

Stevenage Borough Council's Annual Report (2023-2024)





Welcome to

STEVENAGE

The heart of a town lies in its people

Message from Richard Henry, Stevenage Borough Council



Welcome to our 2023/24 Annual Report and my second as Leader of the Council. I am proud to share that over the past year we have achieved so much and that our ongoing efforts continue to make our

award-winning town a great place to live, work and visit.

As in previous years, the impact of the cost-of-living crisis continues to affect our daily lives. Through close working with our partner organisations, we have been able to provide help and advice during these difficult times. I am proud that we have been able to help over 20 organisations to provide food and energy poverty support to residents across the town. This includes establishing 15 Warm Spaces across Stevenage in the winter and partnering with our voluntary and charitable communities to provide food and clothing to those most vulnerable.

Alongside this work, we have continued to deliver on the priorities that we know are

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important to you. We have progressed our plans to regenerate the town by opening the new railway station car park. We have begun work on the residential, retail and community facilities at the Oval following an extensive period of consultation with residents. We have continued to invest in our young people’s futures through the launch of the Youth Skills Summit in partnership with Mission 44 and North Herts College.

Our commitment to working with residents is central to our approach to shaping services. Your views were a key consideration when in February 2024 Full Council unanimously approved the council’s new Corporate Plan – Making Stevenage Even Better (2024-2027). The plan sets out the council’s direction of travel for the next three years. It is informed by what matters to you and from responses we obtained we have been able to provide a clear framework by which existing partnership commitments and programmes can be reflected.

As a council we are keen to engage with our residents and through our Cooperative Neighbourhood programme activities, we have been able to get your views on a number of different policy and project areas, this includes: our approach to social housing allocation; what tenants want from the repairs service; where the Museum should be relocated and what facilities residents would like to see in the new sport and leisure hub. I want to thank all residents who took part, your input is vital and I look forward to seeing the outcomes of these projects in the coming years.

Throughout this report, you will see just a few of the council’s highlights and successes from the past year, as well as a look to what our future priorities are. I hope you enjoy reading this year’s Annual Report and look forward to seeing the council have another productive and fulfilling year in 2024/25.

Message from Matt Partridge – Chief Executive, Stevenage Borough Council



Over the past year, our ambitious Future Town Future Council programme has continued to deliver across a range of areas from progressing the regeneration of the town and embedding our unique Cooperative

Neighbourhood approach through to working in partnership to make Stevenage a safe and thriving place in which to live and work. As highlighted by our Leader Cllr Richard Henry, we will make further strides over the next three years having signed off the new Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan (2024-27).

As we begin on our new journey for 2024/25, it is helpful to look back and see what we have

achieved. As a council we have made significant progress towards tackling climate change against the activities set out in our Climate Change Strategy. This includes the installation of solar panels on the rooftops of our seven refuse collection lorries; continuing to invest in the maintenance of our buildings, for example, our programme to decarbonise council homes and launching our Climate Change Community Fund to enable and encourage resident-led climate action projects. Our determination to progress delivery against our climate change commitments is as strong today as it was when the strategy was signed off in 2019.

I am very proud of what my colleagues do on behalf of those we serve, and this report highlights just some of their many successes. Please take some time to read through what we have been doing to improve the town and the council along with what we have planned for 2024/25.



Future Town Future Council Achievements

Our 'Future Town Future Council' Corporate Plan set out the council's vision for revitalising both the town and council for the 21st century. Our key aims and objectives were laid out across five programmes of work:

- **Transforming our Town**
- **Cooperative Neighbourhoods**
- **More Social and Affordable Homes**
- **Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving town**
- **Making Your Money Count**

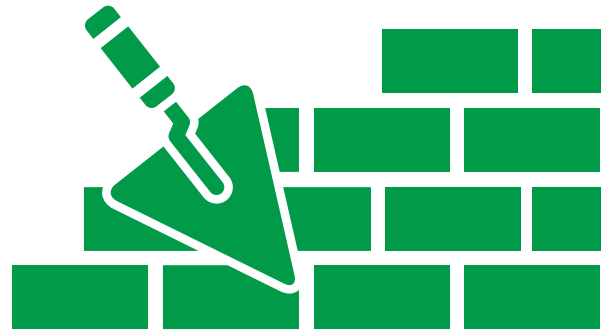


The following pages set out what we have achieved in each programme.



Transforming Our Town

Our town is evolving and becoming Even Better, with the introduction of new transport facilities, spaces for leisure activities, new workspace, homes and arts and culture. By providing new spaces for our communities and improving the vibrancy of the town centre, we are supporting our businesses and transforming our town into a place which has something for everyone. We are on a mission to create a vibrant town centre where people want to live, work and play.



This year we have:

- Made improvements to the cycle network with artwork installed in underpasses near the football ground. They 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





- Opened the Railway North multi-storey car park in May 2023 after a year of construction. Boasting 622 spaces, 30 blue badge spaces, 30 EV Charging points powered by solar panels, and a secure cycle storage facility for 80 cycles, it is a state-of-the-art car park. It is also the first in Hertfordshire to receive the Park Mark Plus award and was jointly awarded 'Best Car Park in a Town or City' at this year's British Parking Awards



- Appointed Morgan Sindall to help deliver an all new £45m Stevenage Sports and Leisure Hub that will become a flexible state-of-the-art facility with swimming, studios, gym space and flexible sports facilities in one central location

- Won the Innovation Award 2023 at the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire Constructing Excellence Awards for our Co-Space partnership that offers flexible workspaces, 24/7 access and two roof terrace areas in the town centre



Transforming Our Town continued...



- Completed phase one of construction on the Guinness Partnership, located on the former Matalan site. It will host 526 one and two-bedroomed apartments; 143 of which will be affordable housing, and 779 sqm of flexible commercial space
- Continued enabling works on the site of the former Swingate House, including its demolition and associated power supply works. The scheme will see 261 high quality new homes constructed. Progressing the broader SG1 scheme will in time directly create 579 construction jobs, 121 non-construction jobs and £38.6 million in new consumer spending power per annum from new residents
- Gained resident feedback from nearly 300 people on their expectations for a new relocated museum in order to inform design discussions. Feedback included a desire for a more central location with adjusted opening hours, and improved facilities including a café and accessible toilet facilities
- Supported growth in the life sciences industry, including the new £65 million European Headquarters for Autolus Therapeutics, and a new life sciences development at the Forum that is anticipated to generate economic growth of £98 million and 1,850 jobs once fully let.

More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes



Since 2014, the council has provided 495 new affordable homes and remains on track to achieve its ambition of building 517 affordable homes by 2025. In fact we are likely to exceed this target.

This year to help reach this goal, we have:

- Delivered 191 new homes, including the completion of phase one of Kenilworth Close that boosts 7 new retail units as part of the wider neighbourhood regeneration, and the Helston House development in Symonds Green



- Began construction on a further 160 homes, including the supported accommodation scheme at Dunn Close, a new Independent Living Scheme at Brent Court Garages and an affordable general needs scheme on Burwell Road



More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes continued...

- Submitted planning applications for a further 400 new homes including proposals for a neighbourhood regeneration at the Oval
- Secured £10.6m in additional grant funding from Homes England to support construction of the 96 unit scheme at Brent Court
- Reinvested more money into affordable and social homes, with preparations and work progressing on Burwell Road, the Oval, Brent Court and Ellis Avenue sites
- Let 353 council owned properties and made 59 housing association nominations
- Received 2102 online applications to join our housing register, and 455 paper applications from independent living customers and applicants within temporary accommodation. At the end of the 2023/24 financial year, the council had a total of 4809 applications on the housing register
- Purchased a further 12 properties from the open market for social housing via the Local Authority Housing Fund
- Supported 13 prison leavers, with Government funding, into private rented tenancies to help rebuild their lives and aid efforts to prevent them from returning to prison
- 94% of council homes met the national minimum Decent Homes standard as an outcome of the council's improvement programme, including the prioritisation of boiler works where a replacement is required
- Completed 19,780 repair jobs across our properties, with 88% of emergency repairs and 92% of non-emergencies completed within specified timescales
- Surveyed 1731 properties to help inform and update our stock data, with a focus on properties that were previously un-surveyed or surveyed a long time ago
- Carried out major refurbishment works on 376 Flat Blocks to help reduce the UPVC replacements going to landfill and extend the life of each component



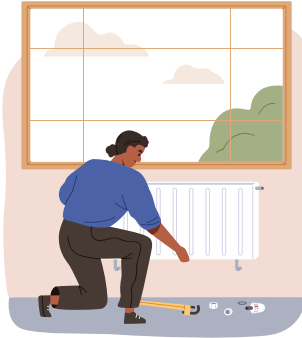
● Installed the following across our properties:

