# Controversy over Victorian lightwell restoration at north London pub sparks local outrage



Plans to reinstate a historic Victorian lightwell at a north London pub owned by the husband of television presenter Kirstie Allsopp have sparked significant opposition from local residents. The redevelopment project, located on Latimer Road, has become a source of controversy as neighbours express concerns about the potential implications of the restoration.

The property development company Wentworth Andersen, managed by Ben Andersen—Allsopp’s husband and a businessman known for his association with the BBC’s Location, Location, Location—purchased the former Ariadne's Nectar Bar in 2023 and has been undertaking renovation work since. The pub, which lies not far from Grenfell Tower, has seen ongoing building activity for nearly two years, much to the frustration of locals who report intrusive noise and uncertainty over the venue's future.

One particular aspect of the redevelopment that has drawn criticism is the plan to bring back a Victorian lightwell, a feature traditionally designed to provide light to cellars. Documents submitted to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) planning authority indicate that Wentworth Andersen intends to reinstate the original lightwell on the pavement outside the pub, using conservation-grade black grilles painted in black gloss. While two other similar lightwells remain at the site—one glazed over—this reinstatement has been met with alarm by some neighbours.

A letter from a local resident condemned the proposal as "baffling and frankly retrograde," suggesting it was an outdated design choice that could encourage inappropriate behaviour, notably upskirting, which has been illegal since the Voyeurism (Offences) Act 2019. The resident highlighted safety concerns, particularly for women and children, stating:

"Not only am I a woman who enjoys strolling through her neighbourhood without fearing a low-angle photo shoot, I'm also a mother to a young daughter. And now I find myself wondering whether this grille is intended as some sort of open-air museum piece on how not to design public infrastructure."

The correspondent expressed disquiet over the lightwell’s placement directly next to the pub’s entrance, describing it as "an absurd inclusion" and a liability that explains why it was concreted over more than two decades ago. They further likened the design to a "voyeur's deluxe box seat" and questioned the relevance of reinstating such a feature in a modern public space.

Concerns also extended beyond privacy and safety, with several residents fearing the lightwell’s restoration could facilitate covert residential development. The building’s upper floors have already been converted into flats, prompting speculation that reviving the lightwell would provide necessary light and ventilation to convert the basement into further residential units. As one neighbour remarked:

"It’s the opening move in a much larger game. Reopening a lightwell serves the developer. This isn’t about restoring what’s there—it’s about paving the way for further piecemeal development."

Others have accused the developers of employing a "development by stealth" approach, attempting to bypass thorough planning scrutiny through incremental changes. The extended renovation period and lack of clear communication from the owners have only fuelled these suspicions.

Further compounding tensions was a prior controversy last year when a large sign emblazoned with the name "Allsopp's" appeared on the side of the building, generating criticism that the name was being inappropriately imposed on the area. The connection to Kirstie Allsopp was significant as her great-great-grandfather owned a beer brand now being revived by a family member and expected to be sold at the pub.

Wentworth Andersen's most recent planning application, concerning changes to the cellar cooling, kitchen extraction, and rear flue, was withdrawn just before a scheduled council decision, leaving the future of the refurbishment uncertain. The lightwell application is expected to be decided shortly.

As of the latest reports, Wentworth Andersen has not commented on the criticisms or outlined their plans for addressing local concerns. The ongoing debate highlights the complexities of balancing heritage restoration with modern safety standards and community expectations in London’s evolving neighbourhoods.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://stqw.org/wordpress/2025/01/19/update-on-proposed-pub-at-274-latimer-road/> - This article provides insight into the complex planning issues surrounding the redevelopment of the pub at 274 Latimer Road, including the lack of planning applications for certain changes and ongoing renovation works. It highlights community concerns and objections to these developments.
2. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/04/27/upskirting-fears-over-kirstie-allsopps-husbands-pub-plans/> - This piece discusses the controversy over the reinstatement of a Victorian lightwell at the pub, with concerns about upskirting and safety, reflecting broader community fears about the development.
3. <https://stqw.org/wordpress/2024/08/19/proposals-for-the-volunteer-pub-in-latimer-road/> - This article outlines the history of the building, previously known as Ariadne's Nectar Bar, and its acquisition by Wentworth Andersen. It details the licensing process and the transformation into The Volunteer pub, touching on community support and concerns.
4. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/pub-latimer-road-the-volunteer-kirsty-allsopp-ariadnes-wentworth-andersen-b1179331.html> - This source verifies the purchase of the building by Wentworth Andersen in May 2023 and discusses plans to reopen it as The Volunteer, highlighting the historical significance of the site.
5. <https://londonnewsonline.co.uk/news/pub-with-a-past-both-good-and-bad-could-get-celebrity-reboot/> - This article mentions the past of the pub and the licensing application process, including concerns from residents about noise and the impact on the local area.
6. <https://www.noahwire.com> - Though not a direct source on the Latimer Road pub controversy, Noah Wire Services is mentioned in the query as a source for the original article, which discusses the broader context and concerns around the redevelopment project.
7. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14654717/Property-firm-run-Kirstie-Allsopps-husband-faces-backlash-plans-bring-lightwell-Victorian-pub-upskirting-fears.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data