

The Citizen



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

March 2010

Annual General Meeting

NOTICE is hereby given that the 85th Annual General Meeting of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be held in the Wellcome Great Hall of the Town Hall, Berkhamsted, on

Thursday 11th March 2010 at 8 p.m.

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

BCA Environment Awards 2009

2009 was a difficult year for everyone, particularly the construction industry. A small number of suggestions were put forward, but the Committee decided that, for this year only, it would look at these together with the ones completed in 2010 for next year's awards. As a result, John Cook has kindly agreed to give a short talk on past developments featured for the awards complete with illustrated slides.

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

Open Forum

Finally there will be an Open Forum in which members will be able to ask questions and make comments. We are particularly interested in your ideas on how the Association can help improve your town.

It is hoped that as many members as possible will stay to make this a lively end to the proceedings!

Chairman's comments

Oh dear! It's all there – snow, lack of salt, lack of gritting, the winter weather is not “global warming” nor “climate change”, failure to collect rubbish (because of weather or Christmas or both), return of the station car-park level two (horror movie?), etc., etc. Well, it's all happened before and we know our ancestors coped and we know we have coped in the past. Does the media wind it/us all up to a frenzy? We do hear, however, of many tales of people helping friends, neighbours and strangers in adverse circumstances so let us hope and acknowledge that typical British stoicism endures and defuses/dilutes the ailments of our society. Life goes on and everything usually gets back to normal (whatever that is!).

I am not looking for sympathy or similar, but my year started with a near miss on setting fire to my home, a loss of my computer for over a month (“thanks” to PC World), loss of the e-mail address I had cherished for nearly 9 years (“thanks” to SKY), running out of oil because “we can't guarantee a delivery date” (even two weeks in advance), loss of electricity in half my home (cause unknown at present) and all this on top of the monster fly tip in my drive that happened towards the end of last year.

I am still here, life goes on and my new e-mail address is listed on the back page.

Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones, Chairman, reports:

Oriental Rugs Brighten a Damp Evening

Robert Aigin of Gallery Nomad brightened what must have been one of the wettest nights of 2009 with a selection of beautiful and colourful oriental carpets. Some 30 members and friends braved the heavy rain and enormous puddles for a most entertaining and informative talk and informal discussion about carpets and their identification; some bringing along their own for identification. Even though we discovered that some 'silk' carpets were actually mercerised cotton, one of the messages we took away was that the pleasure objects gave us was more important than their value. My thanks to everyone for coming on such a depressing evening but my especial thanks to Robert Aigin for making it so worthwhile.

A Snow Covered Ramble

Snow still lay on the ground when about 30 members and friends (plus 5 or 6 dogs), set off on January 1st for our traditional Ramble to Aldbury and back. The sun shone, it was quite cold, and attention was needed as it was often slippery; not just the snow, but also the churned up mud where the snow had melted. The trees in the sun and snow were beautiful, the Monument and Aldbury busy and jolly with Morris Dancers. About 18 took the walk back, and Bill Willett was, as usual, an entertaining and informative leader. Our thanks, once more, to him. I hope many of you will join us on the summer ramble on Sunday, June 6th, starting at 10.30am in front of the station and going to Cholesbury (and back).

'World Finance'

Before the ramble, we have our final talk of the season, by chairman Tony Statham, who will enlighten us on 'World Finance'. Come and find out more on Thursday, April 8th, in the Sessions Hall from 8pm.

Membership Matters

by Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

Our Membership is in a sorer state than it was this time last year as it now stands at 403. This includes the 4 members who have joined since the last newsletter. I have no record of membership numbers before 1983 when it stood at 454.

(Ed - 1974 just under 500 paid up members and rose to the 600s in the early 1990s, although members now include households)

As we have consistently said "It's not just going to meetings, or receiving newsletters, but it is to help us have an influence and a 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 disagreed and said that "We are more than ever ruled not only by local government but by central government as well. Any influence of an association such as that operated by the citizens is not only marginal but also moribund."

What do you think?

There are currently 61 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a second reminder will be enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you to the 140 members who have already recently paid.

You know what the Citizens Association does. 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. Shall we try and get it back to the same level as it was two years ago?

On behalf of the Committee, I would like to say a very big thank you to all the deliverers, whom we are apt to take for granted, for both delivering and on many occasions, collecting the subscriptions as well. It makes my life all that more easy. Several have certainly been doing it for 25 years.

