

# KNIGHTSBRIDGE NEIGHBOURHOOD FORUM

*Simon Birkett, Chairman*

The Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Plan 2018–37 (KNP) was 'made' (i.e. adopted) by Westminster City Council (WCC) on 11 December 2018 after nearly four years' work by the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum (Forum). At the time of writing, it is still the only Neighbourhood Plan in the City of Westminster. We are pleased, though, that the Mayfair Neighbourhood Plan should follow shortly, having obtained around 90% support in two separate referenda at the end of October. Four other Forums – Fitzwest, Notting Hill East, Pimlico and Soho – have held the first statutory consultations on their draft plans and many more in Westminster are making good progress.

The 'making' of the Neighbourhood Plan triggered several immediate changes:

1. It became the starting place for the determination of all planning applications in the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Area (KNA).
2. The neighbourhood portion of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL), which is money raised from residential development and held by WCC for spending in the area, increased from 15% (capped at £100 per dwelling) to 25% (uncapped).
3. The Forum began work on the top 85 non-land-use priorities (e.g. licensing) that were identified during the consultations and listed in the Knightsbridge Management Plan (KMP).

## PLANNING DECISIONS

WCC officers and planning inspectors considering appeals are now referring to the KNP and one or more of its 40 policies in their reports and decisions on planning applications (including refusals of permission). Examples of relevant planning decisions include: advertising and wifi 'plinths' being refused for our busy pavements; restrictions on cafés in Brompton Road (WCC's approval of Illy Caffè's T&Cs application being a notable exception); encouraging developers to implement all-electric

buildings; urban greening (which may appear first in Lancelot Place or Montpelier Mews); and the consistent use of local construction policies. The Forum's 'best practice guidance' is also being used, particularly for construction standards and procedures, by the most professional developers and property owners, who are specifically addressing the requirements of the KNP in their planning applications.

The Forum continues to comment selectively on significant planning applications and appeals in liaison with the Knightsbridge Association.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD PORTION OF CIL

A key objective of the Forum in pursuing a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan was to trigger, in accordance with national planning legislation, the automatic increase in the portion of the CIL monies collected and to be spent by WCC within the neighbourhood area. This difference could represent several million pounds over the lifetime of the plan. (About £31,000 of neighbourhood CIL was collected prior to the making of the KNP, i.e. at the 15% rate. This money arose from the Moreau House development in Brompton Road.) WCC requested the first applications for the spending of the neighbourhood portion of the CIL by mid-September. The Forum's application was guided by eight principles defined in the KNP and the list of general and area-specific projects that were approved in the Forum's October 2018 referendum. The Forum also consulted the KA on the choice of projects. One popular project proposed to WCC and approved was the comprehensive restoration and improvement of the 'hole in the wall', including its lighting. Please contact the Forum via its website or the KA if you have suggestions for an infrastructure project which would meet the above criteria.

## OTHER INFRASTRUCTURE SPENDING

Beyond the CIL, WCC spends regular Council funds every year to improve local infrastructure. Over many years, the Knightsbridge Association has responded to WCC's requests for projects or problems to be highlighted. Significant examples in the last year have included: restoring the heritage pillars, lights and railings at the top of Rutland Gate, new road surfaces in Montpelier Walk and Trevor Place, and new street lighting in a number of streets (e.g. Rutland Gate and Rutland and Fairholt Streets). These works are in addition to day-to-day maintenance works such as street cleaning, unblocking storm water drains, etc. Some of these works are requested by the community and some are chosen independently by WCC.

There are several other sources of funds for spending on infrastructure improvements and other community needs:

- A. 'Ward' funds which are managed by our local councillors to address specific issues;
- B. Planned preventative maintenance schemes for highways, drainage and public lighting;
- C. Ad hoc projects funded by the Mayor and others, e.g. tree planting;
- D. The strategic portion of the CIL monies (i.e. the 'other' 75%), which we would like, at least on average, to be spent in our area; and
- E. Monies from other planning obligations, e.g. £11,000 towards addressing air quality issues in Princes Gardens.

The Knightsbridge Association takes the lead on responding to WCC's requests for (A) and (B) above, liaising with the Forum. The Forum and KA are considering whether they should engage in a more organised manner with the Council and others on their use of infrastructure and other funds and resources more

generally. This might coincide with the desire of local government to be more transparent about their use of monies arising from planning obligations.

