

Battersea Matters

the newsletter of the Battersea Society SUMMER 2012



Wet feet, warm hearts

Sara Milne enjoys the river pageant



It was a wet and windy morning as I walked down Albert Bridge Road to join the small but patriotic queue outside the entrance to Battersea Park where loyal supporters and locals had started to gather at around 7.30 am. It was 3 June, the day of the Jubilee Pageant.

After several hours the park gates opened and we all swept in to stake our claim to a few square feet of waterside viewing. As friends and family arrived to join me I realised we were right across the water from the royal barge, giving us a bird's eye view of everything that would be happening both on deck and on the water.

Applause

The grey clouds and chilly Thames breeze did little to dampen the spirits of those who came to picnic, take pictures and be part of such a memorable occasion. What started as a two-deep crowd along the waterfront soon became six-deep as people stopped to look and applaud as the first of the flotilla started to

trickle along from upstream.

The rowed vessels of different shapes and sizes soon turned into a flood of coloured boats and tiny kayaks. For me, one of the most moving moments was when all the small rowing boats stopped and raised their oars in a salute to the Queen. As the royal barge moved into the middle of the river to start her journey to Tower Bridge there was a roar from the crowd and a smile on the face of the Queen as she waved to us.

What followed was an amazing spectacle of boats and watercraft that made up the largest flotilla ever assembled on the river. Along with the rowing boats were working boats, pleasure vehicles, the armed forces, fire, police, rescue and other service boats, historic vessels, wooden launches, steamers and passenger boats.

As I wandered home I felt that Battersea Park had done us proud and had played her part magnificently in the staging of the great flotilla. God bless her and all who sail past her!



Lavender Gardens street party

Photos Hannah Couper

Northcote Road bunting

Photos Suzanne Perkins



Don't forget to visit our website: batterseasociety.org.uk

for regular updates on Battersea Society news, events and planning matters

From the editor

In my spring letter I forecast a multitude of good things, especially the Olympic Games which of course are still to come. What I did not forecast was the extraordinary weather we have had, veering from hosepipe-banning drought to jubilee-drowning downpours. See the storm clouds over Lavender Gardens on the front cover and read about the effects on wildlife and parks on page 14. Some community gardens have a particularly hard struggle with the weather. Bramford Road (back page) has no water on site apart from what falls from the sky.

Community gardens are springing up all over, offering flat-dwellers somewhere to grow their own food and flowers. Unlike allotments they are usually gardened communally. Often they use previously waste ground belonging to the local authority, so as well as bringing pleasure and cheap food to the participants they cheer up passers-



by. They are also a great way to bring neighbours together.

Battersea Park hosted a fine festival on 3 June and we have the River of Sound to look forward to on 21 – 22 July, when musical stars from across Asia will be performing. I'm looking forward to hearing some quite new and exotic sounds. And at 8am on 27 July another exotic sound will be heard in south Battersea: I will be tinkling the chimes hanging from a shrub in my front

garden, contributing to the artist Martin Creed's noisy welcome to the Games www.allthebells.com

On pages 10 – 11 Mike Roden takes a bus trip – free for us oldies – that reminds us of our city's extraordinary history. And I wonder if there is another capital city in the world where in a single day you can do as I did: pick a basket of elderflowers on the common and see prints by Albert Irvin and Chris Orr (both Battersea residents, by the way) in the Royal Academy.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at another unmissable event: the Battersea Society's annual summer party. It's on Thursday 12 July at St Mary's. If the weather gods are kind it will be outside, with romantic river views. Recent history suggests the crypt is more likely.

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The man on the Battersea balcony

Mike Roden celebrates the jubilee, and anticipates some more fun and games

So that was the Jubilee that was... The plan was to stay on our upstairs balcony and watch the vast armada sail past for several days, while subsisting on coronation chicken and spam sandwiches. There was a minor setback when a BBC camera set atop a 700 foot crane parked itself in the church car park opposite, but we still had a view of the river, and the telly provided some tremendous views upstream and downstream.

The day dawned chill and rain-flecked, but it turned out that the afternoon flotilla was a mere sideshow to the thousands of people flooding past our flats en route to Battersea Park throughout the morning. And my lady wife and I afforded them (and ourselves) some innocent entertainment, by waving down benevolently from our balcony while wearing our



grandchildren's regal masks. So if your photographic record of the day includes images of the royal couple on a balcony in Battersea – please study them a little more closely!

Then of course the rain set in with a ferocity it can only manage during a hosepipe ban. But the British are undaunted by such minor setbacks, and will weather whatever storms beset us through the forthcoming summer. By the time I address you again, we will know the answer to so many questions: will Andy Murray win

Wimbledon, will the England team be triumphant in Euro 2012, will Team GB win more gold medals than anyone else? Though some might say we probably already know the answers. Of course there will be winners and losers, joy and sorrow – and that's just at the Battersea Society party when long serving members fail yet again to win something in the raffle.

But let us not be downhearted. We must put on a brave face for our visitors. The world will soon arrive en masse for the Games, spend a few days at Heathrow Terminal 5, and then enjoy the uncertainty of a trip on the Jubilee Line, before having their picnic hamper seized by security at Canary Wharf. Call me an old curmudgeon if you like – but I've just got time to tell you my favourite Olympian fact, courtesy of the sainted Mary Beard. She reminds us with glee that the celebration of democracy which is the torch ceremony dates as far back as 1936 and was invented by that well-known democrat Herr Hitler. Not a lot of people know that. Mind how you go.

Planning Matters: Cause for concern

Monica Tross outlines the planning committee's challenges

We are concerned that developers make changes to plans during and after the application process (see below).

Having weathered the road and bridge closures over the Jubilee weekend we now have to face more substantial challenges over the whole Olympic period. Walking, cycling and the Overground seem the best bet www.getaheadofthegames.com.

Extra disruption is likely to come from the police basing themselves at both New Covent Garden Market and the Battersea Power Station site from June through to the end of August. They are using these as mustering, briefing and deployment centres and for storage and administration.

COVENT GARDEN MARKET DEVELOPMENT

We support the strategy of developing some areas of the site in order to upgrade and maintain the market itself. However we have very considerable reservations about the lack of detail in the plans submitted so far. If approved, these would give a broad agreement to very substantial (and tall) buildings without much detail to show how these would integrate with other developments in Nine Elms. It is also near impossible to assess their impact on existing neighbourhoods.

Our letter, urging rejection of the plans, can be seen on the Council's planning website, reference **2011/4664**. You can also see the CABE (Council for Architecture and the Built Environment) report on the website which echoes and extends many of our concerns.

NINE ELMS

Master Plans for the development of the Royal Mail site have been approved as have plans for the Marco Polo site. Those for One Nine Elms (**2012/0380**) are still being assessed. CABE have put in a reasoned and somewhat critical assessment of the scheme. The owners of more sites are likely to put forward proposals and this area continues to take up a lot of the planning committee's time.



Roof lines need close monitoring in Chatham Road

100, 110 AND 112 YORK ROAD

We have welcomed the Council's very clear planning strategy documents. However, there are alarming indications that these are being ignored in practice. This site (most recent application number **2011/2950**) is just one example.

