

THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

June 2007

Dear Member,

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a Report on our first ever Survey of Members' Opinions – you'll remember we sent out the questionnaire with the March Newsletter. Perhaps the most important result of the Survey is that the response has been terrific. Of the questionnaires sent out 20.5% were returned – just over 1 in 5. This is far higher than we expected, and far higher than most such surveys achieve.

Moreover, 32% of those who responded took the trouble to write in additional comments, many of which – but by no means all – were complimentary. The questionnaires were, deliberately, anonymous, which means we do not know who the good (and not so good!) responses came from, and we therefore cannot answer them personally. However, as the Report shows, some issues were mentioned by quite a few members, and we shall be addressing these over the next few months.

From our point of view, we found the high response very encouraging, and we are extremely grateful for it – and now to our news reports:

Planning and Conservation

Number 1 Hyde Park (formerly Bowater House)

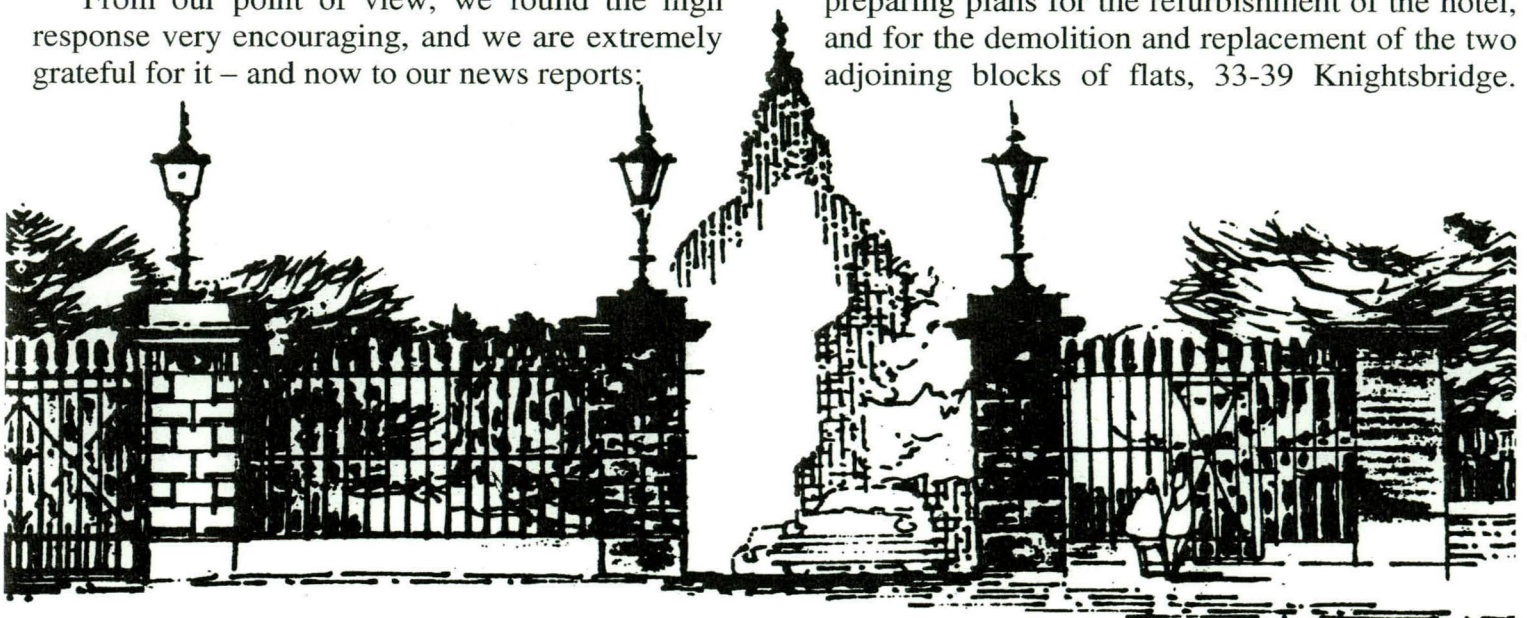
Though there is not much to see on the site, apart from tall cranes, good progress is being made on the piled foundations and the basement, and the construction of the floor slab for the new Edinburgh Gate commenced in April. Problems connected with traffic are dealt with under Transport and Environment, below.

Normandie Hotel

Demolition, scheduled to commence in the spring, has been delayed until later this year. A community liaison committee will be set up before it starts.

The Berkeley Hotel

We have held preliminary discussions with the architects, Richard Rogers Partnership, who are preparing plans for the refurbishment of the hotel, and for the demolition and replacement of the two adjoining blocks of flats, 33-39 Knightsbridge.



President: The Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge
Vice-President: The Lady Grade

Chairman: Winston Fletcher, *Vice Chairmen:* Michael Wright CMG RIBA FRICS, Edward Davies-Gilbert
Hon. Secretary: Carol Seymour-Newton, *Hon. Treasurer:* Christine Gilbertson

We have stressed the need to restrict the height of the new buildings to the general level of adjacent buildings. Designs have not yet been submitted for planning approval, but we have no objection to the demolition of the flats.

