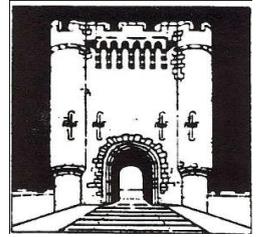


Friends of Lewes

Keeping our town special



Annual Report 2014

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 2014

President Baroness Kay Andrews of Southover OBE
Vice-Presidents Norman Baker MP 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	(10/12)

Elected members	<u>At March 2013 AGM</u>	<u>At March 2014 AGM</u>
	Roger Beasley (11/12)	Chris Kneale (9/12)
	Anthony Dicks (8/12)	Neil Merchant (9/12)
	Jon Gunson (8/12)	Ruth O'Keeffe (5/12)
	Audrey Jarvis (11/12)	Micheal Turner (4/12)
	Roger Maskew (10/12)	

Co-opted in 2014 Janet Kennedy (8/9) Paul Myles (4/8)

(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

EVENTS SUB-COMMITTEE

* indicates member of Executive Committee

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

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
Michael Cotgrove
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. 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 2014, 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 Kim Clark, Frances Tufnell and Mat Homewood resigned from the Executive Committee, although Frances continues to serve on the Planning Committee. New members to the Executive Committee are Janet Kennedy, with knowledge of traffic and road safety and Paul Myles, a Lewesian of many talents.

FoL had a membership of 440 at 31st December 2014 (this figure was 478 at the end of 2013). 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 of 36a West Hill Road, Brighton BN1 3RT. FoL employs no staff and has not incurred fees from professional advisers during the year.

On 31st December 2014 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 the Society is able to fund.

ACHIEVEMENTS AND PERFORMANCE

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

The South Downs National Park Authority (NPA) is the planning authority for Lewes and it delegates all but the most controversial planning applications back to the District Council which considers them on its behalf. They are currently determined against the planning policies inherited from the District Council, alongside the purposes and duty of the NPA and the National Planning Policy Framework. A joint Local Plan is under consideration to take effect until the NPA has its own Local Plan and FoL is about to take part in the Inspector's hearings into this joint Local Plan. It has also responded as appropriate to various national consultations.

FoL is playing a full part in the Neighbourhood Plan process initiated by the Town Council which, amongst other things, will be expected to recommend where new housing should be sited in Lewes. It keeps the whole question of the effects of climate change under review.

FoL initiated a review of buildings 'at risk' in Lewes, together with representatives of the District & Town Councils, the NPA, the South Downs Society and the Conservation Areas Action Group. This has produced a list of concerns and proposed actions. FoL continues to be disappointed at the number of large scale dormer roof extensions that are granted planning permission. Such extensions were classed as permitted development but this concession does not apply in National Parks and so since the South Downs National Park was established, new roof extensions now require planning consent. Although FoL recognises that it may be difficult to refuse consent for new dormers that are similar to existing ones, there is an absence of planning policy on the issue. During the year FoL therefore finalised its policy document "Guiding Principles for Dormer Windows" and issued it to the NPA for consideration as a planning policy that could be adopted within the National Park.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

Plans to develop three significant sites in Lewes have continued to evolve throughout 2014: proposals from the Santon Group for the Phoenix site (also known as the North Street Quarter), Quora's plans to demolish the redundant Magistrates' Court to build a hotel and shops and for the site on South Downs Road opposite Sackville House.

The Executive Committee has met with representatives of the Santon Group during the year, it is represented on their sounding board and has appointed members to serve on other groups set up by Santon, mainly to consider design issues. It has also met with the recently-emerged Phoenix Rising group, who have alternative proposals for the balance of use on this key site. A hybrid planning application, jointly by Santon and the District Council as owners of the land, is expected early in 2015.

Plans by developers Quora to demolish the now-abandoned Magistrates Court building in Friars' Walk were rejected by the NPA Planning Committee in December 2013, but discussions proceeded with FoL throughout 2014 on design issues. As FoL had no objection to the proposed use of the site as a budget hotel and retail units, it made detailed suggestions

to the developer on alterations that would make the design more acceptable. A late-emerging alternative plan to preserve the building had scarcely got under way when the revised plans, to which FoL still objected on a number of grounds, including parking arrangements, were accepted by the NPA in December. This was subject to a large number of conditions, including the creation of a Liaison Group to complete design details, on which FoL will be represented.

