



# Stevenston Local Place Plan

Prepared by Stevenston Community Council (2024)



# 1. Overview of the town

## Population

Stevenston has a long history of human occupation: it has been settled by humans since the Stone Age, and as a named settlement has existed for around 850 years. The settlement grew rapidly in the 20th century, in part as a result of the large explosives and chemical factories that were located at Ardeer from the 1870s. The current population is around 9000 people and is in sharp decline, declining by around 6% between 2011 and 2021.

## Deprivation

According to Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) data, Stevenston is the second most deprived town in Scotland, after Methil in Fife. Stevenston has a greater percentage of adults with long term, limiting physical or mental health conditions than any other settlement in North Ayrshire, and the lowest percentage of adults with good or very good self-assessed general health. Perhaps as a result of this, the town also has the highest percentage of adults who provide unpaid care. More so than any other population in the county, Stevenstonians perceive local crime as getting worse.

## Business

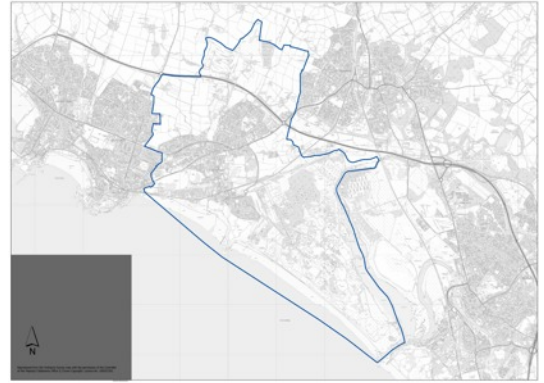
The ONS Business Register & Employment Survey reported that 3195 jobs were located in the town in 2022, more jobs per head of population than any other North Ayrshire settlement apart from Irvine. Most of these jobs are located in the town's industrial estates and retail park. Few of the jobs are located in the town centre. The town centre has relatively few shops - fewer shops per head than any other town in the county. In part, this is the result of the demolition of much of the town centre's retail infrastructure in the second half of the 20th century.

## Community facilities

Stevenston has four primary schools, a secondary school and an additional support needs school, a library, two community centres, a medical centre, and a care home. In recent years the decision was made to effectively move the town's swimming pool to Ardrossan, and most of the town's main playingfields have recently been lost to development. However, the town's leisure centre still has a gym and an ice rink, and a smaller set of playingfields are located at the eastern edge of the town.

## Natural environment

The town has several green spaces, including two Local Nature Reserves. Several green spaces - Ardeer Quarry, Auchenharvie, Kerelaw, Stevenston Beach, and the Ardeer Peninsula - have formal path networks that provide visitors with a variety of walking routes. Green space accessibility has significantly declined in recent years, with most of the town's largest green space, the Ardeer Peninsula, being fenced-off from the public by one of the landowners. The town suffers from an ongoing reduction in quality and area of green space. For example, the Ardeer Peninsula has suffered from large-scale habitat destruction in the form of woodland clearance and commercial sand dune removal, and farmland between the towns has gradually been lost to built development.



*A map of Stevenston, with the area covered by this Local Place Plan outlined in blue.*



*Most of the Ardeer housing estate is in the bottom decile of the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.*



*Chemring is one of several large employers in the town, currently employing 320 people.*



*Much of the Stevenston's green space has been lost to development such as sand extraction.*

## 2. Community Engagement

To ensure that the Local Place Plan reflects the opinions of local people, as free as possible from the biases of the creators of the plan, a data-driven, bottom-up approach was taken to create the plan. First, via a series of online surveys advertised over the town's community Facebook pages, community members generated ideas for how land in the town should be used. Over 200 responses were collected in this phase of the consultation.

Next, these ideas were then collated and, with duplicates removed, this collated list was presented in a new community survey in which respondents rated each idea in terms of how much they agreed with it. 140 Stevenston residents took part in this online survey, which was run using the Qualtrics online survey platform and advertised on the Stevenston Community Council Facebook page, the Stevenston Ayrshire Now and Then Facebook page and in the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald.

