



## FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

### AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

March 2022

### ***Greenspace Action Plan 2022-27***

In the November newsletter we included the compilation of feedback that we had received on the Stage 1 draft of the GAP.

We're glad to say that most of the recommendations that we made to the Council have been incorporated into the latest draft, Stage 2, which is attached to this email. We are aware of two of our proposals that are not yet in the document.

- ***More trees***

We suggested that a line of trees could be planted along the wall that is the boundary of Gregans House car park. This is the wall that faces north-west. At present it has scrub and some not-very-edible blackberries along it. Importantly, there appear to be no services underneath that section to prevent trees being planted there.

We brought up this suggestion with Andrew Mills (see below) and he agreed to pursue this.

- ***Toilet facilities for funfair customers***

Men have been seen using the pond as a toilet when the funfairs have visited. The organisers do not provide portaloos for their customers. The circus does, and elsewhere we have found that funfairs do provide this facility. Some local authorities make this a requirement in their licensing procedures.

This is still under discussion at the time of writing.

### ***Feedback on the GAP Stage 2***

Both North Herts Council and the Herts CC Countryside Management Service welcome feedback on this latest draft. The deadline for this is March 28<sup>th</sup>. If you want your views

incorporated into a Friends of Butts Close response please let us have your comments by Friday 25<sup>th</sup> March. You can of course give your comments directly to Andrew Mills, Service Manager, Greenspace, at [andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:andrew.mills@north-herts.gov.uk). If you do, we'd be grateful to be copied in so we get as full a picture as possible.

### ***Noise from Funfairs etc***

This was also a hot topic in the November newsletter, where we reproduced a response from Council Officers to formal complaints that were made following the visit by Abbott's funfair in October.

As a result, Andrew Mills asked for a meeting to discuss this and other matters that we noted in our responses to the first draft of the GAP. Stuart Howarth (FoBC Steering Group) and I met on 24 February with Andrew Mills and Tom Ayres, Greenspace Manager. Below are summaries from the minutes.

- ***Funfairs and Circuses: Update on issues arising from 2021***

AM summarised the internal discussions between Greenspace Management, Environmental Health and Legal Services. It has been confirmed that funfairs and circuses have to abide by statutory EH regulations. This shall include a satisfactory sound/noise management plan. This is now incorporated into the formal application process by operators for a licence.

Operators are required to provide all supporting documentation to their applications no later than 28 days prior to the event. If this is satisfactory AM will approve the event. If the application does not meet the Council's requirements, AM will consult with the Service Director, and the operator will be given the opportunity to rectify the application within 14 days. The decision to approve or not will be made at 14 days prior to the event based upon the available information at that time.

Butts Close will be available to host two funfair events (currently Thurston's and Abbotts) and one circus annually. Additional funfairs or large-scale events will be offered Walsworth Common as a venue. Licences will be spaced across the season for the benefit of operators, customers and residents. The two fairs and one circus are established annual events at a similar time of year and it is hoped that these timings will continue.

- ***GAP 2022-27 - Stage 2 Draft***

AM noted that the draft had only been received from the County's Countryside Management Service (CMS) two days before the meeting. TR and SH had had a short opportunity to peruse it.

- ***More Trees***

FoBC had proposed an extension of the hedge planted against the Pool wall northwards as far as Fishponds Road. The draft GAP noted this proposal but advised that a hedge there would be unlikely to thrive due to overhanging evergreen trees.

A line of trees can be planted along the wall of the Gregans House Car Park (which faces north-west), and AM will progress this, providing there are no underground service constraints.

- ***Flooding on Bedford Road***

Following a history of flooding along the lower Bedford Road, FoBC had suggested that a hydrology survey could be carried out to explore whether there were any possibilities of using the Close and the pond to mitigate this. However the County had now ensured that Anglian Water cleaned the pipes and sump that allow a clearance of road rainwater to flow onto the Close via an outfall at times of very heavy rainfall. The effectiveness of this will be monitored.

- ***Coordinating Volunteer Work on the Close***

The draft GAP proposes further involvement of FoBC members in carrying out work on the Close. It was agreed that any interested FoBC members will be put in touch with Andrew Taylor, the County Officer responsible for CMS volunteers, in order to ensure coordination of effort. Please email us at [buttsclose@gmail.com](mailto:buttsclose@gmail.com) if you are interested.

It's clear that the Council has made some significant changes to the way that large scale events – funfairs and circuses – will be licensed. A sound management plan is now a requirement from the operators applying to use NHC sites, and the number of bookings for Butts Close has been limited to three, with Walsworth Common offered for additional events.

And as ever, the proof of the pudding...

### ***Local Nature Reserve? Local Wildlife Site?***

The Council has managed Butts Close for many years through the Greenspace Action Plans, with a focus on sustainability and nature conservation. The banks of the pond have been recontoured and reeds have been planted to improve the water quality and habitat, the margins are regularly controlled, and the meadows are sensitively managed, including an increase in the mix of native wild flowers and grasses. This has had a hugely positive impact on the amount of wildlife and flora.

Because of this we want to explore the designation of the Close either as a Local Nature Reserve or as a Local Wildlife Site. The pond and surrounding meadow make up about three acres of the 11 acre Butts Close site. We will explore whether a designation could cover the entire site or just the meadow and pond area: the smallest LNR in the UK is a snail farm in Edinburgh at 2.4 acres, so it wouldn't be the smallest!

We would like to progress this with the Council as it would mark the positive impact of this work and may encourage similar ventures elsewhere.

To help build a picture of Butts Close's nature conservation value it would be useful for any keen nature spotters in the FoBC to submit their records to the Herts Biological Records Centre. This can be done online at <https://irecord.org.uk>. There are apps for Apple and Android phones. The record centre will require the date, location and species, and a photo if at all possible. The location should be given as Butts Close. This will make subsequent searches easier to accomplish.

For this purpose, nature means anything that moves – swims, slithers, wriggles, hops, jumps, walks or flies.

And no, your dog isn't included.

### ***Hitchin Forum's Litterpicking Day – Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> March, 10am***

This comes round quickly! If you can make it, please contact Bill Sellicks via [hflitterpick@gmail.com](mailto:hflitterpick@gmail.com) before 13<sup>th</sup> March, who will send you an online registration form.

Tony Riley  
for FoBC Steering Group

March 2022