This development does not meet the requirement for this area that 'the scale and massing of development should reflect the adjacent sites' nor that 'tall buildings in this location are likely to be inappropriate'. We were delighted that the Planning Applications Committee turned down an earlier application but cannot see that this latest is much of an improvement. Again our full letter can be seen on the planning website.

CHANGES TO AGREED PLANS

We have a general concern about changes to plans both before and after a planning decision has been taken. In the case of the earlier 100-112 York Road application the applicant added a great quantity of new drawings during the assessment process.

These were posted on the website with very little clarity about how these related to earlier plans. The Wandsworth Society (under reference **2012/1444**) made this point vigorously in their letter of objection to this application. Another instance is for the Gardeners' Arms site in Chatham Road. This application was agreed despite very considerable objections by neighbours and the wider community.

We now see a number of applications which appear to

be pushing back on the agreed parameters of the development. Applications **2012/1405**, **1407** and **1490** refer.

UPDATES

Peabody's proposals for additional building at Elmwood Court, (**2012/2223**) would return the frontage to the earlier building line and improve the existing buildings and landscaping. While we don't object to a modern design being proposed, we have some reservations about the way in which this proposal will sit within the streetscape.

There is yet another application in for the site of 575C Battersea Park Road (**2012/1925**). Although much more modest than the earlier plans (all of which were refused) we are likely to object to the change of use from shop to yet another takeaway in this area.

The blight of basement excavation continues to spread with the most recent being the agreement to plans for 16 Bridge Lane (**2012/1027**).

Plans for the former Employment Exchange in Beechmore Road have been approved, including a parking lift down from the street. We expressed concern about potential noise and traffic disruption and are pleased that the Council will check this aspect of the application in detail.

Newcombe House, 319 – 323 Battersea Park Road is to be extended upwards (**2012/0531**).

Don't forget that we like to know what members think, so please do contact us if you have comments on any planning or transport matter.

planning@batterseasociety.co.uk

New investments in the north

Tony Belton celebrates two regeneration initiatives in north Battersea

In March this year there were two announcements of major significance for North Battersea. One was the Council's intention to invest £100 million in the regeneration and refurbishment of Latchmere and Roehampton wards and the other that the Big Lottery has decided to invest £1 million over 10 years in supporting the Latchmere local community. This initiative is part of the Big Local scheme.

The first thing to be said about these announcements is that they are two separate initiatives by two very different organisations and there is no direct link, either intentionally or unintentionally. They also cover two rather different geographical areas, but inevitably there is going to be some confusion between the two.

THE COUNCIL £100 MILLION

The first thing to be said about this is that the Council has not dipped its hand into its notoriously deep pockets and pulled out £100 million. What it has done is to give itself the power to raise the money in the markets using its large stock of public assets, mainly council housing, as collateral. It will not actually draw on the money until there are plans in place to spend it.

Informal discussions suggest that the Council expects to spend about £60 million in Latchmere and the other £40 million in Roehampton – the two most deprived wards in the Borough.

Deprived

To give some idea of what that might mean, the St James Grove estate (aka Castlemaine, the blue and white tower block near the bottom end of Albert Bridge Road, and Roydon Close) regeneration of 10 years ago cost about £10 million and so one might expect the Council to spend similar amounts on, say, Sporle Court and half a dozen of the largest blocks on the Winstanley Estate.

However, I think it is unlikely that the plan will be as simple as that. There are no plans as yet, but early informal discussions indicate that the Council will be looking to break up the monolithic nature of the estates



by selling patches of under-utilised land, and encouraging higher density mixed housing development.

Involving residents

The Council will, I am sure, be keen to leverage other private sector or Housing Corporation money into the area and will be disappointed, I am sure, if its £60 million has not resulted in at least £100 million's worth of regeneration over the next 10 years. But at the moment there is an almost blank sheet of paper and the real challenge for the Council, and the three Latchmere councillors, will be to try and involve residents in the development plans – that is both so important and so difficult to achieve.

I was involved in the St. James Grove regeneration and it involved many long discussions with the residents association and the architects/planners from the Town Hall. That was difficult enough, but in many parts of the Winstanley and York Road estates there are not even residents associations to work with – it is going to be a big job for the three councillors, Simon Hogg, Wendy Speck and me, to assist this process.

Targeting Latchmere

The Council is targeting the whole of Latchmere, ie the area between the main railway lines and Battersea Park and York Roads and between Wandsworth Bridge Approach and the Doddington Estate. The

investment will be aimed at physical construction work or capital investment and it will be Council led and managed.

THE BIG LOCAL £1 MILLION

The Big Local money is aimed at Latchmere ward, less Battersea Fields estate but including Badric Court and the Council blocks at the southern end of Battersea High Street.

The amount of money is much less than the council's, at £1million spread across 10 years and it will be spent on much smaller community-led initiatives. While the Big Lottery would like support from the Council, and will get it, the project will be guided and led by a Big Lottery facilitator, Helen Garforth.

Helen has been working on the project for a couple of months. Her hope and expectation is to encourage local groups to work together to establish a vision for the area and then to develop projects designed to re-invigorate the local area.

Community vision

The Big Local scheme certainly aims to be very much a bottom-up project and on June 14th at York Gardens Library Helen is organising a community vision session. Whatever the results it has to be seen in the context that the Council cut more than £100,000 this year alone in this area's youth service support at Providence House and the Islamic Centre.

One final comment: Both announcements were made six months after the August riots. No one has made any direct connection between these events and just possibly both announcements would have been made at the same time even if last August had been quiet, but the coincidental timing is at least of passing interest.

Tony Belton is a councillor for Latchmere ward.

You can see the city at sunset

After early problems, the Somerset Estate's towers are well-loved, says Ian Bull

High buildings are back in fashion but in Wandsworth their history goes back to the 1950s. Battersea has 18 municipally-built tower blocks of 14 stories or more. The first, built in 1965/6, were Selworthy and Sparkford Houses on the Greater London Council's Somerset Estate, between Battersea Church Road and Westbridge Road. The trend for high municipal flats had begun in 1957 with Sir Denys Lasdun's 16 storey Keeling House in Bethnal Green,

The GLC employed many leading architects and Somerset Estate is the work of Colin Lucas OBE, a pioneer in the use of reinforced concrete for domestic purposes. Between 1954 and 1958 he led the design of Roehampton's spacious Alton West Estate, which like many of his buildings is now listed. Lucas then set about designing blocks containing 20 stories of accommodation for more densely developed areas, including Battersea.

Striking

His design was strikingly brutal, consisting of a fortress-like infilled reinforced concrete framework cast *in situ* with the wooden shuttering rough-hewn to add texture. Two service floors sat beneath 80 flats, the whole topped by a rakish three floor machinery and tank room. The towers are seen as a series of stacked cubes containing two-bedroom flats separated by smaller floors of one-bedroom properties. Their jagged appearance marks out these buildings to this day.

