

Last Friday I had the pleasure of attending the St Helens Borough Business Awards at the Totally Wicked Stadium, and the honour of presenting the Community Champion award to St Helens Town AFC.

The awards are organised jointly by the Council and St Helens Chamber and it's a great opportunity to recognise some of the amazing work going on across the borough.

There were nine award categories including Employer of the Year and Apprentice of the Year as well as awards recognising innovation, work towards net zero, social impact and more.

All of the outstanding nominees deserve praise, and the breadth of talent and creativity in St Helens should give us all pride in the here and now as well as optimism for the future.

Backing local businesses and attracting new investment is vital to our long term growth and wellbeing. We need local jobs and the homes and infrastructure to support them. That's why we agreed the ambitious Local Plan last year, and why we have this year agreed a new social value policy and Inclusive Growth Strategy to do all we can to make sure every £ spent here, stays here in our local economy.

We're doing our best to give local businesses confidence and in the town centre we can already see progress in Church Square Shopping Centre with most units now occupied, as well as £70m funding agreed and a contractor appointed for Phase 1a which will include a new market hall as well as a new bus station.

We're working on the final plans for a temporary bus station, and we're also in the advanced stages of appointing an international hotel brand. Because of commercial sensitivity I'm restricted in what I can reveal - all I can say is watch this space!

There are of course challenges for the council and developers just like there are for most businesses and households right now, but things are moving. Glass Futures, Lea Green station and Parkside redevelopment are all progressing at speed, and the Town Deal projects are all going well, including the World of Glass which is completed and looking fantastic. If you haven't visited it yet, get down there!

Congratulations to all the businesses recognised at the awards, and here's to even more success for them and St Helens.

Best wishes to all Star readers.