

Welcome to my first column of 2022, and happy new year to all Star readers.

It promises to be an important and memorable year for St Helens for several reasons. Of course we're all continuing to deal with the impacts of Covid, and my continued thanks goes to all those keyworkers who worked so hard over Christmas doing everything they can to keep us safe. I'm sure all residents will be hoping this year sees us finally welcome an end to significant peaks of infections and more regular periods of normality.

Our council's work to support businesses and schools will continue, as will our efforts to support jobseekers. Our Ways to Work hub in St Helens town centre has made 1300 interventions in just six months since it opened last June, and a second hub will open soon.

There are also many major projects at a critical point. In the next few weeks our regeneration plans for St Helens and Earlestown town centres will come back to Cabinet for final approval following the public consultation, and planning applications for the first phases will follow shortly after; the major projects in our Town Investment Plan – including a Youth Zone, a Health Hub, digital connectivity and more, and for which we secured £25m through our Town Deal Board – will have detailed business cases submitted to government; major site work will begin for Parkside and Glass Futures; and repair works at the Gamble and Earlestown Town Hall will continue.

As a council we're also intending to continue the progress we've made under new leadership since 2019, and which was recognised by the independent Local Government Association last Autumn.

A lot done, more to do.

Of course, Labour can only continue this work and see these projects through with the support of residents, and that's why this May's forthcoming all out elections (as reported in last week's Star) are so crucial. Labour have just published our 2021 Review, detailing highlights of the past year and most importantly giving a clear account of our progress delivering every promise we made at the elections last May. It's available at [www.sthelenslabour.org/review2021](http://www.sthelenslabour.org/review2021) and I hope all other parties will be equally transparent.

Labour will be entering those elections with a deliverable and ambitious plan for St Helens, and we're looking forward to the campaign and the year ahead.