



**NORTON COMMON**  
**GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN, 2025 - 2030**  
**BRIEFING DOCUMENT**



**North  
Herts**  
Council

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

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A new five-year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for Norton 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 Hertfordshire Council (NHC). The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2025.

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 17<sup>th</sup> May to 14<sup>th</sup> June 2024. A further engagement period in January 2025 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 Norton 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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### **Brief**

Norton Common is a public open space in Letchworth Garden City, located to the north of the town centre, central grid reference is TL218333. The site is approximately 29 hectares in size and incorporates a variety of habitats including woodland, grassland, and marsh. A number of leisure facilities are available on site including bowling greens, tennis courts, lido, skate park and 'Jump Wood'. The Pix brook flows through the site, culverted in places.

### **Ownership and Management**

The site is owned by North Hertfordshire Council (NHC) and is managed by the Grounds Team, with support from Friends of Norton Common and Countryside Management Service (CMS), part of Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside and Rights of Way Service. Management is guided by a five year 'Greenspace Action Plan' (GAP) produced by CMS, in consultation with stakeholders, with objectives for delivering improvements to biodiversity and heritage, access, and community engagement. The 2025 to 2030 GAP follows a series of previous plans which have been produced to guide the management of the site.

### **Designation and Awards**

Norton Common is declared as a Local Nature Reserve, and is a designated Local Wildlife Site (LWS) in recognition of the local biodiversity significance of habitats on site. The site has been awarded Green Flag status for a number of years, in recognition of achieving a quality benchmark for park and greenspace management. Green Flag is judged annually.

### **Heritage**

Common grazing rights were exercised on Norton Common from at least the 1700s up to the late 1800s, during which time the site was composed predominately of dry and marshy grassland. Historic ridge and furrow features can be seen on site today and are a remnant of medieval arable cultivation. From the late 1800s the site was managed for game and grazing ceased, resulting in succession of much of the site to secondary woodland and scrub.

In 1904, the land and freehold were acquired by the First Garden City Ltd. and in 1907 the site was recognised as an area of beauty which should be preserved and made accessible for the new residents. In 1922, Letchworth Urban District Council took over the site, installing access routes and leisure facilities whilst committing to retaining the natural characteristics.

