

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Environment & Climate Change
Date 4 June 2025



GREEN SPACES STRATEGY AND TREE & WOODLAND STRATEGY

KEY DECISION

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 In recent years the Council has successfully delivered several exciting green space initiatives to improve the local environment and to provide enhanced opportunities for Stevenage residents. These initiatives include:
- Community engagement and improvements through an active programme with Green Space Volunteers
 - Significant capital investment in equipped play spaces for children and young people, and provision of spaces for imaginative play.
 - Provision of an aqua parc at Fairlands Valley Park
 - Delivery of the Stevenage Biodiversity Action Plan & Biodiversity Net Gain improvements
 - Community tree planting – community orchards, community woodlands, micro-woods
 - Following receipt of a petition for lighting at Fairlands Valley Park a bat survey has been commissioned which will help inform the potential for a future lighting scheme.



- 1.2 The draft Green Spaces Strategy and Tree & Woodland Strategy have been developed, following consultation with colleagues and residents, to support future delivery of further improvements over the next ten years in order to ensure that these assets continue to meet the needs of people and wildlife in the future.
- 1.3 Officers present this report to seek approval of the Green Spaces Strategy 2025-2035 and Tree & Woodland Strategy 2025-2035 for Stevenage.
- 1.4 The team responsible for the delivery of the majority of the Green Spaces Strategy, including the action plans for the principal parks, currently comprises four officer roles. One of these is currently permanent. The other three range from 0.2 -0.8 FTE on fixed term contracts, with two terminating in September 2025 and the third in September 2026.
- 1.5 In this context, the report highlights the proposal for identifying additional revenue funding over the course of the next 18 months to create a permanent green space officer role to support the successful delivery of the Green Spaces Strategy, and the community engagement associated with many of the actions in both strategy documents.
- 1.6 Officers will explore options to fund this post through planning gain funds, or other suitable funding streams.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Green Spaces Strategy and Tree & Woodland Strategy 2025 – 2035 be approved.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The strategy documents support, and are supported by, other local policy documents including the Biodiversity Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy, Health & Wellbeing Strategy, the Local Plan and the Corporate Plan: Make Stevenage Even Better.

3.2 Green Spaces Strategy 2025 - 2035

- 3.1.1 For this strategy, green spaces consist of:

- Allotments
- Cemeteries and churchyards

- Commons
- Open spaces
- Parks and public gardens
- Play areas
- Local Wildlife Sites
- Woodlands

3.1.2 Good quality green spaces are increasingly recognised as an essential quality of life resource as they:

- help to mitigate the impact of climate change,
- act as green corridors for wildlife,
- provide an affordable way to get people active – boosting mental wellbeing and physical health,
- Increase property values and attract inward investment,
- Encourage people and communities to come together,

3.1.3 Fields in Trust developed a minimum standard of green space provision, identifying that at least 24m² of green space per individual is needed to enable everyone to participate in recreation, sport, play and reap the well-being benefits. Their Green Space Index, 2024, identifies that there is 22.52m² of green space provision per individual in Stevenage, which falls slightly below the minimum standard identified.

Whilst it may not be practical or possible to create new green spaces within the borough boundary, it does highlight the need to protect and improve what already exists and seek to maximise opportunities for additional green spaces through planning gain.

3.1.4 Despite the slight shortfall in green space provision quantity standards the Fields in Trust Green Space Index, 2024, does identify that 97.75% of Stevenage residents live within a 10-minute walk of a green space:



3.1.5 This strategy sets out objectives for the way in which green spaces in Stevenage are maintained, managed, and improved to ensure that they are

safe, accessible, sustainable and meet the needs of our communities and the environment today and in the future.

- 3.1.6 64% of residents who responded to the consultation reported that they did feel safe when using green spaces in Stevenage. However, concerns about personal safety at night was a common theme.

The perception of personal safety is a concern across the UK with 82% of women and 42% of men feeling very or fairly unsafe walking alone after dark in parks or open spaces (Office for National Statistics: Perceptions of personal safety and experiences of harassment). The perception of the fear of crime generally exceeds actual crime, however. the Green Space Strategy identifies the need to work with partners to consider a range of measures to help improve the perception of personal safety in Stevenage parks and green spaces for all residents.

