



July 1977

No doubt many of our members will soon be taking their summer holidays, indeed some may have had them already. To all of you whether the pleasure is to come or has already come and gone we trust you have an enjoyable time.

There are a number of items of concern expressed in this Newsletter, particularly the review of the electoral arrangements for the Town and the proposed Luton airport extension. It is most important, if you want your views taken into account that you let us and your M.P. know what you think about the Luton proposals.

Your Rates

A Green Paper on Local Government Finance was published in May by the Government, rejecting many of Layfield's radical proposals for changing the financing of local government (such as a Local Income Tax).

The Government, however, support a revision of the form of Rate Support Grant. At present, this has three elements:-

- (1) A grant to authorities with a low rateable value per head (the "Resources element");
- (2) A grant to authorities who need to spend more per head (e.g. because of a higher-than-average proportion of children of school age) (the "Needs element");
- (3) The amount of domestic relief given to all domestic rate-payers. It is proposed to merge the needs and resources elements into a single "Unitary Grant" to avoid some distortions (and consequent inequalities) which occur under the present system.

The Government also propose that, with effect from 1982/83 rateable values of domestic property should be based on capital values (which will be reassessed every five years) rather than current rental values. Such a change is essential in view of the very limited numbers of homes now rented from private landlords. It is expected that the effect of the changes should be that "there will probably be a tendency for rateable values at the top and bottom of the market to rise relative to the national average, and of some properties in the middle to fall".

Industrial and commercial property should continue to have rateable values based on rental values. In order to put domestic and non-domestic property on to a comparable basis, it would be necessary to apply a divisor to domestic capital values to arrive at a common change base for all properties. This divisor would be fixed at the time of each five-yearly valuation and be used to determine the relative rate burden between domestic and non-domestic properties - previously varied annually by the level of domestic rate relief.

The Government have proposed that any major changes resulting from the new form of valuation will be phased in, but local communities will need to judge the impact on their own residents. The Citizens' main concern is to assess the impact of the new proposals on Berkhamsted ratepayers and to advise their members if they consider that the burden will be unfairly increased relative to other parts of Dacorum and other districts of Hertfordshire.

The significant factor for each property is capital value divided by rateable value. If this factor for any one property is higher than either (1) the average for Dacorum; (2) the average for Hertfordshire and, to some extent (3) the national average, your rates are likely to increase; if lower, they will go down.

We hope to publish more information on this subject in the Newsletter at a later date.

Dacorum Volunteer Bureau

The Dacorum Volunteer Bureau has now opened an office in Berkhamsted on a Monday morning between 9-30 a.m. and 12.30 p.m. in The Gables, Prince Edward Street, (Tel. Berk, 6930). It is hoped that this will soon be open every morning.

The Bureau is a project of the Council of Voluntary Services and is a non-profit making organisation. Basically the bureau supplies voluntary labour to local welfare organisations who rely on the support of volunteers to contribute to the effective day-to-day running of their essential services, without this help, many would be unable to function.

Volunteers assist a great number of varied bodies including the hospitals; WRVS; Social Services; Youth and Community Service; Chest, Heart and Stroke Association; Herts. Association for the Disabled; Day Centre for Handicapped; Youth Clubs.

Volunteering is offering help as a friend. It can be a small commitment or a regular weekly activity depending completely on how much time you have to give. Some people hesitate before volunteering because they are frightened of getting involved - what might they be expected to do? Will they get stuck with strange people at inconvenient times? They would like to help but don't want to get lumbered in an area they don't fully understand. These are common fears, but in practice they are groundless. You are rarely, as a volunteer, propelled into situations on your own without any back-up, and when you start to help, what you do depends entirely on what you offer of your time. Many volunteers, once they start work, feel that they are under used rather than over-stretched.

Volunteers can be from 16 years onwards, there is no age limit to helping other people enjoy life more. The Organiser Jean Noble would be pleased to hear from anyone interested in voluntary work and also from organisations who require volunteers. Ring Berkhamsted 6930 or Hemel Hempstead 53935

Citizens Advice Bureau Service

The fact that some 40 years after its inception the Citizens Advice Bureau service in the United Kingdom can lay claim to 710 operational bureaux used each year by more than 2½ million people, suggests that the needs which inspired the setting-up of the organisation are still very much with us today. Indeed, one could say without too much fear of contradiction that the needs if anything, have multiplied, an indictment, if one is needed, on modern life.

