News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association SPRING 1986

TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE

This Borough shares with Croydon the dubious distinction of being the only planning authorities in London to hold closed planning committee and sub- committee meetings. From 1st April meetings have to be open to the public and the Association is planning to cover them, perhaps in co-operation with neighbouring associations, to gain a better idea of the grounds on which decisions are made. It is a daunting task, with a meeting to be covered each week in April, but it would help us understand the rationale behind th approval of certain developments such as 42 Ladbroke Grove, which the Association opposed most forcefully. The Council has never said why it holds its meetings in private, and when the new rules were introduced refused to change its policy until the last possible day.

LANSDOWNE COURT

This Association was very concerned about a planning application to add an extra floor to Lansdowne Court at the junctions of Lansdowne Crescent, Rise and Road, and were asked by the Town Planning Department for their comments. The Association decided that the development was so inappropriate that it objected on grounds of principle, rather than go into detail. In March the Town Planning Committee rejected the application on grounds of visual scale, overdevelopment of the site, and lack of parking facilities — the grounds given by the Association.

The Committee's rejection was so total that one has grounds to hope that should there be an appeal it, too, would be rejected.

RESTORATION GRANT

Last year the Ladbroke Association gave their support to an application to Council to restore the wall fronting numbers 65-77 Ladbroke Grove. Planning permission was obtained in March this year, and a grant was given out of 'Brighten up the Borough' funds, contingent upon a certain contribution from the freeholders. The wall will be rebuilt and newly rendered, its balustrade will be replaced. Work is to begin in May, the freeholders having formed a group to manage both restoration and future maintenance. Once completed the new wall will improve considerably this part of Ladbroke Grove.

TREES

Our trees form one of the most distinctive features of the area, but recently there seems to have been an increase of work being done without permission, including in communal gardens. If you wish to fell, lop, top or uproot trees in this area you must give the Planning Department six weeks' notice. You may not carry out the work within the six weeks without permission, an exception being trees under 3″ in diameter at chest height. If a tree is cut down or uprooted in a way likely to destroy it a magistrate can impose a fine of £2,000 (£1,000 for lesser damage) or an unlimited fine in higher courts. The Borough is, where it can find street sites that don't interfere with the gas and other mains services, planting a substantial number of new trees.

RECRUITMENT DRIVE

Early results from selective leafleting of Ladbroke residents before Easter yeilded encouraging results. New members are still welcome — have you asked your neighbours to join?

HOW SHOULD WE COLOUR OUR BUILDINGS?

One of the distinguishing features in the appearance of buildings on the Ladbroke Estate is the use of Stucco. Many of the buildings are completely covered with it; others use it in combination with brickwork. Stucco needs to be painted for the sake of appearance and for protection against the weather. Where it is not painted, as in St Peter's Church, it tends to look shabby and it does not weather well. The need for and the cost of regular re-painting is one of the disadvantages of stucco, but it does lead to a regular visual renewal and freshening of the buildings.

When the buildings were new they must have looked very different from what we see now. The stucco probably a 'stone' colour, the window and door frames brown or black, and the doors painted with a 'grained' finish — very different from the multi-coloured scene of today! A number of factors have brought about this change. There have been enormous developments in paint technology, with a much wider range of weather-resisting colours, and there have been changes

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SECRETARY

Elizabeth Beaven has served us well as our Secretary. But she feels that she cannot carry on much longer, because of failing health. So she has regretfully asked us to try and find a new Secretary. This is an extremely important role. Do you know anyone with the right kind of abilities, some spare time and a willingness to serve the Association in this way?

THIS IS URGENT!

in taste and fashion. There has also been the trend away from leasehold ownership to individual freeholds which has lessened the constraints on the way people paint their houses. What principles should guide us when we re-paint our houses now? 'Purists' will say that we should repaint them as they were when they were built. At the other extreme, some will say that the design is 'strong' enough to take a wide variety of colours and that such a variety makes for liveliness.

Let us consider some possible guidelines. Perhaps the most important is that the colour scheme should always support or enhance the architectural design or composition. How does this apply?

In a grand architectural composition like Stanley Gardens, with St Peter's Church at one end and the pair of 'tower' houses at the other, the colour scheme should support the composition — the two long terraces should be the same colour; the tower houses should be painted as one building, not each different, as at present; and how splendid it would be if St Peter's Church was brought to life with a painted facade!

Ideally, all the terraces of identical houses should be painted in one consistent colour scheme. A good example of this is Royal Crescent in the Norland Conservation Area to the west. Here the houses are all the same colour with architectural features such as cornices, architraves, etc picked out in white. This was a co-ordinated Town Scheme backed by the Council. Another approach which allows some variety within a unity is seen in the Town Scheme in Kensington Park Terrace North, Kensington Park Road. Here, window frames and architectural features are all painted white to give a unity to the terrace, whilst the flat stucco surfaces can be painted from a selected range of compatible colours.

