



MAY 1978

Make a Date

We hope that our readers will approve of the Editor changing the format of the Newsletter for this issue but we do want to remind you of our Annual Wine and Cheese Party - the tenth in fact. Please make a note in your diary and bring your friends on

Friday, 23rd June in the Court House at 6.45 p.m.

The charge is £1.25 per head and we invite you to let the Secretary, Mrs. Sheila Walton, know how many there will be in your party. Please 'phone her on Berkhamsted 5988.

The Gypsies

We promise, after this edition, not to raise the subject again this year! Unless there is something vital to tell you, that is. But at our AGM one of our members raised the subject and rightly voiced her opinion in strong terms to the extent that your Editor offered to publish a letter from her if she so desired. This we gladly do, in full and as written, in the Appendix. We believe it deserves the following reply from the Chairman.

Persons of Nomadic Habit of Life

Mrs, Davies lives in close proximity to one of the sites occupied by so-called gypsies. She argues that the Committee have failed to further the aims of the Association in that they have not recognised that the real problem for the Association is not that of the gypsies but the encroachment on to common land.

The Committee recognise that collectively people who lead a nomadic life present a continuing problem, and that this has increased in recent years because the spread of new housing and road development has reduced the number of places where their presence can be tolerated without severe nuisance to nearby residents and the creation of hazards to traffic and damage to the environment.

It is the view of the Committee that the problem must be solved but that the right course is not to pursue a policy of moving the people indiscriminately back on to the roads from which they will move into other equally unsuitable areas. The long term solution is to provide permanent sites. This will be expensive and could amount to as much as £5,000 for each pitch, which would have to be met from the rates. Since the provision of sites in one area would only serve to attract such people on to the area, the provision of sites must be an exercise which is subject to some co-ordination and so must be the subject of central planning. In the meantime, there will be sites which are contiguous to the highway and where the encampments are so offensive that they cannot be tolerated even on a temporary basis. In these instances, it appeared to the Committee that they should recommend removal.

The Committee accepts that one of their primary aims is the preservation of areas of natural beauty. In seeking to do so it feels that it has to have reasonable regard to the practical, financial and legal difficulties that exist. Mrs. Davies can be assured that we fully appreciate and sympathise with those who are especially adversely affected by this problem and that we are anxious to see it solved as soon as possible.

Caravans at Brickhill Green

Well, we could hardly believe our eyes! Someone has deposited a mound of earth on the perimeter of the Green. To maintain our position of strict neutrality (some say sitting on the fence) we have written to the Dacorum District Council reminding them that there is a public right of way across the Green. We took the opportunity to remind the Council of the urgent need to provide permanent sites for gypsies and hoped that the Council will use its best endeavours to encourage the County Council to follow the lead of Buckinghamshire and get on with it.

Second Golf Course

Members who were not present at the public meeting that we held on the 20th March may like to have the following note of the proceedings.

The Vice-Chairman of the Association, Mrs. Hilary Talbot-Ponsonby, took the chair in the absence of the Chairman, Mr. R. Norman Williams on business abroad. She explained that the Golf Club had declined to be officially represented at the meeting on the ground that the matter was "sub judice." After reading out the gist of a number of letters received from people unable to be present (two for the proposal, eight against, and one for compromise) she called on Mr. Robert Allen to summarise the facts and the law applicable to them.

In answer to a question he explained that the Manorial rights and the freehold of a common meant much the same thing. In either case, the owner's rights were subject to those of the commoners. Rights of common went, as a rule, with a particular farm or cottage, and passed with it from one occupier to the next.

In the general discussion which followed a number of interesting points were made. It was recalled that the Deed of Declaration and the conditions to be attached to it had been the subject of controversy in 1934, but objections had been met and were withdrawn. The idea of making a second course had also been raised before: in 1965. Some people were under the impression that the trustees to whom part of the common was conveyed in 1923 held it in trust for the town; it was explained that they were trustees for the Golf Club.

A commoner, Mrs. Quartermaine of Frithesden End, said that she still exercised occasionally her right to cut furze and bracken on the common.

