



Registered Charity No: 1168619 Patron: Lord Fellowes of West Stafford DL

Welcome to The Belgravia Society magazine, covering all aspects of village life in **Belgravia** and beyond.

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This magazine has been independently produced by the Committee of The Belgravia Society on a voluntary basis with regular contributions from local residents and other authors in and around Belgravia.

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Chairman's Mes



George Waite Chairman of The Belgravia Society and ESRA

The Leasehold and Freehold Reform Act has become law

he following is an extract from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities' website: www.gov. uk/government/news/leasehold-reformsbecome-law:

- The Act which has officially received Royal Assent – strengthens existing and introduces new consumer rights for homeowners.
- The Act will make it easier and cheaper for leaseholders to buy their freehold, increase standard lease extension terms to 990 years for houses and flats, and provide greater transparency over service charges. The Act will also remove barriers for leaseholders to challenge their landlords' unreasonable charges at Tribunal.
- It will further ban the sale of new leasehold houses other than in exceptional circumstances, end excessive buildings insurance commissions for freeholders and managing agents, and scrap the requirement for a new leaseholder to have owned their house or flat for two years before they can buy or extend their lease.
- The new powers also grant freehold homeowners on private and mixed tenure estates the same rights of redress as leaseholders, and equivalent rights to transparency over their estate charges, and help more leaseholders take over the management of their property if they want to. Leaseholders in some buildings are barred from taking over the management of the site or buying its freehold if more than 25% of its floor space is commercial - such as shops or offices on the ground floor.



But this limit will now be increased to 50% to enable more homeowners to access Right to Manage or the right to a collective enfranchisement.

- Scrapping the presumption that leaseholders pay their freeholders' legal costs when challenging poor practice that currently acts as a deterrent when leaseholders want to challenge their service charges.
- Banning opaque and excessive buildings insurance commissions for freeholders and managing agents, replacing these with transparent and fair handling fees.
- Banning the sale of new leasehold houses so that, other than in exceptional circumstances, every new house in England and Wales will be freehold from the outset.
- These are just the highlights, and you should seek professional advice if you intend to apply to extend your lease, buy your freehold, or challenge a service charge, or an insurance commission or a management handling fee,

Many of you will know that our member for Parliament, Nickie Aiken MP was very much involved with levelling up minister Michael Gove and junior ministers. She was very knowledgeable on the subject and worked tirelessly for reform. She called together local people from around Westminster, including our Editor, Mary Regnier-Leigh, to meet to discuss the issues and give examples of the problems for tenants in terms of service charges, lease extensions and all the other matters covered by the new Law.

I must say that Mary worked very hard to provide Nickie and the ministers with information regarding disadvantaged tenants. Thank you, Mary.



Thank you for your support

BY NICKIE AIKEN MP

ith the General Election now called for 4th July, I am no longer your MP. It has been the honour of my life to represent you in Parliament and ensure your voices are heard.

Right up until then, I have been working on the issues that matter including saving Belgravia's last Post Office. Many of you will know that the Post Office proposes to close the Eccleston Street branch. Whilst this is due to their tenancy ending later this year, I have spoken out and raised concerns over what this will mean for you and your access to postal services. I've worked with local Councillors Tony Devenish, Elizabeth Hitchcock and Rachael Robathan to hold the Post Office to account so that any decision taken ensures you can continue to access a local Post Office. I encourage you to also respond to the consultation by 12th June at nickie.news/PostOffice.

Over the last four and a half years, I am proud to have worked with so many of you, our local Residents' Associations and business groups. I've had a number of walkabouts with our local Councillors, held Grosvenor and the Council to account, and spoken out on the issues that matter. I've raised awareness of workplace rights for fertility treatment, supported the most

vulnerable in our society and led the campaign to repeal the 1824 Vagrancy Act, fought to save our buses, championed the importance of sleep, launched our plan to make our streets safer, secured a pioneering newborn screening programme, and supported our children by securing changes to the Domestic Abuse Bill to recognise children living in abusive households as victims too. I've brought leasehold reform to the front of the Government's agenda, spoken out on women's health issues, and championed our businesses to give them the support they needed.

