



THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

March 2012

Dear Member

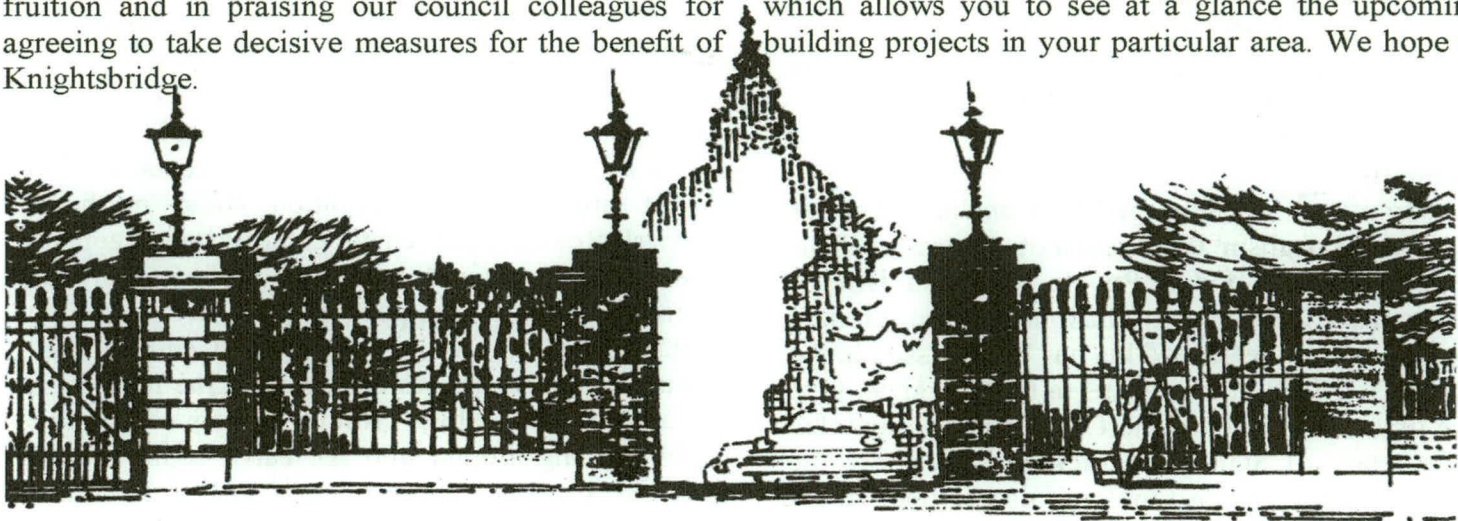
If it is true to say that fifty is the new forty, we can safely say that life for The Knightsbridge Association is just beginning as we enter our 51st year. It was truly a privilege for me to preside over the festivities for our half century and it was a great pleasure to see so many of you during the course of last year.

As ever, your committees have been hard at work tackling the challenges that are thrown at us daily. You will read about many of them in the following pages but one development does deserve special mention. At the instigation of The KA, Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea have been holding formal meetings to shape a joint plan to manage Brompton Road, particularly in the summer months. Attended by both council leaders and a delegation of councillors and officers from each, the so-called "Knightsbridge Summits" have already resulted in coordinated plans to deal with pedicabs, license infringements and a communications policy aimed at summer time visitors. We have held two summits so far and the next one is planned for late spring. I am extremely proud of our committee members for their perseverance and hope you will join me in thanking them for bringing this effort to fruition and in praising our council colleagues for agreeing to take decisive measures for the benefit of Knightsbridge.

On an administrative note, the Treasurer has asked me to point out that many members are paying incorrect amounts for their annual dues to The KA. It may be that you have changed bank accounts or that you have not examined your standing orders in a while, but either way, it would be extremely helpful to her, and therefore to all of us, if you could make sure that your instructions are fully up to date. As you know we have an obligation to provide accurate accounts and our auditors will take a dim view on any discrepancy between the number of members we have and our membership income.

