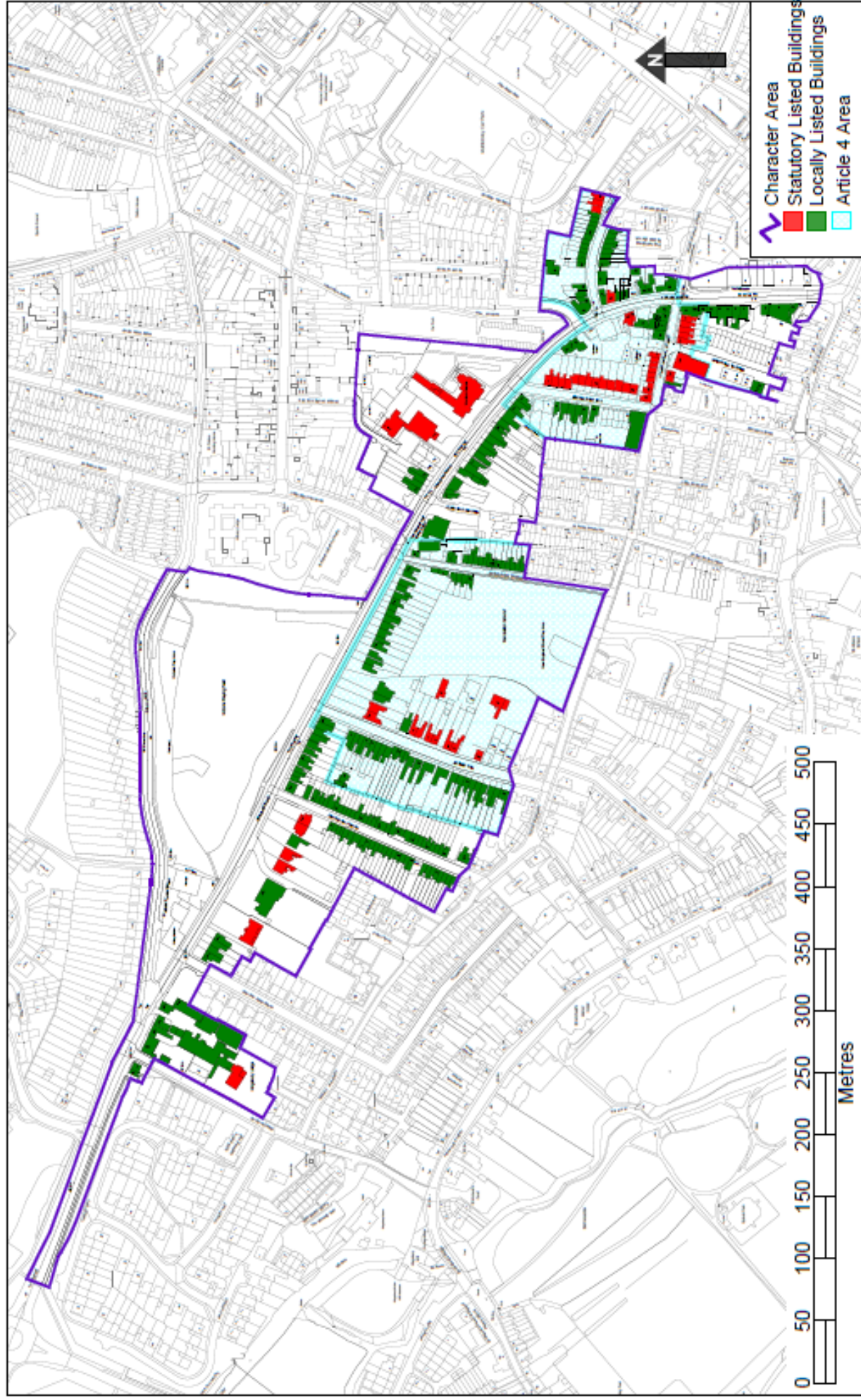


Character Area 5b

Verulam Road





AREA 5B: VERULAM ROAD

Area 5b: Verulam Road

Bowes Lyon Mews, Branch Road (part), College Street, Hill Street (part), Lower Dagnall Street (part), New England Street (part), Portland Street (part), Spencer Street (part), Verulam Road

Article 4 Direction – covers much of the area (see map)

Scheduled Monuments

None.

Listed Buildings

Branch Road

Kingsbury Lodge (Grade II), Wall along road side with entrance gate to Kingsbury Lodge (Grade II), Outbuildings to Kingsbury Lodge (also curtilage of LB).

