



# **SOPWELL NUNNERY**

## **GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN, 2023 - 2028**

### **BRIEFING DOCUMENT**

Produced by:



On behalf of:



**St Albans**  
City & District Council

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

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A new five year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space. This briefing document provides an overview of how the GAP will be produced, and sets out how stakeholders can contribute to shaping the plan.

GAPs are essentially map-based management plans that provide focus and direction for the running and improvement of open spaces. They provide a clear, logical process to determine the activities that should take place over a stated period of time to achieve the objectives for the site.

The GAP is being produced by the Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of and in partnership with St Albans City and District Council. The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2023.

Engaging communities is integral to the production of GAPs, to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of and able to interact with the plan production process. This briefing document initiates and supports this community engagement.

The engagement period will run from 21 November 2022 to 02 January 2023. A further engagement period in December will provide an opportunity to assess the draft version of the GAP. Please use the contact details in Section 6 to comment on the aspirations for the site.

This document has been broken down into easy to read sections:

Section 2 provides an overview of the site and location map.

Section 3 reviews recent management of the site.

Section 4 contains the core objectives for the Sopwell Nunnery GAP.

Section 5 summarises the public engagement methodology, setting out how and when stakeholders can contribute to the plan.

## 2. BACKGROUND

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Sopwell Nunnery Green Space is a 5.5 hectare public open space situated in the Sopwell Ward to the south of St. Albans, ten minutes walk from the city centre. It is bordered by the Alban Way to the south, Cottonmill Lane and Sadleir Road to the west, and the River Ver on the other two sides. The green space, including the associated Nunnery Allotments, is located on a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM): the site of the 12th century Nunnery of St Mary and the 16th century remains of Lee Hall.

Sopwell Mill Open Space is 0.9 hectares situated to the south of the Nunnery site, separated by the railway embankment that now accommodates the Alban Way, but connected to the Nunnery green space by the Ver Valley Trail. A site boundary map is included in the following pages.

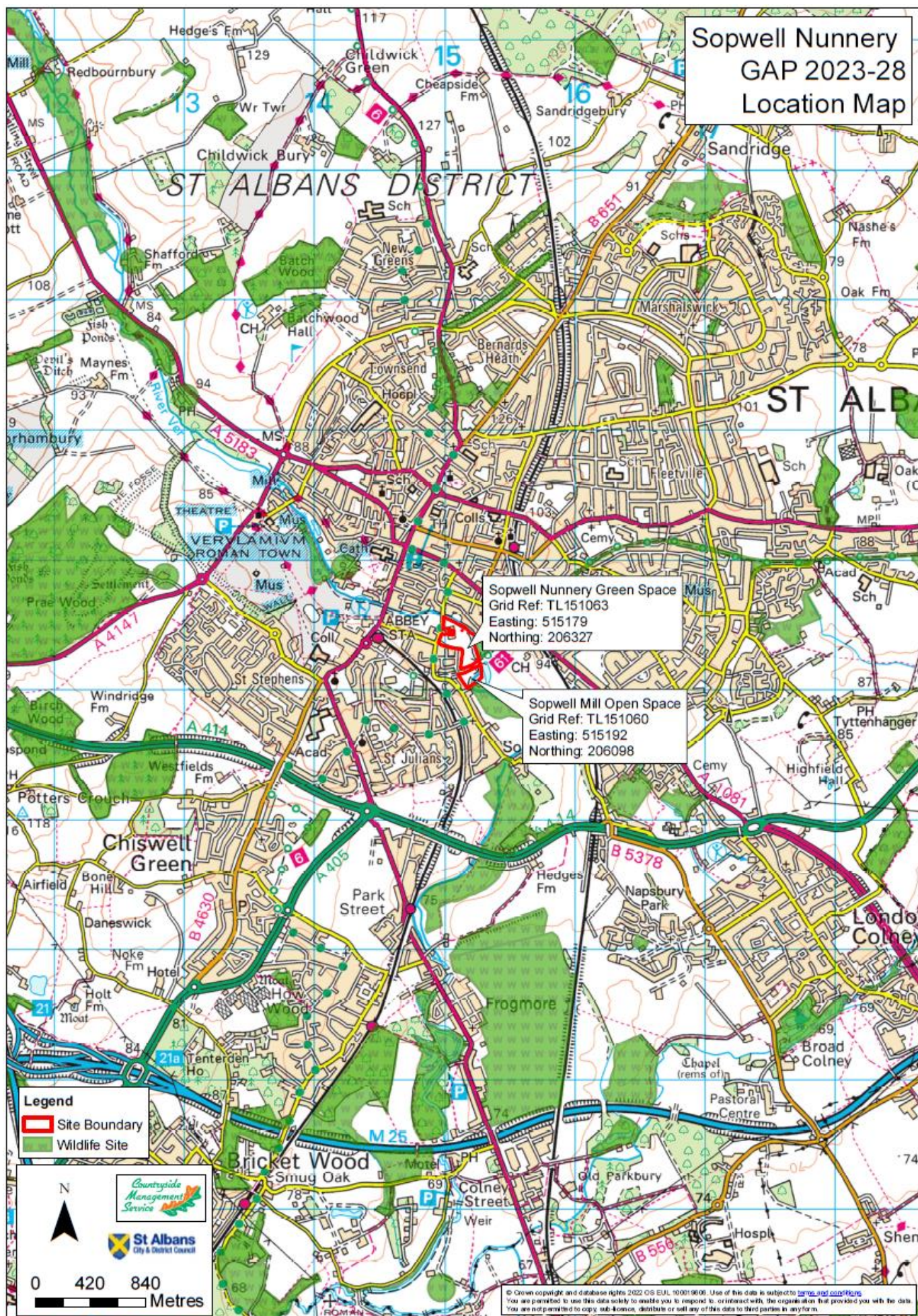
Sopwell Nunnery Green Space is on the flood plain of the River Ver and contains a mosaic of riverine habitats, wet woodland, scrub, wildflower meadow and amenity grassland. The varied habitat of the site has potential for use by a wide range of wildlife including BAP priority species such as grass snakes and several species of bats. Kingfishers, dragonflies and damselflies are frequently seen along the river and water rails have been seen in the wet woodland.

