

Ladbroke News

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SUMMER 2022



Climbing rose in Alba Place, just off the Portobello Road

GRAFFITI IN PORTOBELLO ROAD

There continue to be appalling graffiti in the Portobello Road. It is particularly unsightly in the evening when all the graffiti-covered shutters are down. The Ladbroke Association, along with other local bodies, has been urging the Council for well over a year to do a big clean-up and at the same time to encourage shops and other establishments along the road to put an ant-graffiti coating over their shutters and walls. Such coatings mean that future graffiti can be easily washed off, and nothing discourages graffiti “artists” as much as the instant disappearance of their work. There are also other ways of discouraging graffiti, such as avoiding solid shutters. Graffiti artists are also less likely to spray over proper murals and where there is planting, such as the climbing rose in the picture above (planted by an enterprising shop-keeper).

We took the new Lead Councillor for the environment and the RBKC Director of “Cleaner, Greener and Cultural Services” on a walkabout last month to show them the problem and to discuss possible measures to discourage graffiti in the future. There is not much point in a clean-up before Carnival, but we are assured that once it is over the clean-up will go ahead. The Council also says it aims to provide more resources to this problem and find a way to navigate some of the red tape surrounding graffiti removal on private property.

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LADBROKE AGM

This year’s Ladbroke Association Annual General Meeting took place on 19 July, the second hottest day of the year. Fortunately, our venue, St Peter’s church, was probably as cool as any non-air-conditioned space could be in the circumstances. Nevertheless, we were determined to rattle through it as quickly as possible, and it was over within the hour. The Chairman and Treasurer (who had reached the end of their three-year terms) were re-elected; and a new committee member elected – Liz Ellerton, an American who has lived in the Ladbroke area for 42 years and has had a career in marketing and advertising.

The 2021–22 accounts were also adopted. Thanks in part to some extremely generous donations and extra members, as well as less expenditure during the pandemic, we have an extremely healthy surplus and can now afford to spend some money on amenities in the area. We marked one of the Queen’s previous jubilees by donating a tree to each communal garden and are thinking of doing so again. We would be grateful for other proposals from members. Ideas which have been mentioned include plaques to famous residents (as persuading English Heritage to put up plaques is becoming almost impossible), or better signage, including signs with information about the area. Leverage is possible – there are Council sources which might match-fund.

UKRAINE IN AND NEAR THE LADBROKE AREA

The Ukrainian Embassy has long had its consular section at 78 Kensington Park Road. The main Ukrainian presence in London, however, is just outside our area on the other side of Holland Park Avenue. The Ukrainian Embassy is at 60 Holland Park; the Ukrainian Religious Society of Saint Sophia (a charitable institution established to promote the advancement of education and religion) is at 79 Holland Park near the junction with Holland Park Avenue; The Ukrainian Institute (which includes a Ukrainian language school) is at the same address; and a Ukrainian Social Club at 175 Holland Park Avenue. Most noticeably, however, there is the statue of King Volodymyr on the corner of Holland Park Avenue and Holland Park, next door to the Ukrainian Institute.



The Ukrainian consulate in Kensington Park Road

The statue of St Volodymyr shortly after the Russian invasion. The notice at the bottom says “Glory to Ukraine” (Awpics/Alamy)

Volodymyr (or Vladimir in Russian) the Great (c.958 – 1015) was Prince of Novgorod (now in Russia) and Grand Prince of Kiev (now in Ukraine). His original realm was quite limited, but during his reign he expanded it to include modern day Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, all of which regard him as a national founder figure. In 988 he converted himself and his realm to Christianity. To mark the thousandth anniversary of this event, in 1988 the Ukrainian community in the UK erected the statue of Volodymyr that is now a

local landmark. Busloads of Ukrainians came from all over the UK to celebrate the unveiling, and the statue has since become a focus for demonstrations by the Ukrainian community in London. There were major demonstrations next to the statue at the time of the Orange revolution in 2004–5, and the statue was covered in orange flags, with the occasional poster being put up overnight by Russians saying “Ukrainians are fascists” in Russian, quickly removed the next morning by supporters of the revolution.