Over the course of the coming year, I will personally be leading an effort to review our Constitution. Perhaps you were not even aware that we had one? It is a document that has served us well for fifty years, but changing times mean that we need to bring it up to date. If you have any suggestions on what it should look like, I would be very happy to hear from you – both the Constitution and a link to email suggestions to me are on the website (www.knightsbridgeassociation.com).

If you have not yet registered on the website, please do so at once. In the members area, you will see our completed Planning Application Search Tool, which allows you to see at a glance the upcoming building projects in your particular area. We hope to



President: The Lord Marshall of Knightsbridge

Vice-President: The Lady Grade

Chairman: Yoshi Nishio, *Vice-Chairmen:* Edward Davies-Gilbert, Carol Seymour-Newton,

Hon. Treasurer: Phyllis Lusher.

broaden the scope of this in the coming year to include search for the details of licensed premises – enabling the ‘one click’ reporting of infringements and so forth – road closures and other issues of concern to our members. You have no doubt noticed that I bring up the website every time I write. But it really is the case that the more people use it, the better and more useful it will become. I know that some of you have been a bit flummoxed by the registration process, but please don’t give up – it is far from perfect but it is fit for purpose and will improve over time. As we look forward to the next fifty years, I have no doubt whatsoever that the website will be an integral part of and indeed the focus of the work we do at The Knightsbridge Association.

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION

Exhibition Road

The controversial shared surface scheme was completed in November last year and officially opened in February by Mayor Boris Johnson. Concerns were immediately expressed about safety aspects, while the pristine surface has quickly become badly spattered with chewing gum and stained with oil and tyre marks, which has resulted in RBKC already having to spend substantial extra funds on cleansing and traffic management. The Roadway will be used during the Olympics as a gateway to Hyde Park and it will be closed for part of that time for the “Exhibition Road Show”. This Event is being organised by RBKC and will consist of a range of entertainments to include: music, aerial choreography, acrobatics and street performances. 30,000 people are expected at any one time but with a daily total of 100,000 people. The KA has requested a robust stewarding plan, no excessive road closures and that the organisers guarantee vehicular access at all times for residents. Despite having been given assurances by RBKC to the contrary, many local residents are understandably fearful that Exhibition Road will be seen as an ideal large scale venue by event organisers in the future. We are keeping a watching brief.

Basements

Attempts to include legislation on basements as part of the Localism Bill were not successful. This was disappointing and a Private Members Bill on Subterranean Development has now been brought forward by Lord Selsdon. This has been passed in the House of Lords but there seems to be little appetite to make time for the Bill in the Commons. We feel that the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, should ask the Government to provide time and also to remove the “permitted development” status from such work. The problem is that although in conservation areas

planning permission is required and planners do consult neighbours and can attach the conditions necessary to protect them, it is otherwise “permitted development” and uncontrolled. Owners are entitled to have Party Wall Agreements with any neighbours carrying out works within certain distance to their property and so they should make contact as soon as they believe work is being carried out. Costs of these agreements are met by the party doing the works. Last year The KA commissioned a comprehensive Basements Policy Document and this was sent to WCC as our submission for the City Management Plan in the Local Development Framework. We feel that any excavation should be in proportion to the existing house and with no more than 50% of the area under gardens. We are using this document as the basis of all our lobbying at WCC and RBKC. Elsewhere, The Ladbroke Association has produced a four point “wish list”, which we support.

Natural History Museum

The KA joined other associations in opposing the over use of the East Lawn at the Natural History Museum (NHM). East Lawn was part of Sir Alfred Waterhouse’s original design for the setting of what is now considered one of the most important buildings of the Victorian era. Our concern has been the proliferation of events and the amount of time that the East Lawn is neither green nor accessible to the general public. We were alarmed by the damage and the downtime for the Ice Rink - open for 3 months and requiring at least a month for recovery before being re-turfed. We have been trying to find the right balance. Although our views have been supported by English Heritage, the Victorian Society and the Open Space Society, frustratingly, they appear to have fallen on deaf ears.

