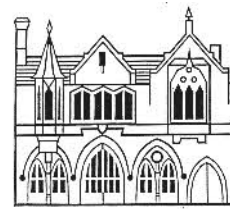


# The Citizen

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



**December 2008**

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## Chairman's Column

*Our Chairman, Tony Statham, writes -*

Our editor's comments and some remarks to me by fellow committee colleagues suggest that the Association no longer takes as active an interest in our community as it did in the past. There are suggestions that we used to be more outspoken in defence of certain issues or raising objections about others. Well, I think we have put out a few controversial comments in the past couple of issues but as far as I am aware, there has been very little feed-back from our members. Do you care?

We are here to represent those willing to subscribe to our Association and we take pride in trying to be a non-political body. That means that we are able and willing to criticize local issues if we feel they are contrary to the benefit of the town and its residents. Do we do a good job? We are not elected as both town and borough councils are, so perhaps you are less concerned about our views. We strive to find a compromise position but will make our views known if we feel strongly enough about something. One member resigned recently because they didn't agree with some of our opinions; unfortunately they were not willing to elaborate. Let us know if we can do better.

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**May we wish all members (and other readers!) a Merry Christmas - followed by a**



**Happy and Healthy New Year.**



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### **Dacorum Environmental Forum.**

*Our representative, Norman Cutting brings us up to date*

The latest meeting was held on 16th October and the main subject was a report by the water group ([www.defwatergroup.org.uk](http://www.defwatergroup.org.uk)), which is concerned in ensuring that our water resources meet our needs. This is not helped by the usual problem of having additional demands being imposed on the area. The groups web-site provides masses of information on the problems that are expected to worsen over the coming years unless action, (and that means money) is taken in the very near future. Of immediate interest to residents is the building of reed beds near to the sewage works which is intended to 'clean up' the water before ending up in the Canal.

Berkhamsted is now officially a 'Transition Town'. The idea is to encourage local communities to reduce their reliance on goods and services from outside, reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and work together in a process called 'the great unleashing'. Hemel Hempstead is considered as 'too large' to participate in this sort of scheme and I personally think our town is currently not suitable either. I believe it's due to it now being a 'commuter town' owing to the lack of employment for residents and easy access to the railway. More houses are proposed even as I write, but still no jobs for these new residents!

The Sustainable Communities Act is an all embracing act that can assist the work of the 'Transition Town' ideal. The actual mechanisms are still to be worked out, but it will

need our Borough Council to opt into the Act by next March before anything can actually happen. The forum felt that this all embracing legislation will have implications far beyond what the government is expecting. For example, it's likely that the Act will enable us – yes, us, to change national government and local government/organisations decisions or even force them to take action. The Hospital and Housing recent decisions can be open to review under this act, we may even be able to force road repairs to be carried out or more 20 mph residential speed limits to be introduced.

Tring & Berkhamsted Cycling Campaign are doing their best to promote the use of cycling in the area and now have a web-site ([www.tbcc.org](http://www.tbcc.org)). One of the ideas for Berkhamsted is to use the Canal towpath as a cycle route, but aside from the width problems, this has been brought up several times in the past and even the last CARP meeting considered the problem. I recall suggesting to County during the 'improvements' to our High Street that a dedicated cycleway should have been incorporated. Apparently, cyclists don't like road junctions and there are too many in the High Street, so it didn't happen. That's County thinking for you.

Lastly, The Dacorum Partnership is a scheme to make the Borough carbon neutral by 2021 and has an action plan to help achieve this target. Sustainability 'Week' will be 12th to 24th January 2009 and will incorporate talks to schools, displays, career and funding availability talks during this period. Keep your eyes and ears open for more information or visit [www.dacenvforum.org.uk](http://www.dacenvforum.org.uk).

## Activities Sub-Committee

*Rita Jones, Chairman, reports:*

'The Spirit of Berkhamsted' is still active. Berkhamsted's own lifeboat was in use the day before Margaret Edinburgh's talk to some 40 members on October 8th. Although the original 'store' for our lifeboat had been lost in coastal erosion, a temporary home has been found and its useful life continues. We also heard about the history of the RNLI, its duties, which cover the Thames, as well as coastal water, the costs of sea rescues and its reliance on voluntary support, including finance. This is an Institute for which we can be justifiably proud.

The next event following this publication is the Traditional New Year's Day Ramble to Aldbury and back. Meet leader Bill Willett at the front of Berkhamsted Station at 10.30am., on Thursday, January 1st. Lunch will be in the pubs in Aldbury, or your own picnic. If you want to leave the group at Aldbury, you will have to arrange your transport back to Berkhamsted. This is a popular walk and an enjoyable end to the festivities, so do join us.

