

BUTTS CLOSE GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2016 – 2021



January 2016

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1 SITE SUMMARY

Name	Butts Close
Address	Bedford Road Hitchin SG5 1HA
Grid ref	TL 18082 29598
Size	4.5 ha (11 acres)
Owners	North Hertfordshire District Council Hitchin Cow Commoners Trust
Designations	Common Land (CL49, CL57, CL71) Conservation Area (Butts Close, Hitchin)

VISION STATEMENT

The aim of this Greenspace Action Plan 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.

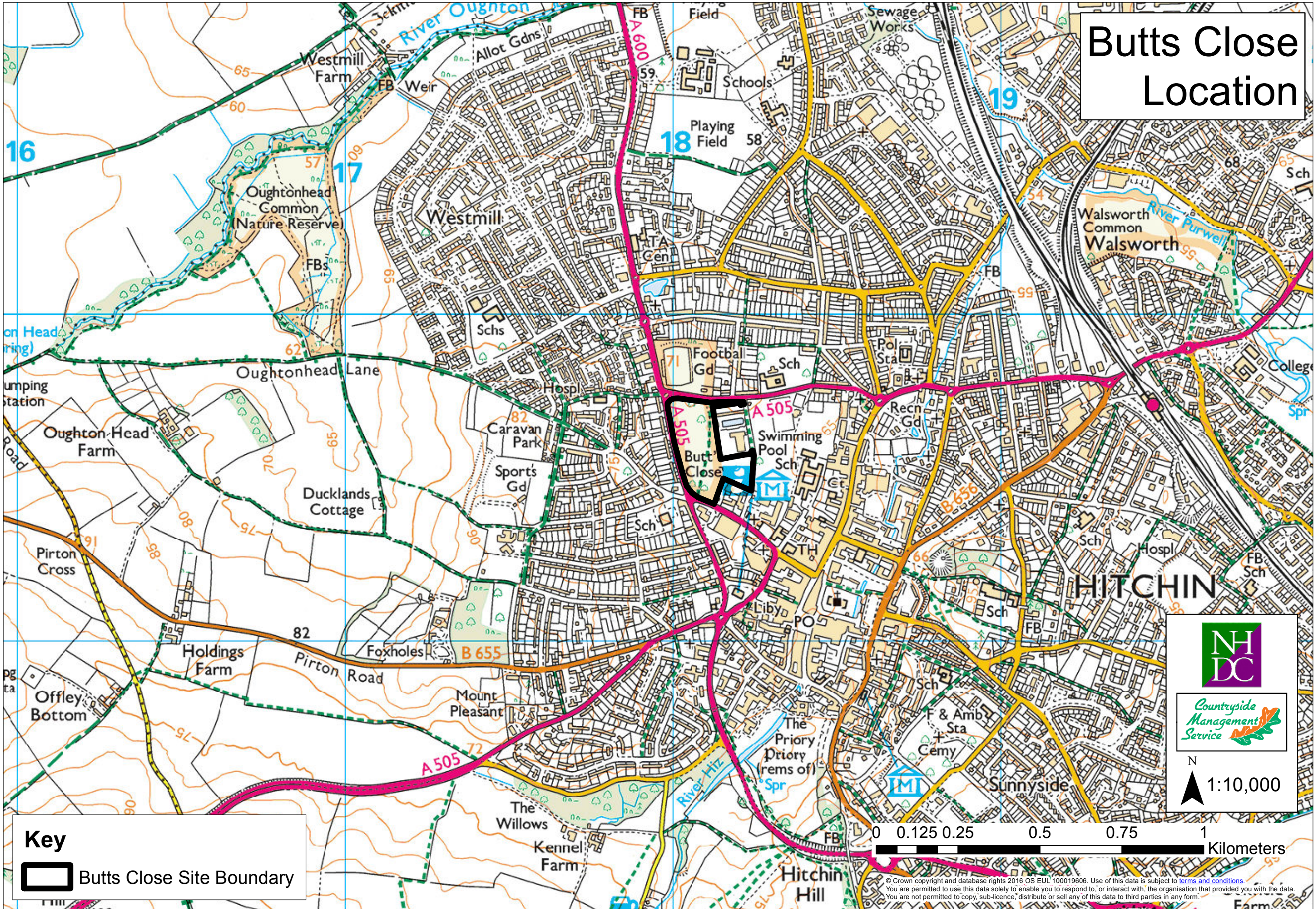
This will be achieved through the following objectives:

- To provide clear and welcoming access into and throughout the site
- To ensure that visitors to Butts Close feel safe and able to enjoy the site at all times
- To ensure the standard of maintenance is maintained and relevant
- To ensure ongoing costs are sustainable and secure external funding for capital works
- To protect and enhance the biodiversity and heritage of the site
- To support and encourage community involvement at Butts Close
- To promote awareness and interest in Butts Close


The GAP for Butts Close sets out the management, maintenance and development framework of the site over five years.

The GAP is reviewed annually, so that any outstanding tasks can be rescheduled as necessary. The GAP is also frequently reviewed in conjunction with the Countryside Management Service (CMS) and any other relevant bodies.

Butts Close Location



Key

 Butts Close Site Boundary



N
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Butts Close Site Description

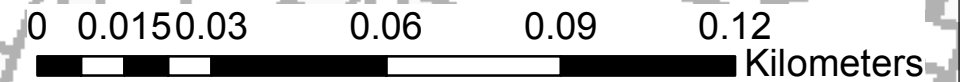


Key

- Bench
- Buoy
- Dog bin
- Litter bin
- Vehicle access
- Trees
- Amenity cut grassland
- Scrub
- Conservation cut grassland
- Hard surface
- Pond
- Building

