Making Stevenage Even Better – Consultation Report

APPENDIX B

1. Background

The five strategic priorities and three cross-cutting themes set out in 'Making Stevenage Even Better' were based upon resident feedback captured through the findings of the Residents Survey (2021), the Tenants Survey (2021), and the Cooperative Neighbourhoods Resident Priorities Survey (2023).

The survey findings represented 3,000 resident's views across a range of topics and provide a strong local evidence base for change.

Key priority areas were identified as:

- Maintenance and appeal of local areas (e.g., littering & cleanliness, pathways and pavements)
- Safety and crime (e.g., reducing Anti-Social Behaviour, drugs and young people hanging around neighbourhoods)
- Green spaces and climate change (e.g., better parks, maintenance of green spaces, climate change activities to reduce carbon footprint and improve biodiversity)
- Provision of good local Services (e.g., council house maintenance, customer services, waste collection and recycling, satisfaction with housing repairs)
- Good local shops and facilities (e.g., diversity of retail and investment in town centre, new leisure facilities, youth initiatives and activities in neighbourhood areas to promote health & wellbeing)

For focus, the areas identified by residents have been recategorised into the following list of strategic priorities, and to provide clarity, three of the strategic priorities are broken down into subcategories:

1. **Transforming Our Town**
   a. Regeneration
   b. Enterprise & Skills
2. **More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes**
   a. Building New & Sustainable Homes
   b. Maintaining Good Quality Homes
3. **Thriving Neighbourhoods**
   a. Clean Neighbourhoods & Green Spaces
   b. Community Safety
   c. Culture & Leisure
4. **Tackling Climate Change**
5. **Balancing the Budget**

In addition to the five strategic priorities, three areas of work which cut across delivery of all strategic priorities, were identified as **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**; **Health and Wellbeing**; **Technology & Innovation**, and these are referred to as cross-cutting themes.

To ensure that the strategic priorities and cross-cutting themes are representative of the views of residents, businesses and community groups, a six-week consultation on the

proposed 'Making Stevenage Even Better' Corporate Plan (2024-2027) was open from 23 October to 4 December 2023.

A variety of engagement activities took place to help ensure that members, businesses, staff, community groups and residents were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposals. Respondents could either provide their views via the online survey, which could be accessed by scanning a QR code or visiting the website. They could also request a hard-copy form by email or post, or come into the office to access the computers in the Customer Service Centre. Large print and translated versions were also available upon request.

Activities to promote the consultation included:

- An article in the Chronicle magazine with a distribution list of 36,000 households
- Multiple sponsored Facebook posts through the SBC account with a reach of approx. 11,000 people
- Multiple Instagram posts though the SBC account with a reach of approx. 3,000 people
- A post on the Council's Linked-in account which has a reach of approx. 11,000 people
- Posters placed in every Community Centre and on every Neighbourhood Board
- A 'Have Your Say' webpage on the Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) website,
- Promotion at the Step2Skills Job Fair and Disability Confident Event
- Circulation of promotional materials to local business partners
- Member engagement through circulation of the survey to party leaders
- Proposal presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members in October 2023 and January 2024
- Circulation of the promotional materials to the 27 Voluntary, Community, Social and Enterprise (VCSE) members of the Social Inclusion Partnership
- Circulation of the draft corporate Plan to Stevenage Together partners
- Posters placed in high footfall areas in Daneshill House and Cavendish Road
- Promotion to staff though an Intranet article and news item in the weekly News desk Round-Up

Survey respondents were asked 15 fixed questions and the option of free text responses to supplement their answers. To enhance understanding of the feedback provided, a thematic analysis of the free text answers was undertaken.
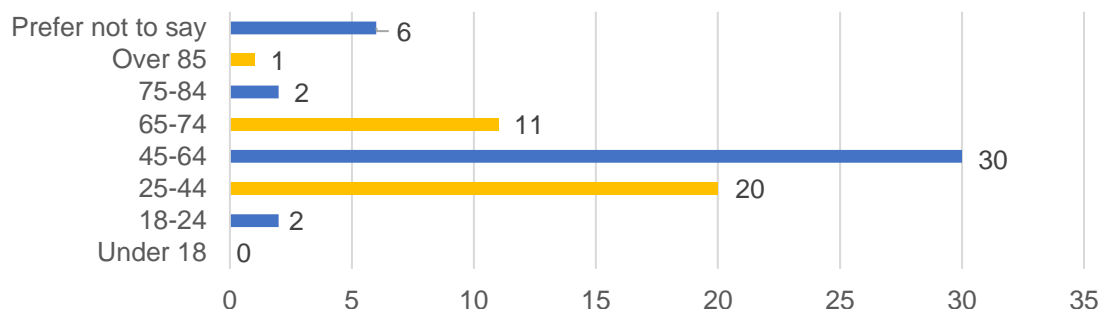
Upon the consultation closure, 72 responses were received.
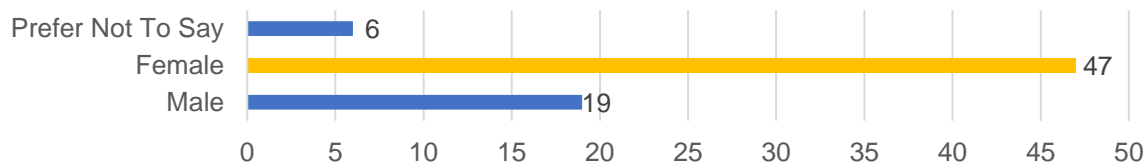
Respondent Demographics

From the 72 responses obtained, the majority of respondents were female (65%), from the 45-64 age bracket (41%), had no disability (55%), considered their nationality to be White English/ Welsh/ Scottish/ Northern Irish/ British (75%), followed no specific religion (38%), and were Stevenage respondents (90%) with the highest response rate from those living within the Chells ward (15%).

