



**Berkhamsted
Citizens
Association**

NEWSLETTER

April 1986

Salute

We normally open our April newsletter with reference to the countryside and garden signs of Spring. As we write this year we look in vain for the first full promise that winter's whip has finished lashing us on road, hill and garden. Hopefully, a tough April will give way to a sumptuous May, and a summer that will help us forget last year's disastrous season. What we cannot forget this Spring is the loss of a friend of the Association and "a son of Berkhamsted", Percy Birtchnell. Percy's niche in Berkhamsted life is so well known and has been described with eloquent testimony in St. Peter's Church and in the Gazette, that comment here is unnecessary. We will miss him and salute him. An appropriate silence for Percy, and for Neil Cowan, a past Chairman of the BCA who died last autumn, was registered at our AGM in mid March.

Forum

"Education at the Crossroads?" is the subject of our four speaker forum on Wednesday 23rd April in the Sessions Hall at 8.00 p.m.

Speakers will be Mr. John Cotton, recent County Secretary N.U.T; Miss Ruth Milbank, Divisional Education Officer; Councillor Mrs. Iris Tarry, Chairman of the County Education Committee; and Mr. Ken Hills, a local school governor. Each speaker has been given a general framework in which to plan their comments, so as to give a consistent presentation. They have been asked to cover the following points:

- (a) Biographical, ie. job, role, powers and responsibilities
- (b) Philosophical, ie. what is education for?
- (c) Funding - for maintenance of buildings, equipment, staff establishments - efforts by PTA 's
- (d) Implications of falling pupil rolls
- (e) Teachers' morale
- (f) G.C.S.E.

We are hoping for a relevant, lively, maybe contentious but thought provoking presentation. Hopefully it will be not too political but informative on the issues involved, and the pros and cons of the various angles on this important and contemporary problem area.

Please support this meeting, and bring your friends, whether they be parents of current school children or not.

Berkhamsted is Changing

This is on the front of our membership form, which goes on to say "The changes will affect you." Sometimes these changes affect us directly by a building development at the side of or back of our house, and we react vigorously, rushing down to the next Council meeting. More frequently, the changes affect us indirectly by removing familiar

buildings or open areas. The only thing constant is change - goes the well worn cliché. So if we believe it to be inevitable, the change has to be acceptable and pleasing or we get cynical and uncaring. Each month gives us solid evidence of this - read the Gazette, Herald or Mail, to see examples of change jolting somebody. In the town centre, the 'cottage' shops Blaze and Gemma's have to give way to redevelopment of their premises. The Hall Park site will likely go to W.H. Smith's DIY warehouse and a new canalside development at Ravens Lane Bridge will change that area for ever. The big houses are being lost to infilling on the south side of the valley. So if this is necessary we must at least demand quality in design and finish. And in some cases we must be prepared to say no. "We" are nearly always the Town Councillors, and mostly Dacorum Councillors, elected to act on behalf of the community. They have a terrible responsibility for our inheritance, and our futures. That is why your Association believes in maintaining regular informed dialogue with the Councillors. We may not always believe they make a wise decision, sometimes we accept that they do, but we should always let them know we are all concerned and have to live with the results of their decisions. Developers can be influenced to review initial plans, so that economic forces are not the only ones to be considered.

As we write, townspeople have been alerted to a planning application to demolish, alter and extend buildings in the High Street and Lower Kings Road, currently occupied by Mcllroys, the Bookstack, De Lisle's jewellers, Adams Opticians and J. & J. Records and the offices above them, for the purpose of constructing "one new shop unit". This could be for an extension of the Mcllroys shop perhaps on ground and upper floors - thus giving a large Department Store, or it could be occupied by a supermarket or other "multiple" as per most Town Centres. There may be differing views as to the architectural importance of these buildings but such a substantial change at a centre point of the town is very significant and therefore contentious. Clearly more of our High Street is falling to the modern developer. For more details members should contact their Councillors or Town Clerk or Dacorum Borough Council Planning Department to give their views on this proposal. The required notice under the Town & Country Planning Acts says that representations should be made by Monday 21st April 1986. Plans can be seen at the Civic Centre, Berkhamsted on Tuesdays, or at Dacorum Planning Office, Civic Centre, Hemel Hempstead on any day - Monday to Friday. Clearly further details are needed, and will be asked for by many people. Berkhamsted needs more choice of shops and more parking, but how do we get this without destroying the town's character and its small shops?

Liaison

For the above reasons, a meeting was requested, and arranged recently, with the Mayor, senior Councillors, and officers of Dacorum Borough Council. It was arranged in conjunction with Berkhamsted Town Council, with the Mayor, Councillor Janet Dunbavand and six Town Councillors. Four members of the BCA were present. By prior arrangement, there was a prepared agenda. This was centred on leisure facilities, town centre development, planning policy and the by-pass.

