Think of a number and double it... The H/V looks at the escalating security costs of the Olympics and Paralympics...

Evidence sent to Parliament

The Parliamentary Transport Select Committee has invited written evidence on the transport plans for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The committee stated that it is particularly interested in: the impact on the road network resulting from Games Lane (the so-called "Z-blade") lanes and the Olympic Route Network (ORN), the measures taken to manage travel demand during the Games; the impact on public transport, including aviation, of increased demand during the Games; the effects of travel disruption for businesses and services; and the delivery of a "transport legacy."

Two robust responses have been sent from Westcombe Park, one by the Westcombe Society covering the main issues, and an individual response (posted by the Society) on the need for disabled access at Maze Hill station (the designated station for the World Heritage Site). The submissions have been posted on http://westcombe.blogger.com/.

Happy Easter

Blackheath murder convictions

In February 2011 a crew of four men were sentenced to a total of 175 years imprisonment for the murder of a young woman. The men were found guilty of murdering a young woman who was last seen alive on 15 July 2010. The prosecution said that the victim had been attacked and raped before being murdered. The defendants admitted that they had carried out the crime in order to obtain money to support their drug addiction. They were sentenced to life imprisonment for murder and other offences.

Greenwich Park Gates

There have been a number of complaints about the demolition of the southern gates to Greenwich Park. Among the complaints are that bricks which could have been reused were carelessly disposed of, and that the gates had been officially "vandalized." The truth is that work was required on the gates to allow vehicles through for the staging of the Olympics in the Park. The park authorities said that they were using this as an opportunity to carry out improvements that have been needed for some time. There have been concerns that vehicles such as fire engines would be unable to pass in the event of an emergency. The Royal Park management of Greenwich Park, Graham Dear, commented: "The work will make improvements to the layout of the junction and have been needed for some time, and although some disruption will be caused, the result will mean improvements for all users of the park. The current gates are an eyesore from a time when the only traffic was pedestrian, cyclists and horse-riders and small horse-drawn carriages. The gates are not wide enough and they are regularly damaged. There have been many accidents involving cyclists. The new design is much safer."

The vertical piers have been demolished, but Royal Parks say only one of them retained its original bricks – dating back to 1883 – and they will be kept for use on future estates to restore Mary’s Garden.

Antiques, Collectables & Craft Fair

The John Roan School Maze Hill, SE3 7UD

Sunday 15th April 9.30am - 3.00pm

Admission £5

Enquiries

07766331988 / 07774074076

www.r-amd.co.uk

The Westcombe Society

Easter Egg Hunt Sat. 7th. April 2-00 pm.

Come to Mycenae House gardeners an Eggcellent Hunt! No adults allowed unless accompanied by children!

Sat 21st April – Quiz Night

7-30pm for an 8pm start at Mycenae House. Bookings and 'chippy' supper.

If required, must be ordered in advance. Please contact Caroline on 8835948 to make your booking. Quiz tables will be set up. Why not get your neighbours to make up a team or come on your own and meet some new people.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MAY 20th

The Society needs to elect its new chairman and treasurer, as Caroline Baker is retiring this year. We urge members to come forward and stand.

We would welcome some new faces and fresh ideas so that we can continue to evolve – a Membership Secretary needed in particular!

MACMILLAN CANCER RESEARCH SPONSORED WALK

The walk this year at Cobham Park is on Sunday 6th May (Bank Holiday weekend) and is in aid of Macmillan Cancer Support. The walk goes through the village of Cobham, through Luddesdown and across spectacular open countryside. It is said to be "moderately challenging" with hills and steep slopes, so it is not suitable for pushchairs or wheelchairs. There is a shorter route of just 3 miles.

This year each walker has to pay £3 to register for the event and then find sponsorship – no minimum amount has been quoted so far.

