

STEVENAGE EVEN BETTER: THE STORY OF REGENERATION

This document provides an overview for Members on the regeneration of Stevenage Town Centre. This looks at the need for change, the projects that have happened, and what is still to come.

Further information on the projects can be found on our website and social media channels:

[Home - Stevenage Even Better : Stevenage Even Better \(stevenage-even-better.com\)](https://www.stevenage-even-better.com)

Instagram: @stevenagebetter

Twitter: @StevenageBetter

Regeneration: the need for change

Town centres across the country are changing, and Stevenage is no exception. Although exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, before this hit the council realised that there was a need to evolve the town centre, creating a 21st Century New Town. Our strategy is based on creating a thriving town centre comprising a mix of retail, leisure activities and town centre living.

Traditional retail is in decline, largely driven by a shift towards online shopping and people not using the physical retail available to them. Across the country, town centres and high streets have visibly changed as large retailers such as Debenhams closed their stores. There is a need to attract visitors in different ways, so we can support existing businesses and attract new occupiers. Today's consumers are looking for more food, drink and leisure experiences in addition to retail.

Our programme is based on research such as The Grimsey Review which calls for town centres to evolve with more focus on health, culture, housing, leisure, and residential, whilst retaining some shops. The review recommends less reliance on cars and introducing more green spaces in town. We are ensuring there are accessible services, creating spaces for culture and community interaction, with places to relax and unwind. We have already introduced improved transport facilities and modern new spaces for businesses and will further increase these alongside introducing new homes available for everyone.

Stevenage is the UK's first New Town, a pioneer of its time and a utopia for people leaving London after the Second World War. Yet it is not without its challenges, including ageing buildings in a distinctive post-war style, a fragmented town centre bounded by major roads, and surface level car parking. We are working hard to address these challenges whilst recognising the heritage of the town and the importance of staying true to the town's motto: *The heart of a town lies in its people.*

Partnership working sits at the heart of the programme. Transformation of the town is being delivered alongside a number of partners from both the public and private sector, including The Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership, Hertfordshire County Council, Reef Group and funder UBS, and Guinness Partnership. The council works hard on these relationships to deliver the best in both buildings and opportunities for our communities, who remain central to everything that we do. We know that the programme is divisive, and through an outreach and engagement programme, endeavour to take our residents on a journey with us as we create a place that continues to be exceptional to live, work and play.

Funding the programme

In March 2021, Stevenage was awarded £37.5m from national government's Towns Fund following the submission of the Stevenage Town Investment Plan, created in collaboration with the Stevenage Development Board. The second highest award in the country, this funding is being used for nine projects across the town, some of which have been delivered and others which are at their early stages.

The Stevenage Development Board is chaired by businessperson Adrian Hawkins OBE, the Independent Chair. The Board brings together voluntary key stakeholders from public sector organisations, private businesses, not-for-profit organisations and Heritage organisations, to ensure a diverse range of views are represented. The Board has been working in collaboration on a Town Investment Plan with a clear vision, strategy and delivery proposals, that supports local residents and businesses and has extended its vision to a Gunnels Wood Road improvement scheme and the vital Station Gateway project.

In totality, Stevenage has secured circa £70m of public funding through partnership working and our strong, engaging need for change. We have successfully leveraged this to secure over £600m of private sector investment, a figure that continues to climb with recent planning determinations such as the expansion of the GSK site. We have received support from the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership through local Growth Deal funding secured for Stevenage regeneration, alongside OPE funding for other projects.

What has happened: the story so far

Over the past years, there has been visible change in the town centre. The below provides an overview of projects that have been delivered to date.

1. Market Place

In 2018 public realm improvements to Market Place were completed, installing new play areas for children of all ages, inviting street furniture and vibrant greenery to a previously tired street, improving accessibility, and boosting footfall.

This has transformed the area into a well-used play area with all units now occupied.



Image: Market Place

2. Queensway North

Stevenage Borough Council, mixed-use developer Reef Group and Aviva Investors worked together to deliver a £50m upgrade to the Queensway North. The former site of Marks & Spencer and the adjoining buildings have been redeveloped to introduce new retail, residential and commercial facilities including a 24-hour gym and office space along with 110 new homes and flexible working facilities.

Like our other schemes, Queensway North is based on 'mixed-use' principles and is designed to increase the number of people living and working in Stevenage Town Centre, thereby adding to the demand for services and businesses based here. A number of new commercial tenants have already invested in the premises including PureGym.



