

News from Ladbroke

The Newsletter of the Ladbroke Association

AUTUMN/WINTER



A view from St Peter's church tower, looking towards the city (courtesy of photoBECKET). St Peter's church in Kensington Park Road is currently being restored and our photographer took advantage of the scaffolding to go to the top of the tower and to take some stunning photographs. There are others on our website at www.ladbrokeassociation.info/ViewsfromStPeterschurch.htm

SEGREGATED CYCLE LANE

We described TfL's plans for a segregated cycle line down Notting Hill Gate and Holland Park Avenue in our last newsletter. TfL has now circulated a report on the results of their consultation which can be found at tfl.gov.uk/wood-notting

The report on the consultation exercise is somewhat selective in its use of figures. Even the strongest opponents of the scheme are likely to accept that it would help cyclists, and unsurprisingly a majority of respondents replied in the affirmative to the direct question on whether the scheme would increase cycling. The only invitation people were given to point out problems with the scheme or to suggest better alternatives was in the so-called open questions. Answers to the open questions indicated that

40% of all respondents expressed concern about congestion; 29% were concerned about pollution; 23% were opposed to removing trees; 25% thought it was not good for the area; and 22% felt it was a generally bad scheme, against 15% thinking it was a good scheme. We suspect that if direct questions had been put (and if non-residents were excluded), all but the last of these percentages would have been higher.

The questions we really want answered is whether this scheme is the best way to help cyclists and whether the benefits of the scheme outweigh the downsides in terms of pollution, congestion, loss of trees and rat-running. So far the data released by TfL does not answer either of these questions.

We are well aware the proposal arouses strong passions among our

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The Ladbroke Association New Year Party is taking place at 6.30 on Tuesday 14 January in one of the stunning houses in Kensington Park Road. Invitations are being sent out separately. Much as we would like to offer such events for free, as we are a charity there will be a charge to cover our costs, but we hope that those who come will think it well worth it.

members. As far as we can judge, a big majority are horrified by the prospect of losing trees, extra pollution and congestion. At the same time there is a minority who feel equally strongly that cycling is the way of the future and that we should do as much as possible to make it safer and easier to cycle, even if that involves more restrictions on cars. We probably all to accept that this will be the way of the future,

but whether it is right to reduce car usage by creating congestion is another matter.

TfL have made some amendments to their scheme which they believe would make it less problematic. They have invited the Ladbroke Association and other local associations to a meeting to be briefed on their ideas and we expect this to take place in January. Meanwhile, the Ladbroke Association has been collaborating with neighbouring associations (including the Norland Association and the Pembridge Society) in developing ideas for improving the conditions for cyclists without a double segregated cycle lane. We have with the Council designed a new cycle “quietway” that would go parallel to Holland Park Avenue and Notting Hill Gate, and which we believe would be a lot more agreeable for cyclists even if a bit slower. And we are also looking

at other measures which we hope to present to the Council and TfL.

The position remains that TfL will not (or at any rate not without invoking draconian and never used powers) be able to force their scheme on RBKC, as the latter are the owner of the roads. But RBKC is likely to come under strong pressure. The proposed new cycleway is part of a network of cycle routes, like the spokes of a wheel, allowing cyclists a clear run from the outer suburbs to the centre of London. Most of the other routes have been agreed and many already exist. Hammersmith and Fulham have already agreed the section of the route west of Holland Park roundabout. Nothing has yet been agreed with Westminster for the section between Notting Hill Gate and Lancaster Gate, but if TfL can develop satisfactory plans for that section, RBKC will no doubt portrayed as the only borough

holding up a safe and segregated route for cyclists from the west.

One of the most concerning aspects of this whole issue is the often poisonous hostility in London between cyclists and other road users, leading cyclists to curse motorists and motorists and pedestrians to curse cyclists in sometimes shocking ways. Both sides are to blame. Cyclists ride too often on pavements and jump red lights, and cars go too close to cyclists and their passengers open doors in the path of cyclists (sometimes causing serious or even fatal injuries). But it does make for an extremely bad-tempered debate, and also makes it more difficult to find a middle way whereby all can peaceably share the road space. We think that TfL needs to pay more attention to this problem. Maybe we need better education and a well-publicised London code of conduct for both cyclists and motorists.

