Traders in Old Dover Road were hit with a surprise tax this summer – what’s become commonly known as the ‘pavement tax’.

With many businesses struggling in the current economic climate, questions are being asked as to the logic behind the introduction of this new trading license by the Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG).

It was in July when RBG enforcement officers served papers on shops in Old Dover Road, with traders being told that they were “breaking the law” by displaying goods, or placing tables and chairs outside on the pavement.

Charges are set at £1 per square metre per day plus a one-off £35 set up fee – seemingly insignificant, but it soon mounts up. A double fronted shop would need to pay some £1,500 per year.

For the new owners of Apple’s on Oranges, it came as a nasty surprise: they recently invested some £20k in a refurbishment.

“If we’d known about the new tax, we would have configured the shop differently, taking the stalls on the pavement inside the shop to avoid this additional cost,” said the new owners.

The lack of consultation or information prior to the introduction of the new licensing regime has been something that Susan Donnelly, owner of Blackheath Pet Shop Supplies was very surprised about. “As our landlords, you’d imagine they’d have told us.”

As of the introduction of this new tax, traders sit on the fence as they try to decide whether they can afford to pay the new tax.

Taxing time for the traders

Sarah Winterbottom

Fitting burglar alarms; they also warn drivers to always lock their cars, even outside cafes on the pavement.

Richard Winterbottom, of Pet Shop Supplies was very surprised to hear that his annual £2,000 insurance premium would now be increased by 25%.

“Pet Shop Supplies was very surprised when it was revealed they would have to pay an additional fee for burglar alarms,” he said.

“Not a safe bet.”

The police urge traders to always lock their cars, even when going into the bookies.

Around midday on October 11th, six cars were broken into on roads in and around Westcombe Park Road. The police urge drivers to always lock their cars, even on the way westward on Batley Green one way system, the driver lost control and headed into the bookies.

Crash course

On Thursday October 23rd, at around 0.05 am, the driver of a recently purchased Fiat Punto smashed into a bookies on the corner of Westcombe and Old Dover Road. The police urge drivers to always lock their cars, even for short periods, and to use properly fitted burglar alarms. They also warn people not to leave anything open to view in their vehicles.

Contact: Tom Button
APSS
Blackheath Westcombe SNT 8207 161 820

View our new web site!

Have you viewed the Westcombe Society’s new website yet? Our treat – you can read the WH in colour! Try it out: www.westcombe-society.org

Fireworks threat

Around 100,000 people enjoy the fireworks event every year on the heath. But for how much longer?

First, Greenwich pulled out, leaving Lewisham to foot the bill – and now Lewisham has lost its sponsor, leaving a massive shortfall this year, and the strong possibility that there will be no fireworks next year. This would be a great pity: apart from anything else, firework parties in the back garden increase the danger of accidents. If everyone puts a pound in the bucket that night, Nov. 2, the problem would be solved.

Franctures beware!

Greenwich has won an Excellence in Anti-Fraud Silver Award, in recognition of the range of work it does to tackle fraud and to protect public money.

Police warning

Around midday on October 11th, six motor vehicles, including builders’ vans, were broken into on roads in and around Westcombe Park Road. The police urge drivers to always lock their cars, even for short periods, and to use properly fitted burglar alarms. They also warn people not to leave anything open to view in their vehicles.

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Shakespeare Greenwich-style

Eight Greenwich schools, including The John Roan, Eltham Hill, Thomas Tallis, St Ursula’s, and Corelli College will be performing at the Greenwich Theatre in Croome Hill between November 4th and 9th. For details go to www.greenwichtheatre.org.uk/shakespearefestival.

Last September was a very busy month for the Westcombe Society: on Friday 27th the Macmillan Cancer Support Coffee morning took place – and Saturday saw the Children’s Nearly New Sale. As the picture above shows, this was HUMMING with activity as bargain-hunters joined the mixer in Mycenae House.

No prams please – we were all pushed for space! See below, and stories on p. 2.

The “A” Team at the coffee morning

The Coffee morning (well, lunch, too, really) in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support was a great success, and raised over £480.00 for the charity. Many thanks to the Westcombe Society team of volunteers: Marilyn, Heather, Tessa, J-J, Monica, Pauline, Maureen and Caroline. Don’t say: “Just let them eat cake . . . .”

