



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

November 2021

The Greenspace Action Plan 2022-27: the Stage 1 Consultation

Many thanks to all of you who submitted comments and suggestions on the draft GAP. These have been incorporated into a feedback document and sent to the Countryside Management Service of the County Council and to Andrew Mills, Greenspace Manager, North Herts Council. The document is attached.

We will have the opportunity to comment on the next draft in early 2022.

Noise from Funfairs, etc

Abbotts Funfair visited the Close in October; they have a right to hold a so-called Charter fair annually in Hitchin. It used to be the quieter of the two regular funfairs, Thurston's being the other, but this year the noise was the loudest yet. This was partly due to the way the rides and vehicles were arranged. A wall of trucks parked along the west edge of the Close can act as a sound barrier, but they didn't do that this time.

Several people made formal complaints to the Council – and not just by residents of Bedford Road - and received a response from the Council's Environmental Health Manager. This included the following statement:

In respect to a Charter Fair, although they are permitted to hold the fair, they are not permitted to cause Statutory Nuisance. As such, where my service is aware of such an occurrence, and where we feel a Statutory Nuisance exists, we will instigate the appropriate remedial action. [...]

I have also spoken with my colleague, Mr Andrew Mills, not specifically about this event but not excluding it, and have identified the need to ensure that for any event for which the Council owns the land upon which the event is to be held, we introduce a requirement that the event manager reports on the measures used to mitigate nuisance. If these are omitted, then they will be sought before the permission is granted.

The following week the Circus arrived. Bedford Road residents opposite the Close got a 'Hello, Neighbour' message from the circus posted through their letterboxes, with a free pass to the show. The circus also had a sound technician on duty with a dB meter, and a monitor on a screen showing the readings in real time.

Let's wait for the next fair...

Litterpickers

There was another litterpick across Hitchin on 17th October, organised by Hitchin Forum. Butts Close had fewer pickers than before but much less litter to collect or to recycle, and this was after the fair and on the last day of the Circus. The amounts have been steadily decreasing over the years, which is good news.



Photos: Helen Howarth

Sewage on the Close

After a long time negotiating the labyrinth of Anglian Water, hitting a dead end with their mute chat link and being told 'your call is important to us' forever, I made contact.

I got a call from their cameraman last week. He told me that he had been asked to do a check on the pipes, but he had already done this in October. He said there was no break in either direction from the hole. Categorical. "It's just a hole in the ground" he said.

Contact Friends of Butts Close at buttsclose@gmail.com and Hitchin Forum through www.hitchinforum.org.uk

It seems there are two possibilities. The first is that the 'sewage' was paper and detritus from a



mouse nest - there was evidence of mice around the hole. The second goes back to the rough sleepers who were on the Close around the same time. So perhaps an existing or purpose-made hole was used as a latrine. Not in an expected place, but who knows?

Either way, the cameraman was very clear that the pipe is intact. The fact that the hole was in the same place as a sewer pipe would be coincidental. Anglian Water contacted the Council. Tom Ayres, who works with Andrew Mills, has advised me that they will fill the hole and make good.

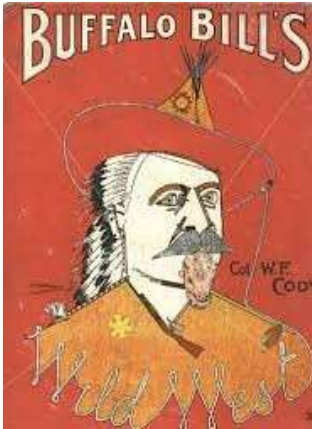
A relief that there wasn't foul sewage on the Close after all? Not quite.

There is one remaining problem. There is a manhole down to the foul sewer a few metres away from the hole that the cameraman talked about. This showed signs of sewage on the grass around the manhole. I've now been informed that it isn't a locking type, and so in sudden heavy flow it is again liable to 'pop up' and allow sewage to soil the surrounding ground. Putting a locking manhole there would likely only move the problem elsewhere. So it seems that Anglian Water should keep a watching brief (sniff?) on that line of pipes and its access manholes.

But this isn't just a Butts Close or even a Hitchin problem. It happens across the country, anywhere when the volume of water exceeds the sewage systems' capacity¹.

¹ Search for "sewage manhole pop ups UK" for innumerable grisly incidents of this nature. If you notice a manhole cover is missing or not on properly it is important to report it to the water company immediately. In Hitchin this is usually Anglian Water (<https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/help-and-advice/report-an-issue/>).

