

Out and about the town (23rd June 2007)

The last meeting of the Berkhamsted Access Committee was held on Friday 22nd June in the Berkhamsted Civic Centre.

We heard that WH Smiths will be improving access for wheelchair and pushchair users and will have access to the lower floor by Christmas. Access to some other shops (including at least one bank) is still an ongoing problem. It was also reported that the 'apparent serial litigator' who has been taking various local authorities to court over the recent disability access legislation met his match in court recently, when the judge decided that he should provide a report on his complaints, which would then enable a higher court to hear the case. This would have the effect of making the 'complainant' liable to costs if he lost (he was using the small claims system which meant that each side paid their costs - and DBC has already spent thousands of our pounds already).

The current Chairman, announced he would be standing down after 17 years in the position and it was decided that as from the next meeting, to be held on Friday 14th September 2007, that it would be called the Berkhamsted Access Group with the Borough Councils' Access Officer in the Chair. Anyone who may be interested in contributing

Councillor Lindy Foster-Weinreb has approached the County Council to improve access in Bridge Street, which was received with polite interest. Having tried to work in the area, I have shared her concerns for some years (along with Victoria Road, Torrington Road, Charles Street and Boxwell Road, to name but a few). Having started on our Council as an Independent, then changed to a Lib-Dem and currently a Conservative, perhaps she thinks she may have more success. I find it difficult to see what else, apart from turning the old boat building area into a car park, could actually be done as the road was not originally built to have a footway either side (like Victoria and Highfield Roads for example) and the actual road is only some 12 feet wide.

All around the town, marks are being drawn on footways for repairs to be carried out, Ravens Lane is crumbling before our very eyes and generally the town is collapsing all around us. Strangely, we are supposed to be living in an affluent part of the country, yet many residents feel we live akin to a third world economy.

Has anyone any news over the four flats which were to be built on the 'spare' land adjacent to the bridge in Little Bridge Road? I recall that late last century I managed to find out it was 'owned' by the Borough Council housing department and suddenly a housing association was given permission to build 'affordable' housing on the site. In 2007 I find a pile of concrete, no temporary parking to relieve George Street and no sign of 'badly' needed affordable housing.

Our very own Cllr Ian Reay (portfolio holder for planning within the Borough Council hierarchy) informed me a while ago that although I had concerns over the on-site parking, this had been resolved. Mind you, this was the same councillor who took me to task when I suggested that the Water Lane car park was ripe for development for as new supermarket by informing me (just 6 months before the news broke) that there were no plans or intention to redevelop the site.

Meanwhile, on the home front, many thanks to those of you voted for me in the recent election and you maybe pleased to know that both the major political parties blame me

for their failures. Strange really, as I didn't even get elected, but I suppose they must know something that I don't.

Whilst I'm thinking about it, long serving Councillor Carol Green was elected as the Town Mayor and newcomer, Councillor David Taylor was her deputy

The strength of our new Council is such that two of the new members don't even have to sit on any of the working committees, the number of which has been cut in any case. With just 3 Lib-Dems and 12 Conservatives on the Town Council, I just hope we don't end up with a load of 'voting fodder' rather than democratic representation. The Borough Council is even worse with 44 Conservative Councillors out of a total of 51.

Our new Councillors have started out well, as only a few days after contacting my new representative, the replacement street name plate was duly installed. Such a pity since I reported it last summer and an officer came and actually knocked on my door to ask where it was (about a month after I originally reported it) and seemed surprised that I didn't actually have it in my back pocket. To make things even better, out of the 3 signs, we have one correct and two incorrect - such is the power of Borough officers (the oldest is the right one) so perhaps we ought to encourage them to get out more and visit the provinces.

Next month, how the Borough Council intends to squeeze a quart into a pint pot, news on the local Crime Prevention Panel and the Environment Forum - bet you can't wait!