We asked one of the groups in the borough promoting cycling, Better Streets for Kensington and Chelsea (betterstreets4kc@gmail.com) to put the case for the cycle lane. This is what they say:

“At the moment RBKC’s transport network is not designed to encourage active transport like bicycling and walking. This is why the share of journeys made by bike in RBKC is very low, while we have the highest share of people using taxis.

We can change this if we want to. The Netherlands famously changed in the 1970s and many cities and countries across the world are changing too. Have a look at Portland, Pontevedra, Paris, Strasbourg, New York, Oslo, Seville, as well as the more familiar examples in Denmark, Netherlands and Germany. And now in London too, but not RBKC.

This is a big topic and regular questions – what makes people bicycle or not, back streets or segregated paths, safety, congestion, avoiding rat-runs, access for emergency vehicles, impact on local shops and so on – have been faced and answered in many different city environments.

The scheme between Notting Hill Gate and Shepherd’s Bush would have been the first meaningful piece of infrastructure in RBKC. We were really disappointed that RBKC leadership didn’t present a fair view, ignoring worldwide evidence.

The scheme is not perfect, but it was good and with some changes it will be an important first step. Without it we won’t get people out of cars and onto bikes, and the high level of injuries on this stretch of road for those who do use it will continue. TfL are making some changes in response to feedback (such as saving trees among others), and we hope people will look at it afresh and discuss with open minds.

Beyond this scheme there is much to do. We’re encouraged by the start of discussions with RBKC, resident groups and others on 20mph limits and safe school streets. Electronic vehicles are better than other vehicles but aren’t the answer. Building one uses more CO2 than a normal car, they transmit lethal brake and tire dust particles, and 1.5 tons in a collision will maim or kill. They cause congestion and encourage a sedentary life. And most people in the borough can’t afford one.

We live in a great borough, but one that is at the bottom of the London league table for healthy streets. Let’s change and start winning!”

PHANTOM PUBS

All the pubs in our area date from early-to-mid Victorian times and were erected as part of the development of the area. Most were predictably along main arteries or market areas – Kensington Park Road, Portobello Road, Ladbroke Grove and Clarendon Road. Happily most have survived, although some in a sadly altered state. At least five, however, have closed, although leaving a ghostly reminder of their presence as the buildings still exist and retain clearly their pub shape.

Perhaps the best of these buildings is the Clarendon Hotel, on the corner of Clarendon Road and one of the spurs of Portland Road. It has magnificent Corinthian pilasters and tall Georgian-style sash windows. It was completed around 1846 and was probably erected by William Reynolds, a builder and surveyor, who was responsible for many of the houses in Clarendon Road. Reynolds established himself as the licensee and



The Clarendon Hotel

took out various mortgages on the building before going bankrupt in 1848. The building continued as a public house and hotel, however under a succession of different publicans, until 1919. In the 1920s it became the Quest Social Centre, which it remains to this day, providing day care for the elderly. It was nearly demolished in the 1970s to build modern housing, but was saved by being given a Grade II listing in 1976.

There were no fewer than three pubs in Kensington Park Road, all dating from the 1860s and all of which have closed. The Codrington was on the corner of Kensington Park Road and Elgin Crescent and is now an estate agent. It was probably named after Admiral Sir Edward Codrington (1770-1851), who commanded a ship at Trafalgar, led the fleet at Washington and Baltimore in the American War and commanded the combined fleets of Britain, France and Russia at the battle of Navarino. On the other side of the road, on the corner of Blenheim Crescent, there was the Arundel Arms (later renamed Blenheim Arms), which closed only recently (in about 2000) and is now the E&O Asian fusion restaurant. The pub-like shape of both these corner buildings can still be seen clearly. The charmingly named Grasshopper at 216-218 Kensington Park Road was unusual in not being on a street corner, but its handsome double frontage still reveals its origin. It seems to have closed around the time of the First World War.

