



KEEPING OUR TOWN SPECIAL

# Annual Report 2015



# 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) E-mail address: [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk)

## Personnel at 31st December 2015

President Baroness Kay Andrews of Southover OBE  
Vice-Presidents Norman Baker Jim Franks Peter Mettyear  
Honorary Life Member John Davey

## EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers	Chairman	Robert Cheesman	(12/12)
	Vice-Chairman	David Hutchinson	(9/12)
	Secretary	Marcus Taylor	(11/12)
	Treasurer	Mike Stepney	(9/12)

Elected members	<u>At March 2014 AGM</u>	<u>At March 2015 AGM</u>
	Chris Kneale (10/12)	Roger Beasley (12/12)
	Neil Merchant (9/12)	Anthony Dicks (8/12)
	Ruth O'Keeffe (4/12)	Audrey Jarvis (11/12)
	Micheal Turner (7/12)	Janet Kennedy (12/12)
		Roger Maskew (11/12)

Co-opted in 2015: Philip Green (2/2)

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

Minutes Secretary Judith Davies

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

## PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

\* indicates member of Executive Committee

Chris Kneale (Chairman) \*  
John Kennett  
Bronagh Liddicoat  
Roger Maskew\*  
Frances Tufnell (Vice Chairman)  
Nick Wiseman  
Carolyn Beckingham (minute-taker)

## EVENTS SUB-COMMITTEE

Marcus Taylor (Chairman) \*  
Audrey Jarvis \*  
Neil Merchant \*  
Marietta van Dyck

## TREES SUB-COMMITTEE

Neil Merchant (Chairman) \*  
Audrey Jarvis\*  
James Newmarch  
David Sacre  
David Saunders  
Peter Thurman

**Membership Secretary**  
**Distribution Organiser**  
**Website Manager**

Marietta van Dyck  
Marcus Taylor  
Barbara Merchant

## **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, and referred to throughout this report as FoL.

Communications to it should be addressed to [enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk). The postal address is c/o Lewes Town Council Offices, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 2QS.

Membership is open to all, on payment of the relevant subscription.

Members of FoL's Executive Committee are the charity trustees. Officers are elected at an Annual General Meeting for one year whilst half of the other elected members retire each year, but are eligible for re-election. In addition members can be co-opted to the Executive Committee during the year. The trustees in office on 31st December 2015, all of whom are FoL members, are listed above.

The Executive Committee, which meets monthly, manages FoL's affairs but annually appoints a Sub-Committee to examine all planning applications affecting Lewes and the surrounding area, another to provide services and events for members, and a trees sub-committee.

Departures and arrivals: During the year Jon Gunson and Paul Myles resigned from the Executive Committee. The new member is Philip Green.

FoL had a membership of 435 at 31st December 2015 (this figure was 440 at the end of 2014). 24 new members were added during the calendar year.

The Charities Aid Foundation holds FoL's liquid assets. Its accounts are examined by Clifton Page Wood, Chartered Accountants, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, Queensbury House, 106 Queen's Road, BRIGHTON, BN1 3XF.

FoL employs no staff and has not incurred fees from professional advisers during the year.

On 31st December 2015 FoL's representatives on external bodies were: -

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

## **OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

The objectives of FoL 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 this by arranging meetings for members on conservation and heritage 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 FoL faces are a failure to find sufficient volunteers to undertake these activities, a decline in income through lower membership, and a lack of legacies which would limit the projects FoL is able to fund. The Executive Committee is aware of the need for planning for the smooth replacement of the society's officers when necessary.

