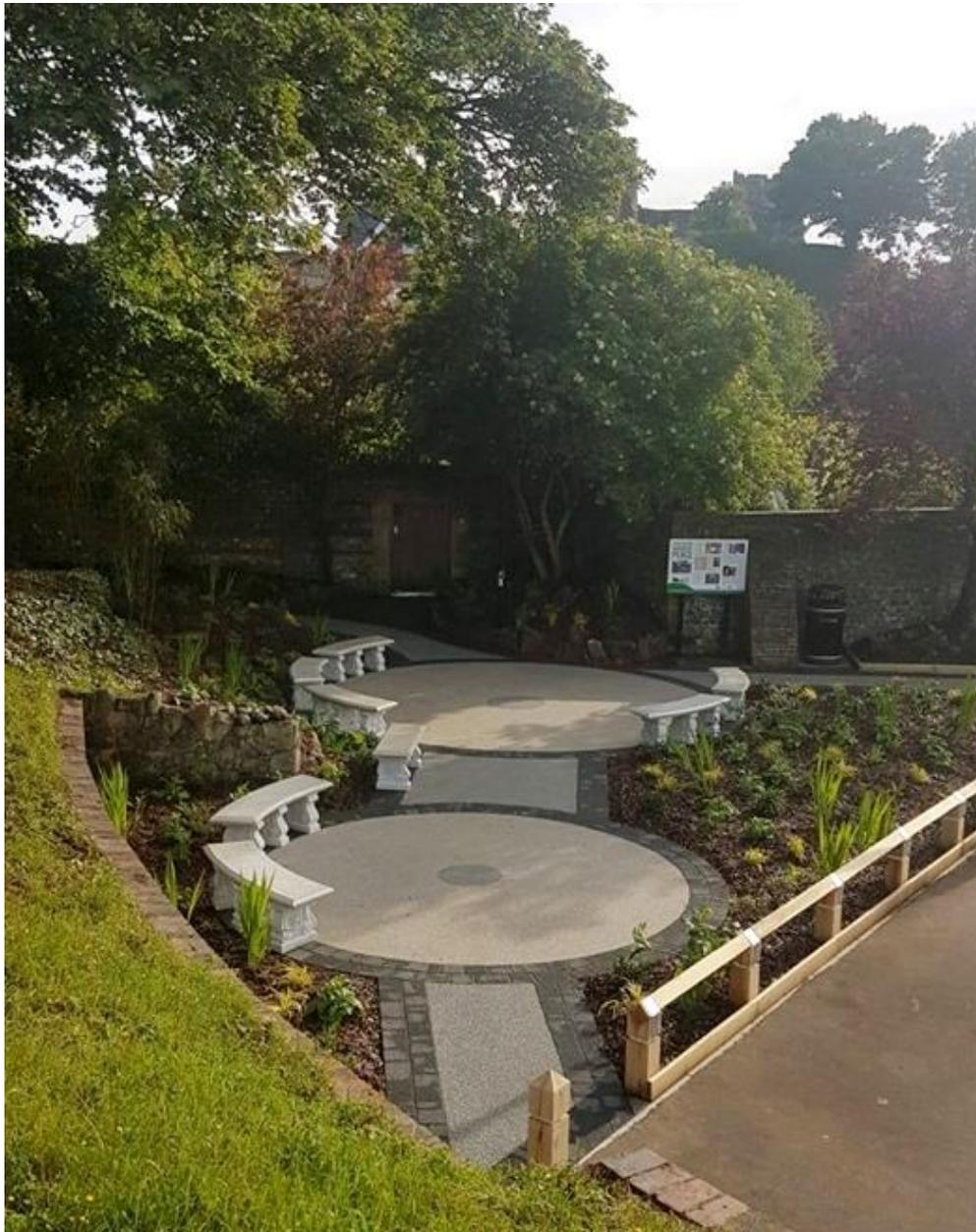




KEEPING OUR TOWN SPECIAL

Annual Report 2019



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 2019

President John Davey
Vice-Presidents Jim Franks, Peter Mettyear & Maria Caulfield, MP

