

The Citizen



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

June 2010

Chairman's Column

Our new chairman, Susan Johnson, writes -

Well, here I am again! Two more years are an exhilarating prospect – for me, at least! I am honoured to be your Chairman again and hope I can lead the Association to greater membership numbers and a higher profile. We as an Association have been working hard for 86 years for the town, and that's worth building on and celebrating.

Very many thanks to my predecessor, Tony Statham, who has agreed to remain as Vice Chairman for a year while we sort out my successor. Our Committee generally could do with some additions (up to five spaces at present) and I urge any member who is interested in joining us to come along to a Committee meeting to see what we do. The next two meetings are on Wednesdays 26th May and 7th July respectively. They are held in private homes, so you will feel very welcome. Give me a call or email to book your seat.

Our AGM on 11th March was a pleasant evening. We had pleasure in awarding Jenny Sherwood life membership in recognition of her late husband and also her personal work as Chairman of the Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society. The Society is, after all, one of the BCA's babies. Our decision to cancel the Environment Award this year caused a bit of a kerfuffle in the press. It seemed to me to be a logical outcome of the building downturn – but the Gazette seemed shocked. And once more the headlines confused 'environment' with 'environmental'. Do the sub-editors read what their own reporters write? We have some good reporters in Berkhamsted (cheerio and good luck to Louisa Felton and welcome to David Tooley!) so it is a pity. Thanks to John Cook for the excellent, as ever, talk on the Award's history which took the ceremony's place. And thanks to all those who stayed to make the Open Forum worthwhile. The general mood was: be more assertive in delivering our opinions. Well, here goes, and I hope you meant it! As a result I wrote to the Gazette and spoke at the Berkhamsted Annual Town Meeting on 29th April saying the Association supported the Town Council in its welcoming the 2nd tier parking installation at the Station. This we feel is a necessary addition to the town centre's parking provision, where space is at a premium and on-street parking a nightmare for residents. The BCA is hoping to persuade Meteor Parking to reduce charges following its installation to encourage people to use the car park and the train. It is an important plank in DBC's on-street parking strategy and to promote train usage.

The Berkhamsted Annual Town Meeting was preceded by the annual Rotary Awards. One went to our own Colin Garrett for his work on doing and organising litter picking on residential roads: a well-deserved accolade. Attendance at the ATM itself was sparse (it clashed with the last Prime Ministerial TV debate) but those who did attend appreciated the presentations – particularly that by the Berkhamsted Youth Town Council. That, along with the Rotary Award to Benjamin Chambers, showed such a positive image of Berkhamsted's young people. The retiring Town Clerk, Colin Westwood, was also honoured by the Town Council after 11 years of great service to the town.

Our quickly-organised (thanks to Rita Jones, and posters courtesy of Katy Brookes-Duncan) Hustings on 28th April seemed much appreciated. Attendance was standing-room only and the audience seemed pleased we had invited all the candidates, whatever their platform or views. All but one attended (the Labour chap cited a previous engagement) and all were given, at the very least, a polite hearing. It is important that the public has a chance to see who wants to represent them for the next few years (months?) before voting again. The General Election's outcome was the hung parliament we had been led to expect, although our MP, David Gauke, was returned with an increased majority. What really pleased me was that the turnout here, at 72%, was one of the larger in the country. At least, I think it pleased me ... it could be regarded as disappointing that the average is so low. As I write we await the outcome of the horse-trading going on to form a government.

We have had some successes since the last newsletter was distributed. All the Environment Award plaques from previous years are up; our lime tree planting in Castle Avenue/Hill got publicity; and we won (at least temporarily) the Paperless Planning argument. But there has been one disappointment: the imminent demise of the Berkhamsted Community Partnership due to withdrawal of DBC funding. The Town Council will support it with funds until the end of June, and then presumably it will go. I am personally disappointed, as I was the first, and Tony Statham the second and present, Chairman. But the Association as an organisation is disappointed, as the Partnership attracted some £120,000 worth of investment into local projects, particularly on Canal Fields and in the Castle – funding not open to local authorities. We hope that the Town Council will be able to plug the gap with increased direct funding for community projects.

