



THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2015 NEWSLETTER

Dear Member,

It has been an unusually busy few months for the KA, but all of it in a very good way. You will have heard by now that the highly unpopular move by McDonald's on Brompton Road to extend its hours to 2AM every morning has been well and truly defeated. The application was first turned down in May of last year. But no sooner had we breathed a collective sigh of relief than they chose to appeal. The court hearings in November were very well attended by members and the judge was clearly moved by the strength of local opposition, contributing to his decision. A victory for common sense, and a very clear example of the Association doing exactly what it sets out to do, and doing it well.

The same could be said, I think, for our annual general meeting last year. The Science Museum made for a stunning new setting and we were able to take into account the concerns and suggestions of members collected over the years in terms of the evening's format. As always, we are eager to hear more from all our members so if you have comments or other ideas to further improve things, please do let us know.

And now, with a new year comes a new initiative: the Neighbourhood Forum. You will recall from Newsletters passim that this is part of central government policy to give people more say in how their communities are shaped. As the custodian of one of London's greatest neighbourhoods the KA is uniquely well placed to lead the effort for this area. Do watch this space – this is an important change to national planning policy and the repercussions will be significant and long lasting. In the coming months we will be putting all of the KA's history and experience to use in ensuring that Knightsbridge maintains its position as the envy of all.

PLANNING AND CONSERVATION

Re-Imagining Albertopolis – an update

The Royal Commission for the Exhibition of 1851, together with the Royal Albert Hall, has been refining designs for the Re-imagining Albertopolis initiative since displaying plans at the KA's AGM in 2012. They have also been progressing detail issues and funding options. The idea is to transform the area of public realm

around the Albert Hall and Memorial to improve the visitor experience, road safety and overall appearance of this iconic site. The highlights of the changes will include: better access and space for pedestrians with a new crossing across Kensington Gore to reconnect the northern part of Albertopolis with Kensington Gardens; improvements to highways by narrowing the main road and removing barriers; and a realignment of the landscape.

A preferred scheme is now supported by all the key players, and the team are now working with WCC and the Royal Parks to finalise the scheme's design. All parties are committed to realising the project as soon as possible.

South Kensington Station

TfL is again looking at development possibilities for South Kensington Station. This must be the fourth or fifth time they have given serious consideration to its future in the last forty years. Massively ambitious past proposals have failed to come to fruition following strong opposition from local residents' groups, including the KA. In 2004 The Brompton Association compiled an excellent report showing how a low key, low cost scheme in keeping with the low-rise village atmosphere of South Kensington, and including step free access and other much needed improvements, was perfectly viable. They followed this up in 2013 by commissioning Malcolm Reading Associates to outline a master plan for the site proposing a small scale, incremental development approach with new building that enhance the existing arrangement without overwhelming

it. The aim was to suggest that this was the approach that should be adopted by TfL. The KA strongly supported The Brompton Association's initiative. We shall be watching this carefully.

RCA South Kensington Tunnel Competition

A design competition, organized by the Exhibition Road Cultural Group was launched to 'improve and animate the South Ken. Pedestrian tunnel' which has been a dilapidated and depressing experience for those accessing the institutions in this area. Teams from the Royal College of Art, Imperial College and the Royal College of Music were challenged to produce designs that 'expressed the spirit of South Kensington and provide a fitting welcome to the area and its world-leading museums, educational institutions and cultural venues.' Three of the schemes were selected to share the £6,000 prize awarded by the Royal Commission. According to the Press Release, the intention that the winning designs will now be taken forward to the next state of design, for further consideration as part of TfL's stations improvement programme.

Natural History Museum

The KA welcomes the NHM's recently unveiled 5-year Masterplan, which has been produced by Malcolm Reading Consultants. The museum's collections are a vast invaluable resource comprising: 61 million specimens (including 34 million insects). 6.9 million fossils. 5.9 million algae, lichens and plants, 420,000 rocks, gems and minerals, 5,000 meteorites, and 5.5 million maps and archive documents.

The Masterplan identifies that this should be stored on the new NHM Digital Collections Programme as it will have the advantage of greater access to a vast range of data and digital information. It will also allow more space for the public areas, from the current 25,000sqm to 36,000sqm, so the museum can accommodate more visitors.

