



September 2011

The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Working for the social and civic life of our community

CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN

Hello to autumn already! As I write the greengages are flying, kamikaze-like, from my tree onto the paving outside the kitchen door and the rain is pouring down. In Berkhamsted we seem to be assailed on all sides by stormy weather on the planning front. Please see the article by Paul Crosland, the Chairman of our Town Amenities Sub-Committee, which sets out the current situation on the GUI effort to cover our Green Belt with houses, seemingly aided by proposed changes to the Planning system. That comes in addition to the local hostellers' determination to reduce our pub signage to blandness, and other businesses to fill the conservation area with gaudy internal sign illumination. It seems we spend all our time objecting! But there are so many good reasons to enjoy living in Berkhamsted, not least the activities of many organisations giving us intellectual stimulus and wonderful entertainment. We must commend the Town Council for having laid on the Pirates of Penzance in the castle; we hope a return to events there on a regular basis at last. And thanks to the Lions for the August Bank Holiday fete; and the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust for its annual Festival. These and the many regular events put on by societies combine to make Berkhamsted the best place to be if TV and radio prove disappointing.

Welcome to our new member households! We appreciate your joining and hope you enjoy our activities (both campaigning and social) in the coming months. Enjoy them enough to renew for next year!

I hope you and long-standing members also enjoy the contents of this newsletter and respond to anything that pleases/annoys you. We're still looking for an editor, you know! You don't have to be too technically accomplished; a knowledge and use of Word and email is all that's required. We have Katy to put the articles together and a friendly printer to produce the finished article. Think about it, please.

Susan Johnson

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.

Contributions and comments to: Katy Brookes-Duncan
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Royal Mail delivery office

The sorting office has closed. There is no collection point in the town. Quite frankly Royal Mail's redelivery service is of no use to me but at some inconvenience I can drive to Maylands to collect my post if I have to (and I will have to!) but what about those people that don't drive? Royal Mail have confirmed in writing that they have not completed an environmental impact assessment, they have not completed an equalities impact assessment and they have not undertaken any consultation with the residents of Berkhamsted. They will not confirm how many people collected mail from the defunct sorting office because this is commercially sensitive information; so we cannot assess what impact the closure will have. Our Member of Parliament and our Town Council have made no headway, despite trying. However, we are not giving up. It is entirely possible for the Royal Mail to find a solution retrospectively and so we shall continue to campaign. Any ideas for action we can take would be welcomed. While we decide what our next step is, please can you email (or send) any personal stories of problems the closure has created for you to: berkhamstedcitizens@hotmail.co.uk

Furious (and fierce!) of Berkhamsted

Silver cup

We've re-found a small but very good quality silver cup with the inscription *The Citizen's* (sic) *Association Cup* and one recipient engraved on it. It was evidently last (or perhaps for the only time) awarded to H C Barber in 1956. Its base is missing, on which might be the names of other winners. The cup was reportedly retrieved from the Civic Centre many years ago following the building's renovation, and has been in our archive ever since. Can anyone help with its history? I have checked our minutes and there is no mention of it.

Email scjohnson@btinternet.com

Walking with Paul Crosland

Nine walkers set out from Berkhamsted station on the annual summer walk to Cholesbury and back. Reflecting the changeable nature of this summer's weather, whilst Saturday had been hot and humid, Sunday was much more pleasant for walking. Our eleven mile walk took us out along the canal to Stag Lane before climbing up to Shootersway. Traversing the bypass, thankfully relatively quiet on a Sunday morning, we continued on along field paths past Marlin Chapel, Rossway and Lodge Farm. After two hours walking we arrived at the halfway point, the 'Full Moon' at Cholesbury. The pub served up plates of sandwiches in double-quick time and, fed and watered, we continued along our circular route. Deviating only for a brief look at Hawridge Church, we kept to the high ground, across two large fields of oil seed rape. The footpath had been reinstated with tractor tracks. However, the towering crop limited the view of Chesham on the horizon for the shorter members of the party!

Crossing the Chesham-to-Cholesbury road near to the Black Bull pub (we didn't go in!) we climbed once more along the bridleway towards Ashley Green. Thereafter, we continued through Hockeridge Woods to the Chesham road near to 'our' junction on the bypass. A few spots of rain began to fall as we continued on the path behind Kingshill Cemetery but our spirits were undampened as we crossed the Berkhamsted School playing fields, continuing down behind the Girls' school, with its new extension, to the town centre.