In the more random terrace groupings there is clearly scope for the variety within unity principle in the colour scheme. In the Ladbroke area there are many paired houses. Two houses forming a symmetrical pair should be painted the same colour and preferably at the same time — co-operation between adjoining owners could improve appearance and also save money.

In the painting of house doors there is perhaps the maximum scope for individual choice, whereas the painting of garden railings or walls should be done for the maximum unity and continuity in the street scene.

There are some 'don'ts' which apply generally.

1. Don't use a colour of a tone much lighter or brighter than the colour on the adjoining buildings.
2. Don't pick out untidy drainage pipes in black, paint them the same colour as their background.
3. Don't finish parapet walls with black bituminous paint. This spoils the look of the skyline.
4. Don't paint brickwork except in very special circumstances.

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARDS

The Association has made two proposals in the Ladbroke area for the Council's annual Environmental Award scheme. One is for the would-be developer of 2 Stanley Crescent for the 'Venetian bridge' and other work at 13-14 Stanley Crescent, while the other is for the external restoration of The Britannia pub in Clarendon Road.

STANLEY GARDENS NORTH

In return for access to the site via these gardens the developer of numbers 24-25 Stanley Crescent agreed to replace the existing fence (sagging chain link on concrete posts) along both Stanley Crescent and Kensington Park Road. While the style of railing chosen is somewhat inappropriate to the area it does represent a substantial improvement on the previous fence. The cost of even this syle of railing is outside the purse of most Garden Committees, so the developers' help is to be welcomed, even if it does not match the quality of new railings found at sites such as at 9 Lansdowne Road.

It is perhaps worth mentioning that Garden Committees do have some scope for asking for substantial garden improvements to be made as a *quid pro quo* when builders ask for access via a garden, for instance in relaying paths with hoggin. Garden Committees are reminded that planning consent will normally be required for a new boundary fence more than one metre high adjoining a road, or two metres elsewhere.

2 STANLEY CRESCENT

The Association and the Town Planning Department have become increasingly concerned at the delay by the Department of the Environment on this appeal, which has been with them since last June. As a result the developer put in a revised application. The Association opposed the original application, but it decided it would not oppose the new application. We were very concerned that after such a delay the appeal was allowed early in April.

NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

The Secretaries of various Garden Committees in the area have been approached by Notting Hill Police about setting up a scheme in the area. Members who wish to find out more about the Neighbourhood Watch or Property Marking Schemes should contact the co-ordinator, WPC Margaret Dickson, at Notting Hill Police Station on 01-741 6276.

SPRING MEETING

The Association heard Martin Garman from the Notting Dale Urban Studies Centre talk to the title of 'Plague Spot & Beauty Spot' on the relationship enjoyed between posh Ladbroke and Norland with the Dale. Though apparently well known in North America and Europe the work of the NDUSC is little known in Kensington. It has built up a substantial resource of local history, concentrating on the working poor of the area beyond Avondale, which as late as the turn of the century had a death rate two and half times as high as the rest of London and which was described by Charles Dickens and General Booth as having the worst poverty they had ever seen. Fifty years earlier the average age in the area was eleven, reflecting the dreadful death rate — 50 per cent perinatal mortality was the rule.

The local economy was based on pigs (three times as many pigs as people), brick and pottery manufacture in the summer, and laundry keeping most of the women and children in work all the year around. At one time there were 111 laundries in the Dale. Exhausted clay pits became open sewers into which houses would collapse, and the stench disgusted the gentry on the Hill, perhaps encouraging their charitable works among the poor. Not until 1863 was the 'Ocean' filled in — today it is Avondale Park. Housing was a permanent problem with the population increasing eighteenfold in the last century. At the turn of the century there were on average 20-24 people living in a four room house, possibly with only one tap — even in this century the Borough Council only refurbished 318 houses in North Kensington in the period between the two World Wars.

Martin Garman left it to his audience to link historical developments with present conditions.

