



**Berkhamsted
Citizens
Association**

NEWSLETTER

May 1993

Editor's Musings

The year moves on and with it events. The last Newsletter presaged the AGM which was duly held and well attended. The discussion was sharp and vigorous and the Chairman coped with it manfully. All as it should be in an organisation which is alive and vital. We now have a reconstituted committee with three new members. Keith Gay, Paul Gilbert and Graham Spittle have now joined us old lags as defenders of the faithful. As is our usual practice, a list of the new committee is attached so that you know who to contact. Similarly, council elections having been held, a comparable list of councillors is included. After all, we are more or less on the same side - I think.

There was also quite a surge in membership as a result of attendees at the AGM joining the Association. That, together with a bit of vigorous recruiting in the Murray Road area, has resulted in twenty additions to our happy band, all very gratifying and indicative of a healthy civic awareness in the town.

The Berkhamsted By-Pass Demonstration Project meeting and exhibition was held in the Civic Centre between 13th and 15th May to review problems and strategy although not, at this stage, to propose solutions. Unfortunately I missed this as I was sunning myself on the South Coast (editorial licence for standing in a howling gale on the top of Beachy Head) but I am informed that it attracted a tremendous amount of interest and that the number of comment forms filled in was exceptionally high.

It is not surprising, as the by-pass approaches completion, that the proposals for redevelopment within the town are approaching a critical stage. Some of you will have seen the Berkhamsted Town Centre Plan draft for public consultation. This runs to some 54 pages and outlines how the traffic flows within the town should be controlled and then, within the centre, how a unifying theme may be developed. It gives the basis on which its philosophy is based - that a prosperous economic base of shops and services should be allowed to continue as at present, augmented as necessary by necessary expansion but maintaining the interdependence of the various activities in order to maintain the "small town feel". All to be in keeping with a high quality urban built environment in terms of historic, architectural and natural environmental factors.

Put simply, the document presumes that what is required is to maintain the centre of the High Street more or less as at present and in order to do this they expect any expansion of grocery shopping to be in the Kingsgate area.

Chairman : Nicholas Nisbet, 51 South Park Gardens. 871806
Newsletter Ed. : Eric Hoey, Fleetwings, London Road, Bourne End 866270
Membership Sec.: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road 865882

This is a presumption which has been vociferously challenged in recent months and if this truly represents a majority view then the central basis for the plan would be regarded as suspect by that majority. What then! If the planners have got it wrong and if a majority of people prefer, as appears from the various letters, to drive out of the centre for their groceries and then back again for whatever other shopping they do, then presumably this will affect traffic flows and the other aspect of the draft study for public consultation, that relating to roads, may also need attention.

No doubt people who attended the recent exhibition have expressed their views on the appropriate forms so that the planners can take them into account. All is very much in the melting pot.

In addition to the above, the Association representative on the Action Group has received outline ideas of what might be done to enhance the approaches to and the general environment of the town. Mind you, these are only ideas and are on the presumption of a centralised High Street. They are quite interesting and are, apparently, based on methods used for town enhancement and "traffic calming" very successfully on the continent. The basic themes are:-

- (1) Mark the town centre.
- (2) Create more space for people.
- (3) Gateways to mark the calmed area.
- (4) Use wood.
- (5) Create a green approach from the east.

Such buzz phrases did not mean much to me when I first read them but when I read the details and looked at the outline sketches I quite warmed to the idea.

It is a fairly long document so I shall have to paraphrase. Neither can I reproduce the sketches so I am afraid it will be somewhat incomplete but basically, the architect looked at the High Street, noted it was a lengthy straggle and had become, more than anything else, dominated by the traffic. He looked for ways of changing that. Taking into account the advantages of the by-pass, he proposes various landscaping devices to signal subconsciously to drivers that they are approaching a pedestrian domain. This is done by varying the width of the road and the nature of its service, by widening footpaths in places, planting trees. He proposes to mark the centre by highlighting existing features and, in particular, by building a replica of the gable of the old Market House on its original site outside Tesco. At this point the architect suggests levelling the road and pavement on the north side of the High Street and marking the carriageway by wooden bollards. It looked good and I could imagine it would work.

The use of wood is the architect's way of introducing the unifying theme based on Berkhamsted's historic past. Widening the pavement in key areas and putting seats (wooden, of course) emphasises the pedestrian domination. An intriguing proposal is to reconstruct a wooden archway on the eastern approach to the calmed zone (again intended to tell the driver that he is no longer dominant) and there are several other features. An archway apparently was erected for Queen Victoria's coronation. I must confess this was one feature I did not go for. It was supposed to be a couple of hounds chasing a fox. It looked to me like two pigs chasing a dinosaur - but I guess that was the sketch.

