

# News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

Summer 2011



*A communal garden in flower*

## PLEASURE GARDENS

The sixteen communal gardens - or "pleasure gardens" - of the Ladbroke Estate are one of its glories. They are a unique feature - nowhere else in London has quite such a series of gardens. Unlike the normal garden square, they adjoin directly the backs of the houses that they were created to benefit (apart from Ladbroke Square, which is bounded by roads on three sides). Tourists seeking out "Notting Hill" and looking for somewhere to relax often eye the gardens longingly and cannot believe that they are not open to the public - although following the film Notting Hill, in which the Hugh Grant character proposed to the Julia Roberts character in the Rosmead garden between Lansdowne Road and Elgin Crescent, one enterprising German tourist did obtain permission from the garden committee to come into the garden to propose to his girlfriend (happily she accepted).

The communal gardens were the inspiration of the Ladbroke Estate's first architect-surveyor, Thomas Allason (1790-1823). He worked for James Weller Ladbroke, who had inherited what was then farmland from his uncle in 1819 and decided to develop it for housing. Allason's original plan, drawn up in 1823, was grandiose: he designed a huge circular road, more than 500 metres in diameter, intersected by an axial road on the alignment of the future Ladbroke Grove. Within the circle, on either side of the axial road, were two semi-circular "paddocks", and another triangular paddock was planned more or less where Ladbroke Square now is (see illustration on next page 3) His original idea seems to have been that each paddock would be surrounded by villas, which would have use of the paddocks as well as their own private gardens.

But in 1825 there was a financial crisis and the money ran out. De-

## AGM

6 JULY 2011

The 43h Annual General Meeting of the Ladbroke Association will be held on

Wednesday 6 July 2011  
at 7.30 for 7.45 p.m.

at St Peter's Church,  
in Kensington Park Road  
(opposite the end of  
Stanley Gardens)

An agenda will be available at the meeting (and will be posted on the Association's website in advance of the meeting).

All are welcome to attend.

## STOP PRESS: NEW PRESIDENT

We are about to have a new President. Sir Angus Stirling, who has, amazingly, been our chairman for the past 40-odd years, has moved out of the area, and we are happy to say that the writer Thomas Pakenham, who is a former chairman of the Association, has agreed to take over. There will be more on both of them in our next newsletter, and we hope that both will put in an appearance at the AGM.

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velopment was put on hold and a large part of the area was let for use as a race-course (which was not a success, partly due to the heavy clay soil). It was not until the 1840s that James Weller Ladbroke was able to relaunch his building plans, and this time it was on a less grandiose scale, with more densely packed houses, mainly in terraces rather than the originally planned detached or semi-detached villas.

Only part of Allason's circular layout was preserved, in the form of the crescents around and to the north-west of St John's church. Fortunately, the idea of communal pleasure grounds also survived. In the words of the original leases of the houses in Lansdowne Crescent, they were intended "for the convenience and recreation of the tenants and occupiers", so that they could "walk and demean" themselves in the gardens – although "none of the Livery or other servants ... save and except the servants in actual attendance on the Children or other members of the family" were permitted to enter.

Several of the gardens are listed, and in 2002 the Ladbroke Association was successful in its campaign to have all the gardens put on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens. This means that the local authority has to make provision for the protection of the historic environment in its policies (including planning policies) and the allocation of resources.

The characters of the gardens vary considerably. Most of them were designed to give the houses adjoining them their own small private back garden with a gate through to the communal garden. But two of the terraces were designed without back gardens; access is direct from the back of the houses. All have lawns and interesting plantings of trees; but some have well-tended and colourful flower-beds whereas others are more like woodland or landscape gardens. Many have remarkable trees – including huge planes that, unlike the street trees, have not been regularly pollarded and retain their natural semi-weeping form. Ladbroke Square, at almost 7 acres, is thought to be

the largest private garden square in London. It has a summer house (originally one of two; the other was demolished in 1980); tennis courts; and a gardener's cottage, still lived in by the gardener.

