

# Ladbroke News

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SUMMER 2021



*The famous cherry trees on the corner of Kensington Park Gardens and Stanley Crescent have continued to be a tourist attraction despite lockdown. We suspect many of the visitors were Japanese residents of London.*

## FREAK WEATHER EVENTS – FLOOD AND HAIL

Appalling flooding affected part of our area following the apocalyptic rainstorm on 12 July. Portobello Road was like a river,



*Ladbroke Grove after the hailstorm*

and many basements were flooded both in Portobello Road and streets directly off it. The flooding saw water – including sewage – come up through floor-boards and toilets and occupants are now faced with a massive clean-up exercise. Many Portobello market shops saw their stock ruined – a disaster when they were just beginning to recover from the pandemic. In houses that had had anti-flood devices fitted by Thames Water after being flooded a few years ago, we are told that many of the devices proved inadequate to stop the upflow of sewage. We will no doubt see all sorts of post-mortems. Communal gardens were also affected. Floodwater swept through the Elgin-Arundel Garden, for instance, leaving a huge lake in the middle.

Infinitely less serious, but nevertheless spectacular, was the localised freak hailstorm that hit the area on 18 May. The hailstones

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We have revamped our website  
and have a new address:  
[www.ladbrokeassociation.org](http://www.ladbrokeassociation.org)

were abundant enough to cover the area with a coating of white, like snow, thick enough to take some time to melt, although the temperature was not that low. The hailstones shredded the new season's leaves of many of our trees, as well as many garden plants. When the hailstones finally melted, they revealed a carpet of green leaf fragments in some streets, as in Ladbroke Grove left.

## GREENING SPD

The events described above emphasise the need for all of us to take measures to deal with climate change. The Council has just issued a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on "Greening". SPDs guide decisions on planning applications and the intention of this one is to bring best environmental practice to bear on planning. The document is a pretty dense read and is chiefly aimed at big new developments, setting out

ways to minimise their effect on the environment, both at the construction stage and throughout their life. Since so much of the borough consists of built-up areas of mainly Victorian houses, we urged the Council to pay attention also to what householders could do to retrofit their houses to reduce energy use and emissions. They have accordingly also issued a “Householder Guide to the Greening SPD” which goes into more detail on greening existing properties. This can be found on the Council website – see [www.rbkc.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/greening-spd](http://www.rbkc.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-policy/greening-spd).

Even the householder guide is a pretty dense read, and rather tediously refers readers back to the main SPD. But we do suggest that anybody doing renovations or adding an extension to their home has a look at it. Topics covered include the following.

### Heat pumps

The government has announced its intention to phase out gas boilers in newbuild homes probably from 2025, although it is likely to be much longer before they are banned in existing buildings. Heat pumps have been widely promoted as an alternative. There are two sorts: air-source heat pumps and ground-source heat-pumps. They can be considerably more efficient than an electric heater and have no harmful emissions. But there are problems, especially with retrofitting to existing houses.

An air-source heat pump extracts warmth from the air. It can be fixed to an exterior wall or roof or stand alone, preferably out of sight. They are normally the size of a standard air-conditioning unit. However, they only really work well in houses that have very good insulation. It looks likely, therefore, that most of us living in old houses will need to replace old gas boilers by new ones for some time to

come. The great hope is that a hydrogen heating system will come along before long. Another option is to install electric heaters. The argument here is that, as electricity generation is increasingly from renewable sources, it is actually going to be a very green source of energy in the future.

A ground-source heat pump needs buried pipes in the ground and requires generous outside space, so is only likely to be suitable for large new houses or houses with large gardens. The heat-pump itself is a metal box the size of a large domestic fridge that needs to be accommodated indoors.

### Insulation

The Scandinavian countries and Germany have been at the forefront of developing building methods that create houses that, through insulation and other clever design methods, need almost no heating, however cold it is outside. The Germans have developed something called the *Passivhaus*, “a building in which thermal comfort can be achieved solely by post-heating or post-cooling the fresh air flow required for a good indoor air quality, without the need for additional recirculation of air”. There is now a “Passivhaus standard” which developers of new buildings are encouraged to follow. The new houses in Holland Park which have replaced the 1930s block of flats, Duke’s Lodge, claim to be built according to Passivhaus principles, although their ratings are apparently not that good.

