



The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Working for the social and civic life of our community

www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

June 2015

Chairman's piece

Susan Johnson
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So, we have a new Government, a new Borough Council, a new Town Council, but the same old BCA Chairman. Thank you for the honour of a sixth term in office - a record for a chairman to date although not, of course, for other Officers. But I look forward to a worthy successor in 2016 as this will definitely be my final turn as Chairman. Looking back over the last, exciting year I am so pleased we mostly got it right and had a great time celebrating our 90th. Thanks to everyone who helped, and turned up to make everything a success. Just another 10 years to our Centenary, which I am sure will be spectacular. Meanwhile back to the hard graft of pursuing the planning and enthusing the town to Citizenship!



A big welcome to Elaine!

Elaine Mercer has joined the BCA committee and will be working with Susan Johnson and the rest of the team in formulating an interesting programme of talks for 2015/16. Elaine has lived in Berkhamsted since 2004 and has been a member of BCA since 2012. A graduate of UCL (a long time ago) she has worked in marketing communications for many well-known names in the Computer and Web world as well as a number of charities. She currently undertakes interim roles and projects and although often seen around in Berkhamsted, her work can take her almost anywhere.

Elaine offered to help when Paul Crosland asked for assistance with loading back copies of newsletters onto the website. With expert coaching from Paul this was achieved.

At the AGM in March chairman Susan Johnson asked for volunteers to co-ordinate activities and Elaine came forward.

She says, "As well as enjoying the various talks, I learned a lot about the BCA from the web project and thought this was a role I could fulfill. I realise that there is a very high standard to live up to, but I have been reassured by the help offered by former event organisers Rita and Susan."

Elaine also enjoys time on the allotment in Butts Meadow and has also given some publicity assistance to the Friends of St Peter's on the Rectory Lane Cemetery Project.



Town Amenities Sub-Committee

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Berkhamsted Station

At the Station, lifts to all platforms as well as access ramps for wheelchairs, have been brought into use, somewhat tardily due to 'unforeseen ground conditions'. Nice lifts, shame about the Substation that goes with them!

Post Box Replacement at Swing Gate Lane

I took the matter of Royal Mail's unwillingness to replace the post box at the junction of London Road with Swing Gate Lane to the Postal Review Panel, an independent review board outside of Royal Mail Customer Services, who are empowered to review complaints from customers who have used a Royal Mail service.. The Postal Review Panel sides with Royal Mail, citing the other post boxes in the vicinity which mean that Royal Mail is complying with minimum requirements of post box provision.

Though no consolation, the January 1969 edition of the 'Berkhamsted Review' (forerunner to 'Your Berkhamsted') records, in the 'Triple Viewpoint' column that "Again the (Urban District) Council's request to the Head Postmaster for an additional letter-box on the north side of the High Street has been turned down. The Post Office and the Station boxes are considered to be enough". There is nothing new under the sun....!

But is it Art....??

Have you noticed the metal sculptures which have 'appeared' on the roundabout by Ashlyns Hall (junction of Chesham Road and Kingshill Way) ? 'Appeared' is in inverted commas as they haven't, of course, just arrived. They have been there since 1994, when the By-Pass opened, but until recently, they have been covered over with vegetation. Why are they there?



In parallel with the opening of the by-pass, the 'By-pass Demonstration Project', funded by the Department of Transport, was unveiled in the town. The Project consisted of a full 'make-over' of the High Street, including narrowing of the highway, installation of new street furniture (all the decent black stuff that you can see today), traffic calming measures (which made it unsuitable for driving tests and resulted in the closure of the Driving Test Centre), new paving, and some decorative street art/sculpture – 'public art' as it is now referred to. The 'gateways' to the town, such as those by the cemetery on Kingshill Way, are surviving examples but these gates are also cleverly disguised traffic calming measures. A set of three metal sculptures were destined for the pavement close to Cafe Rouge. The pavement there was, however, found to be too narrow (didn't anyone measure it first?!). After some head-scratching, a home for sculptures was found.... on the then 'new' roundabout. Herts Highways has recently cut back the vegetation and spruced-up the metalwork, so they can be seen as was (sort of) intended. As you circumnavigate, think of what might have been..... on the High Street !

