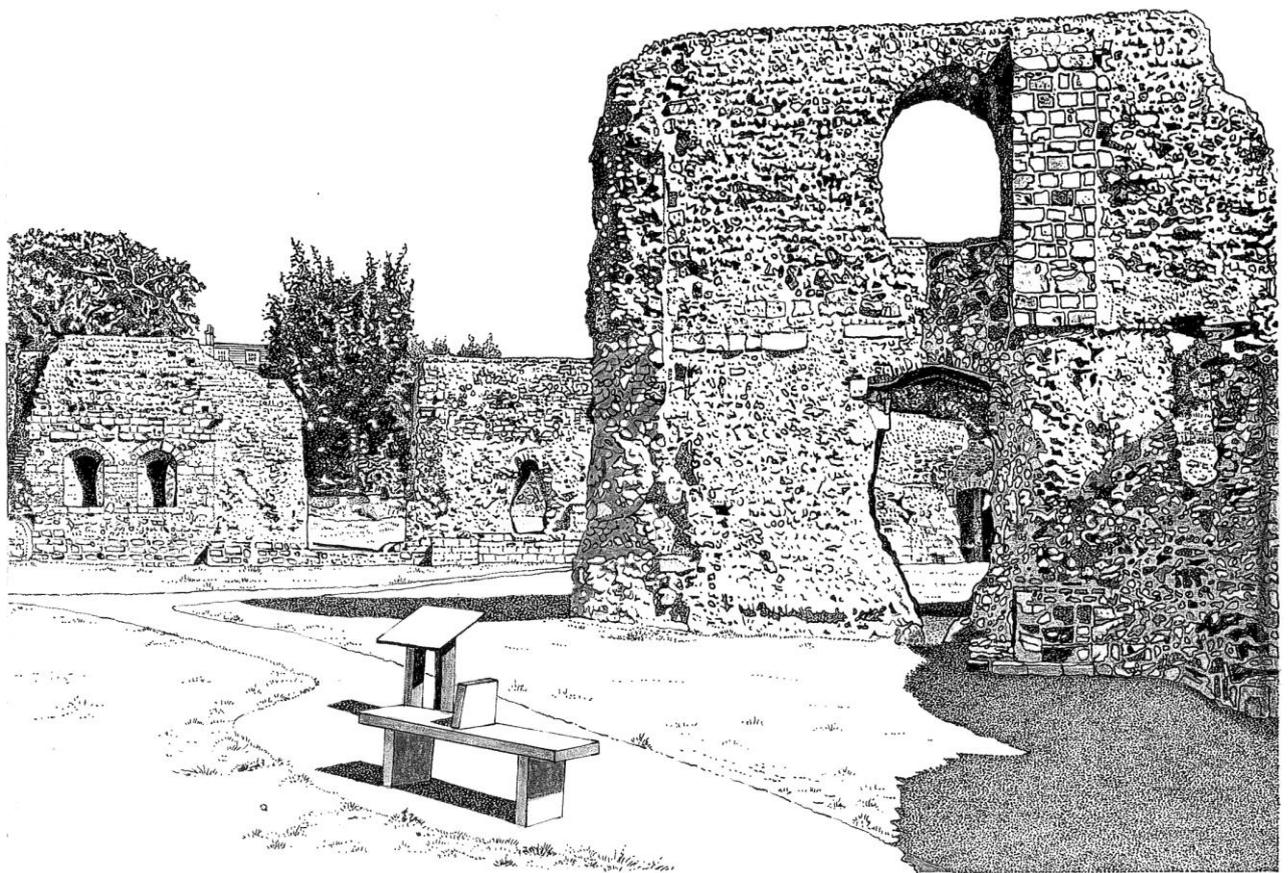


Friends of Lewes



Annual report 2011

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 E-mail address: enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

Personnel at 31st December 2011

President Phyllida Stewart-Roberts CVO, OBE
Vice-Presidents Norman Baker MP Jim Franks Peter Mettyear
Honorary Life Member John Davey

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers	Chairman	Robert Cheesman	(11/12)
	Vice-Chairman	David Hutchinson	(9/12)
	Secretary	Marcus Taylor	(12/12)
	Treasurer	Mike Stepney	(3/5)
Elected members	<u>At 2011 AGM</u>	<u>At 2010 AGM</u>	
	Roger Beasley (10/12)	Kim Clark	(9/12)
	Anthony Dicks (10/12)	Ruth O'Keeffe	(5/12)
	Jon Gunson (10/12)	Frances Tufnell	(10/12)
	Paul Millmore (10/12)		
Co-opted	Neil Merchant (6/7)		
	Micheal Turner (2/5)		

(The figures after each name above indicate the number of actual and possible attendances at Executive Committee meetings.)

