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Annual Report 2021



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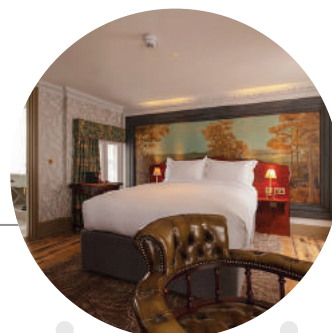
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- Seasonal events

AREA-WIDE PROJECTS

- Street management, cleansing and reporting
- Safety and security team
- Waste consolidation to improve air quality
- Local Giving (charity support)
- Enhancing green spaces
- Supporting local retail
- Hosting events for all
- Christmas lights



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✦ BT Tower by Theo Joseph

Front cover photo by Ollie Joseph

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Special thanks go to Adam Butler
www.adambutlerphotography.com
Adam is a professional photographer
that has lived in Marylebone for over
30 years. The Marylebone Association
is once again grateful to him for his
contribution to the Annual Report.

Annual Report Design
Charlotte Joseph

OFFICERS, COMMITTEE MEMBERS & ROLES 2020-2021



➤ Rose by Ollie Joseph

OFFICERS

Chairman Michael Bolt
Deputy Chairman Tim Carnegie
Hon Secretary Kevin Coyne
Hon Treasurer Mike Kostyn

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Guy Austin, Martin Bikhit, Linda Davies, Rosemary Forgan, Lois German, Richard Lovell, Stephen Quinn, Julie Redmond, Neil Wilson, Yehui Wu

Co-opted Committee Members:
Amanda Feeny (HDRA), Mark Gazaleh (PVA)

SUB-COMMITTEES & GROUPS

Planning

Neil Wilson (Chair), Stephen Quinn (Vice Chair), Jonathan Holt, Luke Tozer, Jeremy Trotter, Tina Frost (corresponding member)

Traffic & City Management

Tim Carnegie, Amanda Feeny

Marylebone Forum Liaison

Michael Bolt, Guy Austin, Amanda Feeny, Mark Gazaleh

Amenity Societies Liaison

Linda Davies

Membership Development & Police Liaison

Richard Lovell

Licensing

Guy Austin

Social Events

Rosemary Forgan, Lois German, Linda Davies, Janice Liverseidge, Liz Queenan

Business Liaison

Julie Redmond, Martin Bikhit

Families

Yehui Wu

Community Liaison

Julie Redmond

Trees & Environment

Mark Gazaleh

Annual Report

Charlotte Joseph

Membership Enquiries

Dave Chan

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT: COMMITTEE CHANGES & WIDER EVENTS



Meanwhile, changes that affected Marylebone continued at quite a pace, many of them propelled by the ongoing Covid crisis. Month by month through lockdowns and since, we continued to report on the unfolding events in our newsletter.

→ Michael Bolt

It has been a long year. Not just because of the Covid fallout but also due to the unusually long gap between AGMs caused by this. Our last one was back in June 2020 and was committee based, and quite a lot has happened since then.

We have seen a few committee changes over this time. Tushna Ghaduly has been replaced by her colleague Yehui Wu, who is to continue with Tushna's role of representing Marylebone Mums and Dads. Tushna has had to stand down owing to other commitments but is still connected with the committee through her contributions in a number of roles including recruitment. Sheila Green had stood down from the committee at the last AGM but had retained an important and popular role organising various social events since. She has now decided to retire and will be much missed, not just by our committee but by many Marylebone Association members.

Linda Davies was co-opted onto our committee originally as lead co-ordinator in our Covid response in the early days of the pandemic. As part of that she attended the monthly Covid meetings held by our local MP and those with the Leader of the Council. These meetings have since broadened out to a wider amenity society agenda and Linda's role has reflected this in becoming committee member for amenity societies liaison. Julie Redmond who joined us to assist in a business liaison role, is now heading that as well as community liaison. Richard Lovell, whilst maintaining his police brief has also taken on the role of membership recruitment. Other committee roles have remained broadly the same.

The Marylebone Covid Help Group continued with its valuable work supporting vulnerable residents affected by the pandemic. Its most pertinent role was in offering support through its many volunteers to those needing to self-isolate. Happily, the need for our services began to steadily decline as last summer progressed and the second lockdown in October did not see the expected rise in demand. So, by the end of lockdown in May 2021 we were in a position to disband the service.

Meanwhile, changes that affected Marylebone continued at quite a pace, many of them propelled by the ongoing Covid crisis. Month by month through lockdowns and since, we continued to report on the unfolding events in our newsletter, sent out at the beginning of each month to all our members.

Below are just some of the highlights taken from the very many articles we have published over this period. Further details on any of the items below, and much more besides, can be found on the MA website where you can access them all under the newsletter tab.

THE YEAR IN REVIEW



➤ Al Fresco Dining by Adam Butler at
www.adambutlerphotography.com

July

We started off the new Marylebone Association year in July 2020 – just coming out of the first lockdown, which itself had lasted a great deal longer than most had supposed possible. It had already become apparent that things were not going to be the same and that there would be no swift reversion to normal.

Even with the reopening of restaurants and cafés as well as the reopening of non-essential retail, the need to continue outside dining was regarded as essential by business in order to aid recovery.

Central government announced radical plans in order to get business moving again, with the wide-ranging removal of licensing and planning restrictions under the Business and Planning Bill. Amongst other provisions, it widened street trading at tables and chairs. Some planning changes were radical, for instance the proposal that offices could simply decide to change into restaurants without the need to apply for any change of use. This we felt could have severe consequences: 'This removes, at one fell swoop, one major leg of the local authority's ability to control the planning mix within our towns'.

We were also concerned about the consequences of extended hours and allowing alcohol off-sales to have the same hours as on-sales.

Meanwhile, Westminster announced the revival of the Oxford Street plans, unofficially put on hold back in December 2019, and we announced our opposition to the general principle of narrowing the street and closing Oxford Circus to traffic due to its potential to adversely impact on Marylebone.

We examined the significant ward boundary changes announced for Marylebone. The Pedicabs Bill sponsored by our MP Nickie Aiken passed its First Reading in the House of Commons. The Bill failed to complete its passage through Parliament before the end of the session, sabotaged by a single MP. This means the Bill will make no further progress for now.

August

We complained about the road narrowing that TfL was inflicting on major routes around our area, on Edgware Road, Euston Road and Park Lane: funneling traffic into one lane to create bike lanes which remained largely unused. Over a year on, and the Euston road blockage is still there. It must have cost business hundreds of millions over this time in many lost hours in queues – and the bike lane is still hardly used.

More disruption was planned for Marylebone High Street with the re-siting of pedestrian crossings and related works. 'How long will the disruption and noise last', we asked – well the answer was most of the year.

September

The Council announced that 20 mph was the new maximum speed limit on Westminster's roads, and we reviewed in more depth (and with some reservations) the new Class E planning relaxations and the rules governing the use of commercial premises.



➤ Shopping on Oxford Street by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

The battle to stop a strip club being opened in Marylebone opposite Selfridges was won. The applicants wanted to convert an existing nightclub on Duke Street into a bar offering 'full nudity' striptease and pole dancing. Selfridges, situated opposite, was against this and we also set out our objections.