NEW COUNCILLORS

Following the May local elections, we have new councillors in all four of the wards which are partly in the Ladbroke Association area.

In Norland ward, Julie Mills stood down and has been replaced by Stuart Graham, another Conservative who has been doing parliamentary work. The second Norland councillor, David Lindsay (Conservative), who has represented the ward since 2002, remains in place. He is currently doing his stint as the Mayor of Kensington and Chelsea, a post that lasts a year and involves much ceremonial attendance at events as well as laudable charitable activities. Each Mayor chooses a charity to promote and David has chosen two: the Rugby Portobello Trust (which supports children and young people) and the Clement James Centre (which supports disadvantaged people to improve their skills and find employment).

In Pembridge ward, another two-member ward, Councillor Dori Schmetterling remains in place but Laura Round did not stand again and Joanna Gardner, another Conservative, has been elected in her place. Joanna lives in the ward. A former solicitor, she already has experience as a councillor from 1998 to 2016, when she stood down for family reasons, and she has also served as an RBKC Cabinet member. So she hits the ground running.

There has been a clean sweep in the larger **Colville**

ward, which was represented by three Labour councillors who did not stand again, including Monica Press who was a major presence in Portobello Road and Colville Forum affairs. The new councillors are again all Labour. Councillor Mo Bakhtiar formerly represented St Helens ward and has moved to Colville as part of a general post in the Kensington and Chelsea Labour party. The other two are new to the Council: Dahabo Isse, who has been running “Dadihiye”, the Somali Development Organisation, active in improving the lives of disadvantaged members of the sizable Somali community in North Kensington; and Toby Benton, who has not given us any information.

Only a tiny corner of the Ladbroke area is in the **Notting Dale ward** – Cornwall Crescent, Ladbroke Crescent and the short section of Ladbroke Grove south of Westway. Again, there has been a clean sweep of the previous members, including Labour veteran Judith Blakeman, who used to be Leader of the Labour Group on the council. The three new Labour members are Marwan Elnaghi, Director and Trustee of the Westway Trust; Claire Simmons, an academic living near Grenfell Tower, who says she was spurred into seeking election because of the Grenfell tragedy and the way it was handled; and Mona Ahmed, an NHS psychiatrist, also living near Grenfell. We also have a new “Lead Member” (the local government equivalent of a Minister) for planning and environment policy, Cllr Cem Kemahli, who has taken over from Cllr Johnny Thalassites.

PIERCED STUCCO BALUSTRADES

In our last newsletter, we wrote about the bottle balustrades that were such a favourite feature of the architects of our estate. They also had a liking for other forms of pierced stucco balustrades, on street boundaries, on balconies and on the tops of façades. Whereas they normally followed one of two patterns for bottle balustrades, every architect seems to have let his imagination roam for the others. A few of the patterns are shown below.



St Mark's Place



Cornwall Crescent



Lansdowne Road

STREET NUMBERS AND HOUSE NAMES

Many of us have difficulties, especially on dark winter evenings, trying to find the number of the house of the friends we are visiting. Often, this is because the number is hidden behind vegetation or on an unlit fanlight. We have, however, noticed an increasing trend in our area towards omitting to put a number on the property. We assume that in many cases this is just because people have not got around to doing so after a refurbishment. Possibly some well-known names may deliberately leave their house numberless for privacy purposes. It does make it difficult for the rest of us, however, and it must horridly complicate the life of the couriers who deliver our online shopping.

What are the rules on house numbering? In London, the relevant legislation is the London Buildings Acts (Amendment Act) 1939. This allows Councils to allocate street numbers (for instance on major new developments or new streets). It also requires people to seek permission from their local Council if they want to change the number of their property or give it an officially recognised name. This quite often happens when a building consists of dwellings with separate entrances and people want to distinguish the different entrances by numbering the doors 16, 16A etc.

