

Christmas is just around the corner, and as always there will be switch-on events and family entertainment across St Helens.

To help cover the costs of the trees and lights in these tough times, I'm delighted to say we've been able to secure sponsorship from several companies carrying out major regeneration work in the borough.

Huge thanks go to English Cities Fund, the council's delivery partner for the major regeneration of St Helens and Earlestown town centres; Balfour Beatty, who are delivering the Parkside Link Road scheme; and City Fibre, who are currently carrying out works as part of a £30m programme to bring full fibre connectivity within reach of almost every home and business in St Helens.

The St Helens switch on takes place on Saturday 26th November in Church Square with plenty of entertainment on offer - check www.sthelens.gov.uk and the Star for all the latest information.

The companies sponsoring the Christmas trees and lights are just a few of the international, national and regionally significant companies investing in St Helens right now. We need to make sure local people and businesses benefit as much as possible from this investment, and that's why at Cabinet last week we agreed a new Social Value policy to focus on creating new jobs and apprenticeships, and new opportunities for local businesses.

We're already working with companies awarded contracts to make sure that where possible they include local training and employment opportunities, climate change mitigation such as solar panels and green energy, and where possible that they use St Helens suppliers and help to boost local supply chains.

Project delivery partners on schemes including Glass Futures, Parkside, and the Ashurst Primary School rebuild have already been visiting local schools, jobs fairs and more in order to make sure local people are aware of new opportunities and careers being created, and the new Social Value policy will make sure this sort of activity is embedded in all future contracts and work.

Essentially, it's about keeping as much money local as possible!

Best wishes to all Star readers.

If you are struggling and need support please reach out - there is no shame in asking for a helping hand and thankfully there are lots of people in St Helens willing to provide one. Please visit www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether for all the latest information, advice and support.