

# The Citizen



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

**September 2006**

---

## Chairmans' Column(s)

**Rita Jones (as BCA Chairman) writes:**

Welcome to our 2006/7 season and I hope you all had a good summer.

A colleague once said that he found that, on all the committees he had served, the committee thought the members apathetic and the members thought that the committee members were aloof and 'did their own thing'. I think our recent survey shows that this is not always true. We are getting support from our members and we do try to find out what you want. We seem to get some things right, even if we may have to 'do our own thing' sometimes. My thanks to everyone who took part and especially to Susan Johnson, who organised it all.

This week I attended, as chairman, the annual meeting between some members of the Town Amenities Subcommittee and Dacorum Borough Councillors and Borough Council Officers. This was quite difficult to set up, because of the increasing pressure on the time of the Borough staff and I am extremely grateful to the Councillors and Officers who gave up part of their evening to talk to us. As a newcomer I found the discussion very useful.

It is not possible to give a full report in time for this newsletter but I think that both sides learnt from the discussions. Berkhamsted is not forgotten and plans, which include the future of our town, are coming up for consultation soon. Comments are actively being sought so please look out for the consultation documents and take the opportunity to tell the council what you think. TASC always responds on behalf of members, but individual replies are very important.

Also, in this connection, I draw your attention to leaflets in the library concerning the way in which hospital services could be delivered locally. If you have not already done so, do have a look and reply.

If we don't respond to these and other consultation documents, but people from other towns and villages do, we could find services moving away from us.

---

### Activities Sub-Committee

Chairman, Rita Jones reports:

I must thank everyone who responded to the recent survey. Your comments on our activities, and especially topics for talks, are most helpful. I am pleased to read that we are covering some of them in the new programme.

We open with an item, which was suggested by some members, after the talk Anna Sims gave us in 2004. Then, Anna explained how we could improve our breathing and a somewhat startled audience found itself doing simple breathing exercises. It can't have been that bad, as everyone left looking happy and relaxed, a fairly rare occurrence. This time Anna Sims is joined by her daughter Celeste Lyn for 'A Concert with Exercises to Inspire You', an evening of operatic arias and duets, with a talk and exercises. Please don't be put off by the exercises. They are not strenuous or difficult and you don't have to join in (though you'll be missing something if you don't, as they are great fun). It is on Wednesday, October 25th at 8pm and in the Great Hall in Berkhamsted Town Hall.

PLEASE NOTE - the change in the day and date (to fit in with the performers' available time and the availability of the hall) and venue, (so we can use the piano and have more room). Do please try to come. We have a lot of space to fill and we do want to make it worthwhile for our guests, who are giving us their time from their very busy schedules.

The second event returns to the usual time and venue, Thursday, November 9th, at 8pm in the Sessions Hall in Berkhamsted Town Hall. This will be our wildlife and countryside evening, as Alice Dowswell, interpretation and learning developer at the Zoological Museum in Tring, will be talking about the museum and Walter Rothschild.

You will note that there will not be a 'seasonal celebration'. Although the event in January was a great success on the night, it took a huge effort by committee members to get the required 49 guests. The work involved in arranging these events does not seem worthwhile, when the reality is that most of the guests are committee members and their friends. We shall certainly be reviewing the reasons why members do not attend social events. It has been suggested that we serve wine, fruit juice and mince pies at a talk, as is the tradition at some other local societies, so we hope to do this at the November talk.

At his talk in April, Nick Siney offered to arrange a guided tour of Meadham Farm Brickworks, Blackwell Hall Lane, Ley Hill and, in the last newsletter I asked members who were interested to contact me with possible dates. Although several members expressed an interest at the meeting, only 2 wrote to me. I have arranged a visit at 11am on Monday September 25th for them and, inevitably, several committee members.

*Continued on back page*

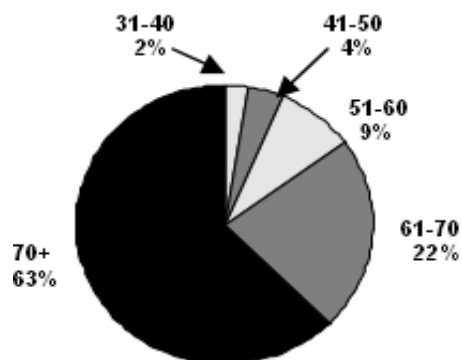
# THE MEMBERS' QUESTIONNAIRE

## The results analysed by Susan Johnson

The Citizens are alive and well and involved in just about everything that goes on in the town – “participation is our speciality”, as Wallace (& Gromit) would say – but we need you to participate in what WE do!

So, first of all, a big thank you to the 80 members who have already participated by responding to the questionnaire, which we sent out earlier this year.

The Committee thought the survey would help us understand what you thought and enjoyed, and how we could retain and attract more members. You have told us universally that the membership subscription is good value for money. The questionnaire's findings confirmed some of our assumptions, but then threw up some new challenges that we need to meet. The return rate of 16% means the findings are statistically significant and therefore can be used as a firm basis for action.



