



**ANNUAL REPORT 2010/11**  
**Presented to the MA AGM on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> May 2011**  
**by Ricci de Freitas - MA Chair**

**Introduction:**

1. Over the past year the MA Committee has pursued a range of projects and issues. Notable successes are highlighted under each of the Priority Areas listed below. These headings are reflected in the MA Committee's Annual Work Plan.
2. Our work has continued to benefit from the contributions of our partner organisations, most notably Camden Council, the Police, Bloomsbury Holiday Inn Hotel, our ever generous business sponsors, Brunswick TRA, Russell Court RA, Witley Court RA, Somerton House TA, Flaxman Court TA and the Friends of Brunswick Square. We regret the demise of the Seymour House RA and wish it a speedy recovery.
3. My warm thanks go to the retiring Committee for their consistent support and encouragement throughout the year.

**Summary of projects and issues tackled since May 2010:**

**1. Improving the trading environment:**

- **Marchmont Street Public Realm Improvements:** These major pedestrian and environmental improvement works are nearing completion, although they have already taken 7 weeks longer than planned. We lobbied successfully for the total upgrading of footways along the street and persuaded the Council to drop their controversial 'contra-flow' for cyclists in south Marchmont Street. The footway widening on the west side of the street has already had the desired effect of reducing traffic speeds. We have been invited to partner the Council in the post-works snagging process to ensure that all defects brought to our attention by MA members are properly addressed, including the poor quality finishes around utility covers and between the new paving and shop forecourts. Traders have suffered major disruption to their businesses during these works, despite the best efforts of the Council's contractor. Loading facilities have been enhanced and controlled parking has been fully restored and enhanced by the introduction of additional cycle stands along the Marchmont Parade, where they have proved to be an effective deterrent against irresponsible pavement parking. We asked for 2 new trees to be planted on the west side outside number 59 and 65, but this was not possible due to underground services. We have been informed that street lighting will be upgraded in the course of the current financial year.

- **Refocus of 'Love Camden' campaign:** With the change of administration at the Town Hall, the 'Love Your Local High Street' banners were removed from local lamp posts and the 'Love' campaign was dropped in favour of a web site based promotional strategy, with all local businesses being invited to promote themselves via the Council's web site.
- **Shop Front Awards:** Gino Men's Hairdresser at 43 Marchmont Street received the Best Kept Shop Front Award. We are planning to judge the shops for this year's award in September. This will again include all the shops within our area of benefit.
- **Pavement parking:** We spent a lot of time communicating with companies whose heavy goods vehicles were responsible for smashing the paving stones along the Marchmont Parade and/or obstructing footways and traffic when making deliveries. Matters have improved significantly, with only the isolated driver behaving unlawfully.
- **"A" Boards obstructing the footway:** A small minority of traders had taken to positioning their advertising "A" boards on the footway, where they caused obstruction to pedestrians. All but 3 continued the practice after we asked them to stop. They co-operated after the Council's Street Environment Officer issued formal warnings.
- **85 Marchmont Street – vacant shop premises:** We have been keeping a watching brief on this empty shop and encouraging the leaseholder to bring it back into retail use. Refurbishment works have commenced to create a new 'Deli'.
- **45 Marchmont Street:** Film Fare sadly closed and the premises reopened in early 2011 as Gino's Hairdressing, next to Gino's Men's Hairdressing.
- **64 Marchmont Street/Natures du Monde:** This shop, which had been trading without the benefit of planning consent for some time, applied for retrospective consent for use as Sui Generis/Skin Care Clinic, which it was granted. MA requested the Council to impose a condition which would ensure that the premises revert to A1/Retail use if and when the current business closes, so that we don't permanently lose a shop in Marchmont Street, but this did not happen.
- **17 Hunter Street:** Following our complaint about inappropriate alterations to the café at this address, enforcement action was taken by the Council, following which the business changed hands and the shop front was refurbished to a high standard, although the original Edwardian brick facades have been lost.
- **47 Marchmont Street (Panino d'Oro) – 21<sup>st</sup> April** saw the sad closure of this popular café after more than 30 years trading. There has been an application for a certificate of lawfulness for A3/Restaurant use of the ground floor shop premises.
- **68 Marchmont Street/Global Talk ATM application:** The owner of this business successfully appealed against the Council's decision to refuse his application to install an ATM in the shop window, despite objections from adjacent residents. The Government Inspector's decision includes conditions which effectively require the original Edwardian shop front to be restored and the location to be monitored

by a CCTV camera at all times. Residents' objections were not taken into consideration by this process.

