



The Bracknell Forest Society

AN INDEPENDENT VOICE FOR BRACKNELL FOREST

Newsletter - Issue 55 – Spring 2025

SOCIETY NEWS

Since the last newsletter the Society has continued to grow with more new members – welcome to all of you.

Our March meeting was almost standing-room only –



we just managed to squeeze in enough chairs in the Recital Room. Andrew continued his talks on local people with interesting stories – this time with **'Twelve local people that you might have heard of'**. Some of our longer-term residents clearly remembered Cyril the Clown and Ma Murphy.

Unfortunately, Paul Lacey was not able to present his 1960s photographs of Bracknell himself. However, Andrew and Colin stepped in at short notice with a double act to show Paul's photos and some extra local history of this decade of change for Bracknell.



Towards the top of High Street – looking west

Many of you will remember Paul's previous talks on local buses. Details of his most recent book are at the end of this newsletter.

In May and June, we have fully booked trips to Ascot Racecourse and Runnymede. These will be followed by our Week of Walks starting at the end of July.

PROGRAMME OF EVENTS

Monday 12th May – Morning and Lunch

Behind the scenes at Ascot Racecourse

A guided tour, meet a racehorse and lunch in a hospitality box.

Fully booked – details sent by email to attendees

Monday 2nd June - Morning

Guided tour of Runnymede

A guided tour by June White who is a National Trust Guide

Fully booked – details will be sent to attendees nearer the date

Monday 28th July to Sunday 3rd August

Week of Walks

The programme will be distributed to members in early July. As last year, spaces will be limited, booking will be required with priority for members

Monday 1st September – 7.30pm

Reading Gaol.

A talk by Mark Stevens (County Archivist)
In the Recital Room at South Hill Park.

Monday 6th October – 7.30pm

The History of New Towns - From Utopia to Britain's Post-war New Towns

A talk by Colin Bird. *In the Recital Room at South Hill Park*

Monday 3rd November – 7.30pm

UFOs over Southeast Berkshire

A talk by Warwick Grigg
In the Recital Room at South Hill Park

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Planning Applications

It has been a quiet start to the year for planning applications on which the Society has made representations.



As announced at our AGM, Alvin Finch has taken over from Paul Scott reviewing the weekly planning application list.

Meanwhile, cranes continue to raise the skyline of Bracknell town centre, as Andrew's photograph of the council's co-development on Market Street shows.

For events see our website: www.tbfs.org.uk or find us on [Facebook](#)

For further information, please email: tbfsinfo@gmail.com.

Demolition of High Street Car Park

The council has received central government funds to help with the demolition of the High Street Car Park which was closed last year because of structural defects.



All the businesses and groups under it have now been relocated with the exception of Acoustic Couch which is still seeking a new home.

New Town Centre Music Venue

Musica Group Ltd is hoping to take over the former TGI Fridays restaurant in the Lexicon, which closed in October.



It has applied to the Public Protection Partnership to sell alcohol, play live music and recorded music from 11am to midnight Monday to Thursday, until 1am on Thursdays and until 2am on Fridays and Saturdays.

Lexicon up for sale?

There are reports that the Lexicon's owners Shroders and L&G are looking to sell the shopping centre. There are not many further details. However, these sorts of property transactions are fairly common and could allow the initial investors to invest in new ventures.

There is no indication that any sale would put the Lexicon at risk – it continues to attract new shops and visitors from around the region. Even the Princess of Wales visited the Lexicon with her children last November.

Sandhurst Neighbourhood Plan

The first draft of Sandhurst's Neighbourhood Plan is available on the Sandhurst Town Council's website. The consultation is open until 19th May 2025.

Four of the walks (led by Andrew and Colin) are repeats of ones that have been included in the Society's Week of Walks in previous years. An opportunity to catch up on any that you missed.

Some need booking – for others you just turn up. See separate list of walks sent with the newsletter for details and book through the Town Council website: https://www.bracknelltowncouncil.gov.uk/council_events/

BRACKNELL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

With Bracknell Town Council celebrating its 70th anniversary, and an ongoing consultation about reforming local government, we thought it would be useful to look back at how services were provided in the past.

Prior to 1888, English local government was primarily overseen by Justices of the Peace in Quarter Sessions for county business. These JPs, appointed by the Crown, held administrative functions and levied local taxes to fund activities like road maintenance and prison construction. The Local Government Act of 1888 established county councils, while another act six years later established created urban and rural districts, as well as parish councils. This established three layers of administration, each responsible for various aspects of local government.

At the top level, Bracknell came under Berkshire County Council (which extended north to the outskirts of Oxford until boundary changes reduced it in 1974), based in Reading. The second level of local government was covered by Easthampstead Rural District Council (which had the same boundaries as the current Bracknell Forest). There was no civil parish of Bracknell at this time, the town being divided between Easthampstead, Warfield and Winkfield parish councils.



ERDC offices, Church Road - approx. 1955

The New Towns Act of 1946 introduced corporations as a means of developing new towns. Bracknell Development Corporation was formed in 1949 and was responsible for the management, design and development of Bracknell. It was independent of local councils but obviously had to work with them, a sometimes fractious relationship. It soon became clear the three parish situation for Bracknell was unsustainable and a new civil parish of Bracknell was



As noted in Andrew's article on Bracknell and Local Government, Bracknell Town Council marked its 70th anniversary on 22nd April. As part of a series of events for the anniversary, free walks for a range of fitness levels are available in the week of 24-31 May 2025. (Note, the Society will still run our Week of Walks at the end of July)

Some are special one-offs including history walks, a swift (bird) walk and a tree walk. Others are regular weekly events that more people should know about.

formed. The timetable for the new parish council was reported in the Wokingham Times:

5th November 1954

When the new civil parish of Bracknell comes into being there will have to be elected Bracknell Parish Council.

