

Pembridge Association Newsletter

Number Six: Autumn 1976

P.A. OPPOSES LIBRARY SCHEME

PEMBRIDGE LIBRARY could grow by up to three more storeys if Kensington and Chelsea Council decide to go ahead with an improvement scheme.

Council accommodation above the library now consists of 16 single bedrooms with communal kitchens and bathrooms.

The Council wants to create self-contained flats and at the same time make room for more people to live there.

This puts the Council in the situation of having to deal with one of its own planning applications in a Conservation Area.

Like any other developer it wants to make the best use of its property and would need additional space to provide the improvements even to house the same number of residents.

The great question is how much space can be provided without exceeding the building bulk that the Council might allow any other developer.

And it may be that no further extension is acceptable on principle on this important landmark.

The Borough Housing Committee appointed a local architect, Sam Lloyd, of Green Lloyd & Adams, to prepare a conversion scheme for the property.

The Town Planning Committee looked at three preliminary schemes but deferred any comment until they had obtained the views of the Pembridge Association.

Some P.A. Executive Committee members objected to all the schemes. But the committee decided to give a measure of unenthusiastic approval to one of the proposals.

The Town Planning Committee therefore decided that it would not encourage the Housing Committee to go ahead with any of the three schemes.

So Mr Lloyd presented two further proposals to the P.A. at its June Executive Committee meeting.

The Committee chose one of these proposals as "the least offensive" but at its September meeting the majority were opposed to any change in the outside of the building, and the Secretary wrote to the Council to report the majority view.

The problem hinges around whether one, two or three additional floors are acceptable.

Kensington Council and the Pembridge Association both opposed the upward extension of No 2 Pembridge Square, next door to the library, although the Department of the Environment allowed this extension on appeal.

So does it make sense from the civic design point of view to raise No 1 Pembridge Square, the library building, up to the same level?

If this were accepted what sort of precedent would it set for owners of other property in Pembridge Square and Pembridge Gardens?

The planning application will be advertised so that local residents can make their views known to the Planning Committee before a final decision is made.

The Council has been very receptive to the views of local residents in this matter so far.

If you feel strongly about the proposal let the Secretary of the P.A. know your views as soon as possible.

Science Centre in Sion Convent?

AN IMPORTANT town planning application has been submitted to the Council by a prospective buyer of Sion Convent - 26-40 Chepstow Villas and 13-23 Denbigh Road.

The proposal is to set up a "London Science Centre".

This would be a conference centre consisting of a secretary's office, communal facilities and meeting rooms for each of 28 learned societies together with a conference hall to be shared by all the societies.

There is likely to be a permanent staff of 25; an average of 200 people using the building; and occasionally up to 400 people at conferences.

Access to a car park in the middle of the site would be made by knocking down 13-15 Denbigh Road.

The Convent is a Listed Building currently used as Our Lady of Sion Junior School and the entire site has acquired "use rights" for educational purposes.

The Pembridge Association hopes to persuade the Borough Council to arrange a public meeting to find out the views of local residents.

FROM THE CHAIRMAN'S DESK . . .

THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE'S diet has consisted mainly of Context Papers in connection with the Borough Development Plan.

Papers on Shopping, Recreation and Leisure, and Social and Community Services are reviewed in this Newsletter.

The articles have been written by various members of the committee after detailed discussion by all members.

The views expressed are, however, those of the writer and not necessarily of the committee as a whole.

(continued back page, column 2)

FUTURE PLANS . . .

THE FUTURE OF KENSINGTON AND CHELSEA is being worked out in a Borough Development Plan and the Council wants to know how local residents would like the Borough to develop.

So they have been writing "context papers" which discuss the possibilities. The Council can then take residents' reactions to the suggestions into account as they work out the Development Plan.

As each context paper appears a member of the PA Executive Committee is assigned to studying it in depth before the Committee sends comments to the Council.

In this issue of the Newsletter three members set out their views on the paper they studied.