NHDC
Countryside Management Service

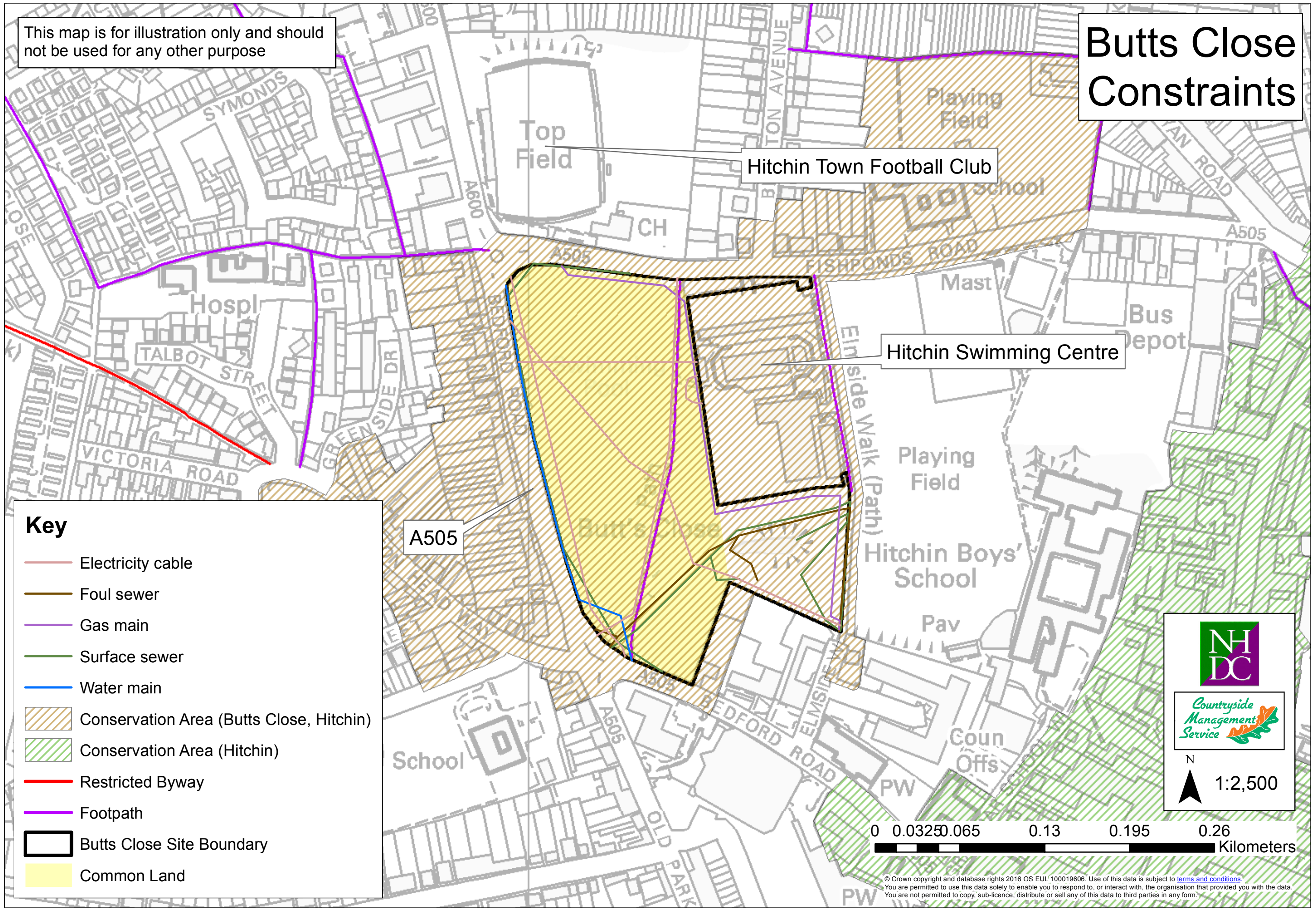
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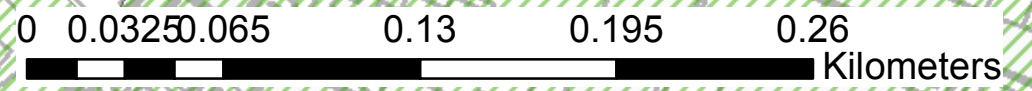
This map is for illustration only and should not be used for any other purpose

Butts Close Constraints



Key

- Electricity cable
- Foul sewer
- Gas main
- Surface sewer
- Water main
- Conservation Area (Butts Close, Hitchin)
- Conservation Area (Hitchin)
- Restricted Byway
- Footpath
- Butts Close Site Boundary
- Common Land

