



BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS

*The heart of
Berkhamsted*

www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk/

February 2024 Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Annual General Meeting & Environment Award

NOTICE is hereby given that the 99th Annual General Meeting of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association will be held in the Great Hall of the Town Hall, Berkhamsted on

Thursday 21st March 2024 at 8 p.m.

Nominations for the posts of:

- Chairman
- Vice-Chairman
- Hon. Treasurer
- Hon. Secretary
- Hon. Membership Secretary
- Committee Members

should be submitted to the Hon. Secretary (Miranda Cummins, 27 North Road, Berkhamsted HP4 3DU) in writing 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 AGM held on 30th March 2023
3. Chairman's Report
4. Hon. Treasurer's Report
5. Election of Officers
6. Election of Committee Members
7. Appointment of Independent Examiners of Accounts

Reminder: only paid up members present at the AGM are allowed to vote

Following the formal business of the night there will be a short break for a visit to the bar. This will be followed by:

Environment Awards for 2023

There are 13 contenders for the Environment Award, all completed by the end of 2023.

Guest Speaker

Hugo Hardy, RIBA Architect.

Chairman's Report

chairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

I hope you all had a good Christmas and wish you a Happy New Year! As I am coming to the end of my two year stint as BCA Chairman I am looking back to my involvement over the last 30 years which includes being Chairman in years 2002 and 2001 and Vice Chairman for 7 years. It's not that I am retiring but reflecting on the importance of the BCA as the civic society for the town. We have survived and continue important work when so many of our ilk have gone.

A real highlight is the Best Dressed Christmas Window Competition expertly organised by Miranda Cummins, our Secretary. There were four commended windows: Vinegar Hill, Berkhamsted Eye Care, Peter John and David Paul; and three winners: the Hospice of St Francis, Woods and, once again, & Quirky. They all received winners' certificates and will share the cup for 4 months each. It was a great honour to present the prizes at the Festival of Light.

Since my last report in November Jeanne Woodcraft organised a talk by Deirdre and Joan who explained the role of Open Door in the community. I, for one did not realise all the things they do.

The most important thing that we have achieved this year is the updating of the BCA website which is now complete and we are already getting new members joining using the "Stripe" system which is a common payment system fully on line. There is a wealth of information available on the site with links to other Berkhamsted websites such as the Town Council. We have retained the archive of old newsletters going back to 1986 which can be accessed from the Home page, then "useful links" then at the page bottom "documents". Try it; it is fascinating, the problems of the town are just the same! We try and keep the news and events section up to date.

I would like to thank all the Main Committee for all their help and support especially Susan Johnson who does so much as Chairman of our vital Townscape Group and as our Vice Chairman. She is helped by the members of the Townscape Group and, as you know, all planning applications are

looked at by the Group (including me). We continue to be a consultee and we are officially notified of all planning applications in Berkhamsted and Northchurch. Our submissions are viewed by Dacorum Planning Department along with Berkhamsted Town Council, Highways and other interested bodies.

With our Centenary coming up in July we are already working behind the scenes with details elsewhere in this newsletter.

Easter Discovery Trail at Rectory Lane Cemetery

The Rectory Lane Cemetery in Berkhamsted will hold an Easter Discovery Trail perfect for families on Saturday 30th March 2024, 10am-1pm.

Children can follow the trail using a clue card specially illustrated by the artist Lizzie Martell. On completion of the trail, which will take in the first signs of spring and the cemetery's intriguing trees and memorials, children will be rewarded with a chocolate Easter egg. They can also keep the enchantingly designed clue card as a memento to colour in at home.

Back in 2022, 114 visitors enjoyed the cemetery's first Easter trail and it is hoped that even more members of the community will come along and take part in the tradition of an egg hunt with friends and family.

Ranger Kate Campbell explains, *"The cemetery is a great place for a trail, with its sculptures and towering trees, beehive and wooden xylophone that always capture the imaginations of our younger visitors. We are so grateful for the illustrated clue card that Lizzie Martell has created for us and that we know children will love, and for the support of Berkhamsted Town Council."*

All proceeds from the Easter Discovery Trail will go towards the upkeep of the Rectory Lane Cemetery, as a place for nature, community and heritage in Berkhamsted. Early Chick tickets cost £3.50 (+booking fee) per child (aged 3 and over) via: tinyurl.com/5x7d6y6n or QR code, with tickets on the day at £6.50. Why not get yours now?!

