

The Citizen



Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

March 2002

Annual General Meeting

NOTICE is hereby given that the 77th Annual General Meeting of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be held in the Wellcome Great Hall of the Town Hall, Berkhamsted, on **Thursday 21st March 2002 at 8pm.**

Nominations for the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Membership Secretary, Hon. Auditor and Committee Members should be submitted to the Secretary (Miranda Cummins, 27 North Road, Berkhamsted, HP4 3DU) not later than 24 hours before the AGM. Consent of the person nominated must be obtained previously.

Agenda

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the last AGM
3. Chairman's Report
4. Treasurer's Report
5. Election of Officers
6. Election of Committee Members
7. Election of Hon. Auditor

The present committee would warmly welcome other members to join them and look forward to additional nominations for committee members.

The monthly committee meetings last for around 2 hours and we have two regular sub-committees.

The Town Amenities Sub-Committee works to try and ensure that changes which take place to the environment, both in Northchurch and Berkhamsted, are for the better.

The Activities & Publicity Sub-Committee plans and organises a programme of talks, walk and other events. The Association is represented on a number of other local bodies such as the CAB, Graham Greene Birthplace Trust, Town Hall Trust and Town Centre Advisory Forum.

BCA Environment Awards 2001

There were 19 nominations for the Environment Award for the year 2001, representing a wide variety of entries. The selected short list to be illustrated at the AGM presentation is as follows:-

Figgs the Chemist
Kwik Fit, the High Street
the offstreet parking, with carport, at Gossoms End
AgroEvo Development
Altered Image
house at corner of Station Road/Gravel Path
canalside Information Plinths
Millennium Garden, All Saints Church, Cross Oak Road
new house at top of Montague Road

new house at Barncroft Road
mansion and restored garden at Castle Village
wall and garage at 2 Charles Street
new Tudor style house at bottom of Cedar Road
path across Canal Fields
restoration of sash windows at 58 Charles Street
house extension at 20A Shrublands Road
new stiles on footpaths around perimeter of town

Speakers from the Service Organisations

We have invited speakers from the Lions and Round Table (and a ladies' organisation, who have yet to confirm) who will give us, very briefly, an idea of all the things they contribute to town life. They will even mention membership criteria!

Open Forum

Finally there will be an Open Forum in which members will be able to ask questions and make comments. It is hoped that as many members as possible will stay to make this a lively end to the proceedings!

Chairman's Topics

Susan Johnson, BCA's Chairman writes:

PAUL GILBERT

As the Chairman of TASC reported in the last newsletter, Paul resigned from that and the main Committee towards the end of last year. I had prepared my copy for the Newsletter too early to make my tribute to him last time, so I am sure he'll forgive me for being a little tardy, because I know he'll read this. He continues to be a member up there in Derbyshire and takes an interest in our doings. We appreciated his loyalty now as then and his wise contribution to our deliberations. He was always willing to 'do his bit' at all functions and was a thoroughly nice man to have around. Good wishes to you and your wife, Paul, and come back and see us as often as possible.

Town Centre Management

I, among others, attended a meeting of the DBC Economic & Policy Development Panel in December to help it debate the future of Town centre Management in the borough. This was the next stage after the Seminar I told you about in the last edition, and the consultants' report was considered in depth. They had put forward three options; one was to do nothing and the other two offered differing models of management. We in the Committee had discussed it beforehand and I went mandated with our point of view. The Panel couldn't make up its mind first go, so it asked for written submissions from everybody. If you would like a copy of the subsequent written submission I made, please get in touch.

The Panel met again on 17th January and its final preference was to see set up a new Partnership Company involving the Borough Council and the retail and business sector in all three towns, with a Berkhamsted Co-ordinator and a new membership scheme (so-called *Option 2*). This was your Committee's preference too. But the success of such an arrangement, indeed its existence, depends upon input from all sides, and it is increasingly obvious that the Chamber of Commerce feels its membership will be less than enthusiastic about paying an amount over and above the business rate for very intangible benefits. The recommendation now goes to the DBC Cabinet; lets see what it decides.

It would be interesting to hear from members of the business and retail sector what they think. How about a contribution to the next edition! Ed.

Seats by Paths

John Cook writes:

The Parish Paths Partnership in Hertfordshire is intended to promote the use and upkeep of local footpaths. It is possible that money from its' budget could be used to provide seats by the side of footpaths at places where they would be of particular benefit to walkers. If any of our members have suggestions as to where such seats might be usefully located in or near Berkhamsted or Northchurch, please let me know and I will pass their ideas on.