Christchurch Close

Christchurch Vicarage (Grade II).

College Street

Odds: 1-27 (incl) (all Grade II).

Hill Street

Odds: 3, 5, 7, 11, 13, 15, 17, 19 and 19a (all Grade II).

Lower Dagnall Street

Odds: 3-11 (incl) and 11a (former Unitarian Chapel), 13&15 (all Grade II).

Spencer Street

26, 28 and 30 (all Grade II).

Verulam Road

Odds: 23, 25, 129, 131, 157, 159, 163, 165 and 169 (all Grade II).

Evens: 40, 42, Verulam House, 48 (former Christ Church) (all Grade II), see also Christchurch Close.



Nos. 23+25 College Street (grade II listed).



Verulam House and the campanile of no.48 Verulam Road, former Christchurch (both grade II listed).



Kingsbury Lodge (grade II listed). Image courtesy of John Bethell.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

Locally Listed Buildings

Bowes Lyon Mews

Former warehouse r/o 21 George Street, now 20-24 (consec).

Branch Road

Evens: 2 (with 187 Verulam Road), Mill buildings r/o Kingsbury Lodge, Outbuildings to Kingsbury Lodge (also curtilage of LB).

College Street

Evens: 8-16 (incl), 20.

Hill Street

Odds: 1.

Evens: 2-8 (incl), 10 (rear of 8), 12-52 (incl).

Lower Dagnall Street

Evens: 2, 2a, 2b.

Odds: 17.

New England Street (see also Area 2c).

Odds: 1-27 (incl).

Evens: 2-10.

Portland Street

Odds: 3-59, Portland Arms (61), Outbuilding r/o 155 Verulam Road.

Evens: 2-36, 38-52.

Spencer Street

Odds: 33-51 (incl).

Evens: 32-62 (incl).

Verulam Road

Odds: 1 (b), 3 and 5, 7-21 (incl), 43&45 The Spotted Bull P.H., 49-75, 85 (British Legion), 87 (Bethal Chapel), 91, 93-123 (incl), 125-127, 133-155 (incl), 161, 167, 171-177 (incl), 179a (plus outbuildings behind), 181 and 181 The White Mill and Units to r/o 181, 183 (plus outbuildings behind), 185 (plus outbuilding behind), 187.

Evens: 26-32 (incl), 34-38 (incl) includes 34a, 42 (rear building only), outbuildings at Verulam House (also curtilage of LB), 52-58 (incl).



Nos. 133-155 Verulam Road (locally listed).



No. 185 Verulam Road (locally listed). Image courtesy of John Bethell.



Nos. 4-10 New England Street (locally listed).

Area 5b: Verulam Road

Character Summary

This character area is located on the north-west boundary of the conservation area. As mapped, this character area has a narrow, broadly linear form, running north-west to south-east, following the course of Verulam Road, the main entrance to the City from the northwest, and taking in some areas north and south. At its eastern edge, this character area abuts the City centre (Character Area 4a) and, at its western edge, the open countryside on the edge of the city. It lies to the north of the Mount Pleasant and Romeland Character Areas (Areas 5c and 2c).

From the city centre, the land falls to the west. Verulam Road descends in parts quite steeply, but is more level on the low ground at the edge of the Victoria Playing Field, where it skirts the hillock of the Kingsbury Mound to the south. The topography of this area is very distinct and leads to interesting and sometimes dramatic and surprisingly far

reaching views. Roads running southwards from the western end (Kingsbury Avenue, Portland Street and Hill Street) slope up from Verulam Road onto Kingsbury Mound. At the south eastern end, Britton Avenue, Spencer Street and Upper Dagnall Street slope up very steeply towards the city centre, whilst, on the opposite side of Verulam Road, College Street and, to a greater extent, Lower Dagnall Street slope down away from the city centre.

The part of this character area which lies closest to the city centre is, for the most part, a quiet backwater to the city centre, although gradually merging into the commercial core of the city. Some of these streets are ancient streets, part of the medieval development of the City, notably Upper and Lower Dagnall Street. Many of the area's listed buildings are within this area.



The topography of the area is integral to its character, providing dramatic and far reaching views.