I am experimenting with an autumn walk this year, in addition to the 'traditional' New Year's Day walk to Aldbury and back. The autumn walk will be on Sunday 16th October, starting at 10a.m. at the station and returning by 2 p.m. to cater for those who would like a walk, but who want to do some other things on Sunday as well!

Graham Greene Festival

The annual GG Festival takes place between Thursday 29th September and Sunday 2nd October. It is showing both screen versions of *Brighton Rock*. The talks are varied and all very good value. If you fancy something different from the usual TV fare over that weekend, give it a try! Contact www.grahamgreenefestival.org or ring 01442 866694.



Walkers enjoying a field of poppies

Berkhamsted Station renovation

Tony Statham

Berkhamsted Station is undergoing one of its periodic renovations. One of the earliest stations to be built in England (praised for its 'Elizabethan style of architecture' in 1837), the present building was erected in 1875. Although the first line had two tracks, a third was added in 1857-9 and a fourth in 1875 which prompted the new building as well as additional sidings to replace the goods yard. While the speed of travel has perhaps made limited progress (in 1887 it was possible to get from Berkhamsted to Euston in 40 minutes) the comfort of carriages and facilities at stations has almost certainly improved. Having previously won the BCA Environment Award for its restoration in 1990, the current booking hall has been redecorated and attention will now turn to restoring the platform canopies. These will require extensive works but it understood the original "saw-toothed valancing" will be retained. Other good news – a new lift will be installed in October.

Road repairs

Hertfordshire County Council has reached the High Street in Berkhamsted, having already finished in Northchurch. It is all welcome; but seems a little limited in scope. Hope your favourite pothole has been covered!



First school expansion

New plans are on the table to increase the capacity of both Greenway and Westfield First Schools to accommodate the 3+ population, the result of the recent increased birth rate. The Greenway expansion particularly has elicited many objections, many from neighbours who fear the increase in parking and traffic movements around the school. Parents of current pupils also fear for a change in the ethos of the school as it becomes bigger. The BCA recognises that children must be accommodated, but called during the original consultation for a robust traffic plan if the expansion went ahead. This appears to have been formulated by virtue of an analysis by traffic engineers, although the assumptions made in their report result in a very broad brush solution, which will undoubtedly not satisfy local residents. The BCA also suggested to HCC that long-term plans should include building another First School on the north side of the valley, to balance all the schools on the south side, which results in so many car journeys. We await HCC's final, rather belated plans; but one thing is sure – children must be found places, and it is better they are made available in Berkhamsted/Northchurch for the children who live here.

Profile: Katy Brookes-Duncan



Katy has lived in Berkhamsted since 1999 and joined the Citizens Association through an event at the Town Hall promoting local voluntary organisations. She only became an

active member after she responded to a questionnaire in the newsletter. Initially she joined the main Committee but last year agreed to chair the Activities Sub-Committee so Rita could take a step back. She also volunteers in the Oxfam shops and campaigns for trade justice through involvement in the Berkhamsted Fairtrade Steering Group.

A career civil servant, she has worked in the Home Office, Prison Service, Cabinet Office and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Katy currently works in the Department for Communities and Local Government;

Some comments from a local “Grumpy Old Man”

Not sure if this will become a regular item in the BCA Newsletter but I won't be grumpy about that! Also, it is not intended to be an “Am I the only one?” type of feature, rather, to comment upon aspects of local culture, topics, etc that might irk the saner members of our community.

For example, have you noticed that when people now wish to push past you, they do so without comment but usually (hopefully) say sorry afterwards? What happened to “excuse me” or “may I get past you” before barging into you? On a similar vein there seems to be an acceptance that cyclists can use the pavement which I think used to be illegal and most of them no longer have a warning bell which I think used to be compulsory – perhaps the editor can correct me on this? (*Ed: It is still illegal for adults to cycle on pavements. Not sure about the bells*) Speaking of vehicles on pavements, we seem to be over-run by prams or baby-buggies whose pushers (men and women) assume they have right of way not only on the pavement but even in the narrowest of spaces inside shops. Was it ever thus? I think not.

