



NEWSLETTER

Summer 2026



Pictures by Nick Robinson

Ruth O'Keeffe - Chair of Friends of Lewes

Welcome to your Summer Newsletter 2026 Newsletter

The two pictures from Nick Robinson for this newsletter look at the Grange Gardens in two very different ways. The first is simply a picture taken on a July day as the sun was beginning to set and the second one, which does I think looks strangely otherworldly, is what an AI programme made of the first picture. It's still the familiar Grange Gardens and yet not. An interesting and perhaps a bit disturbing duo for comparison. Do let Friends of Lewes know what you think about this - a good opportunity this Summer would be by dropping in at Fitzroy House in the precinct on a Friday between 10am and 1pm where you will find a member of the Executive Committee at an information stall all through July and August.

Your newsletter begins with news from the ever-busy Planning Committee - comments made to official consultations are posted on the Friends of Lewes website at <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/> if you would like to refer to these. Roger Maskew has a summary of recent work and Peter Earl a report from a recent Urban Design Group conference which he attended, and planning policy issues including the review of the South Downs Local Plan and updates on the North Street Quarter, Eastgate Street bus station, Eastgate Wharf and Old Malling Farm. He also adds a note on enforcement featuring the Shelley's Hotel building.

Next you will find a report from John Gower, Flood Lead, on policy on development in the floodplain.

Then Peter Earl returns with news about Heritage Open Days which this year are Friday 11th - Sunday 13th September.

Audrey Jarvis has much to report, as the Trees Committee have been working hard both planting and maintaining trees, including a new hedge planting exercise which put 775 mixed whips along the border of Priory School with Ham Lane, and news about the second Lewes Tree Festival held in June. Audrey's piece contains an invitation to members to send in a picture of their favourite tree as part of an initiative to establish a Tree Charter for Lewes.

The Membership Services Committee also has an invitation to members, to send in suggestions for talks and speakers. Details events both past and present are given, with information about subscribing to the website to be kept up to date on new posts - about half the membership are currently subscribed in this way. Paul Yates, our Website and Communications person, regularly updates the website with news.

Finally, there is a reminder to contact Diana Freestone, our Honorary Secretary, if you would like to volunteer to help with the Membership Services Committee.

Hoping to see plenty of members at the upcoming Lewes Societies Fair on 5th September - at our stall or your own!

With all good wishes for the Summer ahead

Ruth

PLANNING

The Planning Committee *from Roger Maskew*

Since the Winter Newsletter in December, the Planning Committee have had six more monthly meetings at the beginning of each month, when a total of 111 planning applications were reviewed, 40 discussed in detail, and 21 responses submitted to the relevant planning authority. As a result of these responses, generally the views of the Society seem to continue to be well received by the South Downs National Park Authority, in the determination of the planning applications that the Planning Committee had considered in detail, and had submitted a response. Indeed in at least one case, a planning submission had been amended in order to take account of the Society's concerns.

At the May meeting of the Planning Committee, we welcomed Julian Till as a new member of the Committee.

Of the 21 responses submitted to date this year, members may be interested in the following planning applications:-

SDNP/25/04957/FUL: 36-38 Friars Walk: Internal refurbishment and conversion of vacant former NHS commercial office building (Use Class E) to provide 37 apartments (Use Class C3) including infilling the undercroft on the ground floor. (Please refer to the January Minutes of the Planning Committee.)

SDNP/26/00124/FUL & 00125/LIS: 1 Albion Street: Replacement of 8no. windows to front and side elevations: (Please refer to the March Minutes of the Planning Committee.)

SDNF/25/01671/FUL: Eastgate Wharf: Demolition of existing buildings and construction of mixed-use development comprising 60 dwellings (Class C3), and 372 sqm ground floor commercial space (Class E), with associated flood defences, landscaping, parking, access alterations, and public realm. (Amended scheme). (Please refer to the June Minutes of the Planning Committee.)