Recently, two corner houses in the Ladbroke area got consent to change not just their numbers but their street. The first is St John's House on the southern corner of Ladbroke Grove and St John's Gardens. This large property, now flats, used to be two conjoined houses, Nos. 59 and 61 Ladbroke Grove, but with their entrances round the corner in St John's Gardens. In 2017 the then owner applied successfully to name the building St John's House and to have its street address changed to St John's Gardens. While we generally think it important for all houses to have numbers, in this case the absence of a number probably does not matter too

much, as it is in a prominent position and on a street with only three other houses. The other case was 22 Ladbroke Square, where again the entrance was round the corner in Ladbroke Terrace which – as the applicant said – caused endless problems with deliveries, tradesmen etc. It is now called Allason House (after one of the designers of the Ladbroke estate) and is numbered 9A Ladbroke Terrace.

The corner house problem is a frequent one in our area, given the predilection of the architects of our estate for grand terraces with the end houses having their main façades and entrances round the corner on a different street – some terraces have the last two or three houses at right angles to the main terrace. Thus, for instance, quite a few of the houses on the west side of Kensington Park Road actually belong to Kensington Park Gardens, Stanley Gardens or Arundel Gardens.



Massive crane delivering paving stones to the back garden of a house in Ladbroke Road. We are sometimes amazed at the number of items that people now hire cranes to lift into their back gardens over the tops of their houses.

COMMUNAL GARDENS MEETING

We are often approached by people wanting information on the communal gardens, and always have to explain that we are not in charge of the gardens and that they should approach the relevant garden committee. Nevertheless, we have always seen it as part our role to be helpful to the gardens. In 2001, the Association organised a meeting of Chairmen and officers of the Ladbroke communal gardens to discuss matters of common interest. We recently organised a repeat. On 17 May we invited the chairs and members of all the sixteen communal garden committees to a meeting at St Peter's church, and we are happy to say that every garden was represented. We also invited one of the Council's arboricultural officers to answer questions on trees, and Robert Barham, the lawyer

whom many communal gardens have dealt with on legal matters, especially on ownership structures.

The impression we received from follow-up emails is that the meeting was generally considered to be useful, not least in introducing members of garden committees to each other. When problems arise in a particular garden, it is often helpful for that committee to find out how other gardens have dealt with similar problems. Hitherto, however, there has been no network to allow this to be done easily (and gardens have had to seek information on contacts from the Ladbroke Association). We are happy to say that one concrete result of the meeting was a decision by the garden committee chairs to set up a WhatsApp group for exchanging information.

PLANNING CASES

Rosmead communal garden

This communal garden, between Lansdowne Road and Elgin Crescent, has some of the best rear elevation architecture on the Ladbrooke estate, deliberately designed to be as decorative and pleasing to the eye as the fronts of the houses. It is also one of the gardens relevantly little marred by unsuitable rear extensions.



Rear elevations on Rosmead Gardens

In the last few months there have been no fewer than three applications for extensions that would in our view seriously mar the look of these terraces. One (103 Lansdowne Road) went to the Planning Applications Committee and was refused, despite being recommended by officers and a satisfactory revised scheme has now been given consent. We are sorry to say, however, that two others on the Elgin Crescent side have recently been approved. This side of the garden has three terraces along it, separated by gaps. To mark the terminations of the terraces, the “book-ending” houses of each terrace have handsome original two-storey canted bay extensions. One, tucked away in a corner at No. 115, has an extension built some years ago, replacing an earlier 1980s one. The others are untouched. All are visible from the garden.

Despite our objections, the owners of No. 115 have now obtained planning permission to build what most regard as a quite unsuitable modern extension. Most recently, No. 103 has been given consent for a new book-end addition extending outwards by two metres, which will be plainly visible from the garden and completely upset the symmetry with the building on the other side of the gap. Even more seriously, it will now be almost impossible for the Council to resist further similar applications, with another bit of our

heritage gone. We are very much afraid that the Council has recently downgraded the attention that it gives to heritage issues and we are taking this up at the highest level.

The underground house

Back in 2010, planning permission was granted for an almost entirely underground house in the courtyard behind the Core restaurant and next to St Peter’s church. Planning permissions only last three years and in 2013 the owner applied for, and obtained, a three-year extension to 2016. Nothing more happened until last year, and we all assumed that this improbable project had been shelved. Then, in 2021, the owner suddenly put in an application for a “certificate of lawful development” to confirm that construction had started in 2016 before the end of the three years’ extension.