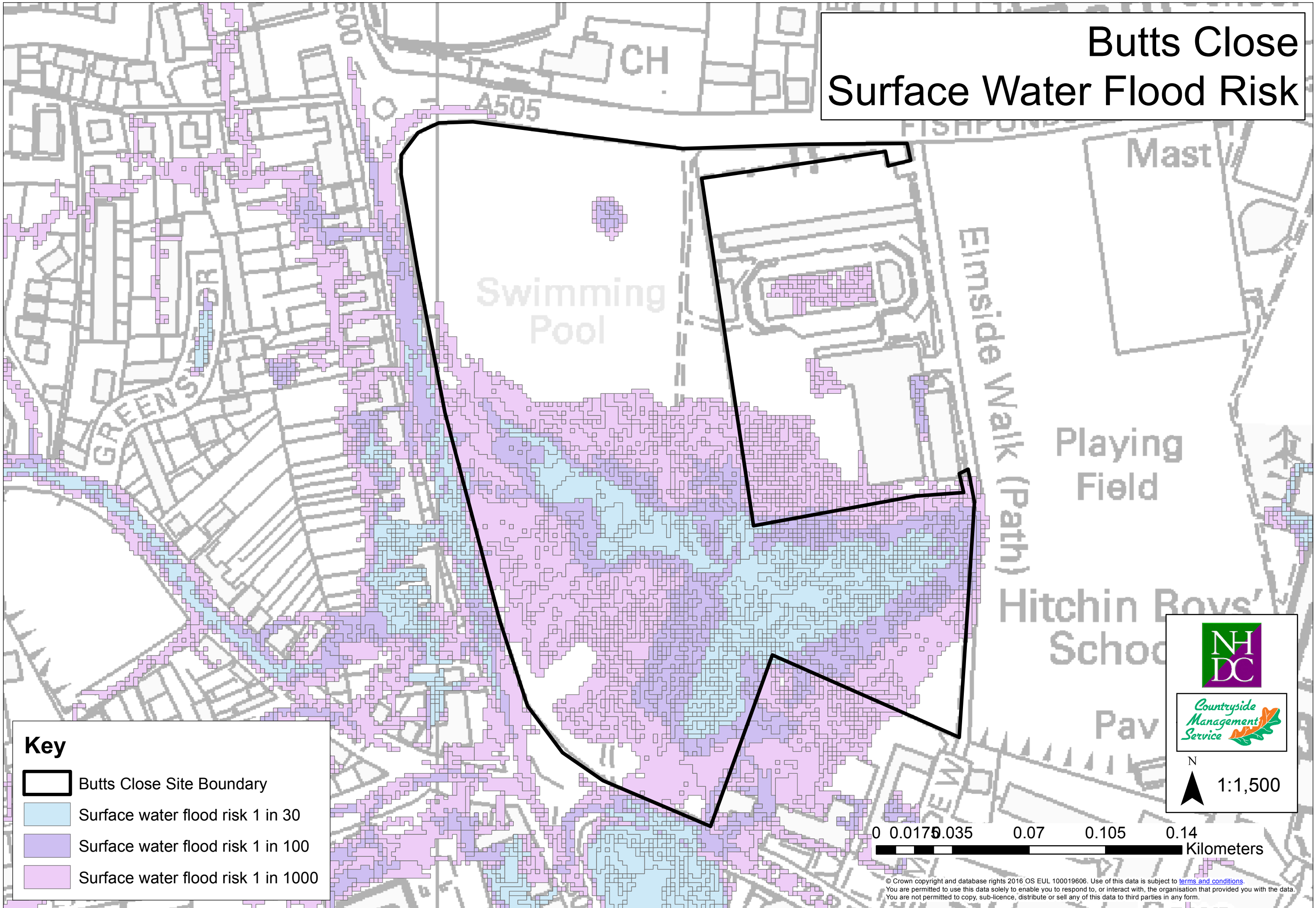


NHDC
Countryside Management Service





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Butts Close Surface Water Flood Risk



Key

-  Butts Close Site Boundary
-  Surface water flood risk 1 in 30
-  Surface water flood risk 1 in 100
-  Surface water flood risk 1 in 1000



N
▲ 1:1,500

0 0.0175 0.035 0.07 0.105 0.14 Kilometers

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2.5 INTRODUCTION

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) and the whole site lies within a Conservation Area.

The large western section of the site is amenity cut grassland. The site has a high public profile and plays host to a number of large community events throughout the year. There is a small section of longer grass in a damp hollow within this area. 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.

2.6 LANDSCAPE, GEOGRAPHY & DESIGNATIONS

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, immediately to the north.

Butts Close is at significant risk of surface water flooding, as is shown on the map in 2.4. The risk on a 1 in 30 year basis is focused on the area around the pond, but also extends to the west of the surfaced path. This is the main reason for the area of conservation cut grass west of the path.

There are no wildlife conservation designations in place on the site. The status of the western section of Butts Close as common land has some constraining influence on how the site is managed. Butts Close is at the heart of a Conservation Area, in recognition of the value of its landscape, and this designation confers some protection on that landscape, including for the trees in Butts Close.

There are many underground services running across Butts Close; the approximate locations of these are shown on the constraints map (2.3). These make any work which involves breaking the surface difficult. The scrub planting which took place along the boundary north of the pond in 2007 was also planned along the boundary south of the pond, but had to be abandoned due to the electricity cable in this area.

2.7 HISTORY & ARCHAEOLOGY

Butts Close has a long history of use as an open space. Its name refers to the archery butts which were placed on the site when it was used as a sporting ground for archery in late

medieval times. The butts were first recorded in 1465. In 1543 the statute making practice with the longbow a legal requirement was revived in response to the threat of French invasion, and the butts extended to a new statutory length of 220 yards.

Until 1829 Butts Close was surrounded by an earth bank. More recently there was a tank, a gun and another military vehicle at the northern end to commemorate the First World War, but these were taken away and melted down during the Second World War.

The site has for a long time – certainly since at least the 19th century – been used to host travelling fairs.

2.8 HABITATS & WILDLIFE

2.8.1 GRASSLAND

The site is largely semi-improved neutral grassland, with limited species diversity. The majority is managed by an amenity cut. A damp hollow in the main western part of the site and the eastern part of the site around the pond are managed by an annual autumn cut and lift regime. Species such as meadow buttercup persist in these areas.



Conservation cut grassland and scrub north of the pond

2.8.2 TREES AND SCRUB

The site has a line of large-leaved lime trees along its southern and western boundaries, a central avenue of pink chestnut and alder and additional trees along other boundaries and around the pond. There is a large and striking weeping willow next to the pond, which has recently lost several large branches. An area of native shrubs was planted north of the pond in 2007 and these are now approaching maturity.

2.8.3 POND

The small pond on the eastern side of Butts Close is designed as a balancing pond, with the concrete dam positioned to hold back water in times of heavy rain and reduce the risk of flooding further east. It is also the part of the site with the highest wildlife value. It was subject to a major restoration project during 2007. The western section of the pond was entirely reengineered to improve its value for wildlife: its banks were reprofiled, marginal and emergent species were planted in its new shallow margins and pre-planted coir pillows were installed along the remaining steeper bank. In the eastern section, a floating reedbed was established in the eastern section to act as a biofilter, absorbing nutrients, pollutants and silt. Willows around the pond were reduced or pollarded.



The main part of the pond

These works achieved significant improvements to the habitats in and around the main western section of the pond, which have matured well in the eight years since. The water in the pond is clear and free of algal blooms and the pond is surrounded by thick emergent

vegetation. The trees have grown back strongly, to the extent that the eastern end of the pond had once again become heavily shaded by the large weeping willow until that recently lost several large branches. This part of the pond remains far less attractive, being dominated by silt, algae, leaf litter and debris.



The eastern end of the pond, showing the structure which supported the floating reedbed in the top right corner

There has been a significant accumulation of silt in the base of both parts of the pond since the previous works were carried out. This has reduced the capacity of the pond and will therefore reduce its effectiveness as a balancing pond.

There are no great crested newt records within 200m of the site boundary and given that the site is surrounded by urban areas of Hitchin, it is considered that there is a very low chance of great crested newts being present in the pond. The only rare species recorded in or around the pond is opposite-leaved pondweed, which is categorised as Vulnerable in the Red Data List for Great Britain but was recorded only in 1986 and 1988.

2.9 ACCESS, INFRASTRUCTURE & FACILITIES

Butts Close offers unrestricted access to the public. There are formal access points from Fishponds Road at the northern end and Bedford Road at the southern end, and these are linked by a tarmac path. There are two further access points from a path which runs along the eastern edge of the site, and mown grass paths lead from here to the main part of the site, running to the north and south of the pond. In addition to these, there are only limited boundary features around the majority of the site – a row of concrete bollards along the

western boundary and a low wooden barrier along the northern boundary. Pedestrians can circulate freely throughout the site.

The only vehicular access is from Fishponds Road, and is controlled by a locked gate. It can be used by grounds maintenance contractors, and for access for vehicles and equipment involved in events on the site.