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Officers	Chairman	Robert Cheesman	(12/12)
	Vice-Chairman	Ruth O'Keeffe	(8/12)
	Secretary	Marcus Taylor	(11/12)
	Treasurer	Mike Stepney	(6/8)

Elected members	<u>At March 2018 AGM</u>	<u>At March 2019 AGM</u>
	David Hutchinson (8/12)	Roger Beasley (10/12)
	Chris Kneale (11/12)	Phil Green (11/12)
	Neil Merchant (12/12)	Audrey Jarvis (11/12)
	Janet Kennedy (11/12)	Roger Maskew (12/12)
		Peter Earl (10/12)

(The figures after each name above indicate the number of actual and possible attendances at Executive Committee meetings in 2019.)

Minutes Secretary Diana Freestone

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

PLANNING SUB-COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP SERVICES SUB-COMMITTEE

* indicates member of Executive Committee

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

Marcus Taylor (Chairman) *
Audrey Jarvis *
Neil Merchant *
Marietta Van Dyck
Paul Mockford
Barbara Merchant

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS GROUP

David Attwood
Paul Benjamin
Judith Davies
David Hutchinson*
Peter Mettyear
Mike Swift
[Advisory non-members in italics]

TREES SUB-COMMITTEE

Audrey Jarvis (Chair) *
Dean Bell
Phil Green*
Nick Jones
James Newmarch
Keith Sacre
David Saunders
Peter Thurman
Chris Bibb

Membership Secretary
Website Manager

Paul Mockford
Barbara Merchant

STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Friends of Lewes – the Civic Society for Lewes - is an unincorporated association founded in 1952, the constitution of which was reviewed at the March 2017 AGM, to bring it in line with contemporary requirements and good practice. It is a registered charity (No 258756) usually known as the Friends of Lewes, and referred to throughout this report for the sake of brevity 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, 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 the AGM for one year whilst half of the ten elected members retire each year, but are eligible for re-election. In addition, up to four members can be co-opted to the Executive Committee during the year. The trustees in office on 31/12/19, all of whom are FoL members, are listed above. During 2019 Mike Stepney returned as Treasurer and Paul Myles resigned. At the end of the year we were pleased to welcome Diana Freestone as the new Minutes Secretary for these meetings.

The Executive Committee, which meets monthly, manages FoL's affairs but annually appoints sub-committees - one to examine all planning applications affecting Lewes and the surrounding area, another to provide services and events for members, one to manage its tree interests and one to consider succession planning. It also has a group that organises Heritage Open Days in Lewes.

FoL had a membership of **413** at 31st December 2019. This is an increase for the second year running and, after revision of the 2018 numbers we see a nett increase of 19 members over the past two years.

New members are 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 belong to FoL that would help; if you know of a group that might like to hear of our work and plans, do let Marcus Taylor know.

The Charities Aid Foundation holds FoL's liquid assets. FoL employs no staff and has not incurred fees from professional advisers during the year.

On 31st December, 2019 FoL's representatives on external bodies were: -

Lewes Conservation Area Advisory Group	Nick Wiseman & Peter Earl
Lewes District Council's Planning Service Users Group	Robert Cheesman
South Downs Network	Robert Cheesman

OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES

The Charity is established for the public benefit to pursue the following Objects in the area of benefit which is the area comprising the Town of Lewes and its immediate surrounding area:

(1) To promote:

- (a) high standards of planning and design in or affecting the area of benefit and ensure that new development is sensitively sited in relation to the surrounding environment.*
- (b) the conservation, protection, development and improvement of features of historic or public interest, and the physical and natural environment in the area of benefit.*
- (c) enhancement of the built environment in, and the social, cultural and economic well-being of, the area of benefit.*
- (d) free access to the public realm in the area of benefit.*

(2) To stimulate public interest in and care for the beauty, history and character of the area of benefit.

(3) To co-operate with public authorities and other bodies in fulfilling these objectives in the area of benefit.

