



KEEPING OUR TOWN SPECIAL

Annual Report 2023



Picture by Nick Robinson

*It was an April morning: fresh and clear
The Rivulet, delighting in its strength,
Ran with a young man's speed; and yet the voice
Of waters which the winter had supplied
Was softened down into a vernal tone.*

William Wordsworth

This poem always reminds me of the Winterbourne in Spring, rushing through the Grange Gardens, and all of the recent rain has certainly given the stream plenty of strength and speed!

Ruth O'Keeffe

Dear Members of Friends of Lewes

Welcome to the Friends of Lewes AGM Report for 2023. I think you will agree on reading it that this has been a year full of events for the Society; culminating in the first in-person AGM for several years.

The report begins with news from Roger Maskew and the Planning Committee, at the end of a very busy year. Thanks, must also go to the previous Chair of the committee, Chris Kneale, who stood down as Chair at the end of the last reporting year and will be standing down from the committee at the AGM in April this year. Stephen Catlin, a hard-working member of the Planning Committee, sadly died in June 2023 and has been much missed.

Roger's report details Friends of Lewes' responses and actions concerning several major applications, the North Street Quarter, Lewes Bus Station and Old Malling Farm, also giving news of the Garden Street Auction Rooms site; see pages 6-8). Planning policy consultations responded to are also detailed, as is Friends of Lewes' involvement with considerations of flood risk in Lewes, reported on by the Executive Committee's lead on this topic during the period of the report, Bronagh Liddicoat; see page 8 - 9.

Audrey Jarvis' Trees Committee report follows, with another very active year of tree planting and maintenance, visiting sites across the town and including visits to Western Road and Southover Schools as well as work with the Western Road School Eco-School Committee and plans to visit Priory School. The Trees Committee have also been out and about contributing to various events in the town. See pages 9 – 12 for all the details, including how to see all the tree planting on a map on the Friends of Lewes website.

On pages 13-14 you can read Peter Earl's report on the successful 2023 Heritage Open Days and plans for 2024.

Di Wilkins report from the Membership Services Committee on pages 15-16 details the wide selection of events that have been organised, both in-person and on line; to find out about upcoming events members and non-members are advised to visit the Friends of Lewes website. The report also sets out fundraising activities and the ways in which Friends of Lewes publicises its activities. Two members of the Membership Services Committee have stepped down this year, and many thanks go to both Barbara Merchant and Marcus Taylor for their invaluable contribution over many years.

For news of financial matters please see page 17. Looking to the future we have recently gained a new Treasurer, Win Myat Htet, and we will be welcoming her to the Executive Committee at the AGM. Our thanks go to Colin French for his interim support and also to Mike Stepney for his help and mentorship in producing the year end accounts.

My thanks as always to all members of the Executive Committee and the various individual committees of Friends of Lewes and to our much appreciated secretary Diana Freestone.

With all good wishes for Easter

Ruth

Chair, Friends of Lewes

THE FRIENDS OF LEWES
The Lewes Civic Society
Lewes Town Council Offices, Town Hall, High Street
LEWES, East Sussex BN7 2QS
Registered Charity No 258756

Web site: www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk email address: enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Personnel on 31st December 2023

President: John Davey

Vice-Presidents: Peter Mettyear & Maria Caulfield MP

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Elected Officers

Chair Ruth O'Keeffe

Vice-Chair Roger Maskew

Secretary Diana Freestone

Treasurer Colin French (January – October 2023)

Executive Committee Members

Peter Earl

Audrey Jarvis

Bronagh Liddicoat

Barbara Merchant

Jane Slater

Diana Wilkins

The Mayor of Lewes has the right to attend Executive Committee meetings.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

Roger Maskew (Chair) *

Will Dorman

John Gower

Bronagh Liddicoat*

Chris Kneale

Charles Meloy

Andrew Winter

Carolyn Beckingham (Minutes Secretary)

TREES COMMITTEE

Audrey Jarvis (Chair)*

Chris Bibb

Phil Green

Nick Jarvis

David Saunders

Matthew Stuart

Duncan Armstrong

Dean Bell,

Keith Sacre

Peter Thurman

Jill Yeates

HERITAGE OPEN DAY COMMITTEE

Peter Earl (Chair)*

David Attwood

Sue Berry

Diana Freestone*

David Hutchinson

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES COMMITTEE

Diana Wilkins* (Chair)

Bronagh Liddicoat*

Barbara Merchant*

Jane Slater*

** Member of the Executive Committee*

Who we are

STRUCTURE GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

The Friends of Lewes, founded in 1952, is the Lewes Civic Society, a registered charity with around 400 members. Membership is open to all, on payment of the relevant subscription. Although wholly independent we are allied to the national organisation, Civic Voice, a national umbrella body for similar groups. The number of members as at 31/12/23 is 413.

Our Mission is to conserve and enhance key aspects of the town: its history, distinctive buildings and the national environment, and its social, cultural and economic well-being – we aim to keep Lewes special.

