



BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS

*The heart of
Berkhamsted*

www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

November 2023 Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Chairman's Report

Gordon Bluck

chairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

A highlight of the last 3 months for me was the talk by Paul Miller, who is the General Manager National Trust for the areas of Ashridge, Dunstable Downs and Shaw's Corner, entitled "Protecting our Roots". I had spoken to Paul earlier in the year to ask him to give us an update of what is happening particularly at Ashridge and he hinted that September would be a good time as there was likely to be some important plans being released to the public. With the meeting booked for 12 October the details had been released and some 40 members were treated to a detailed and very professional illustrated talk "Protecting our Roots"; the 5 year plan for the Ashridge estate. If you missed the talk search on the NT Ashridge website. We are lucky to have Deirdre of *Open Door* speak to us about their work on Thursday 23rd November in the Sessions Hall. More details to follow from Jeanne who is a main committee member and arranging the evening.

The Association has paid for the refurbishment of the BCA 90th Anniversary noticeboard as it was looking somewhat war weary. Simon, a main committee member, has produced "etiquette" for the use of the notice board, at the Swing Gate Lane/High Street junction, to keep it serving the Berkhamsted community.

Our website is now fully operational and contains a lot of information about planning as well as a "news and events" section. We received training from William our webmaster from Design House Studio and there is a panel of main committee members who can keep the site up to date. Paul Crosland, main committee member, has checked and updated the "links" section and if there are changes to be made send them to me at

chairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk We now have the facility for new members to join online, and the current household fee is still £10 per year. The first year will be at least a year, so all members renew on 1st January. Christopher, our Membership Secretary, will send out a reminder to all existing members renewing this way. As word of mouth is very powerful I would encourage all existing

members to encourage neighbours, and grown up children who have returned to the town, to join; even those who have not returned but would like to be kept in the loop.

We are the civic society of the town and as you know we look at all matters planning. As a result we are engaged in discussions on the new Local Plan, and the formation of a Neighbourhood Plan, with the Town Council and other interested parties. Make sure you participate in the process!

Miranda Cummins, our Secretary, is arranging the Best Dressed Christmas Shop Window competition, in conjunction with Berkhamsted Town Council. The Cup and certificates for the winners will be presented at the Festival of Light on Sunday 26th November at 5 pm. By me.

News about our Centenary year in 2024/25 will be detailed later in this newsletter.

I would like to thank all committee members, and particularly Susan Johnson my Vice Chairman, without whom a lot of things would not progress. I wish you all a pleasant seasonal break to enter 2024 refreshed.

Townscape Group *Susan Johnson, Chairman, writes*

We continue, as usual, to offer help to those citizens who want to make sense of the planning system. Here are some updates on the representations the Group has been making on the most significant sites since the last newsletter:

- **Aitcheson Rafferty, 154-158 High Street (now Ashtons)** Ashtons has amended its side window to indicate two panes; and has failed in its attempt to get permission to reverse the situation. Will they appeal?
- **The Tooth Club** at Black Prince Yard has been prevented, for now, from erecting internally-lit signage in the conservation area and next door to a listed building
- **85-87 High Street** The extensive, inappropriate work to this heritage (locally listed) asset, which we had highlighted to Enforcement in 2019 and continued to object to, has been refused permission. The applicant applied to regularise the existing

work, but that was refused. DBC are enforcing, but the applicant is appealing the enforcement. So it goes on till the end of the process.

- **Milton Cottage, 287 High Street** The dispute over the design and colour of the replacement coach door was settled, and permission given. Installation complete.
- **42 Charles Street** Another shop being converted into a house – no objection. But its frontage, we think, should have matched its neighbours. It doesn't.
- **Redevelopment at Elm Court, Elm Grove** We objected to the design and materials, redolent of suburban development in the London boroughs. We urged redesign rather than rejection. It was refused.
- **Detached house on plot adjacent to 23 Station Road** We expected this after no. 23 was allowed on Appeal. We objected, along with Herts Highways and the DBC conservation officer. It was refused.
- **Advertisement and building without permission at the Mad Squirrel shop, 104 High Street** We do not like the squirrel's head in such a prominent place, nor building without permission, especially in the CA. It was allowed.
- **Advertisement for the new tenant in the Town Hall** Approved. Still intrusive.