## **ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE**

The decision to work with a promotions and marketing company has helped bring about a number of successes over the past year:

- New logo and associated paperwork / stationery
- Revised membership leaflet, with integral application form
- Improved press coverage of FoL events

- Monthly plaques article in *Viva Lewes*
- Schools' competition – more entries and engagement of pupils and families at the awards evening
- Sales of the ensuing 2016 calendar
- More references to FoL on social media, mainly via the Urban Arboretum & Lewes Past pages
- Big increase in number of members contactable by e-mail

What it has not yet done is brought about the hoped-for upturn in membership. That is most likely to be achieved by word-of-mouth contacts and by presentations to groups where likely members are to be found. If you can tell others why you are a member that would help; if you know of a group that might like to hear of our work and plans, do let Robert Cheesman or Marcus Taylor know.

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

### ***PLANNING POLICY ISSUES***

Much time has been spent in 2015 on planning policy issues. In January FoL was represented at the Examination in Public of the Joint District Council/National Park Authority Core Strategy which, when adopted, will replace the Lewes District Local Plan. The provision of housing was a key feature of this Strategy and, because the Inspector recognised that it would not be possible to meet the estimated demand in the period up to 2030, he suggested that the fields at Old Malling Farm should be considered for allocation. Following consultation about this suggestion the Examination in Public was reopened in December when FoL made a strong case against building on any greenfield site in Lewes and suggested that the 200 houses it was estimated that Old Malling Farm could provide would be found within the Plan period from windfalls not included in the figures presented to the Inspector.

This objection to building on greenfield sites, and the figure of 835 houses being required in Lewes in the Plan period, was also one of FoL's main points in commenting on the National Park Authority's Preferred Options for their Local Plan. A further draft of this Local Plan will be consulted on during 2016 and it is hoped that it will come into force in 2017 at which point it will replace the Joint Core Strategy referred to in the previous paragraph.

Alongside these two consultations the Town Council is moving forward with a Neighbourhood Plan. This has to be consistent with the Plans mentioned previously and essentially provides local details on planning issues not covered by them. A report by the Town Council's consultants on the public sessions held during the year made a number of proposals. In relation to new housing FoL reiterated its objection to using greenfield sites, as it considers that brownfield sites and windfalls can meet the net figure required. It also suggested that the Neighbourhood Plan should include provisions to support the local economy, improve traffic management and plan for an ageing population.

Other planning consultations have included Government proposals to amend the planning system, the County Council's Waste and Minerals Plan and a long-awaited consultation on an Appraisal and Management Plan for the Malling Deanery Conservation Area where FoL recommended that it should be extended to include the settlement at Old Malling Farm because of the historical connections between the two areas.

During the year FoL members produced guidance notes on garden rooms and a revision of the District Council's shop fronts booklet. These documents, alongside that on dormer windows, which was produced in 2014, await approval by the National Park Authority but are already being used by FoL in commenting on planning applications.

## ***MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS***

Undoubtedly the approval by the National Park Authority's Planning Committee of the North Street Quarter urban regeneration scheme was the most significant development in 2015. As a result of being represented on a Sounding Group set up by the developer FoL was able to influence many of the details of the scheme. In considering it as a whole, it was concluded that it was better to have a wholesale redevelopment of the site, with provision being made to rehouse the existing businesses on the site, than retain the iron works buildings that had not been considered worthy of listing by Historic England. The first phase of the scheme, which is that closest to Phoenix Causeway and on which work will start in 2016, will include a health hub, unobtrusive car parking and a riverside walk as well as 243 houses of which 40% will be "affordable" with 51 of these designed for those needing extra care. Once all phases of the development are complete flood protection will have been provided around the entire site and the adjacent Pells area and over £ 2m secured for recreational facilities, secondary education and subsidising creative workspace and affordable housing.

Another major development approved by the National Park Authority's Planning Committee, despite objections from FoL on design grounds, was the construction of 70 houses and small business units at South Downs Road. During the year demolition of the former Magistrates Court took place and the erection of the steel framework for the Premier Inn was begun. Across the river at Chandlers Wharf a block of new houses is almost complete and FoL will be monitoring whether the planning condition to provide a riverside walk there is observed once the building work is finished.

