



**Berkhamsted  
Citizens  
Association**

# NEWSLETTER

November 1983

## 1. Reflections

It is almost too easy these days to be pessimistic and concentrate on the downside, so perhaps we should reflect in this Newsletter, approaching Christmas and the Season of Hope, on the positive aspect of 1983, so far as it affects Berkhamsted. There are of course, several matters which cry out for attention, but there is time enough in the New Year to beat the drum about them, if events appear to justify it. The summer of '83 was superb and most of us were able to get out and about in the surrounding marvellous countryside. It certainly made up for a very wet spring. We heard of several local folk who got into the barbecue routine and one local shop was even providing sample hamburgers and sausages on the High Street pavement unheard of in previous years! Possibly, because of the spring and summer, the Autumn has been equally outstanding. A few days of overnight frost, have created the browns and golds on the trees which, although not equalling a New England 'Fall', have put on a fine show. For those able to pause and marvel, there have been some splendid kaleidoscopes in the surrounding countryside. The Hockeridge Woods along Chesham Road and Frithsden Beeches beyond the Common as usual are the prime examples but many others abound. That is why local folk are, rightly, so jealous and zealous of guarding our joint local inheritance of such a splendid treescape. Its taken many years to produce such an environment, but a few years cumulative mistakes could change it.

## 2. Positive Progress - 1

One mistake which has been avoided is the destruction of the Town Hall. September 1983 saw its opening to the public, although the Main Hall and other rooms have yet to be refurbished. The picture exhibition in the Arcade foyer reminds us what state the building was in and how much has been achieved. It is to be hoped that the Trustees will now manage affairs so as to open the whole of the Town Hall with minimum delay. Those of us who have seen the Main Hall, cannot wait to see it in all its glory once again. Many local people who remember their younger days in the Town Hall are also waiting eagerly for a renewal of acquaintance. You only need to listen to the chatter in the arcade and Sessions Hall to know what a fund of enthusiasm there is. Surely this can be directed and used to help the remaining refurbishment - not only by digging into pockets, but by volunteer work. Surely we have enough volunteers to clean, paint, carpenter etc. and enough skilled supervision to coordinate such work. Professional efforts may be needed as well - but appropriate volunteers offer a short cut round the expenses.

If you know of anyone willing and able, contact the Town Hall office. Without such help, it may be another two years before phase 2 is completed. Do we really have to wait that long?

### 3. Positive Progress - 2

"There's a long long road a-winding" - its called Berkhamsted High Street!

We have reflected in our monthly article in the Berkhamsted Review, on the number of holes per head of population. The worst is now over apparently and we can enjoy a smooth ride along the High Street in parts. The Town Council have been assured that work will be suspended during the 6 weeks prior to Christmas. Local traders will be happier with this as many have been seriously affected by the disruption. Capital and Chiltern Radio have regularly carried announcements of the disruption and need to avoid. And they have, much to traders' consternation;. This was the reason for the recent advertisement to 'Shop in Berkhamsted - the town of character'. It made one positively proud to be associated with the town and acted as a reminder to locals just what an excellent range of shops and facilities we do have, which contributes to the quality of life in the town. Hence the anxiety of people in Berkhamsted as well as Tring and Hemel Hempstead to the encroachment of Estate Agents and Building Societies into prime shopping areas.

All three towns have had protests about this kind of trend and local Councillors are aware of these anxieties. Hopefully, they will reflect this in the way they vote on such planning applications. The forces against them are formidable as demonstrated at the recent public inquiry regarding application of the Halifax Building Society to open a branch in the 'Kitchen 46' premises next to the Town Hall. Their case is presented by a Q.C. experienced in such matters UK-wide. Similar skills and pressures are applied to land development applications and the Green Belt is constantly under threat. The recent announcement by the Government on Green Belt policy can only increase the threat to the countryside surrounding such towns as Berkhamsted and Northchurch. See the saga at Potten End where land is to be developed effectively closing the 'gap' between there and Hemel Hempstead. By such increments does ribbon development occur. But we digress!

The Association wrote to the Inspector holding the 'Halifax' public inquiry indicating general concern on the effect on the prime shopping area and suggesting alternative sites in the Town centre. Non-retail sites have been proposed within the development of the Youth Club site in Park View Road; and we suggested that the disused site on the left hand side of the Civic Centre would be an admirable place for the Halifax as well as removing a long established eyesore in the Town. The objection to building societies and estate agents as expressed by many people is that by occupying the centre sites they distort and remove the variety of shops available to people, within easy access of car parks, supermarkets and other shops. All towns have a localised area where people mainly frequent and the fringes of these areas are less popular. How many people in Berkhamsted regularly use all the shops between the Post Office and the Parish Church? There is an easily discernible drop in pedestrians as one moves away towards each fringe. So a variety in the Town Centre is perceived as being important. As the Banks are on the south side, perhaps it would be appropriate for the building societies to be on that side, leaving the more popular sunny side for a wide variety of shops, rather than building societies and estate agents which could be grouped into their own 'professional' locale, perhaps with Solicitors.

