

Westcombe NEWS

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February 2012 Issue 1

A community newspaper commended by the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies

Monthly newspaper of The Westcombe Society - A voluntary group devoted to fostering a sense of community

The Portas Report ^{WN} reporter

The Westcombe Society was delighted to welcome Mary Portas, Queen of Shops, to open its annual Dickensian Christmas Bazaar.

Mary Portas not only spent a lot of time going round the stalls, but she also went to the trouble to visit local shops – and, by all accounts, was most impressed.

As if that were not enough, within three weeks of her visit, her special report commissioned by the government, “The Portas Review”, came out.

In this landmark review of Britain’s high streets and town centres, Mary Portas questioned the impact of the Government’s controversial planning reforms on the long-term viability of town centres.

In her report Mary states: “I am worried that the guidance has been softened to the point where far too much out-of-town development may be possible.”

Commenting on the report, Graeme Willis, Senior Rural Policy Campaigner at the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) warns that government’s policies “will lead to more out of town mega-stores and supermarkets that suck the life out of town centres.”

He adds: “CPRE’s research, which maps local food networks, has shown these large out-of-town and edge-of-town super-stores often disrupt and destroy local supply networks and economies, undermining the distinctiveness that has made many of our town centres so vibrant and diverse.”

Local campaigners are hoping that Greenwich Council is taking heed of these warnings.

A recurring issue is that of parking: shopkeepers have been campaigning for

time-limited free parking on Old Dover Road, in order to secure a throughput of shoppers. There are many parts of Greenwich and Lewisham where shopping is free for the first half hour. But, as we report on page 4, it looks as though Old Dover Road is heading for a Pay & Display system. Watch this parking space . . .

Mary goes walkabout

Among local shopkeepers Mary Portas called in on was Julia Marsen in her shop Ottie and the Bea. She reports:

“I hadn’t dreamt we’d actually get a visit. The shop was fairly busy, and I was told ‘she’s here’ and turned to find Mary. I was totally bowled over. She was charming and incredibly complimentary. She said that Early Learning Centre etc could learn a thing or two on how to sex it all up! She loved the reviews that I get the kids to do, and the events. She bought candles for her son’s birthday and a few other bits’n bobs.

“We talked about my plans for the shop, what I had done before, stock selection and so on and then went over to see Joy, and then Sue, who I’m sure were equally thrilled.

“Later I got a lovely message back, asking whether I’d entered the Telegraph Independent Shops Award and telling me to do so as Ottie and the Bea was so deserving....

“So all in all a wonderful visit.... What a privilege to be able to thank her in person for her championing of independent shops and the importance of the high street as an integral part of a community.”

What’s cooking?

Mary called in at several other shops,

including Joy Neal at Blackheath Cooks who said: “We had a very exciting day when the ‘Queen of Shops’ came to the Standard and popped into Blackheath Cooks for a chat after opening the Westcombe Society’s Dickensian Bazaar.”

Joy Neal of Blackheath Cooks is a big fan of Mary’s and cites the ‘Queen of Shops’ as a great source of inspiration when she opened her cook shop and cookery school last year.

Like Julia, Joy was unable to get away from the shop on the Saturday of the bazaar, so she wrote Mary a letter, inviting her to visit Blackheath Standard’s Old Dover Road, cheekily suggesting that if she was ever looking for a shopping area to focus her attentions on, then Blackheath Standard would be ideal!

Much to Joy’s surprise, halfway through an Indian cookery workshop on Saturday afternoon, Mary Portas and her entourage (including a small dog!) walked into Blackheath Cooks!

They stayed for a chat, and were very complimentary about the shop and the cookery school which Mary described as a ‘brilliant concept’. Joy had sold out of Christmas cake tins in the size that Mary was looking for – so the following week when they were back in stock, she posted one to her, along with a note thanking her for visiting the shop.

To Joy’s delight a card arrived on Christmas eve – handwritten by Mary, thanking her, and saying that her Christmas cake was in the tin! The card said ‘Now Joy, THAT’s what I call service!’

It was the best Christmas present Joy could have asked for!



MARY Portas, Queen of Shops, went walkabout in Old Dover Road after opening the Westcombe Society’s Christmas Bazaar. Among those she met was Joy Neal in Blackheath Cooks.

Welcome to the Royal Borough of Greenwich!

The people of Greenwich will have the chance to join in the celebrations when the borough formally becomes the Royal Borough of Greenwich on Friday 3rd February 2012.

This is one of the first events to mark the year of The Queen’s Diamond Jubilee.

The Letter Patent, a document formally confirming the Borough’s Royal status and signed by The Queen, will be presented to the borough on Friday 3rd. February. It will then go on show across the borough.

That weekend will see fireworks in General Gordon Square at 6.40 on 3rd Feb; high jinks all day in Eltham on 4th (including free entry to Eltham Palace) with fireworks at 6.00 pm; and all-day celebrations in Maritime Greenwich Greenwich (on the 5th), with a musical firework display at 6.00 pm.

A Black Poplar tree donated by HM the Queen will be planted in Eltham – at Well Hall Pleasance on 4th. February.

Details of the new Borough crest have also been revealed. Designed by the Royal College of Arms, the crest is based on Greenwich’s existing coat of arms, to which are added other heraldic features including the Tudor Rose.

It is hoped that HM the Queen will visit Greenwich on April 27th.

Libraries threat

Greenwich Council proudly boasts of a freeze in Council tax for seven of the last thirteen years.

But a cold wind is blowing through the library service, as councillors meet on February 14th to save money by placing the borough’s libraries into the hands of private company Greenwich Leisure Ltd. which already runs the local swimming baths.

Calling it “the Valentine’s Day Massacre” Union boss Onay J Kasab fears a cut in some services such as the mobile library. Government cuts are blamed..

New chapter in Eltham?

The Stephen Lawrence murder has long cast a dark shadow over Greenwich, and in the words of the Lord Chief Justice, “scarred the conscience of the nation.”

In a BBC report on what these events mean in Eltham, Katherine Carpenter quoted Professor Les Back, a sociologist, who has lived and worked in the area for years. He said: “The murder of Stephen has been like ‘an open wound’ for the community.

“However . . . it needs to be remembered how many people went to the police to try and do the right thing, to speak with their consciences about what they knew...”

Young people at one youth club are optimistic about Eltham today; In the same report, Reggie Oliver, a 24-year- old youth worker at Middle Park Community Centre, says the area has changed.

“From the early parts of when I was living here, you couldn’t really be in Eltham after 10.30 or 11.00 with the pubs closing. But now you walk through Eltham and you see quite diverse faces. On the face of it, it’s changed quite drastically.”

Katherine Carpenter concludes: “With two men found guilty of London’s most high-profile racist murder there is hope Eltham’s open wound will begin to heal.”

There is however no room for complacency. One young man told the *WN*:

“I look a bit foreign, and I occasionally get abuse shouted at me in the street. You still have to be a bit careful when and

where you go in some places.”