How we are run

Constitution

The Charity is established for the public benefit to pursue the following in the area comprising the Town of Lewes and its immediate surrounding area

To promote:

- high standards of planning and design in or affecting Lewes and ensure that new development is sensitively sited in relation to the surrounding environment.
- the conservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest, and the physical and natural environment
- enhancement of the built environment in, and the social, cultural and economic well-being.
- free access to the public realm.

To stimulate:

- public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character.

To co-operate:

- with public authorities and other bodies in fulfilling these objectives in the area.

Committees

The members of Friends of Lewes Executive Committee are the Charity Trustees. Officers are elected at the Annual General Meeting each year. Four members can be coopted to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee meets monthly and appoints sub-committees which includes the Planning Committee which examines all planning applications affecting Lewes and surrounding areas, the Trees Committee, Membership Services Committee and Heritage Open Day Committee.

Meetings and talks

We aim to hold at least four Friends of Lewes Talks per year, plus a number of coffee-time events. To allow as many people as possible to take part, we hold our events in person during the summer and via Zoom in the winter. Our events are free for members and £4.00 for non-members. All our past and future events are listed on the Diary page of our website at <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk>.

Communications

We keep members up to date via our social media (Facebook and X) as well via our website, press articles and regular emails. and regular emails. We publish a Newsletter three times a year plus an Annual Report.

Our Goals and Objectives

The following are the overall goals pursued by the Executive Committee:

1. To bring further benefits to the town by placing increased emphasis on influencing relevant policy makers at national, regional and local levels (for example on, planning, transport, housing, highways, parking). These policy makers include the South Downs National Park Authority, East Sussex County Council, Lewes District Council, Lewes Town Council and others.
2. a) To work with others to promote and protect the vitality of businesses in and around our High Street, preserve its range of buildings and businesses, and safeguard its community value in the face of commercial change and problematic traffic management. b) To work with others to preserve and enhance the Community Buildings within the Town of Lewes.
3. To preserve the integrity of the Conservation Areas in Lewes through our vigilance and close liaising with local planning authorities and to be mindful of the impact that developments in surrounding areas can have on Lewes.
4. To protect our environment for future generations by encouraging sustainability and the building of climate resilience, whilst adapting to the requirements of a low carbon future.
5. To increase tree canopy in Lewes, from the current 11.5% to the minimum recommendation for urban environments of 20%. We will do this by building on our successful projects to date and supporting other local groups with similar aims.
6. To improve our environment, increase biodiversity and mitigate the risks resulting from climate change by collaborating with other local groups with such aims.
7. To learn, and to seek support for our local efforts, by engaging more broadly with other civic societies and Civic Voice.
8. To increase our engagement with FoL Members and the local community so that FoL priorities reflect local concerns and that Members are kept informed of FoL initiatives.

Updated 22 November 2023

ACHIEVEMENT AND PERFORMANCE AGAINST OUR GOALS

There are four sub committees focused on achieving these goals:

Planning, Trees Committee, Heritage Open Days, and Membership Services.

In addition, individual members of the Executive Committee are engaged with other local civic and local organisations to promote the mission of the Friends of Lewes.

The Planning Committee Report

The Planning Committee Report

The Friends of Lewes Planning Committee continued the important task of considering development proposals affecting the town. The Committee meets each month to examine planning applications, listed building planning applications and advertisement consent applications submitted to the South Downs National Park Planning Authority (SDNPA).

Each month a list of the recent planning applications is circulated to the members of the committee, who each review all of the applications on the SDNPA website prior to suggesting a shortlist of applications for discussion at the monthly committee meeting. Taking all of these suggestions into account, a final shortlist is circulated prior to the meeting. During 2023 a total of 204 applications were considered in detail and representations made to the SDNPA as the Planning Authority on 83 projects. The Trees Committee also submit comments on tree works applications via the Planning Committee, which submits representations on their behalf.

The scope of the wide range of activities that is undertaken by the Planning Committee, discussed in more detail in the following text, includes seeking to achieve the objectives defined by Goals 1, 2, 3, & 4, which were detailed in the previous section of this report.

At the AGM in April 2022, Chris Kneale decided to step down as Chair of the Committee after some ten years of service as Chair, which had been greatly appreciated. Since May 2022, Roger Maskew has been the Chair of the Planning Committee, with continued technical support from Chris. However, Chris has announced that will now be retiring from the Committee after the AGM on the 24th April 2024. As a consequence, Chris's wide ranging technical support to the Committee will be sorely missed.

Regrettably, Stephen Catlin, a valued member of the Planning Committee, died in June 2023 after a long illness.

However, the Planning Committee was pleased to welcome three new members in 2023, namely Andrew Winter, Will Dorman and John Gower, between them bringing a wealth of knowledge and expertise in construction, planning, urban design and flood management, which is proving invaluable in supporting the work of the Planning Committee.