The graphs below set out the breakdown of the demographics by number of respondents:
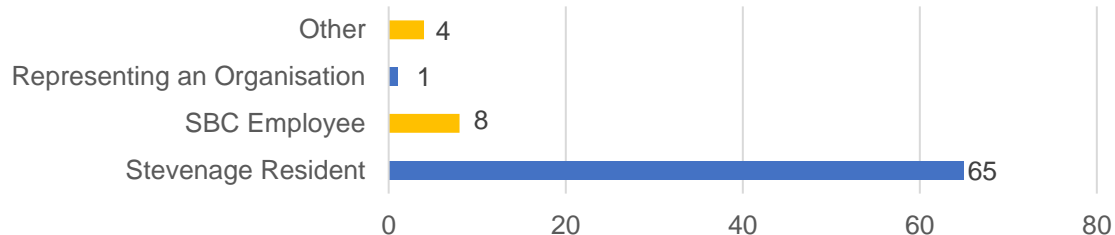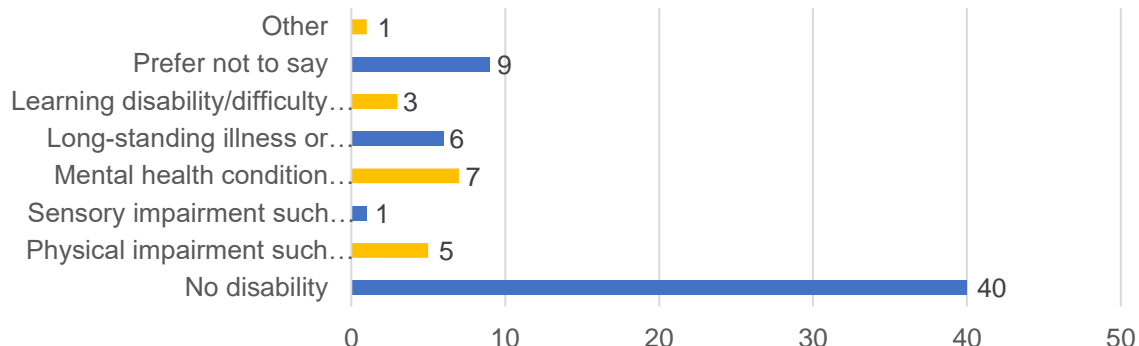
What is your age?

Age	Count
Prefer not to say	6
Over 85	1
75-84	2
65-74	11
45-64	30
25-44	20
18-24	2
Under 18	0

What is your gender?

Gender	Count
Prefer Not To Say	6
Female	47
Male	19

Please select the option that most applies to you?

Option	Count
Other	4
Representing an Organisation	1
SBC Employee	8
Stevenage Resident	65

'Other' Responses:
- Stevenage employed. Potential resident.
- Live on the border of Stevenage.
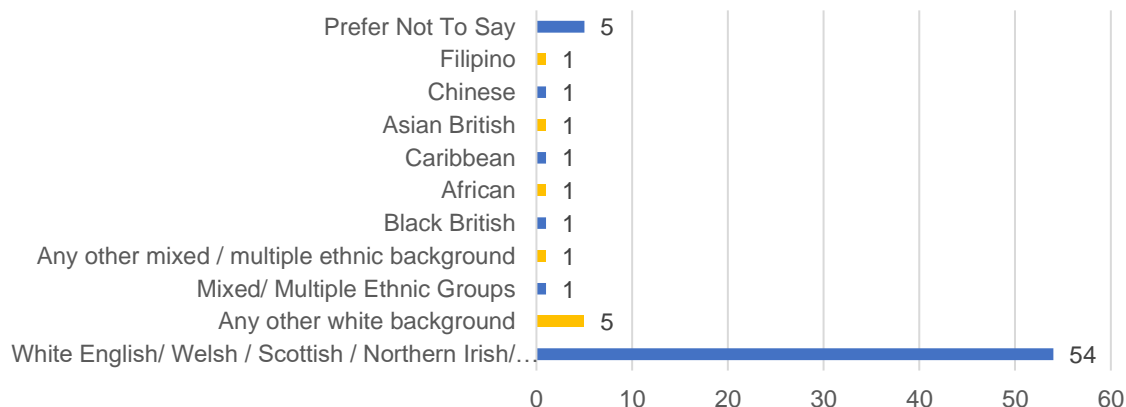- Employee of a business based in Stevenage.
- Chronicle magazine.