This is achieved by arranging meetings on related 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 main risks faced are a failure to find sufficient volunteers to undertake activities, a decline in income through lower membership and a lack of legacies, which would limit the projects FoL is able to fund.

PERFORMANCE

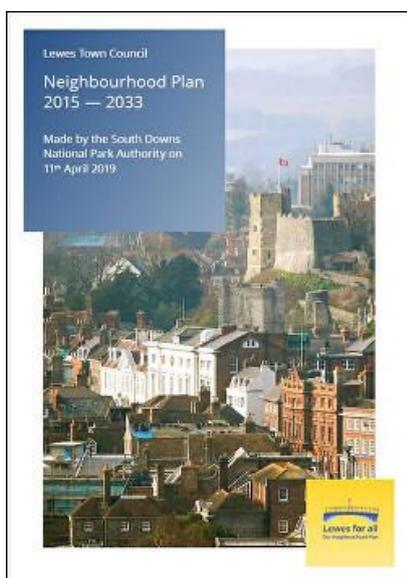
The Executive Committee considers that during the year the activities, projects and services to members, details of which follow, fulfil our declared objectives and that they are beneficial to the town and its inhabitants. The Committee therefore considers that FoL has complied as required with the public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

PLANNING POLICY ISSUES

2019 was the year when both the South Downs Local Plan and the Lewes Neighbourhood Plan were adopted and brought into force. They now form the policy background against which planning applications in Lewes are considered and the former Lewes District/South Downs National Park Authority Joint Core Strategy is now redundant as far as the town is concerned.

The Society was generally happy with the South Downs Local Plan. It provides a consistent policy approach throughout the National Park and includes provision that in any new development 50% of the dwellings provided should be of an affordable nature. However the Inspector's decision to retain the provision to allow housing on the very visible Old Malling Farm site which is part of the chalk downland was disappointing. Before a planning application is considered for this site a development brief is to be prepared and consulted on and this was still awaited at the year end.

Since the adoption of the South Downs Local Plan the National Park Authority has initiated preparation of a number of Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs). These will amplify the provisions in the Local Plan and must also be taken into account in considering planning applications. The Society has already commented on the draft SPD for affordable housing and it is aware that draft SPDs for design and sustainable construction are in preparation. Consideration of the latter two draft SPDs was the topic discussed at a seminar organised by the Society for planning professionals in the autumn.



The Lewes Neighbourhood Plan was supported by over 90% of those who voted in Lewes in a referendum prior to its adoption. The Society was again generally happy with the Plan but is concerned that unless the action points in it are moved forward it will soon become no more than a wish list of desirable projects which do not come to fruition.

Enforcing planning decisions remains a difficult problem although the recent increase in District Council staff devoted to this is welcome. However, even if they take enforcement action, it can still be a long time before the issue is resolved as those concerned often use their right to appeal against the enforcement notice and the planning inspectorate has a large back-log in dealing with these appeals.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

During the year tenders were sought from bodies wishing to build the North Street Quarter scheme and although a short list has been prepared no decision on awarding the contract had been taken at the year end. Tied up with this is the question of the land ownership in the future. In the meantime compliance with the conditions imposed by the National Park Authority for phases 2 and 3 of the development has moved forward and a decision on this is expected in the New Year.

Plans for a new fire station on the Springman House site are still under discussion and the Society has reiterated its wish for some public parking to be retained on this site.

Groundwork activity is now taking place on the South Downs Road site but there has not yet been any physical work on the former car park opposite the Premier Inn nor on the site between Tesco and Homebase.

Plans for the St Anne's school site are still awaited whilst draft plans for the Pells school site are still under discussion.

PLANNING COMMITTEE REPORT

The Planning Committee met each month to discuss every planning application submitted to the National Park Authority which falls within the Town Council boundary. Most of these applications are determined by the District Council on behalf of the National Park Authority, except for those that are 'called in' by the National Park Authority to determine itself, as they could have a material impact on the statutory purposes of the national park.