The ruins of the Tudor Hall have scenic as well as historic interest with the brick walls, window spaces and arches representing the remnants of Richard Lee's Tudor Hall, which was built upon the twelfth century nunnery site.

Both sites are well used by walkers, cyclists, dog walkers and families with strong green infrastructure links through the Alban Way and Ver Valley Trail. Sopwell Nunnery Green Space received its first Green Flag Award in 2007 in recognition of its value as a green space.

The section of the River Ver which borders both sites is one of the sections that is being targeted by the River Ver Project. As a result the scope of this plan is somewhat reduced in that it will not consider actions already included as part of the River Ver Project. This GAP is intended to work sympathetically with the River Ver Project plans as well as those of the neighbouring wildlife sites, Watercress Wildlife Association Local Nature Reserve and Sopwell Meadows Local Wildlife Site.







### 3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

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Previous management plans have guided St Albans City and District Council's management of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space, with the most recent plan covering April 2018 to March 2023.

There are a number of ongoing management operations including: grass cutting, maintenance of paths, benches and signage, small scale vegetation management, hedge laying, litter picking, fly tip removal and tree works to address safety issues through a 3 yearly survey. Consistent management of the wet woodland has allowed it to develop a diverse age structure with great potential as a habitat for wildlife.

Until 2020 a series of well received volunteer and community events were run; from bat walks and surveys, to historic talks and willow sculpture weaving.

Unfortunately a number of actions described in the previous plan were prevented by COVID and the associated lockdowns, notably the maintenance of the woven willow tunnel and works relating to the river. Several of the actions identified in the previous plan which related to the river have now been incorporated into the River Ver Project and the new plan will reflect this.

Vegetation growing on the ruins has begun to threaten the structure and St Albans Museum Services will be producing a new conservation management plan for the SAM which will address this.

## 4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2018-2023

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The Sopwell Nunnery GAP 2023-28 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of St Albans City and District Council and members of the public, and will act as a guide to the work of volunteers. The plan will be largely map based, with sequential, annual management maps to show the actions planned for each year. The resulting change will be represented on the map for the following year. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

The plan will be costed and potential funding sources identified. Once the final GAP is agreed, external funding will be sought to enable the plan to be delivered.

The aim and objectives of the GAP will be as follows:

### Aims

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space are valuable greenspaces within a significantly built-up part of Hertfordshire, at the junction of two popular green travel routes and offering visitors an opportunity to enjoy the natural and cultural heritage of the area. The primary aims for management of the site are therefore to maintain and restore its natural habitats for the benefit of biodiversity, and to provide all visitors with welcoming and accessible spaces which highlight the heritage of the sites.

### Objectives

#### A. To maintain Sopwell Nunnery as a welcoming place, enhancing the experience of using the site for visitors:

- A1 Improve all site entrances to form welcoming, appealing gateways into the site.
- A2 Ensure that visitors are able to successfully navigate to, from, and around the site.
- A3 Provide a suitable network of accessible paths and transport routes throughout the site.
- A4 Improve the accessibility of interpretation materials.

#### B. To ensure that visitors to Sopwell Nunnery feel safe and able to enjoy the site at all times:

- B1 Carry out regular risk assessments of facilities, natural features and general environment.
- B2 Carry out reactive tree works to address safety issues.
- B3 Provide a proactive response to any misuse of the site.
- B4 Continue close liaison between SADC, Sopwell Nunnery Green Space Steering Group (SNGSSG), the local community and local landowners.