The application for the South Downs Road site for mixed housing and commercial development was initially recommended for approval by NPA officers, but the application was rejected by the NPA Planning Committee in 2013. The developer appealed, and FoL spoke at the three-day hearing before an Inspector in March 2014. The appeal was rejected on design grounds and the Inspector's comments on the distinctiveness of the town's architecture sets a valuable precedent. A re-application seems likely and FoL plans to meet the developer in January 2015.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

Each month, FoL's Planning Committee reviews all new planning applications submitted to the NPA that relate to Lewes. The District Council no longer produces paper copies for the public to inspect and the Committee is grateful to the Town Council for providing access to paper copies of the applications.

Committee members have contributed many hours of expert knowledge analysing planning applications and attending related meetings over the year on behalf of FoL. In 2014 it examined 334 applications in detail, an increase of 6% on the previous year. The Committee submitted formal objections to 59, made comments on 8 and wrote in support of 7. Of those applications where it submitted objections, 28% were subsequently refused or withdrawn and a further 20% were subject to design modifications or planning conditions before being granted. In addition, FoL attended the October meeting of the District Council's Planning Committee and successfully argued that planning permission should be refused for new hanging signs on four listed building in the High Street, contrary to the recommendation for approval by Officers.

Although all planning representations are in the public domain and can be viewed on the NPA web site, FoL's own web site was enhanced in April to include a planning section where its representations can be seen together in a summary report each month. To date, 374 planning pages on this web site have been viewed.

Frances Tufnell stood down as Chairman of the Committee in March after ten years and Chris Kneale was elected the new Chairman in April. The Committee had greatly valued Frances' leadership and was pleased when she agreed to continue as a member of the Committee. Aaron Curtis and Natalia Baldazzoni both left during the year and were thanked for their contributions. Roger Maskew and David Stechler joined and the expertise they bring to the Committee is welcomed.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

Plans to extend the implementation of the 20mph speed limit to the town's estates are almost complete. FoL has indicated its marked preference for 'chicanes' rather than "speed cushions" where there is deemed to be the need for physical features to keep speed down such as in 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 was further delayed and is still awaited.

The improvements to Station Street in the autumn caused some traffic disruption, but are generally thought to be successful, with pavements both a little wider and more level. Parts of these proposals which did not receive adequate funding in this phase were plans to improve pedestrian signing information and designation of the routes to be taken by national cycle routes through the town. This was also the case, sadly, with proposals for improving Fisher Street.

FoL contributed to consultations about proposed cuts to bus services. It continued its correspondence with the County Council about parking on pavements, especially by vans and lorries delivering to the High Street, Station Street and Fisher Street. Although the County Council has stated that the upper High Street is one of the worst locations in the County for this, action awaits further research into alternative arrangements.

Representations to the County Council on the inappropriate use of 'black-top' in repairs to paved areas in the conservation area, especially by utility companies continue and individual cases are followed up: a number of the worst cases were resolved during the year. A page on the FoL website shows progress. Members are encouraged to report further examples.

TREES COMMITTEE REPORT

The committee made significant progress in 2014. In conjunction with the Sussex Wildlife Trust, it funded and planted five trees in the grounds of Southover and Western Road Schools' playing fields, and has further plans for this location. It arranged two tree walks in the town, ran a successful schools competition and obtained permission for planting in the Malling Industrial Estate.

Keen to bring an artistic dimension to its work, it established a relationship with a group of local artists who exhibit together during Artwave. They were kind enough to sponsor FoL from their opening night revenue. One of this group, Keith Pettit, also designed a Christmas card for FoL, a new venture that proved very successful. The Committee's most significant achievement was undoubtedly the successful completion of data collection in a comprehensive tree survey of the town. Known as an iTree survey, the data analysis will yield a wealth of information about the town's tree population and its value in environmental terms, and will form the basis for developing a long-term management plan. It is very grateful to students from Plumpton College, who carried out most of the work on the ground, which included the detailed surveying of over 200 sites across the town. Colleagues from the Lewes and Ouse Valley eco-nomics group also made a significant contribution to the work.

OTHER ISSUES

The exchange of ownership of The Maltings building and Southover Grange between the District and County Councils took a long while and longer still before it became clear that the successful lessee of the Maltings would be a commercial concern. FoL officers met with County Council representatives to discuss plans for the future use of Southover Grange and the modest changes and upgrades planned there to enhance its use as a base for the Registration Service and for use by the community. Whilst the gardens at the Grange remain a District Council responsibility FoL has had discussions with them about removing the chestnut paling fencing beside the stream and replacing it with something more in keeping

with the garden. Respect for FoL's knowledge and experience of the town was again evident in our relations with these other authorities and agencies.

