



# Butts Close

GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN, 2022 - 2027

BRIEFING DOCUMENT



NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE  
DISTRICT COUNCIL



## **CONTENTS**

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<b>1.</b>	<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Background.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.</b>	<b>Review of Progress.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>4.</b>	<b>Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2022-2027.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5.</b>	<b>Community Engagement and Plan Production Process.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6.</b>	<b>Stakeholder Feedback.....</b>	<b>10</b>

## 1. INTRODUCTION

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A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Butts Close in Hitchin, North Herts. This is the third GAP for the site and this briefing document has been produced to guide and support the production of the new GAP and sets out how stakeholders can contribute to shaping the plan.

GAPs are map-based management plans that provide focus and direction for the running and improvement of open spaces. They provide a clear, logical process to determine the activities that should take place over a stated period of time to achieve the objectives for the site.

The GAP is being produced by the Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way Service, on behalf of and in partnership with North Hertfordshire District Council. The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2022.

Engaging communities is integral to the production of GAPs, to ensure that stakeholders are fully aware of and able to interact with the plan production process. This briefing document initiates and supports this community engagement.

The engagement period will run from Monday 11th October and Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2021. A further engagement period in early 2022 will provide an opportunity to assess the draft version of the GAP. Please use the contact details in Section 6 to comment on the aspirations for the site.

This document has been broken down into easy to read sections:

Section 2 provides background information, historical context and a location map.

Section 3 reviews the recent management of the site.

Section 4 outlines the core aims and objectives for the Butts Close 2022 - 2027 GAP.

Section 5 summarises the public engagement methodology, setting out how and when stakeholders can contribute to the plan.

## 2. BACKGROUND

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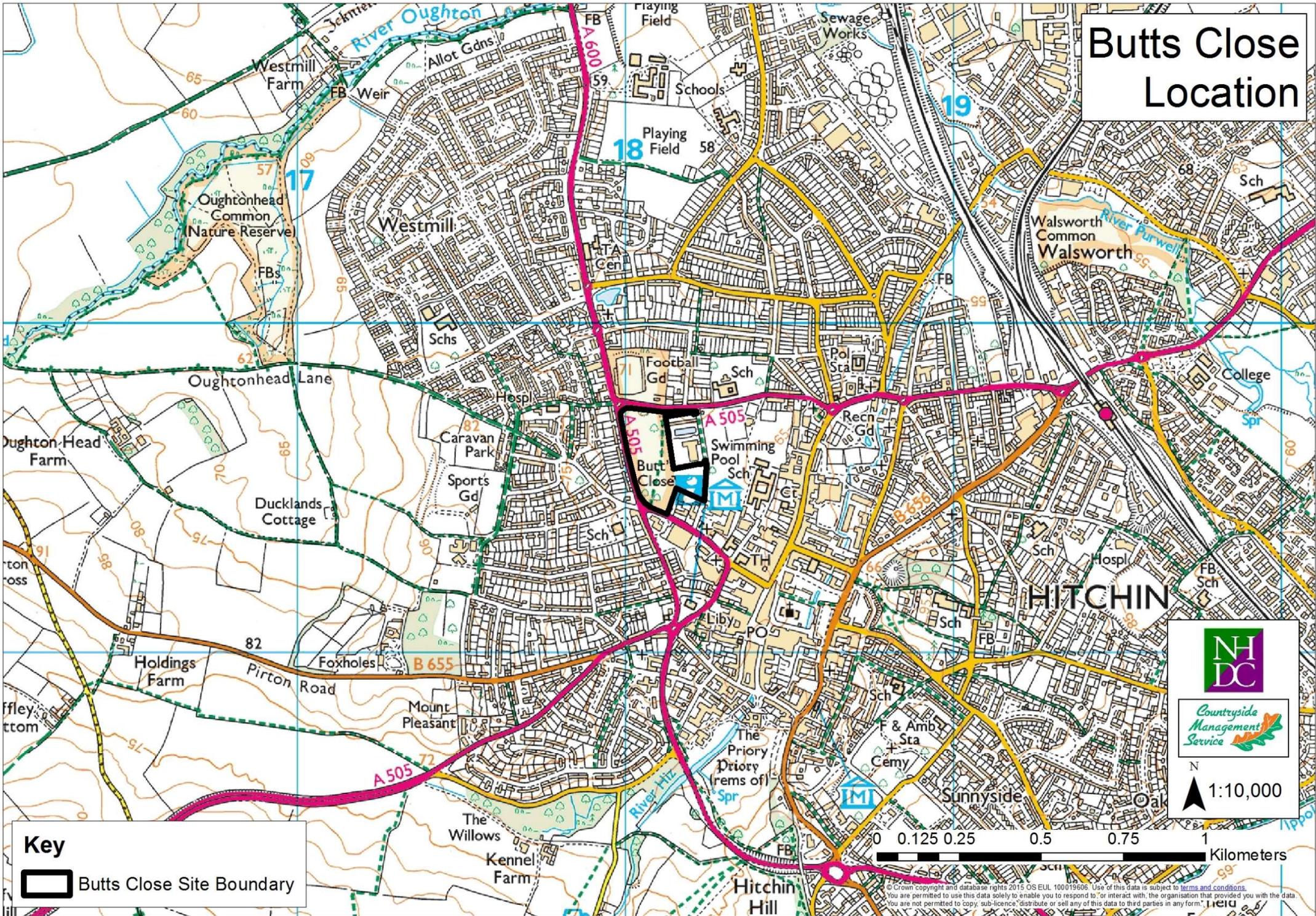
Butts Close is the oldest open space in Hitchin with a long history of use stretching back to late medieval times, when it was a sporting ground for archery. It covers 4.5 hectares (11 acres) and is owned partly by NHDC and partly by the Hitchin Cow Commoners Trust. It is managed by NHDC in partnership with CMS. The majority of the site is registered common land (CL49, CL57 and CL71).