To take part or to sponsor a team, please ring Caroline on 8835948

Westcombe NEWS
Established 1973 Free to 3,800 homes, also available in libraries & selected shops
April 2012 Issue 3

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

Monthly newspaper of The Westcombe Society: fostering a sense of community

All are welcome at the Woodlands Farm Trust Lambing Day on Sunday 15th April (£1.00 am - 4.30 pm). Come and see newborn lambs, and enjoy the chance to buy quality local produce at reasonable prices, including homemade preserves, cakes and honey. Relax in the Café, enjoy the treasure hunt or get involved in craft activities.

Entry is £1 for adults and 50p for children, and all proceeds go towards caring for the farm’s animals. A great family day out! For more Easter events at the farm, see page 5.
May 2012

COMMUNITY NEWS

WESTCOMBE NEWS

ALL ELECTRONIC CORRESPONDENCE TO: Neville Grant, The Editor westcombe@yahooho.co.uk. Tel: 020 8858 8489

ALL MATERIAL TO BE SENT TO: WestcombeNews@yahoo.co.uk

Deadline for the May issue: 15th April 2012

News Editor: Geoff Garvey
Environment Editor: Sarah Winterbottom

Reporters: Martin McDonald, Paul Carter

ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE
Dick Allard: All queries and comments to: 020 8858 7305

The Planning and environment sub-committee: westples@westcombe.org.uk

http://westcombe.org.uk/DISTRIBUTION
Myles Dove & Barbara Henley
Notes about Westcombe and Mauren R Hunt Volunteer distributors please phone 0858 3743, you need your help!

ADVERTISING MANAGER
Martin Little, 149 Westcombe Hill, SE3 7DP 020 8858 1312 (email: martin.little@binternet.com)

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Any word/email address is 3 words.

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Westcombe Society's Blog http://westcombe.blogspot.com

WESTCOMBE SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP
Please send this membership form to: Mrs Margaret Ellis, 4 Ingleside Grove, London SE3 7PH

Name: ____________________________
Address:____________________________
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Tel: ________________________________
Email: _____________________________

Please enclose payment as appropriate:
Family Membership £23 [ ]
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Senior Citizen/engaged £4 [ ]

Letters

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

A B I G.
Thank you!

On Saturday 19th February Henry Bufford and Colin Brown, Chair and CEO respectively of Blind Audio, were invited to a discussion on accessible technology in Greenwich (B). They were honoured to attend a presentation party thanking Westcombe Society volunteers for their service throughout the year.

We were presented with a cheque for the grand total of £3,000 which had been raised throughout the year 2011-12.

"BIG are a small locally-run charity who rely on volunteers, states Colin. "We support many groups living in the Royal Borough of Greenwich funding worthwhile projects for some very deserving people... We can then go on to providing specialist equipment for newly blind people, to give them confidence that there is a future after their sight failing."

"Some of our other projects and services are: fortnightly coffee mornings, tandem Chairman Gordon BakerPerson tackles the cheque box, music project, home visits with benefits claims etc. etc. All these are ongoing and we are striving to keep them all going. Donations play a very important part in keeping BIG running.

"If you would like to become involved with BIG, we are always looking for volunteers and friends who can help, so don't hesitate to get in touch. Local blind people need your help. We want everyone to be included. "My Guide" volunteers to be trained: they would then spend a few hours a week with service users, for up to six months, to help them become independent.

"Many thanks to the Westcombe Society. Henry and I enjoyed meeting you all." Contact BIG on 020 8553 2474, Email: collin@blindindependency.org.uk

PARKING SAGA continues

The Council has retracted the Old Dover Road parking public consultation quoting "errors" on the documentation. This comes after some strong and organised lobbying by the Westcombe Society, local traders and "buskers" resident Toni Hall; over and above the 1,300 plus petition presented to councillors in October.

The Westcombe Society has responded to the withdrawal of the consultation on behalf of traders and residents by asking again for two hour free parking west of the motorway, and no change east of the motorway.

Toni says: "Any further consultation should be widened to include all the people who will be affected by any type of parking restriction imposed in Old Dover Road."

