



NEWSLETTER

Winter 2024



Picture from Paul Kiernan – taken from Lewes Golf Course and showing a steam train making good time out of Lewes on 20th November 2024

There is a certain magic to the idea of a steam train approaching Christmas, rushing through the countryside to enable reunions or deliver presents depending on which story we ascribe to it, and when Paul Kiernan sent his photo of a steam train passing Lewes, shown only by its plume of steam, it had to be this newsletter's front cover picture. Many thanks to Paul for this, and if other readers would like to send in pictures they have taken of some aspect of the town they would be most welcome.

Ruth O'Keeffe - Chair of Friends of Lewes

Welcome to the Friends of Lewes Winter Newsletter 2024

Your newsletter is, as always, full of interesting articles written by members of the Executive Committee. It has been great to welcome two new members to the Planning Committee, Luke Bray and Alex Durn, but sad to lose Diana Wilkins as a much-valued Membership Secretary; many thanks to Diana for all of her work on behalf of the Friends, and we wish her well in her new endeavours.

The Planning Committee continue to be busy, and you will find news of the two new members, as well as articles on the North Street Quarter, Old Malling Farm and the Lewes Bus Station site on pages 3-5. Thanks to Roger Maskew and Peter Earl for these reports, Also on page 5 you will find news from John Gower about Flooding - John is the new Friends of Lewes lead on this topic. There is also an invitation to members who may wish to help in curating a Friends of Lewes exhibition in October 2025 as part of the 25th anniversary of the Lewes Floods in 2000. Peter Earl returns with another article on page 6, concerning the Heritage Open days this year, with information about the dates for next year to add to your diary.

Audrey Jarvis has, as ever, an action-packed report on the Trees Committee on pages 7-8, starting with news about Audrey's presentation "Creating our urban arboretum" to the Trees Design and Action Group, a national charity concerned with trees in the landscape, a copy of which can be found on the Friends of Lewes website. Keith Sacre from the Trees Committee also made a presentation about guidance for community tree projects.

Bronagh Liddicoat and Jane Slater have news from the Membership Services Committee on page 9; and an invitation for Friends to consider joining the committee.

It just remains for me to wish you all well as Christmas approaches - where did 2024 go? - and thank you on behalf of the Executive and other Friends of Lewes committees for your continuing support.

With all good wishes for a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year

Ruth



Christmas Gift ideas from the Friends of Lewes Our popular books, cards, prints and tea towels are for sale via our website, with a discount for FoL members, plus postage and packing charges waived during December.

All the details are at <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/resources/>

THE PLANNING COMMITTEE *from Roger Maskew*

Since the last newsletter in June, there have been a further four monthly meetings of the Planning Committee at the beginning of each month from July to October, when a total of 55 planning applications were considered and responses submitted to the relevant planning authority on 13 submissions.

As a result of these responses, the views of the Society seem to continue to be well received by the South Downs National Park Authority, in the determination of a number of planning applications that the Planning Committee had considered, and submitted an opinion together with other relevant comments.

In August, the Planning Committee welcomed Luke Bray and Alex Durn, both practicing local architects, as new members of the Committee.

During the last four months there has been four projects of major concern to the Planning Committee, as follows:-

- (1) Progress on the approved planning application by Human Nature for the redevelopment of the North Street Quarter, (please refer to the separate item below).
- (2) Approval of the planning application for the proposed redevelopment of the Former Lewes Bus Station site by the Generator Group, (please refer to the separate item below).
- (3) Approval of planning application for the construction of 226 houses on the Old Malling Farm site on the outskirts of Lewes by TopHat Communities Limited, (please refer to the separate item below).
- (4) Initial ideas by Cayuga Homes for the redevelopment of Eastgate Wharf, (the former Wenban – Smith site), on the south side of the Phoenix Causeway were displayed for public consultation during November 2024.

The North Street Quarter *from Roger Maskew*

Members will recall that the amended scheme was considered by the SDNPA's Planning Committee at its meeting held in County Hall on the 15th February 2024, when the committee resolved "That authority be delegated to the Director of Planning, in consultation with the Chair of Planning Committee, to grant planning permission", which would be subject to satisfying a number of conditions.

