



BERKHAMSTED CITIZENS

*The heart of
Berkhamsted*

<http://www.berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk/>

July 2026 Newsletter of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association

Chairman's Report

Ian Reay, Chairman,

We informed members in special message on the 7th of June about the recent passing of the former Association Chairman, Susan Johnson, who joined the BCA main committee thirty-six years ago. However, I would like to stress the central role that Susan played in the Association's more recent activities. In 1981, she put in place the Environment Award which the Association now presents at the AGM each year. She was also responsible for setting up the hustings which the BCA organise and moderate at general elections, and for organising a debate at the time of Brexit. We plan to continue with these initiatives in the future. At Susan's funeral on the 26th of June many Association members attended and we learnt how very wide and varied her interests were. We have included the June 1998 Newsletter as it not only gives her profile but also reference to the c19th cast iron Turnpike Marker which she was instrumental in getting listed by English Heritage in December 2014.

This year, 2026, marks the centenary of the purchase of the Ashridge Estate by the National Trust. The Ashridge estate was originally owned by the 3rd Earl Brownlow, who died in 1921. Since he had no children he instructed, in his will, that the estate be sold off to pay death duties. Originally the estate included large areas in and around the Chilterns including Ivinghoe Beacon and Pitstone Hill. Before the purchase large areas were sold off: Berkhamsted Golf Club bought 530 acres, and over 4,000 acres were sold off in the nearby villages of Ivinghoe, Pitstone and Studham. Clearly there was a threat of substantial housing development on the land.

Consequently, there was an extensive fund-raising campaign led by G.M. Trevelyan, a historian who lived locally, George H. Whybrow, a local historian, and Bridget Elizabeth Talbot, a distant cousin of our very own Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby. The campaign was supported by several political leaders of the time: Stanley Baldwin (the Prime Minister at the time), Ramsay MacDonald (the leader of the Opposition), H.H. Asquith (former Prime Minister) and Viscount Grey of Fallodon.

In 1926 the National Trust acquired an initial 1700 acres of "Ashridge Park", for £80,000. This was extended subsequently and currently the National Trust owns about 5,000 acres of land. This does not include Ashridge House and its gardens. These were purchased in 1928 and donated to the Conservative Party. Today it is a management college with no political affiliations. A recent planning application was granted to allow conversion of part of the house into a hotel, alongside existing uses.

The Association has played a role in fundraising to help support the Berkhamsted Castle Trust's repayment of a large loan enabling it to purchase Castle Fields, adjacent to New Road. This purchase will preserve this valuable heritage site for the town and ensure that it will not be developed. On the 7th May we hosted a Gardeners' Question Time. Five panellists with professional and extensive experience attended and there were demonstrations and plant sales. In total, £600 was raised for the Castle Trust. The following Saturday we hosted a Musical and Literary Arts fund raiser. Madalina Tudoran sang light classical songs accompanied by Bertha Kum on the piano, and there was also trumpet playing and poetry reading. This concert raised nearly £400.

The Chiltern Society is organising its 9th Heritage and Culture Festival between the 20th of September and the 4th of October. Berkhamsted features in one of the events:

Berkhamsted Castle and Castle Fields Tour on Friday 25th September or Thursday the 1st of October.

For more information on this and other events, and to book, visit www.chilternsociety.org.uk.

Heritage Open Days 2026 has as its theme 'Everyday Histories'. This year's events run from 11th to 20th September and there are a number of events taking place in Berkhamsted, as usual. Check venues and book on line at <https://www.heritageopendays.org.uk/whats-on.html>

We are continuing to arrange for evening speakers in the Town Hall. Our next talk is scheduled for Thursday the 1st of October. The speaker will be Tom Rodwell, who organises cricket for charities in third

world countries. His talk is entitled “Third Man in Havana” – a deliberate reference to Graham Greene.