With the General Election now called, I will no longer be your MP on the dissolution of Parliament on 30th May. In the meantime, I am no longer able to perform my usual constituency work. Ministers continue to remain in charge of their departments and the essential business of government and public bodies carries on though major decisions will be deferred to the next Government. I am not permitted to take up any new casework. I am sure my successor will be happy to help you once they are elected.

Thank you for all your support. Belgravia is a very special part of the Two Cities. Long may it remain a vibrant but friendly neighbourhood.



To Nickie Aiken -thank you

BY MARY REGNIER-LEIGH

had received Nickie's usual article and had it in place for publication; then came the calling of the General Election. I asked her if she would like to add or change her article. and she sent me her "Thank You for [Our] Support" response.

Now I want to thank her for all the work she has done while she was our constituency MP. Being of a certain age, I have seen MPs come and go and I have never met one so devoted to her constituents and so hard working as Nickie. Nickie takes up our problems, large and small and, even now, reminds us of the fight for our Post Office.

Her constant updates, the report she gave us weekly, her perspicacity and never-giving-up attitude has been to our huge benefit.

I am just thinking of the article included in our Magazine on pedicabs. Nickie never stopped working to bring them under control and change the law. There have been so many things which she has done or been involved in and supported (some of which she refers to in her article on page 5). She also worked very hard to support the alterations to the law in relation to leasehold reform.

I am certain Nickie Aiken will be a very hard act to follow.



Registered Chairty No. 1168619

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Please fill in the online form by clicking on the link above link.

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Closure of Eccleston Street Post Office



ne of my colleagues in another local amenity Society drew my attention to a notification coming from the so-called Post Office Consultation Hub. It told us, in no uncertain terms, that they were proposing to close the Eccleston Street Post Office, which is what we used to call a Crown Post Office.

This Post Office provides not only the usual postal services but also many others such as cash withdrawals and deposits as well as cheques, parcel services – both by the Post Office and other suppliers – documentation and certification for vehicle tax, and so many other things we rely on this Post Office for.

The reality is that other post offices which they claim will satisfy us (mostly in shops and best described as sub-post offices) are not in a position to offer the services we are used to from the Crown Post Office. The nearest Crown Post Offices are Knightsbridge Post Office (whose future is not certain at the moment) and Broadway, almost at the end of Victoria Street near Westminister Abbey. Knightsbridge Post Office is about 25 minutes walk for most people and the Broadway may be a little less.

The services provided are needed for the whole of Belgravia, its businesses and the many people who work and live in Pimlico. I have not yet come across anyone who does not want this Post Office to stay open. I would add that the information that came from the Post Office states, "Our lease on the premises expires in September 2024 and we vacate the premises in September". Their landlords are Grosvenor. However, for the first time, we find ourselves in total agreement with them (or perhaps they find themselves in total agreement with us) that the



Post Office should not be closed. They have sent out letters to this effect and flyers to their tenants asking for them to object. The closure is supposed to be subject to consultations which close on 12th June.

If we are to preserve our Post Office, then we must respond to the consultation.

From their language it seems the Post Office are determined to close the branch. They want to know our feedback and comments that can help inform their plans. They want to know:

- 1. How easy is it to get to the alternative branches?
- 2. Are the alternative branches easy for you to get into in terms of accessibility?
- 3. Local issues, general comments.

The only comment is that the alternatives are not acceptable and we want the Post Office to stay in Belgravia.

