



SOPWELL NUNNERY

GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN

2023 – 2028



OVERVIEW

Greenspace Action Plans

Greenspace Actions Plans (GAPs) are map-based management plans which specify activities that should take place on a site over a stated period of time; these activities will help to deliver the agreed aspirations which the site managers and stakeholders have identified for that site.

Public Engagement

Engagement with stakeholders is at the centre of effective management planning on any site. An initial engagement period was held Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace and Sopwell Mill Open Space in November and December 2022, to establish core aims and objectives for the site; these are reflected in Section 3. A second stage of engagement to be completed in November 2023 will enable stakeholders to comment on the proposed management actions for the site. An associated engagement response document, published online as an appendix to this plan, summarises comments received and any amendments made to the plan as a result.

Version Control

Version	Issue Date	Details	Author	Reviewed	Approved

CONTENTS

Overview	ii
Greenspace Action Plans	ii
Public Engagement	ii
Version Control	ii
Contents	iii
1.0 Summary	1
1.1 Site Summary	1
1.2 Vision Statement.....	1
2.0 Site Description	2
2.1 Introduction.....	2
2.2 Geography and Landscape	6
2.2.1 Landscape	6
2.2.2 Conservation Designations	6
2.3 History and Archaeology	8
2.4 Habitats and Wildlife	12
2.4.1 Grassland.....	12
2.4.2 Trees and Wet Woodland	12
2.4.3 Scrub and Hedgerows	13
2.4.4 Allotments	13
2.4.5 River Ver	14
2.4.6 Wildlife	16
2.5 Access, Facilities and Infrastructure	17
2.5.1 Access and Circulation	17
2.5.2 Site Entrances	17
2.5.3 Furniture	18
2.5.4 Interpretation	19
2.5.5 Other Routes.....	22
2.6 Community and Events	23
2.6.1 Sopwell Nunnery Green Space Steering Group	24
2.6.2 Events.....	26
2.6.3 Revitalising the River Ver Project	26
3.0 Aim & Objectives	27

4.0	Management Prescriptions.....	30
4.1	A welcoming place.....	30
4.2	Healthy, safe and secure	32
4.3	Clean and well maintained.....	33
4.4	Sustainability	34
4.5	Archaeology and landscape	36
4.6	Habitats and biodiversity.....	37
4.7	Community involvement.....	38
4.8	Marketing and communication	39
5.0	Action Plans and Maps	41
5.1	Annual Actions.....	41
5.2	Year 1 (2023-24).....	47
5.3	Years 2 - 5.....	49
6.0	Specifications	52
7.0	Appendices	58

1.0 SUMMARY

1.1 Site Summary

Site Name:	Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space
Site Address:	Cottonmill Lane St Albans Hertfordshire AL1 1HH
Grid Reference:	TL 515099 206378
Size:	6.4ha (Sopwell Nunnery 5.5ha & Sopwell Mill Open Space 0.9ha)
Designations:	Scheduled Monument Metropolitan Green Belt Environment Agency – Flood Zone 3
Owner:	St Albans City and District Council

1.2 Vision Statement

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space provides an uplifting experience for any visitor whether exploring the ruins; discovering wildlife on the river; exercising the dog or following the site's thousand year old gardening tradition on the allotment. The Green Space allows you to make connections : it links you to the wider countryside and town via the Alban Way and the Ver Valley Trail; connects you to the city's medieval and Tudor heritage; to the productivity of the soil; to other people and to nature. It's a valuable resource for the people of St. Albans.

The vision for management of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space will be to create:

- a welcoming and accessible Green Space for the local community and for visitors from further afield
- a site whose historic significance is interpreted, celebrated and respected
- a place that supports and celebrates self-sufficiency and the production of food
- a site rich in biodiversity

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Introduction

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space is a 5.5 hectare public open space situated in the Sopwell Ward to the south of St. Albans. The busy city centre is only a ten minute walk away. 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 Monument: 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.

ST ALBANS DISTRICT

Sopwell Nunnery

GAP 2023 - 2028

Location Plan

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space
Grid Ref: TL151063
Easting: 515179
Northing: 206327

Sopwell Mill Open Space
Grid Ref: TL151060
Easting: 515192
Northing: 206098

Scale @ A4

1:30,000

Date

March 2023

Rev

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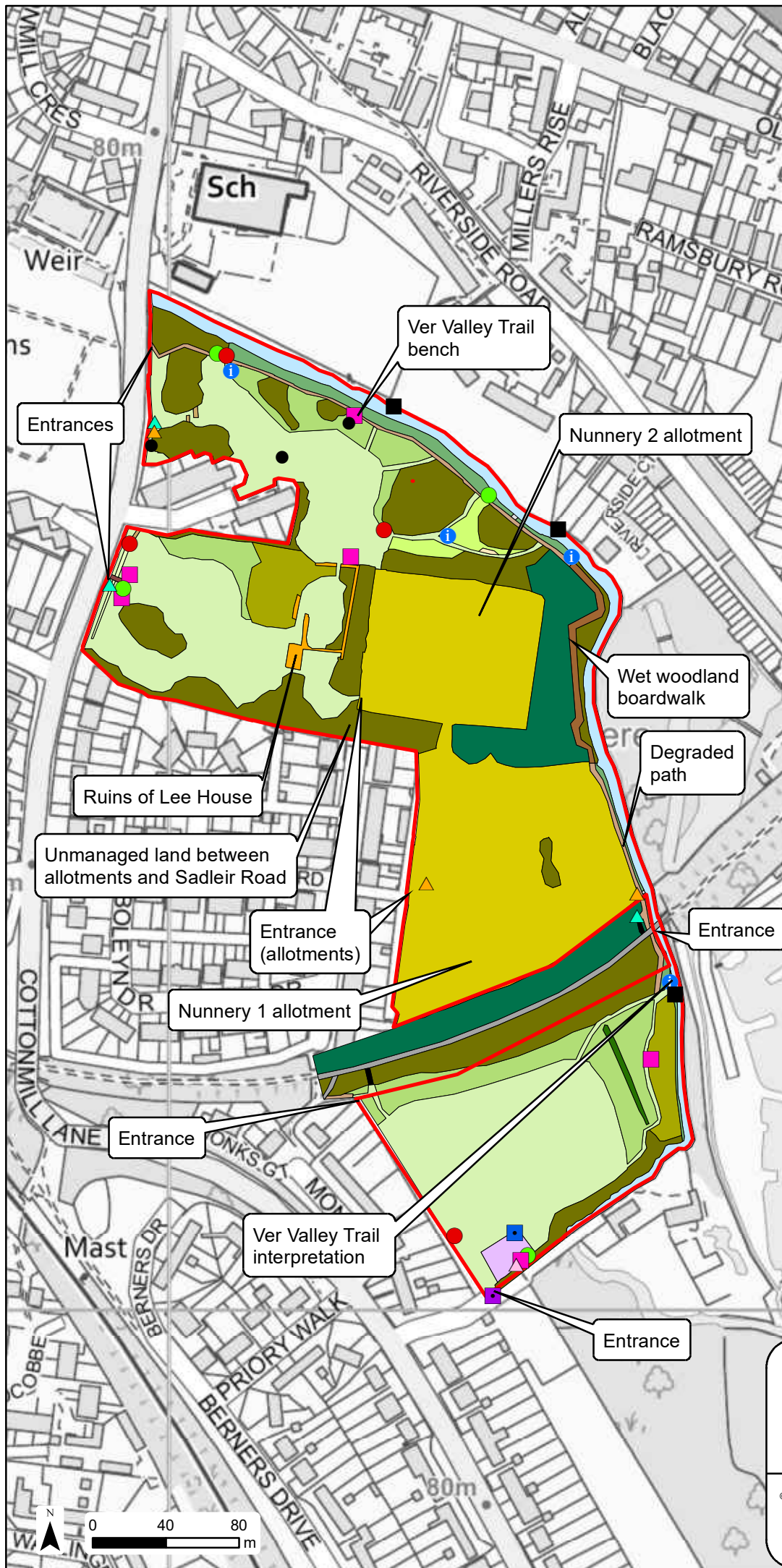
Sopwell Nunnery

Greenspace Action Plan

Site Description

Legend

- Site boundary
- ▲ Welcome sign
- i Interpretation panel
- ▲ Notice board
- ▲ Play area sign
- Bench
- Dog bin
- Litter bin
- Vehicle gate
- Vehicle barrier
- Drain cover
- Outlet pipe
- Amenity grass
- Allotments
- Dry ditch
- River Ver
- Marginal vegetation
- Long grass
- Long grass (wetter)
- Tall ruderal
- Scrub
- Hedgerow
- Woodland
- Bridge
- Boardwalk
- Hard surfaced path
- Permeable path
- Steps
- Dog steps
- Historic remains
- Play area
- Woven willow structure
- Log barrier



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March 2023

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



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Sopwell Nunnery

GAP 2023 - 2028

Constraints Map

Legend

-  Site boundary
-  Footpath
-  Scheduled Monument
-  Local Nature Reserve
-  Main River
-  Flood Zone 3
-  Flood Zone 2
-  Wildlife Site
-  Deselected Wildlife Site
-  Ecosite
-  Deleted Ecosite
-  Conservation Area
-  Greenbelt - November2016

