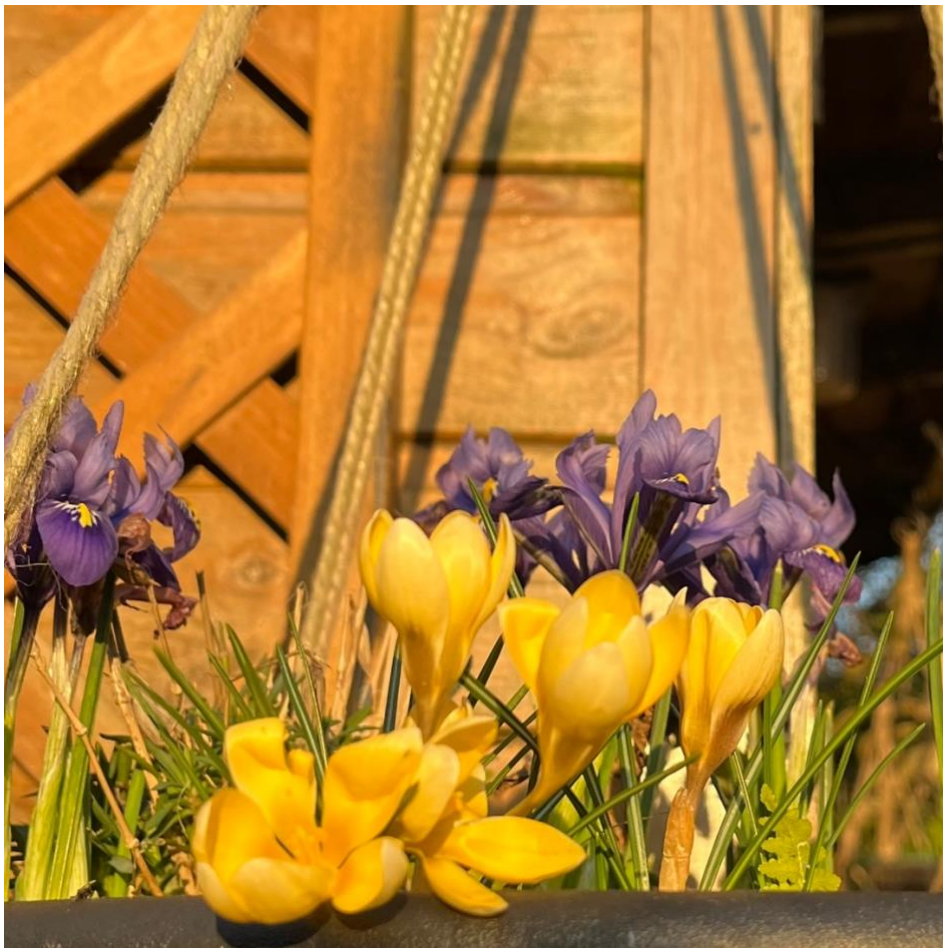




KEEPING OUR TOWN SPECIAL

# Annual Report 2024



*Picture from a member*

Dear Members of Friends of Lewes

Emily Dickinson's poem "A Light Exists in Spring" was, I feel, written for a cold, clear, blue-sky day like the one in March when I am sitting down to write this. I am pecking away at the keyboard left hand only having broken my right wrist on a 'healthy walk' during school half term, relying on Friends of Lewes' excellent Secretary Diana Freestone to pick up any resultant calumnies which the spellchecker either misses or misconstrues. Hopefully between the three of us all will be well!

Your latest Annual Report contains much of interest, and looking ahead to the coming year there will be a number of new projects to let you know about as the next newsletters come out. Thanks as always to all contributors to the report, and the committee members who support them.

Before diving into the main articles of the report, do give some time to the administrative pages which tell you who does what currently, and how your Civic Society aims to conduct itself, including the very useful set of goals and objectives that underpin the work of all our committees.

Roger Maskew's detailed and informative report from the Planning Committee follows, with news about the North Street site and several other applications in progress with Peter Earl providing an update on the Bus Station. Careful consideration of the issues surrounding applications is set out in detail. Next, the related topic of flooding is covered by John Gower, including news of the ways in which FoL is preparing to mark the important quarter century (can it really be that long?) anniversary of the 2000 floods. Do you have family memorabilia from the flood? Watch out for details later in the year letting you know how you can contribute to these events.

