



BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS

*The heart of
Berkhamsted*

www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk/

December 2025 Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Chairman's Report

Ian Reay, Chairman

This year, a week later than the Christmas Lights celebration the Association judged the Best Dressed Christmas Window Competition for the 27th year. This year there was a very strong set of entries and in addition to the winner there were three that were commended.

The overall winner was the estate agent ORCHID Lower Kings Roas, which, by involving children from Bridgewater School to create little houses prepared them from an early age to be citizens of the town.



The three commended entries were &QUIRKY, FORGE and WOODS Garden Centre.



We also gave certificates to two charity shops in recognition of the contributions they make to the town: the **Hospice of St Francis** and the **Hospice of Rennie Grove**.

Evening talks.

Since the last election the Labour government has introduced the notion of “grey belt”. This is lower

quality Green Belt land, which will be prioritised for development. **In October** we invited a retired planning barrister, Trevor Standen, to give us his views on some of the important developments being proposed in Berkhamsted. He pointed out that there is no real articulation of “grey belt” other than some examples, such as disused filling station sites. He also supported the objections which our Townscape committee have raised concerning the housing development on Green Belt land at the top of Swing Gate Lane. He pointed out that brownfield sites should be explored before using Green Belt sites. However, Dacorum’s brownfield site assessment has not been updated since 2021 –and contains inconsistencies, omissions and errors. Nevertheless, the Dacorum Development Management Committee has now approved this application – but with only half of the 14 councillors on the committee bothering to turn up to the meeting to make the decision!

In November, we invited representatives from Berkhamsted School to describe their proposals for the future of the school, following the completion of their recent new sixth form building.

We heard that they are planning a new performing arts centre and new sports facilities. The school is also planning to remove cars from the Castle Campus, to plant more trees on the site, and to improve the coach flow and access.

There will be a public exhibition of their proposals in the New Year.

The school also offered to arrange a tour of the new Sixth Form building to BCA members. **If you would like to attend a tour let me know on ianmreay@gmail.com.**

We would like to extend our programme of evening talks next year. If there is a speaker you would like to invite, or a subject you would like to hear about let us know.

Local Plan

The Local Plan Inspector has stated that there appears to be no clear, consolidated evidence which sets out the reasons and the judgements made by the Borough Council to justify the housing site allocations contained in the submitted Local Plan. The Council has been asked to produce a commentary on the reasons and judgements made as to why certain sites progressed to allocations, but

others were discounted. A list of all Green Belt sites proposed for release, should be provided along with a justification for their allocation having regard to reasonable alternatives, including sites which were found to cause less harm to the purposes of the Green Belt. The Inspector states that this evidence is needed before the next stage of the examination can proceed.

The National Trust has applied for planning permission to install “knee rail fencing” along Monument Drive, on both the north and south side, extending from the roadway to the Visitor Centre. The knee rail will have a gap every 50m and a gap where there is a footpath or bridle way crossing. This application will not be decided by the local authority but by the Planning Inspectorate on behalf of DEFRA.

The picture below shows what a “knee rail” might look like. The purpose, no doubt, is to prevent cars parking on the verges of monument drive.



Rectory Lane Cemetery: another year, another award

At a virtual awards ceremony held on 20th November, Green Flag (the charity which judges and rewards the best management of parks and green spaces, in the U.K. and internationally) awarded the Rectory Lane Cemetery Project ***The Best of the Best Volunteer Team***. This accolade is shared with the Friends of Antrim Castle Gardens, in Northern Ireland. They are a worthy co-winner, with substantial membership numbers and funding, so we can be very proud of this achievement.

This award recognises the hard work and dedication of all of the cemetery volunteers who are part of a wide-ranging team supporting Kate Campbell, the cemetery’s part-time Ranger: weekly and monthly work party members, mowers, grave gardeners, genealogy researchers, fundraisers, guides, event hosts, website manager, project manager.... Volunteers work in groups, individually, on site or at home, coming together as an amazing team, and contributing to the success of the cemetery as a beautiful community space. There is always more to do, so if you like to become involved, or simply receive the monthly newsletter, please contact Kate, by e-mail: team@rectorylanecemetery.org.uk.