1 Rewire

265 Boiler Replacements

86 Heating systems

4 Window Replacements



55 Bathrooms

7 WC's



8 Door Replacements



27 Overhauled Doors



41 Kitchens installed

28 Loft Insulation

33 Overhaul Windows

Five Star Quality Programme **HOUSING DEVELOPMENT**

- 1 Sustainable development
- 2 Genuinely affordable rents
- 3 Tenure blind design
- 4 Makes best use of land
- 5 Community led consultation

- Carried out fencing works on 303 properties since 2023
- Responded to an average of 94.11% of major planning applications within 13 weeks; 98.52% of minor applications within 8 weeks; and 96.33% of other applications within 8 weeks
- At the heart of each development is the Five Star quality approach, which is helping to define the quality of our wider housing programme including sustainable accommodation for genuinely affordable rents

Cooperative Neighbourhoods



The Cooperative Neighbourhoods programme was launched in late summer 2020 to ensure residents were at the heart of decision-making. Our neighbourhood-based teams work co-operatively with residents, ward members and local businesses to shape the services in their area. Through this work we seek to make services more responsive to the strengths, needs and aspirations of communities and localities.

This year we have:

- Hosted the inaugural Youth Skills Summit at Airbus Defence and Space where local students and organisations came together to discuss transforming education, career opportunities and the importance of diversity in STEM. Sir Lewis Hamilton and his charity, Mission 44, were also in attendance to support the launch of the Pioneering Young STEM Futures Programme which aims to increase access to STEM careers for young people in the area



- Officially opened Phase 1 of Stevenage Innovation and Technology Centre at the North Hertfordshire College. This is a new venture created with the College and the Hertfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership. 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.

- Obtained over 6,200 sign ups to our digital newsletters, which provide regular updates on what is going on in the local area
- Launched the next round of engagement following on from the 22/23 resident survey to gain valuable insight from our communities.
- Awarded £60,000 through our local community budgets and supported over 50 organisations to help improve their neighbourhoods
- Continued to work with local residents and organisations to provide support and services that matter to them through our community development team.



- Replaced 50 street name signs in the Longmeadow ward that had become worn over time to improve the look of the area



- Installed noticeboards in Baron Court and Symonds Green Neighbourhood Centre to increase community awareness and information sharing



- Hosted a number of successful community centre events including a Summer Fun Day by the Bedwell Community Social Group that showcased a wonderful display of the ward's history



- Installed a total of 25 defibrillators across town to help to save lives in the local community through Councillors' Local Community Budgets
- Invested £99,000 of the £275,000 funding acquired by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to support our communities, businesses, people and skills through activities such as:

- Cleansing of 18 neighbourhood centres as part of our cleansing blitz
- Undertaking graffiti cleansing and commencing work on our street art project
- Implementing a single-crew team to take a proactive approach to removing large scale graffiti and tagging across the town
- Enhancing the following 5 neighbourhood centres through carrying out significant repairs to the structure/fabric of buildings and outdoor infrastructure such as shop frontage, roofing, windows, canopies, pathways and paving; as well as the addition of assets like planters, benches, railing, fencing:
 - Popple Way Shops (Almond Hill)
 - Bedwell Shops (Bedwell)
 - Marymead Shops (Roebuck)
 - The Hyde (Shephall)
 - Oaks Cross (Longmeadow)

Cooperative Neighbourhoods continued...

- Maintaining primary walking routes to and from neighbourhood centres across the town as part of a deep cleansing initiative
- Encouraging greater diversity in our town's organisations, for example Co-operatives, Community Interest Companies and Social Enterprises



- Introduced an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan that ensures we continue to champion the rights of individuals across 15 actions within 6 core objectives that embody the council's objectives
- Supported the establishment of a Stevenage Equalities Commission Legacy Group to continue to help the council and our partners in addressing the inequalities ethnically diverse communities face in Stevenage. £30,000 of external funding was secured by the Commission to help deliver their Legacy Group Action Plan



Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town



We aim to improve the quality of life for Stevenage residents and enhance the experience of visitors. We achieve this through our approach to tackling climate change, our focus on community safety, and our vision for culture and leisure alongside our plans for a healthier Stevenage. Close partnership working has enabled us to keep our residents safe, whilst ensuring that we remain a dynamic town that for residents and visitors alike.

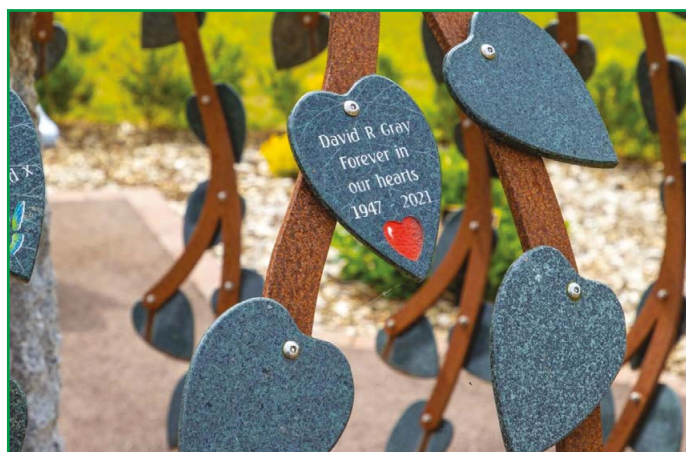
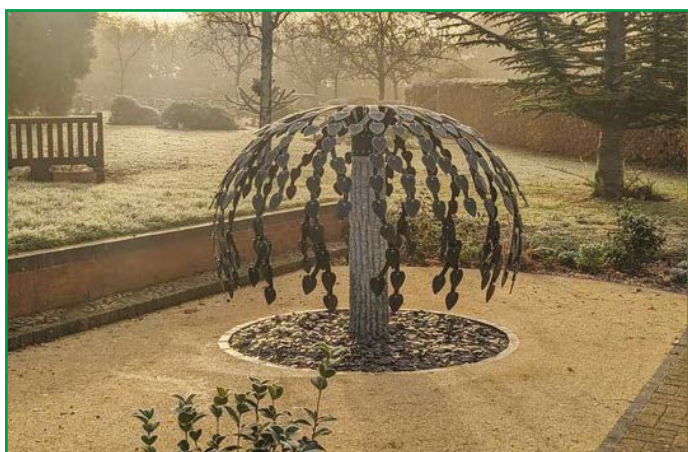
Climate Change

This year we have:

- Set up and launched our online Stevenage Climate Action Plan tracker where residents can explore our 8 strategic climate change themes and the circa 50 different climate actions which are being delivered
- Launched our Climate Change Community Fund that makes £7,500 available per ward, per year for residents-led projects. These projects have supported our climate action by avoiding waste, improving air quality, soil health and biodiversity, producing local food, creating habitats for wildlife, offering natural shade, and saving water and energy
- Worked with Wenta to deliver our affordable net zero emissions service for small businesses and funded 100 local businesses to help them reduce their carbon footprints
- Developed and implemented a sustainable business programme with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, to connect local buyers and suppliers through Meet the Buyer events and intensive workshop days
- Retained 3 Green Flag awards for:
 - Fairlands Valley Park
 - Town Centre Gardens
 - Weston Road Cemetery



Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town - Climate Change continued...



- Installed a sustainable memorial Mulberry Tree at Weston Road Cemetery that includes 16 branches which can hold 240 heart shaped leaves that can be engraved with loved one's name, year of birth and year of death
- Helped residents claim 4,637 tree saplings as part of the Hertfordshire County Council's "Your Tree Our Future" tree giveaway scheme



- Organised community litter picks with 7 schools as part of the Great British Spring Clean. Over 49 bags of rubbish were collected with the help of 154 children



- Improved our open spaces through our Green Space Volunteers giving over 1,000 hours

- Officially opened Fairlane Wood where we planted 1 hectare of new woodland with the help of the community and local schools on the Southfield of Fairlands Valley Park
- Supported community projects, with the support of local charity Waste Not Want Not and local community budgets, such as:
 - Planted over 120kg of tulip and daffodil bulbs in Spring 2024 across grassed areas in Longmeadow ward, this is





equivalent to the weight of an average panda bear!

