



NICKEY LINE

GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN, 2021 - 2026

BRIEFING DOCUMENT

Produced by:



On behalf of:



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1. INTRODUCTION

A new five year Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) is being produced for the section of the Nickey Line within St Albans district. 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 St Albans City & District Council. The completed document will inform the management actions to be undertaken over the next five years, commencing in April 2021.

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 **24th August to 5th October 2020**. A further engagement period later in the year 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 the following 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 Nickey Line GAP.

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

2. BACKGROUND

The Nickey Line is a closed railway line that connects the settlements of Hemel Hempstead, Redbourn and Harpenden. The line is now approximately 7.2 miles long, with about 1.4 miles at the Hemel Hempstead end having been lost to development.

The primary present-day function is a recreational route for pedestrians and cyclists, forming part of the Sustrans National Cycle Route 57 as well as the Chiltern Cycleway.

The current route broadly follows the original position of the rail line, with the exception of minor repositioning around road junctions near to Redbourn and the removal of sections as part of the development of Hemel Hempstead new town.

As a rail line, the route originally connected Hemel Hempstead with the Midland Main Line at Harpenden. Officially called the Harpenden to Hemel Hempstead Railway, it was commonly known as the Nickey Line.

Construction of the line was initially driven by trade as well as passengers. When the line opened in 1877 it included four passenger trains and one goods train, stopping at Hemel Hempstead (different to the present day Hemel Hempstead station, note historic spelling) and Redbourn stations before joining the Midland line on its way up to Luton. This provided an important connection between the straw plaiting textiles trade at Hemel Hempstead and the hat making of Luton.

As the straw plaiting industry declined in the late 19th and early 20th century, the line shifted its focus towards passengers. Following a takeover by Midland Rail, a southern connection was added in 1888 onto the junction with the Midland Rail line, thereby joining up with the London-bound train at Harpenden Central station. The northern link to Luton was closed at the same time. During the early part of the 20th century Heath Park Halt, Godwin's Halt, Beaumont's Halt and Roundwood Halt were opened to encourage passenger use.

A connection was made to Boxmoor Station (now Hemel Hempstead). However, this was only briefly used for goods trains before closure.

With low usage, passenger services ceased in 1947. Goods trains remained until the expansion of Hemel Hempstead in the 1960s, albeit on an increasingly rare basis. Thereafter, part of the line remained in use by the Hemelite brickworks, becoming privately owned by them in 1968.

The upgrade of the Bedford Line (former Midland Line) removed the junction at Harpenden in 1979, leading to the final closure of the line. The tracks were removed in 1982 and the route opened as a cycleway and footway in 1985.

Ownership of the line is split between St Albans City & District Council (SADC), Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) and Hertfordshire County Council (HCC). The land under HCC ownership is managed on agreement by SADC.


The Friends of the Nickey Line was established in 2006 and the group is active in the research and publicity of the line and in carrying out management through their volunteer

work parties. They also source funding towards management and improvement projects. The aims of the group are:

- To conserve and enhance the Nickey Line for the benefit of the local communities and wildlife.
- To encourage and maintain community interest in the Nickey Line.
- To advise, assist and work with any person or body which shares a common interest in the Nickey Line.

Nickey Line Greenspace Action Plan Route Plan

Legend

 Nickey Line Route

Roundwood Halt

Hazel coppicing carried out beside Knott Wood under current plan

Redbourn Lane roundabout crossing

Chequer Lane, Redbourn

Hazel coppicing completed within current plan


Sycamore coppicing introduced under current plan

Section of the Nickey Line within Dacorum
Borough covered by separate management plan