- **67 Marchmont Street – shop front:** Enforcement action was taken by the Council in relation to inappropriate alterations and additions to the shop front and forecourt on this Grade II listed building. The 'eclectic' fascia sign has escaped action.
- **87- 89 Marchmont Street/Russell Supermarket:** Following a series of complaints from residents about noisy late night deliveries and an unauthorised fruit and vegetable stall, the shop changed ownership. It is now operated by the owners of the Unwins off licence opposite.
- **33-37 Marchmont Street/Londis:** We tried in vain for 2 years to get Thames Water to fill the hole to the right of the shop forecourt, which was obstructing access to the residential premises. The Council also had no joy, until we persuaded them to deploy their public realm contractors to rectify the situation. A number of improvements have been made to the shop front, although the large windows still await improvement. The move to 24/7 trading does not appear to have had any adverse effects on residents.
- **Brunswick Food Market – retrospective planning application:** A decision is still awaited on an application for the continued use of the Brunswick concourse on Saturdays and 18 other occasions in the course of the year for a Food Market.
- **Fastoche:** This new fast food outlet opened for business in the Brunswick, although they appear to be cooking hot food on the premises in contravention of the planning regulations for this A1/Shop premises.
- **Robert Dyas opened in The Brunswick:** This new arrival has been generally hailed as a welcome addition to the area – “at last, a proper shop in The Brunswick”, said one of our members.
- **Tavistock Square:** There has been an application for another “Starbucks type” café on the ground floor of Lynton House on the east side of the square.
- **Marchmont Bookshop, Burton Street:** This shop closed during the year after many years trading and is currently concealed behind builders' hoardings.
- **Woburn Walk Traders and residents association:** We have made positive contact with the Businesses and Residents' association for this historic street.
- **Leigh House Hotel:** This business is now up and running under the ownership of the Avonmore Hotel in Cartwright Gardens, after many years as a scruffy staff hostel for a large hotel chain. The external appearance of this prominent Grade II listed building on the corner of Leigh and Marchmont Streets has been much improved.
- **New Bloomsbury Set:** These 'new kids on the block' have kept their word about not allowing their new bar below Snappy Snaps to become a problem for residents. There have been no complaints of anti-social behaviour or late night disturbances for over a year.

- **AGE UK National HQ arrives:** The move of the combined Age Concern/Help the Aged national HQ into new offices in Tavistock Place in spring 2011 was seen as a potential boost to local trade.

## 2. Preserving local amenity/quality of life (including Conservation, Listed buildings, Planning & Licensing):

- **Bloomsbury Conservation Area (BCA):** The full and final report recommending the area extensions we lobbied for, plus a number of our suggested amendments, was approved by the Cabinet Member for Environment on 18.4.11. It remains to be seen whether the increased enforcement powers outlined in the Management Strategy will be matched by the resources available to the Council following the spending review and the reorganisation of the Planning Department.
- **Camden Planning Guidance:** We participated fully in the formal consultation conducted by Camden Council and are pleased to confirm that our main concerns and issues regarding Shop Fronts and Student Housing have been adequately addressed and incorporated into the phase 1 documents. Phase 2 consultation begins in May 2011. Our main interest will be in the CPG for town centres and retail centres.
- **61 Marchmont Street:** An appeal has been registered against the Council's decision to refuse listed building consent for works to introduce 2 self-contained flats on the first and second floors of this Grade II listed building. The Council prefers the house to be a 'House in Multiple Occupation'. We are supporting the owner in his appeal because we want the building to remain as permanent housing for the viability of the area.
- **Bernard Street Georgian doors:** Following the external redecoration of the Great Ormond Street nurses' homes in Bernard Street we asked for the light blue street doors to revert to a more appropriate colour, in keeping with their listed status. The olive green make-over was carried out without protest very shortly after our approach, for which we are grateful to the owners and the Camden Conservation team.
- **67 Marchmont Street – residential elements – planning application:** Consent was granted to reduce the overall number of units in this property from 12 to 8. It will remain as a House in Multiple Occupation, as anticipated, with Enforcement Officers monitoring the changes for compliance. We again argued for the premises to revert to permanent housing in accordance with an extant planning consent, for the viability of the area.
- **68-69 Guilford Street:** Major works are still underway on these Grade II listed Georgian buildings which are on the English Heritage 'Buildings at risk' register. A fear expressed by residents at the appeal hearing for 70-72 Guilford Street is that if the backpackers' hostel appeal, below, is won this will give the green light for 68-69 to be used in the same way.
- **70-72 Guilford Street – unauthorised backpackers' hostel:** We made representations to the appeal hearing in support of the

residents of Guilford Court and the Council's refusal of retrospective permission for a backpackers' hostel. We are concerned about the loss of permanent residential accommodation and the negative impact of the large numbers of young, short-stay visitors to this quiet residential street. We await the result of this hearing.

