



## FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

July 2017

### *The Green Issue...1*



Photo: Simon Maddison

such as meadow buttercup to achieve a dense growth which is cut back once or twice a year. The mowings are cleared and used as horse feed. This approach allows a wider variety of species to develop, which has now been enhanced by the Volunteers of the Countryside Management Service (CMS) who seeded areas around the pond as part of the Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan 2016-21 (the GAP) – although not as yet showing any growth<sup>1</sup>.

I am sure we have all seen the mowers sweeping up and down Butts Close, but perhaps without appreciating the subtleties of grass husbandry. John O’Conner’s, the Council’s contractors, manage all of the open spaces in North Herts, with grass cutting just one of many tasks, but taking up over 80% of the contract by volume. On Butts Close there are three levels of cutting – amenity, which is a general mow, rough, and conservation.

The latter approach allows a wide range of grasses and other species

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<sup>1</sup> “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 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, and species such as ragged robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*) could be considered in wetter areas close to the pond”. (from the Butts Close GAP, pp. 16-17.)

## The Green Issue...2

We made our own contribution to 'greening' the Close in May, when we did another litter-pick. There was less litter evident this time, which is good news, and this time there were no

extraordinary items – bikes and the like – though, sadly, we found one recently deceased hedgehog.



Less good news was the removal of the Council's dog bins across North Herts at the end of March as a cost-cutting measure, including the three on Butts Close. Dog owners were expected to use the litter bins instead, and although NHDC planned to increase the number of litter bins to compensate, these only materialised weeks afterwards. The whole process was handled 'less than perfectly...'. The furore continued in the local press and elsewhere.

One outcome was that two of the FoBC Steering Group<sup>2</sup> met with Andrew Mills, the NHDC Grounds Manager, to discuss how the Council monitors the contract with John O'Conner's, which includes litter bins. We learned that the Council has two contracts for emptying litter bins. Those on grounds and open spaces are the responsibility of O'Conner's, and those on streets and highways are the responsibility of Veolia. This may seem irrelevant, but it means that the bins actually on the Close are John O'Conner's while the bins on Elmside Walk are Veolia's. Yes, confusing...

We thought that Andrew has a pretty robust system for monitoring the O'Conner's contract, but he welcomes contact by anyone if there is a bin on the Close that needs attention<sup>3</sup>.

## The Green Issue...3



In our April edition we showed a Spring photograph of Butts Close Pond, newly trimmed by the CMS volunteers. Its water was free of weed and algae. But now there is a thick scum. We understand that this is probably due to the combination of strong sunlight and the nutrients stirred up by the de-silting process.

It looks pretty unappetising. Although the trail across the water was made by a moorhen, this level of algae is inimical to the diversity of flora

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<sup>2</sup> Tony Riley and Bill Sellicks

<sup>3</sup> He said that email is best: [andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk)

Contact Friends of Butts Close at [buttsclose@gmail.com](mailto:buttsclose@gmail.com) and Hitchin Forum through [www.hitchinforum.org.uk](http://www.hitchinforum.org.uk)

and fauna planned in the GAP, and at present the pond bears little relation to the images on the nearby interpretation board. The GAP extolled the work carried out on the pond previously by the CMS, and indeed stated<sup>4</sup>: *The water in the pond is clear and free of algal blooms and the pond is surrounded by thick emergent vegetation.*

Nature obviously works on a longer timescale. However, we discussed this with Andrew Mills and Andrew Taylor of the CMS, who manages the GAP process. They advised that the pond would 'settle down' over time as nutrient levels reduced, but also asked if we had any suggestions as to how the algae growth could be dealt with. Some research identified a cheap and ecologically sound approach, using barley straw. The straw is made up into long 'sausages' and floated on the water. Over a couple of months this breaks down and releases an oxidiser that destroys the algae, but otherwise does no harm<sup>5</sup>. There are nevertheless pros and cons to this approach, and it remains under discussion by NHDC and CMS.

### *Parking, again...*

You may well have noticed on the recent very hot week-end that Butts Close was used by the swimming pool managers for overspill parking. This time parking continued on the following Monday. A number of Friends of Butts Close complained about this. As one mother recounted, her six year old said: 'Mummy, I don't want to look out and keep seeing a car park'. Andrew Mills took these complaints on board, and advised us that Butts Close would no longer be used as an overspill car park in this way, although there would be times when a request to use it for parking would be considered – it was after all used as such for the few days of Rhythms of the World.

The other parking issue is of course the application by the Council to the Planning Inspectorate for consent to build an access road on the common land of the Close. The Inspectorate received 39 letters of objection, and decided that the matter was best dealt with by way of an Inquiry. We have now been given the date of November 21<sup>st</sup>, continuing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> if necessary, to be held at Hitchin Town Hall, starting at 10am. The appointed Inspector is Mark Yates. This will be a public meeting, but only those people who have previously advised the Inspectorate of their intention to speak may do so. It will be interesting...

### *The Green Issue...4*



Finally, we've all seen the 'Green Box' at the south end of Elmside Walk, beloved once again by local artists...

But did you know what its innards looked like?

Fortunately Simon Maddison was passing with his camera when the gas governor inside was being cleaned.

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<sup>4</sup> Butts Close GAP 2016-2021, p.10.

<sup>5</sup> Contact me at [buttsclose@gmail.com](mailto:buttsclose@gmail.com) if you want more details.

Contact Friends of Butts Close at [buttsclose@gmail.com](mailto:buttsclose@gmail.com) and Hitchin Forum through [www.hitchinforum.org.uk](http://www.hitchinforum.org.uk)



...more like shots from a Gothic sci-fi movie!

Tony Riley  
for  
FoBC

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