



**Berkhamsted
Citizens
Association**

NEWSLETTER

November 1982

1. Activities till Active

In many of our Newsletters, the Activities programme has been given at the end - for no better reason than habit. Yet, over the past few years, we have consistently provided a varied and fascinating programme. There has never been a talk where one could say "that was a waste of time" and most evenings have justified the efforts of the arrangers and the audience. Sadly, many audiences have been smaller than expected to the extent that your committee has seriously considered dropping the programme. However, it is felt that this would be wrong and we should persevere. If you have views on changing or improving the programme we will be pleased to hear from you. We have heard some comments that not many talks are of local relevance, but we do try to maintain some local colour without being introverted. Our involvement is in local affairs but in the subject of our talks we like to look to wider horizons. In the last two years we have had such varied topics as 'Women in Management, Old Clocks, Climbing in the Himalayas, the Fire Service, Local Gardening, European Parliament and Dacorum District Council.' So, quite a mixed bag! The talks on local Wildlife in Ashridge and Local Trees and Hedgerows certainly were well supported - so we may go the Romany way again before long. The main point is that they should be well attended by members otherwise there is no point. Point taken?

The future programme is:-

Tuesday 23 November 'Round the World in an English Garden' - talk by Mrs P. Cunningham

Friday 17 December Christmas Gathering and Carols

1983

Saturday 1 January New Year Ramble - meet at the station at 10am.

Wednesday 26 January 'Living with Deer' - talk by Mr Walter Buckingham

Tuesday 15 February AGM and Open Forum

Wednesday 16 March 'Fleas, flies and their Demise' - talk by Dr. P. Chadwick of Wellcome Research Laboratories

Monday 4 April Easter Monday Ramble - meet at the station at 10am.

Tuesday 26 April 'Village Life in the 20s' - talk by Mr Sidney Quinn

All meetings are held at the Court House at 3pm unless otherwise stated.

2. Town Hall becoming Active

One of the better pieces of local news is that the Building work by professional builders is starting. We understand that the contract, insurance and all the rest of the boring necessities have been completed. Local builders Donald Lockhart have been awarded the contract (after Tenders had been considered) to build the shops in the undercroft, complete work on the Sessions Hall, the back fire escape and the front Market Hall. It is scheduled to be finished in 26 weeks from 15 November. Full details will be given at the Town Hall Trust AGM on 20 November (8pm - Civic Centre). We hope that this will be well attended - as it deserves to be, both to hear details and to support the Trustees, many of whom are hidden heroes for the sweat and tears that have been spent on this project. When it is finished they deserve to be mentioned in some permanent way within the entrance or Sessions Hall. But not too much satisfaction yet - much work remains to be done.

3. Department of the Environment becoming too Active

The Town Hall is the good news, now hear the bad. We have been advised by the Dacorum Tree Officer that the Department of the Environment has decreed that 22 trees in the Castle grounds are dangerous and must be felled. Discussions are under way as to how many, over what period and on what evidence. We are seeking more details but felt it important to advise members of this possible threat to such a wonderful feature in this well loved, area of the Town. We hope that no precipitate action is taken otherwise many people will be both sad and angry.

4. Civic Centre Extension

Discussions have started with the Arts Trust on outline plans to extend the Civic Centre and provide both an improved stage and bigger audience capacity. The BAODS in particular have difficulty in making events pay due to limited capacity of the Civic Centre. It is to be hoped that the opportunity is taken to do a thorough job on this matter and provide Berkhamsted with something worthwhile. The project should compliment the Town Hall facilities and is certainly not duplicating it. The many and various groups in the Town need these facilities of which we have been starved for far too long. With Central Government indicating that there is some money for Capital Spending, then Dacorum District Council should be able to plan for early action not just in a few years but now. We have said for three years that Berkhamsted has not had a fair share of capital projects within Dacorum. It really is time to do something about it.

5. Town Council and Northchurch

One of the contributing factors to this imbalance has been the reorganisation of local government and the removal of any real power and resources from the Town Council. The Town gets the Council it deserves and if it shows no interest in the Council, the latter cannot be very enthusiastic. The BCA has never felt that the Council does not deserve interest and support. On the contrary! our committee members regularly attend Council and committee meetings (as members of the public) and so remain well informed of activities. We welcome therefore a new Councillor for Northchurch, Mrs June Crawley, even though there has been no election, but by nomination of the Council. This is perfectly valid, for if in mid-term, a Councillor resigns, an election need only (and must be) called if two electors formally call for one. In the absence of such a call the Council may co-opt someone to represent the vacant ward.