In 2019 the Committee examined 236 planning applications and submitted formal objections to 38 (16%), made comments on 8 (3%) and wrote in support of 9 (4%). No comments were made on the remaining 181 applications (77%). Representations are submitted directly to the National Park Authority via its online planning portal to ensure representations are received directly by the planning officer dealing with the application, without delay.

The Committee always welcomes approaches by developers to discuss development plans, before a planning application is submitted. It provides an opportunity for the Society to put forward its views and influence designs at an early stage while the details of the scheme are being finalised. During the year development plans were presented to the Committee by two developers and both were open to the comments put forward by design experts on the committee relating to the design. In a separate case a member of the public sought the Society's advice on an appropriate design for a street boundary wall within the Conservation Area. Two members of the committee held a site visit to discuss options with the property owner and provide advice on a design that resulted in a planning application being made that was supported by the Conservation Officer.

The Society continues to monitor the progress of development plans and contacts the Enforcement Officer when it becomes aware of development that has been undertaken without consent, especially in the conservation areas. This is often triggered by a society member or member of the public contacting the Secretary to raise concerns. The construction of a building backing on to the listed flint walls of Paine's Twitten was such a case. Although the development had planning consent, an error in setting out the building levels resulted in the roof of the building being constructed higher than the flint wall, to which is attached. The Society raised an objection with the Conservation Officer and maintained its objection until a design to improve the structure of the flint wall, including capping the wall with coping bricks, was agreed.

Enforcement action with respect to the smoking shelter at the Volunteer public house in Eastgate Street that was built without planning consent continued over the year. Following an unsuccessful planning appeal and an appeal against enforcement notice by the District Council being rejected by the Planning Inspectorate the shelter was finally removed in November. The progress of enforcement action relating to breaches of planning consent remains frustratingly slow.

The Committee always aims to work constructively with the planning authorities and met District Council conservation and planning staff during the year. Matters of common interest were discussed including progress with action taken on a list of sites in the Conservation Area where the Society is asking that action is taken.

TRANSPORT ISSUES

FoL officers have continued to meet with County Council officials and contribute to consultations about parking arrangements. It is hoped that the long-running plan to restore the pavements in front of the Crown Court, damaged by lorries and vans unloading there may be reaching a conclusion. More generally the Society has reminded the County Council that as Lewes is in the National Park and has two conservation areas the maintenance of the highways within them deserves better than average treatment. The Society has also responded to the Transport for the South East consultation.

TREES COMMITTEE REPORT

After a busy year of planning and tree maintenance, the Trees Committee members and volunteers enjoyed planting some more trees around Lewes during National Trees Week, which was from 23rd November to 1st December.

Outside numbers 52 to 56 Prince Edwards Road we have planted a white Hawthorn, a Hornbeam and a flowering Cherry. These have been “adopted” by the nearby residents, who have also given us a generous donation to enable us to plant more trees in this area.



On the green in Cross Way there are now four new trees: another Hornbeam, a Rowan, an ornamental Pear and another flowering Cherry. Both projects were suggested by the residents themselves, who have pledged to water them if we have another dry Spring or Summer next year.

To date we have planted ten mature trees at three different sites on the Nevill and we plan to use the donation which we received from Nevill Residents’ Association to plant some more at another site there in 2020.

Members of our Trees Committee also took part in two enjoyable planting mornings, organised by District Council Specialist Advisor Kim Dawson, at the Railway Land. We made two hedgerows of small mixed native trees, donated by the Woodland Trust along the shared fence by the railway line. On the first morning we were helped by young people from Priory Forest School and on the second morning toddlers from the “Talking Trees” group took part just as enthusiastically.

At the end of National Trees Week, we had the further pleasure of helping to plant a pocket orchard of 32 mixed fruit trees in the grassed area off Waldshut Road in support of Landport Community Gardens. These trees, and some mixed native hedging which we also planted there, were donated by the District Council..