And despite huge improvements in policing, young blacks still complain about unwarranted stop-and-search activity.

In a statement, the Leader of the Council Chris Roberts said:

“It is a source of great relief that the process of justice for the family of Stephen Lawrence has finally begun....

“This is just the first step towards ensuring that all of those responsible are brought to justice. I hope the police will continue with their investigations to ensure everyone involved is held to account.”

<<<< News briefs >>>>

Happy New Year?

2012 got off to a bad start for many: 20 fire-fighters from East Greenwich, Greenwich and Woolwich attended a nine car pile-up at midnight on the A102 Blackwall Tunnel approach. No one was injured but debris covered the road until 1.00 am. Who’d be a firefighter on New Year’s Eve?

Fierce storms

Gale-force winds caused massive delays at the Dartford Crossing – and Queen Elizabeth Bridge was closed for days.

A New Year’s Day shooting

took place inside That Club, a Greenwich nightclub. A number of shots were fired at 4.00 am on New Year’s Day. No one was

injured. There have been no arrests, and the police are appealing for witnesses.

In November, the club had its licence suspended until December 25th. following a near-riot outside, which saw extra police drafted in from Bromley and Lewisham.

Bluecoats School closing

Greenwich Council has agreed to close Blackheath Bluecoat Church of England Secondary School from 2014 after councillors heard that a sustained decline in pupil numbers means there is no realistic prospect of reversing a serious and increasing financial deficit in the school’s budget.

A carefully planned transition process will ensure that children currently at the school experience as little disruption as possible.

The school has been making significant improvements, but numbers have been falling consistently. The number of pupils aged 11-15 has fallen from 767 in May 2005 to 481 in September 2011. This means the school is little more than half full (53% of the 900 - pupil capacity), and unfortunately this has left a very large financial deficit.

But it wasn’t all bad . . .

New father Martin Dunsford, of Polebrook Road, Kidbrooke, has publicly thanked the police officers who went “beyond the call of duty” and helped his girlfriend give birth to their son in a car park.

Westcombe Society’s New Year Calendar
This can be found on page five.

COMMUNITY NEWS

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BIG Thank you!

The Christmas Bazaar was the
Westcombe Society's main fundraising
event for their Charity of the Year. This
year Blind Independence Greenwich was
their chosen charity.

Colin Brown, Chief Executive of B.I.G
said: "We had a very successful and enjoy-
able day on Saturday 19th November.
Mary Portas opened the event mentioning
both charities and local communities, and
certainly generated a buzz.

"Mary was a real draw. We had record
numbers this year and our takings were
up. All our helpers are volunteers and the
event could not take place without their
hard work. We are also grateful to local
traders for their very generous donations.



When Mary met Colin ... PHOTO Geoff Garvey

"Cllr David Grant, the Deputy Mayor of
Greenwich and his Lady also visited, and
many of our visitors commented on the
lovely atmosphere . . . so all in all it was a
successful day all round.

"A B.I.G thank you to the Westcombe
Society for making Blind Independence
Greenwich their charity of the year and for
raising £3000 for us on the day!"

Fond farewell to Jenny and Jim

Popular publicans Jim and Jenny Pugh
of the Royal Standard have left after
three years.

They departed mid-January to take over
the *Ardleigh and Dragon* at Hornchurch in
Essex. This is a dining pub with the
emphasis on Thai cuisine.

Jim said: "If any of the friends we made
during our time in Westcombe Park are
over our way we'd love to see them."

The couple – who have a one-year-old
daughter Daisy – have raised thousands of
pounds for charity during their time at the
pub.

In a chat with Geoff Garvey, Jim
said: "We're sorry to be leaving, but we've
been offered a great new challenge."

They raised £10,000 for assistance

dogs and around £5,000 for children's
charities.

Their latest fund-raising was for Crisis
at Christmas when they raised £630.

Cynthia Finnerty, the honorary curate at
St George's Church, said: "They have
been helping St George's to raise funds for
CRISIS over the Christmas period – so far
they've raised £630, with more still to come.

"I thought it would be good if we could
thank them in the *WN* for this splendid
effort. I wish to thank them for all their
community work in the pub and wish them
and their daughter Daisy all the best for
the future."

And so say all of us. See you in
Hornchurch, Jenny and Jim!

Letters

Letters to the editor may be edited through lack of space.
Any views expressed are those of the writers only, and are
not necessarily those of the Westcombe Society or the *WN*.

Cllr Geoff Brighty (Con.) Blackheath
Westcombe Ward

The December/January edition of the
WN drew attention to the strong
opposition to the Shooters Hill
Equestrian Centre. Despite this,
Greenwich Council has been keen to
promote the centre as a high profile
legacy in return for its status as an
Olympic host Borough. All well and
good perhaps but, as I then found out
when asking about Council backing
for the project, the Council is
preparing to stump up over £3m as a
financial contribution to the scheme.
Some might see it as a strange legacy
that requires the recipient to pay for
it.

Despite committing public money
to the scheme when at the December
Council meeting I asked how many
residents would benefit, from the
centre, the Cabinet member who is
responsible seemed not to know.

Given that, to the dismay of many
local residents, the centre is to occu-
py Metropolitan Open Land and dis-
place the much loved donkey field –
and is to cost us over £3m – local
residents may need some convincing
that this is a good deal.

EDITOR: Curiouser and curioser, as
Alice cried ("She was so much sur-
prised, that for the moment she
quite forgot how to speak good
English"). But at least Mr Thorne
seems happy that his donkeys have
been allocated new green fields to
forage in near Eltham Palace.

From: G Dobbins Humber Road

At last a voice of sanity in this
benighted isle from Ian Bruton-
Simmonds' book *Mend your English*
(reviewed in the last issue of the
WN.)

The BBC has long been in the
forefront of the dumbing down
process that afflicts our national
language and culture, and it is high
time that the vulgarity and linguistic
barbarity that mars our broadcasting
media were eradicated, and the stan-
dards envisaged by the BBC's great
founder, Lord Reith, were restored.

But there is hope, it seems: I
gather that this book has become a
best-seller in the British Library's
bookshop.

From: G. Bailey Westcombe Park
Road

I dislike any erosion in the grammar
of our language: but I think that Mr
Bruton-Simmonds' attacks on the
BBC are seriously misplaced. The
last thing in the world anyone wants
in this country is greater state control
of the BBC – the idea of a Secretary
of State presiding over our national
broadcasting system is preposterous.

Equally preposterous is the idea
that two speakers from the United
States should sit on the board of the
BBC. Nothing wrong with American
English, of course – but can you
imagine the French calling in two
Québécois to sort out the purity of
their broadcasting in French?

The author of the book reviewed
seems to imply that any departure
from Standard written English, and
no doubt Received Pronunciation
("Oxford English") too – is a serious
betrayal of the language. However,
anyone who listens to broadcasters
of fifty years ago will notice that the
gap between the brand of English in
common use then on the BBC, and
the language used by most ordinary
folk, is grotesque.

