

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

Spring 2007



St Peter's Church, Kensington Park Road viewed from Stanley Gardens.

NEW CHAIRMAN

In our 2006 Newsletter we reported that our Chairman Charles Levison was seriously ill. Sadly he died in July. David Corsellis, who had been acting as chairman during Charles's illness, was confirmed as our new Chairman at the Annual General Meeting in July 2006. He will serve a three-year term.

David Corsellis was born in 1937 and has lived in Horbury Mews on and off since 1967. He spent 35 years in the Army and then 12 years as Assistant Under Treasurer at Lincoln's Inn. He is married to the painter Jane Corsellis.

Message from the new Chairman

"I am honoured to be taking over from Charles Levison. As was said in his extensive obituaries, Charles was a man with many enthusiasms and huge energy. He led an extremely interesting and creative life. It amazes me that he ever had time to become involved with the

Association. How he fitted it in is a mystery. But he did and we should be immensely grateful for that and for having had the privilege of working with a man of such talent and charm.

The scrutiny of planning applications remains the core of the Association's role. However I believe that, with the arrival of David Prout as the new Director of Planning and Borough Development, there is an opportunity for the Association, its neighbours in Norland and Pembroke, the Kensington Society and the Notting Hill Gate Improvement Group to have a strategic look at the future of Notting Hill Gate and to improve the consistency of planning decisions and enforcement.

Given that everyone involved in these organizations leads busy lives, it is vital that we share information, views and expertise to avoid duplication of work for ourselves and for the Council Officers.

(Continued on Page 2)

THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION AGM

3 JULY 2007

The 38th Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on Tuesday 3 July at:

7.00 for 7.30 p.m.

at the Lazy Daisy Café, 59a Portobello Road, W11 3DB.

Nominations for new officers and committee members should be sent to the Chairman of the Ladbroke Association, 8 Horbury Mews, W11 3NL, not later than Tuesday 26 June. All nominations should have a proposer and should also be seconded.

GARDEN WALK 6th June 2007

The Association is holding another of its walks around some of the communal gardens in the Ladbroke estate on Wednesday 6 June. It will be led by Henrietta Phipps, whose knowledgeable insights are invaluable for understanding how each garden was designed and developed. There will be drinks following the walk.

A separate invitation with further details will be sent out to members nearer the time. Places are restricted, so those wishing to join the walk will need to book in advance.

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I also hope that we can try to reflect the views of the members of the Association, although this does not mean that we promise to support your own planning application! Our website and contact details are below and we would like to hear your views”.

David Corsellis

Chairman

chairman@ladbrokeassociation.org

WEBSITE

You can access our website at:

www.ladbrokeassociation.org

and this provides a link to our Blog where you can send us comments on any planning matters.

OTHER LOCAL ASSOCIATIONS

The Ladbroke Association is one of several similar associations in the Borough. Next door to us we have the Norland Conservation Society and the Pembridge Association:

Like the Ladbroke Association, they are run by local residents keen to protect and improve their area, and much of their business is concerned with scrutinising and commenting on planning applications.

There was a meeting of the three Chairmen in November 2006 together with the Chairman of the Kensington Society. Subjects discussed included Borough policy on tree pruning (on which see the article on page 5); concerns about the lack of consistency shown by the Borough in planning advice and decisions; the increasing number of subterranean developments (on which see the article on page 4); and the effects that the Mayor of London’s long term plan to extend the Uxbridge Tram system up Holland Park Avenue might have on the area.

The Notting Hill Improvements Group or NHIG is a rather different sort of animal. It was founded in 1993 and its objective is “to improve the environment of Notting Hill Gate and neighbouring streets”. Since its foundation, it has received substantial funds from

local businesses and has also been successful in winning lottery funding. With these funds it undertakes projects to beautify and improve the amenities of Notting Hill Gate. It paid for instance for the stainless steel “Carnival Elephant” outside Newcombe House; the wind sculpture ‘Climber’ high on the stone wall just left of Waterstones; the coloured panels that now brighten up the extremely dreary building above the southern entrance to Notting Hill Underground Station; and the mural on the wall of the alley running down the side of Marks and Spencer into Victoria Gardens. Some members of our committee sit on the committee of the NHIG, and the chief landowner in Notting Hill Gate, Land Securities is also represented.