FoL endeavours to make contact with those who have in mind major developments at other sites in the town and during the year approaches have been made to Waitrose; Subud in respect of the St Anne's School site and Ash Mill in respect of the Lewes House garden site. However there is nothing to report about the possibility of development at these sites or at the empty Springman House in North Street which has been put on the market.

## ***PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT***

The Planning Committee met every month to review all new planning applications submitted to the National Park Authority that fall within Lewes Town. Paper copies are no longer available for the public to inspect at the District Council Offices and details of applications must be viewed on-line. The Committee has been concerned at the time taken to validate some planning applications and the fact that some drawings have not been made available in time for the Committee to consider them. It is grateful to Lewes Town Council for providing access to their paper copies of the applications.

Committee members continue to contribute many hours of expert knowledge, analysing each planning application and attending meetings with developers or their agents on behalf of FoL. The Committee always welcomes being approached for its views before planning applications are submitted and was pleased to meet several applicants during the year to review and discuss their plans.

In 2015 it examined 245 planning applications and submitted formal objections to 47, made comments on 21 and wrote in support of 4. Where its objections did not result in refusal the Committee was pleased to note that some of its representations resulted in design modifications being made before permission was granted and other applications were withdrawn. Representations made are published in summary report on the Society's web site each month and nearly 600 planning pages have been viewed this year.

The Committee successfully objected to an application to make major alterations to a listed building in Southover High Street, which would have adversely affected its architectural character. It was pleased when the application was withdrawn and the owner subsequently met the Committee to discuss an alternative design which it was able to support in principle and which has now been approved.

Two separate applications for vehicular access to Rise Farm via the cycle path between Kingston Road and Cockshut Road, were opposed on safety grounds and an application by Aldi to reduce their free car parking limit from three hours to one and a half hours was also opposed. Both of these applications were refused.

The Committee continues to oppose applications for replacement windows in materials it considers inappropriate. It has successfully objected to the use of uPVC windows in the Conservation Area and the use of modern timber windows with false glazing bars. It argues that timber windows with traditional glazing bars should be used to maintain the character of the street scene.

The Committee objected to the new fire escape at the rear of the Nationwide Building Society because of its visually intrusive design. The planning application has been withdrawn and we are supporting the campaign by a neighbour to have the structure removed on the grounds that an internal fire escape can be provided.

David Stechler left the Committee during the year and was thanked for his contributions.

## ***TRANSPORT ISSUES***

The year 2015 was dominated by the long-awaited work to strengthen the railway bridge, re-order the layout of the station forecourt and improve road safety for pedestrians. Delays meant that diversions were in place from February to November, thus earning the finished work a cover photograph. The works involved new pedestrian crossing and a central refuge near the Mountfield Road junction and revised parking arrangements for short-term parking and taxis.

The 20mph speed limit was extended to the town's estates, with the exception of Malling, which may be reconsidered. FoL objected to the proposed number of speed 'cushions' on Old Malling Way.

FoL officers have continued to meet with County Council officials as part of the consultation phase of their proposed Sustainable Transport Projects. The introduction of RTPI (Real-Time Passenger Information) displays at selected bus stops on the 28/29 route through the town has begun. Plans to make the bus stops on the upper High Street (westbound) and at the Prison (westbound) more accessible to passengers with disabilities should be implemented in 2016.

FoL continued its correspondence with the County Council about parking on pavements, especially by vans and lorries delivering to the upper High Street. Although the County Council has stated that this is one of the worst locations for pavement parking in the county, a further report on alternative arrangements is still awaited.

FoL considered the five yearly review of the County Council's Local Transport Implementation Plan and supported the reduction of traffic congestion in the town, particularly at Earwig Corner and the Prison cross-roads, and pressed for the re-surfacing of Fisher Street.

## ***TREES COMMITTEE REPORT***

The Lewes i-Tree survey, commissioned by FoL, has seen the data-gathering phase completed, mostly by students of Plumpton Agricultural College: data entry was delayed for some months, but has now been completed. Analysis of the results and the preparation of the final report will now follow to produce a baseline audit for future plans.

