THE KNIGHTSBRIDGE ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER

March 2008

Dear Member,

Enclosed with this Newsletter you will find a leaflet about recycling. Can I urge you to read it and – if necessary – take action? If we do not all work together to increase the level of recycling in the locality there is a real possibility of our refuse collection being disrupted – as has happened in many other parts of the country. Please, please don't let this happen here.

And now to other important matters.

Planning and Conservation

Imperial College
Princes Gardens

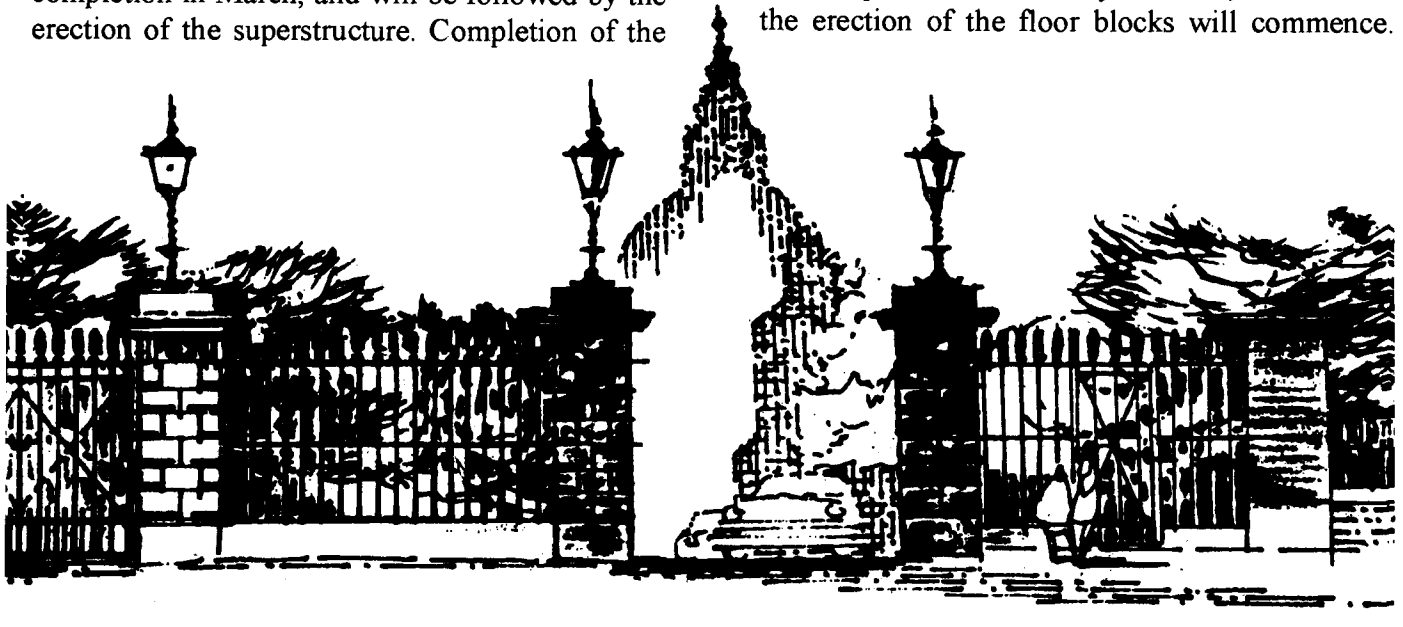
Site works on the Eastside halls of residence commenced early in the New Year following the demolition of Linstead Hall and its annexe. Piling and other ground works now in hand are due for completion in March, and will be followed by the erection of the superstructure. Completion of the project is scheduled for the beginning of October 2009. It will provide accommodation for 440 students - plus a restaurant/bar and convenience store. The Residents' Committee has met regularly to deal with problems that might arise during building works.

Corner site, Exhibition Road and Imperial College Road

The College has appointed architects Foster and Partners, together with Sheppard Robson, to develop design proposals for the south eastern corner of the College's main campus, including a new building fronting Exhibition Road. A planning application is anticipated in 2009.

One Hyde Park

Piling and other ground works continue according to schedule: the ground floor slab is due for completion in the early summer, after which the erection of the floor blocks will commence.



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

TfL's works in Knightsbridge are due to start in April and will include new traffic islands and traffic light controls. No decision has yet been taken on the right turn into Brompton Road, but the consultants Arups have sent the requisite data to TfL to assist them in coming to a decision.

Exhibition Road Project with South Kensington Traffic Improvements

The design of these associated projects continues, and local amenity societies have attended two briefing meetings when views were exchanged. Further details are included in the Transport and Environment section of this Newsletter.

Natural History Museum

Once again, from the end of January to the beginning of March, both the East and West gardens were occupied by temporary marquees, trailers, containers and portaloos to accommodate London Fashion Week. The setting of this listed building is one of the finest in London. But for the second time in twelve months, and in spite of objections from the KA and other amenity societies, it has been used for a purpose that has no connection whatsoever with the Museum. We understand English Heritage have been pressing both RBKC and the Museum authorities to develop an agreed strategy on the commercial use of the garden.