Planning Applications: -

The Planning Committee looks at all applications within the Lewes Town boundary plus those in the surrounding area which may have an impact on the town. Responsibility for determining planning applications falls to the SDNPA, but most applications are determined by Lewes District Council planners under an agency arrangement with the SDNPA. Those applications that may have a significant impact on the town or the wider landscape within the National Park are called in by the SDNPA and determined by their Planning Committee. The Society's Planning Committee comments are submitted via the online planning portal, which records the representations made to each application and notifies the planning officer considering the application.

The comments, which are in the public domain, are taken into account when the application is determined by officers, having regard to national, SDNPA and local Neighbourhood Plan policies, including any supplementary design guides that may be relevant.

The significant planning applications submitted during 2023 were as follows:

The North Street Quarter: -

This planning application by Human Nature for the redevelopment of the North Street Quarter, now referred to as the Phoenix Project, has been extensively covered in both the Spring / Summer and the Autumn / Winter Newsletters, but the 'key' events during 2023 are summarised as follows:-

- 1) A meeting with Human Nature on the 19th January, included a very useful presentation of the scope of the proposed planning application
- 2) The "Phoenix Project" was formally launched at a public presentation at the Depot Cinema on Friday 27th January.
- 3) Human Nature subsequently submitted a 'hybrid' Planning Application to the South Downs National Park Authority, as the planning authority, on Tuesday 07th February.
- 4) This 'hybrid' application consisted of an "Outline Planning Application" for the whole site, plus "Detailed Planning Applications" for the flood defences and for one 'parcel' of the proposed development, illustrating how the 'Building Codes' would be implemented.
- 5) The 'First Response' by the Society to these proposals was submitted on the 17th May and was a combination of 4 areas of support, 6 areas of objection and 2 specific requests regarding the development.
- 6) On the 12th June the South Downs National Park Authority made public its initial officer response to Human Nature indicating a number of 'key' areas which required further consideration.
- 7) Following extensive discussions between the National Park officers and Human Nature, proposed amendments to the Phoenix Planning Application were detailed in a letter from Human Nature's Planning Consultants, dated the 31st August.
- 8) Having studied the amendments to the original proposals, the Society was disappointed that a number of our concerns had not been addressed and as a consequence objected to the proposals in a 'Second Response' dated the 29th September.
- 9) The National Park subsequently arranged for a meeting of its Planning Committee to be held at County Hall in Lewes on the 12th October, when the Society made a statement objecting to the proposals.
- 10) Following a comprehensive discussion of the proposals, the SDNPA Planning Committee resolved that a decision on this application be deferred in order to seek to resolve a number of issues and to report back to the Planning Committee within four months for a further or final decision, which effectively meant by the 12th February 2024.

The Lewes Bus Station: -

- 1) Following the refusal by the SDNPA of the original planning application by the Generator Group in 2022, a revised scheme was submitted and validated on the 17th July 2023.
- 2) The Society submitted its strong objection to these revised proposals on the 15th August 2023.
- 3) As of the 31st December 2023, there was no further progress on the determination of this application by the SDNPA as the planning authority.

The Garden Street Auction Rooms: -

- 1) In spite of the original planning application to redevelop this modest but significant site in the centre of Lewes being refused planning permission, the planning application was subsequently granted planning approval on appeal.

- 2) A revised scheme by another developer was submitted for planning approval on the 07 August and validated on the 21st August 2023.
- 3) The Society submitted its objection to this planning application on the 26th September 2023, as it considers the proposal to be a significant overdevelopment of this restricted site.
- 4) As of the 31st December 2023, there was no further progress on the determination of this application by the SDNPA as the planning authority.

Old Mall Farm, Old Mall Way: -

- 1) "A reserved matter application for approval of scale, layout, external appearance and landscaping following grant of Outline Planning Permission for erection of 226 dwellings including affordable housing public open space and associated infrastructure including vehicular and pedestrian access from Monks Way (SDNP/18/06103/OUT)", was submitted on the 06th November and validated on the 11 December 2023.
- 2) As of the 31st December 2023, the Society was considering its response to this application for submission in January 2024.

Planning Policy Consultations: -

- 1) The SDNPA's consultation on the Lewes Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan (CAAMP) was published on the 06th June 2023.
- 2) This was a very comprehensive document that "defines and records the special interest of a Conservation Area, analyses the characteristics that make it special, as well as setting out a plan for managing change to ensure its ongoing protection and enhancement".
- 3) The Society submitted its extensive response to the Lewes CAAMP on the 05th August 2023.
- 4) The proposals were subsequently approved at a meeting of the SDNPA's Planning Committee held at County Hall in Lewes on the 12th October 2023.
- 5) Lewes District Council's consultation "Towards a Local Plan spatial strategy and policies directions" was published in November 2023.
- 6) As of the 31st December 2023, the Society was considering its response to this consultation for submission in January 2024.

Flood Risk in Lewes: -

FoL took over the role of Lewes Flood Action (LFA) in late 2020 and, in line with our Goal of mitigating risks from climate change, has been supporting measures considered necessary to reduce surface water flooding in Lewes – both fluvial and pluvial.