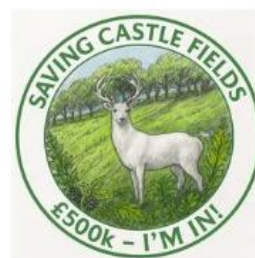
Berkhamsted Castle Trust and the Castle Fields appeal (“Saving Castle Fields - £500k, I’m In”)

Berkhamsted Castle Trust (www.berkhamstedcastle.org.uk) was set up in 2017 to manage the Berkhamsted Castle site – a

Scheduled Ancient Monument – in partnership with English Heritage under a Local Management Agreement. In 2018, the Castle Trust received a donation of 3 acres of land containing the outer earthworks to the east of the Castle itself, beyond the moat, bounded by New Road and Brownlow Road.

Earlier in 2025, the Castle Trust was given the opportunity to further extend its land ownership when a generous local benefactor offered the Trust an interest-free loan of £500,000 to purchase 30 acres of agricultural grazing land on the east side of New Road. This land is of historical significance, being where it is thought that the trebuchets used to attack the castle during the Siege of Berkhamsted Castle in 1216 were sited. There had been several attempts over the years to develop this land for housing, however, these had come to nothing. In 2024, the landowner had signed an Option Agreement with a buyer, who erected fences to restrict pedestrian access to only pre-existing public rights of way. This led to local protests and the formation of the ‘Castle Fields Interest Group’. The Group applied pressure for historic access points to be re-opened and discovered historic, legally-binding agreements which forbade the erection of fences on the land.

Following an abortive attempt by the buyer to auction some of the fields, the lands were finally transferred, after what had been several years of negotiation, to the ownership of Berkhamsted Castle Trust in September 2025, and the Castle Trust, supported by the Castle Fields Interest Group, set to work. The fences and gates have been taken down and the public can once again roam freely across the fields. with the Castle Trust already in discussions with Hertfordshire County Council about designating long-used routes as formal public rights of way. The task has begun in earnest to raise funds to repay the loan over a period of two years. All sorts of fund-raising activities at an individual and corporate level have taken place or are planned, and the scale of the fund-raising task is not underestimated. To date, roughly six per cent of the total has been raised. If you would like to contribute, monetarily, with ideas, or simply by ‘spreading the word’, please come and talk to members of the groups above at the new ‘Artisans and Makers’ Markets on Sunday 14th December, and then from March 2026 onwards, or visit <https://www.berkhamstedcastle.org.uk/castlefields>, or e-mail james.moir@berkhamstedcastle.org.uk.



The appeal logo was designed by local artist and BCA Committee member, Jeanne Woodcraft.

Townscape

The Planning Inspectorate is continuing its review of the Dacorum Borough Council Regulation 19 Draft Local Plan. We have seen that the Inspectors have written to DBC, requesting evidence in respect of the site selection process and justification for housing allocations in the Plan. The Inspectors requested more information from DBC to give a better understanding of the justification for how the Council has determined which Green Belt sites to release for development and why.

Some key proposed developments are due to be reviewed by DBC's Development Management Committee (DMC) in the coming months.

South Berkhamsted development proposals approved by Dacorum Development Management Committee

The outline planning application for the residential-led, mixed use development at 'South Berkhamsted' – on the lands that lie between Chesham Road, Swing Gate Lane, Upper Hall Park and the A.41, and currently designated as Green Belt land – was reviewed by the Dacorum Borough Council Development Management Committee (DMC) on Thursday 27th November. There are fourteen councillor members of this committee but only seven of those were in attendance at the meeting, plus one substitute member, effectively 'standing in' for a member who was unable to attend. Two DBC Councillors from Berkhamsted sit on this committee: Cllr. Stevens from Berkhamsted East ward, the committee chairman, and Cllr. Jankowski from Berkhamsted West ward. Cllr. Stevens introduced the application and spoke against it. Cllr. Nigel Taylor, another DBC councillor from East ward who does not sit on the committee, spoke from the floor against the application.

