



Planning Group Review 2021

Executive Summary

- An increase in volumes of planning applications during the year, up 8.5% to 649, of which 321 relating to trees (210 relating to pruning).
- Effective procedures and systems in place to enable us to efficiently review planning applications. We have also improved our engagement with neighbours and neighbouring amenity societies.
- All applications in our area are examined. After this triage a 85 applications were examined in detail (compared to 42 the previous year).
- Excluding trees 69 objections were submitted which resulted in 23 refusals (8 the previous year) and a further 4 applications withdrawn, giving a 50% success rate. A further 15 are awaiting decision.
- Regarding trees 16 objections were submitted. One application was withdrawn but the others went ahead.
- The end result is more nuanced. Our intervention also leads to the applicant modifying the application or the Planning Officer imposing conditions. This is particularly true in relation to tree applications where the tree officers have limited powers to refuse
- It is also noticeable that in a number of cases the planning officers' interpretation of the planning rules was more conservative than our own.
- Outside reviewing individual applications other strategic activity has involved reviewing the proposed Lewisham Plan and also the government's planned planning regulation reforms. Although the extreme high level reforms envisaged have been shelved for the moment significant changes in respect of permitted development have been implemented.

Commentary

From our database - Review of the last 12 months

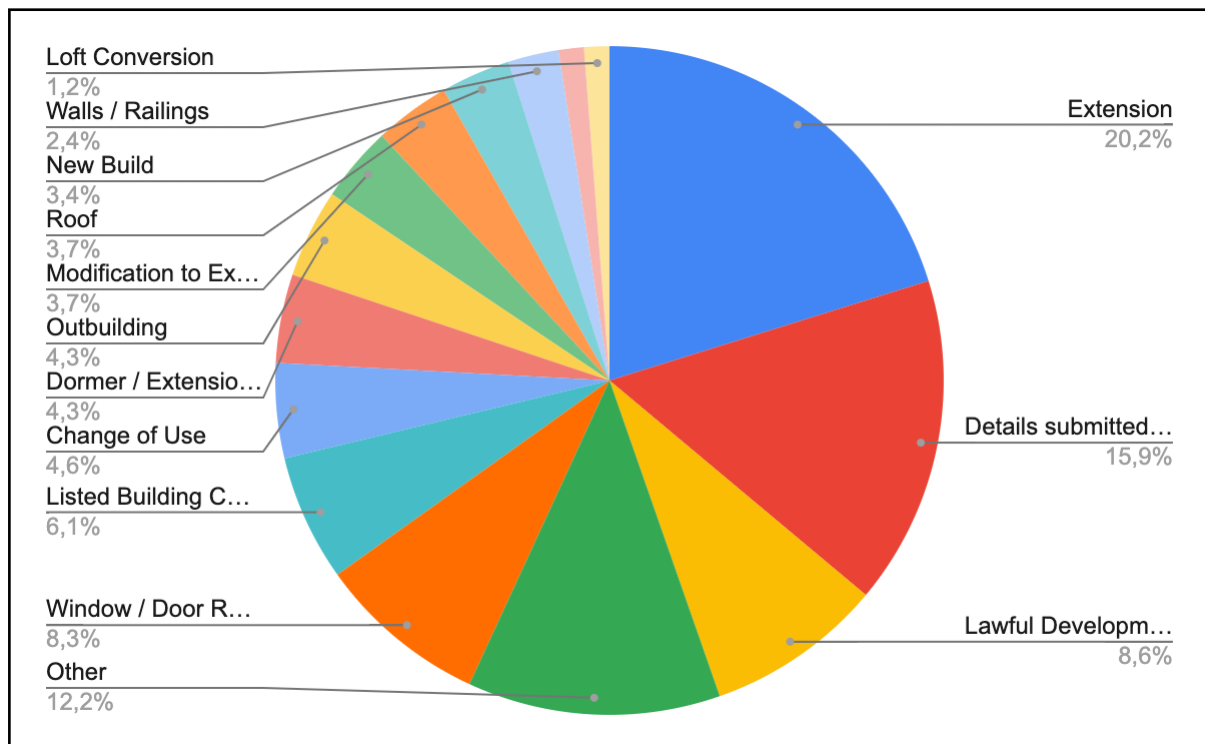
Our database is constructed from 'scraping' the planning portals of Greenwich and Lewisham councils. It is used to keep a record of planning applications in the area we follow and also to construct our weekly email report of new planning applications and decisions. The councils are not always prompt in adding applications and decisions to their portals and so we have had to learn how to work round this to make sure that cases are not missed.

Although there is a focus on applications to which we object, in engaging with the respective Councils we always try to be constructive including recognising examples of developments which might be encouraged.

In the 12 months to 09/01/2021 598 planning applications were recorded in our area of which 327 were in Greenwich and 271 in Lewisham. In the 12 months to 09/01/2022 the numbers increased by 8.5% to 649, of which 363 in Greenwich and 286 in Lewisham. By far the largest number of requests were for trees (321 or 49.5% of the total).

