



# **WALSWORTH COMMON**

## **GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN, 2024 - 2029**

### **BRIEFING DOCUMENT**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Walsworth 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, 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 14<sup>th</sup> August to 10<sup>th</sup> September 2023. A further engagement period in January 2023 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 Walsworth Common GAP.

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

## 2. BACKGROUND

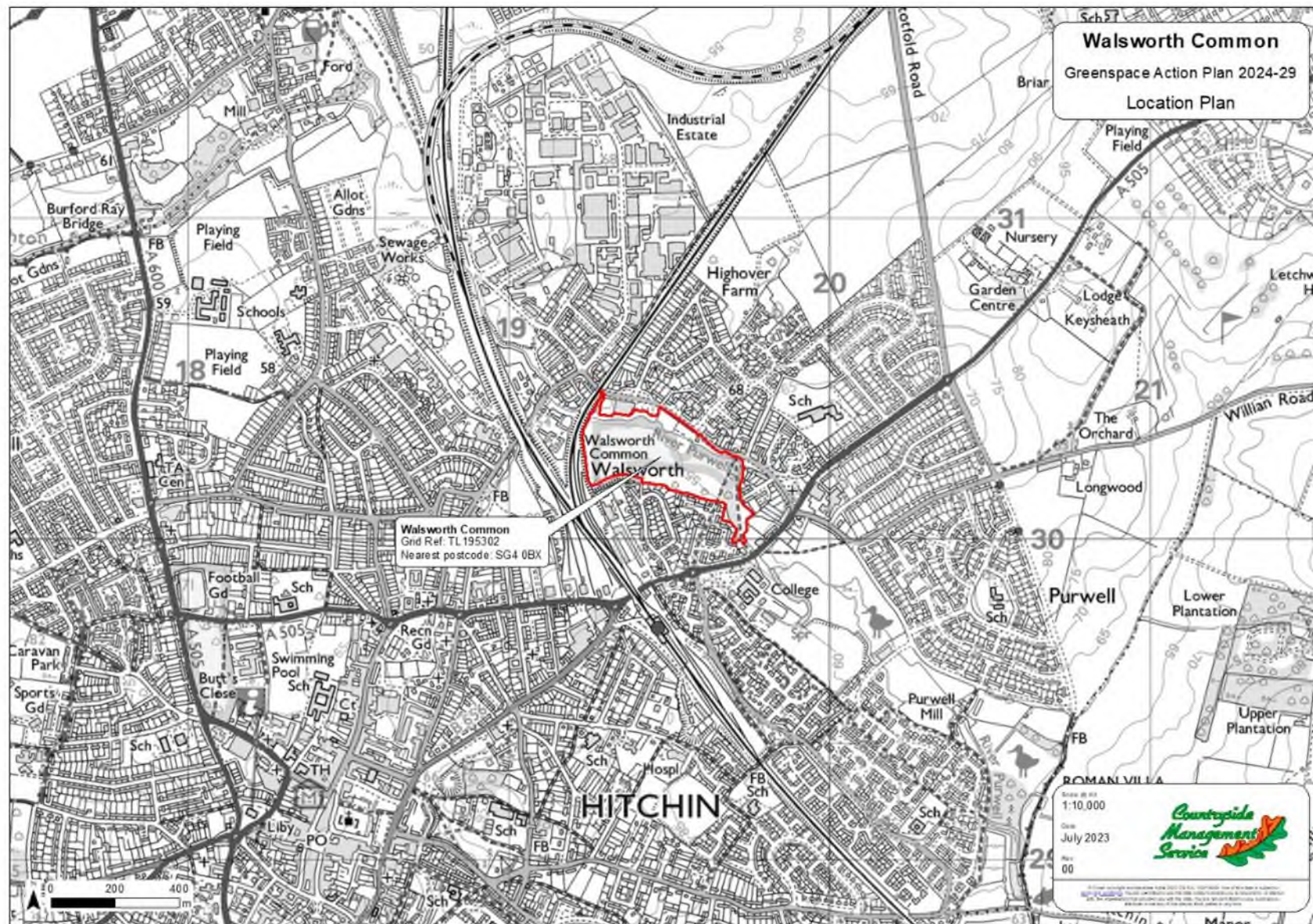
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Walsworth Common is a 9.6ha site situated to the north-east of Hitchin on the river Purwell. The site is owned and managed by North Hertfordshire Council (NHC). The majority of Walsworth Common is registered common land and the site consists of amenity grassland, longer conservation cut grassland, scrub, mature trees and a pond, with the river Purwell running close to its northern boundary. The river Purwell is a chalk river, a globally rare habitat type. The river is also a Local Wildlife Site due to previous records of water vole.