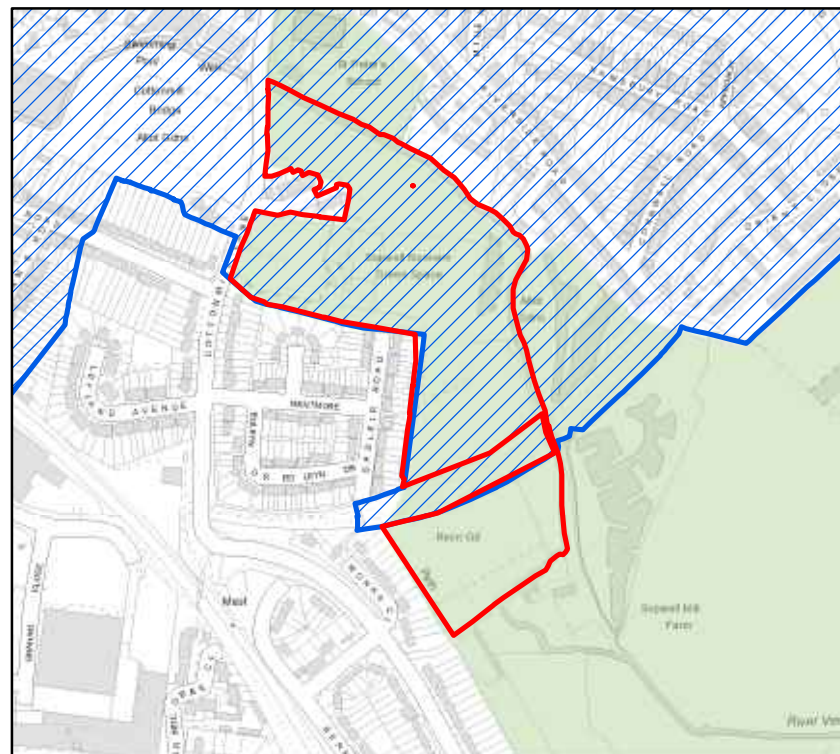
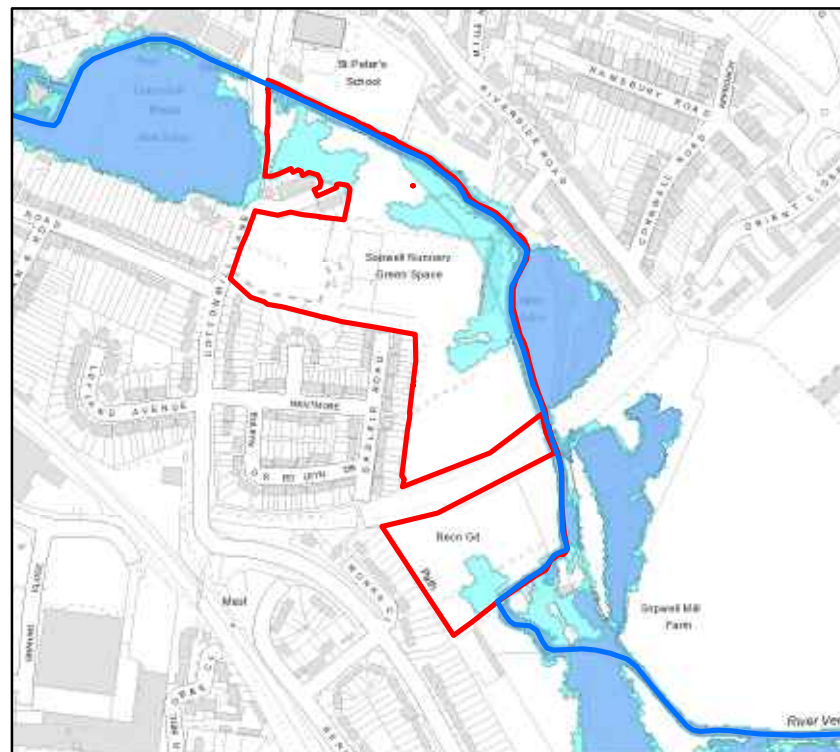
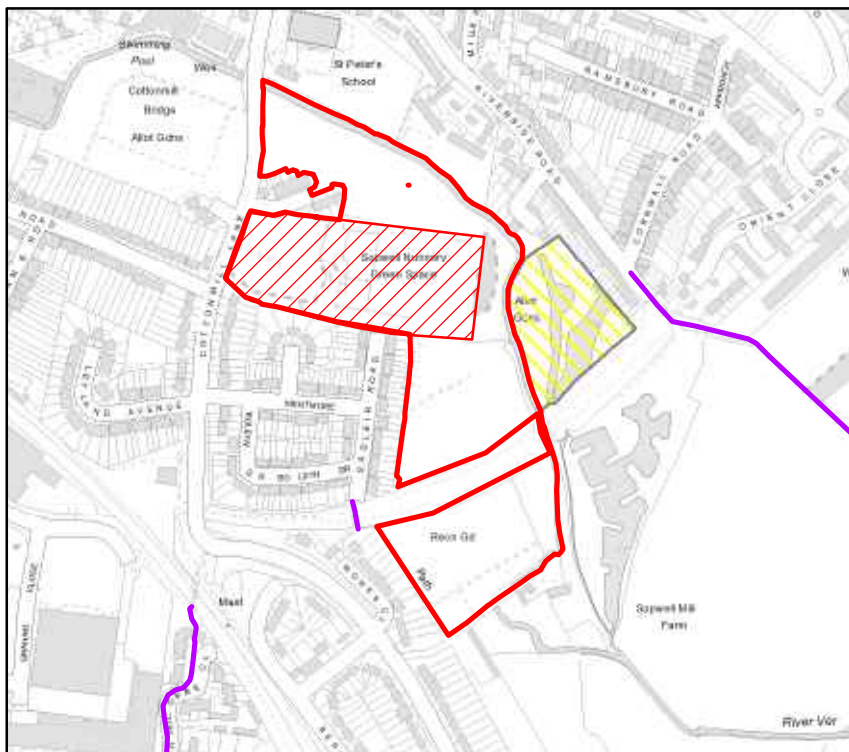
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Countryside
Management
Service



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2.2 Geography and Landscape

2.2.1 Landscape

The site is located on the flood plain of the River Ver. The geology comprises river alluvium covered in stone-less clayey and poorly drained soils, some of which are calcareous. The River Ver chalk river winds its way through the wide valley. Mature willows, some of which have been pollarded, follow the course of the river. The meadows and scattered clumps of scrub add interest to the area of amenity grass.

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.

Although the Sopwell neighbourhood has its share of dense residential developments, there is also a considerable amount of green open space. Sopwell Nunnery Green Space has an important function as an informal recreational area for children, families and dog walkers because of its proximity to the town centre and residential areas. Walkers and cyclists can utilise the good connections along the River Ver Trail or on the Alban Way to access the wider countryside. From the Alban Way to the west there are views of the Abbey Cathedral.

Allotment owners benefit from its long history of cultivation, fertile soils and accessible location.

Nearby sites include the Watercress Wildlife Association Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site on the opposite river bank to the allotments. The site is managed by local residents and volunteers and is open all year round, with a nature trail, boardwalk, wet woodland, old orchard, meadows and a wealth of wildlife to explore.

South of Sopwell Mill Open Space is Sopwell Meadows Local Wildlife Site, alluvial pastures with spring sources along the valley of the River Ver supporting areas of dry semi-improved neutral grassland, species-rich unimproved wet marshy grassland, swamp and fen, and areas of open water.

2.2.2 Conservation Designations

Sopwell Nunnery is subject to statutory and non-statutory designations. See Table 1 and the constraints map.

Table 1 – Statutory and non-statutory designations

Scale	Designation	Detail
National	Scheduled Monument (SM)	Sopwell Nunnery Green Space is a Scheduled Monument (SM) which means the site has national significance and is protected under statute.
	Listed Building Grade II	Sopwell Nunnery ruins is a listed building (entry number 1103135) due to its historic interest and is protected under statute.
	Heritage at Risk	The Benedictine Priory of St Mary (Sopwell Priory) and the post-medieval mansions known as Sopwell House or Lee Hall (entry number 1019137) are registered as Heritage at Risk by Historic England owing to their current poor condition.
District / Borough	Conservation Area	Sopwell Nunnery Green Space falls within the Conservation Area for St Albans, a designation which seeks to preserve the character or appearance of a particularly valuable area. This covers all aspects of the landscape, including trees. Therefore, if any tree works are to take place within the site, a request must be made to the planning authority, who will decide whether the works can commence or whether to issue a Tree Preservation Order.
	Metropolitan Green Belt	Both Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space fall within the Metropolitan Green Belt, designated under PPG2 (Green Belts), which restricts the growth of development in strategic rural areas on the edge of conurbations.

The Environment Agency has included all of the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and the river past Sopwell Mill Open Space in Flood Zone 3 which means consent will be required for any works which may have an impact on the risk of flooding.

2.3 History and Archaeology

Sopwell Nunnery is a well-defined and well documented archaeological site which has been left relatively undisturbed. The monument belonged to the Church in the first instance, before being taken over by one of the Henry VIII's most important advisers. The site's archaeology illustrates the great social and political changes that were occurring in the sixteenth century. The Nunnery has a national significance and has been designated as a Scheduled Monument. It is worth noting that, although the visible ruins are commonly referred to as 'Sopwell Nunnery', they actually represent the remains of a Tudor Hall built by Richard Lee.

Geoffrey de Gorham, the Abbot of St Albans, founded a Priory here around 1140, for Benedictine nuns dependent on St Albans Abbey. There were only five nuns and a prioress present at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The remains of the nunnery still lie beneath the present ruins.

Richard Lee was born in 1513, and his official connections began when he was appointed bailiff and farmer of the Priory around 1534. In 1535, Lee was employed as 'visitor' of the monasteries, and in the next year served with the King's armies as Surveyor of Works in Calais. As a close adviser to Henry VIII, he was in a position to exploit the Dissolution of the Monasteries. By 1540 he had acquired the stone of the priory church and its vestry, paying the Crown £13 6s for full ownership of the building and its property, plus an annual rental of 10s 10d. In 1549, he began altering Sopwell and calling his new house 'Lee Hall'.



The remains of Richard Lee's Tudor Hall.

Richard Lee's will in 1570 includes mention of 'Lee Hall'; and on his death in 1575, the property passed to his eldest daughter Mary Coningsby, later married as Pemberton. Her sister and nephew, Anne and Richard Sadleir inherited in 1610 when she died childless. Thomas Saunders married Helen Sadleir, a descendant of Anne and Richard, and sold the property to Sir Harbottle Grimston. An estate plan of around 1650 shows the north front of the house, probably in its last major incarnation.

