



BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS

*The heart of
Berkhamsted*

www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk/

October 2022 Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association



Chairman's Report

The sad death of Queen Elizabeth has affected the whole Union and round the World and we realise how many lives have been touched by her during her extraordinary reign. We, of course, in Berkhamsted had the honour of Her Majesty visiting us on 6th May 2016 to unveil a coat of arms in St Peter's Church and to commemorate the 475th anniversary of Berkhamsted School. I am sure there are members who have met Her Majesty and I personally remember a number of gun salutes I had the honour to participate in, when I was a member of the City of London regiment; the Honourable Artillery Company. As our Captain General she supported us and all her armed forces and when we received new Regimental Colours I was chosen to guard her and Prince Phillip for the 2 hour ceremony.

King Charles III will, I know, continue to devote his life to the Union.

God save the King!

On a personal note, I trust all members are returning to normal after Covid.

Our membership is growing older and we are in competition for younger people's attention and time with Facebook and social media generally. I, for one, have taken to Zoom lectures produced by Historic Houses Association, English Heritage and NT. They are, of course, produced by organisations with deep pockets and we do not have any professional staff. We are trying to get an events' programme going and the Ashridge House Gardens visit was well attended. As mentioned elsewhere and in an email which we have sent out, we have arranged for an illustrated talk by Ron Basciano regarding the history of Luton Hoo Walled Garden being held in the Sessions Hall of the Town Hall at 8pm on Thursday 27th October. <https://lutonhooestate.co.uk/the-walled-garden> Following the success of the evening with Gagan Mohindra MP I have attempted to get a date, but

with all the things happening it will have to wait for 2023.

We are looking to arrange further talks and I would be grateful for any suggestions from members. I understand from Christopher, our Treasurer / Membership Secretary there are over 30 members who have to be sent newsletters by hand delivery or post as we do not have their email address. I would like to ask them to let me know on either chairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk or gordonbluck@hotmail.com if we may send communications by email. I do understand that you are concerned about giving your email addresses to anyone except your children / grandchildren but it will help us get information to you quickly and you will not have to wait for newsletters (3/4 only a year). We are of course very careful to keep membership data safe and adhere to data protection legislation. Only Christopher and I have any access to the information. We do not sell any data.

I am particularly pleased to welcome both Victoria Collins and Jeanne Woodcraft to the Main Committee and each of them bring fresh eyes and skills to the BCA. One of our major concerns is the website which needs to be simplified and tidied up and made more user- friendly. Victoria has done an enormous amount of work finding out the costs involved which are quite eye watering, especially the monthly/annual maintenance fees. She has considerable experience in her business life and has offered to run a workshop in mid-October for a number of the Main Committee including me, to decide what we want/need from the website. It may well be we start again and move over some of the old content.

We would save the archive material comprising many years of newsletters and minutes for use by historians of the future. I am very excited with the work being done by a working party looking to the future of the BCA. I am very keen to continue our existing format for our existing members whilst

appealing to “Millennials” who are surprisingly interested in knowing what happens in the town especially when they get involved in the planning process. An updated website will help but as I belong to some Facebook sites I see that we need to continue to involve our Facebook page via our Vice Chairman Paul.

I know you will be delighted that the Best Dressed Christmas Window competition is being finalised by our Secretary Miranda who is coordinating with Berkhamsted Town Council as part of the Festival of Light. The award will be made by me on Sunday 27th November at 5pm. We hope you will attend the whole event.

With our centenary looming in 2024 there will a number of things which will be mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. I trust members have been involved in St Peter’s 800th anniversary.

Our Townscape Group continues to look at all planning applications under the Chairmanship of Susan Johnson. This work is arguably the most important thing undertaken by the BCA and particularly as latterly there are delays and omissions to a number of planning applications caused by shortages of staff in Dacorum Borough Planning department. We try and attend all Town Council Planning Committee meetings where we are expressing the Association view to show concern or to object. A member of Townscape presents verbally the formal written view sent to the Borough Council. This makes the BCA an active part of the planning process.

Townscape Group *Susan Johnson, Chairman, writes*

You might be forgiven for thinking we do nothing but complain. Well, it is true we make on the whole *constructive criticism*, but it is designed to try to maintain the appearance of the conservation area and defend the Green Belt, the AONB and open space within the town. We also defend public facilities and services. Given the opportunity, for instance on the occasion of our annual Environment Awards, we even praise some developments!

