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July 2019 Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Chesham Road Playing Field Footpath Appeal



In September last year Berkhamsted School cut down and blocked off the stile which has historically given access to the playing fields from Upper Ashlyns Road. This was done without any warning or notice to the local residents or the pupils of Ashlyns School. The access went across the playing field to the existing footpath (running from Butts Meadow towards the cemetery) and on towards Chesham Road outside Ashlyns School.

Elena, an enterprising pupil, started a petition online, which had 1500 supporters and led to an application being made by local resident, Helen Hodgkins, to the County Council to formally designate it as a public footpath. To establish this, we have to show that it has been used by the public continuously for more than 20 years prior to the school putting up their signs under the Rights of Way Act 1981. This meant getting as many statements as possible from existing and previous residents. Regrettably, the Council determined that there was insufficient evidence to make it a public footpath. Helen has lodged an appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment. Papers are currently being collated for this, including all new evidence. We have had tremendous response from the email to members and we would like to thank all those who have replied. We would love to hear from anyone else who has used the route in the past, so that we can include their voice.

Ben Barth, Footpath Officer

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Townscape Group

Susan Johnson, Chairman scgjohnson@btinternet.com

It seems a long time since we gave the **Environment Award for 2019** in March, but this is the first newsletter since then. Once more there was no plaque awarded, but a certificate of Commendation went to each of:

- **5A Castle Hill:** remodelling and environmental upgrade - awarded to John Minshull, (architect), Phil Bailey (environmental consultant) and to Jo and Jon Rollit, owners and BCA members
- **Brownlow House, Ravens Lane/Chapel Street:** change of use and refurbishment – awarded to Paul Meistry (Builder) and Chris Fairthorne (Joiner)

Our thanks go to our Townscape Group member Simon Heywood, who wrote and gave such a comprehensive and visually exciting presentation at the AGM. The winners seemed delighted. Our congratulations to them all!

Other topics covered by **Townscape** in the previous two months, in no particular order:

- Replacement of public trees and renewal of public planting
- Multi-storey car park – now due to open in March 2020
- Reviewing and commenting on many applications in the conservation area, especially those concerning houses covered by Article 4 Directions, or locally listed, or retrospective, or all three
- Alerting the DBC conservation officer to listed buildings we feel are 'At Risk', especially *The Lamb* and buildings in Church Lane. Watch out for cobbles' repair!
- Keeping track of Enforcement breaches, especially unwelcome internal illumination of advertisements
- Lobbying for protection of the AONB and Green Belt near the castle from light pollution
- Making representations on Bearroc 1 & 2, with some success but not as much as we would have liked. Better luck on opposing other unwelcome, infill developments
- Looking to have the George Street play area designated a Community Asset
- Keeping track of the issue of the new draft Local Plan, which now looks to be released for consultation in May 2020

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) – lobbying on the Town Council working party for use of funds for our preferred projects to improve the town’s facilities
- Canal & Riverside Project (CARP) – pressing for a meeting despite the evasion of the C&RT, British Waterways’ successor
- Lobbying in support of the designation of the path from Upper Ashlyns Road to Ashlyns School as a public footpath. We submitted evidence, and will support the Appeal following its rejection by HCC
- Relaunching the sale of the BCA Footpath Map for the walking season - now available in local outlets and National Trust shops, and selling well

The **Townscape Group** covers these and other topics, and makes representations, both written and in person, to the Town, Borough and County Councils, as appropriate. Please get in touch if you would like to discuss any topics that have been raised by this article; or any other matters relating to the town’s historic fabric, planning or infrastructure. If I can’t help you, I’ll try to find someone who can.

Public Spaces Protection Order (Dog Control) 2019

This may sound a dry and ponderous effort, and not relevant to you, but – **alert, all dog owners and walkers!** This Dacorum-wide restriction came into force in July and applies to all play areas, fenced and unfenced, in the Borough. It has the benevolent intention to restrict all dog access to play areas but, perhaps unintentionally, means dogs cannot be walked, even on a lead, on the path adjacent to the unfenced play area on the Moor, and on Canal Fields close to the skateboard park. Signage alerting people to the new law will be put up. Information leaflets will be made available by DBC and we will circulate them to those on our email list. If you have a dog, please keep them informed!

Berkhamsted Castle Trust was set up last year as an educational and promotional charity to take over (eventually) the day-to-day running of the castle from English Heritage. Our representative Trustee is Susan Johnson; and Sarah Caradec, another of the Townscape Group, is a Trustee in her own right, as a practitioner and student in the field of historic building conservation. You will increasingly see the Trust’s name in connection with the castle and its environs, and events taking place there. We hope this leads to a more user-friendly connection with our most historic and significant monument. Please give generously when you visit! And thanks to all our members who volunteer at the Castle in the visitors centre.