Many people have expressed particular concern over the proposal that any payments should be made via mobile phones. No date has yet been given by the Council for a new consultation. Watch this space!

The WFN...

The Westcombe News has been running for nearly forty years. It started as a single sheet of A4 paper, stranded off on a street (one person probably recalls these ancient means of production), very locally circulated, and only sparingly produced.

Today it comes out regular as clockwork, ten times a year. It is produced and distributed by volunteers; a genuine voice for the community, it has become part of the fabric of Westcombe and Charlench landscape – and indeed part of the local community.

But the WFN can only continue with YOUR support. To be a community newspaper, it needs to be owned – actively inhabited events – by YOU, the traders, and members of the local community.

So please exercise active ownership by contributing your own news and views. And if you are interested in playing a bigger part in its production, we can offer training in the skills involved: it would be very healthy if we had guest editors from time to time.

The WFN is a council-run project, to help build up skills and experience, this is a great way of enhancing your CV. (A student from John Ruskin secured a place at University on the strength of his contributions to the WFN, and is now pursuing a career in journalism.)

It is open to all age-groups – a recent retiree maybe – looking for more active and creative role in the community.

If the cap fits! Give Neville Grant, the present editor, a ring, and find out what fun it is to work on the WFN – and how easy technology has made it to produce.

The phone number; it’s 0858 8489.

Sue Whitmer
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www.suewhitmers.com Info@suewhitmers.com

April 2012/GXD_WFN.qxd 20/03/2012 12:46 Page 2
Happy birthday to the Blackheath Society!

This year the Blackheath Society is celebrating its 70th birthday. The Society, one of London’s oldest and largest amenity groups, has been working to preserve local buildings and encourage good new design. All the battles it has won – and lost – are recorded in Guardians of the Heath, published in 2009 to mark our 70th anniversary in 2007. The Society is more active than ever today. Apart from regular activities to support and preserve the Village and the Heath, our new initiatives include creating the new Hub on the Heath; supporting the new Village Community Centre and Library; launching a new digital archive of Blackheath photographs; promoting a new Westcombe Woodlands organisation. To mark the 75th anniversary this year, the Society has planned three special events: There’s a family Picnic on the Heath on Midsummer Day Sunday 24 June open to everyone with free children's entertain-ment and the formal unveiling of the Hub. BBC Radio 4’s popular Any Questions programme visits Blackheath on October 26th in the halls, and again is open to all. On Friday 30th November the Society will host a Gala Event at Blackheath halls. For information on the year’s events please contact John Bartram on 0208 852 2322; Johnbartram75@hotmail.com

Twenty’s Plenty

Since the mid-1990s Greenwich Council has introduced a large number of 20mph ‘zones’ in residential streets across the Borough to improve road safety. In these zones both pedestrian and traffic calming measures are used to slow traffic to 20mph or less. Recently the Government changed road traffic regulations to allow local authorities to make more use of 20mph ‘limits’. These have ‘20 zones’ and road markings, but without physical speed-reducing structures such as road humps slow drivers down. In addition to the changes in road traffic regulations, there is a growing campaign (20’s Plenty for Us) to cut speeds to 20mph in residential areas. The perceived benefits are more walking and cycling (as people will feel safer), less fuel consumption and pollution, and better quality of life. In February, representatives of the Westcombe Society attended workshops organised by Greenwich Council to discuss, among other things, 20 mph zones and 20 mph limits. There were a number of different perspectives on the issues, but there was widespread support among those attending for a 20 mph limit in all residential roads.

The Council also organized an on-line survey to seek opinions about having more areas covered by 20 mph limits – but the consultation period was only 11 days. Were you aware of this consultation? A lot of people weren’t! If like so many of the Council’s consultations, the notice and timescale were too short to get a good response.