Newcomers to Berkhamsted often do not realise that the shape of the High Street is very different to what it was pre-1994. Then, pedestrians could not easily cross the road without risking life and limb because of the speed of the traffic - on what was a main trunk road - and the width of the road, with no islands. Nowadays the layout is weighted towards pedestrian safety. If people say there are still traffic jams, it is because of the sheer numbers of extra vehicles. Just see what it would have been like by experiencing when the by-pass is closed! Believe it or not, in 1983, when the main drainage in the High Street was renewed, through traffic used Charles Street in both directions on Sundays; can you imagine the chaos that would cause today?!

Police Station site

The Planning Applications for the redevelopment of the Police Station site to create sheltered accommodation, including relocation of the library, and for an associated affordable housing scheme at the junction of Swing Gate Lane and the High Street were considered by Development Control Committee of Dacorum Borough Council on 19th March. The Police Station was approved, but the Swing Gate Lane scheme was rejected. Two months later, and boards advising the redevelopment of the Police Station have appeared on the building, stating that "An exclusive collection of 2 & 3 Bed houses and apartments launching early 2016". We have not heard what the developers propose to do about the Swing Gate Lane site – to modify and re-submit the Planning Application,

or to make a commuted payment for an affordable housing development elsewhere – but we shall keep an eye on what eventuates.

Library Relocation

As part of the redevelopment of the Police Station site, the Library will be relocated into new premises fronting onto the High Street. The B-Hive group, who argued for greater public involvement in the redevelopment of Police Station site, has been asked by the Herts Library Services to organise two consultation events in early July to get community views about priorities for the new library when it moves in 2016. The Library Service is keen to work with B-Hive and to include local people's ideas in the design brief.

The community will have opportunity to help shape the layout of the library for core services and suggest how to maximise its use, both in and out of library opening hours. That could include meeting areas, creative space, pop-up events, advice sessions, exhibition space - many of the priorities the community asked for in the 2013 B-Hive report.

Jane Collis is leading B-Hive's involvement in the B-Hive project, and Jane would welcome assistance in setting up the consultation events, and also hearing from you if you have views on how the Berkhamsted Library should deliver services for the benefit of the community. Jane can be contacted by e-mail at jane.collis@virgin.net.

BCA 90th Anniversary Footpath Map

Thank you to those who have ordered a copy of the Citizens Association Footpath Map direct from us. A reminder that we will deliver to your door. Contact Paul Crosland (see email address above) or call Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby to order your copy.

Environment Award 2014

Last year we awarded a BCA Environment Award plaque; this year there was quality in abundance as we awarded no less than four Certificates of Commendation for developments completed in the past year. In no particular order, these were nos. 4 and 4A, Park View Road, the 'Highgrove' development in the former rear garden of the Grey House in Kitsbury Road, the High Street planters installed by Berkhamsted Town Council and 'Whitefields' in Shootersway. More details can be found on the BCA website, under the 'Latest News' tab.

Towpath Upgrade

The BCA continues to be represented on the Town Council-led 'Canal and Riverside Partnership' by our Vice-Chairman, Gordon Bluck. By the time this newsletter reaches you, the last remaining elements of the works to upgrade the towpath from Canal Fields (Waitrose Bridge) to Lock 50 approaching Northchurch will have been completed.

After the BCA voiced concerns over the poor quality of the surfacing between Castle Street and Canal Fields, completed in 2013, an improved limestone-based surfacing has been installed on the newly-renovated stretch, endorsed by the Canal and River Trust (C&RT). Time will tell if this truly is an improvement (tarmac would be several times more expensive, and funds are limited).

