



CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2016/17
Presented to the MA AGM on Tuesday 16th May 2017
by Ricci de Freitas - Chair

Introduction:

1. 2016/17 has been another busy year for the MA Committee, dealing with a range of projects, issues and developments in support of our Aim to ensure the continuing improvement of the area. These are summarised under each of our Priority Areas, listed below (in no particular order).
2. We have continued to benefit from the support of our valued partner organisations and individual members, including residents' associations (**) and the Holiday Inn hotel, who host our meetings.
3. I am once again indebted to the MA Committee (*) for their constant support and encouragement.

Summary of projects and issues arising since May 2016:

1. Preserving local amenity/quality of life (includes Conservation, Listed buildings, Planning & Licensing):

- We continued monitoring the major GOSH/UCL **Zayed Centre** building project in Guilford Street and our representations put a stop to heavy goods vehicles driving through and 'idling' in residential streets, in breach of the agreed Construction Management Plan.
- We supported Knollys House residents in opposing the **Generator Hostel's** recent proposal to install a mural on the historic wall of Compton place, and got their plans for the shop front at 37 Tavistock Place suitably modified. In conjunction with Knollys House RA, BRAG and BCAAC, we got the Generator to withdraw their proposals for telecoms antennae on the roof of the hostel. We have yet to see any changes as a consequence of Patron Capital's decision to sell their interest in the Generator's world-wide group of hostels.
- We continued to press Camden to reinstate two Grade II listed walls at **195-199 Gray's Inn Road** after we succeeded in getting long-standing unsightly advertising hoardings removed.
- We objected to the installation of several **new telephone kiosks**, which were refused planning consent.
- We continued to press for the 'proper' **landscaping of the former petrol station** on the corner of Coram Street and Woburn Place, in conjunction with Russell Court residents. We supported Brunswick Centre residents

in opposing a change of use to the former **FCUK shop in the Brunswick** to A3 Restaurant use.

- Our representations brought about 'sympathetic' improvements to the proposed new shop fronts at **3-5 Bernard Street**, where 3 independent businesses were replaced by 'chain' outlets.
- **The Brunswick drainage works** continue to blight the shopping centre and 2nd floor podium.
- We objected to the unsuccessful proposal by **Unwin's** to install an ATM in their shop front at 84 Marchmont Street.
- The '**Night-tube**' went ahead without the feared impact on local amenity that we had expected, and in accordance with the undertakings we received from TFL following our representations to a public meeting in the Town Hall prior to implementation. These included policing anti-social behaviour and mitigating the effects of noise and vibrations for residents living above the line.
- **4 Tavistock Place** reverted to office use after several attempts to change the use to residential, with extensions to the roof, rear and basement. The consented 'improvements' are a cause for concern for residents of the adjacent Tamar House, with whom we have liaised.
- Following complaints from residents of the Brunswick and Coram Street, we set up a meeting with the senior management of the **Marquis Cornwallis pub** at 31 Marchmont Street. We obtained a number of undertakings aimed at reducing noise and footway obstruction, but there are still issues to be resolved.
- **Hotel Russell's** major £80M refurbishment has gone smoothly, with the hotel planning to re-open ahead of schedule this summer. Several long-standing residents of the area have told us they are saddened by the loss of the historic name, which has been changed to Principal London, to bring it in line with the other hotels in the new owners' global portfolio.
- **The University of London's Garden Halls in Cartwright Gardens** opened in September 2016 after two years of construction works, which were monitored by local organisations represented on the Community Liaison Group (including two MA reps). The halls were officially (and discreetly) opened by Princess Royal, but without local representatives being invited. **The gardens** were simultaneously opened to the public (for the first time in 200 years), with local residents and workers taking full advantage of the sun-drenched seating and refurbished tennis courts. A new route has also been created through the gardens into Burton Place and beyond. We now await news of the Council's plans for installing a new public footway along the east side of the gardens, which will be a great benefit to pedestrians, whilst providing better access to the gardens. The 'temporary' history board inside the garden (it wasn't what was specified by UPP) provides a foretaste of our next historical publication.
- One of our eagle-eyed volunteers spotted damage to the parapets of the Grade II listed buildings at **53-55 Cartwright Gardens**, which was reported to the Camden's Conservation Officer, resulting in essential

works being carried out to preserve the architectural feature and protect the public from falling masonry.

