



# **OUGHTONHEAD COMMON**

## **GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN**

2022 - 2027

### **BRIEFING DOCUMENT**

Produced by:



On behalf of:



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Oughtonhead Common. This briefing document provides an overview of how the GAP will be produced and sets out how stakeholders can contribute to shaping the plan.

GAPs are essentially 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 (CRoW), on behalf of and in partnership with North Herts Council (NHC). 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 26<sup>th</sup> October to 28<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 an overview of the site and location map.

Section 3 reviews recent management of the site.

Section 4 contains the core objectives for the Oughtonhead Common 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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Oughtonhead Common is a 16-hectare site situated along the northwest edge of Hitchin. The site is comprised of a mosaic of important wildlife habitats, including wetland, grassland, woodland and scrub.

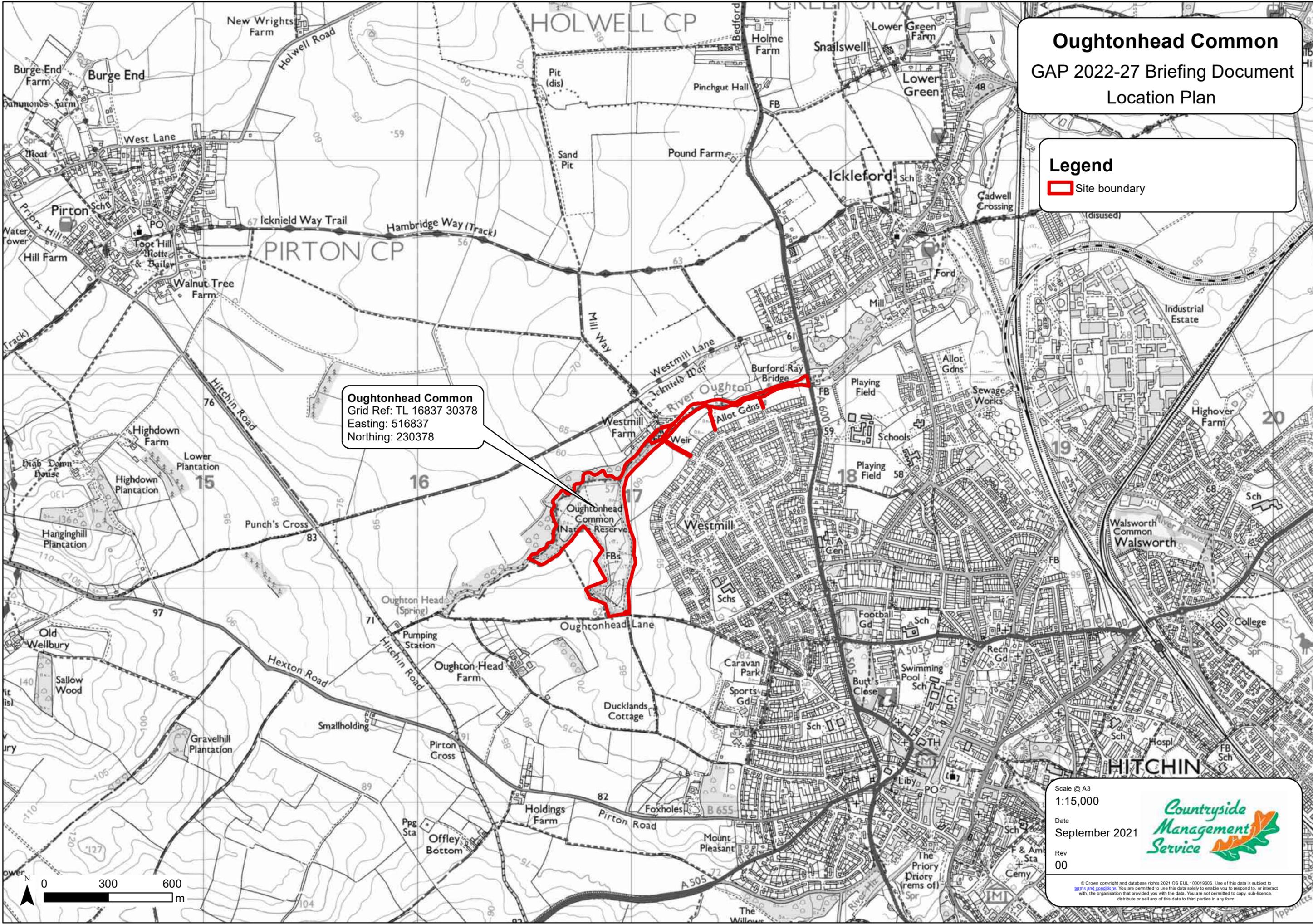
Owned by NHC, the site is managed by the District Council in partnership with CMS and the Friends of Oughtonhead Common for informal public access and nature conservation. The site is registered common land (reference number CL051), a Local Wildlife Site and Local Nature Reserve.