- Installing plants, flower beds, wildflowers and planters in Chells Manor Community Centre, Hyde Shops, Silkin Court community garden, and Shephalbury Park
- Maintained and developed Oval Community Garden, ABC Park and Community orchard to provide natural space resource areas that are open for members of the public, schools, clubs and community groups to use

- Had 45 residents accept PV and battery installations under the Solar Together Scheme. Up until April 2024, 22 total solar installations were implemented in Stevenage; with 274 solar panels, 111 kW installed. A total investment of £229,470 (2,067 £/kW installed) was therefore made, achieving 17 tCO2 reduction. Further, 22 installations included batteries, with 158 kWh installed in energy storage across the town
- Promoted the Home Upgrade Grant (HUG2), which aims to provide free energy-efficient home improvements (e.g., insulation/ventilation upgrades, low-carbon heating and hot water, solar PV) to low income and off-gas households, reaching over 400 stakeholders, with over 170 being directly mailed
- Engaged with the community on climate change conversations during events such as Stevenage Day and National Libraries Week
- Trained our council's senior leaders in Carbon Literacy via an APSE (Association for Public Service Excellence) course
- Continued implementing social value as part of our procurement processes and taken part in a regional diagnostic to identify our sustainable procurement priorities.
- Installed InPost parcel lockers across the town, allowing a reduction of last-mile emissions by as much as 75% compared to traditional to-door deliveries
- Undertaken planning and a market interest assessment on a Stevenage Cycle Hire scheme, which included public consultation with businesses, residents, stakeholders and indicative market players, This scheme will be implemented across the town, promoting active travel and reducing transport-related emissions
- Donated 155 bicycles to the Recycle Your Cycle scheme for refurbishment and reuse



Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town - Climate Change continued...

- Installed 4 cycle hangars across town to provide a bike storage alternative for our residents living in flats or small houses with little or no safe storage for their bikes.
- Procured and incorporated the first three electric vans to our fleet
- Incorporated new low emissions requirements to our taxi licensing policy



- Installed solar panels on the rooftops of our 7 refuse collection lorries, saving up to 1,100 litres of diesel per year and lorry, reducing emissions and saving money
- Monitored our electricity consumption across 11 council sites, including Daneshill House and Cavendish Road Depot, through a digital meter explorer

- Installed EV charging infrastructure where each charger serves two vehicles at Bedwell Shops (2 out of 3), the Glebe Shops (2), Oaks Cross Shops (3), The Hyde Shops (3), St Nicholas Pavilion (3), Archer Road Shops (1), and Filey Close Shops (3)
- Implemented energy efficiency measures through our new leisure facility management contract with Everyone Active across the facilities, including LED replacement of lighting, Building Management Systems upgrades, and insulation works
- Improved energy efficiency in 150 homes through the Local Authority Delivery Scheme 1B which aims to raise the energy efficiency of low income and low energy performance homes (those with energy performance certificate ratings of D, E, F or G) – all properties that received works through this scheme have been raised to a rating of C or above
- Upgraded energy efficiency in 209 households under the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1
- Works have also started to improve some flats blocks and houses as part of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2, this aims to improve the energy efficiency of 237 properties and is due to complete in 2025
- Began construction on the Gridserve Stevenage Charging Service Station, which is due for completion by the end of 2024. Once completed, 34 electric vehicles will be able to charge simultaneously
- Installed 6 water butts that each hold up to 200 litres on our garage site on Whitesmead Road to collect water for use on our allotments. This means each water butt can hold the equivalent weight of 4 Giant Pacific Octopuses!



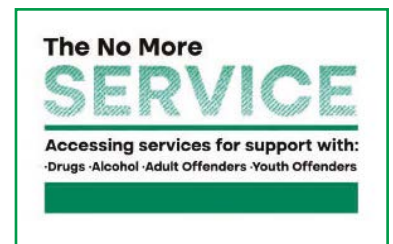
Community Safety

This year we have:

- Provided support to victims of domestic abuse through our Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) programme with regular drop in services, training courses, and research projects with partners that explore the links between deprivation and domestic abuse in specific wards like St Nicholas



- Continued providing complex needs support for individuals to tackle issues that negatively impact their daily life, and actively encouraging young people and their families to look for ways they can get involved with new hobbies through our No More Service. This included:



- Responding to a total of 95 adult cases, 73 of which were new adult referral cases in Stevenage and 22 adult Acceptable Behaviour Agreement cases, signed by high-risk offenders
- Supporting 16 service users with Job Centre Plus to help get them back to work
- Obtaining 2 properties for domestic abuse perpetrators who are completing our Evolve programme. So far, 3 clients have completed the programme and moved onto new accommodation
- Helping facilitate a youth Evolve program that is offered county-wide under the No More Youth Service. A total of 91 new cases were supported across Hertfordshire



- Offered support and advice to any rough sleepers across the town through No More Service and our Rough Sleeper team during their early morning “Op Urban” operations
- Seen a continual decrease in the number of anti-social behaviour cases occurring within Stevenage over the last year due to the strong joint working between the council and partners as part of the SoSafe Partnership, specifically the proactive policing evidenced through initiatives such as ‘Clear, Hold, Build’
- Gained resident insight on crime, anti-social behaviour and safety in communities through our Community Safety Officers alongside partners at street meets and the Big Knock at the Tower blocks

- Successfully bid for Safer Streets funding to support our Clear Hold Build project under the umbrella of Build a Better Bedwell that seeks to tackle drug-associated crime

Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town - Community Safety continued...



- Produced a cuckooing protocol and project, in partnership with Hertfordshire Constabulary, to streamline support to some of our most vulnerable clients

- Introduced a range of new measures to tackle graffiti in Stevenage, working in partnership with Stevenage Police Station and Junction 7 Creatives. This includes regular patrols at known hotspot locations and the installation of mobile CCTV cameras. Junction 7 Creatives will also commission artists to create a series of 'mini murals' on Openreach fibreoptic cabinets around Stevenage to brighten up the town and offer a more positive alternative to tagging



- Allocated £176,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Funding Programme to the completion of the street art project, maintaining the graffiti removal carried out in 23/24, and to begin works of a neighbourhood centre and neighbourhood allocations enhancement programme

Culture, Leisure and a Healthy Stevenage

This year we have:

- Directly delivered or supported 50 events across the town with over 60,000 people attending them, including:
 - Stevenage Fireworks Display
 - St Nicholas Day
 - Armistice Day
 - Remembrance Sunday
 - Pride Awards
 - Halloweentastic
 - Christmas Market
 - Christmas Light Switch On



- Stevenage Day 2023 took place on Sunday 11th June with over 200 stall holders, rides, and caterers celebrating the cultural diversity of Stevenage with our very own World Music Stage featuring music and performances from a wide range of cultures

- Supported the Stevenage Filipino community with hosting their own Barrio Fiesta Event on Event Island that showcased Filipino cuisine and performances. It was supported by the Mayor of Stevenage Cllr Myla Arceno and Ambassador Teodoro L. Locsin, Jr. from the Philippine Embassy



Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town - Culture, Leisure and a Healthy Stevenage continued...



- Relaunched Shephalbury Park Tennis Courts after a £112,000 refurbishment by the UK Government and LTA Tennis Foundation and hosted a successful open day with the Mayor to commemorate this

- Held the Stevenage Walking Festival in May with 351 walkers taking part and 92 families taking part in the family trail

- Offered a range of health and wellbeing services and programmes through the partnership with our new leisure provider Everyone Active and Healthy Stevenage partnership

- Encouraged a total of 77,178 children to use Everyone Active facilities and programmes specifically aimed at under 16's such as:

- Home Education Programme at Stevenage Arts and Leisure Centre.
- Holiday Activities including multisport sessions, junior golf and netball camp.
- After school activities including tennis, dodgeball and table tennis.



