

# View from the house

**We were favoured this week by a visit from arts minister Tessa Blackstone, who came down to see the work being done by the Westway Project.**

It was overdue recognition, not only for the imaginative and energetic workers with Westway, but also for the many schools, youth workers and indeed young people who have put their time and skills into it over the past couple of years.

The Westway team started off locally with a project to brighten up the underside of the motorway as it cuts through North Kensington (hence the name, obviously).

Even though I belong to that highly exclusive club of fans of the Westway's architecture, I can see only too well that the paths alongside it have become dark and dingy and sometimes dangerous (the latter usually being a result of the former).

The Westway Project cleaned up, painted and lit up along strips of the motorway, such as around Acklam Road.

More recently, the project has led teams of schoolchildren and young people in mural and mosaic design and creation, and the finished products shine out in such places as the top of Barlby Road, in communal areas on the Wornington Green estate; in the play area on the Brunel Estate and on the wall of the Venture Centre in Wornington Road.

Next up is, I believe, a project for the Dalgarno Partnership.

The Westway Team and I were keen not only to show the arts minister the finished product but also to give her some sense of what went into it in each case, and some of the benefits.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this is not the educational element, although the youngsters did learn about the worldwide and millennia-old story of mosaics and murals, but the extent to which sometimes quite disaffected and even anti-social youngsters felt a sense of pride and ownership of community art.

One striking piece of evidence in support of this is the fact that, in an area where, sadly, graffiti and damage to communal property is all too common, Westway's art projects remain undamaged.



REGENT'S PARK AND KENSINGTON  
NORTH LABOUR MP KAREN BUCK

Indeed, the Wornington Youth Project's passionately-committed youth worker Barran Hulme tells with pride about how, when one mural did get 'tagged' by graffiti, the young people who had designed and constructed it went on a detective mission to locate the culprit.

Another practical but important benefit is that by lighting up the mural decorating one of the entrances into Wornington Green, the whole area immediately feels safer.

I don't want this all to sound like the script for a Broadway musical. Community art will not save the world, but I have no doubt whatsoever of the contribution art and good design can make in lifting people's spirits and improving the quality of life in a neighbourhood, and that involving people, especially young people, can create an important sense of ownership and unleash creative talent.

I hope the Westway Project goes from strength to strength, and that we deepen and widen the understanding all our policy makers have about the importance of art and design.