



KEEPING OUR TOWN SPECIAL

# Annual Report 2025



Crops just starting to come through on the Downs – *photograph by Nick Robinson*

Dear Members of Friends of Lewes

I took the photograph above a week ago, on one of those almost Spring days when it really seems like the winter is almost gone, all bright sun and green shoots. Today as I write this is another story altogether. A murky March morning, which the weather app in our house previewed for us by announcing fog followed by overcast weather, and so far, this has sadly proved true with no sight whatsoever of the sun. But by the time you read this the entrance of Spring that last week promised should be closer, with all the hope for renewal and new growth that brings. This being no ordinary newsletter but the Annual Report, it encompasses all four seasons in the life of Friends of Lewes in another year of the work of your Civic Society.

The Annual Report starts with our official details; address, list of trustees and committee members and then takes you through our structure, governance and management - if you haven't done more than glance at this it is well worth becoming more familiar with more of the details. Our goals and objectives that follow are regularly reviewed to keep what we aim for up to date.

Before leaving the official details pages, mention must be made of our erstwhile president John Davey, who sadly passed away during the year of this Report and will be much missed. Thanks are due to Peter Mettyear for stepping up at short notice to be president. Jane Slater, a valued member of the Executive Committee, has let us know that she will be stepping down from this, although we hope she will remain a member of the Membership Services Committee.

Next, the report takes you through the achievements of the year in pursuit of the goals, as shown by the four sub committees which focus on work towards them; Planning, Trees, Membership Services and Heritage Open Days.

The Planning Committee reviews all planning applications within the Lewes Town area plus those immediately outside which may affect Lewes, discussing in detail all applications, big or small, that need comments. Thanks must go to Roger Maskew for all his hard work as Chair, together with all Committee members, and John Gower for all his work on the flood exhibitions and presentations of the past year, detailed in the report below.

The Trees Committee continues to excel under the leadership of Audrey Jarvis, and thanks are due to all her team of volunteers who work hard to plant and look after the ever-increasing numbers of trees in the town. This part of the report includes pictures of the team in action as well as attendance at local events and festivals to bring their work to the attention of a larger audience and raise awareness of the need for trees.

Our Membership Services Committee has been working this year with members stepping up as acting chair, including Bronagh Liddicoat, for which many thanks are due to all. A new Chair has not yet been appointed, but this has not prevented much good work from taking place. During the year the Society has welcomed a new Membership Secretary, Jill Smit, and a PR and Communications Officer, Kate Minogue. This section of the report includes news and statistics about the Friends of Lewes' online presence, which Paul Yates looks after for us.

The Heritage Open Day Committee, ably led by Peter Earl, have again organised a very successful event across an increased number of venues. Many thanks to all involved, and as this is a small Committee at present, the Report contains an invitation to members to get in touch if they would like to help.

The Report is completed by a roundup of financial matters - Diana Freestone's work on this in the absence of a treasurer must be noted with many thanks. Our local grant giving is illustrated at the end of the report.

Thanks as ever must also go to all our members for their support.

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 2025

President: Peter Mettyear

Vice-Presidents: Alison Grant & James MacCleary MP

### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

#### Elected Officers

Chair Ruth O’Keeffe

Vice-Chair Roger Maskew

Secretary Diana Freestone

Treasurer Vacant

#### Executive Committee Members

Peter Earl

Audrey Jarvis

Bronagh Liddicoat

Jane Slater

#### Co-opted Members

Jill Smit – Membership Secretary

Paul Yates – Communications

John Gower – Flood Lead

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)\*

Duncan Armstrong

Chris Bibb

Dr Dean Bell,

Nick Jarvis

Keith Sacre

Matthew Stuart

Peter Thurman

Jill Yeates

### MEMBERSHIP SERVICES COMMITTEE

Vacant (Chair)

Jill Smit (Membership Secretary) \*

Paul Yates (Website & Communications) \*

Bronagh Liddicoat\*

Peter Mettyear

Kate Minogue

Jane Slater\*

### HERITAGE OPEN DAY COMMITTEE

Peter Earl (Chair)\*

David Attwood

Sue Berry

Diana Freestone\*

*\*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<sup>st</sup> December 2025 is 413.