## BRINGING THE KNP TO LIFE

The Forum has moved quickly to capitalise on the extremely positive vote in its referendum. The Forum said it would 'pursue at least once' each of the 'Top 85 priorities' that were identified by the community during the preparation of the KNP by contacting the lead organisations involved in each. WCC would be lead player on 64 of 85 priorities and has been very supportive. Progress so far includes planning

enforcement, regulatory enforcement (e.g. confiscating stock from street traders), street cleaning, traffic and environmental issues, including air quality. The Forum's activities also included: commenting on WCC's initial and then draft Regulation 19 of its new City Plan (WCP); helping to establish an informal group of Forums in Westminster that complements WASF (see below) by focusing on planning issues; encouraging and advising other Forums on progressing their Plans and beginning to produce knowledge notes to share our experience with others; and trying to engage with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, developers and others about the possible future sale of part or all of

the Hyde Park Barracks land. The most important of these was probably the WCP. Throughout, we have been helped greatly by WCC councillors and officers including Rachael Robathan who sits on our Board.

Much has been accomplished, but there is much yet to do. We will be applying to Westminster to renew our five-year mandate in 2020. Please follow our work and consider joining the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Forum if you live, work or study in the Knightsbridge Neighbourhood Area (which is bounded broadly by Brompton Road, Albert Gate, South Carriage Drive and Queen's Gate). You can do so at [knightsbridgeforum.org](http://knightsbridgeforum.org).

# AMENITY SOCIETIES AND COMMUNITY LIAISON GROUPS

## WESTMINSTER AMENITY SOCIETIES FORUM (WASF)

WASF comprises about 25 amenity societies, including the Knightsbridge Association, that are formally recognised by Westminster City Council (WCC) and have been representing Westminster's local communities for decades. Amenity societies are different to Neighbourhood Forums in that they focus more on the day-to-day needs of residents than strategic planning matters. Some individuals are involved in both amenity societies and forums. WASF's primary aim is to provide an opportunity for amenity societies to identify common issues and encourage the Council's leadership to hear and respond to those of greatest concern to our community. WASF was co-ordinated for many years by the highly respected Elizabeth Virgo. When she retired from the role there was some soul searching about WASF's future role and leadership. The group was re-invigorated in early 2019 by the election of Richard Cutt (of the Residents' Society of Mayfair and St. James's) as Chairman and Michael Bolt (of the Marylebone Association) as Vice-Chairman.

Examples of issues raised by the reinvigorated WASF include: the use of the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL); feedback on the draft

Westminster City Plan, e.g. a request for more ambition from environmental policies; improving the Oxford Street district including vehicle-free areas; enforcement of planning and licensing conditions; and encouraging WCC to address the many day-to-day problems created by Airbnb, e.g. noise, anti-social behavior. On the last of these, the Council has established a specialist team tasked with tackling abuses of short-term lettings with over 1,500 properties in Westminster under investigation. One City Council tenant has been ordered to pay over £100,000 after losing a court case against the Council for illegally letting his flat. This pressure is a testament to what amenity societies can accomplish when working together under the WASF umbrella.

## COMMUNITY LIAISON GROUPS

A Community Liaison Group is a different type of organisation. For many years, WCC has sensibly required the developers of major developments to establish and operate a Community Liaison Group (CLG) throughout the construction phase of a project. The primary aims of CLGs are to minimise the disruption caused by the construction of large

buildings and address other issues arising from the development, e.g. changes to the planning permission. Typically, CLG members include representatives from the KA, other local amenity societies, neighbouring apartment blocks, the developer and their contractor(s), and one or more Westminster Councillors. They usually meet monthly.

Based on long experience, the keys to successfully minimising disruption include: insisting that construction and servicing issues are considered at the design stage of the development; agreeing a detailed construction management plan before works commence; the developer using an experienced communications specialist; bi-weekly newsletters with updates and explanation about forthcoming works; careful planning with WCC, TfL and RBKC of traffic arrangements including road closures (e.g. not installing or removing cranes during the pre-Christmas period); and genuine and early consultation with the community about possible changes to planning permissions. Provided these things are done well, most large projects cause relatively few problems.