It is possible to retrofit old houses to meet this standard – and the Octavia housing trust has indeed done just that in one of its houses in Princedale Road. But it is expensive and invasive; and there seems to be a real problem with overheating in summer. It is not therefore a realistic option for most old buildings. But there are a number of things that can be done to minimise heat loss from old buildings, and these are spelt out in

the Council document.

For instance, the heat loss from old and sometimes ill-fitting windows can be minimised by installing draught-proofing and double glazing (the latter will more or less halve the heat loss). Many of our houses have their original internal wooden shutters which provide excellent insulation. Where these have not survived, it may be worth reinstating them. Heavy curtains will also do the trick.

### Over-heating in summer

The main problem arises when windows are warmed by the radiant heat of the sun (north-facing windows let in little heat). Wooden shutters and heavy curtains or blinds will help keep out heat in summer as well as cold in winter. If curtains or shutters or blinds are kept closed in south-facing bedrooms during the day, they should remain pretty cool. However, if a new extension is being built or new dormers installed, it is worth positioning the windows if possible so as to avoid direct sunlight in summer. There are also efficient fans on the market that make one feel cool in the heat.

Air conditioning should be a last resort, especially as it is only likely to be really needed during particularly hot spells, which are still limited in this country. It is hugely wasteful of energy, as well as expelling hot air (adding to the urban heat and global heating generally) and making a disturbing noise for neighbours unless put inside an “acoustic enclosure”. Retrofitting air-conditioning normally requires planning permission and an adequate acoustic enclosure is one of the things the Council will insist upon. There can also be a problem finding somewhere to put an air-conditioning unit so as not to spoil the appearance of our historic buildings (a problem that also applies to air-source heat pumps).

## PAVING STONES

When the Ladbroke estate was first built, it was paved with York stone – hard-wearing sandstone from Yorkshire, now highly prized. It was not just the pavements that were made of York stone. Paving in gardens and steps were also made of York stone – although later other stone was probably also used for some front doorsteps; and from the 1850s a fashion developed for using patterns of tiles for front doorsteps and the paths leading to them.

Very little York stone street paving survives in our area. There is a patch in Stanley Crescent along the side of Stanley Gardens North; and other short stretches in Ladbroke Road and Ladbroke Terrace. It also survives along the private road in front of Nos. 65–77 (odds) Ladbroke Grove. The Council generally

appreciates its worth and recently carefully relaid the York stone in Stanley Crescent. There are also some enormous and magnificent York stone flags on some of the forecourts in front of the shops in Portobello Road and neighbouring streets.

A lot of the original York stone paving in front and rear gardens is happily still there. The original York stone steps down to front basement areas have also survived in many cases, along with the original simple hand-rails. However, almost all the original York stone steps up to front doors have gone. Steps are subject to heavy wear, and in some cases leaks to cellars below may have caused the original steps to be replaced.

Until the last few decades, new or reclaimed York stone was usually the replacement of choice. More recently, however, there has been a fashion for different stone,



*Huge flagstones outside 158 Portobello Road.*



*York flagstones outside Nos. 65–75 Ladbroke Grove*



*York stone steps down to the lower ground floor in Stanley Crescent.*



*Well-worn probably original steps at an 1830s house in Ladbroke Grove. These early steps were square cut; later bevelled or bullnosed edges were used.*



*Two houses in Elgin Crescent: York stone on the left and new white stone reminiscent of a Mediterranean villa on the right.*

including funereal slate and a rather glaring white sandstone reminiscent of the Mediterranean. Neither really fits with the architecture of our area. Moreover, the white stone soon gets grubby and has to be cleaned regularly with a pressure hose – or even bleach – if it is to retain its pristine whiteness. York stone, on the other hand, needs little maintenance; although it slightly darkens with age, it also seems to mellow. And it has a much more interesting texture. The only advantage of white stone is that it radiates heat less than darker ones – black slate, for instance, positively beams heat back at one. Even with global warming, however, the number of days when this is a real advantage in our climate are likely to be limited.

