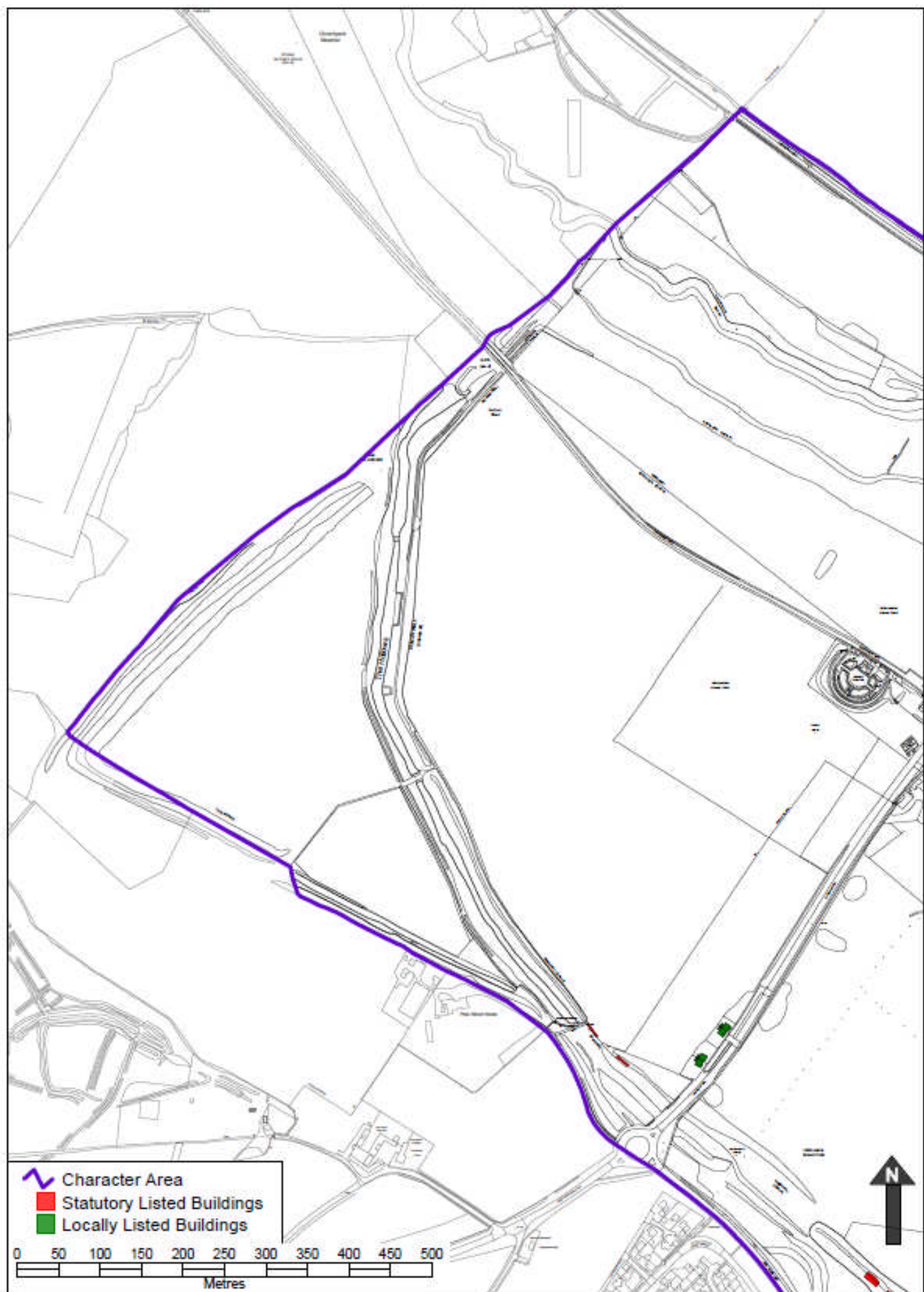


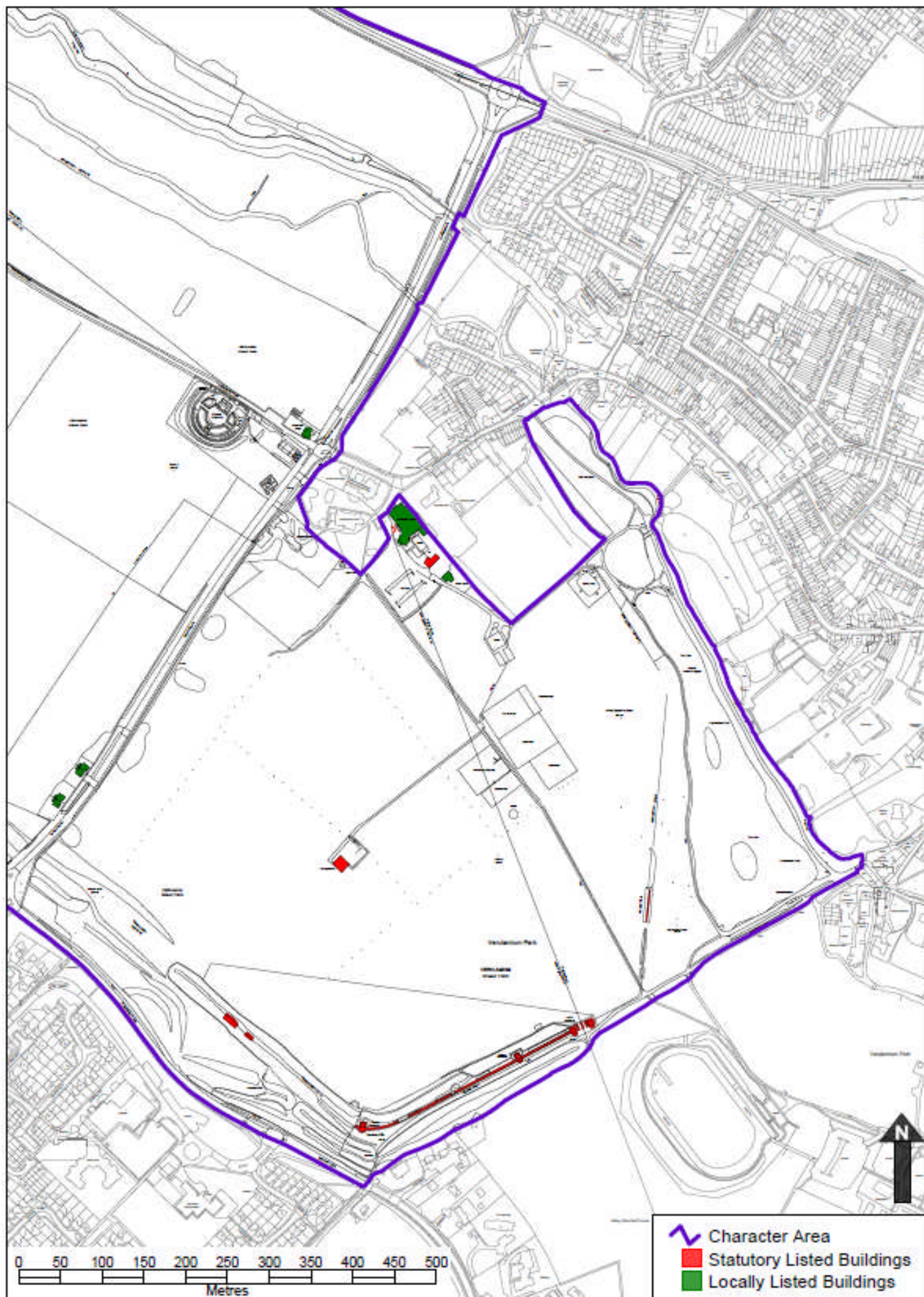
Character Area 1

Verulamium





AREA 1: VERULAMIUM
Map 1



AREA 1: VERULAMIUM
Map 2

Area 1: Verulamium

Bluehouse Hill, King Harry Lane (western part), Redbourn Road (part), St.Michael's Street (part).

