

Congratulations and good luck to Steve and Dave Jones from Haydock, the owners of Two Brothers coffee shop which has now opened in the stunning Globe Building on the corner of Barrow Street in St Helens town centre. It's a terrific addition to a booming part of the town centre.

It will be joined soon by the Imperial Quarter and visitors to the town centre will have also seen the prominent structure being built outdoors on Ormskirk Street to enable Cork and Dough, The Church and Secret Garden to offer outdoor food and drink. It's exactly the kind of thing our town centre needs and the latest example of quality investment by Ian Pitts who has owned these venues and the Imperial for a number of years.

The Sefton has also recently opened an outdoor pavement-café style offer, along with many other venues, and it's great to see.

The pandemic has been tough on many local businesses and the hospitality industry especially, and I hope people will get behind these venues and all our local pubs, bars, restaurants and food outlets in the weeks and months to come to help them back on their feet.

As a council we're doing all we can to help businesses, from supporting them through the planning process, providing pavement licenses and access to business support grants, and we'll continue to do all we can to support them and our local economy. This is why we've developed an Economic Recovery Plan in collaboration with local businesses, which you can read here:

<https://www.sthelens.gov.uk/business/st-helens-economic-reset-recovery-plan/>.

We'll be celebrating many local businesses and entrepreneurs at the St Helens Business Awards later this year, and the nominations were unveiled last week. I know from speaking to those involved in the judging that it was a nearly impossible task to whittle each category down to a shortlist, let alone to pick the winners. The awards are being organised for the first time in partnership by St Helens Chamber and the Council and it's another sign of us doing things differently, and another good example of what we mean by #StHelensTogether.

I'm delighted to say that the Pride of St Helens Awards will also take place this November after a 12 month break. After the last 18 months, and the terrific community spirit, innovation, resilience and kindness we've seen demonstrated across St Helens, I'm sure both awards evenings are going to be very special occasions.

And finally this week, like everyone in St Helens I was sad to hear that John Smith, better known affectionately as Johnny Wellies, has died. For many years he's been a fixture and fitting of the town and on the few occasions I spoke with him he was courteous and friendly. He'll definitely be missed.

Best wishes to all Star readers.