On the 18th October 2024, Human Nature issued a "Planning and delivery update" on The Phoenix Project, with the 'key points' being as follows:-

- (1) Human Nature was "happy to report that National Highways (the government body that maintains major roads in England) has finally removed its objection to the application". This change of view was based on the proposed shift away from reliance on car ownership towards active travel and shared transport.
- (2) Human Nature confirmed that "Discussions with the County Council on travel and transport are ongoing". In this respect, the County Council as the Local Highway Authority has yet to remove its objection to this planning application.
- (3) Human Nature also confirmed that a draft version of the Section 106 Agreement has been circulated, and it is hoped that this legal document can be finalised and signed by all parties by the end of November this year.

Old Malling Farm from Roger Maskew

Members are reminded that the Society responded on the 25th January 2024, and strongly objected to the reserved matters application in terms of both “the scale, layout, external appearance and landscaping”, together with a number of “drainage comments”.

However, Southern Water, (in a letter dated the 05th February 2024), stated that following a “detailed network modelling review”, the company had decided that the full number of houses could now be accommodated on the site, as compared to their previous limit of 50 houses.

An amended scheme was subsequently submitted by the applicant on the 04th April 2024.

Having assessed these amendments, the Society submitted further comments to the Planning Authority on the 22nd April 2024, maintaining its strong objection to the proposals.

Notwithstanding these concerns, this planning application for the construction of 226 dwellings was granted approval at the SDNPA’s Planning Committee meeting in Midhurst on the 12th September 2024, subject to satisfying a number of conditions.

Lewes bus station update from Peter Earl

The planning application for the residential and commercial redevelopment of the Lewes Bus Station site was considered by the Planning Committee for the South Downs National Park Authority at their meeting on 12th September in Midhurst. Members voted by 7 to 3 to approve the plans for the 6-storey development, subject to the completion of a legal agreement to secure a number of matters, including two affordable homes and £291,000 towards alternative bus facilities on the southern side of Phoenix Causeway. Once the legal agreement is signed it allows the planning permission to be issued, paving the way for the demolition of the bus station and garage by Generator Group, who would then build 35 homes, including three houses and 32 flats, as well as 198m² of commercial floorspace on the ground floor.

The new bus provision is proposed to be delivered by East Sussex County Council, and would include two bus stops with shelters and real-time passenger information on the southern side of Phoenix Causeway adjacent to the Waitrose car park. This would be complemented by a further three bus stops, with shelters, real-time information, a kiosk and toilet facilities, on the northern side of Phoenix Causeway provided by Human Nature Ltd as part of the 685-home Phoenix Development that was given the go-ahead, in principle, earlier this year. Once the new bus stops were provided it would allow the removal of the three (currently ‘temporary’) bus stops at the bottom of School Hill.

James MacCleary MP, and the “Campaign to Save Lewes Bus Station”, supported by many local organisations, including the Friends of Lewes, requested that the planning application be ‘called-in’, because of the way the application was handled and the judgements reached, so that the development could be considered at a public inquiry. Angela Rayner, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government issued a “Holding Direction” on the 13th September to the South Downs National Park Authority, preventing the decision notice being issued whilst she considers the request. The ‘Holding Direction’ was removed on the 20th November and therefore the SDNPA are able to proceed to issue planning permission once the legal agreement is signed off.

The National Park Officers considered the public benefits of the bus station redevelopment were sufficient to outweigh the ‘less than substantial harm’ both to the Conservation Area and the setting of the nearby listed buildings from their six-storey building. The Friends of Lewes have consistently questioned the officer assessment and requested a more detailed explanation of how the development, which visually competes with the adjacent Eastgate Baptist Church

tower, is acceptable when the same authority have been critical of the impact of building around St Thomas's Church in Cliffe High Street. It is not considered that the changes from the previous application have significantly reduced the size, scale or height of the development from the previous application, or that the design with truncated chimneys and glass and steel balconies, is acceptable in the historic core of the conservation area.

At the same time there remains an absence of clarity on the re-provision of the proposed Phoenix Causeway bus interchange and the associated bus stops. East Sussex County Council has stated that it does not have the resources to explain how the bus facilities on Phoenix Causeway will provide an interchange, work with other stops, provide for the layover of buses between services, and the loading and unloading of tourist coaches, including left-hand drive (continental) vehicles. The Friends of Lewes do not consider that the alternative provision, either side of a very busy road, provides the an 'operationally satisfactory alternative' to the bus station, which would be safe and convenient, or indeed adequate for the town's needs, being required to accommodate 1600 services each week.

The Friends of Lewes are continuing to seek clarity on these matters to ensure the appearance of the conservation area is protected, along with its landscape setting, and the setting to adjacent listed buildings.