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Activities Sub-Committee

Rita Jones, Chairman, reports:

2010 opened, in February, with a full house for Ann Farrer's excellent talk on 'Red Kites in the Chilterns'. The birds, their history, the background to their disappearance from and re-introduction to the Chilterns and other parts of Britain, were illustrated with superb photographs. The success of the project can be seen in the sky above our town.

On April 8th, our Vice-Chairman, Tony Statham, gave an entertaining talk on "World Finance". Tony spent over forty years in international financial markets in roles spanning stock-broking and investment analysis to managing financial information. His talk was based on a training course he developed over several years. Avoiding the complexities of modern financial jargon, he covered essential markets ranging from foreign exchange (currencies), fixed-income securities (bonds and gilts), equities (stocks and shares) to a brief look at the global commodity markets, which include the "softs" or agricultural goods to metals including gold. Tony supported his talk with a number of "props" including a "gold bar", a "money tree" and both real and fake currency notes. Sadly, our only mementos were old style £5 notes – fakes!

The final 'activity' of the 2009/10 season is the Summer Ramble on Sunday June 6th to Cholesbury and back. Led, as usual, by Bill Willett, we meet outside Berkhamsted Station at 10.30 am, or you may join us along the route to Shooters Way. We hope to stop for lunch in Cholesbury; bring your own picnic if you wish. Anyone wanting to leave or join us there will have to use their own transport.

Our thanks to our speakers, leader of the rambles and all other helpers and Activity Committee members.

The new season opens with our contribution to The Berkhamsted Arts Trust Festival which runs from 1st to 24th October. This is 'An Evening with Richard Mabey' on 14th October at 8pm in the Great Hall. Could we fill it again? I hope so.

Other talks planned are 'The Journey of the Recyclables' on November 11th, "Is it hilly in Switzerland? – Tales of a Tour Manager" on February 10th and Stephen Hearn from Tring Market Auctions, provisionally as the date cannot be confirmed until later this year, on April 14th.

Meetings will take place in the Sessions Hall (apart from the October meeting) at 8 p.m. and coffee, tea and biscuits will be available from 7.45 p.m.

I have been chairman of the Activities Committee for about 10 years. Inevitably enthusiasm and inspiration wane, so I have decided that it is time to hand over to someone new. This will therefore be my last year. If anyone fancies taking on the organisation of our events, do please let our Chairman know.

Membership Matters

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

It has been the normal practice with this issue to enclose a list of Committee Members together with a list of Berkhamsted, Northchurch and Dacorum Councillors. However partially because your committee personnel remains unchanged and also because the Annual Council Meeting at the end of May has not yet taken place, we should not pre-empt the make up of their Committees or the name of the Mayor. Therefore the list will be issued later.

In the last two May Newsletters, I reported that the membership had dropped from 450 household memberships to 419. This last year, it has dropped still further to 403. On the more positive side, 32 subscriptions were then outstanding. At present it is 25. If you are one of those, a third request will have been enclosed with this newsletter. If you have paid and have still been sent a reminder, please let me know. Thank you to the 176 who have renewed their membership for this year, 65 paying for three years. This saves having to send out yearly reminders. We would like to welcome the member that joined at the beginning of May, our fifth since the beginning of the year.

Joining is 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.

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. It is as simple as that. It saves time and me not having to forward them a membership form. It would have be marvellous if we could return to the level we were this time in 2008 (450) but let us see if we can even attempt a more modest figure of 425.

Sixty Years of Preserving History

The Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society celebrates its 60th Anniversary

Jenny Sherwood, its Chairman, reminds us:

This year the *Berkhamsted Local History & Museum Society* celebrates the sixtieth anniversary of its foundation. One of the first major events of the newly formed Citizens Association in 1924 was a large exhibition entitled '*Bygone Berkhamsted*', which attracted many visitors. It remained a concern of a number of members of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association in 1950 that not enough was being done to protect and preserve items of local historic interest that led to the formation of the History Society, the *Berkhamsted & District Local History Society*, a name which it retained until very recently. Berkhamsted was fortunate in having several prominent local figures with the dedication, drive and persistence to see the Society through the early years and to ensure that it, albeit under a new name, is still flourishing today.