Audrey Jarvis' contribution from the Trees Committee is as always action-packed and a testament to the continued hard work of the members. In addition to core activities surrounding tree planting and maintenance you can also find out about their community events and engagement. Don't miss news that follows the report letting you know about Lewes becoming a "Swift-friendly Town" together with a note about Lewes Climate Hub and the town having gained Level 1 Arboretum status through an international accreditation programme.

Next, the latest from the Membership Services Committee, with news on events, projects and publicity together with some technical details about our website. Thanks are due to Di Wilkins for all her valuable input as Membership Secretary and Chair of Membership Services. This section concludes with an invitation to members; would you like to join the Membership Services Committee? All details provided.

Peter Earl reports back on a well-attended Heritage Open Day and gives the details known so far for the coming year. Again there is an invitation to members if you would be interested in taking part in the heritage weekend this year.

Finally, Diana Freestone sets out headlines for our accounts; I can reveal that new projects are already coming forward for support including a mini museum in an old telephone box and renovation work to the community building, the Hub, on Landport - to be included in future correspondence with you.

It just remains for me to thank you our members and readers, for all your support and wish you a Happy Spring; why not take up one of the invitations in this report and come and join the people you are reading about?

With all good wishes

*Ruth*

Ruth O'Keeffe  
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](http://www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk) email address: [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

**Personnel on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024**

President: John Davey

Vice-Presidents: Peter Mettyear & James MacCleary MP

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Elected Officers**

Chair	Ruth O'Keeffe
Vice-Chair	Roger Maskew
Secretary	Diana Freestone
Treasurer	Win Myat Htet

**Executive Committee Members**

Peter Earl  
Audrey Jarvis  
Bronagh Liddicoat  
Jane Slater

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

**PLANNING COMMITTEE**

Roger Maskew (Chair) \*  
Luke Bray  
Will Dorman  
Alex Durn  
John Gower  
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 Yates

**MEMBERSHIP SERVICES COMMITTEE**

Vacant (Chair)  
Bronagh Liddicoat\*  
Peter Mettyear  
Jane Slater\*  
Paul Yates

**HERITAGE OPEN DAY COMMITTEE**

Peter Earl (Chair)\*  
David Attwood  
Sue Berry  
Diana Freestone\*  
David Hutchinson

*\* 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 over 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 31/12/24 is 407.

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 of Lewes.

#### **To co-operate:**

- with public authorities and other bodies in fulfilling these objectives in the Lewes 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. 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, Membership Services and Heritage Open Days**

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 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 2024 a total of 201 applications were considered in detail and representations made to the SDNPA as the Planning Authority on 62 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 are detailed elsewhere in this report.

At the AGM in April 2024, regrettably Chris Kneale decided to retire from the Committee after nearly twenty years of service, and as a result both his technical expertise and extensive knowledge of the planning system and previous planning applications considered by the Friends was sorely missed. Chris's contribution to the Friends was subsequently recognised at a presentation to him at the launch of the Heritage Open Days weekend in September 2024.

The Planning Committee was pleased to welcome two new members in 2024, namely Luke Bray and Alex Durn, both from Axiom Architects, thus re-establishing the link between this Local Architects Practice and the Friends of Lewes, as had been the case with previous members of the Committee.

In April 2024, John Gower an established member of the Committee, took over the "Lead Flood Role" from Bronagh Liddicoat, who has successfully undertaken this role for a number of years.

### ***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 2024 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, was previously considered by the SDNPA's Planning Committee on the 12<sup>th</sup> October 2023, when the Friends detailed their reasons for objection.

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 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

A revised scheme for the Phoenix Project was submitted by Human Nature in December 2023 with the deadline for comments being 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

The Friends submitted a response to the SDNPA on the 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024, maintaining our objections to this amended proposal, specifying both our overall and detailed conclusions.

This revised scheme was re-submitted to the SDNPA's Planning Committee at its meeting on the 15<sup>th</sup> February 2024, when the Friends repeated their objection to the revised scheme.

