



# NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

## Ruth O'Keeffe - Chair of Friends of Lewes

Welcome to the Friends of Lewes Spring Newsletter which introduces our new Treasurer - Melanie Gregory and Trustee Bronagh Liddicoat together with news of our activities and events to come.

Look out for details of the webinar on the future of Lewes High Street and our Coffee Time Talks.

Read about the sterling work of our Planning and Tree Groups plus our plans for this year's Heritage Open Days which we are all looking forward to visiting in the Autumn.

My very best wishes for a healthy and happy Summer,

Ruth

## Our new Treasurer & Trustee

### Melanie Gregory, Treasurer

I have lived in the Lewes area for the last 30 years, moving here when my husband was offered a new job. That job has long since gone, but we love it here so have never considered moving on.

I am a certified chartered accountant (FCCA) and have specialised in working with charities and non-profit organisations in East Sussex since I qualified in 2002. Prior to that I worked in international business development for a number of market-leading organisations; I chose to retrain as an accountant in order to bring up our two daughters.

I have a keen interest in Lewes, its history and heritage and look forward to working with The Friends of Lewes as Treasurer, to support its aims to keep Lewes special.

### Bronagh Liddicoat, Trustee

Bronagh is a Chartered Civil Engineer who read Civil Engineering at the University of Edinburgh, along with undergraduate Urban Design and Regional Planning.

Her career in the construction industry, which she enjoyed immensely, was mainly in the maritime and airfield sectors, both in the UK and abroad.

In recent years, she led STEM Sussex in supporting employers in the science and engineering sectors in SE England to engage with their future workforce, whilst working with young people and teachers in schools in raising awareness of STEM career path opportunities.

Despite being brought up in rural Ulster, Bronagh became aware of Lewes at an early age. Her seventh birthday present was the Eve Garnett children's book, *'In and Out and Roundabout – Stories of a Little Town'*. And so, she first learnt about 'Twittens, leading off the High Street...', often 'between high flint walls' and Mr Steggles' house which was hexagonal, 'originally a windmill'. No mention of the Conservation Area!

Bronagh and her husband moved to Lewes just over 35 years ago and have enjoyed bringing up their family in a town which proactively looks to the future but with a healthy curiosity about its past.

She has been involved with a number of local organisations, including Lewes Childrens' Book Group and, more recently, Lewes STEMfest and Lewes Light.

Bronagh has been aware of the positive impact of the work of The Friends of Lewes over the years and was honoured to be elected as a Trustee. She looks forward to contributing to future activities.

## **Planning Update** *from Peter Earl*

### **Garden Street Auction Rooms, Garden Street, Lewes**

Members will be aware that a planning application was lodged in October 2018 for the redevelopment of the former Gorrings' auction rooms into ten residential units comprising 2 two-bed split-level apartments, 4 three-bedroom houses and 4 four-bedroom houses (ref: SDNP/18/05444/FUL).

The application was considered by the South Downs National Park Planning Committee in March 2020 where, against officer advice, it was refused because its mass, scale, bulk, design, materials and extensive glazing being incongruous and overly dominant within the street scene, and in other important views, which would harm rather than preserve or enhance the special architectural or historic interest, character and appearance of the Lewes Conservation Area. The design was considered incongruous and unacceptable with significant construction costs associated with it which that eroded the viability of the development to provide policy compliant affordable homes. The unacceptable harm and the absence of any affordable housing provision from residential development was considered to be in conflict with policies of the South Downs Local Plan.

An appeal was subsequently lodged by the applicant and the appointed inspector, S J Papworth DipArch (Glos) RIBA, considered the main issues were: -

- The effect of the development on the character and appearance of the Lewes Conservation Area and the setting of listed buildings.
- The effect of the development on the aims of policy that seeks the provision of affordable housing.

The inspector's conclusion on this main issue was that the proposal is of the design quality sought by planning policy and is appropriate to this degraded site with the presence of the existing corrugated structure on a prominent site. The proposal was also considered to accord with policy requirements and statute in terms of its effect on the character and appearance of the Lewes Conservation Area and was not deemed to harm the setting of listed buildings and scheduled ancient monuments.

The conclusion, in terms of affordable housing and lack of immediate viability, was considered particular to the economics of the design. Because the SDNPA's position on this, in their report, did not change, and they were not suggesting a lesser quality of design in order to provide affordable housing. It was therefore considered that, due to the design being considered unacceptable by the Committee, the rationale for not seeking affordable housing fell away. Accordingly, the inspector considered there was no reason to re-consider the process, and evidence already gathered, including that of external experts, was not the robust approach sought in the supporting text to the affordable housing policy.