This stretch of towpath is well-used by walkers, cyclists and strollers enjoying one of the 'unique selling points' of our town, so its surface needs to be durable. The path is now 1.5 metres wide, thanks to additional funding for schemes to encourage cycling. There have been problems with 'permanent moorers' causing a nuisance near St. John's Well Lane, but the C&RT Enforcement, Dacorum BC who own the adjacent land, and the police, are all aware. We shall be 'encouraging' the Canal and River Trust to seek funding for the canal towards Bourne End.



Activities

Susan Johnson

Since I last wrote this column we have had a lot of activity. The **AGM** on 19th March went well, but the **Environment Awards** were not so successful. It wasn't that we did not award them (see Paul's TASC report), or that the winners did not attend; it was the fact that we couldn't get the equipment to work and so the result was no pictures. However on 16th April we had no talk on **Bee Farming** either (as the speaker cried off), so we substituted a social event with the elusive EA pictures. It was a very pleasant evening! An equally pleasant event was the 90th Anniversary Lunch on Saturday 18th April in Sunnyside Church Hall. Many thanks especially to Christine Manning for organising this so brilliantly, and for all the Committee and partners for their help on the day. Everyone seemed to enjoy it, and we were able to give our invited guests a welcome few hours' respite from the election campaign. This was, of course, not the case with our traditional **Hustings** for all General Election candidates on Wednesday 22nd April in Berkhamsted Town Hall. The event was over-populated and seemingly much appreciated.

And there my tenure of the Activities portfolio ends. We are fortunate that, following the AGM, Elaine Mercer (who has helped us over the past year with uploading to our website) came forward to join the Committee and to take over Activities. So, with much relief, I hand over to Elaine

A Hint of Things to come

Elaine Mercer
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The season of talks begins on Thursday 8th October with a talk from Helen Gray, Development Manager at the Cathedral and Abbey Church of St Alban. Helen will be coming to talk about the progress that the Abbey is making on its project to improve the visitor facilities and experience. The project will tell the story of the Cathedral from Alban's execution and burial which made the site a centre for pilgrimage, through its medieval life as a Benedictine Abbey to the Victorian restoration and creation of the Cathedral as we know it today.

On Thursday November 12th we move to the very opposite end of the built environment chronologically speaking. Embarking on a new - build project takes courage, but to do so using an entirely new method of *both* design and construction takes a certain pioneering spirit. The resulting project was the subject of a Grand Designs programme and BCA is delighted to welcome Celia Brackenridge who will share with us some of the ups and downs of building a new house (and a few observations of appearing in a

TV programme) as well as telling us what it is like to live in the world's first computer cut house five years on.

Talks are also planned for 4th February and 14th April and details of these will be available in the next newsletter and on the website.

Both talks will be in the Sessions Hall at the back of the Town Hall in the High Street and will begin at 8.p.m.

(Note: Because of the terms of our public liability insurance we have to enforce the limit on numbers, so sometimes, with apologies, we have to turn people away. Best advice – get there early.)

Membership Counts

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A big warm welcome to the 7 members who have joined since the February newsletter; three of these as a result of attending our Parliamentary Hustings.

From numbers attending that event, the town clearly appreciates what we put on. Our membership now stands at 355, in line with this time last year. This is welcome news, as maintaining (and perhaps increasing) numbers means we maintain influence.

There are currently 25 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 to the 56% 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 they are not, encourage them to join by sending me £5 along with their name and address. Who knows, our membership could approach 400 by the end of the year!

Electronic Newsletter

Please let me have your e-mail address if you would you like to receive this Newsletter electronically. By getting it this way you will receive it in advance of hard copies, and possibly in colour!

If we have your e-mail address, you will also get reminders of our events and important issues that affect the town. Nearly half of our membership receives these notifications. We would be delighted to include you on the circulation list.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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Published by the
Berkhamsted Citizens Association ©
Printed by Strong's Printing Services tel: 878592