The GBP (Great British Public)
could not be expected to embrace
the Beeb as a great national institu-
tion if all its broadcasters sounded
like, say, Malcolm Muggeridge, or
Giles Brandreth. The BBC's policy to
use diverse regional accents – pro-
vided they are comprehensible – is
surely the right one, and indeed
enriches our great language.

From: Annie Hart
Easterbrook Road

To relieve road congestion around
here, how about asking Network Rail
to create a new station at the
Standard? It would be sited where the
railway between Charlton and
Blackheath is in a 'cut and cover' near
the shops of Old Dover Road / along
the line of Vicarage Avenue.

It would require digging out for
platforms, signage, escalators and
steps but might not need much infra-
structure above ground, apart from a
ticket machine and ticket barriers.

I think it is worth exploring: the
cost need not be great, and it would

serve a well-populated area of
Blackheath. As an alternative, what
about a southern extension of the
Jubilee Line from North Greenwich
Station?

From: Paul Carter Deptford

Well it's 2012 and the 6% rise in
train fares means that the annual sea-
son ticket for Westcombe Park to
Charing Cross now costs a hefty
£908. I hope this extra money will
mean fewer cancellations. But with
the Olympics bringing greater disrup-
tion to Southeastern services, I do
worry what value of service we will
get for our money.

A Southeastern spokesman said:
"We never like to cancel any trains,
but with over 2000 trains a day on
infrastructure that is 150 years old
and unprecedented numbers of peo-
ple travelling, on rare occasions we
may have to cancel some trains.

"If any passenger has a comment
or complaint they can contact our
Customer Service department who
will investigate all incidents and
reply within 10 working days. During
the Olympics we will be providing a
timetable which has been specified
by the Olympic Delivery Authority
and Network Rail, but we
will be working hard to ensure dis-
ruption is kept to a minimum."

Now that the fare payer, rather
than the general taxpayer, has to pay

Diana Theobald

Diana was born in Hampshire, one of
three children whose father was an
Army officer, and she joined up and served
in the WRNS as a driver towards the end
of WWII, later transferring to the ATS
(Women's Auxiliary Territorial Service).

There, she met and married Laurence
Theobald, who worked in local government.
Later, he joined the staff of the United
Nations. His work gave him and Diana the
experience of living abroad – in Nigeria and
in the Sudan, in the Caribbean, and in Syria
and other countries in the Middle East.

In 1961 Diana and Laurence decided to
purchase one of the new flats in Parkside to
use as a base when they were on leave. This
enabled them to enjoy visits to the opera and
to concerts and art galleries, as well as to
Greenwich Park where Diana loved to walk.

They were caring and helpful as well as
excellent hosts to their neighbours, and
would hold summer parties on the lawns as
well as Christmas celebrations in their flat.

When the Westcombe Society was formed
they became active supporters and even after
Laurence died in 2004, which was a devas-
tating loss for Diana, she continued to deliver
the Westcombe News to her neighbours in
Coombe Mews, and helped the Westcombe
Society in quiet ways for many years.

At last, in declining health, she was taken
ill on her way to a Day Centre on December
8th 2011 and died in Lewisham Hospital.

Our deepest sympathy to Diana's family,
especially her niece Amanda. Our thoughts
are also with her many friends in Parkside,
in the Westcombe Society and in the
Blackheath Branch of the Townswomen's
Guild. **M.D.**

Charity calls for volunteers

Greenwich & Bexley Community
Hospice on Bostall Hill, Abbey
Wood in SE London is calling for
local people of all ages to join its
friendly volunteer team.

The Hospice provides free spe-
cialist care and support to local peo-
ple with a life-limiting illness. In the
last year alone it supported over
2,500 local people and their fami-
lies, friends and carers in the bor-
oughs of Greenwich and Bexley.

This Community Hospice has a
dedicated and much-valued team of
almost 600 volunteers working in a
variety of roles – from charity shop
work and fund-raising to working
directly with patients and their
families at the Hospice.

FOR MORE INFORMATION
contact Vanessa Hill, Volunteers'
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LOCAL NEWS

Shopping? Go no further than the Old Dover Road!

Geoff Garvey takes a look at some of the dynamic businesswomen of Westcombe Park.

PHOTOS: Geoff Garvey

As we settle into Diamond Jubilee Year – and our borough now becoming Royal Greenwich – what about all those forecasts for doom and gloom in 2012?

Well, for a bunch of women at the Standard, they're not being put off with tales of woe and despair. They're the new (ish) girls on the block who are breathing fresh life into our shopping parade.

Some lively newcomers include the newly revamped pet shop; a children's out-fitters and toy shop; a classy florists; a cook shop, and a deli.

So, what have they got to say for themselves? Take Susan Donnelly, who runs Blackheath Pet Supplies. She's trading in premises that first started 25 years ago.

No anonymous supermarket-style chain tactics for Susan. She declared:

"The main aim of my pet shop is to give people a personal service with the choice of great items for their pets...we stock and recommend natural hypo-allergenic pet foods from British-owned companies... we have deliveries from our suppliers twice a week and always aim to source that special item for your pets

"I supply products with health and behaviour benefits and always have plenty of free samples for your pets to try...Just think.... what would your pet really like?

"I have amazing nutritional help from the "Burns" advisors who support my business...after attending the many trade shows around the UK I enjoy networking with other people within my industry...

"Now I'm very excited to be expanding my business to provide a dog walking/cat sitting service in partnership with a local girl who has studied for the past 3 years in Animal Management."

From pets to kids

Just across the road is the bright sparkling business of Julia Marsen – intriguingly



Julia Marsen



Susan Donnelly

named Ottie and the Bea after her children.

Julia told the *WN*: "Customers keep coming back to us because they enjoy the experience of shopping in Ottie and the Bea – they love the atmosphere, the wonderful customer service, and most importantly they love the superb selection of products which are constantly being refreshed and are reasonably priced.

"Children themselves review products and I'm constantly looking for new items that allow creative and imaginative play.

"Products are always out in the shop to be looked at and played with and our prices compare favourably with other shops. Importantly, we are seen as a key part of the community."

From kids to food

Now when toddlers grow up a bit more then perhaps their mums and dads hope they'll be dab hands in the kitchen.

That's where Joy Neal steps in. She runs Blackheath cooks – the Cookery School and Cookshop.

Joy recalls: "I still remember spending my pocket money here 25 years ago when the shop we now occupy was a card shop. I trained as a primary school teacher, and after teaching in Deptford for three years I ran a catering company. I then started a kids cookery business called Munchkins Kids Cooking in 2005. It was unique – it focused on teaching kids to appreciate 'real' food from an early age.

We're a cookery shop at the front where we aim to sell 'useful and beautiful' items for the kitchen – so we have all kinds of gadgets and gift items and have recently expanded our baking section due to customer demand. The nice thing about being a small shop is that we can get to know all our customers, order in special items that they want, and we're always happy to have a chat and give cookery advice!