The green approach is fairly self-evident. It involves planting trees and some grass banks together with one or two tricks for hiding or containing parked cars. Mind you, he gave up when he got to Gossoms End. Either he ran out of ideas or he thought it was beyond redemption.

On the whole, I liked the ideas. If you are one of nature's cynics, as I am, you may say "So what, but will it work?". Apparently it does and when I was told that Tring centre had been modified using similar themes, I had to admit that I do get the feeling that it has a pleasant centre and that the pedestrian is boss. I used to regard Tring as a boring dump with few attractive features but not now.

There is one other draft the Association has received, nothing to do with town planning this time. This is the Draft Community and Leisure Strategy and this runs to 85 pages, so this time I shall have to précis my précis. Sometimes there is little to report in a newsletter but this time the reports have come in by the acre. Mind you, the time it takes to read them is nothing to the time it takes me to fold the maps. I can't fold maps. The bends never go in the right place. I hope the people who have lent me these documents will not be cross if they get their maps back looking like one of those toilet rolls the dogs have had a go at on television. Luckily, there are no maps in the Leisure and community strategy draft.

Basically Dacorum Council has invited comments on the strategy to be adopted over the next three to five years. It has largely been brought about by various changes caused by central government legislation and demographic changes in the area. These include the need for compulsory competitive tendering, devolution of budgetary control to schools which affects dual use of facilities, control of capital expenditure, the introduction of the Community Care Act (e.g. greater use of day care and services such as meals on wheels) and, surprisingly, the Charities Act, which by placing legal responsibilities on to committee members has made it more difficult to recruit volunteers.

Briefly services which are market led, (e.g. sports and leisure activities, arts and entertainments) will be managed and planned by what is called "enabling" which means that if a need is identified then the council may no longer provide it directly but must work with others, eg. the private sector to enable the project to go ahead. As a matter of policy it is proposed that no more additional services are taken on without commensurate increase in resources but of course this might include the development of different services. The general strategy is:-

- (1) No addition of major new facilities.
- (2) Provision for capital maintenance and refurbishment programme.
- (3) To improve performance and monitor it and to assist grant aided organisations to do the same.
- (4) To support the voluntary sector to give stability.
- (5) Overall to improve financial efficiency.

A lot of the document is what the Americans call "Mom's apple pie" - objectives with which no-one will disagree. It is what will happen in an imperfect world that really matters. For example, some rationalisation process might involve a relocation which would have a disproportionate disadvantage not immediately obvious. The BCA Committee is giving it some detailed study and will co-ordinate a response.

Although all of what is involved will affect Berkhamsted as part of Dacorum, there is only one item particular to Berkhamsted where significant changes are likely. That is the Civic Centre. Some refurbishment is proposed and it is to be run in the long term by some unspecified voluntary organisation. Some of the activities carried on behind the centre (eg. the depot) are to be relocated and the probability is that it will be used as a museum store and a workshop for the Heritage Trust.

As far as I can see, it is not the sort of change which would drive the citizenry of Berkhamsted to the barricades (wooden, of course) but all is being looked at by the BCA Committee.

By-Pass Fun Day

The date has now been arranged for 4th July. It looks like being a thoroughly lively day. Anything the Round Table organises is usually pretty good, so make a note of the date.

Planning

- (1) An application for a white fence around the BMG compound at Swing Gate Lane to be used for advertising has been opposed because it is felt that the gateway to Berkhamsted should not be spoiled.
- (2) Plans have been submitted for 40 flats on the Shaw & Kilburn site near the station. There are three blocks on the railway side and one opposite on the canal side. There were objections to the design of the flats which was felt to be unsympathetic to surrounding buildings. Particular exception was taken to the block on the canal side because of its effect on the view across the Moor and also the extra traffic from that side would be a hazard.

Future events

Friday 18th June. Summer Wine at Amersfort. Invitation attached.

An outline programme has been drawn up. It is likely to be as follows, but has yet to be finalised. The final programme will be issued with the September newsletter.

7th(?) October	National Trust speaker on deer of Ashridge.
24th October	Autumn Ramble, meeting at Cross Oak Road and using one of the new bypass crossing.
3rd November	Mrs. June Perkins, Three Valleys Water Services.
17th December	Christmas Carols in the Town Hall.
1st January 1994	New Year's Ramble to Aldbury.
? February	"I am a journalist".
24th March	AGM and Environment Award (plus speaker).
4th April	Easter Ramble.
2nd May	Town Walk with guest leader.
17th June	Summer Wine.