Berkhamsted Castle Trust and the Castle Fields Appeal

In our December newsletter, we referenced the ‘Castle Fields Appeal’ which was to raise £500,000 to repay a generous loan provided to Berkhamsted Castle Trust for the purchase of historic fields to the east New Road, Berkhamsted. By the middle of June, the Appeal has surpassed £200,000, including Gift Aid contributions – forty percent of its target. Berkhamsted has really rallied to this cause – in March, ten volunteers from the ‘Save Castle Fields’ group ran in either the half-marathon or the fun run, and raised £11,500 between them. In May, a street party was held by the residents of Foggy Bottom (the old name for the area including Chapel Street, Bridge Street, Manor Street and Ravens Lane). Earlier in the year, a nine year old resident of George Street did a sponsored run around his neighbourhood, whilst in June, Eliza Hermann (also a BCA member !) did a marathon-length walk in laps along the path between the two Castle moats. The sponsorship monies from each of these events and activities has helped towards the target. In June, a new project was launched : ‘Save Your Space’. This new initiative highlights the potential destruction of the Fields by development and divides the fields into 3 metre by 3 metre squares, each having a ‘What3words’ address <https://castlefields.berkhamstedcastle.org.uk/>. Each What3words square within Castle Fields is available for purchase at a cost of £39. Whilst you won’t own the land, you will have helped secure the future of Castle Fields as an open space for all to enjoy ! This initiative has been particularly successful and £25,000 was raised in the two weeks following its launch. Look out for a flyer being delivered to all addresses in Berkhamsted and Northchurch.

If you, or someone you know, would like to help Berkhamsted Castle Trust achieve its target, please contact James Moir (james.moir@berkhamstedcastle.org.uk) or visit the market stall on the High Street – usually by the pathway to Waitrose – on the second Sunday of each month (coinciding with the Artisans and Makers’ Market).

Resurfacing of London Road

The pot-holed approach to Berkhamsted along London Road is no more and the whole road from Bourne End Church to the Old Mill has been resurfaced during overnight road closures during late May and early June. The repair works were undertaken partly as a result of legal action taken by a local resident (and BCA member) against Herts County Council under Section 56 of the Highways Act 1980. We know that Bridgewater Road is in need of repair, but are there other roads or locations in Berkhamsted and Northchurch that you believe are in a dangerous state of disrepair ? Please let us

know by e-mail to chairman@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Station Road is now one way towards Gravel Path/ Restrictions from Castle Street to Chapel Street.

Please be aware that Station Road is now one way only, towards Gravel Path, after the entrance to Travis Perkins. This is so that HGVs bound for Travis Perkins can still readily access and leave the warehouse. Turning from Castle Street into Chapel Street is now prohibited to vehicles, though – please note - Chapel Street itself remains a ‘two-way’ street. Please feed back your thoughts on how these initiatives are working.



Gravel Path/ Station Road junction



Castle Street/ Chapel Street junction

UK Government puts Dacorum Borough Council into Special Measures due to its record on Planning decisions

On 15th June 2026, the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a ‘designation notice’ to Dacorum Borough Council under Section 62A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, which has the effect of DBC ceding control of some decision-making powers with respect to Planning to the UK Government. These ‘special measures’ will continue in effect until such

time as they are revoked. It means that developers seeking permission for major planning applications, including those for ten or more homes, will now be able to apply directly to the Planning Inspectorate, rather than having their applications considered by DBC.

The reason why this has happened is the high number of planning applications that have initially been refused by DBC, in its capacity as the local planning authority, and have subsequently been overturned on appeal by the Planning Inspectorate, i.e. the reasons for refusal have not met national planning criteria. Another reason why DBC has been put into 'special measures' is that it does not yet have a have an approved Local Plan in place for the period 2024 to 2040 – it is currently under review by a Government Inspector.

The official DBC response to this development can be found via the following link :

<https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development/planning-applications/government-designation-for-major-planning-applications>

Victoria Collins, MP for Harpenden and Berkhamsted, said:

"People are fed up with a top-down planning system that neither protects the green belt nor delivers the social and affordable homes we need. They're against development dumped on communities without the roads, GP surgeries and school places to match, and now without even a local voice in the room."