Do say: “Try our scones, too – and why not stay for a delicious sandwich lunch?”

To be opened by Dominic Coleman

FREE SHOWS FOR CHILDREN

12.15 & 2.30 Traditional Punch & Judy Show

Craft & Charity Stalls Refreshments Mulled Wine

Live Music around the Christmas Tree

Santa’s Grotto

Sponsors: Doomed Ltd, Loco, FwC, Loco, Macclesfield, Greenwich Do Chesters

Adverts E2, £16 E1, under £2 free, Members £1 proceeds to South London Special League

PHOTOS

Sponsors: Doomed Ltd, Loco, FwC, Loco, Macclesfield, Greenwich Do Chesters

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November 2013 Issue 9

The Westcombe Society's Dickensian Christmas Bazaar will be opened by local resident and celebrated actor Dominic Coleman.

This year, the Westcombe Society’s Dickensian Christmas Bazaar will be opened by local resident and celebrated actor Dominic Coleman.

See below, and stories on p. 2.
Raising money for Macmillan Cancer Support

CHI Angela Cordeiro, the Mayor of Greenwich, arrived to open the Coffee Morning for Macmillan Cancer Support on Friday 27th September. Best behaviour, everyone! PICTURED, LEFT: Marilyn Little & J-J Aune of the Westcombe Society, Mark Johnson-Brown (Manager of Mycenae House), the Mayor, and Peter Dixon of the Vanbrugh Community Association. RIGHT: Two volunteers

The baby seems slightly amazed by the Mayor’s B cling … … while the Mayor seems amazed by the delicious cakes!

Sell-out at the Nearly New Sale

After the Macmillan Coffee Morning, it was time for a quick rearrangement of all the chairs and tables in the hall of Mycenae House, ready for the Nearly New Sale next day. Phew! Marilyn Little reports: “We had nearly 100 people through the door which was more than last time. “The main thing was, we had lots of satisfied customers (and stall-holders?) so it was a very worthwhile day for everybody. “Thanks must go to Joanne for organising the event, well done. Added bonus: we also sold some of the left-over cakes, scones and sandwiches from the coffee morning, thanks to our friends in Mycenae House. “So all in all a very good day! Many thanks to all concerned.”

Letters

Any views expressed are those of the writers only, and are not necessarily those of the WNY or the Westcombe Society.

From Caroline Ovsev

Rearmsond Field

The final figure raised for Macmillan at the Coffee Morning and subsequent sales amounted to £1589.30. When added to the sponsorship for the walk £647, The Westcombe Society will have raised £2236.30 for Macmillan so far this year and I think all those involved should be proud of themselves. Many thanks to all those who helped out or supported these events.

From: Gahl Marston

Coloured Rd.

Ras in Uve? Blackheath Village, Kollbrooke Village, Millenian Village – the myth of country life in SE London continues. But is it a myth? In the last fortnight in fruitful SE3 I’ve given away surplus tomatoes, grapes, perennials and home-made chutney; and have received windfall apples, and the visits of innumerable bees with the promise of honey in due course from a neighbour’s hive.

From: Cllr Geoff Brighty (Con.)

I noted in the Planning Board papers for the Lovella Wharf application a very helpful submission from the Westcombe Society. By now readers may have heard that the Planning Board, unanimously, rejected plans to increase the number of residential units. East Greenwich residents were well organised and put forward a compelling case. Before the meeting, I paid a visit to the Thamesmead Dry Dock as well as Greenwich Park and the Old Naval College to assess how views would be affected.

In my comments I referred to the impact the development would have on views from the World Heritage Site at the Naval College, from Greenwich Park, the impact on the East Greenwich Conservation area, concerns about the effect of the proposed hefty increase in residential units on local infrastructure – in particular transport. Given the devotion of some Planning Board members to large, high rise developments on the river front and in the north of the Borough I was very pleased this was turned down.
Les Dodson, who sadly died on 31st August after a long illness, was, with his wife Pat, one of the founder members of the Westcombe Society, and its pre-cursor, the Humber Neighbours. Les was keenly interested in sporting activities and a formidable footballer in his younger days and even into his later years. He was also a founder member of the Westcombe Parkers cricket team – formed by a random group of local friends. Les went beyond the call of duty to become a demon opening bowler, and contributed to the demolition of many opposing challenger over the years. In later years, there are those who remember him looking like ‘Doc from Back to the Future’, in his cricket white coat, sipping behind the stumps.