Easter activities at Woodlands Farm

There’s lots going on Easter at Woodlands Farm at 331 Shooters Hill. From 1st – 9th April there is an Animal Egg Sporting Trail: Normally chickens lay eggs – come and explore the farm and find the hidden animals which lay eggs – who would you be surprised by what you find? A self-guided trail is available when the farm is open – and it’s Free! On Tuesday 10th April there is a Spring on the Farm event from 10.00am - 12.00 pm (£1 per child, accompanying adults free.) Spring is here, it is the chance to meet the baby animals on the farm. We will be doing crafts, games and seeing the new animals. Tickets are essential, so call 020 8319 8900

Then on Wednesday 11th April you can view ‘Marvelous Minibeasts’ from 10.00 am – 12.00 pm (£1 per child, accompanying adults free.) What is crawling around in the leaves – and what is hiding under those logs? Join us as we go exploring in the woods. Our friendly minibeasts are lurking here! Booking is essential, so call 020 8319 8900

For more information, see our website or contact Hannah Forshaw on education@thewoodlandsfarmtrust.org

Shenda is our Woman of the Year!

Shenda, of Shenda Falvey ‘Personal Training & Bootcamps’, has been awarded the prestigious title, ‘Wonder Woman of the Year’, after scooping 23% of the votes in a recent poll. Locals voted with their fingers when they were asked by ‘The Wonder Woman Network’, a networking site for female entre-preneurs in Greenwich and Lewisham boroughs, to nominate their most inspirational business woman.

With over 60 hopefuls in the running, Shenda topped the league, being delight-ed when her victory was announced on March 8th. – International Women’s Day. The RYF first profiled Shenda in February this year. When asked what made Shenda stand out, a voter explained: “She should win for her determination and success at designing programmes that are affordable and make fitness accessible, even to working parents. Shenda provides a very friendly training experience that embraces all abilities. I really admire her for making such a success in such a short amount of time whilst being a mum of two. She truly is a WONDERWOMAN! She is a great inspiration to the women of Greenwich.”

Shenda also runs six bootcamp classes per week at Central Park, in front of the 02. Come rain, snow or shine, you will find Shenda every Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday morning at 9.30am and each Monday and Wednesday evening at 7.30pm ready to put clients through their paces with a fun and invigorating workout. Shenda is offering a FREE non-obliga-tory session to all potential new recruits. For and new and mums to be, Shenda is fully qualified in ‘Pre and Post Natal Exercise’. With her personal experience as a parent, she has clients feeling in tip top condition throughout their pregnancy, followed by an easier labour and birth, and a quicker recovery.

You can contact Shenda on 07847 727 355 or shenda@shendafalveypersonaltraining.co.uk. www.shendafalveypersonaltraining.co.uk

Westcombe News April 2012

Local designer and artist Mark Titman recently held a showing in Greenwich of his latest PARK LIFE.

You may remember that this area was recently commissioned to design and install a drinking fountain for the Royal Parks. His Park Life series is another extension to his portfolio. Vivid colours and vibrance portray various views that a walker may witness within the park in late Autumn or early Spring. By painting in the park, the artist was able to give over much of the visualisation to the trees themselves. An exciting collection! For further details, visit www.marktitman.com
FEATURES

Festival of Art
Blackheath has a large number of extremely gifted artists, and their work can be viewed in the Blackheath Art Society’s Spring Festival of Art. The festival starts at an Open Studios Taster Exhibition in the Mulberry Tea Rooms at Charlton House from 2nd April until 19th May.

Twenty artists will be exhibiting a master piece to whet your appetite. Full details of all 3 events are available at www.blackheathartsetsociety.org.uk or contact 020 8853 2266. See also page 8.

Book reviews:
Not the Westcombe News

The Murdoch Archipelago by Bruce Page
Simon & Schuster UK; 2011 £14.99
The Fox Effect: How Roger Ailes Turned a Network into a Propaganda Machine by David Brock, Ari Rabin-Hart and Media Matters for America NY: Anchor Books 2012 £15.00
Bruce Page, an investigative journalist – he was a former member of the Sunday Times renowned Insight team – has written a detailed analysis of how the Murdoch “archipelago” of media islands, large and small, came to be so hugely successful and influential.