We would urge anybody who is thinking of repaving

their garden or redoing their steps to go for York stone if at all possible, as more in keeping with our architecture (we are delighted that one of the grand listed houses in Kensington Park Road has recently applied to replace its non-original marble steps and pavers with York stone). As York stone is (along with Portland stone) the aristocracy of British paving stone, it is correspondingly expensive. However, if it cannot be afforded, there are some good cheaper sandstones imported from India that are much nearer it in colour than the white stone now so popular. It is not suitable for heavily used steps, so it may be worth splashing out for York stone for front door steps.

*We are putting a longer version of this article on our website.*

## GARDEN PAVING AND CLIMATE CHANGE

One of the chief sources of summer heat in towns is radiation of sunlight from hard surfaces like roads and pavements. Indeed, one can often feel the welcome coolth when one enters a park from the street on a hot day. Paving in gardens may be thought to make an insignificant contribution to this. But it is reckoned that possibly a quarter of urban space is occupied by domestic gardens. So taken together, they can have quite an impact on the micro-climate of towns. We have noticed a trend recently towards almost total paving over of front gardens – and for all we know back ones as well. Paving is much easier to maintain than planting, but it is not environmentally friendly because of water run-off, likely to be an increasing problem with the extreme weather linked to climate change. We are told that, in the floods that followed the storm on 12 July, gardens with grass or gravel were relatively little affected, whereas those with paving saw the flood sweep through them.

Planting, whether in flower-beds or in tubs or planters, provides shade and the evaporation from

leaves acts as a cooling agent, as well as capturing carbon and thus reducing the pollution from which we all in London suffer. We would therefore urge all residents of the Ladbroke area to do their bit for the environment by maximising the area of planting in their gardens. The latter need not be high-maintenance flowers; there are plenty of low maintenance and attractive evergreen shrubs and small trees. Grass is obviously better than astroturf, but if astroturf is used, a porous type should be chosen.

Hedges are also better than walls or fences. Not only do they help maximise the amount of pollution-reducing greenery, but they are more in character with our architecture. The designers of the Ladbroke estate intentionally aimed for villas and terraces interspersed with greenery, with the greenery in front gardens and back gardens giving onto communal gardens deliberately visible to passers-by through railings or bottle balustrades. The openwork nature and private greenery of our gardens are one of the amenities of living here and walking in our streets. They should be cherished.



*Almost fully paved front garden*



*Well-planted front garden*

## PORTWINE ARCADE AND PORTOBELLO STAR

The Portwine antique arcade at Nos. 173–175 (odds) Portobello Road started life as a double-fronted butcher's shop. George Portwine originally had a shop on the other side of the Portobello Road, but he was successful enough to want to move to new premises. He acquired two shops opposite in the early 1900s and was able to invest in an ornate double shopfront with stained glass, impressive pilasters and fascia with painted lettering on glass – the only remaining example in the Portobello Road. The 1911 census return indicates that his wife and nephew were helping in the business and his sister-in-law acted as cashier. All lived on the premises above the shop with the couple's young daughter and two servants, a cook and a housemaid.

The butcher's shop has long gone, although until recently the premises remained in the ownership of the Portwine family. By the 1970s, it had become a double arcade of antique stalls. The pandemic meant that it was closed for a long period, but it opened again, albeit not with its full complement of dealers, as soon non-food shops were allowed to open. Over recent years, however, little or no investment has been made in the arcade and the whole building is now pretty scruffy.

Next door at No. 171 is the Portobello Star pub, or more a cocktail bar these days. It began life as a shop. In the mid-19th century the government, in the hope of weaning the poor off gin, made it easier to get a licence to sell beer and the Portobello Star opened as a beerhouse in the 1860s. It got a full licence around the time of the Second World War, and is now very much one of the historic Portobello pubs.

