

**Meeting** Cabinet  
**Portfolio Area** Environment and Performance.  
**Date** 09 of October 2024



## CLIMATE CHANGE – ANNUAL UPDATE OCTOBER 2024

### KEY DECISION

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### 1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 This report builds upon the update provided to the Executive at its meeting in October 2023 and provides Cabinet with an overview of the action that Stevenage Borough Council (SBC) is taking to address climate change. Specifically, the report outlines the most important climate action work undertaken across the eight strategic themes identified as priorities in the Stevenage Climate Change Strategy of 2020.
- 1.2 The report also outlines further action being taken by SBC, in partnership at the county level through the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) and references the regional activities of the East of England Regional Climate Change Forum (RCCF).
- 1.3 Furthermore, the report outlines the street-level work and opportunities being undertaken to support local people in making positive environmental changes in their local areas, reducing Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, and increasing support for behavioural change in local neighbourhoods.

- 1.4 Importantly, the report also highlights the continuing need for substantial legislative and financial support from the UK Government to achieve the target for the town and Council to be net-zero by 2030.
- 1.5 The report also presents the latest draft of the Stevenage Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), prepared in partnership with Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. This plan summarises progress to date and outlines habitat priorities for the next five years.

## 2 RECOMMENDATIONS – CABINET:

- 2.1 To acknowledge the progress in delivering the Stevenage Climate Change Strategy and action plan across the eight strategic areas, and delegating powers to the Portfolio Holder to make alterations following further engagement with other members.
- 2.2 To approve the Stevenage Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2028, attached as **Appendix 3**, with a one-page summary in **Appendix 4** and a neighbourhood breakdown in **Appendix 5**.
- 2.3 To note the release of the Climate Change Action Plan tracker available at [Stevenage Climate Action Plan](#) (for further details, see **Error! Reference source not found.** in **Appendix 1**).
- 2.4 To recognise the updated national climate action context, especially the new UK Government’s climate priorities (further details in “*Level 2 – UK National Climate Action*” in **Appendix 1**), and SBC’s collaborative regional and countywide work.
- 2.5 To note the launch of the Stevenage Green Business Grant Scheme to help local businesses implement greener solutions to reduce their carbon footprint (details in **Appendix 1**, “*Level 6 – Stevenage Level*” under “*Businesses*”).
- 2.6 To note the implementation of the “*Pathway 3 – People & Processes*”, focusing on ways of working and service-related emissions, particularly the establishment of the Staff Climate Champions Group (details in **Appendix 1**, “*Level 6 – Stevenage Level*” under “*People*”).

## 3 INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 Council officers have been working with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance to review the Stevenage Climate Change Strategy<sup>1</sup> and action plan. This includes assessing current and potential projects and identifying the necessary steps to achieve the goal of a net-zero town and Council by 2030.
- 3.2 Central to our efforts to tackle the climate crisis is recognising the actions needed at all levels, from coordinated international efforts, such as those

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<sup>1</sup> Available at: [Stevenage Climate Change Strategy](#)

outlined in the latest UNFCCC<sup>2</sup> Conference of the Parties (COPs), all the way through to collective and individual actions that can be implemented in the Stevenage's neighbourhoods and communities.

- 3.3 This report highlights several of Stevenage Borough Council's engagement and actions, ranging from reflecting global trends to implementing local actions and improving active engagement within the community, as illustrated in the scheme below.



Figure 1. SBC Climate Action Approach: the 9 levels for Climate Change Strategy.

## 4 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE – SUMMARY

### Level 1 – Global Climate Action

- 4.1 The Paris Agreement, adopted by 196 countries at COP21 (2015), is a legally binding treaty aimed at limiting global warming to well below 2°C, with efforts to cap it at 1.5°C. It has driven significant global funding for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and investing in low-carbon technologies. Under this treaty, countries are required to submit Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) detailing their plans to reduce GHG emissions and adapt to climate impacts.
- 4.2 COP28 in Dubai (2023) concluded with the first global stocktake of climate action under the Paris Agreement, revealing slow progress across all areas of climate action and the need for a 43% reduction in global GHG emissions by 2030 from 2019 levels to stay on the 1.5°C pathway, and calling for accelerated climate action and a faster transition away from fossil fuels. COP28 also emphasized scaling up climate finance, with £9.88 billion pledged for the Green Climate Fund and a historic agreement to address climate-related losses and damages in vulnerable countries. However,

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

current climate finance flows fall short of the trillions needed for clean energy transitions and adaptation efforts.