The committee has contributed to the Neighbourhood Plan, to comments on the North Street Quarter application and has given advice about planting and soft landscaping at the planned Depot Cinema. There was a long debate about the future of the poplar trees on Blake's Walk, where retention was recommended. Trees were planted on South Downs Rd and at Southover School.

New locations for the planting programme have been identified, including on the Nevill estate, in Valence Road and hopefully some 'gateway' trees at entrance points to the town.

## ***OTHER ISSUES***

Officers from FoL have met several times with the CEO and other officers of the District Council. We discussed housing policy, the future of the Tourist Information Office and adequate provision of public toilets among other matters. The future creation of a single CEO, shared with Eastbourne Borough Council will require the building of a new relationship.

Liaison meetings between FoL and members of the Town Council occur roughly twice a year, where matters of mutual interest can be raised and updated. The support and advice of the Town Council in several FoL projects is much appreciated.

Respect for FoL's knowledge and experience of the town continues to be evident in our relations with these and other authorities and agencies.

## ***PROJECTS***

- In collaboration with the Town Council four more historic plaques have recently been erected in the town. Two of these celebrated women who had lived and worked in Lewes : Eve Garnett in Keere Street and the "Ladies at Miller's" on St Anne's Hill. Also marked was Bell Lane Recreation Ground and the site of the County Theatre (the town's first cinema) on Watergate Lane. A list of possible sites for plaques next year has already been begun – if you have suggestions for this list, please make them to Marcus Taylor. Why not try to get to see them and extend your knowledge of the town and its past inhabitants or check out our list of 71 plaques at: [https://friendsoflewes.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/lewes\\_plaques\\_and\\_photos\\_asj\\_160120.pdf](https://friendsoflewes.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/lewes_plaques_and_photos_asj_160120.pdf)
- FoL has worked closely with the District Council to secure improvements to the "public realm" in the town over the past year. FoL believes that Lewes is a special place: these are small examples of their efforts to enhance its appearance:
  - In the Grange Gardens in Southover, FoL played an advisory role to ensure that the most appropriate and least visually-intrusive safety fencing was chosen to go as required along the channel of the Winterbourne stream.
  - In the Knot Garden, now repairs to the paths are completed, a jointly-funded floral centrepiece to replace the now-defunct fountain is planned.
  - In the attractive flower beds at the western end of Phoenix Causeway, a 'gateway' to the town, FoL has committed to sponsoring the planting for the next two years.
  - At the bottom of Watergate Lane, where the granite bollard protecting the Victorian Water trough, missing for many years, has been replaced and the stonework cleaned.
- FoL continues in its role as organiser for the annual Heritage Open Days, which, in 2015 attracted a record of around 4,000 visits across the town. Amongst the venues, HMP Lewes was the first prison ever to open up for this national event. Thanks are due to the team of FoL members who organised the weekend, our sponsors- Christmas Ogden, Stapleton Consulting and Lewes District Council- and to all those who volunteered to steward at the venues.
- The long-running saga of improving the "Magic Circle" above Castle Ditch Lane continues. Efforts to get the County Council to confirm a right of way from Castle Precincts and down the steps to Castle Ditch Lane have taken almost two years, but we are assured it is near completion. This is an essential first step in this long-intended project.
- Building on last year's successful initiative of a competition for primary schoolchildren, they were invited to pick their favourite place in Lewes, illustrate it and say why it is special. There were almost fifty entries and the quality was so high that FoL featured 13 of the pictures in a 2016 calendar, which sold out. A further quiz for the coming summer is planned.

There has been good coverage of FoL activities in the *Sussex Express* and in *Viva Lewes* in 2015.