The Urban Design Group conference *from Peter Earl*

The Urban Design Group conference was held in Lewes on 5th June at the Depot cinema with the Friends of Lewes taking an active part. Vice-chair of the FoL, Roger Maskew, gave an introductory talk about the town, its history, architecture and some of the issues it faces currently. A particular theme of the conference was the amount of development land taken up by roads and associated space (for car parking and access), and whether that was the best use of space. Delegates were shown examples, particularly from Cambridge, where new residential development achieved a better balance of land-use and more communal areas of open space. In the afternoon about 60 delegates joined FoL walking tours of the town. These took in some of the new developments between the twittens on the south side of the High Street and Lansdown Place/Friars Walk. There was particular interest from the delegates in the wealth of mathematical tiled buildings we have in the town and the extensive use of flint in new as well as old buildings. The tours finished with tea at the Town Hall hosted by the Mayor.

The Urban Design Group (UDG), founded in 1978, is a membership charity, open to all who care about the quality of life in our cities, towns and villages and believe that raising standards of urban design is central to its improvement. The UDG believes that good urban design depends upon successful collaboration between all those who shape the built environment, whatever their professional or personal background. They believe a great deal of development is still badly designed with more than 75% of all planning applications in the UK prepared by someone with no design training.

Planning Policy issues

The review of the **South Downs Local Plan** has reached another milestone and was published for public consultation on 12 May 2026. The FoL made extensive representations in respect of its soundness and legal compliance with national policies. The comments covered the general policies and the specific strategic development sites within Lewes. The full submission can be viewed on our website:-

<https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/2026/06/27/response-to-the-south-downs-local-plan-proposed-submission-regulation-19-may-2026/> under Regulation 19 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012.

Following the very successful Friends of Lewes 25th Floods Anniversary Exhibition, we received a considerable amount of feedback indicating that Lewes's residents did not want any more homes to be built in the floodplain. In response we have developed a policy position on development in the floodplain, which was included in response to the latest version of the SDNP Local Plan as outlined in John Gower's piece below.

The South Downs Local Plan consultation ran for six weeks until Tuesday 23 June 2026 and is now closed. All duly received representations will be reviewed and submitted alongside the Local Plan to the Planning Inspectorate. It is anticipated that the Plan will be submitted for independent examination by the end of this year, and examined at a public inquiry in early 2027.

Planning update

There seems little progress on many of the town's development sites.

The **North Street Quarter development** proposals remain very uncertain with more than 28 months having elapsed since the South Downs National Park Planning Committee decision to grant planning permission, and also 10 months since the developer, Human Nature's last letter of correspondence to the SDNPA. The legal agreement necessary to enable any planning permission to be issued has still not been published, and is unsigned.

In February 2026 Lewes District Council indicated it had purchased all of Human Nature's land, which extends across the north side of North Street, for £9.5 million to help deliver affordable housing. The District Council announced on 1st July that its Cabinet is now to consider proposals to sell a key parcel of land and enable the comprehensive regeneration of the North Street selling it to 'Human Nature Hollybrook Phoenix Ltd', which is a new company including Jonathan Smales, the director of the current Human Nature company, as a director. It is stated that the move would allow the site to be brought under single ownership, helping secure external funding and helping deliver the new health hub, flood defences, homes and other community facilities central to the scheme.

There are clearly many challenges remaining, not least those identified by the Friends of Lewes.

The **Eastgate Street bus station** remains empty and unused, with passengers still having to find the right stand amongst the multiple options in adjacent streets. There is no indication that the development will proceed with outstanding ecological surveys and other schemes still not submitted. The bus station is still for sale and, until all schemes are approved, redevelopment cannot be considered imminent. Meanwhile, there is nothing to indicate that this inconvenience and harm to the town is likely to end any time soon. It is vital that the bus station issue is resolved in order not to prolong the town centre disruption, confusion and inconvenience of dispersed bus stands.

Eastgate Wharf

An amended scheme, albeit seemingly out of time, has been submitted to demolish the existing buildings and construction of mixed-use development comprising 60 dwellings, 372 sqm ground floor commercial space, with associated flood defences, landscaping, parking, access alterations, and public realm.