"We love it when people bring in photos of things they've cooked (or even better, samples to taste."

"Behind the shop is our cookery school where we run fun hands-on cookery classes for cooks of all ages and all abilities! Our customers range from stay-at-home parents, to retired gentlemen who have never needed to cook before, to students, professionals, local foodies and everyone in between.



Joy Neal

"We aim to create an un intimidating environment where everyone can learn, have fun, and most importantly create some delicious food, which we usually share with a glass of wine at the end of the session."

And almost next door ... is Mocas café and deli, run by Lucia Le Vsoci, which was featured in January's *WN*.



Lucia Le Voci

From food to beauty

Another dynamic businesswoman is Sarah Buckley, who runs B-Brown Nail - Tanning - Beauty Salon.

Said Sarah: "We offer a very varied selection of beauty treatments ranging from classic manicure, pedicures and facials to more modern treatments such as fish pedicures, Botox and fillers to name just a few.

"We offer a very friendly and relaxed atmosphere by qualified therapists in a modern salon offering competitive prices... We always have special offers available and an OAP day on Mondays between 9.30 - 3.30. We also offer clients a loyalty card, where they have 10 treatments and get the 11th for half price."



Sarah Buckley

And from beauty – to flowers!

Passion Flower owner Hatti Arabaci told the *WN*:

"Starting any business is an anxious and daunting prospect, often taking many years to grow from a seed of an idea to fruition. Yet amongst all of the variables, there was always one certainty for me and that was the location.

"As a Greenwich resident for many years, I had identified Old Dover Road as a special place where its uniqueness lay in its blend of independent retailers and palpable sense of community."

Declared Hatti: "Whether you are buying a quick bunch for the home, flowers for your wedding, or a gift for a special occasion, our attention to detail is paramount and we'll go that little bit further to provide our customers with the unusual and beautiful.

"Like all romantics, we LOVE weddings and understand that the thrill of



Hatti Arabaci

organising your wedding starts with selecting your dress and then, the flowers.

This is why our flower service is truly personal. We give our brides (and grooms) unlimited time to discuss and sample our flowers to ensure that they are 100% happy with their choice and we also provide the added bonus of sourcing table accessories through our vast network of suppliers."

So the next time you think of going to a bland chain store mall think Old Dover Road.

The *WN* wishes all our local shopkeepers and traders a Happy and Prosperous New Year. AND urges all our readers to support our local shops. We are SO lucky to have them!

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FEATURES

Westcombe News wins new awards

The Westcombe Society has yet again won awards for the *Westcombe News* – and for its outreach to the community.

Every two years, the Walter Bor Media Awards take place at the London Forum of Amenity and Civic Societies (based in Islington), and publications are submitted from all over London.

Walter Bor 1916 – 1999

Walter Bor was an architect who was born in Vienna of Czech origin.

A secular Jew, he escaped to England with his friend, the actor Herbert Lom when the Nazis took over Austria in 1938.

Tragically, he failed to persuade his family to join him, and they all perished at Birkenau concentration camp.

He then had to teach himself optimism.

As an architect, he saw his mission as helping to rebuild a clean, rational and democratic world for everyone after the ravages of the second world war. He regarded modern architecture and urban planning as weapons with which to forge a new world of common decency.

He specialized in mass housing and the comprehensive planning of bombed-out or brand new towns and cities, and worked with the London County Council on replanning the heavily blitzed East End of London.

His long life saw him working in places as far afield as Shenzhen (China), Glasgow, Liverpool, Toledo (Ohio), Cambridge, Prague, Bogota – and Milton Keynes.

The Westcombe News won the Walter Bor Award for local newspapers in London in 2005, the year the award was started. It has since been repeatedly commended.

This year, the Society won two awards: it was commended for its local community newspaper the *Westcombe News*; and the society was “Specially commended” for “effective use of multi-media channels to distribute society news and views to the public.”

The Westcombe Society, and the *Westcombe News*, has featured on BBC TV news on several occasions in recent years, and also in the *Guardian* newspaper, and on numerous occasions in the local press. The Westcombe Society also has its own web pages and blog.

A spokeswoman for the London Forum particularly commended the way the paper came out so frequently – and was delivered street by street by volunteers to the whole community, not just members of the Westcombe Society. Also commendable was the way it was made available in libraries and other public places.

Commenting on the awards, Gordon Baker, Chairman of the Society, said: “The Society is extremely pleased to have had our work recognised in this way. This represents a huge tribute to all the hard work of our members, particularly Neville Grant the editor, but also the editorial and distribution teams, the contributors, and all who contribute to the society's website and blog.”

Free NHS courses help Greenwich residents manage their condition

The NHS in Greenwich is offering residents the opportunity to come along to free courses designed to help people with long term conditions, or their carers, learn new ways to manage their health.

The Expert Patients Programme run by Greenwich Healthy Living Service – a part of NHS Greenwich – is a series of informal courses run by two trained tutors who have experience of long term conditions themselves. They provide expert advice directly to patients, their carers, and to parents of children who have long term conditions.

A long term condition is one that can't be cured – but can be managed through medication and/or therapy. They include conditions such as diabetes, asthma, depression and coronary heart disease.

Ruth Shaw, Deputy Head of Greenwich Healthy Living Service, said: “The Expert Patient Programme courses are an excellent way for people to learn more about their long term health conditions while also discovering new ways to manage them in the most appropriate way.

“The courses are run by two trained tutors who are living with a long term condition themselves or care for someone who is. This means anyone coming on a course can speak with an appropriate expert who can share their own experiences and ideas.”

Greenwich resident, Barbara, has made positive changes to her life through the Expert Patients Programme.

She said “I have suffered from a number



Barbara

of long-term conditions and when I recently went through a bad stage I was referred to the Expert Patients Programme.

“Being shown new techniques and setting myself manageable goals gave me the inspiration to start living again. I am so grateful that the Expert Patients Programme has provided me with the help and understanding I need.”

NHS Greenwich is now taking bookings for the next term of courses running through February and March 2012.

The courses are informal, easy to follow and cover a variety of topics including relaxation, exercise, problem solving, communication with healthcare professionals and family and friends. Each course runs for two-and-a-half-hours per week over six weeks.

To book a place or for further information about the upcoming courses running in February and March 2012 call the NHS Greenwich Expert Patients Programme office on 020 8312 6070.

Parking problems

GEOFF GARVEY
reports

How many times have you driven along Old Dover Road, planning to do a bit of shopping, only to find there's no place to park? And then driven home . . .

Yes, it happens all the time. And the problem is that the people parking in Old Dover Road are not shoppers at all – they either work there, or they are commuters.

The vexed question of parking at Old Dover Road – whether there will be charges or a free period for shoppers plus a fee – is still being considered by the Council, which, at a meeting in January, decided on further local consultation.