In the final stage of the consultation, 62 Stevenston residents took part in a Qualtrics survey advertised via the Stevenston Community Council Facebook page. This survey presented the plan as a whole (the plan being composed of the land use ideas that were agreed with by the majority of respondents in the previous survey) and measured respondents' level of agreement with the plan. 82.3% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the plan, 9.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed, 8.1% neither agreed nor disagreed.

In addition to asking questions about land use aspirations, the survey also asked the community to generate and, in a second survey, rate what aspects of Stevenston contribute most to their wellbeing and quality of life. Similar to the land use element of the survey, the output of this element of the survey was a collated list of community-generated, community-rated factors influencing quality of life.

### Summary of findings

The community's main aspirations for the town focussed on radically improving the town centre in terms of its open space and retail infrastructure, and protecting the town's green spaces and built heritage.

In terms of the factors influencing wellbeing and quality of life, the community rated 'open countryside all around' and 'clean streets' joint top, with 'Beach' and 'other green spaces (e.g. Rec/Ardeer Quarry, Ardeer Peninsula, Kerelaw)' following just behind. The other items rated above the midpoint of the rating scale were 'Good transport links', 'Dentist, doctors surgery and chemist all in one place', 'The townspeople', 'Local shops', 'Auchenharvie Leisure Centre', and 'Jet/Ardeer Services petrol station'.

The wellbeing results mirror those of the land use element of the survey, with green spaces and central amenities emerging as the most important items in each.



*The town's countryside emerged as the most important contributor to wellbeing and quality of life.*



*The beach and other greenspaces are important factors influencing local wellbeing and quality of life.*



*Fundamental structural improvement to the town centre is one of the community's top priorities.*



*Of central importance to the community is the protection of the towns natural and built heritage.*



### 3. The Plan

The land use ideas generated and supported by the community are grouped below into two main categories: 'The town centre' and 'Open space'. These two categories also align with the two main categories of formal feedback that Stevenstonian respondents had in respect of the 2009 Stevenston Regeneration Plan by Irvine Bay Urban Regeneration Company, the main pre-community council structured survey of residents aspirations for the town: the town centre needs a drastic approach to regeneration, and the development of open spaces should be restricted.

#### The town centre

The layout of the core of the town centre, outlined in red on the right, was not designed, but rather evolved over several decades as various developments found a home there after the demolition of much of the town centre in the 1970s. This piecemeal evolution has resulted in a poorly organised town centre lacking civic space and many shops.

The general opinion among community members is that there is a need for fundamental structural change to the town centre. In particular, there is a need for restructuring of the town centre to provide more retail infrastructure and create a greater sense of place. This restructuring might necessitate, for example, demolishing one or two buildings and replacing them with a town square fringed with new shops.

A significant area of the town centre has been abandoned for decades (see area outlined in red in the bottom right image). The large area of brownfield green space behind New Street and Bogelmart Street, which includes the former gas works site, is largely inaccessible to the public owing to a combination of fencing and dense scrub. To increase both public benefit and footfall in the town centre, this area should be brought into use as a community green space or car park. Green space options include community growing space and/or new green routes to and from the town centre.

Similarly, the Debra building, which occupies a prime position in the town, should be repurposed as a meeting place/ museum/ community facilities, and its car park should be reopened for town centre users to mitigate the shortfall of parking provision in the town centre.

The former Rankins pub, which sits at the edge of the town centre, has been empty and in a poor state of repair for many years. The most popular opinion among community members is that this building be demolished and the site used for the creation of new Council housing.



