



MAY 1977

One of our major local assets, the Canal and the land adjoining it has yet to be developed to realise its full potential, as one focus of leisure certainly in and around the town. In this issue we review the background and look forward to hearing your views on what now should be done.

The Canal

The Dacorum District Council have followed up their 'Consultation Report', referred to in our Autumn Newsletter, with a policy statement accepting most of the recommendations and adopting a number of other suggestions, including our own that Pixies Mere at Winkwell should be considered for nature conservation. The original study was in part the Council's response to pressure for recreational facilities at a number of points along Dacorum's stretch of the canal and to the view that some parts of it had been neglected.

In the background is the Hertfordshire Structure Plan, now under consideration at the Department of the Environment, which provides for an "amenity corridor" along the length of the canal, in which the County's policy would be to prevent 'urban coalescence' - that is, ribbon development - to restore areas whose appearance has already been damaged and to provide leisure facilities. The Dacorum Council's contribution will be to develop and enhance its section of the canal and the Policy Statement sets out specific policies to this end. It deals first with the uses of the canal and second with its environment.

Uses of the canal

(a) Boating The Transport Act 1968 classifies the Grand Union Canal as a cruising waterway, commercial traffic having virtually ceased. In the belief that pleasure boating will increase, the British Waterways Board has adopted the policy of encouraging mooring in basins alongside the canal rather than against the canal bank itself; and they suggest major basins, sufficient to accommodate about 300 boats at roughly 25 mile intervals, with smaller basins at intervals of about 5 miles. The District Council's policy will be to exercise planning control so as to favour the provision of up to 300 moorings in their area (Policy 1). Planning permission has already been granted for 150 of these at a marina now being constructed at the Cow Roast. Other locations suggested are Northchurch, Bourne End and Kings Langley. These basins are most likely to be provided by private enterprise but planning permission will be needed in every case and the Council are very conscious of considerations such as the local environment and means of access.

(b) Walking Further use of the canal environment by walkers should be encouraged and detailed investigations should be made regarding the provision of such facilities as nature trails and picnic areas - (Policy 2).

(c) Angling The British Waterway Board leases the fishing rights to the London Angling Association which is responsible for the day to day management of angling on the canal. Any improvement in the present situation must be through management but the Council

recognise that at present they are limited in the role they can play in this respect.

(d) Nature conservation Obviously Tring reservoirs are the most important features of the district from this point of view. The four reservoirs (Wilstone, Marsworth, Tringford and Startopsend) were constructed early in the nineteenth century to supplement the Wendover arm as a feeder of water to the canal at Tring Summit. Since 1955 they, and the adjoining banks and woodland, have been a National Nature Reserve under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act, 1949; the reserve is managed directly by the Nature Conservancy Council. From the conservation angle, the Policy Statement stresses the need to ensure that the presence of the public in large numbers does not prejudice plant and bird life. For this reason the Nature Conservancy Council, supported by the British Waterways Board, oppose sailing or other sporting activities, with the ancillary facilities that go with them, at the reservoirs and this attitude will be upheld by the Dacorum District Council.

The Wendover Arm is rich in freshwater fauna and flora and the Nature Conservancy Council will consider notifying it as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The Aylesbury arm is only one of several areas of interest to ornithologists; the list includes the Tring cutting, the dry section of the Wendover arm, Pixies Mere (Winkwell) and Tring sewage works. The Thames Water Authority is allowing the Kings Langley lakes to be developed as a nature reserve. Consultation will continue with conservation interests. The Statement recommends that special regard should be given to the Wendover arm which could either become subject to conservancy management policies or be considered for a Site of Special Scientific Interest, or perhaps a nature reserve. Development control will be exercised so as to resist development on or adjoining the arm which would destroy the present environment (Policy 3).

Environment of the Canal

(a) Improvement The Policy Statement speaks highly of the pleasant surroundings where the canal passes through open country, but with regard to the built-up, and particularly the industrial areas, it says "... it is in these locations that the canal tends to become visually neglected and abused. Some users have taken advantage of the opportunities provided by their canal-side location but others have turned their backs on it with the result that both the canal and the views from it have become dirty, untidy and generally run-down." It continues, "... the canal provides a back-cloth to many activities and it is important that the visual amenity of it becomes the subject of positive policies encouraging the improvement of the poor parts as well as the conservation and enhancement of the better areas." Derelict land and buildings should be tidied up and, where possible, put to some beneficial use. Canal-side industrialists and other occupiers should be persuaded to clear rubbish heaps and neglected corners, to provide landscaping and seating and generally to be aware of their impact of their premises on the environment.

When canal-side sites are redeveloped the Council will use its powers of development control to ensure improvement of the environment and the use of design and materials sympathetic to the location; and positive steps will be taken to encourage other canal-side occupiers to improve the appearance of their premises (Policy 4).