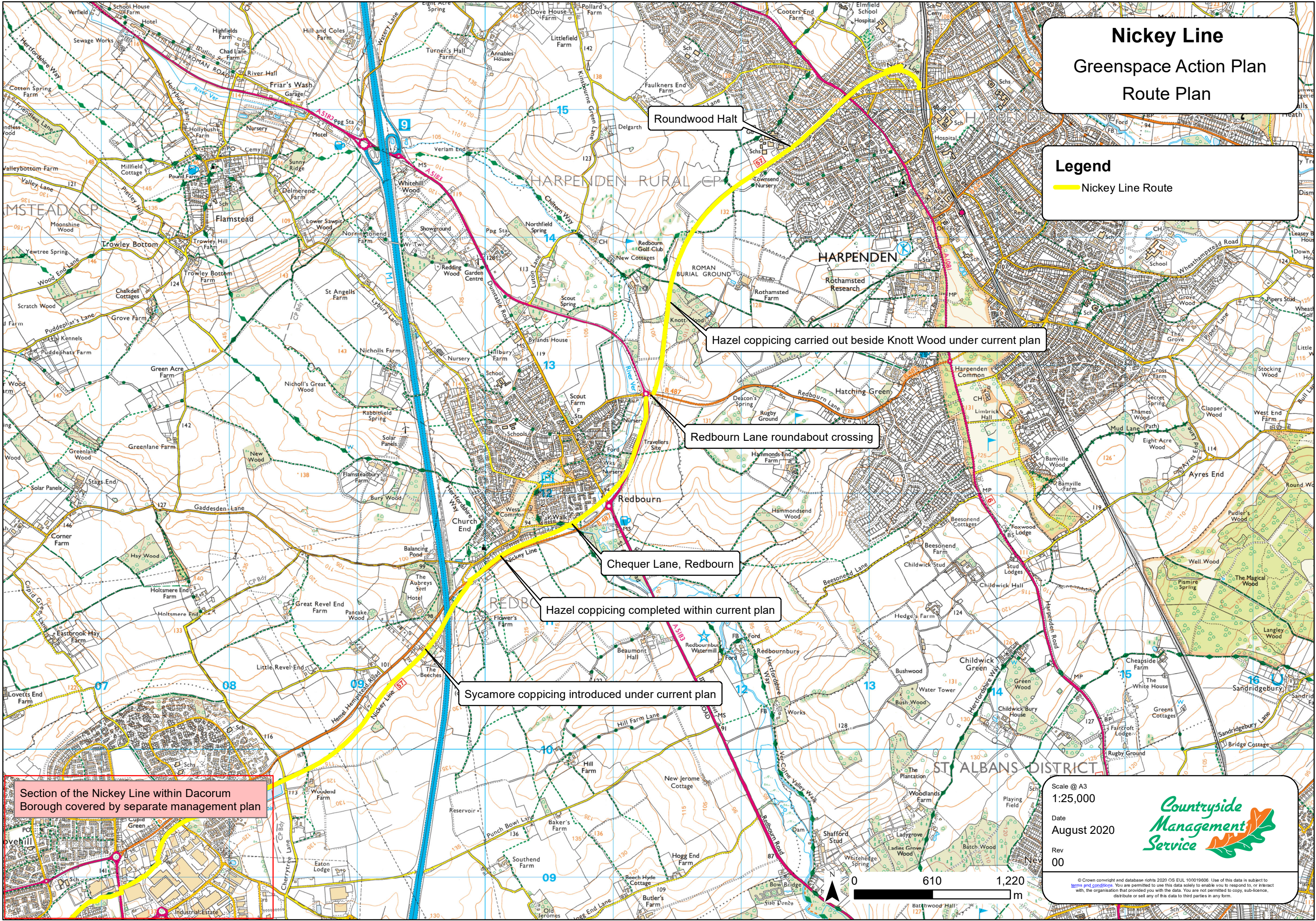
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[SITE MAP]

3. REVIEW OF PROGRESS

The current Greenspace Action Plan for the Nickey Line covered the period from 2016 until 2021. The new plan would commence in April 2021.

Amongst the improvements made during the current plan are:

- Hedgerow coppicing beside Knott Wood
- Coppicing of hazels through Redbourn
- Introduction of coppicing close to the M1 tunnel
- Access and surfacing improvements from Chequer Lane in Redbourn
- Tree thinning near Roundwood Halt
- Clearance of vegetation from Roundwood Halt platform
- Ongoing maintenance of grass scallops
- Improved viewpoints at Redbourn Lane roundabout crossing

It is proposed that several items that could not be funded within the previous plan are carried forward as aspirations for the new plan should funding be found:

- Adopting a scheme of interpretation including new information boards and an updated leaflet
- Surfacing improvements across the route
- Continued coppicing and hedgerow restoration between the M1 and Hemel Hempstead

4. GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (GAP) 2021-2026

The Nickey Line GAP 2021-26 will be a simple, easy to read plan for use by officers of St Albans City & District Council, the Countryside Management Service, Friends of the Nickey Line and members of the public, and will act as a guide to the work of volunteers. The plan will be largely map based, illustrating the actions planned for each year. The document will be reviewed annually to ensure it remains effective and relevant.

The plan will be costed and potential funding sources identified. Once the final GAP is agreed, external funding will be sought to enable the plan to be delivered.

The plan will cover the section of the Nickey Line within St Albans district. A separate plan is in place for the section within Dacorum Borough. All local authorities involved will work collaboratively to ensure joined up thinking across the different land ownerships.

The aims and objectives of the GAP will be as follows:

- A. Promote public use of all sections of the Nickey Line:
 - A1 Create a legibility to the entire route, ensuring users understand where they are in the context of the whole line
 - A2 Seek funding for the upgrade of surfaces to allow for travel between Hemel Hempstead, Redbourn and Harpenden for walkers, runners and cyclists and, as much as possible, for wheelchairs and pushchairs.
 - A3 Monitor usage by different user groups at various points along the route
 - A4 Create views out from the line where possible to connect users with the wider landscape
 - A5 Enhance access points, ensuring these are clearly signed and welcoming
- B. Ensure engagement and involvement of the local community along the route
 - B1 Support the Friends of the Nickey Line to continue running events, activities and volunteering
 - B2 Publicise and facilitate potential for involvement from each of Harpenden, Redbourn and Hemel Hempstead
 - B3 Develop a scheme of interpretation that allows people to understand the history of the line and present day points of interest, with branding to reflect the historical use as a railway
 - B4 Protect remnant features of the railway and increase their visibility to the public, including Roundwood Halt and the various rail bridges
- C. Enhance the Nickey Line's role in providing a green corridor
 - C1 Enhance key habitats including the trees, hedgerows and ground flora along the route
 - C2 Adopt appropriate management regimes
 - C3 Build in adaptability for the future, including the replacement of trees that die with appropriate native species
 - C4 Ensure good biosecurity practice is followed

