

Like everyone else I've been appalled and shocked by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It's a barbaric attack on democracy and freedom, and a threat to stability not just in Eastern Europe but the whole world. Britain needs to stand united with our allies against Putin's aggression.

Last weekend we lit the iconic Steve Prescott Bridge blue and yellow in a display of unity and solidarity with the Ukrainian people and this week we have been flying their flag above the town hall.

Gestures like this are important, but we need action too. That's why we've called on the British government to do everything in its power to give support to Ukraine, including giving refuge to anyone forced to flee the country.

Over the years many Ukrainian nationals have made their home here in our region, and my heart goes out to them right now. I can't imagine what they're feeling, and the trauma they must be going through seeing their country attacked in this way. St Helens stands with them, and we are ready and willing to provide a warm welcome to anyone else from Ukraine who is forced to flee their homeland in the coming weeks.

Judging by the response I've seen on social media, including in the many comments on the Star website, that's the overwhelming response of most people.

Our borough has a long and proud history of welcoming people needing sanctuary or looking for a better life for themselves and their families, from the Welsh and Irish immigrants of the 19<sup>th</sup> century right up to the modern day.

St Helens Borough Council has actively participated in the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme for over five years, supporting successful integration by providing English language support for both adults and children as well as employment support.

We were also the first council in the region to house Afghan families under the Afghan Relocations and Assistance Policy, and last year we celebrated Refugee Week, bringing our community together to showcase the valuable contribution refugees have made to the rich diversity of our borough including our food, culture and sport.

We'll always do everything we can to support those in need, whether they're St Helens born and bred or from elsewhere. It's our moral duty, and right now the people of Ukraine need us.

Best wishes to all Star readers.