



BERNARDS HEATH

GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN

2026 - 2031



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; these activities will help to deliver the agreed aspirations which the site managers and stakeholders have identified for that site. The plan is set out sequentially, first providing background information on the site (Site Description) and an assessment of its condition and opportunities for improvement (Analysis and Evaluation). This is developed into Aims and Objectives for the site, a set of Action Plans which identify how these objectives will be achieved, and detailed specifications for the work to complete the actions.

Public Engagement

Engagement with stakeholders is at the centre of effective management planning on any site. Initial engagement with the Friends of Bernards Heath was held in 2025, to establish core aims and objectives for the site; these are reflected in Section 3. A second stage of engagement completed in May 2026 enabled stakeholders to comment on the proposed management actions for the site. An engagement summary included as an appendix to this plan details the engagement process and summarises the comments received and any amendments made to the plan as a result.

Version Control

Version	Issue Date	Details	Author	Reviewed	Approved
V1	19.06.26	Final plan – initial issue	FD	GA	AT

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1.0 WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

1.1 Vision Statement

Bernards Heath will be managed as an attractive, welcoming and well-maintained greenspace that balances recreation, biodiversity, and heritage. The site will support a diverse range of habitats, protect its historic features, and provide a safe and enjoyable environment for visitors, achieved through sustainable management and partnership working.

1.2 Introduction

This Greenspace Action Plan (2026 – 2031) sets out a practical framework for the ongoing management and enhancement of Bernards Heath, building on progress made during the previous plan period.

The site provides important recreational space, supports a range of habitats, and contains features of local historic interest. This plan focuses on maintaining and improving habitat quality, managing trees and woodland edges, controlling invasive species such as laurel, and ensuring site infrastructure is well maintained and fit for purpose.

Management will be delivered through a coordinated approach involving the St Albans District Council (SADC), the Countryside Management Service (CMS), and the Friends of Bernards Heath (FoG), with flexibility to respond to changing conditions. Overall, the plan aims to ensure Bernards Heath remains a well-managed, accessible, and ecologically valuable space for the community.

2.0 SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 Site Summary

Site Name: Bernards Heath

Site Address: Sandridge Road, St Albans, AL1 4AG

Grid Reference: TL150083

Size: 9.9ha

Owner: St Albans District Council

Bernards Heath

Action Plan

Location Plan

Bernards Heath
Grid Ref: TL 150 083
Easting: 515046
Northing: 208357

The Waste
Grid Ref: TL 156 085
Easting: 515680
Northing: 208590

Scale @ A3
1:25,000
Date
June 2026
Rev
01



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Bernard's Heath

Action Plan

Site Description

Legend

- Bernards Heath
- The Waste
- Bench
- Dog Bin
- Heritage
- Interpretation
- Litter Bin
- Notice Board
- Trees
- Woodland Paths
- Grass
- Hedge
- Path
- Play Area
- Scrub
- Track
- Woodland

