A huge queue of people lined up outside the new IKEA building for its official opening on February 7th, eager to view IKEA’s treasures inside. Served ranks of staff, in distinctive yellow livery, waving the blue and yellow Swedish flags, gave the customers a warm welcome with music and dancing as they poured in: a real party atmosphere.

IKEA Greenwich, which was dogged by traffic concerns before its opening, led to a traffic jam all the way to Greenwich – lots of people blamed IKEA for it. “So, so far, so good!”

Special transport provision
An IKEA spokesperson told the WN that the store is the first in the UK to offer a 24-hour delivery service. The first twelve weeks of opening will see offers including subsidised despatch rates within a 40-minute radius by public transport, and market hall products delivered by electric bike courier, Zapp.

IKEA have given £750,000 to the Royal Borough of Greenwich Council ‘towards the promotion of sustainable modes of transport for co-workers and customers of IKEA.’

Proposed improvements have included new bus lanes, pedestrian and cycle crossings and bus lanes. 41% of customers are expected to arrive by car with the rest taking a bus, walking or cycling.

The travel plan for IKEA also refers to improvements to cycling and pedestrian access, and ‘public realm improvements.’ But these are unlikely to improve the ‘grey and grim’ walk from Westcombe Park station under the A2, Brightly says.

In a statement to the WN, Cllr Damien Scott-McDonald, Cabinet Member for Air Quality, Public Realm and Transport said: “While a major retailer and job creator like IKEA opening up in the Royal Borough is to be welcomed, residents have very serious concerns about traffic and air quality and it is right that they are addressed.”

Residents’ responses will feed into a much more detailed consultation we will do later this year as we prepare for the next budget cycle which starts in April 2020.

Royal Greenwich has done well to provide the services it does while keeping council Tax relatively low, but this news will come as little surprise to students of local council finance.

Leader’s statement
Cllr Danny Thorpe, Leader of the Council, said: “We have the 11th lowest council Tax in London, but the relentless cuts from central government are making it increasingly difficult to protect our vital frontline services. We propose to prioritise the people who most rely on our services.”

The consultation closed on 10th February 2019. The 2019/20 budget was debated at Full Council on 27th February.

Last year, the WN asked “When is a consultation not a consultation?” The brief answer is when respondents have almost no time to respond.

Now, the Council has done it again: on 26th January, they asked us all to have our say on its budget proposals for 2019/20 by 10th February. Yes, we might have responded if we’d known about it, and been given enough time. Even so, make no mistake: it’s a serious exercise which could have an impact on us all.

The problem faces councils all over the country. A Commons Public Accounts Committee has warned the government is in denial about local government finances. Adult social care has been particularly hard hit: the charity Age UK reports that in the past twelve months 54,000 people across the country have died waiting for a social care package.

In Greenwich, the reduction in central government funding, combined with increases in costs, means that for 2019/20, the Council is facing a £7.5m pressure on its budget. Cuts could mean reducing expenditure on non-essential services and/or increasing council Tax by 2.99%.

Your views count…

The Council is asking residents for their views on three priority areas which could receive additional funding in 2019/20:
* setting up a serious youth violence reduction team to help combat and prevent youth and gang violence
* giving support and advice for people moving across to Universal Credit
* providing training and support to help people return to work.

Cllr Christine Grice, Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources, said: “Since 2010, the amount of money we receive from government has reduced by over £125million – that’s well over £3,000 per household. At the same time, our costs have risen due to inflation and because more people need our services. So far we have been able to protect most services, by efficiency savings, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to cope.”

Residents’ responses will feed into a much more detailed consultation we will do later this year as we prepare for the next budget cycle which starts in April 2020.

20 Rip-off

At the end of January some 8,000 school children sang in a concert at the O2, raising money for a children’s cancer charity – with more than 20,000 parents and grandparents in attendance.

A proud grandparent who attended her nine-year-old grandaughter’s debut on the stage has bemoaned what happened.

“The concert was lovely, though we couldn’t actually see Ruby on stage – you needed binoculars – we never begrudged the £22.50 tickets (though there was a £7.50 ‘handling charge’).

“Before we went we checked up on parking at the O2 – £12.00 for six hours, that’s not too bad, we thought.

