

THE KENSINGTON SOCIETY

WINTER NEWSLETTER 2020

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The Chairman's Report

ALMOST always as I sit down to write my chairman's report for both the annual report and the newsletter, I am surprised by all the changes. Never could any of us have envisioned those we have faced since January and the changes we still face. In this newsletter we have added some human stories, not just talk about planning and policy changes, and developments, though there is much to say. Hopefully, these stories will add to a recognition of the value members of our community give and help us formulate how we all will live in the future.

Back to the task at hand: the chairman's report for the newsletter. Usually we would have held our Annual General Meeting in the spring. However, even before printing our annual we were aware that coronavirus was on its way. We changed the cover of the annual specifically to reflect what we felt may be rare, a celebration of friends gathering with a glass of wine or two. How right we were. Following advice from the Charity Commission, we cancelled the AGM. We had envisioned an AGM in the autumn. As we now know that too was impossible.

The trustees however continue our work, though through virtual, rather than face-to-face, meetings with the various councillors and officers. Our trustee meetings take place via Microsoft Teams. I have always enjoyed our bi-monthly meetings which can be amusing with heated debates, contradictions and final agreements. The Teams format has worked well but for me it is not the same as being in Committee Room Five with the banter. We have been gracious enough not to comment on each other's interiors, nor when one of my dogs demands dinner, or the headaches of making the sound system work. Our usual meetings are a very much a give and take of opinions which we miss as we "raise your hand" or forget to put your hand down or worst, forget the camera is on.

On the planning committee each of us has our own interests, which tends to direct our tasks. However, in almost all cases we already have an agreed position. Example: support HMOs (Housing Multiple Occupation) and oppose their loss. We are reviewing our position on offices, the loss of which we have always opposed. With the changes brought by Covid and government housing demands, we have agreed to review each change of use application as a committee. Oddly, offices have become more valuable than residential per sqm. Common agreements are over supporting open space, resisting amalgamations, and opposing, successfully, advertisements on telephone booths.

When it comes to an issue such as contributing funds to a campaign, the rule of five applies. Our constitution sets a quorum



Even when the tube network re-opened, relatively few people used public transport: this is Kensington High Street Station mid-morning.

at five, so five trustees must approve contributions. We have recently given £1,000 towards a report by an expert in townscape assessments to the campaign against the Kensington Forum Hotel.

A few times, we have had a member query our alerts. In most cases, we try to make the alert informative. However, in such cases as South Kensington Station and the Kensington Forum we give chapter and verse on the objections. When a development or an application is very much a local issue, we contact the local Residents' Associations and ask if they want support. We have over 35 RAs who are members and we are often the communication line between the council and them. Recently we organised a Teams meeting for councillors and transport officers to present proposals for the Kensington High Street cycle lane (see report). The councillors were concerned it could become out of control – instead, it was a very productive meeting providing a surprising amount of assistance over a difficult problem.

Some other issues we have addressed over this year:

- Our opposition to the lack of fire strategy on the 100 West Cromwell Road application, on which our President spoke as an objector, has led to the Mayor of London adding a specific policy for fire safety.
- We have commented and are now constantly consulting on changes to the RBKC planning committee.
- We produced an alternative plan for the tables and chairs on Exhibition Road which was recognised as safer. Though supported by councillors, constant changes on use of open space mean this proposal has not been implemented.
- We now have a trustee on the new planning advisory committee replacing the old boys group of the Architects Appraisal Panel.
- We have a representative on the Exhibition Cultural Group Advisory Committee.
- When the cycle route became a major issue for the residents of Holland Park and Notting Hill Gate we organised and cajoled TfL into presenting the scheme. With one week's notice we organised a meeting of over 400 in the town hall.
- We continue to oppose the redevelopment of Allen House which, if approved, will replace 45 units with 46 units in much denser development. The basement parking is removed, and the developer is claiming the right to residential parking. Affordable housing contribution is argued to be for only two flats – off site, of course.
- Avon House was refused following mounting opposition from KS, ESSA and some very powerful members. We need care homes but not ones where the only outdoor space is a minimal patch two levels below ground and the rooms, beds only without any seating area – more last resort than care home.

Slowly, we have become a working party with the council, council officers and the councillors.

As I sit here with the leaves golden and the weather cooling, and enter a new lockdown, I know we will make it through this. We have so far. The challenges are varied and many and continuing. We must recognise that the future will not be "normal" anytime soon. But we will continue, the internet will keep us connected, if not truly in touch. The more we do function as normal the sooner it will return.

Amanda Frame *Chairman, the Kensington Society*

As we went to press we heard the sad news that Christopher Buckmaster died on 2nd November of Covid-19. A former councillor for Kensington ward for 20 years, a Royal Borough mayor twice, and a friend to many of us. He will be missed by us all.

We also have been informed that, very sadly, David Campion has also passed away. David was a councillor for 51 years for Pemble ward and mayor in 1985–86.

Traffic Measures Post-lockdown

ONCE lockdown ended and people were encouraged to go back to work, the government was faced with a dilemma. It wanted to discourage use of public transport because of the difficulty of social distancing and the risk of infection. The government then made a valiant, if at times misguided, attempt to square the circle by issuing a ‘statutory guidance’ to councils asking them to make arrangements as soon as possible to make it easier to walk and cycle while keeping social distances.

Experimental temporary schemes

A raft of measures was suggested, including widening busy pavements to make it easier for pedestrians to pass each other; “pop-up” cycle lanes using temporary barriers; introducing “low traffic neighbourhoods” to which vehicular access is limited; and more 20 mph limits. It was emphasised that speed of implementation was of the essence. Apart from cycle lanes to which the government gave special priority, all of these measures would be introduced by “Experimental Traffic Orders” which allow a measure to be put in place for a maximum of 18 months without having to go through the normal lengthy consultation procedures. After that, they have to be removed, unless there is a full consultation with residents on making them permanent. Funds are provided by central government via TfL.

Low traffic neighbourhoods

Using these experimental orders, the council has closed most of Portobello Road to vehicular traffic from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday to Saturday to make trading and shopping safer, and this has been generally welcomed. They considered the introduction of a low traffic neighbourhood in the St Quintin’s and Dalgarno wards, with a filter system to restrict vehicular access to residential streets and the re-routing of traffic. An informal consultation of local residents’ associations quickly revealed strong opposition and the council dropped this idea – no doubt rightly, as similar schemes installed in other boroughs have aroused strong protests.

Pavement widening

Pavement widenings were however created where the pavement is particularly narrow by the Underground stations in Notting Hill Gate and Kensington High Street: temporary barriers were installed

along the part of the road next to the pavement to allow pedestrians to spill onto the carriageway. TfL for its part also installed similar widenings in Earl’s Court Road, which is under its control rather than that of the borough. It turned out to be one of those ideas which sounded good in theory but were a failure in practice. The divided off bits of roadway were untidy and rarely used by pedestrians and the narrower carriageway merely caused problems for road users and especially cyclists. It is a credit to our council that it realised this fairly early on and removed the barriers. TfL has been slower to react and the Earl’s Court Road barriers are still in place.

Kensington High Street cycle lanes

The council was under particularly intense pressure to do something for cyclists, so as to allow people to cycle to work rather than go by public transport. In response to the statutory guidance, Hammersmith and Fulham Council had taken quick action to create a pop-up lane from Hammersmith roundabout to Olympia; and Westminster Council was planning to do the same for the road between Queen’s Gate and Knightsbridge. The pressure was all the greater on Kensington and Chelsea as it has the reputation of being the least cyclist-friendly inner London borough, having not a single dedicated cycleway. The council therefore proposed a pop-up cycle lane in Kensington High Street and Kensington Road to join the Hammersmith and Knightsbridge ends together and give cyclists an uninterrupted run from Hammersmith to Knightsbridge.

