

Friends of Lewes Annual Report 2004



STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Friends of Lewes - the Lewes Civic Society is an unincorporated association affiliated to the Civic Trust whose constitution was last amended in March 1997. It is a registered charity (No 258756) usually known as the Friends of Lewes but referred to in this report as the Society. Communications to it should be addressed to Lewes Town Council Offices, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2QS. Membership is open to all on payment of the relevant subscription.

Members of the Society's Executive Committee are the charity trustees. Most are elected at the Annual General Meeting. Half retire each year but are eligible for re-election. Officers are elected for one year. The trustees in office on 31st December 2004 are listed opposite; they all served for the full year except Ruth O'Keefe who was elected on 25th March and Paul Millmore who was co-opted on 17th August. The Executive Committee manage the Society's affairs but annually appoint a Planning Sub-Committee that examines all planning applications affecting Lewes and the surrounding area and a Society Sub-Committee that provides services for members. A working group to consider sustainable transport issues has also met during the year.

During the year the land previously owned by the Society at Love Lane, Lewes was conveyed to Lewes Town Council for no consideration as professional advice was received that it had no commercial value and it was considered that the Council were in a better position to manage it. The Town Council paid the Society's legal costs and undertook to retain it as natural woodland.

The Society had a membership of 524 at 31st December 2004 (537 - 2003). The Charities Aid Foundation holds the Society's liquid assets. Its accounts are examined by Ian Clifton & Co., Chartered Accountants of Lenham, Southover High Street, Lewes BN 7 1HX. It employs no staff and has not incurred fees from professional advisers during the year.

On 31st December 2004 the Society's representatives on the following external bodies were: -

Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies	Peter Mettyear
Lewes District Council's Planning Service Users Group	Robert Cheesman
South Downs Campaign	Robert Cheesman and Paul Millmore
Lewes Town Strategic Partnership	David Tufnell

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The Society's objectives are to stimulate public interest in the beauty, history and character of the town of Lewes and its surrounding area; to organise concerted action for protecting and enhancing the townscape of Lewes and the architectural, visual and historic interest of Lewes and the surrounding area and for preserving free access to the latter; and to co-operate with kindred societies. It does so by arranging meetings for members on conservation issues; lobbying relevant bodies to protect the historic environment of Lewes whilst recognising that the town needs to remain an economically vibrant place, and by supporting projects that fall within its objectives.

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)
www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Personnel at 31st December 2004

President	Peter Mettyear
Vice-Presidents	Lord Campbell of Alloway Norman Baker MP Joanna Hallett

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers	Chairman	Robert Cheesman
	Vice-Chairman	David Hutchinson
	Secretary	Joan Holkar
	Treasurer	David Tufnell
Elected members	At 2003 AGM	At 2004 AGM
	Roger Beasley Patricia Sexton	Edward Gibbs Ruth O'Keefe Joy Preston Frances Tufnell
Co-opted Members (by Executive Committee)	Katharine Clark	Elisabeth Howard Paul Millmore
Minute Secretaries	Brigid Wells	John Hollands

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

PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

SOCIETY SUB-COMMITTEE

* indicates member of Executive Committee

Frances Tufnell (Chairman) *
Carolyn Beckingham
Raymond Brownell
Michael de St Croix
Helen Grogan
John Kennett
Betty Lewis
Joy Preston *
Martin Redman

Patricia Sexton (Chairman) *
Angela Blyth
Edward Gibbs *
Peter Hammond
Maureen Harvey
Marietta van Dyck

Membership Secretary

Marietta van Dyck

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

INTRODUCTION

Although the public authorities are generally more inclined to give conservation issues a higher priority than was the case in the past, much effort still needs to be made to monitor their proposals and comment on them as appropriate to ensure that the historic environment of Lewes is not compromised by other considerations being given priority. Whilst consultation and occasionally exhibitions are used to involve the public in significant issues, the extent to which comments made are taken on board is difficult to judge. Often local pressure groups are formed with relatively narrow objectives and whilst the Society is willing to work with any of them it must necessarily take a view that considers the town as a whole rather than one particular part of it. Inevitably this means that compromises sometimes have to be made and with a number of significant developments moving forward this is a matter where careful consideration is necessary but where the continuing need for an over-arching civic society is paramount.

