

Last week, some important decisions were made that will impact St Helens for years to come.

On Tuesday it was announced that we've been successful in securing Freeport status. This will bring massive investment and new jobs to our region in the years ahead and it will help to unlock the full potential of the Parkside in Newton which has been designated one of three tax sites in the region.

It's already proving a success. I visited SSO International in Haydock with Metro Mayor Steve Rotherham to meet staff and hear about their achievement in becoming the Freeport's first Customs Site Operator.

It was great to hear directly from a local employer about the benefits and confidence Freeport status is already bringing to our local economy, and it's even better to know that even greater opportunities for St Helens lie ahead.

Myself, Steve Rotherham and other local leaders have been clear from the start that we want Freeport status to help us attract industries like advanced manufacturing and green energy. We've also been clear we won't accept any watering down of workers' rights or environmental standards.

Then on Wednesday, Cabinet agreed more than £500,000 funding for the next stage of repair work to the Gamble, which is at the heart of our town centre plans. We also agreed a new Inclusive Growth Strategy for consultation. Our aim is to make sure that the council does everything it can to put local workers and businesses at the front of the queue for the opportunities we're working to create.

In addition to the Freeport, Parkside and the Gamble restoration, we're also working on delivering the town centre regeneration plans with English Cities Fund; eight Town Deal bids; two Levelling Up Fund bids; Glass Futures; Earlestown Town Hall restoration; Moss Nook and Cowley Hill brownfield redevelopment; the new Lea Green station; school rebuilds; and Omega West, with even more in the pipeline.

It's not about shiny new buildings – it's about new jobs, new homes, new skills, and the pride and aspiration they'll create. It's a level of regeneration not seen here for decades and definitely something to get excited about.

Best wishes to all Star readers.

**This continues to be a difficult time for many of us. If you need support with bills, housing, health and wellbeing or anything else, please visit [www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether](http://www.sthelens.gov.uk/sthelenstogether).**