



KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2026

CHAIRMAN'S REVIEW



*Knightsbridge
is going soft*

Dear Members

As we come to the end of a gruellingly hot summer, stand astride the onset of Autumn and the arrival of a new Administration, Byron's short stanza from his poem *The Bride of Abydos* beckons: -

*Be thou the rainbow in the storms of life!
The evening beam that smiles the clouds away,
And tints to-morrow with prophetic ray.*

The heat will abate, nature will recover, and the Association will continue to search for the 'prophetic ray' be it in Brompton Road, Upper Rutland Gate or in Westminster Council's Draft Statement of Licensing policy, all of which are covered in more detail in this edition.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Ashley Rothstein as this Newsletter's new editor. Ashley is on the board of the PTA at Brighton College School in Princes Gardens. She is no newcomer to editorship and has already made a

timely contribution to the Association's response to the High Value Council Tax Surcharge consultation launched by the Ministry of Housing in June. She follows Carol Seymour-Newton's forty years of extraordinarily dedicated commitment as editor of our annual reports and newsletters. While welcoming Ashley, we will continue to draw on Carol's extensive knowledge and wisdom on local matters for as long as possible.

Technology

Carol's impending departure has spurred us to digitise annual reports from the millennium to the present day; and newsletters from as far back as 1978. Together, they provide an unparalleled social history of the Knightsbridge neighbourhood. You can glimpse the Brompton Road of the 1970s, its sloping "plage-like" pavement, the fishmonger with the marble slab next to Gloriette and Lord Roberts' Workshop

and, from that, begin to gauge the change that has occurred over the last half century. These documents will be appearing on our website over the next few weeks thanks to Carol's careful sifting of the archive.

Planning & Conservation committee

Francesco Brenta will be taking up Carol's role as chairman of the Planning and Conservation committee and, as if these changes were not enough, sadly our Treasurer Gary Lapidus will be re-locating to the United States at the end of the year after a short but productive tenure in-post. Change is always just around the corner, but it should not obscure the fact that many of our residents are '*permanent fixtures*' who have lived in the neighbourhood - if not at the same address - for upwards of thirty years. Review of the Government's council tax proposals brought this very much to the fore.

Council Tax

Responding to the High Value Council Tax Surcharge consultation forced the Association to reflect on the absurdity that those who bought flats in Knightsbridge thirty years ago were acquiring '*mansions*'. Properties then could be acquired for between five and seven times annual salary. Today, that ratio is closer to twenty times, caused largely by foreign investment inflows responding to other policy objectives over which residents had no control. The proposed criteria for access to HVCTS deferral options are pitched so low that those who qualify would likely be eligible for social housing!

The Association objected to the Government's 'Fairer Funding' proposals in August 2025 arguing that the funding formula needed to reflect costs borne by a capital city including the true cost of housing and services in Inner London; and that the transition period should be extended from 3 to 10 years. In July 2026, we heard that the impact of the Fairer Funding proposals would reduce Westminster Council's grant funding by just under half over the next four years leaving a funding gap of £100 million.

According to Councillor Fisher, "*central Government seems to be assuming we are going to raise Council Tax by 75 to 100 percent to make up the Council's immediate budget shortfall.*" A 75 percent increase in Council Tax when combined with the HVCTS or 'Mansion Tax' would mean that by 2028 H-rated properties would be paying

Council Taxes of around £7,100 per annum, an increase of 240 percent on today's charge.

Knightsbridge Partnership

The Knightsbridge Partnership has been successful in increasing footfall in Brompton Road. This is good for traders but brings increasing volumes of trade waste that end up on the corner of Brompton Road and Montpelier Street.

This is not good for residents who may have to walk past it two or three times a day. For residents, it is not the international reputation of London that is at stake, it is their daily amenity. Those who benefit most do not live here. It never used to be like this; and residents are questioning whether much heralded improvements to the public realm over the longer term – whose funding remains contingent on contributions from RBKC and Westminster – justify the degradation of the street scene in the short term.



Can Knightsbridge really qualify as an 'international destination venue' with pavements that look like this?

Upper Rutland Gate gardens

Upper Rutland Gate gardens fell into disrepair a long time ago and a short history of its unloved life follows on page 6. The Association tried on many occasions to breathe life into

this stranded asset, and I am pleased to report that recent initiatives appear to be bearing fruit. Following contact with the Council and indirectly with the garden's freeholder, we were successful in drawing attention to the garden's dilapidated state. Contractors were hired to level the undergrowth, remove unwanted furniture from the north end and install a combination padlock on the wicket gate. A recent conversation with the contractor revealed that a further inspection of the trees would take place shortly to ensure tree safety as advocated by the Association on many occasions in the past.

Meanwhile, the Association and residents with properties overlooking the gardens, met with Members and Officers from Westminster Council to explore how the garden could be managed by a residents' committee financed by a precept on the Council Tax for properties overlooking the garden. Following much chivvying, the Council are now contacting the owner and we await further feedback.

