Circus Field: local voices heard

Following an extraordinary number of objections from local residents, amenity societies and organisations, the Royal Borough of Greenwich Events team have withdrawn a Licensing application to extend the number of events on Circus Field (the area of the heath just south of Blackheath Gate). Cllr Denise Hyland said: “This is a very special part of the borough which we are all determined to protect and to listen to the views of local residents whenever proposals come forward”. The application submitted was for up to five separate events on top of the current usage by circuses and fairs and “in perpetuity”, thus reducing the possibility of effective scrutiny and change in future.

to give credit where it is due, when asked, the Council did agree to widen the consultation area so that more residents could be made aware of the proposals, and also extended the deadline for responses to the 18th January: actions which were much appreciated.

So what does this consultation application withdrawal mean? Certainly, the number of objections has a lot to do with it: many people wrote to the Council opposing the proposals, and the Westcombe Society collaborated with the Blackheath and Greenwich Societies in jointly urging the Council to withdraw the application pending a fuller discussion and consultation, which would include the Blackheath Joint Working Party (BJWP), Cllrs Cherry Parker and Geoffrey Brighty supported the societies’ objections.

The main concern was the scope of the application which could potentially have extended the use of the Circus Field for events for an additional 110 days per year (including setup and breakdown days); and, as the application did not give any detail as to the nature of the events planned, it would be impossible to estimate their impact. A number of issues were raised, such as noise, nuisance, additional traffic, pollution and loss of amenity. There was also widespread concern the Circus Field could suffer serious environmental damage due to overuse.

The Council have now agreed to apply for licences on an event-by-event basis. The BJWP have given conditional approval for the ‘In the Night Garden’ event to take place later this year on the understanding the site be slightly changed to mitigate the impact for pedestrians. There was also agreement that if the event sought approval for following years its total duration would be reduced.

The full credit is due for listen- ing to the public: and the outcome may be regarded as a reaffirmation of the value of the democratic process.

The BJWP met next at The Bakehouse, Age Exchange at 7.30 pm on Feb 16th. All welcome.

As reported in the last issue of the WN, East Greenwich Residents Association (EGRA) has conducted its own air quality monitoring this year. Harmful nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) was measured at 14 sites over two months, in Spring and Autumn. The results, together with those of the wider area, include the No to Silvertown Tunnel Campaign, and Greenwich Borough, reveal that: • air pollution is bad, being above legal limits on all major roads • it has barely improved since 2005 • pollution is bad even in quiet streets • major new developments (eg. the cruise liner terminal) will make it worse.

Research by Kings College, London estimates that up to one in five of all premature deaths in Greenwich may be attributable to it.

Pollution is also a major contributor to asthma and heart conditions, and it is a cause of stunted tooth development in children. So it is high time that the Council make a New Year’s resolution to deal with these issues.

EGRA’s draft air quality manifesto recommends 21 actions to tackle bad air. These are set out on page seven of this issue of the WN. None of these actions are magic wands. None are costly, and all must be complemented by London – and nation-wide – measures. They include declaring East Greenwich, or indeed Greenwich, an ultra-low emission zone, providing greater publicity and traffic-free days, and perhaps planting a tree for every resident killed by air pollution. See p. 7.

Note: The World Health Organisation has issued a strong warning about dead levels of pollution in many of the world’s biggest cities, including London.

The Arches to be sold

The purchase of the former Arches Leisure Centre is to be Meritcape, which is a development company based in Hertfordshire. The company intends to redevelop the property for a non-leisure use, subject to planning consent.

The report to Council states that “the land upon which the Arches Leisure Centre is built is subject to a 1922 covenant that restricts the use of the site to public baths, wash houses and other buildings for Municipal purposes”. These purposes “shall not injuriously affect the adjoining Westcombe Society’s Environment Committee will remain vigilant.

Further news


Circus Field: local voices heard

Gentleman Jack: a new film for February

Greenwich & Docklands International Festival 2016

Pennycook, described his first hectic nine months as our new MP.