Scheduled Ancient Monuments

The whole of the character area is Scheduled (Scheduled Monument Nos: 1, 1b, 1d) with the exception of the roads, the field between the River Ver and the Redbourn Road, and small areas which are built on i.e. the immediate curtilage of nos. 1-4 and St.Michael's Lodge, Bluehouse Hill, and Verulamium Museum, St.Michael's Street.

Listed Buildings

Barn 33m. SSE of Verulamium Museum (St.Germain's Barn) (Grade II)

Visible parts of Roman City (all Grade I and also Scheduled Ancient Monument) as follows:

- Fragment of wall at west of city at Verulamium.
- Fragment of wall at south west of city at Verulamium.
- Fragment of wall including tower at southern point at Verulamium.
- Long stretch of wall incorporating tower & gateway along southern boundary at Verulamium.
- Fragment of wall on eastern boundary at Verulamium.
- Part of Roman house with mosaic floor and hypocaust, at Verulamium.
- Corner of building which was in forum of Roman city, St.Michael's Street.



Fragments of the Roman Wall (Grade I listed and Scheduled Ancient Monument)

Locally Listed Buildings

Bluehouse Hill

1-4 (consec.), St.Michael's Lodge.

St.Michael's Street

Museum, Grebe House.



St Germain's barn (Grade II listed) and Grebe House (locally listed)



Nos. 1-4 Bluehouse Hill (locally listed)



Area 1: Verulamium

Character Summary

This character area covers a large part of the western side of the conservation area and also pushes out into the countryside from the edge of St Albans. It lies almost entirely on the southern slope of the Ver valley apart from one field on the northern slope running from the river up to the Redbourn Road (A5183). The southern part of this character area stretches uphill to King Harry Lane. The area is predominantly parkland and fields which gives it an open character. There is both a strong sense of history and tranquillity about this whole area that should be preserved.

To the west are the important country landscapes of the Gorhambury Estate, crossed by the River Ver, with views out towards the Fosse (the extremity of the known Roman city), and the excavations of the Roman Theatre alongside the former Watling Street. To the east lies the largely green expanse of Verulamium Park, which is a key feature and both a formal and informal recreational and cultural asset for St Albans, containing several visible sections of the Roman city wall, a man made lake, the river, sports pitches and courts, play areas, and, in the corner of the park adjoining St Michael's Street, Verulamium Museum.

The open nature of the area means that views across it and radiating from it are numerous. The southern slope of the valley affords long distance views of the built up area of the city on the northern side above the valley bottom. The park provides a special, distinctive and

substantial open and verdant setting for the city with splendid iconic views of the Abbey rising above sloping city streets. From Bluehouse Hill the Abbey is viewed across the park and, in addition, the view eastwards from Redbourn Road provides yet another special long distance view, showing the Abbey's scale and position on the hillside dominating the city and in particular the profile of its nave, north transept and massive castellated Norman tower against the city skyline. Other notable views from this area include the pleasing short distance views eastwards from Bluehouse Hill into St. Michael's (Area 4c), which forms an informal edge to the city of a rural village nature, and views of the tower of St Michael's church from various vantage points which provide a strong link to Area 3.

Although busy Bluehouse Hill divides the park to the east from farmland to the west, the Roman remains provide the historical connection which merges them into an area of identifiable character. Due to the undeveloped and open nature of this area these archaeological remains are dominant and the setting of the Gorhambury estate with the open rolling countryside on the west side of the character area and the parkland on the east are crucial contexts for accessing, reading and appreciating them. Not only are the scheduled monuments important in their own right, but their settings are precious and both need to be retained and protected as assets for the city.