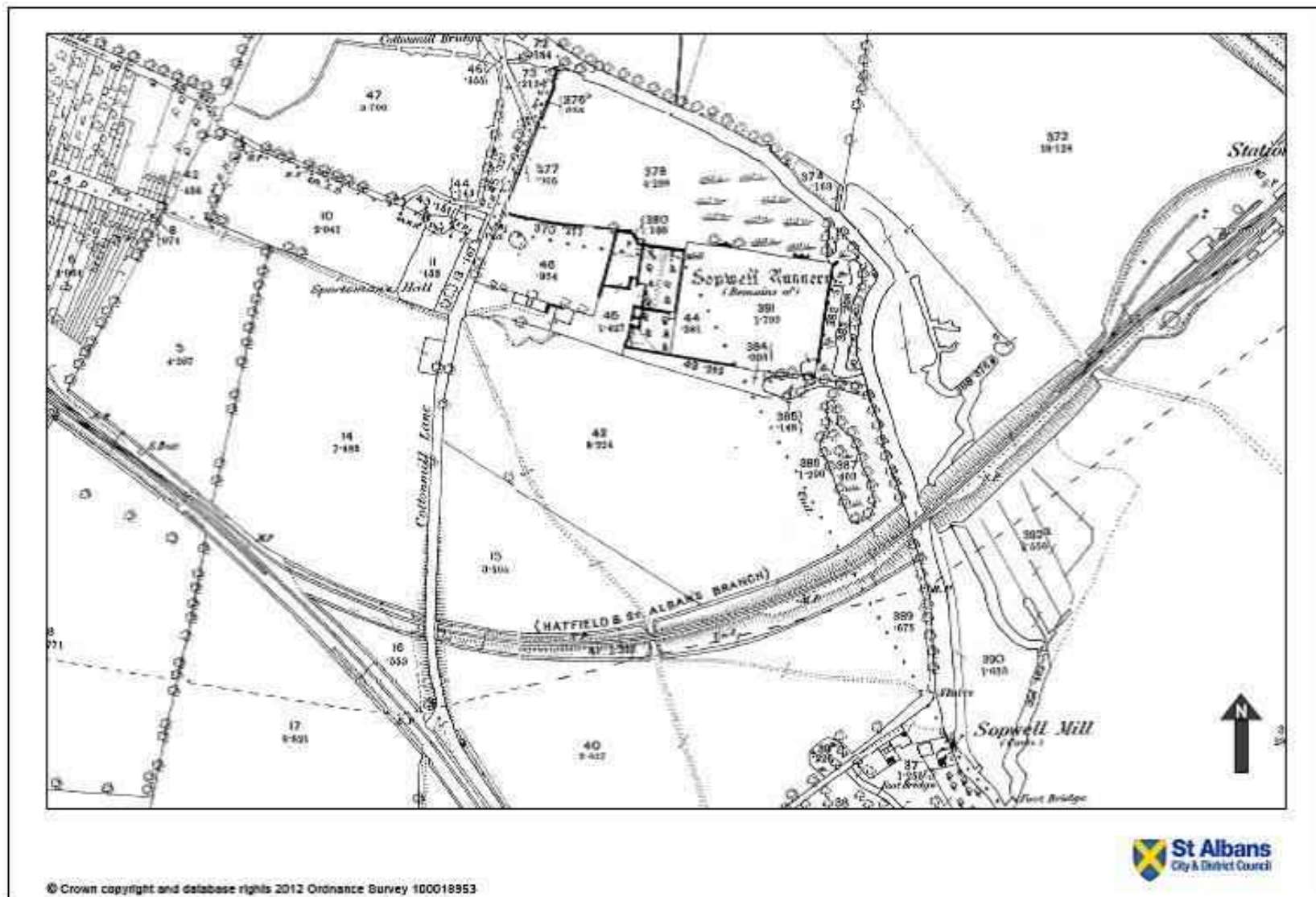
Only the ruins of one wing and parts of the Great Hall now survive. In 1673 building material was removed from the site for re-use at Gorhambury, and eventually by 1682 it was said that 'Here was a great house but of late taken down and sold'. However, something of the building still survived, as payment was made to a glazier in 1698 for maintenance work at Sopwell. These tenements endured into the early eighteenth century when a lease of a great garden, 'now ploughed', and garden house was made to a William Kilby, gardener. Representations of the building in the eighteenth and nineteenth century show a ruin (see picture below) but there are indications of limited habitation as late as 1793. Indeed, one outbuilding was in use until the 1960s as a motorcycle repair shop and scrap metal merchant.

The ruins are currently on the Heritage at Risk register and a final consolidation phase needs to be programmed to remove it from the register. Management of the ruins is consented by Historic England. A major programme of repair works has been carried out including removing encroaching vegetation and vegetation that is growing out of the ruins, repairing brickwork using approved processes and clearing

vegetation from in front of the ruins to maintain the views. Management of vegetation on and around the ruins is ongoing to prevent damage recurring. There have been problems with graffiti and vandalism with bricks removed from the walls and people climbing on the ruins.



Sopwell Ruins by Mr John Day 1850.



Map of the site circa 1880.

2.4 Habitats and Wildlife

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space has a significant role to play in the Ver Valley's wider landscape and as a wildlife corridor. Adjacent sites like the Sopwell Mill Open Space, the Cottonmill Lane Allotments, the Watercress Wildlife Association Local Nature Reserve, the Alban Way and the Marlborough Club provide connectivity and additional habitat space for wildlife. Although the Sopwell Nunnery site is relatively small, it hosts a wide range of habitats and species.

2.4.1 Grassland

Across the sites there are two large sections of amenity grass that are cut regularly, to allow the public to use the open space for recreation purposes such as informal ball games and picnics.

In the previous plan there were efforts made to restore areas of the grassland to wildflower meadow by relaxing the grass cutting regime and sowing wildflower seed. This was partially successful, with the species diversity increasing in the wildflower margin of the laid hedge in Sopwell Mill Open Space, providing an additional nectar source for invertebrates and food for small mammals. On both sites the longer grass allowed by the relaxed mowing regime provides a greater diversity of habitats for invertebrates, small mammals and birds. This plan will follow on from that and take a more targeted approach to creating wildflower grassland in some of the longer grassland areas.

2.4.2 Trees and Wet Woodland

Wet woodland or carr is an important, rare habitat featured as one of the Forestry Commission's Regional Targets and a priority habitat for the UK. Apart from the construction of the Ver Valley Trail boardwalk, this area remains largely unmanaged and the habitat is maintained through natural processes. The site has a range of old mature Willows (*Salix spp.*), some of which have been previously pollarded and some of which are heavily laden with Ivy (*Hedera helix*). Many of these trees are likely to provide excellent habitats for species such as woodpeckers and bats. There are few young naturally regenerating trees. Trees on site are surveyed regularly and resultant works are prioritised based on risk to life and property.

A woven willow tunnel was constructed in the meadow area on the edge of the carr in 2012 by volunteers and was maintained by the volunteers for several years, however the management of this sculpture was prevented by COVID restrictions while they were in effect. The willow sculpture is now overgrown as a result and the meadow area is dominated by competitive species. The wet woodland will be allowed to expand into this area as part of the River Ver project, providing additional flood water storage and expanding the size of this rare and valuable habitat.

There are a number of specimen trees throughout Sopwell Nunnery Green Space ranging from mature trees to more recent plantings. Individual mature trees are a valuable resource for many invertebrates, birds and bats.

2.4.3 Scrub and Hedgerows

There are areas of scrub which form clumps within the grasslands, allotments, and along the boundary of the site, especially on the embankment of the Alban Way. Scrub provides habitats for nesting birds and mammals in the transitional zone between open ground and woodland. Dense scrub forms an impenetrable boundary feature along the north and south sides of Sopwell Mill Open Space as well as providing valuable shelter for wildlife. To retain this density and to control its propensity to invade grassland habitats, the scrub is managed regularly on a rotational basis.

Ruderal vegetation including Bramble (*Rubus plicatus*) and Common Nettle (*Urtica dioica*) has developed on some of the old footprints of the ruins where tall scrub has been removed in the past.

2.4.4 Allotments

Allotments are highly valuable sites for urban wildlife when managed sympathetically, providing a dense mosaic of habitats and a variety of flowering plants. Cottonmill and Nunnery Allotment Association (CNAA) manage the site along with nearby Cottonmill and Sopwell Mill sites. The Allotment area is divided into two separate sections: Nunnery 1 and 2. The two sites are separated by a narrow corridor of mixed trees, shrubs and low lying vegetation. This corridor is already an important feeding and nesting site for small birds and is used for shelter by larger birds and mammals, such as Foxes (*Vulpes vulpes*) and Hedgehogs (*Erinaceus*

europaeus). The majority of the allotment site comprises tenanted plots which are cultivated for growing vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs. Some allotment holders also keep chickens. Many have sheds and greenhouses and recent initiatives from the allotment association have resulted in a proliferation of wildlife areas and ponds appearing on the plots. The boundaries of the allotments contain a wide variety of shrubs, trees and hedgerows which constitute another significant wildlife habitat.

Towards the south east of Nunnery 1 there is a small wooded area of established old trees. This area is known for bats and a breeding site for small birds. Both sites also have the potential to be used by Grass Snakes (*Natrix natrix*) and Slow Worms (*Anguis fragilis*). The Allotment Association plan to develop the area to further improve it as a suitable wildlife habitat and increase its biodiversity.

The area of land between the Nunnery 2 allotment site and Sadleir Road which contains a section of wall which once formed one of the buildings of Lee Hall and a range of trees and shrubs has been offered to CNAA by SADC to manage as a nature reserve area. This was previously fenced off from the ruins however the fence has broken. Though this area is difficult to access due to tall vegetation and logs placed across its width, it is vulnerable to antisocial behaviour and dumping of garden waste.

2.4.5 River Ver

The River Ver is a chalk river, which are internationally rare and a priority habitat in the UK. Chalk Rivers flow from underground aquifers and are typified by good water quality and steady water temperatures. Most of Hertfordshire's chalk rivers are degraded, but at their best they would support species like Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*), White-clawed Crayfish (*Austropotamobius pallipes*), and Water Vole (*Arvicola amphibius*) and plants such Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus aquatilis*) and Water Starwort (*Callitriche stagnalis*). The Ver's population of brown trout has diminished, water voles have not been recorded here for many years and non-native North American Signal Crayfish (*Pacifastacus leniusculus*) can be found along the river. However, some emergent and in-river vegetation persists and Water Crowfoot is doing well. Kingfishers (*Alcedo atthis*) and Grey Wagtails (*Motacilla cinerea*) are still seen regularly.



Well vegetated section of the river Ver.