Scale @ A3

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Date

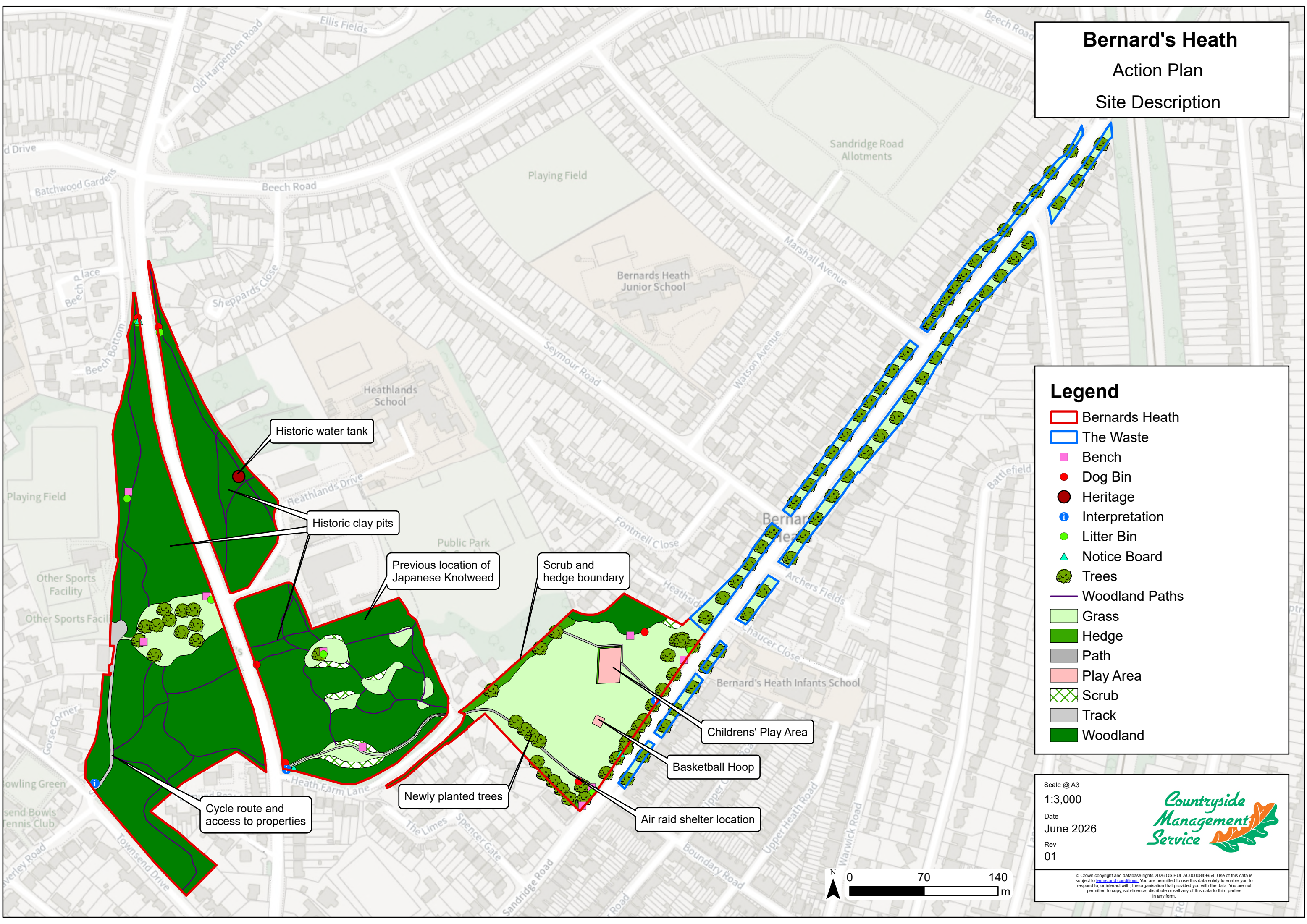
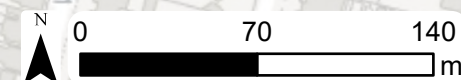
June 2026

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2.2 Site Description

Bernards Heath is a greenspace located within a residential area in St Albans district, providing an important recreational and ecological resource for the local community. The site is characterised by a central area of amenity grassland, which is widely used for informal recreation, including walking and general open space activities.

Surrounding the main field are areas of rough grassland, scrub, and well-established woodland, which together form a varied and valuable habitat network. The woodland areas are a key feature of the site, comprising of mature trees with a developing understorey of shrubs and naturally regenerating species. These areas provide important habitat for birds, invertebrates, and small mammals, as well as contributing to the sense of enclosure and landscape character of the site.

Woodland edges and clearings create transitional zones, between open grassland and denser tree cover, increasing structural diversity and supporting a wider range of species. In places, scrub and marginal grassland have been allowed to develop, further enhancing these edge habitats. However, management is required to maintain balance and prevent dominance by non-native species such as cherry laurel, which can suppress native flora.

Scattered trees and planted avenues along the surfaced path add visual interest and help link different parts of the site, while also contributing to habitat connectivity. The combination of open grassland, woodland, and edge habitats, creates a mosaic that is both ecologically valuable and visually distinct.

Bernards Heath also contains features of local historic interest, most notably the historic water tank. Interpretation boards across the site help visitors understand both its heritage and natural environment.

The site is accessible via a network of informal paths, including a surfaced route through the main field, and is supported by infrastructure such as benches, litter bins, and signage.

3.0 ANALYSIS & EVALUATION

3.1 A Welcoming Place

Interpretation across Bernards Heath has been significantly improved through the installation of new, high quality interpretation boards, providing clear and engaging information on the site's heritage and wildlife. These are generally in good condition and contribute positively to the visitor experience.



Figure 1 Interpretation Board

However, several older noticeboards remain on site and are in poor condition. These are visually inconsistent and detract from the overall appearance. Their removal and replacement with signage that matches the current style would further enhance the welcoming nature of the site.