The borough's Highways Committee was presented with a petition signed by nearly 1,400 people demanding FREE but controlled parking. This follows concern from traders that the free parking places in the road were almost entirely occupied all day by commuters to Central London. In addition, big employers like Marks and Spencer and the Natwest Bank use the spaces as, effectively, company car parks.

The petition requested 2-hour monitored free parking bays to ensure a quicker turnaround in the whole Standard area to support local shops.

At an oddly confused Council meeting on January 10th, The Westcombe Society argued that it was vital for the survival of the shops and businesses that something be done to discourage commuters, and to encourage passing and local trade, by the introduction of time-limited free parking, preferably restricted to two hours. But should pay & display be introduced it stressed the importance of including a short period (e.g. half an hour) of free parking. Councillor Brighty asked for 2 hour free parking to be included in the forthcoming local consultation.

In a statement, the traders said: “We recognise that Old Dover Road is very unusual in having unlimited free parking. However we are also very unusual in the borough as a ‘traditional’ shopping parade, which includes the whole range of independent businesses needed to support a local residential area, and we believe that this should be protected.

“While we recognise the council's need to make money from parking opportunities, we are all council tenants, and pay rent to the council for our premises. Any introduction of paid parking will adversely affect our ability to run our businesses.

“Since the very steep increase in parking charges at the (Old Dover Road) car

park in 2011, many of our businesses have suffered a decrease in customers, with one being forced to close, and the parade has been noticeably less busy. Our concern is that introducing paid parking along the parade will continue this trend, and more of us will be unable to continue trading.”

The recently published report by Mary Portas states: ‘I fundamentally believe that to increase the cost of parking in a locality (when there are alternatives offering free parking elsewhere) is to curtail the appeal of that location to the shopping consumer and therefore the longer term economic viability and wellbeing of the area.’

Local traders argue that either 2-hour (as in the petition) or 1-hour free bays would stop people parking there all day and would greatly increase the turnover of customers on the parade. This would greatly benefit local businesses.

One method of payment being considered is by mobile phone only. But the traders (*and the Westcombe Society*) objected strongly: “This would cause major problems for many of our elderly customers, or those who don't use mobile phones – and would make it difficult for such people to shop at the parade. We object strongly to the introduction of paid parking, and in particular to parking paid for only by mobile phones.”

The Westcombe Society notes:
The Council's Sustainable Communities and Transport Scrutiny Panel report of 2008 noted that: ‘Most (shopkeepers) favoured a system of short-term free parking.’ It recommended: ‘The council should be open to consider ... proposals supported by local traders and local community groups to change or introduce parking restrictions ... In particular, parking and loading arrangements on Old Dover Road.’

What's wrong with home-grown trees?

TfL has come under fire for buying trees from Germany to plant at the side of the Blackwall Tunnel approach road.

Local Labour MP Nick Raynsford said: “While I welcome the planting of trees to shield residents from the noise and traffic fumes of the A102, why couldn't TFL have bought home-grown British saplings?”

The trees were due to be planted last year, but planting has been delayed because the German saplings couldn't be delivered in time.

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WHAT'S ON

ARTS

BLACKHEATH DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOC., St Mary's Church Hall, Cresswell Park, Blackheath 4th Thursday of every month, 2.30pm
23rd Feb. Denis Moriarty on A.W.N. Pugin: A Passion for Gothic Non-members £5 on the door. See www.artsinblackheath.org.uk
GREENWICH DECORATIVE & FINE ARTS SOC. King William Court, the Univ. of Greenwich, Mon. 13th Feb. **Brothers of the Brush: Artist Monks in 15th century Florence** - Sian Walters see www.gdfas.org Non-members £8.00
GLOBAL FUSION MUSIC & ARTS Exhibition of paintings by Ugandan children Charlton House until 29th Feb. Free. Funds raised go to building a Teachers' centre in Uganda

CHILDREN

GREENWICH HERITAGE CENTRE
Please phone 020 8854 2452 to book a session or ask for further details of the Saturday Club.
GREENWICH THEATRE
Monday, 13th – Sat 18th. Feb. **Balthazar's Bazaar of the Bizarre** Magical adventures lay in wait for Jack ... Perf. times: 1am, 2pm, 5pm (not Thursday) Adults £10 Children £7.50 Family Ticket £27 (not available online) Ages: 6+

MUSIC

ST. PAUL'S SINFONIA
perform *Mozart Overture Die Schauspielfeldirektor*, Tim Jackson *Be not afraid*'d, Panufnik *Sinfonia Concertante*, Brahms *Serenade no. 1* at St Alfege's Church Greenwich Friday 17th Feb.at 7.30 pm Tickets £12.00 (concs £10.00) on the door. Seating unreserved

BLACKHEATH HALLS
Fri 3rd Feb. 1.15 Lunch and Listen Erdesz Trio Music Appreciation with Matthew Taylor
Mon 6th., Mon 13th, 20th Feb, & 27th Feb. 10:00 am - The Glories of Czech Music
Mondays 6th, 13th, & 27th. Feb. 1:10 pm Classical Fundraisers
Mon 6th Feb. 7:00 pm Meantime Jazz.
Tues 7th Feb. 7:30 pm Beats in the Bar
Fri 10th. Feb. 1:15 pm Lunch and Listen: Leah Blakelock
Fri 10th Feb. 8:00 pm Emily Smith: Nominee Folk Singer of the Year. 16.00 (concs. £14.00)
Sun. 12th Feb. 11:00 am Blackheath Sundays: Victoria Simonsen cello & Benjamin Powell piano
Tue 14th. Feb 10:00 am - Blackheath Halls
Fri 17th. Feb 1:15 pm Lunch and Listen: Pablo Soto Hurtado, guitar
Fri 24th. Feb 2 1:15 pm Lunch and Listen: Vinsenz Stergin Ensemble
Sun 26th. Feb, 11:00 am The Barbirolli Quartet
Mon 27th. Feb. 7:00 pm Meantime Jazz
Tue 28th. Feb 7:30 pm Beats in the Bar



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The Westcombe Society

Dates for your 2012 diary!

