

Meeting Cabinet
Portfolio Area Environment, Planning and Transport
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CLIMATE CHANGE – ANNUAL UPDATE OCTOBER 2026

KEY DECISION

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1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The report provides the annual update on delivery Stevenage's Climate Change Strategy covering Council-led action and progress across the eight strategic themes.
- 1.2 Work included implementing a new Greenhouse Gas Accounting Framework for Council's emissions, with a multi-scope inventory covering over 700 buildings, fuel and energy use, water use, and other indirect emissions.
- 1.3 In 2024, Stevenage recorded its lowest territorial emissions within local authority influence, at 275.7 ktCO_{2e} (2.2% lower than in 2023 and 52.6% below the 2005 level) with per capita emissions of 3.0 tCO_{2e}, below the Hertfordshire and East of England average.
- 1.4 The report highlights actions delivered in 2025/26 including those done with partners and local communities. These create wider benefits for residents and businesses including warmer homes and buildings which are cheaper to heat, increasing greenspaces and assets for community wellbeing and

enhancing the natural environment. Measures to be delivered in 2026/27 will build on these to increase benefits to more of our residents, whilst improving our environment.

- 1.5 While the Council continues to make steady progress towards its sustainability objectives, achieving its long-term goals will require ongoing legislative and financial support from central Government to ensure local living standards and energy efficiency continue to rise.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS - CABINET:

- 2.1 That the 2026 Climate Change Annual Update (Appendix 1), detailing 2025/26 delivery, be noted.
- 2.2 That Cabinet approves the forward-looking actions for 2026/27 as set out in 3.22.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Following the declaration of a Climate Emergency in June 2019, Stevenage Borough Council (the Council) committed to achieving net-zero emissions by 2030, recognising that this transition is deeply intertwined with building a sustainable future, thriving local economy, and improved quality of life. This commitment is supported by the 2020 Stevenage Climate Change Strategy, and guided by the online Climate Action Plan Tracker, while embedding “Tackling Climate Change” as a core priority within the Making Stevenage Even Better Corporate Plan to build long-term community resilience, enhance local environmental quality, and safeguard residents’ wellbeing.
- 3.2 This year’s report marks an evolution in reporting by adopting a streamlined 6-level structure for climate action (Global, National, Region & County, Town, Council, and Local Community) to prioritise local delivery and tangible impacts communications.

PROGRESS ACROSS THE 6-LEVEL FRAMEWORK

- 3.3 The following summarises the 6-level framework adopted by the Council and the main steps being taken under each:
- 3.4 **Global Context:** Grounded in the Paris Agreement (2015) framework, targeting limits on global warming to 1.5 °C. Aligned with international milestones, including the UK’s commitment at COP¹29 (Baku, 2024) to cut GHG emissions by at least 81% by 2035 relative to 1990 levels.
- 3.5 **National Context:** Structured around the UK’s legally binding net-zero target for 2050 and provisional 2025 territorial emissions data showing a 54% reduction since 1990. Benefitting from national programmes such as the Warm Homes Plan, the Local Power Plan, and the establishment of Great

¹ COP: Conference of the Parties

British Energy, alongside responding to national adaptation warnings regarding extreme heat, flooding, and drought.

- 3.6 **Region & County:** Delivering joint county-wide projects through the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) such as Solar Together, “Your Tree, Our Future” planting, and the Hertfordshire Retrofit Strategy development and implementation and continuing to prepare for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- 3.7 **The Town (Town-Level Data):** According to DESNZ² 2024 data (published in June 2026), Stevenage recorded its lowest territorial emissions within local authority influence at 275.7 ktCO_{2e}, a 2.2% drop from 2023 and 52.6% lower than in 2005. Per capita emissions stood at 3.0 tCO_{2e}, falling below the wider Hertfordshire (3.1 tCO_{2e}) and East of England (3.6 tCO_{2e}) averages. Sector breakdown shows that Domestic (30.72%) and Transport (29.06%) are the main emitting sources in the town.
- 3.8 **The Council (Operations & Governance):** Established a comprehensive and rigorous internal multi-scope Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Accounting Framework including a GHG inventory covering over 700 assets under the operational control consolidation approach (see *Background Document - GHG Reporting Framework Main Report*), replacing legacy baselines to govern future reduction strategies and decision-making. The revised market-based baseline (including all Scopes 1, 2 and 3) for FY 2023/24 stands at 4,710.12 tCO_{2e}, with FY 2024/25 emissions recorded at 4,458.44 tCO_{2e} (a 5.3% reduction). Formal progress tracking against the 2030 target is based on a dedicated target-tracking boundary comprising market-based Scope 1 and 2 and a selected subset of Scope 3 assets, standing at 2,998.76 tCO_{2e} for FY23/24 and 2,714.46 tCO_{2e} for FY24/25 (a 9.5% annual reduction).
- 3.9 **Local Community:** Engaging residents via the Climate Action Plan Tracker. Participated in Stevenage Day with a climate action stall in the STEM Village. Approved and funded 10 ward-level community-led green projects via the Climate Change Community Fund (CCCF). The approved projects covered a diverse range of environmental and sustainability enhancements across the borough: tree planting & improvements, community gardens & nature areas, rainwater harvesting, active travel infrastructure, and bulb planting.