After an extensive discussion at the Committee, the revised scheme was approved subject to the following conditions. "That authority be delegated to the Director of Planning, in consultation with the Chair of the Planning Committee, to refuse the application with appropriate reasons if:

(a) The Section 106 legal agreement is not completed, or sufficient progress has not been made within six months of the Planning Committee meeting of 15<sup>th</sup> February; and or

(b) The Secretary of State for Transport requires that the application be refused (in accordance with the 2018 Direction of Trunks Roads)."

On the 7<sup>th</sup> August 2024, a letter was sent to the SDNPA's Interim Director of Planning, with the following request:

"Given that this six-month period will expire soon on the 15<sup>th</sup> August, are you able to advise whether this planning application is likely to be referred back to the Planning Committee for further consideration?"

A reply dated the 4<sup>th</sup> August stating that sufficient progress had been made, although there was not yet an exact timescale for the Section 106 legal agreement to be completed. On the 18<sup>th</sup> 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.

As of the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, there had been no further news.

*From Roger Maskew*

## ***Lewes Bus Station Redevelopment***

Members will be aware that the planning proposals for redevelopment of Lewes Bus Station in Eastgate Street have been through a long period of consideration.

In September 2022 a planning application by the Generator Group for the demolition of the bus station and its redevelopment with 40 dwellings and 198 m<sup>2</sup> commercial floorspace with 17 car parking spaces was refused by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) who is the planning authority for Lewes. In June 2023 another application was submitted, this time for the demolition of existing buildings and the construction of mixed-use development comprising 3 houses and 32 self-contained flats with 198 m<sup>2</sup> of ground floor commercial space.



The Friends of Lewes made strong objection to this application, on the grounds that further development in the town centre was unnecessary, given: the large number of currently vacant commercial properties in the town centre; that new dwellings should not be built on the flood plain prior to the longer-term flood risks being fully assessed and the necessary flood protection measures implemented, and that there is an absence of the required 50% 'affordable' dwellings. Furthermore, it was considered that Lewes deserves to have good quality architecture, at an appropriate scale, provided at this important location which does not harm its character or setting within the Conservation Area. Further grounds were that a well-designed bespoke bus station within the town centre is also required in order to encourage both residents and visitors to make greater use of the local bus services, the best location being the existing bus station site in Eastgate Street as an integral part of an agreed transport plan for Lewes. Significant environmental improvements were also considered to be needed to Phoenix Causeway in order to improve its appearance and amenity as an appropriate 'entrance' to the historic town, including retaining the trees within the Tree Preservation Orders on both sides of the road.

Our representation referred to the failure of the development to conserve and enhance the existing townscape and its conflict with policies in the South Downs Local Plan, the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan and national planning policies. It was considered to be at variance with the National Park's purposes and duty "To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage, and to foster the social and economic wellbeing of its communities".

Subsequently, amendments were made to the design of the building, and whilst the reduction in the mass and heights of small parts of the proposed development were welcomed, they are at best 'minimal', and have little effect in reducing the overall visual impact and harm to the historic core of the Conservation Area and the setting of adjacent listed buildings.

The 'key' outstanding concern is the urgent need to provide suitable bus interchange facilities for the centre of Lewes, following the closure of the former Lewes Bus Station. It is not considered to have been met by 3 bus stands on the north side of the Phoenix Causeway (as part of the Human Nature's proposed redevelopment of the North Street Quarter), and two bus stands on the south side, financed by the bus station developers. This location is not considered to be acceptable as it is too remote from the town centre and cannot provide a safe or attractive replacement, straddling, as it does, the town's busiest road. Whilst a resolution to approve Human Nature's planning application was made in February 2024 the planning permission still had not been granted by 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 and there is no indication of any timescale for implementing it, including the 'replacement bus station' arrangements.

The Society made further representations and took issue with the judgments of both the design and conservation assessments which were considered inconsistent with the SDNPA's own advice, particularly the recently approved Lewes Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan and the SDNPA Design guide. The former has identified a number of 'improvement areas' in the town including the oversized St Thomas' Court development beside St Thomas a' Becket church which it considered detracts from the townscape of the area and dilutes the historic urban grain.

