



**CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2015/16**  
**Presented to the MA AGM on Tuesday 17th May 2016**  
**by Ricci de Freitas - Chair**

**Introduction:**

1. 2015/16 has been another busy year for the MA Committee, having dealt with a range of projects and issues, which are summarised under each of the Priority Areas listed below.
2. We have continued to benefit from the support of our valued partner organisations and individual members (\*\*), and we are particularly grateful to the Holiday Inn hotel for hosting all of our meetings.
3. I am once again indebted to the MA Committee (\*) for their constant support and encouragement throughout the year.

**Summary of projects and issues dealt with since May 2015:**

- 1. Preserving local amenity/quality of life (includes Conservation, Listed buildings, Planning & Licensing):** We lobbied for the disused public toilets in Guilford Place back into use, resulting in a change of ownership and change of use to a restaurant (Ramen noodle bar). We supported Knollys House residents in opposing the installation of telecoms equipment on the roof of the Generator Hostel. We lobbied for the removal of unsightly advertising hoardings at 195-199 Gray's Inn Road. We kept pressing for 66-67 Guilford Street – listed 'buildings at risk' – to undergo restoration and conversion to housing, which is currently underway. We opposed the change of use of 4 historic BT telephone kiosks in Russell Square to A1/Retail use, although the Council granted planning permission. We supported Witley Court and Russell Court resident in opposing the installation of a Boris Bikes station in Coram Street, which was granted planning permission by Camden. We argued for the former petrol station forecourt in front of Russell Court to be landscaped as a condition of planning consent connected to the change of use of the underground car park to a storage centre, which was adopted by Camden. We objected to the retrospective change of use of 67 Marchmont Street from House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) to 'short stay' accommodation (holiday lets), which was 'Refused and Warning of Enforcement Action to be Taken'. We supported Brunswick Centre residents in opposing an extension of alcohol licensing hours at Tesco Express, 40 Bernard Street. The licence was rejected in total. We objected to the closure of Russell Square station ticket offices, but this went ahead.

New arrangements for consulting on planning applications came into force on 1.5.16, consisting of neighbour notices being replaced with more detailed site notices and an upgraded e-alerts service, which includes recent decisions, as well as the existing notifications of new applications. We welcomed the proposals to restore, refurbish and modernise Hotel Russell, which will take place from 18th June 2016 to 17th February 2017.

- 2. Improving the Street Environment:** We have continued lobbying BT to remove their redundant telephone kiosks from the footway in front of 40 Bernard Street (opposite Russell Square station), but with no joy to date. We persuaded Camden to carry out earlier refuse collections in Marchmont Street and Leigh Street in order to improve the appearance of these streets for the benefit of businesses, residents and pedestrians/shoppers. We have continued reporting fly-tipping whenever it occurs. Following the sad demise of the Ailanthus (tree of heaven), which grew for many years outside Alara at 60 Marchmont Street, we lobbied for replacement trees and the effective reinstatement of the uneven footway. We have also lobbied for problematic tree pits in pedestrian 'hot-spots' to be filled with flexible paving (rubberised solution) to protect the roots and eradicate trip hazards.
- 3. Traffic & Pedestrian safety:** We supported the Council's Gray's Inn Road pedestrian safety improvement scheme. We will be arranging a public meeting at the end of June/early July for people to have their say about the Council's Tavistock Place trial traffic scheme. We lobbied Camden/TfL to hold a public meeting to allow residents of Judd Street to have their say about a traffic scheme affecting their street - this included discussions about two other schemes under consultation. We pressed Camden for information about the Cartwright Gardens traffic plans, which now look like being put on hold until the outcome of other traffic proposals in the area is known. We supported the Guilford Street/Bernard Street Quiet Street proposals, which have been implemented with the exception of the works around Guilford Place, which are pending the completion of the Zayed Centre (20 Guilford Street). We supported TfL's proposals for the new No. 10 bus route, which will come into effect on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2016.
- 4. Business matters:** New arrivals in the past year include Greater London Properties on the corner of Judd and Leigh Streets, Las Iguanas Latin restaurant, replacing Strada in the Brunswick, and Prêt à Manger opened another branch at the President Hotel, Guilford Street. Grrrilla! Restaurant ceased trading at 50 Tavistock Place, soon to be replaced by an authentic Italian Pizzeria. Vegetarian's Paradise at 59 Marchmont Street closed. It remains to be seen what will replace it. Across the road at No. 64, Natures du Monde is to be replaced by a photographers' gallery/coffee shop. North Sea Fish at 7-8 Leigh Street received an impressive upgrade, making it a contender for the 2016 MA Shop Fronts Award, which was won by Pitted Olive, a few doors away, in 2015. We are seeking nominations from the public for this year's award. Since Camden introduced a 'Late Night Levy' on licensed businesses, there has been a flurry of licensing hours variations from local