Minutes Secretaries Judith Davies & Angela Blyth

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

PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

EVENTS SUB-COMMITTEE

* indicates member of Executive Committee

Frances Tufnell (Chairman) *
Carolyn Beckingham
Kim Clark *
John Kennett
Betty Lewis
Joy Preston
Nick Wiseman

Marcus Taylor (Chairman) *
Marietta van Dyck
Peter Hammond
Jeannette Swayne
Susan Weeks

Membership Secretary
Distribution Organiser

Marietta van Dyck
Michael Cotgrove

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Friends of Lewes - the Lewes Civic Society is an unincorporated association, the constitution of which 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, who are elected at an Annual General Meeting, are the charity trustees. Officers are elected for one year whilst half of the other elected members retire each year but are eligible for re-election. The trustees in office on 31st December 2011, all of whom are members of the Society, are listed opposite; in addition David Tufnell resigned in January because of ill health, Nick Robinson resigned in April and Eddie Gibbs in September. Neil Merchant was co-opted in May, Micheal Turner in July and Mike Stepney was appointed Treasurer in July.

The Executive Committee, which meets monthly, manages the Society's affairs but annually appoints a Sub-Committee to examine all planning applications affecting Lewes and the surrounding area and another to provide services and events for members. There are currently vacancies on both sub-committees.

The Society had a membership of 502 at 31st December 2011 (this figure was 527 in 2010). It has been decided to reduce the rate for Life Membership of the Society from £300 a year to £180, to make this option more attractive.

The Charities Aid Foundation holds the Society's liquid assets. Its accounts are examined by Clifton Page Wood, Chartered Accountants of 36a West Hill Road, Brighton BN1 3RT. The Society employs no staff and has not incurred fees from professional advisers during the year.

On 31st December 2011 the Society's representatives on external bodies were: -

Federation of Sussex Amenity Societies	David Hutchinson
Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group	Anthony Dicks
Lewes District Council's Planning Service Users Group	Robert Cheesman
South Downs Network	Robert Cheesman

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 immediate surrounding area and to co-operate with similar civic 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 principal risks facing the Society are an inability to find sufficient volunteers to undertake these activities and a possible decline in income through lower membership, a lack of legacies and low interest rates. This would limit the projects the Society is able to fund.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

The Executive Committee considers that during the year the Society's activities, projects and services to members, details of which follow, fulfil the Society's objectives and that they are beneficial to the town and its inhabitants. The Committee therefore considers that the Society has complied with the public benefit test that applies to all charities.

PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

The South Downs National Park Authority (NPA) was operational from April 2011 and agreed to delegate all but the most controversial planning applications back to the District Council who will consider them on behalf of the NPA and within the policies the NPA adopt. Over the course of the year, the Society made a detailed contribution to the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework. The Society commented on the District Council's Core Strategy document and the Appraisal of the Malling Deanery Conservation area. It also pressed the NPA, who subsequently agreed, to extend the Lewes Conservation Area to include additional land to its west, including the grounds of St Anne's School. The Society contributed to the consultations about the future of the Stanley Turner Ground and the recreational use of Landport Bottom and communicated concern to the District Council about the obtrusive use of chestnut paling fencing by the Winterbourne Stream in the Grange Gardens.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

The planned extension to the Tesco supermarket has been delayed, while the impact of the new Aldi store on Brooks Road, which opened in October, is being assessed. Plans by Waitrose to build a new store on the former Wenban-Smith site do not appear to have advanced at all.