Miss Hager spoke of the pressure on wild life from the large numbers of visitors to the commons and Ashridge woods, not only at weekends but also on weekdays during the summer, Berkhamsted common, where it bordered on Frithesden Beeches, was noted amongst naturalists as a typical woodland-edge habitat for birds and if more land were taken from that part of the Common a valuable field for study would be lost for ever; and the pressures on wild life on the commons and in the woods in general - already great - would be increased.

Attention was drawn to the number of golf courses, some under-used, already existing in West Herts.

On behalf of the Golf Club, it has been suggested that many members of the public walked on the fairways in preference to the wilder part of the common. On a show of hands, it was seen that the large majority of those present preferred to walk in the wild,

Mr. John Stobbs spoke as a keen golfer who had also used the common from his youth. He urged that a joint committee, on which all interests should be represented, should be set up to manage the Common.

Mr. Bayliss spoke, not as captain of the Golf Club, in which capacity he had no brief, but as an ordinary member who was also a member of the Citizens' Association and of the Local History Society. He stressed the flexibility of the Golf Club's plans (for instance the Club would have applied for outline planning permission had that option been available) and said that the Club had already proposed discussions with the National Trust and the Citizens' Association. The Club had no intention of interfering with footpaths and bridleways, and trees would be left standing wherever possible,

Mr. Kenneth Webb pointed out that discussions between the Golf Club, the National Trust and the Citizens' Association could not possibly take place before the planning application was considered by the Development Control Committee of the Dacorum Council on 30th March. Mr. Bayliss replied that the Club had felt it useless to try to reach agreement in a large meeting such as the present; progress would be more likely in a smaller meeting between the bodies concerned on the basis of facts and law accepted by all present.

Mr. Stobbs suggested that the proposed layout required an excessive amount of land; it could be fitted in close to the existing course, using much less land,

What would happen to the common if the plan for a second course were abandoned and nature left to her own devices on the wild part? Those in favour of the second golf course maintained that it would revert to primeval woodland; others valued the young oaks, which would need to be removed to make way for a second course, Mr. H. Fisher took a more balanced view. He thought that the present course improved the common by opening it up; but he realised how many people used the wilder parts and recognised that another 18-hole course would change its character completely. The Golf Club would be changed too: as it stood it was a club for local residents but a 36-hole course would entail great expense, fees would probably go up and outsiders would be attracted. A disturbing thought was that the financial strain might prove too much and the Club could become bankrupt and be taken over by some organisation unconnected with the town.

Mr. Bila spoke up for those who did not own cars and for whom Ashridge was out of reach. He regularly walked on the common and wanted it to stay as it was. Mrs. Chadwick said she had obtained 1400 signatures to a petition against the second course. Mr. Dennis Hart summed up a widely-held view by saying "We can live safely and harmoniously with one golf course but not with two".

Ultimately a resolution was proposed by Mr. Fisher and seconded by Mr. Michael Day "That this open meeting, called by Berkhamsted Citizens' Association to consider the application by Berkhamsted Golf Club for planning approval for a new golf course on the common, requests the Chairman of the meeting to send a letter to the Dacorum District Council objecting to the application".

An amendment to add at the end the words "in the context in which it has been put forward, and calls for consultation between all interested parties" was lost by 39 votes to 18; the resolution was then passed by 43 votes to 13,

What will the Club do now? Amongst the possibilities are to appeal against the decision to the Secretary of State; to submit a fresh proposal with a different layout, perhaps one taking in less land and making better use of that occupied by the existing course; to adopt a policy of waiting for a more propitious time. But they will no doubt ponder the weight of opposition that their recent application has provoked and would certainly do well, before going further, to find out what their own members want.

The Lagley Site

We wrote to the Dacorum Council and the County Council suggesting that the Lagley House site would be suitable for an old people's home and that a swap be made with the Manor Street site which has already been allocated for this.

The County Council replied that an inspection of the site had shown that, although it is their intention to erect one of their smaller homes in Berkhamsted, the Lagley House site appears to be smaller than that at Manor Street, which itself is only just big enough for their purposes. The Council also feel that Manor Street is more convenient for the town's facilities and whilst the area is of mixed development this is not without its virtue. It would be contrary to current ideas to concentrate provision for the elderly in one particular area and they believe that they will be able to develop a more effective project on the Manor Street site.