- We wrote to Camden in support of a planning proposal to change the use of **1-7 Woburn Walk** from offices to their original residential use. Although there were objections to this from third parties, it was approved.
- There has been another (third) failed attempt to redevelop **11-12 Grenville Street**, each proposal falling foul of planning requirements. We have made it clear that we wish to see these historic (but not listed) buildings brought back into residential use after years of being either empty or squatted. We have also pressed for improvement to the unattractive café premises and for the **restoration of the historic arch** over the entrance to Colonnade.
- Our objections to proposed alterations to the Grade II listed 'house' at **1 Leigh Street** (Leigh House Hotel) bore fruit, with consent being totally refused.
- We raised our concerns about the **Council's plans for redeveloping Camden Town Hall** in Judd Street, about which they had not consulted local residents. We gained a commitment from the Cabinet Member for Finance for a Community Development Forum to be held prior to a Planning application being submitted and for a Community Liaison Group to be set up to allow local residents to monitor the development, if and when it receives planning consent.
- We lodged a number of objections to a proposal to refurbish the residential parts of **59 Marchmont Street** – a Grade II listed building. These were taken on board by the Council and developer, although works took somewhat longer to complete than originally anticipated.
- Concerns about **Grade II listed railings** in front of houses in Judd Street and Leigh Street have been brought to our attention by local people. We have taken steps to have two sets of blue painted railings revert to their historic black colour and the other railings repaired by the freeholder at the request of leaseholders.
- We made representations to the Army Centre in Handel Street about the inconvenience being cause to residents by parking suspensions connected with quarterly **London Fashion Week events** being staged at the venue. The event organisers have indicated that they will be staging their last such event at this venue in September 2017, and they made a donation to MA by way of an apology to the local community.
- We launched a campaign via our Blog site aimed at putting a stop to **AirBnB type lettings**, as a means of preserving permanent residential accommodation in the area. Working with Camden Council, we have identified a number of properties which they are investigating with a view to taking enforcement action. We were also informed by a supporter that key safes were being attached to the railings of a local park, so we got them removed by the Parks Service. We have also discovered individual flats within multiple occupied houses being used as short-lets, at exorbitant rents. One such flat in a Council block was

being rented at £1,500 per week, next door to a Council tenant paying £120 a week in rent, so it is a lucrative business.

2. Improving the Street Environment:

- We have continued lobbying BT to remove their **redundant telephone kiosks** from the area, and to properly maintain their retained kiosks, including the Grade II listed kiosk in Brunswick Square, which they redecorated at our request but have kept it locked for the past year.
- We are monitoring the implementation of **Camden's new refuse and recycling contract**, making daily reports on short-comings with a view to keeping our streets clear of rubbish for the benefit of businesses, residents and pedestrians/shoppers. We have continued reporting fly-tipping whenever it occurs. We have serious concerns that residents receiving street collections do not know the new day of collections from their property.
- We pressed for more **new trees** to be planted and for over-sized tree pits to be reduced, with positive results in Marchmont, Hunter and Sandwich Streets.
- After four years of intermittent 'nagging' of the Council, they removed two sets of **redundant railings** (left stranded after the 2012 Russell Square traffic scheme) from the corners where Guilford Street and Woburn Place meet Russell Square, respectively. It pays to persevere.

3. Traffic & Pedestrian safety:

- We held a public meeting in September 2016 for local people to air their views about the **Tavistock Place trial traffic scheme**. The Council has referred its decision on the scheme to a **Public Inquiry**, which will commence on Tuesday 3rd October at 5 Pancras Square.
- We supported the Council's proposal to realign the **Barclays cycle hire station in Cartwright Gardens** to make way for the introduction of a footway on the eastern perimeter of the gardens.
- We have continued to press, in conjunction with Bloomsbury ward Councillors, for the busy **footway on the south side of Handel Street west** to be upgraded, but Highways Maintenance Managers consider it to be in an acceptable state. If you are concerned about this matter, please get onto your Councillor and/or Camden Highways to report the poor state of the footway. We will be launching another 'offensive' in this regard once M&J Group have finished the drainage works on The Brunswick, and removed their unsightly scaffolding.
- We received an undertaking from Camden when they introduced a **contra-flow for cyclists at the south end of Marchmont Street** that they would monitor its use with a view to seeing whether it was encouraging cyclists to continue their journeys up the rest of Marchmont Street against the flow of traffic in the narrow stretch of road. We reported that this had become a serious issue for pedestrians

and cyclists and asked the Council to consider taking out the contra-flow. We await their response.

