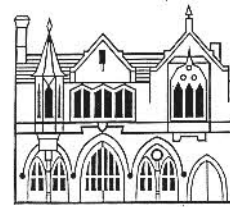


The Citizen



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

September 2007

Delivering quality health care for Hertfordshire – Consultation period 12th June to 1st October 2007

Your editor writes:

At great expense and effort, yours truly has glanced through a lot of the documentation provided by the local Health Care Trusts (yep, all 4 of them) and dismissed the bits that don't normally affect those of us who live in Berkhamsted as we need to concentrate on the 'choice' that will be provided for us in the future. Two things stick out immediately.

They are not concerned with where acute services are provided, as Watford will be the main site with Hemel as the non-acute one. This decision has already been made unless DHAG can persuade the courts that an error has been made.

The financial arguments are beautifully laid out and if you accept the assumptions made, then, as with the last 'consultation', the decision to be made is obvious. Watford will do everything, Hemel will provide diagnosis facilities with planned surgery at either Hemel or St Albans.

The best bit is that the Governments Cabinet Office guidance reminds everyone that it is a consultation, not a public vote on the proposals, so that's all right then!

What are the main assumptions made?

Staffing will not be a problem, unlike in the past, as everyone will want to work in the latest hi-tech teaching hospital in Watford. In 2006 there was a problem identified with staffing the Hemel birthing (award winning) centre and not enough births were taking place to make it viable (500 a year needed). The shortage of staff and mothers not being able to use the birthing centre are not, of course, related to its viability.

Building the new facilities at Watford will be much cheaper as no contamination needs to be sorted out and land is readily available, unlike Hemel Hempstead, where the site has 'physical constraints'.

Getting to Watford is so much easier than getting to Hemel. Emergency ambulances will be able to use the hard shoulder when traffic levels are high as the County Council will upgrade all the routes to the new Watford Hospital.

The supporting appendices to the main document (pages 105 to 130) provide yet another wonderful insight into the way the business model is constructed. When things don't go as planned (when do they?), the usual solution is 'Develop contingency plans' and many items on the acute services review risk register suggests the overall risk of things not going to plan are medium to high. Needless to say, no member of the management team will resign or lose their job as a result of the decisions made which result in the object not actually being achieved as the 'contingency plans' will solve everything.

What is likely?

Staffing will be no easier for Watford than at Hemel or St Albans due to the high cost of living and being so near to London. This really is the basis of centralising Health care in one major location coupled with up to 7 smaller community based health care units. The staffing numbers contained within the 'business plan' have been compiled under ideal conditions and no allowance made for when things don't quite pan out as intended. Agency nurses cost a lot more than permanent ones, for example.

There is no mention of the £35,000,000 the temporary unit will cost apart from it needs to be provided. Perhaps they assume it will be sold at cost?

The 'uncontaminated' land that the new Watford Hospital will be built on, is not only liable to flooding, but during WWII the rubble from part of the bombed Shrodells hospital and later, the remains of the Watford power station were also dumped there prior to a bit of top soil being added for conversion to allotments.

In 1970, the new Hemel Hempstead Hospital was going to be built on the land set aside by the CNT for just such a project. Over 35 years later, the construction industry is in such a poor state, that it cannot possibly build on the land because of the physical constraints. It's not contaminated, it's not liable to flooding, it's adjacent to a dual carriageway directly linking to the motorway network, it's on a similar slope to the existing buildings and Hemel has another 24000 odd dwellings about to be built locally.

I could go on but there is a public meeting, organised by the NHS, on Monday 24th September in the Berkhamsted Civic Centre so your fears can be put to rest.

Be prompt if you wish to attend as it starts at 7pm and finishes at 8:30pm.

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones - Chairman reports:

The Summer Ramble on July 1st was fraught with problems, because of the difficulty in finding a suitable venue for lunch, but a small group set off optimistically, along the canal towpath, in the pouring rain. They were joined, en route, by committee members, who had checked the starting point and lunch stop originally proposed, in case prospective walkers were there (they weren't). Our optimism was rewarded as the rain eased off on leaving the canal and climbing towards Bovington. Enlivened by Bill Willett's interesting comments on the places we passed, we had a most enjoyable day and even some sun. Last year the group was small because it was very hot. This year, I suspect, the rain put people off. Next year we are changing the date to Sunday, June 1st and we hope we shall have more suitable weather and a larger group.

2007/8 Programme, see enclosed card.

The new programme opens on October 11th, with a talk by John Cook on 'The Building of Berkhamsted'. Talks on local topics are usually popular and I hope we get a large audience.

