

# Friends of Lewes

the Lewes Civic Society



## *Spring 2009 Newsletter*

### **South Downs National Park**

On 31 March the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, after considering the reports by the Inquiry Inspector, decided that a South Downs National Park should be created with a National Park Authority and that Lewes should be included within it. The Secretary of State noted that as part of the reopened inquiry the Inspector received extensive evidence from those supporting inclusion of the town and he therefore reconsidered the issue. As a result the Inspector decided that Lewes had a more intimate relationship with the adjoining chalk hills than any of the other settlements on the edge of the designated area. He also changed his view on the quality of the valley landscape to the north of the town and consequently concluded that the town could be said to sit within a landscape of national park quality and that the River Ouse and the rights of way network offered markedly superior recreational experiences within the area. The Secretary of State agreed with the Inspector's conclusions and, on that basis, decided to include Lewes in the National Park.

In addition to the inclusion of Lewes and the Ouse valley to Hamsey, the Secretary of State has included land at Ryngmer Park and Gote Farm in the National Park but conversely has excluded land to the east and north of Offham that had originally been designated by the Countryside Agency.

The Secretary of State also took the view that, given the National Park's exceptionally large population and the number of local authorities within the Park, the National Park Authority should delegate its development control work, so far as possible, to the constituent local authorities.



Since the Secretary of State also decided to include 6 small parcels of land in the National Park which had not previously been designated, it has been necessary for public consultation to take place about these areas. These include 3 parcels of land on the fringes of Brighton and 1 at Plumpton and should not prove contentious. In addition the Secretary of State will be consulting about the membership of the National Park Authority, which is likely to be between 29 and 37 members.

He then anticipates laying a Statutory Instrument before Parliament in the autumn of 2009 so that, if Parliament is content, the National Park Authority can be established

and members appointed to it from April 2010. After a year as a shadow authority, during which time officers are appointed, premises obtained and initial administrative arrangements decided, the National Park Authority will become operational from 1 April 2011.

Bearing in mind that Lewes will be the largest settlement in the National Park; the Society has already suggested to Lewes Town Council that it should endeavour to obtain one of the seats on the National Park Authority allocated to parish councils. It would also expect Lewes District Council to have its own seat on the Authority.

Whilst it is difficult to be precise about the effect that the National Park Authority will have on the town the Society hopes that as a single purpose authority funded by Government it will have significant resources to devote to conservation and enhancement, including cultural heritage, both in the rural and urban environment.

Whilst a National Park Authority has no remit to promote tourism it does have a duty to promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of its area by the public, and thus better interpretation facilities can be anticipated. On the planning front the National Park Authority will produce a national park plan that will determine overall policy for land use and, whilst the Society considers that delegation of most development control issues is right, they will need to be determined within the parameters of the national park plan with particularly controversial planning applications being determined by the Authority itself.

Clearly much work will need to be done to ensure that the South Downs National Park Authority becomes one which will make a difference to Lewes. In that context the Society intends to work closely with the South Downs Society, which aim to be the body co-ordinating community and recreational interests across the National Park. The Society will also produce a wish list of conservation projects or other matters to which it attaches priority that can be handed

to the Authority once it is established. If members have any suggestions as to what could be include in such a list please either e-mail the Society or drop a note into the Town Hall with your thoughts.

### **Conservation Area Advisory Committee**

The District Council have agreed to set up a pilot committee covering Lewes and, it is hoped, the Malling Deanery conservation areas providing that members representing commercial and professional interests can be attracted to serve on it. The Society accepts that it is essential that any committee should be broadly based and adopts a considered approach if its views are to be valued by the District Council.

### **Major developments**

*Tesco* – The Society objected to this planning application for a substantial extension for similar reasons to those made when the previous proposal was submitted in 2006. We were content with the design and materials for the proposed extension but were concerned about the loss of designated industrial land, the additional traffic that would be attracted to the shop, and the potentially deleterious effect that the expansion could have on other shops in the town centre. We also asked that a pedestrian route should be retained to Homebase and that if the District Council is minded to approve the application, conditions should be imposed to restrict the range of goods sold in Tesco to items not readily available in the town and for the landscaping in the car park to be better maintained.

*Former Canon O'Donnell centre* – The Society objected to this planning application for a four storey building of flats on the grounds of loss to the townscape and community amenity. We also considered the proposed building too high, out of scale with the surrounding area, and would provide an



inadequate focus for the view in Western Road when looking west. In addition the materials proposed were too varied and some inconsistent with the Council's design guidelines for conservation areas.