October

A new lockdown was announced and al fresco was extended to the end of October.

More changes were announced by central government. In a number of articles we detailed some of the issues: 'We now have a White Paper which will substantially change much of the remaining planning scene. The intention is to move to a rule-based planning system; at present planning decisions are discretionary rather than rule-based, nearly all decisions to grant consent are undertaken on a case-by-case basis, rather than determined by clear rules for what can and cannot be done.' Now it was proposed that the whole country should be divided into three zones. Two of these zones to rely heavily on permitted development.

Since then, it has become apparent that reservations are widespread and the new minister in charge of this, Michael Gove has recently ordered a review.

November

We announced a U-turn on the Euston cycle lanes, but this turned out to be premature. On the eastbound side it was removed, but the westbound remained, and is there, causing chaos, to this day.

At WCC a new Oxford Street Programme Director was appointed, the third such person to hold the post within the last year (he too has since left).

We heard that the Edgware Road Stress Area was to be removed, in spite of levels of crime at four times the borough average.

The Baker Street Two-Way Scheme review revealed that by and large the changes had bedded in well. There had been reductions in nitrogen dioxide, but it was noted that the overall reductions outside of the study area tended to be greater than those within. In other words, this area has seen less improvement in air quality than most of the surrounding areas in central London – indicating that the scheme still needs a few tweaks.

December

We looked in some depth at the decision by Westminster City Council to build on the kick-about pitch in Luxborough Street which ignored a petition of 800 residents, various church covenants, and their own planning policy, which is 'a very, very clear policy designed to protect open spaces being lost to development.' Councillors admitted they had been put in a 'very difficult position'. An example of poor consultation.



➤ Montagu Square by Ollie Joseph



➤ Regent's Park by Ollie Joseph



➤ Fountain by Ollie Joseph

Another scheme introduced with inadequate consultation and in the face of residents' wishes was the plan to trial an experimental low traffic scheme across the Hyde Park Estate. This would have prevented vehicles from using the residential streets. As we said it was: 'another example of Westminster City Council's community engagement approach that has left much to be desired'.

A notable and long-awaited event was the commencement of the Marylebone Square development on the Moxon Street car park. We were in attendance at the breaking ground ceremony opened by the Mayor, Jonathan Glanz. We couldn't help feeling that the school and residents on the Square were in for a number of years of pretty severe disruption.

The Marylebone Forum virtual AGM was held on 14 December. Later in 2021 Westminster City Council agreed to re-designate the Marylebone Neighbourhood Forum for a further 5 years.

January

The Marylebone Association rebranding was launched. It had been 10 years since our last logo change, and it was felt we needed something that was more legible on the various online formats now in widespread use. Allied with this, we started the process of upgrading our website.

We reported that Covid cases in Marylebone had rocketed. The Marylebone Association Covid Help Group continued to help with shopping, pharmacy collections and the like.

Dame Barbara Windsor, one of Marylebone's most famous residents, died aged 83. She had a keen interest in the area and was involved in various local campaigns.

We had a number of complaints about the new Portland Place cycle lanes. It appeared that congestion problems had emerged since the cycle lanes halved traffic capacity: 'for much of the day bicycles are rarely sighted in these cordoned off areas'. This was another scheme that was brought in with barely any consultation.

February

We previewed the new Westminster cycle stores, which in our view 'were pretty hideous and looked more like giant rubbish bins', and we just hoped that Westminster 'didn't spend too much on the design.' Since then, we have seen a considerable number of these grace our streets – unfortunately, familiarity has not improved their appearance.

We reported that the rough sleepers after seven years had finally left their Park Lane residence, leaving devastation in their wake: 'The notorious illegal camp that was home to beggars and linked to a rise in crime and anti-social behaviour in the local area was finally dismantled and council workers were left to clear piles of rubbish and dismantle tents.'

March

This month saw the commencement of the Marble Arch Mound saga. We noted that the scheme had originated back in 2004 in order to cover the Serpentine Gallery in Hyde Park but was dropped because of difficulty and cost: 'As with other



✦ The High Street by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

Oxford Street District projects we would be interested to know the projected costs of this and how the funding is split'. A pertinent observation given what has happened since.

In the same month, the narrowing of Oxford Street was announced – and whilst in the very process of asking us for our views, the scheme was actually put in motion, the contractors appointed, and closure dates in March for Oxford Street for the enabling works were given. Announced also was the al fresco scheme, to return in April and to continue until the end of September 2021. This was in spite of a commitment given in 2020 to consult before reimposing it.

On Marylebone High Street, no sooner had the crossing works finally finished than the pavements were up again, this time at the bottom of the High Street between New Cavendish Street and Blandford Street.

However, a job that really needed doing was left undone – repaving the area immediately to the south on Thayer Street. We pointed this out: 'After extensive upgrading of the crossings and pavements a few hundred yards up the road on the High Street, Thayer Street now presents a sorry contrast.'

April

For the second year the staff at John Lewis generously donated a number of boxes of Easter eggs and hot cross buns to the Marylebone Association Covid Help Group. Their Easter donations were distributed to the local homeless and rough sleepers who were touched by their kind gesture towards the local community.

The Marble Arch Mound got planning consent from the WCC planning committee in the face of at least 51 written responses against. We asked if this was a 'horrendous misuse of public money particularly given the economic crisis' or will it 'give people an opportunity to look afresh and with wonder at this well known, but sadly increasingly overlooked, area'. We have since had the answer to that particular question.

On a brighter note, WCC confirmed the £25 million of funding for the refurbishment of Seymour Leisure Centre and a new library. However, issues remain with some of the proposals regarding the use of the space.

The Soho Society ran an online survey on Westminster's Street dining proposals for the Summer. 'To date 32% of respondees are planning to leave Soho because of al fresco'.

Hyde Park – and another dubious consultation this time on road closures in the park. The problem was that a lot of the local residents living adjacent to the park had seen an increase in traffic through their streets as a result of these closures. We asked: 'Are the views of those who actually live in the area being drowned out by those of visitors?'



✦ Walking by Adam Butler at
www.adambutlerphotography.com

Westminster was reported as having the lowest vaccination rate in the country, according to data published by the Central London Clinical Commissioning Group.

WCC Approved the draft City Plan 2019. This new City Plan set out the blueprint for all development in the borough for years to come and we reviewed some of the key provisions.

The New West End Company got their BID proposal renewed for 5 more years.

May

We were finally able to announce that Association Events were back in the real world! At least outdoor ones – starting off with a walk discovering King’s Cross.

We ran an article on the problem of e-scooters, ‘they are a growing problem for the police and public’, and the problematic roll out of a hire scheme for them in our area.

On the 25th of May, Marylebone celebrated the end of lockdown with a new tree planted in Wigmore Street organised by the W1W Planting Initiative. The Lord Mayor Johnathan Glanz, John Gilhooly of Wigmore Hall and the noted musician, Stephen Hough CBE were in attendance.

June

Work on the Marble Arch Mound commenced.

We published an article on helicopter noise – is this Marylebone’s greatest nuisance? ‘Over the years we have reported on many issues that irritate, annoy or blight the lives of residents. All of these though have one redeeming feature in common – that is, at any one time, they affect only a small part of our population, helicopter noise increasing affects us all however.’ Why not just use drones we asked?