*The town centre is well used and regarded as being of central importance by the community.*



*A consistent theme in public consultations is the need for fundamental structural change in the town centre.*



*The core of the town centre does not have the retail infrastructure to support many shops.*



*Almost a hectare of unused green space is located at the edge of the town centre.*



### 3. The Plan (cont.)

#### Open space

In the community survey results, Stevenston's countryside emerged as the most important contributor to wellbeing and quality of life. The green spaces in and around the town are not just of central importance for community health and wellbeing, they are also strategically important for economic growth. For example, in their 2009 regeneration plan for the town, the area's former urban regeneration company suggested that capitalising on Stevenston's green spaces was key to regeneration: enhancing and promoting the town's natural and other green spaces would lead to 'the best talent' choosing to move to the town, bringing with them the skills and wealth needed to regenerate the town from the bottom-up. Furthermore, the urban regeneration company mirrored the sentiments of the community in their belief that, collectively, the town's wild spaces are also important for attempts to enhance tourism in the local area.

Because of the social, economic and environmental importance of the town's green spaces, the community's opinion is that no more wild green spaces should be developed. For example, the green space at the former Kerelaw school grounds should not be developed, nor should the wild greenspace on the Ardeer Peninsula. Indeed, the community would like the Ardeer Peninsula designated a National Nature Reserve (NNR) or similar, for the benefit of local people, the wider tourist economy and the environment.

Similarly, no further farmland surrounding the town should be lost to built development. Anger over loss of countryside around the town to urban sprawl has been a consistent theme of Stevenstonian responses to public consultations over the years, including Council-run consultations.

Over 800 new homes will be constructed over the next decade between two large housing developments at Mayfield Farm, which is just within the western boundary of the town, and West Byrehill Industrial Estate, which is just beyond the eastern boundary of the town. The huge amount of housing to be built within the next few years coupled with the projected fall in occupied households in the local area means that further loss of countryside to housing is unnecessary as well as undesirable.

Much of the greenspace around Stevenston is privately owned and largely inaccessible to the community. Some of this green space should be taken into public or community ownership to be managed for the benefit of the community and the environment.

Much of the town's historic built heritage has been lost in recent decades, including much of the urban landscape of the town centre and much of the industrial heritage on the Ardeer Peninsula. The historic built heritage that remains should be preserved better rather than demolished or left to fall into ruin.



*For many years, the community have campaigned for Kerelaw to be protected as green space.*



*The community want the nationally important dunes, heaths and forest on the Ardeer Peninsula protected from further development.*



*The Ardeer Peninsula's Black Powder Forest is the largest area of wild woodland in the county and a popular recreation spot.*



*Almost 400 new homes are being constructed by Persimmon at the eastern edge of Stevenston.*

## 4. Statement regarding the LPP's fit with LDP2, NPF4 and the Three Towns Locality priorities

The Local Place Plan presented here aligns with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4), North Ayrshire Council Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2) and the Three Towns locality priorities.

LDP2 promotes town centre-first development to enhance economic and social vitality. The LPP's focus on restructuring the town centre, including creating new retail space and civic space, supports LDP2's emphasis on town centre revitalisation. The enhancement of the town centre also aligns with the Three towns locality priority of promoting the local economy and tourism.

The LPP suggests using a prominent abandoned site at the edge of the town centre for new council housing and regenerating the extensive vacant land behind the town centre, which aligns with LDP2's strategy to regenerate vacant and derelict land and support new housing developments, particularly affordable and council housing. It also aligns with NPF4's focus on sustainable land use and regeneration of underutilised land, and directives to address housing needs efficiently.

The LPP's emphasis on preserving existing green spaces and establishing new community green spaces corresponds with LDP2's policies on protecting green infrastructure and enhancing public access to natural areas, aligns with NPF4's focus on environmental conservation, and fits with the Three Towns locality priorities of improving community wellbeing, promoting the local economy and tourism, and increasing civic pride and community engagement.

The LPP also exemplifies NPF4's strategic approach to land use, which seeks to balance environmental, social, and economic factors. On the Ardeer Peninsula, for example, the LPP takes a balanced approach to development, suggesting the active industrial areas, such as Stevenston Industrial Estate and Chemring's extensive landholding, rather than the nationally important habitats, are used for further development.

Similarly, the LPP seeks a balance between housing development and community and environmental goals. It would not represent balance to destroy further wild habitats and green spaces, such as Kerelaw and other countryside between the towns, when there is a surplus of potential new housing sites and a total of over 800 houses being built in two estates at the east and west border of the town.