“But when we got there we were told it was £33.00 for parking for events! Inside the O2, thank goodness we took a packed lunch, but Ruby definitely deserved a treat.

“And that was another £12.00 for a chicken-burger and chips.”

“That is nothing but a cash machine – and you wonder how much of the money we all spent went to charity?”

You have been warned!
**WESTCOMBE NEWS**

**Members & Helpers’ Party**

One Saturday night last month Mycenae House was abuzz with good cheer at The Westcombe Society’s helpers and volunteers’ party – a special annual event highlighting the work of the Society. As well as a tasty buffet there was an eclectic and delightful range of music from harpist Cecilia. During the evening Marilyn Little, Chair of the Environment Committee, addressed the helpers and volunteers on the work of the Volunteer Centre Greenwich. Jon Ficker, trustee and Vice-Chair of the Centre accepted the donation and outlined the valuable work of the organisation. Raising money for a chosen local charity each year is, along with bringing local people together, the Society’s passion. **JANE WILSON**

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**Letters**

Views expressed are not necessarily those of either the Westcombe Society, or the Westcombe News.

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**OnBlackheath change of date**

The OnBlackheath event may possibly take place on any Tuesday in April. Any such change of date for the event would need to be put into effect by a new grant application to LBR Lewisham Grant. It is important that residents of Greenwich are kept full informed, and to this end the Working Group Chair Council will be willing to forward any comments.

Please note these dates in your diary: Monday 4th March 7.00pm At Blackheath Exchange - Blackheath Joint Working Party OPEN MEETING. open to anyone to express their views on anything to do with OnBlackheath – including OnBlackheath.

**WANTED! More volunteers to distribute the HY” and to help with Westcombe Society’s community events. Please phone 8853 2756 or 020 8853 2756, we need your help!**

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**Barclays Bank**

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**Environmental Press**

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**Soleh House**

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**Greenwich Town Hall**

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**Westcombe News March 2019**
The People’s Vote helps Community Projects

You’ve been wondering around Greenwich Park on a Sunday morning, near the bandstand, you might have noticed a small group of men looking people in their 50s and 60s running up and down a slightly wonky pitch marked out with cones, shouting to each other about passing, and, more worryingly, throwing a ball to try and hit some of the players. This is Danish Longball, played, with very little skill, by members of The Bad Football Club. We do play football, but only very occasionally, because we have found that our favourite sport is Danish Longball! It all started when my friend Lesley announced that she fancied playing cricket in the park. I was fresh from a Christmas Day triumph in a family game of 5 a side football, despite not having played for decades. My favourite game, I told her, was one I’d played on the holidays I’d been on as a child. It’s a bit like cricket, rounders and dodgeball all mixed together. You can be very fit and be got “out” very quickly in the game, or you can consider yourself pretty rubbish and be one of the last ones scoring runs for your team. It’s a great leveller and a lot of fun: Danish Longball. We did indeed play football at our first meeting, badly, hence our name, and now the name lives on partly because we very rarely play it at all.

Some of The Bad Football Club aren’t keen on sport, so we mix up our monthly meetings with country walks, city walks, card and board games sessions, and parties (always with games). We’ve also resurrected the game of “hurky” which involves hiding behind trees in Ormeau Woods and rushing out to kick a can and free the “prisoners”. If you think that these activities sound rather childish, you’d be right. But after a few decades, the novelty of being a grown up is wearing thin. This is our chance to access our inner 8 year olds (maybe not when we’re necking the prosecco). Lots of our members are single or have the other half at home. Most of them are a bit middle age but we have some younger members too (the youngest is 10). Loneliness is not something we talk about, but just as going to a church could help with that, RFC is another place to meet local people regularly and to forge relationships through shared activity, humour, and the foregoing of dignity.

We’ve been running for nearly four years now. It’s all going well, but the activity I would like to promote to readers of The Westcombe News is Danish Longball. Although very many Bad Footballers will show up to a country walk, there’s quite a bit of pleading around bad hips and dodgy knees and not-being-picked-for-school teams when it comes to Danish Longball. You need at least eight players for a match, but really about 16 or 20 players would give us a better game. Who knows? We could even start a league.

