



NEWSLETTER

Summer 2025



Heart of Reeds Picture by Nick Robinson

Ruth O'Keeffe - Chair of Friends of Lewes

Welcome to the Friends of Lewes Summer Newsletter 2025

It is late evening as I sit down to write to you about the Friends of Lewes' Summer newsletter but the heat of the day persists even now that the sun has gone down. With 2024 the hottest year on record and temperatures soaring this summer again there is plenty of evidence of global warming. Climate has always changed throughout Earth's history and if one delves back in time there are several instances of warmer periods than now, for example in the previous interglacial period about 130,000-115,000 years ago, and again during the Holocene Climatic Optimum about 9,000-6,000 years ago in the Northern Hemisphere. The difference between those warmer periods and today is the extent to which human activity, in the form of greenhouse gas emissions, is driving the change in climate.

Locally, one of the effects of climate change is the greater susceptibility of the town to flooding, and on page five of this newsletter you can read about your civic society's Flood Anniversary exhibition, it now being an incredible quarter of a century since the October flood in 2000. After a preview in the Corn Exchange in tandem with this year's Lewes Societies Fair, on Saturday 30th August from 10am-1pm, the exhibition will be open during the weekends of 11th-12th October and 18th-19th October in Fitzroy House, and then at the end of October there will be a Lewes Floods Conference. Our thanks go to John Gower who is the curator and the co-ordinator of the Friends of Lewes' exhibition and our part in the Conference.

Returning to the beginning of the newsletter after this dive into times past, you will find your Planning Committee has been busy as ever, and Roger Maskew's report on pages 3-5 covers many aspects of this, with Peter Earl contributing information on the latest news on the North Street Quarter and the ever-perplexing saga of the former Bus Station and the diaspora of bus stops across the lower part of the High Street.

Peter Earl also has news of Heritage Open Days on page six; these will be on 12th-14th September this year, with a preview of the venues, tours and walks at 7.30pm on Wednesday 20th August with Marcus Taylor.

Audrey Jarvis takes us on a wide-ranging tour of the Trees Committee's works over the last few months; as ever they have been very active across the town and you can read all about this and see the pictures on pages 6-8, including an update on the Lewes Swift Supporters and their work, highly relevant to the topics mentioned at the start of this note to you.

The Membership Services Committee report covers dates for your diary and news of two new committee members, Jill Smit who is our new Membership Secretary, and Kate Minogue. Many thanks to these two society members who have volunteered to take on committee work; and there is still an appeal (see page 10) for further society members to add their contributions too. Could this be you?

The newsletter ends with a reminder about subscriptions, donations and merchandise to purchase - please continue to support your civic society through these.

Finally, it just remains for me to thank not only the people who work for you on the various committees of the Friends of Lewes, but also you, our invaluable membership. Thank you for the support you give - and have a great summer!

With all good wishes

Ruth

THE PLANNING COMMITTEE *from Roger Maskew*

The beginning of this year has been particularly hectic with not only the prospect of East Sussex being amalgamated into a Unitary Authority with West Sussex and Brighton and Hove, but also two significant Local Plan Review Consultations by both Lewes District Council and the South Downs National Park. (Please refer below for further details in “Planning Policy Consultations”). The January meeting of the committee unfortunately was cancelled due to snow, but since then there have been five monthly meetings of the Planning Committee at the beginning of each month, when a total of 32 planning applications were considered in detail and responses submitted to the relevant planning authority on 15 planning 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.

During the last six months, the following projects have been of particular interest to the Planning Committee: -

Former Garden Street Auction Rooms. Demolition of existing industrial buildings and provision of 18 residential units with associated amenity, car and cycle parking provision.

The Friends of Lewes objected to the two previous planning applications for this site, and although this proposal is considered to be an improvement over the last application (SDNP/23/03275/FUL), the Society was not yet able to support this application due to a number of concerns. (For details, please refer to the minutes of the March Committee.)

White Hart Hotel, 55 High Street. Demolition of the former hotel annex and construction of five new dwellings with parking and associated landscaping.

The Society was not yet able to support this scheme due to a number of concerns. (For details, please refer to the minutes of the March Committee.)

Land East of Brooks Road. Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment to provide Class E foodstore with ancillary parking, access and landscaping.

The Society objected to this proposed scheme by Lidl Great Britain Limited. (For details, please refer to the minutes of the June Committee.)

Eastgate Wharf: Demolition of existing buildings and construction of mixed-use development comprising 74 dwellings (Class C3), ground floor commercial space (Class E), with associated landscaping, parking, access alterations, and public realm.