There are bureaux in each of the three towns in the Dacorum District, Hemel Hempsted, Berkhamsted and Tring and, in addition, a Consumer Advice Centre staffed by C.A.B. workers, at 41 Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead.

Bureaux staff, who are volunteers, deal with almost every type of problem under the sun, and to enable them to do their job each bureau has its own information system, issued by the National Association of C.A.B., whose offices are in London, and updated by them every month to ensure that all the information to hand is current.

Enquiries are broken down into 14 main categories, e.g. Family and Personal; Housing, Property and Land; Employment; Social Security to name but a few. When an enquiry is made the bureau worker will identify the category and by using the filing system, seek out the appropriate advice. A good relationship with both national and local organisations is used as a back-up to our own resources.

So if you or a friend want help or advice call in at the Berkhamsted Bureau at The Gables', in Prince Edward Street. It is open from Tuesday to Friday from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m.

Town Council Electoral Wards

Notice was given to the Association by the Dacorum District Council of the commencement by the Council of a review, at the request of the Berkhamsted Town Council, of the electoral arrangements for the town of Berkhamsted.

The Policy Committee of the District Council had proposed that certain of the town wards be combined and that the number of town councillors be reduced from 18 to 14. It was proposed that the wards of Durrants and Shrublands be combined and have instead of 5 councillors, that Bridgewater and St. John's be combined and also have 4 instead of 5 councillors, that Ashlyns, Castle and Hall Park wards be combined and have 5 instead of 7 councillors, and that Northchurch remain as at present with one councillor.

In the time allowed it was not possible to ascertain the views of many members, but those members of the Association's Committee who were consulted were largely in agreement and in the reply the following points were made:-

1. that it does appear that so long as the Town Council is able to exercise only its present restricted powers 18 Councillors are too many and a reduction to 14 would be justified;

2. that since the Town Council is concerned with matters which have particular relevance to one part of the town as distinct from others, such as road safety and the monitoring of property development, and so needs to be aware of what may be the divergent views of various sections of the town, this may be achieved more effectively by having a larger rather than a smaller number of wards;
3. that the proposals do not appear to take into account the planned development of Tunnel Fields over the next five years;
4. that the new proposals, which involve the combining of some wards, will produce new wards which have no features in common, which will have boundaries which are not easily identifiable on the ground and for which there is no logical justification; and
4. that since the approved (1977) town wards have not been the subject of serious criticism, and those wards were of a general recognisable character, no case has been made for the proposed changes in the number of wards.

The Association's letter was acknowledged and an assurance was given that the views expressed would be taken into account by the District Council.

Luton Airport

The local press has carried reports and comment following a meeting held in Potten End at the end of May. Mr Bailey, from the County Council, spoke comprehensively of the airport problem close to our doorstep and affecting the South-East as a whole. Naturally the local interest focused on Luton Airport but it was clear that policies relating to Luton should not be considered in isolation from the wider issues involving all the commercial airports around London - nor indeed from national policy on air transport.

The report of the Roskill Commission was followed by the oil crisis, so that estimates or rates of growth in air traffic have undergone major revision. At the present rate of growth, the four airports around London - Gatwick, Heathrow, Luton and Stansted - will be able to cater for four times as many passengers up to the early 1990s with additional terminal buildings only. A vital factor to note is that this growth would not necessarily mean many more flights or extended night disturbance: the wider bodied aircraft (Jumbo, Tri-star, DC10) carry more passengers per flight and closer air traffic control enables more movements in a given length of time.

The impact of the growth in passenger traffic will thus not be so much in noise levels but in the population increase which will follow from the extra jobs created in administration, control, maintenance, servicing, etc. - up to 5,000 new jobs at Luton airport - which would generate a similar total in service and public sector jobs in the surrounding area. This would mean up to 21,000 more people around Luton, growth in the population which has not been allowed for in the planned structure for either Herefordshire or Bedfordshire. Many more people will need homes, better local road networks will be required - and existing employers in the area will possibly feel a draught as their workforces are tempted by the glamour, pay and perks of an airport job.

So much for Luton. Hertfordshire would also be affected by a similar pattern of growth at Stansted where the impact would be proportionately greater. But is it all inevitable?