The site is largely surrounded by residential areas of Hitchin. It is bordered by the main A505 road to the north, south and west, and there is a swimming pool complex and a playing field to the east. Hitchin Town Football Club is based on Top Field, part of the same complex of common land, to the north.

The large western section of the site is mainly amenity cut grassland. The site has a high public profile and plays host to a number of large community events throughout the year. There are two small areas of longer grass within this area, one in a damp hollow and a further one adjacent to the wall of the outdoor swimming pool. There is a line of large-leaved lime trees along the southern and western boundaries, and a tree-lined avenue running through the centre of the site along a tarmac path. The trees here are a mixture of pink chestnuts and recently planted alders.

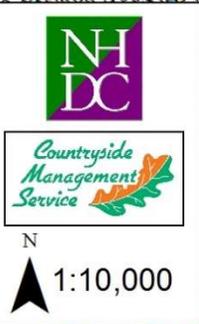
The smaller eastern section is managed with conservation in mind. Its focal point is a small pond, which is surrounded by tall marginal vegetation including common reed, long grass and a number of trees, including a large weeping willow. Grass paths are cut through this area and provide access to the site from the east. There is an area of scrub to the north of the pond along the boundary with the swimming pool complex.

# Butts Close Location



## Key

 Butts Close Site Boundary



NHDC  
Countryside Management Service

N  
1:10,000

0 0.125 0.25 0.5 0.75 1 Kilometers

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### 3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

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There has been positive progress made against the objectives set out in the previous GAP, the second for the site which covered 2015 - 2021. The focus of these works looked to continue to build on the habitat improvements made in the eastern part of the site through the 2007 - 2012 GAP and create an enriched visitor experience through better interpretation.

The pond had seen success from the initial habitat improvements, but additional work was required to address diminished water levels within the pond and vegetation encroachment, maintaining the wildlife benefits the pond provides. The most significant work was to desilt the pond which was carried out at the very beginning of the 2016 – 2021 GAP. This allowed the pond to carry out its main function as a balancing pond and prevented any risk of the pond drying out due to decreased capacity. The large weeping willow and 2 additional willow were again pollarded to prevent over shading of the eastern section of the pond and the floating reedbed re-established here. Further habitat was created in and around the pond with marginal vegetation managed on a 2-to-3-year basis. The conservation cut and lift grassland around the pond was seeded with wildflower as a trial for other areas of the site.