That's the updates; now for the significant *new* ones:

- **9 flats near junction of LKR & Greene Field Road** Opposed on the grounds of ugliness, height and terminally boring architecture. Application withdrawn.
- **Redevelopment at 2 Beech Hill Court** Inappropriate design, materials and effect on the CA, although not actually in it. Once again opposed by Conservation, and we support them. It's not often we hear that 1960s architecture should be respected!
- **SANG (suitable alternative natural green space) in several places** Look out for one near you! There will be several for developers to try to counteract loss of open space elsewhere to housing.

Come along to the Town Council Town Planning Committee to listen, and to make your voice heard on these and other matters. If you need any help to make representations on a planning matter, whether in person or written, please get in touch. We might not agree, but we will help you put your point of view across. townscape@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Consultation on the Borough Plan to 2040

It is really important you participate. Comments are open to 11th December 2023. You can submit them via letstalk.dacorum.gov.uk or by post to The Forum, to the Berkhamsted Civic Centre or to the Library. This is not a planning application; it is strategic planning fundamental to the future of the whole of the Borough, as well as Berkhamsted. A little effort now will be worth the trouble.

Shops & restaurants (but few Banks)

On a general note, M&Co's conversion is virtually complete. Have you tried *Vinegar Hill*? And another artisan baker? Several other empty shops are being brought back in new guises. Look out for them! Berkhamsted High Street is not dead – merely undergoing a transformation. A word in support of the banks which remain (Nationwide – love the advertisement! – and HSBC); and most particularly the Post Office at the Way Inn. What would charities, particularly, do without them?

Neighbourhood Plan

The Town Council is intent on developing a Neighbourhood Plan, which will help to govern the land use development of the town over the next 10-15 years. Everyone is invited to participate in its formulation and, as it is a Planning document, the BCA Townscape Group is joining in. Please, participate in any invitations/surveys you receive, as *your* opinion is important. The first will be in the next edition of *BTC News* due out in mid-November. The whole process will take two to four years, so we are in it for the long haul.

Environment Awards

In 2024 on Thursday 21st March we will hold our 99th AGM in the Great Hall of the Town Hall. After the business of the evening we will consider all the contenders for the Environment Award 2023 in a presentation. Simon Heywood's laptop will not fail this time. Maybe the contenders to 31st December 2023 will offer more quality and the award of a Plaque? Refreshments, and maybe a speaker?

Centenary Projects

Our Information Board at the bottom of Swing Gate Lane outside the school has been refurbished. That originally celebrated our 90th anniversary.

Another (and main) Centenary project is the refurbishment of the Town Shield on its oak post outside the Civic Centre. It belongs to the BCA and was installed originally to mark the coronation of the late Queen. It has been removed for the work to be done. So now it is timely for our Centenary in 2024/25 and to mark King Charles III's coronation. We intend to re-install the post soon after our AGM in March. Look out for the day and time of the unveiling, and come along for the event!

Paul Crosland writes

New Parliamentary Constituency of Harpenden and Berkhamsted

Who knows when the next General Election will be, other than 'some time in 2024'? We do know two things, however. Firstly, the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be holding a General Election Hustings as it traditionally has done. Secondly, Berkhamsted will find itself in a new parliamentary constituency, called 'Harpenden and Berkhamsted'. Berkhamsted and Northchurch have been part of the South West Hertfordshire constituency since 1983, before which both fell within the Hemel Hempstead constituency. The parliamentary seat of South West

Hertfordshire currently forms a thin strip along the western fringe of Hertfordshire, from Rickmansworth in the south to Long Marston in the north, but as a result of country-wide boundary reviews, Berkhamsted's election allegiances will in future be with Markyate, Redbourn, the northern part of St. Albans and Harpenden.