The Second World War brought changes. Part of one garden was dug up to grow vegetables and an air raid shelter was built under the central lawn of another. Bombs did their bit, taking out several of the houses backing onto communal gardens, and these were too often replaced by unattractive blocks of flats. After the war, the area declined sharply during the Rachman years, and many of the gardens, particularly the more northerly ones, became scruffy and unkempt. There are stories of how some residents even parked their cars in them, and others used the gardens for dumping rubbish. But the gardens were still enjoyed. To quote the journalist Minette Marrin, a former resident of the area, "there was a time when our communal garden was overgrown and shabby, full of groovy young people lying about peacefully smoking weed".

As the area developed in prosperity from the 1970s onwards, the gardens – and the houses backing onto them – grew smart and they are now probably as well-tended as at any time in their history. But there has been a downside for the casual passer-by: before, there were many gaps between terraces

or pairs of semi-detached villas through which enticing glimpses of the gardens could be obtained. Now, most of these gaps have been filled by side extensions and garages.

Generally, the gardens are open to anybody living in a building backing onto them. They are administered by elected committees of the residents, who decide what rules to apply. The rules vary between the gardens – some for instance allow dogs either loose or on a lead, and some ban them completely. Most ban private parties (except for children), but many organise a communal firework party on bonfire night or a summer garden party.

The gardens do not come cheap. A gardener needs to be employed and money is needed for tree surgery, planting, maintenance and insurance. Most of the gardens are funded by an annual "precept" which is set each year by the garden committee and then collected by the Council along with the Council tax from all the residents with access to the garden.

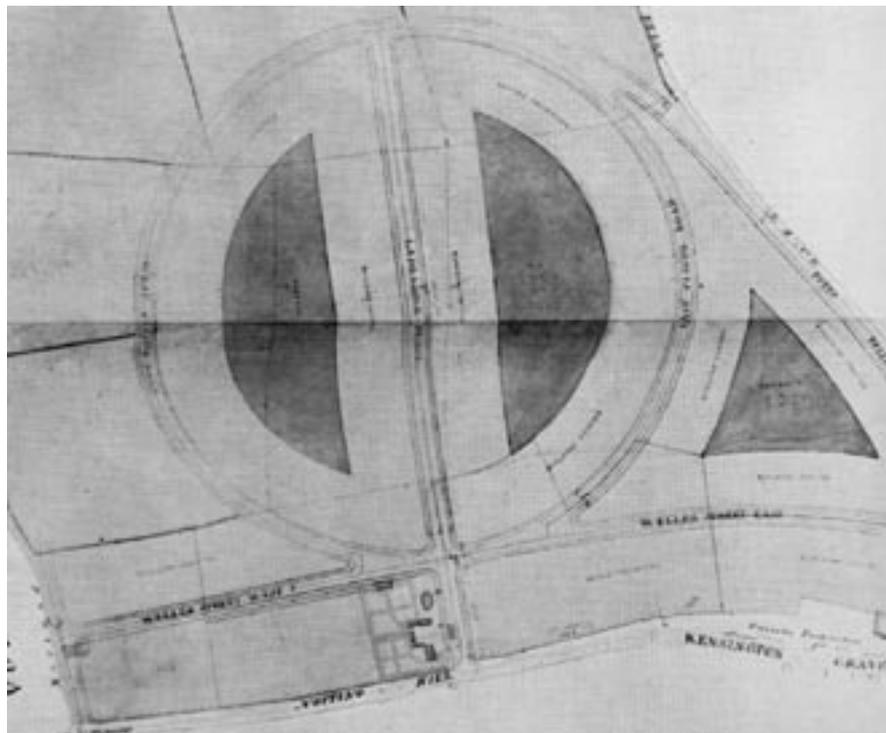
For those enjoying the gardens, what the backs of the houses look like matters as much as the fronts. The backs are often as elegantly stuccoed as the fronts, particularly those designed by Thomas Allom, the architect brought in by Felix Ladbroke, James Weller Ladbroke's successor. Quite a few of these houses are listed, and the



*The elegant backs of houses in Lansdowne Road, as seen from the communal garden. (Photo by courtesy of Marsh and Parsons)*

backs of others are protected by Article IV Directions so that any change to the backs requires planning permission. What should and should not be allowed is a contentious issue. Unfortunately, there have been some cases where extensions have been added illegally – a situation described Rachel Johnson’s novel *Notting Hell*, set on a fictional communal garden in the Ladbroke area. The Ladbroke Association follows closely any planning applications affecting communal gardens and opposes those that the Committee believes will adversely affect the character of the garden. In particular, it normally discourages significant extensions above basement level. Recently there has been concern about balconies or terraces built at first floor level. While for the occupant of the house they may represent a wonderful extra open-air room, for other residents they can mean overlooking and noise.