Clearly they need to be told in no uncertain terms, that the alternative of an indirectly managed office branch will not provide the services used regularly by all those who use the Eccleston Street Post Office. The distance to the nearest Crown Post Offices is approximately over a mile or more away in 20 to 30 minutes' walk for a fit walker. Many of the residents in the area would not be able to manage. Younger people and businesses rely on the Post Office for their extensive services and losing that facility will be a great blow to the community.

If we are to preserve our Post Office then we must respond to the consultation by 12th June.

Grosvenor tell us that the building has been much neglected. Grosvenor would like it back but is more than happy to find alternative premises in Eccleston Street. Obviously, it is between the Post Office and Grosvenor to find a solution. We do hope Grosvenor are able to do that, and we know that the Post Office have been very unwilling to communicate and discuss the matter.

It is now up to all of us as well, and by this I mean not just one member of the family but all of them, to email or even write to the Post Office in response to consultation. The surrounding sub-post offices are not sufficient and Crown Post Offices are too far away. It is essential for there to be a Crown Post Office in Eccleston Street.

INVITATION TO THE NEXT SOCIETY COMMITTEE MEETING

We would be delighted for you to join our next meeting in person on

11th June at 5.30pm at The Caledonian Club

The meeting will only last 45 mins, when we will then move to the room for the AGM.

Please let us know if you wish to attend by emailing info@thebelgraviasociety.com.



The future of Belgravia

n the old days, before many of us lived in Belgravia, there were shops in basements which could be accessed by residents, and many shops in the streets with a variety of products. We often use the phrase "butcher, baker and candlestick maker" to define the mixed uses of many of the shops we had.

However, since the millennium, we have seen huge changes to those shops. Instead of considering how to support our many different shops, Grosvenor has chosen a strategy which in effect turns our shopping streets into smaller versions of Bond Street. They have already started and they have certainly declared their intentions when they published their "Belgravia District Strategies" at the end of last year. I think it would be better named as "Grosvenor's District Strategies for Belgravia".

Elizabeth Street is described as being "aspirational accessible location and the mix of recognisable brands." They say that they are working with WCC and their tenants to create a permanent outdoor dining scheme which is being delivered this year. It is claimed to complement their restaurant and retail occupiers.

Motcomb Steet will be known for its mix of globally renowned luxury shops and quality contemporary restaurants. The street is pedestrianised from midday to midnight creating a pleasant atmosphere. They do not take into account residents who might be disturbed by the coming and going of pedestrians into and out of the area up to midnight or later, or the loss of choice of shops.



Corner of Eccleston Street - empty for nearly a year



Outside dining in Elizabeth Street



Elizabeth Street shop awaiting tenant

In future, we will lose those shopkeepers who we know and trust and will be left to do our shopping elsewhere.

Eccleston Street is said to be the amenity location for Belgravia and home to independent brands. The street is described further as the gateway to the district and provides neighbourhood and amenity uses for residents and office workers.

Pimlico Road will continue to be an internationally-renowned design district. Pimlico Road is described as the western gateway to the district and is an internationally recognised destination for interior design.

Strategy includes Eccleston Yards. We see nothing to argue with here save the caveat that noise should not affect the residents who live around it.

We have written on a number of occasions about the fact that Grosvenor have forced out tenants. This has been done by three methods. The first is, at the expiration of a lease, Grosvenor quotes rents way beyond tenants' abilities to pay, based on the high rents from the new luxury shops that have already been rented out. The second way has been by exercising break clauses in the leases that were accepted by tenants without understanding the risk of being forced to leave. Thirdly, tenants have accepted leases, excluding their right to renew the lease under the Landlord and Tenant Act.

In future, we will lose those shopkeepers who we know and trust and will be left to do our shopping elsewhere. That is unless, of course, you want to buy some luxury goods. Will their strategy work? Actually, I am not sure it will. Why should Londoners come to Belgravia when they have the West End, Knightsbridge and the real Bond Street to go to?



