

2021 has been a challenging year for all of us. We spent the first 6 months in varying degrees of lockdown, and then while it looked like life was getting back to some sort of normality we've recently been faced again with the worry and uncertainty of increasing cases and potential restrictions.

While there's no doubt it's been a difficult year, there have been lots of positives and reasons to be proud.

For all us Saints fans this season will live long in the memory, and the homecoming in July was also something very special. The return of the Pride of St Helens Awards in November was also definitely a highlight of the year, as was the hydrogen trial at Pilks and work beginning on site for Glass Futures – two projects putting St Helens back on the international map.

Above all else, the ongoing efforts of our local NHS, carers and all keyworkers has been incredible. But perhaps the greatest positive has been the overwhelming effort of residents to do the right thing – getting vaccinated, and in recent weeks stepping up to take the booster.

As a council, despite many ongoing challenges, we've made great progress on a number of exciting developments including Glass Futures and approval for both the Parkside and Omega West projects; agreement of our Climate Action Plan with firm commitments to achieving net zero by 2040; the excellent feedback from the Local Government Association that under new leadership since May 2019 our council has made significant progress in transforming and improving how we work; and of course our once-in-a-lifetime regeneration plans for St Helens and Earlestown town centres.

We're striving to be the very best council we can be and that will continue in 2022.

Over Christmas please keep an eye on the local press and [www.sthelens.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.sthelens.gov.uk/coronavirus) for all the latest information. The council has also pulled together links to a wide range of information and advice all in one place, including bin collection dates, library opening times, GP/Pharmacy details, mental health support and much more at [www.sthelens.gov.uk/christmasopening](http://www.sthelens.gov.uk/christmasopening), and you can still call St Helens Together on 01744 676767 if you need help.

Whatever the next few weeks bring, I hope you and your loved ones have a safe and merry Christmas, and I wish you all the very best for a happy and healthy 2022.