

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

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SPRING 1987

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT —

This year has to some extent been a year of experiment and change for the Association.

The aims, organisation and practice of the Association have been the subject of some considerable thought and discussion. A working party has been formed with a wide and open ended brief, to look at the Association's objectives, strategy and mode of operation. The primary objective of the Association is of course to protect and enhance the beauty and character of the area; it is essential that from time to time we assess just how effective we are in achieving this objective, and if necessary, review our methods of working to keep abreast of changing needs and circumstances.

The format of the Executive Committee's meetings has changed, as has the structure of the Committee's business itself. Much of the work of the Committee is now being dealt with initially by working parties or sub-committees, researching, discussing, preparing papers and reporting to the main committee. The main committee is thus able to take on more of an executive function than before, by delegating the detailed exploration of issues to the working parties or sub-committees, and devoting more of its own time to the broader issues of strategy and objectives.

For example, town planning applications are examined by a sub-committee for action. (Members should rest assured however, that every application in the Ladbroke Area is laid formally before the full Committee for consideration, and if necessary a controversial application will be examined in detail.)

In addition, 'ad-hoc' sub-committees have been set up to deal with specific matters, for example

the question of replacement of lamp-posts throughout the area, which is currently being discussed by the Council, and which is reported on in more detail in this issue of the *Newsletter*. Another sub-committee is looking into the feasibility of putting together a handbook on the maintenance of stucco.

Many other matters are being studied or are under review, and I hope to be able to report on further progress at the AGM in June.

One outcome of our review process which may not have been so welcome to members has been the increase in the minimum subscription to £5. I have sought to explain the reasons for this decision in a letter to all members, and I believe that most members have by now adjusted their banker's orders or subscriptions. The Honorary Treasurer will give a full report at the AGM. We have received one or two letters from people who feel unable to afford the increased subscription, and we should perhaps consider a concessionary subscription.

Some weeks ago I met with the Chairmen of the neighbouring conservation societies to discuss matters of common interest. One point which came out of our discussion was the common desire to see the Council pursue a vigorous policy of enforcement against contraventions of planning law such as non-conformity with approved plans and elevations. Another item of common interest, although not so strictly within our area, but of concern, was the rather rundown state of the streetscape in Notting Hill Gate. It is understood that an environmental improvement scheme is being prepared for Kensington High Street, and we would like to see a similar study undertaken for our own principal shop-

ping street, the Gate.

A considerable number of planning applications have been considered by the Committee during the year, and these are described in greater detail elsewhere in the *Newsletter*. I would like however, briefly to mention here the most significant applications which have come before us since the last *Newsletter*.

The most important planning matter to have received our attention this year has probably been the application for the redevelopment of Bowley Clinic site, on the corner of Ladbroke Road and Ladbroke Terrace. A number of different approaches have been suggested by the developers and their architects, ranging from the pure conservationist approach to a virtual reconstruction of the existing facades, to a more adventurous (and of course controversial) approach involving the replacement of the existing buildings on the Ladbroke Terrace frontage with a totally redesigned building, not necessarily designed in the classical idiom.

The architects have, to their credit, sought the views of the Committee on the relative merits of the various approaches. However, the Committee has for some time taken the view that whilst there could be advantages (as well as possible disadvantages) in becoming involved in the early design stages of certain proposals, it would be impossible to guarantee extending the same time and interest to all applicants. On the practical level, there is just not enough time available to a voluntary Committee. For this reason we have not become involved in the design stage of this large project, but will of course be closely monitoring the proposals. As a result of the discussion of this site,

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the Committee has reaffirmed the view that its prime function must be to comment upon and react to specific planning proposals, within the context of a general policy for the area.

The other major application currently before the Council is for the establishment of hotel use in 15 Kensington Park Gardens and I would draw your attention to the detailed report given in the Planning section of this *Newsletter*.

Also worth mentioning here is the appeal for an extra storey on Lansdowne Court at the corners of Lansdowne Crescent, Rise and Road. Representations have been made by all parties, and the Inspector is now considering the case. A decision is still awaited.

The unfinished state of the Kensington Temple forecourt, and the apparently permanent use of the forecourt area (previously garden) for car parking, are also continuing causes of concern.

On the positive side, we are very pleased to record the highly successful completion of the restoration of the front boundary wall at 67-75 Ladbroke Grove.