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

### **How we are run**

#### **Constitution**

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

##### **To promote:**

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

##### **To stimulate:**

- public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character 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 co-opted to the Executive Committee. The Executive Committee meets monthly and appoints sub-committees including the Planning Committee which examines all planning applications affecting Lewes and surrounding areas, the Trees Committee, Membership Services Committee and Heritage Open Day Committee. Friends of Lewes have no paid officers and all committee members are volunteers.

#### **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, X and Blue Sky) as well via our website, press articles and regular emails. We publish a Newsletter twice a year plus an Annual Report.

## Our Goals and Objectives

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

<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p> <p>b) To work with others to preserve and enhance the Community Buildings within the Town of Lewes.</p>
<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>
<p>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.</p>
<p>6. To improve our environment, increase biodiversity and mitigate the risks resulting from climate change by collaborating with other local groups with such aims.</p>
<p>7. To learn, and to seek support for our local efforts, by engaging more broadly with other civic societies and Civic Voice.</p>
<p>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.</p>

*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 civic and local organisations to promote the mission of the Friends of Lewes.

FoL have no paid officers and all members are volunteers.

## **The Planning Committee Report**

### **Planning Committee**

*From Roger Maskew*

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 2025, a total of 68 applications were considered in detail and representations made to the SDNPA as the Planning Authority on 26 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.

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.

### **A review of the significant planning applications in 2025**

#### **The North Street Quarter:**

This significant application by Human Nature, known as "The Phoenix" development, was reviewed in some detail by Peter Earl in the 2025 Winter Newsletter, and the following comments still apply: -

"The situation with the North Street development is still inconclusive with no final legal agreement being completed, and therefore no planning permission having been issued, to-date."

"If the Human Nature development does not commence, it is unclear how the toilet facilities and a cafe/kiosk to serve the bus stands on Phoenix Causeway, which were to be in the proposed health hub, can now be provided within the foreseeable future."

#### **The Former Lewes Bus Station:**

This important application was also reviewed in some detail by Peter Earl in the 2025 Winter Newsletter, and the following comments still apply: -

"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 Section 106 legal agreement was signed off on 2nd April 2025 allowing the planning permission to be issued on 3rd April 2025.”

“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 not be implemented or stall.”

The Generator Group, the developer promoting this development, has subsequently decided not to implement this scheme, and has now put the site up for sale.

**190 High Street (the former Barclays Bank):**

Change of use of the vacant bank to a 5-bed house and 5 self-contained flats. At the end of December, this proposal is still an “application in progress”.

**Former Garden Street Auction Rooms:**

Demolition of existing industrial buildings and provision of 18 residential units with associated amenity, car and cycle parking provision.

This application was presented to the SDNPA Planning Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> December and the “decision is pending.”

**White Hart Hotel, 55 High Street:**

Demolition of the former hotel annex and construction of five new dwellings with parking and associated landscaping. This application was presented to the SDNPA Planning Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> December, but as there are some outstanding issues to address, the proposal is still an “application in progress”.

**1-2 Cliffe High Street:**

Change of use of the ground floor of Nos. 1 & 2 to a Sui Generis public house, replacement of rear extension to No.1, new dormer and single storey rear extension to No.2, foundation stabilisation works to Nos.1 and 2 and repairs to river wall.

This proposal is an “application in progress”.

**Land East of Brooks Road:**

Demolition of existing buildings and redevelopment to provide Class E food store with ancillary parking, access and landscaping.

The Society objected to this proposed scheme by Lidl Great Britain Limited, which was refused by the SDNPA Planning Committee at its meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

**Eastgate Wharf (the former Wenban-Smith site and adjacent car park):**

Demolition of existing buildings and construction of mixed-use development comprising 74 dwellings, ground floor commercial space with associated landscaping, parking, access alterations, and public realm.

This proposal redevelopment by Caluya Homes was not supported by the planning authority, who have asked for a redesign of the scheme, which is anticipated by the end of February 2026.

**Astley House, Spital Road:**

Demolition of the vacant building and the construction of 27 residential dwellings with associated landscaping, on-site car parking and access from / to Spital Road. The Friends of Lewes objected to this proposal, as the Society considered that this amended scheme was inferior to the 2021 scheme, which was refused and the subsequent planning appeal dismissed.

This proposal has yet to be determined, so is still an “application in progress”.