When informed of these plans, we accepted that in the circumstances it would have been extremely hard for our council to refuse to install such a pop-up lane. We did, however, emphasise that it should be for a trial period only and should be fully reviewed before any decision was made on its future. We also said that it should be light-touch, with easily removable barriers and without the blocked off turnings and island bus stops that were expected to cause such havoc in Holland Park Avenue and Notting Hill Gate.

We also insisted that, despite the urgency, the council should first inform residents’ associations, businesses and institutions along the route, giving them a chance to comment. Councillor Johnny Thalassites, the lead member for transport, accordingly wrote round to “stakeholders” including the residents’ associations along the route, on 19 June. There appears at this stage to have been little negative comment (and indeed some positive), although some local traders were worried about access problems. The council then held an exhibition of its plans for residents’ associations and others and



also entered into a dialogue with the traders, as a result of which a number of modifications were made to its original plans.

When this newsletter went to print the two temporary pop-up lanes had been installed on Kensington High Street, separated from the main flow of traffic by 'wands'. For the most part traffic flows freely, but there have been real problems, especially at rush hours, and especially at the pinch point between the Royal Garden Hotel and Kensington Church Street where the channelling of traffic into one lane on each side can cause serious blockages, as can road works.

These difficulties caused such concern to local residents that a petition was organised and many emails sent to the Town Hall calling for the instant removal of the cycle lanes. We have urged the council to see if changes can be made to alleviate the problems. We are happy to say that Councillor Thalassites has now met some of the objectors and has promised to set up a review group, to meet very shortly. We welcome this. We have however told the council that we are very disappointed that they are planning to introduce island bus stops in two locations and urged them to rethink (these were apparently on the plans shown to stakeholders at the exhibition, but nobody appears to have picked it up).

We have been asked why the Kensington Society supported this scheme while so strongly opposing the proposed cycle lane in Holland Park Avenue and Notting Hill Gate. The answer is that we see the two schemes as totally different. The Kensington High Street scheme is a temporary one designed to meet a particular set of circumstances (to encourage more cycling during the pandemic). It is clearly understood that it is a trial. The Holland Park scheme, on the other hand, was to be a £42 million permanent scheme with no trial period. What is more, it did not even make particularly good provision for cyclists: as Holland Park Avenue and Notting Hill Gate are narrower along most of their length than Kensington High Street, there was to be one two-way cycle lane, narrower even than TfL's own guidelines, which seemed likely to bring a real safety risk, especially when fast cyclists tried to overtake slower leisure cyclists.

We think it important, now that this scheme has started, that it should be allowed to run long enough to prove itself, or not as the case may be. We look forward to Councillor Thalassites' meeting with "stakeholders" and the possible adjustments to the scheme. We have no idea how the pandemic will develop or what restrictions there will be in future. Although its use by cyclists is small at present, it may well build up and turn out to bring benefits to local business and to increase visitors to the museums. Moreover, any major change of this sort to the road layout of this sort needs time to bed down; the example of other schemes indicates that often after a while the traffic adjusts and problems recede. So we think it would be wrong to condemn the scheme after only a few weeks.

What happens on Kensington High Street will inform future policy on cycle lanes generally in the borough (and this is an area where the pressure is likely to continue). If, at the end of a trial period when statistics on the route have been collected, the council can show that the current arrangements are causing unacceptable problems, it will be that much easier to argue for no cycle lanes through shopping centres such as Kensington High Street and Holland Park Avenue/Notting Hill Gate. We do think, however, that there is a case for encouraging cycling (and not just during the pandemic) and that there may be a case for there to be a dedicated cycle lane somewhere east-west across the borough. Quite apart from the clean air benefits, for the young who cannot afford the houses in the places that their parents could, and for whom London transport fares can be prohibitive, cycling is increasingly likely to be the preferred means of transport to work. Cromwell Road would seem an obvious option as it is very wide and has few shops and buses; but that road belongs to TfL and they have hitherto refused to consider it. This may be our next campaign.

AGM 2020 – Update

In our previous Newsletter, last winter, we promised that our annual general meeting would be held in May this year. With the Covid pandemic and lockdown threatening, we sent a letter within our annual report cancelling the AGM. Not deterred we are now looking forward to 2021 when we intend to hold a combined 2020/2021 AGM in the Town Hall as usual.

We have consulted with the Charity Commission who, under recent government legislation, are allowing charitable organisations to hold AGMs on-line up until 30 December this year. However, we have discussed this possibility and concluded that an on-line meeting is not something that would suit our membership. As long as we file our accounts with the commission on time (which we have done), offer our members the opportunity to ask the questions they would have asked at an actual AGM, and inform our membership of the reason for the cancellation, the commission is happy for us to delay. This newsletter will bring you up to date and we are always available to chat on the telephone if there is a specific issue and problem.

We very much hope that this will give us sufficient time to enable us to meet up, face to face, later on next year as we have done in the past. We so enjoy the opportunity to meet with large numbers of our members at the AGM and subsequently at the drinks in the Mayor's Parlour and we look forward to seeing you all in 2021.

*** VOLUNTEERS NEEDED ***

We run the Kensington Society on a shoestring and our Trustees do an amazing job. If we are to continue to do so – we need help!

We especially need help in five particular areas:

Planning – Do you understand planning? We need to meet you! We are more and more asked to help our members with planning issues, major and minor. The more help we have, the more help we can give!

Licensing – Do you know about alcohol licences? The issues of tables and chairs on pavements? We would be delighted to hear from you.

Events – our events secretary needs extra support – help with ideas, then planning and helping at events.

Treasurer and Membership Secretary – we need an accountant to maintain the accounting and membership records.

Do you **write**? Our hard-pressed editors would be more than happy to talk to you.

If you can help with any of the above do get in touch
kensingtonsociety@outlook.com

We look forward to hearing from you!

Government Planning Proposed Changes

GOVERNMENT has had much on its plate with the virus. It has also found the time to delve deeply into the entire national planning process with major changes proposed. Two government consultations on planning were published in August, with consultation on the first “Changes to the current planning system” ending 1 October. Our council responded with a particularly good report opposing the imposition of housing targets for London which have been very widely opposed as unrealistic for our densely developed borough. The second is the Planning White Paper “Planning for the Future.” Again, RBKC planning officers have produced an excellent draft paper and we commented and added our views to the final response to government.

The White Paper proposes radical reforms to the planning system. There is a strong emphasis in meeting a manifesto commitment to build 300,000 new homes, and for central direction of where these should be built. This is regardless of changing demographic trends and the impact of what may prove a long-lasting pandemic. The full extent to which local councillors may lose influence on deciding individual planning applications has yet to emerge.

- **Housing targets.** The potential housing target for RBKC under the new regime has been calculated by Lichfields as 3,285 homes per annum. This is the same as delivering a site the size of Kensal Canalside every year. The current housing target for RBKC set by the Mayor of London in the new London Plan is 448 homes. In recent years our council has not achieved mayoral targets. How could we get anywhere near this proposed government figure without major intensification of every possible site including those in the conservation areas which cover 75% of the borough? To achieve this scale of new housing would require large-scale redevelopment.

