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INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot of recent discussion and press reporting about the future of The Portobello Road Market and my role in its apparent demise. A small section of this reporting has been based on truthful events and on people's opinions, which I absolutely respect. However, far too much of it has been inaccurate, politically based nonsense aimed at the royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea and the forthcoming local elections in May. The remaining parts, including several damaging newspaper articles, contain serious misinformation about the recent letting of 282/292 Westbourne Grove to the retailer All Saints and many personal attacks directed at me.

The overall suggestion is that Portobello Market is under threat from property developers such as me, and unless the Council brings in legislation to protect it, the market will die. This fact in itself, is quite simply not the case. Portobello Market is not under threat from anyone as far as I am aware.

The Council own, regulate and run the market and it is entirely their decision as to what to do with it. Primarily I believe they need to accept this responsibility and instead of bringing in new legislation, they should focus on the fact **that it could be drastically improved**. Likewise the shops on Portobello road are not being developed into a 'High Street clone'. However, the shops and antiques arcades in a small part of the road are facing mounting financial problems and **I would like to discuss a solution to these problems** that is not based on archaic protectionism and retrenchment to a bygone era.

Many of the recent protesters' assertions about the redevelopment of 282/292 Westbourne Grove are either simply untrue or deliberate distortions of actual events. Similarly, the attempts to suggest that my company (The Portobello Group) has sinister plans for redeveloping our arcades on the Portobello Road into mass retail outlets are totally unfounded. We, like other shop, business and arcade owners in the antiques section, face many different problems. **We need support and assistance from people who understand the issues and want to address those problems.**

Commercial redevelopment around the market is a consequence of these problems, not their cause. The varying factors putting pressure on the market are complex; they reflect the way the area has changed and the way this has impacted on the antique dealers who use the market. Those issues can't be summarised in a press slogan or solved by a wave of the legislators' wand.

I want this document to bring anyone who has an interest in The Portobello Road

Market together to start a proper debate. This would be a non partisan discussion about the factors which are causing the decline in the market and what can be done to reverse that trend. I want us to address the real issues and share our aspirations for the future, not just try to protect the past. This document is an effort to get the ball rolling by attempting to put forward my view of the problems and what I think is required to allow the street to evolve with the times and the market to prosper and thrive.

We all have a lot to lose. If the current trends continue without anything changing, the antiques section of Portobello road will go on contracting and, bit by bit, it will eventually die. This very real prospect may eventually stop people coming to Portobello road altogether and that would be catastrophic for us all.

Warren Todd
Portobello Group

THE PORTOBELLO STORY SO FAR -

How did we get where we are today?

How has Portobello market changed?

The Portobello Market is run by RBKC. It is a street market of outdoor stalls along the mile of Portobello Road running from the junction with Chepstow Villas in the south down to Portobello Green/Golborne Road in the north. It trades in different sections including Antiques, Fruit & Veg, New Goods and a bustling Flea Market. **It isn't under threat of closure and no developers are able to change it as far as I am aware.**

This street market is the 'Life Blood' of Portobello road. It is this market that needs to be maintained and improved. This market is responsible for the livelihood of hundreds of stallholders. This market drives the large footfall on the street, creates the ambience and maintains the uniqueness of the area. This market is owned and controlled by RBKC - it isn't under threat, but the antique section could be significantly improved!

Either side of the street market lie the shops of Portobello Road itself. They are predominantly privately owned shops that follow the prevailing trends of the time and have done so for the last 100 years. These shops are striving to survive in an area dominated by a market which has reduced its trading hours from six days a week down to only one. It seems now that every time one or two of these shops changes hands, people are in uproar that it is a threat to The Market itself.

These shops have always changed hands and they haven't always been smaller independent units as the protesters will have you believe. It is the very fact that these shops are free to change with the demands of the market place that has enabled the street itself to evolve. Without this freedom to evolve we would never have had the Antiques section in the first place - it only started in the 1950's.

Until the 1950's most of the shops were set up to serve the local community. There were grocers, butchers, haberdashers, clothing outlets etc, etc. Some were large emporiums like Jesse Smith at 143-149 Portobello Road, and some were even well known retail names like 'Burton's Tailors' at 177 Portobello Road and Marks & Spencer, who operated a mega store at 188-192 Portobello Road. All of these shops operated on a six day per week basis!