There was full discussion of the plans for the Leisure Services site at Ashlyns School, which will include the creation of new all-weather tennis courts, floodlighting, and facilities for other ball games on the area of the courts, refurbishment of swimming pool and changing rooms, and the provision of a Sports Hall for indoor sports. This will allow extension of facilities for the school during day/term time; and facilities for the

people of the town/area in the evenings, weekends and holidays. The whole project will cost £¼ million, to be started in late 1986 and being available in 1987. This will be a major increase in sports/leisure facilities in Berkhamsted and is to be welcomed. Whilst there are some disadvantages in the Ashlyns site (being not in the town centre) for a valley town like Berkhamsted the options limited, and the economics of Local Authority finance mean that a dual use scheme sharing between Dacorum and County is the only viable scheme these days. School buildings unused at evenings and weekends and holidays never made much sense.

The other major issue discussed was the overall plan for Berkhamsted town centre with special emphasis on car parking and the linking of St. Johns Well Lane car park and that at Lower Kings Road. Without reasonable car parking our town centre will die, losing ground and appeal to other towns and one stop shopping sits, even though those are some 10-20 miles away. Don't believe it? Look what is happening in many, many other towns. Go and have a look at how many shop sites in Chesham are for sale. What is so ridiculous in Berkhamsted is the availability of parking on the High Street and the lack of it off the High Street. The A41 by the (developed) Co-op building is becoming positively dangerous, and the parking bay must be extended towards Cowper Road before long. The pavement is wide enough for several more yards to accommodate such an extension.

Continuing pressure from the M25, and pressure to be put on the Transport Minister, was discussed. It was recognised that the need wasn't just for a by-pass for Berkhamsted but for Apsley and Kings Langley as well. It really should be termed the Berkhamsted and Kings Langley by-pass. At least the Ministry are recognising apparently the need for a dual carriage-way road. But 1989? We can't survive that long without relief to the A41 and to our shopping centre. The DIY centre at Hall Park will be the Crowning Glory to a too long and patient town.

ANNUAL ENVIRONMENT AWARD

The winner this year is Compass Point, built at New Road, Northchurch, as sheltered housing for elderly people, commissioned by Dacorum Borough Council Housing Department and designed by the architects Edmund Tory & Associates. The award was received at our AGM by Councillor Peter Benton, Chairman of the Housing Committee.

A Certificate of Commendation was awarded to the livery painting of the canal bridge at Lower Kings Road. This was carried out by the County Surveyors Department of Herts County Council. This award was received by Mr. A.M. Collins, Bridge Maintenance Engineer (County Council) who acknowledged that it was a joint effort by the Bridge Engineers and the County Planning Department, the member of which mainly responsible had now gone to New Zealand. No relevance! Behind the scenes on this lies the work of Guy Moores who is an ex Chairman of BCA and whilst subsequently on the Committee worked hard to get the County, Dacorum and British Waterways Board to tackle various aspects of canal improvements. A Certificate of Commendation for Conservation was awarded to Dickmans the Chemists for the sympathetic restoration work carried out on the shop front window. This is a rare example of a more traditional style, and its retention and renovation in existing style was welcomed.

Grand Union Canal

We are attempting to put a little "Grand" back into the canalside environment, by persuading the appropriate authorities and local people to improve and care for this linear through our town. To achieve this a survey report has been completed and sent to the British Waterways Board and Borough and County Authorities. We shall follow up this item as a significant contribution to improving the local environment. Local

people can do their bit by collecting litter, and preventing it growing'.

Membership Fees

These are currently a minimum of £1.50p. for family membership and £1.00 for single membership, and have moved up slowly over the years! Well short of inflation! The Committees past and present have been loath to increase unless necessary, and required by the Association's financial requirements. The constitution gives a technical difficulty regarding subscription charges vis a vis the AGM in March and the subscription year (calender).

An amendment was passed at the AGM as follows:

- "3. The minimum annual subscription for individual membership and that for family membership shall be determined by the Committee at a meeting held before the end of October and shall be payable as from the succeeding first day of January or at the time of joining during that succeeding year."

George Cameron asked for reasons as to why the subscription should be raised and Norman Williams replied to the effect that the proposed amendment did not expressly or implicitly necessarily contemplate an increase in the subscription. The amendment was recommended because it would enable in the previous October the Committee to assess the need for any variation in the subscription rather than in the previous March. At this later date it would have available to it more up-to-date information both as to the state of its accounts and its likely future commitments.

Waterside Festival

An extra focus on our linear park is coming on May 17th and 18th when the Inland Waterways Association are holding a "Berkhamsted Waterside Festival". 100 narrow boats and 5000 people are expected at the site based on the Moor, by the railway station.

Jubilee History

Selling well! A fresh print has been produced and copies can be obtained from any member of the Committee or at the Bookstack, Potters Pride and P.C. Birtchnells in the High Street.

Activities

- | | |
|----------------------|---|
| Wednesday 23rd April | "Education at the Crossroads" (details on page 1), Sessions Hall. 8.00 p.m. |
| Friday 20th June | Summer Wine. Victoria School. 7.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. |
| Thursday 3rd July | A Walk in the Woods with Chris Meade an ornithologist with an infectious and informative enthusiasm. Meet at Ashridge Monument at 7.30 p.m. |