The Planning White Paper proposes that the standard method for calculating the housing targets for a specific area would enable “*the least affordable places where historic under-supply has been most chronic take a greater share of future development*”. Kensington & Chelsea is the least affordable place in the whole country. The unaffordability to most people of housing in the borough is a product of supply and demand in a market with long-term economic features which building extra properties will not change.

- **Zoning:** Under the government’s proposals, there will be a new system of designating all sites in a planning authority area under three categories of ‘growth’, ‘renewal’ or ‘protection’. A ‘zoning’ approach to Local Plans is new to the UK albeit used in other nations. Public and community consultation on Local Plans would be limited to the early stage of defining these zones and related site allocations. There would be scope for community involvement in setting ‘design codes’ for neighbourhoods or even individual streets. The mechanics of achieving agreement on these (other than via neighbourhood plans with a referendum as at present) are not yet clear.

Planning applications as we know them would not be required for developments in ‘growth zones.’ Outline planning consent would be assumed provided proposals met national standard planning policies. No further public consultation on such applications would be involved. For ‘protected zones’ there would be planning applications, with an assumption that these would be decided by officers on the basis of national policies, supplemented by design codes where these are in place. It seems clear that it can be assumed that all existing conservation areas will come within the ‘protected’ category.

Council planning officers have had a first shot at such a

‘zoning’ approach in the map included in the current *Borough Issues Consultation*. This is the first stage of preparation of a new Local Plan. Earls Court and Kensal Canalside, both existing ‘Opportunity Areas’, are the only two ‘growth zones’ identified. Other areas will be designated for potential ‘renewal’, including town centres. The White Paper uses the term ‘gentle intensification’ for these zones, including new housing on small infill sites. Such intensification could not possibly be ‘gentle’ if the current government housing target were to remain at anything close to its currently proposed figure.

- **Community involvement.** The White Paper has little detail on how the public and local community organisations and amenity societies will be able to be involved in this proposed future planning system. Consultation appears to be limited to a pared down Local Plan and to design codes. More planning decisions will be delegated to planning officers, and the ability of bodies such as the Kensington Society to work with ward councillors and lead members to influence decisions on major developments looks like being much reduced.
- **Development Management Policies** are intended to be set largely by standardised national policies within an expanded National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The White Paper argues that this will reduce unnecessary duplication, with similar policies being repeated in Local Plans. There is already widespread concern amongst local councils that a ‘one size fits all’ approach, written by central government, cannot possibly cover the development management issues that arise in areas ranging from rural villages to the centre of cities, let alone in this borough.

A worst-case scenario is that such generic national policies would lead to the exclusion from a Local Plan of long-established policies applying in the borough today. This could mean that many specific RBKC policies tailored to the borough’s almost unique requirements would be lost. Such policies include protecting our community uses, the controls on basements, resisting the loss of employment uses, amalgamations, HMOs, harm through ‘sense of enclosure’ from new buildings or conversions, and more.

We have worked both with the planning officers and the councillors in responding to the White Paper consultation and pressed the government for major changes, if not total abandonment, of the proposals. We are not alone in our opposition. Our own MP as well as other MPs and local authorities feel the same. The Secretary of State has already signalled that the necessary legislation will take time. Change to Permitted Development rights, introduced earlier this year through secondary legislation, are even now being challenged in court.



Achieving the sort of targets in the government’s Planning White Paper would require large scale redevelopment throughout Kensington, one of the most densely populated boroughs in London.

Planning Improvements to Local Planning

THE Local Government Association (to which most local authorities belong) has a "Planning Advisory Service", through which its members can subject themselves to a sort of peer review of their planning operation. Last year, our council asked the service to do a review of its planning services. This came up with a number of recommendations which we welcomed, as the Kensington Society has been urging the council for some time now to make improvements to the way the local planning system operates.

One of the chief recommendations was that the council needed to do more to establish open and transparent engagement with the community; and to provide evidence that communities are being involved and listened to – something we have been urging for some time. A recent example of bad practice was the setting up by the council of a new Quality Review Panel to provide advice on prospective building developments in the borough. This includes a large panel of architects and similar. There was no consultation on the terms of reference or composition of this panel, and few of those appointed were local. Both we and the Chelsea Society expressed our strong disappointment, not least because, with our local knowledge, we are well placed to suggest suitable members for a panel of this sort. We did get a sort of apology from the council, and they agreed that each society could nominate one member to the panel to represent the local community.

Since then, things have much improved, and we are in informal dialogue with the council on a number of their current initiatives. We think the council has also become more punctilious about having proper public consultations about new policies. We have been promised the re-instatement of the sounding board in the form of an Amenity Society/Resident Association Forum as well as quarterly meeting with resident societies and improvements to the RBKC website planning news.

Another recommendation that we greatly welcomed was that the planning department should have a mechanism that gives it control and better strategic oversight of major development schemes. We have long been worried about the current regime which involves council officers participating in the development of major schemes but excludes any involvement by the public until a late stage in the process when any meaningful change is difficult. As a result, too

often the scheme when finally unveiled contains elements that arouse fierce public opposition. Moreover, because the officers have been exposed so closely to the developer without the balance of discussions with the public, the report on the scheme often reads like a prospectus from the developer. The result is that there is a bust-up when the scheme comes to the Planning Committee, as we saw for instance in the case *inter alia* of Dukes Lodge and the Kensington Forum Hotel; the officers' recommendation is overturned; and it then goes to appeal or is called in by the Mayor or Secretary of State, creating uncertainty and delay. So it is good news that the council has now undertaken to bring in the public at the formative stage.

For more minor schemes, the report recommended that the planning department "*should adopt a more collaborative approach to negotiating on non-major applications. Finding ways of resolving objections and negotiating with agents and applicants as early as possible will help deliver a more customer-oriented service and improve efficiency by reducing the number of withdrawn applications/refusals and the number of resubmissions and appeals*". We fully endorse this conclusion and are talking to the council about how it should be done.

We are also talking to the council on ways to improve the operation of the planning committees. At present, both the Planning Committee (which deals with major schemes) and the Planning Applications Committee (PAC) (which deals with the smaller ones) both have only five members (although the ones on the PAC are drawn from a wider pool and change from meeting to meeting). We think this works not too badly for the PAC – although we are sometimes shocked at how little some councillors seem to know about planning rules and policies and we think there should be extra training for members of the PAC. But for the major schemes, the Planning Advisory Service recommended a bigger membership, again something we heartily endorse. The restriction of Planning Committee to five set members with no rotation leads to mistrust and problems when a member is absent and has to be replaced by a substitute with no experience of dealing with big applications. For big projects, if there are only five people, members with particular views can unduly influence the meeting (or can give the impression of doing so). We think there should be say nine (or at least seven) members on the Planning Committee.

Heythrop College – Update

AFTER a ten-day public inquiry in February, the planning inspector's report, scheduled for mid-March, arrived in mid-August. After the long wait, the decision, to allow the development to proceed, was a great disappointment.

The appeal was against the Mayor of London's direction to refuse the application for 142 units of luxury extra-care housing, and the refurbishment of three town houses fronting Kensington Square with only five small affordable housing units. The Mayor considered that the amount of affordable housing was insufficient.

Local residents challenged the loss of a major educational facility, a social and community asset, and the impact on listed buildings and the conservation area. The council did not appear at the appeal to defend their proposal that the application be allowed.

A major feature of the development will be a large raft over the railway. The 5-year construction period of the project would have a massive impact on the area due to the scale of construction traffic. There was also concern that the extra-care housing was aimed at the top end of the housing market and should have included more affordable housing, especially affordable extra-care units. The appeal

was dominated by the affordable housing issue, unfortunately with little reference to the other issues.