- Hosted a launch event for the 'Real People, Real Stories' project in partnership with Stevenage FC, Samaritans and Everyone Active at The Lamex stadium on a matchday in November to highlight available mental health support. 'On Your Side' legacy project will continue to deliver mental health support through MIND

- Supported the Herts Mind Network's Crisis Café to provide provisions for individuals experiencing crisis situations, whilst emphasising the importance of mental health services in the community



- Launched our Young People's Healthy Hub Inclusive Minds project for 12-17 year olds that aims to instigate discussions around social media and its impact on mental health and body image
- Achieved Dementia Friendly Community Status through the hard work of our Leisure and Health team. A dementia friendly café will also be established to provide support and respite for caregivers



- Began renovation work on the gardens at Ingelheim Court to help encourage gardening and in turn improve residents' wellbeing.
- Introduced a new library to Fairlands Sailing Centre after being approached by a local resident who had the idea of a community library where residents are encouraged to donate and swap books
- Invested £1500 in inspiring music curriculum at the Ofsted graded Outstanding Woolenwick Infant and Nursery School through local community budget funding from ward councillors and the youth mayor. The project aims to lay the foundations for a lifelong love of music, drive positive change amongst the pupils, and establish primary music strategy legacy



- Celebrated Covid the Cobra's legacy through community projects such as an underpass mural on Grace Way and the unveiling of several pillars that will preserve the hand-painted stones for years to come. Covid the Cobra was originally created by the Stevenage community during the first lockdown in 2020 and was made up 10,000 stones to form a snake

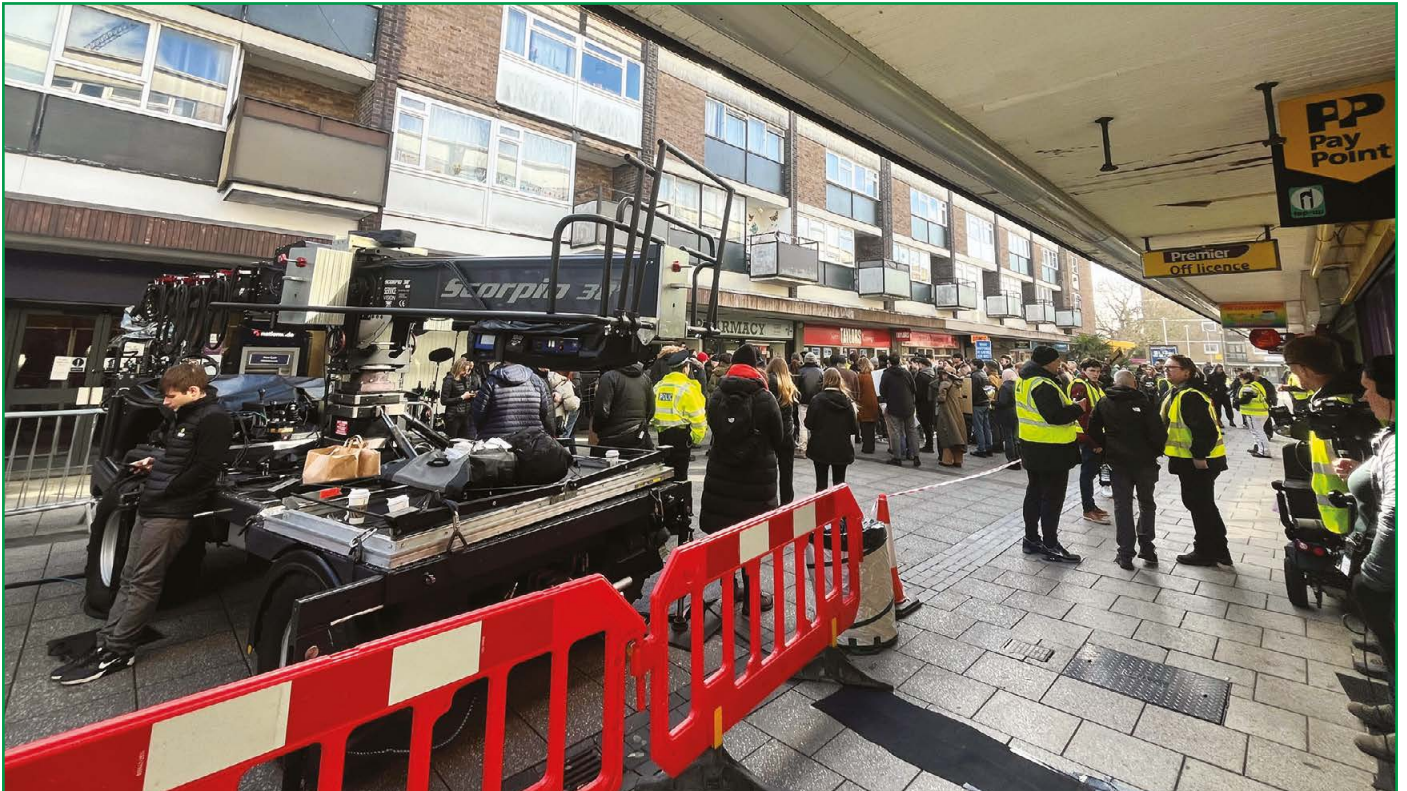
Clean, Green, Safe and Thriving Town - Culture, Leisure and a Healthy Stevenage continued...

- Hosted a range of successful exhibitions through the Stevenage Museum including:
 - 'Talking Shop' which opened in February 2023 until September 2023 and was funded by £10,000 from Historic England's Everyday Histories fund to explore people's memories of the town centre in its heyday (the 1950s to the 1970s). As part of this exhibit, 120 children attended a tote-bag making workshop and Open Artbox led a series of workshops for people living with dementia and their carers inspired by shopping in the town
 - 'Scenes from Contemporary Life: 50 years on' opened in October 2023 until March 2024 and celebrates the recently listed work by Bill Mitchell in the underpass to the Town Centre Gardens, which was installed in 1973. Local students then participated in a week-long clay panel making master class in August and an after-school volunteering programme was held for 16-18 year olds in the autumn term



- Continued to host a range of events at our Event Island including Childrens Playday, Halloween activities, International Day, Cycle Hire event, Stevenage Older People's Network event, Barrio Fiesta and the extremely well attended Christmas lights 2023 switch on. The space will remain in situ before becoming the Garden Square as part of the SG1 masterplan





- Supported 4 large scale filming productions in Stevenage. This most recently included a high octane, special FX scene on Queensway in the Town Centre. Due to the level of knowledge and responsiveness from council staff, the production company stated they had a 'soft spot' in their heart for Stevenage so we hope to welcome more filming to the town again soon!



- Attended the Advent and Christmas reception at The Coptic Orthodox Church Centre, at which King Charles III unveiled a plaque and planted a tree to commemorate his visit

Making Your Money Count

Since 2010 there has been an 49% reduction in Government funding to Councils across England. This has led to significant financial pressures across local government which have been exacerbated by national policy decisions on welfare and social rent, rising inflation, energy and food costs.



When combining both Government funding cuts and unfunded inflation the total reduction in spend per household in Stevenage is equivalent to £325.20 per year. This has resulted in the council needing to find cumulative savings of £14 Million since 2010 to meet the shortfall.

Despite these challenges, the council has remained financially resilient, ensured sufficient resources are available and has continued to work hard to deliver for its residents.

This year we have:

- Successfully awarded Government grant funding of £17million to build new housing and £5million to invest in decarbonisation and help reform our services.
- Administered £23.95 million business grants to Stevenage businesses since March 2022 (18 schemes/4375 businesses)
- Gained £37.5 million in Towns Fund funding to support new leisure centre, museum and cycleways
- Received £15,315 through businesses using Stevenage as a filming location
- Provided £11.7million in business rate relief
- Paid out £20.6million in Housing Benefit
- Paid out over £145,000 in Discretionary Housing Payments to provide financial support to help with rent or housing costs
- Awarded £6.1million as part of our Council Tax Support scheme payments to help people struggling to pay their council tax
- Ensured that the fees and charges for 2023/24 (5-8%) are below the rate of inflation (10.3% in January 2023) so that the burden is not passed onto residents, despite an additional £2million of pressure on council budgets in 2023/24 from inflation rates.
- Received over 237,000 online transactions, including over 24,900 online form submissions.

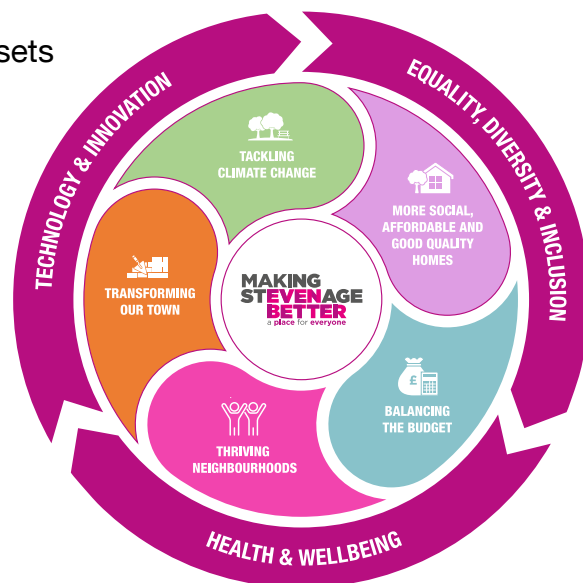


- Introduced a new café at the Stevenage Museum which replaced a hot drinks machine that was costing in excess of £1000 a year to hire. Volunteers now run the café and have introduced a pay it forward scheme to support residents impacted by cost-of-living challenges.
- Invested in transformation initiatives that seek to improve how our services are delivered to customers. This has included:
 - £13,500 investment in equipment and technology to facilitate the relocation of our customer service offer within the council's main offices and co-locating the team with key customer facing services and duty officers.
 - £41,700 investment in technology and process changes to improve ease-of-access to online services for customers. This involved the introduction of a new telephone solution that includes messaging signposting customers, via text message, to the appropriate online service to resolve their query.
 - £215,000 investment in technology and improving cyber security. This involved moving the systems to the cloud to increase resilience and enable better use of technology.
 - Utilised existing technology to create and enhance our online services for Bulky Waste, Trade Waste, Cemeteries, Allotments, and Garages instead of requiring new investment.