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. In the most recent meeting, the eventual location of the White Lion inn sign from Westgate Street was settled. In his natural copper and pewter state, he is now on display above the bar in the Corn Exchange in the Town Hall. The support and advice of the Town Council in several FoL projects is much appreciated.

SOCIETY PROJECTS

Some of the projects mentioned in the last annual report made good progress:

FoL contributed significantly to the restoration, fifty years on, of the monument in Lewes Priory grounds which marks the 1264 battle.

Funds were contributed to the project to put up banners in key locations to mark the 750th anniversary of the Battle of Lewes in 2014.

FoL assumed the role of organiser of the successful Heritage Open Days in 2013. In 2014 over 3,500 people (up 1,000 on the previous year) attended 16 venues over the long weekend. Thanks are due to those who made this go smoothly and to all the sponsors.

Following the late Paul Millmore's research and an application by FoL for listing, *English Heritage* has now scheduled the former industrial Offham tramway, tunnels, portals, parapets and retaining walls in the vicinity of the Chalk Pit pub. The *NPA* will provide an information board, to which FoL will contribute, at the site shortly.

While others are still uncompleted:

The "magic circle" above Castle Ditch Lane: efforts to get the County Council to first confirm a right of way through the circle area from Castle Precincts and down the steps to Castle Ditch Lane have taken over a year, but are near completion.

Only slow progress has been made in fulfilling the terms of the £5,000 legacy given by Paul Millmore in 2012 because the greater part of this was for tree maintenance and this must await the planting programmes, but it is a comfort to know that these crucial funds exist when work begins. Paul's other wish, to re-establish the post of Town Crier in Lewes, is proving more elusive, but will be pursued. His hope that some overhead wires in the town can be put underground is focussing on Albion Street.

FoL has received good coverage of its activities in the *Sussex Express* in recent months.

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

Four lectures took place in 2014; in January Kate Hickmott and Helen Chiasson, education officers of Lewes Priory Trust brought us up to date on their latest lottery-funded project, "*Putting Lewes Priory on the map*". In March Marietta Van Dyck shared her extensive knowledge and love of the town's architectural details. In October Mat Homewood outlined the turbulent history of Lewes pub-life and in November, Jon Gunson brought us anecdotes of some of the knights who took part in the Battle of Lewes in 1264 and described this year's banners project.

Tours of the Grade 1-listed Jireh Chapel and of Harveys Brewery were both very well-attended.

Two general meetings were held in the year; at the AGM in March, Jenny Rowlands, CEO of the District Council entertainingly shared her impressions of Lewes, whilst at the Autumn General Meeting in September Rupert Clubb, Director of Communities, Economy & Transport for the County Council talked about his role.

In July, a large party from The Guildford Society spent a day touring Lewes and declared they had had a very interesting time. The visit will be reciprocated in 2015

In September a smaller party from the Rye Society paid a return visit. In both cases, it was good to be able to discuss mutual matters of interest and problems facing civic societies.

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. In June a stall in the pedestrian precinct produced some interesting conversations, but few new members.

Innovations this past year were competitions for primary schoolchildren: a poster competition in term-time, which led to an exhibition in the Town Hall in October and a holiday trail for families based on the historic plaques around the town.

For some years Michael Cotgrove has arranged distribution of newsletters and the annual report and also has sent e-mails to members as appropriate. He has now asked to stop and a replacement in this role is being sought. Barbara Merchant keeps our website up to date and it has become a valuable source of information on Lewes issues. Marietta van Dyck as Membership Secretary continues to keep track of our members with meticulous care. We are very grateful to all three of them.

Thanks are due to all those who give their time organising and staffing events, providing services for members or carrying out other work for FoL. Additional offers of help to ensure that all our activities and work continues would be appreciated.

We 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 FoL's publications, on our sales table at lectures in the Town Hall. Please call Marietta Van Dyck on 01273 474521 for orders (delivery within Lewes) at other times.

FINANCIAL REVIEW

Receipts and Payments

General Funds

On FoL's unrestricted funds, receipts in 2014 amounted to £8,792 (*£10,476 in 2013*) and total payments £6,883 (*£6,799*) which resulted in a surplus of £1,909 (*£3,677*).

With the exception of receipt of a £1,440 grant from the NPA towards FoL's tree survey in 2013, the aggregate of receipts from voluntary sources has remained fairly stable.