There are numerous benches, litter bins and dog bins around the site, which are generally in fair condition. There are no noticeboards and no signage. A lifebelt next to the pond is often subject to vandalism.

There are underground services widely distributed across the site, which are a significant constraining influence on some potential actions. Shrub planting was planned along the boundary south of the pond in 2007 but proved impossible due to an underground electricity cable. The approximate locations of these services are shown on the map in 2.3.

2.10 MANAGEMENT, COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & EVENTS

2.10.1 MANAGEMENT

Responsibility for management of Butts Close lies with NHDC. The maintenance works are currently carried out by John O'Conner (JOC), the grounds maintenance contractors for NHDC.

Five year Greenspace Action Plans (GAPs) for the site are produced by the Countryside Management Service in consultation with the relevant partners and stakeholders. The last plan ran from 2007 to 2012.

2.10.2 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT & EVENTS

Butts Close is very well used by the local community. As well as the many people who make use of their local green space by walking through or around it, Regiment Fitness exercise groups use the site on a near daily basis and it hosts travelling fairs several times each year.

The Friends of Butts Close (FoBC) is a local community group with a particular interest in the management and protection of Butts Close. They organise litter picking on Butts Close as part of the Big Hitchin Tidy Up. They also produce regular newsletters and inform the relevant parties when specific amenity or risk issues arise.

3 ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION

3.1 A WELCOMING PLACE

The open landscape of Butts Close automatically creates a welcoming feeling. It is clear that it is a public green space with open access. However, it lacks any formal signage. As a visitor to the site, there is not even any evidence that it is called Butts Close. This could be rectified through the interpretation panels described in 3.7.

The pond, which is the most interesting place in Butts Close in biodiversity terms, is difficult to access. This is especially the case during the summer, when it is surrounded by long grass and tall emergent vegetation. Improving access by establishing a mown grass path to the edge of the pond would give the local community more opportunity to enjoy the wildlife of the pond. Access has until now been intentionally restricted using long grass to address the problem of rubbish in the pond and to reduce the risk of people falling in the pond. However the improvement works to the pond have made it a more attractive place, which should in itself reduce fly tipping, and the interpretation panel described in 3.7 should make the location of the pond obvious to people using the path.

3.2 HEALTHY, SAFE & SECURE

Reactive tree work should be carried out whenever any tree safety issues are identified on the site, and any misuse of the site addressed in a proactive manner.

When well-grown, the large weeping willow by the pond creates the only dark, secluded space on the site. This is not only an opportunity for misuse, but also suppresses plant growth at that end of the pond. The crown of this tree was reduced in 2007, and although it has recently lost several branches, another crown reduction is needed to prevent this 'cave' effect redeveloping. This will be addressed through actions in 3.5, and the condition of the tree should continue to be monitored.

Vandalism regularly makes the lifebelt unavailable and therefore ineffective. Although it cannot be secured, it may be helpful to add a poster to the stand emphasising the value of the lifebelt. For an example of this approach, see http://www.east-northamptonshire.gov.uk/news/article/711/council_supports_water_safety_campaign_with_lifebelt_reminder

3.3 CLEAN & WELL MAINTAINED

The existing grounds maintenance contract should be monitored to ensure that the tarmac and grass paths are well-maintained, the litter and dog bins are emptied regularly, and the grass cutting – both amenity and conservation cuts – is carried out as specified. In 2015, the conservation cut was carried out but the cut material was not lifted afterwards. This management leads to a build-up in soil nutrient levels, favouring coarse grasses ahead of wild flowers. For the health of the grassland it is important that a conservation cut and lift is carried out where it is specified.

The concrete bollards along the western and southern boundaries of Butts Close are in various states of repair – some are in fairly good condition and others are badly damaged. Even in this condition they are generally more attractive than the wooden barrier which runs along the northern boundary and would be the only realistic alternative as a replacement. At

this time it is recommended that the bollards should be retained, but reviewed once again at the end of this GAP.

The litter bins at Butts Close are of an open-topped design which allows litter to be easily spread around, particularly when they are full. In addition, it may be more logical for bins to be sited next to benches. These bins should be replaced and re-sited.

The benches on site remain functional but are ageing. The replacement of bins and the development of signage and interpretation provide an opportunity for these benches to be upgraded to achieve a consistent style across all site furniture. Benches should be of a design and material to mitigate the need for maintenance, for example by using recycled plastic benches similar to those already in place on the site.



Examples of bench and bin design (www.streetmaster.co.uk)

Two areas along the boundary of Butts Close particularly need tidying: the boundary south of the pond, with scattered trees and bushes and a damaged brick wall, and the far south-eastern corner, where the last two trees in the avenue of limes have scrub around their bases, with a build-up of litter, and look less healthy than any of the other trees. This work would be suited to a volunteer work party.

3.4 SUSTAINABILITY

No significant changes which would affect the ongoing maintenance of Butts Close are proposed, and maintenance costs should therefore remain sustainable.

Butts Close is a very public site, with high levels of use by the local community and an extremely high number of motorists passing by on the busy A505 through Hitchin. Securing external funding for some of the capital works proposed in this plan should be a priority. The use of volunteer work parties would help to achieve some of the practical habitat management in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

3.5 CONSERVATION & HERITAGE

The pond benefited from the habitat management work carried out under the previous GAP. Some additional works are needed to address changes to the pond which have occurred since then and to maintain the wildlife value of the pond.

As noted in 2.8.3, the quantity of silt in the base of the pond has increased significantly since 2007. This affects the main function of the pond as a balancing pond by reducing its capacity. Works to desilt the pond should be designed and costed at the beginning of this GAP, and funding sought to carry them out. A decision on desilting should precede any other works carried out on or around the pond.

The tall marginal vegetation which the grounds maintenance contractors are unable to access should be cleared during the autumn every 2-3 years to reduce the build-up of biomass. The crown of the large weeping willow should be reduced and the two sallows pollarded once again, to bring more light to the pond and to reduce the amount of leaf litter falling into the water.

This will open up the eastern end of the pond, allowing a floating reedbed to be re-established on the existing framework. This will perform the valuable function of filtering nutrients and pollution from the water in this part of the pond, and considerably improve its appearance. In order for the reedbed to persist, the growth of the weeping willow will need to be monitored. When it has grown back sufficiently to shade this area completely its crown should be reduced again.

There are not currently any floating pond plants, and these should be established within the pond, for example to provide perches for dragonflies and damselflies. A species which could be used is *Potamogeton natans*. It should be confirmed whether or not opposite-leaved pondweed survives in the pond prior to the introduction of other pond plants.

