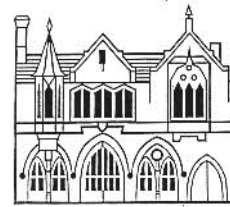


The Citizen



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

March 2008

Annual General Meeting

NOTICE is hereby given that the 83rd Annual General Meeting of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be held in the Wellcome Great Hall of the Town Hall, Berkhamsted, on

Thursday 13th March 2008 at 8 pm.

Nominations for the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Membership Secretary, Independent Examiner and Committee Members should be submitted to the Hon. 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 | 5. Election of Officers |
| 2. Minutes of the last AGM | 6. Election of Committee Members |
| 3. Chairman's Report | 7. Appointment of Independent Examiners |
| 4. Treasurer's Report | 8. Any other business |

Following a short break to include **wine or fruit juice and 'nibbles'**:

BCA Environment Awards 2008

There were a number of nominations for the Environment Award for the year 2007 representing a wide variety of entries. The selected shortlist below will be illustrated at the award presentation prior to the winners being announced.

- | | | |
|----|---|---|
| 1 | 6 Murray Road | - Replace existing dwelling with 2 detached houses and garages |
| 2 | 77 High Street | - Replace existing with new, plus 14 flats |
| 4 | Turner Court (ex Bulbourne Hse) Gossoms End | - 42 new apartments |
| 5 | Collegiate School, Kings Road | - rebuild/restore wall |
| 6 | Lagley House, Gossoms End | - Refurbishment and extension |
| 7 | Adjacent to Silverdale, Queens Road | - Replace office/garage with 2 flats |
| 8 | Victoria School, Prince Edward Street | - Replacement of nursery building |
| 9 | 20 Montague Road | - Replace existing with pair of semi detached |
| 10 | St Andrews URC, Chapel Street | - New front entrance and alterations |
| 11 | Hospice of St Francis, Spring Garden Lane | - New complex |
| 12 | St John the Evangelist, London Road, Bourne End | - Extension and lobby |
| 13 | The Cobb, 20 North Road | - Replace existing garage with extended living and garage area. |

Afterwards:

With the current interest in the future of the Water Lane Car Park, Cllr. Ian Reay (DBC Planning & Regeneration Portfolio Holder) will attend and allay any concerns members may have.

Then:

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!

The present Committee would warmly welcome other members to join them and look forward to additional nominations for committee members.

Chairman's Column

To quote from a regular contributor to the local press 'Am I the only one...', in this case, who thinks that local news is getting more and more worrying. Local hospital services, Water Lane, the imminent loss of the Day Centre and 'cash crisis' at the Swan Youth Project to name but a few. What is BCA doing? With changes in management for the Hospital Service, the Committee have agreed that Norman Cutting keeps a watching brief for now; Water Lane - see Tony Statham's report; the Day Centre - I am gathering information for a letter to Hertfordshire Adult Care Services; the Swan Project - this news broke too late for our January committee meeting but strategies seem to be being formulated. Bring your ideas and comments on these, and the other 'worries' I haven't mentioned, to the Open Forum at the AGM.

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones - Chairman reports:

AGM - The Interval

You will read all about the meeting elsewhere, but the major innovation, as far as this sub-committee is concerned, is to serve wine or fruit juice and 'nibbles' during the interval. In recent years a social evening has not been well supported, so last year our social occasion was wine etc. during the interval at the November 2007 talk, and this went down very well. Jenny Jones, with unanimous agreement, suggested it might be a good idea to do this instead at the AGM. I hope you will agree, and it will be so helpful if you can let one of the committee know what you think, on the night.

Our speaker will be Cllr Ian Reay, to give us the official background and update on the Water Lane Concept Statement; see Tony Statham's article.

Come with your questions.

An Alert for the Last Talk of 'Our' Year

8.00 pm. Thursday, April 10th.

'THE BERKHAMSTED FIRE SERVICE from 1886'

Our speaker, Alan Verney, has access to the local fire service records going back to 1886 and certainly has a fund of reminiscences as he and his son have both been our local volunteer firemen. Alan spends a lot of time away from the town, so I am very grateful that he is coming back to give us what promises to be a fascinating talk. Do please support him.

Dacorum Environment Forum

Norman Cutting reports:

The last meeting, held on 17th January, concentrated on waste and surplus packaging and a proposal that local supermarket managers might be asked to attend and give their views. It transpired that Marks & Spencer were the worst of the local supermarkets for the amount of food packaging. Don Palmer gave an impassioned plea for Borough Wards to compete in reducing carbon emissions, Ruth Chapman (DBC) outlined the formation of a Tree Warden Scheme to be launched on 17th April which will do for trees what the community support officers do for us.

Paul Harris of Friends of the Earth brought up the concerns of many regarding the possible reduction in local bus services coupled with the introduction of free improved bus passes. Cllr Bert Chapman (Portfolio Holder for Environmental issues) explained that the bus pass issue was a 'statutory duty' which was under-funded by national Government. The budget cuts suggest that the Borough Council have to look more carefully at 'non-statutory services and public transport comes within this context - however, it does come within the County Council range of responsibilities, and discussions are taking place.

