

NEWS AND VIEWS

Plans for Kensington

THE small area of London bounded by Kensington Gore, Cromwell Road and Queens Gate contains some of the most important museums and institutions in Britain. The Science, Natural History and Victoria and Albert Museums, Imperial College, the Royal Colleges of Art and Music and the Royal Albert Hall, are all situated there. But this very concentration of collections and colleges, which makes this part of Kensington one of the most important cultural and educational areas in London, is proving disadvantageous. An important event at the Albert Hall, for example, "turns the whole area into a seething mass of motor vehicles", in the words of a letter to the *Times* by the directors of the institutions. They then announced that they have formed themselves into a standing committee to represent to the authorities the unique character of the district and to see that this is taken into account in the planning of buildings and roads.

The institutions have, for example, failed in their separate attempts to have traffic conditions improved. Those students of Imperial College living across Exhibition Road from the main buildings have a great deal of difficulty crossing over the road to work in the mornings. Then, ice-cream vans accumulate outside the Science Museum, causing the pavements to be littered with ice-cream cartons and sticks. The derisory fines that are imposed on the owners of the vans have not stopped them from coming.

When the committee has dealt with the more immediate problems, it intends to "promote a study of the problems and potentialities of the area", in particular to see what might be done to turn the area into an educational and cultural precinct. Since 1959, the University of London has been trying to turn the Bloomsbury area into such a precinct by buying houses in the region as their leases expire and by establishing university offices and departments in them. The original plan of this venture included proposals that certain streets should be closed to traffic, but this has not yet happened.

Cheerful Association

THE British Association, which is due to begin its annual meeting at Leeds on August 31, has unexpectedly been able to show a small surplus on its accounts for the years 1966-67. On the heels of a deficit of £7,000-odd for the previous year and a gloomy forecast from the general treasurer, this seems a proud achievement. In reality, however, the association is more despondent than delighted, for its balanced budget is more the result of curtailed expenditure than increased income. The Department of Education and Science remains deaf to the plea that the grant of £12,500 which the department has made in recent years for the support of the lecture service should be doubled for a start, and that the department should also match private contributions towards the cost of these social services

up to a maximum of £12,500. The general treasurer does not in this year's annual report repeat his explicit complaints against the department, but he does mention with approval the way in which the Ministry of Technology has decided to make a further grant of £10,000 towards the cost of the propaganda which the association is doing among young people in the cause of the more fruitful application of science. According to the general treasurer, the need for economy has also led to potentially profitable innovations, such as the decision that the association's journal *The Advancement of Science* should from April 1967 be published on a commercial basis.

The chief consequence of straitened circumstances has been a reduction of the extent to which area branches of the British Association have been able to provide lectures on scientific subjects for local organizations. The total number of regionally organized lectures fell from 1,409 in 1965-66 to 998, but the central service provided by the headquarters of the British Association remained more or less unchanged at 311. One striking feature of the comparison between the two years is the decline in the proportion of adults attending lectures provided by the association. Evidently the Women's Institutes have been more seriously deprived of lectures on science than have the schools. There is, of course, nothing in the report to indicate whether the slackening of support from the British Association has been accompanied by an increase of support—not necessarily financial—from other sources. Whatever may have happened, there is obvious comfort to be drawn from the way in which the science fairs, which began as a kind of juvenile sideshow at the annual meetings, have become a continuing hit, first with the *Sunday Times* and now with BBC Television. The association is also modestly pleased about its work with audio-visual aids for education and with attempts to introduce more science lectures to colleges of education, although it is not equally successful everywhere. As it diversifies, the association may have to acknowledge occasional failures.

Clean Air at Harwell

IN a report issued this week, the National Society for Clean Air urges the Ministry of Transport to fix limits for the contents of car and lorry exhausts. The report, "Air Pollution from Road Vehicles", states that although road and rail transport together use only one-tenth of the fuel consumed in Britain at present, car exhaust pollution so affects city streets that conditions in them could become intolerable as the number of cars increases, if no controls are introduced. Britain will be spared the photochemical smog that afflicts Los Angeles, unless, ironically enough, the skies become clearer. Even then, the most harmful product of the motor car will continue to be carbon monoxide. Already the concentration of this gas in streets can reach dangerous levels—as much as 360 parts per million was recorded in Oxford Circus. It is forbidden to expose industrial workers to a concentration of more than 100 p.p.m. in an eight hour day.

The best methods of reducing pollution, the report concludes, are by installing modified carburettors and fuel injection systems; exhaust after-burners and catalysts are less effective. The report criticizes the