Images: improvements to Queensway North

3. Town Square and North Block

In 2021 Stevenage Town Square one of the town's most iconic and well-known areas received a major upgrade. Working with developer Mace and lead contractor, Ashe, new granite paving, bespoke, retro lighting, new drainage facilities, seating and more were installed. The area provides a vibrant and ambient area for people to sit and enjoy.

The development of the adjacent North Block has provided new retail, commercial and flexible office and events space. The heritage building frontages have been based upon Stevenage's initial architectural heritage. As well as celebrating the visual heritage, this space has provided a rare example of modernising post World War 2 architecture in a sustainable way.

One of the largest tenants is Co-Space. Opened in August 2021, the space is the first of its kind in Stevenage offering flexible workspace, 24/7 access and two roof terrace areas, all created by award winning interior designers. The partnership working between the council and the occupier has received acclaim, winning the Innovation Award 2023 at the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Constructing Excellence Awards, and shortlisted as a finalist at the 2023 APSE Awards in the category of best Best Public / Private Partnership Working Initiative.

The Town Square is a site for listed artworks, and in 2022 three brass plaques were installed in the paving recognising the town's heritage by commemorating this artwork.



Image: North Block and the interior of Co-Space

4. Event Island Stevenage

Located adjacent to the Town Square on the site of the old bus station, Event Island Stevenage is a community space that offers a multi-purpose and informal play area with a variety of activities for informal play, featuring 11 new trees and planting. Our vision was to deliver a temporary space to generate activity for local communities to use and enjoy, a place to dwell and contribute positively to urban life. It was designed to play a key role in activating the vacant station site and adjacent retail frontages, enhancing the pedestrian movements across the space, attracting footfall and encouraging spend to support local businesses.

A number of exciting, inclusive and informative events have already taken place on Event Island since it launched in October 2022. These include Childrens Playday, Halloween activities, International Day, Cycle Hire event, Older Peoples event (Stevenage Older People's Network) and the extremely well attended Christmas lights 2023 switch on and Barrio Fiesta. A programme of future events is already lined up ready for next year.

The space will remain in situ before becoming the Garden Square as part of the SGI masterplan.



Images: people enjoying Event Island Stevenage

5. Bus Interchange

The award-winning Bus Interchange opened in June 2022 and provides a greatly improved modern facility for current and future bus users.

Facilities provided in the new Bus Interchange include:

- Covered heated /climate-controlled waiting area with seating;
- A shop and café;
- Toilets including accessible disabled facilities;
- CCTV;
- Live passenger information boards, including live train times;
- New Coach Stop.

The Interchange utilises sustainable drainage which funnels rainwater into the ground, allowing bus users to enjoy new green landscaped areas, planted trees and wildflower meadow areas to increase local biodiversity.

The Bus Interchange forms part of a sustainable travel hub for the town, improving the towns travel and connectivity links with the Railway Station, the Railway North new multi-storey car park and the town centre, aided by the addition of a surface level pedestrian crossing over Lytton Way.



Images: The Stevenage Bus Interchange

6. Railway North multi-storey car park

Construction on this facility – one of the projects funded through the Towns Fund and Local Growth funding - began in May 2022 and the car park opened a year later in May 2023. The car park enhances the user experience and avoids columns to aid driving throughout the floors.

The new facility includes:

- Secure cycle storage facility for 80 cycles, run by bespoke operator Spokesafe;
- 622 spaces, almost double the capacity of the former level surface car park;
- 30 blue badge spaces split across different levels;
- 30 EV Charging points with the capacity to increase charging facilities significantly as demand increases;
- Solar panels to increase sustainability and help with charging bays.

The external metal facades incorporate images highlighting the achievements of Stevenage in the fields of science and technology and celebrating our communities.

The car park is the first in Hertfordshire to receive the Park Mark Plus award, (demonstrating the highest quality of today's modern car parks in services, operations, design and build), and was jointly awarded 'Best Car Park in a Town or City' at this year's British parking Awards.



Images: Railway North car park. Credit to Chris Winter Photography and Huber

7. Underpass Murals

In August 2023 three new pieces of artwork on the walls of the underpass located by Stevenage FC and Wickes at the Broadhall Way roundabout were unveiled.

The artworks on the walls of the underpass are themed to represent the town's achievements in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), the town's green spaces and active travel routes, and our much loved Stevenage Football Club (Stevenage F.C). The three designs reflect the areas to and from the underpasses.