Museum Lane

On 22nd December the NHM submitted plans to alter radically Museum Lane, the service entrance to the NHM and Science Museum bordered by two lawns. The plan specifies new lighting and a catering unit. Following a consultation we objected to the scheme on the following grounds: unacceptable 59% loss of green space; Exhibition Road north of Cromwell Road should remain catering/cafe free; and Museum Lane should not be used for events. Problems of noise, disturbance and litter would be inevitable, and we would lose a local and national amenity. Furthermore, we couldn’t see the need for a lighting scheme, which would merely encourage people to hang around into the early hours and no doubt be used to encourage its use for events. RBKC’s decision is awaited.

Hyde Park Events Licence and the Olympics

Numerous complaints about the level of noise and the poor stewardship of last year's events led WCC to review the licence for events in Hyde Park. As a result from 2013, the number of events is being reduced from 13 to 9 with no more than four having capacity crowds of 65,000 and the remainder capped at 50,000. This is a welcome change. Sadly the noise limits remain at 75 decibels (vs hoped for 73). There will be extra monitoring, especially of low frequency noise, as the heavy beat can penetrate as far away as St John's Wood and cause particular misery to residents. Note that these limits will not be imposed on the events in Hyde Park this year, including the free concerts during the Olympics in July.

Kensington Palace

Kensington Palace has undergone a major £12 million transformation in time for Diamond Jubilee and the Olympics. It re-opens to the public on Monday, 26th March.

Bulgari Hotel and Residences

The work on the hotel and residences has almost been completed and the public opening will be towards the end of May. The hotel consists of 85 rooms and suites and 2 penthouse residences. The 6 levels of basement include a ballroom, function rooms, a spa, gym, and 25m long swimming pool. During its construction The KA was part of the Community Liaison Group that was set up to explain progress and to help iron out problems that arose during the course of the works.

6 Trevor Place and 7 Montpelier Square

Last month the back extension of 6 Trevor Place collapsed while undergoing extensive building works. Following calls from neighbours and The KA, WCC, together with the Health and Safety Executive, have put a ban on the present builders continuing work on the house until the exact cause of the collapse is known. There is concern that neighbouring garden walls have been undermined and may also collapse. A fire in 7 Montpelier Square has caused extensive damage to the building. An electric blanket has been blamed but an investigation is underway.

LAW AND ORDER

Out of Town during the Olympics?

While some people are looking forward to events this summer, many residents will be leaving town for their summer holiday and are concerned that their homes will be empty and at risk. The press frequently report disturbing incidents of squatting so we are

continuing our correspondence with Mark Field MP and the Housing Minister, Grant Shapps as the Government has promised to make squatting a criminal offence. Meanwhile, you are advised to alert your neighbours if your property is likely to be empty for a long time so they can report any suspicious activity. To protect your home – against burglars or squatters - make sure that your windows and doors are securely locked, especially basements.

Pedicab Regulation

Neither the Metropolitan Police nor TfL has the power to regulate or license pedicabs at present. Such regulation would require a change to national legislation but Boris says he is determined to tackle irresponsible pedicab drivers who break the rules or cause a nuisance. The Law and Order Committee is working with the police and councils who are cracking down on anti-social operators and getting dangerous or unroadworthy pedicabs off the road. The influx of pedicabs into Knightsbridge is seasonal, so after the success of operations last summer plans are in place for more action this year.

Not so supercars

The area around Brompton Road always becomes busy pre-Ramadan with an influx of wealthy visitors bringing their supercars, which have become an annual nuisance to residents. The issue of entry of these vehicles at UK borders remains frustrating, as discussions between the police and customs has only served to highlight resource issues that mean only a small number of vehicles entering the country are actually checked. However, the Safer Neighbourhood and Traffic Enforcement Teams are taking our concerns very seriously and joint operations will take place to see not only that these vehicles (an indeed all cars driven in Knightsbridge) are properly insured and that their drivers actually have a Driving License.