The area adjoins the city centre (area 4a) at its east end but is much quieter in contrast.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

Character Summary

Verulam Road was opened in 1826, when it formed part of the major upgrading of the London to Holyhead coach route commenced by Thomas Telford in the late C18. This major route into the City from the northwest links directly into London Road, the major route from the southeast, which had been cut by Telford in 1794. The coaching boom that had initiated these new roads was short lived, as the railways soon brought an end to the coaching trade. Instead, Verulam Road became St Albans best residential area in the 1830s and 1840s, as tall terraced houses in yellow stock brick with stucco detailing and Greek Revival villas spread along the banks of the carriageway and into the quiet new roads of Hill Street and New England Street. Verulam Road and many of the roads which run off it have largely retained their

residential function and character. Its Regency roots and importance are evident with the grand and visually dominant buildings that survive (several of which are listed), and this style is also echoed in the Victorian terraces, although these are naturally of a smaller scale.

The area is also characterised by two fine open spaces: Victoria Playing Field, which occupies a large triangular area on the northern side of Verulam Road, and New England Street Playing Field to the south of Verulam Road. Both contribute recreation space, landscape value and a sense of space to the area, as well as aiding the setting of the buildings. Trees and hedges within and around these open spaces make an important contribution to the area.



Victoria Playing Field is one of the important open spaces in the area, the other being the New England Street Playing Field.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

History: Regency

The most westerly buildings on Verulam Road are situated on the corner of Branch Road, a mid C19, painted cottage and some early C19, painted villas set just behind the back of the pavement edge on the corners of Branch Road. Behind and adjacent to these houses is a complex of buildings, built in 1827 shortly after the opening of Verulam Road, which was the Kingsbury Brewery. The largely three storey brewery buildings are well-preserved examples of early industrial buildings built around a large central yard which is accessed from Verulam Road. Built in brick and knapped flint (although most of the brickwork is now painted or weather-boarded), these buildings have arched windows and brick buttressing. The brewery closed in 1898 when Kingsbury Brewery was sold to Benskins and the brewing operation moved to Watford. The site is now used by various companies as offices, although it remains one of the best preserved old brewery sites in the county.

To the rear of the brewery complex, but originally part of the same site, is Kingsbury Lodge, built as the brewery manager's house and now Grade II listed. This is a double span house with high pitched, slate roofs and, although two-storey, it is a tall house with attics and a basement. The twin gables address Branch Road and there are parapets along the side returns. Well-crafted flint panels are set within the painted brick walls. Set back from Branch Road, behind a similarly well crafted brick and flint wall, in a spacious site, this is part of the streetscape of Branch Road, rather than Verulam Road, but is included in this area to retain historic continuity with the rest of the brewery site.

Overlooking Victoria Playing Field (known as 'the meadow'), near the west end of the road, are four large Italianate villas of classic proportions. Historically these buildings would have overlooked open undeveloped land; the openness of the Victoria Playing Field today emulates this and serves to open out the street scene along much of Verulam Road. All of these buildings are stuccoed and painted white; their decorative features include thickset cornices and porches supported by columns with triangular pediments above. All are set back from the road on a wide bank and have large front gardens as well as generous rear gardens. There is little other residential building of such stark classic origin, although the street continues eastwards with two smaller scaled classical houses, closer to the road. It then merges into a more Victorian genre with terraces but, as some of the smaller terraces display heavy square bays, thick set wooden window frames and plain coloured brickwork, the Regency character is emulated.



Kingsbury Brewery (locally listed) is one of the best preserved old brewery sites in the county.



The Italianate villas overlooking Victoria Playing Field. Image courtesy of John Bethell.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

History: Regency contd.

On the north side of Verulam Road, the Regency style is picked up again with an impressive listed Italianate former church, called Christchurch. Dating from 1850-1856 and designed by Charles Parker, it is constructed of ashlar with heavy classical details such as round-arched windows and classical capitals; its campanile is a landmark which is visible in longer views. The Vicarage (also listed) adjacent to the church is of a mid C19 date and also probably by Charles Parker, being of a similar style to the church; it is now converted into flats. The church was built on the site of stables which belonged to Verulam House, which is now used as a nursing home and is set within its own walled garden. It was originally built as a coaching inn 'The Verulam Arms' and opened in 1826 but, following the expansion of the railways in 1848, business from the mail and stage coaches which used this main road into the town declined and the building was sold, and its stables demolished to make way for the Church. The classical qualities of this group of buildings fit in well with the rest of the street, which displays this style either conspicuously or modestly, such as in the Victorian terraces.