Before the advent of health and safety rules, Les was at one time in charge of the post-fireworks supper. He was also a founder member of the Dog Society who were doing free breeder displays in this ward Cherry Parker: “We are not losing all round.”

The story of song

The Thomas Tallis Society (TTS) is performing in a concert ‘The Story of Song’ is at 7.30pm, on Saturday November 9th, at St Albage’s Church, with period instruments and the choir of New Renaissance Voices.

The concert explores the development of choral music over three centuries, and includes works by Josquin, Schutz, Tallis, Gabrieli, J.S Bach and Monteverdi. In short, a treat!

Tickets are priced £12 and are available on the door, or from www.ticketsource.co.uk/ttc.
Features

Changes to welfare policies and cuts in housing benefit  Cllr Alex Grant

Cllr Alex Grant gave a presentation to the Vanbrugh Park Estate Tenants and Residents Association in September. This is an edited version.

The growth in private renting

There has been a huge growth in private renting in Blackheath and Westcombe Park in the last decade: up from 16.8% of households in 2001 to 24.5% in 2011. One in four households here is now rented from a private landlord: a decade ago it was just one in ten.

At the same time, because of the right to buy, the proportion of renting people leaving the council has dropped sharply from 22.4% in 2001 to 15.0% in 2011.

The number of owner occupiers has, surprisingly, also fallen slightly, from 51.5% of all households in 2001 to 49.9% in 2011. Probably for the first time, fewer than half of the households of Blackheath Westcombe ward are people living in homes that they own.

So a reduction in council housing, through the Right to Buy, has been more than offset by an increase in private homes being rented out by their owners, and home ownership has fallen overall.

Benefits Cap

Since the “Benefits cap” came into operation last year, we are beginning to see what the real impact is on families in the borough.

In a nutshell, the government’s policy is that total benefits cannot now exceed:

* £500 a week for couples (with or without children living with them)
* £500 a week for single parents whose children live with them
* £350 a week for single adults who don’t have children, or whose children don’t live with them.

According to figures from the Royal Borough of Greenwich, about 340 families in the borough are affected by the Benefits Cap. Of these, the council is already advising 110 families – of which 68 (well over half) are in private rented accommodation, not council or housing association homes.

On average, each household is losing £500 a week. Of course, some are losing more than £30 a week. The cap not only affects families on just a few more than £100 a week. With the cap not yet fully phased in, and more cases likely to come forward, this is probably just the tip of the iceberg. However, the exact impact on Blackheath and Westcombe Park is currently unknown.

What action the council is taking

The council has proactively contacted all households affected by the benefits cap, and has already been advising hundreds of households. Residents have been given advice about returning to work, what help they can receive from Discretionary funds, or arranging to have more affordable housing.

(feat on page 6)
households is now rented from a private sector landlord, which in many cases is passed on directly or indirectly not in cash in hand – it is housing benefit. Much of this is from the benefit system, and every family, to advocate and care for this great facility. This approach has worked well – there is no evidence of a fielded plot to blow up a water reservoir near Shooters Hill. Charlton Lido helps feed a sense of community, when I was last there, early in September, the pool was being enjoyed by plenty of families, school friends, and groups of mourners. It has space for lap and club swimmers, but also for lapping about and catching the sun. I’m told that the water has felt delightful even in chillier October mornings.

The people hoping to develop the Friends group would love to hear from anyone interested in supporting the Lido. You can read more about it here: http://charlton- champion.co.uk/2013/09/10/ friends-of-charlton-lido-time-for-action/ (You can also find out about controversial plans to rename the Lido!). And swimmers at every level can look forward to the spring and to being able to swim under open skies again. The city council has already invested £5 million to improve the Lido.

Effects of welfare policies (cont from p.4)

The council has also decided to invest £900,000 in improved inspection of private sector rented housing to check that it is safe, and that it is not being used as a base for crime and/or anti-social behaviour. Though welcome, these resources will only concentrate on 1,000 properties – about 5% of the 20,000 homes in Greenwich which are rented privately.

