



Registered charity number: 1196292

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# PLANNING GROUP REVIEW 2022

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## Executive Summary

- Broadly speaking our coverage area is that of the Blackheath, Blackheath Park, Belmont and St Stephen's conservation areas. We limit our coverage of the Westcombe Park area, as The Westcombe Society is active there, but we work in collaboration with them where appropriate.
- We aim to be constructive our approach to the councils and gain credibility in consistently targeting and framing our limited number of objections well. We endeavour to ensure that we do not oppose applications in an uninformed and unjustified way.
- All applications in our area are examined. After this triage a 88 applications were examined in detail (compared to 85 the previous year).
- Excluding trees 52 objections were submitted which resulted in 22 refusals (23 the previous year) and a further 4 applications withdrawn, meaning that the local authority agreed with us in relation to 50% of the applications where we took a position. A further 10 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 One application was withdrawn but the others went ahead.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 further work on the Lewisham Local Plan, in particular to prevent even taller tall buildings with the objective of challenging overdevelopment generally and protecting views from the Heath in particular; work on the retrofit debate (improving the energy efficiency of buildings subject to conservation protections), triggered by a case in Telegraph Hill; and work with other Lewisham amenity societies to improve public engagement and the working of the Lewisham planning process.

# Review of Planning Applications in the 12 month period to 09/01/2023

The work of the Blackheath Society Planning Group involves some 10 volunteers. We look at issues of planning policy and scrutinise all the planning applications received for our Blackheath area.

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.

In the 12 months to 09/01/2023 668 planning applications were recorded in our area of which 350 in Greenwich and 318 in Lewisham. This compares to 649, of which 363 in Greenwich and 286 in Lewisham in the previous year.

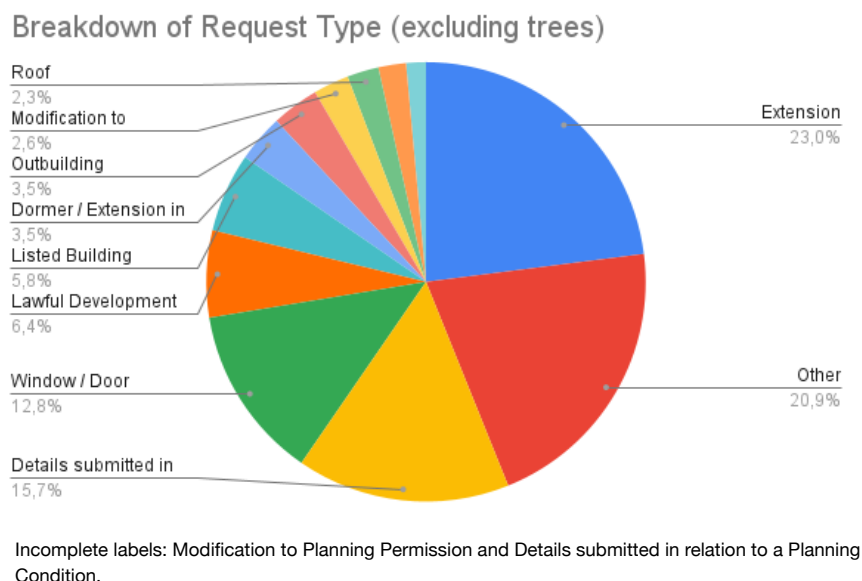
Although there is a focus on applications to which we object, in engaging with the respective Councils we always try to be constructive including recognising examples of developments which might be encouraged. Very few tree applications are refused but we are often able to obtain improvements and less drastic action through our actions and liaison with the respective tree officers.

The Councils' ability to refuse or apply conditions on tree applications is very narrowly constricted as compared to building applications. The 'raise no objection' numbers disguise the fact that in a high proportion of the cases where we have written to the council the original application has been modified to something much more acceptable before the end of the process.