A further article asked about the future of Hyde Park: ‘Increasingly Hyde Park seems to be for the accommodation of vast numbers of people in unauthorised gatherings which often end up in an outbreak of lawlessness and some type of confrontation with the police and the accompanying helicopters’.

We became acquainted with the term ‘Spiegeltent’ – as one was to be erected at Cavendish Square, with the, by now, customary lack of consultation. Other than the police, the scheme received limited opposition, quite possibly due to the fact that so few of us had been made aware of it!

July

It was revealed that WCC had decided to go ahead, without any consultation, with its idea for two Oxford Street Piazzas, entailing the closure of part of Oxford Street. This was to start at the end of July and to open by November. This came as something of a body blow after the many promises regarding prior consultation on this scheme received over the previous few years.

It was also in breach of promises not to close the road made during and after the Council 2018 election: ‘So it is therefore with a great sense of disappointment that we



✦ Marble Arch Mound by Charlotte Joseph

once again find ourselves on the front line facing the same issues a mere three years on from the scuppering of the Mayor of London's grandiose and damaging pedestrianisation proposals.'

We ran an article on Park Lane congestion, another example of road engineering causing congestion by TfL.

WCC made a formal decision to go ahead with rental e-scooter footway trials, we had an article in our newsletter on that.

Westminster City Council was also updating its Licensing Policy and wanted to know what residents think – as we said: 'residents could not be blamed for being rather worried'.

During the Covid pandemic there had been a vast increase in the number of premises in Westminster offering delivery services. 'The question is – are the new proposals tending to lean too much in favour of allowing business to trade in this way and paying too little attention to residential amenity in the process?'

Meanwhile the Mound was steadily growing, and so was the price tag – up from £700K to £2 million and rising – with the date of completion put back again, to August.

August

This month finally saw the much delayed, opening and the rather more rapid closing, of the Marble Arch Mound. It went on to attract a torrent of adverse publicity mainly focused over the cost and the point of it. We commented: 'Westminster Council has achieved the seemingly impossible in attracting such a level of national and indeed international criticism for this local piece of folly.'

Deputy Leader Melvyn Caplin sent us an article which we published in the newsletter putting forward WCC's case for the Mound and other Oxford Street projects.

But we were now even more worried about the Piazzas and the race to install them without any consultation: 'We are assured that closing Oxford Circus and diverting the traffic through our area instead will be absolutely fine, but this seems highly improbable – and given their attempts to date, what faith can we really have in WCC's judgement and assurances to the contrary?'

Meanwhile, Oxford Street with its many candy stores and gift shops was looking down at heel: 'Westminster needs to give attention to the product rather than the wrapper, they need to ensure the quality of the shopping offer, otherwise all is in vain'.

Residents were removed from sitting on the governing body replacing the old West End Commission. This was met with some equanimity due to the fact that they had in truth little say on the old one.

The Boundary Commission for England produced its initial proposal for changes to the current Cities of London & Westminster constituency. We asked: 'Westminster and Cities of London to split?', as this, surprisingly, was the proposal.



✦ Candy Store by Ollie Joseph



✦ Another Beautiful Morning by Michael Moszynski

In the same month that parts of North Westminister witnessed serious flooding, a new study discovered that London basement extensions are now as normal as loft conversions. 'Kensington and Chelsea have the highest number followed, readers will not be surprised to hear, by Westminister.'

September

We reported on the August bombshell that the Marble Arch Mound project was now actually costing Westminister taxpayers £6.6 million. This was over three times the previously stated £2 million cost which itself was a large increase on the £700 – £900k figure that we were given at the launch.

As a result, Deputy Leader Cllr Melvyn Caplan, who spearheaded the project on behalf of Council Leader Rachael Robathan resigned. We pointed out the original idea for the Mound was unlikely to have come from him and wondered what was Elad Eisenstein's role, the Programme Director appointed to mastermind the whole Oxford Street District. A few weeks later he too stood down. We said: 'Regardless of where the idea came from, this a scandal that need not have occurred, if only the Council had listened to the many sceptical voices against, including warnings, it may be said, made in the pages of this newsletter'.

We asked: 'Will the Mound however be the only debacle? There are worrying parallels with the Oxford Street Piazza project'.

We detailed a letter sent to the Leader of Westminister Council on behalf of 24 Westminister Amenity Societies (WASF) drawing attention to the problems stemming from the lack of adequate consultation with residents generally.

We wrote about two Neighbourhood Forum Referendums in Soho and Fitzrovia West. As Business Neighbourhoods both involved a separate referendum of businesses. Both overwhelmingly passed the plans, albeit on pretty low turnouts.

The consultation on the future of the Seymour Leisure Centre was extended into October: 'The improvements to the Seymour Centre will be the biggest community infrastructure project in our area'. However, concerns were expressed about the removal of the mezzanine from the proposals.

Hanover Square Gardens finally reopened to the public on 15 September.

October

In the final month of our Review – the major announcement was that the Piazzas had been pulled!

Yes, in spite of the fact that work on them had already commenced on their implementation, it was announced in September, that, 'having listened to our residents' all temporary works had been stopped and 'the temporary Piazzas previously planned to open at Oxford Circus later this year will not now go ahead, along with all associated enabling street works.'



✦ Time To Shine by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com



➤ Marble Arch Mound by Charlotte Joseph

We said that although WCC was still intending to focus on more permanent schemes, 'this victory should not be underestimated. Westminster were intent in pushing this scheme through without consultation under Experimental Traffic Orders and indeed they had commenced the enabling works. They were made aware of the widespread discontent with the general lack of proper consultation that had occurred since Covid, by the letter sent on behalf of the Westminster Amenity Societies, as detailed in last month's newsletter.' Following on from this, and a number of backbench meetings, it was decided to abandon the Piazza works scheduled to have closed Oxford Street from this November.

We reported on the Leader's response to the WASF letter which, 'represents a substantial move forward, in that it is a recognition that all is not right with the present methods of consultation and there is an evident willingness in the letter to address this.'

In order to better achieve this aim it has been agreed to form a small working group, which will include a Marylebone Association representative, to investigate with the Leader of the Council and key officers how this can be best addressed.

Another article on the Mound: 'The old adage that there is no such thing as bad publicity has certainly been proved correct'. However, the abandoning of all charges to visit the attraction, 'meant that ratepayers and any sponsors that can be found will have to underwrite the entire 6.6 million pounds cost of the scheme. Numbers may have now increased, but by dropping any charges the financial consequences are even more dire.'

Finally, we wrote on the problem with Regent Street: 'Someone needs to decide whether Regent Street is to continue to be an essential north-south thoroughfare for the West End's traffic or to become a shopping Mall for Crown Estates commercial rental portfolio. So far it is trying to be both - and failing at both.'

Incidentally, this was another scheme which was pushed through with no prior notice and is now seeking endorsement with a poor and biased consultation document.

So ended our (extended) year. Covid has made it a strange and unusual one and has multiplied the challenges that we have had to face, both to combat it, and in the issues and schemes that have resulted from it.