3.2 New Green Spaces

- 3.2.1 There has not been any significant new green space in Stevenage since Chells Park in the 1980/90's, and yet with the growth of the Town there is a need for additional green space to meet the needs of the increasing population.
- 3.2.2 In September 2022 the Council granted planning permission for a residential development to the North of Stevenage. Alongside the provision of homes and school etc this development will also deliver a new country park. The park will provide 38 hectares of informal open space available for use by everyone, including pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders. It is anticipated that much of the park will be restored, and managed, as hay meadow, but will also include reinstatement of hedgerow field boundaries, tree and copse planting along with the creation of a community orchard.
- 3.2.3 The park will be created by the developers and adopted by the Council for future maintenance and management. The developers will also provide funds to support the management and maintenance of this significant new green infrastructure. (Artist's impression of the country park below).



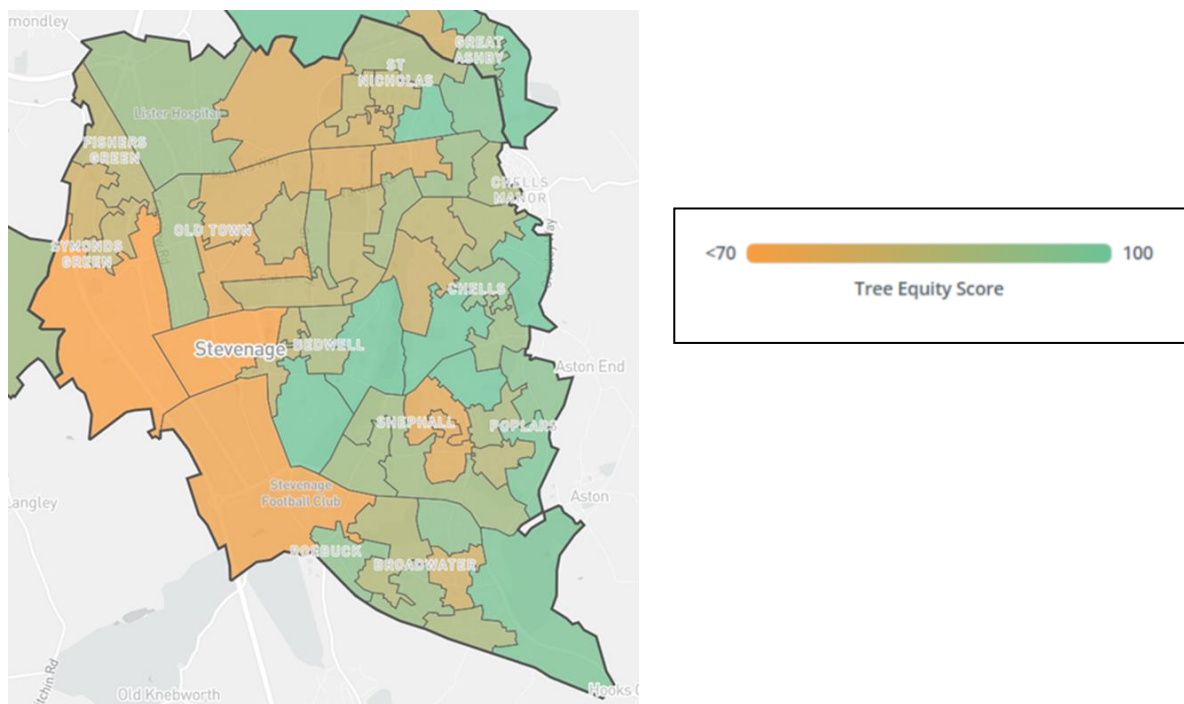


Visuals supplied by Nicholas Pearson Associates.