**Aldi House, Brooks Road:**

Demolition of four industrial units and part demolition of the food store for the construction of an extension to the food store with car and cycle parking and associated works. The Friends of Lewes were concerned about the over-provision of supermarkets (and the consequent traffic generation), but agreed this was a better option than the proposed new Lidl store. This proposal was approved on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

### **Southdown Sports Club, Cockshut Road:**

Creation of 2no padel courts and the re-siting of 2no tennis courts together with flood lighting.

The Friends of Lewes considers this initiative to be a positive asset for the Southdown Sports Club, in order to encourage greater use of the range of existing facilities. This proposal was approved on the 11th November 2025.

### **52 Southover High Street:**

Change of use of existing museum store building (Use Class F1(c) to a creative/creative arts studio (use class E (c) (iii) with fenestration and internal alterations and retrospective permission for new internal services.

The Friends of Lewes strongly supported this planning application, as the Society considered that the proposal would enable this building to be used for community use, which would both complement and enhance the adjacent Grade II\*Listed Anne of Cleves House. The proposal was approved on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2025.

### **Downsview, Juggs Road (one of two applications):**

Demolition of existing 3no bedroom mobile homes and erection of 4no bedroom bungalows.

The Friends of Lewes strongly object to this planning application, as the Society considers that both the size and design of the proposed building would be totally unsuitable for this very sensitive site, within a downland setting on the edge of Lewes. The proposal is currently an “application in progress”.

### **Downsview, Juggs Road (Second of two applications):**

Demolition of outbuilding and replacement with 4no bedroom bungalows.

The Friends of Lewes strongly object to this planning application. Indeed, the Society recommends that there should be no residential development at all at such a westerly location, within the wider downland setting, and being so remote from the edge of Lewes. This proposal is currently an “application in progress”.

### **Planning Policy Consultations: -**

Towards the end of 2025 there was a Unitary Consultation from central government inviting comments on the following two proposals: -

(1) A Unitary Authority proposal from East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Hastings Borough Council, Lewes District Council and Rother District Council.

(2) A Unitary Authority proposal from Brighton and Hove City Council, with a request for boundary changes to be considered between Brighton and Newhaven to include “sensible geographic and economic areas” that would effectively increase the size of the existing Unitary City Authority. Comments were invited by 11<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

At the beginning of 2025, Lewes District Council held a public consultation into a review of The Lewes District Local Plan. To date, there has been no official response from Lewes District Council.

The South Downs National Park Authority also conducted a review of their South Downs Local Plan in a similar timescale. Details of the range of responses have been made available on the SDNPA’s website, but as yet there have been no proposed changes to the South Downs Local Plan.

**Planning in Lewes:** Without any prior consultation, the SDNPA has announced that the Contract with Lewes District Council to assess minor planning applications in Lewes will not be renewed when the current contact ends on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026. On 8<sup>th</sup> December, a letter was sent to Sion McGeever, (CEO of the South Downs National Park), expressing the Society’s dissatisfaction at the way Planning in Lewes is being handled by the park authority.

### **Planning Enforcement**

*From Peter Earl*

The Friends of Lewes have an ongoing list of planning enforcement issues which are drawn to the attention of national park Officers, or their agents, at regular intervals for consideration and action. In this respect we are reliant on members’ vigilance, to notify us of any suspected breaches of planning control. Such information should be passed to the Secretary in the first instance at [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

## Flood Issues in Lewes:

*From John Gower*

The 12<sup>th</sup> October 2025 marked the 25th anniversary of the 2000 Lewes floods. The Friends of Lewes supported the Town Council in delivering a two-day flood conference and public meeting, informing residents and emergency responders about the devastating impacts of flooding and raising awareness on how to be better prepared for future events. The conference and public meeting were extremely successful, ensuring that lessons from the past were not forgotten, and helped Lewes to be better prepared for the impacts of future floods.

The Friends of Lewes also curated a major Flood Exhibition featuring photographs, films, paintings, poems, recorded memories and reflections from the 2000 Floods. It was enormously successful with over 5,000 visitors and we were delighted that James MacCleary, our MP, agreed to formally open the exhibition at our first Fitzroy House showing. We are extremely grateful to the many people who provided over 500 photos, pictures, poems and their recorded audio memories, and to the hardworking volunteers who made the events possible. The exhibition was extremely well received and we gathered many feedback questionnaires which helps us to shape future events.