A Reminder

Don't forget the Midsummer Ramble. This has been moved to June, following requests from walkers. I hope that Sunday June 1st will be as popular as the New Year's Day Ramble. Same meeting point in front of Berkhamsted train station, at 10.30 am, route to be announced

Berkhamsted Castle Liaison Group -

a short report by *John Parsons*

A meeting of the Castle Liaison Group was held in the Town Council Offices on the 1st November. It was chaired by the Mayor, Councillor Carol Green, who was supported by County and Town Councillors, representatives of the Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society (BLHMS), the Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society, the BCA, the Dacorum Heritage Trust and officers from English Heritage (EH), who manage the castle on behalf of the Duchy of Cornwall.

A constitution for the Liaison Group (CLG) was approved. The BLHMS reported on the success of the Information Room at the Castle. Since it was opened on 24th August (only at weekends and on the Bank Holiday Monday) over 1,000 visitors had viewed the exhibition. The 16 panels depicting the Castle's history had been produced by the BLHMS with the aid of an 'Awards for All' lottery grant. It is proposed to re-open the Centre for Easter, and depending upon the availability of volunteers to man the Centre, to open it to visitors from May onwards, subject to the agreement of English Heritage. The BLHMS also hoped to arrange two Open Days for schools during the closed season.

It was hoped that some provision could be made for visitor parking in the proximity of the Castle but it was also recognised that there is no easy solution to the lack of toilet facilities.

EH reported that while progress on maintenance was slow because of other commitments, work was continuing, particularly with the removal of dead and diseased trees.

BTC has arranged a grant for a student at the University of Hertfordshire to prepare a 3D virtual reality tour of the Castle in the 14th century. This is based on an idea of the CLG rapporteur. Again BLHMS is deeply involved in the project.

The Committee thanked Mrs Jenny Sherwood for all the work that she and other members of the BLHMS had contributed to make the Information Room such a success.

Water Lane ‘Concept Statement’

Our Vice-Chairman (Tony Statham) tries to clear up some of the misconceptions

Background/Introduction

The most recent process to evaluate the re-development of the Water Lane car park site began in earnest with Dacorum Borough Council’s (DBC) appointment of consultants in February 2006 to conduct a feasibility study for the site (S1 in the ten year DBC local plan 1999-2011). This study was published in June 2006 and was discussed at the Annual Town Meeting held 29th March 2007. A draft concept plan evolved from this study and was made available for public consultation inviting comments by 14th September last year. Your committee (and some committee members acting independently) objected to some of the proposals outlined at this stage. On November 27th, DBC adopted the concept statement and this action (and announcement) appears to have suddenly raised concerns within Berkhamsted about the future development.

What is the Concept Statement?

It is a brief statement of how the development of a site could contribute to the Local Authority’s vision. It explains how the policies and objectives of the Development Plan should apply to specific sites. It is much less detailed than a development brief but more informative for developers and the community. It is intended to be a guide for possible developers in drawing up proposals for the site. It will be used as a framework for assessing planning applications for the site.

What it is not

The Concept Statement is not a planning application. Before this ‘Concept’ can become a reality, a planning application would have to be submitted and approved, which in the case of such a major development would be a long and exhaustive process.

Discussion

Copies of the Concept Statement are available from DBC.

The Water Lane site is complex. Regardless of any emotive feelings about how it might be developed, there are several factors, which will constrain development, perhaps even preventing any final agreement. Firstly the site is in multiple-ownership (minimum 6 separate parties); any development would ideally require a leading majority freeholder. Some compulsory purchase may be required; this may impose a financial impediment to further action.

The site is in the conservation area and any development would need to meet a variety of criteria. The general policy approach to design is set out in the Conservation Area Character Appraisal and Policy Statement as follows: - *“The diversity of uses, design, heights of buildings, roofscape and materials within this area all contribute to create the distinct character and appearance of this busy market town. This diversity should be maintained and encouraged, whilst targeting resources to achieve the enhancement of buildings and elements, which presently detract from the overall character and appearance of the area”*.

Thirdly, there are a number of physical constraints that need not be detailed here but include, for example, major utility services such as gas, water and sewerage lines.

Summary

Your committee supports the idea of re-developing this site but with several reservations. We agree that the ground floor of the new buildings should be used for retail outlets. We agree that a mix of residential, office and leisure facilities should be incorporated into the overall design.

We regret that the opportunity to re-develop a greater area may be lost. There are unattractive buildings to the west of the Town Hall i.e. corner of Lower Kings Road; neither Amersham House nor Berkley Court make a positive contribution to the site; there are wasted opportunities to not consider other aspects of the site such as Chiltern House, the British Legion Club and the car park to the north of this building.

Although the committee is not unanimous on the establishment of a multi-storey car park (either above or below ground), it is essential that this opportunity to enlarge the parking facilities in the centre of Berkhamsted should be seized without question. We do not agree to the closure of Water Lane to vehicular traffic nor to the suggestion that Greene Field Road should handle two-way traffic. The conflict with the busy intersection of the Waitrose and public car park entrance in Lower Kings Road and the regular heavy traffic to/from the station will only lead to congestion and possibly gridlock at this juncture. It would also mean consequential greater traffic flow in Mill Street, which is not suited to it.