## Level 2 – UK National Climate Action

- 4.3 The UK has committed to reducing GHG emissions by at least 68% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, aiming for net-zero by 2050.
- 4.4 Nationally, GHG emissions have continued to decrease, with transport as the main emitting sector. Provisional figures for 2023 estimate national net territorial GHG emissions at 384.2 million tCO<sub>2e</sub>, a 5.4% decrease from 2022 and 52.7% lower than in 1990. The long-term trend in UK territorial GHG emissions is outlined below.

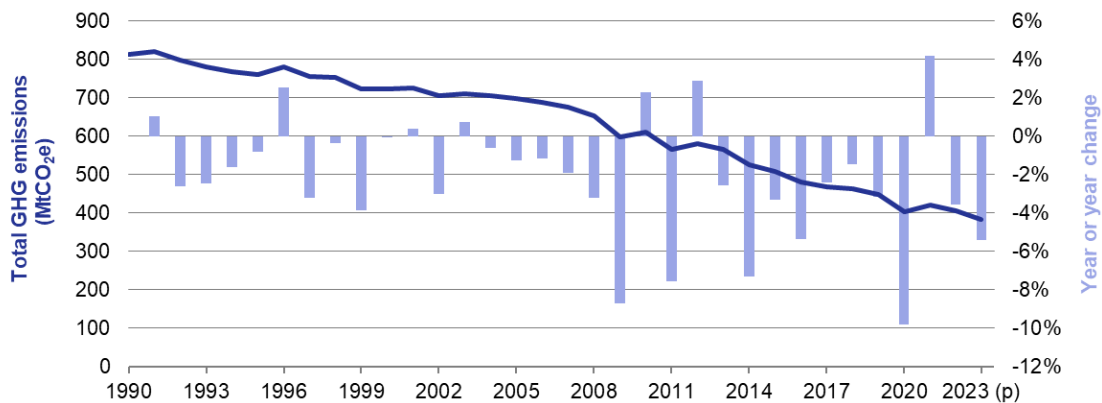


Figure 2. UK territorial GHG emissions, 1990-2023 (provisional figure for 2023).  
Source: DESNZ, National Statistics.

- 4.5 The long-term decrease is due to a shift from coal to gas and renewables, energy efficiency, and a decline in energy-intensive industries. In 2023, emissions fell mainly due to lower gas demand for buildings and products, and higher electricity imports from France.
- 4.6 Despite this progress, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) indicates the UK is not on track to meet its net-zero target, and only a third of the required reductions are backed by credible plans.
- 4.7 The new UK Government aims to reinstate and strengthen climate policies (e.g., ban on petrol and diesel cars, transition to heat pumps) and establish new ones for home retrofitting and decentralised energy production. Its new approach is expected to provide more stable funding for Local Authorities' long-term climate initiatives.

## Level 3 – Large Businesses

- 4.8 Over 90% of global GDP is now covered by net-zero targets, presenting a significant market opportunity for British businesses and job creation.
- 4.9 Stevenage hosts prominent businesses in aerospace, biotechnology, technology, and defence, many of which are well on track to meet their corporate net-zero targets. Brief case studies on the climate actions and commitments of Fujitsu and the Stevenage Bioscience Catalyst are included in the **Appendix 1**, “*Level 3 – Large Businesses*”.

4.10 The Council continues to collaborate with these businesses to share best practices and learnings on climate action.

**Levels 4 & 5 – Regional and Countywide Climate Action**

4.11 Collective work at countywide and regional levels is crucial for the Council's climate action, bringing together resources for the greatest impact, effectiveness, and efficiency.

