



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

June 2013

Another busy month!

“Peaceful” Butts Close has again seen a lot of activity – some good some not so good.

No, it’s not a Motorway...!

You will doubtless have noticed the construction traffic on Butts Close alongside the pool and Archers’ gym. Yes, they’re building a road! No it’s not permanent.

The Council approved works to facilitate the extension of the facilities at the swimming pool and at the gym. This will improve amenities for Hitchin’s fittest – and those not so fit but wanting to be. The development will all take place within the existing ground plan, so no encroachment on Butts Close. BUT, the only way in for construction traffic will be from Fishponds Road and down the west side of the pool, so a temporary roadway has been built there to accommodate this.

As we understand it:

- the ‘kink’ in the temporary road at the top end is to ensure trucks avoid the tree there
- this has meant placing the temporary road across the newly-metalled footpath
- the heavy construction traffic is planned to be over by the end of Summer
- at the end of the work the whole area will be reinstated and returned to grass
- overall the work is scheduled to be completed by January 2014

At first glance:

- however careful the contractors are, mud might be spread across the footpath and up to the Fishponds Road entrance, especially if we have one of those wet Summers...*(again!)*
- people with buggies, disabled scooters or push-bikes will have to watch out on the footpath – the contractors have put up a number of safety signs for both their drivers and workers and for pedestrians
- January 2014 is the planned hand-over date but it might overrun

The contractors are Borrás Construction Ltd, and their website emphasises their attention to customer care¹. If there is a safety or other urgent issue their published phone number is 01727 850633.

More on the Crumbling Bollards

In the last newsletter we asked for any ideas as to what to do with these. As reported then, Andrew Mills (NHDC) has already said that he is aware of their deterioration, and is thinking about the idea of replacing them with wooden rails to match those already in place on the Fishponds Road side. Some Friends of Butts Close suggested that the bollards could just be removed. Andrew however said that the Council would be concerned, as this could then allow unauthorised access by vehicles onto the Close. The wooden rail option does seem the best, and much better than these:



As we were advised before, the Council has no specific budget for this work and it would have to be done on an ad hoc basis – UNLESS local Councillors could suggest that Officers might reprioritise their budgets and accommodate this work?

Hitchin's Big Tidy-Up Day on Sunday May 5th



A number of Friends of Butts Close got together during this town-wide initiative, and cleared a total of one oil drum, four bags of rubbish and three more of recyclables.

We were expecting to dip into the Pond with our wetsuits and snorkels (just kidding!) but when we arrived we found that the **Hitchin Fire Service** had decided they wanted to help too, and had done all the pond work already.



Watch Commander **Graeme Cheshire** said, "We got stuck into clearing rubbish from around and within the pond. We removed much general litter as well as an old bike frame, a shopping trolley and a tractor tyre. We also retrieved and replaced the Life Preserver Ring!"

Of course, as soon as the whole of the Close was clean and pretty, along came the fun fair! But that's life...

¹ See http://www.borrasconstruction.co.uk/__802570CE0054097F.nsf/display/custcare.htm

The Tank – Part I

We have discovered that the World War I tank, the 'Fearless', was installed in 1919 on the Close at the top end by Fishponds Road. A military history forum gives its position and a great deal of technical information too².

The late Brian Limbrick³ also remembered the tank:

When war was declared on September 4th 1939 I was 7 years old. During the last week of August 1939 my family moved to Great Offley in Hertfordshire where my father became the village policeman. We knew that war was possible in 1938...

1938: I was a spectator at a civil defence exercise on Butts Close, Hitchin. I had a grandstand view because my father seated me on a World War I tank which stood on the Close as a memorial. A mock house was built of inflammable materials in the middle of the greensward. A large yellow twin-engined aeroplane flew over and dropped an object on the 'house', which burst into flames. Someone appeared at an upper window shouting for help and firemen and police rushed forward with a ladder and rescued them.

Imagine getting that past 'Health & Safety' nowadays...!

Since the Swimming Pool was opened in 1938 it is most likely that the tank was on the Close broadly opposite the Football Ground entrance, and not where the Pool was built.

The Tank - Part II?

However, John Norris (Bedford Road) remembers playing on old tanks (perhaps other military equipment?) on Butts Close in the 1940's, and these were also opposite the Football Ground.

Anyone else know about this?

Did you know...?



Butts Close also had its part in labour history⁴. Joseph Arch, President of the then newly-formed National Agricultural Labourers' Union, addressed a mass meeting on Butts Close on July 23rd 1873. He was supported by Hitchin's Arthur Ransom as an enlightened local employer. He spoke of the need for better wages, pay and conditions, and demanded the vote for all working men (*sic*).

Such were the messianic qualities of Arch's oratory that many self-respecting union-minded agricultural labourers would display a portrait of Arch in their homes⁵.

² See <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=88086&st=75>

³ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/07/a6336407.shtml>

⁴ *Hertfordshire in History: Papers Presented to Lionel Munby*. Doris Jones-Baker. Univ of Hertfordshire Press 2004. P.259.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joseph_Arch