

BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS

*The Heart of
Berkhamsted*

September 2017 – Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Hello Everyone

I hope you have all had a lovely summer and are ready for the delights we have arranged for the coming months. Be sure to put **October 4th 8pm** in your diaries for another of our 'Art in Action' events in the Town Hall, Great Hall. The last one was so popular many of the artists and guests begged us to arrange it again. We have! On **November 15th 8pm** at the same venue we will be holding a **Berkhamsted Visioning** evening. Come and join in, share your hopes and dreams for our town. *You* are what will make it a great evening.

On **January 24th 8pm**, this time in the Court House, we will be holding a **Burns Night Dinner**. (The night before the official Burns Night, so that it will not interfere with your personal arrangements.) For this event, you will need to secure your place at the table by December 20th with our secretary Miranda Cummins. The catering will be superb and cost £26 a head. If we do not have sufficient bookings by that date we will cancel, so book quickly! (See back page for her contact details.)

Now for the more serious side of our activities; as you will see from Susan Johnson's report our Townscape Group has been busy. I had a meeting with James Doe from Dacorum Borough Council. As a result of this meeting, you all need to know that there is a Green Belt Review going on. The Town Council has been briefed on process and issues, and submissions will be considered by DBC Cabinet on 19th September. After which, assuming Cabinet members are in accord, there will be a consultation involving all citizens. We will, of course, be responding on your behalf and would, of course, welcome and value your input.

The infrastructure challenge is a huge issue. DBC have a team working on this, but it has been established from existing staff, as there is no funding for engaging the much needed, extra manpower.

There will be an "Issues and Options" consultation. We will be offered areas of both high density and

Green Belt. However from the land supply information they currently hold, they do not think it is possible to accommodate the required new build with just high-density building. In other words, it would appear inevitable that we will be **robbed** of sections of Green Belt.

Currently the development in West Hemel, which almost abuts Potten End, is 900 units. However there is an application in to increase this to 1100 units. The current planning policy does not preclude this! Although this is not directly Berkhamsted, it will certainly have an impact on our infrastructure and car movements - not forgetting our sense of being 'hemmed in'.

The **South Berkhamsted** development of 800 units, which was turned down by the inspector in 2014, is currently being reviewed. There is still pressure from the developer for the scheme to come forward. DBC made a commitment to do an early review at the time. They are now under pressure to incorporate the space in the local plan. They say no firm decision has been made, but they need a blueprint for the borough. Obviously if the decisions after consultation are deemed unsound the Inspector can send it back. There needs to be vociferous public comment as to how to plan proactively and sensitively with all the variables. There must be a proven gap in capacity, not hearsay. This necessitates professional in-depth research with evidential analysis to check the veracity of a developer's submission.

As you can see there is a great deal to engage us all over the next few months, underlining the importance of you, our members, to involve yourselves. I look forward to seeing you all at our social evenings.

Warmest wishes

Townscape Group

Susan Johnson

TASC became Townscape Committee which became Townscape Group. Well, here I am again - and now Chairman! Much more work than ever before. Gordon Bluck must be congratulated for 25 years in this seat; he has stamina! Many thanks to Gordon; and to Jenny Habib, who has also retired entirely from BCA committees. Gordon remains with us. And we have new members: Philip Sadler and Simon Heywood. And where would we be without the services of CT-P? He produces all the information on which we base our opinions. We are most vociferous at the AGM Environment Award. This year the commentary was written by Sarah Caradec – our great find, who honed her skills at the *Victorian Society*. We did not award a plaque (again, you say!) this year, but gave a Highly Commended certificate to the David Case Pavilion at the Berkhamsted School playing fields – a lovely, vernacular building using the best of materials.