4.12 The Council actively participates in the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP), a member-led organisation advancing climate change and sustainability initiatives across the county. HCCSP has facilitated collaboration with local partners, secured funding, and coordinated projects delivery, including Solar Together for solar installations, LEVI for charging infrastructure deployment, and the tree planting scheme “Your Tree, Our Future”. HCCSP is also collaborating with the Hertfordshire Growth Board (HGB) to deliver the Sustainable County Mission.

4.13 The East of England Regional Climate Change Forum (RCCF) has been established and is enhancing SBC's efforts by providing collaboration opportunities for regional climate action. As part of this collaboration, the Council has been discussing and analysing its sustainable procurement practices through various initiatives.

**Levels 6 – Stevenage Level**

4.14 In 2022, Stevenage recorded its lowest historical GHG emissions at 362.8 ktCO<sub>2e</sub>, a 5.02% decrease from 2021 levels, and 17.5% lower than in the baseline year (2018). GHG emissions have consistently decreased across all sectors since 2005, with transport as the main emitting sector, followed by the residential sector. Stevenage's per capita emissions in 2022 were lower than county, regional, and national averages. The territorial GHG emissions trajectory for Stevenage is shown below.

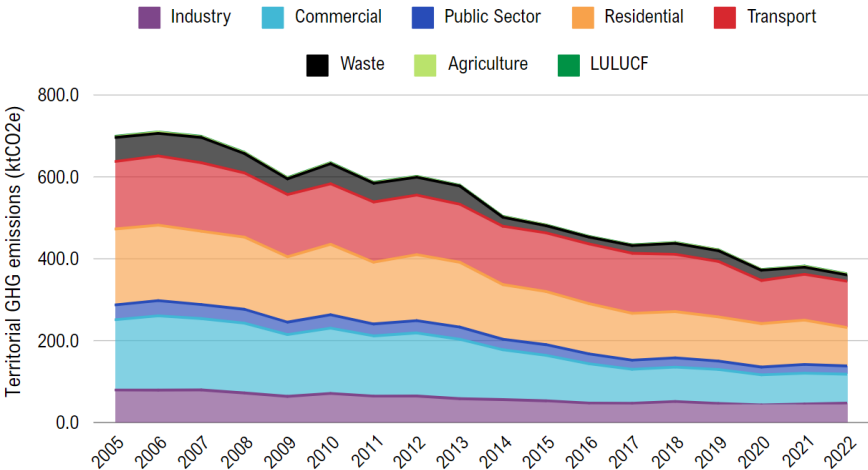


Figure 3. Stevenage territorial GHG emissions estimates 2005-2022 (ktCO<sub>2e</sub>). Source: Based on DESNZ data.

4.15 The Council’s GHG emissions have dropped by 39% since 2018, with a 61% reduction expected by October 2024 when switching the fleet fuel to Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO).