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

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

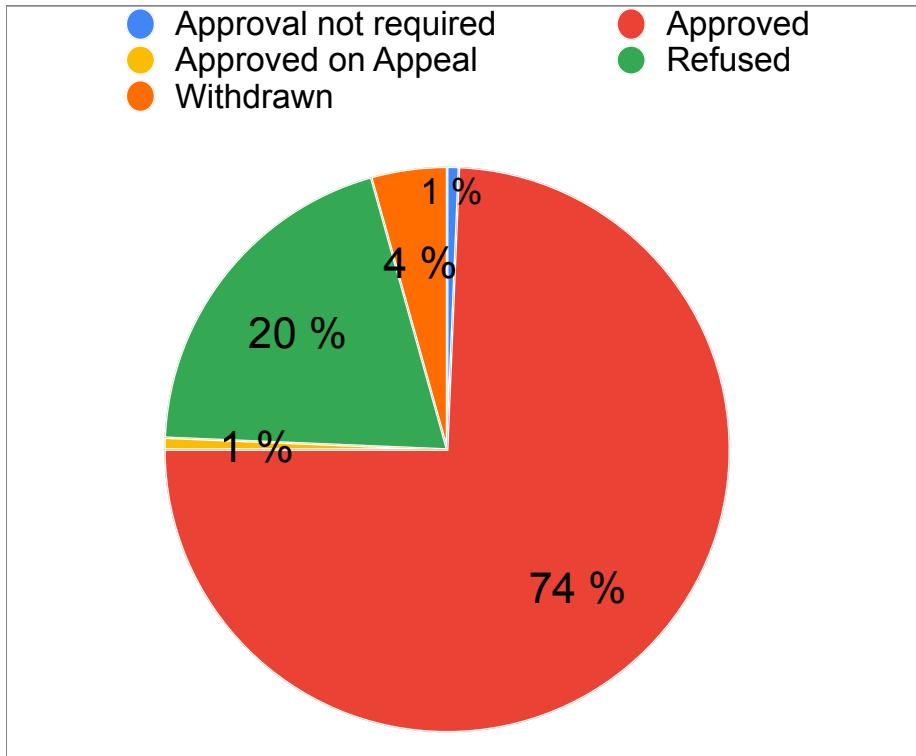
the largest number of requests were for trees. The global breakdown, excluding trees, is as follows:



Our response to applications has become much more nuanced in the last year. We make more submissions focusing constructively on conditions and less on pure objections.

It is also worth noting that some major applications eg Leegate can involve considerable effort in the year without a conclusion, since Leegate will be decided in 2023.

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



Note that the councils are quite robust in their approach. 25% of applications were refused or withdrawn (usually an indication that there is a problem with the application and it is likely to be refused).

All applications in our area are examined. After this triage a further 88 applications were examined in detail compared to 85 in the previous year. 62 relate to building applications and 26 to trees.

Request Type	Greenwich	Lewisham	Total
Details submitted in relation to a planning condition	2	0	2
Dormer / Extension in roof	3	1	4
Extension	10	12	22
Large Development		1	1
Lawful Development Certificate	1	0	1
Listed Building Consent		5	5
Loft Conversion	1	0	1
New Build	4	0	4
Other	3	6	9
Outbuilding	2	0	2
Redevelopment		1	1
Trees - Fell	4	13	17
Trees - Fell and Prune	0	4	4
Trees - Prune	0	5	5
Window / Door Replacement	0	10	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>88</b>

Action taken on the 62 cases (excluding 26 tree cases)

Action	Greenwich	Lewisham	Total
Comment	2	5	7
No Action		3	3
Objection	24	28	52
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>62</b>

Decisions on these applications (excluding trees)

Local Authority Decision	Greenwich	Lewisham	Total
Approval not required		1	1
Approved	9	16	25
Refused	10	12	22
Withdrawn	3	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>52</b>