Townscape continues to monitor, particularly, the conservation area and heritage assets everywhere, both details and substantial issues. The recent increase in 'RET' (i.e. retained) applications – which are made for work already done – is worrying. Why do some developers, both large and small, ignore the rules? This puts more strain on Enforcement. We fret about the likes of Dickman's, whose internal fixtures are disappearing; and the sudden change of colour of the Olive Tree restaurant, which turned out to be all right, once we had got used to it. With a conservation area, the devil is in the detail; and the detail is at risk. Internal illumination of advertisements is a particular bugbear.

The Judicial Review of the multi-storey car park decision was dismissed earlier this year, and so DBC is now going out to tender. Love it or hate it, we had better make the best of it. The Town Council, at the behest of the Parking Forum (on which Paul Crosland represents us), is challenging the specifications, particularly the lack of ducting for the forthcoming electric charging points; and the size proposed for the spaces. No point in having spaces which cannot accommodate the ubiquitous 4x4s! And, being in the middle of the conservation area, we try to make it look better than it would otherwise be.

Other topics to be watched:

- Replacement trees for the High Street
- Rebuilding the bridge access to Townsend Gate, now underway
- Social housing started at the corner of High Street/Swing Gate Lane
- Reinstatement by BTC (at the BCA's request) of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group to plan bids to the fund for additions to our facilities

If you are interested in planning (and it's not all negative comments) but don't want to commit to membership of Townscape, please keep an eye on the BTC Planning

Committee agenda, and feed your comments through me or the Town Clerk. Commenting has not been made easier by the new management software on the DBC website, but we are all pressing for the work on it to be completed. Evidently there is to be a handbook issued to help with its use – ironically, weeks after its introduction. The Transport & Environment Committee also deals with interesting topics. It's worth getting involved with your Town Council; as well as with your fellow Citizens!

Graham Greene Birthplace Trust Festival 2017

Susan Johnson

The 19th International Graham Greene Festival takes place this year from Thursday 21 to Sunday 24 September at the Town Hall and Berkhamsted School. I'm sure you all know that GG is Berkhamsted's most famous literary son; and this year we have one of this country's most admired crime writers – Peter James – speaking. Please access the Festival website for more details of this and all other events. <http://grahamgreenebt.org/festival-2017/>

Susan is the BCA representative Trustee on the Trust

Castle Liaison Group

Susan Johnson

The Castle Liaison Group meets annually to discuss the castle's upkeep and events taking place there. The Group has representation from the Town Council (who chair it), the Duchy of Cornwall (its owners), English Heritage (its managers), and various community groups (Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society, who organise manning the Visitor Centre; the Citizens, and the Archaeological Society – it is, after all, a Scheduled Ancient Monument). It will meet next in October and there should be discussion about the possible acquisition of some extra land to complete the whole area covered by the castle site; and possible delegation of some management aspects. Interesting times.

Susan is the BCA representative on the Castle Liaison Group

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby
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There are 24 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a reminder is enclosed with this newsletter. If you have already paid or no longer wish to remain a member, please let me know. This may be your last chance to pay.

We continue to circulate our members, by email, on important issues that may affect you and the town. Nearly 60% now receive these messages together with reminders of our events. Of these approaching 40% choose to receive newsletters electronically. Would you like to be added to this list?

Paul Crosland writes

Works have continued through the school summer holidays to install traffic lights at the junction of Shootersway with Kings Road and Kingshill Way. The primary reason for the lights is to create a safe pedestrian crossing point, especially for children going to and from Ashlyns School.

Berkhamsted Citizens is supporting the Town Council in its efforts to ensure that the trees which were cut down in the High Street in 2014/15 are replaced. These were supposed to have been replaced as part of a re-paving programme in the Town Centre co-ordinated between Dacorum Borough Council and Hertfordshire Highways, but this did not happen.