POLITICIANS come in for a lot of criticism, so it is good to give credit where it is due. At a meeting with members of the Greenwich Society on January 16th, Matt Penycook, described his first hectic nine months as our new MP. Apart from dealing with constituents’ problems in the five surgeries he has every month, he gets some 200 emails every day. Immigration queries alone amount to 200 every week.

At the meeting he expressed concerns about the Council’s proposals on Circus Field, he said he had come out against the proposed Silvertown Tunnel, and was appalled at the effects the government’s housing bill would have on society. The WN has looked at the work that he has been doing in the House of Commons. Apart from committee work (eg. on the Housing and Planning Public Bill) here are a few samples of his interventions on the floor of the House, as reported in WAUSAU:

As the Crow Flies

Welcome to the New Year! East Greenwich’s fourth annual Wassaile took place in January in the Memorial Orchard now established in the Pleasaunce. The sun shone and around 70 people drank “Magic Bus” cider from Kent, danced with Greenwich Morris men and sang with Charlton-based Morrigums*, dressed in their Victorian “steam- punk” outfit! Pitoschio café supplied warmth, food and drink. Thanks, Lizzie! Children made “evens” and “by Queens” and poet Jacqueline Woodward-Smith led the children to say a wassail blessing, and place bread dipped in cider on the trees.

Organiser Pip! welcomes help in pruning and weeding the trees – and any creative ideas for the 2016 event. See p. 7.

* Their CD As the Crow Flies can be obtained from http://www.morrigums.co.uk

Our VPocks the boat

The Westcombe Society

Annual Helpers’ Party

Sat 20th February 2016

8.00 – 10.00 pm

in Mycenae House

All volunteers and helpers at The Westcombe Society events are invited to join us!
**Letters to the editor**

Any views expressed are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Westcombe Society or the Westcombe News.

**C. Bailey**

Westcombe Park Road

In the past, the WN has appeared hostile to the Garden Bridge project in West London, but it now supports it, and the project is in “the pipeline.” TFL has now agreed to pay £10 million towards the cost – and is offering a £20 million “bridging loan” (golden)! So in Joanna Lumley’s words, “It will bring peace and happiness to Londoners who cross the Thames every day.”

Not much peace or happiness to those living nearby, however, just noise. TFL will also have increased the number of buses on this route. The programme, and contacts and makes arrangements with their programme. The current fee for a tree is £20. Many of us find meeting up on Monday morning is a great way to start the week. New members are very welcome and attend programme this coming term includes – The Regent’s Canal past and present, Dockers go to War, and Plumstead – a village, a common and a Victorian suburb.

**Local History Group Wendy Higgs**

The Mycenae House Local History Group has just celebrated its 20th birthday. We meet term-time on Mondays between 10.15 and 12.15, with a refreshment break mid-morning.

In the Autumn and Spring terms we have talks, usually with overheads, from a number of excellent speakers. In the Summer term we have guided walks and visits to areas of historical interest, often locally but sometimes in central London.

In pursuance of these subjects have included: Pupils’ connections with Greenwich, the Bromley Society, the origins of the railways in the South East and a visit to the Bank of England Museum.

Originally the group was part of Further Education at Goldsmiths, but funding was withdrawn in 2005. Participants decided with the encouragement of ex-tutor and local historian Diana Rimmel, to continue meeting. And here we are now!

The group is run by volunteers, and we keep our costs as low as possible. Each year a small team of members organises the programme, and contacts and makes arrangements with their programme. The current fee for a term is £20.

I for one greatly prefer the current layout. I for one greatly prefer the current layout. It’s six weeks later, another Christmas gone, and I’m still waiting for a kidney. And I am not going to sign up to the NHS Organ Donor Register in favour of the heath here in Blackheath.

But his other views are questionable: for example, dismissing the remains of Elizabeth Oak would negate the ecological benefits of rotting wood, a haven for animals and wildlife. And we now have a flourishing Elizabeth’s Oak planted by Philip, Baron Greenwich, some thirty years ago. I for one greatly prefer the current look of the Park, with its greatly improved men. But we can agree on the snow: it gives the Park a wonderful ethereal look.

