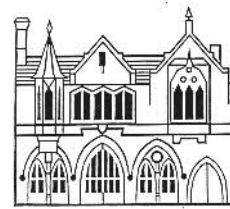


The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association
Working for the social and civic life of our community



June 2006

Chairmans' Column

Our new Chairman, Rita Jones, starts this issue.

As this is the first column I have written for The Citizen as your Chairman I thought I should have another look at our constitution to confirm that the committee and I are working along the right lines. Yes, we are trying to stimulate an interest in public affairs; we try hard to prevent the loss of 'objects of architectural or of historical interest or of natural beauty'; we hope we are 'initiating and assisting useful measures in the public service' and we do provide opportunities for discussion of all matters of local public interest. However, if the last Open Forum was anything to go by, public discussion is definitely out of fashion. Perhaps it is the terror of public speaking, which I can well understand, and we were relieved to get a good response to the questionnaire.

This is your organisation and the committee are carrying out what we hope are your wishes. However we do need some feedback. A good example is the new Hospital Sub-committee. The local hospital service has been through many 'crises' during the past 30 years, but this time it looks as though it could have serious effects on Berkhamsted. The sub-committee is initially operating a 'watching brief' by attending public meetings of the various local health service committees and starting a dialogue with the very experienced campaigners in Hemel Hempstead. To this end Zena Bullmore kindly agreed to speak at the AGM. By presenting one of the points of view, this should have provoked much discussion, but sadly, failed. It is proving difficult to find the true facts behind the hospital crisis. Clearly something will have to be done to control the spending. Some of the plans I have heard seem very sensible, but some of the closures and transfers seem at the best illogical and at

the worst, likely to have a major impact on local patient care. Or are we just panicking? Perhaps local needs and improved treatments do not warrant so many beds or clinics? Do we have the infrastructure in place to cope with the changes?

There must be members with inside knowledge, at the giving or receiving end, of how the health service really operates locally. The questionnaires completed at the AGM indicated that some members do have opinions on this. With this newsletter you will find a copy of the questionnaire for those who were unable to be present at the AGM. Do please spare a few minutes to complete and return it. The replies we have received so far have been really helpful.

The Hospital Sub-committee is just one of the initiatives undertaken by your committee and your comments and ideas about any aspects of our work will be very welcome. I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Finally, I must say how delighted I am to see that the railings along the canal in Station Road have, at last, been painted (apart from a small area of recent damage). The rusting, peeling railings were part of the first impressions of Berkhamsted received by visitors arriving by train, and may have indicated that we were an uncaring town. CARP, when I was the BCA representative (and probably before), repeatedly tried to get this work done. Eventually, thanks to Lindy Foster-Weinreb, work was started on the preparation and undercoating, but, sadly, could not be completed. Suddenly the painting is finished and I, for one, am very grateful.



Some of the 2005 Environment Award winners

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones - Chairman reports:

On February 8th, the first talk of 2006 was by Phil Pennington, on 'Wildlife and the Boxmoor Trust'. This gave us a new insight into the Trust, one of the oldest of its type in the country, and its work. The talk was beautifully illustrated with some excellent slides. I realised how much we take our local countryside and its wildlife for granted by assuming it just happens. Phil showed us that it requires careful conservation and management, illustrating how once familiar sights and sounds may disappear without our realising it. This includes chalk grassland, familiar to us, and covering parts of the Trust's lands, but an endangered environment. We learnt that it is mainly found in South East England and, amazingly, from a worldwide perspective, is at greater danger than the rainforests. We are fortunate in having such a resource on our doorsteps and should be grateful to the Tudor Parishioners of Hemel Hempstead who bought the land and set up the Trust in 1594.

On April 6th we welcomed back Nick Siney, who gave his postponed talk on 'Bricks: Restoring the Past'. Amusing and entertaining as ever, newcomers were given a quick description of brick production by hand. This was followed by an account of the many problems to be solved when restoring old buildings, and how the older brick makers often had some very unusual solutions. This is one of the many old crafts in danger of dying out if they don't attract young craftsmen. Nick offered to update us on some of the

projects he talked about so this may not be the last we see of him.