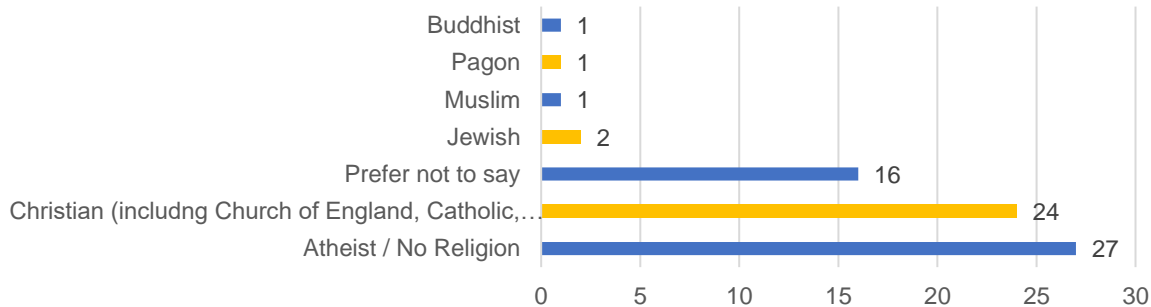## Do you have a disability? Please select the option that most applies to you.

Option	Value
Other	1
Prefer not to say	9
Learning disability/difficulty…	3
Long-standing illness or…	6
Mental health condition…	7
Sensory impairment such…	1
Physical impairment such…	5
No disability	40

'Other' Response:
- Adult son has, lives with us, has cerebral palsy.

What is your Nationality?

Option	Value
Prefer Not To Say	5
Filipino	1
Chinese	1
Asian British	1
Caribbean	1
African	1
Black British	1
Any other mixed / multiple ethnic background	1
Mixed/ Multiple Ethnic Groups	1
Any other white background	5
White English/ Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish/…	54

What is your religion?

Option	Value
Buddhist	1
Pagon	1
Muslim	1
Jewish	2
Prefer not to say	16
Christian (includng Church of England, Catholic,…	24
Atheist / No Religion	27

Where are you based?
(Or if you live outside Stevenage, please select Other and state the town you live in)

Location	Value
Other	7
Woodfield	0
Symonds Green	5
St Nicholas	8
Shephall	5
Roebuck	3
Pin Green	5
Old Town	9
Martins Wood	2
Manor	6
Longmeadow	3
Chells	10
Bedwell	5
Bandley Hill and Poplars	4

'Other' Responses:
- Bedfordshire
- Cambridgeshire
- Hitchin
- Broxbourne
- Watton on Stone
- Walkern
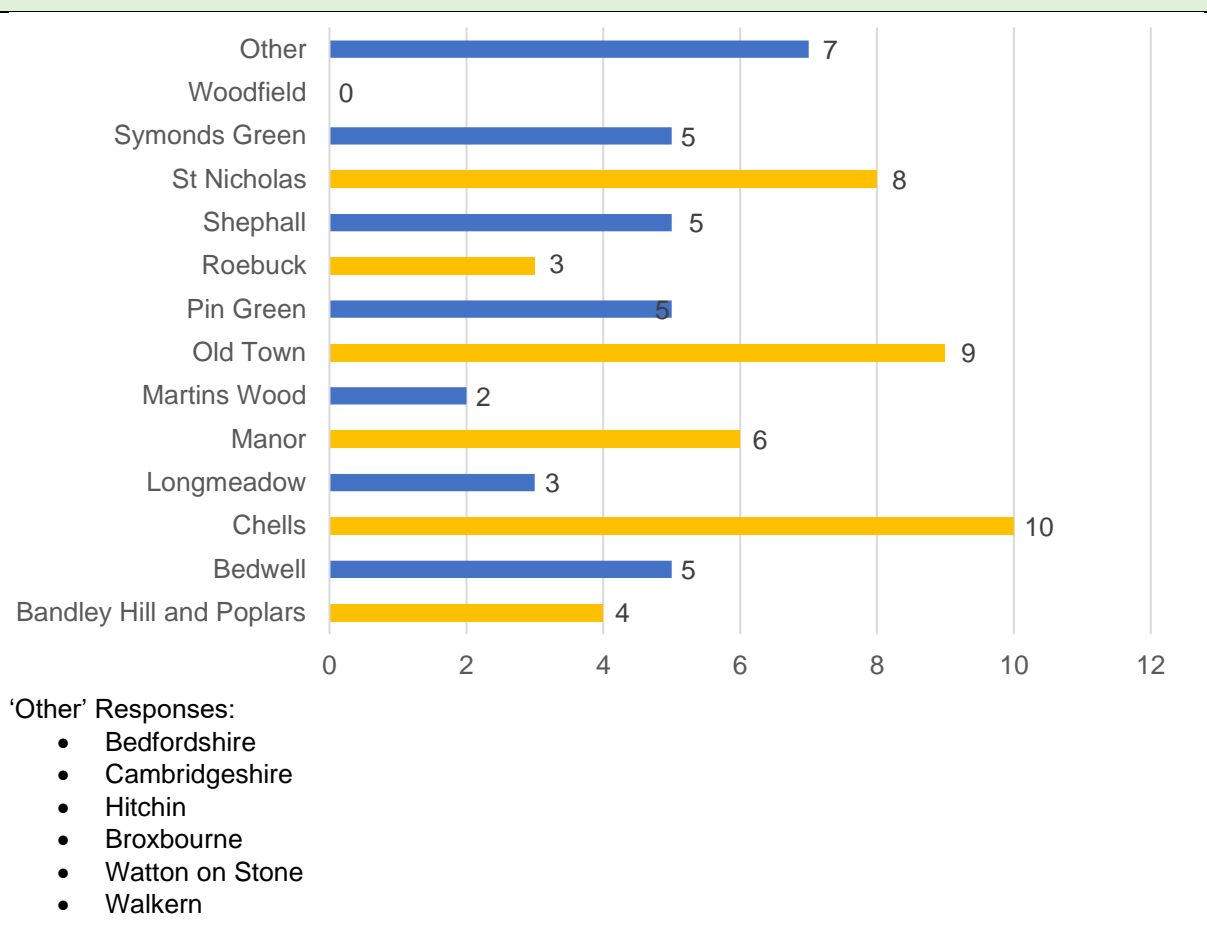
Strategic Priorities