Escape to the country

BY PATRICIA BURTENSHAW

ack in the Summer of 2021, you may remember seeing herds of Indian elephants 'roaming' the Royal Parks. They were featured in an article in this magazine in our July issue of the same year. Although each had a real-life counterpart, these particular elephants were not real but models made of lantana, created in Tamil Nadu, India, and brought to London to display as part of the *Real Elephant Collective* project.

Fast-forward to Spring 2024, and Annabel Elliot, sister of Queen Camilla, held a Spring Fair in her home in Dorset to raise funds for the local church. The Fair had the usual attractions: a variety of stalls selling local produce, plants, books, toys and crafts; a raffle; coffees and

teas on sale with delicious homemade cakes (of which I partook – the coffee & walnut was divine!); and an Open Garden.

The Open Garden was, for me, the highlight of the event. What a beautiful and serene place it is. I walked through a gateway into formal manicured lawns surrounded by beds of well-tended planting and neatly trimmed hedges which led around the house, opening to a view across the Dorset hills. I kept walking towards a rewilded area of longer grass with paths mowed between for easy walking. I glimpsed a Victorian greenhouse to my left between rows of tall hedging, and onwards through the wilder section to some trees ahead.





Above left: Formal garden Above right: Pet cemetery Right and previous page: The little family of lantana elephants Below: Traditional greenhouse





Under the trees was a pet cemetery, little gravestones and heart-shaped wooden plaques nestled under the branches among the ivy and groundcover plants. Peaceful, tranquil, and quite moving to see all the names inscribed of beloved dogs and pets from past years of loving family life.

Onwards through the trees and suddenly I'm out in the open with a vast expanse of tall grass before me. But what's this? A family of three life-sized elephants roaming the field ahead. I recognise them instantly as two adults and one baby elephant from the

Elephant Collective project, now living happily at the end of a Dorset garden! What a great surprise ending to my journey through this lovely place.

Annabel is a life member and patron of Elephant Family, of which her brother Mark was Chairman until his death in 2014. After their Royal Parks appearance, we understand the elephants went on sale, with the proceeds going to the work of Elephant Family. It was delightful to see a small family of elephants again – now happily retired among the human family that is working hard to save them. \blacktriangle

Belgraviain



n line with the Chelsea Flower Show, Belgravia in Bloom took place again this year from 20th to 27th of May, its ninth year. Maps to the displays were freely available on the Internet. The businesses who were supporting it use the opportunity not only to provide displays, but also to welcome visitors and provide special offers for their services.

Eccleston Yards provided a number of displays including the centrepiece which we have reproduced in a photograph for you. The theme this year for the festival was "Floral Fun and Games" which prompted tenants in and around Belgravia to bring fun and games to life with floral displays.

Judging by the number of people who I saw in Belgravia with plans and maps to visit the various displays, there is no doubt that this is a floral festival which will bring visitors to the area.

This year, the official charity partner of Belgravia in Bloom was Horatio's Garden. The charity takes care of people with spinal injuries and looks to nurture their wellbeing. Horatio's Gardens are vital places for reflection and adjustment for people facing lifechanging injuries and long stays in hospital. The profoundly positive impact of a Horatio's Garden is clear for patients, their loved ones and hospital staff. Research shows that 94%



Previous page: House of cards

Above: Colour cube in Eccleston Yards Right: Chelsea in Bloom Sloane Square

Below right: A riot of colour in Eccleston Yards

of beneficiaries see an improvement in their wellbeing, with 91% reporting that the gardens have supported their mental health.