Why is this change happening? Constituency boundaries are reviewed periodically to make sure that constituencies are all roughly the same size and respect local connections between areas.

Constituencies should all have a similar voting population, currently within 5% of 73,393.

Is this certain to happen? The Parliamentary Boundary Commissions for the four home nations published their final recommendations in June 2023. Once approved by the Privy Council (no government intervention is permitted), the new constituencies will be used for the next General Election thereafter (any by-election beforehand would use the existing constituencies).

When will candidates be announced? The constituency of South West Hertfordshire will remain in place after the re-organisation of electoral boundaries, so it is not yet known if the incumbent Member of Parliament, Gagan Mohindra M.P., will stand for election in that constituency, in the new Harpenden and Berkhamsted constituency, or elsewhere. As always, once a General Election is called, polling day is expected to take place a minimum of twenty-five working days afterwards.

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Our membership stands at 283 households. A warm welcome to the households who have joined this year. There are 9 still to pay for 2022. We hope you still wish to remain a member. If we don't hear from you by the end of the year, I regret we will have to assume you no longer wish to remain a member and will remove you from our records

There are also a further 22 who have yet to pay for this year. A renewal slip will be sent to the 31 members who are up for renewal for both years.

You can pay your subscription direct to our bank account: 60-02-21 (NatWest): 51 85 84 87. (Business). Please use your name as the 'Reference'.

Or, if you prefer to pay by credit card, you can pay as a 'new member' through our new web site at

www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk/membership

and pressing **buy**.

Life has changed, and we will in future send newsletters only by email to all members for whom we have email addresses. We also fully understand the situation of those that cannot or will not let us have an email address. Over 30 newsletters are still printed.

AROUND THE TOWN

The Graham Greene International Festival

It took place in 2023 from Thursday 28th September to Sunday 1st October. Well-attended, from all over the world.

Electric Vehicle Charging Stations coming to Berkhamsted

At a recent meeting of the Town Council Parking Forum it was revealed that rapid Electric Vehicle charging stations will be installed at the St. John's Well Lane Car Park, probably before the end of 2023. The charging stations are provided by Osprey under a grant from the Office for Zero Emission Vehicles (OZEV) with support of the Energy Saving Trust. They will be installed at eighteen car parks across the Borough of Dacorum.

Multi-Storey Car Park

Surface water flooding associated with storms during the past year has caused damage to the power supplies to the lift in the multi-storey car park, resulting in the lift being out of action for long periods. Work is in hand to improve drainage in the area and in the longer term, the lift availability should improve. Anti-social behaviour and vandalism continue to be a problem in the car park in the evenings, and anyone witnessing such behaviour should call the police using the 999 service.

Rectory Lane Cemetery

The Rectory Lane Cemetery Project is now well into its 'maintenance phase'. If you would like to be kept informed on the latest developments on the Project, please contact Kate Campbell, Ranger, via e-mail: team@rectorylanecemetery.org.uk

Berkhamsted Station Ticket Office Reprieve

As you are probably aware, the local Train Operating Company, supported by the Government, submitted proposals in the summer to close almost all of the ticket offices at stations under its control. This was part of a move by train operators across England, supported by the Government, to reduce costs and thereby the subsidy required by the train companies to operate rail services. The proposals were hugely controversial and, along with more than 700,000 other respondents, the BCA submitted a formal objection to the proposed closure of the ticket office at Berkhamsted station, and we copied our objection to our local M.P., Mr. Mohindra. We cited the factor that, for many rail users, their first engagement with the railway is the ticket office, where they can talk to someone who has the patience and knowledge to explain how to get the best-value ticket, and the optimum route for their journey. We explained that the loss of the staffed ticket office, open every day, at regular times, would be a huge disincentive for people to use the railway - just at a time when government is trying to encourage the use of public transport, to reduce congestion and pollution.