- Prior to the redevelopment of the student halls in Cartwright Gardens we carried out a site visit with the Camden Cabinet Member responsible for Highways with a view to highlighting areas for improvement, including the **neglected footways along both sides of Leigh Street**. We asked whether they could be upgraded at the same time that the footways surrounding the student halls received the treatment funded by a Section 106 agreement. They were duly upgraded in March 2017 to the direct benefit of residents, businesses and visitors to the street.
- We have more recently asked the Council to upgrade the footways in **Coram Street** (beside the gym) and **Herbrand Street** (alongside the hotel), where it has become very difficult terrain for pedestrians to navigate/manoeuvre.
- A volunteer reported **defective street lighting in Woburn Walk**, following which we asked Camden to upgrade the lighting, which they did without delay.

4. Business matters:

- **Imperial London Hotels Ltd** replaced their guest restaurants with 'street-facing' commercial outlets in a programme of improvements to the Bedford, Royal National and Tavistock hotels.
- **New independent businesses** arriving in the course of the year include: Greater London Properties (Judd Street/Leigh Street), Pizza Sophia (50 Tavistock Place), arte & Stili, Italian ceramics (6 Leigh Street – formerly Povey's hardware shop), Saucy Restaurant (59 Marchmont Street), Bon Vivant replaced Balfour Restaurant (73-77 Marchmont Street), Turkish Barbers opened in Woburn Place and 69 Marchmont Street (replacing the short-lived Royal Salon). The protracted refurbishment of 64 Marchmont Street will see the opening of a 'photographers' gallery' styled business, with the inevitable coffee bar.
- Meanwhile, businesses in the wealthier **Brunswick shopping centre** are closing at an alarming rate. This year, closures include: FCUK, Benetton, Gap for Kids, Halifax Bank, Space NK, and Joy and 'Petit a' tea room in April.
- **Business Rates**, combined with a large rent increase, are putting pressure on other independent businesses, with the Computer Centre at 61 Marchmont Street closing recently.
- This year's **Shop Front Award** went to a previous winner, Fork Deli & Patisserie at 85 Marchmont Street, with the Deputy Mayor presenting the award. The MA Committee decided to confine the award next year to premises where physical improvements have taken place.
- **Unite hostel** at 19-29 Woburn Place has been sold. They had previously obtained planning consent to rent out rooms to non-students outside term time. We will monitor developments for signs of change to their business model which might be of detriment to residential amenity.

5. History Project:

- In the course of the year we unveiled 4 new **commemorative plaques** to: Robert Owen, father of the co-operative movement, 4 Burton Place; chemist, Dr Alphonse Normandy, 91 Judd Street; poet, Charlotte Mew, at 30 Doughty Street; and Sir Rowland Hill, founder of the modern postal service, former 2 Cartwright Gardens. We are grateful to the generous donors and sponsors of the above plaques and 'VIP' guest receptions (see web site for details). We have two further plaques in the pipeline: George Jacob Holyoake, social reformer, 4 Woburn Walk; and James Burton, builder, on the BMA building, which stands on the site of his former home, Tavistock House, later occupied by Charles Dickens.
- With 3 of our six original sites for **History Boards** now completed (Brunswick Square Gardens, 15-17 Tavistock Place [LSHTM building], and Cartwright Gardens), we are still hopeful of installing boards in Mecklenburgh Square and The Brunswick. Other potential sites are Coram Street and Bernard Street (approved in principle by Camden), depending on the outcome of The Brunswick board.
- We launched our fourth historical publication, *From Fields to Fountains – The Story of Bloombury's Russell Square*, at Senate House in September 2016. This has proved to be as popular as our first three publications, with all proceeds from sales being used to support the work of the association.
- We have been monitoring progress with the development of plans for Holborn Library, which will halve the size of the **Camden Local Studies Library and Archives Centre** and send much of the collection to an external location. This centre has been an invaluable resource for MA's historical research.
- We received an undertaking from Camden Highways several years ago to **relocate an historic boundary kerb stone** from Russell Square to Brunswick Square, but this has not been expedited, despite our periodic reminders and repeated promises by the Officers concerned.

6. Development Opportunities:

- The **Bloomsbury Research Institute** behind the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine at 15-17 Tavistock Place.
- A development proposal for **Collingham Gardens** by St George's Church, Queen Square.
- We have been endeavouring for some time to persuade the owners of the '**sunken garden**' in **Coram Street** to raise it to street level and open it to the public. The ownership changed hands and the new owners informed us that they had their own plans for the site, but these have fallen through due to complications with the lease. In the meantime the Fitness First gym in the lower basement has closed and the premises are being refurbished by **The Gym** company, who are advertising a 24/7 gym, with a package of inappropriate signage. We have objected to their proposals in conjunction with Brunswick TRA.

