



**BURYMEAD SPRINGS &
CADWELL LANE PLAYING FIELD**
GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN, 2024 - 2029

BRIEFING DOCUMENT



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1. INTRODUCTION

A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Burymead Springs & Cadwell Lane Playing Field. 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, on behalf of and in partnership with North Herts Council. The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2024.

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 14th August to 10th September 2023. A further engagement period in January 2024 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 Burymead Springs & Cadwell Lane Playing Field GAP.

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

2. BACKGROUND

Originally under two separate management plans, Burymead Springs and Cadwell Lane Playing Field are now being brought under one plan due to their proximity to one another and connectivity through the river which flows north from Cadwell to Burymead. This new single action plan will cover all management and ambitions for both sites. Both are located in north Hitchin, owned by North Hertfordshire Council (NHC), and managed in partnership with Countryside Management Service (CMS).

Cadwell Lane Playing Field is a 2.3ha open space bordered by an industrial area to the north, residential area to the south, river Hiz and railway line to the east and Cadwell Lane to the west. A former landfill site, much of the space is now a full-sized football pitch which underwent resurfacing with topsoil and turf from Wembley Stadium in 2013. This is managed as an amenity cut along with much of the grassland surrounding it with a conservation grassland border along the perimeter of scrub and new planted hedgerow.

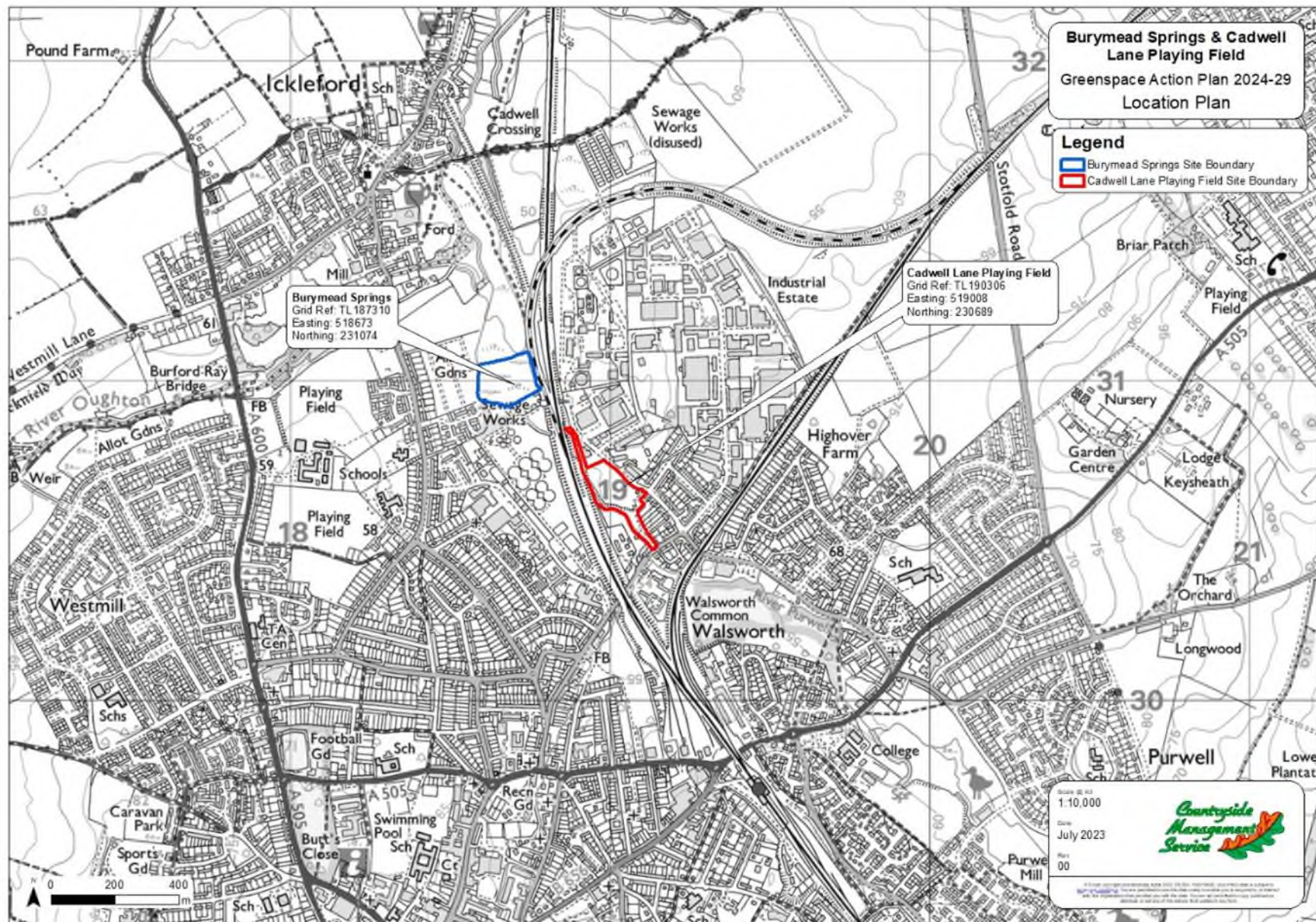
The bank top on the western side of the site has a small number of tall poplars which were retained when work to improve light levels into the river Hiz was carried out in the previous plan. This wooded bank runs to the west of the site along the river and stretches south to meet Grove Road. The river itself is a chalk stream, an important and vulnerable wetland habitat under threat in the UK.