The Kensington Society covers the whole of the Kensington part of the Borough. This is a bigger and grander body than our local associations, with royal patronage and a

number of extremely distinguished Kensington residents on its council. It was founded in 1953, before Kensington and Chelsea were combined into a single borough (there is also a Chelsea Society founded in 1927). Its objectives are similar to those of our association, but on a wider scale, and it concentrates mainly on the more major projects affecting the area as a whole. It is well suited to dealing with major policy matters, having amongst its members people with very considerable expertise and experience, who are also prepared and able to devote much time to dealing with these matters.

All these associations have one thing in common, namely that their chief interlocutor is the Council of the Royal Borough. A large part of all our time is spent discussing issues of concern with the Council and its officers, either in writing or face-to-face.



The Climber wind sculpture next to Newcombe House



Notting Hill Gate looking east from Pembridge Road



The Carnival Elephant, by Nadim Karam, on the Newcombe Piazza.



ST PETER'S CHURCH **150th ANNIVERSARY APPEAL**

St Peter's Church on Kensington Park Road has launched an appeal for £1,500,000 to restore the church and to add much-needed facilities.

This marvellous Victorian (Grade II* listed) church is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year. But the structure needs a lot of attention. In particular, it has a large, handsome upper gallery round the nave that is in such poor condition that it cannot be used. The times also call for a good range of modern upgrades - including better WCs, facilities for the disabled and better meeting areas.

The church has a typical Sunday congregation of over 175 people. But is used for many other community events. Its exceptional acoustics mean that the building is a good venue for professional and amateur concerts; Radio 4's

Any Questions was once recorded there. It is also popular among local schools for end-of-term events, projects and Nativity plays. Many community courses on parenting and family well-being are held there. All this means that, in a typical week, some 1,000 people pass through its doors!

The early days of the appeal have been brilliantly successful with over £350,000 raised in the first few months from the congregation. Anyone interested in finding out more about the plans (they have been fully costed and the necessary permissions obtained) or in contributing, can contact the Vicar, the Rev. Mark Hargreaves, on 020 7221 9841 or mail at:

mark@nottinghillchurch.org.uk
or at the Parish Office at
59a Portobello Road, W11 3DB.

UNAUTHORISED DEVELOPMENT AT 18 HORBURY CRESCENT

In our last newsletter, we described the long running saga of 18 Horbury Crescent, which used to be a house in multi-occupation but which the new owners wanted to convert back to a single house. Because of the shortage of accommodation in the borough, the Council was initially reluctant.

Finally, as the house had lain empty for many years, it reluctantly agreed to the house's conversion, although it still needs detailed planning permission. In the meantime some

unauthorised work was undertaken and we reported last time that the Council was taking enforcement action to require the owners to undo this work.

We are happy to say that, although the owners appealed against the enforcement, the appeal was dismissed. The owners have had to reinstate the unauthorised work, which included the lowering of the rear garden. So far there has been no new planning application.

COME AND SEE YOUR HOUSE

*An exhibition of photographs at
the 20th Century Theatre
16-17 October 2007*

The Association will be holding an exhibition of the photographs taken by Thomas Erskine of the front of every house and building within the Ladbroke Conservation Area. There are over 900 photographs, and many of the individual photographs have been combined to produce interesting panoramas of streets and blocks of houses. It will be possible to buy prints of the images shown. If your house is not shown in print, you will be able to view it on a screen and order a print if you want.

The Exhibition, which is very kindly being funded by **Estate Agents Savills of Kensington Church Street**, will be held in the historic 20th Century Theatre in Westbourne Grove and will be mounted in conjunction with The St Peters Church Appeal. There will be an evening event at 6.30pm on 16 October with admission by ticket. Details will be publicised later but please email

chairman@ladbrokeassociation.org if you want to hear more about this now. The exhibition will be open to the public from 10am to 4pm on 17 October, so do put these dates in your diary.

