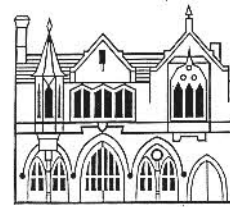


The Citizen



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

September 2008

Chairman's Column

Our Chairman, Tony Statham, writes -

My initial message to our members in the last newsletter reminded you all of the impending investigation into the proposed alteration of flight paths across the Chilterns. Most of you will now know that the consultation date was extended and indeed a hearing was held in Berkhamsted on 10th June. The Chiltern Countryside Group will be responding to NATS initial feedback report, which describes four options being considered for their route near Tring and the possibility of rethinking the route across the centre of the Chilterns AONB; further meetings and feedback are progressing the debate.

Although the future of air travel across our skies will no doubt increase despite the inexorable rise in oil prices, we are reminded of issues closer to the ground and both planning matters and the state of our roads are two highly topical concerns.

Readers (and residents) may never fully agree on the rights or wrongs of the former and you are invited to consider the article by Vice Chairman Susan Johnson in this copy of The Citizen. This will be thought provoking or even controversial but is a useful reminder of the greater debate that we have to stretch our boundaries mentally, as well as physically, to accommodate the changing scenario of an increasing population and the demands of Government for more housing.

Our Town Amenities Sub-Committee always tries and take an objective stance on planning proposals and does object where these are deemed to be contrary to the benefit of the town or area in question.

We are also compiling a summary of the worse areas of roads in the town and will, in due course, submit these "pothole highlights" to the County highways department; we are encouraged to note that some remedial work is about to begin but suspect there will be many areas that still need attention.

Membership Matters

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

We hate to mention this subject but quite a number of you – 27 in fact – have not let us have your subscription for 2008. Regrettably we need money to survive and the main source of our income is derived from your subscription. I agree it is very easy to forget and put my reminders in your 'To Do' tray so we hope that you will not mind being reminded yet again. Please don't let us loose touch with some of you.

If you have paid, and I have enclosed a reminder with this Newsletter, please let me know, so that I can check my records. Of the 241 who have paid, thank you.

Membership currently stands at 445 members, 5 down on this time last year and this will inevitably drop still further if we lose you. The good news is that 26 members have joined since November.

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones, Chairman, reports:

Dates for your diary 2008/9

Attached to this Newsletter you should find the programme card for 2008/9.

We start on Thursday October 8th, with the talk on 'The Spirit of Berkhamsted', the story of our lifeboat, which was postponed in February 2007.

All talks are held in the Sessions Hall, starting at 8pm, with coffee, tea and biscuits available during the interval.

A reminder

Occasionally, due to circumstances beyond our control, last minute changes have to be made. The only way to let everyone know is through The Citizen, the posters and the BCA and Berkhamsted Arts Trust websites. I hope this won't happen but please remember to check.

The Activities Sub-Committee looks forward to seeing you in October.

INFILL! A battle of bricks and infrastructure

Susan Johnson has a view

I have listened with a certain wry amusement to the protestations of the Town Council and others at the evils of in-filling in the urban area of Berkhamsted.

The modern development we know as the town is really one big infill. For instance, half of Boxwell Road stands in the former garden of Boxwell House (now Harrowell & Atkins in the High Street). The other half was a market garden. The whole of the Hall Park estate stands, not surprisingly, on the 'park' of the old Hall, last owned by the Greenes. So infill is not a new phenomenon. It is merely lent respectability by the passage of time.

Many town councillors themselves live in so-called infill housing. I'm not criticising them for that; I do too. But they have to acknowledge that today's development is being carried out by their fellow citizens for a variety of reasons, not least to gain a comfortable retirement and perhaps a legacy for their children. So who are we to criticise, except for the most high-minded of reasons? The law allows, and circumstances dictate.