(b) Conservation "Much of the intrinsic charm and attractiveness of the canal," the Statement continues, "lies in the canal vernacular reflected in locks, bridges, lock cottages, pump houses and other

structures associated with the original function of the canal... Fortunately, most of these items are owned and used by the British Waterways Board in their statutory function and responsibilities regarding the canal and, therefore, the maintenance of such property and structures should be assured." There follows a list of canal-side buildings which will be submitted to the Department of the Environment for listing as structures of architectural or historic interest. These include the canal bridge and cottage at Dudswell, the lock cottage at Berkhamsted lock and the "Boat" public house, the stable block and store occupied by Bridgewater Boats and the canal bridge, locks, pump house and cottages at Cow Roast. It is recommended that the Berkhamsted Conservation Area be extended to include the south side of Station Road; and that at Winkwell the nucleus of development comprising the canal, two locks, a stretch of the Bulbourne, Pixies Mere, the Three Horseshoes and some of the adjoining houses and cottages should be designated a Conservation Area under the Town & Country Amenities Act 1974 (Policy 5).

(c) New Development The final paragraph of the Statement is worth quoting in full;

"It is unfortunate that local authorities and statutory undertakers are themselves responsible for some of the most unsympathetic and prominent new structures related to the canal. Examples are service crossings that are unduly prominent and bridges that are completely alien to the character and 'feel' of the canal as at Billet Lane, Berkhamsted."

* * *

We welcome this Policy Statement. The study which preceded it was evidently thorough and the subject has been approached with understanding of the daily impact on the senses (conscious or subconscious) of the environment in which we live and move. All that remains is to implement the policy. Obviously much that needs to be done must wait until the present financial crisis has passed, but meantime there is much that could be done, given the will, by voluntary effort. We have already made it clear to the Council that we shall be glad to help. We shall, of course, continue to watch planning applications and to draw attention (and if necessary raise formal objection) to any features which we consider damaging to the character of Berkhamsted and Northchurch or their environs.

In our April 1976 Newsletter we referred to the controversy between walkers and riders over the use of paths and tracks over our common. This was hardly a problem v/hen riders were, few, but with the growth of riding for pleasure some tracks have been getting badly cut up in wet weather. One can only imagine what the ways were like in the days when country lanes were often impassable by wheeled traffic in winter, and pack horses were the only practicable means of transport between small towns and villages.

It now seems that a solution of the conflict may be in sight. Extensive though the commons are, they are quickly traversed on horseback and it is natural for riders to wish to extend their rides through Ashridge woods to Ivinghoe Common and the hills beyond leading to the Beacon; yet curiously there are no bridleways in this area, though they are more numerous than footpaths on the commons closer to Berkhamsted. Most of this is National Trust land, except for a small enclave surrounding Ashridge House,

owned by the Management College. Though a landowner has no right to interfere with the use by the public of rights of way, he is free to give permission to anyone to cross his land, on foot or on horseback, by routes which he may specify or by any. If the National Trust and the Management College were willing to permit riders to use a few tracks and woodland rides, which could be way marked and would link up existing bridleways, the riders would be less tempted to use ways which are footpaths or not public rights of way at all, and would get better rides into the bargain, especially in the Ivinghoe area.

The National Trust and the Management College have set up a small working party which is considering a solution on these lines; it is likely to come up with specific recommendations in the next month or two, after which there will be an opportunity for public discussion. In the meantime this information is given to members of Berkhamsted Citizens' Association in confidence, in the hope that those who have any views on the subject will get in touch with our representative on the working party (Robert Allen, Berkhamsted 5212)

Your Own Piece of Common!

How often do you take a stroll over our local commons? And have you complained about the litter there - or even commented on the lack of it? If you have, you should consider becoming a Guardian of the Countryside and so help to maintain one of the towns best - and free - recreational assets.

The 'Guardians' is a very informal organisation. Members agree to 'patrol' a plot of common and keep it litter free, either by collecting it themselves, or reporting the location of bulkier items to the organiser for removal to be arranged. Once a year a major weekend 'sweep' is arranged (usually in February-March) when a trailer patrols the Commons and collects all the rubbish accumulated by the Guardians concerted efforts.

A number of plots are 'vacant' at the moment:

- Berkhamsted Common - on the west side of the road near Frithsden Copse.
- Berkhamsted Common - to the north-west of Coldharbour Farm.
- Northchurch Common.
- Part of Aldbury Common.

If you would like to take on one of these, please contact Chris Wilson (16 Oakwood, Shootersway, Berkhamsted, Tel. no. 6921)

Tidying up the Town (See "Help Wanted", April Newsletter, page 2.)

Peter Ashford and his first volunteers have already made a start by clearing litter from the banks of Chesham Road. He could still do with a few more helpers; if you don't like to see the accumulations of litter in waste places around the town, please get in touch with him. Although he has moved to 1 Greenway his telephone number is still Berkhamsted 2054. He asks us to remind householders that the bulky articles the refuse collectors won't take away can be dumped in the skips on the St. John's Well Lane car-park - that's what they're there for.