Burymead Springs is a 2.5ha site to the north of Cadwell Lane Playing Field at the end of Cadwell Lane and separated by industrial units. To the east is the Hitchin railway flyover and East Coast Main Line and to the south a metal scrap yard. To the west across the river Hiz, there are allotments and a residential area, and to the north there is a cricket bat willow plantation, providing a link to open countryside. Access is available via a public footpath from Cadwell Lane to Ickleford, and a path leads from the footpath to the river and through the site. A viewing platform provides an opportunity to view the lagoon and reedbed. It is designated as Green Belt land, and lies within a larger Local Wildlife Site, Cadwell Marsh and Burymead Springs.

Burymead Springs is part of an ancient riverside meadow which stretches along the rivers Purwell and Hiz through Hitchin and encompasses three other NHDC sites: Purwell Meadows, Walsworth Common and Cadwell Lane Playing Field. Throughout the site and in the surrounding landscape springs rise to the surface and the wet nature of the site is reflected in its habitats today.

Priority habitats within the site include the river Hiz, a chalk stream, and an area of reedbed with an open lagoon. There is also an area of meadow, small areas of woodland including mature willow, alder and poplar, a significant amount of scrub and hedgerows, a number of small seasonal ponds and a new drainage ditch including an attenuation pond installed by Network Rail. The local wildlife site status of the larger area of which Burymead Springs is a part reflects its fen and swamp

indicator plant species and records of water vole and harvest mouse from the 1990s; otter was recorded in 2008 with further sightings in the wider catchment in recent years.



3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

3.1 Cadwell Lane Review

This will be the second Greenspace Action Plan for Cadwell Lane Playing Field, where the first covered the period between 2016 and 2021. This previous plan looked to carry out actions in and around the river Hiz to improve the watercourse as it flows through the site. It also aimed to make the park more inviting and improve some of the natural habitats on site.

Now the park has welcome signs for Cadwell Lane and is tied into the surrounding landscape and other sites along the river valley through Hitchin with an interpretation panel. This series of interpretation panels extends to Burymead Springs. The pavilion which attracted antisocial behaviour and graffiti has also gone from the site, with the site now visible and open along the whole eastern edge.

Under the previous plan the remaining borders of the football field were harrowed and seeded with a wildflower mix to create areas of diverse grassland. This reseeded has been successful although the area of conservation grassland appears to have been reduced since establishment. This grassland also forms a border to the hedgerow planted along the northern boundary during the previous plan. This is doing well and remains protected from browsing and damage. Recently tree works undertaken by the neighbouring property have increased light levels to the hedgerow but also made a gap in the western end providing the opportunity to extend the hedgerow.

The work to the river channel alongside the playing field has been a success with an improvement of both in channel vegetation and bankside vegetation. This is contrasted by the section of riverbank to the south of Cadwell Lane which is still shaded with limited species diversity in low growing species. The growth of scrub on the bank between the playing field and the riverbank is kept back from the informal riverside path by ad hoc management from NHDC.

Easier access to the river here does result in some rubbish alongside the banks but occasional tasks by volunteers address the worst of this. Downstream where access to the river is more difficult and on the approach to the scrap metal yard rubbish in channel worsens with larger pieces, needing machinery to remove, occurring at times.