Flood risk continues to be a critical issue for Lewes. Climate change brings ever-increasing rainfall intensity, which places significant pressure on local drainage systems, the River Ouse, the Winterbourne Stream and their flood defences. Whilst Lewes has not had any significant problems, we have seen flooding in Alfriston, Barcombe, Plumpton and many other areas around the country. There were several instances of recently completed flood defences being 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, making better local planning essential to safeguard Lewes.

It is projected that more than one in four homes in England will be at risk of flooding or coastal erosion by 2050, 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. In Lewes we have seen increasing problems with surface water flooding at Nevill Green, where the drainage systems and sewers are no longer able to cope.

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, both in Lewes and elsewhere, 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, 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.



## Trees Committee Report - Lewes Urban Arboretum

**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.**

**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.**

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 had great fun in planning several events for our Lewes Tree Festival, which took place in the beautiful weather between Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2025. On each of the two Sundays, Peter Thurman and Keith Sacre each led a guided walk round the trees in the gardens of Southover Grange. On Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2025 Audrey and Nick Jarvis had a delightful time leading a group around the trees on the Railway Land.

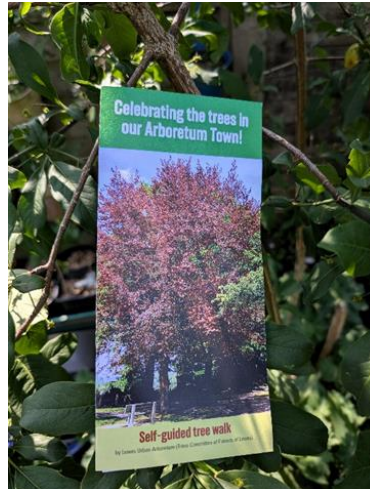


*Railway Land*



*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, open Wednesdays to Saturdays from 11.00 a.m. to 3.00 p.m.



We actively support the Swift-friendly Town initiative promoted by Lewes Swift Supporters (LSS) and formally approved by Lewes Town Council in 2024. In April and May 2025, 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 a nature-friendly addition to your garden, you can add your contribution to the Mosaic Map: <https://www.railwaylandproject.org/lewes-mosaic-map>



*The Mosaic Project wall collage at Lewes Climate Hub*

In April, when we first began our visits to research sites for tree planting in 2025/2026, we visited Convent Field, where we had been asked to plant some trees for shade and shelter. We came up with a plan to plant up to 57 trees there, carefully spaced and landscaped to avoid compromising the sports grounds and to make sure that any spectators will still have a good view. After three working party days, the planting was fully completed by 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025.



*Members of the Trees Committee planting on Convent Field*

This ambitious project has only been possible thanks to the helpful support of Lewes District Council, who gave us permission for the planting, took part in the planning stages, and donated the stakes, cages, and strimmer guards to protect the trees.

We can only plant so many trees with the generous grant funding and donations we have received. In a wonderful gesture, local artist Dinah Morgan donated £480 following her “only Human” sculpture display. Our partners in the Mosaic Project sponsored four English Oaks and four Cockspurthorn trees, chosen because both trees are good for wildlife and likely to be climate resilient. We have been lucky enough to receive grants of £2,000 from Lewes Town Council, £2,000 from Friends of Lewes, and a grant of £3,000 from Chalk Cliff Trust. Various Lewes residents, who visit Convent Field regularly, have sponsored an additional nine individual trees in memory of members of their family members or pets.

We have now planted 326 trees since we reinstated the Trees Committee in 2012, with 312 of them surviving extreme weather or vandalism. This includes 69 different species of trees. As part of our commitment to our accreditation as an “Arboretum Town” we have had an enjoyable exploration of several sites in Lewes to continue our inventory of the different tree species. This includes street trees, trees growing in front gardens and around public buildings, and the collections at Southover Grange, Malling Deanery Arboretum, and East Sussex College. So far, we have recorded 195 different species and 234 tree varieties. We will publish the inventory as an annotated map on the Friends of Lewes website so that residents and visitors may explore some of the wonders of our town arboretum – and we will keep adding to the map in future years!