Respondents were first asked if the strategic priorities proposed within Making Stevenage Even Better were representative of what they believe Stevenage Borough Council's priorities should be.

Yes 69% | No 31%
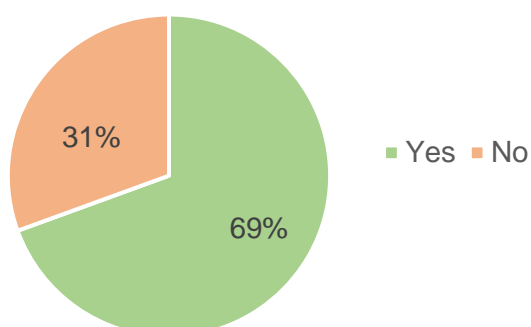
Sixty-nine per cent (69%) of respondents answered that they were. Of these, fifty-six per cent (56%) went on to also agree with each strategic priority individually.

Of the thirty-one percent (31%) that answered that these were not representative, thematic analysis of the free text responses indicated that the following areas were most commonly suggested as alternatives:
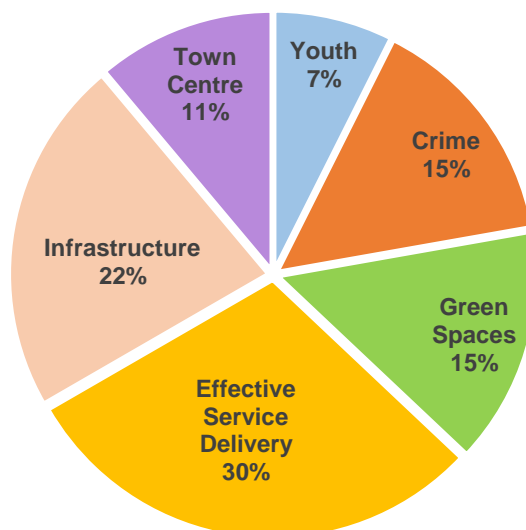
Thirty per cent (30%) of respondents within the group outlined that 'Effective Service Delivery' should be an additional priority for the Council. Investing in the Council's existing services and committing to delivering them at a high standard was considered a key priority for many. Respondents specifically mentioned the upkeep of garages, maintenance of hedges, and completing efficient housing repairs as examples of the services they would like greater focus on.

Twenty-two per cent (22%) of respondents within the group outlined that a strategic priority of 'Infrastructure' would be beneficial and could be embedded within the existing 'Transforming Our Town' priority. Investment in doctors, dentists, roads, and public transport as part of regeneration would help support the growing population. This in turn led to respondents suggesting that improved infrastructure would encourage multinational businesses to Stevenage.

Fifteen per cent (15%) of respondents within the group also suggested a strategic priority of 'Crime' as this would provide an opportunity to tackle drug use and anti-social behaviour. Seven per cent (7%) of respondents within the group outlined that prioritising services for the 'Youth' of Stevenage could aid in tackling crime across the town.

Fifteen per cent (15%) of respondents within the group specified that whilst the strategic priority of 'Tackling Climate Change' was welcomed, a focus on 'Green Spaces' should be included within this. Ensuring sustainability and preserving green spaces were outlined as a key priority for some respondents.

Eleven per cent (11%) of respondents within the group suggested a greater focus should be placed on specifically improving the town centre. The £1 billion investment through the Stevenage Even Better programme of work will deliver town centre improvements. However, it is clear that further communication to residents is required to promote this.

Transforming Our Town

To strengthen the prioritisation of key areas, Transforming Our Town is broken down into 2 subcategories: Regeneration and Enterprise & Skills.

Regeneration focuses upon the regeneration of the town centre and surrounding areas to deliver benefits to residents, through improved public services, local amenities, employment opportunities, transport links and access to green spaces.

Enterprise & Skills focuses on opening up access to outstanding skills, training and educational opportunities in growing local sectors such as life science, space and defence, and construction, so that our community benefits from economic growth, skills and improved job prospects.

