



KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

SPRING 2014 NEWSLETTER

Dear Member

Noah's journey in his Ark as described in the book of Genesis lasted for 370 days – 150 days of flooding and a further 220 days while the world dried out. While animals embarking two by two and gopher wood have not been so much in evidence in the south of England, the timing has so far been remarkably similar. Let us hope that life can now return somewhat to normal for all those devastated by these conditions.

In Knightsbridge, we have been fortunate in only having to deal with problems on a non-biblical scale. Like many in the central postcodes our main and increasing concern has been the near obsession with basement excavations in residential properties. The arguments are by now well established: the seemingly “easy money” that can be made by adding new square footage against the nuisance and damage, both physical and financial to properties nearby. More and more, there are instances of damage being caused not just to

the property next door to the incessant pneumatic drilling but to houses further away that are still affected by the vibrations. Adjacent properties do have some consolation in that party wall agreements can provide for compensation for collateral damage, although this hardly compensates for the loss of amenity caused by noise, dust and heavy construction traffic over many years. But houses further afield have little or no redress; indeed a claim on their own insurance will likely result in rising premiums.

To be fair, the councils have not been entirely oblivious to these problems, however. Early last year, Kensington & Chelsea published their new basement policy, closely followed by Westminster with its own version a few months later. While there are still legal hurdles to their full adoption (unsurprisingly the proposals are being vigorously contested by well funded basement developers) there is a growing feeling that we may have finally



Vice-President: The Lady Grade

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

Treasurer: Olivia J Cox.

reached a tipping point, and that some relief for long suffering neighbourhoods may actually be in sight.

Meanwhile the café 'monoculture' of Brompton Road shows no sign of abating. We recently conducted a survey of the main commercial zone, the 700 or so metres from Scotch House corner to the V&A and were somewhat amazed that there were 59 separate licensed premises offering food of one sort or another. Whereas in the past, the class use order gave some protection from change of use from A1 (retail) to A3 (food), recent changes in government policy have removed this protection. Shop after shop has closed and re-opened almost immediately as a café.

But here too there is some light at the end of the tunnel. At our instigation, Westminster and K&C have been convening about once a quarter for what has come to be called The Knightsbridge Summits. Here, councillors, officers, the police and other stakeholders can freely exchange views and try to come up with best practice solutions to common problems, primarily focussing on the 'Brompton Road Problem'. Progress is slow. But progress is being made.

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION

M.O.D. PROPERTY SALES

Brompton Road Station (Brompton

Rd end of Cottage Place). The old underground station has been bought by a wealthy Ukrainian for "in excess of £35million", with plans to turn it into a residential compound. We assume that there will be no need for the usual basement excavation since the underground tunnels are already in place!

Meanwhile the KA and the Brompton Association have jointly submitted an application for Listed Building status in view of the station's considerable historic significance both with regard to the development of the Piccadilly Line and its use as the headquarters for the Army's 1st Anti-Aircraft division in wartime Britain. Listing would not prevent development but would ensure that certain features, such as the oxblood tile façade would be retained.

Hyde Park Barracks Reports suggest that the asking price is £600m, which many feel is too cheap. We understand that the MOD has received several offers of interest, from all the usual suspects. The KA fervently hopes that the Barracks will be with us for a long time to come and that the strict conditions for any developer of the site, including the requirement to provide the Household Cavalry an alternate site with more space, better facilities and a suitable location close to Buckingham Palace to house 300 men and up to 240 horses, will prove too onerous.

V&A COURTYARD

The museum is well on the way to raising the full £42m needed to fund this exciting project, which they anticipate will be opened to the public in 2017.

THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ESTATE

In February members of the Planning Committee again met with representatives of the Estate to be updated on their evolving plans for this substantial block of property. They are currently upgrading their service yard – accessed off Basil Street – and are working on plans for redeveloping nos. 33 and 35 Brompton Road. No. 33 is the ugly modern building straddling the entrance to Hooper's Court.