- 3.2.4 During 2026/27, Phase 1 of the park will be made available for adoption by the Council, with Phase 2 anticipated in 2029/30.
- 3.2.5 In addition, planning permission for the West of Stevenage development was granted in autumn 2024. Alongside the provision of homes and school etc this development is proposed to deliver a new playing field and associated sports facilities.

3.3 Tree & Woodland Strategy 2025 – 2035

- 3.3.1 As Britain's first new town, Stevenage was designed with a great deal of emphasis on green space and its importance in helping to create a thriving community. Existing features such as hedgerows and lanes, woodlands and veteran trees were retained and used to create open space, wildlife corridors and an immediate sense of place and many of these features still exist today.
- 3.3.2 The Stevenage Amenity Tree Management Policy was approved by Executive in February 2021, and this strategy has subsequently developed to support the ongoing delivery of a good quality tree stock for future generations to benefit from.
- 3.3.3 Trees, like much of our landscape, are facing unprecedented environmental challenges including climate change, financial constraints, land-use pressures etc.
- 3.3.4 The Tree Equity Score UK combines information (tree canopy, income, health, employment, age, heat, air pollution) from a variety of sources to create a single measure from 0 to 100, the lower the score, the greater the need for tree planting investment.



This data will help identify priorities for future tree planting within Stevenage.

- 3.2.5 The Woodland Trust’s Woodland Access Standard aspires that no person should live more than 500m from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2ha in size, and there should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20ha within 4km of people’s homes. However, it does acknowledge that in urban areas the 4km threshold should be the minimum provided.

Their 2017 publication Space for People, Targeting Action for Woodland Access provides the following data for Hertfordshire:

	% of population with access to a 2ha+ wood within 500m	% of population with access to a 20ha+ wood within 4km
Broxbourne	19.2	100.0
Dacorum	33.5	72.1
East Hertfordshire	8.8	67.5
Hertsmere	15.4	95.3
North Hertfordshire	9.4	10.9
St Albans	24.4	71.9
Stevenage	45.8	100.0
Three Rivers	43.9	99.3
Watford	3.1	100.0
Welwyn Hatfield	30.3	100.0

- 3.2.6 A recommendation of the Emergency Tree Plan for the UK (Woodland Trust, 2020) is to provide a minimum of 19% tree cover to support the UK being carbon neutral by 2050. In 2024 it was calculated that Stevenage has a tree canopy cover, including woodlands, of 22%.
- 3.2.7 Whilst the 22% tree canopy coverage for Stevenage is positive, approximately 7,500 amenity trees have been lost over the past twenty years. There are currently approximately 32,500 amenity (non-woodland) trees in Stevenage and it's therefore important that the tree stock is monitored and maintained.
- 3.2.8 This strategy sets out objectives for the way in which the Town's tree stock, including amenity trees, woodlands and ancient hedgerows, are managed and developed to ensure that they continue to contribute to an attractive and healthy environment for people and wildlife now and in the future.

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDED COURSE OF ACTION AND OTHER OPTIONS

- 4.1 During 2021/22 and 2022/23, 3,500 responses were received to resident surveys. As part of the survey's residents were asked to identify their top local priority. "*More / better parks and green spaces*" was in the top 10 of priorities for each Ward, and collectively was identified as the top priority town wide. "Tree / shrubs / grass maintenance" was in the top 10 of priorities for each Ward, and collectively was identified as the 6th highest priority town wide.
- 4.2 The development of the two strategies has been driven by Councillor Simon Speller, the former Portfolio Holder for Environment and Performance.
- 4.3 The strategies have been informed by phases of public consultation:

When	Purpose	No. of Responses
Winter 2023/24	To understand what residents thought of the green spaces / tree stock, why green spaces / trees are important, etc.	490
July – Sept 2024	To inform action plans for principal parks – as part of the Green Spaces Strategy	474
Jan – Feb 2025	To seek feedback on the draft strategies	53

- 4.4 Colleagues in Environmental Operations, Leisure, Planning Policy, Climate Action, Development Control, Insurance, Housing, Co-operative Neighbourhoods, and Engineers were also invited to provide feedback to the draft strategy.