If you would like to come and join The Bad Football Club for a game of Danish Longball, please email me at marybauckham@gmail.com. Our next game is on Sunday 3rd March, 12 noon, in Greenwich Park (meeting at the bandstand). After that the big game will be on Sunday 19th May (same time and place).

We also have some walks lined up. Get in touch! All welcome!

The interior, today: a sorry sight.

The much-loved Arches Leisure Centre boasted a 110 station gym, a fitness pool, a leisure pool including a spa pool, two exercise studios, a Crèche and a Sauna. In addition it was home to various swimming and sports clubs.

Today the building looks shabby and neglected. However, it has an interesting history. It was built to the designs of Horst and Andrews, the winners of a 1923 National Architectural Competition to replace the original 1850s building.

The 1850 baths were among the first in England to be built following the 1848 Baths and Washhouses Act. This Act was designed to give workers in the hurriedly-built bathroom-less terraces a chance to wash as well as to learn to swim. This building proved inadequate for the number of men returning from the forces after WW1 to take up jobs in the flourishing industries in Greenwich.

The Baths that replaced the original building in 1923 extended across a whole block of Trafalgar Road. It is the largest building in the street.

The arches symmetrical design was inspired by Roman baths. It gave the street order and dignity, a worthy approach to the famous buildings of Wren further along Trafalgar Road.

The building had a character all of its own, yet it fitted into the modest scale of its immediate neighbours and of Hawkmoor, which it did not compete with or ape. It was renamed The Arches after the slipper baths (individual private bath-rooms) in the centre of the complex which were later replaced by a gymnasium.

The Arches was a “Locally Listed” building and its design has inspired many later swimming pools. It was the first of its kind in Greenwich, and we've been running for nearly four years now. It’s all going well, but the activity I would like to promote to readers of The Westcombe News is Danish Longball. Although very many Bad Footballers will show up to a country walk, there’s quite a bit of pleading around bad hips and dodgy knees and not-being-picked-for-school teams when it comes to Danish Longball. You need at least eight players for a match, but really about 16 or 20 players would give us a better game. Who knows? We could even start a league.

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What will become of it?

To lose this fine character-filled building prepared a study in 2012 showing some of the unusual and original details of the design of this award-winning structure.

The Society was pleased that after the original intention for the Arches to be sold for demolition, the Council included the following “Planning Guidance” with the advertisement for its sale:-

“...as a locally listed building located on a busy road and in a conservation area, the potential for development is subject to certain constraints and... the preference would be for sympathetic conversion/extension.”

For more painful photographs visit 28dayslater.co.uk/threads/the arches

LOCAL DRESSMAKER
R. G. Austin
(Established 1962)

Heating Engineers.
Property Maintenance.
Electrics, Painting, Decorating, Plumbing.
Central Heating.
Shower and Bathroom Specialists.

2A Haslam Road, Blackheath SE3 7TS
Telephone: 0208 858 7309
gaynashb@gmail.com
FEATURES

Linda Baker looks at

The Problems of Academisation

We hear a lot about schools becoming academies. One thing we know for a fact is that they are not the answer to the underperforming problem of the education system.

A BBC Panorama programme last year exposed the ease in which academies can fail to meet the very basic standards set by Ofsted. This is despite the financial difference they then make is by taxpayers’ money going into private pockets, and management teams awarding themselves fat salaries.

We are also told that academies raise standards, and the Government have proudly Ofsted a result as a prime reason for taking schools out of Local Authority (LA) control. But there is no evidence that, academies do raise standards higher than in LA schools; in fact, evidence suggests that, overall, academies achieve about the same. However, academies have a habit of restricting the curriculum to subjects that are not thought desirable by the OFSTED inspectorate.

Why is this? Well, if you are running a school as a financial business it is important to recruit the kind of children who will yield good results. Like a crop! Good results equal successful school! But for many academies this has proved difficult to put this theory into practice.

Special Needs Education

This brings me to the next bad habit of academies. They tend to reduce Special Educational Needs and Disabilities departments (known as SEND) to a minimum. They don’t want anyone eating into their ‘nice’ money on children who do not automatically fuel the results machine. The most expedient way to deal with this is to push children out of the academy system and into the remaining LA schools, schools that have a well-established strategy used for dealing with the needs of children.

