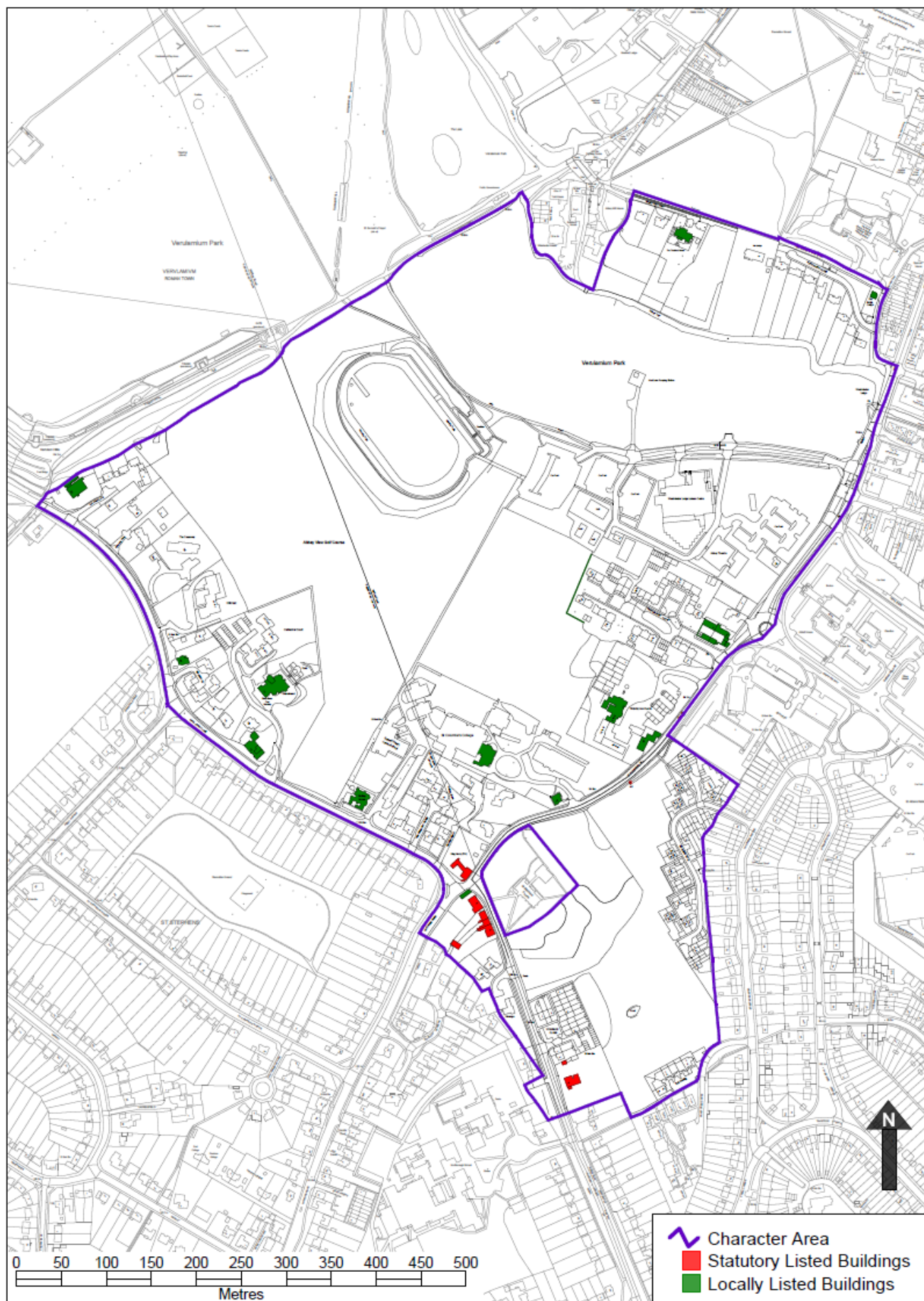


Character Area 7b
The Park and St Stephen's
Hill





AREA 7B: THE PARK AND ST STEPHENS HILL

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Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Abbey Mill End, Grove Road (small part), King Harry Lane (eastern part) (includes Havercroft Close, The Ramparts, Romans End, Spinneys Drive), Lady Spencer's Grove, Mercers Row, Mud Lane, Pondwicks Close, The Close, St. Stephen's Hill (part), Vicarage Close, Watling Street.

Scheduled Monuments

In Abbey Mill End/Pondwicks Close adjacent to Ver Lodge: Monument number 96 - Site of Conventual Buildings

Listed Buildings

St. Stephen's Hill

King Harry P.H. (Grade II), Milepost between 10&12 on opposite side of road (east) (Grade II).

Watling Street

Odds: 5 (Glebe House plus outbuilding) (Grade II)

Evens: 2 (St Stephen's House) (includes curtilage listed coachhouse), 4-8 and barn r/o 6&8 Watling Street (all Grade II).

Locally Listed Buildings

Abbey Mill End

2 The Thatched House (Thatched House and Little Thatch).

Grove Road

Old Bridle Lodge.

