

The Citizen



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

March 2011

Annual General Meeting

NOTICE is hereby given that the 86th Annual General Meeting of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be held in the Wellcome Great Hall of the Town Hall, Berkhamsted, on

Thursday 10th March 2011 at 8 p.m.

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

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

The 6-weekly committee meetings last for around 2 hours and we have two regular sub-committees.

The Town Amenities Sub-Committee works hard to try and ensure that changes made to the environment, both in Northchurch and Berkhamsted, are for the better. The Activities & Publicity Sub-Committee plans and organises a programme of talks, walks and other events.

The Association is represented on a number of local bodies such as the Berkhamsted Arts Trust, Town Hall Trust and Berkhamsted Community Partnership.

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

CA Environment Awards 2010

There were a number of nominations for the Environment Award for the years 2009/10, representing a wide variety of entries. The selected developments to be illustrated are as follows:

Dean Fry Court (110 High Street) - flats
Heron Place, Bank Mill Lane (Rose Cottage) - flats
Water Tower, Shootersway - painting
St Albans House & Moss Edge House, Elm Grove - new homes
Stag Lane - Phase II, northern half
Station Car Park - 2nd tier
The Car Works, 390/392 High Street - refurbishment

The Gables, Gravel Path - refurbishment
Temptation, 211 High Street - shop front
Garden House, Cross Oak Road - new home
Sherwood Mews, Park Street - new homes
Cross Oak Road street sign - new design
Canal Fields
3-7 Charles Street - remodelling as houses

Guest Speaker

Our Town, Borough and County Councillor, Ian Reay, will bring us up to date on local highway and planning matters.

Followed by (if time allows):

Open Forum

Finally there will be an Open Forum in which members will have the opportunity 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!

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones, Chairman, reports:

Reducing, Reusing and Recycling (November 11th)

Recycling is clearly popular with our members as a large and lively audience heard Sheila Chauhan, Dacorum Borough Council's Environmental Awareness Officer, explain what happens to the things we recycle each week. Everything is recycled in this country, apart from paper. The most cost effective, efficient and environmentally friendly way to deal with paper is to send it to a large centre in Belgium, confirmed in visits by Sheila and her colleagues. Metal staples etc. don't need to be removed from paper before recycling. All types of bottles, including caps, are the only plastics which can be recycled but it is hoped to include other plastics in the near future. Sheila brought examples of products made from recycled material including fleeces. Sheila deals with the door to door collections but she did mention the many other items which may be taken to the recycling centre which is run by the county. These include tetrapacks, used for juices and milk. The enthusiasm of the audience was impressive and questions could have gone on well after 10pm.

'An Evening of Antiques' (April 14th)

I hope we have an equally enthusiastic audience for the April evening with Stephen Hearn of Tring Market Auctions, who have been 'Fine art and chattel auctioneers and valuers since 1832'. Bring along your fine art, chattels and any other interesting old items and Stephen will tell us all about them.

Walks

About 16 of us, plus a dog, met on New Year's Day for a very pleasant walk to Aldbury, led, as usual, by a very informative and entertaining Bill Willett. It became increasingly damp so we returned along the canal. The Midsummer Walk will be on June 5th, to Cholesbury and back.

Goodbye and Hello

These are the last events I shall be organising for BCA and I welcome Katy Brookes-Duncan as the new Chairman of the Activities Committee. I wish her the very best of luck for the future and am confident that she will continue to receive all your support.

Membership Matters

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

A big welcome to our 5 new members who have joined since the last newsletter. They include: one that

joined having seen our form in the New Home Owners Welcome Pack; on a recommendation from an existing member; and a lapsed member that last paid in 2004. This means our membership is 402, one down on this time last year. Perhaps we have reached the bottom and from now on can continue to look up. 28 years ago our membership was 454, rising to 611 by 1995 before falling back. As we have consistently said "joining is not just going to meetings, or receiving newsletters, but it is to help us have an influence in having a say." It is therefore very important that we maintain numbers.

There are currently 76 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a reminder will be enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you to the 142 members who have paid as a result of the renewal notice enclosed with the December Newsletter.

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

Finally, on behalf of the Committee, I would like to say a very big thank you to all the deliverers, which we are apt to take for granted for both delivering and on many occasions, collecting the subscriptions as well. Several have certainly been doing it for 25 years, when my mother was Membership Secretary.