It is often said that at present almost the only growth sector in newspapers is in very local, community-based publications (such as the RNV). But tell that to Rupert Murdoch who must at least be given credit for massive newspaper sales in the past – and indeed for rescuing Fleet Street from the so-called “Spanish practices” with his move to Wapping, and the use of modern technology.

Page’s book, first published in 2003, has been updated to take into account recent history, and is rigorously researched, and beautifully written. Page shows that the hacking of Milly Dowler’s phone was not a random occurrence. He argues that it originated in the Murdoch empire’s essential character that, after eighty years, still unchanged.

Culled into question is not just the future of the press, the freedom of which is so important, and which, yet, has been so massively abused by ruthless journalists and proprietors.

Also at risk is the future of our media, which in the wrong hands could so easily – and should one say degenerate, all too easily into a version of Fox News”, which the authors of The Fox Effect argue really convincingly has become a serious propaganda outlet intent on reshaping the Republican party in its own image.

One of the authors of The Fox Effect, David Brock, was a former neo-con who had a “Road to Damascus” moment, and documents how Fox News in the US brazenly misrepresented Obama, and fomented the Tea Party movement.

The jury is still out on the future of NewsCorp and its BSkyB bid: many commentators point out that Murdoch came within a whisker of taking complete control of BSkyB. It was the revelations in the Guardian about phone-hacking that stopped it in its tracks. It is generally held that such a take-over would have a hugely negative impact on Britain’s broadcasting heritage.

As Page observes: “Certainly a great many people in Britain will find it hard to see how NewsCorp can be trusted to run the second largest (and richest) broadcasting system when it’s clear ambition is to become the only one, and its reputation says it will play rough in pursuit of things it wants.” We await the next chapter!

Take a walk on the wild side... ANNE ROBBINS

If you saw any of BBC2’s recent series “Bees, Butterflies and Blooms” you will already know that there is real concern amongst the horticultural world about the rapid decline in pollinating insects. This is having a serious impact on plants that are dependent on these insects for pollination, e.g. orchard produce such as apples and plums.

These insects are in decline as a result of a decline in their natural habitats which contain wildflowers. Apart from simply looking beautiful, wildflowers play an important role by providing pollen and nectar for bees, butterflies and hoverflies – vital pollinators in cities and countryside alike.

But these insects need to feed earlier and later in the growing season than the flowering times of domestic gardens. And with bees and butterflies threatened by loss of habitat and diversity of food sources, we can do much more in our own urban setting to help sustain them.

The “River of Flowers” campaign wants people to plant wildflowers in their front gardens – literally to create a “river of flowers” which will certainly give pleasure to the human eye as well as the insects.

According to the campaign, any garden with a tree is suitable for growing “woodland-edge wildflowers”. These flowers can give bees and butterflies an early source of nectar and pollen.

Many groups in London are already growing native wildflowers to support insect life. Locally, the University of Greenwich Sustainability Team planted several hundred square metres of meadow with wildflowers and native grasses at its Acacia Hill site last year. They are now less often to encourage seed production, and the results for insects have been encouraging.

Out on the Greenwich Peninsula, the Ecology Park grows wetlands and meadow species. In 2011, its Meantime Nursery started to experiment in growing turf with meadow wildflowers mixed in. Some of this was planted in the East Greenwich Pleasance, along the north border, last autumn. The team from Transition Westminster carried out the work, with support from the Friends group and Greenwich Parks and Open Spaces, with a hope to see a positive impact on the biodiversity on the Peninsula as a result.

Elsewhere, people are monitoring the barebells and native grasses on Blackheath. On page 7 of this issue, there is an account of volunteers clearing ivy and scrub from Woodside Woodlands to encourage forest undergrowth including wildflowers. You can help, too! Why not sow wildflower seeds or plant young seedlings in your own garden? Advice and seeds for all situations in our online as well as from local garden centres.

