

News from Ladbroke

April 1976

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SUBSCRIPTIONS are due on April 1 and should be paid to the Hon. Treasurer H.F.A. Jackson, Esq., 50 Holland Park Avenue, W.11. It is hoped that members who do not already have Banker's Orders or Covenants will take them up; forms are available from the Treasurer. The minimum subscription is £1 for an individual or a family but anyone who feels able to give more will not be discouraged since expenses, such as the cost of this Newsletter, are constantly increasing.

1. Planning

The following is the text of a paper prepared by Mr. Ian Grant as Architectural Adviser to the Kensington Society:

Conservation Area Reports

"In accordance with the requirements of the Town and Country Amenities Act of 1974, the Kensington and Chelsea Council is undertaking the preparation of a set of reports on the Conservation Areas in the Borough.

These are to take the form of a series of proposals for the preservation and enhancement of the designated areas, and it is hoped that they will serve as a guide to developers wishing to carry out conversion or rebuilding, to householders proposing extensions or alterations, and to the Council's Officers themselves in their own processes of decision making.

The first report will deal with the Ladbroke Area, and this is now nearly complete; the Ladbroke Association has been fully consulted by the Council's Officers, and the committee of the Association has been able to cooperate with comments and suggestions at the various stages of preparation.

The format of the document will serve as a model for future Reports and it is probable that the material will be presented in the following manner:-

An Introduction, which will contain a brief analysis of the general basis of Conservation and its physical and psychological effects, together with a short historical and architectural history of the Ladbroke Area, tracing the development from its beginnings in the 1820s to the virtual completion by the 1880s. This would emphasise the especial quality of the layout, and its relationship of architecturally unified buildings with large gardens and communal open spaces. This section will probably be illustrated with a series of early maps.

The Introduction will also contain a list of contemporary problems which can have an adverse effect on the character of the area (parking, traffic, alterations to buildings, loss of trees, unsuitable development, etc.,) and a short section on the Law as it relates to such problems.

This will be followed by a street by street survey, with more detailed notes

on key buildings and groups, and the section will also contain specific proposals for the treatment of alterations, additions, painting, conversions, and replacement of decorative detail. A further section will contain proposals for the treatment of front gardens, forecourt parking, boundary walls, garages and dustbin enclosures, and it is to be hoped that these two parts will provide a useful design guide for future work.

There will be a final section containing suggested criteria for redevelopment.

The Report will be a most welcome document, and, if we are to make Conservation into a positive rather than a negative operation, it should provide invaluable guidance by formulating a policy to encourage improvement, and to restrain or halt the gradual erosion which has been taking place since the war."

St. John's Vicarage, Ladbroke Grove, and 2 Lansdowne Crescent

An application for permission to demolish these two houses was opposed by the Association and refused by the Council. The Association felt grave concern over this case, since the houses occupy an important corner site, are in harmony with the church, and no indication was given of any proposed design for redevelopment. The applicants have now gone to appeal, and the Association will be watching events.

15 Kensington Park Road

The Association was unhappy about the very low space standards in this proposed conversion into small flats.

76-78 Elgin Crescent

The situation still remains very unclear in this case. The Council appears to consider that, on a point of law, it is unlikely that enforcement action can be taken to prevent the owner using the back gardens of these houses as a car park, so long as the vehicles are standing on gravel. The Association is keeping a close watch on the matter in conjunction with local residents.

1 Arundel Gardens

The Association has always felt concern about the evidences of gradual encroachment by car parking onto the edges of the communal gardens. In this case, the whole of the private garden area of the first house in the corner block has been surfaced for vehicle parking with an exit onto the road, making a most unwelcome and damaging intrusion.

1 and 2 Ladbroke Gardens

The Association is continuing to watch this case, where an illegal vehicle opening was formed into the rear garden space of the corner house onto Ladbroke Grove. After enforcement action by the Council, work was apparently abandoned, but unfortunately the original cast-iron railings have not been replaced.

2. Forecourt Parking

One of the subjects discussed in the report on the Ladbroke Conservation Area which is being prepared by the Council is car-parking in front gardens and forecourts. This is an important matter and our Committee has been much concerned with it. It is also a controversial matter, for some people feel that it is desirable to get cars off the streets, especially now that street parking and all that it involves is damaging to visual amenities. A great deal of forecourt parking already takes place. At present, planning approval is required for any proposal for forecourt parking where a house is divided into flats, but not in the case of a single family house.

