

# The Citizen



Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

November 2003

## Chairman's Report October 2003

*Our Chairman, Gordon Bluck writes:*

As I sit here in Wales typing into a laptop computer I am reflecting on 12 years on the main committee of the Association, 10 years as the Town Amenities Chairman and nearly 2 years as Association Chairman, and I wonder if it was all worth it.

I was in my 30's when my BCA career started and in that time I have had at least 2 regular meetings a month together with the extras such as the Ravens Lane/Manor Street work with the builders which were fortnightly for a long time. Well, the answer to the question is: yes it is. The only reason for even questioning this, is that I received a letter from a member who had nearly not renewed her membership because she felt we were not doing anything about new developments in the town and in particular a development, which is currently "on ice" near her. Well, let me put the record straight. This Association, through the hard working Town Amenities Sub-Committee, looks at all planning applications affecting the town and members give up their own time, as I do as Chairman, to ensure they are appropriate for our historic home.

In the past years since I went computerised, there are 477 stored items, mostly letters of objection, and this can hardly be not doing our job. Our role is not to keep the town in aspic, but to ensure that it develops in the way it always has done, apart from the horrors of the 1960's. We rarely object to domestic developments outside the conservation area, leaving this to Town Council and local residents, and we always try to be positive. We also represent our members on a regular basis at meetings called to improve the town, such as the Berkhamsted Urban Design Study, Town Centre Forum, Canal & Riverside Partnership and the latest series of meetings about the town 'Health Check'. Because we achieve more by our non-confrontational approach, by suggesting change where necessary, we have not had a very high profile as we work behind the scenes.

At the recent "Our Community in Action" exhibition we had a display of press cuttings going back to 1932 which showed we had been involved in all of the great challenges facing the town. At that event I had the opportunity to talk to the CARAB group who were set up to oppose the development at Ravens Lane/Manor

Street and have since matured into an Association representing people in the conservation area in its totality. On the face of it we might feel somewhat miffed that something we have been doing for over 75 years is being usurped; nothing can be further from the truth, in that we are delighted to have a partner in this important work. Some residents belong to both Associations, some belong to one. Unfortunately some belong to neither, but that is another story.

A brief update on the footpath map, is that it is coming up for a reprint, having sold some 3500 copies. Better paper next time, promise!

On a final note our excellent treasurer has an article elsewhere in this newsletter about subscriptions and all I will say is that her proposed rise will bring us up to half the annual fee of CARAB; not that they are expensive but we are too cheap, doing the work we do. I hope to see you all at the Christmas event.

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## Wildlife on your Doorstep - brief report

*Norman Cutting writes:*

The 2003/04 season started with an informative talk by Petrina Allen from the Herts & Middx Wildlife Trust on Wednesday 15th October.

We learnt that the Trust was formed in 1964 and is part of the National Wildlife Trust which, in partnership with others, aims to look after wildlife and improve their habitat.

One of the little gems we learnt about was that the otter was found to be extinct in Herts during the mid 1970's, but following the introduction of just 6 in 1991 in the RMC quarry at Amwell, the colony is now flourishing and expanding.

Based in St Albans, the trust can be contacted on 01727 858901

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Next issue due out at the end of February 2004

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## THE ASSOCIATION : WHAT WE DO

For the third consecutive year your Committee took a stall at the Lions' Community Fair, now called "Our Community in Action". It took place on the morning of Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> October in the Town Hall and I hope you had time to call in to see our stall and the very many others showing the work of the varied voluntary organisations in Berkhamsted. As part of our display showing the involvement of this Association in Berkhamsted life I produced a sort of check list, which I thought would help the public understand the work put in by the Committee and its two sub-committees, and perhaps in turn inspire you to join one or more.