Sat. 18th Feb Helpers' and Newcomers' Party
Invitations will be going out soon. Any newcomers to the area welcome - please contact Caroline Owens on 8853 0948 if you would like to attend
10th March – Children's Nearly New Sale
Anyone interested in having a table or rail should-please contact Joanne Lucas by calling or texting 07709 571 777.
17th. March – Daffodil Tea
7th April – Easter Egg Hunt
21st April – Quiz
20th May – AGM
16th June – Jubilee Tea for Senior Citizens
July – Summer Picnic – date to be confirmed
22nd Sep – Members' Evening
28th Sep – Macmillan World's Biggest Coffee Morning
29th Sep – Nearly New Sale
17th November – Dickensian Christmas Bazaar

COMMUNITY

FRIENDS OF MYCENAE GARDENS
will be holding its first Annual General Meeting at 7.30pm on 16th. February at the Greenwich Steiner School, Woodlands, 90 Mycenae Road.
JOHN ROAN SCHOOL Maze Hill
Sun. 26th Feb. 9.30 am - 3.00 pm Antiques Collectables and Craft Fair Admission £1.00 Enquiries: 07766331998 / 07774407406
BLACKHEATH BRIDGE CLUB welcomes all players to duplicate sessions in Mycenae House Mon. & Thurs. 7.15 pm & on Wed. at 1.15 Tel. 8851 2609
WESTCOMBE WRITERS' CIRCLE 1st. Thursday each month, 2.30-4.30 at Mycenae House. Ring Joan Paice on 8305 1652 or Rosemary Gill on 8858 5088
BLACKHEATH FLOWER CLUB Meets third Friday of every month at 1.45 pm at Mycenae House
WOODLANDS FARM, Shooters Hill The farm is open every day except Mondays from 9.30 - 4.30 pm.
FREE. Toddler Club Thursdays 10 - 12
BLACKHEATH & GREENWICH WOMEN'S INSTITUTE: First Wednesday of every month at 7.30 pm at Sunfields Methodist Church, Old Dover Road, SE3 8SJ eileenflanagan194@btinternet.com
BLACKHEATH SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY
Fri. Feb 17th. 7.45 Mycenae House Prof. Ann Hill of the University of London talks on **Malnutrition & Infant Mortality in the Developing World**
BLACKHEATH HALLS
Quiz Evening Fri 3rd Feb 2012 8:00 pm
OPEN MIC NIGHT with Ben Golding at Blackheath Newbridge Club, 22 Charlton Road , SE3 7HG on Saturday 4th February at 8pm. you're a musician/singer feel free to come and play! Ring Ben on 07940 521989 or just turn up!
SECOND CHANCE CHOIR rehearses Thursday evenings during term time, in Blackheath. New members welcome. Ring Margery Nzerem 858 3544
ENGLISH FOLK MUSIC 9.00 pm every Tuesday at the Lord Hood pub, Creek Road
ANNUAL ARCHITECTURE LECTURE
WED. 15th FEB. 8PM Blackheath Halls. Eric Parry on ARCHITECTURE AND THE GENIUS OF PLACE Tickets: £12(£10 concs. £6 students)

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For further information please contact: Mrs Sharon Herd (Matron/Registered Manager) on 0208 463 8399



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THEATRE & OPERA

THE GREENWICH THEATRE Crooms Hill, Greenwich, London SE10 8ES 020 8858 7755
Tue 21st - Sat 25 Feb. THE TRIAL Franz Kafka
Tuesday, 28 Feb. - Sun 4th March LORD OF THE FLIES A plane has crashed on an uninhabited island. The only survivors are a group of school boys. No adults, and no rules ... Golding's masterpiece.
GREENWICH PLAYHOUSE Greenwich Station Forecourt, 89 Greenwich High Road 020 8858 9256 - boxoffice@galleontheatre.co.uk
Until 5th Feb.: **THE SWORD AND THE DOPE** Hilarious take on Arthurian legend
Coming up in May: Alan Bennett's **The History Boys** by Sell-a-Door Theatre Company.
THE ALEXANDRA PLAYERS Thurs 16th - Sat 18th Feb 8 pm. Doors open 7.30 pm **ENCHANTED APRIL** A gentle comedy by Matthew Barber adapted from the novel by Elizabeth von Arnim. Four women find their emotional selves - but do they like what they find? At the Alexandra Hall, Bramshot Avenue, SE7 7HX. Tickets £8 (£7 Concs). 020 8858 2769

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URGENT!

The Westcombe Society needs storage space for Christmas Bazaar equipment etc. for example in an unused garage.

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Focuses on the BBC

FEATURES

Getting fit in 2012!

Shenda Falvey Personal Training & Bootcamps, is raising the pulses of local residents with the launch of a new health and fitness service for those living in the Westcombe Park and Peninsula area. With exhilarating outdoor group Bootcamp classes and individual personal training, there is something for everyone!

Every Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday sees the Bootcamps classes taking place at Central Park – in front of the Pilot Inn, 68 River Way, Greenwich Peninsula – straight after school and nursery drop off – perfect for those busy parents. If that time doesn't suit there is also the evening sessions every Monday and Wednesday at 7.30pm. From new mums to marathon winners these effective and fun classes offer complete body conditioning for all ages and abilities

Locals can finally forget about boring gym sessions and cramped studio classes, and instead enjoy an hour of Bootcamp fitness frenzy to burn fat and lose inches, increase fitness, muscular strength and endurance, reduce stress, blood pressure and cholesterol levels and improve body shape – who can ask for more...

The personal touch is guaranteed by keeping the classes small and with the sessions changing daily, unfit beginners to fitness enthusiasts stay motivated whilst achieving great results. And with a FREE taster session on offer to everyone, Westcombe Park residents are set to be in top condition in 2012!

For those who prefer a more personal approach, Shenda also offers one-on-one



training with programmes specifically designed, after a FREE consultation, to meet clients' individual goals.

Shenda said, "I'm delighted to be offering this new service to the people of Westcombe Park. With the choice of personal training, either one on one or with a partner or friend and group Bootcamps, residents have the option to create a health and fitness package to suit their lifestyle – a great way to get into and stay in shape this year."

Prices are as follows:
Bootcamps £9 per drop in session £90 for 12 sessions per month (mornings) £90 for 12 sessions for 6 weeks (evenings) Mix of evening and morning classes available on request
Personal Training £45 per hour session with FREE consultation meeting Buy 10 sessions get one FREE For further information, to book a FREE Bootcamp taster session, discuss Personal Training options or purchase gift vouchers contact Shenda on: 07887 727 335 Email: shenda@shendafalveypersonaltraining.com Website: www.shendafalveypersonaltraining.co.uk

Photo-opportunity!

R&B Photo School runs a number of photographic workshops in and around Greenwich.

R&B stands for "Richard and Ben"! Our studio workshops are based at Mycenae House and our off-camera flash location workshops use the splendour of the Old Royal Naval College as a back-drop.

Our workshops cater for both beginner and advance digital photographers. We provide a high level of expert advice and a lot of hands-on experience; perhaps you will also get the chance of having your

images printed in *Westcombe News*! Your tutors are Richard Liston and Ben Joseph. Richard specialises in portraiture and also teaches at a London College, and Ben specialises in reportage wedding photography, and also has teaching experience. Both tutors are professional, published photographers who will take your photography to an advanced level. **For a list of workshops, see www.randbphotoschool.com Our next six-week studio workshop starts on February 8. Mention Westcombe News when you book for a 10% discount.**

digital photography **cookery** **tennis** **mandarin** **children's parties** **fencing** **women's institute** **book club** **gymnastics** **dancing** **trampolining** **cookery** **mandarin** **children's parties**

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digital photography **cookery** **tennis** **mandarin** **children's parties** **fencing** **women's institute** **book club** **gymnastics** **dancing** **trampolining** **cookery** **mandarin** **children's parties**

We Need Family & HOME!



