

# The Citizen



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

**December 2010**

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## Editorial

As the Chairman is indisposed, I've been let loose on the front page again.

After parking, the current concerns of those I speak to, are the changes to the bus services and library hours. Our man about town (aka Graham Spittle), went to find out what's going on at the library and he reports that he visited the library, but the consultation document was not available until the last week in October.

Broadly it proposes that the library close at 7pm instead of 8, Monday and Friday morning and all day Tues. His personal disappointment is that the afternoons do not start until 2pm, so for those like him working in the Town, the only lunch-time opening will be Wednesday and Thursday.

That's it in a nutshell, so have your say if concerned.

I'm afraid that other members of my family seems to have got in the bus problem. Auntie made the photo in the Gazette over the dropping of part of the Chiltern Park service, then an Uncle spoke at a Town Council meeting discussing the problem. I've had my ear bent over the sort of buses now being used and how unhelpful the drivers are becoming. To crown it all, the Slough bus doesn't go there anymore, now comes up Swing Gate Lane, into Woodlands and up into Hilltop Road via Beech Drive. Naturally bus stops don't exist, but County have an excuse:

'Widespread on-street parking, school traffic and the general conditions of traffic on the road has resulted in the opinion that a fixed stop in this position is not a viable option.' (*Location - Swing Gate Lane*) The reason it changed its route was due to traffic in Three Close Lane (or was it due to snow and ice?).

Do you get the feeling that everyone is complaining and moaning about the public highways being obstructed, but not prepared to bite the bullet?

Naturally, I have the solution, but the BCA don't like it - neither would you, so stop complaining!

## Notes:

*Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby needs feedback*

Talks not on a Thursday – Tried and Failed.

Over the last year or so there has been considerable upset that we always have our meetings on a Thursday, a day that clashes with members other activities.

Not only do we have to find a suitable affordable hall but also the availability of the speaker. When we set up the talks, we have tried to spread them out over Tuesday, Wednesday or a Thursday. We avoid Mondays, because that is Town Council night and because we think that members of a civic and amenity society should be able to exercise their democratic right to attend the meetings; particularly planning. We naturally avoid Fridays, Saturdays and Sunday as that is when people go away or have more exciting things to do.

Suitable hall space, at an affordable price is limited, especially when halls are booked on a permanent basis and we have to compete with the numerous other societies and other activities to which our members belong.

Please give us some feedback on this issue.

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## Quick Reminder!

Nominations for the 2010 Environment Award are now being sought.

If you can think of any development, that was completed within the last two years (as the choice for last year was limited!) and has contributed to the visual street scene, then why not nominate it for the Annual Award?

Do you think that the community works to Canal Fields, completed in 2009, is worthy of the award or can you think of something more worthy?

Give us your thoughts.

Drop a line to the editor, or contact any committee member before the 14th January.

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**The Officers and Committee would like to wish all our members**

**A Merry Christmas and a**

**Healthy & Prosperous New Year**



## **Another offering!**

*Katy Brookes-Duncan puts pen to paper*

I consider myself a committed urbanite and have a passion for the built environment. I do like nature but at a distance. For me the countryside is somewhere you visit, a brisk hike or challenging run, fleeting excitement as some wildlife darts away or flies off, I might even stretch to half an hour rest in a particularly tranquil spot but that's it. I don't like: gardening - dirty nails; or bird watching - have to sit still for too long; in fact anything that flies - flaps too much; the list goes on! My interests definitely lie elsewhere. So I was not particularly looking forward to the talk by the renowned naturalist and writer Richard Mabey on 14 October. (You might wonder why I went at all but I thought I would show my support). As it turns out, I enjoyed the evening immensely. Richard was erudite and engaging and gave us a personal reflection of his writing and its development. His narrative was complemented with readings from his articles and books. So enthralled was I, that I feel compelled to read his newest book "Weeds" (which looks at the cultural framing of specific plants at certain times as weeds).

In fact I have always been pleasantly surprised at how interesting and enjoyable the BCA talks are despite not being the typical BCA audience member! I'm just past my late 30s ☺, work full time in London, and in the evenings have a tendency to watch more trashy TV programmes than I'd really like to confess to. If I hadn't got involved in the BCA I wouldn't go to these talks which would be a real shame because they are actually very good. So this is the dilemma: clearly we want to continue to provide a programme of talks that entertains our core audience but how do we attract a wider audience that wouldn't normally get off their sofas?

I've agreed to chair the Activities Sub Committee and I'd love your ideas for talks or events that you would like to attend. Please send your suggestions to me at [k.b-d@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:k.b-d@hotmail.co.uk)

## **Membership & Committee Matters**

*Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby,*

To emphasize what the Chairman wrote in her last column, your five officers have served 92 years between them and the 5 longest on the committee (including officers) have notched up 112 years. That is an average of 22½ years each. I am not suggesting that each committee member has to serve that length of time! Even if it is for a year or two, would you like to join us?

