

VPE All Residents' Meeting, September 2023

Details

Held at Mycenae House
5 September 2023 at 8pm

Present – Committee Members

Alex Wheeler – Chair
Laura Cade – Joint Secretary
Gill Fairbanks
Clare Barry
Virginia Clements – Treasurer

Apologies received:

Mick Cooke – committee member
Alberte Lauridsen – committee member
Leo Fletcher – Ward Councillor

Community Values

Alex Wheeler explained that following the AGM the committee would like to ask residents to follow this code of conduct during our meetings in order that everyone gets a chance to speak and have their views heard:

'We all have the right to be listened to and respected. We therefore ask that we avoid talking over each other, and put up our hands and wait to be brought in by the Chair. Given the length of the agenda, it may not be possible for all views to be heard on each subject, so we may need to note down those who weren't able to speak and contact them outside of this meeting.'

Approval of Previous Meeting's Minutes

Harry Miller pointed out an omission in the AGM's minutes. HM had asked that a vote be taken on the following motion which was seconded by Roger Irwin:

'This meeting of the Vanbrugh Park Residents' Association condemns Greenwich Council for the unnecessary and inept attempt to prevent the growing of plants and flowers outside residents' homes. All notices to this effect should be withdrawn immediately.'

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved.

ACTION: Laura Cade to amend the previous meeting's minutes to reflect this omission and update the website.

Achievements since the AGM

Estate Management

Many long-term examples of neglect have been remedied since the pot plant issues occurred and the AGM meeting where council staff and councillors were present. AW gave an update on progress made since that AGM meeting in June:

Drain surveys to Combe Mews and drain repairs / back cutting – complete.
Drain surveys to rest of the estate is on-going. The council is currently working with Hardy Drainage to put together a programme which is due to start by the end of September.

Cleaning of the undercroft garage area at 1-19 Combe Mews is complete.
Pigeon proofing of the undercroft garage area at 1-19 Combe Mews is complete.
Paving the entire estate and accommodating new planters as requested by the Gardening Club is on-going.
Gutter clearance to all properties on the estate commenced on 1 September.
Bauder liquid membrane and repairs to concrete steps across the estate will be undertaken. The council has raised orders and will start work w/c 18/9/2023.
Ridge Structural engineers have inspected the crack at 1-19 Combe Mews and will crack monitor for the winter / spring. This will help the council decide on the appropriate repair.
Ridge Structural engineers also inspected the expansion joints to the walkways on the balconies of the two blocks 2-20 Combe Avenue and 9-21 Vanbrugh Park Road. They had no concerns that any structural defects were present.
The removal of balcony plants has been put on pause for the moment.
5G Mast application defeated again.
New, larger bin in swings area.

LC commented that she had spoken to the Greenwich Society who were open to lobbying and creating a policy about acceptable standards as regards our conservation area and 5G mast applications. The Westcombe Park Society may take a similar view.

Duncan Brown said the council don't have to agree to such requests from companies like Hutchison and they could be blocked at source.

ACTION: Laura to follow up with Greenwich Society.

ACTION: Duncan Brown to find out what how we can ensure the council blocks telecoms requests or requires them to do subterranean works.

Next issues to be addressed

Communications

LC asked those present about the most effective way the Residents' Association can contact residents. There is a WhatsApp group people can request to join. Posters with news and events are posted in the noticeboards across the estate. Word of mouth is encouraged. We welcome suggestions about different ways for the Residents' Association to communicate with residents.

HM requested the posters pasted on bin doors be removed as they are disintegrating. Other residents suggested there could be more noticeboards next to bin sheds which would maximise how many people would see community updates.

LC advised those present that VPERA committee member Virginia Clements updates the website with news and minutes as soon as possible. Our website is a useful resource of information and contacts: www.vanbrughparkestate.com

ACTION: Committee members to remove the pasted posters from across the estate.

ACTION: VC to look into the cost of new noticeboards.

Maintenance and report jobs

AW reported that if non-urgent repairs relating to external decoration or maintenance of buildings on the estate are not carried out within 5 weeks please email the Residents' Association and we will chase for you. hello@vanbrughparkestate.com

The VPE website now has direct link to the RGB council repairs reporting page:

https://www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/info/200179/building_work_repairs_and_improvements

Refurbishment of Westcombe Court

AW reported that works are expected to start before April 2024 and last for 12 months. Surveys are now underway. Leaseholders are already making payments towards the works.