The Society has a large and growing membership and is actively involved in the community. It gives two prizes every year to pupils of Victoria School, the *Percy Birtchnell Memorial Prize*. It holds Heritage Open Days every September, has a permanent exhibition of old photographs in the Town Hall, relating to the history of the Market, the Town Hall and the Mechanics Institute. It has produced sixteen panels depicting the history of Berkhamsted Castle on display in the Castle Visitor Room, open Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holiday Mondays from 10am-6pm in the summer months. It provides guided tours of the Castle for schools and other groups and tours of the Castle and historic sites of the town for 'A Walk Back in Time' under the auspices of the Chiltern Conservation Board. This is in addition to the meetings and outings provided for members. Annually the Society's research journal, '*The Chronicle*' is produced and every three years a large exhibition is held.

Yet, we still do not have the desired museum for Berkhamsted. Our large collection is housed in museum conditions in the Dacorum Heritage Trust Museum Store, in Berkhamsted's former fire station, an accredited museum.

To celebrate our 60th anniversary we are staging a large exhibition, 'Sixty Years of Preserving History', in which visitors can look back over the years, see old photographs, some of the artefacts from our collection, and learn more of the Society's activities today. This runs from 29th June-3rd July 2010 from 10am-5pm in the Civic Centre, Berkhamsted. School parties are welcome, but must be booked in advance. Admission is free. Don't miss this valuable opportunity.

For further details of this and other events please call 01442 865158 or email KSherw9100@aol.com or look at the website www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk

We really must decide!

Norman has yet another cunning plan!

Right, everyone agrees we have a problem with the number of cars and the number of options providing a solution is almost as numerous as the number of vehicles.

We need to go back to basics. Do we want to accommodate the 'need' (bit like housing!) for residents to be able to travel anywhere, any-time using whatever method they like, or do we want to 'reclaim' the town, that even I don't remember?

The second is the ideal that, quite frankly, will be unacceptable without a major change in residents' attitudes, although I really don't see that happening to the members of the human race who come to live here - after all, that is what most of you have done. So we are left with trying to resolve the unresolvable. See, I do just like a challenge!

Let's start with the conservation area and that it would be nice if emergency vehicles, dust carts - old school, I'm afraid - and even public transport could actually travel along the public highway reasonably easily. That means that at least 8ft (2.44m, if you must) is available between the kerb and any obstruction of the highway, for example the extremity of any 'parked' vehicle.

Taking my vehicle as average, it is 6' 4" (1.93m) wide so any highway less than 14ft 6" (4.50m) wide should not have parking allowed at any time. Highways between 14ft 6" (4.5m) and 21ft 6" (6.4m) wide (kerb to kerb) could have parking allowed on one side only and only on highways over 21' 6" (6.4m) wide (kerb to kerb) could vehicles be allowed to use both sides to 'park'.

Before all the clever clogs start going on about only legally being allowed to park in 'designated' parking spaces, I'm trying to be practical as most of the 'designated' parking spaces in the town are not 6' 4" (1.93m) wide by 15' (4.58m) long (size of my average car) and that rare thing called discretion is usually employed.

You will notice I have not even considered 'residents parking' as that is an emotive issue even in those areas where garages and drives are available. It's even got to the point where the motorist will not even cross the road as witnessed by the number of cars providing a slalom course along residential roads. I even had one the other day which had blocked the road. I found a householder who explained the vehicle belonged to his daughter. She apparently couldn't reverse down the available drive, so just 'stopped' and went shopping taking the keys! It was 'bumped' so that vehicles could pass.

The above is as good a starting point as any I have seen and could be combined with a change in planning attitudes over converting garages to habitable rooms as well as residents learning how to use their drives - another lost ability.