The consent does provide for the issue to be revisited, through a legal obligation if anticipated costs change, and is subject to a number of planning conditions, largely as proposed by SDNPA.

The SDNPA is being requested by the Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group to lodge an immediate High Court challenge to revoke the decision as being unlawful because the inspector did not ensure that the necessary publicity was undertaken to allow the public and others to make representations. It is also considered that the inspector has also made an error in law in considering it satisfactory for a developer to pay 'over the odds' for a site, and then propose a costly design precluding the delivery of affordable housing. The inspector also failed to apply the principles in other relevant judgements where the role of sites allocated for affordable housing was key. The Auction Rooms site is an '*allocated site*' in the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan identified to meet local housing need with a clear mix of housing sizes. The decision compromises the delivery of affordable housing policies on allocated sites within the Neighbourhood Plan.

Watch this space!

## Enforcement work

The work of the Friends of Lewes Planning Committee also involves reporting breaches of planning control to the Local Planning Authority to ensure appropriate action can be taken, either through the submission of regulatory planning applications, or by enforcement action. Working with the Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group (CAAG) cases where a need for property maintenance works are also identified, to ensure further deterioration and damage is prevented. The Society, with members of CAAG, meet officers on a regular basis to discuss and, hopefully, progress cases and identify any additional matters of concern. At present a formal notice is being considered for the maintenance of a vacant property within the bottleneck of the High Street to ensure this building's appearance does not deteriorate further and cause harm to the attractiveness of this part of the conservation area.

At the present time there are some 50 cases across the town where a need for action has been identified. The District Council, acting on behalf of the South Downs National Park Authority, has recently served an Enforcement Notice in respect of the unauthorised replacement of wooden windows with UPVC windows at 4 The Fosse. An appeal has been lodged, and we await to see if the notice is upheld.

Following concerns raised by members, the South Downs National Park Authority were asked in November 2020 to confirm that the height of the flatted development behind Brooks Close, next to Tesco, was in accordance with the terms of the planning permission SDNP/17/03100/FUL.



***Flatted development at Brooks Close, November 2020***

Despite reminders, we have yet to receive confirmation that the development is in full accordance with the approved plans. Meanwhile, of course, the works have progressed!

The County Council are overseeing the rebuilding work of the Castle Wall Grade 1 listed building and scheduled ancient monument following its collapse in November 2019. It is understood that Ancient Monument Consent needs to be sought for the rebuilding works and an update on the programme has been sought on this and the flint wall in Rotten Row to St Anne's School.

It is hoped that it will soon be possible to undertake the rebuilding works to the Castle Wall allowing the public right of way to be reopened from Castle Ditch Lane to the car park, reinstating the access to the Garden of Peace which was restored and opened by the Friends of Lewes in the summer of 2019.

## RETAIL TO RESIDENTIAL

### Planning Advice Note

A new Planning Advice Note from Friends of Lewes, which will soon be available, sets out key principles on maintaining the quality of design in the conversion of properties from retail use to residential, an increasing trend on many UK High Streets.

Examples of the different approaches are discussed, with reference to examples in Lewes, along with a summary of the relevant planning legislation. The Planning Advice Note is intended for use by all involved - property owners, developers and architects, and will be available via the Friends of Lewes website: <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk>

### New Permitted development rights that could change our High Streets.

The Government will be applying a new permitted development right in conservation areas to allow the change of use from 'Commercial, Business and Service' use class to 'Residential', without planning permission. Civic societies have been opposed this provision due to the potential impact on the character and appearance of such areas, including sites of special architectural or historic interest. It is considered that a planning application should be required for the change of use in conservation areas to enable local consideration of the impacts and to maintain the character of the area and the mix of uses, especially in High Streets and other retail areas, where the ease of such changes could affect the vitality of shopping areas.

The government are to undertake a short technical consultation on the detailed changes but intends to bring forward legislation to make consequential changes prior to 1 August 2021.

### THE NORTH STREET QUARTER *from Roger Maskew*

This item for the Spring Newsletter is based on two references, the first being the 'April Update' issued by Human Nature on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2021, plus two items in the Sussex Express, (of the same date), on both the front cover and on page 5.

The 'key points' are as follows:-Human Nature has confirmed that it has "acquired the part of the North Street site in Lewes formerly owned by Masrei (known as Santon)".