The inspector decided that the appeal be allowed, noting the benefits of the scheme outweighed any harms to heritage or any policy conflicts.

The inspector's report covered all the issues, mainly focused on whether the scheme could support more affordable housing. Nevertheless, he did consider very seriously the scale and nature of the construction traffic and specifically acknowledged that this was a critical issue which needed to be resolved if the project were to proceed.

The Society supported the local residents' case and was equally concerned about the loss of this major education site – one of the last in the borough – to luxury housing. This was precisely what the council's Local Plan policy was meant to prevent.

There are still a number of issues to be sorted out, including Listed Building Consent and various construction and environmental management plans.

If the project does go ahead, the prospect for the next five or six years is daunting. Residents face a long period of demolition, excavation and construction, including building over the railway, with as many as 100 lorry movements a day in the peak period travelling a third of a mile through residential backstreets.

The Academy Pub – Positive News

THE Academy Public House, which has been closed since August 2016, was successfully redesignated as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) in January 2020 for a further 5 years. The ACV applies to the entire building including the upper floors.

It became apparent last year that the upper floors were being used as a separate residence. Following an enforcement request, the council's investigation established the unlawful use including unlawful removal of the internal stair. An Enforcement Notice was issued requiring the cessation of the unauthorised use as a separate residence and the reinstatement of the stair. Not surprisingly the owner appealed against the Enforcement Notice.

We are pleased to report that in August 2020 the Planning Inspectorate dismissed the enforcement appeal. This is an important ruling for the national pub industry, protecting a locally important social hub from development as yet more housing.

This decision is a major coup for the Kensington Society and for Norland Conservation Society and Clarendon Cross Residents Association, who have worked tirelessly with the Society to protect the pub from property development but none of it would have been possible without the overwhelming support of the respective members. A big thank you to you all.

We now must find a way to have the pub re-opened. We shall endeavour to open up dialogue with the owners, and we shall keep you posted.

Kensington Forum Hotel, Cromwell Road

As expected, on the second mayoral hearing, on 22 October, and in spite of a strong joint case put up against this development, the deputy mayor, Jules Pipe, decided to approve the developer's plans. This is of course subject to certain conditions and whether the Secretary of State decides to call in the case. We wait to see.

Following the previous hearing on 21 June 2019, the council successfully challenged the mayor's proposed decision to allow the replacement of the current 28-storey hotel by two towers, one 30 storeys and a second 22 storeys, in the middle of area where the prevailing height is 5-6 storey Victorian terraces. The mayor's main concern has been the issue of affordable housing.



The council's case was the mayor's decision was flawed in the manner in which it was made and its purpose, which was to prevent the Secretary of State exercising his legal right to intervene. As a result, the decision was quashed, meaning that a new decision must be made by the GLA, which was the subject of this hearing.

The Society worked closely with a strong force of local residents and the council, to present a robust case at the hearing. The aim was to demonstrate that this scheme is contrary to both the mayor's new London Plan and the borough's new Local Plan with regard to tall buildings and hotel development. A particular element of the challenge was the impact of this massive scheme on the surrounding streetscape, townscape, views from as far as Kensington Gardens and Battersea, as well as on our skyline. We supported local residents in commissioning a report on the likely impact that the scheme would have on the townscape of the surrounding areas.

While the result of the mayoral hearing is the same as before, this time the Secretary of State will have time to consider whether he should intervene.

The overlay demonstrates clearly the difference between the existing Holiday Inn and the proposed Forum Hotel development.

Newcombe House: Planning Permission is granted

THE extended planning process for this important site has been a constant theme of this newsletter for many years.

The last newsletter reported on the third Public Inquiry that took place in November of last year, resulting from the decision by James Brokenshire, the then Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government to call in the Mayor of London's decision to grant approval to the scheme.

The final Planning Inspector's report following the Public Inquiry, recommended approval. It then passed to the new Secretary of State, Robert Jenrick, who in turn granted final approval on 25 June.

Of particular interest to residents living close to the site will be the condition requiring a Construction Traffic Management Plan. The developer has an obligation to consult with all who might be affected by traffic accessing the site, both for demolition and construction.

*Newcombe House as it is at present.
Photograph: PhotoBECKET*



South Kensington Station: What can we say? How about: what a mess!

FOR years and years, there have been discussions about the redevelopment of South Kensington Station. In 2016 TfL issued a proposal for the redevelopment. The proposal separated the upgrade and station capacity increase, to be paid for by TfL, from the further development surrounding the entire site along Pelham Street, on the Bullnose, and down Thurloe Street. Finally, in 2018 it was announced that Native Land was to be “the preferred joint venture partner” for all but the station upgrade. What was not stated was that Native Land would have controlling powers of 51%.

Having spent years working with TfL on a planning permission granted in early 2012 for the main works to the upgrade, with the introduction of Native Land all dialogue ended. Native Land and TfL did have glossy presentations which they called a “consultation”. Sadly, these “consultations” consisted of large boards carrying selected views with no reference to what was the view before. Every “consultation” entailed more and more shocking proposals. The development exploded into larger and larger buildings. The architecture, well suited for any modern city, has no context reference to the conservation areas or the many fine listed buildings. There was no dialogue. Then came the application this June. And the uproar began.

The application was validated on 3 July. Shockingly on 24 July, just 21 days later, TfL reported it was “pausing” the station upgrade because the cost of the projects has “exceeded original project funding”. We never have received any notification from TfL and, of course, not from Native Land. We called our contact, a lovely young man at TfL we had been talking to for years, and asked what was going on. The answer was, and was repeated several times without explanation, “TfL is pausing”. When asked what “pausing” means, the answer was “pausing”. We asked if he could call me back and explain what “pausing” actually means. He has not called.

The important, and often misunderstood aspect of “pausing”, is that the application submitted in June included these “paused” parts. In planning when you are given approval for development

there is no obligation/requirement to do all the elements of the permission. In other words, the application in July for a massive development, if approved, could be built without the major community element of the station upgrade. What many people seem to miss is that the “paused” works for the upgrade included the new ticket hall and importantly the new lifts from the new ticket hall to the District and Circle Line platforms to be funded by TfL.

It is the one element we all wanted from this development – step free access throughout the station to the D&C platforms, to the tunnel and to/from the street level. Museums, of course, want the improvements to the access and capacity, as well. Some have unreservedly backed the applications and have mounted a support campaign. Unfortunately, the campaign has not mentioned that, if approved, there is no guarantee that there will be any works to the station or step free access.

We, the Kensington Society, have supported the organised residents’ associations in their extremely researched and thorough objections. Thurloe Owners’ and Leaseholders’ Association and Onslow Neighbourhood Association have been particularly active. No stone has been left unturned. We appreciate that there will be development but not at this expense.

TfL was in a financial mess before the pandemic began and now is demanding £5.7bn from the government. That money will not go to this development.

The council planners have informed us on 2 October that “the applicants have decided to pause and consider the content of the large number of representations, 1,569 objections at the time of writing, before deciding how best to address the concerns raised and how to proceed. This would seem to be a sensible and positive step at this point”.

We still want to know what “pause” means. It is not a planning term.

Update: at the time of writing there are 1,765 objections, with 205 in support of which 111 stating the desire for step free access. Like we said, what a mess!

The proposed new bullnose building with new buildings in Thurloe Street and Thurloe Square in the background.



The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the individual contributors and not necessarily those of the Kensington Society

C^{COVID}-19

THE CHALLENGES AND SURVIVORS

These are just some of the stories we have heard from our members and friends, individuals and businesses, of surviving the pandemic so far.