DELIVERY ACROSS THE 8 STRATEGIC THEMES

- 3.10 The following sets out the key areas of delivery the Council has made across the 8 strategic themes:
- 3.11 **Businesses:**
- Supported SMEs³ through 200 Wenta’s Action Zero Gold Memberships to create carbon reduction plans.
 - Delivered the Small Business Sustainability Support Programme (workshops, audits, consultancy) via Sustainable X using UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

² DESNZ: UK Department for Energy Security and Net Zero

³ SMEs: Small and Medium-sized Enterprises

- Awarded £70,000 Green Business Grant to seven SMEs/charities to implement energy-saving measures and clean technologies.
- Promoted green skills through North Hertfordshire College's Town Centre Campus and the Pioneering Young STEM⁴ Futures programme.
- Continued embedding Social Value via the Social Value Portal and national TOMs⁵ framework.
- Enacted the Co-operative Procurement Strategy 2025-2028.

3.12 **Homes:**

- Progressing toward EPC⁶ Band C for all Council homes by 2030 (currently ~66% compliant). Subject to affordability through Housing Revenue Account and UK Government funding availability.
- Completed the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 2.1: £2.62m grant + £3.97m Council match. 237 homes retrofitted using a fabric-first approach.
- Progressed the Major Refurbishment Contract, delivering insulation, efficient lighting, and upgraded windows/doors into properties.
- Started Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund (£3.85m grant + £3.15m Council match) to upgrade c.379 Council homes by 2028.
- Supported 48 private households via ECO4⁷ and GBIS⁸ schemes.
- Secured and started delivery of £1.5m from the Warm Homes: Local Grant to upgrade ~100 low-income private homes by 2028.
- Supported the delivery of Solar Together and the Hertfordshire Retrofit Strategy through HCCSP.
- Delivered sustainable new-build housing using a 5-star quality design approach.

3.13 **Construction & Regeneration:**

- Advanced construction of the all-electric, fossil-fuel-free Sports & Leisure Centre (featuring solar panels and heat pumps), completing in late 2027.
- Relocated the Indoor Market to a modern, all-electric facility; and repurposed the old building into a new Engineering and Construction Campus.
- Adopted the Local Plan Partial Review (July 2026) with strengthened policies on operational emissions, energy use, cooling, water efficiency, decentralised energy systems, green infrastructure, and SuDS⁹.

3.14 **Waste & Recycling:**

- Worked with the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership toward zero waste to landfill by 2030.
- Upgraded eight neighbourhood recycling sites using UK Shared Prosperity Fund and CCCF funding.

⁴ STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics.

⁵ TOMs: Themes, Outcomes, and Measures.

⁶ EPC: Energy Performance Certificate.

⁷ ECO4: Energy Company Obligation - Phase 4.

⁸ GBIS: Great British Insulation Scheme.

⁹ SuDS: Sustainable Drainage Systems.

- Completed Flat-Block Recycling Pilot Phase 2 across 41 blocks funded by £719k of EPR¹⁰ funding, introducing custom three-wheeled bins, and expecting a 4% uplift in borough recycling rate.
- Rolled out weekly food waste collections to 38,000 properties (77,000 caddies deployed), alongside commercial food waste services.
- Recovered 240 unwanted or fly-tipped bikes through Recycle Your Cycle.
- Promoted Herts Sustainable Families initiatives.

