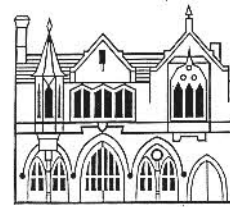


The Citizen



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

June 2007

Chairmans' Column

Rita Jones starts this issue

It was with great pleasure that I was privileged to start my second year as Chairman by presenting, for the first time in a couple of years, the Environment Award Plaque. The worthy winner, Castle Mill Flats, and the runner up, Headlands House, were so close that I was pleased to present a new award - a Very Highly Commended Certificate, to Headlands House. Another new award - the Special Commendation Certificate was given, not to a formal building, but to the Skate Board Park. This was a good example of cooperation between the Town and Youth Councils and other town organisations and it was very pleasing that the BCA should give an award to a project by and for the young people of the town. I should like to thank John Cook and Gordon Bluck for their excellent presentation and the members of the Town Amenities Sub-Committee for all the work involved in the judging of the award. I hope these results bode well for future buildings in our town.

However, I also had to announce the retirement of another committee member, Ken Davies. Ken joined the Committee as Vice-Chairman in 1988 and was Chairman in 1989-90. Since then he has served on the Town Amenities Sub-Committee and also served as representative of the Association on the National Trust Ashridge Committee and the Dacorum Citizens Advice Bureau. He was a career railwayman, starting as a junior engineer in the GWR in 1939, continuing through the many changes to the railways after his war service in North Africa and Italy. He specialised in the management of major railway projects in the UK and Iran. When he retired, he was British Rail's Chief Projects Officer, involved in the electrification of the East Coast Main Line and the reconstruction of Liverpool Street station. I thank him for his work on the Committee and we wish him and his wife Paula good health and happiness in their future.

I am delighted to welcome, as elected members of the Committee, David Collins, our Publicity Officer, David Woodward and Katy Brooks-Duncan. I should like to thank all Committee members for their support and hard work during the past year and look forward to working with them in the future. We still have vacancies on the Committee, so if anyone would like to join us please contact me or any other Committee member.

Your editor writes:

Norman Cutting sticks his oar in again

As usual, I've been out and about talking to residents in my capacity as a local business owner - although I should say that residents tend to talk to me, for some reason

The 2½ subjects brought up are the possibility of a small travellers site, the proposed development at New Lodge (corner of London Road and Bank Mill Lane) and the odd comment about the size and scale of the new development between Castle Street and Mill Lane. Very little about developing the Water Lane car park into a supermarket site or even Stag Lane.

If you think about it, it's in the early stages that residents seem to believe they can influence decisions being made on our behalf, later on, it's a lost cause as far as they are concerned. Perhaps that is why the turnout at the recent elections was so low. I hope the new Town and Borough Councils address this matter as in both institutions, the opposition is only token and only bodies like our Association can reflect the concerns (or praise) of the broad spectrum of those who live in our town.

Finally, I hope the Borough planners don't make the same mistake over New Lodge as they did over Stag Lane, by 'suggesting' what would be acceptable to developers, then turning it down!

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones - Chairman reports:

Colin Smith, in his entertaining talk '**Coffee with a Local Flavour**' on **April 6th** covered everything you ever wanted to know about coffee, and more, from plant to cup, visiting history, geography and finance on the way.

The evening culminated in a coffee tasting and a display of coffee making equipment from his collection.

Having read so many articles and leaflets on the correct way to make coffee, it was comforting to discover that the answer was -

'Make it the way you like it'.

The Summer Ramble, Sunday, July 1st.

CHANGE CHANGE CHANGE

The starting point will now be **BERKHAMSTED Train Station**, **NOT Hemel Hempstead** as in the original programme. Bill Willett, our leader, has been checking various routes and suggests that we start in front of Berkhamsted Train Station and walk, via the canal and Garden Field Lane, towards Whelpley Hill and Bovingdon. There will be a stop for lunch at the White Hart, Whelpley Hill at about 12.20-1.00 pm (you can bring your own lunch). We shall return via Bovingdon, Westbrook Hay and the canal, to get back to Berkhamsted at about 5.30pm. Although only part of the route will go through the Boxmoor Trust, Bill thinks this will be an interesting walk and will have a good lunch stop. The new starting point will be on the posters and web-sites (BCA and Arts Trust). Please note that if you only want to do half the walk, you will have to provide your own transport from Whelpley Hill.

I do hope that many of you can join us. If we are lucky enough to have a warm day, Bill is very good at finding shady paths.