The River Oughton, a chalk river, forms the northern boundary, with agricultural land to the west and south-west, and residential areas and playing fields to the south-east. The site is well used for informal recreation including walking, dog-walking, jogging, horse riding, cycling, and picnicking. It has long been a magnet for naturalists, being the largest marsh on chalk in Hertfordshire. Many of its features are priorities in the County Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

**Oughtonhead Common**  
 GAP 2022-27 Briefing Document  
 Location Plan

**Legend**  
 Site boundary

**Oughtonhead Common**  
 Grid Ref: TL 16837 30378  
 Easting: 516837  
 Northing: 230378



Scale @ A3  
 1:15,000  
 Date  
 September 2021  
 Rev  
 00



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### **3. RECENT MANAGEMENT**

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This is the latest in a series of management plans for Oughtonhead Common since the first plan was produced in 1974 and replaces the Greenspace Action Plan 2017-22. Under successive plans the site has seen a range of enhancements, including improved access and information through the hard surfacing of paths, installation of interpretation panels and production of a site leaflet.

Over the period of the last plan, completed projects have included installation of in-channel structures in the River Oughton to increase flows and improve chalk stream habitats, tree and vegetation removal along the river and ditches on site to reduce shading, coppicing of hazel stools, river bank protection works, improvements to path surfacing, and the replacement of interpretation structures.

Current annual management includes cattle grazing of the main grassland areas, with scrub control, management of wetland vegetation and general maintenance across the site carried out by the Friends and CMS midweek volunteers. This work is currently supported by funding through Defra's Environmental Stewardship scheme, a 10-year agreement which is due to come to an end in 2022.

The emptying of litter bins adjacent to site entrances is carried out through the NHC grounds maintenance contract.

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

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The Oughtonhead Common GAP 2022-2027 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of NHC 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 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 aim and objectives of the GAP will be as follows:

### Aim

To maintain Oughtonhead Common as one of the premier wetland sites in Hertfordshire. Through the management and creation of wildlife-rich habitats, the long-term future of the site will be secured for the community as a welcoming and well-maintained place for the enjoyment of nature.

### Objectives

- A. A welcoming place** – *To provide a welcoming green space for the enjoyment of the local community*
  - A1 Improve access to, from and around the site where possible – linking to residential areas, local greenspaces, businesses and schools, public transport, shops and local amenities
  - A2 Ensure waymarking of Rights of Way is maintained around the site, updating where necessary
- B. Healthy, safe and secure** – *To provide and maintain clear and safe public access onto, and around Oughtonhead Common*
  - B1 Carry out reactive tree works to address safety issues
  - B2 Respond promptly to reports of misuse of the site
- C. Well-maintained and clean** – *To ensure that all aspects of Oughtonhead Common are kept clean and well maintained*
  - C1 Manage and maintain paths, boardwalks, bridges, benches, access infrastructure and signage
  - C2 Remove fly-tipping, undertake regular litter picking, empty litter bins, and carry out small scale vegetation management along access routes
- D. Environmental management** – *To ensure all aspects of site management are undertaken with sustainability as a guiding principle*
  - D1 Ensure ongoing maintenance costs are financially sustainable

- D2 Secure external funding to ensure the viability of capital works
- D3 Ensure impacts of climate change are considered in management decisions
- D4 Presumption against the use of herbicide
- D5 Monitor results of delivery to evaluate the success of management activities

**E. Biodiversity, landscape and heritage** – *To conserve and enhance the important wildlife, landscape and heritage features of Oughtonhead Common*

- C1 Continue to improve the quality of the unimproved grassland and increase its overall area whilst diversifying scrub habitat
- C2 Maintain and improve river, ditch and bank-side habitat, to encourage water vole, brown trout and kingfisher, supporting the key features they require to survive
- C3 Address collapsed weir on the River Oughton through delivery of recommended option from feasibility study
- C4 Continue to manage other wetland habitats to increase biodiversity
- C5 Continue to manage scrub and woodland habitats to increase biodiversity
- C6 Control invasive species

**F. Community involvement** – *To ensure engagement and involvement of local communities*

- F1 Support volunteer activity at Oughtonhead Common and ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the GAP
- F2 Continue to support the Friends of Oughtonhead Common and encourage the local community to become further involved in site management in a structured and supported way