3.15 **People & Awareness:**

- Integrated "Tackling Climate Change" as a Corporate Plan priority.
- Established a 28-member staff Climate Champions group with dedicated topic sub-groups (e.g., active travel, recycling, events).
- Promoted carbon literacy training for officers and members via LGA¹¹ and APSE¹².
- Updated the Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA) (~50 climate risks) and integrated findings into corporate and operational risk registers.
- Prepared a 5-Year Climate Adaptation Plan.

3.16 **Biodiversity:**

- Planted 121 new street trees while maintaining ~30,100 trees and 18 woodlands.
- Delivered additional tree planting and woodland management (Lanterns Lane) funded via CIL¹³.
- Supported the delivery of the "Your Tree, Our Future" planting scheme.
- Created three new Miyawaki micro-woods (3,000 whips) at Peartree Park, Chells Park, and Symonds Green.
- Adopted the Tree & Woodland Strategy and Green Spaces Strategy (June 2025).
- Started implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan (2024-2028) (including a dedicated tracker portal).
- Established full Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) monitoring via Exacom/Uniform, securing delivery sites at Chells Park, Canterbury Way, and Fishers Green.
- Green Space Volunteers contributed over 1,700 hours to green space improvements.
- New wildflower areas were created at Fairlands Valley Lakes and St Nicholas Park.

3.17 **Transport:**

- Switched the entire Council's road fleet to 100% Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO), cutting direct emissions by 98.6% (c. 760 tCO_{2e} avoided).
- Expanded the EV fleet to include seven electric vehicles and vans.
- Re-launched the Beryl Bikes Cycle Hire Scheme (150 e-bikes, 45 bays), recording over 90,000 journeys and 239,000 km cycled by mid-2026.

¹⁰ EPR: Extended Producer Responsibility.

¹¹ LGA: Local Government Association.

¹² APSE: Association for Public Service Excellence.

¹³ CIL: Community Infrastructure Levy.

- Installed seven secure cycle hangars across the town.
- Partnered with HCC¹⁴ under LEVI¹⁵ funding (Urban Fox awarded as the CPO in December 2025) for public EV charger rollouts in late autumn 2026.
- Approved licensing fee discounts for Hackney Carriages and Private Hire vehicles (50% for Zero Emission Vehicles, 25% for Ultra-Low Emission Vehicles).

3.18 **Energy & Water:**

- Maintained Zero Carbon for Business tariff with EDF for corporate electricity supply, guaranteeing zero Scope 2 emissions.
- Completed Phase 1 of the Gordon Craig Theatre lighting refit (replacing auditorium fittings with LEDs¹⁶) and awarded Phase 2 for stage lighting.
- Delivered LED upgrades at the Town Centre Clocktower, St George's & Westgate Multi-Storey Car Parks, and Daneshill House.
- Partnered with Everyone Active to drive energy efficiency (boilers, BMS¹⁷, LED lighting) across leisure sites.
- Appointed Telex Water as portfolio manager and launched a 15-month Automatic Meter Reading trial.
- Installed community rainwater harvesting systems (Roebuck shops and Greydells Allotments).
- Engaged with Great British Energy on future local funding and shared ownership models under the Local Power Plan.

3.19 Appendix 1 provides a detailed update on Stevenage's Climate Change Strategy and action plan delivery.

STRATEGIC CLASSIFICATION OF CLIMATE ACTIONS

3.20 To transparently demonstrate how the Council's climate actions deliver value and impacts, a detailed strategic assessment of climate-related interventions has been undertaken, cataloguing and evaluation major actions across delivery mechanisms, funding streams, influence pathways, and operational impact boundaries (as detailed in section 17 of Appendix 1).

3.21 The results highlight a balanced and proactive approach: while the majority of initiatives are directly council-led or capital-backed, a significant proportion actively leverages external grant funding, drives wider town-wide and community benefits, or directly cuts net operational GHG emissions (such as through fleet decarbonisation, estate energy efficiency, and extensive borough-wide green infrastructure management).

FORWARD-LOOKING DELIVERY ACTIONS FY 2026/27

3.22 The following forward-looking initiatives are planned for 2026/27 to maintain strategic momentum across the town and Council climate-related actions. To

¹⁴ HCC: Hertfordshire County Council.