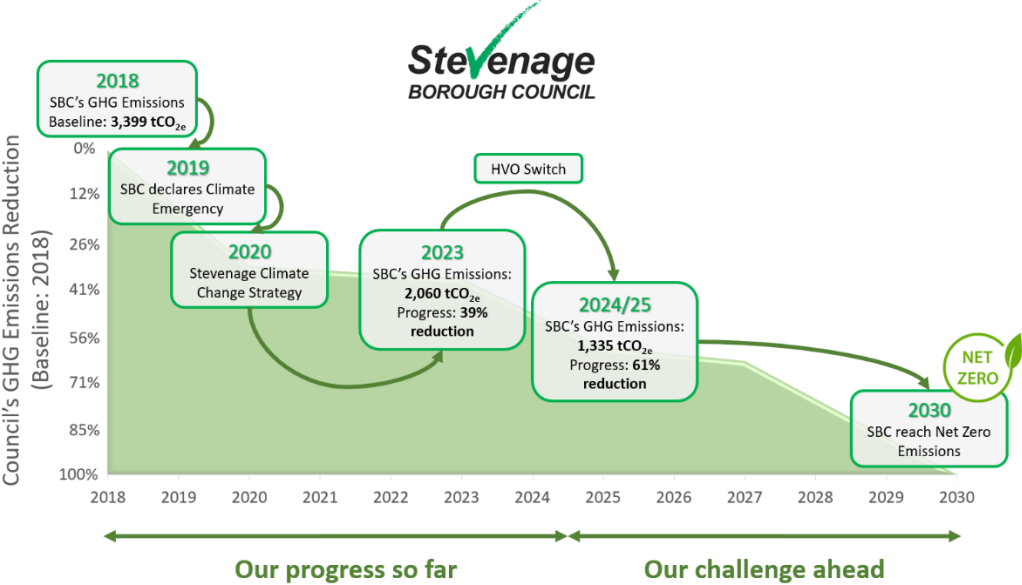


Figure 4. SBC emissions trajectory so far and expected challenge ahead.

4.16 Following the declaration of a Climate Emergency in 2019, the establishment of a target for Stevenage to be net-zero by 2030 (for both the town and the Council), and the development of the Climate Change Strategy in 2020, the Council has now released its Climate Action Plan Tracker online. This tracker showcases over 50 actions across eight strategic themes, as described in the following paragraphs.

4.17 **Businesses:** The Council has been actively supporting local businesses, particularly micro-businesses and SMEs, in understanding, setting, and meeting their climate goals. This support has been delivered through Wenta’s Action Zero Programme (119 businesses registered so far) and the Sustainable Business Programme funded by the UKSPF. These programmes offer advice on understanding sustainable needs, developing action plans, monitoring and reporting progress, and creating Carbon Reduction Plans (CRPs). Building on these programmes, the new Green Business Grant Scheme provides SMEs with £70,000 this year for green solutions implementation. Additionally, the Council continues to promote and deliver actions on sustainable procurement and social value.

4.18 **Homes:** The Council aims to achieve a minimum EPC band C for all 8,000 Council homes by 2030, essential for becoming a net-zero organisation and town<sup>3</sup>. UK Government central funding is crucial for reaching this target. SBC has been delivering decarbonisation and retrofitting actions funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF), upgrading properties from below EPC band C to above, reducing bills, and cutting emissions.

<sup>3</sup> While it is essential for SBC to continue investing in decarbonising its social housing stock and achieving an EPC standard that ensures safe, warm, and quality homes, this is subject to affordability within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA), given the broader pressures currently faced by all social landlords.

Improvements have included wall insulation, loft insulation, double glazing, efficient lighting, and solar panels. 209 houses were upgraded through SHDF Wave 1, and 237 homes are being retrofitted now under SHDF Wave 2.1. The Council has also been promoting schemes to decarbonise private homes (e.g., LAD, HUG, Solar Together), and ensuring that its new housing developments are greener and include sustainable features as part of its 5-star quality approach. Finally, the Stevenage Borough Local Plan (SBLP) is being partially review, with policies for sustainable, low-carbon, and zero-carbon homes across Stevenage being proposed.



Figure 5. External appearance of Mount Pleasant properties before and after SHDF retrofits.

- 4.19 **Construction & Regeneration:** Transforming the building and construction sector is critical for achieving climate goals. As a leader in town centre regeneration, the Council has significant influence in building better and more sustainable buildings and places. A comprehensive regeneration programme has delivered sustainable projects with various partners (e.g., Railway North MSCP, opened in May 2023) and will deliver key projects in the future, such as the Public Services Hub. A crucial tool for the Council to lead climate action is the Local Plan, currently under partial review to update existing climate policies and incorporate new ones, on topics such as energy efficiency, emissions targets and offsetting (including whole-life carbon targets for large developments), overheating and cooling, water and wastewater management, and green infrastructure.
- 4.20 **Waste & Recycling:** The waste sector significantly impacts climate change. Currently, 77% of residual waste in Hertfordshire is processed at EfW facilities, with a target for zero waste to landfill by 2030. The Council also aims to increase recycling rates to 60% by 2035. However, Stevenage's current recycling rate is 39.1%, the lowest in Hertfordshire. The Council is conducting a pilot programme to increase recycling rates in flat blocks and has implemented solar panels on the rooftops of seven refuse collection lorries, to save money and reduce GHG emissions. SBC has also made progress by participating in the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership (HWP), through various initiatives and communication campaigns to promote waste reduction and recycling.



