



**Berkhamsted
Citizens
Association**

NEWSLETTER

March 1992

EDITOR'S MUSINGS

"Here we go, here we go, here we go" as they chant on the football terraces. Rockets are fired, balloons go up and the long-awaited by-pass is at last underway

Not that it is necessarily beloved by everyone. My postbag tells me that Association members living near the line of the road are understandably apprehensive. There is probably not much that can be done at this late stage but we should remember that one person's boon is sometimes another person's bane and if the Association can do anything to assist them it should.

In the same post bag another correspondent complained that both the December Newsletter, and the Gazette did not give sufficient prominence to the antipathy expressed against the Kingsgate Centre at the October public meeting to discuss Berkhamsted after the by-pass. My correspondent submitted her letter for publication. Unfortunately, it cannot be published in full as space is strictly limited but I am happy to record her view that the meeting expressed strong opposition. Certainly from the murmurs of approval (which, incidentally are referred to) which greeted several points and the applause which followed the statement by one speaker that he had yet to find one person in favour of Kingsgate, I too would have supposed it was unloved. Both my correspondent's and my own feelings are, however, subjective, and no objective method of assessment, for example a vote, was taken. I certainly have met people who thought Kingsgate was a good idea. I am, however, quite happy to make my correspondent's views known.

I must confess though that no such lofty thoughts as objectivity of assessment were in my mind when I wrote the Newsletter. There was a great deal of information from the meeting to cram into a couple of sheets of paper and I concentrated on the issues raised by the speakers. Kingsgate and Stag Lane, although obviously relevant, appeared somewhat peripheral to the main issue. We will do better next time. I cannot, of course, speak for our august rival, the Gazette.

Although not actually dependent on the by-pass, the nature of the shopping centre in Berkhamsted will be a major issue in determining the shape of Berkhamsted after the by-pass. So it is well worthy of a little debate at this point.

What do we want? What should a shopping centre do for a town like Berkhamsted? And whatever we want, what is practical?

First of all, let me declare a vested interest. I am not a shopper. I may occasionally be mistaken for one, but I am primarily a beast of burden. I am, however, married to one, a dedicated enthusiast.

You may be sure that I am fully briefed on the subject of shopping and shopping centres.

What can we expect from a shopping centre in a town, the size of Berkhamsted and located where it is, assuming a certain amount of modest expansion, which was at least one view expressed by the experts at the meeting on Berkhamsted after the by-pass? What would we like?

My enthusiastic shopper believes there is scope for, and would like to see, one of the middle range multiples such as British Home Stores or Marks & Spencer to supplement to present range of more individual fashionwear stores. With the proximity of Hemel Hempstead and Watford, I am not so sure that their management would see it that way.

So we hit the first snag. What we might like and what is commercially viable may be two different things.

Now, what of the essential mix of food, chemists, stationers, shoes, hardware and electrical stores, etc.? Is it about right at present? What are the trends that might effect it?

The first which comes to mind is the growth of out-of-town superstores. Do we really want to drive all over the place for our essential shopping. I certainly do not, nor does my enthusiastic shopper at present, although I view with alarm some increase in her complaints of queue lengths at checkouts and the problems of climbing over three tiers of shop assistants frantically packing shelves at the same time as serried ranks of other dedicated shoppers are frantically trying to empty them in our local supermarket.

Am I being nightmarish if I have a feverish vision of the out-of-town superstores doing to the town centre stores what the supermarkets have done for the village shops?

I realise that, as a dedicated non-shopper, I have no right to an opinion on these matters, but here goes anyway,

I think that out-of-town superstores will devastate small town shopping centres. The corollary to this is that since some expansion is necessary, further development of the town centre will have to take place. It would be nice if this could include some facilities we do not have at present but commercial consideration will dictate the viability of this, a derelict empty shop is often worse than none. The centre should be as compact as is practicable. It should comprise a harmonious whole with nothing excessively out of scale and that includes multi-storey car parks.

Just at the moment there is a unique opportunity to make something worthwhile of the centre. The by-pass will relieve the centre of congestion. There are unusually good funds available in the By-Pass Demonstration Project and the matter is actively under consideration. The planners will never have a better opportunity.

What views from the rest of you?

PLANNING AND AMENITIES

Bridgewater Road/Billet Lane A letter was sent to Dacorum Council concerning the danger the danger at this junction. The council concedes that there is a problem but is reluctant to do anything which might encourage the use of Bridgewater Road. Further thought is being given to the problem,

Let there be light The Mayor of Berkhamsted has made a proposal for the refurbishment of the fencing and lamps by the station and canal and has sought the assistance of the Association. The Association supports the idea and wonders if this could come under the town enhancement proposals following the by-pass.

Rex Cinema A planning application has been submitted, keeping the shops and entrance but with office buildings behind. It looks reasonable - which is more than you can say for its present appearance.

Alfords site Proposals have been received for a three storey building. The Association has written expressing reservations.

Town Centre Study An action group has been formed to discuss the By-pass Demonstration Project. The Association's first reaction is that the proposed conservation area is not wide enough.

Old Peoples' Home Dacorum Council has submitted plans to the Department of the Environment (after all, they cannot be judge and jury for their own planning applications) for an old peoples home to be built on Green Belt land. The Association, while welcoming the proposal in principle, believes that the Green Belt is not the right place for it and has said so.

AGM 1992/3

This is to be held on March 26th in the Sessions Hall at 8.00 p, m.

New members are needed for the Committee. We live in a democracy. The Association is a democratic institution. It exists to represent the views of the citizens of Berkhamsted. All such organisations need revitalising from time to time. The AGM is when you can make your views known. Consider taking a more active part.

The health of any organisation is dependent on new blood from time to time so let us see a good transfusion at the meeting, otherwise there might be a lot of clots.

GENERAL ELECTION

You may not have noticed that there is to be a General Election this year, that is if you are short of sight, hard of hearing, and living in a cellar. The Association is, of course, completely non-political, but hopes as in previous elections to host a debate between the main candidates when the time comes. We don't know when, we don't know where, but when the time comes we hope you will be there.

KINGS ROAD FOOTPATH?

The dangers for pedestrians walking to the top of Kings Road have recently been highlighted by Berkhamsted Councillors James Ford-Smith, Stanley Sharpe and Tony Price. Provision for a pavement is only on a reserve county programme and not scheduled for improvement until after completion of the by-pass. The Councillors are therefore launching a public petition on this matter and if more than 100 signatures are obtained, the petition must be debated by the County Council. The petition will be available for signature at the Civic Centre and the Physiotherapy Clinic at Gossoms End from the end of February and on 7th March David Sherratt will be collecting signatures in the town, so please go along and add your name.

GUARDIANS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

The Guardians of the Countryside carry out an annual litter sweep of the Common. Volunteers are allocated a small area of the common and asked to collect rubbish and either take it to the tip or leave it at the edge of the road for collection. This usually takes place in March. If you are able to spare a couple of hours to help the Guardians, please phone Liz Hutchinson on Berkhamsted 64440.

BY-PASS PLANS

For those who could not visit the by-pass exhibition at the Civic Centre, the plans can be seen at the motorway site office at Tring, but you would be advised to ring the Motorway Residential Engineer first, on 0442 890288.