



**Berkhamsted
Citizens
Association**

NEWSLETTER

May 1994

NWESLETTER

Editor's Musings

Here we are again with June about to bust out all over and another newsletter due. The AGM has come and gone. It was well attended and vociferous, and none the worse for that. A new committee is now in place with a new chairman, Keith Gay. Keith would like to introduce himself to the members and has penned a few words which are included below. I shall therefore muse a little less on this occasion.

In my last newsletter I mentioned, in my report on our annual discussion with Dacorum Council, an item on the "Dacorum Residual Character Study" which caused my poor brain some confusion since it did not seem to make much sense. Apparently it caused Mr. Barnard, the Director of Planning no less, some confusion too, which was a little odd because it was from his presentation that I took it. He has however kindly written to me to say it was "Dacorum Residential Character Study". Thank you, Mr. Barnard, I am now a lot less confused. Whether it was my hearing which was inadequate or my writing which was illegible I do not know, probably both. But it is simply the analysis of the characteristics of the various areas of housing. When he analyses the characteristics of my house, he will probably write "Nut House".

A lot of visitors attended the exhibition on the Town Centre Proposals between 9th - 13th May. The Association has been looking at them and so far has not arrived at a corporate view, not surprising since there was not one. It deserves a fair amount of thought. We would be interested in views on the proposals to help us in our response so we would like to know what you think is a good idea and what is a load of cobblers.

Most of you will be aware that this year the Environment Award went to the Department of Transport for the bypass. The plaque will be mounted on the south side of the Dennys Lane bridge. A commendation was given to Mange Tout in the High Street.

The Association has been reviewing various aspects of its organisation and presentations. Amongst other things whether it adequately caters for a wide enough age range in its various activities, whether its presentation of activities is satisfactory and on the other side of the same coin, whether there is adequate feedback from members. A very helpful letter has been received from a member suggesting that there might be scope for a more welcoming attitude to new members.

I had hoped to air a few views on these topics with a view to stimulating some dialogue and discussion on these and related issues in this newsletter, together with a review of the role of the Association in general. I think this will have to wait for the next issue but I may as well make a virtue out of a necessity and suggest that if anyone feels like putting pen to paper with any comments on what is wrong and what is right with the organisation then please let us know. In particular any suggestions for improvement will be gratefully received.

It would be great if we received 1027 letters from our 1028 members, each with an individual point of view. If you wonder why not 1028, that is because my wife will give hers to me anyway.

The Summer Wine party this year is interestingly different. It is at the National Film Archive on 17th June. There will be a brief (15 minute) video on their work and a range of interesting things to see. The usual wine and goodies will be available and there is one big bonus, cover is available if it is as wet as it was last year. So throw away your wellies and roll up for a great night.

Finally, don't forget those letters please. What can we do to make things better? No point is too small. Even if you think there should be changes and even if you positively like something, please let us know. It really will help us.

Chairman's Message

This is the first newsletter to be issued since I was elected Chairman at the March AGM. I do not intend to make a habit of taking up valuable newsletter space, but I have asked the editor to let me have the floor occasionally in the months to come.

I wanted first of all to say how honoured I was to have been asked to take on the task of chairing the Association for a while. The BCA celebrates 70 years of activity next year and it is rather daunting to contemplate carrying on the work that has been put in over those years by all who have helped the Association to flourish. But rather than look back at the past I really wanted to take this opportunity to share with you some of my thoughts about the future. There is no doubt that the town is facing a challenging few months with much talk of change in the air. In particular we have to try to represent your views on local government reorganisation and the Kingsgate scheme. I would like briefly to review these topics.

Local Government Reorganisation

We were asked to submit our views about unitary authorities to our Local Government Commissioner, Mr Robert Scruton, by the end of May and this we have done in a detailed letter just despatched. Your committee examined the proposals from two aspects: Would a change to a unitary authority be likely to improve local government services in Berkhamsted and district?, and would such a change improve efficiency and hence lower costs to the tax payer? Long hours were spent debating these two points but in the end we tended to agree that the answer to both is "No". We have told the Commissioner that this is our opinion. We admit that in the absence of specific figures we could not categorically say that there could be no cost savings, but we would need to see detailed budgets if we were to be convinced. In the meantime, common sense and previous experience indicates that this could be an expensive exercise.

The Kingsgate Scheme

What is the Kingsgate scheme? The proposals seem to change from month to month and to date there have been no properly detailed plans to consider. Your committee is not against the idea of such a scheme in principle. Sooner or later one or both of the existing large grocery stores in the town will have to be modernised; they are wasting assets. It seems to us self-evident that as they decline relative to the competition even more trade will leach away to other sites within a ten mile radius which are offering a better service. The view of the BCA committee is that a development on the Kingsgate site will be acceptable if all the following conditions are met:

- The new store should not be very much bigger in terms of its selling space than the existing Waitrose store.
- There should be adequate parking space around it and those spaces should not be controlled by the store but should be available to all High Street shoppers.
- There should be good access for pedestrians between the new site and the High Street, if necessary by creating new access points near to the High Street/Kings Road crossing.
- The development must include a sensitive and imaginative treatment of the canal and car parking areas so that this part of the town is made to look more attractive than is currently the case.

Town Amenities

1. An application for development at the corner of Swing Gate Lane and the High Street has been refused. This included a new canopy, boundary wall and relaxation of existing conditions on used car sales.

2. Kingsgate. All that is currently known is that the Waitrose proposals are for a smaller store than Sainsburys. Detailed plans are awaited.

3. Proposals for housing development at Beechcroft, Chesham Road, have been increased to ten houses. Objections have been lodged on the grounds of over-development and increased traffic problems.

4. Planning permission has been granted for a household waste site at Northbridge Road. The Association made detailed comments and 28 conditions of use are imposed on the users of the site.

5. Amended applications for the Lex site. Although accepting development, detailed comments have been made on brickwork colours and some aspects of design to make them more in keeping with adjacent buildings.

6. Mercury Communications tower, Shootersway. Objections have been made.

Future Events

Friday 17th June Summer Wine at the National Film Archive.

European Elections Attempts are being made to arrange a forum for candidates. Problems are being encountered, some agents are showing no interest in the proposals, some are refusing to appear if certain parties are also present. Since the Association is strictly non-political this is presenting problems. It looks as though we will be unable to arrange a suitable meeting. If we can, however, it will be separately advertised.

General

The Way Inn Christian Centre Trust has launched a public appeal to finance the Swan Youth Project. They would welcome donations to:

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