



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

January 2016

PUBLICATION OF THE BUTTS CLOSE GREENSPACE ACTION PLAN JANUARY 2016

In November 2015 the County Council's Countryside Management Service (CMS) put out their Draft Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan for consultation, and we provided our appraisal of that Draft, published in our December Newsletter. Other organisations and individual people also responded. The consultation period ended on January 11th 2016, and the CMS has now published the final version¹.

In our own submitted appraisal we strongly welcomed the consultative approach being taken by CMS, and this final version confirms that the feedback that Council Officers have received has been fully taken into account. Indeed, the Appendix provides three pages detailing the feedback that CMS had received. This final version has addressed and incorporated all of the key matters raised by consultees, and we believe it is a more robust Action Plan as a result.

We hope that you will find the time to access it and to read it.

There remains the matter of its implementation. The original allocation from NHDC for the Greenspace Action Plan was £30,000. The document identifies an indicative budgetary requirement of £17,700 for eight Action Plan elements, but two elements (E1 and E6) remain uncoded. In addition, the first identified task in the Year One Action Plan is to *'Design and cost works to desilt the*

¹ This can be accessed at: <http://www.hertslink.org/cms/15475080/buttsclosegap/>

pond, and seek funding to implement' (E8). Rightly in our view, the Action Plan identifies the pond and its surroundings as a critical area for improvement (Section 3.5), and it sets out six specific tasks to achieve this (A2, B3, E1, E2, E7, E8). However, the Plan also indicates that this work should be contingent upon the achievement of capital funding for clearing silt from the pond:

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. (see Section 3.5, para 2).

It is clearly prudent that much of the careful redesign, replanting and husbandry of the pond and its environs should take place after the desilting process has been completed and any heavy machinery has left the site. This therefore places the achievement of capital funding for this process on the critical path for successful delivery of the Action Plan.

We therefore urge Officers and Members to prioritise this funding in order that this work can be carried out, and thus enable all the objectives in the Butts Close GAP to be achieved.

...in other news...

Last week the Comet² reported how a Police chase ended up in Butts Close pond:

[one man]...was eventually caught near to the marshy pond on Butts Close, but not before a policeman fell into the freezing water...[an eyewitness said]..“I think one particular policeman wasn't aware of the marshy bog in Butts Close when he gave chase, as he came back soaked up to his chest. I'm not shaken, but you don't expect something like this to happen in the centre of Hitchin”.

In this case, it appears there was no serious harm. The incident does however emphasise the importance of the lifebuoy always being available on its stand for those (hopefully very rare) occasions when it may be needed. Unfortunately it is all too often vandalised and/or thrown into the pond. One consultee on the Draft Butts Close GAP did make precisely this point, and the final document does attempt to address the matter (Section 3.2 & Action B3), albeit only in the second year of the Action Plan.

² The Comet, January 21, 2016. Hitchin Edition, p.3.