the last 18 months to play the game and their success on the pitch is nothing less than they deserve.

Saturday's win means Saints are the first club to hold both the men's and women's Challenge Cup trophies at the same time – it's a unique achievement and speaks volumes about the character, professionalism and desire of everyone at the club.

On Monday we then had the homecoming, and it was so good to see the pictures and video from around the borough of crowds enjoying the sunshine and showing their thanks to both squads. It feels like a particularly historic and important moment for the women's game, and I couldn't be happier that as a council we were able to work with the club to give them the homecoming they deserve.

For younger generations especially, like my own two sons, it was a very special occasion and one I'm sure they'll remember for a long time.