Thank you to all the residents and volunteers who have supported us: with their suggestions, taking delivery of the trees and in planting them. We are also grateful to several people who have made donations to our Trees Funds, either as “Christmas gifts” to a friend, as carbon offset for air travel or simply because they would like to see more trees in Lewes.

Several plans are in progress for more tree-planting in 2020 but we are always pleased to have suggestions for new sites from Lewes residents. You may contact us by e-mail to: arboretum@friends-of-lewes.org.uk

OTHER ISSUES

Officers from FoL have met regularly with the CEO Rob Cottrill and other officers of the District Council. Discussions have involved public toilets, car parking and the progress of the North Street Quarter and Springman House site. The Council’s co-operation over the completion of the Garden of Peace was exceptional and crucial.

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

In October FoL hosted another seminar for some 30 planning professionals on design issues, particularly in the Conservation Areas, and had an update from the National Park Authority's Design Officer about their emerging Supplementary Planning Documents on Design and Sustainable Construction.

DESIGN AWARDS:

Every two to three years the Society gives awards or commendations to building and renovation works that have been completed in the intervening period which it considers make a positive contribution and set standards for future work. In May at a ceremony held in Lewes Town Hall FoL, President John Davey presented certificates to builders, architects, designers, craftspeople and owners of those projects chosen for such recognition

Awards were given to Depot Cinema, with an additional award for the flint-work there and to Hill House on Juggs Road, an example of Passivhaus design, which went on to win awards for sustainability and design from the Royal Institute of British Architects.

Commendations were given to Falcon Wharf, the frontage of the Red, White & Blue on Friars Walk, Alexis Dove – shopfront, the Butcher's glass advertising sign on 40, Cliffe High Street, Priory Barn, Yew Tree Cottage, the repairs to 200 High Street and to East Sussex Highways for the brick re-paving of St Andrew's Lane.

The Society hopes that this scheme will encourage other architects and developers to design schemes of equal quality, whilst members are encouraged to submit suggestions to the Society of new work when it is completed for the next round of awards and commendations.

PROJECTS

Historic Plaques: Three new plaques were installed in 2019: one is on Lewes House on School Hill;



Another is on the former Council offices in Fisher Street which were designed around a century ago by a prolific local architect, Rowland Hawke Halls.

The third plaque is on 43 Cliffe High Street, marking where Dame Grace Kimmins, the founder of Chailey Heritage Craft Schools & Hospital lived as a child in the 1870s.

Many buildings in the town have histories that are no longer evident and these plaques are of interest to both visitors and residents. For the full list, visit <https://thefriendsoflewes.files.wordpress.com/2018/11/lewes-plaques-and-photos-asj-181120-reduced.pdf>

A Peace Garden for Lewes: The completion of this major project was a great example of co-operation with the District and Town Councils who contributed to the funding and management,. However it still required the drive of Paul Myles and his small team, the specific skills of Chris Bibb from the District Council and the remarkable pragmatism and care of Artur and his landscapers to bring this long-running dream to fruition in June. Inevitably, it features on the cover of this year's report.

Lewes Town Maps for tourists:

With the co-operation of the Sussex Archaeological Society, a copy of FoL's revised Lewes Town map, printed on metal, has now been placed in a bricked-up window on the side of Barbican House.



Litter Free Lewes: Several FoL members continue to be regulars on litter-picking weekend trips. For details on dates/ times/ locations or to get in touch – find Litter Free Lewes on Facebook, @litterfreewes on Instagram or email litterfreewes@yahoo.co.uk

HERITAGE OPEN DAYS

Blessed with warm, sunny weather, this year's Heritage Open Days weekend achieved a record number of well over 4000 recorded visits. Thanks to nearly 100 volunteers - building owners and managers, organisers and stewards – and our six sponsors - we were able to organise the weekend and distribute a programme of events in leaflet and poster form around the District. The re-opening of the Law Courts after a 10 year absence was a huge attraction and there was also an increase in the number of private houses that opened, along with old favourites, such as the Freemasons Hall and Southover Grange.