The vegetated margins of the river can provide an important refuge and migration corridor for wildlife. They are cut in rotation once every three years so that at least two thirds of the margin remains intact at any time. In the past pre-planted coir rolls have been attached to unvegetated sections of the river bank to extend this habitat and reduce erosion. Dogs entering and exiting the river have worn deep grooves into the bank in places impacting the paths as well as the river habitat and the installation of dog steps has not had significant impact in reducing this.



Erosion around dog steps installed on the River Ver.

The Ver Valley Trail follows the River Ver from its source at Kensworth Lynch, north of Redbourn to Bricket Wood where it joins the River Colne and eventually finds its way to the River Thames at Staines.

2.4.6 Wildlife

Kingfishers are known to have bred along the banks of the River Ver in recent years. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), Coot (*Fulica atra*) and Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) are found feeding and nesting along the river. While in the more scrubby and wooded areas you will see Blue Tit (*Cyanistes caeruleus*) and Great Tit (*Parus major*), you might also spot Bullfinch (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*), Nuthatch (*Sitta europaea*), Treecreeper (*Certhia familiaris*) and family parties of Long-tailed Tits (*Aegithalos caudatus*). With the nearby lakes Little Egrets (*Egretta garzetta*) and Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*) are often seen flying over.

There are plenty of suitable habitats across the site for a wide range of invertebrates from the tiniest of insects such as Woodlouse (*Oniscus asellus*) and ants (*Formicidae*) to the more noticeable species that people recognise such as hoverflies (*Syrphidae*) and bees (*Anthophila*). Butterflies are a favourite with many people and can be seen on a warm sunny summer's day feeding on the various nectar sources around the site. Red Admiral (*Vanessa atalanta*) and Peacock (*Aglais io*) can be found on bramble flowers while in the more dappled shady areas you could spot a Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*). In late spring start to look out for damselflies and dragonflies hawking along the river for insects; an unmistakable one is the Banded Demoiselle damselfly (*Calopteryx splendens*).

With the varied habitats the site has potential for use by both Grass Snakes and Slow Worms, especially the allotment area where there are suitable nesting sites, food and water; they are protected under the Countryside and Wildlife Act 1981. Other species of interest that have been recorded in the vicinity include bats (*Chiroptera*) and small mammals.

2.5 Access, Facilities and Infrastructure

2.5.1 Access and Circulation

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space can be accessed by road, foot and public transport; it is seen as a valuable asset to the local community. Due to its proximity to the urban environment the site has a relatively high rate of usage by visitors to the ruins, walkers, dog walkers, families and children. The site is close to a local primary school, and the close mown areas in front of the ruins are frequently used for informal play.

The sites are accessible from the Alban Way - part of the National Cycleway Network (Route 61) – which divides the two sites with its surfaced off road path popular with cyclists and walkers. The Ver Valley Trail follows the River Ver through the sites.

2.5.2 Site Entrances

There are entrances onto the public open spaces from:

- Cottonmill Lane at various points onto both sites
- Alban Way onto both sites
- Sadleir Road into Sopwell Mill Open Space (crossing the Alban Way)
- Monks Close into Sopwell Mill Open Space

Vehicle access onto Sopwell Nunnery Green Space is restricted by a ditch along Cottonmill Lane to the front of the ruins and logs at alternative access points to prevent risk of ground damage and fly tipping on the sites. The Council's Grounds Maintenance contractor is able to access the sites with vehicles via the allotments when required. Sopwell Mill Open Space has a lockable vehicle barrier to access the main grassland in the southern corner by the play area.

A wooden footbridge allows easy access from Cottonmill Lane across the ditch opposite the ruins. The northerly access point by the river from Cottonmill Lane is furnished with a ramp.

The allotments, which are only accessible to tenants, can be accessed by three pedestrian routes, or by car off Sadleir Road. Off-site parking is very restricted.

2.5.3 Furniture

Play Area

There is a small play area for younger children located in the southern corner of Sopwell Mill Open Space. The play area is popular and regularly used by families. Over time the play equipment will become worn and may require replacement; the play area is inspected regularly and repairs undertaken when required. Any new equipment would require external funding.

Benches

There are four benches on Sopwell Nunnery Green Space, three overlook the ruins. The fourth is installed by the river as part of the Ver Valley Trail depicting the rivers course and the natural and social history of the river. This has suffered some vandalism and, due to natural weathering, the carved illustration has become difficult to see. There are two benches on Sopwell Mill Open Space, one in the play area, the other viewing the recently laid hedgerow.



Ver Valley Trail bench following its installation in 2011 (left) and in 2023 (right).

Litter and Dog Waste Bins

The site is provided with both litter bins and dog waste bins, which are emptied regularly as part of the grounds maintenance contract. There are three litter bins and three dog waste bins on the Sopwell Nunnery side of the site, while Sopwell Mill Open Space has one litter bin in the play area and one dog waste bin further into the site. As bins near the end of their lives they will be replaced with bins which can take

both litter and dog waste; at this point positioning of bins can be rationalised to reduce the number on site.

Footbridge, Steps and Ramp

The footbridge, steps (from the Alban Way) and ramp are checked regularly for safety and any issues should be dealt with immediately. There are three sets of dog steps into the river which are also regularly checked.

Boardwalk

A length of boardwalk runs through the wet woodland following the Ver Valley Trail and joins Sopwell Nunnery Green Space to Sopwell Mill Open Space. The boardwalk is named Fenny's Boardwalk after the man who looked after the stables that used to be opposite the ruins in Cottonmill Lane. The boardwalk is inspected regularly, items such as the weld mesh are replaced as required however this structure is approaching the end of its lifetime and is showing increasing amounts of wear and tear.



Fenny's Boardwalk takes the River Ver Trail through the wet woodland.

2.5.4 Interpretation

Welcome Signs and Notice boards

Welcome signs to orientate visitors are located at the three main entrances on Sopwell Nunnery Green Space; these are now looking a little dated and the southern entrance sign is often obscured by vegetation.

There are two notice boards for Sopwell Nunnery Green Space maintained by Sopwell Residents Association; one on Cottonmill Lane and the other at entrance to the allotments by the River Ver. These are becoming tired and difficult to view. There is a third notice board on Cottonmill Lane relating to the Revitalising the River Ver project. This is the most prominent of the notice boards on the site. There is also a notice board located in the allotments off Sadleir Road for use by allotment members. The main allotment access gate from Sadleir Road has a sign with the allotment name and contact details.

There are no entrance signs relating to Sopwell Mill Open Space.

Interpretation Panels

There are three interpretation panels around Sopwell Nunnery Green Space to inform visitors about the important natural features that are found on the site - wet woodland, spring and summer wildflower meadows; and explain the management required to enhance those habitats. These are now look dated and are subject to graffiti.

There is a dedicated River Ver interpretation panel on the banks of the river near to the Alban Way Bridge just into Sopwell Mill Open Space; again like the benches this tells the story of the River Ver with intricate carved detail though due to natural wear and tear it is less visible than it originally was.



River Ver interpretation panel.

Website and other media

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space has its own web page on Parks Herts website at www.parksherts.co.uk/parks/view/sopwell-nunnery-green-space. There is also a page on the St Albans Museums website about the ruins at www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/visit/sopwell-ruins.

A leaflet was produced for Sopwell Nunnery Green Space in 2011. It contains a map with information about the site's history and wildlife. The leaflet can be accessed via the Countryside Management service website at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/services/recycling-waste-and-environment/countryside-management, but is not currently promoted through the Parks Herts or museum service webpages or the district council website. The leaflet does not include Sopwell Mill Open Space.

Open Space to Park Street Station. A leaflet for this walk is also currently available from the Ver Valley Society's walks page.

The western end of the Alban Way divides the two sites. This multi-user active travel route was formerly the old Hatfield to St Albans branch line. More information on this route can be found on the Council's website at www.stalbans.gov.uk/walking-and-cycling and on Sustrans website at www.sustrans.org.uk/find-a-route-on-the-national-cycle-network/alban-way/.

The Abbey Line Trail also passes through both sites on its route following the Abbey Line from St Albans Abbey Station to Watford Junction Station. A detailed route guide of this walk can be downloaded from the Abbey Line Community Rail Partnership website at abbeylinecommunityrail.org.uk/days-out/abbey-trail/.

Plans for a new country park to the south of Sopwell Mill Open Space have been proposed as part of the mitigation for a new Strategic Rail Freight Interchange (SRFI). With its north entrance adjacent to the south entrance of Sopwell Mill Open Space, the country park will allow visitors the opportunity to extend their walk along the riverside through a near continuous stretch of green spaces. The proposed footpath crosses the Ver Valley Trail near the junction of Cottonmill Lane and Butterfield Lane and re-joins the trail just before it passes under the A414. The Rights of Way improvements planned in this project are unlikely to be completed in their entirety within the lifespan of this GAP, but it is possible that work on the area neighbouring Sopwell Mill Open Space will begin towards the end of this 5 year period.

2.6 Community and Events

The Council works closely with the local press to promote parks and green spaces especially by organising community days. Sopwell Nunnery Green Space has received well-earned recognition for being an important open space in the District and one which is well used by the local community. It has received the Green Flag Award in previous years, however SADC will not be applying to renew Green Flag status for Sopwell Nunnery Green Space.

2.6.1 Stakeholder Organisations

Due to its historical interest and value to residents as a local green space and the ecological importance of the river as habitat corridor, Sopwell Nunnery has a diverse range of stakeholder organisations who play role in guiding the management of the site.

Sopwell Residents Association (SRA)

The SRA work for, and represent, the residents of the Sopwell ward, to uphold equal opportunities and work for good relations amongst members of the Sopwell community. They promote an ongoing process of consultation between users and providers of organisations. They organise social activities which are open to all members. They also help create a safer community, create a better sense of community and work to improve the environment.

In 2011 the SRA published 'Sopwell, a history and collection of memories'. Details of the book and how to obtain a copy are to be found on the SRA website sopwell.org.uk. Any profits made from sales are used for community projects.

Cottonmill and Nunnery Allotment Association (CNAA)

The CNAA are a voluntary organisation, representing plot holders on Cottonmill, Sopwell Mill or Nunnery sites. Formed in 1994, they are one of the largest allotment associations in the St. Albans area, with over 105 active members.