From: M. Little

Westcombe Hill Mr. Ross (WN Dec.2015) is entitled to his opinion, but he unfortunately compares Greenwich Park with Hampstead Heath, but he should compare like with like. Greenwich Park is a park. Hampstead Heath is a heath. It is possibly true, dare one say, that Hampstead Heath compares favourably with the heath here in Blackheath. But his other views are questionable: for example, dismissing the remains of Elizabeth Oak would negate the ecological benefits of rotting wood, a haven for animals and wildlife. And we now have a flourishing Elizabeth’s Oak planted by Philip, Baron Greenwich, some thirty years ago. I for one greatly prefer the current look of the Park, with its greatly improved men. But we can agree on the snow: it gives the Park a wonderful ethereal look.

From: Lourisa Le Marchand GFMA Love arts charity Global Fusion Music & Arts needs a Treasurer/Treasurer to work closely with the Project Manager overseeing all the financial aspects of GFMA. The appointee would play a key role in the development of the charity, to enable GFMA to provide the ongoing support services they give to the community. Please check out our website www.globalfusionmusicarts.org.

Please phone 020 8585 9497 or email info@globalfusionarts.co.uk.
Fixed odds betting: licensed to thrill?

Your editor once checked into a hotel in Gaborone, Botswana and was given a room key and two gambling chips for use in the hotel’s casino. The casino was not filled with James Bond characters, still less any "Bond girls"; for the most part, the clientele were local workers hoping to eke out their earnings by winning some semi-mystical jackpot.

One was a lorry driver who could ill afford losing his money; still less could he afford to develop a gambling habit. I threw my chips randomly onto a roulette table, drew a blank, and thankfully walked out.

According to a report by London Councils, two hundred years after the first recognisable betting shops appeared in London, fixed odds betting (FOB) terminals are now the biggest source of gambling losses on the high street. The report argues strongly that London’s boroughs should have more powers to restrict them.

The report by London Councils – which represents London’s 33 local authorities – states that FOB terminals, which allow up to £100 to be wagered every 20 seconds, can seriously harm individual and their families, local communities and economies.

In 2014, nearly £459 million was lost and more than 1.5 billion bets – worth £13 billion – were placed on the 7,000-plus terminals in London.

That’s a lot of cash down the drain. But FOB terminals can also harm local economies due to ‘clustering’ of betting shops. This reduces retail diversity, potentially increasing social isolation and can mean less money is spent with local businesses.

London Councils’ report outlines the social ill-effects of problem gambling. It recommends measures to support the capital’s high streets, including promoting the value of markets and supporting outdoor arts and culture.

Commenting, a local resident: "We have our own local clusters here around the Standard: let’s hope that none of the empty shops in Old Dover Road are turned into betting shops."

The problem gambling treatment charity the Gordon Moody Association estimates that for every problem gambler ten other people are also directly affected.

Improving the odds

The FN has learnt that town centre locals are spending almost £50,000 a week on gambling on one armed bandits.

The council is stepping up efforts to tackle gambling-related problems and protect vulnerable residents by launching a new pilot scheme in General Gordon Square, Woolwich.

Betwatch will see the council working with the Met Police and local betting shops to share information related to crime and antisocial behaviour.

Woolwich town centre currently hosts 48 fixed odds betting terminals (FOBTs) which are making an average of £1000 profit a week each. Punters can place bets of £100 a time on the casino-style betting machines. The council is now taking in a large percentage and restricting the stakes on FOBTs to £2.00.

For further information on gambling responsibly, visit www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk.

Think you may have a problem? Go to: http://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk/

Desert Island Poems
Barbara Ward

In December, a special poetry evening organised by Helen Eastman, the Director of ‘Live Canon, in collaboration with Made Greenwich Gallery, the poet NJ Hynes and Poetry Network for SE London

Blake Morrison discussed his chosen Desert Island poems, and each poem was the electrifyingly performed by three ‘Live Canon’ actors, part of this group specialising in reciting poetry ‘from the old canon.’ Blake’s considered and illuminating discussion of his choice of poems was followed, after cake and mulled wine, by the performance of the seven highest entries from the popular vote – a somewhat surprising ‘hit parade’ (painstakingly collated by NJ Hynes) of moving and sometimes humorous works.