LAST YEAR'S CHRISTMAS PARTY

In recent years the Association's Christmas Party has been held in some of the most interesting houses within the Conservation Area. 2006 was no exception with the party being hosted by Judith and Richard Greer in their amazing house in Kensington Park Gardens on 6 December.

The Greers proved to be exceptional hosts who welcomed the sixty or so attending and with great pride encouraged everyone to explore a most original house with a fascinating collection of contemporary art. Many thanks to the Greers.

THE NEW TROGLODYTES

Subterranean development in the Ladbroke area

Whereas we have hitherto struggled with stucco and battled with balustrades, the last few years have seen the arrival in Ladbroke (as elsewhere in the borough) of the underground chamber.

Whether for swimming pool, play area, utility space or panic room, these new subterranean constructions have ramifications of a new order for our beloved area. Not aesthetic, but structural – and potentially environmental. These can involve very substantial work. Sometimes it is only practicable by essentially removing all but the front and party walls to enable the basement and internal modelling work works required to meet the aspirations of the owners. Quite apart from the inhuman assault of industrial-scale noise, dust, sludge and nuisance inflicted on neighbours during the construction phase, we may be storing up problems for the future with the fundamental mismatch of materials when reinforced concrete is inserted into 150-year-old lime mortar terraces on slopes of London clay.

Our Ladbroke terraces, with their often paper-thin party walls, were built essentially as one building, with the individual internal walls contributing to the stability of the whole. Over time, they have stood up to a lot of punishment, with internal walls being randomly removed and RSJs being inserted into party walls – some of which may already be bearing well over the load that would be allowed if they were being built today (it has been estimated, for instance, that those on at least one part of Elgin Crescent are bearing 170% of the load that would be permitted in newly built houses). We are not sure that all engineers check and consider this carefully enough.

London clay is a material known for its dramatic responsiveness to water, and our houses have also floated up and down with their neighbours during wet and dry periods, greatly helped by the elasticity of the lime mortar used between the bricks and in the stucco. Indeed,

their very flimsiness can be a circumstantial strength.

There is clearly a risk that the construction of rigid new basement areas will put neighbouring buildings (and not necessarily only the immediately adjacent ones) at some disadvantage, if not now, then in the future. Already, when one building is underpinned, it can cause cracking in neighbouring ones when the clay expands or shrinks and they move with it while the underpinned house does not.

There can be particular problems where there the water-table is high or there are rising groundwater levels. A paper endorsed by the European Council of Town Planners (*Hidden Aspects of Urban Planning, 2002*) has pointed out that water-tight basement walls may behave like a dam, channelling water flow around the structure – causing a rise in groundwater level on one side and a reduction on the other, which could cause heave and subsidence many years after the original construction.

The Council is aware of the problems. Its published policy is “to resist subterranean development where the structural stability of adjoining or adjacent listed or unlisted buildings within conservation areas might be put at risk” (CD32 of the Council’s Unitary Development Plan). Moreover, it has recently begun to require all applicants for planning permission for such developments to produce a report by a structural engineer. But if that report is favourable, planning permission is usually granted (the Council claims that it is quite hard for them not to do so when the engineer’s report says that there are no problems). As regards the long term, however, this is a largely unknown area, and it is not clear that the structural engineers always consider long-term effects sufficiently, or have the necessary geotechnical expertise.

The Council has also recently agreed to commission a geotechnical survey of the whole area. This is in line with the advice of Hidden

Aspects of Urban Planning calling for the incorporation of geotechnical and geo-environmental advice into national, regional and local development plans. So we welcome it. But that survey will inevitably be fairly general, and not necessarily adequate to pinpoint problems with individual projects.