More Greenwich families than ever are needed to become adoptive parents. And it's not just in Greenwich.

The charity Fostering Network warns that around 1,200 extra foster carers need to be found across the capital in the next 12 months. The new figures, published by the Fostering Network, show the scale of the challenge for fostering services as they struggle to provide the right foster homes for all the children who need them.

Since 2008 the number of children living with foster families in England has risen by 16 per cent, and is continuing to rise. There is also an ageing foster carer population and around 14 per cent of the workforce retire or leave every year.

Without these extra families, too many children will have to settle for second best. This might mean living with a foster carer who is a long way from the child's home, school and family, or who does not have space for their brothers and sisters, or even living in residential care when fostering has been identified as the right option.

Helen Clarke of the Fostering Network said: "All children in care need a family they can grow up with who can love them, be ambitious for them and help them achieve their potential. For a growing number, foster care is the best option.

"By becoming a foster carer people can help the children they welcome into their homes to have the best possible opportunity of a positive future, to do well at school and be successful in later life.

"Foster carers come from all walks of life, from teachers to factory workers and builders to nurses. If you want to work with children and have the right skills to foster, then finding out how you can make a real difference to children across the capital could be a great start to the new year."

To be eligible you need be over the age of 21 and able to offer a stable home. You must show you can afford to look after a child and satisfy the relevant checks. You do not need to live in the borough, and whether you own or rent your property is not important. The main thing is being able to meet the needs of each individual child.

In Greenwich, adopters are sought from all ethnic backgrounds. Careful work goes into finding a suitable match but this does not automatically mean that the adopting parent has to be from the same ethnic background as the child – the key thing is a willingness to acknowledge and support the child in his or her own racial identity.

The process starts with contacting the Greenwich Adoption Team, based in the new Woolwich Centre, Wellington Street. Prospective adopters are interviewed, fill in an application form and then go for an assessment. Checks on adopters include medical, criminal and reference checks.

A social worker will work alongside them. If all is well, an adoption panel will grant them the right to adopt. Then they would have to wait a while for a child to be matched to them. They might later apply to adopt the child if they wish.

There can also speak to people who have adopted a child themselves – the best way to understanding what it involves.

Cllr Jackie Smith, Greenwich Council's Cabinet Member for Children and Young People said, "Adoption helps change the lives of young people, and ... is very rewarding. It is not a daunting process, but it does take time, effort and commitment." **To find out more about becoming a foster carer, contact Greenwich Council's adoption team on 020 8921 2752 or email adoption@greenwich.gov.uk Information is also available on: www.greenwich.gov.uk/adoption Or call Fosterline on 0800 040 7675, or visit www.couldyoufoster.org.uk**

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ENVIRONMENT

Local planning applications can be viewed by logging on to the Westcombe Society Planning and Environment Subcommittee's blog: <http://westcombe.blogspot.com/> or by going straight to: http://www.greenwich.gov.uk/info/200074/planning/21/view_planning_documents

Greenwich's N/S divide

Transport for London has remained unenthusiastic about a feasibility study by Hyder, commissioned by Greenwich Council, for an eight-station extension of the DLR to reach as far as Falconwood.

So far, the feasibility study has cost £25,000. The proposed route would run from Silvertown. It would cross the river by a tunnel that would emerge on the Peninsula to meet the BTSA on the east side and would then run along the centre of the A2 on an elevated structure.

It would cross Woolwich Road, run up to the Sun and the Sands, then on to Kidbrooke, Eltham Station and would then finally terminate at Falconwood. According to the study, the total cost would be likely to exceed £1bn.

However, the report remains positive about an extension, highlighting particular importance for the Kidbrooke regeneration project and saying it will have "extensive economic and regenerative benefits for the south of the borough".

The Council has since authorised a second feasibility study, costing £45,000.

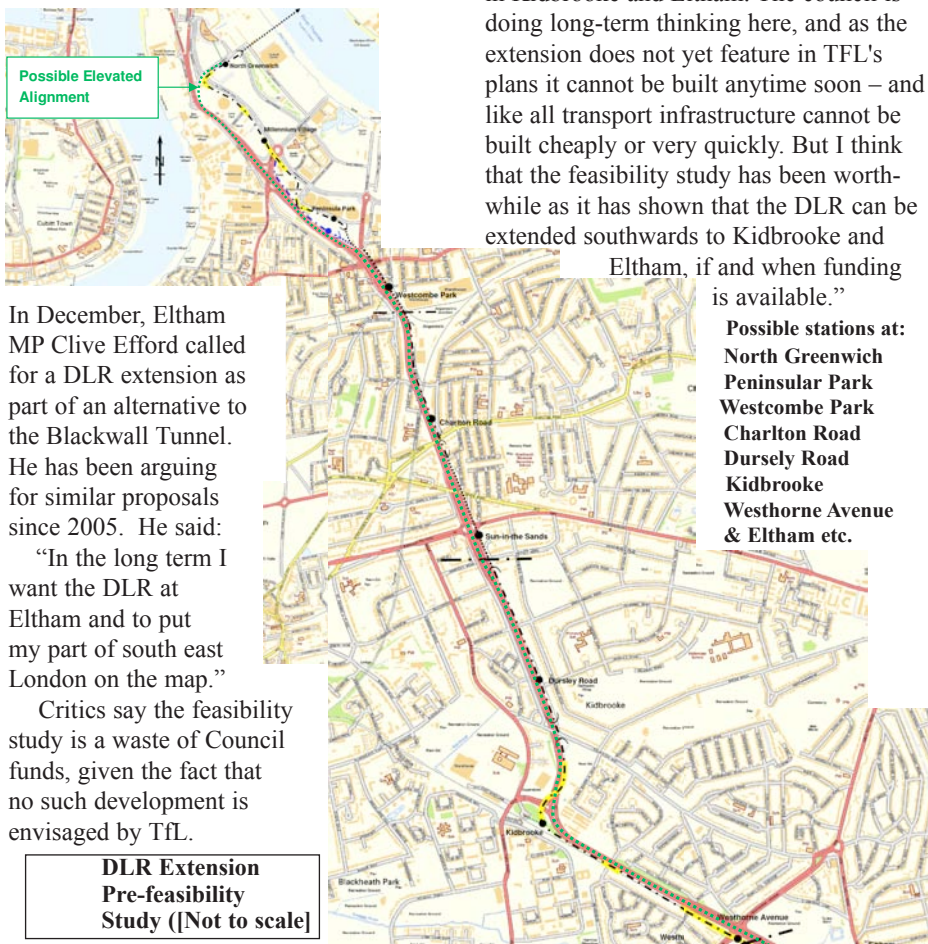


ABOVE: Artist's impression Sun in the Sands. Elevated DLR Concept. More information can be found at <http://committees.greenwich.gov.uk/Dec13> 2011

Asked to comment, Cllr Geoff Brighty (Con.) told the *WN*: "If it can be done, a DLR extension running through Kidbrooke to Eltham would be welcome; but the focus so far has been on the A2 route and, as I understand it, there would be problems to overcome with narrowing lanes for the elevated railway and at the Sun in the Sands roundabout. It might also raise questions about the possible effect on local residents who live along the route."