Our next speaker, Derek Simpson is a local resident with an interesting job. He is Joint General Secretary of Unite the Union, the combined Amicus and TGW Unions, and will talk about the challenges facing trade unions in the 21st century, on Thursday November 8th.

I was intrigued to read a little while ago, in the Gazette, that Berkhamsted is the home of the Parrot Society UK. Parrots in general, and a locally based UK society seemed interesting topics for a talk and Leslie Rance, the society's secretary will open the 2008 programme on February 11th. This is a Monday, so a chance for those members who have other engagements on a Thursday to attend.

Finally, another local topic, 'The Berkhamsted Fire Service from 1886 to the Present Day', given by Alan Verney on April 10th, back to Thursday again.

All talks will start at 8pm in the Sessions Hall of Berkhamsted Town Hall.

There will be a New Year's Day Ramble to Aldbury and back, and the route for the ramble on June 1st will be announced nearer that day.



Hardy members find somewhere for lunch during the summer ramble.

Membership Matters

By Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

We still need your help.

We have tried in the last two newsletters to encourage you to get a friend or neighbour to join. As a result, we have two new members. I am sure you have tried. Thank you. So where are we going wrong? We need your views. We have therefore a very long way to go to achieve our aim of 500 members before the end of the year. I will still honour my promise made in the last Newsletter that I will give a bottle of wine to the member who has helped recruit the largest number of members and a further bottle for one of the new members. Please see what you can do between now and the AGM and continue to persuade your friends or neighbours to send me £5 together with their name and address (together with your name if you wish to be included in the competition).

Membership currently stands at 450 household members. This includes seven new members who joined at the map launch. (Being a promotion, these members will not be included in the draw.)

There are currently 20 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a fourth request will be enclosed with this newsletter. If you have paid and have still been sent a reminder, please contact me. Of the 182 who have now paid, thank you.



We got it right, why can't the Council?



Remember the flats to be built on the land in Little Bridge Road?

Well, not a lot happened as they wouldn't listen when told they would have problems.

Now about the car park I suggested?

Chairman's Column

Rita Jones on the launch of our updated footpath map

It is always exciting to be involved in something that is successful, and the revised BCA Footpath Map is certainly that. We were honoured by the presence of His Worshipful the Mayor of the Borough of Dacorum, the Mayor of Tring, the Mayor of Chesham and the Deputy Mayor of Berkhamsted, representatives of Bovingdon and Markyate Parish Councils and of local walking groups, at the launch in the Civic Centre, Berkhamsted, on the morning of July 14th. Some of the Saturday morning shoppers popped in for light refreshments and to see the small exhibition. Since then the maps have been flying off the shelves of local bookshops and outdoor centres in their hundreds.



A change in the Town Council may mean possible changes in the town, so your committee could have a busy year ahead. Sadly, we may not be able to change government regulations regarding Christmas tree lights (though I hope a compromise can be reached), but we shall, as usual, be looking at all new plans.

Do let us know what you think.

Berkhamsted Crime Prevention Panel

Norman Cutting reports on the last meeting:

The panel meets bi-monthly and is the link between local residents and the local police service.

The main item of this meeting was a talk by Nathan Welch of the ASB team based in the Civic Centre at Hemel Hempstead. Like most youth programmes, the team could do more with more money and he is hoping that a funding bid in the autumn will be successful, so the work can continue.

Nathan made the point that it's no good addressing today's problems, it has to be a continuous process otherwise it never gets solved.

He explained that graffiti is part of the on-going problem and would like to have a 'permanent' facility in each of the main towns in the Borough as the temporary one around the old Kodak building had been very successful.

Members of the Panel were reminded that the non-emergency number for the police is 0845 33 00 222, but they are having difficulty persuading the public to use it. I can't think why!

The latest crime report for May and June showed that it is still increasing on a year by year basis in the area.

The latest Neighbourhood Watch newsletter should be out by the time you read this and the annual meeting of co-ordinators is scheduled for early October. Concern was expressed that not enough people are coming forward for this vital task. Just 3 or 4 hours a year is all it takes, so, if any readers (say under 60!) are interested, then get in touch – you know how!

Dacorum Environmental Forum

Norman Cutting reports:

The main item on the agenda was the expansion of Luton Airport. You may recall in 1998 (come on, keep up!), I went on a fact finding mission to the Airport where all the expansion plans were explained. This included the 2nd runway, the building of a dual carriageway and moving walkway from the new rail/road interchange below the Vauxhall Motors plant.

