

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

AUTUMN 1986

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT — 1986 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Looking back over the past year one sees certain on-going trends in the way the area is changing. The rapidly rising values have presented a great attraction to developers and the flurry of building activity continues. The results are not always desirable and lie more in the substantial profits for the speculators than in benefits to the local community and environment.

One of the Association's main tasks is to try and influence the changes that are taking place. Views on this vary widely. On the one hand purists will try and resist any change; on the other, there are people who call for greater freedom, especially in relation to their own activities! It seems to me that the policy of the Association should be positive and realistic; accepting change, but seeing that it is appropriate and sympathetic to the character of the area. The Association seeks to take such a balanced view in dealing with Planning Applications.

Three cases are worth mentioning. The recent work as 28-30 Lansdowne Road has caused much concern. We have spent considerable time with the architects and planners in trying to improve the standard of design, and I think the result is better than it would otherwise have been. The proposal to add another storey to the blocks of flats known as Lansdowne Court was considered inappropriate to the area. The Council took a similar view and the Planning Application was turned down (*see item on page 6*). We continue to press for the completion of the external works at the Kensington Temple, and for a limit to be put on the use as car-parking of the area in front of the building. This case has dragged on for far too long.

We had a meeting with the Chairman of the Town Planning Commit-

tee, mainly to discuss the Council's policy on enforcement. We expressed our concern that the Council appeared willing to take enforcement action on what seemed to us some relatively trivial matters, but was unwilling to take such action over the larger and more important issues. The outcome of this meeting was not entirely reassuring.

We supported the Campaign to Limit Agents' Signs and Hoardings (CLASH), and this has now had some success. Experimental controls are being applied to the placing of estate agents' boards in some Conservation Areas in the Borough. We are pressing for similar controls to be applied in the Ladbroke area.

Each year we make recommendations to the Council for suitable subjects for their scheme for Environmental Grants and Awards. A singular success has been the grant given for the re-building of the wall to the service road to Nos 65-77 Ladbroke Grove. We look forward to seeing this work completed later this year and the resulting environmental improvement. At the Association's suggestion, an Environmental Award has been given for the design of the new bridge linking Nos 13 and 14 Stanley Crescent.

We had two meetings for members this year. One took the form of a walk through the communal gardens on the east side of Ladbroke Grove. We were glad to have Dame Sylvia Crowe with us at this most enjoyable event. The other meeting was addressed by Martin Garman of the Notting Dale Urban Studies Centre. He gave a fascinating talk on the history of Notting Dale and its relationship with the development of Notting Hill.

Our Newsletter continues to be published twice a year. We thank Peter Thorold for his time as editor,

and we now welcome Colin Cohen in this role. I am sure he would welcome suggestions and contributions for *News from Ladbroke*. This is our one link with all our membership.

In the spring we had a recruitment drive when we canvassed about 400 houses in the area. To date, this has had the gratifying result of adding about 60 people to our membership. There is no doubt that the larger our membership, the stronger our influence will be.

I have now come to the end of my term as Chairman. It has been an interesting and enlightening experience. One of the things I have noticed is how parochial we tend to be in environmental matters. We are very concerned about our own immediate environment, but our concern diminishes as distance increases — there must be some sort of law of tolerance to change! It must be the job of an Association like ours to balance out such idiosyncrasies in an even-handed over-view of the environment as a whole.

Finally I would like to thank all those who have supported me during the past three years.

Robert Meadows

ELIZABETH BEAVEN

Elizabeth became the Honorary Secretary of the Association in 1984. She quickly became part of the Association and, in particular, of the Executive Committee. Her long experience in the Civil Service gave her expertise from which we benefited, most of all in her high standard of minute-writing. Her unobtrusive efficiency was much appreciated, and we were very sorry when it became apparent that her decline in health would prevent her from continuing as Secretary. We are grateful to her for what she did for the Association, we hope her health will improve and wish her well.