If work starts within the three years on something that has been granted planning permission, it can be continued any time and the three-year limit no longer applies. The relevant legislation defines work as including ‘*the digging of a trench which is to contain the foundations, or part of the foundations, of a building*’. The owner claimed to have dug a trench and inserted three caged reinforcement bars in 2016, backing up their claim with photographs and drawings. The Council duly granted the certificate in June last year, after which the site was sold to an individual who we understand has been thinking of building the house for his own use (and has renamed it “Hideaway House”).

Various aspects of the 2010 planning consent now no longer met current regulatory requirements and the new owner applied for a “non-material amendment” (NMA) to the planning permission to update it. The Council refused the application on the grounds that the changes were substantial and would need a full planning application. The application for an NMA, however, caused alarm bells to ring locally. If this project were to go ahead, the construction (with all material being taken in and out via the narrow covered passage between the restaurant and the church) would have a major impact both on the Michelin 3-star Core restaurant and on St Peter’s church, the fire escape of which is into the courtyard.

We began to wonder whether the Council had been right to grant the “certificate of lawful development”. One of the architects on our committee did some investigating and reached the conclusion that the works that had been undertaken may well be in the wrong place and the wrong size to form part of the foundations and would have to be completely redone. We have therefore written to the Council submitting our evidence and urging that the certificate be withdrawn.

NEWCOMBE HOUSE

Members will recall that, after seven years of applications, refusals, approvals and three public hearings, planning permission was finally given in 2020 for Newcombe House in Notting Hill Gate and the buildings around it to be demolished and rebuilt. The plan was for a much higher tower, which many objected to. However, the scheme involved a number of public benefits, including a much needed state of the art GP surgery for 18,000 residents (on which the developers had signed an agreement with the NHS); a large public square or plaza where the Farmers' Market could continue as before and other events take place; more office and retail space than the current buildings; step-free access to Notting Hill Gate tube station's eastbound platform; and 33 genuinely affordable flats, of which 23 would be on site. On balance, therefore, it was supported by the Ladbrooke Association (with whom, along with the Kensington Society, the developers had actively engaged, making a number of changes at our request). We were also influenced by the fact that this bit of Notting Hill Gate was becoming increasingly scruffy and badly needed redevelopment.

The developers, Brockton Everlast, have however now sold the site on to another set of developers, a joint venture between Beltane Asset Management and Angelo Gordon Real Estate. At our request, the Council set up a meeting between local interest groups and the new developers, together with their architect Henry Squire (who was responsible for the boring monolithic Ruby Hotel). What they told us was not immediately reassuring, although they did claim that their plans were still at the concept stage.

The new developers are planning to keep the present tower, probably adding two extra floors. They plan to demolish

Waterstones and the buildings along Church Street between Notting Hill Gate and Kensington Place and rebuild them, probably higher on the Church Street side, as a mixture of retail and residential units. They say they are also engaging with the NHS on including a "potential health facility", but it is likely to be on a smaller scale than that envisaged under the previous scheme. There would be no step-free access to the Underground. Disappointingly, they plan to build over the car-park where the Farmers' Market is held. The ground floor level would be given over to a "a curated indoor space for vibrant new shops and restaurants/bars" – effectively a covered market.

We expressed disappointment at the loss of so many of the desirable features of the previous scheme. Because their scheme is a much less ambitious one than the approved one and does not include the letting space that would have been provided by the taller tower, we have to accept that, if it goes ahead as currently envisaged, the developers will not be able to afford all the public benefits offered under the previous scheme. We may need to decide, therefore, what our priorities are when engaging with the developers and Council planners. We would be interested in members' views on this.