However, the funding for these children just isn’t there. On the 22nd October, an article in the Guardian stated that SEND children are being failed by a system that is ‘very much in the dark’ three times more parents today are winning tribunals than in 2011 because there are just not enough suitable school places available for their children’s needs. And what happens if the Government fulfills its plans to scrap SEND from the curriculum? What’s happening in Greenwich

We know that academies can be predatory in their actions. Let’s look at what’s been happening in Greenwich. We have two schools that have recently been under threat of academisation.

One of these is John Roan, the oldest secondary school in Greenwich, but with a state-of-the-art new building, a listed old building, and other buildings and playing fields, all bequeathed to Greenwich and overseen by The John Roan Foundation. The John Roan has been ground down over a series of years by changes of inadequate management and by underfunding, and received a poor Ofsted assessment (which many believe was unfair) citing high turnover of staff as a concern. Despite pleas from the LA, and strong local opposition, the DFE are adamant to academise. Of course they are, because the school will be a jewel in the academy crown.

However before Christmas, as readers of the RN will know, the UST withdrew its sponsorship, as it said it did not have the resources or the desire to address the challenges that the school faces.”

Also, it was found that last year half a million pounds had gone from the school budget, much of it spent on so-called school improvement plans run by the UST, and leaving the school in deficit. The “professional services” of the UST failed to improve the school, but the money has gone. Academies have a habit of shifting the blame, but still the DFE has learnt nothing, and are obsessed on academisation at any cost, despite mounting pressure.

The second school under threat of academisation was Sherington Primary School. But, hang on! This school was deemed to be outstanding by Ofsted, so the argument raising standards being the driving force for academisation was a bogus one. They wanted Sherington for an academy for another reason, which is that it is much easier to do so as an academy if you start off with a high-achieving school! The fact that the LA has been doing well doesn’t seem to matter. An invitation to a private company can do better. The proposal was so strongly opposed that it was thrown out.

Academies have developed an ethos that doesn’t sit well with educationalists and teachers. The children’s well-being is not at the heart of the academy philosophy, and the shocking statistics on mental illness in children shows this.

For this reason teachers and education workers are taking industrial strike action against academisation in Greenwich and around the whole country. And teachers are stressed too, for numerous reasons, and many are leaving the profession - some of them to teach overseas, including the much-vilified EU.

They know that academies place demands on them that they cannot agree to. They know that academies have little interest in the conditions of employment for teachers and for education workers. And they also know that academies frequently suffer a hammerblow of high-quality teachers leaving unstable and constantly changing staffing conditions, sometimes with unfamiliar personnel taking classes.

The democratic deficit

But the most compelling argument against academies is the lack of democracy. An LEA is answerable to the local electorate. The LA can deal with any problems. Where do you go to in academies? To the academy foundation that is the head of the business, but then where? Nowhere! An academy has a 125-year lease that can’t be rescinded without a change in law. Once an academy trust takes over, almost anything can happen. In Greenwich, for instance, the Greenwich Free School was established in 2012, and was co-registered to ARK Multi-Academy Trust in 2018, the school being “too onerous for the trustees”, in other words, it failed the necessary expertise. It had a very high fixed pupil exclusion rate of more than 20%.

The trend now is for academies to join up in large organisations. For example, Correlli College (Academy), established in 2011, was by 2016 being given ‘support’ by Leigh Academies Trust (LAT). By 2018 the school had become the Hailey Academy Trust.

In Greenwich, we have had trusts that lasted barely three years. And, around the country, there are about 200 so-called ‘orphans’ schools that have been abandoned by their academy trusts, and left with no support, and are under threat of legal action to return to their Local Authorities.

What about the future

What schools are future generations of children going to go to? Who knows! Anyone who can afford to run a school can have a go. Yet money is being wasted on academisation. Already, the administration costs alone of implementing academisation has been estimated at £2bn, all coming out of the overstretched education budget. This is money that should have been spent directly on children’s education: as a result, LA schools – and indeed now academies – are being starved of funds.