Common areas had expensive terrazzo surfaces and the flats benefited from exceptionally large windows. Even the high tank rooms were allowed attractive French windows for roof access. Perhaps the most inspired touch was the very careful alignment of the blocks to give the best possible views of central London as well as of sunrise and sunset.

The GLC had intended to widely replicate this robust design yet there would be only 11 such blocks, the costs of providing the ultimate proving

too great. Selworthy and Sparkford Houses were let on Christmas Eve by estates officers Len Ledger and Brian Steward. The electricity hadn't been connected so they did their task by torchlight and without lifts. They had let the sister Westbury Estate in Wandsworth Road the day before so they must have been fit!

Neighbourliness

The GLC 'graded' potential tenants. Income, job, education, particularly the appearance and cleanliness of current accommodation were recorded and used to house like-minded people together. Somerset Estate was reserved for those with 'good' standards and many of the first tower block tenants were schoolteachers, the education authority being allowed a special quota of properties. This lettings system generated great resident satisfaction and led to the formation of a notably effective tenants association. The strong foundations of neighbourliness became a necessary asset, for the tower blocks had problems that would have rendered less happily occupied buildings barely tenable.

These concrete flats were almost totally devoid of insulation. Coupled with expansive single glazing, and a severe wind-chill on the upper floors, heat loss was enormous and

extremely rapid. Ineffective electric heating elements were cast into the floor slabs, centrally metered, and were charged for in the rent. The charge became a burden and the heating was connected to the tenants' meters, allowing some control over the bills. As electricity prices rose, fuses were removed for fear of accidentally switching on a heating system whose warmth was whipped away by the wind around the 200 foot high towers.

Condensation

Paraffin and bottled gas heaters brought appalling levels of condensation. Later 1970s fire regulations required removal of some lift lobby glazing to aid smoke distribution. Winter conditions could be exasperating and in 1982 brought the unwelcome attention of BBC television.

The estate transferred to Wandsworth Council in 1980. Despite a less discriminatory lettings policy very few unsociable elements moved in, and turnover of flats remained low, as did rent arrears. Prior to the transfer the GLC had allocated funds for gas central heating, fully enclosed lobbies with electronic smoke detection, CCTV entry-call, and three new flats on the ground floor. Completed in 1984/5 the improvements transformed living conditions. Investments in 2000/2001 saw double glazing, and the treatment of the exposed concrete framework to prevent 'spalling'. The residents *continued overleaf*

Flats benefited from exceptionally large windows



continued from previous page
bravely chose the most expensive re-fenestration option although that has, for now, cost the buildings a listing.

The 1980 Housing Act had introduced the tenants' right to buy. Many local housing staff were surprised when a particularly large number of Somerset Estate tower block occupants opted to become leaseholders. This enthusiasm was

not lost on policy makers, who were eager to encourage RTB. Somerset Estate was thus declared a 'sales area' in which all vacant properties would be sold to a waiting list of Wandsworth residents.

Logo

A budget for 'Sales Area Spend' to make the estate more attractive to purchasers allowed for some branding and the 'Old Father Thames'

logo that appears across the site was the result. By the mid 1990s most of the flats had been sold.

Today these are among London's most pleasant point blocks to live in. Not only are they Battersea's first, but thanks to their immense structural strength they will also be the last. Colin Lucas can deservedly rest easy.

Ian Bull is an illustrator.

Citizens arise!

Jenny Sheridan reports on a packed community meeting

There was whooping. There was applause. A lot of applause. Much of it even before the speaker began to speak or the children's choir to sing. With so many church groups represented it was no surprise that the Wandsworth Citizens Agenda for a Brighter Future assembly on 29 March 2012 was rather happy-clappy.

And indeed there was much to applaud. Battersea Arts Centre's Grand Hall was packed to the rafters with over 400 local people. Children and young people who rarely have the opportunity – let alone the confidence – to speak to a large gathering did so with passion and skill. The leader of Wandsworth Council and the borough police commander engaged with critical questioning.

The aim of the event was to report back on the problems unearthed by Wandsworth Citizens' community listening campaign and to seek commitments from the police and the council. The vicar of St Mary's, Simon Butler, introducing the evening said that last summer's riots showed that there were issues to be addressed and injustices to be tackled. He quoted the area's proud history of first seeing and then fighting injustice. Wandsworth is a great place to live and work in many ways, he said, but not if you are young.

The Citizens' agenda has four priorities:

1 Make our streets safer and improve relations with the police

Andy Beech from the Winstanley Estate told how his small son had found needles and blood on the floor. Drug dealing and use had become tolerable in his block, he said, but

it was not tolerable to him. He was critical of the police response. He has started street dance classes to lead young people away from drugs and violence. The borough commander pledged to work with Citizens to make Clapham Junction a safer place and to adapt patrol routes. Pressed by Simon Butler on timing for this, he said it would



happen by late September. It is this pressure on decision-makers to make commitments in front of a large group of local people that is the signature of Citizens nationally.

2 Create more jobs and work opportunities

London Citizens had campaigned for local jobs around the Olympics and had opened community job centres in churches and mosques. The request to council leader Ravi Govindia was to 'broker relationships for us with key developers ... to get local people into local jobs.' Councillor Govindia offered a seat at the table but turned down an exclusive deal with Citizens, pointing out that many other organisations needed to be involved.

3 Affordable youth activities

Local young people who had not joined last August's looting had a stake in their own community, in part because of shared opportunities and activities. A member of the Islamic

youth centre described it as a lifeline that had inspired him to want to go to university. Now its council funding is being cut. The demand was for a community centre on Surrey Lane Estate, an audit of affordable youth activity and a budget controlled by young people. Cllr Govindia's response was that an audit had already been carried out and young people can and do help to shape budgets but are not elected so cannot control public money.

4 Decent affordable homes in neighbourhoods families can be proud of

Unfortunately there was little time remaining for this important area. Wandsworth Citizens asserted that estate residents had lost trust in the council. Cllr Govindia strongly denied this. Citizens demanded annual meetings with him as leader. He referred them to the cabinet member for housing as the appropriate communication channel.

Although they achieved few commitments from the council, Wandsworth Citizens have made their mark. Impressively, they have set up residents' associations on estates, including Surrey Lane and the Winstanley, which for years the council has tried and failed to do.

Residents' associations, as Rev Butler said, roar where an individual can only whisper, they enable people to take control of their destiny and they create neighbourliness.



James Kakanyera of St Mary's Church introducing the speakers

The good old days, or were they?

Sue Decsy asked some friends to look back at the past with grey-tinted spectacles.

Nowadays Northcote Road (aka Nappy Valley) is the well-to-do haunt of young blonde mothers driving Range Rovers with a toddler in the back or chatting on their mobiles in buggy-filled cafés. But was it always so affluent?