The Friends of Lewes objected to the initial proposals with concerns about the different styles being too fussy, and in need of simplification, the failure to address the townscape importance of the site, and the scale of the proposed development fronting the river Ouse. The site forms part of the 'gateway to Lewes', and will be very visible from both the Phoenix Causeway and from the tow path on the eastern side of the river. It was suggested that the scale and range should be similar to that fronting the river, south of Cliffe Bridge, and be limited to a maximum of four storeys in order to be sympathetic in scale to the wider setting along the river frontage between the Phoenix Causeway and Cliffe Bridge.

The layout of any development must retain important views of the river and the distinguished listed Harvey's Brewery buildings. Similar objections have been raised to the new proposals including the inadequacy of flood defences, deficiency in public car parking, inadequacy of the town square and the riverside walkway provision.

There is a 13-page requirement for further information from the Highway Authority, which highlights the problems of meeting the site requirements of a comprehensive development in a piecemeal way.

Old Malling Farm

It appears that the development of this site is being progressed with the necessary detailed schemes being submitted to the SDNPA for decision. The scheme has been modified and, rather than a modular form of house construction (off site), it is to be timber-framed. In the meantime, the District Council has provided an update regarding the access ramp to the railway cuttings. It has confirmed that responsibility for delivering the ramp sits with the Lewes District Council and that officers are still working on design options. Once a design is agreed, a planning application will be submitted and needs to be approved. The final layout is apparently dependent on the available Section 106 funding, which is set out at £850,000, to be allocated and used to only part-fund the 'Access Works'. It remains unclear what the design of the access ramp will be and when it will be delivered, although it must precede the building of houses south of the farm access road under the terms of the planning permission.

Enforcement *from Peter Earl*

The Friends of Lewes, working with Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group, monitors developments in the town and draws the SDNPA's Enforcement Officer's attention to changes which may not have planning permission, and untidy sites, so that the relevant enforcement action can be considered by the officers at the SDNPA.

The situation with the Shelley's Hotel at 137 High Street is of concern, along with the neighbouring 136 High Street, an early 19th century red and brown brick gabled building (currently boarded up). Both are listed buildings, with the Shelley's Hotel being a grade II* listed building dating from the 16th century, comprising very elegant features both inside and out. It closed at the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 and has remained empty since (pictured on the next page).



The Friends of Lewes, amongst others, had hoped that by now, there would be some clarity on its future along with the adjacent, concerns about the condition of the buildings were raised with the South Downs National Park Planning Authority as far back as 2020. Requests for the buildings to be inspected, to allow their condition to be assessed, have not been followed up and apparently, a formal Enforcement Notice requiring action has only recently been issued. Despite a request for details of the action taken by the SDNPA with the timescale for compliance, nothing has been forthcoming. It is unclear if the SDNPA action will ensure that these important listed buildings will be protected, or whether they will be allowed to deteriorate further.

Policy on Development in the Floodplain *from John Gower, FoL Flood lead*

Lewes has a long history of flooding. In October 2000 the River Ouse and Winterbourne Stream burst their banks inundating large parts of the town causing devastating flooding to 613 homes, over 200 businesses and many hundreds of hectares of low-lying land. Lewes was cut in half for three days with traffic unable to pass over the Phoenix Causeway or Cliffe Bridge. Electricity and gas supplies were cut to large areas of the town and sewers were blocked with sewage flooding, internally, into over 100 properties. 186 people spent several nights sleeping in emergency accommodation in Lewes Town Hall, the Lewes Leisure Centre and Malling Community Centre. Damages for the Ouse Valley exceeded £130 million, nearly £250 million at 2026 costs.

Severe flooding also impacted Lewes in 1960, 1938, 1911, 1909, 1878 and every 30 - 40 years back until records began in the late 17th century.

Last year, the Friends of Lewes commemorated the 25th Anniversary of the 2000 Floods with an exhibition of photos, films, poems and memories which was visited by over 4,000 people. In October we helped Lewes Town Council hold a two-day Flood Conference and Public Meeting to review the 2000 flooding and the responses to it. The meeting concluded that building additional homes in the floodplain is unsustainable. A clear majority, by a show of hands, supported stopping new residential development in the floodplain. In response, the Friends of Lewes has produced a policy on development in the floodplain, which sets out our objections to new, un-adapted homes being built in the floodplain. Floating homes and those built on stilts would be acceptable as these would be safe from future flooding. We also call for more greening and better more sustainable drainage, something that is becoming ever more important with the impacts of climate change. The Policy has been sent to the South Downs National Park Authority, as part of our response to the consultation on their new Local Plan.