PLANNING

Extra storeys – Arundel Gardens, Ladbroke Road. There are still frequent applications to build extra storeys, often in mansard roofs with dormer windows. In Arundel Gardens this form of extension has become an established pattern, and what is important is that the new storeys should all follow a similar profile and have similar details in the windows. In one case where the details did not conform with the established pattern, Planning Permission was refused and an Appeal has been lodged. The Association will support the Council in this Appeal.

Another important case was a joint Planning Application for extra storeys on Nos 80-86 Ladbroke Road. Here, whilst the proposal itself seemed questionable, it also seemed that it would be carried out piecemeal – a house at a time, and probably never completed. Clearly this mitigated against the idea.

There is a need for a clear Council policy on the whole matter of extra storeys in the Ladbroke area.

Blenheim Crescent, Kensington Park Road – loss of family houses. There have been Applications for a number of the smaller houses to be divided into flats or maisonettes. These houses seem eminently suitable to family use, and their loss to this use is unfortunate.

Nos 2/3/4 Lansdowne Walk. These houses owned by the Sheppard Trust were to be up-graded, but this has been delayed by lack of funds. The proposed temporary use, in the meantime, is as a hostel for mature women students.

Nos 84-94 Blenheim Crescent. After some delay, the proposal has been revived by the Kensington Housing Trust for a replica re-build of these run-down houses. But they would provide 21 flats and maisonettes. There is some concern over the car-parking implications of this proposal.

Nos 28-30 Lansdowne Road. The saga of these houses continues. The latest episode concerns the proposal to demolish both the glazed porches and replace them with a less elegant design. This has become a matter of some controversy. There is an opinion that the building looks better

without the porches – one of which was demolished without consent, but the residents want the porches as protection against the weather.

Listed Buildings. Some owners of listed buildings feel free to suggest quite radical alterations to them. If this is allowed it makes a nonsense of listing. Such buildings should not be changed, except in very exceptional cases and with expert guidance. The removal of decorative detail from listed buildings is also a practice which must be deplored. There is a tendency for the Council to take too 'soft' an attitude over such cases in order to avoid the risk of a successful Appeal against Planning Refusal or Enforcement action.

ESTATE AGENTS' BOARDS

Earlier this year the Council introduced a total ban on estate agents' boards in four areas in the Borough, on an experimental basis, the nearest area being around Royal Crescent. Boards can only be erected in those areas if planning permission is granted, which is unlikely.

The Council are now considering extending this ban to the Ladbroke Area. The Association has been asked to assist the Planning Department by taking photographs showing examples of visual harm caused by boards. If you are able to contribute any photos of your own please do send them to the Chairman, Richard Bird, 166 Kensington Park Road, marked on the back with the date on which they were taken, and the street. We will pass them on to the Council.

MEMBERS' VIEWS

The Committee would very much like to hear the views of members on the role and objects of the Association. Could we do more – and if so, how – or are we doing too much already?

Should we be concentrating on any particular issues in the area? A number of issues were raised at the AGM, but the Chairman would also like to hear other members' views. Do please let him have your thoughts.

THE BOWLEY CLINIC, LADBROKE TERRACE

An important Planning Application has recently been before the Council. The Bowley Clinic has changed hands and the new owners wish to turn it into a nursing home for the elderly. Some quite radical changes are proposed in the various buildings on the large site which is bounded by Ladbroke Terrace, Ladbroke Road and Wilby Mews.

The main building in Ladbroke Terrace is formed by a group of terrace houses linked to the adjacent villa on the north by a modern red-brick structure. The proposal is to rebuild this link to an improved design, to tidy up the south end of the terrace and to add an extra storey within a new mansard roof with dormer windows.

On Ladbroke Road, the modern red-brick building will be demolished and a new and enlarged wing built as a returned end to the existing terrace of houses and extending back into the garden. A conservatory-type day room will be built in the garden and linked to this new wing and to the main building. The terrace houses, Nos 44-50 will be offered additional small gardens. Five new small houses will be built on the east side of Wilby Mews.

