

by HertsCMS a year ago

Butt's Close Pond, Hitchin



 STATICFLICKR · A YEAR AGO

Project detail

Butt's Close is a 4.5hectare (11.2 acres) greenspace in the heart of Hitchin. It is made up of closely cut grass and formal tree planting, and until recently it offered limited opportunities to local wildlife and those who would like to experience it. Now CMS are changing all that!



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At the request of site owners, North Herts District Council, CMS produced a Greenspace Action Plan (GAP) to guide the management of the site until 2012. The plan identified one corner of the site as having the potential to offer a small haven for wildlife. The area contained a fairly formal pond that was edged by concrete gabions and heavily shaded by a number of large willow trees. The boundaries were unsightly and had become difficult to manage. The area was hidden from the many people who pass by each day on the busy A505 from Hitchin to Bedford.

A number of key actions were necessary in order to transform this dull and featureless hole in the ground into a vibrant area for wildlife.

Trees

Trees needed to be managed to reduce the amount of shade they cast, cut down on the number of leaves that fell into the pond and allow people to see it.



Two large willows were pollarded; a traditional management technique where branches are cut back severely and allowed to re-grow from the cut ends. This reduces the size and weight of the crown of the tree.

The prominent weeping willow was treated less aggressively. The crown was gently reduced and re-balanced to create a pleasing shape whilst reducing shade cast and improving access to manage the ground beneath.



Above, clockwise from left: Trees shading pond before, First cut of the willow, Trees after the cut, Trees before

Pond

The pond had a number of problems. The banks were steep and edged with concrete gabions and slabs, meaning that few plants could grow. The water suffered from large algal blooms - these are a sign of high nutrient levels entering the water.

Shallow marginal areas were created and planted with colourful native species such as water mint, marsh marigold and ragged robin. Where the banks are at their steepest Coir (coconut fibre) bio rolls planted with rushes, sedges, reeds and flag iris were installed.

A floating reed bed was constructed from an interlinked tubular framework and installed close to the water inlet. This was covered by a thick mat of coir pillows planted with common reed and anchored to the pond base. This hydroponic reed bed will suck unwanted nutrients from the water reducing algal blooms. When established it will be 50% more efficient than a traditionally planted bed.

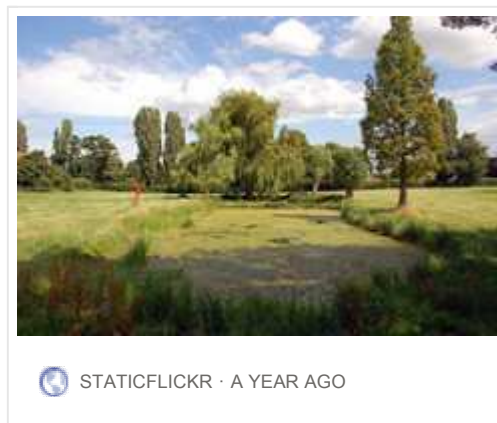


Above, clockwise from left: Pond before, Installing the bioroll, Pond after, Building the reed bed

Works to the pond have now been completed and the CMS went back to create areas of native tree and shrub planting around the site boundaries. These provide colour throughout the year along with cover and food for wild birds.



Pond plants are beginning to settle in and the surrounding meadow recovers from the disturbance.



Pond plants are now beginning to establish themselves.



High summer and all of the bare earth has been reclaimed by surrounding vegetation and the pollarded willow trees are now covered in vigorous new growth. The first seasons growth is now in full bloom, emergent plants such as purple loostrife are flourishing.



As the pond enters its second season all of the pond plants are now fully established and ready for the warmer weather of spring. Happy frogs can be seen enjoying the pond and laying their spawn.



The final part of the project is now in place as the protective fence around the native shrub planting is completed.