When it came to voting, Cllr Stevens, as committee chairman and an 'interested party', could not vote and left the meeting. Votes cast were four in favour of the application, none against and three abstentions. The abstentions included Cllr. Jankowski, which we find rather strange given Cllr. Jankowski's profile on the Berkhamsted Town Council website, in which he describes himself as "passionate about protecting the environment". There were 1420 objections in the 'Public Comments' on this planning application on the Dacorum planning portal, against 3 supporting the application.

One possible reason for the reluctance of councillors to vote against this scheme is that the national (Labour) government's focus on increasing the rate of construction of new homes means that the developer, Taylor Wimpey would be likely to take the rejection of the application to Appeal, where it is likely that the planning inspector would uphold the Appeal. The Appeals process is costly one, especially in legal fees, and councillors are likely to feel that they need to 'choose their battles' and spend precious funds on those cases where there is a greater certainty that they will be successful. The BCA has requested to have the 'South Berkhamsted' development 'called-in' by the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and

Local Government. We wait to hear if our request has been successful. In our submission, we have highlighted the lack of tangible support for the application in the DMC vote – only four councillors in favour from a committee of fourteen.

The planning application for the construction of a Lidl supermarket in Gossoms End, between Majestic Wines and Turner Court, are also due to be considered by the DMC. The BCA has objected to the removal of the affordable housing units in the current application compared to what was proposed – and approved by Planning – previously. We believe this site is suitable for residential development above the supermarket, something that is the norm in other countries. Lidl contends that the building has been 'specially designed for Berkhamsted' but we can find little to differentiate the Berkhamsted scheme from other bland, stark, corporate-led buildings that characterise this company's retail offer. We believe that little or no recognition has been given to the fact that the development is next to the river Bulbourne – a nationally important chalk stream. The Environment Agency requires an 8 metre wide 'buffer zone' along the river bank for protection of the river environment, but this has been ignored in the planning application.

The DMC is due to consider the application for the change of use of a site at Swing Gate Lane, across the bridge over the A.41, for a five-home, travellers' caravan site. The BCA believe this is contrary to DBC's own 'saved policies', specifically CS22 'New Accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers'. This policy requires traveller sites to be site 'close to facilities', not on Green Belt land, outside the main settlement of Berkhamsted, accessed via a single track road.

There appears to have been little meaningful developments in the 'larger scale' planning applications already submitted: the mixed-use redevelopment of the High Street, between Boots and Water Lane, by the freeholder, Sorbon Estates, the development of 80 housing units by Croudace west of Blegberry Gardens, between Shootersway and the A.41, or the redevelopment of the Kings Road Evangelical Church. A planning application is awaited for another site off Shootersway by Crest Nicholson Homes, and also for a mixed, residential and care-home development, led by Beechcroft, along London Road, opposite Hall Park.

Turning to the smaller scale developments, and consideration is still being given by the Planners to proposals to re-build the former Eastwoods shop on Gravel Path to two, three-storey, three-bedroom houses, and the construction of two, three-bedroom houses at the rear of 354 High Street (was Kite Windows). DBC has granted planning permission for the planting of 2-metre tall copper beech trees around the perimeter of Fosse House (corner of Bridgewater Road and Brownlow Road), as mitigation to the ugly, close-boarded timber fence that was erected without planning permission.