Designed to encourage active travel and utilise the 45km of cycle way that Stevenage offers, there are plans for more of this urban artwork throughout the town. Unveiled artworks have received a great reception, fostering a sense of community spirit and encouraging pride in everything the town offers.

The project has been funded by the Stevenage Development Board through the Towns Fund. Part of the funding is allocated to improving cycling and pedestrian connectivity, and artworks to the underpasses and cycleways throughout the town are a key part of this, creating some stunning visuals in areas close to key parts of Stevenage. Stevenage Borough Council and Hertfordshire County Council (as Highways Authority) have worked in partnership to improve the underpasses, creating a colourful, welcoming pathway to key areas within the town.



Images: STEM and Stevenage FC themed murals

8. Autolus Therapeutics HQ (Former Marshgate car park)

The new £65m biopharmaceutical manufacturing European Headquarters for Autolus Therapeutics within the Town Centre is now operational. Construction work commenced November 2022 and the development from Reef and UBS Asset Management joint venture was delivered at rapid speed, along with construction partner Merit Health.

The site has brought new jobs to the town as well as increasing footfall and adding to the town centre economy. The associated new public realm works and some re-provision of some public parking is nearing its final stage of completion.

Stevenage is world-renowned for its Life Sciences industry, but the introduction of this cutting edge sector to a town centre environment is a fairly new one. Through partnership working, schemes are able to be delivered quickly, which was particularly critical for a scheme such as Autolus that delivers life-extending cancer treatments. This is the key reason that Stevenage was chosen for these new headquarters for Autolus over Maryland USA, due to access to skills and a proactive and driven local authority who were able to manage the planning process at speed.

The scheme was highlighted in The Harrington Review of Foreign Direct Investment, with a focus on delivering inward investment through a proactive planning approach in Stevenage and providing growth for the local area, the local cluster, and the national Life Sciences Strategy.

The paper can be viewed: [231123_Harrington-Review-Report-FINAL-2_HH_Global_.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#).



Image: The new Autolus building

9. Stevenage Innovation and Technology Centre (SITEC)

In March this year Phase 1 of SITEC was officially opened at the North Hertfordshire College Stevenage campus. SITEC is a new venture created in partnership with the College, Stevenage Borough Council, and Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (Hertfordshire LEP). It aims to make the most of Stevenage's position in the Golden Triangle of Research and Development between Oxford, Cambridge, and London, providing a space for local people to the skills and knowledge needed for success in the many STEM businesses in the area.



Image: SITEC

What is happening: Projects on the ground and in development

There are a number of projects that are either delivering on the ground or have been publicly spoken about whilst remaining in their early stages of development. These are outlined below.

1. The Guinness Partnership (former Matalan site)

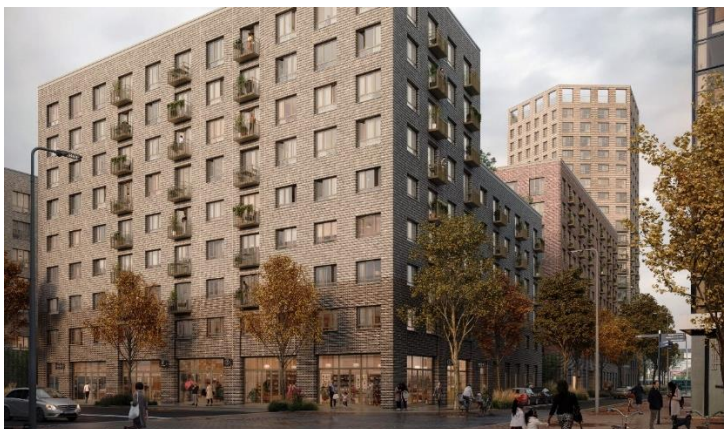
Construction is underway on the former Matalan site. The Guinness Partnership is delivering 526 one and two-bedroomed apartments along with 779 sq m of flexible commercial space at street level which aims to create active street frontages.

Lovell Partnerships, appointed by The Guinness Partnership, began work earlier this year on the first phase of the scheme. This is delivering 143 new homes which will all be affordable and provide a valuable source of low-cost homes located in the heart of Stevenage. This is expected to be completed in early 2025, with further phases set to follow this.

The council will get nomination rights from our housing list for all units.

Although not a council scheme, officers have worked closely with the housing provider to ensure that great quality, affordable housing is provided in the heart of the town.