The following pages summarise how the Society met its objectives in 2004 under relevant headings. Overall it remained a busy year where the work involved in keeping the Society going fell on a small number of people. However the appointment of Ruth O'Keefe and Paul Millmore during the year has been welcome and both have already made significant contributions. Thanks are also expressed to all who have undertaken tasks that have assisted the Society meet its objectives.

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

With 12 meetings in the year it has been necessary to discuss succinctly and reach decisions on the various issues concerning the Society as well as to provide for its management. It is in the nature of a civic society that a good deal of time is spent reacting to proposals put forward by others but, nevertheless, the Society has lobbied on a number of issues and, within the constraints of its human and financial resources, considered how it might be more pro-active. In addition to the substantive issues mentioned subsequently, increased local publicity has been sought to keep the public informed of the Society's work and encourage new membership. During the year representatives have met with Norman Baker MP and representatives of Lewes Town Council to discuss matters of mutual interest and it is hoped that these meetings will be repeated at regular intervals. Meetings on specific subjects have also been held with officers of both East Sussex County Council and Lewes District Council. Reports have been received from Society representatives on external bodies including concern about the ineffectiveness of the Lewes Town Strategic Partnership.

PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee has continued to meet monthly. Frances Tufnell was appointed to succeed Robert Cheesman as chairman from the beginning of June. The Committee considered 323 planning applications affecting Lewes and its immediate surroundings and 103 tree work applications were noted. Just over 50% of the total were for the Conservation Area. The Committee commented on 67 applications, sometimes to

commend them whilst other comments were not overall objections but criticism of details. At times poor or inadequate plans were also criticised. A number of applications for the demolition of garages and for the development of roof space in older houses were noted, and it was suggested that the District Council should adopt policies to cover this type of work. In the case of garages concern was expressed about increased parking either on hard standing in front gardens or on street in narrow residential roads. Fire risk was a concern with developments in the roof space of properties constructed before building regulations were applied. This was taken up with the District Council who said that most party walls met building requirements. A request was also made for a policy on solar panels.

The question of advertising on telephone boxes in the Conservation Area was also raised with the District Council as well as the Civic Trust. Advertising consent was not then required but new Government regulations should have been introduced by the end of the year. Following the Society's enquiry the District Council confirmed that repair grants have not existed since 2001 and since the Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme ended in June, no money has been available for repairs to listed buildings. In response to another enquiry as to whether shops should continue to look like shops when they are changed to residential use, the District Council said that they have a flexible approach but shop windows of exceptional quality should be retained.

PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

Commenting on planning policy developments remains an important task for the Society. During the year the initial consultations on the Local Development Framework took place and Debbie Portchmouth from the District Council spoke at the Society's Autumn General Meeting. Subsequently the Society responded so that its view on how planning policy should be framed for Lewes is on record. In particular it suggested that the town should remain a vibrant market town of character and diversity with commerce and industry appropriate to that status. A flexible approach to new housing development on brownfield sites should be taken and the possibility of having riverside paths on both banks of the river encouraged. Adequate provision should be made for tourism with a better pedestrian experience provided. Preventing flooding and reducing pollution must remain priorities. Ensuring that development outside Lewes does not increase traffic to and from the town as well as making public transport more user friendly were among other issues put forward.

The Urban Capacity Study undertaken by the District Council concerned future housing sites and the results will be used in the Local Development Framework. In Lewes the Society objected to the inclusion of the Southover Nurseries site as it is largely on land that once formed part of the Priory, which is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. After intervention by English Heritage the Council withdrew the site from their study.