Westcombe Court leaseholders made Freedom of Information requests to gain more information about the scope and cost of works.

Next site walkabout

The date of the next site walkabout is tbc.

Stephen Davies offered to participate in next site walkabout and contribute his expertise as an architect.

HM asked if the walkabout could include checking the growing crack in the east water tower which is on the Vanbrugh Park Road side of the stairwell to Combe Mews. There are serious cracks which could indicate subsidence.

KH commented that the tree at back of #2 Combe Avenue is cause for concern and she is aware the resident in that property has already raised the issue a number of times with the council.

GF mentioned a tree previously fell and damaged a house on the estate. A survey of trees could be useful.

Duncan Brown raised the issue of crumbling exterior plasterwork on the side of one property. After some discussion it was agreed the VPERA could/should raise this issue with the council because it is a council property. If it were a private freehold property, then it would be the freeholders' responsibility to repair the unsightly cracked wall on the side of the house.

ACTION: LC will request an estate-wide tree survey.

ACTION: CB to ensure east water tower cracks are looked at during next estate walkabout. Andy Eglinton to be contacted

ACTION: LC to report the crack plaster on the house reference during the meeting.

Service Charges Update

AW reported the Residents' Association has an on-going campaign to get service charges for leaseholders to be consistent between households – if anyone has concerns please report to committee.

Following a back and forth with the council with regards to service charges, it was discovered that RBG had been charging numbers 1-19 Combe Avenue for the cleaning of all the bin chambers on the estate. They have said this will be rectified but we are still in negotiations with them as to the best way to do this.

Moving forwards bin cleaning charges will be assigned to the blocks as following:

1-19 Combe Avenue, 1 bin; Combe Mews, 1 bin; Vanbrugh Park Road, 1 bin;

Westcombe Court, have their own bin. The rest will be absorbed by the council.

With regards to the differences in bills with items e.g. patrols, apparently some of the older leases had a clause in them meaning that new charges could not be added, which is why there are different bills for newer leases.

Differences in insurance: still under discussion.

High block charges for electricity: still unanswered by the council and we will follow up.

High price for asphalt: still under discussion.

We are still awaiting confirmation of reallocation of some jobs to charges to estate rather than back where that makes sense.

With regards to the new charge for patrols/CCTV we have asked what we would be getting from this over and above what we would expect from the police anyway. If they are intending on providing

CCTV/patrols we have asked for details of when this will be implemented. So far no response. The VPERA will follow up.

We have asked them to waive their management fee on this occasion.

AW – invited all leaseholders to consider speaking to neighbours in order to compare service charge bills and identify discrepancies.

Imelda - thanked HM for all the work he's done for leaseholders.

DB – asked if HM's knowledge of leaseholder support services and rules could be posted to the VPE website.

HM – recommended an advice organisation which provides telephone appointments for leaseholders in need of guidance and information.

Beth Higham-Edwards– requested the committee help bring leaseholders together so they can have a separate conversation about service charges affecting them. She also commented that leaseholder associations can find out about works and gain information that individual leaseholders cannot. She expressed residents' concerns about costs and standard of works; she would like to see a cost breakdown before works start.

HM – advised that the council must provide leaseholders with a Section 20 notice if costs over £100 accruing to leaseholders is likely. Leaseholders have the right to comment on such plans before the council proceeds.

ACTION: CB to look into leaseholder associations.

ACTION: CB to reach out to all leaseholders on the estate and invite them to a meeting to discuss issues relevant to them.

ACTION: VC to list contact details for leaseholder organisation on the website. It is an advice organisation providing telephone appointments for leaseholders in need of guidance and information.

ACTION: Doug and VPERA to continue to push RGB for resolution of service charge queries.

Freeholders fund

LC reported that generally freeholders do not pay service charges as they paid to be released from the obligation to do so at the time of purchase. It is proposed to set up a fund where freeholders and anyone else can contribute to support estate projects and events Residents' opinions are sought on this proposal.

