

This year is the 75th anniversary of the historic St Helens and Stuttgart twinning agreement, and it's something everyone in St Helens should be very proud to celebrate. It's one of the oldest twinning arrangements in Europe, beginning just after the Second World War at a difficult time for both the UK and Germany, and it was a brave and bold thing to do.

In the 75th year there's no better time to renew our friendship.

Last weekend I was honoured to visit Stuttgart to take part in numerous meetings and events as part of a delegation including Mayor of St Helens Cllr Lynn Clarke and representatives from the Council, our Youth Council, St Helens Music Service, Cowley school, St Helens Town AFC, UC Crew Dance Group and more. All these organisations, and others, have strong relationships with Stuttgart. These are not relationships that are managed and directed by the Council - they have grown and flourished independently. Their success reflects the benefits everyone sees in the partnership.

All of these organisations represented St Helens superbly, and I've got to give a special mention to our Youth Council members Anja and Yasmin from St Cuthbert's, our music service singers and musicians, and staff and students from Cowley. I think giving young people opportunities like this is vital and seeing them so excited and proud was the highlight of the visit.

Among various events we were honoured to find out that Stuttgart have named a new square in a significant development 'St Helens Platz', following on from our naming of the path around Taylor Park 'Stuttgart Walk' earlier this year.

Maintaining our partnership is not without its challenges, especially in difficult financial circumstances. We have to give it content and direction which encourages tangible benefits for people. So I am especially happy to have agreed a new Memorandum of Understanding with the elected Mayor of Stuttgart Dr Frank Nopper, committing us to working together to tackle common challenges and making the most of new opportunities covering education, economic growth and investment in new technology, climate change, and much more.

On these and other things I know we can achieve real progress together, and more than we could on our own.

We thank Stuttgart for their invitation and friendship, and look forward to 75 more years.

Best wishes to all Star readers.