- D. Provide a safe and enjoyable route
 - D1 Conduct tree risk surveys and implement mitigation works
 - D2 Improve navigation of major road junctions where possible
- E. Uphold a high standard of maintenance
 - E1 Ensure surfaces are kept clear of debris and vegetation to maintain full access
 - E1 Regularly review the programme of vegetation management to ensure it continues to provide an attractive route and biodiverse habitat
 - E3 Ensure that value for money is obtained
 - E4 Replace benches, signage and other site 'furniture' as it is required

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.

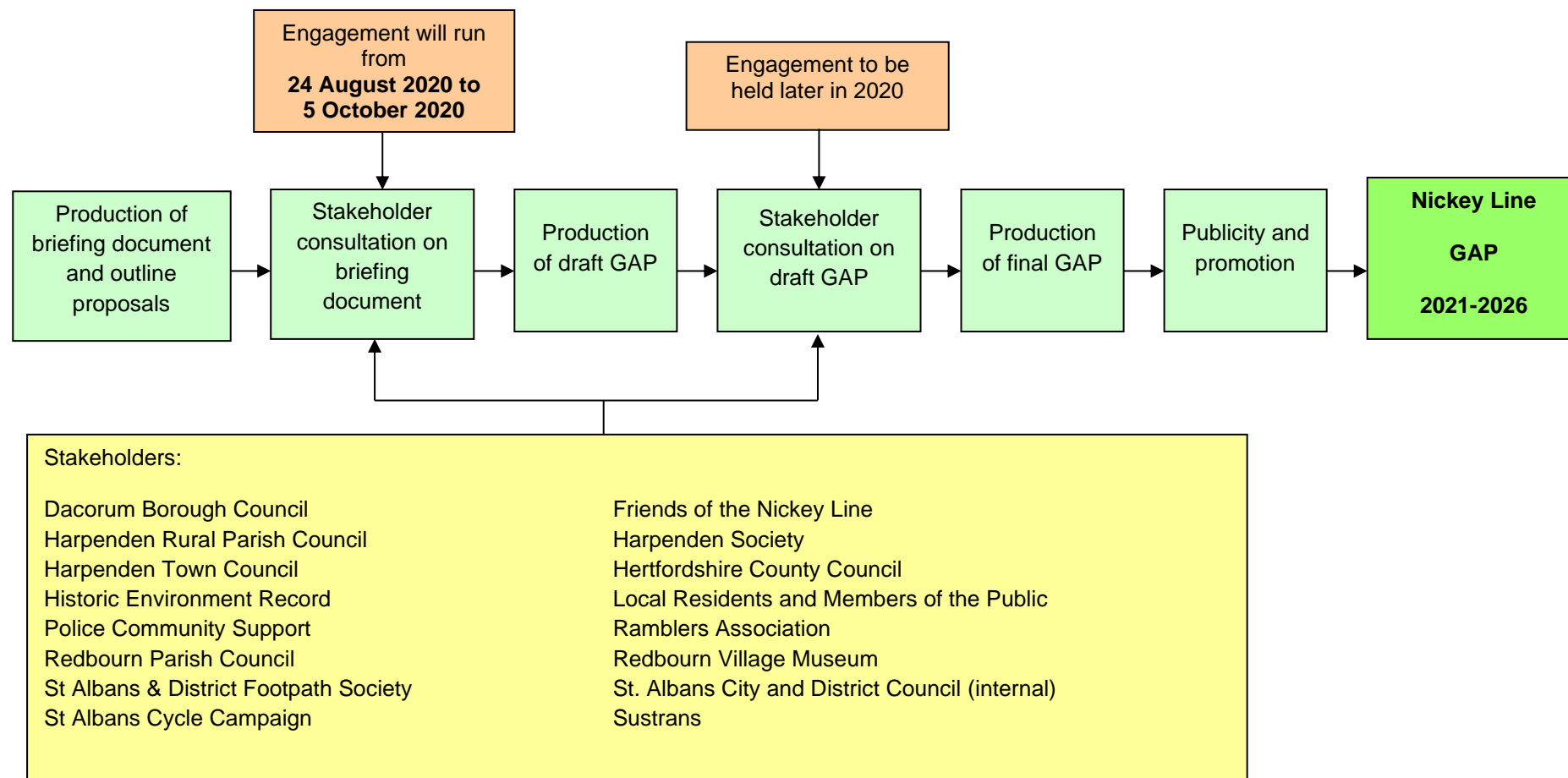
In order to provide all interested stakeholders and groups with the opportunity to feed into the production of the new GAP, we have adopted a structured two-stage approach to community engagement.

- 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 **24th August to 5th October 2020**.
- 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 will be run later in the year and will be publicised through on-site notices and online.

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 Nickey Line Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) 2021-2026.

Please return your comments using the contact details below by **Monday 5th October** at the latest.

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