The Abbey from Verulamium Park

History

resembles a banded rock formation. The wall ends on the south-east at London Gate; where the foundations are marked out. Accessed from King Harry Lane, via a pedestrian bridge over the ditch, a wide tarmac pathway, flanked by historic iron railings, runs alongside the Roman walls to the west and the deep ditch to the east. Beyond the ditch the eastern edge of the character area is marked by the edge of residential development on King Harry Lane. Further north the boundary follows the pathway (Causeway) which divides the western part of the park and the lake from the eastern part (Area 7b).

The map illustrates the Roman city of Verulamium, which is the site of modern St Albans. The city is enclosed by a red-shaded wall. Key features labeled on the map include:

- Roman Gate:** Located at the top left, near the River Ver.
- Theatre:** A large semi-circular structure in the center.
- Temple:** A large rectangular structure to the right of the Theatre.
- Verulamium Roman Town:** The area within the walls, including the Theatre and Temple.
- Roman Wall:** The boundary of the city, shown in red.
- River Ver:** Flows through the city, with a bridge labeled 'River Ver'.
- Modern City:** The area outside the Roman walls, shown in white.
- Other landmarks:** Roman Wall, Roman Gate, Roman Temple, Roman Theatre, Roman Forum, Roman Amphitheatre, Roman Circus, Roman Basilica, Roman Forum, Roman Amphitheatre, Roman Circus, Roman Basilica.

At the bottom of the map, there is a copyright notice: "© All rights reserved OS License No: 100018953 - 2011".

A wide-angle landscape photograph showing a village with several buildings, including a prominent red-brick house, nestled at the foot of a dense forest. The forest covers the lower slopes of a hill, with some trees showing early autumn colors. Beyond the forest, a bright green, open field stretches across the middle ground. In the background, more rolling hills are visible, also covered in green vegetation, under a clear blue sky with a few wispy white clouds.

View across St Michaels to the Gorham Block and the Fosse.

Area 1: Verulamium

History contd.

The City Council purchased the eastern part of Verulamium from Lord Verulam in 1929. Some of the Roman city was excavated over the following thirty years and then for the most part covered over to be used as parkland¹.

Whilst within the park there are a number of visible sections of the Roman city walls, forum and gateways, which are part of the Scheduled Monument and also Grade I listed buildings, the park must still conceal a wealth of archaeological knowledge. To the west of Bluehouse Hill where the conservation area stretches the full extent of the known Roman city up to the Fosse defence work, the history and the form of the Roman town is more obvious and the Roman theatre and adjacent Roman buildings alongside the former Watling Street (now the drive to Gorhambury), which have been excavated and left uncovered, are a valuable tourist attraction.



*Left:
The Wheeler
Excavations
(1932)*

*Photo from St
Albans Museum*



The Roman Theatre



The Roman Theatre, showing the relationship with St Michael's Church

At the western edge of the park adjoining St. Michael's the vein of history running through the character area is also evident, with the popular Roman museum, built in the 1930s to house the finds (extended in the 1990s in a neo Roman style), and to the south a modern visitors' building (2004), faced in white concrete embedded with crushed and whole shells, protecting and interpreting the excavated Roman hypocaust and mosaic. Here also ridge and furrow fragments and field boundaries survive from the medieval and early post medieval landscapes.



The Verulamium Museum extension



The modern building which houses the Roman hypocaust .



Early C19 postcard showing the Causeway, the railings and the Roman Wall

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

Area 1: Verulamium

Buildings

South of St. Michael's Church is the vicarage and its large garden. The vicarage was replaced in the late 1920s to a design by Percival Blow, local architect of note, in a vernacular style with a shallow plan and steep gables, akin to a row of three cottages. The vicarage garden is transitional between the churchyard (Area 3) and the open area of the park. From Bluehouse Hill the curtilage of the vicarage is largely hidden behind a brick wall, single storey brick outbuildings and shrubs, with the red tiled roof and gable tops of the vicarage just visible from here and also from the park, particularly in winter.