Some gardens have sides that abut onto a road, with a gate for access (used by those residents on upper floors who do not have direct access). Mostly the gardens are enclosed by iron railings, as they were originally. But there are difficult trade-offs between elegance and security. The so-



*The original plan for the Ladbroke estate, drawn up in 1823.*

called Notting Hill rapist in the early 1980s specialised in breaking into the back of ground floor flats from the communal gardens. As a result, various defensive strategies have been adopted. Some of the gardens have allowed impenetrable privet hedges to grow up and over their railings. Hugh Grant and Julia Roberts would no longer be able to climb over the

gate into the Rosmead Garden, for instance, given the vegetation that has grown up around it. Members of the Ladbroke Association are, however, given a chance each year to have a guided tour of the gardens, led by the knowledgeable Henrietta Phipps. This year, we explored Ladbroke Square, Stanley Crescent Gardens and Stanley Gardens South.

## SUBTERRANEAN DEVELOPMENTS

What started as a small campaign, mainly by the Ladbroke Association, against the noise and misery caused to neighbours by basement excavations, has been developing into a much more broad-based affair, and there have been a number of developments.

In particular, the King’s Road Association of Chelsea Residents (KRACR) organised a public meeting at Chelsea Town Hall on 8 February, attended by a large number of people, including the Leader of the Council, Sir Merrick Cockell, and has since set up a network of all those interested in RBKC and Westminster to pursue solutions to the problems. In the words of Dr James Thompson of KRACR, we are campaigning for ‘more considerate building codes,

tougher enforcement of building conditions, legal action against developers who cause damage and intolerable conditions for neighbours, and alterations to legislation to bring all “extreme” developments under proper planning control’.

The Council still considers that it is legally bound to accept most applications for subterranean developments. It did, however, turn down an application for a sub-basement development under a listed building in Kensington Park Gardens on the grounds that it would introduce a disruptive and historically inappropriate element. The developer went to appeal and the Council’s decision has been upheld. This is good news as it establishes that, for developments under listed

buildings at any rate, planning permission can be refused.

While it has continued to give permission for subterranean developments (which do not seem to have slowed down, despite the economic downturn), the Council is now fully seized of the importance of this problem in the eyes of its residents. Sir Merrick Cockell wrote to the Minister taking up almost all the points made in the Ladbroke Association report (at [www.ladbrokeassociation.org](http://www.ladbrokeassociation.org)). He has also spoken to the Minister personally – although so far to little effect. The difficulty is that this is a problem that really only exists in the richer areas of London and just does not appear on the Government’s radar.

## BOOKSHOPS IN THE LADBROKE AREA

We had hopes of the Localism Bill, now going through Parliament, as it contains provisions to give local residents more control over what happens in their environment. Unfortunately, however, what the Bill largely does is to give residents who form themselves into a group more power to initiate developments; it does not provide for them to stop or control unwanted developments. Nevertheless, there may be some possibilities for residents' groups at least to influence how such developments are done, so as to minimise nuisance to neighbours.

Although the Bill has yet to complete its passage through Parliament, the Government has offered to fund some pilot "neighbourhood development plans". The residents of Markham Square in Chelsea, who are particularly plagued by basement excavations, accordingly formed themselves into a group, with the full cooperation of the Council, and have just been chosen for a grant of £20,000 from the Government to develop their scheme. Their hope is that they will be able to devise a plan that ensures such developments are done in a way that minimises damage, noise and nuisance, even if they cannot be stopped.

Meanwhile, the Ladbroke Association has been pressing the Council to develop its own guidelines on considerate development. We had a lot of support from Norland Ward Councillor Julie Mills, the then Cabinet member with the main responsibility for this area. Unfortunately, however, others in the Council were less keen and this exercise has stalled for the time being. We plan to return to the attack.

There is nevertheless something to show for our efforts. The Council website now contains what it calls "Advice to Builders" which lists both statutory and good practice requirements. Despite its title, this is intended for the information of residents as well as contractors, and those who are living next to a noisy major development might find it useful, although it is not as consumer-friendly as we would like.