We hope that in future the Council will:

- ensure that the structural engineer’s report considers both the “whole terrace” effects and the long term effects on neighbouring properties. They should also look at incremental impacts. Whereas one swimming pool and sauna may not cause undue problems, two or three or four in a single terrace could well do so;

- require that an individual geotechnical or geo-environmental report be produced on each development project before it is given the go-ahead, unless these aspects are fully covered in the engineer’s report. Such reports should again look at the whole terrace and consider possible incremental and long-term effects. Full consideration should also be given to the environmental effects of the actual construction; Buckinghamshire County Council, for instance, recently refused permission for a pool on the grounds that there were no suitable arrangements for relocation of displaced soil;

- consider where appropriate refusing large underground developments on grounds of over-development. Here we welcome the fact that planning consent has just been refused for the building of a double basement under a narrow terraced house in Chepstow Crescent to provide for staff accommodation, a gym, cinema, swimming pool and associated plant. The application had we understand come from a developer, and the Planning Services Committee rightly took the view that it was over the top for what is a not very large house by the standards of the area.

Robina Rose

OUR PRECIOUS TREES

Trees, both on the streets and in the area's many gardens, are one of the most precious features of our area, and in our last newsletter we expressed concern about the excessive tree reduction work that had been carried out on the planes in Ladbroke Grove, between Holland Park Avenue and Ladbroke Square.

The Chairman of the Association – along with members of other similar local groups – recently attended a meeting with Angus Morrison, the Royal Borough's Trees Officer, to discuss our concerns. Angus is responsible for the some 9,000 trees in public spaces in Kensington and Chelsea, all of which are numbered and marked on maps. Over the past 10 years or so, the Borough has planted some 1,000 new or replacement trees.

He explained that a large part of his £250,000 annual budget goes on an annual tree maintenance programme that aims to ensure that each tree is pruned once every two years – although he admits that he cannot quite achieve this. Just one contractor is used. He also made clear that pruning is tailored to the type of tree and clear instructions on what is needed are given to the contractor. He said that planes, for instance, can be cut back to the growth points and grow back vigorously. The aim is that the overall shape of the tree under foliage should remain the same.

Pruning is necessary for a number of reasons. The large planes along main roads can in particular be a traffic hazard, especially for double-decker buses, if not cut back regularly. Trees are also blamed for taking away light and for causing subsidence. People are not slow to make claims against the Council if they think that a tree has caused damage to their property. Angus Morrison said that he was under constant pressure from insurers and his colleagues in the Borough dealing with claims. He said that if trees are pruned only occasionally, this can cause extra root growth, thus worsening any subsidence problems. But he explained that, if they are pruned regularly, this does not happen; and since regular pruning began some years ago, the number and size of claims against the Borough have both reduced.

Angus Morrison's staff also keep a close eye on sick trees; when one needs to be replaced, they normally plant the same species. If you spot a problem with a street tree, you should call or email the Council on 7361 2767 or trees@rbkc.gov.uk.

While a lot of what he told us was reassuring, we remain concerned that his budget is very small for the size and nature of the task. It would be better, for instance, if in each street only every other tree was pruned at any one time, so as to avoid the distressing look of a whole street's length of butchered trees, even though that might be slightly more expensive.

PLANNING MATTERS

We are often astonished that some residents who have bought into our wonderful estate want to undertake unauthorised building works that would have a detrimental effect on the very local environment which presumably attracted them in the first place. One of the Association's tasks is to be vigilant and "out" these incidents, so that we can preserve the particular atmosphere of the Ladbroke Estate and allow both residents and visitors to continue to appreciate it.

Sadly, it seems that some residents believe that they can alter their buildings without obtaining the necessary consents. Unauthorised works are nearly always noticed, be it by a local resident, a member of the Ladbroke Association or the Council's inspectors on their site visits. The result is a follow-up enquiry to the Council's Planning Enforcement team. If the team unearths illegal works, the perpetrators are then forced to rectify the matter one way or another. Sometimes works are stopped and the illegal works are ordered to be removed and the original layouts reinstated. More often the situation is rectified by the submission of retrospective planning applications. But such retrospective applications are not always granted, so beware!

All listed buildings and all buildings within a conservation area like the Ladbroke estate are protected by law, and carrying out relevant works without the appropriate consent is a criminal offence. In particular:

- the demolition or alteration (including in some cases internal alteration) to a listed building requires "listed building consent";
- alterations to the exterior of all buildings in a conservation area may also require planning permission. This can apply to quite minor alterations, like say changing a sash window to a casement one. And gardens too may be protected.