Working Through Covid-19

I work in obstetrics and gynaecology in a central London hospital and have lived in the borough since 2005. The arrival of Covid-19 in the UK was no surprise; I am from Hong Kong and I felt increasingly anxious that the lessons being learned there were not being adopted here. Many of us felt there was lack of preparation, and we were scrabbling for PPE and making protocol changes under great pressure. All elective services were cancelled, including (for a short while) cancer surgery. Clinics rapidly became as “virtual” as possible; unprecedented changes have been made to the way we offer antenatal care. On the plus side, many feel we are working far more efficiently. The lockdown has accelerated our ability to offer telemedicine and has forced healthcare providers to adapt, rapidly. It was a much-needed review of the way we “do things”. We skinned it down to emergency services; our juniors were redeployed to cover emergency medicine, ITU and general medical services. I miss “normality”, and I despair at the loss of lives across the globe. I think we shall have a completely different outlook on what counts as a “necessary” going forward, both at work and at home.

The incredible acts of kindness that have been demonstrated were awesome; stories I can share with my children. Crisis brings out the best and worst in us. I have enjoyed less pollution and a traffic-free cycle to work. I woke each morning with my windows wide open and was struck by a strange feeling of joy and sadness as I realised, I could hear birdsong rather than the normal drone of aircraft approaching Heathrow. I felt incredibly lucky to work on the

frontline, but also felt torn between wanting to protect my family and the need to do my job.

I have two young children who have been affected by the lockdown in both positive and negative ways; they are old enough to understand that we are having to be more careful and things that we used to do are not possible now. My husband has been working from home since March and juggling a full-time job with home schooling, something I wasn’t able to support much during the initial surge of infections. Our roles have been redefined, the dynamics changed, but we’ve enjoyed making it work. A crisis is both cohesive and divisive, but in my opinion, the prevailing theme that defines the pandemic, is that strong teamwork and community effort has never been more important.

Dr Nikki Lee



Covid – A Corporate Real Estate View

As a great believer in data driven decisions, I’m not convinced that looking back to the old normal is going to be helpful. Instead I will share a theory: that a building is an expression of societal needs and demands at a given point in time. Needs and demands change, leading to eventual obsolescence. Cycles of refurbishment and redevelopment traditionally mean buildings can be matched to gradual progress, but this does not account for pandemics.

There won’t be a golden bullet to end the Covid-19 pandemic. Even as treatments and vaccinations become available, we’ll not go back to the old ‘normal.’ We have already seen what many believe will be a long-lasting effect on the way we work. Forced to operate within varying levels of physical distancing measures, office occupiers will seek to keep the good bits – perhaps a more liberal approach to working from home – and refuse the bad bits – say, poor collaboration. Will we still need offices in the future? Undoubtedly. Will we use them in the same way? Most certainly not. This makes me think that we have just witnessed a huge decline in the usefulness of many of our existing office buildings.

I’d hazard a guess that the typical office worker is enjoying spending less time travelling to sit in an office with headphones on, ignoring colleagues and burying their heads in spreadsheets. That can be done from the comfort of one’s home desk, with the bonus that you only need to be presentable from the waist up, if even that.

I do however believe that all but the very least sociable office

workers enjoy direct human contact and are growing tired of endless video conferences. The office of the future will need to provide less solo space, and more areas for collaboration, communication, teamwork, blue skies thinking, team building, and socialising.

I believe that serviced offices will become ever more popular. They provide greater flexibility, a better sense of community, more amenities, and they encourage intra and inter-company collaboration. They also allow many small businesses to spring into life (and allow others to fail with fewer financial consequences), and small businesses will support employment and the green shoots of economic growth. Shoehorning serviced offices into old building stock is physically and commercially challenging in a market that values long lease and secure income. However, as demand changes and valuations adjust, this might be a viable proposition for the owners of offices.

There are also opportunities in local politics and town planning, but this requires numerous groups to step up to the challenge. **Businesses** need to better integrate themselves into local communities, a small amount of time invested in this would go a long way. **Local authorities** need to become better at directing revenues from business rates to uses that benefit the community and generate social capital. If this can be supported by **landowners and developers** who genuinely want to steward their little piece of society’s-built environment, we could harness the winds of change and come out of a seemingly desperate situation in a better place.

Jamie Trivedi-Bateman

Investment & Asset Management Professional

The International Suzuki Violin Teacher

The hardest part of lockdown for me was the cancellation of the Easter music dream I was organising – the British Suzuki Gala concert, which was to have been held at the Royal Albert Hall on Easter Sunday, April 2020. The direction of this enormous event was consuming my life at the start of the pandemic. Plans had been made over several years to bring 1,300 talented young musicians from all over Europe to play in the Gala. The performers had been practising for months by heart, on violin, viola, cello, bass, flute, recorder and piano, to play music by Bach, Mozart, Vivaldi and much more. The programme would have included 134 students on the Mendelssohn violin concerto as well as the Haydn cello concerto and Mozart's Alla Turca for 80 pianists, plus a few specially arranged compositions.

Then, BOOM! It was all off. Gutted. April 2023 maybe?

My heart is full of gratitude for my precious Italian violin beside me. This beautiful instrument was made over 300 years ago and has proudly survived dozens of epidemics, plagues and earthquakes since then, unscathed. This violin is my working tool and never changes, whatever the government Coronavirus Guidelines may be. I give thanks to this stability in my life.

Fortunately, even in lockdown, violin can be taught to anyone who has access to Zoom, wherever they are. So recently, I have enjoyed acquiring new computer skills to keep my livelihood as a Suzuki violin teacher.

If anything, my workload has increased since quarantine started. Every week violin lessons fly out from Kensington Park Gardens to students in Poland, Russia, Czech Republic, Germany, Vietnam and Italy, as well as locally. Some of the European teachers are beginning to recognise each other from these virtual meetings and have started their own chat between countries. I love it, watching the reality of music becoming an international language.

There have been many touching stories which have emerged in the midst of this pandemic, sweet moments where communities have unexpectedly come together. Kensington Park Gardens was no exception. On Thursday evenings during the worst of the pandemic



Helen Brunner is a world-renowned teacher of the Suzuki method of learning to play the violin. She became founder-director of the London Suzuki Group in 1972 and has since trained teachers all over the world. Photographed by Michael Becket

at 8:15pm (after the NHS clap), we put on a little street concert. Up to a dozen local musicians (mostly from No. 7, 8 & 9 KPG) played for an appreciative audience. Cars stopped and clappers came out onto their balconies. We lovingly prepared pieces including J S Bach's double violin concerto, Pachelbel and Vivaldi concertos from the classic repertoire. Sometimes we were joined by a young opera singer for 'Ave Maria' 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' and on the night Vera Lynn died, we performed 'We'll meet again'.

At the beginning of lockdown, Michael and Kay (upstairs at No. 9), invited me to tea. This happily became a fixture, and for weeks and even months we enjoyed our time together – lots of sharing, fun conversations and laughter! It was a lifeline for me as I was sorely missing my originally planned professional travels as a violin teacher/examiner, to India, Poland, and Russia.

In fact, it was Michael who recommended that I join the Kensington Society, which is how I come to be writing this.

Helen Brunner

Thackeray Street – A Whole Community

The buzz of Thackeray Street was not something we gave much thought to, until it was no longer there. People on their commute to and from work, shoppers, the chatter of school children from Thomas's walking – hand in hand – around the block, neighbours and office-workers having coffee or lunch, walking down to Gloucester Road or up to Kensington High Street... it was our rhythm, it was our life. Until March 2020 when a national lockdown – gave us all a new normal.