Join us for an
EASTER
Discovery
TRAIL

Saturday 30th March
10 AM - 1.00 PM

Early Chick child ticket £3.50 + booking fee
Book Now!

Lizzie Martell Illustration
BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL
Rectory Lane Cemetery
BERKHAMSTED

Green Bin Collections

Dacorum's Green Bin collection service starts again on the week commencing 4th March. Arrangements for subscribing for this year's fortnightly road-side collection and the subscription cost will be decided at a Full Council meeting of Dacorum Borough Council on 28th February. Residents who have a bin sticker displayed on their green bin for 2023 will be able to have their bins collected during March, until the new arrangements have been put into effect. More details can be found on line via the following QR code, or the following website address : <https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/environment-street-care/recycling-refuse-waste/household-waste-recycling/green-wheeled-bin/garden-waste-subscription-service>



AROUND THE TOWN

Commemoration of the 80th Anniversary of D-Day

The commemorations of this event in Berkhamsted will include the lighting of a beacon at Velvet Lawn at the very precise time of 9.17 p.m. on Thursday 6th June and a suitably-themed Dinner & Dance on Friday 7th June.

The Graham Greene International Festival

The 25th Festival will take place in 2024 from Thursday 3rd to Sunday 6th October.

Travel

HertsLynx Demand-Responsive Bus Service

HertsLynx is a demand-responsive bus service that was introduced in Dacorum in December 2023. It has been operating in the districts of North Hertfordshire and East Hertfordshire for the past two years. In all three areas, the promoter of the service is Hertfordshire County Council. To use the service, a prospective passenger first needs to open an account, which is done either by calling or going on-line.

HertsLynx vehicles have a maximum seating capacity of 16 passengers including one wheelchair user.

What does "demand-responsive" mean? It means that passengers either call or go on-line/ use an app when they wish to make a journey. They are picked up from a designated stop near to them at a given time and taken to their destination. There are no set routes – the bus follows a route set according to the passengers who wish to make use of it. Thus, on a particular journey, other passengers may be picked-up along the way, which may involve a diversion off of the 'direct' route. For example, a passenger may wishing to travel from Potten End to Tring may find

that the journey goes via Aldbury to pick-up a passenger travelling from there to Northchurch.

The only restriction is that HertsLynx cannot be used for routes that a regular bus follows, for example Tring to Berkhamsted or Northchurch to Hemel Hempstead. HertsLynx is part of the government's '£2 maximum single fare' scheme, so that is the most you will pay, and the fare is paid through your HertsLynx account.

500 Bus becomes X5

From 6th January 2024, the 500 bus service became the X5 – part of a network of longer-distance bus routes centred on Aylesbury, to destinations such as Oxford, High Wycombe and Milton Keynes. There were no significant changes to frequencies or timings, and no changes to the Sunday 501 bus service.

Train Fares

Starting in the Spring of this year (the date is yet to be announced), contactless travel for full-fare paying passengers will be introduced on London Northwestern rail services between Tring and Euston, including intermediate stations. In preparation for this, fares were revised and simplified from December 2023, so the new fares from Berkhamsted to London are :

- Single Journey to/ from Euston (peak – see below) : £13.50
- Single Journey to/ from Euston (off-peak – all other times) : £10
- Return journey to/ from Euston (both ways at peak times) : £27
- Return journey to/ from Euston (both ways at off-peak times) : £20

“Peak” travel means on trains timed to depart before 0930 on Monday-Friday and departing between 1600 and 1900 Monday – Friday).

Railcard fares and those with a Travelcard added will continue to be available from the ticket office or ticket machine.

Further 20 mph Consultation : Chesham Road to Swing Gate Lane

Herts County Council are consulting on the further extension of the 20 mph zone to take in Chesham Road and Swing Gate Lane, plus the roads in between, including Hilltop Road. This is primarily to slow traffic in the vicinity of Ashlyns, Thomas Coram and Swing Gate schools. Traffic calming, in the form of speed cushions, will be introduced between Ashlyns School and the Kingshill Way roundabout. Further details can be found at <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/consultations/consultations.aspx> and go to the 'Open Consultations' list. This closes on Monday 4th March.

Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG)

The term 'SANG' has entered the lexicon locally following recent proposals to create two 'SANGs' in

the area – one at Castle Hill, Berkhamsted and one associated with new housing development at Haresfoot Farm just south of the By-Pass (A41). We thought it was an opportune time to explain what a 'SANG' is and why suddenly the proposals to create two have come up in recent months.

Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANG) is a term used in the United Kingdom in the context of planning and development. It refers to green spaces that are created or designated to provide recreational space for residents, with the aim of diverting human activity away from more sensitive areas, such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), or Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

The main purpose of SANGs is to prevent increased recreational pressure on the protected sites, which could potentially harm the wildlife and habitats they support. These green spaces are designed to be attractive and accessible, offering a range of amenities such as walking trails, picnic areas, and play areas. They play a crucial role in sustainable urban development, balancing the needs of people and nature. Locally to us, as part of its emerging local plan, Dacorum Borough Council has found evidence that additional residential development in the Chiltern Beechwoods Special Area of Conservation, is leading to higher visitor numbers to Ashridge (for example), and an increase in adverse activities such as trampling, mountain biking and dog fouling.

To limit this impact, a habitat regulations assessment (HRA) is now needed for any residential development, irrespective of the numbers of units involved, within the 'zone of influence' of the Chiltern Beechwoods SAC, which extends 12.6 km (approx. 8 miles) from Ashridge. This has led developers who would like to build houses in the 'zone of influence' to try to create SANGs on marginal or under-utilised land in order to create alternative green spaces that local residents might be encouraged to visit instead of visiting Ashridge. The proposals for SANGs have encountered opposition from local residents in the affected areas who fail to see why land which is already open countryside or agricultural land should be 'converted' to SANGs promoting increased traffic to the new SANGs, construction of new car parks, littering, anti-social behaviour and the like. Supported by the views of residents, Berkhamsted Town Council objected to the planning application for the establishment of a SANG at Castle Hill and this will be considered by Dacorum Borough Council at its next Development Management Committee meeting. A planning application for Haresfoot Farm - associated with the construction of ninety new homes – has just been submitted.

Buckinghamshire Council has produced guidelines for the creation of SANGs and these can be found via the following link: [Buckinghamshire-Council-Guidelines-for-Suitable-Alternative-Natural-Greenspace.pdf \(buckinghamshire-gov-uk.s3.amazonaws.com\)](https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/s3.amazonaws.com/Buckinghamshire-Council-Guidelines-for-Suitable-Alternative-Natural-Greenspace.pdf)

Proposal to Erect an Agricultural Barn on Common Land at Sandpit Green, Swing Gate Lane

We are keeping an eye on a proposal made by a landowner in Swing Gate Lane, adjacent to the bypass bridge where a horse sanctuary was set up a few years ago, to erect a steel-framed barn on common land at Sandpit Green. We have been in contact with the Open Spaces Society, CPRE Hertfordshire and the Chiltern Society and we intend to object to any building on common land – which would in any case require special authorisation by the Planning Inspectorate.

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:

- **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.
- **Redevelopment at 2 Beech Hill Court** Inappropriate design, materials and effect on the CA, although not actually in it. Once again, opposed by the Conservation Dept., and we support them. It's not often we hear that 1960s' architecture should be respected! Disappointingly, given permission.

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

- **The rebuild of the Kings Road Evangelical Church** I have not seen such a reaction since Punch Taverns wanted to replace the *Crystal Palace PH* with housing! It makes Townscape's existence worthwhile. I have given information to the objectors on how to use the planning system effectively, and they have taken it from there. We have made a formal objection.
- **The Castle Hill SANG** The objectors turned out in droves to Town Planning Committee; and the objections from the Town Council were consequently robust. We supported their opinions, along with those of The Chiltern Society, the Open Spaces Society and CPRE Herts; all of which we are members.
- **The Haresfoot houses' planning application 24/00330/MFA** As I write this application has just arrived for consultation. We had previously objected to the surrounding SANG. The application is due to be heard at Town Planning Committee on 18th March, when the expected

objectors can be accommodated comfortably in the main hall.

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.

Shops & restaurants (but few Banks)

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.

The Lloyds Bank conversion to *Kinderzimmer* is rather fine – and they kept the car park! Look at the list for this year's Environment Award.

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 was in the edition of *BTC News* distributed in January. If you did not get one, ask the Town Clerk for a replacement; or access the questionnaire via the Town Council's website. The whole process of developing the Plan will take two to four years, so we are in it for the long haul.

BCA 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! We'll have more information in the next newsletter. Our actual centenary is on 4th July 2024.

BCA Events

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 was made at the Festival of Light on Sunday 26th November 2023. This event is a joint venture between the Town Council and many local volunteer organisations, and we are grateful to all the participants.