During the year the public inquiry into the proposed South Downs National Park continued sitting. The Society had made representations through the South Downs Campaign that the boundary of the park should be further north of Lewes than proposed by the Countryside Agency partly in order to protect the setting of the town

from unwanted development. It is likely to be late 2005 before the Inspector reports to Government on the matter and the latter take a decision.

At the turn of the year the draft Regional Plan had just been published; the Society will be considering whether it needs to make representations on this in order to ensure that the historic status of Lewes is conserved for the future.

The Society also responded to a request from the District Council for a list of buildings at risk in the conservation area. It remains to be seen whether this will lead to any improvements to the buildings in question.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS IN LEWES

The planning application by the Raven Group to redevelop the former Baxter's print works site was considered in the year. The Society raised no objection to the concept of housing being provided on this site, as St Nicholas Lane is not suitable for heavy industrial vehicles. However it was suggested that the road becomes one way to cope with an increase in traffic. The lack of play space on the site was regretted but the provision of a walking route from St Nicholas Lane to Walwers Lane welcomed.

After the planning application to develop the land between Walwers Lane and Church Twitten, to which the Society had objected, was withdrawn earlier in the year a new application covering this site and the adjacent Lewes House garden site was submitted in December. The Society has since objected to this, mainly on the grounds of the height of and increase in the number of housing units proposed, but also because the design did not reflect the vernacular, lacked an irregular roof line, failed to embrace sustainable principles, removed trees from the Walwers Lane site and had inadequate car parking provision. The Society welcomed the open space provision and pedestrian routes through the site, accepting the concomitant need to have openings in the flint walls to permit this, but considered these should all be of an arched shape.

FLOOD PREVENTION

The work to provide flood protection in the form of a wall by the Tesco store and a bank around the Malling playing fields had just been completed at the end of the year. Once the grass and other vegetation have grown it should blend well into the Lewes scene. News as to when other parts of the town, particularly the highly visible western bank of the river north of the bridges, will be given protection was still awaited.

SEWERAGE IMPROVEMENT SCHEME

Although the work on this scheme gave rise to some inconvenience during the year Southern Water and their contractors have handled the public relations aspect very well. They spoke at the Society's AGM in March and have kept affected residents informed of progress. Most of the work had been completed at the year-end and it is anticipated that the new storm water system will be fully functional by March 2005.

NEW LEWES LIBRARY

Construction of the new library started in June and by the end of the year the brickwork was complete and new timbers were being put in place. The building works continue to be on schedule and within budget. The County Council have found some extra funding for the fitting-out budget; this will release Library appeal money for still greater enhancements. The appeal fund stands at £ 70,801 and it will soon be possible to decide how to spend it. The Lewes Library Friends are extremely grateful to the Society, particularly the Treasurer, David Tufnell, for acting as their banker.

FLINT WALLS

The Society made representations to the District Council when it was proposed to demolish part of the Dripping Pan boundary wall alongside Ham Lane. This flint wall is on the line of the former boundary wall to Lewes Priory and, in view of this historical connection, it was considered that every effort should be made to restore it. The Council subsequently commissioned an archaeological survey and the results of this were under discussion with the Society and other interested bodies at the year-end. Separately the Society has welcomed an initiative by the Lewes Buildings Preservation Trust to provide grants for the repair of flint walls in Lewes.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

a) EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

The Society's greatest achievement during the year was to persuade the County Council of the principle of introducing a 20mph speed limit in Lewes. Although the area proposed by the County Council was smaller than the Society would have liked and no practical work on introducing the limit has yet been undertaken, the County Council's decision was an important first step towards making the town a more pleasant place for pedestrians and cyclists. This concept is the Society's aim and at the year-end discussions were planned with Living Streets and Cycle Lewes to try and use our combined influence to maximum effect.

Nevertheless the County Council has been busy with other traffic measures, the most significant of which was the introduction of a controlled parking scheme in the town centre. The Society welcomed the scheme, but has suggested some minor adjustments that need to be made, particularly around the boundaries, to the County Council. The net revenue from it should be used to finance other transport improvements in the District including a roundabout at the exit from the Safeway supermarket and further improvements to Cliffe High Street to make it more pedestrian friendly. The roundabout would also be a gateway into the proposed 20 mph area mentioned above.