For a small area, the Ladbroke estate is extraordinarily well endowed with bookshops. We are lucky to have a branch of Daunts at 112-114 Holland Park Avenue, and of course Waterstone at Notting Hill Gate, both a few yards outside the area. But in addition, we have a clutch of bookshops around Portobello Road, including three interesting independent ones all founded by enterprising women.

### The Travel Bookshop

Thanks to the film *Notting Hill*, this is the most famous bookshop in the area, at 13 Blenheim Crescent, just off the Portobello Road. Richard Curtis, the writer and producer of *Notting Hill*, lived nearby and spent a day sitting in the shop taking notes. From this he developed the idea for the Hugh Grant film. In fact the bookshop in the film was a created film-set, but it was inspired by the Travel Bookshop and many tourists still beat a path to its door for that reason, although few of them actually buy anything there.

The shop was founded in 1979 by the admirable Sarah Anderson, a woman with no experience of running her own business (and who had lost an arm to cancer in childhood). She had a passion for travel, and it was the first bookshop in London specialising in travel. It has always stocked both old and new travel books. For the first eight years Sarah ran it virtually single-handed – as she herself has said, fortunately she was a better bookseller than Hugh Grant, and it went from strength to strength.

She has now left the shop and written several books of her own, including *Inside Notting Hill* (with Miranda Davies), and an autobiography *Halfway to Venus: a one-armed journey* that deals movingly with her life as an amputee. Meanwhile, the shop still flourishes under its new owner and remains a mecca for those searching for travel books about out-of-the-way countries. It also organises regular talks by travel authors.

### Books for Cooks

Books for Cooks is at 4 Blenheim Crescent, over the road from the Travel Bookshop. It was founded in 1983 by Heidi Lascelles (who has now retired and runs cookery holidays from Tuscany), a former nurse with a mission to improve the availability of cookbooks in an era when British food was still a bad joke. She originally had a tiny store on the other side of the road, but soon outgrew this, not least because of the reputation she gained for being able to track down any cookbook from anywhere in the world. In those days, general bookshops relegated cookery books to a small unobtrusive section at the back. Now that cookery books are on the front display, the shop's original mission has largely been accomplished and it no longer has quite such a variety of books on the shelves, although it can still procure almost any cookery book in print.

When the shop moved to its current larger premises, Heidi decided to put theory into practice and introduced a tiny cooking area at the back with a few tables, to test recipes from the books. Every lunchtime a starter, a main course and two desserts are cooked from different books on sale in the shop and are served for extraordinarily reasonable prices. Unsurprisingly, it is highly popular and each day some 40 people are served (on a first come first served basis) from midday onwards until the food runs out. Under the shop's current owners, Rosie Kindersley and Eric Treuillé, this miniscule restaurant has been supplemented by a demonstration kitchen upstairs where cookery workshops are conducted by cookery book authors.

### The Oxfam Bookshop

Some local residents are still unaware that there is an excellent Oxfam Bookshop at 172 Portobello Road, in the middle of the market area. It opened in 2004 and has an enormously eclectic selection of books, ranging from high quality art books to "two-for-one" paperbacks. It is one of several

specialist Oxfam bookshops in London; their good value has led to criticism of unfair competition from some booksellers.

It relies on local donations and receives some 50 bags of books (each containing perhaps 100 books) a week from the book banks in Sainsbury's car-park and Lonsdale Road. It is open seven days a week and some 35-40 unpaid helpers help to run it, putting in anything from a few hours to five days a week. Many of these are professionals offering their services for charitable motives, but it also does its bit for the local community by taking on people who need experience to help them to get into work.

### **Lutyens & Rubinstein**

The new kids on the block, at 21 Kensington Park Road. It was opened in 2009 by literary agents Sarah Lutyens and Felicity Rubinstein, both of whom live nearby. They still operate their literary agency, from premises next to the shop. It is an independent generalist bookshop, and as such a brave venture, as it is only just round the corner from the much-



*Bookshop at 21 Kensington Park Road*

loved Elgin books that went out of business some 10 years ago. Their original stock was chosen by asking all their friends and contacts what books no bookshop should be without, and the stock still reflects a distinctly personal taste. It may be a smaller collection than

in the big bookshops, because it is a small shop, but it has clearly been extremely carefully chosen. Another idiosyncratic touch is the sale of other items such as honey (the husband of one of the owners is a bee-keeper) and perfume in among the books.

