

# THE CITIZEN

The Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



June 1998

## Profile: Susan Johnson



Susan, our new Vice-Chairman, joined the BCA as soon as she moved to Berkhamsted in 1981 and has served altogether six years on the Committee and eight on the Town Amenities Sub-Committee.

Born in Barnet, she grew up in the London suburbs and was educated in Essex and at Birmingham University. She spent eight years as an administrative officer at the GLC/ ILEA before leaving in 1980 to start a family and then moving to Berkhamsted with husband and daughter; a second daughter followed.

Already a part-time national organiser for the National Childbirth Trust, Susan became Secretary and then Chairman of the West Herts Branch in the mid-eighties. She is proud to have been a co-founder of the first Mother and Toddler Group in the Sessions Hall immediately following the opening

Susan re-entered local government in 1989 as Town Clerk of Tring. The BCA greatly benefits from the professional expertise and enthusiasm she puts into her work with us, particularly in planning matters. Her other local interests are music (she has sung in several local choirs), art, the Hospice of St Francis and the Friends of the Town Hall. Her wider interests include membership of the RSPB and Amnesty International.

Susan is married to Brian, a Finance Director of a well-known drinks company, and their two daughters, Rebecca (17) and Caroline (16) are at Berkhamsted Collegiate School.

## FUTURE EVENTS

Next year will be the 75th Anniversary of the founding of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association, so we are planning rather a special garden party on Saturday, 19th June 1999. If any members have suggestions for further ways of marking this anniversary, or the Millennium the year after, Committee members would be pleased to hear from them.

Full details of our autumn and winter programme will be given in the next issue.



*Dry moat in the castle*

## Report from Gordon Bluck, Chairman of the Town Amenities Sub-Committee.

As a commuter and a resident I was delighted that the Pepsi machines in the railway station have been re-sited in a location more in keeping, but I took no comfort in the machine on the Bridgewater Road exit being pushed over. Any rumours that my Committee members had anything to do with this are not true.

The pressure upon the town in planning applications continues and we try and support good design through the Environment Award. David Brunt did an excellent presentation of the short list at the AGM, and even though I am Chairman and obviously studied and voted on the nominees, David always keeps me riveted with his presentations.

The renovation of the Baptist Church was a worthy winner, with other excellent designs in evidence. I personally thought the two garages in Charles Street and Shrublands Road were very well done. The Benetton conversion of the old butchers shop is disappointing in view of their national presence, and the signage and the restoration of the tiling could be better.

We wrote on this basis when they went for retrospective planning permission.

Our involvement with the CARP canal project continues, but we are happy to take a little bit of a back seat as the Town Council, Dacorum Borough Council and British Waterways put real money into the scheme.



*The canal at Broadwater*

The lead by the Town Council to provide the first funding has meant that either £50,000 or £100,000 is now available, with more to come. Some people in the town have been critical of the Town Council, but as far as the canal is concerned they have taken the lead. Well done! Work will start soon.

Five members of the main Committee gave up a whole Sunday morning to represent the Association at a workshop run by Donaldsons - the Town Centre consultants - whom DBC had commissioned to review Berkhamsted. They will incorporate the views into the final recommendation.

The final version of what was the Residential Area Character Study has been approved and I have the Association's copy, now called 'Development in Residential Areas'. Any members wishing to borrow it call me on 875348.

There have not been too many plans which we have objected to other than the 'Smoke House' in Middle Road, but this has been agreed by the Town Council and DBC. At the last meeting suddenly there were lots of things to look at. A new plan for the Old Mill looks an improvement, although the traffic still remains a potential problem.



*Garden in Chesham Road where Graham Greene played as a boy. 18 flats to go here?*

There is a block of 18 flats proposed in Chesham Road, and although the development is in keeping with other large properties the tree screening is important. I am writing to DBC regarding the clutter which is appearing in the Conservation Area, apparently without planning permission, for example the banners at the YMCA charity shop and the hire shop next to the station. There is a 'secure parking' sign next to Cesare Nash estate agents which is visually intrusive on the High Street. Other examples are around and I don't want to appear a busybody (especially as I am only 46), but this and every historic town needs looking after. On a final note I would like to thank John Cook our new Chairman for writing my last report as I was too tied up with work.

## **Rotary Club of Berkhamsted**



Colin Stott, for 28 years a member of the BCA, is President of the Rotary Club of Berkhamsted. He writes to the Citizen with cordial greetings from the Rotary Club, pointing out that they and the Citizens Association have much in common. While the Citizens concentrate on the amenity aspects of Berkhamsted, they look after welfare and support.

He tells me that the Rotary Club of Berkhamsted has generated and given many thousands of pounds to local organisations over the last twelve months and their giving over the next twelve may exceed this by a factor of two. And yet, like the Citizens Association, they agonise over their membership figures and wish that more good men of Berkhamsted would come and join them.

If any reader would like more information about Rotary they should contact either Colin (home number 862528, office 874941) or their secretary, Geoffrey Sumner, who's daytime number is 872311

## Personal View

from our new Vice-Chairman, Susan Johnson.