Looking at our broad objectives and strategy, it seems that as the pressures on our environment become more intense, we need to take a new look at our ability to cope with these problems. How can a conservation group such as ours remain effective when confronted with considerable professional skills and financial resources? If we are to be effective we must recognise that our own resources and methods must equal those with whom we may find ourselves in opposition or disagreement. By way of resources we need time, persistence, and specialised knowledge. By way of methods we need an efficient organisation with the backup of modern facilities.

There is a very wide range of possible options – but they all have a financial effect. It is conceivable that the membership would be prepared to pay a relatively high annual subscription in order to maintain a truly professional organisation, with paid full time staff. On the other hand we do have a voluntary committee, and the energy and time devoted by those who assist in the Association's work is the very lifeblood of its existence. The path chosen for

the immediate future is seen as a middle way, where the bulk of the work is still carried out by voluntary committee members, but part time paid helpers are taken on to assist in specialised areas such as secretarial support. It is hoped that in this way we will be able to retain a level of effectiveness sufficient to cope with immediate needs.

Finally I would like to remind all members that the Annual General Meeting will take place on 24th June. A formal notice is enclosed with this *Newsletter*. We urge you to attend as the AGM provides an opportunity for members to hear directly about the work done and to raise their own questions or introduce new ideas – which are always welcome. Of course ideas have to be implemented and seen through, and this needs people; there are at present three vacancies on the Executive Committee and any nominations should ideally be lodged before the AGM.

Richard Bird

Eight estate agents' boards in Holland Park Avenue

Five estate agents' boards in Ladbroke Grove – sharp-eyed readers will notice that one has been broken off, while the last (hidden) board is also from Faron Sutaria

ESTATE AGENTS' BOARDS

Unsightly proliferations of agents' boards continue to be a problem in the area. Attempts have been made by the Council to achieve a moderation of the worst excesses through voluntary restraint on the part of estate agents, but without success. A walk or drive down Ladbroke Grove, for example, should convince even the most fervent supporters of the right to advertise one's property that the situation is out of control. As a result there is now a definite possibility of the Council introducing a total ban on boards throughout the Ladbroke area in the near future.



LADBROKE SQUARE IN 1925

In our last Newsletter we printed an extract from Osbert Lancaster's autobiography in which he described his early memories of Elgin Crescent. We are very grateful to one of his contemporaries, Mrs Levinson, has written to us. She remembers meeting him at children's parties — 'a fat little boy'. She was born in Lansdowne Crescent and later lived in Lansdowne Road, Ladbroke Square and Lansdowne Walk. Before leaving London, in 1976, she wrote the following reminiscence of Ladbroke Square.

Fifty years ago I was eleven years old. I spent almost every day in the holidays and every early evening after school in summer in Ladbroke Square and can truthfully say that it has altered very little since those far-off days.

My parents had been members since their marriage in 1903 and from 1914 I was most certainly wheeled in my pram up and down the top grand walk by my nurse whilst my elder brother of ten and my sister of seven played with their friends. At that time we lived in Lansdowne Crescent.

But eleven years old is a good time to start memories of the Square, as by then I knew it in every detail.

In 1917 my mother was widowed and we had moved to Lansdowne Road — so I would walk alone to the Square most days with the old-fashioned gate key hung around my neck on a length of tape. Entering by the gate in Ladbroke Grove near, St John's Church, I remember the first lawn to be almost identical to today. Compared with the other trees in the Square the two weeping ash trees seem to have grown less than I would have expected.

To my childish eyes in the 1920s, they afforded a real tent of shelter under which one could hide or play 'houses'. The huge black poplar which has been lopped (or it would have been dangerously tall) had its companion close by. This has now been replaced by the young catalpa tree. I both loved and feared these two giants — loved them for the fat, red, furry catkins that fell thickly on the ground in spring and was really

frightened in a high wind when their leaves tossed and their branches moaned ominously.

The lower part of this lawn, as today, was rather dull and often damp though, every alternate year, it was enlivened with a grass tennis court. (The other year, it being removed to where its permanent home now is).

In the dark, cool summer house umpteen games of 'House' 'School' and wet-day picnics took place — and also there was hung here a little note-book, pencil attached, for booking the tennis court. I don't know how many of the present members know that the circular flower bed near this summer house was originally a pond with a very pretty fountain in the middle? The surrounding ballustrade was covered with rather feeble pink rambler roses in summer — bright blue scillas grew in the bed around the pond in springtime.

Generally speaking there were less flowers than today and in their own private gardens most Londoners at that time hadn't much imagination beyond geraniums (red), lobelias (blue), and alyssum (white) (Shades of the British Empire!) — so the scillas and also the continuous strip of yellow and mauve crocus all along the top walk in spring were a rather special pleasure.