**G. Marketing and communication** – *To promote awareness and interest in Oughtonhead Common*

- G1 Widely promote volunteer and community events at Oughtonhead Common, using both traditional and electronic media
- G2 Utilise newly installed noticeboards to update site users of developments on site
- G3 Update and re-print the Oughtonhead Common site leaflet

## 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.

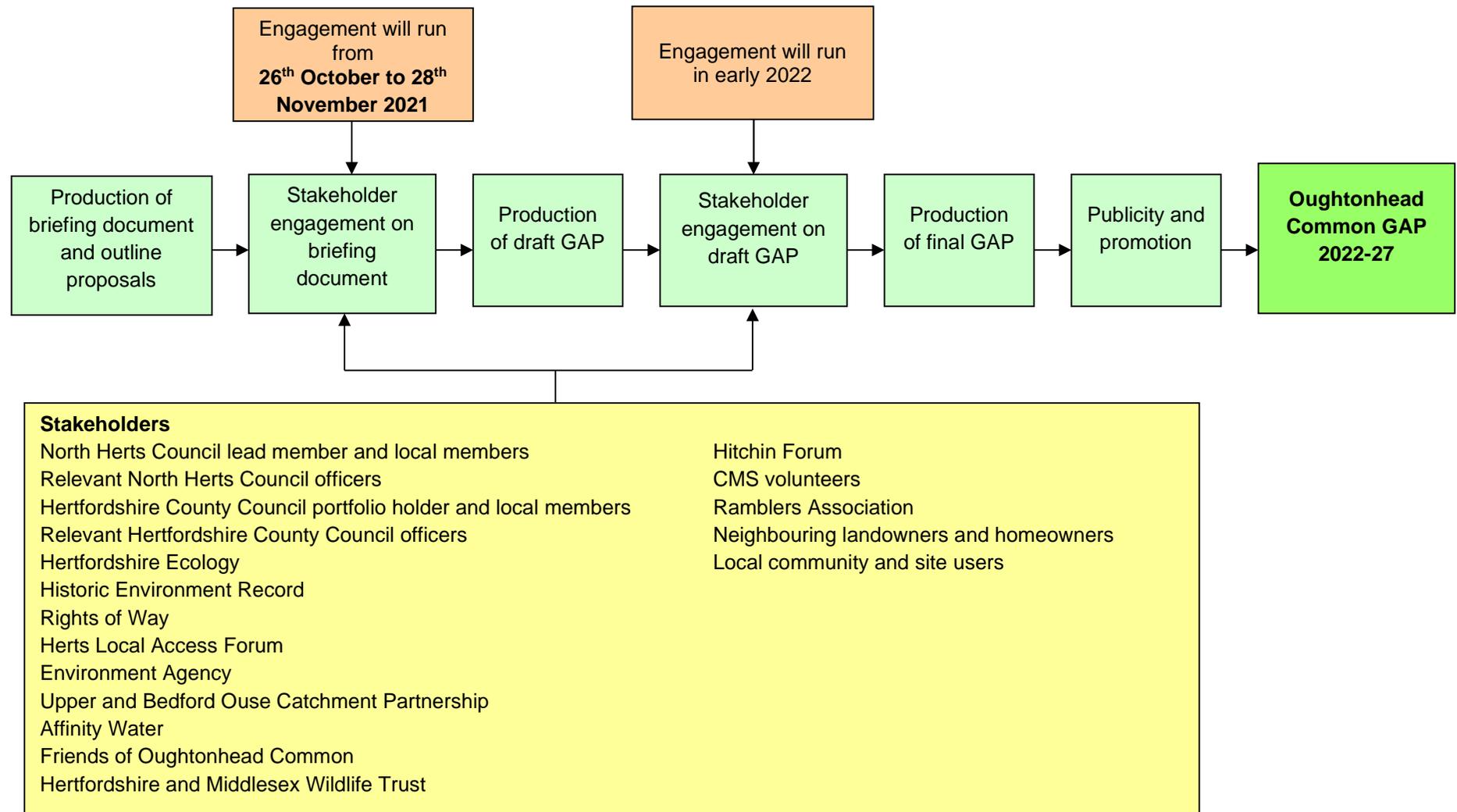
In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- 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 **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October and Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> 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. This stage is intended to run in early 2022.

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 Oughtonhead Common Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2022-2027.

Please return your comments to Michael Poole at:  
[michael.poole@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:michael.poole@hertfordshire.gov.uk)