The Portobello Road still has lots of pubs, but four fewer than in its heyday. The Freemasons Arms at No. 76 was destroyed by a bomb during the blitz. The Oxford at Nos. 90-92 closed in the 1930s and the Portobello Tavern at No. 138 in the 1920s, but both retain their public house type façades. The Duke of Sussex at No. 272 was demolished to make way for the construction of Westway in the 1960s.

Some of the other pubs in the Portobello Road are so changed that one wonders whether they can still be called pubs. The Ginstitute took over the old Colville at No.186 and it is now the Distillery, devoted entirely to gin. The new landlords restored the façade with great success to reflect its Victorian pub ancestry, but destroyed the magnificent first floor Victorian pub dining room. The former Golden Cross at No.

240, subsequently Shannons or the Market Bar, is now a sushi restaurant, although its ground floor does still have a popular bar.

The old Portobello Gold at No. 95 has gone distinctly upmarket and is more restaurant than pub, although again it retains its ground floor bar.



The old Codrington pub, early 1900s.



The Codrington pub building today (photoBECKET)



The former Grasshopper

BENCHES AND BUS SIGNS

The Council is seeking sponsorship for street benches and bus countdown signs.

Benches

Apparently there has been interest from residents in contributing towards the installation of street benches. The Council has now decided to invite anybody interested to sponsor either an existing bench or a new one to the tune of £2,000 (the approximate cost of a new bench). The sponsor would then have the right to a small plaque on the bench reading “This bench has been sponsored by...” or “This bench is in memory of...” The maintenance of the bench is currently funded by the Council.

The Council says it will try to put benches where the sponsors would like them, but cannot guarantee to put them in any particular location. There are a number of rules. The pavement must be wide enough to allow the free passage of pedestrians; the bench cannot be in front of the windows or doors of residential premises or outside schools; and they must not obstruct e.g. the entrance to cellars. The Council interprets the rule about doors and windows rather strictly.

For instance it will not allow benches in front of garden walls or hedges if there are windows from which the bench might be seen. However, they might be prepared to relax this rule if the sponsor was happy to have the bench in front of his or her own property.

Anyone interested in sponsoring a bench should send an email to benches@rbkc.gov.uk stating their interest and preferred location (if any).

Countdown signs

These are the signs at bus stops that tell one what the next buses are and in how many minutes they will arrive. There are some 2,500 at bus stops in London (including quite a few in Kensington) and they are widely used in other cities in the UK and elsewhere. Some years ago, however, TfL decided not to roll out any more countdown signs, apparently on the assumption that, with mobile phone ownership now almost universal, people could use their phones to get the information, through either the

internet or TfL’s bus app, or by texting the code number on the bus stop.

TfL did agree, however, to installing more signs if local authorities were prepared to pay for new ones in their area. Our Council is now planning to install some extra ones, but would like sponsorship to help with the costs. It is writing to local businesses to offer them the opportunity to sponsor the placement of a countdown sign at a bus shelter close to their business or to provide bus arrival information within their building. Residents and other interested parties are also welcome to sponsor a Countdown sign if they wish to do so. Signs cost between £9,000 and £12,000 and the Council would put a notice on the sign with the name of the sponsor.

We suspect that most people would find it much easier to check bus information by a quick glance at a countdown sign rather fiddling with their mobile phone. So anybody who does sponsor a sign will be doing the community a service. Contact ayesha.flemming@rbkc.gov.uk for further details.

AIR CONDITIONERS

We are seeing increasing numbers of applications for condenser units needed in connection with air conditioning units. With global warming and the summer heatwaves that it seems to be bringing, the demand for air-conditioners seems likely to continue and grow.

From the point of view of the planet, air-conditioning is extremely energy intensive. According to the International Energy Agency, using air conditioners and electric fans to stay cool already accounts for 10% of all global electricity consumption today. Global energy demand from air conditioners is expected to triple by 2050, requiring new electricity capacity the equivalent to the combined electricity capacity of the United States, the EU and Japan today. Anything that we do in the Ladbroke area will only be a drop in this ocean. Nevertheless, it does behove the

environmentally conscious to think of any little things we can do to reduce the problem.