Shisha Smoking

This has become a major problem on the raised pavement of Brompton Road. The cafes can charge £20-£30 for shisha so it encourages them to stay open later as they can make a profit without selling alcohol or food. The smoke and the hot charcoal used to light them are health hazards. All this despite license conditions specifically forbidding the placement of these pipes on the pavement. Despite frequent reports to councils, enforcement action has so far been perfunctory at best.

Cycling on the Pavement

Residents continue to complain about the number of cyclists who use the pavement instead of the road.

Even though cycling on a footpath is not a Met priority, residents can be assured that our local police are fully aware of our concerns and bikers are issued with fixed penalty notices if caught on the footpath. Unfortunately it appears that most Boris bikers are unaware of the law.

Beware Petty Crime

Pickpocketing and Handbag Theft are rife in the cafes on Brompton Road where professional thieves, mostly male, often target personal possessions such as handbags and laptops. Members of both Safer Neighbourhood Teams regularly visit shops and cafes giving advice and training to staff and warning customers not to leave their property unattended but the statistics are still too high. Clever and professional thieves are difficult to catch and even when convicted are often given lenient, short or suspended sentences.

"Lebanese Loops" are strips of metal hidden in cash machines that prevent cards from being returned. Avoid withdrawing money at night or in deserted areas. With the **"Brass Ring" Scam** victims are shown a yellow metal ring, seemingly with a hallmark, and asked if they might want to buy the 'gold ring'. Needless to say, the ring is a plumbing fitting worth no more than 40p. **Car Crime** – don't leave anything of value in your car, even if hidden or locked out of sight. Thieves are now able to "clone" the signal from your remote key fob, returning to your vehicle at a later time to remove valuables or simply to drive it away.

Change of Legislation

On 15th January 2012 the Metropolitan Police Authority ceased to exist. On a day-to-day basis the changes will have little obvious effect. The new Commissioner, Bernard Hogan-Howe will retain responsibility for operational policing. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor (Policing and Crime) will be directly accountable to the public for policing performance.

AGM Raffle

The proceeds of the champagne raffle at the 2011 AGM were divided between Crisis at Christmas and The Mayhew Animal Home, where the number of cats and dogs looking for homes is at record levels. A very generous donation from a KA member topped up the donation to £500 – gratefully received by the rescue centre.

Congratulations

Due to the vigilance of residents and excellent work of our Safer Neighbourhood and Parks Teams we are happy to report that Knightsbridge remains one of the safest areas of London.

OTHER BUSINESS

Change of Leader at Westminster City Council

In January Cllr Colin Barrow announced that he would be stepping down as Leader of Westminster City Council in March. He became Leader in 2008 and has since led WCC during a time of great challenges and almost unprecedented change. Cllr Philippa Roe, one of our Knightsbridge & Belgravia ward councillors, was elected Leader of the Conservative Group at a meeting on 29th February and will have been confirmed by a full council meeting on 6th March. Philippa has been a tremendous supporter of The KA, and our congratulations go to her.

KA Dues

As mentioned in the Chairman's introduction, please take a moment to check with your bank the status of your Standing Order. Many members are paying an incorrect sum. The annual dues are £20 Single, £30 Household and £40 Corporate. Thank you.

KA EVENTS

We do not have any functions planned during the summer events. Some members have suggested getting into the spirit of things by holding a garden party to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee – if anyone would like to volunteer to organise this, please get in touch with our events organiser, Gill Tickner (gill.tickner@knightsbridgeassociation.com). We hope to have a more casual event in the spring, details of which will follow.

For now, do put in the diary:-

MOSIMANN'S Black Tie Dinner – 5 September

By popular demand, and following our very successful dinner there two years ago, we are planning to return to this fantastic private members' club in Belgravia. Details will follow nearer the time but numbers will be strictly limited to 50 so do book early.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 11 December
6pm Concert Hall, Royal College of Music.

Yoshi Nishio

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