Nick Siney offered to arrange a guided tour of Meadham Farm Brickworks, Blackwell Hall Lane, Ley Hill and some members expressed an interest. If you would like to visit the brickworks, (you will have to provide your own transport), please send me, Rita Jones, 18, St. Margaret's Close, Berkhamsted, HP4 2LH, a short note giving a selection of suitable weekday dates between August 14th and September 30th and a telephone number, together with a stamped, addressed envelope. I should then be able to select a suitable day and make an appointment. As we are restricted to a maximum of 15 places, applications will be dealt with on a 'first come first served' basis. Please do not send any letters until 18th June, to allow for delivery of the newsletter.

Last, but certainly not least, I hope to see many of you on Sunday July 2nd for **The Midsummer Ramble**, from outside the front of Berkhamsted Railway Station at 10.30 am to Aldbury for lunch, and back (own transport if you don't want to walk back). The New Year's Day walk was a great success (see the last Citizen) and, if the weather is good, this should be even better. I hope you haven't all started your holidays and will be able to join us.

Next season's talks will cover Tring Museum, 'The Spirit of Berkhamsted', Coffee and Breathing, with a return of Anna Sims, this time with her daughter, in a concert.

From our representatives:

Dacorum Environmental Forum

Our new representative, Norman Cutting, attended the last meeting held on 20th April.

Main items from this forum:

- ✓ The concern that there was a lack of action following the 'Action Plan' presented at the January meeting.
- ✓ Rudolf Kirst, representing the Hemel Hempstead GM Action Group, requested the forum to support the County Council in their policy of opposing GM crops and reminded members that the EU certifies GM free food even if it has 0.9% GM content.
- ✓ The ongoing 'Urban Nature Conservation Study' concluded that the Borough still has wildlife corridors and could be used when considering planning applications. Maps have been produced for the main urban areas (including Berkhamsted). Concern was expressed that trees were being cut down in Northchurch, but lack of enforcement or reporting means that many incidents go un-noticed.
- ✓ There was an update on the Buncefield situation, but still awaiting the latest report (issued early May).
- ✓ Paul Harris, representing F.O.E., requested the forum to support all objections to the expansion of Luton Airport. Richard Blackburn (DBC) reminded members that the first of a number of planning applications in connection with this development will be made early this summer and the Council will make representations.
- ✓ Richard Blackburn also reminded members that the first part of the Local Plan review (core strategy - see next page) will be circulated in May and responses are requested.

QUESTIONNAIRE – WE NEED YOUR HELP!

Many thanks to all those who filled in the purple-coloured questionnaire distributed at the AGM. The success of that trial outing has emboldened us to contact the whole membership through this edition of the newsletter. You will find enclosed a questionnaire (only the colour of the paper is different from the original) aimed at the rest of our current membership.

The Association's Committee needs to understand the membership's profile and wishes, what it values from our current activities and what it would like the organisation to be doing in the next five years or so. The questionnaire is designed for individuals to fill in, so please feel free to copy it, and send in as many as there are of you in the house. Please put it in the post, or pop it through my door (address on the bottom of the form). I'm afraid the Association's coffers cannot run to pre-paid envelopes! If it would be more convenient, please download the questionnaire from our website and email it to me at Johnson@stonycroft.fsnet.co.uk. But please do not fill in the questionnaire enclosed here if you did so in March; all the original returns have been read, analysed and their contents noted.

It would be helpful if questionnaires could be returned by 30th June 2006, if possible. I can then analyse the contents and the Committee can start work on trying to fulfil your wishes. A summary of the results will be published in a future newsletter. Hoping to hear from you soon!