‘The market stretched right up to Bennerley Road, and the smell from the rubbish at the end of the day was terrible. Most of the area was very mixed with a large number of Afro-Caribbeans and working class white people. There were a fair few villains, but everybody got along as long as they turned a blind eye to what was going on. People looked out for each other then. All the kids went to the local schools and people did their shopping down the Northcote. There was loads of butchers where you could buy cheap meat, and special shops for the West Indians where they’d buy salted fish and cans of strange vegetables and drinks. There was a bakers where you could buy hot corn bread and jamaica patties. Nearly the whole of Broomwood Road was black people then, the houses were rammed full of people, they used to buy them together and all the family lived together.’ **VW & MG**

Plenty of drugs

‘In the 60s there wasn’t much going on in the area as far as night life was concerned; we used to go up West to the clubs to dance or over to Eel Pie Island (near Richmond) in the late 60s early 70s. There was plenty of drugs in the area, one of the local pubs was notorious – you could get just about anything, so we would. We’d walk home over Albert or Chelsea Bridge from the West End and get a bacon sandwich from the van on the Battersea side of the river so you had enough energy to get back home.’ **VW**

‘When I first came here 25 years ago we moved into a house that was all bedsits, most of the large house were split like that, it was an area where you could live quite cheaply. There was loads of Housing Association houses which meant that you could find somewhere to live if you didn’t earn very much

money or you were a student. The houses weren’t maintained that well, you were just left to get on with it, I suppose they didn’t have enough money to maintain them – but at least you had somewhere to live and the rents were fair.

‘I remember Northcote Road in the winter, when all the stalls had their lights on, it used to be thronging with people and at the end of the day you’d see little kids and old people looking through the fruit and veg that had been left by the side of the road. There used to be a raggy man who lived with his little jack russell in one of the places where they used to store the stalls overnight. You’d see him wandering round during the day, he’d get bits of work helping set the stalls up and taking them down at night and do a bit of fetching and carrying for the stallholders.

**‘You could
get a run-
down house
and make it
habitable and
get a mortgage’**

He used to guard the stalls at night and he didn’t have anywhere to live so they let him sleep there.’

‘You’d never go on the Common (Clapham) after dark, that would be asking for trouble. Some of the boys would go up there in a gang to see if they could catch any queer blokes at it and beat them up, they didn’t think they were doing anything wrong. They used to get up to all sorts, I think the police had a hard time of it ‘cos everybody kept shtum’.

‘When I first came to Northcote Road after losing everything, we lived in one room and didn’t have a kitchen so we used to go over to Tony’s café for a hot meal (it was good and cheap). Tony’s still there, the only remaining greasy spoon. In the early 90s I used to watch the drug dealers across the road. In the seventies I didn’t feel safe walking down the road at night as a young woman.

‘Lots of the old houses were owned by the LCC or the GLC and were very badly maintained. Then Ken Livingstone came along and introduced Ken’s Lottery: you could buy a run-down house and make it habitable then you could get a mortgage.’ **SD**

Familiarity

‘We moved to Battersea from Tottenham in 1964. I used to visit before then as I had a friend in Winstanley Road and we used to drink in the Winstanley Arms. Battersea then was a solid working class place and the pub was more like the extension of someone’s living room, with people in their slippers and an easy familiarity, almost like family.

‘The area was poor and there was always permeating it the Battersea Stink, from either the glucose factory or Price’s Candles, both on the riverbank. No-one would accept responsibility. This smell was still evident in the late sixties.

‘The house where my friend Arthur rented a room was small and dilapidated and ripe for the redevelopment that occurred in the sixties. .

‘By the time Muriel and I moved to St James’s Drive in 1964 things were changing (as they were in Tottenham) with a sense that things could only get better, as indeed they did.

‘My less positive thoughts are about the loss of the old social ties and networks and the gentrification of the area. I don’t consider myself as a gentrifier but as a solid working class lad. We did our shopping on the Bellevue Parade where there were two butchers, a fishmonger, greengrocer, the Co-op, a baker etc.

‘Of course if the people all around you have the same income then you don’t consider yourself hard done by. Galbraith says being rich is earning 10% more than your neighbours or peers. So I suppose the people on the Winstanley certainly feel poorer today than their predecessors of some 50 years ago.’ **CC**
Sue Decsy works at Webbs Fine Art Gallery.

Foxes: love them or hate them?

Anti: Lucy Saunders

'That first summer, I spotted a fox in the next door garden and it was "Ooh come and look at this." Now we can't use our garden as we wish because of the family of foxes living under our shed,' says Sarah Chinchin. In the three years since she and her husband moved into their house, fox activity has increased significantly. Sarah grows her own vegetables, particularly potatoes, onions and herbs – the foxes destroy it all. While Sarah ensures her rubbish is closely protected, that doesn't stop the foxes bringing rubbish into her garden from elsewhere. She finds takeaway wrappers and bottles that have nothing to do with Chinchin family consumption in her garden every morning. When she brought home big bags of compost by bus, foxes ripped apart the bags and scattered the compost so that Sarah had to throw the remnants of bags away and couldn't use the compost. And then there's the smell.

Tunnels

Sarah's husband has used bricks to block the holes the foxes use. The foxes create a network of tunnels under the fences at all sides and have removed the bricks every time. 'They have no fear,' says Sarah. 'I don't hang washing out overnight anymore because I'm scared they will rip it down and destroy it. I don't want to kill the foxes – but I don't want them here. We're lucky our children are grown, you wouldn't want a toddler in the garden.'

Fox faeces contains toxocarasis, the round worm parasite that can, in rare cases, lead to blindness. It is most likely in children under four, because of their habit of putting things, including fox poo, in their mouths. The disease is fortunately very rare, but what is more significant is how the increasing fox population is affecting how people use their gardens.

DEFRA stopped its attempts to control urban fox populations in the 1970s, though some London

councils continued this work into the 80s. While no one is keeping official records of the urban fox population, anecdotally it seems the population is increasing.

Hazardous waste

'Last year, we'd caught six foxes in two weeks before we decided we couldn't afford to kill any more. A dead fox is considered to be hazardous waste so it costs £80 each to incinerate,' says Nigel Lee, who paid a pest control company to provide traps and shoot and incinerate each fox. Nigel reckons he has spent more than £3,000 on fox control, but that is just the start of the cost of foxes for him. His family car is a Range Rover Sport, which has had to be fixed three times because foxes have chewed cables to get at transmission fluid. By the third time, Nigel took the car to a specialist armour plating company used to working on diplomatic and military vehicles to fox-proof the cables. All this fox activity has been in the last three years – Nigel and his family have lived in the same house since 1991.

A garden can add as much as £10,000 to the value of a property and the presence of foxes can detract. Patrick Collin from Tennison Property says: 'If a seller is aware of the problem, they would be wise to confirm the existence of foxes but I do not believe it is a legal requirement. People with small children are understandably wary.' He has a fox problem of his own. 'I have a very mangy one which walks across my conservatory roof and I believe lives in the garden centre next door.'

Butterflies, bees, frogs, newts, toads, small birds and spiders can give the same pleasurable jolt of recognition that we are all part of the natural world, even though we live surrounded by buildings. It is unlikely that it would ever be possible to eliminate foxes in London entirely. Reducing the fox population so that a fox sighting is once again a rarity would support wildlife, protect children and domestic pets from



disease, allow people to enjoy their outdoor space to the maximum and protect the value of their property. I am looking for balance, not a pogrom. *Lucy is a freelance writer and PR and lives in Earlsfield.*

Pro: Sara Rackow

I have a very basic feeling that we interfere too much with nature and that things have a way of naturally sorting themselves out. Under this umbrella of feeling come foxes. I have read all the anti-fox propaganda to try to get a balanced view but that upsets me, so I will just list a quick pro-fox antidote:

Foxes add to the wonderful variety of wildlife in London.