Basil Street Hotel

Regrettably the Basil Street Hotel closed some time ago, and plans have now been submitted to convert the building to office use. At the same time it was proposed to upgrade Hoopers Court – which runs between Brompton Road and Basil Street – by the inclusion of shops, facilities for sitting outside, and uplighting. We, and some of those whose flats overlook Hoopers Court, objected on grounds of noise and the detrimental effect on residents. As a result, we are glad to say the proposals have been amended and the Court will remain as it is apart from repaving in Yorkstone.

Natural History Museum

For some time we have been concerned about how often access to the gardens has been restricted as one event follows another. In April an application was made for the closure of both East and West gardens for a period of six weeks, to accommodate temporary buildings for London Fashion Week. We have objected, believing the closure of the gardens, which are vital to the setting of this fine building and are greatly enjoyed by visitors to the Museum, is unacceptable – not least because the Fashion Week has nothing whatsoever to do with the Museum itself. Moreover, the activity associated with the show can cause unwelcome disturbance to nearby residents.

Imperial College Centenary Celebrations

The Centenary Staff Party is on Wednesday 11th July in Princes Gardens, from 2pm-8pm with music, a bar and food. The garden will be closed to the public.

Exhibition Road

We reported in our last Newsletter that this Project has been stalled due to lack of funds – and it still is. The planners are therefore now concentrating on re-organising traffic flows south of Cromwell Road, especially around South Kensington Station, where the narrow pavement by the north exit causes problems for both traffic and pedestrians. High priority should be given to this, irrespective of the future of the Exhibition Road Project itself. RBKC remains committed to going ahead with the Project next year, and there is to be a public information exercise this autumn.

Brompton Estate

Changes to this part of Brompton Road continue, with the loss of further neighbourhood shops. No 217, previously occupied by Sketchley and Timpson, has received planning permission for a new shopfront and internal alterations to increase the retail space. With so many changes taking place it is vital Brompton Estates should get the right mix of replacement shops, which residents – as well as visitors – need.

Hyde Park

Trees – following the January storm damage, KA Executive Committee agreed to make a donation of £1,000 towards tree replacement, and invited members to contribute personally if they wished. Many of you did so, and Sara Lom, the Royal Parks Foundation Chief Executive, has written thanking us – and particularly asking us to pass on her thanks to members who generously made additional personal contributions.

The Barracks – we have objected to a British Horse Society proposal to use part of the Barracks' perimeter wall to display 112 steel plaques with the names of people and horses included in the Society's 'Hall of Fame'. The scheme has the Royal Parks' blessing, but we believe it wrong to use part of this prominent building for what is, in effect, an advertisement for the British Horse Society and its sponsor.

Summer Pavilion – a temporary pavilion will again be erected in front of the Serpentine Gallery during the summer months. Every year a well-known architect, usually from overseas, is invited to design a pavilion that is more of an architectural showpiece than a practical café (during the day) and a venue for social and cultural events (in the evening). The freedom given to the architects has resulted in some highly original designs being built, and this year's building by two Scandinavian architects is no exception.

Christmas Market – instead of the Funfair which has been held in North Carriage Drive for the last two Christmases, the Royal Parks are proposing a different type of event this year, to be held in Serpentine Road. This will include a skating rink, a Christmas market and a number of seasonal activities, running from 24th November to 6th January. It should be both quieter, and more attractive, than the Funfair.

Events in Hyde Park

14th - 17th June: Wireless Festival concerts – estimated numbers 25,000, on the Parade Ground 3pm - 10.30pm daily.

23rd & 24th July: Hyde Park Calling Festival concerts - estimated numbers 45,000 on the Parade Ground. 2pm – 10.30pm daily.

Setting up and taking down: 4th - 29th June.

6th - 8th July: Tour de France - TfL People's village 7th - 8th July; prologue 7th July.

Setting up and taking down: 2nd - 13th July

15th July: Capital 10km run - estimated numbers 10,000.

Setting up and taking down: 13th - 16th July.

22nd July: Elite Triathlon, London 2012 warm up event - low numbers.

Setting up and taking down: 21st - 22nd July

25th August: Notting Hill Carnival Steel Band competition - on Parade Ground 7-10.30pm

26th - 27th August: Caribbean Cultural Quarter - music on bandstand, exhibition tents, food stalls.

27th August: Caribbean Events - GLA to run Carnival related event on Parade Ground.

Setting up and taking down 22nd - 28th Aug.

Please note there will be Road Closures in the Park associated with all these events

(Events later this year will be published in the September newsletter)

KA and other Associations have been urging the Council to reduce the permitted level of decibels, and to ensure this level is not exceeded. WCC 24 hr Noise Line for complaints: 7641 2000
Parks tel. no. during events only 07896 296941

Miscellany

Petition re Repairs to Listed Buildings - VAT is payable on repairs to Listed Buildings though not on alterations, which has always been an anomaly. A petition has been mounted on Number 10's website, and we urge those with internet access to sign it. It runs to the 11th May 2008 <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/VATlifthishistic/>

Rutland Gate Wall - has now been reinstated and is looking good. It would look even better if the railings, removed during the war, could be put back on top of the wall....

