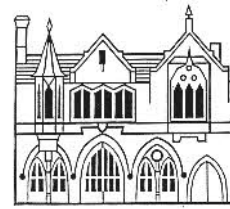


The Citizen



Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

March 2005

Annual General Meeting

NOTICE is hereby given that the 80th Annual General Meeting of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be held in the Wellcome Great Hall of the Town Hall, Berkhamsted, on **Thurs 17th March 2005 at 8 pm.**

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
8. Any other business

Following coffee:

BCA Environment Awards 2004

There were a number of nominations for the Environment Award for the year 2004, representing a wide variety of entries. The selected short list (details on a separate sheet on the night*) will be illustrated at the award presentation prior to the winners being announced.

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!

** Due to a combination of the lead time of producing the newsletter, earlier than usual AGM date and the required notice period, we have been unable to include the list with this newsletter.*

It will, however be available on the web-site '<http://www.bca.normcall.com>' prior to the meeting.

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 program of talks, a walk and other events. The Association is represented on a number of other local bodies such as the CAB, Graham Greene Birthplace Trust and Town Hall Trust.

THE DACORUM CITIZENS ADVICE BUREAU

John Parsons our new representative writes:

When Graham Spittle was elected Vice President (he will be President next year) of the Hertfordshire Law Society, he resigned as the Berkhamsted Citizens' Association representative (and Company Secretary) of the Dacorum District Citizens Advice Bureau (DCAB), I volunteered to become the BCA representative on the DCAB.

While I was vaguely aware of CAB activities I rapidly became both very impressed and at the same time depressed by what I have discovered in my early acquaintance with DCAB.

The organisation consists of 11 paid staff (mainly part time) and 57 volunteers who deal with 18,200 enquiries from 12,000 people in a typical year. The all-up income of the Bureau is just over £250,000 per annum. And so the cost of each case is £13.75 – How is that for value for money?

For this money, the DCAB has recovered monies (mainly from government benefit agencies) to the value of £1,670,000, i.e. a return of nearly 7 times its cost, and as all of this money goes to the most needy people in the community, it immediately flows back into the local economy.

The income of £250K is derived from £213,000 from the Dacorum Borough Council. The balance comes from other funders to support our outreach projects. Unfortunately the DBC contribution has been reducing over recent years, and in line with most local authority spending is likely to be reduced again this year.

The DCAB has offices in Hemel, Berkhamsted and Tring and also holds “outreach” sessions in various doctors' surgeries, Sheltered Housing Communities, and is now starting a series of sessions in selected schools. These newer activities, while very valuable in reaching under privileged communities, are dependent on obtaining funding on an annual basis.

The most common problems that the bureau assist on are:- Social security benefits of one sort or another total around 6000 each year, Consumer problems (mainly debt) account for about 2500 and employment a significant number. Debt problems are increasing at an alarming rate.

It takes 12 months to train a typical volunteer before they are qualified to act as advisors and the Bureau insists on certain ratios of expert (usually paid) staff to volunteer advisors to maintain quality of service. The DCAB is in dire need of persons who are able assist in their implementation of IT systems either by trouble shooting or instructing staff on the use of their IT systems.

The bureau also acts in an upward direction by alerting their central organisation, and local and central government organisations on where policies and procedures do not work and how they might be improved. Malpractices like improper debt collection and, bogus holiday schemes are also high-lighted. This involves reading through the case notes of significant enquiries and putting them forward for consideration for further action. The DCAB would like to hear from anyone who thinks that they could help in this work.

DCAB can be contacted at bureau@hemelhempstead.cabnet.org.uk

Our suspicions confirmed - Norman Cutting reports:

Our un-elected East of England Regional Assembly have actually sent the governments housing requirement list back as the government didn't want to pay for the additional infrastructure costs needed to accommodate the additional houses 'required' for the east of England.

Hertfordshire's share would have been 80,000 and Dacorum was allocated around 6000. This is roughly the number of houses in Berkhamsted already and no-one seems to have any real idea where they are to go, without changing the basic character of the area.

On a cold wet Saturday morning in early February, some 230 signatures were collected on a petition →→→→

Chairmans' Report

Our Chairman, Graham Spittle reports

Festival of Light

It was a great pleasure to participate in the festivities surrounding the switching on of the Christmas lights in the High Street on 3rd December last. For those who have not attended one of these occasions, I do commend them to you, and urge you to go along next time. There is always a great feeling of community as people take advantage of the closing of the High Street to traffic and throng around the platform erected by the Christmas tree, or visit the many stalls and entertainments; this time with the added attraction of seasonal music from the Salvation Army.

My official duty was to present the BCA cup for the best dressed shop window in the opinion of the judging panel, which deservedly went to 'Itzomi' in Lower Kings Road. Certificates were awarded to the runners up: 'Benellie', 'Home & Colonial' and 'Temptation'.

Of necessity judging has to take place in November, and I have some sympathy with those who stand out against starting Christmas so early, and leave their decorating until later.