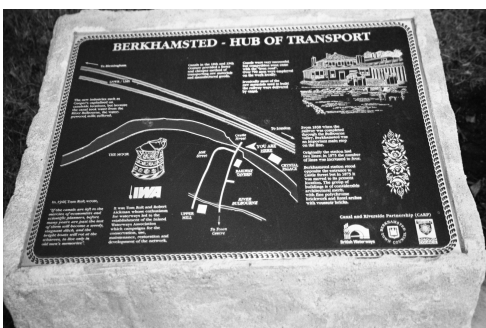
**WE**

- **LOOK AT ALL PLANNING APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED FOR BERKHAMSTED PLUS ANY SIGNIFICANT ONES IN NORTHCHURCH. MAKE COMMENTS AS NECESSARY. THIS MEANT LOOKING AT IN EXCESS OF 450 APPLICATIONS IN 2002.**
- **PRESENT EACH YEAR OUR OWN "ENVIRONMENT AWARD" FOR NEW BUILDINGS/REFURBISHMENT/FACILITIES IN THE TOWN, TO HIGHLIGHT GOOD PRACTICE IN DEVELOPMENT**
- **CAMPAIGN TO ENHANCE AND PRESERVE THE CONSERVATION AREA, WHILST RECOGNISING THE CONTRIBUTION OF NEW GOOD QUALITY BUILDING**
- **PRODUCE A FOOTPATH MAP (5<sup>th</sup> VERSION CURRENTLY AVAILABLE) DESIGNED WITH THE WALKER IN MIND**
- **WALK AND CAMPAIGN TO ENHANCE FOOTPATHS IN BERKHAMSTED, NORTHCHURCH AND THE SURROUNDING AREA**
- **HAVE REPRESENTATION ON MANY CO-OPERATIVE VENTURES e.g. The Canal & Riverside Partnership (CARP), The Berkhamsted Urban Design Study (BUDS)**
- **MAINTAIN LINKS WITH AND MEET MEMBERS AND OFFICERS IN ALL THREE TIERS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**
- **REPRESENT THE RESIDENTS OF THE AREA ON MANY ORGANISATIONS e.g. The Town Hall Trust, Dacorum Environmental Forum, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Parish Paths Partnership, The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust**
- **ORGANISE SPEAKERS ON LOCAL TOPICS AND ISSUES, FOR MEETINGS IN THE TOWN HALL. ORGANISE SOME SOCIAL EVENTS FOR MEMBERS**
- **PUBLISH A NEWSLETTER TO KEEP MEMBERS INFORMED**

**WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU LIKE US TO DO?**

**PLEASE LET US KNOW AND PREFERABLY VOLUNTEER TO HELP US DO IT**

**Susan Johnson - Committee member**



Left:  
CARP one of the information plinths - winners of recent BCA Environment Award.

Right:  
Bridgewater Boats on the canal - a scene maybe never to be seen again!



## Subscriptions

*Our Treasurer, Christine Manning, explains our concerns:*

Those Members who were able to attend this year's AGM will recall that there was considerable discussion on the Association's finances. There has been a deficit on the General Fund income and expenditure for the last ten years and the Association has been surviving by using up accumulated reserves. The General Fund stood at £859 at the end of last year and, based on forecasts, will be entirely used up before the end of next year if no changes are made.

The current subscriptions barely cover the cost of the Newsletter, let alone meetings, general administration and other expenditure like the important Environment Award. We are not a fundraising organisation - costs have to be met by the membership. At the AGM, Members' views were sought as to whether, in addition to increasing subscriptions, it might be appropriate to make a small charge for meetings, mainly to cover the cost of hall hire. As many Members pay their subscriptions for five years at a time, the full impact of increasing subscriptions will take some while to get through to the Association's finances - it is only at the renewal of these five year subscriptions that the increase will apply. On the other hand, making a charge for admission to meetings would have an immediate impact on our income, but some felt that it might deter people from attending meetings.

Our Newsletters are a major element of the Association's costs and we are actively looking at ways to reduce this overhead, without affecting our ability to keep in touch with Members. It was felt that, as only one Newsletter is sent to each household, it might be appropriate to change the subscription structure to reflect this.

The Committee has resolved:

From 2004 subscriptions will be increased to £5 per annum per household.

Meetings should continue to be free for Members, but that commencing with the October meeting, Members and guests will be invited to make a small voluntary donation towards costs. Non-members will be charged £2 entry and encouraged to become Members.

Finally, our membership has been fairly static for a long while and by far the best way of increasing our income would be to have more Members. So spread the word - make a point this year of attending at least one meeting and bring a friend or neighbour with you. We need more Members - please!

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### **BCA Activities**

*Rita Jones writes:*

Norman has written a brief report on the talk we organised for October (in case you missed it).

On Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> November, the talk will be by John Leonhardt and Peter Grainger, who were both involved in the book 'A Century to Remember' about the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Little Gaddesden. They will be telling us how the village produced the book, their Millennium project, and perhaps something about village life through the last century.