The **Berkhamsted History Hub** might have come to your attention. As the recipient of a HLF grant to develop the interpretation and promotion of the rich historic fabric of the town (quite apart from the HLF grant for the Cemetery Project – Berkhamsted, deservedly, gets lots of Lottery funding!) this is making good progress. The Citizens are well-represented, both as named participants but also because a lot of other organisations’ members are also ours. A final report will be produced later this year, and might lead to full-blown project funding to promote Berkhamsted as a more tourist-centred town.

The 21st Graham Greene International Festival will take place this year from Thursday 19 to Sunday 22 September. Its theme this year is ‘Reflections on Greene’ and will feature two films – *21 Days* starring Vivien Leigh and Laurence Olivier; and the incomparable *Our Man in Havana* with Alec Guinness. There will also be a talk by **Sir Vince Cable**, erstwhile leader of the Liberal Democrats, on *Politics and the Novel*, if you fancy hearing him speak on anything other than business and Brexit. For tickets and more information go to www.grahamgreenebt.org

Car Parking

“A piling rig, A piling rig, my kingdom for a piling rig!” as Shakespeare [Richard III, Act V, scene IV] might (not) have said.... At long last, a piling rig has finally arrived on the **Multi-storey Car Park** site on Lower Kings Road and works can now commence on the foundations for the new structure.

What was the Lower Kings Road car park has been hoarded off since early January and the first activity, once the area was closed off, was to divert underground utility services away from where the new car park will be built. It appears that services diversions on the car park site have not gone well, because five months later, they were still at it. Now that works have begun, Dacorum Borough Council’s Project Manager estimates that completion will be February of 2020. At the June meeting of the Parking Forum - a Working Group of the Town Council at which Councillors, interested individuals and organisations (including Berkhamsted Citizens) are represented - the Council’s Project Manager was urged to improve communication with local businesses and residents, to inform them what is happening behind the hoardings and to keep them updated on what the forecast completion date is.

Who is paying for the delay? According to DBC’s Project Manager, the Car Park contractor, Huber, is contractually responsible for the Utilities works, so Huber bears its own costs of being on site for longer than was anticipated. Normally the contractor could be liable for payment of liquidated damages for finishing later than the contract date, however it appears that the clock for delays only starts ticking once the Utilities works have been completed and Huber is able to get a ‘clear run’ at the construction works. It is therefore in Huber’s interests to complete the construction works as quickly as they can, in order to minimise their cost exposure.

The reduced number of the parking spaces in the town centre during the Christmas trading season will clearly have an impact on local businesses, and as well as residents and visitors who face another winter season using the temporary car park on the Moor, not to mention the further damage to that valuable green space in the town centre. These matters remain as a major concern.

It is also of some concern that, according to DBC's Project Manager, operational aspects of the car park, including the charging regime and how many spaces will be reserved for business users, have not yet been finalised. The Forum members urged DBC to engage with the Forum, and thus with local businesses and residents to ensure that the new car park operates to the benefit of local businesses and residents.

The imposition of the temporary **Car Park on The Moor** site in central Berkhamsted has been contentious from the off. Looking objectively, Dacorum Borough Council was placed in an invidious position. If it closed the Lower Kings Road car park for the duration of the construction works for the new multi-storey, without any provision for replacement spaces, it would be accused of strangling the town's businesses, many of whom depend on customers who drive in for their footfall. Where to put the temporary spaces is also contentious – too far away and people will consider it too far to walk, so a town centre site was considered imperative. Plans for the temporary car park were submitted for Planning approval, but Dacorum shot itself in the foot by proposing to cut down ancient trees on The Moor, and only a last minute action by local Town and Borough Councillors saved several important trees from the chop. The Planning consent stipulated a condition that the period of operation of the temporary car park should be for a maximum of one year. This should have been sufficient to allow for the eight month construction period for the new multi-storey, but as we now know, this has been delayed. So... what should happen after November this year, which will be a year since the temporary car park opened? Should the temporary car park be removed and the Moor be reinstated with new trees planted in the winter season – notwithstanding the parking pressures this will place on the town and its economy **or** should the period of operation of the temporary car park be extended for four months or so, until the new multi-storey car park has opened? Your views on this will be welcomed. Please address these to the BCA Chairman or any BCA committee member, or drop an e-mail to vicechairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Maps