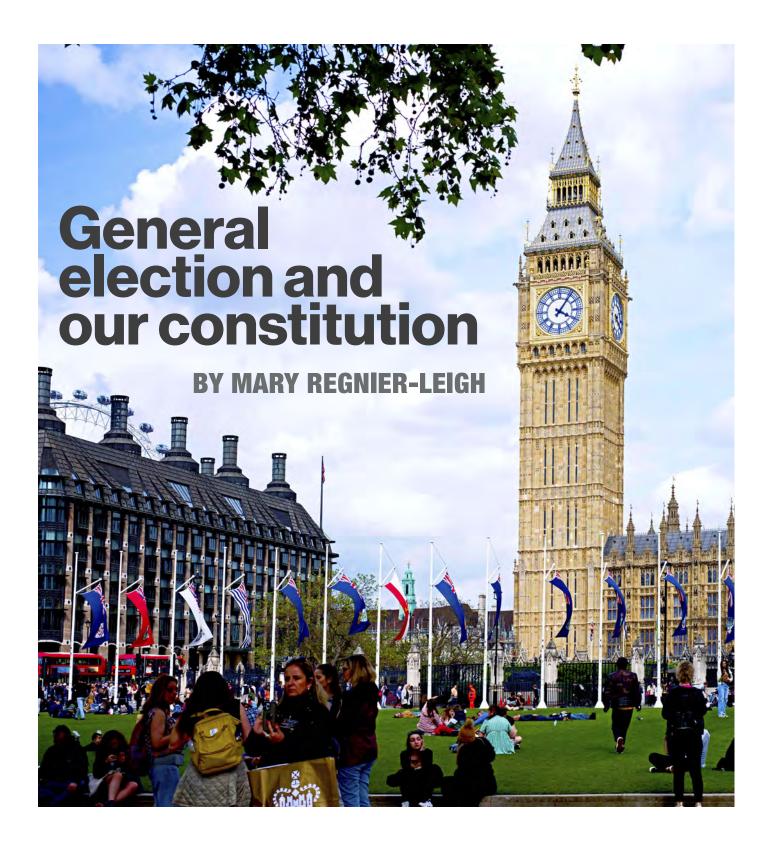
The charity's vision is to sustainably grow thriving communities and biodiverse gardens in all eleven NHS spinal injury centres in the UK. To date, they have opened seven gardens in the South West, Scotland, Stoke Mandeville, Midlands, London & South East, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with work having begun on their eighth in Sheffield in Spring 2024.

Other areas also have their own floral shows at the same time. No doubt they are encouraged by the success of the Belgravia shows.

We can do no better than let the photographs show the exceptional flower displays. We look forward to next year.







his issue's monthly contribution (page 5) from Nickie Aiken as our MP is her last. As I write this on 24th May, Parliamentary Business will end today. There have been two days, ending tonight, to "wash up" Parliamentary bills to determine whether they should be passed into law or whether they should be held over for the new administration of whatever colour, or indeed, accepted as "dead".

Basically, these are chosen on those matters which are really very important to be passed into law. Examples are to ensure that those who will receive compensation in the blood scandal or Post Office scandal, leasehold reform, and one or two other important pieces of legislation are not lost because of proroguing of Parliament. They can receive the Royal Assent if approved by both Houses of Parliament before parliamentary business ends.



They will then be signed into law by the King. Those which are deemed to be less important within the two days available, can be held over to the new Parliament. Some items will be "dead" and they may be resurrected by one party or another, but there is no certainty.

On 30th May, Parliament is dissolved and all business in both houses comes to an end and MPs are no longer MPs. The Speaker ceases to be an MP as well. He does retain the responsibility for the management of the House of Commons, as he remains Chair of the House of Commons commission until a new Speaker is elected.

Members of the House of Lords remain members as they are not elected. Business in the House of Lords though comes to an end when the Parliament is dissolved. Members of the House of Lords can access the premises of Parliament following the dissolution. Former MPs can go to the House of Commons but only to collect things from their offices.

From then on until the actual dissolution of Parliament on 30th May, our MPs are very restricted in what they can do. Once dissolution of Parliament has taken place, they will no longer be MPs.

The Government does not resign when Parliament is dissolved and they remain in charge of their departments. The role of Minister is independent of the role of an MP. They retain their ministerial titles after dissolution but cannot use the title of MP.