According to our records 14 have yet to pay their subscription for 2010 and therefore a fifth and final reminder is enclosed, inviting them to pay for next year as well. As we do not want to lose members, please may I have your subscription? If you have paid, and have been sent this reminder, would you 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 following year. This year, I am sending out 219, in addition to the 14 final reminders. This shows that only 43% of the members have already paid. If you were to consider paying a three year subscription (£15), it would make my life all that much easier this time next year. Renewal slips are also being sent to those who indicated that they would not be renewing, hoping that they have changed their minds. If you use Internet banking, have you thought about setting up a regular annual payment? Ask for details - now!

Membership currently stands at 411 households, 5 down on this time last year; this smaller reduction is that 18 members have decided to join us; three times that of last year.

You know what the Association does. We have tried in the past newsletters to encourage you to recruit a new member. Please could you persuade a friend or neighbour to send me £5 together with their name and address? It could be considered as giving the same Christmas present to two people: your friend and us!

In past newsletters, I have said it would be marvellous if we could maintain the position we were in in previous years. Last year I had hoped it would be 425. We are struggling to keep above 400; 200 down on 2001. Please think about it.

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## **Parish Paths Partnership**

The idea that visitors and residents alike might like a guided tour around parts of the town they rarely venture into seems to have gone down like a lead balloon.

Instead, a leaflet with a map indicating 'audio points' will be available on the Town Council web site early next year. The walk will go from the station, visit the castle, along the canal to Bullbeggars Lane, up Garden Field Lane to Long Green. From there, along the ridge to the Berkhamsted School playing fields, down to Butts Meadow, pop into St Peters Church, down Castle Street and back to the Station. For those who want to go further, Bourne End (St Johns Church) is on the list and up Sugar Lane. If you get tired earlier, then you can pop down Swing Gate Lane and along to Castle Street.

**Dear Editor,**

I write in response to the comments made by Susan Johnson with regards to the 2nd tier of parking at Berkhamsted station.

As with her letter to the Gazette earlier this year, Susan has referred to the BCA backing the Town Council in support of the addition of the 2nd tier to the car park, without actually checking the opinions of the BCA membership.

When London Midland belatedly undertook their consultation the result was that 214 submissions opposed the scheme, and only 24 submissions were in favour. The reasons for the strength of opposition is clear to us given the fact that there were on average 100 free spaces available in the car park at peak usage time. The motivation for installing the car park extension was therefore clearly London Midland's franchise obligation to provide additional parking along the length of the line, rather than there being a specific need for additional parking at Berkhamsted station. This is not to say that there isn't a parking problem around the station area, clearly there is but we still do not believe that the 2nd tier has in any way helped to address this problem.

London Midland completely ignored local residents views and went ahead with the scheme regardless.

We feel strongly that an organisation like the BCA should not ignore local residents views, and should take better care to make sure that it is correctly representing the feelings of the membership, before going to the Gazette with such opinions. I am also saddened by Susan's appreciation of the "quality of materials" used, when we still believe that the steel and concrete structure is completely incongruous with the historic appearance of the rest of the station area.

It is with regret that we feel that while Susan continues to offer her opinions as those of the BCA membership, and remains Chairman of the BCA, that we will not be renewing our membership.

Yours sincerely J R

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**FIRE!**

*Christstophor Talbot-Ponsonby reminds us all!*

It is now nearly three years since Alan Verney of the Hertfordshire Fire and Rescue Service came to talk to us. He told us that we can all have a Free Home Fire Safety Check. This service is completely free and could save your life. You may also be entitled to a free smoke detector.

- Visits are by agreed appointment only
- Only uniformed fire-fighters will call
- They will always use an agreed password and show an official ID Card.

Would you like a visit?

Call 0800 587 3347 to arrange your free visit or visit [www.hertsdirect.org/fire](http://www.hertsdirect.org/fire).

**Have your say on borough's big issues**

*Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby reminds us that it's no good just sitting and moaning. Get involved and make your opinions heard - then you can blame everyone else!*

People are being given the chance to have their say on issues from house building to the economy.

A public consultation on the big issues facing the borough over the next two decades began on November 3rd and runs until December 15th.

Steve Holmes, cabinet chief for planning and regeneration at Dacorum BC, said "This consultation gives an important opportunity for local people to have their say so we can have an informed debate within the community over the big issues that affect Dacorum, including affordable housing for local people, developing our economy out of recession and ensuring sustainability and environmental protection.

This document is about our future society, economy and environment and will set the basis for all new development in the borough as a platform for all our future plans and programmes.

It addresses the issue of providing new homes and gives different options for building new homes in the borough."

Copies of the consultation papers are online at [www.dacorum.gov.uk/planning](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/planning) and are also available at local libraries and council offices.

