

Democratically Yours

Successor to 'Sunnyside Up' - Political Newsletter of Norman Cutting
Issue three Summer 2004

Just a note to everyone

It's a while since you received one of my missives. Some of you have moved into the 'ward' (aka Berkhamsted East) and some have just realised that what goes on in Westminster and our two Civic Centres actually affects you more than you thought.

Why a newsletter?

Since I stopped doing my column in the 'Berkhamsted Review', it is fairly difficult to find out the background to the decisions taken on our behalf. Even the Borough Councillor who took over my column, Cllr. Ian Reay, tells us very little about local day to day political activities. The official word is available via the internet, but never seem to answer questions like 'why were the yellow lines removed from most of Three Close Lane?' or 'why are the lines recently painted a nice bright yellow and still not conservation area style in all the area?' (see Charles Street for an example).

Next year we will be able to elect a County Councillor in May, maybe even a new government and decide if we stay in Europe or not (forget the constitution, it will be on whether or not we stay in Europe as the government will have a better chance of getting the result it wants!).

Westminster

I hate to say this, but the best source of information really is a magazine entitled 'Private Eye'. It has a completely biased view on Government and will make you either want to emigrate or get involved in the decision(?) making process.

The major political parties have excellent web sites promoting their particular brand and another source of information is a site natively called www.wpolitix.co.uk. If you've managed to stay interested this far, then go have a look.

Locally

The Borough Council is Conservative controlled, although most of the Berkhamsted representatives are actually Lib-Dems. The Town Council is Lib-Dem apart from just one Conservative.

While the Town Council are still trying to impose a skateboard park on ground they do not own (for only 6+ years), the Borough expect to have theirs operational by later this year. The temporary one at the top of Lombardy Drive has fallen into disuse, although the Manor Street venue still attracts a few users at weekends and summer evenings.

When your Council Tax bill arrived did you notice that services are being reduced and costs are going up. I think everyone now accepts that national government, and our 'friends' across the channel, have imposed more and more requirements on both County and Borough Councils without actually providing enough money to carry them out. Our Borough was one of a few in the country that was actually solvent until recently. This was largely due to funding for the New Town being used to ensure its success. The Town Council, in 1974, just gave everything away to the new district council and with it, all responsibility for deciding our future. It now acts as an 'consultee' on Berkhamsted matters (except the allotments), but manages to spend more than £120,000 of our money this year doing it. It took over the Christmas lights in the late 1990's and 'lost' the management of the Town Market.

The trend now is 'partnerships'. CARP is a prime example on how the way things have to be done. BUDS was another project with shared costs, although with even less say. Planning is currently under the stewardship of the Borough with the Town Council, just consulted. Not to worry though, soon even that little pleasure will be no more with decisions being taken by own very own unelected Regional Assembly located somewhere round the M25, turn left up the M11 and then right into the Fens – I think! Just a thought though, perhaps that should be round the M25, down the M2, under the water and keep going.

Why?

Well, there is an election coming soon and the two major parties are pushing postal voting for all it's worth. This means that they believe you

are more likely to vote if you don't have to troop down the the polling station. Mind you, did yours move further away last time? mine did - sorry, I digress. They believe that turnout will go up from between 30-40% to as much as 70% and thus believe it will be enough to win any election. The Lib-Dems are still convinced that proportional voting (like the last European one) will be much fairer (even if subject to corruption).

Once again, belief and reality are miles apart in the political world. Anyway, I thought you all deserved something decent to read during the hot summer days while the kids are home and give you all something to think about.

What are the two burning issues in the town as I write. Well, the new refuse collection system has just started and just £20,000+ could easily be spent installing a skateboard park on Velvet Lawn that no-one seems to want.

Skateboarding

I have to declare an interest in this as the proposed site is less than 100 yards from my garden, will mean either removing or moving a fair distance one of the football pitches and generally be a real pain in the neck. If it is used, it will attract older children and the noise drift will mix with the current by-pass vehicle noise. The Town Council are making all the right noises to meet a commitment made by the last Council - even down to suggesting that CCTV will be installed to help keep an eye on the situation. The only problem is that privately, a number of Town Councillor's are not convinced it is a good idea (sorry - vote winner) and when it was on the town planning committee agenda recently, it transpired that the Youth Council didn't think it a good idea either. I did suggest that the money could be better spent on the town centre 'Gatecrashers' club or even the Youth Club up the other end of town. Some hope!

Just in case the Borough Council are minded to approve the application - they who must be obeyed!! - I suggested that only temporary planning permission is granted and the CCTV and management group be in place prior to any work commencing. We shall see.

Meanwhile -

The 'wheelie' bins have arrived!

Those of you who are members of the Berkhamsted Citizens Association - just £5 per year and apply via the web site <http://www.bca.normcall.com> - will have seen my photograph the illegal parking of these bins on footpaths in Hemel Hempstead. Where are the wardens when you want them?

This disgraceful event is starting in the conservation area of Berkhamsted. But fear not, I have good reason to believe the Borough Council may have seen the error of it's ways. Amongst the hills in our area, they spotted that a number of homes actually didn't have nice smooth access to the highway, just a lot of steps. These homes have been issued with bio-degradable sacks to help the situation. It surely can only be a matter of time before the obstruction fines start to build up and eat into someone's budget. After all, we know who they belong to and who left them there.

Talking about footpath obstructions, I was in Priory Gardens the other week and a couple of mothers had to go into the road with their push chairs (in front of me!) just to get round a car parked on the 'footpath'. Being the gentleman that I am, I didn't run them over but did say to them it was a shame these people didn't actually think. One of the mothers admitted that before having a baby, she did the same thing - but now the penny had dropped and wants all pavement parking banned. The problem is that it is, but no-one actually will do anything about it.

As part of my ongoing commitment to make this town better to live in, why not visit one of my web-sites (or even the Conservative one at <http://www.berkhamstedtory.org.uk>) and keep updated on local events and political campaigns. You could even ask a political question or two and I will endeavour to find out the answer. www.normis.whodunit.co.uk - for comments www.normcutting.com - about me www.berko.org.uk - about the town

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