The poor state of pavements in key parts of the conservation area, such as Station Street, has been taken up with the County Council but, whilst the need for improvement is accepted, lack of resources has prevented work from taking place. This is also the main reason behind the County Council's decision to replace street lights in the conservation area with standard models when this becomes necessary. The Society continues to pursue both these issues.

Other suggestions which the Society have put to the County Council include reversing the traffic priorities at the junction of Fisher Street and West Street so that the pollution caused by standing traffic in the former is reduced; and creating a better transport interchange at the railway station. The latter would require the weight limit on the station bridge to be wholly or partially lifted and the possibility of this taking place seemed greater at the year-end.

b) *HIGHWAYS AGENCY*

The Highways Agency, an arm of central Government, is responsible for the A 27. During the year they have proposed an improvement to this road between Southerham and Beddingham mainly to replace the level crossing at Beddingham with a bridge. Since the level crossing is not only a safety hazard but also causes considerable queuing on the road, which can have an effect in Lewes, the Society took the view that the work was justified on environmental grounds even though the area in question is a particularly beautiful one. More recently the Agency have announced that traffic lights are to be added to the Ashcombe roundabout early in 2005, which will make it easier for vehicles to access the A 27 from the Brighton road.

During the year we have renewed our campaign with the Agency to have a lower noise surface laid on the Lewes by-pass because of the constant drone heard by residents in the southern part of the town. Whilst the principle of this has been accepted, the Agency is very firm in their view that this will not be done until the existing surface needs renewing. However some lengths of the inside lane of both carriageways do meet this criteria and are being resurfaced appropriately. Vehicle speed also contributes to the noise but the Agency did not consider that cameras were justified. Whilst the Society will continue its campaign it is unlikely that any measures will remove the nuisance created by traffic noise entirely.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS – SOCIETY SUB-COMMITTEE

In addition to the two General Meetings held for Society members three lectures have been organised to which members of the public have also been invited. These were: -

The history of horseracing in Lewes by Richard Rees

Living history by Joy Preston

Pre-Georgian Lewes; its place in English history by Dr Colin Brent

Two of these lectures took place, as an experiment, in Christ Church Hall whilst the Lecture Room at the Town Hall was used for the other. Wine is now provided as a regular feature at these lectures in order to make them more sociable.

Escorted visits were arranged for members to Lewes churches and graveyards, and the Southerham recycling facility. The latter may be repeated in the near future.

Three newsletters have been provided for members to keep them abreast of Society business. However, despite efforts to increase membership, there has been a net decrease during the year. All of these activities require volunteers to organise them

and, at present, this falls on too few shoulders. Thanks are therefore due to those who do give their time in this way to assist the Society's services to members.

SOCIETY PROJECTS

Tourist maps

Indoor locations were found during the year for three of the Society's Lewes maps, which had not been previously displayed. Prior to handing them over to the Tourist Information Centre and museums now displaying them the maps were framed and endorsed to show that the Society had provided them. A volunteer has been sought to manage the existing maps and consider the need to revise them.

The proposed Pavilion for the Railway Land

The Railway Land Wildlife Trust is undertaking a feasibility study into how a pavilion at the entrance to the nature reserve might be managed and financed once built. Depending on the result a decision can then be taken as to whether the project, which the Society first proposed as a memorial to its former Chairman, Peter Linklater, is viable and consideration given as to how it might proceed.

The "magic circle" above Castle Ditch Lane

Research has been undertaken to establish how this area once looked and a survey is currently taking place so that informed decisions can be taken on designing and financing an improvement to the area in conjunction with other bodies.

Books

During the year the Society produced two books. One recorded the various lectures given in 2002 to celebrate the Society's golden jubilee whilst the other was a personal account of Lewes between the wars by Bill Wells who had been brought up in a house, since demolished after bombing, in West Street. Both books are still on sale.