Further information on The Guinness Partnership can be found on their website: [The Guinness Partnership](#).



Images: work underway on site, and an artist's impression of the development

2. New Sports & Leisure Centre

The proposed new Sports & Leisure Centre for Stevenage will consolidate the sports and swimming facilities currently provided at Stevenage Arts & Leisure Centre and Stevenage Swimming Centre, bringing them together under one roof.

They will be re-provided in a new state of the art building with a wide range of innovative and exciting services and activities, promoting healthy living and wellbeing for residents.

It is proposed that the facility will encompass swimming, studios and gym space with flexible sports and leisure facilities, with early ideas including the inclusion of a café with access from the Town Centre Gardens.

The design of the new Sports & Leisure Centre is in its very early stages and the council is working with the local community on a facility that will provide something for everyone. This co-production commenced in November when the council asked residents, businesses and visitors to complete a short survey to help us understand what is important to them.



Image: an artist's impression of the new centre

3. SG1 (Mace)

SG1 is a partnership between Stevenage Borough Council and Mace to deliver new investment into the heart of Stevenage Town Centre. SG1 forms a large part of the transformation of the town and will deliver new homes, commercial activity and public spaces for all to enjoy.

The masterplan area runs north to south from Swingate House, down Danestrete, and includes land along Southgate and between Southgate and Six Hills Way. The scheme will deliver new residential-led mixed-use development, new homes for sale and rent, ground floor retail and commercial space, alongside new public open space including Garden Square, currently home to Event Island Stevenage, and a Public Services Hub.

SG1 will directly create 579 construction jobs, 121 non-construction jobs and £38.6 million in new consumer spending power per annum from new residents.

Enabling works have been taking place over the past two years on the site of the former Swingate House, including its demolition and associated power supply works. The council is working with Mace to start work on the first phase of the masterplan at Swingate, with work expected to start on 261 homes early this year.

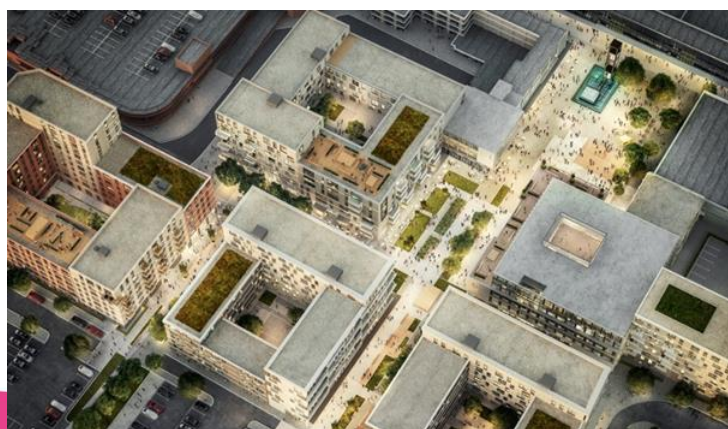


Image: artist's impression of SG1

4. Public Services Hub

The proposed new hub offers a one-stop location for public services, overlooking a new Garden Square in the heart of town and is currently in the early stages of design.

The shared public services hub is in line with government policy and is looking to include the museum, library, health, voluntary, council and charity services all under one roof, to improve the user-experience for residents accessing services and providing further sites for developing homes in the future.

It is likely that the new building will house Stevenage Museum. Currently located in the undercroft of St George and St Andrew, Stevenage Museum is a key feature of Stevenage town centre. Showcasing the history of the town, along with a programme of events for all the family, the museum is a much-loved community space that celebrates the arts, culture and history of the UK's first New Town. It deserves to be celebrated and expanded so that the rich history of the town can continue to be told.

Earlier this year, we asked the community to share their views on what they would expect from a relocated museum. Almost 300 people responded. The community would like to see the museum relocated to a more central location with different opening hours, and improved facilities including a café and better toilet facilities, including accessible toilets. This important feedback will be considered as design works on the facility progress.