There was no script, we had no rehearsal. People were confused and many were scared. We were told to stay at home, save lives, help the NHS. However, our local restaurants – such as Ottoemazzo – immediately swung into action offering their delicious food as takeaway (particularly the pizza!), together with Montparnasse Café and Franklins Wine Bar; this kept the spirit of Thackeray Street alive. More importantly residents had a few friendly faces that they could make contact with every day, talk about what was going on in the world, a few open doors in a street of closed shops, all with that familiar notice on the door, "Following Government guidance we are now closed". There was also the corner convenience shop open throughout the lockdown and later in April, Grato Restaurant on Kensington Square evolved into an Italian deli pop-up which

was a welcomed addition.

Our local resident association, Kensington Court Residents, stepped into action making contact with all members asking them to check on neighbours to ensure that no one who may need help – or had to shield or self-isolate during the unknown challenging period ahead – slipped through the cracks. This meant that there was a point of contact – neighbours looking out for neighbours – it was natural and seamless. Genuine. The absolute definition of community.

Exercise was permitted during lockdown and, with the wonderful warm sunny weather, we were blessed to have access to two amazing green spaces on our doorstep, Kensington Gardens and Holland Park. Certainly, these parks took on different roles with their playgrounds and cafes closed. But we could safely walk, breathe, listen to the birds and touch base with nature again.

The forced change of pace and with many working from home, we found that people discovered as well as rediscovered the area. Noticed small hidden details in the architecture and the eclectic independent small shops that pepper the side streets. Thackeray Street, a small thoroughfare that connects Kensington Square with Kensington Court, is well placed (a block behind the High Street) which meant easy access to Boots, Marks & Spencers, Whole Foods, Waitrose and Gloucester Road with the treasure trove that is Margaret Mills Hardware. It was reassuring that surviving did not

How Covid 19 Affected Lidgates, Our Retail Family Business

As it happened

It seems like so long ago, I was sitting in our staff room where we have a TV, watching the news with a few of our butchers during a lunch break. There was a virus killing people in China. Straight away, a butcher nearly 20 years my senior made a statement, "this will go across the world and come here!" He was quite right. A few weeks later it had spread to the UK and one of our drivers approached me, explaining his wife had been told she was extremely high risk, and he would be unable to come to work. It was at the exact time people were panic buying, the supermarkets shelves were empty, we were selling items like chicken fillets 10kg at a time. Our shop was heaving, it was like Christmas. Whilst trying to keep up with demand over the next few days, one by one more staff were told that either they or their partners were high risk and needed to self-isolate. At one point we had 9 experienced long-term team members self-isolating. The remaining team members worked extra hours to cover the workload, many of them deeply concerned about travel to work options as death rates rose sharply. This would be crippling for the business even in a quiet time, but our phones were ringing like crazy and we just could not keep up. We started work at 4am and finished cutting and packing meat at 11.30pm for days on end. At the time, people said we should just deliver what we could, but we had long term loyal customers desperate for food deliveries, and this was the week before lockdown had even actually started. Somehow, we managed to recruit people, and build small teams. They were not butchers and all new to our industry. One I was working in, was even BA cabin crew.

What we did

To distance staff as much as possible, we organized a night shift. This also helped production hugely. With some clever technology, we were able to have some of the phone calls answered at Beverley's (our front desk supervisor) house as she self-isolated. We employed external cleaners. We hired more van drivers, provided staff with face coverings, dramatically increased our disposable glove use, and

provided further hand sanitizers for customers and staff. We are fortunate that we can gauge the general cleanliness of the shop by surface swabs we test every 2 weeks, which we normally do for food hygiene reasons anyway. I was, and still am, immensely proud of the grit, courage and spirit the entire Lidgates team have shown, as supermarkets offered delivery slots in 3 weeks' time, our team delivered orders the same day.

The future

The future of retail shopping and customer habits is very uncertain for the coming years. We have seen some trends occurring though. This pandemic seems to have encouraged people to eat more meat and in particular offal to maintain iron levels and good general health. Online shopping and daily deliveries will probably continue to remain a big part of London life. This has not been easy as many suburbs are turned into LTN's (low traffic neighbourhoods), making life extremely challenging for the city's delivery drivers. But there is one thing you can certainly count on. This great city is home to millions of amazing, diverse, determined, empathic, and resilient human beings, and as we pull together with our community spirit, looking out for one another, we will get through this unprecedented time.

Danny Lidgate

Alam and John are Lidgates loyal drivers



mean relying solely on the internet. There were safe places to go, where you could practice social distancing and were guaranteed a smile even this was behind a facemask.

The lockdown was a time to bring out the best in people. There was genuine care and concern. New routines and new traditions like clapping for the NHS and our keyworkers every Thursday at 7pm. New ways of working, socializing and keeping in touch, mostly on Zoom. Hand-drawn rainbows in windows and shopfronts. Gallery 19 – as a non-essential business – was closed for the duration of the lockdown but we regularly – during exercise time – popped in to check on things. It was so comforting to hear knocks on our window, a familiar face and a thumbs up. Gallery 19 is twenty-five years old this year; and while we have always felt part of the community this period really made it concrete. Community is everything and our community is amazing.

Sandra French Gallery 19

Ottomezzo – who immediately swung into action offering his food as a takeaway



Park Walk Primary School

At the beginning of this year, I never would have anticipated what I would have to consider and the decisions I was going to need to make as the Headteacher of Park Walk Primary School.

Thinking back to March 2020, it was with great sadness that I followed the Government directive and closed the school two weeks earlier than expected for the Easter holidays and the foreseeable future. I had no idea how long that would be or what was to follow. It felt awful being unable to finish the Spring Term with end of term celebrations acknowledging the hard work of our pupils. But this was the only way to support the fight against COVID-19 and keep the school community safe.

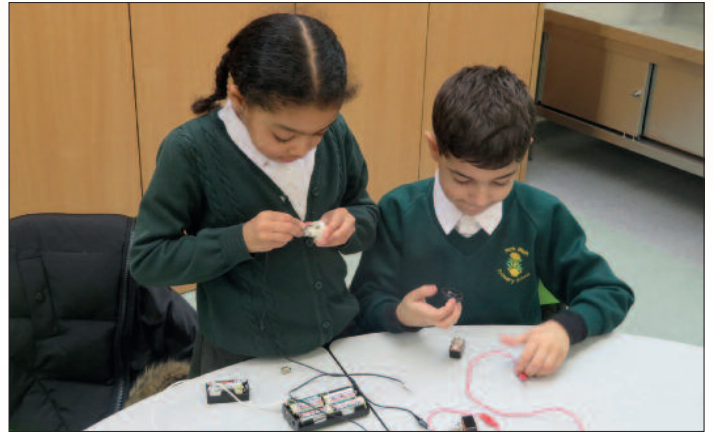
It was the end of a very busy week, during which staff had worked tirelessly to put plans into place for the immediate closure. As a small school, the staff know our families so well we were able to set up quickly a specific plan to support each family and their differing circumstances. In a final staff briefing on Friday 20th March 2020, we set up an emergency contact system, I said what I thought was important to reassure everyone and we said our goodbyes. By late afternoon, I sat at my desk in an eerie school, wondering if I had done enough.