Making Stevenage Even Better

The new Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan sets out the council's priorities for the next three years. What matters most to our residents, matter to us. Residents have been at the heart of developing this plan. We have listened to these views, and for the purposes of clarity and to provide a clear framework by which existing partnership commitments and programmes can be reflected, we have categorised the areas that matter to residents most into five strategic priorities and three cross cutting themes that will be delivered across all the strategic priorities within the Corporate Plan:



- **Transforming our Town**
 - Regeneration
 - Enterprise & Skills
- **More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes**
 - Building New & Sustainable Homes
 - Maintaining Good Quality Homes
- **Thriving Neighbourhoods**
 - Clean Neighbourhoods & Green Spaces
 - Community Safety
 - Culture & Leisure
- **Tackling Climate Change**
- **Balancing the Budget**
- **Cross-Cutting Themes**
 - Equality, Diversity & Inclusion
 - Health & Wellbeing
 - Technology & Innovation

**MAKING
STEVENAGE
BETTER**
a place for everyone

We refer to these as cross-cutting themes and each represents the need to raise awareness of important social benefits and the importance we place on effective partnership working and existing commitments to tackle health inequalities, champion equality, encourage inclusivity, embrace diversity and provide innovative solutions for residents. By maintaining focus on these three themes, we can ensure a comprehensive and well-rounded approach to delivering outcomes for the benefit of our community.

This corporate plan provides a framework for our thinking, decision-making and resource allocation. For each of our five strategic priorities and three cross-cutting themes, a set of accompanying outcomes and actions will be published and monitored annually to ensure we are on track to deliver on the outcomes we want to see.

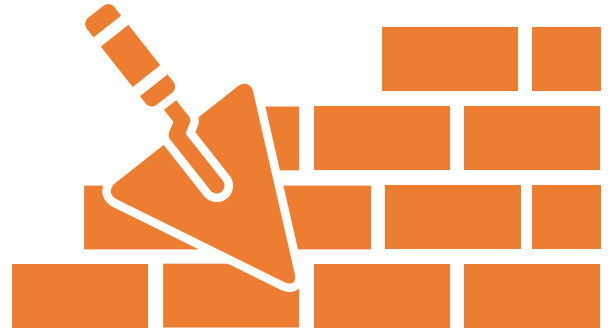
Priorities for 2024/25 are summarised opposite:

Transforming Our Town

Regeneration

In 2024/25, we will:

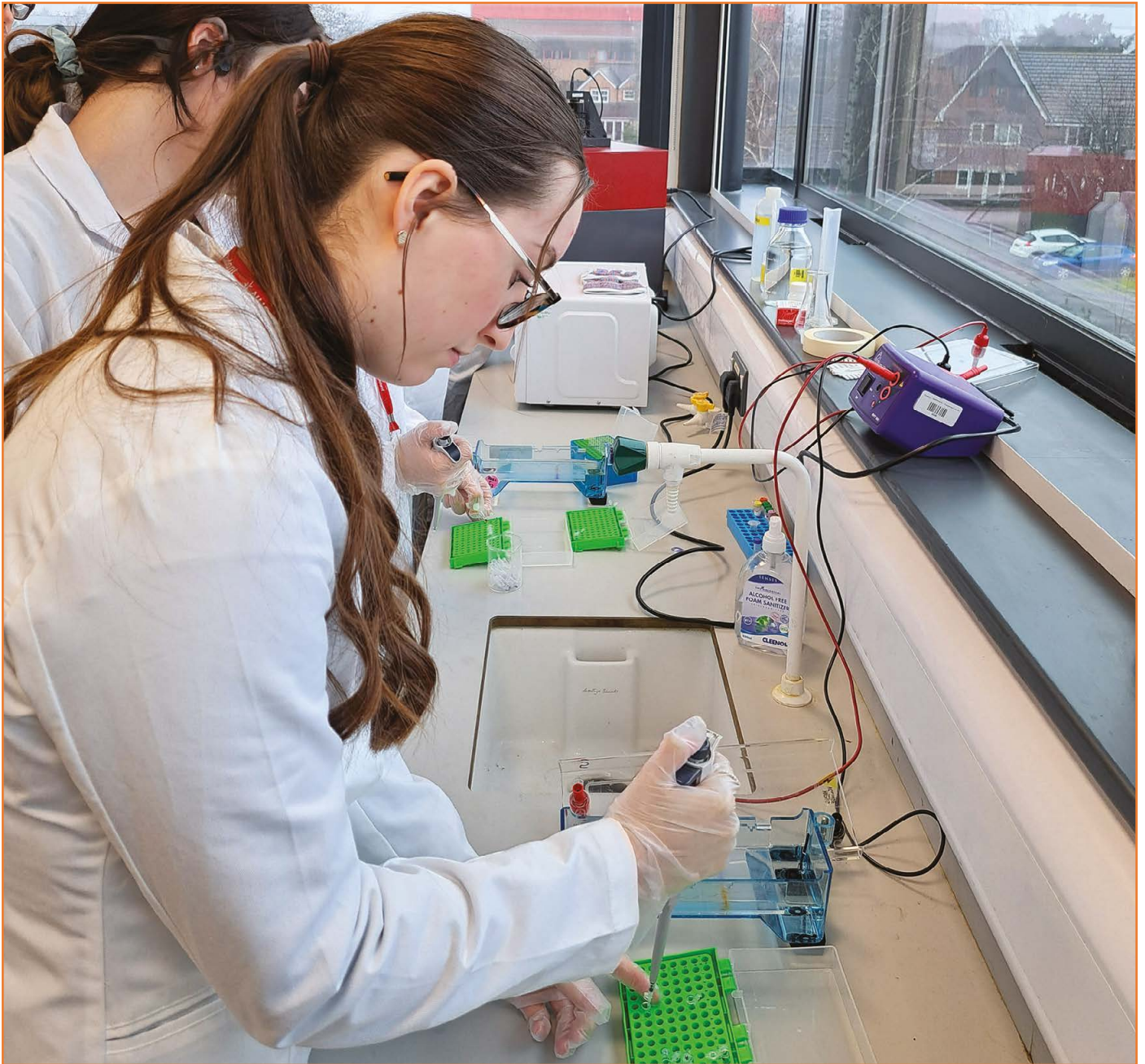
- Begin the delivery of the first phase of SG1 development
- Continue engagement and begin planning for the new SG1 Public Sector Hub that will act as a civic hub offering a one stop location for public services
- Work with developers of the land adjacent to the Glaxo Smith Klein R&S site, as they bring forward delivery of up to 5,000 new jobs and connecting infrastructure
- Develop funding strategy to explore range of bidding opportunities to support the regeneration programme, including bidding for Homes England support



Enterprise & Skills

In 2024/25, we will:

- Implementing the Stevenage Skills Framework with specific focus on providing residents with the tools to make the most of the opportunities available on their doorstep by working with key partners, industry, and educators
- With partners, develop proposals for a new enterprise centre within the town centre to provide young people with support around life skills, and educational training



- Host a skills event to support young people understand the employment opportunities available to them in Stevenage and for local businesses to promote career pathways.
- Support organisations through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and successfully complete delivery of the 24/25 'Communities & Place', 'Supporting Local Business', and 'People & Skills' allocations
- Work with Mission 44 to deliver the 'Access to All' pilot project in collaboration with Hertfordshire County Council and Herts Local Enterprise Partnership; the 'Primary Science Quality Mark' pilot project in collaboration with the University of Hertfordshire; and the 'Inspiring Science for the Next Generation' programme in collaboration with North Herts College
- Ensure businesses take up and utilise the updated specialised Business Support Programme to enable them to use a wide array of tools and intelligence at their disposal, to grow and adapt to ongoing challenges and help the local economy to continue to recover

