



St Stephen Parish Council: Strategic Plan 2021 – 2026

Adopted: 18 February 2021

Reviewed: 22 December 2021

Review due: May 2022

THE PARISH COUNCIL VISION

Community	<i>Support our local communities, encourage inclusion and diversity</i>
Environment	<i>Protect and enhance our local environment</i>
Governance	<i>Promote participation, good management and efficiency</i>

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Executive Summary

The nature of local government has changed significantly over the last decade and it is likely that parish councils will continue to take on more responsibilities in the future.

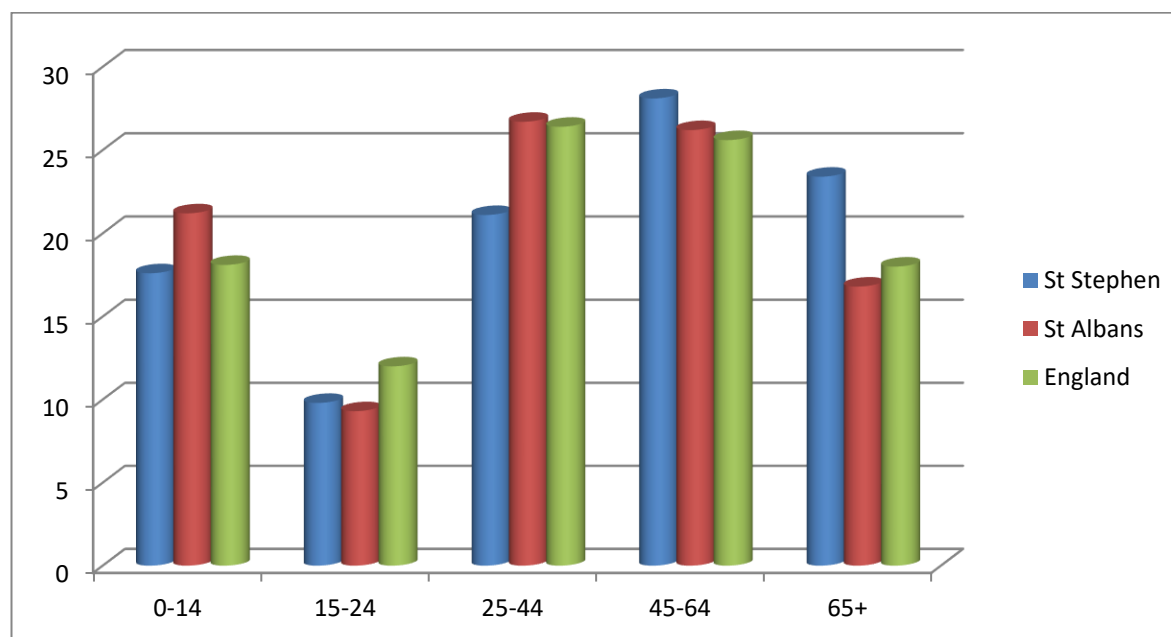
This plan sets out the priorities the Council has set itself for the next five years (2021–2026), in order to ensure that it is best placed to meet those challenges. The aim of the Plan is to give the community an understanding of what the Parish Council is working on and what it aims to achieve. It is intended to be a working document which the Council will update regularly.

Profile of the Parish

The Parish consists of three main villages Bricket Wood, Chiswell Green and Park Street, with the latter incorporating the areas of How Wood, Frogmore and Colney Street. The division of the Parish by the M1 (running north to south) and the M25 (running east to west) means that community identity is much focussed on the three individual main villages rather than the Parish as a whole. The Parish Council recognises that while each village flourishes independently, it looks to support and provide services for the community as a whole.

The population of the Parish is 13,865 (2011 census). This is approximately 10% of those living in St Albans district. Estimates from 2017 suggest that the Parish population has since risen by 2.2% to 14,177 – a figure which is expected to increase still further given the three housing developments of Harperbury Park (232 dwellings) Hanstead Park (138 dwellings) and Lancaster Gate (100 dwellings), which are already under construction, plus the target of an additional 90 units per year for the next decade as proposed by the recent Housing Needs Assessment, prepared for the District Council by AECOM in August 2017. Latest Government advice, which is informing the St Albans Emerging Local Plan, suggests that the target for St Albans District may be 913 homes per year between 2020 and 2032, with a significant proportion likely to be identified as within the Parish.