*Some favourite Lewes trees on our tree inventory: Cappadocian Maple in Malling Deanery Arboretum, Pomegranate in Grange Road, Red Oak at East Sussex College*

We are extremely fortunate in having so many experienced and knowledgeable members on our Trees Committee. As well as helping to plant the trees and look after them, they give an extraordinary amount of time to share valuable advice and skills, answer questions, give talks at events, and lead our guided walks. They have also been great ambassadors for Lewes Urban Arboretum and in putting us in touch with other tree organisations. We are planning to have even more guided walks next year, such as a return visit to Malling Deanery Arboretum, in the spring as an adjunct to the tree walk that we organise as part of Friends of Lewes Heritage Open Days in September.

Throughout the spring and summer, we have continued our programme of tree maintenance, weeding, pruning, and mulching the trees that we have already planted. We are very grateful to all those local residents who have “adopted” a tree or a group of trees near to where they live and have watered them during the long dry spells.

At the Floods Event on 1<sup>st</sup> November, we shared information about how trees contribute to reducing water run-off that can lead to flooding. Visitors to our stall shared their ideas for new tree planting sites in 2026. If you have any suggestions, please let us know!



*Some of the visitors to our Lewes Urban Arboretum stall at the Floods Event*

In September, we joined other members of the Mosaic Project in organising a stall and a guided tree walk around Nevill as part of the Eco Home Open Houses and Gardens season.



*The Mosaic Project stall in Highdown Road*

At the end of November 2025, we put on a display at The STEMfest to show how trees benefit a wide range of wildlife. We very much enjoyed working with the young people who attended and made wooden decorations with us to celebrate the wildlife. About 100 children went home with their own pendant or Christmas tree decoration!



*Blackbird, Polecat, Red Squirrel, and Robin – some of the lovely designs from the young people at the STEMFest*

In December 2025, we ended the year by hosting a wonderful Woodcrafts Day at Lewes Climate Hub. Rustic Tim and Michael joined us to help 120 visitors to make snowmen, reindeer, or Christmas tree decorations.



If you would like to help to look after our trees or to suggest a site for a new tree, please do get in touch: [arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

Visit our website to see a map of all the trees we have planted so far:  
<https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/natural-environment/lewes-urban-arboretum/>

*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

In February, Alex Moojen gave a talk via Zoom entitled 'Efficiency and retrofitting listed buildings and older buildings in protected settings'.

In April, the AGM followed a presentation from Sion McGeever, CEO of the South Downs National Park Authority. Complimentary wine and snacks were available.

In August, Marcus Taylor previewed the buildings that would play a part in the ever-popular Heritage Open Days, held in September.

In November, Peter Thurman presented a session on 'Trees and climate change' via Zoom.

To allow as many people as possible to access our events, we usually 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

Two new Lewes Heritage Plaques were placed in 2025 by the Society, in partnership with Lewes Town Council. The first, at the Star Brewery in Fisher Street, records the actions and generosity of Pat and Michael Cooper who saved the building from demolition by turning it into the current art gallery and workshops in 1989. The second, on Temple House on School Hill, notes that the international headquarters of global environmental campaign group, Greenpeace, were based there in the 1980s.



*Ruth O'Keeffe, James McCleary MP, Debbie Annells and Cllr Adrian Ross at the unveiling of the Greenpeace HQ plaque*

We record our immense thanks to Marcus Taylor who has provided the Society's input to the joint Heritage Plaque scheme with the Town Council for the last fourteen years.

Costs of the plaques have doubled in the last year, due to the increasing costs of raw materials and manufacture. However, the Society is keen to continue supporting provision of the Heritage Plaques which record links with historically significant people or buildings in Lewes.

### Merchandise

We have raised funds through the sale of books on topics of local interest as well as tea towels and cards. These are available at our events and via email: [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

### Membership

Membership levels have been generally steady during 2025, thanks in part to our in-person meetings, ending the year at 413, compared with 407 at the end of 2024. Please consider introducing friends and neighbours to the organization. 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