➔ **Michael Bolt**
michael.bolt@marylebone.org

ACCOUNTS



✈ Rainy Reflection by Ollie Joseph

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE (£)

INCOME	2020	2019
Subscriptions	8,219	8,955
Donations	–	500
Advertising	–	7,300
Events	1,650	2,181
Bank interest	16	33
Total income	9,885	18,969
 EXPENDITURE		
Administration	1,008	1,216
Printing & Stationery	1,240	4,287
Events including AGM	2,199	4,058
IT Services	3,045	2,383
Postage	449	905
Committee Expenses	358	590
Donations	1,000	–
Miscellaneous	68	68
Total expenditure	9,367	13,507
 NET SURPLUS	518	5,462

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 31 DECEMBER 2020 (£)

ASSETS	2020	2019
Cash and Bank	43,392	43,993
Total Assets	43,392	43,993
 LIABILITIES		
Creditors	(505)	(1,624)
 TOTAL NET ASSETS	42,887	42,369
 RESERVES	42,887	42,369

The Marylebone Association reports a small net surplus for 2020, which has been a unique year for both the Association, its members and communities it serves. The Committee has continued to work hard to manage its funds responsibly and to direct them, together with their time, where they are deemed best placed. The Association remains in a healthy financial position to maintain its influence within the communities it serves, and tackle future challenges to improve the quality of life in the neighbourhood and meet its responsibilities to its members.

→ Mike Kostyn
mike.kostyn@marylebone.org

SOCIAL EVENTS

VISITS, TOURS AND DINING EXPERIENCES

To say the last 18 months or so have been 'challenging' is a bit of an understatement – particularly if you are trying to organize outings, events and get-togethers for people who are not actually allowed to go out – or get together! However, the dreaded Covid seems to have brought out the inventive side in us all so we did manage to continue regular Book Club meetings and organize some virtual walks (thanks to Zoom).

These 'walks' were led by local Blue Badge Guide Janice Liverseidge and covered a wide range of subjects and interests – a Florence Nightingale walk, one from Marylebone along Regent's Canal to King's Cross and another, Reconstruction from Destruction around Spitalfields and Farringdon plus Heroes and Heroines of Hampstead. Although nothing replaces the camaraderie of a 'real walk' it meant that a far greater distance could be covered than would have been 'in real life'.

Then in the late Spring – at last! – some of the regulations relaxed and we had our first real live event on 22nd May; a walk around the King's Cross development. Led by Janice this was (unsurprisingly) fully booked with so much to see and so many friends to catch up with. We explored the amazing 'city within a city' that is the new King's Cross, with the imaginative conversion of many of the old buildings alongside some breath-taking new ones. The weather was pretty miserable, but it would have taken more than this to dampen the enthusiasm of our group, many of whom then went off to enjoy a lunch at some of the local restaurants.

Continuing with our 'freedom celebrations' in early June, MA members gathered for a picnic tea in Regent's Park. It was a perfect summers day when our group got together bringing their own food, refreshments, rugs and fold-up chairs to enjoy the catch-up under the (much needed) shade of the beautiful mulberry tree.

The highlight of the early events came in mid-June, with a return to the popular Anacapri Ristorante for an al fresco dinner of delicious and plentiful Italian dishes. The weather wasn't so kind, but as with previous events here, Emilio provided a 3 course choice from the à la carte menu with as much wine as could be drunk. As members waded into their first courses (after a gloriously sunny day) the first raindrops fell! But such are the new skills acquired by all in the hospitality industry, umbrellas were set up and secured within minutes and the warm rain seemed somehow exotic rather than depressing. And probably the wine helped – certainly a memorable evening was had by all.

In 'normal times' nearly 2 million people visit St Paul's Cathedral annually but with tourists still thin on the ground we had a delightfully peaceful visit in late July, with no overlapping into other groups as so often happens at our most popular tourist attractions. Our guide confessed he hadn't been in the Cathedral for many months – and was actually feeling a bit nervous. However his obvious love of the place, combined with his near encyclopedic knowledge, simply added to the charm of our visit.



✦ Best Coffee In Town by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com



✦ Canal Boats by Ollie Joseph

In mid-August our next walk took us to Paddington and Little Venice. Like King's Cross, another example of an area that was, until recently, a deserted wasteland, yet now positively bubbling – new homes, new offices and most of all, pubs and restaurants and PEOPLE! As we followed the canal towpath towards Little Venice most of us were amazed at how lively it all was and expressed the common thought: I had no idea any of this was here....

The annual Summer Wine Tasting and Lunch was also a huge success at Ishtar, the modern Turkish Restaurant on Crawford Street. A selection of summer rosé and white wines, plus some light reds, were discussed and of course enjoyed.

Thanks go to Sheila Green for organising this event – amazingly now in its 14th year! Many MA members will recall with pleasure some of the other events Sheila has initiated and organized over the years – the January drinks party, The Larrik pub nights, the coffee mornings at The Wallace Collection and The Marylebone Hotel – and many, many more. Sheila has decided to take life a little easier from now on so our thanks and all good wishes to her for the future.

Our next big outing was in September when 31 of us gathered at the Bright Courtyard Club in Baker Street. Once again an opportunity to enjoy a truly sumptuous Chinese feast in this elegant restaurant seated in our own private dining-room within the 5 storey glass-roofed atrium.

The ever-popular coffee mornings had been on hold for eighteen months but are now back in full swing with the initial post lockdown morning held at the glorious Wallace Collection. There was a good turn-out with members all happily chatting and just enjoying the lovely venue and the opportunity to meet up once again.

REGULAR GET-TOGETHERS

Book Club: This popular event takes place on the first Tuesday of each month and following many months of operating on Zoom is now happily back at The King's Head Pub in Westmoreland Street. A different book is chosen each month with all books available on both paper and e-readers. Thanks go to Elizabeth Queenan for organising this event throughout the difficult lockdown months and now at last back to normal.

Coffee Mornings: Held on Wednesday mornings on alternate months throughout the year with everyone welcome and no need to book. Different venues used, and notified in the newsletter in advance, with some old favourites included.

Pub Evenings: Held on the second Monday of each month and alternating between The Larrik in Crawford Place and The Prince Regent on Marylebone High Street. It is always an enjoyable evening and a fantastic opportunity to meet local fellow residents in an informal and friendly atmosphere.



☛ Coffee by Adam Butler at
www.adambutlerphotography.com

Scrabble Club: Having lost our previous home at The Natural Kitchen (but having managed to rescue all our boards and dictionaries which The Natural Kitchen stored for us) the Scrabble Club has risen like a true phoenix in the new location of the upstairs dining room at The Duke of Wellington pub on Crawford Street. We meet roughly every fortnight, on the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. We start at 5.00pm but people can come and go as they please until 7.00pm and there's never a problem accommodating people with different skill levels. There is no charge and boards/dictionaries are provided.

We would like to thank all of you who have supported and participated in our social programme in the past and look forward to welcoming you in the forthcoming year. We are busy planning future social activities which are such an important aspect of the Marylebone Association for so many of our members.

