

This week our once in a lifetime plans for major regeneration of both St Helens and Earlestown town centres have taken a big step forward.

Readers will remember that the council and our partners at English Cities Fund (who have a proven track record of delivering major town and city centre regeneration schemes) published masterplans last October. This was followed by a public consultation and we had a terrific response, with hundreds of responses and thousands of views of the websites (which are still live) at www.sthelenstowncentre.co.uk and www.earlestown.co.uk.

I'm pleased to say there was overwhelming support for the proposals. 88% of responses supported the plans for St Helens town centre and 94% supported those for Earlestown.

Concerns raised through the consultation about parking in St Helens town centre and the size of the new covered market in Earlestown are among the issues which have been fed into the new and updated plans which were presented at Cabinet on Wednesday this week.

The plans for St Helens town centre include a new bus station, a new market hall in the centre of the town, new high quality office space, high quality homes for town centre living, a hotel, and extensive public realm improvements.

The first phase in Earlestown town centre will include improvements to Market Square with a partially covered market area, events space and landscape improvements, as well as improvements to key high streets between the rail station and the Market Square to make the environment more welcoming and pedestrian friendly in support of local businesses.

Planning applications for the first phases will now be drawn up and submitted shortly.

Residents will have seen the scaffolding around the Gamble as external repairs take place, and this week we've also approved nearly £1m funding for external repair work to Earlestown town hall.

We said we would regenerate our town centres, and we meant it. We said we would repair the Gamble and Earlestown town hall, and we meant that too.

It's also great to see more proposals for development in St Helens town centre from local entrepreneur Ian Pitts. His plans are very exciting and exactly what we need – it's only through a mix of public and private investment that we will transform the town centre, and that's what we're going to do.

Best wishes to all Star readers.