You can access a copy of the policy here <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/2026/06/27/friends-of-lewes-policy-on-development-in-the-floodplain/>



Heritage Open Days 11th – 13th September 2026 *from Peter Earl*

The Heritage Open Day Committee has been working hard to deliver this year's Heritage Open Day festival weekend, which will take place from Friday 11th to Sunday 13th September 2026.

The organising Committee is always looking to add new venues to the festival and new walks or tours. If you are able to put forward a building or other feature to the festival, or would be interested in undertaking a walk, please contact the Society's Honorary Secretary at enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk.

In addition, we are in need of help with stewarding some of the properties on the Saturday and Sunday. If you can offer any help, even for a couple of hours, that would help support the property owners during the festival. Again, please contact the Society's Secretary.

The Society is extremely grateful for the sponsorship of the festival by Adams and Remers and Rise Joinery, and to Lewes District Council for their support with the printing of leaflets.

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.

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.

A new hedge for wildlife

On 8th February, members of the Trees Committee and our helpful volunteers met with pupil representatives from local schools and their parents to facilitate the planting of 775 mixed native whips at the border of Priory School with Ham Lane. It was a cheerful day with a fantastic group of people of all ages working together to plant and mulch the little trees. The choice of trees included Hornbeam, Hazel, Dogwood, Field Maple and Alder.



The day was the result of a great deal of planning that started in Autumn 2024! Our team offered to help [Green United](#) to fulfil their wish to plant more trees for wildlife by sourcing and part-funding the tree whips, canes and tree guards, arranging for wood chip delivery, and paying for the rotavation of the planting strip. It was jointly funded by the Trees Committee and a grant that Green United were given by Tesco's. Special thanks to Trees Committee member Duncan Armstrong for delivering all the mulch and ferrying it to where it was needed on the day.

Making a Buzz

In March we spent a lovely afternoon at the Linklater Pavilion for the "Making a Buzz" event. This was organised by the Mosaic Project partnership between the Railway Land, Wildflower Lewes, Common Cause, Lewes Swift Supporters and Lewes Urban Arboretum. We had an interesting talk from [Buzz Club](#) and a chance to make Hoverfly lagoons and bug bunkers to take home.

Lewes Tree Festival 2026

For the second year we organised a Lewes Tree Festival to celebrate the trees in our Arboretum Town. We began with a launch day at Lewes Climate Hub on 13th June, where we were supported by members of the other committees of Friends of Lewes. The 92 visitors could find out where we have already planted trees and share their suggestions for new sites, be advised about the best trees to plant in gardens on chalky soil and explore the range of trees that support our declining wildlife. Rustic Tim was with us throughout the day to help people to make their own woodcraft flowers to take home. The Membership Services team were available to show Friends of Lewes merchandise and answer questions about the work of our volunteers.



Our guided walks on 14th, 20th and 21st June were well attended and very enjoyable. In all, 97 people came along to find out more about the trees in the gardens of Southover Grange, at Malling Deanery Arboretum, and on the Railway Land Nature Reserve. We had very good weather and, when it became too hot, the trees provided some cooling shade. That is one reason why we need more of them!



Thank you to the Rotary Club of Lewes for sponsoring the tree trail leaflets and posters for the Tree Festival.

A Tree Charter for Lewes?

In December 2025, members of the Trees Committee attended a consultation at the University of Sussex on the draft Rights of Trees toolkit that had been developed by Joanna Smallwood of the Environmental Law Clinic with her students. Many of us met up again at the wonderful “Voices of the Wild” conference at the Railway Land Nature Reserve in April and were further inspired. After the conference, our Trees Committee members arranged to meet up with representatives from the Railway Land, Lewes Town Council, the Environmental Law Foundation, Lewes Climate Hub, and South Downs National Park to plan towards gaining a Tree Charter for Lewes that would protect the Rights of Trees in our Arboretum Town.