Basil Street Fire Station

Despite vociferous protests, the fire station sadly closed in January. Although part of the Estate, it has been on a long lease which is now up for sale. Following a study commissioned by the KA in 2006 this was one of the buildings put forward for listing. English Heritage agreed to list three others, 39-41 Brompton Road, 4a & 5 Sloane Street and Lincoln House, Basil Street, but not the fire station.

BASEMENTS

KA Proposal We have continually lobbied for better regulation of these disruptive excavations. Back in 2011, we published a position paper on the subject, and while there has been

some improvement to conditions that have to be endured by neighbours during the 12 months plus that these projects take, there is a lot more that we feel councils need to address. We have put together some more specific proposals that we expect to present to councillors in the very near future. The central pillar of our proposal is that councils establish a dedicated Basement Team that would become the 'one stop shop' for everything related to basements: from giving pre-planning advice to prospective applicants to monitoring the site as the project progresses to addressing the concerns and complaints of neighbours. Such a team would be entirely self-funded by the addition of an Excavation Levy to all basement planning applications. As basements are really only a problem in a select group of postcodes where the high cost of digging is far exceeded by the resulting uplift in a property's value, it is felt that such a levy would easily be absorbed into a project's budget. Developers and neighbours would have a single point of contact with the council, and the council would be able to monitor these potentially complex projects more closely. It seems to us like a 'no brainer'. Let us hope the councils agree. Watch this space.

Applications granted

31/32 Rutland Gate/54 Montpelier Walk (former Sudanese diplomatic

buildings) and at 40 Rutland Gate/50 Montpelier Walk. 4 Trevor Place, 4 Ennismore Gardens, 10 Sterling Street and several more have been submitted. If you are in an adjacent property, engage a planning consultant and/or structural engineer to scrutinise the proposals. If permission is granted, employ a party wall surveyor to look after your interests – the costs of doing so are the responsibility of the developer.

Council Policies WCC's Interim Guidance Note on Basements will be consulted on further before they seek Cabinet approval to adopt it formally as a Supplementary Planning Document. This would give it clearer status and greater weight in decision-making when determining planning applications for basements. RBKC is currently consulting on the legal 'soundness' of their proposals as part of the Partial Review of the Core Strategy.

PARK MANSIONS

Following WCC's refusal for the building of five flats on the roof of Park Mansions – strongly opposed by tenants and the KA – a second application was submitted last year this time for nine flats, arousing equal opposition. This application has now been withdrawn.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

In November we submitted an application to designate the whole of Knightsbridge and the two Parks as an officially recognized "Neighbourhood". The deadline for public comments

on our application passed towards the end of January. We now wait to hear the Council's deliberations. If the designation is approved, a Neighbourhood Forum can be constituted.

COMMUNITY

INRASTRUCTURE LEVY (CIL)

The Government has now ruled that this levy will not apply to domestic buildings or extensions.

WARD FUNDING

WCC: A new enforcement officer has been appointed, dedicated to the Knightsbridge / Belgravia Ward, paid out of our ward funding. She will work closely with our street monitor, Ravi Kumar.

RBKC: Under a similar scheme, we are waiting to hear if our application for funding to restore the historic hitching posts and rails running along the south side of Ennismore Street will be successful.

LICENSING

Polish Hearth Club The KA, working closely with Exhibition Road RAs, raised a number of objections to the Club's application to extend licensing hours, decouple alcohol and food consumption and permit access to non-club members. WCC granted the application while imposing a number of conditions in response to our concerns. The Polish Hearth Club has decided to appeal the decision and KA has indicated its willingness to support WCC in defense of its ruling. We will be

preparing a witness statement preparatory to a Magistrate's hearing.