- To mark this significant stage, Human Nature are proposing a new 'working title', namely **The Phoenix Project**.
- Human Nature are in the process of appointing their design team and have recently held a two-day design team workshop on line.
- In the article in the Sussex Express, Jonathan Smales, both a Lewes resident and co-founder and CEO Human Nature, commented that "we're determined to deliver this important regeneration project including a long-awaited integrated health hub, flood defences, homes and workspaces. We use information associated with the existing planning consent, but redesign is needed for greater viability, liveability and to meet challenges of the climate crisis. We shall move forward at speed, take the site out of limbo and build a scheme that Lewes can be proud of".
- A key event will be the Phoenix Project Design Festival that Human Nature will host on site over the weekend of the 09<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> July, when it is expected that some initial ideas for developing this important site will be exhibited for discussion.
- Following the festival, it is anticipated that there will be a period of approximately six months involving an 'ongoing design and consultation process', with the prospect of a Public Exhibition in the New Year.
- It is anticipated that a Planning Application for the revised scheme will be submitted in approximately a year's time, in April 2022.



## The Future of Lewes High Street?

Thursday 20 May 2021, 7:30 for 7:45pm

A Zoom Webinar and discussion

Lindsay Frost will chair a Panel discussion with representatives from Lewes Chamber of Commerce, Lewes Area Access Group, Lewes District Council and Lewes Living Streets.

High Streets throughout the United Kingdom have evolved constantly over the centuries in response to the current needs of living, working and shopping. Recently an increase in online shopping and the need for pandemic social distancing has further changed the High Street. What challenges and opportunities does this bring?

Covid 19 has accelerated this change as post lockdown retail activity has had to adapt to the need for social distancing. Can we learn from the Far East where countries adapted their urban centres following the outbreak of SARS-CoV in 2003?

This, and many other aspects of the challenges and opportunities facing the High Street, will be discussed at a Friends of Lewes Zoom webinar on Thursday 20 May when Lindsay Frost will chair a Panel discussion, putting questions from the online audience to the Panel of representatives from Lewes Chamber of Commerce, Lewes Area Access Group, Lewes District Council and Lewes Living Streets.

***The Panel Discussion on the Future of Lewes High Street on Thursday 20 May 2021, 7.30 for 7.45pm will be free, and all are welcome to join the online audience.***

Find event details and the link to register in advance at <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/diary/>

The talk will be free, and all are welcome.



## Trees Committee Update *from Audrey Jarvis*

Our new year began well with the planting of a new disease-resistant Elm tree at Lewes Cemetery! The Trees Council invited all Tree Wardens to apply for one of thirty *Ulmus* “New Horizon” Elms to celebrate thirty years of their Tree Wardens Scheme. We were lucky enough to be awarded one and we planted it in January at the top of the Cemetery. It is the same variety as the four lovely Elms that we planted on St. Anne’s Hill in our joint project with ESCC in 2017-2019.

At the beginning of February, we planted a wildlife hedge of 250 native whips at the bottom edge of Lewes Cemetery which includes Field Maple, Alder, Blackthorn, Alder Buckthorn, Guelder Rose, Hawthorn, Hazel, Hornbeam, Dog Rose, Rowan, Spindle and Willow. Together with the 27 trees that we planted at the Cemetery in November 2020, this should help to provide a long flowering season to benefit bees and other pollinators.



*Lewes Cemetery Elm tree with Audrey Jarvis*



*Nick Jarvis planting the hedge at Jubilee Gardens*

Later in February, in all weathers, we planted another wildlife hedge alongside the fence by Jubilee Gardens. These 200 whips included Field Maple, Hornbeam, Spindle, Blackthorn Downy Birch, Silver Birch, Pedunculate Oak, Hawthorn, Dog Rose, and Hazel. Both this hedge and the hedge at the Cemetery were funded by a Beelines grant from South Downs National Park Trust in a joint project between Friends of Lewes, Lewes District Council and South Downs National Park. Thank you very much to Chris Bibb, LDC Specialist Adviser, and Jan Knowlson, SDNP ranger, for their splendid co-operation and hard work to make sure the project could go ahead despite the lockdown. The project also included wildflower seeds and plugs which were sown and planted at the bottom of the Cemetery in March and April.



Once all our planting projects were completed, we began trees maintenance - visiting each of the trees we have already planted and pruning, adjusting any remaining ties, weeding, and mulching. Since 2015 we have planted 87 trees and 1152 whips as hedging. The main challenge now is keeping them watered during dry Spring and Summer weather.

If you would like to become a “Tree Watering Champion” please do contact us by email to [arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk) and share your address and we will let you know if there is a tree near you that you could help to look after!



