

The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



June 2001

Chairman's Topics

Susan Johnson, BCA's Chairman writes:

AGM

I thought the AGM a great success. I was re-elected. (There is not necessarily any connection between those two opening sentences.) Seriously, it was a good occasion. We have two new Committee members – Norman Cutting (as Newsletter Editor) and Felicity Johnston – and a new Treasurer, Christine Manning, and we welcome them all. Gill Feil retired after many years of organising our talks and other activities and our grateful thanks and Life Membership deservedly go to her.

The Environment Award went to the Deans Lawn housing development in Chesham Road, with commendations to Magoo's Wine Bar (part of the BUDS improvements); extension of The Warehouse in Ravens Lane; and the Collegiate School's new sports pavilion. Rob Martell gave us a presentation on the Berkhamsted Urban Design Study (BUDS), which is doing so much to improve the look of things at the back of the High Street near Waitrose, something the BCA has been advocating since the original Kingsgate plans and which Dacorum Borough Council is funding to great effect.

The whole evening had a warm feeling, which extended to the Mayor who not only won a commendation for the extension to her house, but was congratulated on her Berkhamsted profile-raising outing on ITV's Carlton Country. What with her efforts and Berkhamsted Town F.C. in the final of the F.A. Vase, we are really on the map these days.

LAING'S RAVENS LANE DEVELOPMENT



The Ravens Lane development reaches its excruciating dénouement. Dacorum Borough Council has given its blessing to the method statement for the site's decontamination and two years of work starts in June; six months of remediation and eighteen months of building. The merits of demolition and rebuilding have been endlessly debated, not least in our Town Amenities Sub-Committee, but now concentration must be directed on the welfare of the residents of the area. Under some pressure from several directions, Laings have agreed to the setting up of a Liaison Group consisting of representatives of the main parties – the Town and Borough Councils, CARAB, us and Laing themselves. The Group will meet roughly fortnightly over the whole two years either until the work is finished or the parties feel there is no more need. The main area of contention will be the results of monitoring by the on-site chemist, who will be a Laing's employee. I have suggested a consultant might be a better choice, to put results at arm's length from the developer. This monitoring group will certainly be a test of Laing's willingness to put residents before the perceived smooth running of the project. We will keep you up to date on progress.



CAR PARKING – THE WAY FORWARD

I promised a report on the St. Valentine's Day seminar on car parking. I must admit the evening was most informative and I now know the definition of a Controlled Parking Zone. If Dacorum becomes one, we could have a coherent policy for parking throughout the Borough, including properly managed car parks and, possibly, residents' parking schemes. However, there are downsides. All car parking in car parks would have to be charged (currently free in HH and Tring; all but Berkhamsted, in fact) and residents' schemes would be chargeable to the residents involved. There is also the knotty question of who would be left out of a scheme, where all the on-street parking would inevitably end up. It's a bit like CCTV; fine for those who've got it but not good for those affected by displaced crime. The main worry for Berkhamsted will be the sledgehammer and nut quandary; will the cure be worse than the illness? "One size fits all" might not be a good solution for us.

The Borough Council promises that there will be full and wide consultations before decisions are reached. Your Committee will be as involved as possible in all opportunities to debate these difficult issues.



BERKHAMSTED TOWN CENTRE ADVISORY FORUM

I attended the last one in place of Gordon Bluck while he was away on holiday. It really is getting into its stride now with a regular attendance of thirty people or more. The main thing on the agenda was the results of research on attitudes after the recent marketing of the town centre. Strangely, the results seemed to be exactly the same as before the marketing! Sometimes you wonder whether it is a true reflection of the situation or whether it is the way the research is carried out. Anyway, at least I know someone who took part in a "focus group" so I know they didn't make it up!

WEST COAST MAIN LINE INQUIRY

The Inquiry comes to town in July and we can attend to listen to the evidence on the Northchurch vents and the Dudswell Transformer. It is very significant for our neighbours in Northchurch so please come along to support them if you can.

JOE THE BUTCHER

He's really done it this time! National Butcher's Shop of the Year, courtesy of the Meat Trade's Journal. Congratulations to Joe and his team. We've really appreciated his emphasis on quality through this difficult time in the farming industry. We also happen to think he's a good bloke when it comes to local causes and charities. Well done, Joe!