- **73 Guilford Street:** Works have still not commenced on this permitted residential development on a WW2 gap site, more than a year after planning consent was granted. We are concerned that the developer for this property was a key witness in support of the adjacent backpackers' hostel.
- **74-76 Guilford Street:** We have lobbied for the Section 106 contributions relating to this development to be allocated to Coram's Fields and Brunswick Square Gardens respectively, but it is proving difficult to obtain a clear statement of intent from the Council, despite our requested intervention by the Cabinet Member for Environment, Cllr Sue Vincent.
- **Surplus Virgin Media cables on Marchmont Street frontages:** We have tried in vain to persuade this company to meet its social responsibilities in relation to the Grade II listed buildings on the west side of the street, despite a direct appeal to Sir Richard Branson.
- **50 Tavistock Place:** We have supported residents with the continuing problem of the noisy kitchen extractor fan used by Pizza Park.
- **Wakefield Street - Dairy site:** We have kept a watching brief on this development, despite it being beyond our area of benefit, because it could impact negatively on our members and partner organisations. The revised application was removed from the agenda of the Development Control Committee on 19.5.11 due to a technicality. The Friends of St George's Gardens and Regent's Square RA have expressed their concerns about the impact on the gardens and residential amenity, primarily due to the bulk of the proposed buildings and the proposal to include terraces, which might become a source of noise nuisance.
- **Wakefield Street - former garage site:** Works continue with the building of 3 X 3 storey town houses on this site. The Museum of London archaeologists appear to have found very little of interest, apart from bones lying in a north-south alignment, which is no surprise considering that this was once the site of a Baptist Church.
- **45 Sidmouth Street:** Full planning consent was granted for a housing development on this site by Development Control Committee on 7.4.11, although Committee Members were concerned about the low proportion of affordable housing being provided (8 out of 52 flats, or 20% of the total floor space, as opposed to the desired 50%). This was attributed to the recent total withdrawal of Government grants to the private sector for building social-housing. A Section 106 agreement will see £15K being invested in St George's Gardens and £15K in Regent's Square. MA objected to the previous application which included a large amount of speculative student accommodation.

- **Rocking Thames Water inspection covers in Marchmont Street:** We reported a number of noisy Thames Water inspection covers, which were disturbing residents at night as vehicles pass over them. Three out of four were repaired. We await the final fix, which has become more of a noise nuisance for residents since the onset of the warmer weather.
- **2 Tavistock Place –** The application to change the use of this building to short-stay accommodation was withdrawn following our representations to the Planning Officer, who accepted our argument that it represented a material change to the approved scheme. A revised application for the same change of use was registered on 11.4.11. We have again objected to this.
- **Generator planning application:** An application by the Generator to build offices on the site of the disused garages (former Mary Ward Hall) in Compton Place was withdrawn following objections from MA and adjacent residents. A revised application taking into account local concerns has yet to be registered by the Council. We have learnt that there may be major disruption to the Tavistock Place cycle lanes once these works commence.
- **91-93 Marchmont Street/Lord John Russell pub:** We have been informed by the Planning Officer dealing with this case that Planning consent is to be granted for a residential development on the upper floors, subject to the signing of a Section 106 agreement to make this a car-free development, although there is some doubt about whether this proposed development will proceed.
- **35-37 Tavistock Place:** We contacted Imperial London Hotels, the owners of this building, to consult them about the possibility of submitting a listed building application to English Heritage. They informed us that they were opposed to such an application on the grounds that it would make it very difficult for them to carry out alterations and repairs to the building. We do not consider these to be adequate grounds for the building to not be listed, but have agreed not to pursue the matter, but to keep a watching brief on the building and take action if there are signs of alterations or neglect to this rare example of an early 19<sup>th</sup> century coaching inn.
- **Integrated Drug Treatment Centre proposal:** There was widespread relief when the Council made a decision to locate this controversial facility to the east of Kings Cross station, within existing health authority premises. This was a good example of united community action working to defeat a common threat to the area south of the Euston Road.

### **3. Improving the Street Environment:**

- **Trees:** The Council has replaced a number of failed or vandalised trees in the area during the year and planted several new trees at our request. We have asked the Council to investigate the planting of 2 new trees in Grenville Street (west side), 2-3 new trees in Brunswick Square (south side), one outside the Russell Hotel in Bernard Street on the bend in the road, a row of trees on the east side of Hunter Street to complete the avenue of London Planes and 2-3 trees along the north

side of Handel Street west. They have ruled out planting trees on the south side of Tavistock Place west because of the presence of historic cellars and two trial pits outside numbers 59 and 65 Marchmont Street proved unsuccessful due to underground utilities.