Rough sleeping

Next door at 2–8 Rutland Gate, (this is a proper 'mansion'), the rough sleeper Anders Fernstedt was the subject of a recent article in the Daily Mail. The building and its chequered history were examined forensically in a Daily Telegraph article of 26 October 2025, referenced in my review for our 2025 Annual Report. Since then, Anders' "shrine to homelessness" has expanded in the portico of this once grand building, as evidenced in photographs and further commentary on page 6. We now have a channel of communication with the building owner's managing agent thanks to forensic work by Cristiana Ionescu.

Iranian Embassy

I attended a meeting with Rachel Blake MP and residents from Kingston House East and North at noon on 27 July to review Police management of protests around the Iranian Embassy and the effect these protests continue to have on residents. One resident commented that *'this has been going on for forty-seven years, but the situation has deteriorated badly since December 2025'*. I have some sympathy with the remark having witnessed the SAS assault on the same Iranian Embassy building in 1979 to secure the release of police and other hostages taken by embassy staff.

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 received Royal Assent on 29 April. The key change is that a senior police officer must now consider *'relevant cumulative disruption'* when deciding whether a

protest may result in *'serious disruption to the life of a community'*. We have written to Rachel Blake MP urging pro-active use of this legislation to bring back normality for those living in these buildings. Further commentary on page 10.

The Royal Parks

Four heat waves have devastated parks across the land, no more so than in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens, as illustrated [above, below, or elsewhere in text]. Small trees are most vulnerable because large trees draw out what little moisture is left in the soil.



The Royal Parks hosted summertime concerts in Hyde Park again this year from 27 June to 12 July. The season announces itself to unwary residents as roars of appreciation rise from a crowd of sixty thousand and float across the summer airwaves. Unlike previous years, the evening of 3 July proved an exception with the throb of bass drumbeats penetrating deep into the southernmost Montpeliers.

Licensing

You may recall the Westminster After Dark consultations of 2025 presaged the review of the Borough's licensing policy. This protracted process concluded with a presentation of revised policy at the offices of Westminster Council on 23 July, attended by Paul Meitner for the Association. The outcome is reported on page 7.

Many of you will have taken a summer break by the time this reaches you. I hope the change has refreshed you and that you have been able to recharge to face the challenges ahead. Thank you for your continuing support and I look forward to meeting you in the street, on the dog walk or at our AGM at the Mandarin in January.

Melville Haggard
Chairman

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION REPORT

Francesco Brenta and Carol Seymour-Newton

© SQUIRE AND PARTNERS

The problems caused by the cyber-attacks on both local Councils earlier in the year now seem to have been sorted out and planning applications are once again proceeding in the normal way. Various major developments are wending their way through the Council planning departments, and some new ones have been submitted.

ONGOING PROJECTS

I KNIGHTSBRIDGE GREEN 44-56 BROMPTON ROAD

The developers are now going through detailed design work with a view to demolition commencing in mid-2027. The KA and agents for neighbouring buildings continue to hold monthly meetings with the developer. A Community Liaison Group (CLG) will be set up which will involve representatives from both Councils, TfL and wider residential and commercial interests to monitor the development as it progresses.

PARK TOWER HOTEL

101 Knightsbridge

The refurbishment and extension of the Park Tower Hotel has moved a step closer. The developers have confirmed that they now have the funds to proceed, and that the design process is continuing with the aim of submitting their Gateway 2 application under the Building Safety Act by the middle of next year. Members will recall from the spring that planning permission was granted in 2025, the Association having welcomed the improvements to the two-storey podium on the Knightsbridge frontage while opposing the substantial increase in height, which RBKC's planning committee judged to be outweighed by the scheme's merits.

LOWNDES HOTEL

Lowndes Square

A revised application has been submitted for redeveloping this hotel at the lower end of the square. The Association had previously raised objections to some aspects of the design, but considered the revisions were a distinct



Lowndes Hotel — CGI

improvement in both the materials proposed, which were more contextual, and the reduction in height although we still had concerns over the bulkiness of the façade facing Motcombe Street.

SOUTH KENSINGTON STATION



Following our report in the Spring Newsletter, two further applications have been lodged in connection with the redevelopment of the station, and these have aroused concern. One of the conditions of the planning permission granted on appeal in 2023 was that before redevelopment commenced, step free access to the ticket hall, platforms and the subway that links to the Museums had to be carried out.

The surrounding group of residents' associations (including the KA) will be holding the Council to these conditions.

HANS CRESCENT – PUBLIC REALM

Plans have been revealed to revamp Hans Crescent, the busy retail and hospitality street linking Harrods with Knightsbridge Underground Station. A joint venture between The Knightsbridge Estate and Harrods, designed by Andy Sturgeon Design (the practice behind the recent Sloane Street works), the scheme sets out to make the crescent greener, more welcoming and easier to enjoy on foot.