These statistics do not reflect the fact that in other cases our intervention has led to planning applications being modified and the Councils imposing conditions on their approvals. This is difficult to analyse without expending significant time analysing individual decisions.

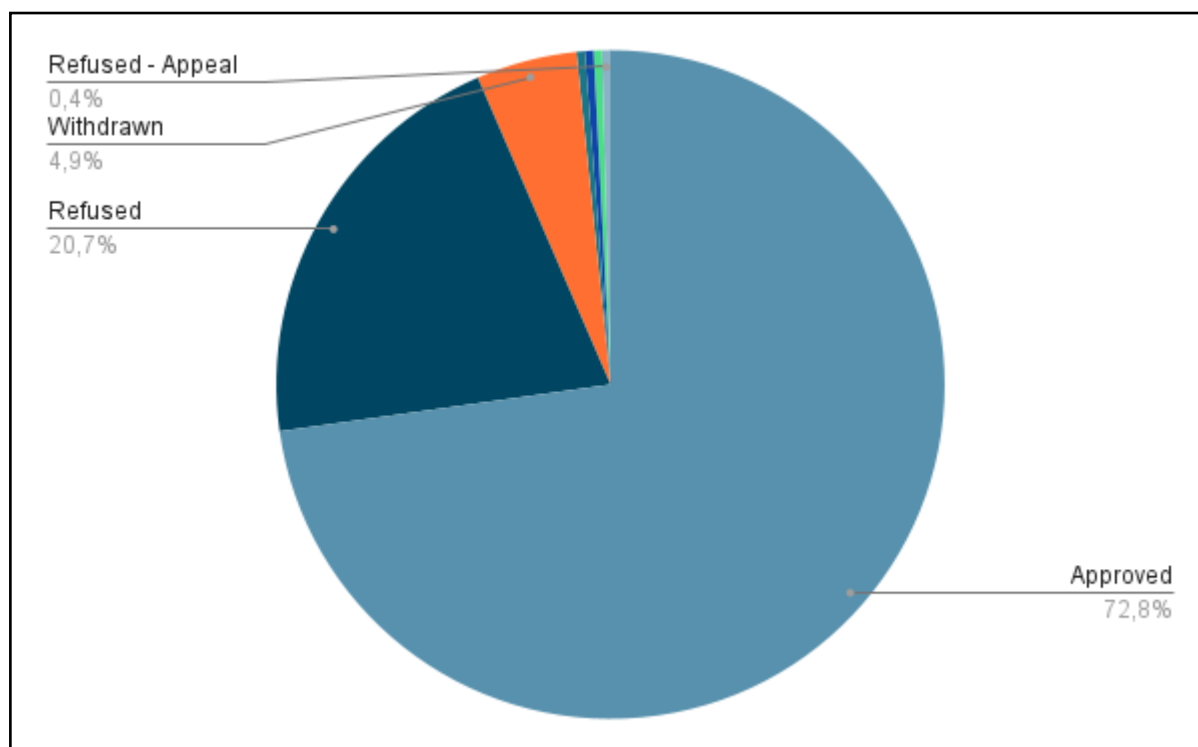
The global breakdown, excluding trees, is as follows:



Incomplete labels: Details submitted in relation to a planning condition, Modification to existing Planning Permission, Dormer / Extension, Listed Building Consent, Window / Door Replacement and Lawful Development Certificate.

The Other category includes: conversion to flats, garage/car port, large development, outbuilding, repairs, signs and fascias.

The outcome of decided applications (excluding trees) was as follows:



Incomplete labels: Approved with Conditions and Refused - Appeal Dismissed

In reality, more approvals may be subject to conditions but to detect them all a very fine examination of approvals would be required.

All applications in our area are examined. After this triage a further 85 applications were examined in detail (compared to 42 the previous year). 69 relate to buildings and 17 trees.

Excluding trees the breakdown is as follows

	<i>Borough</i>		
<i>Objection</i>	Greenwich	Lewisham	Grand Total
Comment	3	3	6
No Action	3	2	5
Objection	33	25	58
Grand Total	39	30	69

Below is the breakdown of the above applications by request type:

	<i>Borough</i>		
<i>Request Type</i>	Greenwich	Lewisham	Grand Total
Change of Use	2	1	3
Conversion into flats	1		1
Details submitted in relation to a planning condition		1	1
Dormer / Extension in roof	2	3	5
Extension	17	8	25
Large Development	1		1
Listed Building Consent		4	4
Modification		1	1
Modification to Existing Planning Permission	1	2	3
New Build	6	4	10
Other	1	3	4
Outbuilding	2	1	3
Signs and Fascias	1		1
Walls / Railings	3	1	4
Window / Door Replacement	2	1	3
Grand Total	39	30	69