Buddha Bar Following representations by KA and local residents, Buddha Bar's License application for extended hours was rejected. The application raised important issues concerning noise from late night dispersion in front of residential apartment blocks, parking and waiting by cars and mini-cabs in the constricted road access into Hyde Park and noise and vibration within the building itself.

Tables & Chairs The KA is reviewing the proliferation of tables and chairs on the elevated section of the Brompton Road and other locations and, where necessary, checking with RBKC/WCC to ensure that exterior T&Cs conform to premises license requirements. We intend to meet WCC and RBKC councillors to discuss the bar/cafe/restaurant monoculture that has been allowed to inflate along the Brompton Road from the Oratory eastwards to the Berkeley Hotel and we are hopeful that our concerns will be addressed.

LAW AND ORDER

CRIME STATISTICS As a borough Westminster is unique in the UK or even Europe in that it has an extremely high daily transient population. There are 240,000 residents and this number is increased daily by 2 million. Potentially all these people could

become victims of crime. However, proportionally, the number of crimes recorded every day in Westminster is fractional compared with every other capital city and we are incredibly safe. All crime, with the exception of car crime, is on a downward trend. Westminster, attracting people from all over the world, is a target rich environment for criminals.

FOREIGN NATIONAL OFFENDERS

Measures are being taken in Westminster to better manage Foreign National Offenders who commit crime or anti-social behaviour or who are not exercising their treaty rights (obtaining gainful documented employment) and not functioning independently. Since January 1 there are new powers and the police are working with and supporting immigration officers. It is an offence to be in this country and not exercise treaty rights within the first 30 days of arrival. People who are in need or vulnerable are always supported but Westminster now has a hub at Charing Cross Police Station where Home Office immigration enforcement officers, police officers and intelligence analysts can detain and identify people who may have criminal backgrounds in their own country. There is also an element of organised crime involved. Foreign nationals who turn to crime or exploit the free travel arrangements are subject to administrative removals and barred

from re-entry for a minimum of twelve months even if they agree to return to their own country voluntarily.

CAR CRIME

Vehicle crime is still high across both boroughs, mostly on visitors to the area who leave valuables in their cars. Residents are again advised not to leave anything in their cars and check that doors are locked. The police know who the perpetrators are, they visit their homes and inform them that the police know who they are and where they live and this appears to deter them from committing further crime.

The police are increasingly retrieving DNA samples from stones and pebbles used to smash car windscreens to steal from them. Sometimes this is the sole piece of evidence that leads police to the suspects. It is important to leave everything in place and call the police if your car gets broken into, the same for a burglary.

Preparations are being made for the summer influx of high performance vehicles which will continue to be seized if they are found not to have valid insurance for the UK. The Brompton police team have written to the embassies explaining that whilst overseas visitors are very welcome to visit Knightsbridge they should drive considerately.

PROFESSIONAL BEGGARS

The Group Dispersal Zone is to be renewed to cover the summer period.

The beggars have learnt not to stand together as a group so new legislation will be applied if they are caught begging. This will allow the police and councils to apply for an injunction, which is a civil order, replacing ASBOs.

ROUGH SLEEPERS

60% of rough sleepers generate approx. 60% of all anti-social behaviour. People cannot be physically forced to engage with the voluntary sector or public services who want to assist but if necessary police have powers to detain people and get a full mental assessment. Knightsbridge is within a street no-drinking zone and alcohol can be confiscated. Robust action has been taken against rough sleepers in the Hyde Park underpass who allegedly are making about £30,000 a year. The police ask Residents not to give money to beggars.

WINTER WONDERLAND

This has become a national event with over three million visitors over 44 days. The number of visitors this year increased by half a million but reported crime only slightly increased as additional resources and different tactics were employed. Groups of 300–400 travellers turned up but their behaviour was not as anti-social as last year. Royal Parks Policing is funded by a Home Office Parks Grant which runs out in April 2015. Due to financial constraints future funding for the officers who police the parks is uncertain.

