

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

SPRING 1981

WINTER MEETING

The Association's winter meeting was held at the Knights of St. Colomba Hall on 9th February, and took the form of a discussion on the ever-topical question of trees on the Ladbroke Estate. Some eighty members and their friends attended the meeting – a good turn-out which reflected the importance of the evening's discussion. Peter Annett, the Borough's Arboriculturalist, opened proceedings (members having had a chance to look at a display of plans and aerial photographs) with an interesting and thorough explanation of the workings of tree preservation orders and the extent to which they can be enforced. He clarified several aspects of unauthorised or badly executed pruning of privately owned trees and the penalties that can be imposed. Although the Borough cannot insist on tree surgery work being carried out by firms on the approved list, Mr. Annett encouraged all those considering having their trees pruned to use a reputable firm of tree surgeons.

Peter Annett then referred to the Borough's policy on street trees, and outlined the planting programme for the present season. The locations for new trees being planted in pavements were restricted by a number of factors – the presence of service cables and pipes, traffic sight lines, the position of private cellars, the dominance of privately owned trees in front gardens, and the architectural context of the street. On the latter point, it would be inappropriate to embark on a tree-planting programme in, for example, Stanley Gardens.

The next speaker, for the Association, was Jeremy Lever. He referred to the series of articles in previous Newsletters which had explored some of the difficulties which could be encountered when trees and buildings stood side by side on the shrinkable clays that cover the whole of the Ladbroke Estate. Concentrating on the theme of the visual impact of trees in the context of the Estate, Jeremy Lever showed a slide of Holland Park Avenue in 1898 and compared the avenue of London planes at that time with the position today, posing the question: what are we all doing about the existing and new trees that will give pleasure to others in the future?

To answer this question it is essential to know who owns and controls these trees, and Jeremy Lever had therefore carried out a visual survey of all trees that can be seen from the street and classified them into three categories: *street trees*, being owned and maintained by the Borough; *private trees* in front gardens, being owned and maintained by individuals at their own expense, but controlled by tree preservation orders; and *trees in communal gardens*, being owned by Garden Committees and maintained at the expense of those ratepayers living around each communal garden, and again controlled by tree preservation orders. Jeremy Lever then showed slides of the survey drawings, indicating the relative importance of each type of tree throughout the Ladbroke Estate. Further slides, taken in the summer of 1980, enabled an appraisal to be made of the appearance of many local streets. For example, the badly disfigured privately owned trees at the southern end of Kensington Park Road were compared with the magnificent groups of trees in the communal gardens in Stanley Gardens north and south. Jeremy Lever thought these trees were of such importance to Kensington Park Road that there was no need for street trees in this section of the road. The architectural completeness of Stanley Gardens itself would be undermined if trees were planted in this road. The trees at the northern end of Kensington Park Road were, unfortunately, ill-defined and confused, and were not in keeping with the architectural composition of the terraced houses.

Moving to Ladbroke Grove, Jeremy Lever contrasted the fine canopy of plane trees at its southern end with the barren scene at the northern end, and suggested that the Borough should pursue a vigorous tree-planting programme to enhance this area. The intimate character of Lansdowne Road was then described, a street whose privately owned trees at the southern end generally complemented the varied form of the buildings, and whose fine row of silver maples at the northern end reflected the unified appearance of the terraced stuccoed houses. Finally, several other important streets were examined – Clarendon Road, Elgin and Blenheim Crescents, Ladbroke Road, Lansdowne Walk, St. John's Gardens, Kensington Park Gardens and Lansdowne Crescent.

The Chairman then invited questions from the audience, and the ensuing discussion indicated the interest and importance to members of the subject of trees in the area. Concern was expressed on the importance of enforcing a proper tree-pruning policy, especially for privately owned trees, and the exacting nature of many of the questions posed was well-matched by Peter Annett's considerable technical expertise and intimate knowledge of the Ladbroke Area.