The Portobello Road landlord who owns the Portobello Star acquired the Portwine building a couple of years ago and has put in a planning application to rebuild all three buildings behind their façade to create a large restaurant in Nos. 171 and 173 and to move the pub to No. 175, with enlarged lateral flats on the upper floors. (He has also removed the

remaining dealers elsewhere.) The application has attracted almost 280 objections, chiefly expressing concern about the loss of the arcade. In fact, because of recent planning law changes, no planning permission is needed to turn the arcade into a restaurant, although permission is required to make changes to the pub.

We have welcomed the retention of the façade and the proposal in the application to restore the shopfront to something close to its original form. However, we are concerned about the effect of this proposal on the vitality of the Portobello Road. The pandemic has meant that a lot of the traditional dealers and shops have given up – only about two-thirds of the stall-holders have returned. But we are deeply concerned about the loss of yet another arcade, since these are so intrinsic a part of the character that attracts the visitors who keep the market alive. We have urged the



*The now rather scruffy double shopfront George Portwine's butcher's shop*



*The Portobello Star in 2008*



*Tiles from the butcher's shop in among the antiques*

applicants to reconsider this aspect of their proposal and to retain an arcade in this location. Even if there are now fewer antique dealers, it would make a lot of sense to dedicate this arcade to “vintage and collectibles”, for which there seems an increasing demand. Another option would be to encourage the arcade to become a craft centre with dealers as well as classes and demonstrations.

We are also opposed to the move of the pub to No. 175, where it would be next to a bar and in close

proximity to the Duke of Wellington on the other side of Elgin Crescent. The applicants have argued that the pub is not viable in its present location. It seems to us that it would be even less viable in this other location, and that what is needed is investment in the pub in its historic place.

Some of the blue and white tiling of the butcher’s shop has survived inside the arcade, and we have also urged that this be retained as an important historical relic.

## ADVERTISEMENTS AND MURALS

Planning permission is not normally needed to paint murals on walls or hoardings, except when the mural is an advertisement. Thus, when a vast mural advertising Hugo Boss gents’ underwear went up on the side wall of No. 156 Portobello Road (the Kurt Geiger shop), the Council took enforcement action and required that the mural be removed. That was in 2019. Earlier this year, another huge mural went up on the same wall, this time advertising (albeit in a less obvious way) the Klarna “shop now, pay later” company. Again, the Council took enforcement action and it has now been removed.

Why do such offenders persist? Enforcement action takes time and the Hugo Boss advertisement was in situ for many weeks. It seems, therefore, that advertisers consider that these weeks’ coverage is worth the cost of putting up the mural (plus presumably a payment to the shop).

This normally blank side wall, which is at the entrance to a tiny mews, is a tempting target for decoration. It is fortunately too high up for the graffiti artists. But it seems a pity not to use it some way. The Colville ward Councillors have hatched a scheme to have a competition for young artists in the autumn, and if the winner is a painter, the first prize will be to transfer their painting to the blank wall. So literally, watch that space! The hope is that the competition would become an annual event.

No. 7 Lansdowne Road (on the corner of Lansdowne Walk) has been undergoing major works for many months. As is the norm now, the house and its long garden side wall have been hidden away by hoardings. The builders decided to decorate the hoarding with a brightly painted mural. Opinions on it seem to be divided. Some feel that it adds colour and



*Hugo Boss mural 2019*



*Klarna mural 2021*



*Mural on hoarding in Lansdowne Road 2021*

interest to what would otherwise be a bare hoarding. Others, however, object to it as being inappropriate in among our sober Victorian architecture. In this case, the Council said it contained no advertising element, so no planning permission was required and no enforcement action could be taken.

## NOTTING HILL POLICE STATION

The Ladbroke Association and various other local associations, together with the chair of the independent Advisory Group for Kensington and Chelsea Police, had a really useful ZOOM meeting with a number of Lead Members from the Council about the future of the police station. The Metropolitan Police still don’t seem to have quite decided

whether to dispose of it or not. But we managed to persuade the Council that if they did, the Council should look at acquiring it as a community centre of some sort, for instance with a medical centre and possibly a mini-police station. We are also pleased to say that the Met has agreed to keep open for another year the mini-police station in Lancaster Road next to the Brands Museum.

