

THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT

June 1978



CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW

Dear Member:

It is now nearly a year since I was asked to take upon myself the formidable task of leading the Knightsbridge Association, but, due to heavy commitments during Jubilee Year which I had to discharge and the intervening holiday period, it is approximately nine months' activity which I shall review and upon which I will comment in this Annual Report.

In this office I succeeded John Wallis who had been Chairman for three years and I cannot pay too high a tribute to his selfless dedication of time and effort to the work of the Association. Under his Chairmanship, problems which had to be faced had grown so much that the burdens which he had to bear

were enormous. As an ex-member of the City Council, John Wallis was used to hard, time-consuming work taking up the whole of his spare time, but he eventually ended up doing work equivalent to that of the Chairman of a Civic Committee without the assistance of a vast administrative machine.

Accordingly, when I accepted the responsibility of Chairman, I stipulated that I should be allowed to institute some administrative changes which I felt could meet the needs of our greatly increased work; enlarge the membership; encourage more personal participation from members by sharing the workload; and raise the money to accomplish these aims.

REORGANISATION

The Committee elected in June 1977 included experienced veterans, but also a leavening of new members. Instead of frequent meetings attempting to deal with every aspect of the Association's work, it now meets at intervals to take major decisions and ratify administrative actions. The day to day work is done by several new Committees consisting of members of the main Committee who are interested in the particular subject and ordinary members of the Association who are also interested and are, thus, invited to participate.

The Environment Committee handles all matters of planning and development in the area and takes action to protect the neighbourhood. It is assisted in this task by six Area Chairmen who watch and monitor developments in their areas. It has also formed a sub-committee to deal with the vital and ever present problem of Traffic and Parking. Separately a small committee has been established to attempt to deal with Litter another major problem for Knightsbridge.

The Membership Committee is responsible for a continuous drive to bring the Association's

work to the notice of the local citizens and obtain new members.

The Social and Events Committee is responsible for organising the social and other events which allow the members of the Knightsbridge Association to meet and get to know one another and also for helping to raise extra finance to meet our extended activities.

A new Treasurer was elected at the last Annual General Meeting and Valerie de Fe's first report is attached.

The office of Hon Secretary was revived and subsequently accepted by Carol Seymour-Newton.

Our invaluable Secretary, Lindsay Thomson, has continued to serve the Association on a part-time basis.

All holders of offices, not already members of the Committee, were co-opted as members at the first full Committee meeting.

One of the pressing needs of the Association was to have a central office and, luckily, because of the generosity of Lorraine Challen, we are able to enjoy the facilities of her new premises at 21 Cheval Place and, thus, for the first time, there is a permanent address for correspondence.

MEMBERSHIP

In the Autumn the Membership Committee, under its Chairman, Ray Salter, began its first Membership Drive. Newly designed brochures and letters were delivered by canvassers or posted in the area. The initial response has been very good and many more members have joined and continue to join the Association as they hear about its work and achievements on behalf of the neighbourhood. We are also gaining an encouraging number of local businesses joining and contributing generously to our funds.

The Committee decided that subscriptions had been too low to cope with our work efficiently, especially taking into account

inflation. Rather than discourage new members by making an increase mandatory, it was decided to leave the minimum subscription where it was, but to indicate that £5 was the preferred and increasingly usual amount. This is now the minimum subscription from nearly all our members with many generously donating larger amounts.

Since there is quite an element of a floating population, these lists need constant up-dating and were revised during the year. The membership is healthy and growing daily and it is hoped that it will continue to do so.

ENVIRONMENTAL MATTERS

The main activity of the Association has always been the protection of the architecture and amenities of the Knightsbridge area. This involves a constant monitoring of planning application made to the borough. We are recognised by WCC as a consultative body on planning matters and this means that the Council sends large amounts of papers and documents to us weekly and expects to receive our replies by due dates in order not to hold up the planning procedures. This is a significant amount of regular work for a voluntary organisation to handle and it is dealt with by the Environment Committee under the Chairmanship of Geoffrey Challen, RIBA, and a group of dedicated members including another distinguished architect, Sydney Fisk and a notable engineer — Harry Aubrey. During the period under review we have been asked to comment on some thirty separate development applications mostly quite small, but nevertheless requiring visits and meetings and general administrative effort.

The Association has commented adversely on a number of applications where we considered approval might lead to a significant increase in density and put further pressure on scarce parking space, or strain existing inadequate domestic circulation, or create intensive multiple occupancy or disturb well established architectural entities, or neighbour's rights to light. Positive successes range from retaining the cobbled paving in Relton Mews to halving the height of proposed rebuilding in Princes Gardens

and obtaining a more domestic expression for its facade.