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

Peter Thorold, Chairman of the Association, writes:

Membership of the Ladbroke Association reached 200 in the early 'seventies and has stayed obstinately close to that figure until very recently. In 1975, for instance, membership was 210 and in April 1980, no more than 233 – less, incidentally, than neighbouring Norland. Admittedly, from the point of view of members, we make things difficult for ourselves under our constitution which creates one member for a whole household, no matter how many people it comprises.

Nevertheless, this standing still in terms of membership seemed odd and disappointing. It could hardly be that our basic subscription was too high: it has stood at £1 since 1971 against an increase in the retail price index of over 200%. It could not be that the neighbourhood has declined: Ladbroke makes house agents boggle, and a cursory look around will show new paint and healthy restoration. (There are some unhealthy proposals in the pipeline, but that is another story.) There is also more single ownership of houses, a factor which should benefit our numbers. It is not that the Association has been inactive. We do at least as much as most amenity societies and have scored a reasonable number of successes and carry out a regular programme of activities. Whatever the reason, it was clear that the best way to boost our membership was not by another round of general exhortation but by an old-fashioned canvass. We printed 450 copies of an appeal letter and dropped them during January over all parts of the Estate. The result, I am delighted to say, is satisfactory: since 1st January membership has increased from 245 to 313 and subscriptions – many people are kind enough to give more than the basic – have gone up by £152. I hope that members will feel this to be encouraging, and I hope too that when they run into a likely neighbour who has escaped our trawl, they will bring him or her (or perhaps 'it' as we are talking of households!) into the Association. Our influence depends to a great extent on the strength of our membership.

I do not suppose that anyone, whatever else they may think of us, will judge the Association profligate. In fact a number of people have suggested that the £1 subscription is too low, and that we could further our aims more effectively by raising it to a more realistic figure. The Committee considered the question and came to the conclusion that since we are still budgeting for an annual surplus of revenue over expenditure and maintain a healthy reserve of around £1,000, we should hold the subscription for at least another year or so. That amounts perhaps to a tiny gesture at a time when rates are shooting up, but I hope it is one which will reassure members that we are determined to handle their money conscientiously.

PLANNING

HIPPODROME PLACE

Whilst this road is technically outside the Conservation Area, the Association feels that, like the shopping amenities of Clarendon Cross, the issues raised are of sufficient general importance and relevance as to make its attitude more positive than that of a

mere bystander. Pressure is therefore being placed upon the Borough Engineer's Department in the hope that this may influence the Works Committee who, it is understood, are ultimately responsible for approval of the construction required in building the small piece of bypass road between Portland Road and Walmer Road. It should be noted that the road and pavements in Hippodrome Place are about half the normal minimal width, and that should a pedestrian be hurt by a passing vehicle, or indeed a vehicle itself be damaged, the Borough could be legally responsible for damages. The protruding bay windows, and opening lights of the new Hippodrome Mews development exacerbate an already unsatisfactory situation.

CLARENDON CROSS

The Association continues to support measures to retain this area for family shopping, and is delighted to see the opening of a new greengrocer and the possible opening of a butcher's shop. The closing of Hippodrome Place would not only make this a safer shopping area, but could help in the revitalisation process and thereby make an important contribution to the future of Clarendon Cross.

2 LANSDOWNE CRESCENT

There is a proposal to construct an additional storey to the Vicarage opposite St. John's Church, and particular care is required since the relationship to the Church makes the site one of primary importance. Unfortunately the extra floor would tend to dominate this key corner site, and the Committee views the whole proposal with some misgivings. It is understood that the application has been approved by the Council, and it can now only be hoped that the additional storey will not take the form of the application as submitted to the Borough Town Planning Committee.

ARUNDEL GARDENS AND LADBROKE GROVE

The proposals to erect small blocks of flats were opposed by the Committee in both cases, not so much for their detailed design, but because it seemed that their construction would seriously damage existing properties and their surroundings on the Ladbroke Estate.

1-7 LADBROKE ROAD

A proposal for an office development, large in volume though low in height, to be situated in the gardens behind the shops existing at the south eastern end of Ladbroke Road, was rejected by the Borough. The Association's attitude was that whilst the positioning of a commercial development so directly adjacent to that existing at Notting Hill Gate would not constitute a major infringement of the area, the traffic generated would add problems to an already extremely congested junction, and so make the project undesirable.