On Trading Activities, overall sales have increased slightly. This was aided by the introduction in 2014 of new Christmas Cards which will also be sold in 2015. With no expenses being paid to trustees, the cost of running FoL in 2014 was £2,593 (£862 on Governance plus £1,731 on Other) against £1,576 in 2013. The increase is virtually wholly due to non-recurring expenditure on FoL's "Public Face" review which was established to raise awareness of our work, reduce and if possible reverse the decline in its membership and recruit a wider age range. As this review spans late 2013 to mid-2015 there will be further

non-recurring costs in 2015 and these will predominantly be met from reserves. While currently, the costs of running FoL remain below the 2014 ordinary membership subscription income of £3,286 it is nevertheless hoped that those who can afford to pay more than the minimum subscription will continue to do so in order that FoL is able to continue to support small enhancements to the town.

With the exception of the 2013 tree survey, expenditure on, and successful delivery of projects has remained relatively low in recent years, although new procedures introduced this year have helped to bring greater rigour to their planning, approval, control and timely delivery. Grants and donations of £1,879 were, however, made towards other organisations' schemes in 2014.

Balance Sheet

General Funds

At the end of the financial year, FoL's total assets on its unrestricted funds account amounted to £40,138 of which £37,756 was cash and £2,382 stock of books, tea towels and cards. A reserve of £10,000 has historically been considered necessary and proposed unrestricted net project expenditure of some £3,000 is currently envisaged (including the "Public Face" review consultancy, new membership leaflets, competitions/quizzes and membership/IT support). Part of the residual cash balance of some £25,000 is conventionally held in order that FoL can provide funding for further small projects which meet its overall objectives without firstly having to make an appeal. Currently, there are also a number of significant development proposals underway in Lewes on which FoL may need to seek specialist advice and representation. The higher than normal balance has been identified as a source of funding should this eventuality arise.

Restricted Funds

A further £11,256 of cash is held in restricted funds. Of this, £6,208 has to be spent on tree planting (Tree Planting Fund) and £5,048 on the maintenance of trees and getting the post of Town Crier re-instated.

PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

The *Public Face* initiative, which began last year, has progressed, with the advice of a marketing company being sought and more detailed promotional plans for the coming year being tabled. FoL intends to be more pro-active in pursuing its objectives in the future, but the extent to which it is able to do so will continue to be determined by both the human and financial resources available. In particular it would like to assist minor projects which enhance the townscape of Lewes and it believes that its support for such projects could lever funds from bodies such as the NPA.

Approved by the Executive Committee on 21st January, 2015 and signed on their behalf by

Robert Cheesman Chairman

UPDATE - February 2015

Former Magistrates Court – Despite what you may have read in the press FoL did not support the planning application for a Premier Inn to replace the disused Magistrates Court. Whilst it had no objection to the concept of a hotel with retail shops at ground floor level it had concerns over the design proposed. Whilst many of our suggested design points were taken on board by the developer in the final plans approved by the National Park Authority, there were still design aspects that caused FoL to register a formal objection to those plans. FoL was also concerned about car parking and has suggested to the developer that they should try to obtain use of the private car park previously associated with the Magistrates Court.

North Street Quarter – It seems possible that a planning application for the redevelopment of this site will be made in February and that at that time the developer will be arranging a public exhibition of the plans for information. Members are encouraged to look at these plans and let the FoL have their comments in writing, either by e-mail to enquiries@friends-of-lewes.org.uk or by post to the Town Hall. In addition FoL intends to arrange a members meeting when the plans can be discussed prior to it submitting comments on them. Lewes Phoenix Rising has submitted a request to English Heritage for the former ironworks buildings on the site to be listed and the outcome of this request is awaited.

South Downs Road – FoL has had a meeting with the developer of this site about a new planning application for about 70 residential units which is likely to be submitted shortly. Members with comments on it should let FoL have them in writing, as mentioned in the previous paragraph.

Plaques – Five more interpretive plaques have recently been erected in the town as a result of a joint project between FoL and Town Council. They are at Southover Forge, the sculptures above the entrance to County Hall by William Mitchell, the sites of the Odeon Cinema in Cliffe High Street and the Cinema de Luxe on School Hill and one opposite the Town Hall which celebrates the many clockmakers in Lewes in the past. A complete photographic record of these can be found on the FoL website.

FoL is now considering possible sites for further similar plaques and members who have suggestions on both sites and the subject matter to put on them should inform Marcus Taylor.

Distribution Organiser – Following Michael Cotgrove's resignation, FoL urgently needs a volunteer to prepare the newsletter for printing, then arrange this and the subsequent distribution of it to those members who continue to receive hard copiers. Fortunately the database work that he also undertook for the Society has been taken over by Paul Mockford.