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## **LADBROKE GROVE/LADBROKE SQUARE BUS STOPS**

The installation of two bus stops in Ladbrooke Grove at the level of Ladbrooke Square for the 228 has taken up a number of parking places. The Council are adamant that others have been squeezed in nearby, so there is no net loss in the number of places. The amount of space reserved for the bus is, however, enormous, especially as the No. 228 is one of London's least frequent buses (and does not seem to have the herd-like instincts of many London buses), and not many people use those stops.

We have taken this up with the Council. Apparently the bus stops were designed to meet Transport for London's "accessible bus stop design guidance" – the aim is to allow the bus to come right up to the kerb so that wheelchair users and other less mobile people can get on and off the bus without dif-

ficulty. This is clearly a desirable objective. But it is hard to believe that quite so much space is needed for such a relatively small vehicle. The Council say that the northbound bus stop was reviewed and reduced in size by one bay length in July 2010, following discussions with TfL. They have now agreed to have a look at the southbound one to see if anything further can be done.

Some of the parking places that were displaced by the bus stops were 4-hour pay-and-display bays, useful for workmen doing jobs in neighbouring houses – as well as for visitors wanting to spend more than a couple of hours seeing their friends in the Ladbrooke area. There are still a number of four-hour pay-and-display bays nearby: outside the Ladbrooke Day Nursery; in Ladbrooke Square

near the junction with Ladbrooke Terrace; outside Nos. 67 to 75 Ladbrooke Grove; in St. John's Gardens; and in Kensington Park Gardens, near the junction with Stanley Gardens.



*Over-large 228 Bus stop in Ladbrooke Grove next to Ladbrooke Square.*



## LADBROKE GROVE/HOLLAND PARK AVENUE TRAFFIC LIGHTS

After many months of work (or rather non-work, as much of the time nothing seemed to be happening), the reconfiguration of the traffic lights at the Holland Park end of Ladbroke Grove is at last complete.

Transport for London (TfL) is responsible for the operation and maintenance of traffic lights in London, and decided that, as part of their ongoing maintenance programme, the traffic lights at the Ladbroke Grove-Holland Park Av-

enue junction needed replacing.

The Borough then decided that they would take advantage of this work to “declutter” the junction a bit. In particular, the traffic lights were put on lamp columns instead of having their own poles. Reducing the amount of “street furniture” is all the rage at present, and has been pursued with particular vigour by Cllr Daniel Moylan. Certainly the street furniture at the crossing is now much sparser and more elegant.

In addition, the Council has slightly repositioned the western pedestrian crossing on Holland Park Avenue so as to improve visibility – which it says was impeded by one of the trees.

The Council has also removed completely the central island in Ladbroke Grove. It says that this was substandard as regards width and was also frequently being clipped by vehicles (a fact that those of us who live nearby are only too well aware of). It considers that, as there is a “green man” period when the road can be crossed in one go, the island was not really necessary.

We are not sure how welcome this will be to pedestrians using this crossing. As it was often possible to cross half the street safely without waiting for the green man, the central island was much used. Whether pedestrians will now be more prepared to wait for the green man remains to be seen, but if they continue to cross when there is no green man, there could be an increased risk of an accident involving a pedestrian.

## THE NEWSLETTER

We aim to bring out two newsletters a year. We normally try to include a mix of news (especially on planning matters) that may be of interest to residents, and articles on the architecture and history of the area.

Suggestions for topics that we could cover in future issues would be welcome.

Any suggestions please e-mail: [editor@ladbrokeassociation.org](mailto:editor@ladbrokeassociation.org)

## NOTTING HILL GATE IMPROVEMENTS GROUP

At the June quarterly meeting of the Notting Hill Gate Improvements Group, the long-serving Project Leader, John Scott, tendered his resignation as it felt that it was time that someone younger should take over the role that he has exercised since he co-founded the Group with Piers de Montfort in 1993. Tim Burke was elected to be the new Project Leader. There was then a discussion, followed by a majority vote of those

present that the Group should be renamed as:

"The Notting Hill Improvements Group" and take in a much wider area including the Portobello Road Area to the North.