- **Realignment of luggage stall in front of Russell Square station:** It has taken us years of lobbying to get nowhere with this issue, with the stall continuing to obstruct the free passage of pedestrians in this heavily congested location.
- **Lansdowne Terrace - roadway ponding:** Following our sustained lobbying about the serious ponding in Lansdowne Terrace the Council has agreed to carry out the total renewal of the roadway.
- **Handel Street - Ponding at the base of the steps below the north entrance to Waitrose:** Despite our lobbying over several years this hazard remains, with Officers 'bouncing' responsibility for this essential repair between departments. We have asked the Cabinet Member for Environment to intervene.
- **Brunswick Square - Public realm proposals:** We have submitted a joint MA/FOBS proposal to the Council (Officers, Ward Councillors and Cabinet Member for Environment). These will be considered as and when funds become available, beginning with a project to improve the cycle route between Euston Road and Holborn, which will pass through the square, which is included in the Investment Programme in the Council's Transport Strategy. We have also submitted an expression of interest to a private sector funding initiative. They have invited us to provide them with more details for their investors.
- **Brunswick Square - final footway upgrade:** The south side of Brunswick Square received a footway upgrade, completing the total renewal of footways in Brunswick Square, for which we had lobbied the Council since 2008, when we launched the Friends of Brunswick Square. The historic cobbled road surface along the Colonnade between Grenville and Herbrand Streets is also currently being renewed at our request.

#### **4. Traffic & Pedestrian safety:**

- **Marchmont/Tavistock junction pedestrian safety improvement project:** The implementation of this project was followed by a shocking display of mass-civil-disobedience, with drivers ignoring the banned left turn from Tavistock Place into north Marchmont Street. There were several serious accidents and frequent altercations between drivers, cyclists and enforcement Officers. We held a 'summit' meeting with the Cabinet Member for Environment and senior Officers, which resulted in undertakings to carry out further improvements to the scheme to address continuing pedestrian safety concerns. The eastern island was extended to physically deter left turning vehicles and the cycle lane markings were extended across the junction to reinforce road use priorities. Our request for further improvements to the confusing signage and the re-phasing of the traffic signals to reduce waiting and increase crossing time for pedestrians (current average wait – 80 seconds; current maximum green man time – 4 seconds) has been rejected by TfL.

- **Russell Square traffic and public realm scheme:** Works continue with this major traffic scheme. The Council extended the footway on the south side of the entrance to Bernard Street at our request and has confirmed that the banned left turn from Woburn Place will remain.
- **Camden Transport Strategy:** We submitted comments on this strategy, emphasising the need to introduce improvements to pedestrian connectivity and reduce vehicle dominance in Brunswick Square.
- **Boris Bike Scheme:** This scheme is about a year old – it seems longer – and it appears to be working well. Early complaints from residents in south Marchmont Street about late night noise nuisance from bike bells seem to have dissipated.

## 5. History Project:

- **Sir John Barbirolli's Commemorative plaque:** We continue to pursue the installation of a plaque to this great man, having obtained permission from the owners of the Brunswick to install a plaque on a plinth in front of Foundling Court, instead of on the front of this building, which English Heritage objected to. We have received two large donations and some smaller contributions to cover the cost of this plaque, which will be installed and unveiled as soon as we have overcome some outstanding technical issues.
- **Sir William Empson's Commemorative plaque:** Again, we have received one large donation towards the cost of this plaque, from an academic in Tokyo, who is a great admirer of Empson's work. The plaque has been installed and will be unveiled on 1<sup>st</sup> June by Empson's son, Jake, in the presence of other family members, academics, writers, the Mayor of Camden, The Right Honourable Frank Dobson MP and Professor John Haffenden, Empson's acclaimed biographer, who has been instrumental in the organisation of this event. Unfortunately, our generous main donor, Miki Fukayama, is unable to attend the ceremony as intended, because her family were directly affected by the recent events in Japan.
- **(George) Emlyn Williams' Commemorative plaque:** This plaque was unveiled by Griff Rhys Jones in the company of the Mayor of Camden and representatives of various organisations on 27<sup>th</sup> April. We are grateful to One Housing Group for sponsoring this plaque. They are the leaseholders of the premises on which the plaque was installed. The event received some positive media coverage including articles on the BBC Wales web site and Wales Online, plus Camden New Journal.
- **"Tales of Brunswick Square":** Although most of the 'academic' research has been completed for this book, we are still seeking personal anecdotes of people directly affected by the demolition of homes to make way for the Brunswick development in the 1960s.