We also offer help to those who want to make sense of the planning system, steering them through the maze as best we can. We hope members of the public appreciate this help, and maybe will join the BCA as a consequence. We must stress that complaining on social media cuts no ice with planners. You have to make the case through the Dacorum Borough Council planning website.

Here are some updates on the representations the Group has been making on the most significant sites since the last newsletter:

22 Shrublands Road – retention of tree house in front garden The modest application received permission, and the structure has now been

dismantled down to the level of the side fence – thank Heavens!

Aitcheson Rafferty, 154-158 High Street (now Ashtons) When the applicant did not build the window facing Water Lane to the approved plan, we informed Enforcement. Nothing has appeared to happen yet, but we remain hopeful Ashtons will amend the window. **New development at 57 South Park Gardens** An application is now in for 6 houses rather than the 5 given permission; no decision yet.

And then there is the application for **Solar Array** in Bourne End; against National Planning Policy, and creating a future Brownfield site for housing development a few years hence. Well, I am pleased to say sense prevailed and it was refused at Development Management Committee. We await an Appeal.

That’s the updates; now for the new ones:

- **Barclay’s to Gail’s.** We helped save the bricks of this listed building from direct paint, which would have been indelible
- **The Tooth Club** at Black Prince Yard has been prevented from erecting internally-lit signage in the conservation area and next door to a listed building
- **Felling trees subject to TPOs** and Conservation Area controls, without justification or suggested replacements; all over the place!

We have contacted senior management of DBC Planning about the general slowness of decision-making, and lack of enforcement. They assure us they are recruiting staff as quickly as they can to break the backlog; but are incidentally hampered generally by Government restrictions on the planning process in the Chilterns.

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

Environment Awards

In 2023 on Thursday 30th March we will have our 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 2022 in a presentation, thanks to Simon Heywood of the Townscape Group.

Now is the time to submit any suggestions for the Awards. All the developments should have been completed by 31st December 2022.

We hope you will come along in 2023 to see where the accolades for 2022 go. Will this be another year of multiple winners?

The Berkhamsted Proclamation

The accession to the throne of HM King Charles III following the sad death of HM Queen Elizabeth II on 8th September, whilst ensuring continuity and stability, presented official bodies in the town with some interesting challenges.

Flags were at half-mast for the late Queen but full mast in celebration of the new King. A strict timetable of upping and downing was followed. Then there was St Peter's who had both an up and down flag and muffled/unmuffled bells to deal with. Again strictly time-tabled – unfortunately, differing timetables for bells and flag.



What about the Proclamation - when should that be held? Who knew there was a strict protocol for passing on the Proclamation from the initial announcement at St James's Palace – just as news would have been spread by town criers back in the day. Scrolls to County Councils (County Council Proclamation), from County Councils to Borough Councils (Borough Council Proclamation) and on to Parish/ Town Councils. (Berkhamsted Town Council Proclamation). After all, it's been 70 years since we (or rather our parents' generation) did it.

On Sunday 11th September your councillors spent the day (unsure whether to wear black or not) dashing between proclamations. HCC 1pm, DBC 4pm and finally a lovely ceremony in sunshine outside the Civic Centre at 5.30pm. The Proclamation was read by our Town Mayor Cllr Wendy Conian, prayers lead by Fr Stuart from St Peter's, music and audio provided by Paul Chambers and a rousing chorus of God Save the King from the audience. The ceremony might have little practical relevance these days, but it was good to feel part of history.

There was a peal of bells at St Peter's in the evening of Saturday 8th October to mark a month since the death of HM Queen Elizabeth II and the Accession of HM King Charles III.

Best Dressed Shop Window Competition

The Berkhamsted Festival of Light will be held this year on Sunday 27th November. Every year Berkhamsted Citizens present a silver cup and certificates for the winner(s) and runners up of the Best Dressed Christmas Shop Window competition. This is the twenty-fifth year that we have been sponsoring the competition. It is open to all shops, and other premises with windows that are suitable

for decoration, along the High Street (from Highfield Road to Cross Oak Road and including Lower Kings Road, Castle Street, etc.). There is no stipulated theme but, particularly in recent years when many shopkeepers are going through challenging times, in judging the windows we have taken into consideration originality and recycling rather than simply the amount of money spent. This means that smaller shops and charity shops are not at a disadvantage. We are looking for eye-catching displays which will attract passers by. Judging takes place on Thursday 24th November and prizes will be presented at 5pm at the Festival of Light.

Miranda Cummins

BCA Centenary celebrations

As you will be aware (I hope) the Citizens Association is 100 years old in 2004/5. It first met in 1924 and had its first AGM in 1925 – so we've spread its centenary over the year.