Enhancing both vacant town center green spaces and other green spaces in the town and establishing the Ardeer Peninsula as a National Nature Reserve are initiatives that support community wellbeing through improved access to natural areas, aligning with NPF4's emphasis on blue and green infrastructure and the Three Towns locality priority of improving community wellbeing.

Overall, the LPP largely supports local priorities and aligns with the directives of NPF4 and LDP2, particularly in fostering a greener, more vibrant community and enhancing local economic and cultural assets.

## 5. Proposed amendments to the LDP and their justification

### **The former Kerelaw School grounds**

LDP2 has allocated some of the former Keelaw School grounds for housing - in particular, the biodiverse, flower-rich brownfield areas - whereas the LPP suggests the entirety of the site be classified as open space or countryside in LDP3.

Consultation for the LPP revealed that the vast majority of residents do not want further green spaces developed in and around the town. Moreover, specific consultation with the community on the former Kerelaw School grounds has illustrated a strong desire to see the site protected from development. In one recent online survey, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they want Kerelaw to remain as publicly accessible green space rather than be used for housing. A selection of comments made in the consultation, which illustrate community sentiment, are reproduced below:

- 'It's a beautiful area and popular with the locals being so closely located to the existing housing areas.'
- 'My family walk and exercise in this green space. Lots of wildlife in the area for us to explore and enjoy. Would be a great loss to the local community if sold for a development.'
- 'As most of the green belt areas around the town have been developed, it would be nice to keep some green space for leisure purposes.'
- 'Many people use this green space whether it be walking, mountain biking, kids exploring and building dens. Highly against new houses being built in areas like this! These places need kept!'
- 'I have always walked here since I was a child and would be sad, if future generations were not able to walk here.'
- 'It's the only accessible green space in the area. Well used by the local community.'
- 'Great place to walk your dog safely off lead and for children to play and explore and learn about nature. It's home to many wild animals and should be kept as a green space for them more than anyone else.'
- 'It's a nice walk to take the kids and dogs up there. See the rabbits and deer.'
- 'Currently used by dog walkers, horse riders and general public walking in a quiet area of countryside and should remain as too many houses leaving little to no greenspace for outdoor activities that keep people fit and healthy.'

Further illustrating the importance to the community of leaving the former Kerelaw School grounds undeveloped, over the past 5 years two separate community organisations have been created with a view to buying the former Kerelaw School grounds in order to protect them for community use.

In addition to the social benefits brought by the former school grounds, the site has significant biodiversity value. In the Council's most recent LNCS review, the site met the threshold of environmental and social importance to be declared an LNCS.