Facilities on site include football pitches, a basketball court, a skateboard ramp, two children's play areas and a small pavilion. Local people use the common for informal recreation including dog walking, exercise and as a walking/cycling route to school and work. The common provides an ideal location to hold large public events like fairs, festivals, circuses and concerts.

Walsworth Common makes up one of four NHC sites in a chain of green spaces along the Purwell Valley. To the south is Purwell Meadows Local Nature Reserve, while to the north on the river Hiz are Cadwell Lane Playing Field and Burymead Springs. A walking route to include all four sites has been established.





### **3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS**

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This Greenspace Action Plan follows similar plans covering the periods from 2014-19 and 2019-24 which have guided the management of the site.

Recent improvements to Walsworth Common have included regrading the site to accommodate new sports pitches, reseeding conservation grassland around the sports pitches to increase the diversity of wildflowers, installation of flow deflectors in the river Purwell and associated tree works to create more diverse habitats in the river and the design and installation of new interpretation promoting links to other NHC sites in the Purwell Valley. Updated site interpretation is currently in production.

Current maintenance operations at Walsworth Common include grass cutting, management and maintenance of the path surface and signage, play area maintenance, small scale vegetation management, litter picking, fly tip removal and reactive tree works to address safety issues.

## 4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2024-29

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The Walsworth Common GAP 2024-29 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of North Herts Council, Countryside Management Service 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:

### **Aim**

To promote Walsworth Common as Hitchin's premier recreational hub, boasting a wide range of natural habitats and providing a unique and enjoyable place to visit for a variety of user groups.

### **Objectives**

#### **A. To provide an area of open space that is welcoming, safe and well maintained for local residents and visitors to enjoy.**

- A1 Improve access to, from and around Walsworth Common; linking to local greenspaces, businesses and schools, residential areas, public transport, shops and local amenities.
- A2 Continue to promote the natural habitats of Walsworth Common and accessibility through the site and along the Purwell Valley using signage, interpretation and leaflets.
- A3 Maintain all site entrances to form welcoming, visible and attractive gateways to Walsworth Common, in proportion to their location.
- A4 Maintain the condition of the car park, ensuring it is welcoming and resilient.
- A5 Undertake proactive response to the misuse of the site.
- A6 Carry out regular risk assessments of the facilities, natural features and general environment found at Walsworth Common.
- A7 Carry out programmed tree works to address safety issues.

- A8 Monitor the grounds maintenance regimes (including litter collection) to ensure they comply with the contracted standard.
- A9 Ensure that all furniture and facilities are maintained in a safe, serviceable and tidy condition.

**B. To maintain and enhance the quality and value of Walsworth Common's natural habitats.**

- B1 Maintain and improve the diversity and wildlife value of habitats on site to protect specialist species and biodiversity.
- B2 Maintain and enhance areas of conservation cut grassland without impacting recreational activities.
- B3 Manage scrub habitat across the site preventing further encroachment of scrub into the grassland areas.
- B4 Manage the pond with rotational vegetation clearance and removal of overhanging vegetation.
- B5 Continue with active management of the river and riverbank habitat including rotational bankside vegetation management and provision of viewing areas, tree management, provision of buffer zones next to the river, in-channel flow deflectors and removal of invasive non-native species across the site.
- B6 Monitor mature trees around the common and undertake restocking to provide the next generation of trees.
- B7 Continue to work towards the eradication of invasive non-native species.

**C. To support the health, fitness and well-being of all users through a range of high quality recreational opportunities, events and activities.**

- C1 Ensure existing recreational and sports facilities are maintained in a safe and serviceable condition.
- C2 Develop and explore the potential for offering new and improved recreational facilities and opportunities at Walsworth Common.
- C3 Develop the play facilities to provide an exciting, challenging and unique experience for all age groups.
- C4 Promote and support the use of Walsworth Common for Hertfordshire Health Walks.



**D. To promote community involvement at Walsworth Common.**

- D1 Support volunteer activity on the Common and ensure all involved operate towards achievement of the GAP.
- D2 Encourage community and volunteer involvement with practical conservation tasks and events.
- D3 Continue to offer all visitors and local residents a variety of events and activities at Walsworth Common.
- D4 Maintain regular contact with key stakeholders and community groups and consult on decision making where appropriate.
- D5 Continue to monitor, record and learn about the wildlife of Walsworth Common.

**E. To ensure ongoing management is environmentally and financially sustainable and secure external funding for capital works.**

- E1 Ensure the costs of ongoing maintenance proposed in the GAP are financially sustainable and achievable with the resources available.
- E2 Seek external funding from grant bodies and development funds, to deliver proposed activities beyond annual maintenance.
- E3 Ensure all management is carried out according to environmental best practice, including on herbicide use, plant biosecurity to minimise tree disease, and sustainable woodland management practices
- E4 Identify approaches which will deliver multiple benefits, such as combining habitat and tree risk management.