Sleepless nights followed as I worked through endless lists of more and more actions I could take to support families from afar. Alongside keeping the school open every single day (holidays included) to provide childcare for key worker families and those pupils with specific needs, we created personalised packages of home learning on our school website with printed out packs (for those unable to access technology) for each class to collect at the gates. We opened the school playground as a drop-in library, prepared packed lunches each day for families to stop by and collect (this ensured those eligible for Free School Meals were able to access daily food), made welfare calls to every child in the school and provided specific learning tools for children with Special Education Needs. After receiving a considerable donation, we even created arts and craft packs for every child in the school to help keep them busy! Our incredible staff put their personal struggles aside to be able to do all of this and, I have to say, I have never been prouder.

In June we reopened the school with the support of RBKC, a dedicated staff team and a highly committed group of local Governors. This was an incredibly hard decision but having ensured we had a detailed risk assessment and logistics plan in place, I felt confident it was the right thing to do. The moment the gates opened on that first day back and I saw the children's faces and their sounds filled the previously empty halls, the agony of the last few months melted away and everything felt right again.

This year was undoubtedly tough on everyone. With all of us fighting our own silent battles – trying to look after small people, caring for older people from afar or even running out of toilet roll! However, it was also amazing to see the generosity of others and the resilience and strength from all our school community. It really did highlight to me what a wonderful honour it is to lead our school. And, as we go forward into this brave new world, we certainly have a lot to do to maintain the high standards of education for the kids. We will need to fundraise heavily to make up for the lost income and to implement new ways of working to keep everyone safe. But as a team, we will do all this and more to create a happy, safe place for our children to learn and grow – even in the most difficult of times.

Emily Caldwell *Headteacher*
info@parkwalk.rbkc.sch.uk



Natural History Museum

The doors of the Museum at South Kensington first opened on the 18 April 1881, and over 139 years have only closed during the Second World War.

That was until Tuesday 17 March 2020 when, as the COVID-19 virus continued to spread, the decision was made to close the Museum and enter lockdown. At that time, we were not aware it would be a further 20 weeks until our doors would reopen.

Despite being closed, work continued maintaining our collections and the building. The collection of 80 million specimens, from dried plants in the herbarium to fossils lining kilometres of shelves, needed to be looked after to make sure that they will still be there in another 150 years' time. Our scientists ensured that all our specimens – from fossils to flesh eating beetles – remained safe and secure. Read more about this on our website – it was an intriguing period.

www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/the-natural-history-museum-in-lockdown.html

Although we could not welcome visitors to the Museum (usually an average of 15,000 visitors a day), we continued to keep people informed about the Museum and our work by adapting our previously physical events and activities for the digital world using our website and social media channels.

From Nature Live (twice-weekly interactive talks featuring topical discussions exploring the natural world with our scientists and cutting-edge research) to activities for adults, families and children in their own homes and gardens, it was a chance for our audiences – both new and old – in the UK and further afield – to

learn more about the Museum, the natural world and our vision for the future where both people and the planet thrive.

Why not find out more: www.nhm.ac.uk/discover and www.nhm.ac.uk/visit/exhibitions/nature-live

Visiting the Museum and Forthcoming Exhibitions. The Museum reopened to the public on 5 August. Our normal opening hours resumed on Monday, 19 October allowing more visitors to enjoy both the Museum and exhibitions. All entry must be pre-booked as capacity to the Museum and our exhibitions has been set so that all visitors have a safe and enjoyable time.

Although we have reopened, our Nature Live interactive talks and many other events continue virtually whilst Government restrictions remain in place. However, there is still much to look forward to at the Museum. We hope to see you again at the Museum soon

Wildlife Photographer of the Year– until June 2021. This year's exhibition promises to immerse you in the breath-taking diversity of the natural world. The award night on 13 October was broadcast live around the world and the Museum's Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cambridge, announced Sergey Gorshkov as the overall winner for his photograph 'The Embrace'. Visit www.nhm.ac.uk/wpy to view the photographs and for more information on how to visit.

Fantastic Beasts: The Wonder of Nature – our blockbuster exhibition – allowing you to discover where the real and wizarding worlds intertwine, is set to open this winter. Keep an eye on our website for news about ticket releases.

[The Natural History Museum](http://www.nhm.ac.uk)



NHM Fantastic Beasts The Wonder of Nature Conservation © Trustees of the Natural History Museum

A Year of Milestones and Reflections

With ‘bump’ on the way, 2020 was always planned to be a big year. In late January we were able to celebrate a 40th birthday weekend in Dorset with 40 close friends. Even with my great friend Ronan, a respiratory consultant, in tow, we had no idea of the gravity of the pandemic news from China and the storm that was about to hit us. However with close family in Northern Italy, we were able to appreciate the seriousness of the impending situation slightly earlier and, sensitive to risk given ‘bump’, we pulled our daughter, Isabella, out early from her last month of nursery.

Hunkered down as a family unit, Delphine and I were able to spend unexpected quality time with Isabella ahead of the arrival of her brother in June. And thanks to digital tech, we managed to keep connected with friends and family across the globe. Starting every morning with a Joe Wicks online exercise broadcast, we quickly settled as a family into our daily routine – Isabella with remote home learning (on the table on which my grandmother used to run her seamstress business) ably supervised by Delphine who continued to help her search clients navigate their house purchases. My private markets investment work too moved online in a matter of days, made all the easier working in a small long-standing team. We loved the weekly clap for the NHS, through which we made new friends whom we periodically assist with groceries.

Enjoying a quietened London, with socially distanced walks around Kensington and Chelsea and its beautiful parks and evenings working our way through Netflix, we found that lockdown passed relatively quickly. Before we knew it, it was June and the birth of our son, Leonardo, at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital. Having previously been advised that I wouldn’t be able to attend the birth, a week before I was told I could now attend one of the most incredible and amazing life experiences. Thank you to all the wonderful hospital staff, who made us feel so comfortable, safe and secure.



The Colombo family in the garden at home

With a growing family we started the year keeping an eye open for a new house. Led by our ‘in house’ search agent, we were fortunate to find our ideal in Norland. And with Isabella starting ‘big girl’ school, despite the difficulties of this year, we have much to be thankful for.

This pandemic has been the first real disaster of my generation. It could be the first year we will not be able to spend time with our closest family members who live abroad. And with blue passports next time we see them, cross-European travel may not be as easy as previously. Nevertheless, we are grateful that despite some complications and difficult situations, our family and friends are keeping broadly OK. This year really has made us understand the importance of not taking friends and family for granted. Keep in touch. Don’t procrastinate. Get things done and adapt. Key skills to instruct our children.

Matteo Colombo

The Knightsbridge Estate: Construction Under Covid

The Knightsbridge Estate (“The Estate”) is situated between Harrods and Harvey Nichols, a 3.5 acre site of a rare collection of unique buildings. Since 2010 there has been the total redevelopment of the site forming a mixed-use scheme behind one of London’s most impressive retained Dutch gabled heritage façades including the restoration of listed building, façade retentions and a new London Underground station, new retail units, offices and housing.

With so many moving parts to this complex construction and engineering project, anxiety levels ran high as the full impact of Covid around the globe became clear. With Italy in full lockdown, factory shut-downs in northern Italy affecting cladding manufacturer Permasteelisa added to the delay and uncertainty. As confusion in the construction sector prevailed, a decision was made to reduce the number of men on site – significantly before Boris Johnson’s announcement that the UK was going into full lockdown and that all construction work must cease.

From that time, main contractor Skanska met the challenges head-on, swiftly implementing Covid-compliant measures to enable construction work to resume as soon as permitted, whilst maintaining supply-chain relationships with over 50 sub-contractors to keep their manufacturing sites operational. This enabled Skanska to re-calibrate the design and build work, and regain lost momentum. This facilitated a further objective: to keep workers off the government furlough scheme and avoid the risk of redundancies.