© HARRODS



The improvements include six new seating areas, new lamp-posts and better lighting, and an area set aside for temporary art installations, together with around 80 square metres of new planting and three new trees. Michael Ward, Harrods' managing director, said the project "creates an inclusive, welcoming communal space that elevates the shopper experience while prioritising sustainability," reflecting what he described as the store's long-term commitment to the stewardship of Knightsbridge. The Royal Borough is a partner too: Councillor Josh Rendall, lead member for transport, parks and clean streets, placed the scheme within the Council's "Amazing Spaces" programme and noted that the wider works would also deliver a new step-free entrance to Knightsbridge Underground Station. The project is due to be completed by autumn 2026.

NEW PROPOSALS

HARRODS

A major Listed Building application has been submitted for extensive alterations associated with a new Fine Watches and Fine Jewellery department. The proposals involve substantial interventions to the historic fabric, including new double-height spaces, escalators and lifts, structural alterations and changes to the Hans Road elevation, alongside the reinstatement of a number of historic features.



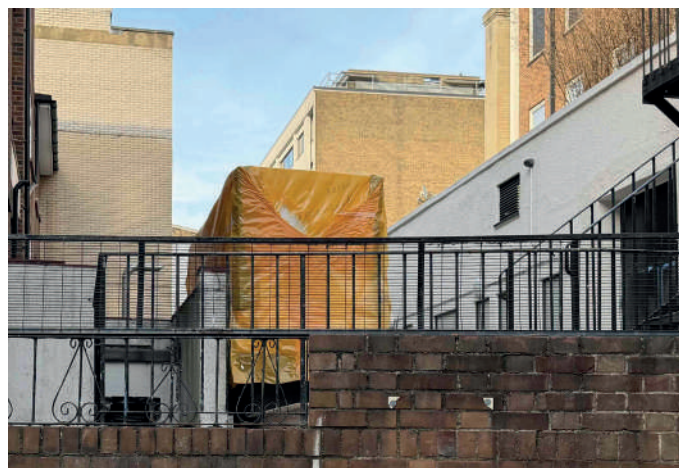
The KA will be considering carefully the extent of the interventions to the listed building and their impact on its historic character.

PRINCES COURT 88 Brompton Road

The owners of this substantial art deco block opposite Harrods applied to add an extra storey, which residents within the block and the KA opposed on grounds of height, massing and loss of amenity, and the precedent it might set along Brompton Road. At the time of writing, the application has been withdrawn.

180–186 BROMPTON ROAD

Planning permission has been granted for a change of use of the former NatWest branch to medical or health services, but refused for restaurants and cafés. The KA has objected to a separate application for a diesel generator (pictured, wrapped in orange) that would be an eyesore and sit within feet of residential windows. The RBKC planning committee deferred a decision pending a raft of further information and review.



UPPER RUTLAND GATE GARDENS



As a result of the KA contacting the Council earlier in the year asking them to check on the condition of the trees – members may remember the tragedy some years ago when a falling branch killed an innocent passerby – the Council contacted the owner's agent. This resulted in an immediate response – tree surgeons were sent in and the scrubby centre of the garden cleaned up.

In June members of the Planning Committee and representatives living round the Upper Garden had a meeting with WCC officers and ward councillors to explore once again whether a satisfactory conclusion could be reached for the future management of this much neglected garden.

The Council sent a follow up letter to the agent and we are awaiting a response.

One solution might be for the Council to exercise its powers under the Town Gardens Protection Act 1863. Without going into detail this would need a majority of two-thirds of the owners and occupiers of houses surrounding the garden requesting the 'Council to vest its management in a Committee of rated inhabitants'.

2-8 RUTLAND GATE

The Association has finally managed to contact the agent and is exploring what they can do to get rid of this eyesore. They tell us that they do clear it from time to time but it soon reverts to



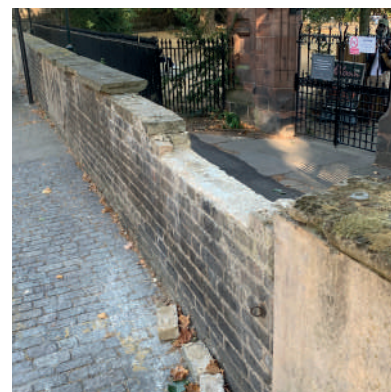
2-8 Rutland Gate

the same state. We have made further suggestions as to the actions that might be taken, and await their response.

ENNISMORE GARDENS MEWS

Cycling – a resident member wrote to the Association to report being knocked down by a fast-moving cyclist on the pathway linking the Mews with Brompton Road. We reported the incident to RBKC, pointing out that signs at both ends of the pathway stating 'Cyclists Dismount' are routinely ignored. After extensive correspondence with the Council, the affected pedestrian and the Association it was established that the Council would not be able to install a 'gated passageway' as this would impede the right of way for wheelchair users and disabled.

