

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SPRING 1988

HOTEL FOR KENSINGTON PARK GARDENS?

Local concern over the project for a hotel at 15 Kensington Park Gardens has turned into anxiety and anger. The problem is that hotel use was granted for this building back in 1946 and the developers are arguing that it still applies. Residents and the Association declare that it does not. The hotel permission was hedged with conditions which were not complied with: hotel use was to start within six months, and it did not; the basement was to be for storage only, whereas it was converted into flatlets. Moreover, long-established residents of Kensington Park Gardens testify that the house was actually used generally for flatlets and not as an hotel over the forty subsequent years.

A hotel in Kensington Park Gardens would change the atmosphere of the neighbourhood and be most disagreeable to the residents. Its presence would constitute a precedent for further commercial activity locally. What is more, it would be directly contrary to the Council's own District Plan.

On top of all that, the developers, as one would expect, want to squeeze in as much accommodation as they can on the site. So it is not just a question of use but of alterations and additions to the building. They are applying for permission to build an extra storey in front and two extra storeys behind to overlook Ladbroke Square Gardens. In addition they want to construct extra accommodation at basement level at the rear which would affect neighbouring gardens and the Square garden itself. Lastly the scheme would ruin some of the fine rooms within the house. Kensington Park Gardens is of course one of the most distinguished streets in Ladbroke and the house, part of a terrace, is a listed building.

All is far from lost. Not only has there been an unprecedented outcry from residents locally and further afield in the neighbourhood, but English Heritage, whose judgements carry great weight with the Council, has objected to the main architectural proposals. The Ladbroke Association has taken the unusual step of putting the scheme to the vote at the March members' meeting.

The opposition to the plan was unanimous.

Peter Thorold

OTHER PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Lansdowne Road

There has been a flurry of activity at the south end of Lansdowne Road in the last six months.

No 1 This is the detached house at the corner with Ladbroke Road. At one time it had a side extension on the south, similar to those at Nos 3 and 5, and over the years there have been various proposals to rebuild a side extension. The recent planning application

envisaged a large full-height extension. It has been refused by the Council on the grounds that "...it is considered to be an inappropriate form of development on this important corner site... it would adversely affect existing street views, local character and visual amenity and also set an undesirable precedent for other full building height side extensions in the area." An appeal has just been lodged.

Nos 3 and 5 The proposals for

these houses caused much concern among local residents, and as a result of representations by them and by the Association, the scheme was amended to reduce the number of residential units allowed. We are still concerned over the detailed design of the large forecourt, the arrangement of the car-parking and the preservation of the existing trees.

No 4 This is one of six beautiful houses arranged in pairs on the east side of Lansdowne Road. Partly due, we think, to too soft a policy on the part of the Planning Department, these houses have been progressively altered, and to an extent even spoiled, over the years. Fortunately the recent proposals for No 4 were modified before being approved.

70-72 Ladbroke Road Both these houses have suffered from an inappropriate treatment of their top storeys. Recently there were two co-ordinated planning applications which proposed, among other things, the proper restoration of the top storeys of both houses. Sadly, however, it seems that this full co-ordinated scheme has been dropped, at least for the time being, for a more recent application is concerned with the restoration of No 70 alone.

11 Stanley Crescent This is one of the magnificent paired listed houses which terminate the vista of Stanley Gardens. This pair is linked on either side by a colonnade to the neighbouring houses and the whole group, along with Stanley Gardens, forms an impressive piece of townscape. Many years ago a side extension to No 11 was built above the colonnade, destroying the symmetry. No 11 is now undergoing a complete and welcome refurbishment, and the Association has suggested that this is an excellent opportunity for the ugly side extension to be removed.

A CASE FOR ENFORCEMENT?

There can be few parts of the Ladbroke Conservation Area which do not echo to the sounds of scaffolding being erected and the appearance of the skips.

These are the obvious signs that the builders have arrived. Can we be sure that the work about to start has planning permission or, for that matter, needs permission? Also when the work is finished does it conform to the original application?

Not all alterations and additions need planning permission. For listed buildings and those subject to an "Article 4 Direction" it is required, but for others, even within a conservation area, certain works can be accepted as "permitted development", a term incidentally which applies only to dwelling houses and not to buildings divided into flats.

Neighbours

The immediate neighbours to any proposed building works requiring planning permission will be notified in writing by the Planning Department at the Town Hall that the owner has made an application. Other people have to rely on a notice displayed outside the property or look in the local newspapers for information. Whether permission has been granted or not is more difficult to discover. Unless you go to the library in Ladbroke Grove or to the Town Hall you will not know.

