LOCATION
On the western edge of St. Albans. The area is divided by the A4147 with the southern part of the area enclosed by settlement on three sides.

LANDSCAPE CHARACTER
An ancient cultural pattern overlies the contemporary landscape of the area, dominating the valley floor and slopes of the river Ver. Signs of ancient Roman settlement prevail and a museum and visitors centre serve to interpret the local history and archaeology. Public access is good throughout the Roman town area and is well used for informal recreation. The Ver river, associated artificial lakes and parkland contribute to the area’s attractions. The land becomes more intensively managed and used for formal recreation to the south east. To the north of the A4147 access is more restricted within the arable landscape.

KEY CHARACTERISTICS
• ancient cultural settlement patterns
• suburban recreation
• wetland vegetation
• water features
• parkland trees
• arable landuse north of A4147

DISTINCTIVE FEATURES
• Verulamium Roman foundation and later Roman settlements
• artificial lakes
• River Ver
• Roman theatre

Roman walls within
Verulamium park
(G. Lee)
PHYSICAL INFLUENCES

Geology and soils. The chalk bedrock geology is overlaid by clay-with-flints plateau drift on the upper slopes and sand and gravel on the lower slopes with alluvium in the valley bottom. Areas of colluvium are also present above the valley floor. Soils are acidic loam to the north west of the A4147, a typical paleo-argillic brown earth, well drained and often very flinty (Carstens association). Soils are predominantly unsurveyed south east of the A4147 but are likely to be an extension of the Charity 2 association with alluvial gravels.

Topography. This rectangular area forms part of the Ver Valley. The river floodplain is situated along its north-eastern edge and expands in the south of the area to form a mainly flat expanse. The rest of the area comprises the valley’s south-westernly undulating slope, which comprises parkland in the central area and arable land to the north. The perimeter of the Roman settlement is marked in a number of locations by earth banks and ditches, as at The Fosse and the Hollows.

Degree of slope. The central park section of Verulamium has average slopes of 1 in 25 whereas the agricultural area to the west has average slopes of 1 in 20. The east section is the flattest part, with slopes averaging 1 in 28.

Altitude range. 115m towards the west and the southern edge; 80m in the flood plain of the River Ver.

Hydrology. There is no standing water in the northern, agricultural section of the area. The River Ver flows into Verulamium Park under the A4147 Hemel Hempstead Road. Just to the south there is an old mill, now converted into a museum. In the park the Ver flows adjacent to a large ornamental lake, sited wherefishpools, maintained to supply the abbey, were once located. A number of ponds within private gardens and the grounds of an hotel on Fishpool Street are connected to the Ver, which spits again at Abbey M ill House and then rejoins to flow out of the park. It is predominantly a chalk stream, but affected by eutrophication in this area. However, a concerted effort by the local wildlife and environmental groups has resulted in considerable improvement. The Environment Agency’s River Quality classification for the River Ver at New Barnes M ill (Area 17 of S Herts LCA), which is 2.25 km downstream of Verulamium is ‘good’.

Land cover and land use. The area to the south of the A4147 is mainly laid to grass and is now extensively used for recreation, with areas for picnics, a paddling pool by the lake and café/restaurant. An athletics circuit and other more formal types of recreation dominate the southern area of the park. To the north of the A4147 in the agricultural section the land use is mainly arable.

Vegetation and wildlife. One discrete area of woodland lies close to Pre W ood House on the slopes. The woodland is transitional with typical species being oak/beech/ash/hazel and oak/hornbeam, heavily affected by conifer/ornamental plantation. Hedgerows are relatively sparse in the area with mostly elm/hawthorn/hazel with the occasional field maple, elder and dog rose. A distinctive single row of purple-flowered horse chestnut marks the edge of the lane towards Gorhambury park on the west of the river. Very little natural grassland remains. There are several bat species in the area. In Verulamium Park, the lake is home to a wealth of waterfowl including great crested grebes, coot, pochard and tufted duck. The islands in the lake support one of the few heronries in Hertfordshire whilst on the River Ver occasional sightings of water vole are reported.

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL INFLUENCES

Verulamium Park and the plateau slopes were covered by the Roman town of Verulamium, traces of which are evident throughout the area. It is thought that the Romans developed the settlement in this location not because of its strategic geographic location but rather for its importance as a ritual ceremonial centre for the local Belgica tribe. Substantial lengths of the Roman town wall and defensive banks and ditches remain. The hypocaust and the site of the London Gate to the City are also evident. Remains of embankments dating back to the 2nd century AD survive in the area. The whole of the Roman town is scheduled as an ancient monument of national importance. Verulamium park was purchased from the Earl of Verulam in 1929 by the then City Corporation. Construction of the ornamental lake, a main feature of the park, started in the same year and gave much needed work to the unemployed during the economic depression of the 1930s. The grounds of the Abbey are used by people for walking, playing informal games, picnicking and relaxing and provide a main route into Verulamium Park from the town centre. They are also used to hold outdoor Christian festivals and events, with the Abbey providing a beautiful backdrop.