King Harry Lane

12, 14 (Glenalmond), 22, 32 (Pook's Hill).

At St Columba's College: frontage building (Watling House) and two C19 buildings to rear (Iona House and The Lodge).

St Stephen's Hill

Old Wall r/o Westminster Court, 4 and 4a (whole courtyard),

Trevelyan House (now nos. 8-12 Trevelyan Place) and no.10 The Bungalow and Coach House (now 23 Trevelyan Place).

At St Columbas College: 12 (Lodge).

Watling Street

Coach House to no.2 (also LB curtilage).



Milepost on St Stephen's Hill (grade II listed).



Old Bridle Lodge, Grove Road (locally listed).



Nos. 4-8 Watling Street with no. 2 (St Stephen's House) in the background (all grade II listed) as seen from St Stephen's churchyard.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Character Summary

This very large character area covers the southern part of the conservation area immediately east of the extremity of the known Roman city (Area 1). It lies almost entirely on the bottom and the southern slope of the Ver valley. A large proportion is public realm and a valuable green space. It also includes primarily residential areas of a particularly verdant character.

In the north of the character area is the eastern part of Verulamium Park, generally open in character amongst groups of trees, with the River Ver along its northern edge, here shallow and narrow. Overall, the park provides a special open and verdant setting for the City and this part of the park provides the more formal recreational area on its southern side, containing the leisure centre, the running track, and nine hole Abbey View golf course. In contrast, the meadow north of Mud Lane provides an informal flat area for walkers and recreation near the river (including the Ver-Colne Valley walk), as well as a venue for temporary outdoor official events.

Two residential culs de sac north of the river, Abbey Mill End and Pondwicks Close, are included in this character area as they relate to the park from their position in a wooded area above the river.

The parkland character continues southwards and uphill into a largely residential area. This has developed from Victorian suburban development of large houses in very spacious grounds overlooking Verulamium and the Abbey and much historic fabric remains within the matured wooded landscape. This part of the character area (where the hidden line of Roman Watling Street runs across a series of property boundaries) stretches southwards up to King Harry Lane and eastwards to St Stephen's Hill. The sloping and partly open nature of the area means that views across it are numerous and significant. The southern slope of the valley affords long distance views of the built up area of the cCty and the Abbey on the northern side. Conversely, there are views from the Abbey Orchard and Holywell Hill southwards.



The open green parkland in this area is an important aspect of its character and affords views of the Cathedral and City on the northern side of the valley from the southern slope included in this area.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Character Summary

St Stephen's Hill is a particularly verdant entrance to the City, winding and almost rural in character along much of its southern length, being lined by large trees set on banks on both sides and, for the most part, above the road. Land immediately adjoining St Stephen's Hill, from the King Harry P.H. to the Duke of Marlborough P.H. on its west side and from the church to Centrium Court (a four-storey office redevelopment of the former Mercers factory) on the east, still remains generally free of development, with trees, landscaping and parkland dominating this route into the city. At its northern end it divides Verulamium Park from the commercial and residential areas to the east (Areas 6a & 7a) and becomes entirely urban in character as it continues north of the bridge over the River Ver into the city centre as Holywell Hill (Area 4d).

King Harry Lane, formerly a rural lane and curving, follows the ridge along the southern edge of Verulamium and forms the southern boundary of the conservation area at this point. For the most part extremely verdant along the northern side (where it is in the conservation area), there are several historic

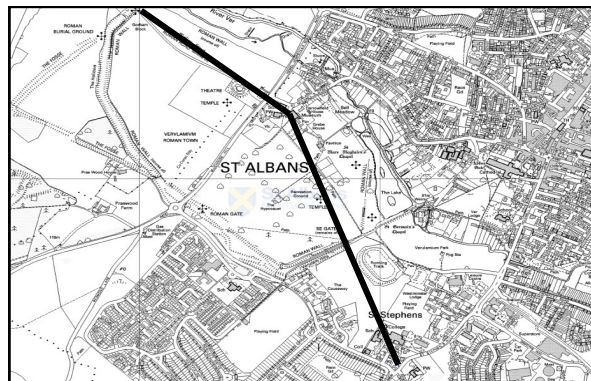
buildings which break through the vegetation into view from the road and are a giveaway to the turn of the C20 origins of residential development here.

At its south eastern corner, historic Watling Street, the main road from the south, enters the conservation area, a typically straight Roman road. Here is a small cluster of listed historic buildings and landscape surrounding two listed local landmarks - St Stephen's Church and the King Harry public house - and the road is of modest dimensions pleasingly retaining the integrity of this historic grouping. On the east side of St Stephen's Hill and immediately below the churchyard, an undulating linear public open space, pinched in the middle, is also included for its parkland character and its historical association with the church, having previously been vicarage gardens (St Stephen's Hill Open Space). Trees including many specimen trees within the space and surrounding the church are a valuable asset.

There are several extensive Tree Preservation Orders in this character area indicative of the amenity value of the trees.