At the same time local churches have set up a Foodbank for those in most need, and lots of advice agencies have set more sessions for people in need. But the real solution apart from a reduction in private sector rents, is a more affordable housing of all kinds, both for those looking for work and for those in low-paid work.

Conclusion

It is important to realise that people receiving housing benefit are not all “work-shy scroungers” – 40% of Housing Benefit claimants are in work, and many of the others will be disabled or retired. Much of the income that these families receive is not cash in hand – it is housing benefit which in many cases is passed on directly to their landlords in the private sector. In Blackheath, Westcombe, Eltham, and elsewhere, four of five households is now rented from a private landlord, as the 2011 census data reveals.

With rents in this area high, and rising further all the time, for those who are unwell, are single parents, or find it hard to find jobs, the choice is simple: economise, or put up sticks and move. The situation will get worse as the “Bedroom tax” kicks in - it is impossible, for families with children and other parts refurbished. It will sit sympathetically with the original fabric. Alfege’s Church was the scene of a suffragette demonstration in London, with children forced to change schools, or even move out of the capital altogether. Do we really want to live in a society where only the well-off can afford a home with four beds or more in the SE3 postcode is a weekly rent for a home with four beds or more in the SE3 postcode is a whopping £600 – well above the benefits available to any people affected could move to another council housing estate if they are judged to be “impoverished” – and as the name suggests, a whopping £600 – well above the benefits available to any people affected could move to another council housing estate if they are judged to be “impoverished” – and as the name suggests, a whopping £600 – well above the benefits available to any people affected could move to another council housing estate if they are judged to be “impoverished” – and as the name suggests, a whopping £600 – well above the benefits available to any people affected could move to another council housing estate if they are judged to be “impoverished” – and as the name suggests, a whopping £600 – well above the benefits 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Shocking new figures, shared at a public meeting organised by the ‘Say No to Silvertown Tunnel’ campaigners, reveal that air pollution levels in Greenwich exceed both legal limits set by the European Commission, and WHO guidelines – in some areas by more than 50%.

The Royal Standard gave readings of 51.88μg/m3 (readings above 40μg/m3 are in breach of EU quality regulations). These new results mirror those of the Royal Borough of Greenwich (RBG), which were obtained through the Freedom of Information Act by the ‘Say No to Silvertown Tunnel’ campaign.

In fact, according to figures from the Environment Agency, London is the most polluted capital city in Europe.

Speaker, Dr Ian Mudway, lecturer in respiratory toxicology at King’s College, told the well-attended meeting about his findings from a five year study investigating the effects of air pollution on the population in Tower Hamlets and Hackney (on the north side of the Blackwall Tunnel). The results are grim and bleak: premature death plus increased hospital admissions, GP visits and medication. In fact there are 29,000 premature deaths in the UK each year due to exposure to particulate air pollution.

The audience learnt how exposure to air pollution, at levels similar to those in Greenwich, causes inflammation of the lungs and lung function changes in healthy adults, and actually starts the growth of developing lungs in children.

“Air pollution is largely traffic created,” explained Dr Mudway, and according to Andrew Wood from the ‘Network for Clean Air’, diesel is responsible for 90%.

(See The devil is in the diesel, WN, July/August 2013, page 7)

This point was reiterated by Simon Birkett from ‘Campaign for Clean Air in London’, who added that diesel vehicles represent 50% of the total market in the UK and are responsible for up to 30 times more emissions than petrol driven engines.

Birkett went on to challenge the audience to petition Greenwich to provide greener buses, and replicate residents’ successes in Putney. Susan Berry, from the Campaign for Better Transport also shared campaign successes as part of what was a rallying call to attendees.

The link between air pollution and the proposed Silvertown Tunnel became clear when John Elliott, an ex-GCL Transport Planning Consultant with forty years’ experience, stood up to speak. Mr Elliott challenged the kitchen logic that new roads will reduce congestion.

Sharing many examples of new roads that have been built in London and elsewhere, he provided evidence to show that new roads result in additional car journeys, and actually increase traffic levels and exhaust emissions. And with the approach to the new tunnel shoreline that the Blackwall Tunnel the audience was left wondering how this could be the actual need for another road crossing.