## FILMING

When film companies are making films and occupying precious parking spaces with their vehicles, they are usually prepared to pay a fee to the affected residents. Portobello Road is a favourite location and there is a long-established arrangement whereby a payment is made to the market authorities. In other areas the companies usually look to the local residents' association.

A company that was filming in

Lansdowne Crescent recently has made us a £300 payment for a day's shoot. In order to make sure it was channelled towards those most inconvenienced, we are dividing it between the three communal gardens onto which the houses in Lansdowne Crescent back. If we get any further sums, we would welcome views on what we should do where there is no convenient communal garden.

Such fees are only paid for serious shoots (usually for making

advertisements), not we fear for the constant pop-up fashion shoots that we see so many of. If you do see a proper shoot in the area, please alert us so we can try to extract a fee for the inconvenience. These companies are also interested in interiors. If you would be interested in letting your house being used, there are a number of location agencies who would be interested in taking local houses of interest onto their books.

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## TABLES AND CHAIRS LICENCES

In order to help businesses offer outside hospitality during the pandemic, last summer the Council (following new government regulations) introduced two new types of temporary licences allowing restaurants and cafés to put tables and chairs either on the pavement or on the roadway in suspended parking spaces, without the need to seek separate planning permission. On pavements, adequate clearance for pedestrians must be left (between 2.5 and 3.5 metres depending on how busy the pavement is).

Any business putting tables and chairs on the roadway must install decking or a similar enclosed platform. The Council did not originally require decking, but says that the experience gained in summer 2020 indicated that it was the most satisfactory solution in terms of road safety. Pavement licences last 12 months or until the end of September 2021, whichever is the sooner. Licences for tables and chairs on the roadway last 12 months. There are government plans to extend this regime for a further year.

The scheme has been wildly successful, with tables and chairs springing up all over the place and people apparently content to eat or drink outside in often extremely inclement weather. It will be

interesting to see whether this taste for outside eating will survive next winter, now that inside eating and drinking is allowed. The Council is planning to consult on making it a permanent scheme, with licences issued on an annual basis. So far, we are unaware that this explosion of outside tables and chairs has caused any significant problems, although not all the decking is particularly elegant.