The Conservation Strategy

Gordon has written in his TASC report about the work the sub-committee has put in on recording the Conservation Area, and identifying properties for possible listing or Article 4(2) Directions. Our thanks especially go to John Cook and David Brunt for giving unstintingly of their time; the (almost) finished photographic record of the area is an enormous help to us in considering planning applications and will be a great asset to the DBC Conservation Officer in her day-to-day work.

The Borough Council is now in the process of developing a **Conservation Strategy**. We contributed to the first consultation phase, concerned with the Draft's content, in the form of a written submission and I would be happy to send or email a copy to anyone on request. This followed much lobbying on our part at the Town Centre Advisory Forum, although I think at last we were pushing at an open door. The draft Strategy will go out to formal consultation later this year, with the possibility of extra staff in the Planning Department to make its implementation a reality. Let's hope that Dacorum has come round at last to giving conservation its proper consideration. It would please an awful lot of people in the town and vindicate years of work by the Citizens.

The REX

The Rex is well on its way to refurbishment. It's not what I wanted, exactly, but it's a whole lot better than I thought we might get. The flats will undoubtedly be very desirable, the restaurant will be fashionable but, most importantly, **the cinema will be restored**. Now the operator has been identified he has an uphill task of putting together the funding. To this end he is marketing club membership, in the hope of persuading sponsors to cough up substantial sums to get it up and running in return for booking privileges. For £60 you can be an ordinary member but for £300 you can have a seat named after you! If you were, like me, very keen on saving the cinema and want to help get this off the ground, get in touch with James Hannaway on 01442 866787 or email on hannaway@appleonline.net

This could be a very *exciting* venture. I'm willing to put my husband's money where my mouth is.

West Coast Railway Upgrade

Chris Green, Chief Executive of Virgin Trains and long-time member, writes:

The upgrading of the West Coast mainline railway remains one of the largest rail projects in Europe and still involves an investment of over £4 billion after all the recent debate over its funding.

Phase 1 of **Track & Signalling** work is on schedule for completion next year and will herald the 125mph railway, with a journey time from Watford to Manchester of less than two hours. 60% of the work is already finished and the sharp-eyed will have seen the evidence in new, stronger track, overhead electrification renewals and re-signalling.

This track work reaches a critical phase this summer when, unfortunately, it will be necessary to shut all four lines on some weekends to replace the complex junctions between the tracks, as well as the 25,000 volt overhead wiring. There will be plenty of advance warning, together with an intensive coach service to the next available station, on the weekends when it occurs.

Phase II was to have boosted speeds to 140mph by 2005, but the re-signalling costs for this phase have now reached such a huge figure that it is unlikely to happen this decade. It was this Phase II that would have forced all the Silverlink trains on to the slow tracks.

The good news is that the **Pendolino tilting trains** are performing well on the test track and should start running through Berkhamsted this spring on crew training runs. One Pendolino costs £11 million and we are ordering 53 of them: so we determined to get the quality right before they come onto our busy tracks.

We hope to get the first trains into service for the Commonwealth Games in Manchester this July, and thereafter introduce a new train into service every fortnight. The Pendolinos will start by taking the place of existing trains at 110mph and then we will add additional services.

From 2003 we shall introduce a **new timetable** that reflects trains running at 125mph, and increases train frequency from six to nine trains per hour. Virtually every train will call at either Watford or Milton Keynes to serve the Herts/Bucks market. Every hour there will be a train to get us from Watford to Birmingham in less than 70 minutes and to Manchester in 115 minutes.

The **Pendolino tilting mechanism** will be switched on early next year in time for the new timetable and will enable the train to take corners faster than conventional trains without any additional sense of speed. We shall be well placed to see this in action as the new trains pass through the famous reverse curves each side of Berkhamsted station!

The mission remains unchanged: to transfer people from the M1 and M40 to the West Coast railway. If we are successful we have the capacity to double rail passenger journeys and make a real difference. I know that some residents have been worrying about noise, but having stood next to the test track at 125mph, I can assure everyone that these trains are vastly quieter than any train running today. They are much lighter than the existing trains and have been designed to muffle their noise: I think they really are good news for everyone.

BCA Activities

Rita Jones writes:

2002 got off to a good start with a well attended and enjoyable ramble to Aldbury and our grateful thanks to John Cook, the leader.

By the time you read this newsletter the talk on Chenies Manor will have been given and, if there is sufficient interest, we hope to follow this with an evening visit to the Manor some time in the summer.

Don't forget the last evening meeting of our year, on Wednesday April 24th (8pm, Great Hall, Town Hall), 'May I suggest?'. This is a joint meeting with the Grahame Greene Birthplace Trust and, like the previous joint meeting, is a dramatic presentation, this time of some of Graham Greene's letters to the press. It promises to be a very entertaining evening.

