

The Citizen



Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

July 2003

Chairman's Report June 2003

Our Chairman, Gordon Bluck writes:

Well, the time has come round again to do the Chairman's bit and summarise the last three months and how the association is going forward.

The Annual General Meeting was a success with a reasonable attendance and, as those of you who attended will have noticed, I turned things round with the general interest speaker, Nick Edlin, right at the beginning. There were two reasons for this, first he could then get away home at a reasonable time as he was giving up his evening as a council officer and secondly we were still awake. He spoke on the latest regarding parking plans in Berkhamsted and I felt this was useful. He kept to the point and was, as requested, brief. As usual David Brunt gave an excellent presentation on the Environment Award and I had the pleasure in presenting the three certificates for high commendation to:

- a) Bartrum Cottages - the 'affordable housing' part of the Laing's development at Raven Lane/Manor Street
- b) The conversion of The Old School and The Studio in Chapel Street
- c) St Mary's Place in Northchurch

At the end of the AGM I was delighted to learn that Tony Statham had agreed to fill one of the vacancies on the main committee. He is very, very welcome and has already attended a main committee meeting and given wise council. Tony has also agreed to join the Town Amenities Sub-Committee which strengthens it, following various losses to this sub-committee. Another bit of good news is that at the AGM Bryn Maidman, Laing Homes' Construction Director, approached me to say that in an effort to further integrate new owners of their properties into the town, they will supply a copy of our footpath map to them as part of a welcome pack. In addition they will pay the first years subscription and complete the forms on their behalf. With busy professionals moving in, this is important, as I know with a full time job etc. this does not get done.

As I write this report, we have received the cheque for all new and potential Laing homeowners up front.

This has proved a useful boost to our flagging finances and, more importantly, gets us new members without any pain. I hope that they will get involved. As I have mentioned before the Association has, mostly by myself, been involved with Laing's liaison group with Councillors and the CARAB group in the Manor Street/Raven Lane project for the last two years. I have been impressed with the care they have taken to make the development as painless as possible. As I will mention in my other report, "in the pocket of" is not something our members should be concerned about, as your Committee and Chairman were not born yesterday and Laings know and appreciate that.

My final thought is regarding finances. Our excellent Treasurer has pointed out, as did the last Treasurer that we need to pay more in some shape or form for the Association to continue to support our town. Subscriptions are low and we are working on how this can be achieved.

EAST OF ENGLAND MARKET TOWN AWARDS

Susan Johnson reports:

Congratulations to CARP on winning the Heritage section of this competition run recently by the EEDA and Action for Market Towns. They beat off stiff competition.

Well done Lindy Foster-Weinreb and British Waterways for putting together the entry in one morning flat! The Citizens are proud to be part of this partnership and gave it the Environment Award for its plinths last year. Let's hope for more co-operative working to get the scheme's work extended further along the canal.

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<http://www.bca.normcall.com>

BCA Activities

Rita Jones writes:

Forthcoming Attractions 2003/4

The 2002/3 season ended with a very interesting talk by Cic Upcott on the Chiltern Society, including its plans for the future. The aims of the Chiltern Society are very similar to our own, but covering a wider area. Sadly the attendance was disappointing but this may have been because of the rival attractions of a sunny Easter holiday week..

The next talk in 2003 is on Wednesday October 15th, opening the 2003/4 season. Pauline Oliver of the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust will talk about 'Wildlife on Your Doorstep'. Pauline is a member of CARP and is advising on the management of the wetland area off Lower Kings Road. She will talk about the work of Trust, as well as the wildlife particularly on a local level.

Some of you may have seen the book 'A Century to Remember' Little Gaddesden's millennium project on village life in the 20th century. This was a team effort and I thought some of you might like to hear how they did this, as well as a little about local village life. The result will be 'How We Made the Book', to be given by John Leonhardt and Peter Grainger on Thursday November 20th.

The Christmas event with mince pies, mulled wine and carols will be on Friday December 12th, followed by the traditional ramble on New Year's Day.

Talks for 2004 are opened by David Thorold, Keeper of Archaeology at Verulamium Museum. He will tell us about 'Recent Developments at Verulamium Museum in the St. Albans Area' on Wednesday February 18th.

The AGM, with the Environment Award, will be on Thursday March 25th. This is followed by the final talk of the 2003/4 season. Nick Siney needs no introduction after his excellent talk last year. This time the talk is 'Bricks Restoring the Past' on Wednesday April 21st, about some of the unusual or historical problems faced by the brickmakers.