The Society was not yet able to support this proposed scheme for the redevelopment of the former Wenban Smith site and adjacent car park, as there were a number of concerns that needed to be addressed further by the applicant. (For details, please refer to the minutes of the June Committee.)

Planning Policy Consultations: -

The Proposed Local Government Reorganisation of Brighton and Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex into a Unitary Authority, was confirmed by the Deputy Prime Minister on 5th February. As a consequence, the 2025 May County Council elections were cancelled. To date, no further details of the Local Government Reorganisation have been made public.

At the beginning of the year, Lewes District Council held a public consultation into a review of The Lewes District Local Plan and the Society responded before the deadline of Friday 28th February 2025. (The document can be reviewed on the Society’s website.) To date, there has been no official response from Lewes District Council.

Within a similar timescale, The South Downs National Park Authority conducted a review of their South Downs Local Plan and the Society responded and the Committee reviewed its preferences on both existing land allocations, that had not yet been developed, and for new land allocations for housing in Lewes. The Society responded in some detail before by the deadline of Monday 17th March 2025. (This document can also be reviewed on the Society's website.) To date, although there has also been no official response from the South Downs National Park, a response is not anticipated until later in the year.

Old Malling Farm *from Roger Maskew*

Following the approval of the planning application for the construction of 226 houses on the Old Malling Farm site on the outskirts of Lewes by TopHat Communities Limited, it is understood that the developer put the site up for sale, but that there has been no further progress to date.

The North Street Quarter *from Peter Earl*

The situation with the North Street development is fairly complex, following an error by the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA) which was picked up by the Friends of Lewes.

On 12th March, the SDNPA mistakenly issued planning permission for the development without the related Section 106 legal agreement being first signed off. In consequence, this separated the planning permission from all the on- and off-site requirements that had been negotiated with the developer over the 28 months that the application had been under consideration. These included 30% affordable housing; the Design Code; Sustainable Construction measures; a package of on-site and off-site Transport Mitigation Measures (including the 3 bus stops on north of Phoenix Causeway, a new Riverside Walkway, New Bridge, reprovision of the 3 coach parking spaces, a 'transport performance bond' and related financial contributions; Flood Defences; CoMobility Hub; Health Hub; Cultural workspaces and the biodiversity net gain. Without these provisions, the development would have been unacceptable and it is therefore vital that the legal agreement is attached to any consent.

The South Downs National Park Authority have acknowledged the magnitude of their mistake which was attributed to an 'unforeseen technical error' and have taken legal steps to expunge the planning permission through a judicial review to the High Court of their own decision (taking themselves to court). In the meantime, the legal agreement relating to the Phoenix Quarter development cannot be signed (at the date of this article, 24th June) and therefore a replacement planning permission cannot be issued. It remains to be seen if the agreement will be signed, which also involves Human Nature's financial backers, a Luxemburg finance company, who have a charge on the land.

The Former Lewes bus station update *from Peter Earl*

Members will recall that the South Downs National Park Planning Committee recommended the redevelopment of the Eastgate bus station and garage for approval in September 2024. The required section106 legal agreement was signed off on 2nd April 2025 allowing the planning permission to be issued on 3rd April 2025. There is now three years to implement the consent, with no less than 6 detailed schemes still to be submitted and approved prior to any works commencing (including the demolition of the existing bus station buildings). Only upon implementation of the consent would the developer be required to transfer an index-linked £291,000 to East Sussex County Council to construct the alternative bus facilities on the southern side of Phoenix Causeway. In the meantime, the existing temporary bus stands will remain in operation in the Lower High Street.

There is no clarity from either the South Downs National Park Planning Authority or East Sussex County Council on what central bus interchange facilities will be provided should either the bus station redevelopment or the North Street planning permissions be unimplemented or stall. The provision of a replacement bus station with vital interchange facilities is effectively in limbo for an uncertain period.

The status of the Eastgate bus station planning permission has been thrown into doubt, and cannot currently be implemented. Following the issue of planning permission, Lewes Town Council decided, at its 6 May meeting, to pursue the first stage towards a judicial review of the South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA)'s decision. On the advice of appointed solicitors, and a barrister, a legal challenge is being investigated on the two strongest grounds of Public Sector Equality Duty and Air Quality. A High Court judge will now decide whether this challenge is valid, and if it should proceed to court, which is anticipated to take between 4-6 months. If the challenge is successful, the SDNPA will have to review their planning decision.