The Guardian reported on 23 January 2019 that the parliamentary watchdog, the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) concluded in its report that the education of tens of thousands of children has been damaged by academy failures, and by the misuse of public funds. Parents are rightly concerned that their children’s education is being disrupted by the fall-out from the academisation policy. Let’s spend the money on stress-free improvements in locally elected LEA schools, where we have a chance to see and influence what’s happening. Anti-academy campaigns are gaining strength and being heard. The fight now is worth it: at stake is the plight of education for our children – and for their children’s education in the future.

The point of education

The point of getting educated is to acquire mental grip: this is needed by everyone today, more than ever before. What has happened to mental grip? It seems to have gone WHO! In many quarters, including Westminster and Whitehall. Unfortunately schools have been organised for thirty years mainly on the principle of getting students to memorise facts and processes, pull them out in the examination, and hence end up with good grades. This fetish for memorization is not doing any good. This is not education.

FEATURES

The point of education

The point of education is to acquire mental grip: this is needed by everyone today, more than ever before. What has happened to mental grip? It seems to have gone WHO! In many quarters, including Westminster and Whitehall. Unfortunately schools have been organised for thirty years mainly on the principle of getting students to memorise facts and processes, pull them out in the examination, and hence end up with good grades. This fetish for memorization is not doing any good. This is not education. Everyone needs much more grip than this. The PEB Group was founded in 1995 and has spent twenty-five years answering what is required to make bookkeeping software useful. Our first meeting was at Coway Hall on March 2nd and May 25th. For more details email Chris Ormell on chrisormell@aol.com or go to www.philosophyforeducation.moonfruit.com.

The second school under threat of academisation was the John Roan School, has been hit by headlines in the RN. The school was set up in 1677. It has a proud past, and a strong tradition in the community. But what is its future?

Our local school, the John Roan, has been hit by headlines in the RN. The school was set up in 1677. It has a proud past, and a strong tradition in the community. But what is its future?

Westcombe News March 2019
MUSIC

BLACKHEATH HALLS
Wed 6th Feb 9.30 pm
nuEMO, Mutter & Mehta
Free recital room, free booking required.
3.75 pm performance of Barber and Weber.
Tickets £16.60

MUSIC

CENTRAL ASIA talk by Chris Alexander:
Mon. 11th March 7.00pm
Trinity Laban Conservatoire, all home dads welcome.
Each 2nd Tuesday of the month – 10.00am – 11.30am.

STAFFORD HOUSE

GRANDMA
Food from around the world – how does it get on our
Table?

WHATS ON

WESTCOMBE WILLOWS

Free brunch/arts and craft Contact

Saturday of the month – 10.00am – 11.30am –
Centre, all home dads welcome.
Each 2nd Tuesday of the month – 10.00am – 11.30am.

CHILDMINDERS

Tues – Thurs.

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March 2019

Heritage centre update

Readers will be aware that the Heritage Centre was abruptly closed with no clear steer on the future of the archives and their accessibility. This is now the only London Borough to have an easily accessible archive.

The original plan was to move the Centre to Anchor Point, and while the Heritage Centre Trust understands that work on the plans is “ongoing” there has been a regrettable delay in implementation.

Greenwich Archive Users Forum (GAUF) are still in discussion on this fraught issue with the Council and with the Greenwich Heritage Trust (GHT).

It is understood that Trust staff hope to offer a “bespoke” service from March for experienced researchers and, for others, an appointment service. It is not clear if this will be at Charlton House or elsewhere. Work is ongoing on cataloguing, and digitisation is being considered.

Local planning authorities have a legal obligation to make information about the historic environment publicly accessible as part of policy-making or development management.

If you would like to be added to the Supporters’ List of GAUF, please contact Elizabeth Pearcey (e.pearcey@gmail.com)

Counselling for young people

Launched on 4 February 2019, the first day of Children’s Mental Health Week, a new online counselling service will give children and young people across south east London, including Greenwich, access to free, anonymous mental health and emotional well-being support.

The NHS across south east London has commissioned the Counselling Centre to run a counselling service, Kooth, to give local children and young people aged 11-19 access to free, anonymous mental health and emotional well-being support.