Full marks to Blake and Helen, whose dialogue was informative, witty and entertaining, and congratulations to Made in Greenwich and the organisers for a rare and special evening praised by all. Raffle prizes of Champagne, chocolates, wildflower seeds and other ‘vital luxuries’ for anyone stranded on a desert island had been donated by Poetry Network for SE London as a means to fundraise for its support to future poetry events at Made in Greenwich, and added to the general enjoyment of an exceptional evening.

Blake Morrison’s most recent poetry collection is ‘Shingle Street’ (one of your editor’s favourite places on the coast of Suffolk). The collection is described as ‘a brawura performance that’s also solid and heartfelt’ (Observer, March 2015)

Blake Morrison’s Poetry selection:
Philip Larkin - Dockery and Son
Ted Hughes - Daffodills
Tony Harrison – Marianne with D
Elizabeth Bishop - Filling Station
Thom Gunn - Touch
Seamus Heaney - The Shank
Thomas Hardy - In Time of The Breaking of Nations"

Greenville Conservative councillors have warned against what they set as Greenwich Council’s ‘creeping centralisation’ of library services in the Woolwich, Greenwich and Eltham Centres. They have proposed a new ‘Library Lock’ policy to protect smaller libraries and combat the centralisation process.

The move follows the council’s recent decision to consult on closing the Greenwich mobile library service.

There is also growing concern for the future of the eight smaller libraries in the borough in New Eltham, Chatham, Blackheath, Plumstead, Blackheath, Chatham, Thamesmead and West Greenwich.

In a move described as ‘ominous’, a separate report on the performance of the library service focused almost entirely on the larger ‘co-located’ libraries in the Woolwich Centre and Eltham Centre.

These two large libraries have now been joined by the Greenwich Centre, which has absorbed the East Greenwich Library.

A new library at Abbey Wood as part of the Crossrail development is also proposed.

A local resident was “horrified” at the thought of losing the local library in Old Dover Road. “We ought to organise a petition if that happens,” she said.

The Royal Borough is proposing redesigning the existing Library Outreach Service, which currently stops at 18 roadside locations, 6 primary schools and 27 nurseries, and issues 30,000 items a year. The plan would be to focus on vulnerable house-bound residents who need the service the most. Some staff claim that this is the thinnest of the wedge, leading to cuts in library services.

The Council also propose investment in new technology and tablet computers to allow customers to see the full library catalogue in their home, allowing them to select from the full range of material on offer, rather than the more limited choice available with the confines of the current mobile vehicle service.

The closing date for comments is Friday 18th March 2016.

Merrell “Peggy” Hawkes

We are very sorry to record the death of Mrs Merrell Hawkes (“Peggy”), who for over forty years ran Pegga Stores, one of the best little shops in the Standard. Its striped awning and decorative metal grill made its own distinctive statement on the street. Peggy was always full of fun: she was a semi-professional dancer who entertained troops in the war, before settling down and getting married.

She was best-known for her shop, a tribute to her good taste. There she stocked an amazing range of first-class items, from calendars and diaries with Art Nouveau designs to greetings cards and wrapping paper – and very attractive small gifts to go inside the wrapping paper.

Merrell Hawkes was always there, always ready for a friendly chat, active almost to the end of her years, (her 90th birthday was to have been in January). Merrell Hawkes came from a well-known Blackheath family – her father, Mr Boon, paid for the shelter on the Standard that was sadly demolished some years ago, as it was vandalised, and attracted street people who some locals found threatening.

The funeral was on January 11th. Our deepest condolences to her husband and family.
Peter Greaves reviews The Establishment – And how they get away with it
By Owen Jones, 2014, 2015

According to the author, “Today’s Establishment is made up – as it has always been – of powerful groups that need to protect their interests and a democracy… (3) represents an attempt… to ‘man-age’ democracy, to make sure that it does not threaten their own interests.”

Just who are “they”? Jones writes: “The Establishment includes politicians who make laws, media barons who set the terms of debate; businesses and financiers who run the economy; police forces that enforce a law which is rigged in favour of the powerful… It is unified by a common mentality…” Because “I’m worth it.”