What sort of time scale should we be looking at? Well, the final decision would need to be taken by the highways authority - Herts County Council - who would not even think of trying to resolve the problem without a 'cunning' workable plan proposed by either the Town or Borough Councils. We had new County Councillor (Cllr Ian Reay) elected last year, who just happens to be a Town Councillor and Portfolio holder for Planning and Regeneration on the Borough Council. Now the general election is out of the way, both Town and Borough councils are due for re-election in May 2011. plenty of time to knock this idea into shape and a good platform to get re-elected with a mandate to implement a viable plan to 'ease' the one sad thing about our town, caused by residents and resolved by our Councillors in co-operation with residents.

I have just thought of another solution which is not quite as good. Remember when cars had to be 'parked' facing traffic, on the left hand of the road and show a front/rear light on the offside during lighting up time?

Town Amenities Sub-Committee

Gordon Bluck, TASC Chairman reports:

At long last the plaque for the 2008 Environment Award winner at Torrington Road has been erected and the owners of the properties are pleased. Similarly the 2007 award to the Collegiate School has been put up.

Some of you will have seen the press coverage of the planting of three trees in Lime Walk which the BCA has paid for together with a maintenance contract. Effectively the Footpath Fund has paid for this; and now we are looking to contribute towards restoring the Totem Pole next to the canal. This project is being led by the Berkhamsted Community Partnership, whose Chairman is Tony Statham and the Vice Chairman is me. Looks incestuous, but it shows the number of bodies the BCA is represented on.

Regarding general planning matters, we have written to the Borough Council to say that following the installation of BT broadband cabinets (which we can't stop) there is a generally unacceptable level of street clutter in the conservation area and it should be reduced.

There had been a proposal to stop the paper versions of all planning applications and rely on the Internet. We have told the planners this is unacceptable especially as the Internet planning system has been regularly inaccessible. Our Chairman Susan Johnson spoke to this effect to the Town Council Planning Committee and they will no longer be a pilot for paperless planning. We have been asked to pay £165 a year to receive a paper copy of the planning lists; as you can guess we will not pay and will rely on the Gazette newspaper list.

We had a very useful meeting with two committee members of the Save Your Berkhamsted group at the March TASC meeting and it was decided that we will stay in touch to further the good of the town whilst our organisations remain separate.

I have received an email trumpeting the birth of a new quango: the East of England Local Government Association (EELGA) on the 1 April; *stop sniggering at the back BOY*. This is strange in that the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) had been disbanded the day before as it had passed its sell by date. Strange that this body has the same premises and councillors make-up as before as, I guess, are the permanent 41 staff. Having checked the meeting diary on the Internet site there is only one meeting booked in May. Gosh! That is a heavy workload for an quango costing us £millions a year. I was concerned to see that there are 10 "spatial" planners

to guide the Borough Planners in the same way the EERA staff asked owners of Green Belt land south of Berkhamsted to submit plans for many new homes. This was not mentioned at the workshop I attended with local planners last year and I wonder if they knew. Snouts and Troughs come to mind, especially in these tricky times. Too many layers, too much money. The email to them asking about budgets to run the show was ignored.

On individual applications the plan for 14 flats at The Glebe, Chesham Road was objected to as insufficient parking provided, although national planning guidelines had been followed. The plan for 5 terraced houses off George Street was strongly objected to as over-development and overbearing.

I am personally still very keen to make better use of the car parking at the rear of the Civic Centre for the public and I was heartened that the Town Council is looking at the matter. Existing authorised essential users would of course have passes. I know not all of my Committee support my view but I am hopeful that Town Council can pursue the idea.

If members want to contact me my home number is 873548.

Chairman's Column continued from Page 1:

You will see articles on other organisations on which we have representation elsewhere in these pages. We have recently joined the Green Belt Council (£10 p.a., in case you are worried) which is a voluntary, non-political, non-aligned body working to preserve the Green Belt around London. It fits well with our CPRE (Council to Protect Rural England) and Chiltern Society memberships. Membership of the Council will enable us to give a Berkhamsted perspective to its discussions, and share views and common problems. Green Belt preservation is going to be a big topic over the next few years.

Snippets:

Parish Paths Partnership is trying to put together audio walks around the rural footpaths. Also FP32 - aka Briar Way - is to come under Safer Routes to School scheme and may qualify for funding.

Berkhamsted Access Committee still needs members.

Contributions/letters/comments to:

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association