The results are listed in the Chairman's Report. Participation was good this year; and it fulfils our pledge to *Encourage Participation in Civic Life*.

New Year's Day walk

This was re-instated for 2024, led by Paul Crosland

and starting from the front of the railway station. A 7-mile walk with a stop for lunch at the *Bridgewater Arms PH* in Little Gaddesden. 14 people and 2 dogs participated. The dogs had no choice in the matter

Environment Awards

In 2024 on Thursday 21st March we will hold our 99th AGM in the Great Hall of the Town Hall, starting at 8pm. 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 a speaker. The earlier-than-usual date is to avoid Easter Week. The contenders are listed here:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. 320 & 320A High Street / St Johns Well Lane | Conversion of ground floor from vet into flats etc. |
| 2. 2 Finch Road | Two storey side extn and alts to front elevation |
| 3. 42 Charles Street | Conversion of building to single house |
| 4. Flint House, Shootersway Lane | New dwelling |
| 5. 37 High Street | Raise ridge roof to create a new first floor etc |
| 6. 1 Castle Hill | Replacement dwelling |
| 7. 15 Shrublands Avenue | Insert double glazing into extg double sliding sash |
| 8. Shooter Yard, Shootersway | Dem of extg bldgs & construct 5 detached houses |
| 9. Hockey Club, Tring Road | Artificial Games Pitch/ Multi Use Games Area |
| 10. Kinderzimmer, 205 High Street | Refurb of Lloyds Bank to Day Nursery & Pre School |
| 11. Montague Mews, High Street Northchurch | Dem of garages etc; construct 10 dwellings |
| 12. The Old Cottage, Bank Mill Lane | Garage alts; double storey glazed entrance hall etc |
| 13. Introduction of 20mph zone throughout the town | |

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Our membership stands at 277 households. A warm welcome to the households who have joined this year.

A reminder will be sent to the 108 members who are up for renewal for 2024 and a final reminder to the 19 who did not renew in 2023. We hope you still wish to remain members.

Our preferred method of payment of your subscription is by Bank Credit Transfer (BCT) direct to our bank account: 60-02-21 (NatWest): 51 85 84 87 (Business). Please use your name as the 'Reference'. Cash or cheque is also accepted. Or, if you prefer to pay by credit card, you can pay as a 'new member' through our website at www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk/membership.

As mentioned in an earlier newsletter, we will in future only send newsletters by email to 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.

Station Ticket Office

In our last newsletter, we reported on the Government's U-turn on allowing a mass closure of station ticket offices by the train operating companies, and a reprieve for Berkhamsted Station's ticket office. Barely had the dust settled on that decision when rumours began circulating that Berkhamsted's ticket office would be closed throughout the month of January due to a combination of staff sickness and pre-arranged extended leave for the primary member of the station staff. This also meant that not only the ticket office but also facilities such as the toilets and waiting room would be closed for a month. The BCA was able to confirm that the rumours were indeed true, but we were promised that there would be additional staff making periodic visits to the station in order to make some facilities available.

Our Chairman, Gordon, contacted our M.P. who took the matter up with the Minister of State for Transport, Huw Merriman, on Gordon's behalf. It transpires that the Train Operator, London Northwestern, has had unfilled vacancies for ticket office staff since the pandemic. Digging deeper, the reason why the vacancies persist is because although LNW has made a "Request for Authority to Recruit", the Government – in the

guise of the Department for Transport – has not authorised the expenditure to allow the vacancies to be filled. Thus, if a staff member is on leave or sick, there is a good chance that the ticket office will not be staffed and the rest of the station facilities will be closed. The above example clearly demonstrates how the Government micro-manages the so-called ‘privatised railway’, not the Train Operating Companies.

‘Our’ key member of staff was welcomed back to her post from 29th January and she is generally on duty from around 7 a.m. until mid-afternoon each weekday.

Station Murals

People arriving in Berkhamsted by train are now treated to an interesting and colourful display of murals on the walls of the walkway linking the platform entrances. The Friends of Berkhamsted Station had the idea of brightening up the station before the COVID lockdown and images produced by well-known local artist Mary Casserley were selected for the display. Landmarks featured include the Castle, the canal, the Rex Cinema and Berkhamsted School. Mary was pleased to donate the images free of charge to this project which she hopes will benefit the town. Funding was provided by West Midlands Trains, the parent company of London Northwestern Railway, and the signs were produced by Amber Signs and Print of Gossoms End.



Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association
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