Sixty-eight per cent (68%) of respondents answered that the 2 subcategories are representative of their priorities as a resident:
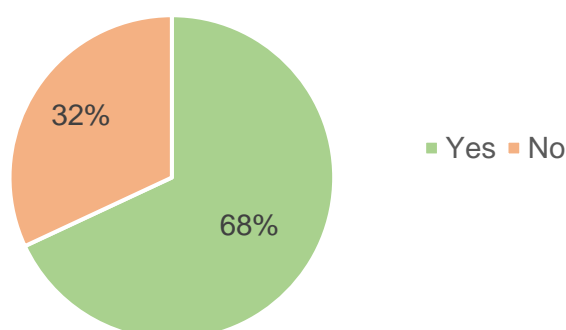
For the thirty-two per cent (32%) who did not consider the priority to be representative, their responses can be categorised into five themes:
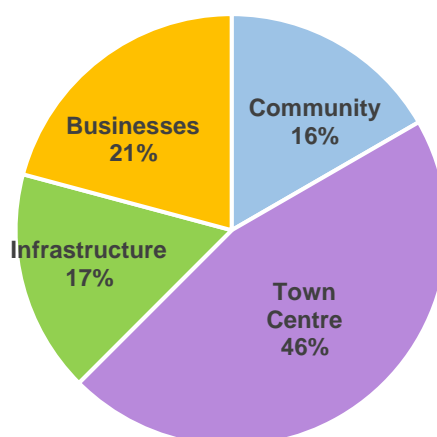
Forty-six per cent (46%) of respondents within the group, answered that a greater focus should be made on the improving the town centre. Specifically, improving shopping and leisure facilities and attracting retail businesses through reduced rents. Further communication to residents about the specific aspects of the Stevenage Even Better and Towns Fund work, would help promote the benefits that include new retail and leisure facilities.

Twenty-one per cent (21%) of respondents within the group, expressed the need to put greater emphasis on supporting businesses. Supporting and investing in businesses and jobs,

specifically those within Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) industries on Gunnels Wood Road, were seen as a strong priority for Stevenage residents. Further, it was suggested that promotion of apprenticeship schemes and activities within the STEM sector would be beneficial.

Seventeen per cent (17%) of respondents within the group, outlined their desire to see infrastructure built to support the growing town and population. Residents outlined that it's all very well building new homes and creating new jobs to attract prospective residents, but local infrastructure needs to be built alongside this too. Additionally, ensuring green spaces, roads, and cycle paths are maintained across the town were suggested to support this effort.

Sixteen per cent (16%) of respondents within the group, outlined that the community should be at the heart of 'Transforming Our Town' and establishing community hubs that hosts activities and events like social clubs for children would help to establish a sense of community.

More Social, Affordable & Good Quality Homes

To strengthen the prioritisation, More Social, Affordable & Good Quality Homes is broken down into two subcategories: Building New & Sustainable Homes and Maintaining Good Quality Homes.

Building New & Sustainable Homes focuses on ensuing that the demand for local homes is in part met through the provision of more social, affordable, and good quality homes that meet improved sustainability standards.

Maintaining Good Quality Homes focuses on the provision of good quality tenancy, housing maintenance, repairs and homelessness service to residents.

Sixty-four per cent (64%) of respondents agreed that the two areas of focus were representative of their priorities as a resident.
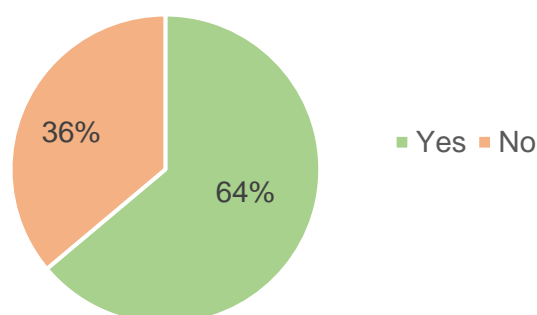
Thirty-six per cent (36%) of respondents did not consider this priority to be representative, and their responses can be categorised into four themes:
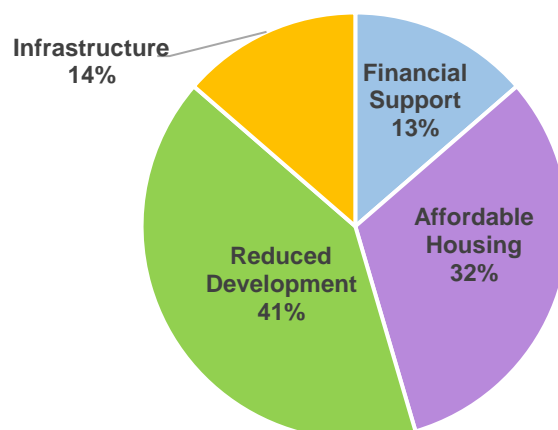
Forty-one per cent (41%) of respondents within the group, answered that there has already been an abundance of flats and houses already built in recent years and would prefer a reduction in building development. Reasons included, not enough parking options, families would prefer houses that have gardens, too many of Stevenage's green spaces are being developed.

Consequently, infrastructure to support the growth in housing was mentioned by fourteen (14%) of respondents. A focus on increasing the amount of parking, doctors' surgeries, hospitals, and police presence were all suggested as helping to ensure the infrastructure is there for the proposed new housing developments.

Thirty-two per cent (32%) of respondents within the group raised issue with the use of the term 'affordable housing' as it is not clear what this means, and therefore further communication would be helpful for residents.