*Phoenix* – It is understood that this proposed development is currently in abeyance and in any event the developer is awaiting determination of the separate planning application that has already been made for industrial units at Malling Brooks into which current industrial users at Phoenix can be decanted.

*Nurseries site, Malling Street* – The Society has objected to further development of this site as it considers that the increase in housing units from the 28 already approved to the 41 proposed will exacerbate the traffic situation in Malling Street where right turns from the development towards the town centre are already difficult. It also considered that the development should not take place if it would aggravate the surface water run-off problem or prevent measures from being taken to deal with this.

### **Planning Policy**

The District Council hope that the core strategy for the Local Development Framework will have been agreed by 2011. The Local Development Framework will replace the existing District Local Plan in which policies for land use are set out. There will be public consultation on the draft core strategy and the Society will play a leading part in ensuring that this reflects the need to conserve the environment both in and around Lewes.

### **Alleviating flooding**

The Society welcomed the plans by the Environment Agency to improve the flood defences on the eastern side of the river from Tesco to the end of South Street. It is understood that work on this scheme should start shortly.

The Society has also taken up with the Environment Agency the flooding that occurs in low lying parts of Malling, particularly Orchard Road and Spences Lane, due to surface run-off following periods of high rainfall. We understand that the pumps behind Tesco have been upgraded to deal with this problem and should activate before any property is flooded. If this is so, we have suggested that the Environment Agency need to build up the confidence of residents of this area that the problem has now been alleviated.

Contact has also been made with the County Council who are taking the lead in acting on the recommendations in the Integrated Urban Drainage project. Work in dealing with the previous flooding after heavy rainfall in Grange Road is already in hand, whilst a new gully has been installed near Southover Grange and high pressure water jetting is being used to clear blocked drains. The Society has welcomed this work but said that it is important that drains and gullies leading to them are kept clear particularly in the autumn leaf fall season.

### **Traffic matters**

*Parking* – The Society has suggested to the County Council a number of minor changes that would improve the public perception of the parking scheme in the town. Among these was the need for give-away maps to be produced showing the car parks in the town and the level of charges in each. In relation to minor infringements we were referred to the County Council's Parking Charter which, among other things, allows for overstays of no more than 10 minutes.

*New works* – The County Council have informed the Society that they plan to provide

a mini-roundabout at the junction of The Avenue and Offham Road and a traffic island in Station Road immediately north of the Mountfield Road mini-roundabout.



The former will slow traffic entering the town whilst the latter will make it easier for pedestrians to cross. Other plans for Offham Road and Mount Place are being considered. The possibility of making further improvements in the railway station area including Station Street partly depend on finance becoming available and partly on the necessary structural improvement to the Station Road Bridge being undertaken. Whilst

the possibility of introducing a new road from either the A27 or the A26 into the Mountfield Road area of the town has been suggested previously, there is no possibility of this taking place in the foreseeable future.

### **Books**

Partly as a result of the publicity given to street names in Lewes at the turn of the year, the Society is working on a revision of the book written by Les Davey which it originally published in 1961. Work is also progressing on a revision of the Lewes Twittens booklet.

### **Magical Moments many years ago**

Norman Oldham, a former Lewes resident, has written to say that when he motored home on a moonlit July evening after a night at the Glyndebourne Opera the facades of the Georgian buildings in the High Street blended perfectly with the atmosphere of the “Rake’s Progress”. In addition the trumpet obligato of Anne Truelove’s aria was still ringing in his ears and he thought “What magic”

### **DATES FOR YOUR DIARY**

**Saturday 11 July – The Societies Fair**– The Society will have a promotional stall at this annual event commencing at 10 am at Lewes Town Hall.

**Wednesday 7 October – Autumn General Meeting** 7.45pm, Lecture Room, Lewes Town Hall

**Wednesday 18 November – “Lewes Phoenix Iron Works Reborn”** -a presentation introduced by Christine Hall of Artemis Arts at 7.45pm in the Lecture Room, Lewes Town Hall.

The Lewes Phoenix Project is the brainchild of Artemis Arts who are working with the community to capture the stories and images of the former Iron Foundry. The project will feature in this year’s Art Wave and celebrate local creativity inspired by the story of the Phoenix Iron Works.