This work has been successful, and the pond is a pleasant and attractive wildlife area with good floral diversity both in and around the pond. The wildflower seeding carried out in the conservation cut and lift area around the pond was a success and the diversity is much improved with an abundance of Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Meadow Pea and Vetch. There is, however, some minor algal growth on the surface of the pond and the taller marginal vegetation is causing shading. The large willow has regrown the crown and is starting to block light in the eastern section of the pond.

Further tree planting took place along the central avenue to replace the failed trees from the planting carried out in the previous GAP and these have taken well for the most part. The interpretation boards at the main entrances to the park and alongside the pond has enhanced education opportunities for visitors to the park.

## **4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2022-2027**

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The Butts Close GAP 2022 - 2027 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of NHDC, CMS officers and members of the public, and will act as a guide to the work of volunteers. The plan will be largely map based, with sequential, annual management maps to show the actions planned for each year. The resulting change will be represented on the map for the following year. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

The plan will be costed, and potential funding sources identified. Once the final GAP is agreed, external funding will be sought to enable the plan to be delivered. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

The aim and objectives of the GAP will be as follows:

### **Aims**

The aim of the Butts Close Gap is to maintain and enhance Butts Close as a popular and well-used green space in Hitchin. Butts Close will provide both recreation and biodiversity for the local community to be involved with and enjoy.

### **Objectives**

#### **A To provide clear and welcoming access into and throughout the site**

- A1 Continue to maintain the improved access to the pond
- A2 Replace remaining old bollards and knee rail fencing with bollards creating a uniform boundary around site

#### **B To ensure that visitors to Butts Close feel safe and able to enjoy the site at all times**

- B1 Carry out reactive tree works to address any safety concerns
- B2 Respond proactively to any misuse of the site

#### **C To ensure the standard of maintenance is maintained and relevant**

- C1 Managing and maintaining both the surfaced and grass paths and interpretation boards
- C2 Litter picking, emptying litter bins and dog bins, and carrying out small scale vegetation management
- C3 Maintaining a regular amenity cut and an annual conservation cut of the grass as appropriate to different parts of the site

#### **D To ensure ongoing costs are sustainable and secure external funding for capital works**

- D1 Ensuring ongoing maintenance costs are financially sustainable
- D2 Securing external funding to ensure the viability of capital works

**E To protect and enhance the biodiversity and heritage of the site**

- E1 Carrying out minor further habitat management on and around the pond to build on gains achieved through desilting work during the previous GAP
- E2 Completing selective tree work in the area around the pond
- E3 Replicate the successful enhancements to the meadow adjacent to the pond with the remaining conservation cut grassland areas, further increasing the biodiversity of the site
- E4 Planting of a single specimen tree in the eastern wildlife part of the site as a celebratory feature
- E5 Continue the planted line of lime along the northern edge of the park to provide a continuous green border
- E6 Expand the conservation cut and lift management regime where possible.

**F To support and encourage community involvement at Butts Close**

- F1 Encouraging the local community to become involved in the management of Butts Close in a structured and supported way and ensuring all involved operate towards achievement of the GAP

**G To promote awareness and interest in Butts Close**

- G1 Promotion of volunteer and community events at Butts Close

## 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN PRODUCTION PROCESS

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Effective community engagement is at the centre of successful management plans. The value of a GAP is maximised when it incorporates and balances the aspirations of stakeholders and interest groups.