- Rosemary Forgan
rosemary.forgan@marylebone.org
- Lois German
lois.german@marylebone.org
- Elizabeth Queenan
liz.queenan@marylebone.org



✦ Canal Boats by Ollie Joseph

AMENITY SOCIETIES LIAISON



➤ Joy by Charlotte Joseph

The MA Covid-19 voluntary service provided the first point of contact for many residents during the height of the pandemic. It was also recognized by local and national government wanting to understand and respond to the impact of Covid. Our MP, Nickie Aitken established weekly Covid Zoom calls to hear first-hand of local problems and kept us updated on government priorities, policies, data and services. Government grants to support the arts and sustain museums, theatres and galleries and housing for the homeless were examples of the many new initiatives that were identified and addressed. These meetings continue but the focus has shifted to economics, transport, planning, crime and many other aspects of life that have been affected by Covid.

Violent crime and drug abuse are a priority across Westminster but many of us are affected daily by 'minor crimes' of anti-social behaviour, mobile phone theft, e-scooters, helicopter noise etc. How to report these crimes, share surveillance and monitor progress are all issues that are ongoing matters for the MA and the police. It is really useful to hear that colleagues in other parts of Westminster experience similar issues but also how specific problems can be. Al fresco dining, for example, has been popular with the public but for residents in areas such as Soho, it has proved challenging.

Westminster City Council voluntary services, 24-hour helplines, social service support, Health Champions and other initiatives were launched to help us with Covid. WCC also set up a monthly Zoom meeting with Residents Associations across the borough. A key topic this past year has been effective consultations. Residents and businesses care passionately about local amenities and participate fully in the numerous consultations that take place each year, but their views seemed to have little impact on decisions made by WCC. The Marble Arch Mound and the recent resurrection of the proposed Oxford Street Piazzas development are two examples where local residents across WCC felt their voices were not being heard. Not all consultations fall under the WCC umbrella, and transport issues such as cycle lanes and Congestion Charging have been implemented by the Mayor of London with little consultation. However, in recent months WCC has recognised that procedures for consultation could be improved and measures are now underway to develop more effective and transparent consultation methods.

Covid-19 has touched us all in different ways. Our support group has brought new opportunities to engage and contribute to life in Westminster including bringing us into contact with many other local agencies and charities – from Age UK to Councillor Emily Payne's food initiative. We want to ensure that we represent the views of the people of Marylebone so please let us know what matters most to you. Working closely with our colleagues in government and other agencies we can contribute to Marylebone's recovery and influence its future direction post-Covid.

➔ Linda Davies
linda.davies@marylebone.org

BUSINESS & COMMUNITY LIAISON



✦ Wedding Bus by Charlotte Joseph

The last eighteen months have been a period of profound change. Looking back, it is very easy to reflect on what we have lost. Tragically, some have lost loved ones and family connections. Many others have lost jobs and businesses. We have all lost some of our freedoms and opportunities. However, as we start to emerge from this extraordinary time we can, perhaps, start to focus a little more on how much we value what we have and the community that we are part of and how best to protect and enhance it going forward.

Bloomberg has just reported that the West End was the first central London area tracked by the Pret Index (which uses Pret a Manger's sales as a measure of the returning workforce) to pass pre-Covid levels. We can well believe it; you only have to walk down the high street to see that Marylebone is truly alive and kicking again. However, whilst footfall is recovering, the make-up of our high street has changed. We have said goodbye to some of our much-loved staples like Patisserie Valerie, the Natural Kitchen, Rachel Riley and Emma Bridgewater. We have lost many essential services including banks, building societies, our Post Office, and Boots and Tesco on George Street. This is not only inconvenient but within those businesses, we have also lost many friends.

A unique aspect of the Marylebone community is the personal connections that residents and businesses have built over the years. We are delighted to welcome new retailers like JOY, Mejuri, Clarendon Art and some fantastic new restaurants and cafés like Taka on Marylebone High Street, Ottolenghi on Marylebone Lane and So French on Seymour Place. It is going to take a while for us all to get to know these new businesses and the people who work within them but when we do, we know new friendships will follow. While we are enjoying getting back into our community, we will also start to rebuild the connections that can make Marylebone such a magical place to be.



✦ Preparing For Lunch by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

There will be challenges ahead. Staff availability and lorry driver shortages will impact retailer supply chains. E-commerce and home delivery will continue to prioritise last-mile delivery depots and dark kitchens over accessible and integrated commercial spaces. The review of al fresco dining rules and the changing seasons will undoubtedly impact our restaurants and cafés. However, with a bit of patience, deliberation and commitment to our community we are sure that the area will once again support the sort of businesses that have defined it in the past.

The Marylebone Association is a voice for the area's residents but also wants to represent the businesses that have chosen to base themselves here. Stronger connections between these two communities should enhance the area for the good of all. It would be great to hear from more businesses as to their aims and aspirations for the future and how the Marylebone Association can help them. Corporate members are very welcome and should direct membership enquiries to membership@marylebone.org.

→ Julie Redmond
julie.redmond@marylebone.org

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Masked by Adam Butler at
www.adambutlerphotography.com

RECOLLECTIONS OF A HEALTH CHAMPION

It is hard to believe we are still living in a pandemic. As I get off my weekly Zoom Westminster City Council Health Champion call, we are moving decisively back towards 'normality'. As of today, the case rate in Westminster continues to fall. Children have returned to school and the October half-term break is nearly upon us, our children no longer have to form bubbles nor observe social distancing; face-coverings and contact-tracing have ceased to be mandatory in schools.

Things looked very different a year ago. Faced with predictions of a second wave after an initial devastating surge of infections, I decided to take action to help and support residents and businesses in the community.

In August 2020, I volunteered as a Health Champion for Marylebone, as well as the West End; I also sat on the committee of the Marylebone Association and supported the volunteers group.

We have all shared so much together. The Health Champions network has enabled thousands of Westminster residents to remain up-to-date on Covid. The Council keeps us informed of the latest health advice and case statistics so that we can help family, friends, and other members of the community to make informed decisions about living with the virus. Health champions are residents, and they always need more volunteers.

In January, I decided to use my nursing skillset and qualifications to join the vaccine rollout programme with NHS Central London Healthcare at Lord's Cricket Ground and the Royal Horticultural Society. Our team was a mix of GP practice doctors, nurses and administrative staff – we all worked on a rotational basis.

A lot has changed since then, and we have come a long way. I feel proud to have contributed to the vaccination of the residents of the West End and now the booster vaccines.

Some of the bigger vaccination centres are now closing, but further challenges lie ahead. Changes and decisions are being made with just a week's notice. WCC and PHE are preparing for winter with plans for continuing with booster shots, outbreak management plans and task groups. And then there are the indirect effects of Covid: we are still grappling with a snowballing mental health crisis and a backlog in routine treatments and diagnoses.

Whatever the future holds, I have no doubt that the residents of the West End will demonstrate the same grit, resilience, and community spirit that they always do. I am looking forward to helping and being a part of that.

→ Julie Redmond
julie.redmond@marylebone.org

FAMILIES

Despite the challenges of the past year, the Marylebone area continues to thrive with plenty of families living in the area.

Parents have had to juggle with ensuring their children attend their online classes or are sufficiently well-entertained while they work from home. Even when schools opened, there was constant worry and uncertainty around closures of bubbles and risks of infection. There has also been a fair amount of crime and anti-social behaviour that have added to the stresses faced by families. Exacerbated by the recent introduction of e-scooters for hire, parents are concerned about their use in crime and general safety of pedestrians and children as riders zoom past carelessly.

Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 restrictions, activities for children, both public and private, have been limited. While Hyde Park, Regent's Park and Paddington Street Gardens are absolutely invaluable, there is no indoor space for young children since the Soft Play area in Seymour Leisure Centre was closed down. As a result, the families of Marylebone are very interested and engaged in the future of the Marylebone Library and Seymour Leisure Centre. Knowing the significant value that the refurbishment will bring to the wider community, it has been disappointing to see Westminster City Council's funds being poured into projects like the Marble Arch Mound.

However, there have been some silver linings of course. The reduction in traffic and crowds has made life in Marylebone and the surrounding areas very pleasant and friendly for young families.

The pandemic can be credited with playing a role in strengthening the community. The Marylebone Mums and Dads group continues to be active on Facebook and Instagram, and even had to move from WhatsApp to Telegram Messenger to accommodate the growing membership. The entrepreneurs within the group, led by Alexandra Mills-Haq, have recognised the difficulties faced by local businesses and are developing a discount scheme initiative to support and encourage patronage of interested businesses.

With the easing of restrictions, meet-ups have gradually come back. There is now a regular meet-up amongst new parents every Friday afternoon as well as larger family picnics on an ad hoc basis. You can find more details at www.marylebonemums.com.

→ Yehui Wu
yehui.wu@marylebone.org



✦ **Crocuses** by Stella Reeman for Life in Marylebone 2014 photography competition



✦ **Out and About** by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

POLICE LIAISON



➤ Police in Regent Street by Ollie Joseph

During the autumn/winter lockdowns there were substantial reductions in street crime, robbery, theft and assault. This was probably due to the low numbers of people outside and the effective closure of pubs (leading to reduced fights and A&E admissions) and the fact that many more homes were occupied for most of the time. There was also a reduction in aggressive begging as the weather deteriorated and some beggars returned to their home countries. There was however a significant increase in all computer-based crime/fraud, as many more people became dependent on online transactions.

With the progressive termination of lockdown, came the corresponding increase in most forms of street crime – particularly phone theft and street robbery. Violent crime also increased although fortunately the effect has to date been limited in Marylebone.

On a local level, the long serving Chair of the Ward Safer Neighbourhood Panel (the Ward Panels are meetings where the Police, Local Authority and representatives from the neighbourhood come together to discuss issues of community safety) has stood down. Our thanks go to Yael Saunders for her years of service. She is to be replaced by Helen BurrIDGE of Baker St. Quarter. The Metropolitan Police are also attempting to establish a Police Encounter Panel, which will 'allow local communities to review important policing incidents and share feedback'. Prime targets for membership are members of ethnic communities and people under 25.

The new threat will come from another temporary trial – the e-scooter. Already being used illegally with little police enforcement. Evidence from other UK trials and trials in Paris, San Francisco etc indicate that these dangerous vehicles which are often ridden on pavements are a real danger to pedestrians, particularly the disabled and to children. They are however ideal for street crime as they are fast, silent and difficult for the police to follow – should they wish to do so!

The responsibility for avoiding crime and its consequences is increasingly on the shoulders of the resident – so exercise care – but avoid direct involvement.

➔ Richard Lovell
richard.lovell@marylebone.org

PLANNING



✦ Marylebone Tower by Ollie Joseph



✦ Coffee On Chiltern Street by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

The Sub-Committee team remains both strong and committed and we are very fortunate to have such a dedicated group of professionals giving their time for free. The effort given by the team in responding to the circa 600 applications a year and attending presentations is significant and worthy of a note of thanks.

CORONAVIRUS

The coronavirus pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the property world and construction in the borough but the success of the vaccination programme and growing long term market confidence in London means a number of larger projects are now moving forward. Westminster Council is seeing a rise in planning applications and the planning teams are returning to their offices and resuming site visits. Our consultation process remains in place, and we continue to assist members with planning queries and problems.

MARBLE ARCH MOUND

Following a number of virtual meetings, a strident correction to the submitted Statement of Community Involvement and our strenuous objections to the application, the WCC Planning Committee approved the Mound on the 30th March 2021. Opened to national and international criticism the Mound remains highly controversial. When the cost of the project was queried by us in March 2021, we were told that the costs were between £700k and 900k. As we now know the costs spiralled to a staggering £6m which prompted the resignation of Cllr Melvyn Caplan, Deputy Leader – the project is now known as Melvyn's Mound! We understand that the Mound will be removed in January when its temporary permission expires.

PROJECTS ON SITE

- Marble Arch Tower – due for completion by October 2021 with new A3 use on ground floor and Sainsbury's returning to the corner site.
- 1 Great Cumberland Place by AHMM – new office and retail. On site until summer 2022.
- The NCP car park site on Marylebone Lane has now been demolished and the concrete frame for a new 206 bed hotel by Shiva Hotels is complete. On site until late 2022.
- The Moxon Street project, Marylebone Square, is now fully underway with Kier progressing well – site works will be ongoing until May 2023. The Sunday Farmers' Market has been relocated temporarily onto Aybrook Street for the duration of the site period. The developers have been running neighbourhood meetings and details of these are posted on our website.
- 19–35 Baker Street by Michael Hopkins Architects, Derwent London and The Portman Estate; this is a £400m project that will comprise of 293,000 sqft of mixed use space (office, retail and residential). Erith have been appointed to commence soft strip, demolition and piling. These works commenced on the 31st August 2021 and are due to complete by June 2022. The main build project is due to complete in 2025.



✦ Marylebone High Street by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

PROJECTS DUE ON SITE

- Cavendish Square Car Park – 270,000 sqft of mixed use development with 4 levels all underground – approved by Westminster Virtual Committee on 28th April 2020. Site start date unknown.
- Marylebone House, 129/137 Marylebone Road, a part retrofit and part new build office building was approved at Committee 13th April 2021 despite strenuous local objections. Site start date expected autumn 2021.
- 1-7 Harley Street – new medical building behind retained facade was approved by Westminster Committee in November 2020. Site start due 2023.
- John Lewis – proposals to adapt 40% of the Oxford Street building to become JLP offices – approved at WCC Committee on 27th October 2020. Site start date unknown.
- Luxborough Street Playground development (nursery and 14 affordable flats) – the application was approved at WCC Committee on 13th October 2020 despite 62 objections and a petition with 800 signatures. Site start date unknown.
- Debenhams – following the shop closure the building has been vacant as of 17th February 2021; the proposal by AHMM is to retain the concrete frame and retrofit as mixed use (retail and offices above). Following a number of pre-application meetings the application was submitted to WCC – the application was approved on the 28th September by Committee without a single objection. Works are due to start later this year.

IN PLANNING STAGES

- M&S Marble Arch – proposed complete demolition and redevelopment of their Marble Arch buildings by Pilbrow & Partners. Following a number of pre-application meetings the application for mixed use (retail and offices above) has been submitted to WCC and is currently under review by Officers.
- Garfield House (90-100 Edgware Road, Tesco Express) – proposed new office development on Edgware Road by Hopkins Architects and Portman Estate; the ambition is for it to be an exemplar sustainable building. Pre-application discussions are ongoing.
- The new Marylebone Library saga continues; the temporary Library is located at 9-11 New Cavendish Street and has a maximum stay until June 2023. The final site for the new Library has been announced to be incorporated into the refurbished Seymour Leisure Centre – this is to be a 10,000 sqft facility and remains in the design stages. WCC have been undertaking community consultation and we are engaging with this process.
- We are currently in early discussions in respect of a new mixed use retail led development on a 2 acre site at the western end of Oxford Street that The Portman Estate and GPE are working on – we look forward to seeing the project over the next year as the design evolves.
- There are also two new major sites in the Baker Street area which we look forward to seeing in the coming year.