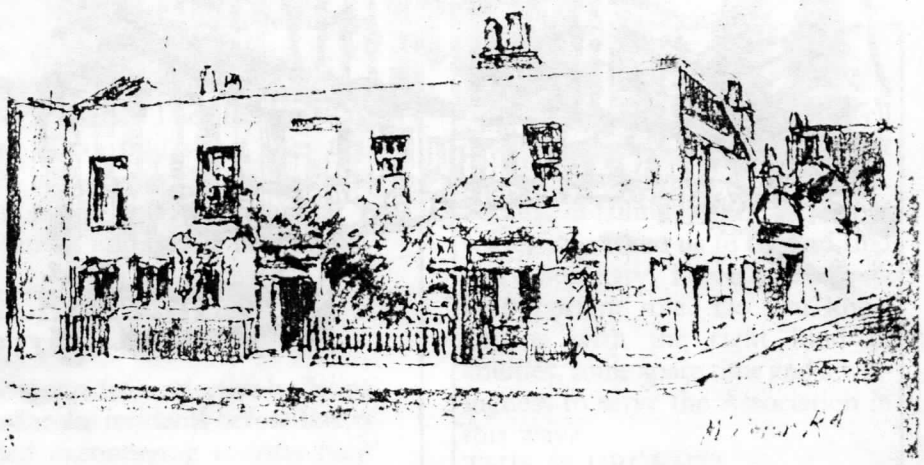
Above right: Kensington Potteries 1855. Below right: Walmer Road.

ENFORCEMENT

The Association has always supported the Council when it takes enforcement action against developments for which there has been no planning application, or in which the actual development departed in some way from the plans that were approved. The Association was very concerned about departures from the plans at 28-30 Lansdowne Road. Due to pressure from local residents and the Association the situation has been considerably improved, but the Council feels that further action by them would result in an appeal by the owner which would be upheld by the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The Association is still encouraging the Council to take all available action against the untidy state of the site and the unfinished external works at the site of the Kensington Temple at the junction of Kensington Park Road and Lansdowne Road. We feel that the Council could better employ its scarce resources on cases like this, rather than at 10 Horbury Mews and 20 Lansdowne Crescent (currently under appeal). We shared the Council's concern over the development at Notting Hill Police Station, but realise that they are powerless to act. While the police *should* have gone through a process of 'consultation', in the final event they do not require planning permission.

COTTAGES IN "KENSINGTON POTTERIES," 1855.
From "Ragged Homes and How to Mend Them," by Mrs. M. Bayly.



HOUSES IN WALMER ROAD.
Drawing by W. Cleverley Alexander.

PROPOSED TOWN PLANNING CONTROL CHANGES

A report is being considered by the Secretary of State for the Environment, which recommends several changes to existing town planning controls. The changes concern the 'Use Classes' — one of the means by which the uses of buildings are controlled. Theoretically, any 'material' change in use of a building could require planning permission, but under government order, changes are automatically permitted from an existing use to another in the same Use Class without the need for planning approvals; for example a grocer's can become an undertaker's, as both are within the same 'shop' class. The definition of a Use Class is therefore of considerable importance, as it allows unrestricted changes of use within a class.

The main proposals in the report are:

1. An expansion of the 'shops' class to include building societies, estate agents, banks, restaurants, cafes and betting offices, and possibly even the offices of lawyers, accountants, architects, insurance brokers and the like.
2. The merging of offices and light industry into one new 'business' class.
3. The creation of a new 'residential' class to include flats, houses and small residential homes, for the elderly. In addition to this, however, is a proposal to permit householders to run businesses from their homes, employing up to four other people.
4. A proposal to decontrol the subdivision of residential accommodation, which would permit the conversion of a house into any number of flats without the need for planning approval.

Possibly the proposal may be of concern to residents in Kensington, where commercial pressures are so intense. The first proposal, to expand the shops class, could mean the loss of local shops if they became estate agents or the like. The second proposal, the merging of offices and light industry, could result in the loss of local mews garages, etc. The third proposal, to allow businesses to operate from homes, could lead to a significant increase in the number of office workers in the Borough. The fourth proposal, to decontrol residential sub-division, could result in an enormous increase in the density of population (and in the demand for parking spaces). It is perhaps the last two proposals which could have the greatest impact in Kensington.

The thinking behind the proposals is in line with current Governement policy to allow the maximum freedom for market forces to operate, trusting in the market to look after the life of the country. Whilst this thinking may be appropriate in the economic sphere, and even perhaps suitable for certain developing areas, the impact of the proposals upon the character and amenity of established residential areas, especially within London, could be severe.

If you are concerned about the proposals you should write now to your MP or local councillor, referring to the 'Property Advisory Group Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) Order 1972 Report'.

The Council has already written to the Secretary of State strongly opposing the changes as they will remove so many planning controls.

Lansdowne Crescent, Notting Hill

May fair

The St. John's Church May fair takes place around St. John's, Ladbroke Grove on Saturday 10 May. from 2 p.m. A very jolly event.

Topographical books

Several recent books have featured the Ladbroke area. This illustration of Lansdowne Crescent comes from *Gentleman's London* from Weidenfeld & Nicolson.