Brickwall repair – the long wall separating Ennismore Gardens Mews from the garden at the rear of Holy Trinity Brompton began falling into disrepair some years ago and has now reached a state of dilapidation calling for urgent attention. We wrote to the Director of Planning and Place at RBKC pointing out that in a previous era (circa 1999) the Council had agreed to take ownership of the wall on the grounds that *"the best way of maintaining this wall and preventing the problems recurring would be for the Council to take it into its ownership."* This is what happened, evidenced by the repairs at the wall's eastern end. The Strategic Head of Property and his team are now reviewing their records regarding ownership and maintenance responsibilities and we await to hear further.



Mews Arch – after a piece of masonry fell off earlier in the year, the Mews arch is currently undergoing repairs which are due for completion in September.



Ennismore Gardens Mews Arch

These are being undertaken by WCC, which is interesting since in 1994, when the Arch was similarly in need of repair, the Councils were unable to agree on responsibility – another grey area, as with the wall (see above). At that time RBKC, with the agreement of WCC, did the repairs.

RETROFIT AND HISTORIC BUILDINGS

Members of the Association attended Westminster City Council's recent retrofit workshop. The Council is seeking to make sensitive retrofit of Westminster's historic building stock easier, with an emphasis on a whole-building approach and lower-risk improvements before more substantial interventions; particular attention is also being given to the difficulties of retrofitting mansion blocks and flats. Also of interest, neighbouring RBKC has recently gone further by introducing a Local Development Order allowing qualifying slimline double-glazed replacement windows, including in flats, and is developing simplified consent routes for appropriate works to listed buildings.

LICENSING REPORT

Paul Meitner

As before, there have been few licensing applications to review but plenty to think about in relation to policy and regulatory changes.

WESTMINSTER CITY COUNCIL (WCC) REVISED STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY

WCC has consulted with Residents Associations (RAs) about amendments to the 2021 Licensing Policy (which must be updated every five years). The Association attended one of these consultation meetings at City Hall in July. The good news is that no major changes are proposed – it was described by one of the WCC officers present as a 'light refresh, to comply with legal responsibilities'. Most of the emphasis is on tidying up wording and reflecting changing market conditions. One of the strategic aims now is the promotion of economic growth, but there is no change to core hours or the other fundamentals of licensing process and we were heartened to see a section emphasising the

importance of local powers and responsibility. It remains to be seen how the new policy, to be published in September, interacts with the Mayor of London's Licensing Policy, due to be finalised by the end of December 2026.

LONDON STRATEGIC LICENSING CONSULTATION

The Association commented last time on the proposal that the Mayor of London be granted powers to 'call in' the final decision as to whether 'strategic' licensing applications should be granted, as part of the creation of a London-wide licensing policy. The underlying motivation seemed to be the desire to promote the hospitality sector and the nighttime economy.

In March 2026 Parliament approved the Mayor's power to 'call in' applications, so it is now part of the framework of the Licensing Act 2003. The GLA is consulting with local authorities and others as to how this new power should operate.

We and other Residents' Associations ('RAs') continue to seek clarity as to what makes a licensing application 'strategic' and the number that are likely to be called in by the Mayor's office.

LONDON NIGHTTIME TASKFORCE

As reported in the Spring newsletter, the Taskforce was created to 'manage and promote' London's nighttime economy. It included the creation of a permanent, independent London Nightlife Commission, to deliver the Taskforce's recommendations and drive the future of London's life at night. The Taskforce has since been rolled out and its primary purpose is clear – *"to protect, support and grow London's vital nighttime industries"*. Whilst acknowledging that nighttime noise complaints are a significant source of conflict between businesses and residents it prioritises economic benefits ahead of residential quality of life.

WESTMINSTER AMENITY SOCIETY FORUM (WASF) – MEETING WITH WCC, 3 JUNE 2026

The Association attended the above meeting, part of a periodic consultation between WCC and the RAs in the borough. It included a very good presentation from Amanda Rigby from the Covent Garden Community Association on the problems caused by Pavement Licences (PLs). These are essentially:

1. pedestrians being forced into narrow spaces and onto busy roads
2. disturbed sleep caused by nighttime activity and
3. noise of dragging tables and chairs on and off pavements.

We were all concerned by the lack of consultation in the process for granting new PLs and the lack of enforcement when breaches occur, made worse by 'shared spaces' for pedestrians and cyclists on many streets. She requested more robust enforcement of licence terms, specific guidance on how we can deal effectively with new PLs, also that they be added into the WCC 'Report it' app to record problems and that WCC listen to RA feedback when it arises.

WALTON CAFÉ 48 Walton Street SW3

As reported in the previous newsletter, we objected to this application, which involved tables and chairs (T&Cs) on the pavement until 10 p.m. Our view was this would result in late night noise, when the T&Cs were assembled and dismantled, and as such constitute a public nuisance, as well as a risk to public safety arising from obstruction of the pavement.

The application was adjourned twice by RBKC and eventually heard on 18 June. Despite 13 objections and the advocacy of Councillor Mary Weale it was approved with conditions, including the operation of an external management and dispersal plan and the closure of the doors after 9.30 p.m. when private events are being held.