Parkland dominates the route into the City from the south.



The line of Roman Watling Street. The blue line indicates where the Roman road leaves the King Harry junction of Watling Street and cuts across Verulamium Park and part of the Gorhambury estate.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

History

Several key topographical factors and routes and their histories have shaped the form of this character area as follows.

Continuous with present day Watling Street, the hidden line of Roman Watling Street cuts through the area and continues diagonally across the park to be picked up again on the ground at St Michael's Lodge on Bluehouse Hill (Area 1). The western boundary of the character area is marked by the deep ditch, part of the defence work for the Late Iron Age and Roman settlement, which runs from King Harry Lane along the edge of residential development and the golf course. Further north, this boundary follows the pathway along the historic Causeway which divides the eastern part of the park from the western part and the lake (Area 1). Roman material has been unearthed throughout the area, as typically the top of the hill, adjacent to the Roman road, was the site of a Roman cemetery.

The parish church of St Stephen, the most southerly of three churches founded on the approaches to Saxon St Albans in the C10, was placed at the top of the hill where a lane diverged from Watling Street to the Abbey. Late in the tenth century, the entrance to Watling Street was blocked at St Stephen's, forcing those bound north-west from London down St Stephen's Hill to the valley bottom and then up Holywell Hill and in a loop round the Abbey to rejoin the Roman road at St Michael's. It continued as a route for pilgrims throughout the medieval period. Although there is some evidence of medieval occupation, the parish church of St. Stephen did not become the focus of village life as the other parish churches did. Separated from the centre by the steep hill, it was not a good site for medieval inns and there was no river Ver to attract a mill. Then, from the C17, the area was "bypassed"; coaching traffic entered St Albans not from Watling Street but on a new road from London on the south east. Lack of growth over the centuries left the area green and wooded, with the church uniquely set in a wooded churchyard and large vicarage garden. A very small group of buildings from the C16-C18 survive

near the church. Maps from the C18 show the group of buildings around the church in the current layout but at that time there also appeared to be a few buildings immediately west of the church facing St Stephen's Hill.

The south western boundary (also the conservation area boundary) follows King Harry Lane. A lane curving along the ridge and skirting the southern extremity of Verulamium is shown on the 1721 Stukely map, and annotated "Watling Street or King Harry's Lane" on the 1810 Brayley's map. The existence of the Roman town meant the west end of King Harry Lane has remained entirely undeveloped (Area 1), whereas private developments have eaten into the land at the east since the mid C19.

In the mid to late C19, the southern slopes of the Ver valley became a focus for residential development of large houses accessed both from St Stephen's Hill and King Harry Lane, taking advantage of the position overlooking the city and the Abbey. This location has attracted further development in the form of infill and redevelopments.

Dating from the 1930s onwards, Pondwicks Close, a short new road (1937), and Abbey Mill End (late 1960s), accessed from Abbey Mill Lane, were built up with detached houses on their south side in spacious gardens sloping down to the north bank of the river.

In 1961 the Council bought an area of farmland east of the Roman town adjoining the south bank of the river from Lord Verulam to protect it from residential development pressure. From this time it became a public park and various leisure developments followed, grouped towards the southern boundary¹.

¹ Hertfordshire Gardens Trust: Local List: St Albans, Verulamium Park

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Spatial Analysis

The Park and Mud Lane

Being adjacent to the river, within the alluvial flood plain of the Ver and near to the Watling Street and its entrance into the Roman town, the area around Mud Lane is undoubtedly of historic importance to St Albans: although by no means fully explored, Iron Age remains and remains of a number of Roman buildings (thought to include a mill and/or suburban house and/ or a temple) have been discovered in this vicinity. There is also archaeological evidence of medieval settlement when the area north of Mud Lane (earlier called Fullers Lane) was used as "tentergrounds" for drying cloth. The area was used as farmland into the C20 and a farm complex (Verulam Hills Farm) was situated beside the Causeway at the western extremity of this character area, until well into the middle of the century, now marked by a group of trees and scrubland north west of the running track. Some of the field boundaries are still visible, in particular between the west of St Columba's College and the golf course.

The area north and south of Mud Lane was partly used in the middle of the C20 for allotments, and huts were located here possibly used in connection with POW transit during WW2. West of Westminster Lodge, two similar huts and a rather utilitarian, modern, single storey building are currently used by air, army and sea cadets.

