



# The Citizen

Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Working for the social and civic life of our community

[www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk](http://www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk)

June 2014

## Chairman's Piece

*Susan Johnson*  
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This is an exciting year for the BCA – the 90<sup>th</sup> since our foundation. We continue to do the work our predecessors did; and continue to enjoy one another's company at our many events and those of other local societies. I was reminded of that when I attended the Mayor's reception in April; so many organisations doing so much for Berkhamsted, and their representatives gathered together by the Mayor in one room. Splendid; and I knew almost every person there. But therein also lays the problem.

I am honoured to be elected your Chairman for the third time, and not a little alarmed. Honoured obviously because it is a rare event in the Association's history for anyone to be elected for a third term; alarmed because no-one else volunteered to do it! Alarmed for the Association. I realised when looking at the reports of our fellow civic & amenity societies at the recent Association of North Thames Amenity Societies (ANTAS) meeting that we are the granddaddy of them all. And while writing the piece for the Gazette in March, I also realised how many local Berkhamsted organisations the BCA helped to found. So, in honouring our legacy, let's look actively for more and (a bit) younger members so that we survive beyond our Centenary.

Finally grateful thanks to Graham Spittle (and his ever-supportive wife Helen) for his 20 years on the Committee and for twice serving as Chairman. A well-deserved Life Membership.

## The Citizens' Archive

Can you remember what you were doing twenty years ago? Some of us struggle to remember what we were doing yesterday, but if you were in Berkhamsted and interested in local activities, the chances are you were reading about them in our newsletter. If you lived in Berkhamsted at the time, or you are simply interested in recent local history and would like to recall what the issues of the day were in the 70s, 80s, 90s or the noughties, you can now go on line and read archived copies of the Citizens Association's newsletter. Go to our website, then click on the 'Minutes and Newsletters' tab. There are over one hundred and sixty newsletters available for your delectation, so if you have trouble sleeping, you know where to go! Many thanks to Elaine Mercer who has uploaded the newsletter archive to the website. Thanks also to Brian Wedge and the Yearwood family who kindly offered to help, and to our Membership Secretary, Christopher, who compiled the archive.

EXTRACT FROM BCA'S NEWSLETTER - MARCH 1968

BERKHAMSTED'S GREATEST EYESORE- The response to this 'poll' was a little disappointing - perhaps as the Gazette seem to think it was too 'kinky'. The result for those who missed it, was

1. The Town Hall (with special reference to the fish smells)
2. The derelict shops on the corner of Prince Edward Street
3. Curry's shop.

These three got by far the most votes; other mentions include 'my Mum', 'pavements (especially the High Street and outside Kitsbury Post Office)', 'the approach to Berkhamsted', 'the Gas works'. Though mention was made of the 'Home & Colonial Stores' sign, it appears that eyesores are noticed mainly at eye level.

## 90<sup>th</sup> Celebrations

Those of you who attended the AGM will remember filling out a questionnaire indicating, from a limited choice admittedly, how you would like to celebrate our first 90 years. There was a good response and it was clear that everyone present wanted an event. The overwhelmingly preferred price was £20 per individual. The most popular events: garden party, film at the Rex, informal lunch. The Committee felt the garden party was too weather-sensitive; the film could not be agreed upon; but the informal lunch would be enjoyed by all. Venues and menus will be researched, based upon 100 members attending.

Our other 90<sup>th</sup> celebratory items are progressing well. The Sparrows Herne Trust marker will be restored this summer, having attracted the necessary permissions and funding. The new edition of our very popular Footpath Map will be published in June/July in time for the main walking season. The only thing to be behind schedule is the new public notice board at the corner of Swing Gate Lane/High Street, where permission to site it needed from HCC has not yet been forthcoming; and indeed we have not yet chosen the design! We'll get there soon.

## Town Amenities Sub-Committee

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### Any old iron ?

I feel like a fraud. In March, at our Annual General Meeting, I made a presentation in advance of the BCA's Environment Award. During that presentation, I referred to the Conservation Area as a "jewel in the crown of Berkhamsted". Regrettably, that turns out not to be the case. Almost immediately after the AGM took place, a large green substation surrounded by a three metre high, galvanised, unpainted steel palisade fence appeared in the forecourt of Berkhamsted Station, which is within the Berkhamsted Conservation Area. As you will probably have seen, it's a real eyesore! No protection for the jewels, then? Well, yes....., or no....., or maybe.....