BINGHATTI 197-205 BROMPTON ROAD

We reported on this application to place T&Cs outside the premises in the Spring newsletter. We objected, as the premises regularly have queues, making the pavement extremely congested. Unfortunately the application was granted.

LAW & ORDER REPORT

Anne Wright and Frances Blois

VICTORY AT LAST ON CAR MEETS

On the 30 July 2026 the High Court of Justice granted an injunction against car meets. The effect of the injunction is that any car meet will now be illegal across Hyde Park, Knightsbridge & Belgravia, Brompton & Hans Town Wards and St James's and the West End which also means that the Police will have the power to arrest those taking part. Those who breach the injunction also risk substantial fines or the seizure of their assets.

For several years, we have reported on the disruption caused to residents and nearby businesses by organised car meets on Exhibition Road. Although the Police and Council have carried out joint enforcement action, these measures have been limited in scope and have not been enough to prevent the gatherings.

This is only the second Car Meet Injunction to be granted in London and is a significant achievement made possible through the dedicated efforts of the wider Knightsbridge and Belgravia Police Teams - particularly by PC Paul Wyllie and PC Georgie Meadows – and Councillor Rachael Robathan – who championed this work over a good long 18 months.

RECENT LEGISLATION WHICH MAY AFFECT US

Although both our Police Teams in Kensington and Knightsbridge have reported a drop in anti-social behaviour and shoplifting offences in the past year the *Crime and Policing Act 2026* which received Royal Assent on the 29 April 2026 does provide additional support to the Police and as a consequence additional comfort to ourselves.

In summary the Act introduced and/or strengthened provisions dealing with:

1. Antisocial behaviour and retail crime

- **Respect Orders** have been introduced, enabling courts and police to impose stronger controls on persistent antisocial behaviour, including exclusion from specific areas such as town centres. These Respect Orders could be of assistance in or around the Iranian Embassy and protest targeted high

value retail establishments in Sloane Street and the Brompton Road.

- The creation of a **specific criminal offence of assaulting a retail worker**, enabling tougher penalties and custodial sentences.
- Police response to **shoplifting**, reversing the previous downgrading of so-called low-value (less than £200) theft and allowing more robust enforcement with a maximum seven-year prison sentence.

2. Expanded police powers

- **Drug testing on arrest** to better address repeat offending and drug-related crime.
- The introduction of new powers allowing police to **enter premises without a warrant** to recover stolen goods where their location can be verified using tracking technology (e.g. smartphones using tracking Apps such as Apple's Find My).
- The provision of **greater access to DVLA data** to assist in identifying suspects.
- A ban on equipment commonly used in serious crime, including **SIM farms** and certain vehicle-theft devices.

3. Serious violence, weapons and exploitation

- An increase in penalties for **weapons offences**, including the sale and possession of bladed articles, and created new offences linked to intent to cause unlawful violence.
- The introduction of specific offences targeting **child criminal exploitation** and "**cuckooing**" (taking control of a person's home for criminal purposes).

4. Violence against women and girls

- The creation of new offences addressing **spiking, intimate image abuse**, and elements of **online stalking**.
- The criminalisation of possession and publication of certain forms of **harmful pornography**, including material depicting strangulation or adults role-playing as children.

5. Protests and public order

- Expansion of police powers to impose conditions on protests by requiring consideration of the “cumulative impact” of repeated or concurrent demonstrations in the same area. Again, this could be of use in or around the Iranian Embassy.
- Introduction of new protest-related offences, including [concealing identity at a protest](#), and new restrictions around sensitive locations such as places of worship and private homes.

IRANIAN EMBASSY, RACISM and PROTEST MARCHES

Meetings with Rachel Blake MP, Police and residents near the Iranian Embassy have been arranged and well attended. Well informed police officers have explained what the constraints in current legislation are in redressing the balance between the right to protest and the right to use the highway unhindered and generally to “quiet enjoyment” of the residential environment. Changes to primary legislation to reflect changes in behaviour are necessary but are unlikely to be pursued currently although there has been some visible action on racial hatred following the North London stabbings and arson at Synagogues.

DOCKLESS BIKES

The new Leader of Westminster City Council Councillor Paul Swaddle has put into action a number of measures to keep our streets safer from dockless bikes.



- [Real time data sharing partnership agreed with Lime](#). For the first time the Council has been given live visibility of where every Lime bike is parked across Westminster so enforcement teams can target problem areas directly and take action with actual evidence.
- [Fixed Penalty Notices have almost doubled since May](#).
- [As at July 235 bikes have been seized from streets in Westminster](#). Bikes blocking pavements, obstructing dropped kerbs and making life harder for residents have been removed with the Operators paying for removal, storage and collection before the bikes are returned.
- [A Dockless Bike Operators Summit](#) was convened in July to agree binding parking standards and real accountability for how bikes are used on Westminster’s streets – the results of the Summit are not at the time of writing publicly available.