The main detriment to the town is said to be the erosion of open space and quality of life. Well, yes and no. Open space is always said to be at a premium, but the open spaces of amenity land and allotments remain; and we are surrounded by open countryside. Do planners inappropriately apply urban sensibilities to the market town? It is the urban fabric which is being filled, and I would argue that density is not always the issue here. Have you looked at the density of Victorian housing? Yet that is admired and sells at a premium, even in these dark days of the credit

crunch. No, the main detriment to the town is the paucity of design of modern housing, and there much more pressure could be brought to bear. The emphasis should be on the quality of building, which we as an Association try constantly to promote in our annual Environment Award. And then there is incremental development without commensurate public facilities, like school places and NHS facilities. These should be more keenly fought for by our elected members.

While government planning policy supports infill (designating the back garden as 'previously developed', i.e. brownfield, land) and houses sell, then this trend will continue. Otherwise pressure will be brought to bear for even more Green Belt land to go under concrete. However I can see why infill will not find favour with many in Berkhamsted; especially those whose neighbours wish to capitalise on their already good fortune. But I question whether opposition is coming from the direction of those who genuinely oppose on planning and environmental grounds. Most opponents seem only to wake up to their new-found zeal when their neighbour puts in an application. The answer is to persuade your neighbour not to!

Those of us who have examined and, if thought necessary, opposed certain developments over the last quarter century, regard such opposition with a quizzical eye. The Association continues to try to make comments on planning issues which affect the town generally and not favour the views of some narrow sectional interest. This might not please all our members, but we are concerned primarily with quality and facilities, and will examine each proposed development on its own merits. The battles are presently most usefully fought over bricks and infrastructure, where there really *is* a war to be won.

And now for something completely different Kennel Club International Festival 2008 at the East of England Showground

For those of you who missed this event in early August:
Over 750 caravans and tents were in attendance (left photo). Even being in a wheelchair doesn't stop you (right photo) and our youngest had a great time (middle photo).



Autumn in the 1970s

Extracts from our newsletters found by Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

Autumn 1973: Around the Halls: The tale of our favourite dodo – the Town Hall - creeps slowly on, with no firm decision from Dacorum. Unable to fix a demolition schedule. Can't accept offers for commercial leases. Disrepair too bad for temporary use. The Phoenix must wait. Etc

..The lease on St Peter's Hall has to be sold in order to raise money to restore and extend the Court House, with the lease being put to public tender – probably early in 1974.

...And in it (water): Have you ever been to Amersham swimming pool? Many of our citizens have. They go there because of the inadequacy of the changing facilities at Berkhamsted pool. We have written to the U.D.C. to see what improvements could be made using part of a special finance allocation recently offered to them by the County.

Autumn 1974: Did you know that 1975 is European Architectural Heritage Year? This intends that local communities should look for and preserve some building which forms part of our architectural heritage. No prizes for naming a suitable candidate! Perhaps the most annoying aspect of the Town Hall saga is that the ratepayers of Berkhamsted have paid £26,000 in 1973-1974 in professional fees for designing a hall that is not to be. The District Auditor considered that the plans of the UDC came to nought through a combination of unfortunate circumstances which could not have easily been foreseen at the time the expenditure was authorised.

Autumn 1975: The Town Hall once again creaks into the headlines. With the moratorium on local authority spending DDC must lose interest from an immediate action point of view and believe it or not the word 'renovation' is once again being murmured.

St Peter's Hall (*just behind the church - now NCH offices*) is not taking bookings for much longer in view of its impending sale. The lease of St Peter's Hall is interesting DDC but that considerable expenditure will be necessary if the purchase is made. And the DDC cannot spend money this year. Meanwhile Boxwell House is to be sold since the Council cannot make effective use of the building.

Autumn 1976: The old bank at 222 High Street (*now Britannia Building Society*) is to be sold and there is a suggestion that it could be turned into a town museum. {views were sought.}

October 1977: Last Spring Waitrose Ltd asked DDC to conduct a poll of grocery and provision merchants in Berkhamsted with a view to issuing an Exemption Order under Section 1 (4) of the Shops Act 1950. Such an Order would remove the requirement for this class of shop to close on one weekday afternoon a week from 1 pm. It is expected that results will be made public soon.