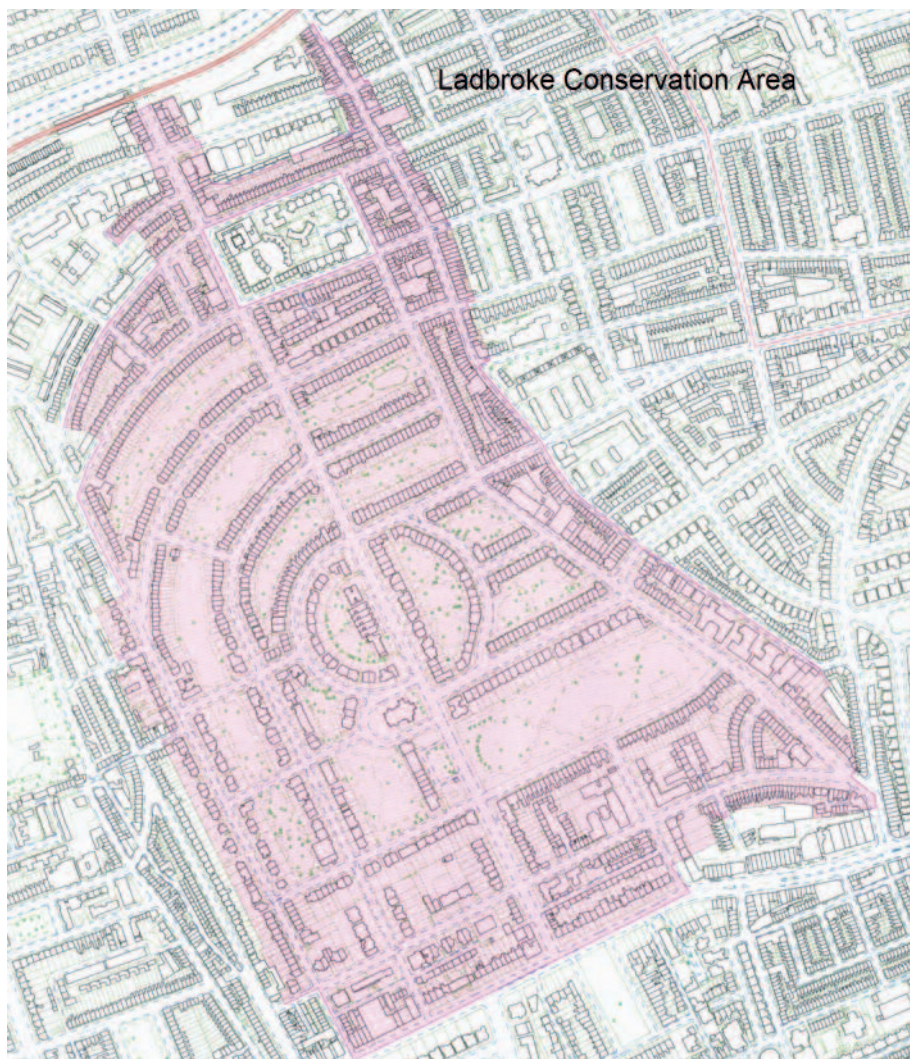
## KENSINGTON PARK ROAD CLOSURE

Earlier this year, the Council closed to traffic the section of Kensington Park Road between Elgin and Blenheim Crescents. The closure is due to last until the end of September, when a decision will be taken on whether to extend it. The aim was a praiseworthy one, to create a friendly space for pedestrians and the cafes and restaurants (several with tables and chairs on the roadway) on this stretch of road. We are not sure that this aim has been achieved. In practice, quite a few vehicles do still use the road and there are often vans parked. And the decking for the tables and chairs faces the cafés rather than the roadway, so anybody walking on the road sees only the backs of the decking. This means that there is not the same effect as often achieved on the continent (and at

the south end of Exhibition Road by South Kensington station) of lots of cafés spilling out onto the road in a friendly way.

## CYCLEWAYS

As anyone with an interest in cycling will know, the Council pulled the experimental segregated cycleway along High Street Kensington at the end of last year after only 6 weeks, before (in the opinion of many) it really had a chance to prove itself – or not, as the case may be. The Council appears to have been spooked by opposition from the Kensington Business Forum (who feared the cycle lane would interfere with the Christmas shopping period and therefore wanted it removed quickly); and from the extremely vociferous residents' associations from the area around High Street Kensington. The local cycling group complained that, because the decision had been taken by the Lead Member for Transport, it was unconstitutional, as it should have been taken by the whole Leadership Team. The matter therefore came back to the Leadership Team in March. They confirmed the decision but decided that independent studies should be commissioned on the way forward. These are expected to be announced imminently.



## MEMBERSHIP

The Ladbroke Association was founded in 1969, in the same year as the designation of the Ladbroke Conservation area. The original impetus for the setting up of the Association was a proposal by the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea to cut down and replace the plane trees along the southern end of Ladbroke Grove. Led by the well-known architect and town-planner Robert Meadows and other local residents, the Association was successful in opposing the proposals, and the trees remain.

The Association is registered as a charity (Charity No. 260627) and is therefore subject to the strict rules governing charities.

The Association receives notices of planning applications and inspects, discusses and comments on those which affect the Ladbroke area in any significant way. In addition, the Association has been involved in (and sometimes initiates) discussion with the planning authorities on wider questions of conservation and planning policy.

We are concerned that we should reflect the views of the broad community who live in the area. Everyone who is a resident of the Ladbroke Conservation Area should be a member of the Association so that their views may be heard in the debate on continuing issues in the area.

The more members we have, the more influential we can be. At present we have under 400, as many people have moved away. If you have new neighbours, please do encourage them to join. Membership for a person or family costs only £15 a year, which is we reckon a bargain in this day and age.

Would-be members can download a membership form from our website: [www.ladbrokeassociation.org](http://www.ladbrokeassociation.org) or apply to the Hon Treasurer: **Paul Bastick, 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD**

## THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

**President:** Thomas Pakenham

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**Vice Chairman:** Jane Martineau

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## 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](http://www.ladbrokeassociation.org)

and the website also includes much historical information about the conservation area.

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