So do consult the Council's Planning Department before you start on any alterations.



Trees in Ladbroke Grove in April 2004

How does the Ladbroke Association deal with planning applications?

Every week, the Council prepares a list of all the planning and listed building applications that it has received. The Council is required to consult the Ladbroke Association on planning applications in the Ladbroke area. It therefore sends these weekly lists to the Association's Planning sub-committee, headed currently by local architect Malcolm Pawley. The other member of the sub-committee is David Marshall, who is a chartered surveyor. Details of planning decisions taken on previous applications relating to the Ladbroke Estate, and any subsequent appeals against these decisions, are also sent to the Association.

Malcolm gathers together the applications and on a monthly basis both he and David visit the Planning Department to inspect the applications and their associated drawings and statements. There are usually about twelve applications per month on which they report to the main Ladbroke Association Committee.

Many of the applications are for minor works of no particular concern. But in about half of the cases the Association decides to make representations to the Council because we consider that the work proposed is not in keeping with the character of the conservation area. For instance, we have recently been concerned about proposals for basement extensions that will result in the disappearance of "real" gardens at street level are such an important feature of the area. Usually, however, we suggest only some fairly minor change to make a proposal more acceptable.

Mostly our representations are in writing. But Malcolm quite often also discusses problematic applications with the relevant case officer in the Planning Department. Occasionally, for important cases, he will go along to the Planning Committee Meeting at which the application is being discussed and speak on behalf of the Association.

Planning Case officers and the



*24 Kensington Park Gardens
Conversion from American School
to a single family house - a case recently discussed by the the Ladbroke Association Committee.*

Planning Committee members do take account of our views and usually concur with them. But we lose some 'battles'. Sometimes this is due to adverse planning case law which the Council has to observe. Often, however, we believe that it is due to the Council officers misinterpreting Council planning policies.

We expect members to let us know their views on planning applications that are troubling them. Whenever an application seems likely to have a deleterious effect on the conservation area, we are usually happy to support objections (although there can be problems where there is disagreement between neighbours on what would be acceptable). What we cannot do is to intervene when a proposal affects only the immediate neighbours and not the area generally, for example, where a new extension would involve a loss of privacy for the neighbour. Much though we might sympathise, this is a case where you would have to fight your own battle.

THE FUTURE OF THE NORTH SIDE OF NOTTING HILL GATE

The EDF site

In early 2006 it became apparent that developers were starting to take real interest in putting together proposals to develop the old London Electricity Board (now EDF) site off Victoria Gardens (the empty area beyond the row of houses behind the Oxfam shop). The southern boundary of the Ladbroke Conservation Area, which is the Ladbroke Association's area

of interest, runs along the southern garden walls of the houses on the south side of Ladbroke Road. So the EDF site and indeed the whole of the north side of Notting Hill Gate are outside the Conservation Area. However, the Ladbroke Association Committee has agreed that, despite this, it should take a close interest in any proposals for the site, as they will inevitably have an impact on those living within the Conservation Area.

The first sign that the developers were serious came one Saturday morning in 2005 when some tree surgeons arrived early in the morning, locked themselves into the site and proceeded to cut down two fine trees on the edge of the site abutting Victoria Gardens. Local residents protested to the men, but to no avail and the trees were gone by lunchtime. Protests were made to RBKC but unfortunately there was nothing to be done as the two trees were outside the Conservation Area and were not subject to Tree Preservation Orders.

It then became apparent that the northern part of the EDF site had been sold off to developers. In 2006 most of the residents of the houses in Ladbroke Road that back onto the EDF site formed themselves into an association to enable them to respond better to any development proposals for the site.

During the latter part of 2006 the developers and their advisers were in contact with these residents. Then in December 2006 the developers staged an exhibition of their proposals for building ten houses on the newly purchased north site.