The Committee continues to review planning applications and comment on aspects likely to increase surface water flooding, for example through use of impermeable paving materials, discharge of runoff onto the public highway, location on the flood plain, whilst supporting measures to reduce runoff from new developments and objecting to new build on floodplains. The Society noted that the implementation of Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 has still not taken place. This would require any new development to include high quality sustainable drainage (SuDS) and would remove developers' automatic right to connect to public sewers. This has led to the building of new developments which add to the flow volume of existing surface water drainage systems and, inevitably, to the increase in sewage discharges to water courses during periods of rainfall. The public consultation on the implementation did not take place in 2023, as promised by DEFRA.

Sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) reduce the risk of surface water flooding, pollution and help alleviate the pressures on the traditional drainage and sewerage systems. Their objective is to manage rainfall close to where it falls, whilst also considering amenity and biodiversity. Rain gardens can be a key part of sustainable drainage.

In April, FoL Members were given the opportunity to visit the extensive new rain garden at Wallands School, funded by South Downs National Park (SDNP) Communities Fund and managed by The Aquifer Partnership, which has already had a favourable impact on local surface water flooding. Previously, in 2021/22, the FoL Planning Committee had involved Wallands School pupils in the raingarden planting and this proved to be a successful way of raising awareness of the benefits of SuDS drainage systems - the young people understood the need to reduce runoff and were keen to explain the principles to their families.

The Committee took the opportunity to emphasise the benefits of SuDS and permeable paving at a local neighbourhood event in October organised by Nevill 2030. In addition to reducing the risk of local flooding, SuDS help protect the long term viability of the aquifer by ensuring rainfall is allowed to soak into the ground and eventually return to its source. The current summer water shortages in areas of the South East underlines the need to protect the source of water for Lewes – the Brighton chalk block aquifer.

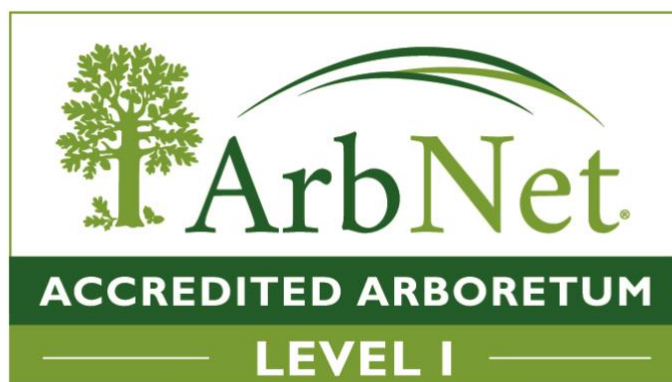
The Society worked in partnership with Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust (OART) in the development and publicity of a pilot scheme, funded by Lewes District Council, where the addition of rain garden planters under down pipes in front gardens in the Neville estate and surrounding areas, would both 'slow the flow' and highlight a way of reducing surface water runoff from residential properties.

Roger Maskew & Bronagh Liddicoat

Trees Committee Report

Goal 5: To increase tree canopy cover in Lewes, from the current 11.5% to the minimum recommendation for urban environments of 20%. We will do this by building on our successful projects to date and supporting other local groups with similar aims.

The current Trees Committee was formed in 2012 to follow the vision of the late Paul Millmore of Lewes as a "town in the trees". A notable step towards this vision was made in May 2023, when the international [ArbNet Arboretum Accreditation Programme](#) awarded Lewes "Level 1 Arboretum status" in recognition of our inventory of the different species of trees in the town and our programme of planting and tree maintenance. Lewes is now officially an arboretum town!



2023 began with a return visit to the grounds of Western Road and Southover Schools, where we had helped each of the 550 pupils to plant a native whip to make a wildlife hedge in January 2022. This year, it was the turn of the new Reception class children from each school, who planted their own little tree alongside a newly installed fence to complete this valuable wildlife corridor around the perimeter of the grounds.

Their trees included Hawthorn, Blackthorn, Dog Rose, Guelder Rose, Field Maple, Wayfaring Tree, Hazel. We are very pleased to hear that pupils and parents have been checking them regularly as an after-school activity. We also worked with pupils on the Western Road Eco-School Committee to plant 130 whips in their Forest School area.

Later in January some of our grant from the Local Authority Treescapes Fund, (LATF), was used to plant ten Alder trees, (*Alnus glutinosa* and *Alnus incana*), along Winterbourne Lane on the bank above the Winterbourne stream. Thank you to Bonny's Wood, who took charge of this working party to negotiate the underground service and traffic flow.

In February we met at Nevill Green to plant three *Acer campestre* Lienco, (Field Maple), three *Pyrus calleryana* Chanticleer, (Pear), and three *Sorbus intermedia* Brouwers, (Whitebeam), around the perimeter of the Recreation Ground. Thank you to the many Nevill residents who watered these trees during the dry Spring and Summer. We also planted a *Liriodendron tulipifera*, (Tulip tree), in Glebe Close.