Gritted teeth (rather than roads)

Susan Johnson shows her true colours

I am definitely turning into a Grumpy Old Woman. I have been emailing poor Councillor Ian Reay (our county councillor) about priorities on the gritting front. Herts Highways could not even manage the bus route up from the High Street into Cross Oak Road; or the access to the doctor's surgery in Boxwell Road. It seems the steeper the road, the less gritting took place. Councillor Reay rightly pointed to grit shortages and rationing, but I am concerned about choices – in a town which is largely built on steep slopes and is inaccessible when it is icy. It's not so much the going down, as the inability to get back up. Still, we managed – we walked. He did say that Berkhamsted Town Council would be collating all comments on this subject to submit to Herts Highways to contribute to a full scale review later in the year.

Please send your comments to the Clerk on [Berkhamsted.towncouncil@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:BerkhamstedTownCouncil@dacorum.gov.uk) or on a piece of paper. If enough Berkhamsted residents make their voices heard, we might get a little more attention next time. Even if it is for 2030.

Hospital Update - Norman has been wading!

The experiment of closing local A& E departments has been such a success that London is the latest area to discover the advantages that this brings, with plans to introduce 'polyclinics'. Sound familiar?

The Trust Board had a meeting on 26th January, but I just couldn't make it. It might have had something to do with the last couple I've attended where you are informed of the decisions made previously and the public input is minimal. I did, however, get provided with a copy of the independent review of the services now provided by the West Herts Hospital Trust and, naturally, you would love to know what both the review and myself think of our local General Hospital Services. The review was taken during Sept/Oct 2009.

Continues on

www.bcacitizen.org.uk/news/cit0310.pdf

Litter Update - Colin Garrett

In the September edition of *The Citizen* amongst the editor's odds and ends, he mentioned my campaign to get litter off the residential streets of Berkhamsted. The result was fewer 'phone calls than I had hoped. However, one of them was from the Chairman so I know that a good example is being set from the top. So far we have 42 volunteers but more are needed particularly in the streets that lead from Charles Street down to the High Street, Cowper Road, Park View Road, Boxwell Road and Kings Road itself. They are short streets but need regular attention. I am happy to say that some roads in the town attract so little litter that I will not look for a resident to help keep them tidy.

For about a month our activities were somewhat curtailed by the snow, but what a mess it revealed when it thawed ! Any further offers to help deal with it will be gratefully received by e-mail at xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx or by 'phone on 866694.

Christmas Shop Window Competition

In association with Berkhamsted Town Council, we sponsored and judged the Best Christmas Shop Window, looking at all premises in the High Street and in Lower Kings Road.

All the winners are presented with certificates, by the Chairman of the BCA, Tony Statham, at the Berkhamsted Festival of Light on Sunday 6th December and the overall winner is also presented with a cup, which they can display in their window for the duration of the Christmas period.

The judges felt the standard of window displays was, as ever, generally extremely good, and some new entrants this year made the choice difficult, but the overall winners, for a second year in a row, were **Lisa Kay** of High Street. Their witty and inventive display of Christmas meerkats brought a smile to everyone's faces, as well as displaying their goods to the best advantage.

The runners-up were:

Number Twenty, Lower Kings Road

Peter John, High Street

at home dot com, High Street

There's an election coming!

We are hoping to once again arrange a hustings for the major candidates sometime in the month prior to the event - Watch for posters and our web-site for details.

Editorial - Norman Cutting is still thinking!

Shock Horror, Snow in winter!

Yes, I know the climate is supposed to be changing. I know we missed out on the 'barbecue summer'. I know we were promised a 'mild and wet' winter. I know the we paid £billions to the metrological office to have a purpose built complex with one of the most powerful computers in the world in sunny Exeter, as the Bracknell facility did not provide accurate enough forecasts for the 21st century.



Swing Gate Lane
(left)
Gravel Path
(Right)



Continues on

www.bcacitizen.org.uk/news/cit0310.pdf

Bins laden (couldn't resist this title)

Susan Johnson did warn us!

People seem to get very upset when weather disrupts the bin collections. Understandably? Probably, if you have little room to store rubbish securely and where you cannot smell it. But such fury? There seem more important things to fume about when set beside, for instance, the state of the public borrowing requirement, or the Haitian relief effort.

Bin men really do their best in the most appalling weather, and sometimes they cannot keep up the standards we expect. When it's minus 7, I tend to sympathise. But one thing has annoyed me, and it's about DBC's priorities.

I am a dedicated recycler and, despite having three grey bin collections since just before Christmas, we have not had one green bin collection since 9th December (I write this late January) despite their being scheduled and the snow having melted. I am told this is because black bins are overflowing. Forgive me, but is not Christmas and New Year the easiest time to fill a green bin? Even if we have little in the way of garden rubbish, are there not acres of cardboard and packaging, wreaths and bits of tree, and food scraps to feed the five thousand? I have a green bin full, ten extra green bags and I am still having to collect cardboard in my utility room.

Am I alone?

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck reports:

Many thanks to Tony Statham (Chairman) for stepping into the breach as I forgot to do the last newsletter report.