*James Power mulching the hedge at the Cemetery.*

### **Progress towards our 2021 goals**

*Goal 6: To improve our environment, increase biodiversity and mitigate the risks resulting from climate change by collaborating with other Lewes-based groups with such aims.*

Friends of Lewes is affiliated to Lewes Climate Hub and our representative regularly attends their fortnightly planning meetings. Their physical hub at 2 Fisher Street is due to open on 22<sup>nd</sup> May but meanwhile they have arranged a series of interesting virtual talks which are shared on their website: <https://lewesclimatehub.org/>

You can sign up to receive emailed newsletters from the Hub here:  
<https://lewesclimatehub.org/contact>.

In February and March 2021, Lewes Swift Supporters funded and installed 7 new Swift nest boxes and callers in De Montfort Road, thanks to grant funding from Friends of Lewes. If you live in Western Road, De Montfort Road or very nearby, please contact Lewes Swift Supporters [lewesswifts@gmail.com](mailto:lewesswifts@gmail.com) because you may be eligible for a Swift nest box from their remaining grant funding. If you live elsewhere in Lewes, you are very welcome to contact them for advice on buying your own nest box. In the past two years Lewes Swift Supporters have helped or funded the installation of 41 single and 15 double nest boxes to increase the available accommodation for these fascinating Summer visitors.



*One of the Swift boxes installed by Lewes Swift Supporters*

In the past few months, the Trees Committee of Friends of Lewes have joined with the Railway Land Wildlife Trust, Wildflower Lewes, Lewes Swift Supporters and Common Cause to form the Lewes Nature Mosaic group. Through working together and making joint applications for grant funding we aim is to make our green spaces bigger, better, and more connected - to create green corridors and improve biodiversity across the town.

We will keep you posted about any success that we have! If you know of any land that may be available for a tree and wildflower nursery or for planting up as a small woodland area, we would love to hear from you: [arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)



## Keeping you in the 'Loop' from Jane Slater

Friends of Lewes Civic Society has through our regular Coffee Time Talks tried to keep our Members informed as the COVID vaccine is now readily available to all adults over 40 and we are all looking forward to once again meeting our friends and family face to face.

However life may never quite be the same again but I imagine that the meetings that we have introduced such as our Zoom Coffee Time Talks, which are free to all Members, will be still be a useful way of keeping us all up-to-date.

These Coffee time Talks are freely available to the Members of the Friends of Lewes . If you would like to join in and attend our talks you can find details on our Membership page on the website and we will send you a Zoom link a few days before each talk.

At the height of the pandemic I rang up most of our Members to see how they were managing and there are some very fascinating people who told me a little bit about themselves. If any of you would like to tell the Members about your favourite hobby or have a suggestion for an interesting speaker for our Talks please do get in touch with our Membership Secretary Diana via email: [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

Look out for some exciting Coffee Time Talks in the future months

### Coffee Time Talk dates for May to December 2021

Speakers to include on:

#### **May 18th 10.30 to 11.45**

**10.30 Eileen Blythe - How I have researched my Ancestors who lived in Lewes in 1624**

Eileen will tell us about her family connection to Lewes. She has been researching into the Lewes Rentals of 1624, and the tenants in the 4 parishes, which includes members of her family.

**11.15 John Wilton - Postcards sent to and from France during the First World War**

John is retired school master who has over the years been dedicated to helping charities raise money to support local causes both in Sussex and in countries around the world. However his hobby in his spare time is collecting old postcards and had written several books on the subject.

This time with John's slides in the correct order!! (**apologies from Jane for the mix in March**)

#### **13th July 10.30 to 11.45**

#### **Vivien Yule - Wild birds**

Vivien says - I've been giving some thought to the subject of my next talk that you so kindly invited me to give to the Friends of Lewes. My preference would be to talk about the birds that we come across in Sussex. I have taken a lot of photos of birds, so could again base my talk around some of these, using a similar format to the wildflowers talk. I look forward to putting together what I hope will be an interesting talk for your members.

#### **Christine Hall - Life at Breaky Bottom Vineyard**

"Breaky Bottom sits in a beautiful, secluded fold in the Sussex Downs – wonderfully remote; My husband, Peter, planted the vineyard in 1974, seeing the potential offered by a climate similar to that of Champagne and the Loire."

