

THE CITIZEN



The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

June 1996

PROFILE

Congratulations to David Brunt on being the newly elected Vice Chairman of the Association.



David has lived in Berkhamsted since 1979 and is a chartered structural engineer. He works in London for an international design consultancy which is renowned world-wide especially for its innovative building designs. He has worked on a wide variety of projects in the UK and overseas, involving old and new buildings.

Those who have attended our AGMs in recent years will have particularly noted David's expert analysis of the entries for the BCA's Environmental awards, and for his excellent slides of the contenders.

It is not surprising that with this background he is specially concerned with the buildings of Berkhamsted; but his interests extend to the history of the town, and he emphasises that he would like to see it continue to be a lively community enhanced by improved facilities.



Berkhamsted's new domestic waste facility - Fully functional

Our Railway

Looking back, will the first half of the 1990's be seen as the golden age of rail travel for us in Berkhamsted? We never had it so good: new trains - four an hour to Euston - the best of them taking less than half an hour; a service throughout the night; a freshly renovated station and a big, well-made and secure (?) car park. In terms of its rail service I doubt if there was a better off town of comparable size anywhere in the world. And if things weren't quite right there was the man in charge of the whole of Network SouthEast on the platform in the morning to complain to.

Now, alas, things aren't quite what they were. We are down to three trains an hour in the evenings, they are a bit slower, the all-night service has been withdrawn; and is the station beginning to look a little neglected?



*Berkhamsted Station
Are you buying a bit?*

Railtrack, which now owns the track and the station, which has just been sold off, and soon we can expect our trains to be operated by a private franchisee. Berkhamsted commuters who are thinking of buying Railtrack shares may not have considered all the consequences. Once they become shareholders the boot will be on the other foot, and they may find themselves cornered on Platform 4 when things are out of kilter, and having to defend the system of which they have chosen to become part owners.

The Roof-line & Ashlyns Estate

The last issue of the Citizen talked about the roof-line of the town, and this prompted Mrs Thie of Chesham Road to write and draw my attention to the strange collection of large metal objects that have appeared on the roof of a block of flats in Hill Top Road. She describes these as a desperately ugly alteration to the roof of the building, and I agree with her.

The Borough Council Housing and Health Department which owns the building tell me that these are Mercury mobile telephone antennas and ancillary equipment, and they are meant to be a permanent fixture. It is proposed to build a wall to screen them partially, and as we go to press work on this wall has begun.



There was no objection from the Town Council or the Development Control Committee when planning application was made, I suspect because no one really appreciated the size and impact of what was proposed.

This is a great pity. The Ashlyns Estate, though it is nothing

but housing, to my mind is the best bit of town planning in Berkhamsted, if not in the whole of Dacorum, and it should not be allowed to be spoiled. It is now 25 years old and still looks modern and in good shape. And it is also pretty well maintained, thanks to the Borough Housing Department.

The Estate covers 11 acres of hillside as steep as 1 in 6 in places and has 337 housing units in it. In the late 60's the designers set out attempting to follow a number of principles, including segregating pedestrians from motorists, retaining existing footpaths and staggering dwellings to increase privacy; and these they managed, by and large, to achieve pretty well.

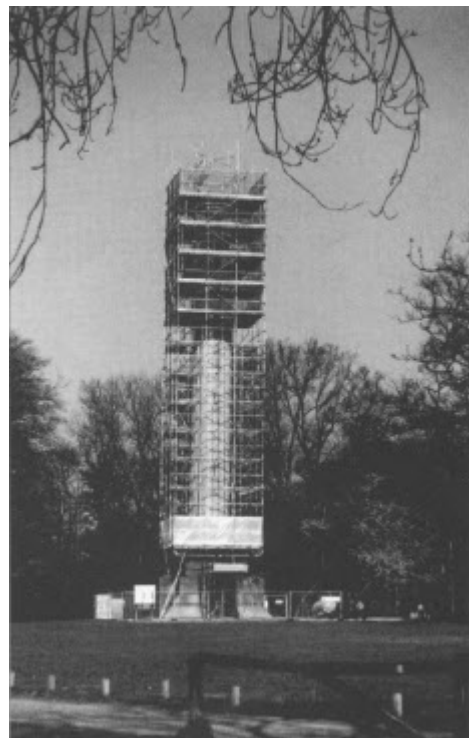


Ashlyns Estate - Pedestrian segregation.

EVENTS

Inserted in this Edition you should find an invitation to the Association's Summer Party, and it is hoped that as many members as possible will be able to attend on 29th June, starting at 8.00pm.

The National Trust's visitor centre is near the Bridgewater Monument and will provide an attractive venue, whatever the weather. Arrangements have been made for the shop at the centre to be open for about half an hour during the evening, and members will be able to see what is currently on show in the exhibition room.



The Bridgewater Monument; easy to find in its mantle of scaffolding.

Look out in the next edition of the Citizen for details of the new season's programme starting in October; but walkers should reserve 6th October, and the first evening meeting will be on 17th October.

TOWN AMENITIES SUB-COMMITTEE

Gordon Bluck reports:

Life would be very boring if there wasn't a crop of planning applications for our committee to look at, but I have to say it has been somewhat quiet except for a few flurries of activity. This was typified by the 'saga of the yellow bricks'. I was phoned by a Town Councillor as apparently the bricks for the new Waitrose were 'vivid yellow'.