Figure 2 Old Noticeboard

3.2 Healthy, Safe and Secure

The site is generally well used and maintained, with regular inspections of trees and infrastructure supporting public safety. Some incidents of vandalism have occurred, including damage to site furniture and graffiti on the historic water tank.

These issues highlight the need for ongoing monitoring, repair, and where necessary, consideration of relocating vulnerable infrastructure to more visible areas to reduce anti-social behaviour.



Figure 3 Missing bench and damaged bin

3.3 Well Maintained and Clean

Routine maintenance of the grassland, bins, and site furniture ensures the site remains clean and functional. Interpretation boards are also subject to inspection and maintenance.

Some site furniture has been lost or damaged, and the historic water tank requires periodic cleaning due to graffiti. Ensuring timely repair, replacement, and ongoing maintenance is important in maintaining overall site quality. It is suggested that a clear Perspex or equivalent sheet is placed over the sign on the water tank so this can be removed and replaced when graffiti occurs, saving the cost of having to replace the full signage.



Figure 4 Historic Water Tank

3.4 Environmental Management

The site is managed to balance recreation with environmental enhancement. Amenity grassland is maintained for public use, while marginal areas are managed to increase biodiversity through reduced cutting and the development of longer grass and scrub habitats.

There is scope to further enhance environmental management by widening these marginal habitats and refining cutting regimes to improve structure and ecological value.



Figure 5 Marginal Habitat

3.4.1 Climate change and sustainability

Tree management and planting contribute to climate resilience, while sustainable grassland management reduces intervention and supports natural processes. Opportunities exist to strengthen resilience through appropriate species selection and habitat expansion.

3.5 Biodiversity, Landscape and Heritage

Bernards Heath supports a mosaic of habitats, including amenity grassland, rough grassland, scrub, and woodland. Woodland edges and clearings provide important transitional habitats, although some areas are being cut more frequently than intended, limiting their ecological potential.

Cherry laurel is increasing in some locations and requires management to prevent dominance and protect native biodiversity. The historic water tank is a key heritage feature, although its condition is affected by drainage issues and vandalism. It is important to keep up with the maintenance of this feature to ensure its longevity.

Japanese Knotweed has historically been present and treated. The location should be periodically monitored for any regrowth.

3.5.1 Tree planting opportunities

Existing tree planting along the central path contributes to the landscape character. There is potential to replace failed trees and extend planting to form a more continuous avenue, using appropriate species to enhance visual interest and biodiversity. The current planting design along the roadside alternates blossom colour, so it important to continue this pattern to ensure cohesiveness across the site.



Figure 6 Dead tree requiring replacement

Previously planted trees have had their guards left on for longer than required and these should be removed to allow the tree to grow naturally. It is important that any future trees have a clear plan in place for ongoing maintenance, including watering, mulch, and guard removal, to ensure maximum success rate.

3.6 Community Involvement

The site benefits from active involvement by the Friends of Bernards Heath, who have played a key role in delivering improvements, particularly in interpretation, maintenance of site furniture, and litter clearance. Continued partnership working will be essential to support ongoing management and enhancement.

3.7 Marketing and Communication

Interpretation boards are the primary means of on-site communication, effectively conveying information about the site's heritage and wildlife. Upgrading the remaining signage will improve the consistency and clarity.

Ongoing maintenance of interpretation and visibility of information will help ensure visitors remain informed and engaged with the site.

4.0 AIM & OBJECTIVES

The aim and objectives of the GAP are as follows:

Aim

To manage and enhance Bernards Heath as a well-maintained, accessible, and ecologically diverse greenspace that supports recreation, biodiversity, and heritage.

Objectives

A. To provide a welcoming and well-presented site.

- A1 Remove outdated noticeboards
- A2 Secure funding to install replacement signage consistent with current interpretation.
- A3 Maintain and regularly inspect interpretation to ensure it remains clear, clean, and informative

B. To ensure the site is healthy, safe, and secure

- B1 Undertake regular tree safety inspections and reactive works
- B2 Repair or replace damaged site furniture and consider relocation where vandalism occurs

C. To maintain a clean and well-managed environment

- C1 Continue routine maintenance of grassland, bins, and site infrastructure
- C2 Maintain and clean the historic water tank and associated signage, with potential to place a clear sheet over the signage if graffiti continues

D. To improve environmental management and sustainability

- D1 Implement and refine grassland cutting regimes to enhance habitat value
- D2 Expand marginal habitats where appropriate to increase ecological function