St Michael's Vicarage

Adjoining Verulamium Museum is St Germain's Barn a weather-boarded and timber framed barn from the C18, a reminder of the more recent history of this area as farmland and listed (Grade II), used for storage. To its south west stands Grebe House, a timber framed building salvaged from Watford and relocated here in the late C20; an interesting import which makes a charming contribution to the ambience of the park, and which is not out of place with its timber framed neighbour and has therefore been locally listed. South west of Grebe House is a café which provides a valuable facility for park visitors but aesthetically has a neutral contribution.



Grebe House

Adjacent to Bluehouse Hill and alongside the drive to Gorhambury, close to the Roman theatre, is a C19 lodge house (St Michael's Lodge) which is notable for its gothic style, flint walls, high pitched fish scale patterned clay tiles roofs and pretty patterned timber and cast iron windows. It positively contributes to the character of this area and has been locally listed. It also shares characteristics with several of the listed C19 flint faced buildings in the adjacent character area of St Michael's (Areas 3 & 4c) which provides a strong visual and historic link with that area.



St Michael's Lodge, Bluehouse Hill

Visible across the park at the southern end of Bluehouse Hill and set behind a lay-by, there are two matching pairs of early C20 Arts and Crafts modest rural "estate cottages" with a simple U-shaped frontage with forward projecting gables at each end, finished in pebble dash with first floor mock timbering between the gables and simple wooden casement windows. These contribute to the rural character of the area and were built for the Gorhambury estate alongside Bluehouse Hill at the time when it terminated at St Michael's village. They have therefore been locally listed.



The Inn on the Park; Grebe House and the Museum are in the background

Area 1: Verulamium

Public Realm

Along with hedges and lines of trees, the wide expanse of the park running up to King Harry Lane incorporates natural grassed areas and along most of the boundary with King Harry Lane there are tall trees and hedgerows.

However, on entering Verulamium Park on its northern side from Abbey Mill Lane, the sight of the expanse of the lake, the river, wildfowl, trees and shrubs, mown grass, grass pitches, courts, play areas and play pools, with adults and children enjoying informal and formal recreation, gives this part of the area more of an urban park-esque character.

Owing to the accessibility of most of the eastern side, a large proportion of this character area is public realm and indeed also valuable green space, as is described above.



The Inn on the Park with courts to the south and informal space in the foreground



St Michael's Manor, glimpsed from the Park



Northern entrance to the park from Abbey Mill Lane



The Lake, looking south eastwards from the footbridge



Looking north-westwards across the sports pitches



The north-western end of the lake, used for Model Boating.

Area 1: Verulamium

Public Realm (contd.)

Bluehouse Hill is the entrance to the city from the southwest and Hemel Hempstead. Formerly linking only to St. Michael's, in the 1960s a new section was cut on the north side of the valley to join with the Redbourn Road and Verulam Road at Batchwood Roundabout. Although the road is wide and busy, and divides the character area and the Scheduled Ancient Monument in two, it fortunately has some trees and hedgerows to either side and wide grass verges (which in spring are awash with daffodils). Along the southern section the road is mostly below the surrounding land but the north section is above it and more obvious and noise from the roads reaches into the adjoining green areas. Many of the negative aspects of the character area are related to the roads.



Bluehouse Hill showing the green verges



Bluehouse Hill—Boundary treatment of post & rail fencing and seasonal daffodils.

Bluehouse Hill is in the main bordered by robust wooden post and rail agricultural-style fencing on the east side and post and wire fencing mixed with rural hedgerows on the west side, both being appropriate to the rural and open character to either side. In addition, sections of red brick and flint walling survive on some historic boundaries surrounding the church and vicarage and in part between the fields on the west of the hill, linking the area with similar walling in Areas 3 & 4c. The wire mesh safety fencing on the bridge where the road crosses over the Ver is, in contrast, more urban, but is relatively transparent and limited in extent.