The new programme has been arranged and is on our web-site. I am currently confirming titles and the final programme will go out with the next issue of the Citizen and will be on the Arts Trust programme.

Footpath map out soon.

We are currently entering the final phase and it will have an index to go with the Town Map and be printed on better quality paper.

If you want to be one of the first to have a copy, then send me your e-mail and I will let you know where and when they will be available - or keep an eye on the web-site

On Moving to Berkhamsted

A 'Newcomer' (actually Mrs Collins - but don't tell anyone)

Retirement and an empty nest prompted us to look for somewhere different to live, not remote, not a museum but a place with history, peaceful but part of the 21st century. Berkhamsted fitted the bill.

On our arrival at our new home the heating whirred into action on a chilly autumn afternoon with a warm welcome and kind neighbours appeared with potted plants, bottles of wine and promises of help. The young lady at the supermarket packed our groceries. The inevitable little technical problems associated with moving were solved by the cheery young man at the hardware shop. He identified our difficulties on the basis of a slight description and provided a solution for the outlay of a pound or two.

Bone tiredness hit us early that evening, accepting that there was a thirty year gap between this move and our last. We stood at our landing window looking out towards the trees of Ashridge as dusk fell and watched as the lights came on and the townsfolk of Berkhamsted settled down for the night. Our experience of the last few hours had indicated to us already that Berkhamsted was a lovely place to live.

Waitrose

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby comments:

Not much has been written in '*The Citizen*' over the new extension. It was a different story when Waitrose, or Kingsgate as it was known then, was proposed in the early 90's. The new extension is aimed primarily at providing an improved shopping environment for existing customers. This reminded me our 1993 September newsletter. His Enthusiastic Shopper introduced Eric Hoey, the editor, who called himself a misfit, a non-consumer in a consumerist society, to the new Sainsburys in Apsley. E.S. pointed out what a magnificent store it was with its large choice with its 650 packets of Kellogg's cornflakes. He wanted to know which packet to take. There were similar quantities of Rice Crispies and All Bran. How could that be improved choice he queried. His mind boggled at the monumental attack of constipation, which would require the consumption of 650 packets of All Bran. He thought the store could be improved if the trolleys could be motorised as he thought the southern end of the store was somewhere in Somerset. Eric also made reference to the serried rows of heavily sprayed and beautifully packed cabbages. Does any of this ring a bell? -
However, all Waitrose's bananas are now Fairtrade.

Local Elections

Committee member, Susan Johnson, has a view:

The Elections on 3rd May in Dacorum turned out to be more exciting than was originally intended. Rather than concentrating on voter swing or the number of bin collections one received, most of the publicity was centred on whether 12,000 or so postal votes with the wrong instructions enclosed were a challenge to local democracy, or merely to individual powers of observation. The Dacorum Chief Executive apologised profusely and there was some tutting amongst those who have *never* made a typing error in their lives, but the outcome seemed not to have been affected. The Borough generally went a deeper shade of blue, except in Tring. There, the Lib-Dems held on and consolidated their control.

Berkhamsted Town Council changed drastically, as it has in recent elections. Now, instead of a 14 to 1 Lib-Dem majority, we have a 12 to 3 Conservative one. I do not really understand why Berkhamsted, almost alone amongst the parished areas, swings so violently. After the upset of the Berkhamsted First revolution the town seemed to get a taste for it. I am sure it is good for democracy, but not for continuity of policy. We must wait to see whether the newly-constituted Council will take a radically different direction.

The Borough Council has a dilemma which *is* about democracy. Under its present rules, Cabinet decisions can only be 'called in' for scrutiny with 10 signatures on the paper. The Opposition, even if it is united (5 Lib-Dems and 2 Labour) cannot muster enough on its own. Will the new Council change the rules, or smugly steamroller everything through? Is this bowing to the electoral mandate; or challenging the rights of the (albeit small) minority? Will individual conscience make a welcome comeback?

I am sure that we on the Citizens – a non-political organisation – will always leave our personal leanings at the door. We have now, as in previous years, a councillor on our Committee and politically-active persons in our midst. However our membership can be assured that this organisation works together for the general well-being of the town, whatever colour (or none) we personally might favour.

