



June 2013

# The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Working for the social and civic life of our community

[www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk](http://www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk)

## Chairman's Column

*Katy Brookes-Duncan*

My name is Katy and I am a Facebook addict! I am. I love it; I do. It's great. I can keep in daily contact with my Mum when getting the timing for both of us at the end of a phone-line is impractical. I have more contact with a lot of my friends, especially those that live further away, than before. I have new friends. I have a huge worldwide professional network and immediate source of advice should I need it. I also know a lot more about what's happening in Berkhamsted. All thanks to Facebook.

A few weeks ago the 'Everything Berko' Facebook group had an on-line conversation about the state of the green spaces and pavements in the Town. The main issue was dog-poo. Why can't all dog owners be responsible for clearing up after their dogs? There is an owner of a large dog in the Velvet Green area that is a particular culprit, be warned there are several women looking out for you! However, it's a problem around the Town and mothers taking their children to Westfield School aren't happy either. (I don't think men are happy about it either but my Facebook network is predominately female.)

However, it's not just the things dogs leave behind that annoy us! After footballers have played on Velvet Green there is always a scattering of drink bottles around the pitch. I think too of the recent articles in the Gazette about the litter on the verges of the A41 and the annual litter-pick that collects tons of waste.

So my request this month is to please pick up your litter and bag and take away your dog-poo. Please help keep our Town looking good and a pleasant place to walk through. If you are particularly civic minded you might also pick up the odd bit of litter and put it in a nearby bin please.

Keep Berkhamsted tidy!

## Joining the Electronic Age

*By Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby*

### ***E-notification for BCA Events***

Following the very successful talk by Adrian Scarborough, we have had several approaches suggesting we should offer an E-notification reminding members of forthcoming events.

We therefore propose to e-mail members reminding them perhaps both two weeks and two days before events. If you would like to be included in this service, please could you let me know? I already have 54 e-mail addresses and you will be included in this service unless you ask me to remove your name.

### ***Electronic Newsletter***

Would you like to be among the growing band of members to receive this Newsletter electronically (pdf), which we started last year? By getting it this way, members receive it in advance of other members and in colour!

E-mail addresses will be maintained confidentially by the BCA. They will not be disclosed to other members nor made available to third parties under any circumstances. E-mails are of course sent out as blind copies.

To be included in either of these please email me at: [christopher@talbot-ponsonby.org](mailto:christopher@talbot-ponsonby.org)

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association.

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## Town Amenities Sub-Committee

*Paul Crosland, Chairman*

### ***The Canal Towpath***

One of the first tangible actions taken locally by the Canal and River Trust – the charity that has taken over responsibility for the canals and navigable waterways, nationwide – has been to refurbish the towpath between Castle Street bridge and the ‘Waitrose’ bridge at Canal Fields. Discussions took place over funding during 2012, and thanks to contributions from Hertfordshire County Council and Berkhamsted Town Council, approval was given to the works being completed during the financial year ending April 2013.

The Citizens Association is represented, by our vice-chairman Gordon Bluck, on the local Canal and Riverside Partnership (that’s CARP, as opposed to CART, the body mentioned in the first sentence above – I hope you are keeping up...). CART, who are members of CARP (sorry...!) advised at a meeting in September 2012, that a tar-bound surface would be put down, with chippings, thus providing an impermeable surface which would not deteriorate under the heavy use over this section of the towpath.

As many of you will have seen, the towpath works were duly completed just ahead of the end of the financial year, and an improvement they undoubtedly are. However, the surfacing is unbound and appears to consist of cinders on a compacted hardcore surface, between wooden palings. The Citizens Association feels that – as nice as the path looks now, the surface will not stand up to the rigors of heavy use by walkers and cyclists after a period of wet weather, such as we have experienced over the past year. CART has claimed that the impermeable surfacing was “too expensive”, and by reducing the specification, it will be able to afford to upgrade more sections of towpath, for example in Northchurch. The BCA has raised the matter with the Town Council. We feel strongly that the monies contributed by the Council should be properly spent within the Town. After we raised the matter at the Town Meeting in May, Town Councillor Collins advised that the contractors will repair any damage to the path’s surface arising from normal wear and tear over the next ten years. We will keep you updated on developments.

*Photo Right: Canal towpath before upgrading*

## ***A Brighter Berkhamsted?***

The Town Council has proposed to set up a Working Group to look at ways of improving the appearance of the town, for example, by tree and flower planting, provision of seating, graffiti removal. The BCA has welcomed this initiative and has stated its willingness to become involved in such a project.

### ***Friends of Canal Fields***



Canal Fields is the name given to the area of open space bounded by Broadwater, the Berkhamsted Tennis and Squash club, the railway line, the footpath linking South Park Gardens with Park Street and, of course, the canal. When Canal Fields was improved in the late 90s and early years of the Millennium, it was hoped that a ‘Friends’ group could be set up to ‘manage’ the area on both a practical and organisational levels. This happened to an extent and volunteers do maintain the Millennium Garden, for example. Dacorum Borough Council and Berkhamsted Town Council would like to reinvigorate the Friends of Canal Fields, and the Citizens Association has welcomed this move. We have suggested to the Town Council that young families might like to get involved with such an initiative.