We asked the County Council if they could give us an idea as to when the home on the Manor Street site would be built but they say that this is not possible. This project has been in their forward plans for some years but during recent extreme financial stringency the Central Government has felt forced to revert to a system whereby forward plans are reviewed annually. As part of this process, a three year projection is undertaken and it has not been possible to include Berkhamsted in the projection up to 1980/1.

The Hospital Service

On the 14th June the Area Health Authority will announce its decision on the location of a new District General Hospital for the North West Herts District.

There are indications that this will be built in St. Albans and that the services available in the Dacorum District will be of an even lower level than at present.

The implications of this decision are of immense importance to us all. The problems of travelling to St. Albans by public transport can hardly be exaggerated. To ensure that Berkhamsted is aware of the facts a meeting has been arranged by the Berkhamsted League of Hospital Friends at the Gable Hall, Berkhamsted, on Tuesday, 6th June at 8 p.m. The meeting will be addressed by Dr. Ian Mortimer, District Community Physician and by Mrs. Bullmore, Chairman of Dacorum Hospital Action Group.

Definitive Maps of Rights of Way

Under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 County Councils have a duty to maintain Definitive Maps of public rights of way. The Hertfordshire County Council published their first (provisional) map by stages between 1959 and 1966 on the basis of information collected in the 1950s and 1960s. They are now embarking on the first review of their Definitive Map (this first review is also known, for some reason, as the "Special Review"),

Virtually all the paths shown on the current Citizens' Association footpath map are marked on the 1968 Definitive Map. The latter, however, distinguishes between those which are footpaths only, those which are bridleways (for passage on foot or on horseback) and those private roads which are also public footpaths; our footpath map makes no such distinction. Future Definitive Maps will re-classify roads used as public paths as either by-ways open to all traffic, or bridleways. The County Council have already done some work on this re-classification and the results will be incorporated in the current "Special Review".

Sheets of the existing Definitive Map covering the Dacorum District may be seen during office hours at the offices of the District Council; sheets covering

Berkhamsted and neighbourhood are also held by us and may be seen on application to Robert Allen (The Grey House, Kitsbury Road, Berkhamsted 5212) who also has some explanatory notes and a supply of Forms for submitting claims for the inclusion of rights of way in the Definitive Map.

Claims must be submitted to the County Council by 1st August, 1978. When they have all been considered a Draft Revised Map will be published (Watch local press for notice of publication). Four months will then be allowed for objections to the draft. We believe that claims and objections will carry more weight if submitted by the Association rather than by individuals and therefore suggest that members should get in touch with Robert Allen (as above).

This and That

The footbridge across the Bulbourne and the derelict watercress beds at the bottom of St. John's Well Lane has at last been repaired. We drew the District Council's attention to the need last October.

Future Activities

Did you remember to put it in your diary? Friday, 23rd June, Court House 6.45 p.m.
Annual Cheese and Wine Party

Thursday, 6th July : St. Peter's Church, 8 p.m. Architectural Walk No. 3.
Mr. Michael Tollit will again lead this popular event. Do not miss this opportunity to see something more of the beauty of Berkhamsted.

Finally Have you paid your 1978 subscription yet? Please try to do so to Lloyds Bank in the High Street.

APPENDIX

The Constitution, The Commons and the Committee

At the A.G.M. I questioned the actions taken by the Citizens' Association at the Public Inquiry last July (Dacorum D.C. had taken steps to prevent the stationing of caravans on Common Land) as set out in the November Newsletter and the Annual Report.

The Association has in its Constitution four aims which I think it worthwhile restating here:

- a) to stimulate the interest of the inhabitants in local public affairs and to promote the sentiment of local patriotism
- b) to work for the preservation of objects of historical interest or of natural beauty
- c) to provide opportunity for discussions of all matters of local public interest
- d) to initiate and assist useful measures in the public service

One would expect that the Officers and Committee of an Association with a stated Constitution would be wholeheartedly committed to those aims. Furthermore, it is because the ordinary members (and any prospective members) believe this to be the case that they join the Association in the first instance.