Berkhamsted Access Committee

Norman Cutting attends and reports:

We understand from WH Smith that the works required to improve access to the basement will be carried out before the end of the year (another result!). The Marlowes Centre in Hemel only allows ½ price parking for disabled people who use shopmobility, so we have made our concerns known due to discrimination - watch this space. We are trying to get Waitrose to modify their new layout to aid the disabled. For example the position of the scales and vegetable racks are proving difficult to use. HSBC bank are having problems to improve access, and they are blaming the planning system so the access officer is investigating and will report back.

If you have an access problem in the town, get in touch and more information on the 'berko.org.uk' web-site.

Dacorum Environment Forum

Norman Cutting reports:

The latest meeting had, amongst other items, a report from the Environment Agency and one updating us on the 'civic zone' (now renamed) in Hemel Hempstead.

The Environment Agency reported that the aquifer levels are now back to normal, and once the Cow Roast pumping station finally stops extracting water in the autumn, all will be well.

The major presentation of the evening was an outline of the plans for the area of Hemel Hempstead bounded by Queensway to the Market Square and Marlowes to Leighton Buzzard Road. It is proposed, to have the new Civic Centre, bus station, car parking, cinema, supermarket, college, arts centre (to replace the old 'Pavilion'), other leisure facilities (restaurant/bar etc), keep the 'green feel' to the area and provide around 1000 dwellings. This will be self funding and completed by 2015.

As you all know, I am not one to have concerns about ambitious projects, but I think it fair to say that most who were in attendance, shared my feeling that it might get scaled down in the fullness of time.

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

The main highlight for the Town Amenities Sub-Committee this time of the year is the environment award.

John Cook wrote the script, took the photographs and projected the slides.

I did the presentation of the words and Chairman Rita Jones made the presentation of the awards.

A plaque to Castle Mill, a very highly commended certificate to Headlands House and a special commendation certificate to the Skateboard Park. A big thank you to all involved with the marking and those involved at the AGM on 21 March. Being part of the historic record of the town the slides will be lodged with their predecessors in the heritage store.

On normal planning matters we sent a representative to the developer's presentation regarding the New Lodge site opposite Hall Park for 50 dwellings 40% of which will be 'affordable'. We await formal plans. At 208 High Street, 'The Bloc', we expressed concern regarding retention of the seating at this narrow part of the paving near the pedestrian crossing.

We understand there are proposals for a "green gym" along the canal and this committee supports the idea. As always if any members want to put their thoughts forward to us please phone me on 01442 873548.

It is with great sadness I have received Hilary Talbot-Ponsonby's resignation from the Committee. Her hard work and diligence looking at the planning applications and her work marking the environment award over many years has been invaluable. In the 13 or so years I have been Chairman of TASC she added to every debate and although I did not always agree with her, that is the role of a active Committee member and of course not everyone agrees with my views. Quite right too. Hilary tells me she has been looking at planning applications since 1960 with both the Council and the BCA.

All I can say in conclusion is thank you for all you have done and enjoy the rest of your retirement.

Contributions to:

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Edited and compiled by Norman Cutting

Membership Matters

By Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

We need your help. How can we increase our membership? Please let us know.

In March, I asked you to encourage a friend or neighbour to join. As a result, we have recruited one new member. Thank you for trying. We still have a long way to go to achieve our aim of 500. As Membership Secretary, I intend to give a prize (out of my own pocket) to the member who has helped recruit the largest number of members. The member who recruited in March will be included. There will also be an extra lucky draw for one of the new members. Please can you continue to persuade your friends or neighbours to send me £5 together with their name and address (together with your name if you wish to be included in the competition).

Membership currently stands at 443 household members which is one down since March.

There are currently 35 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a third request would have been enclosed with this newsletter.

If you have paid and have still been sent a reminder, please contact me.

If you are one of the 160 who have now paid, thank you.

Memory plays tricks

Norman Cutting is getting old!

Like many readers, I take the 'Berkhamsted Review' (used to have an excellent contributor on Council matters!) and was reading Christopher Greens' article on our Post Offices.

I seem to recall that Claridge Court was built on the site of the main Post Office and sorting office in Lower Kings Road.

In fact, when I was a lad, Lower Kings Road was a hive of activity with all sorts of useful shops like a record store, newsagent, Express Dairy, biscuit shop and a fruit and vegetable shop on one corner and 'sweetie' shop on the other.

Strangely, dates don't seem to relate - it's just a period, like Sainsburys, Currys, the coffee 'bar' next to the Town Hall, Woolworths etc.

I know Sainsburys and Currys were not here at the same time, but they were here in living memory.

Let's have your 'living memories - please!

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