Candidates' Meeting

You may have wondered why we have broken with the tradition of many years in not holding a "Candidates' Meeting" before the recent County Council and Town Council (bye) elections. The reasons for this are threefold. First, the audiences have been gradually dwindling over the years. With the switch from the old U.D.C. to the Dacorum D.C. and Parish (now Town.) Council, interest in local government is less immediate. Secondly, the elections are now held on Thursday, the Berkhamsted Gazette is published on Thursday evening, with copy expected the previous Monday, and so, for any report to go in, the Candidates' Meeting would need to be about two weeks before the election. (In the old days with the elections on Saturday, Gazette out on Friday with copy in on Tuesday, we traditionally held the meeting on the Monday of election week.) This is probably what leads to the third reason - the reluctance of many would-be councillors to give up valuable canvassing time to attend such a meeting, with a limited audience, with no hope of getting to a wider public through the press.

Ideally we need all candidates on the platform. The absence of several at a District Council election meeting is bad enough, but at a County Council election meeting the absence of one candidate of the three, as happened at the last minute at the bye-election in October last, is disastrous.

Nevertheless, we hope that when there is a Parliamentary election we will be able to hold such a candidates' meeting, which the Citizens' Association has only once achieved. Our M.P. Robin Corbett, has promised to take part "even though it is not generally to the advantage of the sitting member" on principle, and the other candidates would have nothing to lose.

Road Safety

One of the areas of local activity which the Citizens' Association seeks to monitor is road safety. It is one in which at times it is possible to get things done. Therefore we bring to members' attention that next month the local Road Safety Committee will hold its annual town inspection. This is the occasion for the committee to carry out site inspections on any particular hazard to which a member of the committee wishes to draw attention. Any Citizens' Association member wishing to have any issue raised on this inspection is invited to bring it to our attention. Road safety issues can be raised at any time but it can be especially productive to make use of the general inspection. Ring the Secretary on Berkhamsted 5988.

As mentioned in the last Newsletter we wrote to the Council about the state of Brownlow Road between the junction of Bridgewater Road and Lower Kings Road and they have now told us that an order has been placed with one of the Council's annual contractors to break-out and re-surface the road. This is likely to be a difficult job in view of the bus route which cannot be diverted due to the low bridge. It is hoped the work will take place in the near future. A satisfactory outcome to our efforts!

Accounts and Subscriptions

All of us, in these times of virtually stagnating incomes and ever increasing prices, try to budget our domestic accounts whether consciously or unconsciously. Balance sheets, budget forecasts

or accounts are not the type of reading which one usually takes to bed for excitement although occasionally a set of accounts whether our own or a Company's may read like a horror story.

Many voluntary organisations are started with good intentions and aims but for one reason or another fall by the wayside. It must therefore be to the credit of past committees that the Citizens' Association has now been in existence over 50 years and that the present cash balances are so healthy must to some extent be due to their efforts.

The Committee has a responsibility to keep Members informed at all times and possibly a short interim financial report in the Newsletter between A.G.M.'s may prove informative. The present Bank balances as at 13 April 1977 are Ordinary current account £24.44, Deposit account £3.34, Map current account £10.79, Deposit account £35.79. The investments in the Anglia Building Society have been increased by a further £100 in the Ordinary account and £150 in the Map account. The £100 deposit in the Ordinary account is only temporary but takes advantage of the higher Building Society interest rates now that Bank deposit rates have now fallen to only 5%. The various Map accounts will continue to increase as sales are made and so provide at least part of the capital sum needed for a future reprint.

Much of the Income required for the Association comes from subscriptions. At the present time approximately 50% of last year's members' subscriptions are still outstanding and without wishing to be mercenary it would be helpful if those outstanding could be paid as soon as possible.

Future Events

Wine and Cheese - This year, as part of the Jubilee celebrations, our annual wine and cheese party will take place in the Court House on 7 June (6.45-8.30 p.m.). Breaking for once with our usual practice, by which the party is confined to members and their friends, this one will be open to all; invitations will not be sent out, but admission will be by ticket, price £1. As accommodation in the Court House is limited, not more than 200 tickets will be sold. To make sure of one, send your money now to the Hon. Secretary, Mrs S. Walton, 11 Murray Rd? Berkhamsted, who will send you a ticket as soon as they are printed. Towards the end of May tickets will be put on sale to the public at the Civic Centre, at W.H. Smith and at Dickman's the chemists. So do not delay.

Since Michael Tollit conducted his popular "architectural walk" round the town last July many of us must have been seeing Berkhamsted buildings with new eyes. Darkness fell before he had shown us half of what he intended, so he has promised to show us the other half on Wednesday 13 July, starting at 8p.m. from St. Peter's Church.