Berkeley Hotel

In our Annual Report we gave details of the proposed extension and refurbishment of this hotel and expressed dissatisfaction with the design which, in addition to its excessive height, features a series of metal hangers which project above the roof. We believe these roof structures will greatly harm the appearance of Knightsbridge, and we were disappointed when planning permission was granted last year, in spite of objections from the Royal Parks as well as KA.

Normandie Hotel

Although planning permission for a new hotel was granted in 2006, work has not yet started. Meanwhile the fenced off sections of the property facing Knightsbridge Green continue to attract rubbish and litter which defile this attractive pedestrian alley linking Knightsbridge with Brompton Road.

Montpelier Hall, 14-18 Montpelier Street

Construction has commenced on the redevelopment of Montpelier Hall behind the existing façade. The scheme comprises six flats with a basement car park reached by a car lift from Montpelier Mews. The original building dates from 1896, when it was built as a nurses home for St. Georges Hospital, now the Lanesborough Hotel.

Hans Crescent

Funding is now available for carrying out alterations and improvements to the western arm of Hans Crescent, and K & C will start work on the site in early summer.

Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens

The temporary Peter Pan theatre, for which planning approval was granted in November last year, despite objections from some twenty neighbouring amenity societies, has been delayed until next year. The old Boat House has been demolished and the new one should be up and running in time for the new season.

Park Events

6th April: Torch Relay, Hyde Park and St. James's Park
No road closures

17th May: Moonwalk, starting and finishing in Hyde Park
Overnight walking marathon.
Road closures

7th June: Red Bull Flugtag: Hyde Park.
Flying machine competition over the Serpentine. Road closures.

Further events will be flagged up in the June Newsletter.

Noise numbers:

WCC 24 hour Noise Line: 7641 2000

Parks Noise Line (during events only): 07896 296941

Rutland Gate Garden Railings

An appeal has been launched to raise the funds to reinstate the railings removed at the beginning of the Second World War. Anyone wishing to make a donation can obtain a charity gift aid form from the Porters' desk at 58 Rutland Gate. KA is supporting the appeal and, as with the replacement of other local garden square railings will be making a contribution.

Excavation of Basements and Gardens

Consultants appointed by RBKC to identify and assess factors relevant to basement developments issued their initial study in February, and this is now subject to public consultation. Many KA members have expressed concern that the basement constructions, which may be substantial, will affect water levels. This possibility is well covered in the RBKC report, which concludes this should not be a problem. It

does, however, stress the importance of employing competent engineers and experienced contractors, especially where the underpinning of adjoining houses is involved.

A Welcome New Initiative: WCC Funding for Local Projects

WCC is offering £100,000 to every Ward, including Knightsbridge and Belgravia, in each of the next two financial years, for local improvements and to build local engagement. At least two of our three councillors will need to support any proposition submitted for WCC approval. Anyone can propose an idea directly to any of our three WCC councillors. KA would also be very pleased to receive members' ideas, which it could hopefully submit with its support. Possible ideas require a minimum cost of £5,000 and can include changes to traffic signage, double yellow lines, public seating or any other neighbourhood improvements. Ideas will be considered regularly by WCC during the two year period *but to be included in the first batch your ideas should be sent to us by 31st March* - as in this case the early bird may well catch the worm!

Additional powers for the Mayor of London

The Greater London Authority Act 2007 has granted the Mayor additional powers enabling him to supplant the local planning authority where new buildings are of 'strategic' importance. This includes buildings over 30 metres high or 20,000 sq. metres in floor area. Both WCC and RBKC have policies to restrict the indiscriminate siting of tall buildings, policies that appear to be at variance with those of the Mayor - who makes no secret of his love of high buildings. KA strongly believes tall buildings are not in scale with most of Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea, and urges the Mayor to exercise his responsibilities with restraint.

Transport and Environment

Exhibition Road and South Kensington Station

KA is keen to see improvements to Exhibition Road. However in regard to RBKC's current plans we have key concerns the Council has not answered. These include: is there any evidence, anywhere in the world that 'shared surfaces' (which mix vehicles and pedestrians) can work for more than a couple of hundred vehicles per hour (compared to the 800 or more per hour apparently expected by RBKC in Exhibition Road)?; which roads would be used by the hundreds of vehicles diverted hourly from Exhibition Road?; how would coaches for the museums (often with parties of children) load and unload safely without blocking the new single lane each-way road?; and how can a scheme work that stops halfway up Exhibition Road at the boundary with WCC? We have asked these question, as well as others, and asked for details of the plans for the substantial changes proposed to the roads around South Kensington station. While wanting to see improvements in Exhibition Road, we must oppose the current scheme until RBKC addresses these important concerns. (A copy of our letter to RBKC can be downloaded from our website.).