Figure 6. Solar panels installed on Stevenage's refuse collection lorries

- 4.21 **People:** Stevenage can only achieve its net-zero targets if everyone participates. In November 2023, the Council's SLT approved the *Pathway 3 – People and Processes*, identifying staff-related emissions requiring significant behavioural changes. To implement Pathway 3, a Staff Climate Champions Group (SCCG) was established to improve engagement, raise awareness, and drive positive change within SBC. This group aims to discuss themes like business travel, waste, water use, and service delivery. Last year, the Council also organised several training initiatives on climate change and sustainability. Finally, as climate adaptation is critical to prepare for and adjust to the climate impacts, the Council developed its first Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA), outlining 51 specific climate-related risks, within four categories and across 18 service areas.
- 4.22 **Biodiversity:** Biodiversity loss and climate change are intricately connected, making it crucial to protect and enhance biodiversity, and highlighting the importance of new policies such as the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). The Council aims to plant over 4,000 trees by 2030 and increase the town's tree canopy cover to 19%. Recently, 3,500 saplings were planted in Fairlane Wood, alongside other initiatives like community orchards. The Council is also discussing a new tree replacement policy for new developments in the Local Plan partial review and is developing new strategies for Tree & Woodlands and Green Spaces. Moreover, a new Biodiversity Action Plan (2024-2028) has been produced and is presented for approval. The detailed presentation of this plan is included in **Appendix 1**, "*Level 6 – Stevenage Level*", under the "*Biodiversity*" section, whereas the full report is attached as **Appendix 3**, with a one-page summary in **Appendix 4** and a neighbourhood breakdown in **Appendix 5**.





Figure 7. Stevenage's Fairlane Wood.

- 4.23 **Transport:** Transport is the main emitting sector in Stevenage, contributing 31.2% of the borough's total GHG emissions. The Council aims to decarbonise its fleet before 2030. Starting October 2024, the fleet will switch to HVO, reducing net GHG emissions by up to 90%. Since 2023, three new electric vehicles have been incorporated into the fleet. The Council also recognises the importance of active travel for meeting its climate targets and is implementing a Cycle Hire scheme across the town, with 45 hubs and 150 e-bikes, along with other cycling initiatives (e.g., cycle hangars, maintenance stands). Additionally, EV chargers are being deployed across the town, an EV Car Club has been established, and a new taxi licensing policy with climate considerations has been developed. The Council also conducted its first post-pandemic Staff Travel Survey to assess employee's commuting and business travel habits and explore further sustainable incentives.
- 4.24 **Energy & Water:** The energy sector is responsible for over two-thirds of global emissions. The UK aims to decarbonise its electricity system by 2035. Meanwhile, the Council has switched to a zero-carbon electricity tariff since 2022, and continuously monitors electricity demand across its main sites using a digital meter explorer. Natural gas usage remains the main challenge for SBC in this regard. In 2023, energy audits were conducted for Daneshill House, Cavendish Road Depot, and the Indoor Market, and efficiency upgrades have been delivered across leisure facilities, Daneshill House, and the MSCPs. Besides energy, water is also crucial for the town's sustainability, especially since Hertfordshire is one of the driest regions in the UK. Water and wastewater management policies are being included in the Local Plan partial review, and rainwater harvesting infrastructure has started to be implemented locally.

### Level 7-9 – Local Engagement

- 4.25 Local community engagement remained a key focus for 2023/24. Initiatives included an updated Climate Change Communications and Marketing Plan, a dedicated Climate Action Plan tracker portal for resident feedback, and participation in community events like Stevenage Day, featuring educational stalls and giveaways to promote sustainability. The Council also provided educational online resources, such as an Environmental Days Calendar and a Sustainable Event Handbook. Additionally, the Council engaged with

various stakeholders, including the Central Library, the Stevenage Football Club Foundation, and local businesses, to promote sustainability initiatives.