Whilst accepting that committee members have other allegiances, when they are dealing with Citizens' Association affairs the objects of the Association should be paramount. Deviation from this course is tantamount to betraying the confidence of the ordinary members.

In the November Newsletter it states: "Your Committee felt that they should give evidence at the Inquiry and debated the matter on 7th July. Not unexpectedly opinions were divided." (my underlining) Further, in the Chairman's closing remarks at the A.G.M. and in the Vice Chairman's remarks at the Special 'Golf Course' meeting, both these Officers said, in effect, that it is to be expected that a

Committee which represents members with differing viewpoints, would itself necessarily have divided opinions. Accepting that members and Committee can, and do, have differing views on subjects which are peripheral to the aims of the Association, they are not entitled actively to oppose the aims of the Association.

The Association acknowledges as an asset the presence of the Common Land that we are fortunate to have on our doorsteps, (Newsletter May 1977) However, when referring to Commons, the Association usually mentions only the larger ones - Berkhamsted and Northchurch. Just as important are the other smaller commons and greens, e.g. Hudnall, Potten End, Little Gaddesden etc., and especially to those on the southern side of the town, are Brickhill Green, Long Green and Sandpit Green, The protection of smaller commons and greens is just as important as that of larger ones,

Paragraph 3 of the item on Gypsies in the November 1977 Newsletter stated: "Other members of the Committee argued that preventing gypsies and others from camping on the three greens would not solve the problem" Which problem? a) The problem of encroachment and attack on our common land? OR b) The gypsy problem?

The problem with which the Citizens' Association was confronted for the Local Inquiry purposes was that of the attack on our common land. This must be so because of item b) of the Constitution and because Long Green and Sandpit Green are designated by the H.C.C. as areas of Great Landscape Value. The gypsy problem, whilst needing an urgent solution, is not the concern of the Association any more than many other problems are and the Association cannot make itself responsible for every problem. Any member of the Citizens' Association who was an active "gypsy supporter" would have had their views represented at the Inquiry by the Gypsy Support Groups who appeared. The Association were blind to the danger to all common land represented at the Inquiry and appeared to be unaware of the weakness of their actions.

The solution of the Accommodation for Gypsies Problem is not, in fact, assisted by the sort of approach the Association were advocating at the Local Inquiry (for Long Green and Sandpit Green) i.e. 'by letting them (the gypsies and others) stay wherever they happen to be,' This attitude makes the way of life attractive to many more dropouts (others) thereby inflating the problem, and it delays the pressure for the setting up of proper sites. The less there is movement of gypsies, the more complacent the County will be with regard to the setting up of permanent sites.

The March 1978 Newsletter draws our attention to "A second Golf Course on the Common" which item selects for special attention planning application No. 4/0092/78 as published in the 17th February issue of the Gazette. It seems pertinent to ask why this particular planning application, involving development on Common Land should have been highlighted in the Newsletter when, in the very same issue of the Gazette there were five other applications (4/0097/78 to 4/0101/78) representing a greater intrusion on Common Land - the proposed stationing of 10 Caravans on Common Land, namely, Brickhill Green.

Since the Citizens' Association does appear to recognise (in selected circumstances) the value of Common Land and the importance of the protection thereof, it is being very shortsighted to allow applications as above to go unchallenged since once a precedent has been set ALL COMMONS WILL BE VULNERABLE in this respect. The Association has been noticeably silent regarding the applications for caravans on Common Land - to date 17 Applications representing 23 caravans! The Association did, however, feel it necessary to hold a special meeting to hear views on the proposed Golf Course.

Finally, I have reason to believe that the Association's membership figures would represent a much higher proportion of the Berkhamsted inhabitants were it were to be seen to be practising what its Constitution preaches. What is the purpose of the Amenities, Environment and Planning Sub Committees, not to mention the Footpath Map if, when a blatant assault is made upon all of these, a blind eye is turned? The whole of the foregoing is extremely important when one remembers that the Citizens' Association is the body to which reference is made by outside organisations for soundings on matters within their field of activity,

SHEILA DAUIES