POWERS OF LOCAL AUTHORITY

The Committee is concerned about the apparent lack of enforcement powers of the Borough Planning Department in relation to applications where approval is granted conditionally. It would seem that the Borough may grant permission on the condition, for example, that repairs be carried out, obscured glass be placed in a new window opening, or missing mouldings be replaced, but if the householder chooses not to comply there is little that can be done. It would seem that since the system of conditional permissions does not seem to be working, some other procedure should be adopted, such as obtaining undertakings in writing from the applicant before approval is given by the Town Planning Committee.

INTERNAL PARTITIONING

It would appear that neither the Borough nor the Association can greatly influence the manner in which internal divisions are made, but any householder who is carrying out this type of work should consider alternative methods of dividing rooms. It is possible to obtain the desired results without, for instance, irreparably damaging ceiling mouldings, and without placing partitions so close to windows that they affect the rhythm of the street facade.

LADBROKE GARDENS HOTEL

No recent planning proposal has generated more controversy than that to convert a portion of 28/31 Ladbroke Gardens into a hostel for the homeless. The Association has played little part since there was no intention to make significant external alterations to

what is anyway an undistinguished building architecturally. However, it is worth reporting some background. The building has been a hotel for some fifty years, and the present owners wishing to sell, it was proposed that it be acquired by the Latimer Housing Society with financial backing from the Borough. 28/29 Ladbrooke Gardens were to be used as temporary accommodation for homeless persons and Nos. 30/31 to provide bedsitting room type accommodation on a permanent basis for "young single working people" nominated by Latimer on a basis to be agreed with the Council. The application was approved by the Town Planning Committee on 23rd February but later rejected with regret by the Health and Housing Committee on the grounds that there is no money available (the reduced allocation of capital finance for housing purposes in 1981/82 having been notified to the Council some nine months after the proposal was first put forward). The project has therefore lapsed.

THE NORLAND CONSERVATION SOCIETY

A previous issue of "News from Ladbrooke" reported on the activities of the conservation society on our eastern flank - the Pembridge Association - and we now look briefly at those of our western neighbour, the Norland Society. Its Chairman, Mr. Nigel Judah, has kindly sent us a copy of their most recent Newsletters which show, not surprisingly, that the Society is interested in as wide a range of issues as those which concern us - sensitive restoration, harmonious new development, town planning enforcement action by the Council, tree preservation and planting - and, last but not least, traffic.

Indeed, traffic has been a burning issue lately in Norland because of proposals to build a new industrial estate at Freston Road, adjacent to the M41, with access from Royal Crescent/St. Ann's Villas. It seemed to the Society both that this would increase existing traffic pressure on these roads to unacceptable levels, and that it would be perfectly feasible to construct a new link road direct from the M41 to the industrial estate. So the Society combined forces with the Royal Crescent Association to brief a barrister specialising in planning matters to represent them at a Public Inquiry in Hammersmith (in whose area the estate lies) - and the Inspector accepted their case. As a result, he recommended that Hammersmith should change their District Plan to reflect the conservation societies' views, and that the local authorities concerned should conduct a study into the feasibility of a new road between the M41 and the Freston Road Industrial Estate. Hammersmith Council has now changed its District Plan, and the three local authorities concerned (the Greater London Council, Hammersmith and Kensington and Chelsea) will be meeting in the near future to put in train the feasibility study.

Providing an important backcloth for this and other issues in Norland is a new draft Policy Statement, prepared jointly by the Society and by the Borough (who are bearing the cost of publication). The Society has long felt that an area which has been formally designated as being of outstanding historic and architectural interest should have a published document recording in architectural and environmental terms what is in the area and how the buildings, streets, trees and gardens should best be conserved and enhanced. A comprehensive photographic survey has been made by two local photographers, and will be incorporated into the final document. Meanwhile a public meeting will be arranged shortly by the Council enabling members of the Society and other residents to contribute to the discussion about the contents of the draft Policy Statement.