Sports facilities for HP4

DBC has allocated nearly £51,000 to improve sports facilities in the HP4 postal district this year. The Youth Town Council has the task of taking nominations for recipients and then it will be up to us, the public, to vote for our favourites on 30th October in the Civic Centre. I think this sort of exercise is known as Participatory Budgeting. It's the newest local government idea to come out of the USA. It seems to favour those with the most eye-catching scheme, rather than the most worthy. But it's real democracy!

having worked on planning policy and housing policy she will be working on 'Decentralisation and the Big Society' until she takes voluntary redundancy at the end of April next year. After which she is planning a portfolio career consulting on government relations and social media communications and aims to develop her cake baking business... and in her spare time she runs marathons and half marathons.

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Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Paul Crosland, Chairman

TASC meets around once a month, and comprises seven members. The dictionary defines 'amenities' as 'useful and enjoyable features', and TASC reviews such matters as planning issues and the environment, the canal, parking and trees, which all relate to the use and enjoyment of our town.

Two issues have dominated the Sub-Committee's work in the past three months – the closure of the Berkhamsted mail delivery centre, including the loss of a collection point for undelivered mail in the town centre; and the exhibition of proposals for a major housing and community development to the south of town on Green Belt land close to the by-pass.

The housing development, referred to by the developers - Grand Union Investments – as the South Berkhamsted concept, was exhibited to the public in early June. TASC has made it very clear to the developers that the view of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association is that there should be no development on Green Belt land. However, we are well aware that the changes to the national Planning system being proposed by the Government, and we believe it is sensible to take a pragmatic approach by continuing to keep an eye on the developers. We feel that it is better to understand the developer's purported intentions than to pretend that the proposals do not exist. The views of the membership on this issue, and our attitude to it, would be welcomed.

I referred to the proposed changes to the Planning system, and TASC has expressed the BCA's views on the Localism Bill to our MP, David Gauke.

TASC has been lobbying for the pre-refurbishment hanging sign for the Kings Arms to be reinstated. However, although the building is Grade II listed, there does not appear to be a historical basis for the reinstatement of the sign. There have been several planning applications from local hostellers for changes to their signage, and TASC has commented on these, where appropriate. We are hopeful that our intervention has brought about a more 'joined-up approach' by Dacorum BC (as planning authority) to the issue of alterations to Berkhamsted pub signs. TASC has been vigilant on the issue of internally illuminated signage for shop fronts and has objected where these have been included in planning applications in both Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

To demonstrate that we are not simply 'naysayers', we have written to commend a house owner who is reinstating timber sash windows in the Conservation Area. And we are making progress on the possible replacement of the trees near the station. TASC also welcomed the recent imposition of Article 4 Directions on a number of properties within the Berkhamsted Conservation Area, which comes partly

as a result of many years of lobbying by the BCA, especially the work put in by John Cook. We understand that a review of the Berkhamsted Conservation Area will come up for public consultation in the autumn, and we shall monitor this with interest.

BCA Activities

Katy Brookes-Duncan

The summer is a quiet time on the Activities front apart from our summer ramble. After many years of sterling service Bill Willett has retired from leading our walks – we are immensely grateful to Bill for all he did. Paul Crosland has kindly agreed to take this on and he will be trialling shorter walks so we hope more people will feel able to get involved. The first one will be on Sunday 16th October. We have also published the new timetable of evening events (see insert). We hope that we have hit on a mix of local and topical issues that will appeal to our loyal audience but also attract new members. At our first event on 13th October you'll be able to find out about the new TV station for Dacorum. We do recognise that a significant proportion of our membership may have little personal interest in the future of the schools in the town but for the Association to continue to thrive we need to be seen to be relevant. The lack of school places and proposed additional classrooms are key concerns for the town's residents. Please think: are there parents of young children amongst your acquaintance that you could invite to our talk on 10th November to ensure the County Council understand the town's concerns?

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

What a fantastic quarter! Since the last newsletter we have been able to welcome 12 new households. A very big welcome to you all! One joined as a result of our summer ramble; eight joined when we drew attention to the South Berkhamsted Concept Public Exhibitions; and three with our petition trying to persuade Royal Mail to retain a collection point in Berkhamsted once the sorting office closed. It shows that you appreciate our drawing your attention to the changes that are taking place locally. Our membership is now 411 households.

Joining helps us have an influence on what is happening. It is therefore very important that we maintain numbers. There are currently 16 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a reminder will be enclosed with this 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. It makes a great gift!