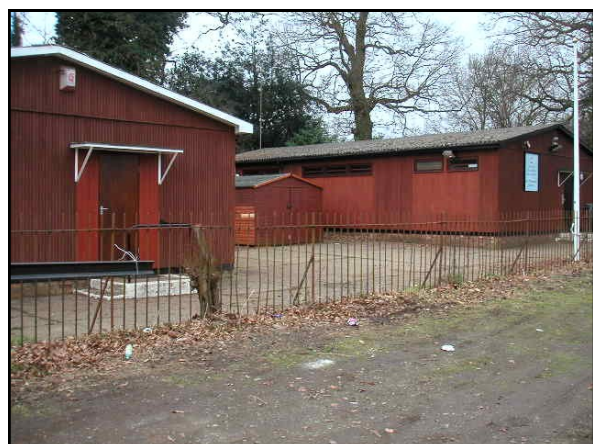
The Company of Ten drama group, set up in 1934, created their first theatre in 1955 in a small barn at Abbey Mill. Following the Council's purchase in 1961 of the Mud Lane area, in 1968, a new Abbey Theatre, designed by local architects Michael Meacher and Partners, was constructed south of Mud Lane and close to the Holywell Hill frontage. Sir Michael Redgrave laid the foundation stone and the theatre was opened by the Queen Mother. The theatre is in a dark red/brown multi brick and has a flat roof. It has since been extended with a new construction workshop, wardrobe, studio and foyer which detract from the balance of the building.



The Abbey Theatre, designed by Michael Meacher and Partners, was built south of Mud Lane in 1968.



The single storey, modern building that is used by the local cadet forces.



The two huts used by the air, army and sea cadets are similar to those erected in the area during WWII that were possibly used in POW transit.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Spatial Analysis (contd.)

By 1973, a Council swimming pool and leisure centre had been constructed immediately west of the theatre. The leisure centre has now been replaced.

Here, also in the south of the park, are two further leisure facilities: the large expanse of the running track and its low and uninspired ancillary buildings, surrounded by harsh industrial style galvanised security fencing and tall floodlights, and the pleasant, largely manicured and sloping expanse of the aptly named nine hole Abbey View Golf Course, crossed by a public footpath and, although here invisible, the route of Roman Watling Street.

Trees remain in and surrounding the parkland to the north, and walkers use this pleasant area that offers some excellent views of the Cathedral tower. The Ver-Colne valley walk runs along the north side of the park but appreciation of the river is precluded by undergrowth and overgrown grass between the path and the river bank.



The nine hole Abbey View golf course.



The new Westminster Lodge leisure centre.



The running track to the west of Westminster Lodge leisure centre.



The old Westminster Lodge leisure centre. These facilities have now been replaced in a new building to the east (see above).

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Spatial Analysis (contd.)

St Stephen's/ Watling Street

Historic as its name suggests, present day Watling Street (A5183) is still the main access from the south, but it now enters the City through a deep fringe of C20 suburban development. The road is a typically straight Roman road running uphill to the historic King Harry P.H. visible in the vista at the top of the hill. Trees dominate this vista when in leaf. It passes between St Stephen's Church (see Area 3) and a group of C17-18 listed buildings opposite the church, on a road of modest dimensions with narrow footways which has retained the integrity of this historic grouping. Indeed, the canopies of the trees almost touch, bridging across the road. Lack of growth over the centuries left the area green and wooded, with the church distinctively set in a wooded churchyard (see Area 3) and large vicarage garden.



The view of the Abbey and city centre from the bottom of St Stephen's Hill.



St Stephen's church in its wooded churchyard setting as seen from Watling Street.

St Stephen's Hill

Adjoining the church at the top of the hill, St Stephen's Hill is a particularly verdant primary entrance into the City, winding and almost rural in character along much of its southern length, being lined by large trees set on banks on both sides, for the most part above the road. There is occasional mid C20 residential development along the west side, but set back and, for the most part, not unduly dominant (apart from the pair of modern houses just south of the park behind a close boarded fence). An intrusive offset roundabout serves as an access into the retail and office complex, built over part of the Gasworks site. At its northern end where it becomes Holywell Hill, becoming wider with a treed central reservation, it divides Verulamium Park from the commercial and residential areas to the east (Areas 6a & 7a). From here there are views towards the city centre and the seemingly densely packed buildings stretching up the hill with The Maltings shopping centre (1980s) on the crest of the hill amongst the roof tops. It becomes entirely urban as it continues into the city centre as Holywell Hill (Area 4d). This transition point is marked by the Duke of Marlborough public house just north of the modest bridge which takes the road over the River Ver at an historic crossing point. From the park, the commercial and residential buildings are screened by trees when these are in leaf.



St Stephen's Hill is winding and rural in nature.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Spatial Analysis (contd.)

King Harry Lane

King Harry Lane extends west from the top of St. Stephen's Hill and the King Harry P.H., which towards the eastern end can be seen closing the vista eastwards. By 1810 this route, which was a curving lane connecting Hemel Hempstead Road with Watling Street and St Stephen's Hill, was running along the southern border of Verulamium. The present day, largely residential area, which has developed from Victorian suburban development of large houses in very spacious grounds overlooking Verulamium and the Abbey, still retains much of this historic legacy within the matured wooded landscape. The road is a now a wide and busy route with footways and verges to each side, but in common with Area 1, along the frontage to King Harry Lane, the character is still green and there are tall trees and hedges. However, in this character area, the native trees are interspersed with ornamental trees and shrubs. The greenery is also punctured by views of houses, fencing, red brick walls, piers and some railings, and the road takes on a more cultivated and suburban appearance particularly towards the eastern end.