3.2 Burymead Springs Review

This is the third GAP for Burymead Springs. The first covered the period from 2009 to 2014. The site came under the control of Network Rail between 2012 and 2017, as a result of the construction of the Hitchin railway flyover, and the majority of the actions from the first GAP were implemented by Network Rail. This included the construction of an otter holt and a reptile and amphibian hibernaculum, installation of a viewing platform for the lagoon and a new interpretation board.

More recently work has focused on improving the site after the impact of the railway flyover construction. A major piece of work in the 2018-23 GAP for Burymead Springs was desilting the lagoon. This had significantly reduced in size and capacity for holding water and was extensively covered in common reed. This reinstated the lagoon back towards its previously excavated size in 1997 and provided more expansive areas of permanent open water.

The previous plan looked to get the management of the meadows into a rotation, which unfortunately lapsed again throughout the Covid period, as well as reinstating a boundary hedgerow on the eastern boundary. The planting carried out after the work by network rail has established into scrub in places, but some requires replanting. It provides both vital foraging and nesting habitat as it continues to grow into a screen for the adjacent scrap metal yard. A hedgerow has been planted in the spoil on the western edge of the lagoon and fenced in to protect it from damage while it establishes under the current plan.

The river is in good condition as it passes through Burymead Springs and recent tree works carried out on the opposite river bank have allowed significantly more light into the river. Monitoring of in channel vegetation growth will allow assessment to see if further works are required on the willows that border parts of the river.

4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2024-29

The Burymead Springs & Cadwell Lane Playing Field GAP 2024-29 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of North Herts Council 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 aim and objectives of the GAP will be as follows:

Aims

To maintain and enhance the habitats across both sites as valuable links in the wider chain of the river valley, with a focus on maintaining the habitats to a high standard and improving local engagement.

Objectives

A. A Welcoming Place

To enhance the experience of using Burymead Springs and Cadwell Lane Playing Field for regular users and visitors

- A1 Look to improve signage further through Cadwell Lane to Burymead Springs
- A2 Ensure access into and around the sites is clear and suitable for all users

B. Healthy, Safe and Secure

To ensure that visitors to Burymead Springs and Cadwell Lane Playing Field feel safe and able to enjoy the sites at all times

- B1 Proactive response to misuse of the site
- B2 Carrying out reactive tree works to address safety issues
- B3 Ensure access routes and structures are fit for purpose
- B4 Maintain a 'no digging' area around the attenuation basin

C. Clean and Well Maintained

To ensure the standard of maintenance is upheld and relevant

- C1 Keep paths clear and well maintained with vegetation cut back from here and around structures
- C2 Removal of graffiti and fly tipping across the sites
- C3 Work with the adjacent scrap yard to prevent material from falling into the site
- C4 Carry out litter picks along the river Hiz for smaller objects and address any larger dumping that may occur

D. Sustainability

To ensure sustainability of all management operations on site

- D1 Ensure ongoing maintenance costs are financially viable
- D2 Secure external funding to ensure capital works are viable
- D3 Ensure all management is carried out according to environmental best practice, including on herbicide use, plant biosecurity to minimise tree disease, and look to retain woody material on site where possible

E. Conservation and Heritage

To conserve and enhance the key habitats of Burymead Springs and Cadwell Lane Playing Field

- E1 Carry out regular conservation cuts of the dry and wet meadows at Burymead Springs
- E2 Maintain and enhance the conservation margin at Cadwell Lane Playing Field
- E3 Cut a portion of the reedbed on a 5-year rotation
- E4 Improve seasonal ponds around Burymead Springs
- E5 Coppice encroaching scrub from within the reedbed and meadows
- E6 Maintain previous hedge and tree planting
- E7 Deliver river restoration work as part of a wider river catchment project including repeating pollarding along river Hiz
- E8 Plant an avenue of trees along the eastern edge of Cadwell Lane Playing Field

F. Community Involvement

To develop and maintain an informed, involved and enthusiastic local community

- F1 Encourage further involvement from the local community in the management of the site alongside supporting volunteer activities to achieve the aims of the GAP.
- F2 Ensure all involved in the site operate towards achievement of the objectives of the GAP.

G. Marketing

To promote awareness and interest in Burymead Springs and Cadwell Lane Playing Field

- G1 Promote the wider links throughout the Hiz Valley and the rivers Oughton and Purwell with regular updates on essential work through local groups.
- G2 Promote any volunteer events or community activities in local newsletters.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN PRODUCTION PROCESS

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.