Although the runway has been cancelled (for now), the road is currently being built although no sign of the interchange as yet. The planning permission granted in 1998 was worded in such a way that almost anything could be done without restriction. It is expected that passenger numbers will increase by making better use of the existing runway, although the promised employment gains are unlikely to materialise due to the low cost/no frills airlines making more use of the facilities.

You may have noticed the marked increase in helicopter movements (and noise) recently. This is due mainly to the airport targeting business users who can easily arrive by helicopter, be whisked off in an executive airliner and return without the hassle of the M1 or M25.

Noise complaints can still be made via the usual channels for both fixed wing aircraft and helicopters.

In view of the recent flood situation, the next meeting, on October 25th, will focus on our own water group with a speaker from Halcrow.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

We were delighted that Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby has agreed to join the committee as well as serving the Association as Membership Secretary and a member of the main and activities committees.

His expertise following his service on the Town Council will be invaluable. Welcome.

I hope all members will have seen that the latest version of the footpath map is again on sale and our grateful thanks to Bill Willett for bringing the map up to date and having it published. It is the same price and on better paper. Already well over 1000 have been delivered to our suppliers with a special mention to Andrew at Bookthrift who was the top seller. A great effort from all concerned.

On general planning matters there is little to report but we have objected to the application by Tesco Metro to put up internally illuminated signs in the conservation area.

Democracy rules!

Susan Johnson updates us:

You may remember I wrote a piece on the local elections in the last edition and posed the question – would the Borough Council change its rules of ‘call-in’ to enable the now very small opposition to hold its Cabinet to account. Well, against the expectations of the cynical, it has. It is now only necessary to have 5 signatures to call in a decision, so the LibDems can do it on their own, without recourse to the serried ranks (well, 2) of the Labour Party.

So individual conscience is given a reprieve! Just as well.

It's GG Festival time again!

Susan Johnson, our nominated trustee reminds us:

I feel obliged to blow the trumpet of the annual Festival. But it really is an annual treat to see what it is dishing up each year – and this one is no exception. There's the pre-Festival Literary Quiz in the Town Hall on Wednesday 26th September in aid of the Hospice; two films – one at the Rex and one at the Civic Centre – on 27th & 28th respectively; and several fascinating talks by eminent contributors on 28th, 29th & 30th, all in Berkhamsted. Why not come along and dip your toe in Greenland? Look at the GGBT Festival website www.grahamgreenefestival.com or contact Colin Garrett on 01442 866694 for ticket availability.

Contributions to:

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Edited and compiled by Norman Cutting

Revenue raising - never!

Norman Cutting comments:

I noticed in the national press a couple of months ago, that a new traffic warden elsewhere in the country, had issued a large number of penalty notices (parking tickets) in her first few weeks in the job. It was reported that residents were not as concerned as her bosses.

Then in August, we have a report that our Town Council seems to be concerned about parking in the town and the Borough Council says that Berkhamsted residents incur more 'tickets' per head of population than other towns in the Borough.

I admit, I'm surprised the number is so low as the regulations are worded in such a way that almost every time you park in a marked on-street bay – remember you are not really allowed to 'park' on the Queens Highway unless in an area set aside for the purpose – you cannot comply.

For example, you should obtain a ticket prior to parking your vehicle within the boundary of the marked bay.

Now think about this one, it means that you buy your parking ticket, then find a spot to park. This spot must be large enough to contain all your vehicle, including wing mirrors, no part may extend over the footway and the wheels no further than 200mm from the kerb. I don't actually know of any on-street parking bays that I can get my vehicle into, even if I could find a way of obtaining a ticket before stopping. Even in the car parks, care would need to be taken as I've seen cars overhanging front and/or rear of spaces and that ignores the odd 'angled' approach due to lack of room to manoeuvre.

Youth provision at the Swan

Susan Johnson heaps praise!

I must say how impressed I have been with the recent provision of youth activities put on at, or through, the Swan Youth Project in association with the Youth Town Council, the Town Council and the Berkhamsted Community Partnership. The recent summer holiday activity at the skateboard park is a case in point; and the gig nights at the Swan. Special thanks must go to Claire Muir, the Youth Worker, for her leadership.

It is such a pleasure to be able to praise something positive about 'you' against a background of a plethora (and I use the word in its correct sense, I think) of negative images and reports. Keeping young people engaged in positive activities, which they help to organise and enjoy, is essential to a pleasant town for all of us. I am sure it has had a lot to do with the recent reduction in anti-social behaviour reports.

If you have internet access, have your very own 'Citizen' sent to you (in colour) as a pdf file and keep an eye on the BCA web site for any updates as there is a lot going on!

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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