It is a pity that Mr Nigel Travis was also not accepted as only one vacancy existed. Members of the Town Council will possibly agree that there is a need for some new people, without losing the experience that exists and without operating on a political ticket. The Town Council may not have much power, but it can have considerable influence - if it plays its cards correctly and in a lively, informed way. The row over the Northchurch ward may be about the virility of each council, or raising rates money, but it would be more beneficial for all citizens if both Northchurch Parish Council and Berkhamsted Town Council got together regularly to set some priorities and action by Dacorum Council for this area. There seems to be a separateness which is not very productive.

6. Developers' Responsibilities

The Town Council deserve congratulating for their reaction to local developers passing responsibility for tree planting on to house holders. If this is allowed no planning permission granted on the premise of landscaping being completed, will be worth the paper it is written on.

7. Loot or Looting?

We have been in discussion with Barclays Bank on their proposal to install a money dispenser in one of their splendid doors facing the High Street. This is an impressive building and aspect from Lower Kings Road and will not be enhanced by a square of silver metal stuck in it. We were hoping that an alternative position would be feasible, but the Town Council and Dacorum Council have granted planning permission for the loot machine in the door.

8. Framework for the Future

Whilst one of the Association's functions is to observe and comment on planning applications in the town we have always supported the idea that these applications should be judged fairly and consistently. We are also concerned to see that planning permissions granted do not adversely affect areas and features of the town. Some of the problems stem from the limits imposed by drawings and promises of features eg. landscaping, which are promised, but fail to be implemented. Hence our support for the Town Council's efforts to get action on this matter at Garden Field Lane and Tunnel Field. The planning committee of the Town Council meets 27 times a year compared with approx. 9 meetings for other committees. So you can judge the relative amount of activity and, cumulatively, each planning application is subtly changing its area of the town. In some cases the change is not subtle. By the nature of its activity, the planning committee (and the Dacorum Development Control Committee) is reactive. It is very rarely pro-active, ie. seeking to take an initiative and positively initiate improvements. There is no measurement of the trends occurring, or the increased population which is slowly happening, or the pressure on resources. The planning committee have only certain planning principles within the Dacorum District and County Plans.

9. Three for the Town and One for the Road

In the above context we have sought to initiate improvements and help the Council to achieve this, by submitting three papers during the last year. These are respectively on

1. Tree planting in the Town
2. Outline proposals for the area between Lower Kings Road and St. John's Well Lane
3. Leisure Services

The recent note in the Gazette reported agreement by the Council to limited tree planting but failed to report that this resulted from the initiative of the Association. No matter, and we are seeking for glory! Members however, should be advised that this is a typical result of action taken by the Association - in many cases without ballyhoo and publicity.

The planning document for the neglected area between the two car parks is another example. We are currently following up the matter with Councillors. The same goes for the subject of Leisure Services, we hope to report in more detail on this in our next newsletter.

10. Read the Review

We aren't in receipt of commission for suggesting that members take the 'Berkhamsted Review' - The monthly Parish Magazine. It is available by subscription or from newsagents. However as the BCA has a regular article in each edition we use this as a means of telling members who are readers of the Review, what is going on. As it is issued 12 times a year, as opposed to 6 to 7 Newsletters, it is a useful method of writing and communicating on Town affairs. On some occasions there may be slight overlap on subjects covered in the Review and the Newsletter and we apologise to members for this. Don't forget, we are trying to reach a wider audience - and encourage people to become members of the Association. The December edition contains the first of a series of historical notes of the Association. As the Association will be 60 years old in 1984 we thought it a good idea to give extracts from a booklet giving the history of the Association during the period 1924-49. It may well be the incentive to write the history of the subsequent 35 years. We propose to give these extracts in the next three or four Newsletters and in the Review. It covers a number of fascinating topics. Who would have thought that the Association would have written reports on Housing in Berkhamsted, Care of Adolescents, Recreation, Roads and Pathways and Adult Education.

Did you know that Hockridge Woods were once in Buckinghamshire? They were once under threat of total lopping and the BCA were substantially responsible for saving it from the axe and saw. Well, we are still in there pitching for the same issues which seem to occur from time to time and we still have to fight for the quality of life in our town and countryside.

More of this next year. Meanwhile your Chairman and Committee wish all members (and readers) a Merry Christmas and a
Happy New Year.

Our next Newsletter will be in January in the form of the Chairman's Report preparatory to the AGM in February.