Not surprisingly, given the restricted size of the site and the price that must have been paid, the



Victoria Gardens showing the EDF site on the far right with the Ladbroke Road houses behind

proposed development was very cramped and of a high density and would have had a considerable impact on the residents of the houses in Ladbroke Road. No planning application for the development was ever submitted, however; and in March 2007 the developers announced that they had sold the site and therefore would not be progressing their proposals. We now wait to see what the intentions of the new owners are. We understand that they have retained the previous owner's advisers.

The need for a strategic approach to planning.

It is the view of the Committee that RBKC should not allow the development of part of the EDF site in isolation. Our view is that there is a unique opportunity to redevelop the northern side of Notting Hill Gate as a whole, especially as proposals have now emerged for the redevelopment or remodeling of part of the southern side (Newcombe House and some of the neighbouring buildings). The northern side presently has little or no architectural merit; the buildings are of poor quality; and the whole design of the area is unattractive and inefficient. Building houses on the splinter of EDF land would make any redevelopment of the rest of the north side of Notting Hill Gate much more difficult.

We believe that RBKC should take a strategic approach to the redevelopment of the north side of Notting

Hill Gate, taking into account what is proposed for the south side. In order to do this RBKC should discourage isolated proposals and encourage the various interested parties to produce a comprehensive scheme for the redevelopment of Notting Hill Gate (which could well include some housing on part of the EDF site in line with the planning guidelines already issued for the site).

David Corsellis

The Council's Notting Hill Gate Advisory Group, meeting on 23rd April, independently came to the same conclusion.



EDF site as seen from Victoria Gardens looking east



Model of proposed new housing development on the EDF site



Victoria Gardens with the EDF site entrance half way along on the left.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Your Treasurer will be presenting the end of year accounts for 2006/7 at the Annual General Meeting.

I should like to thank all members who completed their Gift Aid pledges. This will generate additional income of approximately £400 per annum. To date we have been able to reclaim Gift Aid from the taxman for a total in excess of £1,600. This extra resource will help us promote the Ladbroke Association and fight off any difficult planning applications in the future. I will be presenting full accounts for the membership's consideration at the AGM.

ESTATE AGENT'S BOARDS

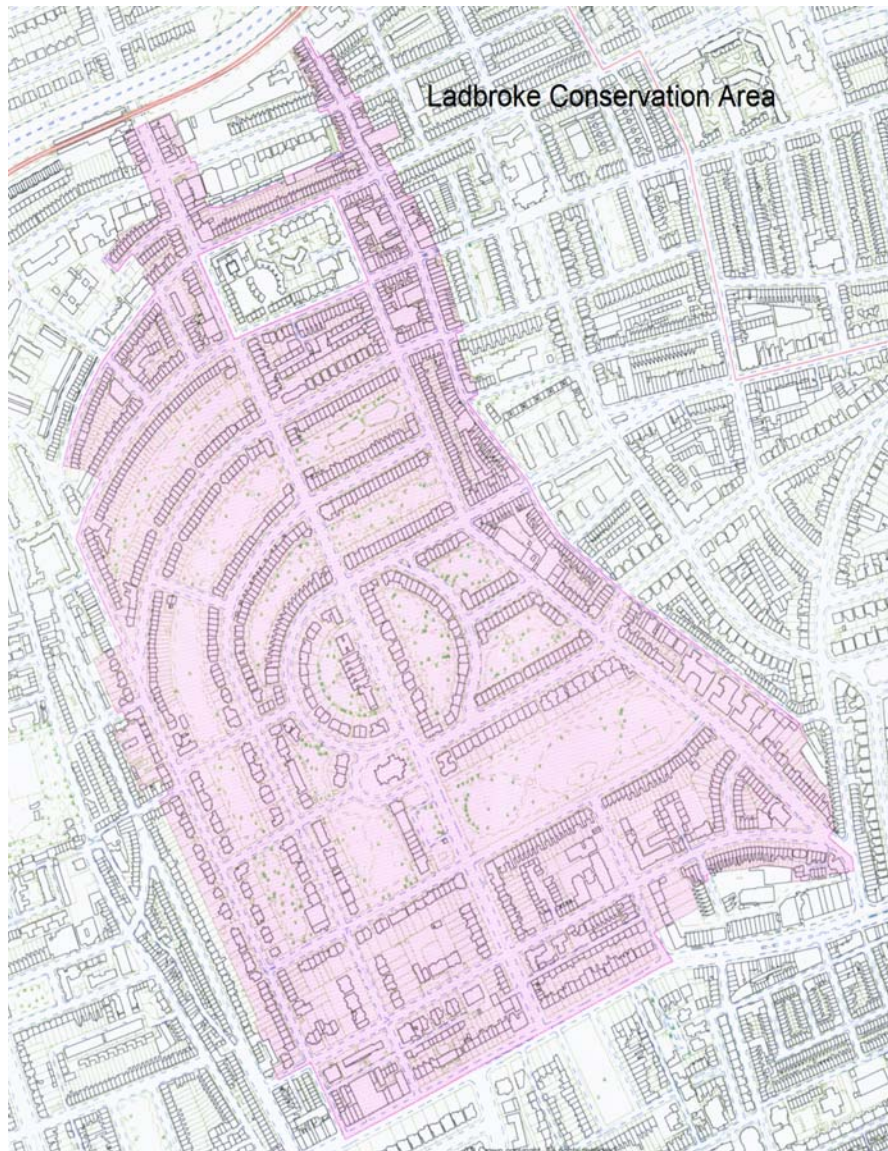
The Ladbroke Conservation Area (apart from small parts in the North and North-West) is a "Section 7 area", which means that a direction has been given by the Government under Section 7 of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 1992 forbidding the erection of estate agent's boards outside residential or commercial property, although certain types of board are allowed for business premises. Those of us who can remember the time when our terraces were festooned with multiple boards are heartily glad that they are no longer subject to this blight.