- 4.5 The Woodland Trust have also reviewed the Tree & Woodland Strategy and support it and what it seeks to achieve.
- 4.6 A presentation on both strategies was provided to the Economy and Environment Select Committee in March 2025.
- 4.7 All comments and feedback from the consultations have been considered and the draft policies amended where appropriate. The actions within both strategy documents seek to deliver works identified through the consultation. Some actions are more aspirational than others as financial constraints may limit the resource capacity (funding and / or officer time) to deliver some activity identified.
- 4.8 Within both strategies indicative timescales for delivery have been provided for each action, i.e. short term: 1-3 years, medium term: 3-7 years, or long term: 7-10 years.
- 4.9 Feedback from the consultation has established a series of key topics for green spaces and green infrastructure in Stevenage. These have informed the 71 actions within the Green Spaces Strategy:

Subject	Theme	No. of Actions
Our Community	Access & Provision	10
	Communication	5
	Engagement	5
	Community Safety	5
Our Environment	Nature & Wildlife	7
	Sustainability	11
Our Spaces	Health & Wellbeing	5
	Maintenance	4
	Development	9
	Management	11

- 4.10 Green Spaces Strategy actions include:
- Review and revise our park byelaws (short)
 - Develop a policy to inform future sponsorship, memorial and dedication opportunities (medium term)
 - Develop partnership arrangements to extend the range of facilities available, increase capacity and secure external funding (ongoing)
 - Ensure future burial provision (long term)
 - Review provision of footpaths within sites to support improved access (long term)
 - Support and promote group activities within the parks to increase presence levels for longer periods (ongoing)
- 4.11 In addition to the more generic green space actions identified within the Green Spaces Strategy, resident feedback has also informed the development of individual action plans for each of the 11 principal parks.

- 4.12 Feedback from the consultation has established a series of key issues for trees, woodlands and ancient hedgerows in Stevenage. These have informed the 59 actions within the Tree & Woodland Strategy:

Theme	No. of Actions
Tree Canopy Cover	7
Engagement & Collaboration	9
Woodland Management	9
Nature Connectivity	5
Climate Change	4
Age Diversity	4
Species Diversity	4
Tree Health & Resilience	8
Risk Management	6
Protecting & Enhancing the Historic Environment	3

- 4.13 Actions within the Tree & Woodland Strategy include:

- Identify low canopy coverage areas and prioritise tree planting in these areas (short term)
- Consult with local stakeholders on any significant developments and changes to the treescape in their street (ongoing)
- Survey trees in tenanted gardens to identify risk and propose mitigation actions (short term)

- 4.14 To improve the structural diversity of at least 10% of current woodland area by 2035 (long term). Within both strategies the actions have an indication of timescale for delivery. When identifying timescales officers considered the resources required to deliver the action and the capacity of the necessary resource.

Officers will seek opportunities to deliver any actions sooner than indicated within the strategy as capacity allows and supported by external funding opportunities where possible.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 There are time limited posts within the current structure supporting the work on the Green Space Strategy. In order to continue the work contained with this report Officers are looking at identifying funding to employ a Grade 7 green spaces officer at an estimated cost of £55,240 per annum.
- 5.2 External funding has previously supported green spaces projects (including tree planting, sports pitch improvements, lake improvements etc) and officers

will seek to make applications, where we are able to meet the criteria, to support the delivery of the more capital elements of the action plans.

- 5.3 It is also anticipated that Section 106 agreements, commuted sums, Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) contributions and planning gain will also support the delivery of some actions.
- 5.4 Local Community Budgets and Climate Change Community Fund are internal sources of funding available via Ward Councillors working with their local community.
- 5.5 As previously stated, in the context of the pressures on local government finance, it may not be possible to deliver all the actions within the strategies, however progress and updates will be monitored.

