



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE

AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

August 2014

After our sodden Spring, Butts Close again showed its resilience. The ground dried out, the funfair came and went, the grass renewed itself, the trees blossomed and the cow parsley wafted its scent across the common...Simon Maddison's photo shows the willow in all its May glory.



Updates:

Photo courtesy of Simon Maddison

Regiment Fitness

Although more and more sessions are being held on the Close, the organisers are being careful to rotate their exercisers, and the grass surface doesn't appear to be suffering.

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

NHDC Green Space Management Strategy and the Crumbling Bollards

As we reported in the last newsletter, work regarding the bollards was not included in the Strategy, and Andrew Mills (NHDC) has confirmed that this is still the case. He has also advised us that the work programme for Butts Close that is within the Strategy is *planned* for 2015, but that its delivery may need to be delayed or amended.

Swimming Centre/Archers Developments

James Bliss writes:

I'm pleased to report the works have been completed at the Swimming Centre and Archers. We do still have a few minor snagging issues which we are working closely with North Herts District Council and Borrás to resolve as soon as practical.

The general feedback has been very positive and the usage for both the Swimming Centre and Archers is increasing which was anticipated and why the development / investment into the facilities took place. Within the site footprint the reinstatement and reseeded of the area previously used by Borrás [for their plant and cabins etc] has started, and I anticipate this will take a few months to bring back to the original grassland feature. This area has always been fenced off in the past. However when the area is suitable and ready we would like to open this area up and allow the outdoor pool users to enjoy it.

Once again I would like to thank the local residents for their patience and understanding during the development works.

Hitchin Tidy Up

The Butts Close annual litter-picking fest took place on Sunday 6th April, again as part of the Tidy Up organized by Hitchin Forum.



A very big thank you to everyone who was involved, and especially to the kids from Christ Church.

We collected a total of eight bags of rubbish and two of recycling! Needless to say, a walk-around this August weekend showed its mysterious reappearance...!

To the Barricades or to the Check-outs?

This was to be a gentle, pastoral update... all good news...

...until the *Advertiser* dropped onto the hall floor last week, with a front page on a resurrected threat of the Tesco Invasion of Top Field, with its implications for Butts Close. Hitchin Forum have given the Advertiser their comments, and rather than paraphrase this, we have attached their document here. Whatever your views on these proposals, it will only be by communicating them to our elected members that they will carry any weight.

We will be watching the local media with interest...

Ellie, Helen, John, Stuart, Tony

August 2014

APPENDIX

Hitchin Forum comment on the 'Screening Opinion: Application No: 14/02028/1SO on Top Field for a retail superstore'.

We understand that such a screening opinion may precede a planning application (An applicant for planning permission may ask the planning authority for a "screening opinion" on the potential environmental impact before submitting the application. If it receives such a request, the authority has to issue an opinion within 3 weeks of the date of receipt).

The application is made by New Road (Clifton) Ltd. The land is held in trust by Hitchin Cow Commoners Trust and follows the revelation made 2 years ago by the Trust that it was pursuing a deal with New Road Developments Ltd to have a Tesco store on Top Field and for a sports facility, currently located on Top Field, to be transferred to a field opposite Kingshott School.

We note that the object of HCCT is detailed as *"for the benefit of the community through the provision of facilities for the charitable use for cricket, football or other sports or for other general charitable purposes for the benefit of the inhabitants of the town of Hitchin."* We believe that the Trust should be acting for and with the residents of Hitchin. They are a self selected group of people, who may have their own notion of what is for the best of the town, but they have not consulted the town residents on what they think. Two years ago HCCT called a meeting of local groups and informed them of what they had already agreed with Richard Daniels of the New Road company. It seems that they believe they know what will benefit the community, but have not asked the community.

Does Hitchin need a superstore on Top Field? What effect will that have on the town centre shops and the local corner stores? Some analysis of retail capacity and patterns would be needed to answer that, but the impression is that it would not enhance the town and is likely to have a negative impact on the high street shops, which provide an attractive focus for residents and visitors. Tesco's, the original suspect, have attracted opposition in other areas because of the impact they have had on local businesses. But whether it is them, or another superstore, do we need a 4th large supermarket in town? Should a Hitchin charity be making a deal to do so? We think not.

Building a supermarket on the Top Field site will have grave implications for Hitchin, both in terms of our town centre and Westmill estate shops, and traffic congestion. What effect would this have on Bedford Road and Fishponds Road and how would that be managed? There is also the question of "overflow" parking for the swim centre provided by Top Field; if this is lost there might well be pressure once again to tarmac more of Butts Close to provide parking.

We oppose the building of a superstore on Top Field, and believe that the Cow Commoners should not allow the Trust land to be used for this.

Hitchin Forum 6/8/14