We considered that the lack of a ticket office would also lead to higher levels of fare avoidance unless on-board ticket checks are stepped-up, because these have also become rare. Our view was that sectors of society such as senior citizens and people with disabilities would be more likely to be disadvantaged if a staffed ticket office is no longer available to them.

We were therefore heartened by the recent announcement by the Government's transport secretary, Mark Harper, notwithstanding his approval of the original plans, that he would ask the train operators to withdraw their proposals to close ticket offices because they failed to meet the high standards of serving passengers' needs. We have no doubt that there will be other pressures on rail operators to cut costs – like the withdrawal of Southern services beyond Watford Junction. We will continue to monitor these and take action accordingly.

New trains for 'our' rail line

The first of a tranche of new trains for London Northwestern Railway will probably have entered service by the time you read this. The 'Class 730' trains - which are three years late, reportedly due to COVID - are built in the UK by Alstom, will ultimately run as 5-car or 10-car sets, though the initial trains are those ordered for West Midlands services, running as 3, 6 or 9 car sets. Their introduction will enable the withdrawal of the unpopular Class 319 units which are now more than thirty years old.

Sunnyside Rural Trust,

Jacob Armiger, Publicity & Communications Intern

At Sunnyside Rural Trust we offer tailor-made veg boxes (April-Oct, now unavailable until April 2024), with the produce lovingly grown and harvested by our own trainees. Our trainees are adults with learning disabilities, who work across our three horticultural sites: the Activity Centre in Northchurch, and Hemel Food Garden.

All our produce is grown to organic standards and is fresh, seasonal, and local. Once you have decided on the contents of your veg box, reply to our weekly email (which you will receive after signing up) by Wednesday at 10am. We will then have it ready for collection at either our weekly Berkhamsted market stall (Berkhamsted High Street, Thursday 10:30–12:30), or from our Northchurch site Farm Shop and Café (from Wednesday afternoon). Or we can send your veg box to our Hemel Food Garden site (Farm Shop and Café) for collection on Thursday, Friday or Saturday.

To get more information or sign up to our weekly veg box scheme, please contact us at vegbox@sunnysideruraltrust.org.uk or via our website www.sunnysideruraltrust.org.uk

Sunnyside Rural Trust is a thriving charity and social enterprise offering training and work experience for 150 vulnerable people. We support people with learning disabilities to acquire skills in a number of rural activities. These include beekeeping, looking after chickens, growing a wide range of plants and produce, landscaping and garden maintenance.

**Sunnyside Rural Trust,
161-163, High Street, Berkhamsted, HP4 3HD
07933 174762 (Mobile)**

BCA Events

The Open Door/Dementia- friendly Berkhamsted

A talk by the organisers on the work of *Open Door* and their activities in various spheres on Thursday 23rd November 2023 at 8 pm in the Sessions Hall, Berkhamsted Town Hall.



Best Dressed Christmas Shop Window

Sponsored jointly by the BCA and the Town Council, and judged by independent members of the BCA in the week beginning 20th November, the annual Award is made at the Festival of Light at about 5 pm on Sunday 26th November 2023. Come along and hear the result before meeting and greeting Father Christmas on his sleigh. This event is a joint venture between the Town Council and many local volunteer organisations, and we are grateful to all the participants. It fulfils our pledge to *Encourage Participation in Civic Life*.

New Year's Day walk

This has been re-instated for 2024, led by Paul Crosland and starting at 10.30 am from the front of the railway station. A 7-mile walk with a stop for lunch at the *Bridgewater Arms PH* in Little Gaddesden. *Undertaken at your own risk. Well-behaved dogs (and their owners) welcome.*

Annual General Meeting & Environment Awards 2024

To be held in the Great Hall, Berkhamsted Town Hall on Thursday 21st March 2024 starting at 8 pm. The earlier date is to avoid Easter Week. We might also have a speaker.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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