Other issues

The Society suggested to the relevant bodies a number of minor works that would improve the townscape. It also remains concerned at the number of signs in the town. The latter is being pursued through the District Council, as is the related issue of ensuring that signs are helpful to tourists

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Society's unrestricted income last year amounted to £ 8,514. This includes £ 170 raised for the District Council's skateboard park, which will be paid to them when it is confirmed that the project will proceed. Donations were also increased by money given to the Society in memory of the late Mr C Walter Hodges, which at the year-end amounted to £ 235. The Society is grateful to the Hodges family for having been nominated as the recipient of donations from those who wish to remember him.

Total expenditure for the year amounted to £ 6,581 including £ 131 paid in expenses to trustees. This resulted in a surplus for the year of £ 1,933 compared with a loss of £ 2,320 last year. This year only £ 340 has been spent on projects whereas last year a contribution of £ 1,000 was made to the Baxter's Field Company and the remaining cost of the Grange Garden railings was met. However £ 3,322 has been spent, with a further sum of £ 1,396 paid after the year-end, on publishing the two books reported above. So far £ 2,137 of this expenditure has been recovered from the sale of these books and it is hoped that eventually the income will cover their full cost.

The Society has been holding about £ 17,000 in a deposit account, which generated interest income of £ 592, as a reserve to enable funding to be offered to projects meeting the Society's objectives and to brief Counsel if a public inquiry took place on a planning application that threatened the fabric or environment of the town. This policy has been reviewed and it has been decided that a reserve of about £ 10,000 should be adequate for the future. The existing reserve will therefore be run down during the next few years by increasing expenditure on supporting relevant projects.

The level of subscriptions has also been reviewed as they barely cover expenditure on the basic core activities of the Society before any projects are considered. Although the latter will be partially financed from reserves for a few years, a negative budget is not sustainable in the long term. It is therefore being recommended that subscriptions are increased to £ 8 for a single person and £ 11 for a couple. Assuming the number of members remain constant this should generate an additional £ 500 per year.

The Society is also operating a restricted fund held in a separate deposit account for the Lewes library project. This fund has risen during the year from £ 51,203 to £ 70,800. The majority of this increase was provided by the 50% share in the profit generated by a concert held at Glyndebourne. It is expected that the bulk of these funds will be spent in 2005 on library facilities not provided by the County Council.

PLANS FOR FUTURE PERIODS

Whilst the Society will continue to comment on proposals made by others concerning the town of Lewes, it will also lobby relevant bodies to undertake projects that will conserve the town's historic features. In particular it has started to draw up a list of projects that a future South Downs National Park Authority might be able to support. In addition a list of possible projects that the Society itself might support has been drafted. The extent to which this becomes possible, and the current level of services to members maintained, depends on the funds and human resources available in the Society to carry them out. The latter often constrains other Society activities and the need to build up the number of active volunteers as well as membership generally is likely to be a continuing key feature in the year ahead. Nevertheless the objective of the Society to protect and enhance the townscape of Lewes will remain paramount,

Approved by the Executive Committee on 24th January 2005 and signed on their behalf