The association works closely with its members and the council to maintain and improve amenities on the allotments. They especially aim to provide a strong and united voice in their dealings with the council. They offer a range of benefits to their members and organise a wide variety of social activities. They publish a regular own newsletter and have a dedicated website www.stalbansallotments.co.uk which is linked to from the Council's allotment web page.

The Council has updated the allotment rules and tenancy conditions to cover issues such as the use of chemicals, pets, anti-social behaviour, disputes between tenants and measures to deal with waiting lists. John O'Conner Ltd supply the allotments with rotted compost from vegetation collected from across the district, every other year.

St Albans Museum Service

St. Albans Museum Service oversees the protection and maintenance of the Scheduled Monument, continues to develop the understanding of the site and works to provide information about its history www.stalbansmuseums.org.uk/sopwell-nunery.

Every two or three years the service oversees the removal of vegetation from the remains of the Tudor Hall by a private company.

Countryside Management Service (CMS)

CMS works with the Council to enhance, care for and promote enjoyment and awareness of the countryside. They advise and, when able, give practical assistance to local authorities and conservation groups on how best to care for sites, including the commission and implementation of management plans www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/cms.

CMS play an active role in encouraging volunteers and local residents to identify and become actively involved in projects on their local green spaces. CMS's practical volunteers work towards implementing the GAP. Extending works to include Sopwell Mill Open Space and potentially other local sites will make sure that any one site does not get 'gardened' and provide opportunities for people to get involved with lots of different tasks.

CMS also provide opportunities for informal recreation through events, guided walks www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/walksandmore and run Hertfordshire health walks at local sites www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/healthwalks.

Watercress Wildlife Association (WWA)

Volunteers of the Watercress Wildlife Association (WWA) along with local residents manage for the adjacent Watercress Wildlife Association Local Nature Reserve (LNR). On the opposite bank of the River Ver the LNR consists of old watercress beds, nature trail, boardwalk, wet woodland, old orchard, meadows and a wealth of wildlife. The association has a consultative role on the steering group.

Ver Valley Society (VVS)

Ver Valley Society (VVS) have been integral to the development of the Ver Valley Trail which joins the green space to the wider countryside www.riverver.co.uk/. They organise volunteer tasks on this stretch of the river and are part of a wider Riverfly monitoring programme in the area, with a monitoring site at Sopwell.

Other stakeholders who receive minutes from steering group meetings include St. Peter's Primary School.

2.6.2 Events

Until recently the SRA held guided walks starting at Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace which were well attended. The Countryside Ranger for the area also ran guided walks for schools in the past. Unfortunately no events have resumed since they were stopped in 2020.

2.6.3 Revitalising the River Ver Project

St Albans City and District Council is working in partnership with the Environment Agency to restore the River Ver between Verulamium Park and Sopwell Mill as well as the lakes within Verulamium Park. The aims of the project are to return the Ver to a more natural chalk river which is more resilient to climate change and better able to support iconic chalk stream biodiversity, and to restore the natural heritage of St Albans; creating more sustainable lakes and improved green spaces.

Because the scope of this project includes the section of the River Ver that runs through Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space, this GAP incorporates some actions which have been proposed as part of the River Ver Project to give a comprehensive overview of the management of these sites. The project will deliver habitat improvements to discrete reaches with this stretch of the river forming reaches 5 and 6. Work on these reaches will take place during phase 2 of the project.

The project is currently going through an extensive design and consultation process which will ensure it achieves the intended ecological impact and has the support of stakeholders. For more information on this project, please visit the district council website at www.stalbans.gov.uk/revitalising-river-ver-project.

3.0 AIM & OBJECTIVES

The aim and objectives of the GAP are as follows:

Aim

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.
- D4 Respond proactively to climate change.

E. To protect the nationally significant archaeological remains and historic landscape of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space

- E1 Ensure above ground historic features and buried archaeological remains are appropriately managed by developing a conservation management plan.
- E2 Undertake appropriate actions to ensure their preservation such that they are no longer at risk, including scrub removal and repairs.

F. To maintain and enhance the quality of the habitats across the sites, while maintaining their value for biodiversity and recreation

- F1 Continue the annual grassland management regime.
- F2 Create and actively manage wildflower grasslands on both sites.
- F3 Prevent encroachments of scrub into the grasslands.

F4 Undertaking rotational coppicing of the boundary hedgerows and manage the laid hedge on Sopwell Mill Open Space.

F5 Continue with active management of the river and river bank habitat in cooperation with the River Ver Project.

F6 Monitor and record species across the sites.

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.

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 Highlight the natural and cultural heritage of the sites and communicate this to visitors.

4.0 MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTIONS

The management prescriptions described here form the basis of the actions proposed on the following action plan maps and tables (Section 5).

4.1 A welcoming place

Welcoming visitors to the site must start before they reach the site, when they are deciding whether or not to visit. This is because the majority of people looking for access information are much less likely to visit a destination if they can't find the information they need. Accessibility information on the ParksHerts and St Albans Museums webpages for Sopwell Nunnery is currently limited and could be improved. It acknowledges that the site is wheelchair and pushchair friendly and provides information on how to reach the site but is missing other information which would be useful for people with disabilities such as a description of the terrain, the location of the nearest public toilets, or what formats interpretation is provided in.

The district council do not currently have a webpage specifically for Sopwell Nunnery however it is listed as on their Commons and Greenspaces page so they could link to the Parks Herts webpage from there, making the information easier to find.

The entrances to Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space are relatively informal, with only a single defined path running through both sites. Such informal access is beneficial as the open view of the ruins from Cottonmill Lane does invite visitors onto the site however there is no entrance sign to Sopwell Nunnery at the north end of the surfaced path and the entrance signs and accompanying Notice boards at other access points for Sopwell Nunnery Green Space are beginning to appear worn. The noticeboards frequently contain out of date notices and the entrance signs provide limited information beyond the location of points of interest and facilities within the site. The entrance signs are also entirely visual and use small text. As a result, the entrance signs in their current state could lead visitors to feel the site is not cared for and exclude people with visual impairments.

There are no entrance signs for Sopwell Mill Open Space at any of the entrances at present, the site being accessed via minor residential roads. The map on the entrance signs for Sopwell Nunnery Green Space also do not include this area so it is not as well signposted as it could be.

Following delivery of the River Ver project, after which the map will need to be updated, new entrance signage should be installed. This and all interpretation produced during the delivery of this GAP should be made accessible to a wider range of visitors by using appropriately sized font and making plain text versions adapted for use with text to speech software available online. Signage and interpretation will also continue to make use of illustrative elements to convey information e.g. maps with symbols identifying the locations of facilities. By improving the visual appeal and accessibility of the entrance signage the sites will be made more inviting. To ensure visitors can make the most of the many connecting routes off Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space new entrance signs should also consider what lies beyond the site. Highlighting on maps further walking routes, including the Ver Valley Trail and the new country park to south when it is completed, and directing visitors to points of interest outside the site as well as inside it.

The surface of the path has been identified as an issue hindering access, particularly between the two sites. Erosion around the dog steps has rendered the path unsuitable for use where it passes underneath the Alban Way bridge. The provision of a high quality path will only become more important considering the possible increase in the popularity of this route when the country park opens and extends the available riverside walk. Phase 2 of the River Ver project includes plans to replace sections of the path which will be moved back from the river bank to allow the bank to be regraded to a shallower slope. The new path will be a minimum of 2 metres wide and suitable for use in all weather. At the same time the existing path could be repaired and improved where necessary, including making the disabled entrance at the north of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space more user friendly. As this is a later stage of the River Ver project, some repairs to the path and fencing along the river bank will be carried out prior to these enhancements to ensure the path remains safe for site users in the interim.

The boardwalk will be replaced as it is reaching the end of its lifetime. The new boardwalk should have a minimum width of 2m to allow site users to pass each other comfortably. The boardwalk may be extended during Phase 2 of the River Ver project as proposed enhancements to the river bank will reconnect a larger area of the site with the floodplain and facilitate expansion of the carr.

4.2 Healthy, safe and secure

St Albans City and District Council follow regular maintenance regimes for all of the public open spaces they manage. This includes inspection of the allotment fencing and the paths every six months, independent inspection and servicing of the play equipment annually as well as weekly internal inspections, and inspection of the trees on the site every 3 years, and addressing any issues identified by those inspections.

The site has been subject to occasional vandalism, primarily on the interpretation materials. While the council endeavours to remove all graffiti from the site in a timely manner, occurrences of graffiti impact visitors' perceptions, potentially inviting further antisocial behaviour and making the site appear less safe. Given the open nature of the site, positive deterrents such as encouraging greater public presence on the site and ensuring the site looks well maintained are likely to be more effective in preventing graffiti at Sopwell Nunnery Green Space.

Due to its secluded nature, the area of land between the Nunnery 2 allotment site and Sadleir Road has been at risk of use for antisocial behaviour since the fence broke enabling access from the ruins. Tall vegetation, including bramble (*Rubus plicatus*), makes this area difficult though not impossible to reach at present and could be allowed to develop into a more substantial barrier.

There have been instances of people foraging in Sopwell Nunnery Green Space which is permitted under UK law, provided it is only for personal consumption and it does not damage rare or endangered species. However, it should be noted that potentially dangerous species are not removed from the site so site users are advised to exercise caution when picking any wild plant. In addition, foraging should be practiced with restraint, never clearing a species from the site, thereby allowing some specimens to reproduce and ensuring sufficient resources remain for wildlife.

Oak processionary moth (OPM) has not been found within Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace or Sopwell Mill Open Space to date, however St Albans City and District is within the Established zone for this invasive species. This means it is now the responsibility of landowners to manage OPM on their land, rather than the Forestry Commission. Due to the ecological and public health impact that OPM presents, SADC has adopted control measures in line with guidance provided by the Forestry

Commission. If a potential OPM sighting is identified on site, either through the course of regular inspections, maintenance activities or reported by a third party or member of the public, action should be taken according to the Oak Processionary Moth (OPM) control process detailed in the appendix (see 7.1).