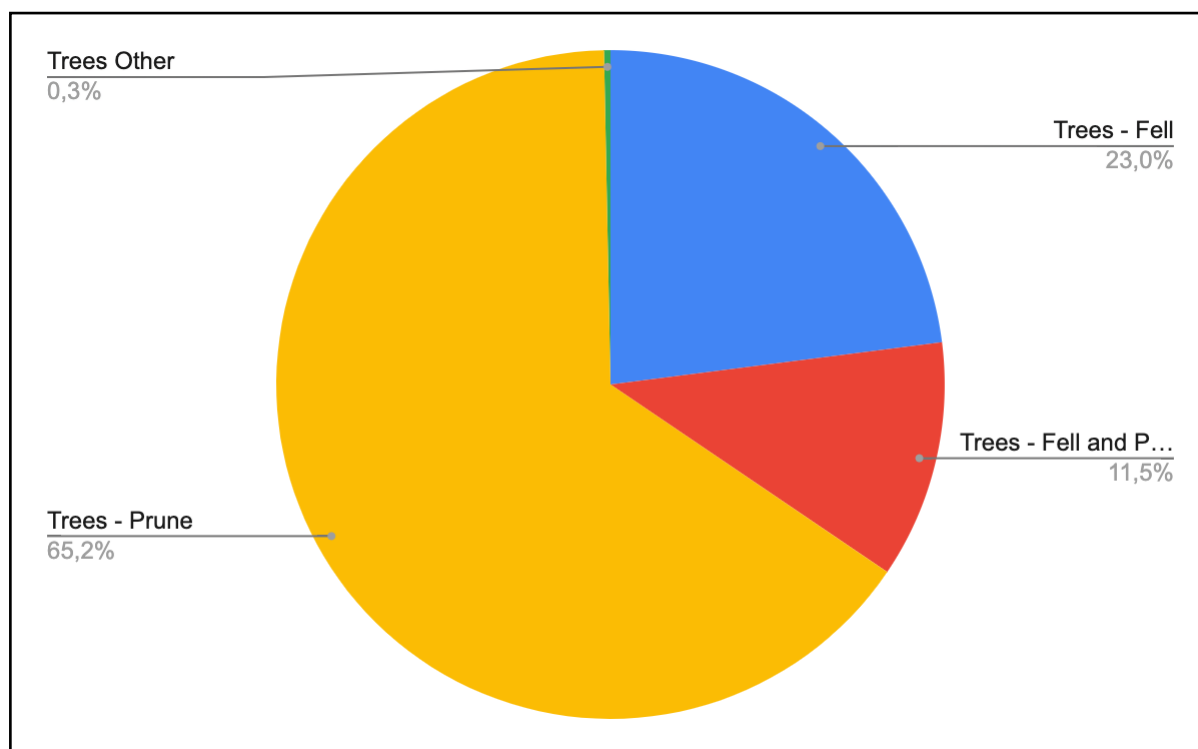
And below the decisions on the above:

	<i>Borough</i>		
<i>Local Authority Decision</i>	Greenwich	Lewisham	Grand Total
Awaiting Decision	8	7	15
Approved	18	8	26
Approved with Conditions	1		1
Refused	7	15	22
Refused - Appeal Dismissed	1		1
Withdrawn	4		4
Grand Total	39	30	69

Excepting those awaiting a decision, 50% of the applications to which we objected were refused or withdrawn. Total refusals were 23 compared to 8 the year before.

Tree Applications

In total there were 321 tree applications (192 in Greenwich and 129 in Lewisham).



Incomplete labels: Trees - Fell and Prune

Most of these applications concerned pruning. Excluding pruning the position is as follows:

<i>Local Authority Decision</i>	Trees - Fell	Trees - Fell and Prune	Trees Other	Grand Total
Approved	5	2		7
Raise no objection	59	32	1	92
Raise objections	1			1
Withdrawn	2	1		3
Grand Total	67	35	1	103

A further 8 are awaiting a decision.

We made 16 objections relating to tree applications in the year. One was withdrawn but the others went ahead.

Very few tree applications are refused but we are often able to obtain improvements and less drastic action through our actions and liaison with the respective tree officers. It should be noted that the Council's ability to refuse or apply conditions on tree applications is very narrowly constricted as compared to building applications.

Tree applications can be very variable and some single applications relate to a large number of trees.

Bear in mind also that other applications, for example extensions, may have an important impact on trees. This may be hidden and relies on our vigilance to identify such situations and comment and point them out to tree officers.

Other Activity

In addition to our work on individual applications, major issues in the last twelve months has been reviewing and commenting on the new Lewisham Plan and considering the impacts of the government's (shelved for the moment) plans to water down planning regulations.

Lewisham and Greenwich only have one part time tree officer to cover planning issues relation to trees for the whole borough. They are stretched. Our tree specialists have worked hard this year to improve engagement and communication with the tree officers and to encourage them to view The Blackheath Society as a resource to support them in their work.