To our great satisfaction, LATF money also funded contractors to plant three more *Ulmus* "New Horizon", (Elm), on St. Anne's Hill. With the Elms planted previously in the joint Lewes Urban Arboretum and ESCC project in 2017-2019, this restores the original row of seven Elms shown in a photograph from 1923.

In November we heard from Southover School that they would like to replace a felled Walnut tree that had been next to the infants' playground. We took great pleasure in donating and planting a *Sorbus thuringiaca fastigiata*, (Hybrid Whitebeam), with two of the pupils helping to mulch it afterwards.



It is estimated that we lost over 90% of the Elm trees in Southern Britain when Dutch Elm Disease swept through in the 1960s and 70s. We decided to bring some more Elms back to Lewes by choosing a disease-resistant variety, *Ulmus Lutece*, as our main "Gateway trees" to welcome people into the town. Ten Elms were planted in Prince Charles Road, six on Nevill Green, three in Brighton Road and three in Offham Road. Many birds and some small mammals eat Elm seeds, and the White-letter Hairstreak butterfly depends on elms as a food plant and the species has declined dramatically since Dutch elm disease arrived in the UK.

To provide blossoms for the bees and berries for the birds, we chose several *Crataegus persimilis prunifolia*, (Cockspurthorn), to plant next to the Elms in Brighton Road, Offham Road and on Nevill Green. The ones which we planted in Gundreda Road in 2021 looked wonderful and were covered in red berries this year.



Neville Green



Brighton Road

In December we dodged between the gas works to plant seven more trees in Houndean Rise and Southdown Avenue. We chose a mix of *Liquidambar styraciflua* Worplesdon, *Acer campestre*, *Prunus Umeniko* and *Crataegus persimilis prunifolia* to complement the trees which we had planted there in 2018 and 2022.

One of our most enjoyable working parties was in Ham Lane in December, where we planted five *Alnus glutinosa* and five *Populus nigra* between the Scout Hut and the Cockshut. It was very wet and muddy, but we enjoyed the company of the Beaver Scouts group who were weeding and planting the hedgerows which they had planted the previous year. They also helped us to ferry the mulch across to our trees – and shared their soup with us at lunchtime. At the end of season, we felt very proud of planting 51 trees in November and December, bringing our total number of new trees planted in the verges and open spaces around the town to 222. This would not be possible without the willing support from officers of Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council, who have given us planting permissions, supplied us with service maps, and included us in the LATF grant which paid for twenty of the trees planted this year and last year. To thank them for their support, we joined LDC and local volunteers in January to help to plant 28 trees and a copse of 80 whips at Beechwood Hall, Cooksbridge which were also funded by LATF.

Thank you also to Ouse Valley Climate Action for the second year of funding to pay for ten of the trees.

We are also grateful to the residents who help to look after the trees and who have given donations so that we could plant trees to commemorate their family or friends.

Our i-Tree surveys of 2014-2019, [iTree Survey – The Friends of Lewes \(friends-of-lewes.org.uk\)](https://www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk/i-tree-survey-the-friends-of-lewes), estimated that we need to almost double the tree canopy cover of Lewes: to remove carbon dioxide and pollutants from the air, provide habitats for wildlife, and to make our town a more attractive, enjoyable and healthy place to live and spend time in. We have already identified several sites where we hope to plant more trees in 2024-2025, many of them suggested by residents. If you are able to help to increase tree canopy cover and biodiversity by planting a tree or a hedge in your garden, please do get in touch with us: arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

You can see all the trees which we have planted so far on this map on the Friends of Lewes website: [Lewes Urban Arboretum: tree planting to date – Google My Maps](https://www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk/lewes-urban-arboretum-tree-planting-to-date-google-my-maps)

Members of the Trees Committee have taken part in several events over the year. In May, the Trees Committee hosted a display at Lewes Climate Hub to showcase the work of the Lewes Urban Arboretum Project, including a talk from Peter Thurman on “Trees and Climate Change”. At the Nevill 2023 Sustainable Gardens event in October we shared suggestions for trees to plant in gardens.



We had a stall at the Societies Fair in September and, as part of Heritage Open Days, we organised a display at Lewes House and a very enjoyable walk and talk around Malling Deanery Arboretum.

At our stall at the STEM Festival in November, we invited children to make posters and draw pictures to explain the importance of trees. We are part of the Ouse Wild Network initiated by Wilder Ways and have joined them for rewilding events over the year, including the fantastic Wilder Ways Festival at the Railway Land in September.

When we are not busy planting our Lewes trees or looking after them, we often visit Laughton Greenwood to help out on their volunteer days. This is always enjoyable and includes not only planting trees but also a range of other jobs such as clearing the woodland rides and making paths or bridges.

In addition to working with Western Road and Southover Schools, we have also been invited to Priory School to share ideas for improving their Forest School area. We are looking forward to developing this in 2024.