Flooding - from John Gower

Our hearts go out to the people of Southern Spain who suffered devastating flooding, which has killed over 200 people. In some places a year's rain fell in 8 hours. Sadly, climate change and rising global temperatures make such events more likely.

Lewes has a long history of flooding and in 2000 the river Ouse burst its banks and 610 homes and 300 businesses were badly flooded. 186 people had to sleep in the Town Hall and Malling Community Centre until the flood waters subsided, and many could not return home for months whilst the damage to their homes was repaired.

The Friends of Lewes will be marking the 25th anniversary of these floods next October, watch out for details early next year. Our website has important information and simple steps to help minimise the impacts from flooding. Please check it out [here](#).

John Gower is the Friends of Lewes flood lead, having recently taken over from Bronagh Liddicoat. John spent his working life as an environmental scientist with the Environment Agency and led the recovery after the in the 2000 Lewes floods. He also has expertise in coastal defences and long-term climate change, something that Lewes is vulnerable to.

Lewes Flood Anniversary 2020 – 2025

Are you interested in helping curate a Friends of Lewes exhibition?

We are looking for someone to help set up an exhibition of the Lewes 2000 Floods, which will be part of the 25th anniversary next October. It will include sourcing photographs, memories, artworks and recollections to display alongside some audio recordings and videos that will also be made.

A little bit of time and enthusiasm are more important than previous experience! If you are interested, please contact the secretary at enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Heritage Open Days 13th – 15th September 2024 from Peter Earl

Lewes Heritage Open Days event was just one of 5,427 events that took place across England, with 82% of visitors nationally stating that it made them feel proud of their local area. It was estimated that nationally £11.5 million contributed to local economy through 'secondary spend' and I am sure that Lewes benefitted too with people enjoying the fine weekend and all aspects of the festival. We have again had an enormous amount of positive feedback from so many people about all elements of the 2024 festival in the town, with all venues being well attended and almost all the spaces on the tours and walks being taken.

It was really pleasing to be able to provide access to a new venue and add different walks to the programme. Sussex Past were able to open the doors of three historic Lewes landmarks, The Castle, Anne of Cleves House and Bull House throughout most of the Lewes Festival.

Lewes Crown Court was also open again with over 1116 visitors on the single day of opening. The feedback again was overwhelmingly positive, with the majority of individuals stating that it had also given them a better understanding of the justice system with the most popular part of the visit being to the cells and the courts, the prison transport van and meeting the people that work there from judges to the clerks. Watching the consideration of a mock crime in one of the courts was thoroughly recommend.

Feedback included reference to the walk by a master craftsman David Smith who opened people's eyes to skill of flint work - how to read a wall, the twittens in the town and the many buildings constructed with flint. The tour of St Thomas a Becket church and bell tower was described as well organised and professional.

The Lewes organising committee would like to express their huge thanks to all those that supported the event, whether as property owners, tour and walk guides or as stewards, without whose help the event could not take place. We are also extremely grateful for our sponsors, Lewes History Group, Lewes Therapeutic Gardening Group.

At the Heritage Open Day launch the Society's vice chair, Roger Maskew, paid tribute to the significant contribution that Chris Kneale had made to the work of the society, and particularly his services to the Planning Committee, where he was chair for 11 years, and the Executive Committee. Chris was presented with a certificate and a small gift.

The 2025 national HOD event is to take place between 12-21st September and the Lewes dates will be the **12th – 14th September 2025**. The organising committee will start work in March and if there is anyone who would like to become part of the group or would be interested in stewarding, please let Diana Freestone know on enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

We are always looking to add new venues to the festival and new walks or tours.

- If you are able to bring a building or other feature to the festival or would be interested in undertaking a walk, please get in contact the Society's secretary. And
- If there is a specific venue or walk within the town you would like to see during the event, please let us know.

Trees Committee Update from Audrey Jarvis

In July, two members of the Trees Committee were invited to join a seminar organised by the Trees Design and Action Group, (TDGA), on the topic of “Engaging with communities to support local tree planting and deliver change”. Audrey Jarvis gave a presentation on “Creating our urban arboretum” and Keith Sacre presented on the topic of “Useful arboricultural guidance for community tree projects”. A copy of the presentation about Lewes Urban Arboretum is available on our website: [Community Engagement – The Friends of Lewes \(friends-of-lewes.org.uk\)](https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

What are we doing?

- Planting trees in verges and green spaces
- Planting wildlife hedgerows
- Looking after all the trees and hedges we have planted
- Responding to applications for tree works
- Responding to consultations on new developments

Why are we doing it?