The Society's strong objections were presented orally to the SDNPA Committee members at their meeting in Midhurst in September 2024, but on a split vote it was resolved to approve the development. Officers had advised that the proposals had attempted to address heritage impacts identified in the previous application and that there would be 'less than substantial harm' to the Conservation Area and nearby listed buildings, due to the scale and form of the parts of the roof and inclusion of two floors of accommodation in the roof space. This harm was considered to be 'at a low level', with the public benefits of the proposal outweighing that harm (the benefits being the delivery of under 6% affordable housing and the removal of the temporary bus stands in School Hill, which were built after being displaced from the bus station). The legal agreement required to issue the planning permission had still not been signed at the end of 2024 and so no planning permission was in place at that time.

Whilst the SDNPA stated that they required a subservient building set adjacent to existing taller buildings, the result is a block of flats which encroaches up to the edge of the highway beyond the footprint of the existing building which, in terms of height, is over 6 storeys, substantially taller than all the other buildings in the street which are one, two and three storeys. Even the Eastgate Baptist Church tower reaches just 21.490m compared with the 24.025m of the new building. In the Society's view this confirms the unacceptable scale of the proposal which can only reinforce the SDNPA's own consultants' recommendation to remove ugly and unsympathetic developments from the boundaries of the Conservation Area.



Whilst a detailed explanation of officer judgements was sought, the SDNPA declined to reply. The town's conservation area has been identified as 'the jewel' in the National Park but, on this evidence, it's a jewel that will be irrevocably tarnished if this damaging development ever sees the light of day. The Society supported the request for the application to be called-in by the Deputy Prime Minister for determination after a public inquiry. After a ten-week wait this request was declined, despite widespread support, from the Lewes MP, Lewes Town Council, the Campaign to Save Lewes Bus Station and many others.

*From Peter Earl*

### ***The Garden Street Auction Rooms***

In June 2024 there was a request for the implementation of the original planning application, which had been allowed at appeal, prior to confirmation of discharge of pre-commencement conditions.

The Friends of Lewes objected to this application, and added that should the approved scheme require any amendments or modifications, the Society would like to suggest that a new planning application may be required.

As of the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024, there was no further progress on the determination of this application by the SDNPA as the planning authority.

### ***Old Malling Farm***

Members are reminded that the Society responded on the 25<sup>th</sup> 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 05<sup>th</sup> 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 04<sup>th</sup> April 2024. Having assessed these amendments, the Society submitted further comments to the Planning Authority on the 22<sup>nd</sup> 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 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024, subject to satisfying a number of conditions.

### ***Redevelopment of the Eastgate Wharf site by Cayuga Homes***

The main aim of the application is built around the connectivity to the housing, commercial community and neighbourhood plan for Lewes. The design incorporates a mix of materials that are currently present within the Lewes townscape. The team have been working with NSQ and the Generator Group to ensure the design and space is compatible with the aspiration of the other developments.

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.

### ***Planning Policy Consultations***

The deadline for comments on the consultation on the Lewes District Council's "Local Plan Spatial Strategy", was Thursday 8th February 2024.

The draft of the Society's response to the consultation, (kindly written by Chris Kneale), was agreed, and it was subsequently submitted on Monday 05<sup>th</sup> February before the extended deadline of the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

*From Roger Maskew*

### ***Flood Issues in Lewes***

Flood risk continues to be a critical issue for Lewes. Climate change is bringing ever-increasing rainfall intensity, which places significant pressure on local drainage systems, the river Ouse, and its flood defences. The Environment Agency projects that by 2025 more than one in four homes in England will be at risk of flooding or coastal erosion, up from the current figure of one in six. The majority of these additional properties will be at risk from surface water flooding, highlighting the urgent need for effective planning and mitigation measures.

Flood risk remains a significant factor in commenting on planning applications. The Friends of Lewes Planning Committee actively monitors local developments to ensure that building does not place the community at increased risk of flooding. Additionally, we keep a close watch on upstream developments to ensure they do not overload the River Ouse and exacerbate flood pressures in Lewes. Of particular concern is the continued practice of paving over gardens for driveways without adequate on-site soakaway drainage. Poor enforcement of planning and building control requirements by authorities has been noted, and we are pushing for stricter compliance to mitigate the surface water flooding risks that this practice can cause.

Despite the clear need for improved drainage systems in light of climate change, the government has yet to implement the sustainable drainage requirements for new developments as mandated by Section 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010. This requirement would ensure that new developments incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) to manage surface water runoff effectively, thereby reducing flood risks. The delay in implementing these measures is a significant concern for communities like Lewes, which face increasing flood threats.