On the whole, the ban is well observed. If you do see any offending boards, you can telephone the Council on 020 7361 2275 or you can report the board by email to:

chairman@ladbrokeassociation.org giving details of the exact location of the board, its nature and the name and telephone number of the estate agent.

NEWSLETTERS ON OUR WEBSITE

- ♦ Summer 2001
- ♦ Winter 2001
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THE OFFICERS AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

Officers:

President: Sir Angus Stirling

Chairman: David Corsellis

Hon Treasurer: Paul Bastick

Hon Secretary: Anne Chorley

Committee Members:

Jan Brownfoot,
David Campion,
Sandra Kamen,
David Marshall,
Robert Meadows,
Peter Mishcon,
Malcolm Pawley,
Peggy Post,
Robina Rose.

Minutes Secretary: Teresa Flisek

Newsletter: Sophia Lambert

THE CONSTITUTION AND OBJECTIVES OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

The objects of the Society shall be to promote and encourage the following objects by charitable means but not otherwise:

- ♦ To encourage and promote high standards of architecture and town planning within the Ladbroke Estate Conservation Area
- ♦ To stimulate and promote public interest in, and care for the beauty, history, and character of the neighbourhood
- ♦ To encourage the preservation, development and improvement of features of general public amenity or historic interest.

provided that the Association shall not join or be affiliated with any political party.

Anyone wishing to view the complete Articles of Association of the Ladbroke Association can do so via its website at:

www.ladbrokeassociation.org

Photos by David Campion. The artwork and layout for this Newsletter was composed by David Campion using the Adobe InDesign software. Printing was done by Prontoprint Notting Hill Gate.

TO JOIN THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

If you wish to join or support the Ladbroke Association, please complete this standing order form and send it to Paul Bastick, the Hon Treasurer, 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD. The minimum subscription is £5 for family or individual membership but many members pay £10 or more to support our activities. We would also greatly appreciate it if you could complete a Gift Aid Form which is available from the above address.

To:.....Bank plc Sort Code:

Address of Bank:

Please pay to Barclays Bank plc, 212 Regent Street, PO Box 4BP, London W1A 4BP Sort Code: 20-71-74, immediately and thereafter on 1 April each year until further notice the sum of £..... for the credit of the Ladbroke Association (Account No: 80522635)

Signed..... Date.....

Address.....

Postcode:.....