We are disappointed that the Environment Award plaque for 2008 has not been put up and we are working to get this done. Regarding the 2009 competition, there were so few projects started and completed we will hold these over to this year and will have instead an illustrated talk by John Cook on the history of the award which will be a fine treat for the AGM.

Two private parking signs at Lincoln Court, Charles Street have appeared in the conservation area; we have objected to the Borough Council.

A group has been formed called "Save our Berkhamsted" to lobby specifically against housing developments at the top of Durrants Lane and a travellers' site off Shootersway. Although the consultation period has finished we hope to foster closer links and hopefully get some members to join our TASC and main Committee.

The boatyard has been sold so we can hope it will have suitable development on the site.

Paperless planning -*Susan Johnson isn't so sure*

DBC's Planning Department is having another go at getting agreement for paper copies of plans to be a thing of the past. The idea is that it all goes virtual and there will be nothing to see at the Town Council's offices, except on a screen at a council Planning Committee.

You will either have to look on line at home, or at the Library; or go to Hemel to see a paper copy. (So the good citizens of Hemel are not going to be disadvantaged!) Tough if you do not have a computer or know how to use one. I have one, and know how to use it, but I do not relish looking at big plans on a titchy screen, or trying to compare one with the other, flicking backwards and forwards. And as for coping with a series of plans ... I have yet to see BTC's reaction to this, but I intend to argue that they have a duty to their parishioners (especially the elderly ones and the technophobes) to ensure a paper copy is available for scrutiny at their offices.

Councillors may be computer buffs, but many of those they represent are not. It's great to see plans in glorious colour on a screen in a meeting, but that does not preclude their availability beforehand on a table on paper.



Hilary Talbot-Ponsonby
1915 -2010

From Gordon Bluck

It is with great sadness I learnt of the death of Hilary Talbot-Ponsonby. This sadness is tempered with the knowledge that she had such a full life, vital war work at Bletchley Park, local Councillor, National Council of Women and of course the BCA (a past Chairman), the list goes on and on. She and her late husband still found time to bring up their family. I am sure that others will put her important life in context far better than me. Although she resigned from TASC a few years ago, she was a vital part of the Committee and as Chairman, I was always ready to hear her views although I did not necessarily agree with them. Always keeping me on my toes she was just the person we needed with her experience and knowledge. She was sadly missed when she resigned.

From Susan Johnson

I would like to add my personal tribute to her. She was an inspiration to me when I started my BCA activities. I remember chatting to her over my front garden gate in Boxwell Road over twenty years ago and thinking that I could contribute to local life as she did. I had yet to return to local government work but I had two children at a local school and I had been Chairman of the local branch of the NCT. I loved talking to Hilary – about her war at Bletchley Park, her time on the Urban District Council, her family – and latterly giving her a lift to TASC meetings, right up until two years ago. I will miss her company, her wisdom and her sense of fun.

The December 1999 profile is included in:
www.bcacitizen.org.uk/news/cit0310.pdf

Contributions/letters/comments to:
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Web site: <http://www.bcacitizen.org.uk>
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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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Independent Hospital report continued

Remember we are starting from the point agreed by the West Herts Trust that all services would remain at Hemel until the new facilities are fully functional at the Watford site. Wrong! Apparently all is not ready, but Hemel has been closed for services transferred anyway.

Remember that concerns were expressed on the travelling time and how people might not make it to Watford. Wrong! You die either before the journey begins or when you get to hospital. Patients do not die in an ambulance.

Remember the 4 hour waiting time? Up to 8 Ambulances were seen by the Independent report writers queuing outside the AAU (not A&E, you note). Nothing to do with the clock starting when patients attend reception I suppose?

I can remember being assured by the Chief Executive, Jan Filochowski, when I queried what would happen to Dacorum (including Berkhamsted and Tring) patients, who currently have reasonably easy access to Hemel Hempstead, who might like visitors after being stuck in hospital for a week or two, that patients would only be in Watford for 48 hours maximum before either being discharged or transferred to Hemel having been stabilised.

Indeed the layout of Watford confirms this attitude. Generators providing power, temporary 'modular' buildings acting as wards, no day room or ward televisions. Only small difficulties. The Independent report highlights are things like noise, nowhere for patients to be actually transferred to, no real facilities for intermediate care, no discharges over the weekend as staff are just not available.

It was noted that the Watford facility is working at full capacity and management are pleased that being so efficient must mean they are providing good value for money - which, naturally, is the whole point. Not sure how the additional 20,000+ residents expected in Dacorum along over the next few years are going to be handled though.