Our unwritten constitution is based on centuries of common law, precedent and tradition and is almost unique. It provides for us a smooth and certain transition from one Parliament to the next with an election by the people.

We go forward without conflict to a peaceful and proper democratic outcome. On 9th July we will have a new Government and we can look forward to a State Opening on 17th July.

Some dates for you to remember:

18th June – deadline to register to vote; **19th June** – deadline to apply for a postal vote; **26th June** – deadline to apply for a proxy vote and an ID certificate.

All voters must remember to take with them evidence of identity, usually a photographic item like a passport, driving licence or bus pass. There are other acceptable items but do make sure you have the right one, and remember you must have the ID with you.





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Wanted!

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Peninsula for lea



were all made from cake or other edible delicacies. The Tea included one glass of sparkling wine of your choice, or sparkling tea – a very wide variety of teas from China, India and Japan were available including green, white and black tea.

The service was impeccable. There is no doubt that if you are on a diet this is not the place for you, although special requirements are available.

eeing the Peninsula Hotel was now open for business, friends and I ventured to go for Afternoon Tea. This is served in the lobby where there are well spaced tables and live music played from a balcony overlooking the area. It was therefore a nice background, loud enough to be enjoyed and quiet enough not to intrude on the conversation.

At the time of our visit at the end of April (too late for us to review the Tea in last month's Magazine), the Afternoon Teas were Peter Rabbit themed. We were told that different themes would be used at other times.

The menu offered many choices. For savouries there was a choice of sandwiches with a very wide selection of fillings, with additional sandwiches offered without being asked. Naturally, scones with or with without raisins, were served with the requisite cream and jam. Then came the cakes, if you had any room for them! These were in a variety of very artistic and creative forms. Some looked like little plant pots (inspired by Mr McGregor's garden on the Peter Rabbit theme) with a small attractive plant inside. What was amazing was that they

We left the hotel, each with a Peter Rabbit toy for any children in the family and a feeling of having had the best Afternoon Tea we had ever enjoyed. It was also the most expensive as well. However, all Afternoon Teas in the quality hotels are very expensive and this was very much worth the extra cost. We will certainly go again.





now subject to law

e are delighted to report that the act of Parliament dealing with Pedicabs is now Law. What this means is that TfL are now empowered to crack down on roque pedicab drivers by regulating fares and improving safety standards. Hopefully this will bring the industry into line with other transport in the capital.

It will put an end to dangerous driving and antisocial behaviour, especially in hotspots like Soho and Covent Garden.

Belgravia has seen an increase here as well. It is not unusual to find pedicabs, with very loud music, cycling through our streets. The passing of this law closes a loophole that allowed pedicabs to evade the law for the last 30 years.

We can only hope that TfL does bring forward the licensing scheme in a similar way to other local authorities. TfL would have the ability to introduce fare control to combat overcharging, protecting customers from being ripped off as we know they have been.

TfL will be able to set standards for operators, drivers and their vehicles to improve safety of pedicabs as well as introducing insurance and ensuring that vehicles are roadworthy. It should ensure that drivers undergo criminal record checks before being allowed to carry passengers in the same way as taxi drivers or private hire vehicles must do. They will be able to restrict the presence of pedicabs in certain areas and at certain times. I think most of us will have seen large numbers of pedicabs outside theatres when they expect a performance to end, blocking the road to both motor vehicles, pedestrians and other users.

Bringing in this change has taken our retiring MP, Nickie Aiken, most of her term as an MP to achieve. She started with a private members bill which had universal support, except from one MP, which meant the matter could not go forward. She tried again but the same MP stopped the bill. However, the Government did agree to include it in a new transport bill, but then to speed it up agreed to have it in a single bill which would go through much more quickly, as indeed it did.

One doesn't really want to talk of legacies when Nickie has worked on so many other things on our behalf. However, this can certainly be remembered as one of her legacies. Thank you, Nickie.