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## Your Editor gets to say.....

*Norman Cutting has a view (as usual!)*

I consider myself 'Mr Average'. I'm not really good at anything, nor am I bad at anything. I'm even an average driver and that's saying something, as a man.

What's he going on about this time, you ask. Well, I somehow managed to get lumbered with the job of transferring some of the associations' newsletters into a digital format and this involves actually reading them.

This is where the 'average' bit comes in. The average Berkhamsted resident really doesn't care what goes on, until it directly involves them. When you are a child, you are around the town, day in and day out and you see things happen – but anything you don't like, well, what can you do? Then you go on to university or find a job which either takes you away or you really have better things to do with your time. As you get older, sooner or later, you suddenly realise that things have changed without you noticing and you start to care. To be honest, that's what happened to me and I suspect many non Citizens' Association members are in that situation. My 'turning point' was the 1995 'Kingsgate' saga, when I suddenly found myself actually doing something (my wife was livid!!) and ended up being elected to both the Borough and Town Councils. I suddenly had to take notice of what was going on in the town.

The 'Berkhamsted Review' used to be the source of Berkhamsted news when I was a lad and going through some of the old BCA Newsletters it was obvious that my recollections were correct as the early ones keep referring to watching the 'Review' every month for the latest news. I've got to the end of 1980 so far, and the detail beggars belief. You want to know about Common Land law or the effect of travellers in the town, maybe even the Town Hall, housing developments, traffic problems, environment, health and care for the elderly, the Canal. The list goes on and on – this is just one decade!

The traffic problem has always been, well, a problem. A while ago, the 'Review' carried a drawing and proposals regarding Water Lane and how the idea in the 1920's was to form a rather nice park together with re-routing the High Street traffic. It failed due to the townspeople of Berkhamsted not being able to raise the finance. In the 70's there was a proposal to make the High Street from Castle Street to St. John's Well Lane one way, and take London bound traffic down St. John's Well Lane into Lower Kings Road going alongside the Canal/Bulbourne, round by the station and up Castle Street and allowing Lower Kings Road to be pedestrianised, with an alternative of rejoining the High Street at the traffic lights instead of going all the way to Castle Street. Once again funding was the stumbling block. We ended up with nothing in both cases apart from car parking and a shop. The traffic problem remains to this day. Looking though the few issues one thing seems to stand out. If a lot of the proposals had gone ahead, then the town would, in my opinion, been a nicer place than we have (is that possible?).



## Membership Matters

*Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby - Membership Secretary*

We are likely to lose 22 members who have not yet paid their subscription for 2008, representing 8% of those who needed to pay. If you are one of those, a fifth and final reminder is enclosed, inviting you to pay for next year as well. We do not want to lose you, so please may I have your subscription? If you have paid, and have still been sent a reminder, please contact me as a matter of urgency.

For many years now, we have included with the last newsletter of the year, a renewal slip for the next year. This year, I will be sending out 233. This shows that 45% have already paid. If you were to consider paying a three year subscription, it would make my life that much easier this time next year.

Membership currently stands at 444 households, 11 down on this time last year, despite 26 new members. This figure may drop to as low as 422 if we have to remove who have not paid.

*The Editor continues to pontificate:*

You can have a peek at some Berkhamsted social history by visiting our new web-site at <http://www.bcacitizen.org.uk> and following the links to the archive. Material is being added all the time, so let us know what you think.

Let's go back to..... late 60's and the 70's

March 1968 covered subjects as diverse as the Civic Amenities Act 1967, the flower festival at Sunnyside church, looking for a representative on the Home Safety Committee as well as a members walk along all the footpaths every year to ensure they remain open.

March 1973 saw the launch of the 'new' newsletter format, advising residents of a 'meet the candidates for the forthcoming Dacorum Council elections' public meeting and saying we were going to strengthen our liaison with the U.D.C. on amenity matters such as canal development.

March 1978 brought concerns about Gypsy encampments and neglect of the common. Believe it or not, two and a half pages of detail on the Caravan Sites Act of 1968. Another two on Common Land Law and still managed to discuss Lagley House, the possible Manor Street home for the bewildered (now, that's the place for me!), the latest on the Town Hall and even the Wendover Arm of the canal.

Talking about money (well, I was), this was the time of local government reorganisation and it seems our Urban and Rural Council just handed all the towns assets over to the new Borough Council based at the Town Hall in Hemel Hempstead. We ended up with a 'Berkhamsted Parish Council' with 18 Councillors with nothing to do. This number was quickly whittled down and their main purpose in life was to look at development plans involving the town, being Trustees of the Town Hall and Market and being guardians of our Allotments. Within a couple of years, it turns into a Town Council, so things must have started to look up. Being a mercenary sort of chap, it seems the town 'misaid' just about everything it had bought and paid for over the centuries. I'm really looking forward to finding out what happened in the 80's through the Associations eyes and whether anyone else questioned the loss of 'our' assets.