Christine is a partner in the business and work alongside Peter and the team throughout the year. As well as supporting the work in the vineyard and winery, she shares her love of the countryside and the wildlife by hosting visits from local schools. She is also a well-respected artist



## **Future Coffee Time Talks in 2021 September to December - *Speakers still to be confirmed***

**Tuesday 7th September, Tuesday 19th October & Tuesday 14th December all starting at 10.30 am**  
**Ewa Burman** will explain the wonderful food that is cooked to celebrate Christmas in Poland

### **Other suggested Speakers**

**Marcus Taylor**, a long-standing Member of Friends of Lewes and Chairman of the Membership Committee told us last Christmas all about the many books published by the Friends about the Town which are available at a great discount to Members especially during the month of December however I have since found out that he was once a contestant on the BBC's Mastermind program and has agreed to tell us all about it.

### **Roy Burman - Holidays my family have enjoyed**

Roy Burman is a businessman who lives in Ditchling and has a hotel in Eastbourne which opened it up for business just days before we all had to go into our first COVID lockdown. He will tell us how he coped over the last year keeping his business going and reflect on Holidays that he and his family have enjoyed in previous years.

Other ideas - Growing Orchids / Berwick Village Church / The Lewes Floods

## **Heritage Open Days 2021**

It is possibly a sign of optimism that the national Heritage Open Days organisers have already announced the 2021 dates as being 10<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> September. With the pandemic there is an element of uncertainty as to the precise format that will be possible. However, with every passing week and the number of Covid cases reducing locally, there is more optimism that the government roadmap will permit this annual festival of our heritage to be marked in something approaching its normal format across the town.

A working group has been formed and have started putting together different venues for this year's event which is proposed to take place between the Friday 10<sup>th</sup> September to Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> of September in Lewes. In addition to the opening of buildings a number of guided trails can be expected, as well a small exhibition.

The event will coincide with the national 'Ride and Stride Day' when churches across the county are open, including most of the churches in Lewes. It will also overlap with the annual Artwave festival in the town, so September should be a good month to enjoy the town.

The national theme of the Heritage Open Days event is 'Edible England'. So, if there are any culinary proposals members wish to put forward, the working group would be interested to know about them, especially if there are 'tasting trails' to be undertaken! So far, I have had the suggestion of 'Sussex Pond Scones'. These would be a basic scone recipe with the addition of organic lemon zest and possibly currants. They could be served with lemon curd or blackcurrant preserve perhaps? Enjoy your experimentations!

If you would like to join the working group, would be prepared to open your historic property, or know someone that would be willing to open theirs, please get in touch. Additionally, if you would like to guide a trail around Lewes or help run a Friends of Lewes stall at the Town Hall on either of the days, please contact the Secretary at [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

## Events

### Here are the up-coming Friends of Lewes events

#### **Tuesday 18 May 2021, 10:30am - Members' Coffee Time Talk**

Eileen Blythe will tell us how she researched her ancestors who lived in Lewes in 1624, and John Wilton will be showing postcards sent to and from France during the First World War (in the right order this time!)

#### **Thursday 20 May 2021, 7:45pm**

Lindsay Frost will chair a panel discussion with representatives from Lewes Chamber of Commerce, Lewes Area Access Group, Lewes District Council and Lewes Living Streets - on the topic of The Future of Lewes High Street?

High Streets throughout the United Kingdom have evolved constantly over the centuries in response to the current needs of living, working and shopping. Recently an increase in online shopping and the need for pandemic social distancing has further changed the High Street. What challenges and opportunities does this bring? Join our online audience and listen to the Panel's views before making your contribution to the discussion.

#### **Tuesday 13 July 2021, 10:30am - Members' Coffee Time Talk**

Vivien Yule on the subject of wild birds in Sussex, followed by Christine Hall on life at Breaky Bottom Vineyard

**These Friends of Lewes talks will be via Zoom, and our Membership Secretary will send notifications with links to all Friends of Lewes members.**

**Details of all our talks are on our Diary web page at [friends-of-lewes.org.uk/diary/](https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/diary/)**

**Friday 10 September - Sunday 12 September 2021 - Heritage Open Days**

### Upcoming Lewes History Group talks:

#### **Monday 10 May 2021, 7:30pm**

John Kay will talk about the listed buildings of Lewes

#### **Monday 14 June 2021, 7:30pm**

Sarah and Peter Earl will show us what they have discovered about the history of East Street and Albion Street, Lewes

These Lewes History Group talks will be via Zoom, and are free to History Group members who will be emailed links to join the talks.

Non-members can buy a ticket (£4) from [www.ticketsource.co.uk/lhg](https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/lhg)

Details of all Lewes History Group talks are at [leweshistory.org.uk/meetings/](https://leweshistory.org.uk/meetings/)