They recycle waste and clean up the streets of throwaway food in the early hours.

Fox dung dries up very quickly to become throwaway fertilizer for the garden.

They eat snails that destroy garden plants.

Why does the fox attract such strong reactions from people? As far as possible we should live and let live, as most animals do most of the time, except when they are driven by necessity and instinct to eat and to find protection.

Our dislike of foxes usually comes from too much personal contact with them. People have varying reactions to having to live in close proximity with wild creatures. Personally I am happy to let them roam and I like seeing them.

Unlike others I've never had my rubbish ripped open because the contents of my recycling bags are clean and any foodstuff gets put in a strong bin that they cannot open. The noises the foxes make interests rather than irritates me. I have had foxes digging up bulbs in my garden and leaving dung tracks but instead of feeling affronted I take into account the time of year, the fact that they have to feed their cubs and their natural instincts to mark territory. I do not feed them myself but I know people who do and I don't disapprove.

If you do not like foxes living nearby it is always possible to find a compromise, such as being more responsible with food waste, wearing ear plugs and limiting the damage. There are products on the market designed to deter foxes which emit a sound that they do not like although personally I feel we are surrounded by enough noise already. You can also try natural remedies like human urine to put them off.

Foxes are not especially cruel or vicious. Their instinct is to attack and stop a chicken fluttering rather like

a cat with a mouse. It is extremely rare for a fox to attack pets or babies. People and dogs attack them more often than vice versa. Cats can look after themselves in general and a cat can easily see off a fox. In nature the weakest are always the most vulnerable and that has nothing in particular to do with foxes except as victims of man.

I am from the school of live and let live. We all have to eat and life is a struggle, especially for foxes. And I can't resist adding: the cubs really are very sweet.

The NHS in Wandsworth: how can you get involved?

Jeremy Ambache and Jamie Gillespie describe the new health structures

The Health & Social Care Bill recently approved by Parliament will result in changes to the way health services are provided in Wandsworth. The Bill abolishes Primary Care Trusts which have commissioned health services, and replaces them with groups of GP commissioners. Our local group will be known as Wandsworth Clinical Commissioning Group (WCCG). They will operate out of offices in Putney Bridge Road. The Group will be led by GP Dr Nicola Jones from the Brocklebank Health Centre and she will be supported by GPs from other practices in the borough.

Public health

The new WCCG will take on full commissioning responsibilities from April 2013, when the Primary Care Trust is finally phased out. The current commissioning budget for services is £600m. The budget transferring to the CCG will be smaller as specialist services will be commissioned by a new National Commissioning Board.

The WCCG has already committed itself to prioritising the following ways of working:

- Developing an active patient and public involvement strategy in the three localities of the borough (Battersea, Wandle and Putney/Roehampton)
- Working to strengthen public health, which is becoming a responsibility of Wandsworth Council, through the new Health & Wellbeing Partnership, leading to closer integration of health and social care



St John's Health Centre, Wandsworth

- Engaging with every GP practice in the borough in order to develop improved services. Work is already underway for conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease; sickle cell anaemia; diabetes

Also, it has agreed the following three-year list of priorities

prevention (early diagnosis, screening etc)

sexual health

substance misuse

services for children

services for older people

long term conditions

mental health

end of life services

maternity services

moving services from hospital to community

The responsibility for involving patients and the public currently lies with Wandsworth Local Involvement Network (LINK), to which we both belong. The new Bill aims to strengthen public involvement by creating a new body called Healthwatch and giving Wandsworth Council responsibility for setting this

up. The Council has not yet decided what form Healthwatch will take but it is due to come into being by April 2013.

The WCCG has already demonstrated its commitment to patient involvement by working with us in the Local Network to identify a strategy, and we already have a seat on the WCCG shadow board. When the WCCG formally takes over its budget next April, there will be one seat on the board for a representative of Healthwatch and one seat for a member of the public.

Patient groups

Wandsworth LINK and CCG are working together to activate a system of patient involvement which means that every GP practice in the borough will have a patient group in place. These groups will survey patient opinion and make recommendations to improve services within their practices. Each patient group will also be able to feed in their views to locality groups within the borough and eventually influence the commissioning of services.

So if you would like to get involved and have your say, you can ask to join the patient group in your own GP practice.

Join your local involvement network at www.wandsworthlink.org.uk or call 020 8516 7767

Jeremy Ambache and Jamie Gillespie are members of the executive of Wandsworth LINK. Their views are personal and not the views of any organisation.

Great Bus Journeys of the World No 3

Mike Roden rides the 344 from Clapham Junction to Liverpool Street (well – almost)



As I settle in my seat, Emma Hignett reassures me that I'm on the correct bus. She is the actress chosen in 2006 to be the voice of London's iBus system, providing passengers on London's 8,000 buses with information. The system has over 30,000 announcements covering 19,000 bus stops on the 700 routes managed by TfL. Anyway, while I've been boring you with statistics, we've followed the route described in the last edition of *Battersea Matters*; up Falcon Road and along Battersea Park Road, then at Latchmere Road, we head into new territory as the bus carries straight on. We stop outside Dovedale Cottages – a neat sheltered housing development which started off as two almshouses in 1841. The big hole opposite used to be a busy branch of Travis Perkins.

Two London icons

This section of Battersea Park Road is very mixed. The Old Imperial Laundry retains a glimmer of its Victorian splendour, but now houses various interior design, media and creative companies. Otherwise it's takeaways, convenience stores and restaurants, with the odd specialist store, a fireplace shop and a printers for instance. There is a slightly grim air about the forest of council blocks which is the Doddington Estate, though a poster for a Jubilee Lunch organised by the Residents Association is a welcome sign of community effort. As we pass Queenstown Road, the chimneys of Battersea Power Station come into

view, and at the same time I catch sight of a cat staring wistfully from an upper window of the Battersea Dogs and Cats Home. Strange to have two London icons so close to each other – one still providing the same vital service it's been offering since 1860, the other just as uncertain of its future as when it was decommissioned in 1983.

As we approach Vauxhall Bridge we are surrounded by building sites. The Tideway riverside scheme is going ahead despite vigorous opposition, and the Embassy Gardens development will soon be taking shape. By 2015 we should see the US Embassy rising into the sky. With plans for part of New Covent Garden Market to be redeveloped, this new Nine Elms City looks set to rival Canary Wharf and Docklands, dominated on its edge by St George's Wharf Tower. At 181 metres high with 49 storeys, it will be the tallest residential building in the United Kingdom.

Yellow amphibians

The 344 trundles on past the half-finished skyscraper into the chaos of Vauxhall Cross, and circles round the stainless steel bus station with its ski slope whose solar panels provide a third of the bus station's electricity. This is a major transport hub, with tube and rail stations, and a little further to the east a slipway provides access for those yellow amphibious craft of the Duck Tours, which (I'm told) were all used for the D-Day landings.