In November, ESCC advised the Trees Committee of a proposal to fell the Lombardy Poplars along Blake's Walk, in line with a legal agreement which had previously been drawn up between ESCC and the developers of the nearby buildings. The Poplars were originally planted by the Lewes Trees Group, (not affiliated with Friends of Lewes), as nursery trees to encourage the growth of the Limes and they had intended that the Poplars would be felled when the Limes were fully established.

Because of our goals of increasing tree canopy cover and biodiversity, we were concerned at the potential loss of healthy trees. When we contacted the ESCC officer to express our concerns and propose working with ESCC on a revised management strategy, he readily agreed to this idea. He formed a “Blake's Walk tree specialist group” which included members of the Trees Committee, contractors who have been overseeing the tree works, and developers of the nearby site. After several site meetings and discussions, a plan for pruning the trees to maintain both their resilience and a good shape was agreed. The result is that none of the healthy trees will be felled. One dead Lime tree is to be removed and the stump ground out. There will be three replacement trees planted to keep the avenue theme in place.

Audrey Jarvis

Working with other groups to improve our environment

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.

Tree and Wildflower Nursery

This joint initiative of the Trees Committee, Wildflower Lewes, and the Railway Land Wildlife Trust, as part of the Lewes Nature Mosaic Project, has had a very successful first year, thanks to regular visits by volunteers from each group to water and care for the emerging seedlings.

Of the 440 native tree seeds sown by the Trees Committee in October 2022, we have grown about 150 healthy saplings so far. They include Oak, Hazel, Blackthorn, Rowan, Dogwood, Wayfaring Tree, Spindle which will be used to make a wildlife hedge later in 2024.

The wildflower nursery, managed by Wildflower Lewes, provided a wealth of wildflower plugs which have been donated to the High Street Pollinator Corridor Project or given to residents to plant in their own gardens. In addition, the Railway Land Wildlife Trust grew 80 small tree whips until they were of a good size to plant out at the Railway Land in December.

As part of the High Street Pollinator Corridor, Friends of Lewes sponsored three large planters which we installed outside School Hill Surgery and planted up with native wildflowers.

Lewes Climate Hub

In March 2023, members of the Trees Committee and other Friends of Lewes committees joined all the other partner groups of Lewes Climate Hub to celebrate the opening of the new Hub premises at Lewes House. We had a glorious day, beginning with a procession from the Railway Land to Lewes House accompanied by drummers.

Earlier in March, Juliet Oxborrow, one of the trustees of Lewes Climate Hub, gave a well-attended and informative coffee time talk via Zoom to let members of Friends of Lewes know how they might become involved with Hub activities.

Lewes Climate Hub is an independent alliance of community groups and organisations in and around Lewes. Friends of Lewes is represented on the management team. It is a Hub for everyone! You can keep up to date with what is happening by dropping in on Wednesdays to Saturdays, 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m., or by visiting their website [News & events | Lewes Climate Hub](#).

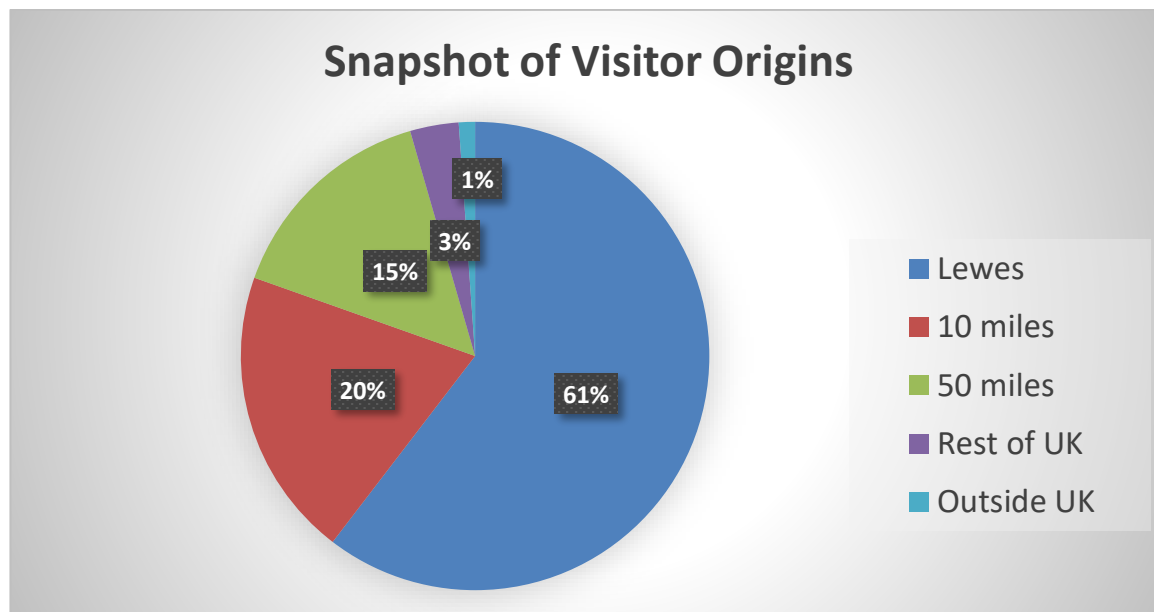
Audrey Jarvis

Lewes Heritage Open Days 2023

The Friends of Lewes once again organised the annual Lewes Heritage Open Days in the town, as part of the national festival to showcase our special buildings and wealth of history. The event, over the weekend of the 8th to 10th September 2023, was blessed with glorious hot, sunny weather which attracted significant number of visitors to the town. It was heartening to see crowds queuing in the High Street, eagerly waiting the opening of the Law Courts (see picture below) which was one of the 23 venues that opened. In addition, there were a total of 11 walks, tours and talks.