Transport and Environment

Air Quality

Please support our Campaign for Clean Air in London by signing our petition to the Prime Minister at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/LondonCleanAir/>. It is in all our interests!

Number 1 Hyde Park - Major road works at Scotch Corner

Major road works are expected to start at Scotch Corner in early June to accommodate gas main diversions, the Edinburgh Gate move and generally to improve traffic flows. The works will continue for several months and will involve the closure of Edinburgh Gate at the beginning of the works and the subsequent reopening of a single lane replacement at the western end of the redevelopment later this year as the works end. Pedestrian access along the southern edge of the redevelopment is expected to cease for an extended period, to prevent pedestrians crossing the junction in an unsafe manner to reach Hyde Park.

We have been assured that, during all these road works, signposting will be agreed with TfL to warn traffic and pedestrians of the restrictions, advising them of alternative routes.

We await final confirmation that the important right turn from Knightsbridge around Scotch Corner into Brompton Road will be implemented with these road works.

Tree Preservation Orders

WCC is committed to working with the Royal Parks to protect the local environmental heritage, including our trees. A Tree Preservation Order for 10 trees in South Carriage Drive is provisionally scheduled to come before a Planning Sub-Committee on 28 June. Anyone concerned about the possible loss of these trees, adjacent to the Bowater House redevelopment, should write to "Planning, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP" well before that date.

Tube maintenance

Lastly, we have been told track maintenance is planned on the London Underground west of the Hyde Park station, which should improve the smooth running of trains.

Law and Order

Police Priorities

Our neighbourhood police teams continue to focus on their vital priorities: begging, anti-social behaviour and residential burglary. Great effort is going into dealing with the massive influx of south-eastern European beggars and thieves who now plague Central London. Over recent months the police have also reduced the number of traditional beggars and rough sleepers in the Knightsbridge area, working closely with the Homelessness Outreach teams.

An important aspect of police work is the distribution of crime prevention literature (pick pocketing and theft of unattended property) to shops, cafés and the museums. 65,000 leaflets will be distributed throughout the summer, targeted mainly towards tourists and visitors, who tend to be the victims of these crimes.

Distraction Crimes

Fortunately residential burglary remains low – though it does occur - and snatch is also almost non-existent. But there is a real problem with distraction thefts from cash machines. A group will approach a customer who has just input a PIN, distract them with maps or stupid questions, and use the resulting confusion to press the button and make off with the cash. These thefts naturally occur in the street rather than inside bank premises. Another street trick is to drop a fake gold ring in front of a victim. The suspect points this out and then proceeds to pick the victim's pocket as he/she bends down to retrieve it. Similar distraction thefts from bags are also occurring increasingly in cafés and coffee shops – don't allow yourself to be distracted! The police are also receiving an increased number of reports relating to people being 'dipped', amidst the pushing and shoving as they get on and off of buses.

The KA Law and Order Committee has regular contact with the police, and we can always pass on any concerns or information if requested.

Licensing

KA has achieved several positive results in opposing unreasonable extensions to opening hours, but has now seen a decision go against it. We supported residents who objected to the Wellington Club at 116 Knightsbridge staying open to 2am. Ten local residents, as well as the police and Westminster's Environmental Health team, submitted objections on the ground of increased noise and disturbance, but WCC's Licensing Sub-Committee nonetheless granted the extended hours, albeit with some conditions attached. In their decision, the Sub-Committee pointed out that none of the objectors attended the hearing to put their case. So it looks as though in future objectors should not only write, but also be available in person to state their opposition.

Cleansing

We know how important this is to members – see the Summary of members responses enclosed. I am therefore happy to announce that following the very sad death of Frances Rice (see below) committee member Dr Klaus Leist has

volunteered to take on responsibility for liaison with the Councils regarding all aspects of street cleansing.

Social Events

Tuesday, 15th May: Reception and Lecture on the Forbidden City of Beijing, at St Wilfred's Hall, The Oratory: This was another very popular and successful evening with all tickets sold.

Future KA Events

Thursday 20th September: Reception at the Serpentine Boathouse and cruise on the Solarshuttle: Members will be invited for an evening cruise on the Serpentine, with wine and snacks in the boathouse. Details to follow.

Bonhams Private View: Date and details to follow.

Thursday 20th October: Scottish Evening & Dinner at the Caledonian Club.

Tuesday 11th December: Annual General Meeting at the Royal College of Music.

Other Events

9th & 10th June: London Garden Squares weekend - 160 London Gardens open to the public on one or both days. For further information visit www.opensquares-loirevalleywines.org

15th - 28th June: The Royal College of Art's 'The Great Exhibition 2007'.

For further information visit: www.rca.ac.uk

It is with great sadness that we learned of the death of Frances Rice at Easter. She had served on both the Executive and Planning Committees for nearly 30 years, and had also done sterling work for many years liaising with both local Councils on the uphill battle over street cleaning, about which she cared passionately.

Finally, I would like sincerely to thank, as always, the members of the KA committees who put in so much work on behalf of the neighbourhood - and to thank you all, for reading.

With best wishes


Winston Fletcher, Chairman

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