"Dacorum has been caught between a rock and a hard place. The government have put in place more rules, more applications and with no extra funding. Instead of fixing that, the Government has simply taken power away. I'll be pressing ministers to reverse this decision and to back, not punish, councils working hard for local communities."

The BCA Townscape Group will continue to review planning applications that affect the character of Berkhamsted and Northchurch and make our views known to the DBC Planning, the DBC Development Management Committee or to the Planning Inspectorate as appropriate.

Berkhamsted in Bloom

by Kate Campbell

On July 15th, three judges from **Anglia in Bloom** will visit Berkhamsted, to evaluate eleven sites picked out by our hard-working steering group. We are in the 'large town' category and will have around four hours to show them around.

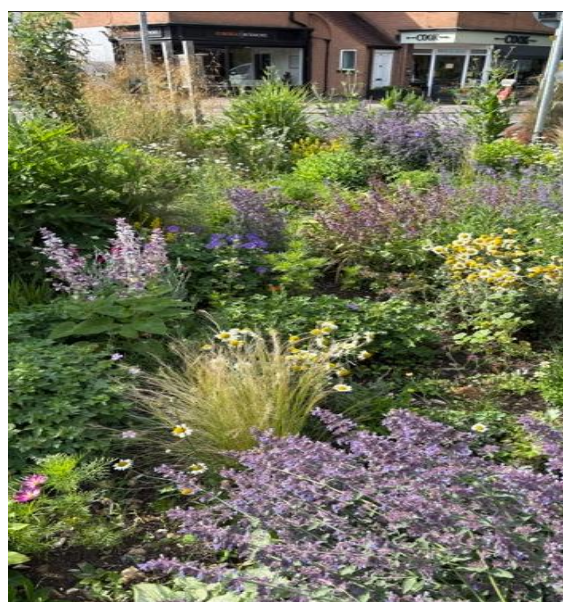
The idea for entering the **In Bloom** campaign came from the dismantling and re-distribution of one community garden ('Open Door' at 360 High Street) in October 2025. This highlighted just how many volunteer gardens there are in our town. We formed a WhatsApp group, had a few meetings, and so the campaign began!

Some of the gardens are well established, some still in their infancy. They include the Millennium Garden on Canal Fields, Berkhamsted Station Garden, Kings Road Wildflower Meadow, Lime Tree Walk (Castle Hill Avenue), Swing Gate School, 'Greene Field Corner', St Peter's Church and Rectory Lane Cemetery. See the map below for more details.

All plants have been sown, split or gifted and nurtured by the gardeners at no cost. They are mostly herbaceous perennials and annuals not requiring regular watering and benefitting a wide variety of insects.

Kate Campbell, the Ranger of Rectory Lane Cemetery (the Community Project part of the campaign) and a steering group member said, "It's brilliant to be part of such a community effort, with like-minded gardeners – that's already a win from participating in the **In Bloom** campaign, whatever the results turn out to be in the Autumn."

If you'd like to get involved, please email berkhamstedinbloom@gmail.com. Details of Anglia in Bloom can be found at www.angliainbloom.co.uk



**Greene Field Road garden
(junction with Lower Kings Road)**

Sustainable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs) at Castle Hill and Haresfoot Farm

Whether or not you like the principle behind them, the SANGs at Castle Hill and Haresfoot Farm appear to have been finished now for some time, so why are the car parks at each location blocked off and out of use? We asked this question of Councillor Garrick Stevens, Garrick made some enquiries and the following is from Dacorum's SANG delivery officer, Steven Werrell: *"We are awaiting the completion notices from Taylor Wimpey (TW) on both Castle Hill and Haresfoot Farm. Once received we will re-inspect the sites against the (completion) criteria. Both sites failed their SANG site inspections last year (2025), but hopefully they (TW) will have acted on the remedial actions noted. Once the defects have been corrected they (TW) will receive a 'certificate of practical completion'. I understand there will be a handover from TW to The Land Trust (who are responsible for the maintenance of the SANG) once the sites are in operation"*.