I am a great believer in personal responsibility. Before you start thinking I'm harking back to Thatcherism (I'm too much of an unreconstructed old local government officer for that) I'm talking about what each resident or business can do to enhance the town when undertaking building work, either new or refurbishment.



Unspoilt houses in the Conservation Area.

Lots of us do small amounts of building - small extensions, walls, driveways, window replacements - which might or might not need planning permission, but can have a positive or deleterious effect on our streets. Lots of it is not seen as significant enough to warrant control, but a wall built of unsuitable bricks, or an unfortunately cladded fascia, or PVC windows in a Victorian house can spoil the look of a terrace; whereas a new porch in the style of the house can add both amenity to you and pleasure to the rest of us. So please, when you are considering building, however insignificant it may seem, do think about how you can make the design fit the context and the best materials to use. If you are unsure or would like ideas, ask the planning officers at Dacorum and, if you are in the Conservation Area, the Conservation Officer.

The BCA's annual Environment Award is all about pointing out good practice on the domestic, community and commercial fronts, in design and materials. I would like to see all the citizens and businesses of Berkhamsted signing up to that ideal - not to mention all three tiers of local government!

## A Surfeit of Signs

Would you agree with me that there are too many signs and notices in Berkhamsted? everyone of them must have been justified in someone's mind, but in total they make an awful jumble, and in a way the more of them there are the less effective each becomes. The Highway Authority is just as guilty as other parties in continuing to add poorly designed signs along the High Street, really cluttering it up after the

after the serious attempt made as part of the Bypass Demonstration Project to tidy up the signage and give some sort of coherence to it all.

Opposite the station there is a jumble of seven separate signs on a lamppost and a pole next to it.



7 Signs by the Station . . . and 8 on the common

Then is it necessary to have a sign in the Castle saying steep slopes? Are the public really so dim that they can't recognise a steep slope when they see one?



On the other hand, to my way of thinking notices which have been there for donkeys' years develop a right to be left alone, even when they are no longer relevant. Perhaps the oldest of these in town is the one which dates from the time when the High Street was part of a turnpike operated by the Sparrows Herne Trust.



Old turnpike sign near Park Street

Then there is the Home & Colonial sign, which has been a feature of the High Street as long as anyone can remember, high up on a gable wall, and the Coopers sign similarly high up on another gable wall in Manor Street; and my favourite: the little enamel advertisement over



Dickman's shop door which I would guess has been there for 70 years or more. It simply says *Invalid Bovril*.



## The Chiltern Society

The Chiltern Society, of which the BCA is a corporate member, was founded in 1965 with the sole aim of conserving the character of the Chiltern Hills in four counties comprising 600 square miles. It is run by volunteers for the benefit of all who live, work or visit the Chiltern for recreation.

It is concerned with planning issues, protecting historic buildings, sites and conservation areas, preserving and enhancing rivers, woodland, heathland and rights of way; in general defending the Green Belt and the natural amenity and integrity of the countryside against unsuitable development.

The Chiltern Society has some 5000 members including many corporate members. For further information or membership details you can contact the Administrator at  
113 Vale Road, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 3HP.  
Tel/fax: 01 494 771250.



## ...And Speed Limits in the Town

On the question of traffic calming, it is three years since new measures were imposed in Berkhamsted, and as part of them the central part of the High Street and part of the Durrants area were made 20 mph zones. On the whole this move seems to have been pretty effective, but it involved a proliferation of ugly and confusing signs at each entry to the 20 mph zones.

The rest of the town (apart from certain streets which have traffic calming obstructions of one sort or another) has not benefited.

What would be the objection to imposing a 20 mph restriction over the whole town? The 20 mph signs would then only be necessary where roads enter the town and where there are already 30 mph signs anyway.

The very longest journey anyone is likely to make within the town (including Northchurch) is about four miles. Assuming you could do this at a constant 30 mph it would take eight minutes; if you were restricted to 20 mph it would take four minutes longer. In practice average journeys within the town are probably only about two miles long, and a speed of 30 mph is not achievable for very long on most of the town's roads. So an average journey time would only be increased by perhaps a minute - probably less - if the maximum speed were to be restricted to 20.

It is really quite nerve-racking for elderly people who are a bit slow on their feet to cross Kings Road, Gravel Path or Castle Street, the way cars speed along them. Speed limits are widely disregarded, but it would not be unreasonable to expect that the people who drive down these streets and others at 40 mph today would drop their speeds proportionately if the restriction were lowered.

There would be a real benefit in terms of less noise and improved safety. Would there be any disbenefits, apart from the need for those who drive their cars every day having to set their alarm clocks to ring just a minute earlier?



## Speed Limits in the Country...

A current concern of The Chiltern Society is speeding on rural roads. It is seeking the views of a wider public on the following proposals:

Throughout the Chilterns:

- 30 mph speed limits in all villages, or
- 40 mph speed limits on all minor roads, or
- a combination of both.



It asks, if you are in favour of these proposals to write to the Chiltern Society at the above address. (Although it doesn't actually ask for a response from those who are not in favour, I don't see why they should not write too).



Castle Street: Difficult for the elderly to cross.

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

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

Tel: 01442 866278

Tel: 01442 865882

Produced and Printed by The Print Shop (01442) 876881 & Gemini Printers (01442) 871017