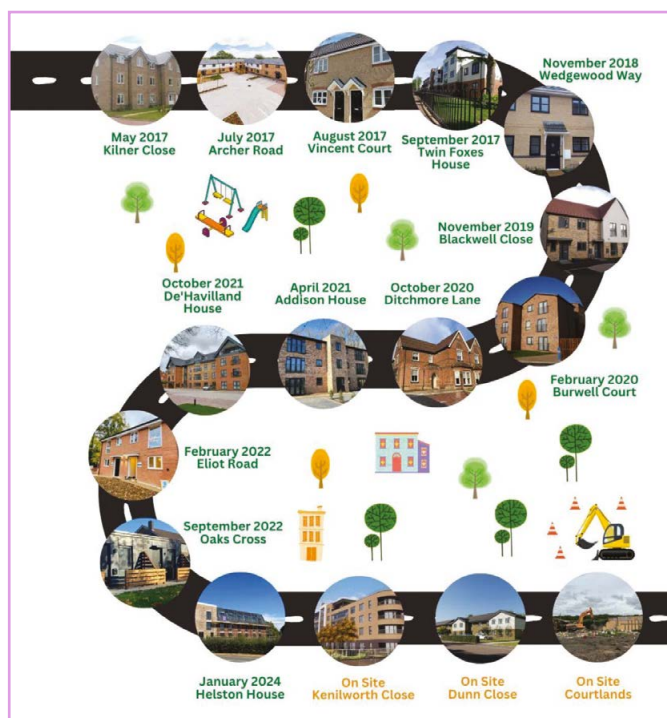
More Social, Affordable and Good Quality Homes



Building New & Sustainable Homes

In 2024/25, we will:

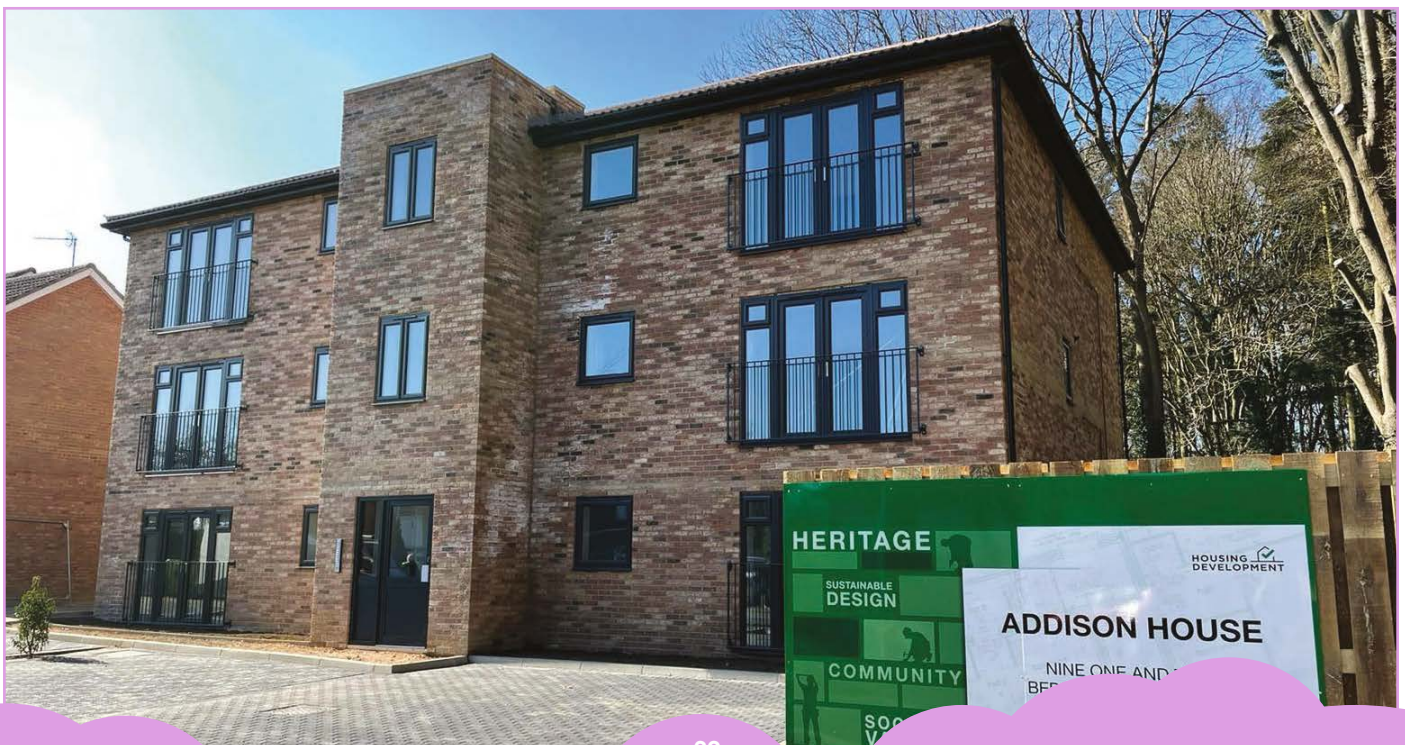
- Provide 113 new social and affordable housing under a supported housing scheme, independent living scheme, for affordable rent, or for private sale to contribute towards our goal to deliver 1000 new homes by 2029/30
- Begin work on mixed use regeneration scheme including residential, retail and community facilities at The Oval
- Reduce rough sleeper count through providing accommodation including purpose built modular units and targeted anti-social behaviour intervention
- Continue to offer our support to those affected by the conflict in Afghanistan and Ukraine by providing housing for refugees



Maintaining Good Quality Homes

In 2024/25, we will:

- Update and deliver a new Repairs and Maintenance Policy and associated Responsive Repairs Improvement Plan
- Launch the new online 'Book Hub' service, which will allow tenants to select convenient repair appointment times and monitor repair progress
- Consult and deliver on a new Allocations Policy which makes best use of housing stock for those most in need in the community
- Carry out an Asset Review for the council's housing stock to establish where future investment is required
- Streamline the support available by delivering services through 'one front door', this includes the Providing Homes Services, Survivors Against Domestic Abuse programme, No More Service & Safeguarding to create a Community Advice & Support service
- Establish a Housing Engagement & Performance Working Group to support delivery of the programme and monitor success/required improvements and develop a suite of engagement activities to encourage as many tenants as possible to work in partnership with the council
- Implement the Damp, Mould and Condensation Improvement Plan to improve the living conditions of our tenants
- Deliver the Decent Homes Programme to achieve 100% of housing stock meeting national standards, including the installation of 995 new kitchens or bathrooms, 1875 heating upgrades, 1500 window or door upgrades and 1400 energy efficiency works over the next three years
- Implementation of a High Rise Resident Engagement Plan to help inform the design and delivery of building safety works programme



Thriving Neighbourhoods

Clean Neighbourhoods & Green Spaces



In 2024/25, we will:

- Successfully deliver local projects through the UKSPF funding stream in all Clean Neighbourhood areas
- Fully establish the creation of resident led plans for each of the Clean Neighbourhood areas built from resident engagement data analysis
- Continue 4-year programme to remove old, tired or operationally constrictive shrub beds and convert to grass
- Implement digital system to support and improve Steet Scene operations
- Develop and implement a Green Spaces Strategy and a Tree & Woodland Strategy
- Develop and deliver a varied programme of volunteering opportunities



Community Safety

In 2024/25, we will:

- Provide educational sessions alongside police and advice given to schools children year 7-11 in the school setting under the banner of Op Educ8
- Continue to support victims of domestic abuse and obtain properties that can be used as emergency accommodations through our Survivors Against Domestic Abuse service
- Work with partners to support clients who are suffering domestic abuse and explore the links between domestic abuse and deprivation to implement interventions where necessary
- Working with Perpetrators of domestic abuse to change offending behaviours through our No More Perpetrator programme
- Identify vulnerable individuals that could be victims of Cuckooing and provide them with support and guidance on how to take enforcement action against perpetrators.
- Utilise the Safer Streets Funding to improve our Tower Block's entry systems and security



Culture & Leisure

In 2024/25, we will:

- Continue the design stage and begin planning of the new £45m Sports and Leisure Hub facility
- Continue to encourage children (Under 16s) to participate in Everyone Active facilities and outreach programmes
- Identify postcodes with high levels of deprivation and target Everyone Active programmes to those most in need
- Develop Arts and Heritage Trail utilising the segregated cycleways and paths
- Develop initial design of new Museum cultural offer that celebrates the New Town heritage