This autumn marks the 25th anniversary of the devastating 2000 Lewes floods. The Friends of Lewes are supporting the Town Council in planning a town-wide Flood Conference, which will raise awareness and educate residents and emergency responders on how to be better prepared for future flood events. As part of these efforts, we will run a supporting Flood Exhibition featuring photographs and recorded memories and reflections from those who experienced the events of 2000. These initiatives aim to remind the town of the devastating impacts of flooding and ensure that lessons from the past are not forgotten.

Whilst Lewes has not experienced any recent major flooding events, rainfall intensity continues to increase, placing stress on the River Ouse and the Winterbourne Stream. In September 2014, nearly three times the average annual rainfall fell across much of the UK, leading to widespread flooding in many other areas. There were several instances where recently completed flood defences were overwhelmed, resulting in the flooding of homes and properties. These events underscore the increasing challenges posed by more intense and unpredictable rainfall patterns due to climate change.

Further afield, in October 2024 Valencia, Spain, experienced a devastating flood in which over 250 people lost their lives. Sudden and severe flooding overwhelmed local rivers and diversion channels. Tragically, 60% of those who drowned did so while trapped in their vehicles, highlighting the dangers of attempting to move cars or drive through floodwaters. This serves as a stark reminder of the importance of heeding flood warnings and avoiding unnecessary risks during flood events.

*From John Gower*

## **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.***

We began the 2024 tree planting season in November by planting eleven native Hornbeams, (*Carpinus betulus*), on the verge beside Prince Charles Road, Malling. They continue the line of ten disease-resistant Elms that we planted there as gateway trees in 2023 and should become a welcome landmark at the entrance to Lewes. These trees will provide food, habitat, and valuable winter cover for a wide range of insects and invertebrates.



*Photo by Chris Bibb*

Our next working party was also in Malling, where we planted four Persian Ironwood trees, (*Parrotia persica*), near to Malling Stores in Malling Close. This tree has lovely red leaves in autumn and the planting was inspired by a beautiful example we had seen in Malling Deanery Arboretum.

Just around the corner from the stores, in The Martlets, we planted three Pin Oaks, (*Quercus palustris*), that have deep red leaves in autumn that have a distinctive “pin” at the end of each lobe of the leaves. One of these trees was planted in the gardens of Southover Grange last year to celebrate the coronation of Charles III.

On the deep verge leading down to Hereward Way we planted another Pin Oak and six Oriental Planes, (*Platanus orientalis* “Minaret”). In 2015 we planted a similar Plane tree next to the car park of Southover and Western Road Schools and it is growing very well.

These non-native species were chosen for their climate resilience and to add some diversity to the tree population of the town. Our group has now planted 69 different species of trees in Lewes.



Photo by Peter Thurman

We finished off 2024 by planting eight more trees in Lewes, making a total of 253 that we have planted since our first working party in 2014. We started by planting three Field Maples, (*Acer campestre* Elsrijk), in Queen’s Road. These trees have an upright form that will suit the narrower verge there. Next we planted two favourite trees - English Oaks, (*Quercus robur*), in Monk’s Way. A resident of Ferrers Road had asked us to replace a felled tree outside her home, so we chose a Wild Apple, (*Malus trilobata*). She was very pleased indeed with the result and gave us some mince pies to speed us on our way.

Nearby, in Prince Edward’s Road, a resident has been taking very good care of the Sweetgum, (*Liquidambar styraciflua* Worplesdon), that we planted there in 2021. He suggested that we might plant another one in the opposite verge, so there is now a matching pair. Last of all we went back to Houndean Rise. Because of the gas works there last year, we were unable to plant one of our Cockspurthorn trees, (*Crataegus prunifolia*), so we promised to return and plant one this season.

We are very grateful to Lewes District Council and East Sussex County Council for giving planting permissions and supplying service maps for our planting sites.





The Trees Committee have hosted several community events over the year. We organised a fortnight of activities at Lewes Climate Hub as part of the “Taking Steps for Wildlife” season that focussed on the benefits of trees for wildlife and included a talk by Keith Sacre of our Trees Committee on the benefits of trees. During Heritage Open Days we led another popular walk around the amazing variety of trees at Malling Deanery Arboretum.