I am certainly not advocating that Portobello's shops should all become chain stores. Far from it. But without the flexibility to allow change and adapt to prevailing economic conditions and consumer demands, these shops will eventually close down.

How the Antiques section on Portobello Road evolved

The Antiques trade on Portobello road is relatively recent and was the result of particular circumstances that allowed it to flourish. After the war there was a large number of bomb damaged properties on the Junction of Portobello Road and Westbourne Grove. It was here that antique traders from the Caledonian road were encouraged to come and trade. The rents were cheap because the buildings were dilapidated and the street market on this section also encouraged 'Antique Dealers'.

By the 1960's many of the shops in this section had started to migrate from a variety of genres into antiques. They subdivided their shops into small stalls to create 'Antique Galleries' (an example being Harris Arcade, 161-163 Portobello Road, which originally sold prams). The owners did this to survive in a changing climate. It was only after they became antiques galleries that trading was reduced to the 1 day per week pattern that we see today. Eventually, the 'Antiques Market' became so successful that antique shops spread into Westbourne Grove and surrounding side streets such as Ledbury Road.

THE SITUATION TODAY

Antique sales on Westbourne Grove and Portobello

The economic conditions that allowed the antiques trade to flourish did not last. Unfortunately back in the deep recession of the early 1990's, the by now enormous local trading in antiques quite simply dried up and most of the antique shops in Westbourne Grove were forced to close. The entire area was on the verge of collapse. Thankfully, the Portobello Road antiques section was just about able to survive this difficult period due to its historic reputation and the vast footfall created by the continuing presence of the street market.

So many antique dealers had been forced to sell their properties that over the next few years the area around Portobello was forced to transform itself in order to survive. The Westbourne Grove that we see today is a totally rejuvenated shopping area, whose continued existence is due to a combination of wonderful individual shops, niche retailers and some of the biggest names in fashion. Westbourne Grove was forced to adapt early because it couldn't rely on the global reputation of Portobello Road and the huge footfall of the street market to keep it going. It has become much more dependent on local shoppers again, reverting to a seven-day trading pattern and due to the huge increase in local property values it now reflects the needs and requirements of affluent local shoppers.

Now it's the turn of the shops on the antique section of The Portobello Road to find a way to survive in a changed economic climate. The owners and operators of these shops and more pertinently the arcades, quite simply cannot afford to keep them going in their current format.

Although it is a huge factor, this current demise cannot be blamed on the economic climate alone. There are many other factors at play- including huge increases in the rents and business rates of the properties themselves, spiralling maintenance and operating costs, and a refusal from the antiques stallholders to trade more than one day a week.

I have tried very hard to maintain the arcades on Portobello Road even though some owners have closed their arcades and let them to retailers. Every year it gets harder. We have fewer dealers on the street pitches, so it follows that there are vacancies in the arcades. And with more vacancies, the owners such as me have to let in new goods to fill the vacant stalls or suffer further losses. This has created a vicious circle. But that isn't the only problem.

The profile of visitors to Portobello has changed as well. Not many visitors are actually here to buy 'Antiques'. They come for a fabulous day out and they spend money on many things other than antiques. And they don't just come on Saturdays. Every week from Sunday to Friday, 40,000 people come to Portobello. Finding the antiques section closed they are disappointed and leave with a negative impression. Portobello has become as much a tourist destination as it is an antiques venue and it should deliver a good day out -every day.

The net result of all this is that in the antique section the arcades and galleries are suffering financially. Over the last 15 years, shop rents in Westbourne Grove, and further down Portobello Road, have trebled. Meanwhile, business rates have increased in line with the mounting shop rents. The tourists and shoppers are faced with walking through a section of the street that is closed six days per week. What business can survive on 1 day per week trade, when it pays bills for seven days every week?

I have been branded a 'wicked developer' who has recently come in to buy up all the properties and change them into 'Chain Stores'. This myth just doesn't fit with the facts. I have been running these properties as Antique Arcades since 1994. I bought Lipka's in 2001 to stop it being turned into a 'GAP' – and I've tried very hard to make it work as an arcade for nearly ten years. I did this with an eye on preserving the very reason I and many people love The Portobello Road. I have resisted both change and approaches by retailers for many years - often to my financial detriment. But I am fighting a losing battle.