I think I am right in saying the fountain only played on Sundays — a day when many of the large congregation of St John's Church paraded around the Square after the service and before going home to the inevitable roast beef Sunday lunch. There were Church-children and non-Church children — clothes being the distinguishing feature which produced mixed feelings of disapproval, jealousy, superiority and disdain for a few hours each week.

The fountain was a source of

constant pleasure and constant daring in our rather simple lives — especially on one occasion when by brother and some friends discovered where the water cock was situated and actually had the audacity to turn it on on a weekday!

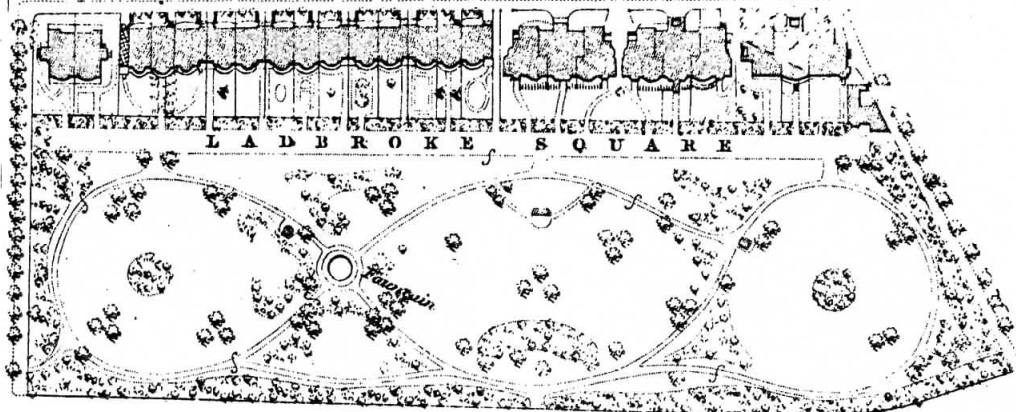
At that time the Head Gardener was a kindly or rather strict (to us) Mr Simms and I was worried that he might single me out as the sister of the criminal! If my memory serves me rightly he had three very clever children who all went to Oxford and one of his sons is now a well-known ornithologist. One wonders if early awakenings of the love of birds were aroused in their little rural slice of Kensington?

The large centre lawn — like all the square — is virtually unchanged. The trees are all bigger and more luxuriant, save the poor old gnarled hawthorn, which in those earlier days flowered with beautiful white May blossom. I have always imagined these trees to be part of the original countryside and dotted about the Hippodrome of the 1830s (Mrs Gillespie — former Honorary Secretary of the Garden Committee — suggests they may have formed part of a hedge). The rhododendron bed — now improved with the addition of azaleas has grown abundantly.

Nurses and their charges parked themselves and their prams along the top walk and gossiped while the children played. Fathers and mothers only seemed to appear on Sundays, if at all.

Older unaccompanied children like myself met a friend either by arrangement or by chance and groups formed — quite often in 'rival gangs'. We mostly went to the same school — Norland Place School — and mostly knew everyone of our age. There were the inevitable 'bullies' and 'teasers'

Continued overleaf



and rivalries but on the whole it was a very happy community.

There was certainly a wider age range among the children probably due to the fact that in those days nearly all the houses surrounding the Square and in the near neighbourhood were single-family dwellings – there were less adults – dogs only on leads and as for sunbathing!! The very trees would have withered and dropped at the sight of a bikini-clad sun-worshiper! Nobody brought their own deckchairs (or probably even possessed them) – the iron and wooden garden benches were the only seats.

There was no playground – no climbing frame – games were mostly imaginative or make-believe or conventional and old-fashioned like Rounders – French Cricket, Tip-and-run and so on.

In summer time a Walls Ice Cream vendor on a tricycle tinkled his bell as he rode round the perimeter of the gardens. This was the supreme treat – a brickette of vanilla ice cream exchanged for two pennies thrust through the bars of the Square gate.

One rather attractive feature that has disappeared is the little winding flagged path beside a tiny stream, flanked with tall balsam plants, that ran downhill from a path below the pond to the lower walk.

The far lawn – ie, the furthest from me as I had entered from the west side, is again scarcely changed. The same circular shrubbery north of the tennis court. The horse chestnut tree now paved around its trunk and perhaps a few more roses – the twin summer house painted dark green.

