



## FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER



**December 2018**

### *Liaisons, Liaisons...*

No, not those sorts of liaisons, but the last four months seem to have been taken up with networking and lobbying. September saw the meeting with NHDC Officers and James Bliss, Swim Centre Manager, to review how we thought the summer months went for the Close and also for the swim centre. We sent you the minutes of what was a productive meeting. We fed back that we thought NHDC management of the Close was effective. We also discussed how the swim centre parking issue could be addressed by more strongly promoting the Lairage as an alternative, and this resulted in a submission by Hitchin Forum to the Hitchin Parking Strategy – anything to keep Butts Close off the town parking agenda.

We were also asked to advise the Countryside Management Service (CMS) on 2018/19 priorities for the Butts Close Greenspace Action Plan. As we were about to participate in the Big Hitchin Clean-Up we took the opportunity to check all over the Close, and then appraise the work of CMS to date and to suggest what now needs to be done. We fed back our views – see the appended notes.

We had also liaised with NHDC planning control, opposing a proposal for a car valeting service on Top Field, on environmental and nuisance grounds. In October we learnt that the Council had refused permission and an appeal has upheld their decision.

But not everything ran smoothly. Elmside Walk, on the eastern edge of the Close, is a well-used pathway at night as well as by day, and it was the scene of a nasty mugging earlier this year. Simon Maddison, FoBC, had noticed that the street lights on Elmside Walk were not working, and he reported this to Herts County Council. James Bliss had also reported the fault, as no doubt had others. But nothing happened. Despite doggedly contacting Officers and County Councillors it took five full weeks before the lights were on again. It seems that there is a fault in their fault report system... apparently reporting a bank of eight consecutive lights not working can only be done successfully by reporting on each individual defunct light!

Simon raised a formal complaint with Herts CC and their lighting contractor, Ringways. Their response was that the fault was in an underground cable, not the lighting itself, and this necessarily meant additional delays. Of course, proactively keeping people updated with progress on faults – and not just complainants – would seem to be basic customer care practice, and yet seems to be beyond so many statutory agencies and their contractors (don't mention the bins...).

### *Rogues' Gallery*



As in previous years, Hitchin Forum (together with 'Clean-Up Hitchin') organised the pan-Hitchin Autumn Litter-Pick.

This time Butts Close was graced by even more than the usual suspects, and, impressively, there was less litter than usual.

Are conservation and recycling messages getting through?

Have a great Christmas break, and let's hope 2019 brings peace and health to all.

Tony Riley  
for  
FoBC  
December 2018

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)

### **Butts Close GAP – Management Action Plan Year Three**

Friends of Butts Close and others carried out a walk-around on 21<sup>st</sup> October as part of the Big Hitchin Clean-Up.

Comments were confined to the pond and the surrounding area.

1. The undergrowth appears to have been very effective in deterring drug users, and there was very little litter evident, although more may become apparent when everything dies back. There was almost none floating in the water. Most of the algal growth has gone too, whether or not due to the earlier use of barley straw extract. The wilderness aspect must surely mean that in time it will be a higher quality haven for wildlife. The actions previously taken under the GAP have clearly been successful.
2. The coppiced area north of the pond (on the southern boundary of HSC/Archers) has developed a rich variety of growth. There is however an increasing growth of brambles and this needs thinning. We note that coppicing this area forms part of the 2018-19 GAP.
3. We suggest one amendment to the actions planned in Year Three of the GAP. This concerns the mown pathway that gives access to the pond. The map on page 27 of the GAP indicates that this pathway should be semi-circular, running from the west towards the pond and then turning north after reaching the interpretation board. We would like this to be re-instated but with a short extension along the north edge of the pond up to the lifebelt. This would give better visual access to the pond and its margins but should not increase access to any sheltered area that could provide cover for drug users.

Friends of Butts Close Steering Group  
24 October 2018