



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

December 2020

Christmas Tree Edition

We've been contacted by a number of people asking why the Italian Alder, *alnus cordata*, is being used by the Council to replace the dying *Horse Chestnuts*, instead of an indigenous variety?

It is a very hardy, handsome, and fast-growing large tree, and is often regarded as the finest of the species - it is a member of the birch family. Native to southern Italy, it was introduced to Britain around 1820. It has an attractive conical shape, and provides good winter interest, as the glossy, heart-shaped leaves may persist through December. Its tolerance of both a wide range of soils and of urban pollution makes it a useful tree for the reclamation of derelict sites, as well as a specimen tree for parks and woodland. Its catkins are a good food source for insects, as are the winter cones for birds. So no, they won't provide any conkers, and it is sad that horse chestnut trees are largely dying out across the country. But they have given us both beauty and fun for centuries since they were introduced from Turkey in the late 16th century. So they aren't indigenous to Britain either.



Photo: Simon Maddison

The *Sapling Hedge* has needed some on-going care: thanks to the Friends who have weeded and cossetted them over the last nine months. About 10 out of the original 120 died, and we have replaced them with some kindly donated damson saplings. But they've got some way to go before they look hedge-like!

And finally, we wish everybody a **Happy Christmas** as much as is possible in these strange and muted times. 2021 quickly, please!

Tony Riley, for Friends of Butts Close