Social Events

Homes across the estate will be participating in this year's Open City events. The estate will be hosting events on Saturday 9 September and on Saturday 16 September we will have a picnic on the lawn from 4pm. Friends and family welcome. Please bring your own picnic provisions. A further consultation about the memorial/celebration of Emily Wilding Davison will be held during the afternoon.

Gill Fairbanks has designed cards with images of the estate which were passed around to all those present at the All Residents' meeting to raise money for projects. Would people like other merchandise such as a t-shirt or calendar? Please let the committee know.

[Halloween event?] – children’s fancy dress Sunday 29th 16.00. residents to volunteer to do trick or treat

Our Christmas event is scheduled for 17 December. If you want to donate to the raffle, please get in touch. We are open to suggestions on how the event should be done. Email hello@vanbrughparkestate.com

In 2024 we will celebrate 60 years of the estate (the estate was completed in 1964) at the summer party. This is a very important landmark for us all and we want help and suggestions to make it a huge success. 1960s fancy dress for all (prizes for children) and a 60s themed evening dance in the laundry area have already been proposed. Please email the committee with suggestions.

Gardening Club/Greening Update

Planting updates

LC reported the Greening Committee has worked with Greenwich and Rineys to get 8 new communal flower beds, as well as flower beds for 8 houses, installed alongside the paving improvements. This was turned around very quickly to suit the council's timetable, and we are very grateful to everyone involved and look forward to seeing them take shape.

We will be splitting the remainder of our funding on buying the initial plants for the 8 communal beds. We propose that we have a session before the works are finished, to decide on which plants to buy as well as take ideas for future phases.

Though if anyone has an itch to start planting in the meantime, please do! It's amazing to see some have started already!

We are starting to look for more funding for the next phases. Project ideas are very welcome as it can help us look for the appropriate funding sources. Please email hello@vanbrughparkestate.com

More trees have been secured from the Woodlands Trust. 2022 plantings mainly growing well.

The new saplings will be planted in the Northern Woodland in the autumn, as part of our plans to create a softer/wilder edge to the estate to separate from the road.

An apple tree walk will be planted for Louis and Victoria Alexander. 7 apple trees, financed by the collection arranged by residents, are being bought from Woodlands Farm on Shooters Hill Rd so we can remember Louis and Victoria and everything they did for the estate. The proposal to plant them along both sides of the path on the estate side of the Vanbrugh Park West swing area.

Gorse bushes will be planted either side of Combe Mews to deter fly-tippers.

The grapevines planted either side of the laundry area are getting established. The committee and Laura Davies thanked all those who worked so hard to plant the vines.

We have planted 50 lavender bushes around the estate and many of them have survived the summer heat.

If you have a little bed outside your house or flat, please plant things in them that you would like.

The Gardening Club will accept contributions that have outgrown back gardens.

Residents are asked to help in the upkeep of both the community beds and the ones near their own houses/flats.

The council have promised the Gardening Club supplies of bulbs and the labour and seeds to plant a wildflower meadow between Combe Avenue and the dips. Advice on species is being sought from head gardener of Greenwich Park.

Again, we welcome ideas about planting and the VPERA will arrange a workshop for residents to discuss what they would like. Date tbc. A community planting day is also tbc.

IC- commented that speed is of essence re planting because the empty smaller beds are attracting kids and dog mess.

Emily Wilding Davison update:

We have been developing ideas about how to memorialise EWD over the last year, and will be having the final workshop of this phase on 16 September 2023 – everyone is welcome.

We will send out a flyer with more information on the ideas so far and would love everyone's feedback as part of our consultation. We are thinking about some seating and some sort of awning in the laundry area between Combe Avenue and Combe Mews. If the ideas are going in the right direction, we will look for funding for the next phase where we can develop the designs further.

IC expressed concern about antisocial behaviour and restrictions to children playing in the area if the laundry area were changed as per the above suggestion. LC advised her to come to the consultation session on 16 September to discuss further.

AOB

Gill – raised the issue of a potentially unstable tree tilting over the path to the dips which is directly across from Combe Mews. The tree is being strangled by ivy and could be a hazard if it falls over.
Ally – raised the issue of a leaking portaloos outside #5 Combe Mews.

ACTION: CB will call Andy Eglinton at the council re the leaking portaloos asap.

ACTION: to photograph leaning tree by the path onto the dips and raise this with RBG