Social Services

THE ROYAL BOROUGH, we learn from the opening paragraph of the Context Paper on Social and Community Services, covers under 3,000 acres and so is the smallest of the London Boroughs, while with a population of 180,000 it is the most densely populated.

The paper then fell into two parts, the first about the functions and responsibilities of agencies providing social and community services and the second on provision for different client groups.

The first named three "giving" agencies, adequately covering the background and structure of the Area Health Authority and the Social Services Department of the Borough.

But it provided a very inadequate section about the voluntary agencies which abound in this Borough.

The second section detailed six client groups, or those at the "receiving" end: children and young persons; families; the physically handicapped; the elderly; the mentally ill; and the mentally handicapped (not to be confused with the mentally ill, being those born with some deficiency).

Of these groups, numerically the most important is the elderly. For one in eight people living in the Borough come under this heading and they outnumber the children up to the age of 17.

The paragraphs on the mentally ill revealed that Kensington and Chelsea has the highest suicide rate in London, and the fifth highest mental admission rate.

Much of the paper's argument depends on the acceptance of the figures supplied by statisticians that the number of children and of elderly will decline in the years ahead.

If this is so, a decline in the number of elderly will be against the national trend. Already one in three referrals to Social Services Department concern the elderly.

It proved very difficult to say if the provision of the services

described in the paper was adequate for the area covered by the Pembridge Association. The area itself includes very few facilities: no day nurseries, no meals-on-wheels centre, no schools for the handicapped, no special housing for the elderly.

But this is no guide to the adequacy of such provision. And while we do have a psychiatric day centre opening shortly, those attending will come not only from Pembridge but from all over North Kensington.

Clearly this paper called for a different form of treatment from the others and the Director of Social Services met this by arranging four open meetings to which those responsible for voluntary provision were invited to discuss needs and future proposals for different groups of people.

The four meetings drew together people interested in the care of children and families, the elderly, the physically handicapped and the mentally ill. They were held in April, May and June and owing to my special interests I attended the first three.

Representation was Borough-wide and attendance was not too large for some useful exchanges of ideas. The Director of Social Services and other Borough officials and councillors were present while the Chairman of the Social Services Committee took the chair.

The paper's summary of the future dwelt on the provision of more facilities; for example, more for the under-fives and more skilled social work to meet the increase in marital problems.

But some of us feel that the last word was best said in the concluding paragraph of the section on the elderly: that merely providing services or residential places is only the foundation of care.

Improving the quality of life must be the overall aim, and this is the task of the community at large.

Douglas Richardson

Shopping

THE SHOPPING Context Paper tries to relate the specific problems of shopping in the Borough to their context in London and nationally.

Particular features of the central London shopping pattern are the lack of demand or opportunity for the development of car-based shopping, and the importance of tourism in maintaining the profitability of the main centre. These points also apply to the Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

The paper examines the changes in the distribution of floor space between 1966 and 1971. There has been a marked fall in the amount of floorspace used for food, with a corresponding increase in the space used for durable goods.

The latter may be assumed to be largely due to the growth in clothes shops and - particularly relevant to this area - the growth in the antiques trade.

Part of the decline in floorspace for food-shopping can be attributed to an increase in efficiency. So the decline in floorspace will not necessarily reflect a corresponding decline in turnover. A significant factor, of course, is the replacement of the local shop by the supermarket.

The paper compares the wards in the Borough in terms of average income, age and proportion of resident visitors.

The Pembridge average income is just below the Borough average. It has a low proportion of the under-15 age group and a relatively low proportion of retired people, but a high proportion of the 15-25 age group. As might be expected, the proportion of resident visitors is above the Borough average.

The paper discusses the various shopping centres in the Borough.

On the whole the north part of the Borough fares relatively well for food-shopping, but attention is drawn to the inadequacies of Notting Hill Gate as a convenience centre.

The Portobello Road and Westbourne Grove centres of the antique trade represent a special feature which grew up at the time when these centres had a high proportion of junk shops when the houses in the area were being emptied and converted for multiple occupation in the early 1960s, and

Recreation & Leisure

- how well served is the Pembridge Estate?

the contents of these houses came to the junk shops.