#### C. To ensure the standard of maintenance is upheld and relevant across the site

- C1 Manage and maintain the paths, signage and grass cutting by monitoring the grounds maintenance regimes.
  - C2 Remove graffiti and fly tipping, and carry out regular litter picks and small scale vegetation management.
  - C3 Ensure all structures are regularly maintained and fit for purpose.
  - C4 Carry out regular inspections and any necessary repairs to the play area.
  - C5 Report any pollution incidents to the Environment Agency.
- D. To ensure sustainability of all management operations on site**
- D1 Ensure ongoing maintenance costs are financially sustainable.
  - D2 Secure external funding to ensure the viability of capital works.
  - D3 Seek to minimise waste and reuse material within the site where possible.
- E. To maintain and enhance the quality of the habitats across the sites, while maintaining their value for biodiversity and recreation**
- E1 Continue the annual grassland management regime.
  - E2 Create and actively manage wildflower grasslands on both sites.
  - E3 Prevent encroachments of scrub into the grasslands.
  - E4 Undertaking rotational coppicing of the boundary hedgerows and manage the laid hedge on Sopwell Mill Open Space.
  - E5 Continue with active management of the river and river bank habitat in cooperation with the River Ver Project.
  - E6 Monitor and record species across the sites.
- F. To protect the nationally significant archaeological remains and historic landscape of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space**
- F1 Ensure above ground historic features and buried archaeological remains are appropriately managed by developing a conservation management plan.
  - F2 Undertake appropriate actions to ensure their preservation – including scrub removal and repairs.
- G. To enable local people and regular visitors to take an active role in the conservation, decision making and development of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space**
- G1 Support volunteer activity on site and ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the GAP.
  - G2 Encourage the local community to become involved in the management of Sopwell Nunnery in a structured and supported way.
  - G3 Organise and enable a range of events and activities across the sites.
  - G4 Countryside Ranger to run talks and walks for school groups.
- H. To attract a wider variety of visitors to enjoy Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space and fully realise their value as an open space**



- H1 Continue to develop events and activities with partners, key stakeholders and the community; raising awareness and interest in the sites.
- H2 Promote a greater awareness and interest in the sites through a variety of media – notice boards, leaflet, interpretation panels, website.
- H3 Develop and promote the revised leaflet and interpretation panels to local schools and businesses and further afield.
- H4 Display Green Flag Plaque and promote award.

## 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN PRODUCTION PROCESS

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Effective community engagement is at the centre of successful management plans. The value of a GAP is maximised when it incorporates and balances the aspirations of stakeholders and interest groups.

In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- For the first stage (this briefing document), stakeholders and site users will be invited to make comment on the core aspirations in Section 4; it is hoped that any further aspirations and/or issues will be identified through this information gathering process. This first stage of community engagement will run between **Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November and Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January.**
- For the second stage, stakeholders and site users will be invited to read through and make comment on the draft GAP, which will include the detailed proposals and actions. This stage is intended to run in between approximately **Monday 6<sup>th</sup> February and Monday 6<sup>th</sup> March.** To support this stage, we will be holding a guided walk and engagement session for any users or interested groups that may wish to discuss the proposals or a particular aspect in more detail. The arrangements for this event will be confirmed and advertised nearer the time.

Following the second stage exercise, the final document will be produced, published and the actions will commence.

Please be aware that we will not respond individually to comments received through the public engagements; instead, we will produce a summary of comments, noting any amendments made to the plan as a result. This engagement response document will be published online alongside the briefing document, draft plan and final plan. We will retain contact details only for the purpose of keeping respondents informed about the plan development process.

### 5.1 Greenspace Action Plan production process

1. Production of briefing document and outline proposals.
2. Stakeholder engagement on briefing document. Engagement will run from approximately 21<sup>st</sup> November 2022 and 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2023.
3. Production of draft GAP.
4. Stakeholder engagement on draft GAP. Engagement will run from approximately 6<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and 6<sup>th</sup> March 2023.
5. Production of final GAP.
6. Publicity and promotion.

## **5.2 Stakeholders**

- Local HCC members
- Relevant HCC officers
- SADC members
- Relevant SADC officers
- Cottonmill and Nunnery Allotment association
- Ver Valley Society
- Watercress Wildlife Association
- Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- St Albans Museum
- St Albans and Hertfordshire Architectural and Archaeological Society
- St Albans City Neighbours Committee
- Sopwell Residents Association
- St Albans Cycle Campaign
- St Albans & District Footpath Society
- Sustrans
- Environment Agency
- Historic England
- Local Community



## 6. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

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Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We are keen to receive feedback from you on our proposals for the Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2023-2028.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January** at the latest.

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