The term was brought into common usage by Henry Fairlie writing controv-
erially in 1955, meaning “a network of powerful people who socialized together, looked out for and helped each other as the need arose.” At that time, there was a belief, in that era of welfare capitalism, that active government was necessary for a healthy, stable society.

However, there were others, such as Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman, arguing for a laissez-faire state and free trade abroad – or to put it another way, the diminishing of state intervention in eco-
nomic affairs.

The Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) founded in 1955, pushed free-market ideas in what was at the time a hot political climate. Other think tanks appeared, including the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) founded in 1974 by Thatcher and Keith Joseph, and the Adam Smith Institute founded in 1977, followed later by the right-wing Taxpayers’ Alliance, Reform, Policy Exchange – with Michael Gove its founding chairman. All have less than transparent funding. (A notably exception to these organizations is the New Economics Foundation (NEF), a progressive think tank that remains studiously ignored by most mainstream media.)

These groups and their ilk connect together the worlds of business, politics and the media, abetted by a reviving door culture; their views have not so much entered mainstream intellectual opinion; they have become the mainstream.

The Establishment – and how they get away with it

Peter van der Merve MBE DL, General Editor for Royal Museums Greenwich, will be giving an illustrated lecture about the artists who, since the 17th century, have been inspired by the Park. Sunday 21st February 2016 at 11.00am The King William Lecture Theatre, University of Greenwich, at the Old Royal Naval College. Tickets are £10 (to include a glass of wine) from Friends of Greenwich Park, 3 Orchard Drive, SE3 7QD (tel 020 8552 8831) or on the door at 10.30am.

Painters and the Park

Domestic abuse can take many forms. Research indicates that in their life-
time, one woman in every four in the UK will be affected by it. Domestic violence happens across all socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Overwhelmingly, it is women, not men who suffer from it.

Women’s specialist services – including women’s refuges – have had very serious funding cuts: from 2010 - 2012 there were cuts of some 31% by local authorities, and further cuts have taken place since. In 2014, 4,28 women were turned away from refuges due to lack of space: there were 3,652 women for every refuge bed.

In Greenwich, the council is reminding residents who experience or witness abuse about the range of advice and support available as part of its ongoing campaign to tackle the problem.

By the summer of 2016 the royal bor-
hough will have invested £675,000 in the campaign designed to support victims and encourage perpetrators to get help. Support services are co-ordinated under the Greenwich Domestic Violence and Abuse Service (GDVA) which works with a range of organisations to help families move on from abusive and violent relation-
ships. They include the council-funded Domestic Violence Intervention Team (DVIT) based at Plumstead Police Station. The team provides an emergency response, and follow-up support, and directs victims to other organisations that can help.

How can dance tell a story of love, loss and creation?

Ian McMillan

In immersive theatre, the audience become part of the performance. But immersive dance? Why not? Up-and-coming choreographer Tara D’Aquino presents her new immersive dance drama Quests, a site-sensitive work set in the many spaces of the Borough Halls at Greenwich Dance. Quests is the second part of the In Situ Trilogy, an exploration of the multiplicity of identity.

Guided through the building by the performers, the audience (separated into groups) will sway between the reality, memory and dreams of the director and they themselves become characters in the story. D’Aquino’s company of dancers and actors will be joined by two casts of 20 volunteer performers of different ages and backgrounds, drawn from the community around Greenwich Dance, dancing to a new score by Bruno Humberto and Philippe Lenzini.

Greenwich Dance from 17th to 20th February 7.30 pm

Outlawing domestic violence

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It also works with perpetrators who want to change their ways by directing them to services that can help.

Housing for Women is a charity and housing association which last month celebrated 40 years of supporting women in London. The group has five refuges in the borough and runs a domestic violence helpline. Their helpline is 020 317 8273, (10.00am to 4.00pm, Mon-Fri). In an emergency always call 999.

The Her Centre in Woolwich supports more than 1,000 local women offering free and confidential advocacy, counselling, and emergency housing to women victims - and men, too. Call 020 3260 7772. Clare Jackie Smith said: “The message is clear – the actions of those who engage in abusive and violent behaviour are damag-
ing and totally unacceptable. The council is also working in tandem with victims, giving them support while taking the strongest action against perpetrators.”