The 'threat to the antique section' is not the wicked property developers waiting to gobble it up.

The truth is a lot simpler: the antiques section is just no longer economically viable in its current format.

PROBLEMS AND RECOMENDATIONS

As I've said, I want to stimulate brainstorming, inspiration and debate on the future of Portobello. So, to get the ball rolling, I've summarized the key challenges we face and given you my suggestions for improvement. This is just a start – I will be contacting all involved to ensure everyone has a chance to make their suggestions heard.

The changing face of Portobello

Portobello is a major tourist attraction. It is reported that nearly 100,000 people walk down the street every week. Unfortunately, the majority of these visitors are not in Portobello to buy antiques. They are here for a day out, they want to browse, have a pleasant time, but ultimately they do not buy antiques. The reality is there are not enough real buyers coming to the area every Saturday to support the antique section as it is today.

Recommendation

In order to maintain the positive image of the Portobello Brand we have to have a quality offering for the vast number of non antique shoppers – and that doesn't mean pashminas and cheap copies etc. All Saints is an excellent example of a positive step forward. It is important to realise that fashion is not a threat to the Antiques. They are mutually exclusive purchases appealing to the different visitors.

The Influx of New Goods onto the Stalls

This has happened for two main reasons. Firstly because of a decline in the early morning antique trade sales, many genuine antique dealers have introduced new goods to their stalls to appeal to mainstream shoppers.

Secondly, because of a reduction in the antiques dealers themselves, Arcade owners, in order to protect their investments, have been forced to rent vacant stalls to new goods dealers.

Recommendation

Firstly, we have to re stimulate the antiques trade in Portobello for dealers and buyers alike. I believe we can only achieve this by expanding and improving the Street Market to compete with fairs like Kempton etc. (see section below). Secondly, we must realise that it is not new goods per se which are the threat, but the proliferation of cheap and tacky offerings. Some arcades are guilty of this because of the high vacancy rate on antique stalls. However, to eradicate this may require a consolidation of the good antique dealers into fewer but better quality arcades. This was part of the rationale behind the introduction of All Saints on Westbourne Grove - allowing

us to fill our vacancies in Portobello Road and strengthen our antiques offering.

A reducing number of good quality dealers are trading in Portobello

There is no arguing that the number of antique dealers on the street is falling and most of the arcades have been suffering with vacancies over the past few years. Most dealers have adapted with the times and are nowadays finding different ways to meet the needs of their customers. There are now other ways to trade such as the internet and more particularly e-Bay. These new methods weren't available when the market started and consequently the decline in dealers on the market is not surprising. However, these new methods of trade don't help the arcade owners who are dependent on dealers to rent their stalls.

This isn't just affecting Portobello. other long established London antiques markets have closed completely – Antiquarius, Bermondsey and Camden Market for example. It is bound to get worse. Many Portobello stalwarts, dealers who've been here since the antiques market developed in the fifties and sixties, are now approaching retirement age. A younger generation of dealers is not taking their place because of the modern methods of trading I have mentioned. A pitch or stall is no longer absolutely necessary to every antique dealer.

Recommendation

There are still many excellent dealers in Portobello and at fairs around the country. These dealers need to be encouraged to perceive Portobello as a place to take good money. The antiques section has to be promoted positively again and this has to be done in conjunction with the improvements to the Street Market as outlined below.

Antique dealers only want to trade one day per week

The days when dealers travelled the country for five days a week and brought their goods to Portobello on Saturday are long gone. But that's the way they choose to go on trading. Why? Mainly because that's what they are used to - they have only ever traded there on Saturdays. Many of them live out of London and it's not easy to persuade them that the market could and should work on other days of the week. For many of the stallholders, Portobello is not a livelihood or full time job; it is a pastime, a passion, or perhaps a bit of extra income. This problem is worse for the arcade owners where the shops are divided into numerous stalls where the dealer's only trade on a Saturday but store their stock all week. Therefore, there is no alternative midweek use and unless a majority of the dealers are willing to trade on extra days they can't open at all for security reasons. Many of the smaller shops do now open midweek and have tapped into the trade created by the 40,000 visitors.