The electricity substation is required because our station, along with Hemel Hempstead and Leighton Buzzard, is being provided with lifts. Hurrah to that – in the twenty-first century there *should* be access for all to our railway network, and no question about it. Network Rail, as custodians of our rail network, enjoy certain privileges when it comes to planning matters, primarily so that they do not become mired in planning bureaucracy every time they want to change anything on our rail network. There is a general presumption that anything that Network Rail wants to do on its own property and is required for the running of the operational railway enjoys what are called Permitted Development Rights, and general planning permission is not required. Network Rail doesn't even have to consult with the Planning Authority which is, in our case, the Borough Council – Dacorum. It has implied permission and can just go ahead.

In response to a query from me, Network Rail has stated that it has been in contact with Dacorum Borough Council about the siting of the substation. It contended a number of alternative sites for the substation were considered, with the one selected apparently being considered "the least intrusive on the local area". I wonder.... could there be a more intrusive location?



Network Rail advises that they challenged the requirement for a 3-metre high metal fence around the substation, but the energy supplier, UK Power Networks, refused to accept that the fence could be omitted or reduced in height. As I said before, the station is within the Berkhamsted Conservation Area and the station building, together with the adjacent arches, were recently 'Locally Listed', which means they have added protection from interference. The entrance to a Scheduled Ancient Monument is less than one hundred metres distant, so I have argued that this is a sensitive location. According to information I have seen on the subject of Permitted Development Rights, where developments materially affect buildings or structures, this is not classed as 'permitted development' and the normal channels have to be followed for development to be approved.

On behalf of the BCA I took the matter up with the Head of Planning at Dacorum Borough Council in the middle of April, but at the time of writing this I have not received either acknowledgment of receipt of my communication or a reply. We are considering an approach to our M.P. and potentially a Freedom of Information Request.

We will strive to keep the matter in the public eye locally. Network Rail has belatedly offered to paint the palisade fence green or black. We feel strongly that, in principle, the substation should be moved; or at the very least shrouded in a more complete way, perhaps with brickwork.

### Environment Award 2013

The Citizens Association did something this year that it hasn't done for five years..... it actually found a winner for its Environment Award. We don't guarantee that our choice will please everyone, and even our eminent selection committee was not unanimous that the entry chosen was worthy of a plaque, but democracy being what it is, the majority verdict was that '**Mariners', Cross Oak Road**, was a worthy winner of the Environment Award for 2013, which was presented following our Annual General Meeting in March.

'Mariners' is a striking new residence, replacing an unremarkable villa at the junction of Cross Oak Road with Shootersway. Although its modern facades contrast with the more traditional architecture found around the fringe of our town, the clean lines and complementary use of white render and timber cassette cladding is effective, eye-catching and aesthetically pleasing. The appearance is enhanced by a wooden fence in horizontal strips – possibly cedar – which masks the parking area in front of the house.



Both house owners and architect were pleased to receive the award at the AGM, which we hope helps to encourage good design in the built environment.

Highly commended were the new timber footbridge across the Bulbourne in the Springwood Estate in Northchurch, and the enlarged play area at Butts Meadow. The Herts County Council Member for Bridgewater, Cllr. David Lloyd, collected the award for the bridge and Cllr. Julie Laws, representing Berkhamsted on Dacorum Borough Council (and Portfolio Holder there for Environmental Services and Sustainability), together with two DBC officers, collected the award for the play area.

### News from the Towpath

Gordon Bluck, the BCA's representative on the Canal and Riverside Partnership reports that thanks to funding being found – including a grant of £10,000 from Berkhamsted Town Council – the next stage of towpath upgrade works, from the Waitrose bridge to Stag Lane, will be carried out during the summer.

### Upgraded Berkhamsted Town Council Website

[www.berkhamstedtowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.berkhamstedtowncouncil.gov.uk)

The 'new and improved' BTC website went live on 3 March 2014. Should you be interested in reading the Agenda and/or Minutes of Town Council meetings, go to 'The Town Council' on the left bar, then 'Documents' and use the drop-down menu to obtain the document you require. Anyone who uses Twitter, can follow the hashtag @berkhamstedtc. If David Dimbleby can say 'hashtag', so can I.....!

### Ashlyns School Sports Hall

The BCA is a civic & amenity society, and nothing has captured the dichotomy inherent in these two facets of our organisation than our views on the provision of the new Sports Hall at Ashlyns School. The amenity side has welcomed and supported the Hall being built as soon as possible and has said so at every opportunity; the need of the pupils is great. However the civic side has urged, and continues to urge, a design which enhances through its materials

the setting of the Grade II listed site it is to inhabit. The two were not incompatible; and would have been achievable had HCC and the School made happier choices at an earlier stage. Despite the continued objections of the Town Council up until the third hurdle, this Association's dogged stance against the use of concrete, and the DBC Conservation Officer's strong reservations, the planning application was given permission at the DBC Development Control Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2014, subject to the view of the Secretary of State on the Green Belt issues involved. Although modified from the original submitted, the Hall's design will have a massive concrete wall to the main body of the Hall, in contrast to the elegant brick and render façade of the neo-classical School building. The DBC Conservation Officer, as well as the BCA, contended this unsatisfactory outcome was wholly avoidable had consultations with DBC Planning happened early on in the design stage; years rather than months ago. As it is, we will have a super facility for town and gown at the expense of aesthetic considerations.