And a thank you



Tom F Cunningham has spent his life compiling a history of Buffalo Bill's tours of Scotland (snbba.co.uk) and is now trying to complete a history of the tours in England and Wales. Out of the blue I got an email from him with effusive thanks to Friends of Butts Close for our history of the visit to Butts Close in 1904. It's in the Newsletter for March 2016. I can send anyone a copy if they're interested.

He's only got another six venues to go...

Tony Riley

for Friends of Butts Close Steering Group:

Anneliese Parr

Bill Sellicks

Ellie Clarke

Helen Howarth

Stuart Howarth

13 November 2021

BUTTS CLOSE DRAFT GAP 2022-2027 STAGE 1 DOCUMENT

FEEDBACK FROM FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

Introduction

The Stage 1 Draft GAP was circulated to the 40 members of Friends of Butts Close requesting comments and suggestions. Ten members (25%) have responded. This document collates those responses.

Comments on Section 3

2nd paragraph insert after...due to decreased capacity. The balancing pond function may need to be re-examined. One purpose of de-silting was to increase the pond capacity to accept sufficient surface water at times of heavy rainfall in order to reduce the likelihood of the flooding of premises at the lower end of Bedford Road. However these residences are still affected by flooding.

3rd paragraph could readMeadow Pea, Vetch and Cowslips. [they are in abundance on the meadow patch east of the pond and up to Elmside Walk. Attached is the FoBC Newsletter for July 2020 which contains photographs of wildflowers. CMS/NHC may use these **provided the photographers are credited**].

Add 5th paragraph....

In line with the objective of community involvement, in 2020 the Council supported Friends of Butts Close in planting 130 native hedge saplings along the eastern edge of the Close, adjacent to the west-facing boundary of the swim centre.

Comments on Section 4

- A2 Some respondents questioned whether replacing the knee rail fencing with bollards was best use of public finance. It was noted that the current rail fence provides a better safety barrier to young children who might run off the Close and onto the A505. Replacing the existing old and damaged bollards on the western and southern edges of the Close was supported; it was noted that children do not play along these perimeters because of the steep upward slopes.
- B3 [Addition]
- Work with the appropriate authorities to ascertain the hydrology of the pond, the south section of the Close and the spillway (set in the western bank of the Close) in order to determine the best achievable solution to surface water flooding of premises. (*see information note below*)
- B4 [Addition]
- Ensure that all major licensees provide toilet facilities for their patrons.
- C2 Delete reference to dog bins. They have been deleted.
- E4 It was noted that a specimen tree in that position might make grassland management difficult. FoBC wished to be consulted on any proposed species. Siting of the tree might be an issue. Capswell Brook, which runs east from the pond, is culverted. There also appears to be either a foul sewer or a gas main under that part of the Close – shown on the Constraints Map in the current GAP.

E5 The principle of additional trees was supported, but a number of respondents considered this could reduce the amenity of the Close by restricting the views south and west from Fishponds Road, especially of sunsets and of the shadows cast by the existing lime trees by the setting sun. In addition it was noted that the constraints map in the current GAP identifies what appears to be a gas main running along that northern edge. Two alternatives were proposed. Firstly, the new hedging planted by FoBC could be extended north along the western edge of the swim centre car park. Secondly, a line of trees could be planted along the southern edge of the Close, by Gregans House car park. This appears to be free from underground constraints.

F2 Addition:

To ensure coordination with other Greenspace Action Plans in Hitchin, including Walsworth Common, that identify an aspiration to host more activities. This will ensure that events are evenly distributed in green spaces around the Town.

Information Note for suggested Addition B3 in Section 4

Prior to the de-silting of the pond I visited the properties on Bedford Road south of the (now former) Bedford Arms to ascertain whether residents experienced any flooding. A number confirmed this, and some had pumps installed in the basements to try to mitigate the problem. I understood from Council Officers that one purpose of the pond was to act as a balancing pond, or sump, to accept surface water at times of heavy rainfall, retain it, and to allow its egress eastwards from the pond via Capswell Brook in a more controlled flow, so as not to cause flooding downstream. Friends of Butts Close advised Members of this matter by email dated 30-01-2016.

I have now been told, with evidence, that residents in that section of the Bedford Road nevertheless still experience significant flooding.

Butts Close, and the pond, are some two metres below the level of that section of Bedford Road. It would seem that a survey should be carried out to ascertain whether adjustments to the pond inflow and outflow can be made to mitigate the problem, and/or whether other water management approaches can be made, without creating risk elsewhere (such as downstream) and without compromising the amenity value of the Close.

Tony Riley

for

Friends of Butts Close

12 November 2021