This one day per week antiques trade creates two problems. Firstly, the arcade owners cannot produce sufficient rental income to keep the arcades going and secondly when the hordes of

visitors come to Portobello midweek there is nothing on offer for them. This has a major, negative impact on the reputation of the Portobello brand.

Recommendation

The antiques section of the street market should be expanded and trading increased to seven days per week. This will require investment in promotion, advertising and management. And it will require changes for everybody - and greater commitment from the dealers themselves. It may also require a consolidation of the antique section to keep the quality high and the customers returning. I believe there is potential to use the Street Market to stimulate the Antique section overall. If there were themed fairs daily, weekly and monthly, it could help bring in a regular flow of new dealers and buyers to the street. A week's programme might comprise, for example:

MONDAY – Monthly Fairs to be well advertised

TUESDAY – Farmers Market / French Market

WEDNESDAY – Watch Fair, Jewellery , Silverware etc

THURSDAY – Art, Paintings, Tapestries etc

FRIDAY – Vintage Fashion, Textiles etc

SATURDAY – Antiques

SUNDAY – General

However, initially I would suggest that we aim for 4 days per week Thursday – Sunday when there is already good footfall.

If this were promoted and well managed it would convince dealers in the arcades to trade on additional days of the week. In order to facilitate this I have already stated my intention to upgrade the arcades, stalls and security to enable traders to open.

Business rates payable against seven day per week trading

Everybody's single largest operating cost is business rates. These have more than doubled over the last decade, and another big increase is on the way in 2010. The rate increases in the antique section are calculated by reference to market rentals being paid by other local shops. These shops often trade seven days a week and yet there is no relief available for Portobello shops and arcades that operate on only one day a week. Obviously, if we are successful in creating additional days trading, this problem will fall away, but until then we need help.

Recommendation

We have asked the RBKC to lobby the Valuation office Agency (VoA) for a reduction in rates specific to the Portobello antique section. If they are as committed as us to maintaining and improving the antiques trade then they shouldn't have a problem with this suggestion. At the very least they could offer short term hardship relief for shops and arcades that trade only on

one day per week. They have told us neither of these ideas are possible – could this change?

The Street Market in the Antique Section requires specialist management

The RBKC's efforts to study the growing problem of a failing antiques market in 2007 and the wider implications on small shops trading in the borough, was a well meant exercise which has led to improvements for the market in a number of important respects. For instance, there is now a Town Centre Initiatives Manager whose job it is to deal with day-to-day issues relating to Portobello. This said, there is still significant room for improvement in a number of important respects. The RBKC don't regard the antiques section as a separate entity or as having special problems unique to selling antiques on Portobello Road. They just look at it as part of the market as a whole which, as they describe it, runs for a mile from Elgin Crescent to the Goldborne Road. They don't promote or advertise the market separately. There are no attempts to generate new visitors with for example weekly 'Speciality fairs, or other antiques events. The antiques section only operates on Friday and Saturday whereas other parts operate 6 days every week. Why is this? In addition RBKC has granted the same licences to the same dealers on Friday as on Saturday. This doesn't bring 'New Blood' into the street.

Recommendation

RBKC need to understand the intricacies of the Antiques market. To do this they need to liaise more with PADA or better still employ a specialist antique fair manager to expand the number of traders and bring new dealers to the street more days per week. They also have to review their trader's licence which is very restrictive. Midweek they need to operate more like an Antique fair to bring new dealers to the street.

The antique market could also be much larger and extended further up to Chepstow Villas and beyond. Other ideas include the potential for a covered Saturday antiques only market in the school playground, but only if alternative parking can be provided. The street market is the ideal place for many of the antique stalls. They get far better passing trade. Everyone who comes to the Portobello Road would have to pass their stalls - rather than people having to walk into each arcade. The rents can be kept artificially low by RBKC as they wouldn't have to cover shop rents, rates, repairs, maintenance, electricity etc.

No centralised promotion or advertising

It's easy to assume, because every Guide to London for international visitors mentions Portobello, that the message is just as effectively delivered to other visitors from within the UK, or indeed to Londoners generally. It isn't. There is no centralised website; no separate marketing effort; no advertising budget; and not even a Guide to Portobello. The Portobello Group has produced the only guide booklet for Portobello road at my own cost in an attempt to try and publicise the antique section.