Parish Paths Partnership

Norman Cutting reports

The last meeting before we went to press was held on January 20th. The proposed 'Berkhamsted Audio Trail' describes an easy walk around the eastern end of the town, taking in the canal tow-path, Sugar Lane and Butts Meadow with several alternative routes to make it suitable for both able-bodied and those with handicaps such as needed a wheelchair (also for buggies!). Start & finish points include the Station, Swing Gate Lane and Chesham Road, so it is hoped to accommodate all abilities. The commentary will be done by Cllr. Ron Cowie, who did the commentary for the Berkhamsted Castle video, and pupils of Ashyns School will help with the technical side.

It is intended that the associated map, walk description and commentary – both hard copy and mp3 file – will be available for downloading on the Town Council web-site this Spring.

**Due to lack of space, additional material available on the web-site:
www.bcacitizen.org.uk**

Chairman's Column

Chairman, Susan Johnson, writes :

Happy New Year to you all, and welcome to our new members! I hope you will be able to take full advantage of our events; and that we will see you at the AGM on 10th March. Perhaps you might think about joining the Committee!

I would like to begin by thanking old and new members alike for their comments on our recent outings in the press. The most recent concerned the new 2nd tier of parking at the station – which caused some concern to a few, and pleasure to others. Please, I would like to clarify that, when I write as Chairman of the BCA to anyone, I do so with the backing of the Committee and as the representative of the Association. I am not expressing personal views. If I did that, I would write simply as Susan Johnson of Shrublands Road. You said 'be more assertive' as an organisation, and we are! Unfortunately we cannot take everyone with us every time.

So here is another (perhaps) controversial view. I think that Dacorum Borough Council handled the rubbish and recycling collections this year over the Christmas period extremely well. Everything was collected (mostly) in line with the schedule and there was minimal mess. Do you agree?

The roads however were not well served by the gritting lorries. Herts Highways should rethink its schedule to take account of hills. It's all very well to grit the main roads, but the likes of Cross Oak Road, Kings Road and Swing Gate Lane should have more attention. They are bus routes, after all. So when you give your views to Herts Highways on the spots in the High Street that still need attention (as the last repairs were somewhat patchy) remind them about our topography. Emails/letters to Ian Reay, your County Councillor, and the Herts Area Office.

The news about the probable closure of the police station has caused some concern. The Association will be making representations to try to ensure that the service to the public does not deteriorate; and, most importantly, that the level of police presence does not diminish. We will also be very interested in the future of the station site.

Local elections are upon us again; straight after Easter and the Royal Wedding. The excitement will be tremendous – but not, I fear, for the elections and the referendum! Remember 5th May. We might try to do another (less formal) Hustings this year, if we have the energy, in the preceding fortnight. Look out for the posters.

Please look at all the other articles in this newsletter. Our Christmas Shop Window Competition was well received by shopkeepers; and the Environment Award is being judged in February. The Association relies on you to support its activities and contribute to the annual events it provides to enliven the town. The BCA has been loving Berkhamsted for 87 years now!

CHRISTMAS SHOP WINDOWS

This year the judging panel from the Association went to town (literally) and made five awards: Winners were Number 20 in Lower Kings Road; Highly Commended were Airst & Graces, Ann Maries, Home & Colonial, David Paul (all of the High Street), and Luminous & Vogue of Lower Kings Road.

The number of awards reflected the difficulty of choosing between such good candidates. We hope that all of you use your local shops. 'Use it or lose it' is the mantra. The town centre seems to be weathering the recession well. Long may it continue!

Canal & Riverside Partnership (CARP)

Norman Cutting reports

The last meeting before we went to press was held on January 10th and following the structure changes at British Waterways, a timetable will be prepared to complete the various tasks which have been held in abeyance for one reason or the other. The tow-path is to be upgraded to provide a 'less wet' route, leaflet boxes and information boards have to be installed and the planting of 'wild flowers' are all intended to be either completed or, in the case of the tow-path, upgrading commenced, this year. The Partnership is still looking for sponsors for this project so that we can do it properly this time.

The leaning wall by the Castle Street bridge is still leaning, the path is cracking and British Waterways have been informed several times. You may have noticed that white marks were placed last year to see if the section of wall nearest to the moor was still sinking, but the wall noticed this and started to lean towards the canal to fool British Waterways; but I spotted it and so should they. Several walls near to locks have been damaged by careless boat owners and the concrete apron on the lock nearest to Lower Kings Road has a neat crack. I won't mention the crumbling tow-path by the Bank Mill Bridge – whoops, I just have! - so take care if you take the Berkhamsted Audio Trail.