The Association has been involved in long discussions with the architects and the Council's planners regarding these proposals and various changes were made before the scheme was approved. Although there is some loss of garden and greenery, it is considered that the scheme could improve the local environment, provided that the detail design is handled in a scholarly manner and there is a proper restoration of decorative detail. The Planning Approval carries fifteen conditions and it is clear that the Council wishes the scheme to be carried out to a high standard of design and with appropriate materials.

ACCOUNTS

The Hon Treasurer reported income for 1985-86 of £879.07 and expenditure of £835.18, producing a small surplus of £43.89, as against £295.99 in the previous year.

ALL DONE FROM MEMORY

Writer and artist Osbert Lancaster died during the summer. We are grateful to his publishers, John Murray, for permission to reprint this brief passage and his illustration from *All Done From Memory*, first published in 1953, which recalls his childhood in an Edwardian Elgin Crescent.

I was born in the eighth year of the reign of King Edward the Seventh in the parish of St. John's, Notting Hill. At that time Elgin Crescent, the actual scene of this event, was situated on the Marches of respectability. Up the hill to the south, tree-shaded and freshly stuccoed, stretched the squares and terraces of the last great stronghold of Victorian Propriety: below to the north lay the courts and alleys of Notting Dale, through which, so my nurse terrifyingly assured me, policemen could only proceed in pairs.

The Crescent, like all border districts, was distinguished by a certain



colourful mixture in its inhabitants, lacking in the more securely sheltered central area, grouped in this case round the church. While residence there was socially approved and no traces of 'slumminess' were as yet apparent, there did cling to it a slight whiff of Bohemianism from which Kensington Park Road, for instance, was quite free. Of the residents several were connected with the Stage, and some were foreign, but neither group carried these eccentricities to excessive lengths...

Number 79 was a semi-detached stucco residence on three floors and a basement with a pillared porch, not differing stylistically in any way from the prevailing classicism of the neighbourhood. At the back was a small private garden opening into the large garden common to all the occupants of the south side of Elgin Crescent and the north side of Lansdowne Road. Such communal gardens, which are among the most

attractive features of Victorian town-planning, are not uncommon in the residential districts of West London, but are carried to the highest point of their development in the Ladbroke estate. This area, which was laid out after the closure of the race-course that for a brief period encircled the summit of the hill, represents the last rational, unselfconscious piece of urban development in London. It was unfortunately dogged by misfortune, and the socially ambitious intention of Allom, the architect, and the promoters was largely defeated by the proximity of an existing pottery slum in Notting Dale, which received, just at the time the scheme was being launched, an enormous and deplorable influx of Irish labourers working on the Great Western Railway.

How different it all was in the years before 1914! Then the stucco, creamy and bright, gleamed softly beneath what seems in reminiscence to have been a perpetually cloudless sky. Geraniums in urns flanked each brass-enriched front door, while over the area railings moustachioed policemen made love to buxom cooks. And in every street there hung, all summer long, the heavy scent of limes.

The angel who drove the original inhabitants out of this gilt-edged Eden, not with a flaming sword but by a simple vanishing trick, was the domestic servant. The houses, even the small ones like ours, were planned on generous lines and labour saving was still not only an unrealised but un-thought-of ideal. Fortunately my parents, whose joint income at the time of my birth amounted to all of £600 a year, were able to maintain a cook, a housemaid, a nurse and a boot-boy; my mother, moreover, had been through the hard school of a Victorian grandmother's household, and herself undertook such specialised, and now obsolete, labours as cleaning the chandeliers, washing the rubber-plant and superintending the linen.

The ideal of the servantless civilisation, already fully realised in the United States, is doubtless a noble one, and those who so bravely, and possibly sincerely, maintain that they feel degraded by being waited on by their fellow human beings compel our admiration, although personally they invariably provoke

me to confess that I can tolerate without discomfort being waited on hand and foot. But it is an ideal attended by one grave disadvantage – whom is there left for the children to talk to? A mother's love is all very well but it is only a poor substitute for good relations with the cook.