In 1924 it was part of the national conversation to talk of being a 'citizen' rather than a 'resident'; more inclusive and active in the community – a real participant for the public good, encouraging others to join in. This was when we made our case by letter and in the Press. Nowadays we have electronic communication and – Heaven help us – Social Media; the opportunity to voice our dissatisfaction, possibly without consequence and, ironically, without making a difference. It is now, more than ever, important to belong to an influencing group and band together to improve things for our fellow citizens.

I have volunteered to take on the coordination of the BCA Centenary 'celebrations'. The Committee has decided to follow the pattern of our 90th celebrations. We will, we hope, republish our famous Footpath Map once again as a hard copy – especially for areas without a GPS signal, of which there are several in the Chilterns AONB around here. This will, we hope, become a collector's item. We have nearly run out of the '90th edition'. We will also refurbish a Town landmark, as we had the Sparrows Herne Turnpike Marker refurbished and Listed in 2014. (Keeping schtum about the details of that in case there is a problem) And we might have a luncheon. Any other ideas? If so, please get in touch if you are willing to help! But, most of all, please join in when you are invited! I need your support.

Susan Johnson

'AROUND THE TOWN'

The Berkhamsted Castle Trust

The castle attracts visitors from around the country, and indeed the world. Volunteers (mostly from the BLH&MS) people the castle every weekend from Easter through the summer months and interpret the site for the public. Susan Johnson is on the rota

as a Trustee and a volunteer. It's been a good year *but more volunteers are needed if we are to maintain our service. Please get in touch if you feel you can help! Full training given! Contact Andrew Holder at Andrew.holder@berkhamstedcastle.org.uk*

Berkofest Book Festival

Sunday 20th November, Berkhamsted Town Hall, from 10am – 6pm

If you are looking for an enjoyable event in gloomy November, the third Berkofest Book Festival has a really interesting mix of internationally acclaimed and local, award-winning authors covering many fiction and nonfiction genres.

Authors include Berkhamsted residents: **Robin Ince, Jakko Jakszyk, Stuart Turton and Clare Swatman; plus Jenny Éclair, Michael Attenborough, Nigel Planer, Henry Normal, Helen Czerski, Milly Johnson, Clare Pooley** and many more.

You can book tickets for the whole day or for individual sessions. (Early Bird All Day passes £20; Individual Sessions advance £7 and, unless sold out, £10 on the door on the day)

As they are finalised, more details and timings will be available at www.berkofest.com

As usual, there will be author talks, readings, Q&A sessions, panels, and book signings.

The Graham Greene International Festival

This took place this year from Thursday 29th September to Sunday 2nd October. It was successful with an audience from Europe and, particularly, the USA, where so much of GG's archive is held. Susan Johnson is our Trustee representative, and attended some sessions, and both films. There really is something for everyone.

Rectory Lane Cemetery

The Rectory Lane Cemetery Project is now well into its 'maintenance phase'. Works are in progress to introduce a wildflower meadow to the upper part of the cemetery, but first the dominant grasses which have thrived on the nutrient-rich soils over the years have got to be removed. 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

Travel

An English Regional Transport Association meeting/presentation is to be held in the Court House on 15th October from 2-4pm. There will be a speaker from London Northwestern Railways. Attend if you can!

BCA Events

MP's return visit

Our MP offered to make a return visit in October or November, depending on his Parliamentary obligations. But a lot has happened since then! We are trying to set up a date. Details to follow.

New Year's Day walk

Sunday 1st January 2023 at 10.30 a.m. meeting at Berkhamsted Station. Leader to be confirmed.

Annual General Meeting & Environment Awards 2023

To be held in the Great Hall, Berkhamsted Town Hall on Thursday 30th March 2023 starting at 8 pm. More details to follow.

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby
membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Our membership stands at 292 households. A warm welcome to the households who have joined this year. There are 13 still to pay for 2021. This will mean that if I have not heard from you by the end of the year, I will assume you do not wish to remain a member. Members who still feel able to pay their subscription, which is £10 p.a. (£30 for three) per household, are, of course, welcome to do so. The BCA does have on-going expenses, so we would appreciate receiving your payment, if you feel able to give it.

A renewal slip will be sent to the 31 members who are up for renewal for 2022, and the 13 who have yet to pay for 2021.

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'.

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.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association
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Published by the Berkhamsted Citizens Association © & Printed by Gemini Print Services tel: 01442 871017