



The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Working for the social and civic life of our community

www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

December 2015

Chairman's Column

Susan Johnson

chairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

We hope you joined us at the Festival of Light on Sunday 29th November to see the BCA award the Cup for the Best Christmas Shop Window. The winner this year was Woods Capital Gardens, for its attractiveness and its child appeal. The judges were influenced by the reaction of several small potential customers, passing by pointing out their favourite items. It's so good to see such a great turn-out for the Festival, with so many children enjoying a traditional Christmas fair. Where would we be without our very successful High Street and its thriving businesses? They make a town centre. But if you are stuck for ideas for Christmas presents for adults, and the High Street cannot help, why not give a subscription to the BCA? It's a small outlay for a gift that lasts all year.

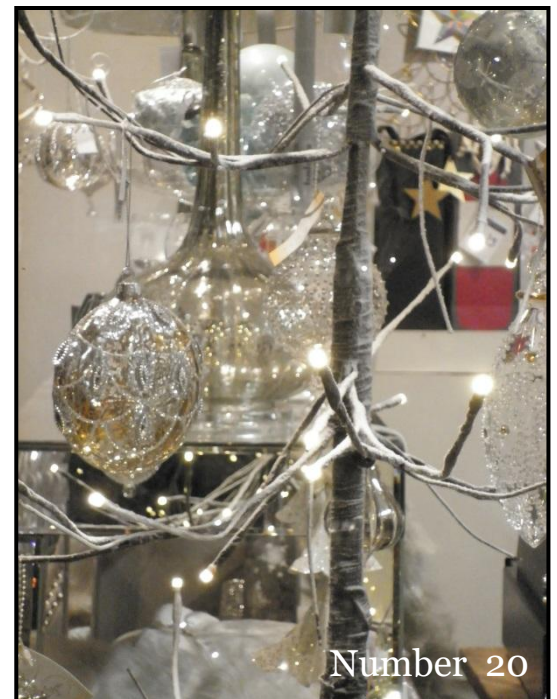
The BCA will be starting its compilation of the short-list for its annual Environment Award after Christmas. Please let us know what you would like us to consider from amongst those buildings completed in 2015, both favoured and not so! We like a wide selection for presentation at the AGM. A very merry Christmas and a happy New Year to all our members!

A plea

On a more serious note, we are now quite worried about the dwindling numbers of Committee members and, most particularly, a successor for me as Chairman come March.

We carry on provided we have all the other Officers bar Chairman (and we do) but it is important someone 'carries the flag' and speaks for the organisation.

Please, think long and hard whether you can help. Come along and sit in on a Committee meeting. We cover a broad remit and do not have any particular bias, except our love of the town and its surrounding countryside. We do have opinions on what constitutes a beautiful built environment and what amenities our citizens deserve; and we make it our business to speak out to promote a balance. We try to hold authorities to account, speaking up for the average, caring resident. The sociable side to our activities is not neglected either. Please renew your membership subscription promptly in January - if it is due, of course!



Woods

Number 20

“A Light to Shine Upon the Road”

Tony Statham

This has nothing to do with the forthcoming Festival of Light but is a quotation from our 18th century resident poet William Cowper which reflects (excuse the pun) the many references to light with religious connotations and brings to mind the impact of the recent conversion to LED street lighting on our highways.

I remember my parents commenting favourably on the introduction of orange street lighting in the 1950s. Although seen as a scourge on the landscape by many at that time, orange lighting reduced shadows and was much better in the more frequent days of mists, fog and smog. In the past fifty years this type of lighting became ubiquitous in most urban areas and I suspect most people took it for granted. As so often, economics (and the greener political environment) has now dictated a return to white lighting. This of course is not the older sodium based system but another use for the newer LED (light emitting diode). Subconsciously, this has become the norm for various everyday products such as watches, clocks and calculators but the technology has now advanced sufficiently to provide adequate levels of lighting for streets.

Personally I find the harsher white light and return of more shadows less appealing than the familiar orange glow. Yes, they are much less expensive to run but do you agree with the change-over?

Hertfordshire Highways will not, of course, go back to the orange lighting but let us know what you think.