A planning application to develop the old Chandlers site by the river was made by Alfred Homes in November. It was disappointing that the developers had not accepted an invitation to present their plans to the Society before submitting their application, however, there was contact between the developers and the Society over several months concerning key aspects of their plans. Whilst recognising that this application represents an opportunity to complete the flood defences south of Cliffe Bridge on the eastern side of the river by using this brown field site for housing, questions about a riverside walk with access to Cliffe High Street and issues of levels and landscaping have yet to be resolved.

The Society objected to the most recent planning application for the demolition of the Canon O'Donnell Hall and the intensive redevelopment of that site for housing. It was thought these should have been re-advertised as a new application. This application was refused, but the developer has appealed. The hall is already on the *Heritage at Risk* list.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

The Planning Committee considered 307 planning applications in 2011 including 3 from the County Council. This shows a 6% decrease on the previous year. They commented on 45 applications, objecting outright to 34, the majority of which were approved by the District Council. The committee commented on others for poor drawings, insufficient information or use of unsuitable materials. 81 tree work applications were noted.

There were a high number of applications for roof conversions, dormer windows and roof-lights. The Society is concerned that these should be in keeping with the existing building both in scale and use of materials. The District Council has said that if they are visible from the public realm, it is generally considered dormer windows should be centrally located within the roof and set back from the eaves, no higher than the ridge, proportional in size and must not dominate the roof slope.

Now that so many applications are submitted electronically hard copies of plans are frequently not available to be seen at the Planning Office. This is causing some difficulty and the Committee is asking the District Council to make hard copies more readily available.

Raymond Brownell resigned from the committee after many years' service. Stephen English and Averil Garritt have also left. The Society thanks them for their work. Nick Wiseman is a welcome new member. We urgently need more new members and anyone interested should contact the Society. Planning experience would be useful but not essential.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

There has been little change to the road scene in the town in 2011. The Society continues to seek improvements to Station Street's pavements and a change of priority at the Fisher Street/West Street junction in order to improve air quality in Fisher Street. The Society has contributed to continuing consultations about parking in the town and has continued to press for a holistic approach, considering on-street and off-street arrangements together. The Society also contributed to the Local Transport Strategy Implementation, stressing the importance of repairing the bridge on the railway station approach road.

The Society raised with the County Council the inappropriate use of blacktop in repairs to paved areas in the conservation area, especially by utility companies; the reply was that some examples of this would be rectified as soon as work on a viable number could be scheduled.

OTHER ISSUES

The Society has also been concerned about litter in the streets and the effectiveness of the town's street drains. These issues have been taken up with the relevant bodies and in a meeting with Jenny Rowlands, Chief Executive of the District Council, but, although some action is taken to deal with specific problems, there does not appear to be a comprehensive strategy for dealing with them on a long term basis.

We have also raised our concerns about the lack of public toilets in the Priory Park area, where the ones on the approaches to Convent Field have been closed and increased numbers of visitors are likely following the welcome restoration and interpretation of the remains there. Both District and Town Councils recognise this need, but are not rushing forward with a solution, which would have both capital and on-going costs.

SOCIETY PROJECTS

A number of projects mentioned in the 2010 report are still uncompleted:

A revision of the Twittens book is nearing completion; it is hoped to publish in 2012.

The “magic circle” above Castle Ditch Lane: some redesign work is in progress to match what is possible with the likely funding available

Restoration of the White Lion sign in Westgate is awaiting an economic means of taking it down. The Town Council has agreed to arrange this and partially fund its restoration.

Plans to place a Greyfriars memorial stone in St Anne’s churchyard await final decisions on materials, design and costs.

While others made good progress:

A list of proposed sites for six more plaques marking historic features in Lewes has been passed to the Town Council.

The Society played a key part, with other groups, in ensuring the success of the Heritage Open Days in September and plans to repeat its involvement in 2012.

A meeting with Anthony Smith, Head of Priory School, examined ways in which the Society’s profile could be raised with younger people. Some ideas to develop were identified.

Longer term, careful thought is being given to the selection of an appropriate project to mark the 750th anniversary of the Battle of Lewes in 2014.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

Five lectures took place in 2011; in January, the planned move of East Sussex County Record Office to the Keep at Falmer was outlined; in February Professor Harder talked about attitudes to recycling and in April John Ford gave a presentation of Charles Dickens’ links with Sussex. In October local author Virginia Nicholson talked about her recent book “*Millions Like Us*” and in November, four members of the Priory Trust spoke about Lewes Priory – Past, Present & Future.