Some towns have achieved this by accident or design and there are pros and cons for such a situation. There are nevertheless, many anxieties expressed about the trends in town centre development such as Waitrose expanding into the Woolworth site. That is another example of choice being limited as Woolworth move out. If Tesco close down that would be another step down the road, to where? Progress?

#### 4. Positive Progress – 3

The Civic Centre should be available in expanded format in January. A quick look behind the scenes shows building work well developed. The back of the building has been expanded to provide a large stage area plus orchestra pit. The wooden panelling has been refurbished and the main hall should be a great improvement for musical / theatrical performances, as well as public meetings of various kinds. £160,000 has been budgeted by Dacorum for this development and it is a welcome one. The actual boundary of the rear wall has been moved only by 12 feet, so the auditorium area is hardly increased, all the expansion being to provide stage area. It remains to be seen whether this is adequate or not, but it seems strange why the opportunity was not taken to increase the auditorium and make it flexible for varying sizes by use of sliding partitions. Consultation took place with the Dramatic Society and others so the size of the place should be based on good judgement!

#### 5. Positive Progress – 4

The proposals for the development of the area between Lower Kings Road and St. Johns Well Lane (behind the Post Office) are now being discussed at the Policy Committee of Dacorum District Council. There may be consultation with other local bodies in the near future. As originators three years ago of ideas for the useful development of this area, leading to the presentation, by us of a formal paper sent to the Town and District Councils, plus a conducted tour, of the area by councillors - we are particularly concerned to see some progress. The area is partially owned by the Council and partially privately owned. Many of the latter 'plots' are not developed or used and collectively the area could be an imaginative and useful extension to the Town Centre. Plans envisage expansion of car parks, some commercial buildings and community facilities.

We have already commented on the original draft plans of the District Council suggesting some reduction in the suggested size of commercial share of the site. There was also not enough increase in car park space in the original plans. The next Newsletter will hopefully contain some indication of the Council's 'finished' plan.

#### 6. Urban Edge Study

The Dacorum District Council Planning office have started a study of the various factors which enhance or destroy features of the edge of urban development. In Berkhamsted - being a linear valley town these factors can be important in decisions and planning applications, particularly when the bypass is built. The Association has been asked to consider the matter and a paper is being developed as observations on features of the town which need careful consideration in planning future development. The next Newsletter will contain more details.

7. BCA Environment Award

This award is given for the best development large or small which has significantly contributed to the quality of buildings in the Berkhamsted and Northchurch area during the past year. The presentation will be made at the AGM in March. Nominations should be put in writing to our Secretary before 1 January.

8. Christmas is Coming

The Association's 'Christmas Gathering and Carols' will be on 9 December in the Court House at 8pm. This is always a warm and friendly occasion. Tickets are attached to this Newsletter. Pay at the door. Don't miss!

9. .... New Year also!

Why not step out on New Year's Day. Our Ramble to the Bridgewater Arms starts at Berkhamsted Station at 10.30am.

10. Membership

We recently arranged two Saturday morning, displays of the Map of the Dacorum District Plan. One was outside the library and one at the Town Hall. Considerable interest was shown and indicates how little is known (or perhaps available?) but how keen people are to know about such matters. We will be repeating these 'presentations' in January and February. The event is of course a means of advertising the existence and role of the Association and we recruited some thirty members. As next year is the 60th Anniversary of the BCA we are naturally anxious to increase membership from its current 800 to 1500. If all members persuade one friend or neighbour (we hope there isn't a distinction!) then this target will be readily achievable. It is more important than ever before that townsfolk have a voice and a lively Association.

But ..... a few current members appear from our records not to have paid their subscription for 1983. We know its not easy to get to the bank but your Newsletter Distributor will collect subs or if you will ring our Secretary to tell when its convenient we will call at your home for it.

If there is a cross in the box below you are recorded as not having paid. If our record is incorrect please let us know.



Chairman - Guy Moores - 44 Gaveston Drive, Berkhamsted tel. 6783  
Secretary - Sheila Walton - 11 Murray Road, Berkhamsted tel. 5988

We hope to issue another newsletter in early January with the Chairman's Report out by mid-February, preparatory to the AGM in March. Meanwhile the Chairman and Committee wish you a Happy Christmas and New Year.