Legal Implications

- 5.6 The Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 places a clear duty of care to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of those who use the facility.
- 5.7 The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1992 require that a 'suitable and sufficient assessment of risks' to the health and safety of anyone using the green space is carried out.
- 5.8 The Occupiers' Liability Act 1957 (revised 1984) provides a common duty of care to all visitors, taking into account current developments and good practice rather than relying on what has been acceptable in the past. It states that greater care is required where children are concerned, as 'an occupier must be prepared for children to be less careful than adults.'
- 5.9 The Equalities Act 2010 prohibits discrimination, harassment, and victimisation based on nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership (in employment only), pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 5.10 The Town and Country Planning (Tree Preservation) (England) Regulations 2012, administered by Local Planning Authorities (LPA) may be made to protect trees that bring significant amenity benefit to the local area. All types of trees can be protected, and a Tree Preservation Order (TPO) can protect anything from a single tree to all trees within a defined area or woodland.
- 5.11 The Occupiers Liability Acts places a legal obligation to maintain trees to ensure the safety of the public, and to consider as part of that obligation for any surrounding buildings.
- 5.12 Legislation including, but not exclusive to, s1 Localism Act 2011 and section 111 Local Government Act 1972 enables the Council to seek compensation for damage or loss of a Council owned tree when that damage is caused by a wilful or negligent actions.

Risk Implications

- 5.13 Financial constraints limit resource capacity to deliver the strategies. It is therefore anticipated that risks for non-delivery of some elements of the strategies are medium / high risk.

Policy Implications

- 5.14 This policy supports other local policy documents including the Biodiversity Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy and Local Plan.

Planning Implications

- 5.15 The development of the new town incorporated emphasis on green space, in all its forms.
- 5.16 Principal green spaces, woodlands, green corridors etc are afforded protection within the Local Plan.
- 5.17 Applications for development within other green spaces are considered on the basis of quality, quantity and community needs.
- 5.18 To ensure provision of adequate green space, including woodlands, for future will require the protection of green space and the provision of new, good quality green spaces within future developments.
- 5.19 While the overarching goal is to protect green spaces, there are instances where strategically disposing of smaller, lower-value spaces can be beneficial, however this will only be considered if there is adequate access to suitable other green spaces. This approach allows for the reallocation of resources to enhance and maintain higher-quality green spaces that better serve the community's needs.

Environmental Implications

- 5.20 The provision of “*more / better parks and green spaces*” was identified as the top priority for Stevenage residents.
- 5.21 The provision of “*tree / shrub / grass maintenance*” was identified as being in the top ten of priorities for Stevenage residents in 2021/22 and 2022/23.
- 5.22 Public awareness of the impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss has increased, and there is growing pressure to do more to support wildlife locally.

Climate Change Implications

- 5.23 Urban green spaces offer great opportunities for positive change and the sustainable development of our cities.
- 5.24 The Green Spaces Strategy identifies a range of actions that will support corporate efforts to mitigate some of the effects of climate change for people and wildlife.
- 5.25 Trees help the response to the climate crises by capturing unavoidable emissions, improving air quality, absorbing pollutants, and helping to mitigate surface water flooding.
- 5.26 One of the best ways of making our towns and cities more hospitable in the coming decades is to protect / increase the number, and size, of trees in our urban areas.

Staffing and Accommodation Implications

- 5.27 A permanent, Green Spaces Projects Manager post is required to support the successful delivery of strategy, and the community engagement associated with many of the actions.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.28 The strategy seeks to improve physical access to green spaces, access to information about the facilities and opportunities associated with green spaces, and to improve the perception of personal safety whilst using green spaces in Stevenage.

Service Delivery Implications

- 5.29 Recruitment to a Green Spaces Development Officer post will support the successful delivery of strategy, and the community engagement associated with many of the actions.

Background documents

- 1.1 **All documents that have been used in compiling this report, that may be available to the public, i.e. they do not contain exempt information, should be listed here:**

- BD1 Green Spaces Strategy 2025 – 2035
BD2 Tree & Woodland Strategy 2025 - 2035
BD2 Responses to Resident Consultation 2023
BD3 Resident Consultation Responses to original draft document

APPENDICES

- A: Executive Summaries
B: Draft Green Spaces Strategy 2025 – 2035
C: Draft Tree & Woodland Strategy 2025 - 2035
C: Equality Impact Assessments