We're now in Spooks Land, as we pass the MI6 Building designed by Sir Terry Farrell in 1995, when the existence of such an organisation was never officially acknowledged.

There's a great view across the river here with Tate Britain, the Millbank Tower, and Westminster up ahead. I catch a glimpse of Lambeth Palace as the bus approaches Lambeth Bridge with its obelisks surmounted by stone pinecones - ancient symbols of hospitality. They do resemble pineapples of course, and urban legend links them to the botanist John Tradescant who probably introduced the fruit to Britain. We're near his burial place now as we turn down Lambeth Road and pass the Garden Museum (formerly the Church of St Mary-in-Lambeth).

We can now see the impressive cupola of the Imperial War Museum. The museum was founded during the First World War and moved to its current site in 1936. The building had been home to Southwark's Bethlem Hospital from 1815 to 1930. Better known to the public as Bedlam, until the early nineteenth century this was notorious for allowing visitors to pay to come and view "the freaks of Bethlehem".

Now I'm bound for another gigantic traffic circus. The bus passes London's Southbank University, and then we are in the middle of Elephant and Castle, the name of course being a corruption of Infanta de Castile. Well actually, that's nonsense. The name derives from a coaching inn



on the site, the earliest surviving record of its use dating from 1765.

The bus has suddenly got very crowded, and Emma Hignett delivers a message I've not heard before about smoking being forbidden on all London buses. No doubt the driver spotted or smelled some transgression and has pressed the correct button.

Marshalsea

Turning toward the City, en route for Southwark Bridge, I see the London Fire Brigade Museum, based in Winchester House, which was once the residence of the Brigade's first chief officer Captain Massey Shaw. We pass Marshalsea Road near the site of the Marshalsea debtors prison where Charles Dickens's father spent some months in 1824. The author himself lived in nearby Lant Street and many of the streets round here have been given Dickensian names, though the only one I glimpse is Copperfield Street. Then I catch sight of Leigh Hunt Street, and wonder if this was named after the poet whom Dickens immortalised as the malingering Harold Skimpole in Bleak House. In fact this cul-de-sac has another claim to fame in that it is London's shortest named street at only 36ft long.

By now the bus is nearing the river. The current Southwark Bridge was built in 1921 and is generally held to be the least busy bridge in London. This may be partly because access to many of roads leading from it was cut off by the so-called Ring of Steel put in place to protect

the City from IRA terrorism, and strengthened in recent years after September 2001, and then July 2005.

If you want to walk down to Tate Modern, or the Globe Theatre you should alight at the stop just before the bridge. There's a good view of St Paul's as we wait here to allow passengers off, and then Emma Hignett tells me that the destination of my bus has changed! After a few moments worrying that I won't be able to deliver my promised article to the editor, I discover that we're going only as far as Monument Station. Since this is only two stops from my original destination that's not a problem, though when I go downstairs it's clear that most of the tourists staying put on the top deck haven't got the message. I presume they'll work it out.

311 steps

Wren's flame-topped Monument commemorating the Great Fire of 1666 is the tallest isolated stone column in the world – 202ft high and is positioned 202ft from the spot in Pudding Lane where the fire is supposed to have started. I haven't climbed it since the recent restoration work. I gather the lighting on the spiral staircase has improved, but there's no way to get to the top other than by climbing the 311 steps. No time to do it now.

I follow the bus route along Bishopsgate – which is a rather exhilarating mixture of modern skyward soaring office blocks apparently made entirely of glass, and old buildings like the church of

Sights to see:

Battersea Cats' and Dogs' Home and Battersea Power Station, Vauxhall Cross, Lambeth Palace, The Imperial War Museum, The Monument and the Shard, Bishopsgate Institute

St Botolph without Bishopsgate, unscathed by the Fire of London but rebuilt in 1729. In the second world war it lost only one window, but in April 1993 was badly damaged by the IRA's Bishopsgate bomb. It was fully restored in 1997. St Botolph was the patron saint of wayfarers and it would probably be appropriate to pop across the road to say thanks for my safe arrival, but instead I join the seething mass of humanity around Liverpool Street Station in search of a cup of coffee, and a trip home on the Circle Line.



Dodransbicentennial? The RCA celebrates theirs in Battersea

Aine Duffy outlines an Olympian year for the world's oldest art college

We're just halfway through the year, but already 2012 has been highly significant for the RCA. Think '2012' and the London Olympics spring immediately to mind. Not known for the sporting prowess of its students (although six of them are carrying the torch along the route), nonetheless the Royal College of Art has had plenty of Olympic glory. Earlier this month, LOCOG revealed the podia and medal- and flower-bearer costumes to the world's press – all designed by RCA students.

Indeed, RCA students have been involved with the London games since the beginning, with projects on everything from designing uses for recycled building materials to creating art works to beautify the site. British design duo and RCA alumni Barber Osgerby are the team behind the 2012 Olympic Torch.

Three centuries

2012 is also the College's dodransbicentennial – its 175th anniversary. As part of a year-long series of celebrations, later this autumn the RCA will present a major exhibition in its Kensington campus. Featuring work by faculty and students spanning three centuries, the as-yet-untitled exhibition will provide a fascinating insight into the world's oldest art and design school in continuous operation.

And this September, the Dyson Building in Battersea will be officially opened. The building will be home to the College's acclaimed printmaking and photography programmes, as well as a new lecture theatre, gallery space, InnovationRCA and business incubator units for graduate designers. The third and final stage of the RCA's SW11 campus, the Woo Department for Applied Arts, is due for completion in 2015.

For those Battersea residents who just can't wait until the official opening however, June 20 marks the opening of the Royal College of Art's graduate show – and the chance to have a sneak preview inside the magnificent new Dyson Building. The ground floor gallery, facing onto Battersea

RCA fashion graduates unveil their Olympic creations

Bridge Road, is planned as a public-facing venue for student work, and what better way to launch the gallery than with SHOWRCA, the College's major annual show.

Last year was the first year that all the RCA's Fine Art programmes (painting, photography, print-making and sculpture) exhibited together on what is now known as the Battersea Campus.

Adding to the space in the Sackler and Sculpture Buildings, RCA students also took over Testbed 1, the vast studio and gallery space on Parkgate Road, for the duration of the show.

Groundbreaking

This year, visitors to the new campus also have a chance to experience some of the ground-breaking design work for which the College is famous. The design products and design interactions programmes will exhibit in SW11 alongside the four fine art programmes. The College plans to use Testbed 2 as well as the Dyson Building's gallery and the Sackler and Sculpture buildings to launch the careers of some 200 young artists and designers. Much of the work will be for sale or commission, and collectors are advised to visit early.

As Dr Paul Thompson, Rector of the Royal College says, '2012 sees the RCA fashion and design engineering students play a very prominent role in the London 2012 Olympics; a recent graduate, Spartacus Chetwynd in the shortlist for the Turner Prize; and alumnus Sir Ridley Scott's new film Prometheus opening to critical acclaim. It's difficult to move without seeing an RCA related event!'