While the Concept Statement suggests “a more attractive car parking square”, this might also be an opportunity to establish a proper pedestrian town square.

We are committed to resisting those elements of the Concept Statement which we believe are detrimental to the future benefit of Berkhamsted. Remember, we have a sub-committee which looks at all plans for the town, whether applications or concept plans, on a systematic and regular basis. We make submissions and will tell you about them in the pages of this newsletter.

**The more people we can get to join the BCA, the greater our voice and influence.
Get your friends and neighbours to join!**

Gripes and Grouches

Susan Johnson responds to the editor taking over the last issue!

Over the Christmas and New Year period, our regular newsagent closed for a well-deserved holiday. That's not the gripe. The difficulty was finding a replacement copy of our regular newspaper from another source. Would it be beyond the wit of the petrol stations, for instance, to get in extra supplies to compensate during this period, instead of sending us all over the place looking for one? It certainly made us appreciate the newsagents and the paper boy!

Does it horrify you that some customers in Waitrose allow their children to sit/stand in the part of the trolley where the food should go? I think of all the dire warnings about the diseases transmitted by, for example, dog faeces, and think about that being transmitted from shoe soles on to our food. Or even their own food! What must their kitchens be like? And then there's the possibility of the children falling out or tipping the trolley up. I saw that recently; the child fell on its head. I have challenged Waitrose to enforce the written warnings they give at the store's entrance, but they are not really keen. They are frightened of the abuse their staff get when challenging customers' behaviour; and presumably losing sales – although they would never admit to the latter.

*So, what do you want to have a good moan about?
Don't all rush at once, otherwise I may not get a look in!*

Local Matters by Norman Cutting

As we go to press, we hear that the Hemel Hempstead 'A&E' will close on 7th October 2008.

This came as a surprise to me as my mother had an asthma attack on the evening of 29th December. The ambulance was called and decided she needed hospitalisation. Watford A&E wasn't accepting anything, Hemel wasn't either, but they managed to get her into the observation ward overnight. She ending up at the Lister (Stevenage) via St. Albans on the Sunday.

I've now heard of several other local residents ending up 32 miles away in Stevenage, but it is easy to get to!

Remember that it was only September 2007 when the Trust said 'WHHT is significantly changing the way it delivers hospital services to improve the quality of care to its patients'.

Please let us know if anyone noticed the improvement.

At the other end of the scale, our 4 years olds are having to go to Hemel to start their education due to lack of spaces in the town. These are the very schools that are due to close due to lack of children in Hemel Hempstead.

JOINED UP THINKING or WOT?

Membership Counts

By Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

In looking through the earlier newsletters I was reminded of a letter one of our members submitted thanking his newsletter deliverer. I thoroughly agree with him and I must apologise to the deliverers for apparently taking them for granted. On many occasions, they collect the subscriptions as well. It makes my life all that more easy. 12 have certainly been doing it for over 20 years; my mother recruited some of these deliverers about 30 years ago when she set up the 40 or so rounds. Three have had to 'retire' this year. A very big Thank You on behalf of all the committee.

Membership currently stands at 437 household members a very big drop from 599 in March 2001. Membership is not just about going to meetings, or receiving newsletters, but it is to help us have a say and thus gain influence. It is therefore very important that we maintain our membership because, if it continues to fall, we may no longer be listened to.

There are currently 114 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a second reminder would have been enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you to the 167 members who have already recently paid.

You know what the Citizens Association does. Please ask a friend and or a neighbour whether they are members. If not, encourage them to join by sending me £5 along with their name and address.

A couple I met on the New Year's Day Ramble joined BCA and said, "We had a lovely time and met some lovely people as well".

Pass this message on and join our next walk on Sunday 1st June!

We need more members.

Number Twenty wins the cup!

Rita Jones writes:

On a very wet night I presented the 10th BCA Award for the best Christmas window display, at the Berkhamsted Festival of Lights.

The enthusiasm and support of the local shopkeepers has grown over the years and with it the standard of display, making selection difficult, so again there were several Highly Commended Certificates, to; Oxfam, The St Francis Hospice Shop and Peter John, all in the High Street.

However, the winner of the cup was Number Twenty in Lower Kings Road. This is a commercial shop whose profits go to the Hospice. I am sure you agree that the lovely Christmas window displays add to the festive air of our town.

Contributions to:

The Citizen

c/o 15 Chestnut Drive, BERKHAMSTED, HP4 2JL

E-mail: bca@berko.org.uk

Web site: <http://www.berko.org.uk/bca>

Edited and compiled by Norman Cutting

Chairman: Rita Jones, 18 St Margarets Close, HP4 2HL Tel: 872757 (e: ritjones@waitrose.com)

Membership Secretary: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road, HP4 3EA Tel: 865882

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

Designed by Norman Cutting - 871851 & printed by The Print Centre - 876600