"Many of the pieces of furniture and ornaments acquired in this way turned out to have considerable value as antiques and Victoriana and a large market quickly developed."

The Borough's shopping centres generally need environmental improvement.

But this depends on major traffic policy decisions, since the first step to any environmental improvement is a reduction in traffic.

Of the three main shopping centres in the Borough, High Street Kensington is the one most relevant to this area.

Here the shopping pattern has changed significantly. The decline of the large department stores has been offset by the growth of fashion shops catering for young people.

Only 15% of the centre's turnover comes from outside the Home Counties compared to 24% in Knightsbridge.

The centre is particularly vulnerable to competition from Hammersmith and outer London centres which have advantages in accessibility, particularly by car.

The main local problem identified by the paper is of enabling the small neighbourhood shop to hold its own in the face of competition from supermarkets on the one hand, and boutiques and antique shops on the other.

The latter have great competitive advantage in the rent they can offer. The paper suggests the possibility of subsidising certain types of shops by rating concessions.

An alternative is that changes of use should be allowed in residential areas only for particular types of shopping. This would ensure that the rents did not affect the higher potential of an unrestricted shopping use.

Reference is also made to the inadequacy of the Borough's powers to control changes from one type of shop to another. Thus the Borough has no effective powers to prevent food shops giving way to boutiques, since such a change does not at present require planning permission.

The paper also discusses the possibility of the Borough itself acquiring and letting shops, if necessary at concessionary rents.

At the end of the day, however, the paper acknowledges that it may not be in the best interests of the public for the Borough to attempt to give artificial life to shops which cannot hold their own naturally.

This can only be done by the use

THE RECREATION AND LEISURE Context Paper naturally deals with the whole Borough. But our concern is with the Pembridge area and its environs, and I have tried to spotlight one or two matters of possible concern.

Facilities falling under the heading of Recreation and Leisure include parks, private squares, sports grounds, swimming baths, concert halls, museums, libraries, theatres and cinemas, and buildings of historic interest.

Within the conservation area we can boast a library and a private square; and within easy reach are Holland Park, the Commonwealth Institute and, of course, Kensington Palace and Gardens.

Since Pembridge is chiefly a residential area with a child population of only about 15% it could be said that the facilities are adequate; and those the area lacks may generally be found in other parts of the Borough.

There are, however, gaps that could well be remedied by sensitive planning should a need be shown to exist. One of these is the provision of small sitting places with trees to provide quiet spots where the elderly may meet and rest.

This matter is one of the concerns of the Borough's Environmental Advisory Committee. There are several places where

this could happen, like the west end of Pembridge Square, the library garden, and just outside the area at Notting Hill Gate itself, outside Smith's and Boot's.

Portobello Road is another area on our borders which is concerned in a loose sense with recreation and leisure. There is no doubt that this could be improved enormously by pedestrian precincts with controlled access for traders at set times.

In relation to garden space the paper poses the thorny question of the private garden squares. This is relevant to Pembridge because of Pembridge Square and it is a problem we have raised before.

My view is that the private gardens should remain private where an adequate committee exists to ensure the garden is maintained. There is no doubt that gardens would suffer if they were open to the public.

In the case of Pembridge Square - one of the larger open spaces in the north of the Borough - the Council should be encouraged to negotiate for assurances that the upkeep and improvement of the garden will continue to the benefit of the square's residents.

In conclusion, it would appear that Pembridge is adequately served by recreational and leisure facilities.

Peter Pilkington

of ratepayers' money, either through direct subsidies, rent or rate concessions, or compensation for restricting existing uses. And the effect may only be to perpetuate a relatively expensive and inefficient form of shopping.

A real problem does, however, exist for the elderly and the less mobile who "find the Borough's shopping centres too busy and distant, have no local shops to supply their needs, or who cannot justify queuing at a supermarket for the small number of items which they can carry on public transport..."

For these people it is suggested that a mini-bus shopping trip service might be provided, as is already done for the physically handicapped.