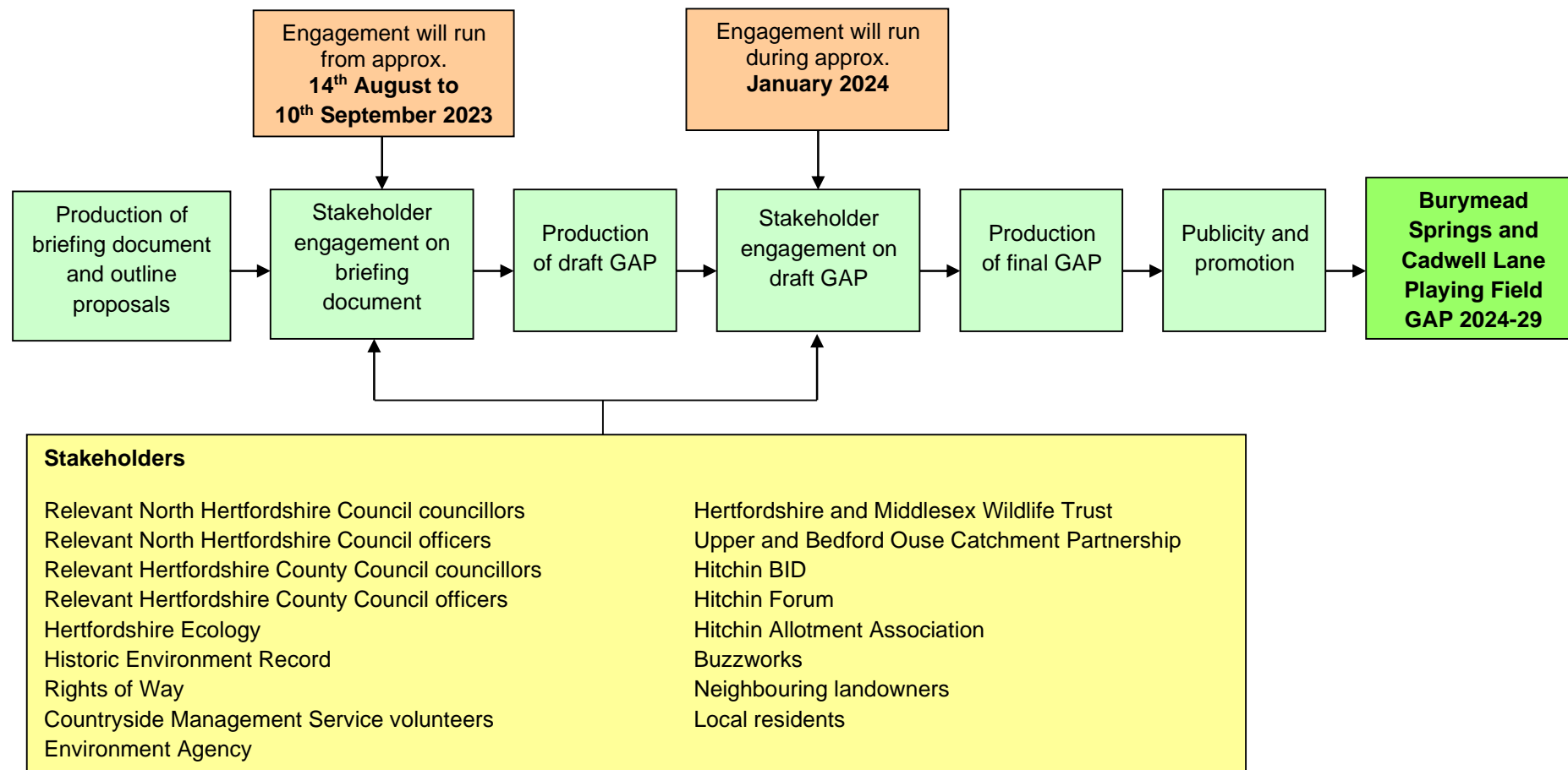
In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- 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 **14th August and 10th September**.
- 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 approximately January 2024.

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

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. We are keen to receive feedback from you on our proposals for the Burymead Springs & Cadwell Lane Playing Field Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2024-29.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **10th September 2023** at the latest.

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