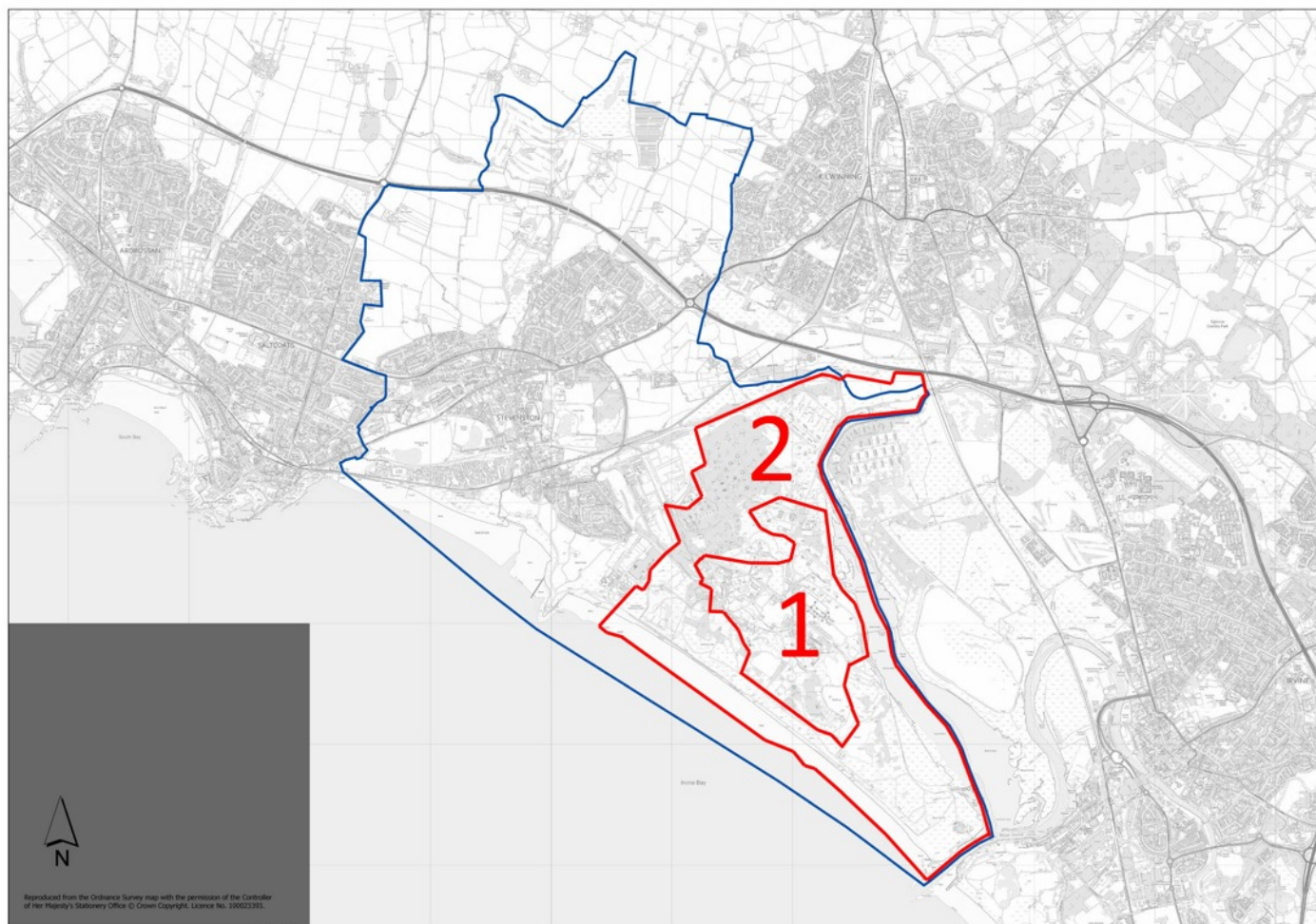
Because the former Kerelaw School grounds is a biodiverse, well-loved and well-used green space abutting a deprived housing estate, the community think it would be both highly unreasonable and highly damaging to the community and environment to allocate it for development in LDP3. Instead, this 17 hectare site should be recognised as an important piece of wild green space and classed in its entirety as open space or countryside.

### **The Ardeer Peninsula**

LDP2 allocates large areas of the Ardeer Peninsula's wild land - including North Ayrshire's largest area of wild woodland, the Black Powder Forest - for business and industry, whereas the LPP suggests that the Ardeer Peninsula's wild areas be kept as green space and so allocated as open space in LDP3 (see Appendix 1).

There are three main reasons why the community has a desire to protect the Ardeer Peninsula's green spaces. First, the Peninsula's wild habitats are of national importance: its biodiversity interest is of SSSI quality. Indeed, the site supports several species not recorded anywhere else in Scotland. Second, as the largest green space in the town, the site also has significant social importance, being well used by the community for recreation. Third, the community is of the opinion that the most sustainable way to develop the Ardeer Peninsula is to protect and enhance it as a National Nature Reserve or similar for the benefit of local people, the tourist economy and biodiversity.

## Appendix 1: Proposed land to be zoned as open space on the Ardeer Peninsula



*We propose that zone 1, the central zone outlined in red, should be classified in LDP3 as suitable for business and industry; we propose that zone 2, the wider, green area of the Ardeer Peninsula, be classified as open space.*