Tree planting opportunities are limited to the central avenue, where there has been a long term programme to replace the pink horse chestnuts with alders as they die. There are currently five gaps along the central avenue, either without a tree or where the planted tree has died, and all can be filled with newly planted trees.

The shrubs planted north of the pond in 2007 have established very successfully. They are now approaching maturity and should be coppiced to encourage dense future growth. Whilst carrying out this work, an old fence line running along this boundary can now be removed, as it no longer serves any purpose.

The areas of conservation cut grassland have been managed in this way for at least 15 years, but have limited floristic diversity. A programme of floristic enhancement in the area around the pond would increase the wildlife value of the grassland and make it much more attractive during the summer. Hardy species with the ability to compete in fertile soil, such as black knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), ox-eye daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*), yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*) and common bird's-foot trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*) would be most appropriate for the site; an indicative species list is provided in the specification for action E3. This improvement would only be worthwhile if the scheduled conservation cut and lift takes place annually as specified.

Because of the cost of this work, and the fact that there is no guarantee of success, it is proposed to initially restrict floristic enhancement to the area around the pond, as a trial. If wild flowers can be established successfully here, further floristic enhancement should take place in other conservation grassland areas on the site.



Ox-eye daisy and black knapweed

There is an area of long vegetation just east of the main tarmac path which is not part of the conservation cut grassland in the management plan. A temporary track was built here for construction vehicles to access the swimming pool site. Although there is an opportunity here to create floristically enhanced grassland from scratch, it is in the amenity grassland area of Butts Close, and it would be more appropriate to restore it to amenity grassland.

Butts Close has a long history of use as a public open space, stretching back to medieval times, but there is nothing tangible on the site to demonstrate this. The two most interesting aspects of its previous use are the medieval archery butts after which it was named and the World War I tank which was kept on the site until the 1940s. The best way to promote this history and encourage local interest in the site would be through new historical interpretation panels as described in 3.7.

3.6 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Community involvement in the site has in recent years involved occasional litter clear up events organised by the Friends of Butts Close. As part of the new GAP, occasional volunteer work parties should be organised by CMS to carry out some of the practical habitat management tasks detailed in the plan, giving the Friends of Butts Close the opportunity to get involved in practical management with the CMS volunteer team. All community involvement should be directed towards achieving the aims of the GAP.

3.7 MARKETING

There is currently no means of advertising Butts Close on the site, whether in terms of its historical interest or its current attractions. Designing and installing interpretation panels at the main entrances from Fishponds Road and Bedford Road which give visitors information about the long history of Butts Close should help encourage local enthusiasm for the site.

An additional interpretation panel next to the pond would provide an opportunity to educate visitors about the biodiversity benefits of ponds, and have a safety benefit by signposting the location of the pond. The Friends of Butts Close should be engaged in the process of designing these interpretation panels, as they will be able to offer valuable local and historical knowledge.



Examples of interpretation at other NHDC sites (Hitchin Cemetery and Norton Common)

This should be part of a wider project to enhance the sense of identity and the landscape of Butts Close and improve its facilities. This can be achieved through the development of interpretation and the upgraded site furniture described in 3.3. By coordinating these items, it will be possible to achieve a consistent and attractive style through the site.

Community and volunteer events, including but not limited to the Regiment Fitness exercise groups and travelling fairs which use Butts Close, should be promoted to maximise the use of the site by the local community, while maintaining the responsibilities of NHDC for licensing and environmental health issues.

The majority of people who experience Butts Close do so from the main road which runs around three sides of the site. The best way to improve the site for these people, and to encourage them to consider using it more, is to improve how it appears from the road. It would be possible to open up sight lines from the road to the pond by creating the mown access path at the right angle and removing a dying alder from the western end of the pond. The interpretation and furniture project will also contribute to this objective, and the interpretation should be sited to be as visible as possible from the main road.

4 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

A A WELCOMING PLACE

To provide clear and welcoming access into and throughout the site

A1 Using new interpretation to welcome visitors at the main entrances

A2 Mowing an access path to the pond to give visitors more opportunity to enjoy its biodiversity

B HEALTHY, SAFE & SECURE

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

B1 Carrying out reactive tree works to address safety issues

B2 Responding proactively to any misuse of the site

B3 Adding a poster to the lifebelt stand promoting its importance

C CLEAN & WELL MAINTAINED

To ensure the standard of maintenance is maintained and relevant

C1 Managing and maintaining the paths

C2 Upgrading existing site furniture, including benches and litter bins

C3 Litter picking, emptying litter and dog bins and carrying out small scale vegetation management

C4 Maintaining a regular amenity cut and an annual conservation cut of the grass as appropriate to different parts of the site

C5 Tidying areas of weedy scrub along the boundary south of the pond and in the south-eastern corner of the site

C6 Reviewing the condition of the concrete bollards along the site boundary

D SUSTAINABILITY

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 CONSERVATION & HERITAGE

To protect and enhance the biodiversity and heritage of the site

- E1 Carrying out further habitat management on and around the pond to build on the gains achieved during the previous GAP
- E2 Completing selective tree work to open up the area around the pond
- E3 Enhancing the conservation cut grassland to increase the diversity of wild flowers
- E4 Restoring the former construction access to the swimming pool to amenity grass
- E5 Coppicing the recently-planted native shrubs to support their long term development and removing an associated fence
- E6 Continuing the programme of tree replanting along the central avenue
- E7 Monitoring tree growth around the pond to ensure reedbed is not shaded out
- E8 Designing and costing works to desilt the pond, and seeking funding to implement

F COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

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 MARKETING

To promote awareness and interest in Butts Close

- G1 Improving the visitor experience and enhancing opportunities for informing and educating by designing and installing new site interpretation panels
- G2 Promotion of volunteer and community events at Butts Close
- G3 Making visual improvements to benefit site users and passing motorists, for example by improving sight lines across Butts Close from the adjacent roads