An announcement from the Heritage Lottery Fund/ Big Lottery Fund on 17th July confirmed that the Rectory Lane Cemetery project, promoted by the Friends of St. Peter's Great Berkhamsted and supported by Dacorum Borough Council, has been successful in securing funding of almost £1 million. The monies will be used to upgrade pathways in the cemetery – behind the Rex cinema on Three Close Lane – to provide new seating, restore some of the graves, repair the archway, entrance gates and gate piers as well as the Sexton's Hut. Full details of the plans can be seen on the Friends of St. Peter's website (www.stpetersberkhamstedfriends.org.uk). Hear more about the project from members of the project team at their monthly stall at the Saturday market. Securing funding is only the beginning. A lot of effort from the local community is required to deliver a project of which the town can be proud. If you would like to be involved, or be kept informed of progress, please email the project convenor, Dr. James Moir (jamesmgmoir@aol.com). The project will shortly unveil a programme for delivery of the works, and there will be a requirement for a Community Liaison Officer - a part-time, paid role.

Berkhamsted Citizens has been working behind the scenes to secure a useful footpath and cycleway through the New Lodge development at the junction of Bank Mill Lane and London Road. A route was included in the approved plans for the development in 2014, which included a replacement for the bridge across the river Bulbourne at opposite Bank Mill, giving better access to the canal from London Road. For one reason or another the bridge was never replaced, which has rendered the footpath route – which was built – rather useless. An ugly green hoarding has been in place at the Bank Mill junction, which detracts from the site which sits in the extended Conservation Area. We have refused to let the matter drop, and works have started in June to secure a through route, for the benefit of local residents and the wider community. At the time of writing, progress appears to have stalled, but we will follow this closely. Hoardings have recently gone up and works have started on site at the junction of the High Street and Swing Gate Lane where nine new council homes are being provided by Dacorum Borough Council.

What's your view on the facilities provided at the new library at the town's cross-roads – is it an improvement? What could be done better? Please feed back responses to chairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk and we will liaise with the library service on your behalf.

New Year's Day Walk: A walk on New Year's Day has been a feature on the Citizens' calendar for many years. Numbers attending vary from year to year, depending on a number of factors. We would like to keep this event going, so please support it if you can. The walk starts at Berkhamsted Station at 10.30 a.m. and finishes about 3.30 p.m. with a pub stop for lunch. Please make own arrangements for lunch.

Paul Crosland

Your thoughts, please

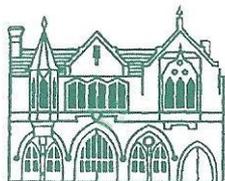
The Committee is considering the merits of increasing Membership subscriptions, which were last increased in 2004, from the current level of £5 p.a. to £10.

This year we have used some of the General Reserve to employ someone to update and modernise our website. In addition you will have noticed that we have been improving the programme of events and these are receiving good reviews from those attending. They are, however, more expensive to run. I anticipate that the General Reserve will have been reduced to around £3,000 by the end of the financial year and, whilst this is a still reasonable amount, if we are to continue to move forward and have funds for future progress, this Reserve will soon run out.

The Committee feels that these improvements are necessary to keep the Association in the public eye and attract perhaps younger citizens' interest in the town and to membership. All organisations need to continue to be open to change in order to survive in a modern world. There is also some consideration that the low Membership value in fact devalues what the Association does and its perceived status in the town. Even at £10 our subscription would still provide good value for money: free entry to all our events, a regular Newsletter and a Committee working on your behalf to keep you abreast of what's going on that will affect your town and promote the reasons for its existence - to develop the social and civic life of the town and district.

The Citizens' constitution allows the Committee to make a decision to increase subscriptions without reference to our Membership and indeed we shall be discussing this at our next meeting. We would however value Members' input to the discussion so, if you have a view on this, please do let one of your Committee members know.

Christine Manning, Treasurer



Berkhamsted Citizens Association

COMMITTEE 2017 / 2018

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Berkhamsted Parking Forum

Paul Crosland

Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

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Lindy Foster Weinreb

Castle Liaison Group

Susan Johnson

Festival of Light

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Friends of St Peter's Great Berkhamsted

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Graham Greene Birthplace Trust

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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