CURRENT PRIORITIES for our POLICE PANELS – BROMPTON AND HANSTOWN, and KNIGHTSBRIDGE AND BELGRAVIA

- [Anti-social Cycling](#) – to reduce anti-social cycling and related offences occurring around South Kensington station, Thurloe Street and Exhibition Road.

These areas have been highlighted as a hot-spot for offences such as cyclists contravening red traffic signals and pedestrian crossings, and cycling on the footway, causing danger and nuisance to pedestrians. This is being measured by the number of such incidents reported to police in these areas, as well as by the number of Fixed Penalty Notices issued for cycling-related offences. High-visibility foot and cycle patrols are in place to target enforcement at these identified hotspot locations

- [Robbery of Personal Property](#) in the areas of Knightsbridge across both boroughs around Brompton Road.

This is an issue across many affluent areas of London due to high value watches and jewellery and which our Police are working to address with high visibility patrols as deterrents as well as specific covert patrols by specialised units to target offenders.

- **Residential Burglary** particularly in the area of Belgravia where targeted patrols in the area of Lower Belgravia and the Eatons where Stop and Search is used where grounds exist.
- **Theft from Motor Vehicles** has increased across Knightsbridge and Belgravia with Prince Consort Road, Kensington Gore and surrounding roads being of main concern. Plain clothed and intelligence gathering patrols at key times and places monitor daily.

Lastly – our Police teams are very much promoting their new app **Met Engage** as a speedy way of keeping in touch and informed as

to what is going on in your part of the Ward – do think about it if you have not already taken part in this new venture: here is the hyperlink

<https://www.metengage.co.uk/>



THE ROYAL PARKS

SERPENTINE BRIDGE



Members will recall the damage done to the Grade II listed Serpentine Bridge when a vehicle, believed to have been racing along West Carriage Drive, lost control and ran along the bridge, causing extensive damage to the parapet and structure of the 1820s crossing that divides Hyde Park from Kensington Gardens.

The impact was severe enough to shift parts of the structure out of alignment, and the repair, carried out for The Royal Parks by specialist conservation contractors working in Bath stone

and lime mortar, with new cast-iron grates fabricated for the arches, has necessarily been a painstaking one. We are pleased to report that the restoration is now complete and the bridge is once again fully open.

DIANA, PRINCESS OF WALES MEMORIAL PLAYGROUND REOPENS

One of the most famous playgrounds in the world reopened on Wednesday 5 August, following a £3 million refurbishment by The Royal Parks charity. Opened in 2000 to commemorate the late Princess, who lived nearby at Kensington Palace, the Peter Pan–inspired playground drew over a million visits a year, but much of its original equipment, including the celebrated sailing ship, had reached the end of its life.

At its heart is a new galleon, 17 metres by 12, moored on a sandy beach, with crow's nests, a tunnel slide and a play telescope; a new treehouse with three climbing towers and an accessible walkway; a redesigned area for younger children; and a water-play feature built around a twelve-metre crocodile whose dams let children control the flow. Accessibility ran through the design, with wheelchair-accessible spaces, a new accessible path and raised tables,

while the new equipment uses sustainably sourced timber and the toilets have nearly doubled, two of them now accessible.



The new water play was suspended at the time this newsletter went to press, owing to the Thames Water hosepipe ban; we hope it will be flowing by the time you visit.

HYDE PARK TENNIS CENTRE and COURTS CAFÉ REOPEN

In February 2026 tennis and padel came under The Royal Parks' direct management, alongside its boating and swimming operations, under the new Royal Parks Sports and Leisure brand. The Hyde Park tennis centre closed for several months of refurbishment, with temporary facilities keeping the courts in play, and reopened in April. The Courts Café, operated by Colicci, now serves fresh sandwiches, salads and hot and cold drinks to eat in or take away.

The programme is broadly unchanged, pay-and-play bookings, coaching, holiday camps and private events, with beginners especially



The Tennis Centre

welcome, and this summer the charity partnered with the Lawn Tennis Association to launch Red Ball Tennis, an introductory format for adults. Income from Royal Parks Sports and Leisure supports the charity's work across the parks; more at sportsandleisure.royalparks.org.uk.

BST HYDE PARK

BST Hyde Park returned this summer with another successful programme of world-class live music and free community activities, welcoming thousands of visitors over three weekends in June and July. Headliners included Duran Duran, Garth Brooks, Maroon 5 and Mumford and Sons, among many others.



Duran Duran took centre stage

Between the ticketed weekends, the Open House programme again opened the park free of charge on weekdays, with highlights including the return of All Things Orchestral with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Hyde Park Darts Championship, and the first-ever 3k run around Hyde Park with Sir Mo Farah, alongside outdoor cinema, family entertainment, wellness and sports sessions and street food.



The Courts Café

The charity notes that it costs around £75 million a year to manage the parks, some 85 per cent of which it must raise itself. Major events across the eight Royal Parks are an important source of that income, which is reinvested in the parks, including projects such as the Diana Memorial Playground.