5 ACTION PLANS AND MAPS

YEAR 1 ACTION PLAN 2016 - 2017

Action	Obj. Ref	When	Responsibility	Funding	Est. Cost	Spec. Ref	Status
Design and cost works to desilt the pond, and seek funding to implement	E8	Apr	NHDC/CMS	Officer time			
Mow a grass path to improve access to the pond	A2	Apr-Sep	JOC	GM budget			
Restore former construction access to the swimming pool to amenity grass	E4	Apr	JOC	GM budget			
Replace all litter bins with lidded version and rationalise bin locations	C2	Jul	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£2500	C2	
Replace all benches	C2	Jul	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£4000	C2	
Design and install interpretation panels at main entrances	G1	Jul	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£3300	G1	
Design and install interpretation for pond	G1	Jul	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£1900	G1	
Cut and lift of conservation grassland areas	C4	Aug	JOC	GM budget			
Pollard willows and crown reduction of weeping willow next to pond	E2	Oct	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£2000	E2/G3	
Remove dying alder next to pond	G3	Oct	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£300	E2/G3	
Sow wild flower seeds within part of the conservation grassland	E3	Oct	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£2500	E3	
Install coir pillows preplanted with common reed on existing framework at east end of pond	E1	Nov	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget	£1200	E1	
Plant floating pond plants	E1	Nov	NHDC/CMS	Capital budget		E1	
Clear marginal vegetation from around pond	E1	Nov	CMS	Volunteers			

Action	Obj. Ref	When	Responsibility	Funding	Est. Cost	Spec. Ref	Status
Coppice half the shrubs along boundary north of the pond	E5	Nov	CMS	Volunteers		E5	
Remove fence from within shrubs	E5	Nov	CMS	Volunteers			
Plant trees to fill gaps along the central avenue	E6	Nov	NHDC	Capital budget			

Butts Close Year 1 Actions 2016 - 2017

- Who**
- NHDC
 - CMS
 - JOC
- Plant trees to fill gaps along the central avenue
- Restore former construction access to the swimming pool to amenity grass

- Plant trees to fill gaps along the central avenue
- Design and cost works to desilt the pond, and seek funding to implement
- Replace all litter bins with lidded version and rationalise bin locations
- Replace all benches

Key

- ▲ Bench
- Buoy
- Dog bin
- Litter bin
- Vehicle access
- Trees
- Amenity cut grassland
- Scrub
- Conservation cut grassland
- Hard surface
- Pond
- Building



NHDC
Countryside Management Service

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Butts Close Year 2 Actions 2017 - 2018

- Who
- NHDC
 - CMS
 - JOC

Source and install a safety poster emphasising the importance of the lifebelt

Key

- Interpretation panel
- Bench
- Buoy
- Dog bin
- Litter bin
- Vehicle access
- Trees
- Amenity cut grassland
- Scrub
- Coppiced scrub
- Grassland with wild flowers
- Conservation cut grassland
- Hard surface
- Pond
- Building

Maintain mown grass path to pond

Carry out amenity mowing where wild flowers are sown to aid establishment

Cut and lift of conservation grassland areas



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Butts Close Year 3 Actions 2018 - 2019

- Who
- NHDC
 - CMS
 - JOC

Key

- Interpretation panel
- Bench
- Buoy
- Dog bin
- Litter bin
- Vehicle access
- Trees
- Amenity cut grassland
- Scrub
- Coppiced scrub
- Grassland with wild flowers
- Conservation cut grassland
- Hard surface
- Pond
- Building

Tidy weedy scrub in south-eastern corner

Cut and lift of conservation grassland areas

Maintain mown grass path to pond

Coppice half the shrubs along boundary north of the pond

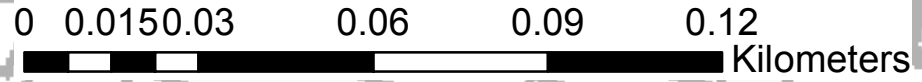
Clear marginal vegetation from around pond

Restore conservation grassland cut and lift where wild flower seeds sown

Tidy weedy scrub along south-eastern boundary



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Butts Close Year 4 Actions 2019 - 2020

- Who
- NHDC
 - CMS
 - JOC

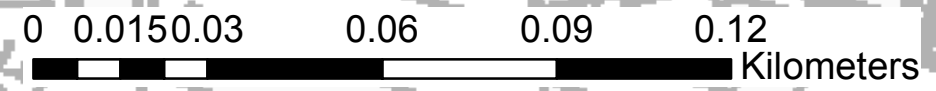
Key

- Interpretation panel
- Bench
- Buoy
- Dog bin
- Litter bin
- Vehicle access
- Trees
- Amenity cut grassland
- Coppiced scrub
- Grassland with wild flowers
- Conservation cut grassland
- Hard surface
- Pond
- Building



Maintain mown grass path to pond

Cut and lift of conservation grassland areas



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Butts Close Year 5 Actions 2020 - 2021

- Who
- NHDC
 - CMS
 - JOC

- Draft new Greenspace
Action Plan
- -

Key

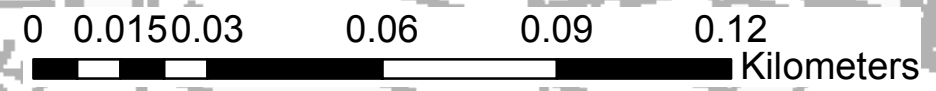
- Interpretation panel
- Bench
- Buoy
- Dog bin
- Litter bin
- Vehicle access
- Trees
- Amenity cut grassland
- Coppiced scrub
- Grassland with wild flowers
- Conservation cut grassland
- Hard surface
- Pond
- Building

Review the condition of the boundary
line of concrete bollards

Maintain mown grass path to pond

Review the growth of trees around pond
to ensure reedbed is not shaded out

Cut and lift of conservation
grassland areas



NHDC
Countryside
Management
Service

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6 GLOSSARY

Amenity cut grassland	Grass cut regularly to remain short throughout the year, for public use
Conservation cut grassland	Grass cut once each year in late summer with the arisings removed, to improve habitat for wildlife
Coppice	Trees or bushes cut at the base to encourage strong new growth.
GM budget	NHDC grounds maintenance budget
JOC	John O'Conner, NHDC grounds maintenance contractor
Pollard	Trees cut higher up the trunk than in coppice, encouraging strong new growth from this point

7 SPECIFICATIONS

C2: Supply litter bins and benches

- a) Supply lidded litter bins and benches in a matching design which also matches new interpretation.
- b) Deliver to CMS for installation by volunteers.

E1: Pond vegetation works

- a) Supply coir pillows pre-planted with common reed (*Phragmites australis*) and install on the existing framework at the east end of the pond. Number of pillows supplied to cover the existing framework.
- b) Install two baskets at the northern edge of the pond, at a maximum depth of 30cm, planted with *Potamogeton natans*.