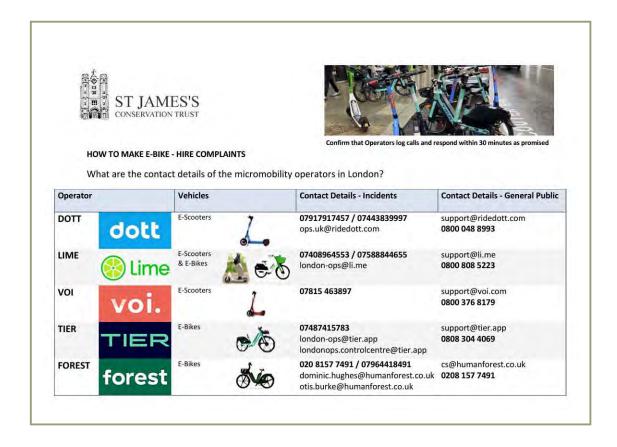
How to complain about e-bikes

alking along Ebury Street to Grosvenor Gardens, you will find a large number of e-bikes on the pavement round to the small designated area which itself is overflowing. There are other places in Ebury Street and all round us where even car parking spaces are cluttered with them.

The Westminster City Council has made arrangements with the various e-bike providers which should ensure that the promoters of the scheme remove bicycles and do not allow them to block pathways or cover other parking areas.

Despite constant complaints, the cluttering still happens. We have already said that it should not be the responsibility of residents to complain, however, complaints can be made to these e-bike providers. We set out below details for you if you should wish to telephone your nearest provider.

In addition, it might help if photographs were sent via email to Cllr Paul Dimoldenberg via email to: **pdimoldenberg@westminster.gov.uk**.



A reminder from **Councillor Hitchcock on** the importance of the Post Office

ou will almost certainly already have heard that the Eccleston Street Post Office is due for closure in September. We view the closure of this post office as a huge loss to the community. This branch, in particular, will be missed as it is a Crown Post Office. That, and the nearest equivalents are located on Vauxhall Bridge Road or Broadway. The Crown Post Office in Knightsbridge has an uncertain future due to the proposed redevelopment of 1 Knightsbridge Green. All these locations are a considerable walk, especially for our elderly residents or those with mobility needs. Crown Post Offices offer services that sub post offices cannot, mainly having to do with banking, passports, vehicle tax and document certification.

It is highly unlikely that if this branch shuts its doors for good, that it will ever be replaced, even by a smaller sub-post office. We have learned that there is no appetite for small shops to open a post office within their premises - it is economically unviable. Supermarkets occasionally offer post office services within their stores, but this does not apply in Belgravia.

It is vital, therefore, that we as a community express our views as part of consultations and petitions. The Post Office is conducting a local public consultation and your views can be made known either at comments@postoffice.co.uk or by going to the Eccleston Street Post Office and scanning the QR code found on the posters around the entrance. The Post Office is currently running 94 of these consultations - that is a huge number of Crown post offices that will potentially be completely lost to the nation.



The consultation for the Eccleston Street branch closes on 12th June.

We are also running a petition to save the post office at westm.news/SaveOurPostOffice. It would be helpful to show strength of feeling amongst the local community to complete both the consultation and the petition. It is only with one large, collective voice that there may be any chance for the Post Office to reconsider this disastrous decision. We have seen the closure of many public services owned by private companies in recent years and once they are gone, they are gone for good. Please help us to save this much loved, much needed and much used post office by making your views known as part of the consultation and the petition.

Editors Note: The more we all oppose this closure, the greater will be the chance that some alternative will be found. Do respond to the calls for response to the consultation.





Registered Charity No: 1168619
An amenity society recognised by the City of Westminster

Membership Application

Membership is open to residents and non-residents and is free

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Second name	(if any)		email	
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The Belgravia Society Magazine

The only independent voice for Belgravia

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