The Marylebone Association website is used to distribute our planning responses, any planning news and details of all public exhibitions will be posted on the planning page.



➤ Christmas Of Dreams by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com and below

Drinking at the Pub (below) by Adam Butler

RELATIONSHIPS WITH WESTMINSTER AND THE ESTATES

The Sub-Committee undertake regular meetings with both Westminster's Senior Planning and Design Officers and Councillors. There is a good relationship based on shared knowledge and in some cases shared frustrations. We encourage early consultation for all major schemes in the pre-application stage to ensure all planning and amenity issues and exemplary design quality is tackled at the very outset.

We would like to thank Robert Ayton, the recently departed Head of Design and Conservation for Central Area, who has left WCC after 35 years of service – Robert's experience and knowledge has been invaluable and we would like to wish him all the best in his future endeavours.

We have also been pressing for Westminster to introduce an independent Design Review Panel and, following a number of positive meetings with Senior Officers and Councillors, this remains under review.

We have recently undertaken development reviews with both The Portman and Howard de Walden Estates to look at their 5/10 year plans; this has been very fruitful to look into the future of our area in the context of the ongoing progress by both Estates.

➔ Neil Wilson
neil.wilson@marylebone.org



LICENSING

The Licensing Sub-Committee monitors applications for new and modified licences within the Marylebone area. We aim to negotiate with those applying for licences to ensure that any adverse impact of licenced activity is minimised. Although we try and monitor all the communication from Westminster about new proposals we cannot guarantee to pick up every contentious issue. Therefore, we rely on our members' feedback and encourage them to contact us to alert us about any licensing issues they may have.

We would like to highlight the fantastic work done by Licensing Advice Project at Citizens Advice Westminster. Richard Brown, the solicitor charged with responsibility for this, works tirelessly on behalf of residents and we thank him for the invaluable work he does for everyone who lives in our area.



✦ The Prince Regent by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

During the last year there have been a few applications on which we have made representations and on the whole outcomes have been relatively satisfactory. That said, there is a feeling that Westminster City Council are not very focussed on the needs of residents, and it has taken some effort to overcome the apparent bias in favour of businesses which has manifested itself. The emergence of a new night-time economy in the shape of al fresco dining and entertainment is a case in point. The legislation to allow this was rushed in by Central Government and quickly adopted by Westminster. As is often the case hurried legislation can lead to poor outcomes and one only needs to speak to residents on Soho to know what problems that means. Mercifully within Marylebone there are not too many areas where outside dining flourishes but nevertheless some sympathy must be extended to the residents in, for example, Marylebone Lane, who now have much more noise disruption than before the pandemic.

Last year we highlighted the problems caused by busking and that Westminster had been working on the issue for some time. Marylebone really did not suffer from this except along Oxford Street. The Council were proposing to introduce a licensing regime to control the nuisance and we were fearful this might have the effect of driving some buskers into Marylebone. In the event the Council listened to comments and a licensing regime was introduced in April this year which covers much of The West End and includes our area of Marylebone. Three authorised busking sites have been designated in Oxford Street (Vere St, Old Quebec Street and by the Marble Arch Mound!)

One area of note has been the rapid growth in the number of firms attempting to provide 24-hour home delivery services. These require delivery hubs to be located right in the centre of town to enable deliveries in under, typically, 20 minutes. These hubs wanted to be able to deliver alcohol 24/7 and therefore began to make applications for off-sales. There are a couple in Kensington & Chelsea, one in Harrow Road and one in Swiss Cottage. We have seen applications in Great Portland Street and Baker Street.



➤ Pub by Charlotte Joseph

Westminster spotted this trend pretty quickly and are now consulting on proposed revisions to their Statement of Licencing Policy which could lead to regulation of such premises and place certain constraints on their operations and hours. The consultation also covers an update to Off-Sales policies both from restaurants and from retail premises.

➔ **Guy Austin**
guy.austin@marylebone.org

STREET TREES

It has been another good year of street tree planting in Marylebone and Fitzrovia. Despite a shorter planting season due to Covid-19 concerns, further progress was made during 2020-21. Across the two neighbourhoods, 30 new and 19 replacement trees have now been added to our streets.

On the 25th of May, we also celebrated the end of lockdown with a new tree planted on Wigmore Street by the Lord Mayor Johnathan Glanz, John Gilhooly of Wigmore Hall and the noted musician, Stephen Hough CBE. They were enthusiastically assisted by the eco-team of Queen's College Preparatory School. We are grateful for the opportunity to make the case for more trees to be planted on this major local thoroughfare.

Roughly 976 trees (of 26 species) have now been planted across our neighbourhoods since 2009 in support of the All London Green Grid, Marylebone's Low Emission Neighbourhood (LEN), Fitzrovia Forest and Oxford Street District projects. This year's new trees were in part supported by The Portman Estate and the W1W Tree Planting Initiative (Westminster Tree Trust). The latter raised funds from locals to support tree planting in our neighbourhood. We are following with interest the possibility of additional trees being delivered as part of the Oxford Street and Cavendish Square projects. Our target is to reach a total of 1,000 new trees to help complete the area's green grid.

➔ **Mark Gazaleh (Project Lead)**
mark.gazaleh@marylebone.org

HARROWBY & DISTRICT RESIDENTS' ASSOCIATION



♣ Geese in Hyde Park by Charlotte Joseph

This year has been a strange one, yet despite many people staying at home, it has brought out the best in our community. We didn't need to set up special arrangements to look after elderly residents – the links were already there and everyone looked out for one another. If anything, it enhanced the feeling of community and more people got to know their neighbours.

Another positive was that the crossings along the Edgware Road were finally finished and are now a bonus to the area. Traffic was quieter, at least to begin with, and the air quality improved.

A further advantage of lockdown was that short term lets were unable to operate so our streets were clear of unwelcome rubbish and anti-social noisy behaviour. We hope that the Council and government will take note of this and bring forward a registration scheme to prevent rogue landlords from abusing this form of accommodation.

Unfortunately, the Sherwood Court Car Park was yet again a blight. In last year's Annual Report it was noisy pedicabs which caused the problem. This year it has been (and continues to be) the 'SUPPER' delivery hub with noisy polluting scooters ferrying food from fancy restaurants across London. In a quiet residential area where people are forced to stay at home, this was a considerable problem. The landlords were unwilling to help and Westminster Council, due to Covid, were very slow to act upon the numerous complaints from residents. Nevertheless, we had excellent support from our local Councillor, Barbara Arzymanow. Eventually, an enforcement notice was served but 'SUPPER' appealed and therefore are still trading and causing nuisance. This is an example where the voice of residents should have been given far more weight in a quiet residential conservation area. We sincerely hope the appeal will be rejected.

