

The Citizen



Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

June 2002

Chairman's Topics

Our new Chairman, Gordon Bluck says:

Having spent so much time in the background as Chairman of the Town amenities sub Committee (in fact 8, or is it 9 years?), Susan Johnson, our outgoing Association Chairman asked me to be her Vice Chairman and how could I refuse. Our two year stint has flashed past and so for good or bad you have me for the next two years.

I can not let the moment pass without thanking Susan for her excellent and professional leadership of the Association; she has got a number of long term projects underway, including John Cook's nearly completed photographic record of the central core of the town and the priority list for listing and application for Article 4 Direction. The master copy of the photographic record has been lent to Dacorum Borough Council Planning Department and they will have it reproduced and available to the general public.

I suppose my mission statement is to continue to work with all interested parties, Borough and Town Councillors and Officers in a non confrontational way while still getting our point over. The Association has sought to do the best for the town for over 75 years and it is our role to achieve that aim on behalf of you and the other residents. As most of you are aware, we have at least annual meetings with senior Councillors and officers at borough level and these are very useful to aid the dialogue and help put forward our concerns.

As part of the Associations role to educate us all the excellent range of talks will continue later in the year chosen by the Activities Sub Committee and I hope you will be able to attend some or all. As a final plea we are always on the lookout for new blood to get involved, certainly on the planning side and if you want to come along to a meeting please phone me on 873548. The problem is that none of us is getting any younger; (*for goodness sake I've just turned 50*) and I hope some of you can give us some time.

A brief advert is for a joint litter pick on Monday 1 July at 7.15pm with the Berkhamsted Guides along the canal and we will all meet at the fake canal gates near the entrance to Waitrose



Examples of the 'problem'
Victoria Rd (above) & George St (below)

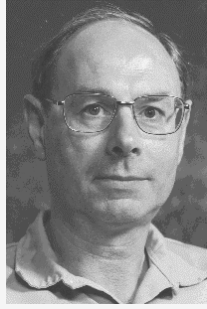


CAR PARKING MANAGEMENT *Susan Johnson reports:*

Mercifully I didn't look foolish. Dacorum's Cabinet did decide to go out to public consultation on decriminalisation, the possible introduction of car parking charges in HH and Tring and a residents parking scheme for Berkhamsted. A few of you actually emailed me on the subject so I know it has caught your attention! Those of you who went to the Annual Town Meeting will know that Brian Scott's exposition of the story so far woke people up and, as usual, elicited the type of detailed questions he couldn't possibly answer at this stage. (Brian Scott is the DBC Head of Engineering and Environment – explanations elsewhere.). Arup are currently talking to 'key stakeholders' about the detailed issues and will design a scheme to go out to public consultation in August/September/October, with implementation about a year later. So look out for the chance to make your comments later in the year.

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Profile:
Norman Cutting
(Caretaker editor)



THE ‘FUTURE BERKHAMSTED’ WORKING PARTY - *Susan Johnson writes:*

At the Annual Town Meeting there was a report about the ideas emanating from the Future Berkhamsted Working Party. This is a sort of Think Tank, set up under the auspices of the Town Council’s Finance & Policy Committee, whose brief is to try to formulate a Town Plan which can be adopted, and recognised by the Borough Council, as the basis for the discussion of future planning, transportation and other issues affecting the town. A laudable aim. However, I was a little alarmed to hear that some of its aims were to turn my road into a Home Zone; to make a lot of the roads in the Conservation Area one-way; and to make Shootersway into a sort of bypass. It seemed a recipe for extremely fast traffic all whizzing around the town while I was overwhelmed with other people’s children.

Now, I had seen these ideas reported in the press previously but I hadn’t realised it had got as far as serious discussion. I had tried also to get myself invited to join the discussions last year when I was Chairman, to no avail. (Sour grapes?)

No one was keen to tell me when the group met! (Do you blame them? – Ed.) Anyway, at the ATM the Mayor promised to make sure that in future meetings were advertised on the notice boards so interested people could contribute. Look out for meetings, and let me know. You’d better go along yourselves. Personally, I would like to know if someone wants to erode my quality of life without bothering to ask me what I think. If we are going to be turned into the London Borough of Berkhamsted, I want the opportunity to comment before the sledgehammer hits the nut.

Norman really is one of life’s failures. It all started when his mum decided to have him at West Herts Hospital in the far off town of Hemel Hempstead and was proud to spend the princely sum of £7 10s for the privilege, which was the special rate for servicemen. Arriving at the age of 2 weeks to live in one of the ‘prefabs’ at the top of Three Close Lane, has also lived on Durrants Estate and currently resided at his present home for nearly 25 years.