## 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.

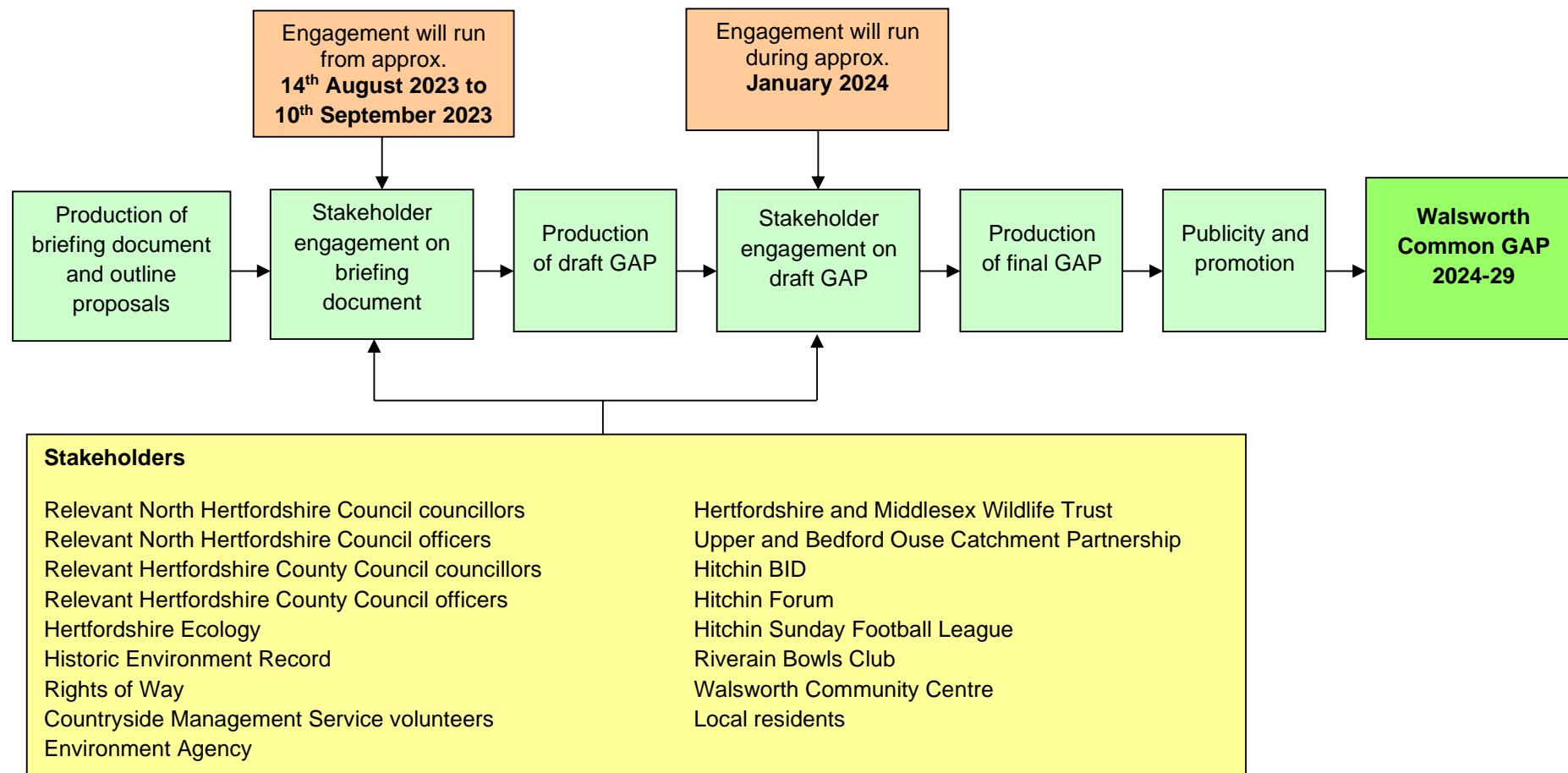
In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- 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 **Monday 14<sup>th</sup> August and Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> 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 during **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

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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 Walsworth Common Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2024-29.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September** at the latest.

### **FAO Andrew Taylor**

Countryside Management Service  
Environment and Infrastructure Department  
County Hall  
Pegs Lane  
Hertford  
SG13 8DN

**E-mail:** [andrew.taylor@hertfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.taylor@hertfordshire.gov.uk)

**Phone:** 01992 556063