If the building works are underway and appear to be outside permitted development, as for instance when the extensions rise above the original ridge line, or project beyond the front wall of the house, then it is worth telephoning the Planning Department to check whether permission has been granted. But even if it has, can we be sure that what is being built is not materially different from what is approved? Not all infringements are noticed by the Planning Department's team of enforcement officers who are already fully stretched. Sometimes infringements are the result of a deliberate flouting of the planning regulations, sometimes

they simply come about through ignorance.

Infringements

When things go wrong what can local residents do about the situation? The chief enforcement officer suggests that before writing indignant letters to the Planning Department you make a friendly approach to the person having the work done and ask if they have planning permission. In theory this is sensible but often the property is empty. However it is worth trying.

Otherwise ask the builder; sometimes he can be helpful. If all is not well make a note of the property's address and telephone the general enquiries desk in the Planning Department. They will tell you if permission has been granted and will give a general description of the approved development. If this description does not match the work actually in progress then write to the enforcement officer giving the basic facts and the reason for your concern.

In time his team will look into the matter. And of course you can contact the Ladbroke Association.

Taking the case to the enforcement officer may make one appear as a "busybody", but if you care about the environment in which you have chosen to live, it seems reasonable to obtain answers to your questions.

What happens after a case has been referred is sometimes difficult to discover. Will the Borough make an enforcement order or will they come to some arrangement with the offender? Enforcement is a discretionary power and whether the Borough uses it will depend on the nature of the offence. Retrospective planning applications are sometimes made so that the case can be reviewed. Although local residents are encouraged to help the Borough with basic information, as with Neighbourhood Watch, there have been occasions when the over-zealous have elevated the importance of a case beyond the level it warrants and the Council feels obliged to proceed with legal action. This is a costly procedure and can achieve nothing.

But when someone rides roughshod over the planning system local residents can help. They are encouraged to obtain facts about the violation, preferably take a photograph, and send the information to the enforcement officer at the Town Hall. Let them decide on the circumstances and should the case go to court, be prepared to support the Council by attending in person or by writing a letter.

KENSINGTON TEMPLE

In our last issue we printed a photograph of the broken-down wall on the Ladbroke Road side of the Kensington Temple and mentioned something of the unhappy story in which the Council plays a part which is far from heroic, let alone dignified.

The reconstruction of the site has been going on since the early 1980s, and at the end of 1985, after strong protest, we were informed that the Town Planning Committee had authorised a "section 65" notice requiring those in charge of the Temple to clear up the site and to rebuild the boundary wall facing on to Ladbroke Road. By April 1986 it was clear that section 65 notices held no terrors for the Temple, and indeed their sangfroid was amply justified: the threat of action by the Council simply evaporated. Still in June of the same year the Town Planning Department did assure us that their officers would "continue to press for the urgent completion of the works on the site". "Urgent" was hardly a word to fit any of the circumstances, and by that time the Temple appears to have assumed that it was all a bluff.

At any rate matters were no further forward when nine months later the Association's chairman met one of the Council's officials on the site to detail our complaints. The meeting at least had the result that the Planning Department then resumed its threats: if the works were not completed by 9th July 1987 a recommendation would be made to the Planning Committee that legal action be considered. For a moment, against experi-

ence, we really believed we were getting somewhere. But alas, our hopes were disabused. The people at the Kensington Temple were no more impressed by this ultimatum than they had been by the section 65 notice, and how right they were. For it was bluff. July came and went, and the wall was still untouched, the litter of dead leaves and rubbish deteriorated further and the piles of builders' material continued to moulder undisturbed.

Anyway at last there are signs that we may get action. The Association has approached the Councillors for Pemble Ward, Mr Campion, Sir Anthony Coates, and Miss Weatherhead (who is on the Planning Committee), and given them a detailed history of the whole affair. We then learned that the Planning Department had imposed a new deadline of the 15th March 1988 for everything to be completed. With past experience in mind it would not have required innate cynicism to be less than astonished to find on 16th March that very little had been done. What was a boost to our spirits however was that Mr West of the Planning Department intervened immediately. For a day or two some workmen actually appeared, although up until a short while ago inertia once more appeared to rule. But now, at the end of April, the efforts of our councillors and of the Planning Department have at last paid off and a serious attempt at clearance seems at last to have started. It remains, however, important that the site should be properly put in order, that there should be a re-planting of the shrubs which have been destroyed and that parking should be restricted to its pre-1980 level, before the Temple's works began.

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY

In January the Kensington Society (to which the Ladbroke Association makes an annual donation) organised a meeting for representatives of conservation groups in Kensington to be addressed by the chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor Orr-Ewing. Many questions

came up but the main reason for the meeting was the widely reported pessimism of the Council in the face of political pressure to adopt a more relaxed attitude to developers. In particular representatives had in mind Councillor Orr-Ewing's statement that in future it could be difficult to risk having planning applications brought to appeal in front of the Department of the Environment. It was some comfort to hear that the Council was now perhaps rather more optimistic about defending conservation than they had been. Councillor Orr-Ewing reiterated his statement quoted in the Borough's winter newsletter that "we regard Garden Squares as absolutely sacrosanct".