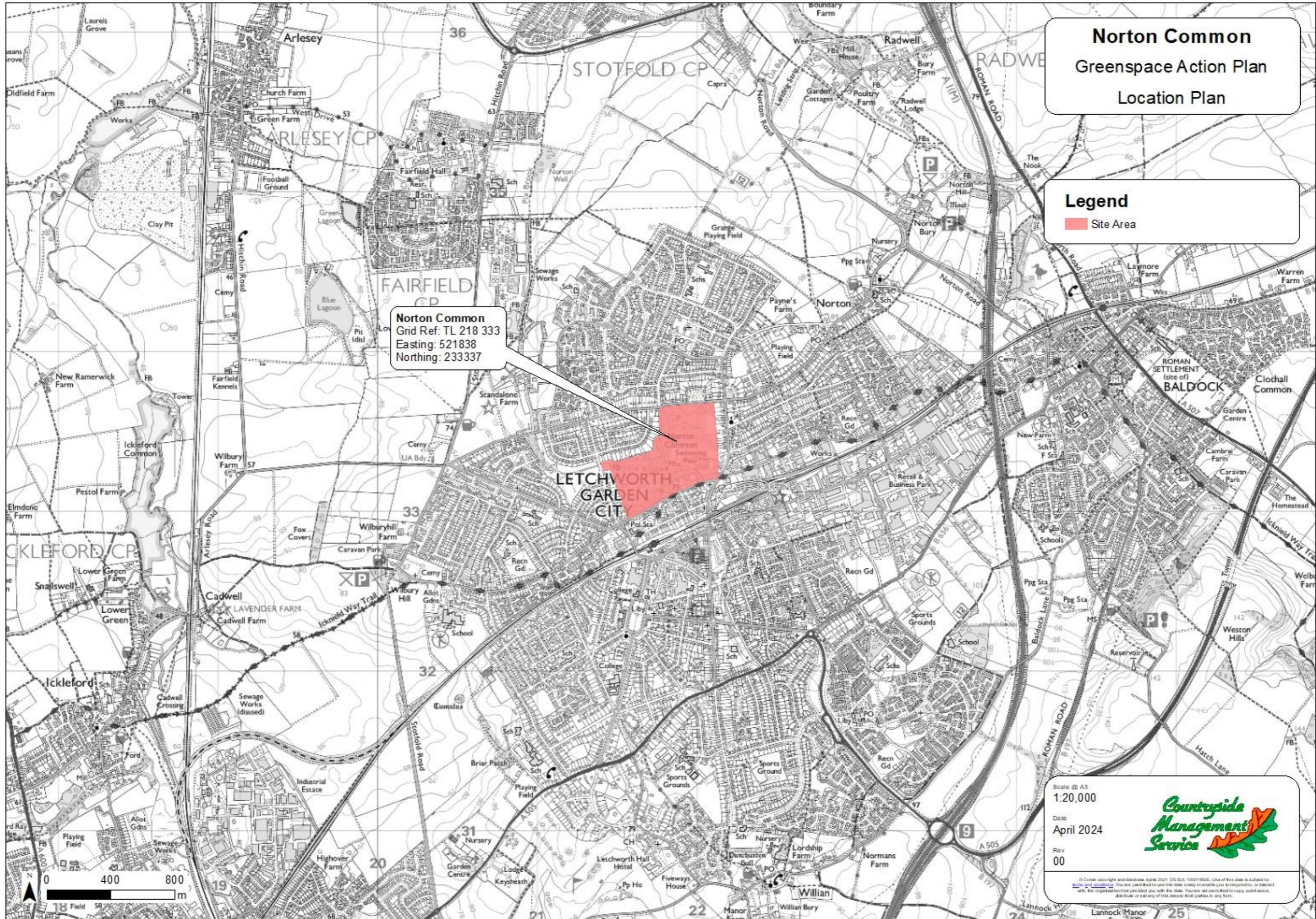
### **Biodiversity**

The site contains a rare example of boulder clay marsh, a sensitive habitat which supports a wide diversity of wildflowers. Unimproved grassland on ridge and furrow

is also species rich. Wildlife includes 'black' squirrel (an unusual form of Grey squirrel), pipistrelle and noctule bat, and Muntjac deer. A formal tree avenue of horse chestnut and lime bisects the site. The Pix brook has been extensively modified for flood risk, affecting the water regime on site.

Friends of Norton Common monitor the biodiversity of the site and provide management support for more sensitive habitats, including tree planting to diverse secondary woodland and control of competitive plants encroaching on rare marsh habitat. Marsh and unimproved grassland are cut and lifted annually by the Grounds Team. Wildlife value of the Pix brook has been enhanced by reducing shading and re-profiling and seeding some stream banks.





**Norton Common  
Greenspace Action Plan  
Location Plan**

**Legend**  
■ Site Area

Norton Common  
 Grid Ref: TL 218 333  
 Easting: 521838  
 Northing: 233337

Scale @ A3  
 1:20,000  
 Date  
 April 2024  
 Rev  
 00



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

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A summary of improvements carried out between 2019 and 2024 is as follows:

#### **Access and Interpretation**

Interpretation on site has been updated by installing four welcome panels at entrances from Cowslip Hill, Icknield Way, Norton Way North and Wilbury Road. A further three interpretation panels have been installed with information about marsh, meadow and woodland habitats.

An updated leaflet has been created featuring information about the site's rich history such as its previous use as arable land, with the visible undulations 'ridge and furrow', and grazing land, as well as information about the Friends of Norton Common (FoNC) and examples of wildlife to see on site.

A boardwalk has been installed by volunteers in the northeast corner of the park. Several benches have also been added.

The Kings Bridge on the footpath by the small marsh is scheduled to be replaced in the summer of 2024 with a more durable structure. It will be designed to be used primarily as a pedestrian bridge with occasional use by grounds maintenance vehicles. It will be finished with an anti-slip surface and a handrail/parapet.