This is a broad outline of the mental picture I have of the Square in the Twenties and Thirties. Of course I could fill in with endless details and anecdotes – but this could be a bore to readers. I can only end, therefore, by saying that many of the happiest times of my life have been connected with the Square and many of the old friends I met there have remained friends for life.

Pipe-dream or nightmare. The development at 28 Lansdowne Road continues to cause concern. The latest addition is this proliferation of external pipes

CIVIC TRUST SPEAKER

Perhaps it was tempting providence to arrange a members' meeting on the 1st April! In the event it was a very unpleasant wet evening. Nevertheless, about twenty-five people came to the meeting and heard a very interesting talk by Mr Arthur Percival of the Civic Trust. Mr Percival divided his talk into two parts. His first part dealt with the very many activities of the Civic Trust concerned with making people aware of and improving the environment. Help to local amenity societies, publications, films and videos, a library of books and slides, approaches to Government, arranging conferences and competitions – these are some of the wide-ranging aspects of the work of the Trust.

The second part of the talk was illustrated with slides and dealt with a number of examples of ways in which the environment had been improved – stimulated by the Civic Trust. We were shown 'before and after' photographs of car-parks which had been improved by planting and re-surfacing; small pieces of urban waste land turned into attractive corners with planting and paving; buildings refurbished and brought back into use; street scenes improved by painting and the replacement of inappropriate street furniture, etc.

It showed that substantial improvements can be made with

imagination and relatively little expense. Have we any ideas for improving the Ladbroke area?

KENSINGTON TEMPLE

For more than three years the Association has been aware of the unsatisfactory state of the external spaces round this building. Since the main alterations to the building were carried out, the external spaces have remained in an untidy state, the boundary wall's piers and gates have not been repaired, and the garden space in front of the building has become a permanent car-park. This is clearly unacceptable, especially for a listed building which stands as a land-mark near one of the main entrances to the Conservation Area.

During this period the Association has repeatedly asked the authorities at the Temple and also the Borough Council to take steps to remedy these matters.

Recently work started again on the Ladbroke Road side of the building and we have been assured that this time the work will be taken to a full completion. The Borough Council has also sent a Completion Notice to the Temple authorities. But, so far, there is no assurance that the random car-parking in front of the building will be limited and the former garden area restored. We shall continue to give this matter the attention it deserves.

CONSERVATORIES

Conservatories were a common feature in Victorian houses. It seems that they are becoming popular again, for they have of a number of recent planning applications. As they tend to be at the back of the houses, they are not generally visible except when they overlook communal gardens. Their treatment calls for particular care – their shape, how they relate to the house, their detail design. Each one should be tailor-made for its position. Standard catalogue models are seldom appropriate!

CORRECTION

Unfortunately the address of the Honorary Secretary was given incorrectly in the last issue of the Newsletter. The correct address is 44 Ladbroke Grove, London W11 2PA. Our apologies to members.



PLANNING

During the past six months we have looked at many planning applications, and given our views on them to the Director of Planning. The most important are listed here.

15 KENSINGTON PARK GARDENS

This is one of the many listed houses in this grand street. For many years it has been in poor condition and unsuitable changes have been made to some of the windows. Although in 1946 planning permission was given for hotel use, since then the building has been used as a rooming house, and there appears to be no evidence of it ever having been used as an hotel. It would be appreciated if any member of the Association who has any knowledge of the use of the building during the period from 1946 to 1952 would contact the Honorary Secretary of the Garden Committee, Christopher Wood, on 01-727 8770.

There is now a planning application to turn it into an hotel and to build a restaurant under the back garden – involving some 75 lorry loads of spoil for which the only means of exit might be through Ladbroke Square Gardens. The proposed refurbishment of the exterior is welcome, but the use as an hotel and the extension below the garden are considered to be totally inappropriate to the area. The Association and many residents have expressed their opposition to the scheme, but no decision has been made by the Council.

THE WALL

The wall separating the service road from the pavement in front of Nos 65-77 Ladbroke Grove has now been rebuilt. It has been restored to its original form, complete with piers and balustrade and finished in stucco – by the time that you read this *Newsletter* it should have been fully painted.

This is a great improvement and an example of successful co-operation between the Association, the local residents and the Borough Council. The wall will be considered for an Award under the Council's Environmental Awards Scheme.