Working within government guidelines, a fresh approach to

health and welfare was implemented across the site. New measures included the introduction of a site pedestrian ‘one-way’ system, additional canteen facilities allowing for social distancing, increased changing facilities and a block contract with NCP for workers, as initially no site access was permitted if travel to and from the site was by public transport. With these measures in place, Skanska successfully managed to build worker numbers back up to pre-Covid levels by mid-June, resulting in a total work stoppage of only two weeks.

The economic and social impact of maintaining an active site should not be underestimated. For every worker on site there are an estimated two additional workers involved in supplying materials and off-site manufacture. Maintaining a design programme with over 750 technical drawings being prepared and submitted for approval each month, involves a design team of over 50 architects and engineers. It is with some pride that we can say that the total direct and indirect household dependency on the redevelopment work on The Estate is estimated to be 1,200.

It is equally no small achievement that the project is back on track. Preparation for the handover of the new entrances to London Underground, including the step free access on Hooper’s Court is all but complete. The retail units are also largely complete. The restoration work across the retained façades and on the listed building at 5 Sloane Street has been carried out with help from specialist stone mason PAYE. We are delighted that the roofscape also now has a beautiful cupola above 1 Sloane Street, originally conceived by JW Duvall Goodwin Architects in 1903, when the building was first drawn up.

Chelsfield Group

Coping with Covid

Obviously, it wasn't The Virus. The rumble of Covid thunder was getting closer with pockets of infection in northern Italy and France, but the storm had yet to break in the UK. So, in early March when I woke up with a headache, and my wife felt ill, I was convinced it was a routine bug. Sarah stayed in bed, though I got up and, fortified by paracetamol, started work.

That evening I realised it must be flu. We both had a minor fever with aching muscles and for the next two days we both felt sorry for ourselves and stayed in bed. But by Sunday I was better. Whatever it was I had fought it off. Feeling pleased with myself, I went for a routine long walk with a friend.

That was the first false dawn. On Monday I started coughing. Still I thought it surely can't be Covid. Nobody we knew had Covid. But by evening I was too ill even to listen to the news. The cough grew worse, and at times it came in such frightening spasms that I had no time to draw breath. I could scarcely sleep, my temperature mounted, and I was so uncomfortable that I often felt better lying on the floor. After a week, even when I wasn't coughing, the simple act of breathing started to get hard. At times I panicked, fighting to suck air. It was so exhausting that I could scarcely speak, and I could not have called for help or talk coherently on the phone. Had Sarah not been there to calm me (thankfully, she had none of the respiratory symptoms) I would have been in trouble.

Eventually, even she got scared for me and dialled 111; but gave up after waiting 40 minutes. By then I had succumbed to exhaustion and was asleep.

Our GP sent a prescription for antibiotics – to help prevent the viral infection from being overlaid with a bacterial one – but the reality of that first wave of Covid was that either you were in hospital (or a care home) or you were more or less on your own.

Heaven knows what would have happened had I really been on

my own. I couldn't eat and wouldn't drink. When she was sufficiently recovered, Nurse Sarah stood over me insisting I sipped at honey and lemon and forcing me out of bed each morning to change the sopping sheets and make me sit under the shower.

Three more times I felt better, and on those days, I went to rest in a chair or even visited downstairs and was able to read books and do crosswords. But, to my dismay, in each case I relapsed. Two weeks from the start I had temperature of 40°C (104°F) and it seemed the torment would never end. I became thoroughly depressed. But 18 days in, now the fourth occasion on which my temperature went below 39°C (102°F), it stayed down. Impressively it remained low for two days, and then as if by magic it was back to normal.

It all seems foggily distant now. With illness, as with pain, something which is all-consuming at the time is soon forgotten. And there were two silver linings. I have had several antibody tests and still show positive, which implies a much-reduced risk of reinfection, if not completely immunity. But the real upside was my downsize. I lost so much weight that I emerged from the ordeal with the svelte figure I lost way back in my mid-thirties.

Naturally, I've almost put almost all of it back on.

Nick Ross *President the Kensington Society*



Dear Reader – Are you a member? If not – Join us!

The Kensington Society, established in 1953, fights to preserve the best of our magnificent built heritage and historic parks and valuable green spaces, as well as the best of contemporary architecture and design. We are a critical friend, advocating positive planning decisions helping residents and council alike. We are 700 strong and we have 33 affiliated local resident associations. We represent a significant force in Kensington.

We support local resident members with their individual planning matters. Do you have a problem in your neighbourhood? Are you faced with a major development which concerns you? Our trustees can help!

We have been involved in so many planning battles that we have a huge contact database and enormous experience which we can use in support of major local issues. We provide our affiliated local

resident associations with a range of expertise and knowledge. We alert our members about major issues in the borough; we send a yearly newsletter, and annual report and hold an AGM in the spring.

We work closely with our local councillors and council officers, providing them with the view from the ground and helping them to formulate local policies.

And normally, outside of the Covid pandemic, we organise a programme of events and lectures – walks and talks – where you can meet your Kensington neighbours. Currently these are all on-line. We aim to revert to real life as soon as we are able.

Join us – it only costs £15 per year.

Contact us:

Email: kensingtonsociety@outlook.com

For further information our website: www.kensingtonsociety.org

MEMBERSHIP

Charity No. 267778

The membership subscription is payable by bank standing order only and is renewable annually on 1 January. This entitles one person to be a member. Please complete further forms for additional memberships.

Individual subscription £ 15 Renewable annually on 1 January.

Donation £ _____

Total £ _____

Please pay by bank standing order only; no cheques.

Title: _____ Full Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

City and Postcode: _____

Email: _____

Mobile: _____

Home Telephone: _____

How did you hear of us? Renewal ☐, Friend ☐, Planning Issue ☐,

Other ☐ _____

Please treat as Gift Aid donations all qualifying gifts of money to The Kensington Society made today or in the past four years or in the future.

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I confirm that I have paid or shall pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax for each tax year (6 April to 5 April) that is at least equal to the amount of tax that all the Charities or Community Amateur Sports Clubs that I donate to will reclaim on my gifts for that tax year. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify. I understand that the charity will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give after 6 April 2008. You can cancel your Gift Aid declaration at any time. Please let us know if you change your name or address or no longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains. If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self-Assessment tax return or ask HMRC to adjust your tax code.

X Signature: _____ Date: _____



THE KENSINGTON
SOCIETY

BANK STANDING ORDER

Bank Name and Branch: _____

Bank address: _____

City and Postcode: _____

Sort Code: _____ Account: _____

A/c Name: _____

Please pay Barclays Bank Notting Hill Gate sort code **20-47-34** for the credit of **The Kensington Society** account **70519138**,

reference * _____ a first payment of £ _____

immediately and an annual payment of £ _____ on 1 January until further notice.

This cancels any other previous standing order to The Kensington Society.

X Signature: _____ Date: _____

* The membership reference number will be allocated when we receive your membership form. Please check that your bank address and post code are given above as this form will be sent to your bank for processing. The bank will need your original signature. **Please post** to The Kensington Society, 23 St James's Gardens, LONDON W11 4RE. For further information email kensingtonsociety@outlook.com or call 020 7193 5243.

The objects of **The Kensington Society** are to preserve and improve the amenities of Kensington for the public benefit by stimulating interest in its history and records, promoting good architecture and planning in its future development and by protecting, preserving and improving its buildings, open spaces and other features of beauty or historic or public interest.