HITCHIN FORUM
Caring for our Town

FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

September 2024

Summer Sun, Summer Rain…

There's an art to catching Summer. Only the nimble have managed it this year, as each week has given us a taste of all four seasons at once, if you count massive hailstones as snow and storm-stripped branches as autumn. And a wet apocalypse this last weekend.

TR. Photographed with permission.

This group managed to find Summer two Sundays ago, catching the evening heat.

As did The Bug Hunters in July, when Phil Barron of the Hitchin Nature Network organised a Bug Hunt on the Close. His report on a very successful day is appended.

Hitchin Forum's Litterpicking Day is on Sunday October 20th

If you want to join the Butts Close Team - henceforth the Butts Close Litterati - and have not registered already, please email Bill Sellicks at hflitterpick@gmail.com.

Coming Soon

Andrew Mills has advised that the provisional bookings for Autumn are:

Abbotts Charter Fair - Here Now!

Circus Wonderland 13th – 20th October

Coming Very Much Later

is the Hedge. ..

Do look again at the March 2024 Newsletter for reference and for the differences between hedges and hedgerows. I asked Heidi Hutton how and when our straggly effort would begin to take on a recognisable shape.
She responded:

We [The Countryside Management Service Volunteer Team] will be back at Butts Close this winter, tending to the hedges, coppicing another section of the hedge behind the swimming pool [between the gym boundary and the pond - TR], and planting some new hedgerow plants in this section to thicken it up a bit.

The plan for the hedge you are referring to, I believe, is not to lay it, but to manage it as a more traditional parkland hedgerow. This management will be taken on by O'Conner's in due course, as it is something that falls within their general maintenance specifications. Whether this happens next year, or the year after, we'll let the hedge decide. I would recommend that, as the volunteers will be on site this winter, they do another trim of the hedgerow this winter to get it

into a nice shape before we hand over its management to O'Conner's. Possibly it might be better if we did this again next year, like I say, it depends on how the hedge is doing. HH.

The purpose of planting a hedge were set out in the Newsletter for March 2019:

- Increase the overall biodiversity of Butts Close
- Improve the amenity value of the Close by creating a green hedge line which will complement the existing hedge line to the south of this perimeter
- Deter the painting of graffiti on the existing wall surfaces

I asked Heidi for any mixed species examples elsewhere in the County so we could envisage what we might get in a few years' time. She sent us these:

Composers' Park, Elstree

Verulamium Park, St Albans

And Louise Wileman, NHC, pointed us to these:

By Bowls Centre, Norton Common

Opp 234 Icknield Way, Norton Common

CP at Howards Park, Letchworth

My own view is that the Norton Common examples fit Butts Close best. Lots of interest and a bit woolly round the edges. Do please let us know your views, but bear in mind that the hedge itself will largely dictate how it develops.

Hopefully, not coming at all…

The ghost of roadways past had reared its head. In 2017 we objected to a Council plan to build a roadway down the east side of the Close in order to provide access to a proposed extension car park. The Planning Inspectorate found for the objectors. End of roadway.

Or so we thought. But you may have seen cars and vans driving up and down between the Fishponds Road entrance to the Close and the fenced off section of land at the back of the gym.

The ground was very dry when this photo was taken but heavy rain will likely cause a mud bath here. From the tracks, vehicles are sometimes driving down the transverse path and then turning left, and sometimes driving down the grass area between the transverse path and the hedge. They appeared to be Pool management staff or their contractors, but perhaps members of the public. We have always accepted that contractors need access to the site via the Fishponds Road gate – examples are refuse and recycling collection, plant servicing and building repair work – because these are time-limited activities or necessities – but we would object to public parking access. We alerted Andrew Mills. The Council issued a statement:

North Herts Council confirmed the issue has been raised with Everyone Active. The vehicles identified in the photo belong to contractors carrying out the works to the fitness studios. The Council have asked Everyone Active to ensure the gates are kept closed when contractors park in the area and apologise if this was not the case at the time. Please be assured that the vehicles were works contractors and that Everyone Active and the team onsite would not allow parking in this area for any other reason.

A reassuring response.

Tony Riley

for
Friends of Butts Close
September 2024

Hitchin Bug Hunt 2024

A Bug Hunt took place on Sunday afternoon 21st July on Butts Close, organised by Hitchin Nature Network, and centred on the part of Butts Close by the swimming pool where there was plenty of long grass. The weather was kind, sunny and warm but not too hot. A table with books and posters, some moths to look at and insect nets to borrow was set up and even half an hour before the scheduled start we had eager customers wanting to chase bugs. Who knew that chasing insects would be so popular, especially amongst the younger generation who were delighted to catch even the smallest of things?

I was hoping people might find some unusual bugs and that I could record what we saw, how many of them there were and take some pretty photos. In the event I was rushed off my feet with a constant stream of youngsters, and those not so young, asking questions about what they had caught. It was delightful to be part of and see such enthusiasm and I think it fair to say the event was a success. In the end we had about 25 people attend many of who stayed for well over an hour & seemed to depart satisfied.

One thing that struck me was the large quantity of insects found: many Grass Bugs (looking very much like grass seeds) and dozens of Common Soldier Beetles. The insects are present because of certain areas of grass that have been allowed to grow long: a recent innovation on Butts Close I think. My favourite find was someone who caught a bright green Roesel's bush-cricket.

There are quite a few thankyous finish with:

- This was a formal event sanctioned by North Herts council with proper permissions granted, thanks to Andrew Mills for waiving the normal booking fee
- Countryside Management Service provided third part insurance liability, my first aid and leadership training and loan of a first aid kit and to Heidi Hutton for supporting
- Friends of Butts Close and Tony Riley for supporting the idea
- Rosemary Pateman for loan of insect nets, wildlife posters
- Steve MacSweeney for loan of insect nets and laminated wildlife guides
- My daughter and boyfriend for helping set up and pack away
- My wife for painting the sign
- My fellow Hitchin Nature Network committee members for helping out and provided yet more equipment

Roesell's Bush Cricket

Bug Hunt in Progress