- 4.26 Finally, the Council continues to prioritise neighbourhood and street-level work, particularly through topic reference groups and the implementation of the Climate Change Community Fund (CCCF). The CCCF has supported eight green community projects within seven wards, delivering benefits such as reduction of waste, improved biodiversity, water conservation, and climate adaptation. Details on the CCCF process, requirements, and case studies are included in **Appendix 1**, “*Level 7-9 – Local Engagement*” under the “*Neighbourhood and Street Level Work*” section. Further information on the approved CCCF projects is available in **Appendix 6**.

## **5 IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 5.1 The costs associated with producing and consulting on the climate change strategy have been met from the agreed departmental budget. A number of projects referenced within this report have secured third party funding from government and other sources, such as S106 agreements, to be able to pilot initiatives, or to improve sustainable travel assets. Local CIL funding may also be available to support improvements to local infrastructure that reduce the GHG emissions in the area such as new trees, better lighting, and footway improvements.
- 5.2 It is recognised that a move to net zero and sustainable travel could mean reduced income, for example related to car parking income, which is used to fund other services, and will need to be continually reviewed through the Medium-Term Financial Plan process. There are likely to be significant reductions in income to the Council linked to changes in the way people commute and use the Council’s car parks. This will need to be carefully managed to ensure the services and provisions for sustainable transport the income funds can continue.
- 5.3 As the Council works on options and future projects to achieve the ambition of being a net zero carbon Council and town by 2030, Officers will need to bring forward a number of business cases. If the government does not step in to support the local government sector and the Council is required to provide the investment, then a significant reprioritisation of other projects and activities would be required to progress highly complex projects to absorb increased revenue and capital costs.

### **Legal Implications**

- 5.4 There are no direct legal implications associated with adopting or delivering the Climate Change Strategy, however it is likely the UK Government will begin introducing stricter targets with legal implications for those Councils that are not meeting Greenhouse Gases reductions.

### **Risk Implications**

- 5.5 The greatest risks associated with this work are failing to secure sufficient support from residents, businesses, and government to protect us all from the effect of climate change.
- 5.6 There is also a reputational risk of not meeting our climate targets set in 2019-2020, primarily due to the lack of resources or funding and co-funding from the UK Government.

### **Policy Implications**

- 5.7 The annual update on Climate Change supports the Council's own Climate Change Strategy and wider corporate ambitions for a low carbon future across the town.

### **Climate Change Implications**

- 5.8 This report highlights the risks, challenges, and opportunities that the Council must address, not only GHG emissions but its wider climate action aspirations.

### **Equalities and Diversity Implications**

- 5.9 Climate change affects those in most need both in the UK and around the world. Those in deprivation, hunger or unwell are both most affected by climate change and least able to address it. Therefore, the Council is duty bound as one of those in the world that are more able to act, to act now.

## List of Acronyms

<b>APSE:</b>	Association for Public Service Excellence.
<b>ASHP:</b>	Air Source Heat Pump.
<b>BAP:</b>	Stevenage Biodiversity Action Plan.
<b>BMS:</b>	Building Management System.
<b>BNG:</b>	Biodiversity Net Gain.
<b>BREEAM:</b>	Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method.
<b>CCC:</b>	Climate Change Committee.
<b>CCCF:</b>	Climate Change Community Fund.
<b>CCPG:</b>	Climate Change Progress Group.
<b>CCRA:</b>	Climate Change Risk Assessment.
<b>CIL:</b>	Community Infrastructure Levy.
<b>COP:</b>	UNFCC Conference of the Parties.
<b>COP21:</b>	21 <sup>st</sup> UNFCC Conference of the Parties, Paris, France, 2015.
<b>COP28:</b>	28 <sup>th</sup> UNFCC Conference of the Parties, Dubai, UAE, 2023.
<b>Council:</b>	Stevenage Borough Council.
<b>COVID-19:</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019.
<b>CPO:</b>	Charge Point Operator.
<b>CRP:</b>	Carbon Reduction Plan.
<b>CSC:</b>	Customer Service Centre.
<b>DEFRA:</b>	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.
<b>DESNZ:</b>	Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.
<b>EA:</b>	Everyone Active.
<b>EELGA:</b>	East of England Local Government Association.
<b>EfW:</b>	Energy from Waste.
<b>EPC:</b>	Energy Performance Certificate.
<b>EV:</b>	Electric Vehicle.
<b>GDP:</b>	Gross Domestic Product.
<b>GHG:</b>	Greenhouse Gas.
<b>GPC:</b>	General Purposes Committee.
<b>HCC:</b>	Hertfordshire County Council.
<b>HCCSP:</b>	Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership.
<b>HFCEV:</b>	Hydrogen Fuel-Cell Electric Vehicle.
<b>HGB:</b>	Hertfordshire Growth Board.