For more information, see: urbanecology.org.uk; greengreenwich.blogspot.com; riverofflowers.org; reallywildflowers.co.uk; wildseed.co.uk

Street Meadow: photo: Anne Carter Van Ronk; riverofflowers.org

NEw nursery opening – early 2011

Morden College Care Home – Callum Welch Court

Callum Welch Court is an exceptional Care Home with a CSCI ‘3 Star Rating’. Situated in the peace & tranquility of the award-winning grounds of Morden College, Blackheath, it provides spacious, attractive and affordable respite accommodation; delivering high quality nursing & personal care for elderly people. With a wide range of activities, excursions and facilities provided to the Residents in our Care Home, they are also able to enjoy our private Chapel, Library, Champagne bar & Restaurant. Callum Welch Court is able to accommodate a certain number of private resident and also a small number of permanent private residents.

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

For more information visit our website at www.zoomnurseries.com

Alternatively you can contact: Justin Oliffe, Director of Operations on 0208 6370720 or email john@zoomnurseries.com

The Street located in the far end of the Heads at an angle to the footpath

National Maritime Museum
“Titanic Remembered”
To mark the centenary of the Titanic disaster
Until September
Protecting your property

PAUL CARTER investigates

How much has changed?
"The day begins to break and soon there is the hum and noise of life. Those who have spent the nights on doorsteps and cold stones crumble off to bed; they who have slept in beds come forth to their occupations too and business is as is. The fog of sleep rolls slowly off, and London shines awake. The streets are filled with carriages and people gaily clad. The julls are full, too, to the throat, nor have the workhouses or hospitals much room to spare."

Master Humphrey’s Clock – Charles Dickens 1840 - 1841

CASE STUDY: Disused buildings in Anderton Park Road in Moseley are the subject of a 12-year struggle to bring them back into use. Birmingham city council’s housing stock. It took the Council years to realise. Compulsory Purchase Order – and there still remains problems ...

There are thousands of such properties all over the tale to have Photo. Nick Wilkinson/newsroom24.co.uk

force the squatters out.

Also, the squatters could make allegations against you. The best advice is to call your local police sergeant from the Safer Neighbourhoods team and discuss any plans you may have.

Not all squatters cause trouble I have spotted plenty of vacant buildings in Greenwich and neighbouring boroughs and where there is opportunity, temptation often follows.

Obviously not all squatters cause trouble or target your homes and some people might not see a problem with homeless people living in an empty building.

However, if squatters occupied a property for ten years, they could become legal owners. But how many homeowners have to save up for more than ten years before they can buy their first home?

The Government is investing £400m in new homes over the next four years. It is hoped that this will help homeless people get off the streets – and that the new law will be passed to protect homeowners from squatters.

The fact is that getting on the property ladder is a monumental struggle for those fortunate enough not to live on the streets, and when you have a home you want to protect.

Lewisham’s Creative Squatters

In Lewisham, there are more than 17,000 people on the housing waiting list. Members of the Lewisham People Before Profit political party have taken over four of the Council’s derelict properties and renovated them on a shoestring budget.

The properties were due to be auctioned – but have had to be taken over by the Council. The Council said that it was not cost-effective to renovate them – and added that the proceeds would go to renovating other homes...

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Westcombe News April 2012

So, what DO you do?
The Greenwich Police answer the questions below:

Q: If you came back from a six month holiday and found squatters living in your house, what should you do if forced entry, then would the police arrest the squatters for burglary?

A: No, this does not amount to a burglary. In relation to property crime, burglary is when someone enters a building as a trespasser with the intention to steal, or forms that intention after entering the building as a guest. If a squatter uses a property, a different issue and one which requires you to fit into two different groups of people before police can act. The first group is called “a displaced residential occupier” if the definition of displaced residential occupier is met, then police can assist the displaced occupier to request the squatters to leave. If the squatters refuse to leave, they commit a criminal offence and police can force entry to the premises to arrest the squatters for refusing to leave when directed by the displaced occupier.