It is estimated that there were over 7000 individual visits to buildings and tours over the weekend. This was significantly helped by the attraction of new venues, such as The Rusty House in South Street and the Sussex Past properties of The Castle, Anne of Cleves House and Bull House. The pie chart below gives a snap shot of the wide appeal of the event to the town and further afield. Some visitors had travelled especially to the town for the weekend to enjoy everything that was on offer, and is evidence of the revenue brought to the town's economy.



As always, the event is only possible through the generosity of property owners for making their venues available, our sponsors, whose financial support is invaluable, and the large team of volunteers that help in so many ways, from the organising committee, to those that volunteer to steward at different properties, and those who generously give their time to lead walks and talks. A massive thanks to you all for allowing so many people to enjoy the event and make it such a successful festival. We have had an enormous amount of positive feedback from countless individuals about all elements of the event. The national organisers also visited the town during the event and were understood to be highly impressed with our organisation of the local festival and the wealth of buildings we had accessible, particularly Harvey's Brewery.

The 2024 Heritage Open Days year is now upon us with the theme this year being; Routes. Networks. Connections. 2024 marks Heritage Open Days 30th anniversary year and communities are being encouraged to explore the history of routes, networks and connections. As ever this can be broadly interpreted, be it local links like inter-faith walks, exploring global trade routes or focusing on the story of a key item like the postage stamp! Already, it is proposed to have new walk about the railways of Lewes that have shaped the town since the middle of the 19th century and continue to play an important role as a transport hub. Hopefully, the Lewes celebrations will see a return of our own bus interchange this year, or at least a clear commitment to delivering it!

The Lewes festival will be between **Friday 13th and Sunday 15th September** with the launch being on Thursday 5th September. A key feature of the event is that all the festival events must be free.

The Lewes Heritage Open Day team are always seeking new venues in the town and members can either put forward their own buildings or businesses to be open for part or all of the weekend, or encourage others to join this national festival. Stewards have an important role during the event and if you are able to help, please do contact the secretary at enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk.

Peter Earl

Membership Services Committee

Goal 8: The committee's goal is to increase our engagement with members and the local community so that FoL priorities reflect local concerns and that members are aware of FoL initiatives.

If you have ideas for future events, please get in touch with membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk.

Events

This has been another productive year for the committee's activities. During 2023, we organised five Friends of Lewes talks focusing on FoL's core objectives. These were: The Wildlife of Lewes (Michael Blencowe), the Role of the South Downs National Park Authority (Trevor Beattie), Heritage Open Day Preview (Marcus Taylor), Reeves Lightbox Exhibition (Brigitte Lardinois & Tom Reeves) and The Planning System in Lewes: A Rough Guide (Marcus Taylor & Peter Earl).

In addition, we held six coffee time talks on Historic Plaques in Lewes (Marcus Taylor), The Lewes Climate Hub (Juliet Oxborrow), Designing & Working with Trees (Peter Thurman), Conservation on the Farm (Michael Richards), Lewes Priory Trust (Tony Freeman) and The Old Inns of Lewes (John Davey).

We also organised a visit with our partners, The Aquifer Partnership, to the Wallands School Raingarden and supported the Heritage Open Day activities, the Lewes Societies Fair and a Sustainable Gardens event in the Nevill. Thank you to all our members who attended throughout the year and made these events such a success.

To allow as many people as possible to access our events, we hold them in-person during the summer and via Zoom over the winter. All events are free for members and £4 for non-members. All our past and future events are listed on the Diary page of our website at <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/diary/>.

Historic Plaques



Another plaque in the series marking hidden or less-obvious bits of the history of Lewes has recently been installed at the Snowdrop Inn. As a result of co-operative funding by the pub's owner/licensee, Lewes Town Council and the Friends of Lewes, the plaque highlights the tragic loss of life of eight people in the avalanche in South Street in 1836 - the greatest number of people ever killed by falling snow in the UK. There has been a plaque in South Malling church giving the details for years, but this one by the pub's main door, will make the story better-known. Thanks to all who made this possible.

Merchandise

We have raised funds through the sale of [books](#) on topics of local interest as well as a tea towels and cards. These are available at our events, via enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk and the Tourist Information Office in Lewes.