THE BOWLEY NURSING HOME

Since we last wrote there have been changes in proposals relating to the buildings in Ladbroke Terrace and Ladbroke Road. The scheme is now being dealt with in two parts. A revised planning application was made for the buildings in Ladbroke Road. This involved demolishing the existing buildings – the relatively modern nurses' home and the two end houses in the terrace, and re-building in a manner which accommodates the new uses in a more satisfactory way. The proposal is to re-build in the style of the existing Victorian terrace, but with some modifications to window spacing, storey heights and roof treatment. The Association looked at these proposals and made some critical comments. However the scheme was given planning approval and the work is now progressing.

It was found that the original proposals for the buildings in Ladbroke Terrace could not be carried out for structural reasons. It seems now that the intention is to apply for permission to demolish these buildings and design a new building which will suit the needs of the nursing home, as well as being an appropriate design for the site and context. When a new planning application is made, we shall look at it and make whatever comments seem necessary.

1 LADBROKE SQUARE

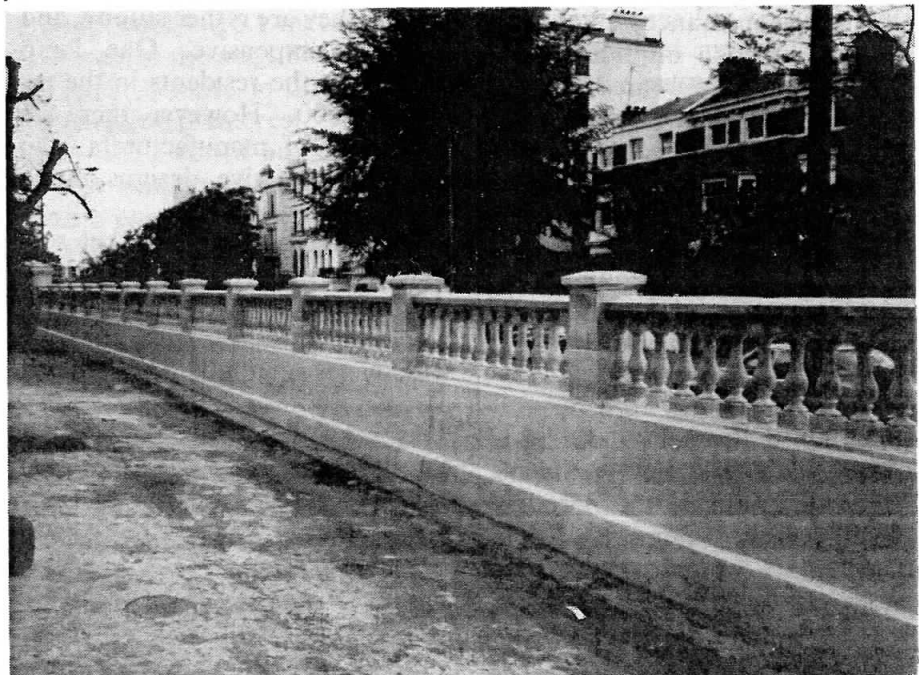
This important corner building is in a very run-down state, but a recent planning application has been approved for its refurbishment and extension by the Council. The lower floors will be used by the existing day nursery and the upper floors as residential accommodation. At the back, the ugly fire escape will go and there will be general improvements incorporating a single storey extension for the Nursery. The Association welcomed these proposals but also expressed the hope that the conservatory at first floor level at the side would be re-designed.

As with all planning applications members can always make their own representations direct to the Planning Department at the Town Hall.

LANSDOWNE COURT

The proposal to add a storey to the two blocks of flats in Lansdowne Crescent, Rise and Road is currently the subject of a Planning Appeal. The Association supported the Council in resisting this proposal. At the time of going to press, the outcome of this appeal is still not known.

The wall: nearly complete



STREET LIGHTING

Many of the existing lamp-posts in the Ladbroke area are going to start coming down next year. The usual concrete column lasts up to 35 years but may start to crack up as early as 25, and many of ours are now ready for replacement. The shape of what is to come is not yet visible in our neighbourhood but is to be seen in Gloucester Walk, off Kensington Church Street. The new stands are not made of concrete, but of rather elegant slim black steel with a small cross bar of the sort originally designed to support ladders but now retained more for decoration than for anything else.

At the moment there exists in Ladbroke a variety of lampstands. As I sit typing this article I can see three different kinds from my window: in Stanley Crescent there is the fairly usual concrete stand of 5 metres high with the head curving over the street; while in Ladbroke Gardens, a few yards away, there is a taller version, this time with a rounded as opposed to a straight head, and also another, an odd-ball, which has a slightly dotty Spanish look. In future we will have a greater uniformity although the main roads, Ladbroke Grove and Kensington Park Road, will keep the much larger stands and the more powerful fluorescent lights.