He managed to fail his 11+, he managed to fail his GCEs as well as his ONCs.

He even managed to fail to make his millions by running his own business for 30 years. He has even managed to stay married to the same woman for nearly 35 years, I mean, who would have thought it?

On the bright side, he inflicted himself on residents by standing for election to the local Town and Borough Councils in 1995, and to his surprise, actually got elected.

During his short time on both Councils, he was a member of numerous committees, instrumental in sorting out the Christmas lighting, De-Lisle clock and the first (still running indeed!) town web-site (<http://www.berko.org.uk>).

He is currently involved in producing the very piece of paper you are reading (just waiting for someone to take over!) and trying to decide whether the recent run of good fortune should be terminated by standing again in the election next May.

To cycle or not to cycle - that is the question - *Norman Cutting says:*

Those of us who have been known to actually walk or cycle around the town know the ‘dangers’ of attempting to use the High Street.

I wonder how many have thought about cycling along the bypass. The markings on the road got me thinking. I always thought the idea was to use the dusty, dirty bit between the ribbed white line and the grass, trusting you get between junctions without a puncture.

The road markings suggest otherwise. As you join from a junction, you are directed as above. However, as you approach a junction, you have to give way to faster cyclists riding along the main carriageway. This happens at each junction; indeed, come off at the Hemel Hempstead turn and you are guided into a small lay-by and told to stop before joining motorised traffic.

Just where these ‘faster’ cyclists are directed onto the main carriageway, I have yet to discover.

I think I’ll just stick to the old road for now.

DACORUM'S ORGANISATION and REGIONS and REGIONAL GOVERNMENT and THE ABOLITION OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL by Susan Johnson:

What, all at once? Well no, but these are matters which have or will be raising their heads over the next couple of years. I promised at the AGM to explain how DBC operated (how long have you got?) and then realised there are more pressing issues which ought also to be aired. What happened in France and the Netherlands, and even in our own Burnley, and is echoed in much of Europe recently, means it is now more important than ever that we VOTE in local as well as national elections. Your chance comes first on 1st May 2003 (barring by-elections) when the Town and Borough are up for grabs. In my view, if you don't vote, you have no right to complain.

Now, Dacorum's organisation. Well, you know it is now run by a cabinet of Councillors with specific portfolios, just like The Cabinet, who make executive decisions, which are open to scrutiny, but are acted upon immediately if not 'called in'. The management structure (officers = employees) is headed by a Chief Executive, an Assistant CE and three Strategic Directors who have reporting to them 'heads of service' who are responsible for the actual delivery of services. Doing things, as you and I might put it, rather than thinking about them. If you want the finer details, I have a copy of the structure, which I can provide on request. This is the modern way of doing things: no committees (except those with quasi-judicial roles like Development Control and Licensing), and supposedly quicker response times. But does speed mean better or more democratic decisions? I would argue not, and the democratic process is not seen to be done, even if it is.

Regional Government is also currently in the news. The North East seems to fancy it, and I saw the inevitable call for the Independent Democratic Republic of Yorkshire. (A Good Thing, according to my daughters, if it means their father can remain an ex-pat whilst staying at home and we can get our passports stamped when visiting Grandma. We might even get a re-run of the Wars of the Roses.) Seriously, it could mean the opportunity for more inward investment from the EU, at the expense of the abolition of County Councils. Much debate to come, and meanwhile we are in the Eastern Region along with Great Yarmouth, but totally cut off from Ashley Green. Borders are somewhat arbitrary, as large parts of Europe have discovered.

SKATEBOARD PARK Susan Johnson says:

The Town Council seems unable to find a site for a much needed facility that pleases anybody, let alone everyone. Either the place is near facilities (thus safer for the children and less likely to cause additional nuisance) but too close to housing; or it is nowhere near housing but therefore a risk to children's safety. Or it is on a sensitive site in the Conservation Area and therefore unacceptable to the conservation lobby (no names, no pack drill), let alone the householders. Ironic really, when this is 'permitted development' for the Borough Council on its own land. But they won't build it unless the community concurs.

The Town Council is internally split on this, thus resulting in one committee putting up a planning application, which is then criticised by its own Planning Committee when it is referred back down for consultation! Finally it emerges that the ruling group wants to 'bury bad news' and the Council won't let it.

