

The Citizen



Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association
Working for the social and civic life of our community

December 2006

Chairmans' Column

Retirement of Norman Williams.

Norman Williams, the longest serving member of the BCA committee, has reluctantly decided it is time for him to take a well-earned retirement.

Norman and his wife, Hilary, moved to Berkhamsted in 1966. He is a solicitor and joined the Department of Health and Social Security (then the Ministry of National Insurance) as Legal Assistant, eventually being appointed Under Secretary. He was head of the department responsible for the safety of medicinal products in the United Kingdom and, for that purpose, represented the UK at the European Commission in Brussels. On his retirement from the Department, the Treasury appointed him arbitrator specialising in Friendly Society disputes and he was their Assistant Registrar from 1984 until 1993. He was made Companion, Order of the Bath for his services.

During the war, Norman served in the Royal Artillery and took part in the Normandy Landings.

Clearly a busy man, he found time to be elected to the BCA committee in 1974. He was vice-chairman in 1977-78, 80-81, 83-84 and 86-87, and served two terms as chairman, from 1978-80 and 1984-86. Until his recent retirement, he was a member of the Town Amenities Sub-committee (TASC) and represented the Association on the Berkhamsted Crime Prevention Panel.

Over twenty years ago he invited the vicar and choir of the church in Potten End to give BCA members a Christmas concert with some community singing. This was so successful that it established the tradition for the annual Christmas celebrations, which continued in various formats, but always with carol singing, for many years.

As well as his work for the BCA, he took a leading role on the management of the Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring Citizens Advice Bureau. He was chairman for five years continuing as their president.

Members of the committee and of TASC shall miss his valuable contributions, his advice and his wise words as our 'elder statesman'. We thank him for his many years of service and on behalf of the committee and, I feel sure, all the members of the Association, it gives me pleasure to wish him a very happy and healthy retirement, and to thank his wife, Hilary, for all her support.

As this is the last newsletter of the year, may I wish you, on behalf of all your committee:-

A very merry Christmas and a happy New Year

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

The date of the AGM has been changed to **Wednesday 21st March 2007**

Editorial - Norman Cutting sitting on the fence!

A recent application was approved by the local planning authority and has caused mixed feelings amongst your committee, so I thought members might be interested in the ongoing debate and maybe let us have your views for the next issue.

KITCHENERS FIELD

Town Amenities Sub-Committee view:

The BCA has fought hard over many years to maintain the Green Belt and AONB in Berkhamsted and Northchurch. In the past, the Town Council and Dacorum Borough Council have also supported this stance. However, acting against several appeal decisions preventing Areas of Natural Beauty (AONB) from being converted into sports facilities, DBC's Development Control Committee has voted to grant a recent planning application to turn a part of Kitcheners Fields over to youth football pitches

This application was opposed not only by us but also the DBC officers, the DBC Chairman, the Castle Hill Association, The Chiltern Society and, English Heritage.

We believe that this decision is worrying when you consider the precedent for the AONB and the pressure on this land for sports use. We are also concerned for the future of the archaeological remains under the surface. and the change of appearance of the AONB from natural grazing land into "developed" sports facilities.

The Applicants made the point that there are insufficient playing fields for children to play on in Berkhamsted. We would submit that there are sufficient under used school playing fields in the Berkhamsted area to remove any necessity for land of AONB status to be converted into sports facilities.

There are some rays of hope for our beleaguered AONB and Green Belt. The land in question has a Section 106 Agreement on it which limits its use to agricultural; there is no Right of Way to get to the pitches; the recent Appeal decisions made this decision open to Judicial review. So we're not defeated yet.

The Association will discuss all this with the Castle Hill Association and The Chiltern Society to see what, if anything, we can collectively do to defend the AONB from those who would do otherwise

Several Committee members view:

The Raiders club supports 250 children, including two girls teams. The proposed pitches are half the size of normal pitches and are designed for 7/8 year olds. The club does use both Bridgewater and Ashlyns school pitches but there is competition for use and they are over-used. You have to bear in mind that the club plays around 20 matches each week, sometimes 2 or 3 three matches at a time one after the other. The Raiders are not the only local club, there are several other competing clubs and teams all after the same facilities. It is acknowledged by the council that Berkhamsted is 30 hectares short of grassed areas to be used for this kind of thing and a lot of what there is belongs to the Collegiate. The club used to use some of their pitches but they are no longer available.