Cllr. Alex Grant (Lab.) comments: "The DLR extension would make travel to North Greenwich, Canary Wharf and the Royal Docks a lot easier for people living in Kidbrooke and Eltham. The council is doing long-term thinking here, and as the extension does not yet feature in TFL's plans it cannot be built anytime soon – and like all transport infrastructure cannot be built cheaply or very quickly. But I think that the feasibility study has been worthwhile as it has shown that the DLR can be extended southwards to Kidbrooke and Eltham, if and when funding is available."

Possible stations at:
North Greenwich
Peninsular Park
Westcombe Park
Charlton Road
Dursley Road
Kidbrooke
Westhorpe Avenue
& Eltham etc.



In December, Eltham MP Clive Efford called for a DLR extension as part of an alternative to the Blackwall Tunnel. He has been arguing for similar proposals since 2005. He said:

"In the long term I want the DLR at Eltham and to put my part of south east London on the map."

Critics say the feasibility study is a waste of Council funds, given the fact that no such development is envisaged by TfL.

DLR Extension
Pre-feasibility
Study (Not to scale)

John Roan Redevelopment

Since the go ahead was given to John Roan's planning application in October last year, the Westcombe Society Planning and Environment Sub-Committee (WSPESC) has approached the school on behalf of local residents with the view to setting up a working party while the upper and lower schools undergo significant redevelopment over the next few months.

Local residents are bound to be affected so it is reassuring to know that John Roan school has responded enthusiastically to the suggestion.

Equally, local councillors Alex Grant and Geoff Brighty broadly support the initiative. The working party would keep lines of communication open between the school, the developers and residents to resolve any issues that may arise during the redevelopment. Work is due for completion in 2014.

"John Roan is right in the heart of the

Westcombe community, and as the local amenity society we are well placed to bring stakeholders together and set up a working party," comments Dick Allard, Chair of WSPESC.

With building due to start imminently, local residents who want to take part are asked to contact WSPESC directly on westpes@gmail.com

Aircraft noise

The Government is due to publish its new aviation policy for public consultation before the end of March, and local campaigning group, HACAN East, is calling for them to relook at how they measure aircraft noise levels.

HACAN point out that noise levels in SE London from Heathrow and London City flights are as serious as those in West London.

Dig & delve in 2012!

In January, Transition Greenwich and the Friends of East Greenwich Pleasaunce doubled the size of the park's memorial orchard with a new year planting of six more fruit trees.

A good turnout of volunteers did the digging, planting and erecting of tree guards, with expert guidance from the London Orchard Project, which has supported the project since the beginning.

It is hoped that, as it matures, the orchard will become a focus for community activities in the Pleasaunce, such as an Apple Day and new year wassailing.

The project benefited from a grant from the Greenwich Pride award scheme run by



PHOTO: Lara Ruffle

the council, with financial support from Capital Growth and practical support from Greenwich Parks and Open Spaces department and the Pistachios in the Park cafe.

When the buds burst in spring, local volunteers will care for the trees, running a rota to water them. If you are able to help with this very enjoyable task, please email gavinmcgregor@gmail.com

Gavin McGregor

London 2012 Olympic Update

Greenwich Council is currently considering LOCOG's planning applications for the Olympic and Paralympic events due to be held in Greenwich Park in August and September.

In March 2010 Greenwich Planning Board gave outline permission for the Greenwich Park events to be held, but laid down over 30 conditions with which LOCOG would have to comply before full clearance could be given.

LOCOG's applications for release from these conditions was due to be considered by the Planning Board meeting on 26th January, but consideration has now been postponed, without a fresh date, to give the Council more time for the paperwork.

Before Christmas the Westcombe Society's Planning and Environmental Sub-Committee (WSPESC) scrutinised a mass of text, plans and maps related to the application, and duly submitted its views to the Planners along with other stakeholders and interested parties.

WSPESC has found that LOCOG's response has still left a number of key questions unanswered, and reiterated its

original concerns to the Council.

The Olympic Transport Plan was only produced in December. WSPESC contend that this was much too late for proper consideration, lacking in clarity, and based on wholly inadequate local consultation.

The plan left unanswered vital questions about public transport, the Park's closure schedules, parking restrictions, disabled access and noise pollution among others.

WSPESC insists planning permission for the Transport Plan should not be given until full consultation has been carried out with Westcombe Park residents and businesses, and a serious attempt made to take their needs into account.

"Westcombe Park stands to suffer more inconvenience from the Greenwich Park Olympics than anywhere else in the Borough," WSPESC chairman, Dick Allard asserts. "We are looking for a more strategic and joined-up approach to the critical issue of transport, to avoid the area becoming gridlocked,"

Many local residents are now asking themselves whether the Olympic period would be a good time to leave home ...

Christopher's column



The Cutbacks

I started this during those warm-ish wet-ish days before Christmas, following an unplanned bit of hacking in a client's garden.



My glamorous assistant 'tidied up' two large phormium, cutting them back to stumps. On aesthetic grounds alone, why would anyone do that?

About four days later, I found that some acanthus I'd carefully cut back in July, giving shiny new leaves for the Winter, had been hacked to the ground.

In a small garden open to the (paying) public, creating such empty spaces seemed unwise, but it seems that no-one can agree when or whether to cut back over Winter. My general advice to clients is to cut back plants whenever they become unbearably scruffy, but I never advise an Autumn cull. Winter is dreary enough without looking out on bare earth and our asters produced lovely yellow and brown stems, while the nasturtiums went on till after Christmas.

Cutting back in Autumn was traditional, but with some warmer, drier winters, and a mix of perennials, shrubs and grasses, it's unnecessary. If you like cutting everything in one go, wait till February, when light levels & soil temperature give faster regrowth.

Otherwise, cut in stages. Roses and lavender are first (January), the lavender cut to produce new shoots which you can trim later

(by a third) to stagger flowering. Cut all roses to a good shape and produce new flower buds (which varies according to type).

Robust growers (buddleia, lavatera) can be cut hard at pretty much anytime, but they can also be trimmed again later to give flowers over a longer period.

Most perennials are tidied up as new growth starts, with a few cut according to taste – trim any thistle types in August for new leaves over Winter, but if you leave some seedheads, the new foliage is smaller.

Cut dogwoods (for colourful stems next winter) last of all, just as new leaves appear. After that, it's start trimming shrubs which flowered earlier...

Remember, whenever you cut back a plant apply general purpose feed (seaweed, Growmore – or bonemeal if local wildlife allows), and water well. Christopher Raven

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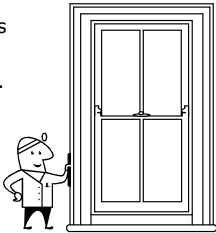
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