Field pattern. In the middle ages the area comprised open fields, owned by St. Albans Abbey. Remains of their associated field banks are clearly visible in the Park, along with traces of rare ridge and furrow. The south corner of the area known as Deerfold wood contains the last remnants of the deer park owned by the Abbot of St. Albans.

Transport pattern. The line of the historic Roman Watling Street runs through the area from north west to south east, but is not a prominent visual feature today. The area is crossed by the main Hemel Hempstead Road, (A4147). In Roman times the whole of the area was covered by a grid of roads which shared the same north-east/south-west orientation as the A4147 (see hyperlink at bottom of page). The road is straight and bordered by intermittent mature native hedgerows and wide verges. A more sinuous B road branches off along St. M ichaels Street towards the north-western edge of St. Albans leading up to the Cathedral.

Settlements and built form. Historic buildings and interpretation centres such as the museum are located within the park. They attract and accommodate a high number of tourists and visitors to the area. The conservation area of St. Albans covers the whole area of the park and cathedral grounds.
VISUAL AND SENSORY PERCEPTION
The area is contained by topography, vegetation and settlement and is only locally visible. It is a medium scale landscape whose distinctive archaeological features throughout create a feeling of unity. Views within the area are limited and filtered by boundary vegetation and  
Rarity and distinctiveness. The area is unique in Hertfordshire by virtue of the importance of the archaeological features, which are internationally rare. The Roman theatre, remains of the Roman wall, parkland trees and lake and views to the cathedral are visual treasures.

VISUAL IMPACT
The visual influence of the archaeological features is localized and in some cases there are other subtle landscape elements. The eyesores such as the road, running track, sub-station and some of the surrounding urban settlement is locally apparent. The cathedral dominates the skyline to the south, creating an imposing focal point for the area.

ACCESSIBILITY
Total length of Public Rights of Way - 5966
Total length of Other Public Access - 1866
Total length of Designated Cycle Routes - n/a
Total length of all public access - 7,832m
Area of LCA in square metres - 1,663,970
Length to area ratio - 1:212

COMMUNITY VIEWS
This area is regarded as distinctive. “Three years ago a good part of the wall was standing, but ever since, out of wretched ignorance, even of their own interest, they have been pulling it up all around, to the very foundations, to mend the highway” .... “the track of the streets is visible when the corn first comes up or is nearly ripe” “Itinerarium Curiosum or an account of the Antiquities and remarkable Curiosities in Nature Observed in Travels through Great Britain” William Stukeley, 1724

LANDSCAPE RELATED DESIGNATIONS
St. Albans Conservation Area
Scheduled Ancient Monument -the whole of the Roman town
Landscape Conservation area (south west of Bluehouse Hill)

CONDITION
Land cover change: widespread
Age structure of tree cover: mature
Extent of semi-natural habitat survival: fragmented
Management of semi-natural habitat: not obvious
Survival of cultural pattern: declining
Impact of built development: high
Impact of land-use change: moderate

ROBUSTNESS
Impact of landform: insignificant
Impact of land cover: prominent
Impact of historic pattern: continuous
Visibility from outside: locally visible
Sense of enclosure: contained
Visual unity: coherent
Distinctiveness/rarity: unusual

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North Hertfordshire Landscape Character Assessment
STRATEGY AND GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING CHANGE: CONSERVE AND RESTORE

- promote measures of agricultural and landscape management that enhance and emphasise the unity of the Roman settlement, particularly to link the areas north and south of the A4147
- restrict tree and shrub planting within areas of archaeological interest to avoid disturbance of the integrity of remaining artefacts
- survey and manage parkland and veteran trees for biodiversity value
- restrict ploughing of grasslands within the parkland
- promote strategies to visually mitigate intrusive built features and adjacent urban areas
- encourage the establishment of buffer strips of semi-natural vegetation along all watercourses, avoiding potential conflict with recreational use
- protect river corridors and water meadows from development that would alter its character visually or environmentally, such as culverting or loss of water meadows.
- encourage the enhancement and creation of wetland landscape features such as reedbeds, ponds, scrapes and pollarded willows.
- improve the management of old meadows and pastures by ceasing fertiliser and herbicide application and introducing sensitive grassland management such as late hay cutting or low density livestock grazing.
- ensure all existing and proposed recreational land uses include appropriate measures to manage and enhance the existing landscape setting and historical and ecological value.
- maintain and develop the traditional pattern of roadside verges as a local feature and a wildlife resource. Promote a clear strategy for the visual and noise mitigation of transport routes and integrate these corridors into the local landscape character.
- encourage the restoration and enhancement of wet grassland to provide a habitat for wading birds and wetland flora.
- promote hard detailing proposals sympathetic to the historic context of the area, with an emphasis on the use of natural and vernacular materials
- within existing woodlands, encourage the replacement of softwoods with indigenous native deciduous communities, provide hedgebank management and re-establish a species-rich ground flora
- encourage the reversion of arable areas to grassland and to make provision for enhanced public access to these areas so as to improve the awareness of the extent of the Roman settlement

Verulamium Park and St. Albans cathedral (G.Lee)