Compared to the District, the Parish has a high percentage of residents aged 65+, which account for nearly one quarter of its population. Equally, there is a high proportion of adults aged between 45 and 65 years. By implication the proportion of younger adults (aged 25 to 44 years) is much lower than the District and has fallen significantly since the beginning of the millennium.



How St Stephen Parish Council works

The Parish Council consists of 12 representatives who are democratically elected every four years (or co-opted to fill vacancies). The Parish is divided into 4 political wards that have the following number of representatives.

Bricket Wood East	1 Council Member
Bricket Wood West	3 Council Members
Chiswell Green	3 Council Members
Park Street	5 Council Members

From these 12 councillors a chair and vice-chair are elected annually.

The Parish Council makes decisions through committees and working parties that have delegated authority in line with the Council's standing orders. The Council has five Committees that decide (to varying extents) the strategic direction and organise much of the day to day business of the Council.

The Parish Council is funded by generating income through services delivered (such as hire of halls and sports pitches) and through raising a precept on the council tax charge. The 2020/2021 Council budget set a precept of £558,143 which equates to a council tax charge of £86.59 p.a. per council tax band D household. The Council's net expenditure for 2020/2021 is budgeted to be £725,409. (the difference being made up from hire income and grants)

Supporting the Parish Council is an officer structure to deliver services and to ensure that all decisions are made appropriately. The structure is headed by the Clerk, who is also the Council's statutory Responsible Financial Officer. The Clerk in turn is supported by a number of staff as shown below.

Committee Structure

Full Council	<u>Reports to</u>
Finance	Full Council
Human Resources	Full Council
Community & Leisure	Full Council
Annual Events Working Party (AEWP)	C&L / Full Council
Planning & Environment	Full Council
Neighbourhood Planning	P & E / Full Council
Fixed Assets	Full Council
Future Developments Working Party	Fixed Assets/Full Council

Other working parties or Task & Finish Groups (T&FG) to be agreed from time to time by Full Council – to be set with fixed time limit, only extended by resolution of Full Council.

Parish Council Objectives

1. Improve the ways in which we understand, engage with and involve members of the Parish community

Understanding our community

- ✓ Conduct regular Parish surveys and consultation exercises with residents and community groups, to better understand their needs and aspirations

Engaging with our community

- ✓ Create and maintain a database of community contacts
- ✓ Identify new opportunities for community engagement, for example by establishing a Youth Council or similar
- ✓ Improve the accessibility, relevance, ease of use and immediacy of our communication channels, including social media

Involving our community

- ✓ Increase involvement of the community in Parish Council activities, for example by:
 - including Residents Association representatives on committees and task-and-finish groups
 - supporting and encouraging local organisations to adopt and run community events
 - working with local sports groups, clubs and residents' groups to improve the range and quality of facilities available
 - seeking more involvement by local schools
 - increasing public input into the community awards scheme

2. Provide value-for-money by delivering our services with greater effectiveness and efficiency

- ✓ Improve the organisational management and efficiency of the Parish Council, for example by:
 - reviewing the staffing structure and objectives to ensure they reflect changing legislative and community needs
 - providing induction for new staff and members, and a training programme for staff
 - monitoring the competitiveness of hire charges and affordability
- ✓ Develop and implement a fixed assets strategy including, for example:
 - developing a fixed assets maintenance programme
 - evaluating the viability of the Parish Centre as a community and office space in the short, medium and long term
 - undertaking cost v benefit analyses associated with the provision of playgrounds, parks and sports pitches
 - exploring the opportunities for expansion at Greenwood Park Community Centre
- ✓ Improve our forward-planning, for example by:
 - developing succession planning for and flexibility in staff and members
 - formalising a process to identify Parish Council projects
 - considering future opportunities and challenges, including anticipated increases in powers and responsibilities