It was generally felt that any major redevelopment in Notting Hill Gate was unlikely in the near future and that the Group would be better focused on the changes that are taking place in Portobello Road.

## PLANNING MATTERS

### Green developments

We are noticing an encouraging trend towards ecologically-conscious planning applications.

An interesting one was granted last year for a “green wall” on the side of No. 32 Kensington Park Road. It has now been installed and looks rather fine.



*Green wall in Kensington Park Road*

It is effectively a vertical garden up the side façade of the building, planted with evergreen plants, apparently needing little maintenance.

It is watered by rainwater that has been stored and harvested in an underground tank.

Green walls can bring a range of benefits. They mean lower heating and cooling costs for the house; the harvesting and use of rainwater means less run-off and pressure on the drains; and the plants help filter pollution and absorb carbon, albeit in a small way.

The Association was also impressed by an application for a smallish underground development at 18 Lansdowne Road. Although we are far from happy with underground developments generally, this one was exemplary in its sustainable approach. The design aims to score a ‘Very Good Standard’ Eco-Homes rating under the Government’s Code for Sustainable Homes, and again includes rainwater harvesting for irrigating the garden as well as the recycling of “grey water” (from sinks and baths); solar panels; en-

ergy efficient lighting; and a host of other “sustainable” features. The developer is also employing a hydrological consultant to ensure that run-off into water courses is no greater for the developed site than for the pre-developed site. Another encouraging feature is that the Council imposed a planning condition that the subterranean development should not be used or occupied until the entire dwelling has achieved the relevant Eco-Homes rating of Very Good, partly in order “to secure mitigation for the environmental impact of the subterranean development”.

### Red pillar-boxes

There are some fears that, if the Post Office is sold off, the new owners could want to dispense with the red post-boxes. The Council has therefore been investigating the possibility of having them listed by English Heritage. The Ladbroke Association has made a list of the pillar-boxes in the area to send to English Heritage. There is one Victorian one (on the corner of Lansdowne Walk and Clarendon Road), as well as four dating from the reign of Edward VII; seven from the reign of George V; and three Elizabeth II ones.



*Victorian postbox  
(with modern graffiti!)*

### All Saints

We reported in our last issue how All Saints, the clothes shop on the corner of Westbourne Grove and Portobello Road, had been instructed by the Council to make various

alterations, so as to bring the building in line with what was agreed in the planning permission for the reconstruction of the buildings it occupies. The main alterations required were the replacement of the synthetic material used for the window frames by wood, and the removal of unauthorised windows on the Portobello façade.

Instead of making these changes, All Saints have put in a new planning application with much improved window frames, but still with windows along the Portobello side. The Council now has to decide whether to accept this or to insist on enforcing the original planning permission. The Ladbroke Association has told the Council that it approves of the new window designs, but believes that All Saints should be held to their original planning permission as regards the Portobello Road façade.