Thirteen per cent (13%) of respondents expressed a desire for greater focus on providing financial support for residents who had a housing need.

Thriving Neighbourhoods

To strengthen the prioritisation of key areas, Thriving Neighbourhoods is broken down into three subcategories: Clean Neighbourhoods & Green Spaces, Community Safety, and Culture & Leisure.

Clean Neighbourhoods & Green Spaces seeks to ensure that neighbourhoods and green spaces are clean and well-maintained, so that residents can be proud of where they live.

Community Safety commits to ensuring that respondents live in safe communities where crime and anti-social behaviour are reduced through effective partnership working.

Culture & Leisure utilises close partnership working within the culture and leisure sector to enable a vibrant, thriving, creative town, which improves quality of life for respondents and benefits the local economy.

Eighty-one percent (81%) of respondents agreed that the areas of focus of Thriving Neighbourhoods was representative of their priorities as a resident.

Legend: ■ Yes ■ No
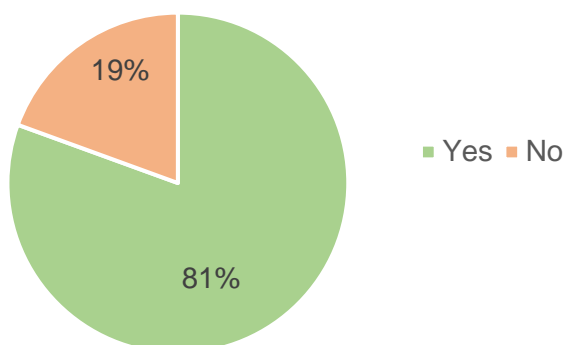
Nineteen per cent (19%) of respondents did not consider the priority to be representative and their responses that can be categorised into three themes:
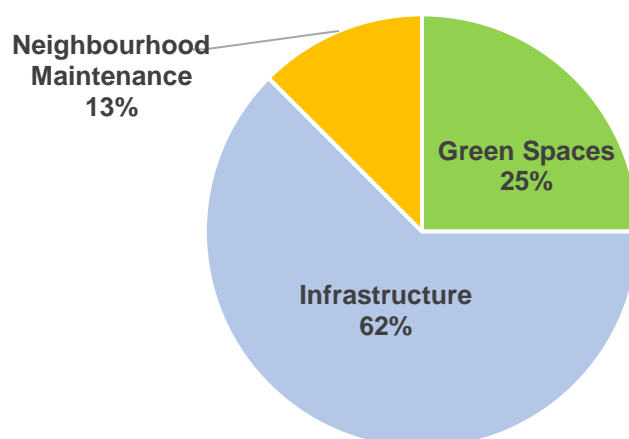
Sixty -two per cent (62%) of respondent within the group, answered that infrastructure should be a priority. Specifically, investment in community centres and policing/security measures.

Investment in green spaces was mentioned as a key priority for twenty-five per cent (25%) of respondents within the group, with a focus on a desire for funding to help residents better look after their environments and clean up their neighbourhoods.

Thirteen per cent (13%) of respondents suggested that regular and planned maintenance of neighbourhoods should be a priority as a way for the Council to demonstrate that they are investing in their wards.
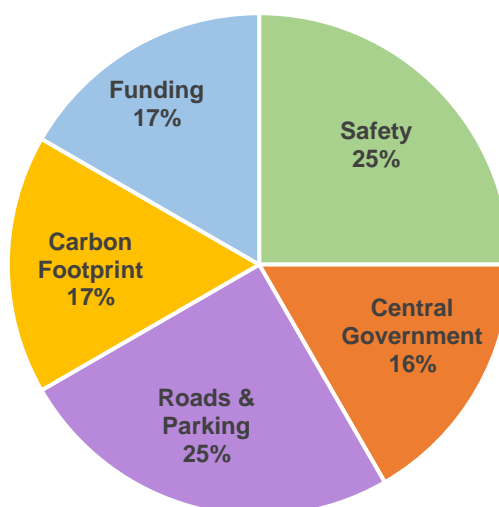
Tackling Climate Change

The Tackling Climate Change strategic priority seeks to progress the reduction of carbon emissions to net zero by 2030 and provide support to businesses and residents to do the same.

Seventy-eight per cent (78%) of respondents agreed that Tackling Climate Change was representative of their priorities as a resident:
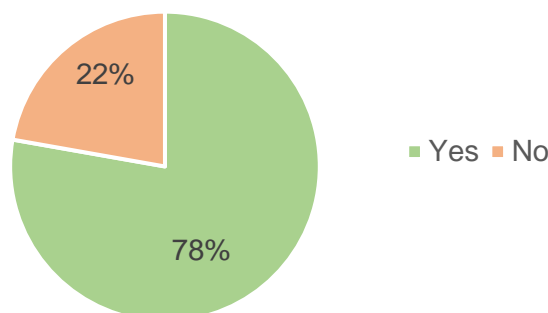
Twenty-two per cent (22%) of respondents did not agree that Tackling Climate Change was representative of their priorities, and their responses can be categorised into five themes:

Twenty-five per cent (25%) of respondents proposed that investment in roads and parking would perhaps be better for the town as a whole instead of tackling climate change.