A key element of the plan is to improve public circulation to reduce queues outside and inside the museum. Two major projects will help to deliver this: the grounds project incorporating a third entrance (the plans are in process) and the Waterhouse link corridor that will run from the Darwin Centre to the Earth Hall. The giant plaster cast of a Diplodocus skeleton, Dippy, installed in 1979, will be taken off display and replaced by the 82ft female blue whale skeleton suspended from the roof. Raising the money to carry out the proposed plans will be key to the implementation of the masterplan as will being granted the statutory permissions for this Grade I listed building.

Sculpture in Princes Gardens

Imperial College is hosting an exhibition in the Gardens of eight contemporary Nordic sculptures as part of SKULPTUR, an exhibition of three-dimensional art. The exhibition lasts until January 2016.

V&A Museum Exhibition Road Courtyard

2014 saw the completion of most of the preparation for excavation, and included the temporary removal of the Aston Webb Screen, demolition of back of

house buildings and insertion of 477 piles around the perimeter of the site to create the containing wall for the underground spaces. 2015 will be the busiest year for construction, starting with the excavation works, which will reach 20m at the deepest point. Construction of the new spaces - object handling areas, gallery walls, roof structure, and the main staircase area - will follow immediately. Currently the main contractors are reinforcing the tops of piles with concrete, and placing 13 large steel props to span the site, supporting the structural walls of the new building as the dig progresses. Construction to continue through 2016 and the new Courtyard will open to the public in early 2017.

55-93 Knightsbridge and 1-3 William Street

By the end of February the properties were vacant, and investigative works had begun. As noted in our 2014 Annual Report, demolition behind the retained façade of this huge redevelopment is due to start in the summer. Completion is targeted for the first quarter of 2018. The scheme includes shops, offices and residential. We anticipate that a community liaison group will be set up by the owners to deal with any problems that may arise during the course of construction.

13-15 Princes Gate

This was the wartime home of the Kennedy family when Joseph Kennedy was ambassador to the court of St. James, and more recently housed the General Medical Practitioners. Plans had been approved by the council to return this to two single houses. A further

application has been submitted to make it into one single residence, which will no doubt be sold to yet another wealthy overseas buyer and remain largely uninhabited. An eventual price of £300 million has been suggested – a record for a single dwelling even for this area.

Rutland Gate Upper Garden

Following the tragic accident last year when a passer-by was killed by a falling tree, the KA supplied the WCC with files going back to the 90s to try to help locate the absentee owner. The WCC lawyers are weighing up the possible next steps to take. The KA are still trying to find out what enquiries the Police are making to establish whether there has been negligence by the owner.

Serpentine Gallery Summer Pavilion

This year Serpentine Galleries celebrates the 15th anniversary of their Pavilion commission. In December they announced that Spanish architects SelgasCano will design the 2015 Pavilion. Headed by Jose Selgas and Lucia Cano, the award-winning studio is the first Spanish architecture practice to be asked to design the temporary Pavilion on the gallery's lawn. In keeping with the criteria of the Serpentine's scheme, this will be the studio's first new structure in the UK. Plans were due to be revealed as we went to press.

WCC's City Plan

Which includes the long awaited new basement policies is again out to consultation and still has several steps to complete before going to an Examination in Public and final adoption.

RBKC

Meanwhile, at the beginning of December the verdict by the Inspector on RBKC's new guidelines on basement developments was published in favour of adoption. This was formalised on 21st January at a Full Council meeting and is now being implemented. It has taken two years to draft the policy, consult extensively on it and finally submit it to the Inspector, while being aggressively opposed at every stage by basement developers and their teams of paid advisers. Basements will still be permitted but strict guidelines will set limits on their scale (maximum of 50% can be extended under a garden; a restriction to a single storey in most cases; an outright ban under listed buildings and a requirement for a Construction Traffic Management Plan to be submitted). The outcome has been closely monitored by other Councils including WCC, and they should now be able to pursue the adoption of similar policies.

TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT

Air pollution

Government projections, obtained by the Clean Air in London (CAL) campaign using the Freedom Information Act, have revealed that 1.3 kilometres of the A4 from Hyde Park towards Burberry, are expected to be the 15th worst road link in the UK in 2015 for levels of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), a toxic gas. The projections estimate an annual mean concentration of NO₂ of 95 micrograms per cubic metre (ug/m³) in 2015 which is well over twice the legal limit of 40

ug/m3 that has been in legislation since 1999 to be met throughout European cities by 2010. The projections also reveal that Knightsbridge is still expected to exceed the legal limit in 2030. Previous analysis has identified buses and diesel cars and vans as the main sources of NO2 emissions with taxis responsible instead for higher particle levels (so called PM2.5 and PM10). This sort of pollution affects everyone to a greater or lesser extent so it would be wise to walk down side streets rather than the main road, if possible. The independent CAL is campaigning for our area to be included the Mayor's ultra-low emission zone from 2020, with an intermediate step by 2018, to tackle diesel pollution.

Parking

At the recent AGM one member suggested the KA should consult its members more frequently on its policy stances and gave the example of Res Park hours being extended to 24 hours last year. We responded at the AGM but it is worth putting on the record here that our activities, as in the ResPark example, are prompted usually by many Members having expressed serious concerns about problems they want addressing. In the Res Park example, it took two to three years of campaigning to bring about the changes and we highlighted the problems and our proposal in newsletters and the Annual Report in 2013. In our Newsletter this time last year we went further and pointed people to WCC's formal consultation that was then ongoing, with contact details for comments to be sent. As we had expected, WCC's consultation showed strong support for the changes

which were then implemented in an efficient manner by our Councillors and their officers before the local elections. In a separate example, it took us several years of campaigning to get the traffic lights re-phased beside One Hyde Park to reduce unbearable queues eastbound on Knightsbridge. These cases show that it is only by campaigning consistently over a long period of time can we get significant changes implemented so please do contact the relevant KA committee or the Chairman if you have feedback on our newsletters or the Annual Report.

LAW AND ORDER

Illegal Immigrants

Residents continue to voice concerns to this committee at the increasing number of Roma beggars and rough sleepers in Knightsbridge and in our parks. Although the situation in other European cities such as Paris, Barcelona and Rome is far worse, it appears that due to the EU open borders policy nothing can be done to halt the free movement of these people who are causing such deterioration to our environment. We therefore invited Diane Kimpton from the Home Office to our last meeting who outlined the work being done across London by officers from her department, in partnership with councils, the police, and other agencies, who are trying to ensure that people are legally in this country. Every person who enters this country must have a valid passport and is checked to see that they are the rightful owner of that document otherwise they are refused entry. European passport

holders have three months in which to exercise their treaty rights. This means that they must either come to work, be a student, self-employed or self-sufficient. Much of this work is late at night and early morning patrols are also conducted to identify individuals who are not exercising their treaty rights and remove them from the country if they have been here for more than three months. The Government is working very hard to change the EU open borders policy. We were interested to hear that officers are not permitted to question EU citizens regarding their background when they arrive and we hope that there will eventually be a Europe-wide intelligence system to reveal if a person has committed a heinous crime in another country. Rough sleepers have taken over the Hyde Park Underpass at Wellington Arch and on the morning following our meeting 88 people were removed under new 48 hr dispersal notices available to the police. Unfortunately even if they are removed from an area the problem is not really solved as they are only displaced for a while and usually return within a few days.

Premium car thefts

Statistics show the theft of expensive motor vehicles is increasing. Police have been stopping drivers of Range and Land Rovers as two of these a day are being stolen within RBKC alone as opposed to half that number in previous years. A design fault in these expensive vehicles allow thieves to manipulate the 'keyless start' feature to make off with a parked car without even a screwdriver. There have been over 25 arrests and uninsured vehicles were seized. Owners

are advised to fit crook locks. Mopeds and motorcycles need to be secured to the ground as otherwise they can be lifted into a van. People are still leaving property on show in their cars or in the boot where laptops etc. can be located electronically if not completely shut down. The Commissioner has announced Operation Endeavour, a concerted effort to reduce vehicle crime across London.

101

Residents are asked to call 101 if they see any suspicious activity, especially in the evening hours and pass on the reg numbers of any car they see speeding or driving in an anti-social or dangerous manner. Operations continue to control any supercars that are causing mayhem. Violent crime is the lowest in London but telephone and various frauds continue to target older residents. Cloning and distraction theft is occurring daily at all our local ATMs. Residents should note the number on the back of their cards and store in their phone so they can call to cancel their card immediately if it is lost, stolen or disappears into a machine. The cards can be used within a few minutes to buy goods or at a casino. It is safer to withdraw money during banking hours inside the bank branch or to use cashback at a supermarket.