SHOWRCA 2012

20 June – 1 July (closed 29 June);
10.00am – 5.30pm daily
Free admission

Royal College of Art, Howie Street,
and Kensington Gore.

Free shuttle between the two
campuses operating daily.

www.rca.ac.uk

Aine Duffy is head of media relations
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Review: London: city of contrasts

Jenny Sheridan reviews an exhibition at the Wandsworth Museum

London in the mid 19th century shared much with today's city. Its public face was busy and expansionist with grand modern buildings, but tucked around the corner was poverty and despair. The exhibition at Wandsworth Museum *Portrait of London: historic photos of London and Wandsworth 1857 – 1965* shows both aspects and also documents the huge progress made, especially after the Second World War.

The London-wide part of the exhibition is divided into three historical segments. Photographs from the 19th century reveal some of the buildings and countryside lost as London modernised – who now could envisage the rural retreat of Hornsey? – as well as the general prosperity. But a dirty and exhausted woman cradling a sick child – not her own – in exchange for a crust of bread reminds us of London's darker side. The picture could illustrate a Dickens novel.

Compulsory education

Information boards help us understand the reasons behind the growth of photography. Compulsory secondary education brought in in the 1920s led to a literate population



top Clapham Junction Entrance, St John's Hill c 1906, © Wandsworth Heritage Service
above Marshall's Stables, Upper Richmond Road, 1897
©Wandsworth Museum



hungry for newspapers, which demanded illustration provided by better and better cameras.

Come the 20th century there are lively photographs of fruit porters in Covent Garden Market and tugs on the busy Thames. Suffragists proudly return the camera's gaze; a beautiful model sits in an art nouveau studio. From the war an amazing photograph shows the moment a

façade collapsed after a bombing raid. From this stage on the pictures are technically better, including a backlit study of a crowd listening to an orator at Speaker's Corner.

Villages

The last section of the exhibition is devoted to the eight villages of Wandsworth: Balham, Battersea, Earlsfield, Putney, Roehampton, Southfields, Tooting and Wandsworth. Captions are bang up to date, including a reference to the successful SW11TCH campaign to change Google's mind about Clapham's place on the map. There are historic pictures of the inside of the Power Station and of vast crowds in Garratt Lane at Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee in 1897.
Open Tuesday to Sunday 10am – 5pm
Late opening first Thursday of every month: 5 April, 3 May, 7 June, 5 July and 2 August until 9.30pm
The exhibition closes 12 August.

OTHER EXHIBITIONS

Pumphouse

The Pumphouse gallery in Battersea Park is celebrating the Diamond Jubilee with an exhibition of memorabilia and souvenirs of the royal family lent by local people. Biscuit tins, celebratory mugs and plates are joined by written anecdotes and photographs of individuals holding prize royal possessions.
Until 24 June.

Battersea Park Road: from stallions to dog-groomers

Battersea Park Road houses a dog grooming salon, cafés and pubs, a large housing estate and several shops. But less than a century ago, where the Doddington Estate now stands, it was home to up to eighty

Foundling Museum

In the 18th century, the Vauxhall Gardens (*Battersea Matters* summer 2008) stood near where the future Nine Elms development will rise. A new exhibition at the Foundling Museum explores London's premier pleasure grounds. Treasures include the solid gold pass to the Gardens given to William Hogarth as well as paintings by Gainsborough, Rowlandson and Canaletto.

horses, including four black stallions bought from the Royal Mews. These were the property of Henry Smith a dynamic funeral director whose business was known all over London. Described as 'a live wire and an outstanding example of a self-made man' you can read about Henry Smith and his firm in a fascinating article in the spring issue of the *Wandsworth*

Curator David Coke explains, 'Without Vauxhall, modern art and music would be quite different, and aspects of our lives that we take for granted – street lighting, policing, mass catering – would have taken much longer to develop'.

Until 9 September. The exhibition is supported by a series of talks and concerts.
www.foundlingmuseum.org.uk

Historian. And the community gardeners (see page 15) can only dream of that Doddington manure.

The autumn issue of the newsletter will celebrate 50 years of archaeology in the borough and will also feature a survivor's account of the V2 strike on Usk Road in January 1945.
For copies of the newsletter, contact Neil Robson nrogroson@tiscali.co.uk

Drought, what drought?

Valerie Selby explains the effects of the drought and the rains on the borough's parks and wildlife

There has been a lot of confusion about the fact that we are currently in a drought situation and yet there has been a steady stream of rain outside our windows for what seems like an age.

If there is a long drought in winter it may not be obvious to us as the weather is cold and the sky is gloomy, but it can cause problems for public supply if groundwater and reservoirs don't refill. A short drought in summer, on the other hand, is very visible as the soil and small streams dry out, affecting gardeners, farmers and the environment. For those of us who manage parks and green spaces both types of drought have an impact. We rely on winter rain to top up the reservoirs that we draw on for watering new planting and to fill lakes and ponds. We then need summer rain to keep plants alive during hot weather and to replenish water features as they evaporate.

Consistently dry winters have left reservoirs and indeed groundwater substantially below normal levels. Where we normally water in newly-planted areas, recently-planted trees, sports pitches, cemeteries and allotments, we have been banned from doing so. We cannot fill ponds, lakes and fountains unless they are home to managed fish populations.

Borehole

So what can we do? We are extremely lucky that when Battersea Park underwent restoration a large irrigation tank was installed below ground. This was plumbed into our 'grey water' system, where the water used is drawn from a borehole not the main public supply. We have an annual licence which limits the volume of water we can draw from this borehole, but as long as we stick within that limit we can use this water for appropriate purposes. Usually we switch as needed between filling the irrigation tank (which is then used to feed all the automated irrigation in the restored festival gardens areas of the Park) and filling the lake. It is our ability to keep a steady flow of water through the lake in recent years that



'Pretty rum do, this weather.' Meerkats in Battersea Park Childrens's Zoo

has vastly improved water quality and aquatic ecology.

During this period of hosepipe bans and possible drought orders we are additionally using the borehole to fill bowsers attached to our maintenance vehicles. These will be used to water priority areas such as trees still in their establishment phase, and newly planted areas (such as the Winter Garden in Battersea Park). Where possible we have not planted up summer bedding displays and we have altered our management practices on some sports pitches to try to retain grass cover and to reduce the amount of watering required.

Fish health

In King George's Park we also have a borehole, of much smaller capacity, which we can continue to use to keep the lake topped up although this remains difficult as this lake evaporates a lot of water in warm weather. Elsewhere in the borough we are monitoring water levels in lakes daily and keeping an eye on fish health. If we see signs of distress in fish we have the ability to ask for dispensation to turn the public water supply on to 'top up'.

The rainfall this spring has greatly helped us in the short term. Most newly planted areas and bedding have received just about sufficient water to keep them going without the need for us to bring borehole water to them via the bowsers. It has also kept lakes topped up and the cool weather has limited any algal blooms which usually affect us in the summer. The downside is that some nests have been flooded out with first broods being unsuccessful both on lakes and on land. However it is for these kinds of situations that many birds are geared up to laying two or more broods each year – it's a kind of preparation for the inevitable.