- To increase tree canopy cover for climate resilience
- To improve biodiversity for wildlife and for us

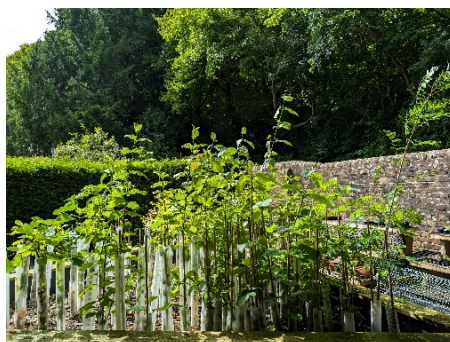


Excerpt from presentation to TDAG

At our Trees Committee meeting in July, we chose the tree sites and appropriate trees for each site. Our working parties will begin in November, when we will be planting thirty-six trees around Malling and three more elsewhere in Lewes.

One of the ideas the committee had suggested for future planting was on the perimeter of Priory School field that runs alongside Ham Lane. We were delighted to hear from Green United that they would be interested in taking this on as a project, using some funding they have received from Tesco's. In September we met the student representatives from each of the Lewes primary and secondary schools to measure up and make plans. They are going to make a presentation to the school governors and, hopefully, gain their approval for planting in 2025.

We have made several visits to Wallands School to talk with them about increasing biodiversity in their new “quiet garden”. In January, we plan to return there to plant some of the trees we have grown in our tree nursery there as a wildlife hedge. The locally-collected tree seeds were planted in October/November 2022, and they have grown a great deal with all the rain we have had this year.



The young trees in our tree nursery

On 31st August we enjoyed talking about trees with visitors to the Societies Fair. In November we will be giving a talk about trees and Swifts at the House of Friendship, where we planted a Silver Birch in December. On Sunday 17th November, the Trees Committee had an overwhelming response to their activity at the Lewes STEM Festival in the Town Hall. Visitors were queuing up to make a wooden tree decoration to celebrate the value of trees for wildlife!



STEM Festival November 2024

In between the events and site visits, we have been weeding, mulching, and pruning the 222 trees we have already planted for the second time this year. We want to make sure they are all doing well before we plant any more. It is wonderful to hear how much the residents who live nearby appreciate the trees and have kept them watered over the year.



Liquidambar styraciflua Worplesdon, Prince Edward's Road

During Heritage Open Days in September, members of the Trees Committee led in a guided walk around Malling Deanery Arboretum. Keith Sacre shared information about 28 of the trees with thirty visitors.



Guided walk around Malling Deanery Arboretum, September 2024

Membership Services Committee update from Committee Members:

Bronagh Liddicoat and Jane Slater

The Membership Committee has been busy with the publicity and organising of Society Talks, whilst being the first point of contact for Members. We are always keen to hear Members' suggestions for Talks and speakers, which are in support of our Aims and Goals.

In August, Marcus Taylor previewed the wonderful buildings that Friends of Lewes had organised access to between 13-15 September under Lewes Heritage Open Days. The weekend is very popular and it was useful to have a guide to the interesting backgrounds behind them. This year we had nearly twenty buildings to choose from, ranging from the Rusty House to Harvey's Brewery. Marcus' guidance made everyone very enthusiastic to book places.

Our November talk was on **Wednesday 13 November via Zoom** when Paul Stevens talked about 'A Summer with Swifts, Swallows and Martins.' Paul is a respected ecologist specialising in swifts. He related natural world functions to habitat management especially with the Chalk Downs and Flood Meadows.

In September, the Town Council approved a proposal from the Lewes Swift supporters to designate Lewes as a swift friendly town. Members should register for the Talk on the Friends of Lewes website to receive the Zoom link for the Talk.

Next year, in the Spring, we hope to hear from the Conservation Officer, Alex Moojen with an update on looking after buildings in the Conservation Area, given the challenges of climatic effects etc.

We are sad to lose Diana Wilkins as our Membership Secretary and chair of the Committee and thank her for all her worthwhile efforts. If you would like to be involved in any way, or think that you would enjoy the role of Membership Secretary, please see the website for further details.

Join the Membership Services Committee

Do you have a passion for local topics? Do you like meeting people and sharing ideas? Then why not join us on the Membership Services Committee? We are a small, friendly team who meet once every three months to create a programme of talks and events to inform and support the Friends of Lewes' mission to 'Keep Lewes Special'. If you would like to find out more, please contact Diana Freestone at membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk.



VOLUNTARY DONATION

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>