This is where one has to return to the question of what is national policy on airports. The Government have published two reports on Airport Strategy, one looking at London's requirements and the other at the rest of the country. If one splits strategy like this there is the obvious danger that the "right" solution will never emerge as the problem is not being considered as a coherent whole. The "rest of the country" includes the large triangle formed by Manchester/Liverpool, Birmingham and Sheffield, not only a substantial area of land but also an area with a large population and important centres of industry and tourism. Nobody has seriously investigated the amount of air traffic at London's airports which relate to this area, whether of Englishman travelling abroad or foreign visitors coming here on business or pleasure. Nobody knows whether the predicted growth in traffic is genuinely concentrated in the South-East or whether London's estimated requirements are being inflated by the continued limited facilities for international (or even European only) air travel from airports outside the South-East. Nobody has done detailed cost estimates of the expense of developing a new airport more modest than that envisaged by Roskill compared with expanding facilities at existing sites, certainly not estimates which take account of the extended socials environmental and planning impact there would be beyond the confines of the airport(s) alone.

Yet the Government is at this moment preparing a White Paper for publication in the autumn which will set out what they intend to do - and once hardened into print, their policy will be more difficult to influence. Time is short for the public to make known their views to MPs and the Department of Trade. The issue is wider than "We don't want it to happen here". Something is going to happen somewhere, but we want that something to be the best possible in the national interest. The risk is that, without a comprehensive appraisal of what is best - which will have to be started soon, things will drift towards making do with the facilities we have and extending these on an ad hoc basis as required. A decision cannot just be put off: by the early 1980s we shall need to know how best the planned growth is to be catered for so that the proper facilities can be developed in time and in due order. If you want more facts and figures, the County Council has prepared an excellent leaflet which also sets out their policy in more detail. If you are in anyway concerned with how the Government is to arrive at its policies (which are made in your name) then address your views to your MP, to the Department of Trade and too if you like to your association.

A Little Local History

If you have ever taken a walk beside the canal from Castle Street to Ravens Lane, there would have been so much to look at - the totem pole in Alsford's yard, the assorted canal craft tied up alongside, ducks and geese standing on the towpath or swimming in the water - that you are unlikely to have noticed, on the opposite banks a large shed with a broad weather-boarded gable

facing the canal and a Cavernous opening beneath; and even if you did, it is almost certain that you did not notice that the opening is all of 80 feet wide. Yet that is the most remarkable fact about it.

This shed is one of those in which narrow-boats were formerly built; but as a typical narrow-boat is some 70 feet long it had to be launched sideways into the canal (the slips used for this purpose were still in position in living memory). It followed that the sheds in which the boats were built had to have, on the side facing the canal, an unobstructed opening of some 80 feet; and that is the length of the great timbers - five of them - that span this shed. Almost certainly they came from the virgin forests of Western America, where the Douglas firs from which they were cut had been growing for hundreds of years.

An adjoining shed of equal width, though not so deep, was spanned by two similar timbers; but this one was recently demolished in the course of modernisation of Alsford's yard. The 80 foot timbers, with others, may now be seen opposite the totem pole at the entrance.

The Shed still standing is associated with another piece of Berkhamsted history. Between 1914 and 1919 it was used as a mess by the Inns of Court Officers Training Corps whose motto "Salus populi suprema lex" (the safety of the people is the over-riding law) is inscribed in letters a foot high on one of the timbers. Mr Alsford asked us, through the Chiltern Society, whether we should be interested in preserving this historic building if ever he decided to dispose of it. Had it been in better condition it could have had the makings of a centre for indoor sports and for constructive activities such as canoe-building and do-it-yourself car maintenance, but it would cost a large sum to restore the structure, let alone clear the floor space and fit it out for such purposes; so regretfully and after consulting the Local History Society, we had to say "No", But that does not mean that the inscription need be lost. Mr Alsford has promised that if he ever removes the building or disposes of the land, he will do his best to reserve that part of the beam which bears the motto, and have it suitably installed in a public position in the town.

This and That

The latest national craze skateboarding has of course reached Berkhamsted and we have approached the council who are now studying the possibility of providing a rink. We will keep you informed of developments.

We are preparing our usual full programme of meetings and other activities for the autumn and will be giving full details in the next Newsletter in September.