Canal and Riverside Partnership

Gordon Bluck, Vice Chairman

For those who are unaware of this Town Council Working Party, it was formed some 25 years ago to promote the health of the canal and the River Bulbourne. I have been attending as your representative on and off for that time. Rather large sums of money have improved the towpath and there are plans to stop boaters staying too long on the new moorings, partially paid for by our Association. The Canal and River Trust (C&RT) will be enforcing “no overnight” to “14 day” with majority 2/7 day stays. This avoids the problems of last winter in which I was directly involved, when a member was unhappy with the burning of fence panels to have a barbeque. I understand our action caused things to be sorted on a national basis. We are no longer to have winter moorings in the town following the problems. Boats are being recorded on arrival and departure on computer and, if rules are not followed, canal licences will be withheld. In the worse cases boats will be impounded and sold. Your membership supports our involvement.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Paul Crosland, Chairman
tasc@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Police Station site

The site on the south-east corner of the main crossroads on Berkhamsted High Street is once again vacant – for the first time in forty-three years. A police station has stood on this site since 1764, but I think it is safe to say none of the various edifices built there can have been described as ‘architectural gems’. Writing in the May 1972 edition of *The Berkhamsted Review*, ‘Townsmen’ describes his feelings at the recent demise of the previous incarnation thus: “I cannot shed tears over the departure of one of the ugliest buildings in the town”. That building lasted longer than the one most recently demolished, however, dating from the 1890s. Before that The Bridewell, or house of correction, occupied the site and the accommodation included a subterranean dungeon, 4.5 metres x 3 metres on plan and 1.9 metres high. It had “no windows, chimneys, bedsteads or even straw to give prisoners a little comfort when sleeping.” The Bridewell had been improved in 1843, sufficient to make it “a place fit for a police station to which prisoners might be remanded before commitment, but (which) would not be fit for prisoners under any sentence, however short.”

The most recent police station was itself an unloved structure, dating from 1972, when architects of such public buildings had Irish republican terrorism in mind, even in Hertfordshire! It is rumoured that the police station was designed to accommodate a large deployment of traffic police, when the present by-pass was intended to be built as a motorway. In recent years it had become expensive to run and, at a time of increasing pressure on police budgets and changing policing methods, its days were numbered. During the demolition process our ever-vigilant Membership Secretary stepped in to make sure that the ‘blue plaque’ on the police station wall for the Berkhamsted Heritage Walk was removed and put into safe storage for re-use.

Once cleared of the remaining rubble, the site is to be developed by Beechcroft Homes as sheltered housing, providing twenty-three apartments, designed for the over 55s who increasingly favour town centre living. The opportunity will be taken to re-site the public library so that it has a High Street frontage, and the town’s population were consulted on what they wanted to see in their library during the summer of 2015. It remains to be seen if the new buildings improve the standards of architecture at this focal point of our town.



A question: between the demolition of one police station and the construction of another on the same site in the early 1970s, the police station was temporarily relocated to former school premises in the town. Does anyone remember the name of the school or its location?

The Changing High Street

Some of you may have read in other places that ‘Dar Papillon’ and ‘The Emporium’ in the High Street opposite Kitsbury Parade will close early in the New Year as the building is to be sold. Our former Chairman, Katy Brookes-Duncan, has run The Emporium for the whole of 2015. Katy will be sorry to see the shop close, but notes that several existing High Street shops have enquired about the property. Rents and business rates on the High Street are continuing to rise, and despite consumers being urged to ‘shop local’, many independent shops continue to struggle to match revenue with costs. We are lucky in Berkhamsted that we have few ‘voids’ – shop units lying vacant for months or years - and a good mix of shops, but our efforts to support our local retailers should be re-doubled to maintain our High Street in vibrant health.

Why is my train so short?

Thanks to a re-allocation of trains by the Department for Transport, the six four-carriage class 321 trains used by London Midland were sent to Scotland in October and replaced by four four-carriage class 319 trains previously used on the Thameslink route. Worse still, one of the four Thameslink trains was found to be defective on transfer to London Midland. As a consequence of the shortage of rolling stock, certain peak hour trains into Euston have been reduced in length on a regular basis, and other trains have been shortened on occasions. London Midland has not advised a timescale for when the defective train will be returned to service.

Environment Award 2015

Although there has been a lot of a change to the townscape of Berkhamsted during 2015, several

developments do not fulfil our criterion of having been completed by the year end – New Lodge/Townsend Gate being but one example. Consequently, we probably have fewer items on the long list to be considered for the Award than we normally have at this time of the year.

What new buildings or new features around town have attracted your attention for the right or wrong reasons? Your committee wants to hear your views, so please contact Paul, details above. Is any new addition worthy of an Environment Award plaque?