- ✓ Improving our financial control, for example by:
 - reviewing Actual v Budget v Forecast reconciliations by the Finance Committee and presented to Full Council
 - developing an investment strategy and undertaking ongoing management of investments
 - reviewing supplier performance to ensure continued value-for-money
- ✓ Pursue all possible appropriate forms of alternative revenue and funding, including maximising Section 106 (or Community Infrastructure Levy) monies available, including:
 - liaising with District Councillors to share strategy
 - advancing project planning to facilitate swift and easy release of funds

3. Promote the wellbeing, sustainability and inclusivity of our community

Wellbeing

- ✓ Promote positive planning and influencing local development, e.g., by:
 - delivering the Neighbourhood Plan
 - proactively engaging with major planning applications
 - promoting the Parish in the Local Plan development
- ✓ Seeking to safeguard the separate identities of the three villages and their environs, for example by:
 - protecting green corridors to prevent coalescence
 - promoting distinctive characteristics and features of the individual villages

Sustainability

- ✓ Promote and provide opportunities for the reduction of waste and increase of recycling, for example by:
 - encouraging 'paperless' office and digital communication
 - upgrading litter bins to recycling bins
 - promoting the use of more sustainable materials within the Parish Council, and by our concessions, licence holders and hirers
- ✓ Raise environmental awareness amongst employees and the community, for example by:
 - supporting events and organisations such as Sustainable St Albans, Ver Valley Society etc.
- ✓ Review and reduce energy costs and associated emissions Parish Council wide, for example by:
 - considering options for purchasing fuel efficient/electric/hybrid vehicles when replacing fleet
 - installing solar panels at Parish Council facilities
 - installing electric car charging points
- ✓ Promote and support a Community Energy Scheme
- ✓ Investigate grey water harvesting
- ✓ Protect green spaces, and promote and instigate environmental enhancement schemes, for example:
 - new tree and shrub planting
 - new ponds and water environments
 - environmental and habitat management
 - developing a green spaces works programme

Inclusivity

- ✓ Ensure the type and frequency of Parish Council events reflects a wide range of community interests
- ✓ Promote and support local voluntary groups
- ✓ Ensure that the Parish Council continues to provide diverse and inclusive leisure facilities
- ✓ Assess and improve disabled access and facilities in Parish Council facilities

Action Plan

Priority	Action	Responsible Committee/Officer	Performance Indicator	Timescale
	Improve the ways in which we understand, engage with and involve members of the Parish community			
1	Carry out Parish Survey	Community and Leisure	Draft to Community and Leisure committee Jan 22	Results published Mar 2022
2	Develop updated Communication strategy	Comms T&FG/Full Council	Draft strategy Jun 2022	Adopted Sep 2022
1	Delivering the Neighbourhood Plan	Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group	Draft for referendum Feb 2022	Adopted 2022
2	Promoting the Parish in the St Albans Local Development Plan	Planning & Environment	Input into District Local Plan Process	Ongoing to 2025?
3	Promoting diverse and inclusive leisure provision to meet the needs of the community as whole – review existing and update list of projects (Appendix A)	Community & Leisure	Review and update list of priorities following parish survey Aug 22	Dependent on funding
3	Support social needs within the whole community – initial contact with Residents Assns., Church, community, School and Youth Groups – update in Parish survey	Full Council / Youth T&FG	Projects identified and added to action plan & future projects list following Parish Survey Aug 22	Ongoing
1	Review Community events calendar – to lead on from Parish Survey and approach to community organisations	Community & Leisure/AEWP	2022/23 Plan for events by Mar 2022 2023/24 plan for events by Sep 2022	Ongoing
2	Establishing a Youth Council and/or delivering youth centred project/s	Full Council / Youth T&FG	Consultation with youth service providers/schools/groups Jul 2021 Project Plan and budget Sep 21	Sep 22- Sep 24