Recommendation

The RBCK should take a stronger lead in advertising and promoting the Portobello market as a whole and the antiques section in particular. What it offers needs to be looked at in the context of what will appeal to the target visitors. That means keeping the quality of the antiques market high. Even if that means reducing the number of arcades and increasing the quality and profitability of those that remain. It means creating interest and excitement throughout the week with any number of possibilities - such as French fairs, Jewellery fairs, Silver fairs, and the list is endless. The 40,000 people who come to Portobello midweek currently find limited products on offer outside the omnipresent fruit and vegetable market.

There is no Portobello Brand, no Portobello Trademark and no official merchandise

The Portobello name is known worldwide to millions of people – even if few know exactly what it is! This international awareness of the name is a massively under-exploited opportunity.

Recommendation

A recognizable and consistent brand could easily be created for Portobello and the name used to promote and sell a range of merchandise. With a relatively small initial investment, and consistent use of the brand by RBKC in its promotion of the area - royalties from this brand could create a significant revenue stream for RBKC to be reinvested in to the Market.

Forecourt Trading

RBKC are trying to regulate forecourt trading - the only source of income some landlords have mid week.

Recommendation

Forecourt trading is part of the street market and market culture. Instead of making it difficult and policing it fiercely, the RBKC should manage and police it positively – if only for safety reasons.

Congestion

Recommendation

Pedestrianisation of the areas between the junction of Portobello road and Chepstow Villas and the junction with Blenheim Crescent every weekend would ease congestion around the market. It would also enable more street market stalls to be operated.

Parking

Parking is a major problem for stallholders, even on Saturdays when they receive payment exemptions.

Recommendation

There is a Council car park nearby in Lower Wood Court. Why can't we use it?

Signage

Recommendation

The street signage from Notting Hill Tube Station directing footfall to the market needs improving.

“Save Portobello Market”

Everyone including me would sign up to a genuine campaign using this slogan. However the campaign is not based on any truth but designed merely to cause public confusion and panic. There is no outside threat to Portobello Market from me or anyone else. There will be no mass closure of any shops. Much of the publicity now is very negative and actually damaging to the confidence of what is a fragile marketplace already.

Recommendation

That we all get behind a positive campaign to communicate our mission – to work together to create a shared vision for a sustainable and flourishing future for Portobello.

THE WAY FORWARD – Creating a shared vision for the future.

If we are to usher in a vibrant future for Portobello I suggest we must:

1. Work together

All of us who have an interest in the Antiques market need to come together and combine as a group to discuss the future of the market with the RBKC. That means Portobello Antique Dealers' Association, local politicians, residents groups and organisations like mine who have large investments in the market and its future.

2. Agree that Portobello needs better management

Ensuring that the street market continues to thrive is the best natural defence in retaining the individuality and identity of Portobello road. If the street market were extended, expanded and managed properly it would maintain the vitality and individual character of the area and safeguard its future.

3. Accept that the market has had to adapt before and can do so again.

What we can't do is go on trying, and failing, to keep Portobello exactly as it was thirty years ago. The street market is the direct responsibility of RBKC and it is their job to encourage and stimulate the changes needed to build a real future for Portobello. If this is done in conjunction with PADA and the Arcade Landlords we can work together to create a wonderful and sustainable future for Portobello.

GETTING STARTED – a series of meetings

I would like to propose a series of meetings, under the aegis of the RBKC as the owner of the market and the elected representatives of the local community, to discuss the market's issues and come up with some very specific solutions to our problems. I am prepared to organize, promote and fund these meetings myself if necessary. As I've said, everyone who has a stake in the future of Portobello has a view that counts and I want very much to hear everyone's ideas and suggestions in response to the challenges I've set out. If anyone has any answers to the questions I have posed then believe me, I want to hear them.

The real threat to Portobello Road lies, not in the highly unlikely prospect of "megashop" developments but in a continuing unwillingness to address the commercial realities which are causing the problems. I have suggested some answers to this problem and look forward to

discussing them with all stakeholders in a constructive environment.

NB In view of the political sensitivities surrounding the upcoming election, I will organize the first of these sessions once the election outcome is known. However, I would appreciate any comments or feedback that you have relevant to this document and any other problems / solutions that you would like to identify, as soon as possible.