**Age profile of respondents**

Our membership is predominantly elderly (although it could be that the over-70s were more likely to fill in the form), but we need a more balanced range of ages to join us, to ensure our future. How about encouraging your younger relatives/friends/neighbours to join? Or buy them membership for Christmas? They might like it once they've tried it!

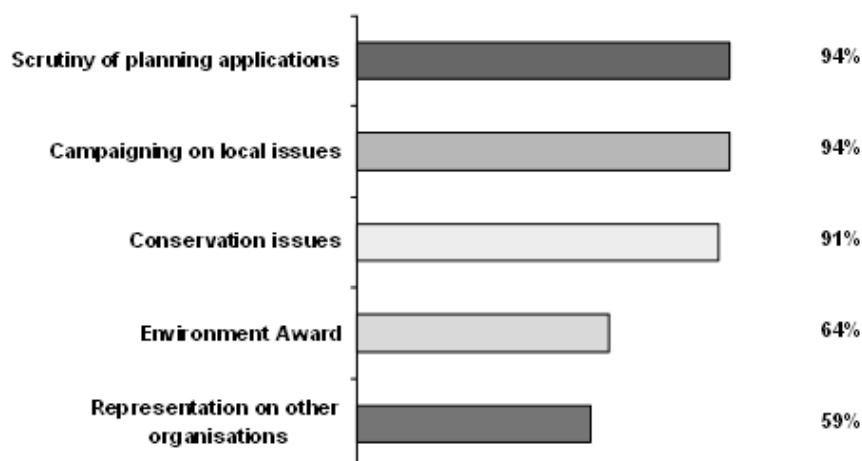
One surprising finding (to the Committee, anyway) was that, while a large number of you liked the Environment Award, you didn't see it as important. The point of the Award is that, while it entertains, it also educates those who are about to develop – both companies and local residents – to use best practice, by showing good examples of building and installations, raising standards by example. Sort of *pour encourager les autres* without the downside. It also guarantees us our one annual splash in the *Gazette*.

*Q. Would you like to see more overt criticism in the Award's presentation, highlighting some examples of "less than best practice", for example?*

Another surprise was that you did not greatly value our participation in outside bodies e.g. the CAB, Graham Greene Birthplace Trust, Crime Prevention Panel. Many of these local bodies were set up with the support, or at the behest of, the BCA. Our representation is enshrined in their constitutions and we represent the voice of Joe Public in their debates; they need us, as they need other organisations' representation, to fulfil their obligations. We report back on their activities to the Committee.

*Q. Do we need to report back to you more, either at our meetings or in the pages of this newsletter?*

### Importance attributed to Committees' work



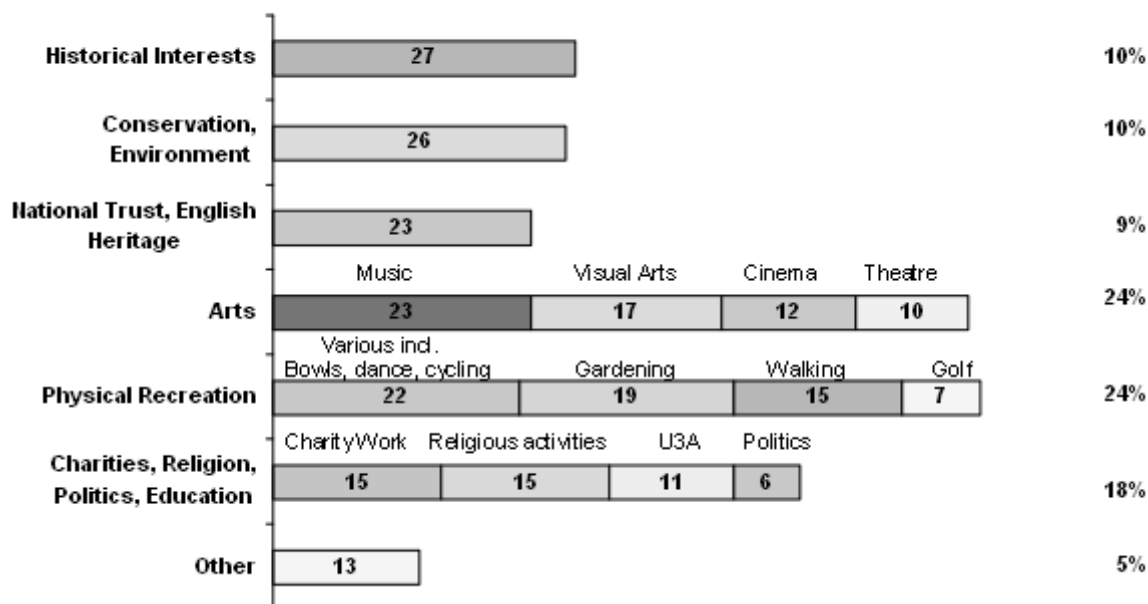
In theory, talks are very popular – but not on the whole well attended. 90% of respondents declared an interest, but only 63% admitted to attending. In fact, only forty people on average come to each, and ten of those are from the committees! They are held in the evenings to make them accessible to all age groups and circumstances – not least those running them – but it’s often a barrier for older members.