Priority	Action	Responsible Committee/Officer	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1	Inviting Res Assn / community group reps onto Community and Leisure and task and finish/working groups	Com & Leisure/ AEWP/Youth/ Woodbury Field	Initial invites by Spring 2021	Ongoing
2	Improving the community awards scheme with greater public input to awards – Follow on from appointing Community reps on committees.	Com & Leisure	Run community awards Sep-Dec 21 Review process Jan 22	Ongoing
2	Review involvement with the local schools (primary & secondary)	Com & Leisure/Youth T&FG	Start process Oct 22	Ongoing
2	Create and maintain database of contacts throughout Parish	Admin staff / communications T&FG	Identify need through parish survey Start compiling Sep 22	Jan 23 - ongoing
	Provide value-for-money by delivering our services with greater effectiveness and efficiency			
1	Undertaking a cost vs benefit review of services delivered by the parish council in terms of value for money eg sports pitches/play facilities/community centres and identify cost savings	Finance	Initial report Sep 22 –annual review	Ongoing
1	Following a review of the viability of the Parish Centre as a community and office space, plan for alternative facilities	Fixed Assets	Instruct consultant/project manager Jun 22	Report by Sep 22
1	Exploring the opportunities for expansion at Greenwood Park Community Centre	Fixed Assets	Instruct consultant/project manager Jun 22 Feed into budget Nov 22	Phase 1 Jan 23
1	Reviewing the staffing structure and objectives to ensure they meet with changing legislative and community needs	Clerk / HR	Instruct consultant Jan 22 Report Mar 22 Instigate changes Jun 22	Ongoing
2	Gaining the Local Council Award – ensuring policies and processes of the Council are good practice	Clerk / HR	Report to HR with action plan	April 23

Priority	Action	Responsible Committee/Officer	Performance Indicator	Timescale
2	Developing green spaces management plans	Planning & Environment / Finance	Consultation summer 22	Management plans complete Nov 22 Ongoing implementation
1	Developing a fixed assets maintenance programme	Fixed Assets / Finance	Initial programme Apr 22 + 6 monthly review	Ongoing
1	Training and development for staff and members	HR / Full Council	Training audit Mar 22. Annual review following appraisals	Ongoing
1	Developing an investment strategy and undertaking ongoing management of investments	Finance	Develop initial plan and update process Feb 2022	Ongoing
1	Reviewing supplier performance to ensure continued value for money	Clerk / Finance	Review timetable Apr 22. Annual Report to Finance in Sep	Ongoing
1	Formalising a process to identify suitable projects for listing, subject to available funding (S 106. Etc.)	Full Council	Initial List December 2021 Annual review February with this Strategy	Ongoing
	Promote the wellbeing, sustainability and inclusivity of our community			
2	Encourage paperless office and digital communication	Clerk & admin staff	Monitor expenditure on paper through budgeting process	Ongoing
2	Review waste collection and disposal systems to ensure efficient with increased recycling	Community & Leisure	Review Sept 2022 Implement changes and monitor	Ongoing
2	Improve sustainability in materials – adopt policies and procedures for increased sustainability eg use of peat/bedding plants	Planning & Environment	New policy end 2022/ programme of review of contracts	Ongoing
3	Supporting events & local organisations such as: Sustainable St Albans, Ver Valley Soc. Etc.	Community & Leisure	Cllrs & Admin to monitor organisations / press & social media and feed into office –	Ongoing

Priority	Action	Responsible Committee/Officer	Performance Indicator	Timescale
			'diary' to be a 'to note' item on Full Council Agendas	
2	Considering options for purchasing fuel efficient/electric/hybrid vehicles	Staff/Fixed assets	Rolling replacement programme devised Spring 2022	Ongoing
1	Plan for enhancing community and staff facilities at GWP inc solar panels, electric car charging points, accessible toilets, office space, increased car parking, new sport hall floor, energy efficient heating/lighting, grey water harvesting	Fixed Assets / Finance	Budgeting process, staff resource in place, funding plan, feasibility study, plans	2023/24
3	Promote and support Community Energy Scheme	Community & Leisure	Initial Report Summer 2022	2023/24
2	Tree & Shrub Planting - New ponds & water environments – Develop ongoing programme of development and enhancement on Parish controlled land	Planning & Environment	John Bell Copse – Winter/Spring 2021 Green space management plans complete Nov 22	Ongoing
1	Assess and develop accessibility enhancement programme, inc accompanied facilities at Greenwood Park	Fixed Assets	Fixed Asset Development Strategy Winter 21/22	Implementation ongoing dependent on funding