Our Christmas Party on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> December, apart from the mulled wine and mince pies, will give you the opportunity to join in Christmas Carols accompanied by a small choir from Panda Players of Chesham. As well as the carols, they will be entertaining us with a selection of songs from the

musicals. This promises to be a very happy start to the Christmas festivities, so please join us.

Christmas will, as usual, be followed by the New Year's Day ramble, starting from the front of Berkhamsted station at 10.30 am. The walk is to Aldbury, with a stop for lunch, and then, for the energetic, back again (you have to provide your own transport back to Berkhamsted if you need it). This will be an enjoyable and healthy start to 2004.

Finally, our first talk of 2004 is on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February when David Thorold, Keeper of Archaeology at Verulamium Museum, will tell us about recent developments at the museum and in the St. Albans area.

Each meeting starts at 8 p.m. in the Great Hall in Berkhamsted Town Hall (apart from the walk, of course). From October, coffee or tea and biscuits will be 50p. I look forward to seeing you at all the events.

## Town Amenities Sub-Committee

*Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:*

With my other Chairman's hat on, I have to say that since my last report there have not been many domestic applications we have had to object to. However, to the north of the town, the two concurrent applications by the cricket club and golf club to extend their grounds met with our opposition.

The cricket club applied again to change an agricultural field to a sports field and, although this has instant appeal to help the footballers of the town, particularly clubs like the Raiders, we thought that to flatten this field would be creeping urbanisation in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The golf club similarly wanted to convert a field to a private golf range and create a "wild flower meadow". We strongly objected as it was too visible from the town and, although the plans showed a small fence protecting the road, we felt this would need to be made much higher. We also felt the spectre of floodlights could not be ignored.

Some of you may have seen my open letter published in the Gazette about the huge amount of temporary signs advertising long gone concerts, and yellow ones all over the town for housing developments sold long ago. Richard Page, our MP, has put his support behind this campaign and when Dacorum Borough Council has the time and funds they will take action. This is something we will take up with them when we have our annual meeting. Tony Statham, the latest arrival on the committee, has produced an excellent photographic record of problem areas in the town, such as pavements, and this will be shown at that same meeting.

We have, as always, objected to the usual crop of internally illuminated signs, in the Conservation Area particularly the proposal to have lit advertising panels in a new bus shelter outside NatWest Bank.

Long-standing members of the Association know of our involvement with the Canal and Riverside Partnership and we learnt with horror that the Town Council proposed to take it fully within the remit of the Environment Committee rather than have it as a working party lead by councillors. This could have cut off funding sources open to British Waterways and, although we understand that the focus should now be moved to the river, we felt very strongly it should not be just a Town Council project. Following a written submission, three of us attended the full Council meeting to discuss this proposal and both Susan Johnson and I were allowed to speak. We both

expressed the BCA's opposition to the changes. The BCA also offered to take over the running of CARP and suggested we could act as independent Chairman, with the existing membership including Town Council. Although this was rejected, probably fortuitously, it was decided that the Partnership would remain as it is, and we hope that it will continue its work in the town as part of a much bigger review of the canal outside our boundaries.

We will be watching to see that meetings are called and that the Town Council does not allow it to wither on the vine.

## And Finally

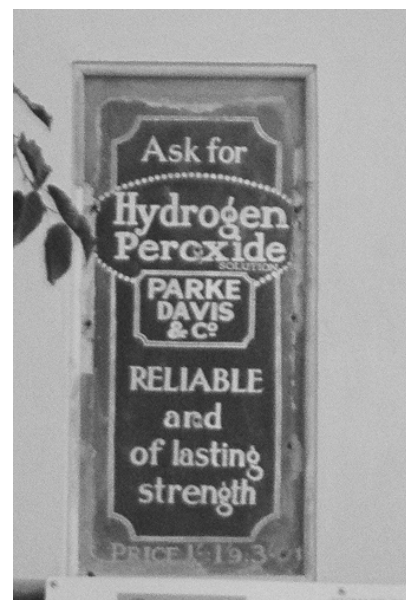


Above:

The existing wooden bus shelter mentioned in Gordon's Town Amenities Sub-Committee report.

Below:

Another piece of history exposed!



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*Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association*