The Dacorum Development Control Committee was meeting the next day, hence the urgency. A fax to the Planning Department expressing concern and our urgent objection elicited a phone call from the Planning Department explaining that the bricks were the same as used in the Bridgewater Court Development (1995/6 winner of BCA's Environment Award). This brick should weather like the railway station and is certainly not glazed.

It now transpires that the main problem is that the yellow brick are of fairly uniform colour with some blue splodges in them. Bridgewater Court's bricks have more variation between bricks.

Although we must be vigilant we must get our facts right and avoid 'bees in bonnets', and that applies to me too.

Other matters discussed in the last few months include the following:-

- 1) Another objection to a front land development in Kingsdale Road.
- 2) Concern regarding the traffic implications of the proposed development at Headlands, Gravel Path.
- 3) Paul Gilbert continues to represent the Association on the Canal and Riverside Partnership, the Town Council initiative supported from the beginning by the BCA. (See his report below).



*Canal & Bulbourne side by side at Broadwater
- being improved by CARP*

- 4) As a committee we would wish to support the initiative by the shops on the High Street backing onto the Waitrose Store site in opening their 'back doors' and improving the environment.



High Street Shops, opening their back doors to Kingsgate

- 5) We have written regarding the application for permission for two signs in the conservation area, i.e. Mackays and McIlroys we have requested the lettering is the same size. Result awaited.

- 6) A letter sent to the Conservation Officer at Dacorum Planning Department expressing some concern regarding the sometimes excessive 'chalkboard' signage in the High Street, especially outside listed buildings.

- 7) Objection sent regarding the proposed illuminated 'totem pole' sign outside Johnsons Laundry as an unwelcome addition to the street scene. Permission refused

- 8) We have studied the consultation document 'Herts County Council's Structure Plan for 1991- 2011' - the development strategy and dwelling distribution. We have sent a submission emphasising that we resist all attempts to downgrade and allow incursions into Green Belt land. Also any attempt to link together the settlements of Hemel Hempstead/ Potten End/ Berkhamsted/ Tring must be strongly resisted.



Berkhamsted Castle - Green belt

Seeing Yellow and Red

As **Gordon Bluck** reports, the furore over the bricks for the new Waitrose building has not died down. 'A horrible bright, alien yellow which will not mellow and harmonise with the rest of the town' is a view that seems to have taken root. The defenders of the choice say that yellow bricks with red-brick banding and trimmings are at least as traditional as any other in Berkhamsted's street scene, and an inspection of the sample bricks and a walk through the town will confirm that this is true.

One trouble is that our Victorian buildings have suffered from a century of smoke pollution, so that now their original colour scheme is obscured. What we want is for a public spirited Berkhamsted citizen to win the lottery and spend just a little of the winnings on cleaning some of these old buildings in the town, for example, buildings in Lower Kings Road which could benefit would be Castle Mill and No 40, which is just by the entrance to the car park. These are both built of yellow brick with red brick trimmings.



No 40 Lower Kings Road. Yellow & red bricks.

What actually is CARP?

This is an appropriately fishy acronym for the Canal and Riverside Partnership for Berkhamsted. It is run by a committee of representatives of the Town Council, the Berkhamsted Citizens Association, Dacorum Borough Council through its Community & Leisure, Planning, Environment and Heritage interests, and the local business community and the Berkhamsted & District Chamber of Commerce. Canal interests are covered through British Waterways and the Inland Waterways Association. The National River Authority who are responsible the River Bulbourne and its environs are also involved.

The committee is also served by representatives from Groundwork Herts who have a specific interest in the expansion of community use of the rural environment within the urban area, and the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust.

BCA's man on the committee is Paul Gilbert, who reports: We are making excellent progress with plans to improve the canal area and the first phase has been completed.

At our last meeting representatives from Waitrose were present to describe the contribution John Lewis will be making for Kingsgate landscaping.

For the greater long-term improvements lottery funding is a strong possibility, and a small sub-committee has been formed to select a designer for the whole project based on the committee's Design Brief.



CARP progress - old narrow gauge railway exposed

Lamps and Swans



CARP does not extend to cover the canal and river between Lower Kings Road and Castle Street, but this stretch has recently had its own enhancement: firstly by new lamps on the canal railings to replace the original ones which were removed very many years ago, and now by its own brood of six signets

One of the restored Lamps, opposite the railway.

Their nest was in a very public place close to the road between Castle Street and the station.



AT THE AGM IN MARCH THE FOLLOWING WERE ELECTED TO THE COMMITTEE FOR 1996/97:

GRAHAM SPITTLE (CHAIRMAN), DAVID BRUNT (VICE CHAIRMAN), PETER BRAYBROOKE (TREASURER), MIRANDA CUMMINGS (SECRETARY), CHRISTOPHER TALBOT-PONSONBY (MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY), GORDON BLUCK, GILES CLARK, JOHN COOK, KEN DAVIES, GILL FEIL, COLIN GARRETT, PAUL GILBERT, SUSAN JOHNSON, JENNY JONES, RITA JONES, MARGARET PHILLIPS AND NORMAN WILLIAMS.

Chairman: Graham Spittle, 25 Harford Drive, Watford, WD1 3DQ

01923 224744

Membership Secretary: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road, HP4 3EA 01442 865882

Citizen Editor: John Cook, 21 Castle Street, HP4 2DW

01442 866278

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