Members may remember that the Association has been producing a Fieldpath map since the 1937 edition was published by Edward Stanford Ltd of Long Acre in sections mounted on linen. All this for a princely 3/-; that's three shillings to you and me. Now equivalent to £7.60, it makes our current 90th Anniversary edition footpath map a real bargain at £2.95. The latest series of maps have been produced by Bill Willett our own map maker and have been reprinted and revised twice with some 11,000 sold. The original funding some 20 years ago came from the BCA involvement in the Parish Paths Partnership with a grant of £1,000, and I managed to get a further £2,000 grant from Dacorum Borough Council. This enabled virtually the whole cost of map to be covered. Having just been made redundant in the great Bank Manager cull of 2000 I could get on my bike and organise the marketing. All ticked along till interest waned over a number of years but, following the 2015 reprint for our 90th celebrations and some sales, we had some 4,000 left. In March this year I put it to the main Committee that I was happy to get this going again. Maps were dragged out of people garages and nooks and crannies and with some new business cards I went on a sales route again. Our new member of Townscape, Anne Foster, has been highly successful in selling 210 maps and, with the support of our Treasurer, Christopher, who's even sold some maps to the Way Inn, we are off to a flying start with over 640 sold. The map is now stocked in National Trust Ashridge and Dunstable Downs visitors centres, Hill Farm Cafe, Waterstone's Berkhamsted, Complete Outdoors, Wigginton Community shop, College Lake and others. The whole idea is to fulfil the pledge not to make profit for the BCA but to encourage walking and enable charities like the NT to raise funds. This being said; the map fund is in surplus and we have already paid for the 3 trees near the Station advertising hoardings and trees in Lime Walk (off Castle Hill Avenue). Over £2,000 was spent on our information notice board near Swing Gate Lane and I am sure there will be other things to be done in future. I would like to thank everyone including the ever supportive Paul Crosland and Susan Johnson for all their help.

Gordon Bluck

The Decline of the High Street?

The increasing number of empty units in the town centre is a worrying trend. Closures seem to be on the up at present – Porters, Santander, Luminous & Vogue, Zebra, the Berkeley Gallery, Coral, Makana. The latest retail unit to voice concern over its future is the oldest of the lot – Woods. Its owner, Capital Gardens, is convinced that Waitrose's expansion of its plants and garden range, specifically, is undermining the smaller retailer's profitability. This may be true, but it could be that the supermarket's expansion into another sector shows desperation of its own; John Lewis & Partners is by no means immune to current trends; it just has greater ability to absorb its losses due to its size and its constitution. The *Citizens* think that the closures are part of a potentially worrying trend which has undermined the vitality of many a town centre, caused by consumers' drift towards internet shopping. That would certainly be borne out by the number of delivery vans buzzing around town. And then there's the punitive Business Rates. But let's look on the bright side! The Copper House has opened in the Town Hall; Per Tutti is now in the old Britannia building; there is a new Day Spa in the old Knight Frank premises; there is a new interior design consultancy next to one of the new barbers. Indeed, there are more barbers and designers and coffee shops than you can count! So the High Street has taken a different turn. The worrying thing is that few of its new occupants sell any 'things' – they are service providers of one sort or another. So residents become concerned, but are contributing to the trend.

The *Citizens'* message is – **use the High Street to buy things, or lose that facility!** Support Woods by buying its many gardening – related products. And, of course, go out to coffee/brunch/lunch/dinner after a relaxing time in one of the many facilities at your disposal. Berkhamsted is a prosperous, thriving town; residents can help keep it as such.

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Our loyal core membership stands at 325 households. A warm welcome to the 16 new households who have joined since our February newsletter. There are 29 subscriptions outstanding. A renewal slip will be enclosed for those still to renew.

Nearly 83% of our members choose to receive **electronic notification** of things that affect our town and giving notice of our meetings, including those which are arranged at short notice and without any other means of notification. Nearly a third of our members also choose to receive our newsletter electronically. If you would like to be added to either of these lists, please let me know.

Events

We were delighted that our MP, the Rt Hon David Gauke, came to talk to us on Friday 12th July. Many thanks to members who attended this lively evening, and especially all those who asked such interesting questions.

and a new date for your diary...Wednesday 6th November at 8 p.m.

Back by popular demand...so many people have requested a second spectacular Wine Tasting, we have persuaded Majestic to host another this year! We're hoping the manager of Majestic Wines, lovely Lou, will be choosing some of her favourite wines and sharing her knowledge with us.

We will be giving more details nearer the time, meanwhile please put the date in your diary, and discover some wonderful wines with us!

Barbara Gainsley, Co-Vice Chairman

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Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

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