The dates for next year's event are 10-13th September, when the 10th anniversary of the Society's involvement in its organisation will be celebrated. Planning will begin in February- and if you would like to be involved, or have ideas for future venues or events, then please email leweshod@gmail.com

SERVICES FOR MEMBERS

Four talks took place in 2019: In January Norman Baker spoke with much insight and affection about the town which he represented in Parliament for 18 years.

In February three speakers looked at different aspects of our environmental concerns and actions: Dean Bell talked about the i-trees survey's findings, Milly Manley described the activities of Litter Free Lewes and Louise Holloway outlined the creation of Tingle's Way – the eco-trail through the town which links to the South Downs Way.

In September, the unique Reeves archive of photographs was coupled with Tom's inimitable, easy style to focus on Lewes High Street over the decades: nobody does it better!

The October presentation by Aimée Felus of CHAMP showed in fascinating detail how complex and very delicate an environment Chalk Downland is.

At the AGM in March, Tristan Bareham, then CEO of the Sussex Archaeological Society (Sussex Past) spoke about that Society's wide range of activities and operating challenges.

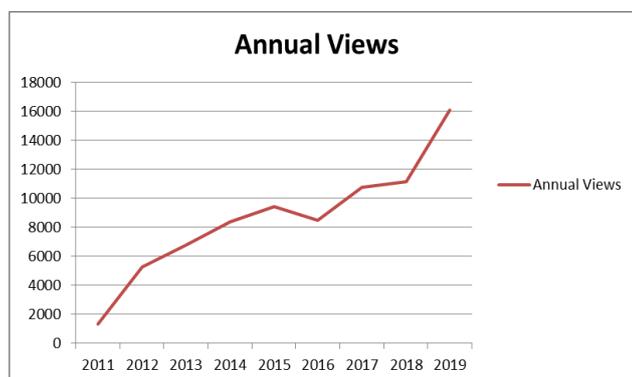
In September a small group greatly enjoyed a guided tour of Gosnell's factory on the Brooks Road industrial estate.

Participation in the Societies Fair in the Town Hall in September provided FoL with another opportunity to explain to the public the wide range of its activities and interests and was felt to be one of the best of these annual events. Accurate awareness of our values and what we do has to be where the path to membership begins.

In late November a number of people in the town who represented organisations but were not yet FoL members were invited to a reception where a presentation of the many aspects of the Society's work was made. There was lively interaction and a good Q&A session. Marketing activity of this sort needs to be continued to increase awareness of all that FoL does to try to keep Lewes special.

Three illustrated newsletters were sent out during the year.

Website and social media:



Website usage since 2011 indicate a steady rise, followed by the beginnings of a possible plateau, and then an uptick for 2019, when views reached 16,110, averaging 44 views per day.

Our website News items are copied to Facebook, drawing followers to the website. A recent effort to increase our Facebook presence to reach a new audience (by ‘Sharing’ posts to other Facebook groups) is likely to have contributed to the 2019 uptick.

Followers:

- Website – 88 News items subscribers (2018:67), +31%
- Facebook – 412 following FriendsOfLewes (2018 no figures)
- Facebook – 352 following LewesUrbanArboretum (2018 no figures)

The most popular website pages in 2019 were Heritage (eg. HODs, Garden of Peace), FoL talks, building developments (eg. Neighbourhood Plan, NSQ), and trees.

Our grateful thanks go to Barbara Merchant for keeping FoL’s online presence both current and attractive.

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

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Robert Cheesman’s approaching retirement from the Chairmanship of the Society prompted the establishment of a succession planning committee to seek out a suitable successor for him, and for Marcus Taylor who is also stepping back from the role of Secretary.

This new committee looked at Charity Commission governance guidance on best practice for small charities, and that guidance places strong emphasis (among other things) on treating trustee recruitment as a priority, on recruitment practice and on limiting tenure in order to ensure a healthy turnover of suitable trustees. Specifying tenure limits also sets clear expectations for candidates, to help them assess how their desires fit with the role on offer. Following this guidance, the Succession Planning sub-committee were given Terms of Reference which establish it as a standing committee with a brief to identify and recommend suitable candidates for elected positions, as they fall vacant. Changes to the FoL constitution have been drafted to redefine roles and introduce tenure limits. These will be put forward for membership approval at the 2020 AGM in March. A documented recruitment process has been adopted for the future..