Another service provided by some of the Borough's community centres is a bulk-buying service, which enables them to resell at lower than shop prices to old people using the centres.

The Context Paper is intended as a basis for discussion. It raises questions but does not give any firm answers.

The basic issue is whether the Borough should attempt to interfere with the ordinary market forces which govern the development of the shopping pattern.

If one can detect any conclusion in the paper it is that such interference should be treated with caution since it involves expenditure of ratepayers' money with doubtful effect.

Clearly the Borough should do all it can to ensure that the elderly and less mobile are properly catered for and to improve the environment of the existing shopping areas.

But the authors of the paper do not evince any great confidence in the desirability of the other suggestions put forward for discussion, and one may feel some sympathy with that view.

Robert Carnwath

Concern over Russian Embassy proposals

THE RUSSIAN EMBASSY is proposing to develop the eastern end of Palace Gardens and the 1½ acre former barracks site in Kensington Church Street.

This would involve the demolition of 6 and 7 Kensington Palace Gardens which are both Listed Grade II buildings.

There is general concern about the proposals in principle - the details are not yet available.

The Pembridge Association has written to the Secretary of State, Mr Crosland and to Sir Brandon Rhys Williams, MP for the area, and is liaising with the Kensington Society and the Linden Gardens Residents' Association.

The Kensington Society plans to hold an open meeting to discuss the proposals. A date will be announced soon and P.A. members are urged to attend the meeting.



Above: One of the cartoons kindly provided by Richard Warren for the pamphlet on the Pembridge Association which was produced earlier this year.

CHAIRMAN'S DESK (continued from front page)

Copies of the Context Papers and of the Association's comments may be obtained from the Secretary, Peter Chapman.

We gladly accepted Adrian Robson's offer to compile and produce this Newsletter and hope it will be of interest to both old and new members.

Douglas Richardson

Planning Applications

So far this year we have sent observations to the Council and/or to the Department of the Environment on the following planning applications:

- 31-32 Pembridge Square
- 13-15 Denbigh Road
- 16 Pembridge Place
- 22 Pembridge Crescent
- Russian Embassy proposals
- 1 Pembridge Square Library proposals
- Convent of Our Lady of Sion proposals

In addition, of course, all planning applications and proposals have been examined, and many have been taken up at an informal level with the Council by members.

Executive Committee of the Association

Rev D Richardson	Chairman	48 Ladbroke Road
Mr T de Zoete	Treasurer	33 Pembridge Villas
Mr P Chapman	Secretary	62 Lansdowne Road
Miss E Aslin		Flat 1, 9 Pembridge Crescent
Mr D Campion		13 Rodney House, Pembridge Cres.
Mr R Carnwath		2 Chepstow Place
Mr J Hillelson		34 Chepstow Place
Miss J Lawton		Flat 1, 9 Pembridge Crescent
Mr A Robson		3 Pembridge Crescent
Mr S Tanner		10 Dawson Place
Miss D Weatherhead		13 Clanricade Gardens

Wanted - Volunteers!

First, and most important, a volunteer is needed for the job of Secretary of the Association to take over from Peter Chapman.

He has moved out of the area into neighbouring Ladbroke, and is therefore prepared to be succeeded by a resident in Pembridge.

And second, the Editor of the Newsletter would be very grateful for any offers of help with the typing involved in the Newsletter. Phone Adrian Robson - 229 4777.

Pembridge Square

There has been considerable correspondence and discussion with the Borough Council by the Association and individual members over the use of 31-32 Pembridge Square.

We are assured that the Council is taking steps to stop unauthorized use of the building.

ST PETER'S HALL 59A PORTOBELLO RD 8.00 PM
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
 Tuesday 7th
 December 1976

MAKE A NOTE of the date of this year's Annual General Meeting.

Mr Ian Grant, FRIBA, Vice-Chairman of the Kensington Society will give an illustrated talk on Victorian architecture entitled "Sixty Glorious Buildings".

Published by the Pembridge Association, P Chapman, 62 Lansdowne Road, W11.