For more information, visit www.royal-
greenwich.gov.uk/domesticviolence

* Figures come from Solace Women’s Aid

Westcombe Park

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PHOTO: Chris Nash

Borough Halls at Greenwich Dance.

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Freephone helpline: 0800 802 5565
NOTE: From Dec. 26th 2015, coercive or controlling domestic abuse become a crime punishable for up to five years in prison. Domestic abuse cases in England & Wales rose by 31% from 2013 - 2015.

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ARTS

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

SAMUEL PEPPY's plaque: Giles, Sir, revolution

Open daily until 28th March. Explore the turbulent history of Stuart London - the largest ever exhibition about the great, scandalous and decisive moment.

BLACKHETHER DECORATIVE FINE ARTS

TUES 16TH FEB 7.30pm in the Crypt to Mary's Church, Crossroad Park. Thurs 25th Feb 6.00pm for the 2pm performance. Blackheath Decorative Fine Arts - extraordinary expressions in stained glass

GILBERT & SULLIVAN:

A SIDE TO SIDE BY SIDE

King William Court, University of Greenwich Mon 6th Feb. 6.00pm An Anthony Georgey and Antn Kapke Lecture by Rosalind White

Explore the curiously parallel journeys of the two arts

MADE IN GREENWICH GALLERY

230 Creek Rd SE3 7th Feb 6.30pm

‘Valentine’s for Nature’ Event Held - try larks in a fun way Fortinus House, Mike Phillips Graham High Cotterall at 11th - 14th Feb. Other nature-related events

FAN MUSEUM 31, Crosses Hill

Sat 11th Feb – Sat 05th June 9am-5pm ‘Treasures of the Fan Museum’ Exhibition Celebrating the museum’s twenty fifth anniversary

COMIC-BOOK WEEKEND

MYCENAE HOUSE

Sat 6th Feb. 5.48 pm The Boy Who Blew Picasso by United Artists. 70 minutes 144 Oak Hill Park, SE10 8ES

£7.00 | £5.00 | £3.00 under 12s

10th Feb 6.00pm  Exploring the common ground between the two artists

ANISH KAPOOR Lecture by Rosalind Whyte

Mon 8th Feb. 8.00 pm Anthony Gormley and King William Court, University of Greenwich

SAMUEL PEPYS: plague, fire, revolution

NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM

19th February 2.00 pm: 

‘Treasures of the Fan Museum’

Celebrating the museum’s twenty fifth anniversary

A little boy dreams of being a world class magician

LONDON SE10 8ES  BOX OFFICE   8858 7755

Untied Artists. (70 minutes) Age 4+

Sat 6th Feb. 3.00 pm   The Boy who Bit Picasso

MYCENAE HOUSE

90 Mycenae Road, SE3 7SE Visitors are welcome at Park, SE3. Please use the station car park. Non mem-

BLACKHEATH HALLS Children’s Theatre

22 Lee Road, London SE3 9RQ  Recital Room,

BLACKHEATH HALLS

SATURDAY 20th FEB. 8.00pm

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When does a “safe space” become “unsafe”?

In this article, NEVILLE GRANT regrets that free speech in our universities is under threat

N March last year, the #AComedianKateSmurthwaite had been disinverted to a gig in Goldsmiths because she had an opinion differing from that of the Students’ Union. The Students’ Union had a policy of defending workers’ rights: it was held that Kate Smurthwaite’s views on opinion were “unacceptable.”

Her views? She thought that prostitution should not be prosecuted: and indeed, their clients should feel the heavy hand of the law. According to the union this breached sex workers’ rights. A sex worker and campaigner known as Molly Coddle came out in support of their stance.

You couldn’t make it up.

It is not the first time that Kate Smurthwaite had chosen “free speech” as the theme of her gig. Many observers take the view that the campus of Goldsmiths University is not the best, outside Parliament, than a university allowed to be expressed.

The announcement came from the Goldsmiths Students’ Union claims to be a “safe space”. I looked up “safe space” to discuss dissenting ideas about the political parties in May. It has forewords by the PER Group to send to the political parties in May.