There are other concerns, in particular noise for neighbours and the cluttering up our buildings with ugly condenser units (which need big “acoustic enclosures” to reduce the noise). Often, units can be placed out of sight on the roof, behind a parapet, or in a basement area, or hidden in the garden. But for a flat the only place may be on a balcony, where it is in plain view and likely to cause noise problems for neighbours as well as spoiling the look of the building.

We very much hope, therefore, that residents will think hard about alternative solutions before deciding to go for air conditioning. Victorian and Georgian houses with their solid walls and window shutters are in fact quite efficient at keeping cool, although not so good at keeping out the cold (whereas modern houses are

very effective at insulating against the cold but tend to over-heat). So it is worth playing to their strengths. In the Mediterranean the solution is to have shutters (or even opaque curtains) that can be closed when the sun is out. These can be remarkably effective, especially in bedrooms, where it does not matter if the room is dark during the day (and according to Which?, 51% of those they surveyed said their main reason for buying an air conditioner was to make sleep easier). Quite a few of our houses still have the internal wooden shutters that were installed when they were built and we suggest that, where they are missing, re-installation should be considered. There are of course now very efficient fans (like those manufactured by Dyson). These have their limitations, but use a fraction of the energy needed for full-on air-conditioning.

If you are insulating a loft with a bedroom underneath, it is worth remembering that the bedroom will

be 3° cooler if the floor of the loft is insulated rather than the roof.

Conservatories pose particular problems and if they are south-facing there is probably little that can be done to keep out the heat. The only really effective solution is not to build a conservatory on a south-facing elevation.

PUDDLES ON PAVEMENTS

Those of you who have occasion to walk past the Portobello and Uli restaurants at the top of Kensington Park Road will be aware that for some months a huge puddle was forming on the pavement whenever it rained because of uneven paving. We drew this to the attention of the Council, which, we are happy to say, is now re-laying the paving stones.

Anybody can report problems like this to the Council by emailing streetline@rbkc.gov.uk or by calling the dedicated telephone line 020 7361 3001, and we would encourage our members to do so.

HOTEL IN NOTTING HILL GATE

We reported in our last newsletter that Frogmore, the property company which owns most of the north side of Notting Hill Gate, is planning to demolish the whole of the block that includes Marks and Spencer and replace it with a 173-room hotel. We regret to say that they have now obtained planning permission for their plan, despite opposition from the Ladbroke Association, the Pembridge Association, the Kensington Society and many local residents. As we have made clear, our objection was not so much to the proposal for a hotel on that site as to the fact that the building proposed is a large monotonous block, higher than its neighbours, that will dominate that end of the street. For those coming down Campden Hill Road, there will no longer be the view of trees over the low-built building that is now Marks & Spencer (those with long memories will remember that is was previously Damian Hirst's restaurant Pharmacy and before then

a Greek restaurant that advertised plate-breaking on Saturday evenings). Instead there will be a high monolithic block which will also take a lot of light from Victoria Gardens.

One of the chief concerns is the traffic that would be generated by a hotel of this size, both delivery lorries (who would use Bulmer Place, the service road behind this side of Notting Hill Gate) and vehicles carrying hotel clients. The Planning Committee did accept that deliveries could be problematic and the applicant is being required to produce a "Servicing and Delivery Management Plan" which will be brought back to the Planning Applications Committee for determination, so there will be a further chance to comment on it. It will include servicing/delivery hours for the development, and frequency of deliveries within those hours.

Frogmore claim that most guests would arrive by public transport. We think it inevitable, however, that there will be a quite significant number arriving by taxi or Uber. The hotel entrance will be on the Notting Hill Gate frontage, and vehicles stopping there are bound to hold up traffic at

the junction with Campden Hill Road. The Planning Committee is precluded from taking into account any future plans for the area, but if TfL plans for a cycle lane go forward in any form, the problems will be compounded. Again, the applicant is required to provide a Taxi Management Plan, which we shall want to scrutinise in detail.