Some of the members of the Rights of our Trees group, (ROOTs) after our second meeting

At the launch of our Tree Festival on 13th June, we encouraged people to take part in our “Special Trees” project. Members of the Rights of our Trees group shared photographs of a favourite tree in Lewes and included a note of what made it “special” to them. See our website for an example and more details: <https://friends-of-lewes.org.uk/2026/06/23/do-you-have-a-favourite-tree-in-lewes/>

To take part, email us a portrait photograph of one of your favourite trees in a public space in Lewes, with a note about what makes it special to you.

Please email your photograph to arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk by 31st July.

The photographs will be displayed at Lewes Climate Hub during Heritage Open Days, 12th to 13th September and at other venues later in the year.

Membership Services Committee update *from Committee Members:*

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

MSC Members:

The current members are:

Jill Smit – Membership Secretary (membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

Bronagh Liddicoat – Heritage Plaques

Kate Minogue – Committee Chair / Social Media

Jane Slater – Merchandise

Paul Yates – Website & Communications (communications.friendsoflewes@gmail.com)

Events:

- In January 2026 the Membership Services Committee organised a 'Coffee morning' at Southover Church Hall. This well-attended event was organised in order that local people could find out, in person, more about what the Society does and to meet the volunteers that help support it. Representatives from the Society's committees were on hand to answer questions and a presentation was available detailing the Society's activities and goals.

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

- In March 2026 a new Heritage Plaque was placed at 1 St Andrew's Place, Southover Road by the FoL and Lewes Town Council to commemorate John Stenhouse (formerly Steinhäuser). He was the Medical Officer in Lewes and founded the sanatorium in 1905. He conducted valuable work in child mortality rates and specifically deaths from tuberculosis. Additionally, he served in World War I with the Sussex Yeomanry as a Surgeon-Captain and was a member of the Royal College of Surgeons.
- In April 2026, immediately prior to our AGM, Juliet Oxborrow gave a presentation entitled **Five flood actions for Lewes** during which Juliet explored the desirable actions required to enhance future flood security for the town. This was the first time the Society had used its own audio equipment and understandably there were a few glitches which were noted. A new Infographic detailing the Society's work in 2025 was distributed to all attendees.
- In June 2026 the FoL Trees Committee launched the Lewes Tree Festival with an exhibition from the Lewes Urban Arboretum at Lewes Climate Hub. Also, four guided walks were organised to celebrate our trees and our status as an Arboretum Town – one of only two in the country! All the walks were led by local arboriculturists who are members of our Trees Committee.
- Our next event will take place on Saturday 5th September when the FoL will be present at the Societies Fair in Lewes Town Hall from 10am to 1pm.
- Please note a further date for your diary: Friday 11th September to Sunday 13th September - Heritage Open Day Weekend.

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 Membermojo website – The Friends of Lewes ([Friends of Lewes](#)) or by contacting (membership@friends-of-lewes.org.uk). Subscription categories are: £12 per year (individual), £17 (joint), £120 (life) or £170 (joint life).

Website and Member Communications:

Of our 405 members, 205 are currently subscribers. By being a subscriber, you are automatically emailed any new post placed on the website, keeping you better informed. If you would like to subscribe, just enter your email address in 'Get Free News & Events via Email' section on the right of the home page and click on 'click here to become a subscriber'. You will receive an email to confirm your subscription. Doing so will keep you up to date with any new events, planning reports, grant updates, responses to government and council issues / proposals that may have a local impact etc.

Our website was refreshed, updated and reorganised over a year ago now. We hope you find the site easy to use and navigate. The site is regularly reviewed to see if there are any errors, omissions or improvements that can be made. We still have the intention to refresh the website further to enhance the usability and visual presentation.

It is there to serve and inform 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.

Merchandise: FoL merchandise is available at our events and via our website [Shop](#) link where you can order Friends of Lewes books, cards, prints and tea towels.

Interested in volunteering?

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/>