Residents do feel safer knowing there is a permanent effective police presence in the parks and hope this will continue.

POLICE CONTACT NUMBERS

The feedback from residents is that the 101 non-emergency number is working very well. In a real emergency the number is still 999.

TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

We have written to WCC and RBKC with a list of issues we would like to see addressed in traffic management plans, particularly during basement construction. These include, for example, ensuring that vehicles arrive 'just in time' rather than blocking the street and causing disturbance early in the morning.

On other traffic matters, WCC expects to complete the works at the top of Exhibition Road by Hyde Park by April. The main change will be to allow pedestrians to cross on all four legs at the same time (though not 'diagonal crossing') while all traffic is stopped. To maintain 'capacity' at the junction, it has been necessary to ban the right-turn northbound in Exhibition Road towards Knightsbridge and make other changes.

24 HR RESIDENTS' PARKING

We are very pleased WCC is consulting on plans to implement 24 hour Residents' Parking throughout most of our area (see advertisements on street posts). There is much need

for this change as ResPark has been increasingly invaded by late night visitors who turn up at 10pm and take parking spaces needed for residents returning after dinners or events. The KA has called for this change in its Annual Report for the last two years and in a number of newsletters as well as, of course, in meetings with WCC. **It is VERY important that as many of us respond positively to the proposals by emailing TMO@westonejv.co.uk quoting reference 6157/PJ or in writing to West One, 10th Floor, Westminster City Hall, 64 Victoria Street, London SW1E 6QP by 14 March 2014.**

Several smaller street projects are expected to be completed in the next few weeks. One of these is the creation of a small indent in the pavement in front of the Bulgari Hotel to aid traffic management. Once completed it will be complemented by enhanced enforcement of parking restrictions in that immediate area.

Last but not least we have congratulated our Councillors on their excellent proposals for quiet-way cycling routes through local streets. We have also joined all the other amenity societies in Westminster in asking our Councillors and all others standing in the May local elections to commit to ensuring the whole borough is included in Mayor Johnson's ultra-low emission zone by 2020 with an intermediate step by May 2018.

EVENTS

We are in the process of putting together the social program for 2014. Details will be available on the website as soon as they are finalised, so please regularly check www.knightsbridgeassociation.com.

Printed invitations will also be sent out.

SAVE THESE DATES - further details to follow

May 1st visit with light lunch to RAF Bentley Priory Battle of Britain Museum.

June 9th - cocktail reception and private view of pre sale collection of 19th Century European, Victorian and British Impressionist Art courtesy of Bonhams.

Annual General Meeting The AGM will again take place in December, date and venue to be arranged.

Eaton Square Concerts Eaton Square Concerts, supported by KA members, the Friends of Music at St Peter's, Eaton Square, have published details of their five spring concerts, the first being on Thursday 6th March – further information at www.eatonsquareconcerts.org.uk

In concluding, I wanted to mention briefly the 2013 AGM. I have had more feedback about this than any other subject during my time as chairman, and I am grateful to all those of you who got in touch. While the majority of us, I think, enjoyed

the magnificent evening in the Silver Galleries, some were less happy. Issues raised included: awkward to reach the venue, difficult to navigate around the display cases, not enough time for questions during the meeting, what was wrong with the Royal College of Music and so on.

Rest assured, we will take on board all these comments and do our best to improve the AGM for this year. There are surprisingly few convivial spaces with the capacity that we need in our immediate vicinity. The few that exist are either not equipped to host meetings, are prohibitively expensive, insist on us using their very pricey caterers, or in some cases all three. One member was particularly aggrieved that we were so grateful that the V&A was hosting us when she (the member) 'can visit the Silver Galleries at any time for free'. While she is undoubtedly correct, for any voluntary, non-profit organisation like our's, minimising our costs is always a fundamental fiduciary duty. If anyone has ideas on a suitable alternate venue or would like to sponsor the AGM at the end of this year, please do get in touch with me

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