- Further works are underway as part of the **Coram campus** redevelopment project, with the Victorian crematorium and swimming pool currently being demolished.
- MA and other local groups were consulted last year by St George's Church, Queen Square, on their plans to redevelop **Collingham Gardens** (sited between Coram and St George's Gardens) for a mix of housing and community facilities. A range of concerns were expressed and the church has recently announced that it has dropped its original plans, but intends to look at other ways to develop the site.
- The **former Express Dairy site**, between St George's Gardens and Regent Square (off Wakefield Street) has been "sold on" by the developers who received planning consent for a mixed use scheme on the site about 3 years ago. They have submitted an archaeological investigation report to Camden, which either indicates that they are planning to go on site in the not too distant future or that they are simply trying to keep the original planning consent 'alive' (a condition attached to the consent requires a start on site within 3 years of the date of the planning decision). We have continued to monitor developments in partnership with the Friends of St George's Gardens. The listed historic wall on the north side of the garden has been sealed off by the Council while they consider what to do with it.
- The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine eventually received Planning consent in January 2017 to proceed with the development of the **Bloomsbury Research Institute** at the rear of their building at 15-17 Tavistock Place. Unfortunately, whilst awaiting planning consent, UCL has pulled out of the project, leaving LSHTM to consider its options.

7. External Communications, Partnerships and Events:

- The **MA web site** has continued to act as an important vehicle for external communications, complemented by the well-received **Marchmont Voice blog site**.
- The **Marchmont Community Garden** continues to attract plaudits, with this year's spring flower bonanza surpassing previous years and the award of first prize for the **Best Community Garden in Camden** in Bloom. A pair of Great Tits nested in the tree in the garden last spring. This year the garden has been graced with two pairs of nesting blackbirds – testament to the biodiverse environment which was created from day one. The volunteers who maintain the garden are grateful to Martin Brazil of Murphy's builders for repairing a piece of decking which was damaged by thoughtless skateboarders; and to the generous business donors for their financial support, including Waitrose customers for placing their tokens in our box in the store.
- After a two year break, we are delighted to announce the return of the **Marchmont Street Party**, on Saturday 23rd September 2017 from 12 noon to 5pm. This has been made possible by working in partnership with Kings Cross Brunswick Neighbourhood Association to deliver the

event, and by the generosity of local businesses who have pledged the required funding to make it happen.

- We have invited residents of **Medway Court** to open their garden to the public, but there are serious security concerns which prevent this from happening. In the meantime Medway Court TRA have run a number of community engagement projects which have brought about many improvements to the site, including a new mural, plants to disguise the ugly car park air vents and gardening workshops.
- We have maintained our participation in the **Bloomsbury and King's Cross Safer Neighbourhood Panels**, **Bloomsbury Breakfasts** and the **Bloomsbury Festival**, for which we welcome your ideas on this year's theme of 'Independence'. Last year we organised an historical tour of Russell Square, a repeat of our popular 'traded here' plaques in shop windows project in partnership with Skoob Books and an event centred on the unveiling of the Charlotte Mew plaque. We have continued to support the **Friends of Brunswick Square**, whose volunteer gardening scheme has brought about significant improvements to the gardens. We are represented on the **Bloomsbury Squares Interim Partnership Board**, and have supported the idea of forming a Trust, which will be considered at a forthcoming meeting. We continue to be represented on the **Cartwright Gardens Community Liaison Group**. The **British Museum** community access scheme allows us to send a small number of members to each new 'block-buster' show for free.
- The Chair represented MA at the **Queen's visit** to Goodenough College in December.
- The MA Committee declared **Coram's Fields** to be our adopted charity, although we not yet found an opportunity to translate this into a cash donation. Any ideas would be greatly appreciated.

Ricci de Freitas – Chair

***The MA Committee for 2016/17 was:**

Ricci de Freitas – Chair
Andrew Cussens
Clive Gilbert
Marc Abomnes
Nicky Sinnett – Treasurer
Richard Ekins
Gareth Maeer
Nigel Kemp
Eileen Mahon
Len Phillips
Andrew Sorene
Bob McIntyre
Nicky Coates
Tom Reed
Elizabeth Paul

****MA's valued residents' association partners:**

Brunswick TRA
Clare Court RA
Downing Court RA
Flaxman Court TRA
Guilford Court RA
Knollys House RA
Mecklenburgh Square RA
Queen Alexandra Mansions RA
Queen Court RA
Regent Square RA
Russell Court RA
Sandwich House RA
Rugby & Harpur RA
Sinclair Sandwich Thanet Ltd
Somerton House TRA
Tavistock Mansions TRA
Witley Court RA
Woburn Walk Association