The grandness of most of the buildings plays a vital and prominent role in defining the character of the area. Similarly striking styles are found in Hill Street and College Street, both of which are located off Verulam Road, and these two roads are therefore included in this character area. Hill Street is accessed from Verulam Road up the sharp incline which is the Kingsbury mound; notable survivals here are the c.1840 stock brick pairs of semis which also have painted dressings, and several of the terraces which have wide, square, wooden framed windows with imposing proportions. College Street, which slopes down from Verulam Road, has a foreshortened and impressive view of the Abbey nave. It is dominated by the three storey, listed, brick, terraced houses on the eastern side and northern end, which are distinctive in their height compared to the buildings opposite and to the Spotted Bull, an early C19 two storey public house with a low pitched slated roof facing Verulam Road behind this group. This height difference is

exaggerated as they are raised above the pavement on a bank. To the south of this three storey group is a further listed group of terraced houses, set back from the street frontage behind small gardens, again raised up. Buildings on the western side of College Street are later (see Victorian below).



The campanile of Christchurch is a landmark which can be seen in longer views into the area.



Hill Street contains grand, Regency buildings like this locally listed house.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

History: Regency contd.

Part of Lower Dagnall Street, which predates Verulam Road, is included in this character area because, although mixed with earlier and smaller scale properties, some timber framed, this street contains some grander and larger visually dominant buildings, more in keeping with the Regency style of this character area. The most obvious of these buildings are nos. 2, 2a and 2b: no. 2 was a church, no. 2a was the Sunday school house and no. 2b was the school master's house. However, no. 2 was re-fronted in the 1980s to echo the classical style of the adjacent buildings. This grander style continues to the west with the Former Unitarian Chapel, now used as offices with a modern extension at the rear. It dates from 1697 and displays a heavy hipped tiled roof and cement rendering with brick details; it was used by Samuel Ryder for a time as offices for his seed business. To the south of the street, nos. 3-11 are a group of listed cottages which date from the early C19, they are a fine group constructed of red brick which present a series of four gabled roofs (except the first) to the street and fine sash windows and grand doors. As the road slopes steeply downwards from Verulam Road, the houses are raised from the pavement, particularly to the western end, and have a basement level denoted with light wells.

Nos. 23/25 and 40 Verulam Road are two early C19 red brick buildings which are listed. No. 40 has good blue diaper patterning and one of the street war memorials unique to St Albans.



Lower Dagnall Road is older than Verulam Road and has some smaller scale, timber-framed buildings.



No. 40 Verulam Road (grade II listed, far left) displays blue diaper patterning.



Nos. 2a and 2 Lower Dagnall Street (locally listed) were a Sunday school and church, no. 2b (out of shot to right) was the school master's house.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

History: Victorian

Portland Street bridges the Kingsbury Mound, with an incline rising from Verulam Road and descending towards Mount Pleasant. This is early to mid C19 terraced housing, in long and continuous two-storey terraces, set to the back of the pavement edge on both sides of the narrow street. Most are small-scale houses, although there are some double-fronted houses of similar scale set within the terraces. The predominant material is red brick, although some of the front elevations have been painted. The paving on both sides of the street is historic blue brick which enhances the architectural continuity of the street.

The northern end of New England Street, which is located in this character area, consists of smaller scale terraces, with slate roofs typical of the period and which echo many of the houses on Verulam Road. The other half of the street consists of a terrace which is set further back and of a slightly smaller scale and is therefore included with Character Area 2c as the buildings have more in common with buildings such as those in Temperance Street and College Place.

The western side of College Street consists of small scale, mixed style houses. At the southern end of the street, they are red brick houses built in the 1980s but of a Victorian style which relate well in scale to the related office development on the corner of Lower Dagnall Street, which was a former hat factory, partly redeveloped to retain part of its façade onto Lower Dagnall Street. No. 20 marks a change to the more historic streetscape - it is a red brick stand alone building with a higher pitched roof than the rest of this side of the street. To the north, the buildings are Victorian with various small groups of terraces, united by various stylistic qualities and at the far north is a semi-detached pair of houses in 1930s Arts and Crafts style. Compared to the eastern side (see above), this side of the road contains more gaps and more mixed styled houses, some with high pitched dormer windows and some with large double storey gables with glazed bays.



Smaller scale, typical Victorian terraces in New England Street (locally listed).



Houses on Portland Street on the slope up from Verulam Road. Image courtesy of John Bethell.



Victorian terraces and a 1930s Arts and Crafts semi-detached pair at the northern end of College Street.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

History: Victorian contd.

