

The Citizen



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

March 2009

Annual General Meeting

NOTICE is hereby given that the 84th Annual General Meeting of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be held in the Wellcome Great Hall of the Town Hall, Berkhamsted, on

Thursday 12th March 2009 at 8 pm.

Nominations for the posts of Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Hon. Treasurer, Hon. Secretary, Hon. Membership Secretary, Independent Examiner and Committee Members should be submitted to the Hon. Secretary (Miranda Cummins, 27 North Road, Berkhamsted, HP4 3DU) not later than 24 hours before the AGM. Consent of the person nominated must be obtained previously.

Agenda

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Apologies for absence | 5. Election of Officers |
| 2. Minutes of the last AGM | 6. Election of Committee Members |
| 3. Chairman's Report | 7. Appointment of Independent Examiners |
| 4. Treasurer's Report | 8. Any other business |

Following a short break to include **wine or fruit juice and 'nibbles'**:

BCA Environment Awards 2009

There were a number of nominations for the Environment Award for the year 2008 representing a wide variety of entries. The selected shortlist below will be illustrated at the award presentation prior to the winners being announced.

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| 1. 38 Castle Hill: | Demolish existing garage/kitchen. Build extensions. |
| 2. 9 Upper Hall Park: | Rear, side and front extensions. New vehicle access. |
| 3. 52, 54 Gossoms End: | Two new semi-detached houses with parking and access. |
| 4. Stag Lane - to date: | 150 new dwellings, parking, access and landscaping. |
| 5. The Chilterns, Stoney Close: | Demolition of building and construction of 26 flats in three blocks. |
| 6. 25-27 Shrublands Road: | Demolition of the old Hospice and construct 16 flats with parking. |
| 7. 12 Torrington Road: | Construction of four houses and eight flats. |
| 8. Little Bridge Road: | 4 maisonettes and associated parking. |
| 9. Collegiate School, Haslam Fields, Shootersway: | Construction of changing room pavilion. |
| 10. Linden House, 224 High Street: | Restoration of doorway. |
| 11. 10, North Road: | Side and rear extensions. |
| 12. Mount Pleasant/Crabtree, Gossoms End: | 4 new townhouses. |
| 13. 5 & 6 Billet Lane: | 2 semi-detached dwellings. |
| 14. Alpines, Tower Close: | New detached dwelling. |
| 15. The Great Barn, Castle Hill: | Barn Conversion. |

Then:

With the latest concerns with the 'local' health facilities, we are hoping to have a speaker (or two) from the local hospital trust, to give us the latest information.

At the time of writing, we have not confirmed this so please check with the various notice boards around the town and/or our web-site nearer the date for the very latest information.

Followed by:

Open Forum

Finally there will be an Open Forum in which members will be able to ask questions and make comments. It is hoped that as many members as possible will stay to make this a lively end to the proceedings!

Chairman's Column

Firstly a big thank you to those members who took the trouble to reply to my "challenge" of whether we still care for our community. There still appears to be a consensus that Berkhamsted is a good place to live despite the constant outside pressures that threaten the benefits of living here. There is real concern however that the infrastructure is not being addressed by the authorities to cope with the inexorable increase in population and thus the extra housing that will be built.

In the last several years I reckon there have been very few, if any, new medical practices, extra school places or material improvements in traffic management and parking. These are obvious factors but what about the long-term hidden needs such as bigger utility supplies (gas, water, electricity and rubbish disposal)? There is, I suspect, an inherent belief that the infrastructure will only be expanded after more people have moved here and after more houses have been built. The recession may slow down the problem but it doesn't solve it. Please keep up the pressure on both the town and Borough councils not to lose sight of this extremely important element of our environment.

In the last few weeks I have sometimes wondered whether we (the citizens) can actually care for our town. Some members have expressed the fear that our Association has no influence or ability to stand up to issues that affect us; sadly a few have resigned as they see no benefit in remaining with us. This is potentially defeatist if you are able and willing to take a stand when and where relevant.

Please encourage your friends and neighbours to support us. It is frustrating when the Town Council agrees with us (or us with them) only to have the

initiative or proposal dashed by Dacorum; I guess I just asked the question of whether Dacorum cares for Berkhamsted? To be fair they have supported some issues but their hands are also tied by central government and I don't intend opening up that discussion here!

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones - Chairman reports:

On this snowy, February day, the fascinating story from our last talk, Redbournbury Watermill, from the Doomsday Book to its recent restoration after a devastating fire, and the delicious bread made from its flour, are a distant memory. Tours of the mill can be arranged and we hope we can organise something in conjunction with our Midsummer Ramble. We may have to change the date, but watch this space.

Thursday April 2nd.

