

# Stevenage

Hertfordshire

'Mark One' New Town – Designated 11 November 1946

Stevenage was the first New Town to be designated under the New Towns Act 1946. Located in Hertfordshire, it was one of the first-wave 'ring towns' designed to accommodate overspill from London and create a better environment in which to live and work. The pioneer New Town (which was nicknamed 'Silkingrad' by early protesters in reference to Lewis Silkin, Minister of Town and Country Planning) has developed into a town with a successful economy. Stevenage Borough is a tightly bound urban authority, and the urban area reaches up to the administrative boundary in many places, and, to the north-east, spreads across into the neighbouring North Hertfordshire District. This geography creates challenges for planning for housing growth today.



## Key facts:

- **Location:** 30 kilometres north of London, on the A1(M) and East Coast Main Line, and in close proximity to the M25 and Luton, Stansted and Heathrow Airports.
- **2011 Census population:** 83,957, in 34,898 households.<sup>1</sup>
- **Local authority:** Stevenage Borough Council.
- **Local Plan status:** Saved policies from Stevenage District Local Plan (adopted 2004).

## New Town designation:

- **Designated:** 11 November 1946.
- **Designated area:** 2,456 hectares.
- **Intended population:** 60,000, revised to 80,000 'plus natural growth' (population at designation: 6,700).
- **Development Corporation:** Aimed to provide for the growth of industry and commerce concurrently with population to provide local employment, and to provide accommodation primarily for those working in the town, to avoid Stevenage becoming a dormitory town. Development Corporation wound up 31 March 1980.

## Housing, deprivation and health:

- The proportion of homes in Stevenage that are owner-occupied (58.2%) is 0.4% and 5.3% lower than the UK New Towns and the UK averages, respectively. Nearly one-third of households in Stevenage are in social rent (28.4%) – 6.9% and 10.2% higher than the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively. At 11.4%, the proportion of privately rented households is 1.5% and 4.9% below the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively.
- Stevenage has a slightly higher proportion of deprived households (by 1%) than the English New Towns and England averages.
- The 2011 Census reported that the proportion of Stevenage residents with 'very good' (47.0%) and 'good' (35.7%) health is broadly consistent with, or higher than, the UK New Towns and UK averages. There is a lower proportion of residents with 'bad' or 'very bad' health than the UK New Towns and

UK averages. 3.6% declared themselves to be in 'bad' health (0.7% lower than the English New Towns and England averages), and 1% declared 'very bad' health (0.2% and 0.3% below the UK New Towns and UK averages, respectively).

## Employment/economic profile:

- The town has a successful economy which has recorded job growth in excess of regional and national averages over the last 15 years. There is a strong presence of high-value, knowledge-intensive industries.
- There is a sharp contrast between resident and workplace earnings, with higher-paid jobs often filled by in-commuters from elsewhere, taking advantage of Stevenage's excellent transport links.
- Within Hertfordshire LEP.
- The Borough's resident workforce is characterised by below-average skill levels and educational attainment.

## Development Corporation legacy:

- The masterplan is still referred to by council planners.
- The pedestrianised town centre was used as a model for planners and architects for many years.
- The road layout and design accommodates traffic levels which were never envisaged.
- The structure and abundance of green space remains important and valued.
- The town still works, is popular, and wants to grow.
- The western side of the town centre was never effectively realised and the link between the railway station and town square is weak as a result. Today, this results in a confusing entrance to the town centre for visitors arriving by rail.

## Key issues for the future:

- Town centre regeneration.
- Ensuring that infrastructure is adequate (especially transport).
- Encouraging highly skilled earners to live locally.
- Planning for housing growth within a tightly bound urban area surrounded by Green Belt and without strategic planning.

<sup>1</sup> Figure for the tightly defined Stevenage Borough area rather than the functional urban area

## Did you know?

Novelist EM Forster lived in Stevenage (1884-1894) and set his novel *Howard's End* in the area.