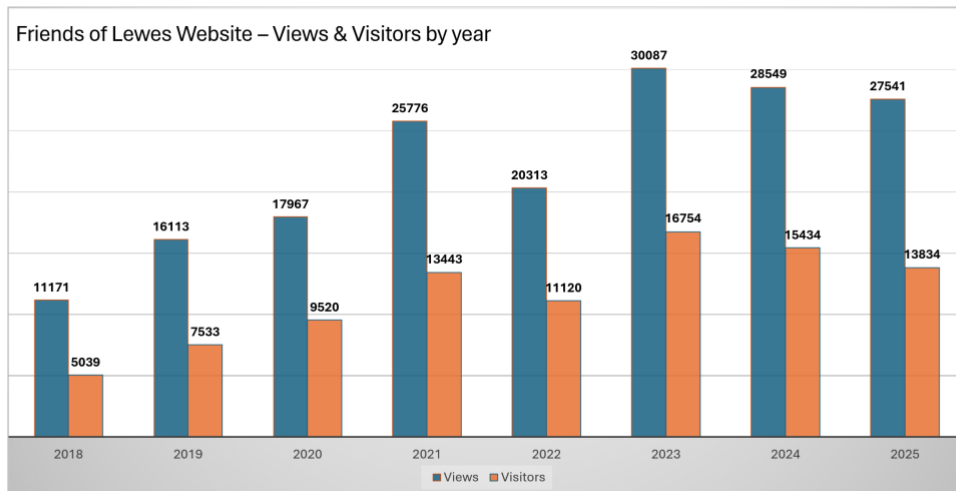
We aim to publicise events and activities in print media (*Lewes News, The Lewesian, Sussex Express*) and electronically (*Lewes List, Facebook, Bluesky, X (formerly Twitter), Visit Lewes*) where deadlines allow.

## Website Insights

The number of visits and views of our website in 2025 showed a reduction year on year with the usual peak in August / September reflecting the activity around Heritage Open Days. Views were down by 3.53% and visitors were down by 10.37% on 2024 figures. (See graph below)

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

We are currently working on a refresh of the website which it is hoped will deliver a brighter and more engaging user experience with simpler navigation and searching.



## We are also continuing to promote our online / Social Media audience:

Website 201 News item subscribers. A 10% increase on 2024.  
Facebook 1207 following Friends of Lewes. An increase of 6.4% on 2024.  
Facebook 695 following Lewes Urban Arboretum. An increase of 6.1% on 2024.  
X (Twitter) 94 following @lewesfriends. A decrease of 2% on 2024.  
X (Twitter) 666 following @LewesArboretum. A decrease of 2.6% on 2024.

## Membership Services Committee

The Committee was joined early in the year by Jill Smit as Membership Secretary, and by Kate Minogue as PR and Communications Officer. Their input is most welcome.

**\*\*Membership Services Committee members are always welcome.\*\***

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, Jane Slater, Jill Smit, Kate Minogue & Paul Yates*

## Lewes Heritage Open Days 2025

The Friends of Lewes continued to play an active part in the coordination and promotion of this national festival which has become England's largest festival of history and culture. Established in 1994 as a contribution to the European Heritage Days, it has now been celebrated for 31 years.

Locally, the Friends of Lewes, through the sterling work of its committee members, organised the event in the town arranging access to 21 different venues between Friday 12th to Sunday 14th September. The event offered free access to buildings which are not normally open to the public, or would otherwise charge for entry. In addition, there were 8 walks related to the theme of 'Architecture', including the development of railways in Lewes, and how to date historic buildings in the town. Lewes House, in the High Street, was again the base for events with exhibitions from the Friends of Lewes, Lewes History Group, as well as a basketry demonstration and energy advice from Ovesco. Lewes House Garden Group served refreshments on Saturday and Sunday and organised tours of the garden.



*Launch event with Cllr Paul Davies (Chair of Lewes District Council) and his consort Jonathan Knuszka*

The organising committee arranged for 2,500 map leaflets to be printed and distributed over a wide area stretching from Eastbourne to Hassocks and Newhaven to Newick. In addition, the maps were available at around 100 outlets in Lewes and the surrounding area. It was also available at the Tourist Information Centres in Lewes, Seaford, Newhaven and Eastbourne. Visitor feedback continues to indicate that approximately half of attendees come from outside the town.

There were several new venues, including the Victoria Hospital and Lewes Little Theatre, as well as some buildings which have not been part of the festival for a while. The different venues represented a range of historic periods and styles and a variety of uses, including Thomas a Becket Church in the Cliffe which has 12<sup>th</sup> century origins and a 17<sup>th</sup> century clock mechanism. At the other end of the spectrum, the festival included the 1961 house designed by the Lewes architectural practice of John Schwerdt. The County Combined Courts were again open to help explain how the justice system works with 'mock' hearings. Even on a very wet Saturday some 1,590 people visited the courts, exceeding all recent attendance records.