It is hoped that once the management of Britain's Canals is sorted out, then the years of neglect will be corrected, but personally, I'm not holding my breath.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Susan Johnson reports:

For the last month or so Gordon Bluck, the TASC convenor, has had his turn at being unwell, so he has asked me to write the report for this newsletter.

The vast majority of recent planning applications have been domestic, but numbers have been keeping up, especially considering the economic climate. Perhaps people are improving rather than moving? TASC does not tend to over-involve itself with 'domestics', leaving that instead to neighbours and planning officers. We do, however, keep a close eye on all proposals in the conservation area, both domestic and commercial. Recently we submitted views on the proposed alterations to Birtchnell's old shop (now spectacularly redundant) and on internally-illuminated signage for HSBC, expressing concern about the former and objection to the latter. So that you do not think we only complain, we also expressed support for the proposed restoration of the front of 56 Shrublands Avenue. It is very pleasing to see an individual citizen investing in the fabric of the town, and particularly within the conservation area.

Please don't think we do not follow through with issues which concern you. We continue to monitor the 2nd tier parking at the station. Recently some light pollution had been noticed from the south side of the valley. I have written to London Midland and received a response, but not yet a reply. Similarly I wrote to DBC about the loss of the old swinging inn sign at the King's Arms; and the way planning objections not reported through the Internet were recorded. Both issues are receiving attention. We made a submission on the draft Dacorum Core Strategy, and were concerned at the lack of timescale for the installation of new infrastructure. We acknowledge that 200 houses planned for the site off Shootersway is a somewhat alarming rise in density, but accept that extra houses can be accommodated in the town and this is a site long destined to receive them. We will concentrate our efforts on practical outcomes of any planning application which comes forward, such as achieving a pleasing layout and design, ensuring safe accesses and an improvement in infrastructure to support the project.

A more immediately concerning development is the proposed installation of lighting pylons at Kitchener's Field for Berkhamsted School's playing fields. We understand the School is in conversation with DBC and neighbours about this; and we will keep an eye out for the inevitable planning application, as this land is in the AONB.

Another significant recent decision is the refusal at Development Control Committee of the proposed flats at The Glebe, Chesham Road. The application was up for

approval but was voted down, not least on parking deficiencies. Now that the Planning Guidance has changed on parking provision this will rear its head quite often. At least we now have a more common sense approach. Whoever heard of a household in Berkhamsted with fewer than two cars?!

More mundanely, we are making representations to DBC, through the Town Warden, to have more frequent (or any at all) street sweeping in the back streets. Although the High Street is well covered, the likes of Charles Street are neglected. Please keep writing/emailing the Town Warden where mess is apparent and he will follow it up.

(Parked cars don't help with street cleaning! - NC)

Where are the results of the Town Council's parking survey? Try <http://www.berkhamsted.gov.uk> and click on latest news. Amongst the list is a link to Residents Parking Zone survey. Each road surveyed, is listed with a summary, although no decision of any action (if at all) will be made until the summer, which is after the May election and believe when most are away on their holidays. This is an issue which affects many hundreds of town centre residents and any changes will need to be carefully considered. Not that there are any funds at DBC to install parking zones in the foreseeable future.

Meanwhile, we have the BCA's AGM, where the results of the Environment Award will be announced. I hope that you, the membership, understands that this is not a 'Green' award (which is what the Gazette always tries to label it) but concerns itself with development, be they buildings, facilities or landscape, which were significant additions to the town in the previous year (or in this case, two, as we did not have a presentation last year). Similarly the so-called shortlist is just that – a short list – whittled down from a long list. The items on it do not indicate the Sub-Committee's opprobrium or approbation; they are merely significant for one reason or another and appeared (in this case) in 2009 and 2010. Hope you'll attend for the results.

Finally, we have a vacancy on TASC for a willing volunteer to replace the estimable John Parsons. It is important we have new blood on the Sub-Committee, so if you have an interest in planning, buildings, landscape and the general facilities in the town, please get in touch so we can arrange for you to sit in on one of our meetings to see what we do. Sitting on TASC does not mean you have to sit on the main Committee, but we've got vacancies there too!

Contributions/letters/comments to:

The Citizen

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.