Drug problems spilling over from the Edgware Road have long been an irritant in the area but during the pandemic there was a sudden spike with dealers appearing in their cars, in the middle of our community. HDRA asked everyone to keep a log of all the dealing. Residents responded eagerly with photographic evidence of people, registration numbers and times. We produced an 'excel' log which we gave to our MP who passed it on to the Borough Commander. Action was taken and the dealers moved on from our patch.

Seymour Leisure Centre: After many years of inaction regarding our Library we are pleased that WCC are finally consulting on the future of this listed building to accommodate both library and sports facilities. It is



➤ Oscar by Michael Moszynski

going to be hard to fulfil everyone's expectations but it is imperative that progress is made both in consulting the public on what they want – producing brave designs – and presenting the scheme to planning by the end of the year. Marylebone deserves a proper library and better sports facilities.

➔ **Amanda Feeny (Chairman of HDRA)**
amanda.feeny@marylebone.org

PORTLAND VILLAGE ASSOCIATION

The Portland Village Association (PVA) has long promoted the enhancement of local amenity on behalf of residents and businesses. Some notable objectives for the last decade have been paving improvements, street greening and increased pedestrian safety on Great Portland Street. We were pleased to see the tree line return to Cleveland Street and additional trees added to Bolsover Street and Great Portland Street this year.

The association has been active in licensing issues which saw a new nightclub start at the One Marylebone church site, a cricket-themed venue take over the Villandry location and a 24/7 food and alcohol delivery service come to our neighbourhood. We also raised with the Council, residents' concerns about the continued unsafe scooter and bicycle use on our roads and pavements. The PVA continues to request WCC support to clear up rubbish and fly-tipping in our area, especially near Broadcasting House.

➔ **Mark Gazaleh (Chairman of PVA)**
mark.gazaleh@marylebone.org



➤ Tree Planting In Cleveland Street by Mark Gazaleh

IN SUMMARY



✦ Conversation by Adam Butler at
www.adambutlerphotography.com

The majority of our job is involved with questioning and alerting members to what emanates, in one way or another, from Westminster Council.

→ Michael Bolt

The events of the last 18 or so months have brought the relationship between the individual and the state into sharp focus. Whether imposing restrictions on personal freedoms or bailing out businesses and employees, the government has been at the centre of the Covid-19 conversation.

Looking back over this period it is also clear that in Marylebone it is local government that is at the centre of much that we have written about and much that we need to respond to.

Whether it is essential local road closures, or grandiose ideas that went wrong, such as the Mound; or ideas that come and go, but linger on, such as the Oxford Street Piazzas; or those that stay around, such as the al fresco proposals: the majority of our job is involved with questioning and alerting members to what emanates, in one way or another, from Westminster Council.

There was a time when it was accepted that the function of the local council lay mainly with essential but unexciting tasks such as, keeping traffic moving, keeping streets clean, planning, enforcement and organising services for the benefit of its ratepayers. More recently, and particularly over the past year or so, with the challenges that Covid has set and the opportunities it has given for swift and unilateral responses, things have changed. It does appear that some have lost sight of this rather unglamorous role and are far keener to pursue various more exciting alternatives that will get written about and noticed by the wider constituency.

A few years ago, WCC united with TfL to inflict on us the pedestrianisation of Oxford Street which would have been a disaster, not only for Marylebone but other surrounding areas. It was done because the privatisation of public space, particularly in the West End is very lucrative. Rather than waste valuable shopping space on roads, why not convert them into shopping areas and see a vast increase in income from them? At least in theory. After a great deal of effort from residents, Westminster Council decided to abandon this plan, and now strangely few voices can be found in favour of it (with the exception of the London Mayor). Even previously diehard advocates now admit privately that perhaps it was for the best that it didn't go ahead.

Unfortunately, the desire for the big project and the kudos that is seen to go with it has not gone away. A mere three years later and we are confronted with other grandiose schemes, albeit on a somewhat smaller scale. One of these is the Marble Arch Mound, but this for all its sins at least keeps itself to itself and does not directly affect us. But the proposal to close Oxford Street either side of Oxford Circus to create two Piazzas most definitely does. This unwanted offspring of the old full-scale pedestrianisation

Throughout Westminster in many different areas, many amenity societies have had their own issues with poor, or non-existent consultation.



✦ Traffic on Wigmore Street by Adam Butler at www.adambutlerphotography.com

scheme clearly goes back on the promises made in 2018 to keep Oxford Street open, as does the narrowing of Oxford Street and the proposed afternoon closures of parts of it.

In fact, in one important way these proposals are actually worse than the previous TfL ones. For at least TfL attempted to consult before proceeding, even if the consultation was rather heavily weighted towards achieving the plan in hand. With the Piazzas, Westminster Council didn't even manage that. They announced that they were going ahead and two months later they commenced work under the Experimental Traffic Order provisions. We argued that this was a misuse of this particular piece of legislation, its use could be justified in the early days of the Covid crisis, but certainly not now.

Now, at the time of writing, the Piazzas have been stopped. However, this wasn't because WCC have abandoned the idea, indeed they still want to do it. It was because the principle of proceeding without consultation had been comprehensively exposed and blown out of the water by the massed numbers of the residents' amenity societies of Westminster (WASF).

Throughout Westminster in the different areas, many amenity societies have had their own issues with poor, or non-existent consultation. When they all realised how widespread this was, those who had had enough of schemes with inadequate, misleading or no consultation decided to act. A letter was sent to the Leader of the Council signed by 24 amenity societies setting out in no uncertain terms the problem they saw with WCC proceeding this way. And what gave it teeth was one more scheme that had emerged without the possibility to challenge it – the Mound. The revelation that people were not prepared to pay to see it, the massive overspend, and the national, indeed international, derision it attracted, all brought such untested top-driven initiatives into question.

The subsequent resignation of the Deputy Leader of the Council and the Programme Director for the project gave us all pause for thought. If this is what cabinet governance looks like, where a few of those at the top can push forward an obviously risky scheme without any consultation and then have a blank cheque to spend over 6 million pounds of unsanctioned borrowed money on it, then something is wrong. Poor consultation is a bad thing, we have seen plenty of that, but no consultation is worse. The WASF letter centered around the theme of consultation and what had gone wrong.

Of course the Oxford Street Piazzas have not yet gone for good and even if they were to, no doubt other proposals will follow. The difficulty is that the West End is a business area that commands big clout, where commercial decisions that may damage residential interests can bring in hundreds

of millions of pounds of extra income over a few years. Powerful lobby groups are listened to, as are even more powerful vested interests, and in the face of this the residents' hand is a very weak one. But Westminster Council has shown on occasion it does listen and the response received to the WASF letter was one such. It is just a shame that it takes so much effort to get to this stage.

As the various articles in our Review show, we still have issues with enforcement, licensing, planning, crime, dirty streets and paving that needs replacement – but the last year has made us wish that we could get back to concentrating on these core issues. So, the sooner we can leave behind Covid and grandiose projects emanating at the behest of big business and concentrate on day-to-day civic matters, the better. Developing and progressing our area in a gradual, piecemeal, organic, and above all consensual way is surely preferable in the long run for all of us.

→ Michael Bolt
michael.bolt@marylebone.org

↓ Summer In The Park by Ollie Joseph



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→ **The Marylebone Association**
229 Great Portland Street
London W1W 5PN
Email: admin@marylebone.org
www.marylebone.org

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