## **SERVICES FOR MEMBERS**

Four lectures took place in 2014; in January Brigitte Lardinois, organiser of the exhibition of Reeves archive photographs in the shop windows of the town, gave us the fascinating story behind the images and the work involved in making that treat happen. In February Marcus Taylor used some of the slides presented to FoL by John Houghton to present a *Personal View of Lewes*, which was a 'sell-out' and led to a repeat a few weeks later, as well as being repeated three times since to other groups in the town. In October, Paul Myles shared his researches into the origins of Lewes Little Theatre and in November, Daniel Wynn, Trees Officer for the District Council, told us about his work.

Two general meetings were held in the year; at the AGM in March, Trevor Beattie, Chief Executive of the National Park Authority, talked about how he sees the place of Lewes in the National Park.

At the Autumn General Meeting in October, Bill Shelford, one of the Deputy Lieutenants for East Sussex talked about the many different aspects of this role, after presenting prizes to the schools' competition winners.

Participation in the town's annual Societies Fair in the Town Hall in July provided another opportunity for FoL to explain to the public what it does. Awareness of this has to be where the path to interest and membership begins.

Sincere thanks are due to all those who serve on committees, give their time organising and staffing events, provide services for members or carry out other work for FoL. Additional offers of help to ensure that all our activities and work continues would be appreciated.

## **FINANCIAL REVIEW**

The Financial Report for the Year Ending 31st December 2016 at pages 10 and 11 has been reviewed by the Society's Independent Examiner, who has provided an unqualified report to the Trustees/Members.

### **Receipts and Payments** General Funds

On FoL's unrestricted funds, receipts in 2015 amounted to £7,933 (*£8,792 in 2014*) and total payments £8,042 (*£6,883*) which resulted in a deficit of £109 (*surplus of £1,909*).

The aggregate of receipts from voluntary sources has remained fairly stable but on trading activities overall sales have decreased (from £1,893 to £1,353) despite receipts of £543 from the sale of 2016 calendars. As a vigorous sales drive has continued throughout 2015 this may reflect a saturation point being reached in the local market.

With no expenses being paid to trustees, the cost of running FoL in 2015 was £3,832 (£809 on Governance plus £3,023 on Other) against £2,593 in 2014. The increase is virtually wholly due to non-recurring expenditure on FoL's "Public Face" review (now completed) which was established to reduce and if possible reverse the decline of its membership and recruit a wider age range. While, currently, the recurring costs of running FoL remain below the 2015 ordinary membership subscription income of £3,329 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.

FoL remains active in reviewing opportunities for delivering and supporting Projects, Grants and Donations with expenditure remaining relatively stable at £1,747 (*£2,326*).

### **Balance Sheet** General Funds

At the end of the financial year, FoL's total assets on its unrestricted funds account amounted to £39,577 of which £37,647 was cash and £1,930 stock of books, tea towels and cards. A reserve of £10,000 has historically been considered necessary. Part of the residual cash balance of some £28,000 is conventionally

held in order that FoL can provide funding for further small projects without firstly having to make an appeal. In addition, there is the potential for a sizeable project (the Magic Circle) to come to fruition in the next few years and there is always a possibility that FoL may need to seek specialist advice and representation on significant development proposals. The higher than normal balance has been identified as a source of funding should these eventualities arise.

#### Restricted Funds

A further £10,713 of cash is held in restricted funds. Of this, £5,645 has to be spent on tree planting (Tree Planting Fund) and £5,068 on the maintenance of trees and re-instatement of the post of Town Crier.

#### **PLANS FOR THE FUTURE**

FoL will continue to work on improving its marketing to the public whilst maintaining the professional approach it endeavours to take on issues that arise. However, what it is able to do will be constrained by the resources, human and financial, that are available to it. In particular it would like to assist more minor projects which enhance the townscape of Lewes and it believes that its support could lever funds from bodies such as the SDNPA.

Members are also encouraged to check out our website [www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk](http://www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk) for updates on many of the issues mentioned here and for copies of FoL's contributions to consultations and press releases.

Approved by the Executive Committee on 27th January, 2016 and signed on their behalf by

Robert Cheesman      Chairman