E. To protect and enhance biodiversity, landscape and heritage

- E1 Manage woodland edges and clearings through appropriate rotational cutting
- E2 Control cherry laurel to prevent dominance and support native species
- E3 Monitor and maintain the historic water tank as a key heritage feature

F. To strengthen community involvement

F1 Support and work in partnership with the Friends of Bernards Heath and volunteers in site management and projects

G. To improve communication and site understanding

G1 Maintain high quality interpretation across the site

G2 Improve consistency of signage to enhance visitor understanding and engagement

5.0 ACTION PLANS AND MAPS

1.1 Annual and Regular Actions

Abbreviations: CMS – Countryside Management Service, GM – Grounds Maintenance, SADC – St Albans City and District Council, Vols – Volunteers / Friends of Bernards Heath

Ref	Action	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding	Spec.
0.1	Cutting of amenity grassland areas	All Year	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	
0.2	Emptying of bins	All Year	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	
0.3	Tree safety inspections	As Per Schedule	SADC	SADC	SADC Budget	
0.4	Reactive tree safety works	As required	SADC	SADC	SADC Budget	
0.5	Cleaning and maintenance of interpretation boards	Annual	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	
0.6	Monitoring of condition of site furniture	Annual	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	
0.7	Cutting of rough-cut grassland areas	2-4 times per year	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	
0.8	Cutting of amenity grassland areas	Regular	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	

0.9	Cutting of conservation grassland areas	Aug/Sept	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	1
0.10	Cutting of woodland edge habitat	Every 3-5 years	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	2
0.11	Cleaning of historic water tank	Yearly	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	

1.2 Year 1 – Year 5 Action Plan 2026 – 2031

Ref no.	Action	When	Lead	Delivery	Funding	Spec. Ref.
1.1	Removal of older noticeboards x 3	Year 1	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	3
1.2	Install replacement noticeboards x 3	Year 1	CMS	Contractor/ Vols	SADC Budget	3
1.3	Widening of conservation grassland in the field through amended cutting regime	Year 1 then annual	SADC	JoC	GM Budget	1
1.4	Tree planting along the path in the field	Year 1, Nov-Jan	SADC	SADC	SADC Budget	
1.5	Removal of guards and stakes from established trees	Year 1	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	
1.6	Replace lost or damaged site furniture	Year 1	SADC	SADC	SADC	
1.7	Replace signage on historic water tank	Year 1	CMS	Contractor	SADC Budget	
1.8	Selective thinning and reduction of laurel in priority areas	Year 1, Nov-Feb	CMS	Contractor	SADC Budget	4
1.9	Maintain newly planted trees	Year 2-4	SADC	SADC	GM Budget	
1.10	Ongoing laurel control and follow-up management	Year 2-5	CMS	SADC	GM Budget	4

Abbreviations: CMS – Countryside Management Service, GM – Grounds Maintenance, SADC – St Albans City and District Council, JoC – John O'Connor Grounds Maintenance Contractors, Vols – Volunteers / Friends of Bernards Heath