We see this site as perfect spot for a really good state of the art medical centre given the excellent communications. We also saw the proposed open plaza as one of the big plusses of the Brockton scheme, giving Notting Hill Gate a signature feature not shared by other local centres such as Kensington High Street. We are not in principle against some sort of covered plaza. The Farmers' Market is moving the Fox School playground (see below) and may find a permanent home there. But many were hoping that there would be a space that could be

used for other events, such as art and craft exhibitions, and community services such as blood donation vans, and this does not seem compatible with their plans. The developers have suggested that the covered market might be like the much bigger and very swish New York Chelsea Market (photographs of it can be found on Google) and could specialise in gourmet foodstuffs. We would be interested to know what members think. We note, however, that there are already mini-gourmet food centres at the junction of Westbourne Grove and Portobello Road (with e.g. the Notting Hill Fish Shop and a new branch of Sally Clarke) and on or just off Holland Park Avenue (although sadly the Michanicou brothers are closing their shop and retiring).

There will be more meetings with the community and public exhibitions of the plans as they are developed and we will keep members informed. In the meantime, as we have already told members who are signed up to our email alert list, the new owners have carried out a survey of the site that has revealed worrying safety problems. They have received advice that they should close the site to public access in order both to undertake the works and to ensure future safe management. This will involve hoarding the site appropriately to allow the works to take place and make it secure. They say that, this way, they can secure appropriate public liability insurance cover as they cannot insure for continued public access.

This will obviously affect the Saturday morning Farmers' Market. Fortunately, a new home has been found for it nearby, on the playground of the Fox Primary School on Kensington Place (also accessible from Edge Street). The last market on the Newcombe House car-park will be on 20 August and from 27 August it will be at Fox School.

RUBY HOTEL

Construction on the new hotel on Notting Hill Gate is proceeding apace, and it is scheduled to open in March next year. Our impression is that generally the work has been carried out considerately, minimising the impact on the neighbourhood. There is one aspect, however, about which we are less happy. This concerns the artwork on the front of the hotel.

As part of their planning permission, Frogmore, the developers (who own most of the north side of Notting Hill Gate) signed a “Section 106” agreement with the Council undertaking to do various things for the public good, to make up for the impact of the hotel project on the area. Part of the agreement required them to spend a certain amount of money to install some public art on the front façade of the building. Frogmore set up an advisory panel of local residents’ associations, arts organisations and ward councillors to come up with recommendations on an appropriate artwork – which we welcomed. This met several times, with its members putting in a lot of time, and duly came up with ideas, recommending an abstract mosaic design.

Unfortunately, Frogmore handed over the final decision on the work and the artist to be employed to the hotel operator – a small hotel group based in Germany. The German headquarters took no notice of the recommendations and have gone for a design which we regard as quite unsuitable for Notting Hill Gate. It is a highly colourful affair with strange figures, meant to allude to the Notting Hill Carnival and might well look good somewhere on the Carnival route. Notting Hill Gate is not, however, on the Carnival route and we do not think it should be seen as a mere appendage or extension of Portobello Road and the Carnival. It needs to have its own distinct identity. The decision also drives a coach and horses through the consultation process.

The terms of the Section 106 agreement appears to give the Council quite a lot of control over the design. It seems, however, that this could not be exercised to control the final design. We would like to see tighter conditions in future Section 106 agreements providing for public art.

THE GATE THEATRE

Sadly, the Gate Theatre above the Prince Albert pub has moved to a larger venue in Camden, after 43 years. It was founded in 1979 by a man of the theatre, Lou Stein, who turned down an assistantship at the National Theatre to create an artistic hub for upcoming artists. It was opened on a shoe-string – Lou Stein put an advertisement in *Time Out* saying “newly formed Fringe Pub Theatre at Notting Hill requires experienced, people, lights, sounds, also actors, no money but the prospects are good”. It was probably the most cramped of the London pub theatres with a tiny room; comfort was definitely not its middle name. However, it soon developed a reputation for putting on interesting new or lesser-known works. It won numerous awards and many now well-known actors appeared there at the beginning of their careers.