A: The second group of people that police can assist is called a protected intended occupier. They will have the appropriate legal paperwork to say that they were about to start residing in the premises as their main home and are protected intended occupants. This protection for the police is the same as the above, except that you will need paperwork to serve upon the squatters.

Q: How long would the court process take to evict squatters?

A: If you apply for an immediate right to possession of a property which has been taken over by a squatter (eg you are a landlord or the occupier of a property) you can apply for an interim possession order (IPO) to get your property back. You may be able to get an IPO from the courts within a few days. You can only apply for an IPO if you are just seeking possession. You can only use an IPO if you are making a claim for another remedy, for example, damages.

You can only use an IPO against people who are trespassers – it can’t be used against former licensees, tenants or sub-tenants.

Once squatters are served with an IPO, they must leave the property within 24 hours. If they don’t leave, they are committing a crime and may be arrested. It is also a crime for them to return to the property within 12 months of the date of the order.

To get final possession of the property, you must also make an application for possession under the IPO. A final order for possession will normally be made soon after the IPO.

The ‘Options for dealing with squatters’ information can be found on the Justice website: http://www.judiciary.gov.uk/downloads/con-solutions-dealing-squatters-repsonse.pdf

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FEATURES

You go away for a much needed holiday; when you return, you find the locks have been changed, your property has been dumped in the front garden – and your home is full of complete strangers.

Of course, it couldn’t happen to you or me, could it... You sure about that?

So, what could you do?

The Government has announced a new offence to prosecute squatting in residential buildings to help address the appalling impact that squatting can have on homes, businesses and local communities.

They aim to tackle the great distress of people being unable to use their own homes – and the costly battle they can face trying to reclaim their property.

The change comes following the ‘Options for dealing with squatting’ consultation which took place late last year. Victims of squatting, homeless charities, students and police were among the 2,217 respondents. The consultation addressed the pros and cons of creating a new offence to tackle squatting, and the effects this would have on homelessness in the UK.

The Government plans to make the changes by amending its Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill. If passed by the Lords it is hoped the Bill will be introduced by this spring.

Legal professionals questioned whether the police would have the resources to enforce new offences when they appeared to be unwilling to enforce existing laws.

Not a criminal offence

At present, squatting is not a criminal offence, so unless breaking and entering can be proved, the police are often reluctant to get involved.

As a result, owners and occupiers of property usually end up following civil procedures to have squatters evicted. Under the new offence, squatters who occupy genuinely abandoned or dilapidated non-residential buildings will not be criminalised. However, there remains a risk that squatters could still be prosecuted for criminal damage, burglary and other related offences.

Students and workers will be reassured by the fact they would not be prosecuted for occupying academic or office buildings to highlight their protest. UK Justice Secretary Crispin Blunt has said that not criminalising squatting in non-residential buildings was a “balanced compromise”.

Squatters’ Action for Secure Homes (SASH) argues that squatting is a symptom of the housing crisis, and that for many homeless and vulnerable people, it is the only way of avoiding sleeping rough.

So more affordable housing is required, but the Government pointed out that owners cannot get in to renovate rundown buildings because squatters are present.

The Metropolitan Police conducted a survey of squats in the London Boroughs, and identified a total of 224 squares, although they conceded that there might be many more that they did not know about.

The Met point out that many of the known squats in the London boroughs are occupied by foreign nationals, and significant work would need to be undertaken with the communities affected, local councils and related third sector organisations, to ensure that enforcement was carried out in a proportionate and appropriate manner.

Greenwich Police confirmed they have no reported incidents of squatters moving into people’s homes.