APPENDIX 1

THE TRUTH ABOUT 282/292 WESTBOURNE GROVE

In order to redress the balance regarding the publicity surrounding this project I thought it important to replace the media and local speculation with the facts.

This redevelopment has been carried out with great care, pride and the utmost attention to detail to preserve the integrity and character of the area. My decision to introduce AllSaints to Westbourne Grove was not taken lightly. However, I do believe it has met, even exceeded, my aim to inject youth and vitality into a run down parade of shops. AllSaints are a very well respected fashion retailer, which have proved to appeal to both tourists and the younger locals seven days a week.

Did I mislead people with my plans?

As a commercial operation, I cannot run any of my properties or businesses at a loss. In order to remain commercially viable in the face of the mounting challenges discussed earlier (running costs, commercial rents, increasing business rates, etc) Lipka's needed to remain open for at least six, if not seven, days a week. I raised this with the dealers and very few dealers were interested. Consequently, I was forced to look at other solutions to make the site pay its way.

The initial 2007 plan was simply to redevelop the residential upper parts of the property, and retain the basement as an antiques arcade – providing a separate, well advertised entrance. Dealers agreed to move to another part of the building whilst the work was being done – but during the construction it quickly became apparent that this wouldn't work because of logistical and safety considerations. The answer seemed obvious – I had vacancies in other antique markets so I offered them far better pitches on Portobello Road – pending return to trading in a basement arcade at Lipka's when the work was completed. Then, during the refurbishment, and whilst dealers were off-site, it became clear that a basement trading area would not actually be viable. Due to the depth of the basement dig out it would no longer have easy access off Portobello Road, in addition to this it required a separate means of escape out to Westbourne Grove that couldn't be accommodated into the scheme and finally we had very little interest from antique traders in taking up the proposed space. Clearly this had not been the smooth transition I had hoped but the problems we encountered were unforeseen when the work started. Throughout the entire process I kept the relocated dealers informed, both by letter and verbally, given that I saw them in our other arcades every Saturday. Suggestions that they only found out about the situation when the scaffolding came down to reveal an AllSaints shop, are once again simply untrue.

Incidentally, during the time that dealers were out of the Lipka's site I tried once again to persuade them to return on an increased number of days a week, but this suggestion was of no interest whatsoever.

Was I always out to make a quick buck from Lipkas?

I bought this property in 2001 when it was under threat of redevelopment as a 'GAP' clothing store. I tried to make it work as an arcade for over eight years before concluding that it couldn't be done. Throughout these years I turned down many offers of rental from far larger less appropriate retailers than AllSaints.

In the end, not unreasonably I believe, I decided that it was no longer possible to maintain this Westbourne Grove property as a Saturday only antiques arcade and felt that AllSaints was the best solution.

Did I treat the dealers badly?

There were 79 dealers in the Lipka's arcade when it closed for redevelopment and all of them were offered alternative pitches in my other Arcades. Nobody has lost their livelihood. No-one was evicted. 66 of these dealers are now trading from other pitches in Portobello. 42 of these were re-housed into my other arcades. The dealers concerned were given rent concessions when building started on the Lipka's site and also in their relocated pitches. In fact, the majority of these new pitches are arguably in far better positions.

Consequently, the change has not disadvantaged the traders who moved, and has strengthened the antique market on Portobello road by relocating the best dealers into the many vacant units that existed in other arcades.

Did anybody in Lipka's lose their livelihood as a result of the redevelopment?

Everybody with a pitch in 282/292 Westbourne Grove was offered an alternative pitch in my other arcades, and I know that all but a handful are now trading on Portobello Road – right in the heart of the antiques section. Most of them have moved to other arcades owned by the Portobello Group. Others have found pitches elsewhere. Nobody lost their livelihood.