Pondwicks Close and Abbey Mill End

Pondwicks Close and Abbey Mill End, running roughly east west, are housing developments from the 1930s onwards with spacious well-treed

gardens leading down to the river, taking advantage of the assets of the south facing slope. The name Pondwicks reflects the history of the site. The canalisation of the Ver (from the Roman era) left space for ponds north of the river. There is archaeological and mapping evidence for several ponds providing freshwater fish for the monastery (Hare, 1634 and Fowler, 1876). "Pond Wicks" appears on the Hare Map of the Abbey precinct (1634) and is the name of one of the monastery's ponds. An "old pond" is also shown in this vicinity, south of where the modern houses are now, on Fowlers 1876 plan of the C14 Abbey, and archaeological finds also support this. The modern houses were built on the solid gravel at the edge of the river peat. Pondwicks Close was a short new road from Lady Spencer's Grove, divided into plots with a variety of house designs for individual owners. Abbey Mill End is accessed from Abbey Mill Lane to the west and lies south of the Abbey Orchard. There is a gap along Abbey Mill End, west of Ver Lodge, related to the Scheduled Monument: AM12 Site of Conventual Buildings. Here is the only point where the precinct boundary has not been divorced from the rest of the Abbey precincts and infilling between the Abbey and the boundary would destroy this relationship and an appreciation of the former enclosed space.



King Harry Lane has retained its mature wooded landscape.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Buildings

Although the area has many common characteristics, the buildings in this large character area and their settings are most easily considered under two headings: St Stephen's and The Suburbs. The first includes a group of earlier and therefore listed buildings, the second includes locally listed buildings.

St Stephen's

The few C16-18 historic buildings which lie close to the church of St Stephen are listed. The King Harry P.H. opposite the church, at the top end of current day Watling Street, is a local landmark. From its façade it appears Georgian, but it was first recorded in the mid C16. On the west side of Watling Street, opposite the churchyard, C18 buildings with well-mannered red brick facades (nos. 2-8 Watling Street) sit in a line behind minimal front gardens. At the south end, no. 8

(Watling Cottage) features some of the distinctive external (and internal) Arts and Crafts details of notable local architect Kinnear Tarte. Behind it a barn dates from the C17. Adjacent, nos. 4-6 still retain their simpler appearance. As the road widens slightly to the "King Harry junction", the larger scale St Stephen's House (no. 2), a wide symmetrical C18 house with a typical doorcase and fanlight is set at a slight angle away from its neighbours. Next to it, an associated single storey, red brick, converted coach house, with a red plain clay tile roof, sits prominently on the corner of the junction with Watford Road forming a charming end stop. Its side wall forms the edge of the road. The garden behind St Stephen's House and its coach house provides a valuable break between the modern suburban development of Watford Road and this group of buildings in the conservation area.



St Stephen's House no. 2 Watling Street (grade II listed).



Nos. 4-6 Watling Street (grade II listed).



Coach house of no. 2 Watling Street (locally listed and curtilage listed).



King Harry P.H. (grade II listed) is a local landmark at the top of Watling Street and St Stephen's Hill.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Buildings

At a dip in the road, the southern boundary of the conservation area is heralded by a tall red brick wall on the north side (partly rebuilt) with no. 5 Watling Street (Glebe House) sitting behind but visible above the wall. Its main features from in the street scene are a white façade with parapet and plain red clay tiled roofs and prominent chimneys. Both this early C18 house and its C19 listed outbuilding exhibit some gothic features. North of no. 5 is Vicarage Close, a small early 1970s development of two-storey pairs and terraces, again behind a red brick wall which continues across the frontage with only a break for the access road. Whilst a pair of houses address the main road, the others are arranged to front onto a footpath network linking with the open space behind. Built in red brick with a modern roof tile, the style of houses is typical of its time. The frontage is dominated by shrub-

bery. Beyond, the red brick wall characteristic of this area continues up to and around the churchyard, crossing the frontage of the former vicarage (sadly lost in the late 1960s), now open space and an informal car park for the church. Opposite, a tall hedge largely hides a short but wide cul de sac of larger early 1980s houses (nos. 10-14) including the new vicarage. These houses were built on a triangle of previously undeveloped land on the edge of the conservation area and are characterised by dominant plain tiled roofs, a brownish red brick and garages projecting forward.

In the 1980s and 1990s, two housing developments (Mercers Court and The Close) encroached into the edge of St Stephen's Hill open space which lies to the rear of the church. These are described under Public Realm.



Glebe House no. 5 Watling Street (grade II listed).



Vicarage Close, an early 1970s development.



Informal church car park on the site of the old vicarage.



A 1980s cul de sac on the opposite side of the road to the church includes the new vicarage.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Buildings (contd.)