businesses, reducing their hours to avoid paying the levy. The Brunswick drainage works continue to blight the shopping centre and 2<sup>nd</sup> floor podium.

- 5. History Project:** We unveiled two more commemorative plaques to several 'A list' subjects, firstly to Virginia Woolf, Leonard Woolf, John Maynard Keynes & Duncan Grant, who lived at 38 Brunswick Square, and secondly to J.M. Barrie, who lived at 8 Grenville Street, now Downing Court. All necessary permissions and funds have been obtained for a plaque to Robert Owen, father of the co-operative movement, who lived at 4 Burton Place. We are awaiting listed building consent for Dr Alphonse Normandy, who lived and worked at 91 Judd Street, and the Poet, Charlotte Mew, was born at 30 Doughty Street. Our second historical publication, *Tales of Brunswick Square – Bloomsbury's Untold Past*, has exceeded 500 sales to date, but it has some way to go to match sales of *The Story of Marchmont Street*, which has achieved more than 3,000 sales in 4 editions. Our third publication about the history of Russell Square is currently 'in-design'. All proceeds from the sale of these books are used to support the work of the association. Another history project reached fruition this year, with the installation of two history boards in Brunswick Square Gardens, produced in collaboration with the Friends of Brunswick Square and Camden Council, and funded by Section 106 contributions from various local housing developments. This year also saw the publication on the MA website of our second illustrated history of a local street by James Pender, resident of Burton Street.
- 6. Development Opportunities:** The University of London consulted on its Masterplan for its estate, which includes the possibility of new buildings and a roof top restaurant on the Senate House tower. The Bloomsbury Research Institute obtained planning permission for a global centre of excellence on land behind the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine at 15-17 Tavistock Place. Great Ormond Street Hospital, in partnership with University College London (UCL), also got the go-ahead for their globally important Zayed Centre for Research into Rare Disease in Children at 20 Guilford Street, where works are slowly progressing. A development proposal for Collingham Gardens by St George's Church, Queen Square was not well received during the first round of pre-planning consultation, exposing a range of complex issues, including deconsecrating the graveyard, the protection of the listed historic walls surrounding St George's Gardens and the loss of open space.
- 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, which was set up by one of our Committee Members, Gareth Maeer. The Marchmont Community Garden continues to attract plaudits, with this year's spring flower bonanza surpassing previous years - an external organisation has offered to install a 'living green wall' on the tall flank wall overlooking the garden, at no cost to the community, subject to the required permissions being obtained from Camden (landlord's consent and planning permission). We have sustained our representation on the Bloomsbury Safer Neighbourhood Panel, Bloomsbury Breakfasts and the Bloomsbury Festival, for which we welcome

your ideas on this year's theme of 'Language'. We have continued to support the Friends of Brunswick Square, who have at last managed to get a new water supply installed in the gardens, which will be a great help with their popular community gardening workshops - other improvements include three new notice boards, new planting and seeding of the lawns, as well as improvements to the north verge. FOBS also organised a very successful 'Emma Festival', in June 2015. We are represented on the Bloomsbury Squared Interim Partnership Board, which is looking at re-thinking Bloomsbury's garden squares in a climate of diminishing resources. We continue to be represented on the Cartwright Gardens Community Liaison Group and we have participated in pre-planning consultation on the British Library extension, in which we pressed for improved accessibility for residents south of Euston Road.

**Ricci de Freitas – Chair**

**\*The MA Committee for 2015/16 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 (Co-opted)  
Jennie Hogan

**\*\*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