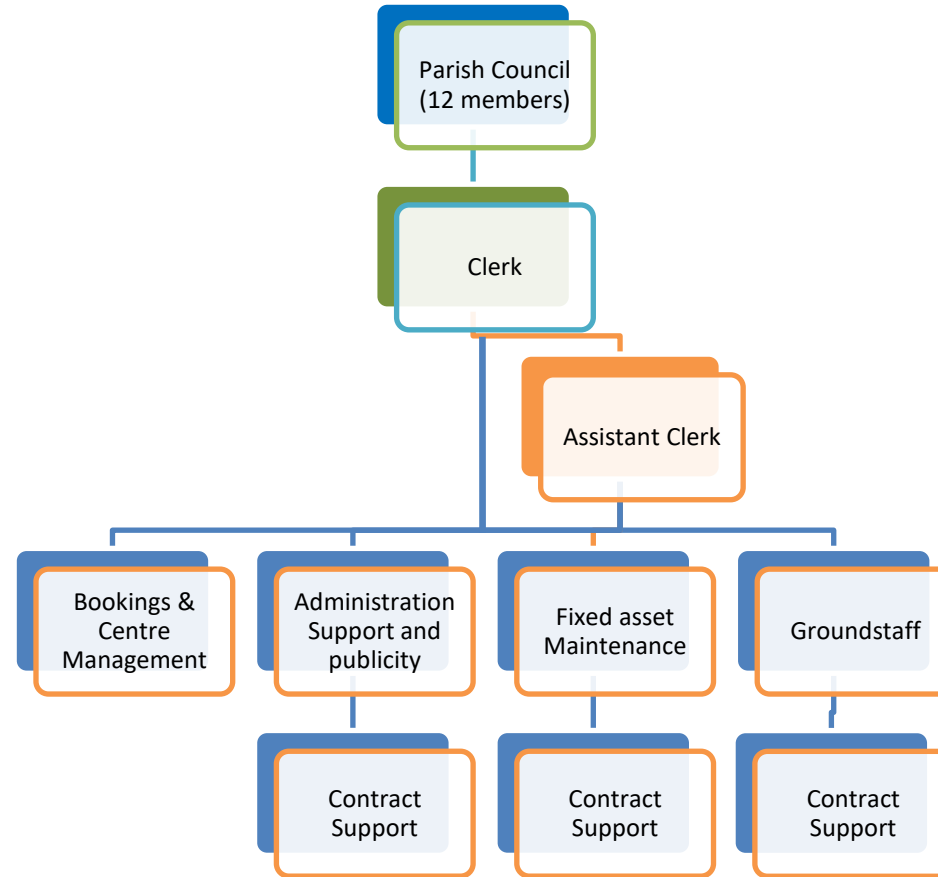
Appendix A – Projects Awaiting Funding

Priority	Loc	Item	Status of Scheme	Requires Planning /Approval	Est. Cost	Likely funding	Committee / Area	Notes
1	BW	Woodbury Field access, drainage & wetland	Concept	Poss	£45k	Council	Fixed Assets	
1	BW	Woodbury Field improve play and sports facilities	Initial Plans	Yes	£95k	S106 earmarked – part with SADC	Fixed Assets	Needs drainage /access done first
3	BW	Hanstead Wood – take on ownership/management	Concept	S106 amendment	£250K	Developer	Full Council	Dependent on developer transfer and commuted sum
2	BW	Blackgreen Wood management plan implementation	Concept	FC permission	£30K	Woodland Improvement grant / other grant	Fixed Assets	Management plan to be written/ commissioned
1	CG	Greenwood Park – extend facilities, car parking, office space, accessibility, energy efficiency measures, electric car charging points	Concept	Yes	£150K	Council/ Green grants/ loan /S106 Leisure fund with SADC	Fixed Assets	Budget for project management and first phase in 22/23
2	CG	Cherry Hill Play Area - Replace fence with native hedge and widen footpath	Planned	No	£12K	S106 S106 Green infrastructure fund with SADC	Fixed Assets	Previously agreed at Leisure committee