¹⁵ LEVI: Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure.

¹⁶ LED: Light Emitting Diode.

¹⁷ BMS: Building Management System.

ensure these measures resonate directly with local residents, they are explicitly designed to bring practical benefits back to our community, easing cost-of-living pressures through lower utility bills, creating warmer and healthier homes and spaces, expanding accessible green spaces, and securing a cleaner, more resilient environment for every Stevenage resident. The focus remains on coupling environmental improvements with measures that improve people's daily lives and capture operational efficiencies.

Homes

- Continue delivering the Warm Homes: Social Housing programme with Equans to upgrade approximately c.379 Council homes by April 2028.
- Deliver Year 2 of the Warm Homes: Local Grant, providing energy performance upgrades and low-carbon heating to eligible low-income private households.
- Transition to a dedicated delivery vehicle for the Hertfordshire Retrofit Strategy (led by HCCSP).
- Review the Private Rented Sector Exemptions register for Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES).
- Continue applying a 5-star approach to housing development projects.

Energy & Water

- Continue consolidating and monitoring Council utility bills and meter reading procedures.
- Explore decarbonisation and green energy across Council assets and operationalise a building decarbonisation group focused on prioritised sites.
- Progress Phase 2 of the Gordon Craig Theatre lighting project, installing LED stage lights to complete the high-efficiency transition.
- Implement rainwater harvesting opportunities at allotment sites.

Biodiversity

- Plant over 100 more trees, including CIL-funded initiatives, and tree replacement policies. Miyawaki micro-woods, the "Your Tree, Our Future" scheme, and other local projects are also considered.
- Develop CIL-funded meadow improvement works.
- Carry out developer-funded improvements to Fishers Green Common Pond.
- Continue work to implement the Biodiversity Action Plan via targeted conservation and update its online tracker portal.
- Implement the Tree & Woodland Strategy's targeted actions, focusing on increasing canopy cover and nature connectivity.
- Implement actions outlined in the Green Spaces Strategy (2025-2035).
- Implement and monitor Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) actions.

Construction & Regeneration

- Continue progress in construction of the New Sports & Leisure Centre.
- Continue to work with regeneration partners committed to zero-carbon operations and responsible development.

Waste & Recycling

- Complete improvement works at flats to ensure they have access to recycling services, in line with Simpler Recycling legislation.
- Introduce kerbside flexible plastics recycling for all households by 31 March 2027.
- Promote recycling via communications and resident and schools' engagement.
- Promote Recycle your Cycle, Herts Sustainable Families, and other initiatives through the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership.

Businesses

- Keep on implementing Social Value and the Cooperative Procurement Strategy.
- Add sustainability objectives to Pavement Licensing and Street Trading Policies targeting single-use plastics and efficient outdoor heating.

People & Awareness

- Continue the Climate Change Community Fund (CCCF), using an enhanced model to empower resident-led climate projects via Cooperative Neighbourhoods.
- Maintain and update the online climate action tracker portal.
- Publish the termly Sustainability Newsletter for schools and colleges.
- Fully operationalise the GHG Accounting framework to standardise climate tracking across the Council.
- Complete the Climate Adaptation Plan and continue embedding high-priority climate risks into the Council's risk registers.
- Continue delivering the Climate Champions programme focusing on recycling, events, active travel, and green workspaces.
- Assess and propose upgrades for Stevenage Day and other events' sustainability features.

Transport

- Move toward the physical installation of public EV charging points funded by LEVI in partnership with HCC.
- Deliver public artworks for the Stevenage Heart Trails at Fairlands Valley Park, Millennium Path, and King George V Playground to promote active travel.
- Install more secure cycle hangars across the town.
- Monitor Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO) usage across fleet operations.
- Assess future fleet requirements for an electrification roadmap (including Cavendish base analysis and replacement cycles).