The applicants, The Generator Group, have placed the bus station with a Lewes estate agent, to sell for around £4.6million and therefore it is unclear if they, or another developer, will take on the redevelopment of the site. In the meantime, the temporary hoarding can remain as a poor visual gateway to our historic town.

Lewes Flood Anniversary 2020 – 2025 – Exhibition from John Gower

This autumn is the 25th Anniversary of the 2000 Floods, when on 12th October over 600 houses and 300 businesses were devastated, as following days of very heavy rain the River Ouse burst its banks and flooded large areas of the Town. The Emergency Services were stretched to their limits as Police, Fire Brigade, RNLI, Environment Agency, Town, District and County Councils, and many voluntary groups and individuals deployed huge resources in response to and in the wake of the flood.

Nearly 200 people spent several nights in the Town Hall and Malling Community Centre. Half of the flooded businesses did not reopen. The estimated cost in 2000 was £112 million. It would be considerably more now (£230 million+) if, despite the town's improved flood defences, climate change accelerated natural forces prevail.

The Friends of Lewes are holding a Flood Exhibition where people's photographs, artefacts, films, voice recordings and memories will be on display. The exhibition will be previewed on **Saturday 30th August at Lewes Town Hall Corn Exchange between 10:00 and 13:00**. On **Saturday 11th October we move to Fitzroy House**, where James MacCleary MP will officially open the exhibition at 11:00.

The display is open for the weekends of **11th/12th October and 18th/19th October from 11:00 to 16:00**. Come and see the photographs, hear the memories, read poems and find out why Lewes floods every 30 - 40 years, despite ever higher defences being built.

The 25th anniversary of Lewes' devastating 2000 floods is an important opportunity to reflect on what has been learned, what new challenges are emerging and what planning and preparedness are in place, or need to be in place now.

On **31st October and 1st November** Friends of Lewes are supporting the Lewes Floods Conference and Public Meeting at the Town Hall.

Heritage Open Days 12th – 14th September 2025 from Peter Earl

The Heritage Open Day Committee have been working hard to deliver this year's Heritage Open Day festival weekend, which will take place between Friday 12th and Sunday 14th September 2025. It will include some new venues and tours, including Lewes Victoria hospital in Nevill Road and Eastgate Baptist Church. Friends of Lewes Members will be given a preview of the venues, tours and walks available over the festival weekend at Marcus Taylor's talk on Wednesday 20th August at Lewes Town Hall Lecture Room at 7.30pm.

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.

Trees Committee Update from Audrey Jarvis

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.

Having completed most of our tree planting for the season in November and December 2024, we only had six trees left to plant at the beginning of 2025. In January 2025 we met at the Stanley Turner Ground to plant two Alders, (*Alnus incana*), and four Wild Apples, (*Malus trilobata*). The Alders were chosen because they have grown well when we have planted them on other sites, and we decided on the Wild Apples after seeing a beautiful example in a garden in Malling.



Some of our planting team at the Stanley Turner Ground

In February, we returned to Wallands School to plant 40 tree whips in their new quiet garden. They were a mix of native trees that we have grown from seed at our tree nursery.



We planned several events for our Lewes Tree Festival, which took place in the beautiful weather between Sunday 15th and Sunday 22nd June. On each of the two Sundays, Peter Thurman and Keith Sacre each led a guided walks round the trees in the gardens of Southover Grange. On Tuesday, Audrey and Nick Jarvis had a delightful time leading a group around the trees on the Railway Land.



Railway Land

Southover Grange

To celebrate our trees and our Arboretum Town, we have also produced a self-guided tree trail leaflet that takes you on a gentle walk around Lewes, starting and ending at Lewes Climate Hub. Copies of the leaflet are available from the Hub, which is open from Wednesdays to Saturdays from 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.



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.

Lewes Swift Supporters (LSS) are delighted to report that twelve of their boxes have been occupied by Swifts this year, including three of those funded by Friends of Lewes in De Montfort Road. Possibly because of the warmer weather at the beginning of Spring, it has been a record-breaking year for Lewes Swifts, with 99 occupied nests confirmed so far.

Friends of Lewes supports the Swift-friendly Town initiative promoted by LSS and formally approved by Lewes Town Council in 2024. In April and May, LSS organised a six-week season of events at Lewes Climate Hub to encourage everyone to become part of what makes Lewes a “Swift-friendly Town for Nature Recovery”.