Entrance to Haresfoot SANG

Townscape Group

Gordon Bluck - Chairman

When preparing for this report, I decided the very first thing was to thank the members of Townscape Group.

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby produces the lists of new planning applications for Berkhamsted and Northchurch, which we all review, to make our judgements on them. Paul Crosland takes our minutes and keeps us up to date with the outstanding applications by way of a comprehensive agenda before each meeting. Simon Heywood, and particularly Anna Barnard, who often writes the long and detailed objections before I use the magic of 'cut and paste' onto the Dacorum Council Planning Portal, as we are a consultee. Susan Johnson was a vital member of Townscape until her recent death and there is an article elsewhere in this newsletter about her. Normally the BCA Chairman Ian Reay attends the Townscape group and his experience as an ex-Councillor at Town, Borough and County level is invaluable. I find his wise counsel vital to the output of Townscape.

At the time of writing, an application for the construction of 102 dwellings at Haslam Fields, Shootersway has recently landed and the Townscape Group is reviewing this. The 'open' applications are moving forward at glacial speed. The proposals developed by Sorbon Estates for 162-192 High Street appear to have come to a halt. We have heard that there have been problems finding an alternative site for the public toilets in Water Lane Car Park. We have also objected to the proposal to 'stop up' the highway at the back of the shops and the access to the Town Hall. Turning to the scheme to build 80 dwellings at Blegberry Gardens off Shootersway we have objected as it is not in the local plan. The Dacorum planners have refused the application. Good. Moving on, the Lidl supermarket, despite the efforts to resurrect the plan over 5 years ago to incorporate affordable flats the plan was approved without the flats. We are working on ensuring that light spill from the supermarket is restricted and that the protected corridor alongside the River Bulbourne at the rear of the site is maintained.

The plan for a new Kings Road Evangelical Church having been refused is being resubmitted and comes before the Development Management Committee (DMC) on 16th July. The BCA continues to strongly object due to height, bulk etc. The plan for five mobile homes on land off Swing Gate Lane by the by-pass bridge has been delayed and we continue to object. Regarding the plans for 130 dwellings at Haresfoot Farm this was granted on 29th May.

The plans for 200 dwellings with new access from Shootersway (application reference 25/03092/MOA by Croudace Homes) is also due to come before the DMC on 16th July - we have strongly objected. As with all the plans we object to, our submissions are on the Dacorum Planning Portal and available to all to view. An outline application reference 25/03126/OUT to build a 75-bed care home between London Road and Bank Mill Lane is under consideration; we have objected at length as the site is Green Belt and prone to flooding.

Berkhamsted councillor installed as Mayor of Dacorum



Councillor Garrick Stevens, who represents Berkhamsted East ward on both Berkhamsted Town Council and Dacorum Borough Council was elected as Mayor of Dacorum for 2026 – 2027 on 13th May

2026. We congratulate Garrick, who is also a longstanding BCA member, on this honour.

BCA Newsletter Archive

Just a reminder that a newsletter archive can be found on our website – look under ‘Documents’ on the home page or follow this link :

<https://berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk/document-archive/>. As we are sadly reporting the passing of former Chairman, Susan Johnson – who many of our members see as epitomising the BCA - we are attaching to this Newsletter, the BCA Newsletter for June 1998, which contains a profile of Susan.

Membership Counts

Christopher Talbot-Ponsonby

membership@berkhamstedcitizens.org.uk

Our membership stands at 249 households. We welcome the 10 households who have joined this year.

A reminder will be sent to the 29 households who are up for renewal for 2026. 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 previously mentioned we only send newsletters by email to members for whom we have email addresses.

We also fully understand the situation of those that do not have an email address. 14 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:

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