A note from The Royal Parks on sound levels: they are aware that on the weekend of 10–12 July some residents who are not normally troubled by the concerts could clearly hear them, and that KA members felt the music seemed louder than usual. They wish to assure residents that the sound was not turned up and that there has been no change to their sound management; rather, a strong easterly wind during the final weekend carried the sound towards Knightsbridge as had not happened on earlier weekends or in previous years. The Royal Parks and the organisers monitor levels throughout and will continue to work with acoustic specialists to keep within permitted limits and minimise disruption wherever possible.

SOUTH CARRIAGE DRIVE CYCLEWAY



As presaged in our Spring newsletter, the trial re-routing of the South Carriage Drive cycleway is now operating, as shown in the photograph. The north side of Queen Elizabeth Gate is now open for cyclists to pass through into the Park Lane cycle superhighway. We hope the new layout will reduce collisions between cyclists and pedestrians at this busy junction and, if the trial succeeds, open the way for the resumption of eastbound motor traffic on South Carriage Drive to relieve the severe congestion in Knightsbridge.

CULTURAL / LOCAL INTEREST

THE QUEEN'S TOWER RESTORED

The Queen's Tower, arguably Imperial College's most recognisable landmark, has emerged from a three-year restoration, reopening officially on 21 April 2026. The 138-year-old tower, nearly ninety metres tall, is the sole survivor of the Imperial Institute, opened by Queen Victoria in 1893; when demolition of the Victorian buildings was proposed in 1956, a campaign led by the then Poet Laureate, Sir John Betjeman, secured a compromise whereby the tower would stand while the Institute around it came down.

Because the tower is listed and parts of the brickwork were fragile, the scaffolding had to rise without touching the structure itself. The copper dome was renewed with recycled copper from Finland, gleaming now but destined to weather to the familiar green, and the finial regilded in gold leaf; the four putti crowning the tower were repaired and recarved. Half-way up hang ten bells, each named for a member of Queen Victoria's family and still rung on royal anniversaries by a band of campanologists, several of them Imperial staff and alumni, leaving the tower, in the College's own words, well placed to weather another 150 years.



BHARTI KHER AT THE V&A

From 20 July 2026 to 24 January 2027, the V&A presents *Bharti Kher at the V&A*, a free display of works by the British Indian artist, known for her fantastical hybrid sculptures exploring the body, identity, gender and culture. Four of Kher's works are shown in dialogue with the Museum's historic collections of European and South Asian sculpture, bringing a contemporary feminist and transcultural perspective to the galleries.

The centrepiece, for residents at least, stands outside: a four-metre bronze sculpture, *Gaia*, now installed in the Exhibition Road Courtyard.

Drawing on small South Indian Golu figurines and reimagining them as a monumental hybrid form, the work reflects on shelter, domesticity, and the body as a vessel of history and memory. Passers-by along Exhibition Road can see it in the courtyard until the display closes in January.



PHOTOGRAPH: DAVID LEVENE

Bharti Kher, Gaia (2026), V&A South Kensington

EVENTS PAST

Estella Shaw

THE GREAT EXHIBITION ROAD FESTIVAL

The Great Exhibition Road Festival is a free annual celebration of science and the arts held each summer in South Kensington. Over the weekend of 6–7 June, more than 57,000 people flocked to the area to enjoy events for all ages.

Visitors enjoyed hands-on workshops, talks, performances and installations from museums and cultural organisations including Imperial College London, the Natural History Museum, the Science Museum, the Royal Parks and the V&A. Whether exploring the stars through Bollywood dance, building a squishy textile robot or traversing Mars by tasting chocolate brownies, there was something for everyone.

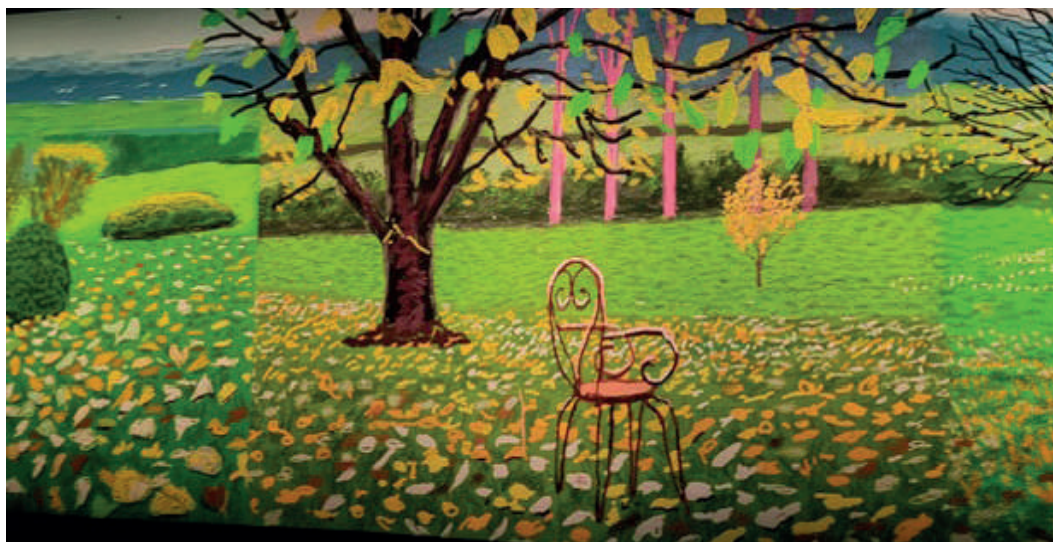
The Great Exhibition Road Festival returns on 19–20 June 2027.