2004 is the 80th anniversary of BCA so we hope to celebrate with 'Summer Wine'. Watch this space!

All BCA events are dependent upon your support. The talks cover a wide variety of subjects of local interest so I hope there will be something to attract you. Please come along and make all the time and effort of speakers worthwhile.



You have to get out of your car to get this view from Little Bridge Road.
(The road that isn't and goes no-where - but was and did)

PARKING UPDATE

Susan Johnson has the latest:

The decriminalisation of parking in Dacorum looks like it is going ahead. The draft parking Orders went out for consultation in March, and late in May the DBC Cabinet gave the go ahead. Provided the decision is not 'called in' for reconsideration, by the time you read this the final Orders will be (or about to be) published, for implementation in October.

So we in Berkhamsted will have the usual charging regime in the car parks plus, for the first time, charging on the High Street. It is proposed that it will cost 10p for 12 minutes. If you need more than 12 minutes, you will be able to pay in multiples of 10p for up to an hour. After that you must move on. What do you do if you don't know how long you need? You pay for a larger amount of time than it could possibly take; or you park somewhere else where the time limits are more generous and walk to your destination. It's really quite simple, if initially irritating. It should provide a greater turnover of spaces and thus a fairer deal for all shoppers.

The residents parking scheme in Berkhamsted was abandoned in its original form. As I thought, when you saw the details, the vast majority of you were incensed. There will be some investigation later in the year of the needs of residents close to the station, who are the worst affected by commuter parking; and the whole scheme is due to be reviewed after it has been working for 6 months. So there will be opportunity to tweak, but not to abandon wholesale.

Hope you are broadly satisfied, if not ecstatic.

Dacorum Citizens Advice Bureau Office opens in Civic Centre

June Street (Chairman - D.C.A.B.)

The long awaited accessible premises are now open! We are most grateful to Dacorum Borough Council and Berkhamsted Town Council for re-locating us from the quaint cottage in Prince Edward Street, from where we have provided services for over thirty years

Our smart new office is located on the first floor, in the room which was formerly the Town Council Chamber prior to their move to the purpose built top floor. There is a lift to assist disabled people, elderly people and prams, push chairs and wheelchairs – facilities we have been seeking for many years.

We are pleased to be sharing this new suite of first floor offices with the Dacorum Council for Voluntary Service and the Dacorum Volunteer Bureau, with whom we have worked very well for many years together to provide services, information and advice for the people of Berkhamsted and surrounding areas.

Our office hours are: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 10am – 1pm with up to 10.30am for “drop in” enquiries. Appointments can be made, the last one being at 12 noon.

Advice is given on consumer issues, money problems, debts, benefits and a wide range of other services.

We hope to continue to assist people with their various issues and to work with the Berkhamsted Citizens Association, and their representative Graham Spittle. Not only is he a good friend of the CAB but he also brings his expertise, common sense and his wonderful sense of humour to our Management Committee

If you are in need of some advice, please visit the offices or telephone: 01442 866930

Susan Johnson brings us up to date:

Town Centre Management

The DBC Town Centres Manager, Amanda Kentish, is in post and has set up Town Centre Management for HH, Old HH, Berkhamsted and Tring.

It started on 1st April and a dedicated (in both senses) officer, Jim Guiton, is spending a morning each week in each place on site to make sure things get done. Berkhamsted’s morning is **Monday** and he can be contacted through the Town Council’s offices in the Civic Centre. Please use him to help direct what you would like to see done for Berkhamsted’s betterment.

Elections & the death of Democracy

Not my headline – the Gazette decided that uncontested elections in the villages meant democracy was dead. Well, if so, it’s been dead for many years, as it seems to have escaped their notice that there are rarely contested elections there. The late arrival of Wigginton’s nomination forms says more about human error and Royal Mail than it does about vox pop. In Berkhamsted, Tring and Kings Langley the parties battled it out as usual – with some slightly surprising results. Tring Town Council has gone LibDem (from Conservative) for the first time ever, Kings Langley went Conservative (it often changes hands) and Berkhamsted now has all but one councillor LibDem. The lone Conservative opposition councillor has a lot of democracy to maintain! At the Borough Council the Conservatives have consolidated their hold on power (from the tenuous position of holding it by the Mayor’s casting vote). I hope that the new Portfolio Holders use their position wisely. It’s more of a commentary on democracy that we have local government by cabinet (which is what PHs are) rather than the old committee system. It’s supposed to give us quicker decisions – but are they the right ones? And should so much power be vested in a small number of councillors? Please write to us with your view.