The western half of Spencer Street, which was cut in c1864 to link the new Verulam Road to the new Court House, is included in this character area. Beyond the corner with Verulam Road, where the façade of a taller two storey commercial building with a shopfront curves to turn the corner, Spencer Street is residential in its character and predominantly its use. The eastern half is in business use and is therefore included with Character Area 4a. Cut in the early C19, and on the Tithe map (1840s), it consists of long terraces of red brick houses, quite modest in scale but many with fine sash windows. They are located on the pavement edge, with the northern side being on a raised pavement. The houses have high pitched roofs, a feature exaggerated by the curve of the road up the hill towards the Town Hall. The boundary of the character area in Spencer Street is demarcated by two features: Cross Street and a block of flats to the south side, with views of the red brick Baptist church behind (see Area 4a), and nos. 26 and 28 on the north side, a listed pair of early C19, three storey, brick villas with a fine hipped roof, of red brick with diaper pattern of blue headers. They serve to close the vista from Cross Street (Character Area 4a). Together with no. 30, a smaller scale listed building, they are of an earlier date than the remaining houses and the road curves away from their building line so that they are at a slight angle to the road and thus with a small front garden area. Near the southern end of the street is an unusual single story building with a clerestory roof lantern which dates from the 1847 and was formerly a British School. Rather hidden away on the north side, behind the terraces and rear of Britton Avenue, is no. 56 (Spencer House), a large, two storey, white, symmetrical house with two double height bays in a verdant garden, which breaks into the streetscene through a small gap in the terraces bridged by a wall.



The entrance to Spencer Street from Verulam Road is marked by a commercial premises with a curved façade.



The houses on Spencer Street are located on the pavement edge; on the north side (pictured), the pavement is raised.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

History: Modern

Most of the modern development in this character area is situated around the juncture where Verulam Road merges into the commercial area of town. On the west side here is a good group of locally listed commercial buildings from the nineteenth century; the group has particularly pleasing appearance and proportions and several have excellent traditional timber shop fronts, some original and some re-instated. A notable exception of the location of modern development is the petrol station on the junction of Verulam Road and Folly Lane which, as an industrial and functional building which displays bright signage and a flat roof, is not a typical or sensitive introduction into this character area and is a negative feature; it is therefore important that changes are not allowed which could make the building more obtrusive.

Opposite the entrance to Britton Avenue is a mixed retail and residential block, which, although obviously of the 1980s, has been carefully designed to suit the area. It is finished in cream render and a dark brown timber typical of the era. Nevertheless, it has large, vertically set rectangular windows to three storeys and shares a similar height roofline with the buildings to the east on Verulam Road's junction with George Street and on the west it steps down to the Spotted Bull P.H. which is of a more modest scale.

Verulam Road terminates on the east side with the rear of Christopher Place, which contains a colonnade almost entirely of restaurants, which is a lively area at night. Christopher Place is a 1980s shopping centre (Gordon Benoy and Partners) in yellow stock brick and rather harsh red-orange engineering brick, with steep plain clay tiled roofs. Although it is primarily part of Character Area 4a, the service entrance is onto Verulam Road and unfortunately presents an over-large and unpleasant gash in the façade. After this entrance the road curves eastwards into the High Street (covered in Character Area 4a) and there is a remarkable view of the Abbey Tower above the roof of Heritage Close which can be seen from within this character area.

Several non residential elements have been replaced (or are being replaced) by residential buildings in the last twenty to thirty years. There are some modern developments that are quite successful. For example, the modern residential development of Bowes Lyon Mews, which replaced a commercial site and is located on Lower Dagnall Street behind the former Unitarian Chapel, and the 1980s/1990s Knight's Orchard set off Verulam Road, a small development successful in terms of its minimal impact on the historic streetscape. Also, modern alterations to historic buildings have been successfully implemented, for example a 1980s rear extension to Christ Church on Verulam Road, which is partly hidden below ground and with a fully glazed bay, integrates with the listed building.



Bowes Lyon Mews is a modern residential development behind the former Unitarian Chapel on Lower Dagnall Street.



The petrol station at the junction of Verulam Road and Folly Lane is unusual in its location away from the commercial centre to the east. Its position and insensitive design make it a negative feature of the area.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

Materials and Details

Although there is some variation of style and use - stuccoed villas and brick terraces; commercial premises and public buildings - the original regency buildings are still in evidence to date these roads. This is reflected in the materials: brick, but also much stucco, mainly slate roofs and timber sliding sash windows, fine doors often with details such as carved architraves and moulded hoods. This period is also reflected in the detailing, which is overtly classical, such as Regency railings and fanlights, or covertly classical, for example where the Victorian terraces display heavy square bays, thick set wooden frames and plain coloured brickwork, emulating the Regency character.