Dick Allard of the Westcombe Society Environment Committee has contacted the RBG expressing serious reservations.

Further information can be found on www.silvertown_tunnel.co.uk which has a map showing the most polluted areas in Greenwich. Really badly affected are those leading to the Blackwall Tunnel, particularly the A102, the Sun in Sands intersection, and the Woolwich road flyovers.

News from the park

Greenwich Park is looking better than ever. The Friends of Greenwich Park report that the Park has been restored so well that no one would know that the Olympics had taken place.

The Friends have arranged a Sunday Morning Bird Walk on 17th November at 8.30 am, led by Patricia Brown.

There is no need to book, just turn up at the official meeting point near the Blackheath Gate. The walk is free and having binoculars will greatly add to the pleasure.

Christopher’s column

Clean sweep

When the leaves start to fall you have to decide whether to sweep or not. As a teenager one of the joys of Autumn was walking to school and finding conkers amid the ankle deep leaves on the pavement. Those were the days.

I was glad to read that at least one garden writer left leaves remain on their flower beds – but you have to clear them. I’m afraid. Plane tree leaves are slow to break down but if you shred or mow over them, they will rot down – tree leaves are slow to break down but if you have to clear lawns, I’m afraid. Plane tree leaves are slow to break down but if you have to clear lawns, I’m afraid. Plane tree leaves are slow to break down but if you have to clear lawns, I’m afraid. Plane tree leaves are slow to break down but if you have to clear lawns, I’m afraid.

But if your garden is in full sight of the house you will also have to decide whether to clear up for Winter, or not. Tidy doesn’t equal organized in my eyes, and you will have to plan what to do if you are to get the best out of the garden in the ‘bear’ cold months. Cutting down old stems all at once isn’t necessary or even the best thing to do.

Every gardening move is in some way an aesthetic one – pruning, mowing etc are all based on how it looks as well as the need – so what you want to see will affect the ‘tidying’ you do. For example, leaving seed heads to stand until they collapse with frost or wind is OK if you like that look – and it’s also good for birds and insects if there are any around.

Hollow stems like fennel will provide shelter for insects if you cut them and pile up somewhere – but can also provide home for slugs. It’s your decision.

However, you must be tidy where small bulbs or perennials are coming through (early geraniums like G malviflorum for example). These do need clear space – not a blanket of soggy leaves – and also a shot of grit or fine grit over the site for more than a few days is not good for acid grassland, which can be damaged if the layer of cuttings blocks light and air from the turf, or if increased soil nutrients are released when the grass cuttings decay. Once the cuttings had been lying long enough for the valuable seeds of plants (such as harebells and birdsfoot) contained in them to fall to the ground, it was a real case of ‘making hay while the sun shines’.

Many people will have noticed the meadows on Blackheath this year and it is hoped that they will continue into the future, with both acid grassland meadows and the flowering bunds sown with brightly coloured flowers (such as blue cornflowers and vipers bugloss, and red poppies) typical of arable field edges. However, in order to preserve the ecosystem of the heath it may be that there is an occasional need to ask for help from volunteers, as there was that day in October.

If you would be interested in helping on the heath, please let the Westcombe Society Environment Committee know by emailing environment@westcombesociety.org.uk with the subject ‘Blackheath nature conservation volunteers.’

Saving the acid grassland

EMILY NORTON of the Westcombe Society Environment Committee

A small group of volunteers spent a warm sunny Sunday afternoon in October picking up the grass cuttings left by the mower on the corner of the heath next to Vanbrugh Park. This is an area of acid grassland which is important for the flora it supports, in particular harebells.

Leaving grass cuttings lying on the site for more than a few days is not good for acid grassland, which can be damaged if the layer of cuttings blocks light and air from the turf, or if increased soil nutrients are released when the grass cuttings decay. Once the cuttings had been lying long enough for the valuable seeds of plants (such as harebells and birdsfoot) contained in them to fall to the ground, it was a real case of ‘making hay while the sun shines’.

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TOOTING
THE FOUNDATIONS OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS will be held on 10th Nov at 10am at St James's Church, Tooting Bec. Exams are optional. Please send your applications to: Mr. F. J. Knights, 163 Tooting Bec Road, London SW17 8EP. Tel: 020 8772 2223

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