Kooth offers access to self-help materi-als, mood-tracking and goal setting tools, counsellor messaging and peer-to-peer support through moderated online forums.

The forums address issues ranging from exam stress and depression to self-harm and relationship problems. Qualified counsellors are available to support any child or young person in one-to-one sessions, from 12-noon until 1pm on weekdays, and from 6pm until 10pm on weekends.

Young people can log on to Kooth.com from any connected device wherever they are 365 days a year to access help and support for their mental wellbeing.

Cllr David Gardner, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Children’s Services and Schools, said: “Through our Young Mental Health Ambassadors and Greenwich Young People’s Council we want to ensure that our borough think mental health and well-being are a priority. Now through Kooth they will have access to professional advice all year round at a touch of a button – just another way of making sure that all our children and young people have the best start in life.”

Meet your neighbour: Neville Grant talks to Joel Thomas, Director of BCfS

When you first meet Joel Thomas, you get the strong impression of a very happy man who is passionate about music. So passionate that he appears to have time for little else: a human dynamo with incredible energy. And he needs it! Apart from running five different choirs at the Blackheath Centre for Singing, all of which meet regularly in Mycenae House, he has now added two other commitments as organist at St George’s church, and choir master to the church’s choir.

Born in Finchley, he went to school in North London, he took part in the music making as a Junior at the Guildhall School of Music on Saturday mornings – which he highly recommends as any school child interested in music.

He graduated from the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester – a formative experience: he says that the college did not just operate in its own musical enclave, but he made a point of involving the university in its activities. Jules won his first award as a conductor in such a collaboration, over twenty years ago. I first met him when he became St George’s new organist; impressed by his skill, I asked him if the organ was his primary instrument. No, he said, it is the piano. His first job? Freelancing – serious music, not soft jazz in smoky night clubs; but soon, much no doubt to the relief of his bank manager, he got a job as Director of Choirs for Barnet Schools Music Centres. A job he did for seven years.

This was the period when as director of music, he had to hone his skills as a conductor, a job that requires empathy with the performers (and the audience) as much as technical skill; he is now much in demand as a freelance conductor, virtually every week, working with some ten different choirs across London.

But he already runs those six different choirs in Blackheath apart from St George’s, which made dramatic progress under his baton, they range from his Chamber Choir, which includes advanced singers, some of whom are graduates in music; a “Finding Your Voice” choir; a “Singing for Pleasure” choir; a “Finding Your Voice” choir; a choir dedicated to pop, soul and jazz; and a small but growing children’s choir. All this work is packed into Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays, leaving three – no, four – days of the week for his conducting those other choirs across London.

These involve a very wide repertoire: Monteverdi, Bach, Mozart, Carl Orff’s Carmina Burana, and modern works, including the American composer Eric Whitacre. He even conducts the occasional opera – including a notable Dido and Aeneas in St Albans’s a while ago, where he will return to conduct Brahms’ German requiem at Easter.

Many readers will remember a splendid performance of Bach’s Christmas Oratorio in December at St Margaret’s, Lee. Joel seems totally inextricable. How does he manage it? Mainly, it seems because he is passionate about music.

He does have staff and volunteer team to back him up. But the local choirs all need their programmes worked out, select music appropriate for each group; then he must get familiar with the scores for many other professional engagements – doubly demanding if as often happens there is limited time for rehearsals.

I asked Joel which three pieces of music he would choose if cast away on a desert island and this newly stumped him: on the classical side, under extreme pressure, he finally nominated Tallis, Monteverdi and Brahms; otherwise he was very eclectic, but placed folk at the top of his list.

He must occasionally unwind, surely. Yes, although he has only lived in Blackheath for three years, he has worked here for ten, starting the BCfS in 2012. He loves the green spaces of Blackheath and Greenwich Park, and exploring the Kent countryside. But music is his passion. So where are his singers coming from? All over our area in SE London: currently there are about ninety singers in his five different choirs: they don’t have to be able to read music, and he enjoys working with a varied skill base, from children, and beginners, to professionals.