Suburbs on the hillsides (C19 and early C20) Southern Slope

North of King Harry Lane and west of St Stephen's Hill, the character area includes an area developed in the Victorian era for housing. A number of large, individually designed, Victorian houses of architectural value were built for the wealthy on the southern slopes of the valley overlooking Verulamium and the Abbey. This group sprang up with the coming of the railways and stand in very well-treed and landscaped grounds (including specimen trees) which tend to soften and protect the approaches to the medieval core of the City. Largely untouched by alterations, these buildings have architectural merits in their scale and materials. Several of these houses have been lost in the latter part of the C20. Some have survived particularly well with outbuildings and have also maintained their details. Others have been incorporated into later development. In one case, only the lodge house has survived.

One which did not survive was St Stephen's Hill House. It was replaced in the 1960s by a residential cul de sac, Westminster Court, in the form of terraces of maisonettes set around a series of lawned and landscaped open spaces, with communal garage courts to the rear. In spite of its typical 1960s neo-Georgian appearance and modern tile and pale brick, this has now matured into a pleasant and secluded environment marred only by the predominance of on street parking. From the foot of St Stephen's Hill, it is accessed past an attractive and nicely detailed group of early coach house buildings, evocative of the wealth of the Victorian era, now in commercial use and locally listed.

Trevelyan House (formerly Westminster Lodge and later used by the YHA as national offices before conversion to flats in the 1990s) is a two storey red brick building with a plain clay tile roof and good stone detailing. It is little altered and its interesting architectural features include shaped gables, canted bays, tall decorated chimneys and a squat central roof turret with a conical roof. In winter the north facing gables

and turret are visible from the Abbey Orchard, the Westminster Court housing being set at a lower level on the valley slope. Within the curtilage, the bungalow and coach house/workshop buildings, also converted, are in a similar red brick with complementary details. A number of houses and flats were constructed to the north and south whilst retaining and respecting the original buildings, the original residential access driveway, the terraced lawned garden and many of the trees, including specimen trees and shrubs. The boundaries of the site were kept as transparent as possible giving the site a very rural feel. Thus, beyond the western edge, a railing along the boundary allows the grounds of Trevelyan House to blend with the wider space of St. Columba's College playing fields and, on the southern boundary, a treed bank blends with the college's wooded grounds. Views to and from the site are possible given that it is raised above the road affording glimpses of the trees beyond around the Centrum Place site.



Westminster Court.



Trevelyan House (locally listed).

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Buildings (contd.)

Further uphill, and now both incorporated into the large modern complex of mid-late C20 buildings at St Columba's College, are Invergeldie (now called Iona House and forming one end of the main school block) and its modest but pleasing single storey lodge house of red brick with a plain clay tile pyramid roof (near the St Stephen's Hill frontage). Fronting King Harry Lane, Watling House, a tall three storey rather imposing red brick house, is now also part of the college complex and announces the college entrance. Whilst austere, it is almost gothic in appearance with a very high pitched bonnet roof and a rounded turret to the north western corner looking towards the park. Unfortunately its chimneys have been truncated. It has a collection of small traditional outbuildings to its western side. From the entrance to St Columba's, the Abbey is clearly visible over one of the lower modern blocks of the college.

Still grander, Glenalmond has had a particularly interesting history nationally and locally. It was designed in 1903 by a Scottish architect (Allen Stevenson of Ayr) for H.C. McIlwraith, one of the directors of the White Star Line. During WW2 it was the HQ of MI5 and was used as a base for a number of intelligence activities including training spies. After the war it was a training centre for Civil Defence. Later it was the District's first privately operated residential home for the elderly and is currently used as a children's nursery. Glenalmond has a series of fine gables with deep sprocketed eaves and prominent bays. A three storey flatted block (Cathedral Court) was built alongside the old building in the 1980s. This was designed with a series of high gabled roofs to respect the setting of the old building and the views over the park and enabled minimum subdivision of the grounds. Their shared entrance from the road is marked by walls and piers and, to the west of these, Glenalmond's Lodge House also survives, but as a separate residence. Sited prominently just behind the verge, it has prominent half timbered gables above a red brick deep plinth. A new house has also been slotted in behind the lodge.

Further west adjoining the Verulam Hills is no. 32 Pook's Hill another early C20 house, white painted with a low pitched single storey scullery element with a tall chimney at the rear and, although the roof has concrete tiles, it is locally listed as one of the early buildings contributing to the area's character and appearance.



No. 12 King Harry Lane is locally listed. It is the lodge building of Glenalmond (no. 14) which has a particularly interesting history and is also locally listed.



Watling House (locally listed) marks the entrance to St Columba's College.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Buildings (contd.)

Large houses on King Harry Lane that have not survived include Campbellfield, lost in the late C20 (1980s). However, as a reminder of the historic development, its single storey lodge survives behind a curved brick wall as no. 22 King Harry Lane, a prominently sited rendered building with slate roofs, it has elaborate chimneys and, although extended, has retained its character and has been locally listed. Halsmead, an attractive early C20 house in Queen Anne style near to the King Harry P.H., the line of the Roman road and what turned out to be a Roman cemetery, was demolished in the 1980s (captured on video). This was replaced by a cul de sac of somewhat indistinct houses (Havercroft Close), a rather negative modern intrusion into the street scene and setting of the listed public house and its curtilage barns, fortunately softened by maturing planting.