Priority	Loc	Item	Status of Scheme	Requires Planning /Approval	Est. Cost	Likely funding	Committee / Area	Notes
2	CG	North Close – creation of community orchard and garden, allotments and car parking	Concept	No	£50K?	Council/grant	Fixed Asset/Community & Leisure	
2	CG	St Julians Wood management plan implementation	Concept	FC permission	£30K?	Woodland Improvement grant / other grant	Fixed Assets	Management plan to be written /commissioned
2	CG	Boundary improvements – planting up, coppicing and fencing GWP boundaries	Concept	No	£20K?	S106	Fixed Assets	Management plan to be written /commissioned
3	CG	Astroturf pitch in GWP	concept	Yes	£100K	Sports Eng	Fixed Assets	
2	PS	Park Street Pavilion – structural work, bi-fold/patio doors, flooring, energy efficient heating	concept	No	£20K	Lottery, future S106	Fixed Assets	Needs devolvement of asset first
1	PS	Enhance play facilities at Park Street Rec	Initial plans	No	£100K	Council/future S106	Fixed Assets	First phase planned Feb 2022
2	PS	War memorial – restore wall and memorial, extend paving	Concept	No	???	Sponsorship/ grant/council	Fixed Assets	

Appendix B

St Stephen Parish Council – Outline of Organisation Structure



The Parish Council employs external support services to assist in the key areas of Information Technology, Human Resources and Health & Safety.

Appendix C

Assets & Resources

The Parish Council owns and manages a range of assets, as summarised below

Community buildings

Greenwood Park Community Centre

Greenwood Park Pavilion

Park Street Pavilion (on long term lease from St Albans District Council)

Parish Centre

Parish Centre Barn (staff only)

Parks and open spaces

Greenwood Park

Park Street Recreation Ground (on long term lease from St Albans District Council)

Parish Centre field

Woodbury Field (on a long term lease from St Albans District Council)

North Close

Mayflower Road

Cherry Hill

Park Street War Memorial

Woodland

Blackgreen Wood

St Julians Wood (within Greenwood Park)

Sports pitches

Greenwood Park

1 Cricket Square

3 Senior Football Pitches

1 Junior / 9v9 Football Pitch

1 Mini / 5v5 Football Pitch

Park Street

1 Cricket Square

1 Senior Football Pitch

1 9v9 Football Pitch

Bricket Wood

Informal pitch – Parish Centre

Allotments

Park Street Lane - 5 full plots

Watford Road - 25 full plots

Tippendell Lane - 44 full plots

Children's Play Areas

Chiswell Green

Cherry Hill, Greenwood Park, North Close

Park Street

Mayflower Road, Park Street Recreation Ground

Bricket Wood

Woodbury Field

The Parish Council has responsibility for, and undertakes

- ✓ Management, maintenance and development of its parks, including play areas and sports pitches
- ✓ Provision of a sports hall, pavilions and rooms for hire
- ✓ Upkeep of many of the bus shelters within the Parish
- ✓ Facilitating the organisation of, and support for various community events and activities,
- ✓ Provision of grants and discounts to support charities and local organisations
- ✓ Monitoring of planning applications and other policies and providing comment to District Council
- ✓ Accessing Section 106 funding available as a consequence of local development, *(Current potential Projects are listed in Appendix B attached)*

The Parish Council is in the process of developing a Neighbourhood Plan, which is well advanced and nearing the referendum stage. It also responds to consultations on planning matters at district, county and national levels.

The Parish Council maintains its own website and publishes occasional newsletters to inform the community of developments and upcoming activities. It also has its own Twitter account and manages a Greenwood Park Community Centre Facebook page. It contributes to local community social media groups, where appropriate.