The final talk in this series has changed slightly from the talk in the programme. Danny Bonnett and David Brown arranged a presentation covering a general update on The Environment, using evidence from the United Nations Environment Programme, developments in Berkhamsted's Transition Town status and a few new ideas related to these topics. Since I planned these talks, the world has changed, affecting the way we work and live. Please don't think, 'Not the environment again'. The environment and sustainability may have an even greater effect on the way we work and live in the future, as some jobs disappear or become less important, and replacements have to be found. Come along to hear the evidence for (or against) some of the claims, perhaps to challenge some of the ideas, or to discuss some of your own, and to be entertained. As usual, 8pm in the Sessions Hall with coffee, tea and biscuits to sustain you.

New Year's Day ramble - Tony Statham joins the group

As is customary, members and guests met for our New Year's Day Ramble at 10:30 am outside Berkhamsted Station and were led into the countryside by our most reliable map guide, Bill Willett. This was my first full attempt at the event since a knee replacement about 18 months ago and it was a wonderful endorsement that some things in our health service turn out exceptionally well. I was delighted to greet over 40 walkers from 8 (or a little older) to 80 (or a little younger) and we set off up Castle Hill admiring the splendid barn conversion at the top of the ridge. A well-guided route took us across Northchurch Common and ultimately down into Aldbury via Tom's Hill.

We arrived at the two local pubs for welcome lunchtime refreshment competing with a jolly crowd of Morris dancers and their followers. While these traditional folk are a quirky element of the English countryside and apparently under threat of disappearing, it was an entertaining interlude during our journey. A challenging climb out of the village up to the Bridgewater Monument started our return back through Ashridge and finally to our starting point by about 3:30 pm. This was a splendid way to start the New Year and while we face a good deal of uncertainty in the current economic climate, a great chance to clear the head and generate optimism for the months ahead; even better, walking doesn't cost anything!

Is this the time to change our ways?

Norman Cutting gets on his high horse - again!

I'm not sure how to put this. The down turn in the economy has had an effect on the town as I see it.

I noticed the reduction in cars moving around the town over the Christmas period, and put it down to residents taking their usual 3 week break in the Alps or Bognor or wherever and life will return to normal in the middle of January. What seems to have happened is that the usual 'school run' still takes place, but cars are clogging up the roads by just 'being there'.

In my bit of town (other end to where you are!), Ravens Lane is now, in effect, a one-way road - not sure how long the new surface will last - and Beech Drive is also filled up. The County Council have finally discovered that cars actually block Swing Gate Lane and are introducing parking restrictions. Not to worry though, Woodlands Avenue is currently unrestricted so plenty of space there, as in Lombardy Drive and Cedar Road.

This brings me on to the main point of this short filler piece. The Borough Council have already spotted this trend as takings are down in their car parks (sad or what?). The solution is naturally to increase prices to cover the costs of enforcement. I remember, as will most of you, that the fees are set to be revenue neutral as the point is to encourage turnover of spaces and not be a money maker. It's also the law that highways are for 'traversing', not for parking of vehicles. Naturally, there has to be a degree of common sense as we really don't want yellow lines everywhere, but the average motorist seems to have left common sense at home once they get behind the wheel. Cars are parked on the footway, across junctions causing blind spots and the current Citizens Association 'we want action' complaint is the vehicles churning up the grass verge outside Lagley House. These vehicles used to park outside the old offices on the other side of the road, but once that was sold for housing, then they just moved. As there are no waiting restrictions in place and the road is wider than most in the town, it begs the question - why park on the grass?

It just seems acceptable for motorists for use the footway - aka footpath or place for pedestrians - to leave their box on wheels as there is no enforcement of the law. I was once brought home by a colleague who just drove straight on the footway outside my house to let me out. I just asked why and she gently reversed and came forward and stopped parallel to the kerb. 'Sorry', she said, 'it's habit' - she knows my views!

Perhaps the Borough Council could leave parking charges as they are and enforce some of the other little highway rules to bring the books back into balance. I can already hear the cries of 'Where are we supposed to park then?'. The answer is actually in our own hands. I know of residents who occupy small terraced cottages without a garage or anywhere to park a vehicle and actually have two cars. Garages are left without a vehicle inside, even when attached to your home.

You will notice that I haven't suggested that you shouldn't have your own personal transport system, but a little more thought would help everybody. We are lucky in Berkhamsted as we have reasonably good local bus service compared with others. My elderly step-father lives on an estate up a hill with limited access, so he dreads the day when he can't drive. The only bus I've found runs every two weeks by request. The town he lives in? Hemel, of course. So think yourselves lucky and try to change your motoring ways (even if you travel to London everyday!).