An example of the negative propaganda circulated by the protesters was the early accusation that we had evicted 94 years old Phylis Pollak and her son, Paul. Here's what Paul said to me about the move:

"I've been on Portobello for over thirty years, and my mother over forty. We both had businesses in Lipka's

when Joe Lipka retired in 2001, when there were all sorts of rumours about it being sold to a big retailer. But it didn't happen. A year or eighteen months ago, part of the arcade closed for the redevelopment and people were relocated. Not thrown out, but relocated to other parts of the building. We were moved around a couple of times within the building which was inconvenient but we never had to stop trading. I had two moves, the first into a next door property where I had 6 or 8 weeks notice to move. Then, after three months, I got notice again and was offered a pitch in the Red Lion arcade on Portobello Road. We got a rent free period and compensation for the money spent refurbishing the pitch in the next door property. Overall, the business was not dislocated and I haven't lost any business that I know of. The Red Lion is on Portobello Road which has always been the prime spot on the market, there's no denying that. Lipka's was always off the main road and people were always a bit reluctant to come round the corner. And of course, at the end the scaffolding didn't help attract people in. On balance, I'm paying a bit more in the Red Lion arcade but I've moved into the main road, so things have pretty well balanced out for me. Were we tricked into moving? Quite the opposite. People knew that Lipka's was closing and we certainly weren't kept in the dark. I'm a realist. None of us like what is happening to the market but it's obvious that things are different from the way it was even five years ago. Outside pitches used to change hands at a premium - now they can't get enough people to take them. Since we moved to the Red Lion, my mother sadly has had to retire due to ill health. Portobello Group treated her very kindly, especially when she was in hospital, and were sympathetic and understanding while she decided she would have to retire."

Is the AllSaints shop out of keeping with the area?

AllSaints Portobello is neither a cloned retail outlet nor a multiple chain store. It is a cutting edge fashion business, recently voted the UK's most exciting fashion business by the highly respected fashion industry trade magazine, Drapers Record. Its target customers are young, successful and affluent with money to spend on clothing and a variety of other purchases alike including antiques. It brings the full vitality of the flourishing AllSaints business to Westbourne Grove and helps cement the street's increasing reputation of being one of London's premier fashion streets.

AllSaints has the ability to draw new customers, into Westbourne Grove and Portobello, and this is clearly evident from the number of customers visiting the shop. This is what John Ryan, Group Stores Editor of Drapers Record had to say about the store:

"The long storefront is painted different colours at various intervals which is intended to promote the idea of a series of small shops rather than a commercial behemoth. Whilst perhaps it may differ from what it replaces, All Saints is to be congratulated for creating a space that blends with its surroundings." (20 March 2010)

I asked AllSaints to tell me how their customers have reacted to the new store. This is what they

told me:

“AllSaints Portobello, on the corner of Westbourne Grove and Portobello Road, is our newest and best store. It has now been trading for twelve weeks and has exceeded our targets and expectations. We have had a lot of very positive feedback and a big welcome from our loyal customers who live in the area and from the many visitors to Portobello who have come into the store. Westbourne Grove is already home to many great fashion names, including Joseph, Nicole Fabri, Paul Smith, Agent Provocateur, Jigsaw and many more. AllSaints is a very positive addition to the draw of the area. The store has already become a local landmark with thousands of UK shoppers and international tourists admiring and photographing the shop. As with all of our stores, great care and attention to detail has been paid to the execution of both the exterior and interior. The shop has a trading area of 11,000 sq ft on two floors, ladies on the ground floor and mens downstairs. AllSaints have been able to integrate the two floors with a dramatic and well designed staircase which adds to the visual appeal and architectural integrity of the shop. We have carefully designed the shopfront to make the frontage sympathetic to the local environment, creating the look of three individual shops”.

I am disappointed that the arrival of AllSaints has been drawn into the argument and that the protesters have raised unfounded concerns that the store is not in keeping with the area because of its size and position. I believe this is not true and unfair to AllSaints.

I do realise that some people are upset because the site was formerly occupied by the antiques arcade and they are anxious about the future of the Portobello antiques market generally. So am I but for different reasons. The new AllSaints store is a commercially viable solution in a changing environment which at every level is in keeping with the area and a welcome arrival on Westbourne Grove.

The arrival of AllSaints is clearly a big plus for Portobello as well. It ensures that there is something good on offer seven days per week and generates a greater footfall that can only be good for other local businesses.

Finally to reiterate, most of the antiques dealers who formerly traded in Lipka's have been rehoused into vacant stalls elsewhere on Portobello, where their arrival has helped to strengthen the depth and quality of the arcades on Portobello road itself.