

I'm delighted that work on repairs to the Gamble building will start next month. The building means so much to all of us and it belongs to the people of St Helens.

It's the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its opening this year so there's no better time to make sure it's fit for the future.

While we work to protect our heritage sites, we are also working to support many exciting new developments, including those to bring derelict brownfield sites back into use. This isn't always easy in a town like ours where so much land has in the past been used for a variety of industries and is contaminated as a result. The Tory-Lib Dem coalition government scrapped funding specifically for decontamination a decade ago, leaving places like St Helens in the lurch and sites sitting empty much longer than they should.

Now, as a member of the Liverpool City Region, we're able to bid for funding to clear up sites including Moss Nook in Sutton and we've been successful in winning millions – enough to clear the site, making it safe for new housing and a range of amenities.

I visited the Moss Nook development recently to see the progress and it's notable that a playground is the first thing to be built – it's going to be a fantastic place for families and I'm certain the homes when completed will be in high demand.

As part of the planning application process, the developer has committed to fund improvements to local sports facilities; £25,000 for a specific highway improvement schemes off Sutton Road; the operation of a bus service with Merseytravel between the site and St Helens town centre; and £20,000 for provision of a cycleway.

It's a great scheme and one I'm looking forward to seeing progress in the months and years ahead.

The independent, expert Local Government Association visited St Helens two weeks ago, reviewing our council and our progress since their last visit in 2019 just before I became Leader.

They spoke with staff, councillors, and external partners and stakeholders and after carrying out their interviews and reviewing our work I'm delighted to say that the headline feedback we've had from them is extremely positive.

They report that our Council "has changed considerably and is in a far stronger position to where it was. The Leader and Chief Executive have led and sustained this significant change." They go on to state that "significant improvement is evident across a number of areas. The scale, pace and extent of improvement seen is a credit to the Council."

Obviously this feedback is great to hear. It's nothing less than our fantastic keyworker council staff and my St Helens Borough Labour colleagues deserve after two years of very hard work and some big changes. The fact we've made so much of this progress during a pandemic and all the challenges that's brought is amazing.

But we know we're on a journey and we're not there yet. As Leader I have big ambitions for the council, our borough and what we can all achieve together. We're on the way.

I'm looking forward to sharing the full report when we receive it in a few weeks time.

Best wishes to all Star readers.