Concerning major new developments shewn in Westminster City's written Statement, we have asked for modifications to a scheme completing the South Lodge site; of the other main proposals we are continuing our opposition to an increase of hostel/hotel category development by the Imperial College of Science and Technology in Princes Gardens.

We have noted with satisfaction Westminster City's submission to the Department of the Environment of a proposal to extend the Conservation Area of Knightsbridge, virtually enveloping the whole Ward, and which together with Conservation Areas in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, cover the area of the Knightsbridge Association's proposed aegis bounded by the triangle of roads — Brompton/Cromwell Road, Kensington Road and Queensgate.

One unfortunate exception to this protection is the block between Brompton Road and Cheval Place where the Royal Borough is planning, with its recent permission to rebuild the LEB premises, a seven storey replacement throughout the Victorian low rise terrace.

Members of the Association have attended numerous meetings over several years consulting with City Planning staff towards Westminster's Written Statement of its intentions for the next decade.

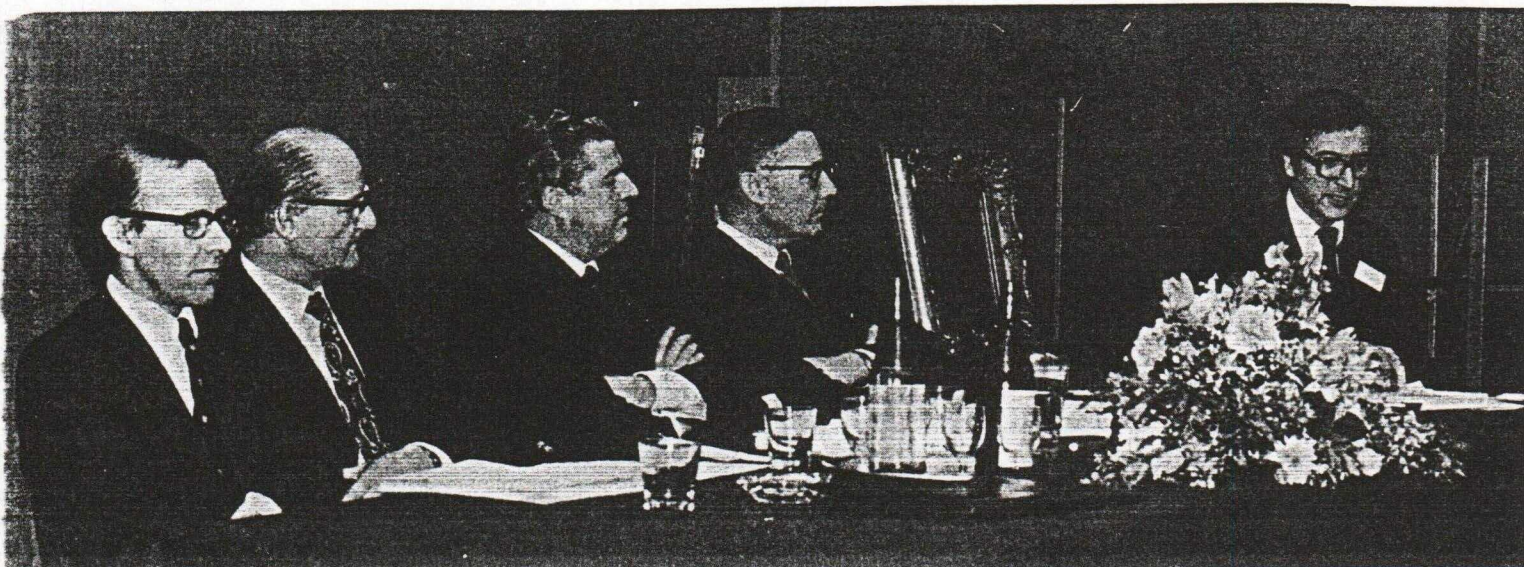
KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA

Although the major part of our area is within the City of Westminster a significant part lies within the borders of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea where we have several members and supporters.

We have not hitherto enjoyed the same close relationship with the Royal Borough as we have with Westminster and recently the Association has taken the initiative in attempting to remedy the situation. This is increasingly necessary as

BRAINS TRUST

Mr B F Hicklenton; Cllr T Whipham; Cllr C A Prendergast; Mr Ian Lacey; Neville Labovitch



there are many problems affecting the neighbourhood which have caused us to make representations to the Borough.

In Cheval Place and through to Brompton Road, Kensington and Chelsea have given permission for the LEB to demolish their building (No. 140/148 Brompton Road 11/15 Cheval Place) and rebuild in an unsuitable

manner creating far too much bulk. Also the familiar shop fronts on the Brompton Road would disappear although this is a section which the DOE and Westminster have recommended to be included in the Conservation area. This view has our strong support. We have objected to the permission granted to the LEB and intend to continue to press our objections.