We had a lot of engagement with younger children at the STEM Festival in the Town Hall in November and helped them to make medallions to celebrate the wildlife that trees support. We also enjoyed giving a talk about Lewes trees to visitors at the House of Friendship.

One of our Tree Committee members, Peter Thurman, gave a presentation to Lewes Town Councillors to support them in commenting on planning applications that involve tree works. In July, Audrey Jarvis and Keith Sacre were both asked to give presentations to the Tree Design and Action Group about community tree planting and tree maintenance.

We have made site visits to Priory School to propose a joint venture with Green United to plant a long hedgerow for wildlife on the boundary of the school grounds and Ham Lane. The Green United representatives from each of the Lewes schools worked on a presentation to the governors that persuaded them to give permission for this to go ahead in January 2026.



Malling Deanery Arboretum



Tree talk at Lewes Climate Hub



STEM Festival

## 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***

The whips in our tree nursery that we grew from seeds collected locally have grown very well. We plan to plant them around the new quiet garden at Wallands School early next year. Wildflower Lewes has been able to supply a wide range of residents and community groups with the chalk grassland wildflowers we have grown from seeds.



## Lewes Swifts Supporters

In September 2024, Lewes Town Council agreed to the request from Lewes Swift Supporters to proclaim Lewes as a "Swift-friendly town". Everything we do to support Swifts enhances biodiversity for all other wildlife, so this fits well with the goals of Friends of Lewes, and we were pleased to support the project. You may find out more about it here: <https://e-voice.org.uk/lewesswiftsupporters/lewes-a-swift-friendly-town>.



## Lewes Climate Hub

As a partner group of Lewes Climate Hub, at 32 High Street Lewes, we are pleased to have been part of their success. In 2024, they welcomed 3,300 visitors over eleven exciting sessions, and you may find out about their plans for 2025 by signing up to their newsletter, sponsored by Friends of Lewes: <https://lewesclimatehub.org/>



*Climate Hub Garden Party, July 2024*

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!

*From Audrey Jarvis*

## Membership Services

**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.**

### **Events**

This has been another busy year for the committee's activities. During 2024, we organised five Friends of Lewes talks focusing on the core objectives of Friends of Lewes. These were:

- "The River Ouse: Current condition, pressures and what we're doing about it" (Peter King of Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust) – 20<sup>th</sup> February,
- 'Laughton Greenwood - our Local Community Woodland' (Steve Lewis of Laughton Greenwood) – 19<sup>th</sup> March,
- 'Climate Change: Implications for Coastal & Fluvial flooding in Lewes and Lower Ouse valley' (John Gower, FoL Lead on Flooding) - 19<sup>th</sup> June,
- 'Heritage Open Day Preview' (Marcus Taylor) – 20<sup>th</sup> August, and
- 'A Summer with Swifts, Swallows and Martins' (Paul Stevens) – 13<sup>th</sup> November.

At our Annual General Meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> April, the Talk 'Retrofitting in Lewes' (Chris Rowlands and Nicki Myers of Ovesco) was supported by a panel of energy experts.

At the Lewes Climate Hub on the 30<sup>th</sup> March, we staged a discussion on 'How to protect yourself from surface water flooding' with John Gower, Bronagh Liddicoat and Di Wilkins from FoL and Rachel Paget from Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust (OART).

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 was installed at 29 St Ann's Crescent to commemorate Grand National jockey Lewis Bilbie Rees with input from Marcus Taylor. There are currently 91 commemorative [plaques](#) in the town.

### **Merchandise**

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

### **Membership**

Membership levels have been generally steady during 2024, thanks in part to our in-person meetings, ending the year at 407 (compared with 413 at the end of 2023). 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.