In my case, the centre of the below-stairs world was Kate the housemaid. This remarkable woman, gaunt, near-sighted and invariably prepared for the worst, not only endeared herself to me by acts of kindness to which I could always be certain no strings were attached, but also provided my only contact with the real world which lay beyond the confines of my isolated nursery...

A few additional figures there were who stood in a rather closer relation to the small world of Number 79 than the anonymous ranks of passers-by I observed from my pram: they, while obviously debarred from the full club privileges of Kate, the cook, my parents and the boot-boy, yet enjoyed, as it were, the facilities of country membership. The Italian organ-grinder, a martyr to gastric troubles, who regularly appeared every Thursday afternoon; the crossing-sweeper in Ladbroke Grove whose function the internal combustion engine was even then rapidly rendering as decorative as that of the King's Champion; the muffin man, the lamplighter and the old gentleman who came out on winter evenings to play the harp by the foggy radiance of the street lamp – Dickensian figures who have obviously no role to play in the Welfare State and have left no successors. Doubtless their disappearance should be welcomed, and yet they did not appear to be either downtrodden or exploited: indeed, the impression they gave was chiefly of a proper consciousness of the important role in the social fabric played by muffin men, lamplighters and organ-grinders...





SUBSCRIPTIONS

For many years the annual minimum subscription has been held at £1, payable on 1st April each year. Increasing costs have now forced the Committee to consider raising the minimum subscription. Members will be advised before next April.

TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEES

Residents may be unaware that they have the right to attend meetings of the Town Planning Committees at the Town Hall. During the last year the Ladbroke Association has itself been sending observers to the regular committee meetings.

There are two committees – the Applications Sub-Committee, which deals with minor, routine, or non-controversial planning applications, and the Planning Committee, which deals with a much wider range of issues. Both are chaired by the same chairman and vice-chairman.

The Applications Sub-Committee meets about every two weeks, and comprises four councillors, usually three majority party members and one minority party member. Meetings tend to last between one and two hours. Each application is accompanied by a written report, usually prepared by individual planning officers, containing a description of the site and proposals, relevant planning history, the planning considerations for and against, a note of any objections raised and, finally, a recommendation for decision. It is extremely rare for the Sub-Committee to vote against the recommendation in the report, although they may choose to avoid making decisions on difficult or important cases and refer them instead to the main committee for decision.

The main committee meets about every three weeks, and comprises a larger number of councillors. Meetings tend to have a more 'political' flavour, due mainly to the nature of the issues being dealt with – and possibly to the presence of a larger audience. The agenda usually consists of a fairly wide range of matters covering both town planning and traffic. For example, the agenda in June dealt with road humps, tourist coach facilities, bus lanes, footway widen-

ing, road safety in London, land use surveys, traffic regulation orders and, almost at the end of the list, planning applications.

The process through which individual planning applications travel is therefore:

- 1 Application lodged.
- 2 Public consultation by advertising and writing to neighbours likely to be affected by the proposals.
- 3 Assessment of planning considerations by the Director of Planning and preparation of a report together with a recommendation.
- 4 If the proposal is relatively minor, and based on established principles, it may be dealt with under delegated authority by the Director of Planning.
- 5 If it requires a decision it is put before the Applications Sub-Committee.
- 6 The Applications Sub-Committee decides to refuse, approve or refer the application to the main committee.
- 7 The main committee decides to refuse or approve the application.

Considering the number of applications which are usually considered each month, the committee sessions are surprisingly swift as a great deal of work has been carried out behind the scenes, before an application is formally considered by the committee, and the chairman and vice chairman in particular have to 'do their homework' beforehand in order to keep abreast of the multitude of applications.