NEW INITIATIVES

Although most of the Association's work may be thought of as defensive in protection of the environment, we have gone over to the offensive in the sense that we have ourselves decided to investigate several problems that affect our neighbourhood and to propose solutions. Those ideas we would like to present to the membership for discussion and then to the appropriate authorities for their consideration.

Accordingly, a sub-committee has been established with Raymond Burton as Chairman to consider the problems of traffic in and around the area and the equally vexed question of residents parking. In this task the Committee

has the cooperation of Imperial College in their investigations. Several ideas for removing heavy traffic from the area have been mooted and it is hoped to make a preliminary report later in the year.

The other increasing cause of irritation to local citizens is litter and garbage. John Wallis has undertaken the Herculean task of trying to come to terms with this problem. We have the willing cooperation of the Authorities but we have only just begun to tackle its complexities. However, it is a battle that must be won if the area is to remain pleasant and habitable.

SOCIAL EVENTS

Carol Seymour-Newton acted as Convenor of the Social and Events Committee which was responsible for arranging the Christmas Bazaar last year. A hard-working committee — including Lorraine Challen, Valerie de Fe, Pat Wolfston, Nina Wallis, Carol Mappin, Valerie Ahrends and Sonia Labovitch spent long hours planning the event and the experience and generous involvement of Lady Grade helped to ensure a great social and financial success.

The quality of the tombola gifts and raffle were of a very high standard and so were the contents of the stalls. The purchasers had exceedingly good value and the evening made a profit of nearly £800.

The punch was declared excellent and the party was a great success.

Recently we held our first Brains Trust at which the Councillors and Officers of WCC answered questions put by local residents. This was both a social and a serious occasion and achieved its success because of the enthusiasm and participation of the members of the Association who were an informed and involved audience.

The members of the panel said that they enjoyed their evening and were glad of the opportunity to discuss local matters with members of the Association.

BRAINS TRUST *Part of the audience*



GERALD ROW POLICE STATION

Late in 1977 the Association was made aware of the possible closure of Gerald Row Police Station due to a suggested amalgamation of Police Stations into larger units with the consequent loss of the more intimate connection with the neighbourhood. We made known our disquiet to the Commissioner of Police

and accepted an invitation from a Protest Committee set up in Belgravia, to be represented on that body. The Association was duly represented by Miss Georgina Greene and contributed an amount towards the fighting fund. As you know, the protest, which received much publicity, proved successful.

A WARNING

Unfortunately a confidence trickster posing as a member of the Knightsbridge Association has been extracting money from some members of the public by asking for donations at the doors

of their homes. This is not our method of obtaining funds and members are asked to report any strangers that they see or hear of attempting to obtain money in this way.

THE ANNUAL MEETING

I apologise to members for the fact that the Annual General Meeting follows so soon after the Brains Trust, but we are bound by the Rules to hold it in June. This rule is too inflexible and a Special Resolution will be put to you at this year's Annual General Meeting allowing the Meeting to be held once a year at a date to be fixed at the Committee's discretion.

The Committee have asked me to offer myself to you again as Chairman. I have accepted the nomination as a mark of my appreciation to all those far-sighted members who have preceded me and have built the Association into the strong and effective body that it is today.

The Committee, too, offers itself for re-

election and I commend the members to you. They have been a strong and hard working group of people who deserve your support. The extra names are Sidney Fisk and Lady Gillett who have been nominated by me as Chairman.

If there are no further nominations there will be no need for a ballot, but I should mention that it has always been the custom to co-opt further members during the year.

The Annual General Meeting will take place on Thursday evening, June 29th at 6.30pm at the Holy Trinity Church Hall. Wine will be served at 6.00pm and I hope as many of you as possible will come.

MR PETER BROOKE, MP

I am pleased to tell you that our Member of Parliament. Mr Peter Brooke, will be present at the Annual General Meeting from 6.00pm and has agreed to address the meeting after the business has been disposed of.

Those members who attended the Brains

Trust may wish to ask questions of Mr Brooke about matters which were out of the jurisdiction of the Members of the City Council and who were thus unable to deal with them on that occasion.