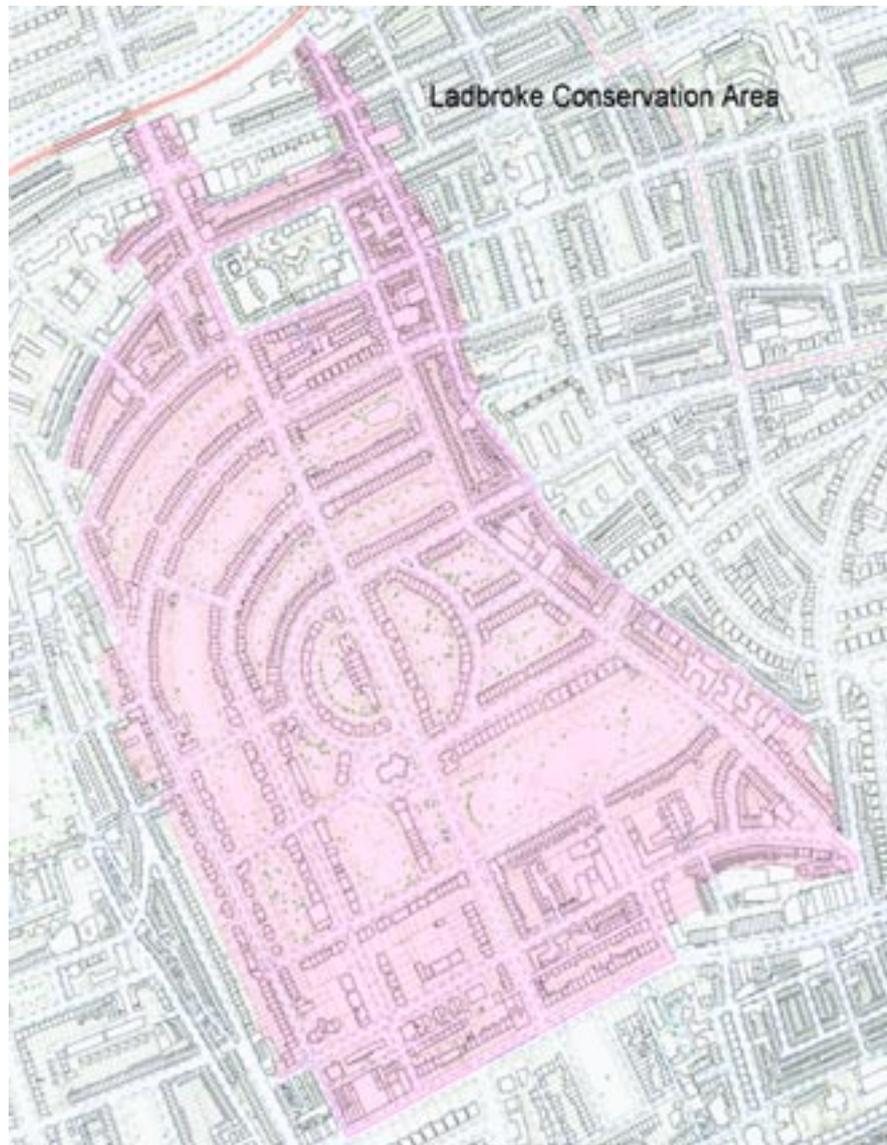
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## CHANGES AT THE COUNCIL

There have recently been several changes in the “Cabinet” of the Royal Borough.

Daniel Moylan, the Deputy Leader and Cabinet member for planning and general political heavyweight, has for the last year or so been combining his RBKC role with being Deputy Chairman of Transport for London. He has now decided to devote more time to Transport for London (and to advising the Mayor), so he has resigned from the Cabinet and also from his post as Deputy Leader (although he will remain as a councillor). His place as Cabinet member for planning has been taken by Councillor Tim Ahern.

As mentioned above, the feisty Julie Mills, the Norland Councillor who has been the Cabinet member for inter alia environmental health (a portfolio that includes noise on building sites) has been elected this year’s Mayor of the borough, which means that she too has had to give up her Cabinet position, which has been taken over by Councillor Fiona Buxton.



## THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

### Officers:

*President:* Sir Angus Stirling  
*Chairman:* Graham Child  
*Hon Treasurer:* Paul Bastick  
*Hon Secretary:* Anne Chorley

### Committee Members:

Alex Bell  
 David Campion,  
 Peter Chapman  
 David Corsellis  
 Maurice Fraser,  
 Sandra Kamen,  
 Andrew Lamont,  
 David Marshall,  
 Peter Mishcon,  
 Malcolm Pawley,  
 Peggy Post.

*Newsletter:* Sophia Lambert

## THE OBJECTIVES OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

The Association is a charitable non-political organisation. Its constitution requires it to promote and encourage the following objectives 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.

The complete constitution of the Ladbroke Association is on its website at:

[www.ladbrokeassociation.org.uk](http://www.ladbrokeassociation.org.uk)  
 and the website also includes much historical information about the conservation area.

The layout for this Newsletter was composed by David Campion with the Adobe InDesign software. Printing was done by: Prontaprint 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 £15 for family or individual membership but many members pay more to support our activities. We would also appreciate it if you could complete a Gift Aid Form which is available from the above address and on the website.

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<sup>st</sup> April each year until further notice the sum of £..... for the credit of the Ladbroke Association (Account No: **80522635**)

Name: [Please print] .....

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

Address.....

.....Postcode:.....