<b>HGV:</b>	Heavy Good Vehicle.
<b>HMWT:</b>	Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust.
<b>HP:</b>	Heat Pump.
<b>HRA:</b>	Housing Revenues Account.
<b>HUG1:</b>	Home Upgrade Grant Phase 1
<b>HUG2:</b>	Home Upgrade Grant Phase 2
<b>HVO:</b>	Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil.
<b>HWP:</b>	Hertfordshire Waste Partnership.
<b>ICT:</b>	Information and Communication Technology.
<b>ktCO2e:</b>	Thousands of tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent.
<b>LA:</b>	Local Authority.
<b>LAD3:</b>	Green Home Grant Local Authority Delivery Phase 3.
<b>LCA:</b>	Life Cycle Assessment.
<b>LCB:</b>	Local Community Budget.
<b>LED:</b>	Light-Emitting Diode.
<b>LEP:</b>	Local Enterprise Partnership.
<b>LEVI:</b>	Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure.
<b>LGA:</b>	Local Government Association.
<b>LNRS:</b>	Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
<b>LP:</b>	Local Plan.
<b>LULUCF:</b>	Land Use, Land Use Change, and Forestry.
<b>MSCP:</b>	Multi-Storey Car Park.
<b>MTB:</b>	Meet the Buyer
<b>MtCO2e:</b>	Millions of tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent.
<b>MVHR:</b>	Mechanical ventilation with Heat Recovery.
<b>NDC:</b>	Nationally Determined Contribution.
<b>Net-Zero:</b>	Balance in the amount of GHG emitted with the amount removed from the atmosphere, resulting in no net increase in these gases.
<b>NHS:</b>	National Healthcare System.
<b>ORCS:</b>	On-Street Residential Chargepoint Scheme.
<b>ORR:</b>	Operational Risk Register.
<b>OZEV:</b>	Office for Zero Emission Vehicles.
<b>PAAP:</b>	Project Assessment and Approval Process.
<b>PSDS:</b>	Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.
<b>PV:</b>	Photovoltaic.

<b>RCCF:</b>	East of England Regional Climate Change Forum.
<b>SBC:</b>	Stevenage Borough Council.
<b>SBLP:</b>	Stevenage Borough Local Plan.
<b>SCCG:</b>	Staff Climate Champions Group.
<b>SHDF:</b>	Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund.
<b>SLT:</b>	Senior Leadership Team.
<b>SME:</b>	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprise.
<b>SSSI:</b>	Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
<b>SuDS:</b>	Sustainable Drainage System.
<b>tCO<sub>2</sub>e:</b>	Tonnes of Carbon Dioxide Equivalent, a standard unit used to measure the impact of different greenhouse gases on global warming.
<b>TOMs:</b>	Themes, Outcomes and Measures (Social Value).
<b>UK:</b>	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
<b>UKSPF:</b>	UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
<b>UNFCC:</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.
<b>WNWN:</b>	Waste Not Want Not.
<b>ZCB:</b>	Zero Carbon for Business Tariff.
<b>ZEV:</b>	Zero Emissions Vehicle.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1      Detailed Climate Change Annual Update 2024**
- Appendix 2      Stevenage Territorial Emissions Infographic**
- Appendix 3      Biodiversity Action Plan 2024-2028 Report**
- Appendix 4      Biodiversity Action Plan One-Page Summary**
- Appendix 5      BAP – Neighbourhood Breakdown**
- Appendix 6      Climate Change Community Fund (CCCF) Projects**