Frogmore will not operate the hotel, but will let it to a hotel operator. A lot depends on who they choose. The 173 rooms are very small, and concern has been expressed that it may end up as effectively a backpackers' hostel, to the detriment of the Notting Hill Gate shopping centre. We hope that these fears will be misplaced. There is now a fashion in European towns for hotels with tiny rooms, but designed to a very high specification and with excellent services. Frogmore is rumoured to be in negotiation with Hoxton Hotels, who are reasonably high end and operate hotels of this sort in Paris and Amsterdam, and three in London, at Holborn (174 rooms, starting at £135 for their "shoebox" rooms), Southwark (192 rooms starting at £130) and Shoreditch (210 rooms starting at £140).



Design of new hotel in Notting Hill Gate

PAINTINGS ON HOUSES

There is a scattering of buildings round the Ladbroke area whose owners have decorated with designs or frescoes. A striking example No. 1 Codrington Mews, the headquarters of XL, the UK's largest independent record label. The walls of its corner building have been decorated with artwork from its artists albums.



Artwork from the solo album The Eraser by Thom Yorke of Radiohead.

The building above Nu-Line on the corner of Portobello Road and Westbourne Park Road has trompe-l'oeil figures in its windows (above right). On the other side of Westbourne Park Road, No 300 has a Nilotic design and hieroglyphics on its façade, left over from when it was occupied by an organisation called Caribbean Cultural International who used it as a cultural centre specialising in the dissemination of information and literature about



143 Elgin Crescent



Above Nu-line (photoBECKET)

African history. The building was named Karnak House under their watch. There is also a very discreet and tasteful design on the front of No. 143 Elgin Crescent (below left).

Do we approve of such artworks? This is a difficult one. They can be said to add to the interest of the area. In the right place and with a good design, we see no problem. For instance, the XL frontage does not impinge on any particularly significant part of our heritage. The design on 143 Elgin Crescent, which is part of a good Victorian stucco terrace, is more questionable, but it is so discreet and unobtrusive it is hardly a problem. Nevertheless, if too many of these adornments began popping up, we would be worried.

What is the planning position?

Planning permission is needed to put stucco on any brickwork and for listed buildings, and there is one terrace in our area – Nos. 126-184 (evens) Kensington Park Road – that has restrictions on the colour the houses may be painted (the rules are different for commercial premises like pubs), But otherwise there is not much to stop residential householders from painting what they like on their façades. Readers may remember the famous “stripy house” in a mews behind Kensington Square which the Council tried to get redecorated in a plain colour and found that they had quite a battle on their hands. But we would not encourage such features and if such decorative additions did start to be a problem, we would probably press the Council to impose “Article 4 Directives” requiring planning permission.

NEW MEMBERS

For some years now, our membership has remained steady at 350-400 members. We rely, however, on the constant recruitment of new members to replace those who move from the area or die. We are particularly

keen to recruit new arrivals. So if you have new neighbours, we hope that you will mention the Association to them and let the chairman, Sophia Lambert (chair@ladbrokeassociation.info), have their details so that she can invite them to join.

BLUE DOORS AND BOOKSHOPS

The film Notting Hill continues to bring tourists to the Portobello market in search of the Travel Bookshop and the blue door featured in the film. Many, we suspect, end up thoroughly confused.

The bookshop in the film was inspired by the Travel Bookshop in Blenheim Crescent, founded in 1979 by Sarah Anderson, a remarkable woman with a passion for travel and a much better bookseller than Hugh Grant. She gave up the business in 2011 and the shop is now a good general bookshop, the Notting Hill Bookshop, which looks not too unlike the original and usually has a knot of tourists in front of it taking photographs.



142 Portobello Road, never a bookshop but where some of the interior scenes were shot.

The scenes inside the bookshop were not in fact filmed there, but some were filmed in an antiques arcade further up the Portobello Road in which appropriate sets had been installed. The arcade is now occupied by a gift shop, but has been making the most of its connection with the film – see photo above.