Concerns such as car parking, different organisations occupying the same 'reception area' and other minor operational difficulties are being addressed - it says, even going as far as trying to get the various 'service providers' to talk to each other. For example, car parking should be resolved in the design of the new Hemel 'branch', but the generators have been removed (so much for everything being ready at site 1 before shifting from site 2). The discharge arrangements will be raised with others as will actually providing customers with suitable medication.

Generally, the independent report feels that the West Herts Hospital Trust is coping with the usual little



Hilary Talbot-Ponsonby
1915 -2010

Chairman of Berkhamsted Citizens Association, member of the old Urban District Council, school governor, founder member of the Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust - these are just some of the roles in which Hilary has served the community of Berkhamsted and Northchurch over many years.

She joined the BCA Committee in 1972, was chairman in 1976 and 1977 and membership secretary from 1979 to 1981, the job which her son, Christopher now does. Her late husband Evelyn was chairman before her.

A qualified architect, Hilary was for many years particularly helpful in vetting and commenting on planning applications and still offered advice as she considered necessary to the Amenities Sub-Committee.

Among her other interests were the National Council of Women of Great Britain where she was on the Transport Permanent Working Party with special interest in Railways and Bicycles. She was President of the Northchurch Derby and Joan Club.

Hilary has been honoured for her services to the town by being made a patron of the Town Hall Trust and a life member of the BCA.

Hilary died on 7th January and the funeral service took place on 19th January at St Marys Church, Northchurch.

difficulties that 'customers' are prone to provide due to not fitting the expected 'profile' that management planned for. The Trust provide the answers expected when questioned and the data does look good, with mortality rates dropping and patient experiences rated highly. Compliance with Patient Reported Outcome Measures (proms) was over 96% which must be good. I get the feeling that the fault lies with everyone else from customers actually wanting treatment to the attitude that hospitals do not need buildings (that was a comment by the CE when asked about the Hemel buildings at a 'consultation' meeting in the civic centre) as they are not what the Trust should be involved with.

The whole report runs to over 40 pages and available on:
(highlight and cut'n'past link below)

[http://www.wherts-pct.nhs.uk/Documents/getinvolved/Board/2010/january/DPerformance Board Report _West_ Jan10 final BF version.pdf](http://www.wherts-pct.nhs.uk/Documents/getinvolved/Board/2010/january/DPerformance%20Board%20Report_West_Jan10%20final%20BF%20version.pdf)

OK, so we live on an island and without the weather to talk about, we would be stuck for something to say. However - snow is snow and we live in the Chiltern Hills with the operative word being 'Hills'. We live in an affluent park of the country, pay a fair amount for the pleasure and expect something for our money.

The first snow came just before Christmas, we had about 6 to 8 inches and, I'll be honest, I was disappointed that more effort wasn't made to get roads cleared, but it was Christmas and to actually have snow was a novelty. It cleared away once the men got out and about and the shock of a weather forecast actually being correct wore off.

Then another warning of snow. The powers that be, obviously thought that it couldn't happen again, so not a lot got done. I think it's fair to say the town stopped dead. Only it stayed 'dead' for a couple of days. Cars slid down the hills on their own, Flattish bits of road became a car park for dented vehicles as drivers found that a couple of inches of snow coupled with just a single track road - either part of a cunning plan by county (Chesham Road) or allowing cars to park both sides of road with just enough room for a Mini Moke to get through without any manoeuvring space. I am also confident that residents will not learn from this experience! It all ended up alright though, as once the temperature started to rise 48 hours latter, the hills started to be closed 'due to the number of accidents'.

Meanwhile, neither the County Council, the Borough Council nor the Town Council came out of the situation with flying colours. I have suggested to the Town Council that perhaps a system could be put in place for the 15 elected Town Councillors to report in about their ward problems, during 'abnormal' times and the office staff could report up the chain so that suitable action taken quickly - even just a couple of cones across impassable hills would at least provide a warning. One chap I tried to help turn round in Chesham Road admitted he got as far as Hemel, found cars sliding all over the place on the hills and decided to come back home - via that well known flat road called Chesham Road and they kept trying to get up even though it was obvious cars were stuck!

Just to cheer you all up, I fell over and hurt my bum on that other well known neglected road, Swing Gate Lane service road. Don't know why, but DBC housing chucked a bit of salt on the paths leading to the various blocks of flats that they own (in the end!). They also own this service road and it gets absolutely nuffin apart from it's share of potholes! Needless to say my stupid dog completely ignored my predicament and just carried on practicing being a spaniel.

Do I have enough room to explain what went wrong over the snowy period with the refuse collection service? You bet. I'm the editor and have the last say!

The Borough say one thing, don't use the Internet or press to keep residents informed that things have changed, only for residents and staff to end up confused. I can only say that the expected phrase 'lessons will be learnt and it will not happen again' is not really good enough!

