HITCHIN FORUM
Caring for our Town

FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

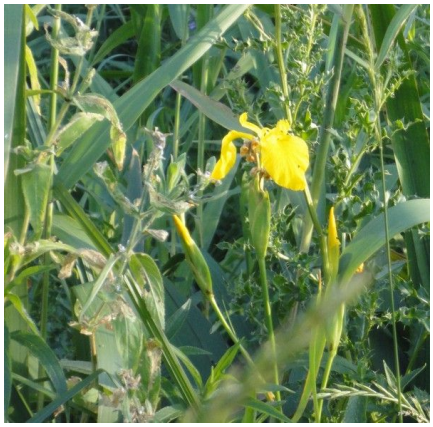
July 2018

Parched...

Most of Butts Close has dried out these past weeks, much like our lawns and gardens. But nature is resilient, and it will all spring up once again. The green sections that remain show where the water table is still close to the surface, and of course the pond has become an oasis in a mini savannah.

If you can struggle through the grasses that surround it, you can see that the pond water is still covered in slimy growth, so the barley extract treatment seems to have done very little – we did acknowledge that it was an experiment, and thanks to NHDC for trying. There are a couple of moorhens there, so they at least don't seem to mind.

The surrounding growth is however much richer in flora since the wildflower seeding last year by the Countryside Management Service.



But not all of the growth on the Close may be welcome.

Hemlock

A number of Friends have noticed that the central 'wild' sections of the Close have tall weeds, which appear to be hemlock or cow parsley. I thought I should do some research; I was surprised to find that there are over 90 poisonous plants[1] in the UK, the most common being Deadly Nightshade, Giant Hogweed, Monkshood, Foxglove, Winter Cherry and of course Poison Hemlock.

Hemlock[2] grows to some 2 metres or more, is similar to Cow Parsley in appearance, but has some important distinguishing features, the most notable being the red speckles or blotches on the stems. These are absent in cow parsley but may ***also*** be absent in the young hemlock plant.

Reddish speckled stalks of Hemlock

Stalks of Cow Parsley

[1] See http://www.thepoisongarden.co.uk/atoz.htm which also gives the botanical names and information on toxicity.
[2] See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conium_maculatum for full details, including its toxicology for the grisly minded.

It is clear that there is indeed hemlock on Butts Close, most notably in the central wild growth area.

But it is in fact pervasive. It is found across the country, preferring damp habitats, ditches, banks, roadside verges, and waterside locations. All parts of the plant are poisonous to humans, but only if ingested: toxic effects have been noted when only a few leaves have been eaten, for example when mistaken for parsley (or the root for parsnip) by foragers. As a precaution it should not be handled without protective gloves, and children should not play with its stems or flowers.

Should it be removed? This would seem to be pointless. It would doubtless grow back, on that patch or elsewhere on the Close. And then there are the other 89 poisonous plants to think about, some probably thriving on the Close too.

Better to respect nature, in all of its diversity. And buy your parsley from the greengrocer...

Football Fever...

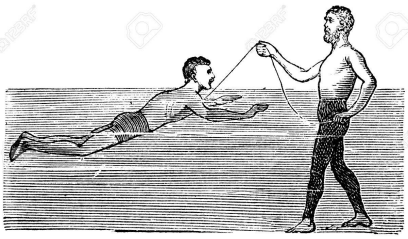
Proposals for a Tesco's, more car parking, and now a car valeting business – Top Field, owned by the Hitchin Cow Commoners Trust, is always a source of planning excitement. This time it's an application for the use of the Football Club car park for a car valeting and washing service, to be set up on the Fishponds Road perimeter behind the line of trees and hedging.

The original application was made in 2017 and the Council refused planning permission in January 2018 following submissions by Environmental Health, by local residents, and by Friends of Butts Close.

The applicants however have appealed to the Planning Inspectorate, and August 3rd is the deadline for any further submissions. NHDC consider that their refusal was robustly founded but Officers may be making further representations to the Inspectorate. The FoBC Steering Group considers that the original letter of objection sufficiently sets out our case.

All of the relevant documents can be found through the NHDC Planning Portal, searching for the application reference 17/02744/1.

Forthcoming Events…



On Saturday 11th August the Hitchin Swimming Centre is having a gala to celebrate its 80th Anniversary.

Given the likely additional pressure on parking it seems reasonable if NHDC decide to allow the north end of Butts Close to be open for parking, ***provided*** this is properly controlled and stewarded.

And finally…

Thanks to everyone who responded to our request for confirmation that you wanted to continue receiving FoBC emails. The GDPR guidance implied that it covered everything other than a personal birthday card list! It did seem to be a bureaucratic imposition, but it was good to know anyway that all existing FoBC members did positively want to continue. And remember, unsubscribing is very easy…

Have a good summer!

Tony Riley
for
FoBC
July 2018