Seventeen per cent (17%) of respondents felt that they already contributed to tackling climate change through reducing their carbon footprint, through activities such as recycling, cutting carbon emissions, and limiting water and energy usage; so promoting other activities and behaviours that would help fulfil the Council's ambitions would be useful. Further understanding their carbon footprint was suggested as a way to assist with this priority too.
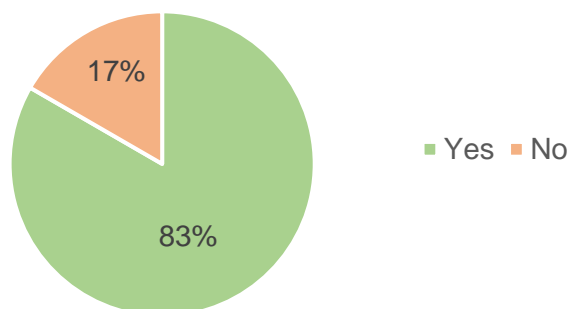
Seventeen per cent (17%) of respondents suggested that funding from the Council to help achieve this priority would be welcomed.

Sixteen per cent (16%) of the group answered that central Government should be driving the local climate change agenda and the Council should align with national targets and goals.


Balancing the Budget

The Balancing the Budget strategic priority seeks to ensure that sufficient financial resources are available to deliver on the Council's priorities, while remaining resilient to the impact of increasing financial pressures.

Eighty-three per cent (83%) of respondents agreed that Balancing the Budget should be a priority:

Seventeen per cent (17%) of respondents did not agree that the strategic priority of Balancing the Budget was representative of their priorities. This group suggested that the Council would not need to make savings if the following where addressed.
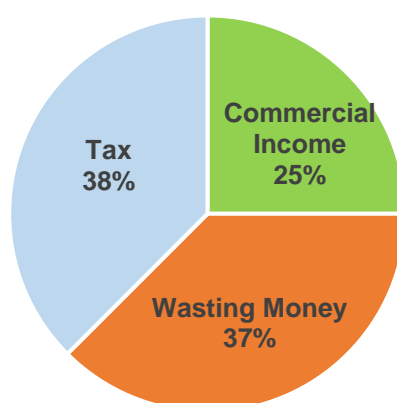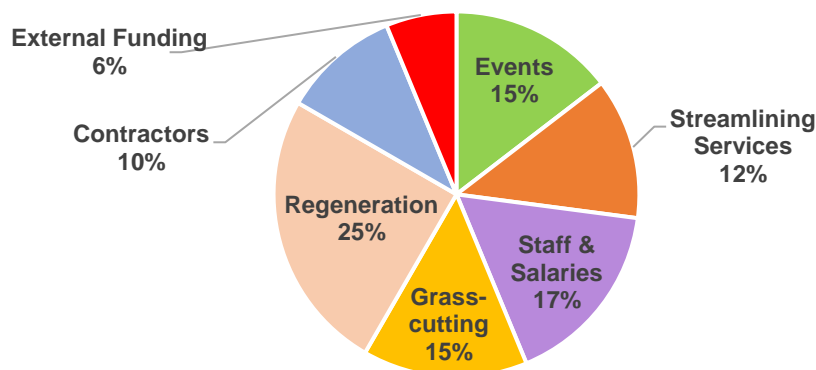

Thirty-eight per cent (38%) of the group, suggested an increase in local taxes.

Thirty-seven per cent (37%) of respondents in the group suggested that the Council should stop wasting money on cost saving exercises that did not save money. For example, residents suggested that by closing children's play centres there would be an increase in anti-social behaviour which the Council would need to spend money on to tackle.

Twenty-five per cent (25%) of respondents suggested the council look at alternative sources of income generation, through increasing commercial activities like advertising or sponsorship.

Saving Suggestions

All survey respondents were asked for financial savings suggestions. The responses can be categorised into seven themes:

External Funding
6%

Events
15%

Streamlining
Services
12%

Contractors
10%

Regeneration
25%

Staff &
Salaries
17%

Grass-
cutting
15%

Twenty-five per cent (25%) suggested that the regeneration work would attract new businesses to the area which would increase business rate revenue and car parking income.

Seventeen per cent (17%) of respondents answered that staff and Councillor salaries should be reduced.

Fifteen per cent (15%) suggested the Council should consider selective grass-cutting allowing green spaces to grow wilder (within safe reasons) and reduce maintenance costs for grass cutting etc. Emphasis was also put on assessing the efficiency of recycling services i.e. investing in more durable recycling boxes or streamlining the missed bins process.

Streamlining services was mentioned by twelve per cent (12%) of respondents as a way to generate savings. One respondent suggested that a thorough assessment of all the Council's 'financial leakages' should take place. Another respondent suggested encouraging staff to give feedback on the services they carry out as they would have the most insight into where cuts could be made. Cutting discretionary services were also suggested by respondents.

Ten per cent (10%) of respondents felt that the work carried out by Contractors was excessive. Residents commented that contractors are sometimes employed at far greater costs then if local talent was utilised. Where there are frequent repairs and maintenance on Council properties, the suggestion was also made that the tenant should be liable.

Fifteen per cent (15%) of respondents suggested reducing or cancelling events such as the November Fireworks Display, or those held on the Event Island and the Stevenage Museum.

Seeking external funding to plug the financial gap was suggested by six per cent (6%) of respondents.