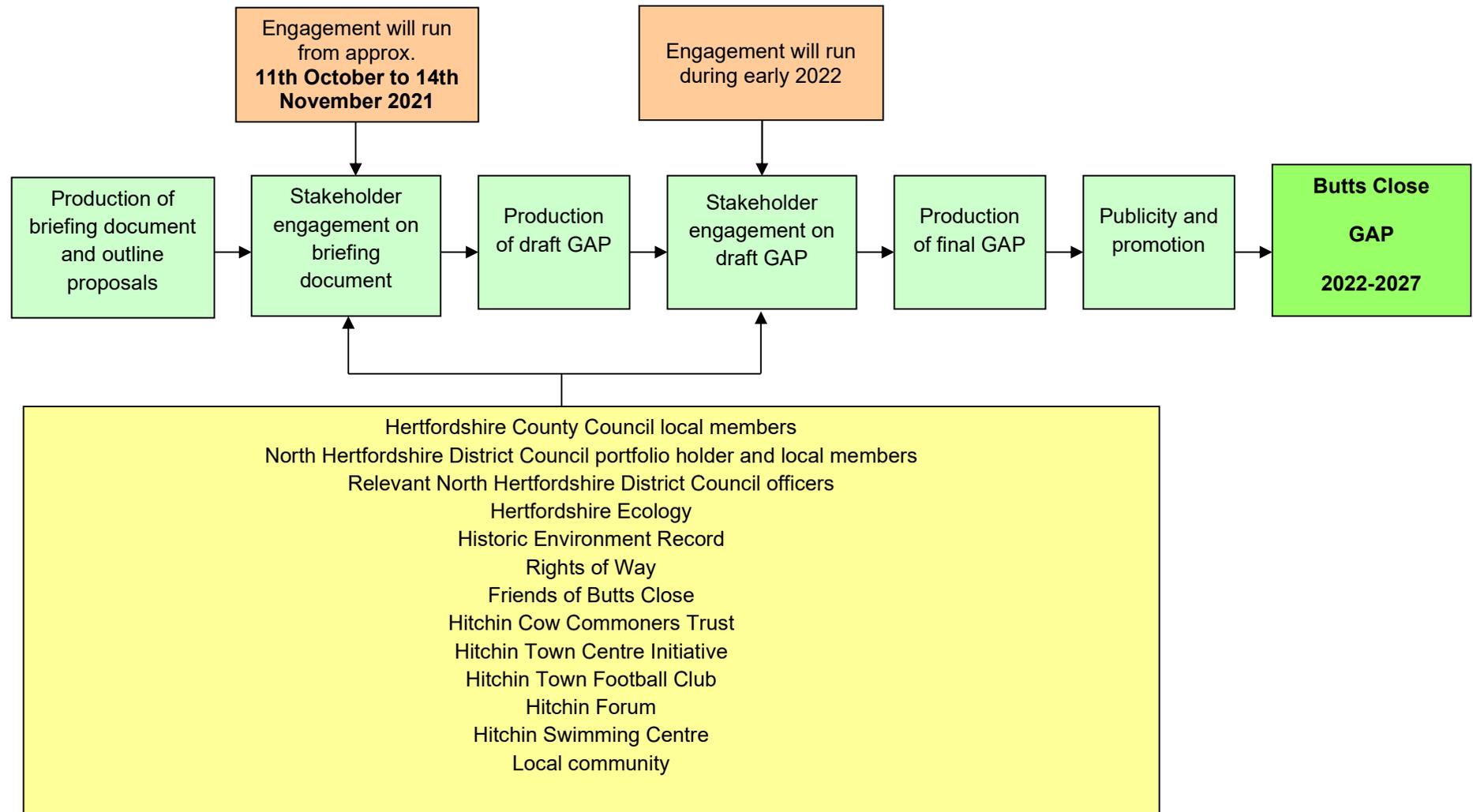
In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- For the first stage (this briefing document), stakeholders and site users will be invited to make comment on the core aspirations in Section 4; it is hoped that any further aspirations and/or issues will be identified through this information gathering process. This first stage of community engagement will run between the **11<sup>th</sup> of October** and the **14<sup>th</sup> of November**.
- For the second stage, stakeholders and site users will be invited to read through and make comment on the draft GAP, which will include the detailed proposals and actions.

Following the second stage exercise, the final document will be produced, published and the actions will commence.

Please be aware that we will not respond individually to comments received through the public engagements; instead, we will produce a summary of comments, noting any amendments made to the plan as a result. This engagement response document will be published online alongside the briefing document, draft plan and final plan. We will retain contact details only for the purpose of keeping respondents informed about the plan development process.

The following diagram shows the Greenspace Action Plan production process:



## 6. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK

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Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We are keen to receive feedback from you on our proposals for the Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2022 - 2027.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **14<sup>th</sup> November** at the latest.

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