The season drew attention to the Mosaic Project, a collaboration between Lewes Urban Arboretum, Lewes Swift Supporters, Wildflower Lewes, the Railway Land, and Common Cause. If you have made nature-friendly addition to your garden, you can add your contribution to the Mosaic Map:

<https://www.railwaylandproject.org/lewes-mosaic-map>



The Mosaic Wall at Lewes Climate Hub

Membership Services Committee update *from Committee Members:*

The Membership Services Committee (MSC) has been busy organising and publicising 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.

[Goals for 2020 and beyond – The Friends of Lewes](#)

Events:

In February 2025, the Lewes District Conservation Officer, Alex Moojen, gave helpful and detailed advice on how to look after buildings in the Conservation Area, particularly in light of the challenges resulting from climatic changes.

In April 2025, immediately prior to our AGM, the newly-appointed CEO of the South Downs National Park, Siôn McGeever outlined his vision for the Park and referred to the current funding pressures before answering audience questions relating to Lewes' place in the Park. The issues raised ranged from concerns on the 'democratic deficit' to the loss of hedgerows.

Our next event will take place on **Wednesday 20 August at Lewes Town Hall Lecture Room at 7.30pm**. Marcus Taylor will give a talk '**Looking forward to Heritage Open Days 2025**'. This event is free to Members and is an essential taster prior to Heritage Open Day registration which opens at 9am on Thursday 21 August via Eventbrite. The talk is for members only, but non-members are most welcome to come along and join Friends of Lewes on the night.

Further dates for your diary are as follows:

Saturday 30 August 2025 – Friends of Lewes Flood Exhibition preview

Photographs, paintings, memories, films and voice recordings of the 2000 floods.

Venue: Town Hall Corn Exchange 10:00-14:00

Entry: Free

Friday 12 September to Sunday 14 September 2025 – Lewes Heritage Open Days

Organised by Friends of Lewes.

Venue: Various

Entry: Free

Saturday 11 October 2025 – Lewes Floods Exhibition

Official opening by James McCleary MP.

Photos, paintings and memories to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Floods.

Venue: Fitzroy House, Lewes Precinct (opposite Boots) 11:00-16:00

Entry: Free

Friday 31 October 2025 – Lewes Flood Conference and Flood Exhibition

Venue: Lewes Town Hall 09:45-16:15

Entry: Free, but booking required. Details to follow.

Saturday 1 November 2025 – Lewes Flood Exhibition and Public Meeting

Venue: Lewes Town Hall

Exhibition: 10:00-16:00

Public Meeting: starts at 13:30

Entry: Free

Please visit the Diary page of our website for more details [Diary – The Friends of Lewes](#) where you can also sign up for news updates.

We do hope that you will be able to attend and enjoy many of the above events. We look forward to meeting you there.

MSC Committee Members:

We recently welcomed two new members to MSC: Jill Smit (Volunteer Membership Secretary, part time) and Kate Minogue. They are both contributing with enthusiasm to the Committee.

Membership: Our membership level is broadly steady at 405 members. Please consider mentioning the Society to friends and family who may be interested. They can join via the website [Membership – The Friends of Lewes](#) or by contacting membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk for £12 per year (individual), £17 (joint), £120 (life) or £170 (joint life).

Website and Member Communications: Our website was refreshed, updated and reorganised six months ago. This included a change of font and colour scheme. We hope you find the site easier to read and not so harsh on the eyes. The site is continuously reviewed to see if there are any errors, omissions or improvements that can be made. It is there to serve you, the members, so if you have any suggestions or observations, we welcome your feedback. Please use the website contact form to get in touch. [Contact Us – The Friends of Lewes](#)

Out of our 405 members, only 187 of members are subscribers. By being a subscriber, you are automatically emailed any new post to the website, keeping you better informed. If you would like to subscribe, just enter your email address in 'Get News & Events via Email' section on the right of the home page and click on 'click here'. [The Friends of Lewes – The Lewes Civic Society](#) You will receive an email to confirm your subscription.

Merchandise: FoL merchandise is available at our events and via our website (see Publications [Books – The Friends of Lewes](#) Cards, prints and tea towels [Cards and prints – The Friends of Lewes](#)). The items have also been available at the Lewes Tourist Information Centre (TIC) until recently, but this has been impacted by the current relocation of the TIC to the Council Office and the reduced space available. A decision is awaited regarding the future permanent location of the TIC.

The Friends of Lewes Membership Services Committee would be pleased to hear from members who would be interested in contributing to the Committee. If you would like to get involved, please contact the Honorary Secretary, Diana Freestone, by email: enquiries@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>

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