Low Emission Zone and CO2 Charge

London introduced a Low Emission Zone inside the M25 on 4th February that effectively bans the most polluting large vehicles. The Mayor has now approved a CO2 charging scheme which will charge £25 per day for cars in Vehicle Excise Duty Band G to drive in the Congestion Charging Zone from 27th October 2008. While in principle we support 'polluter pays' schemes, we continue to press vigorously for such schemes to be both fairer and more effective. For further details ring: 0845 900 1234.

Skips

There have been several instances recently of skips being replaced shortly after 6.30am, causing much noise and nuisance to residents. WCC told one operator they would lose their license for a second 'offence'. RBKC has also been helpful and served a Notice under the Control of Pollution Act on a repeat offender. We have asked RBKC to add a condition to all skip licenses in future prohibiting their movement outside the hours allowed for builders' work generally. If you have any problems, please ring 7641 2000 (WCC) or 7361 3001 (RBKC).

South Carriage Drive (SCD)

Following discussion of SCD at our AGM, we have again pressed the Royal Parks to keep it open on Sundays, to alleviate congestion elsewhere. (It is also closed for 20 other days for ceremonial and other events). We are likely to need WCC and RBKC and others to support us if we are to succeed.

Law and Order

Good News, Bad News

Good news first. There has been a massive reduction in theft of and from motor vehicles in the area now known as Montpelier. (Westminster South is split into three areas, Montpelier, Belgrave and Eaton). The upgrading of street lighting by WCC in Ennismore Gardens, the

leafleting by PCSO's, street briefings and the increased awareness of residents not to leave property on show have all contributed. Well done everybody!

Now the bad news. We need to work on the burglary figures. Unfortunately, before Christmas, we suffered a number of residential burglaries. The K&B Safer Neighbourhood Team went house-to-house in all three areas, and found that although most homes had good quality locks and security systems these were not always being used. Most burglaries occur when homes are empty but some occur when people are at home, so the police strongly advise residents to secure their homes at all times. If you are the unfortunate victim of burglary do preserve the scene of the crime carefully, as Westminster now has four Scene of Crimes Officers on duty 24 hours a day.

The crime statistics for Brompton Ward (RBKC) are healthy except for pickpocketing, which has risen alarmingly, particularly on the buses and at bus stops along the Brompton Road. Small teams of white, black, asian and arabic pickpockets are at work – as well as the Romanian women with babies.

Hyde Park

The priorities for the Safer Parks Team are anti-social behaviour and unauthorised cycling/speeding on footpaths. Greater dog control is also needed, as dogs have been attacking squirrels and killed thirteen swans this winter. During December and January there was a significant increase in reported crimes in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens. This was attributed to a crackdown on drug dealing in the parks, and the Winter Wonderland where policing and lighting had to be significantly increased as the event progressed. There are new mobile speed guns now in operation in the park so watch your speed!

Harrods

The Harrods court order against fur demonstrators is coming up for renewal. Harrods Security Director, Barry Thorne, has received complaints from nearby residents concerned about the disruption caused by the crowds and megaphones. He has asked if KA members who are upset by this would contact him, confidentially, at Harrods.

Terrorism

There is a new national police initiative on terrorism. Fighting terrorism is not solely a police issue. It is also very much a community issue. However, due to the current proactivity that WCC and RBKC commit to counter terrorism, the local threat, though 'substantial', is deemed lower than 'severe'. This tightening up of security makes our community safer so that, hopefully, the potential terrorist will be unable to operate. To keep the area safe it is vital to pass on to the police information about any strange behaviour or hostile reconnaissance that you notice.

... and More Good News

A Civic Watch Survey provided to the Knightsbridge and Belgravia Ward Panel showed that 72% of K & B residents felt safe walking alone after dark compared with a Westminster average of 61%, and that only 12% of K & B residents felt their quality of life was affected by fear of crime compared with a Westminster average of 22%. Perhaps Jacqui Smith should move here!

Social Events

We are hoping to run a Private Tour of the Royal Albert Hall, with lunch, in the spring, and to hold a Midsummer Dinner and Recital at the Royal College of Music in June. Details will be circulated to members when they are available.

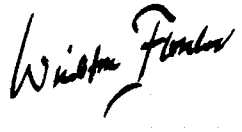
Other Events

King's Road Antiques Fair: 6th – 9th March:
Members are invited to visit the Fair at Chelsea Old Town Hall.
Free entry for 2 by showing this Newsletter.
Thurs-Sat: 10.30am-6pm Sunday: 10.30am-5pm. Details on www.penman-fairs.co.uk

Chelsea Art Fair – 24th-27th April
Members are invited to the Fair at Chelsea Town Hall.
Free entry for 2 by showing this Newsletter.
Thurs-Sat: 11am-7pm Sunday: 11am-5pm. Details on www.penman-fairs.co.uk

Thank you all, as always, for your support – and thank you for reading.

With best wishes



Winston Fletcher, Chairman

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