## 6. Development Opportunities:

- **Marchmont Community Garden:** Murphy took possession of the site on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> April, on a 20 weeks contract period ending in August 2011. The MCGP Board will be organising a bio-diversity workshop, a visit to a community-led garden in south London and a series of information sessions outside the garden during the works period. A

launch event will be held on 3<sup>rd</sup> September. We are grateful to Architects Network and London Wildlife Trust for their professional input to this project and to Big Lottery Fund/Groundwork UK and Camden Council (Section 106) for their financial support.

- **Marchmont Parade:** Replacement of the 'wrong hedge' continues to drag on, with responsibility for paying for this being 'bounced' between Council departments. In the mean time sheltered housing tenants do not have the protective barrier they were promised from anti-social passers-by. The landscaping and public art has been in place for a full year with much interest being shown by visitors to the locality, which is linked to the exhibition of the actual 'Tokens' in the Foundling Museum. We are grateful to the friends of John Aldus for organising a wonderful open evening at the Museum to launch the public art.
- **Cartwright Gardens:** Following the decision at our last AGM we took steps to broker a deal between the University of London, The Skinners' Company and Camden Council to open these gardens to the public. The Head of Camden Parks & Open Spaces has confirmed the financial viability of transferring responsibility for the management of this historic garden to the Council. However, this is now held up by a review of Parks & Open Spaces, which is not likely to be completed until the autumn.
- **Coram Street 'pit' and Bernard Street environmental improvements:** Ownership of the hotel/office block 'island' between Coram Street and Bernard Street changed following the collapse of its previous owners, Targetfollow Group. We are hopeful that the new owners, Imperial London Hotels Ltd, will be interested in implementing our proposals.

## 7. External Communications:

- **MA web site:** During the course of the year we 'migrated' our web site onto a more user-friendly platform, which enabled us to take direct control of updating the content. Also, the site has been optimised for Google, which means it is receiving a lot more 'hits', which we now monitor via Google Analytics. We have also loaded a number of photo collections onto Flickr.com, which can be accessed via links on the MA web site. We have received much positive feedback about our web site, from members, partner organisations and casual visitors, with many of our photos being chosen as 'favourites' on Flickr.com. We have created links to various partner organisations and loaded details of every local business onto the site. These are generating nearly 50% of the overall site traffic. We are grateful to Sure Productions for setting up the site and for their on-going support.
- **Marchmont Street Party:** It was decided at the last AGM that we would not stage this event in 2011, due to other commitments. The MA Committee has begun making plans for an event to coincide with the 2012 Olympics and is building a profile of partner organisations.
- **Friends of Brunswick Square:** We continue to support this organisation through our attendance at FOBS Committee meetings and participation in events. We negotiated for FOBS to have a page on the Friends of Bloomsbury Square web site, to which we have also provided a link from the MA web site. We have loaded a large set of

Brunswick Square Gardens photos on our Flickr.com pages, which have received record 'hits', with the entire collection being 'requisitioned' by Camden Council as a slide show on its official web site. FOBS are working with the Council on a plan to improve the planting within the gardens and the introduction of a memorial to Queen Caroline of Brunswick, after whom the gardens were named. A separate proposal has emerged to install a memorial to the founder of Bangladesh, which will be the subject of consultation. This is proposed by Camden Councillors and the Bangladesh High Commission, who are intending to fund it.

- **Bloomsbury Safer Neighbourhood Panel:** We have been represented on this panel by Len Phillips for the second half of this year, the main priorities for which have been drugs, youth disorder and bike thefts.
- **Kings Cross Safer Neighbourhood Panel:** We are now on the mailing list for this group and have been in communication with Officers on a number of issues, including the groups of anti-social youths who have recently been gathering in Marchmont Street.
- **Cultural Bloomsbury:** We continue to be represented at these useful breakfast gatherings, which provide great opportunities for networking.
- **BIG LUNCH:** We were invited to participate in this event but declined because it was felt that it would not be appropriate for our multi-faceted urban streets.
- **Bloomsbury Festival (BF) 2011:** This is being planned for October and we have offered Marchmont Street as a venue for arts organisations, with no takers to date.

The MA Committee for 2010/11 was:

Ricci de Freitas – Chair  
Ian Broderick – Vice-Chair  
Clive Gilbert – Treasurer  
Neil Ovenden  
Nigel Kemp  
Eileen Mahon  
Len Phillips  
Marc Abomnes  
Nicky Sinnett  
Tony Tugnutt  
Ray Smith

Report ends.

**Ricci de Freitas**  
**Chair - MA**