However, there have been several occasions when Greenwich Council property was let vacant, sometimes for an extended period, and squatters moved in, and had to be evicted, notably at a house in Coleraine Road, which was squatted in twice before being sold by the Council.

A criminal offence...

The squatters’ action was a “balanced compromise”.

Squatters’ Action for Secure Homes

Join us at Open Door: Blackheath High School community leisure and learning centre. Contact: 020 8557 8456; opendoor@bkhs.kwli.net

Digital photography cookery tennis mandarin’s parties fencing tennis school institute book club gymnastics dancing trampolining cookery mandarin’s children’s parties
Planning applications can be viewed in the library, or at Strategic Planning, Peggy Middleton House, 50, Woolwich New Road. They may also be viewed on www.greenwich.gov.uk/planning

Frank Smith

Action stations!

Not much Fun and Games

Morris dancers promise flash-mobs during the Olympics, after commentators described the expanded budget for the opening ceremony as "boring". But the Thames Morris dancers and a couple of school choirs won't suffer.

In 2008 Chairman Seb Coe (ironically) promised Morris dancers en masse, prompting the Southbank 500 Morris event, where dancers of every age and gender performed to enthusiastic (occasionally disbeliefing) crowds.

In the end, though, 'multiculturalism' will surely rule, and the five ring circus will not feature our folk dance and song in any recognisable form. Perhaps a little paganism would lift things up and reconnect us with the land – baldric fire, jack in the green or wickerman?

Since the Park will only open for the Games (access doubly severely restricted),

by the time we see it in 2013, the planting will either be established or if there's a harsh winter, a lot of the perennials will vanish, leaving the structural elements (fences, hedges, and the 2,000 trees planted last year).

Planting includes 'natives' (whatever that actually means), but the theme park areas include plants from around the world which British plant hunters brought to the UK for cultivation.

The 'legacy' is a big park but a landscape which has been irreversibly altered – rivers banked, river wider & shallower than before – though the wetlands are to be restored too.

We are also promised that the historic (ext 1903) Manor garden allotments will return to their original site after the Games. It may be good, but will be overshadowed by the Orbit tower, an ugly reminder of the folly that was the 2012 Games, a counterpoint to the elegance and optimism of the Festival of Britain.

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ENVIROMENT

Woolwich Masterplans

Greenwich is set to take a big share of London's prospective growth, with five of the 33 Opportunity Areas listed in the 2011 London Plan within the Borough.

Primary responsibility for determining the nature of developments within these areas lies with local councils, and Greenwich has been consulting on 'Masterplans' providing broad guidance for Woolwich, Charlton Riverside, Peninsula West and Eltham.

The combined target levels of growth set by the London Plan for these areas (including the whole of the Peninsula) are 13,000 jobs and 22,000 new homes.

Given that our transport system is already very congested, a main concern of the Woolwich Masterplan (WSM) is the neglect of this issue and of ways to prevent the planned expansion making the road congestion and overcrowding on public transport very much worse.

In the WSM’s view, the ‘Vision’ section of the Plans should be seeking an actual reduction in the overall level of traffic in the Borough, and be aiming to minimise journeys generated by new developments.

Instead, the Peninsula West plan includes a proposal for a 40,000 capacity outdoor sports and music venue, and along with Charlton Riverside is set to release land around wharves by relocating wharf-related activity many miles away, generating many more HOV journeys to replace river traffic.

The WSM strongly urged that the area around wharves should be kept for warehousing and industrial use, and that any new arena should be strictly contingent on additional public transport (such as the possible southern extension of the DLR).

Boris Johnson’s decision to resurrect proposals for a new tunnel from Silvertown to the Peninsula came too late to be considered, but in the WSM’s view the main impact of an additional tunnel would be merely to generate yet more traffic.

Instead, we should be developing local bus links and aiming for an environment that is conducive to walking and cycling, rather than one that encourages private cars.
The Government Boiler Scrappage Scheme of £400 only applies to old boilers.

Call Stephen Wristworth now on 07725008280.