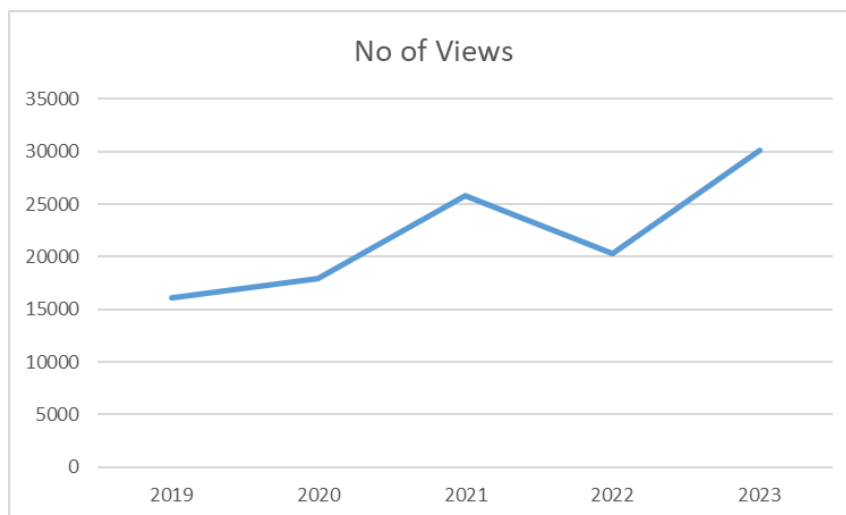
Membership

Membership levels have been growing steadily during 2023, thanks in part to our in-person meetings, ending the year at 413 (compared with 398 at the end of 2022). Please consider introducing friends and neighbours to the organisation. There are many ways to get involved through taking part in events online and in person, or by helping out on one of our committees.

Publicity

We publicised FoL events in three print titles: *Sussex Express*, *Lewes News* and *The Lewesian*, and electronically in *The Lewes List*, *What's On in Lewes*, and Visit Lewes's *What's On*. The figures for the number of views of our website reached their highest ever levels in 2023, having increased by 48% compared with 2022, when they had dipped down after a Covid-driven peak in 2021 (2023: 30087, 2022: 20,288; 2021: 25,752; 2020: 17,943, 2019: 16,110). This is all the more impressive given that website views have been growing steadily from around 5000 in 2012.

Friends of Lewes Website, views per year:



We are also continuing to increase our online audience:

- Website - 164 News item subscribers (2022: 141, 2021: 131; 2020: 100), +16%
- Facebook – c.1000 following FriendsofLewes (2022: 924, 2021: 637; 2020: 533), +8%
- Facebook - 635 following LewesUrbanArboretum (2022: 522, 2021: 460; 2020: 412), +22%
- X (Twitter) – 100 following @lewesfriends (2022:79, 2021: 44, 2020: 9), +27%, 684 following @LewesArboretum (2022: 600) +14%

Members and non-members can sign up to receive our news and events by registering their email via our Home page friends-of-lewes.org.uk.

Membership Services Committee

At the end of the year Barbara Merchant stepped down from the Committee due to ill-health, and Marcus Taylor retired after many years of long service. We would like to warmly thank them both for their invaluable support.

Diana Wilkins

Friends of Lewes Accounts & Financial Review 2023

Receipts and Payments

There was an overall surplus in 2023 of £6495 (2022: £100), a net change of £6395. At £15,671 net receipts increased by £8,571 mainly due to substantial grants and donations toward the Trees Committees work.

With no remuneration being paid to, nor any benefit obtained from a related entity by any trustee, and with only minimal expenses in the course of the Society's business being reimbursed, the cost of running Friends of Lewes increased slightly to £2,068 (2022 £1,900)

Restricted Trees Fund

Total receipts paid into the Trees Fund (which is restricted to expenditure on tree planting) was £7,666 (2022: £535). Two substantial donations were received from the Rotary Club and Ouse Valley Climate Action as well as donations from private individuals. This, plus the income from participation in the Lewes District Lottery, goes wholly to support tree planting.

Expenditure during the year amounted to £4,335 and the year-end surplus of £3,331 will go towards the continued planting during 2024.

Balance Sheet

At the end of the 2023 financial year, the Society's total monetary assets account remained at £69,800 which is held in Charities Aid Foundation bank accounts. It was agreed that the stocks of books and tea towels historic value would be written off in this year's accounts and future sales and purchases be accounted for in the year they occurred.

Reserves Policy

The Executive Committee considers that the current General Fund cash reserve held is more than appropriate to its needs for the smooth running of the Society in 2024 and beyond. This will allow the Society to support new projects in the coming years.

Diana Freestone, Secretary

*A copy of the Society's accounts will be available on our website from 1st April 2023.
If you would like a hard copy posted or emailed to you, after this date, please contact the Secretary*



VOLUNTARY DONATIONS

We depend largely on our members' subscriptions to carry out our work, and welcome additional help from donations and legacies of any amount, however small.

*You can also support Friends of Lewes by participating in the Lewes District Council Local Lottery at:
<https://www.leweslocallottery.co.uk/support/friends-of-lewes>*