Cross-Cutting Themes

In addition to the five strategic priorities, there are three areas of work which cut across delivery of all strategic priorities, these are **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**; **Health and Wellbeing**; **Technology & Innovation**, and we refer to these as cross-cutting themes.

The inclusion of cross cutting themes represents the need to raise awareness of these areas when designing and delivery services. They have important social benefits and should be considered as integral to the wider strategic priority programmes of work.

All respondents were given the opportunity to comment on the cross-cutting themes and suggest alternatives. The majority did so through the free text response option in Question 15. Free text analysis shows that there was broad agreement with the themes proposed. Including, many respondents highlighting the need for more youth services, which is an

integral part of the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) and Health & Wellbeing programme of work.
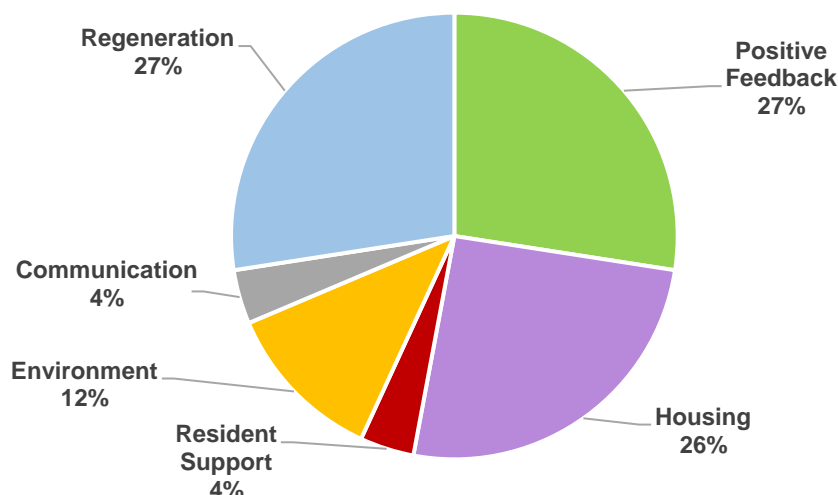
Respondents also suggested that the Council should publicise the benefits of the many green spaces and cycle paths in Stevenage, which is well represented in the 'Health and Wellbeing' cross-cutting theme (e.g. plans to establish a Cycle Hub in partnership with Fairlands Activity Centre).

There were also suggestions concerning online accessibility which is key to advancing EDI and the Technology and Innovation theme (e.g. revised Web Content Accessibility Guidelines).

Additional suggestions for cross-cutting themes included climate change, with one resident commenting that even though climate change is a key strategic element and aspiration is key having this as a core cross cutting theme should also be considered.

General Feedback

All respondents provided their general feedback on Making Stevenage Even Better proposals and their answers can be categorised into six clear themes, as per the below pie chart:

Regeneration 27%
Positive Feedback 27%
Communication 4%
Environment 12%
Resident Support 4%
Housing 26%

When providing general feedback, the majority of people (27%) provided positive comments. A selection of comments is provided on page 15. Twenty-five per cent (25%) of respondents' highlighted the desire to see more social housing across the town. Whilst this is already embedded within the More Social, Affordable, Good Quality Homes

"Supports the climate goals"

strategic priority, respondents took the time to draw attention again to its importance. Housing related suggestions from respondents included making the Council's housing stock energy

efficient, building social housing first, building more bungalows for the elderly and reducing leaseholder service fees.

A great amount of focus was given to Regeneration with twenty-seven per cent (27%) praising the ambitious plans and looking forward to them coming to fruition. Respondents also took the opportunity to comment on the need to focus on attracting new businesses, repairing and updating streetlights, and repairing pavements and roads.

"The priorities are sustainable and will promote pride in being a Stevenage resident"

Respondents also emphasised the need for a greater focus on both transport and parking with requests for accessible, such

"Integral to transforming the town"

as proposing that implementing cheaper parking within the town centre would help reduce the number of commuters parking in residential areas. It was also suggested that there needs to be sufficient garages made available within high density residential areas to help alleviate parking issues. Further, some resident felt that not enough focus was given to sustainable transport, such as cycling.

Twelve per cent (12%) of respondents were also keen to repeat their support for the Tackling Climate Change strategic priority, emphasising that climate change needs to be a high priority issue for Stevenage and green belt land, promoting the use of cycle paths and recycling should be key components of this priority.

"Good to see planned infrastructure to cater to a growing town"

Four per cent (4%) of respondents highlighted that they would also like to see greater emphasis given to supporting respondents with aspects such as the cost-of-living crisis, and those with small businesses.

Future Engagement

As part of this consultation, we asked respondents how they would prefer to receive communication on the development and progress of Making Stevenage Even Better and the majority highlighted social media as their preferred method (85%), followed by the Council website (47%), the Community eNewsletter (43%) and community noticeboards (26%). Additional suggestions of Instagram and TikTok to convey messaging, posting leaflets or newsletters through doors, sending email updates, and displaying QR codes in public places such as the library or Community meetings in each area would also help.

Under the UK Data Protection Act 2018, respondents were also asked if they were happy for us to store their details, to which 42 responded yes and 39 of these (93%) provided their email address for further.