The Blue Door gift shop at No. 131



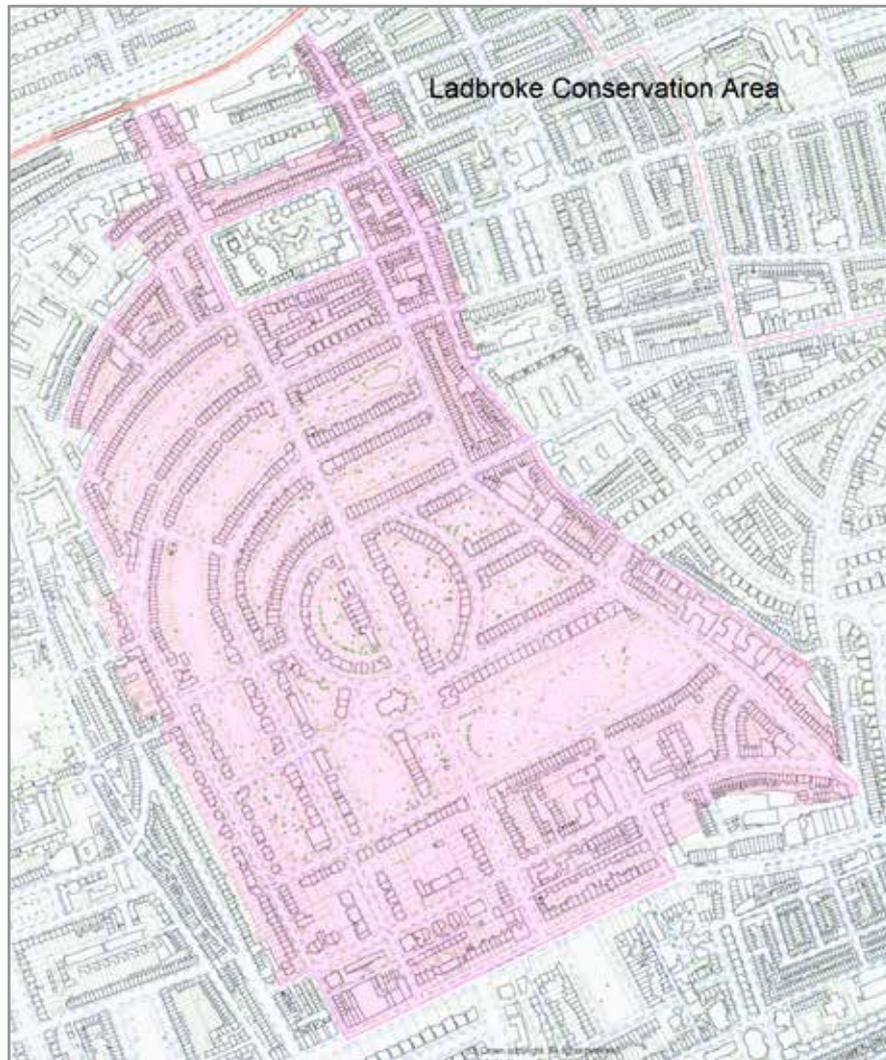
The original Travel Bookshop in 2007

As for the real blue door, it was not in Portobello Road at all, but just round the corner at 280 Westbourne Park Road, which was the home at the time of Richard Curtis, who directed the film. After he left, the new occupants, presumably fed up by the attention it attracted, repainted the door black, but it is now blue again, albeit a more discreet and darker shade.

Further up Portobello Road, the gift shop at No. 131 (which as far as we know had nothing to do with the film) has climbed on the blue door bandwagon by painting itself blue and adopting The Blue Door as its name (see bottom left). The door to the side of the shop leading up to the floors above is painted a strong blue and we can only hope that not too many tourists are misled.



The blue door in the film as it is today, with tourists taking photos



THE OFFICERS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE LADBROKE ASSOCIATION

President: Thomas Pakenham

Officers:

Chairman: Sophia Lambert

Vice Chairman: Jane Martineau

Hon Treasurer: Paul Bastick

Hon Secretary: Anne Chorley

Committee Members:

Kay Broadbent

Tom Croft

Catherine Faulks

Sandra Kamen

David Marshall

Peter Mishcon

Malcolm Pawley

Peggy Post

Tony Temple

Newsletter: Sophia Lambert

editor@ladbrokeassociation.info

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.info

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

This edition of the newsletter was edited by Sophia Lambert and the printing was done by The London Printing Company.com in Notting Hill Gate.

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.info

or apply to the Hon Treasurer:

Paul Bastick, 75A Ladbroke Grove, W11 2PD