Car Parking Management

Susan Johnson, BCA's Chairman writes

By the time you read this, the DBC Cabinet will have considered the Arup report on the possible way forward for Car Parking Strategy in the whole of the borough. I will guess that they will have decided to go out to public consultation on decriminalising parking offences; introducing parking charges where none exist (HH and Tring); and introducing a residents parking scheme in central Berkhamsted. (Either that or I am going to look foolish!) I think this will be the new black when it comes to dinner party topics; is your house in the scheme or not? What will it do to the look of the area? And what about the value of my house? Great stuff!

The Best Christmas Shop Window

Susan Johnson, BCA's Chairman writes:

Those of you who came to the Festival of Light will know that it was well-attended, not least by a lot of very excited children awaiting Father Christmas. I was 'on' just before the switching-on ceremony, presenting the cup sponsored by this Association for the best shop window decoration. The standard seems to be rising year on year and the level of participation is certainly no lower. Three of us from the Committee look at every window in the High Street and Lower Kings Road one afternoon in late November, and we judged the winner this year, once again, to be Home & Colonial; their windows were charming, colourful and inventive. The runners up were Itzomi in Lower Kings Road; The Cutting Room in the High Street; and its neighbour The Adult Studies Centre, with a tour de force on the theme of the twelve days of Christmas interpreted to illustrate all the activities on offer at the Centre. The Festival itself is a miracle of co-operation, co-ordinated by the Town Council and held together by the DCVS with input from every service organisation in the town.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman, writes:

As I write this report in January and look back over the last three months it has been all quiet on the planning front with some old chestnuts coming back to life like Dracula, such as the proposed Castle Mill development, and even the cricket club has gathered a big file of support for its plans to convert the pavilion to be more like a leisure complex. We presume that the club is preparing for a planning appeal at some stage, but unless the scale of the plans is reduced in this sensitive location, the Association will continue to object. We have written a letter supporting the principle of building a skateboard park near the youth club, as there is no known alternative site offering support facilities including first aid.

Following on from John Cook's work on a photographic record of the High Street and roads important for the Conservation Area, a large part of our December meeting was spent deciding our priorities for listing and article 4(2) Directions. You may be asking what an Article 4(2) Direction is. Well, in layman's terms, it is the withdrawal of permitted development rights (changing doors, windows etc.) for residential buildings and gives planners powers to stop, say, stone cladding where it is not appropriate. Susan explains about this and other current conservation issues elsewhere.

The shortlist for the annual Environment Award is being compiled as I write and my Committee looks forward to the judging. A final plea: if everything goes to plan and I am elected Chairman at the AGM, I will need help if I am to continue as Town Amenities Chairman. I wonder if members who do not want the commitment of being on either the Activities Sub or main committee would be prepared to come forward for TASC, even if they only attended every other meeting. I know everyone is busy but please bear this request in mind.

My home number is 01442 873548.

QUEEN'S JUBILEE

This year sees an extra event – the Queen's Jubilee – and the Round Table Fete at the Cricket Club ground will be moved to the 3rd June Bank Holiday and expanded to incorporate this mega celebration. The co-ordinating committee is up and running and we look forward to a very special event.

Community Policing

Susan Johnson, BCA's Chairman writes:

Our community sergeant, David Dumbleton, came to speak to your Committee in January, along with the Chairman of the Berkhamsted Crime Prevention Panel, Brian Hunt. We appreciated them giving up part of their evening to bring us up to date on local issues. Once again they stressed that fear of crime was always greater than the reality; but that we should do as much as possible to keep our possessions and ourselves safe.

The sergeant told us that the new arrangement of **community policing** meant a greater presence on the beat and officers allocated to each Ward. Each officer will carry a mobile phone **whilst on duty** and can be contacted regarding **non-urgent** policing issues affecting the Ward. They are:

Constable Geoffrey Ellis (Castle)	07736 225285
Constable Richard Austin (East)	07736 225287
Constable Richard Parfitt (West)	07736 225286
Constable Andrea Betteridge (Town Centre)	07736 225291
Constable Lance Edwards (Northchurch)	07736 225290

The officers work as a team and all but Andrea Betteridge are full time. But they can't be on duty all the time, so you can still telephone the community office on 01442 271108 or, of course, dial 999 for emergencies.

I know what you're going to ask next – which ward do you live in?

For the answer to that one, phone the Town Clerk, Colin Westwood, on 228945. I'm sure he'll be helpful; after all, he used to be a policeman!

Some dates to note

March 21st - AGM and Environment Awards
March 27th - Town Centre Advisory Forum
April 24th - Graham Greene Dramatic Presentation

Corrections to last issue

(bound to become a regular section!)

Just one date wrong - gosh, I must be getting better! My request for comments on the newsletter brought forth just one response - you do actually read it, don't you? (e-mail contact: norm@berko.org.uk)

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