E2/G3: Tree works

- a) Carry out works to four trees around the pond, as indicated during a site meeting with the supervising officer.
- b) Weeping willow: carry out a crown reduction to the same points the crown was reduced to in 2007.
- c) Sallow x2: pollard both trees to the same points they were pollarded to in 2007.
- d) Alder: fell to ground level the partly dead alder at the western end of the pond. Cut the stump as close to ground level as possible.

E3: Establish wildflower seed mix in conservation grassland area

- a) This work should be undertaken while the grass is short, ideally in October.
- b) The work can be undertaken by volunteers or a contractor.
- c) The ground within the sowing area should be scarified using a mechanical scarifier, and approximately 60-70% of the soil should be visible once scarification is complete.
- d) Across the prepared area, seed should be hand sown thinly at approximately 2g of seed per square metre.
- e) Damp sand should be mixed with the seed to act as a carrier and identify where seeds has been sown.

- f) Immediately after sowing the ground should be rolled using a heavy roller, to ensure the seed is fully in contact with the soil.
- g) In the year following sowing, bring the section into the amenity mowing regime. Restore it to the conservation cut regime two years after sowing.
- h) The area where this mix is intended to be established is 0.4ha.
- i) Sow a mixture of hardy native wildflowers which will provide a variety of colours throughout the spring and summer and will be able to compete in a fertile soil.
Example of species list and percentages by weight below:

Yellow Rattle	<i>Rhinanthus minor</i>	5%
Cowslip	<i>Primula veris</i>	7.5%
Meadow Buttercup	<i>Ranunculus acris</i>	10%
Black Knapweed	<i>Centaurea nigra</i>	10%
Oxeye Daisy	<i>Leucanthemum vulgare</i>	10%
Field Scabious	<i>Knautia arvensis</i>	7.5%
Agrimony	<i>Agrimonia eupatoria</i>	2.5%
Meadow Cranesbill	<i>Geranium pratense</i>	2%
Harebell	<i>Campanula rotundifolia</i>	
Musk Mallow	<i>Malva moschata</i>	5%
Perforate St. John's Wort	<i>Hypericum perforatum</i>	1.5%
Common Toadflax	<i>Linaria vulgaris</i>	2%
Common Verbena	<i>Verbena officinalis</i>	
Lady's Bedstraw	<i>Galium verum</i>	7.5%
Common Bird's-foot Trefoil	<i>Lotus corniculatus</i>	5%
Tufted Vetch	<i>Vicia cracca</i>	
Selfheal	<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>	7.5%
Wild Majorum	<i>Origanum vulgare</i>	3%
Meadow Vetchling	<i>Lathyrus pratensis</i>	2%
Wild Carrot	<i>Daucus carota</i>	10%
Yarrow	<i>Achillea millefolium</i>	2%

E5: Coppice shrubs

- a) Fell all shrubs close to ground level, cutting on an angle above the stub to allow water to run off.
- b) Where stools fail to regenerate or where gaps exist, replanting should be considered, but not within 3m of viable stools.
- c) Work to be carried out by volunteers. Arisings should be cut into small lengths and left piled to be collected by the grounds maintenance contractor.

G1: Design and installation of interpretation panels

- a) Design and produce an A2 interpretation board which provides orientation for visitors and information on the history of Butts Close, and provide PDF version of the same.
- b) Design to be based around a hand drawn site map or other image, accompanied by photographs and text, and to follow the NHDC house style.
- c) Provide two proof stages of full colour design in hard copy and PDF format.

- d) Supply an upright frame, twin leg, in materials which match the new site furniture and incorporating a GRP panel.
- e) Quantity: 2.
- f) Deliver to CMS for installation by volunteers.
- g) Also design and produce an A2 interpretation board which provides information for visitors on the wildlife found around the pond, and provide PDF version of the same.
- h) Follow the specification above, parts b-f.

8 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Consultation responses

<p>Section 2.3</p> <p>The map indicates that Top Field is Common Land. This is reiterated in 2.5, para 1. This is incorrect, as the land was deregistered in 2012.</p>
<p>Section 2.5</p> <p>Para 2. “Parts of Butts Close are at risk of surface water flooding on a 1 in 30 year basis. The risk is focused on the area around the pond, but also extends to the east of the surfaced path”. If this latter phrase refers to an area between the pond and the surfaced path, it would be helpful to have this clarified. In January/February 2014 residents also noted significant surface flooding of the damp hollow in the large western area, which has longer (conservation cut) grass - see Section 2.4, para 2.</p>
<p>Section 2.7.3</p> <p>“...a floating reedbed was established in the eastern section to act as a biofilter to the water source for the pond”. This work was carried out on the ill-founded basis that the water source for the pond flows from the east. This is not the case: it is quite clear from the topology and hydrology of the area that the pond is fed from the higher ground to the west, and exits (as Capswell Brook) eastwards, being culverted beneath the Grammar School playing fields and joining the river Hiz behind Bancroft Gardens. Its purpose is to act as a ‘balancing pond’. In the past, heavy rain caused water surges to the east through the culverted brook which sometimes resulted in flooding of Bancroft, broadly opposite Skinner’s Almshouses. The concrete dam running north-south across the pond has the effect of holding water back in times of heavy rain, allowing a more measured outflow eastwards through the culvert, and thus mitigating the likelihood of flooding downstream.</p> <p>“...these works were very successful” . The state of the eastern end of the pond suggests otherwise. “...This part of the pond remains relatively unattractive, being dominated by silt, algae and leaf litter”. The photograph in the draft GAP that accompanies this statement is somewhat disingenuous. It is in fact also dominated by debris and old ironwork and the photograph (left) gives a better indication of its current state.</p>
<p>Section 2.9.2</p> <p>“[Friends of Butts Close] organise litter picking on Butts Close as part of the Big Hitchin Tidy Up”. They also produce regular newsletters and inform the relevant parties when specific amenity or risk issues arise.</p>
<p>Section 3.1</p> <p>This section is partially endorsed.</p> <p>Para 2. “Trialling a mown access path for one year would provide the opportunity to assess at the end of that year whether or not it should be retained”. It is unclear how the success of the mown path will be evaluated.</p>
<p>Section 3.3</p> <p>This section is partially endorsed, with the caveat (see para 4) that the benches when replaced should be of a design and material to mitigate the need for maintenance. The benches shown as examples may not appear to meet that criterion. Recycled plastic benches (as are already in place on the Close) would appear to be more robust, and still give a pleasant appearance.</p> <p>Para 5. It is clearly not within the remit of this Draft Action Plan to address any health and safety issues that may arise from the damaged wall on the boundary south of the pond. However, this appears to be a dangerous structure. Access from the Close to the land south of this wall is easy as a large section has fallen. Any person standing close to the remaining sections of the wall could be in serious danger. We believe that this is County Council land on licence to the NHS or to NHDC. It is designated H/r5 on the NHDC land allocation map.</p>
<p>Section 3.4</p>

“...Securing external funding for some of the capital works proposed in this plan should be a priority”. We would welcome indicative costings of the revenue and capital implications of this draft plan. This would enable a better understanding of the financial context within which any suggestions for prioritisation can be made.