This Association, meanwhile, supported the application for the Sports Centre site (although it knew some of its membership would not be best pleased) for the greater good for young people. As usual, there are no easy answers. Let's hope the Town Council continues to search for a site, while the young skateboarders use the small park at Northchurch or, if they fancy something further afield, the skateboard park at Tring which will be open (they hope) by mid June.

Second Police Station Open Day

One of the services was information on self help with crime prevention. There is lots we can individually do to prevent crime regarding theft from / of cars, house / garden shed burglary, and - security of our mobile phone. Handy leaflets on all these subjects were given out.

Mobile 'phone theft causes so much grief, but we can do something about it.

Make a note of the 15 digit IMEI number, so that the network can just disable your stolen phone.

This number is on the main body of the handset or just key in star-then hash-then 06-then hash.=*#06#

The 15 digit code will appear on the screen which is unique to your hand set. Write it down and keep it somewhere safe. Should your mobile be stolen you can phone (landline!) your service provider and give them the recorded code.

They will then be able to block your hand set even if the thief changes the SIM Card, and your phone will be useless.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman, writes:

Now that I have 2 hats on, this is the planning bit. In the last 3 months the highlight of this committee has been the Environment Award won by the excellent canal side information plinths and the plans are to agree a smaller version of the normal plaque in metal and have it attached where it will not damage the structure.

We were concerned with the proposal to install illuminated bus shelter signs on the London Road entrance to the town, which might be acceptable in London but not in the entrance to this market town. We objected.

We again objected to an application for a conservatory in the conservation area, not when it was put forward, but when the applicants wanted to use UPVC and not the more traditional wood. UPVC conservatories go green in a few years, look poor and there is little you can do about it; I have one and it does, but there again, I am not in the conservation area.

Susan Johnson, the outgoing Chairman and a stalwart on my committee represented us at the "Brighter Dacorum Future Day", about the way forward for planning and this is typical of the way your committee give up their time, as well as having the day job!

I have had an approach from CARAB (Conservation Area Residents Association of Berkhamsted) to have joint meetings and closer ties following a meeting between officers of our Association and CARAB. We will be taking this forward and I am personally delighted that what was a single issue group, to either stop or get into an acceptable form the Laing's plans for the Ravens Lane and Manor Street development, has now extended their remit. They at one time had more members, some shared than the BCA and were the largest representative body in the town. By the time you have read this I will have been in touch with Patsy Blackmore, their Chairman.

We are slightly concerned that the railings outside Overton House at 133 High Street and owned by the Collegiate school will be replaced and I am sure they will.

If you have concerns on any matters regarding planning matters phone me on 01442 873548.

Castle Village gets peoples award!

Melanie Heath of Ward Homes writes:

Castle Village, on the Berkhamsted Hill site, has been awarded a Certificate of High Commendation in the Environment Award Scheme for 2001.

Although the BCA was formed in the 1920's as the town's main civic society, it was not until 1980 it introduced an annual Environment Award Scheme with this purpose: "to stimulate interest in the local environment by the presentation of an annual award to the work which, in the opinion of the judges, is worthy of recognition due to its quality of design and construction and its enhancement of the environment for the benefit of Berkhamsted and Northchurch".

Any one of the BCA's 1,000-plus members can make an award nomination, and the word "work" does not necessarily apply to just buildings, as the overall winner for 2001 – canal-side information plinths – demonstrates. Naturally, this broad diversity makes the competition extremely tough.

Whilst the judges grant only one main Award, other works – like Castle Village – can be awarded with a Certificate of High Commendation if the quality is deemed of sufficient merit. It's therefore a great testament to have been recognised by ordinary local citizens, in what are, highly respected Awards.

Entries are judged on several different criteria, namely design standard, surroundings, quality and benefit to the community. Castle Village, with its sensitive restoration of the Grade II Listed Mansion House and Japanese and Sunken Gardens, would undoubtedly have scored highly for it's blending with neighbouring buildings and enhancement of the immediate environment.

A very big thank you to the BCA!

For further details please call the marketing suite on 01442 872129 or visit the website www.wardhomes.co.uk

Corrections to last issue

(bound to become a regular section!)

None that anyone has spotted yet!

We welcome all your suggestions and contributions, so why not contribute?

(e-mail to: bca@normcall.plus.com)

Berkhamsted (or Northchurch) in Jubilee Year Competition Result

| | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|--------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 5 to 9 age group | Richard Timms | Age 7 | Swing Gate First School | Poem |
| 9 to 13 age group | Emily Stidston | Age 13 | Egerton-Rothesay School | Drawing with poem |

Congratulations to both winners (and schools)

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association