I asked Joel what is the appeal of singing in a choir: he says it’s all about self-expression, fellowship – and the inclusiveness of it: you might never meet your fellow-singers if it were not for the choir. Above all, it generates joy: ask anyone who sings in a choir, and they will tell you that singing makes them feel better, and there is scientific evidence to support this. With the world as it is, we certainly do need more joy in our lives. So, come and sing!
Goodbye to Wet Wipes?

According to the non-profit London-based environmental organisation Thames 21, wet-wipes are changing the shape of the River Thames. Thames 21, which cleans rivers and canals across the city, said its volunteers pulled 5,453 wipes from one small area the size of a tennis court on the river embankment near Hammersmith in a single month, an increase of more than 1,000 wipes on last year’s figure.

“You need to go at low tide to see the mounds forming,” said Kirsten Downer, a member of Thames 21. “Wet-wipes are accumulating and affecting the shape of the riverbed. These mounds look natural, but look closer: they are composed of wet-wipes mixed with twigs and mud.”

Antiseptic wet wipes are widely used in the NHS, staff are trained to dispose of them properly – NOT down the loo. Wet wipes, especially baby wipes, have now become a massive industry in the UK. The main problem is that people assume all wipes, baby or otherwise, are flushable, when in fact they contain plastic, are not bio-degradable, and should therefore never be put in the toilet.

In December, Water UK, found that 93% of all sewage blockages in Great Britain were due to wet wipes. There are some 300,000 sewer blockages a year, costing £100m, and harming the environment.

Around the world, cities are finding huge fat bergs are giant blobs of solid waste accumulating and affecting the shape of the riverbed. Thames 21, wet-wipes are changing the shape of the River Thames. Thames 21, which cleans rivers and canals across the city, said its volunteers pulled 5,453 wipes from one small area the size of a tennis court on the river embankment near Hammersmith in a single month, an increase of more than 1,000 wipes on last year’s figure.

This year, a fat-berg the size of 11 double-decker buses was found last year. This year, a fat-berg an astonishing 64m in diameter was found in Sidmouth, Devon.

And the wet wipes that aren’t blocking the sewers are making it into the river, and not just the Thames. Sewers, rivers and canals all round the country are affected. Our coastline, too: over the last ten years, they have also stacked the rules by prejudging planning applications and rec-should be imposed development control case officer, (who is probably dealing with dozens of other schemes) plus the odd bit of input from specialist staff.

If the change is from one use in a category to another, it simply isn’t “development”. Whether permission is needed for a change of use depends on which categories are involved and in some cases on size. For instance, your neighbour’s small extension or garden building may be permitted development. Planners are paid to suffer so that you don’t have to, but a quick google of ‘permitted development’. For instance, your neighbour’s small extension or garden building may be permitted development. Planners are paid to suffer so that you don’t have to, but a quick google of ‘permitted development’ or ‘change of use’ should take you to the relevant pages on the internet: www.planningportal.co.uk for further information.

“This scheme’s outrageous! How could the Council allow the application to be submitted?”

Terrible the proposed development may be, but if a planning application has the necessary plans and forms properly completed, then the Council is OBLIGED in law to consider it.

“Why didn’t the Council take far more time and make the application proper consideration?”

From receipt the Council only has eight clear weeks (for most applications), or 13 weeks for “major” applications, before the applicant can appeal to the Secretary of State and hence take the decision out of the Council’s hands. This time includes compulsory periods of consultation.

“Why didn’t the Council get the last detail of this scheme to comply fully with its policies?”

National planning regulations encourage detailed consideration of the ramifications of application schemes (by requiring applicants to submit supplementary statements on design or sustainability) but the inexorable ticking of the clock often undermines these good intentions. Unfortunately, applicants may well be able to commit a dedicated project team to negotiating an approval, whilst cash-strapped councils assign a development control case officer, (who is probably dealing with dozens of other schemes) plus the odd bit of input from specialist staff.

“Why didn’t they tell the applicant to appeal and be damned?”

You almost need a background in games theory to explain this satisfactorily. Official planning guidance promises that all applications or planning appeals should be approved unless this would be “harmful to matters of acknowledged planning importance.”

This is obviously reasonable, since it rules out refusal of a planning application on grounds of cost in design or sustainability. However national planning guidelines have successively ruled out more and more things from constituting ‘matters of acknowledged planning importance’.

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