



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

December 2015

A Special Edition...

APPRAISAL OF THE DRAFT BUTTS CLOSE GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN (THE DRAFT GAP)

In the November Newsletter we published the outcomes of the 'walk-around' of Butts Close with Andrew Taylor of the County Council's Countryside Management Service (CMS). The purpose was to identify what work might be put into the Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan (henceforth the GAP).

The draft GAP has now been published by the CMS and the local Council (NHDC), and is available for consultation until 11 January 2016. Appended to this newsletter is the Councils' poster, which gives the website address for accessing the Draft GAP and the contact details for providing feedback. We strongly welcome this approach by the two councils, as there is no statutory requirement to consult on plans of this nature.

We have scrutinised the draft and our appraisal is also appended, which you may wish to read before giving comment to the Council. We **know** this is not the best time of the year to ask anyone to go through three pages of detail but we hope that you will find the time nevertheless, in between the shopping and decorating!

Our best wishes for the Season and for the New Year!



Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan Consultation

The Countryside Management Service is working in partnership with North Hertfordshire District Council to draw up a Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) for Butts Close.

We have been gathering the views of stakeholders and user groups since the beginning of October. The feedback from this process has now been drawn together in the draft Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan. Consultation on the draft GAP will run from Monday 30th November through to Monday 11th January. To view the draft plan, visit:

<http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/parks-and-open-spaces/parks-and-open-spaces-projects>

Following the consultation, the GAP will be amended as required, agreed and actions to deliver the plan will commence.

To comment on the plan, contact Andrew Taylor, Countryside Management Service.

Tel: 01992 556063

Email: andrew.taylor@hertfordshire.gov.uk



APPRAISAL OF THE BUTTS CLOSE DRAFT GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN 2016-2021 (Nov 2015)¹

Section 1

No contention with this section.

Section 2.3

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 2012².

Section 2.5

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.

Section 2.7.3

"...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 Gardens³. 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.



"...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.

¹ accessed on 30.11.15 at <http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/parks-and-open-spaces/parksand-open-spaces-projects>

² http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/uploads/pins/common_land/decision/com_269_decision.pdf

³ <http://purwellvalley.blogspot.co.uk/2011/02/purwell-valley-circular-walk-route-3.html> and see the entry for 18-1-2012 from Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, Archaeologist of NHDC. See also page 5 of <http://www.hitchinforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Desk-Based-Assessment-2010.pdf> (page 12 of the pdf). The west-east direction of water flow and the functions of the pond have been confirmed by Andrew Mills, Grounds Service Manager, NHDC. Personal Communication to TR 30-11-15.

Section 2.9.2

“[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.

Section 3.1

This section is partially endorsed.

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.

Section 3.2

This section is endorsed.

Section 3.3

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.

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 map⁴.

Section 3.4

“...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

⁴ http://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/northherts-cms/files/hitchin_map.pdf

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 3.6

This section is endorsed.

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.

Section 4

This section summarises the aims and objectives identified within the narrative of the report, and should therefore reflect the feedback of this appraisal.

Section 5

This section sets out actions on an annual basis and provides summary maps to show where the work will take place.

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.