To the west the land is largely agricultural and part of the Gorhambury Estate and access to the Roman theatre is by admission fee. The former Watling Street leading to Gorhambury is not public although access is permitted currently by agreement. Nevertheless the visibility of this well maintained agricultural area from the two adjacent public roads is high and it is a much valued contributor to the character area as a green space, providing a pastoral backdrop with livestock grazing right on the urban fringe of the city, and with trees lining the access to Gorhambury and emphasising the course of the River Ver.



Gorhambury Estate cottages on Bluehouse Hill



Estate land on the outskirts of the city.

Area 1: Verulamium

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Positive

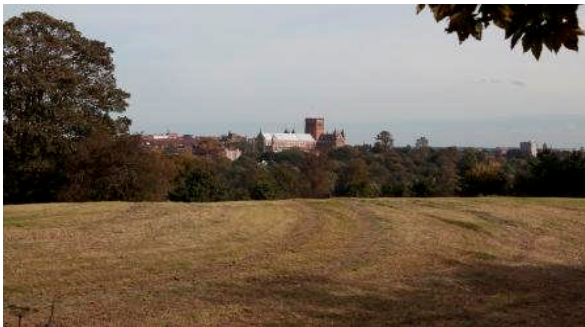
- ✓ Views of the City and particularly of the Abbey.
- ✓ Historic Assets - Scheduled Ancient Monuments, listed and locally listed buildings.
- ✓ Strong sense of Roman history, and open setting for the visible archaeological and historical remains.
- ✓ Green swathes, trees and hedgerows.
- ✓ Public Access to the park.



The Abbey from the park with part of the Roman wall.



The Roman Theatre



View of the Abbey and the city from Bluehouse Hill.



The well-used path between the lake and the River Ver.

Negative

- ✗ Tall lamp columns on the south side of Redbourn Road interrupt the special view of the Abbey. Opportunities for improvement of this situation would be welcomed.
- ✗ Telegraph pole detracts from the setting of the Roman theatre. Opportunities for improvement would be welcomed.
- ✗ Whilst necessary for direction and public safety the large amount of traffic signage on Bluehouse Hill and at the Batchwood roundabout and in particular the traffic lights, lighting and signage associated with the 'no right turn' into St. Michael's Street and the pedestrian crossing to the theatre do detract from the character of the area. Opportunities for improvement of this situation would be welcomed. The pedestrian crossing to the south is less obtrusive.
- ✗ Guard fencing at the River Ver bridge on Bluehouse Hill is mitigated, due to its limited extent, transparency and current patina, and is therefore more neutral.
- ✗ Some of the fencing and other structures associated with sporting activities in the park are obtrusive and interrupt views across the green swathes of the park. Opportunities should be explored to improve quality and reduce the visual effect of such enclosures and structures.

Area 1: Verulamium

Positive & Negative Characteristics and Scope for Change

Negative (contd.)

- ✗ Some of the furniture in the park such as the waste bins, would benefit from co-ordination and re-siting to avoid visual conflict with the visible Roman remains.
- ✗ Museum car park – this is an unfortunate encroachment into the green area of the park but its effect is mitigated by its limited size, matured landscaping (with ornamental trees) and surrounding hedging. Opportunities should be explored to improve its quality and reduce the visual impact.



View south-eastwards towards the City, from the Redbourn Road showing the lamp columns



The Museum Car park

Scope for change

- The status of the majority of this area as Scheduled Ancient Monument and Metropolitan Green Belt does limit the scope for groundworks and development.
- Taking the Verulamium Park Masterplan Study and the Verulamium Park Management Plan forward provides an opportunity to look at ways to enhance the character and appearance of the Park whilst encouraging its continued use and accessibility. The St Albans City Vision (2010) indicates that 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, and proposals include an outer Green Ring around the city centre taking in a route through the park.
- St Albans City Vision encourages the Council, together with English Heritage, to investigate more 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.