As a 'thank you' to all those who help, acting as stewards, leading tours, giving talks, or are involved in its promotion in other ways, a launch event was held on the 4<sup>th</sup> September in the garden of Lewes House. About 40 people attended the launch event including the Chair of Lewes District Council and the Mayor of Lewes, Emily Clarke. We are particularly grateful to all our sponsors and especially those who make their properties available.

The Friends of Lewes recognise the importance of this event to the local area, highlighting the special architecture and history on our doorstep, as well as promoting the town to a wider audience. Lewes Heritage Open Days weekend will be returning in 2026 between Friday 11<sup>th</sup> September and Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> September. The national theme is '**Exploring daily working life through the ages**', exploring stories of working lives, from learning a craft to establishing routines and cherished rituals, helping to discover our factories, kitchens, businesses and gardens, and especially the craftspeople who have created our town, such as the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker.

If you would like to be involved or have any ideas to contribute, the Lewes Heritage Open Day team would welcome this. We are always seeking new venues in the town. Members can either put forward their own buildings or businesses to be open for part or all of the weekend, or encourage others to join in. Stewards have an important role during the event and if you are able to help, please do contact the Secretary at [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk).



*The queue outside the combined courts in the High Street*

*From Peter Earl*

## Friends of Lewes Accounts & Financial Review 2025

### **Receipts and Payments**

There was an overall deficit in the year 2025 of (£20,144) (2024: £1,467), a net change of (£18,677). At £22,062 net receipts increased by £11,269 mainly due to donations and grants towards the Trees Fund and the Flood Exhibition, which took place during the latter part of 2025, and a slight decrease year on year from membership subscriptions.

During 2025 Friends of Lewes awarded a total of £16,085 in grants towards Lewes Town Projects:

- Love Our Ouse – Winterbourne Festival - £1,860;
- Landport Community Film - £2,800;
- St Anne's wall restoration £2,000 – *awaiting completion in 2026*
- Baxter's Field Railings £3,500 – *awaiting completion in 2026*
- Pipe Kiln restoration £2,500;
- Landport Community Hub £3,000; and
- Lewes Societies Fair £425.

In addition, financial support was given towards the 2000 Anniversary Flood Exhibition £3,000; two new Heritage Plaques £335; and a new Tree Trail Booklet £811 which is pictured in The Trees Committee Report. Pictures of some of the other projects are below.

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 to £4,016 (2024 £2,880 which included the purchase of a laptop for the Membership Services Committee).

### **Restricted Trees Fund**

Total receipts paid into the Trees Fund (which is restricted to expenditure on tree planting) was £10,103 (2024: £3,500). Grants were received from the Chalk Cliff Trust, Green United and Dinah Morgan together with a number of individual donations towards memorial trees. Income from participation in the Lewes District Lottery is included in these figures which decreased from £947 in 2024 to £697 in 2025 to which goes solely to support tree planting.

Expenditure during the year amounted to £12,440 and the year-end deficit of (£2,337) is offset against the carried forward balance of £8,716 at the beginning of the year.

### **Balance Sheet**

At the end of the 2025 financial year, the Society's total monetary assets account totalled £51,123 which is held in Charities Aid Foundation bank accounts.

### **Reserves Policy**

The Executive Committee considered that the General Fund cash reserve held at the beginning of the 2025 was more than appropriate to its needs for the smooth running of the Society. As a body we need to demonstrate that our charitable purposes are truly being met for the benefit of the town hence the desire to actively support the projects detailed above.

*Diana Freestone, Secretary*

*The Society's accounts will be available from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2026  
If you would like a copy posted or emailed to you, after this date, please contact the Secretary*

*Pictures of the Winterbourne Festival programme, the Mayor Emily Clarke unveiling the plaque commemorating the Landport History Film, Societies Fair sponsored by Friends of Lewes and Landport Community Hub storage sheds*



*Pipe Kiln in Pipe Passage before and after restoration*



*Lewes Floods Exhibition flyer*

☆☆☆☆

### 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>