The reason why this question arises is because last year, one faction of the Goldsmiths Students’ Union hosted a screening of Dear White People and advertised it as being only “for BME students”. BME stands for ‘black and minority ethnic’ – and the poster specified that the screening was for students of ‘African, Caribbean, Arab, Asian and South American ethnic origin’.

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The announcement came from the union’s Welfare and Diversity Officer, Ms Bahar Mustafa, and education officer Sarah El-Alfy. The reason why this question arises is because last year, one faction of the Goldsmiths Students’ Union hosted a screening of Dear White People and advertised it as being only “for BME students”. BME stands for ‘black and minority ethnic’ – and the poster specified that the screening was for students of ‘African, Caribbean, Arab, Asian and South American ethnic origin’.

This seems to have become par for the course. Goldsmiths’ earlier in the year, Ms Mustafa had convened a conference on “diversifying the curriculum”, which also excluded white people. And, again, white people were asked not to take part in a demonstration against racism.

On the event page she wrote: “If you’ve been invited and you’re mad and/or white PLEASE DON’T COME.”

That hashtag “is something that a lot of people in the feminist community use to express frustration.” She has often expressed her abhorrence of racism, misogyny and homophobia, and her use of the hashtag seems to have been an ironic reference to a #BlackLivesMatter hashtag that was appearing on social media at the time.

Ms Mustafa said it was really only a joke, though she conceded that her use of the term “white trash” in one of her tweets was “unprofessional.” Apparently, the police did not get the joke, and Ms Mustafa was summoned to appear in court. The case was later dropped.

Tuesday 17th February

Spring Detox

Lunch £2.50 per child

Join us for this season’s top gent. The number of women desperate for detox day but not all women don’t see a dietician to do this. In this course we will discover what has happened and how to help your parents.

If you’re looking for a bit of a help in-between (Spa Day to collect your fresh face. For more information call 020 8808 8808.

Wednesday 17th February

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Lunch £2.50 per child

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Stew, Uggs and Spa £4 per child

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For more information on these events or to book please contact the Farm on 020 8319 8900 or email education@thewoodlandsfarmtrust.org

When does a “safe space” become “unsafe”?

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Bullied and harassed

Last November, The President of Goldsmiths Student Union Adnaani Rashid resigned because she was allegedly bullied and harassed by Alex Etches, Campaigns and Activities Officer, and to a lesser extent by Bahar Mustafa. Both Alex Etches and Bahar Mustafa then stepped down amid allegations that they created a “hostile working environment.”

As one of the generation who sought and campaigned against apartheid all this was unbelievable.

Goldsmiths Student’s Union claims to subscribe to the notion that a university should be a ‘safe space’. I looked up “safe space” on the internet, and of every site I visited defined (possibly oxymoronic) it as “a place where anyone can relax and feel self-expressed, without fear of being made to feel uncomfortable.”

So the question arises, who would feel “safe” in a “racially-segregated space?”

And what prejudices one would have to feel that a space could only be safe if it was racially segregated? Donald Trump might have a view on this. It gets worse: last December, a prominent human rights campaigner, Ms Namazie was giving a talk on campus on “Apostasy, blasphemy and free expression in the age of ISIS” (after following an invitation from the Atheist, Secularist and Humanist Society (ASH). Ms Namazie was heckled and almost shouted down by members of Goldsmith’s Islamic Society (GIS): her powerpoint presentation was racist, fundamentalist and had caused the receiving death threats. Security officers had to come in to guard her. (One can view the whole episode on YouTube). So much for safe spaces . . .

The GIS wrote to ASH attacking her “bigoted views,” and issued a statement: “As an Islamic society, we feel extremely uncomfortable by the fact that you [ASH] have invited Maryam Namazie. As she very well probably know, she is renowned for being Islamicophobic, and very controv – we feel unsafe if an individual will violate our safe space.”

The President of Goldsmiths’ ASH society had sent an email invitation to the Islamic society’s president “because I wanted them to be included in Mayam’s talk and the ensuing discussion,” but, he said, “the group ‘had responded to my email with a thinly veiled threat asking me to call off the event on the grounds that it violated the safe space policy.”

He accused some in the Goldsmiths Islamic Society (GIS) of making non-Muslims who wish to have a “safe space” to discuss dissenting ideas about religion feel “unsafe.”