The original application made covered a much larger area and would have involved drainage and it is this application that the Inspectors were against. The present application is for use of a much smaller area. There is no excavation involved, just a bit of filling in with top soil to level off and make it safe for the children. There will be no reseeding, apart from the levelled off areas and the goalposts will be temporary. The grass will not be cut really short - and lets face it, even the farmer has the right to cut the grass if he wants to, AONB or not. The only real visual affect, as we understand it, will be a few extra lines in the ground.

You might also like to know that not all of the Castle Hill residents are against the application - letters of support were received from 8 of them.

Points from the application:

The applicant is the prospective purchaser

They own/control land adjacent to the site

The size is .9 Ha

Site owned by David Wilson Homes

Application by Peter W Abbiss on behalf of Berkhamsted Raiders Football Club and Berkhamsted Cricket, Sports and Social Club

The application says the fencing etc remains, the drawings show a 'new fence to match Berkhamsted Collegiate School fence'

No regrading will be carried out, only reseeding (repaired on drawing)

2 junior pitches approx 50 yds by 40 yds and 60yds by 40 yds.

Public footpath runs adjacent to proposed site.

Larger scheme refused in September 2003 dismissed on appeal

No objections from BTC.

Support from Watford FC Community Sports and Education Trust and the England U21 head coach and manager.

Our MP asked DBC to support the application

Activities Sub-Committee

Chairman, Rita Jones reports:

Walter Rothschild, The Zoological Museum in Tring.

A well attended and highly entertaining talk by Alice Dowswell covering Walter Rothschild's eccentric and privileged life, numerous exotic pets and the museum past and present, plus 'Look out for future exhibitions'. Wine and 'nibbles' were served in the interval as a substitute for the separate seasonal celebration. Tell us what you think about this.

The Annual New Year's Day Ramble. Please meet Bill Willett and other members in front of Berkhamsted train station, at 10.30 am on Sunday, January 1st 2007 for our walk to Aldbury (and back). We have been to Cholesbury for 2 years, so this year, as there are so many possible routes to Aldbury, Bill decided to take us there again, this time via a new route. Aldbury also has the advantage of the choice of 2 pubs for lunch, but you can bring your own. Remember, if you don't want to walk back you will have to provide your own transport.

The next meeting, on Thursday February 8th 2007, Sessions Hall, 8pm, is about Berkhamsted's very own lifeboat, 'The Spirit of Berkhamsted' and so deserves your support. Our lifeboat is going through a difficult patch and Margaret Edinburgh, Chairman of the Berkhamsted branch of the Royal National Lifeboat Institute will up-date us on this, give us the boat's life to date and tell us something of the history and workings of the Royal National Lifeboat Institute.

A member, Anita Blackett, has kindly sent a review of our first meeting on October 25th, with Anna Sim and Celeste Llyn, and my apologies to Celeste Llyn for the misspelling of her surname on all the publicity. I thank Anita very much for her review. Perhaps other members would like to write reviews of future meetings for the Citizen.

A CONCERT WITH A DIFFERENCE

In October I went with a guest to your meeting entitled 'A Concert with Exercises to Inspire You. We thought it sounded fun – a concert with a difference and it was just that.

A breathing Workshop! How will this work? We were about to find out. With huge amusement we flung arms over heads to stretch ribs and lungs; bent low to the ground to expel every last drop of breath. We were timed to see how long we could hold on without a gasp for air. All of these exercises were performed under the watchful eye of the speaker, Anna Sims. She is an international voice trainer and extended breathing specialist. Anna was teaching us the breathing technique she had discovered when recovering from an almost fatal fire accident.

With great good humour Anna continued to show us how she helps opera singers to reach the high notes. First she put one foot up on a chair leaned forward slightly and sang a high note. Then she raised one leg high in the air to the side then curled her toes and sang. I won't describe what she did with a walnut!