BCA Activities

Elaine Mercer
activities@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

A tradition of hospitality at St Albans Cathedral

Over fifty people came for the talk about St Albans Cathedral and its development plans. Stephen Potter, who is both a Cathedral and City Guide, gave us a hectic tour of its lengthy history. Besides being a parish church, it is also home to a number of unique artefacts, wall paintings, the only remaining Norman crossing tower, the largest nave in the country, seven apses and not one, but two shrines of Saints – namely Alban and Amphibalus. The church is now approaching 900 years old. Its architectural variety bears witness to the many centuries of our continuing life, first as a monastic abbey, then a parish church, and now also as a cathedral. The church stands over the place where Alban, Britain’s first saint, was buried after his martyrdom over 1,700 years ago, making it the site of longest continuous Christian worship in this country. Less well known is that the church building in use today was actually completed and dedicated in 1115. Events celebrating the inauguration of the building have been taking place throughout the year culminating in a service where a set of new statues for the medieval screen in the nave by sculptor Rory Young were dedicated. Today the building has an ecumenical role hosting events for the Catholic, Lutheran and Russian Orthodox communities locally, as well as a temporal role hosting ‘Flog It!’ and talks. The Cathedral values the tradition of hospitality, so will never charge for entry. The management team realised that preserving all these treasures and traditions must continue. An initial £400,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery is helping to fund the scoping and planning of a major development in the form of a Welcome Centre to improve the visitor experience. There is still a chance for individual contributions, in the form of sponsoring an Alban Angel hanging from the vaulted ceiling.

The Computer Cut House – four years on

Cleaning the house in an hour using an integral system and having minimal utility bills would both be high on my wish list for the perfect home, so I listened with rapt attention to how Celia Brackenridge and Diana Woodward took us through their very entertaining journey to a new home, as Flanders and Swan would say, 'Designed for Living'. I think I was not alone in being somewhat in awe of such an adventurous pair but we soon realised these were not 'debutantes' in the sphere of major house projects. Between them Celia and Diana had experience of 15 homes of various ages and building materials. They were familiar with the pluses and minuses of timber-built property, having recently left Scotland where, because of the weather, that is a major trend. Once a location was chosen, they secured an inter-war bungalow originally built for people who were weekendening away from London! They soon realised that putting the building to rights would be more expensive than starting again and, when they mentioned the resident glis glis, there was a ripple of amused recognition around the audience. At this point Diana spotted an advertisement in a 'property porn' magazine for some brave souls to be the pilot project for a new type of building where timber was cut into the correct shape on-site and assembled by a team in just eight weeks. The spruce used was made up into 500 boxes of different shapes and sizes and each was filled with treated shredded paper for insulation. No crane was needed and no skips because wood shavings were recycled into decking. If that were not enough, they also agreed to take part in Channel 4's *Grand Designs* and appeared to be extremely patient as they explained how decisions were negotiated and problems overcome. The result is a beautiful home with very clean lines comprising two bedrooms, two bathrooms, and two studies which double as guest bedrooms, and an EPC certificate showing that the property is 92% efficient. There were plenty of questions from a large and appreciative audience including three from a former architect – all answered in full.

Future Events

Friday 1st January - traditional New Year's Day walked by Paul Crosland. Meet at Berkhamsted Station at 10.30 to set off for Aldbury where we will stop for lunch. In the event of adverse weather conditions we will post a revised plan on our website or you can contact us via 07585 792229.

Thursday 4th February - The Work of the BFI National Archive, including footage of local films – Jez Stewart, a Curator of Non Fiction

Thursday 17th March – AGM and Environment Awards

Thursday 14th April - Dead Space to Living Space: transforming the Rectory Lane Cemetery – Friends of St Peter's

All meetings are at 8 pm in the Town Hall

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby
membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

We continue to circulate to nearly 50% of our members by email on important issues that may affect you and the town, together with reminders of our events. Of these a third choose to receive newsletters electronically, either as or as well as a hard copy. Would you like to be added to this list? E-mail addresses are maintained confidentially by the BCA and are never made available to third parties under any circumstances.

Regrettably, there are still 11 yet to pay their subscription for 2015. Although this is 4 fewer than this time last year, we do not like to lose members. Membership currently stands at 360 households. A warm welcome to our four members joining since our last newsletter, to boost our increasing membership.

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

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to say a very big thank you to the 60 deliverers, which we are apt to take for granted; many collecting subscriptions as well. Several have certainly been doing it for 35 years, when my mother was Membership Secretary.

Subscriptions for 2016

We are enclosing with this newsletter a renewal form to our 146 members who are due to pay for 2016 (£5). If you were to consider paying a three year subscription (£15), it would make my life all that much easier this time next year. Instead of paying by cheque or cash, subscriptions can be paid online to:

Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Sort code 60-02-21 Account N° 51 85 84 87

Please ensure your name and initial is shown in the payment reference and notify the Membership Secretary you have paid your subscription this way.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

Contributions and comments to: Elaine Mercer
activities@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

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