One of the more amusing moments took place recently when the designer of a scheme, showing a model to the committee, asked the chairman for all the lights in the room to be put out. He quickly explained that this was in order to demonstrate the sunlight angles (with his pocket torch). After some understandable hesitation the request was granted and for five minutes the committee sat in the dark, illuminated only by the beam of a pocket torch.

As a result of attending the committee meetings, the Association has learnt something about the background to planning decisions. Whilst it may not be worthwhile attending all future meetings, the Association will try to ensure that it has an observer or representative present at those where any major issues affecting the Ladbroke Area are dealt with.

THE 1986-7 COMMITTEE

CHAIRMAN Richard Bird, 166 Kensington Park Road
VICE CHAIRMAN Peter Thorold, 3/25 Stanley Crescent
HON SECRETARY Linda Kelly, 42 Ladbroke Grove
HON TREASURER Dr. Peter Austerfield, 168 Kensington Park Road
COMMITTEE Paul Bastick, Ladbroke Grove; Colin Cohen, Lansdowne Crescent; Marguerite Evers, Kensington Park Gardens; Ian Grant, Ladbroke Square; Jeremy Lever, Lansdowne Crescent; David Marshall, Stanley Crescent; Robert Meadows, Stanley Crescent; Thomas Pakenham, Elgin Crescent.

NEW COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Miss Marguerite Evers was elected to the Committee at the last AGM. She is an interior designer and author, and has lived in the Ladbroke area a number of years.

The Committee is always willing to consider nominations for new committee members. At present we particularly lack a committee member in the Clarendon Road/Lansdowne Road area.

GRANTS

Grants to help residents restore properties in conservation areas are being offered by Kensington and Chelsea Council from October 1.

A total of £10,000 is being set aside over the next year to finance the scheme. The maximum grant will be £500 per property. Handouts will not exceed 25 per cent of the cost.

Works likely to attract grants include restoration of missing ornamental features, front garden walls, railings, porches, balustrades and stucco cornices. However, the property must be the only one or one of only two in a clearly-defined group of buildings missing the feature to be restored.

Grants will also be made if the owners of three or more properties in a distinct group are doing similar work at the same time.

WALL FALL DOWN

The wall in Ladbroke Grove fronting numbers 65-77 was partly demolished following the District Surveyor's warning that the northernmost pillar was unsafe and the rest of the wall came down in October, the freeholders' scheme to rebuild it (*News from Ladbroke Spring 1986*) having been delayed from May until the scaffolding at number 69 had been removed.

The wall's original brick construction and moulded render are to be reconstructed, but in keeping with present practice locally the render is to be painted, not left plain as it seems to have been when the wall was first built (c. 1841). The missing balustrade is to be replaced, to the design suggested by an outline that could be seen on the north pillar of a section of a baluster.

Instigated by the Ladbroke Association and masterminded by committee member Paul Bastick, the

freeholders' scheme includes a commitment to future maintenance. Resurfacing the private road behind the wall and remaking the pavement must await further funds however.

DOUBLE PARKING

The council is considering the residents' request for chevron parking to be introduced in Arundel Gardens. This would increase the number of spaces and narrow the road, preventing double parking.

Residents petitioned the council warning that the present double-banked parking on both sides of the road had become dangerous, obstructing the traffic and blocking access to emergency vehicles.

However, the fire brigade strongly objected to the plan saying it would not be able to get a turn-

table ladder into the street in the event of a fire in one of the tall buildings.

LANSDOWNE COURT APPEAL

The owners of these blocks of flats on the corner of Lansdowne Crescent, Rise and Road have appealed to the Secretary of State against the Council's refusal of permission to add an extra floor to each of the blocks. The Council and the Association considered that an extra floor would increase the bulk of the buildings in a quite unacceptable fashion — especially when looking up the hill. You can make your views on the plan known by writing to The Secretary of State for the Environment, Room 1010 Tollgate House, Bristol BS2 9DU by 14th November and quoting reference APP/K5600/A/86/53635.

