



## FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

September 2020

### *Crime Edition*

With no funfairs and no circuses, you would think that this summer on Butts Close would have been uneventful. But not so.



The first crime was the theft of one of 'our' beautiful and very heavy benches. The one at the corner of Bedford Road and Fishponds Road went missing around 20<sup>th</sup> July. Here is a photograph of it gone...

A member of the public found it sitting in an alleyway near Redhill Road and told the Council. It was retrieved by John O'Conner staff and they found that a wooden slat had been damaged by the thieves: quite what they intended is anyone's guess. A replacement slat is on its way and the bench will be back in a week or two.

Then in August about fifty protective spirals around the new saplings were removed – about a third of the total. Vandals? We don't know. But most of them had been carefully pushed into the nearby litter bin. Fortunately we were able to retrieve them all unharmed, and Andrew Mills asked O'Conner's to replace them. He also suggested some notices pointing out why they were needed.



Scene of Crime photo by A Parr



Notices are now in place

This 'crime' was featured in the Council's emailed *North Herts Park and Green Spaces News*. We were spurred on to check out the rows of saplings, and a weeding party cleared the invaders. We also identified some saplings that had deceased; we are making arrangements to replace them, which will be done during the dormant months.

### ***Dumping Swag or Litter...?***



You may remember that at the last litter-pick one of the Friends of BC found a stash of papers and a cash box in the undergrowth near the gas regulator building, by Elmside Walk (see *FoBC Newsletter December 2019*). They were from a burglary of a town centre café a few days before. Then last weekend Simon Maddison found an abandoned strongbox in the same place. The police came and investigated – it's still there, so perhaps not criminal evidence after all.

### ***...and on Sunday October 18<sup>th</sup>?***

This is Hitchin's next Big Litter Clean-up. More information will be forthcoming on its organisation given the coronavirus, but please do put the date in your diary now if you can make it.

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)

## Bleeding Canker



This time a biological crime. Horse Chestnut trees across the country are being destroyed by an infection of the bark with the bacterium *pseudomonas syringae pathovar v. Aesculi*. The bark bleeds a dark sticky fluid (hence the common name Bleeding Canker).

There is no realistic cure, though a few do survive. The damage can progress until the tree starts to die, and at this point the tree will become a danger to the public, and needs to be felled. Karl Wilkins, the Council's Tree Officer, has said that unfortunately all of the horse chestnuts on the Close are infected, and they are unlikely to survive. One has already had to

be cut down. This is a pan-European problem. Sad, because they are very beautiful and give so much pleasure.

## Our Readership

You may not know, but we have an international readership – there are Friends of Butts Close from as far as Kansas and Texas. And, it seems, from LA, a Mr Chandler providing this contribution:

*It was a grey day in Hitchin. Just two calls all morning. A husband missing for three hours, and a cat up a tree. I figured on a Bourbon lunch, when the phone rang again - a dame saying a whole bench had disappeared overnight. Nothing unusual for this little town, but there was something in her voice, maybe her accent, that made me curious. Funny, I could almost see her shape as she spoke: soft, curvy, but strong at the same time, someone you couldn't mess with without paying for it. Where was it? Butts Close. As soon as she said that I realized this was no ordinary heist. These were serious benches, some said like royalty. But there was no bench fence, and I knew all the fences in town. We agreed no bench, no fee. I picked up my fedora and set out for the only place in town where honor among thieves was a dime a tip-off.*

*It didn't take long. Some quiet persuasion, and the bench appeared. Nobody down the bars wanted to touch it. Easily solved. But more than the fee, I wanted to meet this broad, and on my terms. On the bench.*

*But I'd have to wait...*

Tony Riley for FoBC 15 September 2020

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