Berkhamsted Access Committee

Norman Cutting attends and reports:

The most recent meeting was held on 12th December 2008 (next one 20th March 2009) in the Civic Centre meeting room on the 1st floor.

Main points were that the Lower Kings Road disabled bays still haven't been sorted and the Borough Council will be chased. HSBC access improvements are slowly grinding forwards, but we did get W H Smiths' lower floor access sorted eventually! The Access Officer, John Gavin, updated the committee on Hemel and Tring problems/solutions.

Problems were drawn to the attention of the Committee regarding Greene Field Road which is the usual exit from the Water Lane car park - potholes and careless parking (usual defects all over the town!). If you, a friend or a relative suffer from a disability and have problems getting about, then why not get involved and something might be able to get done to help you and others in the town. For more information drop either myself or John a line, telephone 228000 for John or myself on 871851 or come along on 20th March at 3pm for a warm welcome.



A member spotted this latest example of the total disregard, by our friends at the County Council, for the setting of a listed building in the conservation area .

Members may wish to comment to
HCC Highways or our County
Councillor

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

One of the most recent planning events is the Site Allocations Supplementary Issues and Options Paper issued by the Borough Council.

We responded on behalf of the Association saying we were unable to particularly support any of the proposed travellers/gypsy sites around the town which all have problems of location not just for the town but any future residents.

As far as new areas for residential development, we have objected to reference 'Be/h 2a land east of Swing Gate Lane' due to loss of valuable rural Landscape. All other proposed development land was supported.

Following the granting of green flag status to Canal Fields the Borough Council has applied to itself (the planning department) to put up a new aluminium 8 metre flag pole to show off the new green flag. The site chosen was near the entrance to the football ground despite the BCA objecting to this waste of money.

DBC granted themselves permission with the proviso that location was discussed with Town Council. Their preferred location was at the north end of the bridge near the car park. We emailed the Town Council to support this location to be told the siting was still in the control of DBC and any movement of site would need a further planning application and this would cost money they did not have.

Why is it that local government officers know what is best for Berkhamsted, such as the fitness trail which has ended up as a small fitness circle. Anyway Nanny knows best.

We have written to DBC to ask if they will replant 2 trees in Lime Walk between Castle Hill and Castle Hill Avenue to complete a currently broken line. We have copied to Town Council and the Berkhamsted Community Partnership for support which we have heard may be forthcoming. On the Partnership I am currently the BCA representative and the Chairman is our own Chairman Tony Statham. Committee members, David Collins (Town Mayor) and Jenny Habib represent the Town Council and Chiltern Society respectively. If there are any matters members want to address on this important body please direct them through me on 01442 873548.

The latest on the canal footpath disaster near the Crystal Palace is that the contractors will return in better weather.

Contributions to:

The Citizen

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E-mail: bca@berko.org.uk

Web site: <http://www.bcacitizen.org.uk>

Edited and compiled by Norman Cutting

Membership Counts

By Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

Did you know that our Association has the largest number of 'paid up' members in the town? Membership currently stands at 419 households, but worryingly this is 18 (4%) down on this time last year. I have no record of membership numbers pre-1983, but it then stood at 454.

As we have consistently said it's not just going to meetings, or receiving newsletters, but it is to help us have an influence in what we say. It is therefore very important that we maintain our membership because if it continues to fall we may no longer be listened to. A former member disagrees. He said that "We are more than ever ruled not only by local government but by central government as well. Any influence that an association such as that operated by the citizens is not only marginal but also moribund." Whereas a 94 year old has renewed with a three year subscription offering to man the barricades with our chairman to protect our trees. What do you think?

There are currently 89 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a second reminder would have been enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you to the 140 members who have already recently paid. You know what the Citizens Association do. Please ask a friend and or a neighbour if they are members. If not, encourage them to join by sending me £5 along with their name and address.

Three of our faithful deliverers have had to give up. I am grateful to them and all our deliverers for what they do, many of whom collect subscriptions as well. Thank you on behalf of all the committee.

Yet another Hospital update by Norman Cutting

As we go to press, we hear that the Hemel Hempstead 'General Hospital' location will be decided by the Trust by the end of March 2009.

They have also decided to reconsider the 'unreconsiderable' called the Hemel birthing unit and a 3 month 'consultation' period will have to take place.

There is now a little, but growing, doubt over funding for the 'new' Watford Hospital. This should be interesting as a new 'Trust' is due to be in place with different ideas in about 4 years time.

Past Chairman and Activities sub-Committee Chairman, Rita Jones, attended another secret Primary Care Trust meeting regarding Foundation status. Guess what? She was the only member of the public who attended!

Due to lack of space*, some 'regular' items have been held over to the next issue.

So watch your letterbox!

** My fault, my short filler expanded!*

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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