In developing a policy on this matter the Council has consulted the Ladbroke Association and will continue to do so. The Council proposes to bring all future car-parking in forecourts under planning control, and to develop a policy and design guide for dealing with individual applications. Our Committee has welcomed this proposal and expressed the following views on the policy and design guide:

1. In some places, any further forecourt car-parking should not be permitted, largely for traffic safety reasons. Forecourt parking almost always entails backing out on to the public road, usually through a line of parked cars which restrict visibility. This is a hazardous operation anywhere, but is especially dangerous on roads carrying a volume of mixed traffic or anywhere near a road junction. We consider that any further forecourt parking should not be allowed on Holland Park Avenue, Ladbroke Grove, Kensington Park Road and Elgin Crescent (bus route end), and in addition, within a distance of (say) 30m of any road junction anywhere.
2. Forecourt car-parking should generally be discouraged, but there may be some houses where such parking has not already been arranged and where it might be permitted, provided that it conforms with a carefully worked out set of design constraints. Such constraints should include the preservation of trees, suitable paving of the hard-standing, limiting the area of the hard-standing to less than 50% of the forecourt area, back-edge of pavement line to be maintained by satisfactory gates. In any case, each application should be considered individually on its merits.

When the Council's report is available in draft form, there will be an opportunity for the Association to discuss this and other matters contained in the report.

3. Street Lighting

Last Autumn the Borough's Department of Engineering and Public Amenities, conscious of the somewhat discordant nature of much of the street lighting within certain of the conservation areas, erected several different experimental lanterns on the south side of Pembridge Square.

Interested parties were invited to comment and at the same time to bear in mind that one of the prerequisites of the scheme is the retention of the existing concrete standards, the replacement of which would be impossibly expensive.

Several members of the Ladbroke Association inspected the lanterns and reported, in each case, that not one of the experimental designs could really be regarded as satisfactory. This was principally because the lanterns exhibited all failed to fit harmoniously with the concrete standards. Some examples were merely awkward whilst others verged on the absurd.

The committee wrote to the Director of Engineering and Public Amenities last February to congratulate his Department on their initiative in launching the experimental scheme and also on their continuing efforts to encourage public consultation. With reference to the choice of lanterns, however, the Committee felt bound to point out not only that none of the designs was satisfactory, but also that if the Borough were to proceed with any single one of them an opportunity would have been lost to remedy an existing eyesore in many of the conservation areas.

In his reply to the Committee the Director of Engineering and Public Amenities reported that there had been widespread disagreement among those who had

written with comments on the Pembridge Square Scheme. Accordingly the next step will be to renew the lighting in not more than one or two streets possibly using only two designs. The public will then be invited to make further comments. It is understood that in addition an industrial designer may be commissioned to assist with the project.

The Director of Engineering and Public Amenities has kindly undertaken to keep the Committee informed of all further developments.

4. Traffic

No-entry signs have been placed in Clarendon Road at its junction with Lansdowne Rise, preventing South-bound traffic from continuing directly down Clarendon Road. With this measure the Borough Council's present traffic management scheme for the western end of the area is fully implemented.

Proposals to close the short northern section of Ladbroke Terrace have, it is understood, been abandoned.

Members will be canvassed in due course and a report made to the Borough Council regarding the effects of the present scheme on the area as a whole.

5. "Europa Nostra"

Members of the Ladbroke Association, at a meeting held on November 4th, 1975 were privileged to see a film entitled "Europa Nostra", specially made for European Architectural Heritage Year. This film was sponsored by a number of European Governments and had scenes shot in fifteen countries. The Ladbroke Association showing of the film must have been among the first in this country after the premiere in Amsterdam.

The film was introduced by Mr. Michael Middleton C.B.E., Secretary-General of the United Kingdom Council of European Architectural Heritage Year. Mr. Middleton, who had taken an active part in its production, kindly consented to answer questions after the film had been shown. The photography was brilliant, showing examples of single buildings and whole areas beautifully restored and others either spoilt or lost through neglect or deliberate demolition. The film also emphasised factors which are enemies of conservation, such as inharmonious new buildings, traffic congestion, unsightly advertisements and street furniture.

One left with feelings of admiration for the makers of the film, which was a great achievement for European Architectural Heritage Year, and with the hope that there might be a further opportunity of seeing it.

6. Trees in Conservation Areas

We would like to draw attention to the recent Kensington and Chelsea Borough Newsletter, and in particular to the feature on tree conservation and regulations within a designated conservation area.

"Trees very often make an important contribution to Conservation Areas and since the 1974 Act it is now necessary to notify the Council of any intention to cut down, lop, top or improve any tree in a conservation area even though it is not the subject of a Tree Preservation Order. The Council have 6 weeks to inspect the tree and come to a decision on whether the work is appropriate. Trees which are subject to a Tree Preservation order should, of course, be put through the formal application procedure".