*Q. Is the thought of going out in the evening four times a year so off-putting, given that half of you live in central Berkhamsted?*

We’ll look at the 27 topics you suggested, 10 of which were mentioned more than once, and see what we can arrange. Your interests are wide and extremely varied. We need to marry them up with speakers.

*Q. Have you suggestions for speakers?*

**Interests of members** (261 replies in total)



Similarly, we can’t seem to hit the right note for social events. As many as half of you won’t come, for various reasons, mainly related to age and infirmity (“geriatric inertia” being the most humorous explanation given), and some just don’t like what we arrange.

*Q. What would you like us to arrange and what would it take to get you there?*

One thing is certain – the newsletter is universally valued. It would have a more varied content if YOU wrote for it. Members’ contributions were suggested in the survey responses. How about it? It could be a platform for a particular interest/gripe. Send in your letters.

*Q. Would you like us to introduce ‘columns’ from, say, a councillor? We are not party political, but are interested in public life.*

We are pleased that a small number of people expressed an interest in joining the Committee. We will be inviting them to observe our committee meetings in the coming months, with a view to co-option now or election at the AGM in March 2007. We have been lacking a publicity officer for several years – here’s a chance to recruit one.

So the watchword is **PARTICIPATION**, especially from younger members. We need:

- More members
- A wider age range in membership
- Existing members – and new ones – to join in events and talks
- Writers for the newsletter, particularly with ideas
- Your opinions

In that spirit, if you wish to respond to any of the specific questions posed above, or suggest any other ways we could better meet your needs, please write to me or any member of the Committee. Contact details were enclosed with the last newsletter.

Falling membership and participation are not unique to us, Berkhamsted or the area. It’s happening country-wide. We have, as a nation, become more sedentary, passive and grumpy! If you want to challenge the flow – help us and make waves!

## Activities continued from front page:

There are a few places left, so if anyone is interested, please ring Miranda Cummins on 866075. It might be possible to offer transport.

The Midsummer Ramble was on a really hot day but Bill took four of us along a pleasant, interesting and, mercifully, shady walk to Aldbury. After a welcome drink, and lunch for some, one of us made the return journey, for which Bill found another shady route.

There was a request that the talks should be better advertised. At the moment they are in Berkhamsted Arts Trust 'The Arts for Berkhamsted' leaflet and the programme card for BCA Members, posters are put up on the main notice boards in the town, including the library and Town Hall about 2 weeks before the event, advanced notice is given in the Citizen, see above, and they are usually included in Berkhamsted Living and sometimes in the Gazette as well as on our web site. Does anyone have any other suggestions?

---

## Town Amenities Sub-Committee

*Chairman, Gordon Bluck reports:*

Firstly I would like to tell members that we welcomed Jenny Habib to the Committee and already her experience as an architect is proving invaluable.

The biggest development we have considered as a committee is the Stag Lane development which is proposing 150 dwellings. The developers have followed the Dacorum Borough Council design brief closely so our objections to the planning application are the same as those on the brief. In other words we object to the lack of open space on the development and no provision for a small shop. In addition we felt the design standard was poor particularly at the entrance to the development.

Regarding the plans at Bulbourne House site near Billet Lane we were disappointed that amended plans were submitted which had brought forward the building line to the road. We objected again and although I hand delivered the letter to the Civic Centre to be forwarded to the planning department it did not get through. I now use email as you get a receipt. A discussion with the planner concerned revealed that it was he who had asked for the front building to be brought forward in a request to developers as he felt it would fit in better with the street scene. We do not agree. We are also finding that with only 14 days consultation on amended schemes there is often not enough time to object. In fairness to the Council this is a central government ruling. Our Association Chairman has arranged after much hard work a meeting between Borough council officers and members to discuss matters affecting the town. These meetings have been going for decades but it appears they do not want to have them any more. Too much trouble I suppose. Anyway members will have met with DBC by the time this is published and we will get feedback in next newsletter.

As I have not said it for a while I would like to thank all members of the Committee for their time and support.

---

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

Graham Greene Festival - **28th September to 1st October 2006**

Bruce Nixon has a new book out and holding a book signing at Waterstones from 7pm on **27th September**

Hospital Trust Consultation meeting Tring Community Hall on **Oct 3rd** at 10am (you missed the Berkhamsted one!)

Bed push on **8th October** from Marlowes bandstand to Watford Hospital.

Hospital Action Group are looking for someone to 'front' a 'judicial review' on the Hospital Trust 'consultation' process.

Do you suffer from excess 'by-pass' noise? Let us know.

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

Contributions to:

The Citizen

c/o 15 Chestnut Drive, BERKHAMSTED, HP4 2JL

E-mail: [bca@berko.org.uk](mailto:bca@berko.org.uk)

Web site: <http://www.berko.org.uk/bca>

**Edited and compiled by Norman Cutting**

---

Chairman: Rita Jones, 18 St Margarets Close, HP4 2HL Tel: 872757 (e: [ritjones@waitrose.com](mailto:ritjones@waitrose.com))

Membership Secretary: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 38 Kitsbury Road, HP4 3EA Tel: 865882

*Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association*

---

Designed by Norman Cutting - 871851 & printed by The Print Centre - 876600