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## **Hospital Update**

*Norman Cutting keeps you up to date:*

This year has brought news that we are to have a new 'Hemel Hempstead General Hospital' somewhere in Dacorum, Accidents and Emergencies shouldn't happen between 10pm and 8am as not enough staff are available, the Hospital Trust wants to turn itself into a 'Foundation Trust' as it will give it more freedom and is now on course to make a profit next year - the two must be connected, but less than 10 residents even cared enough to attend the public meetings in October to find out what this had to do with providing a decent local health service.

Patient infections have been reduced by the highest percentage - but starting from the highest infection rate, is this not to be expected?

To add to the misery, the Chief Executive didn't know where the original West Herts Hospital was (where I was born) or that part of the Hospital is listed.

Don't worry though, they are making a profit and that is the main thing!



## **George Cameron**

In September we lost our longest serving Life Member.

George Cameron had been a life member for 31 years in recognition of his service as Chairman in 1962/1963 and as a committee member from 1955 - 1976.

He represented the Citizens Association at various times on the Library Committee, the local National Trust Committee at Ashridge and the Citizens Advice Bureau.

His funeral was at Sunnyside Church on October 2nd when we were able to support his wife Vera and his family.

*(A full profile in the December 2001 Newsletter)*

## Town Amenities Sub-Committee

*Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:*

Members will, no doubt, have noticed that a number of cars are being parked on the verge outside Lagley House (between Coombe Gardens and the Sports Centre). It is unsightly especially where the verge is churned up. I have asked the Town Clerk to see what he can do with Herts Highways and possibly the police, as I was under the impression parking like this was an offence. We await developments.

Following the resubmission of plans to build 9 flats at rear of 121/127 High Street, we have again objected on the basis of the bulk, which would be clearly visible from the north side of the valley, and the loss of business parking.

Both the Association Chairman and I, represented you at a seminar hosted by the Borough planning department themed "The Future of Berkhamsted", which was very informative.

The major plan to build 54 dwellings in and around New Lodge at the Hall Park entrance to the town has caused a lot of criticism as reported in the local paper put forward to the Town Council planning meeting. About a year ago there was a meeting of interested parties, including the BCA and Town Council, to set some parameters for an acceptable scheme. The detailed plans have flowed from this. After a lot of discussion we agreed that we liked the plans and approved of the Lodge being retained and supported the design by the architects, Tempietto, who have designed a number of local developments. We also liked the provision of a play area which was lacking in the Stag Lane development. We felt however, that the scheme needs more than an extension to the 30 mph speed limit with a raised mini roundabout at the entrance and two more, both raised, at Bank Mill Lane and Hall Park. There should be no parking at any time in Bank Mill Lane with yellow lines and the cycle entrance there should have chicane fencing to reduce chance of accidents. There was a lot of discussion over the screening on London Road but the proposed alternate wooden fencing and railing looks better option than hedging which would require maintenance.

### QUICK REMINDER!

Nominations for the 2008 Environment Award are now being sought.

If you think any development, completed during this year (2008), has contributed to the visual street scene, then why not nominate it for the Annual Award?

Drop a line to the editor, or contact any Committee member without delay.

## SITE ALLOCATIONS

Consultation by Dacorum Borough Council

*We want you to give your view.*

As you might know, the Borough Local Plan is now called the Local Development Framework (LDF); just like 'Development Plans' is now 'Spatial Planning' and 'Development Control' is now 'Planning Management'. I have trouble keeping up, and I work in local government!

Anyway, as part of the process to develop the LDF the Borough Council has to consult on various Development Plan Documents; and the latest is one on Site Allocations. This may sound innocuous, even tedious, but it is important that we all make our views known on this. The document encompasses what sites are proposed for designation in the LDF for housing, gypsy and traveller sites and open land.

The document is available on the Internet ([www.dacorum.gov.uk](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk) - on the Spatial Planning section), or you can see a hard copy at the Berkhamsted Civic Centre or in the Library. There is a questionnaire which can be filled in on line; or it is available from the above or by ringing 01442 228660. The hard copy can be returned in the post; or in the internal mail going from the Civic Centre Cash Office; or by fax 01442 228771.

The consultation runs until **15th December 2008** so by the time you read this newsletter, time will be of the essence. Your Town Amenities Sub-Committee will have already made its submission, but it is individual views which will make up the bulk of the replies, and have an influence on the outcome.

I urge you to take the opportunity to be involved in this process.

Susan Johnson



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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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