LICENSING

London Underground 24 hour service

Tubes are to operate 24 hours a day at weekends from September 2015. Although the plans currently only call

for five lines to run these extended hours – and the Piccadilly Line is one of them – it is safe to assume that all night trains across the network are simply a matter of time. This will unquestionably increase the demand for late night opening in this area generally and Brompton Road in particular, which the KA will fight tooth and nail. Knightsbridge must not be allowed to sleep walk into becoming a late night entertainment area.

McDonalds 177 Brompton Road

RBKC, ably supported by KA residents, were successful in defending the Appeal by McDonalds for extended opening hours. In spite of a friendly letter from the KA to its CEO in America warning him of the strength of opposition, McDonalds unwisely pressed on with its appeal. With RBKC being awarded costs of £45,000 the exercise will have cost McDonald's in excess of £100,000. A big "thank you" to residents who attended the three day Hearing at the City of London Magistrates' Court; and to Members and Officers from RBKC and WCC for defending and writing letters of objection, respectively. An interesting footnote: McDonald's unresponsive CEO has been replaced.

Polish Hearth Club

In association with the Exhibition Road RA, KA objected to the Application having written previously to WCC councillors to alert them to the detail of the Club's impending approach. Our case was aided by a helpful Environmental

Health Officer who shared concerns that clearing-up could have taken place on the open air terrace at 01.00am. Revised conditions were agreed which include (a) the Terrace will close to everyone at 22.30, including all staff clearing up (b) there should be a Marquee covering the terrace at all times which will help to muffle sound and (c) a phone number will be distributed to local residents so they can ring if they are being disturbed. With thanks to Jane Whewell for her tenacious attention to detail.

Zuma

Working with support from 199 Knightsbridge, KA has objected to Zuma's planning application seeking to lift the condition restricting their hours to midnight. A Planning Inspector's report dated 2003 relating to this premises, indicates how disturbance factors which beset residents now were clearly already evident twelve years ago. The outcome is awaited.

13 Exhibition Road

Patisserie de Reves has applied for an Application for the grant of a premises licence to permit the sale of alcohol for 38 covers of which 14 will be inside the premises, 15 will be on the Terrace and 8 will be on the forecourt. The premises is currently licensed as A1 but if the Application is approved, the patisserie would be conducting A3 regulated business from an A1 premises. KA has posted an objection and is working closely with the Thurloe Residents' Association.

HYDE PARK AND KENSINGTON GARDENS

Major Event Schedule 2015

The events schedule begins with the World Triathlon at the end of May and finishes with Winter Wonderland running from December into January 2016. Full details at <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/events>

Road closures

Notification will be provided on Park notice boards 4-6 weeks in advance and road signs will go up four weeks in advance.

Noise

The designated noise telephone number for all events throughout the year is 0800 567 7079. WCC's 24 hour noise number is 020 7641 2000. **It is essential to phone at the time the noise is occurring.**

THE ASSOCIATION

Annual General Meeting

As usual, the meeting will be held in early December. Date and venue to be announced.

Events

The Committee is currently working on a schedule of events for the year. If you have suggestions or would like to help organize something, please do get in touch.

Eaton Square Concerts Eaton Square Concerts

Supported by KA members the Friends of Music at St Peter's, have published details of their Spring season of 5 concerts; the first is on Thursday 12 March. Further information at eatonsquareconcerts.org.uk.

And finally, an apology and a thank you. I know from the abundant feedback that many of you really enjoyed the feature article on the history of the KA that we ran in the Annual Report last year. I certainly did. Well, Nigel Cox, who meticulously researched and put together the highly entertaining piece, had his byline unceremoniously removed during the final edit. Sorry about that!

And our grateful thanks to Sir Malcolm Rifkind who, as our MP for Kensington and Chelsea, has been a great help and supporter of the KA for many years. We were sorry to hear that he will not be standing for election in May, and I'm sure you will all join me in wishing him the very best.

Yoshi Nishio

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