

Friends of Mycenae Gardens

NEWSLETTER NO 1 SUMMER 2011

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www.MycenaeGardens.org.uk

Welcome to our first newsletter

The Friends of Mycenae Gardens launched in March. Membership is free so why not encourage neighbours to join? We have a website and have suggested a maintenance plan to the Council.

The Westcombe Society and Steiner School Multicultural Day gave us an opportunity to meet many of you.

We are now working on a management plan and we hope to invite you all to share our thoughts on this soon

A formal planning application from Greenwich Council to build children's play equipment in the grounds of Mycenae House is the reason we are distributing our first newsletter and it's your first chance to get

actively involved. Please do, as we cannot be sure what you want for the gardens if you don't let us know.

The committee plans to object to the application, based on the views collated so far, in the hope that we can secure play provision better suited to the garden's and children's needs.

Do you want a playground in this beautiful historic vista?



This is the magnificent row of Plane trees planted as a landscaping feature of the Georgian villa, Woodlands, which was built in the 1770s, when America was fighting for its independence.

It offers tranquillity and shade in a setting that is awe-inspiring, and was planned centuries ago to complement the Grade II* listed building, as part of the pleasure grounds.

It brings a special character which isn't matched anywhere else in the gardens and makes a distinct contribution to the wildlife.

Man-made structures would intrude on this historic design and the wildlife that depends on being undisturbed. Equally, concentrated activity risks additional root compaction, potentially damaging the ancient trees.

This is what Greenwich Council proposes for here



This is the play equipment that Greenwich Council would like to install in exactly this spot.

It consists of two items, but one comprises six connected modules. The larger unit is almost 14 metres long and more than two metres high. The more compact one is just under 2 metres high and is about 4.7 x 3.7 metres in the proposed area.

The location is unique in Mycenae Gardens as a prime example of a special habitat – a woodland glade, an area open to sky and sun, but completely surrounded by trees. It is ideally suited to the butterflies and other colourful insects which enjoy this spot.

It provides an unmatched area for them to bask in the sun, and then feed on the nectar from the flowering wild plants, which also need this sunny spot to flourish. The plants in turn are an ideal place for the insects to lay their eggs and ensure good feeding for their caterpillars.

The area has been maintained totally free of insecticides by the council for many years.

Our users

Children love the gardens and safely engage daily in imaginative adventures. While play equipment is important for children, the committee genuinely feels that other locations and types of equipment would be more suitable, so we are opposing the plan.

Some of the wildlife that will be affected by the proposal



Butterflies close to the proposed play equipment: left to right Comma, Small White, Spotted Wood and Holly Blue

Four more views of the affected area



The effect of dappled light through the trees lends a special enchantment to the view, characterised by its stillness



Massive historic Plane tree limbs sweep down to within two metres of the ground. Planned play equipment is taller than that



The historic aspect

Mycenae Gardens are a remnant of the pleasure gardens associated with Woodlands, the handsome 18th century villa built for John Julius Angerstein in the 1770s, and now a school.

Landscaped parks and gardens were a feature of gentlemen's houses at that time and, unfortunately, all that survives in the grounds from that era is the row of enormous London Planes.

The largest trunk measures an impressive 5.6 metres, giving a probable age of around 250 years. The tree with the widest limbs has a canopy more than 30 metres wide.

These are majestic trees, as good as any Plane in Greenwich Park. They were intended by the Georgians to impress, and standing beneath them today has a profound effect.

These are stately trees to complement the stately home, Woodlands, which, as a building, is given full legal protection.

The practical aspect

Mycenae Gardens already suffers from erosion because it is so popular. The lawns are worn through and the area proposed for the play equipment is either entirely bare because of tree shading, or, as can be seen above, threadbare turf.

Play equipment use will also risk extra compaction of the soil around the tree roots, which could cause them harm.

The natural history aspect

Mycenae Gardens has been designated by Greenwich Council as a Site of Local Nature Conservation Importance, identified as site NC51.

Describing Westcombe Park conservation area, the council acknowledges the grounds "comprise a mature garden with trees, dense shrubberies and grassland with a diversity of habitats for common birds and other animals."

While the species in this portion of Mycenae Gardens are not globally threatened, nor especially unusual in Britain, they are important for the neighbourhood and deserve protection.

They provide a reservoir of creatures that visit surrounding gardens, bringing pleasure and helping to pollinate flowers, shrubs and trees.

Most importantly, the range of species adds immeasurably to the biodiversity of the area, and Greenwich Council has acknowledged the importance of fostering biodiversity wherever possible.

The day details of the plan were published four different species of butterfly were photographed next to the proposed playground, taking in the sun's warmth (see front page).

They are Comma, Small White, Spotted Wood and Holly Blue. They all require peace and quiet to flourish.

None would be able to thrive here if this quiet spot was transformed into a place where children noisily and vigorously play, as would only be natural if this equipment were built in this beautiful spot.

Make your voice heard about the planning application

Greenwich Council needs planning permission to go ahead with the scheme and has set a deadline of August 17 for comments on the planning application.

It's very simple to share your views.

Simply go to <http://bit.ly/LLuVK> and search for application number 11/1557/F and add your views or write to London Borough of

Greenwich, 5th Floor Planning, Crown Buildings, 48 Woolwich New Road, London SE18 6HQ quoting the proposed development at The Grounds of Mycenae House, Mycenae Road, Blackheath, SE3, Reference Number 11/1557/F.

The plans can be seen at Blackheath Library, Old Dover Road, Blackheath, SE3 7BT.

Find out more about the Friends of Mycenae Gardens and let us have your views at www.MycenaeGardens.org.uk