At the year end the committee is continuing its search for chair, secretary and ordinary trustee candidates for identified upcoming vacancies.

FINANCIAL REVIEW (subject to independent examination)

Receipts and Payments

2018 saw receipt of some £35k from a local resident who wanted it to be used as a contribution towards a pedestrian crossing that was provided on the Brighton Road. This increased the levels of receipts and payments in equal measure and the Society also benefited by being able to recover £9k of Gift Aid from HMRC. This being a one-off event, 2019 saw a return to the Society’s usual levels of financial activity. In aggregate, subscriptions and donations remained stable at some £5k.

As planned, the Society's Inns and Twittens books were reprinted during the year at a cost of £1.4k. This expenditure accounts for a net cash loss being reported on the sale of books etc. Against this, though, Harvey's Brewery contributed £250 toward the printing of the Inns booklet.

The Society's Garden of Peace project (financially supported by the Town Council, the National Park Authority and the District Council) was completed and officially opened on 12th June 2019 with only a further £1k being met by the Society. The District Council has undertaken responsibility for its maintenance.

Contributions to other projects during the year (£5k) included the Reeves Light Boxes exhibition, restoration of a flint wall at Church End, wildflower Lewes and continued sponsorship of the Eastgate Street flowerbed.

There was considerable tree planting at a variety of locations during the year. While gross spend was £4k, we were pleased to receive generous donations of £1k, leaving a net £3k to be met from the restricted (trees) fund. Donations towards this activity are always welcome.

In December, the Society joined the newly launched Lewes District Local Lottery. This will form a new source of income from 2020 and should members participate in this venture, we would encourage them to nominate the Society as their beneficiary.

With no remuneration being paid to, nor any benefit obtained from a related entity by any trustee, and with only minimal expenses in the course of the Society's business being reimbursed, the cost of running FoL in 2018 was £1.9k against £1.8k in 2017. While, currently, the recurring costs of running the Society remain below the 2017 ordinary membership subscription receipts of £3.6k it is nevertheless hoped that those who can afford to pay more than the minimum subscriptions will continue to do so in order that we are able to continue to support small enhancements to the town.

Balance Sheet

At the end of the financial year, the Society's total monetary assets on the unrestricted funds account amounted to £47k and £5k on the restricted (trees) fund, all of which is held in Charities Aid Foundation bank accounts. Stocks of books and tea towels valued at £2k were also held.

The Executive Committee considers that a cash reserve of around £44k is appropriate. This comprises continuation of at £10k operating reserve, and £34k for new projects and unplanned new expenditure. The latter (£34k) component is considerably larger than the 2017 provision of £15k since it recognises:

- the potential financial impact of trees expenditure predominantly having to be met from the unrestricted fund. (With significant expenditure (£8k) planned for 2020, the restricted (trees) fund will be exhausted during the year). While the remaining balance of planned 2020 expenditure (£2.5k) is budgeted to be met from the unrestricted fund, this cannot continue indefinitely without putting the Society's finances at risk. The Executive Committee is currently reviewing this matter.); and
- possible new (net) costs may arise from the current review of the Society's goals and priorities.

OUR PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

2020 will be a year of change for the Society: a change of leadership and fresh specific short-term goals.

FoL continues to seek more opportunities to present its aims and activities to the public and will maintain a professional approach on all issues that arise. However, what it is able to do is and will be constrained by the resources, human and financial, that are available. It would like to assist in advancing and funding more projects or activities which enhance the townscape of Lewes and believes that its support could help lever funds from other bodies such as the National Park Authority.

Members are also encouraged to check out our website www.friends-of-lewes.org.uk and its Facebook page 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 22nd January, 2020 and signed on their behalf by

Robert Cheesman Chairman