Modern development has continued to infill the large plots throughout the last eighty years. Apart from the extensive school complex at St Columba's, which incorporates some of the old buildings, and the other developments already mentioned above, this has been in the form of more modest, typically two-storey, mid-C20 style houses, for the most part with plain tile roofs. These houses follow a loose building line set well back but facing King Harry Lane. Later infill and redevelopment of some of the earlier properties largely takes the form of well set back culs de sac where the new housing development sits amongst a treed landscape.

Kingsgate: A modern development around a courtyard of barn-like, red brick houses with steep red plain tile roofs which breaks forward of the general set back.

The Ramparts: Set downhill behind no. 32 Pook's Hill, a small development of three houses with a bungalow closing the vista which allows views of the trees across the top. To the east of the entrance road, a red brick wall still survives marking the historic boundary.

Other modern developments both set well back from the road include:

The Causeway (1990s), in community use, a low modern building with a red pantile roof.

Hillcrest (1960s) (fifteen flats in three storey linked blocks) is flat roofed, in a pale brick, typical of its date. At the rear it is close to the golf course.



Kingsgate is a modern development off King Harry Lane.



Hillcrest is a 1950s flat development.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Buildings (contd.)

Northern Slope

North of the river, Pondwicks Close and Abbey Mill End are developments from the 1930s onwards in spacious gardens and a verdant setting leading down to the river, taking advantage of the assets of the south facing slope. Built on part of Pondwick Meadow, Pondwicks Close was a short new curving road from Lady Spencer's Grove (now a footpath). At its entrance bending southwards past Old Bridle Lodge, an attractive Regency house, it was divided into plots and a variety of house designs, by different architects (including some local) acting for individual owners, were submitted from 1937 to 1939. Buildings from this period exhibit a variety of styles generally in the Arts and Crafts idiom but most have been considerably altered. The architects included locals such as Percival Blow (no. 7) and Hopson Hill; others came from London. There are also some later buildings at the eastern end of the close. The close is characterised by informal staggered plotting and, although side extensions have tended to close the gaps between buildings, surviving views through add to a feeling of space. Abbey Mill

End, set down immediately below the Abbey Orchard, is accessed from Abbey Mill Lane. It includes mainly later C20 houses and an unusual and attractive thatched house dating from the 1930s which has been locally listed. Development of this land east of Abbey Mill House with three individually designed houses in the mid 1960s was limited to protect the green character of the area and views southwards from the Abbey Orchard and northwards from the new park. Abbey Mill House is included in Area 2b.



Pondwicks Close.



The Thatched House on Abbey Mill End is an unusual 1930s building and is locally listed.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Public Realm

Owing to the accessibility of the park covering most of the northern part of this character area, a large proportion is public realm and a valuable green space that offers some excellent views of the Cathedral tower. The Ver-Colne valley walk runs next to the river, along the north side of the park, but any appreciation of the river is somewhat precluded by undergrowth and overgrown grass between the informal path and the river bank. At the eastern end the path crosses the river on a modest modern bridge with a metal rail, emerging onto Holywell Hill where walkers must cross the road to pick up the path eastwards. Here the river, its vegetation (including bullrushes) and the red brick bridge (with stone capping), which takes the road over the river can be appreciated. To the north, on the corner of Grove Road and Holywell Hill, an area of landscaped river bank, grassed with mature willow trees, provides a small but attractive green space. Modern estate fencing emphasises the informal quality of this part of the river bank.

For the most part, along the eastern edge, the park is enclosed with typical traditional vertical park railings. However, within the park north and south of Mud Lane, there are some styles of security railing and protective barrier which are rather harsh and industrial in appearance.

The character area includes the public open space behind St Stephen's Church fronting onto the eastern side of St Stephen's Hill. This green open space is an undulating park which sweeps down in the centre and has large expanses of well mown grass, a pond enclosed for safety by informal fencing and individual trees and groups of trees, many of them large. There are stands of trees with informal undergrowth around the periphery of the space which helps to deaden the noise and views of traffic on the surrounding roads and give it a secluded feel. Even when the trees are in leaf there are glimpses of the church, particularly its distinctive spire and there are also views across the valley to the Abbey.

Two modern housing developments from the 1980s have eaten into the periphery of this space. Mercers Row is a development of two storey houses, set down along the lower northeast edge of the park. In yellow brick with red detailing and shallow tiled pitched roofs, arranged in pairs and unusual blocks of four, it attempts to address the space, yet minimise its impact on it. The layout has a zig-zag edge to the park and the houses are in many instances arranged to front onto the open space across footpaths, thus avoiding back gardens along the periphery and providing surveillance to the space.

