

Environment Committee Report for the Westcombe Society AGM, May 2025

The Environment Committee's role in the Westcombe Society is to look after our environment, both built and natural. Our remit includes planning, air quality, trees and open spaces, licensing, and traffic and transport. We meet monthly, this year again entirely online, and have lively email discussions between meetings. The committee reports on its work in the Westcombe News and the WS website, ably coordinated by Maggie Gravelle and Emily Norton, keeping members and residents up to date. It's vital that we understand and can respond to what our members and local residents want, and the Westcombe News is the key to that. We try to be responsive to comments and questions, and we are grateful to everyone who has contributed to our work.

Road traffic and transport have been a leading concern this year. The implementation of the Low Traffic Neighbourhood [LTN] restrictions the Westcombe Park area as well as Greenwich has not been painless, but it is cutting through traffic. In Westcombe Hill, there are no longer rattling large lorries avoiding the morning rush hour, and residents have mentioned the reduction in noise as a positive. We are though aware of the inconvenience for a number of people, for instance in taking ill children to early doctors' appointments. We are asking residents for comments and also directing them to write to ward councillors and to add their views to the Borough's own comments page. We hope that the Transport Department will meet us and other affected amenity societies to review the changes this autumn. At the same time, we've been awaiting the effects of the opening of the Silvertown Tunnel, which may make traffic on the A102 flow better but could also mean drivers will seek alternative routes to the Rotherhithe Tunnel, to avoid paying tolls.

The new Tunnel has also meant a new wall designed to alleviate some of the noise and air pollution from the A102 traffic. This can be seen at the bottom of Westcombe Hill and by the Siebert Road underpass, and is quite substantial. The Westcombe Society advocated for this at the Public Investigation hearings and the inspectors made it a requirement. Behind the scenes, Marilyn Little and the residents along the route have been working hard to make this the best it can be. There are still improvements to be made to the landscaping at Siebert Road and Westcombe Hill, and to the underpass itself.

The committee looks closely at applications for tree work. Greenery and mature trees are an important part of the character of our area, and we take seriously the impact that losing this would have on wildlife and on residents' well-being. We comment regularly on proposals, and try to encourage support for Mycenae Gardens, the Dell, and the Dips. Over the last year, we commented on a number of planning developments for building, including breaches of planning and proposals that might diminish the special character of the conservation area. The Royal Borough of Greenwich [RBG] Planning Department has clear advice on building and renovations in conservation areas, and we comment on proposals where householders, developers, and utilities want to exceed the guidelines. We look at plans for redevelopment outside the immediate area that might affect us. We also respond to consultations with the Borough, which last year included changes to planning advice, cycle routes, and elements that will feed into the upcoming new Local Plan.

The Environment Committee works collaboratively with a number of other organisations, and could not achieve what we do manage without being part of these networks. Locally, we send representatives to the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel, the Safer Parks Panel and the

Greenwich Park Stakeholders, the Friends of Mycenae Gardens committee, and the Blackheath Joint Working Party. We communicate regularly with our ward councillors, and we appreciate their hard work and support. We've also been closely involved in the Greenwich Line Users Group, which has helped make the train service at Westcombe Park more frequent at rush hour and somewhat more evenly spaced throughout the day. More widely, we help convene the Greenwich Planning Alliance, which brings together amenity societies across the borough for discussions with the RBG Planning Department officers and helps coordinate responses to broader planning issues. This has led to constructive involvement with consultations, including those on revising advice on developments, and on how developers should engage with local amenity societies and the wider public. And our member Helen Warner is on the board of the London Forum, which aims to represent a large network of amenity societies across the city. Its open meetings and reports are hugely informative, and our involvement gives us a valuable perspective on how other groups deal with planning issues, including central government policy changes.

Another element of WSENV's work is licensing and support for traders at the Royal Standard, where we're seen an increase in the restaurant and hospitality sector. We do check licensing applications and trying to protect residents from intrusive impacts, but mainly we look at signage, parking, and traffic issues, and hope to maintain a prosperous trading environment for all.

The Environment Committee consists of volunteers, and we don't all have previous experience of planning or environmental issues. However, common sense is useful and we also develop our expertise by drawing on our networks. While we work together collaboratively, we don't claim to be fully representative of the area's residents. We would welcome more members in the hope of diversifying our group and broadening our awareness of your concerns. Protecting our environment is less work than you might think, but is much needed to mitigate the impacts of climate change while keeping Westcombe Park attractive and a pleasure to live in.