Section 3.5

This section is partially endorsed.

Para 3. The proposed work on the east end of the pond once again appears predicated upon the erroneous belief that the pond is fed by water flowing from the eastern end into the dammed section to the west – that is, uphill: “..allowing a floating reedbed to be re-established on the existing framework. This will perform the valuable function of filtering nutrients and pollution from the water...” The floating reedbed would only act as a biofilter for water flowing out of the pond and into the culvert, which would be of no value to the pond. We would welcome clear and well-founded options (including indicative costings) for a permanent solution to this eyesore.

It is unclear from this section whether the central area of conservation cut (noted at 2.7.1) will also be subject to floristic enhancement. The maps do not include this area for wildflower planting. We believe that this should be the case, and thus should be specified within section 3.5 of the GAP, reflected in section E3, and included in the relevant annual actions.

Section 3.7

Paras 1, 2 and 4 of this section are endorsed.

Para 3. “Community and volunteer events, including but not limited to the Regiment Fitness exercise groups and travelling fairs which use Butts Close, should be promoted to maximise the use of the site by the local community”. Such promotion should however take place with full regard to the responsibilities of NHDC for licensing and for environmental health issues. We understand that one of the travelling fairs has been subject to complaints over noise, and in the past several houses were rendered uninhabitable for a day when an easterly wind blew exhaust from the fair’s diesel generators into house basements and ground floors.

Glossary

There is no glossary. It would be helpful to include a short description of some technical terms, such as coppicing, amenity cut, etc., and to reiterate abbreviations – such as JOC, GM.

Conclusion

We welcome this consultative approach to the development of the Greenspace Action Plan for Butts Close. This was initiated with the organisation of a walk-around by the CMS Projects Officer with representatives of the local community, and the outcomes of that process have been broadly reflected within this current draft. There are however a number of areas for clarification and one area of critical importance - regarding the pond - that we recommend should be addressed in the next draft.

I think that the FoBC comments are unduly negative.

It would be a great shame if commercial Fairs were unjustly restricted from entertaining the public, as they have been doing for a great number of years. We used to have boxing booths, and circuses as well – but that was in the bad old days before political correctness wove its tentacles around us.....

Most of the recommendations in the draft GAP are eminently sensible – but I urge your Council not to make Butts Close excessively ‘hygienic’ and too much like a regimented space in the sinister metropolis of Milton Keynes. Oughton Head used to be a wonderful unkempt piece of countryside where boys and girls could play in a ‘wilderness’. Now it is sedated and sanitised by Council paths, and unnecessary fences.

One thing I did wonder and that is if you’d had an ecological habitat survey done on the area. There is a slim possibility that the pond may have Great Crested Newts, (they are present at Ickleford Common about a kilometre away) and if so, close-mowing the meadow around the pond would wipe out most of their terrestrial habitat.

Also the plan does not stipulate which wildflower species are intended to be planted within the area

around the pond. Wildflowers are extremely difficult to retain in competition with long grass, unless they are nitrogen fixers like clover or are tough as old boots like creeping buttercup, etc. Yellow rattle may help but often gets wiped out in severe winters. Sowing low nutrient loving wildflowers in this area may be a complete waste of time, money and energy as the soil is likely to be very fertile.

The Council's policy on long grass is to cut it once a year and let anything seed into it. This has resulted in a situation at nearby Ransom's Rec where the long grass has been invaded by ruderal thugs like cow parsley, rose bay willow herb, thistle and nettle – which is what happens if the cut is only once a year. If these areas were cut more frequently, in the same way as many road verges are, with a high blade, this would prevent the taller ruderals from taking over, reduce the vigour of the grasses and allow the more interesting and diverse wildflowers to compete better. Ideally the arisings would have to be removed to reduce fertility, and I know this is more expensive than leaving them on site. But even if the arisings were left on site during the interim cuts and removed on only one cut per year, I think it would help to establish and retain wildflower diversity. It's worth trying anyway. We were hoping to conduct some similar experiments on Ransom's Rec ourselves but ran out of manpower.

To the casual visitor, one of the most obvious physical features is the hollow to the west of the main path at the north of the site near to Fishponds Road. I am not clear myself the origin of this actually is - I have heard at least 2 theories - a bomb crater and a chalk pit. It would be interesting to have the origin confirmed (perhaps by Keith Fitzpatrick Matthews) and for this to appear in any information panel.

Just an observation about the surroundings of the pond - during the FoBC / Hitchin Forum litter picks, it is clear that the east end of the pond is used for impromptu 'gatherings' often fuelled by alcohol and possibly other drugs. The re-greening of the pond surround at this point could help to reduce (perhaps with suitably robust species, even deter!) it's use in this respect. The continued existence of the conservation grassland between Elmside walk and the pond would further reduce the likelihood of the misuse of the area. I would anticipate that there might be an issue with vandalism of suitable plantings during the establishment phase similar to that experienced by bank restoration works at the Chalky on Oughtonhead. It looks as though a way has been found to get over the problem there, so it can presumably be avoided on Butts Close. I doubt the mown track positioned at the other end of the pond would displace the problem to that end, since I assume that those responsible would be most likely to pass along Elmside walk on their way from the town centre.

A final point is that the lifebelt is invariably subject to vandalism. I have no suggestions to make about what to do about this except to say that you may know of situations elsewhere in which lifebelts survive such attention, and maybe lessons can be learnt about sighting or choice of a different type.

I welcome the fact that you are consulting on this Plan. I live at Fishponds Road. I regularly use Butts Close and see many others enjoying this valuable amenity. My views are reflected in the submission that you have received from the Friends of Butts Close which I support.

I assume that positive as well as negative feedback is welcome and contributes to the consultation. That being the case, all I actually wanted to feed back is that my family and I thought that the GAP looked really excellent and comprehensive and will, if enacted in full, be of significant benefit to Butts Close (we live nearby and use it regularly).