On the southeast of the space, The Close comprises a short L-shaped terrace of houses, again in yellow and red brick, which fronts onto a footpath which leads southwestwards onto Watling Street. Abutting the park at the top of a slope, the straight rear wall presents a harsher junction with the green space, but here the park is allowed to flow right up to the base of the buildings under a very low post and rail fence. A children's play zone is successfully tucked away next to the buildings in a corner of the open space. However, a small car park juts out next to it which would benefit from some landscaping to soften its appearance. On the south west side, Vicarage Close (early 1970s) is visible, with fenced back gardens onto the space.



A bench on the Ver-Colne walk showing the route of the River Ver.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Public Realm (contd.)

Watling Street, King Harry Lane and St Stephen's Hill are all well used roads for access to the City centre. Materials used for the public realm are in the main tarmac for roads and footways but the predominance of trees, shrubs and hedges and some grass verges acts as a foil. Historic, as its name suggests, Watling Street is still the main access from the south and passes between the church and other listed buildings opposite on a road of pleasantly modest dimensions with narrow footways which has successfully retained the integrity of this historic grouping. Red brick walling survives on most historic boundaries in this area including those surrounding the church, the site of the former vicarage and beyond no.5 Watling Street.

A number of the grounds of the former large Victorian houses accessed from King Harry Lane and St Stephen's Hill, although still privately owned, are in community type uses and or in communal grounds and therefore enjoyed by a wider audience than they would have been when they were first built. Again red brick walling visible in the street scene is a distinctive feature of the area.



The open area behind St Stephen's church provides further public green space in the area.



Grass verges and hedges act to soften the use of tarmac as a surfacing material.



Red brick walling is a distinctive feature of the area.



Most road and pavement surfaces are tarmac.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

- ✓ Views of the City and particularly of the Abbey.
- ✓ Views of St Stephen's spire which gives a reference point and sense of place.
- ✓ Historic Assets - Scheduled Ancient Monuments, listed and locally listed buildings.
- ✓ An area with a particularly strong verdant character green swathes, trees (including specimen trees) and hedgerows.
- ✓ Surviving and legible historic routes (St Stephen's Hill, King Harry Lane and Watling Street (south eastwards from the King Harry P.H.)).
- ✓ Retention of large houses and their related landscapes within new development retains a strong sense of the City's Victorian history.
- ✓ Typical traditional park style railings.
- ✓ Park and public access to the park and nine hole golf course.
- ✓ Public Open Space at St Stephen's.
- ✓ Network of footpaths linking to the open spaces.
- ✓ Red brick walls – give a strong sense of identity and cohesiveness.



Views of the Abbey from within the area are a positive aspect.



The park and open space at St Stephen's have a positive impact on the character of the area and are significant amenities.

Area 7b: The Park and St Stephen's Hill

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Negative

- ✖ Sub Station and related hard surfacing in the centre of the park off Mud Lane.
- ✖ Whilst necessary for direction and public safety, traffic signage on Watling Street and St Stephen's Hill does detract from the character of the area. The pedestrian crossing on King Harry Lane is particularly intrusive, using standard guardrails. Opportunities for reduction and improvement of signage, and improvement of guardrails would be welcomed.
- ✖ Some of the fencing and other structures separating the different functions in the park are obtrusive and unattractive. The galvanised steel security fencing around the running track is particularly harsh and industrial. Barriers to prevent access by vehicles into the grassed area north of Mud Lane are dated and utilitarian. Opportunities should be explored to improve quality and design and reduce the visual effect of such enclosures.
- ✖ Car parking – this is an unfortunate encroachment into the green area of the park. Its appearance could be mitigated by landscaping. Opportunities should be explored to improve its quality and reduce the visual impact when the leisure centre is redeveloped.

Scope for Change

- Any development or redevelopment in the area must take account of the verdant character of the area and the other historic assets that have been identified. The retention of the tree cover and the height and positioning of any new buildings within the area are key points in avoiding adverse effects and preserving the landscaped character of the area in particular in views from the Green Belt, the Abbey, the open spaces and the main roads (St Stephen's Hill, King Harry Lane and Watling Street).
- Future improvement and management of the Park provides opportunities to look at ways to enhance its character and appearance whilst encouraging continued use and accessibility. Improved pedestrian routes through the park from the city centre to St Michael's and Verulamium Museum are desirable to improve connectivity of the areas of interest, particularly for tourists. Links to an outer Green Ring around the city centre taking in a route through the park would be beneficial.
- Further exploitation of the Roman history through innovative, but sufficiently sensitive ways of interpreting and accessing the archaeological value of the park.
- Opportunities should be taken to enhance the appearance of the area during any programmed highway works.
- Improvements in landscaping could be made to the edges of St Stephen's Hill Open space.
- Although the Ver-Colne valley walk runs along the north side of the park, appreciation of the river is precluded by undergrowth and overgrown grass between the informal path and the river bank. Consideration could be given to enhancing appreciation of the riverside location whilst respecting ecological issues.
- The status of some of this area as Scheduled Ancient Monument does limit the scope for groundworks and development.
- Much of the open area is Metropolitan Green Belt which limits scope for development.