The Townscape Group has welcomed the proposals to convert and re-use an historic pair of properties

on the corner of the High Street and Holliday Street. Nos. 58 to 60 High Street have been vacant since 2007 and several applications have been made to redevelop the site. No. 58 is a locally-listed building, and now, an application has come forward to refurbish this long-neglected building and extend it at the rear for residential use. The single storey building at No. 60 – which will be easily recognised by long-time residents as ‘G. Holliday & Sons’ cycle and motor-cycle business – would be re-established as a shop unit. The application can be found on the Dacorum planning portal, by searching for reference 25/02620/FUL. The Design and Access Statement provides an interesting insight into the history of the buildings.



Outside of our immediate area, a planning application to convert part of Ashridge House to a 206-bedroom hotel (Application reference 25/01374/MFA) was submitted in June 2025, and is scheduled for consideration by the Dacorum DMC, probably in the new year.

SANGs (Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces) in Berkhamsted and district

Haresfoot Farm (23/02508/MFA) – the creation of footpaths appears to be complete; new planting has been undertaken; fencing, including acoustic fencing, has been erected; the car park off White Hill (22 standard bays, 2 accessible bays, bicycle rack) is largely complete, although not yet open for use.

Castle Hill (23/02972/MFA) – additional fencing has been erected; the car park off Castle Hill and the access road to the cricket club (25 spaces, bicycle rack) are largely complete, but not yet open.

Nettleden Road/ Potten End Hill (Potten End) - the application for a SANG on land between Potten End Hill and Nettleden Road was initially

rejected by DBC. It went to Appeal and the Appeal was allowed by the Planning Inspector.

DATE FOR YOUR DIARY

New Year's Day walk : 'making Ends meet' (walk leader: Paul Crosland)

There will be a short walk, approximately 5 to 7 miles in length (will be adjusted to suit the conditions), starting and finishing at the front of Berkhamsted Station. The walk will feature the footpaths across Castle Fields (featured elsewhere in this newsletter), Potten End, Bourne End, the Bourne Gutter, and Swing Gate Lane. Meeting time, 10.30 a.m. Be prepared for a variety of conditions under-foot !

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby
membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Our membership stands at 263 households. We welcome the 19 households who have joined this year.

A final reminder will be sent to the 22 households who were up for renewal for 2025. We hope you still wish to remain members.

A reminder will be sent to the 128 households who are up for renewal for 2026.

We hope you wish to renew. If you don't, please let me know.

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

This is for a single year only unless you repeat it for extra years.

As mentioned in an earlier newsletter, we only send newsletters by email to members for whom we have email addresses.

We understand the situation of those that do not have an email address or prefer not to use it. 25 newsletters are still printed.

Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Association

Contributions to the Editor: Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby, 15 Shrublands Avenue, HP4 3JH

or via email to: membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Published by the Berkhamsted Citizens Association © & Printed by Gemini Print Services tel: 871017

Berkhamsted Neighbourhood Plan

The latest phase in the production of the Neighbourhood Plan is a consultation which is taking place between 26th November and 7th January

2026. Responses are requested via an on-line survey – see the link to the ‘Berkhamsted Neighbourhood Plan - Consultation’ on the Berkhamsted Town Council website (www.berkhamsted-tc.gov.uk). Please see the poster at the end of this newsletter.

Berkhamsted Neighbourhood Plan

Time to comment on the draft policy ideas!

The Neighbourhood Plan will help shape how Berkhamsted changes and evolves over the next fifteen years. It is a vital document that will guide planning decisions.

Whether you are a resident, business owner, or simply care about the future of the town, please let us know what you think - your views will help shape the Neighbourhood Plan.

Consultation runs from 26th November to 7th January - you can view and respond online, and visit our drop-in event to find out more.



Consultation drop-in event **Why attend?**

Date: Wednesday 3rd December
Time: 9.30am to 12.00pm
Venue: The Civic Centre

- Have your say on the future of Berkhamsted
- Help influence future planning decisions
- Get informed of progress on the Neighbourhood Plan
- Speak with members of the Neighbourhood Plan team
- Let us know if you think the ideas are heading in the right direction
- Suggest ideas for infrastructure improvements



Berkhamsted Town Council