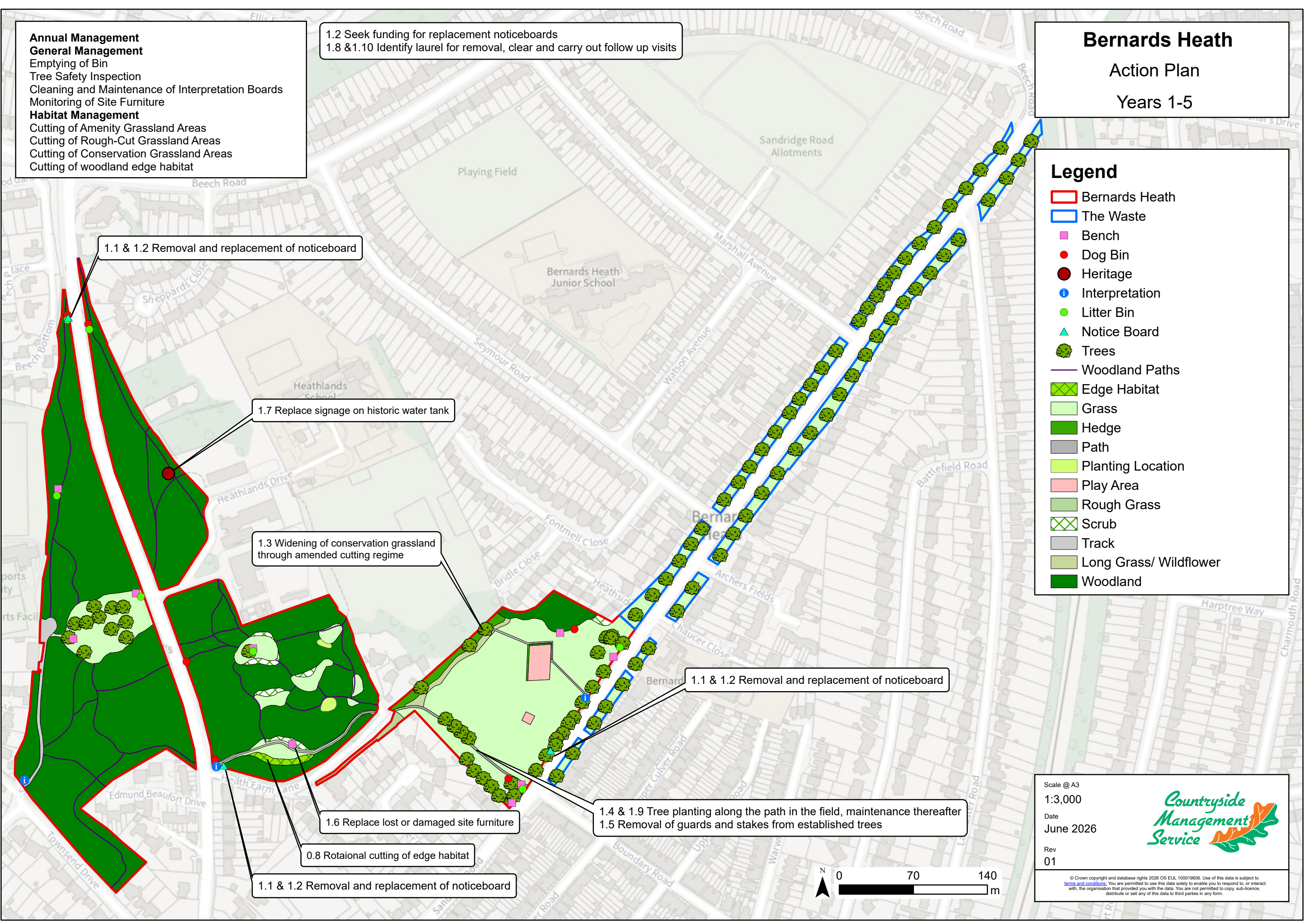
- Annual Management**
General Management
Emptying of Bin
Tree Safety Inspection
Cleaning and Maintenance of Interpretation Boards
Monitoring of Site Furniture
Habitat Management
Cutting of Amenity Grassland Areas
Cutting of Rough-Cut Grassland Areas
Cutting of Conservation Grassland Areas
Cutting of woodland edge habitat

- 1.2 Seek funding for replacement noticeboards
1.8 & 1.10 Identify laurel for removal, clear and carry out follow up visits

Bernards Heath
Action Plan
Years 1-5

Legend

- Bernards Heath
- The Waste
- Bench
- Dog Bin
- Heritage
- Interpretation
- Litter Bin
- Notice Board
- Trees
- Woodland Paths
- Edge Habitat
- Grass
- Hedge
- Path
- Planting Location
- Play Area
- Rough Grass
- Scrub
- Track
- Long Grass/ Wildflower
- Woodland



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Countryside Management Service

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6.0 SPECIFICATIONS

6.1 Conservation Grassland

July – August

- Single late summer hay cut of conservation grassland areas
- Arisings to be collected after two to three weeks to promote distribution of seed

April

- Early spring cut and lift (removing arisings) can be considered if coarse grasses or undesirable species are an issue

6.2 Woodland Edge Habitat

Herbaceous Areas: Rotational cutting every 3 to 5 years to allow herbaceous zones to mature to promote structure diversity

Shrubby Areas: Rotational cutting every 10 to 12 years

6.3 Noticeboards

Removal of three outdated noticeboards and replacement with noticeboards of the below specification:

The noticeboards shall be an externally mounted, lockable display case suitable for parks and open spaces, of robust construction and designed to withstand vandalism, weathering, and heavy public use. The design shall reflect the established interpretation style at Bernards Heath, and the St Albans District Council style.