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**Activities Sub-Committee**

*Rita Jones, Chairman, reports:*

'An Evening with Richard Mabey' was, if numbers are any indication, a success. It not only attracted about 150 people (and on a Thursday night) but also made a convert, see Katy's review on page 2. It was our contribution to the Berkhamsted Arts Trust Festival.

The next event is the New Year's Day Ramble starting at 10.30 a.m. in front of Berkhamsted Station. Bill Willett promises a new (to this walk) route to Aldbury and back, with a stop for lunch, which may be purchased, (or bring your own)..

On Thursday, (not again!!) February 10th 2011, Brian Johnson, who leads rail tours, will entertain us with, 'Is it hilly in Switzerland? Tales of a Tour Manager', in the Sessions Hall at 8 p.m.

We all have amusing anecdotes about our holidays. Just imagine how many the tour manager has.

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**Picture Quiz**

So easy, everyone knew it was the number on a tree for the national database intended to 'log' all the trees in the country. Found in Butts Meadow and other public areas - yes I know, I should get out more!

## Town Amenities Sub-Committee

*Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:*

Let me report what has happened since the last newsletter. Although my Committee have been looking at all the applications there has been little of note. I suspect that the economic situation has reduced the average planning application to extensions only. Similarly the candidates for the Environment award are thin on the ground but we are currently working on the list. This time of year I always want to thank my Committee for all their hard work especially the 12 a year meetings and the whole Association should be grateful their work.

John Parsons has been our planning Czar for many years researching in detail all applications. Although he agreed to continue a couple of years ago he has decided to stand down. I would like to thank him for all his support over the years He will be sadly missed. As the Committee is now thin on the ground any member who wants to step forward to join TASC would be welcome. You do not need to serve on the main Committee.

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## Canal & Riverside Partnership (CARP)

*Norman Cutting is our representative*

Another action packed meeting took place in mid October. Main subject on the agenda was the re-organisation of British Waterways. The proposal is that British Waterways change its status and move to the Third Sector, using the National Trust as a model. The emphasis is on the maximum use of other Third Sector organisations and volunteers.

In the meantime, it seems a 'holding' system is swinging into action. The wild seed planting that was planned for this autumn, having got all the required approvals, has suddenly been stopped; causing the wild seed to be very cross indeed. The idea of having the Ravens lane bridge painted for free also seems to have provoked concern, interpretation boards are a danger to themselves and actually fixing information leaflet boxes appears to be a danger to all and sundry.

The Canal Fields Liaison Group appears to have disbanded, but the good news is that the 'Waitrose' bridge over the canal has little strips of metal attached to stop it falling to bits, but the bad news is the funding as a result of Green Flag status has gone exactly where expected - and it has nothing to do with Canal Fields.

Meanwhile the world goes it's merry way!

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## Meanwhile - for something completely different.

**Reminder** - Festival of Light, 5th December 3:30pm  
Lights on at 5:20 pm and presentation of the BCA best window display award.

Fancy your 'Citizen' straight to your computer?  
How about 6 issues a year, 3 paper and 3 on-line only?  
Let me have your views!

## As promised - Normans' update

The new Station car park has had the expected result. In cold weather, the north facing ramp gets very icy and the bottom of New Road appears to have been turned into a single lane highway on a permanent basis.

The good news is that the 'traffic calming measures' introduced as part of the enhancement project in Ravens Lane are to be altered on 'road safety grounds'.

I can't think where the vehicles that currently park there all day will go, can you? The spaces in Mill Street are usually taken up by 8am, but on 27th October I did see one space for an hour - it was the school holidays!

I have seen correspondence regarding this problem and it looks like the 'Ravens Lane' solution will be tried - you know, park - no park - park - no park - etc., to allow vehicles to pass each other. It didn't work in Ravens Lane, don't they ever learn!

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## From Freda Earl

I am Chairman of the Sunnyside Allotment Society (not Chairperson and certainly not Chair. I may end up with a wooden leg but not yet I hope). I am also allotment Rep for Sunnyside on the Town Council's Allotment Management Team and I am responsible for lettings and matching new tenants to suitable plots. As I talk to people who want to start growing their own food I have realised that there is not one, but two generations gap since the last time people did this. I was brought up with Dig for Victory and marrows growing on top of air raid shelters so it came as a bit of a shock when I asked new tenants "Can you get advice from your parents?" and got the answer "Oh no, they have never grown a vegetable in their lives and nor have my grandparents." At the allotments there are plenty of people happy to give advice but it must be hard for people needing help to grow fruit and vegetables at home without it taking over their lives.

The urge to grow things is very deep in our nature. Younger people living in their first flats often grow amazing houseplants. When they get their own bit of garden they use this skill to grow plants in pots on patios and decking. New varieties have been bred to grow happily in this restricted space. These plants need big pots, good compost and enough water. Labour-saving they are not but you can stick them in the removal van if you move.  
*Editor note - there is currently a waiting list of approximately six months for allotments.*

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**(Copy date for next edition - 29 January 2011)**

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