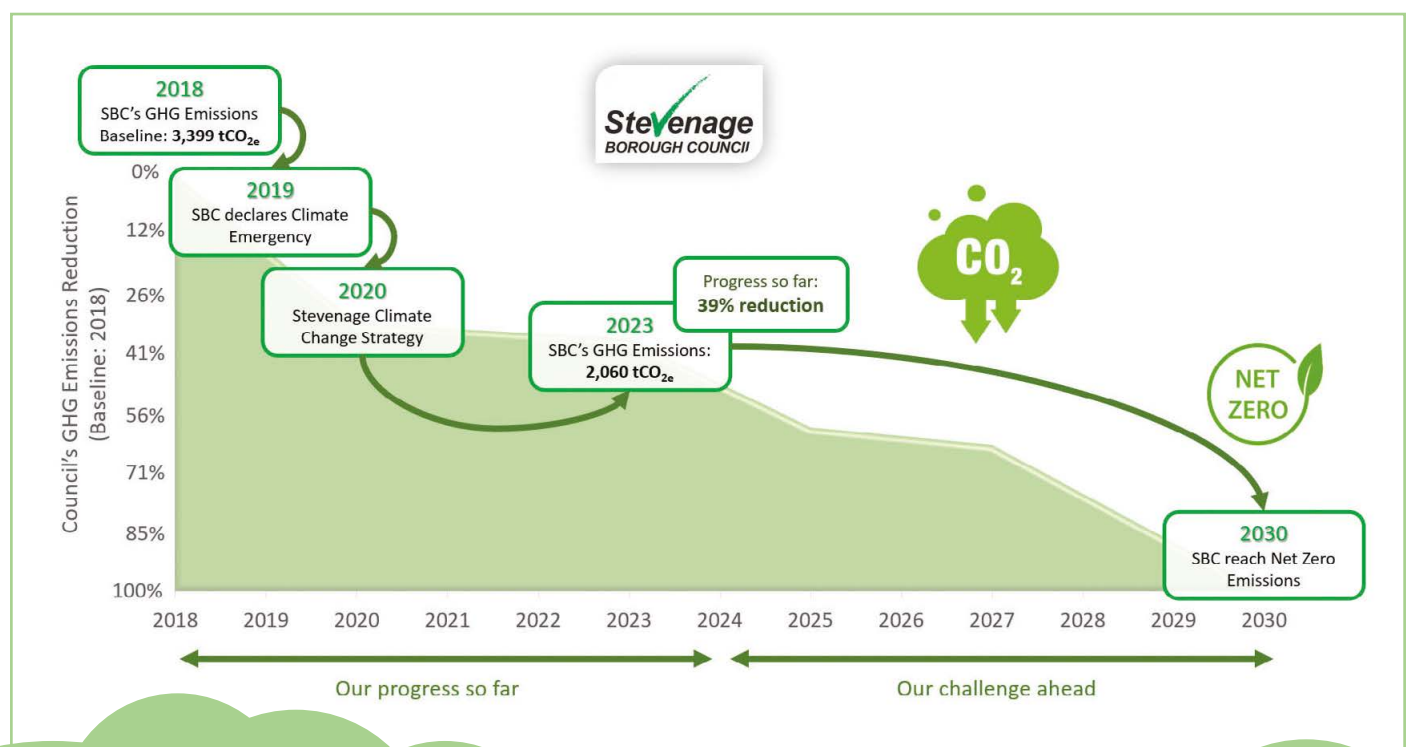


Tackling Climate Change



In 2024/25, we will:

- Monitor the first Biodiversity Net Gain schemes
- Support procurement of new waste receptacles
- Planting of new trees to aid in increasing tree canopy coverage
- Develop and begin delivering Wilder Stevenage action plan for 2024-2029
- Review of kerbside collections, in accordance with new government legislation, with a view to improve recycling rates
- Manage new and existing meadow grassland sites, including identifying new sites to expand this project
- Implement Community Climate Change Fund funding infrastructure to support community managed actions and encourage the public to get involved with projects that would enhance biodiversity, reduce carbon emissions, improve the local environment, or enhance climate resilience
- Begin transition of our current diesel fuelled SBC's owned fleet to one run by low-carbon fuel known as Hydro treated Vegetable Oil, reducing over 90% of its Greenhouse Gas emissions
- Analyse policies and background for heat networks developments across Stevenage.
- Prepare climate adaptation report to include relevant aspects of climate risk and adaptation for council activities and services, whilst following the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership Adaptation Subgroup guidelines



Balancing the Budget

In 2024/25, we will:

- Increase growth from current and new concessions contracts and traded services
- Review of all services provided to or on behalf of the council by external supplier or third party, as per the Insourcing Roadmap 2023-26
- Develop a commercial culture across the organisation through providing training, tools and communication plans
- Complete annual exercise to recategorise garage stock in time for fees and charges setting 2025/26
- Monitor the income from charges from freeholders for cleansing, weeding and sweeping



Cross-Cutting Themes

Equality, Diversity & Inclusion

In 2024/25, we will:

- Complete a review to inform understanding of digital accessibility compliance and develop and implement an action plan to track progress
- Publish a Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan 23/24 Progress Report in Autumn 2024 and launch a new EDI Action Plan 2024/25 alongside it to ensure we continue to champion the rights of individuals across our workforce and local communities



Health & Wellbeing

In 2024/25, we will:

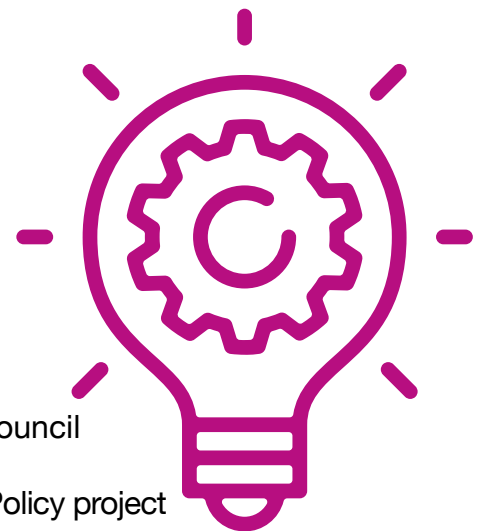
- Support women's wellbeing in the workplace by investing in training, interventions and support, including hosting a Menopause Café and providing free sustainable period products for staff
- Launch a new 5-year Healthy Stevenage Strategy that includes launching behaviour change projects and supporting school leisure facilities



Technology & Innovation

In 2024/25, we will:

- Acquire Cyber Assessment Framework, Cyber Essentials Plus, and Public Services Network accreditations
- Ensure full utilisation and value for money of all business insight, systems and Office 365 apps across the council
- Review and replace the currently telephone service used by the council
- Develop and implement a new ICT and Data Strategy, and New ICT Policy project
- Upgrade or replace existing server hardware to meet the increasing demands of a council's ICT infrastructure