"Relics of Bygone Berkhamsted."

*By Jerry Sherwood, Chairman
Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society*

Berkhamsted Citizens Association exhibition held on Monday 8th December 1924.

"The Berkhamsted Citizens Association scored a success on Monday evening last when they held a free exhibition of relics of bygone Berkhamsted. The relics, which were loaned by a number of kind friends, were staged in the Sessions Hall, and in addition a number of old industries of the town were demonstrated. Certain it is that this exhibition created an immense amount of local interest and through its success the committee may some day be encouraged to provide an even greater exhibition of this kind, which will be largely supported and a delight to all who live in the town and district." Thus reports the Berkhamsted Gazette for Saturday, 13th December 1924. The old industries demonstrated at the exhibition included woodwork and woodturning, boot making, ironwork, lace making, straw plaiting, basket making and wallpaper making. In 1924 Berkhamsted still had a woodenware factory and, if straw plaiting and lace making, together with wallpaper making had already gone, the town had a large chemical works and a large clothing factory, neither of which remain in Berkhamsted today.

Numerous photographs, prints, drawings and paintings of old Berkhamsted were included in the exhibition. Among the relics on show was a piece of bronze-age pottery. Mr. R. A. Coates, a local resident connected with the British Museum, spoke about the 37 old deeds and charters dating from 1198-1601 relating to Berkhamsted, held in the museum. One would assume, I hope correctly, that these are still in the safe keeping of that venerable institution. But I wish I could speak with the same conviction of the "numerous photographs, prints, drawings and paintings of old Berkhamsted". It is likely that a number of those have already been lost or deteriorated to such an extent that they were no longer kept. Some members of the Citizens Association were concerned that little was then being done to protect and preserve items relating to Berkhamsted's historic past and this led to the formation of the Berkhamsted and District Local History Society in January 1950, the first 'daughter society' of the Association. The first President was Miss B. W. Russell, Headmistress of Berkhamsted School for Girls; and Edward Popple, former Headmaster of Victoria School, was Chairman. Percy Birtchnell, the leading local historian, was Secretary and continued in that post until his death in 1986.

The aim of the Society was, and still remains, to encourage and promote an active interest in all matters of historic enquiry in Berkhamsted and the surrounding district. The following year the Society held its first exhibition of bygone Berkhamsted in Victoria School.

The Society is now able to store its archives in the Dacorum Heritage Trust's Museum Store, where they are preserved in appropriate conditions, and can be used for research purposes, but we have no museum in Berkhamsted. Members of the public are normally reliant on the regular small exhibitions in the Library in order to see something of these archives, and on the larger annual exhibitions staged by the Dacorum Heritage Trust, in which Berkhamsted must take its turn alongside Hemel Hempstead and other areas of Dacorum. This year, fifty years after its first exhibition, the Society, now the Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society, is staging an exhibition in the Civic Centre, entitled "Berkhamsted- the Past 150 Years", which traces the historical development of the town from 1850 - when it was still much as it had been in mediaeval times, clustered round Castle Street, Mill Street, the High Street and its alleys - to the Berkhamsted of today.

In 1850 the population of Berkhamsted was 2,802. Today Berkhamsted and the village of Northchurch are geographically one and have a population of nearly 20,000. Then there were a number of large houses on the edge of the town. Today only Ashlyns Hall remains. We have lost many of our fine old houses in the town centre and many of the industries that made the town such a vibrant place. The need to fulfil the wishes of those founder members is even greater today.

The Society has an increasing archive but there are almost certainly boxes of old letters, diaries or photographs in attics of older residents. Sadly photographs fade and paper crumbles, if not stored in appropriate conditions. You may remember who the dark-haired little boy in the front row was or know exactly the relationship of Uncle Henry to the family, but will your children and grandchildren? We all have a duty to preserve our heritage for future generations.

We hope that our exhibition will provide a "trip down memory lane" for older and long-standing residents of Berkhamsted and make the children and newcomers aware of the heritage of the town in which they live. It will certainly make us all aware of how much Berkhamsted has changed even in the last few years! Do not miss this unique opportunity!



Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck writes:

Once again the number of planning applications we have had to study has been relatively low. Thank goodness, as we as a Committee, and indeed the readers of this newsletter, lead increasingly busy lives. Just to reiterate the purpose of the Town Amenities Sub Committee for new members of the Association: we are supplied by the Borough Council with formal lists of planning applications and from there we can sift out the ones we are interested in, i.e., those affecting Berkhamsted and Northchurch. The more important plans are often copied to the Association Chairman or me by the Borough Council, for which we are very grateful.

"Berkhamsted- the Past 150 Years" runs from 11th-16th June in the Civic Centre. Admission is free.

It saves us having to view the plans at the Town Council offices, although I am personally very lucky as I can view them at the home of a Town Councillor, out of office hours, as we both have full time jobs. As a Sub-Committee we focus in on the major developments affecting the town and principally the conservation area and we do not concern ourselves with individual domestic developments unless they have an impact on a sensitive area. We rarely support applications, but will not just object, in suitable cases, but also offer suggestions for improvement. Our letters sit in the file at the Development Control Committee meeting and are viewed by the public. Although we have no power in the planning process, we do, I believe, have an influence. In the 8 years I have been Chairman, and certainly before that time, we have always tried to keep any trace of "vested interest" out of committee decisions, which has been a feature of small town politics round the country for many years.

However, returning to my report, it is with great sadness that I have to report that, after many years on this Committee including often taking the minutes for me, Gill Feil has had to stand down for personal reasons. We will all sorely miss her hard work and sound advice. Thank you Gill for everything.

After much discussion regarding the plans for the sports complex at the Collegiate School it was decided, after a split vote, to express concern over the loss of green open space, the impact on the traffic and loss of on street parking; but appreciating the special status of educational establishments we did not object to the application.

We have seen several retrospective applications over the last 6 months or so and I would urge all our membership to consult with the planners as to whether permission is needed for conservatories, TV aerials etc.

One large development caught our eye earlier in the year, which was the 14 flats at 112-114 High Street which we felt had turned its back on the High Street, with entrances at the rear and the loss of the historic doorway on the current building. We also thought that real slate should be used on the roof and the single parking space on the left side removed. I delighted to report that I have just received a copy of the amended plans and all the changes we wanted have been made. A result, as my son would say.

David Brunt gave his customary excellent presentation on the environment award and the plaque was won by Dean's Lawn development in Chesham Road. I know for most of us this is the highlight of the AGM; thank you once again David for all your hard work.

THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

By our Chairman

Quite a do. The Mayor managed to get 130 people there. More than I've ever seen without a full scale protest in progress. There were refreshments and short presentations from those in the town who had "done well" this year. Then we got down to a brainstorming session on what we would like to see that would make the town a better place. Many of us wanted better cultural facilities (cinema, small theatre) and town regeneration (degrees of radical rebuilding of the 1970s buildings) and more sports facilities. And car parking (control; more of it, more of it anywhere but outside our own houses). It was a worthwhile evening and good fun. But I'm not sure it was what the legislation intended – the Town Council facing its electorate and explaining itself. But as a public involvement exercise, it was top hole!

THE ELECTION – AT LAST!

The Citizens normally organise a candidates' meeting, but the High Street Baptist Church has beaten us to it. It will be held there on **Wednesday, 30th May at 8 pm** and, at the very least, the three main candidates will be there. Others may be nominated after this goes to press. I've offered the Church added publicity through our organisation, so please come along to put the awkward question you've always wanted to ask. It's the nearest thing you'll get to a good, old-fashioned hustings.

Corrections to last issue

(bound to become a regular section!)

Due to formatting problems in the last issue -
Page 2: 'e' slipped from 1st column, so last but one line and should read: 'outbuildings are locked'.
Page 3: 'vegetables' really is one word - honest. This means that the telephone number for the Focus Project should be 876255.
Back: Editors e-mail address really is norman.cutting@ntlworld.com

Chairman: Susan Johnson, Stonycroft, 9 Shrublands Road, HP4 3HY Tel: 875517; e-mail johnson@stonycroft.fsnet.co.uk
Membership Secretary: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road, HP4 3EA Tel: 865882
Compiled by: Norman Cutting, 15 Chestnut Drive, HP4 2JL Tel: 384723; e-mail norman.cutting@ntlworld.com