### The four letter 'L' word

Not the 'last' word, but the 'Lidl' word..... The Town Amenities Sub-Committee considered whether the proposed new store at Gossoms End was an 'amenity' or not and we concluded that, as a sub-committee, we don't have a view on the principle of a supermarket building an outlet in our town. We shall, of course, review any planning application that may be submitted in the way that we review all such applications. In the meantime, what view do you, the membership, have about the proposed new store – for, against or indifferent? Comments please.



### Life Members

A pub quiz question for you: "Can you name five Life Members of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association?" Our Life Members are those who have provided extraordinary service to the Association, and their names are now recorded on the website. Go to our website: [www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk](http://www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk) then click on the 'Membership' tab.

## Activities

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A full house – or is that House Full? – in Berkhamsted Town Hall (including visitors from St Albans) greeted James Hannaway, CEO of the Rex, when he came to speak to the BCA on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> April about his new project. ‘The Odyssey’, in St Albans, so called because it took 10 years to come to fruition, is now due to open in September/October 2014. It was a tortuous and painful birth, involving the local listing of the façade, a failed housing development (fortunately for the cinema’s survival), purchase with the aid of the local civic society and the City Council, formation of a company, and generous funding by local ‘angels’ rather than any help from banks. In fact, a similar story to that of the Rex; except the Odyssey is far bigger at 450 seats, has kept its foyer but has had to have its auditorium completely recreated internally rather than restored. The whole project, in the tried and tested colours of gold, red and black, will cost in the region of £3.5m.

The BCA has been shouting encouragement for the Rex from the sidelines since 2000, when it first voiced support in its newsletter for the restoration, rather than the demolition that many advocated. No-one now would advocate such a course of action. This year the Rex has been open for 10 years. The Odyssey’s opening will be a fitting birthday present. Our guests from St Albans certainly thought so.

Our next event, and the final one in the 2013/4 season, will be the Summer Ramble on Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> June starting as usual at 10.30am in front of Berkhamsted Station. No doubt Paul Crosland will point out local landmarks, like the attractive addition to the station forecourt!

We try to offer a varied programme of activities every year, and the coming one is no exception. The dates and topics for 2014/5 (briefly) are as follows:

- **9<sup>th</sup> October 2014:** A talk by the Red Squirrel Brewery, Potten End
- **13<sup>th</sup> November 2014:** A talk by Dr James Moir (DBC Planning and Berkhamsted resident) on the recent changes to the Berkhamsted Conservation Area
- **1<sup>st</sup> January 2015:** New Year’s Day Ramble led by Paul Crosland
- **5<sup>th</sup> February 2015:** Talk by BCA member, author and world authority on the Beatles, Mark Lewisohn
- **19<sup>th</sup> March 2015:** 90<sup>th</sup> AGM with Environment Awards and guest speaker
- **16<sup>th</sup> April 2015:** Talk by Brian Norman on bee farming
- **21<sup>st</sup> June 2015:** Summer walk led by Paul Crosland

More details will be available and the annual ‘card’ issued with the September newsletter. See you in October, if not before.

## Membership Counts

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A big warm welcome to the 8 members who have joined since the February newsletter. Six of these are as a result of a member taking up the challenge to recruit a friend. Can you beat that? This means our membership now stands at 360, an increase, although modest, on this time last year. In the past, I have always said it was down. Is this something we can congratulate ourselves on in our 90<sup>th</sup> year? I understand other newer organisations are losing members. We have consistently said “joining is not just going to meetings, or receiving newsletters, but it is to help us have an influence in having a say.” It is therefore important that we maintain our membership because if falls to low, we may no longer be listened to.

There are currently 22 members with outstanding subscriptions. If you are one of them, a reminder will be enclosed with this newsletter. Thank you to all those that have renewed for this year and the 87 who have renewed for 3 years. 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 would be marvellous if we can continue to encourage members to join and who knows, get it up to 400 by the end of the year.

### Electronic Newsletter

Please let me have your e-mail address if you would like to receive this Newsletter electronically. By getting it this way, you will receive it in advance of hard copies and possibly in colour! If we have your e-mail address, you will also get reminders of our events and important issues that affect the town. E-mail addresses will be maintained confidentially by the BCA. They will not be disclosed to other members nor made available to third parties under any circumstances. Any correspondence is of course sent out as blind copies.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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