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The Giants on the Move: A Puppet Street Parade on Exhibition Road

DAVID HOCKNEY AT THE SERPENTINE



Part of A Year in Normandy – David Hockney's digital 'tapestry' which wrapped around the Serpentine Gallery

This summer Serpentine North hosted *A Year in Normandie and Some Other Thoughts about Painting*, the first exhibition the gallery had ever devoted to David Hockney. Free to visit from March until late August, it paired new paintings with *A Year in Normandie* (2020–21), the artist's ninety-metre digital frieze charting the seasons at his former Normandy studio, shown in London for the first time and inspired in equal measure by the Bayeux Tapestry and the Chinese scroll.

The show acquired an unexpected poignancy when Hockney died at his home in London on 11 June, aged eighty-eight, one of the most influential British artists of his generation and, into his ninth decade, a tireless champion of new ways of seeing. Visitors in the closing weeks were able to take their leave of a remarkable body of late work in the setting of one of our own Royal Parks.

THE PROMS RETURN TO THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL

As every summer since 1895, the world's greatest classical music festival has once again taken up residence on our doorstep. From 17 July to 12 September, the BBC Proms 2026 brought more than eighty concerts to venues across the UK, most of them at the Royal Albert Hall. This year's season was themed around American music, marking 250 years since the US Declaration of Independence, and ranged far beyond the usual repertoire, from a late-night Prom honouring Paul Simon's *Graceland* to an evening of James Bond film music, alongside world-class visitors including the Met Orchestra's Proms debut and the Los Angeles Philharmonic under Gustavo Dudamel.

Every concert was broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and many were televised. But there is nothing quite like being in the room, and few residents are as fortunate in their proximity as ours. The festival culminates, as ever, in the Last Night on 12 September – that singular evening of flags, fanfares and unabashed sentiment that closes the summer in style

LONDON OPEN GARDENS

London Open Gardens, the annual fundraising weekend run by the charity London Parks and Gardens, returned this June with some 120 gardens taking part.



PHOTOGRAPH: TIM WEBB

Park Square and Park Crescent Gardens

Over one weekend each summer, ticket holders can discover hidden gems across the capital: gardens belonging to historic institutions, squares once home to world-renowned names, green

spaces familiar from film and television, and beautifully designed plots with breathtaking views over the city.

The weekend is also a chance to meet the head gardeners, volunteers and residents who care for these spaces. Behind it is London Parks and Gardens, a small charity with a big ambition: to protect and preserve London's green spaces for

future generations, with the weekend's proceeds supporting that year-round work.

The charity expects to make its first announcements about London Open Gardens 2027 in October. To keep up to date, readers can subscribe to its newsletter at londongardenstrust.org or follow London Parks and Gardens on Instagram and Facebook.

EVENTS

We are delighted to tell you that the Association has recently formed an events committee to work on a programme of events, beginning gently with the Backgammon Evening below. The plan is to hold events more frequently.

If you would like to suggest ideas to the committee, please contact natascha@knightsbridgeassociation.com.

BACKGAMMON EVENING

The first of these will be a Backgammon Evening at The Kensington Hotel on Monday 5 October. This will be a relaxed and enjoyable social gathering, an opportunity for Knightsbridge Association members to meet, connect and enjoy the timeless game of backgammon in a welcoming atmosphere. Absolute beginners are especially encouraged to attend, and no previous experience is required. Whether you are discovering the game for the first time or simply looking to enjoy a pleasant evening of conversation and entertainment, all members are warmly invited to join us. Further details will follow.

65TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

We are pleased to announce that the elegant Ballroom is already booked for Monday 11 January 2027. We are extremely grateful to the management of the Mandarin Oriental for once again making it available to the Association. Please keep the date in your diary. A charity to benefit from the raffle has yet to be selected.



The lucky winner of last year's raffle

USEFUL CONTACTS

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Cllr. James Small-Edwards James.small-edwards@london.gov.uk

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REPORT A FAULT

To report faults re lighting, pavements, potholes,
blocked gulleys etc. go to:
www.westminster.gov.uk/report-it
www.rbkc.gov.uk/contact-us/report-problem-borough

All information correct at the time of going to press.