4.3 Clean and well maintained

Day to day maintenance of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open Space is carried out by John O'Conner as part of a wider grounds maintenance contract. This includes grass cutting and cutting back hedgerows as well as litter picking, and removal of graffiti when required. To ensure the visibility of the entrance signage at the south entrance to Sopwell Nunnery Green Space from the Alban Way, the hedgerow should be cut more regularly.

As previously mentioned, the path will be realigned and improved during the delivery of the River Ver project. The boardwalk will also be improved as sections reach the end of their lifetime and are replaced. To ensure public achieve the best value for money balancing sustainability, longevity of public assets, and aesthetic value, supports made of wood effect recycled plastic will be used to hold up the boardwalk going forward.

The fence at the top of the bank beside the path linking the two sites is dilapidated; it has been repaired in a couple of places and is now absent in others. The River Ver project aims to realign this path, which will allow the path to be made wider, and to regrade the bank. Until this takes place an interim solution is needed to ensure this path is safe and in an acceptable condition for site users. The path should be resurfaced and the fence should be replaced.

The entrance signage is anticipated to be replaced towards the end of this plan; the signage is beginning to look tired but it would be inefficient to replace these items before projects which will change the map are delivered. The existing interpretation on the site is also in poor condition, being vandalised and tired. This again makes the site seem poorly cared for, inviting further anti-social behaviour on the grounds. To resolve this issue the Ver Valley Trail bench and the mount for the Ver Valley Trail interpretation will be restored. New interpretation relating to the history of the site, and to the habitats and wildlife will be installed in Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace.

To add to the durability of new interpretation it will have a graffiti resistant coating. Installing more engaging interpretation may also improve the quality of site indirectly; facilitating learning about the natural and historic environment can encourage visitors to look after the site, as people are more likely to value what they understand and therefore they will be more motivated to protect it.

The River Ver is patrolled by dedicated volunteers from the Ver Valley Society on a monthly basis. They take measurements of the flow, record the state of the river and path, note vegetation and wildlife, and report any pollution, rubbish or fly-tipping. where necessary inform suitable authorities of problems. In addition to this, informal inspections are carried out by SADC and CMS officers. Members of the public are also able to report water pollution and other environmental incidents to the Environment Agency, please visit www.gov.uk/report-an-environmental-incident for more details.

4.4 Sustainability

In 2020 St Albans City and District Council published The Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy which describes the council's targets and intended actions to improve the district's environmental impact. This aligns with the Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy produced by the county council in the same year and guides the management of all SADC properties and projects.

SADC are committed to managing their open spaces using environmentally sustainable means. They have implemented the following measures:

- composting green waste generated on site and supplying the well rotted material to the allotments once every two years
- adopting peat, herbicide and pesticide free grounds maintenance, except where there is net benefit to the environment (e.g. to prevent spread of invasive species).

The allotments are similarly managed to reduce any negative environmental impacts and there is growing support among tenants for environmentally friendly gardening.

To ensure management on site is sustainable, all works will be specified to ensure the best value for money is achieved with the funding available, balancing the ecological impact of the materials and supplier, the durability of the item, aesthetic value, and price. This means that sustainably sourced renewable materials are used for items which do not experience a significant amount of wear and tear or can have component parts replaced as and when required. For items which need to be more robust or cannot be replaced easily, metal (usually stainless steel) is most often used. Wood effect recycled plastic is used where having a more natural aesthetic is also important.

Sopwell Nunnery Green Space will also be included in a proactive response to climate change. Expanding the wet woodland and riparian habitats as part of the River Ver project will reconnect more land to the flood plain, creating additional flood storage as well as increasing the coverage of a rare habitat to the benefit of species which depend on it. Best practice management will be employed with regards to all habitat and vegetation works.

Furthermore, visitors will be encouraged to act more sustainably. By facilitating learning about the local ecosystem and its importance and how individuals can protect it, interpretation on site could be used to promote environmentally friendly behaviour. This may include behaviours such as:

- Reducing water consumption at home to reduce the amount of water abstracted from rivers,
- Not allowing dogs into watercourses for two days after flea and tick treatments to reduce the insecticides leaching into the water, and
- Using reusable bottles and other containers to reduce waste.

To ensure the ongoing maintenance costs are financially sustainable, the council will maximise the use of existing resources and proposed works will be achieved within the available site maintenance budget, or funded through external sources such as existing or future Section 106 funding. Alternative funding sources will also be explored in the first year of delivery to facilitate other proposed actions.

4.5 Archaeology and landscape

The archaeological remains within Sopwell Nunnery Green Space are a remarkable historical asset that appears neglected and often misunderstood. They are currently on Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register, recorded as being in poor condition though a programme of repair works has been carried out. The final phase of this programme, which includes consolidation and putting a conservation plan in place to ensure the ruins will be well maintained going forward, has yet to be delivered.

The SM has the potential to contribute to the cultural offering of St Albans as a historic town. Therefore safeguarding the ruins against further damage and getting the ruins off the Heritage at Risk register is a priority action for the management of this site.

The St Albans Museums Service will finish development of a conservation management plan in the first year of this action plan. The conservation plan will ensure above ground historic features and buried archaeological remains are appropriately managed, detailing appropriate actions to preserve these important features. This will include, as a minimum, removing vegetation from the ruins to prevent roots damaging the mortar and controlling ruderal vegetation on the footprints of former buildings to prevent damage to buried remains and maintain open views of the above ground features. Any additional actions identified in the conservation plan will be adopted into this GAP following the conservation plan's completion.

The potential of this site as a place of interest is not currently realised largely due to the poor condition of and lack of appreciation for its heritage. Richard Lee's importance to national history is not well recognised, and the ruins of Lee Hall are often mistaken for the remains of Sopwell Nunnery. Installing new interpretation exploring the history of the site is essential in increasing the recognition of its significance. SAHAAS have begun preparations to produce two panels for the site; one on the building and one on Richard Lee.

There have been issues with visitors climbing on the ruins and defacing them in the past. Given that the ruins of Lee Hall and the buried archaeological remains are such a remarkable historical asset, access to the ruins should be maintained to allow visitors to connect with the cultural heritage this site represents. Installing

interpretation is more likely to dissuade such behaviour, as people are more likely to value what they understand and therefore they will be more motivated to protect it.

The River Ver project is unlikely to impact the ruins in any way as the SM lies outside of the floodplain.

4.6 Habitats and biodiversity

Due to the historic nature of this site, to enhance the character of the site habitat improvements should reflect the historic land use, taking into consideration how the site is currently used by visitors. The habitat management prescribed by this plan will also need to foster climate resilience, so will need to facilitate the establishment of ecosystems which can withstand increasing extreme weather events.

The map produced around 1880 shown in section 2.6 depicts a mosaic of wet grassland, wet woodland and grassland. The wet woodland covered approximately the same area that it currently does but there was a larger area of wet grassland to the north of this. The River Ver project includes plans to reconnect this area with the flood plain of the river and allow it succeed to wet woodland. While there is no evidence available that this area was historically wet woodland, it is a rare habitat that supports many species which will be more resilient and able to support more wildlife on the site if it covers a larger area. It will also support the stability of the water level in the river by providing flood storage.

The river bank habitat is currently managed through routine maintenance, with one third of the riparian vegetation being cut every year to encourage new growth and enable visitors to see the river. During the course of this GAP a number of habitat improvements for the river and its associated habitats will be delivered in cooperation with the River Ver Project. This will include:

- The river bank will be reprofiled to narrow the channel and create a shallower slope, increasing the area connected to the flood plain on which riparian habitat can establish.
- Tree thinning will be undertaken in places along the river bank to allow more light to reach the water.
- Woody berms will be installed in the river channel using material from the tree thinning to introduce flow diversity.

- Pools will be created, to provide continuity of habitat during periods of low flow for species which require deeper water.
- Gravel will be added in places to create riffles, which again create flow diversity but are also a vital feature for fish spawning.

There have been issues with dogs eroding the river bank where they enter and exit the river and the installation of dog steps has had limited impact in reducing this. The actions which will be delivered through the River Ver project will help to address this, as shallower banks stabilised with vegetation will be less vulnerable to erosion.

The majority of the site will be maintained as amenity grassland. The grounds maintenance contract specifies that amenity grass be kept between 10cm and 20cm length while wildflower areas are cut once per year and cuttings removed off site. A new wet grassland wildflower area may be established in Sopwell Nunnery Green Space as part of the River Ver Project as groundwater levels recover making lower lying areas of the site wetter. The wildflower areas will be cut once in autumn. The wildflower area on the east side of Sopwell Mill Open space has become dominated by taller competitive species so the frequency of cutting should be increased to three times a year, in April, late July and October, to allow smaller species to grow.

The hedgerows along the boundary of Sopwell Mill Open Space need to be managed to stop encroachment into the grassland and play area. The laid hedgerow across the site needs to be managed by continuing the schedule of laying and cutting regrowth.

The Ver Valley Society regularly record wildlife seen by volunteers, including standardised ecological surveys for freshwater invertebrates on behalf of the Riverfly Partnership. Members of the public could also be encouraged to contribute to citizen science efforts using apps such as iRecord, which enable the compilation of species datasets used to inform conservation work and research.

4.7 Community involvement

A period of public engagement accompanies the production of this management plan, enabling the local community and stakeholders to inform management of the site. All user groups with an interest in the site are aimed to be included in this process, and for their requirements to be considered as part of the planning process.

Liaison with stakeholders will continue throughout the delivery of this GAP to ensure it remains relevant and actions are delivered as planned. The action plans will be reviewed and updated annually in response to feedback and information from stakeholders. Means for members of the public to provide feedback about the site should be easily accessible via the council website and promoted on the site noticeboards.

Ver Valley Society and CMS conservation volunteers will deliver tasks on site, and opportunities to engage with these groups will be promoted to encourage local residents to become actively involved in site management. Volunteering is a tried and tested way of increasing interest and care for a site, whilst providing participants with the benefits of healthy activity, socialisation and environmental projects.

Guided walks, talks and other events can likewise engage members of the community and cultivate interest in the sites and their maintenance. There is great potential for using both sites to host a range of events and activities, both those relating to the ecology and history of the site, and community events, by working with residents and schools to run events.

