

As reported in last week's Star, two world-first projects are underway here in St Helens, putting our borough at the forefront of the green industrial revolution and back at the heart of international glassmaking.

Located on the empty brownfield land next to Saints' stadium, essential preparatory work for the ground-breaking £54m Glass Futures development has begun. Once operational next year, the 160,000 sq. ft Centre of Excellence for the international glass industry will be looking at how carbon can be reduced from the glass production process.

The current phase of works on site will take around a month to complete before the main construction works start in late autumn, and it's very exciting to see work well underway.

As a Council we committed funding to cover pre-planning and planning costs, and we also helped to secure £9m funding from the Liverpool City Region. It really does show the power of collaboration, and the importance of having a Labour council working with our Labour Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham to get more investment for St Helens.

A number of major cities and towns around the country wanted to bring Glass Futures project to their area, so for it to come to St Helens speaks volumes of the influence we still have in the world of glass making.

Joining the internationally significant Glass Futures project, and in another world-first for St Helens, trials have started here to produce float (sheet) glass using hydrogen.

The natural gas fossil fuel which is normally used in the manufacturing process will be completely replaced with hydrogen, with the intention of showing how industry can significantly cut carbon emissions and take a big step towards reaching net zero.

The trials are taking place at Pilkington almost 200 years after they first began making glass here in 1826.

It was fantastic to visit the site recently alongside Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham, our Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport Cllr Andy Bowden, and our Climate Change Champion Councillor Mancyia Uddin.

The trial is part of the ground-breaking 'HyNet Industrial Fuel Switching' project, led by Progressive Energy, with hydrogen being provided by BOC based here in St Helens, and its success will provide confidence that low carbon hydrogen from HyNet can replace natural gas. This is believed to be the first large-scale demonstration of 100% hydrogen firing in a live float (sheet) glass production environment anywhere in the world.

HyNet will begin to decarbonise the North West from 2025. By 2030, it will be capable of removing up to 10 million tonnes of carbon from across North West England and North East Wales each year – the equivalent of taking four million cars off the road annually. This will help St Helens and the region to achieve our target of reaching net zero emissions by 2040.

Glass Futures will be completed in 2022, bringing a number of high-skilled jobs to St Helens. For more information visit www.glass-futures.org, and find out more about HyNet at hynet.co.uk.

We can be proud that after two centuries of glass manufacturing, St Helens is still leading the way.

Best wishes to all Star readers.