Two general meetings were held in the year; at the AGM in March Jim Redwood, Interim Planning Officer for the National Park Authority outlined the changes and challenges ahead, whilst in September Tony Burton, Director of Civic Voice, described their work and talked about current issues and concerns nationally.

In February, a small group of committee members were shown round the recently-completed Lewes Police Station by Chief Inspector Natalie Moloney.

Michael Cotgrove continues to arrange distribution of newsletters three times a year, and other information to members whether as a hard copy or by e-mail.

Over the course of the year the Society's website has been completely redesigned and updated, for which we are very grateful to Barbara Merchant, who showed great perseverance in getting it the way we hoped for. Visit www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk and see for yourself.

The Society again participated in the town's annual Societies Fair where it explained what it does. Thanks are due to all those who give their time organising events such as this, services for members or other work for the Society. Additional offers of help to ensure that all our activities and work continues would be much appreciated.

We now have new stocks of tea towels in three colours, navy blue, maroon and green, at £3 each. These will be available, together with prints and cards and the Society's publications, on our sales table at lectures in the Town Hall. Call Marietta Van Dyck on 01273 474521 for orders (delivery within Lewes) at other times.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

On the Society's unrestricted funds, receipts in 2011 amounted to £9,651 (*£10,203 in 2010*) and total expenditure £5,952 (*£9,994*) which resulted in a surplus of £3,699 (*£209*).

While varying on each item, the aggregate of receipts from legacies, donations, functions and grants has remained similar between 2011 and 2010 – notably with the aid of a generous unrestricted legacy from Mary Edith Wrigley in 2011. The subscription receipts remain buoyant and include the benefit of the residual part-year effect of last year's increases. While there is no receipt for Gift Aid in 2011 the period covering the nine months to 31st December 2010 has been applied for and it is anticipated that £613 will be received in January 2012. In 2012 and future years, the previous year's full 12 month's rebate will be applied for, and payment received from HMRC earlier in the Society's financial year.

With no expenses being paid to trustees, the cost of running the Society in 2011 was £4,415 (£1,496 on Governance plus £2,919 on Other). This is a significant increase on the 2010 aggregate cost of £2,683 but is virtually wholly accounted for by the £1,170 one-off costs of designing and implementing the Society's new web site and the advance payments of circa £540 for 2012 room hire. Allowing for these items, the recurring costs of running the Society remain below the 2011 ordinary membership subscription income of £3,548. It is nevertheless hoped that those who can afford to pay more than the minimum subscription will continue to do so in order that we are able to continue to support small enhancements to the town.

Consideration will be given to moving to Income and Expenditure accounts during 2012 so that accruals and prepayments can be apportioned to the year(s) to which they relate. This would provide a more consistent approach to financial management and reporting and facilitate an easier comparison of expenditures and incomes between similar periods.

At the end of the financial year, the Society's total assets on its unrestricted funds account amounted to £32,151 of which £29,815 was cash and £2,336 stock of books, tea towels and cards. A reserve of £10,000 has historically been considered necessary but the amount above this is held in order that the Society can provide funding for small projects which meet the Society's overall objectives without firstly having to make an appeal.

A further £5,783 which has to be spent on tree planting is held (in cash) in the restricted tree fund account. The Society continues to manage a restricted fund for the Lewes Library Friends which is held in a separate deposit account. In 2011, following a request from the Library Friends, a £5,000 grant towards the purchase of equipment etc. at the Lewes library was made to the County Libraries service leaving a balance at the year-end of £3,718.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The Society will continue to take a professional and independent approach to the issues facing the town, while trying to explain what it does to the public at large more effectively. However whilst it would like to be more pro-active in pursuing its objectives in the future, the extent to which it can do so will continue to be determined by both the human and financial resources available. In particular it would like to financially assist minor projects which enhance the townscape of Lewes and it will be considering whether its support for such projects could lever funds from bodies such as the National Park Authority.

Approved by the Executive Committee on 23rd January, 2012 and signed on their behalf by

Robert Cheesman Chairman

The Annual Report cover of the Priory Park was drawn by Marietta van Dyck, to whom grateful thanks are offered.