4.8 Marketing and communication

The remains of Lee Hall are a remarkable historical asset that appears neglected and often misunderstood. Sopwell Nunnery Green Space has the potential to contribute to the St Albans' cultural offer and add to its appeal as a historic town. Using engaging and accessible interpretation and events to communicate the heritage would bring a range of rewards both in terms of understanding and attraction.

To that end new interpretation panels highlighting the history and wildlife of the sites will be installed and a new leaflet will be developed. The leaflet could be made available in a physical format at St Albans visitor information points, however it is anticipated that it will be primarily accessed digitally, either to view digitally or for home printing, so it should be promoted on all webpages relating to Sopwell Nunnery. Improving the available interpretation will also enhance the value of Sopwell Nunnery Green Space as an educational resource and a venue for events, enabling schools and local organisations to benefit more from it. Links with such organisations should be developed to ensure this potential is met.

Volunteer activities and guided walks around Sopwell Nunnery and the surrounding area have been well received, offering a more direct and personal opportunity to engage with the heritage of the site, therefore these will continue. Furthermore the walks and talks with the Countryside Ranger which have been run for school groups could be offered to special interest groups as well. The two public open spaces have been used for community events in the past, however these did not relate to the heritage of the site. The ruins could serve as a backdrop for plays and living history events linking to the Tudor history of St Albans, increasing their value as a community asset.

The noticeboards, which will be replaced at the end of their lifetime, should be used to promote events on the sites with content reviewed monthly to ensure they remain up to date. The SADC website could also be used to promote the Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and Sopwell Mill Open space as venues for community events.

5.0 ACTION PLANS AND MAPS

The following action plans include ongoing management for which budget has been allocated and prospective actions which are subject to funding being secured. Actions proposed as part of the Revitalising the River Ver project have been here, these are subject to funding being secured and it is undecided whether these will be delivered within the timeframe of this GAP.

5.1 Annual Actions

Ongoing management

Prospective actions

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec . ref:	Status
0.1	Health and Safety inspections and undertaking of works.	B1	When required	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.2	Empty bins on a weekly basis.	C2	All year	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.3	Replace old dog bins with litter bins unless another litter bin is in the same area.	C3	When required	SADC	SADC (JOC)	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.4	Undertake a tree safety survey every 3 years and carry out emergency tree work.	B2	Sep-Feb	SADC	SADC	Tree Budget	Staff time	n/a	
0.5	Continue to manage the Allotments in accordance with their plan.	B4	Ongoing	SADC/CNAA	SADC/CNAA	Allotment Budget	Staff time	n/a	

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec . ref:	Status
0.6	Conduct bi-annual inspection of Allotment fencing and carry out repairs.	B1, C3	Mar & Sep	SADC	SADC / CNAA	Allotment Budget	Staff time	n/a	
0.7	Supply rotted compost to allotment composting bins.	D3	Autumn Every other year	SADC	SADC (JOC)	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.8	Play area inspection and undertake any repairs as required.	B1, C3, C4	Weekly	SADC	SADC (JOC)	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.9	Play area service.	C3, C4	August	SADC	SADC (JOC)	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.10	Commission an independent inspection of play area and carry out identified improvements/repairs.	C4	Once per year	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.11	Management of vegetation through the GM Contract.	C1,C2, F1, F2	Ongoing	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.12	Cut 1/3 of the riverbank to encourage new growth annually except where erosion is evident.	F5	Sep	SADC	SADC (JOC) / CMS / Vols / VVS	GM Budget	Contract rates	2	

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec . ref:	Status
0.13	Annual River Ver check for over-hanging trees/scrub impacting on river. Agree work to be done by contractor/vols.	F5	Sep	SADC	SADC(JOC) / CMS / Vols / VVS	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.14	Inspect all paths and steps (to Alban Way) undertake repairs as required.	A1-A3, B1, C1	Every 6 months	SADC	SADC (JOC)	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.15	Maintain and replace log barriers.	B3, C3, D3	When required	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.16	Maintain notice boards with a content review every month.	H2	Monthly	SRA	SADC / SRA	SADC Budget	Vol time	n/a	
0.17	Remove all graffiti in accordance with SADC graffiti policy.	B3, C2	When required	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.18	Remove fly tip.	B3, C2	When required	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
0.19	Maintain wildflower areas through cut and collect	F2	Apr, Jul-Oct	SADC	SADC (JoC)	GM budget	Contract rates	4	

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec . ref:	Status
0.20	Report any pollution events to Environment Agency.	B3, C5	When required	ALL	All	n/a	n/a	n/a	
0.21	Secure external funding to ensure viability of capital works.	D2	Ongoing	SADC / CMS	SADC / CMS	n/a	n/a	n/a	
0.22	Undertake routine management of the ruins following the Scheduled Monument conservation plan – removing scrub, ivy from around the ruins, fallen trees etc.	E2	Ongoing	SADC / SMS	SADC / CMS	SADC Budget	TBC	n/a	
0.23	Monitor and record species across the sites (including Riverfly).	F6	Ongoing	All	All	n/a	n/a	n/a	
0.24	Maintain bird and bat boxes.	F6, G1	Nov-Jan	SRA	SRA	n/a	Vol time	n/a	
0.25	Devise and run a programme of volunteer/community events and walks.	G1 - G3, H1	Ongoing	SADC	SADC / CMS / SNGSSG	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	
0.26	Liaise with stakeholder organisations and all other users.	B4, F1-F3, G1-G3	Ongoing	SADC	All	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec . ref:	Status
0.27	Promote the site as an educational resource and as a venue for public events and film location.	G2 - G4, H1, H2, H4	Ongoing	SADC	SADC	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	
0.28	Update Sopwell Nunnery Green Space and ParksHerts webpages when required.	H2	When required	SADC	SADC	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	
0.29	Review and update annual action plans.		Mar Yearly	CMS	SADC / CMS / SNGSSG	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	

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Task Responsibility

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> SADC led | } Officer/Contractor delivered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CMS led | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SADC led | } Volunteer delivered |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CMS led | |

- | | |
|--|---|
| Health and safety inspections | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Empty bins | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Replace dog waste bins | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Tree safety survey (every 3 years) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Follow Allotment management plan | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Supply compost to allotments | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Routine vegetation management | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Check for branches overhanging the river | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Inspect paths and steps | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remove graffiti | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Remove fly tip | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Report pollution events | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Secure external funding for capital works | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Monitor and record species | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Maintain bird and bat boxes | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Arrange a programme of events | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Liaise with stakeholder organisations and other site users | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Promote the site as an educational resource | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Update webpages | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Review annual action plans | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace Action Plan Annual actions

Legend

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Site boundary | <input type="checkbox"/> Long grass |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Welcome sign | <input type="checkbox"/> Long grass (wetter) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interpretation panel | <input type="checkbox"/> Tall ruderal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Notice board | <input type="checkbox"/> Scrub |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Play area sign | <input type="checkbox"/> Hedgerow |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bench | <input type="checkbox"/> Woodland |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dog bin | <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Litter bin | <input type="checkbox"/> Boardwalk |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle gate | <input type="checkbox"/> Hard surfaced path |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vehicle barrier | <input type="checkbox"/> Permeable path |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Drain cover | <input type="checkbox"/> Steps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outlet pipe | <input type="checkbox"/> Dog steps |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Amenity grass | <input type="checkbox"/> Historic remains |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Allotments | <input type="checkbox"/> Play area |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dry ditch | <input type="checkbox"/> Woven willow structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> River Ver | <input type="checkbox"/> Log barrier |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marginal vegetation | |



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Date
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5.2 Year 1 (2023-24)

Ongoing management

Prospective actions

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec. ref:	Status
1.1	Develop a Scheduled Monument conservation plan	E1	Apr-Nov	SADC	SMS	GM Budget	Contract rates	n/a	
1.2	Restore Ver Valley interpretation	B3, C3, H4	Apr-Sep	SADC	SADC / CMS	TBC	TBC	n/a	
1.3	Update accessibility information on websites	A2	Apr-Mar	SADC	SADC	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	
1.4	Secure funding for prospective actions	D2	Apr-Mar	SADC	SADC / CMS	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	
1.5	Install historic interpretation near ruins	A4, H2, H4	Apr-Mar	SAHA AS	SAHAAS / SADC / CMS	SAHAAS	£4000	6	
1.6	Install ecological interpretation	A4, H2, H4	Apr-Mar	CMS/ SADC	CMS	TBC	£4000	6	
1.7	Repair the path fencing along the riverbank between the two sites	A2, A3 C1	Apr-Sep	CMS/ SADC	CMS	TBC	TBC	5	
1.8	Undertake management of the ruins following the SMC plan	E2	Apr-Nov	SADC	SADC / CMS / SMS	SADC Budget	£10,000	n/a	

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Task Responsibility

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| SADC led | } Officer/Contractor delivered |
| CMS led | |
| SADC led | } Volunteer delivered |
| CMS led | |

Develop SMC plan



Update accessibility information
on websites



Secure funding for prospective
actions



Restore the Ver Valley
Trail interpretation



Carry out maintenance
of the ruins



Install historic interpretation



Repair path
and fencing



Replace ecological interpretation



Legend

- | | |
|--|---|
| Site boundary | Marginal vegetation |
| ▲ Welcome sign | Long grass |
| i Interpretation panel | Long grass (wetter) |
| ▲ Notice board | Tall ruderal |
| ▲ Play area sign | Scrub |
| ■ Bench | Hedgerow |
| ● Dog bin | Woodland |
| ● Litter bin | Bridge |
| ● Pedestrian gate | Boardwalk |
| ■ Vehicle gate | Hard surfaced path |
| ■ Vehicle barrier | Permeable path |
| ● Drain cover | Steps |
| ■ Outlet pipe | Dog steps |
| Amenity grass | Historic remains |
| Allotments | Play area |
| Dry ditch | Woven willow structure |
| River Ver | Log barrier |

Sopwell Nunnery Greenspace Action Plan Year 1 actions

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5.3 Years 2 - 5

Ongoing management

Prospective actions

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec. ref:	Status
2.1	Replace existing boardwalk	A2, A3, C3	Yr 2	SADC	SADC	UKSPF	TBC	n/a	
2.2	Maintain laid hedge across SMOS – lay, cut, weed.	F4, G1	Yr 3, Yr 5	CMS	CMS/Vols	SADC Budget	Vol time	n/a	
2.3	River bank reprofiling	D4, F5	TBC	SADC	SADC	River Ver Project Budget	Contract rates	2	
2.4	Realign and resurface path	A2, A3 C1	TBC	SADC	SADC	River Ver Project Budget	Contract rates	5	
2.5	Tree thinning along river bank	F5	TBC	SADC	SADC	River Ver Project Budget	Contract rates	3	
2.6	In channel habitat improvements	D3, F5	TBC	SADC	SADC	River Ver Project Budget	Contract rates	2	
2.7	Extend boardwalk	A2, A3	TBC	SADC	SADC	River Ver Project Budget	Vol time	n/a	

Ref no.	Action	Obj. Ref	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding Stream	Est. Cost	Spec . ref:	Status
2.8	Wet grassland establishment	F2, F5	TBC	SADC	SADC	River Ver Project Budget	Vol time	4	
2.9	Develop new leaflet	A4, H2, H4	TBC*	CMS/ SADC	CMS	TBC	£400	n/a	
2.10	Install a kingfisher nest box	F5	TBC*	CMS/ SADC	CMS	TBC		n/a	
2.11	Install new entrance signage	A1, A2 A4, H2	TBC*	CMS/ SADC	CMS	TBC		6	
2.12	Development new 5 year GAP		Yr 5	CMS/ SADC	CMS / SADC	SADC Budget	Staff time	n/a	

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*Action is subject to delivery of the Revitalising the River Ver Project.