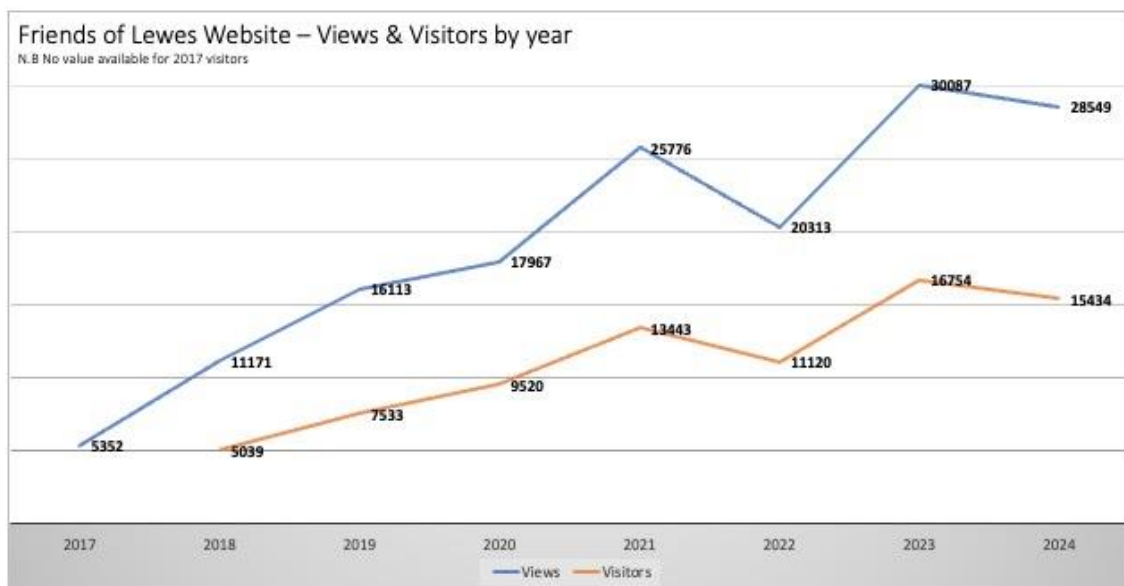
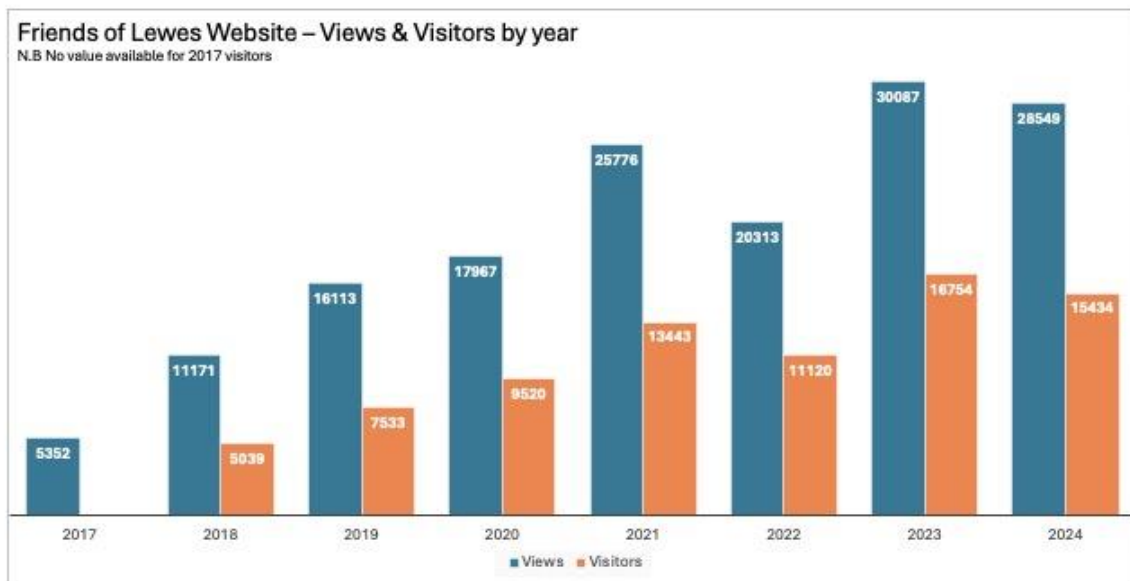
### **Publicity**

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*.

### **Friends of Lewes Website, views per year:**

The figures for the number of views of our website maintained their high levels in 2024, having increased by 41% to 28,549 compared with 2022, when they had dipped down after a Covid-driven peak in 2021 (2023 - 30,087, 2022 - 20,288, 2021 - 25,752, 2020 - 17,943, 2019 - 16,110). Website views have been growing steadily from around 5,000 in 2012 – see graph below.

