

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE

INFORMAL MINUTES

Date: Monday, 3 November 2025

Time: 6.00pm

Place: MS TEAMS

Present: Councillors: Leanne Brady (Chair), Jim Brown, Robert Boyle, Forhad Chowdhury, Alistair Gordon, Andy McGuinness, Claire Parris, Ceara Roopchand, Peter Wilkins and Jade Woods

Also in attendance: Portfolio Holder for Environment Councillor Rob Broom

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 8.00pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dermot Kehoe

2 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

The purpose of the report was for Cabinet to note the actions taken and the progress made on the strategic themes from the 2020 Climate Change Strategy.

Officers explained the nine levels for the Climate Change Strategy. These were broken into:

Global Climate Action

- The Paris agreement and NDCs remained the cornerstone of global climate action.

National Climate Action

- The UK was aiming for an 81% reduction in Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG) by 2035 and net zero by 2050 – one of the most ambitious targets globally.
- Emissions continue to decline, especially after the closure of the last coal power station in September 2024.

Members raised questions regarding national targets not mirroring regional targets and highlighted the challenges of reducing these emissions in the next five years.

Larger Businesses

- Stevenage hosts prominent businesses (aerospace, biotechnology, defence) which were on track to meet corporate net-zero targets.

- The Council continued to collaborate to share best practices and learning.

Regional/Countywide

- Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) was key for collaboration and investment at this level.
- Projects included:
 - Solar Together (Round 3): 33 installations complete with a 130kW capacity, with the scheme aimed at private homes.
 - Your Tree, Our Future: 5,831 trees planted, with the next phase due December 2025. It was noted that Stevenage had a 22% tree canopy cover, which was above the 19% threshold.
 - LEVI Programme: The national scheme aimed to increase Electric Vehicle (EV) provision. It was currently out for tender, with appointments expected in the coming weeks.
 - Hertfordshire Local Retrofit Strategy: Developing delivery model and finance options.

Discussions took place regarding how the Solar Together Project was being advertised and the low participation uptake in the project across the town.

Questions were raised about the monitoring of tree survival rates. It was noted that this would be for the Stevenage Direct Services Team to respond to. Tree planting targets were also discussed.

The Portfolio Holder for Environment noted that the Miyawaki tree planting method had been used across the town, with another four woods to be planted over the next two years.

Comments were raised regarding the uneven distribution of tree cover across wards, and it was suggested that data could be used to prioritise areas with lower coverage for future planning.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) highlighted the need for strong cross boundary collaboration and what impact this would have on the HCCSP.

Stevenage Level

- Stevenage achieved its lowest recorded emissions under the influence of the local authority in 2023, with steady decline since 2005.
- Transport and domestic sectors remained the largest emissions contributions in the town.
- Monitoring continued to ensure reductions were sustained and were not a by-product of higher energy costs affecting households or businesses.

Questions were raised regarding travel to work patterns for Officers of the Council. It was noted that a staff active travel survey was complete in 2023/24, but commuting patterns had not shifted. Officers explained the cycle to work scheme and EV car clubs offered to staff which had a low uptake.

Discussions took place regarding the local plan provision and the social, economic and environmental elements.

It was noted that further work was needed to make informed decisions regarding travel to work patterns, which Unison and Active Travel Working Groups were looking into.

It was noted that additional work was required to enable more informed decision-making on travel to work patterns, with Unison and Active Travel Working Groups currently examining this matter.

Officers explained that SBC's emissions had dropped by 61%, which was driven by zero carbon tariff electricity and Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) biofuel, in comparison to the 2018 baseline.

The challenge of setting targets within the Council's boundaries was discussed. It was noted that work from home emissions should fall under Scope 3, as the organisation does not have direct control over them, making it difficult to establish a baseline for these emissions.

Members acknowledged that although the Council did not directly manage working from home emissions, transparency remained important. Members discussed the hybrid shift in work arrangements, and it was agreed that data collection on the impacts of hybrid working would be useful for future reporting and decision making.

The Chair questioned about the Scope 3 emissions related to the transport of waste abroad. It was noted there were issues with the quality of waste data, and discussions around a strategy needed to improve data collection from partners.

Local Engagement

- Ongoing events and presentations with stakeholders.
- Educational resources shared with schools and communities.
- CCCF projects (2024/25) supporting waste reduction, biodiversity, water, and climate adaptation.

Council's Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Accounting and Emissions

The objectives included:

- To produce an accurate GHG Accounting Report for 2024/25, which would include Scope 1,2 and partial Scope 3 emissions.
- Update the baseline to 2023/24 to track reductions.
- Improve data collection and storage for future reporting.

Officers explained the progress so far on the report and it was noted that over 600 assets had been reviewed and categorised.

Officers then discussed the eight strategic themes at the Stevenage Level.

1) Businesses

- 147 local businesses had joined the Wenta Zero Action Programme.
- UKSPF Sustainable Business Programme
- £70k from the Green Business Grant Scheme supporting eight businesses.

2) Homes

- Major retrofit schemes in place to improve 620 council homes.
- An aim to reach EPC Band C by 2023 for all council homes - £11.4 million required for remaining upgrades.
- Warm Homes Local Grant open for private homes.

3) Waste and Recycling

- Campaigns on sustainable living and recycling.
- Flat block recycling and food waste collections expanding.

4) People

- Climate Change Champions.
- Climate Adaptation and Risk Assessments.

5) Construction and Regeneration

- Ongoing regeneration of the new Leisure Centre, Public Services Hub and indoor market.

6) Transport

- HVO fuel switch and six EVs added to the Council's fleet.
- New cycle hire scheme, EV charging infrastructure and active travel initiatives.

7) Energy and Water

- Zero carbon electricity tariff and site energy audits.
- Lighting and building upgrades across council sites.
- Water efficiency and monitoring projects underway.

8) Biodiversity

- Tree and woodland projects progressing (target 4,000 trees by 2030).
- Biodiversity Action Plan and volunteer work ongoing.
- Trees and Woodland Strategy
- Green Spaces Strategy

The Chair thanked officers for their presentation and asked Members to email across any further questions.