A reimagined Museum for Stevenage STEVENAGE MUSEUM

We asked for your views on a reimagined museum for Stevenage. Here is a snapshot of what you told us you would like to see in a new space. STEVENAGE BETTER a place for everyone

- Lighter and brighter
- A café
- Better toilet facilities, including accessible toilets
- In a central location
- More temporary exhibitions
- Different opening hours
- New activities you would like to see
 - Family friendly
 - Educational, such as object handling
 - Interactive and virtual experiences

Images: an early sketch image of the Public Services Hub, and museum survey results

5. Cycling & Pedestrian connectivity (inc. Arts and Heritage Trail)

Stevenage has a unique cycling and pedestrian infrastructure and this project provides an opportunity to improve key parts of to support sustainable active travel options and create a more welcoming user experience for residents and visitors who use the network and improve connectivity to key facilities in the town centre. Stevenage has a rich history of arts and culture, and we have some unique artworks which are much loved throughout the borough. The creation of an Arts & Heritage Trail will allow these to be further celebrated and enjoyed for generations to come.

Work within this area also looks at identifying public realm improvements on key routes in and around the town centre.



Image: artworks around the town

The growth of Life Sciences

Stevenage is world renowned for its Life Sciences industry. It is home to Europe's largest cluster of Cell and Gene Therapy companies, the CGT Catapult, GSK, Bioscience Catalyst and an ecosystem of global Life Science, Aerospace & Technology companies.

Reef Group and funder UBS are bringing forward much of the new development focused on this industry. Below is an outline of their key schemes, which follow on from the completion of the Autolus HQ building earlier this year.

Further information can be found: [Spotlight on Stevenage — Forge_Kn | Stevenage | Oxford | Cambridge | London \(forgekn.io\)](#).

1. The Assembly (Phase 2)

Phase 1 of The Assembly was completed earlier this year with the opening of the Autolus HQ building, on the site of the former Marshgate car park. Phase 2 encompasses the site currently home to The Forum. Spanning 450,000 sqft, four new laboratory buildings have been designed to provide cutting-edge GMP advanced manufacturing capabilities. These purpose-built lab facilities will also include a collaboration and skills building, providing an environment that fosters

innovation, collaboration and skill development for the life sciences industry. A multi-storey car park will be provided to replace the existing surface level parking.

The development bolsters the ongoing revitalisation of Stevenage town centre, with restaurant, retail and collaboration spaces at the ground floor level fronting onto a new public square. The introduction of commercial life science space will support existing and future business in the town, bringing footfall and expenditure through the addition of an estimated 1,850 high-value jobs.



Image: Artist's impression of The Assembly, Phase 2. Credit: Reef Group

2. Elevate Quarter

A resolution to grant planning permission has been secured for an additional 1.6 million sq ft of Research & Development (R&D) and Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP) facilities at the GSK campus.

The new and expanded campus will provide a world-class landscaped setting with a range of amenities and facilities.

Health, well-being and inclusivity are at the heart of our design philosophy, alongside our efforts to minimise the impact we have on the planet.

Elevate Quarter will combine work alongside exercise and socialising with amenity provisions including cafes, bars, a nursery and e-bikes all within a close proximity to the town centre.



Image: Credit Reef Group

Unlocking opportunities for local communities

There are a number of benefits to this transformation programme, including stimulating the local economy with increased footfall, providing upgraded facilities to local communities, and evolving the town so that it continues to be an exceptional place to live, work and play.

A core part of this transformation programme is centred on opening up opportunities for local people and providing skills training. We work closely with our development partners to provide opportunities for people to gain the skills and qualifications needed to be successful in obtaining jobs and careers in construction and STEM industries, such as through the provision of SITEC.

We are driving private sector investment and ensuring that our town has the space to support small business development, skills and jobs, including the opportunity for our residents to gain experience in the construction industry. Stevenage Works, a job and training hub managed by Stevenage Borough Council and comprising of a vast range of partners, is well established. The organisation raises awareness of the local jobs available in local businesses for local people, and provides a free recruitment service, provision of training courses and apprenticeships to local people and residents of all ages and experience levels.

We encourage all partners to place local employment and skills training as a key element throughout their project lifecycles, not only opening up construction jobs and apprenticeships, but training people to learn new skills.

Reef Group have produced a series of videos speaking to local people about how they have acquired jobs within the Life Sciences sector: [Spotlight on Stevenage — Forge_Kn | Stevenage | Oxford | Cambridge | London \(forgekn.io\)](#).

The Hertfordshire Opportunities Portal details how local people can access information about Life Science careers: [Life Sciences | Sectors in Hertfordshire | HOP \(hopinto.co.uk\)](#).

As part of the council's programme of community outreach, we engage with local schools and speak to the next future generation about the jobs open to them. This includes working with our partners to deliver site tours to inspire young children.