(A 'visit' counts each unique visitor session and 'views' count each time a page is loaded)



We are also continuing to increase our online audience:

- Website - 182 News item subscribers 15% increase over 2023 (2023 -159, 2022 - 141, 2021 – 131, 2020 -100),
- Facebook – 1135 following FriendsofLewes increase of 13.5% (2023 - 1000, 2022 - 924, 2021 – 637, 2020 – 533)
- Facebook - 655 following LewesUrbanArboretum increase of 3% (2023: 635, 2022, 522, 2021: 460, 2020: 412),
- X (Twitter) – 96 following @lewesfriends down 4%, (2023: 100, 2022: 79, 2021: 44, 2020: 9),
- X (Twitter) - 684 following @LewesArboretum increase of 6%.

Members and non-members can sign up to receive our news and events by registering their email at [membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)



## Membership Services Committee

The Committee was joined early in the year by Peter Mettyear plus Paul Yates and Bill Kocher who look after the website and IT requirements. Their input is most welcome.

We were sorry to lose Diana Wilkins as our Membership Secretary and Chair of the Committee mid-way through the year. We thank her for her input and hard work in those vital roles.

Membership Committee members are urgently needed, so if you would like to contribute to our Committee, please contact Diana Freestone at [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

*From Bronagh Liddicoat & Paul Yates*

## Lewes Heritage Open Days 2024

The Lewes Heritage Open Days events were just a few of 5,427 events that took place across England in September 2024. It was again blessed with fine weather which attracted a significant number of visitors to the town, who seemed to enjoy the varied elements of the festival. Again, we had a gratifying amount of positive feedback from a lot of people on various aspects. All the venues reported a high level of attendance and, even though the number of guided tours and walks was increased, almost all the spaces were booked up, some many weeks in advance. The Harvey's Brewery tour continues to be very popular!

It was really pleasing to be able to provide access to the Quaker Meeting House which had recently undergone refurbishment. Sussex Past opened the doors of three historic Lewes landmarks: The Castle, Anne of Cleves House and Bull House throughout most of the Lewes Festival this time.

Lewes Crown Court was again overwhelmed, with over 1116 visitors on its single day of opening. The feedback, again, was extremely positive, with the majority of people stating that it had also given them a better understanding of the justice system. The most popular parts of the visit were to the cells, to the courts, the prison transport van and meeting the people who work there, from the judges to the clerks. Watching the consideration of a mock crime in one of the courts was thoroughly recommended. Feedback on the festival included reference to the guided 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 overall feedback was extremely positive which is testament to the hard work done by the organising committee throughout the year. They would like to express their huge thanks to all those who supported the event, whether as property owners, tour and walk guides or as stewards. Without this help the event just could not take place. We are also extremely grateful to our sponsors, Lewes History Group and 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 to the Executive Committee. Chris was presented with a certificate and a small gift.

The 2025 National Heritage Open Days event is to take place between 12 - 21st September, with the Lewes festival confirmed as the 12<sup>th</sup> - 14<sup>th</sup> September. The theme this year is 'Architecture', incorporating all the different buildings, bridges and structures in the town, exploring how they have been designed and built, and particular influences.

The organising committee 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 contact the society's secretary. In addition, help with stewarding is always needed, as is sponsorship.

If you are able to help, please do contact the secretary at [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk).

*From Peter Earl*

## **Friends of Lewes Accounts & Financial Review 2024**

### ***Receipts and Payments***

There was an overall surplus in 2024 of £1,467 (2023: £6,495), a net change of -£5,028. At £10,793 net receipts decreased by £4,878 mainly due to a decrease in donations to the Trees Restricted Fund which was unusually high in 2023.

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 £2,880 (2023 £2,068).

### ***Restricted Trees Fund***

Total receipts paid into the Trees Fund (which is restricted to expenditure on tree planting) was £3,500 (2023: £7,666). Income from participation in the Lewes District Lottery is included in these figures which increased from £663 in 2023 to £947 in 2024 which goes solely to support tree planting.

Expenditure during the year amounted to £3,641 and the year-end deficit of £142 is offset against the surplus in the general fund.

### ***Balance Sheet***

At the end of the 2024 financial year, the Society's total monetary assets account totalled £71,267 which is held in Charities Aid Foundation bank accounts.

### ***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 2025 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 from 19 March 2025.  
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>