11th March 1955

Polling for the 15 seats on Bracknell Parish Council takes place on March 28th

22nd April 1955

The new Bracknell Parish Council held its first meeting in the Easthampstead R.D.C. offices on Friday last (15th April) with 13 of the 15 councillors present.

In another reorganisation of Local Government in 1974, Easthampstead Rural District Council was replaced by Bracknell District Council, and Bracknell Parish Council took the opportunity to become Bracknell Town Council. Bracknell Development Corporation continued as a separate entity until it was wound up in 1982.



*Easthampstead House.
Home of ERDC and BDC from early 1970s*

In a further change, Bracknell District became Bracknell Forest Borough in 1988 (the word 'borough' was later dropped from the title), which entitled it to have a mayor. With the abolition of Berkshire County Council in 1998, Bracknell became a unitary authority, effectively reducing the administration to two levels from the previous three.



*Time Square.
Current offices of Bracknell Forest Council
Andrew Radgick (History Officer)*

COVID DAY OF REFLECTION

The national COVID-19 Day of Reflection took place on Sunday 9 March 2025. To mark this day, Bracknell Forest Council commissioned a memorial bench, which is now located in Lily Hill Park.

Bracknell Forest rangers selected the pieces of wood, sourced from our local forests, to be used for the bench. It was then crafted by volunteers from Ascot Shed. The bench is for residents of Bracknell Forest who need a place to sit, reflect and enjoy a moment of peace in beautiful surroundings.



Lily Hill Park

Bracknell Town Council also installed a remembrance bench and garden which is at Braybrooke recreation ground.



*In remembrance of those we lost to COVID-19
and those who suffered mentally, emotionally and physically.
Through hardship and sorrow, we stood together.
We are thankful for the strength of our community
and key workers in the face of adversity.*

Braybrooke Recreation Ground

BTC HISTORY WORKING GROUP

Several Bracknell Town Councillors have formed a History Working Group with the aim of increasing awareness of and preserving the town's past. The group's Chair, Ellen MacHale gave a brief overview of the group at our AGM

The group has been preparing submissions to Bracknell Forest Council to add to the list of Locally Listed Buildings which Andrew described at the AGM. Submissions already made and awaiting decisions include: the Panels from the former Crossways House that are now languishing in the Met Office and Western Roundabouts; the Sculpture over the entrance of Harmanswater Community Centre and also the early 1970s group of Easthampstead House, Bracknell Central Library, and Town Square. More submissions are in preparation.

As part of the 70th anniversary of the Town Council, work is underway on five information panels that will be installed around the town. Funded from money paid by developers for

community projects, these will give some of the history of places significant to the New Town. We will share full details when the panels have been installed later this year.

OTHER NEWS

Downshire Golf Course Cemetery plans confirmed

Bracknell Forest Council's cabinet has approved the use of the Pitch-and-Put course at Downshire Golf Complex to expand Easthampstead Park Crematorium and Cemetery for more than 1,000 burial plots. The council decided this was the only viable option to avoid running out of burial plots. An archaeological survey is required before work is expected to start in March 2025.

Local Transport Plan

A new Local Transport Plan has been approved by Bracknell Forest Council. It outlines the borough's long-term transport strategy from 2025 to 2037. It sets out how the council will create a more sustainable, accessible and resilient transport network that supports the environment, local economy and residents' health and wellbeing.

Key elements of the plan include:

- ▶ Improving walking and cycling routes, particularly to schools
- ▶ Enhancing access to reliable public transport
- ▶ Rolling out more electric vehicle charging points
- ▶ Encouraging alternatives to short car journeys
- ▶ Supporting travel behaviour change in communities and schools

Trees for Streets

Bracknell Forest residents, businesses and community groups can now choose to green their streets following the launch of a tree sponsorship scheme.

Trees for Streets is a not-for-profit, national tree sponsorship scheme. It was co-founded in May 2021 by the charity Trees for Cities and civic innovator Start with Local. The scheme works with councils across the UK to facilitate the planting of trees through community led sponsorship.

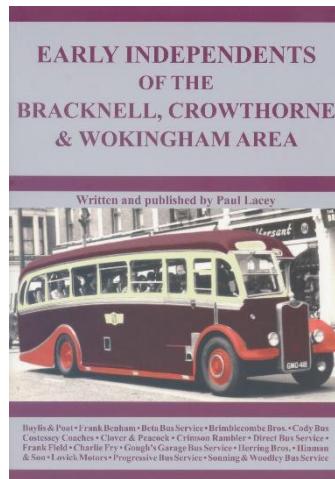
Bracknell Forest Council has recently joined the scheme to give residents more choice about tree planting in their streets. For further information about how the scheme works, including the cost of tree sponsorship, visit the new [Sponsor a tree in Bracknell Forest](#) page on Bracknell Forest Council website.

Bracknell Forest secures national tourism status

Bracknell Forest, alongside the five other Berkshire councils, have successfully achieved accreditation as a Local Visitor Economy Partnership.

This means Bracknell Forest and its partners are now part of VisitEngland's new national tourism network. This links the borough directly with the national tourist board and the UK government.

It is not yet clear whether this will result in any changes within the borough.



Paul Lacey's recent book **Early Independents of the Bracknell, Crowthorne & Wokingham Area** has a cover price of £15, but can be obtained direct from him for £12, by sending a cheque to 17 Sparrow Close, Wokingham, RG41 3HT, that price including P&P under this offer.