Susan Johnson
Committee member

Editorial

Norman Cutting has his say (again)

I've been sent a summary of the Dacorum Borough Council Core Strategy for the Local Development Framework. This is the first stage in the 'consultation' process and provides an insight into how the new planning system introduced by government will affect us all.

They have thoughtfully provided 62 questions for consultees to respond to. As is usual with these documents, the questions are very general, but often phrased so that the required answer is provided.

Highlights:

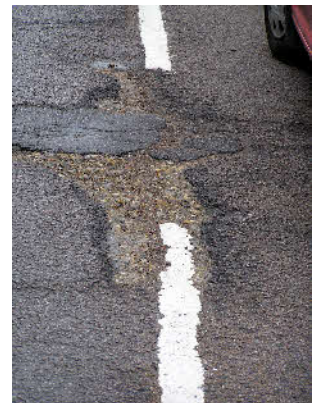
On housing - 'Using urban land efficiently is encouraged. In 2004 the figure achieved was 91%'. I can't imagine how this was worked out.

On Employment - 'Sufficient land is available to meet the Borough's employment needs but there is not a significant excess'. In the light of Buncefield, the suggestion that housing should be considered at Three Cherry Trees Lane and Breakspear Way, means that additional housing in Hemel Hempstead will result in more commuters as employment availability within the Borough reduces.

On Transport and Infrastructure - 'Government guidance emphasises that existing and planned physical infrastructure including utilities such as water and sewerage, electricity and gas, passenger transport, cycle and pedestrian routes must be able to accommodate the needs of any new development.'

Go on, read it again. In case you didn't know, government policy is actually to develop then install the infrastructure - maybe.

The good news for Berkhamsted and Tring is that they are not being considered for expansion - yet.



Above

Was it only last May that Ravens Lane was 'patched up'?

This May, the road needs 'patching' up again.

Below

'Our' beech tree this spring.



Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Norman Cutting writes:

Gordon Bluck was confirmed as the Chairman at the first meeting after the March AGM in April.

Gordon reported that he had sent a strong letter to DBC as not enough time was allowed to comment on the amended plans for Bulbourne House (now approved).

The Town Council had issued a document regarding 'A Future Berkhamsted', to which Gordon and Tony Statham had produced a response. As it turns out, not many others did, so the Town Council are re-thinking this idea.

Berkhamsted Castle Update

John Parsons Reports:

Berkhamsted Castle watchers will be pleased to see that English Heritage is working on cleaning up the Castle site, by clearing away fallen trees and clearing excess reeds from the moat.

Members will also be interested to hear that the Berkhamsted Community Partnership has been awarded a 'Quality of Place' grant from 'Action for Market Towns' and the 'East of England Development Agency' for the production of 8,000 full-colour booklets on the Castle, probably costing £2, for distribution from various sites in the town.

The grant will also provide for the production of maps of Berkhamsted and its hinterland, showing places of historic interest. These will be available from three vending machines in the town. There will also be three 'Heritage' notice boards and a permanent display in the Town Hall depicting its history and that of the Mechanics' Institute.

Mrs. Jenny Sherwood of the Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society is leading the considerable effort required to produce this material and she and her team deserve thanks from all of us for her efforts.

Hospital Sub-Committee

Norman Cutting reports:

We are currently looking to organise a public meeting to raise the awareness in Berkhamsted of the work being carried out on our behalf by the Dacorum Hospital Action Group in Hemel Hempstead. We would appreciate if any members would be interested in assisting in this project, to get in touch.

It must be me!

Norman Cutting dreams:

It was a chilly night in December, when I thought I'd better top up with fuel before I got home. I pulled into the petrol station and started to fill up. It must have been doing this for almost ¾ of an hour and still not noticed the smell of petrol in the air, the faint inflammable mist drifting across the forecourt, my feet soaked in liquid and the cutout on the nozzle hadn't operated. I was then awoken by an almighty big BANG!



Sights you may not see again!

Above

Canal fields play area

Below

Berkhamsted School from Mill Street



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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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