Type

A big change will be the wide introduction of high pressure sodium lighting such as we have already in Clarendon Road and other streets and the disappearance, except on the main roads, of fluorescent lighting. Some people are less than enthusiastic about the orange glow given out by the new bulbs. The Borough's answer to their objections is that fluorescent bulbs can be expected to last about two years and the high pressure sodium, four and a half years, and that the latter is anyway cheaper on ordinary running costs.

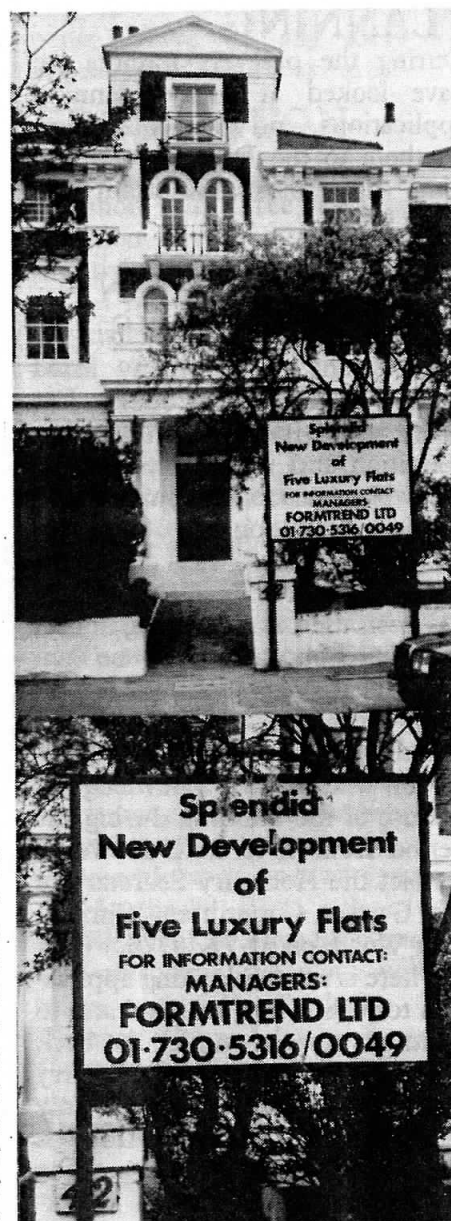
What can we do to influence the sort of lighting which we will have in Ladbroke? It clearly would be difficult to persuade the Borough – in view of the difference in costs

– to drop their plans for high pressure sodium – but it seems possible that they would be responsive to arguments about the height of lamp stands. At the moment, for instance, there appears to be a certain illogic in the choice for individual streets. Why are the stands in Clarendon Road shorter than those in the narrower Portland Road for instance? It may be more difficult to convince them on another aspect of the new lamps. We are due to get elegant black steel stands but they will be surmounted not by curved lanterns but by the opaque vertical heads of the Clarendon Road type. A case can be made for clear glass. The Borough is unlikely to be sympathetic either to criticisms of the rather Walt Disney-like crenellation around the head of the new lanterns.

Alternatives

There is, however, another line of approach. Outside the Ladbroke conservation area, in streets such as Campden Hill Square and St James's Gardens, for example you will find another sort of design altogether in the old cast-iron green Kensington Patent Street Lighting Lanterns. They are there because they were there, and have never been removed, but there are other streets in Kensington and Chelsea where the residents are negotiating to have them reinstalled and paying the difference in price themselves. We are not necessarily keen on these particular lights. They would not be appropriate to all streets, they are rather stubby, and they are expensive. One lamp might cost the residents in the region of £600. However, there are a number of manufacturers who produce attractive designs much more cheaply.

The Association will be closely concerned with street lighting over the next few months and we would be delighted to hear from anybody with views on the subject. Please contact either myself at 25 Stanley Crescent (01-727 6766) or Colin Cohen at 8 Lansdowne Crescent (01-727 3919) who has an answering machine.



A single board may be offensive, due to its size

USE CLASSES ORDER

Legislation comes into effect on June 1st which will place 'light industrial' uses in the same class as offices. This will mean that businesses such as mews garages, craft workshops and the like could be converted into office premises without the need for planning permission (and *vice versa*). There is unlikely to have any significant impact in the Ladbroke area itself, but it could lead to the loss of some useful service industries and perhaps some local colour in the neighbouring areas such as North Kensington and Portobello Road.