



FRIENDS OF BUTTS CLOSE AN OCCASIONAL NEWSLETTER

March 2026

Out of the Cocoon ...



It was a mild winter, so no snowmen this time, and after snuggling down during long soggy months the Close started waking up with snowdrops and crocuses, shoots and buds.

And it's been well-prepared by the Countryside Management Service (CMS) Volunteers¹ who have pruned, replenished and generally cleaned up the hedges on the east and south borders, coppiced the hedgerow on the south edge of the Pool complex, and cleared the south side of the pond. Now the grass is bursting through and we're waiting for John O'Conner's mowers.



We reported some dying trees on the north side to Alan North, The Council's Greenspace Service Manager, and these were removed. The replacements seem to be thriving. Last month I reported some broken knee-rails along Fishponds Road: my email was read at 7.53 and the repairs finished by 11.39 the same day!

The Decarbonisation Scheme

You may remember that we advised the Council and their contractors Willmott-Dixon of our concerns regarding the Construction Traffic Management Plan², which were acknowledged and acted upon. We understand that the work is almost finished, slightly ahead of schedule. We did report one concern regarding works traffic on the Close and this was swiftly dealt with. Willmott-Dixon also put up a temporary fencing tarp along the west-facing side, printed with garden greenery. Good for them. It reminded me of the 1970s fashion for photo wallpaper³.

¹ Led by Heidi Hutton, Senior Projects Officer, CROW, Herts CC.

² See the August 2025 Newsletter.

³ At least they didn't choose a beach and palm trees...



The contractors will be removing the metal plate roadway in the coming weeks. This should have saved most of the Close from deep rutted damage, and we look forward to seeing the remediation work that will follow.

Local Government Reorganisation

A seven-week government consultation is underway, finishing March 26, 2026, regarding proposals to replace Hertfordshire's two-tier council system (the County Council and the District Councils) with new unitary authorities. The purpose is to simplify local government, reduce costs, and create more sustainable and community-focused services.

There are three primary options: dividing the county into two, three or four unitary authorities. Note that a fourth option, making the whole of Hertfordshire one unitary council, was not supported as being too remote from our communities.

Two Councils

Hertfordshire County Council and St Albans City and District Council proposed 2 unitary councils. These would comprise the district areas of:

- **West:** Dacorum, Hertsmere, St Albans, Three Rivers and Watford
- **Eastern:** Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts, Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield

Three Councils

East Hertfordshire District Council, Three Rivers District Council and Watford Borough Council proposed 3 unitary councils. These would comprise the district areas of:

- **West:** Dacorum, Three Rivers and Watford, plus 4 wards from Hertsmere
- **Central:** Hertsmere less 4 wards, St Albans, and Welwyn Hatfield
- **Eastern:** Broxbourne, East Herts, North Herts and Stevenage

Four Councils

Broxbourne Borough Council, Dacorum Borough Council, Hertsmere Borough Council, North Hertfordshire Council, Stevenage Borough Council and Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council proposed 4 unitary councils. These would comprise the district areas of:

- **North West:** Dacorum and St Albans
- **South West:** Hertsmere, Three Rivers and Watford
- **Central:** North Herts less 6 wards, Stevenage and Welwyn Hatfield less 1 ward
- **Eastern:** Broxbourne, East Herts plus 6 wards from North Herts and 1 ward from Welwyn Hatfield

The statutory consultation closes on 26 March 2026. It is available on the [GOV.UK website](https://www.gov.uk). Details and interactive maps are available at www.hertfordshire-lgr.co.uk including the pros and cons of each option. The decision will be made by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government “in the Summer”.

Might this affect Butts Close?

We have had a long and successful relationship with the Greenspace team at North Herts Council, and hopefully we would be able to enjoy that within a new structure. Of more concern is the future of the Countryside Management Service, and especially with the leadership of the Volunteer Team by the Senior Projects Officer, which is currently a County-wide provision. Volunteer services can take years to develop and require ongoing nurturing. Our experience of the team has been one of valuable dialogue and collaboration. It has never felt ‘remote’, and we see its services for Butts Close as highly successful.

We think its devolution within new unitary authorities could threaten its success, and certainly could likely increase costs. We would prefer a team that remains working across Hertfordshire and delivering against Greenspace Action Plans negotiated with each unitary authority.

The Big Spring Clean Litter Pick

This pan-Hitchin event will be held on Sunday 22 March, and of course includes clearing Butts Close. The stalwart Friends who do this regularly will meet opposite the pond at 10am. I’m sure they will have contacted Bill Sellicks already, but if anyone else would like to join in then do email him at hflitterpick@gmail.com.



Tony Riley
March 2026