CABMEN'S SHELTER

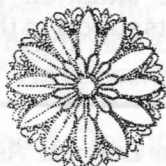
The Council has agreed to make a grant towards the restoration work of the cabmen's shelter in Kensington Park Road and work is now in progress.

SPRING MEETING

The distinguished architectural historian Hermione Hobhouse was the speaker at the Association's Spring Meeting at St John's Parish Centre on 14th March. The hall was packed to overflowing to hear her speak on *Stuccoville - the making of an inner London suburb*, a most interesting description of the development of Belgravia in the nineteenth century.

ESTATE AGENTS' BOARDS

The Association supported the Council's application to the Department of the Environment that estate agents' boards be banned in the Ladbroke Conservation Area. We are pleased to report that no new boards can in future be erected without planning permission which in practice will be difficult to obtain. We congratulate the Council on its initiative.



PLANNING APPLICATIONS:

What happens

Before building work can start, whether for new building, or for extensions to existing buildings, planning approval and buildings bye-law approval must be obtained from the planning department at the Town Hall. They will advise if planning permission is unnecessary. Normally, a person wishing to carry out work will commission an architect who will be responsible for getting the necessary consents.

The procedure is as follows. Drawings must be submitted to the planning department, showing the work proposed, along with the appropriate forms which will provide information on what is put forward. There should also be photographs of the building and its immediate surroundings.

A fee must be paid, the amount of which relates to the size of the project. If the building is 'listed' a special additional application must be made. Before making any application it is desirable to seek the informal advice of the department on the proposals and the way they are presented.

Lists

The planning department is required to advertise all planning applications so that interested parties have the opportunity to comment. Lists are published weekly and may be viewed in, or bought from, the planning department. The lists are also published in the *Kensington Times* and the familiar yellow notices must be clearly displayed outside the buildings concerned. The planning department will also write to owners of buildings in the immediate vicinity.

Any planning application may be inspected at the planning department during normal office hours and staff will give any explanation needed. Anybody may object to, or comment on, a planning application, and what they say will be taken into account.

The planning officers will form a view on each application and especially on how it conforms to the Borough's District Plan, and will make recommendations to the

planning committee of the Borough Council. The committee will decide on approval or refusal and the applicant is notified in writing. In the case of an approval conditions may be imposed, and for a refusal the reasons must be clearly stated. Normally the planning committee will give a decision within eight weeks but with large or complicated proposals it may take longer.

Appeals

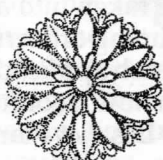
If an application is refused, the applicant may appeal to the Secretary of State for the Environment and the appeal procedure is invoked. It is then up to the Borough Council and the appellant to present their cases. Expert witnesses may be called, and any interested person may submit evidence.

The appeal may be heard at an agreed date in public at the Town Hall or it may be dealt with by means of written submissions.

Appeals are conducted by inspectors, who will visit the site and write a report which will include a recommendation to the Secretary of State as to whether the appeal is to be allowed or not. There is no time limit for dealing with appeals and sometimes it is many months before a result is known.

The Association

Before every Committee meeting of the Ladbroke Association, two Committee members, Robert Meadows, an architect, and David Marshall, a surveyor, meet at the Kensington Town Hall planning office and look carefully file by file at all the current planning applications. They identify the sensitive or contentious applications and where possible carry out on the same day a site inspection. They then report their findings and views to the full Committee the same evening. Afterwards Robert Meadows writes with the Committee's comments to the Director of Planning.



NEW LAMPS FOR OLD

New lamp posts and lanterns are now being put up in the area. The lanterns remain the 'Walt Disney' affair mentioned in an earlier newsletter, though the columns do represent an improvement on the existing concrete standards, even if they are a little spindly.

However compare those being put up by Kensington & Chelsea with those being installed in

neighbouring areas of the City of Westminster as shown below. From left to right: Lansdowne Road, Queens' Gardens and Hyde Park Square.

The Royal Borough's Works Committee claims that more pleasing standards (or using even several different types) would cost too much, but the City of Westminster manages to afford them, while maintaining its reputation for sparing use of ratepayers' money.



STOP PRESS

As we go to press we hear that an appeal has been launched into the Council's decision to refuse planning permission for the demolition of the Bowley Clinic at 11-13 Ladbroke Terrace and the erection of new residential care suites for the elderly. The Association will watch the situation carefully and offer its support to the Council.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The 1988 Annual General Meeting of the Association will be held on June 22nd at St John's Parish Centre at 8.30 pm.

Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, MP for Kensington, will be present.