The second part of the evening, after a well earned cup of tea, was an absolute delight. The Great Hall proved to be a perfect setting to sit back and listen to the amazing voices of the young opera singers. Not only did they sound wonderful but they looked good too: the ladies in colourful gowns and the gentlemen very distinguished in their evening suits.

Thank you BCA for a truly inspirational concert, I am sure it was enjoyed by all who came.

What next on the Hospital Scene? Tony Statham updates us

By the time our members read this, another stage will have passed on the decisions being made about the future of the West Herts Hospital Trust (WHHT) and thus the future of Hemel Hempstead Hospital. Remember, even if you live in Berkhamsted, this is officially your hospital and it needs your support.

There was a wonderful promise of a new hospital at Hatfield (so easy to reach from Berkhamsted) but the news this week is that this has finally been shelved as has the new Watford Hospital as this will be 'refurbished' and a few temporary buildings placed in the car park. A & E will be at Watford, elective surgery at St Albans and around 50% of the Hemel site sold off.

At a public meet held by the trust on November 16th, they decided that the responses to the consultation exercise was flawed due to the high number of 'activists' who responded, even though 82% preferred Hemel to Watford

If all this suggests that there is no way back, don't give up. The fight by the Dacorum Hospital Action Group (DHAG) goes on.

Keep up to date via the Internet at www.savehemel.com or www.bca.berko.org.uk.

Keep Fighting!

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Chairman, Gordon Bluck reports:

Since my last report the proposals for the Stag Lane site has been approved which is hardly surprising as the developer was working towards the Borough brief. A lot of time was spent by my committee in considering the Dacorum Borough feasibility study for the land of the High Street and Water Lane produced by Tibbalds and others. I have set out below the Associations views.

a) It is regretted that the study was limited to the use of the narrow definition of the Water Lane car park and the adjoining buildings. The inclusion of the private car park behind W H Smith and the Royal British Legion would have opened up significant opportunities for an improved scheme. The ultimate goal being to the redevelopment (on a phased basis) of the whole area from Water Lane car park to Lower Kings Road and the rather indifferent building to the west of the Town Hall.

b) Concerning access, it was considered that Water Lane was an important access to the site as the Greene Field access was not readily obvious to strangers to the town. Water Lane should be converted into a two way access from the High Street. It was also considered that if Green Field Road is to be made a two way route, recognition must be given to the proximity of the access to the Lower Kings Road/Waitrose car park and a co-ordinated traffic management system installed.

c) The opportunity should be taken to increase the car parking accommodation in the town, a multi-storey (above ground) car park seems the most likely choice. The inclusion of the space behind W H Smith would yield a suitable site for such a structure.

d) The proposal to improve the public toilets is supported.

e) The implication that the central store around which the proposal was based should be a food based supermarket such as Tesco or Waitrose is deprecated and a wider search for a suitable flagship store should be undertaken.

On other major developments the Association objected to the proposal for 22 Flats at The Glebe Chesham Road due to over development, view supported by Town Council and the application was refused by the Borough planners. One of the reasons being there were 2 too many underground parking spaces!! This raised an interesting point in that when I asked the planner why it had not appeared on the planning committee minutes I was told that only 10% of plans are considered by councillors. I can understand this for, say a single storey side extension but not a block of 22 flats. In this case everyone agreed it should be turned down. In my 13 years as TASC Chairman I had not realised that an officer can turn down a major scheme. We also objected the proposal for 26 flats at The Chilterns, Stoneycroft, on grounds of overdevelopment, inadequate parking and disappointing architectural design. In addition the plan to convert 113 High Street to 13 residential units was opposed due to poor traffic management proposals and the proposal for the egress of traffic onto the High Street was positively dangerous.

Odds and Ends - a round-up of other items as we've run out of space - by Norman Cutting:

Hemel has realised the parking problem that many areas of Berkhamsted have suffered for years .

Hemel will be used for outpatients and diagnostic testing; Watford Hospital will be refurbished and portacabins added - you couldn't make it up, if you tried!

All the latest updates and more info on our web-site →

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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