THE FUTURE

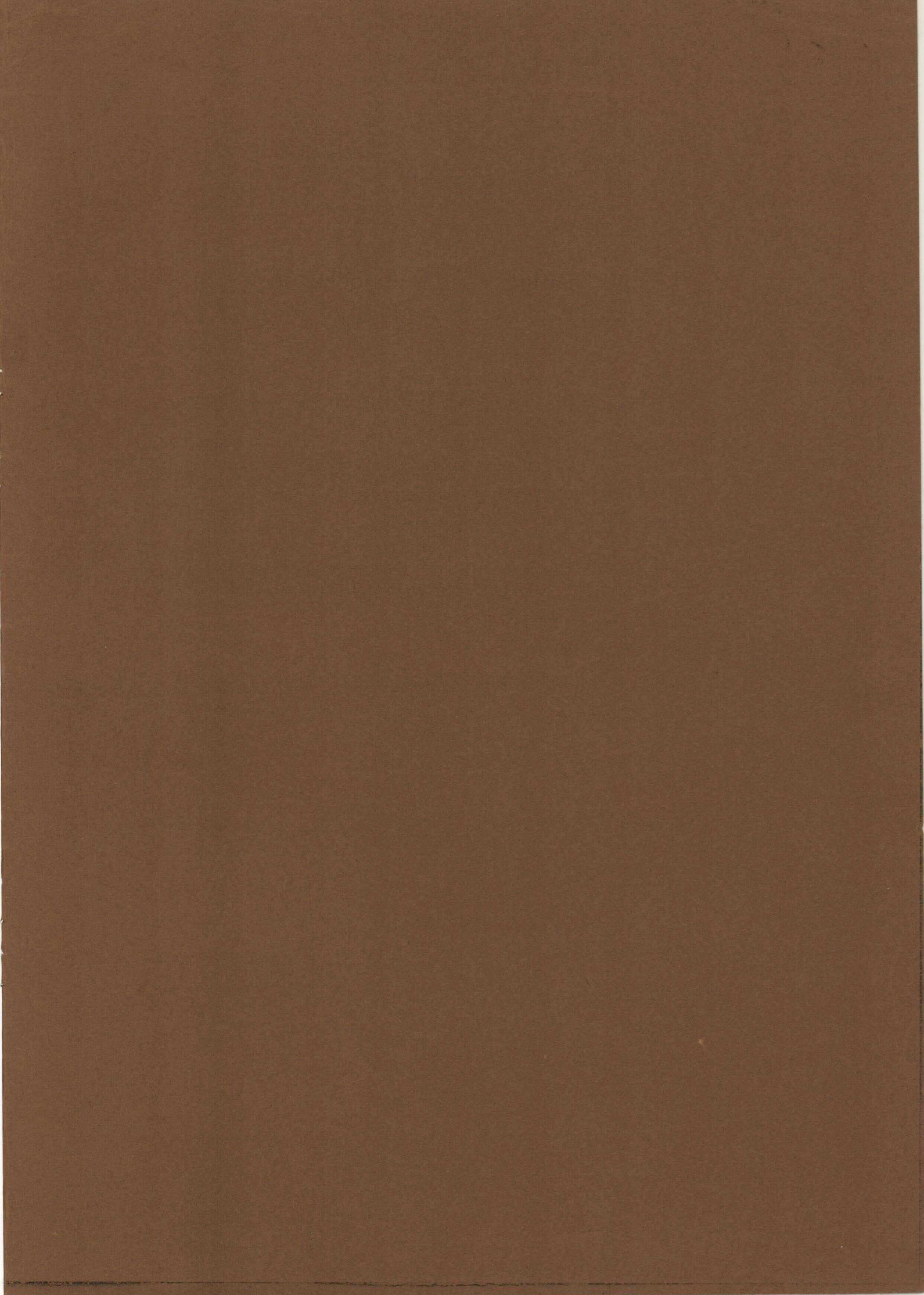
Never has the exhortation to eternal vigilance been more apt than in the area of conservation. The fine heritage that we enjoy in Knightsbridge has only survived because of the determination of many of its citizens that it should remain. Now, although we have a sympathetic Council at Westminster, there are still many threats to the area and dangers come, too, from other causes than the senseless demolition of old, beautiful and familiar buildings. We are offered unsuitable new edifices without charm that detract from their surroundings; there are constant attempts to increase the density of the area beyond that which it can bear; we are constantly assaulted by heavy through traffic in residential streets; there is inadequate

parking for local residents and an increasing garbage and pollution problem.

Added to all this there is a growing burden of heavy rates and increasing rents at a time when incomes are, at best, static. This is not just a problem for individuals, but a cause for concern for all those who wish the inner City to retain a vital community with a proper mix of citizens contributing to the life of the capital.

We, in the Knightsbridge Association, are aware of those difficulties and are doing what is within our power to come to grips with them. It is your support and involvement that will make possible the continual protection of the neighbourhood and, hopefully, the solution to some of its problems.

June 18, 1978 Neville Labovitch
12a Ennismore Gardens SW7



The Knightsbridge Association
21 Cheval Place, London, S.W.7

Chairman

Neville Labovitch MBE

Hon. Secretary

Carol Seymour Newton

Hon. Treasurer

Valérie de Fé

Chairman of Environment Committee

Geoffrey Challen CBE

Chairman of Membership Committee

Ray Salter