#### **Biodiversity and Heritage**

The wildflower meadow grassland located in the northeast of the site has been annually cut and lifted by contractors in mid-July.

The rare marsh habitat has continued to be managed as conservation grassland with a single annual cut carried out by the contractors. The timing is determined by weather conditions, flora and contractors' availability but it normally takes place around July. Following the cut, volunteers collect the arisings immediately and move them to the small marsh where they remain for some time to drop their seeds. The arisings are then completely removed from site by volunteers.

Volunteers have delivered an impressive number of actions during the last five years, including the removal of non-native invasive species such as Variegated Yellow Archangel, Russian vine, Russian Comfrey and three-cornered leek. They have also helped control the spread of thistles, comfrey, nettle and Alexanders around the site, without the use of pesticides.

Volunteers have also coppiced willow scrub in and around the large marsh, meadow and a section of the tributary to open habitat between the two marshes. They have also removed small trees to create scallops near the 'six-ways' paths.

Other volunteer tasks included the creation and maintenance of dead hedges, collection of yellow rattle seed from selected areas in the large marsh to spread over the small marsh and meadow, tree planting and watering, weeding and tree replacement where necessary.

The central avenue of horse chestnuts trees has been interplanted with lime trees to anticipate their decline and removal.

### **Community Engagement**

The Friends of Norton Common (FoNC) is a voluntary group working to preserve the precious habitat of Norton Common for people and wildlife. They carry out conservation tasks every Thursday and wildlife surveys, such as bat, butterfly and flora surveys.

Other community events are organised by North Herts Road Runners, Forest Schools and Nature Tots among others.

The site may be suitable for low impact commercial events such as cinema and outdoor theatre events in the summer, potentially attracting a wider demography of visitors to the site. Any such event will need to consider the ridge and furrow.



## **4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2025-2030**

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The Norton Common GAP 2025-30 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of North Hertfordshire Council and members of the public, and will act as a guide for volunteer tasks and activities. 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**

Conserve and enhance the biodiversity and heritage of the site, in particular boulder clay marsh, species rich grassland and ridge and furrow, and maintain the site as an accessible, welcoming, and enjoyable place to visit offering a variety of recreational and leisure options.

### **Objectives**

#### **A. A welcoming place**

- A1 Maintain interpretation, signage and waymarking around site
- A2 Review site access and implement strategies to improve access for all users

#### **B. Healthy, safe and secure**

- B1 Maintain sport and leisure facilities catering to a wide range of user groups
- B2 Carry out three-year tree risk survey and work programme, and reactive tree works
- B3 Check and maintain play equipment to high safety standard

#### **C. Well maintained and clean**

- C1 Encourage responsible use of the site and a low incidence of anti-social behaviour
- C2 Site infrastructure is well maintained, including buildings, paths, and benches

- C3 Regularly empty bins and litter pick
- C4 Watercourse is clear of debris and free of pollutants
- C5 Maintain buildings and formal landscaping
- C6 Maintain Green Flag standards of greenspace management

**D. Sustainability**

- D1 Ensure ongoing management costs are financially sustainable
- D2 Carry out management according to environmental best practice and in response to challenges to the environment ([NHDC Council Plan 2022-27](#))
- D3 Identify and apply to external funding sources for capital works where available

**E. Conservation and Heritage**

- E1 Manage conservation cut meadow and marsh habitat to promote wildflower diversity
- E2 Improve connectivity between large and small marsh by maintaining tributary corridor
- E3 Manage woodland to promote a varied age structure and a mix of native tree species
- E4 Monitor tree health and respond to significant pest and disease impacts
- E5 Control the spread of non-native and invasive plants with minimal reliance on herbicide
- E6 Manage trees along the Avenue to secure continuation of this landscape feature
- E7 Protect historic ridge and furrow by planning access and events to minimise impact
- E8 Develop and deliver river restoration projects on the Pix Brook within Norton Common and downstream through Pix Brook Meadows