Ms Namazie was very familiar with the notion of bigotry, having read from Iran’s repressive government. As a fierce campaigner against Islamic extremism, she bravely went ahead with the talk.

A university “cannot be a safe place”

Later, she said: “Safe spaces can be a good thing for women who face violence but a university cannot be a safe place. It needs to be an unsafe place where people learn to question ideas they have taken for granted. If we cannot have free and open debates at universities, where else can we have them?”

Not everyone agrees on what’s a “safe space” might be. Goldsmiths Islamic Society has previously hosted a number of radical speakers. Namazie also told London Student. “This very group which absurdly speaks of “safe spaces” has in the past invited Hamza Tzortzis of IERA [Islamic Education and Research Academy] which says the beheading of apostates is painless and modern Begg of Cage Prisoners that advocates “defensive jihad”. Tzortzis has also claimed that “We as Muslims reject the idea of freedom of speech.” (IERA is currently under investigation by the Championships Commission.)

Namazie said despite the “many attempts at disruption the meeting ended successfully and raised critical issues, including that criticism of Islam and Islamism are not bigotry against Muslims – often the first victims of Islamism.”

Incidents such as those briefly described here make the concept of “safe spaces” almost Kafka-esque, very sad in view of Goldsmiths’ long tradition of encouraging free expression and open debate. As a spokesman for the university said: “The university supports freedom of speech. The university follows a set of regulations to help ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students and employees of the university, and for visiting speakers.”

To be fair, this problem is not just Goldsmith’s problem. Oxford University cancelled a debate between Germaine Greer was banned from some campuses because of some of her views; UCL banned the Nietzsche Club because it put up posters saying “equality is a false God”, and Dunde refused to allow the Society for the Protection of Unborn Children to attend their freshmen’s fair.

It seems to me that when choosing a university one should not merely look at its entrance requirements, and the quality of teaching. One should also look at whether it is indeed a safe place where one can freely explore ideas without being bullied, harassed or threatened.
Residents of Siebert Road and Westcombe Hill whose homes back onto the busy A102 Blackwall Tunnel southern approach road are to have noise reduction fencing put up on the end of their gardens. This news follows after the Royal Borough’s campaign to have them installed.

When the road was built, properties that back onto it weren’t provided with fences to protect them from traffic noise, due to different standards in force at the time. Residents have long complained about the excessive traffic noise levels.

The residents and the Council have been pressing Transport for London (TfL), which now manages the road, for noise barriers for a number of years. Recently the Council redoubled its pressure on TfL, with talks held between the Council leadership and senior TfL management, which resulted in TfL conducting feasibility studies to look at installing some kind of barriers for a number of years. Recently TfL announced that Transport for London has responded to Council pressure after all this time. A million pounds is a large and welcome investment but the residents have been suffering from noise from one of London’s busiest roads for too long. We now need to convince TfL to separate the issues from on the South Row pond and install the barrier as the earliest opportunity.

EGRA has consistently warned against over-building our precious infrastructure with over-development. This includes our air. Professionals, developers and the Council have dismissed these warnings. They are now coming true, in packed bus lanes, traffic, severance and poorer air quality (AQ). And this is well before the biggest developments come on stream.

The suggestions below are designed to complement London-wide proposals such as those by Clean Air London, and national initiatives following the Supreme Court ruling this year and the VW diesel scandal. Why Urgent Action is Needed

Part 1 of EGRA’s air quality report revealed the extent to which our air is polluted. Part 2 – this draft manifesto – shows how it is better than clear our air overnight. It is better than doing nothing, which appears to be the current policy.

• call for better policing of all traffic rules and pocket parks
• ban biomass and waste burning
• review the future of public transport links

EGRA has now produced this draft manifesto.

Residents and visitors should note that residents of Siebert Road and on the new islands will be protected from traffic noise, due to the works; and to the contractor for so patiently dealing with the vagaries of the weather, tree root blockages and multiple punctures.

Residents and visitors should note that the protective netting and supports along South Row and on the new islands will be removed as soon as the planting is sufficiently established to withstand the attentions of the Canadian Geese and swans.

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