4 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The annual update on climate change actions is a significant mechanism to ensure the Council maintains transparent, robust, and auditable tracking of its progress toward its broader sustainability and operational targets, ensuring that local delivery continues to improve residents' lives and protect the environment while meeting its net-zero target.
- 4.2 Noting the annual update and endorsing the forward-looking delivery actions for FY 2026/27 allow members to evaluate past delivery performance (such as the successful rollout of 100% HVO across the Council road fleet, major social housing retrofits lowering utility bills and tackling fuel poverty, estate energy efficiency measures, and grassroots community projects funded via the Climate Change Community Fund) alongside future planned activities in local decarbonisation, waste management, active travel, and biodiversity, among others.
- 4.3 Alternative options to this course of action were assessed, as indicated below.
- 4.4 Option 1: Do nothing. This option was rejected because failing to actively progress and report on climate action would lack transparency, fail to meet emerging public expectations for local environmental leadership, and leave the Council without a structured mechanism to manage future environmental and climate responsibilities that directly affect residents' health, comfort, and financial wellbeing.
- 4.5 Option 2: Delay formal reporting of climate progress. This option was rejected because it would weaken future external funding bids (such as housing and retrofit grants that lower bills for residents) and leave the Council without a clear framework to evaluate long-term target progress and community benefits.
- 4.6 Option 3: Do not report annually to Cabinet. This option was rejected because, while there is no strict statutory duty to produce an annual climate cabinet report, choosing not to report would hinder transparency, negatively impact strategic decision-making, undermine the Council's corporate priority of "Tackling Climate Change" as set out in the corporate plan, and weaken the commitment to achieving long-term community climate resilience and raising local living standards.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 5.1 Approving the annual update, the forward-looking programme, and the Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reporting Framework has no direct, unbudgeted financial impact. The delivery of individual climate, retrofit, and biodiversity initiatives will continue to be managed through existing capital and revenue budgets, external grants, Section 106 contributions, and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), among others.

- 5.2 The Council will continue to allocate £97,500 per year from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) through the Climate Change Community Fund (CCCF), supporting ward-level sustainability projects led by community organisations.
- 5.3 Achieving net zero by 2030 will require strong business cases. If Government support falls short, existing projects may need reprioritisation to manage financial pressures.

Legal Implications

- 5.4 There are no direct legal implications arising from noting the annual update or adopting the updated GHG baseline and reporting framework. The actions align with the requirements of the Climate Change Act 2008 and prepare the Council for emerging public sector reporting standards.

Risk Implications

- 5.5 Endorsing the updated framework mitigates data and reporting risks by establishing a verified multi-scope baseline across over 700 assets under the operational control approach. Failure to adopt a standardised framework would increase the risk of audit non-compliance and misalignment during the transition to new unitary authorities.
- 5.6 Delivery is challenged by internal capacity limits, supply chain issues, and reliance on external partners, potentially delaying progress and raising costs.
- 5.7 Missing the 2030 net-zero target could damage the Council's or the new unitary authority's reputation amid growing public scrutiny and national benchmarking. National policy shifts or delays may disrupt local plans, while stricter regulations could increase compliance burdens and expenses.

Policy Implications

- 5.8 The annual update on climate change supports the Council's own Climate Change Strategy delivery and wider corporate ambitions for a low carbon future across the town.
- 5.9 The actions outlined are consistent with wider corporate priorities, including the Medium-Term Financial Plan, Housing and Regeneration strategies, the Local Plan, and the Co-operative Procurement Strategy.
- 5.10 At the county level, the report aligns with the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership (HCCSP) priorities.
- 5.11 Nationally, the report supports Government strategies such as the Warm Homes Plan, the Local Power Plan, and the UK's commitment to carbon budgets under the Climate Change Act 2008 (as amended).

Climate Change Implications

- 5.12 This report highlights the risks, challenges, and opportunities that the Council must address, not only GHG emissions but its wider climate action aspirations. Actions outlined contribute directly to reducing GHG emissions across housing, transport, procurement, energy, and biodiversity.

- 5.13 The proposals also support climate adaptation and resilience. Workstreams such as the Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA), biodiversity enhancement, and sustainable urban drainage systems (SuDS) policies strengthen the town's ability to cope with flooding, heatwaves, and other extreme weather impacts.
- 5.14 Failure to progress climate action would increase local vulnerability to climate risks, undermine national and countywide net-zero objectives, and expose the Council to higher long-term costs.

Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 5.15 The climate initiatives endorsed within the report, specifically fuel poverty mitigation, home energy efficiency grants, and community-led ward projects, actively support vulnerable groups and help address health and socioeconomic inequalities across Stevenage.