Many of the properties use brick and have timber sliding sash windows.



There are many interestingly detailed, fine doors.



Many of the buildings reflect the Regency period through detailing, such as the use of railings.

Area 5b: Verulam Road

Public Realm

The entrance to the City from the west is particularly rural in character (Verulamium Area 1). Verulam Road enters the City from the Batchwood roundabout and the conservation area boundary follows the north side of the road. To the north, playing fields and trees contribute to the setting of the conservation area and to the south a hedge line with trees screens the mid C20 housing in Camlet Way (Area 5c) which is at a lower level. The landscaping of this character area is primarily defined by the public spaces of Victoria Playing Field and New England Street Playing Field. Both gifted in the Victorian period, the New England Street Playing Field, of two and a half acres, was given in 1874 by the representatives of the late Mrs. Mary Searancke and the Victoria Playing Field, containing over six acres, was given in 1898 by Mr. and Mrs. Charles Woollam as a playground for children¹.

Although there are generally few trees on the streets, the groups of trees in Victoria Playing Field are sufficiently large to add to the character of nearby streets, particularly Verulam Road. This is also true of the Gombards car park, located behind Verulam Road in Character Area 7L, which has a plethora of trees which also contribute to Verulam Road and are visible from Verulamium Park where they form a backdrop to the Christchurch campanile and the roofscape of Verulam House. The yew trees east of Verulam House are also significant and effort was put into their retention. The recreation area, New England Street Playing Field, is a more enclosed space behind Verulam Road and between New England Street, Hill Street and Mount Pleasant, which also contributes to Character Areas 2c and 5c. The tops of the trees contribute over a wider area. The contribution of trees located within public spaces is supplemented by those within gardens. Classic blue pavements are in evidence in the side streets in this character area, exceptions are the majority of Verulam Road at the western side where concrete paving slabs from the mid C20 have recently been replaced in tarmac.



The New England Street Playing Field was gifted in 1874. Image courtesy of St Albans Museums.



Victoria Playing Field contains a plethora of trees which add to the character of nearby streets.



Gombards car park contains a good group of trees, which contribute to Verulam Road.

¹ 'The city of St Albans: Advowson and charities', A History of the County of Hertford: volume 2 (1908).

Area 5b: Verulam Road (1826)

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

- ✓ The open spaces of Victoria Playing Field and New England Street Playing Field.
- ✓ The mature trees in the area, particularly those in the public open spaces, around the Gombards car park, and those in gardens.
- ✓ Historic assets, including the grand listed buildings at the west entry to the character area, which mark Verulam Road as a Regency road, and their locally listed early C19 counterparts.
- ✓ The listed buildings which serve as landmarks, such as the former Christchurch with its distinctive Italianate campanile tower which is an important feature of this character area, adjoining areas and in the wider views of the city roofscape, and Verulam House set within a walled garden.
- ✓ Groups of smaller scale C19 listed buildings that contribute to the distinct character of the side streets.
- ✓ The pre-C19 listed buildings that illustrate the early framework of the area.
- ✓ Locally listed buildings that contribute to the area and the setting of the listed buildings, including the former Kingsbury Brewery complex, which is one of the best preserved old brewery sites in the county, and many early C19 buildings.
- ✓ The Article 4 Direction which has enabled much of the area to retain its traditional detail and therefore character.
- ✓ Traditional pavings and kerbs prevail in the area.
- ✓ Traditional park railings to Victoria Playing Field.

Negative

- ✗ Places where historic street furniture and paving has been patched, repaired or replaced.
- ✗ A few developments, most notably the petrol station and car dealership at the western end of Verulam Road, which are out of keeping aesthetically or in terms of function.
- ✗ The amount of on street parking on many of the roads which has a negative visual impact on the area, together with the amount of traffic on Verulam Road.

Scope for Change

- Maintenance and reinstatement of traditional paving bricks and stone kerbs.
- Incremental unsympathetic changes such as in materials, roof lights and unsympathetic extensions should be avoided in order to retain and enhance the positive characteristics of the area.
- Possible scope for tree planting at the High Street/Verulam Road junction (highway margins and spaces around commercial buildings).