Robert Cheesman Chairman

RECEIPTS & PAYMENTS ACCOUNT

	2004		2003		2004
RECEIPTS	General fund				Library
	unrestricted				Fund
	by Donors				
Voluntary Sources		see			
		note			
Subscriptions	2,193.00		2,124.00		
Life Member Subscriptions	360.00		0.00		
Legacies	0.00		0.00		
Donations	1,469.50	(a)	911.00		1,380.00
Function Income	186.91		233.00		16,683.94
Grants	0.00		0.00		
Tax rebate	680.57		308.42		145.26
SUB TOTAL:	4,889.98		3,576.42		
Trading Activities					
Book Sales	2137.22	(b)	0.00		
Tea towels	669.00		677.50		
Card Sales	52.60		47.00		
Poster Sales	134.00		2.00		
SUB TOTAL:	2,992.82		726.50		
Income from Assets					
Interest	631.75	(c)	561.72		2,213.00
Miscellaneous Receipts	0.00		0.00		
TOTAL RECEIPTS	8,514.55		4,864.64		20,422.20
PAYMENTS					
Direct Charitable Expenditure					
Project Costs	340.88	(d)	2406.80		
Function Costs	98.00		332.93		824.45
Insurance	135.00		120.00		
Grants	0.00		1,000.00		
Web Site Maintenance	260.20		340.00		
SUB TOTAL:	834.08		4,199.73		
Other Expenditure					
Printing & Stationery	665.27		758.35		
Post & Telephone	190.15		242.67		
Travel	0.00		0.00		
Room Hire	407.24		488.26		
AGM & Annual Report	57.75		255.26		
Subscriptions	225.00	(e)	200.00		
Independent examination costs	0.00		70.50		
SUB TOTAL:	1,545.41		2,015.04		
Trading Activities					
Book Production	3,322.26	(f)			
Cards bought	0.00		0.00		
Tea towels bought	810.87		752.00		
Poster Acquisition	0.00		0.00		
SUB TOTAL:	4,133.13		752.00		
Miscellaneous	68.75	(g)	217.50		
TOTAL PAYMENTS	6,581.37		7,184.27		824.45
(DEFICIT)/SURPLUS TO DATE	1,933.18		(2,319.63)		19,597.75

NOTES:

- (a) includes Skateboard Park £170.00: in memory of Walter Hodges £235.00
 (b) Book Sales: Lewes Anniversary Book £1,847.13; Wells Book: £290.09
 (c) Interest on CAF deposit account: £592.37 CAF chq. acc: £39.38
 (d) Project Costs: Framing Town Maps £241.00 Lettering for same: £99.88
 (e) CPRE: £25.00, Sussex Amenity Societies: £ 25.00, Southdowns Campaign: £25.00 Civic Trust £150.00
 (f) Book Production: Lewes Anniversary Book £2,722.26; Wells Book: £600 (Owed £1,395.81 Total Cost £1995.81)
 (g) Seminar cost £10.00 Purchase of planning maps :£11.75 Advertisement in LDC 'Link' Magazine: £47.00

MONETARY ASSETS

Bank Cash Balances

GENERAL FUNDS

unrestricted

LIBRARY FUND

restricted

	CASH	CAF CHQ	CAF DEP	TOTAL	
BROUGHT FORWARD FROM YEAR 2003	0	727	16,831	17,558	51,203
(DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FROM ABOVE		1,841	92	1,933	19,598
BALANCES AT 31 DECEMBER 2004	£ 0	£ 2,568	£ 16,924	£ 19,491	£ 70,801
UNCLEARED (CHEQUES)/CREDITS		0	0		
CAF BANK STATEMENT RECONCILIATION		£ 2,568	£ 16,924		70,801

OTHER MONETARY ASSETS:

Stock in Hand at Cost

Books	£3,000
Tea Towels	£ 575
Cards	£ 245
Posters	£ 773

TOTAL

£4,593

LIABILITIES

Creditors: Cheesmur - retention money for work on the Grange Gardens railings: £349.40
 PRM - printing of Wells book: £1,396
 Debtors: Inland Revenue: £1.00 (under-paid last claim) - Sx Archaeology: £40.00 - LDC: £100

NON-MONETARY ASSETS

Date acquired Cost to date Estimated value

Held for Investment Purposes

None

PROJECT EXPENDITURE INCURRED & PROPOSED

PROJECT	98-02	2003	2004	2004	2005	TOTAL
	Actual	Actual	Budgetted	Actual	Budgetted	SPENT
Grange Garden Wall & Railings	14,946	2,195	349		175	17,316
Town Information Maps	9,171		-	341		9,512
Finger Sign in Keere Street	754		-			754
Linklater Pavilion	976		500			1,476
Grant to Baxters Field	0	1,000	-			1,000
TOTAL		£ 3,195	£ 849	£ 341		£ 30,058