- E9 Bring Pix Brook Meadows under the same management umbrella as Norton Common
- E10 Carry out species and habitat monitoring to identify trends and inform management

**F. Community involvement**

- F1 Support the Friends of Norton Common to make a positive contribution to site management, in particular the monitoring and improvement of sensitive habitats, and ensure that all involved contribute towards the objectives of the GAP
- F2 Support Forest School and Nature Tots
- F3 Provide an opportunity for stakeholders, including local residents and community groups, to influence the new GAP through a structured engagement process
- F4 Provide opportunities for the wider community to participate in site management, including hosting corporate volunteer days for local businesses
- F5 Support [NHDC's vision for 2022-27](#) to put people first and deliver sustainable services, to enable a brighter future together

**G. Marketing**

- G1 Friends of Norton Common to lead periodic guided walks
- G2 Host site leaflets, wildlife surveys, and management plan on NHDC website



## 5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLAN PRODUCTION PROCESS

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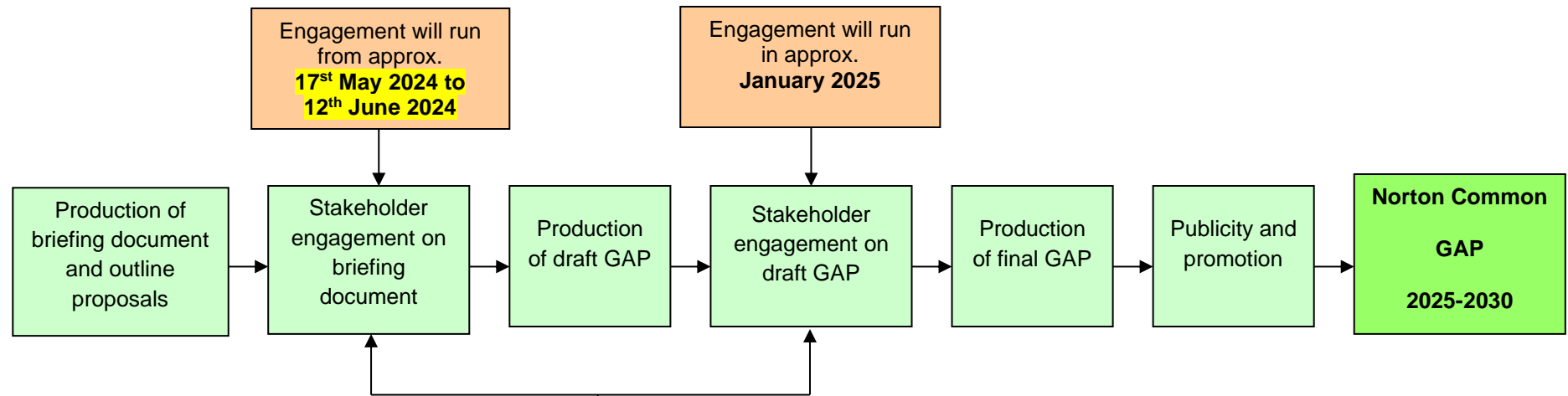
Effective community engagement is at the centre of successful management plans. The value of a GAP is maximised when it incorporates and balances the aspirations of stakeholders and interest groups.

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 **Friday 17<sup>th</sup> May and Friday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2024.**
- 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 2025.** 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:



<b>Stakeholders</b>	
Friends of Norton Common	Grange Community Social Club
North Hertfordshire District Council Officers	Environment Agency
North Hertfordshire District Council Cllrs	Ramblers Association
Hertfordshire County Council Officers	Cycle Herts
Hertfordshire County Council Cllrs and Portfolio Holder	Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation
Hertfordshire Ecology	Hertfordshire Natural History Society and Field Club
Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre	Upper Bedford Ouse and Catchment Partnership
Hertfordshire and Middlesex Wildlife Trust	Local Community
Historic Environment Record	The Gardens Trust
Historic England	Letchworth Sports and Tennis Club

## 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 Norton Common Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2025-2030.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **Friday 12th June** at the latest.

**FAO Adolfo Gonzalez**

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