October 1978: Berkhamsted Castle: Earlier this year some disquiet was caused when it was learnt that the Department of the Environment (DOE) as part of a programme to reduce costs, were preparing to dispose of resident custodians at some ancient sites and buildings and that Berkhamsted Castle was one of those most likely to be affected. As a result of strong public pressure this policy it is likely to be modified and that we in Berkhamsted will retain a Custodian at the Castle.

August 1979: The Custodian at Berkhamsted Castle is no longer full time and that as a consequence the hours when the public are admitted have been restricted and that the same facilities are not available for visitors. A petition was organised by the Association for which more than 500 signatures have been obtained. This has been passed to our local MP Mr Nick Lyall who has been asked to make representations to the DOE.

Editor's Note

If you find this interesting, I have been putting old editions of 'The Citizen' on our web site in pdf format. So far I've gone back 13 years and will be putting more on over the next few months.

However, the Association only has those since Spring 1973 in addition to Spring 1972 and March 1968. So if you have any other issues, we would appreciate you lending them to us for recording both for our archive and the web-site. We will take care and return them without delay. If you can help, give me a call or drop a line.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

It is pleasing to note that two recent planning applications for external illuminated shop signs have been lit by trough or halo lighting rather than the internally illuminated signs we as an Association hate in the conservation area. We have recently objected to the retention of one of these at The Wilderness. Although hidden away the principle should stand.

I have recently joined the Berkhamsted Community Partnership as the BCA member and you will no doubt be aware Tony Statham, our chairman, also chairs the Partnership. I had not fully realised all the projects it was involved in. The current plan to install up to six fitness stations on a "fitness trail" near the canal is already funded and Dacorum Borough Council permission is being sought to have them installed.

At the time of writing this report, we have been unable to source at a reasonable price, the Environmental Award plaque to be presented to the Collegiate School. If anyone has contacts who might help, please let me know.

TASC is very concerned that town land assets are being sold off for short term gain, particularly the County Council land at Manor Street, the former site of the closed day care centre. We would like to see the land only being leased for say, ten years, to keep it in public ownership.

Canal & Riverside Partnership (CARP)

Your representative, Norman Cutting reports:

The reincarnated partnership continues to flourish under the chairmanship of Cllr. Lindy Foster Weinreb.

A number of projects are under way at the moment, including information boxes, the towpath refurbishment, planting (or should that be, scattering?) of wild seeds, refurbishment of the various metal plaques and re-fixing the canal signs.

We have also brought to the attention of those who are responsible, the build up of rubbish in the Bulbourne adjacent to the Lower Kings Road bridge and naturally, it was not clear cut as to who actually is responsible.

If you spot a problem, then contact Lindy or me

Editors column

Norman Cutting has his say:

The County Council is having a wonderful time at the moment doing even more patching up of our roads. Ravens Lane has just been done as I write and a couple of roads near to where I live are due for 'patching' in September. As I recall, apart from 'patching', not a lot has been done to our highways in recent years. Compare with when I was a wee lad when every 5 years, a large tar lorry would trundle down the road, followed by a fleet of lorries reversing with the back open and gently letting out lots of small stones until empty. Then a hissing sound was heard, just before the white steam of the roller came round the corner to flatten the stone into the still wet tar. It was a shame when the lighter diesel version took over a few years later.

There wasn't anything like the amount of traffic then as now, but the interval is nearer twenty years than the old five. Still, that's progress.

Browsing through Susans' piece, I'm not sure I am not alone in spotting the flaw in the 'debate'. Exactly where are all these new residents going to work? Our existing industrial estates don't even have a bus service, the residential roads around the town centre are already filled with 'all day parkers' and commuting is being actively discouraged, so what do you think?

I've been reminded about the 'freecycle' as part of the yahoo.co.uk site. Go to:
<http://uk.groups.yahoo.com/group/berkofreecycle/>
where you can join the happy local band of converts.

The idea is that you can circulate items you want to get rid of or something you might be looking for. The main point is that no money changes hands and no profit is made as you are not allowed to gather things to take to the local car boot sale for example.

Personally, I've managed to give away some old 19" racks and a dog crate that wouldn't quite fit a new car we bought.

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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