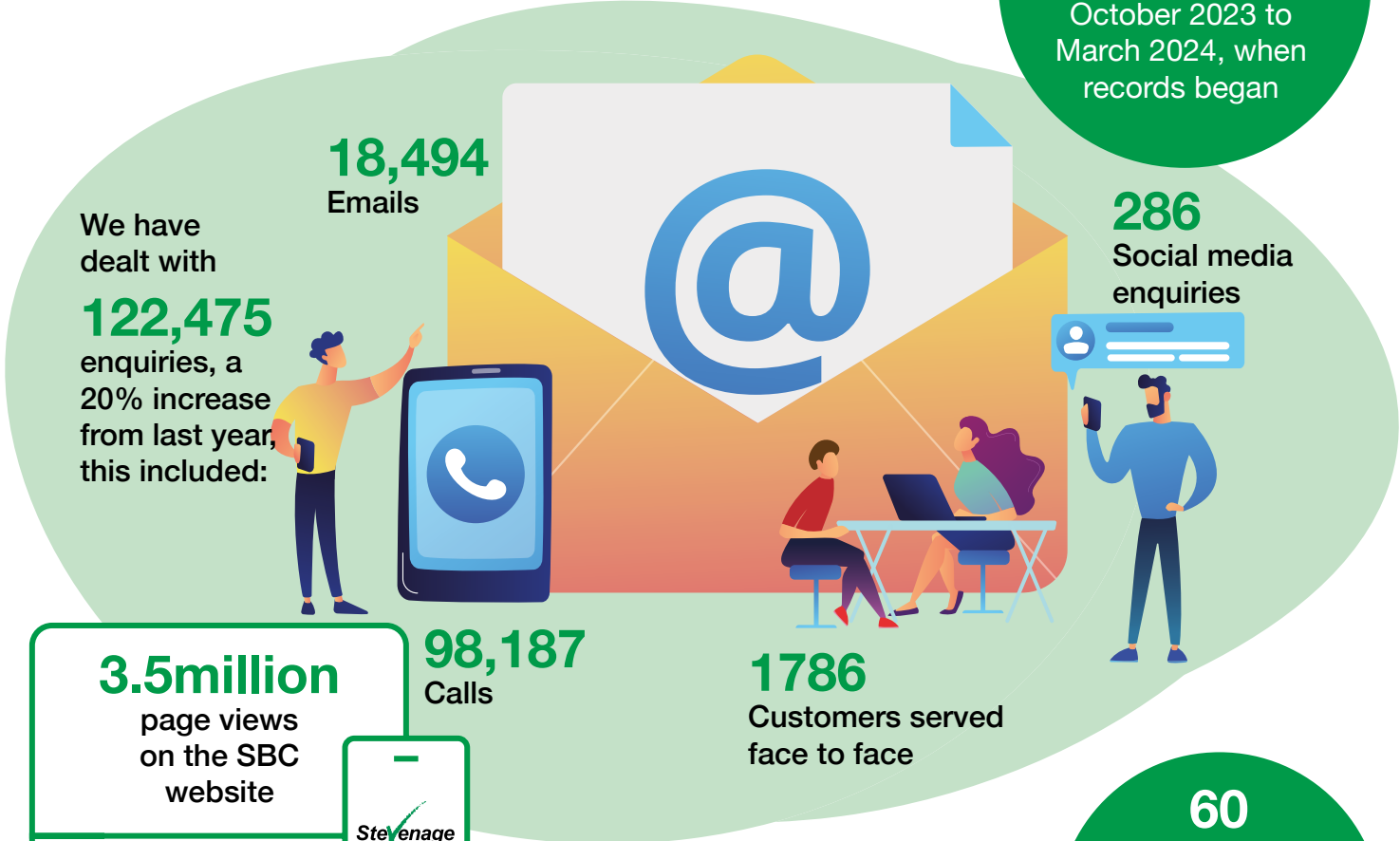
Delivering for Stevenage

At Stevenage Borough Council we have circa 700 members of staff who deliver customer service support, housing, waste, environmental health, planning and leisure services. In 2023/24, we continued to ensure that council services operate for the benefit of local people and to a high-quality that provides value for money.

This year we have:

- Relocated the Customer Service Centre to a single location in the main reception at Daneshill House to streamline key services.

3722
enquiries received at reception between October 2023 to March 2024, when records began



60
Prevent checks safeguarding cases

- Worked closely with our partners in 2023 to respond to:

36 adult safeguarding referrals
196 child safeguarding referrals



Supported **75** new businesses and created **101** new jobs with our partner Wenta through our Business Technology Centre

- Continued to develop new online services for services such as Trade Waste and Cemeteries and Garage Lettings Service. Our new state-of-the-art digital Garage Lettings Service earned our Garages and Transformation Team the prestigious Granicus 'New Initiative of the Year Award 2023' due to its success



Seen a 25% reduction in the number of fly-tipping cases reported from **2,899** to **2151** fly tips, when compared to the same period last year



Collected an average of **99.59%** of waste bins throughout the year



Improved the town's overall recycling rate to **39.9%**, up from **37.6%** last year

Collected an estimated **17,445 tonnes** of refuse in 2023/24, the equivalent to roughly 2 Tyrannosaurus Rexes!

Recycled, reused or composted an estimated **12,165 tonnes** of refuse in 2023/24, the equivalent to nearly 20 Polar Bears!

Purchased **12** affordable/low-cost properties via the Local Authority Housing Fund to host the increased number of refugee arrivals from Ukraine and Afghanistan



Completed **139** house in multiple occupation renewals, **43** licensed and non-licensed inspections, and **14** suspected investigations

Issued **£20,500** worth of civil penalties across **4** housing-related offences to landlords.

Delivering for Stevenage continued...

Received **59** private sector housing condition complaints, with **6** being served enforcement notices including **1** Prohibition Order to prevent overcrowding

Received **79** service requests about rubbish accumulations on domestic premises and served 5 enforcement notices for rubbish accumulations.



Investigated **7** filthy and verminous premises.



Investigated over **360** residential and commercial noise complaints, with **66** being linked to a barking dog and **132** due to loud music. **14** noise abatement notices served as a result.



Inspected **7** properties for the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

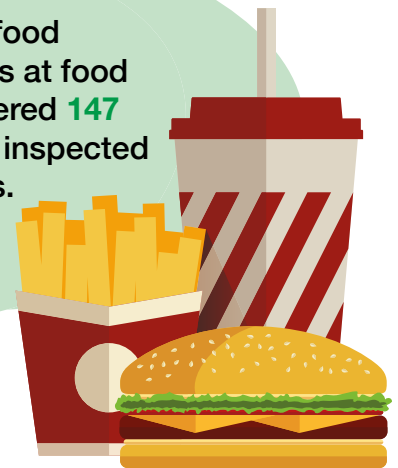


Received **41** public health burial service requests.

Undertook **149** food safety interventions at food businesses, registered **147** new premises and inspected **74** new businesses.



Carried out **180** vehicle condition checks on taxi and private hire vehicles.

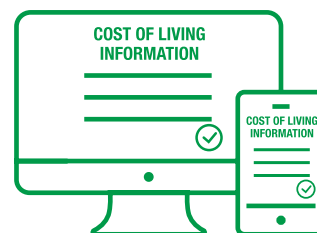


Cost of Living

Rising inflation and interest rates continue to have a significant impact on local people's cost of living especially in relation to fuel, food and utilities. The council has continued to work in partnership to support residents during this challenging time.

This year we have:

- Continued to implement our Cost-of-Living Action Plan for Stevenage which set out how we, alongside our partners, would mitigate the potential impact on residents and businesses, as well as council employees and finances.
- Administered and ran a £100,000 Household Support Fund that supported local organisations to reduce food and energy poverty across the town. The project reached 20 organisations including charities, schools, and local community groups, as well as establishing six community cafés for residents that seek to help address isolation and loneliness as well as provide cost-of-living advice and support. This year we have provided £81,500 to food and energy poverty support across the town; £6,000 to secondary and primary schools for breakfast, lunch and after school food support; and £11,780 to community cafes to act as weekly open access warm spaces with food support. The remaining £720 has been allocated to continuing community cafes.
- Launched the Cost of Living Website Hub to provide up-to-date support, including Government and local grants, advice about avoiding scams, and household cost support such as for school uniforms.



- Worked with partners including Citizen's Advice and the Money Advice Unit to offer residents a comprehensive advice and support service.
- Supported 5,098 residents as part of our Council Tax Support Scheme.
- Continued to support 15 Warm Spaces across the town to provide a place for people to keep warm, get some food and drink and access support services.
- Provided 90-minute Community Kitchen programme sessions in partnership with the Stevenage Football Foundation covering meal preparation, managing food budgets, food hygiene and leading a healthy active lifestyle.
- Supported Vineyard Church in running the main foodbank for residents under the banner of Vineyard Foodshed.
- Recruited an Income Officer responsible for Emergency and Temporary Accommodation and a Welfare Benefit and Debt Advisor to support tenants further.

A Cooperative Council

As a Cooperative Council, we are passionate about our communities and enabling them to co-produce projects and service related policies. Central to this approach is the principle of community wealth building which focuses on how much money is held and reinvested in an area for the benefit of local communities. As one of the largest procurers of goods and services locally we are committed to ensuring that not only do we champion this approach to other partners and businesses, but through our actions too.

This year in particular, we have worked closely with partners across the Cooperative Councils Innovation Network to support the following policy lab projects:



● Little Bank of Kindness

[timebank logo & website screenshot] A key aspect of our collaboration with partners is working co-operatively with residents to highlight priorities for our communities. Therefore, we have partnered with Made Open to pilot a “Little Bank of Kindness” community timebank within the St Nicholas Community Centre. Timebanking is the process of exchanging time and skills with other people in your community. Examples of timebank community activities have included dog walking, gardening support and companionship.

● Arts and Culture for Social Inclusion

This project aimed to raise the profile of arts and culture events and activities locally, widen engagement and better represent local communities. Through collaboration with Junction 7 Creatives, we promoted arts and culture across the town through signposting opportunities, linking up artists, and providing spaces to express a culture or showcase their art.







Stevenage Borough Council's Annual Report

(2023-2024)

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