Personally, I’m worried that 1984 is now with us. Almost 20 years late, but that’s what you get in Britain with any public project. We are watched by CCTV, our DNA is about to be put on a universal data base, we might be made to carry identity cards, and our retina imprint will go on our cash cards. The Freedom of Information Act means organisations can limit what the public can be shown; and the Data Protection Act means we can’t put anyone in touch with anyone else. War is peace. Freedom is slavery. Newspeak is here. Or am I being paranoid? Answers on a postcard....

I’m renewing my sub to Amnesty International.

Town Amenities Sub Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

In the last three months there have not been many plans which have caused us concern but we have met every month and as many as possible of the Sub-Committee look in detail at the plans.

As I mentioned in my Chairman's report we welcomed Tony Statham to the TASC as an addition to our number. We considered and objected again to the squeezing in of a new dwelling adjacent to 22 Beech Hill which we feel is still inappropriate.

As you will see from the national and local press the old Figg's shop has been listed grade 2* and we wrote recommending public access (by appointment at controlled times) should be part of the permission to convert to offices. We certainly had no problem with a flat above.

Concerning the application by the Baptist Church on the High Street to demolish the front wall and railings the Association felt this was a loss to the street scene and would lose an integral part of the design of the church. There were also concerns regarding the possible parking outside the church, we objected. We also objected as we always do to the proposed illuminated sign at Lunn Poly, 190 High Street on principle. I know this is our mantra, but if you go to Stratford-upon-Avon, even McDonald's have to have a muted wooden sign. Why not Berkhamsted?

The proposal to erect seven large houses between Oakwood and the bypass was something that we felt was pushing the boundaries of the town and we objected on that basis. Frankly who would want to be so close to the bypass?

We supported the skateboard part in the proposed site at Butts Meadow (I can hear my phone ringing already). The proposal to demolish one bungalow at 9 Kitsbury Terrace and build three town houses was too much and you can guess what we did. That brings me to the hot potato which is the demolition of four perfectly good houses in Graemsdyke Road and construction of, I have to say, a well designed block of 24 apartments. This would be fine in a flat and suitable location, however this is not that, with the land falling away to Kings Road and frankly, the plans showing tree screening do not reflect what we and the residents see on the ground. It is difficult to see how a building of this bulk can hide behind those trees especially in winter; at least the collegiate school sports hall is cut into the bank. We have objected and hope that this will not sour the good relationship for co-operation we have built up with Laings. ↗

Before you all fall asleep, there were two more objections, to an illuminated projecting sign at Lloyds Bank and the plan at 2 Briar Way for a pair of semi detached houses following demolition of a bungalow. As I always plead, if any member wants to support our work please let me know; phone 873548.

Hertfordshire and the East of England Region (EofE Reg.) *John Parsons updates us:*

When I wrote the piece on this subject for the last edition of The Citizen, I was relying on my reading of the Plan and upon brief telephone conversations with officers of the HCC and the East of England regional offices, and I had drifted into some lateral thinking about how Hertfordshire had been included in a region with which it had so little commonality.

I was therefore interested to read in the recent edition of the Herts.C.C. newsletter Herts Direct, that the County Council had consulted all of the councils in the County, and that they had unanimously (and across all parties) supported the view that Hertfordshire had little in common with counties like Norfolk and Suffolk and that if Hertfordshire was to be involved in a regional authority, it should be Northern Home Counties or South-east England based.

In a poll of 1000 Hertfordshire residents, run on behalf of the County Council only 4% knew that we were in the E of E Reg., 15% thought that we were in the South East and 70% did not know!. More than 50% were strongly opposed to a regional assembly.

The County Council is writing to the Deputy Prime Minister asking that the allocation of Hertfordshire to the the EofE Region should be reviewed before any plans for a referendum are formulated.

As this aspect of your Committee's policy appears to be in good hands, I am now trying to find out how much it has cost us to date to get into this position and how much it will cost to be "regionalized."

Corrections to last issue (a regular section!)

Gremlins crept in again last time due to my upgrading the program used to produce this newsletter. Should be better now!

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

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association