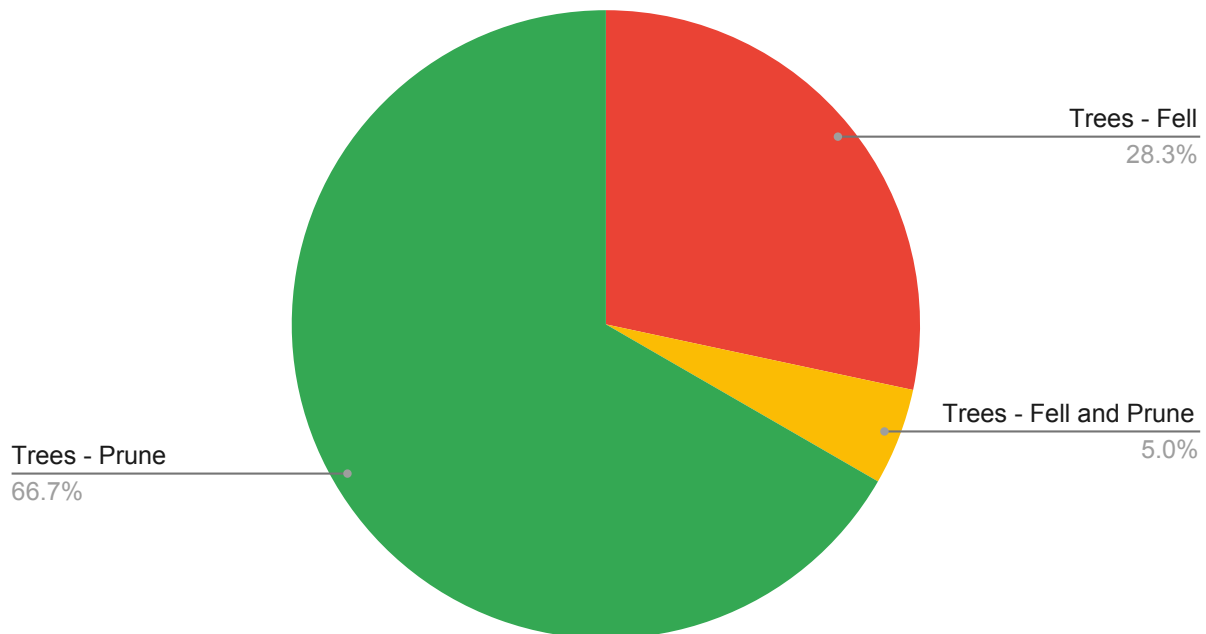
10 applications are awaiting a decision.

Excepting those which are awaiting a decision 50% of the applications on which we commented were refused or withdrawn which is consistent with the previous year.

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

## Tree Applications

Tree Applications by Type



Most of these applications concerned pruning. Excluding pruning the Councils' decisions are shown below:

Local Authority Decision	Trees - Fell	Trees - Fell and Prune	Total
Approved	9	1	10
Closed internally	3	2	5
Raise no objection	66	13	79
Raise objections	3		3
Refused	1		1
Withdrawn	5		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>103</b>

Action taken on tree applications:

Action	Greenwich	Lewisham	Total
Comment	1	2	3
Objection	3	20	23
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>

Decisions on tree applications examined in detail:

Local Authority Decision	Greenwich	Lewisham	Total
Approved		1	1
Closed internally		3	3
Raise no objection	1	16	17
Raise objections	2		2
Withdrawn		1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>24</b>

Two applications in the above table are awaiting a decision.

## Other Activities

We reviewed and commented on the Lewisham Local Plan (and Prospect for Blackheath) in 2021. We made further comments on the version issued in 2022 along with the Tall Buildings Addendum, with criticism for the increase in maximum heights in certain areas, notably Leegate, but these seem to have been ignored. Stressing the adverse impact of views from the Heath we sought to get some protection for Blackheath. Lobbying resulted in the temporary withdrawal of the latest Local Plan draft and the reinstatement of the lower height limits before the Reg 19 version was approved for consultation (coming soon).

The main other area of policy last year was the retrofit debate, started by a case in Telegraph Hill involving external insulation.

I think we actually received a substantive, if insubstantial, response to the 30+ planning process suggestions for improvement made by all the Lewisham amenity societies in 2021, but by the time we received them in 2022 the agenda had moved on!

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 Councils' ability to refuse or apply conditions on tree applications is very narrowly constricted as compared to building applications. The 'raise no objection' numbers disguise the fact that in a high proportion of the cases where we have written to the council the original application has been modified to something much more acceptable before the end of the process.

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