## **Multi-storey Car Park**



The outgoing Mayor of Berkhamsted, Councillor Ron Cowie recently used a speech at his civic dinner to hail the proposals for a multi-storey car park in Lower Kings Road next to Waitrose as a “success of his term of office”. I believe that accolade to be a little premature as the proposals for a car park – which is an additional parking deck on an existing Dacorum Borough Council car park – are still at the feasibility stage. The cost for providing around a hundred additional spaces is likely to be upwards of £3 million. The Citizens Association is interested to hear your views on the subject. Do you think Berkhamsted needs additional car parking spaces, regardless of cost and suitability of location? Is Lower Kings Road the right place to build such a car park? Water Lane, behind Tesco might be a better site, but we understand there are land ownership difficulties and Lower Kings Road is an ‘easy win’. Will Lower Kings Road and the cross-roads get even more congested, causing even greater problems than now? Air pollution levels (nitrogen dioxide) from vehicle emissions in the High Street are already tending towards dangerous levels at times. We are interested to hear from you, the membership, on what stance the Citizens Association should take on the issue of the proposed multi-storey car park. Please contact me with your thoughts at [peejaycee@yahoo.com](mailto:peejaycee@yahoo.com), or via the Chairman.

## **Lower Kings Road trees**

As an update to the article in the December 2012 edition of ‘The Citizen’ the three trees planted on the corner of Lower Kings Road and Brownlow Road near to the station, which were funded by the BCA, appear to have survived the winter and blossomed in our belated spring. One is looking a little sorry for itself, and we’ll keep an eye on it.

Should any die within two years of planting, however, they will be replaced by Dacorum Borough Council, free of charge. For the record, the two outer trees are *Amelanchier arborea* Robin Hill – pink flowers that turn white, young leaves turn from red to green and develop autumn colour. The middle tree is a *Prunus umineko* – white flowering cherry with autumnal leaf colour change.

## **Gable Hall**

The Localism Act of 2011 contained a provision for local communities to apply to local councils for buildings or other assets which are of ‘value’ to the community to be registered with the council on a Register of Assets of Community Value. This means that, should the owners of the asset, be they private or local authority, wish to dispose of the property or to demolish it, the person or body which has registered the asset has six months to raise the funds to purchase it for the community.

The Citizens Association has continually lobbied Dacorum Borough Council to make better use of Gable Hall in Prince Edward Street (by Victoria School) for the benefit of the town. In 2008, the building was taken out of public use on the grounds that it would cost (we believe) around £75,000 to bring the building up to standards required by current building regulations. The building lay empty and unused for several years until it was let out to a local theatre group and dance workshop on a short-term licence (again, so we understand). By registering Gable Hall, we hope that – should Dacorum Borough Council decide to withdraw the licence and go through the procedures of demolishing the building, the citizens of Berkhamsted would at least have the opportunity of saving a valuable community space in the town centre.



## **BCA Activities**

*Susan Johnson*

The AGM and Environment Awards evening on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> March was a success. The Environment Award was once more without a plaque-winner, but Certificates of Commendation were given to the Castle Wharf development and Brasserie Blanc. Our speaker that evening was John Highmore, the volunteers' co-ordinator of the Canal & River Trust (CART), formerly British Waterways, and there is every hope that his plea for a local group to help with canal side maintenance will become a reality.

The last talk of this season was on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> April by a special guest – Adrian Scarborough, our local star of stage and screen. By common consent, his anecdotes and tips on acting technique were both very amusing and interesting. All present had a wonderful evening and we appreciate him keeping the date free in his busy schedule at home and abroad. We welcomed him as a new member, and hope he continues to join in our activities. See him on your TV screens again (BBC4, my favourite channel) this summer!

Our final activity this season is a summer Ramble on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> June at 10.30 a.m. from the station, led by Paul Crosland. Please come along! But I can't promise any good weather.

We know activities are something that the membership holds dear and enjoys enormously; and it often introduces us to new members. So we have booked the following dates for 2013/14 for you to put in your diaries NOW:

- Talks on 10<sup>th</sup> October and 7<sup>th</sup> November 2013;
- Walk on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014;
- Talk on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014;
- AGM on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2014;
- Talk on 10<sup>th</sup> April; and
- Walk on 29<sup>th</sup> June 2014.

We have some good ideas for speakers, and have cast our net in the hope of bagging a few fish. We need to firm up our titles in time to put them in the so-called 'Green Sheet' (the Berkhamsted Arts Trust leaflet) by the end of June.

As you know, all talks take place on a Thursday in the Town Hall and start at 8 p.m.; and walks start from the Station at 10.30 a.m. Tell your friends and neighbours! But, as you will also be aware, the Activities Sub-Committee which used to organise these events does not actually meet, or indeed exist at present, due to lack of volunteers. An informal group comprising Miranda (our Association Secretary), Rita Jones, Jude Egan and I are trying to keep this side of things going, but it is hard without some fresh volunteers. So think urgently about how you could help! If you do not feel able to get involved directly, perhaps you could suggest a good speaker you have heard, or heard of, that we could add to our list of those we could approach. Please, get in touch with me or the Chairman as soon as possible. Your Association needs you!

## **Membership Counts**

*Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby*

A big and warm welcome to our 5 new members who joined at the Adrian Scarborough Meeting. This means our household membership is 355, still nearly forty down on this time last year. Surely we can sink no lower? It is over 200 lower than it was 10 years ago.

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 our membership because if it continues to fall we may no longer be listened to.

There are currently 20 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a reminder will be enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you to all those that have renewed for this year and the 54 who have renewed for 3 years.

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 would be marvellous if we can get it back to the same level as it was when the last renewal notices went out (396).