Where I expect the fluctuating rainfall levels to have had greatest effect is in insect populations such as butterflies and dragonflies which need the dry weather to fly, mate and lay eggs. However we won't fully understand the implications of this wet spring till the end of the year when all the recorders send in their records from throughout the summer. Only then will we know if these species managed to delay emerging until the drier weather and shifted their usual patterns to later in the season. Here's hoping. *Valerie Selby is principal parks officer for Wandsworth Council.*

'The garden is for all of us'

Community gardens are flourishing. In the first of a series of articles, Jenny Sheridan explores two gardens in Battersea

DODDINGTON

You go up the metal stairs behind Tesco on Battersea Park Road and onto the roof of the business centre and you find – what? Not a messy roofscape but the Doddington and Rollo community garden. In this surprisingly large space there are flowerbeds (lupins, sweet williams, roses), apple trees, a grassy area for children to play on, and beds full of herbs, salads and vegetables. At the back there's a small maze planted with strawberries and lavender.

Garden club

'It used to be a no-go area,' explains Louisa Knight, the young chair of the garden group. 'Anti-social behaviour meant it was locked most of the time. A couple of years ago we did a listening exercise via London Citizens and realised people could see this big jungly space from their windows but they couldn't get into it. So we started a garden club and five or six of us started to open up the garden every Saturday to clear up the mess. We got grants from the council and Capital Growth and volunteers from Regenerate UK and City Lights. In late 2010 residents started to get more involved, especially when we held community events.'

In 2011 the council's Big Society grant enabled them to buy tools, a shed and a polytunnel. Louisa sees the garden as a potential catalyst for other community activities like after-school classes, or a neighbourhood café. She would love it to be accessible more often.

Five popular events were held in the garden in 2011 and there has been no recent anti-social behaviour. While up to 150 people attend family events, surprisingly few residents regularly make use of the garden. Louisa is hopeful of change; 'By the end of the year I hope most people will have visited or enjoyed the produce or got involved in some way. We're working to build partnerships with other organisations.'

For our Jubilee Big Lunch there will be four residents' association, two churches, Tesco and other local

businesses like the children's nursery.'

'The garden has great possibilities for sharing experience,' says Graham Harris, chair of the Doddington West Residents Association. 'The estate went into decline in the 70s and 80s and the council recognised this and poured money in. Now it's highly desirable and there is a mix of tenure, with both leaseholders and tenants. People queue to buy here but there are still pockets of real poverty. There isn't quite as much community involvement as I'd like, and sharing and comparing different ways of growing potatoes or herbs is a way for people to come together.'

Why do people get involved? Louisa says, 'I grew up in New Zealand and when I came to England I was amazed by the seasons – spring is just so exciting! My grandmother was a keen gardener but my main involvement is because I love this community and I like giving people the opportunity to do something they love. Most people here don't have a garden. They can do as much or as little work as they like – the work and the produce are available for everybody. Or they can just relax.'

Snail hunting

Hadas, another volunteer gardener, wants her daughter to appreciate that food comes from the ground, not the supermarket, and to learn to love fresh healthy food. When I visited, Hadas was clearing entrenched weeds from a potato bed. I joined in, pulling bindweed from the strawberries and infant beetroot.

There are the usual problems any gardener faces, from dandelions to pests. Louisa says that, as well as running around playing, children have become enthusiastic slug and snail hunters.

I know if I lived in one of the flats I would be out there every Saturday, weeding and planting or just watching the bees, their legs baggy with pollen, negotiate the cabbage flowers.

'We have come a long way in a short time, considering we only started last year,' says Louisa. 'It's early days and there's a lot to do.'





above **Doddington residents enjoy their garden**
right **Flower meadow and vegetable beds at Bramford Road**



We need such a lot: plants, tools, volunteers to help with the gardening, money.' The garden group has now become a separate body from the residents' association and can fund-raise on its own account.

The garden club's new poster gives the basic community gardening message: 'The garden is for all of us.' *The garden is open year-round on Saturdays 10am - 1pm and in the summer on Tuesdays from 4 - 8pm. Contact louisa.knight@gmail.com*

BRAMFORD ROAD

The Doddington, like most community gardens, relates to residents of an estate or community. Bramford Road is different. It is in a public park and it grew out of a project, Transition Town Wandsworth. The Transition Town idea is to develop resilient communities, able to adapt to the results of climate change and the end of cheap oil supplies. Initiatives are bottom-up rather than top-down. An example is people coming together to develop under-used public space and turn it into something productive and beautiful.

TT Wandsworth wanted to make such a garden but had no site in mind. Steve Frazer, one of the group's founders, says that discussions with the council were long and arduous, but in 2010 the council allowed them to take over the planting of a space in a small park near the junction of Old York Road and the Trinity Road roundabout. Most of

the park is maintained by the council and planted with shrubs for ease of maintenance. It is mainly used as a cut-through for walkers and cyclists. The TT group has a long strip of land under the railway line.

Meadow

Before the community garden took it over, the area was little but trees and dusty, barren earth. Last summer, it suddenly exploded into technicolour as a wildflower meadow came into bloom, delighting passers-by. Steve Frazer says, 'We wanted to make the space as multi-functional as possible - attractive, ecologically rich and productive. The meadow was very popular. It flowered from June to early autumn.' There is also a woodland area and flower borders where local people have donated plants or have grown them from seeds in a windowsill gardener scheme. There are raised beds for vegetables, full of council-donated compost.

It is a challenging site: there is no access to water and no storage. The volunteer gardeners collect water from Homebase up the road, an arduous task. A local resident lets them store their prison-restored tools in her hallway.

'When we started we had massive enthusiasm but little experience and no money,' says Steve. 'We have had

about £2,000 all told in grants. The council's eco-fund has given us a grant to grow drought-tolerant plants so we have planted lavender, rosemary, sage and other tough Mediterranean plants. We plant to encourage bees too.' Steve has noticed a marked increase in earthworm activity since they started gardening a year ago.

This is less obviously a garden with an active local community than some others. Popular events have included action days for planting, a seed swap and taking part in Open Garden Squares Weekend this June.

'We want to grow relationships with local organisations,' says Steve, 'but we've all got full-time jobs.' Steve is a landscape architect ('I work in an office so it's good to get out and actually work on the land'). Miranda, another core team member, works in television.

Pub meetings

Decisions about the garden are made at meetings every two or three months, usually in a pub. The group would welcome more local involvement. 'There is a lot to do,' says Steve. 'You can spend as much or as little time as you want. As well as gardening it would be great to have help with the website, marketing, fund-raising or building community relationships.' They would also welcome donations of plants, especially vegetables and winter or early-flowering shrubs, to extend the growing season.

The gardening times are 11.30 - 2 on Sundays throughout the year and Wednesday evenings from 7.30 in the summer. But the garden is open-access (they think it is the first publicly accessible garden on public land in Wandsworth) so would-be gardeners can donate their time at other times too.

www.projectdirt.com
ttwandsworth@hotmail.co.uk