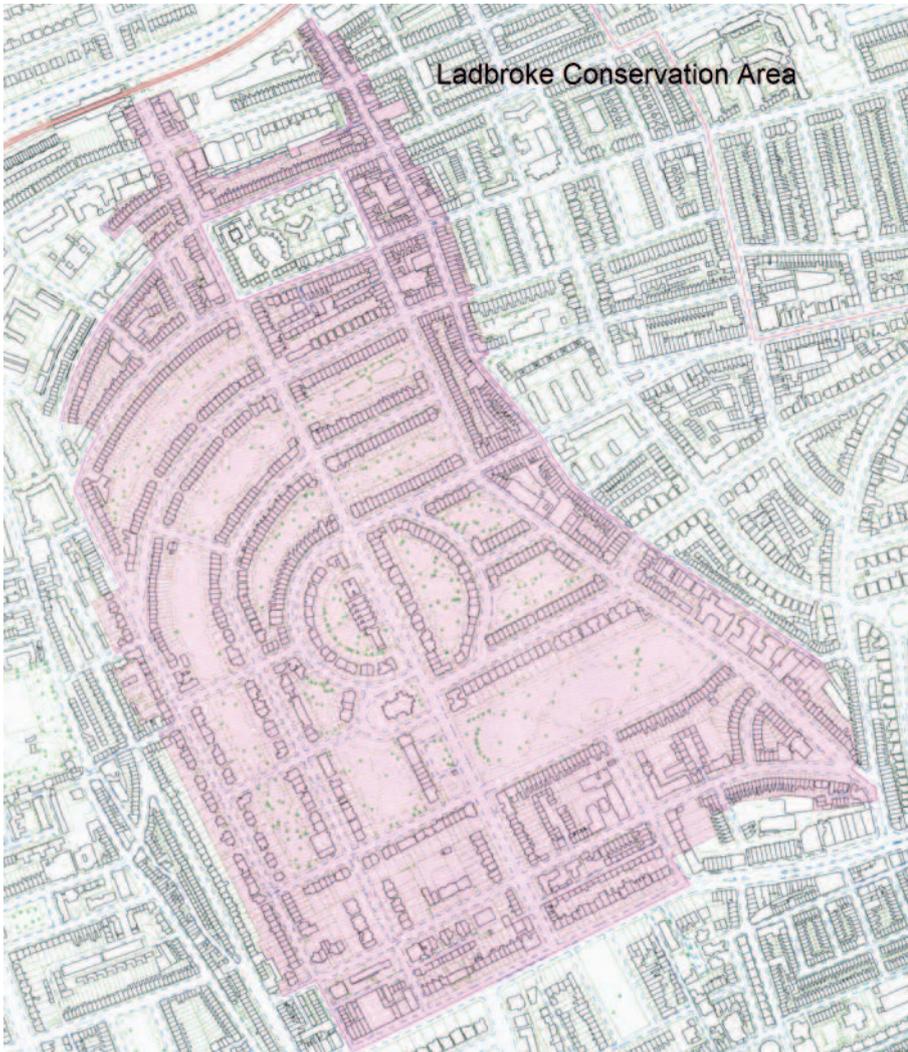
The discreet door of the Gate pub theatre

POLICE INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUP

Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) were set up across London in response to Stephen Lawrence’s murder. The main aim for the groups is to be critical friends to the police, particularly during serious incidents. IAGs work with senior members of the local police to give feedback and constructive advice on police strategy that affects the community. Members of the IAG are made up of local residents, all volunteers representing particular interests. There is already an active member from the Ladbroke area on the Kensington and Chelsea group, but Claire van Helfteren, the chair of our IAG, would welcome volunteers who would be interested in joining the IAG and feel that they could represent a particular section of our community in terms of a special interest group or a cultural or religious group. Meetings are usually quarterly or sometimes a little more frequently if there are community concerns to discuss. The IAG is also interested in hearing general concerns about policing in the area (not individual incidents), in particular problems affecting a particular area or section of the community. Claire’s email is cvh@inspiretobe.co.uk.

Police Station

The Council has incidentally just been told by the GLA that a decision on the sale of Notting Hill Police Station will now be delayed until the completion of a Metropolitan Police “Estates Strategy” that is currently underway. This is not anticipated until November.



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 notice 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 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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Chairman: Sophia Lambert

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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

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

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