Frame and Structure

- Constructed from durable, non-corroding materials such as powder-coated aluminium or equivalent
- Colour to be dark green or equivalent heritage / conservation colour, unless otherwise agreed with SADC
- Slimline but robust frame design with concealed fixings where possible
- All materials weather-resistant and suitable for long-term external use

Glazing and Security

- Lockable front-opening door (side-hinged or top-hinged)
- Glazing to be high-impact resistant (e.g. 4-6mm toughened safety glass or polycarbonate)
- Anti-vandal design with tamper-proof locks
- Sealed unit to prevent water ingress and condensation

Display Area

- Minimum display size: A1 or A0 to match existing interpretation boards
- Magnetic or pinboard backing suitable for temporary notices

- Internal layout to support both permanent interpretation and community notices where required

Weather Protection

- Fully weatherproof construction with internal seals
- Ventilation system to reduce condensation while maintaining water resistance
- UV-resistant materials to prevent fading of displayed information

Posts and Installation

- Mounted on two or more supporting posts where required
- Posts to be galvanised steel or powder-coated aluminium, set in concrete foundations
- Height and positioning to ensure accessibility and visibility without obstructing views
- Installation to comply with relevant health and safety and accessibility guidance

6.4 Laurel Management

Why

- Laurel is a vigorous, non-native shrub that can dominate woodland and woodland edge habitats
- Dense laurel growth suppresses native ground flora, limits natural regeneration, and reduces habitat diversity
- Managed control supports the long-term conservation of native woodland structure and biodiversity while retaining some evergreen cover where appropriate

What

- Identify priority areas where laurel is becoming dominant or preventing the development of native vegetation
- Carry out selective thinning and reduction, focusing on removal of younger plants and reduction of dense stands
- Cut laurel at the base using hand tools or mechanical means appropriate to scale; treat stumps to prevent regrowth
- Stack arisings in discreet habitat piles or remove from sensitive areas as appropriate
- Schedule works for late autumn or winter to minimise disturbance to wildlife.
- Monitor regrowth annually and undertake follow-up management as required to prevent re-establishment

7.0 APPENDICES

7.1 Engagement Summary

7.1.1 Introduction

7.1.2 Engagement Feedback

7.1.3 Stakeholder List

Friends of Bernards Heath

St Albans District Council

Hertfordshire County Council and St Albans District Council Councillors

Relevant HCC officers including CMS Communities Team, Rights of Way, Ecology, and Archaeology

Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust

Herts and Middlesex Butterfly Conservation

Bernards Heath users and local residents

7.2 Strategic and Policy Context

7.2.1 St Albans City and District Council Strategies

7.2.1.1 Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy 2024 – 2027

St Albans City and District Council have committed to addressing the climate and ecological emergencies through reducing emissions, enhancing biodiversity, and promoting sustainable resource use across the District.

The Council aims to:

1. Achieve net zero carbon emissions from Council operations by 2030 and support district-wide net zero by 2030
2. Embed sustainability, climate resilience, and biodiversity into all policies, decision-making, and service delivery
3. Work with partners, communities, and businesses to drive behavioural change and environmental improvement

Key themes within the [Sustainability and Climate Crisis Strategy \(2024 - 2027\)](#) include energy and buildings, transport, waste and circular economy, natural environment and biodiversity, and water management.

The Strategy places particular emphasis on managing land to increase biodiversity, improve resilience to climate change, enhance carbon sequestration, and deliver multi-functional green infrastructure.

7.2.2 Hertfordshire County Council Strategies

7.2.2.1 Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy

Hertfordshire County Council declared a climate emergency in July 2019 and have since committed to make Hertfordshire cleaner, greener and more sustainable.

HCC want to:

1. Lead in their own operations
2. Enable sustainability with their programmes, policies and decisions
3. Inspire businesses and residents to take action

The ambitions of the [Sustainable Hertfordshire Strategy](#) include achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions before 2050, ensuring communities are ready for future climates and improve wildlife in our land and water by 20% by 2050.

7.2.2.2 Tree and Woodland Strategy (2022-30)

The Tree and Woodland Strategy sets out ambitions for Hertfordshire's treescapes until 2030:

- Supporting the establishment of at least 1.8 million new trees across Hertfordshire, including at least 1.2 million trees, one for every resident of Hertfordshire, and at least 100km of hedgerows, equating to 600,000 hedgerow trees.
- Promoting and supporting the development of woodland management plans to help ensure woodlands provide a range of benefits to their owners, wildlife and local communities, while remaining resilient to pressures on tree health.
- Facilitating and enabling residents and businesses to support tree and woodland establishment and enhancement initiatives in Hertfordshire.