Dacorum Museum Store

Just after the previous edition of *The Citizen* went to press your Committee learned of the threatened ending of Dacorum Borough Council's funding of The Dacorum Heritage Trust Limited, the body responsible for the museum store. The Committee were dismayed to think that to achieve a saving of currently less than £70,000 per annum, the store's collection of irreplaceable artifacts and records might be dissipated.

At the Committee's request I have been corresponding with the Councillor and officers most involved to express our dismay. I hope Association members approve of the Committee's view that any diminution of the Trust's activities would represent a loss to the people of Dacorum disproportionate to such a small financial saving, and that it is hard to conceive a way the money might be spent, which would represent better value. This is not just a

Berkhamsted matter, as the store serves the whole of the borough. Someone who knows how many council tax payers live in the borough can probably work out exactly how much each of them will have to pay in future to keep this priceless record of our heritage. It can only be a few pence each year.

I hope that, by the time this *Citizen* reaches you, the proposals will have been abandoned. However, you may be concerned to know the proposals were ever made.

Cycling on the Pavement

Heaviest postbag so far after my piece under this heading in the December issue of the *Citizen*. Do the burghers of Berkhamsted object to cycling more than driving on the pavement? [October 2004]

Commons in Court

Your committee has recently learned with regret that the Open Spaces Society lost its High Court case against Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for failing to hold a public enquiry into fencing on Wisley Common in Surrey. Although Wisley Common may not be an amenity affecting our members directly, the principles at stake here are of national importance, and we should applaud the Society for trying to stand up to the forces of government in this regard.

With Berkhamsted's history of direct action to preserve common land, you may like to send a donation towards the Society's fighting fund which was depleted by the case by some £45,000. Cheques payable to Open Spaces Society can be sent to chairman Rodney Legg at 25A, Bell Street, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon. RG9 2BA. As a charity, the Society will benefit from an accompanying Gift Aid declaration, which I could provide on request.

BCA intends to make a token payment as a gesture of solidarity, but, as readers will know, the Association is not a fund raising organisation and is unable to give real financial support to any cause; how ever worthy.

→→→ calling for the whole thing to be re-thought and abolish the regional assembly.

This would not be so bad if, a week later, it is reported that hundreds of thousands of houses are going to be demolished 'up north'.

Have I missed something?

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones reports

The old year definitely ended on a high note with the Derek Fowlds' talk and our Christmas celebrations, not only a 'sell out' but with people waiting for returns. We are very grateful to the Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society, who arranged Derek Fowlds' visit, for sharing this event with us.

2005 has started well with over 30 people taking part in the traditional New Year's Day walk. Our thanks to Bill Willett for leading this. He has agreed to lead next year's walk and has suggested a midsummer walk, which the committee thinks is an excellent idea. Please let us have your comments and watch this space.

I hope the support will have continued for Peter Ingram's talk 'The Paper Trail Project' on February 24th.

Plans for meetings from October 2005 are well under way. However, the demand for the few halls that are available for public meetings has increased. The Sessions Hall seems to be a suitable venue for meetings, apart from the AGM, but is very popular, and we have been asked if we could fix the day of our meeting. The second Thursday in the month fits in with the Sessions Hall bookings and does not seem to clash with meetings held by many of the other Societies in Berkhamsted. Therefore this will be the day for our meetings in October, November, February and April (Easter permitting) from the end of this year. As it is impossible to please everybody, I realise that this may not be the most convenient day for some of you but, from the few days available, this seemed to be the most suitable choice, and I hope you will understand. The AGM will continue to be held in the Great Hall on a Thursday towards the end of March, this too depending on the date of Easter.

As many will remember from last year's AGM, we have been looking at new ideas for the Christmas celebrations. A suggestion that the date should be changed from December, a busy month, to January, was well received, so it was decided to try this. The Sessions Hall has been booked for Saturday, January 21st 2006. No, sadly, we can't repeat last year, but I am sure you have some good ideas for the celebration, so do bring them to the AGM or pass them on to a Committee Member.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

I am afraid that I forgot to produce a report for the last newsletter but the sad thing is nobody noticed. However, this time I have got my act together, but there is actually very little to report.

The highlight of this time of year is the annual environment award run by David Brunt and details will be elsewhere in the newsletter. As usual I am very grateful for the hard work by all my committee and specifically David who puts in a great deal of effort. In the last few months there have been a number of applications for internally illuminated sign in the High Street and we always almost without exception object as they spoil the look of the conservation area. Other developments we have objected to include the proposed 18 flats at Rose Cottage 17 Bank Mill Lane and two 5 bedroom houses at 6 Murray Road.

After my last report a member quite rightly pointed out that I had been unfair about the amount of work being done by the group trying to improve the facilities of the Castle. The good news is that following a change of personnel at English Heritage a important meeting took place on 1 February for all stakeholders to decide the terms of reference and the way forward. I was unable to attend as it is during the day and I have a full time job. The Association did its best to send a representative.

As usual.....

Page references got muddled in the last issue due to last minute changes to layouts - sorry, but I trust you managed to find things OK.

We are still looking for someone to help raise the profile of the Association by taking on the publicity role.

There must be someone out there who would appreciate a challenge!

Remember the web site has late breaking news and issues of this wonderful newsletter, latest version is password protected for members only, just ask!

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

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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