

Regenerating St Helens town centre is a priority for all of us, and I know it can't happen soon enough.

Town centres everywhere are all facing the same issues – just read the comments section on any neighbouring town's local news sites and you'll see the same type of remarks and concerns from residents.

Places everywhere are grappling with the same challenge of how to reinvigorate areas that were once dedicated to retail, but which much of the public have drifted away from in favour of supermarket superstores, retail parks and online shopping.

In St Helens, since I became Leader we've agreed and signed the deal with our regeneration partner English Cities Fund; set up the Town Deal Board, securing £20m funding for projects to compliment the ECF work; completed external repair work to the Gamble and committed to keeping it in full public use; and published once in a lifetime plans for regeneration.

That's all as well as continuing to deliver essential statutory services through a pandemic and a cost of living emergency.

Work is continuing at pace behind the scenes on the regeneration plans and I know that it can be anxious for some as they wait to see what the future holds, as seen in last week's story about the St Mary's Market stallholders worried about their survival.

I understand their fears but let's be clear – the only guaranteed way they won't survive is for us to do nothing. And we're doing everything we can.

And I've said it before and I'll say it again – there are hundreds (yes, hundreds!) of businesses in the town centre, including stallholders in the market, and they can all be helped right now if we use them and ignore the moaners on social media.

Last week it was confirmed another two new businesses would be opening, occupying the former Two Brothers coffee shop at the bottom of Barrow Street – an area which is already home to many small businesses.

I visited the new Greavesy Tuck Shop this week to wish them well and get some sweets for my children and I met Tim who owns it with his wife Bethany. It was great customer service, choice and value - good luck to them and to Number 6 Tattoo Studio!

Let's all get behind our local businesses.

Best wishes to all Star readers.