Task Responsibility

- | | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| SADC led | } Officer/Contractor delivered |
| CMS led | |
| SADC led | } Volunteer delivered |
| CMS led | |

Develop new leaflet

Develop new 5 year GAP

Install new entrance signage

Establish wet grassland

Extend wet woodland

Install kingfisher nestbox

Realign path

Install new entrance signage

Install new entrance signage

Resurface path

Extend boardwalk

Replace existing boardwalk

Tree thinning

Bank reprofiling

Maintain laid hedge

Sopwell Nunnery

Greenspace Action Plan
Years 2-5 actions

Legend

- | | |
|---|---|
| Site boundary | Play area |
| Amenity grass | Log barrier |
| Allotments | ▲ Welcome sign |
| Dry ditch | i Interpretation panel |
| River | ▲ Notice board |
| Marginal vegetation | ▲ Play area sign |
| Long grass | Bench |
| Long grass (wetter) | ● Dog bin |
| Tall ruderal | ● Litter bin |
| Scrub | ● Pedestrian gate |
| Hedgerow | ■ Vehicle gate |
| Woodland | ■ Vehicle barrier |
| Bridge | ● Drain cover |
| Boardwalk | ■ Outlet pipe |
| Hard surfaced path | ■ Gravel bed |
| Permeable path | Brush structure |
| Steps | Pools |
| Dog steps | — The Alban Way |
| Historic remains | |

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6.0 SPECIFICATIONS

1.	General prescriptions relevant to all works
Public safety	<p>Members of the public to be kept a safe distance from works with signs and or banks men. Access routes may require temporary closure.</p> <p>Contractors shall be responsible for safeguarding all materials and plant on site and shall ensure that all such materials and plant in no way or at any time, represent a danger or risk to the general public or authorised persons.</p> <p>Work will be left safe at the end of the day and any hazards will be protected to prevent public access.</p>
Damage	<p>Any and all damage caused by the Contractor to land property or any other permanent features shall be required to be made good by the contractor at their own cost.</p> <p>All works around the Scheduled Monument to be carried out sensitively, and with a watching brief if deemed appropriate, to avoid damaging the monument.</p>
Timing	<p>Unless otherwise stated, all habitat management work will be undertaken between 1st September and 28th February.</p> <p>All work will aim to be undertaken outside of wettest winter months to minimise damage to soils and tracks.</p>
Vehicles and equipment	<p>Machines and vehicles should not be left to idle and should be turned off to reduce air pollution and noise.</p> <p>Contractors should ensure that all equipment/plant/vehicles entering the work site be clean of all soil and plant material that may have accumulated from work on other sites. This is in order to prevent invasive plant species or other contaminant from being introduced to the site.</p> <p>All refuelling, including chainsaw, is to take place on a specifically designed spill containment device, away from watercourses with fuel spillage kits on site at all times.</p>
Waste disposal	<p>All spoil and cut material should be removed from site and disposed of responsibly and in accordance with current waste legislation, and the site be left tidy.</p>

2.	River works
Details	<p>Prior to visiting the site and commencing works contractors and volunteers must follow the Check-Clean-Dry protocol for all plant and equipment to avoid spreading of invasive non-native species (INNS).</p> <p>Any INNS identified on site should be disposed of responsibly to prevent it spreading on site or downstream. Cut vegetation of any sort must not be left on the river bank or in the river channel. It should be disposed of responsibly off site, with temporary storage at least 5m from the top of the bank.</p> <p>To mitigate against the displacement of sediment from activities in channel a silt curtain will be established downstream of the working areas extending the full width of the channel. Inspection and clearance of accumulated materials against the silt curtain will be carried out on a daily basis. The silt curtain will remain in place for 48 hours after completion of the works.</p> <p>Any re-fueling of plant is to be carried out at the start of each working day in a compound away from the water's edge. Spill kits will be available at all times on mechanical plant. Oil booms will be positioned across river channels.</p> <p>In the event of a pollution incident, the Environment Agency pollution incident hotline will be contacted on 0800 80 70 60</p> <p>Material from within the site should be used for the creation of wood debris structures where possible.</p>
Timing	<p>In channel works should be undertaken in autumn, to avoid worst weather conditions while minimising the impact on wildlife.</p> <p>Marginal and bank vegetation should be cut on rotation every two-three years in late autumn or early spring to minimise the impact on wildlife</p>

3.	Tree thinning
Details	<p>Any thinning works will further the aim of reducing coverage of non-native species (e.g. sycamore) and encouraging natural growth/ regeneration of native species.</p> <p>Arisings to be disposed of appropriately through small amounts of deadwood stacking or removal off-site.</p> <p>Opportunities for deadwood creation should be realised through thinning works.</p> <p>Halo-thinning around crowded 'feature' trees will provide improved environmental conditions. Halo to be no larger in radius than half-height of feature tree.</p> <p>This site has the potential to support nesting birds and bats. Works to trees, scrub and hedges should be conducted outside of the breeding season. A survey of potential roosts should be carried out prior to the commencement of works. Should the contractor come across any evidence of bats (or any other protected species) then they should stop work immediately.</p>
Timing	<p>Thinning requiring mechanised techniques and/ or vehicles to be undertaken in autumn, to avoid worst weather conditions.</p> <p>Lighter thins involving volunteers can be undertaken at any stage between September and February.</p>

4.	Wildflower seeding and management
Details	<p>Provenance of wildflower and grass seed should be from the UK to avoid introducing invasive species. The seed mix must be suitable for wet grassland such as Emorsgate Seeds EM8 – Meadow Mixture for Wetlands.</p> <p>Ground must be scarified and soil loosened to create suitable surface for sowing. Native wildflower (and grass) seed should be surface sown thinly at approximately 4gms of seed per square metre. Damp sand can be mixed with the seed to act as a carrier and identify where seeds have been spread. Firm in with a roll, or by treading, to give good soil-seed contact.</p> <p>In the first year of establishment, newly sown meadows should be mown regularly from mid summer to a height of 40-60mm to control annual weeds and help maintain balance between faster growing grasses and slower developing wild flowers.</p> <p>In the second and subsequent years leave plants from spring through to mid summer to flower. After flowering in July or August take a 'hay cut' to c 50mm. Leave the 'hay' to dry and shed seed for 1-7 days then remove from site. This can be followed with autumn and early spring mowing to 50mm depending on growth rate. In exceptionally hot and dry summers, the hay cut can be carried out earlier in July to manage fire risk.</p> <p>For existing hedgerow wildflower margins, areas within 2m of the hedge or woodland boundary can be left uncut in most years, cutting on rotation every 2-3 years. Areas that are further from the margin and more open can be managed as grassland habitat.</p> <p>Hedgerow vegetation that is not mown or grazed each year will become rough and "tussocky" in character over time, this can form a useful refuge habitat. If it develops into scrub or bramble it should only be cut between October and February.</p>
Timing	<p>For best establishment, wildflower seeding should be undertaken in the autumn, ideally October, before the first frost.</p> <p>Cutting should take place in early spring, late summer and autumn.</p>

5.	Path Surfacing
Details	<p>Remove organic debris from the existing path and break up top layer. All soft spots to be excavated back to firm ground with the to a minimum depth of 100mm and safe width of the surfaced area should be a minimum of 2 metres where possible.</p> <p>Most of the main path already has a base layer but where no firm base layer already exists lay a non-woven geotextile such as Terram 1500 or similar.</p> <p>Supply, spread, grade and thoroughly compact a dense, tight, even base course of virgin granite 50 mm to dust, to a minimum finished depth of not less than 75mm.</p> <p>Supply, spread, grade and thoroughly compact to a dense, tight, even surface, a layer of well graded concrete dust fines 6 mm to dust as surface dressing.</p> <p>Finished, compacted depth to be not less than 25 mm. Base course to be completely covered.</p> <p>Path to have a final maximum 1:40 (2.5%) cross fall or minimum camber of 1:50 (2%) to allow surface water to drain either side.</p> <p>Edging/revetment may be required along part of the path's length.</p> <p>Material must be completely free from deleterious materials and any protruding objects to be removed by the contractor.</p>
Timing	<p>Installation will aim to be undertaken outside of wettest winter months to minimise damage to soils and tracks.</p>

6.	Interpretation
Details	<p>Design to follow the SADC house style and incorporate illustrative elements to convey important information and key features of interest.</p> <p>Plain text version with alternative text for images to be produced for publication online.</p> <p>Lectern frame with wood effect recycled plastic surround and twin leg, incorporating a graffiti, scratch and flame resistant GRP panel displayed at a suitable height and angle to be easily visible to children and wheelchair users as well as the general adult public.</p>
Timing	<p>Installation will aim to be undertaken outside of wettest winter months to minimise damage to soils and tracks.</p>

7.0 APPENDICES
